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From *Social Anarchism* #19, 1994
Retrieved on 11 February 2011 from www.socialanarchism.org

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> Every organization . . . involves a discipline of activity, but our interest here is that at some level every organization also involves a discipline of being — an obligation to be of a given character and to dwell in a given world. And my object here is to examine a special kind of absenteeism, a defaulting not from prescribed activity but from prescribed being.
> (Goffman, p.188)

Probably the salient characteristic of most peoples' lives is dailiness. We take as given much of what is around us — the social world as well as the physical world — and we play out our lives within frameworks that remain invisible to us because we accept them as "natural." Not that our day-to-day worlds are benign by any means. But we cope. As Elizabeth Janeway puts it, "we have all invested a great deal of effort and ingenuity in adjusting ourselves to what we take to be inescapable, continuing, circumstances in the life around us" (p.152). What we usually fail to notice, Janeway continues, is the extent to which "these circumstances have shaped the roles we play, we have shaped ourselves to fit the roles and they, in turn, have influenced the image we see of ourselves." It is the image we see of ourselves that concerns me here — that image, and how we might learn to use on our own behalf the same power with which that image historically has been used against us.

Who we are — by ethnicity, age, economic class, sex, and sexuality — will be weighty in determining the social circumstances that shape us, but, for all of the infinite permutations of individual identity, the message of any particular social circumstance will be mediated and delivered by the other human beings (and human artifacts) around us. In other words, we will know who we are by how we are treated. What we look like (in terms of ethnicity, etc.) determines to some large extent not only with whom we interact but also how we are reacted to. How people react to us plays a big part in determining how we feel about who we are. And how we feel about ourselves will influence strongly who and how we are on the occasion of our next encounter with the world, which in turn will provoke a certain range of reactions, which in turn . . . and so on. For those whose identities are excluded from the normative, the result of this social mirroring is what Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folks* called

"double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (quoted in Alexander, p.9). And that's putting it mildly, all things considered. The world of the "normal" is not always that kind.

Gender is one of the axes along which the content of this social mirroring is most strongly determined. As a system, gender is one of humanity's most common "historically and culturally specific arrogations of the human body for ideological purposes" (Epstein and Straub, p.3). Each moment and location of human society will have its specific and unique gender system, in other words, but each of them will use signs and signals (for example, gender-specific clothing) to "coerce gender identity." Regardless of what biology may lurk behind the appearance, and of what explicitly sexual behavior she or he may engage in behind closed doors, a person who is perceived as female will evoke different reactions than a person perceived as male. This social fact remains true across other deep divisions such as ethnicity or "race." A European-American person may react very differently to an African-American male, for example, than to a European-American male, but his or her response to an African-American male will also differ from that to an African-American female. Women of color, although in some important ways excluded from the U.S. Eurocentric construct of Woman, and despite their commonalities of history and culture with men who share their particular ethnicity, cannot — are not allowed to — "act like men" with impunity. As long as they appear to be women, they, like all who appear to be women, will be subject to social responses that function as a definitional, role-affirming form of social control. This assertion does not imply one "universal" role or identity for women; indeed, such universality — in life or in theoretics — is neither possible nor desirable. But it does seem true that no woman (and, both equally and differently, no man), no matter how she is positioned with regard to any other category of culture or demographics, can escape the pressure of gender expectations in one or more of their many permutations.

> The difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated. I shall always be a flower girl to

the sacred, but it deludes us with a false imitation of it" (Weil, p. 319), I feel I know exactly what she felt. (And I call myself an atheist!) What is real, what matters, whether you call it "sacred" or not, is the individual life. Only at the level of the individual can real change take place. Groups (as opposed to associations of self-consciously autonomous individuals), whatever their unifying principle, are the breeding ground of hierarchy, and hierarchy is the father of role, of the inauthentic life. There is no better way, no more necessary or radical way, to challenge hierarchy than constantly to take advantage of its incongruities with human values and experience. Using humor, when possible, we can raise the hidden coercions of role into a level of theatricality where they can be exposed as unreal and allowed to explode into nonexistence as we leave them high and dry behind us.

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takes more than a spasm of in-sight to persevere in acting out a changed role. It takes repeated acts of determination, it takes the self-confidence of the trickster-hero who is willing to pay the price of mockery and pain for disputing the taboos of the gods" (p.153). The objective is to break through, again and again, to the individual beneath the behavior of the role, the behavior the individual has been trained (consciously — for example, cops — or otherwise) to use in order to evoke certain responses from us and maintain the structure of the role system intact.[5] Although the trained behavior may have been internalized to the point that the individual believes it to be the very ground of his or her identity, our selective refusal to accept the behavior, combined with our humorous highlighting of the incongruity that behavior creates for us, can enable — or even force — the individual to break out of a patterned pseudo-identity that finally is as false and confining from the inside as it is annoying or oppressive to those on the outside. What Butler says of gender roles (p.141) can be true of other roles as well, if we act to break the spell of a "stylized configuration" of behaviors masquerading as a genuine self: "The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found . . . in the possibility of a failure to repeat . . ." Certainly one responsibility of agents working for social change is to raise that possibility, without which there is no hope for innovation.

> There are occasions when an almost infinitesimal force can be decisive. A collectivity is much stronger than a single man; but every collectivity depends for its existence upon operations, of which simple addition is the elementary example, which can only be performed by a mind in a state of solitude. This dependence suggests a method of giving the impersonal a hold on the collective, if only we could find out how to use it.
> (Weil, p. 320)

Weil was a Platonist. She used terms that are foreign to my vocabulary. On the other hand, when she wrote "The collectivity is not only alien to

[5] "To assume a new role for yourself in situations where your role has been rigidly defined is an act of sabotage" (Postman, p. 44).

> Professor Higgins, be-cause he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will.
> (Shaw, p. 270)

I believe Eliza Doolittle when she credits Col. Pickering, not Higgins, for her transformation. Higgins taught her to talk like a lady, but Pickering made it possible for her to feel like one. Through his behavior toward her, Pickering allowed her to experience interactions in which she was assigned the lady's role. That's what made the transformation possible, inevitable, and, inevitably, painful. Eliza's relationship with Higgins's definitely played a role, too, though of a different sort. Once she moves into the Professor's household, her motivation to continue working for self-change is as much the challenge of Higgins' attitude (he refuses to see that she is no longer just a flower girl) as the charm of Pickering's behavior. She invests herself totally in trying to repeat a miracle: to make Higgins respond to her (that is, to transform Higgins) as she has responded to Pickering.

An even more thoroughgoing fictional transformation, and from a much more revealing point of view, is seen in *Orlando*, Virginia Woolf's novel of magical realism published in 1928. The title character is born a man, a nobleman, in England toward the end of the 16th century. One morning about one hundred years later, when he is 30 years old, Orlando wakes up to find himself a woman. The anonymous narrator takes pains to assure us that this is a "simple fact; Orlando was a man till the age of thirty; when he became a woman and has remained so ever since" (p.139). On that particular morning, and for quite a while thereafter, "in every other respect [than the change from man to woman], Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity" (p.138). Because Orlando has run away from his post as British ambassador to Turkey to live with a "gypsy tribe" in the hills, she wears "those Turkish coats and trousers which can be worn indifferently by either sex" (139). "It is a strange fact, but a true one," the narrator tells us, that until Orlando has "bought herself a complete outfit of such clothes as women then wore" and is aboard a ship bound for England, "she had scarce given her sex

a thought . . . [I]t was not until she felt the coil of skirts about her legs and the Captain offered, with the greatest politeness, to have an awning spread for her on deck that she realized, with a start the penalties and the privileges of her position" (p.153).

Woolf has great fun — and so do her novel's readers — with the process Orlando goes through as she, formerly he, learns to respond appropriately and with gusto to the reactions her new sex evokes from Englishmen. It is worth noting, however, that although the novel was written long before the current flowering of "gender studies" and its "deconstruction" of sex and gender, Woolf clearly recognized that these two categories of identity can exist quite separately in terms of social interactions. The female-bodied and -sexed Orlando "remained precisely as he [the male-bodied Orlando] had been" until she began to experience from within her new skirts and petticoats how it feels to be treated as the inhabitant of the gender role called "female." Soon,

> what was said a short time ago about there being no change in Orlando the man and Orlando the woman, was ceasing to be altogether true. She was becoming a little more modest, as women are, of her brains, and a little more vain, as women are, of her person. Certain susceptibilities were asserting themselves, and others were diminishing. The change of clothes had, some philosophers will say, much to do with it. Vain trifles as they seem, clothes have, they say, more important offices than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us . . . Thus, there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mould of arm or breast, but they mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking.
> (pp.187–88)

Woolf is careful to insist that the "difference between the sexes is, happily, one of great profundity," and that clothes "are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath" (p.188). No sooner does she admit that distinction, however, than she immediately proceeds to announce that

over time. As Roger Wilkins noted in looking back over the limitations of the civil rights movement,

> In our naïveté, we believed that the power to segregate was the greatest power that had been wielded against us. It turned out that our expectations were quite wrong. The greatest power turned out to be what it had always been: the power to define reality where blacks are concerned and to manage perceptions and therefore arrange politics and culture to reinforce those definitions.
> (p. 46)

We need to become much more adept at wielding that power to define for ourselves, more skilled at interrupting the definitions that constrain us, more powerful in forcing the hidden power structures into full and confrontational view. I suggest that those of us who are involved in hierarchies that define us as "less" start practicing where we are right now, rather than waiting until someone recruits us for some "larger" struggle elsewhere:

> Many leftists rationalize the discrepancy between their political ideology and their personal behavior as an understandable smudge . . . in their otherwise politically correct lives. They see the causes for that discrepancy as external to them, that is, as something caused externally which will be taken care of after the revolution. They have fallen victim to what the philosopher Abraham Kaplan called the "ordinal fallacy" — first I will do this, then I will do that. Personal liberation will come after the revolution. The fact is, we are what we do. And if we do not do today what we believe to be true, it is the nature of life that we will probably not do it tomorrow.
> (Ehrlich, p. 33)

Newman used as an epigraph for her book an excerpt from an article in *The Rat* about the nation's first Gay Power Week. During the march ending the week-long event, the excerpt reports, marchers chanted: "Ho, Ho, Homosexual / The Ruling Class is Ineffectual!" Now that's funny. And we can make it true. But it won't be easy. As Janeway recognized, "It

bearing down unjustly, usually because my boss is too busy with his own interests to notice what effect he is having on my life, I try not to react with words or actions that say "You have no right to." Those words, that attitude, as Simone Weil wrote (Weil, p.325), "evoke a latent war [over privilege and lack of privilege] and awaken the spirit of contention." Instead, because my boss is "someone who has ears to hear," I try to convey " 'What you are doing to me is not just,' " because that message has the capacity to "touch and awaken at its source the spirit of attention" and mutual respect (Weil, p.325). I might snap to attention and salute: "Yes, sir! Right away, sir!" That, given my usual informality and gaily insubordinate mode of address, is an incongruity he cannot ignore. The role he is playing, and the role his role requires me to play, become opaque and obtrusive. He is put in a position where he is forced to choose; he can choose to continue to play his suddenly-visible role, but he cannot continue to ignore its nature or the consequences his choice will have on my opinion of him. Because he wants to retain my respect (and because he's a genuinely nice guy), he chooses to back off. He chooses to allow me to redefine our relationship away from the power imbalance assumed by the official hierarchy and towards a mutually maintained balance of attention and cooperation.

What I want to figure out is how to make that kind of camp work in a much wider variety of situations. I want to learn how to use incongruity, theatricality, and humor to challenge not only gender boundaries but also power hierarchies. And the reason, again, why it is important to do so is that the way people treat you does matter: It limits how they (are willing to) interact with you and thus how you can interact with them, and thus is a matter of access or lack of access rather than a matter of just good or bad manners. We act out (embody) our attitudes toward one another, and they do matter in very practical ways. For one thing, how we are treated obviously does affect how we feel about ourselves. The higher your status, the easier it is to laugh off and disregard the occasional put-down. For those towards the bottom of the pile, the constant barrage of denigration (including the unconscious and even unintentional) erodes the spirit like a constant trickle of acid on limestone. It may not produce dramatic results immediately, but the damage to the spirit can be considerable

> Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above.
> (p.189)

Orlando, in other words, has always been a mix of male and female genders, and it is not the change of physical sex that causes her/him to evolve from masculine to feminine, that causes modesty to wax and vanity to wane, but the change in gendered appearance and the associated change in how s/he is treated by others.

Eventually, as the 19th century's "spirit of the age" imposes its rigorous gender expectations on England, Orlando's spirit is broken. She realizes she must "submit to the new discovery . . . that each man and each woman has another allotted to it for life, whom it supports, by whom it is supported, till death them do part" (p.245). She must get married. Fortunately for her readers' fun, Woolf was able to create a husband for Orlando who is equally problematic in terms of sex and who has a remarkably unhusband-like ability to stay out of Orlando's way. Many other characters, fictional or otherwise, are not as lucky in facing the pressures imposed by the "spirit of the age," of whatever age. But in virtually every age, we can find examples of people who resist this process by which gendered appearance is made to determine — and circumscribe — the lived, the daily, identity.

> "Ah! I am not pleasant to look at — ?" I could not help saying this; the words came unbidden: I never remember the time when I had not a haunting dread of what might be the degree of my outward deficiency."
> (Charlotte Brontë, p. 698)

Clothing, along with appearance-altering "accessories" such as make-up and hair manipulation, has been and continues to be an important gender marker. One fascinating example of a woman who both recognized the power of the gender system and made a conscious connection between its outward signs and its power to shape internal (felt)

identity was Simone Weil (1909–1943). After working in a factory for a year, Weil was moved to write explicitly about the intimate connection between the individual and the power of societal valuation. "One always needs, for oneself, some external signs of one's own value," she recognized (Pétrement,p. 246).

> It is impossible for the most heroically staunch mind to preserve the consciousness of inward value when there is no external fact on which this consciousness can be based . . . It seems to those who obey that some mysterious inferiority has predestined them to obey for all eternity.
> (p.314)

Even at the age of sixteen, according to her biographer, Weil's "character had in general been formed" and "she had already formed . . . her whole conception of what she wanted to do with her life" She "had resolutely determined to make something out of her life", and therefore "it was — as she herself later said — a great misfortune to have been born a female." Weil's response to this misfortune was "to reduce this obstacle as much as possible by disregarding it, that is to say, by giving up any desire to think of herself as a woman or to be regarded as such by others." If she were perceived as a woman, she would become a woman, and "the tasks that Simone had envisioned for herself . . . would above all demand of her masculine qualities and strength." She was "determined to be a man as much as possible."

Simone Weil was a unique case. But then, so are we all. And as Epstein and Staub have reminded us, every gender system is "historically and culturally specific," hence producing only historically and culturally specific results in the lives of those who share its time and place in history. Weil clearly recognized that the responses a person evokes from others are no more reliably external than is the atmosphere through which we walk. Like the air we breath, the smog of social reaction penetrates deep and becomes metabolized into the stuff of our being. Weil did her best to escape from the consequences of her sex, and she did so by renouncing her membership in that sector of the gender system to which

The weird (well, one weird) thing is: I am quite sure I am a better influence (more of an influence for the good) on my boss than I am on my friends, if only because I'm more aware of what I'm doing in the more formal relationship. With my friends, I carelessly wield my tremendous influence with sublime disregard, not to mention unconsciousness, and probably am as much an influence for the bad as for the good — because it's not polite or friendly to bring this particular fact of life into consciousness, to talk about the fact that we do affect one another constantly. Friendship is supposed to be spontaneous and caring rather than examined and deliberate, and that keeps us from thinking too much about how we affect one another, what we do to one another. There is at least one writer, Iris Murdoch, who explores this area quite thoroughly, though I didn't think of it that way when I was reading her novels. *The Book and the Brotherhood*, for example, could be described as being entirely about what friends do to one another out of sheer carelessness and lack of awareness of their own power.

At work, I often use the tactics of incongruity, theatricality, and humor in small ways, usually to highlight (raise into consciousness) the existence of the hierarchy that frames my friendly relationship with my boss. I work for a nice man, a professor at a university, and the office style is relaxed and "collegial" both as a matter of policy (the university's) and by preference (ours). For weeks at a time, the power hierarchy lies hidden beneath that friendly surface, and my boss would be glad to forget its existence completely. Nice people generally prefer not to notice the shape their privileges take when they intrude into other, less privileged, lives. And of course they always do intrude, more or less painfully. My boss can do his teaching and administrative job as well as he does and also do many other things (play squash, write books, take a weekly turn with his son's carpool, etc.) because my job is designed to support him. The hierarchy that defines our work- ing relationship gives him power over me, and that is a risky position for him to be in. He is constantly in danger of being unjust.

He runs that risk because of the power of his role. And although its shape and label relate to an occupational hierarchy, it is a gendered role, also — gendered not in terms of sexuality, but in terms of ascribed authority (his) and ascribed servility (mine). When I feel the power

we developed survival tactics that have served us well, all things considered.[2]

What I want to suggest now is that we — gay and straight alike — experiment with the tactics of camp and the theoretical insights of nonviolence theory in our own daily lives. Much of the content of nonviolence theory has to do with power, with the belief that power is distinct from authority and inheres in relationships rather than individuals.[3] With that as our basis, we can use the theatricality and humor of camp to spotlight and "denaturalize" the power hierarchies of which we are a part, forcing their incongruities and injustices into the open. I firmly believe we all have much more power than we realize, and that one of the reasons for our customary feeling of powerlessness is our tendency to look to potential locations for change at too great a distance.

This year, I have been thinking a lot about how and how much people influence each other. I have gotten to be very aware of that dynamic in the classroom (where I-as-student am in a "weak" role in relation to the prof) and in the office (where I work as a secretary). More recently, I have started trying to be aware of how friends influence each other, one of the many things it's easier to see in other people's lives than in my own. I have noticed changes in one friend's life and attitudes over the years, for example, that seem to correlate precisely with changes in the folks with whom she spends her time. No doubt the same is true of me, although I have a harder time seeing it.[4] Not only do we all have power, we're all using that power in powerful ways, affecting one another all the time, even though we don't realize we're doing it.

[2] For example, see Rubin's article for a discussion of how butch and femme roles served important functions for lesbians in years past.

[3] Feminists, reclaiming the word — and the feeling — of "power," taught nonviolent activists to distinguish between "power-over" (bad power) and "personal power" (good power). I think that is a useful addition to the categories of power, where "authority" refers to power legitimately and justly earned through experience, wisdom, and (in some cases) skill. Among gender theorists, I've recently learned, "personal power" is called "agency." I like that, too.

[4] John Maynard Keynes wrote: "I still suffer incurably from attributing an unreal rationality to other people's feelings and behavior (and doubtless my own, too)." Quoted in Bucholz.

her biological sex assigned her. As we shall see, she was not unique in choosing that form of resistance.

Cindy Crawford attributes her super-model success to "The Thing." "I get up in the morning and I just see a girl, like any other girl sees," she said in the December issue of the men's magazine *Details*. "Once these guys [makeup artists, hairdressers, etc.] do this number on me, I see Cindy Crawford, The Thing." (P-I News Services)

Talk about gender usually is talk about women, because it is a (usually unspoken) truism in contemporary U.S. society that women are "more gendered" than men. Women are defined by gender in a daily, palpable, encompassing way that men are not, and the content of that definition is "the non-male." Men, in short, are the norm against which women are gendered. As a result, we tend to assume that women are more controlled by the gender system than are men.

Is it true, however, that the gender system operates exclusively or primarily to subjugate women? If women are more rigidly controlled by gender, why is it okay for a girl to be a tomboy but not okay for a boy to be a sissy? Why can a businesswoman wear a "man-tailored" suit and tie to work but a businessman may not wear (nor admit to owning for his own use, even in private) a "woman-tailored" piece of clothing of any description? I want to continue my exploration of gender resistance with an example of men who manipulated the same signs as Orlando and Simone Weil, transforming them, if not into conscious ideological opposition, at least into a wildly unmistakable signal of rebellion.

Weil's choice of clothing remained firmly personal and pragmatic; she aimed at freedom to move through the world with minimal attention to her gender. In dramatic contrast, the drag queens who anthropologist Esther Newton studied in the mid-1960s created their appearances (clothing, hair styles, make-up) for public, performative display. Their intent was neither to disguise their gender nor to deflect attention away from that part of their identity. One young performer, for example, "was in a state of some anxiety" about whether he looked "too transy."

> When I asked one of the older performers what this meant, he said it meant that the boy's drag looked "too much like a real woman. It's not showy enough. No woman would go on stage looking like

> that." . . . Transy drag makes one look like an ordinary woman, and ordinary women are not beautiful.
> (Newton, p.51)

"Transy drag," in other words, is what real women wear; it's what makes us look like real women.[1]

When drag queens wear evening gowns, wigs intended for women, and elaborate make-up, they are challenging the gender system as it applies to them, to (gay) men. They are defining a new slot in the system, a way for biological males to manipulate into a new gender role the pre-existing artifacts that make up a gendered appearance in the culture around them. Whereas Weil avoided the overdetermination of her life by gender through choices that emphasized other areas of her identity, the drag queens in Newton's study reacted to the restrictions of gender by forcing the usually implicit gender system out into the open. The price they paid is that, once they made explicit what is usually assumed, their lives were dominated by the acting out of that one challenge, a challenge that, judging by Newton's report, quickly became ritualized and complicit with the system it had originally opposed. As Neil Postman remarks in another connection,

> Shaw's widely known observation that those who worship symbols and those who desecrate them are both idolaters captures the sense of what I am trying to say. The man who genuflects without knowing why and the man who spits on the altar both suffer from a lack of control. They are victims of a mode of discourse.
> (p.239)

The drag queens "knew how to fight and suffer with comic grace" and "they had the simple dignity of those who have nothing else but their refusal to be crushed" (xiv), Newton wrote of her subjects for the 1979 re-issue of her book. She concluded, however, that theirs was a losing

[1] One answer to my earlier question about why women have more sartorial freedom than men is: Perhaps because restricting women's options in this area would make resistance and rebellion more accessible to us, would "empower" our clothing choices in ways dangerous to the status quo.

battle: "So long as current models of sexuality persist and predominate, gay men will always be 'like' women" (p.xiii). The one strategy they had was no match for the system that gendered their lives.

> Se afirma que una cosa es imposible cuando no se la desea. [One calls impossible what one does not want.]
> — Malatesta

I have said that the drag queens in Newton's study failed to make an effective challenge to the gender system because they lacked a sufficient strategy — and, no doubt, a sufficient ideological background, not to mention self esteem. On the other hand, I now want to propose that we can learn a great deal from the tactics Newton observed and described. For her they were "themes" in the "style" of gay camp (p.106), but I call them tactics: incongruity, theatricality, and humor.

Incongruity means creating juxtapositions (of things or of ideas) that reveal a particular irrationality or hypocrisy in the way we tend to perceive them. Theatricality means that the actor (the one who acts) takes effective, if momentary, control of events in a way that forces onlookers to recognize that they are participating in a contingent situation. The actor, often by focusing people's attention on an incongruity, alters the character of whatever is going on, changing it from a "natural circumstance" (inevitable, uncontrollable, given) into an arena of choice. The actor communicates the facts that choice is desirable and that choice is possible, and s/he often does so through — or at least, with — humor.

Another name for those tactics is nonviolent action. As peaceworker Richard Cleaver has pointed out, it's no wonder so many of the strongest advocates for nonviolence have been gay or lesbian. Queers and nonviolent activists have an awful lot in common, tactically speaking. Moreover, lesbians and gay men, even those of us who are "white" and not inspired to political action by economic circumstances, have had an extra incentive to recognize and reject what Goffman calls the "discipline of being," that "obligation to be of a given character and to dwell in a given world." We are "sex and gender refugees" (Rubin,p.477), and in our particular kind of "absenteeism . . . from prescribed being," to use Goffman's term,