

**Sex, Gender and Heteronormativity:
Seeing “Some Like it Hot” as a Heterosexual
Dystopia**

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**School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies,
University of Bristol,
Working Paper No. 03-07**

This paper was presented at the American Political Science Association, Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL, August 30 - September 2, 2007

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Abstract:

Politics is constituted as a realm of "the serious", and "no laughing matter." Even self-avowedly constructed political performances and spectacles have to be taken "with a straight face." It follows from this that political jokes, satires, parodies, mockery and ridicule – as a constitutive "outside" – are as old as politics itself, and – because they are critical rather than referential – a more varied source of meaning and greater stimulus to interpretation.

Gender was more a "laughing matter" in 1959 when "Some Like It Hot" was released than it was a focus for political struggle. In the film, heterosexuality, bounded of course by "noticed" yet disavowed markers of homosexuality, coincided with heteronormativity, as yet unchallenged and therefore unconceptualized. Since 1990 Judith Butler has retheorized gender as "performative" in relation to the binary and hierarchical concepts through which both sex and sexuality are produced as identity-creating and individually-disciplining constructs of power/knowledge. Her work enables the viewer to see, and therefore interpret, this classic film in a new way.

Wilder's script deconstructs gender (as voice, body language, dress and heteronormative desire) in a clever vocabulary of constructed opposites and matches/mismatches, articulated through a framework that "nothing is what it seems." It presents the physical sexed body as an object produced through conceptualization. It virtually lectures the viewer on "performativity" as repetition, citation, and naturalization of the self. It deconstructs heterosexual romance as psychological fatalism and as a mercenary search for security. Overall it is a romantic fairy tale of transformation and transition from which no one will "live happily ever after," and indeed the naturalization of heterosexuality as physical reproduction of the species and ethical reproduction via the family is entirely stripped out. The film thus has the savage bleakness of Swiftian satire undercut by laughter and the enactment of the (supposedly) absurd. Seen in a certain light, then, "Some Like It Hot" is intellectually subversive, though as a comedy produced by the commercial entertainment "industry" it is of course positioned outside "serious" politics.

This paper uses "Some Like It Hot" to illustrate and explore Butler's work, and to make visible the way that complex conceptual relationships between sex, gender, and sexuality can be laid out in moving images through a series of logical schemata.

Sex, Gender and Heteronormativity: Seeing "Some Like it Hot" as a Heterosexual Dystopia¹

Terrell Carver

"... feminism continues to require its own forms of serious play"
(Butler 1999 [1990]: xxviii).

La Comédie humaine

Politics is constituted as a realm of "the serious," and no laughing matter. Political performances and spectacles have to be taken with a straight face, *particularly* those involving ceremonial kitsch, such as processions, bizarre costumes, rituals with obscure or minimal meaning, "patriotic" tunes and lyrics, rhetorical speeches etc. (Sondermann 1997). Or anyway mockery has to be carefully controlled (typically through policing and "security") such that the *political* show goes on, but as politics, not as a comedy. It follows from this that jokes and humour are a constitutive "outside" to politics – quintessentially a "laughing matter," and therefore (supposedly) "not serious" and so therefore trivial. Indeed laughter at kitsch political moments might expose the funny side to national and civic performances and spectacles with (supposedly) disastrous results, i.e. confusion and uncertainty about what is really "serious" and "political," and what isn't.

However, what happens when the "outside" is also somewhat "inside," that is, a situation where plausible interpretation could go either way, and indeed oscillates between the two: either "it's just a joke," or "it's a political point," now the one, now the other.² This allows the interpreter some freedom, which I shall be taking with a famous film comedy in this paper, and it also famously allows authors a "get out," in that they can always plead triviality if accused of "being political" and therefore "not funny" (which Billy Wilder never had to do, since I assume he never meant "Some Like It Hot" to be political or even serious, other than as "box office").³ My own political point here is a theoretical one, though, in that I use the film to illustrate what I take to be some of Judith Butler's (1999) insights into sex, gender and sexuality, and then comment briefly on the current political issues this raises.

Wilder than Butler

Gender was more a laughing matter in 1959 when "Some Like It Hot" was released than it was a focus for political struggle. This is not to say that there were no struggles then, just that none at the time took this film to be relevant, and nothing like sexual politics in any overt sense appears there. In the film, heterosexuality, bounded of course by "noticed" yet disavowed markers of homosexuality (another necessary constitutive "outside"), coincides with heteronormativity, i.e. the normative and normalizing power of heterosexuality in

¹ I am aware that writing about funny things kills them stone dead; apologies to Billy Wilder *et al.* This paper draws on material previously published in a programme note for the recent new production of Verdi's "Rigoletto" at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden (see note 10 below).

² The TV comic Stephen Colbert's famously non-funny parody of Fox News in front of President George W. Bush at the National Press Club dinner in 2006 neatly illustrates this. Bush's presumption was that the performance would be humorous and therefore safely outside politics; gradually he became aware that the performance was a political attack and therefore not funny, so he took himself safely outside.

³ Other strategies are anonymity and also parody, i.e. adopting an authorial persona that naively advocates the things one is against.

representation, subjectivity, legality and discipline (Butler 1999; arising from earlier concepts of "compulsory heterosexuality" and the "heterosexual matrix"; see Carver and Chambers 2007). This was as yet unchallenged in any very public and comprehensive sense⁴ (though of course there were numerous contrary and sometimes subversive individuals and minority movements), and it was therefore unconceptualized as a *major* political challenge to what was said to be "normal" and "natural" (though the mere naming of "the normal" is always indicative of tensions). Few feminists or gay rights campaigners today would view the film as subversive or even supportive, since it appears to work entirely within (and even to celebrate) the conventional boundaries of gendered behavior, firmly anchored in unquestioned bodily sexual difference, binarized gendered behaviour, opposite-sex attraction and the stereotypical conventions of heterosexual romance.

Since 1990, however, Judith Butler has retheorized gender as "performative," i.e. naming no reality other than the "acts and gestures" through which sex, gender and sexuality are produced as identity-creating and individually-disciplining constructs of power/knowledge (1999: xxvii-xxxiii, 1-44, 171-90; see also 1993: 2, 12-13, 20-2, 106-7, 187-8, 230-7; 2004: 218). She writes:

According to the understanding of [gender] identification as an enacted fantasy or incorporation, however, it is clear that coherence is desired, wished for, idealized, and that this idealization is an effect of a corporeal signification. In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality (Butler 1999: 173; emphasis in original).

Butler's work enables the viewer to see, and therefore to interpret, this classic film in a new way, taking on board a new understanding of sex, gender and sexuality. I read it in this respect as a précis of the theorizations in Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1999), *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and *Undoing Gender* (2004), allowing of course for the differences in the media through which these ideas are worked out in different ways for different readerships/audiences. Moreover, the (presumed) "drag" aspect of the film, because it has a mainstream audience, shows that Butler must be right when she argues that we already know, or at least we can already see, that gender isn't natural and naturalized in the way that our theories (whether commonsensical or religious) authoritatively tell us (Butler 1999: xxxviii-xxix, 174).

In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency. Indeed, part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender ... In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized ... (Butler 1999: 175; emphasis in original; see also 2004: 216-18).

⁴ In his 2001 "Some Like It Hot" DVD interview Tony Curtis comments extensively on the limiting boundary lines of risqué behaviour at the time (both on screen and off), on the other side of which was repression and silence.

Many years before Butler published her work, "Some Like It Hot" illustrates this "radical contingency" and our own "recognition" of this. However, in common with others, Butler herself reads the characters as drag-for-the-mainstream, and the overall trajectory of the film therefore as reinforcing heteronormativity:

... it is clear that there are domains in which heterosexuality can concede its lack of originality and naturalness but still hold on to its power. Thus, there are forms of drag that heterosexual culture produces for itself – we might think of Julie Andrews in *Victor, Victoria* or Dustin Hoffman in *Tootsie* or Jack Lemmon [and Tony Curtis -- TC] in *Some Like It Hot* where the anxiety over a possible homosexual consequence is both produced and deflected within the narrative trajectory of the films. These are films which produce and contain the homosexual excess of any given drag performance, the fear that an apparently heterosexual contact might be made before the discovery of a nonapparent homosexuality. This is drag as high het entertainment, and though these films are surely important to read as cultural texts in which homophobia and homosexual panic are negotiated, I would be reticent to call them subversive. Indeed, one might argue that such films are functional in providing a ritualistic release for a heterosexual economy that must constantly police its own boundaries against the invasion of queerness, and that this displaced production and resolution of homosexual panic actually fortifies the heterosexual regime in its self-perpetuating task (Butler 1993: 126).

My argument is precisely contrasting. Because the film uses "normal" characters (and indeed famous actors whose public personae would necessarily be iconically "normal"),⁵ and because it has in my view *nothing to do with drag* (despite the costuming similarities),⁶ it follows that the Butlerian lesson is potentially much more subversive of heteronormative "normality." Moreover the dramaturgy of the film is itself "serious," in that it is devoid of the knowing ironization and nudge-wink double-entendre faux-subversions that characterize other comedies (particularly the "Carry On" series) that are also about sex, gender and sexuality; nothing in "Some Like It Hot" upsets the "reality" of the story as presented to the viewer (except for the very occasional sequences of "magic realism" involving the elevator). Famous actors playing screen characters are both like us and unlike us, in that they have and represent commonplace "normalities" and are at the same time "alive" in a world where time and space, possibility and plausibility, are selectively skewed and seductively glamorized; the use of "stars" effectively merges the film-world with the audience's "real world," imbued as this is with wish-fulfilment and make-believe. Whether anyone else chooses to read the film in this way is, of course, another question; I merely offer the reading below as an illustrative possibility.

The Binaries of Life and Death

The film itself⁷ is a remake of a German movie *Fanfaren der Liebe* released in 1951, which has much the same story, but without the gangsters (the musicians in the earlier movie take up cross-dressing merely to get work). The dramaturgical trope in "Some Like It Hot," by

⁵ In current UK usage females are "actors," not "actresses."

⁶ I justify this claim below in footnote 8.

⁷ I refer any readers who haven't (yet) seen the film to plot synopses and commentaries easily available on the internet, e.g. <http://www.filmsite.org/some.html>.

contrast, is "disguise," harking back at least as far as pre-Shakespearean literatures, themselves reworking themes older than Ovid, though the reasons why men might disguise themselves as women (or vice versa) have of course been highly varied down through the ages. The two "dames" in Wilder's film are not travesty-roles at all, nor is the performance in any sense drag or even cross-dressing in the usual understanding of the term, since the actions of the two musicians are not at all voluntary:⁸ they are running for their lives, having inadvertently witnessed the St. Valentine's Day massacre in "Chicago, 1929." The film is thus safely mainstream in its apparent presumptions and execution: the men are on the run from death, and the disguises therefore make sense as "normal" behaviour, since killing one's gender identity is preferable to being murdered, and it takes something seriously life-threatening to cause such an identity-transforming set of changes.

However, following Butler's ideas (rather than her reading of the film), my argument is that Wilder's script deconstructs gender (as voice, facial gesture, body language, dress and heteronormatively regulated desire) in a clever vocabulary of constructed opposites/reversals, and staged matches/mismatches. In a remarkable way the film repeats some of Butler's major points, or at least theses that she probably wouldn't disagree with, given what she says in print. It presents the physical sexed body as an object produced through conceptualization. It virtually lectures the viewer on "performativity" as repetition, citation, and naturalization of the self. It deconstructs heterosexual romance as psychological fatalism *and* as a mercenary search for security. Overall, then, it is a romantic but inverted fairy tale of transformation and transition from which no one will "live happily ever after," and indeed the naturalization of heterosexuality as physical reproduction of the species and ethical reproduction of society via the family is entirely stripped out. The film thus has the savage bleakness of Swiftian satire undercut by laughter and the enactment of the (supposedly) absurd, namely same-sex marriage,⁹ and, moreover, a representation of queer couples as the only union that promises true (because specifically fictive) happiness. Seen in a certain light, then, "Some Like It Hot" is intellectually subversive, though as a comedy produced by the commercial entertainment industry, it was of course positioned outside "serious" politics, and still is.

This paper uses "Some Like It Hot" to illustrate Butler's work, and to make visible the way that complex conceptual relationships between sex, gender and sexuality can be laid out in moving images and snappy dialogue through a series of logical schemata. The overarching trope of the film, into which sex, gender and sexuality are inserted and highlighted, is that of "nothing is what it seems," effected by devices that are "on the surface." Thus – drawing a swift philosophical conclusion – if we can't be certain of what's "on the surface," we can't be certain of the "underlying essence," and indeed this confusion and undecidability demonstrate the non-existence of essences anyway. This reverses truth-seeking discourses of certainty deployed at least since the time of Aristotle, and it reverses the way that sex as bodily biology is still commonly thought to determine gender (as feminine and masculine within a

⁸ The idea of dressing up as women in order to get work is specifically deflected early on in "Some Like It Hot." I take drag to be a comic form in which a male actor dresses as a woman or vice versa in order to entertain, typically conveying the perfection of the illusion (e.g. "Ladyboys of Bangkok", "Hinge and Bracket") or openly subverting the illusion while delivering "stand-up" comic routines (in a dissonant or somewhat dissonant voice-register), mocking sex, gender, sexualities etc. (e.g. "Lily Savage," "Dame Edna Everidge"). It follows that within the plot of "Some Like It Hot" (as opposed to common audience perceptions -- which might assume that any man-dressed-as-a-woman for any reason is "drag" -- the appearance of men dressed as women (on my definition above) has "nothing to do with drag." I take cross-dressing to be a voluntary activity not done for the stage.

⁹ This of course reads very ironically today in the light of recent political controversies and developments with respect to same/"opposite" sex marriage; see below.

heteronormative presumption of romance, marriage and reproduction). Indeed the dialogue in the film sometimes satirizes the stable referentiality of language (and body language) and the concomitant logics of "necessity" and intelligibility by creating pastiches of confusion that "make sense." I illustrate these points in the discussion below.

The film opens with a classical prologue – the "funeral parlor" that is also a "speakeasy"¹⁰ – which sets up the surface/appearance/undecidability trope, but does so with another classical device, the dumbshow, i.e. images without words. The absence of dialogue or voiceover or titles makes it clear to viewers that they will need to do some interpretive work. This of course mimics the deconstructive "turn" and the refusal (or at least attempted refusal) of the "voice from nowhere," both of which are constitutive of the post-structuralism and linguistic philosophy through which Butler's discussion proceeds (Lloyd 2007: 10-13, 36-44). Though the methodology is hardly unique to her, her use of it "to trouble" sex, gender and sexuality as a trio was pioneering, and it still troubles those relying, to some degree, however qualified or "strategic," on naturalized "foundations" of bodily biology, of which binarizing concepts of gender and sexuality are said to be the necessary (if somewhat under-determined) expression in individual and social practice.

The opening speakeasy scene introduces heteronormativity via the "chorus girls" and "the boys" in the band who are watching them. Two of the boys (Curtis and Lemmon)¹¹ are girl-watching and exercising "the male gaze" (Mulvey 1989). Again, things are not quite what they seem, in that the conversation of one (Lemmon -- he is talking about financial security) doesn't fit the activity (male gazing), though in a further displacement, this doesn't signify anything particular to the viewer until the very end of the film (a point to which I return). After a police raid, the threat of death forces a life-changing issue in the most dramatic possible way, namely the two "boys" become "girls," and the film embarks on a deconstruction of sex, gender and sexuality (rather than life and death, the latter being of no interest at all throughout the film, even though a number of "bit-part" characters die).¹² This denaturalization of sex, gender and sexuality, and concomitant "troubling" of the foundations of heteronormativity, proceeds in effect through a series of parallels displaced from each other in film-time as the plot unfolds. This gives the movie a visual and intellectual exuberance that mirrors and belies that of the plot, rather illustrating by contrast the idea that dull films are the ones that merely "do" the plot and little else. The construction of further visual, textual and semiotic complexities beyond the mere plot keeps the audience amused, of course, but the point of my discussion in this paper is to reassemble some of these in a more schematic way, such that they articulate Butler's theories and insights. The film could itself be appropriated to teach Butler's work, in my view, without violence to either (and also without the necessity of making any biographical or genealogical claims between the two).

"One ... becomes a Woman"

¹⁰ And the hearse that is really a getaway car, the casket that really holds booze ... etc. The convention for the "Friends of Italian Opera" at the end of the film is a parallel sequence, in that the gangsters reproduce a similar pattern of absurd codes and crucial errors, e.g. "We wuz wid you boss at Rigoletto's." The philosophical point, shared by Butler, is that language is inherently non-referential, or rather, that referentiality is a trope within language, and that referentiality can "make sense" of anything (Butler 1993: 29-31; Butler 1999: 22-33).

¹¹ Given that characters played by these two actors have a number of male and female names and personae (three each) throughout the film, I stabilize my discussion with the actors' very recognizable screen names.

¹² Undramatizing death (by trivialization) and life (by excluding birth or intergenerational issues) keeps the drama focused on sex, gender and sexuality.

The sex/gender dichotomy is introduced via a female secretary who mocks Curtis and Lemmon with a job offer, knowing it's with an all-girl band, a clear impossibility -- supposedly. Lemmon toys with this for economic reasons, but Curtis confirms it as impossible ... until Curtis later decides -- for the best of reasons -- that it isn't. He makes a telephone call, dressed of course as a man, but with facial gestures and voice (only),¹³ he becomes a woman. Viewers see both Curtis the actor and his character in the film in a new and "troubling"/exciting way; my point here is that this transformation can be interpreted as a metaphor for the malleability of binary sex as a social *presumption*, a supposed essence under the surface phenomena that Curtis so successfully imitates (or at least in the film he gives the impression that sheer determination will make this successful). Much later in the film there is the mirror-image version of this: Curtis makes a phone call (dumping Marilyn Monroe)¹⁴ while wearing women's clothes but using his man's voice and acting out¹⁵ a characteristically masculine scenario (Monroe's femininity, by contrast, is all sincerity, credulity, naïveté, making her incapable of such guile). What is "real" in the film-world is thus what the characters get away with, not some supposedly natural or fixed state of their bodies in biological terms that is "naturally" expressed in their facial gestures, body language and dress.

The screenplay of course does not rely on nudity to make any "biological" points anyway, and the dramaturgy is thus one in which gender markers *imply* physical differences in the characters. These are taken seriously in the story, if not by the audience. This of course is Butler's point exactly: we *already* know that gender is a free-floating signifier, not an effect of some biological cause; rather, our presumptions about bodily differences are an effect caused by the "surface" stylizations through which gender is performatively constructed:

When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one (Butler 1999: 9-11, see also 156-8, 187-8; 2004: 209; Halberstam 1998).¹⁶

The film cuts to the famous train-boarding scene where Curtis and Lemmon are dressed as women and comment extensively and exclusively on gender difference ... while visibly (and in film terms successfully) undermining the supposed knowledge that surfaces (e.g. skirts, stockings, high heels) are *requirements* of essential bodily (i.e. female) difference. Monroe appears as iconically feminine, "the real thing," but also as an *outcome* of the bodily performances that Curtis and Lemmon are discovering how to cite and then beginning to practice. Monroe represents in gender terms what they are citing as female and feminine, and is thus the successful naturalization of what they are doing as beginners. She is also the "successful" naturalization of femininity within heterosexuality, as she relates her tragic-

¹³ In his DVD interview Curtis acknowledges that some of his "female" lines were dubbed (presumably by a man) because he couldn't modulate his voice upwards consistently; he then explains that he consistently pursed his lips to create femininity.

¹⁴ In the film Monroe's character "Sugar Cane" is using an assumed name; I stabilize my discussion of this character by using the actor's name, as she was in audience perception terms, "playing herself" anyway.

¹⁵ Here Curtis is playing a character ("Joe") who is acting out a character ("Shell Oil Junior") but is dumping Monroe as *both* his "real" and fictive selves, since they are both involved with her in the same version of heterosexual masculinity, an ironic comment on the way that heterosexuality involves self-conscious acting that utilizes and expresses a naturalized identity.

¹⁶ In the DVD interview Curtis recounts that he and Lemmon were coached by a female impersonator.

comic lifetime predicament in a subsequent scene (set in the ladies room, of course). Monroe explains that she "always gets the fuzzy end of the lollipop," because she falls hopelessly for men ("sax players") who treat her badly (in a later reprise she mentions stylized violence and serial desertion). With respect to the plot and the film, it is crucial that the boys learn to be girls, with lessons from the best (Monroe is the prettiest and most feminine girl in the band, and was also at the time the top iconic sex symbol¹⁷ in Hollywood). With respect to the film, the (supposedly) trivial point is that the deconstruction of sex, gender and sexuality that ensues is merely funny, or at least not very serious.¹⁸

"Sweet Sue" the band leader (who is anything but sweet) is of course the first character¹⁹ who is suspicious of the two "new girls," suggesting that they aren't what they seem. Given that she prods "*her* girls" onto the train with a knob-ended conductor's baton, I take this to be one of Hollywood's moments of "lesbian presence" (White 1999),²⁰ and one where it is evidently that kind of woman who knows what a real woman is (presumably because she doesn't think much about men, as the other girls do, and concentrates her attention on women). "Sweet Sue" and her grotesquely neutered manager "Beanstalk" (the very tall Sue is obviously the giant) are an odd couple foreshadowing the more obvious one that emerges at the denouement (to which I return). This constitutive outside to the heterosexual romancing that develops in various ways throughout the rest of the film thus *highlights* heteronormativity, without challenging it head-on, or overtly troubling it. Even the shocking (apparent) lesbian kiss near the end of the movie, where Curtis in female costume embraces Monroe while she is singing on stage, isn't all that it seems, so no one (in the audience, or in the film – at that point the secret is then swiftly revealed) – has to deal with same-sex physical congress. While heteronormativity is affirmed, this *highlighting* exposes it to analysis.

The sexual segregation through which heterosexuality operates (i.e. the all-girl band, the "girls dorm" sleeping car, the "no men allowed" policy in the band etc.) troubles Curtis and Lemmon considerably when they become "girls," as their heterosexual male gaze, male talk, and male behaviour have to be disciplined, rather than cited to each other repetitiously, as would be the case in their usual "all boys" duo environment, which the film itself celebrates.²¹ The two then are – all along – the happily "married" sort of couple²² that the regime of heteronormativity *definitionally* excludes. This is quite a powerful construction underpinning the film as heterosexual dystopia; only the impossible really works, and the "invisible/unintelligible" (i.e. their "happy marriage," or at least a workable one)²³ represents

¹⁷ Female sex symbol and symbol of "sex" *per se* as constructed within the "male gaze" (Mulvey 1989).

¹⁸ Which it is. Lemmon at one point says he's terrified of being taken to "the ladies morgue."

¹⁹ "Spats," the gangster, is the other. The gangster fraternity is the "other" to the sorority "Sweet Sue's Society Syncopators."

²⁰ The corresponding "gay-male" moment comes much later when "Spats," sitting down with one leg outstretched, orders a submissive gangster (who has to have clean hands) to kneel and button his spats for him.

²¹ The film satirizes the sharpness and separation of the gender binary in the scene where the all-girl band enters the hotel in front of an all-male phalanx of "rich old men" in rocking chairs on the veranda, where their coordinated gender performance mirrors that of the "chorus girls" in the speakeasy (I owe this observation to Dr R. Brown of Swansea University, UK).

²² As the gangsters close in at the end, Lemmon's getaway fantasy of escaping with Curtis to South America and living in a banana republic *together* for 100 years is clearly a marriage proposal.

²³ When the two are a male duo, Curtis always acts "the husband," and Lemmon, "the wife," viz. Curtis leads Lemmon by the hand out of the music agency office. Throughout the film Curtis treats Lemmon's person and possessions as his (i.e. Curtis's, as husband to wife) and refers in that context to "we," a point which Lemmon (protesting) highlights to the audience. The two have clearly been partners for years and learned to get along very happily, managing differences and caring for each other (Lemmon tries to limit Curtis's risk-taking; Curtis tries to protect Lemmon from losing his marriageable masculinity and entering some unthinkable same-sex hell,

the kind of relationship that can never be fully acknowledged in its closeness and intimacy. In the all-girl environment Curtis disciplines his male/heterosexual gaze and desire straightforwardly through self-control and recourse to lady-like manners²⁴; Lemmon does this rather more disturbingly by adopting "girly" behaviour as a way of getting heterosexual (?) female attention. The film cites female attraction and flirtation, but as a group rather than duo phenomenon. Repetitious citation of feminine behaviour among females *en masse*²⁵ then emerges as an appropriate bonding strategy within a heterosexual female community, but somewhat subverted by Lemmon's too successful gestures and sexualized behaviour as exhibited in his temporary "girl-boy" gender-fuck persona.²⁶ Effectively this separates out heterosexual desire from the sexed body and gendered gesture: Lemmon has a presumed female body, but "manly" desires that he pursues with feminine gestures, which get the right result, namely he gets the girls' attention.

Binary Maintenance but Logical Confusion

Curtis puts a stop to this confusion (rather than reversal) of the gender/sex/sexuality binaries by invoking repetition in the Butlerian manner. He gets Lemmon to repeat "I'm a girl, I'm a girl, I'm a girl ...," and the difficulties subside. Much later in the film, the same thing happens, though in reverse: Taken out dancing, Lemmon becomes so thoroughly naturalized as a woman that he wants to marry a man ("Osgood," played by Joe E. Brown, a very well known but older comic actor).²⁷ Curtis again defuses the situation with the same Butlerian tactic. He makes Lemmon repeat: "I'm a boy, I'm a boy, I'm a boy." Curtis's series of questions that precede this apparently blunt (but effective) instrument of reverse-transformation "back to reality" trace out the logic of sex/gender within an unquestionable heteronormativity. But Lemmon's answers all have an impregnable logic all of their own:

C: What happened?

L: I'm engaged!

C: Congratulations! Who's the lucky girl?

L: I am!

C: What?!

etc.).

²⁴ In the DVD interview Curtis discusses the overall character contrast between the him and Lemmon in their female personae, noting that his role model was Grace Kelly or his mother, and that Lemmon's over-the-top foil ("a twenty-cent tart," in Curtis's phrase) was an accidental but happy fit.

²⁵ This is somewhat subverted since the girls are described as rough-talking and behave raucously, effectively freed to be just like men because, out of the male gaze, they don't have to be women. The inverse parallel is musical: when first joining the band Curtis and Lemmon play in a lady-like way, apparently associating hot jazz with masculinity. Sweet Sue tells them to "goose it up," and they learn that jazz isn't the "male gaze."

²⁶ The parallel moment re: Curtis comes later when Lemmon, complaining that Curtis is "after Sugar [i.e. Monroe]," recounts that he has seen the two of them (Curtis and Monroe) in the back of the bus giggling and sharing each other's lipsticks.

²⁷ However, viewing Lemmon and Osgood as men, their tango dancing sequences perfectly illustrate one of Butler's comments on the relationship between gender (which is necessarily heterosexualized) and homosexuality (which plays with, or is made to play with, heterosexualized gender, but in itself would require some *other* conceptualizations of "gender" difference): "The vocabulary for describing the difficult, play, crossing, and destabilization of masculine and feminine identifications within homosexuality has only begun to emerge within theoretical language ..." (Butler 1993: 239). Startlingly, and perhaps prophetically, the film sequence closes with the "Cuban" band suddenly blindfolded -- "gender"-difference as flickering desire between two men is represented as unwatchable, because it is unthinkable. What is interesting, of course, is that the two men on screen are giving precisely this unthinkable and unwatchable performance as actors (the cinema audience knows that Lemmon is a man) for mainstream viewers to make sense of.

L: Osgood proposed to me. We're planning a June wedding.
 C: What are you talking about? You can't marry Osgood?
 L: He's too old for me?
 C: Jerry, you can't be serious.
 L: Why not? He keeps marrying girls all the time.
 C: But you're not a girl, you're a guy, and why would a guy wanna marry a guy?
 L: Security!
 C: Jerry, you better lie down, you're not well.
 L: Will you stop treating me like a child, I'm not stupid, I know there's a problem.
 C: I'll say there is.
 L: His mother. We need her approval, and I'm not worried because I don't smoke!
 C: [loudly] Jerry, there's another problem!
 L: Like what?
 C: Like what are you going to do on your honeymoon?
 L: We've been discussing that. He wants to go to the Riviera, but I kinda lean towards Niagara Falls.
 C: Jerry, you're out of your mind! How are you going to get away with this?
 L: I don't expect it to last, Joe, I'll tell him the truth when the time comes.
 C: When?
 L: Like right after the ceremony.
 C: Oh.
 L: Then we get a quick annulment, he makes a nice settlement on me, and I keep getting those alimony checks everrrrry month!
 C: Jerry, Jerry, listen to me! There are laws, conventions ...It's just not been done.
 L: Shhhh! Joe, this may be my last chance to marry a millionaire.
 C: [sincerely] Jerry, Jerry, will you take my advice, forget about the whole thing, will you? Just keep telling yourself you're a boy. You're a boy.
 L: [sadly] I'm a boy.
 C: That's the boy.
 L: I'm a boy ... I'm a boy ... I wish I were dead ... boy oh boy am I a boy.

At the end of the film, this episode is reprised the other way round, as Osgood persuades Lemmon that the two can get married no matter what:

O: I called Mama. She was so happy she cried. She wants you to have her wedding gown. It's white lace!
 L: Osgood, I can't get married in your mother's dress. She and I We are not built the same way.
 O: We can have it altered.
 L: Uh, no you don't! Osgood, I'm gonna level with you. We can't get married at all.
 O: Why not?
 L: Well ... in the first place, I'm not a natural blonde.
 O: Doesn't matter.
 L: I smoke! I smoke all the time!
 O: I don't care.
 L: I have a terrible past. For three years now I've been living with a saxophone player.
 O: I forgive you.
 L: [assumes ethereal, tragic look] I can never have children.
 O: We can adopt some.
 L: [angrily] Osgood, you don't understand! Uh [takes off wig] ... I'm a man.

O: Well, nobody's perfect.

No doubt in terms of audience reception (then and now) these two exchanges are merely zany, a kind of "Through the Looking Glass" play on words and expectations. Read more subversively,²⁸ however, the first exchange maps out heterosexuality from courtship through marriage to inevitable divorce (figured as annulment), with a ruthless and realistic emphasis on individual financial security, in particular that of the "lucky girl." All of this obviously fights with the tropes of heteronormative romantic love, which the audience must silently invoke, in order to make sense of the exchange as funny. Curtis's repeated allusions to the supposedly obvious, namely that Lemmon cannot be a girl and cannot as a man marry a man, are met with rejoinders that do the mapping (proposal, age, parental approval, honeymoon, serial monogamy, alimony). The second exchange is simply the inverse: rejection, unsuitability in various ways, parental disapproval, untrustworthiness, etc. Osgood's rejoinder, "Nobody's Perfect," then names the truth behind any human relationship, namely that no one ever lives up to any idealization. This contradicts the way that heterosexuality rests on an idealization of supposed "biological" simplicities and inevitabilities wrapped up in merely "being a man" or "being a woman," i.e. this is crucially what it takes to make life together perfect. The inverse logic, however, is that since nobody's perfect, no particular imperfection is crucial, so any two can make such happiness as is humanly possible.

Besides deconstructing heteronormativity for us, and explicating the terms of binarized gender, these episodes also satirize logic and experience, licence imagination and self-construction, and in the end re-endorse the power of citation and repetition *over* the body and mind, just as Butler would have it:²⁹

This perpetual displacement [in gender parody] constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities. Although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization. As imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself (Butler 1999: 176; see also 2004: 54, 80).

Upside Down, Inside Out, Wrong Way Around

While the film gives heterosexuality its constitutive "outsides" in the form of the "noticed" but disavowed lesbian presence and male-male marriage, it also inverts heterosexuality itself by reversing the masculine and feminine gender roles of seducer and seduced³⁰ (much as the girl/boy or ladies/gentlemen roles are more obviously reversed through dress and gesture). Curtis (posing as an oil-millionaire playboy) sets up a tryst with Monroe on Osgood's yacht where they can be alone, but then pretends that women do not move him to make love. Monroe adopts the seducer role, kissing Curtis with increasing passion in order to produce

²⁸ I am grateful for Dr. S.A. Chambers, Swansea University, UK, for stimulus to look further into these passages, and for very helpful comments throughout.

²⁹ In the DVD interview Curtis explains that Lemmon's dancing antics with maracas were staged by Wilder so that the audience could really "hear it" in that particular run of dialogue (whereas elsewhere, Curtis said, with quick dialogue you have to see the movie again and again to follow every word).

³⁰ The scene is preceded by Curtis and Monroe getting to the yacht in a motorboat that is "stuck in reverse," so they make the trip from shore to ship going backwards.

the desired feelings (which are feelings of desire), while Curtis adopts the feminine role of the unawakened virgin. While this reproduces a trope which would not have shocked the audience very much (cf. leap year, when "a woman can propose to a man," or any number of other carnivalesque cultural gender reversals), it demonstrates the scripted character of heterosexual desire. It also demonstrates the process of naturalization through citation and repetition once again, precisely because it has displaced "normal" gender/sex roles such that repetition is *required*. This time, however, the naturalization appears in terms of "internal" feelings of desire rather than "external" legibility as woman or man. Given that citation and repetition already occur in society, one need only repeat the script self-consciously in order to construct the desired reality, and perform the bodily practices repetitiously.

After repetitious kissing, Curtis is supposed to feel a man (even while playing a feminized virginal role), much as Lemmon is made to effect his transformations of visible gender identity (albeit from boy to girl to boy). Lemmon's gender reversals are the most destabilizing, as what is real to him and real to others is so dependent on individual beliefs and desires; Curtis's heterosexual masculinity withstands a violent role reversal, but inflicts instability all round him (viz. his failed romances turned sour, as with the secretary Nellie, and his current romance is with someone who is unstable – Monroe drinks). Marriage is visible in the film only as the presumed goal of romance, but no one ever gets there (or ever will – properly), and the happy/unhappy couples in the film are not mapped to any "normal"/queer boundary line. There are no families (except Osgood's controlling mother, who doesn't appear), and the only significant child-figure is the lubriciously over-sexualized near-midget bellboy; a real little boy is kicked out of the way by Curtis on the beach. Osgood is attracted to Lemmon because he's a "big girl"; in the film little girls don't exist. While the film may appear to be a gallery of grotesques, the tropes add up to a savage attack on presumptions of stability in "human nature" and in knowledge itself, and it constructs a virtual paen to the power of citation and repetition to produce effects (that are normally naturalized as causes).

However, there is a puzzle here. Given Butler's well-known remarks suggesting that drag works to "dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established," how then does she read *some* drag, such as "Some Like It Hot," as mere "imitation," or worse, as reinforcing the gender/sex stereotypes through which heteronormativity is constituted? (1999 [1990]: xxviii; 1993: 126). How then does she read *other* drag, e.g. Divine's performances in John Waters' films "Female Trouble" and "Hairspray," as "persistent impersonation that passes as the real ... [destabilizing] the very distinctions between the natural and the artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer through which discourse about genders almost always operates"? (1999 [1990]: xxviii). What, for Butler, divides "good" drag (which is at least potentially destabilizing of heteronormativity) from "bad" drag (which reinforces it)?

One possible explanation is that Butler simply misreads "Some Like It Hot" as drag, whereas the film is actually about an extreme form of disguise, namely cross-dressing. This is the argument rehearsed above, which then locates the subversive potential of the dramatic form in the way that citation and repetition are handled within the narrative in order to produce gender-transformation, and thus to destabilize the naturalism of "biological" certainties involving sex and sexuality. Thus on this view "good" drag doesn't have to be drag; it merely has to be a cross-dressing performance that "teaches" us gender as a repertoire of stylizations. "Bad" drag, on this analysis, fails to accomplish this subversion because (as in "Victor/Victoria" and "Tootsie," which Butler mentions) the narrative and dramaturgy (rather than the "drag" performances) maintain heteronormative and "biological" certainties which

ultimately trump the subversive potential of didactic cross-dressing.

The key is in the nature of the parody: is it done for non-subversive amusement, such that the subversive potential goes deliberately unfulfilled? Or is it done for subversive amusement, such that the subversive potential is fulfilled (albeit in a way that is necessarily bounded by the conventions and practices of theatre)? Butler took her cue from Divine's "bad girl" character "Dawn Davenport" in "Female Trouble," then noticing her more low-key and less obviously subversive performance as "Mrs. Edna Turnblad" in "Hairspray" merely in passing. The former is a savage parody of every "bad girl" gender-cliché in the book, thus revealing the parodic character of "good girl" citation and repetition as well; the latter is an amiable reprise that is more about body-size, social class and race (on which subjects it is profoundly didactic) than it is about gender, where much of the "gendered" behaviour by boys and girls is effectively androgynous (e.g. hair spraying, dancing, dating and going steady), thus highlighting the *other* binaries under attack. My criticism of Butler in relation to drag and subversion, then, is that she is really more right than she realized: repetition, citation and subversion are the key to the dramatizations she highlights in films such as "Female Trouble" and in "gay and lesbian cultures", not drag itself, which is in any case rather easily misapplied as a term (1999 [1990]: xxix).

Material Girls

As mentioned above, the film brackets off a considerable amount of bodily biology (the locus of sex, on usual presumptions) and thus deals with surfaces. However there are ways of referencing the physical aspects of sexual difference without any crudely literal revelations.³¹ At the beach Monroe constructs Lemmon's body (clad in a women's one-piece bathing suit) *discursively* as female, albeit in a surprising but familiar way. She says admiringly that Lemmon has big shoulders and arms, and she wishes she were as fashionably flat-chested as "Daphne" because clothes hang so well on "her." This says not only that the physical body is constructed through concepts of stylization, because it is *understood* as such through those means, but that presumptive femaleness, for example, does not generate a unique stereotype, but rather any number of different (and indeed opposite) ways of being understood as female and attractive (i.e. Monroe constructs Lemmon as a "big girl"). It obviously instructs the audience that at every level Lemmon's disguise is working, even in a situation (swimsuits) where a degree of exposure functions metaphorically as a reference to naked literalism. The parallel scene in the film is Monroe's own entrance, walking along the railroad station platform in front of Curtis and Lemmon. The "new girls" ("brand new!"³² as Lemmon says) theorize the kind of physical construction that would produce the femininity they are watching: "jello on springs" or some kind of internal "motor." It is from this theorization of the physical that Lemmon says the word (unique in the film): "It's a whole different *sex*!"

The "other" to romance and "the heart," of course, is "hard-headed" calculation, in particular about money. The funny side of money is referenced through Osgood's easy millions that he spends on showgirls, Curtis's funny-money approach to "high finance" when he's pretending to be rich, and Monroe's million-dollar pretend-milk fund licensing her kisses. The point at which the economic framing of heteronormativity enters most directly (and positively, in a hard-headed sense) is with Lemmon, whose initial lines in the speakeasy are not about the

³¹ This is duly noticed in the script when there is initial confusion about not needing a bathing suit at the beach; Monroe explains that they can be rented.

³² As one would say of a manufactured, i.e. "constructed" object.

“chorus girls” he is supposedly watching while he plays his bull fiddle in the band, but about his monetary insecurities, viz. getting his teeth fixed and becoming secure in financial terms (versus Curtis’s plan that they put “their” money on a sure-thing bet at the dog track). When asked by Curtis why “a guy” would marry “a guy,” Lemmon instantly replies “Security!”, and when he is ecstatically convinced that he is going to marry Osgood, it is the financial arrangements (including divorce and alimony, the non-romantic side of heterosexual romance) that trump all the supposedly sexual and legal things that, so Curtis thinks, make the whole scheme completely impossible. Osgood, of course, wants a dancing partner (for a time and for a fee) who looks like a showgirl, and Lemmon has found that he excels at that – a small price to pay for what he really wants. Osgood is the least troubled character in the film; he’s rich and has no worries.

Osgood also has the final famous line (said to Lemmon, who confesses the “truth” that he’s really a man): “Nobody’s perfect.” Thus the bubble of wilful understanding is kept intact, and naturalized “truth” gets sidelined once again, even when it’s about things that are the very basis of “human nature” itself. Butler’s contrast between the world of sex/gender/sexuality stereotypes – that we never live up to, that we can never fulfil, that are the source of the naturalizing scripts we employ – seems a lengthy meditation on this particular point, perhaps a footnote in effect to Billy Wilder.

What is a Body and How does it Matter?

Since the time of “Some Like It Hot” the politics of sex, gender and sexuality has made “It” very hot indeed, and indeed the temperature is still rising. However, the considerable deconstructions that have already occurred, in various places and in varying ways, are somewhat foreshadowed by the film (in this latter-day reading) and largely tracked by Butler’s theorizations (particularly as updated in 2004: 1-16). In particular, the legality of “sex change,” and also trans-sexual lives, has been established in various jurisdictions as a medicalized practice and as a set of legal procedures involving reconciliation with the virtually universal requirement that individuals “identify” themselves with respect to the M/F “biological” binary. However, in current legal practice (where allowed) this is now an effect of individual choice (as appropriately monitored) and is also sometimes decoupled from any uniquely determining regime of physical tests. The necessarily sexed body has thus become an effect of individual choices and political processes, rather than a “natural” outcome of “biological” determinations, or even “standard” medical interventions. Butlerian deconstruction thus mirrors a practical political process of denaturalization, i.e. licensing that which contradicts commonplace presumptions and strictures that are putatively “grounded” in Nature. Nature is thought to mark the inalterable or the sacred, and current political processes, however carefully packaged, can’t fail to “trouble” such doctrines.

Similarly, legislation such as the UK Gender Recognition Act 2002 tracks the Butlerian account of citation and repetition, because it licenses a change of “gender” as M/F (rather than “sex” as M/F) by permitting the changes described above to occur, while decoupling it from any requirements for medical or “biological” changes, relying instead on behavioural criteria. That is, one merely “lives successfully in the chosen gender.” Success is measured over time (at least a year), which is thus apparently the interval needed for citation and repetition to become “natural” to the subjectivity of the person involved. The presumption is that success is also measured by the ability to “live,” i.e. to be accepted in the chosen gender

by others.³³ The procedures through which all this is assessed are presumably in place, but not spelled out in the legislation. It poses intriguing questions about what it is to be successful in a performative concept (such as gender, but only one pole of the binary at a time), and what it is to live this way (such that troubling "failures" caused by gender-change do not occur in *others'* lives).

Finally, same-sex marriage and civil association/partnership legislation, in very patchy and multiply conflicted ways, has realized what "Some Like It Hot" rehearsed as obviously impossible and utterly intelligible. The heterosexual dystopia in the film (where true romance will never produce happiness, and "false" romance will never produce families) was the "realistic" mirror to the discursive and fictive world of heteronormativity which motivates and constrains all the characters (and in that way reinforces real-world fantasies that balance its film-world critique). Because the film is funny, and doesn't trouble viewers by making critical points explicitly, it sends the dystopian world off into the sunset and thus returns the audience to the "real" world of romance outside the cinema.³⁴ But for the film and for Butler, in a sense, the political lessons are the same: it is discourse that is cited and performatively repeated (not some "biological" pre- and extra-discursive Nature that "grounds" culture),³⁵ and discourse is malleable, "free-floating artifice" (Butler 1999: 9-11; Butler 1993: 6). There is seriousness in Wilder's film -- but I wish there were more laughs in Butler's philosophy. This is about as close as we get:³⁶

The loss of the sense of "the normal," however, can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when "the normal," "the original" is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one *can* embody. In this sense, laughter emerges in the realization that all along the original was derived (Butler 1999: 176).

³³ See Butler on the (controversial) concept of "the livable life" (2004: 8, 12, 17, 29-30, 39, 225-7).

³⁴ As Butler argues (1993: 126); quoted above.

³⁵ "A genealogical critique refuses to search for the origins of gender ... a genuine or authentic sexual identity that expression has kept from view; rather, genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and *cause* those identity categories that are in fact the effects of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin. The task of this inquiry is to center on -- and decenter -- such defining institutions: ... compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler 1999 [1990]: xxix).

³⁶ Although to be fair, Butler cites John Waters' film "Female Trouble" (1974) in the original (1990) introduction to *Gender Trouble* and calls for "laughter in the face of serious categories" (Butler 1999: xxviii).

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