

An Unusual Way of Addressing Sex/Gender¹

Tanguy Trillet

This contribution reproduces the performance of the actor Tanguy Trillet, illustrated with selected material. The photographs were taken by Michel Burmat.



Good morning everyone.

I feel particularly flattered to be able with you speak this morning. Well, I am a bit excited. But then I think the coffee I had this morning has me geared up. Add to that a good dose of confidence and I can share my view about sex and gender with you. A very modest view, mind you!

I don't have the expert's perspective of some of those present here have. Instead, my observations stem from an experimental quest. A personal and empirical analysis. I hope this won't bother you and that you will show leniency towards the spontaneity of my observations ... Right! I think the coffee is beginning to have effect. Let's get started!

First of all, I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Tanguy. Tanguy Trillet. In my professional life I am playing at being an actor. Yes, things like that happen! As an actor, I work with a cultural Association for politics and education 'Impulsions Femmes', which is based in France, in Niort. Niort is situated in Deux-Sèvres, which Luxembourg has nothing to be envious about! Our association endeavours to question norms of society and of the family, as well as forms of socialization, and we reflect on the reproduction of modes of behaviour, sexualities, and the sexed and gendered organization of our society and corresponding patterns of action. Our field of practice is culture. Our mission is that all people have the opportunity to reflect and evolve at any time, at any age.

¹ | Original version in French.

About a year ago I met Dr. Erik Schneider. Erik Schneider who is present here today. Erik? Erik. Hi there, Erik! So, about a year ago I met Erik. We met during a conference organized by the Institut Émilie du Châtelet in Paris. Hi Emile, if you happen to be listening. While we were discussing my work, Erik had the idea that I could contribute something to the colloquium today. Erik wanted to attempt a totally new approach to the concept of sex and gender. The guests were to be challenged directly with the subject of 'Gender Trouble'. Judith, that was meant for you. And to all the other thinkers of modernity. Yes, you there. You, who hone wise words that heal our aching wounds! Your words on our wounds. What wholesome words, what worthy wisdom ...²



Where were we? Anyway to you, you who are addressing the question that gender poses: who am I dealing with? Is he he? Is she she? Is he he or she? Is she she or he? Is she he or she? Where is he she or he? Is he or is she she or he? Where is she or he, he or she? Where is he or she he or she? Where is she/he he or she? Where is s_he s_he? Where is s*he s* he? Where is s_he s* he? Where is s*he s_he?

In short, I have tried to perform or incarnate these questions. Showing through performance that gender is always performed. And I speak of incarnation in the literal sense. My profession makes it possible. To use the tools of transformation for being another person, for slipping into another role. So, I created the character, Marion, whom you met yesterday and this morning and

² | Vous qui pensez des mots pour panser nos maux! Penser/panser, mots/maux. Penser e-n des mots m-o-t-s pour panser a-n nos maux m-a-u-x. E-n/a-n, m-o-t-s/m-a-u-x...



who is now on the point of disappearing before your eyes.

In the theatre there is nothing strange about a man assuming the role of a woman. In antiquity people always wore masks and costumes. Only men were allowed to enter the proskene. In Elizabethan theatre of the 16th century, which included for instance Shakespeare, we also find this particularity. Our Juliet was actually a Julius! Today, too, men play women, for instance in some strongly codified theatre forms in Asia such as Kabuki or Bunraku. That was history of the theatre in 35 seconds...

But careful, playing a role is not lying, don't get me wrong.

In playing many of Molière's characters, you are fooled by no one. I assure you, performing is not tricking. On the contrary, performing is creating a truth. And creating a new truth means fighting against the logic of the social majority who wants to squeeze people into preconceived categories. With my performance yesterday, I wanted to make clear that the categories imposed on us can be transgressed and that this transgression is a truth. To be true. To be honest. That's what we learn in the theatre! To be honest in our role. We learn and refine this in the course of our training. In the end it becomes a 'play'. Slipping from one role into another.

Playing with the identities, as in child's play, but maybe not adolescent play. Adolescence! The casting room where these developing social creatures challenge each other. Teens! Kinds of stars whose becoming is informed under sufferance, by institutions they encounter along their path, just like actors who bow to the top brass of the block buster film industry.

The scene of adolescence I refer to here offers a significantly richer enactment of identities in contrast to the simplifying blockbuster. However, success is assured to those, alas, who conform to the sex/gender norms more personal emancipation which is 'the happy end'. Thus, gender is first and foremost a role. A role you define yourself. Scripts or stage directions can perhaps offer models, but in the final analysis it's you who decides. We are all our own directors. And there's not just one role. There are so many! Our repertoire has more than just a Hamlet and an Ophelia! Roles and genders go beyond the binary, two-gender representation. They do not limit themselves to female and male. They offer so many other possibilities.



What has caused my transformation now? That is the crucial question! Where did the incarnation of Marion get me? Well, I admit, not particularly far! The physical search for representing a female character was very fascinating for me, to be sure. But the concrete realization was a lot more complex. Not that I felt un-

comfortable in this role. No. I found it even rather pleasant. But in my relationship with you this was different. I couldn't talk too much about it. Not talk too much about it in order not to disclose my true identity. The contact with you, as honest as it was, was also limited. As if I couldn't take the encounter right to the end. Regarding your reactions, I certainly didn't feel any awkwardness nor did I have the idea of being exposed to wary glances. But that was to be expected. We have to admit that my contribution here blends into an environment favourable to the issue of trans-identity. Here you are well informed and in an empathetic environment. Fortunately! But as Howard Becker has said in his book "Outsiders", a person can at the same time observe the norms of one group and violate those of another. We know that the cognitive structures of the social majority infiltrate the social world, and that trans-identity is generally regarded as deviant behaviour. Let me therefore quote once more Howard Becker: "Deviance is not a quality of the act a person commits, but rather the consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions upon an offender." Let us therefore not forget that gender is also defined through the look of the Other. This look of the Other is in the broadest sense that of our society. This look which submits the I to a classification. And I say I, I say I, but alright, the I, that's us. Corresponding to the codes we have completely internalized we all create a role. According to Bourdieu! And these Others who look at us with judgmental eyes, that's us too! The I is us. The Other is we and the we are we. The I-we, the Other-we, the We-we!





To conclude I would like to quote Jean de la Fontaine and one of his countless practical lessons: The fable of the Woods and the Woodman. A wood-chopper had damaged or lost the piece of wood that served him as a handle for his axe. So he asked the forest whether he could carefully take a branch from which to fashion a new handle. In return he promised to take his trade elsewhere. The forest, who, it must be said, was a bit naive, granted the request. As soon as this happened, the woodchopper attached the handle to his iron and felled the forest.



Therefore I say:

Let the tormentors come, we will concede nothing! Let us fortify ourselves against their sanctions whatever they may look like. Let us reinforce our branches and our glorious foliage and let us not let our forest of uniqueness be cut down by the chainsaw of normality!

Thank you very much.

Salut et liberté!

