

“Look at the Woman I’ve Become”: Camp, Gender and Identity in Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *The Marriage of Maria Braun* and John Cameron Mitchell’s *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in the department of English and Comparative Literature

Chapel Hill
2007

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ABSTRACT

Amy Banks: "Look at the Woman I've Become": Camp, Gender and Identity in
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Mitchell's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*
(Under the direction of Alice Kuzniar)

The concept of female gender performativity is a cornerstone of contemporary queer theory. It suggests that manifestations of femaleness are stylized reinterpretations of socially constructed gender norms. An example of this can be seen in the campy, parodic performance of drag, but it is also reflected in the notion that women themselves are female impersonators. Both groups adapt traditional gender norms in ways that reflect the artificiality of manners of speaking, dress and decorum. Additionally, both groups can attain the subversive power that acknowledgment of such performativity allows. These notions are illustrated in the 1978 Rainer Werner Fassbinder film *The Marriage of Maria Braun* and the 2001 John Cameron Mitchell film *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*.

The character of Maria Braun adapts her own femininity to the cultural, social and political circumstances that surround her. The character of Hedwig does the same, yet as a transgendered individual. An examination of the two films highlights many issues at the core of current Queer Theory and allows for insight into not only gender identity construction but into how identity as a whole is constructed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“One is not born, but one becomes woman.”—Simone de Beauvoir¹

Gender is a universally accepted aspect of identity. Whether it is defined by the individual or by outside forces, whether it is rigid or amorphous, it remains an inescapable aspect of who we are. It influences how we see ourselves, how we see others and how we choose to interact with the world around us. We are confronted with how to navigate the ways in which gender has been interpreted in our society and how we wish to interpret it in our own lives. Traditionally, one is either male or female, and if seen in terms of a dichotomy, each group tends to be defined in opposition to the other. While definitions of what is masculine or feminine have shifted throughout time, it is significant that this sense of dichotomy has endured. How then to interpret gender when it is problematized? Many bodies blur the lines between gender and many individuals actively Gender-Fuck their own identities. Queer Theory allows avenues for exploring the blur between these lines. A core element of queer studies, Judith Butler’s work on gender performativity allows for a queer reading of the traditionally sexed body. Her work purports that gender is not an essential, inscribed trait. Instead it is something that is learned and performed. It is something that one “does”. Butler defines gender, then, as “the stylized repetition of acts through time”

¹ (de Beauvoir 267)

asserting that the gendered self is merely a reflection of “bodily gestures, movements and styles” which “constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (“Performance” 519-520).

Gender can, in these terms, be seen as a kind of theatrical production in which the individual portrays his or her imagined image of a “woman” or a “man” on a daily basis. If defining gender in these terms, what then to make of drag? If its basic format is a man or woman aping and overstating the traditional characteristics of the opposite gender, it does indeed support the argument that gender can be performed. However, the parodic nature of drag intensifies this performativity. In these terms, drag becomes akin to holding a mirror up to an illusion. By imitating this constructed image, drag calls out the “imitative structure of gender itself” (Butler, *Gender* 137). Drag tears the mask off of gender, exposing the fabricated nature of masculinity and femininity as enacted by males and females. This is the subversive nature of drag. It calls attention to the artificiality of our daily actions, our learned behavior and our individual sense of identity. If all gender is parodic, then there is no “norm” to imitate and no “hetero-normative” to deviate from. As Butler points out:

...if subversion is possible, it will be a subversion that emerges from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself. The culturally constructed body will then be liberated, neither to its ‘natural’ past, nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities. (*Gender* 93)

For Butler, this subversion comes from “working the weakness in the norms” already set in place (*Bodies* 237). By denaturalizing gender, the possibility of denaturalizing identity itself is opened up.

The concept of parodic gender performance plays into the subversive elements of camp. While gender performativity engages the individual in questioning the studied, theatrical nature of “gendered” traits, camp calls on the performer to reject the naturality of the body and to construct a “character” by focusing instead on pastiche, kitsch, and artificiality. As defined by Padva, “camp is manifested as an alternative aesthetic and ethic counterpraxis that undermines and reconsiders the epistemology intended by the bourgeois production and reproduction, presentation and representation of its hegemony” (216). So while camp, drag and gender are interrelated, they are not inseparable. More important than the use of gender, drag or any other theme is the use of irony. Harry Benshoff points out that irony is the “highly incongruous contrast between an individual or thing and its context or association” as well as the individual’s arrangement of the material, timing and tone that creates camp (122). Irony, as I will explore it in this paper, refers specifically to a focus on some sort of dichotomy and the juxtaposition between two disparate elements (modern/retro, beautiful/ugly, high art/low art), yet as the link between camp and gender issues suggests, the contrast between female/male is hugely prevalent in our society and therefore provides the ultimate playground for “camping”. The adaptability of gender roles to this type of playful performance contributes to the disruption of the concept of a fixed gender identity. I draw on this connection of gender performativity and camp in my examination of the title characters of Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *The Marriage of Maria Braun* and John Cameron Mitchell’s *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. The notions of identity that are formed out of gender

performance are directly linked to the construction of the characters of Maria and Hedwig.

Becoming Queer: From Fassbinder to Mitchell

Rainer Werner Fassbinder is a film legend. In his prolific body of work he explored issues of gender and sexuality unlike any other director—male or female, straight or gay. His work came before Queer as a construct came into vogue, yet as Alice Kuzniar points out in *The Queer German Cinema*, the sexuality in his films is “outlaw and transgressive: it rearranges the codifying, mutually exclusive binaries of the symbolic social system” (87). So how does Fassbinder’s approach to queer themes reverberate since his death and the end of the New German Cinema movement? Specifically, how does it apply to films of the New Queer Cinema? While there has been a limited amount of research on Mitchell’s *Hedwig*, there has been no research on the link between Mitchell and Fassbinder. In fact, there has been an embarrassing lack of material exploring even surface accounts of Fassbinder’s direct influence on New Queer Cinema. Yet, tellingly, it was an affinity for Fassbinder that inspired the creative collaboration that led to *Hedwig*. Broadway actor John Cameron Mitchell and musician Stephen Trask met on an airplane when Trask opened up a Fassbinder biography.² The result, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, began as a drag performance at a gay rock club, then moved off-Broadway. Their film (written by, directed by, and starring Mitchell) makes little if any direct reference to Fassbinder, but the scenes speak for themselves in the degree to which they pay

² This is revealed in the documentary *Whether You Like it or Not: the Story of Hedwig*.

homage to Fassbinder's work in both style and theme. Mitchell's work perhaps goes further into queerness and campiness as the terms have positioned themselves more prominently into the GLBTQ consciousness. Yet Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun* is an illuminating reference point for *Hedwig's* exploration of the pitfalls in constructing a concept like nationality and inscribing it onto other forms of personal identity such as sexuality and gender.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder's prolific career was marked by numerous films that confronted both his characters' personal identities as well as West Germany's national identity post-World War II. Specifically, his BRD trilogy³—*The Marriage of Maria Braun*, *Veronika Voss* and *Lola*—examines three stages of the country's development through the guise of melodrama or what was known in Hollywood as “women's pictures” in the 1950's and 60's. The influence of Douglas Sirk is especially prevalent in regard to Fassbinder's affinity for melodrama and the result is an over the top campiness in the emotional reactions of the characters throughout the films. The first of this series, *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1978), begins in 1943 during the war with the focus of the film quickly shifting to the devastation of the immediate postwar period, with the economic miracle of the reconstruction thereafter and ending with Germany's win of the World Soccer Cup in 1954.

Fassbinder's decision to cast female leads in his BRD trilogy places feminine identity at the center of his works. It is at once a non-political exploration of personal identity and a very overtly political commentary on

³ Bundesrepublik Deutschland, or the Federal Republic of Germany. The title of the trilogy references that the films were conceived as a retelling of the history of the Federal German Republic after World War II.

national identity. This decision to cast a female Germany is radical because, as George Mosse points out in *Nationalism and Sexuality*, "...the German national subject is usually thought of and represented as white, Christian, heterosexual, and last but not least, male" (25). Maria Braun's story focuses on her struggle to retain her marriage to an absent Hermann Braun. The two were married during the war, yet spent less than a day together before Hermann was sent to the front. Maria dutifully awaits his return, never giving up on her ideal of married love. In spite of this, she accepts the commodification of her sexuality and beauty as she takes a waitressing job at an American GI bar. When Hermann does not return and is declared dead, she becomes involved with a black American soldier, Bill, who seems to genuinely care for her despite Maria's declaration that she will only ever love Hermann. Later, Hermann returns, finding Bill and Maria in bed together. In a demonstration of her devotion to Hermann, she kills the American GI and Hermann takes the blame. As he waits in prison, Maria prepares for their future together. She begins a relationship with her boss Oswald and becomes a very successful business woman, all in anticipation of a happiness that must be postponed. After Hermann's release from prison he disappears for a time, returning 10 years after their wedding only to discover that the delayed satisfaction the two had been anticipating is lackluster at best. When Hermann returns, we only see his back and the expression on Maria's face is not one of joy but blank shock. She must now take on the role she has been preparing herself for all this time, but she is not able to do so convincingly. The two are awkward and passionless towards one another and it appears that Maria's life long goal of

creating a future with her husband has been a fruitless waste. Moments later, she discovers that Oswald has given money to Hermann after his release from prison in order to keep him away until after Oswald's death. Maria's realization that she was merely a pawn in their scheme is not tempered by the fact that she is finally reunited with her husband or that the two have inherited all of Oswald's fortune. Then in an uncertain plot twist, a gas explosion kills them, destroying their new home and their new fortune. It is unclear whether Maria's death is a deliberate suicide, an unintentional mistake or a deliberate act of forgetting—a kind of passive suicide.

For a campier reading of similar themes, one can reference the 2001 film version of John Cameron Mitchell's cult off-Broadway musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. This film can be viewed as a direct descendant of Fassbinder's work. It began as a short act at a queer/punk drag club in New York. Originally, Mitchell simply performed wildly over-the-top, unintelligible punk inspired songs with Trask's band while wearing drag. Then between songs, the character of Hedwig began to emerge, recounting short splices of her dramatic life to accentuate the songs she sang. Out of this was born the act which eventually coalesced into a kind of theatrical rock opera. Productions of *Hedwig* began off-Broadway and continued after Mitchell left the production, with the character of Hedwig even occasionally being performed by women. In light of the film's success, local productions of the piece have been staged all across the country.

As we are introduced to Hedwig in the film, she is an aspiring rock star, born Hansel Schmidt in East Germany, who suffered a botched sex-change in

order to marry a charismatic black American GI (in homage to Fassbinder) and escape to the West. In new surroundings, neither male nor female, she is swiftly abandoned by her GI husband in a Kansas trailer park and is left only with an “Angry Inch” of genitalia as a reminder of her past misjudgments. Now a single woman, Hedwig both baby-sits and forms a band to make ends meet. She meets teenage Tommy Speck while babysitting for his younger sibling and the two begin to fall in love as she introduces him to the world of gender-bending rock pioneers such as Lou Reed, David Bowie and Iggy Pop. Tommy is the son of a high ranking military officer and a born again Christian. Yet despite these factors, he is drawn to Hedwig as a beautiful and talented older “woman”. It is only when he is forced to confront the complicated gender history of Hedwig that he becomes conflicted in their relationship. As Tommy’s rock star success (and high media attention) begins, he denounces Hedwig and leaves her behind. Jilted by Tommy, Hedwig forms her band “The Angry Inch” with a crew of Eastern Block rockers. The film follows her tour as she plays at various incarnations of a seafood restaurant chain, Bildgewater’s, vigilantly following her protégé, ex-lover, former band mate and former babysitting charge, the rock star now known as Tommy Gnosis, who has stolen all her songs and broken her heart.

The film is constructed as a cabaret style rock-opera of sorts, telling Hedwig’s story through monologue, flashback and song. The film, like *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, has two possible readings. On one hand it explores the reconciliation of finding one’s other half (in Hedwig’s case, Tommy, in Maria’s,

Hermann) yet both films can conversely be read as an exercise in reconciling the fractured identities within one's self (as demonstrated in the films dénouements). Hedwig's story in particular has at its core the individual's search for comfort in his/her gender and/or sexual identity. This search provides the opportunity for the character to reexamine the other contributing factors and relationships that construct who she is. Ultimately for Hedwig, the search is not for an identity defined by absolutes, but for becoming at ease with an identity that can be in flux.

While not made in direct response to *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, *Hedwig* can be seen as entering into the dialogue created by that and other Fassbinder films. Fassbinder's BRD trilogy explores the political and social climate of Germany during and after the war. In a sense, Hedwig can be read as a "Part Four" of Fassbinder's BRD cycle, confronting the issues of reunification that Fassbinder never lived to witness. If read in these terms we see Germany as fractured, played here not by a woman, but by a homosexual male playing the role of a female-identifying transgendered person. For Mitchell, Hedwig is East and West, the embodiment of alienation, living between worlds and between genders; it is Hedwig's search for some kind of unification with an unknown other that drives the entire film. This struggle for unification between East and West, male and female is ultimately played out within Hedwig and results in the formation of a kind of hybrid identity. This is reflective of a vital feature of Foucault's argument that sexuality is not a natural feature or fact of human life but a constructed category of experience which has historical, social and cultural,

rather than biological origins. As this applies to sexuality, the character of Hedwig suggests it so too applies to nationhood. As Julia Kristeva points out in *Nations without Nationalism*, redefined national spaces can provide opportunities for self-knowledge as well as opportunities for multiple attachments and affiliations (1). This would imply that our identities, in terms of nationhood as well as in terms of sexuality, can be in flux. It is the exploration of the various stages of this construction that will be the focus of this work, exploring the ways that this construction plays itself out in the characters of Maria and Hedwig. In examining several scenes from each film, I hope to illuminate the performative nature of Maria's and Hedwig's femininity as well as the relationship between this "performance" and the other aspects of each character's identity.

In examining the role of performativity, I have chosen many examples where both Maria and Hedwig actively perform their gendered roles as well as instances that highlight the unconscious nature of gendered behavior. Both characters are highly motivated to take part in a theatrical style of performance, thus complicating the notions of performance and performativity. As Spargo points out, "performativity is often misread as performance in a commonsense way, as a matter of choice, rather than a necessity if one is to have any intelligible identity in terms of the current gender system" (58). Yet, the overlap of performance and performativity in these two films warrants further exploration of the concepts. The degree to which the characters are actively choosing to define their own gender shifts throughout both films. By exploring these two characters in light of each other, I hope to illuminate how both characters explore

notions of performativity, camp and drag that go beyond simple wardrobe changes and physical manifestations of femininity to expose the fragile nature of the binary gender system.

CHAPTER 2

THE SPECTACLE OF MARIA BRAUN

MARIA (*studying her new hairdo*): I look like a poodle.

BETTI: You think so? But it's the latest thing.

MARIA (laughs): I'll bet the Americans are crazy about poodles.⁴

A key component of a performance is an audience. Maria Braun is a master of putting on a performance for those who watch her. The character of Maria is aware of her beauty and the attention it brings her from the beginning of the film. She is also aware, as the film progresses, of the attention she can call to herself by compounding that beauty with a larger than life personality. Fassbinder, more than the average director, seemed equally conscious of the power of his spectacle on the viewer. He often incorporated a Brechtian distanciation⁵ into his films, forcing the spectators out of the moment and encouraging them to acknowledge the artificiality of not only performance in his films, but in everyday life as well. In the above scene, Maria acknowledges that her hair looks ridiculous to her, but the real purpose of the hairdo is to present the American GI's with the image of an All-American Girl. Just as Maria is aware of her ability to control the way the American GI's will see her and what they will project upon her, Hanna Schygulla's performance of Maria allows the viewer to

⁴ A scene from *The Marriage of Maria Braun*

⁵ Bertolt Brecht, playwright, included various techniques in his works (for example, musical interludes or directly addressing the audience) in an attempt to prevent the audience from empathizing too much with the characters on stage. His theory was that if the viewer loses his or herself in the narrative, he or she would miss the political content of the drama.

see how performativity can “make strange” a very familiar, archetypical melodrama heroine such as Maria.

While many critics have accused Fassbinder of misogyny for his less than flattering portrayal of women, especially in the BRD trilogy, Maria Braun is ultimately a well developed and sympathetic character. This reading could come from a misinterpretation of the performative aspects of Maria and of other characters from Fassbinder’s films. In fact, many have read Fassbinder’s female characters as camp, specifically noting that Hanna Schygulla’s portrayals of femininity point to a transvestive performativity. In his essay “Camping in the Art Closet: The Politics of Camp and Nation in German Film” Johannes von Moltke points out that “Schygulla’s performance is marked by an emphasis on a highly stylized type rather than a realistically motivated individual” (8). Indeed, gender is a performance for Maria. Early on in the film, she recognizes the economic potential that her proper performance of femininity holds. Many scenes throughout the film focus on Maria gazing into a mirror, doing her hair or makeup or even frantically changing her clothes in the final scene of the film. This “putting on” and “taking off” of key components of femininity is in keeping with Butler’s concept of gender performativity. These elements are currency in the exchange of ideas that project a sense of femininity onto Maria. Both she and those who observe her are active in assigning this aspect to her character. This is not to argue that Maria does not see herself as feminine or female. In fact, she does. She views her primary identity as that of Mrs. Hermann Braun. The other trappings of femininity that she manifests throughout the film are all created to

protect this aspect of her identity. For example, Mrs. Hermann Braun would not wear her hair as such for herself or her husband. But she will to please the American GI's who will support her until her husband returns and she can re-identify herself primarily as Mrs. Hermann Braun. As Spargo points out:

Butler's study restores gender to a central position in the analysis of sexual desires and relations, but not in order to preserve it as the basis for political solidarity. Instead, she adopts Foucault's argument that "sexuality" is discursively produced, and extends it to include gender. She presents gender as a performative effect experienced by the individual as a natural identity, arguing against the assumption that the gendered identity category "woman" can be the basis for feminist politics on the grounds that attempts to deploy any identity as a foundation will inevitably, if inadvertently, sustain the normative binary structures of current sex, gender and libidinal relations. (54)

Maria is a representation of how the performativity of gender roles is carried out within the same sex. This performance is out of necessity and has nothing to do with anything innately feminine about Maria Braun herself. Unfortunately, it is her performance of gender that ultimately sets her up as the object of male desire and male agency in which she only has the illusion of participating. Robert Martin also points out Fassbinder's manipulation of gender roles in the masculinization of Maria:

One of Fassbinder's most successful techniques here, as in a number of his films, is to reveal the politics of gender by reversing, or denaturalizing, them...Fassbinder, like many feminists and gays of his time, saw gender as a fundamental ideological structure that needed to be deconstructed...Casting Hermann as the little wife, a role he hated playing, and Maria as the strong man, Fassbinder reveals the arbitrariness of all gender codes. (23)

Just as Maria can "put on" the feminine aspects of her personality, so too can she "put on" the masculine.

Maria morphs into a femme fatale when it serves her needs. This begins as she and her friend do each others hair by candlelight in the shabby home she and her mother share during the war. It leads to her job at the American bar as well as to her meeting Oswald on the train. The Maria we are primarily confronted with towards the end of the film is seemingly an echo of the original Maria. Hardened by the emotional stress of existing for something that is absent, Maria begins to take on the persona of an addled woman who still insists on keeping up the guise of composure. Although still young and beautiful, Schygulla's performance begins to be almost reminiscent of the classic Hollywood figures of camp such as Mae West, Bette Davis or Tallulah Bankhead, who later displayed a cynical, worldly version of their youthful sexuality.

Von Moltke argues that Maria's female female-impersonation can be read as camp (76). However, Kuzniar qualifies this argument even further, pointing out that "these female characters, although they manipulatively wield their femininity, do not treat it as camp...for camp is not only the excessive imitation of femininity but the awareness of the failure of imitation: this difference –the queer reinscription of masculinity- is then what constitutes camp. Hence only insofar as Veronika Voss or Maria Braun can be seen as nonfeminine in their imitation of femininity- that is, only insofar as they can be read as transvestic- are they also camp" (74). So while Schygulla's performance in this and other Fassbinder films ultimately reinforces a certain campy aura to her screen persona⁶, the character

⁶ Von Moltke further states: "By the time of her return to Fassbinder, however, the double charge of a historicizing costume-film performance and the performance of the oversexed superstar status turns out to have become the defining trait of her star image" (78).

of Maria Braun, unlike the character of Hedwig that I will soon examine, is lacking the playful, anti-serious quality that is often used to define high camp.

Although Schygulla's Maria does not reach the same levels of high camp as Mitchell's Hedwig, the film and the character, nevertheless, qualify as camp because of the juxtapositions in tone. Part intricate study on the social and economic climate of post-war Germany, part over the top melodramatic soap opera, *Maria Braun* achieves an uneasy kind of comedy and performativity is the key to achieving this tone. If performativity is the key to Schygulla's version of Maria, then it also parallels the performativity of Germany during this period. The Germany that we see in the beginning of the film is stark and grey. Explosions take out whole buildings. Women sift through piles of rubble. Everyone is gaunt and pale. Yet in a few short years, the Germany we see is full of opulent homes filmed in warm light and rich colors. Women have dyed hair and lipstick. They even worry about their weight. Everyone wears powerful business suits. People dine in palatial restaurants. This affluence is almost a parody of wealth. Germany itself is torted up; in drag as something it is not, the antithesis of a nation healing the wounds of fascism. An example of this can be seen after Maria has obtained substantial power within Oswald's company. In one scene she is given the task of negotiating with the unionized workers. One of the union negotiators she must argue with is her friend Willi who remains good natured about their hostile negotiations and even takes her for a drink afterwards. The role of negotiator or even "enemy" is only worn as a mask for Maria, who still adores Willi with whom she playfully acknowledges the irony of the situation.

The mutability of aspects of her personality confounds Oswald's bookkeeper Senkenberg.

SENKENBERG (*surprised*): You...know each other personally?

MARIA: Very personally, in fact.

SENKENBERG: God knows, you could never guess it from the past three hours. (*He walks towards the window.*)

MARIA (*secretively; the shadow of the window frame crosses her face and Senkenberg's*): Because I'm a master of deception. A capitalist tool by day, and by night an agent of the proletarian masses. (*To Senkenberg in a tone of mock seductiveness.*) The Mata Hari of the economic miracle! (*She sighs.*) Ah, Senkenberg! Why are your ideas about people so much duller than you are. (*Maria Braun*)

Maria acknowledges, in a playful manner, the fluid nature of who she appears to be. By calling herself the Mata Hari of the economic miracle she refers to not only her status as a "double agent" in this situation, but also to the fact that she too has taken on a constructed feminine identity. Like Mata Hari, Maria has created a character that she performs. She creates a spectacle that she profits from as she performs the role of "femme fatale".

Another manner by which Maria camps her femininity is through disrupting the male gaze. Although it has been acknowledged that she is a spectacle and that she manipulates her femininity to gain power and attention, most exclusively from the world of men, Maria is not powerless in this exchange. There is something noticeably brazen about Maria's femininity and the manner in which she consistently subjects men to the scrutiny of her gaze. This applies to men with whom she has a sexual relationship (Oswald, Bill, Hermann) as she shifts the center of power in her direction. But it equally applies to all the men she comes into contact with. She holds the gaze of her doctor, her grandfather, her mother's boyfriend- all men who gaze at her, men who are in awe of her.

Fassbinder is known to allow the camera to linger on scenes in a similar manner and we often see her point of view when doing so. An example can be seen when she meets her mother's boyfriend. The audience shares her lingering gaze upon him and it makes everyone in the scene, except Maria, uncomfortable to some degree. By appropriating the "male gaze" Maria disrupts gender norms once again, appropriating the masculine and inscribing the feminine on it. As Berger points out "Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (190). Maria twists this formula a bit by acting and then watching men to ensure they are watching her. For Maria, looking at men is affirmative and something she does blatantly. In her gaze there is a refusal to apologize for being unapologetic.

In the realm of watching and being watched, several scenes focus on the performativity of the scene itself. This Brechtian distancing takes the audience out of the film for just a moment to allow for an acknowledgement that this film is indeed not about only self-identifying with Maria, but observing the context in which these characters exist. Three examples stand out throughout the film. In one scene, after Maria is told (mistakenly) that her husband has died, she goes to the bar where she works to forget her pain. When she walks in, the music stops abruptly. The couples on the dance floor turn to face her in unison. With all eyes on her, she approaches Bill and tells him of her husband's death. Just as abruptly, the music begins again, the couples, like automatons, begin to dance and the scene recommences. Later, when visiting Hermann in prison, the two try to talk loudly over the din of other voices. Suddenly, the other prisoners and their

guests fall silent, all watching her, as she continues yelling. It is as if she is unaware the room is quiet. She tells Hermann that she'll work to create a life for them until he gets out of prison. Then the others in the scene break the unnatural silence by laughing and returning to their conversations. In one of the final scenes after Maria has learned of Oswald's death we see another example of this distancing. As she leaves her seat at a seemingly empty restaurant she is surrounded by five waiters. Over the radio, we hear a discussion on the rearmament of Germany. Meanwhile, Maria almost faints as she is leaving, then vomits as the waiters gather around her to support her. In the foreground, an anonymous man is surreally fondling a woman's exposed breasts. All of these scenes come at crucial emotional moments for Maria. However, instead of becoming "lost" in the drama and enmeshed in Maria's turmoil, the viewer is jolted aware of the performativity of the scene. This gives the audience the ability to recognize that, like Germany itself, Maria has blocked out everything in an effort to create a future that never quite materializes. This hint of absurdity and the unnatural characteristics the actors employ create the distance necessary to view this film on several simultaneous levels.

If gender is performative in this film, it invests Fassbinder's choice of a female lead with even more symbolic power. In a sense, Maria's downfall is her victimization by the patriarchal society that was already in place before her entrance into the dialogue. It is ultimately inescapable and no feminist agenda is seen as capable of changing that in this film's context. While giving the illusion of no longer being operative, the patriarchy is indeed still in control behind the

scenes, secretly pulling the strings of Maria's destiny. Maria is the film's central character and seems to possess strong agency, yet we ultimately discover that she was being duped by her lovers whose collusion undermines her motives throughout the film. This power structure reflects Fassbinder's critique of post-war Germany's relationship to National Socialism after the war. While a new Germany does indeed emerge (as seen in Maria), it is the underpinning bourgeois strains of German society that control the fate of the nation. These bourgeois ideologies existed before the war and still existed afterwards. The quelling of National Socialism did not confront the underlying German ideals that spawned it. Joyce Rheuban points out:

Like many others of similar disposition, he [Fassbinder] was convinced that middle-class existence was based on an exploitative capitalist economic structure and an equally exploitative patriarchal social structure...It became clearer and clearer that Fassbinder's importance lay in his paradoxical position vis á vis middle class society. "I'm a German making films for German audiences," he once declared, asserting the persistent aim that drove him to become the most active and prolific filmmaker of his time. His unflagging energy thus pursued a double-edged purpose: to consistently criticize the assumptions and values of the middle class while continually seeking the means to affect and win over that very audience of "average" Germans who were the object of this criticism. (210)

As an iconic figure of German national identity, Maria is the vessel for Fassbinder's method of overlapping the personal and political. Her status as woman figures into the character's isolation from the public sphere. Maria's historical and political stories are played out instead on the private stage. Mary Beth Haralovich points out that

Formal analysis of sound and mise-en-scène shows how the film blurs the boundaries between personal history and public history, integrating characters with the capitalist economic miracle of postwar Germany and

suggesting alignments between Germany's past and present. Through its adaptation of melodrama (coincidence, the independent woman, the "happy ending"), political engagement is possible because the conventions of melodrama, of entertainment cinema and of bourgeois social relations are called into question. (7)

Also played out in the private sphere is the relationship of Germany to America. While the figure of the American GI, Bill, seems to offer a promise of escape from the cycle of atypical bourgeois ideals (in the subversive nature of an interracial love affair and the couple's willingness to have a child out of wedlock), this American savior has no concrete plans on how to deliver a change in regime, and indeed, Maria kills him before any significant change in her life is suggested. Ingeborg O'Sickey writes that Maria's collaboration with white male power is at the expense of the Other and it reflects the degree to which her power is illusory and temporary throughout the film (15). Similarly, Robert Martin points out:

The irony throughout all these episodes is that the conquering American power is represented by the black soldier, who finds a power, both sexual and economic, in Germany that would be forbidden him in his own country. But the black moment of power is brief. He has provided Maria and her family with food, and Maria with emotional support, but she has no hesitation in returning to the authority of her "lawful" husband, Hermann, the minute he returns from the war. (22)

This further illustrates the point that Maria's murder of Bill thus allows the German patriarchy and German bourgeois tendencies (in the guise of Hermann) to maintain a grip on the German psyche (in the guise of Maria). The ending of the film suggests that the grip of the bourgeois patriarchy has not let up by 1954 and the willful forgetting on the part of the German nation in the years immediately following the war could lead to the country's ultimate demise.

Many of Fassbinder's films have been described as moving pictures, in the literal sense. Fassbinder had a tendency to use many layers of visual and aural meaning which shifted frequently. His work can be characterized by a fluidity of motion and editing in both sound and image. This is extremely obvious in the final scene of *The Marriage of Maria Braun*. As Anton Kaes points out:

For seven minutes, narrative time becomes identical with real time, private time identical with historical time. The mutually illuminating self-representation of Maria and the German nation is intimated and connoted throughout the film by the use of sound that lets public and political discourse enter the narrative space even though the protagonists are presented as unpolitical and oblivious to political discourse. (11)

The chaotic pitch of the scene intensifies as the camera follows Maria rambling around the large house, frantically looking for her place within it. She wears three outfits throughout the duration of this scene, signifying her shifting identity and the discomfort it brings. Concurrently, the radio announcer's voice becomes louder, the rhythm of his speech more rapid, finally climaxing in the celebration of the final score and the announcement that Germany is now the World Champion. The ominous association of Germany with world domination fills the final moments before the explosion, the end of the film and the end of Maria.

CHAPTER 3

HEDWIG AND AMBIGUOUS IDENTITY

“I look back on where I’m from
Look at the woman I’ve become
And the strangest things seem
Suddenly routine” -Hedwig in “Wig in a Box”⁷

Like Maria, Hedwig enjoys being the center of attention. Yet the act of social performance is even more inherent in the character of Hedwig, as she is literally putting on a show throughout the film. Everything is framed in terms of her performance and the performativity of her gender is openly acknowledged and played upon. Just as in *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, the blatant performativity of specific scenes tears the audience out of complacent viewing and forces them to examine not just the internal struggle of Hedwig, but the way in which they internalize their perception of Hedwig's gender identity. However, it is Hedwig's search for some sort of reconciliation, within herself and in the outside world, which drives the story.

Hedwig is a character whose gender identity is fluid. As a film with a central character whose identity is unsettled, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* has the same inherent tension of any film that strives to resolve the unresolved. However, this tension is lessened as the film progresses. It becomes clear that this fluidity is central to Hedwig's identity and it becomes irrelevant that there is

⁷ From "Wig in a Box", a song from *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*

no familiar sexual or gender category in which to place Hedwig. Several scenes throughout the film focus on the instability of Hedwig's identity. Notably, many of these scenes are musical interludes performed by her band. As noted, this stresses the performativity of her identity by bringing the notion of performance into the foreground. Many of these scenes also include animated sequences by artist Emily Hubley, further intensifying the fantastic nature of the film. As Fassbinder did in *Maria Braun*, so too does Mitchell bring a sense of Brechtian distanciation to his work. The musical interludes disconnect the audience from the realistic elements of the story line. When Hedwig breaks into song it provides a form of escape for both Hedwig and the viewer, tearing both parties out of complacent viewing. The character of Hedwig needs this break from the reality of her situation, and music provides her with that escape. For the viewer, this is an extension of the blurring of lines that will remain prevalent in every aspect of this work.

The film jarringly begins with an introduction to all these themes as we see Hedwig on stage, adorned in a glamorous rock-queen costume. She spreads her arms to reveal the text scrawled inside her cape "Yankee Go Home – With Me" then introduces the song with an urgent call to the audience, "Don't you know me, Kansas City? I'm the new Berlin Wall. Try and tear me down!" Immediately, the film is immersed in high camp. We see Hedwig in full, splendid drag. Her shtick is classic drag performance, bantering with the audience, teasing them knowingly. This scene introduces the central themes of performance, gender and identity in a matter of seconds. Notably, nationality is

one of the key elements of this introduction. For Hedwig it is indeed another aspect of her fractured identity. She is neither East nor West. She is a hybrid of the two. As Hedwig is the embodiment of dichotomies that have merged into one, she truly plays up the camp element. She embraces the irony, the convergence of incongruous elements, so central to the concept of camp.

Hedwig *is* both German and American, both male and female, both High Art and Low Art, both public and private. Hedwig's second husband and back up singer, Yitzhak (played by the female Miriam Shor in drag), introduces Hedwig in the song's interlude:

August 13, 1961. A wall was erected down the middle of the city of Berlin. The world was divided by a Cold War, and the Berlin Wall was the most hated symbol of that divide. Reviled, graffitied, spit upon—we thought the wall would stand forever. And now that it's gone, we don't know who we are anymore. Ladies and gentlemen, Hedwig is like that wall, standing before you in a divide between East and West, slavery and freedom, man and woman, top and bottom. And you can try and tear her down, but before you do, you must remember one thing...[Hedwig sings] Ain't much of a difference between a bridge and a wall. I'm right in the middle baby, between nothing at all. (*Hedwig*)

Hedwig's attitude in this song is almost confrontational. She openly presents herself as an individual that resists categorization. And while her call of "Try and tear me down" is a bit of a testimony to her audience that she cannot be bested, it has certain tinges of a genuine invitation to discover the Hedwig that lies behind the performance. The very open presentation of an individual that does not fit into normal categories does not repel, but instead intrigues the audience. This highlights the power of drag and high camp. Without someone such as Hedwig to distort the notions of hetero-normativity something would be lacking. By singing "Ain't much of a difference between a bridge and a wall", Hedwig

glorifies her status as someone who exists between two binaries and revels in the fact that she could be seen as a unifying, instead of dividing, element. Her celebration extends to her audience members, who (in spite of the fact that many will strictly define their own gender or sexual identity) will perhaps get a taste of her particular brand of revolution.

These moments where Hedwig embraces the borderless aspect of her identity are the most jarring of the film and are frequently focused on musical performances. Yet the film is constructed in a style that is reminiscent of a collage or a mosaic. Peppered among the songs, the animated sequences and main plot line of a jilted Hedwig's struggle to expose her former lover Tommy Gnosis, Hedwig's history unfolds in flashback. The background story of Hedwig is central to how the audience and the characters in the film construct this problematized identity. In reading the character of Hedwig as an individual, the audience must be careful not to go too far. The character of Hedwig cannot be criticized for his/her ability or inability to speak directly to trans-identifying individuals. This is not a documentary and it is not the story of a man who chooses to undergo hormone therapy followed by gender reassignment surgery. The film and the character should not be read as such. This is a film about performativity and the different ways that identity can be interpreted in an individual's life. Yet while this is a story about a concept, it does not relegate the character of Hedwig to a one-dimensional symbol. Hedwig is no mythical character who merely represents some ideal of a merged gender identity. Her

struggle to construct her own identity is played out in very real and emotional terms.

Born and raised as a male, Hedwig begins her story as Hansel Schmidt. As we are told through various flashbacks, Hansel's adolescence perhaps indicates that he is a gay male, but gives no strong argument for the fact that Hansel had seen himself as a female trapped in a male existence. Hansel's sexual and gender identity becomes in flux when he meets Luther, a black American GI. As in *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, this character plays a central role in the development of the title character's personal and national identity. Luther also offers the possibility of a brighter future, and like Bill, his promises are mostly centered on American commodities. However Luther's position as an African-American soldier does not make him as unstable as the character of Bill. He will not meet such a deadly fate and indeed, he is able to persuade Hansel more effectively than Bill could persuade Maria. Perhaps this is due to his age or his status as an American in the East or perhaps this is because he does not seem to acknowledge the queerness of his desires. Luther seems to be, in his mind at least, a straight male who is "making an exception" in the case of Hansel Schmidt.

We are introduced to Luther in a scene where Hansel is sunbathing (although the lighting filter is gray, subdued and almost monochromatic to represent the uniformity of the East). Hansel is nude, lying face down amid the rubble in East Berlin. We initially only hear Luther's seductive voice, calling Hansel a "girl" as we see the shadow of Luther's pointy army hat looming ever

closer towards Hansel's anus, hinting at Hansel's initiation into anal sex. As Hansel turns over, Luther is silent for a moment as he realizes the slender Hansel is a man. He then repeats "Hansel", thinking it over, then giving a shrug of resignation as he contemplates the possibility of a homosexual, perhaps more precisely queer encounter. Luther, as we will see, never completely gives over to the homosexual nature of the relationship. He then offers Hansel, who is used to "blander, less complicated confections," a bag of American Gummy Bears. To Hansel, this initiation into homosexuality and American consumerism is exciting and appalling, something "completely different, yet somehow familiar". Hansel continues, "I suddenly realize the flavor in my mouth. It's the taste of power." The camera then closes in on an extremely tight shot of Luther's lips (both a seductive image and one that focuses on racial stereotypes) as he continues in another disavowal of the homosexual nature of the encounter: "Damn, Hansel. I can't believe you're not a girl. You're so fine" (*Hedwig*).

Hansel is, in fact, not a girl and up until now he has exhibited no desire to be one. Hansel's decision to undergo a sex change is not based on an internal struggle, but on what is presented as an external necessity. He is in love with Luther, but Luther convinces both Hansel and his mother that it would be impossible for Hansel to leave East Germany with Luther unless he leaves as his wife. Hansel's mother shows no disapproval of her son's falling in love with another man, and in fact seems anxious to allow this opportunity for Hansel's escape from the East. Hansel, still seeming skeptical and afraid, undergoes the sex change. Something goes wrong and the sex change leaves Hansel with a

one inch mound of flesh where "[his] penis used to be and [his] vagina never was" (*Hedwig*). Now officially a character without an easily identifying gender, Hansel becomes Hedwig. "Hedwig" is a performed identity. And while the audience is never completely sure whether to read Hedwig as male or female, the performed identity is so strong that most will internalize Hedwig as a "she".

As in Fassbinder's *Maria*, the American GI's delivery on his promises is lackluster at best, resulting in Hedwig's "escape" from East Germany, literally landing her in a Kansas trailer park with a thud⁸. The relationship ends in abandonment as Luther leaves with a very Hansel-esque, although physically intact, young man. It is in this scene that we see another example of Fassbinder's influence. Hedwig sits in an armchair, shocked and dismayed by the loss of her husband. Concurrently, the television blares the news that the Berlin Wall has fallen. "All border crossings are open and thousands are flooding into the Western half of the city...The Berlin Wall has fallen and the world will never be the same. The Germans are a patient people and good things come to those who wait" (*Hedwig*). This scene playing out on the television in front of Hedwig renders all her sacrifices pointless.

Again, as in *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, we see the explicit overwriting of the political onto the personal. In terms of public and political aspects that are inscribed on this film, there is an almost religious fervor for American rock music and pop culture. This plays upon the cultural climate of East Germany in the early Eighties. Echoes of American Forces Radio and a hunger for American youth culture permeated the entire Eastern Block, often inciting riots in East

⁸ This is a kind of playful reversal on *The Wizard of Oz*, a film very frequently read in a queer context.

Berlin as crowds gathered to hear concerts performed just over the Berlin Wall. This overlap of the personal and the political is handled in both films with a sense of camp and irony. Again, the juxtaposition between the two, coupled with their overlap, exudes a kind of dark humor. As in *Maria Braun*, the radio and television are the central character's link to the outside world, yet there is a disconnect between the two. In *Maria Braun*, the radio announcer rejoices wildly for the winning of the World Soccer Cup, but at the same time we see Maria being blown to bits. While the world celebrates the fall of the Berlin Wall, Hedwig's life lies in ruin.

This scene is followed by Hedwig's performance of "Wig in a Box", which is the film's most blatant example of gender performativity and its overlap into drag and camp. This song narrates the character's make-over, from abandoned, mousy trailer park girl to rock superstar goddess and the catalyst for the transformation is something as simple as wearing a wig. It is important to note that the focus here is not on the transformation from male to female gender identity. At this point, Hedwig is already self-identifying as a female. Instead, the focus is on the conscious choice of a female character to "put on" an exaggerated femininity. Hedwig begins by exhibiting melancholic sentiments. She sits at home, alone, feeling sad and lost. She searches for purpose and must do something in order not to become totally despondent. No other moment in the film displays the performative nature of Hedwig's gender like the scene where she sings "I look back on where I'm from, look at the woman I've become, and the strangest things seem suddenly routine" while holding a picture of herself

as a young Hansel. At this point in the film, the viewer and Hedwig alike have accepted the character's gender identity as fluid and perhaps even arbitrary. Gender is clearly portrayed as an artificially constructed social performance and it is only an authentic component of selfhood insofar as the individual wishes to experience it as such. As an extension of this performativity, Hedwig's elevation into a femininity that is characterized as high camp begins with her decision to "put on some makeup, turn on the eight-track and pull the wig down from the shelf" (*Hedwig*). Suddenly, Hedwig is transformed into someone else. A woman more glamorous than she, a woman lacking the problems she was dwelling on only moments before. Creating this identity of an individual who is larger than life, and certainly larger than the problems that surround her, is what ultimately gives Hedwig the sense of agency she exhibits throughout the film. Hedwig's femininity is blatantly a performance and this scene shows us how it is done. In terms of female-based female performativity, this scene recalls another from *The Marriage of Maria Braun*. As Maria and her best friend sit in front of a vanity mirror, they do their hair. Applying make-up and making their hair as large as possible, they discuss what particular look will get the most attention. Like Hedwig, they artificially create the version of femininity that they want to project to the world.

Hedwig's performance is spectacle to an even greater extent than in Maria's case. Inherent in this creation of spectacle is the need for an audience. In *Hedwig*, the viewer is encouraged to play the role of audience member throughout the film. The camera's gaze rarely shares that of Hedwig. The

viewer's role as audience member is further intensified when Hedwig occasionally sings or speaks directly to the camera. Hedwig has an insatiable need for an audience and it is through performance that Hedwig creates her identity. A full disconnect with reality eventually envelopes the entire performance of "Wig in a Box" as the front of the trailer collapses, making a stage for the band. The song then devolves into a chant of "It's all because of you, all because of you". This suggests the extreme nature of spectacle in her performance of not only this song, but of her entire persona. That is to say, the performance, the wig, the Hedwig that the audience wants to see, is done for the benefit of you, the viewer. Yet while the audience asks for it, it is Hedwig who needs the audience to want her. Without a public to perform for, without spectators that wish to view the spectacle, Hedwig has no reason to get up off the couch in the opening scene. The importance of the audience factors in even further as Hedwig engages them in a sing-along, complete with lyrics to follow on the bottom of the screen. The affirmation of having members of a disparate audience sing the words with Hedwig breaks down many of the inhibiting factors that could arise from performing, and bending, something as controversial as gender. In previous verses of the song, Hedwig sang of her transformation but always ended with the refrain "Until I wake up, and I turn back to myself". However, in the final verse, Hedwig ends the song with this sentiment "Suddenly I'm this punk rock star of stage and screen, and I ain't never, I'm never going back" (*Hedwig*). It is at this point that we witness the true transformation of Hansel to Hedwig and it is portrayed in terms of revelation and celebration.

One of the final performances from the film, "Exquisite Corpse" focuses further on Hedwig's gender performance. The title comes from a surrealist concept in which a collection of seemingly unrelated words or images are fused together. This is the point of the film where Hedwig becomes dissatisfied with her constructed identity. Yet, in spite of the fact that Hedwig tears this identity to shreds, she/he reconstructs it into something new and still remains intact as a character. As the song's rhythm and atonality intensifies, Hedwig violently rips off her dress and wig. To see Hedwig shed her drag is very powerful, as the audience has come to believe so strongly in the identity associated with her wig and her costume. By this gesture, Hedwig relinquishes the feminine and the previously constructed aspects of her identity. This comes at the height of Hedwig's fame and acceptance. Gone are the misfit fans that have followed her from town to town. Instead of performing in Bildgewater's Seafood Restaurant, Hedwig is now appearing in what appears to be a fashionable, upscale art gallery. She has become a spectacle, yet the danger in this is that the audience has defined her. This loss of agency leads Hedwig to shed her old identity. The audience is left to question what it means that "Hedwig" does not exist anymore. Her constructed feminine identity was so convincing that the audience becomes accustomed to it and assigns the character full female gender status. Yet, although Hedwig sheds her drag, we cannot forget that the angry inch still lies beneath. While now visibly more male than female, his/her actual identity has not shifted, only its physical signifiers. Therefore, if gender is indeed something

that can be performed, it is something that can be in turn "taken off", toyed with, and once again "put on".

In the following scene, we suddenly, inexplicably, see Hedwig reunited with Tommy Gnosis. The two look visually similar, with matching hair cuts, make-up and physiques. As he sings to her, he confesses that he was "just a boy, and you were so much more than any god could ever plan, more than a woman or a man". It then seems that Hedwig and Tommy merge identities. This fulfils the promise of "Origin of Love" from the beginning of the film, in which Hedwig longs for a reunion with her true love while exploring themes from Plato's *Symposium* and suggesting that lovers are two halves of one being. So while Hedwig has shed her drag by the end of the film, the character perhaps simply reconstructs his/her identity to fit a new phase of his/her life. And while the visually gender-bending elements of Hedwig's drag performance have been relinquished, the character is now a hybrid identity of Hedwig/Hansel/Tommy Gnosis. Still a constructed identity, Hedwig has become something a bit more ambitious and a bit less flamboyant. It is in discovering this comfort and peace with an ambiguous identity that Hedwig finds resolve.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Hedwig and Maria toy with a very powerful concept. If gender is indeed something one can perform, many key notions of identity are subject to reexamination. Implicit in this notion is the fact that all aspects of our identity are something that can be, to some degree or another, "taken off" or "put on". As demonstrated through Hedwig's "Exquisite Corpse" --sexuality, gender, race, class, nationality, religion, sub-culture affiliation—all of these elements can be cut up, mixed up, replaced and replayed. The unsettling element of this comes with acknowledging that individuals may never achieve a stable identity and that no one can exist as a fully-realized, "complete" person in the more traditional sense. This instability can breed fear. However, there is also an element of liberation in going beyond the traditional notions of personal identity. If no identity is ever truly stable, there is no need to distort any aspect of oneself to adhere to a standardized cultural definition of any aspect of identity.

At the end of both films, the characters come to an impasse. Hedwig's anger and her desire to shed her constructed identity echo the same sense of transcendent escape that Maria may be searching for when she lights her cigarette on the gas stove, blowing the house (and the identity that she has constructed) to bits. Maria's circumstances at the end of the film force her to

confront the unfulfilled longing she has suffered throughout the film. This longing was impossible to satisfy because it was always deferred to a future she will never reach. Maria -the working woman, the anchor of the family, the woman of conflicted passions- must ultimately make a heroic break with her sentimental illusions. She is confronted with the realities of her material existence and her place within the world she specifically attempted to create for herself. So, in one cathartic moment with cigarette in hand, Maria is able to divest herself of the exchange value she has worked so hard to create. Through her destruction of herself, Hermann, and her wealth, she sheds the shell of performativity in which she has lost her sense of identity.

Hedwig's reconciliation of the two binaries (or even multiple identities) existing in the same body and ultimately unifying in an androgynous being (and a more fluid identity) lends *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* a sense of optimistic closure not found in Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun*. Both characters were symbols of not only femininity but masculinity, sexuality, nationality, and countless other identity categories as well. The major difference in the way the two characters play out is indeed intertwined with the ways in which these notions, and the flexibility of these notions, have changed since Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun*. While performativity did often empower Maria, it ultimately led to her loss of self. Her lack of control of the circumstances that surrounded her and the bourgeois patriarchy in which she performed that femininity ultimately destroyed her. With Hedwig, we see a case of the symbol becoming inherently unstable. However, it is the ultimate acceptance and

embracing of this instability that sets *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* apart. To quote Foucault:

The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them. (50)

This potential for fluidity in terms of identity politics leads to new areas for exploration. While no other individual may occupy the same unique space as Hedwig, many individuals undoubtedly occupy some borderless space (and this extends far outside of the realm of gender) that has yet to be defined, or better yet, acknowledged. And as Foucault points out, it is our personal charge to experiment with these identities, and perhaps, go beyond them.

The illuminating nature of viewing these two films in relation to one another points towards the influential nature of Fassbinder's films on Mitchell and paves the way for further exploration of his connection to other New Queer Cinema directors. As previously noted, Joyce Rheuban points out that Fassbinder often pursued a dual purpose: "to consistently criticize the assumptions and values of the middle class while continually seeking the means to affect and win over that very audience of "average" Germans who were the object of criticism" (210). It can be said that this is part of the legacy left behind for directors of the New Queer Cinema as many directors initially associated with the movement have taken their films into the "mainstream" world of "heteronormativity". In particular, Fassbinder's shadow is cast on directors such as Gus VanSant (whose use of the gay anti-hero lines up with several

Fassbinder films), Todd Haynes (whose work in melodrama reflects their common love of Sirk)⁹ and Derek Jarman (whose work reflects a similar affinity for exploring how social and political power shapes history). Certainly, re-viewing Fassbinder's legacy in terms of the New Queer Cinema movement could shed light on many neglected elements of his work and breathe new life into Fassbinder studies.

⁹ The two directors also share a common element in relation to their works inspired by Jean Genet, Fassbinder's *Querelle* and Todd Haynes' *Poison*.

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