

it? That since the late 1970's there has been a stalling and since the early 1980s a regression regarding - and this must be said boldly - MAJORITIES not now so accepted into postsecondary schooling in e.g. the USA, Canada, 'Europe,' the USSR or China, for some signifying examples, surely relates and yet contradicts some wider claims about equality, access, freedom, advancement through certification, etc etc. Do we not now, and very caringly, have to attend to contra/dictions! Do we not have to find the means, voices, the grain to show that and how even 'admission' (granted by whom, I might ask) can tear, wound, savage and, I use the word VERY directly, abort the desire, the possibility, the dream....the dream, and the hope. How, in other words, there are not enough of 'US' to MAKE A DIFFERENCE when we singularly, alone, arrive at some destination (which may well be an end stop) of a driven hope, a desired be/coming, and find it is not enough, it is not excessive enough, there is no (be)coming, there is no orgasmic release. So, finally, and sharply, when will, and can it ever, in an embodied way, cultural studies/historical sociology (re) turn to the conditions of its own varied PRODUCTION, as c u l t u r a l production? To place, e.g. in graduate school the analyst professor as simply another 'analysand' with no Words (certainly not 'The Word') but a member, a participant, in that all ways open, never to be completed unstitching and reweaving of the fabrication of meaningful possibilities, such that any interpretation is not dismissable solely, and in advance, because it does not gel with, link to and become OVER determined by 'The' meaning, handed out, in small droplets, as Artaud suggested, to succour the beasts of desire (here the empirically common male-graduate course providers are, strictly, mummified, hence, once again, sexuality returns to the centre of meaningful provision and meaning making. It may indeed be the embodied 'situational logic (that analysis is NOT enough, there is, after all, albeit with stuttering, hesitation, mumbling and thus a certain lexical erasure, ALL WAYS PLEASURE). And that, in the end, Historical Sociology, Cultural Studies, and YES, critical pedagogy, cannot reach me, this body here jumping up and down, dancing, singing, and speaking that body language which is never body reading. To that hope these autobiographical remarks are, uh, sung. Milton wrote of someone sightless, I write for everyone to be tuneful/dancing. That anarchistic dancing, laughing and singing Against The Power has had rather a limited 'press' in the last few years (the historians continually turn and return to those who so refused). Surely what such signs sinew is a realised (and not just perhaps, potential) embodiment of showing and sharing that, and what could be more profound than this, 'it' doesn't matter. 'It' is superfluous, 'it' slips by, 'it' simply does not concern us (bodily), 'it' goes, yeah, and also 'it' goes by. I want here, finally to invert or, better, disrupt, a certain cosy theory of ideology much (ab)used in the last ten or so years: so what that 'they' claim certain rights, and indeed do so successively and successfully,

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so what?! Does an adopted universal Christian oriented calendar stop Jews, Chinese, Muslims, and many many others celebrating their days, their years? Of course it does not! Does the worldwide and precapitalist resourced practices of racism and patriarchy stop nonwhites and nonmales saying 'This' just t h i s 'cannot be true, is not fair, is monstrously and violently unjust'? Of course not!

So, yes, and of course, 'we' (a term which is empirically unuseable) haven't done 'it' yet, found a way to organize/celebrate differences differently, but neither have 'They' found a way to celebrate them as grim similarity, have they? So what is going on is a shifting and complicated, indeed, contra/dictory shifting 'Frontier of Control', but our advantage is that this is several and differentiated. No sooner has a programme and policy been articulated around ONE difference than it is revealed that this CANNOT address or attend to differences within that difference. Then the game, round about, roller coaster starts again.

You see, as a final comment, they can never 'get it right,' they'll always stumble and misrepresent/misallocate; we may not yet be able to unify our refusal within a celebration of difference. But, you see, the differences are not simply eradicable, as if they were facts of nature, but they are produced and reproduced by the very workings of this anti-Human violation of any possibility of GENERALLY being human, called, for shorthand, capitalism. They claim to have the dream; ours, in fact, in labour, and that all so so difficult production, organisation, is the task. Organized knowledge, differentiated, differently remains our cultural studies, resourced by our historical sociology, and informing our social curriculum, our political pedagogy. Thank you all.

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SHIFTING IMAGES



BY
CHRISTINA VARGA

As I moved into adulthood, I collected a series of threads that wove themselves into my growing identity: disparate gender roles; public and private roles; sexual, cultural and political identities. At some point they tied themselves into a knot with various tensions between the threads, and now I find myself trying to unravel the knot.

One of the deepest contradictions that has influenced the way I see myself in the world is the tension between "European" (especially East European) and "North American" cultures. I was born in Hungary, but apparently my birth was the catalyst for my parents to leave. They decided to emigrate to the West soon after I was born, to allow me the opportunity to grow up with greater political and economic freedom.

For decades the situation in Hungary had been such that it was dangerous to voice any opinion contrary to the regime. The increasing bureaucratization and deteriorating economy of a state socialist system meant a lack of consumer goods and housing, long work hours and deepening cynicism for most people, with the exception of an elite few. However, my parents did not leave after the partly-failed and bloody revolution of 1956 as many others did. Both had familial ties cementing them there and it was illegal, and therefore dangerous, to leave. They would not have been

able to take most of their belongings with them and only the unknown awaited them in the West. Their knowledge of certain aspects of Western culture was limited, as isolation of the East Block was encouraged by elements such as a tightly controlled media with anti-Western interests. As a Canadian today, I take travel for granted. Even on a secretary's salary it is possible for me to travel (I don't have a criminal record or outstanding traffic fines) and I have access to foreign currency. For my parents in the fifties and sixties, however, even a trip to another East Block country was difficult enough. Obtaining a visa meant going through endless layers of bureaucracy and the money they were allowed to take out of the country was very limited.

In addition, my father, particularly, was engaged in political activity. There was rebuilding of the country to be done after the Second World War. As a socialist he was committed to working towards bettering the condition of workers and peasants, at the same time as creating a more just and equal society.

However, the existing regime did not live up to many of its promises and, in fact, during the 50's and under the influence of a Stalinist model, conditions became extremely oppressive for many. Intellectuals were particularly targeted for violent censorship and scapegoating. Nevertheless, while many people were disillusioned by the way socialism was implemented, believing in those ideals made simply packing up and leaving difficult.

It was, then, the appearance of their child, along with the obvious deterioration and bureaucratization of the regime, that led them to leave everything behind and turn to the West. They did not expect to settle in North America, but came to Canada because my father found work here. Although they did not come from a radically different culture, unlike some of the immigrants who come to Canada, they, like many others, found the cultural transition difficult. The freedom they found was built, as it was



in Western Europe, upon an ideology (free-market democracy) different from the one that my father in particular had spent years basing his ideals, actions and writings upon.

In addition to his belief in socialist ideals, my father came from a background steeped in higher learning. Both his Jewish and central European urban intellectual background formed in him a love of books, music and political discussion. Although Hungary was largely an agriculturally-based country, its capital, Budapest, has a rich cultural history. Ironically, centuries of domination by various conquerors has produced a vibrant and lyrical literary heritage in Hungary. Its connection with German-Austrian culture helped Budapest to become a centre for learning and the arts. Nevertheless, I see in the Budapest that I know a curious tension between the perspective of a colonized and a European elite culture. North America, then, was a shock to my parents in terms of its consumer and mass cultural emphasis. I, therefore, grew up with a sharp distinction between "European" and "North American," based both on my parents' tension-filled perspective and on the dominant popular imaginary in Canada.

The myth of "Europe/the European," in the eyes of many European emigrés, is characterized as the standard of culture, to which their new cultures are compared. Its history and tradition of scholarship and refined artistry engender a strong appreciation, a secure and grounded identity, a sense of communality. Images are, for emigrés, narrative and extended. Cultural and political rhetoric is based on traditional disciplines. The prime example of this "European" stereotype is the type of European film that is touted as having "real" artistic merit: the expectation is that several layers of political, social and historical commentary exist in the work.

The feeling is that "North America" is less rooted in tradition, based more in a commodity/consumer culture; the emphasis on mass media communication engenders a proliferation of seemingly free-floating imagery, shallow and displaced. Status, identity and the right to participate in the culture are validated through values of individualism and increasing technical specialization. Technology inserts itself everywhere. Mainstream culture and political rhetoric is based on ahistorical readings of particular phenomena, in a self-referential world. Again, the stereotypical Hollywood film can be used as an embodiment of these values: the pace and pyrotechnic extravaganza whirl the viewer past any possibility of deeper examination.

Although partly a Eurocentric reading, these stereotypes also have a basis in reality. How to reconcile my distaste of conspicuous consumption with my disgust for Eurocentric elitism became a source of tension for me.

As I try to reconstruct the development of my gender-consciousness, it seems that in some ways it caught me by surprise to realize that I was a woman. This has partly to do with the fact that as a child I was mostly concerned with my cultural allegiances. As an only child of two people who felt culturally displaced, I spent a lot of time under the influence of a defiantly constructed "European" atmosphere at home. Accompanying them almost annually on trips to Europe, I was cushioned from Canadian culture outside of school. During the school year I spent almost all my time with one girlfriend. I remember that time as skipping between being a model student and creating a private world of stuffed animals, miniature models and endless conversations. My parents dressed me in their conception of a European school-girl: dark, woolly

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tights, dark dress shoes, woolen skirts or dresses, usually in subdued colours, a blouse and bookbag. A picture from grade four shows me demurely sitting with hands folded and ankles crossed. Unlike that of my T-shirted schoolmates, this is an almost painfully typical portrait of a child dutifully picking up (middle-class) gender-appropriate cues. However, when my best friend moved away in sixth grade, I suddenly found myself an anachronism in the middle of an already developing



microcosm of gender relations. Since I went to a small-town, nearly homogeneously middle-upper-class WASP school, the gender socialization was a little more subtle than in other schools I subsequently visited, where the girls looked like extras for "Flashdance" and the guys like aspiring "West Side Story" characters. Still, I found myself with a choice between developing my public persona as either a coy, flirtatious, "feminine" girl, or "one of the guys." I intuitively drifted towards the latter, finding, however, that this meant a crash course in mimicking Canadian (pre-teen) culture. I had already had painful experiences, the consequence of having inappropriate props, such as taking green peppers and rye bread for lunch. I wonder now whether my ability to assimilate myself almost immediately into a set of unspoken codes has to do with the fact that my family moved through four different cultures and languages (from Hungary to Africa to Germany to Canada) before I was six years old. Or whether, being a girl, I had already felt the pressure to be hypersensitive about my appearance and self-image, and able to manipulate it.

Whether manipulation or assimilation, the fact that I started to direct my image meant that I began a process of reconstructing the mold I felt had been made for me. I remember the dismay my purchase of track pants and a pair of Nike runners caused my parents. I started playing sports and watching hockey games.

"Eh" entered into my vocabulary. It astonishes me even now how almost overnight I metamorphosed from a socially and physically clumsy outsider into a friendly, sports-literate person accepted into the WASP world. This is not to say that I did not have my problems with this world. I remember a gym class where we played a game of "girls against the boys" volleyball. The inanity of such an artificial separation angered me to the extent that I walked out of the class. But, in general, I am struck by the sense of power and competence that I felt in "passing." It is also

at this time that I noticed my persona encompassing some "masculine" traits, such as competitiveness in the areas of sports and academics - in other words, in the "public" realm outside of emotion and interpersonal relations, in which boys usually outstrip girls. I had a "buddy" relationship with both boys and girls. (This may have to do with the fact that because to a large extent I was playing a role, I did not divulge much of myself to anyone.) I especially found myself relating to boys and sticking up for them in class. Still more defiant, for the most part, towards the straightjacketing discipline of school than the girls, I



related to their predicament. Later, as I began to develop sexual relationships, I found myself having fairly unromantic, realistic, and straightforward attitudes and expectations. Men later told me that they found me intimidating in that respect. At the same time, though, I had some "feminine" traits, such as a nurturing, compassionate attitude towards others, a high degree of self-awareness about my presentation and the fact that I never overtly initiated a sexual relationship.

In many ways I was lucky, in that I never had the fact of my womanhood thrown violently in my face by getting pregnant or getting raped. Because of my supportive background and, therefore, my intellectual confidence, I was seldom treated as inferior and destined for the woman's ghetto. My body, until it later began to express a greater confusion of influences upon it, molded itself with an iron discipline to the dictates of my intellect.

This portrait of a self-assured person, however, began breaking down somewhere along the way. As happens to many girls in their teens, I began to crack. Whether this is because at this point most girls begin experiencing the conflicting pressures that follow them through much of their lives, to integrate contradictory messages into their identities as women, or whether I felt that I was expending more energy "passing" than being a multi-dimensional person, I don't know. The fact is that I was becoming increasingly depressive and concerned about my weight. I grew more and more incapable of dealing with the meaninglessness of much of what I experienced in school, and what I saw going on around me, especially as I became more politically aware. I particularly found myself unable to manipulate language. I saw language as being one of the influences upon what I gradually came to see as a constructed experience. I saw wild contradictions around myself. It seemed so incredible that the world I had known was steeped in such privilege - for instance, education, the luxury of simple moral choices and the unexamined embrace of limited parameters of acceptability. I saw that privilege being painstakingly rationalized and alternatives relentlessly silenced in attitudes and institutions around me, such as in my school and the mainstream media. Even something as innocuous as trying to start a peace group at my high school, focussed on raising consciousness through alternative venues of information, was met for a year with accusations by both students and administrators that we were anarchist agitators. What I saw around me made me mistrust all that I associated with the process of established written and verbal expression. I began to mistrust language as a tool of institutional power, a tool

that allows the manipulation of the perceived realities that society bases its values upon.

At this point I was bulimic, close to flunking out of school, suicidal and seeing a succession of psychiatrists. Eventually I was hospitalized for clinical depression. When I was released, I decided to go to an alternative school in Toronto.

So, at the age of 17 I found myself beginning the process of really taking control of my internal and external possibilities, not simply manipulating the facade. I find it sad that the only way that the medical profession knew how to deal with a girl going through existential/identity questions was to medicate her. As I took myself off the antidepressants I began to re-evaluate the possibility of making sense of things on my own and of being an active agent in the community. I began to use the city to gain access to a small community of young, experimental artists, many belonging to different subcultures, such as gays, punks, anarchists. I went to underground music events, exhibitions, theatre, and participated in demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience. I was playing music, experimenting in the visual arts and conducting seminars for classes. I was more creatively active, but I still could not write anything other than fragments, as I could not form coherent conceptions of the world around me. I did not yet understand the power of play and irony or of expression through the interconnection of fragments. I came from a background of personally experienced privilege, but with a vicarious history of suffering. I could "pass" in the dominant culture, but I did not really belong. I was trying to exit the "establishment," which I connected with a self-conscious reproduction of class and other biases, but I could not deny that a large part of myself was firmly yoked to it. Neither radically inclined, nor mindlessly accepting, I felt I was floating between boundaries. My physical image literally reflected this state of mind: I dressed neither conservatively nor playfully, but wore a neutral assortment of baggy, cast-off clothes. I also had a series of emotionally uninvolved sexual encounters with both men and women. It is telling that something as "radical" as bisexuality almost did not register, as such, with me. That either points to a relaxed attitude to sexuality or the fact that my body and desires were obviously still not really acknowledged as having an existence, other than as subordinate to my intellect. Although desire obviously has a lot to do with the mind, especially the subconscious, my expectation was that if my evolving intellect was able to imagine a possibility, then my body should follow like a puppet. My state of mind can be illustrated by a few fragments from a journal I was keeping at the time:

The city creates things in the imagination that have nothing to do with being day-to-day reality. It's all film. Sex takes on the dimensions of success. Packaging.

I thought of how dirty clothes get in the city. It is more than particles of car emission, viruses or vomit from a drunken person on the bus - it is the residue of people's lives and outrageous experiences.

Fragments. This is an age of fragments. Nothing is whole. Things are parts, alterations, glimpses, limited promises. It seems like things are not created, but altered, distorted.

The frenzied delvings into the sewers of the mind ... dark needs, desperate failings ... the power that comes with the knowledge of the buried ferocity within.

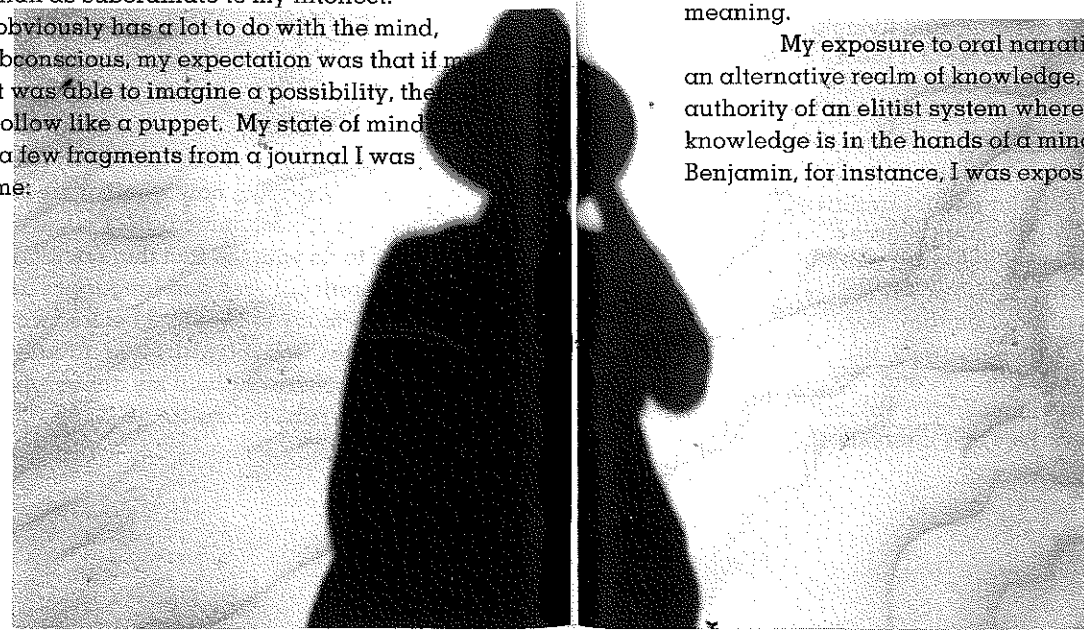
These fragments display a kind of urban sensibility - feeling the pressure of image manipulation and sensing the power of subversion through acknowledging the dirty underside. But I didn't have a language to talk about the shifting, slippery nature of reality - and the power relations that go into its definition. As I was groping my way towards an attempt to understand and define these perceptions, I made a decision at the end of grade 13 to go to university. This was somewhat of a throwback to the days when I could not imagine a future for myself other than an institutionally condoned, intellectual existence. Obviously influenced by a "European" understanding of culture and education, I went to university with a conception of it as being an accepted series of steps to go through to get educated. I therefore chose a variety of first-year survey courses in traditional disciplines and rapidly found myself screaming with frustration. However, I soon realized that I was not looking to assimilate a body of knowledge into an already established framework, but was seeking the beginnings of languages in which to talk about my earlier sensibilities. In Cultural Studies I found a forum for reflections on modernity and transmissions of meaning.

My exposure to oral narrative provided me with an alternative realm of knowledge, different from the authority of an elitist system where the power over knowledge is in the hands of a minority. Through Walter Benjamin, for instance, I was exposed to a language

which discussed the role of "authority" in the constitution of meaning. I was led to move towards a new understanding of knowledge as the end product of specific practices and I began to see myself functioning through the problems and phenomena of the modern and post-modern.

I began to recognize that I had a background of stories and jokes upon which I constructed a conception of my parents' (and, by extension, of my) background. The stories I remember with greatest clarity have to do with the privations and violence my parents sustained. Trivial concerns led without warning to heartrending stories. For instance, my mother yet again voicing her annoyance about my father's incessant smoking drifted into his relating an experience of being imprisoned for political activities and being forbidden to have a cigarette. My father occasionally talked about being a Jew in collaborationist Hungary under the Nazis. He recounted incidents such as Jews being stopped in the streets and ordered to pull down their pants so that their penises could be checked for circumcision. He personally escaped being exterminated by the Nazis, as the "Soviet Liberating Army" marched in when the Nazis were literally blocks away from where his family was living. Later, after his participation in the 1956 revolution, he was black-listed from working because of his dissident activities and made his living translating or writing under other people's names. When I went to visit Budapest 30-odd years after the event, he showed me the public square where he was shot at in a demonstration in 1956. Again, he was nearly killed and survived because someone illegally hid him in a building. (Thirty-five years later he met the woman who had let him in. She was still working in the same building, which had been converted to archives, and she showed him where the bullet holes had been left in a cabinet.) He once described himself dressing up in his best clothes at the age of ten, and going to the "high school" in order to procure himself a sponsor, which was the only way he could go to secondary school at a time when a restricted number of Jews were permitted to do higher studies. He later worked full-time to support himself and his parents while acquiring the equivalent of two M.A.'s and a Ph.D.

My mother came from minor nobility (landowners) and, as a result, was treated as a pariah under the existing regime. In spite of her straight A's, she was told that she would never be admitted to university and that she might consider becoming a shoemaker, as she had had polio as a child, and making shoes was not considered heavy labour. Fed up with the system, she once tried to flee Hungary on a train and was caught. In her desperate fury, she berated the official for the inhuman zeal of a system persecuting people of a generation who had had nothing to do with the oppression of the lower classes. She ended up persuading him to intervene on her behalf to admit her to university. It was at the age of ten that she had contracted polio, and her mother had proceeded to Austria, leaving her and her



younger sister and intending to send for them later. This, however, never transpired and they were left under the care of their grandmother. In a lighter vein, she tells of her grandmother seating a communist propagandist under the family coat of arms and telling him, "Have a seat, Sir Comrade." My mother later ended up supporting the three of them and never got the chance to go to medical school as she had wanted. Hearing this, one begins to understand the importance my parents place on a formal education, the idea being that even after losing everything, one still has one's education.

My oral background also contains a variety of humorous anecdotes and jokes. As in other communities where people are dealing with conditions of oppression, uncertainty and deprivation through underground humour, there is a strong tradition of ingenuously bitter, politically biting humour, not only in East Europe, but in the Jewish intellectual community. There is a great deal of power in the subversive use of language. As an illustration of the shield of irony that renders language ambiguous, I recall an anecdote about a skit performed on stage in Budapest during the 40's. The Hungarian word for steering wheel is also the word for government. An actor simply came on stage with a steering wheel and complained that the steering wheel was broken. Unfortunately, the police in the audience shut the theatre down at that point. Two jokes also stand out in my mind:

Andropov has woken up in the morning. His entourage bustles in and asks how he is feeling, to which the response is, "Fine." How was his sleep? "Fine." How does his head feel? "Fine." How does his stomach feel? How was his urine? "Fine." Finally, how was his bowel movement? "Fine." Then he adds, "I think I will get out of bed now."

The other joke goes as follows:

Rabbit sits on his doorstep filing his nails. Fox comes by and asks him why he is filing his nails. Rabbit replies, "Because when Lion comes they will be sharp enough so that I can tear him to pieces." Bear comes by and asks him why he is filing his nails. Rabbit gives the same response. Blackbird comes by and asks him why he is filing his nails and Rabbit answers, "Because when Lion comes they will be sharp enough so that I can tear him to pieces." Finally, Lion himself comes and asks Rabbit what he is doing. Rabbit replies, "Nothing, I'm just sitting here filing my nails and minding my own business."

These stories constitute a kind of vicarious memory which refers to a time at least a generation older than me. In the fall of '91 I visited Budapest for the first time since leaving as a baby. This was an occasion to reformulate the place from a mythical narrative told in my parents' voices to a collection of impressions viewed first hand. While they were lamenting the loss of a café culture, I was meeting a younger generation which was functioning in a milieu of bars, clubs and fast-food restaurants. The Hungary I've carried around in my heart and mind is not particularly related to the reality of today. The narrative that I know, that revolves around an aesthetic of suffering, creates a monochromatic experience of spectatorship. People living there participate in a reality outside of this aesthetic of suffering. There is an ongoing process of social and political transformation that this historical memory does not include.

My realization of the dynamic and living aspect of Budapest coincides with my interest in a theory of popular culture that is interested in the role of the consumer. I carried with me the residue of my father's concerns about the marginalization of intellectuals by a narcissistic and commercial fascination with mass culture; I also realized that popular culture traditionally is seen as trivial and shallow. However, differentiating between the production and consumption of mass culture enables one to think of the role of agency. Although the various forms of mass culture, from fashion to fast food, from TV to pornography, are produced through a series of institutions and corporations with an interest in preserving values conforming to dominant narratives and interests, their

consumption is influenced by the interests, experiences and values of a variety of subcultures. In this way, the consumers of mass culture are not necessarily passive objects, but rather agents active in the construction of their own experience. This interests me as well in terms of representations of and for women and in terms of how women present themselves in everyday life. Already a veteran of female image construction, I embarked on a course of playing with my image in the real world. Although I found Cultural Studies introduced theories which engage, rather than impose upon, the spaces they try to describe, I became acutely aware that I was not actually inhabiting a space.

As I became increasingly uncomfortable with my disembodied theoretical approach in university, I began to fantasize about being a flight attendant. As I had flown a lot when we were moving around in my childhood, I had come to see flight attendants as some kind of ministering angel, always patient, always in control, kindly and glamorous. Of course, later I understood this image to be a consciously and falsely perpetrated one. It was, therefore, with a self-consciously ironic sense that I prepared for my entrance into this glamorous and grubby world. This job seemed to me to be the epitome of uncomprehending stereotypes of women's roles. On the one hand, it is a dirty, exploitative job. On the other, you are glamorized. It is a wonderful opportunity for self-consciously playing with a stereotypical image and realizing its patently constructed veneer. I saw a pair of drag queens dressed as flight attendants at Gay Pride Day in Toronto and it pointed out to me exactly how this image is open to appropriation by people playing with gender identity. The stewardess has the same larger-than-life aspect of a nostalgic movie star, with the duality of a real person underneath.

Again, I find it amazing how immediately and intuitively I achieved the hostess image. I had never considered myself typically "feminine," but I instinctively knew how to dress, put on make-up and be graceful and charming when applying for positions as a flight

attendant. It later amused me to watch myself negotiating the female trinity of roles that it seems female flight attendants are expected to perform. One is at the same time unattainable virgin, titillating whore and nurturing mother, all wrapped up in one perky package. "Well-groomed" was the greatest compliment I heard among my co-workers (as the plane goes down in flames we remain calm and assured, with knotted scarf firmly in place). Although the contract did not state any overtly sexist conditions, there were unspoken double standards. For instance, at one point in training we were required to jump out the side of the aircraft and slide down an inflatable slide. We were emphatically told not to wear nylons because the friction had once caused a woman's nylons to melt on to her legs. However, the women's uniform consisted of a skirt and nylons. When we pointed this out, we were told that an emergency was unlikely to happen and, anyway, if it did occur, we would have more important things on our minds.

Although I was ambivalent about the image I was creating for myself, I was also having fun playing with my image. In giving myself over to an intuitive understanding of certain social relations I came to an understanding of the body as a visible site of conflicting influences. The process was curiously liberating, as I was using this persona for my own purposes. I got a great deal of pleasure from adopting my different roles outside of their own context. I found that consciously playing with mainstream images, within the mainstream, allows for a certain flexibility in crossing boundaries. It serves a different purpose when played out in a subversive context, such as cross-dressing. It is the context, or intention, which plays a large part in how subversive, pleasurable, or oppressive a role becomes.

At the same time, I realized that the stereotypically feminine image I chose to inhabit requires a degree of attractiveness and "breeding." It is not available to everyone. It is also not desirable to all women to play with mainstream femininity. Some women have undergone a great deal more

oppression than others, and they may not want to have anything to do with an oppressive culture, not even in humour or play. It is often difficult to say at what point one is co-opted by the system. In the process of self-consciously living a game and a reality I was able to experience the tensions of manipulating, and, at the same time, being manipulated by the power relations that go into constructing an image. This was illustrated to me when, after the airline folded, I worked as a secretary. As there are certain assumptions about the intelligence and ambition of people who work as secretaries, it was a slight disruption of my role to be having a theoretical discussion with consultants in the office. However, afterwards I overheard them exclaiming that I was "cute as a button." It was obvious that, in spite of my attempt at inserting an alternate identity into my role, the power of interpreting the meaning of that conversation lay within their control as superiors and men.

One of the secretaries I worked with said, "the sad reality is that appearance counts [in terms of status]." As I weave my identity through shifting images I wonder what there is to recover from the process of image-construction. As I watched people in Budapest struggling with economic and ideological issues in the wake of the collapse of communism in the East Block, I wondered if the preoccupation with appearance and representation is more a North American concern. Of course, this kind of struggle does take place here, as well. I am also more aware of the invisible codes and boundaries dictating the meanings of representation and behaviour in Canada than in Hungary. Through self-conscious and unconscious manipulation of image, I struggle to make the boundaries more visible, while making an ambiguous place for myself.

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