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An Ethnography of the Bay Area Renaissance Festival

Performing Community and Reconfiguring Gender

by

Matthew W. Johnson

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Communication
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DEDICATION

This completion of this project has been long in coming. It could not have been possible without the constant support and devotion of my loving wife, Jessica, along with the cheerful encouragement of my beautiful children, Titus and Lily.

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I wish to thank my advisor Elizabeth Bell, who has patiently and insightfully coached me through my coursework and the writing process, has become an invaluable teacher, mentor, and friend. The members of my committee are all professors at the top of their game. My graduate school experience has been enriched because of their classes and counsel. Finally, I owe a great deal to Keysha Williams who has tirelessly aided me in navigating the technical aspects of the graduate school world. Thank you all for your help and support.

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Matthew W. Johnson

ABSTRACT

This performance ethnography analyzes the means by which performers at Tampa, Florida's Bay Area Renaissance Festival constitute community and gender through performance. Renaissance Festivals are themed weekend events that ostensibly seek to allow visitors to experience life in an English Renaissance village. Beginning with the theoretical assumption that performance is constitutive of culture, community, and identity, and undergirded by David Boje's *festivalism*, Richard Schechner's *restored behavior*, Victor Turner's *liminoid communitas* and Judith Butler's *performative agency*, The Festival is explored as a celebratory community that engages in social change through personal transformation.

Employing reflexive ethnography and narrative as inquiry, Chapter Two catalogues and analyzes a broad range of festival performances, from stage acts and handcraft production, to participatory improvisation, dance, and song. Playful and liminoid, these performances invite participants to make performance commitments and mutually to produce community through participative performance, celebratory objects, and the surrender of personal space.

Chapter Three argues that performances of alternative masculinities at festival play out against the backdrop of R.W. Connell's heteronormative masculinities. These alternative performances break down social barriers, promote self-definition, and provide agency in the embodiment gendered experiences. Likewise, Chapter Four features Festival's feminine performances that reveal the community to be a "wench's world" privileging Judith Butler's notion of performative agency in order to enable communities of difference. The Wench, the Queen, and the Pirate She-King all embody feminine power and serve as archetypes of feminine narratives that privilege self-definition. This study demonstrates Festival to be a women-centered community that engages in a mythopoeia of feminist history.

Acknowledging Festival as a multi-vocal community of mythopoets, this ethnography significantly extends the work of previous research on Renaissance Festivals. Rather than focusing on Festival performances as attempts at historical "authenticity," this study reveals Festival's mythological stance and the means by which performers embody mythology and archetype to their own purposes. Moving away from an audience centered discussion of performance, this study demonstrates how individual performers, through personal transformation, become agents of change through performance.

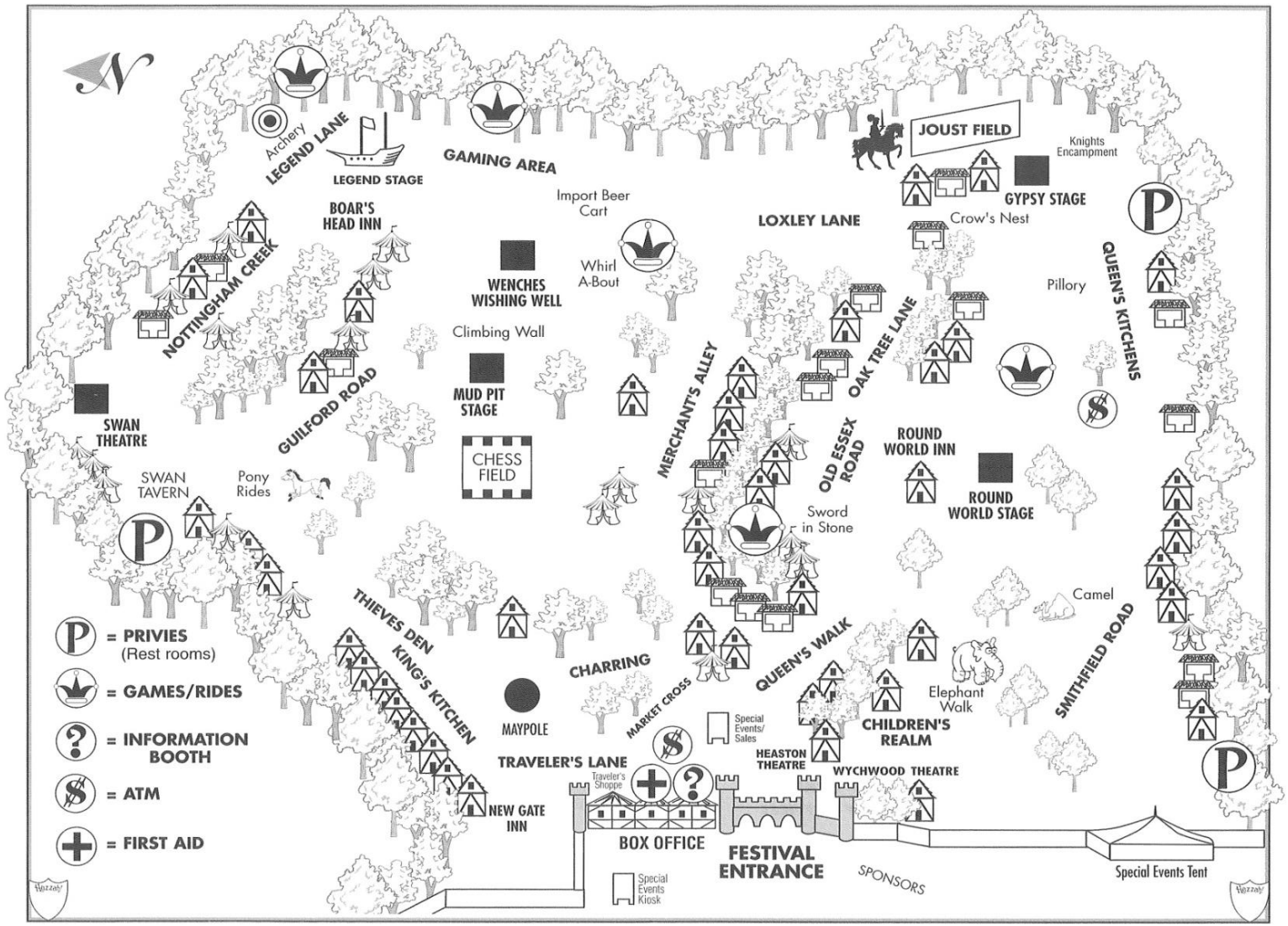

Figure 1: Map of Puddleton (*Image courtesy of Mid-America Festivals, Inc.)*

CHAPTER ONE

TILTING THE WINDMILL:

ON NARRATING FESTIVAL

Mr. Carmichael was everyone's favorite teacher at Groveland High School, even though he taught history. He wore crystals on a leather cord around his neck, an earring, and a large scarab ring. "Peace and joy!" was his daily greeting to each of us at the door of his portable classroom. His shoulder-length white hair, grown long (I suppose) to make up for its lack on the front of his head, swayed in rhythm to the mantra. "Peace and Joy!"

When he taught about Buddhism, he removed all the desks, burned incense in the corners of the room, and arranged us in a circle on a Persian rug. He crossed his legs in the lotus position, hands upturned, looking like a Buddha himself. He was interesting, and interested in us, looking into our eyes intently, seeing things no one else saw in 14-year-olds. He expected excellence. He honored us.

More importantly for us at fourteen, however, he let us watch movies in class. They were historical dramas, offered so that we could taste the flavor of the Middle Ages while, of course, he corrected factual errors along the way; but movies broke up the otherwise monotonous academic day. The performances were meant merely to augment our historical understandings; but for me Peter O'Toole *was* Henry II, and Catherine

Hepburn was Eleanor of Aquitane. Richard Burton was Thomas a' Becket and, unfortunately, Franco Zeffirelli's questionable portrayal of Francis of Assisi formed my core notions of the medieval monk. *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, released in 1973, reinvents Francis as a forebear of the flower-power revolution. And so it was no surprise to us when Mr. Carmichael suggested during the fall of our freshman year that we take a field trip to a south Florida Medieval Faire. We were delighted: anything to get us out of classes for a day.

After a hot and dusty two-hour bus ride, we expected to step onto a giant outdoor stage devoted to history where we could walk among and interact with performed legends. Advertisements promised jousting tournaments, human combat chess, and the opportunity to observe social customs in the midst of a Medieval marketplace. The "village" grounds were bustling with performers, craftspeople, and visitors as we meandered between striped tents displaying hand-made wares. In the aisles villagers walked alongside processionals of the King's court. Fields arranged for combat, comedy, or musical shows dotted the landscape. School kids old and young jostled among the booths, not buying much beyond food—pickles, turkey legs, soup in bread bowls, kebabs—but generally enjoying the scenery, escaping school for a day, and cavorting through the medieval playground. Even the rowdy kids who rolled their eyes at the whole experience had a new group of weirdoes to poke fun at.

There were as many old hippies walking the festival grounds as school children—folks who'd feel right at home with Mr. Carmichael and Zeffirelli's Francis. Long, gray pony tails and tie-dyed shirts, biker jackets and chain-mail bras blended in some fanciful

way with historical costumes and plainly dressed families simply out for a day at the faire. Counter-culture met educational opportunity with a ferocity, creating a carnival-like atmosphere with plenty of fantasy in the mix. Pewter figurines for role playing games sold in booths right next to traditionally hand-crafted swords and clothing. Booths selling crystals and incense butted up against armorers and leather crafters.

It seemed a quirky mix at the time, but despite the oddities, we played the games, gawked at the costumes, and participated in what Umberto Eco calls an escape into medieval romanticism. For the boys at least, the romance hinged on a dream of the Middle Ages as a barbaric fantasy world which allowed us to celebrate virility and brute force (Eco 1973, 69). We displayed our strength and skill at the games, throwing axes at targets or ringing a bell by striking a lever with a hammer. We reveled in the jousts and sword-play while displaying our manliness: messily eating greasy turkey legs and not washing our hands. The girls commented about how disgusting we were. We laughed off their comments and chased them with our mostly eaten turkey legs. Suddenly one of my friends turned on me, brandishing his turkey leg as though it were a sword.

"En garde, you scurvy dog!" He yelled at me.

"Here's my royal foot up your royal buttocks!" I replied, quoting an O'Toole line from *Becket*. One young woman in particular—Heidi, my nemesis in high school—rolled her eyes at us.

"Shouldn't you be playing Richard?" she asked me, referencing Anthony Hopkins' role in *The Lion in Winter*. "Wasn't he the gay one?"

All of the guys rolled with laughter while I turned scarlet. Heidi smiled a biting smile at me and raised her eyebrows before gathering her gaggle of friends, much like her own bevy of ladies-in-waiting, and disappeared down the lane.

I left the Faire that day feeling frustrated and dissatisfied. It was at least partially because of the humiliation and sexual insecurity brought on by Heidi, my constant tormenter. But there was more than that. I had been hoping the whole affair would be a more "authentic" experience with O'Toole-esque performances and Ladies befitting Hepburn's romance. I was disappointed. Their Henry VIII was too old, too skinny. The jousters had atrocious accents. Several vendors didn't attempt period speech at all. Or perhaps I was frustrated at my own level of participation?

The invitation was there, but beyond messing around with the guys, I hadn't had the nerve to get into character. Some of the more convincing actors seemed to welcome guests' less-than-perfect participation. They wanted me to play, but I didn't know enough of the rules to join the game. So I ate my turkey leg, watched a few shows, and went home with an "authentic" looking trinket—a deck of cards in an embossed leather carrying case. My family members were ardent card players and the hand-tooled scene of knights on horses seemed earthy and felt good in my hands; I still carry that card case to family Euchre tournaments. But I went home wishing I had done more, wondering how much fun it might have been to play on that stage: walking among the acres of striped tents, wearing one of those brilliantly crafted costumes, putting on history for hours at a time, even if among the historical tourists and gothic weirdoes.

Years later, attending the Bay Area Renaissance Festival in south Florida, I realized that, whether Medieval Faire or Renaissance Festival, the performances at events like BARF (as is it jokingly known to participants) are mythological rather than historical. Roland Barthes (1972) envisions myth as naturalized narratives and symbols that come to signify socially constructed assumptions. My conception of Festival performances as mythic led me to several important questions.

First, I looked back at my angst-ridden youth and asked, *what is it about these mythologies that so stirred my youthful longings for performances of history and fantasy?* "We are dreaming the middle ages," quips Umberto Eco (1973, 64)—by which he means both Europeans and Americans have been obsessed with the Medieval since the beginning of the Renaissance. Eco calls the middle ages a "mythological stage on which to place contemporary characters" (1973, 68). Performing the medieval is a means by which we mythologize ourselves. As boys, my friends and I played out our insecurities in bombastic swordplay meant to compensate for, at least in my case, continual torment by young women like Heidi. Looking back at the films Mr. Carmichael offered to us, I can see how often I identified with the loud, yet delicate egos of characters like O'Toole's Henry. And I see now what I didn't see before in those films—veiled (and sometimes not-so-veiled) erotic tensions that symbolized the power struggles between mythological characters like Henry and Becket, Henry and Eleanor, or Richard the Lion-Heart and Phillip of France. Lay atop that the social and economic commentary made by characters like Zeffirelli's Francis, and the medieval stage became a place I could grapple with images of myself and the processes of my world.

A second, more important question became, *what does performance do for me, both generally, and specifically as I enact these mythic characters?* Performance was always for me a means of masking my passions or pains and simultaneously putting them on display. Or else it was a means of losing myself in a playful moment that separated me from those same passions and pains. In terms of gendered performances, the mythic quality of the characters on Festival's stage provides a unique opportunity to idealize my interactions with women or with other men and to play out those idealizations bodily. But it does more than that. It changes me, if incrementally. Like Judith Butler, I wonder at the capacity of performative play to engender agency and transformation through my own performances.

Finally, I asked, *what is it about Festival that makes its invitations to participate so intriguing?* The community is about so much more than simple historical reenactment. How do ladies in finery and bikers in spiked leather make sense as constituents of the same storied world? How does a mélange of every set of heroes and heroines from King Arthur to The Three Musketeers (with any number of fantasy franchises thrown in for good measure) make for a cohesive performance? From my initial observations for a graduate research paper, these questions grew. This study is the result of my now long years of association with the Bay Area Festival, and with several other Festivals and Faires in the state of Florida.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyze the means by which performers at Tampa's Bay Area Renaissance Festival constitute community and gender in and through performance. Beginning with the theoretical assumption that performance is constitutive of culture, community, and identity, this analysis focuses on how that process of constituting works for participants at "Ren Fest," as it is known in among the Festival community. Specifically, I lay the foundation for the constitutive nature of performance and characterize Festival performances as reflexive, playful, and liminoid. I argue that, although R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity is certainly in play at Festival, significant reconstitutions of masculinity happen in and through performance. And finally, I demonstrate that Festival is a women-centered community that is actively creating a feminist mythohistory.

I employ reflexive ethnography and narrative as inquiry to catalogue and analyze Festival performances of all types. Performance is the sea in which Festival participants swim. It is a grand stage on which traditional stage acts—musicians, jugglers, knife throwers, and dancers—mingle with improvisational comedy both on stage and in impromptu conversations in the lanes. Craftspeople create Festival personas, and by enacting their crafts they create art-as-performance. Every character on the Festival "stage," either actor or patron, must negotiate the boundaries between Festival persona and their own "backstage." Through detailed accounts of these performances collected over several years and with the participation of members of the Festival community, I have an insider's view of its performative world.

This study differs significantly from most research addressing living history and Renaissance Festivals in that it is, first and foremost, a performance studies project. It extends the work of performance studies research in several important ways. Aptly for this project, Ruth Laurion Bowman (1998) conceptualizes the field of performance studies as a complex carnival whose methodologies and interests create within its scholars a sense of vertigo and disorientation. Bowman suggests that performance studies:

> looks at and handles things in a different way. It asks questions [others] don't ask. It upsets what others take for granted…It challenges students to pursue a line of thought they wouldn't pursue otherwise. All departments need something like performance studies to help shove the dust around. (Bowman 1998, 304)

This study attempts to "shove the dust around" and ask questions that others have not. It looks at the constitution of community and gender as products of performance and play. And most importantly, it privileges pleasure and agency as constitutive elements of performance itself.

The remainder of this chapter places Ren Fest in its historical context and reviews literature relevant to the study. The theoretical perspectives that inform my analysis include David Boje's notion of festivalism, Richard Schechner's understanding of performance as restored behavior, and Kenneth Burke's and Judith Butler's privileging of artist/performer as agent. Additionally, Chapter One overviews the methodological approaches of the study—reflexive ethnography and narrative as inquiry—and highlights key issues of the study, providing an outline of the remaining chapters.

Contextualizing Festival: Background and Relevant Literature

As Kimberly Korol-Evans (2009, 20) observes, "there are inherent problems chronicling the history of the contemporary American Renaissance Festival." As an art form arising out of the 1960s folk movement, few written records narrate the over 40 years of Festival development. Korol-Evans has cobbled together a history of the movement based on newspapers and newsgroups, or festival magazines, as well as from interviews with participants and Festival directors. Her account meshes with the versions I have collected from long-time performers at the Bay Area Renaissance Festival (or BARF as it is affectionately known to participants), both locals and those who travel from Faire to Faire.

In 1962, Phyllis Patterson, drama director for a Southern California youth center, dreamed up the first Renaissance Festival, complete with roving actors and an active marketplace. Searching high and low, Patterson stocked her Renaissance village with musicians skilled in archaic instruments, sandal-makers, potters, weavers, and a handful of other craft hobbyists (Simons 2001). Her "environmental theater" (Schechner 1973, 1988) was as a fundraiser for a local radio station but was received so well that it became an annual event that grew each subsequent year. The burgeoning Pleasure Faire with its focus on earthy hand-craft and pleasure attracted the ever growing alternative hippie crowd. For Patterson, it was an exercise in diversity. In an online Festival newsgroup, she recounted:

> The faire I invented was truly an allegory concocted to appeal and invite participation on many varied levels. I believed there should be a great party

> atmosphere of Eat, Drink and Be Merry! for those who came to party. Additionally, there should be history, theater, art, music, dance and pageantry aplenty for those who want to plunge more deeply into the experience. (Patterson 1999)

Five years after that first "Renaissance Pleasure Faire," as it was called, Diana Paxson, a medieval studies graduate from Berkeley, California hosted a backyard graduation party featuring a tournament in which guests—medievalists, and science fiction and fantasy buffs—wore fencing masks, motorcycle helmets, and rudimentary costumes in order to compete in a tournament using wooden swords and other weapons. From this Middle Ages themed party began the *Society for Creative Anachronism* with its credo, "recreating the 16th Century the way it should have been." Since its humble beginning, the SCA has become a national network with small groups meeting weekly or monthly in communities nearly everywhere. As SCA groups and Pleasure Faire hippies and historical truists began to converge, the Ren Fest movement began a slow take-off as a folk culture oddity. In 1972, organizers in Minnesota decided that the profit potential for such festivals was enormous if appropriately marketed and managed.

The alternative culture origins are still apparent at the Festivals—amidst ladies dressed in finery are booths that offer henna body art, incense, and crafted pipes whose intended uses are clearly dubious. In the parking lot, vehicles covered in activist stickers (some of them old VW vans) dot the landscape with sayings like "Legalize Hemp," "Go Organic," "You Cannot Simultaneously Prevent and Prepare for War," and "My Goddess Gave Birth to Your God."

Visitors today find the festivals an intriguing mixture of the ingredients of their origins. The first Minnesota Renaissance Festival still maintained the flair and flavor that diverse groups brought to its genesis. But as the theme park mentality took firm hold in the minds of the American public (Gottdeiner 2001), the mandate of the corporate vision became clear. Festival began to be transformed into an educational venture where "authentic" representations of historic realities could be experienced by visitors in a family oriented and child friendly atmosphere. Large festivals like Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Michigan are widely known for the grand scale of their facilities and the "accuracy" of their players. Dialect trainers in Florida refer to some of the northern instructors as Shakespearian Nazis. At these larger Faires, the crowd of vendors with ties back to Festival's origins—purveyors of anachronism—find it more and more difficult to justify their existence in these new "Disneys of the Renaissance," as one crafter called them. Frank, one such craftsman, bemoans the transformation of Festival:

> I miss the old days, when we weren't so worried about history. I remember when the Festivals used to be fun—when bikers in Harley vests could chase girls in rabbit skin bikinis down the aisles and no one would blink. This was no place for kids. Now you can't get drunk before closing or they ask you to leave! Now, they want you to speak like you lived in the 16th century or you can't get a booth. That's no way to live. I do this for me, and the show that you get from me is *my* show. I'm the show—this is my life.

Some crafters claim that the Bay Area Festival is more like what Frank calls *the old days*. "There's a reason they call it BARF," I am told. "On the circuit, people know this Faire as 'the nasty show.'" Nasty or not, BARF is a cauldron of carnival-like festivity.

Defining Ren Fest: Carnivalesque Subversion or Festivalism?

Kimberly Korol-Evans' recently published dissertation, *Renaissance Festivals: Merrying the Past and the Present* (2009), is the most relevant research to this project. Korol-Evans characterizes Festival as what Bakhtin (1968) would call a carnivalesque setting in which performers experience multiple states of immersion in history by actively creating belief through ritual. I contend that Festival should not be characterized as carnivalesque—subversively transgressive—nor should it be treated as ritual, but rather as a playful outgrowth of what David Boje calls "festivalism." I also argue that previous research on living history in general, and Renaissance Festival in particular, takes an audience-centered, rather than performer-centered approach that focuses on questions of immersive authenticity rather than on questions of performative agency. Below I make important distinctions among the terms carnival, carnivalesque, and festival to lay the groundwork for this ethnography.

Carnival and Carnivalesque. Renaissance Festivals are a double entendre of Carnival. They are at once performed representations of carnivals and festivals that occurred in English villages during the Renaissance, and carnival-like spaces with liminoid possibilities in the framework of modernity. While representing carnivalesque

transgression of Renaissance social norms, performers simultaneously seek to transgress the norms of today. If Festival's capacity for transgressive transformation is to be gauged, it must first be understood in the context of its attempts to represent the historical aspects of earlier festivals and carnivals.

Historical "Carnival," most often enjoyed in the Mediterranean regions of southern Europe, was celebrated just before Lent and contrasted with Lent's season of fasting and reserve (P. Burke 1987; Findlen 1998). Other carnivalesque festivities throughout the year and in other climes throughout Europe included the twelve days of Christmas, Mayday, Pentecost, the feast of Saint John, All Saints, and various harvest festivals (Davis 1975). Carnival and these other carnivalesque festivals upturned and derided the rules of order for everyday social structure and moral expectations. Food, displays of violence, and sex (both real and imagined) were usually important parts of the ritual play that celebrated all things *low* in disparagement of all things *high*. Comic inversions abounded (Bakhtin 1968; Stallybrass and White 1986). The medieval Feast of Fools, which was organized by the younger members of clergy, involved the election of a Bishop of the Fools who wore vestments backwards, drinking and dancing in the church while singing obscene songs and jeering the attendees or else delivering nonsense messages (Davis 1975). These kinds of rough-and-tumble festivities exemplify the ways in which Festivals celebrated a world turned upside down (Muir 1981). Topsy-turvy inversion varied widely from mock kings and bishops to cross-dressing and prurient satires.

Even today, theorists debate the meaning of such inversion, not only in Medieval and Renassiance carnival, but in modern festive settings. Such celebrations have been described by anthropologists such as Victor Turner (1969) and Max Gluckman (1963) in terms of being a societal "safety valve" in which rituals of rebellion allow for controlled releases of hierarchical tensions in a space that is set apart from the everyday. Other authors such as literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1968) offer a more subversive analysis, that carnival provides space for a separate sphere of experience and critique that is independent of hierarchy and in fact becomes an alternative to it by creating change. It is a sphere of liberation, annihilation, and renewal. Bakhtin observes the grotesque realism of Carnival calling attention to it as an underworld of the higher society. He emphasizes its *ambivalence* (it simultaneously praised and abused what it imitated), its *duality of the body* (an ingesting and secreting low body verses a reasoning and pious high body), and its *incompleteness* (its tendency to focus on youth and renewal). Extending Bakhtin's analysis, Natalie Zemon Davis (1975) argues that carnival is much more than a safety valve; rather, it has the power both to reinforce existing orders or to critique them while promoting rebellion. Stalleybrass and White note two significant veins of carnivalesque transgression: displays of the grotesque and indulgences of physical and sexual appetites. They focus on the production of identity and status which come from repudiating that which is *low* (1986, ix) and the celebration of dirt, excess, and the body as pleasurably celebratory in corporate ritual (1986, 106). The dual nature of such carnivalesque transgression lies in that it is simultaneously praises and abuses the *high* while mainstream culture is able to construct its identity by rejecting the "scene of its low

Other" (202). Carnival cannot always be contained. Its ritual and imagery can migrate beyond the festive occasion making a difference in any number of ways. Liminal, or liminoid spaces created by taboo-breaking enable the consideration of new and alternative ideas.

Whether liminoid festivity is indeed a safety valve or a force for change is largely dependent upon circumstances (Davis 1965), but perhaps a more important question should be asked in terms of what carnival does—not for a broad collective—but for a community of performers as agents in the constitution of their own identities and the identity of the community. Edward Muir notes that carnival can best be understood in terms of performances which are independent of any particular social functions they might serve. Muir calls carnival and the carnivalesque festivities and performance genres that have sprung from it (both in early modern Europe and in more modern performance forms) ambiguous and unpredictable forms of communal play which exist somewhere between "the drama of representation and the experience of real life." Nevertheless it is the very ambiguity of the performances and their functional character that makes them "extremely fertile sources for creative protest" (1981, 114).

But is Renaissance Festival a ground for protest performance? Although this dissertation argues for the transformative potential of Festival performances for individuals, and by extension for the Festival community, I contend that construing Ren Fest as overtly subversive misrepresents its more conservative performances of conventional culture, mythologies, and gender norms. Festival negotiates between performers as agents and a consumer culture.

Festival: Between Carnival and Spectacle. Using performance as a frame for understanding the theatrics of global capitalism and conflicts surrounding it, David Boje (2000, 2001, 2005) envisions a difference between *spectacle* and *carnival* noting the conflicting theatrical motivations of corporate organized and mediated spectacles and the carnivalesque atmospheres of symbolic resistance like anti-sweatshop and anti-globalization protests. In what he terms spectacle, Boje sees a manipulation of meaning-making enacted through theatrical events that serve the production of power and managerial needs of corporations like Disney and Nike. He calls carnival a theatric of rant and madness that seeks release from corporate power in order to stem the tide of alienation that comes from global capitalism. Rather than being carnivalesque, Renaissance Festival might just as easily be envisioned as spectacle—a consumptive marketplace that plays into the theatrics of global capitalism[1]. A number of Festival regulars make the observation that Ren Fest has moved significantly in this direction since becoming a corporate endeavor.

As an alternative to both spectacle and carnival, Boje (2005) argues for the term *festivalism*, a concept that navigates between gaudy consumption and radical reversal. For Boje, spectacle serves as a legitimating narrative that is selective in its storytelling while carnival serves to subvert that narrative. Spectacle is a celebration of material things for the purpose of selling a controlled consumption while carnival is the

[1] Boje's notion of spectacle is not the same as David Proctor's "dynamic spectacle." Proctor envisions spectacle as something that converts performance materials into constructed community histories or develops agendas of community action (1990, 119). For Boje, spectacle capitalism manipulates audiences through dynamic forces that are "entertainmentizing" business (Boje 2005; Wolf 1999).

disordered, subversive consumption. As communities of performance, Spectacle, carnival and festival may all employ theatrics, storytelling, and crafts, but Boje defines festival as a natural outgrowth of communal celebration. Spectacle, carnival and festival may occur simultaneously at one event, he argues, depending on the orientation of the individual actors participating in the scene. One participant may experience the materiality of the spectacle, one may experience the subversion of carnival, while yet another may experience the celebration as a holistic outgrowth of a sense of a community constituting and constituted by the event. This sense of festival may encompass consumption and subversion, but it is not marked by it for they are not necessary to the experience but rather outgrowths of it.

Boje uses the example of Renaissance festivals, along with Shakespearean festivals, harvest festivals, and even craft fairs or film and music festivals to exemplify the constitution of communities in Festive performance. Though spectacles like Disney parks or other themed entertainment venues may appear to do the same thing as these Festivals, they don't facilitate the same kind of community. Reenactment festivals, he argues, begin as communal celebrations of a reverence for particular times or places. Constructing fantasies that elaborate upon the best of the good old days, they go to great lengths to recreate dress, architecture, or social realities that are outpourings of what the community sees as the best of itself or an expression of what it longs to be. But even in the midst of this kind of communal outpouring, Boje notes, there may be much of contemporary spectacle mixed in. He uses as an example The Colorado Renaissance Festival, which sells a Royal Wedding experience for $2,500. The corporate ownership of

nearly all of the largest Ren Fest venues speaks to the growing Spectacle-esque nature of these events. But despite this move towards corporate management and an ethic of consumptive entertainment, Festival is still experienced by its costumed visitors and actors as just that: a Festival of the community. Festivalism may have an activist agenda, but it is empowered in play, self-reflection, social commentary, and pleasure.

I contend that Boje's concept of festivalism is the most apt description of the way community is experienced at the Renaissance Festival. Its performances are multivocal and diverse. The motivations of its crafts-people and actors, casual attendees and committed patrons, or even of its inner-circle—the itinerate "Rennies"—are often at cross-purposes with one another. And yet Festival functions cohesively as both carnival-of-performance and market-place of history. My participant observation in this study serves to "flesh out" Boje's claims about festivalism and multivocality by giving voice to Festival's performers and their performances, accounting for their experiences of the communal celebration and the ways that it empowers them.

Relevant Research on Living History and Renaissance Festivals

Although scholars across a number of discipline deal broadly with public rituals, festivals, pageantry, and spectacles, Renaissance Festivals have received little scholarly attention; they are even more rarely studied as performance. Richard Schechner (1985) references them as parts of larger studies but doesn't analyze them in any depth as performance communities. Other studies are primarily descriptive or anthropological. A 2004 dissertation gives an overview of Ren Fest history and a detailed account of what

happens at Festival, describing it as a place of safety to explore community and identity (Gunnels 2004). Stephen Snow (1993) explores Plimouth Plantation in order to expand the definition of performance to include living history sites, but living history scholars deal primarily with historical recreations as sites of performed anthropology asking questions that touch on accuracy and authenticity. Jay Anderson (1984, 12) calls living history *simulations* that "serve as a mode of interpreting the realities of life in the past more effectively," while Richard Handler and Eric Gable (1997) use Colonial Williamsburg to illustrate the structural limitations of living history museums that try accurately to portray social history. More recently, Scott Magelssen (2008) contests the authenticity of living history, calling the pursuit of historical accuracy a cultural farce. Going beyond questions of accuracy, studies in other fields still hinge on questions of authenticity. Hyounggon Kim (2004) approaches Festival as a tourist sight, describing its participants as experiencing what Robert Stebbins (1992) calls "serious leisure" and a sense of existential authenticity. Kimberly Korol-Evans (2009) treats Festival as a modern day carnival, arguing that Renaissance Festival is the progeny of what Bakhtin describes as carnivalesque. For Korol-Evans, Festival provides for an immersion that is transportive and ultimately authentic.

Moving beyond questions of authenticity, Richard Schechner (1985) highlights the anachronisms endemic to re-creation. He defines performances generally as *restored behaviors*. Schechner imagines bits of behavior—elements of a dance, scripted dialogue from a play, pieces of ritual, or even sets of behavioral expectations—laid out like strips of film that can be "stored, transmitted, manipulated, [and] transformed" in performance

(2002, 36). To historical recreations—and recreations of mythologized pasts—he applies Victor Turner's notion of performance as the *subjunctive mood* of behavior used to express our wishes, emotions and possibilities. The performer, performing an imagined past, is pretending to be someone else, doing something else that may not have ever been done or even imagined. "Restored behavior," comments Schechner, "offers to both individual and groups the chance to rebecome what they once were—or even, and most often, to rebecome what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become."

As educational endeavors, Renaissance Festivals in America explicitly present themselves as faithfully restored behavior indicative of the times which they represent. Tampa's Bay Area Festival advertises itself as "authentic." On its official Facebook page BARF invites patrons to experience:

- an authentic taste of life in 16th Century England
- a cast of 300 professional actors and musicians reproducing authentic dress, accent, speech, and behavior
- over 100 of the finest craftspeople and artisans in the country, invited by jury decision to represent period artistry
- a culinary experience reminiscent of the times

Despite the rhetorical "Huzzah" of BARF's advertising, the Festival is rather as Richard Schechner described Plimouth Plantation—an experience of "anachronisms swimming in a sea of twentieth century tourists" (1985, 87). Festival does not live up to the living history ideal. Rather, it provides an opportunity for disparate cultural groups to "rebecome what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become."

A performance perspective of living history requires a retooling of the living historian's ultimate aim. Rather than telling it "as it was," Renaissance Festivals perform mythohistory and fantasy in order to tell stories that best reflect our justifications of ourselves. As Kenneth Burke (1937) describes, we tend to "live forwards" even when we "think backwards." We assert our values into the future and check them against our myths of the past. For Schechner,

> History so-called is not "what happened" but what has been constructed out of events, memories, records: all shaped by the world view of whoever [sic]—individually or collectively—is encoding (and performing) history. To "make history" is not to do something but to do something with what has been done. (1985, 50-51)

The reconstructed "history" of the Renaissance Festival is what Burke might consider a collective poem that, as an art form, can be said to have an intrinsic value for its own sake, but that is also political. For Burke, drama takes on the form of what he calls a "poetic corrective," wherein artists extol a program of attitudes and emphases which then feed back into the realities they represent. Festival's performances of "the way things should have been" speak to the way performers believe thing ought to be.

Judith Butler argues that one means by which feedback occurs is through performativity, which she describes as "a reiteration of a norm or set of norms" that acquires such taken-for-granted status that it "conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (1993, 12). Although performativity often serves to conservatively reinscribe cultural practices, it can also "passionately reinvent the ideas,

symbols, and gestures that shape social life" (Diamond 1996, 2). As Elin Diamond argues, "it is impossible to write the pleasurable embodiments we call performance without tangling with the cultural stories, traditions, and political contestations that comprise our sense of history" (1996, 1). Diamond presents performance as a site of contested meaning and as an endeavor through which new political perspectives become emergent. James Clifford (1986, 19) says that individuals and groups who "improvise local performances from (re)collected pasts" contribute the "contested, temporal and emergent" nature of culture itself. Performance, according to Diamond, "is precisely the site in which concealed or dissimulated conventions might be investigated" (1996, 5).

The Renaissance Festival proves a unique case for consideration of the public engagement of events, memory and records as a cultural phenomenon, particularly from a performance studies perspective. Kirk Fuoss argues that "cultural performances produce communities by externally and internally articulating them" (1995, 82). Performance literally constitutes the Festival community, not only in the sense that performance is the business of the Ren Fest, but because performance iterates the community. The questions that have not been asked about Festival are the ones that most interest the performance studies scholar. Herbert Blau (1990, 257) defines the heart of performance as "the liberation of the performer as an actor who, laminated with appearance, struggles to appear. By whatever means, the actor achieves autonomy." Performance studies sees performer and performance as the objects of its study. Performance is not the transmission of accurate or inaccurate information, nor is it merely a product produced for an audience, nor yet even a transporting moment wherein an actor may commune

with setting or place. It is all of these things, but it does more than these things. Performance shapes and is shaped by the agent who performs.

Butler conceived of and developed the notion of performativity specifically in the context of gendered performances. Performers, through their performances, contest conventions of gender become contested at Festival. In a recent M.A. thesis, Andie Markijohn (2009, 1) asks "what happens with gender in [Festival's performance] space." She answers that question ultimately in terms of audience, tentatively noting that Festival may prompt "subtle shifts in belief" (2009, 112). A more important question hinges on how performances of gender *gender* performers. More important than questions of audience, for this study, are questions of how performance engages the agency of the performer.

Previous studies of Renaissance Festivals have overlooked a number of important issues. Grasping the multivocality of Festival's performances is, to borrow from Cervantes, like tilting with a windmill. If Festival is Umberto's Eco's *dream of the Middle Ages*, then it seems "an impossible dream"—almost surreal in its combinations of history and fantasy, of re-creation and transformation, of consumption and transgression. In its whirlwind of voices, festivalistic community—rather than transportive immersion or cultural authenticity—better explains the liminoid experience of Ren Fest. I agree that Festival is immersive, but not in the way Korol-Evans describes. It is transportive to a degree, but by means of performance, not temporal displacement or overt cultural subversions. Neither does Festival seek authenticity of re-creation as its most important

aim. Rather, Ren Fest invites participant voices to get into the act on a mythological stage.

This project extends the work of other scholars who have researched Renaissance Festivals. To continue the jousting analogy, this study "catches the ring" in three important ways. First, it acknowledges Festival as laying somewhere between carnivalesque subversion and spectacle capitalism. Second, it stretches beyond questions of authenticity, accuracy, and belief to highlight the ways Festival performers mythologize history in order to reinscribe social reality through their play. Finally, this study moves away from an audience centered analysis of performance. Chapter Two discusses levels of audience participation, but only to contextualize the role of Festival patrons who become mutual producers of the performance community. Informed by Boje's distinctions among Carnival, Spectacle, and Festival, and privileging performance perspectives that highlight community and agency, this dissertation gives performers and their performances center-stage.

Methodology: Reflexive Ethnography and Narrative as Inquiry

My observations of the Bay Area Renaissance Festival began in 2001 as an investigation of performance and ritual and their respective roles in helping to create senses of historical authenticity. I naively entered the Festival arena as a distant observer, gaining a press pass and stalking the grounds of the Faire twice weekly as an outsider trying to make sense of the experience as audience-member. Six long weeks later after wading through my field notes, I realized this cultural world required a much different

pass in order to do justice to its complexity. I began to think more seriously about the potential breadth of study possible at this site, and I set my goal to participate as a cast member the next season. Six weeks of rehearsal and six weeks of performance yielded reams of narrative data that have continued to grow as I have become an active participant in the Festival community. My method of data collection has been reflexive ethnography. In addition, the writing of an ethnographic text becomes in itself a means of analysis. Narrative-as-inquiry is an important step in the process. In many ways ethnographic data collection and narrative-as-inquiry are really two stages of one method, for as James Clifford notes, "the making of ethnography is artisanal, tied to the worldly work of writing" (1986, 6). For Clifford, ethnography as social science is inseparable from writing as a means of representation, both in field notes (which cannot be viewed as objective), and in the final rhetorical construction of an ethnographic narrative (which ought to have appropriate reflexivity that acknowledges the challenges of representation).

Reflexive Ethnography

Anthropological methods of inquiry have made a profound impact on the disciplines of communication (most especially in cultural and performance studies) and history. As Robert Darnton (1984, 3) observes, cultural history—history from below—is "history in the ethnographic grain;" its primary goal is the "deciphering of meaning" in the study of past cultures (Hunt 1989, 12) Likewise, the study of culture in Communication is an endeavor that focuses on meaning in the present. As Clifford Geertz argued, an analysis of culture must be "an interpretive one in search of meaning,"

an "explication…construing social expressions" (1973, 5). The means, too, by which culture is observed by the ethnographer is "from below." As Dwight Conquergood claimed:

> The dominant way of knowing in the academy is that of empirical observation and critical analysis from a distanced perspective: "knowing that," and "knowing about." This is a view from above the object of inquiry: knowledge that is anchored in paradigm and secured in print. This propositional knowledge is shadowed by another way of knowing that is grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection: "knowing how," and "knowing who." (2002, 146)

As participant observer, the ethnographer is envisioned by Conquergood as a co-performer witness who takes an active role in the witnessed community.

Broadly defined, reflexivity is "turning back on oneself, a process of self reference" (Davies 1999, 5). It is a method of looking back upon one's own notions of experience and grappling with the dilemma of relating reality in a subjective manner (Behar 1993, 1996; Ellis and Flaherty 1993; Goodall 1989, 1991; Krieger 1991; Richardson 1997). Although ethnography is not necessarily about personal experience, it can never exclude personal experience. Barbara Tedlock defines ethnography as "an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events, and understanding into a fuller, more meaningful context" (2000, 455). She makes a shift from the notion of participant observation to the more reflexive phrase "observation of participation." The ethnographic author observes herself in the act of participating, reflecting on the culture of others, but

also the impact of that culture on herself and her impact on the thing observed. This perspective on the method follows what Tedlock earlier called the "shift in ethnography toward representing ourselves in the act of engaging with and writing about our selves in interaction with other selves" (1991, 79).

Over the course of the last nine years, first as an outside observer, then as participant observer, as a cast member for two years, and as a costumed participant afterwards, I have had the opportunity to interact firsthand with cast, craftspeople, and patrons. I began attending Festival as a non-costumed patron in 2001 in order to conduct observations of performances and interviews with performers. At that time, I collected both audio and video recordings of improvisational performances in the village lanes, stage acts, and loosely structured interviews with cast members, craftspeople, and patrons.

For the 2002 and 2003 seasons, I became a member of BARF's cast. Aptly, I played the role of Sir Matthew, Her Royal Majesty's Court Historian. With leather-bound journal and period pen in hand, I collected field notes of character interactions and backstage conversations for two seasons. Most of the performers were aware of my research, but many were not. My dual role as both performer and researcher prompted a number of intriguing interactions. For example, on one occasion I sat down to eat lunch with Hodad the Dung Shoveler and the Queen's Headsman, and took the opportunity to scrawl some notes. Hodad told me, dropping character but still using an accent, to take a break.

"You know there's no one within earshot and no one watching. You can stop pretending to Chronicle. What kind of things do you write in that little book of yours?"

"I'm chronicling, actually."

Dropping the accent, Hodad rolled his eyes. "Yes, I know you're the chronicler, but what do you really write?"

"Oh," I stammered. It took me a moment, but I too dropped character. "I'm taking field notes for my dissertation project. I've been doing participant observation."

"Wait," he hesitated. "So you're actually doing what you're pretending to do?"

Since 2003, I have continued to attend Festival in costume to collect notes on performances and to continue interviewing performers and patrons. I have collected Ren Fest crafts, music, and literature; I have photographed performers and patrons; I have become a regular participant in Internet discussion forums; and I have observed events sponsored by the Society for Creative Anachronism. My experiences at Festival range from uncommitted outsider, to cast member, to committed patron and member of the community. I have had the opportunity to converse with literally hundreds of performers and patrons both at Festival and in informal interviews outside of festival.

In attempting to represent the multivocality of Festival, several key informants among both the itinerate Festival performers and the local cast have become central to the data of this study. Luke Cooper, Frank Henkel, and Daphne the Wench have been the core of the "Rennies" who have guided my observations. As Rennies they live an itinerate lifestyle and make their livings solely from Festival. Luke is a master glass-blower, and Frank hand crafts recreations of historical statuary. Daphne is the leader of a

successful performance group known as The Washing Well Wenches. Among the cast of local performers, Jacky Tappet and Queen Catherine have provided tremendous detail and feedback. Jacky works as a dialect and costuming coach for Festival and is a self-identified "word-nerd" relishing in Shakespearean English and historical re-creation. Catherine is a professional actress who organizes her schedule around Festival. Tegan, Brandon, Jaryd, and Tina are unpaid performers who help populate the village every year, while patrons like Ken and Johnny have become costumed regulars. All of these performers and patrons will figure heavily as voices in the chapters to come.

Narrative as Inquiry

If ethnography is a means of observation, narrative is its necessary counterpart in representation. John Van Maanen describes the ethnographer as one who tells striking stories.

> Their materials are words, metaphors, phrasings, imagery, and most critically, the expansive recall of fieldwork experience. When these are put together and told in the first person as a tightly focused, vibrant, exact, but necessarily imaginative rendering of fieldwork, an impressionist tale of the field results. (1988, 102)

In this case, as Laurel Richardson puts it, writing becomes not only a means of representation, but a method of inquiry. It is:

> a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. Although we usually think about writing as a mode of "telling" about the social world, writing is not just a

> mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of "knowing"—a method of discovery and analysis. (2000, 923)

H. L. Goodall calls the soul of good writing the "deployment of a writer's 'coming to know'…It is the substance—both argumentative and poetic—of understanding 'lived experience'" (2000, 137). That soulful writing, Van Maanen's imaginative rendering of fieldwork, must of necessity take the form of narrative. Robert Coles makes the observation that encompassing the complexity of lived moments cannot be done solely with theories; rather "you do it with stories" (1989, 128). Ethnographic "findings" are a matter of translating field notes into prose (Richardson 1990). All social scientists can be envisioned as narrators, as "spinners of professional tales we call 'theories'" (Maines, 1993, 32), but the best spinners utilize narrative to translate knowing into telling. Good narrative orders our notions of reality and identity (Fisher 1984; Crites 1986, 1989; Coles 1989) and is a means of clearly organizing complexities of thought unapproachable by means of raw theory (White 1980). Narrative then, is a valuable tool for knowing. It is a means not only of representation, but of self-discovery.

In order to construct a narrative of the community, I have sought to validate my research by allowing members of the Festival community to review the earlier drafts of my writing. Cast members have been vocal in confirming and critiquing the interpretive work of this project. Because of performers' and patrons' input, I have continued to re-focus the direction of the project. Initially, I did not highlight gendered performances, but because of the feedback I received on the stories I was telling, my research has taken new and unexpected directions.

Outline of Chapters

This first chapter introduces the historical and theoretical context through which the next three chapters should be read. I have overviewed relevant literature and summarized my methodology. Chapter Two introduces Puddleton, a community in which performers and patrons co-create culture and individuals experience identity through performance. This chapter presents Festival as a unique community that obscures traditional differences between audience and performer by inviting participants to immerse themselves in relationships through performance. In addition, Puddleton is a village where the somatic experience of culture is accomplished through the performance of cultural production. Artifacts become more than consumed goods, and link producer and patron physically and psychically. Finally I argue that Festival is a locus for "mythic enactments" (Schechner 1985, 37), where performers actively create embodied stories about themselves that serve as new archetypes to facilitate the presentation and understanding of the self through community.

In Chapter Three, hegemonic masculinity serves as a backdrop against which alternative myths and masculine physicalities are embodied. These alternative performances of masculinity at Festival represent attempts to significant reconstitute gender and are experienced by individual performers as transformative. Five specific performers serve as examplars of masculine reconfiguration that challenge conventional performances of masculinity. Two of these performances illustrate the ways that performance can serve to *open the field* (Connell 1995) in terms of the way men experience gender and sexual orientation. In addition, in this chapter I attempt to

reconcile R.W. Connell's (1995) early critiques of the mythopoetic men's movement with a positive, but less deterministic conception of Jungian archetypes.

The fourth chapter argues that gender performativity enables the agency of the performer. Three types of women performers illustrate the transgressive performance of "uppity women" at Festival. The Washing Well wenches and the International Wenches Guild use *wench* to signify feminine freedom. Queens and Ladies embody feminine power defined in feminist terms. And pirate women serve to illustrate the female masculine in a move towards decoupling gender altogether. Chapter Four argues that Ren Fest is a community with a feminist bent, and it hinges on an experience of community that is emboldened by archetypes of feminine power and feminist narratives. Festival fights head-on the notion that men are superior and becomes a model of communities dependant on individual agency and self-definition.

"The challenge for any claims to performance as constitutive," observes Elizabeth Bell (2008, 20), "is to ask the next question. How does this process of constituting work?" By examining Festival as performance, and individuals as performative agents, I hope to bring a deeper understanding to the means by which performance is constitutive of both culture and community. As agents of our own transformation, we are all performers *laminated with appearance* and *struggling to appear*. Through a deeper understanding of the interaction between the products and processes of history, myth, and performance at Festival, I seek to provide insights into the ways in which performance becomes a means of appearing.

CHAPTER TWO

A DAY AT THE FAIRE:

COMMUNITY AND CULTURE CONSTITUTED IN PERFORMANCE

Play is the exultation of the possible. (Martin Buber 1957, 21)

We begin in a circle, the women curtsying while the men bow deeply in what is described by the French term as a *reverence*. As we join hands, the pipe, fiddle, and bodhran (a traditional Irish drum) begin playing "Gathering Peascods," and we commence the dance. Eight steps to the left, a single turn, then eight steps back, and we are ready for the double circle. The women watch as the men step into the circle, our right arms pointed toward the center while we dance the circle clockwise. As we step back out of the circle, the women take our places and repeat the inner dancing circle.

Now the music speeds up and the women return to the outer circle as the men move inward to *clap*! We trade places, moving outward as the women enter the circle to repeat our *clap*! Rhythmically the circles move in and out past each other as the music continues to gain speed. We finish the dance once more in the outer circle as we move around clockwise, twirling as we go. The music winds to a close, and we *reverence* once more, with crowds cheering. We are not paid festival performers, but patrons who have just learned the simple dance. We misstep throughout the performance and laugh as we

learn. One young woman bows instead of curtsying, and her escort curtsies in reply, lifting the skirt of his tunic daintily, which brings another fit of laughter.

Figure 2: Dancing "Gathering Peascods"

I come to the Renaissance Festival to play. The game is a day-long venture where I am transported into another time and space, which I know for pretend. I speak its languages; I dress in its uniform. I dance its dances and take my social place in its "great chain of being" as lord or peasant. I willingly submit myself to its conventions in all of their anachronistic quirkinesses with no other aim than pleasure in the game itself. As John Huizinga (1938/1950) argues, that although nothing is produced in this kind of play, the resulting performance is a significant cultural activity. Fun itself is the aim of the performance. And yet, as Huizinga also claims, play creates community through the formation of social groups who know the "secrets" of the game. Within Puddleton's palisade walls, there is serious business that gets done while I play. We are creating a

community in our performance, a community that goes beyond the fictional village which serves as our stage.

This chapter makes the case that festival is a community constituted in performance and marked by the ways in which its participants create culture and enact identity through performance. Festival is unique in the ways that it (1) invites participation in the performance, blurring the boundaries between audience and performer; (2) reclaims material culture and the means by which it is produced through performance; and (3) mythologizes identities by engaging in creative reformation of medievalism's symbolic stock enacted in performance. In order to understand Festival's participatory invitations, I first highlight performance commitments made by Puddleton's inhabitants—Rennies, Actors, Crafters, Patrons and Playtrons—and how those commitments to engage, to embody, and to surrender space enable participants to produce the community. Next, I explore the world of Festival handcraft and argue that crafters like Luke and Frank build relationships with consumers in a marketplace of celebratory art-as-performance. Finally, Luke's experience of "rebirth" through festivalistic performance shows how Ren Fest functions as a mythological community of difference. To understand these three ways that performance organizes this community and enables identities, below I utilize the theories of John Huizinga, Victor Turner, and contemporary performance theorists to describe the operations of reflexivity and play at Festival. My "thick description" of this "ground of play" and my conversations with Festival performers are essential to understanding how performative play does the work of constitution.

The Constitutive Nature of Performance

Before delving into the nature of Puddleton as a performance community, it is important to understand, broadly, what performance does in reference to the study of communication and culture. Performance is, as Victor Turner points out, more than simply mimesis, or empty imitation of life. Rather it is an act of poiesis, the creation of social realities, or "making not faking" as Turner describes it (1982b, 93). Turner's notion is that performances—particularly ritual performances—facilitate the creation of identity and community. Performance theorist Richard Schechner agrees, saying that "performances mark identities, bend time, reshape and adorn the body, and tell stories (2002, 22). Those stories are told using what Schechner calls "twice-behaved behaviors," or "restored behaviors." In using this terminology, he points out that performances are behaviors marked by reflection and mental or physical rehearsal for the purpose of making claims about our identities and telling stories about our communities.

Reflection and Reflexivity

The stories about self and community that we tell through performance are both reflective and reflexive. As reflections of an existing social reality performances say something about the expectations we have for appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Or, as Carol Stern and Bruce Henderson assert, performance "provides a way to constitute meaning and affirm individual and cultural values" (1993, 3). The *reverence* is a festival meme that reflects a gendered notion of performance possibilities. Men *reverence*, women curtsy. The breakdown of this expectation in the anecdote above, in which a

woman *reveranced*, revealed a clear understanding that a rule had been broken, resulting in laughter. The "gentleman" partner further highlighted the breakdown with his curtsy, a discursive move that at once freed his "lady" of her mistake while acknowledging the expectations of the situation. These embodied expectations are employed first, out of necessity—one can't reverence in a tightly laced bodice and hoopskirt—and second, out of deference to rules of gender. Both the bodice/hoopskirt and the curtsy embody restraint—both physically and socially. A reverence is a broad and sweeping thing; the man stretches out his front foot while spreading his arms wide—the one pointing down towards his lady's feet, the other held high behind him. At times he will even grasp his hat in one hand sweeping it back, plumage broadening and heightening the expansiveness of the motion even more. This gesture signifies the role of the man towards his woman, and towards his world. Only men are allowed the freedom to fawn and to flourish.

The daily repetition of gendered behaviors, what Judith Butler (1988) calls performativity is one example of the ways that everyday life performances (Goffman 1959) reflect, and thus promote, existing realities. In repeating expected behaviors, we participate in what Kenneth Burke (1941) describes as a conversation that is already going on, using a vocabulary that already exists and that employs limiting terms. Our performances, which reiterate existing vocabularies, continue to carry what we know into effect. But the notion of agency is always also implicit in performance. Dwight Conquergood put it this way: "Performance privileges threshold-crossing, shape-shifting, and boundary-violating figures, such as shamans, tricksters, and jokers, who value the carnivalesque over the canonical, the transformative over the normative, the mobile over

the monumental" (1995, 138). It is this *reflexive* aspect of performance—its ability to push back against culture and reality—that makes performance so powerful. In this way, performance, even the playful performance of Festival, can become "a site of transformation and even a paradigm for cultural resistance" (Pollock 1995, 657). "Because it is public," argues Conquergood, "performance is a site of struggle where competing interests intersect, and different viewpoints and voices get articulated" (1989, 84). Festival is not only a performance community, it is also a community performance where different notions of social reality are not merely invited; they are central to the texture of the show.

Work and Play

In addition to its *constitutive* nature, Elizabeth Bell (2008) describes performance as both *epistemic* and *critical*. As constitutive, it brings notions of social reality and identity into being. As epistemic, it is a way of knowing. Ronald Pelias (1998, 16) calls performance "an embodied procedure that provides insights." It is way to understand ourselves and the world around us. As a critical endeavor, performance stakes claims about our underlying assumptions. D. Soyini Madison (2005) argues that both the production and the study of performance not only can yield insights into the critical expressions within interpretive communities and provide the ability to name and analyze what performers and audiences intuitively feel, but it can also demystify the ubiquities of power and promote social change.

The work of performance is the same described by James Carey (1969) as the ritual role of all communication: the creation, maintenance, repair, and transformation of social reality. It does so in richly symbolic ways, reflected upon, rehearsed, embodied, and savored as a shared production. But the work of performance can never overshadow what Bell (1995) calls an economy of pleasure that is essential to performance's power. Just as Dutch anthropologist John Huizinga proposed a radically new conception of play as an activity that exists only for its own sake, so performance can be understood as existing to service the pleasure of the actor who is somatically celebrating the power of the possible. For Huizinga, the absorption, uncertainty, illusion, and exaggeration that exist outside ordinary life in play are fundamental elements of human culture. So too, Festival is a community founded on the joy of performative play. It is absorbing, unsettling, magical, and bigger than life outside. Through it, we exult in possibilities highlighted by an imagined past in order to create programs enabling who we wish to be in the present.

A Community of Performers

The most serious wor" of Festival performance is the constitution of a community of performers. Huizinga tells us that play is voluntary, is outside ordinary life, has fixed rules and boundaries, and promotes social groups and secrets. For Huizinga, play is an unreal interlude in our lives that has a prescribed time and place, and rules that govern our behavior. It creates social bonds through these rules, and through its secrets. There are insiders and outsiders in play, and crossing the boundary to the inside is like entering

a *magic circle*, where disbelief is suspended, and players accept the conditions of the game that make it possible. When I go to Festival, I put on a uniform, enter a playing field, turn off my mobile phone, and participate in a community. My level of participation—my immersion in the secrets of this world—determine at what level I am a part of the group. But at any level, the magic is there, beckoning me to the center of the circle.

Welcome to My Ground of Play

The Festival setting itself is a giant playground sectioned off from the world outside. Entering the parking lot, I am invited into the first level of immersion. Walking through rows of cars, I look left and right to see garbed patrons adjusting hoop skirts, or donning kilts, or draping themselves with the most rudimentary skeins of fabric to give some period effect. Others wear their street clothes. They slip on sun-glasses or baseball caps; they wrestle babies into strollers. I'm carrying a hand-made clay mug strapped to my belt for drinking; they have bottles of water and sports drinks. Together, we move toward the Festival's front gate. It rises before us as both set-piece and magical boundary, holding back the tide of modernity. As though springing from the ground in the dusty morning, the Queen and her Court join us, themselves striding through the parking lot and inviting us out of our world into theirs. A member of the court tells us they are arriving in Puddleton just in time for the village's local festival and will stay the night in the local inn. We should not expect to find a room. The court will take up most of the inn,

and we should plan to be gone by evening. The effect is almost surreal—like a Brigadoon rising up out of the mist once every hundred years only to disappear at the end of the day.

In front of Puddlton's gate are costumed players inviting us to come in. They are trained to interact with the crowd when long lines queue up at the ticket booth. Telling us what is inside, they encourage us to make a first tentative step into participation. Dare we speak in period speech? Garbed patrons play along, while the half-garbed may throw in an accented expression, trying it out before giggling nervously. *Did I do it right?* The women among the trained performers—and some garbed patrons—curtsy to the King and Queen, while the men sweep down into a deep *reverence* until they are bidden to rise.

Figure 3: The Queen and King Arrive to Enter Puddleton with Us

The court engages in "impromptu" dialogue, introducing this year's plot dilemma. One year pirates have invaded the surrounding area, and the royals are here to see their chaos stamped out. Another year it's the Duke of Norfolk come to stir up dissension among the locals against the monarchy. Whatever the tale, it gives rise to human combat chess in the morning, and fighting in the streets later in the evening. Sometimes there are

weddings; at other times betrothals or reconciliations, all leading to feasting, drinking, singing, and dancing. But it all happens within; you must come and see!

Daphne, now a professional Ren Fest performer, describes to me her first crossing of the walled village's performance threshold. At the time, she was a teenager and came to the edge of the festival wall simply wanting a day of escape from the troubled life of foster care. She describes her foster parents as "holier-than-thou ultra-conservative right-wing Christians who want to shove their religion sideways down your throat." She saw Festival as a place of escape from her world for a day, but she couldn't afford the gate fee. Creeping around the side of the palisade—a wooden fence with a crenellated top—she sneaked back through the wetlands that bordered one side and slid into the Festival grounds under a hole in the fence.

> There was a guy who ran a fencing booth here—his name was Kip—and he caught me at the fencing booth and started laughing at me. As a teenager, I was terrified that I'd been caught. Then I was indignant that he was laughing at me. And he said, "You know you could have walked in at that gate. No one guards it." And then he said, "You must want to be here pretty bad. Do you want a job?"

Fortuitously, Daphne had competitive experience in fencing, and Kip made her an apprentice. In short order, she was training other newcomers, and eventually she began her own show, The Washing Well Wenches. Daphne describes her experience, both literally and figuratively, as one of escape.

> I couldn't believe I was getting paid just to play around. I went to the thrift store the next day and found some blousy shirt, a pair of black pants I could tight roll,

and a pair of boots that looked medieval. This place has been like my home ever since. It's like my own personal fantasyland.

As fantasylands go, Festival is pretty mundane. In an increasingly themed entertainment world where even malls and hotels become Disney-esque environmental stages, it is difficult for Festivals like this one to compete (Gottdeiner 2001). But we are immersed to a degree. As we enter the front gates, we are greeted by a Celtic folk band—guitar, fiddle, and hammered dulcimer—and a knot of dancing wenches. The smell of grilled turkey legs already wafts through the air. Off to the right, we can see the orange glow of the blacksmith's forge fire; beyond that is a row of Tudor-style buildings curving off into the landscape that is dotted everywhere with great grandfather oaks. In front of the lane to the left is a maypole, and down the lane are more storefronts. One is an armory with swords gleaming in rays of light that slant through the trees and are caught by the already swirling dust. The center lane has striped tents and canopies rather than permanent buildings, and at its head is the glassblower's shop, which doubles as a show. Luke Cooper is already out this morning demonstrating the traditional craft. The heat from his kilns makes the air shimmer.

The space may be Richard Schechner's anachronisms in a sea of tourists (1985, 87), but it isn't simply the immersion into a themed physical space that makes Puddleton's participants come back year after year. The sense of community, the "gift of togetherness" (E. Turner 2005, 98), can only be explained by the transportive power of performance.

Liminal and Liminoid Moments

Victor Turner describes a kind of experience common to cultures in which ritualized performances create moments of passage. He calls the state through which one passes in that interstitial moment of ritual *liminality*; it is a moment that is neither here nor there, and serves to move individuals from one stage of life to another—from boyhood to manhood for example. Turner argues that these moments are few and far between. Crossing the literal threshold of Puddleton's gate is not enough to create a *liminal* experience. But Kim Korol (2006) describes the immersive experience of weekend long Renaissance Festival performances for weeks at a time as moving performers into what Turner calls *liminoid* experience (1969). Liminal spaces for Turner were collective experiences concerned with crisis and cyclical rites of passage which are integrated into the fabric of society and are unavoidable. Liminoid spaces are also collective experiences but are more likely to occur in consumer societies at large scale events where norms can be relaxed, like carnival, sporting events, theater, or festivals. Such events happen on the margin of society, are consumed by personal choice, and can challenge social order in important ways.

Korol goes further to describe festival not as an empty interstice—a place that is neither here nor there—but rather as a filled intrastice—an experience of being "both here and there, both then and now" (2006, 15). Stepping into Puddleton, I have to work my way through layers of immersion. When I first attend, I come un-costumed, alone, seeking to observe—to get my bearings. I am at once approached by a costumed performer and invited to speak in the language of festival.

"My Lord, from whence do you hale?" he asks. My response is a stammer.

"Uh, I hale from…Tampa, I guess."

"Tampa?" he considers. "Is that near Cornwall?"

"Yeah, somewhere close to that I think," I laugh. Not attempting to use an accent at all, I excuse myself, "Okay, well, I'm going to get me hence and find a turkey leg. See ya later."

Entering the gate, I sit to watch Luke Cooper's glass blowing demonstration. Explaining the art with great detail, Luke builds bridges between *then and now*. He explains that glass blowing in the Renaissance and today are essentially the same. His simple tools—a long metal blow-pipe, a wooden paddle saturated with water, a piece of metal for scoring the glass, and wet paper—are temporally connected with the time period we're playing at. He explains that the nomenclature for glass blowing and its tools all come from either the original French or Latin, and through his craft we can "experience a little of the past." He doesn't attempt to speak with an accent. He is a present day craftsman guiding our minds backward in time. Luke is both *here and there*, and he invites us go *there.* Closing his show, he invites us to leave money in his hat, and concludes:

> Now when you walked into that front gate up there, you walked into our village. But it's not really our village. It's your village, because it's a village within a village. There's another village out there, even though there's a bit of a time difference. But this village was put here so that you villagers could come here and enjoy yourselves. You can leave the village outside behind and just play here for

awhile, and I hope you enjoy it; because if you get lost in Puddleton, I know you'll come back—next week, and hopefully next year.

Luke's invitation is to "lose ourselves" in a liminoid play-place—a village within a village. As we cross the first threshold, the physical gate, we are invited in further. If we take Luke's offer to return, we are encouraged by the community around us to commit more deeply to the performance, in costume and in speech. Just beyond Luke's space, the Queen's court is inviting visitors to learn period dances. They will play word games in the lanes later. The stage shows require intense audience engagement, and performers walk the lanes and shops with us, striking up conversation. They eat with us, gossip with us, and sit on the ground to play games with us.

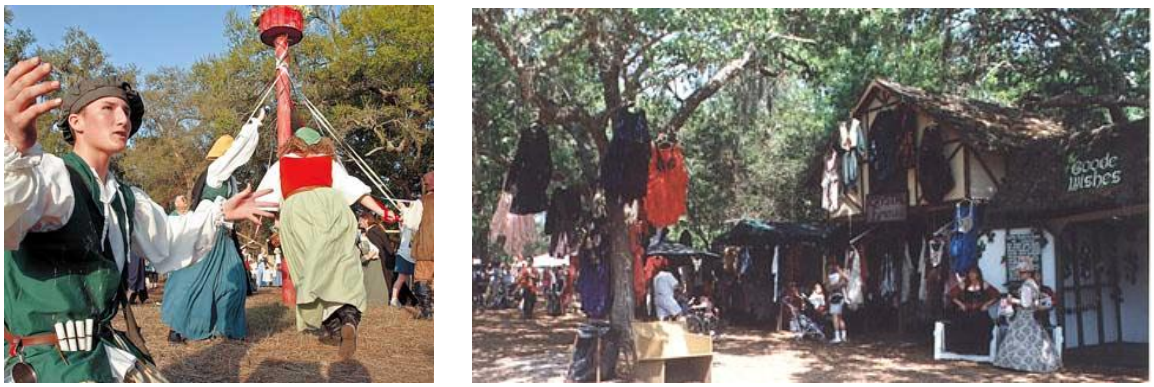

Figure 4: Just Inside the Gate: The Maypole and a Typical Lane

Festival invites me to the liminoid, into the intrastice. It is an invitation to step out of myself and into another time and place. For some performers it is a mobile community that defines them, transporting them to what Hyounggon Kim (2004, 191) describes as a "sacred realm that transcends their mundane existence." The liminoid experience of Festival's intrasticial frame creates for its serious participants the experience of

communitas (V. Turner 1988), a special sense of intimacy and commonality that grows out of the anti-structural nature of liminal and liminoid moments. Edith Turner (2005, 97) calls communitas "the gift of togetherness" that "has something magical about it."

The Parting Glass: Performance Aims of Festival

At the end of the day, I have seen juggling acts, gypsy belly-dancers, a mounted joust, and human-combat chess. I have traded riddles with the French Dauphin, eaten scotch eggs with a random assortment of goth teenagers, and paid five dollars to try my hand at fencing. I have purchased a few trinkets—a glass pen from the glass-blower, a CD of Celtic music, and a leather journal, richly embossed in Celtic knotwork. Dirty from the dust-clouds and weary, I plop down at a table in front of the stage at the The Round World Inn, where the evening's "pub sing" will close out the day.

On the long wooden tables under the oaks, the crowd raises its glasses to toast the king and queen. Irish pirates in hats decorated with long plumes mingle with gypsy dancers draped in sheer scarves and bells. The musicians wear plain woolens while the court dresses in brocaded silks or embroidered velvets and satins. Families with strollers, visitors partially costumed, and guests sporting tattoos, face-rings, black leather, spiked collars, and multi-hued hair mingle with visitors who are decked out in period garb that is even more impressive than the paid performers. Two things unite this mismatched collection of festival participants—beer and song. Each of the music groups at the Festival take turns on the stage. Many in the crowd know the songs and join in. The rest

of us fake it. After several songs, the king booms in over the din of cheering and laughing.

"We are well-pleased with your merry-making, and with your toasts!"

"God save the king!" yells the crowd.

"Thank thee!" answers the stout king. "Your toasts were a lovely thought! Thank thee indeed. But the thought which we now have to impart to thee is not a lovely one." The crowd murmurs its displeasure. He shakes his head in mock sadness and raises his wooden mug covered in worked leather.

"The pub's closing! Last call!" Another murmur of disappointment spreads like a wave, but the king continues. As he speaks, lords, ladies, commoners, and visitors in t-shirts, shorts, and blue jeans make a last dash to the window of the Round World Inn, a tiny round thatch-roofed pavilion, just a few feet away.

"And thereby," continues King Edward the 43rd, "We should ourselves raise together one purposeful and good parting glass! Now you all, follow by the pipers call and Her Majesty and I, we shall make our way…" And all the performers and costumed patrons echo these last three words:

"To the gates!"

Rafferty the Piper fires up his Uilleann Pipes, an Irish version of the bagpipes, and we all march toward closing gate. Outside, drummers are already drumming and women in bright silks and belly dancing gypsies begin to swirl to the tribal rhythms. They are joined by t-shirted visitors and black-clad Goth kids with low-hanging pants and pierced tongues. A few middle-aged women shrug and begin to shimmy, dragging with them

their reluctant husbands who give in without much resistance. The piper and the drummers blend their music together in a coalition that suggests a unity and diversity that is at the heart of this performance community. Rafferty's great kilt and drummers' dreadlocks don't seem to clash here.

Finally, King, Queen, and their attendants, now on top of the palisade wall over the gate, call for our attention. They ask us to join them in a traditional song of parting. Many in the crowd below know "The Parting Glass:"

Of all the money ere I had
I spent it in good company.
And all the harm that ere I've done
Alas was done to none but me.

And all I've done
For want of wit
To memory now I can't recall;
So fill me to the parting glass—
Goodnight and joy be with you all.

Of all the comrades ere I had
They're sorry for my going away.
And all the sweet-hearts ere I had
They wish me one more day to stay.

But since it falls

Unto my lot

That I should go and you should not,

I'll gently rise and softly go—

Goodnight and joy be with you all.

Figure 5: King and Queen atop Puddleton's Gates

"Good lords and ladies, gentles all!" Cries the king. "For these drummers and the piper who have by their skill and wind given the very breath a mighty voice, let us give them our thanks! Hip-hip…"

"Huzzah!" Cheers the crowd.

"Hip-hip…"

"Huzzah!"

"Hip-hip…"

"Huzzah!"

We begin to disperse into the sea of mini-vans and family cars, but not before the Jacky Tappet—who this year is playing the French Dauphin—grabs the crowd's attention for one last word.

"Ladies and gentleman!" He cries in a thick French accent. "It is 6:09, and this is officially…" his voice transforms as all the performers join him in their best American drawls.

"A dialect free zone! Okay!"

One more laugh and the crowd begins its long trek through the cars back into the world as we know it.

Come Play with Me: Invitations to Participate

The participatory pleasures of playing along, particularly of singing along, invite me deeper into Festival's communitas. By the end of the day I find myself wondering how I have moved from initial moments of nervous, tentative attempts at joining the play to loudly trolling songs whose words I don't even know. Ronald Pelias and James VanOosting (1987) describe audience participation in performance contexts along a continuum of activity levels listing four characteristic types of audiences. These participatory levels inform a deeper understanding of how Festival invites its visitors into the magic circle. According to Pelias and VanOosting audiences may be:

1. Inactive Receivers, like traditional attendees of film, theater, or solemn ceremonies.

2. Active Respondants who are invited to participate by responding to cues from stage.
3. Interactive Coproducers where there is an expectation of audience reciprocity in the production of impromptu or other non-scripted performances.
4. Proactive Producers, where the distinction between performer and audience is completely blurred.

Festival is a culture of participation that invites visitors to become a part of the community by moving from inactive to proactive audience members. The liminoid experience of this community is possible because of the ways Festival (1) calls for incremental performance commitments, (2) engages physicality through garb and embodiment, and (3) intervenes in the personal space of patrons.

Performers, Patrons, and Playtrons: Performance Commitments. Festival performers divide themselves into three categories: Actors, Crafters, and Gamers. Although Pelias and VanOosting (1987) have characterized levels of audience participation, rarely do we characterize levels of performance participation. We may talk about lead roles, bit parts, ingénues, walk-ons, and spear-holders, but Festival participants self-conceptions of performance roles are important. In his observations reenactments at Plimouth Plantation, Richard Schechner (1985, 99) notes:

> some performers at restored villages have become permanent residents, living off the income of their crafts and eating the food they have cooked that day in the presence of visitors. Their "lived lives" mesh with their "performed lives" in so

> strong a way that it feeds back into their performances. Their roles become their "ordinary life," supplying their restored behavior with a new source of authenticity.

When this happens, the performers are no longer "play actors," but are akin to a shaman or the Brahman priest whose performance comes to be a truer representation of the actor's identity than anything else. As audience members are invited deeper into circles of participation at Festival, they may even move beyond audience-as-producer into what might be characterized as the shaman of the Faire—the role Festival participants consider to be the soul of Ren Fest—the Rennie. Actors may be paid stage performers and musicians, or unpaid lane performers who have crossed the community's threshold from proactive producers to insiders. Crafters, too, are often local artisans who have reserved space at Festival just as they might in any other craft venue. But scattered among Actors, Crafters, and Gamers, the Rennies serve as the innermost circle. Luke Cooper describes the Rennie for me: "Like a Carnie, only without electricity." Rennies travel from festival to festival, making their living entirely from the Renaissance Festival circuit, and camping out in tents or trailers. Even Festival patrons, when they become so engaged in the community that Renaissance begins to stand as a guiding metaphor for their lives, may be referred to as a Rennie.

"In the earlier days we used to stay on the Festival grounds in the buildings," Luke tells me. "The Rennies built a lot of the set pieces you see here, but the cities have started chasing us out. Something about code violations."

These two inner circles of Festival—the Rennies at the center of the full-time local cast of actors, crafters, gamers—draw in visitors through progressive participation beginning with period conversations at opening gate and move on to positioning monologues like Luke Coopers's invitation to be "both here and there"—a village within a village. These kinds of conversations—along with events like the human combat chess match and the joust, where taking sides and cheering a champion are prompted—immediately move patrons from inactive receiver to active respondent. It's impossible to attend Festival and be inactive; it would take much more work to avoid participation than to give in.

At stage shows throughout the village, and in conversations with lane performers and shoppe-keepers, patrons move from active respondents to interactive coproducers. Interaction with the performers is marked by confusion: performers act confused when they hear contemporary speech and jargon, or modern place names and descriptions of technology. Their feigned confusions demand that I either give up and play the game, or continue to try to force them to understand my world. In any case, I am at their mercy, as this conversation illustrates:

King: Ah, good my Lord! I see thou hast a mechanical sundial!

Me: A what?

King: Many visitors in the village today have one of those lovely bracelets as thou art wearing.

Matt: Ah, a watch.

King: Watch what?

Matt: I beg your pardon, Your Majesty. We call it a watch.

King: And dost thou watch it?

Matt: Only Monday through Friday.

King: Ah! Thou hast made a joke! Here, let me tell thee a riddle!

The king goes on to lead the conversation until I am participating in a game of riddles before passing me off to "Princess Isabella" who invites me to learn a dance.

As with the lane interactions, stage acts require a high level of interactivity. The Washing Well Wenches show, which figures prominently in Chapter Four, involves audience participation both on stage and off. The front five rows are marked off as a "splash zone." Daphne, leader of the Wenches claims "There are no non-participants at the wench show. If you're not involved, it's like painting a big red target on your forehead that says, 'come get me!'"

Finally, patrons who are willing get into the act, put on a costume, create a persona, and act as though they were part of the cast become what Kim Korol calls "playtrons," who are vital proactive producers of Festival's performance community. Cast members build long-term relationships with playtrons who attend regularly. During my second full-time season as a cast member, a playtron dressed as a member of court visited Queen Catherine's audience tent, dropping to a low curtsy.

"Greetings, Your Majesty! I am honored to see you today."

"Hail and well met, my Lady Grey," responded Caroline, "but art thou well and truly hail, for last I heard thou wert under the sickness again."

"No, your majesty. I have visited the doctors at the castle of Sir Moffit. Your Majesty's physicians are exceeding grand in their craft, and I am truly blessed by them."

"So you're in remission?" gasped Caroline, dropping character with eyes widening.

"It seems that way."

"Good Lords and Ladies!" called out Caroline then, raising her voice to the passing crowds and taking up her character again. "Let us have great joy today, for this dear Lady has come with exceeding good news to cheer your Queen. Sir Matthew, wilt thou sing us a ballad of celebration?"

After leading the Queen's attendants in a round of "Good Health to the Company," I inquired after the patron's relationship to Catherine. "Lady Grey," I was told later, was known to Caroline first through Festival, and then through the International Wenches Guild. This was her second battle with breast cancer at the Moffit Cancer Center.

"You know, it's ladies like that," Caroline told me in the green room, "who keep me coming back to do these shows. The connection that we get with guests is unlike any other kind of performance. That's why I'm so committed to selling myself out to this performance, no matter what it takes."

Hyoungonn Kim (2004) notes that a large contingent of Festival participants are involved in what Robert Stebbins calls *serious leisure*, which he defines as "the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that is sufficiently substantial and interesting for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and

expression of its special skills and knowledge (1992, 3). Although only some Festival attendees are indeed career participants, the community at large is constituted in *serious performance* wherein actors—paid and unpaid—make Festival performance the business of their lives. It begins with a few tentative "thees" and "thous" or a participatory song, but it cannot grow without the full engagement of the body.

Physical Commitments: To Garb, or Not to Garb? At the end of my first season observing the Bay Area Festival, I was chided for not yet coming in costume by cast members who had grown familiar with me. When I complained that costume pieces at festival were expensive, I was told that most cast members and participants make their own garb.

"You can buy ready-made pieces if you need to," Jacky Tappet informed me, "but I'd only do that if there is a single item you really like or you can't sew yourself."

Jacky makes all of his own costumes, intricately pieced together in layer upon layer of detail.

"I've got a piece I'm working on that's even hand stitched. I know that's like overkill, but it will be the most authentic outfit I own."

Unlike the members of court—many of whom have taken up sewing out of economic necessity—peasants and villages can put together rudimentary costumes with a homespun look for pennies. Encouraged by this, I was determined to come in costume to the final pub sing that first season. I picked up some dollar-per-yard plaid fabric from the local big box store and sewed it into one massive sheath that I could pleat into a great

kilt. After putting it on the last morning of Festival, I wrote an entry in my journal relating the unexpected feelings I had after my first time going "the whole nine yards."

* * *

On the floor of my living room, I stretch out the four yards of double-width plaid wool and smile at the size of it. Its width of five feet covers nearly the whole floor between the television and coffee table, its twelve-foot length extending from the couch on one end to the bookshelf against the far wall. The fabric is an earthy green and red pattern, much like the dully-dyed woolens a Scot might have worn in the 16th century or before. The garment is the Scottish great-kilt, or *breacan feile* ("belted tartan" in Gaelic), which my Scottish ancestors wore for centuries.

Bending down over the cloth, I begin to fold narrow pleats into it, starting about a foot from the end nearest the couch. Pulling and folding, pulling and folding, I tug the heavy cloth towards me until nearly the entire length is pleated neatly, taking up only a few feet. About one and a half feet of pleats now run the along width of the cloth with a one foot apron on either end. Sliding a belt underneath the fabric I lie down, back to the pleats and fold the aprons across my front, the bottom edge of the pleats at knee-level. I clasp the belt tight around myself to hold the cloth firmly, and as I stand up, the knee length plaid forms the skirt portion of the kilt, while a four-foot train of plaid hangs down behind me. Tucking the corners into the belt, I pull the remainder of the tartan over my right shoulder and pin the plaid to my loose linen shirt. As I perform this ritual, I wonder how many generations of my ancestors enacted the same—day in and day out—and what it meant for them.

The plaid is a symbol heavily laden with rich cultural meaning for the Scottish people. In Hadrian's day, the wool wearing Scots and Picts defied the Roman Emperor until he was forced to build his wall along the borders of Northern England. In later years the highland tribes were to imitate the Roman toga in their great-kilt, and the woolen tartan, developed first as a utilitarian fabric, became just as much a symbol of pride and nationalism. The voluminous garment served shepherds and warriors as clothing, blanket, and sometimes tent. So much was it a symbol of its people that after the 1746 Scottish uprising led by Bonny Prince Charlie, England banned the wearing of tartan.

Gripping the dull green and red pattern in my fingers I reflect on Michael Jackson's (1989) notion that bodily activity manipulates in meaningful and metaphorical ways the domains of mind and geography. Pulling pleat over pleat, my mind races back through time, and in my own hands, I see the hands of my fathers before me, folding the same thick wool in order to dress for a day of work in the fields. Belting it around my middle, and wrapping the cloth around me, I am transported in time and space—I pull the very essence of Scotland around me, and become one with my forebears. I am as they were—perhaps not in time or circumstance, but I feel their blood coursing through my veins, and I know that they are there, stretching out in a long line behind me—making me who I am. As I prepare to step into this other world for a day, I recognize it is a world of fantasy and leisure where others are dressed in historical garb that serves to transport them, if not to another time and place, then into a community that gives them the same sort of feeling. The costumes are all different. For some it is period garb connecting them to their imagined past. For others it is pagan symbols worn on jewelry or in tattoos. For

yet others it might be some raiment out of fantasy or even the everyday wear of their alternative look enhanced by spikes from the blacksmith's shop or costume horns. Whatever uniqueness or sense of authenticity or escape the garb gives them, it unites them in some way with the community of Festival.

Commiting to Touch: Am I in Your Space? The first performance aim of Festival is to promote performer commitments. Its persuasive culture of participation, along with its calls for garbed embodiment, brings patrons progressively closer to the center of Festival's performative world. But the bodily experience of Festival goes beyond garb to allow participants a multi-layered somatic experience. There is a sensuousness about the place that goes beyond the cling of the costumes' fabrics, beyond the wafting smell of anachronistic delicacies, and beyond the shuffle and bustle of the engaged crowds. At the Wenches' wash pit, Daphne explains:

> We touch our act. We physically touch our actors. We go out and put sunscreen on our actors. We put it on them, and like, rub our faces against them. We smear them, and then ask, "Can you rub this in? Can you rub that in?" Again, it's all in the fact that we push the boundaries of physical comfort with people. It's really fun, because you can't duplicate that with a TV show. You can't duplicate that anywhere else.

The somatic experience of touch and the surrender of personal space is Festival's last participatory hurdle. Indeed, Herbert Blau (1985) argues that two concepts ground live performance: implied consent (we agree to be here together as audience and performers)

and the potential for reciprocal touch (the possibility of touching each other is always present). "We know the world in and through our bodies," argues Elizabeth Bell (2008, 21). This "performance as knowing" is "an embodied procedure that provides insights," (Pelias 1998, 16) into self and other. *Body knowledge*, or, as Leland Roloff (1973, 3) calls it "somatic thinking" is the key to an epistemology of and through performance, and is central to the culture of Festival. In its invitations to perform, to garb, to touch, Festival begs its inhabitants to commit to its ground of play.

By Means of Production: Performing Material Culture

If the first performance aim of Festival is the invitation to performance commitments, the second is the celebratory consumption of handcrafted material culture. In an analysis of Navajo folk ark, Judith Hamera argues that "objects animated in and by commodity situations…perform in multiple senses of the word" (2006, 151). Extending Richard Bauman's (1986, 3) description of performance as "the enactment of poetic function" to objects of artistic expression, Hamera describes folk arts and crafts as:

> Products of acts of poiesis and devices of lived history…the object, like the performed story, is the membrane across which performers/artists and audiences encounter and imagine one another, whether from opposite sides of the proscenium or opposite sides of a trading post or gallery counter. (2006, 152)

Among the many tactile performances at Festival are the productions of handcrafted wares on site. The production of material culture becomes a performance that connects in meaningful ways the crafter, crafted, and consumer.

Consumption plays an important role in Festival culture. Food, crafts, games, toys, costumes pieces, artwork, and not least of all performances are the commodities of Puddleton. But in this "commodity situation" the artist/performer has the ability to animate the objections of their creation through story (Hamera 2006, 156). Artisans such as Luke Cooper demonstrate their gifts and create living artifacts which patrons peruse and playtrons consume with love and devotion. Rennie crafters and playtrons value the making and owning of "one-of-kind" pieces that stand in contrast to the mass-produced fare of contemporary consumer culture. Frank Henkel, a crafter of artistic and architectural casts and statues, describes a mystical connection to his materials and his products' attendant artistic gravitas that results from each piece's uniqueness. There is irony, perhaps, in the fact that Frank's authentic handcraft relies on the reproduction of historical artifacts; he nonetheless decries the loss of hand work in the modern world. Lamenting the fact that fewer and fewer people seem to value what goes into handcraft because they think a machine can make it better, he describes the lifetime journey of learning that has gone into his work, each piece touched by human hands.

Frank recounts a story from his early life as a woodworker that shaped his deep desire to embody the process of creation through touch. Traveling to India in his twenties with a friend and fellow woodworker, he opened a production shop making teak furniture for import to the United States.

"I talked to a craftsman there who did all his work by hand," he remembers, "and I told him, 'You could do four or five of those pieces a day instead of one if you set up some machine work.'"

The Indian craftsman simply stared at him, dumbfounded and asked, “Why would I want to do that?”

“He didn’t want to increase production,” Frank recounts with passion. “You know what he said to me? He said, ‘The hand is attached to the heart. So when you make something with your hand, a part of your heart goes into it. If you don’t use your hands, the work will be heartless. It will be cold.’ He was happy, see? I wasn’t. That’s why I was India.”

Frank tells me to call him “Master,” his only stage name. The moniker represents what is important to him about his village persona. He is a craftsman, and brings “magic” to people by transporting the past and the culture of lands far afield to be displayed as talismans, tethering to a past with deeper and richer meaning.

Luke Cooper, too, describes the important place of handcraft as Festival, though he notes that a more commercialized, less-serious crowd has diluted that impulse to a degree. His glass blowing show and the display of his wares is the largest craft area in Puddleton and attracts a high volume of guests who enter the festival grounds and immediately gather around the roaring furnace and the impressive display of multicolored vessels. Arrayed under his canopy are dozens of vibrantly colored glasses, mugs, vases, pitchers, and bowls priced from $45-$300. One end of the display is lined with bodice-chillers—small glass cones that can be filled with ice water and slid down the bodice to rest between the breasts and cool the torso. They are extremely popular among performers and playtrons, both because they provide a welcome relief from the regular

heat, and because they draw the gaze of passersby. Next to the bodice-chillers are a dozen or so shockingly large phalluses for around $100 per penis.

"I have to cater to a Renaissance clientele," Luke confesses, acknowledging that even among serious patrons cost may be prohibitive to "owning the magic." Still playtrons seek after and cherish his more distinctive pieces, and he is revered among the cast and other crafters.

I have asked Luke for a glass mug, in blue and white. Rolling a glob of glass on the end of his blow-pipe, caressing it with a wad of wet paper as steam rises up, he describes the work of another crafter named Blaine whose shoppe is just across the lane from Luke's.

> Blaine makes beautiful handmade furniture, and he makes wooden swords and shields. You can look in there and see him, kinda looking over the wood, trying to figure out which wood can be turned into a sword and which can be turned into a shield or a chair and why. He looks at the wood and he understands the wood. It's the same with me. I look into the furnace and I see the glass and I understand the material. He understands his material, too. He just does something different with his material than I do with mine. Craftsmanship is an odd thing because it does become something that you merge with the material. You merge it with a medium.

As he blows into the pipe, the glob of glass on the end inflates. He shapes it into long cylinder with his wad of moist paper, touching and feeling it into existence.

"When people buy my pieces," Frank relates lovingly, "it's not just because they're beautiful, but because when they take my piece into their home, they know they're getting a piece of my heart." Luke and Frank's art is a "handled," embodied performance that not only produces the thing created, but also constitutes the creator in the act of the making. Luke's craft is literally a performance whereby he communicates his love of the thing touched while demonstrating the act of bringing it into existence. In both instances, performer and audience personalize consumption by physically engaging objects of desire. The mutualilty of touch brings both crafter and consumer into a relationship in and with objects-as-performances that have become *material components of celebration* (V. Turner 1982a).

I Need a Renaissance: A Mythological Community of Difference

Festival is a participatory community; it is a somatic community; but Festival is, most importantly, a mythological community. A final performance aim of Festival is to give the community a semantic foothold in its fairytale setting, a mythohistorical Renaissance. Luke Cooper describes Festival as a magnet for individuals seeking either confirmation of their difference and independence or a space for remaking themelves. His own story of crossing the threshold into the Festival community is one of new beginnings. Before Ren Fest, Luke was a master glass-blower who had devoted 17 years of his life to developing his art. But then, just as Luke had begun promoting artistic pieces that were selling at art shows for thousands of dollars, the owner of the operation where Luke worked was convicted of fraud and embezzlement. As a result of being laid

off, and then sustaining an injury from which it took Luke six months to recover, he lost everything.

"I joined Renaissance literally because of the name. I saw it as an opportunity to rebirth, to begin again. I needed a Renaissance." Many of the hardcore Rennies, like Luke, came to Festival looking for a Renaissance.

"There's a lot of people who are running from something," Luke continues. "Something happened in their hometown or they were the guy that got pushed out of the social scene, a girl who had baby when she was too young or whatever. And they're not a part of their own social situation in the home-town where they grew up. So they leave. You know: the circus comes to town and takes the freaks away. It's like a big wave of freaks that comes into your town, and picks up all the little freaks and then we take them away."

I need a Renaissance. That symbolism of rebirth is central to Festival's magic circle. Luke's talk of freaks sounds as though it were pulled right out of Ruth Bowman's (1998, 304) discussion of the future of Performance Studies: "As scholars and teachers, some of us now base our careers on our work with the so-called monsters, freaks, or aliens in our society: all those Others we've been hearing so much about." I too, like Luke, came to Festival needing a Renaissance. Like Bowman, I study performance because those freaks allow me more ably to critique culture. I study Festival because it is a freakishly interesting nexus of history, fantasy, and mythology through which performance makes community and identity. Walking around the lanes, I see a handy

assortment of history buffs, bedecked in perfect period accoutrement with every “thee” and “thou” in place, properly conjugated.

Figure 6: Playtrons in Fantasy Garb

But more notably, perhaps out of contrast, I see sundry snippets of alternative culture: there are bikers dressed in Viking helmets, goth kids with white faces and bat wings, and a wide pastiche of fantasy figures. Perhaps I come to this study with such fascination for the same reason Daphne sneaked through that fence. Because I secretly

know that I too was one of the freaks. I was that kid: the one with the obsession for fantasy because it obscured my own social awkwardness. When I attended my first Medieval Festival at 14 years old, I was the smart kid, the fat kid, the drama kid with horn-rimmed glasses, the sexually-frustrated kid who wanted a mythology of manhood that explained my own notions of a masculine self. I played *Dungeons and Dragons*, I dreamed of heroism, and loved the idea of being transformed into a knight in shining armor.

There is indeed magic and power in a community that gives its members a sense of place, a sense of connection, and a sense of identity that seems special and unique to each of them, but that is mythologically rooted in time and space. If we are indeed "dreaming the Middle Ages," as Eco contends, that dream certainly plays itself out in diverse ways as Festival. "Americans and Europeans are the inheritors of the Western legacy," Eco tells us (1973, 62), and inheritors too of all the problems that emerged from the Middle Ages—from capitalism to nationalism to classism—which find fruition in the modern age. Defining the Middle Ages as the infancy of all that we have become, Eco outlines a number of "little middle ages"—mental portraits of our dreams. Among them, Eco says the medieval can be experienced as:

1. a pretext, a "mythological stage on which to place contemporary characters"
2. a barbaric age of fantasy which allows us to celebrate virility and brute force
3. an escape into Romanticism
4. philosophical justification for religious dogma
5. a philosophical justification for rationalism and/or religious dogma

6. a celebration of Nationalist identities
7. a platform to explore lost esoteric knowledge

Ren Fest participants bring all of these "little middle ages" to Festival. Chapter Three explores the backdrop of barbaric fantasy against which alternative mythologies of masculinity are staged. Chapter Four will look at how women celebrate and stage "uppity women" as archetypes of feminine power and pleasure. Festival's playground is used to celebrate national heritage—as with Puddleton's annual "Scottish Weekend," which invites the active participation of Dunedin, a nearby community with deep Caledonian roots. The village is peopled by Christians and pagans and, surprisingly, even becomes a site enabling religious dialogue.

"Festival is so New Age," comments one patron—an easy observation to make as you peruse—alongside the armories and period clothing—booths sporting crystals, wands, books of "magick" and prophecy, jewelry, and leatherwork adorned with pagan symbols drawn from Celtic and Nordic mythologies. Tony Breeden, a long-time participant comments on Festival's New Age leanings in his August 2008 Weblog:

> There are a few distinct groups who go to Ren Fairs: performers and merchants, Goths, metalheads, medieval history/period buffs, gamers, Wiccans, fortune tellers, occultists, pagans and guys and gals who belong at ElfCon.

Breedan calls for more positive representations of Christians at Festival, like members of *Renaissance Ministries* and *The Noble Order of Chivalry*, groups whose members attend the Bay Area Renaissance Festival and other Florida Faires in order to reach out to the community as Christians. But as Adan—a Rennie who describes himself as a Celtic

Reconstructionist, and has taken on the Festival persona of an Irish Moor—explains to me, the interplay of Christian and Pagan imagery at Festival is a part of Ref Fest's mythology:

> There were lots of pagans who lived during the Middle Ages. Some people call paganism "pre-christian," but really they were "co-christian"—living along beside them. We're trying to honor that and represent that.

Festival is not historical; but it is *mythical*, both in the way it conceives its conflations of medeivalistic fanstasy and historical recreationism, and in the ways it uses those conflations to enable the production of self in community. The most intriguing aspects of Festival are in the ways that it accommodates historical truist and fantasy buff, Christian imaginings of holy knighthood and Celtic paganism, or contestations of masculine and feminine. In the necessity of that performative accommodation, the mythology of Renaissance Festival allows it to become what Maurice Friedman (1992, 229) describes as a *genuine community* or a *community of otherness* in which openhearted dialogue "confirms the other in his or her otherness and does not demand that the word or way of the other conform to one's own." The dialogue of Festival is spoken in performance. As mutual producers of the community, Rennie, performer, and playtron play together and constitute a world wherein all voices have a say in how the game plays out.

Community: The Serious Work of Play at a Day at the Faire

As a community constituted in reflexive and playful performance, and bounded in spaces marked off through play and communitas, Festival draws performers and patrons into its communal center through several means. As I myself have been drawn into the community's center, my discussions with and observations of performers have brought me to understand the kinds of performance commitments made by Puddleton's inhabitants—Rennies, Actors, Crafters, Patrons and Playtrons. Those commitments engage the body, in garb and in the surrender of personal space, so that the celebration of Festival is experienced somatically. The relationships patrons and playtrons build with Crafters such as Luke and Frank engage the body in material celebration. As Luke's commitment to his own personal renaissance illustrates, Festival enjoins its performers to celebrate difference and a diversity that is enabled in and by the mythological community.

"Performance matters," Ruth Laurion Bowman tells us, "because it is so effective in allowing members of a community to come together and reflect on what they believe, what they desire, what they have done—who they are" (1998, 307). What is central to Festival, a community constituted in and by performance, is its invitations to participate, its somatic production of culture, and its mythology of rebirth. Most importantly, Festival performances give the community permission to play. As Susanna Millar points out, the most distinctive characteristic of playfulness is its "attitude of throwing off constraint" (1968, 21). Performative play can detach performers' experiences from their contexts of

origin and create frames that promote unconstrained thinking and new contexts in which they can move and engage new communities.

David Boje (2005) describes Renaissance Festival as a communal celebration of a reverence for another time and place. As an outgrowth of the celebration, it is enabled by play, self-reflection, social commentary/critique, and pleasure. The playfulness of Festival is an inscription of its dare-to-be-different ethic. It is, as Huizinga outlined, a voluntary step out of ordinary life, bounded by time and space which, though purposefully producing nothing but the processes and objects of its play, serendipitously makes community. The secrets of the community are communicated to the world outside the Festival walls as carloads of costumed participants flood the roads and restaurants afterwards. After closing gate, half-costumed performers fill the village-outside-the-village, welcoming the gawking stares of onlookers. The freaks have escaped. The world will never be the same.

Festival's boundaries enable creative play that has the potential to powerfully affect the way its participants experience themselves after playtime is over. Huizinga's *secrets of the game* allow members of the community to be part of a social group that privileges otherness and the Renaissance ethic of rebirth. At Festival, the performer's *struggle to appear* is perhaps most profound in regards to performances of gender. This chapter has illustrated the means by which the community engages individual performers in reflexivity, play, and communitas. Chapters Three and Four explore in detail the performances of gender that are enabled by such a community.

CHAPTER THREE

OF KNIGHTS, ROGUES, POETS AND KINGS:

EMBODIMENT AND MYTH IN MASCULINE PLAY

Sitting tall and straight on his Belgian warhorse, the stately gentlemen with long gray moustaches heralded the entrance of two armored knights. He wore buckskin lined red tartan trews (the traditional trousers of Scottish riders), a billowing saffron shirt, and spoke with a spot-on Scottish accent. The Herald galloped to and fro, his deep baritone voice booming through speakers hidden by ornate coats-of-arms on the Queen's viewing platform. He urged one side to cheer for the evil Red Knight, the other for the noble Blue Knight. The armored men tilted time and again until, struck in the chest, the Blue Knight fell from his massive Clydesdale. The Red Knight leapt from his stallion to kick the fallen warrior before stomping on the helmet of the unarmed man. The blue side jeered and booed, while the red danced and hooted.

When I was fourteen years old, my first Renaissance Festival found me running first to the jousting field. The embattled knights most aptly captured my boyish Medievalism. I was, as Umberto Eco put it, "dreaming the Middle Ages" in fairy tale and film, with stick-swords and trash can shields, over Dungeons & Dragons, in Tolkien's legendarium and in a dozen incarnations of *King Arthur*. I was enamored then with the myths of nobility and chivalry. But sitting now with my four-year-old son some 20 years

after that first immersion into fantasy, the violence inherent in displays of hegemonic masculinity comes strikingly to the forefront.

Figure 7: Two Jousters Tilting

The Scottish Herald is the same. His moustaches and flowing hair (now white rather than gray) and his rearing horse make him seem a figure out of legend. But for all its theatrical nods to the pomp and dignity of chivalry, the gratuitous nature of the display is belied in the cheers of the bread-and-circuses crowd. Waving half-eaten turkey legs, the Red side jeers and stomps, noticeably more indulgent in its celebrations than the Blue. Several patrons wear black t-shirts with the motto, "I Root for the Bad Guy." But as the Red Knight cheats his way to victory, as he hacks and stomps on the Blue Knight, even my four-year-old can see the holes in the moral fabric of this play. By chance, we're on the Red side. My son looks confused.

"Daddy, I don't want to root for the Red Knight. He's bad. I wanna root for the good guy."

"It's okay, son," I tell him, "It's just pretend."

"But he's mean! You told me not to hurt people."

As if to underscore his observation, a large hairy man to our right screams out, "Yeah! Kick him while he's down!"

Festival and the Reconstitution(s) of Gender

This chapter focuses on performances of masculinity, while Chapter Four considers Festival and feminism. Conventional representations of masculinity at Festival are numerous, but as Judith Halberstam observes, these are perhaps the least interesting of the many variants of masculine expression. As in her work on female masculinities, conventional masculinity will serve here first as "a counterexample to the kinds of masculinity that seem most informative about gender relations" (1998, 3). Alternative masculine performances are informative about gender relations because, in their subversion of masculine norms they make the norms more visible (like the ways in which breaking and unspoken rule demonstrates the existence of the rule). Conventional masculinities will serve second as the backdrop against which alternative myths and physicalities are embodied.

This chapter argues that masculinities at Festival are reconstituted significantly in a diversity of ways. As representatives of some of the ways in which alternative masculinities are embodied in performance at Festival, five performers serve as exemplars in this chapter. Brandon is a regular member of court and the Master at Arms who trains performers in combat. Brandon's story provides a portrait of a performer consciously upholding heteronormativity, but whose initial experiences of community problemetize Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity. Tegan is an openly gay man

who plays a fop. Tegan's story provides an example of a discourse on gender performance as a purposeful transgression of masculinity. Jaryd is a self-identifying heterosexual who, at the time of my fieldwork, was in a romantic relationship with Tegan. Jaryd's performance personas function within the framework of heteronormative masculinity, but his backstage relationships with the community at large illustrate the complexities of narrating and performing one's own identity. Ken and Johnny are Evangelical Christian platrons whose experience of Festival is grounded in the mythopoetic men's movement. They see embodied myths as powerful sources of understanding "Godly Masculinity."

All these performances, drawn from the mythic stock of the Middle Ages, provide a rich landscape for understanding the diversity of ways in which masculinity is enacted, contested, and turned on its head by the Festival community and the individuals who comprise it.

Hegemonic Masculinity

R. W. Connell's *Masculinities* (1995) is a foundational work in the field of gender studies. In it Connell details the concept of hegemonic masculinity, a cultural set of normative masculine expressions at which men are strongly encouraged, both implicitly and explicitly, to aim. The aggressiveness, strength, and drive of these socially endorsed masculinities promote hierarchy, the domination of some men by others, and the subordination of women. These masculine expressions, however, are but a set of choices among other less regarded notions of gender. Connell argues that our experiences of

gender can best be understood not in terms of sexual roles or sexual identities, but with a view towards social processes and interpersonal practices governed by the large-scale structure of gender (Connell 1995, 150).

Although Connell does not seem to advocate a performance frame for the study of gender, she does note that a dramaturgical metaphor is an apt means of approaching studies of gender performances if they include:

1. Well defined scripts to perform.
2. Clear audiences for the performance.
3. Stakes that are not too high.

Figure 8: Human Combat Chess

Although Connell argues that none of these rules normally apply to gender relations (1995, 26), Judith Butler (1988)—taking on a broader definition of performance—argues that our conceptions of gender are in fact constituted in performance. Like Connell, Butler (2004) rejects a foundational binary conception of gender arguing instead that

identity is a performance produced within a "scene of constraint." Connell, too, focuses on the constraints of gender experience, observing in particular the negative weight of hegemonic masculinity in the gendering process.

As outlined in Chapter Two, a number of performance types constitute the Festival community, from large spectacles like the Joust or Human Combat Chess, ritual displays, street bits inviting participation, the material performances of vendors, to interpersonal performances of the everyday. In all of these cases an important aspect of the performance constructions is the display of gender. Kings and Queens, Lords and Ladies, Rogues and Wenches are all divided into the binary of appropriate gender performances. Festival is a great playground for experimenting with the fairy tale roles of men and women. More often than I can recount, when Festival Platrons are asked why they return in costume to participate in the community time and again, why they buy season passes and even hold weddings or other significant celebrations at Festival, they will answer along this line: "Festival returns us to a time when men could be men and women could be women." Such statements reflect in many Platrons a longing to return to Schechner's "history that never was." The "return" is rather to a fantasy of gender found more easily in pop culture than anywhere in history. Through performance that fantasy is made reality. Ren Fest is a stage on which conventional performances of masculinity provide a backdrop against which alternative masculinities emerge. These alternative performances enable performers to rehearse versions of themselves that would not otherwise be rewarded. As Judith Butler (1988) argues, under everyday circumstances the "wrong" performances of one's gender are indirectly but obviously punished whereas

"correct" performances incite implicit rewards. Festival opens up performative possibilities by rewarding alternative play in ways that are personally transformative.

The Moment of Engagement: Hegemonic Masculinities and Embodiment

In observing the process of masculinization common to Western men, Connell describes the *moment of engagement* with hegemonic masculinity "in which the boy takes up the project of hegemonic masculinity as his own" (1995, 123). Hyper-competiveness, a career focus that neglects relationships, suppression of emotions, and the ethic of reciprocal violence, she says, are among the choices that go along with this engagement. The ethic of reciprocal violence and violent sport as competition are written like leitmotifs into the fabric of Festival. The two most popular shows at all of the Festivals I have attended are the Joust and Human Combat Chess (in which armed players battle for chess squares and the capture of their opponents' king).

I recall vividly the first chess match I observed. At the dramatic height of the match and as the village mayor was held at knifepoint, a patron shouted into the dramatic pause, "Slap him like a woman!" only to be echoed by a small boy, "Yeah! Slap him like a woman!" Although there are many alternatives to it at Festival, these moments of engagement with the conventionally masculine are ever present. I encountered such a moment in my introductory audition for a role.

I first met Brandon during my initial audition for the cast of the Tampa Bay area's six week Ren Faire. I had been attending and observing Festivals for two years, traveling to other venues in the state to speak with patrons and local performers as well as full-time

Rennies and Festival organizers. But my research began in earnest when I auditioned to became a cast member at Puddleton, the village setting of the Bay Area Festival. The audition consisted of an improvisational scene with the Queen (a seasoned professional performer) followed by a round of stage combat trials. Brandon is the "Man at Arms" for this particular festival, playing roles from Captain of the Guards to Athos of the Three Musketeers. He also serves as the stage combat choreographer. My "moment of engagement" came with the combat rehearsal. We were told to execute various punches, throws and sword forms in order for Brandon to ascertain our combat abilities for the chess match and brawls in the lanes. Having had half a dozen years of martial arts training, I performed the moves with precision and what I considered a degree of skill.

Spying me from the corner of his eye while working with other performers doing the same moves, Brandon yelled across the stage at me, "What are you doing? You're not gonna kill anybody that way! Here, let me show you. The moves have to be big, and slow. The audience needs to see you."

Brandon's correction was in keeping with the theatrical needs of stage combat as well as the safety of other participants in a choreographed fight. But he went on to deride my attempts by imitating them in mock fashion with high-pitched grunts to illustrate to all the other performers that my performance, what Brandon considered a weak feminized showing, was not acceptable. Internally, I grumbled at the irony in this criticism. My quick precision and force was learned in training to accomplish the most deadly assault in real life, rather than the large broadcasting movements of stage combat.

With a hint of sullenness (I was after all one-upped), I considered the possibility that I might end Brandon's outlandish stage moves with one well placed fist to the head.

Later, I learned that Brandon is a member of *The International Brotherhood of Rogues, Scoundrels, and Cads*, known more simply as the "Rogues Guild." The Guild is a broad organization of Festival men with its counterpart in the International Wenches Guild. Although the Wenches are a well developed and powerful cross-Faire organization that self-regulates the community of women at Festival, the Rogues Guild by contrast functions primarily to promote sophomoric masculinity. On its official website, the IBRSC describes its purpose as follows:

> In a triumphant testament to testosterone, the IBRSC has been established to provide a union for those blokes who consistently dwell in that gray area between chivalry and misogyny. If your idea of a good time is risking life and limb to defend a maiden's honor (as long as the possibility of profit or nookie is in the bargain), then you're our kind of guy.

The site goes on to list its role models, among them: Han Solo, James T. Kirk, Duncan McLeod of *Highlander*, Fritz Leiber's "The Gray Mouser," James Bond, and D'Artagnan. To help visitors ascertain if they are Rogues material, the site provides some simple, tongue-in-cheek questions:

- Do you always shake hands with someone by grabbing the other person's wrist?
- Do you carry a bigger knife than the persons trying to mug you?
- Do you know the name of every Alewench & Rosegirl at a Faire? (and their natural hair color?)

- Does your belt feel uncomfortable without pouches & weapons hanging from it?
- Do you have a tankard in your car at all times, just in case?
- Do you wonder what every woman you meet would look like in a bodice?
- Have you been known to elicit world-weary sighs from wenches at 50 paces?
- Can you generate the emotions of lust and hate in the same woman at the same time?
- Have you ever played "Drench A Wench" with a slingshot & a wet sponge?
- Is that a sword, or are you just happy to be here? Or both?

The questions go on, but these illustrate the flavor of the organization. The emphasis on wild living and womanizing, prowess and weaponry all reflect a conventionally popular masculinity that illustrates by exaggeration the hegemonic model.

Despite my initial frustration with Brandon, I later found him to be an affable fellow who knew his craft well and got along with other cast-members. My first impression and my own defensiveness serve to illustrate how the norm of a worldly, conventional masculinity is indeed a large part of Festival culture. However, the larger field of Brandon's performances illustrate the heart of Michael Moller's (2007) critique of Connell's conceptual systems. Moller argues that Connell's broad claims reduce the complexities and nuance of men's action, experience, and agency in regard to their expressions of gender. Brandon is an example of this nuance. His performance experiences lean heavily towards the embattled warrior. In addition to choreographing Ren Faires, he organizes performing troupes for historical recreations of medieval swordplay and Civil War battle reenactments. For the release of blockbuster epics like the

Lord of the Rings trilogy, the members of Brandon's troupe are employed to attend film openings dressed as fantasy characters to help create atmosphere. Little dialogue occurs in the spectacles Brandon creates, but they all include much physical interaction. His characters seem in this respect akin to what Michael Messner (1995) calls the tribalized athlete who, constantly seeking "time with the boys," fails to develop more mature, intimate, and meaningful relationships. Messner argues that the "boy culture" of athletics serves only to make men more disconnected.

Despite the tribal "boy culture" of the rogues, Brandon has developed many long-term intimate friendships at Festival with both men and women. As Moller argues, significant connections can be and are created by men who perform conventional, athleticized masculinity even in the face of hierarchy and competition. Fraternal bonds exist among members of the Rogues, and long-term supportive relationships between Wenches and Rogues abound. These kinds of close relationships problemetize Connell's critiques of hegemonic masculinity. Nonetheless for Brandon, experimenting with alternative embodiments enabled him to development significant new relationships and impacted his conception of the heroic.

Bodies as Objects and Agents

Connell envisions numerous remakings of masculinity, all of which are difficult to imagine and emotionally problematic. "None of them," she notes, "appears well resolved or particularly stable…To pursue the reconstruction of gender any further requires a move to a new terrain" (2005, 139). And although she sees that new terrain as

one in which collective practice addresses the structural issues which enable negative masculinities, she suggests that one aspect of the process must address the physical ways in which masculinity is embodied. *Re-embodiment*, she says, must be a search for "different ways of using, feeling, and showing male bodies" (2005, 233). Masculine embodiment has been explored in great detail from the world of sport (Donaldson 1993; Light and Kirk 2000; Messner and Sabo 1990, 1994; Messner 1992, 2002, 2007; Wedgewood, 2003) and college drinking (Peralta 2007) to men's health issues (Sabo and Gordon 1995, Robertson 2007) and transexualism (Rubin 2003).

In rethinking the theoretical groundwork of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and James Messerschmidt acknowledge that the use and representation of men's bodies have always been central to understanding the masculine. Yet they admit that "the pattern of embodiment involved…has not been convincingly theorized" (2005, 851). But as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out, issues of "presence, liveness, agency, embodiment, and event" are not merely features or objects of performance studies, but rather they are "issues at the heart of our disciplinary subject" (Schechner 2002, 5). Connell sees bodies as both objects and agents (2002); but whereas the body might be envisioned as an object through which cultural knowledge and ways of being are merely reproduced, a performance frame privileges the agency of the performing body to a much greater degree. What Connell calls "body reflective practice," (the reflection of cultural norms in the action of bodies) is balanced forcefully by what I will term *body reflexive practice*. Embodiment becomes for the performer not only a way of knowing, but also a way of being and ultimately a way of becoming.

Brandon's Bodies

Masculine bodies abound at Festival. They stride about clothed in swords and armor, decked in broad Tudor tufts or sleek Elizabethan breeches and codpieces. Lithe or blocky, the men perform their roles for the most part with fairy tale poise and stature. From the athleticism of the combat arena to the graceful nobility of courtly etiquette, the man-suit is one of power and control. Brandon enacts this prowess in every line of his stature. His look is dangerous and his facial expressions are stern. In contrast, the flamboyant vanity of the male nobility might be seen as a critique of Brandon's masculine body, but the vanity and brocade serve as signs of economic power thus serving the same purpose and only thinly masking the danger hidden beneath them. The nobles wield knives and swords just as readily as their fighting servants. For nearly a decade, Brandon played the warrior's role, and his companions embodied the same ethic of danger.

Brandon grew up in a working class family. He played football and baseball in high school. Like me, his particular brand of Saturday morning mythology consisted mainly of *Dungeons and Dragons* or the like, as did his after school gaming culture. An avid player of fighter video games, Brandon and his friends spend any extra spare time rehearsing for battle performances. When asked about the sheer volume of violence in his favorite past-times, he shrugs them off as mere play. "I'm not really a violent person, y'know? It's just a release. My real job is in computer sales and tech support. Don't worry, I'm not likely to go postal any time soon."

Grace, The Pirate Queen, one of Puddleton's key performers and Brandon's best friend, laughs at his comment adding, "Women like guys with power and strength. And the great thing nowadays is that men are more and more starting to like that in women." As she says it, she wacks Brandon in the chest plate of his guard's armor and raises her eyebrows.

"Yeah, I could take you any day," Brandon quips in response.

"You wish you could," she retorts. He looks at me.

"Don't mess with her. Seriously."

As a classic example of the masculine ethics of violence, dominance by strength, and one-upmanship, I was surprised when in my second year of performing Puddleton Brandon requested to play a new kind of role: a "fop" partnered with Tegan. Tegan, whose story will be detailed more in the next section, had decided to make the move from Puddleton's stage manager to a lane performer and member of the court. Tegan is openly gay and revels admittedly in garish flamboyance. I had never noticed Brandon keeping company with him outside of necessary interactions, and I always got the impression that he was no more than merely tolerant of Tegan's brash effeminacy. As stage manager Tegan would, in fact, purposefully turn up what he calls "the b*tch factor" when Brandon and the rest of the guard were around, just to make the point that their flavor of masculine was not the mainstay of Festival culture.

Although the role was quite a departure for Brandon, over the course of six weeks of rehearsal he and Tegan came to work well together. As fops, Brandon and Tegan performed together in the lanes, and by the second weekend of the performances,

Brandon began to express a greater understanding of Tegan's social world. Their fop personas, which provided comic relief in Restoration comedies, tend to underscore the power of heteronormative masculinity by contrast. And although they might be read as characters who intimate homosexuality (Franceschina 1997), such intimations serve to highlight its statusless position in the society of the time. Brandon's choice to switch up the kind of role he played at Festival brought a good deal of negative pressure from some of his regular performance chums. Grace's character dealt with them in the lanes with obvious distaste and with threats, to which they most often responded with ludeness.

"Isn't that a whip, my good lady-pirate? Whatever shall you do to me, I wonder?" I heard Brandon once improvise.

"Perhaps I'll drag you back to my ship as slaves!" she snarled at him. Picking at his nails and fluffing his cravat, Tegan oogled her, finally offering both hands to be tied.

"Look at her teeth, darling," he called to Brandon. "Take me lady. Take me. Surely not all your pirates are so feminine."

The bit was tempered or changed altogether when children were present, but adult audiences howled with laughter. Grace's rants were performed for the laugh, but back in the green-room, her tone was hardly more approving.

"Dude, you guys are out of control. Why did you ask for that role?"

"It's fun. It's different," Brandon replied, to which Grace rolled her eyes as if to say "I guess."

Talking to Brandon about it later, he offered me more detail. "I guess I just thought that Tegan is really putting himself out there. I've known him for years, sort of,

and I've never really gotten to know him. He always kinda bugged me, but I thought, 'It's probably hard for him to deal with all these macho men all the time. Maybe turnabout is fair play.'"

Admittedly, the role was difficult for Brandon; however, he acknowledged that it was not only an opportunity to build a relationship but also a means of stretching his performance abilities. At the end of the season, I asked again how the role affected him.

Figure 9: Festival Fops
Photos courtesy of Cynthia Porter Photography

"Surprisingly, Tegan and I have become pretty good buddies. He's really funny. I always thought I was a pretty tolerant person, but now I notice how people sometimes seem to be different around him or treat him as a joke, and it really bugs me." Brandon added that because of the role his confidence had grown. He has begun to care less what others (even his closest friends) think about him. That is not to say that Brandon is giving

up battle reenactments and stages combats, or that the associations with those friends are any less important. He expresses a close bond with the reenactors and his troupe of performance warriors, many of whom have developed a more open and jovial relationship with Tegan due to Brandon's influence.

Brandon stepped, literally, into a different pair of shoes. He traded his rugged riding boots for a pair of satin slippers. His stiffened spine and dangerous grace gave way to flourishes and raised pinkies. His stern face and wrinkled forehead made way for winks and rouge. The time Brandon spent with Tegan and their ensuing association certainly influenced their relationship. More than that, spending six weeks in Tegan's shoes created a means of understanding that transformed not only the relationship but also Brandon's understanding of himself.

The Moment of Engagement: Hegemonic Masculinities and the Mythic Hero

"Heroism is so tightly bound into the construct of hegemonic masculinity," writes Connell, "that it is virtually impossible, in contemporary mass culture, to represent gay men as heroic" (1995, 234). Whether or not this is true, Connell's ultimate aim is the degendering and recomposing of masculinities, a project fraught with the complications one might expect where gender rules and roles are enmeshed in a larger social fabric. And while it might not be said that his masculinity outside the lane performances has been recomposed, Brandon's experience playing the fop, and his subsequent relationship bridge with Tegan, allowed him to experience a broadening of emotional ranges, which obviously affected Brandon's conception of heroism. I overheard him after closing gate

one day discussing Oliver Stone's rendition of Alexander the Great. He was reasoning with Grace about the complexities of the conqueror's sexual orientation.

"That guy has no problem going from women to men. And he's totally bad. Now that's a secure dude."

"So you're saying," Grace replied, "that it takes a real man to have sex with other men?"

"I mean," explained Brandon, "you'd definitely have to be secure in your manhood." Hearing this, Tegan chimed in.

"I guess I'm about as manly as they come then, honey."

Moving from heteronormative masculinity into the role of the fop provided Brandon with a bridge to alternate ways of understanding his own masculinity and actually broadened his security in his own heterosexual identity. But whereas the fop role served for Brandon as satirical commentary on his own experience of the masculine, for Tegan the fop was simply a means to get his own personality on the stage.

"I've been looking for a way to feel like I fit in this place as a performer for years," he tells me. "They kept telling me I just needed to find a way to 'get into' these characters, but frankly they were not characters I wanted in." Tegan recounts watching the rogues and scoundrels for years, wondering how he might someday land a role. "Don't get me wrong. I love the bad boys—the Rogues Guild—and I love the costumes of the nobles. But the men in the court are all just so stiff, and the bad boys are just, well, they're just too manly."

The Fool and the Fop

Tegan's take on his fop role is much more consciously related to his gender politics than is Brandon's. His is an actively counter-hegemonic role. He declares openly his desire to provide an alternative to the rogues and rascals who populate the Festival scene. Connell speaks of the moment of separation from hegemonic masculinity as choosing passivity. The renunciation and denial of conventional masculinity may provide the space wherein new personal qualities may grow. But while Tegan's role is clearly a renunciation of and denial of the conventional, it is in no way passive.

Describing his background as an average, white-collar, middle class experience, Tegan was drawn to theater from the beginning:

> I think there are more gays in the arts than in any other industry because we learn early on to perform. First you perform to hide, and so you get really good at convincing people of things about yourself that aren't true. Plausible deniability. And then, if you're like me, and you come out and get comfortable with who you are, you learn to perform because it's like, hey, not only am I going to be who I am, I'm going to make sure it's in your face. So I'm gonna be as big as possible, 'cause everybody is going to know that who I am is okay.

I asked Tegan if he thought the flamboyance of his role was self-parodying and accomplished just the opposite of his aims by making him "the fool," and thus upholding the very thing it was meant to critique.

> You know I heard that same kind of question asked to Harvey Fierstein in *The Celluloid Closet*, and his response was basically, y'know, "So what? I love the pansies." And that's where I am too. I'm a pansy, and I like being the pansy; so the fops let me be that, and show people that that is basically okay.

Tegan recounts one of his favorite moments at festival two years before he became a cast member. One of the more popular traveling troupes on the circuit is a three-man group called The Tortuga Twins. Their shows consist of sword-play and stage-tricks, along with bawdy story-telling using audience members as the characters who enact the narrations. Hailing from the Tampa Bay area originally, the Tortuga Twins are a local favorite, not least because of the "Beer-Show." Every day just before closing gate, the troupe puts on the most risqué of its performances. Most of the Tortuga's shows are rated PG in the Festival guide; the Beer Show is rated R. It is called the Beer Show because each time a performer makes a mistake, he must drink a mug of beer before continuing. The alcohol compounds the likelihood of mistakes and thus more drinks, and the sloshed performers generally end up crossing the bounds of decency.

I watched and recorded the performance that Tegan recounts as his favorite. He was called out of the crowd to play "the princess," and the ensuing show was the most risqué I've seen them perform. It's a standard bit, which one patron describes in this way:

> I went to both of the R rated shows during the closing weekend and brought along some other friends who have never seen the show. I just love the Beer Show! The Tortuga Twins are always in great form: drinking one beer after another and

forgetting lines. Jeff is constantly cracking up because of all the screw-ups, and the man kissing…

The "man-kissing" is only one part of the show, but no matter the story used for the framework (Robin Hood, Goldilocks, even Christmas themed shows), one can always expect to see the Tortugas stripped to the waist while a man from the audience is cast (usually to his embarrassment) in the role of a woman who ultimately must kiss one of the Twins as part of the story.

Figure 10: The Tortuga Twins

Tegan volunteered with no embarrassment, and went well beyond the intended kiss. Normally in the position of control, the twins were unable to contain their laughter and shock as Tegan took advantage of every innuendo. What normally created laughs because of the volunteer's awkwardness was transformed into awkwardness on the part

of the professional performers who were pawed, groped, and fondled by their would-be victim of humor. Tegan relished the victory:

> They were ready for it, but it was great though. They just went with it, and we talked for a long time afterwards. I thought it was great to turn those boys on their heads and just watch the red faces blossom. They sure drank more that show than I've ever seen them drink before.

Performance and Orientation: Opening the Field

Mike Donaldson (1993) argues that gayness, in and of itself, is not counter-hegemonic. On the one hand, much of conventional masculinity is reiterated and amplified in a hyper-masculine fashion in segments of gay culture (Connell's "very straight gay"). On the other hand, Donaldson argues it is "maleness" rather than "gayness" that is desirable in men and that the "flight from masculinity" observed by Helen Hacker (1957) is no longer a given in gay culture. Donaldson might see in Tegan's "turning those boys on their heads" a reiteration of hegemonic masculinity rather than its defeat. The objects of Tegan's desires were first, the body of the hegemonic male and second, the power and control that resides in those bodies' practices.

Donaldson's arguments depend upon the assumption of homosexuality as an identity rather than as an embodied practice. Connell privileges agency and practice over biology and identity in regard to the experience of sexuality and gender. "Young people's sexuality is a field of possibilities," she notes, "not a deterministic system…Adult homosexuality, like adult heterosexuality, is a closure of this field" (1995, 149). In other words, gendered sexual desires become closed at some point for young people on the

basis of experienced relationships. She goes on to say that "sexual closure can happen…without any reference to homosexual identity or any social definition as gay" (1995, 149). Self-definitions of sexual orientation follow this closure of sexual desire. And although Connell observes those closures occurring most often in early adulthood, Festival constitutes an opening of the field even into adulthood.

For Brandon and Tegan, sexual orientation is a closed field. But for Jaryd, a self-identifying heterosexual man, Festival's performance community has become a significant site of emotional transformation. At 35 years of age, Jaryd's first homosexual relationship has been with Tegan.

"There is a certain pride in the 'alternativeness' of Ren Fest," one Festival booth owner tells me. "It's a lot like free love in the sixties. You can be much freer here in terms of who you sleep with, and what that even means."

After my first year as a member of Puddleton's cast, the wrap party included a good deal of revelry, awards, and entertainment. The bawdiness of Festival was multiplied, and self-referential humor abounded. The evening ended with a take-off on a popular comedy routine listing characteristics that mean "you might be a Rennie."

You might be a Rennie if…

…your boyfriend's skirt is shorter than yours

...your boyfriend wears tights, and you don't shave your legs

...you hear the Tortuga Twins are coming to town and you hide any female children you have or, contrariwise....

...you have at least three escape plans should your parents choose to come between you and the Tortuga Twins or any other quality role models

...you've ever had to describe the place you've been living as "The blue tent/RV/camper/car at the end of the second row, by the privies"

…you've had sex in the blue tent/RV/camper/car and you can't remember with whom

…you've had sex in the blue tent/RV/camper/car and you can remember him and her

The last two quips, designed as the climax of the routine, elicited knowing glances between Jaryd and at least three female cast members who had obviously shared some similar experiences.

Recounting his background, Jaryd describes himself as an average student whose primary extracurricular interests were gaming and theater. He split time between divorced parents, and considered himself romantically shy but theatrically bold.

"I'm a pretty insecure person," Jaryd admits, "so you'd think I'd be worried about this relationship [with Tegan], especially since I've always considered myself straight. Not even bi, y'know? But Tegan and I started rooming together last year, and this is such an open atmosphere, this community we're a part of, and I thought, 'hey.'"

The popular explanation for Jaryd's relationship, he informs me, is that he was simply a closeted man, or that he was always bisexual. But he refuses to be defined in that way. He is fighting against what Connell calls the social identity of being gay which "is now so well formed and readily available that it can be imposed on people whether

they like it or not." Going further, Connell notes that "gayness is now so reified that it is easy for men to experience the process of adopting this social definition as discovering a truth about themselves" (1995, 151). Jaryd does not feel as though he has discovered a truth about himself. Rather, he sees his relationship with Jaryd as an outgrowth of an intimacy that formed through time. It is an attraction which is specific to a person, and not to a type of person.

Jaryd's performances do not belie his relationship with Tegan. All of his characters are stock, taken directly from the pages of the IBRSC manual for rogues. Jaryd fights in the chess matches. He most often plays married men who go a-wenching on the side. He is "one of the boys." His relationship with Tegan is out in the open and well-known among the cast. It is not, however, something he shares with co-workers at his day job or with his family.

> I wouldn't mind them knowing, necessarily, but it's just that I don't want the trouble of explaining myself to people. It's like, this is who they know I am, and adding this extra dimension just puts questions in their mind about that. So what's the point in it, really? I know who I am. And they know whatever they need to know, right?

His resistance to an impulse to define is understandable in reference to reified notions of "gayness" versus "straightness." Jaryd's homosexual desire does not translate to wanting to be a part of "gay culture." However, if known beyond the Festival community, his relationship with Tegan would surely place him squarely in the "gay" category, while a relationship between Tegan and a woman could do nothing to place him in the "straight"

category. Jaryd's embodied performances provide agency to resist definition by others. In contrast, Tegan's embodiment is an embrace of the definitions laid upon him. For both of them, the power to define and to resist definition lies in the masculine. But perhaps most intriguingly, the transformation of gendered desires, at least for Jaryd, is accomplished in and through performance.

Jaryd's performances at Festival do not constitute the kind of degendering Connell envisions. But his understanding of his own identity has been impacted by the broader performances made available to him through being a part of the festival community. Although Festival works within and around the framework of much of heteronormative masculinity, Brandon, Tegan, and Jaryd illustrate the ways in which performance broadens field of vision, experience, and identity giving performers agency to self define.

Mythopoeia and the Making of Men

The issues identified here in regard to performances of masculinity have been the impetus for the rest of my dissertation. It is for me a deeply personal journey into the symbolic performance world which has been so central in constituting my own masculine identity. In the early 1990s I became aware of the mythopoetic men's movement inspired by the works of Joseph Campbell, Robert Bly, and other Jungian informed authors. Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces* attempts to universalize the human experience of the heroic through the construction of a common monomyth for the ages, a work that was taken up in the 1970s and 1980s by Robert Bly in *Iron John*. As a result of their

work, thousands of men flocked to deep woods retreats in the 1980s and 1990s in order to find themselves, to reconnect with communities of men, and to seek out authentic visions of manhood for themselves through mythic archetypes. They gathered under the trees, beating on drums, to connect emotionally over stories of father-wounds in the hopes of attaining mystical restoration.

Connell decries the "backward-looking, self-centered stereotypes of masculinity" (2005 xiii) so central to the "men's movement." She argues that its aims are ultimately to fail in annihilating hegemonic masculinity. I've never been to a mythopoets retreat. Despite the urgings of a growing number of Jungian therapists, they descended into obscurity after the mid-1990s. But concurrent with my research at the Bay Area Renaissance Festival, I became involved in a men's group at church that drew heavily upon the men's movement heritage. I argue in this section that the Jungian approach to understanding and creating better experiences of masculinity has much more in common with Connell's own aims of regendering than her writing allows.

Ren-Men and Man Therapy

Early critiques of the mythopoetic movement describe it as morally permissive. Claiming it did more to describe the way men are than to explain it and do anything about it, Ken Clatterbaugh (1995) argued that the movement ultimately fails as a means of transforming masculinity because it lacks clear vision, refuses to acknowledge the structural issues that formulate male power, and relies on notions of "hard-wired" archetypes. He accuses Bly, rightly so, of justifying some forms of violence against

women. Clatterbaugh says of Jungian psychologists Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette (who popularized the archetypal metaphor approach to healing the violent wounds of a man's soul), that they make only "vague admonitions to grow up—to move from an immature to a mature archetype" (1995, 54). Gillette takes issues with Clatterbaugh's critique. In his introduction to *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover*, Gillete (1990, xvii) speaks of the "immature masculinity," and decries the violence and subordination inherent in patriarchy. For Moore, C. G. Jung's deep structures of the mature male psyche are to be found in heroic archetypes that hold the keys to "fullness of being." Connell calls this kind of thinking "ill-tempered myth-making" created from "backward-looking, self-centered stereotypes of masculinity" that reinforces imaginary identities of men. In contrast, Michael Kimmel (1995), although sharing some of Clatterbaugh's and Connell's concerns, expresses his hopes that the mythopoetic movement can become a positively transforming, pro-women movement.

In qualifying the prospect of a regendered masculinity, Connell warns that abolishing hegemonic masculinity risks losing many of its desirable components, namely:

1. the positive aspects of hero stories,
2. the participatory pleasure of athletics and competition,
3. the abstract beauty of fields of pure reason, and
4. the "ethics of sacrifice on behalf of others."

Connell describes these elements of hegemonic masculinity as part of a heritage worth having for boys and girls, men and women. Nonetheless, she argues, the negative expressions of hegemonic masculinity (namely the subordination of women and the

powerless, along with a culture of power, domination, and violence) must be engaged, contested, and annihilated by whatever creative actions promote social justice. She notes, "Any initiative that sets up pressure towards…historical change is worth having" (1995, 238).

Clearly the prospect of overcoming the negative aspects of masculine identities while maintaining the positives is the shared objective of both Connell's model of social justice and the mythopoetic men's movement. Connell's approach has won the day in academic modes of discussion. In a recent reevaluation of hegemonic masculinity's usefulness as a theoretical concept, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) observe that it has held up well in light of research and criticism in a variety of fields, ranging from education and psychology to violence prevention and international relations. They suggest, however, that some of its tenets should be reformulated to provide richer tools for analysis, among them a subtler approach to the complexities of gender hierarchy along with a better understanding of male bodies as "the medium through which selves interact with each other" (Rubin 2003, 180).

The Jungian approach of the Mythopoetic Men's Movement has not fared as well in academia. The movement continues on quietly in the form of men's and women's gatherings like the annual "Great Mother and New Father" conference, and in the international "Mankind Project." The Mankind Project has particularly focused on addressing the earlier critiques of the mythopoetic movement as reflected in its mission statement and the institutional stances outlined on its website. Mature masculinity, it outlines, includes:

- Accountability
- Authenticity
- Compassion
- Generosity
- Integrity
- Multicultural Awareness
- Respect

The group further focuses on the values of challenge, empowering support, emotional literacy, breaking competitive cycles, conflict resolution, and acceptance. It takes an institutional stand against abuse, and asks its members to make this pledge: "I will not another exploit another person's vulnerability."

The language of the mythopoetic men's movement also finds a legacy in Christian men's organizations like the Arkansas-based Men's Fraternity, which boasts 16,000 groups in North America. "Men as wounded" is a theme that runs through both the mythopoetic movement (Bly 1990, Gurian 1993), and Christian writers like Men's Fraternity founder Robert Lewis and *Wild at Heart* author John Eldridge.

Robert Lewis' *Raising a Modern Day Knight* served as the impetus for our Christian men's group. Three fathers asked a "round-table" of ten men, referred to as "the Knights," to help mentor their sons and participate in weekly gatherings and other rites of passage. One of Clatterbaugh's most pointed arguments against the mythpoetic movement is his insistence that the stories and archetypes that are central to it are inherently harmful. Yet authors like Lewis speak of stripping away the myths of

manhood rather than being defined by them, and seeking after genuine transformation that resists what he calls "conventional manhood," which is self-serving, destructive, demeaning to women, and focused on power. These are precisely the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity against which Connell rails.

Johnny's Skirt

Knowing of my involvement in the local Renaissance Festival, a few members of our round table decided to go to the Faire. The general bawdiness of Festival proved a disappointment to this group of devout Christian men, but the fun of cheering jousters and eating turkey legs, and the spectacle of weaponry and handcrafted wares satisfied the tourist impulses of most of those who attended. For one of the group, Ken, however, one trip to Festival was just a beginning. He and another of our Christian friends, Johnny, decided to attend again in costume. Donning kilts or tunics, we were able to explore the world of Festival more deeply.

Ken and Johnny are both 20-something singles from conservative Christian homes. Ken describes his family background as rocky, with a father who is emotionally distant and a mother who is over-protective. Attending a private Christian school as a child, Ken describes his upbringing as sheltered, and he considers himself "naïve in the ways of the world." He is a lover of Martial Arts movies, and although he is a deeply emotional and sensitive person, he feels he most often overcompensates with a kind of hyper-masculinity as a defense against his self-perceived weak nature.

Johnny, too, was raised in a conservative Christian home. He began to have homosexual desires at age 12 and defined himself at that time as gay, experiencing Connell's "process of adopting a social definition." I asked him if he would write an account of his "discovery" and its subsequent impact on his life as a Christian:

> It did feel like a discovery at the time. I thought, "I'm gay. What does that mean? And how could this have happened?" At twelve, I had no way of reconciling my romantic and sexual feelings for another boy with my already committed faith. I had heard of gay therapy for Christians and about things like "Exodus International" much later, but I really don't buy into the idea that my desires for men are just somehow going to magically go away. I don't think I'm ever going to stop having those desires. But I'm committed to a different kind of relationship because of my faith. I have a girlfriend and she knows everything about my emotional life and has accepted the challenges of our relationship. We're going to counseling together, not in the hopes that this will be "fixed", but just so we can talk through our lives together. I never thought I could be attracted to a woman, but Sheila is just as committed to me as I am to her. I don't really care about the "nature vs. nurture" debate. This is who I really want to be.

Brandon, Tegan, and Jaryd performed alternative masculinities that opened up for them fields of personal possibilities. Ken's and Johnny's experiences is the same, although for Johnny the field was opened towards positive experiences of heterosexuality. For both Ken and Johnny, embodying masculine mythologies provided agency to experience the positive aspects of heroism and athleticism.

Walking down Puddleton's dusty lanes, Ken, Johnny, and I made for a sharply dressed trio. Wearing a bronze Tudor tunic with embroidered griffins, my flowing tufted sleeves and lace collar were stifling, but wearing tights and boots rather than pants made for a cooler experience. Ken and Johnny both wore kilts they borrowed from me along with flowing linen shirts that laced up along the chest.

Figure 11: Two Kilted Platrons and a Kilted Performer

"Look at us," Ken observed. "We've been talking for weeks about stories that move us to manhood, and here we all are wearing skirts."

"Appropriate for me, at least," Johnny joked to me. Ken and I are among the few in whom Johnny has confided his story.

"Don't worry, Ken," I assured him. "Ren Faire women love men in kilts. Of course, so do some of the men."

As if on cue, two lady platrons cat-called to us from beneath one of the shady oak trees off to one side of the broad lane lined by clapboard and tented shops. They were both dressed in stunningly detailed period dresses with generous hoopskirts and bum-rolls and ample bosom showing from their laced bodices. Noticing a curious element of their costuming, Ken asked why there were mirrored attachments on each of their right shoes.

"Those are for kilt watching," I told him. Seeing the looks of confusion on both Ken's and Johnny's faces I expounded. "They try to get their foot at the right angle so they can use the mirrors to see up your kilt."

"Please tell me they don't really do that," muttered Ken in disbelief.

In answer the ladies descended upon us, fondling my embroidery and pawing at my companions' kilts. Ken's and Johnny's eyes went wide while they awkwardly and politely struggled to escape.

Both Ken and Johnny recounted in interviews that their experience of Festival was drastically enhanced when they decided to attend in costume. It reminded me of my first day as a participant observer when Tegan, then the stage manager, stopped me after morning call to ask how I could possibly get into festival without a costume.

"Festival can't get into you until you're willing to get into it," he told me. "You can't be Ren Fest without garb. It's like the difference between rehearsal and dress rehearsal. You know the show never really starts until you put on that costume."

Putting on the garb, I felt transformed. Both Ken and Johnny expressed the same kind of experience. Some of Ken's observances included:

- I never thought wearing a skirt could feel so manly.
- I've always kind of been uptight around the ladies, but this really loosened me up.
- I kind of felt like an object to them at first, but then I thought "Isn't that how we make them feel sometimes?"

Johnny noted that he too felt like an object of desire at first, but described it as a freeing experience:

> I know not many people know my story, but the people at Festival really don't know my story. It's like I'm a blank slate here, and I can be whatever kind of manly man I want to be. There is something really freeing about coming here and being able to play a role that's based on these figures out of fantasy because I can be whoever I want to be. I've done stage stuff before, but putting on those roles isn't the same, because they're predetermined for you. Maybe it's because my relationship with Sheila has really been developing, or maybe it's because I can just make myself from scratch, but for the first time in my life, I really felt like I could have a desire for women here. Not just a desire for one woman, but for women in general. It was like being desired made me want to desire.

Johnny still asserts that his desires for men haven't changed, but this significant opening of the field was a powerful experience for him. Certainly the timing of his relationship with Sheila was an important factor in this. But that relationship developed for him in the nexus of exploring significant myths, embodying those myths in new and meaningful ways, and reflecting upon the ways in which those performed myths empowered his experience of himself.

Something Rich and Strange

"Given the possibilities of recombination, much of a degendered and regendered world will be familiar…What we are moving toward is indeed 'something rich, & strange'; and therefore, necessarily, a source of fear as well as desire" (Connell 1995, 234). Connell calls the project of overcoming hegemonic masculinity "high on stress" because it produces gender vertigo and courts dis-integration. It is thus, she argues, incompatible with men's movements that favor a therapeutic approach towards gender reform, because therapy seeks to alleviate the stress involved in restructuring gender orders and conceptions. She makes it clear that therapeutic approaches to masculinity transformation seem to give men a pass, as it were, on sexual politics and difference. She seems to equate the descendants of the mythopoetic men's movement with the model of men's liberation, which she deems unfit as a position from which to adopt social change insofar as "liberation cannot apply to the group that holds the position of power" (1995 235).

Reconstituting our conceptions of masculinity is indeed a project rich and strange. The examples I have explored here illustrate the ways in which alternative masculinities slip in and out, around and through, hegemonic masculinities in an attempt to locate the self in performance. Although I understand the context of Connell's arguments against "men's liberation," I must disagree with her on more than semantic terms. Performance is liberating, and Festival provides a stage on which personal liberation may be rehearsed. These performances ultimately impact personal identity in very real ways. Brandon's conventional performances of masculinity provided him with deep and long-term

relationships because of the community in which they were enacted. Yet surprisingly, his own sense of masculinity was made more secure and his relationships were broadened and strengthened by his embodiment of the fop with Tegan. Tegan experienced personal liberation in the expression of his own identity through performance. Jaryd experienced a very real and profound transformation of his own sexual identity by means of his participation in the community. Likewise, Johnny found ways to embody a definition of himself that he found liberating and self-empowering. In all of these performances, the individuals felt they had gained the power to self-define over and against the constraints of conventional masculine performances.

This chapter does not deal with large-scale structures of power and politics that have an impact on the performative worlds of gender enactment. As part of a larger mythological production, Festival performers embody and transform the very notions of gender they display and act upon. Perhaps the most significant element of Ren Fest's mythological stage is the means by which it provides participants with a landscape for the enactment of bodies and stories by which and through which the performers have been made. It provides for opening fields, for retelling and remaking the stories that make us. Whether for the core of its alternative community, or in the performers and platrons who have expanded that community, or for visitors from outside who share the same strange passion for the backdrop of its magical world, Festival provides an important entry point into the conversation regarding masculinities and the symbols which define those masculinities

CHAPTER FOUR

WENCHES AND QUEENS:

MYTH AND THE POWER OF FEMININE FANTASY

> "If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility." (Judith Butler 2004, 3)

There is already a large crowd gathered around the Washing Well, where Daphne and Eureka shout to garner more interest. They are dressed in peasant garb that is wrinkled and wet. Their hair is matted and contorted in pony tails standing on end. Faces smudged with dirt and teeth blackened, they are pictures of their tagline: "Washing Well Wenches: redefining sexy since 1492."

At the top of their lungs, the wenches urge the audience to come see "The Wench Show!" Ken and I, wearing Scottish garb, arrive near the back of a standing room only crowd. The audience is milling out into the lanes obstructing foot traffic and causing passersby to weave around the back of the booths directly facing the wash pit. There aren't many passersby, however, as all of the would-be passers get caught up in the growing swell of people within reach of the wenches' voices. A great number of the

already seated are regulars who make a point to see the Washing Well Wenches every weekend.

Although the crowd now extends far out into the lanes, there are several seats up front in the "splash zone," and Ken and I make our way to the second row. Daphne spies us and raises an eyebrow yelling at her "cousin" Eureka.

"Look, cousin! Brave ones!"

Eureka turns, and seeing men in kilts, she lolls her tongue at us and undulates her hips in our direction.

"I see them, Daphne. Oh, thank you, Scotland!" At that, she runs over to Ken and "faints." Falling on the ground, she rolls towards Ken and makes as though to peek up his kilt. Embarrassed, Ken quickly sits and arranges his kilt for modesty. Daphne caresses his shoulder. "Are you sure you don't want to sit in the front row. I promise not to peek!"

"Uh, I'm ok," he responds awkwardly, looking to me for guidance. Ken has told me he is unaccustomed to such "forward" women as inhabit the villages of Ren Fests. Back up on the stage now, both wenches transition into the beginning of the show. After introducing each other, Daphne opens with a brief monologue:

> Are you ready for a wench show?! Before we begin, would you like to hear the most frightening words in the English language? Words so terrifying, knights in shining armor have committed themselves to a monastery after hearing these words? Who've given up sword and shield never to hear these words again? Can you handle these words? Okay, listen up. "I'm looking for a man!"

Daphne and Eureka both begin to roam through the crowd, hopping from bench to bench, which causes audience members to move to allow them room to pass. As they move through the group, they improv innuendo. Finally, each of them has picked out a man with a wristwatch, and they look at the time.

"It's 12:29!" shouts Daphne.

"Mine says 12:25!" responds Eureka.

"Well, either he takes his time, or this guy's premature!" After the laughter subsides, Daphne suggests we play a game since we have some time.

"It's a game we all know, a game we all love! It's called "Grope Your Neighbor!" Everyone stretch out your gropers!"

"Everyone in proper groping stance!" Eureka adds, hunkering down with her fingers in groping position.

"That's right," continues Daphne. "It goes right into the buttocks! Stretch out those fingers. If you're not stretching I assume you're a professional groper." She looks at a man who isn't stretching with an inviting glance. "My name's Daphne..."

The bits continues as they explain that everyone on the right side of the audience should grope to their left, and vice versa, encouraging everyone to slide to the middle to make room for folks in the back. They cheer rhythmically, while actually groping each other to demonstrate.

"And grope, and scoot. And grope and scoot, and grope and scoot, and scoot, scoot, scoot!"

Most of the audience laughs while moving to the center. Others take the game more seriously. Ken and I slide quickly to the center aisle to avoid actually being groped.

A largish woman to my left, wearing an extremely low-cut bodice looks at me disappointedly. She smells heavily of beer, and her eyes are beginning to glaze.

"Aw, you took all the fun out of it!" she cries. "I didn't get to grope anybody. Well, I'm gonna grope you anyway!" As she proclaims this, she grabs my backside. Ken looks on incredulously, but only momentarily as he notices a problem of his own. Eureka is now in the aisle next to him, shouting back at her cousin.

"Oh, Scotland! You have nobody to grope!"

"Um, that's Okay," he stammers, but is interrupted.

"You can grope me," she offers, bending over in front of him, and waving her bottom in his face. Looking at me, he shrugs, and then tries to pat her on the back. Grabbing his hand, Eureka wiggles more quickly and rubs his palm on her bottom. The audience roars as he pulls his hand back quickly, and Daphne continues the show.

"Now remember, if you groped the person next to you, and they didn't move at all, you made a friend!"

Festival and Gender Performativity

This chapter argues that gender performativity can go beyond ritual production to the enactment of gender as a daily political choice. Empowered through "archetypes" of feminine power, feminist-centered narratives of community, and performances that upset

notions of masculinity-as-superior, Festival sets itself up as a model of community that grows out of individual agency.

The gendered world, argues Judith Butler, is a performance (1988, 1993, 2004). Rejecting ontological claims to explain binary gender distinctions, she argues, like R. W. Connell, that gender and sexual orientation are not fixed categories; rather, "gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed" (2004, 1). One is either doing male or doing female, either doing straightness or doing queerness. And although Butler argues that the doing is always with and for others, that the constitution of gender in performance is always prescribed by the constraints of a scene over which performers have little control, she nonetheless draws incessant attention to the persistent "I" in the performance. Butler expressly considers the difficult and paradoxical questions of autonomy. Gendered bodies must navigate the issue of individual agency amongst established social norms and critiques that simultaneously constrain and enable acts of "claiming gender for oneself" (Butler 2004, 7). In detailing this paradox of autonomy, Butler argues that gender normalization and gender self-fashioning can be resolved within the broader process of social transformation, but she does not elaborate on the process of this resolution. She has been criticized for this ambiguity, and for the ways her theories of autonomy focus on individual agency rather than large-scale social change. Martha Nussbaum's criticisms in this regard are discussed in detail by Vikki Bell (2007). Nussbaum accuses Butler of a pessimistic and unrealistic denial of the power inherent in social normativity. And although Butler often focuses on individual agency and resistance, Nussbaum describes her analysis as distant from lived experience. Where, she

asks, is the power of an autonomy that may only be expressed in the parody of dominant discourses and practices? “There is a void, then, at the heart of Butler’s notion of politics,” Nussbaum concludes. “This void can look liberating, because the reader fills it implicitly with a normative theory of human equality or dignity. But then we have to articulate those norms--and this Butler refuses to do” (V. Bell 2007, 68).

Performativity is “that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (Butler 1993, 2). It is through such reiterative power, argues Butler, that gender is produced. She envisions gender as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (1990, 44). Erving Goffman (1959) referred to these stylizations as prototypes or schemata of perception which become crystallized through reiterated performance. Butler asserts that the enactment of gender prototypes is not a daily choice, but rather that the performance is a ritualized production that is reiterated under and through constraint (1993, 95). Because it is produced in reference to the constraints of schemata which preceded its constitution, putting on a gendered performance is not like searching through a wardrobe for a gender costume of choice for the day. Rather, since there is no getting outside the constitutive frame of the performance “the terms of discourse must be re-rehearsed and turned against themselves through radical appropriation” (Butler and Salih 2004, 303).

Despite the paradoxes of Butler’s theories of agency, her argument is essentially an existential one (Coole 2006). She writes often of constraint, and yet she privileges the possibilities of radical revision stating that the power of the performative lies in its

capacity to rupture (Butler and Salih 2004). Connell emphasizes large-scale means of promoting social change, and Nussbaum's criticisms seem to echo this. Butler, on the other hand, wants to envision the individual agent's power to cause rupture within and against the larger normative schemata of gender realities. Feminine performances at Ren Fest provide an illustration of just such agency enacted in ritual ways, but also iterated as daily performances choices.

Festival is a community that celebrates feminine power and the transgression of the performative gender schemata at play beyond the palisade walls. The women who perform women at festival are making a political stand and constituting a woman-centered community that serves to center them as performers and as women. Three types of women players stand out as models of transgressive performance at Festival. Daphne and Olive provide insight into a larger group known as The International Wenches Guild, which sees the term *wench* as a badge of honor symbolizing feminine independence and freedom from normative gender expectations. Queen Catherine and her court of Noble Ladies are exemplars of cultural feminism at Festival and actively seek to redefine power in feminist terms. Grace O'Malley provides an introduction into the butch world of *female masculinity* (Halberstam 1998) at Festival that attempts to decouple gender altogether. These women are making myths and crafting archetypes from the material of history in a community that privileges self-definition.

The Wench's World

Daphne makes no bones about it: she is a raging, bleeding liberal on a mission to transform the lives of young girls through performance. She and her bevy of performance partners have made a life and a living dressed in wench's rags frolicking in innuendo and dirty laundry for the express purpose of "creating a hotbed of feminist issues." The Washing Well Wenches is one of the most popular and well-paid shows on the Festival circuit and has the highest average daily attendance at the Bay Area Festival, surpassed only by the Tortuga Twins' once a day "Beer Show." But unlike some of the other women-centered shows at Festival, the draw is not beautiful damsels or slinky gypsy dancers; rather, the Wenches make their fame on ugly. Expressing a desire to create role-models for women outside contemporary standards of beauty and decorum, Daphne and the Wenches create performances that celebrate difference and upset standards of normative gender expectations.

Celebrating Difference

Daphne is keenly aware of her agency as a performer. She admits to having a hard time going to movies because of the ways in which film represents women as one-dimensional. Men, she opines, are allowed the luxury of being flawed in contemporary media. They are interesting, developed; they are the "everyman," she says, whereas women tend to fall into a virgin/whore dichotomy. Daphne sees men in modern performances as "wonderfully complicated and emotionally textured" because of their tragic flaws that bring them sympathy. She describes the everyman of film all in a rush:

"I have a big nose. No one loves me and no one understands me."

"I see the future, and no one understands me."

"I see ghosts, and none understands me."

"I can move things with my mind, and no one understands me."

"I'm Jesus. No one understands me."

"I'm human. No one understands me."

There is little of this kind of misunderstood tragedy for women characters, she argues, and because of that, human sympathies are reserved for male characters. In contrast females tend to be one dimensional supporting characters, contributing to the more human representations of men. She longs for more flawed women characters who are sympathetically human, the "everywoman":

> And there is none of that anywhere. Sometimes we get really excited when little girls come dressed up to our show with some of their teeth blacked out. There is this whole little line of girls who blacked-out all their teeth because they wanted to. I did an interview once, and they said, "What would you tell women who are entering the theater?" I'd tell them that if you have a big nose, work the big nose, don't change the big nose. If they have big ears, work the big ears. If they have a bald spot, work the bald spot. That's what makes an actor.

Daphne says that what makes her proudest of her job is that the Wenches are "the wrong." Audiences are only beginning to be trained, she says, to sympathize with this kind of flawed representation of woman.

They don't want to see the loser girl getting the guy. They don't want to see a woman having self-pity about herself, but almost every movie is about a guy who has something wrong with him. Whether it's for good or for bad, they've got something weird. And you have to watch there and have sympathy for him hoping that his life will turn out fine. And we trained the audience to look at women that way. To sit there for 40 minutes and watch this loser woman, and hope that she gets what she needs at the end. That's my biggest push, and hope, for the show. I want little girls to say, "I don't need to be perfect to be popular."

Figure 12: Daphne and Lucy

Daphne believes that audiences are transforming and have become more ready to see women as humans, that media representations of complex and sympathetic women are

expanding. The confused, the flawed, the wrong, the misunderstood, Daphne sees the Washing Well Wenches as anti-heroes.

Daphne is not alone in her quest to highlight women who stand against conventional outward notions of beauty. Festival is teaming with women who want to break those kinds of molds. Looney Luce, a veteran festival performer, is one of the more popular lane acts. She is garbed in tatters and an odd assortment of scarves, beads, kerchiefs, and feathers. Her teeth, too, are blackened with the extra addition of a green something coming from her nose. She can best be described as a combination of a medieval bag-lady, a burned out hipster, and the-old-lady-with-too-many-cats. Apart from working the lanes, Lucy plays the bodhran in stage acts for two different Celtic bands and performs with "Ploppy Ann" in a comedy show. Like the Tortuga Twins, Lucy and Ploppy have a blue show at the end of the day. Her bits in the lanes focus on fashion consultation for patrons and the Queen's Court.

Lucy's role in the lanes is to point out the fashion faux pas of the courtly clad and of regular guests. She doesn't criticize ungarbed patrons, but rather focuses on highlighting the "errors" of the best dressed. Her humor stems from the inherent irony in her criticisms, but her popularity belies an underlying sympathy for the baseness of her dress and condition. For Lucy and her fans, festival approaches Bakhtin's carnivalesque carousel in the low, the bodily, and the dirty. It is a celebration of ugly in direct opposition to normative standards of beauty and decorum. It highlights and delights in difference; it revels in sympathetic flaws.

Working Wenches

Lucy is not one of the Washing Well Wenches, but she is a wench. That name itself is an indication of the ways in which Ren Fest serves as a means to upset scripted gender expectations. The name wench often is used in derogatory ways to refer to women as servants, as promiscuous, or as strumpets. I can remember as an undergraduate attending a class banquet at King Henry's Feast in Orlando where various stage acts reminiscent of Renaissance Festival performances were performed on a central dais while busty wenches served food to the masses. We were encouraged to yell out "Wench!" whenever we needed service. The young men at my table were delighted with this permission to use such a word not normally available to them in polite company. "Wench!" they yelled over and over again, almost leering as they did so. Yet this is a moniker that festival women at large have adopted as a symbol of feminine power and community. Olive, one of the Washing Well Wenches, explains to a group of younger girls after one of the Wench shows why the term is apt for women of the Festival: "What do you think wench is? Don't worry; whatever you think it is, you won't shock me."

The girls make various guesses: A loose woman? A servant? Olive explains that during the Renaissance a wench was a working woman who supported herself without a husband.

"To be a wench you had to be a strong woman, and no man could handle her. That's why we ended up with a negative connotation for the word. Because wenches were uncontrollable."

As she explains this, Olive points out the large and ornately decorated clothiers booth across the lane from the Washing Well. She uses the owner of the shoppe as an example of a modern day wench.

"You wouldn't know it by looking, but she has a multi-million dollar business based out of L.A. She hires migrant workers, but pays them a living wage. Her shoppe runs simultaneously three festivals at a time."

Many of the Rennies, performers, and platrons at Festival are members of the International Wenches Guild, an organization that itself began as a local performance troupe at a northern Festival but later expanded as membership grew not only among performers, but among platrons who wished to join the ranks of strong, independently-minded Festival women. Boasting thousands of members across North America, the guild offers this description of a wench on its website:

- A wench is not afraid to stand on her own
- A wench is beautiful, regardless of size, shape or color
- A wench is unafraid to use body, brains, and brawn to get what she wants
- A wench doesn't need anyone to tell her how to live, love, look, or dress

Daphne recounts the early day of the wash pit before there was a wench's guild. She describes it as an area where sexy wet women lounged and invited patrons to come gawk at them. Crowds would form quickly when the wenches had water and mud fights. The popularity of the wash pit garnered other performance opportunities at Festivals across the nation, and the Wench show was born. As they began to develop a more structured show, the wenches decided that the images they were portraying were not in keeping with

what they'd like to promote in women's performances, and the new shows grew even more popular. Wench shows sprang up at other festivals, and in 1995 a New York festival performer came up with the idea to create a nation-wide performance guild. What essentially began in New York as a local club quickly grew to massive Festival-wide community encompassing performers and platrons alike.

Upsetting the Male Gaze

The countering of normative models of feminine beauty and decorum are not the only ruptures of performative norms in Wench performances. The Washing Well show takes as central to its political project the rupture of the *male gaze* and sets men up as objects of feminine desire. Laura Mulvey (1975) introduced the concept of male gaze in cinema theory arguing that, in film, the male vision with women-as-objects-of-desire constitutes the positive identity of men and denies women human agency. Through a privileged gaze, men's subjective construction of feminine identity prevails over women's subjective construction of masculine identities.

The interruption of the male gaze is a clear aim of the Wench show as Daphne and the other wenches strive for an ugly look that stands in counterpoint to their open and lascivious gaze. They refuse to be subjectively constructed, and claim the pleasure of looking for women. One of the narratives that best illustrates this is their performance of "Ugly and the Beast."

As warm-ups to the main narrative segment of the show, the wenches invite participation from several male audience members in brief bits where the male gaze is

continuously ruptured in ever-increasing ways. They begin by threatening the audience with “Mr. Wetums,” a twisted up wet sheet with which they slap the water and splash patrons, shimmying with their hips and raising eyebrows suggestively.

Figure 13: Daphne Wooing a Male Audience Member

“The louder you cheer, the drier you’ll stay! I am Daphne the delectable, Daphne the delightful, and most importantly Daphne the over-starched!” Using a large wash-brush Daphne pounds on her bosom, which has been stuffed with broad, shallow metal cans. “I came from the school of hard-knockers!”

Then, thrusting and gyrating their hips they announce together lyrically, “We are your washer, a-women-ah.”

Threatening with Mr. Wetums, the wenches choose three male "volunteers" from the audience and make them do tricks in order to earn roses for their women. After the first volunteer finishes his task, he is required to extract the rose from Eureka's teeth by biting the end of its stem with his own. Daphne encourages the audience to shout "Teeth, teeth, teeth, teeth..." The second participant repeats this scenario with Daphne. The third volunteer, after having been chased by Eureka, goes to get his rose. This time Eureka holds the stem tight in her teeth and bites it off, putting the rose itself all the way in her mouth while the audience shouts "Teeth, teeth, teeth, teeth..." After lolling her tongue at him and more gyrations, the volunteer is finally given a real rose.

The men at the Wench shows are usually good sports, but their discomfort is palpable. They are not accustomed to being the subjects of a lascivious gaze, nor are they comfortable with even the mock grotesqueness of such mutually overplayed ugliness and sensuality. Going a step further, the wenches call out couples for "inappropriate" public displays of affection. The ideals of courtly love, they teach the audience, demand that lovers may not be caught in public touching.

"And there are violators in our audience! Everyone take your fingers and wave them at the naughty couple over by the tree—the man in white and the woman in the blue dress. If you would like a demonstration of what the naughty lovebirds were doing, say 'Aye!'"

As the audience shouts, "Aye!" Daphne and Eureka mime touching each other's breasts, crotches, and buttocks, then grab each other and demonstrate quick thrusting movements before leaning back and puffing on imaginary cigarettes.

"You're all sick!" they conclude, before moving on to their main narrative. "We're going to tell you story, not of 'Beauty and the Beast!' But the better and more educational story of 'Handsome and the Beast!' Also called, 'Nice Guys Get Some Too!'"

The narrative gives them the opportunity to turn the classic fairy tale on its head. It does just what Daphne wants to do with stories: making the woman the problematic character, the man named "Handsome" a simple object of desire. Along with the jokes about Eureka's flat chest, and her delusional sense of her own beauty, the wenches take the opportunity to continue pushing the bounds of female physical power. During the story, Eureka sits on men's laps, pulls up a "dirty beggar" on the stage and gets him to "go down" on his knees, begging her to wash him.

"No way!" She shouts back. "You're a dirty, smelly, nasty, ol' beggar. And I'm a beautiful washer woman. You'll see me in your dreams if you're lucky!"

Ugly and vain at the same time, the story's main character counters expected feminine schemata while simultaneously disrupting the masculine gaze. The story is of full of references to masculine inadequacies. The fairy god-father who turns Eureka into a beast for her vanity has a "broken wand." Handsome, this tale's male version of Beauty, is perfect in every way except one: he refuses to do the laundry. The Beast is willing to kiss him at any rate, and—under threat from Mr. Wetums—Handsome allows himself to be kissed in order to earn his way off the stage.

The fairy tale retelling provides alternative schema for Butler's "costume closet" of gender possibilities. And the ruptures evident in the performance are constitutive not

only of the carnival aspects of Ren Fest, but also constitute femininity in meaningful ways for the community. The ethic of feminine power espoused by the Wench's Guild at large is evident in the narrative, carefully crafted to accomplish the upset. The Guild's creed, as expressed on the International Wenches Guild website, actively envisions and promotes problematic but powerful women:

> We are a group of strong independent women. We are entitled to nothing but complete happiness. We are mothers, daughters, married, single, gay, straight, students, teachers, workers, entrepreneurs, and homemakers. We are proud of our bodies, our minds, and our heart. We carry ourselves with dignity and pride and take responsibility for our own actions. We learn from our pasts and shape our future. We are fighters and lovers, nurturers and hunters. We are ready. We are not perfect.

Men as Objects of Desire

In addition to overturning the male gaze, the Washing Well Wenches turn men into participants in feminine pleasure by empowering women to gaze, and by giving the audience permission to laugh at men as objects of desire. Daphne comments on one of her Rennie friends who is extraordinarily fit but who is considered vain by many of his peers.

> He is a beautiful man. Whenever he goes into a club and he's wearing a tank-top, the men make him cover up. So it's really neat. I push for women to be odd and ugly. And he's pushing the other side of that, which is to allow men to be

beautiful. You know, he's a straight guy, but he just wants to show off his gorgeous body he's worked so hard on. If he was a woman, he'd be praised. But as a man he's scorned. Vanity in women serves the male appetite. So in my opinion, vanity in men serves my appetite. I appreciate it.

In Daphne's opinion, the wenches' overturning of masculine desire is not so much an objectification of men's bodies as it is an egalitarian pleasure-centered ethic of performance (E. Bell 1995). The wenches do not deny women's bodies as objects of desire, but place a feminine gaze on equal footing. As with its usage of the historical meaning of the word "wench," the Wench Show reaches backward for the cultural material of history to illustrate that the perceived inequality is a recent development. They use the historical song "I Never Draw Near" to draw attention to the Wenches' sexual freedom while inverting the traditionally masculine role of toucher and observer.

Choosing the male from the couple who showed overt affection, they bring him to the stage as Daphne reminds the audience, "According to the ideal of courtly love, if you love a man, you aren't supposed to be touching him in public. But we don't love this man! In fact, we don't even know this man!"

"But we will soon!" Eureka adds. "Because according the ideal of courtly love, we can touch him all we want to!"

Touch him on the toe, that's my share,

That's my toe-tripper, you can play there,

Toe-tripper, love my dear,

The more I love him I never draw near.

Touch him on the knee, that's my share,

That's my knee-knocker, you can play there,

Knee-knocker, toe-tripper, love my dear,

The more I love him I never draw near.

Moving from toe to knee, then to thigh, with each verse the wenches touch the male participant in increasingly suggestive ways. When they get to his thigh, the song stops for commentary:

Daphne: Did you all see the way his legs trembled?

Eureka: Yeah, and we didn't even have to put a quarter in his mouth!

Daphne: Lady, you're gonna save on batteries!

Figure 14: The Washing Well Wenches Touching Thigh and Breach

The fourth verse is "touch him on the funny finger." The wenches ask the man's partner to hide her eyes. They banter and make penis-size jokes before doing the funny finger

verse and then moving on to verse five: “touch him on the ‘breach’,” or his breast. On this verse, they twist his shirt into points where it covers his nipples, and then when they repeat “funny-finger” they move back and forth from his crotch to his thigh more and more rapidly:

Touch him on the breach, that’s my share,

That’s my breach, you can play there,

Funny-finger, thigh-thocker

Funny-finger, thigh-thocker

Funny-finger, thigh-thocker

They pause to observe and play with the now pointed “nipples” on his t-shirt.

Ooo, he loved that part!

...knee-knocker, toe-tripper, love my dear,

The more I love him I never draw near!

The song plays to raucous laughter and applause. It may be a trite and base bit of comedy, but the wenches are engaged in serious play. Victor Turner (1982b, 13) was correct that “every type of cultural performance, including ritual, ceremony, carnival, theatre, and poetry, is explanation and explication of life itself.” This inversion of masculine objectification goes beyond explication toward a significant act of *claiming gender for oneself*. And although Butler’s arguments require these performances to be seen first as outgrowths and articulations through and against the very systems that they seek to overturn, these parodies of discourse are not only purposeful but also efficacious.

As parodies they reiterate forms of masculine gaze and objectification, but in reverse. In so doing they serve not simply to buttress the negative aspects of such stylizations, but rather to create something new in the process of negotiating the feminine right to make such claims. The feminine iteration of the male gaze is not object-centered, but pleasure-centered (E. Bell 1995).

Wench as "Archetype"

In the Chapter Three I described the notion of archetype as it is employed in Jungian psychology in the mythopoetic men's movement, and in the religious/therapeutic men's organizations that are its descendants. Although there has been some work in the same vein in the exploration of feminine archetypes (Estes 1992, 2000), one of the great criticisms of a mythopoetic approach to gender is its focus on gendered heroes who have sprung from the very system of social understandings that constitute the gendered world that it is trying to revise. If the "archetypes" are flawed, having been drawn from the storied world that constitutes them, how then are they useful? If we take to heart the notion that archetypes are made rather than drawn from a well-spring of universal human sub-consciousness, then the answer becomes clear. Plato's conclusion in *The Republic* was that story-tellers should be censored His concern over the power of the stories we tell is profound. Our stories, and the heroes that inhabit them, tell us who we are or ought to be. The Festival community makes clear in its narrative who it considers to be the archetypal heroines of its performances. I use the term archetype here, not in the

psychological sense that they are universally recognized symbols, but rather that Festival exalts these feminine heroines as prototypes to be emulated.

As an "archetype" of feminine heroism, the Renaissance Festival community places The Wench in the central position of prominence. Wenchdom is not only for wenches, but for Queens and noble ladies alike. It is her indomitable spirit, her freedom from normative expectations and control, her unwillingness to be managed, her refusal to bend to standards of beauty and decorum which make her a figure that Festival women desire to emulate. The Wench becomes the performative target which female Festival participants aim, and the most representative image of their community ethic.

The Matriarchal Kingdom

In struggling with the problem of agency and autonomy in the face of social constraints that themselves are the platform for the enactment of the actor's agency, Butler concludes there is no position "outside the field" but rather only "a critical genealogy of its own legitimating practices" (1990, 8). Even the wench, who is independent of others in the making of her social circumstances, exists within the framework of dualistic gender identities and the socioeconomic constraints and realities in which she orders her discursive world. The community of women who constitute the Renaissance Festival scene still live and move in a larger social reality in which their narratives are brought to fruition and from which the stock of stories and characters that empower them spring. Nevertheless, in reaching back into history beyond the most recent etymological understandings of the term "wench" to overturn that character and use her

in the construction of something new (in its current context) out of something old, these actors are creatively pressing the boundaries of modern schemata. Butler asks, "If repetition is bound to persist as the mechanism of the cultural reproduction of identities, then the crucial question emerges: What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?" (1990, 42).

The lived experience of this bounded performance community seems to offer an answer. By subverting modern understandings of capital drawn from popular history and fantasy, wenches at Festival reiterate and refashion older narratives in opposition to contemporary interpretations and use the reformulated narratives and the characters that inhabit them to establish identities in opposition to the offerings available to them outside the community. Having been forged in community and internalized in performance, these narratives become meaningful even outside the bounds of the immediate community and affect the larger social world.

Even the Queen is a wench. Queen Catherine proudly displays her Wenches Guild pin as prominently as do the working class lane performers and Rennie acts.

"Wenches are a very important part of culture," Catherine explains as she pins a WIT pin on a younger performer. WITs, or Wenches-In-Training, are young women who hope someday to be full members of the guild. "I may be the Queen, but I am first and foremost a wench." When I asked Catherine what that meant, her answer was threefold. First, she explained, a wench is sovereign. She rules her business and personal affairs, and, most importantly her sense of self. Second, a wench is sensual. The "virgin queen"

illustrated her power over self in that no single man ever tamed her. Finally, a wench is social. She lives in and through community.

The Wench Queen

"Elizabeth was a wench at heart," Catherine tells me. "Of course she would have never allowed herself to be referred to that way, but everything that makes "wench" a powerful image for us is what made Elizabeth powerful." Catherine, who directs BARF (as the Bay Area Renaissance Festival is known to performers and platrons), enjoys being the director of her own affairs. Her role as queen has a natural connection to her role as the cast's chief organizer.

Catherine goes on to describe Elizabeth I—who remains the standard Queenly character at Festivals that prize historical recreation, and who is the reference character even in the creation of fictional Queens like Catherine—as an untamable, unmarried Queen who was fiercely independent and representative of everything a wench desires to be. Catherine, like many Festival performers, is an ardent student of popularized history. But for Rennies, there are often large gaps between "espoused theories" of history (the history written by historians) and "theories in use" (the popularized notions of historical personae and the folk narratives of their lives).[2] History-as-written is not nearly so important as broad strokes that make for good character development.

"She was totally capable of surviving and thriving in the world of men without becoming one of them," Catherine contends. She points to the ornate fashions of the

[2] See Argyris, Putnam, and McLain (1985), who discuss the gap between "espoused theories" of organizations and "theories-in-use."

Queen and her ladies in waiting, claiming that Elizabethan fashion in general was an expression of the feminine influence on the culture of the day. The men wore ornate fashions as well "to keep up with the women," Catherine argues. And although Elizabeth was capable of wielding war and violence, her reign saw flowering diplomacy, a refinement of Court, and the flourishing of art and the English language. All these, Catherine notes, are reasons Elizabeth stands as one of the great icons of accomplished women in history.

Catherine sees Renaissance Festivals as primarily women-centered endeavors. Recounting the history of the first known "Renaissance Pleasure Faire" developed in the 1960s by women in California, Catherine argues that women are not only the "heart of festival" but that they hold the reins.

Despite the fact that Festivals have become in most instances corporate promoted performances, Catherine maintains that the corporate promotion does not mitigate in significant ways the character of Festival as a community endeavor. She describes it as a complex family made up of inter-connected tribes and lays claim to a feminine power and perspective running through the tribes that enmeshes the community.

> The Wenches Guild is the one common denominator among all of the various component performance groups that make up festival. There are wenches among the local street performers, among the Rennies, and among the boothies and crafters, and nearly all of the costumed patrons you see, if they are a woman, they are most likely wearing a guild pin somewhere on their person.

“Festival women are very powerful women,” notes Lady Jane, one of the Queen’s Ladies in Waiting. “And I think that part of that is because, despite the relative powerlessness of Renaissance women in general, there is this sense that Elizabeth was a pretty big game-changer in terms of what women could accomplish. So there’s this idea that women in the Renaissance stand for something for us that’s maybe more than they even actually were.”

There is then a narrative significance to Renaissance women, be they wenches or nobles, that speaks to the performative construction of identities for Festival participants. This narrative value stems from the archetypal nature of the roles for which they stand, whether those roles are born out universally or consistently throughout the history from which they are drawn. Ren women are making archetypes for themselves. The fact that they are representative fictions that have at least an etymological basis in historical reality makes them powerful as components of the system through which performative identities are realized. By reaching back to harness perceived schema from the past, performers are empowered to go beyond the constraints of the present. The fact that these images precede the current social reality lends them vigor and imbues them with credibility and validity.

Wise Women’s Circle: A Literary Model for Gendered Communities

The power of the imagined archetypal characters employed at Ren Fest stems not only from the fact that these characters are drawn from a time before and beyond present constraints, but also because these characters are envisioned as coexisting within present realities. The Wenches Guild is in essence a cultural feminist group. Rosemarie Tong

(1998, 296) defines cultural feminists as those who "praise women's capacities for sharing, nurturing, giving, sympathizing, empathizing, and especially, connection." The Guild revels in the differences between men and women and values these differences as powerful components of an ideal world in which they can define femininity for themselves. Lady Jane and Princess Isabella, two members of the Queen's Court, invited me into their wenches reading group to discuss their perspectives on idealized representations of masculine and feminine characters at Festival. They draw many of their character representations from historical research like the *Uppity Women* series of books by Vicki Leon, who discusses the lives of hundreds of women who have made names for themselves throughout history.

"There have always been women hell-raisers, and these books bring them into the limelight," Jane explains. Funny and irreverent, the stories of women's lives in *Uppity Women of the Renaissance*, *Uppity Women of Medieval Times*, and a host of others in the series serves to anchor the reading list of the wenches book club. Fantasy titles dot the landscape as well, with one series dominating the discussions: Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series. Jordan writes his novels from multiple points of view with strong women characters taking center stage.

"Jordan's characters are inspiring in ways that other fantasy authors' aren't," Isabella tells me, "because he writes about very strong women without losing the strength of the men in the stories. They each have different kinds of strengths, and it's funny to see the way that their differences conflict with each other but work out in the end."

We connect well on this point as I, too, have read the fantasy series. Jordan imagines a world in which, because of an ancient taint on the magical abilities of men, political and social power have become the purview of women.

"But the men are still men," Jane reminds me. "That's what I like about festival. The guys can still be rogues or knights, but we get to be powerful, too."

Fantasy worlds of literature influence Puddleton as much as the world of the sixteenth century does. Instead of kings, Jordan's world is ruled by women's village councils, communities of female conjurors, and hereditary queens. The men there are tolerated, made as objects for the uses of the women's desires, their foibles highlighted at every turn. Catherine puts this point into perspective.

"We like men very much. We like them in their armor; we like their strong arms, we like their physical appetites for us. But ultimately a wench knows she's in control of all of that, just like Elizabeth was. And we're like this circle of Wise Women who really run the show."

Sensual Play/Sexual Prowess

Catherine's first answer to "Why was Elizabeth a wench?" focused on her *sovereignty* in the negotiation of gender as a director of her own affairs. She was not a woman who merely succeeded within a world of men, nor was she a ruler who simply overturned the world of men. Rather she is characterized by Festival women as a ruler who constituted a feminine-centered culture not in opposition to but rather in collaboration with a culture of men. I have suggested that the Wenches Guild is essentially a cultural feminist camp, but

many wenches fall in line quite well with Tong's description of libertarian feminists, who argue that essentialized gender roles serve to keep women passive. "Women are no more destined to be passive," observes Tong, "than men are destined to be active" (1998, 49). When I suggested the term libertarian to one of the more conservatively minded performers at Festival, she quipped, "I'd say libertine more than libertarian." And it is the libertine nature of wenchdom that illustrates Catherine's second justification for calling Elizabeth a wench.

The first aim of the wench is sensuality. The Guild asks "How do you know if you are a wench?"

- Is your tongue registered as a precision surgical instrument?
- Have you been accused of smuggling melons across state lines?
- When removing your bra on Monday, do you find enough loose change to buy breakfast?

Wenches are encouraged to remember that although all men are created "surplus," women may be called to "service" through the appropriate means: proficient neck-biting, ample displays of bosom, and just the right kinds of touch. Lady Jane tells me that even though the term wench retains its positive meaning as a descriptor of the independent entrepreneur, if someone calls you a wench and means "a loose woman," it should be cause for pride and not offense. She explains:

> "Wench" doesn't have any negative connotations. And neither do other modern words that other people mean negatively. We actually organize ourselves by years as a wench: one year in the guild is a tart; two years is a hussy; five is a jade,

seven makes you a madam; and if you make it ten, you're a madam cum laude. And we don't mind trollop or strumpet either. We've got college students, housewives, strippers and entrepreneurs.

During my initial weeks as a Ren Fest performer, I became quickly accustomed to the wench culture at Festival. Catherine plays "The Virgin Queen" with tongue in cheek declaring that everybody knew Elizabeth was doing it with Sir Francis Drake and who-knows-else. When male patrons become too familiar with Queen Catherine, she rebukes them coyly.

"My Lord, thou must know that the Queen is a chaste and gentle lady. But be careful…if I am chased, I will not be gentle."

During my first full weekend of performance, I wandered off into the lanes on my own to interact with patrons and take notes. Knowing my conservative religious background, Catherine warned me to be careful lest I become victim of a public wenching.

"Especially this late in the day, Sir Matthew, a lot of my ladies have been loosened up by a goodly portion of ale."

As the day was getting near to closing gate, I was approached by two female platrons fully garbed. They were accompanied by their husbands who were only minimally costumed. I was wearing my court historian's costume, a bronze skirted Tudor tunic with puffed sleeves, accented by embroidered gryphons. The skirted tunic is worn with only tights and boots. By the time they reached me, one platron was pawing my gryphons while the other was flapping about with my skirt, threatening to lift it up. Their

husbands laughing, I could smell several hours of beer on all of them, and I began to wonder at this early juncture if I had chosen my research area poorly.

"I love your brocade," one of the middle-aged women commented as she slid her hands down my chest and onto my waist. "Wherever did you get it? It's just beautiful."

"She loves a man in tights," commented her husband.

"Mayhaps then thou shouldst get some, my Lord," I quipped.

"No, you're doing just fine," he laughed.

Figure 15: The Author, In Costume

This interaction is but one of many in which wenchly sensuality is expressed as a normal part of festival interaction. Lady Jane, too made sport of me often with her husband, a performer playing the Queen's Guard, looking on. This kind of sensuality is viewed as

playfulness that is an essential part of the Festival world. The physical touch is as much in relish of the richness of fabric and costume as it is a celebration of pleasure in the body. Nonetheless, it stirs distinct feelings of virility and a sanguine appreciation for an economy of pleasure in the body. Just as women's bodies are potentially objects of pleasure or arousal, so men's bodies are as well and are declared so at Festival. Nor do the wenches see it simply as a reversal of negative bodily objectification. At Festival bodies are simultaneously as pleasurable objects and relational subjects. The pleasure-centered approach of Festival levels the playing field by declaring men as potential objects of desire as well. For the Wenches Guild, Elizabeth's wench-hood is cemented in their perception that she was unwilling to allow any one man to keep her, preferring instead to play the irony of her "virgin queen" descriptor while using it as a cover for her sexual freedom and prowess which she aimed at whomever she deemed fit.

A Community of Wenches

Sovereignty and sensuality are both perceived as markers for Elizabeth's worthy induction as the leading member of a wenches' hall of fame. In addition, her sociability marked her as the herald of a new age of English community; she is imagined as a ruler who allowed England to reinvent itself as a more democratic community. A. N. McLaren (1999) observes that concepts of hierarchy, patriarchy, and commonwealth changed during the early reign of Elizabeth I. McLaren argues that both men and women had to reinvent themselves as citizens because of changing conceptions of monarchy during Elizabeth's reign. McLaren's espoused history of Elizabeth becomes for the performers a

symbol of performative possibilities. For them, Elizabeth stands as an icon of the English Renaissance. As a performed character, her reign is envisioned as giving birth to art, expression, and diversity in ways that were unavailable to past generations. As Wench-in-Chief, it is Elizabeth—or some character very like her—who leads the world from English medievalism across the line to English renaissance, a notion that is central to Festival's diversity.

Despite a primarily cultural feminist point of view, the Wenches Guild does not take an essentialist view of gender differences. On its website, The Guild's charter makes its stand on diversity clear:

> We, the undersigned, having put aside our personal differences, are come together to support each other in our belief of a common (but not ordinary) sisterhood of Wenchdom. We agree to support our sisters with loyalty and honesty. We will not rush to judgment on any issue or person. We will respect each other's views and air any disagreement in an organized, calm and open manner (ie: no screaming, hair-pulling catfights in public places, etc. - no matter WHAT the Rogues might want. Take it behind the bard, ladies…) We agree to (as a group) remain politically neutral, remembering that we are a diverse group holding many different opinions. Our diversity, bound together by a single common ideal, is part of our strength and must be celebrated, NOT trampled into uniformity.

Not only are differences in political perspectives tolerated and encouraged, but faith differences and gender orientation differences are not simply tolerated but celebrated. Although guild members admit that their views of women and men might generally be

considered by some to be sexist, nonetheless they represent a broad cross-section of spiritual perspectives, political orientations, and sexual identities. The guild makes a stand on domestic abuse and the equality of women, but it decries "political correctness" and what it considers anti-male forms of feminism while explicitly discouraging stereotypes of both men and women.

The cultural feminist perspective has been criticized for being essentialist and for retreating from politics to emphasize life-style (Taylor and Rupp 1993, 32). This criticism seems to echo a part of Martha Nussbaum's critique of Judith Butler but in reverse. Whereas Butler's calls for individual subversions are seen as distant from lived experience stemming perhaps from a naïve unwillingness to tackle large structures of power, cultural feminism has been seen as retreating from the political fight as well. Although it may be said that Butler's philosophical considerations remain distant from a practical means of enacting subversion, the politics of the personal among Festival women illustrates in concrete ways how a "countercultural movement aimed at reversing the cultural valuation of the male and the devaluation of the female" (Echols 1989, 6) can constitute communities of change.

Elizabeth as "Archetype"

If Ren women envision "wench" as a model of independence and diversity, they hold up Elizabeth and other noble women like her as archetypes of feminine political power and sensual prowess that enable other women to be independent and diverse. The wench's sensuality may serve to upset the male gaze, but the queen's sensuality invites

and returns it. Elizabeth stands as the equal to male political power and offsets it not only in her personal charismatic nature, but also in the usage of the Royal "We." Although anachronistically employed (the habit of the monarch referring to herself as "we" was originated by Queen Victoria), the Royal "We" signifies much in regard to the nature of Festival community. It symbolizes not simply the magnanimity and expansive nobility in the person of the queen, but rather the nature of the community which is an expression of that character in a community of women. When Queen Catherine receives patrons at court and expresses, "We are pleased you are come to visit us," she speaks broadly with the welcome of the community. It is an invitation into a performance community with a feminist ethic. As sovereigns of their own space and culture, Ren women seek to model the power of self-direction and self-definition. As sensual beings, they seek to claim the power of pleasure without reference to masculine control. And as social beings, they seek to embody community and diversity.

Female Masculinity

If Elizabeth is a cultural feminist, Grania is her butch sister. In Chapter Three, I briefly referenced Grace O'Malley, the Irish Pirate Queen, as she is called by Festival performers. O'Malley is a character taken nominally from the pages of histories like Anne Chambers' (2003) biography of the folk-legend, and historical fiction like Morgan Llywelyn's (1986) *She-King of the Irish Seas*. Puddleton's casting-call describes her as:

> "Chieftain of the Umhall Uachtarach & Captain of the Nearaght Cabylbuigh…
>
> She takes her role as chieftain very seriously and her people are her main concern.

She will, therefore, do whatever she deems necessary to keep them well and out from under English control.

A detailed character study provided by the casting director gives further background on this Irish folk-character brought to life on Puddleton's stage. Grace's Irish name was Grainne Ni Mhaile, or Grania. She was born to a sixteenth century Irish chieftain named Owen Dubhdarra who was also a ship's captain. At a young age Grania, having been told that life on a ship was not for women, cut of her hair and sneaked aboard her father's ship to serve. In short order, she was recognized as a valuable member of the crew and raised to second in command. At 15 Grania entered into a political marriage to Donal O'Flaherty, and after his death in a clan war, Grania became chief of the O'Flaherty Clan. In defiance of England and in defense of her family, Grania built large holdings of land and a large fleet that controlled Clew Bay and the surrounding waters. She ventured out to trade as far as Scotland, France and Spain.

Accused of piracy and inciting rebellion against the English Crown which had begun to encroach on her territory beginning in the days of Henry VIII, Grania petitioned Elizabeth for a redress of grievances in exchange for cessation of Irish rebellions. She met with the Queen in 1593. Refusing to bow to Elizabeth because Grania did not recognize her as the Queen of Ireland, the Irish "pirate" negotiated terms with the monarch only to be disappointed when the terms weren't met. Returning then to "piracy," Grania continued to support Irish rebellion.

Puddleton's Grania has become a regular character, played by a performer named Tina. Dressed all in black with long leather boots and carrying a sword and a large

collection of knives, Grania is the leader of the village's visiting pirates. Known as Grace O'Malley only to the English, she is the leader of "the black side" at the human chess battle, and is portrayed as Queen Catherine's nemesis or as her personal privateer. Tina's portrayal of O'Malley is decidedly masculine. She is violent and cutthroat, dangerous and dominant. Romantic advances by men are answered with duals (which she always wins), and her relationships with her female crewmembers are sensuously ambiguous.

I encountered Grace during my first day at Festival. I was advised to go first to the chess match. The show sided Grania's pirates against the Lord Mayor and the Queen's Guards. During the match, Grania orchestrates a ruthless and underhanded attack upon the villagers while Queen Catherine watches from the platform. Grania's first match pits her against the mayor himself. She fights with two swords; he fights with a sword and dagger. Flipping him over her head and onto his back, Grania lands atop the mayor, straddling his chest and pinning his arms while holding his own dagger to his throat.

"Do you yield?" Grania shouts to the helplessly pinned man.

"I shall never yield the town," he responds, desperately.

"I'm not worried about the town…do <u>you</u> yield?" She shouts, grinning lasciviously.

"Madame!" cries the mayor, shocked. "I'm a married man!" From the pirates' side of the chess field men and women taunt the mayor with shouts of "She must have been as desperate as you are now!" And, "Who wears the pants now?"

Jumping down from the viewing platform, the Queen's Jester—a young woman dressed in harlequin—pulls out a dagger to defend the helpless mayor, and Grania rolls to the side to defend herself. The mayor attacks her from behind, but Grania lands a kick to his chest and backhands him into unconsciousness.

"Who is this whelp?" Grania bellows. The jester looks fearful, but dives at Grania, who handily unarms her, grabs her around the waist and puts the dagger now to the woman's throat.

"Enough!" cries Catherine, finally intervening. "Let us complete the competition with dignity and fairness." Grania glares at the queen, pausing for a long moment, and then mercilessly slices the Jester's throat. Gasps fill the air from the performers, and Grace walks away from the corpse without looking down.

Despite her viciousness, Grania is one of the most cheered characters at Festival. Her power is expressed in terms of virile and violent masculinity. This type of masculinity is the transgressive when it is not tied to the male body (Halberstam 1998). Judith Halberstam argues that decoupling masculinity from men can be subversive but that generally it is only accepted if the gender transgressors are heterosexual. In this instance, Grania's sexuality is ambiguous at best. Although she makes advances at men in her performances, they are most often for the purpose of rebuffing them and using the opportunity to display her power and dominance. There is irony in her very name, which she declares to the Queen shouting, "No Grace am I!" But Grace is doing more than simply co-opting masculine power. For Tina, the masculine performances are personally

rewarding because they allow her to display her own "tom-boy" nature in a way that is popular with audiences.

Grania and Masculine Power

Tina describes herself as leading an essentially boring life. An office manager for a small local company, she says she became involved in Renaissance Festival performance when her friend Brandon auditioned.

"I was one of the few girls I knew who played role-playing games growing up, and I think I like playing Grace, really, for lack of sport. I've always felt like a tom-boy myself, and rather than being looked down on for it, Grace is like the hero, or maybe the anti-hero. Anyway, people love her."

Tina's description of herself as a tom-boy seemed to me an understatement. After that first chess-match, I attempted to connect with her and Brandon in the green-room, and I was incredibly intimidated by her. She was dressed all in black, her open fronted skirts revealing leather breeches and high boots with several daggers protruding from belts hung over her shoulders and crossed in the front. She lounged with a dangerous grace even off-stage. Smoking a cigarette, she looked at me in my skirted doublet and velvet hat and asked, "So what are you supposed to be?" I stumbled over my words, trying to explain my work while her piercing eyes seemed to be judging. "Whatever, chill out dude," she said, trying to ease my discomfort. "You're like a nervous little Chihuahua."

It took three seasons and Brandon's run as a fop before I felt comfortable interacting with Tina. She spends most of her time with the Rogues and is considered one of the boys. Although Halberstam observes an inequitable judgment in favor of heterosexual masculine women, Tina's experience of being called a tom-boy illustrates that female masculinity is often just as difficult in the negotiation of her own identity as a "masculine" heterosexual woman. She tells me that being part of Festival is one of the things that has finally made her comfortable with her personal identity.

"Most guys aren't interested in a really deep relationship with me because I'm like one of the guys," Tina admits. "That kinda bugs me, I guess, but they just need to man up. I guess if they can't be more man than me then they don't deserve me."

Grania as "Archetype"

Borrowing from Morgan Llywelyn's historical fiction novel, Grace is called "She-King of the Irish Seas." In her day, she was seen as unconventional for her use of men's tactics in a world of men's politics. Biographer Anne Chambers (2003) declares that Grania was maligned in her day—accused of promiscuity and piracy—because she refused to adhere to the expectations of her gender. Though not nearly as well known as Elizabeth, Grania is an Irish hero and has inspired generations of literature and art. Traditional Irish songs and poetry abound in her honor with the ballad "Oró Sé do Bheatha 'Bhaile" declaring "welcome, thou woman who hast been so afflicted." Despite her unconventional and beleaguered womanhood, Grania is taken as a model for masculine femininity among Festival performers, and as a broader cultural archetype with

an ever-growing cultural popularity in stage productions and even a feature film in the making. At Festival, Grace has become a staple. In rehearsals, Catherine declares, "Look ladies, you don't have to be limited to the meek little good-wife you see in old movies. Renaissance women were powerful. Some of them, like Elizabeth, could work around the world of men's power. Others, like Grace, just did it better than the men."

Halbertstam argues that female masculinity is not a gender construction derived from males, but rather it is a gender unto itself "with its own cultural history" (1998, 77). Halberstam's central point is that female masculinity or "butch" is a devalued category in contemporary culture. Grace's popularity illustrates a willingness among Festival participants to accept female masculinity as a construction with a long cultural history. Their argument for accepting this gender schema mirrors their construction of the wench role. The mythology of Festival's female masculinity sees it as having been there all along.

Making Herstory

Whether wench, queen, or pirate butch, women at Festival push the boundaries of normative gender expectations. "One is supposed to sin during carnival" observes Eric Rothenbuhler (1998, 16). But if there is "sin" in a feminist performance aesthetic, argues Elizabeth Bell (1995), it is not in pleasure and exhibitionism, but rather in the fear of performance's power. Festival women do not fear to exhibit, to express themselves and their community in rhetorically significant ways. They do not fear their differences with men, nor are they willing to allow masculine powers to diminish their constructions of

self. The Ren woman knows, as Jill Dolan says of the powerful woman performer, “how to wield the authority of stage presence, how to control the seductions inherent in the frame, and how to speak the language so that authority, seduction, and language mean something different about the status of women in culture” (1993, 1). Women at Festival refuse to be made by history, and instead seek to be history makers—or as one wench put it, “herstory” makers. Mining the pages of histories written most often by men, they make history not only by attempting to leave a mark on a culture through a women-centered guild, but also through performances of women who become for them models of feminine power and self-definition. They are making myths and writing archetypes into the soul of a community empowered in notions of pleasure and diversity.

In 1977 Joan Kelly-Gadol asked the question, “Did Women have a Renaissance?” She notes that while Renaissance ladies appear as the equivalent of the courtier in education, culture, and charm, that charm became for the Renaissance woman the chief aim. Kelly-Gadol quotes from a Renaissance handbook of nobility that recounts "in a Lady who lives at court a certain pleasing affability is becoming above all else, whereby she will be able to entertain graciously every kind of man" (1977, 33) On the emergence of feminist history, Joan Wallach Scott (1988, 3) notes that although new facts from history “might document the existence of women in the past…they did not necessarily change the importance (or lack of it) attributed to women’s activities.” The project of women’s history is central to Festival women. The *Uppity Women* of past generations are used to celebrate women’s accomplishments and women’s identities. A feminist mythopoeia completes in its own way the work of feminist history—the creation of new

mythic realities and narrative possibilities. Festival women are in the "performative interval" (Green 2007), that performance space between what an actor is and what an actor does, between what an actor sees and what she is becoming. Mythmaking is an act of will that stocks the costume closet with creative possibilities, and feminist performers will reach into that closet of possibilities for generations in order to "dress as woman," step on stage, and become.

CHAPTER FIVE

A COMMUNITY OF DIFFERENCE:

REFIGURING MASCULINITY AND WENCH'S WORLD

In February of 2002, the Largo City Commission threatened to terminate the 22 year-old contract that permitted the Bay Area Renaissance Festival to stage their Faire on Largo property. Festival performers jokingly called this the Tenth Annual End of BARF. The Commission had been threatening for years to shut down the event, arguing that its raucous participants were disturbing to the surrounding community. When it became obvious that the city was no longer just talking, the Festival community roused itself. The village became a site of what Victor Turner (1980) calls a *social drama*: a public conflict between star members over key values in a community. Puddleton's dramatic narrative suddenly included the pirates threatening to burn the village and carry off its inhabitants to sell as slaves—in a thinly disguised reference to the City Commissioners as pirates and Rennies as truly endangered victims.

In April, after Festival ended, the City Commission voted to shut Puddleton down once and for all, but gave them permission to use the grounds for one more season. The last day of the 2003 performance ended with Puddleton surrendering forever to Grace O'Malley. As the last battle neared, Grace and her horde of pirates paraded through the village toward the chess board, shouting:

"We're taking over the town!" and then, breaking the frame, "We're going to show Largo what we're about!"

King and Queen watched from their thrones as the Lord and Lady Mayor's household was ushered onto the chess board. Townspeople and patrons crowded the field, watching as Grace shot a nun and captured the mayor's screaming daughter, putting a pistol to her head.

"The town," Grace offered, "or the girl!" The Mayor didn't hesitate.

"I yield the town," he sobbed, grabbing his golden-haired daughter while the king lifted his mug into the air to signify Puddleton's final "Parting Glass."

The village's demise did not spell the end for BARF. The Bay Area Festival moved just up the road to Tampa and continued on as the village of Merriweather. Loyal cast and playtrons narrated themselves into Merriweather using the same mythologies that made Puddleton such a vibrant performance community.

Returning to Puddleton's gated entrance the week after Festival, I found a sign posted by a performer that read, *The Dragon is Dead, but Beware its Siblings*. Entering the empty village, I walked through the massive oaks and reminisced on the three years of performances that had defined the space for me. The grass on the chess board had been removed by performers in great blocks of sod to be taken home as "a piece of Puddleton." Signs from dozens of buildings had been torn down and taken as keepsakes. The old oaks, hundreds of years old, amongst which were scattered Puddleton's buildings, seemed to be silent repositories of our memories.

Purpose of This Study

In this study, I have shown how participants at the Bay Area Renaissance Festival constitute community and gender in and through performance. Utilizing the words and worlds of participants, I have demonstrated that the Festival community is empowered in play, self-reflection, social commentary, and pleasure. By voluntarily stepping out of ordinary life and playing on Festival's mythological stage, members of the community serendipitously create a community of difference. I have shown that, against the backdrop of conventionally masculine performances, significant reconstitutions of masculinity happen in and through performances at Festival, enacted individually by performative agents. Finally, I have demonstrated Festival to be a women-centered community that engages in a mythopoeia of feminist history.

Chapter One located Ren Fest within a discussion of carnivalesque performance and living history. David Boje's *festivalism*, Richard Schechner's *restored behavior*, and Judith Butler's arguments for *performative agency* center Festival as a celebratory community that engages in social change through personal transformation. My participant observations demonstrated in each of the chapters that followed how that transformation plays out for individual performers. Chapter Two introduced the concept of levels of performance commitments and illustrated the ways performers and playtrons mutually produce community through participative performance, celebratory objects, and the surrender of personal space. Chapter Three related the transformative performances of five festival men, showing how performance breaks down social barriers, promotes self-definition, and—resisting impulses to define men—even opens the field for new

embodiments of sexual orientation. Finally, in Chapter Four the wench's world revealed the potentials of performative agency to enable communities of difference. The Wench, the Queen, and the Pirate She-King all embody feminine power and serve as archetypes of feminine narratives that privilege self-definition.

Acknowledging Festival as multivocal community of mythopoets, I have significantly extended the work of previous research on Renaissance Festivals. Rather than focusing on Festival performances as attempts at historical authenticity, I have revealed Festival's mythological stance and the means by which performers embody mythology and archetype to their own purposes. And moving away from an audience centered discussion of its performances, I have shown how individual performers, through personal transformation, can become agents of change through performance.

Significant Contributions

To date, this dissertation is the only study of which I am aware that has engaged gender as performative at Festival. It has shown that gender in performance can be enabled, extended, and reconfigured in ways real and meaningful to performers. The performative agency that Judith Butler argues for is revealed at Festival to be not only possible, but powerful. Although gender theorists like R.W. Connell take a more structural approach to reconfiguring gender, addressing global politics and economics, Butler has argued that individual agency has the greatest potential to reinscribe social reality. Rather than envisioning what performance does to and for audiences, I have demonstrated the power of performance for the performer—not simply as a theoretical

construct but as voiced in the words of participants who spoke so eloquently of their own lives, joys, and challenges. As agents struggle to appear (Blau 1990), performance becomes a powerful means of social change embodied in the personal transformations of the performer. But more important in terms of individual agency, this ethnography has shown that performance empowers individuals to self-define in issues ranging from personal politics to sexual-orientation. Debates over nature versus nurture, liberal feminism versus cultural feminism, male privilege and men's movements fade into the background if we are empowered by the embodiment of myths we help to create.

Taking the notion of Jungian archetypes out of the realm of a theoretical universal unconsciousness, this project demonstrates the power of mythological narratives in the empowerment of self and community. The mythopoetic movement, much maligned for universalizing gender, highlights the power of myth and archetype in an agent-centered constitution of self. As stories we tell about ourselves, mythic embodiments open the way to do something with what's been done (Schechner 1985) so that mythohistory becomes a means of turning our dreams of the middle ages (or any other age) into community narratives.

Vital to the process of rebecoming is a community that invites the kind of mythopoeia that Festival, and festivalism, invite. Boje's notion of festivalism is central to my findings in this project. It enables a community envisioned as springing from mutual celebration. What festival celebrates is not simply history, nor even the mythohistory which I so strongly argue is constitutive of Festival; but rather, Renaissance Festival is a communal celebration of rebirth and personal agency that gives privilege to the notion of

diversity. As communication scholars interested in dialogue, intersubjectivity, and genuine community, we should note the Festival world and seek to understand its community. Politically, Festival enacts personal agency in the daily exchange of ideas about gender and approaches to history. Economically, it enacts personal agency in a marketplace that is both enabled by and resistant to spectacle capitalism. Relationally, it enacts personal agency in its overt demands for the village to "play nice" in mutual respect and personal expression.

Finally, if there is a reigning myth at Festival—an archetypal model, revealed in Festival's collective mythmaking—that connotes the community's performative ethic, it is the wench. Renaissance Festival is the wench's world. Is there another community that so successfully promotes and enacts femininity—in such a wide range of enactments and embodiment, and that so successfully invites others to join in the play of these acts of feminine power? A wench understands that performance is simultaneously powerful, pleasurable, and playful. A feminine communitas, the "gift of togetherness," has a wide reach at Festival. Performance engages symbolic power to enable the self in its struggle to appear, and feminine self-definition appears at every corner. Performance engages bodily and emotional pleasure to facilitate knowledge of self and revelation of self to other. Performance engages playfulness in ways that absorb, unsettle, enchant, and awe us through the exultation of the possible.

Implications for Future Research

This study has explored performative agency in gendered performances and offered tentative answers in regard to the ways performance can liberate individual experiences of sexual orientation. If gendered sexuality is one fruitful avenue of investigation, then race and ethnicity also deserve future attention. This study only scratched the surface of my Scottish heritage and its fund of cultural capital for performance. Future studies might explore how whiteness is enacted at Festival as the unspoken ground for building mythopoetic selves and communities, how and why people of color are a small part of this Festival community, and how ethnicity—like gender—is a reiteration of history, materiality, and discourse. Race and ethnicity are a tremendously rich area to explore at Festival.

Class, too, needs to be explored, especially as linked to the consumerism, production, and consumption that undergird the Festival experience for participants and audiences. Much of the labor at Festival, the hard manual labor of hand craftsmanship and the hard physical labor of jousting, returns to and longs for a physicality lost in the machine age. How this physicality is classed—as masculine, as blue-collar, as economically precocious—deserves attention in future research. Much of the labor of the royals, too, is physically daunting: the costumes and demeanor require tremendous financial cost and physical discipline. These physicalities and their class linkages are ripe for exploration.

Spirituality is still another area only hinted at in this study. Festival participants explore and promote their spirituality in an atmosphere of open dialogue and respect for

the Other. Christian imaginings of holy knighthood and Pagan imaginings of Celtic shamanism run alongside one another. Festival is ripe with spiritual symbolism—for Neo-Pagans who explore its space as a connection to the "ancient paths," and for Christian recreationists who attend as Templars, monks, nuns, and priests as a means to discussing their faith.

The pedagogy of Festival deserves attention, too. How do Rennies teach through doing and being? How is apprenticeship—long practiced in skilled trades—returned to and enacted in performances, shopkeeping, and cooking? How is improvisational performance—arguably among the most difficult of performance styles—prepared for, articulated, and elaborated? And how is performance itself pedagogical? Instructions about how to "live" in Festival's performative world are embedded in its performances. More broadly, its very culture and character is communicated through performance. Renaissance Festival is an obvious outgrowth and continuation of the folk movement of the 1960s. The music and dance of festival is an artistic branch that runs parallel to folk rock, the protest-song movement, and folklorist music, which have all sprung from folk revival. Festival's music and dance should be explored in this context.

Finally, Boje's concept of festivalism has been underexplored. He suggests several sites in which festivalism arises as a communal outpouring of celebration, including harvest festivals, craft fairs, film and music festivals, and even spontaneous theatrical celebrations that spring up in the margins of capitalistic spectacles. Communication and performance studies scholars should attend to these sites in order to

better understand festivalistic communities and their potential to serve as positive models for cultural communication and community development.

Puddleton and the Forest of Symbols

Victor Turner (1967) describes a Ndembu circumcision ritual in which boys from the African tribe are introduced into manhood by means of a days long ritual which culminates in the boys entering triumphantly—after their time of healing—into an "inner circle" surrounded by their wise ones. At the center of the circle is the strong and hard *chikoli* tree, symbol of virility and strength. The boys, now celebrated as men, surround the tree and are in turn surrounded by a circle of their male elders. Outside that circle are the boys' mothers and sisters, dancing jubilantly. In this liminal space—the magic circle—the young boys make the transformation from childhood to maturity. The men, as guardians of that space, uphold the society's patriarchal structure, and the whole experience serves to redefine parent-child relationships, maintain the community's equilibrium, and bestow prestige upon the ritual subjects.

In like fashion—at least that is the way it seemed to me as I stood under the canopy of oak leaves in the empty performance spaces after Puddleton's demise—Festival's performers are keepers of a sacred space. The Festival grounds were transporting, but only because of the myths that have been made and enacted in and through the community. Looking at the sunlight glinting through the trees amidst swirls of dust in Puddleton, I feel the allure of the community. Turner described the Ndembu society as a *forest of symbols.* The Festival grounds, thickly treed with grandfather oaks

and dotted with fairy tale structures seem as well to be a Forest of Symbols, alive with the memory of performative possibilities. The village's inhabitants guard that space and all its symbolic wealth while other participants stand just outside the circle, jubilant with celebration waiting to enter in and take their place in the symbolic center of a community made in shared performance.

As a youngster, I can remember with great clarity the ways in which my dreams of the middle ages created for me a medieval stage for romantic escape and barbaric fantasy. Like many young men of my age in the 1980s, I was drawn to the mythos of gaming worlds like *Dungeons & Dragons*, both as an escape into the performance world of our minds and as a Saturday morning escape into cartoon adventure and morality tales. We were young men narrating a fantastical world in which we could become heroes, adventurers, or fiends while pretending our comraderie and friendship bonds into existence. D&D was a game about sitting down and telling stories with friends, and now that I look back on it with a more analytical eye, I see it was a game that allowed us to dream the Middle Ages meaningfully through fantasy in order to enact and produce our burgeoning visions of masculinity.

At the time, the game was attacked by cultural conservatives for promoting the occult. The great irony of those conservative attacks on the game was that *D&D* relished in the same heroic landscape and traditional gender constructions we boys had been presented by our conservative parents in bedtime stories and by Sunday night with *The Wonderful World of Disney*. These same traditional tales of masculinity are reproduced and disputed at Festival in meaningful ways. A generation of men whose masculinities

were modeled after Disney-fied warrior heroes, and who formed meaningful relationships (both real and fictitious) around the magic circle of Role Playing (or later in MMORPGs), makes up a large proportion of Festival patrons and performers. Their performances are layered with, often contrasting with the performances of a founding generation of festival men, the Rennies, whose explicit goals are an escape from the traditional culture of masculinity, from what they describe as a materialistic conservative lifestyle in an attempt to explore completely different ways of living.

As one old Rennie put it, "When you join Festival, you sometimes play the part of the gypsy. But in fact, you really are a gypsy, and you're very close to the hippie lifestyle. You get exposed to all kinds of alternative things, so it's great that we get these young people in here brandishing their swords, because when playtime is over, you can teach them about something different, something more."

The immediate draw of Festival for so many former *D&D* gamers is the mythological stage—the playground—where He-Man/Prince-Charming fantasies can be displayed and explored. But in entering that performance world, we Festival men are confronted not only with images from our childhoods, but also with powerful alternatives to conventional images of our masculine selves and that of our feminine counterparts. Festival women craft images of themselves drawn from history and from fairytale and pretend them into being. Like the drums that draw out the so-called wounds of men seeking therapy in dark woods, the drums of festival play to draw us into a way of being

with a beat that is different from what we expected when we entered. As Raewyn Connell reminds us, much will be the same, but Rennies and myth-makers alike find in that forest of symbols new ways to see themselves, to write new stories, to enter into a dialogue of performance where they may see and be seen as purveyors of myth made flesh.

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