

Reflections
on Female and Trans*
Masculinities and
Other Queer Crossings

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Edited by

Nina Kane and Jude Woods

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INTRODUCTION

JUDE WOODS AND DR NINA KANE

This anthology emerged out of a queer cultural project PoMoGaze (2013-2015), built around the exhibition *Parallel Lives* which presented artworks by Marlow Moss (1889-1958) and Claude Cahun (1894-1954) at Leeds Art Gallery in 2014.¹ One element of the PoMoGaze project was the AGender conference in June 2014. This included presentations and discussions, gallery tours, art workshops and performances inspired by the exhibition, the lives of Moss and Cahun and the broader queer cultural themes of trans* and female masculinities. Many of the papers presented at the conference with additional material generated since are included in this book.

PoMoGaze brought together Jude Woods in a curatorial role and Dr Nina Kane (*Cast-Off Drama*) as Artistic Director for collaborative gallery-based projects. The methodology of PoMoGaze was intentionally queer and inclusive, valuing and providing opportunities for community participation in the programming and delivery of gallery events, through steering groups and open performance platforms. We developed a partnership under the name of Queer Eye and ran programmes of free community arts drop-in workshops, performance interventions and Queer Tours open to anyone.² Open calls regularly went out throughout the two years inviting those who were ‘interested in queer culture’ intentionally rather than using an identity category like ‘queer people’. As a result, we gathered an intergenerational and diverse group of creative people all sharing an interest in playing, learning and creating gallery-based queer interventions; exploring and deconstructing intersectional hegemonies using discussion, our bodies, various objects and props, the gallery spaces, artworks from the collection,

¹ The word PoMoGaze is formed from combining ‘PoMo’, a shortening of Post-Modern, with the multiple meanings suggested by ‘Gaze’.

² See ‘PACE 10 Queer Eye’ on the *Cast-Off Drama* blog for more on this. *Cast-Off Drama*, [web blog], 2002, <http://www.castoffdrama.blogspot.com>, (accessed 18 February 2016).

displays and exhibitions. The discussions and curatorial/directorial practices on questions of gender and queer from these projects helped build both the theoretical underpinnings for this book and our working relationship as editors and collaborators.

The AGender conference project invited participation from anyone keen to join in, whatever their background, culture, experience, knowledge-base or skills-set. The steering group, made up of local volunteers of all ages interested in LGBT*IQ cultures and ideas, created a magnificent programme of workshop facilitators, performers and speakers, some from the world of academia (from early-career researchers to emeritus professors) and others representing work in queer activism, arts practice and journalism. The call for submissions on ‘female and transgender masculinities’ resulted in a diversity of papers. Some stayed close to the theme and others broadened it to explore more general issues of LGBT*IQ experience, politics and identities. Some papers dealt directly with the artists Marlow Moss and Claude Cahun in reference to the *Parallel Lives* exhibition, and contributions focusing on the modernist period bear reference in part to that influence. The spread of themes from female and transgender masculinities to other ‘queer crossings’ of relevance to LGBT*IQ cultural analysis is reflected in this book.³

Speakers were selected in a series of open meetings with the steering group and the programme arrived at by consensus, in some cases with long and impassioned debate – an ultimately enriching and informative process that reflected the diversity of strongly-held feelings and opinions on the subject of gender and contemporary feminisms. These discussions also reflected the speed at which social networking is informing gender debate, and the flux of emerging terminologies, ideas, identities and languages at play and open for contestation and discussion in contemporary society.

The dissension made its way into the conference with some papers generating heated exchange between the speakers and the ‘floor’ – particularly in relation to questions of Transgender identity or experience and feminisms. Our practice both in the conference project and in this book, has been to encourage dissenting voices to sit side-by-side with one another on an equal platform reflecting diverse political positions and different modes of gender interpretation. We have encouraged each

³ S. Antosa (ed.), *Queer Crossings: Theories, Bodies, Texts*, Italy, Mimesis International, 2014.

contributor to write from their own perspective, to use terminology as they see fit, and to present their research with confidence, recognising that their political or theoretical positioning may well be contested or contradicted by other contributors to the book. The reader will possibly become aware of these differences as they make their way through the text.

A frequent topic of discussion in the PoMoGaze projects concerned uses of language in relation to LGBT*IQ experience or identity, and as facilitators and event organisers we frequently found ourselves defining, defending or explaining our chosen set of designations for the projects. After much discussion amongst ourselves in the planning stages we opted to use ‘queer’, ‘LGBT*IQ’ and ‘trans*’ in our professional practice with community forums, and have kept to this schema in our editorial comments here.⁴ Language-choice, however, remains a highly-contested area in gender discussion. A fierce exchange arose in the middle of the AGender conference with regards to the use of the word ‘tranny’ by a speaker who found this an affirmative and political choice of self-reference and appropriate to the context of his discussion and community. Other speakers, however, took issue with his usage of it arguing it held negative connotations for transsexual people. Other arguments arose when speakers used the terms ‘transman’ or ‘transwoman’, or ‘MTF/FTM transsexual’ with commentators sharply divided as to the appropriateness of the language choices.

A frequently contested term, discussed at length in the Queer Eye workshops, was our choice of the word ‘queer’. Whereas younger people were drawn to this usage, and recognised it as a term that has been reclaimed both in activist politics and formal scholarship since the 1980s, many older homosexual gentlemen (particularly those who had come of age before 1967) found it a challenging concept having experienced the term applied to themselves abusively for much of their early lives.⁵ They

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Homosexuality was decriminalised in England and Wales in 1967 for those aged 21 or over; followed later by Scotland in 1980 and Northern Ireland in 1982. It was not decriminalised for those serving in the Armed Forces or Merchant Navy until 1994; but the inclusion of a provision allowing UK Armed Forces and Merchant Navy personnel to be discharged for ‘a homosexual act’ is still being challenged by Human Rights campaigners at the time of writing (January 2016). For more on this see The National Archives, ‘The Cabinet Papers 1915–1986: Homosexuality’, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/homosexuality.htm>, (accessed 8 January 2016); also P. Johnson, ‘UK Parliament poised to repeal final

opted to use the word ‘homosexual’ in relation to themselves and others, frequently eschewing ‘gay’ as well as ‘queer’ as having associations of flippancy or effeminacy; finding ‘homosexual’ an affirmative choice that reflected a reclamation of that particular word, and one that marked their own life journeys and processes of ‘coming out’ openly as adults with sexual autonomy and agency in post-1967 England and Wales.

Given the complexities on the question of language, we have taken a decision as editors not to standardise the uses of terminology across the book, but to allow each writer to apply the languages emerging from their own discipline and political position as they deem appropriate. As such the reader will come across differing and sometimes conflicting uses of terminology, acronym or capitalisation, and may find they are challenged by the choice of particular words on the part of the writer. Some common examples here include Trans*, trans, Transgender, queer, Queer, LGBT, LGBT*, LGBT*IQ, LGBTIQA, dyke, genderqueer, ftm, FTM, MtF, MTF, Transboy, dragking and Drag King; also varied uses of pronoun, including the use of ‘they’ and ‘their’ to replace ‘he’ or ‘she’/‘his’ or ‘her’, or s/he. Some authors have consciously mixed their own usage of the different designations to reflect the particularly fluid evolving and contested nature of these terms. Contributors have also taken a varied approach to uses of punctuation in their chapter titles, and we have opted to leave those as they are, at the request of the authors.⁶ We invite the reader to consider their own response to the language and to reflect on how the writer uses it in the context of their particular discussion.

Queerness runs through this collection of essays with multiple themes explored in relation to experiences of the gender binary. There are category-crossing reflections, a plurality of voices and contrasting cultural interests. The contributors’ foci covers historical, art-historical, literary and linguistic enquiry, analysed narratives from diverse cultural texts, lived experience and work created from life stories, explorations about

remaining discriminatory legislation relating to homosexuality and the armed forces’, *ECHR Sexual Orientation Blog*, [web blog], 7 January 2016, <http://echrso.blogspot.co.uk/2016/01/uk-parliament-poised-to-repeal-final.html>, (accessed 8 January 2016).

⁶ The book as a whole is standardised, however, to the Oxford Referencing System, and follows the schema advocated by the University of Western Australia; ‘Oxford Referencing Style: All Examples’, University of Western Australia, [website], ND, <http://guides.is.uwa.edu.au/c.php?g=325241&p=2177430>, (accessed 18 February 2016).

looking at artworks and reflections on embodying or performing artworks. Together they bring a wealth of insight, knowledge and well-constructed argument from multiple disciplines. Much like the AGender conference this book offers a queer hotchpotch; a jumbled, sometimes swirling, assortment of texts that deconstruct and reconstruct gender and desire, moving rhizomatically through to related questions of race, class, economics, religion, culture and embodiment.

Dr Lucy Howarth in *Marlow Moss: Dress Address Name* provides an overview of Moss, her life and work, and historically contextualises her masculine expression of dress in a context of modernism. She provocatively problematises the unquestioning inclusion of Moss in a lesbian canon of visual reference, also the suggestion that Moss was actively trying to look like a man, and argues that her self-presentation could index other social and cultural categorisations.

In *Near Invisi'Bi'lity: Representing Female Bisexuality through Plurality in Susan Glaspell's 'The Verge'* Charlotte Mallinson offers a literary and queer analysis of the play, resituating Glaspell as an important writer on sexuality, identity and other modernist feminist concerns. Mallinson picks up gender ideas sitting between the binary to develop an incisive critique of monosexuality, an affirmation of the much marginalised topic of bisexuality, a noting of queer terminologies at play in *The Verge* and a situating of the play in the sapphic cultural works of the 1920s; concluding with a persuasive analysis of the phallic/ionic associations of flower metaphors in Glaspell's text.

Dr Matheus Odorisi Marques charts a lack of pluralism in *A Minister's Speech and Homosexual Identity*. Focusing on the public speeches of Minister Silas Malafaia (Brazil), he efficiently applies a linguistic analysis to undo Evangelical propaganda, revealing the gendered and ideological binaries found in homophobic hate speech. His work usefully documents current political tensions in Brazil with regard to the rise and spread of both queer rights and anti-homosexual evangelism.

Moving to the second contribution inspired by the Parallel Lives exhibition, Dr David Annwn Jones' chapter *Refractions through Selves: Claude Cahun's icons of the Inner Search, psycho-dramas and photography*, focuses on the life and work of the artist Claude Cahun and her collaborator and life partner Marcel Moore, shedding light on Cahun's esoteric interests. Jones suggests that in the enthusiasm for analysing

Cahun in relation to gender concerns, a vital area of potentially rich scholarship has been ignored, which recognises the artists' mutual attraction to a range of mystical and occult practices and movements. Noting Cahun's interest from an early age in cats, yoga, Spiritualism, Kabbalah, alchemy, the hermeneutic life, Masonic and Egyptian symbolism, her uncle's friendship with Aleister Crowley and the influence of Judaism on her art, Jones unravels how the esoteric manifests itself repeatedly in her writings and in Cahun/Moore's photographs.

'*What can ail thee, knightess-at-arms?*' is the compelling refrain of Dr Susan Clayton in her historically-located exploration of female chivalry, gallantry and wooing referencing literature, art and contemporary popular culture. Clayton's text explores the question of female husbands, with reference to the real-life and cultural figures of Mary Hamilton, James Allen, Brandon Teena, Joan of Arc, Manju, Britomart and La Belle Dame sans Merci, arguing that 'female husbands and knightesses represent alternatives to straight-jacketed expressions of gender'. She raises topical and potentially controversial gender questions about representation and gender assignation in her discussion of Brandon Teena whose death was represented in the 1999 film *Boys Don't Cry*; positioning him both in life and representation as a female husband rather than his more conventional designation as a Trans* man; thus offering an alternative reading of him in cultural discourse.

Jade Montserrat's chapter details challenging and innovative site-specific and installation-based contemporary performance work with the body; performances in which race, gender and sexuality intersect, and in which questions of appropriation, resistance and looking are foregrounded and pushed to the limit, obliging the audience member to look at their own processes of reception and possession. It offers a rhizomatic reflection on Montserrat's project *The Rainbow Tribe* and the iterations and occupations emerging from this process entitled *The Rainbow Tribe Chorus Line, Sets and Spectacles, Communion* and *Shadowing Josephine*; performance works that emerge from study of and an immersion in the life and work of Josephine Baker.

In *Trans*tastic Morphologies: Life-Modelling Theatre and 'The Lady of Shalott'*, Dr Nina Kane explores the potential of Tennyson's literary figure *The Lady of Shalott* and J.W. Waterhouse's 1894 painting of the subject to act as a creative catalyst for exploration of the gender binary and gender crossings. Drawing specifically on her own life-model theatre practice

(essentially dramaturgical and performative), on the gallery education and community projects of Cast-Off Drama and referencing the visual arts work of Phil Sayers, Margaret Harrison and Tony Bevan, Kane charts a progression of the life-model performer from one side of the binary (female) to the other (male). This Trans*tastic passing is enabled through shifting identification with both the Lady of the poem and Lancelot, the Knight, and is presented to the reader here in a rhizomatic and hairy weaving of textual and visual threads.

Gender-crossing and drag practice as activism is the focus of Dr Michela Baldo and Dr Olivia Fiorilli's contribution in *Drag king practices and the struggle against cis-normativity: some insights from the Italian scenario*. Drawing on their own performative experiences of the scene, Baldi and Fiorilli chart the growth of Drag King workshops in Italy from the 1990s to the present, persuasively arguing for the benefits of discussing Drag King as a set of practices rather than as an identity.

Pluralism, gender crossing and Cahun again take centre stage in Eve Gianoncelli's *Claude Cahun and the Practice(s) of Fancy Dress, Cross-dressing and Masquerade, Gender, Eroticism and Subjectification*. In this chapter, Gianoncelli explores masquerade, masculinisation, lesbianism, eroticisation and androgyny in the artist's work; her visual and textual cross-dressing, her practice as an actress and performer in photography and her parodic display of femininity, ultimately arguing that Cahun's work can be seen as an act of her 'becoming subject'.

In *Illustrating the Coming Out Story: Self-disclosure and the Twelve Dancing Princesses*, Dr Catherine Stones discusses current research into the processes of coming out for lesbian women and the formation of an illustration project based on the stories which takes inspiration from the fairy tale of *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*. The chapter offers reflection on the function and nature of coming out, drawing on folk tales and the work of writers Alison Bechdel and Jeanette Winterson to explore this, and suggests that the 'queer coming out story' holds truths and experiences within it that extend to parent-child relationships in general.

How Might Literary Disability Studies Inform an Approach to Trans Poetics?* is the question explored by Dr Cath Nichols using poetry and metaphorical analysis to invoke trans* narratives of embodiment, invisibility and loss. Nichols applies literary disability theory to trans* experience, inviting comparison between the experiences of trans* and

disabled people of oppression. Her chapter includes examples of her own poetry through which ideas can be extended and explored.

Atypical corporeal experience is the focus of *Resisting Freakery* as Jude Woods completes the collection, charting pathologising projections using examples of refusals and rejections of these ideological impositions. Woods combines disability, transgender, visual arts and freak theory to explore different processes of ‘enfreakment’ and ‘freakery’, ultimately arguing for agency through an analysis of the ‘stare’ rather than the ‘gaze’. Woods concludes their discussion with reference to two photographs - *Dance with the Dead Cock* (2009) by Anthony Clair Wagner and their own early self-portrait *Freakified* (1989), to extend discussion of how art can be used to resist the processes of freakery by turning the stare back on the viewer.

Investigation of Trans* and female masculinity themes inevitably recalls Halberstam’s key scholarly work *Female Masculinity* (1998).⁷ In the preface Halberstam describes the common reactions encountered when talking about the project:

People tend to nod and say ‘Yes of course, female masculinity’, as if this is a concept they have grown up with and use every day. In actual fact, there is remarkably little written about masculinity in women, and this culture generally evinces considerable anxiety about even the prospect of manly women.⁸

Since the publication of Halberstam’s foundational book the canon has expanded, but the lack of parity between scholarship and cultural production focused on male femininity and female masculinity described by Halberstam still persists.

This book, I hope, will eventually form just one part of a cultural onslaught on the privileged reservation of masculinity for men.⁹

The editors of this book echo Halberstam’s desire and hope that this project will be considered one more valuable contribution to this worthy endeavour, encouraging an exploration of Halberstam’s original ideas in the context of new understandings and cultural progressions. Part of this

⁷ J. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1998.

⁸ *ibid*, p xi.

⁹ *ibid*, p xii.

re-consideration of Halberstam's ideas involves recognising the huge impact that Transfeminisms are having on debates around female masculinity and masculine identities, and on notions of the binary and its existence as a stable or immovable frame of reference for lived identities. As many of the debates at the AGender conference, and currently raging in the media, our universities and on social networking forums reveal, our contemporary position is one of flux.

The process of discussing gender in the current climate is not an easy one. Whilst many gains have been made in legal, theoretical, medical, technological and cultural understandings in recent decades, there remain many battles to be fought. In some cases the battles are with rising waves of bigotry, backlash and gender terrorism against women and queers fuelled by a resurgence in the powers of patriarchal capitalism, that need addressing internationally. In other cases, the battles are happening amongst ourselves within queer, Trans* and feminist communities as we struggle to define new structures of feeling occasioned by the massive growth of gender literacy, and as we strive to develop languages that can accommodate contesting modes of self-identification within increasingly fragmented and unstable gender parameters. Arguably, philosopher Luce Irigaray's vision of the centrality of sexuete difference to our age is proving prescient. Writing in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, first published in 1984, she said:

Sexual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age. According to Heidegger, each age has one issue to think through, and one only. Sexual difference is probably the issue in our time which could be our 'salvation' if we thought it through [...] sexual difference would constitute the horizon of worlds more fecund than any known to date – at least in the West – and without reducing fecundity to the reproduction of bodies and flesh.¹⁰

The editors of this book believe that open, honest, debate on this 'major philosophical issue' and the sharing of knowledge between us can only serve to enrich understanding and growth not only on questions on female and transgender masculinities and other queer crossings, but within our communities and lives. We offer this collection with this ethos in mind.

Jude Woods and Nina Kane, West Yorkshire, 2016.

¹⁰ L. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, London, The Athlone Press, 1993, p. 5. First published in French as *Ethique de la Différence Sexuelle* by Les Editions de Minuit, Paris, in 1984.

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1.

MARLOW MOSS: DRESS ADDRESS NAME

DR LUCY HOWARTH

Upon encountering one of the several portrait photographs of the British constructive artist Marlow Moss, taken by Stephen Storm (Stefan Nijhoff) over a period from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s, the initial assumption is that she is a man.¹ If the image is labelled, the name of the sitter neither confirms nor disputes this. Once the twenty-first century viewer is furnished with the information that Moss is in fact a woman, the next assumption is that she is a lesbian; whilst this is accurate it is also a gross simplification of Moss's sartorial choices, chosen name and self-presentation. This essay attempts to unpick the various strands of meaning in the fabric (or fabrication) of Moss's identity, woven into her manly attire and represented in Storm's photographs. The semantic inter-determination of clothing and identity is succinctly described by Gertrude Stein, the great figure of the Parisian ex-pat bohemian scene of which Moss was part: 'dress address name'.²

The inter-war period was an opportune time to reassess one's identity. The horrors of the Great War had revealed the instability of Western civilisation; once eternal identities, British and French, were seen as in decline, or in ruins. A key reference for feminist art history is John Stuart Mill's essay 'The Subjection of Women' in which he points out that

¹ The photograph under discussion here is dated c. 1955 and was taken by Stephen Storm (Stefan Nijhoff), the son of Moss's partner A.H. (Netty) Nijhoff. It has not been possible to obtain permission to reproduce this image.

² G. Stein, *How to Write*, Paris, Plain Edition, 1931, cited in S. Gubar, 'Blessings in Disguise: Cross Dressing as Re-Dressing for Female Modernists', *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 22, 1981, p. 497.

‘everything which is usual appears natural’.³ The evidential changes in what had been constants in society provoked fundamental questions regarding the ‘naturalness’ of gender roles. Culture and nature were irrevocably split; what had seemed natural/cultural, was now revealed as purely cultural, and therefore unstable. ‘NATURE’ is identified as humanity’s ‘greatest enemy’ by Moss in an essay of 1933.⁴ Her seminal philosophical influence, Nietzsche, had foretold this state of affairs:

[...] the individual is convinced that he can do almost anything, that *he can play almost any rôle*, whereby everyone makes experiments with himself, improvises, tries anew, tries with delight, whereby all nature ceases and becomes art.⁵ (emphasis mine)

Acknowledging this ‘cultural mortality’⁶ and the mobility of gender roles which had conflated and become referents for each other, novelist and social commentator Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, wrote:

This civilisation no longer has clothes, no longer has churches, no longer has palaces, no longer has theatres, no longer has paintings, no longer has books, *no longer has sexes*.⁷ (emphasis mine)

The division of the sexes is placed alongside art, as one of civilisation’s greatest achievements, acknowledging gender as cultural artifice, and condemning the blurring of gender boundaries as a portent of the collapse of civilisation. It was during this period of catastrophe that artists (women including Moss, Romaine Brooks, Gluck, Claude Cahun, Hans Anton Prininger, to name a few, and also men such as Marcel Duchamp) began to plot their own positions within the contested field of gender.

Moss has been quoted as having said: ‘I destroyed my old personality and created a new one’.⁸ Whilst it is conceivable that in 1919, at the age of

³ J. Stuart Mill, ‘The Subjection of Women’, London, Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1869, cited in L. Nochlin, ‘Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?’, *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1994, p. 152.

⁴ M. Moss, in *Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif*, no. 2, 1933.

⁵ Moss’s bedside book: F. Nietzsche, *Joyful Wisdom*, trans. T. Common, New York, Frederick Ungar, 1960, p. 303.

⁶ I take this phrase from M.L. Roberts, *Civilisation Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 2-3.

⁷ P. Drieu la Rochelle, *La Suite des Idées*, Paris, Au Sens Pareil, 1927, cited in *ibid.*, p. 2.

thirty, she conclusively changed her outward appearance, the notion of a complete and self-conscious forging of a new personality in an instant of metamorphosis, clearly owes something to a certain amount of self-mythologising. This is indexical of a tradition, present in the discipline of art history since Vasari but particularly prevalent in twentieth century avant-gardism, of artist as martyr/hero. More specifically it has been argued that the mythologising of self is a tactical strategy engaged by lesbian writers and artists to establish a distinct lesbian genealogy, because ‘mythology is history’.⁹ This sentiment has strong connections with what writing there is on Moss, particularly the account of her partner Netty Nijhoff, (the novelist A.H. Nijhoff, cited above). Kati Rötger has characterised the accepted account of Moss’s life as ‘a staging of initiation into manhood’.¹⁰ This notion is one of ‘rites of passage’, a common trope in literature and mythology. The ritual process essentially consists of three stages; in the case of Moss, severance can be seen to have taken place in relation to her family in London and her British nationality, as well as (most significantly) her gender; Cornwall provided the liminal space necessary for her ‘ordeal’ and re-birth (she convalesced there as a child, and found sanctuary there on several occasions as an adult); the replacement of her original name Marjorie with the new name Marlow signified the return to the community, albeit a new community of the Parisian avant-garde where she worked for a decade alongside artists including Piet Mondrian, with whom she is most associated.

Moss evoked the dictum to ‘make of one’s life a work of art’ in her unfinished essay on abstract art.¹¹ She considered her persona and appearance to be equal to her artistic output, in terms of self-expression. Her self-reflection had an eye to posterity; she was enacting her own

⁸ M. Moss, translated from Dutch, quoted from memory by A.H. Nijhoff, in the exhibition catalogue *Marlow Moss*, Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, 1962.

⁹ C. Wolff, *Love Between Women*, New York, Harper and Row, 1971, cited in T.T. Latimer, *Women Together/Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris*, New Brunswick, New Jersey and London, Rutgers University Press, 2005, p. 37.

¹⁰ K. Rötger, translated from German, ‘Nachwort -Anmerkungen Zum Titelbild: White, Black, Red and Grey Von Marlow Moss’, p. 358, in K. Rötger and H. Paul (eds.), *Differenzen in der Geschlechterdifferenz –Aktuelle Perspektiven der Geschlechterforschung*, Berlin, Erich Schmidt Verlag GmbH & Co., 1999, pp. 357-360.

¹¹ M. Moss, ‘Abstract Art’ unpublished, handwritten manuscript, c. 1955, private collection.

biography.¹² It is also an existential position, and has parallels with Nietzsche's concept of the 'eternal return', a thought-experiment to evaluate the beauty or goodness of one's own life; *live that you wish to live again*. Moss's re-invention of herself was precipitated by a period of such reflection, after a moment of crisis, probably the discovery of her sexual orientation. Although her decision to drastically change her self was unlikely to have been rationalised in terms of the eternal return at the time, the episode was potentially legitimised in this way upon becoming acquainted with Nietzsche's writing in the Reading Room of the British Museum during her time in London in the 1920s. Nietzsche dwelled on the conscious act of choosing one's 'rôle' in life.¹³ He considered the artist to be a 'dangerous conception' and wrote with ambivalence of:

Falsity with a good conscience; delight in dissimulation breaking forth as power, pushing aside, overflowing, and sometimes extinguishing the so-called 'character'; the inner longing to play a rôle, to assume a mask, to put on an *appearance*; a surplus of capacity for adaptations of every kind.¹⁴ (emphasis mine)

Moss could not have but related this to her own experience, whether or not she considered her 'mask' to have been assumed or relinquished at the point of her transformation.

Michel Seuphor, in his 1958 book entitled *History of Abstract Painting*, states:

There is no such thing as sex where sensibility is concerned, and I know many a highly-regarded canvas which would meet with derision if it were signed with a woman's name.¹⁵

The historical precedents of creative women replacing given names with elected masculine ones are many. The female artists mentioned above, either adjusted their given names to make them more androgynous (Brooks, Gluck) or invented new masculine names (Cahun and Prininger). On occasions a masculine name has been adopted with the express

¹² A phrase taken from E. Kris and O. Kurz, *Legend, Myth and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979, p. 132.

¹³ Nietzsche, op. cit., pp. 302-303.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 318.

¹⁵ M. Seuphor, *A Dictionary of Abstract Painting*, preceded by a *History of Abstract Painting*, trans. L. Izod, J. Montague and F. Scarfe, London, Methuen, 1958, p. 70.

intention of fooling not only strangers into thinking they were dealing with a man, but to disguise the individual's female gender in general; in the terminology of queer theory, to 'pass'. The sculptor Prinner is an example of a female artist who purposely passed as a man. The painter Wilhelmina Barns-Graham enjoyed the confusion her nickname 'Willie' caused, and believed it freed her from the gender prejudice of collectors initially.¹⁶ Moss's name-change occasionally fooled people into thinking she was a man, even if this was not her explicit intention. In the fifties Moss was mistaken for a man in several newspaper reviews, often resulting in a more favourable reception of her work. John Russell claimed to have not known if Moss 'was a man, a woman, or a vegetable growth'.¹⁷ Moss is also assumed to be male, on account of her name and the constructivist art she produced rather than her appearance, in memos from the Director of the New York Museum of Modern Art, and anecdotally on numerous other occasions.¹⁸

Despite these incidents of confusion, Moss's primary intention was rather for her new name to symbolise her transgender identity. 'Marlow' is an ambiguously gendered name, not a specifically masculine one; Virginia Woolf's character Orlando is perhaps an appropriate comparison.¹⁹ It must be noted that the desire to de-gender one's name isn't the preserve of lesbian artists, as is demonstrated by Barns-Graham and also Paule Vézelay, who were heterosexual as far as is known, as was Orlando in both incarnations. It is not recorded where the name 'Marlow' came from; it may have simply been a nickname derived from Marjorie. Moss seemingly was not insistent on the using of her preferred name; as late as 1932 she is listed as 'Marjorie Moss' in the first issue of the Parisian cahier *Abstraction Création*, although she is simply 'Moss' in subsequent issues (perhaps indicating an increasing resolve). Signatures on earlier works tend to be the neutral 'M. Moss', until the forties when she began to sign her works unequivocally 'Marlow Moss'. In letters to her friends however, and on all official correspondence, she always called herself

¹⁶ N. Yakir, 'Wilhelmina Barns-Graham and Margaret Mellis: the Gendered Construction of "St Ives" Display, Positioning and Displacement', PhD Thesis, Falmouth College of Art and the University of Plymouth, 2002, p. 260.

¹⁷ J. Russell, 'Predicaments', *Sunday Times*, 22 November 1953, (cutting in scrapbook, Hanover Gallery records, Tate Archives, London).

¹⁸ A.H. Barr, Memos, August 1942, held in the Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, AAA AHB 2168, frames 32 and 33, MoMA Archives, New York; and, for example, G.S. Whittet, 'London Commentary', *Studio*, vol. 147, February 1954, p. 59.

¹⁹ V. Woolf, *Orlando*, London, The Hogarth Press, 1928.

‘Marlow Moss’, from the earliest existent example of 1934.²⁰ In turn she was addressed as ‘Miss Moss’ or ‘Marlow’, by everyone but her family. Moss preferred not to have a gendering title preceding her name, as can be seen on her 1942 application form to the Artists’ International Association which she filled in very clearly ‘Moss, Marlow (Marlow Moss)’, but ignored the requirement to ‘Please state whether Mr., Mrs., or Miss’.²¹

The photographic portraits of Moss display her auto-constructed gender identity; it may have been Storm who pressed the shutter but Moss possesses authorship of her image. Each highly posed gesture carries weight. The costumes, which include stiff collars and cuffs, silk cravats, jodhpurs and riding jackets, and the props, most noticeably a half-smoked cigarette, are all carefully considered signifiers. They invoke the country gentleman, the sportsman, and the aristocratic dandy. Masculinity is not the only ‘false’ claim amongst these; Moss was an artist not a jockey, a Jew not a gentile, and from the urban merchant class rather than ‘to-the-manor-born’. All types of clothing-fashion functions in this way, projecting a consciously or unconsciously selected identity by means of a language of culturally ascribed indicators. In the portrait photographs Moss’s appearance of maleness is extreme to the extent that she could ‘pass’, more so than in person. The format of the portraits ascribe her with the characteristics of a hero/protagonist. The lack of contextual information disguises her diminutive size. Her slightly rakish attitude evokes masculine femininity, a kind of foppishness, rather than female masculinity; she is not butch. The representation of a woman as a dandy and *flâneur*, which are, in fact, feminised masculine identities, is in common with the self-portraits of other early- to mid-twentieth century female artists: Prinner, Brooks and Gluck, and also with individuals portrayed by Brassai in his *Le Monocle* photographs of the same period (costumes worn recall the sartorial grammar of male homosexuality, stereotypes such as the dandy-aesthete and the sailor).²² Moss bears more than a passing resemblance to the 1924 constructivist personification of modernity by Sándor Bortnyik, a painting entitled *The New Adam*.

²⁰ Letter from Moss to Georges Vantongerloo, dated 2 October 1934, held in the Vantongerloo Collection, Haus Bill, Zumikon.

²¹ M. Moss, Application to Join the A.I.A., Tate Archives, London.

²² Latimer, op. cit., p. 24. The feminised masculine identities of dandy and *flâneur* is discussed in B. Elliot, ‘Performing the Picture or Painting the Other: Romaine Brooks, Gluck and the Question of Decadence in 1923’, in K. Deepwell (ed.), *Women Artists and Modernism*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1998, pp. 70-82.

If Moss's representation can be, in part, ascribed to the man behind the camera, another layer of meaning is added. Moss, as the partner of his mother, was in effect Storm's stepfather. It is possible that he could have projected such a role upon her, or that she intuitively took on that persona whilst under the scrutiny of his lens. As a surrealist, in apprenticeship to Man Ray, Storm would have been aware of the possibilities of gender slippage. His own homosexuality adds a further layer of complexity to the interchange; Moss, the usurper of his father, who, in Oedipal terms, had succeeded Storm himself and was in some ways an equivalent for him. As his model/subject and muse, Moss destabilised Storm's own masculinity; and his portraits of her continue to destabilise the viewer now. Photography is itself of course technically a process of inversion (from the negative to the positive image), and therefore perhaps the appropriate tool for this.²³

In none of the photographs does Moss engage the viewer's gaze. Although she is clearly aware of the camera and the eyes of her audience, she stares into an introspective space. A woman's averted gaze can index many things: modesty, submission, coquettishness, or a vulnerable state of reverie, but generally a complicity in her objectification. Conversely a man's averted gaze indicates his preoccupation with his inner, intellectual life, and his indifference to the viewer. Moss is clearly to be read in the male mode.

Gender-play was not exclusive to artists and lesbians. In society portraits, such as Tamara de Lempicka's, of Moss's friend the socialite/patron Marika de la Salle (*Portrait of the Duchess de la Salle*, 1925), and in advertising images such as Vilmos Huszár's for cigarettes (*Miss Blanche*, 1927), the same discourse is played out. It is less likely that images such as these can be read as straightforwardly lesbian. A pitfall in gender and queer theory is indicated, that is to project values back erroneously, causing a mis-reading or at least an over-reading of figures such as Moss. It is necessary, if fraught, to attempt instead to see things as Moss would have done.

²³ S. Wilson, 'Femininities - Masquerades', in J. Blessing (ed.), *Rose Is a Rose Is a Rose: Gender Performance in Photography*, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997, p. 143.

By determining precisely what notions of female identity were available to individual [...] women, we can understand what cultural resources they drew on in conceiving and living a social self.²⁴

In the 1920s, it was not unusual for a certain type of aristocratic and educated woman to dress in a ‘mannish’ way. Such a woman, a new woman, or *boyette*, would have been considered liberated, and very fashionable. Her appearance would be a signifier for modernity, not necessarily sexual identity. The fashion for tailored masculine suits could be connected to the recent war. The aesthetic of military uniform became desirable because it denotes the conspicuous leisure of an officer class and has associations with an honourable endeavour.²⁵ The same connection can be made with Moss’s fondness for riding attire, as there is no account of her actually riding a horse. On a broad level women wearing clothes previously reserved for men, was a consequence and reflection of the women’s movement. Campaigners and suffragists in the nineteenth century (Amelia Bloomer, Mary Walker) fought for women’s rights particularly to wear clothes that offered freedom of movement. In 1919, around the time of Moss’s transformation, the French journalist Henriette Sauret described the fashion for the cutting off of one’s hair as a ‘gesture of independence; a personal endeavour’, as if the flowing tresses of the pre-war period were actual shackles to be thrown off.²⁶ Sauret’s words seem to characterise Moss’s decision; whether they directly precipitated it is a matter of supposition.

Masculine tailoring on women was only overtly connected with lesbianism at the point of the obscenity trial of Radclyffe Hall’s novel *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928.²⁷ Following Hall’s account, lesbian sexuality was widely seen as masculine behaviour in a woman, and the sartorial style of Hall, and her protagonist, was inextricably linked to this. Moss was

²⁴ Roberts, *Civilisations*, op. cit., p. 14.

²⁵ ‘Conspicuous leisure’, is a tendency in clothing fashion discussed in Q. Bell, *On Human Finery*, new and revised 2nd edition, London, Allison and Busby, 1992. The concept was originally identified in 1899 in T. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*, 2nd edition, London, Unwin Books, 1925.

²⁶ H. Sauret is quoted in M.L. Roberts, ‘Samson and Delilah Revisited: The Politics of Fashion in 1920s France’, in W. Chadwick and T.T. Latimer (eds.), *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris B Between the Wars*, New Brunswick, New Jersey and London, Rutgers University Press, 2003, p. 68 and p. 80.

²⁷ R. Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1928.