

Sex, Drag, and Male Roles: Investigating Gender as Performance. By **Diane Torr and Stephen Bottoms**. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010. Pp 304 + 19 illus. £23.95/\$26.95 Pb; £62.50/\$70 Hb.

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Thought-provoking and a significant contribution to the ongoing debate on performing gender, this study combines a number of narrative strategies that epitomize the impossibility of telling a single story. Torr, a well-known performer on the drag-king circuit, articulates her lifelong experimentation with the art of the body as a site for gender play. This is a double act in which Torr provides an autobiographical centre and Bottoms provides context and scholarly clout. Their performance is a success.

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They begin with a short prologue entitled 'Pissing Contest #1 (Homage to Nam June Paik)'. Here Torr describes her participation in this event organized by Larry Miller, a well-known Fluxus artist. It involved six people, five men, and one drag king – Torr trying out her new working-class Scots persona Angus McTavish – standing, facing a wall, and peeing into buckets. To her astonishment, Torr had the longest pee and was declared the winner. When her fellow contestants found out she was a woman, they were not pleased. Torr's account offers three aspects that continue throughout: her proficiency in performing drag, the important interface between her work and the experimental performance world of New York, and the anger and celebration she has evoked in others in relation to that work.

The book is divided into three sections. Part 1, entitled 'Foundations', starts as a memoir of Torr's growing up in Scotland, where, as a four-year-old, she found herself observing a pissing contest in the woods between her two older brothers. The chapter continues on to her multifaceted study and training of the body, from Paxton's contact improvisation to the martial art aikido, capturing with clarity and elan a particular historical moment. Torr was one of the early participants in the WOW Café, and her at-times out-of-kilter WOW a-Go-Go performances, like the prologue's pissing contest, unsettled many. Part 2, 'Applications', shifts chronologically to the rise of the drag king, which began its ascendance in the mid-1990s. Here she finds an artistic home in which her king personas bleed into the role of teacher and mentor. A particular signature of king gatherings is the workshop, where anyone can learn the techniques and tricks of gender transformation from the more experienced performers. Part 3 of the book features four of Torr's performance texts followed by her 'Man for a Day: Do It Yourself Guide'. Here, in a straight-faced parody of 'do it your-self-ness', Torr offers her wisdom, from breast binding to body language, from packing to the five o'clock shadow.

Throughout, Bottoms provides a critical historical overview that parallels Torr's memoir. The effect is an ongoing dialogue between an artist who articulates her evolving aesthetic and a critic who provides the backdrop to this remarkable story. The inclusion of the performance texts is a particular highlight. A powerful and affecting work, the Torr–Bottoms discourse is an excellent initiation for those who want to start thinking about gender as performance and equally significant for those who already have thought about it.