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## **Trans-formations of gendered identities in Ireland**

Jeannine Woods

The period 1990-2010 saw several major transitions in Irish culture and society. The establishment of the IRA and UVF/LVF ceasefires and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland, a significant challenge to and weakening of the position of the Catholic Church as a major power bloc within the Irish state, and the increased visibility and acceptance of non-normative gender and sexual identities at discursive and legislative levels, all occurring against the backdrop of the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger, prompted changing constructions of national and gender identity. Critical analysis, however, cautions against the easy equation of change with positive progress towards equality and liberation. Looking at representations of trans identities issuing from within and without the LGBT movement at various points during the Celtic Tiger and beyond, this paper illustrates the complex and variegated relationships between such representations and dominant discourses on gender and on national belonging. An exploration of Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* and *Breakfast on Pluto*, and on performances associated with the 'Alternative Miss Ireland' pageant, demonstrates that while representations of transgressive identities can serve to support as well as challenge hegemonic constructions of gender and nationality, performative representations, and drag performances in particular, may serve not only to queer dominant and intersecting discourses on masculinity, sexuality and national identity, but also to reinfect Bakhtin's conception of the carnivalesque in a critical engagement both with political questions and with dominant constructions and definitions of the political field itself.

In looking at processes and acts of queering, it is important to note that the term "queer" is neither fixed nor uncontested. Queer theory comprises a large, complex and diverse body of theory; while it is commonly seen as focused exclusively on gay, lesbian, bisexual and

transgender identities and subjectivities, significant elements of queer theory have engaged in a broader critique of the construction of subjectivities. The strands of Queer theory utilised here are concerned with the interrogation of the various operations which constitute gender and of the intersections between the operation of heteronormative gender identities and the broader operation of structures of power. As Cathy Cohen argues:

For many of us, the label “queer” symbolizes an acknowledgement that through our existence and everyday survival we embody sustained and multi-sited resistance to systems (based on dominant constructions of race and gender) that seek to normalize our sexuality, exploit our labour, and constrain our visibility. At the intersection of oppression and resistance lies the radical potential of queerness to bring together all those deemed marginal and all those committed to liberatory politics.<sup>1</sup>

Heteronormativity can be defined as “the institutions, structures of understanding and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent – that is, organised as a sexuality – but also privileged.”<sup>2</sup> It is important to note, however, that heteronormativity does not institute a uniform dichotomy of privilege and marginalisation between heterosexuality and homosexuality; various heterosexualities, including those of working-class communities, racial and ethnic minorities and single parents are frequently stigmatised as deviant.<sup>3</sup> Queerness thus holds the potential to challenge heteronormativity as a normalising process that polices not only non-heterosexual genders and sexualities but that intersects with systems of power and exclusion in relation to multiple categories of identity.

The insights offered by Queer theory and practice in relation to the operations of heteronormativity have a particular resonance in Ireland, where the interrelationships between gender, sexuality and national identity have had broad and profound implications at discursive and concrete levels. Much has been written by post-colonial and feminist critics in relation to the gendering of Irish nationalism. Strands of anti-colonial nationalism inverted yet retained

binary, gendered definitions of colonialism, casting itself as the defender and liberator of the mother/goddess from the clutches of a marauding, aggressive, masculine empire. Such intersections between gender, sexuality and nationality ensured the centrality of heteronormativity in the establishment and consolidation of the post-colonial state.<sup>4</sup>

Patriarchal, heteronormative structurings of Irish identity were bolstered and complicated by the central role of the Catholic Church in nationalist discourse and in post-independence Irish political and cultural life; discourses on national purity were closely bound up with sexuality and with Catholic morality. While the discourses and practices of the Irish nation involved a policing and circumscription of female sexuality as in other post-colonial states, the circumscription of Irish male sexuality was evident also, with heterosexuality regulated even within the terms of its only acceptable expression, the context of the family. Sexuality was represented as conterminous with national and religious identity, and subordinate to the strictures of both. The influence of the Catholic Church on the Irish State ensured that the family was given special status within the 1937 Constitution, which pledges to protect the institution of Marriage on which the family is founded. The patriarchal family unit and the institution of heterosexual marriage as its locus are given official sanction here; sexualities, genders and identities not conforming to such heteronormative models are marginalised and excluded from the canon of national belonging.

With the rise of the Celtic Tiger and its championing of a neo-liberal economic model and agenda, Irish masculinity became increasingly defined by the acquisition and display of affluence; though still bound up with aggressive risk-taking and bravado, such energies were to be channelled into the pursuit of wealth and the accumulation of consumer goods, through which identity is constructed and affirmed. Constructions and images of gender during and

beyond the Celtic Tiger era have been incisively examined by Debbie Ging, who identifies the rise of post-feminist discourse, the growing popularity of bio-determinist discourses on gender and the growth of an increasingly commercialised media-scape as major factors shaping contemporary understandings and constructions of men and women in Ireland as essentially polarised, each shaped by a consumerism which targets gender-specific markets through the 'ironic' use of brash gender stereotyping which advertising 'both lampoons and simultaneously reaffirms'. Ging observes that free-market economics and post-feminist culture in Ireland, as elsewhere, have combined to support a neo-liberal agenda on gender which, beneath its liberal and progressivist rhetoric, is deeply regressive.<sup>5</sup>

In looking at representations that engage with historical and contemporaneous constructions of gender and that trouble discourses which equate Irishness with narrow and essentialised categories of identity, it is worth reiterating that not all representations of trans identities are necessarily subversive of dominant heteronormative discourses. One of the earliest mainstream gender-transgressive representations in an Irish cultural context, *The Crying Game*, may be viewed as a case in point. Released during the Troubles in 1992, the Jordan film was hailed as groundbreaking in its crossing of boundaries and borders, not least in the realms of national, gender and sexual identity. It tells the story of an IRA cell in the North that captures a British soldier, Jody (Forrest Whitaker), who is lured by the sexual advances of Jude (Miranda Richardson), a member of the cell, and guarded by Fergus, the sensitive, humane IRA man played by Stephen Rea. The two men establish a bond, and Fergus promises Jody that he will look up his girlfriend, Dil, in London. In attempting to escape his IRA captors, Jody is killed by a British Army tank and Fergus travels to London, having abandoned his IRA connections. He finds Dil, (Jaye Davidson) and the two establish a relationship – it is during a scene where the Fergus and Dil become sexually involved that the viewer (and Jimmy, as Fergus has

renamed himself) discover that Dil has a penis and is a transsexual. Fergus's old IRA comrades seek him out to carry out a killing in London; he is pursued by the psychopathic Jude, who is killed by Dil. The film closes with Dil visiting Fergus/Jimmy in prison, where he serves his sentence, having taken the rap for Jude's murder.

Notwithstanding Dil's transsexuality and the transgressive elements of the relationship between Dil and Fergus/Jimmy, *The Crying Game* is inimical to a queering of dominant discourses on gender or national identity. Dil is not the subject of the narrative and displays no subjectivity of her own; she is placed as first Jody's and then Jimmy's woman. Jimmy's move into domestic romance and the feminine sphere (though this is a romance that may never be consummated, as Jimmy/Fergus is straight, and the suggestion is that this is a boundary that is fixed and will not be crossed) precludes his continued adherence not only to militant republicanism but, it seems, to an Irish identity *tout court*, of which militant nationalism is the only option for a nationalist male from the North of Ireland. Meanwhile, Jude's involvement in militant nationalism is represented as negatively transgressive, an annihilating phallic woman wielding a gun and baying for blood, whilst Dil represents the idealised feminine, standing by her man in unstinting love and loyalty. Notwithstanding the discontinuity between Dil's anatomy and gender, dominant heteronormative visions of Irish national identity and gender identities and relations are firmly upheld within *The Crying Game*.

*Breakfast on Pluto*, Jordan's second foray into trans representation, is a more radical interrogation of the intersections between nationalist and gender discourses in Ireland. Utilising camp on narratological and stylistic levels, the film, as the self-narrated story of "The Life and Times of Patrick Kitten Braden", undertakes a queering of aspects of 1970s Irish society. Patrick (Cillian Murphy), living in the border town of Tyreelin, is abandoned by his unmarried mother and brought up by local woman Mrs. Braden. From a young age, Patrick/Kitten reveals himself as transgendered, adopting the name of Kitten and dressing as a girl. Among Kitten's

friends are Charlie, a young black woman (Ruth Negga) and Irwin (Laurence Kinlan), who becomes Charlie's boyfriend.

As the Troubles in the North escalate, Irwin joins the IRA, while Kitten leaves Tyreelin and travels to London in search of her mother, working in various jobs including prostitution. Charlie falls pregnant with Irwin's child and when Irwin is murdered by the IRA as an informer, Kitten returns to Tyreelin to take care of Charlie. Both Kitten and Charlie stay with local priest Father Liam McIvor (Liam Neeson) towards whom Kitten has been hostile and angry, having discovered him to be her father and blaming him for the loss of her mother. The church and parochial house are destroyed in a petrol bombing (whether sectarian or prompted by the presence of transgendered Kitten and the unmarried and pregnant Charlie is not made explicit). Father Liam risks his life to save Kitten from the fire, and he and Kitten finally establish a positive relationship before Charlie and Kitten head for London, where the film closes as they walk through its streets with Charlie's baby.

One of the most immediately striking elements about Patrick/Kitten is her visibility. Visibility as a political strategy plays an important role within the LGBT movement and queer politics generally; in the Irish context, visibility vis-à-vis marginality and marginal sexuality (or indeed any expression of sexuality) has a particular resonance and significance. Ireland's culture of lace-curtain respectability, whereby conformity and adherence to social and especially to moral strictures and the often hypocritical discrepancies between public and private rhetoric, expression and behaviour have been the subject of much Irish literature and cultural representation from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Kitten refuses to be contained or to submit to the culture of silence surrounding that which stands outside the sphere of socio-religious, cultural acceptability. She makes no attempt to conform to what Butler terms "recognisable

standards of gender intelligibility”<sup>6</sup> her gender and sexual identity refuses fixity, as she expresses at different points during the film “I’m a girl”/“I’m not a girl”, an illustration of a queer positionality rather than a of fixed gender identity. Unlike Dil, Kitten is not seeking to “pass” as female; as a Street Queen, she performs gender transgression as an everyday practice.

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Kitten’s actions are thus profoundly and radically political in terms of normative gender hierarchies. Her position vis-à-vis the Troubles and the growing militant republicanism within Tyreelin has been too readily interpreted as apolitical and disinterested, lying as it does outside of her singular concern with her personal desires and happiness (such a reading is reflective of a not-uncommon view of non-heteronormative discursive practices as divorced from the “properly” political, a point to which I will return later). Rather than issuing from a lack of engagement, Kitten’s position on the Troubles can be read as a queering of the discursive matrix within which the conflict is located: a masculinist, rigidly-defined conception of national identity where gender heterogeneity, as with so much else, is deemed as lying outside its borders and where Irish identity is policed to ensure that its borders remain unbreached. In one of the film’s more parodically camp scenes, Kitten joins in with an IRA parade led by Irwin, who is dressed in an army jacket and military regalia, followed by a group of male and female volunteers dressed identically in black tops with black gloves and black sunglasses. Linking arms with Irwin, Kitten asks “If I join up, can I have pink sunglasses, please?” undercutting the gravitas of the parade and its masculinist militarism.

Kitten’s mode of being and of performing gender draws on elements of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, comprising laughter, spectacle, parody and bound up with the inversion of existing power relations and hierarchies. Carnival culture involves the “temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men and of the prohibitions of usual life.”<sup>7</sup>



Kitten's relational modes echo Bakhtin's assertion that the carnivalesque "liberates the world from all that is dark and terrifying; it takes away all fears ... all that was frightening in ordinary life is turned into amusing or ludicrous monstrosities ... Fear is the extreme expression of narrow-minded and stupid seriousness, which is defeated by laughter."<sup>8</sup> Where Bakhtin's carnivalesque involves only a temporary inversion of hierarchies, sanctioned by the powerful in the interests of containing dissent and maintaining the status quo, Kitten's carnivalesque approach to life seeks to effect a sustained subversion of gender and power relations at a personal level.

While *The Crying Game* and *Breakfast on Pluto* diverge markedly in their positioning on gender and national identity, they also share important commonalities. In both films, the main protagonist's railing against dominant strictures of gendered and national identity necessitates an escape from Irish territory. As Joe Cleary has noted in relation to *The Crying Game*:

The city [of London] is ... portrayed as an idealised space in which all territorial identities are, or ought to be, irrelevant. The positioning of the capital as an extraterritorial cosmopolitan zone, and as if it were outside of national space, however, is a rather conventional strategy for concealing its function as the nerve centre of state power ... The city in Jordan's film is a place where men are free to remake themselves – Fergus politically, Dil sexually – but this power to refashion oneself seems conditioned on a gender anxiety that is linked to the repudiation of territorial or national markers.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly in *Breakfast on Pluto*, Kitten's trans identity (and Charlie's status as unmarried mother) ultimately necessitates a move to the metropolitan centre of London. While emigration from Ireland reflects the lived experience of many Irish people over successive generations whose transgressive gender or sexual status forced them to leave the country, transgressive Irish gender identities are represented in both films as displaced identities, which can only be lived out elsewhere. Within the film, narrow definitions of national gender identity preclude any deviation by those who either choose or are forced to remain in the country. Hegemonic models of masculinity are confined to militant

republicanism, which precludes Irwin from attaining domestic happiness with Charlie and leads to his murder, and the Catholic priesthood, which both denies Father Liam from practising the Christian value of compassion and condemns to him a life alone.

Bearing in mind that the films are set in periods roughly twenty years apart, *Breakfast on Pluto*, released thirteen years after *The Crying Game* but set in an earlier period, can be seen to reflect the dominant rhetoric of contemporaneous Irish society. In its parodic critique of the “bad old days” when transgressive and alternative gender identities were unacceptable in Ireland, *Breakfast* offers a metatextual commentary on contemporary liberal and pluralist attitudes towards gender and sexuality, implying that the issues raised by the film belong to the past. In remembering Ging’s assertion that the neo-liberal rhetoric in contemporary Ireland is underlain by regressive constructions of gender, often glossed over by the increased visibility of homosexuality alongside promotion and acceptance of the myth of gender equality as a *fait accompli*,<sup>10</sup> the film’s radicalism in its critique of historical constructions of Irish gendered and sexual identities is limited by its relationship to contemporary, post-feminist discourse.

If dominant discourse cites the increased visibility of homosexuality as a means of masking heteronormative gender ideologies, that visibility has also facilitated a growing awareness of and interest in LGBT issues and cultural performances among increasing numbers of straight as well as non-hetero supporters and audiences. Many of the trans representations and performances which have issued from within the LGBT movement offer radical critiques of Irish heteronormativity past and present. While such representations span various media including cinema, theatre and cabaret-type performance, performative representations, in their immediacy and relative freedom from the budgetary constraints and market strictures bearing on film in particular, are especially well placed to serve as a site of radical engagement both with gender politics and with politically current questions. The Alternative Miss Ireland

pageant (AMI) illustrates the potential of the carnivalesque to critically and politically intervene in discourses on gender, sexuality and national identity in Ireland on a collective level. An alternative beauty contest focused on drag performances, AMI emerged within the LGBT community in the mid-1980s and ran annually as an AIDS charity benefit from 1997 until 2012, drawing increasing audiences from the heterosexual as well as the LGBT communities during its lifetime.

The promotional material for the pageant describes it as “expanding definitions of beauty through spectacle and gender augmentation. AMI looks for the broadest range of entrants - men, women and anything else - to fuck with ideas of beauty and gender in a tumescent celebration of alternative beauty and performance, of concentrated otherness.” Entrants of various genders and sexual orientations, termed “cailins” (“cailín” is the Irish word for girl), competed for the Golden Briquette<sup>11</sup> trophy and the annual title of Alternative Miss Ireland in an evening of drag performances staged in Dublin’s Olympia Theatre under the watch of Miss Panti, one of AMI’s founders and pageant MC. From the early 2000s, AMI attracted increasing mainstream publicity and attention, its national and international visibility bolstered through the use of social media.

In its display of parody, subversion, the Bakhtinian grotesque and its emphasis on laughter, the AMI pageant, like drag performances generally, stands within the realm of the carnivalesque. As with the performative modes employed by street queens, Butler argues that drag as queer performance works to subvert heteronormativity in parodying the notion of an original or primary gender identity through its play upon the anatomy of performer and the gender being performed, and that drag contests serve as one site of queer contestation where the visibility of the queer body assumes a political value. At such sites of queer contestation, the theatrical is

not opposed to the political but instead draws attention to the increasing politicisation *of* theatricality.<sup>12</sup> Some Marxist and feminist scholars have contested the political value of drag performances and other queer practices, arguing that they are centred on local activities of performative transgression that do not serve to engage with broader questions of economic, social and political (in)justice.<sup>13</sup> Such perspectives have been legitimately challenged as rendering the cultural politics of sexuality as secondary to the “real” business of politics;<sup>14</sup> they also neglect to acknowledge that drag performances sometimes serve as examples of performative transgression that engage directly with larger sociopolitical questions.

The AMI has been host to a huge diversity of entries and performances over its lifetime centred around a broad diversity of themes and subjects. In looking at performances which highlight the politicisation of theatricality within queer practices, the performance of Miss Opus Gei and the Glorious Mysteries in the 2010 pageant stands out as particularly powerful. Opus Gei’s performance was in direct defiance of Section 36 of the 2010 Defamation Act, which defines as an offence the “publication or utterance of blasphemous matter” deemed “grossly abusive or insulting in relation to matters held sacred by any religion.” The third act of Opus Gei’s performance opens with the tree stump of Rathkeale, a reference to a tree stump in the grounds of a church in Rathkeale, Co. Limerick in which parishoners claimed to have seen the face of the Virgin Mary in 2009. Music begins to play and the priestly figures surrounding the tree stump chant as they move across the stage in sombre procession. Suddenly, as Madonna’s “Like a prayer” begins to play, Opus Gei, dressed as the Virgin Mary, emerges from the tree stump. She and the priests are joined onstage by four altar boys; after lining up to receive communion from the priests which they promptly **snowball**<sup>15</sup>, the altar boys strip down to white briefs and embark on an erotic defrocking of the priests, removing their robes so that the priests are dressed only in white briefs and their priestly collars.

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As Opus Gei continues synching to “Like a Prayer”, all those onstage perform simulated three-way sexual acts. Two priests kneel in front of Opus Gei, who simulates a double fisting<sup>16</sup> before attaching leashes to the collars of all four priests, commanding them to crawl before her. As the performance draw to a close, the priests and altar boys form a chorus line, holding pictures of the current pope, Benedict XVI, which they rip up to a recording of Sinead O’Connor’s voice declaring “Fight the real enemy”, taken from her controversial 1992 performance on US television which ended with her utterance of those words as she ripped up a photograph of the then-pope, John Paul II.

Opus Gei’s performance contains all of the elements of the carnivalesque in its parodic hyperbole, its utilisation of grotesque humour, its employment of popular cultural references and inversions and subversions of power and authority. While it was not the only performance in the 2010 pageant to defy the blasphemy law, it offers a sharply parodic commentary on revelations which have come to light in recent years of extensive sexual abuse by individual religious and within Catholic institutions in Ireland. Reports and investigations have revealed Church collusion in the protection of abusers which extends to the Vatican. Opus Gei’s performance highlights the contradictions between the Church’s teachings on and policing of sexuality and morality and its actions and inactions in relation to clerical perpetrators of sexual abuse and their victims.

According to Donal Mulligan, who produced the piece, Opus Gei is concerned with “the sexual liberation of the altar boys, not the abuse of priests”, and seeks to counter the elisions between homosexuality and paedophilia which arose in sections of the media during revelations of clerical abuse.<sup>17</sup> The priests in the performance are seduced rather than coerced by the altar boys; Opus Gei’s use of leashes to control the priests, with its associations with the dominance/submission aspects of the sexual practices of BDSM<sup>18</sup> is illuminating in this regard. BDSM utilises power and submission dynamics in the context of consensual desire and

gratification; as Califia notes, BDSM can enable the assignment of meaning and power on a voluntary basis, according to one's desire or whim.<sup>19</sup> In utilising the dynamics of consensual, sexual dominance and submission within the performance, Opus Gei makes a parodic commentary on the abuses of its extensive power by the institution of the Catholic Church.

As with most drag performances, Opus Gei is designed to evoke laughter and hilarity among its audience. One can speculate whether the location of drag within the language of laughter may be one of the reasons why it is dismissed as operating "merely" within the sphere of cultural representation rather than within the sphere of substantive political activism. Bakhtin writes of the understandings of laughter which came to prominence after the Renaissance, whereby "[l]aughter is not a universal, philosophical form ... That which is important and essential cannot be comical. Neither can history and persons representing it ... be shown in a comic aspect. The sphere of the comic is narrow and specific ... the essential truth about the world and about man cannot be told in the language of laughter."<sup>20</sup> In contrast to such understandings, the carnivalesque understanding of laughter is that "it has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole ... [T]he world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint."<sup>21</sup>

In this context, queer performances such as that of Opus Gei engage in a critical form of "truth-telling" regarding cultural and socio-political issues. If the Renaissance carnivalesque involved a temporary and bounded period of licence and inversion, critical contemporary queer performances employ the carnivalesque mode in the service of sustained cultural and political critiques that intersect with other, more conventionalised forms and modes of political activism. Opus Gei's performance unquestionably forms part of a broader movement within and without the Irish LGBT movement that protests the Church's stance on homosexuality, that calls for justice and accountability in relation to clerical sexual abuse and that continues to

campaign against the Catholic Church's continued involvement in and control of Irish state institutions, not least its extensive control of primary and secondary education.<sup>22</sup> In contrast to *Breakfast on Pluto*'s metanarrative of unilinear, liberal progress, Opus Gei's performance both highlights and critiques the continuing power and influence of Catholic Church within the Irish state and its concrete implications for Irish society.

As a further illustration of the reinlection of the carnivalesque in a queering of the political, the promotional material for the 2011 Alternative Miss Ireland pageant displays an engagement with current political and social issues through a drag performance on the streets of Dublin. Late 2010 and early 2011 witnessed the implementation of some of the austerity measures demanded by the EU/IMF Troika as part of Ireland's bailout programme in the wake of the banking collapse and the financial and political crises that brought the Celtic Tiger crashing to an end in late 2008. Austerity has focused on pay cuts within the public sector, on increases in taxation of lower and middle incomes and on cutbacks in government spending heavily targeted towards health, education and social welfare. The AMI 2011 promo, entitled "AMI goes Diddly Sci-Fi", describes the scene on O'Connell Street, Dublin's main thoroughfare: "Troubled as they are, people ebb and flow along and down all the streets, plastic bags straining with assorted processed foods and cheap shoes. The mood is trodden, the government rotten." Miss Panti then appears and proceeds to trans-form some of Dublin's iconic buildings and monuments:

Suddenly, in flashes of green, white and orange light, Panti starts to shoot patriotic lazer-beams out of her false-titties. Zappetta! Zling-ting! Diddly-teeeze! Eeek-eile! She zaps the GPO — it is transformed into a row of hair curlers. Daniel O'Connell is zleeeked into huge shiny plastic hair dryer. A Luas<sup>23</sup> is electrified into a giant tube of lilac lip-gloss. Then, as if seeking more targets, she turns and starts to march across O'Connell Bridge, making one last turn to zap the Spire into a golden Elnett hairspray can. Panti marches on, stops midway on the bridge, and transforms Liberty Hall, in a burst of green flaring plasma, into a giant red lipstick ... Panti-Fem-Bot Lazer-Tits lights up the down-trodden with her patriotic beams of tranny-transformation, rebuilding the cityscape as the metropolis of Alternative Miss Ireland.<sup>24</sup>

In its dragging of the genre of retro sci-fi, the AMI 2011 promo is heavily camp and hilariously parodic. Through her transformation of buildings and monuments with symbolic, historical and political importance vis-à-vis the struggle for Irish political independence and social equality, Miss Panti's performance comments on the disjuncture between the discourses of nationalism and the trade union movement and Ireland's increasing social and economic inequities and perceived political impotence in the face of the current crises. Her targeting of icons and symbols of the Celtic Tiger similarly satirises its rhetoric on Ireland's progress under the operation of neoliberal economics.

While drag performance is by definition subversive of bio-determinist constructions of gender, Miss Panti's trans-formation of Dublin through the utilisation of beauty products and cosmetics aimed at a female market serves to ironise the gender-coded consumerism increasingly held up as the defining element of masculine and feminine identities in Irish society. The performance is subversive in its claim to place, through its reconstruction both of Dublin's cityscape and of the Irish gender-scape. In contrast to the representations in Jordan's films, the AMI constructs a space for transgressive gender identities within the discursive and concrete territories of Irish society. Panti's reconstruction of Dublin as queer "territory of belonging"<sup>25</sup> is radical in its critique of contemporary heteronormative discourses as marginalising increasing groups within Irish society, situating trans-gressive gender performance within the field of the socio-political.

Critical explorations of shifting gender formations and socio-political and economic landscapes in Ireland during the Celtic Tiger era and beyond highlight the fact that while such shifts have facilitated the increased visibility and representation of non-heteronormative gender identities, the interplay between those representations and dominant discourses and structures is neither uniform nor necessarily progressive. Yet if popular trans representations, such as those in



Jordan's films, may be regressive or limited, the increased visibility and popularity of transgressive gender performance, most notably through the medium of drag, can offer a broadly accessible, radical critique of gendered formations of Irishness. If, as Butler has observed, drag parodically imitates the myth of originality, offering an occasion for laughter in its revelation that gender identity is performative and that "the original" is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one *can* embody<sup>26</sup>, the carnivalesque performances of Opus Gei and Miss Panti parody myths of originality as they relate both to gender and to national identity in Ireland. Through their queering of dominant historical and contemporary discourses on Irishness and of post-feminist constructions of gender, the drag performances discussed here bring together the cultural politics of gender transgression and sexuality and critiques of the politics of gender, social and economic (in)equality in an Irish context, such queer practices may prompt broadening sections of Irish society to refigure their readings of and engagements with political and socio-economic problems in Ireland and beyond. Therein may lie one possible response to the question posed at the end of the 2011 AMI promo: "What will save us, now that men don't?"

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<sup>1</sup> "Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?," in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae Henderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24:2(1998): 548.

<sup>3</sup> See Siobhan Somerville, "Queer," in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, eds. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 189.

<sup>4</sup> Eithne Luibhéid, "Nationalist Heterosexuality and Irish Citizenship Law," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 110:1 (2011), 180.

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<sup>5</sup> 'All-consuming Images: New Gender Formations in post-Celtic-Tiger Ireland', in *Transforming Ireland: Challenges, Critiques and Resources*, eds. D. Ging, P. Kirby and Michael Cronin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 22.

<sup>7</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 15.

<sup>8</sup> *Rabelais*, 47.

<sup>9</sup> "Fork-Tongued on the Border Bit: Partition and the Politics of Form in Contemporary Narratives of the Northern Irish Conflict", *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 95:1, (1996), 267.

<sup>10</sup> 'All-Consuming Images', 69.

<sup>11</sup> Briquettes are compacted bricks of shredded peat used as a solid fuel. The semi-state company Bord na Móna was established under de Valera's government in 1946 to commercially harvest peat from Ireland's bogs as a part of de Valera's mission to develop Ireland as a self-sufficient economy.

<sup>12</sup> See *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), introduction; *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 233.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. Nancy Fraser, "Pragmatism, Feminism and the Linguistic Turn," in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, ed. L. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> See Judith Butler, "Merely Cultural", *New Left Review* 227: 33-44; Cohen, "Punks", 27-28.

<sup>15</sup> A sexual practice where a partner takes the semen of another partner into the mouth and passes it to a third partner, usually through kissing.

<sup>16</sup> The insertion of a hand into the vagina or rectum.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Ed Madden, *The Gay and Lesbian Review* (Nov/Dec 2010), 22.

<sup>18</sup> BDSM is an acronym for bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism.

<sup>19</sup> Patrick Califia, *Sex Changes: Transgender Politics* (Berkeley: Cleis Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Rabelais*, 67.

<sup>21</sup> *Rabelais*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> The implications for children's education on gender and sexuality in Church-controlled schools has been highlighted by many such schools' rejection of various Department of Education Sex and Health Education programmes, one example being the Congress of Catholic Secondary Schools Parents' rejection of the 'Exploring Masculinities' programme on the grounds that it encourages positive attitudes towards homosexuality and gay marriage.

<sup>23</sup> Dublin's tram system, opened in 2004.

<sup>24</sup> The video of the AMI promo is available on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bm3a5Vz7xMQ>

<sup>25</sup> Anne-Marie Fortier, "Re-membering Places and the Performance of Belonging(s)", in *Performativity and Belonging*, ed. Vikki Bell (London: Sage, 1999), 42.

<sup>26</sup> *Gender Trouble*, 176.