
Hedwig and the Angry Inch: A Radical Affront to Conventional Renditions of Gender

By Rosa Salazar

An examination of the rock opera's challenge to prevailing perceptions of gender framed within the context of a live interactive performance at the Black Box Cabaret in the spring of 2003.

“why is it so lonely in between boy and girl
they’re so glued down in this world and what it means”

from “boy girl wonder”
by *bitch and animal*
righteous babe records

The sexes were not two as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman and the union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature, which had once real existence, but now is lost, and the word ‘Androgynous’ is only preserved as a term of reproach.

From Aristophanes’ Speech from Plato’s Symposium

The lights dim over a hushed, packed house. The stage stands empty, except for a few musical instruments and microphone stands. The back wall, constructed to portray the Berlin Wall, is spray-painted with graffiti. Coils of barbed wire decorate its rim. A drummer, bass player, keyboard player and guitarist saunter on stage and poise themselves over their instruments while the crowd goes wild, clapping and shouting in anticipation. The band is dressed in a hodgepodge of sparkly tank tops, ripped t-shirts, combat boots, and their faces are heavy with makeup. Their hair ranges from long with colorful hair extensions to short, bleached and spiked, to frizzy haloes of curls. A tall, long-haired guy(?) wearing a bandana on his head walks sullenly to one of the microphones set downstage. In a sharp-edged, bitter voice, the guy announces, “Ladies and gentlemen, whether you like it or not . . .

Hedwig” (Mitchell 13).¹ A lone electric guitar intones the first notes of “America the Beautiful” as a spotlight flashes to the back of the house. Members of the audience crane their necks to view the figure striding confidently down the center aisle, a tall queen with a compact, muscular build, cascades of blond hair curling down her back and around her face, graceful eyelashes, sculpted cheekbones deeply accented with stark lines of rouge, and lips so glistening and full

¹ Any dialogue or song lyric from the play will be cited by the author’s name and page of the playscript on which it appears. Since John Cameron Mitchell wrote the text for the performance and Stephen Trask wrote the music and lyrics, I will attribute speaking parts to Mitchell and sung parts to Trask, although it should be noted that citations of either writer refer to the *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* playscript. Narration of play action is from my own memory of viewing two consecutive nights of a student-produced live performance of the rock musical on the Monterey Bay campus of California State University on April 4th and 5th, 2003.

they appear as pools of deep, red water. As Hedwig takes the stage, she² keeps her back to the audience to show her cape modeled after the American flag. In a single motion, Hedwig spins to face the audience and flings the cape to the floor, revealing a tight denim party dress which clings to her sculpted body. She swipes the microphone from its stand, and as the electric guitar scrapes out the first dirty yet triumphant introductory notes, Hedwig sing-speaks in a full, sultry voice, "Don't you know me? I'm the new Berlin Wall. Try and tear me down (Mitchell 14)!"

And the rock and roll saga begins. Through song and monologue, Hedwig will proceed to tell the story of her life, of the forces which have come together to culminate in this night of music and drama before the audience now. Just two verses into the first song, we get a hint at what is at stake here. This is more than the story of a rocker who dresses in drag for attention. This is Hedwig, singing

I rose off of the doctor's slab
like Lazarus from the pit
Now everyone wants to take a stab
and decorate me
with blood graffiti and spit (Trask 14).

Here we are given the first hint at the major themes Hedwig will explore. This is a story of transformation and recreation, prejudice and marginalization. It

² The character of Hedwig will, for the most part, be referred to using the pronouns "she" and "her" and the signifier "woman" in cases where substitutions for her name are necessary. At times she will be referred to as "he", especially when referring to Hedwig's boyhood as Hansel, and the time leading up to and directly following her botched sex change operation. I hope this will not be overly confusing, but that it will provide some mirroring, in the text of the paper, of the instability of Hedwig's gender identity, and an illustration of the limitations posed by the he/she binary.

refers, time and again, to icons and myths, bringing dearly held conventions and traditions into a new space. Hedwig's botched sex change operation and her subsequent trials, her status as an immigrant from East Germany to the United States, land of supposed freedom and opportunity, illustrates a re-appropriation and refiguring of conventional ideas of gender. The story moves through a narrative of the events of Hedwig's life, and the telling of that narrative draws on myths as diverse as Aristophanes' speech from Plato's *Symposium* to the Christian story of Lazarus. In this story, the margin bangs at the center through an appropriation of the center's methods. The play works with the rather conventional theatrical structure of rising action, climax, and denouement. A problem is presented, the story works up to a climax which is heightened using the possibilities of lights and sound, then the problem is resolved and the audience experiences a catharsis brought on by relief and the joy that a sort of redemption has taken place. The characters have been liberated from the bonds of control that held them. A universal good will has triumphed. All is well, right? Everything in its proper place, the play over, the audience can go home to their respective "realities" unchanged, if perhaps uplifted by this story of a drag queen who overcame.

Except for Hedwig. Hedwig still remains. Hedwig did not disappear after the actor, who, as far as I could tell, was actually an anatomically "normal" male, left the stage. Hedwig in our minds remains the pretty drag queen who confesses her story to us. Who tells us in graphic detail of the way her anatomical sex was "mis-"constructed and how that construction placed her at the margins of a margin. If Hedwig had just been a boy

who turned another boy's head, and consequently discovered that he liked boys too, and wanted to dress like a girl and claim the pronoun "she" as part of her identity, perhaps her story wouldn't be so unusual. But Hedwig was first a boy named Hansel, and Hansel took on his mother's name, Hedwig, and his mother's pronoun "she," and underwent surgery to become a girl so that she could marry an American officer who would sweep her away to America where she would live happily ever after; away from her broken home which her sexually abusive father had left when she was very young, away from her emotionally distant mother, away from oppressive East Germany. Except that from the beginning, Hedwig is operating at a loss. The sex change is a failure, and Hedwig is left without a vagina and only a one-inch mound of flesh as testimony to what once was there. Her husband divorces her and she is left destitute, living in a trailer park, making money as a late-night cashier, babysitting and doing other odd jobs, "mostly the jobs we call blow (Mitchell 57)." If this sounds overly dramatic, well, it is drama. Let us allow it that, and instead focus on the play of gender in this heavily contextualized story. There is so much going on, and from Hedwig as child to Hedwig as immigrant to Hedwig as rock star, the play never lets us forget that Hedwig is situated in a text. Within the conventions of actors playing characters, there are odd displacements, since Hedwig is played by a male actor, and Hedwig's current lover Yitzhak, supposedly a former drag queen, is played by a female. Right away we are aware that the genders of the characters are performative, an idea Judith Butler is fascinated by, especially as it relates to the performance of drag. In her essay, "Per-

formative Acts and Gender Constitution," Butler states:

The transvestite, however, can do more than simply express the distinction between sex and gender, but challenges, at least implicitly, the distinction between appearance and reality that structures a good deal of popular thinking about gender identity. If the 'reality' of gender is constituted by the performance itself, then there is no recourse to an essential and unrealized 'sex' or 'gender' which gender performances ostensibly express. Indeed, the transvestite's gender is as fully real as anyone whose performance complies with social expectations (p. 278).

The characters in *Hedwig* move beyond even the conventional idea of drag as a man in woman's clothing. Their "actual" gender is a transitory thing. To explain what gender Hedwig is, a long narrative is necessary. Even to use the ready labels "transgender" or "transsexual" requires explaining, since those terms can mean many different things. And the gender of Yitzhak is never addressed in intimate detail. At one point Hedwig tells the audience that "he (Yitzhak) was the most famous drag queen in Zagreb" (Mitchell 54). So what we know is that a 'female' actor is playing the character of Yitzhak, that Yitzhak is referred to through the pronoun 'he,' and that 'he' was once a drag queen. Searching for some essential term, label, or state of being in the characters of Hedwig and Yitzhak is not possible. Their personalities are not reducible to a single, recognizable identity. Instead, it is necessary to look at the history of how each came to be labeled in the first place, in order to grasp a sense of 'who they are'. This grasp, however,

is not a grasp of something solid, but rather of something unstable, an unknown. Thus, the gender play in *Hedwig* aptly illustrates Butler's claim that "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Performative Acts 270).

Myth in Hedwig

As an appendix to the playscript for Hedwig, Aristophanes' speech from Plato's *Symposium* is included. The speech contains an explanation of how man came to be the way he is, and includes the myth of the Androgyne. Aristophanes begins by saying "let me treat of the nature of man and what has happened to it" (81).³ What has happened to man is that there were originally three sexes. Double-man was basically a fusion of what we would call two men today, double-woman was a fusion of two women, and the third sex was a fusion of a woman and a man. These creatures were round, had two faces and eight limbs, and traveled like wheels, spinning by using their many hands and feet. The double-man was the child of the sun, the double-woman the child of the earth, and the woman-man was the child of the moon. The gods became frightened because these creatures were very strong and full of pride, so Zeus decided to cut them all in two and re-form them so that they would look like men and women do today. Aristophanes notes that this division is the origin of desire, both homo- and heterosexual, and depending on which of the three breeds you are de-

scended from originally, you will desire someone of your own sex or of the opposite sex. In Aristophanes' telling of it, the myth of the double-man is the most emphasized one, as it is used to validate love between men and boys. This emphasis serves as an affirmation to boys who "hang about men and embrace them" as the most "manly" of men (84).

Hedwig's retelling of this myth, called "The Origin of Love," is a song based on his mother's recounting of the myth to him when he was a child. It seems that in place of any traditional 'birds and bees' story, Hedwig was given this, and from it he forms his own ideas of love. In some senses, the tale Aristophanes weaves is very conventional and essentialist. It bases itself upon categories that came before our current categories of gender; not a pre-discursive space, but a discourse that came before the one we have now. It gives power to the gods to change the discourse; at the center of the story are the powerful gods. This is different from current theories that claim there is no center. On the other hand, this creation myth is very different from the usual story kids get about the origin of love. The myth Hedwig is told leaves ideas of desire, at least, very open. Yes, there are three distinct forms of desire, which are dictated by what your original state was, as a child of the sun or earth or moon, but the possible ways of desiring are slightly more open than those posited by the heterosexual matrix Butler sees in operation. The circumstance of Hedwig suggests that sometimes all it might take to open choices outside of the heterosexual matrix is the telling of a different story.⁴ What is interesting about Hed-

³ Page numbers for the Aristophanes speech are page numbers of the *Hedwig* playscript since Benjamin Jowett's translation of the speech is included as an appendix to the script.

⁴ For more discussion of the heterosexual matrix, see Chapter 2 of Butler's *Gender Trouble*, "Pro-

wig's retelling is that it incorporates additional mythic characters to the ones Aristophanes told about. Aristophanes stuck to Zeus and Apollo as the major acting gods in the myth. Hedwig adds Thor, Osiris and the gods of the Nile, and the unspecific "some Indian god" (Trask 30) to the telling. This mixing of histories and cultures mirrors Hedwig's own mixing as an immigrant to America, and the mixed-up state of her gender.

After hearing his mother tell this story, Hedwig decides he must find his other half, the one he was separated from when the gods sent lightning down to split the circle-beings. She uses language that takes us back to the myth when referring to her own experiences with love. When he thinks he has found his other half, she sings, "you had blood on your face; I had blood in my eyes" (Trask 31). This blood comes from their recent symbolic rending apart, and is a sign that they belong together; coming together would be a reunion of what once was whole. When Hedwig falls in love with Tommy Gnosis, a teenager she will mentor as a musician, and who will ultimately rise above Hedwig in terms of success, a problem arises that shows Aristophanes' story, however unconventional and accepting of "alternative" ways of loving, still does not solve the problem of Hedwig's particular difference. The myth validates same-sex relationships and heterosexual relationships, but the sexes involved are still essentialized. They do not include an individual such as Hedwig, who, as she sings in "The Angry Inch," has only "a one-inch mound of flesh/ where my penis used to be/ where my vagina never was" (Trask 45). This essentialized rendering of gender is shown to be quite present in

hibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix."

the psyche of Tommy, who runs from Hedwig when confronted with her abnormal genitalia. In one scene, Hedwig narrates the exchange that occurred between him and Tommy on the day Hedwig realized Tommy must be the one. In the play, Hedwig switches voices to indicate which character is talking, so Tommy, impersonated by Hedwig, begins by bringing yet another myth into the picture.

Tommy: "Oh Hedwig. Oh, God. When Eve was still inside Adam, they were in Paradise. When she was separated from him, that's when Paradise was lost. So when she enters him again, Paradise will be regained!"

Hedwig: "That's right, however you want it, honey, just kiss me while we do it." (Mitchell 66)

At this point Hedwig, having recently commented on the fact that Tommy has never kissed him in all the months they have been together, thrusts Tommy's hands between her legs. Their ensuing dialogue follows.

Tommy: "What is that?"

Hedwig: "That's what I have to work with."

Tommy: "My mom is probably wondering where I . . ."

Hedwig: "Sissy. Nancy, girly, lispboy. What are you afraid of?"

Tommy: "I love you."

Hedwig: "Then love the front of me." (Mitchell 66-67).

Tommy runs out the door, signaling the end of their relationship.

This moment of rejection for Hedwig is a moment of great awareness for the audience. Hedwig's position at the margins of an already marginalized way of loving is painfully clear. The effects of essentialist categories of gender are shown to be destructive and limiting for

a character we have come to care about. “The Origin of Love” framework myth that Hedwig operates under for her understanding of love, is more open about ways of loving than the Adam and Eve story. Yet it still blocks desire for these two people in love. This may partially be because Tommy Gnosis is portrayed as a character brought up with the Christian framework who fails when he tries to reconcile his love for Hedwig with his understanding of Adam and Eve. But even if Tommy had been told the Aristophanes’ myth instead, the result may have been much the same because of the essentializing of gender still inherent in Aristophanes’ tale. Hedwig’s indeterminate gender doesn’t fit the male or female signification present in either myth.

Another place where the influence of myth is strong in this tale is in Hedwig’s appropriation of Christian figures, such as the reference to Lazarus quoted near the beginning of this paper. This is an interesting switch, since Lazarus in the Bible rose from the tomb after he had lain there several days, while Hedwig’s rising off the table is more of a transformation. In a figurative sense, the old Hedwig, the one who was anatomically a male, has died, and a new Hedwig, the one with, as Hedwig sings, “a Barbie Doll-crotch . . . an angry inch” (Trask 43), has risen.

In another part of the play Hedwig narrates an interchange with his mother from when he was a child. He recounts that he was watching *Jesus Christ Superstar* on television with his mother, and when Hedwig commented to her, “Jesus said the darndest things,” his mother reproached and slapped him, saying that Hitler also died for our sins and that absolute power corrupts. It is interesting that in taking away the Christian myth from Hedwig, she replaced it with

an even more ancient myth filled with Greek gods, but still a myth that relied on essentialist categories of gender just as much as Christianity.

Between the Binary

During the opening number of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, Yitzhak, who has been singing backup, shouts out, to the backdrop of driving guitar and drum rhythms, a history of Hedwig in a nutshell. He recalls the erection of the Berlin wall in 1961 and describes the wall as “the most hated symbol” of the world then divided by the cold war. “Reviled. Graffitied. Spit upon (Trask 15).” He goes on to compare Hedwig to the wall:

Hedwig is like that wall,
standing before you in the divide
between East and West,
Slavery and Freedom,
Man and Woman,
Top and Bottom. (Trask 15)

Hedwig continues singing:

There ain’t much of a difference
between a bridge and a wall.
Without me right in the middle, babe
you would be nothing at all.
(Trask 15,18)

It is almost impossible not to recall Derrida’s *différance* upon studying this exchange. “Writing, for Derrida, is the ‘free play’ or element of undecidability within every system of communication” (Norris 28). The system of communication that has been laid out in the previous selections is composed of a series of binaries, or essential categories to which a sense of presence might be applied. The average person on the street, if asked to define East, West, Slavery, Freedom, Man, Woman, Top and Bottom, would

probably be able to do so. The arbitrary meaning assigned to those words has become so commonplace that they are taken as givens. But Hedwig is not a given. She is a difference. One way of thinking about difference is, in a sense, an extension of the binary; we know that East is East because it isn't West. Difference bridges the gap between what is and what is not, or the gap between two opposite things. Hedwig comes right out and says that without her difference in the middle, the apparently solid binaries would dissolve. Since she is of indeterminate gender, impossible to encapsulate in a single term or word, she is the "element of indecidability" within the system of binaries. To attempt to see and understand Hedwig within the framework of our stilted categories of gender is to read her, in the larger derridean sense of reading and writing.

In an amazon.com review of the motion picture soundtrack for *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, the reviewer writes that what is most interesting about the music is "hidden trails of love throughout this warped story of self-acceptance and discovery." Although I would take issue with the reviewer's choice of the qualifier "warped" (not that the story, in any conventional sense, isn't warped, but to apply the word "warped" to a story about a marginalized character is to do the expected thing, the thing that reinforces negative attitudes towards those on the margins), I think the reviewer is on to something when characterizing Hedwig's story as one of self-acceptance and discovery. Hedwig might have chosen to look at her difference from conventional significations of identity as a handicap, but when she sings that "there ain't much of a difference between a bridge and a wall," and chooses to see herself as essential to the current order

instead of outside of it ("without me . . . you would be nothing at all"), she is certainly accepting herself. She is seeing herself as a part of the world-as-text, acknowledging and providing support for the fact that there is no outside-the-text. A wall might be one way to see the space between two binaries: a barrier, an obstacle to be scaled. Hedwig chooses to see the wall as a bridge, a connecting and necessary element. This is related to Judith Butler's reading of drag:

The moment in which one's staid and usual cultural perceptions fail, when one cannot with surety read the body that one sees, is precisely the moment when one is no longer sure whether the body encountered is that of a man or a woman. The vacillation between the categories itself constitute the experience of the body in question (Butler xxiii).

Hedwig's dress, voice, behavior, and story certainly create this vacillation in the audience which views her, the peculiarities of Yitzhak's identity as Hedwig's "husband," also invoke a feeling of undecidability.

We have seen thus far that there are many challenges to conventional ways of signifying identity in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. Where does the play fail in its aim at calling into question the ways we judge people on the basis of their gender? In Judith Butler's reading of Beauvoir's theory of gender, there is an implication that sexed bodies can be the occasion for a number of different genders, and further, that gender itself need not be restricted to the usual two. If sex does not limit gender, then perhaps there are genders, ways of culturally interpreting the sexed body, that are in no way restricted by the apparent duality of sex (Butler 143).

Certainly the character of Hedwig challenges conventional notions of what it is to be a woman or a man. Hedwig seems to be neither and both. Through Hedwig's telling of her story we learn of

the physical aspects of her gender, which certainly place her in a space that is neither anatomically 'male' or 'female.' But there is evidence of the way the "apparent duality of sex" does restrict our and Hedwig's own cultural interpretation of her body. The first limitation is one of language. There is no pronoun that signifies the space between "him" and "her", so Hedwig must choose. She chooses the feminine when referring to herself, so that can be seen as a potential longing to be an actual woman. Of course, if the sex change operation hadn't been botched in the first place, Hedwig might have turned out to be a "normal" female. Although the actuality of Hedwig lies between male and female, the ideal, what Hedwig wished for from the beginning, was to be a woman, as she expresses in "Sugar Daddy," the song she sings to the American officer she falls in love with near the beginning of the play, before she undergoes the sex change operation.

So you think only a woman
can truly love a man.
Then you buy me the dress
I'll be more woman
than a man like you can stand (Trask
41).

There are also the cultural signifiers of masculinity and femininity that are difficult to escape. Hedwig wears a wig and a dress and makes herself up 'like a woman.' On the one hand, this is a perpetuation of gender signifying practices and significations, but on the other hand, it is a "dramatiz[ation of] the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established" (Butler xxviii). She behaves like a tyrannical dictator toward her band, a rather 'masculine' trait, when she introduces the band to the audience, and sarcastically characterizes them as

"So very talented. And so very lucky to be here" (Mitchell 53). The band meekly, automatically, replies, "Yes, Miss Hedwig" (Mitchell 53). She is also dominating and abusive toward Yitzhak, a behavior most commonly attributed to men who abuse women in relationships. Although this is in a way a reinforcement of stereotypes, it is also a switch, and so can possibly be seen as a re-appropriation of those stereotypes, since Yitzhak is the 'husband' being dominated and abused. Still, Yitzhak's "feminine" submissiveness and Hedwig's "masculine" domination do foster stereotypes, regardless of the sex of the character performing them.

There is, of course, the dramatic climax of the play, when Hedwig sheds her costume and stands before the audience nearly naked, wig gone, makeup smeared, the hair of her chest showing. In this scene it feels like a metamorphosis has taken place. Hedwig is no longer performing. We see her as nakedly as is possible within the confines of our own cultural prison-house. Perhaps some people in the audience breathe a sigh of relief at seeing the male actor as a male at last. Some people are glad Hedwig is cutting the act and being 'genuine', finally showing us who she really is. Some people might be saddened that the character we have come to know as Hedwig seems to have ruptured before our eyes. It is perhaps in this scene that a possibility can be seen for a gender unrestricted by dualities. Throughout the play, the gender-bending has been so extreme that perhaps this nearly naked, make-up smeared, raw form of Hedwig, presents us with that new possibility, a new gender, neither man or double-man, women or double-woman, or Androgyne, but Hedwig. *Différance* standing unclothed before us. It is also as if

the performativity of Hedwig's gender, which throughout the play has been so clearly constituted by Hedwig's choices of female dress and pronoun, is suddenly stripped away. It is a frightening moment; one performance has ended and a new one has not yet begun, as Hedwig stands motionless in her new form before the audience. Butler's idea of gender as performative is compellingly clear at this moment.

Conclusion

After the performance, I went with my brother, who played the lead guitar in Hedwig's band, to a bar in Monterey. Two of my brother's friends went in drag. They were two of the audience members who had rushed up to the stage in front of the first rows of audience seating to dance wildly along during the more fast and frantic musical numbers of the show. These groupies consisted of both men and women cross-dressers. One of the men had changed from a shiny pink dress with a picture of Barbie on the front to a much more appropriate and modest brown number with delicate white flowers. Later I asked my brother if those two wear dresses as a general rule, and he said no, that although the guys are definitely 'out of the box' in general, the dresses were donned for the special occasion of the *Hedwig* show. It's too bad; they were awfully cute.

What does living "outside the box" mean? In adopting unconventional dress and living off-beat lifestyles (these two young men were also vegan), are they also reinforcing the presence of the box? Without the box to be out of, would their behavior be thought of as unusual? Is their choice to act and eat differently from the norm related to Hedwig's feeling of being in the middle of set catego-

ries? By talking about living inside or outside of the box, are we, as Monique Wittig did according to Judith Butler's analysis of Wittig's idea of "lesbian strategy," serving to "consolidate compulsory heterosexuality (or any other form of 'the box') in its oppressive forms" (Butler, 1999, p.163).

Examining once again the figures of my brother's two friends, the guys in girls' clothing, might it be said that in going out in public wearing those clothes, they were, to use Butler's words, "appropriat[ing] and redep[loy]ing" (Butler 163) the categories of identity? Perhaps it is not behavior in and of itself that constitutes the transgressive, but the discourse which would attempt to encompass or describe that behavior. What are the discourses constituting Hedwig's story and how do they serve to overthrow traditional categories of gender? Does the play succeed at articulating a "convergence of multiple sexual discourses at the site of "identity" in order to render that category ... permanently problematic" (Butler163)? I believe it does, despite the contradictions and reinforcing of certain stereotypes that are found in the play.

Amidst all the fragmentation and destabilization of gender in the play, there is still a certain nostalgia for wholeness. At the moment when Hedwig stands on the stage, having shed her wig, dress, and bra, anything could happen. As it turns out, the play ends with some rather predictable themes of redemption and liberation, as Hedwig sings the finale, "Midnight Radio," and symbolically gives Yitzhak back to himself, handing Yitzhak the wig she forbade him from wearing at the beginning of their relationship, and crooning, "Know that you're whole" (Trask 75). Hedwig exits down the aisle with the

spotlight following, the same way he entered in the beginning. Yitzhak is left alone with the microphone to lead the audience in the final chorus, "Lift up your hands. . ." (Trask 79). He seems bewildered yet joyful at this newfound freedom.

Although this ending may seem typical, a closer examination yields more positive, anti-essentialist results. Remember that from the beginning, Hedwig's quest for love was based on the Aristophanes' myth. Hedwig was looking for her other half, a person he could essentially bond with to become the double-figure in the story. The three types of double-figures in the story can be seen as essentialist categories of gender in themselves, so Hedwig was trying to become something essential and whole through his quest for love. In separating from Yitzhak at the end, she is letting go of her essentialist dream, and perhaps opening the way for a new way of love that will not be constrained by a pre-formed mold or by the binary restrictions of gender.

Another important aspect of Hedwig's relationship with Yitzhak is the role of roles in the relationship. At any given time throughout the play, the two take on the binary roles of male/ female in a struggle of domination and submission. When Hedwig sheds the costume of his performance as woman, she is also able to shed the need to continue playing those roles and participating in the domination which is enabled by the performance of the roles. In a sense, Hedwig's affirmation "Know that you're whole," is not nostalgia, but an indication of new openness. Know that you're ok as you are, as you have been formed and made by the forces around you. The fragmentation of your identity, the undecidability of your gender, is the new way

of being whole. What was considered a deficiency is now an asset. Perhaps this is the beginning of Judith Butler's "open coalition," that "will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purpose at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure" (Butler 22).

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