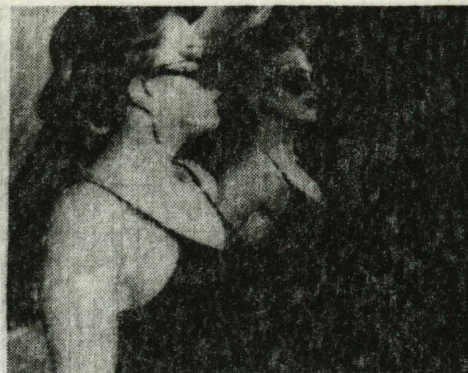


**Y
E
S
T
E
R
D
A
Y
'
S
M
E
N**



The subjects of Byron Newman's photographs are, or until recently were, all men. How do they do it and why?



Peter knows what Dick likes. Dick knows what Peter likes.

The idea that oral-genital contact is much more fun when made between chums of the same sex is commonplace. It's gay lore, fag swank, it's a misogynistic chide and a heterophobic deprecation. Boys do it better. It's a wrong idea: I know there are these girls who can do *such turns* that... oh, but this is a different tale, one for another time. It's a wrong idea, but the proselytising has worked. The straight world has swallowed it, and men resent *them* and women fear *them*. Boys do it better — it's part of the currency, it's as simple as that.

The potency of a received idea has little to do with its approximation to any kind of truth; rather, it moves towards a state of certitude in the collective conscious (a dumb brute, muzzle it) in a quasi-geometric progression. The more it's uttered the more plausible it gets. It gets to be fact in the end. Here's one in the crutch for the idea: the assumption that boys do it better (merely because they know what they like) is akin to the assumption that the thwarted suicide dragged from a river will, in his turn, be a plucky life-saver. Likely as not he'll stand on the frosty bridge shrugging as the bundle of laundry disappears below him.

This doesn't really help me. The only solace can be to just look at the people who subscribe to the idea, just look. Just look at them in Paris. In parts of that city they've put the girls out of business by their subscription to the idea. The idea made flesh — *made* means: built, moulded, inflated, chemically and physically contrived, cut and tucked, depilated, ornamentally mutilated — the idea made flesh is a sex change who has gone on the game (they do tend to) or partial sex change (hormones, yet to feel the knife) who may be saving to get to Casablanca (where the knives are). They aren't all Brazilians, they were all born boys, they were all born in societies contaminated by machismo, they all know about the gift of head don't they.

Boy's nous, woman's body — the *travelo* is a winsome mix for the sexual market-place. They're *product*, partly self-built, often jerry-built, always self-determined. Their bodies are, of course, cartoons of women. But this is apt. Mercantile sex is a cartoon of the real thing; the commerce is fiscal, masturbatory — it obviates the elemental wooing and desperate illusion of mutual attraction that precede even the tawdriest one-night stand. With their stereotypical uniformity and confusion of gender they have made themselves a prostitute *caste*. There are analogies. There are eunuchs and castrati and hijira. They also are sexually, generatively deformed to an end. Here, though, the end itself is sexual. However did they get to be this way?

By Jonathan Meades

Burou's nameplate at Av Hassan II, 71, Casablanca (26 09 96 and 26 05 66) lists his former posts: Ex-Interne des Hôpitaux d'Alger; Ex-Chef de Clinique Obstetricale d'Alger; Ex-Accoucheur de la Maternité d'Oran. At the bottom of the tablet are inscribed: Accouchements Gynécologique and Chirurgie Gynécologique. It doesn't say anything about vagino-plasty, about severing an organ and building a box in its place.

It is half past nine at night and through the glass door there's a boy with shoulders perfectly round like fruit, shining the floor with mop soap. No, he says, I cannot see Dr Burou. I tap again and this time he disappears into the concierge's lair and fetches a personable gimp who tells me I'll have to go to the clinic in the street behind.

When you turn off the boulevard (which is all consulates and notaries and doctors and 1930s Franco/Moorish municipal swagger) you are in a maze of white canyons. There are dustbins everywhere. There are men sitting asleep between the dustbins. There are skeletal dogs trying to tip over the dustbins; they need help. A nurse comes to the door of the clinic and listens with incredulity and affront to what I have to say; then a young woman doctor arrives and says calmly, yes, tomorrow at 10am. She walks away up the stairs from the vestibule: these are the last stairs that George Jamieson walked up, the last stairs that James Morris walked up. How different did the vestibule look when they came back down? Does the confusion of inter-sex extend to the most elemental perceptions?

I stepped out into the street full of dustbins. I thought: there are rigs in them, there are scraps of tackle, *pinces* and *valseuses* (balls), shreds of testis that were cut but not tucked. These dustbins are the graves of corporeal embarrassments, of the wrong parts, of all that might make life, of all that made life so bad, made it *such a torture*. These are the parts that shouldn't have been there to begin with, that never corresponded with the brain that ran the body they were attached to. Are they really in these dustbins? Look for seepage, blood, tissue, red swabs browning with desiccation. Kick down a bin. Watch it all fall out: the carcasses of fowl, food cans, a broken sandal steeped in reeking sauce, eggshells, something like a sponge that oozes ordure, the shirt that covered the beggar that fed the lice, napkins, cardboard, brown paper greased to kill, rags that unfurl like hideous animals waking, the unspeakable things the rags covered. But not those things. I don't see the gear.

They have their ways. They have incinerators, they must have. You have two lives and you have two deaths to match. There is no cheating. *Ils peuvent toujours prendre le pied?* (Can they still come?) That is the first question to ask Georges Burou, Clinique de Parc, Rue du Capitaine de Frégate Laparie (a sailor).

I was put in a waiting room with a dozen affluently Europeanised Moroccan women. (They must all have come from the suburbs of Ain Diab and Hay El Hana where the cubistic white villas are fortified with thick walls and grills and serious metal gates against the vagabond scum from the *bidonvilles*.) The only good thing on the wall was a print of an architectural fantasy representing three putti with compasses, rulers etc round a new (seventeenth-century) house. I was moved to another room, patently unlivid-in, all Directoire gilt and unread sets (of Tolstoy, Joseph Kessel, Proust, Gide, Mme de Sevigné etc). An elegant woman of about 40, French or *pied noir*, with a Parisian accent and a tight chignon, opened the door of a study and gestured me to enter. Dr Burou, she

said, has instructed me to say that he will not see you; he has never given an interview. You are first writer to get this far, into his study.

His study: it is lined with shelves of medical journals and treatises — Les Explorations Fonctionnelles Gynécologiques, Les Cardiopathies Vulvulaires, L'Anesthésie et l'Analgésie Peridur-Génétique Humaine. There are photographs. Burou's looks and sartorial manner are those of a hard-living, hedonistic, aging film actor — one who has got hip late in life. He holds a (grand?) child while his long mane of grey hair is wind-swept behind him. In another shot he wears a big black fur coat and a stetson with a snakeskin band; clinging to his arm is a woman of about 30, blonde by will (of course the hair of the women in this man's life is chromatically chosen).

Has the doctor any children? No reply. *Children?* You're interviewing me. *You can tell me to get out.* Two children. *Sons?* No reply. *Sons?* No reply. *How long is he going to continue operating?* (According to French medical records he is now 70 years old.) He hardly does any operations now. *That's not what I heard; why has he stopped?* He wanted to. *What about the other doctors here?* There are no other doctors. *You? I'm his assistant. Has he sons?* One son, one daughter. *Has he stopped operating because of the notoriety he attracted?* Has he (attracted notoriety)? He just wanted to stop. *Does it concern him that many of his patients have the operation in order to lead a life of prostitution?* Hein. *Does it concern him that many have paid for their opera-*

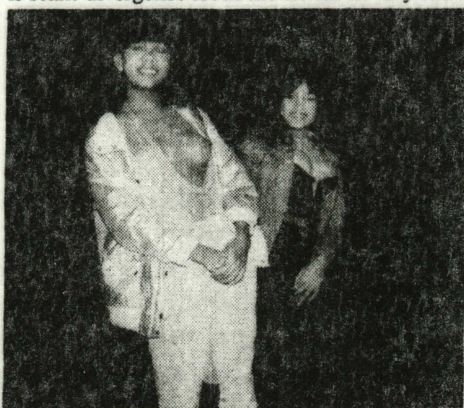


tions by prostitution? I have an appointment.

So I still don't know if Burou has had sex with any of his creations, how (or whether) he determines the patient's need for the operation, whether there are people whom he regrets having operated on, whether he believes that there is a fundamental link between sex-changes and exhibitionistic prostitution, what he would think if his son wanted a sex change, whether he believes that surgical technology has created a demand for an operation that is not necessarily corrective but can be merely cosmetic and commercially exploitable.

Western Paris has a tradition of freakshows. Near Porte Maillot, where now there are air terminals and hotels and conference centres, stood Luna Parc. At night there was music, there were lights like cheap jewellery, there were booths where human anomalies were displayed. Some may have displayed themselves — if you have reptilian skin or are a living skeleton or suffer adiposis dolorosa or are joined to your twin or have a phallic clitoris or three breasts or three legs like Frank Lentini or if the legs of your unborn brother stick out from your groin and you can also eat fire or if coarse hair covers every bit of your body, then you may have to display yourself to stay alive.

The creatures who are brought to life in your lights at night in the Bois de Boulogne are no less disturbing than their teratological precursors. They are just as much the stuff of dream, just as liable to make us wonder about our essence, just as liable to cause our ideas of self to pitch out of the ring. As you cruise the avenues fantastical tableaux are revealed between the trees: how can bodies thus entwine themselves? How can heels like that support a body like that? They're seven inches and they make it almost seven feet. Lots of fake leopards have given their lives to clothe these brawny doxies, and lots of rubber trees their sap, and lots of cows their hides; no one wears much, but it does add up, there are getting on for 200 of them. They are sartorially both extravagant and unimaginative, there is not much variation, there is scant divergence from the norms of tiny skirt,



tight corset, torn stockings (this is outdoors work).

As I said, their bodies are cartoons of women; specifically they recall the dominatrices of S&M magazines. Such magazines are notable for a reliance on drawings, as if natural women lack the bodily stature to fulfill the fantasy. The creatures in the Bois are big, they are also strong. They wrested the territory from the girls who used to work it with straightforward intimidation. That was in the mid-'70s; since then there have been periodic clean-ups by the officers of the First Police District which includes the 16ème arrondissement bordering the Bois. They have not been markedly successful; indeed their main effect has been to disperse those who formerly worked exclusively in the Bois to other red light areas, making parts of them, too, no-go for girls. (An exception is the Bois de Vincennes in the south-east of the city. This was always the haunt of the keen amateur, the housewife turning tricks for pin money or whatever. These ladies resented the incursions of the boys from the Bois de Boulogne and protected their patch armed with *batteries de cuisine*.)

Drive on. Keep cruising and you'll see how fruitless the police's purges have been. Beside the Allée de Longchamp there are lights and men slouching against a canopied booth and haphazardly parked cars. There is steam and the smell of frying. Among the cars is a refrigerator on wheels. You can take post-fellatory refreshment here: merguez and chips, sandwiches (gruyère or saucisson), cold beer, un Pepsi (none of them cheap). All over the Bois are these enterprising small businesses parasitical on the game. No, said the midget greaseball serving at one of them, no I don't give the prostitutes cut prices. No, he said, I won't tell you what my takings are. Then he squirted a dollop of harissa from a polythene bottle onto my merguez and all over my wrist.

A *travelo* whore dressed in mules, legwarmers and a sort of psychedelic nappy came out of the bushes and strutted in front of *blousons noirs* (notable for the luxuriance of their sideburns).



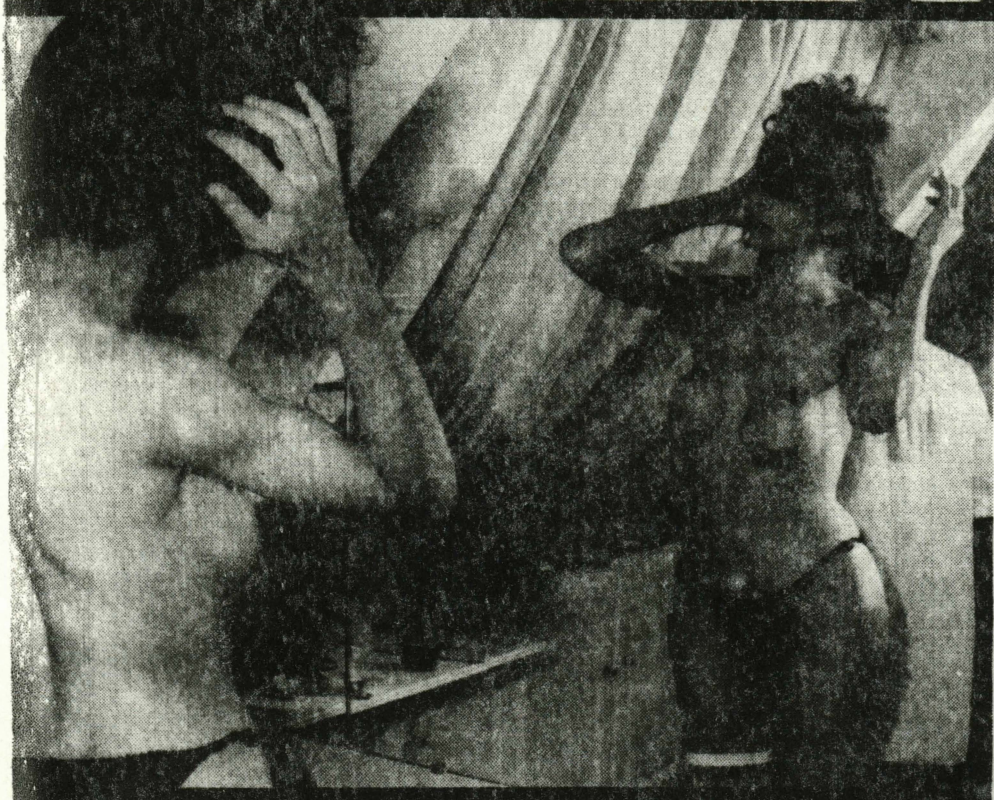
Even beside the vat of bubbling chip oil it was chill. Most of the hookers here warm themselves with drink. This one, a head taller than her two prospective johns, swung a clutch bag with a bottle's neck protruding from it — cooking brandy or armagnac like tractor fuel, most likely. Alcohol habits are common, so is dependence on methylamphetamine; the preferred type is Tenuate Dospan; the only rule is, *always exceed the prescribed dose*. If you're going to give 40 blow jobs in a night it's no doubt just as well to be blocked.

Head: 50 francs. Fuck: 100 francs. If you want to fuck a pre-operative T/S you'll have to join the club, get a lot of chocolate on your biscuit: 100 francs. We are not, understand, talking big dinari here. To make a crust at this game, at these rates, you have to do it again and again.

The cost of living is high. A week's rent of a flyblown room will absorb two night's earnings. Illegal immigrants (which is what most of the Brazilians are) comprise a group that is notoriously exploitable. Alcoholic spirits are as expensive now as in Britain. If you go the hairdresser three times a day that too mounts up. Fetishistic lingerie works out dear, so do those shoes (which no one was ever meant to walk in) from Ernest, 75 Bvd de Clichy, 18ème. Such schmutter does not last long. You send money home to Rio or Sao Paulo: your mother thinks you work in theatre, and so you do. You save for Casablanca. You pay protection. You buy a false passport. You get busted for tax (on estimated earnings) every time the police take you in.

It takes you four or five months of twice-weekly black market hormonal injections before your breasts begin to grow. You crave silicone injections and implants. This agent of facial and bodily change is so crucial to the *travelo* that monopolies in it are established and challenged; murders are committed because of it. A *travelo* called Dottore Dolly has held the monopoly for





some time, illegally importing the stuff from the USA. One of her predecessors ended up in the Seine at Asnières. It is not a safe line to be in, it is only worth pursuing if the profits are high.

Dottore Dolly rarely hooks now. The results of her service can be pitiful: lips swollen like detumescent dildos; balloon breasts whose nipples are monstrously asymmetrical in their disposition; cheekbones so heightened as to curtail vision. Much silicone is self-administered with veterinary syringes which are never sterilised, always shared. The standard of cosmetic surgery which is submitted to is not high either. A nose job is 'something you have done when it's raining and you're bored'. Removal of the thyroid cartilage (*la pomme d'Adam*) can be especially messy; indeed it can be so famously messy that it is increasingly avoided. And the trip to Casablanca is becoming rarer too — whether because Burou's reluctance to operate is a reality or because the price is so high I don't know. Either way, the result is that there is an increasing proportion of *travelos* who look more or less like women but are equipped with male genitalia and intend to stay that way. There is no shortage of demand for them, which causes understandable resentment among certain post-operative transsexuals, divides the caste into two.

There is insidious disco music in Rue St Denis. There are coital rhythms with girls you'll never meet whispering promises they'll never keep, they'll fake anything. The pyramidal piles of Tunisian cakes and the swags of neon are as bright as alcoholic delirium. The girls are dressed not for comfort, not for warmth, but for cystitis. They work with their bodies, and their bodies, awaiting work, have found very many ways of saying boredom, of screaming contempt for the ambulatory mass of punters. Psyche (four years post-operative, as demure as is possible in a hobble-skirted cheong sam) scorned them: 'They do not want to *please*.'

Between the cake shops and the peep shows (*cabines privées*) and the sex shops there are cinemas: '4 Salons Ultra Porno' and so on. We eventually found the one showing a film Psyche was in. (She has made, she says, eight films, though how she can resolve the number is a mystery — such films are evidently cut about, spread around with no particular regard for such niceties as narrative continuity.) We sat through the usual parade of leprous bottoms pumping, of lard-fed Scanda-slugs plating men who should be in Abba, of close-up genitals which make one re-act that pornography is subject to its own laws that have nothing to do with those of eroticism. We didn't get to Psyche's film; a friend who was with us grabbed my arm and told me that she thought the raincoat behind was going to ejaculate on her hair. 'I need an umbrella if I'm going to stay in this place.' We left. Psyche told us this story in a bar (like most of the Brazilians she has adopted a classical name, unlike nearly all of them she speaks good French — so she is able to break the bounds of the Iberophone ghetto most of her compatriots are confined to).

Quarries at night are hellish places. Stone gleams under the moon. There are bright blocks of it, cliffs of it which it doesn't do to fall over — there are rocks at the bottom of the cliffs that are like the teeth of forgotten beasts. In the morning you'll see how grave the damage can be. One of the men who found Petite Yvonne vomited. And so, almost, did I when I saw her — and that was more than six months after (says Psyche). Petite Yvonne was the youngest of eight children born to Corsican parents in Nice. Her father was a mechanic who helped out a *caid*, ran errands, put



about the strong arm. But he was fairly clean. He didn't kill people. All his children were given jobs in good businesses like hotels and ice cream factories. (In 1979 the owner of a Nice ice cream factory and a string of ice cream parlours was found dead from pistol shots in an underground car park. The Nice chief of police said: 'We think that he was killed by assailants looking for a secret ice cream recipe that he was believed to be carrying.')

Petite Yvonne went to work at a patisserie/confiserie, humping in bags of flour and sugar, helping with deliveries to restaurants. Petite Yvonne was called Michel then; he had neither boyfriends nor girlfriends, preferring the company of his older sisters and their friends though they, apparently, were hardly welcoming. For a year or so he was on the periphery of the transvestite milieu in Nice — this was clandestine, and his parents never knew.

He abandoned his job and at the age of 19 or 20 came to Paris. He worked at an hotel off Bvd

Sebastopol. It was a place where girls took rooms by the hour and Michel augmented his paltry wage by changing sheets between tricks. He saw many maps of Ireland and he envied the girls, admired their appearance and hauteur, wanted to emulate them. Cross dressing endowed him with a sexual identity, let him realise himself sexually. He frequented *travelos'* clubs, sought their society, was considered sweet and grave. He found himself and was, according to Psyche, happy for the first time in his life. He was nicknamed Yvonne because of a supposed resemblance to a transvestite cabaret artist of that name; Petite was added because Michel was only five feet tall.

What follows is usual enough: home — a cubicle, 6ft by 9ft, decorated with a collage from magazine pictures and mariolatrous gewgaws; work — the Bois by night; self-improvement — silicone, cosmetic surgery etc; outings — all that I've mentioned plus remittances to a sister-in-law whose husband, PY's eldest brother, had suffered an 'industrial' injury and was unable to hold down a job. Psyche scorns this claim, says the brother was workshy; given the brother's subsequent actions — all zeal and hideously misguided notions of familial honour — it seems she has a point.

What happened was that Petite Yvonne fell victim to fate and circumstance. After a scare in the Bois she was sharing a beat with Psyche on Rue de Lisbonne near Parc de Monceau. Late one night she turned down a punter in a Fiat 500 — with wheels like that he might be a welcher. She got into the next car, which Psyche insists was a Lagonda. The next day she told Psyche that the Lagonda driver was a restaurateur she had known in Nice and that she thought he had recognised her. (He must have been extravagant-

ly percipient: she had by then transformed herself; maybe her voice revealed her.) She feared the worst.

She was right. Her father drove, her eldest brother and her crazy brother sat either side of her — this is guesswork. This isn't: they spent five days in Paris, holed up in a pension near République, asking for her, proffering photographs of her former self. Then they found her. They turned off the autoroute home near Saulieu and dumped her in the quarry outside the pleasant village of Montsauche. The man who found her vomited because her breasts had been cut off, her hair had been shewn like that of a collaboratrice, her lips and cheeks had been cut a lot. She had been left for dead, wracked over the awful rocks. Death might have been better than this. Now she lives in the southern Paris suburb of Meudon and works in a laundry there. She lives as a man, sort of. Psyche visits her now and again. It was about Meudon that LF Celine wrote 'Death On The Installment Plan' and 'Journey To The End Of The Night'.

The progress from a mental trap to a bodily cage to a socio-economic cell isn't happy. □

Jonathan Meades's collection of short stories 'Filthy English' will be published in May.

Byron Newman's 'The Ultimate Angels', from which our photographs have been reproduced, is published by Hutchinson at £12.95.

'City Of Lost Souls', Rosa von Praunheim's transsexual musical film, opens on Friday, April at The ICA. See Film: Repertory listings. 'The Lost Souls' Film Ball at the Asylum, Heaven is on Thursday, 29 March. See Gay London listings.