

More than a Mouthful Sheila Bishop

First performed
April 8, 2001
Gainesville, FL

Part of *Gender is a Drag*
A crookedletter cabaret
produced by Sheila Bishop

More than a Mouthful

Stage: Bare

Costume: Performer wears a red silky robe, underneath (but hidden from audience view until directed to) the performer wears black boys' boxer brief. Around her breasts are medical bandages that have been colored black with pastels. The bandages only minimally cover her breasts- mainly the nipples are covered. Her chest, torso, neck, face and inner thighs are covered in red, blue and black marks made with pastels. Face make-up is bold and intense with very distinct red and black marks on face and neck. It looks like something has been clawing her body in these places. Bare feet.

There is a sense that this is a mask that allows the performer pull down the energies used in the piece.

Movement and voice: Some of the voice changes and most the movement are not noted in the stage directions. Intense, choreographed mixing with fluid, more improv movement and vocalizations.

The Beginning

Performer walks onto stage. Keeps face avert. Moves to center. Back turned to audience. Waits for a long, slow count of 15 to 20. Turns face but not body to deliver first lines. Wry smile and a challenging look.

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant
Success in circuit lies

Emily Dickinson, From Poem 1129

(long pause, four good beats, takes off robe, drops it with a flourish and slowly, sensually turns to face audience).

These *(turns to show profile, cupping breasts, strong strange voice)*
These *(turns torso toward audience, grabs breasts stretching fingers across)*
These
are signifiers of my gender
(parody of sexy s-curve movements, false sexy voice)
of my femaleness
of my femininity
of my womanliness

Circumference: the boundary line of a circle, the length of such a boundary

Danger, curves ahead *(intense sexy s-curves, fake sexy voice intensifies)*
Danger, curves ahead
Danger, those curves ahead with circumscribe your life, little girl
(Crisp change in tone to strong, angry voice, circling gesture with right arm).

Can I circumscribe this circumscription? (*soft, sad*)

“Who you saving all dat milk for?” (*Rasta man voice*)

said as I walk down the street (*normal voice*)

“More than a mouthful is a waste,” (*Southern voice*)

My daddy likes to say. (*normal voice*).

I have more than a mouthful (*points to mouth*)

I have more than a mouthful (*points to breasts*)

Would you like to fill your mouth full of my circumference?

(*cupping breasts and eye contact with someone specific in audience*).

My circumferences-

ss

Can you find the circumference of my circles?

Math is hard (*ditzy woman voice- move head like robot doll*).

It's formulaic (*dry voice*)

2 Pi (*beat- pause and action*) r on my chest (*comic delivery*)

2 Pi r equals circumference (*voice breathy*)

Pi a transcendental number stretches into infinity (*arm/body stretching*)

I want to stretch into infinity

My circumference has no solution.

I don't want to be circumscribed by these spheres. (*annoyed*)

Spheres

The volume of a sphere is found solving for $\frac{4}{3}$'s Pi r cubed. (*academic voice*)

I wish the volume of my spheres was found that easily.

Instead

volume after dusty volume of gender narratives are **stacked** against me (*emphasis on pun of stacked*).

These spheres

hold more than fatty tissue.

They are required to hold more than the biological fact that they are overgrown sweat glands.

Spheres,

sphere of influence,

These spheres influence my life and your interpretation of who I am.

(*forceful, point to audience and back to self*).

But I want everyone to know I'm a girl (*little girl voice*).

I am Daddy's girl (*slightly Southern storytelling voice*)

And so was a rather androgynous child.

Until the middle of tenth grade

when

these (*cup breasts, strong, strange voice*)

made their full appearance,

my gender identity was questioned
semi-regularly.

Are you a boy or a girl? (*nasty, Southern kid voice*)

In 7th grade,
when a somewhat ambiguous gender did nothing for my status as a
d-a-w-g dawg (*very thick Southern voice for spelling and declaration of dawg*).

Funny: I look pretty much the same as I did in seventh grade
except for the **addition** (*pause to let joke sink in*)
Of tits and ass.
So why exactly I was
a d-a-w-g dawg
is complicated.

Enough of this tangent,
but since my story is circuitous
I might come back around to it.

In 7th grade (*Southern storytelling voice a bit thick here*)
to clarify once and for all to the whole wide world my true gender, I got my ears pierced. To
understand just how important this was to me, you need more information. Daddy thinks
piercing is barbaric, so when I asked his permission, he said only if “We can put a bone through
your nose and a plate through your lip, Sheila.” This was 1984, pre-modern primitive, and it
would be another ten years or so before giant silver posts pierced through odd bits of flesh
would be the cachet of cool in middle school.

I was, and perhaps still am, a goody goody who hated breaking the rules. And I desperately
craved Daddy’s approval. His good opinion was a lifeboat during my shitty childhood. But I
was determined and told him so. He told me that if I did I wouldn’t be having a birthday party
that year. And to save money, we only had birthday parties every other year. So I would pay
for my decision for a long, long time.

I did it anyway.

Little did I know that holes in my ears couldn’t circumvent the confusion.

That boy’s got earring in the wrong ear. (*Nasty Southern kid voice*).
That boy’s got an earring in both ears.
Hey, wait a minute.
Are you a boy or a girl?
I’m a girl, I said and cried (*soft, little girl voice*)
It is ironic, that now, sometimes, I wish my gender was still that ambiguous.

“Who you saving all dat milk for?” (*Rasta man voice*)

1998. San Francisco, Mission District.

I can't walk down the street alone without some damn man reminding me that I am a woman.

Ay, mamacita. You're so beautiful. (*Mexican accent*).

As if I didn't already know and did I ask your opinion?

(*Sassy, Southern Angry Woman voice*)

Their eyes locked on my tits.

Thank you so much.

I never would have noticed the balls of fat hanging off my chest.

"Who you saving all dat milk for?" (*Rasta man voice*)\

It is all for you, baby, every last drop.

I have more than a mouthful for you, baby.

Can I circumcise this circumscription?

I no longer go braless, despite hating bras, because I superstitiously think it might save me from some unwelcome com-**men**-tary.

I am tired.

I want to slice off my tits.

I don't want to be circumscribed by these spheres.

If x =female (*academic voice*)

and the function of (x) = x minus breasts,

then $f(x)$ =male.

$F(x)$ otherwise know as y .

So if x equals the particular female Sheila,

if I subtract my breasts

do I equal y ? (*breathy, stretched out sound*)

Male

Female

Which one is the empty set?

And what is my function?

When Bells stop ringing- Church- begins (poetry reading voice)

The Positive- of Bells

When Cogs- stop- that's Circumference

The Ultimate- of Wheels.

Emily Dickinson, Poem 633.

(*half way satirical academic voice*)

It is the assignment of a particular function to the cog that limits its potential. The cog can, perhaps, be seen as symbolic of the human individual. To be whole, one must go beyond one's function (*switch in tone to breathy, transcendent*). In stillness, in not being required to move a certain way- one can touch the ultimate.

In not being required to move a certain way, (serious, soft voice)
I can touch the ultimate.
I am a transcendental number.

I would be doing y'all a deservice, if I left you with the impression that the only reasons I don't want to be limited by my gender are
One. Many men are assholes, and I'd love to be able to walk down the street without them noticing that I am female, and
Two. In an airy, fairy metaphysical, postmodern sort of way, I don't want to be limited to any of y'all's categories.

You see, I have some personal, not so pretty reasons for not wanting to be female.
Circumlocution is need to round out my story.

"Do you want apples, (*slight Southern voice*)
melons or watermelons, Sheila?"
My uncle Eddie asked me when I was about ten or eleven years old
and just beginning to bud.
My reply,
"Apples, small apples."
I got grapefruit.
Though they have been as large as cantaloupes depending on my weight.

You see, I wanted apples
because I didn't want titties anything like Momma's.
Momma has watermelons. (*hands cupping way out in front of chest*)
She loves their juicy fullness (*thick Southern accent*).
She loves to shimmy them suggestively. (shimmy breasts)
They are her **pride** and **joy**
(*cup one breast and then the other to emphasize words*).
Way more than a mouthful (*stretch out way*).
But my mouth never was fed by her breasts,
not even metaphorically.

Momma spins and spins
and spins (*intense, loud, high pitched*)
in crazy circles. (*Voice a growl. movement intense, voice contorted*).
Circles cut into her by her evil bitch of a Mother.
Momma spins and spins
And spins (*intense, loud, high pitched*)
in crazy circles. (*Voice a growl. movement intense, voice contorted*).
She needed a record of her pain.
So, she did her damndest to cut those grooves into me (*loud, low, angry grief*).

(*Through this next section, voice and movement builds in intensity. Moves in box step circle. The performer is channeling her mother's spirit*).

Your daddy is such a handsome man.
You look just like your daddy, Sheila.
You're just like your daddy, Sheila.
I wish I was more like you and your daddy.
I wish I was as smart as you, Sheila.
I wish I was as smart as you, Sheila.
You're such an intellectual.
You think you're better than I am, don't you, Sheila.
You think you're better than I am, don't you, Sheila.

I could've aborted you.
I could've aborted you, little miss pro-choice.

The hells angels drive around and rape women and then they kill them
And then they leave them on the side of the road.
The hells angels drive around and rape women and then they kill them
And then they leave them on the side of the road.

They should cut his balls off.
You'd let all the rapists out of prison, wouldn't you, Sheila?

I was ganged raped when I was eleven.
I was gang raped when I was eleven.
Seven or so boys dragged me into a field.
Seven of so boys dragged me into a field.
I was gang raped when I was eleven.
I was gang raped when I was eleven.
They were looking for my sister Callie.
That slut wasn't home.
That slut wasn't home.
So they dragged me into a field.
So they dragged me into a field.
And a neighbor just stood and watched.
And a neighbor just stood and watched.
I was gang raped when I was eleven.

You'd let all the rapists out of prison, wouldn't you, Sheila
(screaming in anger and hate)

I had a dream you were drowning, Sheila
and I couldn't rescue you.
I had a dream you were drowning, Sheila
and I couldn't rescue you.
I had a dream you were drowning, Sheila
and I couldn't rescue you.
I couldn't rescue you.

I couldn't rescue you.
I couldn't rescue you.
I couldn't rescue you. (*not certain who is speaking here- mother or daughter*)

I'm trying to change, Sheila.
I'll do better. I promise.
I'm trying to change, Sheila.
I'll do better. I promise.
I'm trying to change, Sheila.
I'll do better. I promise.
I'll do better. I promise.

Please forgive me, Sheila.
Please forgive me.
But I love you, Sheila.
I love you.
But I love you, Sheila.
I love you.

(*long pause. Sad, sad voice.*)

I have memories of some of these vicious circles spinning around me when I was five. These vicious circles spun around me every day.
Momma told me she was beaten and starved and gang raped thousands of times.
And I am not exaggerating.
If anything, it is an underestimate.
'Cause Momma's circles have no beginning, and they have no end.
I wanted so badly to break her out of these crazy circles.

(*Tune of "Will the Circle be Unbroken"*).

Will her circle be broken
By and by, lord by and by.

Is this all tangential? (*Slightly nasty voice*)
I thought this story was about your breasts and your gender identity, Sheila?
Not your crazy Momma.
This is not the story of Momma's crazy circles. (*soft*)
But Momma's crazy circles are part of my circles.

When your Momma is caught in crazy circles,
everything female is tainted.
Everything female is tainted.
I can't believe I come from her body.
A skull cracking is Daddy's girl.
The afterbirth, brain cells.
I want nothing that is Momma's.
I am Daddy's . . . child.
I don't want to be circumscribed by her spheres.

Course, now I'm caught in another either or dichotomy.

Male Female

Sane Crazy

Half-truths.

Hopeless hemispheres

needing connection,

and I don't know how to connect them.

Male Sane

Female Crazy

I want an empty set.

(Tune of "Will the Circle be Unbroken").

Will the circle be unbroken?

By and by, lord, by and by.

In ring number one is gender oppression

& the desire not to be limited by any categories.

In ring number two is the desire to be nothing like Momma.

But what is in the center ring of my three-ring gender circus?

Laddies and gentlewomen! *(ringmaster voice)*

If I may direct your attention to the center ring

where for your enjoyment and titillation

the luscious Mz. Bishop

will perform feats

that defy the imagination.

Tonight, she will re-gender herself for her own sexual pleasure.

Fantasy number number one. *(slow, sex voice)*

My mouth encircles the head of his cock,

a substantial mouthful.

I swallow the shaft,

plant my lips firming around the base of this cylinder.

The volume of a cylinder is found solving for πr^2

multiplied by the height. *(academic voice)*

I wish the volume of this cylinder wasn't already written. *(wistful)*

I then suck-slide back up the shaft to the tip, *(slow, sex voice)*

worrying it with my tongue.

I gently lick the sensitive underside

of this circumsised and circumscribed object.

And I pretend

I am a man giving head to a man.

(tune of "Natural Woman")

You make me feel

You make me feel

You make me feel
like an **unnatural** woman. (*very strange voice*)

So I ask you, (*Old Jewish man voice*)
when it's mouth on cock,
does it really matter what gender places lips to head?
Would it be too much to ask for a little freedom?

What is a natural woman?
Make me feel like an unnatural woman.

"A hole is a hole is a hole,"
a gay male friend once said.

Would you like to put your cylinder of circumferences in one of my circles?
Or you could slide it in the space between my spheres.
I am a transcendental number
I can hold infinity.
I have a trinity
you can choose from.
Only one more than men do.
Pi multiplied by the length of your tongue
would solve one of my problems.

I was telling a friend how much I like to woo.
I want to be the prince,
to ride up on my white horse
to a sleeping beauty in a glass coffin.
His sword immobile
until I lift the lid
and swallow it to the hilt
with the most gendered part of my trinity.
And in my make, believe happily ever after,
I strap on a sword for him to swallow.

Yet,
I am a diva
and want to be adored.
I am the absence,
the other,
the negative number,
I am the w/whole to be explored.

I told this friend about the complicated interplay between masculine and feminine
modes that makes up my erotic life, and he said,
"Sheila, you are a gay man trapped in a woman's body!"

Am I a man trapped in a woman's body?

February 2000,

A psychic reads my palms.

"Sheila, in your past

one. . .two. . .three. . .four. . .five. . .six.seven (*hand gestures to emphasize*)

seven lives

you were a man.

In this life, you need to learn what it means to be a woman.

I chafe at that.

Does it have to be either or? (*big, bold voice and movement*)

Lets use imaginary numbers

to solve for the volume of our spheres and cylinders.

Lets empty the sets.

I am an unnatural woman.

I am a transcendental number.

I stretch into infinity

and I can hold it.

My circumference has no solution.

I'm bigger than any of y'all's categories.

And I have more than a mouthful of **contradictions**.

I saw no Way- The Heavens were stitched- (*soft, beautiful poetry voice*)

I felt the Columns close-

The Earth reversed her Hemispheres

I touched the Universe-

And back it slid- and I alone-

A Speck upon a Ball

Went out upon Circumference

Beyond the Dip of Bell

Emily Dickinson, Poem 378

(*Voice stays soft*).

A rigid order, a "masculine" architecture of "feminine" stitching is imposed on infinite space to separate me from the potential fulfillment that space represents. It reversing the half-truth hemispheres of male and female, I can momentarily touch the infinite. But transcendence requires not just the manipulation of dichotomies, but their synthesis.

The w/hole is greater than the sum of my parts. (*big grin delivery*)

(*Tune of "Will the Circle be Unbroken"*).

Will the circle be unbroken?

By and by, lord, by and by.

There's a better home awaiting

in the sky, lord, in the sky.

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant (*clear, clean simple delivery*)
Success in circuit lies.

Performer turns back to audience and holds position until applause begins.

The End (Beginning).