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Reframing Drag Performance:  
Beyond Theorisations of Drag as Subverting or Upholding the  
Status Quo

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## **Declaration**

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree. The work presented here was carried out by the author. Although no parts of the thesis have been published, I have published an independent, but related, book chapter. This chapter 'Are Drag Kings Still Too Queer for London: From the Nineteenth-Century Impersonator to the Drag King of Today' was published on 6 October 2016 in *Sex, Time and Place: Queer Histories of London*, eds. Simon Avery and Katherine M. Graham. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 97- 114.

## **Abstract**

Since the publication of *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* in 1972, drag performance has been an object of fascination for many French and Anglo-American queer and feminist theorists. Employing an intersectional, transfeminist approach, I explore central preoccupations traversing diverse theories of drag, focusing particularly on three issues: the relationship between drag and performativity, the assumption that a drag performer's gender differs from the gender they perform on stage, and the positioning of drag as necessarily either subversive or reactionary. Analysing the flaws and benefits of these conceptual trends as they appear in a representative selection of French and Anglo-American queer and feminist theoretical texts, I challenge the perception of drag as subverting or upholding the status quo, suggesting that this understanding creates reductive generalisations and cannot account for the diversity and complexity of many current drag scenes. Further, I contest the definitional focus on a presumed opposition between the gender of the performer and the gender they perform on stage. Although a performer's gender can shape their experience and understanding of drag performance, the focus on this presumed opposition erases certain performers' identities and distracts from what is actually happening on stage. While my first two chapters concentrate on selected queer and feminist theorizations of drag performance, my final chapter considers the relationship between Butlerian gender parody, intramural parody, and extramural satire in Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus*, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, and Monique Wittig's *Le Corps lesbien*. Here, I develop the frame of 'textual drag' to describe the interactions of these forms of parody and satire in these texts, while highlighting their authors' interrogations of norms of gender performance, gender identity, and embodiment. I then conclude by demonstrating how existing insights into drag performance can be combined with my own findings to create a particularizing, transfeminist approach to drag.

# **Introduction**

## **Research contexts**

I begin this chapter by outlining a representative selection of the diverse academic theorisations of drag, starting by introducing implicit assumptions and explicitly stated beliefs which traverse studies of drag performance. I then zoom in on queer and feminist French and Anglo-American theories of drag performance, raising a series of research questions which inform this thesis as a whole. These questions lead to a discussion of my interdisciplinary, transfeminist ‘scavenger methodology’ (Halberstam, 1998: 13) and of my choice of corpus.

Drag, like camp, seems to resist a single definition.<sup>1</sup> Although many people – whether performers, theorists, or admirers, of drag – have fixed ideas about what drag is and what it does, these ideas are frequently polarizing, and often contain internal contradictions. In order to provide a snapshot of three central conceptual trends, I turn to Judith Lorber’s comments in the preface to the *Drag Queen Anthology*:

Drag’s core elements are *performance* and *parody*. Drag exaggerates gendered dress and mannerisms with enough little incongruities to show the “otherness” of the drag artist. In the exaggeration lies the parody. Drag is performance because it needs an audience to appreciate the underlying joke. The joke is that a man can be a woman or a woman a man convincingly enough that the “unmasking” – or “unwiggling” – at the end of the performance gives a pleasurable *frisson* and evokes laughter, even though the audience has been in on the joke from the beginning. (They have come to see a drag act, after all.)

The laughter is the giveaway. A joke is being played out. What is the joke in drag? Not that someone can pass convincingly as a member of the opposite gender – transgenders [sic] and permanent cross-dressers do not want to be unmasked. The joke in drag is to set up “femininity” or “masculinity” as pure performance, as *exaggerated* gender display – and then to cut them down as pretense after all. (2004: xv-xvi)

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<sup>1</sup> For a nuanced analysis of camp’s resistance to definition, see Fabio Cleto’s ‘Introduction’ in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject* (1999: 3).

First, Lorber’s remarks enable me to pinpoint an idea which traverses many academic and non-academic conceptualizations of drag – an assumed opposition between the gender of the performer and the gender performed. This idea features in historical and theatrical analyses of drag – such as Sarah Maitland’s *Vesta Tilley* (1986), Lawrence Senelick’s *The Changing Room, Sex, Drag, and Theatre* (2000), and Christine Bard’s *Une histoire politique du pantalon* (2010)<sup>2</sup> – as, for example, when theorists explore the careers of specific ‘male impersonators’ and ‘female impersonators’ who performed genders differing from their own (e.g. Senelick, 2000: 333-7).<sup>3</sup> As Bard demonstrates in her thorough, nuanced analysis of ‘women’s’<sup>4</sup> use of trousers in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century France (2010), this focus on an opposition between performer gender and the gender performed can (sometimes) be politically useful. Consider what Bard terms ‘l’interdiction de s’habiller en homme’ (2010: 69-73): in addition to policing gender expression, the Paris Police’s 1800 ordonnance forbidding ‘travestissement’ (69) by ‘women’<sup>5</sup> foreshadowed future legislation which undermined the legal status of married women (73).<sup>6</sup> In

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<sup>2</sup> Unlike many of the texts examined here, *Une histoire politique du pantalon* (2010) does not primarily focus on theorizing drag performance. Rather, this text analyses the political mobilizations of trousers by women and female-assigned individuals in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century France. Although this thesis primarily concentrates on theatrical examples of drag performance, Bard’s text is a valuable reference point here in terms of the insight it provides into gender performance in the French context (e.g. 2010: 69-87; 2010: 242-9; 323-32).

<sup>3</sup> As drag is a form of performance with a long history (e.g. Senelick, 2000: 127), theatrical and historical analyses of drag often overlap, as in the cases of the texts mentioned above (Maitland, 1986: 61-79; Bard, 2010: 172-3). Additionally, as Bourcier demonstrates in ‘Des “Femmes travesties” aux pratiques transgenres: repenser et queeriser le travestissement’ (2006: 125-33), theorists frequently assume an opposition between performer gender and the gender performed, and do not limit this assumption to cases in which performers confirm their identities, as happened in the case of Vesta Tilley (Maitland, 1986: 55-9).

<sup>4</sup> The use of quotation marks indicates that while many of the female-assigned people discussed by Bard would have been women, others may not have identified with womanhood. Equally, this use of quotation marks seeks to account for individuals such as ‘femmes à barbe’ (Bard, 2010: 82-7) – people who are presumed to have experienced hypertrichosis and who chose to ‘s’habiller en hommes’ (2010: 82). Although some of these individuals may have identified as women, dressing in masculine clothing only to avoid public censure (84), others may have identified with masculinity or androgyny.

<sup>5</sup> As Bard explains (2010: 70-4), this ordonnance applied solely to individuals assigned female at birth (72-3), although ‘le travestissement masculin’ (74) was also subject to censure and policing (74-5).

<sup>6</sup> Bard points out that the police ordonnance was drafted when the later legislation was in the process of development (2010: 73), and argues that both forms of legislation sought to control and disempower women (73). Bard writes: ‘Il faut aussi revenir sur le contexte de la décision de 1800. Le Code civil (1804), qui va renforcer le pouvoir des hommes et donner le statut de mineures aux femmes mariées, est en gestation. Actives pendant la Révolution, parfois armées et travesties, les femmes doivent rentrer dans le rang. Leur rappeler qu’elles doivent porter les vêtements de leur sexe est une manière de le leur signifier’ (73).

cases such as this, it is particularly useful to highlight the gender of the performer and to question the impact of their 'travestissement' in relation to structural norms (e.g. Bard, 2010: 69-87; Murat, 2006: 63-5). As bell hooks states, to 'cross-dress as a woman in patriarchy – then, more so than now – was also to symbolically cross from a world of powerlessness to a world of privilege' (2009: 275).

A range of queer and feminist, French and Anglo-American analyses of drag explore the (presumed) opposition between performer gender and the gender performed. Although some studies engage with performers whose gender/s mirror or resonate with the gender/s they perform (e.g. André and Chang, 2006: 255-7; Butler, 1999: 187; Dolan, 2010: 46-7; Greco, 2012: 64; Halberstam, 1998: 241-2; hooks, 2009: 288; Kim, 2007: vii)<sup>7</sup>, this opposition is still frequently listed as one of the defining characteristics of drag performance (Butler, 1999: 187; Dolan, 2010: 46-7, Greco, 2012: 64; Halberstam, 1998: 231-2). Significantly, however, the focus on this opposition has been contested by scholars such as Sam Bourcier<sup>8</sup> (2006: 130-2) and Luca Greco (2012: 63-4). Bourcier's chapter 'Des "Femmes travesties" aux pratiques transgenres: repenser et queeriser le travestissement' (2006) skillfully demonstrates the problematic aspects of defining drag and 'travestissement' on this basis (2006: 126-32). Focusing on this opposition can erase the identities of the performers in question (2006: 126-30), and also stresses a presumed binary opposition at the expense of what is actually happening on stage (128).

Lorber's above remarks (2004: xv-xvi) equally highlight the significance of theatricality and exaggeration in defining drag. Although drag can, and does, occur outside (traditional) theatrical contexts<sup>9</sup>, this emphasis enables us to separate drag

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<sup>7</sup> Notably, unlike the other analyses listed above, Butler's discussion of drag in *Gender Trouble* (1999: 186-9) does not directly refer to performers whose identity mirrors or resonates with the gender they perform on stage. However, in exploring the perceived relations between 'three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality' (187) – assigned sex, gender identity, and onstage gender performance – Butler begins to challenge the assumed opposition between performer gender and gender performance, despite referring to it as a focal point in drag performance generally.

<sup>8</sup> Bourcier will be referred to as Sam Bourcier throughout this thesis. In a discussion on 20th May 2016, Sam mentioned that he uses 'Marie-Hélène/Sam' in certain contexts, but prefers 'Sam' and 'he' pronouns overall.

<sup>9</sup> I want to stress the difference between theatricality as a quality of a performance and theatricality as pertaining to an onstage context. As Esther Newton indicates in her discussion of the relationship between drag and camp (1979: 106-7), an exaggerated, theatrical performance of masculinity or femininity might be classified as drag even if it took place in a location which would not be typically

from other forms of 'cross-dressing' and gender expression. Perhaps most significantly, it begins to challenge the transphobic conflation between drag – a performance which may include an opposition between the gender of the performer and the gender performed on stage – and transgender embodiment. To clarify this further, drag is an onstage performance, which often plays with gendered features and archetypes, while trans is an identity category, relating to anyone whose gender differs from that which they were assigned at birth. The confusion between drag and trans identity may partly stem from the inclusion of drag within the broad umbrella term 'transgender', which was initially developed as an open-ended category which includes gender non-conforming individuals as well as individuals who are transgender and transsexual. However, there is a clear difference between questioning how drag might fit into the umbrella term 'transgender' and deliberately dismissing an individual's identity by conflating it with an (onstage) performance. Following Julia Serano (2016: 175-95; 2013: 104-13) I contend that the deliberate conflation of trans identity with performance constitutes one aspect of the cissexist framework which naturalizes cisgender and cissexual identities, while positioning trans identities as artificial, abnormal, or unnatural.

Returning to theatricality, this is treated as a defining trait of drag by scholars from a wide range of disciplines (Newton, 1979: 107-9; Butler, 1999: 189; Bourcier, 2006: 130; Halberstam, 1998: 236-9; Greco, 2012: Frye, 1983: 137-8). The focus on theatricality traverses several disciplines and bodies of thought – including anthropology (Newton, 1979: 107-9), camp theory (Sontag, 1999: 56), history (Murat, 2006: 86-7), sociology (Bourcier, 2006: 131-2), and theatre studies (Senelick, 2000: 326-38; Rodger, 2002: 118-21) – and facilitates a comparison between techniques mobilized in drag and techniques employed in other performance forms. I especially want to highlight Senelick's formative volume *The Changing Room, Sex, Drag and Theatre* (2000). This wide-ranging text tackles diverse forms of drag and theatrical performance, including but not limited to,

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associated with performance. Newton provides the example of 'a Midwestern football player in high drag at a Halloween ball' (1979: 106).

kabuki theatre (2000: 79-81); male impersonation in American Vaudeville and the late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>- century Music Hall (2000: 326-40); and late 20<sup>th</sup>- century English and American queer performance troupes (489-98). In addition to its admirable scope and its close attention to potential links between performance forms, Senelick's text closely interrogates the forms in question, providing a thorough introduction to the relationship between performance and performer politics (330-40).<sup>10</sup> Following Newton's influential *Mother Camp* and Butler's seminal *Gender Trouble*, queer and feminist analyses of drag frequently draw on its theatrical and performative dimensions, mobilizing these to look at the potential relationship between drag and quotidian gender performance (Butler, 1999: 186-9; Newton, 1979: 102-3).<sup>11</sup>

This leads to the third significant point raised by Lorber's comments: her suggestion that '[t]he joke in drag is to set up "femininity" or "masculinity" as pure performance, as exaggerated gender display – and then to cut them down as pretense after all' (Lorber, 2004: xvi). Although Lorber does not refer directly to Butler's theory of gender performativity (1999: 187-90) here, her emphasis on 'pretence' and 'pure performance' (Lorber, 2009: xvi) clearly resounds with Butler's argument that drag performance can reveal the constructed nature of gender – as Butler writes, 'in imitating gender, *drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency* (1999: 187, emphasis in original) – and the status of gender as a copy without an original (1999: 188). Written in 1990, Butler's *Gender Trouble* constituted a decisive intervention in Anglo-American queer and

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Senelick's analysis of late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century male impersonation in America and the UK closely examines the professional and personal lives of impersonators such as Annie Hindle (2000: 329-31), Vesta Tilley (333-6) and Gladys Bentley (2000: 338-40), demonstrating the ways in which their contexts – American Vaudeville (329), the British Music Hall, and Harlem (338), respectively – identities and personal politics shaped their performance styles and public lives (329-40).

<sup>11</sup> *Gender Trouble*, and to a lesser extent, *Mother Camp*, invite readers to question how gender performance in drag sheds light on the mechanics of quotidian gender performance (Butler, 1999: 186-9; Newton, 1979: 102-3). I discuss Butler's theories of performativity in greater detail in the next section of the introduction, as well as examining them at length in the queer theoretical chapter of this thesis. Significantly, discussions of the (potential) relationship between drag and quotidian gender performance are not limited to analyses which explicitly position themselves as queer or feminist. Although I would argue that this mobilization of drag can carry out queer and/or feminist work, I do not want to suggest that it occurs only within texts which explicitly position themselves as queer and/or feminist.

feminist theory (Prosser, 2006: 259).<sup>12</sup> Although *Gender Trouble* engages with a range of feminist and post-structuralist theories and philosophies – including the works of Simone de Beauvoir (Butler, 1999: 151-2), Michel Foucault (Butler, 1999: 127-39), and Monique Wittig (Butler, 1999: 153-73) – these analyses have not received the same level of critical attention as her concept of gender performativity (Butler, 1999: xxi-iv, Butler in Prosser, 2006: 159): the argument that gender is constituted through repeated acts (1999: 185-7). Butler’s mobilization of drag in her discussion of performativity (1999: 187-9) drew attention to drag performance, suggesting that drag has the capacity to shed light on the constructed nature of gender (187-9). Readings, or misreadings (Butler, 1999: xxiii-iv), of Butler’s analysis were highly influential in scholarship on drag, with Butler’s work being quoted in many later studies (Bourcier, 2006: 129-30; Prosser, 2006: 59-61, Greco, 2012: 67; Tyler, 2003: 102-3).

Moreover, Lorber’s preface highlights another, more contentious, aspect of Butler’s reading of drag in *Gender Trouble*: the question of the relationship between drag and subversion (Lorber, 2004: xvi; Butler, 1999: 187-9). As Butler explains in the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, her discussion of drag is not intended to position drag as an ‘*example* of subversion’ (1999: xxiii, emphasis in original) or as a ‘model for political agency’ (xxiii). Although Butler does raise the question of subversion in her original exploration of drag (1999: 189), she does not assume that drag is *necessarily* subversive, but instead emphasizes the significance of context, performer intent, and audience response (189), arguing:

Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony. A typology of actions would clearly not suffice, for parodic displacement, indeed parodic laughter, depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered. (189)

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<sup>12</sup> Discussing the impact of *Gender Trouble* on the perception of queer theory and on the relationship between queer theory and trans embodiment, Jay Prosser writes ‘*Gender Trouble’s* impact was enormous: [...] appearing with the decade, it transformed transgender into a queer icon, in the process of becoming a sort of icon of the new queer theory itself’ (2006: 259).

Despite Butler's words of caution here and elsewhere (Butler, 1999: xxiii; Butler, 1993: 230-1; Butler 2004: 213-4), there is a definite academic and activist investment in connecting drag to subversion or transgression (e.g. André and Chang, 2006: 268; Bourcier, 2006: 131-2; hooks, 2009: 278; Muñoz, 1999: 99-100, Schacht and Underwood, 2004: 13-4). Schacht and Underwood elucidate this emotional investment in their Introduction to *The Drag Queen Anthology*, arguing that the (potential) transgression of gendered boundaries achieved by drag performers facilitates a recognition of the 'performed basis of all inequalities' (2004: 13) and stating '[f]or those of us in search of constructing a less oppressive future, this accomplishment is certainly cause for hope and celebration' (13). Schacht and Underwood's emotive phrasing clearly communicates the level of investment in the possibility of challenging oppressive gender norms, and although Schacht and Underwood contest the positioning of drag as necessarily subversive (13-4), they retain hope about the positive impact of certain performances (13-4).<sup>13</sup> This investment in drag's capacity to explore possibilities for embodiment outside rigid cisheteronormative<sup>14</sup> models is not limited to scholars, but is shared with some drag performers.<sup>15</sup> However, although some drag performances do certainly encourage their audience members to think about the limits imposed surrounding binary gender norms, the positioning of drag as subversive is problematic as well as seductive. As the impact of a drag performance is dependent on context, performer intent, and audience response, the positioning of drag as subversive can lead to false generalizations or to a hierarchizing dichotomy between 'good', 'subversive'

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<sup>13</sup> Schacht and Underwood offer a useful distinction between the positioning of drag as 'transgressive' and the positioning of drag as 'subversive' (13-4) However, as I argue below, it is easy to create a dichotomy between 'good' transgressive drag and 'bad' reactionary drag, although doing so often overlooks the variety between performers within a given context.

<sup>14</sup> Following Julia Serano (2014), I define cissexism as the failure, on either an individual or systematic level, to recognise trans identities and possibilities. Serano revisits her insightful analyses of cissexism and cis privilege in the following blog composed in 2014: <http://juliaserano.blogspot.co.uk/2014/10/cissexism-and-cis-privilege-revisited.html> (accessed 29 September 2016). The term 'cisheteronormative' is a compound of cissexist and heteronormative, and refers to the assumption – on a structural or individual level – that cissexual embodiment and heterosexual desire are normal and natural, while other forms of desire and embodiment are rare and abnormal.

<sup>15</sup> Some drag performers deliberately aim to encourage their audiences to think about reductive gender norms. For example, Adam All, London based drag king Jen Powell, has explained that their inclusion of 'feminine' attributes in their performance of Adam are intended to challenge hegemonic models of masculinity and to encourage audience members to think about other forms of embodiment.

drag and 'bad', 'reactionary' drag. As Schacht and Underwood's above remark about challenging oppression indicates, queer and feminist scholars are particularly invested in drag's perceived capacity, or lack thereof, to create 'construction, invention, change' (hooks, 2009: 276). This passion for change frequently creates a reductive subversive/reactionary dichotomy which limits balanced discussion about the flaws and/or benefits of individual performances, and can encourage readers to make unhelpful generalizations.

### **Research questions**

My research questions align with the central fields of enquiry outlined above: the opposition between performer gender and gender performed; the relationship between identity, performance and performativity; and the subversive/reactionary dichotomy. Although theoretical texts (Bard, 2010: 74-5; Murat, 2006: 79) and analyses of drag performance spaces demonstrate the significance of performer gender<sup>16</sup>, the performer/performed opposition can exclude trans performers (Kohlsdorf, 2014: 83-6) and detract from the performance itself. Consequently, this thesis questions how theorists can account for performer identity<sup>17</sup>, while refusing to reduce it to a component within a reductive performer/performed dichotomy.

Turning to questions of performance, performativity, and identity, Butler begins to query the relationship between these in her discussion of drag and performativity (1999: 187-93). However, transfeminist scholarship by Bourcier (2012: 156) and Serano (2012: 179-83) has justly criticized Butler in that her analyses can discount

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<sup>16</sup> Performers' identities shape the performances they undertake. For example, Jen's decision to critique hegemonic masculinity through their performances as Adam All was shaped by their experience of obnoxious 'banter' while working on construction sites. Equally, while many inclusive scenes welcome performers of a range of genders, certain performers and fans continue to define drag by the performer/performed opposition and even suggest that drag should be restricted to gay men. Holestar discussed her experiences of prejudices as a female drag queen in her show 'Sorry I'm a Lady', see <http://holestar.webs.com/sorry-i-m-a-lady> [accessed 20 March 2016]. Happily, as Marilyn Misandry argues in their interview with Project Queer, they and other performers in the Manchester scene challenge transmisogyny, [http://projectqueer.org/private/132554673823/tumblr\\_nxb2g6c88N1qb8zww](http://projectqueer.org/private/132554673823/tumblr_nxb2g6c88N1qb8zww) [accessed 20 March 2016].

<sup>17</sup> Notably, many existing studies of drag include excellent analyses of performer identity and its impact. For example, Je Hye Kim's *Performing Female Masculinities at the Intersections of Gender, Class, Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality* (2007), and José Estaban Muñoz's 'The White to be Angry' (1998) provide nuanced approaches which examine performers' experiences of intersecting identity categories – across race, class, gender, and sexuality – and forms of oppression.

personal investments in identity and play into misogynistic discourses (Serano, 2012: 179-83). Equally, however, the performances which performers undertake can intersect with, and even shape, their identities and practices (Greco, 2012: 74-9).<sup>18</sup> Therefore, this thesis aims to query how these intersections operate, while highlighting the significance and validity of identity. Considering how to examine intersections between identity, performance, and performativity, this thesis explores how various queer and feminist theorists account for these intersections, and whether they can be theorized differently in different contexts.

In interrogating the positioning of drag as subversive, I ask what theorists mean by 'subversion', questioning how different contexts shape this positioning. My own investment in challenging cisheteronormative assumptions and structures enables me to understand the appeal of drag as a transgressive form (Schacht and Underwood, 2004: 13-4). Equally, however, my analysis of and participation in drag spaces in France and the UK<sup>19</sup> has drawn my attention to the impact of context and performer intent. Thus, I question how performers encourage audiences to think about oppressive norms, while equally refusing to position drag as subversive or to ignore reactionary performances. Further, following Sam Bourcier, I question the impact of the 'burden of subversion' (2012: 154) on the practice and perception of drag. Finally, I ask how we can appreciate challenges to norms in drag without positioning these as necessarily subversive.

Looking at the reactionary dimension of the subversive/reactionary dichotomy enables me to observe a contextual difference between Anglo-American and French responses to drag performance. I therefore question why the investment in the equation between drag and misogyny primarily occurs in Anglo-American texts. Equally, scrutinizing the biological essentialism in this positioning, I question how it mobilizes and perpetuates transphobia (Raymond, 1994: xxiii-iv) and other

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<sup>18</sup> For the impact of identity on performance see Andre and Chang, 2006: 266-7, as well as footnote seventeen above. Equally, as Luca Greco demonstrates (2012: 69-73), collective performance practices and discussions can shape performer identity, and shed light on the workings of identity construction (2012: 74-9). I discuss Greco's 'Un soi pluriel, la présentation de soi dans les ateliers Drag King. Enjeux interactionnels, catégoriels et politiques' (2012) in my queer theoretical chapter.

<sup>19</sup> I have participated in drag events in Birmingham, Coventry, London, Manchester, Metz, and Newcastle, focusing particularly on London's drag king scene. Although I have not visited Paris drag events, I have closely followed them online, via performers' websites and social media.

oppressive discourses, such as ableism, classism, and racism. Finally, I ask how theorists can account for performances which mobilize these discourses without dismissing certain performances' capacity to encourage audiences to think about normative structures.

### **Corpus and methodology**

The first chapter of this thesis is dedicated to French and Anglo-American queer theory, and offers a close analysis of works by four authors: Sam Bourcier, Judith Butler, Luca Greco, and Judith Jack Halberstam.<sup>20</sup> While several queer theorists have referred to drag within the context of a broader analysis, the perspectives examined here seem to me to constitute a decisive intervention into the understanding of drag as a whole. Butler's *Gender Trouble*, which arguably spearheaded queer theoretical interest in drag, has received extensive criticism (Prosser, 1998: 24-5). Here, I interrogate the problems raised by Butler's analyses of drag and performativity, particularly in cases where Butler seemingly overlooks the complexity of trans embodiment (e.g. Butler, 1999: xxxi-xxiv, Namaste, 2000: 19-22). Equally, however, scrutinizing Butler's language use enables me to highlight the intricacy of her arguments and the misreadings thereof.<sup>21</sup> For readers with a background in queer and feminist theory, Butler and Halberstam are familiar names, while Bourcier and Greco are less well known outside of French-specific queer studies. This resonates with the premise of the AHRC project on Queer Theory in France; queer theory has not been welcomed in the French academy as it has been in the US, and to a lesser extent, in the UK.<sup>22</sup> Equally, these theorists have

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<sup>20</sup> I examine three of Halberstam's works in this thesis: *Female Masculinity* (1998), 'Oh Behave! Austin Powers and the Drag Kings' (2005), and *The Drag King Book* (1999), co-authored with Del la Grace Volcano. Halberstam's name is listed as 'Judith' in the single authored texts above, and as Judith Jack in *The Drag King Book*. In the blog post 'On Pronouns' (2012), Halberstam discusses using both names, as well as 'Jude', and reflects on pronoun use. Halberstam remarks 'when it comes to names and pronouns, I am a bit of a free floater', and refers to using both 'she' and 'he' pronouns. I have decided to use 'Judith Jack' and 'he', in addition to 'Halberstam', throughout this thesis to offer some of the flexibility and ambiguity Halberstam highlights in the blog post. To read this post in full, please visit: <http://www.jackhalberstam.com/on-pronouns/> (accessed 5/09/2016).

<sup>21</sup> For example, my study of Butlerian performativity enables me to challenge Julia Serano's gloss on performativity in her otherwise insightful chapter 'Reclaiming Femininity' (2012).

<sup>22</sup> This project was organized by Dr Hector Kollias (PI), Kings' College, and Dr Oliver Davis (CI), Warwick, and interrogated the apparent reluctance of French academia, and of certain French theorists, to engage with queer theoretical readings of celebrated French writers such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan. For further details about this project, in which I

different specialisms and academic backgrounds. Luca Greco's work is primarily situated in socio-linguistics, and his nuanced analysis of selfhood, plurality, and collectivity within a Belgian drag king group acts to challenge the limits of performativity (2012: 66-8) and to attest to the inclusive nature of certain performance spaces (72-5). Bourcier's invaluable body of work is situated within queer and transfeminist theory, and it is beginning to achieve international acclaim.<sup>23</sup> Bourcier's chapter 'Des "Femmes travesties" aux pratiques transgenres: repenser et queeriser le travestissement' (2006), and his article 'F\*\*\* the Politics of Disempowerment in the Second Butler' (2012) occupy a central space in my chapter due to their rich insight into performativity and identity (2006: 128-31), and as a result of their biting critiques of transphobia and cissexism (150-4).<sup>24</sup> Thus, although Greco and Bourcier may not be as popularly acclaimed as either Butler or Halberstam, their contributions to the study of identity and of masculinity in the context of drag spaces are equally significant.

Halberstam's works<sup>25</sup> – *Female Masculinity* (1998) *The Drag King Book* (1999) and 'Oh Behave! Austin Powers and the Drag Kings' (2005) – have had a substantial effect on later approaches to queer masculinities. These texts played a significant role in foregrounding alternative and/or minority identities and embodiment within the then comparatively conventional body of scholarship on masculinity (Bourcier,

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participated, and which generously provided the funding for this thesis, see <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/modernlanguages/research/french/currentprojects/queertheory/> (accessed 20 March 2016).

<sup>23</sup> Bourcier has been invited as a Keynote Speaker at a number of international symposia, including 'Queer Theory and Academia: The Case of France in an International Frame', held at the University of Warwick. For more details on this symposium, see the workshops section of the Queer Theory in France Project Page <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/modernlanguages/research/french/currentprojects/queertheory/workshops/queertheoryfrenchacademicinstitutions> (accessed 20 March 2016) and the "'Ideologies" and Theories of Gender in Europe' symposium, held at the University of Leicester. For more details on this symposium, see <http://www.pecob.eu/Ideologies-Theories-Gender-Europe-Part-1-France-Italy> (accessed 20 April 2016). Sam Bourcier is recognized by French and Belgian activist groups for his theoretical and activist work: see, for example, <http://www.genrespluriels.be/Marie-Helene-Bourcier> (accessed 20 April 2016).

<sup>24</sup> As noted in note 14 above, I follow Julia Serano in defining cissexism as the failure, on either an individual or systematic level, to recognise trans identities and possibilities. Serano revisits her insightful analyses of cissexism and cis privilege in the following blog: <http://juliaserano.blogspot.co.uk/2014/10/cissexism-and-cis-privilege-revisited.html> (accessed 29 October 2016).

<sup>25</sup> *The Drag King Book* is co-authored by J Jack Halberstam and Del La Grace Volcano (1999), who contributed analyses and imagery to the volume.

2011: 194-6). However, for Bourcier, Halberstam's battle cry of 'masculinity without men' no longer works in either theoretical or political terms (2011: 196-7), as it uplifts butch masculinities while erasing trans men (196-7).<sup>26</sup> Equally, while Halberstam often makes perceptive remarks about popular culture and other art-forms, the works concerned tend to prioritize minority masculinities while neglecting minority femininities.

Although Butler's work primarily concentrates on drag queens (e.g. 1993: 123-40), the other texts analysed here explore drag king performance. My focus on drag kings reflects a bias within early queer theory: as previously noted in relation to Halberstam, the performance of masculinity was frequently a focal point in 1990s queer scholarship, which sought to address a previous scholarly bias towards drag queens (Halberstam, 1998: 231-2). However, my choice of focus was also motivated by my experience of preconceptions about drag performance. In 2012, the drag king performance scenes in London and Paris were rarely celebrated or understood by the cisheteronormative majority, and were discussed primarily by the small number of people who participated in them. In our first interview, Jen Powell, London-based drag king Adam All, explained that audiences often seemed perplexed by extravagant, exaggerated performance styles, and expected hyperrealism or sexiness from drag king performers.<sup>27</sup> This obscurity facing drag kings in London, Paris, and elsewhere encouraged me to celebrate their work and highlight their perspectives throughout this thesis.<sup>28</sup> For example, in Chapter Three,

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<sup>26</sup> On one level, Bourcier's criticism of Halberstam (2011: 196) may seem unnecessarily harsh: the battle cry of 'masculinity without men' targets the assumption that masculinity adheres naturally (and exclusively) to cissexual men, and can therefore be understood as celebrating all minority masculinities, including those of trans men. Nevertheless, Bourcier's criticism merits attention here as it gestures towards a bias which occasionally appears in Halberstam's work (e.g. Halberstam and Volcano, 1999: 127): the belief that trans men 'confirm the dominance of gender binarism' (1999: 127), while other masculinities transgress gender norms. I unpack the problems raised by this bias in my analysis of *The Drag King Book*, which is found in the first chapter of this thesis.

<sup>27</sup> As I argue in the chapter 'Are Drag Kings Still Too Queer for London', this point elucidates the disparity between audiences' responses to drag kings and drag queens (Stokoe, 2016: 102-6). I also want to thank Jen again for their invaluable help throughout this project, and their elucidation of the obstacles facing drag kings in London.

<sup>28</sup> The London drag king scene is currently receiving more media attention than it was in 2012, and this also seems to be the case with the Paris scene, if to a lesser extent. Notably, Chriss Lag's 'Paroles de King', a documentary about French performers, was released last year and has been successfully shown at a number of events. For further details about this film, please visit <http://paroledeking.com/> (accessed 30 May 2016).

I allude to performances undertaken by drag king Adam All and alpha femme Apple Derrières, demonstrating how their work illustrates and elucidates the concepts of gender parody (Butler, 1999: 188-90) and intramural parody (Hutcheon, 2000: 43).

As the above summary indicates, my queer theoretical chapter employs what Halberstam terms a 'scavenger methodology' (1998: 13) – drawing on techniques from diverse fields, including comparative literature, cultural studies, and sociology – and employs a transfeminist approach. Following Ann Enke, transfeminist approaches combine insights developed by trans studies – such as the interrogation of the gender binary, challenges to the impact of assignment at birth, and a recognition of the complexity of identity – with intersectional feminist theory (2012: 2-3).<sup>29</sup> I equally employ this transfeminist, scavenger methodology in my second chapter, which I primarily devote to feminist theorizations of femininity and its performance.

Feminist theorizations of drag span a period of more than forty years: *Mother Camp*, the first extended feminist ethnography of 'female impersonators' (Rubin, 2002: 46), was originally published in 1972. Rather than examining *Mother Camp* in its entirety, I concentrate on key arguments in the chapter 'Role Models'. I place Newton's concept of drag queens as 'professional homosexual[s]' (1979: 3) in a dialogue with José Estaban Muñoz's concept of disidentification (1998: 11), thereby elucidating Newton's original notion and updating it in light of contemporary drag practices.

This analysis is preceded by a critique of three texts, which mobilize the concept of drag as inherently misogynistic: Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire* (1994), Marilyn Frye's 'Lesbian Feminism and the Gay Rights Movement: Another Separatism, Another View of Male Supremacy' (1983), and bell hooks' 'Is Paris Burning?' (2009). Here, I challenge this reductive assertion, examining the bias at

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<sup>29</sup> The concept of intersectionality was initially developed by Kimberle Crenshaw to conceptualize the interaction between sexism and racism in relation to violence against black women. Crenshaw develops intersectionality further in 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color' (1991: 1242-6), and illustrates the way in which identity politics can fail to address the way in which distinct forms of bias overlap and intersect with each other. My thesis as a whole aims to take an intersectional approach, and is consequently indebted to Crenshaw's work.

work in Frye (1983: 138-9) and Raymond's accounts (1994: xxi-xxiv), and stressing the misogyny at work in dismissals of femininity (Serano, 2012: 170-1, 180-3). Equally, this analysis of the equation of drag with misogyny enables me to highlight the disparity between the popularity of this concept in Anglo-American feminist theory and its relative scarcity within the French feminist context.

My focus on performed femininity continues in three further texts: Carole Ann Tyler's *Female Impersonation* (2003), 'And Then You Cut Your Hair: Genderfucking on the Femme Side of the Spectrum' (2006) by Amy André and Sandy Chang, and Julia Serano's 'Reclaiming Femininity' (2012). Serano's nuanced, transfeminist analysis challenges the post-Butlerian feminist orthodoxy which renders femininity inseparable from performance (2012: 179-83) and highlights the misogyny at work in this discourse (79-83). Mobilizing Serano's insights<sup>30</sup>, I demonstrate Tyler's reliance on misogynistic assumptions in her analysis of drag queen performance (Tyler, 2003: 91-2) and question her analyses of identification (2003: 70-1). Despite relying on the positioning of drag as subversive (André and Chang, 2006: 267), André and Chang's discussion facilitates a fuller understanding of the racialization of gender performance and of the impact of racist assumptions on the perception and experience of drag king performance (2006: 264-8). I highlight the significance of these intersectional insights, while equally unpacking the beliefs and assumptions underpinning André and Chang's conversation. I then close this chapter by exploring two French feminist texts; Simone de Beauvoir's 'La lesbienne' (1979) and Laure Murat's *La loi du genre* (2006).

This closing section elucidates the French feminist fascination with women's performances of masculinity (Beauvoir, 1976: 193-215; Bard, 2010: 69-89; Murat, 2006: 67-95). In opposition to the Anglo-American feminist trend of focusing on drag queens while excluding drag kings (Raymond, 1994: xxiii-iv; Frye, 1983: 137-8), French feminists have frequently followed Beauvoir (1979: 193-215) in examining the performance of masculinity at length, while saying comparatively little about

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<sup>30</sup> Serano's insights into identifications with femininity (2012: 180-3) and its dismissal in popular culture enrich my approach, facilitating an analysis of drag queen performance which challenges misogyny in drag without subscribing to the transphobic, misogynistic, generalizations that permeate certain works (Raymond, 1994: xxviii-ix)

the performance of femininity (Bourcier, 2006: 126). Questioning this disparity, I examine Beauvoir's notion of 'la protestation virile' (1976: 193), critiquing its reliance on misogynistic and homophobic assumptions.

Differing markedly from the other texts examined here, Murat's *La loi du genre* provides essential insights into the pathologizing enforcement of cissexist ideals by 19<sup>th</sup>-century French policing and legal systems (2006: 51-65). Examining this text alongside insights drawn from Christine Bard's *Une Histoire Politique du Pantalon* (2010) provides support for my assertion that despite the significance of performer gender (Bard, 2010: 74-5; Murat, 2006: 79), defining drag by an assumed opposition between performer gender and the gender performed on stage can reinforce cissexist binaries (Kohlsdorf, 2014: 83-4) and detract from the performance itself.

My final chapter focuses on three literary texts: Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus* (1884), Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), and Monique Wittig's *Le Corps lesbien* (1973). This final chapter has three aims. It builds on the transfeminist approach and insights examined in the first two chapters, demonstrating that the literary texts examined act, first, to challenge the reductive subversive/reactionary dichotomy, and, second, to illustrate the limits of the binary model which positions drag as 'a man performing as a woman or vice versa'. Third, this chapter develops and explicates the model of 'textual drag'. 'Textual drag' mobilizes Butler's theory of 'gender parody' (1999: 189) and Linda Hutcheon's theories of 'intramural parody' and 'extramural satire' (2000: 43) to elucidate the relationship between textual parody, gendered imagery, and satire in texts focusing on drag and/or gender performance. As I demonstrate, *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, and *Le Corps lesbien* provide insights into modes of identification and expression outside reductive binary models, thereby highlighting challenges to the oppositional model of drag, while resonating with contemporary transfeminist insights.

My conclusion shows how the findings of this thesis develop the groundwork for a particularizing, transfeminist approach to drag. Highlighting my critique of existing models of drag, such as the performer/performed opposition and the subversive/reactionary dichotomy, the conclusion equally raises significant trends

in French and Anglo-American drag performance, focusing particularly on the homogenizing effect of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, and on the inclusive, transfeminist approaches to drag which exist outside its reductive models (Kohlsdorf, 2014: 83-6).

## **Chapter One: Drag! How Queer? A Reconsideration of Queer Theoretical Paradigms of Drag**

This chapter analyses the work of four theorists: Sam Bourcier, Judith Butler, Luca Greco, and Judith Jack Halberstam. As queer theory frequently seeks to trouble established binary categories and to resist heteronormative assumptions, each of these works engages with the perception of drag as a disruptive and revelatory form. While much of the work considered focuses on drag's capacity to either subvert or reinforce the norms of binary gender, this discussion also highlights aspects of drag outside of this paradigm.

Closely analysing selected works provides this chapter with comprehensive insights into previous queer theoretical responses to drag performance. Equally, this technique means that the thesis will be more fully equipped to place these theories in a dialogue with each other, with literary works, and with a more subjective analysis of contemporary drag scenes, approaching these from a transfeminist perspective. I arrange my analysis by author. My readings of Butler's *Bodies that Matter* (1993), *Gender Trouble* (1990), 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination' (1991), and *Undoing Gender* (2004), and of Luca Greco's 'Un soi pluriel: la présentation de soi dans les ateliers Drag King. Enjeux interactionnels, catégoriels et politiques' (2012) will include thematic subsections. I analyse Sam Bourcier's 'F\*\*\* the Politics of Disempowerment in the Second Butler' (2012), before exploring his chapter 'Des "Femmes travesties" aux pratiques transgenres : repenser et queeriser le travestissement' (2006). This facilitates a fuller understanding of Bourcier's politics and an informed reading of his response to drag. The final works discussed here, Halberstam's 'Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance' (1998), *The Drag King Book* (1999), and 'Oh Behave! Austin Powers and the Drag Kings' (2005) will be explored chronologically, as well as including thematic subsections.

### **Drag and Butlerian performativity**

Butler's significant contributions to the study of drag and to queer thought render her work invaluable here. The four texts discussed, *Bodies That Matter* (1993),

*Gender Trouble* (1990), 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination' (1991) and *Undoing Gender* (2004), each present elements which play an vital role in my study of drag, as well as containing problems to disentangle.

The first of Butler's ideas to explore in this chapter is the notion that drag is a performative phenomenon which acts to render gender performativity visible. The 1990 preface to *Gender Trouble* introduces drag and performativity by asking readers to reconsider their previous conceptions about drag as an imitation of gender. Butler teases her readers by asking '[i]s drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established?' (1999: xxxi). I say 'teases' here as Butler first appears to reproduce a familiar notion about drag – that drag imitates gender – but then destabilizes it by suggesting that the idea of performativity can reshape and modify that original perception. Moreover, Butler collapses the original meaning behind the notion that drag imitates gender; that is, for Butler, drag is not the imitation of a 'real', or 'original' gender, but is only the imitation of an equally imitative structure. Butler states this clearly in *Gender Trouble*: '*in imitating gender, drag reveals the imitative structure of gender itself as well as its contingency*' (1999: 187, emphasis in original).

In the main body of *Gender Trouble*, Butler elaborates her concept of drag as performative by linking her work to Esther Newton's *Mother Camp* (1973), an anthropological study of American drag queens. However, Butler argues that her work adds a further dimension to that of Newton, noting: 'I would suggest as well that drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity' (Butler, 1999: 186). On one level, this notion harmonizes with and adds to a performative understanding of drag in that it can be read as creating disruption in the mind of the observer as to whether the psychic space projected by a drag performer would harmonize with the internal psychic space of that performer. Butler suggests that drag unsettles the assumption that an inner truth of gender is expressed visibly on the surface, noting that drag 'effectively mocks [...] the expressive model of gender' (1999: 186). The choice of the term 'mockery' acts

performatively to suggest a form of subverting and revealing which may be as playful as it is destructive. However, the notion that drag 'effectively mocks [...] the notion of a true gender identity' (Butler, 1999: 186) is more problematic. If this sentence is intended to suggest that drag can act to challenge the assumption that an assigned sex necessarily leads to a coherent, corresponding gender presentation and to the coherent, corresponding gender identity, it raises little cause for disquiet. The performative understanding of drag and of gender encourages readers to rethink the causal links between assigned sex and gender, and between gender and gender performance, as well as disputing the notion of gender as an absolute, given truth. However, this suggestion could also be seen to erase trans identities as it does not account for the relationship between gender identity and embodiment.

Butler further interrogates the role drag can play in revealing performativity as follows:

[Drag] also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalised as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency.* Indeed, part of the pleasure, part of the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary. In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity (1999: 187- 8, emphasis in original).

Here, Butler returns to the conceptualization of drag outlined in the 1990 preface to *Gender Trouble*: drag performance reveals the constructed, performative nature of (heteronormative) gender. For Butler, here, drag can produce a moment of recognition at which one – the observer, or perhaps, a drag performer – can perceive that the notion of naturalized gender is as constructed as is any drag performance.

Here, moreover, Butler argues that drag can facilitate the realization that there is no necessary, causal relationship between assigned sex and gender identity, or

between gender identity and gender performance. I would suggest that this reflection on the capacity of certain drag performances to unsettle norms can also be applied to cissexist norms more generally. While Butler does not suggest that drag necessarily acts to subvert given gender norms, she does argue that certain drag performances can provoke observers to rethink the ways in which they perceive gender. Throughout this thesis, I follow Butler in challenging the idea of a necessary relationship between drag and transgression, while equally arguing that certain performances can enable audiences to reconsider their assumptions.

In *Gender Trouble* and 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', Butler discusses the relationship between drag and performativity, questioning the perception of drag as an imitation of 'proper' or essential gender. Butler's concept of performative drag hinges upon the notion that there is no 'proper' gender; that is, each manner of performing gender is valid, and no causal link exists between assigned sex and gender identity. In 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', Butler interrogates the assumption of a 'proper' gender, exploring the consequences of this notion for the performance of drag:

Drag is not the putting on of a gender that belongs properly to some other group, i.e. an act of expropriation or appropriation that assumes that gender is the rightful property of sex, that "masculine" belongs to "male" and "feminine" belongs to "female." There is no "proper" gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex's cultural property. Where that notion of the "proper" operates, it is always and only improperly installed as the effect of a compulsory system. Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. (1991: 21)

Here, Butler's deconstruction of the notion of "proper" gender problematizes the idea of causal links between gender presentation and gender, and between gender and sex. Moreover, this passage further cements the concept that drag dramatizes the performative nature of gender. While 'mundane' may at first appear incongruous here, I suggest that it is used very effectively, operating on three levels. First, it reminds readers that Butler is not only referring to drag performances which take place on the stage, but also referring to all gendered drag.

Second, 'mundane' stresses the idea that gender performance is a routine, everyday business. Third, 'mundane' creates a curious contrast with 'theatricalized', and, together, these terms act to show that however gender is performed, this performance remains routine and remains constituted in everyday acts. Initially, Butler's use of 'appropriated' may also appear incongruous, especially in light of her previous comment. However, 'appropriated' here does not refer to an appropriation of gender by drag, but rather acts to underscore the notion that any gendered performance consists of imitation and approximation.

As this discussion demonstrates, the notion of gender performativity plays a prominent role in Butler's theorisation of drag, both in *Gender Trouble* and in 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination'. Examining these texts has shown that drag can enable observers to reconsider their understandings of gender and provoke questions about the workings of cisheteronormative constructions. That is, drag can act to elucidate the relationship between assigned sex, gender identity and gender performance. However, when adapting the notion of performative drag into this thesis, I endeavour to ensure that such an understanding of drag can coexist with other conceptualizations of drag, and, notably, with full respect for individuals' understandings of their own genders.

### Subversion

In *Bodies That Matter* and in other later writing, including the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, and *Undoing Gender*, Butler has been keen to emphasize that the above perspective does not entail a belief that drag is necessarily subversive. In the concluding passage of the discussion of drag in *Gender Trouble*, Butler writes<sup>31</sup>:

Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony. A typology of actions would clearly not suffice, for parodic displacement, indeed, parodic laughter, depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be

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<sup>31</sup> Although I begin to interrogate this passage in my Introduction, it is pertinent to include it here. This enables me to carry out a closer analysis of this passage, and to compare it with other passages in Butler's work which engage with the perception of drag as subversive.

fostered. What performance where will invert the inner/outer distinction and compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presuppositions of gender identity and sexuality? What performance where will compel a reconsideration of the place and the stability of the masculine and the feminine? And what kind of gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire? (1999: 189)

The first sentences make it clear that the potential of such 'parody' to disrupt heteronormative conceptions of gender relies on context. Significantly, at this point, Butler argues that far from being necessarily subversive, forms of gender parody might in fact be used 'as instruments of cultural hegemony' (1999: 189) in the service of mainstream culture. Butler continues this passage with a series of cleverly placed questions. These questions reveal Butler's excitement with, and interest in, the possibilities raised by some forms of gender parody, while acknowledging that drag performances differ in their impact and reception. Butler's repetition of the phrase 'what performance [...] where' is particularly effective in terms of drawing attention to the roles of context and observer. This repetition encourages readers to pose further questions about the context of any given performance. Moreover, using this question enables Butler to focus on the individual: both on the individual whose particular performance challenges, or sets out to challenge, particular gender norms, and on the particular audience members who witness said performance. The above passage demonstrates that Butler does not position drag as necessarily subversive in *Gender Trouble*. Consequently, it also leads readers to question whether Butler's emphasis on the ambivalent aspects of drag in *Bodies That Matter* overcompensates for what was actually said in her previous text.

I now turn to 'Ambivalent Drag', a section of *Bodies That Matter* which explores the documentary film *Paris Is Burning*. Of the subsequent Butlerian discussions of drag, this is the most focused on refuting a necessary relationship between drag and subversion. As soon as Butler opens her discussion of drag in this chapter, readers perceive Butler's emphasis on drag's capacity to uphold norms rather than subvert them:

Venus, and *Paris Is Burning* more generally, calls into question whether parodying the dominant norms is enough to displace them; indeed, whether the denaturalization of gender cannot be the very vehicle for a reconsolidation of hegemonic norms. Although many readers understood *Gender Trouble* to be arguing for the proliferation of drag performances as a way of subverting dominant gender norms, I want to underscore that there is no necessary relationship between drag and subversion, and that drag may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms. At best, it seems, drag is a site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes. (1993: 125)

While readers can comprehend Butler's anxiety to emphasize the fact that drag is not necessarily a subversive practice, several problems remain here. The first problematic aspect of this argument is that this 'ambivalence' is, as Butler herself acknowledges, the result of the 'more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes' (1993: 125). Butler seemingly acknowledges that multiple subcultural practices and forms of activism are forced to engage with the norms which they seek to negotiate, yet fails to explain why this is particularly problematic for drag. Is drag somehow caught up in these regimes of power to a greater extent than other (counter-) cultural practices, or are all such practices equally tinged with ambivalence? Second, Butler's 'at best' seemingly clashes with the perception of drag as revealing the performative nature of gender as a whole, a concept which Butler nevertheless includes in this text. Yet, even when emphasising performativity, she focuses on subversion, noting: 'In this sense, then, drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality' (1993: 125). Butler adds '[b]ut here it seems that I am obliged to add an important qualification' (1993: 125). While one must be aware of the context in which drag operates, this notion of obligation is curious. Butler's change in emphasis is evident to readers here. While *Gender Trouble* acknowledged that drag can be employed in service of hegemonic norms, this was not its primary

focus. In *Bodies*, however, this view is emphasized to a much greater extent than any other view of drag, including the understanding of drag as revealing performativity.

This new stress on ambivalence is closely entwined with Butler's repudiation of the positioning of drag as subversive and with her response to *Paris Is Burning*:

And the case of drag is difficult in yet another way, for it seems clear to me that there is both a sense of defeat and insurrection to be had from the drag pageantry in *Paris Is Burning*, that the drag we see, the drag which is after all framed for us, filmed for us, is one which both appropriates and subverts racist, misogynistic and homophobic norms of oppression. How are we to account for this ambivalence? This is not first an appropriation and then a subversion. Sometimes it is both at once; sometimes it remains caught in an irresolvable tension, and sometimes a fatally unsubversive appropriation takes place. (1993: 128)

This paragraph furthers the case for the perception of drag as ambivalent by adding the notion that drag can be appropriative.<sup>32</sup> This contrasts with Butler's previous texts, and particularly with 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', which asserts that '[t]here is no "proper" gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex's cultural property' (Butler, 1991: 21). Although I would not suggest that drag performance is immune to this possibility, it seems probable that this 'fatally unsubversive' (1993: 128) contingency would arise from a combination of drag with racism or cultural appropriation, rather than appearing as a result of drag itself. However, Butler does not explore what she means by 'a fatally unsubversive appropriation' (1993: 128), choosing to state only that *Paris Is Burning* 'appropriates', rather than subverts, racist, homophobic, and misogynistic norms.

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<sup>32</sup> This perception of drag as appropriative stands in direct contrast with Butler's earlier suggestion in 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination' that 'Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn and done' (1991: 21). While this point acts to emphasize the lack of originality in all genders, Butler's focus on appropriation in *Bodies That Matter* pinpoints drag as specifically borrowing from wider, misogynistic culture, without reworking the perception of norms.

Butler's use of *Paris* as a vehicle for exploring the ambivalent aspects of drag is problematic. Employing psychoanalytic theory, Butler appears to assume that she is capable of analysing the problems and experiences of individuals that she has only encountered in documentary form, almost as though these figures were her analysands. Moreover, Butler appears to suggest that performances enacted in Drag Ball culture are incapable of reworking dominant norms, but instead act to strengthen them: '[t]he citing of the dominant norm does not, in this instance, displace that norm; rather, it becomes the means by which that dominant norm is most painfully reiterated as the very desire and performance of those it subjects' (1993: 133). Here, Butler denies the agency of the subjects she describes, and negates the capacity of their performances to create jarring or positive reiterations which trouble established norms. Furthermore, as I stress shortly, Butler uses the experiences of a trans woman of colour, Venus Xtravaganza, to solidify her argument.

Butler's relationship with the term 'subversion' changes further in *Undoing Gender*. Emphasizing drag's capacity to create space for rethinking the ways in which gender and gender norms operate, Butler nevertheless seeks to distance herself from the description of drag as 'subversive'. This is neatly illustrated in the propositions Butler invites her readers to consider in *Undoing Gender*.<sup>33</sup> In point D, Butler makes it clear that she perceives drag as having the capacity to thematize and rework gender norms, and also as having the capacity to enable observers to rethink the way in which they perceive gender (2004: 214). In my view, the primary difference between this perspective and those of *Gender Trouble* and 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination' lies in Butler's desire to emphasize drag's revelatory capacity without recourse to the term 'subversion'. While Butler's terminological shift merits emphasis, I support her critique of 'subversion' in analysing drag. Suggesting that drag can shed light on norms acknowledges the activist work created and facilitated by certain performances. However, the term 'subversion' seems to imply that every drag performance destabilizes structural norms – a view which overlooks problematic performances, and places an unfeasible burden on performers.

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<sup>33</sup> See points A to D on page 214 of *Undoing Gender* (Butler, 2004: 214).

This analysis of the relationship between drag and subversion has provided this chapter with a fuller understanding of Butler's work on drag. In particular, this analysis has revealed that Butler's approach to drag is markedly different in *Bodies That Matter* than in her other works.

### Drag and Misogyny

Although both *Bodies That Matter* and *Gender Trouble* critique the perception of drag as misogynistic, this critique is briefer and more generalized in *Gender Trouble*:

The notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities. Within feminist theory, such parodic identities have been understood to be either degrading to women, in the case of drag and cross-dressing, or an uncritical appropriation of sex-role stereotyping in the case of butch/femme lesbian identities. But the relation between the "imitation" and the "original" is, I think, more complicated than that critique generally allows. (1999: 187)

Here, Butler distances herself and her readers from these critiques in three ways. This distance is initially created by the lack of detail given about these analyses, and due to the fact that they are mentioned only as positions '[w]ithin feminist theory' (1999: 187). This positioning immediately suggests that these perspectives, unlike that of Esther Newton who is mentioned by name, will not contribute to Butler's own theorisation of drag. Butler then further distances herself and her readers from these analyses by placing them on a continuum with the homophobic rejection of butch/femme identities. Finally, Butler dismisses these critiques as an oversimplification of drag based on a binary understanding of sex and gender. Although this passage does not present a scathing critique of the position that drag could be degrading to women, it does suggest that this position is largely irrelevant for a nuanced understanding of drag. It is also significant that while Butler refutes the notion that drag is solely a matter of misogyny, she does not deny the possibility that drag performances could contain misogynistic elements. However, although Butler concedes that 'the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynistic culture' (1999: 188), she

continues to suggest that this is not necessarily a repetition of the misogyny of such hegemonic culture as these gender meanings 'are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualisation' (1999: 188). Thus, in *Gender Trouble*, Butler suggests that while drag does not occupy a cultural space which is devoid of misogyny, it is not necessarily misogynistic in the same manner in which dominant cultural forms are misogynistic. This view resonates with two points or issues. First, the idea of recycling structural norms from a different, and often marginalized, viewpoint resonates with Foucault's concept of reverse discourse (1998: 101), which I touch on in Chapter Three, looking at Lisa Downing's analysis of reverse discursive formulations of gender and sexuality in the works of Rachilde and Monique Wittig (Downing, 2012: 195). Second, as Kate Bornstein's Venn diagram of identity, power, and desire suggests (2013: 40), discourses can operate differently when used by individuals who occupy divergent, intersecting identity categories, and in different contexts. That is, a comedy routine which 'punches up', or attacks positions and figures in power, operates differently from one which 'punches down', or attacks marginalized figures and positions, and the impact of these performances will vary depending on the status and position of the comedian.

The 'Gender is Burning' section of *Bodies That Matter* includes two separate approaches to the relationship between drag and misogyny. Here, as in *Gender Trouble*, Butler locates these critiques within a 'feminist tradition' (Butler, 1993: 126). Moreover, Butler continues to connect the critique of drag as degrading to women with the homophobic invalidation of lesbian desire and identity, and criticises both positions. However, 'Gender is Burning' allots far more space to the analysis of drag-as-misogyny than *Gender Trouble*. Butler introduces the feminist critique of drag as misogynistic by referring to bell hooks' essay 'is paris burning', and suggesting that hooks, by criticising 'some productions of gay male drag as misogynist' (1993: 126), 'allied herself in part with feminist theorists such as Janice Raymond and Marilyn Frye' (1993: 126). Butler then comments:

This tradition within feminist thought has argued that drag is offensive to women and is an imitation based in ridicule and degradation. Raymond, in particular, places drag on a continuum with cross-dressing and transsexualism, ignoring the important differences

between them, maintaining that in each practice women are the object of hatred and appropriation, and that there is nothing in that identification that is respectful or elevating. As a rejoinder, one might consider that identification is always an ambivalent process. Identifying with a gender under contemporary regimes of power involves identifying with a set of norms that are and are not realizable, and whose power and status precede the identifications by which they are instantly approximated. (1993: 126-7)

Although Butler's (rather contentious) suggestion that hooks is on a continuum with Frye and Raymond could have led her to frame a strong critique of radical feminism, the critique she launches remains on more psychoanalytic and philosophical terms.

This exploration of the relationship between drag and misogyny has drawn attention to moments of tension in Butler's work in relation to the complex relationship between drag and hegemonic norms. Equally, this discussion has also briefly introduced other conceptualizations of the relationship between drag and misogyny, which I explore in my feminist theory chapter.

#### Butler, Drag and the Question of Transphobia

As this thesis aims to outline a transfeminist, non-binarizing understanding of drag, it is important to highlight transphobic moments in Butler's work and to detach them from the theorization of drag. Some of Butler's discussions about drag fail to acknowledge the important differences between drag performers and trans people, praising both for their capacity to denaturalize gender and thereby eliding their identities.

One example of this tendency to position trans people as denaturalising gender occurs in the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*. Discussing drag's potential to enable audiences to reconceptualise gender, Butler decides to 'shift the example from drag to transsexuality' (1999: xxiv) in order to further illustrate her point:

Indeed, if we shift the example from drag to transsexuality, then it is no longer possible to derive a judgement about stable anatomy from the clothes that cover and articulate the body. That body may be pre-operative, transitional, or post-operative; even "seeing" the body may not answer the question: for what are the categories through which one sees?

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 of a woman. The vacillation between the categories itself constitutes the experience of the body in question. (1999: xxiv)

This passage may simply be intended to invite readers to acknowledge and examine the way in which assumptions about gender, and about the relationship between gender and assigned sex, inform their perspective. However, it has the unfortunate effect of making trans bodies into a poster model for the disruption of naturalized notions of gender. Moreover, Butler's final phrase in the passage above implies that Butler sees herself as able to gauge what 'constitutes the experience' of a given body, without consulting the person who inhabits it.

Theorists such as Jay Prosser, Viviane Namaste, and Sam Bourcier have already remarked on transphobic aspects of Butler's work.<sup>34</sup> I now turn to Prosser's reading of 'Gender Is Burning' in his thought-provoking text *Second Skins*, thereby further elucidating transphobic elements in Butler's work. Prosser examines Butler's use of the term 'homophobic violence' in relation to Venus Extravanza's death. Butler writes:

Consider the different fates of Venus Xtravaganza. She "passes" as a light-skinned woman, but is – by virtue of a certain failure to pass completely – clearly vulnerable to homophobic violence; ultimately, her life is taken presumably by a client who, upon the discovery of what she calls her "little secret," mutilates her for having seduced him. (1993: 130)

Prosser's response to this includes the following:

the presence of the penis on Venus' body renders her neither a homosexual man [...] nor her death an effect of homophobia. Venus presents herself unambiguously as a transsexual woman, not as a gay man or drag queen. Although the only "genetic girl" is behind the camera, it does not follow that all the bodies in *Paris Is Burning* are male. Rather, the film presents a spectrum of bodies and desires, heterosexual and homosexual, in-drag,

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<sup>34</sup> As Sam Bourcier pinpoints disempowering and transphobic moments in Butler's work in 'F\*\*\* the Politics of Disempowerment in the Second Butler', I explore this in my analysis of that text. Viviane Namaste criticises Butler's transphobia in her text *Invisible Lives, The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (2000), which I mention in the conclusion to this chapter.

transsexual, and genetic male, with the subjects frequently articulating the distinctions between these categories with a careful self positioning. (1998: 46-7)

Significantly, transphobic violence and homophobic violence can overlap, and it may not always be possible to distinguish these forms of violence from one another. In situations involving the murders of, and attacks against, trans women who are sex workers, the perpetrator may have decided to assault the victim due to a belief that she is not a 'real woman' and that, therefore, sexual contact with her constitutes homosexual sexual contact. Nevertheless, two significant interconnected points pertain here. First, in addressing Venus' murder (1993: 130), Butler does not tease out the complex, difficult, relationship between homophobia and transphobia which may have been at work here, but simply refers to 'homophobic violence'. Second, speaking from an intersectional, transfeminist perspective, it is essential to acknowledge that the hate crime in question is a transphobic one – one which stems from a belief that Venus Xtravaganza was not 'a real woman'. In pointing only to homophobic violence, without mentioning transphobia or transmisogyny, and in referring pointedly to Venus' anatomy, Butler employs a cissexist lens and downplays the danger faced by trans women of colour – albeit unintentionally.

Prosser also disrupts Butler's analysis of a perceived interaction between Octavia St. Laurent and Jenny Livingston. Butler writes:

The one instance where Livingston's body might be said to appear allegorically on camera is when Octavia St. Laurent is posing for the camera, as a moving model would for a photographer. We hear a voice tell her that she's terrific, and it is unclear whether it is a man shooting the film as a proxy for Livingston, or Livingston herself. What is suggested by this sudden intrusion of the camera into the film is something of the camera's desire, the desire that motivates the camera, in which a white lesbian phallically organized by the use of the camera (elevated to the status of disembodied gaze, holding out the promise of erotic recognition) eroticises a black male-to-female transsexual – presumably preoperative – who "works" perceptually as a woman. (1993: 135)

Whether one agrees with Butler's use of psychoanalytic notions here or not, one cannot fail to notice the impact of Butler's description of Octavia here; the use of

the phrase 'male-to-female transsexual', combined with the unsettling "'works" perceptually as a woman' is a refusal to fully acknowledge Octavia as a woman. In the terms of intersectional transfeminism, Octavia is a woman, and should be recognised as such, whether she is 'preoperative' or not. Prosser disrupts Butler's reading by offering a reading of his own; for him, the voice which enters the scene is 'quite clearly that of a white male photographer' (Prosser, 1998: 51), rather than Livingston's own. Having signalled that he refuses to adopt Butler's analysis, Prosser further interrogates Butler's claims, emphasizing the problematic nature of Butler's suggestion that Livingston's camera acts as phallus and leads to transubstantiation (1998: 51-2). I agree with Prosser's emphasis on the problematic nature of linking transsexuality and transubstantiation in Butler's narrative (1998: 52). However, I would also like to critique Butler's suggestion that lesbian desire is somehow troubled by an attraction to a trans woman<sup>35</sup>, which I feel demeans trans womanhood in general, and Octavia in particular.

Despite emphasizing Venus' and Octavia's identities in her analyses, Butler arguably likens them to, and places them on a continuum with, male drag performers. First, Butler discusses these women within a wider argument that drag has an ambivalent function in *Paris Is Burning*. Moreover, Butler likens Octavia and Venus to male drag performers by treating them in the same manner as the other individuals depicted in *Paris*: a treatment characterised by her own ambivalence towards the 'subversive' or revelatory capacity of drag. Butler's depictions of Octavia and, particularly, of Venus, involve a series of protean shifts. At one moment, these women are categorised as shoring up the oppressive and binary nature of gender norms, yet, at another, they are celebrated as having the capacity to create a transformation of gender in the plot. Thus, the treatment of these women in this analysis can be seen to mirror the treatment of the male drag performers therein, who are, at one moment, decried as recapitulating misogynistic norms, and at another, presented as carrying out a performative reworking of the 'feminization of the black faggot' (Butler, 1993: 132).

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<sup>35</sup> Butler writes: 'What would it mean to say that Octavia is Jennie Livingston's kind of girl? Is the category or, indeed, "the position" of white lesbian disrupted by such a claim?' (1993: 135).

In my analysis of the treatment and depiction of trans people in 'Gender Is Burning' and *Gender Trouble*, I have endeavoured to show that Butler, in seeking to present transgender and transsexual people as occupying a similar, revelatory space to drag performers, unfortunately makes some transphobic and trans erasive comments, whether or not she intended to do so.

Butler's wide and varied corpus of work has made a significant impact both on the theorisation of drag, and on the understanding of gender as a whole. Although it has been subjected to many revisions over the course of her career, Butler's concept of drag as having revelatory and performative dimensions remains significant when examining diverse forms of drag. However, to acknowledge this is not to suggest that everything Butler has written about drag, or even about these dimensions, should necessarily be included in the theorisation of drag. Having gained a fuller comprehension of Butler's theories of drag, this thesis can adapt and incorporate her concepts when exploring other representations and interpretations of drag. In particular, while I engage with performativity in the context of contemporary performance, I will not follow Butler in applying psychoanalytic material to performers.

### **Greco's Concept of the Plural Self**

The next theorist discussed here is Luca Greco, whose work mobilizes the framework of linguistic anthropology.<sup>36</sup> My discussion of Greco's insightful article 'Un soi pluriel: la présentation de soi dans les ateliers Drag Kings. Enjeux interactionnels, catégoriels et politiques' focuses primarily on two issues. First, I briefly examine the way in which Greco situates his article, exploring his use of Erving Goffman's theory of interactionality and Judith Butler's concept of performativity. Having raised this issue, I turn to the central concept in Greco's article, that of the 'soi pluriel' (2012: 63).

Greco's exploration of the plurality of the self leads him to three expedients: an analysis of Judith Butler's theories of performativity, an analysis of Erving Goffman's

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<sup>36</sup> Greco locates his work within this framework in his description of his work on the University of Paris III website: <http://www.ilpga.univ-paris3.fr/pages-personnelles/luca-greco/> (accessed 20 February 2012).

theories of interaction, and an examination of the forms of self created in performance by members of a drag king collective in Brussels. Greco's choice of these authors is motivated by their differing attitudes to the construction and presentation of the self:

Voici le paradoxe d'une rencontre entre Goffman et Butler: est-il possible de concilier une vision axée sur la primauté de l'action et de la répétition des actes historiquement et normativement ancrée avec une perspective focalisée sur des acteurs qui agissent et rendent cela possible sans forcément se laisser engoutir par les apories de l'intentionnalité du sujet derrière l'acte? (2012: 68)

While a rapprochement between interactionality and performativity would be valuable, Greco does not do this in depth here. Instead, Greco focuses on his concept of the self as plural and the illustrations of this in the drag king workshops. While interactionality and performativity do come into play in Greco's concept of the plural self, Greco does not elaborate this further and leaves his readers to make this connection.

The workshops of the DKB ('Drag Kings de Bruxelles') are significantly linked to the organisation Genres Pluriels (2012: 64) – which caters for trans and non binary people – as Max, the DKB workshop leader, also works with Genres Pluriels (2012: 75). In highlighting this point, Greco reveals the multi-dimensional nature of these workshops, and also stresses that the workshops and the organization both aim to 'rendre visibles et viables toutes ces identités qui se positionnent en dehors de la binarité des genres' (64). By engaging with groups and individuals who position themselves outside of binary gender, Greco is necessarily adding a further dimension to the studies of the self previously carried out by both Butler and Goffman. That is, neither of these writers seems to have reflected at length on the way in which the construction of the self, gendered or otherwise, pertains to non-binary individuals.

Having expressed his conception of the principles which inform the running both of the workshops and of Genres Pluriels, – 'le caractère non ontologique des genres, leur fluidité et la dimension idéologique intrinsèque à toute vision binaire des

genres' (2012: 64) – Greco shows how observing these workshops can enable one to glimpse the plurality of the self. The first way in which this plurality is made manifest, Greco suggests, is in the collaborative and interactive nature of creating a drag persona during these workshops.<sup>37</sup> Greco demonstrates these dimensions of creating a persona by drawing the reader's attention to the make-up sessions ('les activités de maquillage' (2012: 69)) and to the way in which a drag name is chosen (2012: 70-1). Greco draws attention to these sessions by providing extracts from transcriptions of them, discussing these in detail. Greco then reflects on the way in which these extracts enable readers to perceive the notion of collective authorship of the self:

Ces deux extraits nous informent sur le caractère dialogique, pluriel du corps et du personnage mobilisés dans un atelier DK. De ce point de vue, on est amené à penser à une autérité (*autorship*) [sic] collective dans la construction de soi ainsi qu'à son caractère non prévisible, non mentaliste, non intentionnaliste. (2012: 71)

This passage brings Greco's two examples of communal self-creation together, underlining their role in his concept of the plural self. Moreover, this passage opens a space for readers to consider how and whether 'the plural self' permeates everyday life. Greco's emphasis on intentionality is particularly thought-provoking here. Although Butler's work already interrogates the supposition that there is necessarily an actor behind each act, Greco perceptibly develops this by suggesting that this lack of intentionality is partially a result of a collective form of self-creation.

Another significant dimension of Greco's concept of the 'soi pluriel' is the recognition that single individuals can, and do, occupy multiple identity categories, and, therefore, that they can change the way in which these categories are shaped and perceived. Having suggested that language can have the capacity to 'revendiquer la place pour un espace et une identité hybrides, pluriels' (74), Greco transcribes an interview with Max, a workshop leader, which strengthens this point. Here, Max qualifies himself as 'parlant au masculin' (74), and explains that he is

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<sup>37</sup> Greco suggests that 'la dimension interactionnelle et collective' (2012: 68) is a central aspect of the plural self.

transitioning (74) but also identifies as a 'lesbienne féministe' (74). Here, the multiplicity evinced in the use of several, supposedly exclusive categories (the linguistic use of the masculine and the feminine, and the identification with lesbian feminism) reveals the plurality of the self. Referring to the drag king mailing list (2012: 73), Greco also examines how plural identities shape the use and understanding of categories. Greco draws on the fact that the users of this mailing list do not employ conventionally gendered terms and pronouns, such as '<<ceux-celles>>', '<<ils/elles>>', '<<nombreux-nombreuses>>' (2012:74), but create their own. As Greco argues, the use of terms such as '<<ceuses>>' [...], '<<z>>' [...] '<<nombreuxses>>' (2012: 74) creates a space to acknowledge the validity of identities outside the gender binary. Some of the categories that Greco highlights initially appear to be based within a binary understanding of gender. However, the combination of these elements seems to divest them of this dimension. Max, for example, identifies both as a 'lesbienne féministe' (2012: 74) and as a trans man, as, for him, these categories are not incompatible.

Some of Greco's conclusions merit consideration here. Notably, Greco concludes that practising drag can contribute to the plurality of the self and invite reflection on the collaborative nature of the self and of performance. Equally, Greco argues that the practice of drag invites us to think about masculinity and about gender, as well as about binary categories. Greco's characterization of drag as a Foucauldian reverse discourse (2012: 79) develops from the argument that drag can provoke individuals to reconsider binary gender.<sup>38</sup> These points, and especially that regarding Foucauldian reverse discourse, can be valuable when considering performers who aim to critique norms, but should not be employed to generalize drag as a whole.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Greco makes this point as follows: 'On pourrait lire les pratiques DK de présentation de soi comme un contre-discours au sens de Foucault (1976: 126-7) en ce qu'elles recrutent (et travaillent) la corporalité "masculine" comme un espace de lutte contre la domination hétéro-patriarcale' (2012: 79).

<sup>39</sup> That is, to suggest that drag necessarily constitutes a reverse discourse would suggest that all performances necessarily respond to majority discourses about binary gender. Like the positioning of drag as subversive, such an argument overlooks problematic performances – in this case, performances which include transphobic and transmisogynistic elements. For more information on

## **Sam Bourcier – Questioning the Applicability of the Term “Femmes travesties”**

This section of the chapter begins with an in depth discussion of the issues raised in Bourcier’s ‘F\*\*\* the Politics of Disempowerment in the Second Butler’ (2012). This facilitates a fuller understanding of Bourcier’s politics, and enables readers to pinpoint other instances of transphobia in Butler’s work. Moreover, this discussion will open up the space to carry out an informed analysis of Bourcier’s ‘Des “Femmes travesties” aux pratiques transgenres: repenser et queeriser le travestissement’ (2006).

As its title indicates, ‘F\*\*\* the Politics of Disempowerment in the Second Butler’ critiques specific problematics within Butler’s work, focusing primarily on Butler’s treatment of trans people. Two points illustrated in this article are particularly pertinent here.

One, this article acknowledges the significance of performativity, while demonstrating that Butler’s use of performativity merits critique, especially in relation to its treatment of trans people (2012: 235) and its understanding of the visual dimension of gender performance (237). Two, Bourcier’s analysis of Butler’s treatment of trans people draws further attention towards the relationship between drag and trans identity in Butler’s work.

Exploring Butlerian performativity, Bourcier first alights on the elements which he finds most problematic. Taking up Jay Prosser’s critique of Butlerian performativity as ‘hyperdiscursive, somatophobic and desexualising in its treatment of sexual practices and sexual orientation’ (Bourcier, 2012: 236), Bourcier argues that Butlerian performativity is abstracted from the ‘real scenes’ (2012: 238) that it purports to describe. For Bourcier, Butler’s abstraction lies in her failure to account for the material and visual dimensions of interpellation, providing a limited account of subjectivation (238). Nevertheless, while undertaking this critique, Bourcier makes it clear that he will not ‘throw out the baby of performativity with the bath

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Foucault’s concept of reverse discourse, see Foucault’s discussion of discourses and reverse discourses on homosexuality (Foucault, 1998: 101).

water' (2012: 239). Rather, by drawing readers' attention to trans artists' capacity to adapt performative and performance-based strategies and include them in their performance, and by highlighting 'identitarian performance' (2012: 239), Bourcier demonstrates the compatibility of performativity with an awareness of, and respect for, trans identities. Significantly, Bourcier reshapes performativity by positioning it as *one* technology of gender (240) – rather than *the* way in which all genders play out – and by stressing the coexistence of performativity and agency (240). In raising the possibility of agential performativity, Bourcier draws attention to the 'myriad ways in which genders are done' (240), and specifically highlights the biopolitical strategies at work in certain trans and genderqueer communities (240).

How does Bourcier's critique act to shed further light both on drag and on the depiction of trans individuals in Butler's work? First, Bourcier alights on Butler's use of 'psychoanalytic dogma' (240-1) in a discussion of a trans woman. Although Bourcier examines Butler's accounts of her encounter with a 'MtF poet of San Francisco'<sup>40</sup>, his disapproval of Butler's application of psychoanalytic theory to trans people's lives mirrors my own. This critique highlights instances of transphobia in Butler's work, while elucidating her use of the paradigm of melancholia in relation to drag and trans identity. Bourcier argues that, in attributing anger and desire to the trans poet, Butler allots this poet, and by extension, all trans people, the place of 'suffering by gender' (2012: 242). Bourcier's suggestion that this trans poet 'inherits the place in the paradigm once occupied by the drag queen of *Gender Trouble*' (2012: 242) initially seems inappropriate in light of the discussion of drag in that text. Looking at Bourcier's focus on melancholia, I suggest that he may have intended to reference *Bodies That Matter* rather than *Gender Trouble* here. Although melancholia features in *Gender Trouble* (1999: 78-89), it is not discussed in the context of drag, while *Bodies That Matter* includes a section devoted to the relationship between drag and melancholia (1993: 234-6).

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<sup>40</sup> Bourcier details two of Butler's accounts of meeting the trans poet in San Francisco; one given during a lecture at Paris 8 in 2008 (Bourcier, 2012: 240), and the other included in an essay 'Le transgenre et "les attitudes de révolte"' (Bourcier, 2012: 252).

I now turn to a second moment of 'F\*\*\* the Politics'. This sheds additional light on the relationship between Butler's use of drag and her depiction of trans people, and adds credence to my suggestion that Bourcier intended to refer to *Bodies That Matter* in the above paragraph. In the passage analysed here, Bourcier questions why dominant gender norms seem to wield greater power in 'Le transgenre' than in *Gender Trouble*, exploring the impact that these norms have on the figures depicted in those texts:

Let us suppose that the origin of transgender suffering [as presented in 'Le transgenre'] is external, or at any rate social and cultural. On this understanding, the wretched norms of gender bear down with all their force on the MtF of San Francisco, to the point where she is rendered unintelligible. They 'torture'. Why does the same phenomenon of cultural constraint described in *Gender Trouble* not have the same effects on the MtF of San Francisco as on the drag queen and why does it not entail the same possibilities of resistance? How have we gone from the gender euphoria produced by the dissonance of the drag queen to a veritable gender dysphoria in the utterance of the MtF of San Francisco? What has changed between 1990, when *Gender Trouble* first appeared, and 2008 or 2009? No explanation is given by Butler. (2012: 244)

I agree with Bourcier's emphasis on the question of resistance here, and I equally agree that the diminution of the possibility of resistance between these texts is unsettling. However, although the reason for such a diminution cannot be definitively ascertained, I would suggest that *how* this occurs is relatively obvious. As highlighted earlier in this chapter, *Bodies That Matter* focuses on the oppressive nature of gender norms to a much greater extent than *Gender Trouble*, presenting these norms as harder to re-enact in a positive fashion. Although resistance to gender norms seems more possible in *Undoing Gender* than in *Bodies*, Butler nevertheless stresses the notion that individuals might tolerate gender norms more than they would wish to in order to access 'a liveable life' (2004: 8). It is possible that by 2008 or 2009, Butler is so focused on the 'violence performed by gender norms' (Butler, 1999: xxv) that she assumes that all trans and gender non-conforming people must necessarily be 'suffering by gender' (Bourcier, 2012: 242). These comments are not intended to discount the palpable violence carried out by hegemonic norms, nor to excuse Butler's pathologization of the poet she mentions

in 'Le transgenre'. Rather, I aim to highlight the development of Butler's view of resistance to gender norms in the period mentioned by Bourcier. In revisiting Butlerian performativity in a thoughtful, critical, manner, Bourcier has shown that performativity can continue to be a useful lens through which to regard gender. Bourcier draws readers' attention to the myriad of gender possibilities outside the cisheteronormative binary, and highlights the presence of these possibilities in queer and trans subcultures. In doing so, Bourcier reminds his readers of the importance of recognizing the queer possibilities which surround them. However, I also feel that Bourcier's antagonism towards Butler, while comprehensible, occasionally colours his judgement of Butler's work as a whole.

Notably, Bourcier seems to suggest that scholars exploring performativity can avoid Butler's work and look to other scholars and practices for their interpretation of it (2012: 239). Without demeaning the valuable work on performativity undertaken by other scholars, I suggest that it is often pertinent to engage with certain concepts in the context of Butler's work. For example, this study can benefit from a close engagement with Butler's work as Butler's discussions of performative drag reflect on the relationship between gender presentation and sexuality. However, I equally suggest that the decision to incorporate Butlerian concepts into a study depends very much on context. As a result of the extensive criticism of Butlerian performativity by trans theorists, I suggest that transfeminist studies of drag should undertake a critique of Butler's work if they choose to incorporate it within their approaches. In my view, trans scholars' critiques of Butlerian performativity (e.g. Bourcier, 2012: 237) augment the original concept, and therefore merit inclusion in all studies of drag. However, these critiques are particularly valuable for transfeminist studies of drag as transfeminist perspectives highlight the insights of trans theory as well as those of intersectional feminist theory (Enke, 2012: 6-7).

This chapter now examines Bourcier's own theorisation of 'travestissement', presented in the above chapter in *Queer Zones: Politiques des Identités Sexuelles et des Savoirs* (2006). After exploring the chapter as a whole, I will consider two key questions which permeate it. First, what relationship does Bourcier draw between 'travestissement' and 'pratiques transgenres' in this chapter? Second, is this

chapter perceptibly informed by Bourcier's role as a queer and trans activist or by his attitude towards Butler?

Bourcier's introduction clearly indicates the substance and approach of his chapter:

Parler de "femmes travesties", est-ce désigner des corps biologiques où viendraient s'inscrire des marques du genre inversées? Mais quel est le discours ou la série de discours qui font qu'une telle dénomination nous est devenue familière? Qui nous pousse à continuer de parler ainsi, prisonniers des définitions médicales, hétérocentrées et focalisées sur le vêtement comme le sous-entend le terme même de travestissement? (2006: 119)

Although Bourcier's introduction contains a familiar definition of drag, this is included only to question its value, and to gauge the discourses which have constructed it. Bourcier's use of 'prisonniers' indicates the strength of his critique of pathologising discourses, emphasizing his desire to question the norms with which we have become familiar. Bourcier then explains that this article will interrogate three previous models of interpreting drag; the medical or sexological model, the 'feminist' or liberation model, and the model of performance. Here, I examine significant points raised in relation to each of three models explored, before turning to Bourcier's concluding paragraphs. Bourcier first examines the medical model of 'travestissement', as originally created by sexologists. Referring hyperbolically to a sexological 'silence construit concernant les femmes' (2006: 120), Bourcier equally underlines the masculinist bias underpinning many sexological concepts. He states that although sexological constructions did not deny the existence of "femmes travesties", these constructions remained unable to fully account for "femmes travesties" (2006: 121-2). He then highlights two dimensions of sexological definitions of 'travestissement'. First, these definitions placed 'travestissement' among the perversions, focusing on the practice of men wearing women's clothing for sexual gratification, thereby foreclosing the possibility of women who wore men's clothing for sexual pleasure. Equally, Bourcier points out that although Magnus Hirschfeld referred to forms of 'travestissement' which provided a 'social' satisfaction rather than a sexual one (2006: 122), sexological definitions arguably tended to efface 'cross-dressing' practices by "femmes travesties". In analysing the

problems of sexological definitions of ‘travestissement’, Bourcier makes it clear that he recognizes the import of social factors in decisions of gender presentation, but that he refuses to support definitions which preclude ‘women’s’ sexual pleasure in cross-dressing. Although his discussion of the medical model does mobilize binary definitions of drag, it is important to acknowledge that, when critiquing sexological models, Bourcier must engage to some extent with their binary notions of ‘men’ and ‘women’ in order to challenge the misogyny inherent in certain sexological notions. Moreover, when Bourcier refers to trans people in this section, his language is respectful rather than erasive. In addition to emphasizing the heteronormative, binary nature of early definitions of ‘travestissement’, Bourcier’s critique of the medical model can warn theorists against discounting possible interactions between social and sexual pleasure.

Having closed his previous discussion by focusing on the importance of a socio-political dimension in some drag scenes and performances, Bourcier turns neatly to his next section: “‘Travestisme féministe’ ou le modèle de la libération et ses ‘perversions’” (2006: 124). The approach which Bourcier refers to as either ‘[t]ravestisme féministe’ or ‘le modèle de la libération’ (2006: 124) includes the positions held by Simone de Beauvoir and Holly Devor among others, and focuses solely on the social benefits of presenting as male in a patriarchal society (2006: 124). Bourcier draws readers’ attention to three key ways in which cisheterosexist biases permeate this approach. Primarily, approaches such as Beauvoir’s notion of a ‘protestation virile’ (2006: 124) centre only on cis women, rather than on all women. Moreover, these approaches ascribe a feminist motivation to ‘cross-dressing’ irrespective of the individual in question; ‘même si les femmes qui portent des vêtements d’hommes ne sont pas des femmes hétérosexuelles, même si elles ne sont pas militantes ou ne se définissent pas comme féministes, elles le deviennent sous l’œil de l’analyste adoptant un point de vue féministe’ (2006: 125). Finally, for Bourcier, such approaches fail to account for trans and non binary people. Bourcier’s criticisms of the erasure of trans and non binary people by the liberation model are especially pertinent to approaches that have been written or

developed from the late 1990s onwards, such as Diane Torr's 'Man for a Day' workshops (125).

Bourcier underlines the above points by suggesting that these approaches are as exclusionary as those of the sexologists, creating in their turn their own sets of norms and perversions (125). Bourcier illustrates his critique of these approaches with concrete examples of the way in which such models of liberation can exclude trans people, focusing first on Diane Torr's drag king workshops (125). Bourcier explains that although these workshops seemingly operate according to the liberation model as they seek to expose male privilege, people of a range of genders have attended them. Pointing out that some of the workshops' participants might feel excluded by the principles underpinning them, Bourcier argues that the concept of 'travestissement' as liberatory fails to account for binary and non-binary trans people who employ performative strategies in their masculinities. I also want to highlight Bourcier's suggestion that certain lesbians have created a restrictive model of understanding drag. Here, Bourcier mobilizes two examples to demonstrate the tendency of some lesbians to attach a lesbian interpretation to figures who might have identified as trans men. Having given the examples of Billy Tipton and Brandon Teena, Bourcier underlines the necessity of rethinking, queering and querying 'travestissement', and of allowing trans possibilities to be recognised and visible among other practices:

Au-delà des phénomènes de réappropriation parfois sauvages dont ces figures de "femmes travesties" ont pu faire l'objet au sein des diverses communautés politico-sexuelles américaines, si les réponses divergent tant, c'est peut-être le signe aussi que la nécessité se pose crûment sur le plan théorique, philosophique, et historiographique de repenser le "travestissement". (2006: 127)

Bourcier's analysis of "'travestisme féministe'" (124) demonstrates how the exclusionary qualities of this approach limit its applicability outside a narrow paradigm. His example of Diane Torr's workshop reveals the fact that some individuals use drag and performance techniques in a manner which the liberation model cannot comprehend. The passage cited above tallies neatly with one of the central tenets of this thesis. That is, as a result of the numerous and divergent

individuals who perform it, drag must be approached in an inclusive manner which accounts for multiple gendered possibilities, as opposed to relying solely on binary interpretations, such as those which oppose the gender of the performer to the gender performed on stage.

Bourcier's next section, 'La cage sémiologique: fétichisme du vêtement et performance du genre' presents several important points to analyse. The first passage to explore runs as follows:

L'expression même de travestissement, outre qu'elle oblige à focaliser sur le vêtement, présuppose qu'il existe une vérité du genre: celle-là même que l'on travestirait. Or, cette affirmation ne peut se comprendre que d'un point de vue hétérocentré, dans le cadre du système de relation sexe/genre imposé par le régime hétérosexuel. Un régime dans lequel réduire le travestissement à la sémiologie du vêtement permet aussi de présupposer l'existence d'un sexe biologique séparé (introuvable par le "c'est une fille"/"c'est un garçon") indiscutable et naturel auquel viendraient se superposer des vêtements discordants en matière de genre. C'est cette articulation normative entre catégorie de sexe et catégorie de genre qui amène à considérer le travestissement comme simple inversion au sein d'un système binaire qui a établi une concordance entre sexe et genre et qui a naturalisé ces deux catégories. (2006: 128)

Here, Bourcier highlights the binary structure which lies behind terms such as 'travestissement' and cross-dressing. As he points out, such terms rely on the supposition that there are two natural sexes which determine one's gender and gender presentation. Thus, even as such terms seem to posit a form of fluidity or mobility, they emphasise the notion of a necessarily stable sex. Bourcier's focus on the role of birth assignment in upholding a binary system may remind readers of Butler's suggestion that the phrase 'it's a girl' is transitive.<sup>41</sup> Although a Butlerian echo might seem surprising in light of Bourcier's vehemence in 'F\*\*\* the Politics', it is important to recognise that Bourcier values the concept of performativity, in which the notion of transitive interpellation can play a part. Furthermore, the critical emphasis on the role of birth assignment is by no means unique to Butler,

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<sup>41</sup> Butler's suggestion that the phrase 'it's a girl' is transitive occurs during a further elaboration of performativity in the 'Critically Queer' section of *Bodies That Matter* (Butler, 1993: 223-242).

but is also remarked upon by trans critics such as Jacob Hale, who critiques the cursory birth assessments given by doctors (2006: 288). Bourcier's emphasis on the problematics of pre-existing terminology such as 'travestissement' and 'cross-dressing' encourages his readers to rethink the way in which they refer to such practices.

Bourcier's analysis of performativity as a method of understanding drag differs from his analysis of the two previous models. Bourcier introduces performativity by noting that this model, unlike the medical and liberation models, does not rely on a stable notion of sex or of gender (2006: 128). Bourcier explains performativity in a clear and concise manner, without criticising Butler. Notably, Bourcier argues that the perception of gender as performative effectively disrupts terms such as "femmes travesties". That is, if gender does not adhere naturally to a body as a result of assignment, but is in fact a construct based on experience or performance, it no longer makes sense to use terms which are based in binary thinking.

The last section of Bourcier's 'Des "Femmes travesties"', simply entitled 'Transgenres', reflects on the models discussed previously within the article, adds additional weight to his existing points, and produces a conclusion. Although Bourcier has already indicated that the term 'pratiques transgenres' would provide a useful conceptual framework for understanding drag, he delineates this in two passages which merit attention here. In the first of these, readers witness a technique which they have already encountered elsewhere in Bourcier's article; the use of a concluding point to begin a section. Thus, here as elsewhere, Bourcier renders his conclusion immediate:

Parler de "pratiques transgenres" plutôt que de "femmes travesties" permet de ne pas reproduire les découpes et les exclusions auxquelles prédisposent les catégories médicales et idéologiques relatives au travestissement; de ne pas enfermer des expressions du genre dans des catégories qui ne rendent pas compte des expériences et de la manière dont s'identifient toutes celles et ceux qui pratiquent des registres d'identification masculines/féminines qui participent de la performance masculine/féminine. Mais aussi et surtout, opter pour une dénomination comme "pratiques transgenres" aide aussi à rompre avec les cadres épistémologiques qui ont formé notre appréhension des genres et qui

continuent d'informer la perception et la réflexion des "experts" de la culture et de la société que sont les historiens, les sociologues, les anthropologues... Après tout, la majorité d'entre eux, d'entre nous, continuent de travailler en s'appuyant sur des catégories telles que la femme et l'homme, le masculin et le féminin mais aussi sur les liens culturellement construits qu'entretiennent ces catégories. A partir du moment où nous acceptons de parler de pratiques transgenres, nous admettons que nous sommes nous aussi en pleine performance et que nous nous faisons partie de l'objet/du sujet de l'étude. (2006: 130-1)

This passage is powerful in its emphasis on rethinking terms which have entered everyday usage. In underlining the need for new terminology, Bourcier enables his readers to reflect on the violence carried out by ideological and medical discourses. Bourcier also poses the thought-provoking suggestion that as soon as we begin speaking of "pratiques transgenres" we begin to recognize our own gendered performances and our participation in 'pratiques transgenres' (131). On one level, I would suggest that it is appropriate to be cautious about this point: if a person who identifies as cisgender uses the term "pratiques transgenres" to describe the subcultural practices of other people, the use of this term will not necessarily modify or challenge that person's identity, especially if that term is used to imply a distance between 'pratiques transgenres' and cis identity. It is important to recognize that not everyone who could identify, or be identified, as cisgender will identify in this way. Yet, as we see from certain trans-inclusive spaces, 'cisgender' can be claimed as an identity by non trans people who are aiming to challenge cissexist and transphobic norms and beliefs (Enke, 2012: 61-3). However, as Bourcier suggests, using such a term such as 'pratiques transgenres' might lead one to be aware of the way in which one's own gender performance, gender presentation, or gender strategies traverse binary, cisheteronormative gender models. This recognition might appeal to Anne Enke, who problematizes the use of 'cis' (2012: 61-74), arguing that, in certain contexts, this term 'reinforces gender as a self-evident, autonomous category' (67), and does not account for the fluidity inherent in trans and non trans identifications (67). As a result of these conclusions, I am inclined to incorporate the term "pratiques transgenres" into this study, although I will be cautious about applying it to contemporary performance.

The section 'Trans' also includes a thought-provoking reflection on the way in which drag can enable one to rethink heteronormative patterns:

De fait, il est intéressant de noter comment le "travestissement" met en crise la grammaire hétérosexuelle des genres et la notion même de genre avec la théorie queer. Si la visibilité culturelle de certaines pratiques de genres est une histoire en pointillés, c'est peut-être que la monstration de la masculinité comme performance a été invisibilisée. Alors, qu'à l'inverse, on demande depuis toujours à la/La f/Femme de renchérir dans l'artificialité-performance de la féminité. Il aura fallu des temps et une certaine altération de la construction de la masculinité pour qu'il puisse être montré que la masculinité aussi n'est que performances. C'est ce que semblent aussi dire les F to M qui emboîtent le pas des drag kings en proposant des versions de la masculinité ou des pratiques de genres où l'opération chirurgicale (la phalloplastie) n'est plus un point de passage obligé. (2006: 132)

This passage is perhaps among the most salient and eloquent of Bourcier's chapter as a whole. Within it, Bourcier mobilizes his own arguments, such as the capacity of "travestissement" to disrupt and/or transcend the 'cage sémiologique', or 'la grammaire hétérosexuelle', placing these in dialogue with other issues which have played pivotal roles in queer and trans conceptions of performance and performativity, such as the notion that the performative aspects of masculinity have been rendered invisible.<sup>42</sup> By interrogating these concepts, Bourcier reveals their malleability and their applicability to different circumstances and paradigms. Consider, for example, Bourcier's statement that '[i]l aura fallu des temps et une certaine altération de la construction de la masculinité pour qu'il puisse être montré que la masculinité aussi n'est que performances' (2006: 132). This statement emphasizes the extent to which individuals need to work at rethinking their notions of identity and performance, while equally reflecting on the difference between perceptions of masculinity and femininity. Thus, Bourcier deploys his argument about the value of "pratiques transgenres" as a conceptual frame to reflect on established theories of gender performance. A further point to consider in this passage hinges upon the discussion of drag performers and their mobilisation of 'technologies du genre' (131). By discussing drag king performances

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<sup>42</sup> This point is particularly important in Judith Jack Halberstam's work (e.g. Halberstam, 1998: 234-5), as will be seen in the following section of this chapter.

and trans practices which modify, codify and work with ‘technologies du genre’<sup>43</sup>, Bourcier underlines the existence of many different trans identities and bodies, which have diverse relationships with medical transitioning. This point demonstrates Bourcier’s respect for (other) trans people and their bodily autonomy, thereby showing that his earlier suggestion that masculinity can be perceived to be a performance ‘pénis inclus’ (2006: 130) was not intended to erase (other) trans identities or practices.

I now return to the questions posed at the beginning of my discussion of ‘Des Femmes travesties’’. The first of these questions – how Bourcier connects drag with “pratiques transgenres” – plays an important role throughout Bourcier’s chapter and in my analysis of it. As demonstrated here, Bourcier’s analysis of three existing models for understanding “femmes travesties” enables him to interweave the necessity for a new conceptual framework, that of “pratiques transgenres”, into his chapter as a whole. Moreover, Bourcier then underlines the workings of, and need for, this new conceptual framework in his concluding section, ‘Trans-genres’. Bourcier’s use of “pratiques transgenres” to reconceptualise drag is a significant move for queer theory as a whole. However, as clarified above, recognizing the value of “pratiques transgenres” does not necessitate using it as a replacement for ‘drag’ in every situation, nor does it mean that cis individuals can decide what constitutes transgender practice.

Further, Bourcier’s use of “pratiques transgenres” as a conceptual space can further elucidate the discussion of the disempowerment of trans people in ‘F\*\*\* the Politics’. If Butler’s work discusses performativity while tokenizing some trans individuals and disempowering others – as some critics have suggested<sup>44</sup> – one can suggest that Butler does not fully recognize the necessity of reconceptualising

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<sup>43</sup> While Bourcier discusses the concept of “technologies de genre” (Bourcier, 2006: 131) or “techniques d’altérations du corps” (2006: 131) in the context of Halberstam’s work here, it is likely that Bourcier is aware of the fact that Teresa de Lauretis first discussed the concept of gender technologies (see de Lauretis *Technologies of Gender* (1987)), as Bourcier mentions Teresa de Lauretis’ work on technologies of gender in ‘F\*\*\* the Politics’ (2012: 131).

<sup>44</sup> Bourcier is not alone in critiquing the treatment of trans people in Butler’s work – as noted earlier in this chapter, Jay Prosser analyses Butler’s treatment of trans people in *Second Skins* (1998: 21-60), while Viviane Namaste critiques Butler’s perspective in *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transgendered and Transsexual People* (Namaste, 2000: 14). Equally Julia Serano questions the perception of femininity as performative in ‘Reclaiming Femininity’ (2012: 179-81).

cissexist binaries. Moreover, it is perhaps unsurprising that Bourcier, who is seeking a radical approach to gender which incorporates the rejection of cissexist binaries into daily life<sup>45</sup>, might become irritated by a figure who asks their readers to rethink their understanding of gender yet frequently fails to interrogate her own response to trans individuals.

The second question which I raised when beginning my discussion of Bourcier's 'Des "Femmes travesties"' was whether this article reflected either Bourcier's engagement in queer and/or trans activism, or the antipathy shown towards Butler's work in 'F\*\*\* the Politics'. I posed these questions simultaneously to highlight the intimate connection between Bourcier's thought and practice. In 'F\*\*\* the Politics', Bourcier repeatedly indicated that his awareness of practices within trans and queer subcultures, such as the poetry event in San Francisco, informed his response towards Butler's problematic statements. Readers of 'Des "Femmes travesties"' recognize Bourcier's presence in activist circles due to the familiarity he demonstrates with queer and trans activist practices<sup>46</sup> and as a result of his emphasis on interrogating the notions with which one has been indoctrinated. To say that Bourcier's activism and critique of Butler play a slightly less prominent a role in 'Des "Femmes travesties"' than in 'F\*\*\* the Politics' is not to undermine the impact of the former. Rather, I suggest Bourcier's choice to focus on diverse practices and theorisations of drag performs activist work by facilitating the reconsideration of pervasive assumptions.

Both of Bourcier's works have provided this chapter, and this thesis as a whole, with much food for thought. 'F\*\*\* the Politics' illustrates the theoretical rift between Bourcier and Butler, while adding further nuance to my discussion of Butler's conceptualisation of trans individuals. Moreover, 'F\*\*\* the Politics' works in tandem with 'Des "Femmes travesties"' to show that Bourcier's sophisticated discussion of queer and trans individuals, practices, and politics is thoroughly

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<sup>45</sup> Such an approach is visible in Bourcier's comment that 'A partir du moment où nous acceptons de parler de pratiques transgenres, nous admettons que nous sommes nous aussi en pleine performance et que nous nous faisons partie de l'objet/du sujet de l'étude' (2006: 131), as well as from his desire to integrate his activism into his academic work.

<sup>46</sup> Here, Bourcier references drag workshops (2006: 125-6), centres trans lives (127), and explores the use of props by specific drag king performers (130).

grounded both in theory and in practice. Four notions expressed across these works seem particularly pertinent here. Bourcier raises readers' awareness of the plurality of behaviours and practices, which could be conceptualised as 'drag', 'travestissement', or "pratiques transgenres", paying attention to the overlap between these categories, and underlining the importance of showing respect to the individuals who undertake, or identify with, them. This point echoes with Luca Greco's notion of the 'soi pluriel' and with his emphasis on the varying practices and identities of trans individuals, and drag performers. Significantly, neither Bourcier nor Greco denies performativity's value for conceptualising identity performance. Rather, both theorists perceive performativity as an essential conceptual tool, but one which should be combined with other approaches. Equally, both Greco and Bourcier modify the concept of performativity when using it in their work – Greco, by highlighting the collective dimension of the construction of selfhood (2012: 74), and Bourcier by stressing the compatibility of performativity with agency and with biopolitical strategies (2012: 239).

Bourcier's works also emphasize that theorists of drag should recognize drag does not exist in a vacuum. Drag can respond to societal norms (of whiteness, able-bodiedness, sexism, and heteronormativity), and may take place in radical spaces which demarcate themselves from mainstream lesbian and gay contexts.<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, readers may conclude that, when discussing drag, whether in the context of trans practices or not, it is essential to be aware of context, of individual response, and to listen carefully to the voices one hears.

Significantly, Bourcier's works also reveal that one can employ performativity – either in one's gendered practices or in one's theoretical work – without accepting the possibility of a diminution in agency. Bourcier's work is particularly useful in that it posits the existence of an individual self which is neither wholly determined nor wholly determining. Thus, this thesis, following Bourcier and Greco, will aim to

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<sup>47</sup> Lisa Duggan's concept of homonormativity seems applicable to specific tendencies within mainstream gay and lesbian movements as mentioned above. Duggan defines homonormativity as 'a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' (Duggan, 2002: 179).

take account of performativity, while paying attention to other modes of exploring agency and selfhood. Finally, Bourcier's works highlight the necessity of interrogating one's assumptions, privileges and positions, and of thereby gaining awareness of the roles these can play in one's attitude to drag. While Bourcier is not alone in stressing this concept, its significance in his works is refreshing and encouraging; after all, queer theory's queerness frequently lies in its interrogation of naturalized assumptions.

### **Judith Jack Halberstam: Drag Kings and Alternative Masculinities**

Judith Halberstam, the final theorist discussed within this chapter, has produced a varied body of work on drag. This body of work includes three pieces, 'Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance' in *Female Masculinity* (1998), *The Drag King Book* (1999), and 'Oh Behave! Austin Powers and the Drag Kings' (2005), which span a seven year period. This chapter explores these works individually, applying close analysis to each.

#### **'Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance'**

While Halberstam's introduction to his chapter provides valuable background information and indicates his stance, this section concentrates on the latter part of his chapter due to its unusual approach. Therein, Halberstam seeks to create taxonomies of drag king performance styles and techniques, situating these in the contexts of drag king contests and drag king shows. Consequently, I briefly delineate an important issue raised in Halberstam's introduction before examining these taxonomies in detail.

For Halberstam, drag king performance is an entirely separate form to drag queen performance. In addition to pointing out the disparity in the recent histories of drag king and drag queen performance<sup>48</sup>, Halberstam argues that the perception of masculinity as 'nonperformative' (1998: 234) and as naturally adhering to certain ("male") bodies makes it far more difficult to perform. This point permeates

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<sup>48</sup> Halberstam points out that while a small number of male impersonators, such as Stormé Delarverie, performed between the 1930s and the 1960s (Halberstam, 1998: 234), lesbian bar culture did not have a drag scene that paralleled gay men's drag queen culture in that era (1998: 234).

Halberstam's chapter, encouraging readers to think about the way in which masculinity and femininity are perceived to be differently structured. Moreover, Halberstam's position provokes readers to carefully examine the techniques that drag kings employ to make the performative aspects of masculinity visible.<sup>49</sup>

Halberstam illustrates his taxonomy of drag king performance styles in reference to 'The Hershe Bar Drag Contests', which he attended in 1995 and 1996. These are a particularly fruitful site for analysis for at least three reasons. As these contests 'attracted a largely black and Latino pool of contestants' (1998: 245-6), they encouraged Halberstam to consider the impact of race on drag king performance. Second, the variety of styles at these contests enabled Halberstam to base a taxonomy of types on his findings there. Third, the differing dynamics of the Hershe Bar contests and the Club Casanova shows provide ample evidence of the differences between a drag king show and a drag king contest.

Before outlining the diverse performance types, Halberstam reflects on a sense of disappointment with one aspect of the first Hershe Bar contest. For Halberstam, the performers at this contest presented 'a big letdown in terms of the performative' (1998: 245). Halberstam's response highlights the difficulties faced by certain performers, who 'when called on to do something [...] just murmured [their] name' (1998: 245), while provoking readers to reflect on the assumption that masculinity is non performative. This is particularly clear in Halberstam's comment that the 'drag kings had not yet learnt to turn masculinity into theater' (1998: 245); here, readers can recognise that the perception of masculinity as naturally adhering to maleness makes masculinity difficult to perform. Notably, Halberstam raises the possibility that some of the performances did not appear as theatrical exaggerations of masculinity because the performers 'seemed to be flaunting their own masculinity' (245). Although Halberstam later explores the coexistence of drag

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<sup>49</sup> In 'Des "Femmes travesties"', Bourcier cites Halberstam on this point: 'Comme le fait remarquer Judith Halberstam commentant la réaction d'une journaliste du *Village Voice* qui avait assisté à un atelier animé par Annie Sprinkle mais n'avait pas voulu mettre de chaussettes dans son slip (packing) : ce que n'a compris Solomon, c'est que les pénis comme la masculinité deviennent artificiels et constructibles dès lors que l'on remet en cause la naturalité du genre' (2006: 130). Bourcier's comments also enable readers to reflect on the differences in traditional perceptions of masculinity and femininity.

masculinities with performers' own masculinities, this early acknowledgement merits emphasis here. However, Halberstam's emphasis on the lack of performativity in the Hershe Bar contest seems somewhat curious in the light of his earlier suggestion that masculinities of colour present an 'easier theatrical task' (1998: 235). If this is the case, why would a space which hosted a large pool of black and Latin contestants present a disappointing lack of performativity? Perhaps readers might surmise that although dominant white masculinities are naturalized to a higher degree than other masculinities, these other masculinities can still be difficult to access and/or perform on stage.

Halberstam's typology is not intended to present a totalising view of all the possible types of performance style which can be seen at drag king contests, but offers an exploration of five, frequently distinct, styles: 'Butch Realness' (246), 'Femme Pretender' (248), 'Male Mimicry' (250), 'Fag Drag' (253), and 'Denaturalized Masculinity' (253). These titles alone are powerful indicators. Readers will initially question whether Halberstam created these categories or whether he based them on categories which already existed in the Hershe Bar contests. The term 'realness' is clearly adopted from the Drag Balls which took place and continue to take place in communities of colour<sup>50</sup>, and therefore potentially raises the question of cultural appropriation. In addition, these titles draw readers' attention to what I might term Halberstam's pro-butch bias; the term 'Butch Realness' stands in absolute opposition to the term 'Femme Pretender', inferring that masculinity is the property of butches, but can only be an act, and even an act of theft, for femmes.

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<sup>50</sup> The Drag Ball culture in communities of colour has been explored by several scholars, as well as being thematized in Jenny Livingston's 1990 documentary film *Paris Is Burning*. Phillip Brian Harper has written an informative and thought-provoking article which reflects on the question of agency in the Drag Ball context. This article "'The Subversive Edge": Paris Is Burning, Social Critique, and the Limits of Subjective Agency"', includes a discussion of the term 'realness' in this context, exploring what it is said to constitute (1994: 90-1). In addition, Ryan Ashley Caldwell has discussed Drag Ball culture, and the sense of community that these Balls can foster, reflecting on the concept of realness, in 'Gender Queer Productions and the Bridge of Cultural Legitimacy: "Realness" and "Identity" in *Paris is Burning*' (2009). As well as being discussed in the context of queer subcultural practices, discussions of Ball culture also take place in postcolonial and anticolonial contexts. As noted in an earlier section of the chapter, Butler's critique of *Paris Is Burning* in 'Gender is Burning' mobilizes concepts from bell hooks' perceptive article 'is paris burning?', which will be discussed in the following chapter of this thesis. In 'Lavender Ain't White: Emerging Queer Self-Expression in its Broader Context', John C Hawley draws on hooks' critique of the pervasive presence of whiteness in *Paris Is Burning* and remarks upon the nuances created by the number of Hispanic members in certain houses as depicted in the film (Hawley, 2005: 59).

I want to highlight Halberstam's characterization of 'Butch Realness' winners and contestants as 'convincing in [...] [their] masculinity' (1998: 246). Although Halberstam expands this definition, noting that 'sometimes convincing meant that she could easily pass as male, but sometimes it meant her display of a recognizable form of female masculinity' (1998: 246), readers might question whether audiences' perceptions mirrored Halberstam's view. This emphasis on 'convincing' performance in the realness category suggests that this term has been borrowed from Drag Ball communities of colour<sup>51</sup>, but Halberstam does not acknowledge this. I also want to interrogate Halberstam's suggestion that the high number of drag kings of colour in this category 'attest[s] specifically to the way that masculinity becomes visible as masculinity once it leaves the sphere of normative white maleness' (1998: 246). While it is essential to recognize the impact of whiteness on perceptions of masculinity and femininity, it is somewhat reductive to position this as the sole reason for the number of kings of colour in this category. First, if 'realness' was a formal category in addition to a category of Halberstam's, its established status in ball culture may have meant that black and Latina/o kings were more likely to be attracted to it. Second, if the contests were heavily attended by black and Latino people, it is not surprising that a category should consist of primarily black and Latino contestants.

The third point raised by Halberstam's discussion of 'Butch Realness' revolves around Halberstam's cissexist bias. Explaining that he was unable to gauge the identities of many of the 'butch realness' contestants, Halberstam makes three further problematic comments. First, in mentioning a 'sometimes vague boundary between transgender and butch definition' (1998: 248), Halberstam appears to take

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<sup>51</sup> The use of this term among Drag Ball communities of colour is attested to be the presence of this term in Jennie Livingston's documentary film *Paris Is Burning*. This term is also used by academics studying Ball culture, as can be seen in Caldwell's 'Gender Queer Productions and the Bridge of Cultural Legitimacy: "Realness" and "Identity" in Paris is Burning' (2009), and in 'Identity and Self-Presentation in the House/Ball Culture: A Primer for Social Workers' (2013) by Diana Rowan, Dennis D. Long and Darrin Johnson. This term continues to be used among Drag Ball communities of colour, as can be seen from the videos and website of Butch Budah, who compiles dvds of Drag Ball performances, see [www.ballscenedvd.com](http://www.ballscenedvd.com) and <http://www.youtube.com/user/butchbudah?feature=watch> (accessed 25 April 2013).

his own identification as a 'trans-but' (1999: 1)<sup>52</sup> as a model for assuming that others experience their identity as having these types of relationship with these boundaries. As a result, Halberstam fails to account for those individuals who would strongly deny the malleability of boundaries between these categories. Second, Halberstam's evocation of a desire for 'a more sustained realness in a recognizably male body' (248) seems to suggest that the desire to transition depends on a wish to present an image which adheres to ciscentric standards, as opposed to stemming from dysphoria. While this may be the case for some trans people, other trans people might wish to present an image which renders them visibly trans and/or queer. Finally, Halberstam assumes that the context of the Contests – 'under the auspices of a lesbian club' (248) – would necessarily dictate the attendees' identity.

Halberstam's next category, that of the 'Femme Pretender', seemingly stands at odds with the category of 'Butch Realness' and raises its own points of interest and concern. This discussion provides particularly clear examples of what I have termed Halberstam's pro-but' bias. For Halberstam, the presence of camp in these performances, and their inclusion of slippages between masculine personas and non-male identities, renders them 'possibly less interesting' (250) than 'butch realness' performances. I contend that the continuities between these performances and drag queen performance do not reflect badly on 'femme pretender' performances. Rather, such continuities indicate the plurality inherent in drag performance: any one of any identification can equally mobilize elements of high camp and excess in their performance. Moreover, Halberstam's discussion is marked by the assumption that 'femme pretender' masculinities are false and are somehow inferior to butch masculinities. Readers might sympathize with Halberstam's feelings that 'femme pretender' performances can be taken as a 'reassurance that female masculinity is just an act and will not carry over into everyday life' (1998: 250) as this assumption erases people whose masculinity is an important part of their identity. Significantly, however, people can have masculine identifications without (always) wanting to include masculinity in their quotidian

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<sup>52</sup> In *The Drag King Book*, Halberstam explains his identity as follows: 'I identify as a trans-but' or a drag but', in other words, a but' who is at the transitive edge of female masculinity' (1999: 1).

gender expression. When Halberstam cites Buster Hymen's statement that Drag King performance allows them to "walk both sides of the gender fence" (1998: 250), Halberstam immediately perceives this as reiterating 'a stable binary definition of gender' (250). Here, Halberstam's investment in female masculinity prevents him from recognizing the plurality and freedom that Hymen experiences through drag performance. Moreover, this demonstrates Halberstam's desire to perceive drag king performance as destabilizing dominant masculinity, and also suggests that Halberstam may dismiss accounts of drag which are not recounted in these terms.

Halberstam suggests that 'femme pretender' performances layer a 'false' masculinity over femininity, partially basing this view on the inclusion of stripping in these acts. Despite stating that this trope can illustrate 'the idea that, as Newton puts it, "the appearance is an illusion"' (1998: 249), Halberstam seems disappointed by the significance of femininity in these performers' lives and acts. While Halberstam's pro-butch bias plays a role here, this analysis also indicates the significance of audience response in drag performance. Curiously, the popularity of stripping as a Drag King trope seems very much to depend on context. Stripping seems to have been popular in the US both in the late 1990s and more recently. Stripping has also been used by the Drag King Fem Show in France, in their performance 'Gender Fucking Zombie Burlesque'.<sup>53</sup> However, when UK based kings include stripping in their performances, they tend to employ techniques which highlight their masculinities, rather than creating a binary opposition. One popular technique involves parting one's shirt to reveal a sculpted bare chest which simulates a 'six pack'.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> This performance, which took place at Pinched Festival, can be seen online via the following link: <http://blip.tv/village-voice-naked-city-tv/drag-king-fem-show-gender-fucking-zombie-burlesque-1029773> [accessed 30th May 2013].

<sup>54</sup> I have only personally encountered one UK based drag king who strips on stage to reveal bare unbound breasts – Calvin Decline, the winner of the June edition of popular drag king competition 'Man Up', held at East London venue The Glory. For more details about 'Man Up', please visit <http://www.theglory.co/man-up/> (accessed 17 June 2016). Notably, however, there may be drag kings in the UK that I have yet to encounter who mobilize this strategy in their performances. The technique of removing one's shirt to reveal a bare six pack, highlighted with make-up, was pioneered by Adam All in the UK, and has gained in popularity in the last year. In a comic twist on this trend, larger performer Rico del Ray removes his outer shirt to reveal a Tshirt which features the

Halberstam's category of 'Male Mimicry' leads to two expedients; a brief exploration of 'male mimicry' and a longer analysis of Diane Torr's Drag King workshops. Despite its brevity, Halberstam's exploration of 'male mimicry' has multiple positive points. Halberstam's definition – 'the drag king takes on a clearly identifiable form of male masculinity and attempts to reproduce it, sometimes with an ironic twist' (1998: 250) – is clear, unbiased and inclusive. This openness permeates Halberstam's introduction to male mimicry. Momentarily shedding his pro-butch bias, Halberstam acknowledges that this type of performance is accessible by 'butches and femmes' (250), as well as, one assumes, others. Moreover, in referring to a performance by a white king which emphasized the 'theatricality of religion' (250), Halberstam underscores the racial diversity at work in this category.

Halberstam's discussion of Diane Torr's workshops has a much more negative tone. For Halberstam, these workshops – which teach participants how to perform masculinity and then take them into a public space – do not really relate to 'the reconstruction of masculinity', acting instead 'like a feminist consciousness-raising group' (1998: 252). Halberstam appears to feel resentful of these workshops for opening up masculinity as a possibility to explore, rather than perceiving it as a lived identity. As a result of this, two problems emerge. On one level, Halberstam is particularly scathing towards one of the participants of the workshop, Shannon Bell, noting that 'Bell plays gender like a game precisely because her gender normativity provides a stable base for playing with alterity' (1998: 252). Here, Halberstam projects his own views about gender onto Bell, refusing both to accept the possibility that Bell experiences gender as plural, and to consider Bell's self-definition. Moreover, as Bourcier points out in 'Des "Femmes travesties"', the values of these workshops – while potentially problematic – have not deterred

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slogan 'This is a six pack'. Notably, my suggestion that the six pack technique can be used to highlight drag kings' masculinities is not intended to imply that masculinity or manhood is incompatible with bare breasts – I recognize the diversity of embodiment for men and masculine people. Rather, I aim to challenge Halberstam's suggestion that the inclusion of stripping in drag king performance necessitates creating a binary between masculinity and femininity. Significantly, in the cases of Sammy Silver, who has posed with his breasts visible, and Calvin Decline, mentioned above, drag kings can reveal breasts as a mode of playing with multiple gendered signifiers, rather than using this trope to create a dichotomy.

many masculine identified and non-female identified people from attending them (2006: 126). Thus, Halberstam's critique is unable to account for these participants, focusing instead on the argument that '[f]or masculine women who walk round being mistaken for men every day, the workshop has no allure' (Halberstam, 1998: 252-3).

The next two categories in Halberstam's taxonomy, 'Fag Drag' and 'Denaturalized Masculinity' contrast markedly with each other and with the other categories previously discussed. Noting that the performance of 'Fag Drag' may stem from the visibility of gay male masculinities (1998: 252), Halberstam suggests that this form may be popular as 'some lesbians in recent years have positively fetishized gay male culture, and some women base their masculinity and sex play on gay male models' (253). Here, Halberstam raises the possibility of fetishization, but does not examine the meaning of this attitude, either in critical or positive terms. This phrase also involves a slippage between drag kings and lesbians, thereby neglecting the range of identities present in drag king communities. Further, in suggesting that the "Castro clone" (253) aesthetic is particularly open to imitation as a result of its imitative structure, Halberstam overlooks the discourses of homosexuality as copy, which Butler explores in 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', and for the possibilities of resistance therein.<sup>55</sup>

Introducing 'Denaturalizing Masculinity', Halberstam argues that these performances can draw on elements of the categories previously described, but that they develop these styles, simultaneously channelling theatricality and 'an alternative mode of the masculine' (1998: 253). Highlighting the multiplicities present in 'Denaturalized Masculinity', Halberstam illustrates this form in relation to two figures; Dred and Tony Vegas. The nuanced discussion of Dred's performance styles establishes the artist's fluid mobilization of diverse performance styles, without restricting Dred to a single category. Moreover, although

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<sup>55</sup> I suggest that an exploration of these discourses could add clarity and depth to Halberstam's account of 'Fag Drag'. That is, by focusing on the interplay between the 'copy' and the supposed original (Butler, 1991: 22), Halberstam could highlight the theatricality of Fag Drag performance while indicating the work these performances might achieve in terms of highlighting gender construction.

Halberstam highlights Dred's conscious play with racial stereotypes, he handles this carefully and does not use it to make generalizations about black drag kings.

Halberstam's discussion of Tony Vegas is also enlightening, as it reveals the manner in which an excessive performance of faux misogyny can enable audiences to rethink the relationship between misogyny and masculinity. However, this analysis does not account for differences in audience response. Vegas' performance may not speak as clearly to all its audiences as to Halberstam; some people might feel that Vegas replicates, rather than questions, misogyny and may be unsettled by Vegas' performance.

Having concluded his discussion of the drag king contest with a thought-provoking reference to the role of denaturalization and defamiliarisation in the 1995 film *Babe*, Halberstam turns to an exploration of drag king performance techniques, referred to as modes of 'kinging'. Halberstam developed this term especially for drag king performance techniques, as he felt that these cannot be subsumed under the term 'camp'. 'Kinging' can become a valuable part of the lexicon used to describe drag performance, although readers should be careful to apply this term to performances, or instances in performance, of exaggerated masculinity, rather than to limit it to performances by women. While this may at first seem only to displace the focus on gender from the performer to the gesture, the reality is more complex than this. It is important, first, to acknowledge that the focus on binary gender in drag performance is incredibly pervasive and longstanding, and that, therefore, a complete rupture with binary gendered thinking is unlikely to occur, or at least to occur quickly. Moreover, I would suggest that terms such as 'kinging' and 'camp' can be effectively used to indicate specific qualities of hypermasculinity, hyperfemininity, or queerness, in any drag performance. That is, if one used the term 'kinging' to refer to a specific technique or range of techniques and applied in reference to drag king and drag queen performances where appropriate, this term could facilitate closer attention to what happens on stage, rather than on a presumed performer/performed opposition.

Halberstam's first example of a 'kinging effect' is 'understatement', which he illustrates in relation to a specific case. Here, Halberstam returns to an example

which he outlined in the introduction, in which a group performance by ‘the B52s’ presented two drag kings whose sulky reluctance created a strong contrast with the ‘more frenetic drag queens’ (259) who shared their stage. The trope of understatement is certainly a key kinging effect; it takes a recognisable image of masculinity and clearly exaggerates it to produce recognition and comedy. However, Halberstam’s analysis might have benefitted further from exploring the inherent paradox of understatement: much of the skill and comedy of this effect springs from the way in which excess is used to demonstrate reluctance.

The next kinging trope, ‘hyperbole’, seems to stand in direct contrast to understatement. However, for Halberstam, ‘hyperbole’ does not refer to all performances of excess, but consists of isolating a particular form of masculine excess and exaggerating it (1998: 259). Naming, and accounting for, this technique is valuable, due to its frequent role in drag king performance generally, and in ‘denaturalized masculinity’ in particular. Halberstam’s two illustrations of hyperbole – the character Murray Hill, and an Elvis tribute performance – enable readers to gauge how self-imitation and repetition can combine for comedic effect (1998: 259). However, while Murray Hill’s character presents a clear example, one might also feel that Murray, like Tony Vegas, is in danger of being taken seriously as a poster-boy for misogyny.

Three particularly significant points arise in Halberstam’s discussion of ‘layering’. Halberstam argues that layering can occur when a King’s own masculinity becomes briefly visible beneath their persona, drawing on Shon’s experience of positive audience reactions (261). While overlapping masculinities constitute one notable example of layering, performers may also layer masculinities with androgyny and femininity, thereby presenting glimpses of differently gendered selves and personas. The second important dimension raised in the context of layering revolves around ‘the permeable boundaries between acting and being’ (1998: 261). As Halberstam phrases it, ‘the drag actors are all performing their own queerness and simultaneously exposing the artificiality of all conventional gender roles’ (261). This is among the most valuable statements in ‘Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance’. Here, Halberstam acknowledges the importance of performativity,

drawing readers' attention towards the fact that identity is both performed and experienced as outside performance. Moreover, this comment resonates with, and perhaps even adds a further dimension to, Greco's concept of the 'soi pluriel': in addition to experiencing a performance self and a non-performance self, drag performers can also experience a sense of self which fluctuates between the two, making itself and these other selves stronger and more concrete. Having indicated that he will include a brief discussion of identity and performance in his chapter, Halberstam turns to the way in which stripping can be included in performances of layering. Although stripping also revolves around transformation in this context, Halberstam is much warmer towards these techniques than to those he discussed in the context of 'femme pretender' performances. For Halberstam, actions such as Jewels' 'antistrip' (262) are clever performance strategies in that they resist the notion that there is a real self to be revealed, whereas stripping in 'femme pretender' performance is necessarily seen to uphold binary notions of gender. Readers can perceive that here, Halberstam's focus on a necessary relation to binary gender prevents him from appreciating the variety and plurality in specific types of performance. As if to underscore the relative value of certain forms of stripping, Halberstam concludes this section by presenting the comments of drag performers who dislike this technique, and also by pointing out that audiences sometimes fail to understand stripping as gender play (1998: 262). While audience reaction is a significant factor in drag performance, it remains important to acknowledge that one's biases, such as that of Halberstam against stripping, may play a role in the questions one asks, or in the interviewees that one selects.

Halberstam's final discussion draws attention to the different identity categories occupied by drag kings and avoids facile assumptions about necessary links between gender identity and performance. This renders it a rich, enjoyable discussion, and contrasts with earlier instances in the text in which Halberstam makes generalizing statements in relation to race or trans identity. Examples of such tendencies can be found in Halberstam's somewhat insensitive remarks about transition as stemming from a desire for a 'more sustained realness in a recognizably male body' (1998: 248), and/or in Halberstam's suggestion that black

masculinities are necessarily more performative than dominant white masculinities (1998: 235). Here, in contrast, Halberstam evinces respect for multiple femme identities (263), and also allows Retro's account of their experiences as 'a transgender Asian Pacific Islander' (264) and drag performer to stand alone without comment.

Halberstam's methodology in 'Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance' is wide-ranging and unorthodox; including interviews, extensive examples, the use of images for illustration of specific points, and allusions to popular culture. Elsewhere in *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam explains that he seeks to create a queer methodology, which is necessarily a 'scavenger methodology' (1998: 13), drawing on and combining various approaches. In 'Femme on Femme: Reflections on Collaborative Methods and Queer Femme-inist Ethnography' (2011), Ulrika Dahl emphasizes the importance of queering traditional methodologies (2011: 1) and suggests that Halberstam's 'scavenger methodology' provides indications of how to progress in this direction (Dahl, 2011: 6). One can thus perceive a harmony between Halberstam's methodology and his subject matter, which encourages readers to build their own queer methodologies. As mentioned in my introduction, I seek to mobilize a scavenger methodology, which draws on a range of established techniques, and takes a transfeminist approach to the texts in question.

Halberstam's approach allows him to present his arguments in an accessible, lively manner. Halberstam's detailed typologies of performance forms and techniques are clearly delineated, and enable him to frame convincing, thought-provoking arguments. It is important to recognise that Halberstam's chapter has problematic elements as a result of its moments of pro-butch bias. However, I acknowledge that it would be impossible to expect Halberstam, or any author, to expunge their own biases and perspective from their work. Moreover, as this chapter appears in the context of *Female Masculinity*, the focus on butch and masculine elements makes sense as it situates drag king performance alongside other forms of female masculinity. Finally, there may also be an extent to which I am particularly aware of pro-butch bias as a result of my own desire to counteract femme invisibility, anti-femme positions, cissexist positions, and binary positions. While Halberstam's tone

can change significantly in accordance with his response to his subject matter, his theorizations as a whole are inclusive, nuanced, and show a great deal of consideration. As a whole, 'Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance' is a valuable work for those who wish to study or think about drag, particularly as a result of its inclusion of new lenses through which to explore particular techniques and modes of expression.

### *The Drag King Book*

I begin by drawing attention to key differences between this text and 'Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance'. First, Halberstam has gained a fuller awareness of his pro-butch bias and cissexism, and aims to separate himself from these beliefs. Halberstam reveals the impact of prejudice on his work, noting that at the beginning of this project, he sought a 'butch brotherhood behind the Drag King world' (1999: 1), but that his conversations with Del La Grace Volcano enabled him to understand a wider spectrum of identities and to 'recognize [Del's] position as a transgender man' (1999: 1). These admissions indicate Halberstam's developing approach, and encourage readers to view *The Drag King Book* as 'a part of an evolving scene of gender creativity' (1999: 1). While I am somewhat sceptical of such an extensive change in Halberstam's position between *Female Masculinity* (published in 1998) and *The Drag King Book* (published in 1999), I feel that it is important to acknowledge Halberstam's emphasis on difference from his earlier perspectives. Second, *The Drag King Book* differs from 'Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance' in its use of Del la Grace Volcano's photography. Although the latter used images to illustrate its points, *The Drag King Book* employs images which offer their own theories and create a mutual amplification between text and image. Finally, *The Drag King Book* differs from Halberstam's earlier work as a result of its inclusion of biographical information and anecdotes by both Halberstam and Volcano. Halberstam's revelation that he sought a 'butch brotherhood' (1999: 1) creates a curious point of comparison with Judith Butler's autobiographical admission in *Undoing Gender*. Here, Butler clarifies how her past – as 'a bar dyke who spent her days reading Hegel and her evenings, well, at the gay bar' (2004: 213) – shaped her later theorizations of drag. Although Butler's recognition of

femininity as a transferrable attribute (213) is the central part of this anecdote, readers will also be interested in the way in which Butler has framed herself simultaneously as an intelligent recipient of philosophical questions and as an everyday participant in gay culture. Halberstam's confessions of his own motivations and irritability (Halberstam and Volcano, 1999: 1-2) act in a similar way: they enable readers to focus both on Halberstam's bias and its impact, and to question why Halberstam has chosen to confide in readers of *The Drag King Book*.

### Gender Diversity

In addition to differentiating it from other academic and non-academic texts, *The Drag King Book's* commitment to gender diversity enables readers to gain a fuller understanding of what gender diversity means. As Halberstam demonstrates, the 'small claims for gender diversity' (1999: 36) offered by *DKB* entail equal respect for single and plural genders, for malleable genders and for fixed genders, and for gender play and gender commitment. This is not a truism, as this equality does not necessarily appear in all of the places which proclaim respect for gender diversity. Here, Halberstam acknowledges that gender is experienced differently for everyone, and can be perceived as a spectrum: one might relate to their gender in the same way that Halberstam does<sup>56</sup>, or one may experience a sense of plural self, such as that explored in Luca Greco's article.

The theme of gender diversity runs throughout *DKB*, and draws attention to four further issues. On one level, the chapter 'What is a Drag King' offers an analysis of different performers' experiences, enabling Halberstam to underline the diversity between kings in terms of their relationship with gender. Here, Halberstam avoids the commonplace pitfall of speaking *for* the performers considered, aiming instead to represent and reproduce the 'complex and elaborate gender systems and codes' (1999: 39) that the drag kings used to articulate their own identities. Following the model of respect for gender diversity outlined above, Halberstam offers a nuanced

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<sup>56</sup> In comparing his own relationship to his gender with Volcano's relationship to his gender, Halberstam writes: 'If Del's sense of identity and embodiment and relation to performance has undergone subtle transformations over the course of two years, mine has remained somewhat constant, anchored to what might be called transgender butchness' (1999: 1).

account of the differing ways in which performers experience their identities, pointing towards the disparity between artists such as Dred whose gender identity and role is 'fluctuating' (39) and those such as Svar Tomcat whose masculinity permeates both their performance and their everyday life.

On another level, Halberstam's discussion of the reductive depiction of drag kings in the media provides nuanced insights, but intimates Halberstam's continued investment in 'butch brotherhood' and in drag's capacity to challenge existing norms. Halberstam's admission that the desire he and Del experienced for 'provocative butchness and essential queerness' (1999: 41) was as thwarted as the media's wish to present 'properly feminine women dressing up for a lark' (41) highlights two issues. First, this point indicates the tendency to position drag performance as functioning to either uphold or destabilize normative conceptions of gender. This position, as remarked upon by Jay Prosser (1998: 31-3) and Viviane Namaste (2000: 14), tends to have the unwelcome effect of celebrating some trans people at the expense of others, creates unnecessary generalizations, and means that many of the other important features of drag performance are disregarded. However, as Halberstam states, these thwarted desires remind readers that drag performance includes complex and diverse techniques and individuals, and as a result cannot be compressed into restrictive categories which assume that they are either 'inherently transgressive' (1999: 41) or participating in 'a harmless attempt to dress up the feminine in new garb' (41). Nevertheless, while this passage is valuable as a whole, one of its attempts at underlining diversity – the assertion that '[s]ome Drag Kings are performers looking to make a buck and others are heralds of a queer future' (41) – is problematic in its creation of another hierarchy. That is, Halberstam seems to position certain Drag Kings as more queer and, therefore, worthier of celebration, than others whose performances relate to monetary concerns.

The third issue about gender diversity to highlight here relates to Halberstam's response to specific trans men's use of testosterone. Here, despite his aim to be respectful of diverse gender identities, Halberstam seems unable to resist pointing out contradictions between these men's commitment to transformation and

technological development – what Halberstam summarizes as their perception of ‘their transgender evolution as part of a lifetime of experimentation’ (1999: 127) – and the language one interviewee, Hans, uses to articulate his feelings about testosterone, which ‘revels in organic imagery’ (127). Halberstam then expresses an ambivalence regarding trans identity, arguing that ‘transgenderism’ simultaneously appears to indicate ‘new forms of embodiment’ (127) and to ‘confirm the dominance of gender binarism’ (128). As Julia Serano points out, the accusation of ‘reinforcing the gender binary’ (2013: 81) is often selectively applied, and is rarely levelled at non-feminine, cisgender people (81). Consequently, Halberstam’s stance seems somewhat rigid and critical here, and may demonstrate intolerance for identities or perspectives which oppose his own.

The final issue raised in ‘Some Kind of Woman: Drag King Genders’ hinges on the notion of community. I feel that this chapter might have benefited from a different name, as the current title has the unfortunate effect of suggesting that all drag king genders relate in some sense to womanhood. For Halberstam and, particularly for Volcano, the inclusion and acceptance of trans men in ‘queer dyke spaces’ (1999: 128) seems to be a positive contingency, which resonates with a refusal of gender binarism, and, perhaps, with a ‘queer future’ (41). However, this discussion overlooks the fact that some queer women’s spaces include trans men while continuing to exclude trans women. In such cases, access to women’s spaces seems to be predicated on transphobic notions of assigned sex as opposed to identity. While I am personally happy to see trans men in many queer spaces, it remains essential to protest and counter ongoing discrimination against trans women. On the subject of intra-community discrimination, Halberstam discusses tensions between trans men and cis drag kings in certain spaces, including London, in the late 1990s (1999: 130). Happily, however, as Svar points out (Halberstam and Volcano, 1999: 130)<sup>57</sup>, there are inclusive queer spaces which welcome people of diverse genders and foster a sense of mutuality and support between performers.

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<sup>57</sup> Transgender drag king Svar Tomcat, whose views are cited and discussed in *The Drag King Book*, points out that while one trans man had a hostile attitude to Svar’s use of hormones, the drag king scene in which he performs generally welcomes people of diverse genders (Halberstam and Volcano, 1999: 130).

The discussion of race by Halberstam and Volcano in *DKB* is limited primarily to a single chapter, entitled 'Class, Race and Masculinity: The Superfly, the Mackdaddy, and the Rapper'. Although I feel that questions of race and racism could have been intertwined more thoroughly into the text as whole, four significant points arise in this chapter. To begin with, Halberstam raises the issue of racial segregation in drag king contexts (140), primarily in reference to the U.S. Focusing on aesthetics, Halberstam explains that the preponderance of 'strict butch-femme codes' (140) in spaces for queer women of colour means that garments which would indicate the presence of a drag king in other contexts would be read differently here. This emphasis on the contextual difference of aesthetics, combined with Volcano's earlier comments about the hostility of Parisian lesbians to drag king performers (125), encourages one to pay particular attention to the differential dress codes which apply in divergent contexts. In addition, Halberstam emphasizes his suggestion that drag kings of colour do not tend to perform at drag king shows, but are more likely to perform at drag king contests (141-2). This divergence applies to some extent to contemporary UK drag scenes as many events hire white performers. However, there are a number of talented non-white drag kings in the UK, who perform in orchestrated events as well as in competitions. I provide three examples here. Romeo de la Cruz, a black drag king who incorporates dancing into his performances, developed his persona at Drag King Cabaret event 'Boi Box' in Soho, and has been hired to perform at club night 'Barelesque', as well as featuring in the final of The Glory's 'Man Up' 2016 competition.<sup>58</sup> In Manchester, mixed race performer Lydia Bernsmeier-Rulow hosts a monthly drag king event 'Boi Zone', performing as Dick Slick<sup>59</sup>, as well as offering drag king workshops and performing at other events. Finally, Lenna Cumberbatch, a black drag king who has now retired

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<sup>58</sup> For more information about 'Barelesque' and about Romeo's performance at 'Barelesque 8', please visit <http://www.barelesque.com/barelesque-8-anim8te-2015/> (accessed 13 June 2016). Romeo's announcement of his place in the 'Man Up' Final can be found at [https://www.instagram.com/p/BGjQhZRyTO2cUsQ2stFOgRLYnytLBR5XrE\\_tp40/?taken-by=rom3odelacruz](https://www.instagram.com/p/BGjQhZRyTO2cUsQ2stFOgRLYnytLBR5XrE_tp40/?taken-by=rom3odelacruz) (accessed 13 June 2016) while further information about 'Man Up', the popular drag king competition held at East London venue The Glory can be found here: <http://www.theglory.co/man-up/> (accessed June 13 2016).

<sup>59</sup> For more details about Dick Slick, visit <http://www.thedragking.co.uk/> (accessed 13 June 2016). 'The Boi Zone' is currently on hiatus, but details of their events and of Lydia's workshops can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/TheBoiZone/> (accessed 13 June 2016).

from the scene, worked hard to develop London's drag king scene after having attended drag balls in the US.

Returning to *The Drag King Book*, Halberstam argues here, as in 'Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance', that race is likely to impact upon performance. Although this is likely to be the case, Halberstam uses Dred and Shon's testimony to suggest that black drag kings will necessarily respect the characters they perform, whereas white drag kings are more likely to include parody in their work (1999: 143). Here, Halberstam creates an unhelpful dichotomy between drag kings of colour and white drag kings, and also disregards drag kings such as Lenna Cumberbatch, who includes a strong sense of parody in her sleazy character Uncle Lenny.

Halberstam's discussion of racial dynamics also alights on 'cross-ethnic' performance. On one level, this analysis encourages readers to think critically about the styles adopted by different drag king performers, and reflects on the way that different drag kings relate to this issue (1999: 145). Moreover, with the help of Retro – a trans, Asian Pacific Islander who has created a 'white trash American truck driver' (1999: 146) character without racist tendencies – Halberstam demonstrates how performers can create characters to reflect upon and demythologize racial stereotypes. Unlike 'Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance', *DKB* contains two interview transcripts in addition to including quotes from interviews throughout the text. Although including the extended version of interviews with drag kings of colour might have added further nuance to *The Drag King Book*, the transcripts included remain valuable in that they enable readers to think about Halberstam's inclusion of his own standpoint in his interviews. Although I concede the difficulty of creating questions without palpable bias, it remains important to note the extent to which Halberstam seeks to drive certain conversations and expects participants to respond accordingly. For example, at one stage, Halberstam poses a leading

question to Mo B. Dick, and when Mo responds in a lukewarm manner, attempts to strengthen his own point using Mo's response.<sup>60</sup>

Overall, *The Drag King Book* is an innovative text, with the capacity for a strong impact on the study of drag. I particularly appreciate this text's aim to underline the gender diversity at work in the drag king scene and its use of various methods – images, interviews and analysis – to explore and illustrate the drag king scene. While the negotiations of race and of certain issues pertaining to gender might have been improved, the text seems to me to present an important step in the study of drag king performance.

#### 'Oh Behave! Austin Powers and the Drag Kings'

While 'Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance' and *The Drag King Book* focus primarily on exploring drag king subcultures, 'Oh Behave! Austin Powers and the Drag Kings' concentrates on the presence of 'kinging' effects and techniques in mainstream media. Halberstam makes it clear that this text will not seek to establish a causal relationship between drag king subcultures and the presence of 'kinging' tropes in the media. Rather, the text focuses on these tropes, their roles, and their impact within a cisheteronormative, mainstream context. The following discussion examines the links Halberstam creates, questioning their efficacy as connections and their effect on his text as a whole.

Halberstam makes two pertinent points before turning to the films that he terms 'King comedies'. Halberstam first remarks on the extent to which gay male culture has permeated the mainstream, particularly in terms of the commonalities perceived between gay men and straight women (2005: 125). In addition to highlighting the lack of visibility of queer women's culture, this point also underscores the perception of femininity as a transferable attribute while masculinity is seen to adhere naturally to men. Second, Halberstam points towards

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<sup>60</sup>This exchange refers to responses regarding the performance techniques of certain drag kings at the Hershe Bar contest (1999: 112). Personally, I agree with Halberstam's point, but I feel that Halberstam could have been more responsive to Mo's lack of enthusiasm. For example, Halberstam could have mentioned this lack of enthusiasm and asked Mo to explain their point of view in more detail.

the growing scholarship and media attention focused on a “crisis” in masculinity’ (2005: 125), while acknowledging that the bond between masculinity and maleness continues to be seen as indissoluble.

While the kinging techniques referred to in ‘Oh Behave’ – ‘de-authentication’, ‘masculine supplementarity’, ‘doubling’ and ‘indexical representation’ – resonate with models of performance discussed previously, they are not explored in either ‘Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance’ or *The Drag King Book*. Employing Volcano’s image ‘Mo B. Dick with Muscles’ to illustrate the notion of ‘de-authentication’, Halberstam draws readers’ attention to the way in which Mo is simultaneously positioned as the authentic masculine, and as imitator. Here ‘de-authentication’ is achieved through Mo’s pose, Volcano’s cinematic techniques, and the use of props such as the ‘Drag King’ shirt (2005: 130). However, I suggest that de-authentication might also be visible when drag kings highlight their performance style or present jarring poses.

Halberstam successfully illustrates ‘masculine supplementarity’, through the image “Tits and Tomcat” (131). Here, Halberstam points out that the presence of a hyperfeminine person next to a drag king creates a play with gendered signifiers which emphasize that king’s masculinity, while also encouraging viewers to question it. Although Halberstam’s lack of further examples at this stage is somewhat frustrating, ‘masculine supplementarity’ is ably illustrated in relation to *Austin Powers*. I agree with Halberstam’s assertion that Vanessa’s presence enables viewers to question Austin’s masculinity before accepting him as an honest, if flawed, figure (145-7). However, this example is somewhat troubling in that it presents Vanessa as possessing a naturalized, non-performative gender, which unsettles Austin’s performance of excess. Notably, Halberstam does not encourage readers to explore examples of masculine supplementarity in other contexts, despite their availability in *The Drag King Book* and elsewhere. For example, in ‘Gender Fucking Zombie Burlesque’, Drag King Fem Show uses masculine

supplementarity to great effect through the image of a conventional weeping widow at the side of the supposedly dead protagonist.<sup>61</sup>

Halberstam's discussion of doubling is particularly powerful, as it is clearly illustrated both as a technique in drag king performance and as a feature of *Austin Powers* (2005: 132). Halberstam's analyses of the Elvis impersonators and of 'Mini Me' markedly mobilize Butlerian performativity; for Halberstam, these repetitions highlight the notion that there is no original and that each copy is as inauthentic as the last (132). 'Indexical representation', while clearly delineated in reference to the scene in which objects on the screen are perceived to mock and represent Austin's penis (2005: 133), is a more difficult technique to include in drag king performance. Consequently, Halberstam mobilizes the cover image of *The Drag King Book* to illustrate this technique, clarifying the workings of 'indexical representation', but leaving readers to wonder how it might operate in live performance.

The kinging techniques described by Halberstam do not seem to come into play during *The Full Monty*. Instead, Halberstam concentrates on aspects of this film which, like certain drag king performances, denaturalize dominant masculinity. Halberstam's focus on the positioning of women as the subject rather than the object of the gaze – 'refusing several gender logics' (2005: 139) – connects this film to drag king techniques of defamiliarisation, and invites readers to interrogate the roles of the gaze and subjectivity in drag king performance. While drag performers are the object of the gaze on stage, their choice to perform restructures the role of power in this subject-object relation. Moreover, performers such as Adam All and Stevie Wonderful refuse the position of passive object in that they underline their roles as subjects through audience interaction.<sup>62</sup> For Halberstam, *The Full Monty* plays with the view that dominant masculinity is gradually becoming obsolete

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<sup>61</sup> A clip of this performance was formerly available at <http://blip.tv/village-voice-naked-city-tv/drag-king-fem-show-gender-fucking-zombie-burlesque-1029773> (accessed 30 May 2013).

<sup>62</sup> In 'And Then You Cut Your Hair: Genderfucking on the Femme Side of the Spectrum', Sandy Chang provides a nuanced analysis of the difference between objectification in daily life and soliciting positive attention on stage through drag king performance (André and Chang, 2006: 265-7). I discuss this analysis in further detail in my chapter on feminist theorizations of drag king performance.

(2005: 140). This perspective creates a strong connection between the film and certain performers' critiques of dominant masculinity, while pointing out the importance of recognizing alternative modes of masculinity and manhood. Overall, Halberstam's analysis of *The Full Monty's* plot includes a nuanced awareness of class boundaries in the UK, concentrating on the way in which the decline of industry may have shaped definitions of working class masculinity (2005: 137-8). However, the question of reception is significant here. While some viewers may share Halberstam's opinion of *The Full Monty* as creating space for alternative and reconfigured masculinities (2005: 138-9), others might read the film as documenting the decline of former industrial cities and of the lives of former industrial workers. While reception is also likely to vary in drag king spaces, drag king performances often take place in LGBTQIA+ spaces, which may be more likely to celebrate alternative and reconfigured masculinities.

Finally, Halberstam argues that gender norms are destabilized in *The Full Monty* as it features men with 'feminine' concerns, such as appearance, and women with 'male' roles, such as that of welder (2005: 141). However, what Halberstam does not examine here is that the access of men to femininity is supposed to be a device to create humour; one is supposed not to believe that 'real' men would be interested in weight loss or dancing skills. Overall, Halberstam's analysis of this film can open readers' eyes to moments of queerness and refusal in mainstream media. However, it is important to recognise that these moments, while significant, will need to be amplified in order for the majority of audiences to recognise queerness as something other than a joke.

In his analyses of the Austin Powers films, Halberstam raises four points of interest. Having previously noted that both the first Austin Powers film and *The Full Monty* mobilize figures of 'abject English masculinity' (2005: 127), Halberstam argues that Austin's masculinity includes aspects of two popular, comic 'Carry On' masculinities – the randy heterosexual masculinity of Sid James, and the exaggerated camp of Kenneth Williams. For Halberstam, this mutuality means that Austin is an unmistakably queer figure, but that the excess of his masculinity is rendered 'kingy' rather than camp (142-3). This approach brings a new lens to *Austin Powers*, which

sheds light on the way in which Austin's excessive masculinity and misogyny can seem amusing, rather than simply appearing as a (hyperbolic) reflection of hegemonic masculinity. Although Halberstam does not connect this directly to drag king performance, one can easily recognise this trope within some drag king performances. For example, Adam All's self-presentation as being highly successful with women becomes all the more amusing in light of his bashful romantic interactions with other men and his fearful deference to his 'first ever girlfriend, Apple Derrières'.

Discussing the 'penis enlarger scene' (2005: 146) and others, Halberstam underscores the way in which 'reaction shots' (2005: 146) and interaction with Vanessa challenge Austin's masculinity, but eventually confirm it. However, although this clearly demonstrates the use of 'masculine supplementarity' in the film, it remains an uncomfortable comparison. While 'supplementarity' in the drag king world can highlight masculinities which are frequently erased elsewhere, Austin's success in "getting the girl" seems only to show that a misogynistic anachronism can still triumph solely because of his masculinity and of his amusement factor. In fact, Austin's evident 'loser status' seems to be an important factor in Halberstam's positive analysis of the first film; although Austin attains hero status, his failure to live up to standards of dominant masculinity seems to Halberstam to expose dominant masculinity as fiction. This aspect of Halberstam's critique becomes clear in light of his disapproval of *The Spy Who Shagged Me*: as Austin's anachronistic sexism 'has become his comic signature' (148) and as he and Dr Evil are supposed to be 'attractive and powerful' (148), the second film loses the queer, satirical critique of its predecessor. However, this sequel is not 'totally irredeemable' (148) in Halberstam's eyes, as a result of its use of doubling. While Halberstam's suggestion that doubling provokes readers to question the existence of authenticity is a valuable one, his suggestion that this leads the film to 'break down all claims to masculine and white authenticity' (2005: 149) seems excessive. Although this film can enable observers to rethink the question of authenticity, it does not exist in a vacuum; one film, or a group of films, which create questioning

and which embed this in a comedy trope, will not wholly change the landscape of mainstream media.

Halberstam's final point – that the inclusion of anti LGBTQIA+ material in *Austin Powers* should not prevent viewers from recognizing that these films perceptibly rely on queer culture – opens space for my concluding arguments. I agree with Halberstam's suggestion that it is important to recognise the impact that queer cultures and counter cultures can have on mainstream society, and to acknowledge that, in Halberstam's words 'behind every good king comedy is a great drag king' (2005: 151). Moreover, I feel that this article is an important exercise in queer recognition and in the deconstruction of mainstream comedy. However, it is also worth stressing the point that kinging techniques seemingly appear in mainstream media only in certain circumstances – in comedy, and applied solely to men – and that these cannot yet be classified as representation.

Halberstam was one of the first queer theorists to examine drag king performance, and his work continues to shape the perception of it. As demonstrated here, each text has important contributions as well containing its own flaws. Although Halberstam's treatment of race and of trans identities and embodiments could be improved, it is important to recognize that he did not shrink from these issues, genuinely endeavouring to mark their roles in shaping alternative masculinities. Although one could critique Halberstam for his desire to position drag king performance as a necessarily radical act, Halberstam clearly recognizes that drag king performances are 'neither essentially rebellious and inherently transgressive nor are they simply a harmless attempt to dress up the feminine in new garb' (1999: 41). Equally, Halberstam's search for transgression, and for a butch brotherhood (1999: 1), becomes comprehensible when situated in the context of societies which celebrate certain masculinities at the expense of others.<sup>63</sup> Overall

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<sup>63</sup> I challenge the positioning of drag as subversive, as this perspective glosses over the difference between performances, and can lead to a framework which excuses problematic performances as 'a joke'. However, I can sympathize with theorists who use this terminology as certain performances do provide impetus for change, and it can be easy to get swept away by enjoyment or by one's yearning for change to oppressive structures.

then, Halberstam's analyses are rich and thought-provoking, and provide useful tools for the theorization of drag.

### **Concluding Remarks: Just how 'Queer' are Queer Theories of Drag?**

Transphobia, cissexism and trans erasure are among the central problems occurring in these works. While Greco and Bourcier could have provided clearer justifications of the terms and pronouns they used at certain points, their work has shown itself to be primarily open to people of all genders. The work of Halberstam and Butler seems to more problematic in this regard, as it is difficult to ascertain the comparative value of these authors' attempts at openness and their use of concepts which can be seen to be cissexist or prejudiced.<sup>64</sup> Unlike the theories of critics such as Janice Raymond (1994: xxiii-iv), the transphobic elements are not integral to the theories of either Butler or Halberstam. For example, as Bourcier pointed out, performativity can be seen as a resource on which to draw as opposed to a contradiction of gender identity (2012: 239-40). Highlighting cissexist and transphobic elements in Butler and Halberstam's works makes it clear that theorists are accountable for these comments, irrespective of their 'queer credentials'. Moreover, expunging cissexist aspects from Butler and Halberstam's more inclusive insights enables me to employ these insights to create the building blocks for a transfeminist theory of drag. While the presence of transphobia in these works seems to render them less queer, it seems appropriately queer to mobilize elements of them for other analyses, while markedly leaving cissexism behind.

The focus on drag kings, rather than drag queens, in the texts considered here distances their approaches from texts which assume drag performance is necessarily 'men' performing femininity.<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, however, the theorists considered here occasionally collapse the term drag king to the figure of a 'woman' dressed as a 'man' (Halberstam, 1998: 232), thereby recreating the binarizing

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<sup>64</sup> I employ the terms 'open' and 'openness' in relation to theory to connote a theory's aim and/or capacity to include and account for a wide range of people, and especially to account for those people whose identities and experiences are often overlooked or erased.

<sup>65</sup> Aside from Butler's 'Ambivalent Drag', which focuses on drag queen performance in the context of Harlem Ball culture (1993: 125), the works in this chapter primarily concentrate on drag king performance. As noted in my Introduction, I balance this focus by centring the performance of femininity in my chapter on feminist theory.

performer/performed opposition, and disregarding gender diversity among drag kings. Luca Greco's emphasis on the plural identities experienced by performers is particularly successful in challenging this binary opposition. For example, Greco's discussion of Max's layered identity (2012: 74) demonstrates the importance of looking at the performance itself, rather than trying to arbitrarily impose categories on those who would not identify with them. Bourcier also addresses this issue through his focus on the adoption of the term 'pratiques transgenres' (2006: 130): the use of this term, although perhaps problematic in certain contexts, forces the reader to confront techniques and gendered signifiers in performance, as supposed to defining drag by the gender of the performer.

While the above discussion indicates flaws in queer theoretical models of drag, it is also important to recognize the valuable insights which Bourcier, Butler, Greco, and Halberstam provide into drag performance. In Chapter Three, I adapt and employ Butlerian performativity in my analyses of literary texts. As stressed here, one can perceive performativity as a valuable resource without discounting gender identity (Bourcier, 2012: 239). That is, one can appreciate Butler's argument that gender performance includes repetition and imitation (1999: 188-9) without devaluing people's identities or the resonances people experience with certain forms of gender expression (Serano, 2012: 181-2). Moreover, Butler's discussion of the revelatory capacity of drag is especially significant in light of the strong reactions drag can evoke, both in performers and in audience members.

In addition to its capacity to enable readers to rethink Butlerian performativity, Bourcier's work is particularly valuable in light of its critique of previous discourses surrounding drag and of its inclusive approach. Although this thesis will not replace 'drag' with 'pratiques transgenres', it aims to avoid terms, such as 'femmes travesties', which define drag on the basis of the sex of the performer. Moreover, this thesis will endeavour to acknowledge how performers' experiences of their identities have modified their practices on stage. Luca Greco's valuable concept of the 'soi pluriel' can also shed further light on the relationship between drag performance, identity, and performativity. If one combines Bourcier's concept of identitarian performance (2012: 239) with Greco's understanding of the self as

constructed through interaction (2012: 274), one gains insight into the complex relationships between conscious performance and performative development. I also aim to incorporate Halberstam's concept of 'kinging techniques' into my analyses, examining the potential differences between performing femininity and performing masculinity.

Before turning to my next chapter, I would like to make two further points about queer theories of drag. First, it is important to acknowledge that this chapter does not touch on all queer theoretical approaches to drag. Certain analyses of drag, such as Kai Kohlsdorf's 'Policing the Proper Queer Subject, RuPaul's Drag Race in the Neoliberal "Post" Moment' (2014) and 'And Then You Cut Your Hair: Genderfucking on the Femme Side of the Spectrum' (2006) by Amy André and Sandy Chang, occupy the boundary between queer and transfeminist analyses of drag. I touch on transfeminist analyses in my chapter devoted to feminist theory, exploring André and Chang's conversation and Julia Serano's 'Reclaiming Femininity' (2012), and I mobilize Kohlsdorf's analysis alongside other critiques of RuPaul to discuss contemporary drag in the Conclusion. However, as noted in my Introduction, I chose the queer analyses of drag selected here as a result of their significant contributions to drag studies, and of the productive dialogue between these texts.

The final point I wish to underline here is the fact that queer theories of drag have previously been criticised for their inability to include trans people without polarising and pathologising them. In my discussion of the treatment of trans people in Butler's work, I have already referred to Jay Prosser's thought-provoking critique of Butler. One significant point arising from this critique concerns Butler's arguably inappropriate use of psychoanalysis as a means of emphasizing the oppressive role of hegemonic norms (Prosser, 1998: 52-3).<sup>66</sup> Although some of the

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<sup>66</sup> My critique of Butler's use of psychoanalysis to elucidate the actions and identities of marginalized people could be read as implying an absolute subjectivism, this is not (wholly) the case. Although I believe that marginalized voices should be included in academic work, I do not suggest that academics cannot provide potential interpretations of the acts and beliefs of marginalized people. However, I feel that the application of psychoanalytic approaches to marginalized individuals, and, in particular, trans people, can be inappropriate, as using these approaches can create a further pathologization of groups who have already been pathologized. Significantly, Monique Wittig

texts in my second chapter employ psychoanalytic concepts when discussing gender non-normativity (Tyler, 2003: 120-1), I challenge the positioning of trans people as objects to analyse, or as problems to solve psychoanalytically, throughout this thesis.

Significantly, Prosser is not alone in reproaching queer theorists on the subject of trans people and drag performance. Viviane Namaste's excellent work *Invisible Lives. The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (2000) devotes two chapters to erasive theorisations, alighting particularly on Butler, Marjorie Garber, and Carole-Anne Tyler. Although each of Namaste's criticisms is valuable in itself, the critical position becomes even sharper when one looks at these pieces as facets of a whole. Namaste's formulation of Butler's work – 'drag queens expose compulsory sex/gender relations, while transsexuals can only offer "an uncritical miming of the hegemonic [sex/gender system]"' (Namaste, 2000: 14) – enables readers to recognize the transphobia at work in this dichotomy, and also illustrates the problems of positioning drag as necessarily either subverting or upholding binary systems. Namaste's exploration of Garber's work shows that, in positioning 'the transvestite [a]s a space of possibly structuring and confounding culture' (2000: 14), Garber renders mute 'the very possibility of a transvestite identity' (2000: 15), by assuming that this can only be a metaphor. Finally, Namaste shows that Tyler's view of drag as exclusionary on the basis of race is predicated by looking at small groups of individuals as though these could be representative of drag culture/s as a whole (2000: 15-6). These arguments highlight the significance of appreciating context when considering the impact and reception of drag performance. Equally, Namaste's arguments reveal that the positioning of drag as necessarily either reactionary or subversive can pathologize trans people, as well as creating reductive generalizations which distract from the performance itself. These insights are particularly valuable for the thesis as a whole. In pointing out these theoretical failures, Namaste strengthens my conviction that drag should not be homogenized

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provided a biting critique of the use of psychoanalysis to treat lesbian and gay subjects and to interpret their actions (1991: 23-5), arguing that psychoanalysis constitutes a pathologizing, dominant discourse, which further marginalizes already marginalized subjects (23-5).

as either subversive or reactionary, but should instead be appreciated in its complexity and multiplicity.

## **Chapter Two - Performing Feminism, Negotiating Drag: Feminist Responses to Drag Performance**

This chapter negotiates a range of significant feminist responses to drag performance published in the last forty years. As a whole, this chapter primarily concentrates on feminist responses to the performance of femininity, thereby reflecting the Anglo-American feminist trend of focusing on drag queen performance at the expense of drag king performance.<sup>67</sup> Further, by focusing primarily on the performance of femininity, I aim to shed light on the way in which femininity is frequently positioned as performative and constructed, while masculinity has been naturalized to a far greater extent (Serano, 2012: 171-3).<sup>68</sup>

This chapter is divided into five sections, each of which concentrates on a particular era of feminist thought or on a certain perspective. These sections combine to shed light on the positioning of drag performance as necessarily either subversive or reactionary. First, I explore three texts engaging with the radical feminist idea that drag queen performance constitutes a mockery of womanhood: Janice Raymond's 'The Politics of Transgenderism', Marilyn Frye's 'Lesbian Feminism and the Gay Rights Movement: Another View of Male Supremacy, Another Separatism', and bell hooks' 'Is Paris Burning?'. Of the three, Raymond's text is the most strident, taking an unmoving, transphobic stance (1994: xxv-xxxv), and arguing that drag queen performance is necessarily misogynistic (1994: xxvi-xxix). While I strongly disagree with Raymond's position, I chose to include this excerpt both due to the influential

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<sup>67</sup>As Troka, LeBesco and Noble point out, although 'work about drag queens was abundant, drag kings were mentioned mostly in passing (if at all) prior to the late nineties' (2002: 4) in the Anglo-American context. There have been many excellent examples of scholarship on drag king performance in the last two decades, particularly within queer theory. Overall, however, scholarship on drag queens and the performance of femininity remains dominant within Anglo-American feminist studies of drag. Further, my primary focus on the performance of femininity in this chapter seeks to balance my focus on drag king performance in my chapter on queer theory.

<sup>68</sup> Julia Serano, whose 'Reclaiming Femininity' is discussed towards the close of this chapter, offers a nuanced discussion of the impact of misogyny on the perception of femininity as necessarily more artificial than masculinity (2012: 171-3).

status of *The Transsexual Empire*, and in order to debunk Raymond's arguments. Marilyn Frye echoes some of Raymond's arguments regarding misogyny at work in drag queen performance (1983: 137-8), but equally suggests that there can be 'a gentler politic' (138) at work in other performances. Consequently, Frye's chapter begins to break away from the belief that drag is necessarily misogynistic, yet unfortunately presents an image of drag as occupying one of two wholly dichotomous positions – that of perpetuating the status quo or that of challenging it. Notably, bell hooks' chapter 'Is Paris Burning?' cites Frye's 'Lesbian Feminism' in order to stress the perspective that drag queen performance does not necessarily challenge existing norms (2009: 279-30). However, hooks broadens the analytical framework employed by Raymond and Frye by concentrating on the impact that whiteness can have on drag queen performance (276-83), and on the way in which whiteness affects the challenges that drag can seek to pose (278). Having examined the way in which each of these texts position drag in relation to misogyny, I turn to the second section of this chapter, which is devoted primarily to Esther Newton's *Mother Camp*, but which mobilizes José Estaban Muñoz's concept of 'disidentification' (1999: 11) to elucidate one of Newton's concepts. This enables me to concentrate in depth on Newton's ground-breaking study while equally demonstrating how an intersectional approach such as that of Muñoz (1999: 8) can bring Newton's work up to date for a contemporary audience. The third section of this chapter examines one text; Carole-Anne Tyler's *Female Impersonation*. Seeking to elucidate the concept of femininity as performance, Tyler explores femininity in a range of contexts, primarily situating her work in relation to psychoanalytic theory (2003: 49-53) and theories of mimicry (37-9). The chapter's fourth section discusses Julia Serano's 'Reclaiming Femininity' and 'And Then You Cut Your Hair: Genderfucking on the Femme Side of the Spectrum', a conversation between Amy André and Sandy Chang. As theorists who openly discuss their femme identities, André, Chang, and Serano bring a valuable 'insider' perspective to this chapter as a whole, balancing out the voices in the thesis who are speaking about femininity from the 'outside'.<sup>69</sup> The chapter concludes with an analysis of Simone de

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<sup>69</sup> Of Serano's work, 'Crossdressing: Demystifying Femininity and Rethinking "Male Privilege"' (2016, originally published in 2007) may initially seem a more obvious choice for this thesis than

Beauvoir's 'La lesbienne' and Laure Murat's *Le loi du genre*. My analysis of 'La lesbienne' concentrates primarily on Beauvoir's concept of 'protestation virile' (1976: 198) – a concept which merits attention as a result of its influential status in French feminist contexts<sup>70</sup>, and due to its richness and complexity. Focusing on deconstructing sexological concepts and the legal history of LGBTQIA+ people in France, Murat's text differs markedly from the majority of works explored in this thesis. However, *La loi du genre* merits close attention here due to the insight it provides into the positioning of drag as necessarily either reactionary or subversive, and as a result of its analysis of Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus*, which I explore in my final chapter.

### **Negotiating Drag Queen Performance and Misogyny: Rereading Marilyn Frye, bell hooks and Janice Raymond**

To varying degrees, each of the texts explored here mobilizes the assumption that drag queens are gay men who perform in gay male subcultural spaces. As both 'Lesbian Feminism' and 'Is Paris' concentrate on subcultural spaces primarily dominated by gay men and seek to challenge gay male misogyny, they arguably have a rationale for mobilizing this assumption.<sup>71</sup> While Raymond also disparages misogyny, I contend that she belittles drag queen performance in order to create an atmosphere of male violence against women, which she then utilises to further her own transphobic agenda.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, as I demonstrate here, the positioning of drag as a uniquely gay male practice is reductive, and causes problems in each of the texts concerned.

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'Reclaiming Femininity' (2012). However, I feel that 'Reclaiming Femininity' is more pertinent to this thesis due to its invaluable insights into personal inclinations, and especially personal inclinations into femininity (2012: 179-81) and due to its negotiations of the subversive/ reactionary dichotomy (2012: 182-3) and of the relationships between performance and performativity (180).

<sup>70</sup> For further details on the influential nature of 'protestation virile', see Sam Bourcier's 'Des "Femmes travesties" aux pratiques transgenres: repenser et queeriser le travestissement' (2006 : 124-5) and Christine Bard's *Une histoire politique du pantalon* (2010: 246)

<sup>71</sup> Frye discusses aspects of 'gay male culture and the male gay rights movement' (139) in US contexts, whereas hooks' explores the drag ball subcultures as depicted in Livingston's *Paris Is Burning* (2009: 278-90).

<sup>72</sup> Raymond refuses to acknowledge trans women's womanhood, insisting instead that transitioning constitutes an act of violence and appropriation (1994: xiv-xv). Consequently, her positioning of drag queen performance as a misogynistic, uniquely gay male practice acts as a keystone of her argument that the enjoyment of femininity by anyone other than cis women is a mockery of womanhood (1994: xxviii-xxix).

In Frye's words, her chapter seeks 'to cast doubt on the assumption that there is any basic cultural or political affinity here at all on which alliances [between gay men and lesbians] could be built' (1983: 130). It is therefore unsurprising that Frye does not engage with drag performances within contexts which may reveal such an affinity or commonality. If Frye had wanted to reflect on parallel performances within and across LGBTQI+ subcultures, she could have examined performances by non-heterosexual male impersonators – such as Stormé DeLarverie, a male impersonator who performed with the Jewel Box Revue 'from the late 1930s to the early 1970s' (Drorbaugh, 1993: 121) – or performances by drag queens who did not identify as male.<sup>73</sup> Instead, Frye positions drag queen performance, and/or 'female impersonation'<sup>74</sup> as an aspect of gay men's 'affectation of femininity' (137), and explores these 'affectations' from two angles. Frye first examines 'female impersonation' and gay male 'effeminacy' (138) from the perspective that these function as an 'exercise of masculinity' (138) and can act to demonstrate gay men's loyalty to manhood and to misogynistic, patriarchal structures.<sup>75</sup> Frye argues that these behaviours cannot be seen as stemming from an identification with femininity or with women, but instead represent a desire for 'power and control over the feminine' (137).

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<sup>73</sup>Certain male impersonators, such as Vesta Tilley, affirmed their femininity and heterosexuality (Stokoe, 2016: 98-102). However, this was by no means the case for all male impersonators. In the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, Annie Hindle affirmed her masculinity on and offstage and legally married her female partner (Senelick, 2000: 329-31), and Harlem performer Gladys Bentley 'provocatively played bull dagger to the hilt' (2000: 338) in the 1920s, although she claim to have been converted to heterosexuality in the 1950s (339-40). I suggest that Frye's chapter would have especially benefited from an analysis of the performances and private life of Stormé DeLarverie, who performed alongside a troupe of 'female impersonators' until the 1970s (Drorbaugh, 1993: 121). DeLarverie also took part in the gay rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s, and participated in the celebrated Stonewall riots in 1969 (Yardley, 2014: n.p.). More information on DeLarverie's career and activism can be found in Elizabeth Drorbaugh's 'Sliding Scales, Notes on Stormé DeLarverie and the Jewel Box Revue, the cross-dressed woman on the contemporary stage, and the invert' (1993: 120-43) and in William Yardley's New York Times article 'Storme DeLarverie[sic], Early Leader in the Gay Rights Movement, Dies at 93', accessible at [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/30/nyregion/storme-delarverie-early-leader-in-the-gay-rights-movement-dies-at-93.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/30/nyregion/storme-delarverie-early-leader-in-the-gay-rights-movement-dies-at-93.html?_r=0) (accessed 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016).

<sup>74</sup> Frye does not use the term 'drag queen', but refers instead to 'female impersonators' (1983: 137), and to 'the impersonation of women' (137). Although I will therefore employ the term 'female impersonation' in this analysis, I will use quotation marks to indicate the limitations of this term.

<sup>75</sup> For Frye, manhood is necessarily linked to a loyalty to structures and ideologies which position women as inferior to men (see Frye, 1983: 136). In her first section on gay male femininity and drag queen performance, Frye seeks to demonstrate the idea that 'most gay men are as fully *men* as any other men: being gay is not at all inconsistent with being loyal to masculinity and committed to contempt for women' (137).

Further, Frye argues that some gay men and 'female impersonators' take pride in their 'prodigious mastery of the feminine' (1983: 137), perceiving this mastery as proof of their capacity to perform misogynistic femininity without fear of 'contamination', and thereby as proof that they are 'superior [to other men] in their masculinity' (138). Thus, at this point in her chapter, Frye positions 'female impersonators' as presenting archetypal examples of a misogynistic gay male perspective which "reveals" that gay men 'pass the Contempt-for-Women test of manhood' (138). This part of Frye's approach raises at least three problems. First, Frye's treatment of 'female impersonation' as a 'gay institution' (137) perpetuates the assumption that this form of performance is necessarily performed by gay men within a specific gay male club context.<sup>76</sup> This approach consequently neglects both performers of different genders within queer contexts and the pantomime and comedy traditions in which drag is performed by straight men. Second, Frye ascribes specific motivations to gay men and to 'female impersonators', rooting their behaviour patterns in misogyny and in a specific relation to masculinity, without accounting for differences between individuals and between cultural contexts. Third, this part of Frye's work includes problematic assumptions regarding the relationships between sex, gender, sexuality, gender performance and power. While Frye's piece is clearly intended as a critique of heteropatriarchal society, her depiction of male femininity as a 'kind of serious sport in which men may exercise their power and control over the feminine' (137) seemingly relies on associations frequently questioned by feminist thought. Although this image is presumably intended to suggest that 'female impersonators' reinforce a hierarchy of male dominance, it continues to place 'the feminine' in a submissive position, and does not counter this elsewhere.

The second part of Frye's discussion of gay male femininity, including 'female impersonation', is likely to surprise her readers. Although Frye continues to rely on particular assumptions – e.g. that gay men perform "affected femininity" within gay

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<sup>76</sup> Frye's only reference to locations for drag queen performance cites 'gay bars and clubs' (137). Therefore, although Frye appears to recognise that gay male femininity can occur in a variety of spaces, she allows readers to assume that 'female impersonation' has one primary locus – i.e. on the gay scene – and that this locus is intimately connected with male homosexuality. Frye thus overlooks the potential effect of differing contexts on 'female impersonation'.

male contexts— she begins to question the idea that this “affectation” is necessarily a misogynistic exercise of masculinity. Continuing her focus on motivation and intent, Frye argues that, in some cases, this “affectation” may spring from a different – and ‘gentler’ (138) – politics, and may present a ‘mockery not of women or straight men but of the whole institution of gender – a deliberately irreverent fooling around with one of the most sacred foolishnesses of phallocratic culture’ (139). As is evident from the language she employs here, such a motivation is far more appealing to Frye. Although Frye’s perception of femininity as the ‘paraphernalia of women’s oppression’ (139) means that she is somewhat disapproving of ‘certain kinds of lightheartedness connected with [it]’ (139), Frye is nevertheless excited by the possibility of a gay male politics which might mock established, heteronormative constructions of masculinity: ‘when the silliness stays put as a good joke on patriarchy it betrays a potentially revolutionary levity about the serious matter of manhood and thus may express a politics more congenial to feminism than most gay politics’ (139). Here, ‘silliness’ acts both to connote ‘lightheartedness’ (139) and play, which Frye emphasizes in this approach, and to strengthen the idea that this play can act to reveal the ‘foolish’ (139) and constructed nature of heteropatriarchal gender roles.

Despite its positive elements, this approach has significant limitations. First, it continues to restrict ‘female impersonation’ and the performance of femininity to gay male contexts. To some extent, this limitation is justified by the scope of Frye’s article: her aim is to shed light on the differences between gay male culture and lesbian feminist ideology. However, the lack of attention paid to straight male performers seems particularly odd in light of Frye’s wish to demonstrate commonalities between gay men and their straight counterparts. Second, here as in her previous approach, Frye focuses primarily on the intent of the performer and consequently overlooks the importance of audience response. Third, this approach appears to assume that femininity is inherently linked to women’s oppression and consequently fails to account for performances of femininity which are experienced

as a conscious critique of dominant perceptions of femininity.<sup>77</sup> By focusing exclusively on gay men's capacity to engage critically with dominant perceptions of femininity and masculinity, Frye arguably undermines other people's capacity to do so, thereby enabling audiences to see gay men as the only group of people who have the power to change representations of femininity.

Frye's emphasis on the importance of intent in both discussions can be useful for new theorisations of drag performance in that it demonstrates that drag queen performance is not homogenous, and that the performer's attitude can significantly impact on the nature of the performance. However, although this emphasis provokes a recognition of complexity in drag queen performance, it lacks awareness of the differing attitudes of audience members and of the meanings they invest in the performances they see.<sup>78</sup> In addition, Frye undermines the possibility of variation in effects of, and motivations for, gay male performances of femininity by effectively tying these performances to either a desire to subvert patriarchal systems or to uphold them.

### **'Is Paris Burning?' bell hooks and Ball Culture**

'Is Paris Burning?' does not position "cross dressing" or female/male 'impersonation' as a gay male subcultural phenomenon to the same extent as Frye's chapter. Rather, hooks acknowledges the existence and importance of performances of masculinity by women<sup>79</sup>, and of performances of femininity by straight men (2009: 276-7).

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<sup>77</sup> For example, consider 'femme', 'queer femme', and 'hard femme' identifications in communities of colour, in queer communities, and trans communities, which may seek to challenge the assumption that femininity is the exclusive property of a single subset of women. Two examples of scholarship on femme identity are *Femmes of Power: Exploding Queer Femininities* (2008) edited by Ulrika Dahl and Del La Grace Volcano, and in *Persistence: All Ways Butch and Femme* (2011) edited by Ivan Coyote and Zena Sharman.

<sup>78</sup> Notably, Frye's sole reference to audience response homogenizes audience reactions and overlooks differences between audience members: 'Female-impersonators are a staple in the entertainment provided at gay bars and clubs, and they play to a very appreciative audience. Their skill is recognised and admired.' (137)

<sup>79</sup> Although hooks does not explore drag king performance in depth in 'Is Paris Burning?', she does share an anecdote in which she performed masculinity as a young woman (2009: 275-6). Further, this anecdote leads hooks to comment on the different meanings allotted to the performance of drag by men and by women in a patriarchal context (275-6).

hooks' emphasis on the importance of acknowledging intersections between racism and sexism leads her to focus on the 'disempowering' nature of 'impersonations of black women' (2009: 276) by black heterosexual men. Consequently, hooks demonstrates her awareness of the capacity of drag performance to mobilize homophobic and misogynistic structures as a result of racist, colonizing attitudes to black male masculinity (2009: 276-8). Although hooks closely examines the relationship of "cross-dressing" to normativity and patriarchal structures, she does not assume that 'cross dressing, [...] drag, transvestism and transsexualism' necessarily uphold these structures: in fact, hooks argues that these presentations and identities can be sites of change, challenge and transformation (2009: 278). For hooks, the capacity of drag queen performances to challenge norms or to uphold them is intimately connected to their apparent relationship to hegemonic norms of whiteness, as well as to the cultural context, gender, and sexuality of the performer. hooks writes:

For black males, be they gay or straight, to take appearing in drag seriously is to oppose a heterosexist representation of black manhood. Gender bending and blending on the part of black males has always been a critique of phallogentric masculinity in traditional black experience. Yet the subversive power of these images is radically altered when the latter are informed by a fictionalized construction of the "feminine" that suddenly makes the representation of whiteness as crucial to the experience of female impersonation as gender, that is to say, when the idealized notion of the female/feminine is really a sexist idealization of white womanhood. (2009: 278)

Thus, in approaching *Paris Is Burning*, hooks' perception of 'brutal imperial ruling class patriarchal whiteness' in this film leads her to emphasize the misogyny and racism which she perceives as dominant in *Paris*, and which she consequently appears to position as dominant in some Drag Ball subcultures. hooks' astute critique of the dominance of whiteness in *Paris Is Burning* enables readers to recognize the impact of intersections between race, sexuality, and gender on drag queen performance. However, some elements of hooks' critique are problematic as a result of their mobilisation of commonplace assumptions about the relationship

between gayness and drag performance, about gay male misogyny, and about the gender of drag queen performers.

The first such assumption present here is that the Drag Ball subculture depicted in *Paris Is Burning* is a gay male subculture as opposed to an LGBTQ+ subculture more generally. The positioning of this subculture as androcentric, and particularly as gay, is evident throughout hooks' chapter; in discussing the issues raised by Livingston's approach, hooks repeatedly refers to the participants of this subculture as gay men, as seen in her use of the phrases 'black gay brothers' (281) and 'black gay "natives"' (283). This positioning is particularly problematic in that the variety of identities and embodiments in *Paris Is Burning* are subsumed under the heading of 'gay male', and that the paradigm of gay male drag performance can then obscure individual and collective motivations and behaviours. Additionally, this positioning raises the spectre of drag's entanglement with gay male misogyny.

Gay male misogyny first appears in hooks' chapter when hooks quotes from Frye's 'Lesbian Feminism', relating the competitive aura of the drag balls to the sports metaphors employed in Frye's text (hooks, 2009: 279). In writing that the subject matter of *Paris*, combined with its director's lesbianism, might lead readers to assume a politics of subversion in the film without having seen it (2009: 280), hooks demonstrates the importance of using a critical gaze when looking at media depicting queer subjects and subjects of colour. This is a key point, as is hooks' statement that 'the film's politics of race, gender, and class are played out in ways that are both progressive and reactionary' (280): as a result of the multiple perspectives in *Paris Is Burning*, a depiction of the film as either progressive or reactionary would be a simplification. Further, as hooks suggests, readers cannot 'deny the way in which [*Paris*'] contemporary drag balls have the aura of sports events, aggressive competitions, one team (in this case "house") competing against another' (280). However, I disagree with hooks' apparent implication that the competitive nature of these drag balls constitutes an exercise of masculinity. This implication seems clear as this emphasis on competitiveness immediately follows hooks' citation of Frye's chapter (hooks, 2009: 279).

This suggestion appears not to account for the way in which some Drag Ball participants engage with norms and categories, or for the kinship structures present in some Drag Ball communities. That is, the ethos of competing to prove one's manhood and masculinity seems at odds with the critical awareness of race and class shown in some of the participants' comments<sup>80</sup>, and does not account for the fierce loyalties present in the house system.<sup>81</sup> Further, the possibility of perceiving counter-discursive strategies at work in the fabric of the Drag Ball culture complicates the suggestion that participants would compete to prove their loyalty to normative masculinity.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, I suggest that the motivation for the competitive element of Drag Ball culture might stem from two other causes: the social status of many of the participants and their loyalty to their houses.

hooks' second engagement with the assumption of gay male misogyny in drag communities occurs in her discussion of how the participants in Drag Balls relate to black womanhood and white womanhood. Having critiqued the way in which Livingston's perspective shapes *Paris Is Burning* (2009: 282-5), hooks argues that some of the participants participate uncritically in reifying white womanhood at the expense of black womanhood. I agree with hooks' emphasis on the clarity of a

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<sup>80</sup> Both in *Paris Is Burning* and in other sources, such as *Voguing*, several participants in Drag Ball culture demonstrate a critical awareness of social norms. As hooks argues, Dorian Corey clearly outlines the impact of race on beauty standards (2009: 277) as well as engaging critically with celebrity culture (289-290). The savvy awareness demonstrated by Corey and other participants such as Willi Ninja, suggests that the balls create a space for rethinking normative categories as well as re-enacting them. Consequently, it seems strange or improbable that in a space in which masculinity and femininity are redefined in community terms, participants would compete in order to prove their normative masculinity.

<sup>81</sup> As *Paris is Burning*, and the personal accounts given by performers in *Voguing* (see particularly Regnault and Lawrence, 2011: 34-35 and 2011: 160) demonstrate, participants develop close bonds with members of their 'house' or performance group. While I do not intend to suggest that competitiveness is incompatible with feeling a community bond, the supposition that manhood is created by competition seems to suggest that all gay male participants would necessarily compete with each other in a way that does not seem to occur in Ball Culture within kinship groups.

<sup>82</sup> When referring to counter-strategies at work in the fabric of Drag Ball culture, I suggest that performing in the categories present at the balls – such as 'Executive Realness', or 'Femme Queen' – can provide participants with the space to rethink these categories and their relationship to them against the definitions of majority discourses. John C. Hawley's exploration of *Paris is Burning* in 'Lavender Ain't White', also underlines the way in which participants might relate to and remodel categories in a counter-discursive manner: 'one might observe that the campy images in voguing are more reliably interpreted as a desire to redefine oneself as an agent with choices. The implied critique embodied by these contestants is not just against the white society that cramps their lives, but also against the heterosexual African-American and Hispanic societies that cramp their styles' (2005: 60).

statement made by Dorian Corey, one of the older participants in the Drag Ball culture depicted in *Paris Is Burning*, who delineates the effects of racism on beauty norms (279). However, hooks' chapter leaves much to be desired in terms of what it implies about the Drag Ball community as a whole and some of its members – including Venus Xtravaganza and Octavia St Laurent – in particular.

hooks argues that viewers of *Paris* are confronted not with 'black men longing to impersonate or become like "real" black women but with their obsession with a fetishized femininity that is white' (278-9), and focuses scathingly on the images of white celebrities which adorn the walls of some of the Ball participants (279). In doing so, I suggest that hooks falsely homogenises the community on the basis of a small number of images, and also seems not to account for the lived experiences and circumstances of some of the participants, placing them into a position of passivity. Here, hooks' justifiable anger at the valorization of whiteness acts to obscure two key issues. First, that the fantasies that hooks decries might constitute necessary forms of temporary escapism from the difficult and dangerous existence that Venus, Octavia, and others have to lead as poor, trans women of colour in a Harlem Drag Ball context. Second, that even if some members of the Drag Ball community respond uncritically to seductive images of whiteness, this does not mean that such a valorization is inherent within Ball culture.

Two further problems arise in this discussion. First, hooks' above comment seemingly implies that Octavia and Venus are somehow not "real women" because of their identification with some images of patriarchal or white womanhood. This is clearly erasive: such an identification or fantasy does not stop these women from being women. Additionally, this part of hooks' discussion includes a series of problematic contextual leaps. That is, hooks arrives at the conclusion that the Drag Ball subculture upholds patriarchal beliefs by critiquing the 'class, race, and gender aspirations' (2009: 278) of two trans women. In this way, hooks not only implies that these women's desires are representative of the subculture as a whole, but also conflates trans women with drag queens. Second, in making these comments and contextual leaps, hooks creates an image of the participants in *Paris* as a homogenous group – of gay men in a gay male subcultural context – who engage

with white, patriarchal values to a large extent. In doing so, hooks discounts the range of views and identities present in this subculture. Watching *Paris*, audience members readily perceive that while some participants engage with misogynistic or patriarchal viewpoints, others are more critical. Consequently, here as in the chapter as a whole, hooks relies upon, and thereby arguably perpetuates, assumptions about ball culture as a misogynistic gay male space.

### **Janice Raymond's 'The Politics of Transgenderism'**

Having looked at the way in which hooks and Frye engage with assumptions relating to gay male sexuality, misogyny and drag queen performance, I now turn to the presence of such assumptions in Janice Raymond's 'The Politics of Transgenderism'. One might argue that Raymond's references to 'heterosexual transvestites' (1994: xxviii) and 'heterosexual transvestism' (1994: xxviii) indicate an awareness of the differing sexualities of those who engage in non-normative gender presentation and/or drag queen performance. However, in Raymond's piece, these phrases do not introduce dialogue about drag queen performance or non-normative gender expression, but often serve to intimate an awareness of potential differences without fully exploring their impact.

The expressions 'transvestism' (1994: xxvi), 'heterosexual transvestites' (1994: xxvii) and 'heterosexual transvestism' (xxvii) are employed to two different effects in Raymond's introduction. Raymond's first reference to 'transvestism' positions it as 'another variation on the transgender theme' (xxvi), and as synonymous with 'cross dressing [and] drag' (1994: xxvi). The following justification of terminology can also be perceived as falsely homogenizing these groups:

While I realize that much of the traditional literature distinguishes among drag queens, cross dressers, and transvestism, and that there are some significant differences among these groups, what they all have in common is that they wear women's clothes. Further, they wear the kind of hyperfeminine clothes that many women would never wear. Thus I use these terms interchangeably for the purpose of this Introduction' (1994: 188-9, n29).

Despite grudgingly acknowledging 'some' differences, this comment suggests extensive commonalities between these three categories, and uses an unsupported

generalisation (of 'hyperfemininity') to make this point. Elsewhere in her introduction, Raymond strengthens the impression of homogeneity between these categories by positioning them as having an identical effect: 'scratching the surface of masculinity by flaunting its opposite conventions of femininity' (1994: xxviii). Raymond's use of the expression 'heterosexual transvestites' (xxviii), also mobilizes this notion of similarity in terms of effect, suggesting that all three groups 'depend on a certain mimicry of women's persons, roles, status, and dress' (xxviii). However, Raymond punctuates this comment with a specific diatribe against 'heterosexual transvestites – who clandestinely parade around in ultrafeminine dress while often retaining their status as straight, white, conservative male pillars of the community' (xxviii). This approach provides insight into Raymond's stance: it aims to capitalize on readers' comprehensible anxieties about the preferential treatment of white, heterosexual, cisgender men, and to use these anxieties to spread condemnation of all those who engage in drag, 'cross dressing' and transvestism. Further, Raymond's use of the qualifier 'heterosexual' is somewhat revealing in that it is used only in conjunction with 'transvestism'. In this way, Raymond's discussion perpetuates the assumption that the other referenced groups – 'cross dressers' and drag queens – are necessarily homosexual. One might originally assume that the positioning of drag as 'another variation on the transgender theme' (1994: xxvi) merely refers to drag's place within the umbrella term 'transgender', which encompasses a range of identities. However, Raymond employs this phrase to gloss over key features of both drag performance and trans identity: the phrase 'a variation on' cannot account for the fact that, in brief, being trans is a question of identity, while drag is a form of performance.<sup>83</sup> Thus, Raymond does not discuss the intricacies of identity or performance in relation to drag performance, yet employs examples – those of Boy George and RuPaul (xxvi-ii) – which strengthen the connection between drag and gay male identity. While it is important to recognize that drag queen performance often takes place in gay male subcultural contexts, Raymond's

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<sup>83</sup> Drag performers are not necessarily cissexual, but performing drag does not mean one is trans in the sense of identifying as a gender other than that which one was assigned at birth. For further clarification on the relationship between transgender, transsexual, cisgender, and cissexual, please visit Julia Serano's 'Cissexism and Cis Privilege Revisited – Part 1: Who Exactly Does "Cis" Refer To <http://juliaserano.blogspot.co.uk/2014/10/cissexism-and-cis-privilege-revisited.html> (accessed 29 September 2016).

omission of faux-queens, drag kings, and pantomime dames enables her to position drag as a uniquely gay-male phenomenon linked to gay male misogyny (xxviii).

Raymond's discussion of RuPaul provides further instances of assumed links between drag performance, misogyny, and male homosexuality. Significantly, Raymond dismissively satirizes RuPaul and his attitude to drag queen performance, reducing him to the stereotype of the hypersexualized, misogynistic, and 'flamboyant' (1994: xxvii) gay man. Raymond seemingly allots RuPaul a metonymical position in her introduction, utilizing RuPaul's iconic status to subtly suggest that a critique of him constitutes a critique of drag queen performance as a whole. Notably, in dismissing RuPaul's theorisation of drag queen performance (xxvii), Raymond intimates that subjective theorisations of drag queen performance by members of the subculture have little or no academic value.<sup>84</sup>

Before returning to my analysis of Raymond's chapter, it is useful to briefly show how this conceptualisation of drag queen performance resonates with French feminist responses to drag queen performance. Although there are few French feminist pieces which contain an extended response to drag queen performance, the perception of drag queen performance as a misogynistic art form is not unique to American or English feminists. Rather, this notion equally emerged in French feminist spheres in the context of Le Mouvement de libération des femmes (MLF).<sup>85</sup> Disagreements about drag queen performance arose in the context of an alliance between members of the MLF and the activist group le Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire (FHAR). Although the MLF included a number of diverse feminist positions, the emphasis on critiquing heteropatriarchal systems led some members to support calls to abolish gender. Consequently, the prominence of the queer, cross-dressing group les Gazolines at FHAR events caused tensions with those

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<sup>84</sup> In positioning herself as 'expert' while devaluing performer experience (1994: xxvii), Raymond makes an error which has been thoroughly critiqued in relation to traditional ethnography (Stinnett, 2012: 129-30). That is, rather than recognizing her 'social, political, and hierarchical position [...] [as] researcher' (2012: 132), Raymond assumes that her own knowledge and authority necessarily outranks RuPaul's voice as a practitioner of drag (1994: xxvii), and consequently uses her own account of his performance style to further her argument that drag queen performance is necessarily misogynistic.

<sup>85</sup> Further information on this significant feminist movement can be found in Claire Duchén's *Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand* (2013).

abolitionist feminists. In one discussion of events leading to the collapse of the FHAR, Frédéric Martel explores objections to the presence of les Gazolines, citing feminist Marie-Jo Bonnet. Martel writes:

La présence de plus en plus visible des Gazolines au sein du FHAR a accru les tensions :  
« C'était un spectacle. Les Gazolines se plaisaient à mettre du rouge à lèvres et des talons aiguilles, se souvient Marie-Jo. Nous jetions ces gadgets qui nous oppriment à la poubelle. Nous n'existions plus parmi les hommes, nous étions niées alors que nous devons nous libérer ensemble. Il n'y avait plus de dialogue possible. » (1996: 56)

Here, Marie-Jo Bonnet engages with the type of rhetoric favoured by Raymond (1994: xxvii): as Bonnet and other feminists have rejected stiletto heels and make-up as oppressive objects, performances utilising these are positioned as necessarily misogynistic. However, two points merit clarification here. First, while Martel cites Marie-Jo Bonnet and other former members of lesbian group les Gouines rouges, these comments are drawn from interviews (56) and other sources, rather than from extended written analyses. Second, it is essential to acknowledge that this opinion was not shared by all members of les Gouines rouges. Having engaged with Marie-Jo Bonnet's perspective, Martel draws his readers' attention to a wholly different attitude:

Cathy Bernheim ne partage pas ce point de vue : " Pour moi, les Gazolines sont les véritables casseurs de la féminité. Ils vont au bout de chaque image. Cela pose vraiment un problème : celui du désir masculin. Mais j'ai toujours apprécié leur présence car ils semblent nous dire véritablement : "On ne naît pas femme : on le devient." Ils étaient plus femmes que nous! "(56)

In my view, Bernheim's response is nuanced and significant. That is, Bernheim acknowledges the capacity of some drag performance to denaturalize gender roles and promote critical thinking, but equally emphasizes the problems raised by male entitlement and privilege. Consequently, it becomes clear that Bernheim and other members of the MLF positioned drag beyond the subversive/reactionary dichotomy, whereas others echoed the more one-dimensional position offered in Raymond's text, to which I now return.

Having used her discussion of RuPaul to strengthen associations between gay male femininity, misogyny and appropriation, Raymond turns to a further critique of “cross-dressing”, in which she refers to different ‘feminist responses’ to drag in order to dismiss them. First, Raymond rejects positions which suggest that “cross dressing” is on ‘a continuum of masculinity and to sympathize with these ways in which some men are deviating from acceptable masculine behaviour’ (1994: xxvii). Here, Raymond dismisses such theories while equally insinuating that drag, “cross-dressing” and transvestism are only practised by men. Raymond’s second reference to other responses lies in her contestation of comparisons between men who perform drag and ‘women who wear pants’ (xxvii). Here, Raymond attacks multiple members of the LGBTQIA+ community, while continuing to position drag queen performance as both misogynistic and as pertaining primarily to gay men. This critique begins as follows, and acts to target gay men, transfeminine people, and transmasculine people:

When most women put on pants, a necktie, combat boots, or a business looking blazer, they are not trying to pass as men. Nor do most of these women stage theatrical performances that call attention to their cross dressing. They do not mimic, for profit, male behaviour. Most women who wear male clothing are not trying to imitate men professionally or personally, nor do they expect to be mistaken for men. (xxviii-ix)

Gay men are the first target: while this critique is directed at all men who perform femininity, the reader is likely to associate the description with gay male subcultures due to Raymond’s previous discussion (xxvii-i). Second, this passage systematically targets trans people, and trans women in particular, through its emphasis on imitation and ‘passing’. Finally, the above passage erases trans men, transmasculine people, and drag king performers. By repeatedly employing ‘most’, Raymond reduces any individual who was assigned female at birth and who performs masculinity to an anomaly.<sup>86</sup> Although Raymond will later grudgingly acknowledge the existence of a transmasculine spectrum (xxix), the above quote

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<sup>86</sup> In highlighting Raymond’s erasure of transmasculine people in her use of ‘most women’ (1994: xxviii), I am not suggesting that transmasculine people are women. According to Raymond’s transphobic beliefs, trans men – whom she terms ‘female-to-constructed male transsexuals’ (xiv) – and transmasculine people are women and would therefore be included among her targets in the passage cited above (xxviii).

places transmasculine people as the exception which confirm the rule – that rule being that drag performance and trans identity are performed or experienced primarily by those assigned male at birth. Throughout her introduction, Raymond creates a totalising gloss which wholly ignores drag king performers and male impersonators, thereby refusing to countenance the possibility that drag subcultures pertain to the wider LGBTQIA+ community. Thus, here as elsewhere, Raymond links drag to gay men and trans women while divorcing it wholly from cis lesbian practices.<sup>87</sup> Significantly, both Raymond and Frye seek to distance gay male subcultures from lesbian subcultures (Raymond, 1994: xxvi-xxx) (Frye, 1983: 130-4) in order to position the former as misogynistic and the latter as echoing feminist beliefs.

I now offer three brief conclusions to this section of the chapter. First, these texts engage with, and to some extent perpetuate, the assumption that drag queen performance is a wholly gay male subcultural form. As noted previously, this positioning can create a dual erasure and reduction. That is, while drag queen performance is defined as niche, and relevant only to gay men, gay men are equally homogenized as creators of camp aesthetics and casual misogyny. The second conclusion drawn here pertains to the significance of race in these pieces and in the study of drag as a whole. Raymond and Frye both engage with race on a somewhat limited basis. Raymond's Introduction, including only a passing reference to race, lacks a critical examination of how race impacts on misogyny, power relations, and drag more generally. The lack of discussion of the Drag Ball culture in the US is a particularly glaring omission in Raymond's text, and demonstrates the need to refer to cultural context. Unlike Raymond, Frye does gesture towards the relationship between race, misogyny, and power structures (1983: 150). Yet as Frye does not fully integrate this perspective in her discussion of gay male femininities, her discussion lacks a thorough analysis of racial dynamics. Contrariwise, hooks subtly analyses the need for consciousness of race and its intersectional impact. I have

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<sup>87</sup> In presenting drag performance and cross dressing as inherently sexual, necessarily masculine perversions, Raymond makes the error which Bourcier critiques in the context of early sexological and psychiatric accounts of cross-dressing (2006: 120-1). That is, the pathologisation which links perversions to men, and only to men, presents women as somehow less capable of sexual desire and sexual autonomy.

suggested that hooks' extensive critique of the oppressive whiteness present in *Paris Is Burning* frequently overlooks the currents of resistance present in some aspects of Ball culture. However, it is essential to recognize that while participants like Corey critically analysed the standards of whiteness in their communities, others expressed a (previous) compulsion to perform whiteness.<sup>88</sup> Consequently, hooks' emphasis on the impact of whiteness seems particularly relevant in an eighties and nineties context, yet may be less applicable to examples of contemporary Ball culture. Finally, it is important to emphasize that assumptions about drag queen performance as a misogynistic gay male subculture are not unique to Raymond, Frye, and hooks. Significantly, these assumptions are also discussed in a variety of spheres, and cannot be confined to cissexist contexts. Further complications arise when considering the presence of transmisogyny and appropriation in (certain) gay male drag subcultures. Trans and queer critics take a diverse range of stances on this issue, as can be seen from debates relating to the use of the word 'tranny' in gay male drag subcultures.<sup>89</sup> Having explored the perspectives of Raymond, Frye, and hooks, I now turn to Esther Newton's *Mother Camp*.

### **Esther Newton, 'Role Models' and *Mother Camp***

A highly significant text for drag queen performance, *Mother Camp* (1972) can be seen as a breakthrough text for gay and lesbian anthropology in that it was 'the first book length ethnography of a modern, Western, urban gay population' (Rubin, 2002: 46). One theorisation outlined in this text – that drag can 'question[...] the

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<sup>88</sup> Consider this statement by Peppa La Beija: 'It was our goal then to look like white women,' La Beija told Cunningham as she reflected on the days before black queens organized their own balls and initiated a very particular housing boom. 'They used to tell me, "You have negroid features," and I'd say, "That's all right, I have white eyes." That's how it was back then.' (LaBeija in Lawrence, 2011: 4).

<sup>89</sup> A range of academics, activists, and interested parties have explored their perspective on the use of the word 'tranny' by trans people, and by members of drag queen communities. These opinions vary from desires to reclaim this word, an emphasis on the use of the word by certain individuals only, and a desire to abandon the term wherever possible. For an indication of some of these positions, see Carmen Carrera's remarks in *The Advocate* <http://www.advocate.com/politics/transgender/2014/05/29/carmen-carrera-fires-back-t-word-critics> (accessed 17 August 2014); Kate Bornstein's blog on the topic [http://katebornstein.typepad.com/kate\\_bornsteins\\_blog/2009/07/who-you-calling-a-tranny.html](http://katebornstein.typepad.com/kate_bornsteins_blog/2009/07/who-you-calling-a-tranny.html) (accessed 16 June 2014); and Jack Halberstam's post on the Bully Bloggers site <http://bullybloggers.wordpress.com/2014/07/05/you-are-triggering-me-the-neo-liberal-rhetoric-of-harm-danger-and-trauma/> (accessed 16 June 2014).

“naturalness” of the sex-role system in toto’ (Newton, 2000: 21) – is discussed and developed within Butler’s analysis of drag and gender performativity in *Gender Trouble* (1999: 186-8). However, rather than examining the entirety of *Mother Camp*, I focus primarily on one chapter, ‘Role Models’, republished in *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay* (2000). My focus on this chapter is partially motivated by Newton’s emphasis on ‘its foundational position in [her] own work’ (2000: 5). Additionally, I chose this chapter for its exploration of links between drag and camp. I will also draw attention to one other concept raised in *Mother Camp*; the positioning of the drag queen as a ‘professional homosexual’ (1979: 3). This text is clearly marked by the time in which it was written.<sup>90</sup> Consequently, some of the terms and ideas employed may be problematic for a contemporary audience.<sup>91</sup> Further, as Newton intimates in the preface to the Phoenix edition of the text (1979), the drag queen culture that she explored in the sixties<sup>92</sup> evolved as a result of social changes (1979: xi-xii). Nevertheless, I contend that many of Newton’s concepts remain significant for analysing drag today, despite changes in drag queen communities.

I concentrate now on one dominant image in *Mother Camp*: that of the drag queen as a ‘professional homosexual’ (1979:3). Newton writes:

As Goffman pointed out, stigmatized groups and categories of persons may be represented by two opposing roles. On the one hand there is the “gentleman deviant,” the person engaged in proving to himself and others that persons in the stigmatized category can be

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<sup>90</sup> Although all the theoretical texts explored in this thesis are marked by their time of writing, this point merits particular emphasis in the case of *Mother Camp*, first written in 1972, and Simone de Beauvoir’s ‘La lesbienne’, first written in 1949. Although Newton and Beauvoir both make arguments which remain significant today, 21<sup>st</sup>-century readers are likely to be struck by the difference between current liberal mores and the attitude permeating certain aspects of these texts. In the case of *Mother Camp*, this difference in attitude is evident in Newton’s use of terminology, as I indicate in note 91 below. In the case of ‘La lesbienne’, the difference in attitude is perhaps most visible in Beauvoir’s hostile commentary on lesbian spaces (1979: 215).

<sup>91</sup> Consider Newton’s use of the word ‘Negro’ to refer to black people (1979: 12, 18, 105, 106). As Tom W. Smith points out, this term had been established as standard by the 1950s (1992: 449), but had begun to be challenged in the 1960s by activists such as Stokely Carmichael (Smith, 1992: 449). While the common usage of ‘Negro’ in the 1950s and 1960s suggests that it is not intended as a slur in *Mother Camp*, the current connotations of this word may render it problematic for contemporary readers.

<sup>92</sup> In the appendix ‘Field Methods’, Newton explains that she carried out her research into drag queen communities in 1965 and 1966 (1979: 134).

just as normal and competent as heterosexuals, [...] At this pole we find the “masculine,” “respectable” homosexuals, the leaders of most homophile organizations and so on. At the opposite pole there are the persons who most visibly and flagrantly embody the stigma, “drag queens,” men who dress and act like women.

Professional drag queens are, therefore, professional homosexuals; they represent the stigma of the gay world. Not surprisingly, as professional homosexuals, drag queens find their occupation to be a source of dishonour, especially in relation to the straight world. (1979: 3)

Initially, one questions how the ‘professional homosexual’ concept could account for performers other than gay men, as such performers may not ‘embody stigma’ in the manner that Newton suggests. The limitations of this concept may stem from the fact that the majority of Newton’s research<sup>93</sup> focused on the experiences of gay male performers.<sup>94</sup> This focus might suggest that the communities Newton encountered were gay-male dominated, and encourages readers to question the developments in these scenes in the last fifty years. That is, although drag queen acts are frequently performed by and associated with gay men, contemporary scenes do include people of other genders and sexualities. However, it is difficult to trace these developments through *Mother Camp* as Newton’s cissexism may have informed her characterisation of these scenes.<sup>95</sup>

Further, it is potentially problematic that this passage seemingly generalizes aspects of, and identifications in, drag queen communities. The polar formulation offered here – ‘gentleman deviant’ vs. drag queen – fits uneasily with the desire for respectability Newton observes in many of the ‘stage impersonators’ (1979: 15)

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<sup>93</sup> Newton carried out interviews with individual performers in Chicago, New York City, and Kansas City (1979: 134). Much of her ethnographic research took place in Kansas City (134).

<sup>94</sup> Newton refers briefly to straight male performers (1979: 6), as well as to drag kings or ‘drag butches’ (1979:5). However, overall, Newton clearly positions her work as focusing on the ‘specialized’ category of gay male drag queens (3-5).

<sup>95</sup> One can assume that terms such as ‘hormone queens’ and ‘sex changes’ (2000: 20) are based on drag community terminology. Nevertheless, Newton does not challenge the cissexism in these terms, places preferred pronouns in inverted commas (2000: 20), and makes at least one transphobic comment (2000: 20). Consequently, readers may question whether Newton employs ‘gay male’ as a category to account for queer people of a range of genders.

that she interviews.<sup>96</sup> In my view, this passage differs from the subtler analyses elsewhere in *Mother Camp* in that it produces the impression that drag queens necessarily embody stigma both on- and offstage. While a drag queen may choose to occupy the stigmatized or phobic image of the “feminized” gay man on stage, they may emotionally or performatively distance themselves from that image in an off-stage context, and may even display hostility to those who ‘embody stigma’ more fully.<sup>97</sup> Despite some shifts occurring in the reception of drag since the 1960s, Newton’s concept of ‘embodying stigma’ remains a productive tool for analysis. In the passage above, ‘embodying stigma’ appears to be fixed state, attached to drag queens irrespective of their situation, yet, elsewhere, *Mother Camp* develops this concept so that it can account for context and degrees of stigma.<sup>98</sup>

The subtler concept of drag performers as deliberately occupying stigmatized roles on stage resonates with José Muñoz’s concept of disidentification and his analysis of Vaginal Davis’ ‘terrorist drag’ (108). Moreover, Muñoz’s analysis can enrich the image of ‘the professional homosexual’ and its applicability to contemporary drag scenes. Despite her nuanced analysis of differences between ‘stage impersonators’ (Newton, 1979: 7) and ‘street impersonators’ (1979: 7) and of the relative stigma they experience (1979: 7-19), Newton’s concept of the stigmatized ‘professional homosexual’ may not fully account for what Muñoz terms ‘commercial drag’ (1999: 99). As Muñoz points out, the commercialization of drag does not necessarily correlate with a decrease in the homophobic and/or transphobic violence to which drag queens may be subjected (1999: 99). Nevertheless, the (omni)presence and popularity of the ‘sanitized queen’ (Muñoz, 1999: 99) produced by programmes such as *RuPaul’s Drag Race* could potentially indicate a decrease in stigmatizing

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<sup>96</sup> Newton distinguishes between ‘stage impersonators’ and ‘street impersonators’ (1979: 7), citing differences in performance style and lifestyle. Respectability and professionalism are often central concerns in the interviews that Newton cites with stage impersonators (1979: 17-8, 97-8), and these interviews frequently include scathing references to performers who do not restrict their femininity to stage contexts (17-8, 97-8).

<sup>97</sup> In Newton’s experience, many of the ‘stage impersonators’ (1979: 7) are openly hostile towards the ‘street impersonators’ (7), frequently relating this hostility to the flamboyant femininity of the ‘street impersonators’ (1979: 18-9).

<sup>98</sup> Newton discusses differing levels of stigma in depth in ‘On the Job’ (1979: 7-19) in relation to the hostility between ‘stage impersonators’ (7), ‘street impersonators’ (7), and ‘street fairies’ (8). Also, in ‘The Queens’, Newton makes perceptive comments about the intersection of racist and homophobic stigma, and refers to the deliberate refusal of racist attitudes by white performers in Chicago (28).

attitudes since the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>99</sup> By incorporating Muñoz's recognition of commercial drag and its (potentially) sanitized nature into Newton's concept of the professional homosexual, readers can account for divisions in drag communities which are oriented around a politics of respectability.<sup>100</sup> As well as potentially

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<sup>99</sup> The presence of commercial drag in contemporary mainstream media does not necessarily indicate a widespread understanding or tolerance of LGBTQIA+ art forms or LGBTQIA+ individuals and subcultures. In addition to acknowledging Muñoz's point about the greater acceptability of commercial drag (1999: 99), we must recognize that filmic and televisual drag performances can represent contemporary 'freak shows' for some mainstream audiences, as Carol-Anne Tyler suggests (2003: 119). Nevertheless, legislative and workplace changes to the rights of LGBTQIA+ people may suggest that attitudes towards drag performers – whether trans or cis – are beginning to change. The legislative changes referred to here include the 2010 Equality Act, which makes provision for discrimination against trans people and includes some legislation to protect 'crossdressers'. The Press for Change website provides some useful resources about this act: <http://www.pfc.org.uk/Equality.html> (accessed 6 August 2014). In the U.S. context, on 15 December 2014, the Attorney General asserted that workplace discrimination against transgender individuals should be prohibited under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act 1964, noting that 'The most straightforward reading of Title VII is that discrimination "because of ... sex" includes discrimination because an employee's gender identification is as a member of a particular sex, or because the employee is transitioning, or has transitioned, to another sex' (2014: n.p.). The Attorney General's memorandum to United States Attorneys, Heads of Department Components can be downloaded at <http://www.justice.gov/file/188671/download> (accessed 7 December 2015). Further, the U.S. government webpage devoted to civil rights emphasizes the President's commitment to the reduction of discrimination against LGBT individuals and individuals perceived as LGBTQIA+, highlighting legislation such as the 'Matthew Shephard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act' which extended 'coverage of federal hate crimes law to include attacks based on the victim's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity' (2015: n.p.). The webpage dedicated to Civil Rights, which includes detailed information about legislation, can be found at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/civil-rights/discrimination> (accessed 7 December 2015). Additionally, continual broadcasting of programmes such as *RuPaul's Drag Race* may mean that American audiences have a greater access to drag than was possible during Newton's study. However, there are significant differences in availability of commercialized drag between the US and the UK during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. Arguably, televisual and filmic drag representation in the UK was more prominent in the 1960s-80s than it is today: consider, for example, 'Charley's Aunt' (1969), featuring Danny Le Rue, and 'The Adventures of Barry McKenzie' (1972), which featured celebrated drag character Dame Edna Everage. Further information about Danny Le Rue and Charley's Aunt can be found at <http://www.its-behind-you.com/spotlightdannylarue.html> (accessed 6 August 2014) and a brief introduction to Dame Edna can be found at <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/mar/19/dame-edna-career-in-clips> (accessed 6 August 2014). However, I do not suggest that drag is less accessible in UK today than in the 1960s-1980s, or that the landscape of representation has remained unchanged. Drag queen performances remain popular in pantomimes, in programmes such as *Mrs Brown's Boys* and *Drag Queens of London*, and in a number of popular films.

<sup>100</sup> As I stress throughout this thesis, it is really useful to examine varying perspectives and discourses in diverse drag communities. Questioning performers about their views on assimilation and respectability politics could constitute one valuable approach. However, although Muñoz's image of the 'sanitized queen' (1999: 99) can be useful here, I suggest that, when incorporating this image into a theory of drag, it is essential to avoid opposing the 'sanitized queen' (99) to performers whose work questions structural norms, and, especially, to avoid necessarily aligning the sanitized queen with 'commercial drag' (99). Both of these expedients can lead to unhelpful, and reductive, generalizations.

operating in drag scenes today, such divisions are already visible in the communities that Newton's text explores (1979: 7-8).

Muñoz's concept of disidentification was developed as an intersectional strategy (1999: 8) to explore the way in which minority individuals construct and perform their identities in relation to wider structures and norms of identification (3-11). Three aspects of disidentification merit particular emphasis here. First, disidentification operates in a complex relationship to existing norms, structures, and stereotypes:

disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this "working on and against" is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance. (1999: 11-2)

Second, disidentification is not necessarily a habitual position; as Muñoz illustrates in relation to Marga Gomez (1999: 1-5) and Vaginal Davis (1999: 93-115) performers, artists and theorists can employ disidentificatory strategies in their work. Third, as Muñoz argues in his nuanced analysis of Davis' performance, disidentificatory strategies can operate by inhabiting, reworking and 'subtly undermin[ing]' (105) oppressive, dominant images and stereotypes. An understanding of these three attributes enables readers to gauge how 'disidentification' can elucidate Newton's concept of the 'professional homosexual' (1979: 3) who 'represent[s] the stigma of the gay world' (3). Disidentification can account for drag queens' choice to 'embody stigma' – their deliberate occupation of the supposedly threatening figure of the "feminized" gay man – and recognizes the currents of resistance and survival tactics potentially at play in these performers' lives and performances. Perhaps most significantly, as disidentification focuses on performer intent and on developing strategies for a given moment, this concept does not assume that performers always succeed in challenging norms either on or offstage. Further, Muñoz's concept of 'working on and against' (1999: 11) existing norms suggests a process, which may have varying degrees of success, rather than a

composite or absolute subversion. Consequently, a disidentificatory lens adds further flexibility to the 'professional homosexual' concept: readers perceive that the embodiment of stigma does not need to be fixed and habitual, and that individual performers will engage with the role of 'professional homosexual', or 'professional queer'<sup>101</sup> to different degrees in different performances. Moreover, this concept is nuanced in that disidentificatory strategies operate differently according to performer and context. Consider the differences between disidentification at work in Davis' performance of militiaman Clarence (1999: 103-9) and Newton's 'professional homosexual' concept. While both performances 'work on and against' (11) oppressive images, the professional homosexual targets a heterosexist caricature of gay men, while 'Clarence' inhabits and undermines (107) a figure which is an external threat to queers of colour.

The stigmatized 'effeminate' image remains commonplace in popular culture, thereby lending credence to Newton's 'professional homosexual' concept. Nevertheless, the prevalence of gay rights discourses in the UK, the US and France may have had a significant impact on the extent of the stigma to which gay men are subjected.<sup>102</sup> To give one legislative example, 'The Mathew Shephard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act' came into effect in the U.S. in 2009, 'extending coverage of federal hate crimes law to include attacks based on the victim's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity' (2015: n.p.).<sup>103</sup> Despite the need for further tolerance in the U.S. and elsewhere, it is to be hoped that legislation and resulting workplace education will continue to reduce homophobic stigma. Consequently, contemporary readers and performers may find Newton's 'professional homosexual' concept less accessible. Overall, however, Newton's 'professional homosexual' can present a productive analytical lens for

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<sup>101</sup> I tentatively suggest that the term 'professional queer' might be more effective than 'professional homosexual' in some cases. Although some individuals would resist interpellation as queer, this term nevertheless broadens Newton's original image to include several performers outside the category of cis gay male.

<sup>102</sup> I do not deny the prevalence of widespread homophobia, transphobia, and homophobic and transphobic violence. The above is intended only to reflect shifts in attitude since the pre-Stonewall era.

<sup>103</sup> As stated in note 29, the U.S. governmental webpage lists legislative action taken to prevent discrimination against LGBT people. This webpage can be accessed at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/civil-rights/discrimination> (accessed 7 December 2015).

performance scholars. Further, the exploration of identification and stigma facilitated by this concept may be invaluable in terms of gauging performer attitudes and audience response.

Turning to 'Role Models,' I concentrate first on opposition/s. The following point underpins Newton's discussion of opposition/s in drag:

Ultimately, all drag symbolism opposes the "inner" or "real" self (subjective self) to the "outer" or social self. For the great majority of homosexuals, the social self is often a calculated respectability and the subjective or real self is stigmatized (2000: 18).

Despite its reliance on the assumption that drag queens are gay men, this statement may offer a useful insight into audience response to drag. Audiences viewing a drag performance are likely to engage with several questions concerning the "real", such as: 'what is the performer's real identification?', 'does this performer act like this in "real" life?' and, 'how does this performance mirror or parody "real" men or women?' Equally, audiences may transpose cissexist attitudes to "real" gender onto the performances they witness. Moreover, performers may also engage with questions of opposition and the "real". This could consist of a simple onstage reference to gender or genitals, whether used when breaking character or during an in-character reference to gender.<sup>104</sup> Equally, some performers might closely interrogate the "real" within their own identities and practices. In looking at the "real", one perceives drag's capacity to enable performers to express aspects of their "real" selves, which they are unable or unwilling to express offstage. As Newton indicates (18), the enactment of a social self may be experienced as a performance, and as performance which one is obliged to undertake for personal safety. The above passage also raises the perception of drag as (necessarily) including a masculine/feminine opposition and

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<sup>104</sup> Some drag performers deliberately 'break character', whether through wig removal or other methods. As in *Some Like It Hot*, breaking character may signify a choice to reveal the performer's "real" gender. Newton discusses breaking character, exploring wig removal, in-character indications, and the removal of breast inserts (2000: 19). Newton describes the latter as 'standard' (19), but I have yet to encounter it in contemporary drag. Performers can also employ in-character references to gender and genitalia, as in Dusty Springs' audition for Drag Idol 2014. However, this 'comic' trope may be problematic and/or transphobic.

an inner/outer opposition, which may not account for performances by faux queens, feminine identified drag queens, and masculine identified drag kings.

Newton's analysis of Greta Garbo's performance<sup>105</sup> (2000: 24-7) enriches Newton's approach to drag, drawing on discussions of the relationship between drag and camp, and examining the ways in which drag performance echoes the enactment of social roles (26). In the following excerpt, Newton further stresses the relationship between drag, stigma, and homosexuality (25), and begins to question why Garbo's performance is marked specifically as drag:

if Garbo playing women is drag, then homosexuals "passing" are playing men; they are in drag. This is the larger implication of drag/camp. In fact, gay people often use the word "drag" in this broader sense, even to include role playing that most people simply take for granted: role playing in school, at the office, at parties, and so on. In fact, all of life is role and theater – appearance. (2000: 26)

This engagement with 'passing' immediately broadens Newton's argument and perspective. That is, Newton is no longer positioning drag as a uniquely gay male phenomenon; rather, she is outlining an approach to the everyday acting and passing which affects everyone. Newton's emphasis on the generalized practice of social role playing encourages readers to question how this role playing operates, and to what extent it maps onto 'incongruity, theatricality, and humour'. This comparison can facilitate a closer reading of both forms, enabling theorists to map out the ways in which quotidian drag mirrors its onstage counterpart. As Newton demonstrates, the perception of everyday life as theatre might make it difficult to define drag if 'all acting is impersonation' (2000: 26). However, this problem is resolved by the recognition that all life contains varying levels of theatricality, and that impersonation is a matter of context and degrees.

Newton's notion of 'homosexuals passing as men' is also noteworthy. As Janet Mock explains, the concept of passing is flawed due to its implication of inauthenticity; 'to pass means that you're passing as something you're not' (2014:

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<sup>105</sup> Newton builds on Parker Tyler's "The Garbo Image", while also engaging with the perception of Garbo in drag communities (25).

Om27).<sup>106</sup> Consequently, Newton's suggestion that 'homosexuals passing are "playing" men' (2000: 26) seems unsettling: manhood is defined by identity, irrespective of sexuality. However, Newton's underlying point remains significant: Newton is suggesting that heteronormative masculinity shapes the concept of 'man' to such an extent that gay men cannot be classified as men.<sup>107</sup> Further, Newton's acknowledgement of the need to "pass" (25-6) indicates an awareness of social drag as a mode of self-protection.

Newton continues her analysis of the relationship between Garbo and drag as follows:

But granted that all acting is impersonation, what moved Tyler to designate Garbo's acting specifically as "drag"? Drag means, first of all, role playing. The way in which it defines role playing contains its implicit attitude. The word "drag" attaches specifically to the outward, visible appurtenances of a role. [...] By focusing on outward appearances of a role, drag implies that sex role and, by extension, role in general is something superficial, that can be manipulated, put on and off again at will. The drag concept implies distance between the actor and the role or "act." But drag also means "costume". This theatrical referent is the key to the attitude toward role playing embodied in drag as camp. Role playing is play: it is an act or show [...] The actor should throw himself [sic] into it; he should put on a good show; he should view the whole experience as fun, as a camp.

The double stance towards role, putting on a good show while indicating distance (showing that it is a show), is at the heart of drag as camp. Garbo's act was thought to be "drag" because it was considered markedly androgynous, and because she played (even overplayed) the role of femme fatale with style. No man (in her movies) [...] could resist her allure. And yet most of the men she seduced were her victims because she was only playing at love – only acting. This is made quite explicit in her film *Mata Hari*, in which Garbo the spy seduces men to get information' (2000: 26-7)

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<sup>106</sup> Mock makes this argument in a video for Upworthy, stating: 'I get irritated with passing, because anytime that I walk on the street my gender is visible. I am a woman. People see me and take me as a woman, and that is not passing. That's me just being. But once I disclose that I am trans, things change, and then I become an oddity. I become an object, something that is objectified and gawked over. And my humanity and womanhood is then checked, and put into question. (2014: n.p.)

<sup>107</sup> This resonates with Monique Wittig's provocative argument that, as they do not comply with patriarchal definitions of womanhood, 'Lesbians are not women' (1992: 32).

This passage indicates complexity and variety in drag, thereby encouraging readers to examine drag performers' styles and skills. Further, the 'double stance' concept arguably develops and extends the established argument that drag has capacity to play with (sex) role<sup>108</sup>: this concept stresses role and distance, while equally interrogating the performer's acting and the relationship between acting and play. The 'double stance' provides multiple potential approaches: one can explore the balance attained by individual performers, map how performers relate to either play or distance, and question the resonances between this double stance and other theatrical styles such as the Brechtian 'Verfremdungseffekt'.<sup>109</sup> Finally, the 'double stance' concept might enrich conceptualisations of onstage and quotidian drag. In everyday drag, a particular role might be detected as such, even when the individual in question is invested in that role. Equally, examining an onstage performer's capacity for the 'double stance' might provoke a recognition of their personal investments and attitudes, as well as of their acting skills.

Turning to Newton's analysis of Garbo's performance, three of the aspects explored seem particularly significant: performer gender, androgyny, and 'overplaying'. Newton's focus on Garbo's portrayal of the 'femme fatale' demonstrates the fact that drag is characterized by performance style – the gender performed and the mode of performance. Consequently, drag and camp are presented as performance forms which exist inside and outside gay male subcultures. To focus on androgyny as raised here, this stance might be seen as another form of deliberate distancing: while the character Garbo plays is marked as female and as a 'femme fatale', the use of androgyny might be seen to interrupt this image and change the audience's response to it. Equally, the inclusion of androgyny could be seen as adding a further layer of play in terms of character depiction. However, Garbo's occupation of the 'femme fatale' seems most significant here. My emphasis on the femme fatale role resonates with Newton's reference to 'overplaying'. Due to its iconic nature, the

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<sup>108</sup> As noted elsewhere in this thesis, many theorists – including Judith Butler (1999: 186-90) and Sam Bourcier (2006: 128-31) – engage with drag's capacity to illuminate gender performance

<sup>109</sup> Introducing the 'Verfremdungseffekt', or distancing effect, Brecht writes: '*Verfremdung* estranges an incident or character simply by taking from the incident or character what is self-evident, familiar, obvious in order to produce wonder or curiosity. [...] *Verfremdung* is, then, a process of historicizing, of portraying incidents and persons as historical, that is, as ephemeral' (2014: 142-3).

'femme fatale' role already contains the element of distance which operates in the 'double stance'; this role cannot be wholly merged into a character or performance. Equally, the 'femme fatale' role lends itself to be played in a flamboyant, exaggerated, manner; a feature which often means it creates 'a good show' (26). 'Overplaying' a role is equally marked with excess, enthusiasm, and a distance from the role in that it is clearly being acted. Thus, the archetypal role of femme fatale and the way in which Garbo occupies it fulfils the conditions of 'drag as camp' as suggested by Newton. While I do not suggest that all forms of drag – either quotidian or on stage – necessarily contain this excess, excess nevertheless frequently marks drag performance in that it facilitates a 'good show' as well as making room for a wide range of (dis)identifications.

I now conclude by emphasizing two significant dimensions of Newton's work. First, Newton pinpoints duality at work in particular performances, those which she describes as 'drag as camp'. Newton's analysis develops the concept of distance in drag by examining distance alongside a need to 'put on a good show' (26) and by discussing the creation of a 'double stance'. This 'double stance' acts to explore performer identifications while equally accounting for performance techniques. Second, Newton's conceptualization of social roles as potentially constituting drag (26) can thoroughly enrich performance analyses. That is, the tactics at work in social roles can be explored in themselves and in conjunction with onstage performance styles. Further, the concept of everyday drag can be explored in conjunction with performative approaches to gender. Newton's understanding, gleaned from drag communities (2000: 26), depends on the presence of a conscious agent who chooses to embody particular roles. Consequently, Newton's everyday drag harmonizes best with performative approaches which recognize agency, such as the trans inclusive approach recommended by Sam Bourcier (2012: 154-6). Whether used in conjunction with performativity or employed alone, Newton's concept, and its capacity to illuminate discourses of passing, constitutes a useful lens when theorising drag.

While highly productive overall, *Mother Camp* does include some problematic features. In light of its age, it is unsurprising that this text includes language and

notions which may seem inappropriate to readers today. Nevertheless, I do question Newton's choice to reprint the text without reference to potential problems of language and content.<sup>110</sup> Consequently, I aim to ensure that I do not reproduce any racist or transphobic language or ideas when adapting Newton's analysis for my own work.

Due to the locus of Newton's ethnographic research, her focus on white gay male performers is perhaps unsurprising; these performers appear to have dominated the scenes Newton encountered. Nevertheless, as Newton refers to non-white and non-male performers<sup>111</sup>, it is unfortunate that she does not examine the impact of race or gender on performer identification and performance style. While Newton clearly delineates the differences between 'stage impersonators', 'street impersonators', and 'street fairies' – even going so far as to note her lack of 'surprise[...] that the first collective homosexual revolt in history, the "battle of the Stonewall" [...] was instigated by street fairies' (1979: 19) – she does not explore the role of race and gender in these community categories. Had Newton engaged further with race and with gender identification, readers could have gained insight into the way in which these aspects feed into differences of politics and performance style, as well as gaining a further insight into community composition.

### **Carole-Anne Tyler's Female Impersonation**

Tyler's text aims to provide a thorough consideration of the concept of gender as 'artifice' and as 'socially mandated impersonation' (2003: 2). Asking 'what would it mean to take seriously' (2) the perception of gender as socially constructed, Tyler engages with postcolonial (68-9) and poststructuralist theories (102-3), theories of

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<sup>110</sup> 'Role Models' contains at least two problematic uses of language. First, Newton employs 'negro' and 'negroes', and does not question whether it is appropriate to equate the role played by 'the camp ethos or style[...] to "soul" in the Negro subculture' (23). Further, contemporary readers may question Newton's seemingly casual use of the phrase 'the Negro problem' (23) to refer to anti-black racism. Second, Newton demonstrates cissexism; she uses brackets around preferred pronouns, calls trans women 'sex changes' (2000: 20) and makes a particularly salacious comment about one trans woman: 'Some impersonators in Chicago told me that this person was now considered "out of gay life" by the homosexuals and could not perform in a gay club. I also heard a persistent rumour that "she" now liked to sleep with lesbians!' (2000: 20).

<sup>111</sup> Notably, Newton praises the work of a black drag queen performing in 'a small, racially mixed homosexual bar in Chicago' (1979: 36). Newton also refers to at least two performers who are trans women. One reference is detailed in footnote 110 above (2000: 20), while the second refers to a trans woman of colour, Lola, who Newton suggests is 'out of work' (2000: 12).

mimicry (37-9), and psychoanalytic theory (17-22; 49-52; 170-2) to explore identity construction and its relationship to gender performance. Employing the lens of impersonation to look at the way in which gender is performed and experienced, Tyler explores femininity both within and outside the context of onstage drag. Of the perspectives discussed in this chapter, Tyler's is the most embedded within psychoanalytic theory, and within Lacanian theory in particular (161-3). Thus, for Tyler, the concepts of 'phallic imposture' (104), fetishism (122), and narcissism (96) can elucidate the workings of drag and of quotidian gender performance. Notably, Tyler is particularly invested in the dichotomy which positions drag as necessarily either subversive or reactionary. As a result of the strength of Tyler's position, the analysis of her work will focus particularly on her use of this binary opposition. In this section, I examine three key areas discussed in *Female Impersonation*, drawing particular attention to the contradictions they pose. One central issue in Tyler's text, and in the theorisation of drag performance as a whole, is that of race and the impact of whiteness (hooks, 2009: 281) on drag queen, and drag king, performance. Two points raised by Tyler seem particularly pertinent here; the first appears in 'Fetishism, Racism, and Impersonation' (2003: 67-88), and the second in 'Boys Will Be Girls: Drag and Transvestic Fetishism' (89-115).

In the first point, Tyler interrogates Spivak's formulation that 'white men are saving brown women from brown men' (Spivak, in Tyler, 2003:68), examining the particular colonizing role played by white women and the lack of subjectivity allotted to 'brown women' (68). For Tyler, white 'wom[e]n's transvestic identification with bourgeois [white] men' (68) allows them to participate in racism and colonization through a 'racist rescue fantasy' (68). Here, Tyler aims to shed light both on the question of identification, and on Spivak's formulation of the lack of subjectivity allotted to brown women by white men and women alike (2003: 68-73). By focusing on the 'transvestic' dimension of white women's identification with men in this sequence, Tyler draws attention to the way in which, in a patriarchal setting, an identification with power constitutes an identification with masculinity. In this way, Tyler's analysis resonates with Simone de Beauvoir's concept of 'protestation virile' (1976: 198), in which women perform masculinity in order to

escape or challenge limiting models of femininity (1976: 195-8). Placing Spivak's formulation in a dialogue with a scene drawn from Homi Bhabha's work – a "primal scene" [Bhabha] attributes to Frantz Fanon, a scenario in which the little white girl bonds with her mother through the fear she experiences when she sees the black man' (Tyler, 2003: 70) – Tyler points out that 'white women are offered two positions in this racist imaginary: that of the victim (the classic, passive place) and that of rescuer' (71), which can only be accessed by an identification with white men at the expense of black and ethnic minority women. While Tyler's analysis is valuable in drawing attention to the way in which this 'transvestic identification' creates complicity with racist structures, it nevertheless raises two questions. First, while Tyler emphasizes Spivak's point that, in her complicity with racist colonialism, 'the bourgeois feminist is as much an imperialist missionary as her Victorian forebear' (71), she does not question what happens when white women's role as 'rescuer' (71) of brown women is positioned as a feminist duty. Consider, for example, the argument that the hijab is necessarily oppressive.<sup>112</sup> Here, Western, frequently white, feminists ignore the opinions of (some) Muslim feminists, arguing that the hijab is necessarily a symbol of oppression; a view which is illustrated by Kate Maltby's article 'Since when was the hijab a feminist statement?', written in response to Hanna Yusuf's video for *The Guardian*, 'My hijab has nothing to do with oppression. It's a feminist statement.'<sup>113</sup> As an article on the blog for 'The Stockton Postcolonial Project' points out, in cases like these, Western feminist perspectives can align with governmental policies, such as the interdiction of the niqab and the burqa in France.<sup>114</sup> I want to question what happens to Tyler's model of 'transvestic

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<sup>112</sup> I do not suggest that the hijab cannot be used in the context of oppressive systems. However, as I argue above, I contest the arguments of Western, often white, feminists when they position the hijab as necessarily oppressive while ignoring the arguments of Muslim feminists. One example of this anti-hijab position can be found in Kate Maltby's article for *The Spectator*: <http://blogs.new.spectator.co.uk/2015/06/since-when-was-a-hijab-a-feminist-statement/> (accessed 2 November 2015).

<sup>113</sup> A link to Kate Maltby's article can be found in footnote 112, above. Hanna Yusuf's video is available at <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/video/2015/jun/24/hijab-not-oppression-feminist-statement-video> (accessed 2 November 2015).

<sup>114</sup> Stephanie Cawley's article exploring the difference in perspective between postcolonial feminists and feminists critiquing the hijab can be found at <https://blogs.stockton.edu/postcolonialstudies/veils-and-postcolonial-feminism/> (accessed 2 November 2015). The niqab and the burqa were banned in certain public spaces in France in 2011 <http://www.france24.com/en/20110411-france-ban-full-islamic-veil-sarkozy-ump-muslim-law->

identification' in cases such as these. For example, can one argue that these feminists are still participating in a colonialist identification with white men in their desire to 'sav[e] brown women from brown men'? Can the participation of men in attempts to regulate and legislate against hijab wearing be read as a 'transvestic identification' with feminism in these cases, or do women's rights merely constitute an excuse for such legislation, as Spivak suggests in relation to the practice of suttee (Spivak in Tyler, 2003: 71).<sup>115</sup> The question of what happens to 'transvestic identification' in different contexts leads me to my second query regarding Tyler's point. While it is understandable that Tyler concentrates on 'transvestic identification' as experienced by white women in the context of Spivak's formulation (2003: 68-71), I want to question why Tyler does not develop this concept in relation to other identities and other experiences elsewhere in her chapter. The absence of this concept in Tyler's analysis of racial dynamics in the works of Jean Rhys (73-86) encourages readers to question whether 'transvestic identification' operates in other contexts, and if so, how this might work. Must this form of identification work only in the context of shoring up oppressive, colonialist norms, or can it work to promote social justice? For example, when men and non-binary people empathize with feminist causes, can this similarly be described as a

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[police-secularism-burqa](#) (accessed 24 June 2016). However, this law remains highly controversial as discussion in 2016 about the potential ban of veils in French Universities demonstrated <http://www.france24.com/en/20160413-france-pm-valls-backs-muslim-headscarf-ban-universities> (accessed 24 June 2016). As an article in the 'Madame' section of *Le Figaro* demonstrates, the hijab is subject to different legislation than the niqab and the burqa. Following a law of 2004, it is not permitted to wear religious symbols, including the hijab and the cross, in schools, colleges, or public lycées. A similar law of religious neutrality created in 2015 bans the wearing of the hijab in creches. In public employment, there are two laws of note: one which stresses religious freedom, and one which bans religious 'signes ostentatoires'. In cases in which wearing the hijab is not specifically banned, certain public employers decide not to allow employees to wear the hijab, and employees must go to court if they want to contest such decisions. For further information on legislation against religious symbols in France, please visit <http://madame.lefigaro.fr/societe/voile-burkini-burqa-ce-que-dit-la-loi-en-france-240816-115966> (accessed 28 February 2017) and <http://www.lefigaro.fr/emploi/2015/04/21/09005-20150421ARTFIG00163-religion-ce-qui-est-possible-en-entreprise.php> (accessed 28 February 2017).

<sup>115</sup> Tyler discusses this point as follows: 'As Spivak notes, Hindu suttee, which was initially seen by the British as an uncivilized religious ritual, was redefined as a crime in the nineteenth century, a move she suggests has a clear, if complex, relationship to the change in the British presence in India at that time. Part of the British project of determining the "good society" involved protecting the brown woman from her own kind, a tactic Spivak describes as "the dissimulation of patriarchal strategy, which apparently grants the woman free choice as *subject*." The brown woman is caught between two paternalisms, two inscriptions of desire on her body: the white colonizer's and the brown man's' (Tyler, 2003: 71).

form of 'transvestic identification'? An article written by genderqueer journalist Laurie Penny seems to suggest that this may be the case for some people. Penny writes: 'here's one big way I differ from my genderqueer friends: I still identify, politically, as a woman. My identity is more complex than simply female or male, but as long as women's reproductive freedom is under assault, sex is also a political category, and politically, I'm still a woman'.<sup>116</sup> In citing Penny on this point, I do not suggest that it is necessary to identify as a woman to support feminist causes: both Penny and I would strongly contest that assertion. Rather, I seek to question how Tyler's model of transvestic identification might operate in other contexts. Equally, one might ask what happens in terms of transvestic identification when we look at the inverse of Spivak's formulation (Spivak in Tyler, 2003: 68). To what extent do 'brown women' align themselves with 'brown men' when refusing to be 'rescued' by white men or white women? This latter question seems to me to be particularly valuable in the context of Tyler's analysis, and to avoid it may lead to an unfortunate erasure of the perspectives of non-white women on this subject. Overall, Tyler's concept of 'transvestic identification' seems to me to be a potentially valuable one, yet one which also merits additional development.

My second exploration of Tyler's mobilization of race relates to Tyler's discussion of mimesis (2003: 101-9). It is somewhat problematic that, while clearly critiquing racism, Tyler nevertheless concentrates on the perspectives of white, cisgender women. As Tyler suggests, whiteness is certainly significant in many theorisations of mimicry (105) as it is in many theorisations of drag performance. Consider, for example, the centrality of whiteness in critiques such as 'Is Paris Burning?' and 'Lavender Ain't White', or, to follow Tyler's line of thought, the primary focus on white performers in *Mother Camp*.

However, Tyler neither examines critiques of whiteness in drag by theorists of colour, nor aims to create a theorisation of drag which includes performers and theorists of colour. Instead, she concentrates on white theorists' perspectives on mimicry – including those of Butler (103) and Irigaray (101) – in order to conclude

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<sup>116</sup> Penny's article is available here: <http://www.buzzfeed.com/lauriepenny/how-to-be-a-genderqueer-feminist#.vjKNylwblX> (accessed 2 November 2015).

that 'theories of mimicry reinscribe white, middle-class femininity as the real thing' (105). Notably, Tyler does not specifically problematize the way in which these theorists' race and class positions enter their texts, but uses these texts to generalize about theories of mimicry as a whole. This is evident in Tyler's discussion of femme femininities. Although Tyler perceptively critiques the assumption that femme femininities are necessarily subversive as a result of recontextualisation (104), she overlooks discussions of femme embodiment by non-white, non-cis theorists. Tyler concludes that a white 'gay sensibility' (104) pervades theories of mimicry without considering texts by femmes of colour. It is also disappointing that this analysis does not engage with Viviane Namaste's criticism of Tyler's earlier work (Namaste, 2000: 15-6). Namaste problematizes the 'tautological' nature of Tyler's argument, noting that Tyler 'overlooks African-American and working-class forms of drag, as for instance in the performances and representations of Joan Jett Blakk, Vaginal Creme Davis, and DeAundra Peek' (2000: 16). Here, Tyler continues to critique drag as a whole via a critique of white theorists' perceptions, thereby ignoring Namaste's suggestion of engaging with drag practices in other contexts.

I now turn to the contradictory uses of misogyny and transmisogyny in *Female Impersonation*. Readers might both be surprised and pleased when Tyler appears to acknowledge that transmisogyny is a form of misogyny and that the devaluation of femininities is a feminist issue (2003: 91). This recognition resonates with Julia Serano's critique (2012: 171-2), and could add further nuance to Tyler's analysis. Unfortunately, however, at least three points in Tyler's text undermine her critique of transmisogyny. First, Tyler's response to trans femininities seems somewhat contradictory. Although Tyler acknowledges transmisogyny, she does so while suggesting that this 'may be why even drag queens often insist that they should not be mistaken for women' (91). Further, rather than exploring the impact of transmisogyny, Tyler turns abruptly to the presence of cis gay male misogyny in drag (91-2), thereby creating a slippage between performance, sexuality, and identity. Second, elsewhere, Tyler employs a psychoanalytic perspective to 'explain' transsexuality, and employs erasive language and concepts, such as noting that 'the transsexual, like the transvestite, wishes to be a "she-male", the phallic woman

who lacks nothing (124). The Lacanian perspective taken by Tyler, which prioritizes the work of Lacanian psychoanalyst Catherine Millot<sup>117</sup>, is embedded in concepts of ‘fetishism’, ‘lack’ and ‘the phallus’ (123-6), and includes both transmisogyny and transphobia. While these psychoanalytic concepts are not necessarily misogynistic or transphobic in themselves<sup>118</sup>, Tyler follows Millot in employing them in a transphobic and transmisogynistic manner.<sup>119</sup> Concentrating primarily on trans women (2003: 123-136), Tyler refuses to accept the validity of trans identities, positioning transsexuality as a ‘perversion’ (125) or form of fetishism, and mobilizes medical texts to dismiss the value of sex reassignment surgery.<sup>120</sup> Finally, despite recognizing the difference between transsexuality and cross-dressing, Tyler often conflates these by ascribing a shared motivation to both. One example occurs when

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<sup>117</sup> Here, Tyler concentrates on points made in Millot’s *Horsexe: essai sur le transsexualisme*, yet also mobilizes work by other Lacanian psychoanalysts (2003: 123-5). Tyler’s other references include Jacques Lacan’s ‘The Meaning of the Phallus’ (1982), *La Robe: essai psychanalytique sur le vêtement* (1983) by Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni and André Courrèges, and Moustapha Safouan’s ‘Contribution à la psychanalyse du transsexualisme’ (1974).

<sup>118</sup> To take on a psychoanalytic perspective does not necessitate adherence to transphobic views such as that of Millot, which denies the womanhood of trans women, suggesting that they wish to attain an ‘third, angelic sex’ (Millot in Tyler, 2003: 124). However, the psychoanalytic emphasis on sexual difference may be perceived as cissexist or transphobic, depending on the way in which it is articulated. For example, Juliet Mitchell’s following comment arguably erases non-binary identities: ‘Sexual difference can only be the consequence of a division; without this division it would cease to exist. But it must exist because no human being can become a subject outside the division into two sexes. One must take up a position as either a man or a woman. Such a position is by no means identical with one’s biological sexual characteristics, nor is it a position of which one can be very confident – as the psychoanalytical experience demonstrates’ (1994: 6).

<sup>119</sup> Tyler mobilizes Millot’s theories to argue that ‘Like the transvestite and the fetishist, then, the transsexual is at once aware of but ignorant of sexual difference, disavowing it by perversely acting out the fantasy of a double sexual identity that is a non-identity’ (2003: 124).

<sup>120</sup> Tyler dismisses the value of sex reassignment surgery by stating that ‘[b]ecoming woman may not cure the transsexual: indeed, two of the foremost authorities on transsexualism note that surgery very often provides only a brief satisfaction before the transsexual renews the demand for a more perfect feminization’ (2003: 125-6). This statement suggests a well-documented and widespread dissatisfaction with sex reassignment surgery on the behalf both of transsexuals and medical professionals. However, Tyler only references three texts: Harry Benjamin’s ‘Transsexualism and Transvestism as Psycho-Somatic and Somato-Psychic Syndromes,’ (1954), Nicole Kress-Rosen’s ‘Le Transsexualisme de Stoller’ (1981), and *Robert Stoller’s Presentations of Gender* (1981). Tyler’s references therefore only account for medical accounts up to the 1980s, and misrepresents one of the theorists discussed. According to Tyler, Benjamin ‘asserts unequivocally that transsexuals are dissatisfied with the femininity achieved by surgery and renew their demand for feminization’ (2003: 140). This is simply not the case; Benjamin does not make this blanket statement about trans women as a whole, but refers only to difficulties experienced by ‘some patients’: ‘The later realization that a complete change of sex including the ability of child-bearing is impossible, and that only a change of secondary sex characteristics has been and can be accomplished, may leave some patients frustrated after a more or less extended period of relief’ (Benjamin, 2006: 51).

Tyler concludes a chapter on transsexuality by referring to 'transvestism' and using a phrase which she had previously applied to transsexuality (2003: 138).

One significant point relating to misogyny in Tyler's text occurs in her discussion of performer gender in drag queen performance, butch femme 'gender play' (104) and mimicry (101-5). As I have stressed throughout this thesis, I contend that drag operates as drag due to the performance of gender and the mode of that performance, rather than as a result of the performer's gender or of any disparity between a performer's gender and the gender performed on stage. Nevertheless, a performer's gender can have an impact on their performance and its reception. Instead of discussing these nuances, Tyler concentrates on the notion of disidentification between a performer's gender and the gender they perform (101-2; 104-5). Notably, disidentification as discussed by Tyler differs markedly from Muñoz's concept (1999: 3-11) of the same name: Tyler is referring to a sense of distance from the role being performed (2003: 104-5), rather than to a mode of 'working on and against' (Muñoz, 1999: 11) a given role or concept. Tyler's model of disidentification might present a useful tool for analysing a performer's relationship to a role, if considered as a potential feature of a given performance. However, to suggest that this constitutes a universal feature of drag or mimicry (Tyler, 2003: 104), or to suggest that this lack of identification is a complete lack of identification on a performer's part (104-5), seems to be somewhat short-sighted. Equally, while snobbery and misogyny can occur in drag and mimicry, Tyler's idea that these forms necessarily 'reinscribe' (105) the image of a 'proper' masculinity or femininity is to simplify the issue. Tyler's focus on 'disidentification' in the context of butch/femme embodiments also merits critique here. For Tyler, the positioning of femme as subversive falls down because it relies on an assumption that the femme 'plays her role for another woman' (104) and therefore depends on the perception of that femininity as specifically lesbian. Consequently, Tyler's criticism seems inapplicable to femmes who perform their femininity for themselves, irrespective of their company, or for femmes who do not identify as women and/or are not attracted to women. Further, throughout this discussion, Tyler's critique of camp imagery and

gender play seemingly implies that these are not valid unless they act to subvert norms, which she argues that they fail to do (104-5).

*Female Impersonation* provokes a mixed response. On one level, Tyler provides a number of potentially useful approaches to drag performance, as we see from her refusal to position drag as necessarily subversive (101-5) and her emphasis on exploring dynamics of identification with an awareness of race (69-75). Equally, however, Tyler is frequently cissexist (104-6) – and occasionally vocally transphobic (122-4) – and often overlooks minority perspectives. I now draw attention to some of the trends present in the parts of the text analysed here. One such trend lies in a somewhat contradictory attitude to race and racism. On one level, Tyler aims to interrogate the role of racism in feminist perspectives and identifications (Tyler, 2003: 68-73) and pays careful attention to the dominance of whiteness in theories of mimicry (105). Nevertheless, in the context of mimicry, Tyler relies on white theorists' perspectives to inform her conclusions, thereby offering what Viviane Namaste refers to as a 'tautological' argument (2000: 16): Tyler focuses on mimicry as explored by white theorists (2003: 39-44; 103-5) in order to claim that '[t]heories of mimicry reinscribe white, middle class femininity as the real thing, the quintessence of femininity' (105). Similarly, Tyler poses a perceptive critique of misogyny in others' work (92-5), yet relies on transphobic and transmisogynistic paradigms (123-5) and appears to assume a necessary distance at work in the performance of femininity (104-5). A final significant trend lies in Tyler's frequent engagement with the subversive/reactionary model. Although Tyler clearly shows that drag performance can contain both progressive and problematic aspects (108), her analyses frequently focus on problematic aspects, while overlooking positive dimensions (93). Overall then, Tyler's approach seems to be wilfully self-frustrating: she approaches drag and gender non-conformity with the expectation that these forms act to shore up oppressive norms, and therefore ignores other possibilities.

**Julia Serano's 'Reclaiming Femininity', and 'And Then You Cut Your Hair: Genderfucking on the Femme Side of the Spectrum', a conversation between Amy André and Sandy Chang**

Serano's 'Reclaiming Femininity' is particularly valuable in its capacity to elucidate both diverse identifications with femininity and the popular dismissal of femininity. As a femme (2012: 170)<sup>121</sup>, Serano is likely to be invested in femininity, or aspects of femininity, to a greater degree than critics who do not identify in this way. However, while this certainly shapes Serano's perspective, it seems appropriate to read this as a particular speaking position rather than a bias which impinges her ability to shed light on the subject. As many of the perspectives discussed in this chapter analyse femininity from the 'outside', the inclusion of femme voices can facilitate a wider-ranging, more balanced discussion.

Notably, Serano stresses the way in which the denigration of femininity as necessarily 'more frivolous, artificial, impractical, and manipulative than masculine gender expression' (2012: 170) ties into structural misogyny and transmisogyny (170-3). This affirmation draws attention to a contradiction at work in some feminist texts, such as Marilyn Frye's 'Lesbian Feminism and the Gay Rights Movement', which openly decry misogyny, yet position femininity as artificial and frivolous (1983: 138), without considering the possibility that this undermines feminine women. Serano's affirmation thus encourages readers to recognize the hierarchy created among women and feminine people by those texts and discourses which demean femininity (2012: 170-6). Equally, Serano offers an astute analysis of the way in which the perception of masculinity as natural and femininity as artificial pervades our understanding of gender and its performance (171; 179). In addition to strengthening Serano's previous point about the relationship between structural misogyny and the denigration of femininity (170), this perspective may shed light on the disparity in popularity between drag kings and drag queens: as masculinity is frequently naturalized to a greater extent than femininity, audiences may find performances of exaggerated femininity more accessible.

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<sup>121</sup> At the beginning of this chapter, Serano openly claims her 'femme identity' (2012: 170).

I now turn to a passage which introduces two key points in Serano's chapter: her perception of femininity as a potentially natural inclination, and her response to the conceptualization of femininity as performance:

Now I can certainly relate to the notion of feminine expression as performance. As someone who has to "dress down" for my day job, I know that when I do get the chance to dress up for an occasion, I have the definite sense of doing something different, of putting on a different exterior than I normally do. Having said that, even when I am at my most outwardly feminine, the feeling that my gender expression is a "performance" does not even come close to how contrived and self-conscious I felt before my transition, when I had to wear male-specific clothing (e.g. putting on a suit and tie when attending a wedding). So although you can make the case that masculinity and femininity are "performances," for me, feminine expression feels way more natural. It resonates with my sense of self in a way that I do not really have words to describe. It just feels right to me, whereas masculine expression always felt wrong. (2012: 179)

To engage with the perception of femininity as natural first, it is essential to acknowledge that Serano qualifies this point in two ways. First, Serano does not suggest that femininity comes naturally to everyone or to all women; rather, this is the case only for 'some' (182) individuals, and occurs irrespective of gender – 'whether male, female, both, or neither' (182). Second, Serano recognizes the fact that personal 'inclinations do not exist in a vacuum' (181), and that inclinations for femininity occur on a backdrop in which society exerts pressure on girls and women to perform femininity in a prescribed manner (182). With these caveats, the idea that femininity can be a natural inclination is noteworthy and powerful. In this passage, Serano draws attention to the significant difference between modifying one's appearance and actions according to circumstance – as for work or at a specific social event – and feeling obliged to present in a manner that is wholly uncomfortable, as in the case of Serano's example of wearing male-specific clothing (179) prior to her transition. Further, the idea that femininity – or another form of gender expression – might resonate with a person's sense of self seems to me to potentially shed light on the motivations for drag performance.

To return to the passage quoted above, I tentatively suggest that Serano misreads others' arguments surrounding the perception of femininity as performance. It seems possible that two separate concepts have become entangled in Serano's discussion of 'feminine expression as performance' (179). That is, the concept of gender performativity – of gender as a constant, repeated set of actions and expressions – which can be seen to apply to all individuals, irrespective of their particular gender – seems to have become entangled with the belief that femme expression is particularly “‘ironic and campy’” (179), in the words of Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (179). Consequently, it is necessary to disentangle these approaches in order to ascertain how they resonate with Serano's understanding of a personal resonance with femininity. Although I can understand why Serano employs the example of 'dress[ing up] for an occasion' (179) to illustrate the idea of feminine gender expression as performance, this example does not act to either support or unsettle the concept of gender performativity. Curiously, Serano's quotidian 'dress[ing] down for work' can be seen as a more appropriate example of performativity, as it represents the way in which she expresses herself on a daily basis. Further, although I understand Serano's anxiety about performative models which appear to dismiss gender identity as 'just a construct' (180), I would suggest that performative models which recognize agency are compatible with recognition of personal resonances with femininity or masculinity.

Reconciling the image of feminine expression as 'ironic and campy' with Serano's understanding of personal inclinations towards femininity initially appears more difficult. However, I think these views are by no means irreconcilable. That is, like Amber Hollibaugh in *My Dangerous Desires*, femmes can conceive of their femininities as camp and as constructed while equally experiencing them as a significant aspect of their identities.<sup>122</sup> A belief in femininity as a natural, personal, and valid aspect of the self does not preclude reworking, shaping, and

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<sup>122</sup> Hollibaugh examines what femme means for her on two levels. First, she speaks of 'femme' as a deeply felt 'erotic identity' (2000: 262) which has the capacity to enthrall and unsettle. Equally, she discusses femme as a gender identity which is both intimately connected to her 'own sense of femininity' (264) and which is embedded in a sense of challenging boundaries surrounding the accepted ideas of womanhood and femininity; 'Daily I construct it and remove it, live it totally, betray it, reconstruct it from dust and fear, find it again' (264).

(re)constructing this femininity. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of reconciling these approaches stems from the fact that femme-ness, womanhood, and femininity are thereby positioned as necessarily more constructed than maleness and masculinity; a point which Serano stresses (179-80). Although scholars who emphasize the constructed nature of femme identity are likely to perceive masculinity as equally constructed, narratives about the construction of femininity might be used to support a wider patriarchal dismissal of femininity as manipulative and contrived (180). However, while I share Serano's anxiety about the use of construction discourses to dismiss and invalidate trans people and feminine people (180), I feel that a blanket rejection of these perspectives could equally act to dismiss those who experience their gender as multi-layered and in a constant state of development. Additionally, theories of performativity and construction can provide us with valuable resources on two levels: in terms of understanding how we enact our genders on a daily basis; and in terms of critiquing assumptions which link a natural femininity to particular roles.

I now turn briefly to Serano's rejection of the tendency to frame queer femme expression as necessarily subversive. Serano critiques this framing in that it can suggest that 'expressions that do not occur in a queer context somehow reinforce the gender binary, heterosexism, the patriarchy, or what have you' (182). The creation of a dichotomy between 'good' queer femininity and 'bad' conventional femininity lacks awareness of intersectionality and nuance, as well as potentially suggesting that conventionally feminine people 'are enabling their own oppression' (182). This point resonates with my critique of the use of the subversive/reactionary paradigm in relation to drag. Despite challenging the framing of queer femininity, Serano shows that collective and individual modes of negotiating femininity can remain powerful, significant, and wholly worthwhile (183). For Serano, ideas of reclaiming and celebrating the forms of femininity that resonate personally with the individual or group are 'powerful and transformative' (183). If this understanding is transferred onto drag queen performance, two conclusions arise. First, in order to explore individual and collective manifestations of drag (queen) femininities and their impact, we should remain cautious about

paradigms which place drag within a binary opposition between “good” queer subversive performance and “bad” patriarchal performance. Second, in order to elucidate personal and collective motivations at work in drag performance, it is essential to regard the enjoyment of feminine gender expression as a valid motive.

Overall, I suggest that Serano’s understanding of femininity is valuable in itself and in its capacity to shed light on drag queen performance. Serano’s chapter includes a clear, critical debunking of the dismissal of femininity by both patriarchal, and queer and feminist discourses. By valuing femininity, its potential as a natural or personal inclination, and by refusing to celebrate only “subversive” forms of femininity, theorists and observers can return to drag queen performance with a fresh lens and a greater quantity of respect and awareness. However, ‘Reclaiming Femininity’ does include two significant issues. The first of these relates to the lack of attention paid to the effect of race on shaping femininity and the way it is experienced. While the short length of the chapter would render it difficult for Serano to include each of the numerous and noteworthy issues pertaining to femininity, her lack of in depth engagement with race is somewhat problematic. The absence of race in conversations about queer and trans femininity becomes particularly problematic when one considers the disproportionate violence faced by trans women of colour.<sup>123</sup> The second issue raised by ‘Reclaiming Femininity’ is Serano’s dismissal of performative approaches to femininity. As demonstrated in my analysis, Serano’s critique can be highly valuable in encouraging readers to question how these approaches intersect with dismissive attitudes towards femininity. Nevertheless, as Sam Bourcier has argued<sup>124</sup>, performativity can be a valuable resource both in practical and theoretical terms, and I therefore suggest that both approaches merit discussion in the context of drag performance.

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<sup>123</sup> A current resource on the disproportionate violence against trans people and people of colour can be found via Glaad media at <http://www.glaad.org/blog/violence-against-transgender-people-and-people-color-disproportionately-high-lgbtqh-murder-rate> (accessed 6 August 2014).

<sup>124</sup> Bourcier discusses the value of performativity as a resource in ‘F\*\*\* the Politics of Disempowerment in the Second Butler’ (2012: 239-40).

**Amy André and Sandy Chang: 'And Then You Cut Your Hair: Genderfucking on the Femme Side of the Spectrum'**

Like 'Reclaiming Femininity', 'And Then You Cut Your Hair' explores femininity from a femme perspective. Published in the edited collection *Nobody Passes, Rejecting the Rules of Gender and Conformity*, 'And Then You Cut Your Hair' operates as an informal conversation between two friends, 'Amy, a mixed race bisexual African American Jew, and her friend Sandy, a genderqueer Chinese American' (2006: 253), interrogating their understandings of femininity and femme identity. My analysis concentrates on three points: the concept of an intersection between femme identity and genderqueer identity, the role of hair in gender expression, and the impact of race on perceptions of femininity and masculinity. However, due to the discursive, conversational nature of André and Chang's piece, these central points cannot be seen as discrete and separate, but rather as mapping onto and enriching each other. I aim to make this sense of overlap and mutual development clear in my analysis.

Having thought carefully about 'femme' prior to, and as part of, this conversation (253), Chang introduces particular readings of 'genderqueer' and 'femme', demonstrating the apparent opposition between these forms:

I think some people might consider femme as meaning: conforming to traditional gender roles or socialization, in terms of the way female-bodied people are encouraged to present themselves in this world. By this, I mean not only in appearance but also mannerisms and character traits, such as tone of voice, language, hobbies and interests. Some people may understand genderqueer as specifically not conforming to traditional or stereotypical gender roles. So, I had to ask myself: how is it that I'm able to view myself as simultaneously femme and genderqueer? Don't these identities seem like they might be contradicting each other? (254)

The reductive dichotomy which positions drag as necessarily either subversive or reactionary is mirrored in Chang's description of common assumptions relating to genderqueer and femme identities. The above description indicates that 'femme' occupies contested terrain: while some theorists position femme as 'ironic and campy' (Piepzna-Samarasinha in Serano, 2012: 179), others may perceive it as

conventional or conformist. Equally, the above description suggests that femme femininity can be conceived of as performative in that it consists of repeated mannerisms and behaviours. Genderqueer, as described above, takes on the 'opposite' mantle of subversion. While some genderqueers might feel that unsettling gender norms is among the aims of their gender expression, others will explicitly reject such received meanings; this lack of alignment with the equation will be the same for femmes, some of whom may feel that their image resonates with conventional femininity, and others of whom may feel that they deliberately dismantle or resignify such forms of femininity.

Although the above passage seemingly positions femme femininity as conventional, I believe that it does so in order to force readers to question their preconceptions about femme identity, femininity, genderqueer expression, and gender identity. When Chang speaks of understanding their own 'gender as existing on a spectrum' (254), and avows that 'I can choose to have a more femme presentation and it doesn't have to mean that I'm choosing one side of the spectrum over another, or conforming to tradition without examination' (256) the discrete models of "conventional" and "subversive" no longer appear either oppositional or appropriate. Here, self-presentation includes a choice and a deliberate form of performance, yet equally resonates with personal identity. While potentially echoing 'everyday drag' as explored by Esther Newton (2000: 26) in its engagement with varying personal roles, self-presentation may differ from onstage drag in that the latter frequently produces a character that is clearly separated from the performer's sense of self, while the former reflects an individual's sense of self or aspects thereof. Significantly, Chang reminds readers that feminine presentation may intersect with a range of identities (2006: 254), and that the relationship between identity and expression is frequently more complex than it is perceived to be. While this allusion to femme femininities does not refer to a personal resonance with femininity, Chang's perception mirrors Serano's in that both conceive of femininity as a valid mode of presentation which can be employed irrespective of gender identity.

Having already been emphasized by the title of the chapter (2006: 254), the topic of hair and its role as a signifier for (femme) identity within queer communities is raised first in the piece itself by André (2006: 256). André remarks: ‘While all this was happening, I first started seeing you around town: you had longer hair than you have now. And I thought, “Oh, she’s a femme.” I just automatically did that’ (256). This reveals an automatic association between femme identity and long hair, but simultaneously complicates or unpacks that association by referring to the fact that Chang, both genderqueer and femme (254), has shorter hair at the time of the interview. For André, the possibility that Chang could be “‘a femme with short hair, just like me’” (256) sprang from an association between femme identity and ‘dance performance – sensuous movement of the body’ (256). While potentially somewhat ableist, this notion nevertheless demonstrates two aspects of hair as a signifier. First, that short hair is primarily associated with identities other than femme, despite the commonplace association between short hair and queerness which André and Chang explore in their discussion (256-7). Second, that the significance of hair can be modified as a result of other (queer) corporeal codes or clues. This point enables spectators to recognize how hair as a signifier might be employed in complex ways to unsettle assumed codes of appearance and embodiment. As Chang can be said to have helped shape André’s conception of genderqueer femme through the use of styling and movement which are not assumed to complement each other (256), drag performers might aid their audiences to unpack their beliefs by cleverly entwining aspects of presentation which are assumed to point to divergent identities.<sup>125</sup>

For Chang, the desire ‘to perform as a drag king’ (2006: 257) acted as one motivation for a haircut. Chang’s reflection on the relationship between hair, drag performance, and gender identity presents a valuable site for analysis:

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<sup>125</sup> In our interview, Lenna Cumberbatch – who formerly performed as drag king Leon da Luvva – discussed having taken part in what she termed ‘genderfucking performance’. One such performance began by juxtaposing ‘feminine’ articles of dress with ‘masculine’ poses and body language, with the performance concluding with a strip to ‘masculine’ attire and the assumption of ‘feminine’ poses. As Lenna explained, this performance deliberately aimed to shed light on the way in which gender is coded through garments and body language, and equally aimed to unsettle these associations.

Cutting my hair made me aware of how people treated me, and it also made me aware of my own sense of masculinity. When I started doing drag, I felt like I pushed the borders of what my gender spectrum was. Because I was able to experience more masculinity, I was then able to consciously choose to experience more femininity. I don't think I femmed myself up as much before I cut my hair as after. I now feel like I can move across a fuller spectrum. (2006: 257)

Often, the model which reads drag as “just” performance neglects to account for the way in which these performances might impact the identity of the performer. This reflection begins to demonstrate the complex intersections between gender performance and gender identity. For example, Chang decided on a haircut in order to *perform* masculinity, yet found that this haircut could enable a more complete realization of *one's own* masculinity. Further, this ‘masculine’ signifier enabled Chang to express their gender differently, shedding light both on personal femininity and on personal masculinity. Additionally, this quote can elucidate the interactions between a sense of personal resonance with a gender expression – ‘my own sense of masculinity’ – and the choice to present oneself in a particular way. Consequently, readers can perceive how Serano’s model of a natural inclination (2012: 180-1) towards a form of gender expression can interact with a more performative understanding of identity as constructed through repeated performances or actions. Equally, it is significant that those who, like Chang, recognize the performative dimension of identity (2006: 267) continue to examine the intersections between identity and performance, rather than framing identity wholly in terms of performance.

André and Chang’s chapter provides two further examples of engaging with femininity in the context of drag king performance. The first of these relates to Chang’s choice to ‘femme up’ while having short hair and performing as a drag king. In expressing both femininity and masculinity in quotidian gender expression, Chang unsettles the expectation that individuals must perform masculinity or femininity exclusively. Further, Chang remarks on the deliberate decision to trouble audience expectations through the performance of both femininity and masculinity: ‘I might do a drag king performance then come out of the dressing room afterward,

totally dressed up as a femme; I want to mix things up. I want to challenge people' (268). Here, drag king performance is employed as a vehicle to enable people to question their ideas; the juxtaposition of femininity and masculinity is not only unusual, but is a deliberate 'challenge'. Chang's emphasis on their desire to challenge expectations through gender expression both on stage and off might appear to sit at odds with their earlier discussion of genderqueer femme. Here, femme expression is not positioned as conventional, but instead constitutes a deliberate challenge to binary standpoints. Equally, the language of 'challenging' expectations does resonate with the positioning of drag performance of necessarily subversive. I contend that such language can be useful when employed to refer to a particular intention or performance, but that it becomes reductive when used to generalize drag performance as a whole.

The second example of engaging with femininity in drag king performance maps onto a wider discussion of race and sexuality. Here, Chang and André begin to explore the negotiation of complex, interlocking stereotypes. For Chang, drag king performance acts as a space to 'personify strong Asian men' (264) and to thereby counter the lack of attention given to Asian men in a racist US cultural context (264). Equally, the strong Asian male image presented by Chang clearly does not preclude femininity, but instead allows to Chang to experiment with 'feminine masculinity' (264). Expanding on 'feminine masculinity', Chang observes: 'My troupe will perform routines where we're perceived as gay because we're very feminine' (264). André then raises the (racist) stereotype that Asian men are inherently feminine and questions what impact this might have on audience perceptions of Chang's drag king femininity as a gay femininity. Unfortunately, as the conversation moves on at this point, readers gain no further insight into Chang's perspective on negotiating the stereotypes at work here. However, this part of the discussion indicates two clear points. First, that drag kings and drag queens of colour have to negotiate a greater number of stereotypes in their performances than white performers. A white drag king might receive criticism for performing a gay male masculinity or gay male femininity, irrespective of whether that performance is intended to celebrate gay male camp, yet this criticism is

unlikely to engage with the drag king's race. As Je Hye Kim suggests, drag kings of colour are subjected to pressures that white drag kings are not: 'drag kings of color are pressured to provide "better representations" of their racial groups and to be a spokesperson for their communities in their individual stage acts' (2007: 225). Second, this discussion gestures towards the potential gap between performer intention and audience response. In this case, Chang's quip "'Are you gay or are you just Asian?!"' (2006: 264) clearly demonstrates their awareness of the way stereotypes about race and sexuality inform audience response. Nevertheless, the fact that it is André rather than Chang who raises the stereotype 'that Asian men are inherently feminine' (264) in this conversation shows how audiences will place their own narratives and meanings on the performances they view.

As a result of its conversational nature, 'And Then You Cut Your Hair' draws attention a wide range of diverse issues connected with femininity, gender identity, and gender performance. Four of the insights provided by this chapter merit emphasis here. First, in discussing the intersections between femme and genderqueer identities, André and Chang remind readers that feminine gender presentation can harmonize with a range of identities. This enables readers to recognize that, contrary to the assertions of Marilyn Frye (1983: 137), drag queens may use their performances as a space to engage with aspects of their own identities. Further, like Serano's 'Reclaiming Femininity' (2012: 171-3), this discussion draws attention to the discourses which position femininity as inferior to, or less subversive than, masculine gender presentation. Second, Chang's complex understanding of their gender identity suggests that Serano's concept of personal resonances with gendered behaviours and identity forms (2012: 179) is compatible with a more performative understanding of gender. Third, like hooks' 'Is Paris Burning?', this chapter emphasizes the racialization of masculinity and femininity, both within and outside drag performance contexts. Finally, Chang's perception of the stage as a safe space to 'to consciously solicit and receive positive attention and reinforcement for being femme' (266) gestures towards a potential motivation for drag queen and drag king performance. Overall, then, I suggest that 'And Then You Cut Your Hair' is a valuable text for scholars invested in exploring the

intersection between gender performance and gender identity, and particularly for those exploring this in the context of drag.

### **Simone de Beauvoir's 'La lesbienne', and Laure Murat's *La loi du genre***

21<sup>st</sup>-century readers of the chapter 'La lesbienne' may be surprised by its contradictions. At times, Beauvoir is exceptionally insightful, eloquently expressing points which still resonate today. However, the chapter also contains views which are outdated – *Le Deuxième Sexe* was first published in 1949 – and even reactionary. While this makes 'La lesbienne' provocative reading, it adds to the richness and complexity of the chapter and makes this text a pleasure to explore. 'La lesbienne', and particularly the concept of 'protestation virile', merits attention as a result of its influence on French feminist responses to (women's) performance of masculinity – an influence visible in Sam Bourcier's 'Des "Femmes travesties"' and Christine Bard's 'La protestation virile'. As Bourcier's astute analyses of performing masculinity (2006: 119-34; 2013: 233-53) play a central role in this thesis, I will draw on points raised in Bourcier's 'Le lesbeavoir entre féminité, féminisme et masculinité' in this discussion.

My analysis concentrates on Beauvoir's exploration of femininity and its construction (1976: 195), on the benefits of 'protestation virile' (193), on the contradictory positioning of femininity (198-9) and masculinity, and on Beauvoir's hostile characterization of butch lesbians (215). Before exploring these factors, I want to draw attention to an underlying aspect of Beauvoir's approach – her mobilization of the sexological model of inversion (196-7; 202; 204). This may explain some of the contradictions at work in 'La lesbienne'. Despite offering astute critiques of certain psychoanalytic (196) and sexological viewpoints and refuting the sexological premise that 'inversion' is frequently linked to physiological traits (190-3), Beauvoir repeatedly cites sexological case studies (196; 202; 204).<sup>126</sup> Some

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<sup>126</sup> The sexological category of inversion can be divided into a series of subcategories, including what we might now term homosexual desire, bisexual desire, intersex embodiment, and transgender embodiment (Storr, 1998: 16-7) (Prosser, 1998: 120). Although definitions varied between sexologists and according to subcategories, certain sexologists, such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, placed a heavy emphasis on 'congenital' forms of inversion (Storr, 1998: 15), while others, such as

contemporary readers may feel uncomfortable when encountering these, as the subjects fit uneasily within the category 'lesbian'. As Bourcier points out, contemporary readers may question whether categories such as 'transgenres' (2006: 110) and/or trans masculine<sup>127</sup> are more suitable for the male- and masculine- identified people Beauvoir discusses (1976: 196; 202; 204). Thus, while the account of the 'invertie' (196) drawn from Havelock Ellis' work may instruct readers about masculine identity and its performance, Beauvoir's text uncomfortably blurs the line between masculine lesbian identity and masculine identity (196). I do not criticise Beauvoir for the omission of terminology which would not have been available to her. Rather, I question why Beauvoir perceives this model of inversion as relevant to her concept of 'protestation virile', and what function these studies play in her analysis of lesbian identity and embodiment. As Beauvoir suggests, the case studies included on page 196 demonstrate that 'c'est la *spécification* féminine qui indigna les deux sujets' (196), while equally intimating that, for these subjects, a decision to be 'un individu complet' (196) necessitates identifying with, and performing, masculinity. Notably, however, these subjects differ from the 'protestation virile' (195) model in that they do not seem to have rejected femininity on the basis that performing femininity constitutes an acceptance of passivity (195, 197). Equally, these subjects do not appear to follow the 'protestation virile' pattern of a rejection of womanhood and femininity due to

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Magnus Hirschfeld and Havelock Ellis, argued that hormones could play a significant role in sexual inversion (Hausman, 30). When beginning 'La lesbienne', Beauvoir debunks the notion that lesbians necessarily have 'masculine' physical traits or personalities resulting from hormonal imbalance (1976: 190) and instead stresses the diversity between lesbians (190). However, despite differing markedly from sexologists on this point, Beauvoir references sexological case studies within her analysis (196, 202, 204).

<sup>127</sup> As Sam Bourcier stresses in 'Des "Femmes travesties"', categories such as 'travestie' may act to erase the identities of the subjects which they purport to describe (2006: 127). Bourcier further stresses this point in relation to 'La lesbienne', noting in 'La lesbienne entre féminité, féminisme et masculinité' that 'En voyant à quel point Beauvoir est fascinée par le culot social des transgenres qui ne sont pas des lesbiennes, je pense à tous ces garçons qu'elle évoque et qui s'identifieraient peut-être, de nos jours, comme des " *female-to-male* " - la travestie de Steckel, une femme biologique à identification masculine et à sexualité hétérosexuelle ou Sarolta-Sandor, hétérosexuel lui aussi - l'on pourrait aussi être tenté de conclure au caractère résolument progressif et créatif de la conception beauvoirienne des genres' (2006b : 110). In addition to underlining the potential utility of terms such as 'transgenre', the above comment gestures towards the progressive dimensions of 'La lesbienne' while indicating the dangers of blanket assumptions about the text – a point I interrogate in the discussion below.

low self-esteem in their teenage years (197).<sup>128</sup> I suggest that there is no conscious element of 'protest' at work in these subjects' rejection of femininity; they simply reject it because they align themselves with (conventional) masculinity (197), and because they (mistakenly) feel that a masculine identity cannot be compatible with any identification with femininity. Two further points arise here. First, if Beauvoir suggested that 'protestation virile' occurred only for 'lesbians' following the pattern described by Stekel and Havelock Ellis (197), her reliance on these models would be comprehensible. However, Beauvoir's emphasis on the idea that heterosexual women can experience 'protestation virile' (198), and on the fact that lesbians can be feminine (205), renders this reading questionable. Second, if the inclusion of sexological case studies stemmed from a desire to engage thoroughly with all available models of lesbian identity, it seems strange that Beauvoir cites only those case studies which include a masculine subject who exclusively desires women.<sup>129</sup>

Before exploring 'protestation virile' in greater detail, I stress Beauvoir's analysis of compulsory femininity and its constructed nature (195). Beauvoir's rejection of the idea of an essential femininity, inherent to all women, merits emphasis here on two levels:

En effet, l'homme représente aujourd'hui le positif et le neutre, c'est-à-dire le mâle et l'être humain, tandis que la femme est seulement le négatif, la femelle. Chaque fois qu'elle se conduit en être humain, on déclare donc qu'elle s'identifie au mâle. Ses activités sportives, politiques, intellectuelles, son désir pour d'autres femmes sont interprétés comme une "protestation virile" ; on refuse de tenir compte des valeurs vers lesquelles elle se transcende, ce qui conduit évidemment à considérer qu'elle fait le choix inauthentique d'une attitude subjective. Le grand malentendu sur lequel repose ce système d'interprétation, c'est qu'on admet qu'il est *naturel* pour l'être humain femelle de faire de soi une femme *féminine* : il ne suffit pas d'être une hétérosexuelle, ni même une mère pour réaliser cet idéal ; la " vraie femme " est un produit artificiel que la civilisation fabrique

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<sup>128</sup> Beauvoir writes: 'C'est ce qui arrivera dans les cas où l'adolescente se pensera disgraciée, en tant que femme : c'est surtout par ce détour que les données anatomiques prennent leur importance ; laide, mal bâtie, ou croyant l'être, la femme refuse un destin féminin pour lequel elle ne se sent pas douée' (1976 : 197).

<sup>129</sup> Although Krafft-Ebing's typology of inversion focused on subjects such as those discussed in 'La lesbienne' (Storr, 1998: 16), sexological case studies 'are more diverse than this concept of 'inversion' allows' (1998:17).

comme naguère on fabriquait des castrats ; ses prétendus "instincts" de coquetterie, de docilité, lui sont insufflés comme à l'homme l'orgueil phallique ; il n'accepte pas toujours son vocation virile ; elle a de bonnes raisons pour accepter moins docilement encore celle qui lui est assignée. (195)

This argument is notable in its divergence from the French feminist tradition of 'féminitude' (Martel, 1996: 48), whose proponents include Antoinette Fouque (48) and Hélène Cixous (Duchen, 2013: 71). Notably, readers familiar with Cixous' work will recognize Beauvoir's emphasis on a socially enforced dichotomy between man as active subject and woman as passive object (Cixous and Clément, 2008: 63-4). Yet, for Cixous as for Fouque, while external patriarchal discourses construct an image of womanhood, there is an essential womanhood beneath that image.<sup>130</sup> As Frédéric Martel writes, 'Fouque défend l'idée que "le féminin" existe en soi. Pour elle, "on naît femme". Elle est donc en désaccord avec la célèbre formule de Simone de Beauvoir "on ne naît pas femme, on le devient".' (1996: 48). Beauvoir's comments align far more closely with constructionist perspectives, such as that of Judith Butler, than with those of Fouque and Cixous. Consequently, critics who align French feminism with schools of thought focusing on sexual difference not only neglect materialist perspectives such as those of Christine Delphy or Monique Wittig (Bourcier, 2005: 192), but equally overlook or misread Beauvoir.<sup>131</sup>

This passage is also valuable in providing context for 'protestation virile' and in its potential contradiction of other arguments raised in 'La lesbienne'. Rather than positioning femininity as an inherent attitude, to be naturally accepted by women, Beauvoir stresses the constructed dimensions of femininity and the vested interests of patriarchy in positioning femininity as inherent to all women (1976: 195).

Beauvoir then further stresses the refusal of compulsory femininity, suggesting that

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<sup>130</sup> Discussing Cixous' essentialist tendencies, Claire Duchen writes: 'feminist thinkers such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray perceive otherness, the feminine, in terms of understanding the dominant discursive parameters of our time. The coming to life of the feminine would necessarily alter the way we think, open up new possibilities and make oppression in social and discursive practices no longer inevitable' (2013: 71).

<sup>131</sup> In 'Wittig La Politique', Bourcier discusses the construction 'French feminism', arguing that it 'was fabricated in the U.S. academic milieu to designate a troika: Cixous-Kristeva-Irigaray' (2005: 192) and 'contributed to eliding the political multiplicity of different French feminist movements and rendering the materialist feminist trend invisible' (192).

such a rejection is wholly comprehensible: ‘tout naturellement la future femme s’indigne des limitations que lui impose son sexe. C’est mal poser la question que de demander pourquoi elle les refuse : le problème est plutôt de comprendre pourquoi elle les accepte’ (197). Here, the sympathy and outrage in Beauvoir’s tone suggest that ‘protestation virile’ acts to police women’s behaviours, marking them as non-compliant if they stray from maintaining the image of the ‘produit artificiel’ (195) of the ideal woman. Beauvoir even confirms this perspective by noting: ‘elle choisit d’être un individu complet, un sujet[...] si ce choix se confond avec celui de la virilité, c’est dans la mesure où la féminité signifie aujourd’hui la mutilation’ (196). Yet elsewhere in ‘La lesbienne’, ‘protestation virile’ is depicted as an extreme reaction which should be avoided if possible, by tempering one’s masculinity with femininity (198-9).

Although Beauvoir opens ‘La lesbienne’ with a commonplace image of lesbian masculinity – ‘la lesbienne coiffée d’un feutre sec, le cheveu court, et cravatée’ (190) – ‘protestation virile’ is not limited to performance of masculinity through dress. Further, while Beauvoir emphasizes the layered performance of masculinity at work in ‘protestation virile’, noting that ‘elle travestit son vêtement, son allure, son langage, elle forme avec une amie féminine un couple où elle incarne le personnage mâle’ (198), she positions this performance as a surface level ‘comédie’ (198) which reflects the deeper truth of ‘protestation virile’ – a rejection of passivity. It is perhaps noteworthy that the model of active masculinity imitated in ‘protestation virile’ is positioned as necessarily heterosexual. That is, although Beauvoir acknowledges the existence of feminine lesbians (205) and of agential ‘virile’ heterosexual women (198), the masculinity performed in ‘protestation virile’ seems to be incompatible with gay male sexuality. Additionally, while Beauvoir suggests that some heterosexual women follow the ‘protestation virile’ pattern of rejecting passivity (198), she suggests that the overall performance of masculinity applies only to lesbians (198)

‘Protestation virile’ has two clear benefits. First, in exploring the reasons why people other than cisgender men perform masculinity, Beauvoir tends to avoid the pathologizing, biologizing approaches common to sexological accounts. Beauvoir

states that 'il n'existe pas entre les deux sexes de distinction biologique rigoureuse [...] il en résulte l'apparition d'individus intermédiaires entre les mâles et les femelles' (190) – suggesting that the gender binary is a culturally imposed category rather than an organic 'fact'. However, Beauvoir makes it clear that while some intersex people might be placed into the category of women performing masculinity (190-1), biology does not determine gender expression or sexuality (190-1). This argument separates 'La lesbienne' from sexological accounts which stress a belief in 'congenital' inversion as well as 'acquired' inversion (Storr, 1998: 18-9), thereby suggesting that 'La lesbienne' is more progressive than texts positioning inversion as an innate 'abnormality'. However, Beauvoir's rejection of these pathologizing perspectives is undermined by her decision to cite sexological case studies without fully problematizing them (1976: 196; 1976: 204-5). A second benefit of 'protestation virile' is that Beauvoir rejects the positioning of homosexuality as a perversion, and concentrates instead on the structural misogyny which seeks to prevent women from assuming their full identities (193; 195; 197). Feminist readers are thus likely to respond positively to much of the discussion surrounding 'protestation virile' as it pinpoints the demeaning limitations imposed on women (197-8) in patriarchal society, and offers a subtle analysis of male privilege and systemic misogyny (196-8). Throughout much of 'La lesbienne', Beauvoir upends the presupposition that masculine women are abnormal and should be condemned for their transgression of gender norms, arguing instead that the norms themselves are at fault due to their reductive nature (196-8). Significantly, Beauvoir also begins to gesture towards the range of possible genders outside traditional modes of masculinity and femininity (198; 202). While Beauvoir stresses the role of patriarchal gender norms in producing 'protestation virile', she notes that

Un grand nombre de sportives sont homosexuelles ; ce corps qui est muscle, mouvement, détente, élan, elles ne le saisissent pas comme une chair passive ; il n'appelle pas magiquement les caresses, il est prise sur le monde, non une chose du monde : le fossé qui existe entre le corps pour-soi et le corps pour-autrui semble en ce cas infranchissable. On trouve des résistances analogues chez la femme d'action, la femme "de tête" à qui la démission, fût-ce sous une forme charnelle, est impossible. Si l'égalité des sexes était

concrètement réalisée, cet obstacle dans un grand nombre de cas s'abolirait ; mais l'homme est encore imbu de sa supériorité et c'est une conviction gênante pour la femme si elle ne la partage pas. (198)

Here, Beauvoir explores the difficulty of negotiating an expectation of passivity and sexual submissiveness when one has an awareness of one's power or agency, whether in intellectual or physical terms. This leaves readers with the clear impression that the disparity between these expectations is perceived as insurmountable as a result of a rigid, culturally imposed binary between active agency and passive acceptance, both of which are unnecessarily gendered. Equally, Beauvoir succinctly suggests that such expectations stem not from any physiological factors, but result instead from the same socio-cultural conditioning which imbues men with belief in their superiority (198). As Sam Bourcier argues, Beauvoir 'déconnecte la masculinité de toute détermination biologique[...] Beauvoir dit aussi, mine de rien, que la masculinité n'est pas réservée aux hommes' (2006b: 110). At this stage, then, 'protestation virile' benefits from a constructionist approach which does not reduce gender to assumed biological facts, and even gestures towards the recognition of forms of gender and gender expression outside the male/female masculine/feminine binaries. Alongside these notable insights, however, readers encounter instances of hypocrisy, which arguably undermine this chapter's status as a progressive, feminist critique of cisheteropatriarchy. Bourcier explores some telling preferences in 'La lesbienne', such as the text's partiality to the performance of masculinity in controlled quantities by heterosexual women (Bourcier, 2006b: 111) (Beauvoir, 1976: 198-9). Bourcier thus recognizes the shifts between (comparatively) progressive constructionism and reactionary essentialism (Bourcier, 2006b: 110-1) which, in my view, characterize 'La lesbienne'.

Exploring these shifts in the tone and content of 'La lesbienne' leads me to the subversive/reactionary dichotomy which permeates many studies of drag. 'La lesbienne' employs the subversive/reactionary paradigm in fluctuating between positioning 'protestation virile' as a comprehensible, and even valuable, mode of engaging with patriarchal norms (1976: 197-8), and the argument that 'protestation virile', at least in its 'extreme' forms, merits condemnation, psychoanalytic

diagnosis and correction (199; 201; 203). 'Protestation virile', then, occupies a contradictory space, acting as a useful tool to deconstruct patriarchal norms (195-8), yet being characterized as unhealthy and even damaging if it is performed to a degree which Beauvoir perceives as excessive (215). As Bourcier summarizes 's'il est vrai de dire que, pour Beauvoir, "le genre est un projet, une capacité, quelque chose que l'on poursuit, une entreprise voire une industrie", les femmes doivent néanmoins rester des femmes et pratiquer la masculinité à bon escient' (2006b: 110-111). One might argue that Beauvoir struggles between expressing empathy for ways of being which acknowledge and negotiate patriarchal gender norms (198) and disquiet at the idea that, in performing masculinity, 'women' may reject womanhood (214-5). However, in lamenting refusals of heterosexual femininity (198-9) and in policing identities and expression (214-5), Beauvoir injects a grain of essentialism into her constructionist approach.

Bourcier also highlights the disparity between Beauvoir's embrace of ('appropriate') female masculinity within a specific context (197-8), while drawing attention to Beauvoir's hostility to lesbian sexuality (214-5). However, in my view, Beauvoir's speciousness becomes even more apparent when one considers the contradictory positions that femininity occupies in 'La lesbienne'. At first, Beauvoir entwines femininity with women's passivity and their compliance with heteronormative ideals of womanhood (1976: 195-7), and classes it as an artificial and constructed attribute (197; 213). However, as Beauvoir introduces pathologizing dimensions of 'protestation virile', femininity shifts, appearing as a valuable aspect of womanhood which can prevent women from damaging themselves and engaging in destructive behaviour (198-9). This questionable, potentially essentialist, approach to femininity provides a sudden jolt for readers and merits attention to its social and sexual aspects. Beauvoir writes:

la femme dite "virile" est souvent une franche hétérosexuelle. Elle ne veut pas renier sa revendication d'être humain ; mais elle n'entend pas non plus se mutiler de sa féminité, elle choisit d'accéder au monde masculin, voire de se l'annexer. Sa sensualité robuste ne s'effraie pas de l'âpreté mâle ; pour trouver sa joie dans un corps d'homme, elle a moins de résistances à vaincre que la vierge timide. [...] . Dans des circonstances favorables –

dépendant en grande partie de son partenaire – l'idée même de compétition s'abolira et elle se plaira à vivre dans sa condition de femme comme l'homme vit sa condition d'homme.

Mais cette conciliation entre sa personnalité active et son rôle de femelle passive est malgré tout beaucoup plus difficile pour elle que pour l'homme ; plutôt que s'user dans cet effort, il y aura beaucoup de femmes qui renonceront à la tenter. Parmi les artistes et écrivains féminins, on compte de nombreuses lesbiennes. (198-9)

Femininity here is detached from passivity, appearing instead an important part of womanhood; the neglect of which constitutes self-mutilation. The choice to embrace femininity is thus a choice to accept oneself as a whole, without undertaking a futile 'protest', while nevertheless retaining one's agency and remaining an active participant in a 'man's world'. Readers now perceive that while Beauvoir sympathizes with the motivation for 'protestation virile' and the assertion of agency, she disapproves of its practice: a concerted performance of and identification with masculinity. This discussion lessens the chapter's earlier acceptance of non-normative genders (190-1; 195-7), implying that there is only one way to 'vivre dans [la] condition de femme' (199) and that the rejection of (heterosexual) femininity is either reactionary or infantile (198). This dismissal of non-normative gender expression is accompanied by the subtle creation of a hierarchy between heterosexual and non-heterosexual women (198-9). That is, only heterosexual women are seen as capable of retaining agency without 'mutilating' themselves and their femininity. Although it is commendable that Beauvoir rejects certain pathologizing perspectives about homosexuality (190-1; 215), her implication that women 'choose' lesbianism, because they feel it is simply too difficult to negotiate passivity with intelligence and agency, feels like a heterosexist insult.<sup>132</sup> Using George Sand as an example (198-9), Beauvoir implies that the

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<sup>132</sup> It seems possible that Beauvoir struggled with negotiating her own active, 'masculine' intelligence with expectations of 'feminine' passivity (Klaw, 1997: 119-20) and that this rendered her more critical of women who could not achieve this 'conciliation entre sa personnalité active et son rôle de femelle passive' (Beauvoir, 1976: 199). Equally, Beauvoir's experiences in her relationships with women (Best, 2013: 3) may have influenced this aspect of her analysis. Looking at Beauvoir's description of intelligent women who are reluctant to face 'l'humiliation du coït [hétérosexuel]' (1976: 198), it seems possible that Beauvoir felt that relationships between women were less likely to reproduce heteronormative hierarchies of male dominance and female submission and that her

reconciliation of passivity and agency in heterosexual relationships can be facilitated by a woman's assertion of sexual power (198-9). Here, heterosexual relationships with unequal power dynamics are positioned as necessarily preferable to lesbian relationships and outward manifestations of masculinity (199).

Before exploring Beauvoir's hostile characterization of butch masculinity (215), I analyse two further dimensions of Beauvoir's exploration of female masculinity, exploring their benefits and contradictions. When discussing the performance of masculinity outside approved heterosexual contexts (198-9), Beauvoir makes three comments of note. First, despite her homophobic aside that lesbianism, '[e]n tant que "perversion érotique" fait plutôt sourire' (212), Beauvoir acknowledges the impact of homophobic stigma (212):

*S'il y a beaucoup de provocation et d'affectation dans l'attitude des lesbiennes, c'est qu'elles n'ont aucun moyen de vivre leur situation avec naturel : le naturel implique qu'on ne réfléchit pas sur soi, qu'on agit sans se représenter ses actes ; mais les conduites d'autrui amènent sans cesse la lesbienne à prendre conscience d'elle-même. (212)*

This striking passage contrasts with Beauvoir's earlier assertions regarding the value of accepting a passive female role and with her repeated, pathologizing references to bitter, insecure lesbian subjects (199: 204-5; 212). In stressing the frequency with which lesbian desire and embodiment is positioned as 'other' in patriarchal societies, and in alleging that heterosexual people escape this immersion in involuntary alterity, Beauvoir references the concepts we would now refer to as 'heterosexism' and 'compulsory heterosexuality'. Although I contest the implied causal relation between these forms of oppression and aggressive or self-aggrandizing behaviour, this passage reveals Beauvoir's insight into heterosexist systems and reminds readers that behaviour linked to queerness is often placed under a microscope, and treated with hostility. Drag, like 'protestation virile', may be policed due to its association both with queer sexuality and queer or non-normative genders.

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assertion about 'choosing' lesbian relationships results from a projection of these views onto other couples. However, in my view, despite these mitigating factors, this part of Beauvoir's analysis remains somewhat heterosexist and patronizing.

The next point examined here focuses on dress. Whether from pique or an attempt at objectivity, Beauvoir questions whether the performance of masculinity through dress results 'par goût ou par réaction de défense' (212). Beauvoir then acknowledges the possibility of a spontaneous desire to perform masculinity, and highlights the association between femininity and performative excess:

Rien n'est moins *naturel* que de s'habiller en femme : sans doute le vêtement masculin est-il artificiel lui aussi, mais il est plus commode et plus simple, il est fait pour favoriser l'action au lieu de l'entraver ; George Sand, Isabelle Ehberardt [sic] portaient des costumes d'homme ; Thyde Monnier dans son dernier livre dit sa prédilection pour le port du pantalon ; toute femme active aime des talons plats, les étoffes robustes. Le sens de la toilette féminine est manifeste : il s'agit de se "parer" et se parer c'est s'offrir : les féministes hétérosexuelles se sont montrées naguère sur ce point aussi intransigeantes que les lesbiennes : elles refusaient de faire d'elles-mêmes une marchandise qu'on exhibe, elles adoptaient des tailleurs et des feutres secs ; les robes ornées, décolletées leur semblaient le symbole de l'ordre social qu'elles combattaient. (213).

This passage includes three assumptions to unpick and clarify. First, in emphasizing the supposed comparative simplicity and practicality of men's garments, Beauvoir expresses a belief critiqued by Julia Serano (2012: 180): that 'feminine' gender expression is necessarily more artificial and performative than masculine gender expression. The fact that some 'masculine' garments facilitate physical movement does not mean that 'feminine' garments feel unnatural or artificial for their wearers – something which, ironically, Beauvoir recognizes elsewhere in 'La lesbienne' (1976: 213). Second, although Beauvoir references a feminist argument about the perception of femininity as sexually loaded, this conflicts with her earlier insistence on the value of embracing femininity (198). In allotting this position to 'feminine' dress while equally criticising performed 'masculinity', Beauvoir implies that women should embrace a passive, sexual role and should dress accordingly, despite maintaining agency (198-9; 213). This implication is then strengthened by Beauvoir's sly suggestion that contemporary heterosexual feminists have ceased to perform masculinity as 'elles ont réussi à maîtriser la réalité et le symbole a à leurs yeux moins d'importance. Il en garde pour la lesbienne dans la mesure où elle se sent encore revendiquante' (213). Heterosexual feminists, then, have focused on

'real' issues, while lesbians have been left to gripe about clothing. Finally, in linking lesbian masculinity to earlier feminist masculinity, Beauvoir makes an assumption consistent with her diagnosis of protestation virile: that she understands the motivations of lesbians and masculine identified people and that these stem from an anti-patriarchal critique (198-9; 213).

Significantly, there is a valuable dimension to the idea that the performance of masculinity by people other than cisgender men engages with, or critiques, wider societal norms. As bell hooks argues in 'Is Paris Burning?', these performances may shed light on the workings and experiences of gender and power within patriarchy (2009: 275-6). Diane Torr, who organizes 'Man For a Day' workshops on drag kinging and the performance of masculinity, emphasizes this dimension of masculine performance, stressing the value of inhabiting one's body differently and taking up space in a way common to cis(heterosexual) men.<sup>133</sup> Equally, French activist group 'La Barbe' uses the masculine signifier of facial hair to draw attention to male privilege and the continued absence of women in certain professional contexts.<sup>134</sup> In addition to impacting on performance practice and activist practice, this concept of performing-masculinity-as-feminist-critique has permeated scholarship on masculinity and on drag king performance, as Bourcier demonstrates in 'Des "Femmes travesties"' (2006: 124-8). This tendency equally resonates with the perception of drag king performance as potentially subversive: both perspectives centre on a (deliberate or accidental) exploration of existing gender norms and the power dynamics created by these norms. When positioned as a possibility, rather than a necessary factor in the performance of masculinity, this idea of performative critique may operate in a more nuanced manner than the positioning of drag as necessarily subversive. Focusing on a feminist critique on the part of a performer enables one to look at performer intent and the success of the

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<sup>133</sup> The description of the 'Man for a Day' workshops stresses this dimension of performing masculinity, and includes the following comments: 'Maybe during a lifetime of observing men [...] you have a curiosity about how men "get away" with certain behaviors that would be considered undesirable or socially unacceptable in women. You might want to experience the transformation from female to male as a way to intercept your so-called "normal" behavior as a woman, and discover new responses'. More information about these workshops can be found at <http://dianetorr.com/workshops/man-for-a-day-workshop/> (accessed 3 November 2015).

<sup>134</sup> More information about 'La Barbe' and their activist praxis can be found at [http://www.labarbelabarbe.org/La\\_Barbe/Accueil.html](http://www.labarbelabarbe.org/La_Barbe/Accueil.html) (accessed 4 November 2015).

performer in communicating that intent to a wider audience, rather than assuming that this intent creates a successful challenge to existing norms.

Nevertheless, although the anti-patriarchal dimension of masculine performance and drag kinging merits attention, it is somewhat problematic for Beauvoir to assume that the performance of masculinity necessarily springs from this desire to critique. This assumption echoes the positioning of drag as necessarily subversive, as it can falsely homogenize the wide range of individuals who perform masculinity for varying reasons. Although Beauvoir does gesture towards the existence of genders outside cisgender male and female (1976: 191-2; 202)<sup>135</sup>, her repeated insistence on 'protestation virile' undermines the idea that people can identify with genders other than those they are assigned at birth and that this phenomenon does not result from a conscious critique of patriarchy or because of a 'disorder' meriting psychoanalytical treatment (201-3). In neglecting this point, Beauvoir equally overlooks the possibility that people choose to wear garments because they feel comfortable with them, rather than choosing them for convenience (213) or in an attempt to protest compulsory femininity (198-9; 213).

Before reflecting on Beauvoir's analysis of butch masculinity, I briefly concentrate on the term 'protestation virile' and its significance. As Toril Moi points out in her critique of Borde and Malovany-Chevallier's translation of *Le Deuxième Sexe*, 'virile' poses certain problems when translating from French to English:

In most cases the word in French simply means 'manly' or 'masculine', or as *Le Petit Robert* tells us, 'having the moral characteristics often attributed to men: active, energetic, courageous etc'. In the chapter on 'The Lesbian', Beauvoir is constantly made to speak of 'virile' and 'viriloid' women, when she means women who are energetic and enterprising. (2010: 6)

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<sup>135</sup> One instance of seeming acceptance of a wider range of genders occurs in Beauvoir's discussion of Sandor: 'Il semble que sans "protestation virile", de manière la plus spontanée, elle se soit toujours pensée comme un homme, grâce à l'éducation qu'elle reçut et à la constitution de son organisme' (1976 : 202). Although this discussion includes the problematic assertion that Sandor may have had a 'complexe d'Oedipe masculin' (203), it suggests that Beauvoir is aware that 'protestation virile' does not necessarily accompany masculine identity.

However, Moi does not explore the problems posed by the term ‘protestation’, which roughly translates into ‘protest’ in English<sup>136</sup>, or by its proximity to ‘virile’. Two aspects of this term merit particular emphasis here. First, ‘protestation’ seemingly connotes the rejection or refusal of a certain fact or belief (Robert, 2014: 2055) – in this case, the equation of womanhood with femininity and passivity (Beauvoir, 1976: 197-9). These connotations render ‘protestation’ an ideal term for Beauvoir’s concept, acting to reinforce Beauvoir’s references to active women’s refusal to fulfil normative expectations, such as sexual passivity (1976: 198-9). However, as I stressed in reference to Sandor’s case study (1976: 201), this aspect of ‘protestation’ makes Beauvoir’s concept less applicable to masculine identified people who do not deliberately reject femininity but simply gravitate naturally towards masculinity. Second, while the spirit of anger and refusal indicated by ‘protestation’ seems appropriate when Beauvoir questions why women accept the passivity associated with womanhood (1976: 197), this aspect of the term raises questions in the context of Beauvoir’s description of ‘protestation virile’ as a ‘comédie’ (198). At that stage in the analysis, as in Beauvoir’s closing discussion of butch masculinities (214-5), a concept which originated as comprehensible condemnation of systemic misogyny is reduced to a futile, childish spectacle, perhaps even a tantrum.

Overall, then, the term ‘protestation’ is useful in terms of indicating a feminist refusal of a misogynistic status quo, yet it also highlights some of the limitations of ‘protestation virile’ as a whole. That is, ‘protestation virile’ seems to celebrate deliberate performances of ‘masculine’ traits which contest systemic misogyny

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<sup>136</sup> ‘Protestation’ shares many of the characteristics of ‘protest’, but also has some connotations that the English term lacks. *Le Petit Robert* defines ‘protestation’ as follows: ‘**1** Déclaration par laquelle on atteste ses bonnes sentiments, sa bonne volonté envers qq. > **assurance, démonstration.** *Des protestations d’amitié. "Après tant d’amour [...] de protestations ardentes et de serments" MOLIÈRE.* **2** (1283) Déclaration formelle par laquelle on s’élève contre ce qu’on déclare illégitime, injuste. *Protestation écrite, verbale. Rédiger, signer une protestation. Protestation de principe.* **3** (1304) Témoignage de désapprobation, d’opposition, de refus. *Protestation violente, bruyante. Protestation indignée, véhémence. Geste de protestation. "Il remuait lentement la tête de droite à gauche et de gauche à droite, sorte de protestation triste et muette dont il se contenait" HUGO. – Protestation collective de la foule. Mouvement de protestation contre le projet de loi. La mesure a soulevé une tempête de protestations. Être sourd aux protestations, repousser les protestations de qq.* **4** DR. Le fait de dresser un protêt (> **protester**, 4°). **CONTR.** (des 2° et 3°) Résignation ; acceptation, acquiescement, approbation, assentiment’ (2014 : 2055).

(1976: 197-8), while allowing little space for masculinities which resonate with the subject's personal identity (214-5).

I now close my discussion of 'La lesbienne' by exploring Beauvoir's hostile characterization of butch lesbians and of queer women's spaces. Here, misinformation combines with a tone of outrage, producing a vitriolic critique, which, in my view, tarnishes 'La lesbienne' as a whole. Having gestured towards the understandable anger lesbians experience due to living in homophobic contexts, Beauvoir writes:

Cette hostilité complexe est une des raisons qui conduit certaines homosexuelles à s'afficher ; elles ne se fréquentent qu'entre elles ; elles forment des sortes de clubs pour manifester qu'elles n'ont pas plus besoin des hommes socialement que sexuellement. De là, on glisse facilement à d'inutiles fanfaronnades et à toutes les comédies de l'inauthenticité. La lesbienne joue d'abord à être un homme ; ensuite être lesbienne même devient un jeu ; le travesti, de déguisement se change en une livrée ; et la femme sous prétexte de se soustraire à l'oppression du mâle se fait l'esclave de son personnage ; elle n'a pas voulu s'enfermer dans la situation de femme, elle s'emprisonne dans celle de lesbienne. Rien ne donne une pire impression d'étroitesse d'esprit et de mutilation que ces clans de femmes affranchies. Il faut ajouter que beaucoup des femmes ne se déclarent homosexuelles que par complaisance intéressée ; elles n'en adoptent qu'avec plus de conscience des allures équivoques, espérant en outre aguicher les hommes qui aiment les " vicieuses ". Ces zélatrices tapageuses – qui sont évidemment celles qu'on remarque le plus – contribuent à jeter le discrédit sur ce que l'opinion considère comme un vice et comme une pose. (215)

Having gestured towards queer women's comprehensible resentment towards heterosexual norms, Beauvoir condemns one 'reaction' – the creation of spaces for queer women – as irrational and artificial. Readers may question Beauvoir's hostility here. Why does Beauvoir suggest that negotiating heterosexist norms constitutes a tacit acceptance of them or a willingness to submerge oneself entirely within heterosexual society? Here as previously (198-9), Beauvoir implies that a contestation of norms must only be practised to a certain degree, and that to exceed that limit is to invite distress, abnormal development, and falsehood. This

accusation of falsehood merits further study. Beauvoir's antagonistic tone and use of language – consider 'jeu', 'comédies de l'inauthenticité', 'inutiles', 'fanfaronnades', and 's'emprisonne' – promotes the image of butch lesbians as undertaking a pointless, self-aggrandizing protest, and as failing to remain true to themselves. In making this barbed critique, Beauvoir evidently overlooks the possibilities of performativity and the development of identity: butch lesbians are not alone in playing a role, or in shaping their identities through repeated performed actions (Butler, 1999: 189-9). Further, in reducing lesbian masculinity to an inauthentic crusade, Beauvoir contradicts her understated acknowledgement of sexual and gendered identities outside a cissexist binary (190-1; 202), and fails to acknowledge the possibility that the 'cage' of lesbian masculinity may be experienced as a liberation from a binarist insistence on 'proper' womanhood. For Beauvoir, the 'cage' of 'appropriate' womanhood, of which she earlier offered a nuanced critique (195), is evidently preferable to the 'cage', or rather, identity space, of masculine lesbian. Authenticity, then, becomes a tool through which to enforce heterosexist norms of embodiment, expression, and identity, echoing with the accusation that lesbians cannot be 'real women' (Wittig, 1992: 12).

Some 21<sup>st</sup>-century feminist readers may feel disappointed, or even betrayed, by Beauvoir's hostility to butch masculinity and to queer women's spaces, especially in light of the positioning of *Le Deuxième Sexe* as a progressive, even proto-queer, text. Beauvoir's decision to include this passage towards the close of the chapter seems unwise, as it produces the impression that this condemnation is a key part of Beauvoir's 'final word' on lesbian desire and embodiment. Although I do not suggest that scholars should abandon the concept of 'protestation virile' due to Beauvoir's hostility, I contend that as this resentment may have informed Beauvoir's conclusions, readers should approach 'La lesbienne' critically. Overall, however, I suggest that 'La lesbienne' should be recognized, alongside Beauvoir's other work in *Le deuxième sexe*, as a valuable feminist text of its era. Despite its significant faults, 'La lesbienne' succeeds to some degree in breaking away from the pathologizing, medicalized narratives of inversion, choosing to highlight the presence and impact of patriarchal structures and compulsory heterosexuality.

Further, exploring 'La lesbienne' reminds readers of the disparities between Beauvoir's perspective and that of theorists of 'féminitude' (Martel, 1996: 48), such as Antoinette Fouque and Hélène Cixous (Duchen, 2013: 71), thereby drawing attention to the dissimilarity between differing factions of French feminist theorists in relation to the concept of the 'eternal feminine'. While Beauvoir does seem to suggest, at one stage in 'La lesbienne', that an acceptance of feminine roles and sexual passivity can facilitate healthy relationships (1976: 198-9), she nevertheless emphasizes the idea of inherent femininity as patriarchal construction (195-7) and does not posit a belief in insurmountable sexual difference. Finally, as 'protestation virile' provides insight into the anti-patriarchal sentiment which motivates certain rejections of femininity and performances of masculinity (195-8), it could be developed to account for performer intent, and would therefore constitute a subtler and more nuanced approach than those which assume necessary subversion of existing norms.

### **Laure Murat – *La Loi du genre***

*La Loi du genre* offers an historical account of the cultural, legal, and literary constitution of the category 'le troisième sexe' (2006: 12-4), rather than focusing entirely on drag or 'cross-dressing'.<sup>137</sup> However, Murat's text merits close attention here as a result of its mobilization of the subversive/reactionary dichotomy, and due to the insights it provides into the French feminist focus on 'femmes travesties'.<sup>138</sup> Concentrating on the French context, Murat examines the curious opposition between the legality of certain sexual acts<sup>139</sup> and the continued police persecution of LGBTQIA+ subjects, who were targeted under the offenses of 'l'outrage public à la pudeur' (2006: 29) and 'l'excitation de mineurs à la débauche' (29). Murat appreciates the subtleties and complexities of the 'troisième sexe'

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<sup>137</sup> I employ the phrase 'cross-dressing' to designate gender non normative dress and non normative gender expression offstage. My use of inverted commas conveys my critical attitude to this term.

<sup>138</sup> As noted in my analysis of radical feminist perspectives, the Anglo-American feminist trend of positioning 'men's' 'cross-dressing' as misogynistic does not seem to have a direct parallel in the French feminist context. Further, French feminists from Beauvoir (1949) to Bard (2010) have focused on the gender performance of 'femmes travesties', while choosing not to extensively explore travestissement by those assigned male at birth.

<sup>139</sup> '[L]es relations entre personnes de même sexe' were legalized from 1791, until the re-criminalization of 'des actes "contre nature" avec un mineur' in 1942 under the Vichy regime (Murat, 2006: 27-8).

category, recognizing its inclusion of individuals with a wide range of embodiments and desires (13-4; 79; 402-3), including, but not limited to, 'pédérastes' (53), 'travestis' (51), 'lesbiennes' (78), 'transgenres' (400) and 'femmes émancipée[s]' (84). Consequently, Murat approaches 'cross-dressing' from varying angles, drawing attention to its relationship with sexuality (36-42; 78), identity (185-216), and feminist ideals (79-98).

The perception of the 'troisième sexe' category – including drag and 'cross-dressing' – as potentially subversive traverses Murat's text (e.g. 25; 63-4; 78). Introducing this concept, Murat suggests that compiling a history of non-binary possibilities necessitates an analysis of the binary categories of 'male' and 'female' and of their naturalization in language and culture (25). Further, for Murat, such histories constitute 'une histoire politique du genre et des rapports de domination du 'viril' sur le 'féminin' (25) as evinced by women's mobilization of 'culottes' as a mode of contesting patriarchal domination (25). Murat then questions whether 'le "troisième sexe", en essayant de défaire la loi du genre, ne ferait-il que renforcer un système hiérarchique où l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes demeurerait inenvisageable' (25). This provocative suggestion operates as a 'red-herring', employed to engage the reader and encourage them to think further about the topic, rather than as an assertion of a viewpoint. Murat's light ironical tone reappears in the closing discussion of 'La tante et le policier' – a chapter concentrating on (fraught) interactions between law enforcement, and 'pédérastes' and 'travestis' (29-65). Returning to the subversion question, Murat sardonically echoes patriarchal creeds regarding gender norms (63-4), explaining that people who did not conform in terms of gender roles and sexual acts were likely to be perceived as threatening 'la base intouchable de "l'amour naturel" et de la "génération"' (64) and were consequently likely to be subjected to police attention and prosecution (64). In addition to directly referencing 'cross-dressing' (56; 63) and visible deviations from gender role, Murat explores the gendering of sexual acts (63-4), underlining the belief that a divergence from heteronormative sex roles constitutes a deviation in terms of 'appropriate' sexed and gendered embodiment (64). These points invite us to think further about the perception of sexual roles and

the potential positioning of sexual roleplay as a form of drag. The second point to stress here is Murat's approach. Murat's emphasis on the structural aspect of maintaining gender and sexual norms (64) is accompanied by an equal stress on the reductive natures of approaches which are unsettled by perceived deviation (63-4). Although Murat is arguably overly emphatic about the potential of "deviance" to challenge reductive assumptions (64-5), her careful analysis of the assumptions in question reminds scholars to look closely at context when exploring drag or 'cross-dressing'.

This discussion of subversive potential leads neatly to the connections drawn between 'cross-dressing' and women's emancipation (78-9). Murat argues that while 'le pédéraste' and 'son "symétrique", la lesbienne' (79) constitute two aspects of the 'troisième sexe' category due to their 'pratiques sexuelles' (78), the third dimension of this category is occupied by those who deviate from established norms in terms of gender role (78). Murat writes:

Ce peut être, bien sûr, le cas du pédéraste ou du travesti qui, las de se conformer à un idéal de virilité sociale, entend assumer un rôle qualifié de 'féminin'. Mais troquer le métier de maçon contre des travaux d'aiguille, loin d'être aisé, demeure malgré tout plus accessible à un homme que de prétendre, pour une femme, devenir par exemple soldat ou architecte, fonctions qui lui sont *de jure* et *de facto* fermées. Avant de comprendre en quoi les femmes désireuses de s'émanciper formeraient un troisième sexe, force est de revenir à ce qui est premier : qu'est-ce qu'une femme pour le XIXe siècle ? (79)

This passage is arguably slightly biased towards 'femmes travesties' as a result of assuming their alignment with women's emancipation. While I sympathize with Murat's emphasis on the refusal to admit women to a range of professions, the suggestion of a heightened difficulty for 'women' 'cross-dressing' (79) potentially clashes with her earlier comments regarding the police treatment of 'lesbiennes' (76-8) and 'pédérastes' (54-6). For example, when discussing lesbian gender performance (76-7), Murat points out a positive public reaction to "le bel Ernest", who wore 'l'habit masculin' and 'une barbe en point' (77), yet, when referring to 'male' 'travestissement', Murat alights on 'La Élie', whose decision to walk around

Paris ““toujours vêtu en domino rose, coiffé en cheveux avec des perles et des fleurs”” (56) led to their inclusion in the police archives (56).

Turning to *Une histoire politique du pantalon* here provides additional insight into the perceived impact of performer gender. In 1800, an ordonnance from the prefecture in Paris forbade ‘women’ to wear ‘les habits de l’autre sexe’ (Bard, 2010: 70), an ordonnance which did not apply to ‘men’ (74). However, this legislation meant that (some) ‘women’ were able to apply for ‘permissions de travestissement’ (2010: 70), licenses to ‘cross-dress’ which were unavailable to ‘men’ (2010: 74-5). Christine Bard explains perceptions relating to this legal disparity:

Dans le cas du travestissement des femmes, la motivation économique peut être mise en avant, mais pour les hommes, le problème est d’une autre nature. Il s’agit surtout de réprimer les relations homosexuelles visibles dans l’espace public, qu’elles soient monnayées ou pas. Or, pour les deux sexes, l’amalgame est fait entre la transgression du code vestimentaire genré et des pratiques sexuelles déviantes. Le travestissement masculin, quand il est associé à l’homosexualité, est une atteinte au modèle viril dominant (2010 : 74-5)

The legal and cultural codes of the time seem to have condemned ‘men’s’ ‘cross-dressing’ as a result of its (potential) link to homosexuality (Murat, 2006: 68; Bard, 2010: 75), while perceiving ‘women’s’ ‘cross-dressing’ as functioning primarily as an assault on patriarchal gender roles (Murat, 2006: 78). This 1800 ordonnance (Bard, 2010: 70) seems to specifically target ‘women’ seeking male and masculine roles, lending weight to Murat’s argument that it was even harder for ‘women’ to access ‘masculine’ positions than it was for ‘men’ to access ‘feminine’ positions (79). Further, both Bard’s analysis (2010: 74-5) and Murat’s analysis (2006: 78-9) indicate potential reasons for the French feminist focus on ‘femmes travesties’ at the expense of ‘travestis’. That is, the connections drawn between ‘women’s’ ‘cross-dressing’ and emancipation (Bard, 2010: 74-5; Murat, 2006: 78-9) in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century may have encouraged later feminists to explore ‘travestissement des

femmes’, and to continue making such links.<sup>140</sup> Further, the tradition of linking ‘men’s’ ‘cross-dressing’ to gay male sexuality – evident in the police files discussed by Murat (2006: 56; 64-5) – may have led (certain) feminists to position it as less relevant to women’s liberation than ‘women’s’ ‘cross-dressing’.

I now turn to Murat’s analyses of Théophile Gautier’s *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and Rachilde’s *Monsieur Vénus*, drawing on these analyses’ investment in subversion and ‘femmes travesties’. Murat’s exploration of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* considers performance, performativity, and subversion (86-7). For Murat, the text’s emphasis on gender and sex as ‘affaires de discours, d’images et surtout d’imitations répétées’ (86) acts to offer ‘une spectaculaire mise en abyme de ce que Judith Butler a défini comme la “performativité du genre”’ (86-7). This suggestion highlights the text’s insight into the de/construction of binary sex categories, while equally gesturing towards the connection between ‘cross-dressing’ and subversion.<sup>141</sup> By focusing on the impact of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*’s gender performances (84-7) while highlighting performativity (86), Murat suggests that Gautier’s text is invested in the capacity of ‘travestissement’ to challenge norms (86-7). In addition to offering insight into Gautier’s text, Murat encourages readers to consider literary traditions which mobilize the idea of ‘cross-dressing’ by ‘femmes émancipées’ (87-90) – a circumstance which led me to question the extent to which French feminist theorists may have been aware of, or invested in, these literary traditions. Notably, Simone de Beauvoir’s discussion of ‘femmes travesties’ in the context of women’s emancipation (1976: 198-9; 208-9) supports the possibility of a French feminist investment in these traditions, and is also likely to have influenced later feminist texts.

Turning to *Monsieur Vénus*, Murat situates this text in a French literary tradition which concentrates on gender and sexual minorities and on apparent challenges to normative mores (Murat, 2006: 89), but which reasserts established order through

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<sup>140</sup> Bourcier’s ‘Des “Femmes travesties”’ may provide further insight here as it highlights the feminist tradition of linking ‘travestissement’ to emancipation (2006: 124-8), and underlines the sexological positioning of ‘femmes travesties’ as socially motivated rather than sexually motivated (120-3).

<sup>141</sup> In *Gender Trouble*, Butler’s discussion of performativity also raised the potential capacity of drag to challenge heterosexist gender norms (Butler, 1999: 188-92).

the punishment of those perceived as transgressing gender norms (2006: 96). Murat's disappointment when discussing the abrogation of possibilities for challenging gender norms (89; 93) suggests that she is, understandably, invested in such critiques of normative systems. Notably, Murat highlights the contradiction in *Monsieur Vénus* between a rejection of the conflation of sex and gender (91) and the continued assertion of coherence between gender and stereotypical gender roles (91). While interrogating this contradiction, Murat demonstrates a subtle awareness of the role of class in perpetuating the hierarchy between the text's protagonists (91). Encouraging her readers to consider the text's apparent rejection of biological determinism (Rachilde, 2004: 74; Murat, 2006: 91) alongside its emphasis on heterosexuality (Rachilde, 2004: 70-4; Murat, 2006: 90-1), Murat questions the impact of the protagonists' punishment on the text's overall meaning (2006: 93). Despite displaying disappointment about this conclusion (93; 96), Murat ensures that her analysis remains relatively open-ended (90-6), demonstrating the text's capacity to make one think without prescribing an absolute meaning to its exploration of norms.

Overall, *La Loi du genre* is a rich text, offering a wealth of detailed insights into the complex, layered 'troisième sexe' category. Murat encourages her readers to closely examine the varied groups constituting this category, and draws links between them through references to legislation (63-5), medicalisation (186-5), and lived experience (392). My analysis has concentrated primarily on Murat's investment in subversion and her insight into the 'femmes émancipées' (84) category, as these aspects are particularly pertinent to this thesis. However, *La Loi du genre* tackles an extensive range of topics relating to gender and sexual minorities, shedding light on topics from sexological categorization (179-95) to tolerance in contemporary France (399-406). Moreover, Murat's investment in subversion does not dictate her overall perspective: instead, her analyses of dissidence pay careful attention to the impact of context and perception (e.g. 63-5; 400-6).

## **Conclusion**

Each of the works explored in this chapter sheds light on a particular dimension of the feminist response to drag performance, and range from the essentialist and transphobic, such as Raymond's 'Introduction', to the queer and transfeminist, in the shape of Serano's 'Reclaiming Femininity'. Having closed each section with an in-depth discussion of the individual works and the questions they pose, I now conclude the chapter as a whole by reflecting on two themes which permeate each of the works considered. These are, first, the concept of a personal resonance with a form of gender expression; and, second, the subversive/reactionary dichotomy. In exploring these themes, I seek to further elucidate the works themselves, while alighting on central aspects to consider in the feminist theorization of drag.

Each of the diverse texts encountered here engages with the idea of a personal affinity to a form of gender expression, whether staunchly upholding this concept – in the cases of Serano's 'Reclaiming Femininity', and André and Chang's 'And Then You Cut Your Hair' – questioning it – in Beauvoir's 'La lesbienne', hooks' 'Is Paris Burning?' and Murat's *La Loi du genre* – or repudiating it – as in Tyler's *Female Impersonation*, Frye's 'Lesbian Feminism' and Raymond's 'Introduction'. In each case, the position held relates both to the author's perspective on the form of gender expression discussed and, more broadly, to their understanding of gender and its construction. For Frye, and especially for Raymond, the perception of gender as an oppressive construct, and of femininity as the 'paraphernalia of women's oppression' (1983: 138), renders it impossible to believe in any natural resonance with any form of gender expression. In Raymond's case, dismissing this possibility facilitates the further dismissal and erasure of transgender identities (1994: xxi-iv). While offering a potentially more nuanced analysis of oppression than either Frye or Raymond, Carole-Anne Tyler equally dismisses the idea of experiencing a personal resonance with femininity or masculinity (2003: 104-5). For Tyler, the distance between a performer and their role (102-5) – whether on stage or in everyday life – prohibits them from identifying with a given gender expression. Yet, as Muñoz's *Disidentifications* demonstrates (1999: 8-14), identification is more complex than Tyler's work seems to suggest. As individuals cannot be separated

neatly into the categories of ‘the “Good Subject,” who has an easy or magical identification with dominant culture [and] the “Bad Subject,” who imagines herself outside of ideology’ (1999: 12), individuals will have differing relationships with the discourses and norms which seek to apprehend or define them at a given moment.

In my view, the outright rejection of the possibility of identification with, or affinity with, a form of gender expression acts to dismiss or overlook the complexity of identification. Consequently, theories which engage, or wrestle, with this concept seem to me to be more valuable than those which dismiss it outright. The term ‘wrestling’ seems most appropriate when describing Beauvoir’s relationship to this concept. Battling against essentialist conceptualizations of femininity and masculinity, Beauvoir spends much of ‘La lesbienne’ emphasizing the relationship between compulsory femininity and patriarchy (1976: 194-8). Despite Beauvoir’s frequent engagement with sexological case studies (196; 200-2; 204), then, the chapter situates itself sharply on the side of constructionism rather than essentialism. While Beauvoir primarily roots the performance of (female) masculinity in anti-patriarchal critique (195; 197-8; 215), the idea of a personal resonance with masculinity does come into play at least once in the course of ‘La lesbienne’ (202). Discussing the experiences of Sandor, also known as Sarolta (201), Beauvoir writes:

Sandor n’a pas été psychanalysée, mais du simple exposé des faits ressortent quelques points saillants. Il semble que sans "protestation virile", de la manière plus spontanée, elle [sic] se soit toujours pensée comme un homme, grâce à l’éducation qu’elle reçut et à la constitution de son organisme[...] sa virilité était si assurée qu’elle ne manifestait à l’égard des femmes aucune ambivalence : elle les aimait comme un homme (202).

Although Beauvoir somewhat undermines this reference to Sandor’s identity by undertaking a psychoanalytic reading of his identity and practices (203), she curiously “diagnoses” him with a *masculine* Oedipus complex (203). While the discussion of Sandor is somewhat disappointing both due to the fact that Beauvoir seems to perceive him as a rare or unique case (202) and due to Beauvoir’s need to submit him to psychoanalytic scrutiny, it nevertheless demonstrates Beauvoir’s (partial) recognition of his identity and suggests that she understands the possibility

of an affinity with masculinity.<sup>142</sup> Although this moment of recognition arguably clashes with some of Beauvoir's harsher comments on 'protestation virile' (214-5), it does harmonize with her constructionist position elsewhere in the chapter, and her tone remains calm when discussing it. The possibility of a natural affiliation with femininity, however, occupies a more contested place within 'La lesbienne'. As my analysis of Beauvoir's chapter demonstrated, this is not because the chapter's emphasis on femininity as constructed (194-7) clashes with the idea of identifying with femininity, but rather because Beauvoir seemingly pleads with women to avoid 'se mutiler de sa féminité' (198). The latter posits an identification with femininity as necessary for women, rather than merely as a possibility, indicating a more essentialist position, and one which clashes with Beauvoir's perspective elsewhere in the chapter (194-7).

The compatibility of a personal affiliation with femininity and a constructionist perspective also appears in *La loi du genre* and in 'Is Paris Burning?'. Like Beauvoir, Murat rejects the concept of an essential femininity inherent to all women, focusing instead on the impact of cisheteronormative structures on perceptions of gender and identity (2006: 25). Equally, however, Murat recognizes and stresses the significance of personal identity (2006: 397), and gestures towards individual preferences towards particular forms of gender expression (2006: 55-6). The idea of personal resonances with a form of gender expression plays a slightly different role in hooks' chapter. In interrogating *Paris Is Burning*, hooks is markedly suspicious of certain forms of the reification of femininity (2009: 278-80). However, rather than creating a simple opposition between a personal affiliation with femininity and an awareness of patriarchal power structures, hooks encourages her readers to interrogate the type of femininity identified with, looking at the wider potential meanings of these identifications (278; 282; 289). Although I feel that hooks'

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<sup>142</sup> Although I feel that the voices of marginalized people should be included in academic work, my critique of the use of psychoanalysis to elucidate the actions, identities, and beliefs of marginalized people is not a form of absolute subjectivism. Rather, I suggest that subjecting marginalized people to psychoanalytic scrutiny can constitute a further pathologization of groups who have already been pathologized. In this case, Beauvoir's use of psychoanalysis to elucidate Sandor's actions (1976: 202) is somewhat disappointing, as Beauvoir seems to reject Krafft-Ebing's pathologization of Sandor through the typology of inversion, but is willing to 'diagnose' him with an Oedipus complex without his knowledge or consent (202).

necessary critique of ‘brutal imperial ruling-class patriarchal whiteness’ (281) occasionally leads her to be overly dismissive of Drag Ball culture and its participants (282; 288), this analysis remains an essential one. In acknowledging the validity of personal inclinations, we must equally recognize that these inclinations do not exist in a vacuum (Serano, 2012: 181), working outside of patriarchal influence.

I now conclude my exploration of personal inclinations by returning briefly to ‘And Then You Cut Your Hair’ and ‘Reclaiming Femininity’. These two texts are the most positive regarding personal inclinations, and, aside from hooks’ above insight, may provide the most pertinent information in this respect. Both of these texts make it clear that an affinity with a form of gender expression has no necessary correlation with assignment at birth (Serano, 2012: 180-2; André and Chang, 2006: 254; 257), although it may closely connect with gender identity (2006: 257) (Serano, 2012: 180). Chang’s nuanced analysis of their own gender identity and expression (2006: 257) reminds readers that experiencing an affinity towards femininity is not incompatible with experiencing a similar affinity towards masculinity. This insight seems particularly valuable, both in its outright rejection of essentialist understandings of masculinity and femininity, and in its capacity to shed light on the complex identifications experienced by some drag performers – a point to which I will return shortly. The point I want to pick up on in Serano’s text is Serano’s rejection of the concept of femininity as performance (2012: 180). For Serano, this concept can act to dismiss personal inclinations towards femininity, while also contributing to the overall depiction of femininity as necessarily ‘more frivolous, artificial, impractical, and manipulative than masculine gender expression’ (170). However, as I sought to stress in my in-depth analysis of ‘Reclaiming Femininity’, the idea that femininity can include performance – or can be performative, ideas which Serano seems to entangle (179-81) – should not preclude a refusal of personal identifications with femininity.

Looking at the recurrence of this concept in the diverse texts examined here leads me to two significant conclusions. First, as long as one separates this concept of affinity from essentialist assumptions about necessary links between womanhood

and femininity and between manhood and masculinity, it can become a useful resource for scholars of drag performance. It would be wholly reductive to suggest that such an affinity constitutes the sole motivation for drag: to do so would neglect the complex range of motivations at work for each performer. However, as Serano's antipathy to the concept of femininity as performance (2012: 180) indicates, the rejection of personal affinities can equally constitute a form of erasure. A sophisticated, intersectional approach, such as those offered by hooks, Chang, and Serano herself, encourages us to accept the significance of personal inclinations towards a given form of gender expression, while equally questioning the way in which these inclinations operate in relation to wider norms of race, gender, class, and ability. The second key point to emphasize here relates to the value allotted to personal affinities or inclinations. I tentatively suggest that the question of affinities may be one reason for the appeal of and interest in drag performance, both to scholars and audiences. That is, in watching a given performance, audiences may be likely to ask themselves why the performer decided to do drag and whether this decision stemmed from an inclination towards femininity or masculinity. These questions may range from the incredulous – how can a *man* like dressing *like that*? – to the sympathetic – do they do this because they *feel like I do* about femininity? The appeal to scholars, attested to by the texts examined here, might similarly operate on an affective level, but may also be complicated by questions about the compatibility of such affiliations with constructionist analyses or with understandings of drag as engaging specifically with norms.

One key similarity between the following discussion and the above analysis of personal resonances is the importance of affect: the desire for subversion, whether through drag or other practices, can be as closely linked to emotional response as personal resonances with a given gender expression. The first point to elaborate, then, is the centrality of the desire for subversion within feminist theory and praxis, and the frustration created by an assumed lack of subversion. This combination of desire and frustration is evident in the closing passages of Raymond's 'Introduction' (1994: xxxiv-v). In her eyes, "transgenderism" – as Raymond collectively terms trans

embodiment, trans identity, “cross-dressing” and drag – ‘has encouraged a style rather than a politics of resistance, in which an expressive individualism has taken the place of collective political challenges to power’ (xxxiv): from this point of view, the idea of drag as subversive is an inflammatory one, preventing the ‘real challenges’ Raymond desires. Consequently, readers perceive that while Raymond condemns drag and transgender identities, the desire for subversion remains central in her work. An echo of this frustration is visible both in *Female Impersonation* and ‘Is Paris Burning?’. While Tyler’s apparent disappointment at her readings of drag as less than subversive (2003: 105) resonates with Raymond’s outraged position, hooks’ chapter begins to shed light on the flaws and benefits of reading drag as subversive.

Looking at the subversive/reactionary dichotomy as a whole, the three central flaws to pinpoint here are, first, the false generalizations and homogenizations created by the positioning of drag as necessarily subversive; second, the allocation of comprehensive power to individual performances in terms of their capacity to affect structural norms; and, third, the potential creation of a hierarchy between drag as a ‘good’, subversive practice, and other queer performance practices or forms of gender expression as ‘bad’, conformist forms. However, to abandon the categorisation of drag as subversive does not necessitate the total rejection of the possibility that drag can provide sites for ‘construction, invention, change’ (hooks, 2009: 276). Instead, scholars can continue to examine the dimensions of individual performances which might lead them to categorize them as subversive – a (queer or feminist) intent to make others think on the part of a performer, and/or a reconceptualization of norms on the part of one or more audience members – and interrogate the impact of these features, while equally recognizing that these features do not constitute a basis for generalisation.

## **Chapter Three: Exploring Queer Embodiment and Proto-Queer Parodic Strategies in Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus*, Woolf's *Orlando*, and Wittig's *Le Corps lesbien***

This first part of the chapter concentrates on the relationship between drag, parody, and satire. In doing so, I aim to shed further light on the way in which drag can be theorized, and to argue for the explanatory purchase on these texts of what I shall call 'textual drag'. This analytical frame elucidates the way in which Rachilde, Woolf, and Wittig mobilize drag on the levels of form and content, and may be extrapolated from these texts to shed light on the use of parodic strategies in other texts which foreground drag and/or gender performance. I contend that 'textual drag' offers a useful frame for understanding the relationship between parody as an 'intramural' form and satire as an 'extramural' form (Hutcheon, 2000: 43). As 'textual drag' seeks to clarify the relationship between 'intramural parody' (Hutcheon, 2000: 25) and extramural satire (2000: 43) in texts focusing on drag and/or gender performance, it can, in principle, be employed in any text which centres gender and which employs parodic techniques in the service of satire. Here, however, I focus specifically on the potential value of textual drag in the context of Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus*, Woolf's *Orlando*, and Wittig's *Le Corps lesbien*.

One might suggest that literary texts are always already in a form of drag: that they necessarily employ existing forms, techniques, tropes, and language, doing so in such a way as to encourage readers to reflect upon the insights they provide. The idea that texts can engage with other texts, styles and forms, 'putting on' a specific appearance, is by no means a new one. Rather, a range of established terms can enable scholars to understand how this 'putting on' operates in different modes and in different contexts. How then does 'textual drag' differ from parody, pastiche, quotation, intertextuality or 'gestic intertextuality' (Stevens, 2014: 75) and how does this frame specifically elucidate the literary texts examined here? To treat

parody first, I suggest that ‘textual drag’ provides a frame for understanding how distinct forms of parody interact with each other, and with satire, in texts which foreground gender performance, as I will illustrate in an analysis of *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, and *Le Corps lesbien*. In my view, stating that Rachilde, Woolf and Wittig use parody in their work does not account for the interplay between ‘gender parody’ (Butler, 1999: 188) and other forms of parody in these texts, or for the significance of gender parody in readings of these texts as proto-queer. Regarding pastiche, quotation, and intertextuality, I argue that these concepts, while valuable, do not provide readers with the analytical tools offered by parody. My argument mobilizes Linda Hutcheon’s differentiation of parody from pastiche, intertextuality, and quotation (2000: 25). For Hutcheon, the repetition with ironic distance, which characterizes parody (2000: 32), is absent in these other forms.

Before exploring the frame of textual drag, however, I want to introduce the texts examined here – *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, and *Le Corps lesbien* – and the concepts employed to elucidate them. These texts are diverse in terms of their historical, social and aesthetic contexts: *Monsieur Vénus* was written in 1884, during the period of the French Third Republic (Hawthorne, 2001: 90); *Orlando* was written over forty years later in Woolf’s personal context of the Bloomsbury group, and in the wider context of post-war England in 1928 (Harris, 2011: 81; 2011: 89), and *Le Corps lesbien* was penned in 1973, at the height of Wittig’s involvement in the post-1968 French feminist movement Le Mouvement de libération des femmes (MLF).<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> I suggest that *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, and *Le corps lesbien* were each shaped by their contexts to varying degrees. In Rachilde’s case, the repressive publishing laws at work in the French Third Republic meant that *Monsieur Vénus* was first published in Belgium (Hawthorne, 2001: 90), wherein it was banned and its author subjected to a fine and the threat of imprisonment (2001: 90). As Melanie C. Hawthorne stresses, this scandal provided Rachilde with a significant amount of publicity (2001: 90-97) and may even have been contrived by Rachilde (2001: 90). Additionally, as I stress later in this chapter, the particular context of literary Decadence – which Rachilde seemingly mocked (Downing, 2012: 210) and celebrated due to her participation in it (Hawthorne and Constable, 2004: xiii-xiv) – influenced *Monsieur Vénus* (2004: xiv) and enabled Rachilde to engage with questions of gender and sexuality. Woolf’s personal life and reading seem to me to have had a significant influence on *Orlando*. The text is dedicated to, and to a large extent, shaped around, Woolf’s lover, Vita Sackville West (Woolf, 2008: 4), while its mobilization of, and revolutionary attitude to the biographical form (2008: 13), seems indebted both to her father, Leslie Stephen (Bowlby, 2008: xxi-xxii), and her friend Lytton Strachey (Harris, 2011: 104). The significance of an author’s life and reading to their text can also be seen in *Le Corps lesbien*. Wittig’s involvement in the feminist movement Le Mouvement de libération des femmes (Martel, 1996: 26), in the radical Front homosexuel d’action révolutionnaire (1996:25-6), and in the lesbian, feminist group les Gouines

Further, there is a significant disparity in the way in which these authors situated themselves in relation to feminism and LGBTQIA+ literature and scholarship. Notably, Rachilde avowed a manifest antifeminism in *Pourquoi Je ne suis pas féministe* (1928: 6-7) and, despite supporting contemporary gay writers (Hawthorne and Constable, 2004: xvii), made occasional disparaging remarks about homosexuality (Hawthorne, 2001: 223). Woolf, however, ‘worked for women’s suffrage’ (Kermode, 2008: viii) and emphasized the importance of financial and personal freedom for women in ‘A Room of One’s Own’ (Woolf, 2008b: 123), a text in which she also vocally supported lesbian relationships (2008b: 108-9). Finally, Wittig, a central figure in feminist and lesbian activism in the 1970s (Martel, 1996: 55-6), created a body of ‘materialist lesbian’ (Wittig, 1992: xiii) thought in which she critiqued compulsory heterosexuality and its impact on minority subjects (e.g. Wittig, 1992: 28-32). Despite these notable disparities in context and authorial perspective, however, *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, and *Le Corps lesbien* each foreground gender, critically engage with pervasive gender norms, and employ textual strategies to facilitate this exploration. As I will demonstrate here, the interplay between textual strategies and feminist critique enabled me to develop the concept of ‘textual drag’, a concept which sheds light on the strategies at work in the texts considered, and which may provide further insight into the literary representation of drag performance as a whole. Further, each of these texts engages with gender, sexuality, and identity, shedding light on their potential relationships: issues which are often at the core of theoretical analyses of drag performance.

Providing a fuller account of my selection of these texts, I turn first to *Monsieur Vénus*. As in the case of the other texts examined here, the treatment of gender and sexuality in *Monsieur Vénus* resonates with insights provided in some of the theoretical responses to drag that are discussed elsewhere in this thesis. For example, Jacques’ original reluctance to embrace his femininity – resulting both

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rouges (55-6) shaped her materialist lesbian perspective (Wittig, 1992: xiii-iv), which in turns shapes *Le Corps lesbien*. Further, as I stress later in this chapter, Wittig ‘borrowed and intertextualized’ (Wittig, 2005: 46) a range of canonical texts in *Le Corps lesbien* (e.g. Wittig, 1973: 11-3), rewriting these from a lesbian perspective (1973: 11-3).

from his internalized misogyny (Rachilde, 2004: 90) and from patriarchal strictures about 'appropriate' gender performance – may remind readers of Julia Serano's thoughtful analysis of the interdiction of male femininities in 'Reclaiming Femininity' (2012: 179-180). Equally, in intertwining Jacques' developing identification with femininity (Rachilde, 2004: 94) with his submissive attitude to the controlling, manipulative Raoule (2004: 112-3), *Monsieur Vénus* raises questions about the relationship between drag, identity, and sexuality, and invites comparison with the contemporary sexual practice of forced feminization. Analysing the relationship between Jacques and Raoule can therefore remind readers of drag's capacity to draw attention to patriarchal power relations<sup>144</sup>, while emphasizing the error made by scholars such as Marilyn Frye when they link drag performance unequivocally with gay male sexuality (Frye, 1983: 137-8).

Unlike *Orlando* and *Le Corps lesbien*, however, *Monsieur Vénus* merits attention in that it demonstrates that satire can operate in a text, even when its author dismisses the idea that the text constitutes a critique. In addition to indicating her internalized misogyny (Rachilde, 1928: 7), Rachilde's *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe* acknowledges the positioning of *Monsieur Vénus* as a feminist text, while simultaneously refusing the classification of herself as a feminist: a position which she presents as having been allotted 'malgré moi' (1928: 8). Rachilde's provocative tone in *Pourquoi* (e.g. 1928: 7) and her evasion of a single subject position – whether that of virgin or of Decadent pervert (Hawthorne and Constable, 2004: xv) – might encourage readers to question whether her anti-feminist stance can be taken at face value. However, rather than seeking to confirm or disprove Rachilde's anti-feminism, readers should approach *Monsieur Vénus* as a text which, irrespective of its author's intentions, foregrounds patriarchal gender norms, thereby carrying out what Hutcheon would describe as 'extramural satire' (Hutcheon, 2000: 43).

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<sup>144</sup> That is, as in the case of *Monsieur Vénus* – which initially received a negative reception as it depicted a masculine woman who held 'an enormous, and for a nineteenth-century public, worrying power over her male lover' (English, 2006: 218) – representations of drag frequently depict exaggerated and/or non-normative gender expression or performance (e.g. Rachilde, 2004: 112), which can invite comparison with 'appropriate' patriarchal gender roles and their associated norms.

Turning to *Orlando*, one of my central reasons for selecting this text is its capacity to negotiate drag alongside gender fluidity (Woolf, 2008: 206-12). In appearing as ‘the very figure of a noble Lord’ (2008: 207) in order to escape the constraints imposed on her as a gentlewoman in eighteenth-century England (2008: 205-6), Orlando deliberately performs masculinity. However, in addition to witnessing this stylized performance of masculinity (207), readers encounter a protagonist who, while markedly identifying with womanhood and with feminism (150-4), provides a strong impression of gender fluidity (212; 243-6). The inclusion of both gender fluidity and exaggerated gender performance creates a layered complexity in *Orlando*; herein, readers encounter a model of drag which, like Beauvoir’s ‘protestation virile’ (1976: 193), engages critically with patriarchal limitations on women’s freedom (1976: 198; Woolf, 2008: 149-53), yet which equally ensures that fluid identities are not subjected to erasure (2008: 211). Further, by featuring a protagonist whose identity is complex (212; 246) and who performs both exaggerated masculinity (207; 212) and exaggerated femininity (148-9), *Orlando* begins to deconstruct the assumption that drag necessarily consists of a person performing the role of the “opposite sex”. The gendered plurality depicted in *Orlando* prefigures questions raised in the work of Sam Bourcier – who critiques the ‘opposite sex’ paradigm and the practice of assuming the gender of a drag performer in ‘Des “Femmes travesties”’ (2006: 127-32) – and that of Sandy Chang – who emphasized the participation of non-binary people in drag performance (André and Chang, 2006: 265-6), while discussing race, femininity and genderqueer identity with co-author Amy André in their article ‘And Then You Cut Your Hair: Genderfucking on the Femme Side of the Spectrum’. As intimated by my reference to Beauvoir alongside Bourcier and Chang here, *Orlando* provides a multi-layered, proto-queer critique; one which is not limited to a particular ‘wave’ or body of queer feminist thought. That is, Orlando’s diverse experiences enable her to reflect on the structural misogyny at work in patriarchal gender roles (Woolf, 2008: 152), while equally gesturing towards the value of a broader approach to the possibilities for gendered embodiment (2008: 212; 246). Further, *Orlando*, like both *Monsieur Vénus* and *Le Corps lesbien*, co-opts and modifies existing literary and narrative strategies alongside its critique of existing norms and systems. In the cases of

*Monsieur Vénus* and *Orlando*, these parodic strategies may mean that readers seeking either a Decadent text or a literary fantasy, respectively, encounter objects and concepts that they may not have expected to come across. Further, as I contend here, these parodic strategies strengthen and enrich the critiques offered by all three of the texts considered.

This leads neatly to my introduction to Wittig's *Le Corps lesbien*. My choice of *Le Corps lesbien* was partially motivated by this text's capacity to broaden one's understanding of 'drag' as a concept. In *Monsieur Vénus* and *Orlando*, readers encounter characters whose actions and sartorial choices enable them to perform exaggerated forms of masculinity and femininity<sup>145</sup> as well as perceiving the textual appropriation which accompanies these performances.<sup>146</sup> In *Le Corps lesbien*, however, the protagonists, j/e and tu, assume the identities of canonical male, heterosexual heroes, drawn from classical (Wittig, 1973: 11-3), Biblical (1973: 138), and mythical (87) contexts. This process, which Wittig describes as 'lesbianizing' (2005: 47), arguably stretches the boundaries of drag as it is most frequently conceptualized, as j/e and tu transform the roles of their heterosexual counterparts (Wittig, 1973: 11-3). However, as in theatrical drag, and specifically, celebrity impersonations, Wittig's process of 'lesbianizing' (2005: 47) involves the deliberate enactment of exaggerated, gendered personas, and, like the drag performance discussed in *Gender Trouble* (1999: 187), this process constitutes a critical foregrounding of roles, which can enable readers or audience members to rethink their assumptions about gender.<sup>147</sup> Further, as a text which carefully mobilizes canonical figures (Wittig, 1973: 11-3; 86-7) with the explicit aim of 'attacking the

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<sup>145</sup> Orlando, Raoule and Jacques all engage in drag in their respective texts, with each performing exaggerated gender roles and deviating from 'appropriate' gender expression. My references to sartorial choices include Jacques' attempt to seduce Baron de Rattoilbe 'en costume de femme' (2004: 199) and Raoule's appearance as a 'jeune homme' (2004: 99) when visiting Jacques. Equally, Orlando decides to dress as 'the very figure of a noble Lord' (2008: 206) in order to escape the limitations placed on her as an eighteenth-century English gentlewoman (2008: 205).

<sup>146</sup> Parodic textual appropriation, in terms of narrative voice, narrative style, and intertextual referencing, is at the centre of my discussion of *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, and *Le Corps lesbien*, providing one key dimension of my concept of textual drag.

<sup>147</sup> Catherine Rognon-Ecarnot shares this view about the transformative power of Wittig's fiction, writing: 'Lorsque la locutrice du *Corps lesbien* prononce les paroles du Christ ou que les guérillères adoptent les postures héroïques des héros de *L'Illiade*, le mythe d'identité sexuée comme la prétention à l'universalité du sujet masculin s'effacent au profit d'un sujet qui ignore la différence sexuelle tout en exhibant le caractère dialogique de son discours' (1999 : 6).

order of heterosexuality in texts' (Wittig, 2005: 47) *Le Corps lesbien* beautifully illustrates the interaction between intramural parody (Hutcheon, 2000: 43) and extramural satire (43) which I discuss through the frame of textual drag. That is, Wittig's mobilization of heroic figures (1973: 11-3) acts both as an in-text parodic commentary on the centrality of heterosexual men in canonical literature, and to foreground and critique what Wittig refers to as 'the straight mind' (1992: 29) – a series of pervasive, interconnected discourses which maintain compulsory heterosexuality.

In the above, I have referred to certain key concepts, such as 'textual drag', 'extramural satire' (Hutcheon, 2000: 43) and 'intramural' parody (43), gesturing towards their relationships to the texts considered here. However, before demonstrating how these concepts elucidate *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, and *Le Corps lesbien*, it seems pertinent to introduce these concepts more fully. I first return to Judith Butler's concept of 'gender parody' (1999: 188), outlining this concept and illustrating how it can be consolidated with other forms of parody in a given text or performance. Butler develops her concept of gender parody in an analysis of 'the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities' (188), arguing that these practices, and drag in particular, 'reveal[...] the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence' (188). That is, for Butler '*in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency*' (188, italics in original). Further, Butler is careful to stress the point that the 'notion of gender parody defended here [in *Gender Trouble*] does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is *of* the very notion of an original' (189). Two significant aspects arising from Butler's discussion of gender parody (186-9) merit attention here: reception and intent. Butler centres the concept of reception in her discussion of gender parody, emphasizing the significance of 'recognition' (187), its impact (187-8), and the 'pleasure' (187) experienced by an audience member on the realization that 'causal unities' (187) between sex and gender are socially constructed (187-8). In this way then, gender

parody can occur due to the response and perception of an audience member; the performance itself provokes this recognition, but it is the audience member who, witnessing the performance, realizes its capacity to shed light on pervasive assumptions about sex and gender. While reception plays a crucial role in Butler's analysis of gender parody, intent is by no means absent from this discussion. In asking '[w]hat performance where will invert the inner/outer distinction and compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presuppositions of gender identity and sexuality' (189), Butler places the content and context of a performance, and the intent of the performer, at the forefront of the discussion of gender parody. As Butler's emphasis on reception indicates (187-8), a performance without the specific intention of 'denaturalizing' sex and gender can still provoke an audience member to think about masculinity, femininity, and their relationship to sex and/or identity. Nevertheless, whether we are exploring onstage drag or drag in a literary context, the intentions of the performer or author can influence the workings, and perception of, that performance. Consider Jen Powell's performance of their drag king character, Adam All. Loveably awkward, Adam attempts to perform hegemonic, macho masculinity, yet frequently fails in this performance due to his love of 'feminine' objects and activities, such as flowers or dancing. Aiming to critique narrow, hegemonic models of masculinity, Jen performs Butlerian gender parody (187-8), alerting audiences to the idea that there are diverse possibilities for masculinity and that being masculine does not necessitate a rejection of 'feminine' qualities. Watching Adam's performance, a viewer could begin to question 'the cultural configurations of causal unities that are assumed to be natural and necessary' (187); recognizing first, the lack of necessary connection between assigned sex and gender (187) and, second, the possibility for 'gender meanings' (188) which differ from hegemonic masculinity or hegemonic femininity. In the case of Jen's performance then, we recognize that gender parody can operate on two levels; that of intent, led by the performer, and that of reception, led by the viewer. Reading Butler's exploration of gender parody, one encounters a form of parody which engages with external, hegemonic, gender norms – norms, perspectives, and discourses occurring outside the level of the performance. As Butler's theory of

gender parody is informed by contemporary drag performance (186-9), and as it engages with Fredric Jameson's distinction between parody and pastiche (188-9), one might assume that 'gender parody' would harmonize with Linda Hutcheon's theory of parody, developed in relation to twentieth-century art forms (2000: 18-9). However, when looking more closely at Hutcheon's conceptualization of parody as 'intramural' (2000: 25), it is clear that gender parody cannot be contained within parody as Hutcheon categorizes it, and must therefore constitute a separate, if potentially overlapping, form. For Hutcheon, parody 'in its ironic "transcontextualization" and inversion, is repetition with difference. A critical distance is [also] implied' (2000: 32). While Hutcheon's emphasis on 'repetition with difference' (32) arguably harmonizes with gender parody, Hutcheon is careful to stress her understanding of parody as intramural (2000: 25; 2000: 43). That is, for Hutcheon, parody has 'a restriction of focus: its repetition is always of another discursive text. The ethos of that act of repetition can vary, but its "target" is always intramural in this sense' (43). To turn briefly to 'ethos', Hutcheon's argument that parody can have 'a range of pragmatic "ethos" (ruling intended effects)' (26), is, in my view, a significant advantage of Hutcheon's theory of parody. In opening up the concept of parody to include a range of ethos, Hutcheon detaches parody from the assumption that it must necessarily include ridicule (41), thereby providing scholars with the language to discuss forms of 'ironic transcontextualization' (32) which do not include that particular form of mockery. Notably, however, Hutcheon's emphasis on 'repetition with difference' (32) and on parody as intramural (25) – as engaging with (an)other discursive text(s) – ensures that the concept of parody remains clear and that it is not extended to the point of confusion with other forms. As I will demonstrate shortly, Hutcheon makes a marked distinction between intramural parody and satire, which she defines as 'extramural (social, moral) in its ameliorative aim to hold up to ridicule the vices and follies of mankind, with an eye to their correction' (43). Notably, this definition of satire will further clarify the dissimilarity between intramural parody and Butlerian gender parody. Before discussing this further, however, I want to illustrate the way in which intramural parody can operate in relation to onstage drag, and to address Hutcheon's distinction between parody and pastiche (34). In the case of onstage drag,

established performance styles, whether adapted from a film, music video, or composite celebrity image, can arguably constitute 'discursive texts' (43) as they include specific, recognizable characteristics which performers can choose to mobilize. Thus, when a drag performer re-enacts such styles and their associated actions, doing so 'with difference' and critical distance, they perform intramural parody as defined by Hutcheon. Further, as 'critical ironic distance' (34) characterizes intramural parody, performances which meet these criteria may also constitute gender parody as developed by Butler (1999: 188). That is, by presenting a modified version of a recognizable performance style, a given performance could encourage a viewer to question heteronormative gender constructions.

As celebrity impersonations and textual allusions can both be undertaken in a spirit of homage, as well as operating with critical distance, it seems pertinent to engage with Hutcheon's differentiation between parody and pastiche (34). As Hutcheon argues, the extension of 'parody' to include a wider range of ethos may complicate the distinction of parody from pastiche, particularly if this means that pastiche can no longer be categorized as necessarily 'more serious and respectful than parody' (38). Hutcheon's nuanced, wide-ranging study of parodic forms leads her to distinguish parody from pastiche on the basis of approach rather than ethos; while both parody and pastiche 'are formal textual imitations [and] clearly involve the issue of intent' (38), parody aims for 'differentiation in its relationship to its model; pastiche operates more by similarity and correspondence' (38). Hutcheon illustrates this point as follows:

Pastiche usually has to remain within the same genre as its model, whereas parody allows for adaptation; George Fourest's sonnet on Corneille's play *Le Cid* ("Le palais de Gormaz...") would be a parody, rather than a pastiche *à la manière de Corneille*. Pastiche will often be an imitation not of a single text [...] but of the infinite possibilities of texts. It involves what Daniel Bilous [...] calls the interstyle, not the intertext. But, once again, it is similarity rather than difference that characterizes the relationship between the two styles. Parody is to pastiche, perhaps, as rhetorical trope is to cliché. In pastiche and cliché, difference can be said to be reduced to similarity. This is not to say that a parody cannot contain (or use to parodic ends) a pastiche: Joyce's "Oxen of the Sun" episode, with its wide range of virtuoso

stylistic imitations, would be a most obvious example (Levin 1941, 105-7). (Hutcheon, 2000: 38)

This passage raises three points which merit particular attention here. First, in providing this nuanced, detailed distinction between parody and pastiche, Hutcheon avoids the slippage between these forms without resorting to a characterization of parody as necessarily including ridicule. The slippage between, or conflation of, parody and pastiche seems to me to be present both in Fredric Jameson's 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' and in Ramona Curry's 'Madonna from Marilyn to Marlene: Pastiche and/or Parody'. At the start of his discussion, Jameson clearly demarcates parody from pastiche (1998: 131), suggesting that pastiche is 'like parody, the imitation of a particular or unique style[...] but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's satirical motive, without laughter' (1998: 131). However, Jameson's pessimistic emphasis on the lack of possibility for stylistic innovation (132) in a postmodern context leads to an overlap between parody and pastiche; as he believes that only imitation is possible in this context, parody collapses into pastiche (132). Equally, in arguing that the aspects of Madonna's image which are 'constructed as pastiche [...] also function as parody' (1990: 16), Curry's article seems to me to occasionally conflate the two forms, and to deprive pastiche of a clear meaning in and of itself.

Hutcheon's definition thus enables scholars to separate pastiche from parody by analysing the relationship between a given 'formal textual imitation' (2000: 38) and its model text, thereby providing further insight into the workings and effect of that imitation. Second, in my view, Hutcheon's argument that a parody can mobilize pastiche for parodic ends (38) has the capacity to elucidate both literary and onstage drag. Onstage, a celebrity impersonation might be enacted solely with the spirit of homage, aiming for similarity rather than difference, and would therefore constitute pastiche as Hutcheon defines it (38). Equally, however, a performance in which parody predominates might equally mobilize pastiche, as for example by paying homage to a particular style or image while poking fun at the way in which that image has been mobilized. This question of mobilizing pastiche for 'parodic ends' (38) within a literary context brings me to my third comment on the above

passage. When reading Hutcheon's above differentiation between parody and pastiche, one must be careful not to focus on the issue of 'interstyle' (38) at the expense of the question of similarity versus difference. As I will demonstrate in relation to the careful, parodic mobilization of Decadent tropes in *Monsieur Vénus*, a text should not be categorized as pastiche simply because it engages with a style rather than with a single text. Rather, one should concentrate on the relationship between a given text and the text or style it mobilizes: as Hutcheon summarizes, 'in Genette's [...] terms, pastiche is imitative, parody is transformative' (Hutcheon, 2000: 38). For example, in the case of *Monsieur Vénus*, Rachilde does not simply create 'one more Decadent novel' (Downing, 2012: 201), but deploys Decadent tropes with difference as part of a wider critique, thereby creating parody as opposed to pastiche.

Parody's capacity to intersect with both irony (2000: 55-6) and satire (57-8) may act to further distinguish parody from pastiche. While parody can vary in its 'ruling intended effects' (26), both irony and satire have a marked, critical ethos (56). Thus, these forms would be somewhat unlikely to appear in the context of a pastiche, as to include them might disrupt the similarity between the pastiche and its model text. Satire, to which I now turn, constitutes a central dimension of this discussion. This is the case for two reasons: first, an awareness of satire's functions can further elucidate intramural parody and gender parody; and, second, as I will demonstrate, satire frequently intersects with these forms in *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, and *Le Corps lesbien*.

Having characterized parody as intramural (25), Hutcheon questions how parody can be conflated with satire, which she describes as 'extramural (social, moral) in its ameliorative aim to hold up to ridicule the vices and follies of mankind with an eye to their correction' (43). Looking at Butler's concept of gender parody in light of this differentiation, one recognizes that gender parody could be seen to confuse parody with satire. That is, gender parody can be positioned as 'extramural (social, moral)' (43) in its effect, as it encourages the viewer to reconsider their assumptions about gender and its positioning in patriarchal contexts (Butler, 1999: 186-9). Here, I want to demonstrate what it means to position satire as 'extramural' (Hutcheon, 2000:

43), illustrating how this positioning can affect analyses of parody and satire and of the texts in which they feature.

For Hutcheon, the ‘obvious reason for the confusion between parody and satire, despite this major difference between them, is the fact that the two genres are often used together’ (43).<sup>148</sup> Significantly, in illustrating how these two forms interact, Hutcheon provides her readers with further insight into their workings and into the distinction between them:

In *Love and Friendship*, Austen parodies the popular romance fiction of her day and, through it, satirizes the traditional view of women’s role as the lover of men. Laura and Sophia live out pre-patterned literary plots and are discredited by Austen’s parody of Richardson’s literary “heroinization” and its presentation of female passivity[...] Along with Mary Shelley, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, and other women writers, Austen used parody as the disarming but effective literary vehicle for social satire. (2000: 44)

Thus, if we do not differentiate between extramural and intramural, we deprive ourselves of the vocabulary to discuss how parody might work independently of satire, and vice versa. That is, if the word ‘parody’ is employed both to signify a play with textual strategies and to designate a social critique, one of these meanings may get lost, or become inappropriate, in an attempt to discuss the other. Further, the classification of parody as intramural and satire as extramural does not act to rob parody of its critical function, as one might initially fear. To return to Hutcheon’s Austen example (44), the parodic appropriation of the romance narrative facilitates the text’s overall satirical critique regarding roles imposed on women. While the parody is therefore directed at a particular narrative style – and is thus an intramural strategy – it functions to strengthen and clarify extramural satire. The concept of textual drag, which I develop in this chapter, enables me to discuss how intramural parody intertwines with extramural satire in texts which foreground gender performance, and especially those which foreground drag. While Butler’s analysis of gender parody allows one to recognize how images of

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<sup>148</sup> The major difference to which Hutcheon refers here is that ‘parody is not extramural in its aim; satire is’ (2000: 43). That is, for Hutcheon, parody always engages with the norms and conventions of another discursive text (43), while satire engages with norms which occur outside of a discursive text.

drag can provoke a consideration of identity and embodiment (1999: 187-8), it cannot fully account for the way in which those images can interact with textual strategies to provide a 'vehicle for social satire' (Hutcheon, 2000: 44). Thus, Hutcheon's exploration of extramural satire separates satire from its contemporary association with ridicule, and acts to provide scholars with the analytical tools to approach textual relationships between intramural repetition and 'extramural (social, moral)' (43) critique.

Intertextuality, like satire, has points of similarity with parody. The definition of intertextuality is noteworthy here, as I contend that although Rachilde, Woolf, and Wittig each deploy intertextual strategies in their respective texts, these references constitute parody, rather than acting as intertextuality per se. I thus want to emphasize parody's capacity to include features which seem to be lacking in intertextuality. Hutcheon contests the definition of intertextuality as 'a purely formal category' (37), arguing that intertextuality, like parody, involves both the text and a decoder 'who can activate the intertext' (37). Despite focusing on the role of the decoder, however, Hutcheon equally rejects models of intertextuality, such as that of Roland Barthes<sup>149</sup>, in which 'the reader is free to associate texts more or less at random, limited only by individual idiosyncrasy and personal culture' (37). Hutcheon therefore builds on the work of Michael Riffaterre, arguing that 'the text in its "structured entirety" (1978, 195n) demands a more conditioned and therefore more limited reading' (Hutcheon, 2000: 37). Initially, this definition of intertextuality may seem to resonate with the mobilization of textual references in the literary works explored here. Consider *Le Corps lesbien*: as Wittig stresses in 'Some Remarks on *The Lesbian Body*' (2005: 46), her use of fragments from canonical texts (e.g. Wittig, 1973: 11-3) aims for the 'conditioned' reading suggested by Hutcheon, rather than permitting a free association between texts. Wittig states that she 'could borrow from these texts on the condition that they were assimilated into the reader's mind with violence' (2005: 46); that is, these texts can only operate in the context of *Le Corps lesbien* due to having been severed

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<sup>149</sup> For further details of Barthes' definition of intertextuality, see Barthes, *The Pleasure of the text*, (Barthes, 1975: 35-6, cited in Hutcheon, 2000: 37).

from their original hetero-patriarchal contexts, and mobilized instead to become 'pliant to my idea of a tension between the "you" and the "I"' (2005: 47), the lovers at the centre of *Le Corps lesbien*. Despite illustrating the concept of a 'conditioned and therefore more limited reading', however, Wittig's description places her strategies within the category of parody, rather than that of intertextuality. That is, as Hutcheon argues, parody constitutes 'a more extreme example' of this conditioned reading 'as its constraints are deliberate and, indeed, necessary for its comprehension' (2000: 37). Further, 'parody demands that the semiotic competence and intentionality of an inferred encoder be posited' (37). Parody is thus marked by intentionality and by 'repetition with difference' (32) in a way which is seemingly absent in intertextuality. Consequently, in referring to the intertextual strategies at work in *Monsieur Vénu*s, *Orlando*, and *Le Corps lesbien* as parodic, one acknowledges the critical ironic distance which permeates these texts.

Having explored Hutcheon's definition of intertextuality (37), I now situate my analysis of parody alongside Lara Stevens' concept of 'gestic intertextuality' (2014: 75), a term developed in the context of Elfriede Jelinek's *Bambiland*, a play engaging with and critiquing the Western media depiction of the Iraq War (Stevens, 2014: 73), and which thus is marked both by intentionality and critical distance (2014: 73-6). In exploring 'gestic intertextuality', I negotiate Brechtian 'gestus' and its role in Stevens' concept (2014: 75-88), and begin to illustrate the particular value of 'textual drag' for the literary works examined in this chapter. Recognizing the potential value of Brechtian 'gestus' to elucidate Jelinek's digitized, postmodern play, Stevens seeks to adapt gestus, 'a strategy created for actors' (2014: 75) to create a mode of 'thinking about intertextuality' (2014: 75). In addressing 'gestus' and its applicability to *Bambiland*, Stevens reminds readers that

Brecht defines *gestus* as a relationship *between* people[...] Brecht also claims that *gestus* is more than an isolated bodily gesture, rather it can be expressed in any form of intersubjective behaviour between characters, particularly those of different classes. *Gestic* language, for example, reveals a character's attitude to another character through their choice of words and mode of address. The *gestus* reveals a character's social status in a

manner that should subtly illuminate their history and the broader social context that brought about their class-specific behaviour. (2014: 75, italics in original)

While '*gestus* traces how humans relate to one another' (Brecht, 2013: 271) and sheds light on their particular context, Brecht equally encouraged actors to employ *gestus* 'in order to self-consciously 'show' that they are acting out the part of the character and are not unified with that character in the seamless way a naturalist or realist performance suggests' (Stevens, 2014: 75-6). It is this mode of 'showing' without immersing viewers in identification with a particular character (76-7) that Stevens analyses in *Bambiland*.<sup>150</sup> However, as Stevens stresses, Jelinek's play, whether staged or in digital form (77), differs radically from the theatrical forms in the context of which Brecht developed the concept of *gestus* (77). Emphasizing Brecht's belief in the importance of creating new forms in order to deal with changing social realities (Brecht, 2013: 48; Stevens, 2014: 77), Stevens explains that 'gestic intertextuality' can provide scholars with the resources to discuss 'twenty-first century dramatic forms that challenge many historical dramatic conventions' (77). Stevens continues:

While the idea of *gestus* as a gesture and a gist that captures social relations between two people was appropriate to a world before the 'society of the spectacle', the idea of gestic intertextuality updates the Brechtian term to make it relevant to the complex networks of social and power relations in a mediatized, digitized and globalized world. (77)

In Hutcheon's terms, then, 'gestic intertextuality' might provide a mode of discussing how intramural parody – the mobilization of 'media soundbites' (73) and quotations from *Aeschylus and the Persians* (73) in Jelinek's *Bambiland* – contributes to the particular extramural satire at work in *Bambiland*; a work which aims to 'show a gap between the 'appearance' of the war as it is 'put on' by the mainstream media and the violence and suffering of its everyday realities' (73). The concept of a textual 'appearance – that which is put on the literary subject matter'

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<sup>150</sup> For Brecht, it is essential that actors do not become immersed in identification with the characters they perform. Rather, 'an actor must remain a demonstrator; he must present the person demonstrated as a stranger, he must not eliminate the 'he did that, he said that', element in his performance. He must not go so far as to be *completely transformed* into the person demonstrated' (Brecht, 2013: 179)

(72), developed in a reading of Jelinek's essay 'Zu Brecht', is, in my view, one of the most valuable dimensions of Stevens' article. This concept provides a clear illustration of the way in which literary strategies, and intertextuality in particular, can shape both the surface and meaning of a given text. Further, this idea of 'putting on' immediately resonates with my concept of textual drag; both terms suggest a sense of artifice and construction as both negotiate the way in which a textual surface is modified to reflect and strengthen the text's content and message. Like this chapter, Stevens' article engages with social critique, intertextuality, and Hutcheon's theory of parody (Stevens, 2014: 74), yet, due perhaps to the subject matter of *Bambiland*, Stevens' approach to the question of 'that which is put on the literary subject matter' (72) differs from my own. Two such differences in approach merit attention here. First, Stevens and I diverge in the meanings we allot to the concepts of intertextuality (74) and parody (79). When first approaching intertextuality, Stevens argues that 'postmodern fiction has frequently employed a self-conscious or metafictional intertextuality through the use of plagiarism, quotation, pastiche or parody, formal devices that Linda Hutcheon argues can augment a novel's political critique' (74), yet she equally builds on Julia Kristeva's understanding of intertextuality, which Hutcheon rejects (2000: 37). Kristeva's valuable work on semiotics and intertextuality (e.g. Kristeva, 1987: 65-72) resonates particularly with Stevens' approach due to their mutual emphasis on the concept of the mosaic, on which Kristeva focused (1987: 66) and which Stevens mobilizes to examine Jelinek's focus on textual surfaces (2014: 75; 77). Stevens' use of Hutcheon's work, however, is somewhat more problematic. On one level, the above reference to Hutcheon reminds readers of the significance of Hutcheon's insights into the relationship between textual strategies and 'political critique' (Stevens, 2014: 74; Hutcheon, 2000: 43-9) – a relationship Hutcheon examines through the concepts of intramural parody and extramural satire (43). Equally, however, Hutcheon clearly demarcates parody from plagiarism (25), quotation (15), and pastiche (38), situating each of these concepts differently in terms of their relationship with satire. Stevens' lack of differentiation between these concepts, combined with her conflation of Hutcheon's approach to

intertextuality with Kristeva's more formal definition (2014: 74), means that Stevens somewhat oversimplifies Hutcheon's perspective (Hutcheon, 2000: 37).

The second central difference between Stevens' approach and my own relates to our mobilization of intertextuality and parody in relation to our subject matter. As demonstrated here, Stevens combines intertextuality with Brechtian *gestus* to develop an approach to Jelinek's *Bambiland*, exploring the interplay between textual strategies and 'political critique' (2014: 74) within that text. However, as Stevens' above reference to Hutcheon's work (74) intimates, gestic intertextuality does not engage with the relationship between parody and satire, but instead mobilizes Brecht's work to talk about the political and social dimensions of *Bambiland* (83-4). In fact, despite her reference to its critical capacity (74), parody remains undertheorized in Stevens' article. Consequently, while 'gestic intertextuality' remains an insightful concept in the context of *Bambiland*, it would be unlikely to translate to *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, or *Le Corps lesbien*. These texts, which mobilize intramural parody alongside extramural satire, concentrate on gender and performance, and therefore merit an approach which sheds light on each of these elements. Although it was developed to account for Jelinek's political critique (73), 'gestic intertextuality' does not prioritize the analysis of gender or heteropatriarchal systems, and is therefore potentially unsuitable for the exploration of these texts. Contrariwise, the frame of textual drag was specifically established to account for the relationship between intramural parody and extramural satire in texts which foreground gender and gender performance. In the same way in which Stevens' concept immediately draws readers' attention to Brechtian *gestus* (2014: 72-3), the association between drag and gender performance enables the term 'textual drag' to foreground issues of gender and of performance within a given text. Like gestic intertextuality, the frame 'textual drag' seeks to shed light on the surface meaning 'put on the literary subject matter' (74) through the manipulation of textual codes, yet equally aims to encourage readers to scrutinize the mobilization of gender in a given text, whether in terms of its use of stereotypical roles, gender expression, gender identity, or gender performance.

## **Elucidating *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, and *Le Corps lesbien* through the frame of 'textual drag'**

In order to illustrate the efficacy of textual drag, I now return to the concepts of pastiche, intertextuality, intramural parody, and extramural satire, placing these in a dialogue with the texts considered here. This will enable me to demonstrate how the frame of 'textual drag' can elucidate the relationships between parody, satire, and gender in *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, and *Le Corps lesbien*. I first explore *Monsieur Vénus*, explaining why this text's mobilization of Decadent tropes (e.g. Rachilde, 2008: 88-9; 184-5; 200) and sexological discourses (e.g. 2008: 25-6) constitutes intramural parody as opposed to pastiche, and analysing the intersections between Butlerian gender parody, intramural parody, and extramural satire within this novel.

*Monsieur Vénus* is perhaps unlikely to be categorized as a parodic work if one follows definitions in which the parody necessarily acts 'to cast ridicule' (Jameson, 1998: 130) on the model text; although Rachilde's writing mobilizes and unsettles Decadent tropes, it does not mock the 'excessiveness and eccentricity [of Decadent discourses] with respect to the way in which people normally speak or write' (130). However, Hutcheon's argument that parody can act to 'inscrib[e] continuity while permitting critical distance' (2000: 20) liberates parody from its association with ridicule, and thereby enables scholars to use the valuable resources of parody to elucidate Rachilde's text. That is, recognizing that the strategies at work in *Monsieur Vénus* operate as parodic appropriations sheds light on the workings of these strategies, allowing me to build on Lisa Downing's argument that, in Rachilde's work, 'inversion', murder, and sexual 'perversion' 'are not just Decadent received ideas being presented again, uncritically, in one more Decadent novel' (2012: 201). Rather, *Monsieur Vénus* samples and rewrites Decadent tropes and sexological discourses in addition to undertaking the intertextual appropriation typical of its era (Gantz, 2005: 116-7). Further, acknowledging the parodic dimension of Rachilde's textual strategies will enable me to map the relationship between these strategies, the text's marked imagery of gender performance, and its critical foregrounding of contemporary gender norms.

I concentrate now on the parodic mobilization of Decadent tropes and sexological typologies in *Monsieur Vénus* (Gantz, 2005: 119; 126-7), analysing its critical disruption of normative discourses of gender performance in the context of the masculine, aristocratic protagonist, Raoule de Vénérande, and her feminine, submissive lover, Jacques. As Katherine Gantz points out, it is Jacques, the working class, feminine artist that Raoule seduces into becoming her mistress (Rachilde, 2004: 89), who appears to fulfil the sexological category of invert (Gantz, 2005: 126-7). Jacques' initial discomfort at being referred to as Raoule's wife (Rachilde, 2004: 90) swiftly disappears as he becomes more comfortable with his submissive role in their relationship, at which point he accepts Raoule's use of feminine pronouns to describe him, playing the role of cosseted, capricious mistress (98), and refusing to accede to the respectable status of Raoule's husband as this would rob him of the position of 'esclave, celui que vous appelez ma femme' (113). Notably, while Raoule deploys the classic language of inversion to describe Jacques<sup>151</sup> – remarking to her former suitor, the Baron de Rattoilbe, 'il existe mon ami, et ce n'est pas même une hermaphrodite, pas même un impuissant, c'est un beau mâle de vingt-et-un-ans, dont l'âme aux instincts féminins s'est trompée d'enveloppe' (75) – her own character equally incorporates aspects characteristic of sexological typologies and case studies. Raoule's handsome, chiselled features (2004: 19), her rejection of conventional femininity (70-1), her desire for Jacques' 'womanly' idealized beauty (18-9; 42), and her masculine self-positioning as her aunt's 'nephew' (38) seemingly place her within the sexological category of 'invert' (Storr, 1998: 16). Further, on the surface level of the text, Raoule's psychosexual development seemingly corresponds with the sexological model of 'perversion' as acquired through a childhood event, which provokes 'a disturbance in the otherwise normal development of an individual who has suffered damaging influences of some kind'

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<sup>151</sup> As Katherine Gantz points out, the image of Jacques as a person 'dont l'âme aux instincts féminins s'est trompée d'enveloppe' (Rachilde, 2004: 75) corresponds both with the sexological category of inversion (see note 149 below for further details of these resonances) and with the contemporary narrative frequently attached to transgender and transsexual experience – that of a person 'trapped in the wrong body' (Gantz, 2005:126). It is useful to note two additional points, however. First, this 'wrong body' narrative has been challenged by trans activists and scholars for its reductionism, and second, that while valuable, Gantz' categorization of Jacques as a 'fin-de-siecle prototype of the postmodern transsexual menace' (2005: 126) does not fully consider the impact of Jacques' relationship with Raoule on his gender and sexuality.

(1998: 15). Equally, Raoule's 'perverse' sexual appetites – such her desire for, and exertion of, power over her submissive lover (Rachilde, 2004: 89), or her suggested role as the penetrative party during sexual intercourse (2004: 211) – combined with her intense physical sensations and capacity to bring herself to orgasm (19) position her within the celebrated nineteenth-century category of hypersexual, neurotic woman (Gantz, 2005: 118-9). However, I contend that Rachilde's mobilization of these sexological tropes is not what it may initially seem to be. Encountering the malleable, submissive, feminine, Jacques (e.g. Rachilde, 2004: 112) one readily perceives the applicability of sexological theories, as Jacques' developing feminine identification (e.g. 94; 131; 199; 211) clearly echoes Krafft-Ebing's typology of inversion (Storr, 1998: 16).<sup>152</sup> However, while Jacques' gender fluidity and identification with femininity should not be discounted by scholars of *Monsieur Vénius*, Raoule's manipulative attitude, violence (2004: 132), and abuse of power (158) equally play a significant role in Jacques' transformation from working class artist (13-5) to cosseted mistress (98). When scrutinizing the text, one perceives that Raoule's skilful manipulation of the people surrounding her – such as the pious aunt whom she persuades into facilitating her marriage with Jacques (163), Jacques himself, and the former hussards officer Baron de Rattoilbe, with whom she arranges Jacques' murder (200) – directly mirrors the text's, and Raoule's own (72-4), parodic appropriation of sexological (25-7) and Decadent discourses. Consider the episode of Raoule's scandalous childhood reading matter. Here, Raoule, having discovered an unnamed book (26), undergoes an immediate change of

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<sup>152</sup> Storr analyses Krafft-Ebing's typology of acquired inversion (1998: 16), stressing the four distinct stages of this 'metamorphosis' (16). The first stage includes a person's desire for someone of their 'own sex', yet suggests that the 'man will continue to take the active role in sex' (16). As little is revealed about Jacques' desire prior to his meeting with Raoule (Rachilde, 2004: 9), the first stage of this typology may not seem to present an accurate description of him. The second and third stages, however, do resemble Jacques' development (2004: 94), and it is also noteworthy that Jacques' development equally seems to follow 'stages', rather than constituting a sudden and absolute change. The second stage of inversion is described as follows: 'the subject's personality is transformed, so that he becomes passive and feels like a woman during sex: this stage is known as 'eviration' ('defemination in women) and resembles congenital inversion' (Storr, 1998: 16). Jacques certainly undergoes a transformation in personality as his relationship with Raoule develops; his original reluctance to be addressed as a woman disappears (Rachilde, 2004: 90), his femininity develops (2004: 94), and he becomes invested in performing the role of Raoule's mistress (112-3). Further, Jacques' sexual passivity is suggested both by his position during a sexual encounter with Raoule (184-5), and due to the fact that Raoule's wax model, which contains Jacques' teeth and hair taken from his body after death (209), has a mechanism which simultaneously opens the model's mouth and spreads its legs (211).

temperament, beginning to show alarming, ‘hysterical’ symptoms: ‘[s]a physionomie s’altéra, sa parole devint brève, ses prunelles dardèrent la fièvre, elle pleura et elle rit tout à la fois’ (26). When seeking a reason for Raoule’s episode, the reader’s attention is initially drawn towards the pathologizing narrative of a young doctor, one of the physicians consulted regarding Raoule’s change of temperament: ‘Ou nonne, ou monstre! Le sein du Dieu ou celui de la volupté! Il vaudrait peut-être mieux l’enfermer dans un couvent puisque nous enfermons les hystériques à la Salpêtrière ! Elle ne connaît pas le vice mais elle l’invente!’ (27). This passage’s repeated use of exclamation marks, its reference to the infamous asylum, its proximity to Raoule’s hysterical episode and its resonances with Raoule’s later self-positioning as an exceptional woman driven by desire (70-4), combine to suggest the narrative’s adherence to the sexological model of perversion. However, when examining a passage which occurs shortly before Raoule’s encounter with the scandalous text (27), one begins to perceive Raoule’s capacity to exceed and manipulate the sexological categories which seek to confine her:

A cette époque un éducateur perspicace eût déjà découvert dans l’enfant des germes vivaces de toutes les passions. Intrépide autant que volontaire, elle ne pliait jamais sans un raisonnement froid qui faisait tomber la férule sur elle-même. Elle apportait à la réalisation d’un caprice une ténacité effrayante et charmait les institutrices par l’explication lucide qu’elle donnait de ses folies. Son père avait été un de ces débauchés épuisés que les œuvres du marquis de Sade font rougir, mais pour une autre raison que celle de la pudeur. (25)

This passage suggests that Raoule possessed the traits of wilfulness, intelligence, and the capacity to manipulate, as a child, as well as during her adult years (e.g. 2004: 20; 65; 200). Although the narrative does not provide an exact account of Raoule’s lucid reasoning for her actions, the juxtaposition between this comment and the reference to her father’s unusual appetites gesture towards a relationship between her wilful, manipulative nature and her (potentially inherited) ‘perversion’.<sup>153</sup> Further, this emphasis on Raoule’s passionate, stubborn,

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<sup>153</sup> The perception of ‘perversions’, such as ‘inversion’ (Bristow, 1998: 88), or hysteria (Rosario, 1997: 135), as potentially hereditary (in certain cases) was developed and debated in sexological literature. Symmonds, a contemporary of sexologist Havelock Ellis, criticised Krafft-Ebing’s early work on

manipulative nature may act to unsettle or contradict the image of her as a 'pure', vulnerable, fragile young woman who would be violently emotionally disturbed when encountering a pornographic text. The interpretation of the young Raoule as an agential figure, capable of manipulating discourses to her own advantage is supported by her depiction throughout *Monsieur Vénus*. Contemporary readers, even those who are encountering this text for the first time, may respond cynically to the sexological explanation for Raoule's hysterical episode and subsequent development, and not only due to the misogyny inherent in this explanation. At this early stage in the text, readers have not only witnessed Raoule's violent desire and heightened sensory experiences (19), but have equally seen her calculated manipulation of her pious aunt, during a scene in which Raoule pretends to have witnessed the death of a child in order to avoid a social commitment (20), and in which she abuses her aunt's piety in order to facilitate her seduction of Jacques (21). Equally, although readers might initially accept a sexological reading of Raoule as having been damaged by this youthful episode, the emphasis on her childhood wilfulness (26), combined with her adult propensity for manipulation and calculated violence (200-1) begins to disrupt this surface-level narrative of cause and effect. Thus, at this early stage of the novel, readers of *Monsieur Vénus* can start to recognize the subtle intramural parodies, and indications of extramural satire, which permeate its narrative. That is, while seemingly reiterating contemporary patriarchal responses to Raoule's developing 'perversion' – in the form of the sexological explanation, the young doctor's tirade (27), and the clerical demand for Raoule's immediate marriage (26) – the narrative equally confronts readers with a wilful protagonist, who has avoided the proposed confinements of both marriage (26) and nunhood (27), and instead has physical freedom (9; 18-9), active desire (19), and a degree of financial independence (13-5).

The sense of the narrative – and Raoule herself – as manipulating discourses of authority heightens as the plot of *Monsieur Vénus* unfolds. In order to illustrate

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hereditary perversion, arguing that 'one of the main shortcomings of hereditarian thought is the way it mistakenly invokes an infinite regress to an unknowable origin from which the pathology must have sprung' (Bristow, 1998: 88). Despite the criticism of theories of degeneration as hereditary, however, these degeneration discourses had a significant impact in nineteenth-century France (Rosario, 1997: 77) and may have been familiar to Rachilde's readers.

this, and to further demonstrate the pertinence of the concept of textual drag, I first analyse the parodic appropriation at work in Raoule's performances of masculinity, exploring the intersection between Butlerian gender parody (1999: 188) and Raoule's ironic repetition of existing modes of Decadent 'perverse' masculinity (Rachilde, 2004: 99; 112-3; 200). As emphasized both throughout this chapter, and in the excellent analyses of Rachilde's work by Lisa Downing (2012: 196-201), Katherine Gantz (2005: 115-8), and Melanie Hawthorne and Liz Constable (2004: ix-xxvi), *Monsieur Vénus* situates itself within literary Decadence, while equally playing with and challenging the conventions of that genre (Downing, 2012: 200-1; Gantz, 2005: 116-8; Hawthorne and Constable, 2004: xx-xxiv). It is thus characteristic that Raoule, as the intelligent, wilful protagonist of a text which employs parodic 'repetition with critical distance' (Hutcheon, 2000: 18), partakes in the French decadent 'game of rewriting' and manipulating established plots (Gantz, 2005: 116). As the text develops, Raoule's play with existing conventions operates both at the level of speech (Rachilde, 2004: 65-75) and at the level of gender performance (99), on which I concentrate here. Raoule enters the text as a striking, rather than beautiful, woman, with delicate bone structure and a feline air (19), who, despite being described in somewhat androgynous terms (19), is keen to order an elaborate, feminine costume for an upcoming ball (10-11). However, having decided to create 'un amour tout neuf' (72), Raoule gradually performs increasing levels of masculinity within both the public and private domains (99). This 'new' model of 'love' constitutes a strategy to induce dependency on the part of a beautiful young man, shaping him to increase his feminine traits, and creating an 'ideal beauty', 'un être à son image' (99), who would depend entirely on his powerful, female lover (73-4; 112). As Hawthorne and Constable emphasize, Raoule's desire to mould Jacques constitutes a differently gendered version of the classic Pygmalion narrative of male artistic lover and his mistress, the woman-as-work-of-art (2004: xxii). However, as readers will recognize, the gendered complexity at work in Raoule's relationship with Jacques (e.g. 94-5; 112-3; 184-5) offers more than simply a reversal of the Pygmalion narrative.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Engaging with Rachilde's parodic appropriation of the Pygmalion myth in *Monsieur Vénus*,

The marked androgyny and masculinity which Raoule deliberately enacts throughout the text – her forceful dominance (64), her refusal of conventional femininity and female sexuality (70-3), and her insistence on linguistic masculinity (38) – merge with a progressively masculine appearance (19-20; 99; 172) as her power over Jacques develops. Raoule’s progressive masculinity and increasing dominance interact with the text’s ironic iteration of sexological narratives of perversion (24-6), gesturing towards the patriarchal associations between maleness and masculinity (91-94), and between masculinity and power (89; 91-94; 200). In this way, looking at the text’s parodic appropriation of conventional, patriarchal narratives (24-5; 112) not only provides insight into Raoule’s parodic behavioural strategies (e.g. 74; 99) but equally indicates why, in a patriarchal society, ‘perverse’ masculinity may be experienced as a necessary outlet for a wilful, wayward woman (24-5; 74). The analytical frame of textual drag thus becomes particularly useful here: to describe *Monsieur Vénus* as a parodic text might indicate its manipulation of textual conventions, yet this description would provide little insight into the interaction of such references (24-5; 72-5; 150-1) with the text’s mobilization of gendered imagery, or its implicit critique of patriarchal power structures (75-6; 112; 155).

My reference to gender performance as parody or parodic appropriation operates on two levels here. As intimated by the connection between Raoule’s creation of a new ‘perversion’ (73) and her increasingly masculine appearance, Raoule performatively cites canonical models of Decadent masculinity in her gender presentation – as for example, when she arrives at Jacques’ apartment dressed entirely as a stylish young man (99) – and gesture, through the use of sadistic violence (132) and an abusive use of intellectual and financial power (61-3; 89). This parodic performance of masculinity acts on the intramural level (Hutcheon, 2000:

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Hawthorne and Constable write: ‘It soon becomes clear that Raoule is a female Pygmalion who fashions from Jacques a corporeal ideal of male beauty after her own desire, “a being in her own image.” Her “possession” of Jacques entails a switch of the conventional gendering of mind/body and creator/creation divisions’ (2004: xxiii). While this rewriting is indeed central to the narrative of *Monsieur Vénus*, Rachilde does not simply invert the myth in binary gendered terms. Rather, Rachilde inscribes this myth with critical distance, depicting Jacques and Raoule as individuals with complex gendered identities (e.g. 2004: 75; 94; 130-131; 184), thereby encouraging readers to recognize the clear margin between patriarchal expectations of gender and sexuality and the multi-layered way in which these forms play out in relation to the individual.

18), echoing with Decadent and proto-decadent depictions of the rich, powerful, abusive male lover, such as those featuring in the works of Charles Baudelaire and the Marquis de Sade<sup>155</sup>, yet repeating them with difference both as a result of Raoule's gender and of her somewhat ironic insistence on the novelty of her model of vice (72, 75). Here, the reader is subjected to parody's 'knowing wink' (Hutcheon, 2000) in that Raoule's behaviour echoes patriarchal iterations of 'proper' masculinity (Rachilde, 2004: 99; 200), yet equally disrupts the pervasive patriarchal order in which 'l'homme possède, la femme subit' (92).<sup>156</sup> This leads me to the second type of parody at work in Raoule's performance, that of Butlerian gender parody (1999: 188). As in the examples of drag and butch/femme stylization in *Gender Trouble* (187), Raoule's performance of masculinity constitutes a deliberate strategy; a performance which increases in intensity as she becomes more committed to her relationship with Jacques and her exertion of power over him (Rachilde, 2004: 89; 2004: 94-5; 2004: 200). Moreover, in the context of the text's marked engagement with patriarchal strictures regarding 'appropriate' gender presentation (70-3; 91-5), Raoule's performance encourages readers to consider gender construction, its relationship with external norms, and its separation from the, equally constructed, category of biological sex (204; 210; Butler, 1999: 188-92).

In emphasizing the connections between Raoule's deliberate performances of masculinity, the narrative's parodic engagement with sexological discourses (Rachilde, 2004: 25-6) and its critical foregrounding of contemporary gender norms (2004: 91-5), my above analysis has begun to outline the value of 'textual drag' as a frame. In order to further demonstrate this frame's capacity to elucidate *Monsieur*

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<sup>155</sup> Both Sade and Baudelaire operate as significant references throughout *Monsieur Vénus*, both as a result of the textual echoes of their imagery – such as the text's rewriting of Baudelaire's concept of sterile, cold, ideal beauty, as emphasized by Hawthorne and Constable (2004: xiv) – and, in Sade's case, through a direct reference (2004: 25) which acts to position the unnamed book (referred to only as 'un livre' (2004: 26)) discovered by Raoule as an exceptionally perverse text.

<sup>156</sup> Chapter VII, in which this phrase occurs, provides an excellent example of the interaction between gendered imagery, intramural parody, and extramural satire in *Monsieur Vénus*. In the first pages of this short chapter (2004: 91-4), the narrator emphasizes 'la loi naturel' (92) in which 'le rôle inférieur que sa conformation impose à la femme dans l'acte générateur, éveille évidemment une idée de joug d'asservissement' (92), yet as the chapter finishes, the narrator remarks on a 'feminizing' change in the man of today (94), rendering him susceptible to the woman's power (94). The narrator then concludes the chapter by stating baldly that 'Raoule de Vénérande possédera Jacques Silvert (94) – a circumstance which becomes increasingly evident in the forthcoming chapter (94-108).

*Vénus*, I now turn to Raoule's parodic, self-aware manipulation of existing literary discourses (70-4), drawing attention to the impact of this intramural parody on the satirical engagement with gender norms which permeates the text as a whole. My focus here will be a conversation between Raoule and the Baron de Rattoilbe (70-4), in which the wilful protagonist convinces her former suitor to collaborate with her in the seduction and manipulation of Jacques.

Two of the central objects of my enquiry – the text's foregrounding of gender norms and Raoule's capacity to mobilize conventions in order to manipulate those around her – permeate this conversation from its beginning (65). Justifying her extreme lateness and last-minute changes to their prior meeting plan, Raoule calms the irate, uncomfortable Baron by positioning herself within the stereotype of irrational, unreliable woman: 'Rien ne doit vous étonner, puisque je suis femme, répondit Raoule riant d'un rire nerveux. Je fais tout le contraire de ce que j'ai promis. Quoi de plus naturel!' (65). As Raoule emphasizes her masculinity throughout the majority of *Monsieur Vénus*, readers readily perceive her deliberate mobilization of a category from which she normally distances herself. When the Baron responds, his fury present yet beginning to subside (66), readers realize that Raoule's choice of tone was calculated, correctly, to dispel an argument and thereby to increase her likelihood of obtaining his help in her seduction of Jacques (70-4). As the conversation progresses towards Raoule's aim, the narrative builds an atmosphere of desire and intrigue through cumulative proto-queer textual and historical references. These allusions include *Amphitryon* (67), whom Zeus impersonates in order to seduce the former's wife (Hawthorne and Constable, 2004: 67 n23); Henri III of France, 'famous for his "mignons" (minions or favourite) and [...] often invoked as a coded reference to male homosexuality' (2004: 68 n24); the novelistic 'noms profanes, Parny, Piron, Voltaire, Boccace, Brantôme' (Rachilde, 2004: 68) present in Raoule's library, and, among them, 'les ouvrages invouables' (69) – presumably pornographic literature. When the narrative has whetted the audience's appetite for 'perversity', Raoule begins her confession to Rattoilbe, noting '*je suis amoureux*' (69) – a statement which, in contrast to her earlier self-positioning as a capricious woman, underlines her masculinity through its use of the

masculine grammatical form. Partially in response to this linguistic emphasis, Rattoilbe ironically comments 'Sapho!... Allons, [...] je m'en doutais. Continuez, *Monsieur de Vénérande*, continuez *mon* cher ami !', to which Raoule responds

Vous vous trompez, Monsieur de Rattoilbe ; être Sapho, ce serait être tout le monde ! Mon éducation m'interdit le crime des pensionnaires et les défauts de la prostituée. J'imagine que vous me mettez au-dessus du niveau des amours vulgaires ? Comment me supposez-vous capable de telles faiblesses? (70)

As Lisa Downing has stressed (2011: 17), this passage does not disrupt a reading of *Monsieur Vénus* as proto-queer, as Katherine Gantz feared it might (2005: 124-5).<sup>157</sup> That is, in separating herself from lesbian desire, Raoule is not necessarily engaging in lesbophobia, but is instead emphasizing her self-positioning as an exceptional woman, a pioneer of a new vice (Rachilde, 2004: 71), and is consequently stressing her contempt for any form of sexuality which allows her to be categorized as ordinary in any way (70-3). While Sappho's works would not have been unknown to late nineteenth-century readers (Downing, 2013: 17), the positioning of lesbian desire and prostitution as insufficiently perverse operates as another instance of parody's 'knowing wink' and as a mode of gesturing towards extramural satire. Raoule's decision to distance herself from these forms of sexuality presents an 'ironic repetition' of the sexological argument that literary works including homosexual desire present a moral contaminant and may even promote degeneration (Rosario, 1997: 104). Further, these ironic references to Sappho's works (Rachilde, 2004: 70, 73), and to the discourses that might invoke them as a warning, contribute to the text's extramural satire as they foreground the restrictive morality of the nineteenth-century society in which *Monsieur Vénus* plays out. Returning to Raoule's self-positioning as 'exceptional', this dimension of her argument becomes increasingly evident as she continues her impassioned confession, supporting her argument through additional parodic uses of intertextuality (70; 71; 73; 74), two of which I want to emphasize here. First, Raoule

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<sup>157</sup> Downing writes: 'However, as Margaret Reynolds (Reynolds, 2000; 2003) has shown, Sappho and Sapphism were fashionably *outré* tropes at the end of the nineteenth-century in Europe, such that Raoule's comment should be interpreted not as hostility or indifference to a form of relationality and a set of practices between women, but rather as the rejection of an (over-determined) sexual label – a 'brand' – in search of the genuinely new' (2011: 17).

simultaneously consolidates her masculinity and her status as sexual pioneer, passionately declaring that 'A présent, mon cœur, ce fier savant, veut faire son petit Faust... il a envie de rajeunir, non pas son sang, mais cette vieille chose qu'on appelle l'amour' (71). As those acquainted with Goethe's Faust realize, such a reference indicates a desire for sexual power and fulfilment (Hawthorne and Constable, 2004: 71n30), as well as for financial and cultural capital, which was so powerful that it could tempt its protagonist into literally entering into a bargain with the devil. In combination with the previous references to Sappho (70) and to pornographic works (69), this statement acts to position Raoule as consumed by desire and as uninterested in maintaining conventional morality. Further, in positioning Raoule as wishing to emulate, and supersede, 'male' and 'masculine' sexuality, this quotation foreshadows Raoule's desire to create a new vice; prefiguring her speech to de Rattoilbe (73-4) and gesturing towards the text's ultimate conclusion, in which Raoule will have total possession over Jacques, as he is transformed into a wax model created to fulfil her desires (210). The second series of allusions which I want to emphasize here occur shortly before Raoule's detailed description of her desire for Jacques and her aim for their relationship: 'J'ai voulu l'impossible... je le possède' (74). Here, Raoule provides an impassioned account of her aim to create a new era of vice and of sexual pleasure, mobilizing images of Sappho (73), antiquity, and even Satan (73) to demonstrate her passion and provide her with additional authority. This second reference to Sappho (73) does not constitute an identification with womanhood, or with female sexuality, on Raoule's part, but instead stresses Raoule's desire to supersede womanhood and sexual conventions through the practice of vice:

Si on était fort, et si de plus on avait des griefs contre la vertu, il serait permis d'être vicieux, en devenant créateur, par exemple. Sapho ne pouvait pas être une *filie*, c'était bien plutôt la vestale d'un feu nouveau. Moi, si je créais une dépravation nouvelle, je serais prêtresse, tandis que mes imitateurs se traînaient, après mon règne, dans une fange abominable... Ne vous paraît-il point que les hommes orgueilleux en copiant Satan sont bien plus coupables que le Satan de l'Écriture qui invente l'orgueil ? Satan n'est-il pas respectable par sa faute même, sans précédent et émanant d'une réflexion divine ? (73)

Despite Rachilde's later scepticism about feminist perspectives, this passage offers a clear satirical indictment of gender norms, which is strengthened by the narrative's use of intramural parody, and which is foregrounded by Raoule's performance of masculinity throughout the text. Here, the category 'fille' operates as a stifling cage inextricable from constructions of virtue (73), which Raoule feels able to navigate only by embracing its supposed polar opposite: the violent, sexualized half of the misogynistic Madonna/whore dichotomy (73-4). The interconnected intertextual imagery of depravity, vice, and Satan's fall resonating throughout this passage ironically echoes misogynistic, Decadent narratives, appearing to adhere to their precepts, while allotting the narrative focus to the subjectivity of an agential, wilful, woman, rather than concentrating on the more typically Decadent figure of the male aesthete – one example of which is the protagonist Des Esseintes in Joris-Karl Huysmans' *À Rebours*.<sup>158</sup> As this passage forcefully demonstrates, *Monsieur Vénus* appropriates the 'Decadent male gaze' and Baudelairean legacy which depicted women only as either 'idealized woman-beauty as artifice[...] [or] organic embodied woman, monstrously insatiable in her appetites, a degenerate and disease-bearing body' (Hawthorne and Constable, 2004: xiv), rewriting these with the 'thumbed nose' (Hutcheon, 2000: 114) typical of parody. Moreover, in doing so, this passage offers a critical evaluation of contemporary gender norms, which suggests that freedom from these patriarchal constraints is difficult to attain, irrespective of one's radical sexual practices and gender performance.

By focusing either on parodic techniques, gendered imagery, or satirical critique, readers can develop a fuller understanding of *Monsieur Vénus*, recognizing that it is far richer than a pastiche of Decadent writing which simply aims for similarity with its model discourse (Hutcheon, 2000: 34). However, while an awareness of each of these forms does provide insight into the nuances of *Monsieur Vénus*, an analysis of the connections between these forms facilitates a fuller comprehension of the novel's overall complexity. Further, if we rely on a term such as layering, intertextuality or quotation to discuss the careful operation of stylistic and

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<sup>158</sup> One example of this figure is the protagonist Des Esseintes in Joris-Karl Huysmans' *À Rebours*.

performative drag in this text, we potentially gloss over the import of masculinity, femininity and performance in the text's imagery and language and, moreover, we underestimate the way in which these textual elements contribute to *Monsieur Vénus'* foregrounding of, and challenge to, the misogyny and masculinist bias operating both in Decadent writing (English, 2006: 211) and in pathologizing sexological narratives.

Turning now to Woolf's *Orlando*, I continue my exploration of the frame of 'textual drag', demonstrating how this text's mobilization of intramural parody and gender performance contributes to its vibrant, proto-queer critique of (cis)heteropatriarchal norms. While my analysis of *Monsieur Vénus* concentrated primarily on the text's engagement with Decadent conventions and ironic references to sexology, the following discussion focuses principally on the narrative voice of *Orlando*, which I describe as that of the faux-biographer. My use of the prefix 'faux' seeks to emphasize the parodic dimension of this narrative voice; while initially appearing to echo the narrative style of nineteenth-century biography (Woolf, 2008: 13), *Orlando's* narrative voice is markedly unsuccessful in approximating this tone, due partially to its lack of omniscience and failure to supply even basic facts (2008: 13). Parodic allusion characterizes *Orlando* as a whole, operating with a range of ethos (Hutcheon, 2000: 41) and engaging with a variety of 'targets' – from the gentle, loving criticism at work behind Woolf's reimagining of Vita Sackville-West's poetry (Woolf, 2008: 252)<sup>159</sup>, to the playful mockery of grandiose critics through the figure of Nicholas Greene (2008: 82-93)<sup>160</sup>, to the faux-biographer's panicked misuse of a quotation from Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* in a desperate attempt to shore up patriarchal conventions surrounding gender performance and sexuality (2008: 134). However, while I emphasize this range of ethos in my following analysis, I concentrate on those parodic appropriations which, like the misquotation from *Mansfield Park*, intersect

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<sup>159</sup> *Orlando* is dedicated to Woolf's lover and companion, the poet and novelist Vita Sackville-West (2008: n.p.), who inspired the figure of Orlando. As Orlando's life and characteristics were partially inspired by those of Sackville-West (Nicolson, 1973: 201), Woolf attributes lines from Vita's prize-winning 'The Land' to Orlando (Bowlby, 2008: 336n 252).

<sup>160</sup> As Rachel Bowlby points out: 'Nicholas Greene [...] is partly based on the dramatist Robert Greene, a contemporary of Shakespeare's [...] and partly on the literary critic Edmund Gosse, a contemporary of VW's [Virginia Woolf's]' (2008: 323).

with extramural satire of gender norms, as well as with imagery of drag and of gender performance. One of the most salient dimensions of the faux-biographical narrative style lies in its seeming capacity to reiterate facile patriarchal dogma about binary gender only to swiftly debunk it (149-50), thereby enabling Woolf to foreground her critiques of binary systems through the satirical use of critical distance (Hutcheon, 2000: 44).<sup>161</sup> While the faux-biographer repeatedly comes close to acknowledging the constructed nature of binary gender and its associated norms (e.g. Woolf, 2008: 180; 211), he seems unable to wholly abandon conventional, patriarchal assumptions (180; 210), and therefore changes his approach (180) or takes refuge behind a stance of impartiality (210). These moments of retreat or hesitation act, like Wittig's essay 'The Straight Mind' (1992: 21-32), to underline the pervasive nature of misogynistic heteronormative discourses. As I demonstrate below, such episodes (Woolf, 2008: 180; 210) offer a clear example of the interconnected mobilization of 'gender parody', intramural parody, and extramural satire, thereby illustrating how textual drag - an analysis of these connections - sheds light on the mechanics and effect of Woolf's proto-queer political critique.

The moment of retreat which I consider here (Woolf, 2008: 210) immediately follows the scene in which Orlando, now a gentlewoman living in London, performs masculinity to escape the claustrophobic high-society surroundings in which she finds herself (205-7). Having been perceived as 'the very figure of a noble Lord' (206) by Nell, the attractive young sex worker she encounters (207), Orlando initially enjoys her seductive masculinity, but, due to her identification with womanhood and feminism, feels compelled to disclose her identity (208). In this moving scene, readers encounter Orlando's deliberate performance of masculinity, an insight into Orlando's varied forms of identification (207-9) and, in the company of Nell's friends, a potentially queer scene of women's bonding and active desire

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<sup>161</sup> Describing the connections and differences between satire and parody, Hutcheon suggests that satire has a narrower and more critical ethos: 'Both satire and parody imply critical distancing and therefore value judgments, but satire generally uses that distance to make a negative statement about that which is satirized' (2000: 44). However, in addition to emphasizing the importance of differentiating between satire and parody, Hutcheon makes it clear that these forms are frequently used together (44), as I am demonstrating in relation to *Orlando*.

(209-10). This poignancy and desire is interrupted by the incursion of parody – a parody which acts in an ironic, playful way, while equally beginning to ‘do the work of patriarchy critique’ (Downing, 2012: 208) in the service of extramural satire. The faux-biographer states:

So they would draw around the punch bowl which Orlando made it her business to furnish generously, and many were the fine tales they told, and many the amusing observations they made, for it cannot be denied that when women get together – but hist – they are always careful to see that the doors are shut and that not a word of it gets into print. All they desire is – but hist again – is that not a man’s step on the stair? All they desire, we were about to say when the gentleman took the very words out of our mouths. Women have no desires, says this gentleman, coming into Nell’s parlour; only affectations. Without desires (she has served him and he is gone) their conversation cannot be of the slightest interest to anyone. ‘It is well known’ says Mr S.W., ‘that when they lack the stimulus of the other sex, they do not talk, they scratch.’ And since they cannot talk without scratching and scratching cannot continue without interruption and since it is well known (Mr T.R. has proved it) ‘that women are incapable of any feeling of affection for their own sex and hold each other in the greatest aversion’, what can we suppose that women do when they seek out each other’s society? (209-10)

This parodic, proto-queer passage merits comment on at least two levels. First, the queer feminist dimension of this passage is perhaps most evident for readers acquainted with Woolf’s seminal feminist essay ‘A Room of One’s Own’, a text which provides additional insight into *Orlando* as a whole, and into this passage in particular. Notably, Woolf stopped work on *Orlando* – the first draft of which was finished in March 1928 – to write the lecture, which would later be developed into ‘A Room’ (Boehm, 1992: 193), meaning that both texts occupied Woolf’s mind during a particular period, and suggesting that these texts may have influenced one another (193). Here, I focus on an echo between the above passage and a fictitious episode recounted in ‘A Room’, in which the speaker invites her audience to think what it might mean if literature were to depict, rather than erase, relationships between women (Woolf, 2008b: 106-9). Beginning to discuss a novel which depicts a relationship between two women, Chloe and Olivia, the narrator of ‘A Room’ suddenly interrupts her narrative, anxiously demanding

Are there no men present? Do you assure me that behind that red curtain over there the figure of Sir Chartres Biron is not concealed? We are all women you assure me? Then I may tell you that the very next words I read were these – ‘Chloe liked Olivia...’ Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women.

‘Chloe liked Olivia,’ I read. And then it struck me how immense a change was there. Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature. Cleopatra did not like Octavia. And how completely *Anthony and Cleopatra* would have been altered had she done so! (2008b: 106-7)

In both passages, women’s spaces are presented as essential in order for love, desire, and companionship between women to flourish. While the relationship between Chloe and Olivia is more frankly positioned as one of desire<sup>162</sup> than the scene between Orlando, Prue, Kitty, Rose, and Nell (2008: 209), Orlando’s passionate response to Nell’s beauty is evident during their first encounter (207-9). Orlando continues to associate Nell’s name with love (297), her eyes clouding with tears (297), as she relives her greatest passions at the end of the text (295-9). The scene in ‘A Room’ thus draws further attention to the sense of queerness permeating Orlando’s meetings with Nell and her friends; an atmosphere of queerness already reverberating throughout this scene due to the passion, desire, and anxiety Orlando experiences when she recognizes the impact of her desire for Nell on her own complex gendered and sexual identity (207-11). Provoking a rush of ‘all the feelings that became a man’ (207) and a flurry of ‘torment’ (208) which forced her to negotiate her identifications with manhood and womanhood (207-8), Orlando’s meeting with Nell enables her to re-evaluate her mode of living (208). Due to her discussion with Nell, Orlando decides to sever herself from the misogynistic ‘society of wits’ (208), and instead of pouring tea while being unable to utter her opinions (203-5), begins to happily explore her gender fluidity (211). When considering the impact of these conversations on Orlando’s life and identity,

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<sup>162</sup> While Woolf gestures towards Chloe’s relationship with Olivia during the following pages (2008b: 107-10), the above reference to Sir Chartres Biron (106) is likely to have been particularly revealing for contemporary readers as Biron ‘was the Chief Magistrate in the trial against Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*’ (Shiach, 2008b: 420 n106), and would therefore have been associated with the condemnation of lesbian desire.

one recognizes the importance of Nell's parlour as a space for discussion between women, and therefore, one gains a fuller understanding of the violence and censorship perpetrated by the misogynistic Messrs S.W. and T.R. (210). In addition to resonating with *Orlando* in its depiction of gender fluidity (2008b: 128) and desire between women (106- 10), 'A Room' reminds readers of the impact of patriarchal bias and misogyny on both the depiction of women (107) and on their lives (26-31, 109-11) - an issue which burns brightly through the above scene in *Orlando*, working alongside the text's atmosphere of provocative play. Having begun to emphasize the significance of gender performance (Woolf, 2008: 206-7), gender fluidity (206-7; 211-2), and sexuality in and surrounding this scene, I now turn to my second point, underlining how these themes interact with the intramural parody and extramural satire facilitated by the faux-biographer (209-210). Looking at the parodic atmosphere and interactive complexity in the passage from *Orlando* quoted above, we perceive that in addition to its relationship of reciprocal development with 'A Room' and its play with the conventions of biographical writing (210), this passage engages critically with the authoritative contemporary discourses of casual misogyny, represented here by Messrs. S.W and T.R. (210).<sup>163</sup> Parodic play is visible on two levels in the narrative style of this passage. First, the faux-biographer, seemingly relatively impartial when recounting Orlando's enjoyment of her conversations with Nell, Prue, Kitty, and Rose (210), can be perceived as being complicit in the patriarchal silencing of women's desires and experiences: although Mr S.W. is not privy to this conversation, the biographer rehearses his opinion as though it were necessarily correct, and supports this bigotry by repeating pseudo-scientific 'proof' (210) of women's incapacity to connect with each other. The text's mobilization of the faux-biographer figure thus

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<sup>163</sup> When I refer to 'authoritative discourses' here, I aim to emphasize the fact that misogynistic dialogues did not occur only in the private sphere. Rather, as Woolf's reference to Mr T.R.'s 'proof' (2008: 210) suggests, chauvinist perspectives abounded in 'non-fiction' works, such as in medical literature – for example, the work of Silas Weir Mitchell, noted hysteria 'specialist' in the nineteenth-century. The contempt for misogynistic theses is another shared feature of 'A Room' and *Orlando*. In 'A Room', the narrator discusses examples from the range of demeaning writings by men about women, demonstrating that such opinions spanned a wealth of literary and non-fiction forms (2008b: 68-70), and drawing particular attention to the dismissive attitude of a former academic examiner, Mr Oscar Browning, who 'was wont to declare 'that the impression left on his mind, after looking over any set of examination papers, was that, irrespective of the marks he might give, the best woman was intellectually the inferior of the worst man' (69).

illustrates the capacity of supposedly objective narratives to shore up patriarchal conventions, while the use of a characteristically overblown nineteenth-century writing style (e.g. 180; 201; 210) functions to imply that these conventions are antiquated and no longer applicable to the world as it is lived today. The playful ironic surface of this passage therefore accentuates the political critique at the novel's centre, while operating in such a disarming, amusing way (210) as to appeal to readers who do not identify as feminists.

Turning now to the second dimension of parodic play present in this passage, I suggest that the use of disarming wit is particularly evident in the text's intramural parody of misogynistic poetic discourses, represented here by Messrs S.W. and T.R, and associated with the works of Pope (205) and Addison (201), whose chauvinism (201-6) initially encouraged Orlando to escape the 'society of wits' (208). Consider, for example, the faux-biographer's parenthetical interruption of Mr S.W.'s obnoxious pronouncement: 'Women have no desires, **says this gentleman**, coming into Nell's parlour; only affectations. Without desires (**she has served him and he is gone**) their conversation cannot be of the slightest interest to anyone' (2008: 210, my emphasis). Here, the faux-biographer subtly undermines Mr S.W. by pointing out that, while dismissing women and invalidating their desires, Mr S.W. has had *his* desires satisfied: having been 'served', he is happy to depart, without any indication that he has shared pleasure with Nell – a circumstance which contrasts markedly with the mutual satisfaction experienced by Nell, Prue, Kitty, and Orlando (209). In addition to resonating with the works of Pope (205) and Addison (201), the first line of Mr S.W.'s remark echoes with the characteristic epigrammatic style of Oscar Wilde<sup>164</sup> – a reference supported by Orlando's use of the phrase 'society of wits' (208) – suggesting a further potential target of intramural parody in *Orlando*. However, while Wilde's occasionally caustic tone may have been one source of inspiration for Mr S.W.'s remarks, Woolf's citation of remarks by Lord Chesterfield (204) and by Pope (205) forcibly remind readers that the denigration of women's intellectual and emotional capabilities was neither an ironic pose, nor the province

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<sup>164</sup> For further examples of Wilde's epigrammatic style, see the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1998: xxiii-iv).

of an objectionable minority, but an accepted viewpoint. On page 204, for example, the faux-biographer notes

Added to which (we whisper lest the women among us may overhear us), there is a little secret which men share among them; Lord Chesterfield whispered it to his son with strict injunctions to secrecy, 'Women are but children of a larger growth... A man of sense only trifles with them, plays with them, humours and flatters them' (204).

As Rachel Bowlby notes, this remark greatly resembles a comment made by Lord Chesterfield in a letter, which includes the line 'Women, then, are only children of a larger growth; they have an entertaining tattle; and sometimes wit; but for solid, reasoning, good sense, I never in my life knew one that had it' (Bowlby, 2008: 332n104). Thus, here as in Raoule's impassioned speech to Baron de Rattoilbe (Rachilde, 2004: 73), a mocking narrative tone and cumulative intertextual references act to foreground a satirical critique of patriarchal gender norms and structural misogyny. Significantly, despite seeming to parrot structural misogyny, and despite seeking refuge behind the category of biographer (210)<sup>165</sup>, the faux-biographer does deconstruct the misogynistic dogma repeated here, noting 'let us [...] merely state that Orlando professed great enjoyment in the company of her own sex, and leave it to the gentlemen to prove, as they are very fond of doing, that this is impossible' (210). Thus, as Orlando is returned to the position of authority on this subject, the 'gentlemen' are subtly undermined by the use of 'very'; a word which unsettles the supposed 'proof' by intimating that although 'gentlemen' may frequently attempt to assert this belief, they are nonetheless disregarded. The political critique underpinning this passage becomes even stronger when examined in conjunction with the text as a whole, and particularly when considered in light of the text's emphasis on questions of gender and of 'gender parody', as I demonstrate in two further comments on *Orlando*. First, to conclude my analysis of this passage, I want to draw attention to a moment of gender-fluidity on the part of the faux-biographer: an issue foregrounded by the biographer's use of 'our' (210). As the above excerpt including the Lord Chesterfield

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<sup>165</sup> The text's narrative voice seeks to avoid the responsibility of commenting on the question raised by the 'gentlemen's' misogynistic dogma, noting 'Let us, who enjoy the immunity of all biographers and historians from any sex whatever, pass it over' (210).

quotation indicates (204), the faux-biographer appears to position himself as male throughout much of the text (e.g. 113, 134, 204). Yet, when Mr S.W.'s obnoxious remark acts as a synecdoche for the erasure of women's voices (210), and particularly the voices of marginalized women, under patriarchy, the faux-biographer can equally be read as being robbed of speech (210), apparently being obliged to repeat this sexist view. The faux-biographer's use of 'our' not only adds a touch of humour to the loss of speech, which would be likely to sound particularly bleak with the third person pronoun, but equally demonstrates significant empathy. That is, this use of 'our' permits humorousness while bringing the faux-biographer and the reader into the category of the silenced, creating a brief moment of opposition against Mr S.W. despite apparently adhering to his views. The faux-biographer may not share the insight into 'both sexes' attributed to Orlando (152), demonstrating some examples of chauvinism (204) and prudishness (134), yet, despite the playfully mocking tone of much of the narrative, this parodic voice seems to develop in terms of its capacity for empathy over the course of the text. In this passage, the latent satirical critique of the silencing and mistreatment of women draws the reader's sympathy without being overtly didactic – a factor which may mean that *Orlando's* feminist message can reach some readers who may be affected by the critiques at work in some of Woolf's other texts. Thus, the elaborate nineteenth-century biographical 'drag' that is 'put onto' the narrative acts with a range of ethos – from the gentle and poignant to the 'thumbed nose' (Hutcheon, 2000: 114) more frequently associated with parody – yet enacts an evolving 'gender parody' as well as producing intramural parody. The gender performed by the narrative voice thus shifts gradually from the reverent, pompous, stereotypically-masculine, colonialist tone present on the text's first page (Woolf, 2008: 13) to the fleeting performance of identification with womanhood, witnessed by readers in the faux-biographer's collective 'our' and in the suggestion that women, unlike men, ensure that their opinions are kept 'out of print' (210).

This moment of gender fluidity on the part of the faux-biographer leads neatly to my discussion of Orlando's complex, gendered, embodiment in the scenes following Mr S.W.'s chauvinist pronouncement. Having disregarded the model of

womanhood and personal interaction assigned to her Messrs S.W. and T.R. (210), Orlando begins living her life in a far freer mode than she attempted prior to her encounter with Nell (205-6). The faux-biographer reluctantly admits that tracing Orlando's habits has become increasingly difficult; while the reader may 'peer and grope' (211) into the 'ill-lit, ill-paved, ill-ventilated courtyards' in which Orlando situated herself, we nevertheless 'seem now to catch sight of her and then again lose it' (211).<sup>166</sup> Orlando's capacity to elude the biographer's scrutiny stems at least partially from the fact that 'she found it convenient at this time to change frequently from one set of clothes to another', performing masculinity, femininity, or androgyny depending on her mood (211-2). The faux-biographer's tone here almost merges into that of a historical fantasy: we glimpse Orlando negotiating the restrictive gender role forced upon her by performing the 'noble Lord' role into which she was originally born (13-15), appearing in 'contemporary memoirs as 'Lord' So-and-so, who was in fact her cousin; her bounty is ascribed to him, and it is he who is said to have written the poems that were really hers' (211). The references operating here, repeated with critical distance (Hutcheon, 2000: 18), are historical as well as literary; on the one hand, Orlando's narrative resonates with historical accounts of 'passing women' – or, to use the term rejected by Bourcier, 'femmes travesties' (2006: 130) – masculine-identified people and/or people performing manhood in order to attain freedom of action (127). These resonances remind readers of the gulf, in that time period and onwards, between opportunities available to upper class, white, cisgender men and those available to women and people of colour. Yet, while contributing to the text's wider feminist satire, the passage's other dominant reference, and fantastical tone – with its emphasis on 'bounty' (211), 'junketing' and 'duels' (212) – deconstructs the possibility that Orlando is performing masculinity *solely* to escape the constricted femininity imposed on her. Orlando's decision to 'become a nobleman complete from head to

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<sup>166</sup> Significantly, the language used to describe the faux-biographer's vantage into Orlando's life during this period – such as the phrase 'as we peer and grope into the ill-lit, ill-paved, ill-ventilated courtyards that lay about Gerard Street and Drury Lane' (211) – echoes noticeably with the language used by the narrator of 'A Room' when discussing the impact of writing about relationships between women: 'For if Chloe likes Olivia and Mary Carmichael knows how to express it **she will light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been. It is all half lights and profound shadows like those serpentine caves where one goes with a candle peering up and down, not knowing where one is stepping**' (2008b: 109, emphasis mine).

toe' (212) during her evening walks provides her with 'adventure' (212), excitement, and a sense of release from the stultifying court case which will determine her right to continue to own her own property (212). In this way, her meeting with Nell has enabled her to embrace her masculinity to an extent which she appears not to have been able to do since becoming a woman (152; 180). Significantly, however, Orlando's decision to perform masculinity – and to enjoy the freedoms it offers (211-2) – does not constitute a loss of identification with womanhood (212). Instead,

She had, it seems, no difficulty in sustaining the different parts, for her sex changed more frequently than those who have worn only one set of clothing can conceive; nor can it be denied that she reaped a twofold harvest by this device; the pleasures of life were increased and its experiences multiplied. For the probity of breeches she exchanged the seductiveness of petticoats and enjoyed the love of both sexes equally. (211)

The faux-biographer's emphasis on the 'device' of changing attire and on the 'parts' played by Orlando indicates a degree of performance and of theatricality in Orlando's fluid appearance – a point strengthened by Orlando's apparent love of 'adventure' (212). However, this atmosphere of excitement and play, again mirrored by a slight shift in tone on the part of the faux-biographer (210-11), is readily explained as an increase in emotional and personal freedom on Orlando's part. For the moment, Orlando is able to live her life in a manner that is authentic to her (211-5); she is now able to embrace her gender fluidity, which was previously only glimpsed by the reader (180) and policed by the 'curious of her sex' (180), and can position herself in such a way as to enjoy upper class high society, without being obliged to enact its norms (213-4). Here, 'gender parody' (Butler, 1999: 188) interacts both with 'gender performativity' (1999: 190) and 'pratiques transgenres' (Bourcier, 2006: 130). That is, Orlando successively performs a range of gender archetypes – receiving 'a proposal of marriage from some great nobleman' (Woolf, 2008: 212), having 'fought a duel, served on one of the King's ships as a captain, was seen to dance naked on a balcony, and fled with a certain lady to the Low Countries where the lady's husband followed them' (212) – and in doing so, draws attention to the way in which we construct the categories of masculinity,

femininity, manhood, and womanhood (Butler, 1999: 188-92), yet, significantly, Orlando is not moulded by these categories into fitting into one 'type', but instead mobilizes them in order to live out her internal fluidity (211-2). As readers see when exploring the passage quoted above, the concept of an external, fixed 'sex' – conforming to what Bourcier refers to as 'une idée normative et hétérocentrée des expressions de genre' (2006: 130) – is simply inapplicable to Orlando, whose internal gender fluidity exceeds the boundaries of limited, binary, cisnormative notions of sex, to shift 'more frequently than those who have only ever worn one set of clothes can conceive' (211). The light vibrant tone of these passages should not be mistaken for an indication of any diminution in *Orlando's* proto-queer critique. At this stage in the text, Orlando's privileges, her whiteness, her class, her financial freedom, and her capacity to be read as either male or female, enable her to negotiate the misogynistic, heterocentric, binary systems surrounding her. The faux-biographer, here employing the rhetoric of fantasy or adventure novels (211-3), is unusually frank about Orlando's sexual life, despite providing sparse information (211). Readers are thus aware of Orlando's bisexuality yet not of the way in which she negotiates this: we are left to wonder whether her sexuality shifts alongside her gender, and to what extent she is perceived as queer or heterosexual, and in which contexts. Here, while Orlando is able to navigate oppressive interconnected systems, the biting parody present in the critique of Messrs S.W. and T.R. (210) is exchanged for an altogether, lighter, freer, tone on the part of the faux-biographer (211-4) – a softer 'appearance [...] put on the literary subject matter' (Stevens, 2014: 72). Orlando's performance of 'noble Lord' masculinity in her first encounter with Nell (Woolf, 2008: 207) has empowered her to recognize the way in which she wants to live her own life (208-14), enabling her to enact the gendered freedom which Woolf advocates throughout this text (e.g. 150-4; 180-2; 242-6; 296).

For all his pomposity, the faux-biographer plays an essential role in *Orlando*. That is, mobilizing historical moments (e.g. 24; 69; 81; 104; 143; 158) and literary allusions and writing styles (68; 96; 131; 134; 204-5; 264-5) – and, significantly, in using these features to illustrate the norms which surround or produce those writing styles

(134; 204; 264-5) – this narrative voice creates a parodic play which enables readers to recognize the gulf between the world as it was, and indeed is – riddled with misogyny (204-5) and oppressive structures pertaining to gender, race, and class, (13;142; 161) – and the world as it ought to be. As demonstrated above, scholars of *Orlando* can benefit by scrutinizing Woolf’s parodic ‘repetition with difference’ (Hutcheon, 2000: 32) of a nineteenth-century biographical style, as this interacts closely with the text’s mobilization of drag (e.g. Woolf, 2008: 207; 2008: 211-2), to create a satirical analysis of (cis)heteropatriarchal oppression and its impact.

As Linda Hutcheon has emphasized, ‘the interaction of parody and satire in modern art is pervasive’ (2000: 44) – a factor which had led to confusion between these forms (43) and which suggests that an analysis of either form will benefit from a discussion of the other. In introducing the frame of ‘textual drag’, I have suggested that texts foregrounding gender, gender performance, and/or drag, can intertwine gendered imagery with intramural parody in order to facilitate and enrich extramural satire. Further, as I have shown in relation to both *Monsieur Vénus* and *Orlando*, a wider comprehension of textual strategies, and particularly of intramural parody, can enable scholars to perceive the way in which imagery of drag foregrounds an illustration and critique of existing gender norms. As noted in my introduction to this chapter, the texts analysed here present differing relationships between an author’s stated intent and the satirical insight offered by their work. While Rachilde argues that she attained the status of feminist author ‘malgré moi’ (1928: 8), Woolf arguably downplayed the status of *Orlando* (Woolf, 1953: 124-5, cited in Boehm, 1992: 192), yet nevertheless made her queer feminist position clear contemporaneously in ‘A Room’, arguing that ‘the most transient visitor to this planet [...] who picked up this [evening’s edition of a] paper could not fail to be aware, even from this scattered testimony, that England is under the rule of a patriarchy’ (2008b: 43). Of the authors whose works are examined here, Monique Wittig is the most transparent about her anti-patriarchal position, stating her deliberate aim to challenge oppressive heteropatriarchal systems through the intertextual strategies of *Le Corps lesbien* (2005: 43). As I stressed in the introduction to this chapter, the perception of *Le Corps lesbien* as including drag

stretches the boundaries of drag as it is normally conceived. That is, the reductive, binary model of drag as a performance which a person 'dresses as the opposite sex' is redundant here; instead, in this text, readers encounter two lovers, j/e and tu, who in their passion, undertake the roles of 'the great lovers of heterosexual culture' (2005: 43) only to reveal the inadequacies both of these canonical, heterosexual heroes (e.g. 1973: 11-3) and the culture which is centred around them.

In order to illustrate the value of textual drag in relation to *Le Corps lesbien*, I first concentrate on a passage drawn from Wittig's 'Some Remarks on *The Lesbian Body*', explaining why I refer to Wittig's intertextual strategies as constituting intramural parody, rather than simply describing them as within the rubric of intertextuality. Wittig writes:

The texts I have borrowed and intertextualized, thrown together are from Ovid (The Transformations) [i.e. *Metamorphoses*], from Du Bellay, Genet, Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Raymond Roussel, Nathalie Sarraute, from the New Testament, from The Song of Songs, from the Homeric poems, etc. I could borrow from these texts on the condition that they were assimilated into the reader's mind with violence. [...] The whole project is an impassible description of lesbian passion; I attempted to leave behind Baudelaire, Lautréamont, and Verlaine.

For what is total ecstasy between two lovers but an exquisite death? A violent act (here in words) that can only be redeemed by an immediate resuscitation. For the great lovers of heterosexual culture (Don Juan, Othello, even Orpheus, the sweet one) are the first, a rapist, the second, a murderer, and the third is brainless. Now on the contrary, when the lovers of *The Lesbian Body* kill, they resuscitate. (2005: 47)

As the frame of 'textual drag' analyses textual connections between gendered imagery, intramural parody, and extramural satire, it necessarily foregrounds literary strategies, political critique, gender, and play or performance. That is, an analysis of the connections between intramural parody and extramural satire will naturally concentrate on how that satire works, and which parodic techniques contribute to it, while the associations provided by the concept of drag act to foreground questions of gender, play, and performance. As the above passage

demonstrates, *Le Corps lesbien* employs Wittig's characteristic tactic of 'dealing a blow with words' (1992: 72), mobilizing linguistic violence and an irreverent, critical 'borrowing' (2005: 45) in order to demonstrate the reality of heterosexuality, and heterosexual culture, as a system, rather than as a 'natural' and foundational 'fact of life' (see Wittig, 1992: 21-32). However, although satire and parody are immediately evident in the above passage, the gentler, yet nevertheless provocative, spirit of play – as is present in Adam All's moment of joy when stripping his masculine attire to perform in a tutu, or in Hutcheon's descriptive reference to parody's 'thumbed nose' (2000: 114) – may be initially harder to perceive in Wittig's above comment, and even in *Le Corps lesbien* itself. The frame of textual drag, then, seeks not only to elucidate this text's biting parody and satire, but to demonstrate how these forces are connected to playfulness, a feature which can pervade drag performance and parody even as these forms draw our attention to political critique (Butler, 1999: 187; 189; Bourcier, 2006: 126). That is, while the love experienced by j/e and tu includes fierce, violent, challenging passion (e.g. 1973: 9; 27; 138) – deconstructing the image of lesbian love as 'the mildest love imaginable' (Wittig, 2005: 45) – it nevertheless equally contains gently mocking humour (1973: 181-2), tenderness (1973: 11-3), and raw joy (87). Returning to the above passage with this in mind, we recognize that Wittig's above insight is brimming with the type of tongue-in-cheek mockery that is frequently, if erroneously, perceived as being characteristic of parody (Hutcheon, 2000: 32). For example, the irreverent description of Orpheus as 'brainless' (2005: 47) almost constitutes bathos following the positioning of Don Juan and Othello as a rapist and a murderer (47), yet this phrasing begins to 'do the work of patriarchy-critique' (Downing, 2012: 208) in reminding readers of the extent to which 'heterosexual culture' pervades canonical literature, peopling it with violent or inadequate men and passive women. Further, for readers of *Le Corps lesbien*, Wittig's reference to Orpheus immediately triggers the memory of Orphée, Wittig's lesbian Orpheus (1973: 11-3) who supersedes her model by succeeding in retrieving Eurydice from the Underworld (1973: 11-3). Wittig's Orpheus and Eurydice fragment (1973: 11-3) combines parodic play with biting satire in the manner which characterizes *Le Corps lesbien*. On the textual, intramural level, Wittig parodies and 'lesbianizes' (2005: 47)

Ovid's tale, employing violent, realistic imagery (Wittig, 1973: 11-3), and replacing the 'brainless' Orpheus and silent Eurydice (Ovid, 2002: 296) with passionate, agential lovers in the shape of j/e and tu (1973: 11-3). Irony, a strategy frequently operating within and alongside parody (Hutcheon, 2000: 54), is one of the primary notes within the Orphée and Eurydice fragment; an episode which utterly rejects the idea of romance as necessarily soft and gentle (Wittig, 1973: 11-3), yet which demonstrates a tenderness (1973: 13) which exceeds that in many canonical romance narratives. Refusing to capitulate in the powerful/powerless dichotomy presented by the lovers in the model text, Orphée willingly follows her lover away from the Underworld (11), but refuses to spare her the gory details of her own suffering (11), instead making her pain and putrefaction palpably felt (12). The disgust-inducing, grotesque descriptions of Eurydice's decomposition and its lack of impact on the lovers' continued intimacy – such as the moment 'quand tout m/on corps putréfié et à moitié liquide s'appuie à un moment donné le long de ton dos nu' (12) – constitutes a rejection of the ideals coded appropriate for narratives of love and passion, as idealized beauty and wholeness are seen as irrelevant to the passion between j/e and tu (11-3; 86-7). However, this deliberate failure to perform as lovers should, according to the conventions of canonical heterosexual narratives of love – including those presented by the model text (Ovid, 2002: 296) – nevertheless operates alongside an atmosphere of intimacy (Wittig, 1973: 11-3), raw honesty (11-3), tenderness and mutual contemplation (13). Thus, just as Orphée, stridently singing (11-2) and showing full confidence in her lover (12), reveals the comparative failures of Orpheus – fear and weakness (Ovid, 2002: 296) – the love between j/e and tu (Wittig, 1973: 11-3) exposes many of the problems present in heterosexual love as depicted in canonical narratives – an unequal balance of power (Ovid, 2002: 296), an expectation of female passivity (296), and an emphasis on beauty or surface at the expense of honesty, mutuality and substance (296). Indeed, as Lisa Downing points out in relation to the grotesque imagery and reciprocally violent desiring exchanges which permeate *Le Corps lesbien* as a whole, the text's disquieting, deconstructive depiction of the lovers 'stand[s] in contradistinction to the idea of "woman" as a smooth, polished, bodily surface with a limited number of fetishized openings; that is, the patriarchal,

pornographic version of femininity' (2012: 205). As my analysis indicates, intramural parody in this scene operates on the level of the particular, rewriting Ovid's 'Orpheus and Eurydice', and on that of the universal, in ironically repeating and reworking heterosexual romance narratives as a genre. As in the other texts considered within this chapter, the parodic ethos varies depending on which episode of *Le Corps lesbien* one is considering; in this fragment, the model characters – and particularly Eurydice – are superseded by j/e and tu, whose love and capacity to trust each other (Wittig, 1973: 11-3), excel the love and trust depicted by Ovid. Yet, as Wittig's bathos-laden reference to Orpheus' sweetness and brainlessness suggests (2005: 45), these original characters are less the subject of biting ridicule, and more the somewhat hapless faces of the system of which *Le Corps lesbien* is an indictment. Significantly, relationships between people of different genders are not necessarily the target of Wittig's vitriol in this text. Rather, *Le Corps lesbien* violently satirizes the system which positions heterosexual relationships as the only valid, natural mode of desire and sexual interaction (Wittig, 1992: 27), and which, in doing so, produces a web of interconnected discourses (29) which violently oppress, and even seek to eradicate, those outside traditional, heterosexual, familial units, producing the injunction 'you-will-be-straight-or-you-will-not-be' (28).

Notably, while the 'drag' at work in the Orphée and Eurydice fragment does not involve the characteristic emphasis on 'clothing' criticised by Bourcier (2006: 130), this drag – the 'lesbianizing' of canonical heroes – is an essential dimension of Wittig's critique, acting in the service both of intramural parody (1973: 11-3; 86-7; 181-2) and of extramural satire. Moreover, this parodic intertextual drag is by no means unique to the Orphée and Eurydice episode, but instead constitutes a central dimension of *Le Corps lesbien* as a whole, and a means by which j/e and tu demonstrate their love, their passion, and their influence: here, j/e, like her parallel and equal, tu, 'is an I so powerful that it can attack the order of heterosexuality in texts and lesbianize the heroes of love, lesbianize the symbols, lesbianize the gods and the goddesses, lesbianize Christ' (Wittig, 2005: 47). Thus, the parodic Orphée and Eurydice fragment then acts concomitantly with the other rewritten fragments

of *Le Corps lesbien* (e.g. Wittig, 1973: 86-7; Wittig, 1973: 138-9; Wittig, 1973: 181-2) to disrupt the pervasive discourses of ‘the straight mind’ (Wittig, 1992: 28) and the violence they perpetuate.

Before carrying out further close analyses of the stylistic techniques at work in the texts considered here – drawing attention to the technical and affective dimensions of these strategies – I want to concentrate briefly on a scene occurring towards the close of *Le Corps lesbien* (Wittig, 1973: 181-2). This episode, detailing the experience of j/e and her lover Archimedeia (1973: 181), has a softer and more overtly comical tone than the Orphée and Eurydice fragment, yet nevertheless packs critical punch in terms of the insight it provides into patriarchal epistemologies and into the way in which bodies of knowledge are commonly classified. Here, rather than reiterating the celebrated, if apocryphal, narrative of the discovery of a significant principle in physics – in which Archimedes experiences a ‘Eureka moment’ in his bath<sup>167</sup> – with j/e at the centre of the fragment as a lesbian Archimedes, *Le Corps Lesbien* immediately subverts this narrative by recounting it from the perspective of Archimedeia’s tolerant, yet amused lover (Wittig, 1973: 181-2).<sup>168</sup> J/e begins her account by questioning why Archimedeia insists on meeting at ‘les bains si parfumés’ (181) when the island on which they live is full of beautiful places which can inspire one to seek one’s lover (181). Her

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<sup>167</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica describe the ‘Archimedes Principle’ as a ‘physical law of buoyancy, discovered by the ancient Greek mathematician and inventor Archimedes, stating that any body completely or partially submerged in a fluid (gas or liquid) at rest is acted upon by an upward, or buoyant, force the magnitude of which is equal to the weight of the fluid displaced by the body’ (2014: n.p.). Equally, the Editors emphasize the point that although the story that Archimedes ‘determined the proportion of gold and silver in a wreath made for Hieron by weighing it in water is probably true, but the version that has him leaping from the bath in which he supposedly got the idea and running naked through the streets shouting “Heurēka!” (“I have found it!”) is popular embellishment’ (2014: n.p.). To see this entry, please visit <http://www.britannica.com/science/Archimedes-principle> (accessed 7 October 2015).

<sup>168</sup> The name ‘Archimedeia’ can be seen to include a subtle reference to ‘Medea’, the eponymous protagonist of Euripides’ play. By employing the name ‘Archimedeia’ for her lesbian Archimedes, and by centring Archimedeia in this joyous, loving episode, Wittig can contrast a fulfilled lesbian relationship with a canonical heterosexual relationship – that of Medea and Jason – which is doomed to tragedy. In the context of Euripides’ tragedy, the purpose of Medea’s marriage was to bear children (Cairns, 2014: 125-7), and, therefore, in killing her children for revenge, Medea negates her marriage while punishing her husband (2014: 125-7). In contrast, Archimedeia and her lover experience a joyous, carefree relationship (Wittig, 1973: 181-2), which is undertaken for its own sake, rather than for the purpose of bearing children. In this episode, then, as in Wittig’s aforementioned critique in ‘Some Remarks on *The Lesbian Body*’ (2005: 47), canonically celebrated compulsory heterosexuality is shown to be very much the inferior of lesbian relationships.

tone cynically amused, yet gentle and ever-tolerant, j/e seeks Archimedeia in the baths (181), and, full of joy and playfulness, sings, presses herself against her lover (181) and then occupies herself with a game: ‘j/e fais flotter les vases à parfum vides à présent, j/e les remplis d’eau poignées par poignées’ (181). In this episode then, J/e’s joyous, carefree, vivacity is presented as *the* natural approach to life (181-2), while Archimedeia’s fervent insistence on her discovery of ‘une loi fondamentale de notre univers physique’ (182) is gently, but laughingly accepted, as opposed to being praised or exclaimed over – after all, the idea that ‘qu’un corps plongé dans un fluide subit une poussée verticale dirigée de bas en haut, c’est m/a très chérie une évidence pour quelqu’une qui passe les trois quarts de sa journée plongée dans l’eau’ (182). With this humorous, gentle episode, *Le Corps lesbien* unsettles the pervasive distinction between ‘specialist’ or ‘expert’ and layperson, presenting a clear indictment of the patriarchal dichotomy in which the supposedly masculine world of business and science is necessarily more valuable than the supposedly feminine world of the home<sup>169</sup>. This distinction is itself shown to be worthless; rather than presenting a single capable, scientific woman, presenting her work to an adoring audience, *Le Corps lesbien* deconstructs and rewrites the Archimedes narrative (181-2) in such a way as to encourage the reader to recognize that the classification of certain bodies of knowledge as ‘masculine’ is a strategy imposed by patriarchy, rather than constituting a fact stemming from a natural association (see Wittig, 1992: 9-13). This conclusion raises two significant points: one of which relates to the political critique permeating this episode, and the other of which focuses on the relationship between the parodic ethos of this episode and

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<sup>169</sup> The critique of ‘experts’ is not unique to radical, feminist politics in post-Brexit Britain. Rather, as Dr Richard North affirms, it has frequently taken centre stage in post-Brexit discussions, having first been raised by Conservative politician and Brexit supporter Michael Gove. However, as I argue above, Wittig is not only posing a challenge to expertise in recounting the Archimedeia episode from Archimedeia’s lover’s perspective. In choosing this device, Wittig challenges the supposed opposition between knowledge categorized as masculine and that categorized as feminine – an opposition which always classes the latter as inferior – while equally refusing to position women as knowledgeable only in certain areas. Further, the critique embedded in Wittig’s Archimedeia episode acts to harmonize with, and strengthen, the challenges to masculine-centrism and heterosexism which underpins *Le Corps lesbien* as a whole. For more details on the mobilization of a narrative of anti-expertise, please see Paul Waugh’s article in Huffpost Politics, via [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/michael-gove-experts-economists-andrew-marr-obr-ifs-nigel-farage\\_uk\\_583abe45e4b0207d19184080](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/michael-gove-experts-economists-andrew-marr-obr-ifs-nigel-farage_uk_583abe45e4b0207d19184080) (accessed 10 March 2017) and Dr Richard North’s article featured by ‘The UK in a Changing Europe’ <http://ukandeu.ac.uk/brexit-our-plague-of-experts/> (accessed 10 March 2017).

the episode's positioning in the text as a whole. In a twenty-first-century queer feminist context, it may seem evident that the gendering of certain epistemologies and attributes is a constructed, and frequently misogynistic, phenomenon. Yet, in writing an anti-essentialist critique of the systematic and unnecessary gendering of personal attributes in France in the 1970s, Wittig not only posed a fierce challenge to 'the straight mind' (Wittig, 1992: 29), but equally parodied and repudiated an influential current of feminist thought – a belief system represented by celebrated feminist figures such as Hélène Cixous and Antoinette Fouque (Wittig, 1992: 13-5) (Martel, 1996: 48-9). Feminists such as Fouque, the leader of the group 'Psychanalyse et Politique' (48), championed the idea of a 'féminitude' (48) – a 'specifically feminine difference' (Duchen, 2013: 20) suppressed by patriarchy, which should be coaxed out through consciousness-raising and psychoanalytic practice (2013: 35). In ridiculing the division between 'masculine' and 'feminine' knowledge, the Archimedeia episode refutes and refuses the concept of 'féminitude' (Martel, 1996: 48), despite playing with the type of imagery which characterizes certain essentialist feminist narratives. That is, the Archimedeia episode playfully mobilizes the association between womanhood and nature – emphasizing, for example, j/e's appreciation of 'les pinèdes fraîches bleues sombres' (Wittig, 1973: 181) – and that between womanhood, water, and fluidity (181-2), yet radically challenges the associated feminist belief in an absolute dichotomy between man-as-rational and woman-as-powerful-in-her-uncontrollability (Cixous and Clément, 2008: 63).<sup>170</sup> Overall then, the text's parodic mobilization of the figures of Archimedeia and her lover (Wittig, 1973: 181-2) – and the idyllic imagery surrounding them (181-2) – acts to satirize two essentialist bodies of thought: that promoted by patriarchy and that advocated by Psychépo.

Before turning away from the Archimedeia episode, I want to briefly highlight the difference of tone between this poem and the Orphée and Eurydice fragment

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<sup>170</sup> In the passage cited here, Cixous highlights the dialectic which opposes man to woman, masculinity to femininity and active to passive, and which aligns manhood with masculinity and activity, and womanhood to femininity and passivity (2008: 63). Although other feminists, including Wittig herself (1992: 50-2), have highlighted this dialectic and its role in systemic misogyny (50-2), Cixous and other proponents of *féminitude*, such as Antoinette Fouque (Martel, 1996: 48-50), reject the positioning of femininity as a social construct, believing instead in an innate femininity (Martel, 1996:48-50).

(Wittig, 1973: 11-3), explaining how the positioning of these fragments in the text affects our reading of them. As I illustrate in more detail below, *Le Corps lesbien* is a text of collective, lesbian construction, deploying anatomical lists (e.g. 1973: 21-2; 50-1; 64-5; 112-3; 128-9; 160-1; 174-5) alongside poems devoted to reciprocal, 'impassible[...] lesbian passion' (Wittig, 2005: 47), to create a lesbian body – both a physical body (1973: 174-5) and a corpus of lesbian texts. Equally, as I have stressed throughout this analysis, the passion and tenderness in *Le Corps lesbien* (e.g. 1973: 11-3; 86-7) reverberates with power and violence; the emotions and qualities necessary to 'attack the order of heterosexuality in texts' (2005: 47) in order to make space for non-heterosexual, anti-patriarchal modes of loving and being. In themselves, the Orphée and Eurydice episode and the Archimedeia fragment each constitute an assault 'on the order of heterosexuality in texts' (47) – in each, j/e and tu use their collective power to perform, and transform, canonical roles and relationships which represent the centre of European heteropatriarchal culture (e.g. 1973: 11-3; 86-7; 138-9; 181-2). However, as Wittig indicates in 'Some Remarks' (2005: 47), it is the accumulated, unadulterated power – acquired collectively through all of the lists and all of the poems – that enables j/e and tu to dismantle heteropatriarchal power structures and to replace them with *Le corps lesbien* (174-5) – created **by** and **for** lesbians. When we fully recognize this, we comprehend the reasoning behind the shift in tone and parodic ethos between the Orphée and Eurydice fragment (11-3) and the Archimedeia fragment (181-2). That is, while the satire underpinning these texts – a violent, powerful, political critique of heteropatriarchy and its discourses – remains the same, the gentleness and playfulness, already latent in the tone of the Orphée and Eurydice fragment can increase to the heights visible in the Archimedeia fragment, as j/e and tu have succeeded in the aim which motivates the 'repetition with difference' of heterosexual texts: the creation of *Le corps lesbien* (1973: 174-5).

Thus far in my analyses of *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando* and *Le Corps lesbien*, I have foregrounded diverse ways in which these texts mobilize intramural parody and engage with gendered imagery and systems. Equally, my analysis has demonstrated how the 'putting on' of textual styles and appearances, such as the faux-

biographer's effusive nineteenth-century narrative voice in Woolf's *Orlando* (e.g. 2008: 13), resonates both with the concept of drag performance as a whole, and with the use of drag and gendered archetypes in the texts themselves. Further, I have contended that intramural parody, gender parody, and gendered imagery, work together to facilitate and foreground extramural satire in each of the texts considered. Consequently, in drawing attention to satirical and parodic techniques while equally emphasizing gender and gender performance, 'textual drag' demonstrates how crucial each of these elements can be in queer, feminist critique, and, moreover, shows that these elements do not necessarily act independently of each other, but instead operate in reciprocal terms.<sup>171</sup> Thus, by conceptualising the parodic repetition of existing textual and 'moral' codes as a form of drag, readers not only gain insight into the workings of this repetition, but equally begin to appreciate how this textual strategy mirrors the performative drag surrounding it. I rely on a term such as intertextuality (Hutcheon, 2000: 37) or quotation (Hutcheon, 2000: 41)<sup>172</sup> to discuss the deployment and interaction of stylistic and performative drag in the texts considered here, we risk glossing over the significance of masculinity, femininity and performance in the imagery and language of *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, and *Le Corps lesbien*, and, moreover, underestimating the extent to which these texts' simultaneous mobilization of gendered imagery and of parodic techniques acts to foreground, and challenge, patriarchal systems.

Having begun to illustrate the use of 'textual drag' as a mode of engaging with intramural parody and extramural satire, I close this chapter with a further analysis of the interaction of these forms in *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, and *Le Corps lesbien*. This analysis enables me to highlight aspects of each text which I have not yet

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<sup>171</sup> Notably, these elements can also work together to do transfeminist, as well as queer feminist, work. However, I chose to use the term 'queer feminist critique' here as I was referring to the queer, or proto-queer, feminist critique undertaken by the authors discussed in this chapter.

<sup>172</sup> Separating 'quotation' from intramural parody, Hutcheon writes: "'Trans-contextualized" repetition is certainly a feature of parody, but the critical distancing that defines parody is not necessarily implicit in the idea of quotation, to refer to a text as a parody is not the same as to refer to it as a quotation, even if parody has been voided of any defining characteristic suggesting ridicule' (Hutcheon, 2000: 41).

touched on in this chapter, as well as further demonstrating the value of the analytical frame of 'textual drag'.

First, I explore Rachilde's appropriation of Baudelaire's ideal beauty figure (Hawthorne and Constable, 2004: xiv), focusing particularly on Rachilde's modification of 'the male decadent gaze (xiv) and on the use of Jacques' idealized femininity as a Decadent motif (Rachilde, 2004: 42-3). As Hawthorne and Constable argue, Rachilde reworked and modified 'the male decadent gaze that split woman into a costumed, made-up [...] inanimate representation of beauty (woman as work of art) and the unadorned person of corporeal appetites' (2004: xiv), unsettling the assumption that a woman must take on the former role, and allotting the 'male' gaze to Raoule rather than to Jacques (Rachilde, 2004: 42-3). Raoule de Vénérande retains many of the characteristics of the classic Decadent hero: she is rich (2004: 13), aristocratic (25), handsome (19), intelligent (26), well connected (154-5), and has 'perverse' sexual appetites (113).<sup>173</sup> Further, as is evident from the early stages of the text, Raoule is an agential, desiring subject (2004: 19), while Jacques is the adored object of the gaze (42), at first to his embarrassment (43), then to his pleasure (98), and, finally, after his death, when he is replicated as a wax model which retains his eyelashes, teeth and hair (210). While far more nuanced and complex than either a repetition or reversal of a Decadent relationship between a 'perverse' hero and his mistress, Raoule's Pygmalion-esque relationship with Jacques – her control over him (86-7), her admiration of his beauty (19), his original naivety (33), and his eventual transformation into 'un être à son image' (99) – constitutes an easily recognizable parody of hetero-patriarchal narratives of love and desire.<sup>174</sup> Raoule's manipulation of Jacques (64) thus clearly invites comparison with textual codes and tropes – such as the Pygmalion myth – which it starkly

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<sup>173</sup> In possessing these characteristics, Raoule can be compared to the protagonist of the celebrated Decadent novel *À rebours* by Joris-Karl Huysmans, as well as to the dandy figures present in later novels such as Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*.

<sup>174</sup> As Hawthorne and Constable point out, canonical French authors such as Balzac and Mérimée had previously mobilized the Pygmalion myth, employing it to 'raise questions about the blurring of aesthetic and erotic experience [...] and about what it means to bring an artistic representation to life' (2004: xxii). In 'Rachilde's rewriting and inversion of the myth' (2004: xxii), however, Raoule breaks with and inverts the canonical and Biblical tradition which insists that the creator or artist must be male.

modifies (Hawthorne and Constable, 2004: xxii). In the same way, this modification of pervasive heteronormative narratives clashes sharply with, and consequently provokes criticism of, the prevailing social order of the society in which it was published. Thus, while Rachilde would later claim that she had little interest in challenging or interrogating the norms and power structures surrounding her (1928: 6), her depiction of Jacques as an ideal beauty to be sculpted and honed (2004: 99) acts to critique and satirize the patriarchal injunction of male agency and female passivity.

Before returning to parody and satire in *Orlando*, I examine *Monsieur Vénus*' opening scene, exploring the way in which this scene positions Jacques as the embodiment of idealized beauty and foreshadows his later role as 'woman-as-work-of-art' (Hawthorne and Constable, 2004: xivv) (Rachilde, 2004: 99). When first encountering Raoule, Jacques already possesses feminine attributes: he is draped in velvet roses (2004: 8) and explains his current occupation in a way which suggests an identification with femininity, stating: 'Pour le moment, Marie Silvert, c'est moi' (9). Here, Jacques' femininity is threefold, occurring on the levels of the fleshly, the narrative, and the naïve/Eve. The 'fleshly' here designates the depiction of Jacques' body and stance in this scene: rather than presenting an odd juxtaposition between the velvet flowers and a developed masculinity, Jacques exudes an image of sensuous femininity – Jacques wears a 'blouse flottante, courait en spirale une guirlande de roses; des roses fort larges de satin chair velouté' (8) and is absorbed in delicate, supposedly feminine work. Jacques' attractive, youthful body is frequently emphasized during the course of *Monsieur Vénus*; textual references to Antinous (43) link Jacques with androgynous male beauty and queer desire<sup>175</sup>, while Raoule stresses the femininity of Jacques' bodily attributes and her attraction to them, throughout the text (2004: 43; 2004: 88). When I discuss a narrative level of femininity, I refer both to the objectifying, sexualized depiction of Jacques (8) and to his temporary self-identification as 'Marie Silvert' (9). Marie's frequent role as 'prostituée' (31) adds another dimension to Jacques' feminine identification. By

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<sup>175</sup> Hawthorne and Constable write: 'Antinous was a Bithyian slave who became the favourite of the Roman emperor Hadrian. Antinous is thus both a paradigm for male beauty and a coded reference in some texts to male homosexuality (Hawthorne and Constable, 2004: 43, note 16).

entwining Jacques with sexualized femininity here, Rachilde foreshadows both Jacques' relationship with Raoule, and his strong identification with prostitution prior to his death.<sup>176</sup> The final layer of Jacques' femininity is that of the naïve/Eve. Jacques' apparent innocence and naivety prior to his relationship with Raoule (2004: 33) strengthens his resemblance both to the angelic, ethereal dimension of Baudelaire's ideal beauty (Baudelaire 2006: 74) and, as Katherine Gantz points out, to the figure of Eve prior to her fall (2005: 116). Just as Raoule's infatuation with Jacques' image (2004: 19) positions her as the mirror image of Baudelaire's enthralled narrator (2006: 74-5), Jacques' naïve insistence that Raoule is interested in him only as a patron of the arts (Rachilde, 2004: 31) enables him – like Eve – to be seduced without any awareness of the potential consequences. Significantly, while these narrative strategies and cumulative intertextual references impress readers of Jacques' femininity and foreshadow his immersion in the mistress role, they simultaneously draw attention to *Monsieur Vénus'* deviation from its literary precursors<sup>177</sup> and to its characters' deviation from socially approved, gender conforming behaviour (2004: 75; 2004: 197-9).

As I have argued here, the frame of textual drag can emphasize an author's mobilization of intramural parody and its contribution to extramural satire, within texts that foreground gender and gender performance. In drawing attention to the Pygmalion narrative parodied by Rachilde (99), this frame foregrounds *Monsieur Vénus'* satirical critique of the positioning of women as objects of beauty to be honed and shaped (210). Equally, scrutinizing intramural parody in this text illuminates the deliberate echoes between its form and content; in the same way

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<sup>176</sup> Jacques' internal monologue shortly before his duel with de Rattaoilbe reveals his identification with prostitution: 'La prostitution, c'est une maladie! Tous l'avaient eue dans sa famille: sa mère, sa sœur; est-ce qu'il pouvait lutter contre son propre sang ?' (2004: 204).

<sup>177</sup> In addition to rewriting the canonical relationship between male artist or creator and his female muse (Hawthorne and Constable, 2004: xxiii), *Monsieur Vénus* challenges and modifies the seductress role through the figure of Raoule. This image of the monstrous, desiring woman is an established literary figure, appearing as the demonic dimension of Baudelaire's 'Hymne à la Beauté' (2006: 74); as the vampiric protagonist of Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*; and as the enigmatic titular character of John Keats' 'La belle dame sans merci' (1996: 58-9), to name but three examples. However, while Raoule mirrors this figure due to her seductiveness, her power over Jacques (Rachilde, 2004: 112), and her decision to dispose of him (2004: 200), she exceeds and modifies this figure as a result of her refusal of 'feminine' sexuality and normative sexual practices (2004: 89) and of her success in facilitating murder without receiving punishment (208).

that Raoule works on Jacques to produce him as ‘un être à son image’ (99), intertextual references accumulate to position Jacques as an ideal beauty and Raoule as his pioneering Pygmalion (e.g. 13; 42-3; 70-4; 99; 155; 210). Further, while both the textual ‘putting on’ of existing discourses and the critical foregrounding of a political system are essential components of *Monsieur Vénus*, it is drag which connects these key textual threads, and it is partially as a result of drag, or as Butler would have it, ‘gender parody’ (1999: 188), that *Monsieur Vénus* created shock-waves in nineteenth-century France (English, 2006: 212-3) and remains provocative reading today.

As I established when introducing the interplay between ‘gender parody’ and intramural parody in *Orlando*, the narrative voice of the pseudo-biographer enables Woolf to connect ‘ironic “trans-contextualization”’ (Hutcheon, 2000: 32) with extramural satire. While ironically echoing the conventional, reverential style of a typical nineteenth-century biographer (e.g. Woolf, 2008: 30-9), the faux-biographer queers this approach by combining an evident lack of omniscience (13) with moments of startling insight into Orlando’s desire and embodiment (50-2; 181; 211). *Orlando* seemingly takes a conventional subject for late nineteenth- to early twentieth- century biography – a white, male member of the landed gentry – yet uses its protagonist’s gender fluidity (150-2; 207-11) to subvert readers’ expectations. By including a parodic version of the stereotypical narrator, Woolf encourages readers to abandon the perception of biography as the study of ‘great men’<sup>178</sup> and to recognize the value of recounting a wider variety of lives; a subject which is passionately discussed in relation to the depiction of queer women in ‘A Room’ (2008b: 106-9) as well as elsewhere in Woolf’s oeuvre.<sup>179</sup> Further, as

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<sup>178</sup> Woolf’s critique of biography as the study of ‘great men’ resonates with Lytton Strachey’s treatment of his subjects in *Eminent Victorians* (1918). While Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Dr Arnold and General Gordon may appear today to be relatively conventional choices for a biographer, Strachey’s critical stance towards them broke with the nineteenth-century biographical tradition of biographers who were ‘eager to pay homage to the dead’ (Reviron-Piégay, 2013: n.p.). Reviron-Piégay also questions whether *Orlando* can be perceived as a direct response to *Eminent Victorians* (Reviron-Piégay, 2013: n.p.). Reviron-Piégay’s article ‘*Eminent Victorians*: Outrageous Strachey? The Indecent Exposure of Victorian Characters and Mores’ (2013), published in *Études britanniques contemporaines*, can be accessed through the journal’s website: <http://ebc.revues.org/638#text> (accessed 13 September, 2015).

<sup>179</sup> Both the portrayal of Mary Carmichael in ‘A Room of One’s Own’ (Woolf, 2008: 5-137) and that of Mrs Crowe in ‘Portrait of a Londoner’ (Woolf, 2004: n.p.) critique the novelistic and journalistic

suggested in relation to the episode of Messrs S.W. and T.R. (2008: 210), Woolf's use of the faux-biographer enables her to critically foreground the structural nature of misogyny, while the archaic narrative style and Orlando's fantastically extensive life span (292) acts to mockingly position patriarchy as anachronistic and far from fit for purpose.

The faux-biographer's ineptitude, evident from the text's first passage below, constitutes an essential element of Woolf's strategy, working in the service both of intramural parody and extramural satire:

HE – for there could be no doubt of his sex although the fashion of the time did something to disguise it – was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters. It was the colour of an old football, and more or less the shape of one, save for the sunken cheeks and a strand or two of coarse, dry hair, like the hair on a cocoanut. Orlando's father, or perhaps his grandfather, had struck it from the shoulders of a vast pagan who had started up under the moon in the barbarian fields of Africa[...] (2008:13)

In this passage, Woolf's whiteness and her white privilege are evident alongside the indications of the text's age. On an initial viewing, readers witness a racially unmarked protagonist engaging in violent, disrespectful play with a relic derived from a racially marked corpse, and, significantly, the actions of this protagonist are uncriticised by the narrator. Despite its clearly problematic nature, however, I tentatively suggest that this scene offers a critique of white supremacist colonialism. My argument centres on the image of the shrunken head (13) and on the faux-biographer's language use (13). The contemporary colonizing narrative would position decapitation as a 'savage' practice – as the phrase 'barbarian fields of Africa' indicates – yet Woolf immediately subverts this by allotting violence to its proper place: to the white colonizer in the shape of Orlando's 'father or grandfather' (13). Central to Woolf's critique, the phrase 'father or grandfather'

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tendencies to focus on 'great men' while overlooking the equally valuable lives and actions of 'ordinary' women (Woolf, 2008: 110). As Sonita Sarker rightly points out in her excellent analysis of Woolf's collected essays 'The London Scene', Woolf's depiction of these 'ordinary' people as racially unmarked (2001: 16) means that her fictional London leaves its non-white inhabitants without representation, just as 'masculinist histories' (2001: 7) neglected to include women as citizens. While Woolf's attempt at inclusive writing merits criticism on this basis, it remains significant that Woolf sought to challenge conventional ideas about appropriate subjects for biography and for fiction, as she does in *Orlando*.

emphasizes Woolf's mobilization of class and sex in this passage. This phrase illustrates the narrator's inaccuracy, deconstructing the image of the biographer who is meticulously aware of each member in the lineage of an upper class family. By including a slippage between 'father' and 'grandfather', Woolf intimates that these colonizing figures of the past are interchangeable, despite their race and class privileges. Further, the link the narrator draws between Orlando's swordsmanship and his gender (13) creates a mocking image of privileged, upper class masculinity: sex is defined here by a person's capacity for violence. Woolf's careful manipulation of narrative style enables readers to recognize the biographical style parodied while equally perceiving the deliberate errors in its reproduction. While encouraging readers to scrutinize the narrator's language use, this technique acts to create distance from the dominant belief systems which are attached to this nineteenth-century narrative style. Thus, here, the biographer's inaccurate repetition of archaic, colonialist rhetoric alerts readers to the critique at work under the surface level of the text. Significantly, the assertion that Orlando's sex is indisputable (13) is challenged on at least two levels in this passage. This image is first deconstructed by any prior knowledge of the text: 'doubt' is exactly what surrounds Orlando's sex, which will be the subject of a trial later in the text (161). Second, as Rachel Bowlby points out (2008: xxxvii), the narrator's emphasis on fashion and its meaning complicates the assertion of certainty about Orlando's sex; here 'the denial of the doubt is just what lets in the doubt, by saying what it says needs no saying' (xxxvii). That is, the narrator's seemingly unnecessary emphasis on Orlando's supposedly indisputable sex provokes the reader into questioning it. Further, the juxtaposition of this normative, binary approach to sex with the biographer's repeated errors (Woolf, 2008: 13) acts both to shed additional doubt on Orlando's sex, and, when considered in light of the text as a whole, to link binary gender systems with the outdated colonialist viewpoint the biographer espouses. Curiously, the faux-biographer's certainty about binary gender and its essential truth echoes ironically with the juridical certainty about Orlando's 'indisputable' womanhood towards the close of the text (243), and in doing so, draws attention to this conclusion's clear resonances with contemporary transfeminist perspectives. That is, Orlando's manhood can be seen to be indisputable at the beginning of the text (13-127), just

as her womanhood is at the text's conclusion (296), yet this is only the case due to identification (296), rather than as a result of biology, assigned sex, or of the pronouncements of biographers and lawyers. Over the course of *Orlando*, readers learn that womanhood does entail oppression under patriarchy (150-2; 210), but that it is compatible with gender fluidity (207-12), that it does not determine sexuality (154; 211), that women are as complex and varied as men (180-1), and that identification, rather than anything else (296), determines gender. Significantly, the juxtaposition of these rich, vibrant insights with the parodic repetition of a conformist, anachronistic narrative voice acts to create a mocking play with cisheteropatriarchal conventions while nevertheless providing a striking challenge to the norms they construct. In summary, then, the narrative masquerade affected by the use of the faux-biographer foregrounds and facilitates the queer feminist satire which permeates *Orlando* as a whole.

Of the three texts examined here, Wittig's *Le Corps lesbien* parodies and repurposes the widest variety of existing styles, techniques, and plots. In *Monsieur Vénus* and *Orlando*, intramural parody primarily operates in relation to one existing tradition – that of nineteenth-century biography in *Orlando*, and that of Decadence in *Monsieur Vénus*.<sup>180</sup> As Wittig suggests in 'Some Remarks on *The Lesbian Body*', however, *Le Corps lesbien* poaches and repurposes a range of techniques and texts – including, but not limited to, the works of 'Du Bellay, Genet, Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Raymond Roussel, Nathalie Sarraute' (Wittig, 2005: 46) – thereby strengthening j/e's substantive assault on 'heterosexual culture' (2005: 47) and on the pervasive discourses of 'the straight mind' (Wittig, 1992: 29). As j/e's process of 'lesbianizing' canonical textual heroes (1973: 11-3; 86-7) constitutes an essential strategy in *Le Corps lesbien* – one which clearly illustrates the relationship between intramural parody and extramural satire – I have primarily focused on this

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<sup>180</sup> As I have emphasized in this chapter, *Monsieur Vénus* also engages critically with sexological discourses (2004: 25-6) and with the Baudelairean representation of women either as 'artifice and artifact [sic] [...] or] as organic, embodied woman, monstrously insatiable in her sensuous appetites' (Hawthorne and Constable, 2004: xiv). Equally, *Orlando* samples various poetic styles, such as that of Pope (2008: 205). However, I suggest that both texts primarily mobilize, and play with, one tradition: nineteenth-century biography in the case of *Orlando* and Decadence in the case of *Monsieur Vénus*. While Baudelairean topos are also centred in *Monsieur Vénus*, this volume does not sample as large a range of texts and traditions as *Le Corps lesbien*.

throughout the chapter. Here, however, I emphasize Wittig's parodic deployment of anatomical vocabulary.

The minute description of bodily parts and processes runs throughout the text in capitalized lists, which Wittig describes as 'piercing' the text (2005: 45). As Lisa Downing argues, Wittig's graphic depiction of bodily parts and processes in *Le Corps lesbien* 'can be seen as consciously parodying numerous (masculine) textual genres, including the medical anatomy, the sixteenth-century *blason du corps féminin* [...] and – of course – the pornographic text' (Downing, 2012: 204-5). As I demonstrate here, Wittig thoroughly severs this anatomical vocabulary from its context – a means of codifying and explaining (women's) bodies – mobilizing it against these model texts to strengthen her queer feminist critique. 'Blason du corps féminin', employed by Maurice Scève among others<sup>181</sup>, constitutes a poetic tradition which objectifies the women it depicts, often operating in one of two ways.<sup>182</sup> These poems tend either to provide a minute appraisal of a single, fetishized body part – as in Scève's 'Blason du Sourcil' (1809: 7) – or to enumerate body parts individually in order to proclaim that the object is perfect as a whole (Downing, 2012: 205). While Wittig's lists employ the minute, detailed description of body parts which characterise the blason form, this intertextual strategy clearly constitutes parody – a form characterized by its transformation of the model text (Hutcheon, 2000: 38) – rather than pastiche. Further, rather than constituting the minimal transformation of a text to which Genette refers when discussing parody (Genette, 1982, cited in Hutcheon, 2000: 21), the intramural parody affected by Wittig's anatomical lists is 'capable of transformative power in creating new syntheses' (Hutcheon, 2000: 20). This 'transformative power' seems to me to be evident in both of the lists' central functions: their collective construction of a lesbian body (Wittig, 1973: 175) and in their defamiliarizing assault on the texts which underpin 'heterosexual culture' (Wittig, 2005: 47).

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<sup>181</sup> For a collected volume, including poems by Maurice Scève, Clément Marot, and Eustorg de Beaulieu, see Dominique Martin Méon's *Blasons: poésies anciennes des XV et XVI<sup>èmes</sup> siècles, extraites de différents auteurs imprimés et manuscrits* (1809).

<sup>182</sup> Here, I am referring specifically to the 'blason' form, as opposed to the related, satirical 'contre-blason' form. For examples of the 'contre-blason', see the collected volume referred to in footnote 180 above.

As Wittig stresses in 'Some Remarks', these lists have a pivotal function in and alongside her parodic appropriation of canonical texts; these lists 'cut off the mass of texts devoted to love' (47). This disruption is twofold, creating a separation both from the passionate poems of *Le Corps lesbien*, and, more violently, from the model texts which j/e and tu modify and lesbianize (e.g. Wittig, 1973: 11-3). First, the lists' stark tone differs markedly from the rest of the text, jolting readers out of their immersion in the passionate poems dedicated to encounters between j/e and tu (e.g. Wittig, 1973: 22-3). The lists' capacity to unsettle readers – an effect partially achieved by their content, their capitalization, and their lack of conventional punctuation – is heightened by their interruption of individual poems, as when 'LES DORSAUX, LES ILIAQUES, LES RONDS' (1973: 112-3) disturbs j/e's description of pulling at her lover's hair. Second, in distancing readers from j/e and tu's passionate encounters, these lists affect a further separation from the texts which Wittig 'borrow[s] from and intertextualize[s]' (2005: 47). Readers can still readily discern many of the model texts beneath Wittig's strategies as these texts constitute a significant cultural dimension of the pervasive discourses of the 'straight mind' (1992: 29). At the same time, however, the violent tone of the lists – and indeed of some of the extracts (e.g. Wittig, 1973: 62-3) – contributes to the transformation of the model texts, and ensures that lesbian passion, as envisaged by Wittig, differs starkly from heterosexual love as it is depicted in the works which Wittig intertextualizes (Wittig, 2005: 47) (Wittig, 1973: 11-3; 86-7). Further, I suggest that the lists' assault on 'the great lovers of heterosexual culture' (47) enables them to construct a lesbian body – both in textual and physical terms – and to do so without reproducing the imagery of lesbian embodiment in the texts which Wittig sought to 'leave behind' (47). The lists' constructive capacity is evinced in two clear ways. First, through the culmination of the listed bodily parts and processes as 'LE CORPS LESBIEN' (1973: 175) in the text's final list, and second, via the sense of collective construction provided by the juxtaposition of certain lists with particular poems. Consider the list entwined with the second poem on page 49: the lovers descend together, their limbs locked, the page finishing with the description 'poitrine contre' (49). While the appearance of the list on page 50 will provoke readers to question Wittig's techniques and aims, the beginning of the list 'LES AREOLES' (50) connects

closely with 'poitrine', providing textual intimacy and collective construction. Further, the lists' emphasis on the value of each body part, both in itself and as a site of desire, mirrors the poems' deconstructive intimacy, undoing the focus on wholeness promoted by the blason (Scève, 1809: 7; Downing, 2012: 205).

Wittig's complex, multi-layered anatomical lists thus create – through the modification of the 'blason' form – and facilitate intramural parody, critiquing and engaging with the hetero-centrism of much canonical literature. Additionally, as I have demonstrated here, this narrative strategy of 'putting on' – in this case, the modification of *Le Corps lesbien* through the inclusion of anatomical lists – equally plays a pivotal role in the text's creation of materialist lesbian 'extramural satire'.

Each of the three texts considered here mobilizes intramural parody alongside imagery and themes of gender and gender performance, collectively constructing a satirical foregrounding of patriarchal gender norms. Equally, despite their disparate styles and tones, each text provides proto-queer insights into the construction of gender and the impact of structural norms on that construction. The mobilization of drag in each of these texts, albeit operating in very different ways, thus acts to prefigure Butler's argument that '*in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency*' (1999: 188, emphasis in original). At the same time, however, the passion at work in these texts – whether that of Orlando's enjoyment in her gender fluidity (Woolf, 2008: 211-2), or that shared in the hunger, joy, and fire of Eurydice's return from the Underworld in Orphée's arms (Wittig, 1973: 11-3) – provides insight into the workings of drag which may be harder to glimpse from theory alone. In developing the frame of textual drag, I have sought not only to shed additional light on the insights, and affects, produced by these texts, but equally to illustrate how the mobilization of formal and structural techniques, particularly that of intramural parody, operates to facilitate and strengthen political critique, effecting a literary 'putting on' which mirrors drag itself. In addition to emphasizing the value of Butlerian gender parody (1999: 188) for analyses of both literary and onstage drag, the frame of textual drag demonstrates how gender parody can both echo and interact with the literary 'putting on' of intramural parody. By focusing on the interaction between gender

parody and intramural parody in the context of extramural satire, textual drag acts to shed light on the specific boundaries and advantages of each of these concepts in themselves, as well as elucidating their collective impact on a given text. Thus, as a composite form, textual drag provides additional insight into the workings of extramural satire – and into the way in which diverse parodic forms, such as gender parody and intramural parody, facilitate it – while ensuring that parody is not conflated with satire, and that drag is not positioned as necessarily subversive in itself.

## **Conclusion – Towards a Particularizing, Transfeminist Theory of Drag**

This conclusion will be divided into three sections. First, I want to highlight three trends that this thesis has found in French and Anglo-American queer and feminist theorisations of drag, demonstrating some of the issues or problems associated with these modes of thinking. Having done so, I briefly explore two, arguably contradictory, dimensions at work in contemporary drag scenes – an exploration which strengthens my above criticisms of certain reductive perspectives in existing theorisations of drag. I then conclude by highlighting particularly valuable insights gathered in this thesis, utilizing these to construct key tenets of a particularising, transfeminist approach to drag performance.

### **Challenging Reductive Dichotomies**

There are three trends to highlight. First, what I refer to as the subversive/reactionary dichotomy – the positioning of drag as necessarily either subversive or reactionary, second, the definition of drag on the basis of an opposition between the gender of the performer and the gender performed on stage, and, third, the link between drag and performativity. In this, the first section of the conclusion, I place some of the key insights of this thesis in a dialogue with each other. In addition to enabling me to introduce a frame which emphasizes the interaction between gender parody (Butler, 1999: 188), intramural parody (Hutcheon, 2000: 25) and extramural satire (2000: 43), *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, and *Le Corps lesbien* foreground some of the flaws in the trends referred to above, as well as illustrating the benefits of other modes of thinking.

To start with the subversive/reactionary dichotomy, the passionate investment that theorists of drag bring to their subject (Schacht and Underwood, 2004: 12-3; Bourcier, 2006: 128-30) mean that this understanding is often seductive. However, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, this binary positioning is often reductive as it cannot account for the complexity and diversity of drag as a whole (Schacht and Underwood, 2004: 11-3; hooks, 2009: 276-7). Equally, as *Monsieur Vénus* shows,

the performances of a single individual can incorporate progressive, challenging dimensions alongside more problematic ones. To dismiss Jacques' performance of femininity as a misogynistic mockery of womanhood –following Marilyn Frye's (1983: 139) or Janice Raymond's theorization of drag (1994: xxvii) – would be to overlook the fact that, after dismissing his initial internalized misogyny (Rachilde, 2004: 90), Jacques does not demean or dismiss the gender presentation of any individual. Further, reading Jacques' femininity as a mockery of womanhood would overlook both the personal resonances Jacques experiences with femininity (2004: 9; 2004: 97) and the role femininity plays in allowing him to discover his identity (2004: 112-3).<sup>183</sup> However, while Jacques' femininity does challenge accepted dogma about 'appropriate' gender expression, it would be equally reductive to describe this femininity as necessarily subversive. Such a description would be unable to account for the relationship between Jacques' femininity and his markedly unequal relationship with Raoule (2004: 91-2). As I stressed in my final chapter, Raoule mobilizes the privileges of wealth, class, and education, manipulating Jacques in order to fulfil her desire of creating 'une dépravation nouvelle' (2004: 73). Overall then, looking at the complexities of Jacques' performance of femininity (2004: 98; 2004: 204) highlights the reductive nature of the subversive/reactionary dichotomy as a whole, foregrounding my argument that it is both unrealistic and unfair to employ 'subversion' as a mode of categorizing drag. Indeed, as Sam Bourcier argues in his critique of Butler's work (2012: 154), theorists can appreciate the inventive and provocative ways in which some LGBTQIA+ people employ performative strategies, without placing the 'burden of subversion' (154) on trans and gender non-conforming people as a whole.

I now turn to *Orlando* and *Le Corps lesbien*, reiterating the way in which these texts unsettle definitions of drag which focus on a supposed opposition between the gender of the performer and the gender they perform on stage. As Bourcier demonstrates in 'Des "Femmes travesties" aux pratiques transgenres: repenser et

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<sup>183</sup>Jacques' inclinations towards femininity illustrate an argument made by Julia Serano in 'Reclaiming Femininity' (2012: 180-1). That is, that individuals can feel personal resonances with a given form of gender expression, irrespective of their gender and assignment at birth (2012: 182). As I highlight throughout this thesis, this insight is a highly valuable one, and one which can partially elucidate performers' motivations for engaging in drag.

queeriser le travestissement', defining drag as 'a woman dressed as a man' or 'a man dressed as a woman' focuses on clothing at the expense of pose, gesture, and techniques (2006: 128), and erases performers whose identity is outside 'man' or 'woman' or whose identity aligns with their onstage performance (2006: 128-30). As Orlando is a gender fluid woman (Woolf, 2008: 208-12), the binary performer/performed opposition is unable to account for the resonances between her identity and her performances of masculinity and femininity (2008: 211-2). For Orlando, as for Sandy Chang, performing masculinity is not only a matter of creating an external character, but also allows one to connect with one's own masculinity (Woolf, 2008: 208; André and Chang, 2006: 257).

Like *Orlando*, *Le Corps lesbien* foregrounds the significance of performer identity in drag, while highlighting some of the problems caused by the performer/performed dichotomy. When discussing j/e and tu's lesbian rewritings of classic heteronormative tales and myths (e.g. Wittig, 1973: 11-3; 1973: 86-7; 1973: 187-8), it is not sufficient to point out the lovers' performances of masculinity. Instead, in order to comprehend Wittig's intentions (2005: 46-7), theorists must recognize that her protagonists' actions provide specifically lesbian challenges to heteronormative discourses. Notably, while the performer/performed dichotomy seemingly draws attention to performer identity, it tends to reduce it to a component within a binary opposition, thereby erasing many of the complexities involved. Thus, describing j/e and tu as 'women performing as men' would not only enrage Wittig – who famously argued that 'Lesbians are not women' (1992: 32) – but would also oversimplify the text's discursive strategies and their challenge to 'the straight mind' (1992: 21). Taken together then, both *Orlando* and *Le Corps lesbien* demonstrate the necessity of developing a particularizing theory of drag, which is able to account for the importance of performer identity without reducing that identity to comply with the simplistic formula of 'man performing as a woman' or 'woman performing as a man'. When describing drag in collective terms, it is far more useful to concentrate on what happens on stage – which is often a play with

gendered archetypes and/or possibilities – than to employ the outdated performer/performed dichotomy.<sup>184</sup>

Since Judith Butler introduced the concept in *Gender Trouble* (1999: 187-9), performativity has become a popular lens with which to view drag. Unlike the positioning of drag as necessarily either subversive or reactionary, the idea that drag can shed light on the performative nature of gender allows for differences between individual performances and scenes (1999: 189). Consequently, particularizing theories of drag can adapt and include the concept of performativity. Equally, Butler's concept of 'gender parody' (188) can begin to elucidate aspects of *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, and *Le Corps lesbien*. Here, I am suggesting that Butlerian 'gender parody' (1999: 188) can elucidate aspects of these texts in itself, as well as interacting with Hutcheon's concepts of intramural parody (2000: 25) and extramural satire (2000: 43). To focus on *Orlando*, one scene in particular resonates with Butlerian performativity: the scene in which Orlando, returning to England by boat, begins to recognize the constraints that will be imposed on her as an English gentlewoman (Woolf, 2008: 149-52). Just as the example of drag performance in *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1999: 187) encourages readers to recognize 'the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done' (Butler, 1991: 21), Orlando's realization that she is expected to perform femininity in a specific manner (Woolf, 2008: 151) highlights the role of norms in quotidian gender construction. However, while *Orlando* allows readers to appreciate the value of performativity, it equally draws attention to the significance of identity in gender performance (2008: 208-12). Consequently, *Orlando* arguably foregrounds one of Bourcier's central criticisms of Butlerian performativity – a lack of thorough consideration of gender identity (2012: 239). As I argued in my exploration of queer theoretical texts, Bourcier's emphasis on agency (2012: 239) adds an additional dimension to Butlerian performativity, rendering it appropriate for the analysis of a wider range of texts and performance forms.

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<sup>184</sup> I use the term 'outdated' here to convey that the performer/performed dichotomy is no longer applicable to many drag scenes. Current drag scenes often feature non-binary performers, such as Adam All and Marilyn Misandry, and/or female drag queens such as Victoria Sin or Georgie Bee.

As a whole, this section of the conclusion has highlighted three modes of thinking about drag – the subversive/reactionary dichotomy, the definition of drag through an opposition between a performer’s gender and the gender they perform on stage, and a focus on Butlerian performativity. This exploration of these conceptual trends has demonstrated some of their flaws and benefits, while equally drawing attention to some of the conclusions I have reached regarding queer analyses of drag and literary texts which feature drag. In the next section, I explore two arguably contradictory trends at work in contemporary drag scenes, drawing attention to the challenges these trends pose to the subversive/reactionary dichotomy and the performer/performed dichotomy.

### **Trends and Challenges in Contemporary Drag Scenes**

The two arguably contradictory trends I want to highlight here are, first, the prominence and influence of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, and, second, the drive towards inclusivity in contemporary drag scenes.<sup>185</sup> Although performer perspectives and references to *Drag Race* have recurred throughout this thesis, I have chosen to foreground them here for two reasons: in order to provide further snapshots of current scenes in France, the UK, and the US, and to demonstrate how they influence my conclusions regarding the theorisation of drag as a whole.

I now briefly introduce *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and its format before looking at four dimensions of *Drag Race* and the discourses it perpetuates. These are, transmisogyny, the promotion of a ‘Standard English Ideology’ (Anthony, 2014: 58-9), the use of Harlem Drag Ball idiom, and RuPaul’s doctrine on drag. Hosted by RuPaul Charles, *Drag Race* is an iconic series which continues to influence mainstream and in-community perceptions of drag. Vying for the title of America’s Next Drag Superstar, performers compete for a substantial cash prize, a touring contract, and additional awards, such as a year’s supply of cosmetics.<sup>186</sup> The series

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<sup>185</sup> Some of the reflections included here were developed in the paper ‘“You Better Werk’: Dragging Language, Imagery and Praxis across Queer Performance Spaces in Three National Contexts’, which I delivered at the workshop ‘Ideologies and Theories of Gender’, held at the University of Leicester on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2016. I also plan to further develop these reflections for a future article based on this paper.

<sup>186</sup> The cash prize for Season 8 was \$100,000, and a one year supply of Anastasia Beverly Hills’ cosmetics. For further information on Season 8 and the prizes awarded, see

follows an established reality TV format, featuring celebrity judges, a pool of contestants, weekly challenges, weekly eliminations, and culminating in a single winner. Each episode features a mini challenge, whose winner receives prizes such as quality cosmetics, and a main challenge, which determines elimination.<sup>187</sup> In order to succeed in the challenges, participants are required to demonstrate a range of skills including acting, dancing, designing, miming, modelling, sewing, and singing. Having watched the participants' performances and consulted with the celebrity judges, RuPaul selects two candidates for potential elimination. RuPaul then makes the final decision, basing this on his response to the selected candidates' lip sync performances. The successful candidate is told 'shantay, you stay', while the eliminated performer must 'sashay away'. The exacting, capricious responses of the judges, the complexity of the challenges, and the interdiction of socialising with friends during the competition, combine to create a pressurized, hot-house atmosphere for participants. Further, as *Drag Race* is a commercial venture, series' editors encourage and highlight tensions between contestants to provide compelling viewing.<sup>188</sup> This manipulation of the participants and their images interacts<sup>189</sup> with the candidates' personal agendas, and notably affects the imagery and discourses shown to the audience. As Laurie Norris' analysis of the series' depiction of trans contestants demonstrates (2014: 34-6), the narratives seen by audiences differs according to the season and episode.

To briefly tackle the issue of transmisogyny on *Drag Race*<sup>190</sup>, this operates on at least two levels. First, *Drag Race* has been criticized for including transphobic

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[http://logorupaulsdragrace.wikia.com/wiki/RuPaul's\\_Drag\\_Race\\_\(Season\\_8\)](http://logorupaulsdragrace.wikia.com/wiki/RuPaul's_Drag_Race_(Season_8)) (accessed 1 August 2016).

<sup>187</sup> For further details on the prizes awarded and on which performers were eliminated at which stage, see the link cited in note 177 above.

<sup>188</sup> For further details on the series editors' focus on conflict, see Laurie Norris' analysis of Monica Beverley Hills' revelation about her trans identity (2014: 48) in the chapter 'Of Fish and Feminists, Homonormative Misogyny and the Trans Queen' (2014: 48-50).

<sup>189</sup> Laurie Norris highlights this dimension of *Drag Race*, emphasizing the way in which the manipulation and moulding of participants in *Drag Race* mirrors the treatment of contestants in America's Next Top Model (2014: 41), a series which *Drag Race* consciously parodies (41-2).

<sup>190</sup> I am by no means the only critic to challenge transmisogyny at work in *Drag Race*. Valuable analyses of transmisogyny and transphobia in *Drag Race* include Kai Kohlsdorf's 'Policing the Proper Queer Subject, *RuPaul's Drag Race* in the Neoliberal "Post" Moment' (2014), Laurie Norris' 'Of Fish and Feminists, Homonormative Misogyny and the Trans\*Queen' (2014), and Sarah Tucker Jenkins' *Hegemonic "Realness"? An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of RuPaul's Drag Race* (2013). Equally, as

terminology in its challenges, as in the case of the particularly problematic mini challenge ‘Female or She-male’.<sup>191</sup> In addition to employing a slur, this challenge arguably plays on the transmisogynistic belief that trans women are falsifying their identities and tricking others, and positions *Drag Race* candidates as having specialist knowledge which allows them to ‘out’ others. Although Logo TV issued a formal apology for this challenge (Daems, 2014: 11) and sought to distance itself from transphobic language, RuPaul further enraged critics by refusing to take their concerns seriously, and by suggesting that those contesting the use of slurs have ‘used their victimhood to create a situation’ (Charles, cited in Merevick, 2014: n.p.).<sup>192</sup> More subtly, but equally harmfully, *Drag Race* operates according to exclusionary policies. As Kai Kohlsdorf stresses, *Drag Race* participants must be assigned male at birth, and must be not be transitioning hormonally or surgically (2014: 84-5). Although some trans women, including Carmen Carrera and Monica Beverly Hills, have participated in *Drag Race*, these women were not ‘out’ during casting (Kohlsdorf, 2014: 83-4; Marcel, 2014: 28-9). Further, as Kai Kohlsdorf points out, the requirement to present part of casting videos in ‘boy mode’ (2014: 83-4) effectively screens against trans women (2014: 83-4). Indeed, these requirements ensure that, to be selected for *Drag Race*, one must be able to pass as a (cisgender) man performing femininity. As Laurie Norris points out, there appears to be a hierarchy of femininities operating in certain seasons of *Drag Race*, with performers who are seen as ‘unprofessional’ – or, rather, too closely aligned to their personal femininities – receiving harsher criticism from judges (2014: 39-41). These microaggressions combine to create an image of drag rooted in biological determinism, which positions drag as a detached gay male performance of femininity and consequently excludes trans women, transfeminine people, and

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I argue here, there have also been criticisms of transphobia in *Drag Race* in the media. For further information, see Tony Merevick’s article ‘Logo TV Distances Itself From RuPaul For Defending Use of Anti-Transgender Slur’, accessible at [https://www.buzzfeed.com/tonymerevick/logo-tv-distances-itself-from-rupal?utm\\_term=.pjzV3eGxW#.oua9OVJQv](https://www.buzzfeed.com/tonymerevick/logo-tv-distances-itself-from-rupal?utm_term=.pjzV3eGxW#.oua9OVJQv) (accessed 2 August 2016).

<sup>191</sup> In this challenge, *Drag Race* candidates looked at images and were asked to determine whether they were looking at cisgender women or drag queens. Merevick’s article, cited in note 184 above, discusses the use of the slur ‘she male’ on *Drag Race*, both in this mini challenge and in the former segment ‘You’ve got She-Mail’. Jim Daems also discusses this mini challenge in his Introduction to *The Makeup of RuPaul’s Drag Race, The Queen of Reality Shows* (2014: 11-2).

<sup>192</sup> In the article cited in note 184 above, Merevick cites comments made by RuPaul in an interview on the ‘WTF with Marc Maron Podcast’.

others.<sup>193</sup> This attitude contrasts markedly with the more inclusive Drag Ball culture repeatedly referenced on *Drag Race* (Kohlsdorf, 2014: 77). Significantly, in addition to being problematic and damaging in itself, the culture of transmisogyny which permeates *Drag Race* can facilitate the acceptance of transmisogynistic and transphobic microaggressions by audience members and developing drag performers.

I now turn to two dimensions of language on *Drag Race* – the repeated use of Harlem Drag Ball idiom and the promotion of a ‘Standard English Ideology’ (Anthony, 2014: 58-9). Although *Drag Race* features contestants with a range of ethnicities, heritages, and backgrounds, audiences tend to encounter only two languages: English and Spanish. As Mary Marcel argues (2014: 31), contestants’ heritages often play a significant role in their performances, as with Alexis Matteo, whose Puerto-Rican heritage informs his depiction of glamorous womanhood. However, Marcel’s preference for deconstructive, challenging drag leads her to a conclusion that I want to challenge: that Alexis ‘seemed to lack a sense of irony towards her own Latina heritage, and arguably affirmed rather than critiqued a certain kind of glamour and womanliness that she so well personified’ (Marcel, 2014: 31). In advocating for an ironic stance towards one’s heritage, Marcel seemingly overlooks the impact of native language in the frequently hostile atmosphere of *Drag Race*. As Libby Anthony has observed, *Drag Race* often promotes a Standard English ideology, which can dismiss or underestimate performers who speak accented English (2014: 58-9). Alexis’ insistence on

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<sup>193</sup> An additional interview with RuPaul confirms RuPaul’s reductive, biologically determinist view of drag as a (detached) gay male performance of femininity. This interview was published by *The Advocate* on the 24<sup>th</sup> August 2016, and accessible at <http://www.advocate.com/people/2016/8/24/quiet-children-rupaul-has-things-say-about-trump-awards-and-cops> (accessed 19/09/2016). Here, RuPaul argues that the ‘irony’ present in drag is lost when a woman performs as a drag queen. RuPaul states: ‘The idea of drag and why drag resonates so much in our male dominated culture is that there is irony in a man dressing up in the synthetic version of being a female.[...]. It has power because we’re not only mocking that synthetic version of a female, we’re also mocking this revered idea of what masculinity is because we’re men. So that dynamic, if you go outside of that, it doesn’t resonate in the same way, it doesn’t have the same irony to it’ (2016: 8m 10s). On one level, this attitude may explain RuPaul’s reluctance to cast trans women as *Drag Race* participants. However, such a possibility does not cancel out the blatant transphobia discussed above. While *Drag Race*’s exclusion of cis women and others also merits emphasis here, I have chosen to focus on the exclusion of trans women here due to the significant roles played by trans women in Ball culture, and due to the transphobic attitude RuPaul espouses in the other interview discussed here.

promoting and exaggerating his Latino heritage thus arguably constitutes a strategy of resistance, while the adoption of an 'ironic stance' might simply feed into the dismissive atmosphere. Notably, acknowledging the promotion of a Standard English ideology in *Drag Race* can encourage fans and performers to consider which behaviours to avoid within their scenes, as well as facilitating a fuller recognition of the programme's dynamics.

When I refer to Harlem Drag Ball idiom, I include phrases such as 'banjee', 'reading' 'realness', 'sickening', 'throwing shade' and 'werk'. This idiom developed in the context of Black and Latina/o Drag Ball communities in Harlem and elsewhere (Levitt, 2013: n.p.), and is closely connected to African American Vernacular English. This vocabulary was first catapulted into the white cisheteronormative mainstream by Jenny Livingston's controversial documentary *Paris Is Burning*, which arguably exoticized it by including definitions of certain terms on screen. While RuPaul began performing in the New York club scene, rather than in the Balls themselves, these scenes seemingly overlapped, making it natural for RuPaul to incorporate Ball culture idiom within his vocabulary.<sup>194</sup> Equally, RuPaul's continual references to Ball culture and to *Paris Is Burning* can arguably be read as his mode of paying homage to the LGBTQIA+ artists and activists who took part in Ball culture. I want to highlight three dimensions of the use of this idiom by *Drag Race* contestants. First, as in Ball culture and other drag cultures<sup>195</sup>, contestants frequently refer to each other using female pronouns and feminine nicknames and epithets, such as 'kitty girl'. On one level, using pronouns that correlate with a person's identity indicates respect for trans individuals. Unfortunately, however, following this trend is not necessarily an indicator of respect, as illustrated by the comments of certain drag performers such as Margo, a member of the performance group the 801 Girls, who is featured in 'Chicks with Dicks, Men in Dresses: What It Means to Be a Drag Queen

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<sup>194</sup> One example of this mutual use of language can be observed in the attribution of the name 'Visage' to Michelle Visage due to her performance style in the club context in which she first met RuPaul: 'Visage emerged from the underground club scene and vogue balls of Harlem in the 80s (she picked up the name "Visage" from her ability to give "good face" on the runway)' Jones, 2015: n.p., via <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/28502/1/catching-up-with-the-world-s-straight-talking-drag-mother> (accessed 24 April 2016).

<sup>195</sup> Esther Newton highlights this trend in relation to American drag queens in *Mother Camp* (1979: 8n16).

(2004: 122-3).<sup>196</sup> The second level of idiom use that I want to highlight occurs within *Drag Race* mini challenges. One challenge, in which contestants are required to ‘read’ one another – to offer a biting critique of another’s performance style –, is prefaced by the phrase ‘the library is open’, and therefore requires knowledge of the idiom in order to participate. This specialist knowledge may be acquired through an awareness of Drag Ball cultures, by watching *Paris Is Burning*<sup>197</sup>, or by watching previous seasons of *Drag Race* itself. Significantly, however, the awareness of this idiom creates access to a community based in shared history. Finally, I want to highlight contestants’ use of Ball culture idiom on social media. On the one hand, using Ball culture hashtags enables drag performers to advertise their work to fans, promoters, and potential venues, thereby operating on a commercial level. Equally, however, these hashtags can make performers’ work accessible to those who are just discovering drag and LGBTQIA+ cultures, and may allow them to experience a sense of community that they are unable to access in other ways.

Notably, the use of Ball culture hashtags on social media is not limited to *Drag Race* contestants or American drag performers, but has been co-opted by performers of other nationalities, including French performers.<sup>198</sup> In addition to the levels of consumer gain and community creation, French performers’ use of Ball culture idiom includes three layers to unpick. First, I want to raise the question of appropriation. Although performers such as Bettie Bitch share aspects of drag culture with those who participated in Ball cultures in Harlem and elsewhere, the former also have significant privileges which were not available to the latter. For

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<sup>196</sup> Despite the problematic title of their chapter, Taylor and Rupp’s analysis takes an inclusive tone as a whole (2004: 113-33). However, while the 801 Girls follow the trend of using female pronouns and feminine epithets to describe each other (2004: 119), Margo makes dismissive comments about trans women, such as ‘I don’t want to be a woman. I don’t understand why anyone would want to do it’ (122-3).

<sup>197</sup> Although critics such as bell hooks have problematized *Paris Is Burning* (e.g. 2009: 284-5), certain drag performers such as Latrice Royale do not share this opinion, but rather perceive *Paris* as a valuable cultural artefact (Royale in Jenkins, 2013: 35-6). As Jenkins argues, it is important to respect the opinions of black gay performers such as Latrice alongside the arguments of cultural critics such as hooks (2013: 35-6).

<sup>198</sup> French performers using Ball culture hashtags on social media include Bettie Bitch, Mika Holly White, and Rebecca Show Drag Queen. Their Instagram profiles can be found at the following links: Bettie Bitch <https://www.instagram.com/p/BD1OckujhyA/> (accessed 1 May, 2016), Rebecca Show Drag Queen <https://www.instagram.com/rebeccashow.dragqueen/> (accessed 1 May 2016), and Mika Holly White <https://www.instagram.com/p/BH98673hz3J/?taken-by=mikahollywhite> (accessed 5 August 2016).

example, Bettie Bitch, also known as Denis Andreu, is a white gay performer, who has a performance residency at a local bar.<sup>199</sup> Consequently, Bitch has the privileges of whiteness and financial stability, and is able to perform in comparative safety. In my view, it is potentially problematic that white gay performers employ language developed by poor LGBTQIA+ people of colour for reasons of publicity and financial gain.<sup>200</sup> However, the privileging of English, as indicated in my above comments on the promotion of a Standard English Ideology in *Drag Race* (Anthony, 2014: 58-9), adds an additional layer of complexity to this point. While French performers' use of predominantly English hashtags may have a commercial motivation – as English hashtags are likely to receive more traffic – it also resonates with Anthony's description of the Standard English Ideology, in which Standard English is positioned as a 'better fit for communication' (59) than other languages or forms of English. These linguistic habits, then, might point towards a perception of English as *the* language for communicating matters of LGBTQIA+ identity and performance, and/or of a perception of French as inappropriate for this usage. Such a view of French may be connected to the perception of French as a 'very gendered language' (Wittig, 1992: 77) – a point which has been highlighted by Monique Wittig among others.<sup>201</sup> Equally, Caitlin Field has presented compelling research which detailed the erasure experienced by (some) French genderqueer people, who found it difficult to express themselves in French due to the linguistic need to

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<sup>199</sup> Bettie Bitch's Facebook page indicates that Andreu has a performance residency at Le Bar Bitch, Nice. Bitch's Facebook can be accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/Bettie-Bitch-104591703250/?fref=ts> (accessed 8 August 2016).

<sup>200</sup> J. Bryan Lowder shares my opinion on this point, writing: 'Due in large part to the popularity of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, [Ball culture] slang expressions and the constellation of gestures, postures, and attitudes that surround them have become commonplace in the gay (and, increasingly, diva pop star) community. And yet, in one of the more uncomfortable paradoxes of modern gay life, members of the primarily African-American and Latino "pier queen"/ballroom scene in which the culture originated continue to be marginalized by the (white) mainstream. That's not shady, it's cruel' (2013: n.p). Lowder's article is available at [http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2013/11/14/pier\\_kids\\_the\\_life\\_pier\\_and\\_ball\\_culture\\_beyond\\_pier\\_is\\_burning.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2013/11/14/pier_kids_the_life_pier_and_ball_culture_beyond_pier_is_burning.html) (accessed 20 April 2016).

<sup>201</sup> For Wittig, the perception of English as an 'almost genderless' language (1992: 76) is erroneous, as both English and French require speakers to employ gender 'in the dimension of the person' (76). However, while Wittig perceives the linguistic gendering of nouns in French as 'relatively harmless' (76), she does note that a person's gender is particularly visible in French as a result of agreement with adjectives and past participles (79).

gender oneself in the feminine or the masculine<sup>202</sup>. While Luca Greco's valuable article 'Un soi pluriel: la présentation de soi dans les ateliers Drag King. Enjeux interactionnels, catégoriels et politiques' demonstrates some of the ways in which French speaking activists have moulded existing language to make space for diverse identities (2012: 74), these terms are unfortunately yet to come into wider use. Further, as evident in the 2014 debacle surrounding the 'threat of gender theory', LGBTQIA+ embodiment, gay relationships, and the concept of sex as a social construct have been positioned as dangerous, anti-French, anti-republican imports.<sup>203</sup> The final issue to highlight regarding French performers' use of Ball culture idiom on social media relates to the vocabulary and content appearing alongside Ball culture hashtags. In the case of Rebecca Show Drag Queen's Instagram feed, viewers encounter transphobic slurs alongside hashtags borrowing Ball culture idiom<sup>204</sup>, while Bettie Bitch's Instagram feed includes imagery – such as the self-titled 'Hindu' look – which falls firmly into the category of cultural appropriation.<sup>205</sup> These examples of transphobia and cultural appropriation seem particularly problematic and glaring in light of their presence alongside idiom taken from trans inclusive communities of colour. Overall, then, while French performers' use of Ball culture idiom sheds light on the privileging of English over other languages, it also indicates the level of influence that *Drag Race* can have on performers internationally, and encourages one to question the role of *Drag Race* in encouraging and perpetuating problematic practices within drag. In addition, the

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<sup>202</sup> Field's paper 'Hermeneutical Injustice and the French Genderqueer Experience' was delivered at 'Spotlight on Genderqueer' at the University of Warwick in 2013. For further details on this workshop and this paper, see Dr Caroline Walters' Storify narrative:

<https://storify.com/DrCJWalters/spotlight-on-genderqueer-29-april-2013> (accessed 24 April 2016).

<sup>203</sup> For an analysis of the received ideas about 'gender theory' as an American import and as a threat which endangers children, see [http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2013/05/25/masculin-feminin-cinq-idees-recues-sur-les-etudes-de-genre\\_3174157\\_3224.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2013/05/25/masculin-feminin-cinq-idees-recues-sur-les-etudes-de-genre_3174157_3224.html) (accessed 1 May 2016) and [http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2014/02/26/theorie-du-genre-dix-liens-pour-comprendre\\_4372618\\_3224.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2014/02/26/theorie-du-genre-dix-liens-pour-comprendre_4372618_3224.html) (accessed 1 May 2016).

<sup>204</sup> Rebecca Show Drag Queen's Instagram feed provides a clear example of the use of Ball culture references alongside transphobic terminology such as 'shemale': <https://www.instagram.com/p/BDGB85GR7EZ/?taken-by=rebeccashow.dragqueen> (accessed 1 May 2016).

<sup>205</sup> The image referred to here, and tagged 'hindu', is visible at [https://www.instagram.com/p/BEbmplsDh9t/?taken-by=bettie\\_bitch](https://www.instagram.com/p/BEbmplsDh9t/?taken-by=bettie_bitch) (accessed 1 May 2016). Other examples of culturally appropriative imagery on Bettie Bitch's Instagram include an image tagged with the phrase 'egyptianqueen': <https://www.instagram.com/p/BG05VEIDh-B/> (accessed 8 August 2016).

layers of meaning at work in French performers' use of Ball Culture hashtags offer another challenge to the subversive/reactionary dichotomy, as such simplistic positioning would be unable to account for all of the dimensions at work in these uses of language.

Before turning away from *Drag Race*, I want to emphasize RuPaul's doctrine on drag, indicating the way in which this informs the series as a whole. Notably, RuPaul is known for the catchphrase 'we're all born naked and the rest is drag' – a deconstructionist approach which resembles Butlerian performativity (Butler, 1999: 188-93). Readers might sympathize with RuPaul's embrace of fluidity, as well as his emphasis on self-love.<sup>206</sup> However, as we see from an interview RuPaul gave in March 2016<sup>207</sup>, RuPaul's emphasis on fluidity can preclude other approaches to identity, thereby erasing other perspectives. In this interview, RuPaul opposes his own deconstructionist approach to a transsexual perspective on identity, noting 'Now, the talk-show hosts ... get it if I'm making fun of myself and if I'm a punch line for them, but not as a human being. They would have a transsexual on because a transsexual is saying, "This is who I really am. I'm real." I'm saying, "No, I'm not real. I'm actually everything and nothing at all."' (2016: n.p.). In addition to assuming that all transsexuals share a single approach to identity, this remark precludes the notion of a stable identity, and dismisses those who experience it as dupes of societal norms. RuPaul then furthers this impression by opposing 'the trans community' to those who participate in drag (2016: n.p.), refusing any commonality between the two, and thereby erasing the trans women who participated in Ball culture as well as the trans people who currently perform drag.<sup>208</sup> Significantly, RuPaul's apparent refusal of essentialism here clashes markedly with his non ironic

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<sup>206</sup> RuPaul frequently concludes episodes of *Drag Race* with the comment 'If you don't love yourself, how the hell are you going to love somebody else'.

<sup>207</sup> This interview, conducted with E. Alex Jung, is available at <http://www.vulture.com/2016/03/ru-paul-drag-race-interview.html> (accessed 1 April 2016).

<sup>208</sup> While it is essential to clarify the significant difference between trans identity and drag performance, RuPaul makes this distinction in a way which highlights the view of trans people as duped by societal norms, noting: 'We mock identity. They take identity very seriously. So it's the complete opposite ends of the scale. To a layperson, it seems very similar, but it's really not' (2016: n.p.). Equally, in light of *Drag Race's* continual referencing of Ball culture and of the participation of trans women such as Carmen Carrera and Monica Beverly Hillz on *Drag Race*, RuPaul's erasure of trans performers appears to be pushing a specific agenda.

reference to 'the gay sensibility' (2016: n.p.) later in the same interview. That is, despite affirming that 'I choose to laugh at and play with it' (2016: n.p.), RuPaul clearly recognizes gay identity, and associates it with particular tastes and cultures, which can only ever be unsuccessfully imitated by straight people (2016: n.p.). RuPaul's repeated suggestion that drag performers 'mock identity' (2016: n.p.) can be read as asserting a belief that performers play with identity in the context of their performances. However, RuPaul repeatedly links this playful approach to identity with drag performers, while placing them in a binary opposition with trans people, who, in his words, 'take identity very seriously' (2016: n.p.). In my view, there is a clear contradiction between RuPaul's view of gay identity – which appears fixed and is linked to a specific sensibility – and his view of trans people as taking identity too seriously.

The final point to highlight in relation to this interview is RuPaul's recognition of the influence *Drag Race* has on developing scenes and performers (2016: n.p.). While trans and non-binary people will naturally vary in their opinions of RuPaul and *Drag Race*, there seems to me to be a cause for disquiet if *Drag Race*, one of the most visible examples of drag culture, includes a doctrine in which certain identities are presented as more disputable than others.

Turning away from *Drag Race*, I want to briefly foreground some of the complexities at work in UK drag scenes, focusing particularly on certain performers' efforts to create more inclusive spaces. The three points to stress here are first, the precariousness of LGBTQIA+ venues in the current neoliberal capitalist climate, second, the rapid development of the drag king scene, and third, collaborative community work by performers to create more inclusive scenes.<sup>209</sup> As I argued in

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<sup>209</sup> RuPaul's series and the prominence of identity politics can be perceived as facets of the current neoliberal climate, as well as being perceived as potentially including challenges to this neoliberal climate. However, the particular aspect of neoliberal capitalism to which I am referring here is a dimension of what Kai Kohlsdorf refers to as the "'post" landscape'. Kohlsdorf summarizes this as follows: 'Echoing the legacy of colorblindness, the "post" landscape believes that we no longer need to talk about racism, sexism, or even homophobia, because oppression is over' (2014: 74). In this context, one repeatedly hears the argument that it is no longer necessary to have bars and venues that are specifically designated for LGBTQIA+ people, as the acceptance of gay identity means that it is safe to patronise 'ordinary' venues. This argument is frequently provided as the reason for the closures of multiple LGBTQIA+ bars in London and elsewhere, which then absolves the landlords of

my book chapter 'Are Drag Kings Still Too Queer for London? From the Nineteenth Century Impersonator to the Drag King of Today', drag in the UK takes place on a backdrop of austerity, neoliberalism, gentrification, and the closure of LGBTQIA+ venues (Stokoe, 2016: 105-7). Since the beginning of my PhD in 2012, the London drag scene has lost multiple venues including The Black Cap, Blush Bar, Candy Bar, The Joiners' Arms, and Madame JoJos.<sup>210</sup> Although longstanding venue The Vauxhall Tavern, which is perhaps especially valuable to queer and trans patrons, was formerly under threat of closure, it has now been granted the status of a listed building 'for its place in LGBTQ history and heritage'.<sup>211</sup> The battle to reopen The Black Cap and restore its status as an LGBTQIA+ performance venue has been particularly fierce, with community members attending regular vigils outside the site.<sup>212</sup> As of July 2016, the company Ruth and Robinson, which had bought the premises but refused to reopen it as an LGBTQIA+ cabaret venue, pulled out of negotiations – a decision which was welcomed by campaigners, who are currently seeking a firm that will restore The Black Cap to its former status.<sup>213</sup> Austerity cuts are likely to have impacted LGBTQIA+ welfare and spending power in London<sup>214</sup>, meaning that certain patrons will no longer be able to attend their favourite events on a regular basis. The combination of price rises and austerity cuts is perhaps

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the responsibility for these closures, despite the rapidly increasing rents to which they subject tenants.

<sup>210</sup> One 2015 article detailing some of the losses of LGBTQIA+ venues in London is available at <http://londonist.com/2015/02/londons-lgbt-and-alternative-scenes-are-fighting-gentrification> (accessed 9 August 2016). A frequently updated list of LGBTQIA+ venues which have closed in London since the turn of the Century can be found at <http://www.thegayuk.com/gay-bars-that-have-closed-in-london-since-the-turn-of-the-century/> (accessed 9 August 2016).

<sup>211</sup> This description comes from the announcement of The Royal Vauxhall Tavern's listed status on the website dedicated to its future: <http://www.rvt.community/the-royal-vauxhall-tavern-is-now-a-listed-building/> (accessed 9 August 2016).

<sup>212</sup> For further details about these vigils and about the campaigns held by The Black Cap Foundation, please visit <http://www.weareblackcap.com/> (accessed 15 September 2016).

<sup>213</sup> An article by Ben Walters, a member of the campaign, discusses Ruth and Robinson's decision to pull out of negotiations. This is available at <http://www.nottelevision.net/victory-black-cap-campaign-developers-pull/> (accessed 9 August 2016).

<sup>214</sup> In 2013, Unison commissioned a report from NatCen detailing the impact of austerity cuts on LGBT people. The 'key messages' summary of the report states that the main effects of austerity cuts on LGBT people on a personal level included the following: 'greater financial hardships from redundancies, real term pay cuts and changes to benefit rules; problems finding accommodation where they could feel safe and that was LGBT friendly; a reduction in sexual health and mental health services that addressed their specific needs; [and] greater feelings of marginalization and invisibility as specialist LGBT services and support disappeared' (2013: 3). The executive summary of this report is accessible at <http://natcen.ac.uk/media/205546/unison-lgbt-austerity-stand-alone-exec-summary.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2016).

especially damaging to trans and disabled patrons, as a result of the additional costs they might incur in order to access events and return home safely.

However, despite this distressing backdrop, drag continues to thrive in London. This is particularly true of the drag king scene, which has seen extensive development in the last four years. When Jen (Adam All) founded drag king cabaret event Boi Box three years ago with their partner Elly (Apple Derrières), they had a pool of around four London-based drag kings who they would regularly invite to perform. Now, there are more than fifty performers to choose from.<sup>215</sup> In London, I would partially attribute this growth to Boi Box itself, as it is an inclusive event which encourages new performers to take to the stage. Equally, popular East London venue The Glory, managed by drag queen Jonny Woo, runs a regular drag king competition, titled 'Man Up', which has attracted a wide range of contestants and audience members.<sup>216</sup> As well as stemming from the hard work of members of the scene<sup>217</sup>, I suggest that the drag king scene may have gained in popularity partially as a result of the growing visibility of drag kings in the media. Although the drag queen scene continues to dominate the media landscape, mainstream media in the UK has begun to showcase drag kings – from a *Guardian* article on 'Man Up' to a section on *This Morning* devoted to, and featuring, drag king performers.<sup>218</sup> Before turning away from the drag king scene, I want to stress two further points; the difficulty of retaining momentum regarding a scene's popularity, and the inclusion of non binary performers in the drag king scene. As former drag king Lenna Cumberbatch

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<sup>215</sup> These points are partially based on Jen's comments during their appearance on ITV's *This Morning*. Jen then substantiated their points in a telephone conversation.

<sup>216</sup> For more information about 'Man Up', please visit <http://www.theglory.co/man-up/> (accessed 16 August 2016).

<sup>217</sup> In addition to working hard on their own events, performers will often appear at Pride events. These appearances are far from easy, frequently necessitating travel and expense in addition to extensive rehearsals. However, appearances at Pride events can be highly beneficial, as they can enable drag kings to introduce drag king scenes and events to a wider audience. Notably, appearances at Pride events can both bolster and testify to drag king popularity, as the article 'Drag Kings Take Centre Stage at Reading Pride' suggests: <http://www.divamag.co.uk/category/lifestyle/drag-kings-take-centre-stage-at-reading-pride.aspx> (accessed 17 August 2016).

<sup>218</sup> The *Guardian* article 'Put a sock in it – all rise for the UK's drag kings' can be accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/womens-blog/2016/jun/23/put-a-sock-in-it-all-rise-for-the-uks-drag-kings> (accessed 16 August 2016), while a Youtube clip of the *This Morning* segment devoted to drag kings is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LoCAf06ekk> (accessed 16 August 2016).

argued, drag king scenes in the UK have frequently experienced peaks and troughs, and it has been difficult to maintain drag king popularity, as those pushing the scene often develop burn out and do not necessarily have acquaintances who are able to take over.<sup>219</sup> Consequently, while the current rise in drag king popularity is highly encouraging, we cannot simply assume that drag king scenes will continue to go from strength to strength. Instead, if we wish to go on seeing the exciting, progressive performances which are currently present in many UK drag scenes, we need to support and promote the performers in question. To turn to my second point, while the growing media awareness of drag kings can be productive for the scene as a whole, it nevertheless causes problems for certain performers. Speaking recently on a panel devoted to drag in London, Jen stated that other performers had specifically asked them to address the misrepresentation of drag kings in the media. Following one of the models criticised in this thesis, articles introducing drag kings frequently refer to them as ‘women performing as men’, thereby erasing the trans men and non binary people who perform as drag kings. Jen was asked to address this issue as a result of the growing numbers of non binary identified kings within London drag scenes. However, despite this erasure, non binary kings generally appear to feel welcomed within the London drag king scene, and we are beginning to witness events which specifically celebrate non binary performers.<sup>220</sup>

This point leads neatly into my final section on contemporary drag, in which I address performers’ aims to create more inclusive drag scenes. Here, I draw primarily on two sources: an interview conducted with Manchester-based drag queen and trans femme Marilyn Misandry, and a panel held by the Queer London Research Forum, featuring Adam All, Apple Derrières, Dr Sharon Husbands, Meth, Romeo de la Cruz, and Victoria Sin. To address the interview first, the interviewer from US-based organization Project Queer highlighted the pervasive atmosphere of transmisogyny in US drag scenes, and asked Marilyn about their experience of

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<sup>219</sup> Lenna made this argument in our interview in August 2013.

<sup>220</sup> Victoria Sin hosted a ‘Non Binary Cabaret’ event in February 2016. For an interview with Victoria after this event, please visit <http://www.divamag.co.uk/category/arts-entertainment/this-week-at-wotever-female-drag-queen-victoria-sin.aspx> (accessed 17 August 2016). Further, the event ‘Gender Identity Cabaret’, which showcases drag by trans and non binary performers, took place at The Glory on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2016. For further details, see <http://london.carpediem.cd/events/781044-gender-identity-cabaret-at-the-glory/> (accessed 31 August 2016).

transmisogyny in UK drag scenes. Encouragingly, Marilyn stated that they haven't personally experienced transmisogyny in the context of UK drag culture, and attributed this to the strong presence of openly trans drag queens in the Manchester drag scene, who would refuse to countenance transmisogynistic comments and behaviour.<sup>221</sup> Happily, all the panel members at the Queer London forum event were openly critical of transmisogynistic and transphobic behaviour, and suggested that such behaviour was criticized and banned in many current drag cultures. Significantly, none of the panel members denied that transmisogynistic and transphobic behaviour occurred within drag; instead, they simply highlighted their desire to challenge it. Further, these challenges constitute one part of the panel members' strategies to criticise and diminish oppressive behaviours within drag scenes. Unfortunately, as indicated in my above analysis of *Drag Race*, drag scenes and performers can have the tendency to brush off offensive comments and actions as merely jokes, as Josh Lee's excellent analysis of racist attitudes in London drag scenes demonstrates.<sup>222</sup> Consequently, Victoria Sin highlighted the necessity of listening to, and supporting, minority performers – such as queer and trans people of colour, and/or others who also experience intersecting forms of oppression – and ensuring that their voices are heard by wider drag communities. Victoria works hard to facilitate these conversations, and her aims are shared by the other performers who featured on the panel.

I now want to demonstrate how the panel members' comments echo and support two of my primary conclusions in this thesis, while continuing to highlight these performers' work to create more inclusive communities. Notably, the panel members pose two challenges to the reductive perception of drag as 'a man

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<sup>221</sup> Project Queer's interview with Marilyn Misandry can be accessed at [http://projectqueer.org/private/132554673823/tumblr\\_nxb2g6c88N1qb8zkw](http://projectqueer.org/private/132554673823/tumblr_nxb2g6c88N1qb8zkw) (accessed 20 March 2016). It is perhaps worth noting that, earlier in the interview, Marilyn highlights the presence of overlapping scenes within the UK drag scene, referring specifically to 'what gets called "traditional British drag" [...] think typically cisgender men in lots of sparkle and big hair, but without the finesse of pageant queens' as well as to 'the alternative scene [...] that's more drag that's interested in politics and deeper expressions of gender'. Consequently, it is possible that challenges to transmisogyny in drag occur more frequently in alternative scenes than in "traditional British drag".

<sup>222</sup> Lee's article 'Does London's Drag Scene Have a Race Problem?' can be found at [http://www.vice.com/en\\_uk/read/does-londons-drag-scene-have-a-race-problem](http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/does-londons-drag-scene-have-a-race-problem) (accessed 19 August 2016).

performing as a woman' or vice versa. All of the panel members highlighted the presence of non binary performers within drag scenes, arguing that the 'woman performing as a man' formula constitutes a misrepresentation, which erases the performers in question. Equally, this formula overlooks and erases female drag queens, such as Victoria Sin, and male drag kings. These points, like my above analyses of *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando* and *Le Corps lesbien*, challenge the formula while equally indicating the significance of performer identity. The second point of critique, which Meth initially highlighted, is that this formula does not account for what's actually happening on stage. That is, this dichotomy suggests that drag creates 'a unified picture of "woman"' (Butler, 1999: 187), when, in fact, contemporary drag includes a range of performance styles, including those which highlight aspects of masculinity or femininity, those which combine masculinity with femininity, and those which focus on using makeup to create ethereal imagery. As Meth argued, the latter styles of drag<sup>223</sup> concentrate on creating fantasy looks – such as those of unicorns, aliens, or mythical beasts – rather than on reproducing the image of 'a woman' or 'a man', and does not necessitate the use of breast inserts or other objects associated with performing 'womanhood'. The performer/performed dichotomy is unable to account for these forms of drag, and therefore characterises drag on an erroneous basis, as well as erasing performers whose identities do not fit the formula.

The panel members equally refuted the positioning of drag as necessarily either subversive or reactionary. Like many of the theorists whose work has been examined in this thesis, the Queer London Forum panel members were invested in drag's capacity to play with gender norms and to encourage audience members to think further about the workings of gender. Each of the panel members emphasized feminist and activist praxis at work in drag, as well as highlighting positive effects on audiences. Yet, while drag's capacity to challenge norms was a central theme in the panel discussion, the panel members clearly acknowledged the fact that drag does

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<sup>223</sup> One performer specialising in this form of drag is Cheddar Gorgeous. For a short interview with Gorgeous and images of Gorgeous' signature looks, please visit: <http://worldofwonder.net/transformationtuesday-gwerrrkout-feat-cheddar-gorgeous/> (accessed 22 August 2016).

not necessarily act on, or shed light on, norms. The panel members' aims to reject oppressive comments and behaviours in drag acts and spaces clearly testify to the fact that drag is not automatically progressive or subversive. However, it is essential to point out that the presence of biased drag alongside more progressive performances does not necessitate the creation of a hierarchy or dichotomy along the lines of a subversive/reactionary formula. Rather, we need to recognize the variety and complexity at work in drag, as well as acknowledging the factors which can alter its impact. These include performer ethos, variety in performance – whether by a single individual or by a range of performers – and audience response. To foreground the latter, a performer's aim or ethos may not necessarily be understood by their audience, and, as audience members' experiences will impact on their perspective, an audience member might respond in a way that the performer did not intend or foresee. Notably, my emphasis on variety and complexity within drag scenes and within audiences was shared by the Queer London Forum panel members, who highlighted the range of styles in contemporary scenes and spoke from a range of perspectives. In this way, the panel members not only demonstrated the short-sightedness of characterizing drag as either subversive or reactionary, but also pointed towards the need for a particularizing theory of drag, which acknowledges performer gender while focusing on what happens on stage.

Before turning to my concluding arguments, I want to outline three significant points. First, English performers are by no means alone in working to create inclusive scenes. Having pointed out the problematic use of Ball culture hashtags by performers such as Bettie Bitch, I want to especially focus on a group of French performers, Les Paillettes, who aim to create exciting, progressive drag events. Describing themselves as “drag queers”, Les Paillettes utilize commonplace drag accoutrements – such as wigs, makeup and glitter – while centring minority performers and tackling political issues, such as homophobia, islamophobia, and racism, and their capacity to create intersecting forms of oppression.<sup>224</sup> At one

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<sup>224</sup> For an introduction to Les Paillettes, please visit <http://yagg.com/2015/11/22/paillettes-a-la-rencontre-des-drag-queers/> (accessed 23 August 2016). This article also highlights the political

event, Les Paillettes member Malik, whose performance character is Géraldine, read the piece 'Je suis', which constituted a nuanced yet irreverent analysis of what it means to live in France as a cis, gay, Muslim man.<sup>225</sup> This piece typifies Les Paillettes' technique of incorporating texts into their shows alongside live vocals and lip sync performances (Héraud, 2015: n.p.), and facilitates their aim of creating queer, political drag while having fun. Malik's choice to tackle Islamophobia and intersecting forms of oppression, while using humour and pulling no punches, renders his piece similar to the disidentificatory work of Vaginal Davis, which Muñoz analyses in 'The White to Be Angry' (1998: 93-115). Notably, Les Paillettes are not isolated from other drag performers in France, but work alongside other performers, such as Crame and Reno, with whom they created the regular event Kasbah Glitter (Héraud, 2015: n.p.).<sup>226</sup> Equally, as Luca Greco's excellent 'Un soi pluriel' demonstrates in reference to 'Les drag kings de Bruxelles' (2012: 73-4), Les Paillettes are by no means the only French speaking performers who are currently creating inclusive, exciting drag.

As stressed above, although many performers are working to create more inclusive drag scenes, much work remains to be done. Four of the behaviours which need to be challenged are ableism, masculine-centrism, racism, and transmisogyny. Having referred to racism and transmisogyny through my discussion of performers' critiques above, I highlight ableism and masculine centrism here. As a disabled person, I am personally aware of, and subject to, conscious and unconscious ableism in current drag scenes, which often takes the form of physical barriers to access (such as stairs or the use of flashing lights), a lack of adaptations (such as sign language interpreters, lifts, or seating), and the lack of interest in removing these barriers. In many cases, performers and event organizers are unable to find accessible performance spaces – another clear consequence of the loss of LGBTQIA+ venues due to gentrification. Happily, however, many performers work to develop adaptations in their spaces and aid audience members who face barriers

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motivation at work in Les Paillettes' shows, and refers specifically to queer and trans studies texts as sources of inspiration (Héraud, 2015: n.p.).

<sup>225</sup> For a transcript of 'Je suis', please visit <http://yagg.com/2016/04/01/je-suis-par-malik/> (accessed 23 August 2016).

<sup>226</sup> 'Kasbah Glitter' is introduced in Xavier Héraud's piece on Les Paillettes, linked in note 37 above.

to access.<sup>227</sup> As Julia Serano argues in *Excluded*, queer women's communities often suffer from masculine centrism<sup>228</sup>, meaning that queer women often feel pressurized to perform masculinity in order to be taken seriously (2013: 54). As Victoria and Elly stressed when speaking on the Queer London Forum panel, this bias manifests itself in (at least) two ways in contemporary drag scenes: through the preferencing of male drag queens over female drag queens and/or non binary drag queens<sup>229</sup>, and through the decision to centre masculine people in discussions which equally effect masculine and feminine people. Despite co-organizing Boi Box and arranging its publicity, Elly has frequently been ignored in discussions about drag king events in London and about Boi Box itself. Thus, people dismiss Elly due to her femininity, despite her significant contribution to the drag king scene. The other form of masculine centrism discussed here – the preferencing of male drag queens – is being challenged by talented female drag queens such as Victoria Sin, Georgie Bee, and Holestar<sup>230</sup>. Happily, these performers' hard work to create recognition for female drag queens is being supplemented by other drag queens' work to include them in established events. In both cases, the drag scene can challenge masculine centrism by promoting events which centre femmes' voices and women's voices, and by enthusiastically supporting events run and co-run by femmes and women.

Although it may seem obvious, I want to stress the point that recognizing the flaws within drag scenes differs markedly from positioning these flaws as 'just a joke' –

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<sup>227</sup> The former organizer of drag king competition King of the Castle, Lenna Cumberbatch, worked tirelessly to render the competition accessible. As journalist Holly Williams pointed out in her 2013 article on drag kings, the 2013 King of the Castle Competition, based in Newcastle, was wheelchair accessible and featured a sign language interpreter. For Holly Williams' article, please visit <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/man-up-the-world-of-the-drag-king-8513984.html> (accessed 23 August 2016). Notably, Adam All and Apple Derrières, who host Boi Box, make a real effort to include disabled audience members and performers, and have consequently made my times at Boi Box much easier and far more enjoyable.

<sup>228</sup> Serano describes masculine-centrism as a form of sexism in which 'masculine gender expression is viewed as more legitimate than feminine gender expression' (2013: 44).

<sup>229</sup> Notably, the preferencing of male drag queens over female drag queens (whether trans or cis) combines masculine-centrism with sexism, as this tactic (consciously or unconsciously) positions men as superior to women, while equally positioning masculine people as superior to feminine people. This tactic can equally involve transmisogyny when male drag queens are positioned as superior to drag queens who are trans women or trans femmes.

<sup>230</sup> I use the term 'female drag queen' here as a result of the performers' preference. As Victoria Sin stressed during the Queer London Forum event referenced above, she prefers the term 'female drag queen' to the more commonly used 'faux queen', as the latter carries connotations of inauthenticity and falsehood.

especially when those who recognize the flaws in current scenes are actively working to challenge them. The latter deliberately confuses drag's irreverent attitude with the inclusion of offensive and oppressive remarks, and consequently perpetuates biased attitudes, and is therefore markedly different from forms of recognition which create the basis for change. This leads me to my final point in this section, which indicates the ease of creating hierarchies – such as the subversive/reactionary dichotomy – and the need to avoid these polarizing approaches. When looking at drag, one is particularly drawn to what might be termed 'the extremes' at both sides of the scale, leading one to notice drag which includes biased behaviours, alongside drag which includes queer and feminist praxis. However, while it is reductive to characterize drag on the basis of one of these extremes, it is equally limiting to envisage drag as a polarized subculture, which must be divided into 'subversive' or 'reactionary' subcategories. This polarized view overlooks and flattens the range of acts and events in diverse drag scenes, and risks creating further generalizations about drag's impact and function. Such generalizations might position mainstream drag as reactionary, while suggesting that alternative drag scenes are likely to be progressive.<sup>231</sup> Although there are performers in alternative scenes who engage with activist praxis, generalizing along this basis might accidentally result in performers or viewers believing that performances in alternative scenes cannot be oppressive. Equally, performances with the capacity to make one think can occur in any line-up or event, whether described as mainstream or alternative. Overall, then, generalizing hierarchies remain unhelpful, as they are unable to convey the range and complexity in drag as a whole.

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<sup>231</sup> Muñoz's work presents such an opposition between commercial and alternative drag, noting that commercial drag provides a safe, desexualized view of drag, which has as yet been unable to promote real change in terms of rights for drag performers or LGBTQIA+ people more generally (1999: 99). While I agree with Muñoz that much mainstream drag does not provide the insight or excitement which can be found in progressive drag, I suggest that hierarchizing drag along the lines of commercial versus alternative is simply likely to create further generalizations.

## **Towards a Particularizing, Transfeminist Theory of Drag**

Throughout this conclusion, I have stressed my critiques of two existing approaches to drag: the positioning of drag as either subversive or reactionary, and the focus on a supposed opposition between the gender of the performer and the gender performed on stage. I now briefly raise one further critique of the positioning of drag as subversive before collating insights gathered in this thesis to create the outline of a particularizing, transfeminist approach to drag.

The final critique introduced here is part of a transfeminist analysis, arising in Julia Serano's *Excluded*.<sup>232</sup> In the chapter 'The Perversion of 'The Personal Is Political'', Serano tackles the arguments that gender identity and expression can either subvert or reinforce the gender binary (2013: 120-35), focusing particularly on the way in which these perspectives are mobilized to police and exclude transsexual people.<sup>233</sup> Having illustrated the way in which certain double standards create policies of exclusion (2013: 130-1), Serano asks her readers to step back and consider what it means to 'subvert' the gender binary:

If we step back for a minute, the assumption that we can subvert or overthrow the gender system by simply engaging in certain gendered or sexual behaviors (but not others) seems pretty silly. There have been gender outlaws and sexual outlaws of one stripe or another since the dawn of history, yet our mere presence has never once simply made sexism vanish into thin air. [...] Such notions may be self-reassuring, but they ignore the fact that acts of sexism occur, not by how we dress, or identify, or have sex, but through the way we see and treat other people. [...] a person is a legitimate feminist when they have made a

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<sup>232</sup> Notably, *Excluded* also acts to offer a rebuttal of the feminist approaches which position drag as reactionary by suggesting that drag buys into an oppressive system (see Frye, 1983: 138, and Raymond, 1994: xxviii). Here, Serano is not directly addressing drag, but is instead tackling transphobic arguments – including those put forward in Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire* – which dismiss and critique trans people on the basis that they are reinforcing the gender binary (Serano, 2013: 121). For Serano, this 'reinforcing' argument falls down on two levels (2013: 121). On the one hand, trans and gender non conforming people are not generally perceived as reifying norms in mainstream society; instead, when encountering trans and gender non conforming people, members of the straight mainstream 'often become bothered, or confused, or disturbed' (121). On the other hand, as Serano astutely points out, the 'reinforcing' accusation is not applied to gender conforming, cissexual people (121), and therefore operates as a 'cissexual double standard' (121).

<sup>233</sup> This analysis can be perceived as an elaboration of Serano's earlier critique of subversion models in 'Reclaiming Femininity' (2012: 182), which I analyse in the second chapter of this thesis. However, I have chosen to include Serano's later analysis (2013: 132) in this conclusion as it offers a succinct repudiation of the positioning of certain forms of gender expression as necessarily subversive.

commitment to challenging sexist double standards wherever and whenever they arise. An individual's personal style, mannerisms, identity, and consensual sexual partners, and life choices simply shouldn't factor into it. (2013: 132)

Three points arise from Serano's animated critique of the concept of subverting gender systems. First, Serano's frankness reminds readers of the impracticality of expecting drag to tackle socially pervasive double standards. Despite the presence of wide ranging, complex drag scenes, structural biases, such as cissexism, misogyny, racism, and transmisogyny, sadly continue to exist. Second, I want to highlight Serano's characterisation of the subversion concept as (self-)reassuring. This point resonates with my argument that theorists and practitioners of drag become invested in drag's supposed capacity for subversion due to their desire to challenge and change systemic bias. Leading to my final point, Serano's argument is especially valuable in that it does not preclude the possibility of progressive, critical drag, despite its rejection of the subversion concept. Instead, Serano foregrounds the fact that challenging existing double standards can constitute feminist praxis. Thus, while Serano makes it clear that drag is not the sole or preferred method for communicating feminist critiques, she equally affirms that these critiques can be conveyed in diverse ways. Consequently, Serano's analysis debunks the positioning of drag as necessarily subversive, while enabling readers to recognize diverse forms of feminist critique – including those which arise in certain drag performances.

While Serano's work in *Excluded* tackles the question of subversion, her essay 'Reclaiming Femininity' provides one point to incorporate when creating a particularizing, transfeminist theory of drag – the role and significance of personal inclination and deeply felt resonances with forms of gender expression (2012: 180-1). It would be simplistic to assume that personal resonances with femininity and/or masculinity provide the sole motivation for drag performance, and I do not suggest this is the case. However, Serano's nuanced analysis reminds readers that personal resonances exist – and can be deeply felt – and should not be dismissed on the basis that gender is simply performance (2012: 180-1). Consequently, while theorists of drag may want to highlight the enjoyment of performance when considering motivation, we should account for the interplay between an enjoyment

of performance and an enjoyment of, and inclination towards, femininity and/or masculinity.

Before highlighting Bourcier's concept of agential performativity, I first recap what I mean by the terms 'particularizing' and 'transfeminist', when I refer to the theory of drag that I am seeking to develop here. When I suggest that a theory of drag should be particularizing, I am arguing that theories of drag should not be based on generalizations – such as those employed in the subversive/reactionary dichotomy, or those which characterize drag on the basis of a supposed opposition between the gender of the performer and the gender performed on stage. Instead, theories of drag should look closely at particular aspects of drag, as well as concentrating on individual performers and given performances. Four aspects which merit attention are, first, audience response, second, context, third, performance content, and fourth, performer intent. Exploring these aspects provides a fuller image of an individual performance, while facilitating productive comparisons between performances. As I have argued throughout this thesis, characterizing drag on the basis of only one of these aspects – such as performance content – provides an inaccurate image of a given performance and its impact. When employing the term 'transfeminist', I follow the definitions of transfeminist theorists such as Anne Enke and Julia Serano.<sup>234</sup> My use of the term transfeminist in relation to the theorisation of drag operates on two levels. On the one hand, I aim to suggest that drag can be theorized in a way which challenges interconnected forms of marginalization, particularly in relation to gender minorities. Equally, I mobilize the term transfeminist to indicate that my developing theory of drag eschews essentialist understandings of sex and gender, and aims to account for trans performers. Rejecting the perception of drag as 'a man performing as a woman' or vice versa constitutes one aspect of a transfeminist approach to drag, as this dichotomy fails

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<sup>234</sup> When first introducing the term 'transfeminist' in relation to the volume *Transfeminist Perspectives in and beyond Transgender and Gender Studies*, Anne Enke writes: 'the compound "transfeminist" arises out of a desire to see both "trans" and "feminist" do more flexible work; we would like to see them not only opening each to the other but opening broadly in all directions, as though they are *both* potential prefixes and suffixes that may modify and be modified by participants whose names we may not even yet know' (2012: 3). Further, throughout her introduction, Enke stresses how the insights of transgender studies and feminist studies can be brought to bear on each other (2013: 1-15) to provide further information on the way in which genders are constructed, experienced, and policed.

to account for non binary performers and can be read as having transmisogynistic overtones. Further, I aim to ensure that my approach to drag is a transfeminist one by prioritizing the views and experiences of transfeminist theorists and of trans and non binary performers.

Introduced in 'F\*\*\* the Politics of Disempowerment in the Second Butler', Sam Bourcier's concept of agential performativity (2012: 239) provides valuable insights which merit incorporating in a particularizing, transfeminist theory of drag.

Although Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, and its relationship to drag, (1999: 186-91) merits consideration when theorizing drag, the lack of agency inherent in this model (1999: 191) makes it potentially problematic. Further, as Butler's concept of performativity and her understanding of trans identity have been criticized by several trans scholars (Bourcier, 2012: 237-9; Prosser, 1998: 21-60; Namaste, 2000: 14), I suggest that it may be inappropriate to include Butler's work within a transfeminist study of drag without critiquing Butler's approach to trans subjects. Significantly, however, Bourcier separates performativity from its Butlerian context, and highlights its value as a resource, noting that 'Acknowledging the performative dimension to gender does not, for one moment, entail an automatic diminution in agency' (2012: 232). This concept of agential performativity enables us to recognize the construction of gender through a repetition of acts (Butler, 1999: 191) without positioning this construction as fully determining, or deterministic. Further, Bourcier's analysis highlights the use of performance and performativity by trans artists and activists (2012: 230-2), demonstrating the compatibility of agential performativity with the recognition of the validity of trans identities and practices. Incorporating Bourcier's concept of agential performativity into a transfeminist theory of drag will enable such a theory to stress the value of performance and performativity as resources, while drawing attention to their visual and phonic dimensions (2012: 230) and demonstrating respect for a range of identities (232).

Breaking with the focus on the supposed dichotomy between the gender of the performer and the gender performed on stage, a transfeminist approach to drag recognizes the potential import of performer gender, but characterizes drag on the

basis of the gender, or genders, performed on stage. That is, such an approach would place (onstage) performances of masculinity within the wide-ranging category of drag king performance, while acknowledging that a non binary drag king might encounter different challenges and experiences to female drag kings and male drag kings. This approach has two clear benefits. First, this approach respects the identity of the performer, and refuses to assume that their gender will fall neatly into a formula which opposes performer gender to the gender performed on stage. Second, this approach encourages theorists to concentrate on what is happening on stage, rather than on the gender of the performer, and therefore facilitates closer attention to context, performance style, performance content, and techniques.

A transfeminist approach to drag should also incorporate an intersectional lens. Employing an intersectional lens constitutes a commitment to avoid furthering the marginalization of already marginalized groups, and contrasts sharply with the transmisogyny present in the trans exclusionary theories of drag written by theorists such as Raymond (e.g. Raymond, 1994: xxiii-iv; Tyler, 2003: 123-6). This commitment to avoid and challenge marginalization and structural bias is essential to the type of transfeminist approach that I seek to develop here. Equally, utilizing an intersectional lens benefits theorists by providing a nuanced, multi-dimensional image, as opposed to one which accounts for only some of the dimensions present in a given performance. That is, an intersectional lens encourages one to recognize how factors such as ability, age, class, gender, race, and sexuality act alongside and through one another to impact a performer's approach and intent, and to shape their audience and context. Leading on from my focus on intersectionality, I suggest that a transfeminist approach can benefit from an awareness of Muñoz's concept of 'disidentification' (1999: 11). Disidentification may not be an appropriate concept with which to explore all forms of drag, as certain performers and performances do not aim to 'work on and against' (11) existing norms. However, disidentification can be a useful way of conceptualizing performances which do engage with such norms,

especially in the case of minority performers.<sup>235</sup> Equally, disidentification can be employed to shape and supplement existing approaches, as I demonstrated in my analysis of Esther Newton's *Mother Camp*. While a concept such as Newton's 'professional homosexual' (1979: 3) may be inapplicable to contemporary drag when used in isolation, utilizing disidentification can augment such a concept for use in relation to current practice. In this case, disidentification can explain how and why a drag queen might choose to 'represent the stigma of the gay world' (3), as well as allowing for the possibility that this representation is a temporary strategy.

Notably, a transfeminist approach to drag can elucidate diverse studies and corpuses, whether these are analyses of theoretical works, studies of contemporary performance, histories and historiographies, or analyses of literary texts. However, different studies will benefit from utilizing varied techniques in addition to those enumerated here. Close textual analysis has been invaluable throughout this thesis, having facilitated a thorough understanding of the texts and images involved. Equally, the particularizing, transfeminist approach advocated here works well with both close analysis and a comparative study of texts. Literary theory, and especially Linda Hutcheon's ideas of intramural parody (2000: 25) and extramural satire (2000: 43), has enabled me to interrogate the themes and images at work in *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, and *Le Corps lesbien*, and has encouraged me to develop the concept of textual drag. When employed in relation to *Monsieur Vénus*, *Orlando*, and *Le Corps lesbien*, textual drag becomes a valuable tool in a transfeminist theory of drag as it acts to demonstrate how these works foreshadow current queer and transfeminist approaches. Further, as I developed textual drag to elucidate the relationship between gender parody (Butler, 1999: 188), intramural parody (Hutcheon, 2000: 25), and extramural satire (2000: 43) in texts which centre drag and/or gender performance, textual drag could potentially become a useful tool for any transfeminist study of drag which grapples with the relationship between performativity and parody within literary texts.

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<sup>235</sup> For example, disidentification works especially well at shedding light on the nuanced performance strategies of Vaginal Davis in Muñoz's own 'The White to Be Angry' (1999: 93-115).

I now highlight two points which are essential to the particularizing, transfeminist approach developed here: an awareness of intent, and an awareness of reception. Focusing on the intent of individual performers allows an approach to be particularizing, while encouraging one to scrutinize details, such as what shapes a performer's intent, and how this intent is manifested in given performances. As intent can be an essential component in a performance, discounting it provides a limited picture of a given performance and its (intended) impact. Equally, exploring intent facilitates insight into a performer's motivation, and can shed light on the way in which queer and feminist praxis can be incorporated into performance. Notably, while intent is likely to be personal and specific to a performer – and, even to a performance – it is important to recognize that intent can be collectively shaped, especially in the case of a performance troupe or collective. As Luca Greco's 'Un soi pluriel' shows (2012: 69-72), a character and style can be constructed collectively as well as individually. As this collective construction of selfhood is likely to shape the intended impact of a character, as well as its physical form, it makes sense to recognize the role of collective construction in performer intent. Additionally, when working in a troupe, performers are prone to consult and influence each other regarding the prospective impact of a given performance.

As with intent, it is necessary for studies of drag to consider the role of audience response in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the way in which drag operates. While a study of performer styles and techniques will shed light on component parts of a given performance and may provide insight into a performer's motivations, one cannot gauge the impact of a performance without examining the reactions of audience members. Significantly, audience response can be explored as a component in the impact of an individual performance or analysed in itself. An exploration of audience response might consider what conceptual tools allow one to comprehend the message of a given performance, or may question how cultural and contextual factors are likely to impact on an audience's reaction. In order to ensure that an analysis of audience response fits within a particularizing, transfeminist approach to drag, I would suggest three points. First, I would recommend focusing on diverse examples of individual audiences, closely

examining which individuals constitute these audiences, and the context in which they are watching given performances. Second, I would suggest concentrating on the identities and experiences of audience members, with an awareness of which intersecting oppressions are faced, or are likely to be faced, by individual audience members. Finally, I would propose a close analysis of performers' styles and techniques, looking at the way in which given performances endorse or perpetuate certain ideals and biases, and questioning how these messages might affect the audiences considered.

Overall, this thesis has examined French and Anglo-American, queer and feminist, theories of drag spanning more than three decades, as well as exploring elements of current drag scenes and literary representation. This has enabled me to discuss diverse trends in the theorisation and practice of drag, including the subversive/reactionary dichotomy, the emphasis on a supposed opposition between the gender of the performer and the gender performed on stage, and contemporary performers' efforts to create more inclusive drag scenes. Having scrutinized the way in which certain theories produce and perpetuate reductive dichotomies, I sought to find and create modes of theorizing drag which aim to avoid generalizations and include a wider variety of performers. In addition to shedding light on central trends in the theorisation of drag, my analysis of existing scholarship on drag has drawn my attention to invaluable ways of conceptualizing identity and performance – some of which I have detailed in this conclusion. Notably, by using a transfeminist, scavenger methodology and building on the insights of scholars such as Sam Bourcier, José Estaban Muñoz, and Julia Serano, I have begun to develop the outline of a particularizing, transfeminist approach to drag. As demonstrated here, this approach challenges generalizing and transmisogynistic conceptualizations of drag, and instead seeks to account for a wide range of performers and techniques, without dismissing or erasing performers' identities. I very much hope that this approach will be useful for future theorizations of drag, and especially those with explicitly transfeminist aims.

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