

Politicization as Signification: Drag Performance as Hermeneutics

Danica Jenck

Abstract: *Judith Butler’s seminal book, Gender Trouble, categorizes drag performance as an indicative example of gender performance. In it, they categorize drag performance along binary lines of gender “opposites”. I argue that Butler’s theory does not hold if the nuance inherent to drag performance is taken into consideration. In examining its complexity, I establish that the artform and its performers are politicized. Through this politicization, I explore how drag performers and drag performance are signified and are able to be understood hermeneutically as a way to expand Butler’s initial theory.*

Keywords: *drag performance, gender performativity, politicization, hermeneutics*

1. Scope of Performativity

Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* discusses how gender is performative emphasizing that drag performers “[play] upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed” (1990/2007, p. 187). Much of Butler’s argument about gender performativity hinges on this idea that gender is not strictly tied to one’s gender assignment at birth. However, this identification of drag performers and drag performance has permeated much of the literature in queer theory scholarship without much critical analysis as to whether this classification of drag is correct or accurate (Browne, 2007, p. 114; Cooper, 2020, p. 107; Halberstam, 2002/1998, p. 236; Hobson, 2013, p. 37).

Butler could not have anticipated trans studies or how their theory helped to establish the literature on gender identification and performativity. With this in mind, I will argue that it is worth examining the limits of gender performativity on one of the populations that Butler cites as an indicative example for their theory. Their foundational analysis on drag performers and drag performance leads to many complications especially because trans drag queens and cisgender drag queens undermine Butler’s inherent analysis. Additionally, many “traditional” and “nontraditional” drag queens cite the art form in exploring and discovering their gender identity (Cooper, 2020, p. 107-108). In exploring the significance of a drag performer taking on a drag persona—regardless of how dissimilar that persona is with that performer’s gender identity—I will show that the act itself of choosing to take on a drag persona and performing as that persona inherently challenges ideas and expectations of gender expression and gender identity.

In critiquing Butler's performativity theory and expanding its scope to explore how their analysis of gender performance and gender expression is interconnected and cannot be analyzed along dualistic lines of separation, I will also take into consideration the ways in which bodies are politicized. If all gender performance and all gender expression are fundamentally interconnected, then both the performance and expression of gender must be examined in relation to each other. This can be shown by examining by how either gender performance or gender expression are socially controlled and regulated by focusing on how the history of drag performance in relation to the LGBTQ+ community in the United States—particularly laws that attempt to regulate non-normative self-expression or identity—turn the performative art into signs and symbols. The politicization of marginalized bodies turns those bodies into a sign and symbol that can be used to make the person living, participating, or interacting with the marginalized group recognizable only in caricature, propaganda, or rhetoric.

This politicization is further compounded when examining the relationship queer geography has in drag performance as it concerns signification. In one sense, I am taking a Ricoeurian understanding of hermeneutics and applying his framework of narrative onto drag performance by focusing on how the politicization of drag performance acts as narrative text that is layered onto and alongside drag performativity. I will supplement Ricoeur's ideas alongside others whose analysis of fashion and dress are useful when considering implications for how appearance defines and constrains politicization. I will also augment this argument by examining my own experiences as a drag queen through this theoretical lens. By transforming the body into a sign and symbol, a hermeneutic undertaking of drag performance can be done in relation to its history in the United States and what this in turn indicates towards future politicization of the LGBTQ+ community.

2. Signifying Locational Space

If we are to view the drag performer's body not as a physical presence but instead as something performative and politicized, then that means that their body cannot be separated from the space that it is in. This is an experience that members of the LGBTQ+ community and drag performers know all too well. The LGBTQ+ community, like many other marginalized communities, has a different relationship to space and embodiment than those who are not a part of the community. This is because the bodies of the LGBTQ+ community occupying space implicate the space through what those bodies signify and represent. With visibility comes vulnerability, and staying fixed in one location opens up the opportunity for violence and exclusion towards non-dominant social groups. Safety and security experienced by members of dominant social groups is understood and experienced differently than marginalized communities. "It is no surprise, then, that queers are frequently suspicious, fearful and unable to relate easily to the fixity and certainty inhering in most dominant ontologies of 'place.' Indeed, many queers find a certain amount of solace, safety and pleasure being in motion or nowhere at all" (Knopp, 2007, p. 23). Yet, the mere suggestion of harm easily interrupts that solace. While staying in motion or existing nowhere does not prevent the possibility of harm, these unconventional forms of space occupation significantly reduce the likelihood of experiencing it.

This relationship of signification found in spaces that are implicated by the presence of LGBTQ+ bodies is reminiscent of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics and his idea of narrative. Much of Ricoeur's ideas on narrative focuses on literary concepts of author and metaphor and heavily draw on Roland Barthes's ideas of authorial intent. Postmodern hermeneutics, which Ricoeur's ideas reside within, relies on narrative as it helps to establish what makes interpretation possible

and how such interpretation can occur. While I will not focus my analysis on what Ricoeur had to say about narrative in a literary sense, Ricoeur's discussion of reference as it concerns author and metaphor are notable here. For Ricoeur, reference acts as a way for the author to connect the text to the reader as well as to place where the text is in relation to other texts that exist in the world (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 36). Applying this concept to this description of queer geography makes the LGBTQ+ bodies existing within space the text and existing in relation to other texts. This relational reference exists regardless of the amount of LGBTQ+ bodies residing within a space. Instead, what matters more is if those bodies are perceived as LGBTQ+. That mere perception that one is a member of the LGBTQ+ community by way of how their body is referenced is enough to elicit a connection as it exists within socially constructed spaces in the heteronormative society we live within.

However, in addition to spaces drag performers occupy being associated with their marginalization, the drag performer's body becomes more than their physical form as they move and interact within space. It is also the collective presence of work, performance, and the space in which all within can exist authentically in a constructed reality that is mutually agreed upon between performer and audience. No words need be spoken when one enters the stage; the makeup, the costumes, and the music does all of the speaking for a drag performer. "It isn't enough anymore just to be a person wearing glittery clothing on stage: drag [performers] must do more to differentiate themselves, to be unique—otherwise, they cease to be worthy of their audience's attention" (Onclin, 2020, p. 156). The body is the drag performer's canvas and the stage, lights, and sounds are the environment which accentuate the performance as art. This again connects with Ricoeur as the drag performer's body is now the text itself being referenced within the performance.

**

I took a deep breath, anxious to audition to the drag group that regularly performed at my favorite bar in town.

I had heard about the auditions about two weeks prior. When I inquired further about the audition process, I was told to arrive at the auditions "in face" with one to two songs picked out that I was ready to perform to. I was also told that I could have one person with me at the auditions as moral support. The audition process was a little different from what auditions were like in theatre. I decided to go for it wanting nothing more than to be in a creative, performing space where I could express myself and find a way for me to further develop my performing skills in an artform that I had never done but had always wanted to do.

The day of the auditions I had arrived early with my then-partner, in face as instructed. I had been listening to my audition song on loop, but I was hopeful and determined to become a part of the performing group.

It did not take much longer until the rest of the auditionees and the producers had arrived. Once the producers were present, they invited us in to the auditioning space and informed everyone auditioning what the audition process was going to entail. We were informed that the only people who could be inside while the audition was occurring were the producers, the auditionee, and the person who came with the auditionee as moral support. Additionally, we were told that when we entered for our audition that we would need to say our name, our personal pronouns, our

persona, and the pronouns of our persona.

After the producers had informed everyone present what to expect, one of my auditionees volunteered to audition first. The rest of us filed outside and waited. While waiting, we determined who would audition and in what order. It was not long until it was my turn to enter.

When I entered the audition space, I took another deep breath and shook out my nerves.

“What’s your name?” one of the producers asked me.

“Danica Jenck,” I said, doing my best to keep my voice level while they took notes.

“What are your pronouns?” they continued.

“She/her,” I replied.

“And what’s your drag name?” one of the other producers asked me.

“Adinee Waters,” I said, hoping that my voice wasn’t revealing how nervous I was.

“What are your persona’s pronouns?” the other producer asked me.

“She/they.”

3. History of Marginalization and Rhetoric

Drag performance has a long history in the United States rooted in LGBTQ+ culture. While many scholars would originate drag’s history in ancient Greece and Rome and in theatrical spaces, the politicization of drag performance did not become explicitly connected to LGBTQ+ rights and the LGBTQ+ community within the United States until after Stonewall and the AIDS epidemic (Andrew, 2023). Prior to this connection, Western drag performance came out of male and female impersonation in theatrical performance (Halberstam, 2002/1998, p. 232-233). An argument could be made that the existence of male and female impersonation in Western theatre tradition is inherently political due to whose bodies were allowed to be on stage and what those bodies could present as. Regardless, the histories of male and female impersonation helped make drag performance possible in the United States.

While the performing arts in the United States have a history of freedom or flexibility on what bodies could present as concerning gender identity, the same cannot be said of its government or medical system. The United States government and its medical professionals have a history of defining and regulating normative sexual behavior and relationships. This included who could marry and under what circumstances, homosexuality being defined as a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association until 1973 (Price, 2018, p. 89), and the illegalization of various sexual acts that were outside of marriage or nonprocreative in nature (Price, 2018, p. 98). Today, this regulation of sexual behavior focuses on transgender people’s right to use sex-segregated facilities, such as bathrooms and locker rooms (Price, 2018, 90). However, the disdain towards those of the LGBTQ+ community in the United States extends out to also include things that are not directly connected to sex or gender.

As explored earlier, the LGBTQ+ community's presence in a location implicates and associates that space with the community. This concept can also be seen in action with the AIDS epidemic.

In the early 1980s, reports of a mysterious disease, dubbed the “gay cancer” and the “gay plague,” began to surface in the national media. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had just published two reports that described the emergence of rare diseases among gay men. . . . By the end of 1981, there were a total of 270 cases of a severe immune deficiency among gay men. It was becoming clear that a new, deadly disease was rapidly spreading within some populations in the United States—gay men, intravenous drug users, Haitian refugees, and hemophiliacs. By August 1992, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had named this new disease Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) (HIV.gov, 2020; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2016). (as cited in Price, 2018, p. 92)

People with AIDS were shunned and blamed for acquiring the disease. The focus for blame was placed on CDC-defined risk groups, particularly gay men, intravenous drug users, and people of color (Price, 2018, p. 92). “Subsequently, people living with AIDS at the time were denied roles in community life. In other words, they became ‘socially dead’ long before their biological deaths (Wright, 2013)” (as cited in Price, 2018, p. 93). Acquiring the disease was a death sentence and functionally excluded the person with the disease from the consideration or care from society at large within the United States.

However, AIDS being a death sentence did not have to be the case if there was government intervention during this time despite the stigma associated with the disease. Unfortunately, the AIDS epidemic was not publicly acknowledged by the Reagan administration until 1985 (Price, 2018, p. 92). During the pivotal time to help find a cure for thousands of people who were dying from the disease, efforts were instead spent on vilifying those with the disease.

What led to the Reagan administration publicly acknowledging the AIDS epidemic was due to creative efforts by various members of the LGBTQ+ community and drag groups to raise awareness and change public perception. In 1983, playwright and activist Larry Kramer and several of his colleagues formed the Gay Men's Health Crisis, a New-York based service group that supported people with AIDS, in response to the federal government's lack of attention to the AIDS crisis. Other notable groups that formed in response were ACT UP (The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), established in 1987 in response to proposed exorbitant costs of initial medications used to treat HIV/AIDS, and the National Association of People with AIDS, established in 1983 and was the first organization to advocate for the rights of those living with HIV and AIDS. What makes ACT UP unique is that they created their own unique logo (Silence = Death) that helped to act as the slogan that represented the movement as well as to hold political and religious leaders accountable (Price, 2018, p. 93-94). Drag queens assisted in AIDS crisis efforts by hosting events or lending their abilities to fundraising efforts with groups like the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in San Francisco being one of the most famous groups to have assisted those with AIDS (Andrew, 2023). These events, along with various instances of people living with AIDS being discriminated against, led the forefront of awareness efforts. AIDS was only formally recognized by the Reagan administration after a close friend of Reagan's wife had died of the disease (Price, 2018, p. 95). This led to the United States government funding research efforts for a cure that still continue to this day.

The history of the AIDS epidemic, as well as other past and current political issues that disproportionately impact the LGBTQ+ community, is representative of the phenomenon of sex

panic. Sex panics are a specific type of moral panic that encompass a range of issues that concern sexuality with moral panic being described as:

the process in which a situation, social condition, or group of people is seen as a threat to the norms, values, and interests of a society, which in turn arouses social concern and widespread fear. . . . Moral panics can result in social changes within a community and political action, including harsher laws, stricter enforcement practices, and increased surveillance. Moreover, moral panics are reliant on the work of the mass media and moral entrepreneurs (i.e. those who start the panics such as public authority figures) to thrive and spread. (Price, 2018, p. 90)

Moral panics and sex panics have both shaped the political landscape of the United States while in turn creating the conditions that enabled the marginalization of disaffected communities. These panics helped to legitimate their marginalization. It is a kind of chicken and egg situation when examining the social and political conditions of various issues associated with the LGBTQ+ community in the United States because it is hard to say whether it is the law or stigmatization that is the cause of disempowerment. Regardless of the source, it is clear that both rhetoric and politics were and are intimately connected in LGBTQ+ issues.

Part of what makes the AIDS epidemic so significant to the LGBTQ+ community and its history in the United States is because being LGBTQ+ had neither legal nor medical recognition from intervention or surveillance. In many ways, this is still true or can become true once more for many LGBTQ+ peoples in the United States today. Without the drag community helping to assist and stand up for their fellow peers in the LGBTQ+ community during the AIDS epidemic, the LGBTQ+ community within the United States would look very different today. It is this politicization and community efforts that makes drag performance seem synonymous with the LGBTQ+ community.

As explained in my earlier section on the relationship between space and drag performers, the perception of LGBTQ+ bodies as LGBTQ+ is enough to elicit signification with space. The history of the AIDS epidemic here demonstrates how both the LGBTQ+ community and drag performers become synonymous and that references via their bodies now signify rhetoric associated with said bodies. In the case of the AIDS epidemic, the association is that of disease and deviance. The AIDS epidemic is a sex panic that triggered conservative, reactionary backlash due to various convergence factors that made it easy to discriminate against marginalized groups, particularly gay men, during the health crisis. Keeping Ricoeur's hermeneutics in mind, this means that those bodies, now defined as one homogenous sign, can now be referenced in association with other negative symbols, such as calling AIDS a "gay disease." These negative symbols act as the basis to discriminate as these symbols are justified *a priori* via external signification.

4. Contemporary Marginalization of Drag Performance

It is worth noting that drag community is not one monolithic group. Many have historically disagreed on the nature of drag performance and whether the focus or emphasis on performance is politics or entertainment (Hilbert, 1995, p. 464). Additionally, the drag community has issues defining how and who can perform. The pervasive image of a drag performer is a flamboyant cisgender gay man dressing as, sounding like, and acting like a "woman" (Andrew, 2023). Because of drag's long history and its associations in the United States with the LGBTQ+ community, it is also hard to ignore the fact that attempts to legalize bans on drag performance as an art form

during 2023 for fears of “harming children” appears as a veiled way to criminalize the LGBTQ+ community through a performance art that is colloquially associated with this marginalized community.

Multiple states attempted to pass laws banning drag performance during the summer of 2023. In an NPR article, “Despite all the talk, no states have active laws banning drag in front of kids,” Josie Lenora notes that all of the drag laws that were attempting to ban drag performances have either been struck down in violation of the First Amendment or have been changed to not mention drag performance at all. Notably, people in favor of banning drag in the presence of children cite that drag and drag performance induce prurient interest, or excessive interest in sexual matters, in children.

“Most drag shows do not appeal to the prurient interest,” says JT Morris, an attorney for the free-speech group Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. “Even if they did, saying something appeals to the ‘prurient interest’ under the First Amendment is not enough to regulate it,” he says, noting that this kind of language makes it harder for a bill to hold up to basic legal scrutiny. “You can’t pass a state law based on disagreement with somebody’s viewpoint. It’s a textbook First Amendment violation.” (Lenora, 2023)

While attempting to ban gender expression and gender performance violates the First Amendment, the fact that attempts were made in that direction in multiple states with such explicit reference to sexual matters is reminiscent of the history of censorship and hostility towards the LGBTQ+ community in media and in government.

These attempts at national and state-located drag performance bans have also directly impacted the spaces in which drag performers and their enthusiasts exist. This is true regardless of whether those spaces exist in states that did not create nor attempt to enforce a drag ban. Game and Grog Bar, a former bar that was located in Yakima, WA, boarded up their windows in response to possible protests to a drag show amidst other protests and violence in the Central Washington area (Tri-Cities and Pasco) related to drag shows in May 2023. Notably, on the former bar’s Facebook page, it cited that these various protests and violence in the Central Washington area were because of those associated with bigoted hate groups like The Proud Boys (as cited in D’Anella, 2023). In anticipation of protests, the bar and its affiliated drag group, Gaymer and Allies, sought out volunteer security guards, with multiple people showing up to the Tuesday drag show (D’Anella, 2023). This politicization of drag performance is in line with sex panics that have resulted in laws and environments in the United States that are hostile towards the LGBTQ+ community. This suggests that while drag performers and their bodies are politicized, that does not mean that the spaces they occupy are exempt from politicization and that this politicization occurs regardless of whether any laws are in effect to ban drag performance.

**

One thing that scared my drag group were posters that were vandalizing walls at a local park and local college that displayed vile, bigoted transphobic language. Those posters read “Samurai Monkey says no to grooming and child sexual mutilation” to an image of a samurai standing next to a no symbol over an inclusive pride flag and “Keep your schools clean” alongside an image of a person throwing away symbols of a Black Lives Matter fist, an inclusive pride flag, and a symbol of a D enclosed in a circle.

It made my stomach sick that there were people where I lived that felt comfortable enough to vandalize public spaces with their hate and bigotry.

After discussing with my fellow drag members what to do and airing my frustrations, I decided to write a letter to the editor. No one else felt comfortable enough to write or do anything as they were concerned about their personal safety and keeping their families safe. While I sympathized, I felt a fire in my gut.

A few days after I had submitted my letter, I received a follow-up inquiry from an editor that asked for clarifying details about the posters and whether any reports were filed. I told them what I knew.

That letter was published a week after I had submitted it.

5. Ad-dressing Hermeneutics

Because the drag performer can (and often does) make every aspect of their body and the space they occupy while performing into art, they, like other performance artists, transform their body, clothes, and physical surroundings into a text. While much of my initial hermeneutic framework analyzes drag performance via Ricoeur, I do not aim at limiting this essay by only focusing on Ricoeur. As mentioned earlier, Ricoeur's hermeneutics on text was heavily influenced by Barthes. Barthes's discussion of authorial intent would make for an interesting analysis as it concerns queer subjectivity and relationality in drag performance, such an analysis is outside the scope of this paper.¹ Instead, I will focus on Barthes's analysis of the body and dress.

Barthes initially introduced the concept of analyzing the body and dress through fashion as a form of desire. Important to Barthes was distinguishing what about fashion signified certain markers and characteristics that allowed people to interpret what others wore.

The plastic meaning of a garment depends a great deal on the continuity (or discontinuity) of its elements, even more than on its form. On the one hand, we could say that in its profane way the garment reflects the old mystical dream of the "seamless": since the garment envelops the body, is not the miracle precisely that the body can enter it without leaving behind any trace of this passage? And on the other hand, to the extent that the garment is erotic, it must be allowed to persist here and disintegrate there, to be partially absent, to play with the body's nudity. Continuity and discontinuity are thus preempted by an ensemble of institutional features: the garment's discontinuity is not content merely to exist: it either plays itself up or plays itself down. (Barthes, 1983/1984, p. 136-137)

Notable here is the use of the term "erotic" as it concerns the relationship between garment and body. To label or call something erotic means to place a signification of desire (specifically sexual) onto the thing itself. There is nothing inherently erotic about pieces of fabric; instead that relationship is conjured and connected in how the fabric, made garment, is worn on the body and how both are perceived (such as claiming an art form that centers on performative expression through fashion induces prurient interest).

¹ One can argue that such a case has preemptively been made as in Sarah Hankins article "Queer Relationships with Music and an Experiential Hermeneutics for Musical Meaning."

Because the drag performer incorporates their body and surrounding space into their performance, this complicates signals to the audience in terms of identifying the performer's gender. Identifying and addressing an individual as a particular gender are two different experiences and expressions.

Emphasising the ways in which sexed bodies, identities and spaces are always becoming – and, specifically, the need to conceptualise these as momentary, fleeting and needing to be re-performed – enables the instability of the dichotomies of gender and sex (male/female, man/woman) to come into view. This approach is particularly important given that sexed and gendered body identities are often naturalised through these processes such that they are invisibilised. (Browne, 2007, p. 114)

Adding in the fact that core to drag performance is creative gender expression and presentation, this means that the drag performer's gender and the drag persona's gender do not have to align along binary "opposites" to legitimate the performer or their performance. To suggest that there are "opposite" genders when discussing the gender of a drag performer and their persona makes invisible gender identities which do not adhere to the more common male or female gender identifications. This, in turn, risks turning Butler's theory into a reductive theory of gender binaries.

Joanne Entwistle drives the connection between dress and body further in "The Dressed Body" by suggesting that the dressed body participates and engages in social spaces, regardless of what the dressed body is wearing and how it moves. She points out that bodies that do not conform to social convention risk exclusion or ridicule (Entwistle, 2001, p. 33). Entwistle also examines discussions of power from Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, and Bourdieu to show how fashion is interconnected with ideas of power, knowledge, and value. While her insights focus on the dressed body in everyday life, these insights can also apply to drag performance. The fact that there were a number of failed laws attempting to criminalize drag and drag performers because of their fashion and dress while doing stylized gender performance and that those performers become a text embodied within the space in which their presence gets implicated by their association, then that means that the body becomes a text that can be understood hermeneutically *through* gender performativity.

One scholar who has done initial work in this direction is Kathryn Hobson. In her article, "Performative Tensions in Female Drag Performance," Hobson explored the significations of a drag performance that she had watched. Hobson clarified that she had watched the drag performance as an audience member despite having a connection to the drag community as a performer. After clarifying, Hobson described watching a performance to George Michael's "Faith" that objectified the female-coded performer and how the white male-coded performer both reinforced and undermined ideas of masculinity and power. Important to her analysis is the context of where this performance is done. Hobson saw this performance in a stereotypically Cuban-themed bar and noted how ironic and disconcerting it was to be in the space owned by a white person and it being occupied by mostly white people. Despite the bar being a queer-friendly space, she left feeling unsafe due to the narratives that the queer environment fostered through this drag performance. At the very end of her article, Hobson makes a call to the queer community, with a focus on drag performers in particular.

As queer community members, activists, and scholars invested in justice we should be sensitive to the oppression of others, especially the members of our own

communities, so as to not further marginalize and alienate them. This essay asks that drag performers be intentional in their performative choices, realizing the ideological nature that these performances both imitate and create. We must all be intentional and self-reflexive in our identity performances. We must be willing to do the work of critique that asks us to be intersectional and to challenge dominant notions of queer so that we can build sustainable communities committed to reflexivity, intersectionality, and justice. (Hobson, 2013, p. 49)

While Hobson does not explicitly call their work a hermeneutic task, their analysis of various choices performers had made in conjunction to the space in which the performance took place is a hermeneutic undertaking. Hobson explicitly connects drag performers to both their performance and histories of oppression and marginalization. Tying her observations in with this theoretical framework helps to further complicate and strengthens Butler's original theory. Incorporating the complexity of drag performance into Butler's theory expands its scope and possibilities while also further bolstering how their theory interweaves with other theories that concern the marginalization of peoples and bodies.

**

About a month before I was to make my debut as Adinee Waters, I was in a drag rehearsal with other members in my drag performance group. I kept on running through my debut song, moving stiffly and finding it difficult to connect myself and my persona to the music. I kept on getting pointers from one of my fellow drag members on how to move more femininely, telling me how to move my hips in a way that didn't look inherently awkward.

No matter what they told me, I was not getting it. My hips weren't moving right.

"Here, let's try this," one of the producers said.

"Follow me," they said and I listened.

"Stand with your back straight against the wall."

I did as I was told, taking note how uncomfortable it was for me to try to stand with my back as flat as possible against the wall.

"Now, you want to move your hips using only your legs while your back stays against the wall. You do not want your back to move away from the wall."

I moved my hips as instructed, feeling my back and hips gyrate, faintly hearing the way in which my bones and joints scraped against each other until I mastered moving my hips femininely.

6. Future Work and Considerations

While the crux of this paper focuses on the history of drag performance and the possibility to explore its legalization and rhetoric concerning the art form through a hermeneutic lens, drag is also about camp (exaggerated satire or media). A discussion about drag would be remiss without examining the body and space as a site for camp and the relationship that camp has with politicization. Further discussion on drag performance could explore this relationship as such discussion is beyond the current scope of this paper.

Additional further possibilities for exploration regarding the politicization of bodies can be found in similarities between drag performance and cosplay. Commonly found in fan communities to works of media in popular culture, cosplay is a kind of dress-up where people recreate various fictional characters as accurately as possible. Many communities form around people cosplaying certain fictional properties and is especially common for more popular properties (*Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Lord of the Rings*, etc.). Cosplay communities are notorious for having members who are exclusionary or who disregard cosplays of people and bodies that do not fit how a character is portrayed and such practices are worth exploring within the wider context of politicization.

Butler's theory of gender performance failed to take into account the nuance that drag performance has through their classification of drag performers. Politicization is a core aspect to drag performance after the AIDS epidemic, and the body implicates space through association of what that body represents. Ultimately, if marginalization can be understood through a hermeneutic framework, then this would imply that all theories of subjection and subjugation that theorize about marginalization are hermeneutic frameworks.

Acknowledgements

My gratitude extends to The Journal of Somaesthetics editorial board and peer reviewers for their feedback. I would also like to thank Dr. Allison Hammer, one of my mentors who contributed significant feedback that helped to develop this paper.

References

- Andrew, S. (2023, April 29). The US has a rich drag history. Here's why the art form will likely outlast attempts to restrict it. *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/drag-queen-us-history-explainer-cec/index.html>.
- Barthes, R. (1983/1984). *The fashion system* (2nd ed.). (M. Ward & R. Howard, Trans.) New York, NY: Hill and Wang. (Original work published 1967)
- Browne, K. (2007). Drag queens and drab dykes: Deploying and deploring femininities. In K. Browne, J. Lim, & G. Brown (Eds.), *Geographies of sexualities: Theory, practices and politics* (pp. 113-124). Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Butler, J. (1990/2007). *Gender trouble*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cooper, A. (2020). Another wig underneath. In H. Kempt & M. Volpert (Eds.), *RuPaul's drag race and philosophy: Sissy that thought* (pp. 105-116). Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing.
- D'Anella, T. (2023, June 6). Game and grog bar boards up windows ahead of possible protests. *NBC Right Now*. https://www.nbcrightnow.com/news/game-and-grog-bar-boards-up-windows-ahead-of-possible-protests/article_8e938abc-e972-11ed-9902-5f5372a038df.html.

- Entwistle, J. (2001). The dressed body. In J. Entwistle & E. Wilson (Eds.), *Body dressing* (pp. 33-58). Oxford, England: Berg.
- Halberstam, J. (2002/1998). *Female masculinity* (4th ed.). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hilbert, J. (1995). The politics of drag. In C. K. Creekmur & A. Doty (Eds.), *Out in culture: Gay, lesbian, and queer essays on popular culture* (pp. 463-469). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hobson, K. (2013). Performative tensions in female drag performances. *Kaleidoscope: A Graduate Journal of Qualitative Communication Research*, 12, pp. 35-51. Retrieved from <https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1167&context=kaleidoscope>
- Knopp, L. (2007). From lesbian and gay to queer geographies: Past, prospects and possibilities. In K. Browne, J. Lim, & G. Brown (Eds.), *Geographies of sexualities: Theory, practices and politics* (pp. 21-28). Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Lenora, J. (2023, July 29). Despite all the talk, no states have active laws banning drag in front of kids. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2023/07/29/1190306861/drag-bans-fail-lgbtq-first-amendment-prurient-arkansas-florida-tennessee-montana>.
- Onclin, H. (2020). The importance of being fabulous. In H. Kempt & M. Volpert (Eds.), *RuPaul's drag race and philosophy: Sissy that thought* (pp. 143-157). Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing.
- Price, K. (2018). Sexual justice. In *Reproductive politics in the united states* (pp. 88-115). doi: 10.4324/9781315169644-5.
- Ricoeur, P. (1976). *Interpretation theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning*. Fort Worth, TX: TCU Press.