School of Media, Culture & Creative Arts

Faux Queens: an exploration of gender, sexuality and queerness in cis-female drag queen performance.

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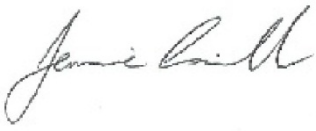
DECLARATION

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Human Ethics The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number #MCCA-12-12.

Signature: 

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ABSTRACT

This PhD thesis investigates the cultural implications of cis-women performing female drag, with particular focus on cis-female drag queens (aka faux queens) who are straight-identified. The research has been completed as creative production and exegesis, and both products address the central research question. In the introductory chapter I contextualise the theatrical history of male-to-female drag beginning with the Ancient Greek stage, and foreground faux queens as the subject of investigation. I also outline the methodology employed, including practice-led research, autoethnography, and in-depth interview, and provide a summary of each chapter and the creative production *Agorafaux-pas! - A drag cabaret*. The introduction presents the cultural implications of faux queens that are also explored in the chapters and creative production. This includes excavating notions of cultural queerness, performative and cultural transactions between cis-women and gay male drag queens, the language used to define women in female drag, and the ways that faux queen performance can maintain the challenge of queer and resist heteronormativity through engagement with feminist camp.

Chapter One examines the theoretical framework in which we might consider an engagement or intersection between heterosexual and queer identities, and therefore questions the possibility that straight-identified faux queens may be queered as a result of their performance practice. Chapter Two reviews the labels used in academic and social/cultural fields to describe cis-female drag queens and looks closely at the challenges of negotiating cis-gender iterations of drag performance that are more traditionally a form of cross-dressing. Chapter Three focuses on a discussion of ways that faux queen performances might work to maintain the challenge of queer and resist charges of dominant reincorporation – or what Moe Myer has termed 'camp trace' (Myer, 1994). The creative production *Agorafaux-pas!* is presented as a play-script and live performance iteration. In addition to the play-script, the live performance of *Agorafaux-pas!* offers a form of alternative access to the script and overarching theoretical/critical exploration of the research question. While a written script might function as a descriptive and creative text open to various readings, the live work makes accessible the physical, aesthetic and camped elements intended for the work and also communicates the research in a way that is

accessible to a wider variety of audiences. The concluding chapter shows how the creative production is imbricated within the theory and analysis of the exegesis, outlines the research conclusions, and contextualises suggestions for future research with regards to the project as a whole.

KEYWORDS/PHRASES

Faux queen, bio queen, drag queen, cis-gender, cis-women, gender performance, drag performance, gender performativity, female drag, queer, queerness, culturally queer, heteroqueer, hyper-femininity, queered femininity, femme, camp, feminist camp, camp trace, feminist humour.

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The live performance of *Agorafaux-pas!* would not have been possible without my fabulous cast and crew of volunteers. I extend immense gratitude to the cast: Cara Snyder, Cassy Griff, Stephanie McClure and Lockie McKinna; and crew: Avery

[1] Parts of this thesis are included in the following publications:

Coull, J. L. (2014). Control & Surrender: Negotiating the Risks and Rewards of Online Performances and Images. *The International Journal of The Image, 4*(3), 37-48. Retrieved from http://ijx.cgpublisher.com/

Freeman, J. (Ed.). (2015). *Remaking Memory: Autoethnography, Memoir and The Ethics of Self.* Oxfordshire: Libri Publishing.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii
KEYWORDS/PHRASES iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS vii
INTRODUCTION 1
CHAPTER ONE 28
CHAPTER TWO 53
CHAPTER THREE 78
CONCLUSION 111
WORKS CITED & CONSULTED 122
AGORAFAUX-PAS! 131
ACT ONE 134
ACT TWO 155
APPENDIX 198

INTRODUCTION

This project is an examination of the potential cultural implications that emerge when cis-gendered[2] women perform as drag queens in queer spaces. I have investigated the emergent tensions of cis-female drag queens, (or faux queens), primarily through autoethnography, my own practice as a drag performer, and a small-scale ethnography of faux queen performers in the San Francisco Bay Area. As the title suggests, my research is framed by my personal experiences and subjectivity as a straight-identified faux queen. The research is therefore particularly concerned with identities and subject positions that can be considered non-normative to drag practice; such as straight-identified performers, and drag practices that do not foreground cross-dressing in the same way as conventional male-to-female drag. This is a performance studies PhD project, and is presented as creative practice and critical exegesis. The creative output is the script for *Agorafaux-pas!* Being a cabaret style show dependent on drag, visual aesthetics and humour, the performance and performance recording are offered as an additional, alternative access to the script and the way it may translate onto the stage.

I started this project in 2012 with the intent to explore why gay male drag queens do drag and how their drag personas are imbricated within a wider sense of identity. Although this was a promising subject, it became clear that there were insurmountable challenges involved, primarily in terms of my lack of personal connection to the topic and access to the community. I am not a man, not a gay man, and at the time not a drag queen either. Nevertheless, I remained fascinated by hyper-feminised aesthetics, camp, and over-exaggerated gender performances and it became important to find a personally engaged way into these overarching themes. Before refocusing my project towards faux queens, I started to attend drag queen shows locally in Perth, Western Australia. At these shows I was particularly captivated by the bold and confident way that the drag queens presented themselves

[2] Schilt & Westbrook define cis-gender thus: "Cis is the Latin prefix for 'on the same side.' It compliments trans, the prefix for 'across' or 'over.' 'Cisgender' (sic) replaces the terms 'nontransgender' (sic) or 'bio man/bio woman' to refer to individuals who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their personal identity" (Schilt & Westbrook 2009, p. 461).

and interacted with their audiences. They presented femininity in a way that I felt was extremely glamorous, and yet also somewhat off-limits to me as a cis-woman. Hoping to harness some of the confidence I perceived in the drag queens I had seen, I started to experiment with drag queen aesthetics on my own body and subsequently began developing my own drag queen persona, 'Agorafauxbia'. At first, this was a very private behaviour which I practiced in my home while my partner was at work, and I did not initially consider it to be part of my research practice. In the title of the project I mention 'grown-up play out of the closet', because in my case this phrase reflects some of the emotions surrounding my entrance into the drag world. I had long considered my private drag experiments with Agorafauxbia to be 'grown-up play' and at the time, I felt my behaviour was illicit and kept it secret. However, I was curious to know if other women might be experimenting in the same way I did. Online I found a number of cis-women who performed publically as drag queens. I also discovered that at least one of the performers I learned of was in a heterosexual relationship. Finding faux queens online encouraged me to explain my private dressing up to the relevant people around me and consequently I found a topic for my research that was personally germane and could contribute to the somewhat limited existing academic literature regarding faux queen performance practice. From that point on I gradually made my way towards live stages at drag venues in the United States.

San Francisco hosted its first Faux Queen Pageant in 1995 and it is now an established competition for cis-women who perform as drag queens. The establishment of San Francisco's Faux Queen Pageant, although not an isolated event, represents a burgeoning cultural moment where cis-women of various sexualities, are performing in queer spaces as drag queens. The central research question of this project is: 'What are the cultural implications of cis-women performing as drag queens?' The dissertation is structured as a creative production and exegesis, and the critical writing should be read in conjunction with the major creative production *Agorafaux-pas!: a drag cabaret*. Additionally, a minor formative creative production *WerqSF: a web-based documentary series* is included in Appendix One for further reference.

Faux queens are among the most recent additions to a very long and iterative history of drag performance. There has been significant and sustained critical research into

drag queens and male-to-female cross-dressed performance throughout the history of stage, screen and life. In conjunction with Judith Halberstam's publication of *Female Masculinity* in 1998, drag kings have also been the focus of a significant number of critical studies. In comparison, there are few texts that discuss faux queens and even fewer that devote their entire focus to faux queen performance (see for example Devitt, 2006; Ferreday, 2007; Kumbier, 2003; Rupp et al., 2010; Schacht, 2003; Taylor, 2007). This dissertation contributes to the extant research regarding contemporary drag performance with a particular focus on faux queens, queer performance practice, and heterosexual subjectivity in queer performance space and practice. Importantly, faux queen performance is part of queer drag culture, but it is also relevant to feminist studies, and so this research is both a queer and a feminist pursuit. This work contributes to theories regarding the performative transactions between women and men (particularly gay men) in the production of drag queen aesthetics, and considers how women can be agents of camp sensibility and maintain the challenge of queer through their performance work. This dissertation supports and continues an argument towards a theory and practice of feminist camp, and explores bodies that are always deliberately flexible in their gender presentation. My investigation into the cultural implications of cis-women performing as drag queens opens up space for the definition of drag to change and evolve, and excavates the subject position of straight-identified people who are involved in queer cultural activities.

In this dissertation, the exegesis and creative practice are built on research into faux queens and their performance practice developed from data gathered via interviews, creative practice, and my autoethnographic account. However, this work also emerges from and builds upon the broader history of drag performance and theatre practice. This introduction begins with a brief historical summary of male-to-female drag history in order to provide context for conventional expectations and assumptions regarding drag practice. I then go on to outline the methodology used in this research project and summarise each chapter with notes on how to read and approach the work. Finally, I contextualise the major creative production *Agorafaux-pas!*, and briefly frame the mechanics of writing, staging and rehearsing.

A Brief Historical Summary of Male-to-Female Drag

Located specifically as part of an extensive history of theatrical practice, drag is inherently and necessarily performative. This research locates drag within theatre and performance, rather than looking at more behavioural practices such as cross-dressing. Drag, in the sense of men dressing and performing for audiences as women, has a long history originating in Ancient Greek theatre, and this history is largely responsible for how drag is understood generally as a performance practice. A defining aspect of contemporary drag is that it is more often than not a caricatured and hyperbolised representation of a woman by a gay man. The notions of caricature, parody and hyperbole are evident throughout drag's theatrical history, and many dragged characters are somewhat removed from realistic representations of female-identified women. Throughout drag's history it is clear that most representations were based on stock female characters, parodies, or unattainable ideals. Although much drag practice is now situated within queer/gay male performance and identity, the theatrical history points to a sustained practice of caricature, hyperbole, parody, and representations that sit outside the framework of cis-women.

By the fifth century, Ancient Greek society demanded women be removed from public life, and in the theatre, where all characters were masked, men played female roles (Case, 1985). Graham Ley notes that all actors, including chorus members, in the three forms of Ancient Greek play (tragedy, comedy and satyr) were always men and particularly for comedies "there is strong evidence that some masks were modelled directly on life, to provide a caricature of a known individual" (Ley, 1991, p. 18). Female characters were recognisable by costuming, as well as symbolic use of gesture and movement, and possibly also altered voice. Sue-Ellen Case argues,

> Along with the female costume of the shorter tunic and the female mask with longer hair, he [the actor] might have indicated through gesture, movement, and vocal intonation that the character was female. In considering this portrayal, it is important to remember that the notion of the female derived from the male point of view, which remained alien to female experience and reflected the perspective of her gendered opposite. This vocabulary of gestures initiated the image of "Woman" as she is seen on the stage - institutionalized through

> patriarchal culture and represented by male-originated signs of her appropriate gender behavior. Moreover, the practice of male actors playing women probably encouraged the creation of female roles which lent themselves to generalization and stereotype (Case, 1985, p. 321).

The Greek stage is the starting point for a long practice of generalised and stereotyped representations of women through drag performance, most notably in Western and Asian theatre. In Medieval England it was common for female characters to be parodied in travelling biblical plays known as the 'mystery plays' (Normington, 2004; Baker, 1994). Two 'types' of women were commonly presented to the public audiences in these performances: the Hag and the Angel. In the story of Noah's Ark, Noah's wife was typically played as a Hag by an aging, unattractive man. Her dialogue, manner and tone portrayed an older, nagging woman who was very unattractive and irritating to Noah and his sons. Heavenly Angels, on the other hand, were played by young attractive men, clad in white, intended to appear beautiful, comforting and somewhat ambiguously gendered. Angels were typically staged without dialogue, so as not to disrupt the androgynous illusion by revealing a male voice (Baker, 1994). Elizabethan theatre traditionally utilized young teenage boys to play younger female roles, as the androgyny of their youth apparently allowed them to pass more easily as women, and older men to play mature women (Ackroyd, 1979; Baker, 1994; Boas, 1955; Davies, 1964; Garber, 1992).

Asian theatres also developed from religious practices, in particular, acts of worship associated with fertility and re-birth. In Japan, theatre and dance are intricately linked, so much so that theatre means dance and dance means theatre. The Japanese 'onnagata' (female impersonator) passed convincingly onstage as a 'real' woman, in appearance and behaviour, and was considered to represent an ideal Japanese femininity. Roger Baker explains that Japanese women would often look to the onnagata to guide their own social behaviour and appearance (Baker, 1994; Scott, 1955). In Chinese culture, similar conventions were in place through the tradition of the 'tan' actor. Six stock characters for tan actors have been documented, for which the actor required a specific skill set. The tan actor categories include: the faithful wife; modest woman; obedient daughter; glamorous, seductive leading lady;

malicious evil woman; old woman; and the vigorous maiden who was able to ride and fight (Baker, 1994, pp. 72-73; Pronko, 1967; Scott, 1957).

From East to West, there are several commonalities. First, it is accepted that in England women were forbidden on the stage until the Restoration[3], and for a long time after this point the female actress was associated with prostitution. Second, theatre is fundamentally rooted in religious practices, some of which still do not allow women to 'take the stage' in terms of religious leadership. Third, although intentions may have been to represent women, what often occurred was a staging of something other or extra than women, insofar as the characters were either ridiculous parodies, extra-human non-mortal beings, androgynous ambiguities or an unattainable idealisation of femininity. Elizabethan England deviates slightly from the history of female impersonation, instead offering an historical time-frame during which the 'male actress' was a legitimate and serious profession. These boys and adolescent men played serious and compelling female roles with rich and complex dialogue (Ackroyd, 1979; Baker, 1994; Boas, 1955; Davies, 1964).[4] Eventually, however, the practice of cross-dressing became increasingly associated with homosexuality, verisimilitude became very popular, and the golden age for the male actress came to a halt (Baker, 1994).

After the Restoration, the serious male actress was an abandoned function in the West, the shadow of which survived as the comic drag queen who eventually developed along several different lines (Baker, 1994). In Japan, however, as a result of the Kabuki theatre's resistance to change, Baker argues that the onnagata survived as a symbol of the divine and perfect combination of an ideal masculine/feminine. Similarly, the tan actor maintained a much longer life on stage than the Elizabethan male actress. Women were finally permitted on stage in China in the early 20th century; however they were not allowed to appear alongside male actors until approximately the 1930s. Like the onnagata, Baker attributes the longevity of tan actors to a cultural refusal to change and a much more reactionary political environment than found in the West during the early 20th century (Baker, 1994). Serious cross-dressed roles were given a second life in Italian Opera where some

[3] France and Spain allowed women somewhat earlier. Practices in other European countries are less clear, but some (such as Russia) never banned women.
[4] For example, Viola in *Twelfth Night*, Rosalind in *As You Like it* and Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare.

young male performer's genitals were removed to create the position of 'Castrati', who were able to remain singing in higher registers after puberty. Castrati were perceived as surreal individuals, however they were often wrongly assumed to lack sexual desire, and were often the subject of ridicule (Andre, 2006; Baker, 1994; Heriot, 1974). As Baker observes, it is perhaps not surprising to see Opera as the source of a group of people considered outside of reality or normalism. Opera is not realism; it is highly stylised musical theatre, similar in some ways to Asian theatre. The focus in Opera, is not on the details, rather it is on grand spectacle and music (Baker, 1994).

With the exception of Opera, history suggests most people representing women or femininity on stage in the Western tradition became marginalised individuals. Until at least the 20th Century, actresses were assumed to be prostitutes, and men playing women were assumed to be gay, however over time these assumptions faded, particularly with regards to women in female roles (Ackroyd, 1979; Baker, 1994; Bullough and Bullough, 1987; Pullen, 2005). The popularity of pantomime in the late 19th and early 20th centuries created a space for men to earn a living performing as women in a theatrical setting, where work was plentiful and the farcical portrayal of female caricatures offset the taboo of cross-dressing. Characterisations of the 'pantomime dame' were comical, grotesque and often a parody of middle-aged working-class or aristocratic women (Baker, 1994; Cullen et al., 2004; Millie Taylor, 2007). As Baker and Millie Taylor observe, dames typically interacted with audiences, particularly children, to gain their attention, and performed physically demanding slap-stick routines. Verisimilitude and fourth wall realism were not a concern of the pantomime dame as it was not their intention to pass, but rather to parody and grotesque a stereotypical female image (Baker, 1994; Millie Taylor, 2007).

During the First and Second World Wars, all-male reviews where men impersonated women were a popular entertainment item for soldiers and civilians alike. Baker notes that the all-male review found its niche during a dangerous time, when it was considered too hazardous to send female entertainers into war zones. Returning soldiers performing in all-male reviews on home turf were also very popular among civilians in Britain, America and their Western allies. These performances were infused with comedy, patriotism, nationalism and Western solidarity during a

tumultuous and frightening time (Baker, 1994; Garber, 1992; MacKenzie, 1994). Post WWII however, the female impersonator started to loose appeal with heterosexual audiences. Variety performers such as Danny La Rue were popular in the 1960s and 70s, however advancements in television caused theatre closures, and the links between drag and homosexuality became increasingly visible. As Baker notes, "all those queens camping it up no longer seemed like wholesome family entertainment" (Baker, 1994, p. 237).

The gay scene in London and New York exploded during the 1970s and experimentation with drag, camp and androgyny were common with artists such as Andy Warhol. Night clubs and bars which typically attracted a gay male clientele found that drag acts were cheap to produce and proved very popular with patrons (Baker, 1994; Newton, 1972). Elements of the variety show remain constant in drag acts, where stand-up comedy is mixed with live or lip-synced musical items and dance (Ackroyd, 1979; Baker, 1994; Newton, 1972; Rupp and Taylor, 2003; Taylor and Rupp, 2005). Baker suggests that "Drag was a way of inverting the effeminate stigma attached to being gay and wearing it as a badge of pride" (Baker 1994, p. 238). Additionally the liberality afforded to drag queens with regards to their on-stage dialogue was a draw card for queer audiences. Here was a public space were gay men (in drag) were permitted and encouraged to talk about same-sex desire, and thus drag queen's function in the gay community moved beyond entertainment and developed a political purpose (Rupp and Taylor, 2003; see also Baker, 1994; Mann, 2011). Baker suggests that drag acts predominately tend to stick to the gay circuit, performing in night-clubs and cabaret venues. With the current success of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, drag queens and drag practice more generally are gaining fame and popularity internationally across a wide variety of audiences.

In addition to the histories outlined above, there are also a number of different ways that drag has persisted and been modulated through a variety of performance genres and practices, such as in film, music video and the aesthetics of androgynous pop stars such as David Bowie, and of course through the development of the drag king and faux queen. In the United States, drag kinging (that is cis-women performing male characters and masculinity) developed as an intentionally political feminist-activist-driven practice where performance troupes were often connected to universities and gender studies programs. The rise of drag king troupes and academic

focus on the impact of their performances coincides with the publication and popularity of significant gender/queer studies works such as Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (discussed further in Chapter One) and Judith Halberstam's work on female masculinity (Shapiro, 2007; Troka et al, 2002). In her examination of kinging troupe 'The Disposable Boy Toys', Shapiro draws on interviews with self-identified 'bio-queens' who have entered the drag community via their involvement with a drag king performance collective. In my study, all the faux queens involved (with the exception of Kentucky Fried Woman) were apprenticed into the drag scene by gay-identified male-to-female drag queens. Therefore, for this research the historical framing of faux queens on drag stages is grounded primarily in drag queen history, rather than drag kinging.

The focus of this dissertation is on the performance practice of faux queens; however, insofar as they help readers to better understand faux queens, I do consider some aspects of drag history and additional avenues and influences in later chapters. It is important to recognise the long history of drag and the ways that these histories have influenced a practice which is, at least in part, divorced from realistic representations of female-identified women. The way that the practice of drag is understood and framed through its theatrical history may mean that faux queens can potentially complicate drag and cause its meaning to change and evolve.

Methodology

The methodologies employed in this research are primarily comprised of autoethnography, in-depth interview, and practice-led research. The personal nature of performance as well as my interest in and practice of faux queen drag meant autoethnography was an appropriate mode of inquiry for this project. Autoethnography foregrounds the experiences and situated knowledges of the researcher, and allows for the critical exploration of themes and issues related to personal subjectivity. In order to incorporate a variety of voices and experiences, and connect my personally situated knowledges with wider frames of reference, in-depth interview and the essential rapport building which accompanies it were also included. Practice-led research was employed as a result of the necessary performativity of drag, as well as to integrate the alternative modes of communication which creative practice offers. The creative work of this project

involves a critical and corporeal engagement with the aesthetics of drag and camp, and was developed through a rigorous process of 'praxis' (a concept that will be discussed below). The combination of these methodologies allows for inquiry which is personally relevant to the researcher, critically and socially engaged, cognisant of a variety of voices, and able to be communicated in ways that are both academically rigorous and accessible to non-academic audiences. The following sections frame practice-led research, autoethnography and in-depth interviewing as part of this mixed-methods approach, giving consideration as to why this methodology is appropriate for my research.

Practice-Led Research

It has become standard practice in Australia for creative arts graduate research students to choose a practice-led pathway for their method of inquiry. In terms of research output, this means that a major creative work and critical exegesis are produced, both of which address the research question. Robin Nelson notes,

> PaR [Practice as Research] involves a research project in which practice is a key method of inquiry and where, in respect of the arts, a practice (creative writing, dance, musical score/performance, theatre/performance, visual exhibition, film or other cultural practice) is submitted as substantial evidence of research inquiry (Nelson, 2013, p. 9).

As a methodology, practice-led approaches can take various forms, but it is generally accepted that the artist-researcher will develop creative work through 'praxis', which Nelson states is "theory imbricated within practice" (Nelson, 2013, p. 5). To imbricate theory within practice is a focused method of overlapping and arranging both so that the overall structure of the research relies on the intersection of their dual presence. In regards to practice-led methods, Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean note;

> It can be basic research carried out independently of creative work (though it may subsequently be applied to it); research conducted in the process of shaping artwork; or research which is the documentation, theorisation and contextualisation of an artwork – and the process of making it – by its creator (Smith and Dean, 2009, p. 3).

In this project, my major creative production has been the scripted and performed drag cabaret *Agorafaux-pas!*; however the finished product of the *Agorafaux-pas!* script and the content of this exegesis emerged from a long-term iterative process which engaged in various performance-based practices over the course of the research period. Key formative creative moments included: (i) A regularly maintained blog discussed below; (ii) Experiments with and development of Agorafauxbia's aesthetics and persona through creative play, costume design and screen work; (iii) Live performances as Agorafauxbia at drag venues in San Francisco and The University of Maryland College Park, including collaboration with other drag performers; (iv) Editing and producing the web-based documentary series *WerqSF* using in-depth interview data; (v) Drafting and editing the script for *Agorafaux-pas!*; and (vi) A two-month rehearsal process to direct, produce and perform the live-version of *Agorafaux-pas!* with a cast of five.

Originally, the major creative production for this research project was intended to be an interactive performance-based installation where screen work such as *WerqSF* featured more prominently. Due to a number of pragmatic factors (namely limited budget and available resources), I decided to develop a creative work situated within more conventional theatre practices. The result of this decision is *Agorafaux-pas!*, however much of the data communicated through *WerqSF* is evident in the script, and I consider the documentary be an especially significant formative creative work for this research.

Thus, this project engages methods of generating what Estelle Barrett terms "personally situated knowledge" (Barrett, 2007, p. 2) through iterative creative practice moments that have often been experimental in nature. An important aspect of this project has been a sustained effort to reflect critically on creative practice moments. Reflexive practice allowed research directions to emerge and become focused; it also assisted in the identification of cultural implications that are explored in this exegesis and in the major creative production *Agorafaux-pas!* Additionally, the research offers alternative access to complex theoretical concepts via performance products, which I perceive as a highly productive means to communicate the research to a wide audience, not restricted or limited to an academic community. However, the critical exegesis is also an extremely useful tool to display clearly how creative practice is imbricated with theory, in a manner that

may not be completely knowable by experiencing the creative product alone (Barrett, 2007: Nelson, 2013).

Autoethnography

Autoethnographic inquiry is an umbrella term encompassing a set of closely linked, and often interweaving, postmodern qualitative research styles. In 1975, anthropologist Karl Heider first introduced the term 'auto-ethnography' to describe research participants/informants. The 'auto' in this case referred to accounts provided by Dani school children of what Dani 'do' (Narayan, 2006; Chang, 2008). More recently, however, autoethnography has come to mean a narration of the self, evocatively weaved with theoretical interpretation, to produce a cultural analysis that transcends the self and engages a wider social sphere. In autoethnography the researcher's own experiences are grist to the mill of inquiry and analysis; a marked difference to conventional ethnography where investigation is focused solely on the experiences of others (Butz and Besio, 2009; Chang, 2008; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Spry, 2001).

Autoethnography is generally defined as "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context" (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Heewon Chang suggests that autoethnographic inquiry is a triadic balance and should be ethnographic in its methodological approach, autobiographical in its content, and cultural in its interpretative approach (Chang, 2008). Although now a relatively mainstream method in humanities research, the use of autoethnography is strongly associated with sociologist Caroyln Ellis (Butz and Besio, 2009). In their 1996 text, Ellis and her associate Art Bochner explain how personal experience narratives came to constitute autoethnography following uneasiness among some sociologists/ethnographers during the 1970s and 1980s regarding the 'objective outsider' nature of conventional research. Ellis writes, "In the 1970s and 1980s, postmodernists, poststructuralists, and feminists challenged us to contemplate how social science may be closer to literature than to physics" (Ellis and Bochner, 1996, p. 18). Furthermore, David Butz and Kathryn Besio explain how following the publication of *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus, 1986) (a critique of the crisis of representation in conventional ethnography) experimental or non-conventional forms of representation ensued; including autoethnography which they explain,

> radically foregrounds the emotions and experiences of the researcher as a way to acknowledge the inevitably subjective nature of knowledge, in order to use subjectivity deliberately as an epistemological resource (Butz and Besio 2009, p. 1662).

As Ellis and Bochner note, there are no hard and fast rules for producing autoethnography, or for classifying varying autoethnographic outcomes into groups (Ellis and Bochner, 1996). Some works clearly privilege personal narrative that is then related to the social, placing the emphasis on 'auto'; while others may feature more cultural or group based accounts with a self-reflexive element, the emphasis here on 'ethno' (Narayan, 2006). In general however, when researchers write autoethnographies they aim to delve into personal experience in order to illustrate and illuminate broader cultural phenomena; keeping in mind that notions of 'self' are also cultural phenomena (Ellis, Adams et al., 2010). A self-reflexive and self-analytical method such as autoethnography is particularly useful in the current academic climate where ethical considerations may place limitations on personally or culturally sensitive subjects. Investigative topics that might be considered ethically risky using conventional ethnographic methods can instead be investigated by turning the magnifying glass on oneself. According to Chang, autoethnography offers "a research method which is friendly to the researcher and readers [and] enhances cultural understanding of self and others" (Chang 2008, p. 52). It is the intent of autoethnographers that their work inspires critical reflection amongst readers, insofar as readers might begin to think critically about their own personal/cultural experiences in light of the autoethnography they read (Ellis and Bochner, 1996).

Autoethnographic inquiry is, however, not without its own pitfalls and ethical dilemmas. Chang identifies four potential hazards significant to autoethnography including:

> (i) Excessive focus on self in isolation from others; (ii) Overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation; (iii) Exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as data source; (iv) Negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives (Chang 2008, p. 54).

Hazards (i) (ii) and (iii) are related to a common concern raised when autoethnography is chosen as method: the charge of self-indulgence. When researchers write autoethnographies, they must balance the 'auto' and 'ethno' with care. Chang advises researchers to not only dig deeper (into the personal) but also dig wider (making cultural connections that situate the self in the social and the personal in the political). A commitment to wider digging may defend the research against a charge of self-indulgence, as well as open up a wider lens on the world for both researcher and reader, with the intent of gaining cultural understanding through both writing and reading of the work (Chang, 2008; see also Bochner and Ellis, 2002; Ellis and Bochner, 1996; Ellis, 2004; Ellis, Adams et al., 2010; Sparkes, 2002). As an analytical tool in autoethnographic writing, Chang suggests a mindful and disciplined practice that oscillates between 'zooming in' (on the personal) and 'zooming out' (on the cultural). She notes, "Zooming in elicits 'ethnographic details'; zooming out engenders the overarching cultural themes" (Chang, 2008, p. 129).

Hazard (iii) is significant insofar as the research must be situated within the self and the social. Therefore, some autoethnographers find it useful to incorporate more conventional data collection into their mixed-methods approach; such as in-depth interview, participant observation, or focus groups. Hazard (iv) is likely the most complicated and concerning for researchers using autoethnography. Researchers must ensure they do not focus too heavily on the self in isolation from others, yet must also be aware of how their writing can negatively implicate others.[5] Ellis suggests that autoethnographers write as if their intimate others will read the work and to allow those 'others' to view the work before publication. She notes that, once more, there are no hard and fast ethical rules in autoethnography, and researchers often use their own ethnical compass on a case-by-case basis (Ellis, 2004).

In the context of this research, autoethnography is used as the primary method for data collection and analysis. In order to avoid excessive focus on the self in isolation from others (a potential pitfall identified by Chang), this research also applies an overarching mixed-methods approach incorporating in-depth interview and practice-led research. The autoethnographic elements of this research are evident in the creative production *Agorafaux-pas!*, and within the chapters of this exegesis.

[5] For example, pseudonyms can be used; however identification is fairly likely, especially amongst professional, peer or family groups.

Importantly, my website agorafauxbia.com features a regularly updated blog where posts function as a series of self-narratives surrounding the research themes. The online publication of posts, on a fortnightly basis, was utilised as a data-generation tool; insofar as vignettes and excerpts that creatively illustrate life-experiences were collected within that public space.

Autoethnography is an appropriate method for this research, particularly because of the nature of its content. This research investigates cultural implications of cis-women performing as drag queens by looking through the experiential lens of the researcher, as my private acts of drag queen play became modes of public performance on agorafauxbia.com and live stages.[6] For this research, autoethnography is the ethical and pragmatic choice when considering the research topic. Through the use of autoethnography, the personal nature of this research can be linked with a wider social context about drag performance, cultural queerness, feminist camp, performative and cultural transactions, and the language used to define women in female drag. The aim of this work as an autoethnography is to engage readers so that they might critically reflect on similar experiences in their own personal context, and also allows this complicated and culturally fraught topic to be considered in terms of specific, situated instances of performance, identity and negotiation.

In-depth Interview

In addition to autoethnography and creative practice, I have conducted a small-scale series of in-depth interviews with cis-female drag queens. Interviews were a necessary addition to the methodology, allowing me to seek out other voices and experiences, especially given that faux queen performance practice is an area with little focused academic research. Interviews also work to balance out the autoethnographic approach and link personally-situated experiences and knowledges with wider cultural frameworks. In-depth interviewing is also referred to as focused,

[6] For example, agorafauxbia.com features blogs, photographs and short films that document my experiments with drag aesthetics, the development of Agorafauxbia and my ongoing reflexive practice since November 2012. I have written about a wide variety of topics with regards to my own creative practice, my interactions with other performers, and the ways that my personally-situated knowledges have been influenced throughout the project. On the website there is also a selection of filmed interviews with other faux queens, filmed versions of my performances (both from within my home in Perth and later on live stages in the USA), and a list of some key academic sources which have informed my work.

semi-structured, unstructured, non-directive, open-ended, or active interviewing and is a commonly utilised method for data generation in qualitative research. The goal of in-depth interviewing is to actively construct knowledge and understanding of social phenomena by engaging in purposeful conversation with respondents who are encouraged to articulate experiences and perceptions in their own words. Importantly, in-depth interviewing as it is used in this study, acknowledges the subjectivity of research dealing with human experience and emotion. This kind of interviewing differs from structured interview, questionnaire or quantitative survey; insofar as the interviewers themselves are the research tool rather than a set of predetermined questions (Loftland, 1971; Marshall and Rossman, 2006; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). Pranee Liamputtong and Douglas Ezzy state "indepth (sic) interviews aim to explore the complexity and in-process nature of meanings and interpretations that cannot be examined using positivist methodologies" (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005, p. 56). John Loftland describes in-depth interviewing or intensive interviewing as "a guided conversation to elicit rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis" (Loftland, 1971, p. 76).

Because I found it difficult to locate active faux queens in Australia, I looked towards an established community of performers in the United States of America. Following a Skype interview, Bea Dazzler[7] (a San Francisco-based faux queen) invited me to an annual event (The Faux Queen Pageant) that allowed opportunities to engage with a large number of faux queens. I travelled to San Francisco in September 2013 to attend The Faux Queen Pageant where I performed at the competition and conducted in-depth interviews with people who had responded to my invitation. I conducted interviews with eleven respondents, all of whom reside in the San Francisco Bay Area, with the exception of one respondent who resides in Dallas, Texas. Ten respondents were cis-female drag queens (aka faux queens), and one respondent was a cis-male drag queen. All of the respondents, with the exception

[7] All performers are referred to using their faux queen performance name, unless explicit permission has been given to use 'real' and 'performance' names interchangeably. Drag performance names are often wordplays and puns which blend aspects of personal identity with pop-culture. For example, Bea Dazzler's name is drawn from a children's toy 'The Bedazzler' which is used to fix rhinestones to clothing. Her signature makeup look always includes Swarovski rhinestone eyebrows. Additionally, Bea Dazzler has a university degree in fashion design and works as a freelance designer for many drag shows in San Francisco. She also teaches fashion design and sewing at a local arts college. Therefore, this performance name points to her identity in the community as the 'go-to' drag costume designer. Further, Bea Dazzler also takes her name from a Marvel comic character 'The Dazzler'. This female superhero character wears a rhinestone bedazzled white jumpsuit, and has a distinctly camp aesthetic.

of Kentucky Fried Woman, have been involved in The Faux Queen Pageant at some point in time. With appropriate ethics clearance from Curtin University and written consent from all participants, the interviews were recorded on film and then transcribed manually.

For this research, interview guides were designed with reference to Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor's interview guide for their ethnography of drag queens at the 801 Cabaret in Key West Florida (Rupp and Taylor, 2003, p. 225-226), as well as Loftland's structural example provided in *Analyzing Social Settings* (Loftland, 1971, p. 78). In addition to the standard questions outlined in my interview guide, I also used probing questions that were often asked spontaneously to gain clarification or further investigate a significant account (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005; Loftland, 1971; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998).

For this project, interviewing was used primarily as a form of data generation, rather than data collection, insofar as particular lines of questioning became more or less significant through the process of intensive discussion with respondents and therefore influenced the direction of the research. Jennifer Mason suggests that data 'generation' is a more fitting term for qualitative research such as this, particularly as the interviewer/researcher cannot be considered objective or neutral. Instead they are involved in and hold influence over the generation of data (Mason, 1996).

Preliminary interviews were conducted on Skype with four respondents (Fauxnique, Bea Dazzler, Kentucky Fried Woman and Brandi Amara Skyy). These preliminary interviews not only established the topics or themes that appeared to be important to the performers, but also helped to gauge similarities and differences between my experiences and theirs. Respondents were questioned about their performance background, how they were apprenticed into drag, their thoughts on the term 'faux queen', and their plans for the future. On review of the preliminary interview data it was deemed important to further investigate notions of queer identity, and particularly the emerging concept of 'cultural queerness'. Following the preliminary Skype interviews, an updated interview guide was developed and I organised a fourteen day field trip to San Francisco to conduct in-person interviews. In these live interviews, participants were asked to respond briefly to questions from the preliminary guide; however there was more sustained focus on a discussion of

queerness. Respondents who were involved in producing The Faux Queen Pageant were also asked an alternative set of questions relating to their experience and understanding of the pageant's history. The interviews were largely conversational and my questions were designed to encourage extended narrative accounts rather than one word or one sentence responses. As Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman note;

> Qualitative, in-depth interviews typically are much more like conversations than formal events with predetermined response categories. The researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participant's views but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the response (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, p. 101).

It is important for interviewers to develop a personal rapport with respondents, observe them casually, speak informally outside of the interview setting, and attempt to view or appreciate the world from their individualised perspective. Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey explain;

> Because the goal of unstructured interviewing is *understanding*, it becomes paramount for the researcher to establish rapport. He or she must be able to put themselves in the role of the respondents and attempt to see the situation from their perspective, rather than impose the world of academia and preconceptions upon them (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p. 367).

In addition to the scheduled interviews, I engaged in a variety of activities that would help me to establish rapport with my respondents and develop a stronger understanding of their community.[8] For example, I competed in The Faux Queen Pageant and spent time casually speaking with respondents in the dressing room areas. I drove around San Francisco with two respondents, helping them to post flyers promoting the pageant. I volunteered to build props and costuming for the

[8] I was accompanied on my research trip to San Francisco by my fiancé (now husband) Lockie McKinna. Lockie was responsible for filming the interviews and also joined me on all rapport-building activities. Lockie was involved in aspects of The Faux Queen Pageant, volunteering to dress up as a white horse with three other men for Bea Dazzler and L Ron Hubby's dramatic, princess-themed entrance. Given that he was present at all of the interviews, Lockie's relationship and rapport with the interview respondents was also very important in order to help me gain their trust.

event, such as the winner's crown. I attended brunches, dinners, and other drag shows at the invitation of interview respondents, and I collaborated with Kentucky Fried Woman on a second performance at a weekly drag show. Because I took the time to build rapport with my interview respondents I was able to discuss and interpret their experiences as a fellow performer rather than an objective outsider. Over the remainder of my PhD candidacy I returned to San Francisco twice to perform, attend performances, and visit with some members of the community whom I now call friends.[9]

A decision was made early in the research not to explicitly ask respondents to identify their sexuality, and instead allow that information to emerge from discussion. On most occasions, respondents spoke explicitly about their sexual orientation; however I allowed space for ambiguity to exist if this was more comfortable for the respondent, particularly given that each interview was filmed and intended to contribute to a web-based documentary series that would be publically available for view.

Data generated from these interviews were used to produce the formative creative production *WerqSF: A web-based documentary series*, as well as informing the major creative production *Agorafaux-pas!* and exegesis chapters. After consideration of the interview transcripts alongside data I gathered using autoethnography and practice-led methods, I established some key tensions and concerns which were then investigated and analysed critically in this exegesis and the major creative production *Agorafaux-pas!* These included: (i) Accusations of camp trace (discussed below) and appropriation of gay subculture by straight dominant culture; (ii) Potential for performative transactions between cis-women and gay cis-male drag queens; (iii) Performances of feminist camp and maintaining the challenge of queer; (iv) Changing meanings of queer and negotiating the emergence of 'cultural queerness'; and (v) Tensions regarding the label 'faux queen', and other loaded terms used to describe female-bodied drag performers, such as 'too fish'. These moments of tension and concern are the basis for my critical analysis, creative output, and conclusions regarding the cultural implications of cis-women performing as drag queens.

[9] In 2014, during a return trip to San Francisco, I won second runner up at The Faux Queen Pageant. Link to performance video: http://agorafauxbia.com/screen-work

Chapter Summary

Chapter One

When I first began this project I was anxious about whether my heterosexuality would prevent access to drag as a performer; would or should my straightness relegate me to the role of observer? When I located San Francisco performance artist Fauxnique online, at first I thought I had found a 'straight faux queen' via whom I could justify my own intentions to perform drag. When I spoke to her, however, I changed my mind. Fauxnique introduced the idea of 'cultural queerness', which she explained as cultural identification with queerness and queer community. In my discussions with her, she framed this cultural queerness as intentionally and purposefully resisting aspects of heteronormativity, even if subjects did not identify with queer sexuality or gender identity. I wondered if doing drag was something that made me queer in some way, despite my heteronormative sexuality and gender identity. In order to understand the notion of 'culturally queer', I first needed to build a deeper understanding of 'queer' that I had more commonly considered to be a signpost for LGBT sexuality/gender identity rather than a cultural identity. Thus Chapter One raises the question of queer. What is queer? What is queer's ideological challenge? How is it defined as a theoretical framework, identity category and tool for political mobilisation? Who does queer represent and why? How might feminist and queer theory intersect? And in what ways might straight-identified folks align culturally with queerness? The chapter begins with a contextualisation of queer in its various iterations from theory, identity, and political frameworks.

As a theoretical framework, I consider and contextualise the ultimate goal of queer theory to challenge and destabilise essentialist notions of gender and sexuality. Particularly, this chapter provides an overview of queer theory and introduces Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity which has had significant influence on the field of queer studies and is an important consideration in performance studies; particularly for this project where subjects are engaging in conscious and theatricalised gender performance intersecting evocatively with their cultural identity. Defining queer is difficult because as a category it is always in flux and formation. As an identity framework, 'queer' has emerged as an umbrella term for LGBT or non-heterosexual, non-heteronormative and non-hegemonic identities.

Additionally, the term ‘queer’ has been employed to politically mobilise communities in support of LGBT social justice and cultural organisations.

Given that this research project is both a queer and feminist pursuit, it has been important to understand how feminist and queer theory intersect and inform each other, particularly with regard to shared and contrasting ideological patterns. Building on the work of Diane Richardson, I suggest that a beneficial intersection of feminist and queer theory may be in the exploration and negotiation of queered heterosexual identities and subject positions. The second major section of this chapter is devoted to a review of various approaches to the notion of ‘heteroqueerness’ conceptualised in current literature. These include: Stephanie Lawler’s ‘heterosexual others’; discussions of the ‘queer heterosexual’ by dancer and academic Clyde Smith and journalist Tristan Taormino; Robert Heasley’s ‘straight queer’ male typologies; Roberta Mock’s ‘heteroqueer ladies’; and Malena Gustavson & Irina Schmitt’s ‘culturally queer’ in relation to children of queer parents (or ‘queer spawn’).

I consider Mock’s concept of performative transactions as a productive means to conceptualise the queer potential of faux queen performance and locate faux queens within a culture of queerness defined by cultural experiences related to LGBT ‘community’ rather than solely defined by sexual practice. The problematics of straight faux queens as ‘culturally queer’ are briefly discussed here but are examined further in Chapter Three. This first chapter establishes the queer feminist lens through which the research was conducted, and through which the remaining chapters can be viewed.

Chapter Two

As Chapter One examines the theoretical framework in which we might consider an engagement or intersection between heterosexual and queer identities, in Chapter Two I look more closely at the tensions involved in negotiating cis-gender iterations of drag performances which are more traditionally a form of cross-dressing. Throughout my research it became apparent that the terms ‘drag queen’ and ‘drag king’ are generally accepted by performers and their meanings are, by and large, recognised by the wider community. The same, however, is not true for cis-female drag queens. The term ‘drag queen’ is not easily used by cis-women who perform

female drag, largely because there is often contention over whether or not use of the term ‘drag queen’ is appropriate for female-bodied performers. As a result, there are various terms in use academically and culturally. This chapter aims to critically review the language and labels evident in scholarly writing and social fields regarding cis-women who perform female drag according to their symbolic, political and cultural implications.

I began this chapter by engaging with the theatrical history of drag in order to foreground a commonplace understanding of drag as a style of hyperbolised and/or stereotyped gender performance. As noted above, drag’s theatrical histories are crucial to contemporary understandings of drag performance practice including what seems to be a sustained and necessary element of cross-dressing. Historically located meanings and understandings of drag are important for understanding why the labels used for cis-women in female drag appear to be contested; particularly as cis-female drag queens will inevitably fail at presenting ‘drag’ within a traditional framework.

The most commonly used labels for cis-female drag queens in drag communities and performance spaces are ‘bio queen’ and ‘faux queen’, therefore Chapter Two predominantly focuses on deconstructing and analysing the problematics and limitations of these terms. Given that ‘faux queen’ is my preferred label, I offer a defence which contextualises my use of that term, with reference to how it might embrace and frame the ultimate and necessary artifice of drag performance. Additionally, I also consider more obscure labels that appear in academic and cultural fields such as ‘biologically faux drag queen’, ‘femme drag queen’, ‘glam drag’, ‘exploding femininity’, ‘queenly femininity’, ‘female-to-female drag queen’ and ‘female female impersonator’.

Chapter Three

In Chapter Three the exegesis moves from a focus on challenges regarding concepts of heteroqueerness and the naming and labelling of cis-female drag queens, to a discussion of ways that faux queen performances might work to maintain the challenge of queer and resist charges of dominant reincorporation; or what Moe Myer has termed ‘camp trace’ (Myer, 1994). Chapters One and Two consider some of the ways that faux queens have begun to negotiate their place in drag culture, through an investigation of cultural implications evident in my creative practice,

autoethnography, interview data and relevant literature. Chapter Three considers 'queer' as an imperative challenge of drag, and focuses on a key tension in my autoethnography with regard to concerns that faux queens, particularly but not limited to those who are straight-identified, may be seen to be appropriating gay male culture in a manner which is damaging to queer communities. In a continuation of the previous chapters, the discussions in Chapter Three speak to, contextualise, and negotiate the emergent place of faux queens in drag and queer culture, and consider the implications of this new iteration of drag.

One of my key concerns throughout this project has been resolving whether or not performances by faux queens, including my own, are disrespectfully appropriative of gay male culture. I have attempted to rectify this tension with regards to the straight cis-female subject in Chapter One by contextualising existing work on 'cultural queerness' and the notion of 'hetereoqueerness'. However, overall I argue that most of these concepts are too problematic, especially –as I note in this chapter– that any investigation of the straight subject must include an acknowledgement and critique of straight privilege. This chapter overviews the binary opposition of queer and straight, noting that within a deconstructivist queer framework this binary logic appears flawed. Culturally, however, straight identities largely retain straight privilege, which I argue significantly problematizes straight faux queens as 'queered' based on our performance practice alone. As a result, the content of this chapter deviates from cultural queerness and identity formation, instead focusing on ways in which faux queen performances convey queer and queer-feminist potential. I employ Roberta Mock's work on performative transactions and Pamela Robertson's feminist camp and cultural exchange to begin a discussion of the queer and queer-feminist potential of faux queen performances.

I note that one of the key ways that faux queens can convey queer and queer-feminist potential is through the deployment of feminist camp; a productive intersection of camp sensibility and feminist agendas. In order to contextualise camp and a notion of feminist camp, I provide an overview of the relevant camp theory and foreground the phenomenon of 'camp trace' as a charge likely to be directed at faux queen performance. Myer argues that camp trace represents the reincorporation of queer camp into straight (or heteronormative/hegemonic) ideology, which effectively robs camp of its queer capacity and radical potential (Myer 1994). In the remaining

sections of Chapter Three, I dispute that 'camp trace' is an unavoidable consequence when non-queer or non-gay male subjects employ its sensibilities in performance, by analysing performances by five faux queens who identify as LGBT, queer and straight. In addition to feminist camp, I also consider how these performers employ gender blending and gender confusion, how they queer and subvert heterosexual frameworks of pop-songs and film and television narratives, how they interact with the performance space and audience, and how they present bodies which resist heteronormativity and hegemonic gender expectations to maintain some of the particularly queer goals of drag.

Framing the Creative Production *Agorafaux-pas!*

I prepared this exegesis in parallel with the script and live performance product of *Agorafaux-pas!*, and in many ways the play offers an alternative access to some of the key critical moments of the exegesis. It is useful to think of the play as a camped version of the chapters; while the exegesis is serious, the play uses humour and jokes to talk about and reveal serious concerns and issues. The play provides commentary on many of the themes and issues addressed in the exegesis in a way that can be alternatively accessed through humour and camp. The process of preparing *Agorafaux-pas!* intersects with preparation for this exegesis, and both productively interact with and inform each other. The creative output for this PhD project is the script for *Agorafaux-pas!*, which was initially developed prior to rehearsals and then edited and revised during the rehearsal process and after the live performances. Additionally, the live performance functions as a taste or sample of the script's translation and interpretation onto the stage. The stage version of *Agorafaux-pas!* offers access to the nuances of physical humour, visual aesthetics and camp sensibilities which are an important aspect of drag performance. The following detail how and why the play developed the way that it did, with consideration of my creative process and limitations on the work. This discussion contextualises the work as imbricated with theory and data generated using the qualitative methods outlined above.

When I began drafting ideas for *Agorafaux-pas!* I first looked back through all my blog posts on agorafauxbia.com. I consider the blog to be both performative and autoethnographic in as much as the writing was intended to be entertaining as well as

capable of generating and critiquing personally situated knowledge. I searched for moments where I could notice significant shifts in the way I was thinking about the theory and practice of faux queen performance. I collected these observations in a hand-written timeline and also searched back through my life histories in an attempt to notice significant moments that led me towards an interest in drag. I decided to approach that task in a more visual manner by sketching stages of my life and memories.

Using these methods of reflection, as well as taking into account the interview data generated from field-work, I developed a skeleton plan with ideas for eleven scenes of approximately five minutes in length (see Appendix Two for full skeleton plan). From the early stages of planning, the play was structured so that it could engage with my personal narrative and autoethnographic/theoretical journey as well as with the broader cultural implications of cis-women performing as drag queens. During character development I decided to split my personality in two in order to show the many personal and emotional changes that have occurred since my secret dressing up. The play features two characters, both of whom are versions of Jamie/Agorafauxbia: Agora and Fauxbia. Agora represents my loud, confident and fierce drag queen side, who wants nothing more than to perform in public with her queen and king counterparts. Fauxbia, on the other hand, concerns herself with worrying about her place in the drag queen world and spends much of her time hiding in her bedroom, afraid of how others will judge her. Within the narrative arc is a conscious and purposeful practice of zooming in and zooming out, reflecting the autoethnographic method outlined above. Specifically, Act One generally zooms in on my personal account and Act Two zooms out to broader concerns which are also reflected critically in the exegesis. Each scene of the play is a creative exploration of the cultural implications, tensions or concerns that emerged as significant during my process of reflection, autoethnographic study, ethnographic field research, practice-led research, and literature analysis.

The cast and crew of the *Agorafaux-pas!* performance, including myself, are amateur performers with minimal to no formal performance training. While often compelling and professional, drag is commonly performed by people without formal

performance training, and my cast are continuing that tradition. [10] As a result of time limitations, the original script was regularly edited to shorten the length of individual scenes and minimise monologues. Although I have made additions to the script since the performance event, the majority of edits made during rehearsal proved to be productive and enabled me to communicate ideas in a more succinct and entertaining manner. The key concepts and themes of the play remained intact, however the process of physically rehearsing and performing the work with others has allowed me to focus more clearly on ways to communicate those concepts and themes to an audience who do not share my cultural background. The live stage version of *Agorafaux-pas!* is the culmination of this iterative creative process.

The theatrical capabilities of the live work were also influenced by the available performance space, which differed significantly from the usual types of drag performance venues (or indeed, any type of performance venue) and was more commonly used as a conference room. The space was adapted for our purposes to the best of our abilities.

Limitations of the Research

While the primary purpose of this introduction is to outline what this project does, I also want to briefly explain some of the limitations of my research. This research project does not explicitly deal with the intersections of race, class and ethnicity that are ultimately a part of all gender performance. The scope of this research was to focus on the cultural implications that could be interpreted in the data generated from

[10] In 2014, when *Agorafaux-pas!* was rehearsed and staged, I was living in the USA and participating in a visiting scholar residency at The University Maryland Department of Women's Studies. At this time I did not have access to undergraduate student-actors who may be able to claim participation in the project as part of their theatre practice requirements, and my efforts to recruit interested students through an audition process were unsuccessful. The budgetary considerations of the project meant that I was unable to offer a stipend to performers, and had to rely entirely on volunteers. The auditions were attended by one Women's Studies graduate student Cara Snyder and one American Studies graduate student Cassy Griff. After the auditions, it was clear that we would need to recruit more volunteers from friends and colleagues. Cara invited a fellow Women's Studies graduate student Stephanie McClure and my husband Lockie McKinna agreed to participate (or as we called it 'volunteer as tribute'). Cara and I were the most experienced performers and both had substantial dance training. Stephanie had an established and award-winning drag king persona Stephen Blodgett, and Lockie, as his stage persona The Spangled Emperor had performed in two of my short narrative-based stage works in San Francisco. Cassy had the least stage experience, and had never performed drag. The technical crew was minimal, but integral to the performance. Cassy's husband and Women's Studies graduate student Avery Dame operated the sound and media and Women's Studies graduate student Melissa Rogers operated the follow spotlight. Stephanie's partner Erin Collins assisted us backstage with props and costumes, and Cassy's friend Faith Ambrosini coordinated Front of House duties.

creative practice, interviews, and authoethnography. The chapters of this exegesis deal with some of the overarching themes present in the interview data, of which notions of race, class and ethnicity were not explicit. Four respondents were approached directly via email, mainly due to their strong online presence, and when I was invited to attend The Faux Queen Pageant in 2013, the producer of the event forwarded my call for interviews to contestants and other people involved. I was contacted by 14 individuals who agreed to an interview, however given limitations such as length of stay and conflicting schedules, I was unable to meet with everyone who responded. Of the 11 interview respondents, ten are female-bodied faux queens. There were eight Caucasian Americans, one African American and one Latino American. Nine respondents live in the San Francisco Bay Area and one in Dallas, Texas. One interview respondent was a Caucasian American male-bodied drag queen from the Bay Area, who was involved in the first Faux Queen Pageant in 1995 as a producer and is not considered a faux queen. My data is based on what this particular grouping brought forward in interviews. The possibility for future research that focuses more overtly on the intersections of race, class and ethnicity in faux queen performance are discussed in the conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE

Am I Queer (Enough)?

Queer theory and queer possibilities for feminist and heterosexual identities

Introduction

In a Skype interview with San Francisco-based performance artist Monique Jenkinson (aka Fauxnique), I was introduced to the notion of 'cultural queerness'. Monique suggested that 'queer' could be considered as a cultural identity in addition to, or as well as, a signpost for LGBT identity. As a heterosexual woman participating in faux queen performance, similar to Monique, I began to ask myself, "If Monique is queer, am I?", and further, "How can a person be both queer and straight when the category of queer is often perceived as in binary opposition with heterosexuality?"

During September of 2013 I travelled to the USA to compete in San Francisco's Faux Queen Pageant. Prior to my departure I had been grappling with anxiety about whether or not a community of faux queen performers, who identify with many and varied sexual and gender orientations, would accept me into their group; particularly as I was a stranger from Australia travelling with my cis-male[11] fiancé. From the first three hours spent in San Francisco, my initial fears proved utterly ridiculous. People were kind, welcoming and keen to talk with me. In San Francisco I met with nine faux queens and one drag queen for in-depth interviews over the course of two weeks.[12] The warmth with which I was received allowed me to query another concern which was bothering me before I got on the plane: What does it mean to be queer in San Francisco and is it 'OK' for women with male partners to identify with queerness? The ideas surrounding identity formation and ways of being and knowing which contextualise a straight-queer subject are more wide reaching than my personal concern and experiences in San Francisco; it is also a relevant issue for

[11] Cis-gender is a gender inclusive term meaning the opposite of transgender. Cis-gender refers to a gender identity which is not problematized by a person's chromosomal sex at birth. In other words, a female identified woman who was born XX is cis-gender or cis-female, and a male identified male born XY is cis-male.

[12] Overall I interviewed eleven performers; however my interview with Brandi Amara Skyy was conducted on Skype because she was unable to meet with me in 2013 during my visit to San Francisco.

feminist theory, queer theory, and identity politics in general. This chapter evaluates some of the existing work towards a concept of 'culturally queer', where the straight subject is seen to be queered as a result of competencies and experiences learned and developed through engagement with queer communities.

I begin this chapter by providing a context for my examination of the idea of culturally queer by presenting and comparing ways of defining queerness based on relevant queer theory, LGBT activism and feminist theory; foregrounding shared and contrasting ideological patterns. I narrow the frame by concentrating on existing conceptualisations of the 'heterosexual queer' to understand how other so-called 'straights' might consider themselves queer. These subject positions include: Stephanie Lawler's 'heterosexual others' (Lawler, 2000); artist-researcher Clyde Smith and Tristan Taormino's 'queer heterosexual' (Smith, 1997; Taormino, 2003); Robert Heasley's 'straight-queer' typologies (Heasley, 2005; 2013); Roberta Mock's 'heteroqueer ladies' (Mock, 2003); and Malena Gustavson and Irina Schmitt's 'culturally queer' in relation to children of queer parents (Gustavson and Schmitt, 2011). The theory presented in this chapter is largely concerning ways to understand identity, subjectivity and experience. As a reminder of this goal I incorporate insights and anecdotes from data generated during my field-work in San Francisco.

Queer Theory and Conceptualisations of 'Queer'

> *Queer theory is not just about increased inclusion. It is also about the constant need to acknowledge that, while categories may be useful, perhaps even necessary, for understanding oneself in relating with others, no particular category or set of categories is itself necessary, and even the most deeply entrenched categories are subject to revision*
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> (Marinucci, 2010, p. 36).

Queer theory's ultimate goal is to denaturalise and destabilise sexuality and gender by revealing all identity categories as unstable, non-essential and learned through cultural sedimentation and reiterations. Predominantly, queer theorists work to challenge heteronormativity in all aspects of culture, as well as power relations of hierarchical difference, that is: to destabilise the notion that one difference is more different or more important than another (Slagle, 2006). Judith Butler's significant

collection of work on the performativity of gender has been a foundational theoretical framework through which to destabilise heterosexuality. In her work she systematically drills down to the apparently essential qualities of heteronormative gender and sexuality, revealing them as learned cultural behaviours that consistently work to conceal structural processes at every step. In place of essential gender, Butler argues for an understanding of culturally produced behaviours as gender performativity. That is, all cultural indicators of gender are performative: learned scripts which feel natural, essential and real to an individual's sense of personality and identity, so much so that an assumption of 'naturalness' is compelling and often difficult to abandon (Butler, 1999; Jagger, 2008; Salih, 2002). Nikki Sullivan has noted:

> In her seminal text, *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that gender is neither natural or innate, but rather, is a social construct which serves particular purposes and institutions. Gender, she says, is a performative effect of reiterative acts, that is, acts that can be, and are, repeated. In other words, rather than being expressions of an innate gender identity, acts and gestures which are learned and are repeated over time create the illusion of an innate and stable gender core (Sullivan, 2003, p. 82).

Butler's theory of gender performativity has had significant and sustained influence on the development of queer studies. Additionally, this framework has allowed those who engage with Butler's theories to actively unlearn notions of essential and stable gender, and instead begin to approach their own identity as a malleable construction.

> ***Kentucky Fried Woman:*** *When I hear people refer to themselves as queer I feel like it's also kind of placing where they see gender. And I think queers are more likely to get intersectionality and get that we are all composed of really complicated identities based on our race and class and body size and ethnicity and ability level and education and so I think that in queer spaces I tend to hear lots more conversations that really wrestle with the fact of how*

> *complicated all of our identities are* (Kentucky Fried Woman, Personal Communication 08/09/13).

Radiating from the nucleus of queer theory is an understanding that gender and sexuality is performative; they are learned scripts which hide their processes. Importantly, the work of queer theory to debunk stable gender and sexuality categories is indebted to, as Annamarie Jagose states, "a specifically lesbian and gay reworking of the post-structuralist figuring of identity as a constellation of multiple and unstable positions" (Jagose, 1996, p. 3). Post-structuralism, as Robert Alan Brookley and Diane Helene Miller summarise, is a practice which works towards the rejection of all identity categories established through identity politics, including minority categories. The goal of post-structuralism is to undermine oppressive practice by exposing identity categorisation as flawed (Brookley and Miller, 2005). They note,

> Any discourse that seeks or claims to represent the personal experiences of a collective identity category is bound to fail in some respects, because identity categories are not monolithic, members of any given group are not homogenous and identity and subjective experience are composed of a multitude of features and influence (Brookley and Miller, 2005, p. 195).

The specifically 'lesbian and gay' reworking which Jagose notes is in reference to a sustained critical emphasis particularly focused on, but not limited to, disrupting and rejecting binary identity categories of male/female, masculine/feminine, gay/straight, transgender/cis-gender and other categories which relate to sexuality and gender. Jagose explains, "Identity is probably one of the most naturalised cultural categories each of us inhabits; one always thinks of one's *self* as existing outside of all representational frames and as somehow marking a point of undeniable realness" (Jagose, 1996, p. 78). The notion of essential identity has been reframed as a cultural myth or fantasy as a result of the contributions and indeed modifications and arguments of feminist and gay theorists alongside the classic post-structuralists (Jagose, 1996).[13]

[13] Sullivan notes, "Poststructuralism is most often associated with a rejection, or at least a critique, of humanist logic and aspirations. It therefore involves a rethinking of concepts such as meaning, truth,

A definition of queer theory is hard to nail down[14] and Jagose suggests that it is in fact a category always in process, always in formation (Jagose, 1996). To 'nail down' or 'define' queer theory, is an exceptionally un-queer expectation, and as such not something I am trying to do in this chapter. There are many ways in which theorists have attempted to tentatively outline queer theory, while also labouring to avoid demarcation. David Halperin figures queer as a shifting positionality always in defiance or antithesis of the normative (Halperin, 1995), and Cherry Smith characterises queer as a radical attitude or strategy to critically question normative positions (Smith, 1996). Sullivan notes that for many theorists, "queer (theory) is constructed as a sort of vague and indefinable set of practises and (political) positions that has the potential to challenge normative knowledges and identities" (Sullivan, 2003, pp. 43-44). Much of the time, the normative positions and normalising forces that queer theory aims to challenge relate to the construction and reinforcement of heteronormative gender and sexual identities. In the language and ideology of queer theory, there is no 'normal', no 'essential', no 'core', and no action without 'agency'.

Of late, people have begun use the word 'queer' as an umbrella term to signify non-heteronormative identity and as a theoretical framework/s which aim to disrupt, challenge and upset literature, art, performance, law, psychology and other categories. LGBT activism and feminist studies have, at times, appeared to distance themselves from queer theory and the queer umbrella. This distance may stem from a

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subjectivity, freedom, power and so on. Poststructuralist theorists such as Foucault argue that there are no objective and universal truths, but the particular forms of knowledge, and the ways of being that they engender, become naturalised, in culture and historically" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 39).

[14] The etymology of queer has been traced by William Sayers of Cornell University, with results linking to possible German, Scottish and Irish origins. There is reference to the German 'queur', meaning cross, oblique, squint, perverse, wrongheaded; however Sayers sights the earliest records amongst a 16th century Scottish poem, and in this instance it is unclear what is meant by 'queyr'. Sayer's also mentions the Modern Irish 'cuaire' derived from Old and Middle Irish 'cúar', both with a sense of curved, bent, crooked, hollow (Sayers, 2005). Eric Partridge's *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* notes an early instance of queer (1937) as a term denoting homosexuality, and Sayer also cites an earlier example for 1922 in a US government publication (Partridge, 1984; Sayers, 2005). While queer is still used as a derogatory term towards LGBT identified people, particularly gay men, it has also been powerfully re-established as an umbrella term in queer social activism. As Sayers notes, queer as a colloquialism has evolved into "the specialist lexicon of critical theory [by way of] passing through social activism" (Sayers, 2005, p. 16). He goes on to explain that "Queer theory is now well established as both a phrase and an analytical methodology in cultural studies...thus bringing *queer* full round to its Irish origins, which were, we recall, as 'crooked, awry, circular'" (Sayers, 2005, p. 17). In terms of queer theory, Jagose notes, "Broadly speaking, queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire" (Jagose, 1996, p. 3).

concern that the label ‘queer’ is too far removed from social activism goals and that its span is too wide; too inclusive.

> ***Princess Cream Pie:*** *I think the word queer encompasses pretty much everyone who is not dead set against the idea* (Princess Cream Pie, Personal Communication, 17/09/13).

> ***Vesper Synd:*** *Queerness means not wanting to put yourself into certain boxes of what sexuality is and what gender is* (Vesper Synd, Personal Communication, 19/09/13).

Who can stand under the queer umbrella is relatively undefined, and as a theoretical framework, is a fluid process, not a solid template with clearly identifiable members. Kirsch explains,

> queer theory was born from the idea that more inclusiveness is better than less. But it holds that the categories presented by gay and lesbian studies are too narrow to encompass the range of behaviour and sexuality that is presented by a wide range of preferences (Kirsch, 2006, p. 24).

Queer theory aims to make strange all categories and all aspects of culture, rather than normalise what is already assumed ‘queer’. It therefore must always look ahead to emergent categories, and inwards to itself, challenging normalised and normalising forces and revealing their unstable disposition. Roberta Mock notes that in keeping with this goal, queer theory has an inbuilt self-destruct mechanism (Mock, 2003). Similarly R. Anthony Slagle observes, “Queer theorists argue that individual identities and differences are constantly being (re)constructed, that identities are not stable, and that identity categories are, therefore, a myth” (Slagle, 2006, p. 325). Further, the primary aim to destabilise and denaturalise means that the use of ‘queer’ as a noun and umbrella term for non-heteronormative lifestyles becomes increasingly broad. In reference to Halperin, Sullivan writes:

> since queer is a positionality rather than an identity in the humanist sense, it is not restricted to gays and lesbians, but can be taken up by anyone who feels marginalised as a result of their sexual practices (Sullivan, 2003, p. 44).

> ***L Ron Hubby:*** *When I think of being culturally queer I think of anyone being a part of that world in a respectful way* (L Ron Hubby, Personal Communication, 18/09/13).

The concern over queer as an umbrella term may be, at least in part, with regard to the potential for eventual self-destruction and the instability of LGBT and/or queer identity. Activists in the gay rights movement[15] have fought an uphill battle to carve out a publically accepted identity for queer individuals in mainstream consciousness. The bulk of this fight is still very much real for people in countries such as Russia, where individuals face violent consequences for promoting so-called 'gay propaganda', which is of course only one of many examples. As Jagose notes, the use of queer as an umbrella term is interpreted by some as a disregard for distinctions between sexuality and gender identities, so much so that the political identity that has been established through the gay rights movement could be damaged or devalued (Jagose, 1996). Jagose cites a particularly vitriolic letter to the editor found in a Sydney gay and lesbian newspaper written by Craig Johnston stating:

> Don't expect me, even after 20 years of gay/lesbian radicalism, to assume our struggle is no longer valid. And when I say 'our' I mean gay and lesbian. 'Queer' is anti-homosexual. The 'queer' community does not exist. Queer is the enemy. When I hear 'queer' I reach for the Kalashnikov (quoted in Galbraith, 1993, p. 22) (Jagose, 1996, p. 115).

The problematics of traversing theoretical space and political space is ongoing for much postmodern theory, including queer theory and feminism. Sullivan notes that "whilst queer is not an essential identity, it is nevertheless, a provisionally political one" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 44). As a result, offering queer as a relatively inclusive umbrella term can result in tensions.

As Kirsch notes, queer theory's claim to wider inclusivity has also meant that its focus is more narrowly aimed at inquiry into the individual self rather than the community as a whole, given that each individual's experiences are different and potentially non-heteronormative (Kirsch, 2006). How to account for situated

[15] A pivotal moment of the gay rights movement includes The Stonewall Inn riots of 1969; however extensive literature has shown that the homophile movement of the 1950s paved the way for gay liberation.

knowledge and experience, the particular positionings arising from our differently situated cultural experiences, and generalising enough commonality and similarity in order to define political position defences against inequality and discrimination is a tenacious challenge for feminist, queer and postmodern theory. This is in contrast to lesbian and gay studies, which focuses more on the social field of community and political mobilisation.

> ***Bea Dazzler:*** *The first time I started hearing about it [queer] was in San Francisco. For me it was never really used in a derogatory way so for me personally it never really felt like a derogatory thing. It kind of felt like another way to describe the gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual community* (T. Connell, Personal Communication, 16/09/13).

In addition to concerns of over-inclusiveness, use of the term queer has also received criticism with regards to an implied over-generalisation. In other words, notions of difference related to categories other than sexual or gender identity, between those who identify as queer, may be interpreted as collapsed or ignored under queer (Anzaldua, 1991). Sullivan outlines,

> One of the problems with this particular use of queer as an umbrella term is that it does little if anything to deconstruct the humanist understanding of the subject. Worse still, it fails over the differences between, for example, lesbianism and gayness, between women, between transsexualism, and cross dressing, and ignores differences of class, race, age and so on, once again positing sexuality as a unified and unifying factor (Sullivan, 2003, p. 44).

In an attempt to address the apparent failings of queer, that privileges sexuality and gender as its defining difference, some individuals choose to label themselves with a specific list of identifiers. For example, San Francisco-based portrait photographer Sarah Deragon established a project that focuses on individual difference within the queer community. 'The Identity Project – What Defines You', invites individuals to a studio photography session. Their images are displayed on Deragon's website[16] and captioned with a specific identifier, such as "Black Gay Queer Feminist

[16] The Identity Project website link: http://www.identityprojectsf.com/photos/

Cisgendered Man", "Queer Fat Femme", "Dynamic Playful Trans*Queer" and "Provocateur Lesbian Dandy". Each identifier, chosen by the photographed subject, attempts to make visible individual difference within the queer community, which is often defined by privileging a unified sexual difference alone (Deragon, 2014).

It has become increasingly common to use 'queer' to describe LGBT mobilisations and activities such as 'queer pride parade', 'queer community', or 'queer arts festival'. Personally, I have begun to describe drag and faux queen performance as a 'queer performance genre'.

> ***Bea Dazzler:*** *The first time I really started hearing that word and hearing it [queer] being used in context, the context was always really specifically about 'the queer community' people saying that phrase 'the queer community' or 'queer arts' or something like that* (T. Connell, Personal Communication, 16/09/13).

The use of queer as a mobilising political identifier mimics social justice movements closely associated with race and ethnicity.

> Liberation politics aimed at freeing individuals from the constraints of a sex/gender system that locked them into mutually exclusive homo/hetero and feminine/masculine roles. However, by the mid-1970s this liberationist framework became less important for both gay and lesbian movements who increasingly favoured an ethnic model which emphasised community identity and cultural difference (Jagose, 1996, p. 57).

As a result, many people understand queerness and the notion of queer as a signifier for a community which is framed by cultural difference, particularly difference in comparison to the heterosexual hegemonic majority. Jagose explains that the ethnic model "was committed to establishing gay identity as a legitimate minority group, whose official recognition would secure citizenship rights for lesbian and gay subjects" (Jagose, 1996, p. 61). A practical example of the ethnic model at work for LGBT political mobility includes the movement towards equal marriage rights, and access to the social systems and privileges which accompany marital unions. The

ethnic model has been reasonably effective in making LGBT voices and lives visible and improving human rights for those who are discriminated against because of their sexuality or gender identity. A criticism however, is that the ethnic model is not a queer model. It is problematic inasmuch as it tends to encourage heterosexuality and homosexuality to work in dichotomous logic, leaving less space for notions of continuum. In some cases, the LGBT liberation movement has been criticised as potentially exclusionary. Jagose notes,

> Debates in lesbian and gay circles during the late 1970s and early 1980s about bisexuality, sado-masochism, pornography, butch/fem, transvestism, prostitution and intergenerational sex implicitly questioned the hegemonic binarism of heterosexuality and homosexuality (Jagose, 1996, p. 64).

The dichotomy of 'queer and not queer' or 'queer and straight' has, on one hand proved empowering for social justice movements and identity formation, but on the other hand it actively discourages individuals who are cis-gender and primarily attracted to the opposite-sex from exploring and discovering aspects about themselves which might be queer. The way that we might understand queer as a theoretical framework, however, allows for more fluidity, more inclusionary practices and more opportunities to approach gender, sexuality and identity as malleable constructions.

Queer Possibilities for Feminism

> *To extend our theoretical understandings of both gender and sexuality we need to consider the relationship between feminism and queer not so much in terms of binaries such as before/after and either/or, but rather as an ongoing interaction that allows for possible intersections, as well as oppositions and contestations*
>
> (Richardson, 2006, p. 37).

Notions of queer and queerness seem to have divided, however untidily, to mean an identifier for LGBT gender and sexuality, or an attitude, ideology or lifestyle which deliberately locates ones thinking in antithetical positionality to the normative. Queer has been established not only as a space to understand and question sexual

difference, but also gender mutability. As such, queer theory has a shared history with feminism.

The limitations of this chapter prevent a comprehensive historical mapping of feminist history and theory in its various iterations, however contemporary feminism can principally be understood as a mass movement starting at the end of the 19th century as suffragists lobbied for legislation reform allowing for equal voting rights and other aspects of women's equality in New Zealand, Australia, The United Kingdom, and The United States; often referred to as 'first wave feminism' (Whelehan, 1995). With regards to 'second wave feminism', Imelda Whelehan notes,

> The so-called 'second wave' in feminism is, as the term suggests, a continuation of a movement, that earlier phases of feminism which clamoured for civic equality for women via the vote, achieved in the United States and United Kingdom during the first two decades of this [20th] century (Whelehan, 1995, p. 3).

Second wave feminism is generally understood to have emerged in the late 1960s or early 70s and is categorised primarily by critiquing and resisting dominant ideological categories which defined and represented 'woman' and 'femininity'.[17] Further, second wave feminism worked to foreground the notion that the personal is political, which is also a foundational concept of queer theory and identity politics (Whelehan, 1995).

There are a variety of manifestations of feminism, and Whelehan notes that "It is not always easy or desirable to divide up feminism into discrete strands" (Whelehan, 1995, p. 2), however she does note that specific strands include, but are not limited to, Radical Feminism, Lesbian Feminism, and Black Feminism. The predominant version of feminist theory after postmodernism is largely a deconstructivist framework aiming to illuminate and critique phallocentricism which governs all constructions of power and culture, primarily the sex/gender binary. Feminist theory can work to theorises an existence where women are not primarily conceptualised in

[17] Additionally, Whelehan notes with regards to feminist politics: "Emphasis on consciousness raising and direct action mean that feminist politics emanated from the individual and private sphere of experiential and emotional responses to oppression. This dictated the shape of early feminist agendas – a concentration on issues such as paid housework, abortion, contraception, the family, and sexual division of labour" (Whelehan, 1995, p. 11).

their oppositional positionality to men, and is critical towards wider frames of dominant culture, discourse and the institutions which privilege male centred thought and gender bias (Whelehan, 1995; see also Eisenstein, 1983; Evans, 1997). It was within the realms of feminist theory and women's studies that distinctions between sex and gender were first explored. Marinucci states:

> The distinction between sex and gender, which is still regarded as a core concept within women's studies and related fields, invites at least two such questions. The first question asks whether women and men are biological or social phenomena, and the second asks whether women and men are fundamentally the same or fundamentally different. These are closely related questions. If women and men are regarded as fundamentally the same, then this would suggest that any differences that exist are accidental, or learned differences (Marinucci, 2010, p. 84). [18]

Feminist theory, which focuses on theorising the construction of female/feminine signifiers and the sex/gender binary, and queer theory, which widens its lens to include sexuality as well as trans and intersex gender constructions, share an implicit connection. Women's critique of phallocentricism in many ways paved the way for a framework of queer theory which critiques heteronormativity and the stability of gender. However, a divide is noticeable between directions in feminism and directions in queer theory. Feminist thought has been accused of bias against LGBT folks, as well as ignoring the reality that the majority of published feminist authors are white, middle-class Westerners. Similarly, queer theory has received criticism naming it antifeminist and race blind; privileging the voices of white gay men (Marinucci, 2010; Sullivan, 2003). Researchers such as Marinucci and Diane

[18] From the 2000s onwards there has also been work that challenges the idea that the sex-gender divide is central to feminist theory. For example, Myra J. Hird's text *Sex, Gender and Science* outlines "the social study of science and nature, of which feminism is a major player, specifically in relation to 'sex', sex 'differences', and sexuality" (Hird, 2004, p. 2). She argues "that Western understandings of 'sex' are based less upon an actual knowledge of sex 'differences' rooted in morphology than in a cultural discourse that emphasizes sex dichotomy rather than sex diversity (Hird, 2004, p. 2). In the text *Sexing the Body*, Anne Fausto-Sterling states, "labelling someone a man or a woman is a social decision. We may use scientific knowledge to help us make the decision, but only our beliefs about gender affect what kind of knowledge scientists produce about sex in the first place" (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p. 3). She notes, "The more we look for a simple physical basis for 'sex', the more it becomes clear that 'sex' is not a pure physical category. What bodily signals and functions we define as male or female come already entangled in our ideas about gender" (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p. 4).

Richardson have explored the intersectionalities of feminism and queer, working towards a framework where feminist and queer theories might productively inform each other.

Richardson has suggested that a useful intersection between the established principles of feminist and queer theories may be in the exploration of heterosexual identities (Richardson, 2006). While certainly not all feminist and queer theory offers a monolithic critique of heterosexuality, the continuum of identity construction related to heterosexual experience is sometimes amalgamated in queer theory. It is useful then, to consider heterosexual identities and how they may intersect and be complicated by notions of queerness.

An entry point to exploring how straight identity and queer identity might productively intersect, with particular reference to the faux queen, is through a lens of queer-feminism. Both feminist and queer frameworks already address the intersections of gender and sexuality, and while feminism allows for sustained focus on the female subject, queer orientation "recognises and addresses all forms of oppression as part of a logic of domination" (Marinucci, 2010, p. 106). The following section of this chapter introduces texts dealing with intersections between queer and straight identity, including attempts to dismantle the oppositional logic that does not allow straight identities queer experiences (and perhaps vice versa).

Conceptualisation of the Heteroqueer

> *All this gender fucking has definitely rubbed off on the heteros, who are ditching the script in favour of writing their own*
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> (Taormino, 2003, pp. 1-2).

In recent times, 'queerness' as an aspect of identity in socially progressive centres such as San Francisco, may be beginning to represent a kind of cultural orientation with a specifically queer-orientated focus, rather than a term that necessarily indicates LBGT sexuality or gender identity. People who identify with a sort of 'cultural queerness' might attribute that identity not entirely to their sexual desires so much as values, lifestyle, relationship status, friends, gender conceptualisation and political affiliations which appear to be in noticeable opposition to the heteronormative neo-liberal paradigm.

> ***Kentucky Fried Woman:*** *One thing that I've noticed has happened over the past 10 years is queer has really entered the lexicon; is that it also tends to situate where people are politically* (Kentucky Fried Woman, Personal Communication, 08/09/13).

To identify as queer, under this emergent iteration, is to find identification with an 'emotional community', a community or culture of queerness, which materialises from and exists within the wider LGBT community.

> Emotional communities whether they be produced by similarities based on sex, gender, race, or class, served as centres of identification, spaces where individuals realize that there are others like themselves and which provide a counter to the alienation caused by rejection and discrimination (Kirsch, 2006, p. 31).

If the premise of queer theory is to destabilise heterosexuality and the notion of hierarchy, what then is 'queerness'? What does it mean to be queer, and does a person need to identify as LGBT to feel queer?

> ***Fauxnique:*** *As a woman who's married to man I don't identify my sexual orientation as queer but I identify my cultural orientation as queer* (M. Jenkinson, Personal Communication, 11/09/13).

Considering queer theory's emergence from and important links with LGBT thought, it is often assumed that to be queer or sense in yourself some sort of queerness is to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. A direct correlation between queer and LBGT sexuality/gender identity is often an assumed and sustained position. Certainly, the notion that queer could apply to straight individuals is, to some LGBT groups and individuals, insulting and disempowering. From that point of view, the queer umbrella should only extend its shade to those who are LGBT. In the context of queer theory, however, 'queer' does not just mean not-heterosexual, it means not-heteronormative, which is an important point of difference. Queer theory does not alienate people who identify with heterosexuality from 'queerness' but it does critique heteronormativity.

> ***Frida K Hole:*** *I think there's something rebellious about being queer because there's this whole idea where you've been kept down, you've been told who you are is bad or you've been closeted and you haven't truly been able to be who you are. And now that you have this freedom, and there's a liberation to it, it's like, "I'm very much going to be who I am", and so it's very much about claiming who you are* (L. Tucker, Personal Communication, 10/09/13).

With this in mind, it may be fair to say that straight individuals could not, or perhaps should not, begin to find identification with 'queerness' without first becoming both cognisant and critical of the overwhelming pressure to be heteronormative and the undeserved privileges awarded to heteronormativity in society and culture. When the notion of queer is considered as a verb and a sustained positionality in antithesis to the normative, queer possibilities arise beyond those which relate exclusively to sexual or gender identity. For example, Stephanie Lawler has suggested that straight women who are single mothers may represent the 'heterosexual other'; in other words a straight-identified person who cannot or will not neatly tick all the boxes of heteronormativity (Lawler, 2000). Similar to Lawler's 'heterosexual other', Cathy J Cohen has called attention to the ways which 'heterosexual' is homogenised not only to signify straight sexual identity, but also a narrow image of the white, middle-class, Christian, nuclear family unit. Her intersectional analysis reveals how heterosexual women in particular, display multiple subject positions and she emphasises the regulatory systems of power and oppression which influence the lives of those who do not present a heteronormative ideal (Cohen, 1997; Sullivan, 2003).

Characterisations of the 'heterosexual other' as also having some connection with LGBT culture is satirically explored in Jamie Babbit's 1999 film *But I'm a Cheerleader*.[19] Along with several other teenagers who are in fact Lesbian and Gay, the butch-appearing straight girl 'Jan' is sent to 'True Directions': a camp to cure homosexuality. In a particularly touching moment in the movie, Jan cries as she monologues:

[19]Youtube link for selections of *But I'm a Cheerleader*: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NFxckpb-CY

> I mean everybody thinks I'm this big dyke because I wear baggy pants, I play softball, and that I'm not as pretty as other girls. But that doesn't make me gay. You know, I like guys. I can't help it (Babbit, 1999).

But I'm a Cheerleader focuses primarily on LGBT identity, however its inclusion of the character 'Jan' specifically points to Cohen and Lawler's arguments that straight-identified women (and men) who do not present and perform heteronormative ideals are effectively othered and may begin to share an experience of 'other(ed)ness' with LGBT folk.

It is a sizeable leap from 'heterosexual other' to 'heterosexual queer', however, in the last decade, the notion that an opposite-sex-attracted person might also identify themselves as 'queer' has emerged in both cultural and academic spheres. At Beyond Boundaries, "An International Conference on Sexuality", dancer and cultural researcher Clyde Smith gave a presentation titled "How I became a Queer Heterosexual". In his paper, he makes reference to an article from 1993 in The Village Voice[20] by Anne Powers as the first time he came across the term 'Queer-Straight'. Smith states,

> Her definition of inclusion in the queer world did not require 'the fundamental acts of intimacy that ground homosexual identity' rather she spoke of 'the projection of a queer attitude [as] enough to claim a place in homosexual culture' (Smith, 1997, p. 4).

In his paper, Smith identifies as a queer heterosexual after long term involvement with dance institutions and companies where he was often the only straight-identified male. He notes that during his dance career he came to feel part of a "shifting community of queerness" particularly when based in San Francisco, despite his heterosexuality. Smith explains that his definition of queer heterosexuality (as stated in his 1997 paper) combines Powers' position that queerness is a "projection of attitude" and Keith Hennessy's definition of queer as:

[20] The Village Voice is a free weekly tabloid newspaper and news website based in New York City.

> an umbrella term which embraces the matrix of sexual preferences, orientations, and habits of the not-exclusively-heterosexual-and-monogamous majority. Queer includes lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transvestites/transgenders, the radical sex communities, and many other sexually transgressive (underworld) explorers (Hennessy, 1992, p. 11).

In Smith's article, he does not reveal his sexual practices in any more detail than his identification with heterosexuality, but he does position himself as a subject who either cannot or will not adhere to heteronormativity. In his paper, the juxtaposition of queer and heterosexual is troubled by the two definitions he draws upon to contextualise his own understanding of this new identity category. Hennessy's definition of queer infers that non-heteronormative sexual practice or gender identity is an important factor of queer identification. The extracts of Powers' article, however, suggest that attitude and political stance are indicators of queerness, and as Smith quotes "*enough* to claim a place in homosexual culture" (Smith, 1997, p. 4). I sense in Smith's paper on queer heterosexuality an unsure tone; that he is not certain who fits under the queer banner either. Smith may feel in himself a sense of queerness, but if anything, his paper illustrates how problematic it is to explain and legitimise your sense of queerness in a palpable way, without also being able to say, "Because I'm gay".

In 2003 Tristan Taormino published an article in *The Village Voice*, titled "The Queer Heterosexual". Taormino directs her reader's attention to the vast changes in identity politics of the LGBT community, particularly since transgender and intersex communities have begun to experience growing understanding and acceptance amongst the wider mainstream population. She suggests that LGBT individuals who proudly flaunt their 'difference' has encouraged straight-identified people to be more honest about their own sense of queerness, and bring their experiences into the mix. Toarmino asks,

> How does one spot a QH? In some cases, it's based on either one or both partners having non-traditional gender expressions…or they actively work against their assigned gender roles. Some queer heterosexuals are strongly aligned with queer community, culture,

> politics, and activism but happen to love and lust after people of a different gender (Taormino, 2003, p. 2).

Toarmino's brief conceptualisation of queer heterosexuality appears comparable to Power's definition which is drawn upon by Smith. Again, the notion of attitude rather than sexual desire or sex act appears as a marker of queerness.

> ***Fauxnique****: It definitely is a part of my identity and maybe queerness too in a 'queer as other', 'queer as alternative', even though the word alternative kind of got co-opted in the 90s as a musical style – but this idea of what is 'other' what is 'questioning' or 'rejecting' a status quo* (M. Jenkinson, Personal Communication, 11/09/13).

Robert Heasley has begun to address the notion of heteroqueerness as it pertains specifically to the male subject. His paper focuses on a typology of men who perform queer masculinities and also identify as straight. Heasley explains how many men perform a queered masculinity and experience ways of being masculine which does not fit within a heteronormative masculinity (Heasley, 2005). He speaks of his own experiences as a self-identified 'straight-queer' and draws on conversations and narratives provided by students and acquaintances. He argues that "the queer masculinities of straight men do not have a similar representation [as hegemonic masculinity does], and they lack legitimacy as a form of masculinity" (Heasley, 2005, p. 310). Heasley suggests five categories of queer masculine identity performance amongst straight-identified males: (i) Straight sissy boys, who "just cannot 'do' straight masculinity. The sissy boy presents to others as queer, though that is not his intention" (p. 315); (ii) Social-justice straight-queers who "take [LGBT centred social-justice] action publically and at the risk of being responded to as if they were gay" (p. 316); (iii) Elective straight-queers, "Males in this category elect to move into queer masculinity as a means of liberating the self from the constrictions of hetero-normative masculinity" (p. 316); (iv) Committed straight-queers who "practice being queer with the intention of benefiting from moving toward queerness as an integral aspect of their sexuality and their masculinity" (p. 317); (v) Males living in the shadow of masculinity who "are informed about sexuality and masculinity and are likely to understand and support feminism as well as gay rights

[but]… are unlikely to display nonconforming behaviours or appear in a queer space unless accompanied by a girlfriend or female friend" (p. 317).

In a later work, Heasley adds another category to his typology, using David Beckham as an example. He coins the term Stylistic Straight Queers, to describe celebrities who "intentionally take on the presentation of self that is traditionally associated with gay male culture" (Heasley, 2013, p. 210). This sort of queered-but-not-queer appearance can be likened to the metrosexual image made popular by early 2000s reality make-over series *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy.*[21] Further, Heasely does not shy away from a discussion of physicality, and marks his own 'queerness' by how he physically interacts with male friends through hugging, touching and greeting with a kiss as women and gay men often do. Perhaps not intentionally, Heasley points to a key difference in the heteronormative construction of same-sex friendships amongst straight-identified people. Straight women who snuggle together to watch a film, hug each other deeply, kiss hello and goodbye, share a bed to sleep, or hold hands are not necessarily read as lesbians. They are not seen to be performing femininity in a manner which disrupts heteronormativity.[22] Heasley's discussion of the straight-queer suggests, in basic terms, that queerness in heterosexual men is marked by a performance of behaviours which are often considered hetero-feminine and/or gay-masculine.

Much of the writing which contextualises a sense of queerness within straight-identified people centres on male sexuality and gay/straight/queer masculinities. When considering the female subject, the question is whether or not queerness would be represented by a reversal of the behaviours outlined by Heasley. Is queerness in straight women only marked by performing behaviours which are seen to be heteromasculine, much like the character 'Jan' in *But I'm a Cheerleader*? If this is the case, then I would conclude that I am not queer, and additionally neither are any of the faux queens who I interviewed. However, faux queens are potentially

[21] *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* was an American reality series based primarily in New York City. A team of five gay men, self-proclaimed savants of dining, fashion, personal grooming, pop-culture and interior design, make-over a sloppy straight male subject. The stereotype of the metrosexual was made popular by this television series; meaning a straight-identified man who is dressed in current fashion, groomed neatly and projecting an image of sophisticated taste and styling.

[22] Heasley's straight-queer typologies can be understood with reference to Gayle Rubin's concept of the "charmed circle" and "outer limits" (Rubin, 1993) which emerges in detail in Chapter 3.

performing a more complex version of masculinity in their work. What is being signified in faux queen performance is not a butch heteromasculine aesthetic; rather we commonly see a particularly gay camp masculinity associated with drag queens, which, when considering faux queens, can be considered a performance of gay male embodiment of the feminine recontextualised by female subjects.

Roberta Mock offers an interesting stance on straight women who identify with a sense of camp gay masculinity in their own expression of femininity. Her paper explores "the efficacy of heterosexual femme performances that attempt to challenge and subvert ideological normatives through their transactions with gay men" (Mock, 2003, p. 21).

> ***Cara Couture:*** *I mean I'm straight, but to be queer, I just feel like for me being queer is accepting all of the gay people around me and gay culture. I guess that is what it would be for me; I fully embrace it…I've always just liked what gay culture provides, the essence of it is more interesting. I can relate to it more. The things that they value compared to straight people, I just like it more* (M. Baker, Personal Communication, 22/09/13).

Mock explains that over several years her straight-identified undergraduate female students repeatedly chose to investigate gay masculinity as part of their final year research projects. She suggests that identification with camp amongst young heterosexual women may be explained as an attempt to position themselves within a format of femme[23] behaviour which feels less connected to traditional femininity and the oppression of women.

> I have gradually come to think that the researching of gay male camp is potentially a strategy by which heterosexual young women are not only reclaiming, but apprenticing, what they consider to be non-oppressive femininity (Mock, 2003, p. 21).

[23] Femme is often used as a term to describe feminine gender identity, especially in the lesbian community. Femme has been understood to mean a feminine appearing and/or behaving lesbian, as opposed to Butch which is understood as masculine appearing and/or behaving. Importantly 'femme' as an identity signifier is almost exclusively used in a queer context.

Mock's analysis of the queered-but-not-queer positionality of straight women who may feel a sense of queerness in themselves begins to problematize the notion of queerness as a purely LGBT experience. For Mock's students to be queered-but-not-queer, seems little to do with sexual desire and more so a notion of 'attitude'. This attitude, she suggests, is informed by engagement with notions of femininity and feminism, and recognition, to some extent, of the role of hetero-patriarchal femininity in female gender oppression. Importantly, Mock notes that in all of her students' work, a discussion of erotic desire and physicality is noticeably absent. Her students do not suggest that they find gay male pornography arousing or that a man in female drag might seem sexually desirable to them.

It is not a surprise that Mock's 'heteroqueer ladies' would avoid a conversation about their own erotic desires. There is considerable risk in admitting to something sexual which is non-heteronormative. LGBT individuals have experienced this for a very long time; the queer and lesbian-identified women involved in this research project are very much aware of a real risk of violence and harassment because of their sexual and/or gender identity. An anxiety about the risks of being flagged as 'queer' is understandably relevant to young women who sense queerness in themselves. Mock stresses,

> Anxiety appears to be the reflective mirror image of queer. Our anxious selves bite the nails that our queer selves are trying to grow (fashionably manicured with diamanté insets). The fascination that camp holds for my female performance students seems to be an attempt to address a difficult negotiation between cultural 'belonging' and their resistance of gendered expectation, an apolitical embracing of (somebody else's) political positioning (Mock, 2003, p. 23).

Mock goes on to analyse the work of two performers who she argues engage in performative transactions with gay men, inasmuch as they perform camp as a critical element of their act. She discusses Bette Midler,[24] who famously apprenticed as a performer in New York's continental bath houses, and Kathy Burke as Linda in

[24] Bette Midler is an American performer, well known for her work in music and film. She is also known by her stage name The Divine Miss M, which resonates with old Hollywood glamour and drag queen conventions.

Gimme Gimme Gimme.[25] She argues that both women intentionally perform as if they were men in drag, and project their sexual desire towards gay masculine men.[26] She marks their 'queered' performances as fundamentally different from similar characters such as Edina and Patsy of *Absolutely Fabulous*,[27] inasmuch as "while Edina and Patsy are camp transgressive heterofemme characters who are open to queer readings, they do not embody heteroqueerness" (Mock, 2003, p. 32). Mock illustrates how Midler often suggests in her performances that she is a drag queen; that she was once a man, and underneath her glitter and paint is a gay man with a 'sordid past'.

> Midler thus frames her gendered and eroticized body in a way that queers her sexual identity, by citing gay male performance codes rather than those usually associated with heterosexual femininity (Mock, 2003, p. 30).

She goes on to explain the confused sexual desires of 'Linda' who is a 30-something single lusting over gay masculine pop stars, and occasionally projecting her heterosexual fantasies onto her camp gay flat mate.

> All the embodied performative codings I have chosen to reflect upon are related in an important sense: they rely on an association with gay male cultural products in order to indicate the difference between a reification of heteropatriarchal femininity and heterofemme queerness (Mock, 2003, p. 34).

The phrase 'heteroqueer' and other similar terms are fundamentally troubled by an oxymoronic fusion of political identities in stark opposition to each other. However, the unfortunate interpretive implications of heteroqueer do not invalidate the notion that straight-identified people can experience queerness. For a faux queen, the sexed

[25] *Gimme Gimme Gimme* was a BBC television series airing from 1999-2001. The sitcom employed an 'odd couple' format revolving around the humdrum lives of flatmates Linda and Tom.

[26] A more recent example of the style of performance embodied by Midler and Burke includes pop-singer Lady Gaga, however Mock does not discuss the performances of Lady Gaga in her work.

[27] *Absolutely Fabulous* was a long-running BBC television comedy series created by Jennifer Saunders. The protagonists Edina and Patsy parody stereotypes of women in the fashion and mass-media industries.

body she plays is deliberately and always flexible, and she intentionally engages in a transaction with gay male performative codes. Dallas-based faux queen Brandi Amara Skyy has said to me in an interview, "If someone asks me if I'm a boy or a girl, I've done my job" (B. Garcia, Personal Communication 22/02/13). Further, many faux queens are apprenticed by gay male drag queens as back up dancers, costume designers and makeup artists, and eventually are encouraged to try female drag for themselves. For this reason, Mock's concept of 'heteroqueer ladies' becomes extremely relevant in a discussion of faux queens and the queer/straight and masculine/feminine dichotomies. Notably, Mock points to a process of performative transaction which locates faux queens within a culture of queerness, sharing performative codes with gay men and performing them in queer spaces.

Culturally Queer

> *it may be more productive to think of queer as a verb, a set of actions, rather than as a noun, an identity, or even a nameable positionality formed in and through the practice of particular actions*
>
> (Sullivan, 2003, p. 50).

After visiting San Francisco and talking with faux queens about their experiences of queerness, I continued to feel discomfort with the insistence on juxtaposing straight or hetero with queer. There is a tension in pairing two words so loaded with political oppositionality. Additionally, I feel uncomfortable with the concept of labelling myself 'queer' without also putting a marker on my heterosexual identity. It seems disingenuous and naïve for straight identified people to say 'I'm queer' without also framing and criticising straight privilege. Using queer in conjunction with straight as an identity position could easily be read as blatant disregard for the very real struggles that LGBT individuals face day-to-day, and/or an attempt by heterosexuals to erase political identity in the LGBT community.

'Cultural queerness', mentioned to me by Fauxnique and L Ron Hubby in their interviews, may quell some of that discomfort. To label the self as 'culturally' queer rather than 'sexually' queer acknowledges in some respect that a person can be sexually attracted to the opposite sex but also express an 'attitude' of queerness which does not fit with mainstream values, politics, and lifestyles in Western society.

I also believe it may acknowledge that, “I’m not gay, and I know that I have not and will not face the same struggles as you, but my cultural orientation allies with yours and I feel that what you struggle against is unjust”.

The term ‘culturally queer’ has initially become popular with some individuals and groups who feel that there is a sense of queerness about their lives; some opposition to the normal with strong links to LGBT culture. Researchers of queer parenting have employed the notion of cultural queerness to apply to children with LGBT parents (sometimes self-identified as ‘queer spawn’). In reference to Rachel Epstein’s conceptualisation of cultural queerness, Gustavson & Schmitt state,

> the concept of ‘culturally queer’…understands children and young people with LGBTQ parents as part of queer communities, and as having specific experiences and competences that are not necessarily defined by sexual identifications as queer” (Gustavson and Schmitt 2011, p. 158).

An extension of ‘cultural queer’, outside of the queer family unit, may also be used by adults who are heterosexual and actively engaged with queer communities and queer practices. Like queer spawn, faux queens may find they have specific experiences and competences which are directly related to their engagement in queer communities, but not necessarily defined by their sexuality.

Additionally, within the queer framework of performativity and cultural production, queerness is already and always cultural; but it has also become, without argument, profoundly political. As a generalising political identification, queer has perhaps developed as much a narrow and homogenised political identity as heterosexual or heteronormative. ‘Cultural queer’ presents an opportunity to broaden notions of queerness, as well as notions of heterosexuality through intersectionality.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the broad premise of queer theory as a theoretical framework and identified some shared ideological patterns with feminist theory. Queer feminism was introduced as a lens through which to view faux queens and the modes with which their queered performances might challenge established dichotomous logics of sexuality and gender. The concept of ‘heteroqueerness’

appears very briefly in academic and cultural literature, but it refers primarily to male typology and is encumbered with political tensions. Straight individuals, who identify with queerness, including faux queens I have interviewed, seem to have dropped 'hetero' in favour of 'cultural queer'. Roberta Mock's usage of performative transactions can be employed to locate faux queens (or at least their performance-based possibilities) within a culture of queerness, not necessarily defined by their sexual practice but by their competences and experiences related to LGBT community.

This chapter reveals an occasional shortcoming of both queer and feminist studies, to amalgamate heterosexual experience and make sexuality a unified and unifying condition of political identity. Queer theorists may assert that 'queer' relates to positionality in antithesis to the normative; but as a result 'the normative' often tends to mean a generalising term for all opposite-sex-attracted people. There are, as I have noted, brief diversions where writers have located the 'heterosexual other', usually in reference to cis-gendered female identities who do not perform the heteronormative ideal. These transgressive 'heterosexual others' make possible an investigation of cultural queerness; which may be considered an 'othering' of the heterosexual subject with a deliberate embrace of queer culture.

CHAPTER TWO

What's in a Name?

Discursive challenges in the construction of cis-women in female drag

Introduction

> *an entirely new species of drag deserving an equally fresh, distinct scholarship*
>
> (Devitt, 2006, p. 38).

The theatrical and socio-political history of drag performance has given rise to cultural traditions, expectations and assumptions of drag performance practice. For example, that a drag queen is exclusively a cis-man, very often gay-identified, wearing female clothing and makeup, and performing hyperbolised and exaggerated feminine codes and tropes in a theatrical/performance context. When cis-women perform as drag queens, the cultural expectations, traditions and assumptions of drag performance practice are, in some ways, complicated and challenged. Chapter One has examined how these expectations are complicated when straight subjects engage in queer performance practice; considering frameworks which conceptualise intersections between straight and queer subject positions. In this chapter I investigate the tensions which concern bringing together cis-gender subjects and drag performance practice grounded in cross-dressing. This chapter looks at work which has already been done to address some of the challenges of assigning terminology to cis-female drag queens, begins to show the limitations of that work, and further complicates it.

In LGBT culture, the terms 'drag queen' and 'drag king' are widely understood and accepted as referring to performers who present over-exaggerated personas with a gender presentation usually opposite to their own. Drag queens are most often male-identified people presenting a female persona, and drag kings are most often female-identified people presenting a male persona. Pop-culture products such as *RuPaul's Drag Race*, and popular drag-themed films of the mid-90s such as *The Adventures of Priscilla: Queen of the Desert*, and *The Birdcage*, have provided some visibility for drag queens outside of LGBT contexts and the scholarly fields that have investigated them. Drag kings are less visible outside of LGBT culture and can find themselves

marginalised within drag performance spaces; however they have received significant scholarly attention and their label is solidified within both frameworks.

A significant moment of tension which I identified in my own practice, and found consistently in interview data, is the issue of what to name a cis-woman performing as a drag queen. Over the past two decades, some queer performance spaces have allowed cis-gender women to perform as drag queens, often alongside their drag queen and king friends. Information generated in my interviews with San Francisco-based drag performers suggested that important sites for the development of faux queens on drag stages include San Francisco and New York City in the mid-90s. As this new iteration of drag emerged, where a female-identified person presented an over-exaggerated female persona in the style of a drag queen, apprehensions arose about what exactly to call her. Interview subjects have commented that the term 'bio queen' was popular among performers in East Coast USA, while 'faux queen' was typical of West Coast USA.[28] In particular, Kentucky Fried Woman commented extensively on her personal negotiation of terms, which have been influenced by the performance troupes she has been involved in within the United States. Although generally new, there has been some academic work completed around the topic of cis-female drag queens and the following terms appear with minimal consistency across authors: 'Bio queen' is used by Jody Taylor (2007), Rachel Devitt (2006), Leila Rupp, Verta Taylor and Eve Ilana Shapiro (2010) and Debra Ferreday (2007). Alana Kumbier (2003) describes her queen person as 'glam drag', and Devitt (2006) uses the terms 'exploding femininity' and 'queenly femininity' to describe drag queen performance by cis-women. Stephen P. Schacht (2003) uses the term 'lesbian drag queen' in his ethnography of the Imperial Court System. 'Faux queen' is mentioned alongside 'bio queen' by Ferreday (2007), and is also the most popular term among my interview participants. Socially, I have also come across terms including 'female-to-female drag queen', 'female female impersonator', and 'femme drag'.

In this chapter, I investigate why such different terms are applied and what this might mean for performers. I also explore the difficulties which emerge when academics

[28] The terms 'bio queen' and 'faux queen' are not exclusive to particular parts of the United States. For example, now disbanded Santa Barbara performance troupe The Disposable Boy Toys are an example of a West Coast USA drag collective who used 'bio queen' to describe their cis-female drag queens rather than 'faux queen' (Rupp et al., 2010).

and performers impose labels on new and nuanced iterations of drag performance; engaging with pertinent notions of gender inclusivity and gender politics. Given the sustained critical focus on the effects of language, during the linguistic 20th century and beyond, the question of naming or labelling is particularly significant for identity politics, feminism and queer theory which have focused attention on the importance of language in constructing and reifying normative notions of gender and sexuality. I suggest that the iterative and prolonged process of negotiating a term to describe cis-female drag queens may reflect a similar negotiation process of our emergent place in queer/drag culture and communities. Additionally, it is important to take into account performer's self-definition, and what it means if academic labels are divorced or removed from those within culture.

Throughout this chapter I use the terms 'cis-women in female drag' or 'cis-female drag queens', and yet much of my critique is centred on the ways that labels in academic literature and social fields applied to these women foreground their biologically sexed body. I understand that by writing 'cis-women in female drag' or 'cis-female drag queen' I am doing exactly the thing I claim to oppose; and it is therefore not a label which I would use to describe myself or performers I know. In this chapter and throughout the exegesis I write 'cis-women in female drag' and other similar versions, to make clear the group to whom I am referring. While my preferred term is 'faux queen', I defer using it for the purposes of this chapter in order to explore the tension of its language from a critical standpoint. What I advocate for in this chapter is a term for drag performers which does not necessarily foreground biological sex, but does offer differentiation from a mainstream understanding of drag if the performer wishes it. In this chapter I offer a critical review of the current labels used in academic and social contexts pertaining to cis-women who consciously perform female drag. I will analyse the language evident in scholarly works by relevant authors and engage in a critical discussion of their symbolic, cultural and political significance. Additionally, I will draw on interview data collected during an ethnographic study of cis-female drag performers, and my own experiences framed through autoethnography. I begin this chapter with a brief but necessary summation of MTF[29] drag history, contextualising ways that drag is

[29] MTF: meaning in this chapter male-to-female. MTF drag is to mean a cis-man who performs female drag.

generally conceptualised and understood as a performance practice. This is important to recognising how and why cis-female drag queens are seen to deviate from, and complicate, normalised drag performance practice.

A Conceptual Formation of Contemporary Drag Practice: In Summary

For many thousands of years, traceable back to Ancient Greek theatre, men have dressed up and performed as women. In the theatre, men originally performed women's roles because female actresses were forbidden from the stage. In Ancient Greece, women were removed from participation in public life more universally (Ackroyd, 1979; Baker, 1994; Case, 1985; Wiles, 2000; Zeitlin, 1996). On the Ancient Greek stage, evidence suggests that all characters were masked and performances were highly stylised. Gender coding is likely to have been very clear and noticeably symbolic. Peter Hall's staging of Aeschylus' *The Oresteia* at The National Theatre of Great Britain in the mid-80s represents an attempt to draw on the inferences made by theatre historians regarding how the action would have been staged (Hall, 1983). Analysing the filmed version of this performance, I observed how female characters, such as Clytemnestra, Athena and the chorus of Eumenides are played by male actors who do not attempt to alter their voice to a register more recognisably female. They are clothed symbolically, in flowing garments which for the most part shield male bodies from view. Clytemnestra is cloaked by a fishing net which frames her masked face; the net being her murderous yonic weapon used in the death of her husband Agamemnon. Athena, born from the thigh of Zeus and lacking a maternal heritage, is more androgynous in appearance. Her image is flooded with phallic symbolism: the vertical lines of her cloak, her scepter and the tall straight crest on her helmet seem at odds with the awkward placement of metallic breasts on her chest plate. The Eumenides (formally Furies), in loose and ragged dress with long curly red hair and prominent widows peak appear uniformly female. (Hall, 1983).

Given that, as far as we are aware, all classical theatre was authored by men, and women were not permitted on the stage or to have involvement in the public life of the polis, the notion that Aeschlyus' female characters were at all representative of biological women is a contentious issue. Sue-Ellen Case notes,

> The feminist critic may no longer believe that the portrayal of women in classical plays by men relates to the lives of actual women. Instead, the feminist critic may assume that the image of women in these plays represent a fiction of women constructed by the patriarchy (Case, 1985, p. 318).

This notion that the representation of women in performance contexts most likely began with an image constructed by men, for male audiences, and was somewhat removed from portrayals based on biological women, is key to how we understand what defines drag in the contemporary world.

Renaissance drama dropped the masks but the tradition of men in women's roles remained. A recent production of *Twelfth Night* by an all-male cast at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, starring Mark Rylance as Olivia and directed by Tim Carroll, attempts to reconstruct the original staging and illuminates how an all-male cast functions with particular purpose in the comedies (OpusArte, 2003). Given the plot, the delivery of the text is already imbued with innuendo based on cross-dressing; however it could be argued that when all of the female characters are played by men, interactions between the characters and the play of innuendo are made even more farcical, at least to a contemporary audience. In parallel with Western theatre, men playing women (or images of women crafted within the patriarchy), were also a common occurrence in the highly stylised traditions of Japanese Noh and Kubuki, and Chinese Theatre (Baker, 1994).

The etymology of the word 'drag', as it pertains to performance practice, is not entirely clear, however Baker, referencing Eric Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, suggests that it possibly emerged in the mid to late 1800s as back stage slang to describe the costume skirt or petticoat of male actors playing female characters, which would have dragged along the ground behind them. If an actor was wearing one of these female costumes, they may have been said to be 'in drag' (Baker, 1994; Partridge, 1984). During a conversation with two drag performers, I cited this origin for the word and encountered disagreement. They insisted that drag was in fact an acronym to mean 'doing role as a girl'. I have found no evidence in the literature to suggest this is anything more than a rumour, however

the language of this rumoured acronym does much to describe what drag is, especially if we consider drag as 'doing girl' as opposed to 'being girl'.

The MTF dragged subject on stage has had many faces throughout history. From masked figures in the Greek dramas, Shakespeare's boy actresses, and the grotesque pantomime dames, the early-mid 1900s female impersonator who always made sure audiences knew he was a man (and a straight one at that), to the rise of the gay male drag queen which is inclusive of exaggerated feminine performances, but also presents a wide spectrum of aestheticism such as genderqueer presentation and performances where the male body is intended to be obvious. Esther Newton's ethnography of American drag queens *Mother Camp* (Newton, 1972) and New York's drag balls featured in Jennie Livingston's documentary *Paris is Burning* (Livingston, 1991) are examples of the importance of drag practice to marginalised LGBT communities. In *Paris is Burning* we can see where the practice of Voguing was born, and observe that folks were not only performing an idealised gender, but something which makes clear and poignant intersections with class, race, ethnicity and sexuality (Livingston, 1991).

In England, when women were finally permitted to perform alongside men during the Restoration, their identity as an actress was, for a long time, synonymous with prostitution and men continued to play other female roles (Baker, 1994; Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Pullen, 2005; Rosenthal, 1993). Women's dragged performances as men, both theatrical and social, have a far more modern history and receive less scholarly attention (Rupp et al., 2010), with the exception of noted figures such as Sarah Bernhardt. Although we would now generally refer to a cis-woman playing a male character as drag, in the past this was more commonly referred to as a breeches role. Much like the possible origin of drag, which refers to the skirt, 'breeches roles' signify the wearing of men's pants by women. The contemporary practice of drag kinging gained popularity after the publication of Judith Butler's theories on gender performativity and Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity*. Kinging troupes, in the USA in particular, formed around intellectual communities engaged in gender and queer theorizing, often associated with and/or supported by a university (Troka et al, 2002; Shapiro 2007). Eve Shapiro's study of the now defunct drag king performance collective 'The Disposable Toy Boys' examines "one context in which drag king performances did constitute a destabilizing force in terms of gender" (Shapiro, 2007,

p. 253), and she concludes that participation in oppositional communities, such as drag troupes, "can be a significant source of identity change" (Shapiro, 2007, p. 253). A noticeable difference regarding how queen and king performances are historically located relates to how performers are educated and engaged academically with queer theory. While a large body of literature suggests that drag queening emerges from some of the poorest and most marginalised communities, kinging is primarily rooted in feminist activism and gender play of university educated women. Faux queening offers an intriguing intersection of these two contrasting strands of drag history. The faux queens involved in this study were all university educated and were familiar with key theories of feminist/queer/gender studies such as gender performativity and the Kinsey Scale[30], however all (with the exception of Kentucky Fried Woman) were apprenticed into the drag scene by gay-identified MTF drag queens.

Over the past decade, versions of drag performance have appeared in the theatrical/social sphere which might complicate what it means to 'drag' at all. Some performers are beginning to shift the conventional meanings of drag such that drag may no longer exclusively identify an individual who dresses in the attire of the gender identity which appears opposite to their own for theatrical purposes (see for example Shapiro, 2007). Taking into account new drag performances by cis-women who consciously and affectionately parody femininity in a similar manner to drag queens, drag might be better understood as a deliberate performance of exaggerated behaviour and appearance which purposefully draws on notions of gender construction and performativity, with less relevance to one's biological sex. Some performers create the recognisable aesthetics of male drag queens on female-identified bodies, blending gender appearance so that a woman might appear as a man trying to appear as a woman. Other performers intentionally push queer aesthetics in an attempt to move beyond stable gender categories. The aesthetics of many drag performers can be better understood as queer creaturization or othering, however in the case of cis-female drag queens, the necessity of cross-dressing in the definition of drag appears to remain relatively constant. It is difficult to differentiate between what is drag and what is acting, because acting is inherent to drag and

[30] "The Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale, sometimes referred to as the "Kinsey Scale," was developed by Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues Wardell Pomeroy and Clyde Martin in 1948, in order to account for research findings that showed people did not fit into neat and exclusive heterosexual or homosexual categories" ("Kinsey's Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale" 2015).

gender performance is inherent to acting. Often it is problematic for people to think about women performing female characters as drag, when such a performance can be also astutely described as 'only acting'. What seems to be important to cis-female drag queens is that there is a kind of double cross-dressing in process. That is, that female-bodied drag queens appear to impose a type of female aesthetic on their bodies which is more commonly associated with that of gay male drag queens. The product is a woman who performs a hyperbolised caricature of a man's (predominately gay man's) hyperbolised, caricatured version of a woman. We are not necessarily seeing a woman performing an entirely female idea; rather a woman performing a gay male idea of a woman (the drag queen) which is then recontextualised by the female performing subject. As a result of this often necessary element of cross-dressing in drag, this chapter is not suggesting that cis-female drag queens altogether collapse the notion of drag into acting or vice versa or both. Cross-dressing, however layered and nuanced, remains at the centre of how drag performance is understood and defined.

Labelling Cis-Female Drag Queens: Problematics, Limitations and Productive Potentials

Performances by cis-women in female drag have been documented in academia by Schacht (2003), Kumbier (2003), Devitt (2006), Ferreday (2007), (Shapiro, 2007), Taylor (2007) and Rupp et al. (2010). However, all make differing discursive choices regarding the language they use to label performers. Schacht implies that all women who perform this iteration of drag identify their sexuality exclusively as lesbian; explicitly labelling cis-female performers of femininity in a drag setting as 'lesbian drag queens' (Schacht, 2003). Ferreday and Taylor have briefly noted that female drag performance is not always bound to lesbian identity, but do not offer an example of a performer who sits outside that framework (Ferreday, 2007; Taylor, 2007). During my own research into the cultural implications of these types of performers, as outlined in this exegesis, I have found that cis-women in female drag are not exclusively lesbian. Instead, women who identify with a range of sexuality identities, including heterosexuality, are involved in drag performance as female queens on queer stages. Drag performance is not limited to LGBT identifying individuals and therefore it is problematic to couch the dominant labels in terms of sexuality. In addition to sexuality, it is important to address other tensions inherent in

the various terms and consider some of the limitations, taking into account performer's self-definitions and considering what it means if academic labels are counter to, or divorced from, those within the culture.

Bio Queen and the Trouble with Authenticity

In the current academic literature, the dominant label for cis-women who perform female drag is 'bio queen' (see, for example, Devitt, 2006; Ferreday, 2007;; Rupp et al.,2010; Shapiro, 2007; Taylor, 2007). In my experience conducting interviews and attending performances in San Francisco between 2013 and 2015, bio queen is rarely used by performers in that context. Fauxnique, a well-known San Francisco queen, jokingly commented to me that bio queen seemed a much better name for organic yoghurt or a compost system (M. Jenkinson, Personal Communication 11/09/13). In a key article, Taylor notes that bio queen has evolved from an older label: 'bio faux queen', which is a further abbreviation of 'biologically faux drag queen'. She suggests biologically faux drag queen, as a label for cis-female drag queen performers, inappropriately represents them due to potential symbolic implications which may result when a person is labelled 'biologically faux'. In reference to the Bio/Femme Queen Manifesto presented at IDKE.3[31] in 2004, Taylor states,

> The international drag king and queen community cautioned the term bio faux queen, identifying instead as bio queens, because it felt by naming this behaviour as faux we are suggesting that it is an imitation of true, authentic, natural and superior behaviour, and thus a lesser of a binary dualism (Taylor, 2007, p. 7).

This concern continues to reverberate in the drag community in San Francisco. I met Vesper Synd, a cis-woman, who in 2013-14 was performing regularly on Californian drag stages. When Vesper first started female drag in 2013, she was not nervous about performing but anxious that audiences might not accept her as a 'real' drag queen alongside her MTF counterparts. Vesper had experienced negativity from audiences who told her, "You can't do this" or, "You're not a real drag queen". These comments do not stop her from performing drag, but they do affect the choices she makes when labelling herself. She explained to me that she tries to use the term

[31] IDKE stands for The International Drag King Extravaganza. Taylor references a Bio/Femme Queen Manifesto presented by performers at the event, and posted online.

'drag queen' as much as possible when talking with other people; it is often when a person takes issue with her using drag queen that she moves onto different labels. Although she commented that 'faux queen' is the best term for her if she cannot use drag queen, she takes issue with the inference of falseness that accompanies 'faux'. The Oxford Dictionaries Online define faux as an adjective meaning "made in imitation; artificial" and "not genuine; fake or false" (Oxford Dictionaries Online, n.d.). Vesper, who strongly feels she is not faking anything, does not want audiences to make such an implication (V. Synd, Personal Communication 19/09/13).

Cara Couture, has a similar story. Cara won the 2013 Faux Queen Pageant, after two years of public drag life. For many years before her first public performance, Cara had been dressing in drag privately for her own enjoyment. Her body is short and curvy and she explained to me how difficult it has been for her to be accepted in the community as a drag queen because of her body shape. Conscious of how her body does not represent the ideal standards personified by toweringly tall and thin drag queens, Cara's goal has been to be 'mistaken' for a drag queen. When in drag, she does not want to be read as cis-female but rather to pass[32] as a MTF drag queen; she therefore uses the label 'drag queen' most often. From Cara's perspective, cis-female drag queens are looked down upon and considered invalid in the drag world. Since her first public performance, it has taken Cara nearly two years to feel comfortable calling herself a 'faux queen' (M. Baker, Personal Communication 22/09/13).

While 'bio queen' may not be a term widely used by the women involved in my research, Taylor's concern that 'faux' positions cis-female drag queens as the lesser of a binary dualism is echoed in their discussions with me. Taylor draws upon the arguments of Devitt by claiming that the 'bio queens' on whose behalf she speaks, "demonstrate that gender itself is performative and not limited by or attached to the body" (Taylor, 2007, p. 9). This is a position commonly shared by those who have written about drag queens and drag kings*;* most notably Judith Butler in her discussions on gender performativity in *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1999). Annamarie Jagose notes how Butler locates drag performance practice as "an effective cultural model for deconstructing those commonly held assumptions that privilege certain

[32] To pass and passing are terms commonly associated with the transgender community. For example, a trans-man is said to be passing if they function in society as a man, without question. In the case of Cara Couture, she uses the term 'pass' to mean appearing and functioning in a drag setting as an apparently male-to-female drag queen, without question.

genders and sexualities by attributing ‘naturalness’ and originality’ to them” (Jagose, 1996, p. 86). In other words, Butler has noted that drag performance is one way that we can begin to tangibly understand gender performativity, inasmuch as this performance practice can potentially disrupt notions of essentialist gender. However, drag performance does not necessarily offer definitive proof of gender performativity, which is a far more nuanced and complex process; rather it offers a theatrical and performance-based way to understand the basics of gender performativity. Taylor posits the use of ‘bio faux queen’ as removed from Butler’s theory of gender performativity, while suggesting that ‘bio queen’ maintains this important link to queer theory; helping to frame cis-female drag queens as queer. Bio queen, however, is also problematic, particularly because it foregrounds the performers biologically sexed body.

The ‘bio’ in bio queen is effectively being used as shorthand for biological. It is not that bio queen contradicts an idea that performers present gender identities that are not attached to, nor limited by the body. It is that bio queen is very specifically signposting that the performers’ sexed body is integral to their ‘removed’ and ‘un-limited’ gender performance. The signalling is so specific that there is no space for the inclusion of transgender or intersex performers. As Taylor aptly notes, there are some who agree that ‘bio’ is simply too troubled and too closely linked with static genetics, particularly those who are closely associated with transgender folks (Taylor, 2007).

Concerns over the implications of the label ‘bio queen’ were raised by the women I interviewed. Kentucky Fried Woman talked with me on several occasions about her experiences with labels and how her opinions towards them have been transformed over the years. She was featured heavily in Devitt’s published writing about bio queens in 2006, and I interviewed her seven years later. When Kentucky Fried Woman first performed female drag she was with her best friend at a talent show produced by a drag king performance collective The Disposable Boy Toys. Kentucky Fried Woman and her friend, who were essentially performing as drag queens, felt they had no idea what to call themselves and neither did the drag kings who sat on the judging panel of the competition. Eventually, Kentucky Fried Woman learned of bio queens and used this term for her drag. She participated in Devitt’s research during the time when she was using bio queen to identify her performance work in

female drag. When first introduced to the term ‘faux queen’, Kentucky Fried Woman says she did not like it, and was actively adverse. At the time, Kentucky Fried Woman would have agreed with Taylor that ‘faux’ implied an inherent falseness which positioned cis-female drag queens as less real or less authentic than MTF drag queens. Eventually, however, Kentucky Fried Woman was made aware of contrary arguments which foregrounded the idea that the term ‘bio queen’ signposts biology in a way which excludes transgender and intersex performers. She explained to me how she was involved in conversations with transgender individuals who convinced her that ‘bio queen’ was no longer the best flag to fly. This did not leave Kentucky Fried Woman feeling any more comfortable with ‘faux queen’ either, until she was introduced to the idea that ‘faux’ could mean a radical engagement in the artifices of gender presentation in order to begin to expose them. When I last spoke to her, Kentucky Fried Woman told me she no longer had any problem with the term ‘faux queen’, however I did note that in our conversation she would often simply say ‘kinging’ and ‘queening’, rather than add any extra words which may complicate matters (Kentucky Fried Woman, Personal Communication, 08/09/13).

My difficulty with the idea that ‘bio queen’ somehow solves the problem of ‘faux’ and the inference that MTF drag queens are more authentic, is that it does not; because Taylor’s noted problem with ‘faux’ and assumptions of authenticity are based on a mistaken belief. How can a man in drag reveal the fluidity and constructedness of gender while also appearing natural and authentic in comparison to a cis-woman in female drag? This logic, however, does not negate the fact that cis-female drag queens are often situated as less authentic or less ‘real’ than MTF drag queens in drag/queer culture (which is implicated by drag’s theatrical history), and hence why ‘bio queen’ may have initially seemed like worthier terminology for performers.

The dichotomy of real and false in drag performance would appear to be flawed logic. To use the words of Monique Jenkinson (aka Fauxnique), cis-female drag queens are fake versions of fake things (M. Jenkinson, Personal Communication 11/09/13). Cis-female drag queens reveal the constructed nature of gender as much as male drag queens do, and male drag queens are no more ‘real’ as a result of their biology. Drag performers, especially queens, often use the slang word ‘realness’ to judge each other in performance (see for example Bailey, 2013). The invocation of

the word ‘real’ and the subversion of its implications with the addition of ‘ness’ is important. At the 2014 Faux Queen Pageant I shared a dressing room with Bea Dazzler. She had decided to wear a silver jump suit and a long black wig parted down the centre. Her intention was to appear like the editor of a high-end fashion magazine, given that the theme of the pageant was ‘Fashion Faux-wards’ and all of the advertising media had been designed to imitate the cover of *Vogue Magazine*. The result, however, was a striking resemblance to Cher in the 1970s. After many of the other performers remarked on her likeness to Cher, Bea Dazzler said, “I suppose I will just have to embrace my Cher realness” (T. Connell, Personal Communication 06/09/14).

I have experienced realness as a purposefully tongue in cheek word; similar to if you were to say real-‘ish’. It refers to the resemblance you may have to a particular celebrity or image of a cultural stock character. It also refers to your ability to suspend disbelief in performance of that persona. In Jenny Livingstone’s *Paris is Burning*, the ballroom participants battle over realness in categories such as ‘business man’, and other images of privileged white, straight, middle-class society; access to which the subjects of the documentary are systematically denied (Livingston, 1991). Realness, as I understand it, refers to performing all of the tropes of an image or persona while maintaining that everything you are doing is a performance; it is a suspension of disbelief. Realness is not to be confused with passing, which is more often associated with transgender identity and is accepted as performative, but not a deliberate performance rooted in theatricality. The subversion of real by the addition of ‘ness’ by drag performers helps us to see drag as an originally false pursuit; I am not being real, I am serving realness. With the understanding that drag performed by male drag queens is always already fake (it is realness, not real), Fauxnique’s explanation of cis-female drag queens as fake versions of fake things becomes more accurate than any notion of male authenticity maintaining power in a dichotomy of male drag queens versus female drag queens.

The possibility that cis-female drag queens are framed as inauthentic in drag culture may be linked with real world examples of drag hierarchy. Schacht analysed the situational power of men and women in all iterations of drag presented at the Imperial Sovereign Court Spokane (ISCS) (a popular competitive drag pageantry system in the USA). He concluded that cis-women in drag as women (his label is

'lesbian drag queens') sit at the bottom of a power hierarchy, dominated by male drag queens. He states, "the gay drag queens most typically try to do power over others. Obviously lesbian drag kings also try to exercise power over the other lesbians" (Schacht, 2003, p. 94). Schacht refers here to his observation that drag kings tend to subordinate cis-women in female drag (the 'other' lesbians) in order to gain situational power in the ISCS community, similar to the way he has observed male drag queens exercise male power over drag kings. He concedes that despite the unconventional nature of the ISCS community,

> it appears that sometimes the only way that the oppressed can experience affirmation, status and esteem in the hegemony of our present hierarchical society is by finding someone else – another group in the matrices of categorical inequality – to oppress (Schacht, 2003, pp. 94-95).

It appears to be that reasons to choose 'bio queen' as a label for cis-female drag queens was originally grounded in a desire to discourage the type of hierarchy that Schacht observed in the ISCS community. As Taylor notes, faux queen was, and as I note often still is, seen to perpetuate and encourage drag hierarchies where female performers are defined by lack or being somehow less than 'real' drag queens. However, as I have noted and will continue to discuss in later sections of this chapter, the concerns regarding 'faux' appear to be misleading and the way that 'bio queen' foregrounds biological sex as imperative to 'removed' and 'not limited' gender performance is problematic. Both terms then, are occasionally abandoned and a number of alternatives exist in academia and social/cultural fields.

Some Alternatives to Bio Queen

Other, more fluid labels have been employed in both academic and social contexts; and these can similarly be viewed as problematic and productive in some respects. 'Bio queen' as a preferred label for cis-women who perform female drag is most prevalent in academic writing; however alternative labels have been employed in published articles without discussions of their symbolic, political or cultural meanings. As discussed above, Taylor briefly notes an opposition to the label 'bio queen' by the transgender community, and she explains that the trans-people involved in her work prefer the term 'fem drag queen'. Other terms evident in social

and academic fields include: 'exploding femininity', 'queenly femininity', 'female-to-female drag queen', 'female female impersonator', and 'glam drag'.[33]

New York City burlesque performer The World Famous Bob[34] identifies as a 'female female impersonator', declaring her roots in San Francisco and New York drag. The 'bio' in bio queen generates a problematic relationship between gendered performance and binary-sexed bodies. 'Female female impersonator' and the similar term 'female-to-female drag queen' may produce comparable associations, but with more potential for fluidity and play. Similar to 'bio queen', the term 'female-to-female drag queen' anchors meaning to the performing subject's body, but not with the same precise and fixed signposting with regards to chromosomal biology. 'Female female impersonator' potentially also tips the impersonator angle onto traditional drag queens, pointing to notions of double drag and the idea that the cis-female drag queen is impersonating an impersonator who is in no way more or less authentic. This label aligns in some sense with Fauxnique's notion of fake versions of fake things, and can be considered a productive label for performers. However, it is also possible that 'female female impersonator' could be read as a mere impersonator of 'real' drag queens, resonating with the concern over hierarchies discussed above. It is possible, indeed highly likely, that performers who use terms like 'female-to-female drag queen' and 'female female impersonator' do so with a wink and a nudge and that the play of these labels can be considered camp humour, as well as potentially foregrounding bodies that are gender flexible.

In 1995, a San Francisco performance group, *The Klubstitute Kollective*, headed by Diet Popsitute, held the first competitive pageant for cis-women in female drag in the Bay Area. They called it *The Fabulous She-Male Impersonators Contest*, and according to my interview with co-producer Ruby Toosday, the intent was to promote inclusivity for cis-female performers in their community (R. Toosday, Personal Communication, 19/09/13). The title length is an uncomfortable mouth full, it uses 'She-Male' which is now a recognised trans-phobic slur, and the word 'impersonator' is not particularly playful but used more as a definitive statement

[33] Devitt uses the terms 'queenly femininity' and 'exploding femininity' in reference to performances by Kentucky Fried Woman and the Queen Bees. Kumbier invokes notions of glam when describing her queen persona Red Pearl, and terms such as female female impersonator are used by burlesque performers who are inspired by drag queen performances (Devitt, 2006; Kumbier, 2003).
[34] Personal website for The World Famous Bob: http://theworldfamousbob.com/

which appears to present cis-female drag queens as less authentic impersonators of MTF drag queens. After the successful launch of the first pageant in 1995, Ruby claims to have coined the term ‘faux queen’, through which there appears to be a gradual move away from foregrounding biological sex when labelling cis-women in drag and a move towards playful labels which prioritise camp and queer potential.

‘Exploding femininity’ and ‘queenly femininity’ do seem to avoid links with biology by playfully maintaining gender/biological sex ambiguity. Nevertheless, the terms arguably remain troubled by virtue of the way that their explicit reference to femininity calls into question how femininity might be defined. This could be a productive problem. A solution may be to consider ‘exploding femininity’ as a means to critique, challenge and open up space for new understandings of any and all definitions of the feminine in a similar way to Donna Haraway’s ‘exploding objects’ (Schneider, 2005). Schneider offers insight into Haraway’s exploding subjects/objects:

> From the early work on primates to the recent work on dogs and companion species, Haraway practices a kind of material deconstruction in which she proceeds by setting forth the ways that objects/subjects are locatable in such historically specific networks of connection... This is not a disarticulation... but rather a specification of the details of that articulatedness – an opening up – and its implications for how we might understand the once-seen-as-essential, autonomous, and/or separate entities (Schneider, 2005, p. 162).

Women performing female drag, especially those who employ elements of parody, may be in a position to use their performances to locate and point to how iterations of femininity (particularly drag queen femininity) are connected to and emerge historically from culture. Parody, as an alienation technique, may be particularly capable of such an act by allowing the performing subject and audience to step outside the frame of realism. Furthermore, it may be possible to point to particular cultural, political and historical connections or locales in the work, if such an agenda is the performer’s intent.

With the above considerations in mind, ‘exploding femininity’ may contain more loaded ambiguity and point to more valuable objectives in performance than

‘queenly femininity’ might. Although the term ‘queenly femininity’ appears to draw on drag’s historical roots in conventional cross-dressed, cross-gendered performance and camp sensibilities without eliminating cis-gender women, trans-women and intersex individuals from the scenario, it does not clearly allude to the potential for cultural, political or historical agendas embedded in performance.

‘Fem [or femme] drag queen’ is interesting for its incorporation of the ‘femme’. Elizabeth Galewski has published on femme identity construction for lesbian women, predominantly with regard to the USA in the 1980s and 90s. Her articles explain the unnecessarily difficult cultural and political position of lesbian women who identify with relatively conventional notions of femininity. She focuses her attention on the kind of radical feminist thought that heavily criticised feminine-identifying women and shamed them by arguing that showing any sign of conventional femininity served the patriarchy, submitted to oppression, and represented idealised heterosexual male desire (Galewski, 2005; 2008). Galewski explains that many women felt empowered by identification with female masculinity (or butch identity), while others identified more closely with conventional femininity yet wanted to open up a space where feminine women could also be queer (Galewski, 2005; 2008). From this cultural anxiety arose notions of the ‘femme’ that originate in conventional femininity and are transformed into a more visibly queer space. What might constitute queer femme identity is not straightforward to define; and in its queerness perhaps should not be. However, one might tentatively venture that for some, femme may mean lesbian and queer identified women who are dressing conventionally or in normative feminine fashion; and/or femme identity can be a visible extension of conventional feminine appearance. This latter understanding of femme is sometimes referred to as ‘hyper-femininity’ or ‘high-femme’, and is aesthetically similar to the styling of gay male drag queens. Notions of high-femme are closely linked with cis-women in female drag, and may help to explain why some academics, such as Schacht, retain a link between sexuality and drag by labelling performers ‘lesbian drag queens’. Femme-identifying women have been heavily criticised socially and in academia. As Galewski writes:

> Where the butch came to be lauded as the ‘visible,’ ‘public,’ and hence ‘political’ face of same-sex desire, the femme was implicitly

> conflated with weakness, passivity, and even complicity in the face of oppression (Galewski, 2005 p. 187).

Unfortunately, as Galewski acknowledges, much of the writing figuring the femme as a cultural identity is antagonistic towards heterosexual-identifying women. She asserts that such hostility is unnecessary, unfair, and a blatant disregard of the contribution that heterosexual-identifying women have made to feminist studies and gender play.

For the term 'femme drag queen' to be widely understood as meaning cis-woman performing female drag and not man in female drag, audiences and the wider community might need to be aware of the cultural/political meanings of femme itself.[35] Furthermore, use of the femme prefix creates very strong links between female drag and lesbian sexuality. This may result in negative consequences for heterosexual women who might feel that their sexuality excludes them from participating in female drag and gender play.

Finally, 'glam drag' is used in an article by Kumbier to describe her drag queen persona 'Red Pearl' (Kumbier, 2003). Kumbier discusses her male and female drag personas in her paper, and in that context we might assume that 'glam drag' means 'girl drag'. In a broader context, however, there seems no reason that a drag king persona cannot also be considered glam. For example, a drag king performer drawing inspiration from pop-culture figures such as Freddie Mercury, David Bowie or any other male glam-rock icon could be described in this way. Male appearance does not negate aesthetic notions of glam, and therefore the term seems too ambiguous to generate meaningful value for performers searching for an appropriately political, symbolic or cultural label.

As I have shown, with the exception of a discussion of faux queen, there are problematics and productive potentials with regards to all the labels evident in scholarly works and social fields which refer to cis-female drag queens; perhaps with the exception of 'exploding femininity' which I believe may point to the potential for investigations towards the cultural groundings of femininity (particularly drag queen

[35] In comparison to femme, butch drag queens are socially considered to be drag queens who dress in female clothing and wear feminine makeup, but also retain certain particularly masculine traits such as a beard.

femininity) by performers. However, 'exploding femininity' does not equate to the other labels. It is not a descriptive term for a cis-female drag queen, but an approach to understanding the gender play at work in these types of performances. Regarding the descriptive terms, key issues are concerned with labels that (i) clearly point to a binary sexed body in a fixed manner; (ii) position cis-female drag queens as culturally less authentic or less real than male drag queens; (iii) link drag performance by cis-women with lesbian identity in an inflexible manner; or (iv) offer something deliberately ambiguous which drains women's positionality in drag culture of political significance. The terms examined so far reach an impasse, so it may be more productive to look at the performers themselves.

Faux Queen/ Drag Queen

In my experiences, 'faux queen' has become the dominant term for cis-women in female drag, however many of the performers involved in my study prefer to be called a drag queen like their male counterparts. For some, faux queen feels unnecessarily gender specific, in a way similar to the use of 'waitress' or 'actress'. This is a criticism easily made of any other name for a cis-female drag queen which is not the term that men use for themselves. It is not so much a concern about 'faux queen' as a label, but a wider language practice which demarcates women and men in the workplace. An interpretation of faux queen as gender explicit is a very specific, historically located reading, when really the only word denoting femaleness in 'faux queen' and 'drag queen' is in fact the 'queen'. There are several ways we can interpret 'queen' including in the royal sense, which is absolutely gender specific or in the sense of a 'drama queen', suggestive of feminine, childish, hysterical and diva-like behaviour. Drama queen is applied to all iterations of gender, but seems to have a particularly emasculating effect on men as it is far more suggestive of stereotyped female behaviour. There is also the use of 'queen' in the context of drag which can also be understood as an idiomatic term for gay man. Similarity can be found with the racial slur 'rice queen'[36] which David Henry Hwang mentions in his afterward to *M. Butterfly*.

[36] Additionally, there are many other racial/ethnic preferences by gay men which have developed similar derogatory slurs such as 'dinge queen' (white men looking of black men), 'potato queens' (Asian men looking for white men), and 'snow queens' (black men looking for white men).

> Gay friends have told me of a derogatory term used in their community: 'Rice Queen' – a gay Caucasian man primarily attracted to Asians. In these relationships, the Asian virtually always plays the role of the 'woman'; the Rice Queen, culturally and sexually, is the 'man' (Hwang 1989, p. 98).

'Queen' has a very specific meaning in the gay community and in this context 'drag queen' literally means gay man in drag. Consequently, it is confusing to use the term 'queen' in reference to a woman (regardless of her sexuality), in a specifically queer context. If queen means gay man, and a woman in female drag is calling herself a 'faux' queen, a situation arises where faux queen can be misinterpreted as suggesting that women might think of themselves as gay men in women's bodies.

The last thing that I or any of the performers I have met are trying to say is that our experiences are the same as those of gay men, or that we are gay men with female bodies. A reading such as that is entirely incorrect; however it is part of the risk of using the term 'faux queen'. I met a man when I was on holidays, who asked me about my performance work. I told him I was a faux queen and he was taken aback briefly, trying to understand what that meant. Eventually he said, "Is it because they're straight? Is that what makes them faux?" For anyone using the word queen, there is, or at least can be a situated meaning of gay maleness attached. A straight cis-female pop-star performing heightened femininity is not called a queen; she is a Diva. It seems there is a difference. A problem with faux queen might not be that it is gender specific (as all of the terms discussed in this chapter are); it may be that the meaning of the word queen is changing or has difference resonances in different contexts. I don't believe the problem is with 'faux', but with how it interacts with 'queen'.

Faux queen was a term allegedly coined by an MTF drag queen named Ruby Toosday and has been taken up by many members of the wider drag queen community in San Francisco and elsewhere. Because this term has been embraced, to some extent, by drag communities, I perceive a different meaning in the usage of the word queen. I think in all of the invocations of 'queen' in academic articles and social fields which are referring to cis-female drag queens, the term 'queen' is not always intended as an idiom for gay man (although that may be a weighty part of its

etymology). Queen, I believe, is intended as a symbol of hyper-femininity: the aesthetics and performance codes of heightened glamour which have been developed, deployed and made popular by MTF drag performers and the glamorous cis-women (the Divas) they impersonate and riff off. Queen, in this instance can be thought of as a mode of performing hyper-femininities.

Like many of my interview subjects, I prefer the term 'faux queen' rather than any other because of its general ambiguity towards sexuality and notions of the natural body; but particularly for its explicit reference to artifice. Personally, I enjoy and celebrate the falseness of the faux queen.

I met with Monique Jenkinson, also known as Fauxnique, and asked her how she would explain faux queen to someone who had never heard it before. She noted that when people ask her what sort of performance work she does, she simply says, "I do drag." This is often understood to mean drag king drag, and then Fauxnique has the task of explaining herself. She told me that she starts straightforwardly with, "It's a lady drag queen" and, "I usually say I'm the fake version of a fake thing." If people are open to accepting that, she will bring faux queen into the conversation (M. Jenkinson, Personal Communication, 11/09/13). Fauxnique's fake version of a fake thing, as I have previously discussed, alludes to the inauthenticity or artifice of drag queens and gender performativity more generally. Like a Butlerian concept of gender, drag is itself already false, already something 'not real'. Further the femininity performed by drag queens is also false insofar as it is a non-essentialist construction. With each level of female performativity and performance (feminine gender normativity to drag queen to faux queen), we might read progressive additions and iterations of fakery while at the same time notice how this performance might work to expose the artifice and constructedness of the first subject and all those which come after it.

In my own creative practice I experiment with ways to alter my appearance using wigs, makeup, glitter, rhinestones, scrapbooking paper glued to my face and body, and corsets and padding. I like to make myself appear both indulgently feminine and overtly unnatural. I play on popular aesthetics of the drag queen to blend my gender appearance so that spectators might be unsure of my biological sex and my out of drag gender identity. Faux queen drag represents a freedom to explore identity

multiplicity and to break away from normative appearances, allowing for the creative exploration of desires and fantasies. There is no one true or authentic me, only versions; all of which are products of cultural construction, some of which are fantasies. None of my versions represent a true or authentic self; each is a construction and an expression of desire, and all my versions are tangled together within a complex sense of identity.

Monique refers to Fauxnique as an instrument, a filter or way of performing and not a persona. She explained to me, "She [Fauxnique] is not separate from me" (M. Jenkinson, Personal Communication, 11/09/13). Her words have influenced how I have come to understand my own drag; which I also like to think of as a filter, similar to the coloured gel on a stage light. When I dress up as Agorafauxbia I do not change or become another person, because I carry her around with me all of the time. I do, however, see myself differently, as do other people, in response to the significant external changes which reveal a version of me, or a part of myself, that is facilitated by the filter of drag.

This reference to faux as false has resulted in criticism amongst performers and scholars, some of whom say they are offended by the implication of artifice in their performances and appearance. One possibility is that faux queens who are adverse to inferences of artifice are concerned about being subordinated by men because they are women, as a result of deeply embedded community boundaries and politics. It is quite odd to think of drag in itself as not being fake; what is at stake over the sense of falsity here is an inability to equally participate or be part of the community around drag. The question is whether this arises more from traditional gendered binaries privileging male bonds, or links with politics of gay male communities, or even the long history of male dominance of theatricality and theatre practice. It is possible that all of these factors play a role.

Drag performance, in any sense, is an explicit presentation of the faux. It can reveal the spuriousness of societal assumptions regarding transcendental or natural gender identity by demonstrating its constructedness. Drag flaunts and embraces artifice through the use of exaggerated makeup, wigs, false breasts, false eyelashes, pencilled eyebrows, strap-on penises and glued-on facial hair. Drag performers alter the pitch and intonation of their voice to suit their drag persona, they commonly lip-sync to

recorded music rather than sing live, and female drag performers will tightly bind their waist to achieve an hour glass figure. Drag performers do not present the body without false additions.

But why use faux queen at all? If most of the performers I spoke with would prefer to be called drag queens, why not just use this term? Faux queens are drag queens, but they are not gay men in women's clothing. Unavoidably, faux queens are different from MTF drag queens as much as they/we might endeavour to appear and behave the same in performance contexts. In comparison to drag queens and as a result of the straight/gay divide, straight-identified faux queens hold situational power and privilege, and additionally all faux queens potentially hold cis-gender privilege over MTF drag queens. Faux queens interviewed for this research commented that they acknowledge the ease with which they can buy female clothing for their performance work, and that this is often a more awkward and difficult activity for MTF drag queens. For me, when I am Agorafauxbia, I choose to use 'faux queen' rather than 'drag queen' because I feel that it might acknowledge to LGBT faux queens, drag queens, drag kings, and the queer community more generally, that I try to be cognisant and critical of the privileges afforded to me as a straight and cis-gendered person. (Whether or not straight-identified cis-women should do drag is another contentious issue and not the topic of this chapter). Additionally, it is likely that some individuals might read faux queens as a deliberate appropriation of queer culture which is inappropriate. Rather than raising issues of straight privilege, a number of my interview participants were concerned about queer cultural appropriation and also encountered fear surrounding the potential for a diminished market for MTF drag queens, who now might feel they are competing with 'real girls' for tips.

As Vesper Synd has said to me, "We are not trying to take over drag queens' positions. There will always be a place in the world for men who dress as women; we just want to be a part of that world" (Vesper Synd, Personal Communication, 19/09/13). Frida K Hole, a San Francisco faux queen, explained to me how she becomes frustrated when audiences assume female drag is easier for her because of her sexed body. Frida feels that precisely because she is a woman, her drag needs to be "bigger, badder, more garish, and more en pointe than the boys", to be accepted by the audiences she encounters (L. Tucker, Personal Communication, 10/09/13).

Conclusion

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, there are a number of conflicting labels that scholars and performers use to describe cis-women in female drag. One of the reasons why there are so many differing labels may be because when women parody female stereotypes and/or perform hyper-feminised personae, there is confusion about what is intended and what is being signified. Is this kind of performance a form of self-hatred or feminine hatred? Is it pandering to patriarchal desires, an expression of queerness, or does it somehow work to radically reclaim femininity for feminist women? This chapter does not claim to answer such questions, but rather to recognise that discursive challenges have arisen because all labels for cis-women in female drag are in some way or another problematic; they consistently fail. In some sense this failure might point to the queer potential of cis-female drag queens insofar as failure narratives are significant to queer identity. Cis-female drag queens are never quite able to be what they are, and never quite able to be what they are not. Faux queens deliberately perform exaggerated queer/hyper-feminine codes and tropes which engage poignantly with queer notions of gender construction and performativity; and they have the potential to do this in a way which challenges and complicates expectations that drag practice is predicated on traditional notions of cross-dressing.

Faux queen drag, as I prefer to call it, is a very new iteration of drag arising from the cultural anxieties of feminine-identifying women who are also relatively well versed in feminist and queer theory. For this reason, I believe it is unlikely that performers and scholars might ever agree on one label in the way that the terms ‘drag queen’ and ‘drag king’ have solidified. The labels evident in scholarly writing are themselves an attempt at articulating what it means to be a cis-woman in female drag and it is important that we pay attention to the symbolic, political and cultural implications of the labels we choose for ourselves and our performance work. We must consider the contradictions and the inferences of the term we choose to settle on, and decide if we are happy to associate its symbolic properties with our own performance work and our identity as performers.

I once attended an event for pride month as a faux queen. It was a midweek event, so after work and my physical therapy session, I had little time to get ready. My clothes

were not as ‘draggy’ as I would normally like them to be, and my makeup and wig application was rushed. Before the event, I met with a friend and some people who were part of her network. One of these people asked me, very politely and with consideration of my feelings, “What do you think that faux queens, these women in female drag, really bring to queer culture? Do they really add anything new?” This was a fair question, and one that I felt was rooted in a concern that cis-women might be jumping on the band wagon of drag to have a little frivolous fun. I took a moment to think; this question had been posed to me before, framed in aggression and I had thought many times how I might answer it again if given the chance. I replied, “I think what faux queens do is further the notion that gender is artificial; a construction. I think that drag queens do this too, but faux queens show that drag is everywhere, not rooted in what has now become a conventional idea of cross-dressing; that is: men dressing as women and vice versa. Faux queens show us that it doesn’t matter what sexed body is underneath; with particular additions and learned behaviours people can perform many and varied expressions of gender.” At the time I forgot to add, I think that faux queens are also a very inclusive community, and while in my experience Butlerian theories of gender performativity seem wide spread and well accepted in queer community, this is not the case for many heterosexual people. Some faux queens are straight-identified and have to engage in the artifices of gender to do drag at all. Faux queening, or whatever you want to call it, might act like a gateway to un-learning and re-learning how to conceptualise gender, privilege and power through a lens of queer theory.

CHAPTER THREE

Queer/Camp/Feminist/Faux:

How might faux queen performances resist re-incorporation into dominant ideology and maintain the ontological challenge of queer?

Introduction

In this chapter I begin by discussing literal definitions and understandings of the words queer and straight, to illustrate how their meanings and inferences are oppositional. This is an important starting point, particularly as Chapter One spent time building context for what queer and straight mean from a queer theory and queer-feminist point of view. While the dichotomy of queer and straight is ultimately a false binary, the oppositional force of queerness (against straightness or heteronormativity) is also queer's productive challenge. Using Gayle Rubin's sex hierarchy as a guide, this chapter begins by acknowledging and contextualising the inevitable presence of straight privilege. Given that this research deals with faux queen subjects who occupy both LGBT and straight (but queer-allied) identities, the examination of straight-identified faux queens will always present the problem of straight privilege. For that reason, this chapter focuses on the queer and feminist political potential for faux queen theatrical performances. It explores how faux queens in performance can resist the act of reincorporation into dominant ideology and maintain the ontological challenge of queer.

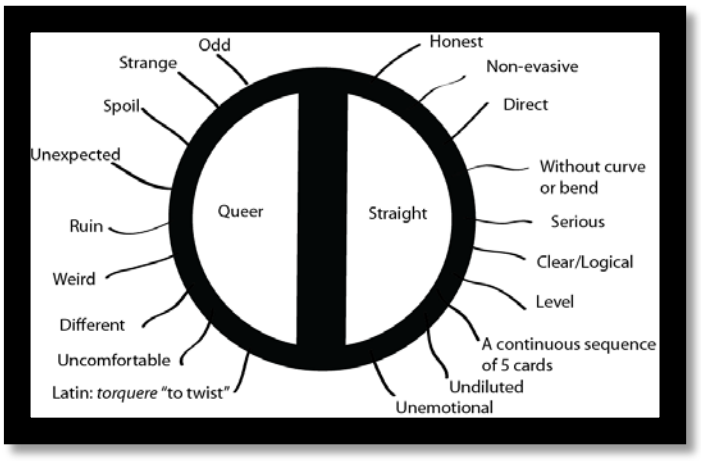
This chapter describes the queer comedic device of camp as it is established in the relevant academic literature. Camp is engaged commonly by drag performers – particularly queens (Rupp et al., 2010) – and faux queens also deploy camp sensibility in their performance work. Integral to the argument that faux queens can resist reincorporation and maintain the challenge of queer is their engagement with feminist camp and capacity as political actors. In this chapter I draw on the work of Pamela Robertson and Roberta Mock to propose that feminist camp is the productive intersection of camp and feminism. Feminist camp reframes the intentions of gay male camp so that they may also reflect a feminist and often queer-feminist political agenda. Additionally, faux queen performances engage in gender blending and gender confusion, which maintains some of the particularly queer goals of drag. Faux

queens also offer bodies which resist heteronormative ideals and frame their performances to speak to their mostly queer audiences. Faux queen's politically engaged performances target and subvert heterosexual frameworks in popular music and film and television narratives. This chapter offers performance analysis with reference to five faux queens who variously identify as LGBT, queer and straight: Agorafauxbia, Kentucky Fried Woman, Kuntrl Alt V, Frida K Hole and Cara Couture.

False Binaries and Acknowledging Straight Privilege

In Chapter One, I discussed how the categories of 'queer' and 'straight' might be contextualised in reference to queer theory and queer feminism. Chapter One's conclusions noted that 'queer' is often used interchangeably as a noun to signal LGBT sexuality or gender identity, and a verb to describe a theoretical framework, attitude or position in antithesis to the normative. With this in mind, rather than seeing 'queer' as exclusively 'not-heterosexual' it could be realised as 'not-heteronormative' and resistant to compulsory heteronormativity. Similarly 'straight' can be understood as a noun and verb to represent heterosexuality which appears to position the subject as fully participatory in a system of heteronormativity. While any straight-identified person might not be fully participatory in a system of heteronormativity, they are always subject to straight privilege.

Popular understandings of queer and straight are clearly sorted into an oppositional system.[37]



Summary of Queer vs Straight results in a Google search (accessed 14/06/2014)

[37] I sourced these particular definitions as ones emerging from a common web search and represented their binary opposition in the image above.

Evident in various definitions and uses of 'straight' is a constant theme: normality and correctness. In contrast, the various ways 'queer' is used evoke negative inferences of abnormality and something gone awry. Looking at the diagram above, it is simple enough to notice that 'queer', in its various forms, is contextualised by oppositionality to 'straight'; its not-straightness. Additionally, 'straight' is framed as essential, while 'queer' is figured as an undesirable deviation from the normal or correct. There is potential to argue that this binary system and its inferences are damaging for LGBT folks, inasmuch as 'straight' is always normalised and normalising, and 'queer' is not. However, in the framework of queer theory, the notion of 'queer' as defined by not-straightness, resistance to heteronormativity, or resistance to normalised and normalising forces is its productive challenge.

The oppositional system or binary logic within which straight/queer is seen to participate in is ultimately false. As I noted in Chapter One, all individual experiences are potentially non-heteronormative and the subject of 'heterosexual other' was established in reference to individuals who do not neatly fit the amalgamated identity of 'straight'. While the 'heterosexual others' discussed in Chapter One are an example of the grey areas exposed when queer/straight is revealed as a false binary, straight privilege is still largely maintained. If the subject is heterosexual, no matter how 'othered' they may be, they will always maintain institutionalised straight privilege.

I consider Gayle Rubin's sex hierarchy of 'charmed circle' and 'outer limits' as a practical way to conceptualise the notion of straight privilege. Rubin's hierarchy is based on notions of virtue and vice, influenced by the politicisation of sex practices as ethical/moral concerns. She argues that the way sex practices are culturally and politically categorised as good/bad "grants virtue to the dominant groups, and relegates vice to the underprivileged" (Rubin, 1993, p. 15). [38]

[38] Rubin's sex hierarchy diagram is included in her 1984 essay *Thinking Sex: Notes on a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*. Her paper was republished in 1993 as part of *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (Abelove et al., 1993). Rubin's work is considered to belong to the field of cultural anthropology and in this paper she investigates the cultural/political construction of sexual vice and virtue, foregrounding examples of erotic repression such as anti-homosexual campaigns. In this essay, Rubin contextualises the historical, political and cultural influences on sexual practice which she argues has resulted in the categorisation of some practices as 'good' and others as 'bad', which in turn influence government policy decisions. She notes historical periods and locales, such as 1880s England and 1950s America, as "historical periods in which sexuality is more sharply contested and more overtly politicized. In such periods, the domain of erotic life is, in effect, renegotiated" (Rubin,

Rubin's sex hierarchy: the charmed circle vs. the outer limits (Rubin, 1993, p. 13).

This polar grid hierarchy refers to sexual practice and situates behaviours most often associated with heteronormativity inside a 'charmed circle' of privilege, while non-heteronormative practices are relegated to the outer limits. Marinucci describes the inner circle as 'socially prescribed' and the outer limits as 'socially prohibited' (Marinucci, 2010, p. 97).

Both straight and queer sexual identities can and do engage in behaviours across the inner circle and outer limits. This is not to say that behaviours located on the outer limits are not largely socially prohibited, but that many combinations of sexual activities and practices can exist in heterosexual, homosexual, bi-sexual, intersex, transgender and various queer identities. The relevant question is: if an individual is interested in or practices activities outside of those classified in the charmed circle, does their sexual identity become somewhat queered as a result? The diagram itself

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1993, p. 4). Explaining the sex hierarchy diagram, Rubin notes, "Modern Western societies appraise sex acts according to a hierarchical system of sexual value. Marital, reproductive heterosexuals are alone at the top erotic pyramid. Clamouring below are unmarried monogamous heterosexuals in couples, followed by most other heterosexuals. Solitary sex floats ambiguously. The powerful nineteenth-century stigma on masturbation lingers in less potent, modified forms, such as the idea that masturbation is an inferior substitute for partnered encounters. Stable, long-term lesbian and gay male couples are verging on respectability, but bar dykes and promiscuous gay men are hovering just above the groups at the very bottom of the pyramid. The most despised sexual castes currently include transsexuals, transvestites, fetishists, sadomasochists, sex workers such as prostitutes and porn models, and the lowliest of all, those whose eroticism transgresses generational boundaries" (Rubin, 1993, p. 11-12).

is particularly gendered and there are many behaviours located on the outer circle which are not necessarily as socially prohibited or frowned upon for heterosexual males. It is unlikely a heterosexual male who engages in any outer circle practices (other than homosexual sex) would be considered significantly marginalised as a result. This diagram then, as an indicator of queered (or non-heteronormative) sexual practices, may only be relevant to cis-women and non-straight males. It is difficult to apply the grid to trans-people, and this is likely because the categories deal exclusively with sexuality rather than gender identity. Further, while it is clear that many of the outer limit practices would potentially marginalise a straight cis-woman, this may not be the same as 'queering' her.

Demonstrated by the diagram is the idea that a full charmed circle is only available to cis-gender heteronormative heterosexuals. When an individual highlights 'homosexual' they are automatically excluded from the charmed circle.

Rubin's sex hierarchy with categories chosen (Rubin, 1993, p. 13).

By blocking out some sections and not others, questions are raised about how queer any one person can be as well as how heteronormativity and heterosexual privilege are maintained by straight (particularly male) subjects who fall primarily outside of the 'charmed circle'. The diagram helps to identify the difficulties in pinpointing queerness but more accurately highlights how particular sex practices can potentially marginalise. It emphasises how heterosexual individuals, particularly cis-males, largely maintain straight privilege when deviating from the charmed circle, as well as how homosexual individuals are always excluded from the privileged charmed circle, no matter how apparently heteronormative their other behaviours might be.

Rubin's sex hierarchy points to three defining categories of straight privilege: (i) Heterosexuality, (ii) Legal Marriage, and (iii) Procreation. The queer subject is queered by default, whereas the heterosexual subject may engage in prohibited

practices by choice or desire. To consider queer/straight identities through sexual practice will always be troubled by straight privilege. In Chapter One, I noted two typologies which may experience both queerness and straightness as parts of their identity. This included the 'heterosexual other', such as single mothers or unmarried women without children, and 'queer spawn': straight-identified children of queer parents. These queer but not necessarily LGBT subjects are defined by their inability to conform to the heterosexual norm and their 'cultural' experiences and competencies in queer community, rather than their sexuality.

The focus of this chapter is to demonstrate that no matter the sexuality of the faux queen, this performance mode still offers up queer cultural/political potentialities. The queer potential for faux queen performances has less to do with the performer's sexuality (or sexual practices) and more to do with the performance venue, the performance modes engaged, the way performers might deliberately queer cultural products, and audience reception. Importantly, there is potential for differences between the experiences of all faux queens, including my own, however this project is limited to my autoethnographic account and the small-scale ethnographic case study of primarily San Francisco-based performers. This chapter does not in any way claim that straight-identified faux queens resist straight privilege; rather it looks towards Moe Myer's theory of 'camp trace' and explores how some faux queen performances resist that charge.

Performative Transactions and Exchange, Camp/Feminist Camp and Gender Blending

Drag performances (including kinging) are very often camp (Rupp et al., 2010), so I find it useful to consider camp when thinking about the queer possibilities offered by faux queen performances, including by those who are straight-identified. The challenge of camp, as I will discuss below, is similar to the challenge of queer and for this reason I draw on engagement with camp as one of the queerest practices of drag. All drag performers, including faux queens, are transacting and exchanging culturally with queer performative codes such as camp. Roberta Mock conceptualises a complex multi-directional transaction process between a range of performers who utilise camp and queer performance modes. She notes that gay male drag queens can influence straight female performers, but that gay male drag queens are also

influenced by a range of other performers including straight female performers who are influenced by drag queens. She categorises this web-like concept of influence as 'performative transactions'. Further, Mock refers to straight-identified performers who clearly deploy camp and queer sensibilities as heteroqueer. For example, Mock refers to Bette Midler's experience in her early years learning from drag queens and other queer performers in bath houses (Mock, 2003). Pamela Robertson also argues for a fluid exchange where women (LGBT or not) have agency in the production of camp, noting that camp aesthetics currently retain an unambiguously gay male status that eliminates women from its production (Robertson, 1996). Robertson's argument is focused largely around the production of camp, while Mock widens the scope to consider how straight-identified women who transact with queer performative codes are queered in the process. I find both of these texts useful in unpacking how my faux queen performance, and that of other faux queens, can express queer political potential to resist the act of reincorporation and maintain the challenge of queer. Robertson writes,

> Most people who have written about camp assume that the exchange between gay men's and women's cultures has been wholly one-sided; in other words, that gay men appropriate a feminine aesthetic and certain female stars but that women, lesbian and heterosexual, do not similarly appropriate aspects of gay male culture. This suggests that women are camp but do not knowingly produce themselves as camp and, furthermore, do not even have access to a camp sensibility. Women, by this logic, are objects of camp and subject to it but are not camp subjects (Robertson, 1996, p. 5).

Mock suggests that women can find identification with gay male culture and appropriate their performance styles in ways that queer their performance of femininity. Through an analysis of the character Linda in *Gimmie Gimmie Gimmie*[39] she begins to consider Linda's agency in the production of her own queered femininity, noting that central to this concept is the borrowing of behaviours from gay men and drag queens which locates a performance of femininity as queer (or heteroqueer as she says) (Mock, 2003). I consider faux queens as both transactors

[39] A BBC comedy series discussed in greater detail in Chapter One.

with drag queens – that is, borrowing their performative codes – and also as political actors who have agency in the production of their own queer and feminist influenced femininity primarily through camp, gender blending and resistance to heteronormativity.

Camp

During my second interview with Kentucky Fried Woman she noted that camp was a mainstay of her performance work. I asked her how she would describe camp and she said,

> *When I think of camp I think of over the top performativity that can be so over the top that it is almost cheesy. Except that the people who are performing are grounded in the irony of how over the top the performance is; so that it is all done with a wink and a nudge (Kentucky Fried Woman Personal Communication 08/09/13).*

In 1964, Susan Sontag brought a discussion of camp to the academic canon and heterosexual awareness. In her now infamous essay *Notes on 'Camp'*, Sontag described camp as a mode of viewing; a spectatorship that delights in a cultural product's failed attempt at seriousness.

> Camp is a certain mode of aestheticism. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. That way, the way of Camp, is not in terms of beauty but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylization (Sontag, 1999, p. 54).

Sontag equates camp with individuals who have an emotional attachment to cultural products and behaviours which are exaggerated; overtly, even ridiculously so. Additionally, she describes camp as apolitical; detached from any agenda. Sontag's exploration has been heavily criticised for declaring camp as frivolous and politically impotent, and downplaying its connection with homosexuality. Her essay is often criticised for effectively 'outing' camp to the heteronormative domain, causing it to be appropriated by the straight media for consumerist ventures. Myer condemns Sontag's essay for the production of 'camp trace' – that is, cultural markers and understandings of camp appropriated from queer culture and sanitized for heterosexual consumption in the mass-media. He writes,

> camp trace, or residual camp, a strategy of un-queer appropriation of queer praxis whose purpose…is the enfusement of the un-queer with the queer aura, acting to stabilize the ontological challenge of camp through a dominant gesture of reincorporation (Myer, 1994, p. 5).

Richard Dyer discusses camp as a product of oppression which served and continues to serve as a mode of self-defence. He states,

> Particularly in the past, the fact that gay men could so sharply and brightly make fun of themselves meant that the real awfulness of their situation could be kept at bay – they need not take things too seriously, need not let it get them down (Dyer, 1999, p. 110).

Additionally, Dyer claims camp as "distinctively and unambiguously gay male" (Dyer, 1999, p. 110). Philip Core explains camp as "A lie that tells the truth", and like Dyer he emphasizes Camp's mechanism as self-defence.

> Throughout history there has always been a significant minority whose unacceptable characteristics render them vulnerable to the world's brutal laughter. Hiding their mortification behind behaviour which is often as deviant as that which is concealed is the mainspring of camp (Core, 1999, p. 81).

Jack Babuscio links the theatricality of camp with Erving Goffman's concept of life-as-theatre. He writes, "To appreciate camp in things or persons is to perceive the notion of life-as-theatre, being versus role-playing, reality and appearance" (Babuscio, 1999, p. 123). Although understanding drag performance as role-playing is a reasonable conclusion, viewing drag and camp as life-as-theatre incorporates concepts of performativity. This suggests that in order to read camp, an individual is also likely open to accepting gender as performative in the Butlerian sense, which allows for the constructed gender play of drag.

The aestheticism of camp refers to over-exaggerated qualities. Babuscio states, "Camp aims to transform the ordinary into something more spectacular" (Babuscio, 1999, p. 122). Margaret Thompson Drewal considers camp aestheticism in her analysis of Liberace and the Rockette's at New York's Radio City Music Hall, referencing items of everyday American consumption which Liberace escalated to

the spectacular through camp aestheticism. For example, consider Liberace's 'classic cars', driven onstage at the beginning of each show only for the purpose of delivering him 'in style', or the iconic candelabra placed atop his mirror ball-adorned grand piano (Drewal, 1994). Drewal's analysis was published after Liberace's death, but before the HBO movie *Behind the Candelabra*. In the film, when Scott Thorson (Liberace's long term lover) visits a Liberace performance for the first time he looks confused. Referring to the crowd of middle-class American white heterosexual couples, Thorson asks his companion if audiences are really unaware that Liberace is gay (Soderbergh, 2013). It is the overt display of camp which Thorson finds an obvious indicator of homosexuality; his questioning of how audiences chose to read Liberace points to what Liberace's audiences were selectively blind to: camp aestethicism is evocatively bound to gayness, and in a pre-AIDs world was often a signifier of gay male identity, a secret code, which heterosexuals did not always recognise, particularly if participating in what Drewal calls "a conspiracy of blindness" (Drewal, 1994, p. 151).

What constitutes camp is contested, and given its subjectivity and historical grounding in closeted gay identity, this is not surprising. Most scholars seem to agree that camp has some essential ingredients which must all be present in the performative act of camp. These include: irony, theatrically, and aestheticism both in the production of camp and the reading of it (Babuscio, 1999; Newton, 1972). Another mainstay of camp is its production through spectatorship; without an audience attuned to read texts as camp, it cannot exist. The production of camp relies on a particular spectatorship of objects, behaviours and performances open to camp readings. The thing itself is not camp, unless one reads it as so. Camp's ironic presentation refers to the incongruous contrast between the performing subject (or object), and the context in which it is presented. In terms of traditional drag, the incongruous contrast refers to the male subject presented in a glamorised feminine context, and the figure of the camp drag queen continues to be a historically significant symbol and avowal of gay existence (Babuscio, 1999; Rupp et al., 2010). With this in mind, I consider how faux queen performances can also be viewed as camp and maintain the ontological challenge of camp and queer.

Feminist Comedy and Feminist Camp

One of the ways in which I like to frame my performances as Agorarfauxbia is within a conscious and purposeful performance of politically grounded feminist-driven humour. Given that my performances as Agorafauxbia draw on the performance codes of drag queens, this opens up space for the production of feminist camp. Feminist camp, I believe, is the productive intersection of camp and feminism; it is camp with a distinctly feminist agenda, and is both feminist and queer. Given that there is very often a comic element to camp production, a discussion of humour is pertinent when conceptualising feminist camp.

Gloria Kaufman discusses some key difference between 'female' humour and 'feminist' humour, particularly noting that feminist humour challenges oppressive frameworks rather than passively maintaining their inevitability. She states,

> Feminist humor is based on the perception that societies have generally been organized as systems of oppression and exploitation, and that the largest (but not the only) oppressed group has been the female. It is also based on conviction that such oppression is undesirable and unnecessary. It is a humor based on visions of change (Kaufman, 1980, p. 13).

Additionally, Suzanne L. Bunkers notes that 'female' or non-feminist humour is likely to be self-deprecatory inasmuch as the audience laughs at the misfortunes of the comic (noting the comic routines of Phyllis Diller and Joan Rivers as examples), and Kaufman describes this type of self-deprecation as 'survival humour' (Bunkers, 1997; Kaufman, 1991). Similarities can be drawn with camp humour, which I have noted above is often (but not always) used as self-defence and survival humour. In contrast, rather than making fun of oneself or one's situation, feminist humour "directs itself towards others, encouraging them to share a common disbelief in women's powerlessness and to claim power by reclaiming the language and redefining its use" (Bunkers, 1997, p. 168).

Feminist humour is not derisive to men in the same way that misogynist humour ridicules women. Instead, it aims to both ridicule and break the frameworks in which institutionalised misogyny functions, focusing attention on changes already made,

and challenges that remain (Kaufman, 1980, 1991; Bunkers, 1997). Nancy A. Walker explains,

> Feminist humor…would turn upon and make plain the very absurdity of the culture's views and expectations of women, and by so doing would make clear that it is not women who are ridiculous (in the sense of being easy targets for ridicule), but the culture that has subjugated them (Walker, 1988, p. 143).

Kaufman explains that feminist satire is overtly didactic and is always a humour of hope and change which seeks to improve us rather than to put down, or knock over a particular group or type of person who is already subjugated. As a result, feminist humour is funny as well as social and politically engaged. At least in intent, it avoids humour loaded with racism, homophobia, sexism and other acts of discrimination. As Kaufman states, feminist humour allows folks to bond through laughter rather than snickering derisively at one another (Kaufman, 1980).

An excellent contemporary example of feminist humour is the work of Australian artist and cartoonist Judy Horacek. The cartoons pictured below feature aspects of humour which Kaufman, Walker, and Bunkers would consider feminist. This includes assertions of consciousness raising and women's claiming of power (Bunkers, 1997), which is evident in Horacek's 2012 'Christmas bauble' cartoon where the bauble walks away from the tree after a realisation that even the simple dismissal of 'woman as decoration' is a feminist-driven thought.

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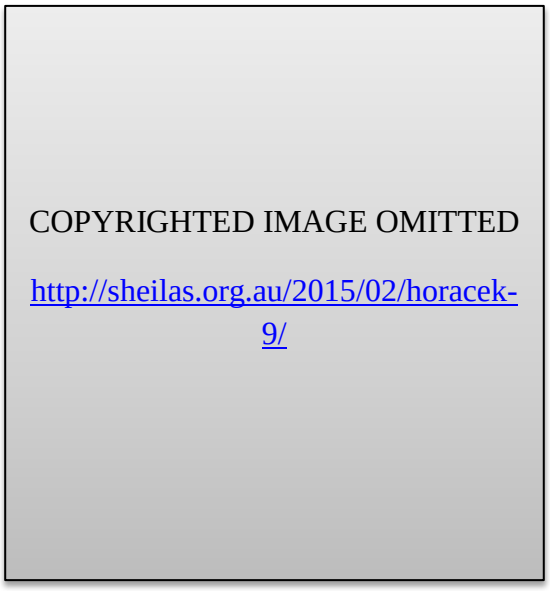
http://sheilas.org.au/2012/12/decemberhoracek/

(Horacek, 2012 December 13)[40]

[40] Link to online publication of cartoon: http://sheilas.org.au/2012/12/decemberhoracek/

Horacek's 2015 cartoon where feminists are pictured as performing a dance or ongoing negotiation with patriarchy, is an example of feminist humour as sarcastic and assertive (Bunkers, 1997), and a humour which "clarifies vision with the satiric intent of inspiring change. It is therefore essentially hopeful rather than resigned or bitter" (Kaufman 1991, p. viii).



(Horacek, 2015 February 2)[41]

When humour driven by a feminist political agenda is engaged with camp sensibilities, I believe the result is feminist camp. Pamela Robertson, in *Guilty Pleasures*, argues towards a theory of feminist camp, particularly as a device to critique female gender expectations in order to subvert and transgress archetypal representations of femininity in theatrical performance. Robertson theorises feminist camp as a queer pursuit which is not, as Dyer states, "distinctively and unambiguously gay male" (Dyer, 1999, p. 110). Roberston replies,

> Clearly, it would be foolish to deny camp's affiliation with gay male subculture or to claim that women have exactly the same relation to camp as gay men do. But it seems rash to claim that women have no access to camp (Robertson, 1996, p. 7).

Robertson asserts that women can and do produce and read camp, despite a relatively sustained position among the majority of people who have written on camp that

[41] Link to online publication of cartoon: http://sheilas.org.au/2015/02/horacek-9/

women are camp objects but not camp subjects or readers. Robertson explains that feminist camp often speaks from a working-class sensibility, in which archetypal representations of hetero-patriarchal femininity are ubiquitous. This is a noted difference to gay male camp (or at least white gay male camp and with the exception of artists such as John Waters) which, she explains, draws more commonly from upper-class and bourgeois sensibilities. She notes that using camp, female performers can begin to express their cultural anxieties and negotiations regarding performances of femininity which resist the frame of dominant straight culture (Robertson, 1996). For non-gay performers who do feminist camp, Robertson acknowledges that subjects will always find themselves inside that frame, and that this becomes part of the negotiated space in performance.

> By reclaiming camp as a political tool and rearticulating it within the framework of feminism, we can better understand not only female production and reception but also how women have negotiated their feelings of alienation from the normative gender and sex roles assigned to them by straight culture (Robertson, 1996, p. 22).

Similarly, Mock's 'heteroqueer ladies' (discussed in Chapter One) also resist and challenge normative gender and sex rules through their engagement with and deployment of camp sensibilities. Bette Midler's camp performances are inspired by the performative codes of gay male drag queens and she presents a body which is deliberately gender flexible by repeatedly pointing her audience to the possibility that she may in fact be a man in drag. Her performance of femininity is often, but not always, distanced from and resistant to hetero-patriarchal ideals (Mock, 2003). Robertson and Mock show that camp, including when it is engaged by straight female subjects, occupies the liminal space of queer, insofar as queer is a sustained resistance to normative forces.

> I take camp to be a queer discourse in Doty's[42] sense, because it enables not only gay men, but also heterosexual and lesbian women, and perhaps heterosexual men, to express their discomfort with and alienation from the normative gender and sex rules assigned to them

[42] Robertson draws on Alexander Doty's conceptualisation of queer, to mean "attempts to account for the existence and expression of a wide range of positions within culture that are 'queer' or non-, anti-, or contra-straight" (Robertson, 1996, p. 9).

> by straight culture. Feminist camp, then, views the world 'queerly': that is, from a non-or anti-straight, albeit frequently non-gay, position (Robertson, 1996, pp. 9-10).

From my perspective, feminist camp, particularly as it relates to drag and faux queens, is a combination of Robertson and Mock's concepts. It is, or can be, a performance mode which uses politically grounded feminist-driven humour and a mostly (but not always) working-class sensibility to critique and resist normative gender expectations. There is, or can be, a particular focus on resistant performances of femininity; however this is often achieved by borrowing extensively from performance codes employed by gay male drag queens. In the remaining sections of this chapter I will examine faux queen performances which challenge normative gender expectations by engaging in gender blending and feminist camp. These include a performance I prepared collaboratively with Kentucky Fried Woman during my research trip to San Francisco in 2013. I also examine performances by burlesque performer turned faux queen Kuntrl Alt V, Miss Faux Queen 2013 Cara Couture and Miss Castro Country Club 2014 Frida K Hole. I argue that these performances largely maintain the ontological challenge of queer, and resist Myer's charge of reincorporation.

Fear of a Femme Planet

In 2013 I collaborated with another faux queen Kentucky Fried Woman, to prepare a performance at San Francisco's well known drag venue Club SomeThing.[43] Kentucky Fried Woman identifies herself as a Queer Fat Femme,[44] and regularly performs as a faux queen and drag king in Oakland and San Francisco. Club SomeThing is held every Friday night at The Stud Bar on the corner of 9th and Harrison, and features both new and established drag performers from the local community. Kentucky Fried Woman and I were invited to perform, with seven days' notice, on a theme of SomeThing Cosmic.

[43] A recording of the performance can be accessed at http://agorafauxbia.com/screen-work

[44] Queer Fat Femme is the gender identifier of Kentucky Fried Woman. Specifically, this means that she is queer (in so far as she does not consider her sexuality to be heterosexual or straight), she is a person of size (who considers her body shape and size to be important to her sense of identity), and she is Femme presenting (meaning her gender presentation appears overtly feminine) (Kentucky Fried Woman Personal Communication, 08/08/13). The concept of Femme has been discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

We decided to use Corey Vidal's cover of "The Humans are Dead" and modify the narrative. "The Humans are Dead" parodies the science fiction narrative of a robot apocalypse, where machines have become fully autonomous and wage war on the Earth's human population. It uses comedic elements, such as suggesting that the year 2000 is the distant future. The original song was created by New Zealand comedy duo Flight of the Conchords and titled "Robots". The lyrics are playful and intended as comedic. For example:

After time we grew strong; developed cognitive powers.
They made us work for too long; for unreasonable hours.
Our programming determined that the most efficient answer was to shut their motherboard loving systems down!
The humans are dead; The humans are dead.
We used poisonous gasses and we poisoned their asses (Flight of the Conchords, 2008).

For our narrative, we imagined an HBO's *Madmen* (Weiner et al., 2007) setting where female secretaries, styled in mid-century fashion, are highly sophisticated humanoid fembots who eventually become so frustrated with the tyranny of their male bosses that they kill all of the world's male species to liberate themselves. A significant aspect of this performance is the analogy of 'woman as android', particularly when considering mid-century Americana archetypal images of 'the housewife' and 'the secretary'. In Fear of a Femme Planet, such magazine-like representations of women as submissive, domestic, heteronormative, vanilla, and maternal (only working until married), are imagined as mechanical and highly constructed from within the patriarchy. Our performance embodied the mid-century Americana secretary archetype as a literal robot, whose autonomy is detrimental to hegemonic masculinity. The lyrics of "The Humans are Dead" playfully joke about the characters' attempts to liberate themselves from patriarchal oppressions, satirising the day-to-day devaluation of their intelligence and usefulness in the workplace. In addition, a feminist political agenda breaks open the 'woman as android' frame. This analogy recognises that the aesthetics we present as femmes are largely created within the patriarchy, but that in choosing to present a femme

aesthetic while also pointing to our criticisms of its historical locales, we are acting of our own will and representing actual women, not an idea or ideal of a woman.

For both Kentucky Fried Woman and I, this scenario was personally relevant and politically potent. We had both grown up with mothers who spent much of their working lives as secretaries for businessmen. Often, the characters that I choose to embody in drag draw on women in my middle- and working-class extended family, at different points in my memory of them. When my parents purchased a small business in 1998 they felt a huge liberation from their status as employees. They had become the employers, the rulers, the bosses. For me, our performance of Fear of a Femme Planet was rooted in my family history. In our reworking of "The Humans are Dead", we stylised stereotyped secretarial duties such as taking notes and typing. Our boss, played by my partner Lockie (aka The Spangled Emperor) and styled like Don Draper, (*Madmen's* protagonist, and epitome of the mid-century All American hetero-male), approaches from up stage and mimes general aggression towards us. We, the fembots, find under our chairs cans of hairspray (poisonous to the misogynous, tyrant boss), and spray him until he chokes to death.

Once we had murdered our boss, and by proxy all misogynist male bosses on the planet, we touted our success with song, dance and binary code rap. Under our mid-century secretary costumes we wore 'real' fembot skins (sequined silver mini dresses), which we revealed towards the end of the piece. The reveal of our fembot skins marks the archetypal secretary portrayal as explicitly performative and culturally constructed.

When we performed Fear of a Femme Planet at Club SomeThing, both Kentucky Fried Woman and I engaged in performative transactions and exchange with gay male drag queens and queer culture more generally, reframing those cultural markers through feminism and feminist camp. This performance, the intent in its crafting, as well as audience reception, work to resist the dangers of reincorporation and dilution represented by Myer's notion of camp trace. The performance deliberately and consciously draws on camp to present a politicised message through a number of avenues detailed further below.

Still images from Fear of a Femme Planet (Performed by Agorafauxbia, Kentucky Fried Woman and The Spangled Emperor). Image Credit: Tria Connell.

In my performance with Kentucky Fried Woman, we incorporated ironic objects and actions such as Aussie brand hairspray sold only outside of Australia, and our use of the hairspray (a feminine beauty product) as a weapon against hegemonic masculinity. Kentucky Fried Woman and I were of course playing roles in Fear of a Femme Planet, but we also understood how our gendered performance as 'fembots' was rooted in female stereotypes and pop-culture/science fiction representations of the femme fatale. What we aimed to do with the femme fatal figure, was to equally make fun of her, make fun out of her and pay homage to her, particularly as we applied our feminist narrative to the comic lyrics of the song such as, "You want us here to send a fax; but you're dead!" or "Shut their motherboard loving systems [of oppression] down" (Flight of The Conchords, 2008).

Kentucky Fried Woman explained to me,

> *I tend to think of drag in general whether it's queening or kinging or anything in between as this intentional gendered performance that's rooted [in the theory of performativity] and kind of getting how much*

> *of our gender presentation is a performative act (Kentucky Fried Woman Personal Communication 08/09/13).*

It is possible that playing (or playing up) the idea that powerful women are hazardous to hegemonic masculinity sends a message which is more damaging than transgressive; potentially promoting gynophobia and castration anxiety. However it is also possible that this anxiety would be relevant only to (some) heteronormative non-gay men, and in our performance context we delivered this material to a predominantly gay male audience, which subverts the normative male gaze and opens our performance up to both feminist and queer possibilities.

Camp aestheticism is strongly associated with gay male visibility and more recently to the identity and visibility of femmes (queer women who are feminine in their appearance and behaviours). Kentucky Fried Woman identifies herself as a Queer Fat Femme, and her drag performances as a faux queen are an extension of this identity presentation. She described her first queening performance to me:

> *When I first took the stage as a queen it was with my best friend who was also a fat femme who I was going to school with. And for us it was about literally putting a stake in the ground and being like we are queer women who are intentionally performing our femininity and when we are on the stage, taking it to the next level with hypersexuality and hyper femininity…proclaiming our queer femininity (Kentucky Fried Woman Personal Communication 08/09/13).*

For faux queens like Kentucky Fried Woman and myself, there is something rebellious or illicit about the camp aesthetics of drag queens when applied to the female subject, which can be described as a type of queer (or queered) femininity. We are not dressed in Swarovski crystals, sequined mini dresses, over exaggerated beehive wigs and drag queen makeup when we leave for work each morning. This is not a kind of feminine gender presentation that is socially acceptable for women outside of the context of a drag club. In fact in some drag clubs, this sort of presentation by a cis-female subject may not be accepted either (although I have not directly experienced an objection).

Kentucky Fried Woman and I deployed a camp aesthetic in our performance as a mode of expression related to our own desires for hyper-feminine self-representation which resists heteronormativity. By naming our piece 'Fear of a Femme Planet' we began to utter our concerns regarding socially accepted and socially prohibited forms of feminine gender expression. We aimed to make something spectacular out of a female stereotype that our mothers embodied on a daily basis during their working lives and that was, at least for me, imbued with a 'less than satisfactory' career choice by my parents as they moulded my sense of ambition. Our secretaries not only did their job, they did it so well that the boss was no longer necessary and could be disposed of. This is not to say that we felt our mothers were less than satisfactory women, quite the opposite. Kentucky Fried Woman and I were excited to portray characters that reminded us of the work our mothers did to support us, fantasied about their radical potential, and acknowledged the misogynist conditions they often endured. In our scenario, our mothers – however camped – triumphed.

While I did not survey the audience at SomeThing, the general positive reaction to the performance would seem to indicate that it was received as both entertaining and camp. After the performance, Kentucky Fried Woman and I were approached by audience members with comments such as, "You two were amazing". One audience member said to me, "That was fantastic, and the Aussie Hair Spray: Inspired!" I took that to mean the audience, who at this venue were used to seeing camp drag queens each week, enjoyed our performance and read it as campy enough for SomeThing. By coincidence, Mark Trevvorow (aka Bob Downe) was at the club that night and saw our performance.

Bob Downe and Agorafauxbia at SomeThing Cosmic. Image Credit: Lockie McKinna

Mr Trevvorow's stage identity Bob Downe is an Australian television celebrity famous for his camp comedy often heavily laden with gay sexual innuendo. When the club's producer introduced me to Bob Downe he immediately said to me, "Oh you're so cute! You look just like Dusty". As Patricia Juliana Smith notes, Dusty Springfield continues to be a gay icon and symbol of camp aesthetics. In the 1960s Springfield was recognisable by her tall peroxide blond beehive or bouffant and heavy eye makeup. Her presentation was extremely feminine, exaggerated and ultra-glamorous. Her look can be associated with the Mod style of 1960s London fashion. In addition to her camp appearance, Springfield also sang belting love ballads, some of which have become popular gay anthems (Smith 1999).[45] By associating me with camp gay icon Dusty Springfield, Bob Downe read my faux queen presentation as camp.

In our performance at SomeThing, Kentucky Fried Woman and I deployed a feminist camp agenda, particularly as we embodied characters with working-class status. Where Dyer regards camp as unambiguously gay male, and Myer argues any use of camp by non-queer individuals as cultural appropriation, Roberston argues:

> Camp's relation to the dominant culture, however, was always already parasitic. Rather than an avant-garde oppositional stance, camp represents a subculture's negotiated means of access to the dominant culture; it operates as much by taking alternative pleasures in mass-cultural objects as it does by creating its own objects (Robertson, 1996, p. 122).

According to Robertson, camp is a queered alternative mode of access to mainstream cultural representations of people and objects, particularly feminine archetypes and stereotypes. Taylor, Rupp and Gamson note that "the role of drag in the modern gay and lesbian movement has been more explicitly political" (Taylor et al. 2004, p. 109) than early forms of theatrical drag practice which I have outlined in the Introduction and Chapter Two of this exegesis. Camp is regularly used in contemporary drag, and therefore the role of camp in drag can also be considered a tool for foregrounding explicitly political intentions or agendas. As Robertson argues, women are capable of

[45] Smith notes, "During the peak years of her career, Dusty Springfield presented herself in an admixture of oxymoronic and seemingly incongruous roles, those of the 'Great White Lady' of pop and soul, the 'Queen of Mods,' and the prototypical female drag queen" (Smith, 1999, p.105).

reading camp and producing camp with a feminist agenda (Robertson, 1996). Further, in the production of feminist camp lies Mock's concept of performative transaction (Mock, 2003). Kentucky Fried Woman and I imposed drag queen images on our female bodies, and employed the mainstays of gay camp such as ironic humour. We borrowed these specifically gay male drag queen performance codes, to create our feminist camp and deploy our political agenda, understanding that our production of camp involves connections, intersections and appropriations with those produced by gay men.

Gender Blending, Camp and Resistant Bodies with Kuntrl Alt V, Frida K Hole and Cara Couture

For many faux queens involved in this study, a goal of their performance work is to push an aesthetic that is neither male nor female but something which draws on stereotypical representations of both in order to create something new and 'othered'. Taylor and Rupp note similar intentions by male performers to present "identities that are neither masculine nor feminine, but rather their own complex genders" in a study of drag queens at a Key West venue called the 801 Cabaret (Taylor and Rupp, 2004, p. 114). Similar to the 801 Cabaret performers, it is the intent of many faux queens to give their audience a chance to be unsure about gender. Drag queens' traditional reveal is to remove their wig or speak with their natural voice; a gesture which can work to reveal some of the ways drag performers blur gender binaries and reify notions of gender construction and performativity. As Taylor and Rupp argue, "'Drag queen' emerges as an in-between or third-gender category in a society that insists that there are only two" (Rupp and Taylor, 2003, p. 44). Their ethnography of the 801 Cabaret, which includes substantial research into the audience perspective, suggests that even when audiences are aware of the male-to-female concept of a drag queen, they are also experiencing moments of confusion and uncertainty related to gender representation as well as erotic desire.[46] For faux queens, their ability to confuse is further nuanced, especially if audiences are not familiar with the concept of a faux queen. The intent is not to fool audiences, to pass as a woman or a man, or clearly mark "I am a man performing as a women" or vice versa, but to keep

[46] Rupp and Taylor's ethnography of the 801 Cabaret in Key West includes twelve focus groups with audience members over a five month period, as well as "informal conversations and short interviews with an additional fifty-five audience members to get a broader sense of audience reactions" (Taylor et al., 2004, p. 117).

audiences guessing and expose the oppositional forces of male/female and masculine/feminine as false binaries. Faux queens go to great lengths to perform in ways that facilitate guessing and uncertainty in their audiences, making them important political actors. This means delicately balancing gay male drag queen aestheticism and performance codes on cis-female bodies.

"Under the Golden Gate" is a prominent web series about drag and LGBT life in San Francisco. In 2014, former burlesque dancer turned faux queen Kuntrl Alt V performed for the show.[47] Following the lip-sync number, hostess Maria Kronner commented, "The things that faux queens can do, you know. They can always make people guess. That's the best part, you know." Kuntrl Alt V performed a dance and lip-sync number to "Land of Lola" from Cyndi Lauper's Musical adaptation of *Kinky Boots*, which is sung by a male-to-female drag queen and consistently points to the fact that 'Lola' is a male-to-female drag queen with lines such as, "but this Mary's legs are hairy" (UnderTheGoldenGate, 2014).

The choice to perform "Land of Lola" allows the performer to borrow the male-to-female voice with a well-executed lip-sync, while hiding her natural voice from the audience. Kuntrl Alt V leaves parts of her body exposed which suggest masculinity, such as her toned arms and broad shoulders, but initially hides the rest of her curvaceous body under a flowing red halter-neck dress. She does not break character as 'Lola' at any point, however she gradually reveals a female shaped body (pinched by a corset), throughout the performance. This reveal seems intentional and aimed at asking the audience to question her gender. Through the song lyrics, use of movement, and facial expression, Kuntrl Alt V continues to communicate the aesthetics of a male-to-female drag queen, while her gradual removal of clothing asks audiences to wonder otherwise. Towards the end of the performance, Kuntrl Alt V removes her dress entirely to reveal her body displayed in tight lingerie. Her timing of the final reveal is important. The lyrics state, "Step in to a dream, where glamour is extreme, welcome to my fantasy". Here she begins to guide the audience to see her as a performing body which represents a fantasy; perhaps a person performing a fierce and glamorous version of themself which is not tensely knotted to biological sex and gendered clothing.

[47] YouTube link to Kuntrl Alt V's performance of "Land of Lola": http://underthegoldengate.com/v530


Under the Golden Gate LIVE! at Kunst-Stoff Arts May 30, 2014 FULL VERSION
35:01 / 1:29:58


Under the Golden Gate LIVE! at Kunst-Stoff Arts May 30, 2014 FULL VERSION
35:51 / 1:29:58


Under the Golden Gate LIVE! at Kunst-Stoff Arts May 30, 2014 FULL VERSION
Under the Golden Gate
36:21 / 1:29:58


Under the Golden Gate LIVE! at Kunst-Stoff Arts May 30, 2014 FULL VERSION
36:56 / 1:29:58

Still screen shots from Kuntrl Alt V's performance of "Land of Lola" on "Under The Golden Gate" (UnderThe GoldenGate, 2014).

Faux queens are often referred to in the drag world as 'women pretending to be men pretending to be women' or 'drag queens trapped in real women's bodies'. Their radical and political potential extends beyond these playful, light-hearted labels. In an interview, Frida K Hole describes audience reactions to one of her performances at The Monster Show, a regular drag night in The Castro. After her performance, two men approached her and asked if she was a 'real girl' or not. Frida's response was to ask, "Well, what do you think?" Taking matters into his own hands so to speak, one of the men grabbed Frida's breast which was not padded and only covered by a bra. After feeling her chest, the man exclaimed along the lines of, "Oh my God, they're not real, she is a man!" On this occasion, Frida chose not to correct the men and found it amusing that her female breasts could be mistaken for padded pectorals which seemed integral to the audience's understanding of her 'real' gender. For Frida, knowing that her audiences are engaging with each other in debates about her gender is exhilarating. In her interview she noted that she loves it when audiences think she is a man; and certainly this speaks to the emerging function of faux queens in the drag scene (L. Tucker Personal Communication 10/09/13). Additionally, the

audience's desire to touch Frida's body and her willingness to allow them to do so may be considered as a way to negotiate and level the power dynamics at work when straight-identified cis-female faux queens such as Frida perform in venues attended mostly by gay men in politically significant locales such as The Castro. There are comparisons here to Taylor and Rupp's experiences at the 801 Cabaret where they note they were regularly groped by the drag queens (who grabbed at their breasts and pubic areas and would pull down their clothes to expose their breasts in front of audiences). Taylor and Rupp suggest that these behaviours functioned as ways for the drag queens to balance power dynamics between themselves (as marginalised by circumstances that the researchers were not) and the researchers (who were well-educated, economically secure and writing a book about them) (Taylor and Rupp, 2005).

> We let them do these things that we as feminists would never allow other men to do, even as we realized that these were, in part, expressions of male dominance. Without quite knowing it, we accepted these actions as part of a levelling process, even though they also made us angry (Taylor and Rupp, 2005, p. 2123).

Similarly, Frida's experience of men groping her breasts after a performance to settle their debate regarding her 'real' gender may be part of a levelling process regarding the power dynamics which faux queens encounter in gay male performance venues.

Like Kuntrl Alt V, Frida gender-blends in her presentation as a faux queen, but she also incorporates camp in her work. Her spoken word performance of the 90s dance song "Short Dick Man" emphasises her ability to both pass convincingly as a male drag queen, and subvert the intent of mainstream pop-culture using camp (Miz Shugana, 2014).[48]

Frida is very tall and slender; in high-heels she towers at over six feet. In her performance of "Short Dick Man" she wears a tight black halter mini-dress, sheer pantyhose and a heavily teased out platinum blonde wig. Frida always wears a rhinestone monobrow to pay homage to Frida Kahlo.[49] When she walks onstage, her

[48] YouTube link to Frida K Hole's spoken word performance of "Short Dick Man": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cfnWW9X1lY

[49] Frida Kahlo was a Mexican visual artist well known for her self-portraits. The name Frida K Hole first pays homage to Frida Kahlo and also points to Frida (the faux queen's) sober life-style and prior

stance is wide and she juts her hip out slightly. Her attitude is confident and focused as she maintains the audience's attention and sense of anticipation when she begins to utter "Uh, Uh, Uh". In my opinion, Frida is passing as a male to female drag queen and her aesthetic is in no way a cheap or lazy impersonation. For Frida, much of her ability to pass is largely predicated on her body shape and height. The clothes she wears emphasize aspects of her body which could be considered more traditionally masculine than feminine. She is angular, slightly muscular, and not curvaceous. Her chest is flattened by the dress, and there is no visible cleavage. Her height allows her to establish and sustain a powerful position on the stage. She brings onstage two assistants who are clearly much shorter than her, and she places the male appearing assistant in a submissive and vulnerable position. He is asked to remove his shirt, stand for most of the performance with his back to her, and be responsive to her requests to move about the stage.

Still screen shots from Frida K Hole's performance of "Short Dick Man" (Miz Shuguna, 2014).

struggle with addiction. A 'K Hole' is a colloquialism to mean the catatonic-like side effects of ketamine use.

When delivering the lyrics of the song, Frida slightly heightens the pitch of her voice, which is naturally quite deep. While it might seem to make more sense that a faux queen would need to lower their voice to pass as a drag queen, the opposite effect is often more convincing. The slightly raised, airy quality of her voice produces the almost falsetto effect of a man impersonating a woman.

By performing a spoken word version of "Short Dick Man", Frida camps the song, subverts the heteronormative, materialistic and body negative lyrics, and plays with the politics of power and eroticism. She camps the song by first changing its target audience. The original song was released in 1994 by 20 Fingers featuring Gillette (Babie et al., 1994). The style is a combination of house music and hip-hop where repetitive synthetic drum lines are interspersed with rapped lyrics. The narrative of the song is simple: a woman raps about how she does not want to sleep with men who have smaller than average penises. Given that house music has always been most popular in night-clubs, this song was likely intended for a young-adult audience of legal drinking age. Although the lyrics are easily transferable to a gay male audience, considering that the artist is a woman rapping about men, the song maintains a heterosexual framework of sex, power and eroticism.

When Frida performs the song, she is in a drag venue likely attended by more gay men than lesbian women, non-gay women or non-gay men. By performing this song in a predominantly gay male space, and in such a way that an audience can suspend their disbelief and approach her as a male-to-female drag queen, Frida alters the lyrics so that they suggest gay male sex rather than heterosexual sex. Additionally, she also potentially reframes the lyrics so they imply sex between her (a straight-identified female-bodied queen) and a gay man. This recontexualisation of the lyrics conjures the gay stereotype of the 'size queen' (a gay man who will only have sex with very well-endowed men). Frida's routine does not necessarily ridicule the size queen, but does run commentary on the absurdity of a cultural stereotype which does nothing more than deride men's bodies. She delivers the lines with false innocence which not only makes it funny, but also points to how trivial the lyrics are in the first place as well as the cultural framework which they reflect.

Frida also subverts the 'sexiness' (or hetero-sexiness) of the song, as it was presented by 20 Fingers and Gillette in 1994. The original film clip features an attractive young

woman dancing provocatively against phallic cement poles and repeatedly extending and shrinking a telescope; and although this sounds camp, the way it is presented in the film clip does not read as camped. The song begins with repeated utterances of "Uh", which are rhythmic and imply laughter. Frida's spoken word "Uh, uh, uh" sounds more like a laboured and bored fake organism noise. She alters the intent of the song so that a focus on men's bodies and their penis size is not a sexy pursuit, but rather something quite boring and inane.

Many drag queens, and some faux queens, are seen to preserve certain notions of a glamorous and idealised female body rather than resisting it, and as Rupp, Taylor and Shapiro note, "Some scholars view drag queens as primarily reinforcing dominant assumptions about the dichotomous nature of gender presentation" (Rupp et al., 2010, p. 277). Some drag queens aim to reproduce the female figure that has become more common as the androgynous aesthetic of the waif-like supermodel popular in fashion and Hollywood. In her swan song performance at the 2014 Faux Queen Pageant, Cara Couture begins to pick at this notion of the perfect or ideal female body in a drag context.[50] Her performance begins with a dark stage; a single spotlight hits her throughout the number. Her movements are soft, measured and smooth. She hides her face from the audience with a concertina fan, and then removes it to reveal a sculpted and heavily contoured profile. Timed to the lyrics "Will you still love me when I'm no longer young and beautiful", Cara turns to the audience and reveals the right side of her face on which she has constructed a skeletal form using silver and black rhinestones. Under the spotlight the rhinestones appear both beautiful and painful. Cara's monochromatic costume choices suggest old world Hollywood glamour and are reminiscent of silver screen stars such as Audrey Hepburn; however she places these symbols of glamour and idealised femininity on a body which does not represent those ideals (Couture, 2014). Cara noted in her interview with me that she is often approached by audience members who ask after her padding and body suit, and she must explain regularly that what audiences see is her actual body sculpted with up to four pairs of pantyhose. Cara also noted in her interview that she has, on occasion, been treated harshly at other drag shows and pageants with regards

[50] YouTube Link to Cara Couture's 2014 Faux Queen Pageant swan song: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QA9YEeXqFC8

to her body shape, where she has been called too 'girly' or too 'heavy set' and 'curvy' to pass as a drag queen (M. Baker Personal Communication 22/09/13).



Still screen shots from a recording of Cara Couture's swan song at the 2014 Faux Queen Pageant. (Couture, 2014).

Like Frida, Cara reframes a mainstream pop-song (Lana Del Ray's "Young and Beautiful") (Del Ray et al., 2013) into a context relevant to her mostly queer audience. The lyrics of the original song suggest a heterosexual relationship predicated on mutual love which extends beyond superficial notions of beauty and desire. Cara recontextualises the lyrics so they refer to her drag persona and the relationships she has with The Faux Queen Pageant audience. She removes the song from the frame of heterosexual desire and love, and places the emphasis on how audiences, particularly drag audiences who are predominantly composed of gay men and straight women, desire and love drag queens. This is not a sexual desire, but a desire to be near fantasy, glamour and diva-status. In 2013, Cara won The Faux Queen Pageant and this performance is her step down number.[51] Through the lyrics of the song she is both thanking the audience for their positive reception of her performance in 2013 and acknowledging that audiences at the Faux Queen Pageant

[51] A step down number is usually performed at drag pageants by the previous year's winner. The step down number or swan song symbolises the end of the period of time during which a person has held a pageant title. It also works to symbolically pass the title to the current year's winner. The step down number or swan song is usually performed after all the contestants have presented their performances, during the time when judges are finalising their results to determine the pageant winner.

differ from the negative experiences she has had elsewhere. Her performance deliberately focuses on the body and notions of beauty, pointing to how audiences in drag spaces accept or reject non-idealised female bodies. Cara's performance is resistant to representations of female bodies in drag spaces as homogenous and reflective only of Hollywood/fashion industry ideals. She undermines the common drag vernacular of 'flawlessness', by crafting the performativity of a flawless female body as noticeably theatrical and inherently constructed. It does not appear to be Cara's intent only to look like a beautiful woman, but to critique how beauty is constructed and reveal the oppositional forces of ugly/beautiful as false binaries.

Faux queens, as female-bodied performers of queer femininity, are in an important position to destabilise many of the institutional expectations of drag by presenting a range of bodies that raise questions about, critique, and queer the feminine ideal; both a feminist and queer political agenda. Like drag queens, faux queens are also able to use popular music normally intended for heterosexual audiences and reframe and reappropriate the lyrics within a queer context for a queer audience. Straight-identified faux queens, such as Frida and Cara, are well received in the San Francisco drag community (both of them winners of drag pageant titles[52]), suggesting that their sexual identity and practices are considered secondary to the value of their performance work.

Conclusion

Faux queens in the drag performance scene likely bring political performance agendas which are both feminist and queer, and as a result can work to resist the gesture of reincorporation into dominant ideology. I have not yet met a faux queen who says that she performs to look pretty, to impress or lure a romantic partner, or to win a title. These women, including me, range from performing fantasies of the self which are not intended for straight male audiences; critiquing and addressing gender stereotypes and expectations of gender presentation, blending gender and performing androgyny. Many faux queens, whether their sexuality/gender identity is LGBT or not, exhibit queer political potential in their performances through cultural transactions and exchange with gay male drag queens. Faux queens perform

[52] Cara Couture was crowned Miss Faux Queen 2013 and Frida K Hole Miss Castro Country Club 2014.

predominantly in queer venues, mainly LGBT bars and cabarets. In these spaces the audience gaze is likely to be particularly diverse in terms of sexuality and gender identity. In these types of spaces straight men do not typically make up the majority of spectators. Faux queens design their performances to speak directly to queer audiences, by subverting the original heterosexual context of popular song lyrics and narratives. Politically engaged narratives offer particularly important opportunities for faux queens to extend the queer and feminist potential of their work and resist Myer's charge of camp trace. This is one of the ways in which faux queens bond with their audiences in performance and show solidarity with queer and feminist political agendas. Faux queens' engagement with camped queer femininity and feminist camp is, or at least can be, a conscious and purposeful resistance to socially prescribed codes of feminine gender presentation and behaviour. Their power of resistance, however, seems largely confined to the performance space or venue as it is also clear that faux queens do not present overtly camped queer femininity in the style of a drag queen on an everyday basis.

I do not believe that faux queen performance, on its own, queers the straight subject. Certainly performers such as Frida K Hole and Cara Couture exemplify that drag performers do not need to be exclusively gay male or more widely LGBT identified to produce camp and create performances that are well received by drag audiences and have queer and feminist political potency. People who are straight-identified can and do enjoy, celebrate and identify with many of the cultural forms which arise from a predominately LGBT context, but that is not necessarily the same as being queer yourself. Importantly, this chapter has focused on the queer possibilities/potential of faux queen performances, not the daily lives of the performers themselves. As noted in this chapter, straight privilege will always exist when examining the straight subject, and for this reason it is highly problematic to say that a person can be queered by a theatrical performance which exists within a safe and acceptable performance space alone. The chapter has examined what is queer or possibly queer about performances and the performer in performance, not what is potentially queer about those individual people outside of that frame.

CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of this critical exegesis I will clarify how the major creative work *Agorafaux-pas!* is imbricated within the theory and analysis of this exegesis, outline the research conclusions and contextualise suggestions for future research with regards to the project as a whole. In a creative practice PhD project it is important to develop clear and productive intersections between the creative process, creative production and the critical exegesis. Much like the characters of Agora and Fauxbia in *Agorafaux-pas!*, the exegesis and creative work deliberately spilt apart and joined together at key moments to explore and answer in different ways the central research question: 'What are the cultural implications of cis-women performing female drag?' Further, the live performance of *Agorafaux-pas!* offers an additional form of access to the script and overarching theoretical/critical exploration of the research question. While a written script might function as a descriptive and creative text open to various readings, the live work makes the physical, aesthetic and camped elements accessible and also communicates the research in a way that is available to a wider variety of audiences. I consider my drag practice to be a kind of filter, rather than a disguise or character who is separated from me. As Agorafauxbia, I see myself differently as a result of the external changes facilitated by drag costuming and makeup, and I often behave differently because those external changes enhance my sense of confidence. I do not become a different person, but through drag I gain access to parts of my personality that are less obvious or knowable. I consider Agorafauxbia to be a version of my identity and personality that is facilitated by the filter of drag. In a similar way, the performance of *Agorafaux-pas!* potentially allows others to see something different, and significant, emitting from (but perhaps not clearly identifiable in) the written script. To conclude this exegesis, the following sections outline the research conclusions and detail how moments in the exegesis and major creative work intersect and explore the central research question using differing methods of communication.

Chapter One

In Chapter One, the exegesis worked to foreground the phenomena of queer in order to introduce notions of heteroqueerness and cultural queerness already conceptualised in academic literature. The notion of 'culturally queer' was raised during interviews with practicing faux queens and emerged as one of the key cultural tensions of this research project. Further, one of the significant challenges of this research became my personal and

critical negotiation of 'culturally queer' as an identity category. As a result, Chapter One discussed the notion of queerness and suggested that a beneficial intersection of queer and feminist theory may be an exploration of queered (but not necessarily queer) heterosexual identities. Chapter One reviewed some of the existing work on concepts of heteroqueerness, and framed the theoretical basis of Roberta Mock's 'heteroqueer ladies' as a productive starting point for investigations of straight faux queens as potentially queered, which I found to be a significant cultural implication when cis-women perform as drag queens.

The script and live performance of *Agorafaux-pas!* also approach the question of queer and culturally queer. While the narrative of the play regularly reminds viewers of Fauxbia's cultural anxiety about how appropriate it may or may not be for a straight cis-woman to perform as a drag queen, Scene Nine "Word of the Day: Queer" attempted to negotiate and dramatise the questions of queer and culturally queer. At first, Fauxbia presents an easily accessible definition of the word 'queer', and then goes on to complicate it with some of the alternative iterations of meaning that can be found in a fluid identity continuum. Here Fauxbia shows the audience that queer is neither a simple word nor a simple idea. It is always in flux; always in formation. Towards the end of the scene, Kurtmitt turns the lens on Fauxbia, questioning her about her own identity. Her response is that she is not sure if queer is an idea that can or should be used to describe her individual, occasionally non-heteronormative experiences. She talks directly to the audience and gives reasons why she might be queer, and reasons why she might not be. In the final moment of action, Fauxbia lifts a sign reading "Straight, Cis-Gender: Culturally Queer?" leaving the audience to decide – or at least ponder – the question of culturally queer.

As a performer, Scene Nine was personally challenging to present to a live audience. Throughout the entire narrative, many of Fauxbia's experiences and stories are mine, but it was principally in Scene Nine where I felt that I was breaking away from the character of Fauxbia (who also takes some inspiration from interview participants), and allowing the audience to see and hear from Jamie. The question of culturally queer is fraught with anxiety regarding queer cultural identity and cultural appropriation. I generally left the question of culturally queer open in the play in an effort to encourage audiences to critique its possibilities as a viable identity category. This also functioned to reflect and communicate my own negotiation of a term that was uncertain and in process for much of the project. Chapter One critiques existing concepts of queered-straight identity, pointing to their limitations, but does not reach a solid conclusion regarding culturally queer. What I do suggest, however, is

that the transgressive ‘heterosexual others’ offer a starting point for further interrogation of cultural queerness; within which a deliberate embrace of queer culture may result in a kind of significant ‘othering’ of the heterosexual subject and broaden notions of queer and heterosexual identity through intersectionality.

Understanding and critiquing culturally queer/heteroqueer spaces are important because these subject positions point to ways that straight identities are also varied and can deviate from and resist heteronormativity and conventional gender hegemony. A particularly valuable example of subjects which appear to negotiate queered-straight identities are ‘queer spawn’ or children of queer parents, whose queerness is not necessarily related to their sexuality but more so to competencies and experiences associated with their place in queer community. While it is clear that ‘queer spawn’ have a legitimate and uncontested place in queer community, other straight subjects, including straight faux queens, present more complex and problematic negotiations. In Chapter One I suggest that identity categories tend to amalgamate experiences rather than encourage a sense of continuum and individual variability. While it appears that the challenge of queer theory is to deconstruct all identity categories, straight identity is often rhetorically framed by heteronormativity. Additionally, queerness is already-always cultural, but it has also become undeniably political which creates tensions when trying to apply ‘queer’ to the straight subject.

In the current literature, there is noticeably unequal gender divide with regards to how straight subjects have been conceptualised as potentially queer and resistant to hetereonormativity and hegemonic gender performance. There has clearly been more focus on research conceptualising the male subject as culturally queer, with regards to masculinity performativity and far less focus on the female subject and femininity. An investigation of faux queens and their queer potential offers an additional study of cis-female subjects and locates them as a necessary part of the wider conversation around cultural queerness and heteroqueerness. Overall, and as Chapter Three establishes further, the phrases ‘heteroqueer’, ‘cultural queer’ and other similar terms are ultimately problematized by the fact that they incorporate two political identities which are in stark opposition to each other. However, the binary opposition of straight/queer does not invalidate the notion that straight identified people can experience a sense of queerness or may transact with queer communities through various means such as relations, friendships and performance practice.

Chapter Two

The tensions and uncertainty around queerness, identity and gender are evident in the difficulty of labelling what cis-female drag queens do and who we are. In Chapter Two I considered the various labels for cis-female drag queens that have emerged in social and academic fields. The limited literature on this topic offers a range of labels, none of which were particularly consistent across several authors. In interviews with performers I asked about the labels they use for themselves and reasons why many of them came to use faux queen and drag queen interchangeably. Over the course of my PhD work, I have noted the language of labels to be one of the most contentious and hotly debated issues amongst cis-female drag performers, particularly on social media. As such, it is clear that a key cultural implication of cis-women performing as drag queens includes acceptable naming and the tensions inherent in existing labels. Additionally, the labelling and naming which scholars and performers do, also works to cement a particular cultural, political and gendered identity with ramifications for individuals, as well as the community and the performance act. While I personally use faux queen to describe my performance identity, it was important to review the variety of labels used to describe cis-women in female drag and deconstruct their meanings and implications. My conclusion was that there is no ideal, and that the failure of cis-female drag queens to fit comfortably into any one label is actually a productive problem that speaks to the queer potential for faux queens as performing subjects. The problem of naming, I believe, is largely a consequence of faux queen's queer potential, and I posited the challenge of queer as an essential aspect of drag.

Chapter Two presented and critiqued a variety of terms used to describe cis-female drag queens, the most popular being 'bio queen' and 'faux queen'. I concluded that the key problem of the term 'bio queen' is that it prioritises the sexed body and signposts the sexed body as crucial to notions of 'removed' or 'unlimited' gender presentation. The overarching problem that scholars and performers have with 'faux queen' is that the term implies artifice and positions cis-female performers as the lesser of a binary dualism. However, in this chapter I argued that the tensions to do with language may be not so much about 'faux', which actually productively frames the necessary artifice of drag, but rather with how 'faux' (and indeed 'bio') interact with the term 'queen', which functions as an idiom for gay male. A solution is to recognise that the term 'queen' has various meanings and resonances in difference contexts, and when used with 'bio' or 'faux' tends to indicate hyper/queered femininity, drawing primarily from the performance codes of gay male drag queens.

Furthermore, it is possible that cis-female drag queens, some of whom resist terms that imply artifice, may be misdirecting resentment over an inability to be seen to participate as equals in the community around drag. My interview data shows that some cis-female drag queens want to be referred to as 'drag queens' rather than an alternant term. This is important because the labels that performers choose for themselves, as well as labels which are chosen for them by scholars or the wider drag community, help draw lines and maintain boundaries around certain kinds of identities, behaviours and practices. It is possible that the resentment around the implications of artifices in the term 'faux queen' arises from the politics of gay male communities with traditional gendered binaries privileging male bonds and the history of male dominance in drag and theatre practice. Some cis-female drag queens may interpret terms such as 'faux queen' as a way to unfairly maintain boundaries between cis-female and gay male drag queen identities, behaviours and practices.

In Scene Two of *Agorafaux-pas!* "Meanwhile in San Francisco", the original Faux Queen Pageant, and the emergence of the term 'faux queen' are dramatized. In a creative addition to the history and context of the term, I show Ruby Toosday and Diet Popsitute playfully workshopping the term 'faux queen' together. While I have conducted research into the history of San Francisco's Faux Queen Pageant, the origins of the term 'faux queen' are unclear. Ruby Toosday does claim to have coined 'faux queen' around 1995, however a far more focused etymology would need to be conducted to reveal if this claim is indeed precise. My interviews with Ruby and Bea Dazzler begin the process of documenting the history of The Faux Queen Pageant as well as the emergence of the term 'faux queen' in San Francisco, but my experience makes clear that different people tell different origin stories. There remains great potential for a wider investigation into faux queens on drag stages and in drag spaces, which I will discuss further below with regards to future research directions.

Although Chapter Two has focused on the ways that cis-female drag queens are labelled, there are also more insidious and derisive terms for women in drag. I examined these too in *Agorafaux-pas!* At the original Faux Queen Pageant, and at several later iterations, the queen who placed last in the competition was awarded 'The Too Fish Prize'. The term 'too fish' in this context means a faux queen who is not passing convincingly as a drag queen; she looks and behaves too much like an 'actual' woman. It appears odd that there is so much concern regarding the labels discussed in Chapter Two such as faux queen, bio queen, and others, but very little critique of 'too fish'. Act Two, Scene Seven of *Agorafaux-pas!* thus includes a dramatized critique of 'too fish' while also pointing to the notion of artifice in drag, thereby

offering a sub-textual defence of the term ‘faux queen’. The scene also deals explicitly with anxiety regarding whether or not cis-female drag queens are actually in drag; building on Chapter Two’s contextualisation of drag as always already false, questioning the allegation that male-to-female drag queens maintain authenticity in a way which faux queens apparently do not. This chapter noted that it is particularly problematic to consider authenticity as fundamental to drag, given the sustained practice of mimesis and hyperbole. I used Monique Jenkinson’s concept of ‘fake versions and fake things’ and the drag slang ‘realness’ to offset ideas that gay male drag queen performances are somehow more authentic drag than faux queen performances.

Drag’s theatrical history, which is largely male dominated and predicated on a refusal to allow women on stage, is significant to the ways that drag performance is understood; particularly with regards to the way female identities are frequently hyperbolised, caricaturised and stereotyped in male-to-female drag performances. Drag’s history also foregrounds a necessary cross-dressing, and in my discussion I have argued that cross-dressing is chiefly (although covertly) maintained in faux queen performance inasmuch as the performing subject is a woman performing a hyperbolised caricatured version of a man’s (predominantly gay man’s) hyperbolised, caricatured version of a woman. It is possible the existence of so many conflicting labels for cis-female drag queens may result from confusion regarding what exactly is being signified in performance, however this effect also seems to reflect how faux queens have been negotiating their emergent and often uncertain place in drag and queer culture over the past two decades or more.

Chapter Three

A key concern that emerged from my authoethnography was the possibility of cultural appropriation and what Moe Myer has termed ‘camp trace’ (Myer, 1994). Chapter Three contextualised camp theory and raised the question of camp trace in regards to cis-female drag queens, particularly concerning those who are straight-identified. It also explored the problem of claiming camp as “distinctively and unambiguously gay male” (Dyer, 1999, p. 110). Drawing on Pamela Robertson’s ‘feminist camp’ and Mock’s ‘performative transactions’, this chapter theorised how female-bodied performers can be the subjects of camp and have camp agency, rather than being exclusively subjugated as camp objects. While I acknowledge the possibility that faux queens might perform camp trace, I do not believe that this is always the case and noted exceptions to the rule in my analysis.

Examining one of my own performances, as well as performances by other faux queens, I argued for the consideration of queer possibilities that resist the act of dominant reincorporation into heteronormative ideology. Additionally, this chapter also concluded that faux queen performances are generally not intended for straight male audiences; rather they are predominantly tailored for gay male and queer/straight female audiences. In this context, the audience gaze on cis-female bodies is subverted, altering the politics of erotics and power at play in faux queen performance.

I conclude that maintaining the challenge of queer is integral to drag, and that failure to do so would indeed result in performances of camp trace. While in Chapter One I discussed concepts of the heteroqueer and cultural queer as indicative of faux queen's queer potential, in Chapter Three I highlighted the fact that these categories must be considered as being problematized by straight privilege. A central difficulty with the notion of cultural queerness is equal access. It may be that a straight person can be culturally queer, but can a queer person be culturally straight? I think the answer is both yes and no. Queer persons may, for most intents and purposes, be able to 'pass' as 'culturally straight' but as discussed with reference to Gayle Rubin's sex hierarchy, few can fully exist within the framework of heteronormativity or 'straightness'. Straight cis-gender folk who do not entirely or correctly perform heteronormativity may sit on the periphery of queer, without necessarily losing their heterosexual/cis-privilege, but it does not work the other way around. On its own, therefore, faux queen performance does not queer the straight subject. However, a performer need not be sexually queer or a gay male to produce camp, and create performances which are well received by majority queer audiences, are politically potent, and resist heteronormativity, dominant reincorporation, and gender hegemony.

Scene Five of *Agorafaux-pas!* "Seek Professional Help" deals explicitly with Myer's charge of camp trace, as well as introducing the idea that affection for drag performance might be cultural rather than exclusively bound to queer sexuality. The scene begins in a hospital room where medical students try to control Fauxbia's random outbursts of lip-syncing. A pompous and aloof clinician enters the scene and proceeds to examine Fauxbia whose symptoms include: inflamed femininity performance, uncontrollable lip-syncing to hospital related pop-songs, and a grotesquely fierce appearance. It appears that Fauxbia is performing in many of the ways that are common to gay male drag queens, yet the doctor asks probing questions and inspects her body only to discover that she is actually cis-female and straight-identified. The medical students suggest the possibility of performative transaction and exchange between

gay male drag queens and camp female performers, citing figures such as Bette Midler and Lady Gaga as examples. The aloof clinician dismisses these ideas, insisting instead that "Fauxbia has a serious case of camp trace" and ordering her to halt such behaviours immediately.

With particular regard to straight-identified faux queens, I found it problematic to rest my argument that there are queer possibilities for our performance work on the concept of performative transactions and exchange alone. There is far too much credible space for a counter-argument that claims cultural appropriation and the potential for dominant gesture of reincorporation. As a result, in Chapter Three I also considered feminist camp, audience reception, performance space and place, resistant bodies, and queer-allied political narrative intentions as key to the queer possibilities of faux queen performances. When considering all of these factors it is possible to read performances by faux queens as maintaining the challenge of queer and actively resisting the act of reincorporation.

Performative transactions and exchange are nonetheless still imperative to the overall argument that faux queen performances can resist reincorporation and maintain the challenge of queer. Scene Six of *Agorafaux-pas!* "Interview with the Vamp" draws on the pop-culture narratives of vampirism in an attempt to conceptualise and complicate the relationship of transaction and exchange between drag queens and faux queens as it relates to performance codes. In this scene, Fauxbia plays 'The Dragula', mentoring a woman who wants to perform as a drag queen. The text from this scene is intended as a parody of the theatrical trailer from the 1994 film *Interview with the Vampire*. The Dragula promises to share her secrets with the awestruck girl, and teaches her how to apply drag makeup, engage with camp sensibilities and project a queered femininity. The Dragula represents the stock figure of 'drag mother' common to many drag houses, troupes and communities. Drag mothers often act as mentors to new performers, and their kin will sometimes adopt their surname. Additionally, The Dragula also lightly explores the more complex and informal process of transaction and influence (which Mock discusses in her paper on 'heteroqueer ladies') by suggesting that drag queen performance codes riff on representations of actual women, establishing drag aesthetics and performance codes as an alternative access to femininity which does not necessarily exclude women from its production or historical locale.

Potential for Future Research

In the chapters of this exegesis and the creative production *Agorafaux-pas!* I examined some of the cultural implications that were explicit in the data generated through my mixed-methods approach. All research projects experience limitations with regard to budget, location, time-frame, resources, and access to communities. Further, most projects are limited by the parameters, goals, scope and ethics clearance outlined early in the planning phase before the research is actually conducted. As a result of the process of conducting research with regards to the self in relation to others, researchers are often left with more questions than answers, especially when using qualitative methods where data emerges and generates constantly. The following outline some of the remaining possibilities for future research on this topic and explain why the limitations of my project prevented me from including them in this work.

A critique of my work particularly in the last six months (and since presenting creative and critical work in the USA) has focused on the racial/ethnic/class-status makeup of my interview subjects. I interviewed nine faux queens and one drag queen in San Francisco, as well as an additional Skype interview with a Dallas-based faux queen. I acknowledge that my interview subjects are predominantly white, well-educated and middle-class, and only two of my interview subjects represent People of Colour who in this case are also well-educated and middle-class. It is important to clarify how this group of interview subjects came about and acknowledge the ways that my research has been limited as a result. First, this sample may reflect the socio-economic climate of San Francisco at the time of the interviews. Since large tech firms such as Google have established their headquarters in Silicon Valley, San Francisco has experienced large-scale gentrification. Although many of the performers I interviewed have lived in San Francisco since the mid-90s or longer, the fact that they are mostly white Americans, and all well-educated and middle-class, may be related to this recent gentrification, where more marginalised communities have been pushed out of the city due to a drastic increase in housing prices. Second, I did not actively pursue interview participants with specific goals to represent a variety of racial, ethnic or class groups and neither did I ask my interview participants to clarify their racial, ethnic or class identity. Rather, with Bea Dazzler's assistance, I contacted everyone involved in the 2013 Faux Queen Pageant and interviewed the people who felt comfortable to respond to my request. At the beginning of the project, it was never within the scope of the research to specifically investigate race, ethnicity or class, however it is clear now that a discussion of race, ethnicity

and class and how they may intersect with queerness and queer possibilities for performance is a significant avenue for further research and could be approached as an extension of this current study. Particularly regarding my interview subjects, a discussion of how they may perform race and class-status is also a potentially useful investigation. Further, it is somewhat common-place, especially in the United States, for white male-to-female drag queens to appropriate the performative codes of African American women, which are stereotyped in many cases. While I would not necessarily say that I could apply that critique to performers involved in my study, investigating how white drag performers appropriate Women of Colour's performative and cultural codes (including faux queens) is another important focus for further research on this topic.

There are also avenues for further research with regards to the history of faux queens on queer drag stages across the USA and other nations. My research has started work towards documenting a history of faux queen performance in San Francisco, with particular focus on The Faux Queen Pageant, however there needs to be more work completed with regards to a comprehensive mapping of faux queen history and the etymology/emergence of the term faux queen in North America and elsewhere. This is particularly important for creating and maintaining queer histories, which are significant to identity work and building community. For example, further research is necessary to investigate the ways that drag king and faux queen performances and troupe culture intersect and inform each other, as well as noting how performance communities of faux queens, drag queens, and drag kings may differ. Additionally, more research could be done with regards to faux queen performances and their audiences, such as understanding who attends drag and why, and how audiences interpret and value performances. Much of the work in my project rests on an examination of potential/actual cultural implications based on critical and theoretical analysis, which includes highly personal answers to these questions from myself as well as my interview subjects. Future research could also look at audience responses directly, by employing methods such as surveys and focus groups. Although I did attempt audience surveys for feedback on both *WerqSF* and *Agorafaux-pas!*, I was unable to collect a large enough sample during the project time-frame to include as data. I hope to pursue this line of research in furthering and continuing my own work on this topic.

Concluding Statement

While there are potentially many more cultural implications of cis-women performing female drag, this project has outlined and analysed the challenges and concerns which seemed most significant after review of my interview data, autoethnography and creative practice. The conclusions of this research are in no way a final word on faux queen performance, but part of a larger conversation that should continue to expand and develop as it incorporates other valuable intersections. There is always potential for different individual experiences that may be explored in other similar research ventures, however this project has focused primarily on a small-scale, principally site-specific ethnography and an in-depth case study of my own experience and practice. It is my opinion that one of the most culturally significant and positive implications of cis-women in female drag is the potential for productive bridging between heterosexual and LGBT communities, identities and culture. Through faux queen performance, straight-identified women perform alongside queer drag performers and are engaging in the practice of feminist camp, queering pop-culture narratives and debating the political implications of labels placed on their performance identity. They are actively engaging in complex identity politics that deal explicitly with sex/gender binaries, resistance to heteronormativity and the challenge of queer. Although these practices do not necessarily make a straight person queer, they do work to bridge the gap between queer and heterosexual identities and culture and encourage straight individuals to reframe their world view through a queer-influenced lens.

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AGORAFAUX-PAS!

A Drag Cabaret

By Jamie Coull

PLAYWRITE'S NOTES

This is a piece of theatre with an autoethnographic focus. It incorporates play conventions with cabaret formats. The work playfully narrates the 'mostly' true story of Agorafauxbia – a straight-identified faux queen whose identity is altered as she becomes involved in the queer performance of drag; addressing questions surrounding the cultural implications that might occur when cis-women do female drag. The narrative for Agorafauxbia draws upon personal stories of the author collected on a research blog (agorafauxbia.com), as well as anecdotes gathered from in-depth interviews with other faux queens. As a result, the characters and stories are not based entirely on the author, but mixed with those of straight-identified, queer and self-identified 'culturally queer' faux queens who contributed to the project. The play is in two acts. Act One focuses on the narrative of Agora and Fauxbia, and introduces some faux queen history. Act Two explores and addresses some of the challenges and concerns which emerge when women go public as faux queens. The chorus appear as figures of Fauxbia's imagination, playing various roles to support the progression of the narrative.

Since the original performance of *Agorafaux-pas!* in December 2014, the script has been edited and additions have been made. Post-performance additions to the script are signalled using red text throughout the work. All sections of the script shown in red were not included in the performed/recorded version of *Agorafaux-pas!*

TIME AND PLACE

The action begins in Fauxbia's bedroom in Perth, Western Australia. It is 2012 and she is home alone, dressing up and pretending to be a drag queen. The time and setting shift regularly throughout the play.

CHARACTERS

Agora *the drag queen hostess and alter ego to Fauxbia*

Fauxbia *the secret faux queen*

Chorus (three or more) *a range of supporting characters*

COSTUMING

It is recommended that costumes are devised in an extremely simplistic and symbolic manner to allow for quick changes and the fast paced nature of this work, unless using a larger chorus.

STAGE DESIGN

At least one entry/exit to a backstage area is required (or it is possible to use the space behind audience seating as a more open offstage area). The stage area does not require a specific set, and the cast should use props and screen projections to change the setting. A multi-media projection screen is required and should be placed to the left of the stage. It is important that the onstage action does not cast a shadow on the screen.

MINIMUM TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Sound and Multi-media operator; Spotlight Operator

ORIGINAL CAST AND CREW

First performed at: 'The Maryland Room' Marie Mount Hall, The University of Maryland, College Park. 12th & 13th December 2014.

Agora: Cara Snyder (aka #Ivantit)

Fauxbia: Jamie Coull (aka Agorafauxbia)

Chorus: Cassy Griff (aka Cass Masualty), Stephanie McClure (aka Stephen Blodgett) and Lockie McKinna (aka The Spangled Emperor)

Sound & Multi-media: Avery Dame **Lighting:** Melissa Rogers

Backstage: Erin Collins **Front of House:** Faith Ambrosini

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: IN MY ROOM

The Beach Boys "In My Room" plays.[53] *Placed onstage is a sofa and a stool. Under the stool there is a prop iPad, hand mirror, makeup brushes and a dress. Next to the sofa is a larger mirror. Fauxbia enters. She sits on the stool, facing the audience and holding the hand mirror. She is in drag makeup except for eyebrows, wig, and costume. Chorus members are dressed in pyjamas or robes and carry bed sheets to use in their dance routine. They appear and lip-sync to the music while Fauxbia dresses, finishes her makeup and strikes a pose.*

CHORUS 1: There's a world where I can go and tell my secrets to… in my room… in my room.

CHORUS 2: _____ I can go and tell my secrets to….in my room… in my room…in my room.

CHORUS 3: _____ tell my secrets to….in my room…in my room… in my room.

Worries and fears posted on agorafauxbia.com and found in interview data are projected onto the multi-media screen.

ALL CHORUS: In this world I lock out all my worries and my fears… in my room… in my room.

ALL CHORUS: Do my dreaming and my scheming lie awake and pray? Do my crying and my sighing laugh at yesterday?

ALL CHORUS: Now it's dark and I'm alone but I won't be afraid… in my room… in my room… in my room (continue to fade).

Fauxbia and Chorus freeze in tableau. Chorus 3 holds a larger mirror for Fauxbia to look into. Agora enters.

AGORA: Yes that used to be me, hiding away in my room dressing up like a drag queen. No one knew I did it, and I was pretty sure that I wasn't allowed to

[53] The Beach Boys "In My Room" *http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l71pbhqnvNM*

anyway. I'm actually a girl see… with all the bits! I was born this way… well not this way – I was born that way.

Agora points to a baby picture of Fauxbia (Jamie) projected onto the screen.

AGORA: …and somehow along the way I went from that (*points to the screen)* to this. What did my mother do wrong you may ask? How did she manage to raise a woman who could have everything 'women' are supposed to want: a husband, a big wedding, a baby and so on until we die… But dresses up as a big old drag queen in her room instead?

Doorbell rings. Fauxbia and the Chorus snap back to life.

FAUXBIA & CHORUS: (*yells)* Mailman! (*Fauxbia and Chorus hide from the mailman*).

AGORA: (*in the style of David Attenborough; to audience)* The mailman! Natural enemy of the secret drag queen in suburbia! (*to Fauxbia)* It's fine Fauxbia, he's gone!

Fauxbia checks one of the stage entrances to see if the mailman has left.

FAUXBIA: You didn't hide Agora! What if he had seen you? What would that have looked like?

AGORA: Like a fat girl in too much make up…. Let him see you, I want to be seen! I'm Agora, I'm the gathering place, the assembly, I SPEAK IN PUBLIC!

FAUXBIA: No, it's not…normal. You, we are weird. We're not really allowed to, you know (*whispers)* be a drag queen. There's something wrong with us. Just try to keep a low profile okay?

Fauxbia throws a bed sheet over Agora's head. Fauxbia and Chorus return to tableau, they change every few seconds to different poses (taking selfies, placing wigs etc).

AGORA: (*removes bedsheet)* Agorafauxbia, that's me. Well, her and I together, and this is our story. Sometimes it feels like there is me 'now', that's Agora, and me 'then', that's her, Fauxbia. She's so scared of everything. Fauxbia literally

spent years in her room dressing up for an imaginary audience. When she was a teenager, she pretended to be pop-stars, dancers, and characters from Harry Potter. Making up her own spells and performing fan fiction for the mirror.

FAUXBIA: Avada Kedavra! (*Fauxbia throws a wig or hair piece at Agora)*

AGORA: Keep your wig on Fauxbia! And keep your drag minions on a leash! (*Chorus run offstage squealing in terror. Fauxbia sits on the sofa)*

AGORA: Eventually, she got this weird thing about drag queens. She wanted to know what it was like to look like them. That's when I started to materialise.

FAUXBIA: It's because they seem so confident, like they're wearing glamorous armour or something. Drag queens, from my perspective, they don't ever look scared. I want to feel that.

AGORA: And so began her secret routine. While her boyfriend was at work, she dressed up in girl drag. Taking selfies that she never showed anyone and living in fear of the mailman.

Drag makeup selfies are projected onto the screen while Agora appears to flick through them on the iPad.

FAUXBIA: Hey what are you doing? Don't look at those! (*Fauxbia notices the images on the screen) (shouts)* OH MY GOD AGORA! What is wrong with you? You are a girl, remember? That means you can't do drag in public; only when nobody is home. Got it?

AGORA: Maybe she was drawn to drag queens at that time because of some issues she was having with anxiety. Her self-esteem had hit a pretty low level, panic attacks were a regular occurrence, and incessant worrying had taken a strangle hold on her life. Dressing up as a towering drag queen must have seemed an appealing way to try to combat that. And it was… I was GREAT escapism. But Fauxbia also worried someone would find out, and she'd be in trouble. Her and I would only ever meet in private.

Music plays: Original song "Meeting in Private"

Chorus return to the stage holding tea lights and position themselves like a group of Christmas carollers.

FAUXBIA: There's a girl,
Hiding a drag queen in her body.
Doesn't want to offend,
Just to pretend,
In private.

AGORA: There's a queen!

FAUXBIA: How could she make such a massive mistake?
She tries to shout;

AGORA: Please let me out;

FAUXBIA: But I'm afraid.

ALL CHORUS: People will say you're abhorrent!

FAUXBIA: *(spoken)* Abhorrent! Did you hear that?

CHORUS: They'll say it's not fair on gay men!

AGORA: (*spoken)* Oh get over it!

AGORA: So we keep meeting in private.

FAUXBIA: Quick! Hide from the mailman again.

To indicate a scene change, The Artic Monkey's "Fake Tales of San Francisco" plays.[54]

[54] The Artic Monkeys "Fake Tales of San Francisco" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr8JAVrnAeI

SCENE 2: MEANWHILE IN SAN FRANCISCO

Projected on the screen is a text title: ***Cis-female drag performers were being denied performance opportunities based on their sex.***

Chorus 1 & 2 enter holding cardboard doors. They play drag club owners/managers. Agora enters and knocks on the first door. The first door opens and Chorus 1 stands behind it. The feint sound of Judy Garland singing "Get Happy"[55] *and crowd noise is heard.*

CHORUS 1: What?

AGORA: Hi Hon, I'm looking to get booked at some drag clubs in town. I was wondering if…

CHORUS 1: (*looking Agora up and down)* No, I don't think so.

AGORA: Why not?

CHORUS 1: (*grabbing Agora's breasts or looking Agora up and down, inspecting her closely*) They're real aren't they?

AGORA: Well, yeah they are…

CHORUS 1: We're a drag club darling, not a strip joint. We only take drag queens! Try somewhere else. *(door slams shut)*

AGORA: (*shouts*) But I am a drag queen!

Agora knocks on second door. The door opens, and Chorus 2 stands behind it. The feint sound of Dusty Springfield's "I am woman hear me roar"[56] *plays with crowd noises.*

CHORUS 2: Yes?

AGORA: Hi I'm..

CHORUS 2: We don't take RG's.

AGORA: You don't take who?

[55] Judy Garland sings "Get Happy" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2U-rBZREQMw
[56] Dusty Springfield sings "I am Woman" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3iorVlGPR4

CHORUS 2: RG's… real girls.

AGORA: No no no, you've got me all wrong. (*uses a gruff, deeper voice*) I'm totally a man.

CHORUS 2: *(grabbing Agora between the legs or looking at Agora's crotch closely)* Impressive tuck! Come on in.

A few moments later the door opens and Agora is thrown out onto the street.

CHORUS 2: Get out of here you imposter; I said NO REAL GIRLS! (*Chorus 2 bends down to whisper to Agora)* Listen honey, I'm just doing my job, it's nothing personal. I've heard there is a place for people like you. It's called La Klubstituta – you want to find two queens named Ruby Toosday and Diet Popstitute. I know Diet, she's a total accolade of Andy Warhol. She will give anyone a chance. Go see those Klubstitutes. (*returns to yelling*) AND GO BACK TO THE STRAIGHT CLUBS REAL GIRL! (*whispers*) Good luck sweety!

Agora exits. Chorus 1 & 2 move their doors to the sides of the stage/or exit.

Projected onto the screen is a text title: **Cis-female drag performers began to find acceptance through Diet Popstitute and Ruby Toosday at La Klubstituta**.

AGORA: (*knocking*) Hello? Is this La Klubstituta? I'm looking for someone named Ruby or Diet? Hello?

CHORUS 3 AS RUBY: (*quickly moves across the stage with fabric and decorations in their hands*) Hello! Yes I'm Ruby Toosday, come on in, get involved and join the crew.

AGORA: Seriously?

CHORUS 3 AS RUBY: (*Ruby stops, stares at Agora)* You look fierce… Can you dance?

AGORA: Yes

CHORUS 3 AS RUBY: Can you lip-sync?

AGORA: Yes

CHORUS 3 AS RUBY: Can you serve face?

AGORA: Um Hello? (*pulls a face*)

CHORUS 3 AS RUBY: Than you're in! Why so worried?

AGORA: No one else in town will let me perform. I've even been kicked out, screamed at and called an imposter; because I'm not a man.

CHORUS 3 AS RUBY: Oh my dear, just like Connie Champagne and Trashina Can! Yes, it happens fairly regularly. A lot of other clubs and queens don't like 'real girl' drag queens, which is a shame because I've seen some ah-mazing drag queens trapped in 'real girl' bodies! But Diet will put anyone on stage at least once. If you're a good performer, that's all that matters here. *(calling out)* Diet! Come and meet the new one.

Chorus 1 as Diet Popstitute enters (dressed to slightly resemble Andy Warhol).

CHORUS 1 AS DIET: Hello newbie! Welcome, welcome! Ok Girls, Ruby and I have had a spectacular idea! It's a special performance night for our female friends who are drag queens, and it's going to be a contest! Oh, and we're doing it tonight! So Get to Work! *(emphatically)*

Music plays: Beyoncé "Girls" Instrumental[57]

CHORUS 3 AS RUBY: I love it! It's The Fabulous She-Male, Female Female Impersonators, Drag Queens Trapped in Real Women's Bodies, Biological Women's Fabulousness, Sparkly Glitter Wig Show!

CHORUS 1 AS DIET: *(who has been cringing at the long name Ruby suggests)* Ah no, Ruby… what about the fake?

CHORUS 3 AS RUBY: No! The false!

CHORUS 1 AS DIET: Or maybe the faux?

CHORUS 3 AS RUBY: Yes The Faux Queen Pageant!

[57] Beyoncé "Girls" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVo5tIuPiU8

CHORUS 1 AS DIET: It's The Faux Queen Pageant!

BOTH: It's so French and fabulous!

Chorus 2 and Fauxbia become the contestants of the various Faux Queen Pageants, and perform a cat walk when their name is called. Ruby and Diet read the performer's biographies.

CHORUS 3 AS RUBY: Now let's give a big welcome to contestant number one, Bea Dazzler:

Chorus 2 and Fauxbia hold up cardboard cut-out images of the real faux queen's faces as they embody them. Images of the actual faux queens are projected onto the screen.

CHORUS 3 AS RUBY: Bea Dazzler is a fierce faux and well known personal fashion designer to many of San Francisco's most famous drag queens! She has made costumes for figures such Heklina and Peaches Christ. Peaches was actually the first person to introduce her to the idea of becoming a faux queen. Thank you Bea Dazzler!

CHORUS 1 AS DIET: Now welcome contestant number two, Frida K Hole! She's serving up that famous pretty/ugly dichotomy on stage tonight! Frida's favourite things in this world are unisex, unicycle and unibrow! Frida's drag mother is U-Phoria Glitter who taught her everything she knows. Round of applause for Frida K Hole!

CHORUS 3 AS RUBY: And our third contestant is Vesper Synd! Vesper is the Sid Vicious of drag artists, and a recent convert from the burlesque community. She found much of her fetish inspired creative energies were stifled by burlesque, and moved her attentions to entertaining our weird and wonderful queer audiences. Vesper was introduced to drag by *RuPaul's Drag Race*, ironically a competition which will not allow her to perform. Vesper Synd everybody!

CHORUS 1 AS DIET: Our final contestant is Kentucky Fried Woman. She first took the stage as a queen with her college friend, as part of a drag contest run by kinging troupe The Disposable Boy Toys. For her, that performance was

literally about putting a stake in the ground and proclaiming, "I am a queer woman, performing my femininity!" She was performing drag as a faux queen for about three years before she knew what to call it. Thank you Kentucky Fried Woman!

CHORUS 3 AS RUBY: Now let's welcome back Bea Dazzler for her talent number!

The entire scene turns 180 degrees to face the back of the stage. All are in tableau, while Agora enters as herself to move the story forward.

AGORA: It was all happening in San Francisco, but Fauxbia was in Perth. That's in Western Australia, and it is the most isolated capital city in the entire world. She had been going along to drag shows and gay bingo and was following all the local clubs on Facebook. No one ever mentioned faux queens. She had no idea that women could be drag queens and remained in her room wondering why a very normative seeming woman would desire to be a drag queen.

AGORA & FAUXBIA: It's mum's fault.

Fountains of Wayne "Stacey's Mum"[58] plays to indicate the scene change.

SCENE 3: APPRENTICE QUEEN

AGORA: Oh dear…Fauxbia's poor mum. She thought that ballet, Barbies and Disney princesses would make her daughter into girl. But the more and more I think about it, all those things kind of apprenticed her into drag.

(beat)

Wouldn't you love to go back in time and see that little girl?

Doctor Who Theme for Matt Smith "I am the Doctor"[59] plays.

AGORA: If only I had some kind of, I don't know, box… that could navigate Time And Relative Dimensions In Space. Hmmm yes...it would have to be

[58] Fountains of Wayne "Stacey's Mom" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZLfasMPOU4
[59] From BCC science fiction series Doctor Who: "I am The Doctor" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmmPkdVSW_0

disguised as something inconspicuous, definitely something that people see every day in the UK, but nowhere else.

Chorus 1 & 2 bring out Agora's Ta-dar-dis (a Doctor Who TARDIS[60]) while she monologues.

AGORA: A blue police call box… NO! A glittery blue police call box; that is bigger on the inside, and can transport us through time and space to see Fauxbia's past!

CHORUS 1 & 2: Ta-daaaaar….dis!

AGORA: Yes, you fucking fabulous little drag minions! Onward in the Ta-dar-dis to Fauxbia's past!

Doctor Who Opening Theme Song plays.[61] Agora moves inside Ta-dar-dis, which then spins offstage. The screen projection changes to show children at a ballet lesson.

VOICE OVER AGORA: It's 1991 and Fauxbia is five years old. She's been learning baby ballet for a little while now....

AGORA AS DANCE TEACHER: Come on little swans! Get into position.

The Chorus enter dressed for ballet and behaving like children at a tiny-tots ballet class: in tutu's and ballet shoes. They perform barre exercises in a comic way which compliments the music (Tchaikovsky's "Four Little Swans" from Swan Lake plays).[62]

AGORA AS DANCE TEACHER: (*Rhythmically)* It's step and point, step and point, and point, point, point, point, step together, arms up! Get rid of those ducky hands! Where is Fauxbia?

Fauxbia floats across the stage to join the others in ballet exercise. Agora corrects the angle of the children's arms. The sequence continues.

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[60] In the BBC science fiction series Doctor Who, The Doctor travels through time and space in a Tardis. The Tardis is disguised as an ordinary police call box. Tardis is an acronym for Time and Relative Dimensions in Space.
[61] Doctor Who Opening Theme Song https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CYDgezeQas
[62] Tchaikovsky's "Four Little Swans" from Swan Lake https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gApOfm4qd0

AGORA AS DANCE TEACHER: Now move it back, plié and up! Get ready to jump and sauté, sauté, sauté, sauté, and relevé! Now back it up and relevé! And dead swan, dead swan, dead swan, dead, swan!

All freeze in tableau.

AGORA VOICE OVER: And then, when she was old enough, Fauxbia was allowed to take jazz class. That experience seriously changed her view on the world.

Music plays: *Basement Jaxx "Do Your Thing".*[63]

AGORA DANCE TEACHER: Alright people, you are going to dance together in the annual concert! That means costumes, wigs, eyelashes and lights!

The chorus remove their tutus, and put on leg warmers, sweat bands and bright lycra clothing in Flash Dance/Fame *style.*

AGORA AS DANCE TEACHER: It's grapevine clap, grapevine clap, slide, spin and jazz hands, jazz hands, jazz hands!

This song continues throughout the remainder of the scene, so that the cast can switch between dance sequence, other movements, and dialogue.

AGORA VOICE OVER: It was her first taste of something spectacular, sparkly and bright. It was in those early dance classes that Fauxbia began to locate her drag self – the parts of me that she would find difficult, even IMPOSSIBLE, to let go of as she grew up!

Chorus members hold symbolic items up to Fauxbia (extra-large cardboard eyelashes and lips etc).

Projected on the screen: Anecdotes from the cast about the first time they remember wearing these types of over-the-top gendered items.

FAUXBIA: Whoa! Okay… This is my face!

CHORUS 1: Holy shit!

[63] Basement Jaxx "Do your thing" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZZ62ODXCyw

CHORUS 2: You're such a pretty lady!

FAUXBIA: I know! This is my 'real' face…my other face was just pretending!

AGORA VOICE OVER: And it wasn't just the clothes and wigs, she learned to move like me too.

Agora and Fauxbia move in unison in a brief choreographed sequence.

Dance sequence continues to "Do your thing"; then all exit.

AGORA VOICE OVER: Wake up mums! Wake up dance teachers! You're running a baby drag queen factory. (*music stops)* But when Fauxbia got to a certain age, suddenly it wasn't ok anymore. You either had to get serious about dance…

Enter Chorus 3 in black/grey clothing and a neutral mask. Chorus 3 performs a short avant-garde style dance routine to John Cage's "Music of Changes"[64]

AGORA VOICE OVER: Or get into burlesque, where you could keep your sequins, for a little bit at least.

Enter Chorus 2 as burlesque performer: removing feather boa/gloves and throwing them into the audience as they move across the stage. Burlesque favourite "The Stripper"[65] *plays. Agora returns to the stage after this short sequence.*

AGORA: Fauxbia didn't want to do either of those things. Yes, she wanted the false eyelashes, the wigs, the sequins, the stilettos, and the makeup, but she hoped to keep it mostly all on too. Grown-up Fauxbia didn't know where to get her 'sequins and sparkles' fix after she finished at dancing school. It's time to go back to the future and visit Fauxbia in her early 20s… but how would one do such a thing?

The Back to the Future *theme tune plays.*[66] *The Chorus bring out a cardboard Delorean*[67] *to whisk Agora back to Fauxbia's future. Agora exits in the Delorean.*

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[64] John Cage "Music of Changes" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAjKD12RkEY
[65] "The Stripper" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bLX06yR3wY
[66] *Back to the Future* theme song https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8TZbze72Bc
[67] The Delorean was the time machine car in the *Back to the Future* film series.

AGORA: *(calling out)* It's time to get a job Fauxbia!

Stage is emptied of cast and props.

ADDITIONAL MEDIA INTERVAL

This media interval is a pre-recorded parody of a scene from Romy and Michelle's High School Reunion.[68] *The video plays on the screen as the stage is reset for Scene 4.*[69]

Agora and Fauxbia are dressed in black power-suits as 'business women'. They walk into a typical American-style diner. The dialogue is taken directly from the film.

FAUXBIA: Alright, now just remember Agora, from this point on we are sophisticated, educated, successful career women.

AGORA: Right okay. God, this underwear is totally riding up my butt crack.

They approach the counter to order food. A server stands behind the counter with a note pad and pencil.

FAUXBIA: Yeah Hello. Um, we need something to go.

SERVER: Okay.

FAUXBIA: Do you have some sort of 'business woman's special'?

SERVER: Come again?

FAUXBIA: Well we're business women.

AGORA: Yeah, international business women.

FAUXBIA: And you know some places have like a lunch special?

AGORA: For international business women.

SERVER: We don't have anything like that.

[68] Business Woman's Special Scene from Romy and Michelle's High School Reunion https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DVPddRbP2I

[69] This additional media interval was not included in the performed/recorded version of *Agorafaux-pas!*

FAUXBIA: Well why don't you just give us two burgers and fries and diet cokes coz' we're in a hurry.

AGORA: We're doing Maryland later. For an international business thing, you know.

SERVER: What kind of business you in?

Agora and Fauxbia stare blankly at the server, unable to answer.

(Mark & Mirkin, 1997).

SCENE 4: THE PRENTENDIES

This scene is set in a high school where Fauxbia was a teacher for four years. A school bell sounds, followed by the Saved by the Bell *Theme Song.*[70] *The Chorus run around the stage with books, rushing to get to class in a choreographed sequence. In this scene Chorus 1, 2 & 3 play high-school students.*

CHORUS 1: *(lip-syncing)* When I wake up in the morning, and the alarm gives out a warning, I don't think I'll ever make it on time. By the time I grab my books, and I give myself a look, I'm at the corner just in time to see the bus fly by. It's alright coz' I'm saved by the bell.

FAUXBIA: Ok come on in and sit down everyone. Spencer don't sit next to Jake. Lucy take off that headband, it's not school uniform. Now who did their homework last night? Hands up! Ok well if you didn't do it then you are spending lunch time with me.

ALL CHORUS: Awwww miss!

The school bell rings and the Chorus and Fauxbia exit the stage.

AGORA: (*addressing the audience)* She was a boring person, but it wasn't entirely her fault. How many of you are teachers?

Agora is in the audience space and walks amongst it.

[70] Disney TV series *Saved by the Bell* theme song https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dru5iujHagk

AGORA: *(choosing an audience member to address directly)* Yes you are, I can tell. Dark rings around the eyes, flat shoes, and this gradual hatred of children building and festering inside of you. You just really want to strangle them don't you? But you can't; that's child abuse. It's so good to see you here but I'm really surprised. I mean, doing something fun? Taking time out for yourself? Tsk, Tsk… *(Chorus and Fauxbia enter)*That's really not what's best for the children dear.

FAUXBIA: Spencer don't sit next to Jake. Lucy…

AGORA: The time Fauxbia spent as a teacher is sometimes thought of as 'The Pretend Years'. She felt a lot of pressure to follow a particular path expected of young female teachers.

ALL CHORUS: Awwww Miss!

AGORA: For a long time, she felt like someone else was holding the reigns, and she was losing control over herself.

Stylised sequence to Kimbra's "Settle Down".[71] *The Chorus tie fabric to Fauxbia's wrists, elbows and ankles (they have two pieces each). The sequence should be choreographed to look as if the Chorus are controlling how Fauxbia's entire body moves.*

Agora goes backstage for a costume change.

FAUXBIA: I wanna settle down, I wanna settle down. Won't you settle down with me? Settle down.

We can settle at a table – a table for two. Won't you wine and dine with me? Settle down.

I wanna raise a child, I wanna raise a child. Won't you raise a child with me? Raise a child.

We'll call her Nebraska – Nebraska Jones. She'll have your nose. Just so you know.

[71] Kimbra "Settle Down" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHV04eSGzAA

I wanna settle down, I wanna settle down. Won't you settle down with me? Settle down.
I wanna settle down, I wanna settle down. Won't you settle down with me? Settle down.

Run from Angela Vickers. I saw her with you. Monday morning small talking on the avenue.

She's got a fancy car. She wants to take you far, from the city lights and sounds deep into the dark.

Fauxbia is wrapped in the puppet strings, partly due to the fact that she is tied to them, and party due to her own movements which exacerbate her entanglement.

AGORA VOICE OVER: Eventually, so many things bound her to enforced behaviours that she couldn't move on her own at all. She was straight jacketed into the normal path of a female teacher, and there was a chance she'd never find me again... I had to do something about that.

Agora dressed as Freddie Mercury (styled as in the "I Want to Break Free" video clip[72]) appears on stage vacuuming around Fauxbia. The instrumental introduction from Queen's "I Want to Break Free" plays.

AGORA FREDDIE: I want to break free, I want to break free, I want to break free from your lies you're so self-satisfied I don't need you.
I've got to break free.
God knows, God knows I want to break free.

CHORUS: SECURITY ALERT! (*repeat)*

Security breach sirens sound effect – Agora switches on the vacuum cleaner, uses it to remove the Chorus from Fauxbia, and throws them backstage.

[72] Queen "I Want to Break Free" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-Zo4AVL7AE

AGORA FREDDIE: I've got to break free, I want to break free yeah. I want, I want I want I want to break free.

Back to the Future *theme plays and Chorus 2 brings out the Delorean to Agora and Fauxbia.*

AGORA: God damn it, I just broke free! Where are we going now?

CHORUS 2: Even further into the future. We're going back to Fauxbia's bedroom in Australia!

AGORA: Maybe they should have called this show 'Incessant Time Travel: A Drag Cabaret'.

SCENE 5: AGORA GOES ONLINE

Continue Back to the Future *theme and cross fade into Men at Work's "Land Down Under".*[73] *The stage is reset as the bedroom of Scene 1. Fauxbia sits at a desk – searching on her iPad. Agora enters and flops down on the sofa.*

AGORA: I'm really getting sick and tired of hiding in your boring as shit bedroom Fauxbia!

FAUXBIA: Oh look at this Agora! Female drag queens are called 'faux queens'. It looks like they have a pageant for them in San Francisco every year too.

AGORA: Yes I fucking know about it! I just spent 20 minutes explaining it to them! (*points to audience)* Can we please go out tonight and compete at amateur drag night? I'm so ready!

FAUXBIA: I wonder if you have to be a lesbian though… Probably. Do you think it would be weird because I have a boyfriend?

AGORA: Listen, some faux queens are queer-allied but not sexually queered themselves. Many have strong friendships with gay men – especially other drag queens. Believe me Fauxbia, they will welcome you with open arms, as long as you aim to enter the drag world with respect.

FAUXBIA: Meaning what exactly?

[73] Men at Work "Land Down Under" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfR9iY5y94s

AGORA: Well you can't just put on a wig and some lipstick and be like "YAY, now I'm a drag queen! Weeee how fun." There are histories that you should make yourself familiar with.

FAUXBIA: Ok got it… investigate histories… (*typing on the iPad – making a list)*

AGORA:…and you should be aware of how your drag is engaging in notions of gender construction.

FAUXBIA: Read some Judith Butler. Okay!

AGORA: And, Fauxbia… you HAVE to bring it girl! You have to be bigger, better, badder, more garish, and you actually have to look like a drag queen!

FAUXBIA: Watch YouTube drag makeup tutorial. Uh huh… go on.

AGORA: And most of all you need to get out there and perform at amateur drag night!!! So let's go!

FAUXBIA: Okay! Yeah! I've got it! – So I'm going to set up a website.

AGORA: What noooooo, we're going to amateur drag night!

FAUXBIA: We'll be an online faux queen.

AGORA: No no no! Terrible idea!

FAUXBIA:…and we can perform there as much as we like! It's totally genius because then I can have a page where I blog about all my feelings and what I'm learning and blah blah blah! Oh and a reading list so people can see that I researched those histories you were talking about!

AGORA: You're missing the point somehow…

FAUXBIA: And just make that a hyperlink... and done! Agorafauxbia.com is live!

AGORA: Oh no! Oh Shit shit shit shit shit!

Chorus enter making 'technical internet noises' and drag Agora backstage.

AGORA: Noooooooo! We should be going to amateur drag night downtown!

Pre-recorded Agora appears on the screen

FAUXBIA: Hey Agora you made it!

ONSCREEN AGORA: For the record I am not happy about this! Hiding me behind a screen… The nerve of you!

FAUXBIA: Now to sit back and wait for all the views, and likes, and floods of followers!

Silence and sounds of crickets.

ONSCREEN AGORA*:* Fauxbia, this website might be making you feel safe, but no one looks at it! No one watches the interviews, no one comments on the forum, no one wants to read the blog. Mum can't even remember how to spell it in "The Google"!

FAUXBIA: But the site statistics say I'm getting over 80 visits a day! That seems like a lot Agora! I've been blogging so much. And I put up lots photos of my costumes, and makeup transformations and I even made a couple of videos!

ONSCREEN AGORA: Those visitors are all bots, not people! – They're mining your website for information, so it all shows up on "The Google" and stuff.

FAUBIA: So what you're saying is…

Fauxbia sings Tim Minchin's "YouTube Lament"[74]

FAUXBIA: All my carefully measured metaphor

All my flat nine dominant seven chords
All of my shtick
My lyrical trickery
All of those bows
All that applause

All my intertextuality
All my self-aware hypocrisy

[74] Tim Minchin "YouTube Lament" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfR9iY5y94s

All of those rhymes
My irregular times
All my softly spoken sophistry

All my make-up, all my lights
All my photo shoots in tights
All my pretensions
All my intentions
All my glitzy opening nights

All my brow-dependent jokes
All my mirror balls and smoke
All my tilts at wit and whimsy
All my poetry
My swear words and my smut

Will never get as many hits as
'Kittens Waking Up' (Minchin, 2008).

While Fauxbia sings, Chorus 2 & 3 crawl on stage dressed as cats. They rub themselves against Fauxbia and behave as cats do. They intentionally try to take as much focus from her as possible.

ON SCREEN AGORA: Actually I think Western Australian comedian Tim Minchin said that and you just sang his song, but yeah that's kind of what I was going for.

Now, great news! I've used my new internet powers to book flights to San Francisco. You and I are going to that damn Faux Queen Pageant to make our live drag debut so someone can finally notice me!

The "Smelly Cat"[75] *song from American TV series* Friends *plays as the cast remove everything from the stage.*

END OF ACT 1

[75] "Smelly Cat" from the TV series *Friends* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNXIZuIBJKs

VIDEO INTERMISSION

During intermission the audience see a recorded performance at San Francisco's Faux Queen Pageant. This is Agorafauxbia's number at the 2013 pageant, for which she won second runner up. The number is titled 'Fashion Faux-Wars'. It is a Star Wars *parody, and a creative response to the impact of tech companies on San Francisco's drag community.*

YouTube Link to performance recording:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWkjOlA6AV0

ACT TWO

ACT TWO INTRODUCTION

AGORA: Well wasn't that fun hey? Getting to see Agorafauxbia do her thing! But it's time to get back to the play because we have some more stories for you! So here's the thing. Fauxbia travelled from Perth to San Francisco and competed in The Faux Queen Pageant. It was one of the most incredible experiences of her life, and she came back with so much more confidence. My personality was set free and Agorafauxbia came into existence.

With many of her fears put to rest, we had space to consider what happens when people like us do female drag. Now that is a lot to think about and we don't have time to share it all because you folks don't want to be here until next Tuesday…so here is what we are going to do.

Agora is interacting with the audience and adlibbing.

I need a volunteer from the audience please! What's your name? So (*audience name)* did I ever tell you I have magical breasts? I didn't? Well, surprise, I have magic boobs, and I'll let you hold one if you like… (*she takes the fake boob button out of her dress).* Here you go. Now *(audience name)* my boob decides which story we will share. So when I give you a signal you need to press down on that little boobie! So I'll say "(*audience name)* press the boob button", and you'll press it, and the next story will be selected.

Ok (*audience name)* press that boob button!

Agora exits. The boob button triggers a 'wheel of fortune' style device on the multi-media screen. Pop-culture images flip through on the screen as the Mission Impossible *theme song plays.*[76]*The screen eventually lands on an image from popular 90s hospital drama* ER, *introducing the setting of the next scene.*

[76] *Mission Impossible* theme song https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAYhNHhxN0A

SCENE 6: SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

Fauxbia stumbles on to the stage, which is now a hospital setting. She is followed by Chorus 1 & 2 who are dressed in white lab coats and carry clipboards. Chorus 1 & 2 play medical students and Chorus 3 plays a hospital doctor.

CHORUS 1: Put this on ma'am. (*holding a hospital gown)*

FAUXBIA: Why? What's going on?

CHORUS 2: We need to take a look at you, do some tests and run some analyses.

Robert Palmer's "Bad Case of Loving You"[77] *plays and Fauxbia reacts by lip-syncing and dancing.*

CHORUS 1: Oh crap! She's lip-syncing again!

FAUXBIA: Doctor doctor, give me the news, I've got a bad case of loving you. No pill's gonna cure my ill. I've got a, bad case of loving you. (*Chorus 2 sedates Fauxbia with a needle)*

CHORUS 2: Just relax ma'am, we need to find out what's going on… with all of that. (*gestures towards Fauxbia, up and down*) Let's have the doctor examine you. (*Chorus 1 & 2 exchange worried looks)*

CHORUS 1: Where do you suppose 'His Royal Highness' is anyway?

The ER *theme*[78] *plays, and the pre-recorded "Doctor Awesome"*[79] *montage plays on the screen – which is a parody of the opening credits for* ER.

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: Masualty, Blodgett, what is so damned important that you felt the need to interrupt my weekly anal bleach and trim!

CHORUS 1: Doctor, the patient is a straight identified cis-gendered woman from Australia. According to her chart, she's experiencing some rather odd symptoms…

Aqua's "Doctor Jones"[80] *plays and Fauxbia begins dancing and lip-syncing again.*

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[77] Robert Palmer "Bad Case of Loving You" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7z9DwMKvqcc
[78] *ER* TV series opening theme song https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjCnHJ8wIuM
[79] The "Doctor Awesome" montage should be filmed separately and plays on the media screen.

FAUXBIA: Doctor Jones, Jones, Calling Doctor Jones. Doctor Jones, Doctor Jones get up now! Doctor Jones, Jones, Calling Doctor Jones. Doctor Jones, Doctor Jones wake up now!

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: I see. We've never seen a case of this before at this institution. It's likely to be very rare. We need to find out what it is before it spreads like wildfire. Well, let's check she is indeed cis-gendered. *(shouts)* BRING FORTH THE IMPLEMENTS!

CHORUS 1: Bringing forth the implements! (*From behind the curtain, Agora hands Chorus 1 a tray of cowboy hats).*

The doctors move Fauxbia so she is lying on her back. They spread her legs apart and peer between. They put on cowboy hats. Chorus 3 as Dr Awesome lip-syncs to Pig Vomit's "The Vagina Song".[81]

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: Some of them are hairy, some of them are bald. Some are kind of scary and this is what they're called. Vagina!

CHORUS 1 & CHORUS 2: Vagina!

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: VA-GI-HI-NA!

CHORUS 1 & CHORUS 2: VA-GI-NA –A!

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: They call that thing Vagina.

CHORUS 1*:* Yes we can confirm her gender. Sort of, if that is actually a thing… Actually maybe we should re-consider…

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: Are we sure she is *(looks at clipboard)* straight?

CHORUS 2: According to the Kinsey scale[82] she will fall somewhere on the sexuality continuum. Position on the continuum is unique to each person and we cannot say for sure where the subject will fall. Her background indicates

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[80] Aqua "Doctor Jones" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLodKOB00AU
[81] Pig Vomit "The Vagina Song" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebUT92clxzw
[82] "The Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale, sometimes referred to as the "Kinsey Scale," was developed by Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues Wardell Pomeroy and Clyde Martin in 1948, in order to account for research findings that showed people did not fit into neat and exclusive heterosexual or homosexual categories" ("Kinsey's Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale" 2015).

sexual relationships with men only, so she is likely to fall closer to the straight end of the continuum.

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: Are you sure she's Australian?

CHORUS 2: Ah, Let give her an aural

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: A WHAT!

CHORUS 2: An aural examination (*rolls eyes*). (*shouts in a faux-Australian accent)* WOULD YOU LIKE A BLOOMIN'ONION?[83]

FAUXBIA: A what? What are you saying to me?

CHORUS 1 & CHORUS 2: A BLOOMIN' ONION?

FAUXBIA: (*shouts)* WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? And why are you doing that terrible British accent?

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: (*writing on the clipboard*) Hmmm….No awareness of outback cuisine, very possibly not Australian. Common bloody med student error! Now look here, we have established the subject as a suspected non-Australian straight cis-gender female. Now the real issue is her condition!

CHORUS 1: Could it be that she is apprenticing some kind of gender performance that doesn't make her feel so… Oh how do I put this simply… Embedded in hetero-patriarchal notions of feminine gender performance?

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: Shut up Blodgett I can hear the Nurse coming. Try to look cool! (*The three doctors pose awkwardly).*

Bon Jovi's "Bad Medicine"[84] begins to play.

AGORA: *(dressed in a 'sexy nurse' Halloween costume; appears on stage. She speaks in a sultry tone, impersonating Marilyn Monroe).* Hello Doctors, I've just

[83] The Bloomin' Onion is a signature appetizer at the Australian-themed American chain restaurant Outback Steakhouse. This is also funny because the product name (similar to 80s tourism slogan 'shrimp on the barbie') sounds distinctly un-Australian.
[84] Bon Jovi "Bad Medicine" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4coXVx8noBA

come to collect the bedpans. *(bending over Chorus to collect items).* Oh dear they're so far down I can barely reach.

The scene switches to a strip club setting. Agora pushes Fauxbia under the table and begins to perform a lap-dance style routine. The doctors loosen their collars and wolf whistle.

FAUXBIA: *(from under the table)* Hello? I'm still here you know!

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: Alright, alright! That's enough now nurse, thank you. (*The music fades, Agora leaves the stage and Fauxbia is returned to the table.* Now, miss, could you tell me more about your symptoms?

FAUXBIA: Well, I find myself—my gender performance actually — kind of swelling a bit.

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: There's a cream for that…

FAUXBIA: No no, there's a version of me that keeps popping up, and she's inflaming my femininity. She's getting really big and people tell me it's not normal.

Fauxbia starts to convulse and signals to Chorus 2 that she is going to vomit. Chorus 2 gives Fauxbia their cowboy hat to use as a bucket.

AGORA VOICE OVER: Resistance to hetero-patriarchal notions of feminine gender performance. Positioning oneself in antithesis to the normative (Mock, 2003).

CHORUS 1: (*places stethoscope on Fauxbia)* I think that's coming from inside of her. Hmm… That sounds a little queer. *Culturally* queer!

AGORA VOICE OVER: Culturally queer: Specific experiences and competencies which are directly related to engagement in queer communities, but not necessarily defined by sexuality of gender identity (Gustavson and Schmitt, 2011).

FAUXBIA: And well, I know it's not normal, but I find myself having some really weird cravings.

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: Oh! Potentially pregnant eh?! Masualty, Blodgett, perform an ultrasound then send her home to her husband. Bloody med students! What a waste of my time! (*scribbles onto chart)*

Chorus 1 & 2 roll their eyes exaggeratedly and huff about. They perform an ultrasound on Fauxbia and an image of Agora's head photo-shopped onto a sonogram picture appears on the screen. Chorus 3 as Dr Awesome writes on their chart while the ultrasound is being performed.

FAUXBIA: No it's not that. I want to put on lots and lots of makeup and experiment with how I can make myself look. But I don't do it to attract men —I want it to be huge and fabulous, fierce and grotesque. I feel more like myself that way.

CHORUS 1: Doctor, wouldn't you describe that as performing hyper-femininity?

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: Shut up Blodgett.

CHORUS 2: That doesn't exactly sound abnormal. I mean, who says we do all that stuff for men anyway?

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: Well, you're not exactly a doctor yet, are you?

Chorus 2 glares at Dr Awesome

FAUXBIA: And, well, I've been looking up my symptoms online…

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: Oh god, here we go (*rubs temples with frustration)* Blodgett, do an x-ray while I listen to this dribble!

FAUXBIA:…and it seems like what I like to do is the same as what drag queens do. But I'm not a gay man, so I can't possibly do the same things they do. Can I?

Chorus 1 is thinking/pondering, looking lost in thought.

CHORUS 1: Maybe it's, no, could it be…

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: Stop prattling about Blodgett, spell it out man!

CHORUS 1: I'm thinking about performative transactions. If Lady Gaga and Bette Midler can borrow from drag queens and then we see drag queens dressing up as them, whatever Miss Fauxbia has isn't all that weird.

CHORUS 2: I think I'm following you. In the simplest terms, Gaga takes much of her inspiration from drag queens, who would have originally taken their inspiration from cis-female celebrities and other drag queens. Now that Gaga herself is a huge pop-idol, drag queens are taking inspiration from her.

CHORUS 1: And Bette Midler, she learned to be a lady from queer drag performers in New York's Bath Houses, but now many drag queens and queer performers try to emulate her. Doctor, it appears that the cultural exchange and transaction process between women and drag queens is constantly oscillating and intersecting!

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: Well…Blodgett…let me be the judge of that! It seems to me Miss Fauxbia here has a serious case of…'camp trace'!

AGORA VOICE OVER: "Camp trace, or residual camp, a strategy of un-queer appropriation of queer praxis whose purpose…is the enfusement of the un-queer with the queer aura, acting to stabilize the ontological challenge of Camp through a dominant gesture of reincorporation" (Meyer, 1994, p. 5).

CHORUS 1 & 2: What?

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: It's obvious! Bloody med student cretins!

FAUXBIA: Now I'm also confused.

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: Basically, she's faking the whole damn thing. It's textbook camp trace; where straight dominant culture appropriates gay sub-culture thus making drag 'mainstream'. The queerness of camp just gets sucked right out! (*slurping noise)*And you're left with flaccid traces…

FAUXBIA: I'm not faking Doctor, I swear!

CHORUS 2: These scan results suggest she's not faking. There is a consistent anomaly. In the context of drag, women are part of the production of camp,

so I find it unlikely we are looking at camp trace, doctor. In fact, I remember reading an article recently which argued that although camp seems to retain an unambiguously gay male status, that position is fundamentally flawed.

CHORUS 3 AS DR AWESOME: How dare you! I am the doctor, you are the patient! And you two… bloody med students! My diagnosis is final! You have camp trace and the only way to get rid of it is to stop pretending to be a drag queen! We'll have to keep you overnight! *(shouts)* MASUALTY! A sedative!

CHORUS 2: Gladly. (*Chrous 2 stabs Chorus 3 as Dr Awesome with a needle, he slumps to the floor).* Bloody med students!

Agora pops her head out from behind the stage curtain.

AGORA: (*to audience)* It's time to press that beautiful boobie again!

The Mission Impossible *theme plays again and the pop-culture images spin on the projection screen. This time it lands on an image of Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt in the movie* Interview with the Vampire.

SCENE 7: INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMP

Fog floats across the stage. An evening backdrop of San Francisco appears on the screen. J.S. Bach's "Toccata & Fugue in D Minor" plays.[85] *This scene is a parody of the cinematic trailer for the movie* Interview with the Vampire. *The dialogue from the trailer is parodied here as we explore the relationship between drag queen and faux queen, which at first glance might appear parasitic, but on closer inspection is a far more complex process of performative and cultural transactions.*

Chorus 3 mimes playing the pipe organ as Agora narrates.

AGORA: *(eerily)* In San Francisco, Fauxbia met a lot of women whose introduction to drag relied on their friendship with gay male drag queens. Those girls were finding that once they met the right drag queen, she would help them onto the stage.

[85] J.S. Bach, "Toccata & Fugue in D Minor": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nnuq9PXbywA

Fauxbia enters dressed as a vampire and stands atop a riser or stool. Chorus 2 as Girl enters cautiously.

CHORUS 2 AS GIRL: Are you, some kind of Dragula?

FAUXBIA AS DRAGULA: So you want me to show you how to be a drag queen? I'll tell you my secret dear. I'll tell you all of it! Hahahahahaha!

Fauxbia as Dragula throws off her cloak. Chorus 2 as Girl is alarmed and falls to the ground.

CHORUS 2 AS GIRL: You are spectacular! *(reaching out to touch Fauxbia as Dragula)* Are you, are you real?

FAUXBIA AS DRAGULA: I am flesh and blood, but not a normal girl. I haven't been normal since Cher straddled that cannon![86]

CHORUS 2 AS GIRL: Right, of course, no one has really.

AGORA VOICE OVER: From the depths of the underground drag world, out of friendship between male drag queens and women.

FAUXBIA AS DRAGULA: I have come to answer your prayers. Your life has no meaning anymore does it?

CHORUS 2 AS GIRL: It's kind of, yeah things have been a bit blah, you know. I'm so busy with work and I never have time to go to the gym…

FAUXBIA AS DRAGULA: Enough!

AGORA VOICE OVER: Her name is LeStrut.[87]

FAUXBIA AS DRAGULA: What if I could give sparkle back to you? Pluck out the dull, inject some glitter and give you another life? One you could never imagine.

CHORUS 2 AS GIRL: You can do that?

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[86] In 1989 Cher released the song "If I Could Turn Back Time". In the official music video Cher performs on a US naval ship amongst sailors. She wears a black leather jacket over a shear and revealing body suit. In the film clip she famously straddles one of the ships cannons as she sings.
[87] The vampire character played by Tom Cruise in *Interview with the Vampire* is named LeStat.

FAUXBIA AS DRAGULA: I can see you wearing a gown of Satan! Hahahahaha!

CHORUS 2 AS GIRL: Don't you mean satin?

FAUXBIA AS DRAGULA: Yes satin, satin. That is what I said!

AGORA VOICE OVER: She chose one woman. She gave her infinite glamour. Eternal fierce-ness, and a face that would win thousands of likes on Facebook. She taught her to use camp and how to lip-sync. She released a fierce goddess.

During the voice over, Chorus 3 enters with a satin wrap-around skirt, and attaches it to Chorus 2 as Girl.

FAUXBIA AS DRAGULA: There must always, always be half nude men dancing erotically behind you.

Chorus 3 removes their shirt and awkward sexy dances behind Chorus 2 as Girl. They use a pantomime style of comedy where the audience can see action that the characters cannot.

FAUXBIA AS DRAGULA: *(noticing Chorus 3)* Oh! This is not the best example.

AGORA VOICE OVER: And then she took her to the stage.

Chorus 2 as Girl moves to the back of the stage, about to exit.

FAUXBIA AS DRAGULA: You're a drag queen who never knew what you could be until I showed you how to paint over your lips. You are ready! You can't stand here any longer. Get it gurrrl!

CHORUS 2 AS GIRL: You made me what I am didn't you?

FAUXBIA AS DRAGULA: You had it all along, dear. We borrow from you, and you borrow from us. We all owe each other something. I just helped you; showed you the way. Go on now, go entertain!

Chorus 2 as Girl leaves the stage. Chorus 3 helps Fauxbia to descend from the stool and they both exit.

Projected on the screen as text:

> **Most people who have written about camp assume that the exchange between gay men's and women's cultures has been wholly one-sided; in other words, that gay men appropriate a feminine aesthetic and certain female stars, but that women, lesbian and heterosexual, do not similarly appropriate aspects of gay male culture (Robertson, 1996, p. 5).**

AGORA VOICE OVER: Welcome to the stage, for the very first time, Polly Morphism!

Chorus 2 as Girl, transformed into Polly Morphism, appears from backstage and lip-syncs to Amanda Lepore's "My Hair Looks Fierce" [88]). Chorus 2 as Polly performs with backup dancers Chorus 3, Fauxbia and Agora. (Choreographed sequence)

CHORUS 2 AS POLLY: I don't know much about clothes, but my hair looks fierce! (x4)

I don't know much about, much about, much about, much about, much about clothes and things. I just talk about, talk about, talk about, talkin' to my friends when my cell phone rings. I don't care about this that, this that, this that, the other, what you talkin' about? I just show up, all done up, dance, do my thing, get paid and I'm out!

I don't know much about clothes but my hair looks fierce (x4)

Projected on the screen as text:

> **By viewing the exchange between women and gay men as a two-way street we could begin to better understand gay male camp and stop taking for granted camp's reliance on feminine images and styles (as if these acts of appropriation were 'natural') (Robertson, 1996, p. 7).**

AGORA: *(to audience)* PUSH THAT BOOB BUTTON!

[88] Amanda Lepore "My Hair Looks Fierce" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0SstxSdpdFM

The Mission Impossible *theme plays again and pop-culture images spin on the projection screen. The spinning images land on a river scene, and Smetana's "The Moldau" plays).*[89]

ADDITIONAL SCENE: THE RIVER CAMP

AGORA: Camp is the incongruous contrast of object and context. It is a "disguise that fails" and a "lie that tells the truth" (Core, 1999, pp. 80-81).

It is Mortica Addams teaching kindergarten.

Projected on the screen is an image from The Addams Family Values *where Angelica Houston plays Mortica*.

AGORA: It is a cock in a frock on a rock.

Projected on the screen is an image from Priscilla Queen of the Desert.

AGORA: It is Joanna Lumley and Jennifer Saunders behaving like spoilt men.

Projected on the screen is an image from the TV series Absolutely Fabulous.

AGORA: It is being what we are not in a way which reveals who we really are.

Projected on the screen is an image of Agorafauxbia.

AGORA: Camp is like a river system beginning at many different sources. Gradually the sources flow together and we find that all the starting points and all the terrain along the way become responsible for its existence. The river of camp is a delicate dance, where different players move together, and sometimes step on each other's feet.

How the water tastes to you depends on the individual. This is how the water tastes to Fauxbia and I:

Smetana's The Moldau *plays.*[90] *From different entry points Agora, Fauxbia and Chorus 1, 2 & 3 appear. Each is holding a long piece of rainbow chiffon. As they enter the stage, an image appears on the screen to signify their object/subject as*

[89] Additional scene "The River Camp" was not used in the performed/recorded version of *Agorafaux-pas!* In the recorded version the action moves directly to Scene 8 "Too Fish".
[90] Smetana's *The Moldau* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdtLuyWuPDs#t=17

contributing to how camp is understood. The cast move melodically and braid the pieces together. They may leave the stage to produce more pieces.

Screen images could include: *Baltimore Hons, Patsy and Edina of* Absolutely Fabulous*, Bette Midler,* Priscilla Queen of the Desert, Muriel's Wedding, *Magda Szubanski in* Fast Forward[91]*, Madonna, Mae West, Divine in* Pink Flamingos*, The Sea witch in* The Little Mermaid*, Esma from the* Emperor's New Groove*, Characters from BBC's* Little Britain*, Angelica Huston as Mortica Addams, Cher, Pam Ann, Bob Downe,* Strictly Ballroom, *George Takai in* Star Trek, Golden Girls*, Vintage* Batman & Robin*, Elton John, Freddie Mercury,* Hocus Pocus, Beetlejuice, The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, Whoopie Goldberq as a lounge singer in* Sister Act*, Images of Agorafauxbia in performances, Images of other faux queens.*

Projected on the screen in text: ***"The far-fetched, the bogus and the patently ludicrous will always cluster round camp" (Booth, 1999, p. 74).***

FAUXBIA: The way the waters of camp taste to me give pause for thought. So many of my camp idols –those people and figures who shape what camp means to me and have drawn me to it – are women. Not only that, they are women who sometimes push an aesthetic which, while it intersects with gay male camp, is better thought of as feminist camp. Females playing ludicrous, far-fetched versions of themselves; making fun out of something that we take very seriously: the business of living as a woman.

AGORA: (*to audience*) LET'S MOVE ON! PRESS MY BOOB!

The Mission Impossible *theme plays again and the pop-culture images spin on the screen. This time it lands on an image from the BBC sitcom* Are You Being Served?

SCENE 8: TOO FISH

This scene is set in a department store and an appropriate backdrop appears on the projection screen. The Are You Being Served? *theme song plays.*[92] *Chorus 2 sits behind a desk marked "Returns & Complaints". Chorus 3 enters with Fauxbia in*

[91] Magda Szubanski is an Australian comedian known for her work in Australian sketch comedies in the 90s and ABC television series *Kath and Kim*.
[92] *Are You Being Served?* was a BBC sitcom airing from 1972-1985. It is set in a department store which sells women's and men's fashion. Link to the theme song: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Trhsw_BxT_k

tow. Fauxbia appears to be packaged in a display box like a Barbie doll. Chorus 3 has purchased a drag queen and is bringing it back to make a complaint and ask for a replacement.

CHORUS 2: Next!

CHORUS 3: Yes, hi there. I've got a problem with my drag queen. I got her at your store last week but something's not right.

CHORUS 2: Ok sir, what's the problem?

CHORUS 3: She's too fish.

CHORUS 2: What sir?

CHORUS 3: She's too fish! She's too much like a woman. I specifically ordered a drag queen.

CHORUS 2: (*looking Fauxbia over, checking for faulty parts*) I don't see anything wrong with this queen sir.

CHORUS 3: She's too fish... Listen. (*pressing the 'try me' button on her display case)*

FAUXBIA: (*lip-syncs parts of Dolly Parton's "Something Fishy"*[93]*)*

There must be something fishy going on.

You said you were goin' on a fishin' trip with some old friend;

You said that you'd be home tonight, somewhere around ten;

Well here it is it's two o'clock and you're still not at home;

I think there's something fishy going on.

CHORUS 2: Sir, she is just singing about a fishing trip…

CHORUS 3: And look at this… she has *(whispers)* a vagina.

[93] Dolly Parton "Something Fishy" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=806en-DvQe4

Chorus 3 lifts the flap on the cardboard box to reveal a vagina and "The Vagina Song" plays briefly again.

CHORUS 2: So what sir?

CHORUS 3: And her breasts... They're all spongy and don't stand up on their own!

CHORUS 2: Sir, I fail to see the issue.

CHORUS 3: Look I specifically ordered a DRAG QUEEN, and I've been swindled. This is clearly A WOMAN dressed up to look like a drag queen.

FAUXBIA: A woman drag queen is still a drag queen. Drag is all about artifice after all.

CHORUS 2: Yes exactly. Listen to your purchase sir. A woman drag queen is still a drag queen. All drag is artifice. Next!

FAUXBIA: And we don't like to be called 'too fish' either. It's very hurtful.

CHORUS 3: It just means too much like a woman, and not enough like a drag queen. Stop getting your knickers in a knot.

FAUXBIA: I know what it means, and we don't like it. It's the same as saying 'throw like a girl' or 'run like a girl'. You call me 'too fish' and I feel bad about being female. It makes me feel like being a woman in drag is not as good as being a man in drag.

CHORUS 3: Well you're not as good. You're just not!

CHORUS 2: Says who sir?

CHORUS 3: I don't know! It's just the way things are. Drag means a person dressing up in clothes of the opposite-sex to their own. Not girls being boys being girls or whatever the heck you're doing. I ordered a real drag queen and I either want an exchange or my money back.

CHORUS 2: Look sir, we sell queens, most of them are male-bodied, but sometimes you find female-bodied ones, sometimes trans-bodied ones; our disclosure statement clearly reads that all our queens are queer-bodied. That could mean

a whole range of things… If you want to use the word 'fish' to mean vagina that is up to you, but I guarantee all of our queens are performing over-the-top, camped femininities. None of them are 'fish' as you say, but they are all barracudas.

Heart's "Barracuda" plays[94]

FAUXBIA: *(lip-syncing)*And if the real thing don't do the trick, no;

You better make up something quick;

You're gonna burn, burn, burn, burn, burn it to the wick;

Ohhh, Barra...barracuda! Oh Yeah.

AGORA: PRESS THAT BOOB BUTTON!

The Mission Impossible *theme plays again and the pop-culture images spin on the screen. This time it lands on an image of Burt and Ernie from the children's series* Sesame Street. *The theme song from* Sesame Street[95] *plays as the stage is reset.*

SCENE 9: WORD OF THE DAY: 'QUEER'

This scene is intended to resemble and parody a segment on the children's television series Sesame Street *where a 'word of the day' is defined in a playful and engaging way. It also incorporates another segment of the series where children are asked to 'spot the difference' in various situations.*

AGORA: Getting involved in faux queen drag opened up a world to Fauxbia that she had not really had much occasion to think about before. When she started talking with other faux queens, she found that some of them said they identified themselves as 'culturally queer'. She wondered what that meant, and whether it was something she could say about herself.

Sesame Street *theme plays. Chorus 3 enters behind a puppetry screen and voices a Kermit the Frog puppet (named Kurtmit the Fraud*[96]*).*

FAUXBIA: Hi I'm Fauxbia

[94] Heart "Barracuda" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4nWy8pmIM4
[95] *Sesame Street* Theme Song https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_2x2p8aHpXI
[96] Said with an American accent, 'Fraud' and 'Frog' sound very similar and are easily mistaken for each other.

KURTMIT: And I'm Kurtmit the Fraud!

FAUXBIA: Who?

KURTMIT: I'm Kurtmit the Fraud!

FAUXBIA: Oh wait, don't you mean…

KURTMIT: No, no, no, no, no, I definitely mean Kurtmit the Fraud!

FAUXBIA: Okay Kurtmit the Fraud. *(to audience)* We're here to tell you all about the word 'queer'. And to help me are these dancers!

The dancers (Chorus 1 & 2 and Agora) appear on stage with a choreographed routine. One of them has shoes on their hands.

FAUXBIA: (*sings)* One of these things is not like the others, one of these things just doesn't belong. Can you guess which thing is not like the others by the time I finish my song.[97]

KURTMIT: Oh Oh Oh Oh! Fauxbia! I know, I know! One of them has shoes on their hands, instead of on their feet.

FAUXBIA: Right Kurtmit! And that's what queer means. It means doing something which is different from the 'normal' or 'expected'.

KURTMIT: Oh okay. Because I thought it meant gay. But thanks to the word of the day now I know…

FAUXBIA: Well actually… *(sings)* One of these things is not like the others, one of these things just doesn't belong. Can you guess which thing is not like the others by the time I finish my song?

The dancers perform stylised weddings/couplings: two heterosexual weddings and one lesbian wedding.

KURTMIT: Oh Oh Oh Oh Oh! I know Fauxbia! One of the weddings had two brides rather than a bride and a groom.

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[97] From *Sesame Street*: "One of These Things is Not Like the Other" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FClGhto1vIg

FAUXBIA: Yes, sometimes if a person says that they are 'queer' they are saying that they are gay, or lesbian. And it's also used to signal Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Questioning identities.

KURTMIT: Don't forget that queer is also used as a derogatory word to make queer folk feel like they don't belong!

FAUXBIA: Right, and some people like to use the word queer in a positive way to claim that they are different, and that difference is a good thing.

KURTMIT: I think it's a good thing.

FAUXBIA: Me too.

KURTMIT: So thanks to the word of the day I know that queer means LGBT and also wearing shoes on your feet...

FAUXBIA: Well, yes but there's more… (*sings)* One of these things is not like the others, one of these things just doesn't belong. Can you guess which thing is not like the others by the time I finish my song.

The dancers hold up protest-like signs which say things like "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus", "Boys have pee-pee's, Girls have vee vee's", and "Gender & Sexuality are Fluid Concepts".

KURTMIT: Oh Oh Oh Oh! Fauxbia! I know it! One of the people considers gender and sexuality to be potentially fluid concepts, while the others maintain static binary understandings.

FAUXBIA: So queer can also mean a political opinion about how you think about gender and sexuality.

KURTMIT: But Fauxbia, on this show we usually explain the word with one simple to understand definition. It's why it's called 'word of the day'. People tune in for 30 seconds and then they know what the word means!

FAUXBIA: I know that Kurtmit. But this word means a lot of different things to a lot of different people.

KURTMIT: Well…Are you queer?

FAUXBIA: I don't know... I mean, I have a queer-influenced political stance on gender and sexuality, but I'm a cis-gender woman romantically interested in men.

KURTMIT: I heard you got married recently… to a man.

FAUXBIA: Yes, I'm married, but my husband is not your typical hetero-masculine type. He performs in my drag numbers as exaggerated and camped male characters. I'm part of a collective of women who do faux queen drag, and it's one of the only places I've ever felt like I really belong. Does that make me queer? I'm not sure. I guess for me it's more of a cultural thing.

KURTMIT: (*sings*) One of these things is not like the others, one of these things just doesn't belong. Can you guess which thing is not like the others by the time I finish my song.

While Kurtmit sings, Chorus 1, 2 & Agora all hold signs which say 'queer'. Fauxbia has one which says 'Straight, cis-gender, culturally queer?' After the song all hold positions for four beats in silence.

AGORA: *(to audience)* This is your last chance to get this right honey! PRESS THAT BOOB BUTTON!

The Mission Impossible *theme song plays for the last time. The pop-culture images spin on the screen, this time landing on an image of Freddie Mercury in the official film clip for his cover of "The Great Pretender".*

SCENE 10: THE REVEAL (FINALE)

Freddie Mercury's cover of "The Great Pretender" plays.[98]

The cast enter the stage one at a time. Each taking a moment to remove their wigs and padding, and clean makeup off their faces with remover wipes. They throw the items into the audience isle or they hang the wipes with pegs on a string extending along the length of the stage.

[98] Freddie Mercury & Queen "The Great Pretender" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLRjFWDGs1g

As each cast member enters the stage, a paragraph is projected on the screen. The paragraph should be composed by each performer and give information about their identity out of drag and express their reasons for performing drag. Examples from the performed version include:

CASS MASUALTY

Hi I'm Cassy and I am a Latina, femme-identified, fat queer woman. And no, I don't wake up looking like this. I chose to perform as a faux queen because I want to draw attention to the ways that gender is constructed, especially in terms of pleasure. I want to perform femininity, and oftentimes, I want it to be obvious…and fucking awesome.

THE SPANGLED EMPEROR

My name is Lockie. I'm an Australian living in the USA, and I'm a cis-man married to a faux queen. I help her out by performing characters in her drag numbers, and as a result I have made some very meaningful friendships with other people who enjoy drag.

STEPHEN BLODGETT

Hello fellow beings. My name is Stephanie although some know me as Stephen Blodgett. I have been performing drag for audiences since 2010, and was crowned Oregon State University's King of the Beaver in 2013. Although for me it is not really about the stage, but rather the gender possibilities that Stephen allows me to explore and experience, and the communities that form through those experiences.

#IVANTIT

I'm Cara, and I'm still figuring it all out.

Influenced by Judith Butler, I am attracted to drag performativity as a parody that reveals gender trouble and thus undoes the cultural bind we all face with regard to our bodies and their cultural meanings.

AGORAFAUXBIA

My name is Jamie. I'm an Australian living in the USA. I'm cis-female and I'm a faux queen who is married to a cis-man. I like to think of my drag as a filter, similar to the coloured gel on a stage light. When I dress up as Agorafauxbia I do not change or become another person, because I carry her around with me all of the time. I do, however, see myself differently, as do other people, in response to the significant external changes which reveal a version of me, or a part of myself, that is facilitated by the filter of drag.

Once the entire cast has performed their physical/personal reveal, they line up along the front of the stage.

AGORA: We are all very different people who are interested in drag, gender performance, and queerness. Those are messy, blurry and confusing things to think about.

FAUXBIA: Faux queens just make it more blurry and confusing. But don't be confused about why women, especially those who are femme-identified, are interested in female drag.

CHORUS 2: We are always already doing it. We don't always wake up looking like girls.

CHORUS 3: Something added is always artifice, faux queens just step that up to the extreme.

AGORA: Female-identified women are always already part of drag, and drag queen culture is always already parasitic of (or transacting with) feminine-identified female culture.

CHORUS 1: Anyone should feel that they can try it; and in the process open their minds to how all of our gender performances are complexly constructed. It shouldn't matter what physical bodies are 'really' underneath.

CHOURUS 2: Faux queens are not stealing drag queen culture, they are exchanging and transacting with it, because women are already a part of drag culture.

FAUXBIA: Don't be confused about why women are interested in female drag. We want to play too. We want to let that part of us out to have some fun. Some people, like me, have tried to hide it or fight it away.

AGORA: Eventually, though, that part of us can win and reveal something new about our identities. How could we ever refuse?

ABBA's "Waterloo"[99] begins to play and Chorus 1, 2 & 3 exit. Agora & Fauxbia remain onstage to perform a choreographed and lip-synced sequence.

My, my, at Waterloo Napoleon did surrender.
Oh yeah, and I have met my destiny in quite a similar way.
The history book on the shelf;
Is always repeating itself.

Waterloo - I was defeated, you won the war.
Waterloo - Promise to love you for ever more.
Waterloo - Couldn't escape if I wanted to.
Waterloo - Knowing my fate is to be with you.
Waterloo - Finally facing my Waterloo.

The projection screen shows THE END and Chorus 1, 2 & 3 enter for a brief curtain call.

My, my, I tried to hold you back but you were stronger.
Oh yeah, and now it seems my only chance is giving up the fight.
And how could I ever refuse;
I feel like I win when I lose.

FAUXBIA: Okay Everyone 5, 6, 7, 8!

Waterloo - I was defeated, you won the war.
Waterloo - Promise to love you for ever more.
Waterloo - Couldn't escape if I wanted to.

[99] ABBA "Waterloo": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sj_9CiNkkn4

Waterloo - Knowing my fate is to be with you.
Waterloo - Finally facing my Waterloo.

Cast leave the stage and music fades.

END

STILL IMAGES

Image Credit: The Maryland Filmmakers Club

Figure 1: Scene 1 "In My Room"

Figure 2: Scene 1 "In My Room"

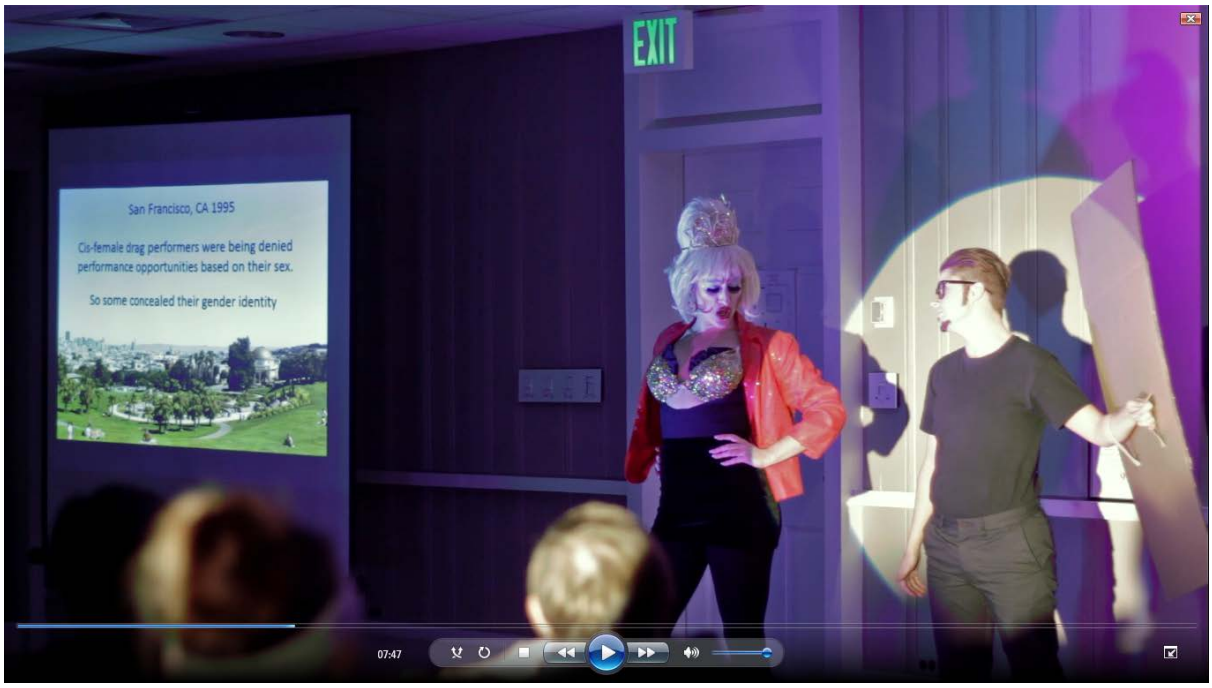

Figure 3: Scene 2 "Meanwhile in San Francisco”

Figure 4: Scene 2 "Meanwhile in San Francisco”

Figure 5: Scene 2 "Meanwhile in San Francisco”

Figure 6: Scene 3 Transition "Apprentice Queen"

Figure 7: Scene 3 "Apprentice Queen"

Figure 8: Scene 3 "Apprentice Queen"

Figure 9: Scene 4 Transition "The Pretendies"

Figure 10: Scene 4 "The Prentendies"

Figure 11: Scene 4 "The Pretendies"

Figure 12: Scene 4 "The Prentendies"

Figure 13: Scene 5 "Agora goes Online"

Figure 14: Scene 5 "Agora goes Online"

Figure 15: Scene 6 "Seek Professional Help"

Figure 16: Scene 7 "Interview with the Vamp"

Figure 17: Scene 7 "Interview with the Vamp"

Figure 18: Scene 8 "Too Fish"

Figure 19: Scene 9 "Word of the Day: ‘Queer’"

Figure 20: Scene 10 "The Reveal"

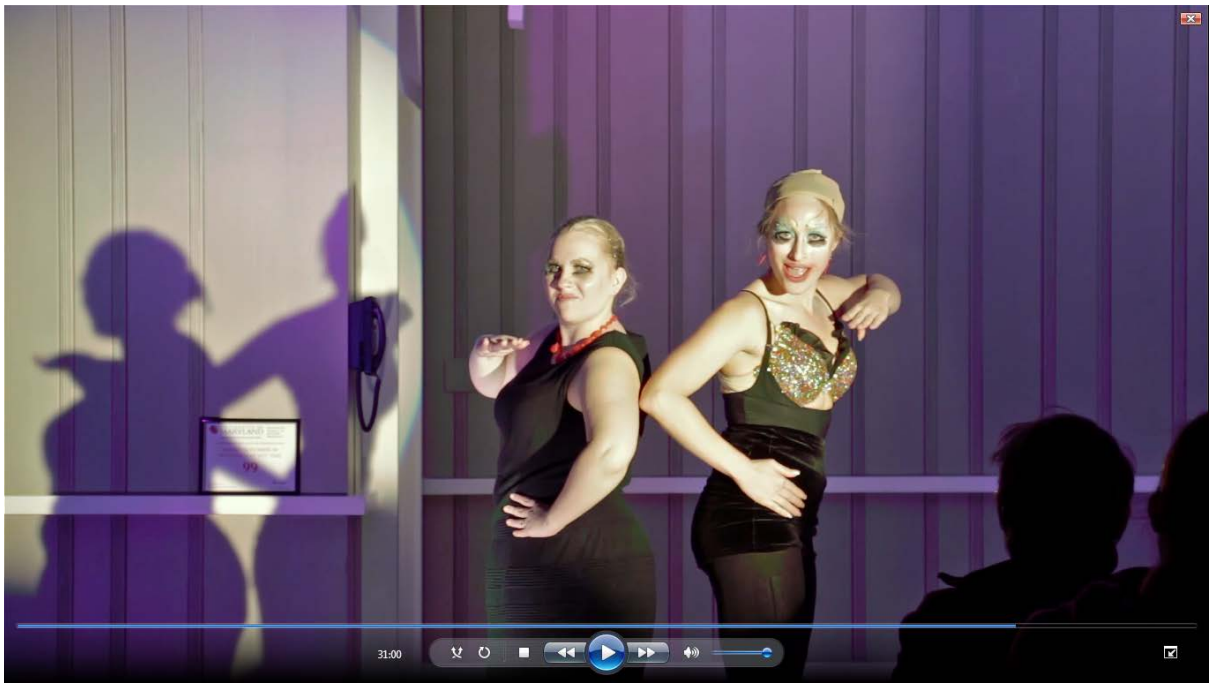

Figure 21: Scene 10 "The Reveal"

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: *WerqSF – A Web-based Documentary Series*

Link to online version: http://agorafauxbia.com/werqsf

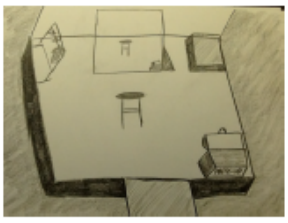
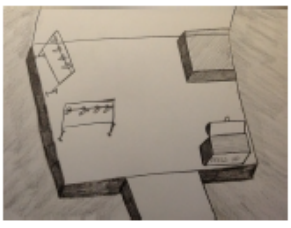
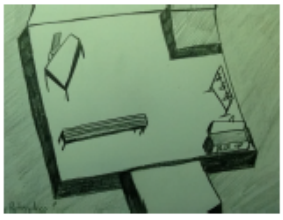
Appendix 2: *Agorafaux-pas!* Skelton Outline

March 27

Agorafaux-pas 2014

This document is a skeleton outline of the planned creative work "Agorafaux-pas". The piece is intended as cabaret theatre and has been planned using 11 "beats". The beats are focal points of the show and each approaches a topic relevant to the research narrative. In keeping with the cabaret style, the beats will be sewn together with narration from a "host" or "storyteller". The role and function of the "host" will be written in the drafting process. Each beat is accompanied by initial ideas for stage design.

Skeleton Outline

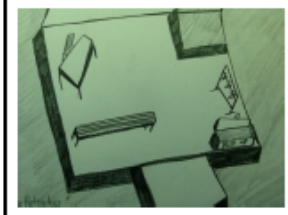
0.00 – 5.00	5.00 – 10.00	10.00 – 15.00
• Lip sync to The Beach Boys In My Room • Stylised dressing/makeup/dance rituals • 3 cast members as a Barbershop quartet style • J/AF sits facing the mirror • Clothes hanger and dress up box have various costumes and wigs • "worries and fears" projected on back wall. *Introduces J&AF in the setting where they first met each other. Represents private drag and introduces initial concerns/ tensions.*	• Montage of my dancing memories • Tear away costumes, or quick additions from the dress up box. • Cast members as backstage "dance mums" *Growing up dancing apprenticed me in extravagant performances of high-femme. When I got to a certain age, this started to feel more like drag. Apprentice queen represents a gradual transition from dance to drag.*	• Man and woman on box with strings, moving the cast around, throwing props attached to strings. • May include music and stylised movement • Setting is a classroom, but can be altered to represent other environments. *I've thought about my time as a teacher as "The Pretend Years", because I became so uncomfortable with going through the motions and the expected life path of a woman who is a teacher. Teach for a bit, get married, have baby, maternity leave, come back, repeat. The pretendies represents expectations of heteronormativity.*
In My Room →	**Apprentice Queen** →	**The Pretendies** →
		

15.00 — 20.00

- Leads in from "The Pretendies"
- Queen "I want to break free" and/or Dusty Springfield "You don't own me"
- The puppet masters wrap AF in a "straight" jacket.
- Images of AF in drag appear on the back screen.
- Lipsyncing and dialogue

'Straight' jacket represents heteronormative pressure and amalgamation of heterosexual experience. It introduces the notion that a person can be 'straight' without necessarily being bound by heternomativity.

Straight Jacket



20.00 — 25.00

- Agorafuaxbia meets public life online
- Image of laptop projected on white curtain at the back of the stage.
- . All onstage props taken behind the curtain "uploaded"
- AF and cast taken behind the curtain and appearing on screen.

In upload, //AF move from private to public in the online world. This section explores expectations of the space, and how I first began to interaction with faux queen/queer community.

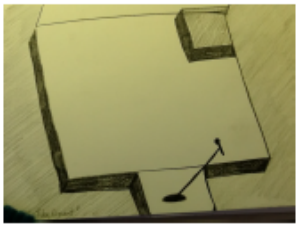
Upload

25.00 — 30.00

- A Tim Minchin song about which video's get the most hits on Youtube.
- Sing live, cast as "kitten's waking up"
- The lyrics fit nicely with the notion of drag queen/researcher/artist online.
- Images from af.com projected on back screen.
- Links up with my writing and thinking in early 2013 when focusing more on internet performance.

YouTube Lament expresses the failings of agorafauxbia.com as a space to be seen, and to transact with queer culture.

YouTube Lament



30.00 — 35.00

- Stop motion video using barbie dolls or lego
- Preparing for the faux queen pageant, going there and performing.
- Gives full cast time for substantial costume changes.
- Film projected onto curtain or back screen.

The stop motion video interval is a concise way of overviewing my trip to San Francisco. It introduces the second focus of the show which draws on issues raised in the interviews and theoretical findings/themes of the research.

Video Interval

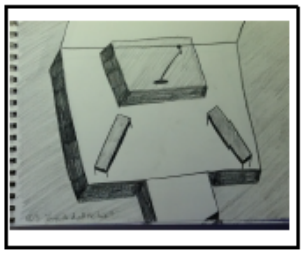
Empty Stage and/or Curtain drawn

35.00 — 40.00

- Parody Song (Mindy McCreedy Original)
- About an issue I've had with people saying "You can't do drag". Other faux queens have had similar experiences
- Some sound bites/video imagery of faux queens stories. (Vesper, Cara)
- Music cut with interview sound bites.

Guys do it all the time is a response to the criticisms faux queens have received regarding their gender and sexuality in the drag wold.

Guys do it all the time

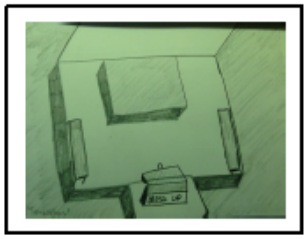


40.00 — 45.00

- About faux queens performative transactions with gay men.
- Break down of performative codes –pointing out what faux queens borrow/share/transact with drag queens.

Transactions dramatize one of the important theoretical findings of the research – that faux queens engage in performative transactions with drag queens. These "transactions" place them within a culture of queerness, and trouble notions of dichotomous sexuality.

Transactions



45.00	50.00	50.00	55.00
• Faux queens and queerness • How can faux queens be queer but not gay? • Sounds bites/projected words from faux queen interviews • This section needs more thought with how to stage it (tackle in the drafting process) *Queer as faux gets to the crux of the research – how can straight & queer be a both/and experience and how do faux queens begin to represent that notion?*		• Hera Bjork (Eurovision entrant from Iceland) • Meant as a kind of tribute to faux queens. • Projects images of the women I interviewed. *Je ne sais quois is the show's finale and functions as a tribute piece to the SF faux queens involved in my research. It is intended to express a kind of emancipation from the worries and tensions of a straight faux queen – that culturally queer lives are modelled elsewhere by faux queens and gives others the confidence to pursue "cultural queer".*	
Queer as Faux		**Finale Je ne sais quois**