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Queer Femme Drag Futures

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Abstract

To document an inclusive and comprehensive queer history means to write about queer femininity and queer femmes. Depending on their perceived outward form, queer femmes are often the most hypervisible and overtly queer, yet at other junctures also the most invisibilized. Often also the most disparaged and overlooked, it is in aesthetic performance, such as drag, where queer femmes are most celebrated and most visible. Cape Town has a long running history of queer femme drag performance, yet there is not a rich history of documenting the lives and experiences of those who perform and participate in drag performance in this place that has somehow gained the enduring moniker of 'Africa's Gay Capital'. José Esteban Muñoz (2009, 1) writes in *Cruising Utopia* that "the here and now is a prison house", and that it is queerness that allows the individual or group to look beyond the boundaries of where we are trapped. In considering heteronormative ideals regarding dress, presentation, perception, and roles in our society, I look towards the queer femme aesthetic performance and presentation of drag as a tool that allows individuals and groups to go beyond Muñoz's prison house of the here and now. As Black and Brown Queer South Africans, individually, and as a group, we are confronted with political, social, and, historical trauma, both consciously and unconsciously. Invoking Christina Sharpe's (2016) concept of 'the wake' alongside Muñoz's 'prison house', I aim to discuss the role of queer femme aesthetic performances in the wake of historical trauma for those who seek joyful queer experiences in Cape Town through the mode of drag performance. This article will address *queer femme drag* as an aesthetic performance and response to the historic and systemic violence perpetrated against the People of Colour in the Western Cape of South Africa who largely make up the participants of drag performances and pageantry here.

Keywords: queer femme drag; aesthetic performance; drag performance; queer African futures; queer African history

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About the author

Lindy-Lee Prince is an anthropologist who teaches at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa. They obtained a PhD in anthropology from the University of Cape Town in July 2021, after receiving a research fellowship at the Centre for Humanities Research in Africa (HUMA). Their PhD dissertation was titled, "Creating Personas, Performing Selves – Gazing Beyond the Masks of Drag and Neo-Burlesque Performance". Prior to this they received their Masters in anthropology from the University of Stellenbosch – where they also completed their undergraduate and Honours training – after submitting their thesis titled: "Above Gender – Doing Drag, Destabilising Dominance, Performing Authentically and Defying the Norms of Gender through Performance in Cape Town". Much of their research focuses on the study of drag, and other hyperfeminine performances, in the Western Cape region of South Africa.

Introduction

José Esteban Muñoz (2009, 1) writes in *Cruising Utopia* that "the here and now is a prison house" and that it is queerness that allows the individual or group to look beyond the boundaries of where we are trapped. In considering heteronormative ideals regarding dress, presentation, perception, and roles in our society, I look towards the queer femme aesthetic performance and presentation of drag as a tool that allows individuals and groups to transcend Muñoz's prison house of the here and now.[1] In some ways, this prison house is also related to the ways in which South African society is structured. Thus, in this article I look to queer femme aesthetic performance as both productive labour and leisure activity in response to the moralistic productive framework that encapsulates the Protestant work ethic and Calvinism that is embedded in much of South African society. Queer femme aesthetic performances such as drag, and the perceived fantasy with which it engages, indicates that another world is possible. Where we are now, and what we see around us, is not all that there is to see.

Further, the ways in which we have become bound to time – this capitalist time structure, which Giordano Nanni (2011, 7) refers to as the colonization of time, has been enforced upon us and becomes a prison of productive labour. There are other views of the use of time that will considered with greater seriousness, in contrast to the ways in which they are often mocked and stigmatized, namely the ideas of 'African time' and 'Drag Queen time'. I also consider Muñoz' 'prison house' through Christina Sharpe's (2016, 6) reframing of 'the wake', a ritual which gives individuals the ability to transcend the traumatic space of death and dying and move to the funeral, gathering, and celebration of life that follows.

This article discusses queer femme aesthetic performances as an artistic response in the wake of the lingering, haunting, structural violence and trauma etched upon the foundations beneath our feet. I envision the unseen, haunting, lingering trauma of our violent past as a call, and the joyful, undeniable, unmissable performance of queer femme drag as a freeing form of response, filled with potentiality. This paper explores aspects of Cape Town's nightlife that take place in relation to the city's past and present, often violent geography within specific parts of the city – the ways in which queer life moves behind closed doors – post Pride, and since more accessible and inclusive bars such as Zer021 and Bronx have been priced out of the De Waterkant area through gentrification – thus moving queers and queer entertainment even further into the barrooms and nightclubs on the outskirts and margins. Furthermore, this paper addresses issues of spatial apartheid and geographic violence with regard to who is/has (been) allowed access to the city, and who is allowed to partake in this nightlife.

Cross-dressing in entertainment is not a modern convention. Throughout history, whether on stage, screen, image, or in other live shows, some form of cross-dressed entertainment may take place for the spectators' gaze. Yet, both historically and in contemporary society, *drag*, as it has become known, which also includes elements of cross-dressing for entertainment, is a *distinctly queer* form of performance. Drag in the Western Cape straddles the lines of queer and otherwise somewhat niche forms of entertainment that have historically been enjoyed by a broader audience too – whether it be from the tradition of community drag pageants that draw in audiences which include children and the elderly,

[1] This paper draws on and expands on themes and ideas from the author's PhD research project, titled "Creating Personas, Performing Selves – Gazing Beyond the Masks of Drag and Neo-Burlesque Performance", an exploration into hyperfeminine performance and performativity in drag and neo-burlesque performances, as well as a visual and textual ethnography providing voice, context, and narrative to the thriving drag scene in the Western Cape.

or cross-dressed performers leading the troupes at the historic Cape Minstrel Carnival. This article addresses queer femme drag as both an aesthetic performance and response to the historic and systemic violence perpetrated against People of Colour – specifically those who, like myself, have had the racial categorization 'Coloured'[2] imposed upon us by former ruling governments, due to a perceived mixed/creolized heritage and ancestry – in the Western Cape, who largely make up the participants of drag performance and pageantry in this research. I will demonstrate the role that drag performance and queer performance art has played and continues to play in South African society.

My research sites are the city's nightclubs and restaurants, such as the Beefcakes restaurant, where nightly drag performances occur, and Zer021, a nightclub where drag shows take place from Thursday through to Sunday, as well as Crew Bar, where weekly amateur drag performances took place. For the portion of this research that focuses on drag, on a weekly basis, between Wednesday and Sunday, starting in 2013, I would frequent both amateur and seasoned drag performances across this part of the city, at times also participating as a drag king on stage in bars, clubs, and at larger annual events such as Mother City Queer Project (MCQP, a large LGBTQ costume party). During the fieldwork process, I selected eight drag queen performers to participate in this project; I spent casual time with them, performed, and conducted semi-structured interviews with them, while engaging in participant observation, and also collecting visual data for the visual ethnographic project that forms part of this research. A few of the participants from the field are introduced in this paper where relevant.

There are also other venues in Cape Town where drag performances take place on a less frequent basis. Drag performance in Cape Town is also closely tied to drag pageantry, where individuals taking on a self-defined drag persona compete for local titles in beauty pageants. The two biggest annual drag pageants are arguably Miss Gay Western Cape and Miss Cape Town Pride.

In the area of De Waterkant/Greenpoint, Cape Town, most of the city's LGBTQ bars, restaurants, and nightclubs are situated within a few blocks of one another along Somerset Road, the main road in the area. As the weekend draws nearer, starting from Thursday night, this small stretch of road becomes populated mostly with LGBTQ patrons, readying themselves for another evening filled with fun among other LGBTQ friends, lovers, acquaintances, and new friends who just have not met yet.

However, there is still a divide between who goes where. On the outskirts of the main stretch of bars and nightclubs is one of the smallest bars/nightclubs in the area, Zer021, where drag performances are a frequent occurrence. On the main stretch of road are two larger nightclubs, Beaulah Bar, where many Coloured and Black people have complained that the bouncers refuse them entry if they are perceived to be of the 'wrong' class, and Crew Bar, where there are young male Go-Go dancers. Both of these venues are largely staffed (barring the bouncers) and frequented by mostly white patrons, while Zer021 is the only LGBTQ bar/nightclub where People of Colour make up the majority of the patrons every night.

Yet when one faces outward, or steps outside of the bar, what lies just ahead is far more sinister than could be imagined. Crossing the street, one is met with the leafy, well-manicured Prestwich Place Memorial, including a trendy coffee shop, ironically named 'Truth'. Upon closer inspection, one finds that this site, and the reason for its *memorial* status, is due to the ossuary that is located at the site. Here, at least 2,000 human bones, identified as being between 180 and 270 years old, are held on

[2] When using this wording, I am making use of the distinctly South/ern African term. More discussion and context will follow, where appropriate.

rows and rows of shelves in a sea of unmarked, unclaimed boxes. These human remains are presumed to be bones of enslaved people who were forced into labour and servitude at the Cape Colony (Kashe-Katiya 2010; Pather 2015). It is at this juncture that I start to interrogate the role of queer femme aesthetic performances in this particular geographic space, and their potential use not only for creating new potential worlds, but also for considering how these kinds of performances exist and are created as a response to the shared trauma of colonization, and the apartheid regime that followed.

As Christina Sharpe (2016, 9) asserts, "living in the wake of slavery is 'living the afterlife of property'". Somehow, the remains of our unknown and unnamed ancestors continue to be there in perpetual limbo – superficially memorialized, yet neatly packed away and never spoken about, and certainly never shown for everyone to see. What kind of spiritual violence do these kinds of actions persist in doing to those who are still on the margins of various intersections of various communities within Cape Town? Drag has become more visible, but this does not necessarily indicate a greater acceptance of it. Further, those who perform drag at Zer021 may not have the opportunity to perform at venues such as Beefcakes, where the patrons/audiences are often heterosexual and white – the venue often caters for bachelorette parties. Here, they run on a tight and timely schedule to maximize profits, and performers are also limited to set performances with no room for experimentation. At Zer021, patrons and performers are often from similar backgrounds, and every week each performer puts on a new show – opening the space up for experimental drag performance too. Due to gentrification Zer021 is constantly hovering around economic instability and threats of closure/moving. Considering how tiny and tucked away Zer021 is, even in a part of the city where LGBTQ people should be welcomed and feel safer, when drag is performed by queer femmes of colour (note that the owner of Zer021 is a white gay man), they are still marginalized, tucked away to ease discomfort until the next Pride Parade arrives and the queens are on display. There is a purposeful intention in choosing not to include photographs of the inside of the ossuary in this paper. My intention was to highlight a particular uneasiness related to the further indignity that our enslaved ancestors' remains have to endure, hidden away, unspoken of, while overpriced cups of coffee are served upon their forgotten memorial.

Since the conclusion of this research, Zer021 has had to move premises due to rising rental costs and gentrification in Greenpoint/De Waterkant. We can then infer that Black and Brown people are only really able to take up permanent residency here once we have passed on. Later in this discussion, I return to Muñoz's (2009, 1) assertion that "the here and now is a prison house", to unpack queer femme aesthetic performance as both productive labour and leisure activity, in response to the moralistic productive framework of the Protestant work ethic and Calvinism that confines many of those within South African society. This discussion will demonstrate how this adoption of Calvinism, as well as time practices introduced through colonialism and missionary work, shows that individuals are not bound to *the* time, but rather *a* time – a framework/set of signs used to determine time in a specific way. Thus, the ability to take possession of and stake a claim over the ways in which time is constructed and used becomes a political act. In this paper, the use and perceived construction of time is challenged through the use and performance of queer femme drag aesthetic performance in Cape Town.

Figure 1: Mitzi and Bassey at the 'Roaring 20s Party' c. mid 1960. Image shared with permission from the Kewpie Collection, housed at the Gay and Lesbian Archive (GALA), photographer unknown.

Figure 2: At a beauty pageant: Carriem (a hairdresser), Sandra Fourie (Miss Greece), and an unknown friend (a hairdresser). Image shared with permission from the Kewpie Collection, housed at GALA, photographer unknown.

Figure 3: Queens and their crowns: Zilin Ayoki Zhang, Kat Gilardi, Enigma von Hamburg, and Logan McGregor. Photograph taken by Lindy-Lee Prince, © 2015.

Cape Town's drag history

Carnival time

In my research, I trace the history of drag performance in Cape Town as having roots in the annual Cape Minstrel Carnival and the *tweede nuwe jaar* ('second new year celebrations'), and make use of this time as a narrative starting point.[3] During this time, enslaved people were allowed one day a year free from their duties of productive labour; this was their only time for holiday and celebration, the only day when they could *turn things on their heads*, so to speak. Historically, the carnival took place at one of the only times per year when enslaved and indentured labourers/servants would have time off from their forced labour. As such, moments of leisure were used to prepare the creative output for the upcoming day of parodic play and perceived frivolity – as well as for the competitions between the carnival troupes ahead of *tweede nuwe jaar*. The competition and the carnival continues to this day, evolving as the years go by – though in more recent decades and years, the City of Cape Town has regularly delayed the traditional carnival procession due to apparent logistical complications.

Until the 1970s, women rarely participated in the carnival procession (Meltzer 2010), and the carnival was considered "a largely male domain" (Pacey 2014, 8). On the occasions that cisgender women would appear in the minstrel carnival procession, they participated as beauty queens, to be gazed upon, on top of a float, or, more clandestinely, they sometimes took part as "secret participants in troupes, with their perceived gender markers disguised by donning the basic male troupe attire of trousers, jacket, hat, and makeup; in a sense then performing" a kind of transformation drag that straddled both drag and concealment (Pacey 2014, 8).

During the procession of the Cape Minstrel Carnival, the *moffie voorlooper*, a cross-dressed troupe member, leading the troupe's procession in the carnival, performed a form of what we would now consider an endorsed drag performance.[4] These performances were, at the time, in direct violation of the discriminatory 'anti-cross-dressing' laws. These laws were enforced in other parts of the country, but they were not applied to the extremely public spectacle that is the Cape Minstrel Carnival (Pacey 2014, 117). In this context, the troupe's *voorloper* highlights the subversive nature of the carnival. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhktin's (1984, 256) writing on carnival/carnivalesque, during carnival time 'authority' and 'truth/law' become relative/unstable; hence, carnival has great potential for subversion through the ritual spectacle that hinges upon performances that are markedly different from ordinary everyday public acts, and as Michael Holquist (1982, 13) asserts, by way of folk laughter. Humour is elicited during carnival through the use of the *moppie* ('comic folk song') (Gaulier and Denis-Constant 2017, 179). There are numerous *moppies* that seemingly mock *moffies* who participate in the carnival.

As the procession leader (participating while cross-dressed), the *voorloper* becomes the most subversive character in the carnival (Jeppie 1990, 82). This placement puts the *voorlooper* in a precarious position, due to their visibility. Their subversive performance in public space stands alongside the liminal

[3] I do not make use of modern interpretations and retellings of historical African art in my work, though I do look to documented historical accounts, lived experience, and performance art.

[4] The *moffie voorlopers* are sometimes thought of as comically dressed, crossed dressed members of the troupe, yet not allowed to practise with them (Gaulier and Denis-Constant 2017, 188). *Moffie*, however, is primarily used pejoratively as a slur towards gay men in South Africa. Henceforth, I will use the term *voorlooper* instead, to avoid continuously making use of a slur.

nature of the carnival.[5] At once the *voorlooper* may be celebrated, leading the troupe, while at the same time being accompanied by songs that 'humorously' denigrate them for their appearance, hygiene, etc. in *moppies*, such as "*Wilhemiena die Moffie*" by Abduragman Morris (Gaulier and Denis-Constant 2017, 190). The public performance of not only cross-dressing, but of cross-dressed queer performance in public space demonstrates the potentiality for liminality in the space of the city during carnival time, where race (the existence of Coloured people in South Africa challenging the biological and cultural essentialism associated with binary definitions of race), class categorizations and gender presentations, as well demonstrations of their sexuality were considered.

Those who participated in the early Cape Minstrel Carnivals already occupied a liminal space by virtue of their race and class categorization, while their involvement in the carnival expanded the limits of what Coloured people had the freedom to do in and with public space, aside from productive labour. The *voorlooper* took this liminal experience and expanded it by bending the ways in which certain bodies were allowed to perform in public. What implications did this have on sexuality in the hetero-dominant society? While these individuals operated within a particular set of ideals regarding carnival participation, they did still comply with the conventions permitting cisgender womens' participation in the carnival, by performing a form of drag akin to the mode of female impersonation, rather than the highly stylized forms of drag that we are accustomed to today. Yet they were subverting the ways in which particular bodies were allowed to perform in public space by performing a kind of cross-dressing in public. Such public displays of potentially queer sexuality and gender presentation were otherwise frowned upon, and illegal, until section 3 of the Prohibition of Disguises Act of 1969 was amended by Act 49 in 1996. This indicated that in public space, any sort of dress or display of the body that did not comply with conservative heteronormativity would be subject to scrutiny and threat of law. At the time, these performances and appearances – which would now be considered a form of drag – were prosecutable under South African law, and specifically under the Prohibition of Disguises Act of 1969. Nonetheless, an inclination towards drag has been a convention of the Cape Minstrel Carnival since its official recognition in 1906/1907.

Featuring prominently, the *voorlooper* demonstrated that which was both subversive and liminal about the carnival and its participants. The *voorlooper* was uniquely positioned, as they were both Coloured and perceived to be LGBTQ or otherwise *queer* in their gender or sexual identity. Colonial and apartheid South Africa had a preoccupation with racial categorization and classification, but despite the attempts made by the apartheid government, there is no single identity or definition of what is perceived to be 'Colouredness'; instead there are numerous, depending on language, region, and/or ideology (Zegeye 2001, 207). The term 'Coloured' refers to a perceived creole identity that alludes to people of mixed race/heritage. Yet this system of categorization has never been entirely stable, leaving room for slippages such as the practice of reclassification, passing oneself of as white, and forms of othering in the context of apartheid era concepts such as 'non-white'. The idea of 'Coloured' people challenges essentialism as there is no monolithic 'Coloured' experience or identity. Further, the liminality inhabited by gender non-conforming people, and all those who challenge gender and sex roles, also created space to challenge essentialism in other ways.

[5] For Victor Turner (1969, 95), "liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions aligned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial".

'Coloured' identity categorization, South African anthropologist and sociologist, Zimitri Erasmus (2000, 71) argues, is a "socio-political position" that was "characterised by both exclusion, and selected inclusion". 'Coloured' people in South Africa thus occupy a space where there might be the potential for access to aspirations of whiteness, through racial perceptions and categorization and the apartheid practice of racial reclassification, though this space that is occupied is also exclusionary due to 'Coloured' South Africans not being white and most not being recognised as such. Apartheid racial categories therefore positioned all other South Africans against the backdrop of whiteness and white identity. Yet, the potentiality of the concepts of 'selected inclusion' as well as 'racial reclassification' infer that categories are not stable or static, and are instead, somewhat malleable. As such, the playful engagement with gendered performance that crossed-dressed performance brings forth during carnival time indicates an added layer of malleability and liminality.

Pacey (2014, 9) writes, "It can be argued that female impersonation is central to many carnivals all over the world, and has indeed been a part of carnival tradition since the Middle Ages." Accordingly, the Cape Minstrel Carnival applies this convention by including the *voorlooper* in the procession. Like other carnivals, the Cape Minstrel Carnival is a site of social celebration, displaying folk humour and parody, but this temporal parodic performance contains the potentiality for protest within it, as it "has the capacity to lay claim to city spaces, and can therefore be seen as a mechanism for certain subcultures and individuals to affirm their rights to the city and define it as their own territory" (de Waal and Manion 2006, 23), albeit temporarily. By making use of holiday and leisure time to prepare for the carnival, those who participate – loudly and very visibly making their presence known, while costumed and singing parodic songs of folk humour – are able to stake their claim to the city they call home – a city with a history of forced removals, destruction, and spatial apartheid. The Cape Minstrel Carnival thus invokes elements of the Bakhtinian idea of the carnival/carnivalesque, via the temporal overturning of ideas of authority and by subverting authority through subversive forms of creative expression.

Invocations of past and present

Historically, queer femme drag performances in Cape Town were not only linked to the Cape Minstrel Carnival. It is outside of the carnival where drag takes on queer meaning, and, as such, *becomes queer*. Drag, pageantry, 'gay parties', queer, and queer femme performances on stage and in everyday life formed a part of the identity of some of those who resided in District Six.[6]

In the image of Mitzi and Bassey (see Figure 1) – taken from the photographic collection and archive of the well-known Cape Town hairdresser, queer socialite, and sometimes drag performer, Kewpie – we see evidence that queer femme drag and hyperfeminine forms of queer performance are not a new arrival in Cape Town. Drag existed comfortably in Cape Town already in the 1950s, 1960, and 1970s – so much so that the local tabloids, such as the *Golden City Post*, sponsored 'Moffie Queen Competitions' at the Kismet Theatre in Athlone[7] as a means to generate salacious tabloid

[6] The sixth municipal district in Cape Town was named District Six in 1867 (Nanda 2004, 383). District Six at the time was considered to be a racially and culturally diverse area of Cape Town. However, this was only temporary, and from 1966 onwards, the area was declared a 'whites only' area under the Group Areas Act of 1950, and most of the residents were forcibly moved out of the area to the outlying surrounding areas of Cape Town that were designated for Coloured and Black people.

[7] A suburb of the Cape Flats, previously designated as an area for 'Coloured' people to reside in by the former apartheid government of South Africa.

fodder as early as 1956, while *Drum Magazine* went on to publish similarly styled articles for scandalous consumption from 1958 (District Six Museum and GALA 2019, 19).

Seeing these queer femmes in the magazines, and what would later be understood as drag already present in early 20th century District Six, indicates that queerness was not always hidden. However, those who participated in gender non-conformity were more readily perceived as subverting the norms of heteronormativity and perceived as outwardly LGBTQ, more so than their more cis-perceived/aligned counterparts, partners, and vice versa. The public performance of drag and gender non-conformity was not so foreign to those who lived and socialized in District Six. There is a rich history of balls and pageants taking place in community halls and night clubs where drag queens and gender non-conforming individuals would participate in nightlife. Here, queer femmes performed hyperfemininely, shifting beyond the heteronormative, cis-normative, idealized identity categories that are prescribed to assigned social roles attached to one's sex/gender. These acts of queer self-creation and self-categorization become enmeshed, creating a new self – the on-stage queer femme/drag persona, who either performs on stage or participates in pageants.

Producing a new self is no small feat, and often requires spending money on wigs, or many hours producing costumes and applying makeup effectively. This is not mere leisurely frivolity, and thus an audience is required for the act of affirming a new, hyperfeminine self through acts of conspicuous consumption, playing at perceived material abundance for the spectator (Posel and van Wyk 2019, 20). Consequently, house parties and fancy dress parties, as well as the larger, more well covered balls, such as those held at the Ambassador Club, were salaciously covered in the tabloids. In Figure 2, attendees and contestants at a drag beauty pageant are photographed, their ballgowns and poses for the camera not differing too much from the aesthetic of beauty pageants of the time, nor from the current drag pageants occuring in the Western Cape, as illustrated in an image from my research at the 2015 Miss Gay Western Cape pageant (see Figure 3). Both images display a stylized performance of femininity, using conventions of modelling and pageantry in what Marcia Ochoa (2014, 2) refers to as *spectacular femininity*, using symbolic resources as a means to produce and reproduce particular forms of femininity. These symbolic resources may include pose, gesture, dress, makeup, crowns/tiaras, and sashes as indicators of pageantry and participation therein.

Against the everyday performance

Personifiying the mask

While drag pageantry still thrives, at present most people are more familiar with queer, cross-dressed performance, which includes elements of dance, lip syncing, acting, performance art, and singing – either in combination, or in parts. When considering that the femme drag character is performed for the audience, the drag persona and costuming elements can all be considered as a form of masking, by means of applying a persona. In this section, I discuss a day spent with a research participant, Roxy Le Roux – a drag performer who used to host the Late Night Drag Show, an amateur performance night, at Crew Bar in De Waterkant. Roxy canceled her performances due to disputes with management regarding their lack of payment of amateur performers. The payment received consisted of two alcoholic drinks at the bar.

Figure 4: Roxy Le Roux at Ardene Gardens in Claremont.
Photograph taken by Lindy-Lee Prince, © 2015.

Roxy had asked me to do a photoshoot for her on this particular day, as she was entering a competition that focuses on environmentalism.[8] However, as Roxy does not have secure private transport, she arrives at my flat in Rosebank, close to the train station, out of drag, with all of her gear in tow. As she applies the mask that makes Roxy, she slowly transforms from the man who arrived at my doorstep to the statuesque, glamorous, Roxy Le Roux. She transforms through the application of her mask, especially the hyperfeminine pieces, including her ever-present blonde wigs. Roxy states that her character pretends to be white, but she is not really white – invoking a South African (unstable) history of racial reclassification, whereby some lighter skinned People of Colour were occasionaly able to blur the lines of race, crossing the threshold into perceived whiteness. When Roxy performs, she is not only blurring and bending the rules of gender through her drag, but she is also doing the same with race. Once Roxy is fully transformed, after applying her press-on nails, and then her platinum blonde afro wig, we pile into my old Opel Corsa and head off to Ardene Gardens in Claremont, crossing our fingers that we will find parking close to the entrance to the gardens. As we enter, two women who are security guards stop us with great amusement and ask Roxy if they can take pictures with her. Not missing a beat while in daytime drag, Roxy graciously complies, with a warm smile and some charming words.

[8] Throughout, when discussing participants, gendered terms may switch back and forth with the use of pseudonyms and stage names.

I use the term 'mask' in my research as a means to indicate the *persona* that Jung, wrote about. Jung (1966, 216) considers *persona* to be an affective term to use, as it refers to "the mask worn by actors to indicate the role they played". The mask has the function of characterization within my research. The hyperfeminine character that is performed is not in the lexicon of everyday performance. This persona is unlocked for particular moments through the invocation of spectacular femininities that are often hypervisual, though they are not always so. While a performer like Roxy does make use of a consistent visual/physical mask in their transformation, instead of constant costume changes, she chooses one look, and then focuses on her character and the ways in which she can connect with the audience. The persona, in my research, is separate from the inner-self. It functions as an identity that is projected to others – one of an idealized image or the mask of a character or of a performer. The persona/mask becomes the performing self. In drag performance, the mask is not strictly a physical item that the performer can put on or take off as they wish – instead, it is an allusion to femininity.

Queer femme drag, in particular, is done with intentional double-speak, in quotation marks – as such, the audience is in on the drag. During drag performance, the illusion of the image that is performed through bodily action functions by working as "a medium for its own images and as a medium that carries a picture" (Belting 2001, 22). Thus, the drag performer takes hold of the attention of the audience for the time during which the performance is taking place, in order to communicate a specific illusory act. But what is this illusory act anyway? What is its purpose? If we consider the performance of drag as a transformatory performance, a performance that demonstrates the possibility of *becoming*, where an individual is *transformed* into, or physically refers to a character/persona for the time it takes to perform the act, it is this act of masking, and the ways in which this is done, that should be interrogated. I argue that the mask only gives the illusion that they (the performer) are something object, able to be passed on and around. It can be understood, however, that the mask also protects the performer from audience projection through the use of what the mask is meant to project into the audience, ultimately challenging their ideas of what exactly it is that they are looking at. This performative mask then becomes a tool in what Muñoz (2009, 74) describes as 'queer gesture', in that these forms of gesture "transmit and amplify the pleasure of queerness, the joys of gender dissidence, of wilfully making one's own way against the stream of a crushing heteronormative tide". While the queer femme performance of drag may make use of elements that are present in heteronormative ideals and social regulation, the playful nature of blending and blurring binaries allow those who participate in queer femme drag performance to turn expectation, regulation, and how the individual ought to present themselves into something with endless potential and possibility.

Roxy, as a character, was created in the wake of what was, at the time, a deeply traumatic experience. She describes herself as being unmotivated and depressed during this time. The character of Roxy provides her performer with an outlet, an escape from his day-to-day life, as a Coloured gay man from a small town, outside of the big city dreams of Cape Town. The heels, the blond hair, the sequins, the racial ambiguity, are not part of his life – but they are part of Roxy's. Yet the qualities of confidence and of feeling loveable, those qualities became part of *Thomas*' life eventually, he tells me.[9] The mask/persona is viewed as an external source of confidence and self-esteem through an assertion of aspirational performance that can provide the individual with qualities that they feel they might lack, as part of their daily interactions. Sara Ahmed (2014, 27) writes that "the

[9] Thomas is a pseudonym.

Figure 5: Roxy Le Roux in her gold jacket and corset.
Photograph taken by Lindy-Lee Prince, © 2015.

singular body becomes an object of shared feeling, a way that the natural body can cohere in recognition of the longevity of a history it can call its own". Thomas' singular body is made up of a specific history, that includes his trauma, but his body also houses the history and experiences of Roxy Le Roux. Thomas's body is shared by both the personas of Roxy and Thomas, and so their feelings and experiences are shared, and affected by one another. This symbiotic relationship is in flux as Roxy performs and engages with the audience. The mask is only temporary, but has a longer lasting impact on Thomas's psyche and feelings of confidence.

Roxy uses a collection of items and props in her act, whether bought, found, or donated, while also making meaningful connections with her audience. Yet, it is not the makeup or the props alone that make Roxy. Rather, it is the meaning that is created through the use of these objects, whether makeup, costume, or props, that is of importance to the performance – as well as the ways in which these meanings allow for communication and connection between the audience and performer. As she always sings in her introductory song: "… and the audience loves me. And I love them for loving me. And we love each other…" She attempts to breathe love into her performances through the act of connecting with the audience.

The corset that she often wears was given to her by her 'drag mother',[10] as was the gold jacket that frequently accompanies it. These items, in their glisten and shine, symbolically brought her to the fore as the shining 'star' of the Late Night Drag Show, as the jacket's gold colour and sequins glistened and gleamed in the glow of the nightclub's lights – a fantastical element that she makes use of to indicate to the audience that they are about to view something special. She often wears this jacket for the entire show run, never changing costumes, because for her, performing drag is less about the costumes, the changing of costume, or the fantasy, than it is about making a connection with the audience.

Lola Fine, a seasoned drag performer and another participant in this research, who understands drag through her style of performance, that of female impersonation and cabaret performance, disagrees with Roxy's manner of staging a performance/show. "People are there to see you", she says. Lola's idea of drag is related to her ideas of what a showgirl is. She often mentions "glitz", and "glam", as she discusses her hope of always wearing eye-catching outfits and feathered headdresses – an aesthetic that, she asserts, is Lola's trademark. Lola's costumes are assembled to her specific aesthetic, as she has

[10] 'Drag mother' refers to a drag mentor, a symbolic mother in a familial/kinship sense.

all her costumes made for her, based on what her vision for Lola is. For Lola, the fashioning of femininity as part of drag performance is both particular and conspicuous. To Lola, the performance of drag is female impersonation. While many performers of drag in Cape Town do not make use of padding (and neither does Lola, for the most part), she always makes sure to wear her breast pads, which both physically and psychically (for herself) symbolize her transformation. Lola's aesthetic transformation is assembled through her collection and use of outward things/items, that are to be looked upon as part of Lola. As Hamilton (2008, 64) writes, these "assemblages are not simply discrete collections of things, but should be understood in terms of their exterior relations". These exterior relations are as important to the performance as what the performer is wearing and how they look; and the items that they make use of infer that the performance is taking place or is about to take place. The items that are used in performance can be ordinary and insignificant in other circumstances, but when in the hands of the performer at the right time, they possess the ability to communicate to the audience that something out of the ordinary, something extra-ordinary, is about to take place, and that they should sit up and take notice.

Outwardly, to perform drag, for Lola, is to perform femininely, to perform her construction of femininity. Further, her performance of drag is a construction of what she considers glamorous femininity to be – which is high-heeled, form-fitted, hair made up, face made up, "showgirl", "glitz and glam" that makes people want to sit up and take notice – hyperfeminine physical expression that is adopted to engage the male gaze.

Figure 6: Lola Fine's hand-crafted breasts. Photograph taken by Lindy-Lee Prince, © 2015.

Thus, her use of costuming and padding is significant to her act of transformation. Even the use of her own long hair is also significant, in that these are the markers that she has chosen to use in order to draw our attention to the fact that she has transformed and is performing drag, and performing theatrically, in that moment.

While not in drag, Lola's long hair is usually pulled back into a low ponytail; as a visibly queer femme person, there are visual and physical cues that are difficult to 'hide' in the name of assimilation. When we meet for interviews in a mall close to Lola's home, she always dresses in a hoodie and jeans, noting that she tries to change the way she walks/carries herself here, slipping on a different mask in an effort to avoid troubling engagements in men's bathrooms. When in drag, Lola makes use of her surface/exterior mask as a means to communicate for herself, and for an audience, that a performance of femininity is taking place. She makes theatre out of the gendered performance. She translates what she understands femininity and feminine performance to be, and passes on this translation to her audience for their own interpretation. Yet, to invoke Marcia Ochoa's (2014) use of felicitous spectacle, when drag audiences view the queer performance of drag as such – a *queer performance* – they are already in on the drag, and are expecting it. Thus, the exchange between Lola and her audience functions as an affirmation of the success of her drag femininity. To Lola, the changes on the surface allow her to enter the realm of her character through an act of becoming, of transformation, while for the audience, these surface indications assist in accepting the presence of the character, and allow them to be captured and taken in by the performance. Yet what exactly is this surface/exterior and how does the audience come to accept the meaning of the exterior level of the performance? If we understand the performance character and what the performer makes use of to infer this character as a form of masking, we can begin to understand the process of communication between the audience and the performer.

Masks, when successfully applied, provide physical information that does not have to be translated into words for the audience that views it. The mask that performers such as Lola use to infer feminine performance is applied through costuming, spatial performance, gesture and posturing, changes in voice, and the use of makeup and hair in specific ways. The mask possesses the ability to conceal the person who wears it, but it also draws attention to the fantasy and the fantastic elements that become evident during the performance of hyperfemininity. Here, I refer to Butler's (2004, 217) understanding of fantasy; as they write, "fantasy is what establishes the possible excess of the real, it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home". This 'elsewhere' that is brought home does not have to contain any personal experience for the individual who performs – the individual who wears the mask of performance. Fantasy is able to bring home that which is 'experienced' and constructed in the imaginary, for many, into fruition. Drag exists in the realm of fantasy, and allows for new ways of understanding performativity so that which is considered to be reality is made more obviously real. If we consider, as Butler does in *Undoing Gender*, referencing Plato, that gender is what makes the human more human, that the playfulness and malleability of gender expression displayed through the act of performances are bending the limitations of what gendered performance and presentation *ought* to be, then it can be inferred that to be human is not just one single thing – it is a constant process of translation, of transformation, of becoming. This is achieved through the application and use of the mask as a performative tool. This mask is not distinctly unique to drag performance, however. Drag makes the transformative elements of shifting into the performance character more obvious as the mask of drag performance is applied in such a way that the audience is usually more obviously aware of the act.

Performing publics, performing politics

As greater awareness of the malleability and potentiality of gender through expression becomes possible, the prison house Muñoz refers to becomes ever more restrictive and constraining. For Muñoz (2009, 1) this is the realm where queerness becomes "that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing". Muñoz goes on to state that "often we can glimpse the world's proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic". Drag performance and queer femme performance has become arguably the most visible queer aesthetic, as it is considered by many as emblematic of an opposition to heteronormative and cis-normative gender and sex ideals. That drag queens are a staple of Pride Parades the world over, including in Cape Town, is no mere fluke, and the hyperfeminine performance of drag is often the most eye-catching display at Pride Parades, due to the hypervisibility of feminine performance and appearance.

Historically, Gay Pride Parades and marches that now take place in cities around the country also carry elements of social celebration and protest that are an integral part to carnival. Pride Marches have roots in the overturning of other forms of oppressive social pressure and policing. Justice Edwin Cameron writes, about the first Pride March in Johannesburg in 1990, "we were asserting our civic entitlements, claiming the run of the city and rightfully invoking the protection of the law in doing so" (quoted in de Waal and Manion 2006, 4). Following this, in 1993, the Association of Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians organized their own Pride march to take place in Cape Town (de Waal and Manion 2006, 64).

Lola states that she participated in the Cape Minstrel Carnival as a *voorlooper* as well as attending the early Pride marches in South Africa. She says:

> I was at those first two Prides. The first in Johannesburg, and the other one in Cape Town. *Of course, I was in drag*, but there were others who showed up with bags on their heads because they did not want to show their faces, but us drag queens, we would never hide our faces, we've put far too much work into it. (Lola, interview, April 8, 2015)

However, some would argue that the use of drag here, as a mask, also functions as the bag does, to shield the identity of those who participate in the event. Lola further recounts how, at later Pride marches, other gay men would confront drag queens, spewing hateful and derogatory remarks at them, in an attempt to ask them why they were even there. She continues:

> These 'straight acting' muscle boys in their matching outfits always had something to say about us being there, because they wanted to show the world how 'normal' they were, how they were just like straight people…

These comments imply that drag queens and those who display cross-dressing in public and in private spaces are shameful in their appearances, as they subvert the hetero-dominant regulatory ideal with their feminine appearance. Even in public displays at LGBTQ events such as Pride marches, there is still scrutiny and threat placed upon those who present their bodies in drag, in public spaces such as the street, during Pride marches. In the early 1990s this was particularly tension inducing, as sodomy laws, as well as laws against concealment related to the Prohibition of Disguises Act, were still in place. Yet even today there is still discontent and revulsion towards non-conformity, not just from cisgender heterosexual people, but also from many who identify as LGB, thrown at those who are more visibly queer, those who are more visibly femme/feminine, and those who appear and perform in drag in both straight and queer spaces. Thus, Muñoz's looking towards a

queer utopia still holds strong. As he writes, "the present is not enough (…) it is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and 'rational' expectations" (Muñoz 2009, 27).

Extraordinary performance: Laughter and stigma

Taking a sip of her beer, Lola leans in towards me and asks, "Is Morticia still doing that rap thing? Oh, I *hate* it so much! It's awful! She loses her posture as soon as she starts, and then you're just left with *boy*." Morticia is a younger drag performer I met at Roxy's Late Night Drag Show, and a participant in this research, who at the time had been performing for close to two years. To Lola, drag is meant to be female impersonation, and is meant to be performed as cabaret. To be a boy in drag is an act of failure to Lola because the illusion of drag as "female impersonation" is lost – especially when this is done intentionally. In Lola's world, drag exists within a binary opposition of masculine/man and feminine/female. I argue that this has the effect of removing that which has the potential to be subversive in the performance of drag, instead using drag to replicate the social regulations and ways of performing gender expression of the mainstream, hetero-dominant society. Lola subscribes to the dominant prescriptions of feminine beauty ideals. If a performer falls outside of this perceived normative ideal, they make a mockery of the performance of drag by relegating it to something that can be laughed at. Yet performers such as Morticia, and other drag performers who perform with visible facial and body hair (such as thick chest hair and leg hair) exposed, do want their audiences to look at them and to enjoy their performances through the enjoyment of laughter. Lola's desire is to be taken seriously while in drag, while Morticia and others desire audible appreciation from their own audiences. In the context of Cape Town, the use of drag, especially by the performers who continue to push the boundaries of hyper-feminine performance, and what constitutes drag, make use of their performances to demonstrate the potentiality for not only new forms of drag, but new ways of being in the world, and potential new futures that are free from the chains of the stigma and pressures of the world around them.

For Morticia, the laughter of the audience is not a disreputable action, but rather a part of the audience's appreciation for them. Referring to Morticia as a "comedy queen", the persona Mark has created for Morticia includes having a caricatured look that infers some form of femininity and feminine performance and expression – but is something other than *just* feminine. Other performers may also express this notion by including elements such as glitter-filled moustaches and beards, as well as exposed body hair. Morticia attempted this with the more garish, gothic look of her early performances. Laughter, due to the structure of these performances, does not frighten her – the laughter is all part of the (hoped for) planned performance.

For Lola, the potential for laughter opens the performance of drag up to a sense of shame, as she wonders exactly what the audience may be laughing at. *Are they laughing at the performance, or are they laughing at the performer as they appear*? To be overtly queer as a Person of Colour, as in Lola's case, is to perform a stereotype through the spectacle of shame (Matebeni 2018, 323). There is the well-worn trope of the working-class, "gay coloured hairdresser" in South Africa, who identifies, dresses and behaves like a woman as a way of communicating that they are gay. Through these acts, femininity and certain types of feminine performance are used to reproduce and re-inscribe mainstream forms of gender performance (Rabie and Lesch 2009, 717). Though some believe that the *moppies* performed during the Cape Minstrel Carnival are parody, and playfully elevate those in drag, this has had a clear impact on how Lola

views laughter in the context of drag performance. These stereotyped behaviours allow people around them to understand who they are through their clothing, and further suggest an adoption of heterosexually coded gendered roles related to sex and sexuality, thereby allowing them to "live comfortably, and strategically in gendered spaces" (Potgieter 2006, 121). Thus, to live as a gay man, in these circumstances, is to try to live as a heterosexual woman. Trouble arises for some gay men then, when they resist "authentic masculinity", which, as Hennen (2008, 49) argues, implies "freedom and control, yet anything marked as feminine is strictly proscribed". Thus, the prescribed masculinity of being a man means not being a woman, or not like a woman, as being like a woman is to lack freedom or control – to be like a woman is to hold less social power. This lack of social power may lead to oppression in various forms.

For Lola, the laughter may well mean that more harm is afoot. Laughter can therefore be implemented as a tool that is used to regulate ways of acting and assert conformity towards the dominant social ideal. Lola worries that the laughter that some performers elicit is not taking place because of their use of comedic elements in their performance, but that it is based on their inability to conform to the ideals of what femininity and feminine performance should look like as a heterodominant normative ideal. In response to this, she attempts to direct and control the actions and physical styling of other performers, telling them how they should dress, do their make-up, stand, and perform, as she feels like an authority due to her decades of experience performing drag.

Lola's actions act as a call towards "collective belief", to invoke Margaret Gilbert's (1987) use of the term. Lola aims, through her actions, to standardize the performance and presentation of drag in order to gain acceptance not only from the dominant social force from the outside, but also as a means to ascribe certain standards within the perceived group as a means for acceptance by the perceived group – that of other drag performers. She believes that one cannot reveal any form of masculinity or masculine performance during the performance of drag, as this ruins the illusion of female impersonation and, to her, opens up the performance to laughter and ridicule. Laughter and ridicule in her belief take away from the performer's dignity. This may be Lola's way of coping with the world around her through the use and presentation of her drag persona. Yet other performers engage with their audiences in more overtly subversive ways, destabilizing gender categories and perceptions around them, while also making sense of their own experiences in a heterodominant, racially insensitive society.

Dragging time

Returning to Muñoz's (2009) assertion that "the here and now is a prison house", I want to unpack queer femme aesthetic performance as temporal production and leisure activity, acting as a response to the moralistic productive framework of the Protestant work ethic and Calvinism that is embedded in much of South African society. Let us consider that individuals are not bound to *the* time, but rather *a* time – a framework/set of signs that are used to determine time in a specific way. Giordano Nanni (2011, 6) writes that "just as the history of imperialism is often written without much consideration of time, the history of time is often narrated without due reference to imperialism". As such, it can be understood that the ways in which many of us understand time as a unit of measurement is greatly influenced by Western imperialism. How did this process come to be? And how did it become so widespread? Nanni refers to this as the "colonisation of time", whereby "the process entailed for colonised societies worldwide, a series of cultural curfews requiring a collective material and ideological shift in understanding of what constituted the permissible time for every

activity, including merely moving across the land" (7). This "colonisation of time" is seen in a variety of ways in South African society, from the apartheid era use of the pass-book, where all "non-whites" in the country were forced to carry a pass book that forced them to be in designated spaces at certain times only, to the enforcing of the productive work day and work week through the adoption of the Protestant work ethic. Thus, the adage of "time is money" starts to take effect.

Yet there has been a debate for some years now regarding the value of the concept of *African time*. Admittedly, this concept does come with some controversy, as it is marred with stereotypes of laziness and unproductive behaviours. It is often used in the pejorative, to infer stereotyped notions of "unpunctuality and tardiness" (Widlok et al. 2021, 397). After John Mbiti's (1970) formal introduction of the term into the academic lexicon, there were many who disagreed with his views and writing on the matter. However, my reasoning for bringing up the notion of African time is as a demonstration of other units of time measurement outside of Western imperialist thought practices. Furthermore, in South Africa this concept is often called 'Cape Town time' to refer to a more relaxed attitude towards time. Even in our colloquial language, South Africans make use of units of measurement that are not readily or easily understood outside of the South African context, by making use of terms such as 'now' and 'now-now', as well as 'just now', all inferring different units of time measurement that I argue are related to the cultural conception of African time. Timing conventions are not necessarily strict in this sense. Time is liminal, yet not unproductive, operating in a state of 'now', but 'not yet now' – a seemingly leisurely pace – though not devoid of action. Building upon this, in drag performance spaces, there is a phenomenon that is commonly referred to as 'drag queen time', an unpredictable unit of measurement that, I argue, destabilizes the boundaries between productive labour and leisure time. Drag performances rarely take place at the designated time, and thus, you as an audience member are beholden to the timing and readiness of the performer. The world outside no longer matters. Those outside, who are always in control, do not hold control in this space. This here and now is not a prison house. This here and now is a fantasy world, crafted by the performer, and you just have to give yourself up to the journey. Thus, experienced drag audience members possess the knowledge that a drag show, especially in Cape Town, will never start on time – not even if the flyer states otherwise. Sadly, annoyed tourists to the city sometimes leave frustrated due to the lack of stable punctuality in the trade.

However, viewing drag performance as an art form, it is clear to see that it can be a powerful medium, not only because it is highly visible in its form, but also because it possesses the ability to transform the individual who performs and presents themselves in drag. These performances have the potential to straddle the lines of both productive labour and leisure activities. By its very action and existence, this form of performance challenges the moralistic Protestant work ethic. Through the psychic characterization, as well as the fashioning of the drag aesthetic, the individual who performs and presents themselves in drag transforms and reasserts ownership over their own bodies, shapes, and how they inscribe themselves on the people around them, as well as the world around them. By using clothing, makeup, and costuming, the individual who performs and presents themselves in drag possesses the ability to change the way in which they are able to take up space in the world around them (Inkpen 2020, 90). Successful drag performers possess the ability to fashion themselves in such a way that they have command over how they stand in the world, how the light plays across their faces and costumes, expressing a type of power that stands against those who mean harm to those who are deemed overtly, or *too*, queer. The queer femme aesthetic of drag allows the individual

who takes on drag to create their own ideal. While other scholars have argued that the performance of drag re-inscribes feminine stereotypes and the ideals associated with that social fact and regulation, I argue that this is true for some, though not all, drag performance and presentation. There is infinite possibility in how drag might look and be presented, for we as an audience have not yet seen all the ways in which queer femme aesthetic performance and drag performance may look.

Drag performance does not take place in a vacuum, and as the world changes around us, the future of drag and queer femme performance yet to come is set to change too. While a lot of drag presentation might appear similar to some, what makes each drag performer unique are the personal touches that the individual who performs applies to their performance character/persona. In her work on the social meaning of fashion, Carly Inkpen (2020, 83) states that "fashion is simultaneously intensely personal and very public" as "fashion can function as armour, as a joyful creative outlet, or political statement". Moreover, as she continues: "we can use fashion as an extended ego when our inner self-representation needs propping up". I assert that the queer femme aesthetic expression of drag performance has the potential to follow the three functions that Inkpen has set forth – as armour, as joyful creative outlet, and as political statement, and sometimes as all three at the same time, through the use of the characterized mask that is applied in drag performance through physical posturing and physical covering, as well as psychic transformation. This joyful creative outlet is particularly significant when thinking of Sharpe's (2016, 12) 'wake'. Here, queer joy takes on the celebratory arc of the observance as it relates to the queer femme aesthetic performance. Drag takes place on the margins of the city, by marginalized groups of people, to celebrate their resilience, so many years later, yet only in short, temporal bursts of celebration. We may not be our ancestors' wildest dreams, though still we have heard their call, responding in the voice of our choosing – a voice swelling with subversive potential.

Conclusion

"The here and now is a prison house" (Muñoz 2009, 1). This is a statement that I have considered throughout this article, though it is a statement that has stuck with me and in my psyche since the moment I read it. For Muñoz this statement stands alongside the assertion that "we are not yet queer" (1). For Muñoz, queer is *there*, out there somewhere, but not yet here, while Sharpe's (2016) wake is *already here*, and *not quite here anymore*. Further, with the timing conventions of drag queen time, queer femme drag is always potentially happening now, but not yet now – as in the space of the city the outward push of historic systemic oppression may function as a call to a loud, hypervisible response. I argue that in part it is queer expression, discussed here as queer femme drag, that is one of the tools that may allow us to find our way beyond the prison house of the here and now. Queer expressive forms allow us as viewers to see for ourselves that there is another way of doing things, and of being in the world. Feminine performances and images of femininity already arrive at our feet with the weight of the objectified, sexualized gaze hanging heavily and dangerously upon them, while drag performance takes on the heaviness of feminine performance and expression and queers it, turning it into a means for empowerment for those who unfavourably go against social prescription and regulation. Queer femme drag makes visible that there is a way beyond the prison house of the here and now, for if the performing individual can imagine it, then they as well as I can see it, and be it too. Queer femme performances pose an uncomfortable challenge to a heterodominant society that is focused on time, money, and the narrow moralism that has permeated into so many spheres of life. Viewing queer femme drag allows us to see

clearly that everyday aesthetics are limited and limiting for those who are forced to cloak themselves in them. Queer aesthetic expression forces us to go beyond the heteronormative everyday expression that leaves many uncomfortable through conformity and regulation. Why, I ask, is one way of being in the world preferred, while all other ways of being leave one labelled as deviant and worthy of stigmatization? Does this not leave us all stagnant with no room to grow and nowhere to go? Perhaps Muñoz was right all along regarding the puzzling swamp in which the present forces us to wade along.

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