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THE THEATRICALITY OF THE EVERYDAY THROUGH COSTUME EXPRESSIONS OF FANDOM AND DRAG

The public defence of Jorge Sandoval's doctoral dissertation in Costume Studies was held online as a Zoom Lectio at Aalto University, School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Department of Film, Television and Scenography on 29 October 2021. Prof. Vicki Karaminas (Massey University) acted as Opponent and Prof. Sofia Pantouvaki (Aalto University) as Custos.

INTRODUCTION

This article-based dissertation, comprising six published research texts, investigates the ways the male costumed body expresses theatricality in non-theatre settings. It does so by looking at costume as a means of expressing non-normative gender, researched through two distinct perspectives: the costume expressions of fandom, and drag. More specifically, the dissertation uses as case studies the regalia of Canadian football fans and drag displays in both professional and amateur situations in Canada and Finland.

The performance of the costumed body in non-theatre settings expands the notion of representation to include human interaction in the physical material world and on the internet—both considered integral parts of the ambit of the contemporary every day, the public sphere, where individuals come together to identify, discuss, perform, and protest personal and societal issues.

My research draws from theories such as Alan Read's concept of theatricality and the ambit of the everyday¹, Judith Butler's feminist theory and queer identity² John R. Suler's idea of performance and identity in social media³, Vicki Karamina and Adam Geczy's philosophies of the body research⁴, Eric Anderson's⁵ and Amir-Ben Porat's research on masculinities and fandom in_sports⁶, Rachel Hann's research on dress normativity⁷, and Peter Boenisch's concept of relational dramaturgy⁸. These voices inform my understanding of the theatrical and emblematic potentialities of the costumed material body in real

1 Read, Alan (1993), *Theatre and the Everyday: An Ethics of Performance*, New York: Routledge.

2 Butler, Judith (1988), 'Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory', *Theatre Journal*, 40:4, pp. 519-531, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3207893>. Accessed 6 August 2009. Butler, Judith (1990), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge. Butler, Judith (1993), *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, London: Routledge.

3 Suler, John R. (2016: 29), *Psychology of the Digital Age: Humans Become Electric*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

4 Geczy, Adam and Karaminas, Vicki (2013), *Queer Style*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

5 Anderson, Eric (2005), *In the Game: Gay Athletes and the Cult of Masculinity*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

6 Amir, Ben Porat (2010), 'Football fandom: a bounded identification', *Soccer & Society*, 11:3, pp. 277-290.

7 Hann, Rachel (2017), 'Debating critical costume: negotiating ideologies of appearance, performance and disciplinarity', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 39:1, pp. 21-37.

8 Boenisch, Peter (2012), 'Acts of spectating: The dramaturgy of the audience's experience in contemporary theatre', *Critical Stages: The IATC Journal*, criticalstages.org/7/acts-of-spectating-the-dramaturgy-of-the-audiences-experience-incontemporary-theatre/. <http://www.critical-stages.org/7/acts-of-spectating-the-dramaturgy-of-the-audiences-experience-incontemporary-theatre/>. (n p). Accessed 23 July 2018.

life and the immaterial body in virtual spaces, through acts of ‘costuming’ the self.

The study explores two research questions:

- 1) How does the performance of the male body create a space for theatricality through costume expressions off the stage?
- 2) How does the consideration of the queered male body in social media platforms advance new paradigms for theorizing the notion of costume in the context of the everyday?

These questions form the basis of the thesis by researching three lines of enquiry:

1. Costuming expressions outside conventional theatre spaces;
2. The queered male body, specifically, the male body in drag in real life contexts; and
3. The theatricality of the everyday, understood here as an action emanating from an ‘everyday event’.

The thesis examines dressing up in everyday situations as an act of ‘othering’ by means of adornment through individuated sartorial expressions, generated by creative whim, fashion, and systems of commodification that re-gender the male body, transforming it into a theatrical instance.

Using qualitative ethnographic research methodology, I examine representations of gender performed through acts of ‘costuming’ in a variety of spaces, such as football stadiums, the street, social media platforms and reality TV. These spaces, I propose, provide opportunities to expand the understanding of theatricality off the stage, where the costumed body performs, expresses, inverts, and subverts gender stereotypes. This dissertation’s findings present the body and costumed expressions of gender, within the ambit of the everyday, as the signifiers and producers of a process, rather than a specific event; this stimulates new knowledge regarding the way we spectate and employ theatricality in regard to non-normative gender expressions and societal assumptions of gender off the stage.

It is important to provide a brief personal context for this research since my approach to this work is auto ethnographic. From early childhood and throughout my career, creating with my body has been a constant. Studying and working as a professional dancer and choreographer for over twenty years, I have always been aware of the materiality of the body. Pushing physicality to the limit, the body became the language I spoke, part of my everyday reality on and off the stage. After retiring from performing, I retrained as a theatre designer, where I found my niche in design for dance. The transition was a natural one: my earlier training helped me to understand the performer’s body and its needs. I have performed in other ways as well: living as a gay man, controlling the body’s suspensions and movements becomes the mechanism used to pass in a gender binary-oriented society.

As I became aware of my non-binaric position within the heteronormative matrix, I also became conscious of my physicality as a gay individual. Instincts and emotions were controlled and choreographed as I performed daily, either revealing or masking my gender orientation. Alongside physicality, dress became an important device, a mask I learned to use to navigate or defy the everyday, but most importantly to stage it. Therefore, my personal background, career choices, and gender preference guide this research.

My contribution to costume studies has been to look at costume through a gender queer lens as a form of theatricality removed from the frame of the stage and situated in everyday spaces that are performatively queered by means of ‘othering’⁹. Therefore, situating the costumed body at the centre of this investigation, and within the frame of fundamental shifts in post-dramatic theatre forms and practices, the need to investigate the body as an immaterial costume vis-à-vis the ubiquitous presence of new technologies and media platforms as spaces for performance was essential.

AIMS AND THEORETICAL FRAMING OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of this study is to examine ways in which dress is employed in daily life as ‘costume’, in both the material world and social media, and how it can be read as a theatrical device that produces additional significations. In the everyday world, exaggerated sartorial gestures challenge established gender notions and representations in playful and meaningful ways, becoming not just an accessory to the body, but a performance in itself. These significations, perceived as ‘the extra daily domain’ as Alan Read calls it, connect everyday dress to the theatrical in interesting ways¹⁰.

However, does eccentricity in dress in the ambit of the quotidian become automatically theatrical due to its uniqueness? Josette Féral ponders this point, asking, ‘how then are we to define theatricality today? Should we speak of it in the singular or in the plural? Is theatricality a property that belongs uniquely to the theatre, or can it also be found in the quotidian?’¹¹

I would suggest that theatricality is everywhere, present in the everyday – resounding but in ways that are always complicated to read.

RESEARCH PROCESS

This examination is supported by the following research leads: the analysis of rituals and dressing up in the world of football fandom to support and subvert normative gender representations, addressed in Publications I and II; the examination of the body itself as scenographic space to interrogate normative gender representations, explored in Publications IV and V; and the investigation of the performative nature of drag on social media platforms and in the public sphere, addressed in Publications III, IV and VI.

To systematize the methodology that explored the aforementioned lines of inquiry, I created the following 4 diagrams that illustrate the connections between the lines of enquiry, the corresponding publications, and their focus.

The first figure describes the interconnection between the topics explored in the six research publications, the specific focus of each one, and how the research relates to the three lines of enquiry. From the beginning, the guidelines established by these lines of enquiry and the focus of each publication (Figure 1) were crucial to forming a comprehensive argument.

9 Hann, Rachel (2017), ‘Debating critical costume: negotiating ideologies of appearance, performance and disciplinarity’, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 39:1, pp. 21–37.

10 Read, Alan (1993), *Theatre and the Everyday: An Ethics of Performance*, New York: Routledge.

11 Féral, Josette and Bermingham, Ronald (2002), ‘Theatricality: The specificity of theatrical language’. *Substance*, Special Issue: Theatricality, 31:98/99, pp. 94–108, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3685480>. Accessed 19 June 2019.

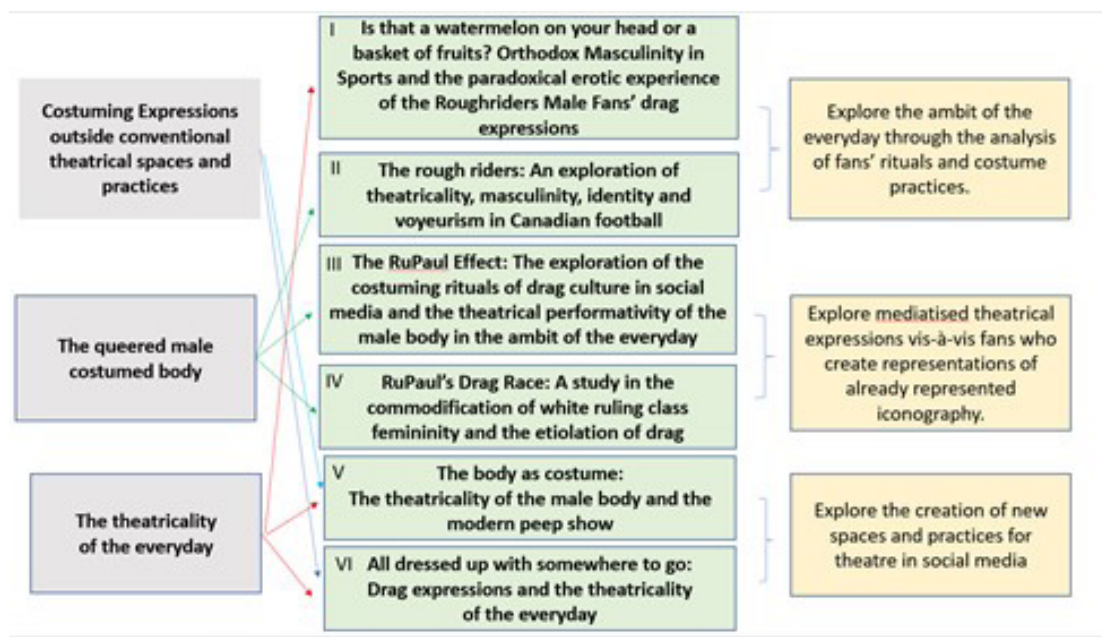


Figure 1: Interrelated lines of enquiry in relation to the six research publications of this thesis.

As part of the research process, I gathered several key elements or terms to guide the research and writing using an intertextual approach to connect images and texts¹². The key terms expressed in this Figure helped to define the methods and materials utilized, that led the research towards the proposed outcomes.

Jennifer Parker-Starbuck and Roberta Mock's model for researching the performing body, establishes four methodological approaches for the negotiation of tensions between bodies in theory and practice, for observing and spectating bodies, as well as performing and participating¹³.

Their four approaches are:

- 1) theorizing the body,
- 2) archival analysis of bodies,
- 3) first-person methodologies, and
- 4) intercorporeal exchanges.

The two approaches I used (number one and number four), allowed me to connect my own corporeal experiences to the research of dressing up and performing in the everyday world. Using my own experience as a reference, I constructed questionnaires and interviews to establish a strong relationship between my research questions, subjects of study and theoretical frame.

The key terms, the methods and materials established in advance, mapped the content, anticipated the outcomes of each publication and they kept the writing focused on the research questions.

¹² Intertextuality refers to the way that the meanings of any one discursive image or text depend not only on that one text or image, but also on the meanings carried by other images and texts.

¹³ Parker-Starbuck, Jennifer and Mock, Roberta (2011), 'Researching the body in/as performance', in B. Kershaw and K. Nicholson (eds), *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 210-235.

PUBLICATION	KEY TERMS	METHODOLOGY	MATERIALS	OUTCOMES
I Is that a watermelon on your head? Intertextuality: Line of enquiry # 1 and #3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The everyday • Dressing up • Costume • The body • Fandom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intertextuality • Literature review • Discursive formation • Intercorporeal exchange approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Images • Questionnaire • Fans' website • Journals • Articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insight into dressing up expressions of sports fans • Insight into sports and masculine capital • Insight into the performance of the body in the ambit of the everyday
II The rough riders Intertextuality: Line of enquiry #1 and #2 and #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dressing up • Costume • The everyday • The body • Fandom • Queer • Drag 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intertextuality • Literature review • Discursive formation • Visual analysis • Theoretical analysis • Textual analysis • Intercorporeal exchange approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Images • Questionnaire • Fans' website • Journals • Articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insight into the sartorial expressions of fans of the game • Overview on ritualistic behavior • Insight into the gendered body • Insight into the performance of the body in the ambit of the everyday
III The RuPaul effect Intertextuality: Line of enquiry #1 and #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costume expressions • The queered body • The everyday • Social media • Fandom • Drag 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature review • Intertextuality • Observation • Textual analysis • Visual analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Media • Reality TV show • Images • Fan's website • Journals • Articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insight into the body as a theatrical device • Insight into traditional theatrical expressions versus costume expressions in social media as representative of non-conventional theatrical expressions
IV RuPaul's Drag Race Intertextuality: Line of enquiry #1, #2 and #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costume expressions • The everyday • The body • Fandom • Drag • Social media • Unconventional theatrical expressions • Queer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical analysis • Intertextuality • Observation • Visual analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media • Online postings • Images • Fans' website • Journals • Articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insight into the commodification of the body in traditional theatrical expressions vis-à-vis drag expressions made by fans in non-conventional theatrical spaces • Insight into the performance of the body in social media platforms.
V The body as costume Intertextuality Line of enquiry #1, #2, #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unconventional costume expressions • The everyday • The body • Social media • Queer • Drag 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Theorizing the body • Intertextuality. • Textual analysis • Visual analysis • Intercorporeal exchange approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media • Images • Online postings • Journals • Articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal experiences of the interviewee regarding gendered costume expressions. • Personal insight into the performance of the body in social media as part of the ambit of the everyday
VI All dressed up with somewhere to go Intertextuality: Line of enquiry #1, #2, #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unconventional costume expressions • The everyday • The body • Queer • Drag • Social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Intercorporeal exchange approach • Theorizing the body • Observation. • Textual analysis • Visual analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Media • Images • Online postings • Journals • Articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal experiences of the gendered body in everyday situations. • Insight into the performance of the body in social media as part of the ambit of the everyday

Figure 2: Key terms and themes.

RESEARCH DESIGN

An initial literature review helped to develop the theoretical framework and the outlining of the core concepts for this research. Figure 3 shows the research structure; it presents the main topics leading the literature review which were essential for the preparation and eventual writing of the six publications. The two research questions are placed in the middle of this diagram as the focal point for the research. The right side of the diagram indicates the research materials used, and the research methods employed for the analysis.

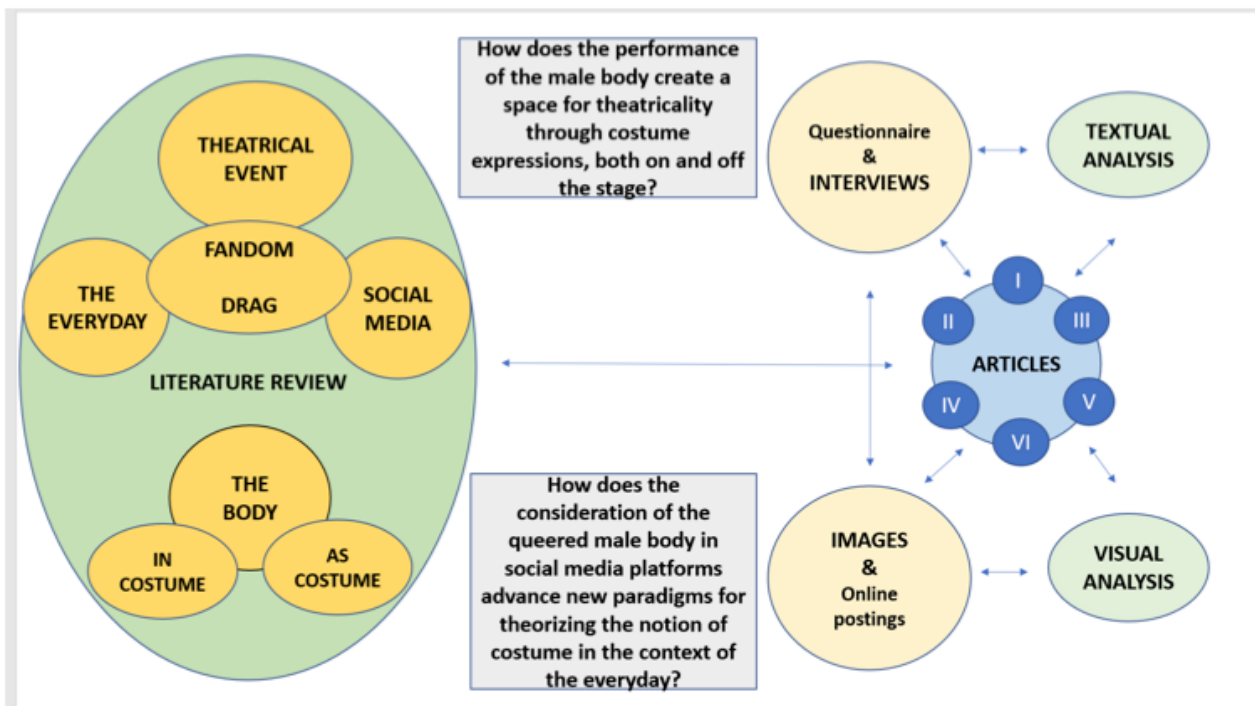


Figure 3: Research Structure.

Figure 4: presents an overview of the methodological approaches that were used to analyze the research materials that supported the research, and how these connect.

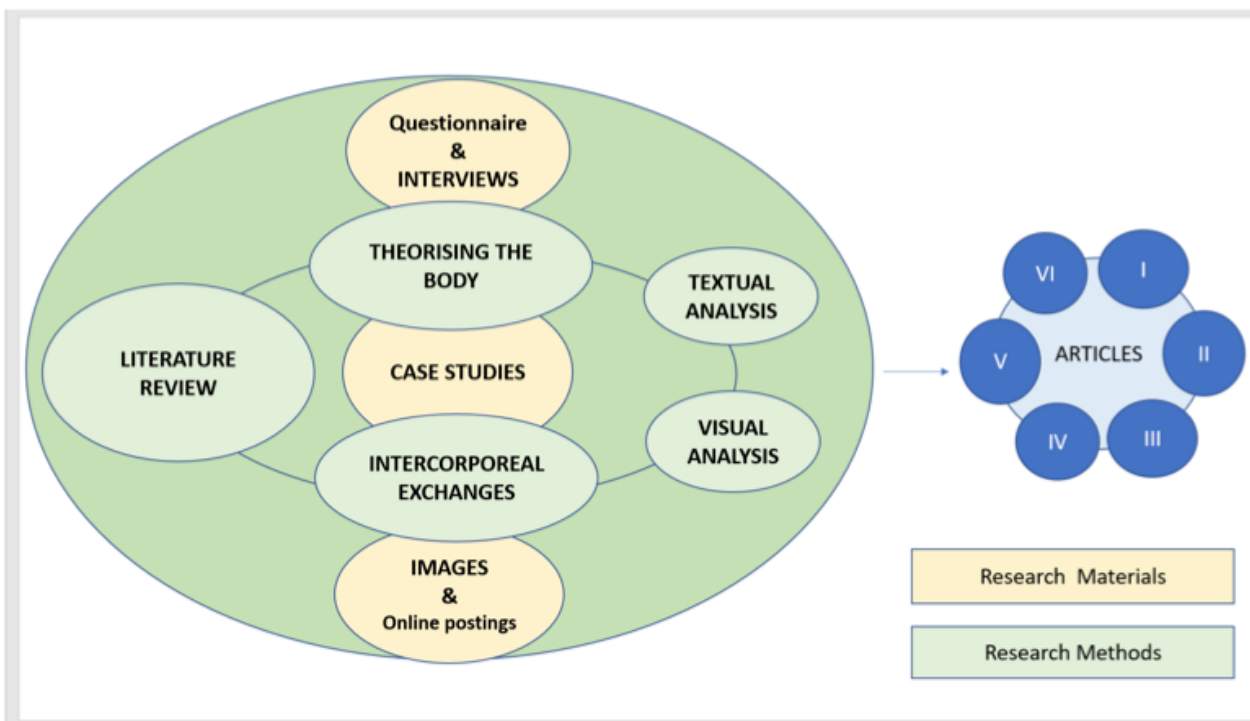


Figure 4: Research materials and research methods.

METHODS

For the development of my research work I used:

- 1) A broad literature review narrowing the choice of possible theoretical approaches.
- 2) Data collection to determine case studies using questionnaires and interviews.
- 3) Analysis of social media representations to illustrate the research premise and draw conclusions.

These three steps enabled a discursive approach¹⁴, using theoretical text and images, to explore the construction of genderqueer meaning through costumes manifest in real and virtual environments apart from the stage, and how costume disrupts normative gender representation.

THE IMAGES

The use of Parker-Starbuck and Mock's methods to examine images as the material or virtual body in and as performance, facilitated the consideration of the cultural positioning of the body and the negotiation of bodies absent and present' through an ethnographic and corporeal approach to storytelling¹⁵.

RESULTS: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Megan Alrutz and Julia Listengarten state that 'theory helps to see the world and the artists' work anew'¹⁶. This simple statement underscores how theory, conjoined with practice, enables an interrogation of the very ways we, as theatre artists, understand representation on and off the stage.

My exploration of the queered male body in costume and as costume in the ambit of the everyday situates my research aims within the double frames of theory and practice, of the abstract and the real. Examining the costumed body in the everyday world as emblematic and agentic rather than as merely material display, has led me to think about theatricality through costume in a broader sense, based on how we interact in the world today. This is particularly true when we consider how popular costuming expressions like street fashion, sports' fan regalia, or party dress, to mention few, have provided, at times, a source of inspiration for theatre designers but have rarely been seen as a theatrical event in their own right. Dressing up for public display, is a process of costuming through 'othering' that carries complex meanings. In this work, I argue that these sartorial manifestations are more than theatrical – they are theatre.

As I explored the male body through fandom and drag, I studied the ways in which, through quotidian actions, the male body in costume queers normative gender representations through overt theatrical acts. Using inductive methodology to understand the male body as emblem—manifest through fan regalia in the sports field and drag apparel on the street, in televised media and on social media platforms I propose the costumed body as a device that can be simultaneously performative, scenographic, and dramaturgical, resonating theatrically outside the bounds of the theatre.

Seen across a wide spectrum, men in drag are the focus of all six research publications,

¹⁴ Discourse: a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it. Discursive formation is the way meanings are connected together in a particular discourse.

¹⁵ Parker-Starbuck and Mock 2011: 214

¹⁶ Alrutz, Megan, Listengarten, Julia, and Van Duyn Wood, M. (eds.) (2012: 7), *Playing with Theory in Theatre Practice*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

ranging from football fans' dress rituals, to drag expressions in social media and on the streets of Helsinki and Montreal. The research, as a whole, contributes to better understanding of how the costumed male body is read in the mundane world using theatre and gender as discursive frames. Focusing on the sports fan in extravagant regalia and the male body in full female drag, I propose the costumed body makes meaning as it interrogates normative gender representations in both real and digital environments. In a sense, queered bodily display functions as theatre and furthers an understanding of what costume is and what it does to subvert normative masculinity. Overall, these findings respond to my two research questions. My argument establishes the realm of the everyday in the twenty-first century to be equal parts material and virtual worlds where gender performances play out, from moment to moment, in real life and in social media. Indeed, users of social media seem not to differentiate between the two¹⁷. Both forms of display have elements that are reminiscent of theatre performance: they are a conscious and creative doing for the appreciation of an audience. Pre-internet, non-normative representations of the male body were limited to the cabaret stage or private club. Arguably, outside these locations, the queer body was largely rendered invisible¹⁸. However, due to the incessant draw of the internet and the media streaming of mainstream shows such as *RuPaul's Drag Race*, invisibility is no longer an issue. The result is a broad presence of non-normative signifiers of gender.

Creatively speaking, cyberspace offers a nonthreatening and anonymous platform on which to posit an alternative persona. The focus is not on accurate representations of oneself, but rather its overt theatricalization. This comes at a time when gender identity is increasingly fluid and provisional, underscoring how the body is the platform for questioning binaries of all kinds. As bodies become more undisciplined, and representation embraces gender variation, physical shapes, sizes, abilities and backgrounds, the performance is never one-dimensional or clear. As such, the body in costume and as costume epitomizes the way in which performer and spectator are simultaneously breaking down normative designations and rendered the division of performer and spectator obsolete.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The study of the costumed body at the intersection of scenography and gender in the context of the real world is, relatively speaking, wide open territory. Expanding research on the way that costume signifies vis-à-vis the gendered body within the ambit of the quotidian will challenge the way we think of and make theatre at the same time as it challenges notions of hetero-normativity, homonormativity and the many other issues related to the performance of gender in society, off the stage and on the internet. Much remains to be discussed in regard to dress and gender: the two are linked in ways we little understand. Expressions like cosplay, fancy dress and national dress in social media are aspects of the everyday still waiting to be explored. Sartorial expressions are intrinsic to the way we move through and understand the world and looking closely at these gestures as a way of expanding the gender envelop, indeed all human possibilities, become the essence and importance of critical costume studies.

¹⁷ Suler, John R. (2016: 29), *Psychology of the Digital Age: Humans Become Electric*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁸ Entwistle, Joanne and Elizabeth Wilson (2001), *Body Dressing*, Oxford: Berg.

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