UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Faculty of Philosophy

English Studies

Aino Hyyryläinen

Gender Reiteration, the Queer, and Language

Performative Gender in the Theatre

Vaasa 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Faculty of Philosophy

Discipline:	English Studies
Author:	Aino Hyyryläinen
Master's Thesis:	Gender Reiteration, the Queer, and Language. Performative Gender in the Theatre.
Degree:	Master of Arts
Date:	2017
Supervisor:	Tiina Mäntymäki

ABSTRACT

Tutkimukseni tarkoitus on selvittää, miten *queer*-sukupuolta tuotetaan teatterin lavalla. Lisäksi tavoitteena on selvittää, mitkä teatterin osa-alueet rakentavat sukupuolta, sekä miten sukupuoli näyttäytyy yleisölle. Tutkimus on viitekehykseltään *queer*-teoreettinen. *Queer*-teorian lisäksi tutkimus ammentaa esimerkiksi teatterintutkimuksesta.

Keräsin tutkimuksen aineiston Vaasan ylioppilasteatteri Rampilla, jossa nauhoitin *ALTER*-nimisen englanninkielisen näytelmän kenraaliharjoituksen. Näytelmän toteutin yhdessä työryhmän kanssa *devising*-menetelmällä, joka mahdollistaa yhteisöllisen tarinankerronnan. Nauhoitteesta analysoin tapoja, joilla näyttelijät tuottavat *queer*-sukupuolta ja tutkin, miten performatiivisuus ilmenee lavalla. Lisäksi nostan huomioita erilaisista teatterin keinoista, jotka tuottavat käsitystä *queer*-sukupuolesta.

Tutkimukseni lopputulos on, että teatterin lavalla performatiivinen sukupuoli on selkeästi esillä. Näyttelijät tuottavat sukupuolta esimerkiksi kehollaan ja äänenkäytöllään. Näiden lisäksi erilaiset ohjaukselliset ratkaisut, tekniikka, lavastus ja puvustus tuottavat sukupuolta yhdessä näyttelijäntaiteen kanssa.

Lopuksi totean, että teatterin lisäksi tuloksilla on vaikutusta myös muuhun elämään: kulttuurisia pakotteita on mahdollista haastaa esimerkiksi toimimalla tietoisesti normeja vastaan. Tällainen suhtautuminen rikkoo sukupuolelle tällä hetkellä asetettuja normatiivisia rajoitteita ja mahdollistaa sukupuolen käsitteen ja tuottamisen uudelleenajattelun.

KEYWORDS: theatre, queer theory, gender reiteration, performativity, devising

1   FROM CATEGORIES TO FLUIDITY

We live in a world that applauds similarity and is used to it. We address our audiences by saying "ladies and gentlemen", because we are convinced that these two words accurately describe the scope of people around us. We assign behaviours into categories and are upset when people do not fit into this categorisation. Only a day's observation shows how much our society relies on definable boundaries, and this same phenomenon also occurs in public debates on gender and sexuality. Queer theorists have questioned the gender binary for decades. Different sets of norms prevail, and it is up to the individual to navigate them. These norms not only guide our gender, but also our sexuality and the expression of our desire.

In this thesis, my aim is to study how *queer* is expressed through gender performance on stage. Specifically, I wish to explore through theory and practice what different aspects build queer gender. How do actors reiterate queer genders, how does language affect gender reiteration, and what elements on stage shape perceived gender in the theatre? I analyse these elements from a recorded dress rehearsal of a devised theatre production. Devising is a collaborative form of theatre, and therefore it is worthwhile to see what kinds of patterns emerge from a play that has been influenced by several artists and their worldviews. Theatre not only reflects the values of the surrounding society, it also influences and shapes these values both voluntarily and involuntarily, so the relationship between the actors and the audience is mentioned where relevant.

Theoretically, my thesis builds on the works of Judith Butler and J. Jack Halberstam. Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999) that gender is performative. Because Butler links our understanding of gender to parody and illusion (Butler 1999: 175), I want to study this idea in an environment that embraces illusion – the theatre. I chose to produce my own material together with a cast of actors in order to closely examine the themes through the artistic process. This rehearsal process created *ALTER* (2015), a play that examines love, gender roles, and a society managed by normative heterosexuality. In addition to Butler, my thesis also draws on the theories of female masculinity and Gaga feminism by J. Jack Halberstam, and discusses ways in

which queer representation utilises femininity and masculinity as they appear outside the female and male bodies. I chose queer theory as the background for this thesis because of the possibilities it offers, both theoretically and practically, "to rethink the possible" (Butler 1999: xx). Normative ideals have long affected what is deemed possible in terms of gender. In my understanding, Butler aims to expand these possibilities, therefore inviting readers to rethink the boundaries of possibility. My hypothesis is that constructed gender reiterations on stage could be seen as rethinking the possible. That task is also the reason why the cast and crew embarked on the journey to devise *ALTER* in the first place. We wished to reimagine the boundaries of gender as nonexistent, and to at least temporarily create a world where gender does not matter as much as in today's society. We wanted to rethink the ways in which we use language and in which we express and perform gender. Our approach from the beginning was, in my understanding, *queer*. Further, queer theory is strongly embedded in practice, because the term *queer* relates to both scholarly and everyday life. Judith Butler discusses the importance of this theory, writing: "There is a new venue for theory, necessarily impure, where it emerges in and as the very event of cultural transition" (Butler 1999: ix). Queer theory has very real possibilities of affecting and being affected by everyday experience.

Here, it should be mentioned that the qualitative nature of this research makes it very local. Our approach refuses what postmodern theory calls *grand narratives* – in fact, our entire devising process can be called postmodern. In connection with gender, this rejection of grand narratives can be interpreted as a shift away from stability in favour of fluidity; away from universality in favour of particularity. In our devising process, particularity means that we relied on our own experiences, and as such the material we produced applies to our own culture only. Butler notes that "[t]he very notion of "dialogue" is culturally specific and historically bound" (Butler 1999: 20) and this also applies to the material and findings of this thesis. Many of the cast and crew certainly experience some form of privilege within our Western culture, whether relating to their ethnicity, health, financial status, or sexuality. We did not make any attempt to reach outside our own culture, but to influence the attitudes *within* it, and sufficed with representing the differences amongst our own worldviews. The findings of this thesis should therefore not be understood as universal. The very notion of stability is in fact contested in queer theory,

and the production of *ALTER* follows this thinking as well. Recreating the work at a later time exactly like the cast performed it in the final dress rehearsal is impossible. In a way, the play functions like gender – impossible to reiterate in an exactly identical way.

The question of pronouns needs to be briefly addressed in connection with this thesis. The English language uses gendered personal pronouns *she* and *he*, which are not always applicable in describing my material. In general, people may give preferred pronouns with which they would like to be addressed1. How does this apply to fictional characters whose pronouns are not necessarily known? I have solved this issue by using *he* when the actor performs a man, *she* when the actor performs a woman, and the singular *they* when the gender of the character is ambiguous or nonbinary. Because I was present during the rehearsal process, I rely on the actors' own statements about their characters when assigning them pronouns – hence, if an actor expressed they are performing a man, I use the pronoun *he*. Especially when discussing queer gender performances, I feel that using the singular *they* emphasises gender performativity and allows for a more accurate discussion of queer expressions than *he* and *she* would.

1.1 Devising *ALTER*

ALTER is a devised play, written by five actors together with me as the director at a local student theatre, Vaasan ylioppilasteatteri Ramppi. The starting point for the process was to explore the possibilities of gender, and the desire to examine and challenge normative heterosexuality was always present during the rehearsal process. Actors utilised their own views of the world in character construction, and these elements translated to their performance on stage. At the end of this process, the play was created with 33 different characters, even more gender performances, and nine scenes, all individual stories and only thematically related to each other. The process of devising *ALTER* began in December 2014, when I discussed the general subject of gender with the cast. These conversations were used to create a general synopsis for the play, where the nine scenes

---

1 Nonbinary pronouns could include the singular *they*, *ze,* and *xe*.

of the final performance were originally outlined. Improvisations and conversations were used to create more material for these scenes. The cast then took a break, during which most of the writing was done by the director and actors. Rehearsals continued in January 2015, where the individual scenes were further broken down and rehearsed in detail. The final script consists of nine scenes, written by myself and some of the actors. The actors who did not write the script still participated in making the scenes through, for example, choreographing and providing their ideas for editing and dramatising the written script for the stage. In this sense, all of the actors had an influence on the final production. The play was performed six times in February, including the final dress rehearsal, and reprised once in April.

ALTER was written and performed in English, which is the second language of the actors. While this thesis will not allow for a detailed examination of performing gender in a second language, it will be interesting to note that performing and writing in a second language will have effects on the performance. Samuel Beckett, whose most well-known plays were written in French and not in his native language English, notes that it is easier "to write without style in French" (Graver 2004: 27). For Beckett, French had an ascetic quality, making it easier to make statements without "writing poetry in it" (Graver 2004: 27). This would imply that working in a second language will also create a quality of honesty and straightforwardness to art, as the artist will not be able to conceal their message in the same way that would be possible with their native language. For *ALTER*, this would suggest that the actors' lines will more straightforwardly express the thought they are trying to emphasise than if they devised in Finnish. However, it should also be noted that some actors also spoke English fluently, albeit as a second language, meaning that the use of poetic language is not entirely excluded from the play.

Devising is a process of theatre-making that somewhat escapes clear definitions. There are some general elements that are found in most devised productions, although the methods and processes are likely to differ across groups. Most importantly, devising is a collaborative form of theatre-making. The models of collaboration vary between groups (Heddon & Milling 2006: 223), and this is one of the reasons why the term 'devising' is difficult to define exhaustively. Besides being a process of collaborative creation, there

are two elements of devising that are found across most contemporary devised performances. Improvisation is involved in most devised productions. Ideas and material are gathered in rehearsals through improvised games and scenes, and these are further developed into the actual play that is then treated and rehearsed as a text. While the basis for a devised performance may also be a ready-written drama, improvisation is used to deconstruct the text and interpret it in a way that radically differs from the original. In *ALTER*, some scenes employ previously written text, and others are based entirely on material created by the group themselves, either through writing or improvisation.

Devised performances often utilise several points of view. In their book *Devising Performance: A Critical History*, Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling write about the relationship between devising and fragmented structures. These fragmentations can manifest as scenes that are chronologically unrelated, or that do not follow the traditional story arc of beginning, problem and solution. Further, Heddon and Milling argue:

> [A] group devising process is more likely to engender a performance that has multiple perspectives, that does not promote one, authoritative, 'version' or interpretation, and that may reflect the complexities of contemporary experience and the variety of narratives that constantly intersect with, inform, and in very real ways, construct our lives (Heddon & Milling 2006: 192).

Heddon and Milling see this complexity of structure as a feature of postmodern performance. Because contemporary devised performances are often fragmented, they can be used to give a voice to those parts of society that often remain silent. This method of theatre making can also establish a dialogue between majority and minority groups, for example, enabling an examination of the power dynamics and moral codes between them.

The material of this thesis consists of a video recording of the final dress rehearsal for *ALTER*, as well as the written script for textual reference. Where applicable, I also refer to early rehearsal recordings, which were filmed during the rehearsal process. The recordings are used to analyse how the actors construct gender through bodily performance and language, and how aspects of *queer* emerge from the material. In the dress rehearsal recording, the actors are constantly in character and on stage. Relating to

this, Heddon and Milling (2006: 209) ask: "On stage, can there ever be a performer who is not acting? Is the so-called 'underneath' of the act simply another act?" These questions are relevant, especially in connection to Butler's theory of gender performativity, but the scope of this thesis will not allow for any deeper analysis of the actors' own gender performance. Instead, my analysis focuses on how actors perform their characters' genders in the chosen scenes, and these recordings form the body of my material.

The play *ALTER* consists of nine scenes, all depicting gender in different ways. I have chosen to analyse the play in its entirety. The nine scenes that are analysed are about a drag queen parodying a pop star ("Firework"), a shop where people come to change their gender identities ("Identity Shop"), a blind date between a man and a woman that results in the man getting killed ("Serial Killer"), a parody of a romantic tragedy done like a poorly executed school play ("Romantic School Play"), an online chatroom turned into a physical space where participants mock each other behind facelessness ("Chatroom"), an adaptation of act 2, scenes 1 and 2 of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet ("Shakesqueer"), a waiter ranting about homosexuality in an empty restaurant ("Homophobic Monologue"), a love affair between two women ("Me And Mrs. Jones"), and finally, the actors appearing on stage as themselves ("I Am").

1.2 Studying *ALTER*

The material for this thesis was collected by recording the final dress rehearsal on video. I also utilise some early rehearsal recordings to compare changes in the performance where relevant. The videos were recorded at Vaasan ylioppilasteatteri Ramppi. I recorded some material during the rehearsal process from December 2014 up to the final dress rehearsal with audience on February 6th, 2015. I viewed the material and chose to analyse all scenes, because each examines a different side of gender performativity and *queer*. Because I chose to use all of the scenes in the play, my material will consist of scenes that have been affected by *all* of the actors and the director. Had I narrowed the material down to specific scenes, it is possible that I would have excluded several points of view from analysis. Because the benefits of devised theatre lie precisely in the multiple available

perspectives, it is relevant to use the entire play.

My method can be described as ethnography. Ethnography is defined by Brian A. Hoey (2014: 1) as "virtually any qualitative research project where the intent is to provide a detailed, indepth description of everyday life and practice". What counts as everyday life is rather obscure, but I will assume that gender performance, whether it occurs on- or off-stage, is a part of everyday life, because it is impossible to somehow stop doing gender for a given amount of time. Further, my method can be called participant observation, because as the director, I actively participated in producing my own material. My role as an artist and a researcher raises some questions of validity: how can I claim to be as objective a researcher as possible, when at the same time I also worked together with the cast whose performances I wanted to study? Hoey (2014: 2) describes this dual role of the ethnographic researcher: "the researcher must both become a participant in the life of the setting while also maintaining the stance of an observer". Recognising these elements of ethnographic study can already help overcome those obstacles that might otherwise prevent a successful analysis in the field. Further, the analysis of this thesis was completed in late 2016, meaning that there was already some distance between the time of production and the analysis of the material. This further ensures that while I am able to use my participation in the rehearsal process to bring forth further points that might otherwise be lost, the analysis is not affected by too much knowledge about what was *intended* as opposed to what actually *occurs*.

As the academic study of theatre has gained popularity, discussions of research validity have become relevant in that field as well. *Practice-as-research* is a method that combines "creative doing with reflexive being" (Kershaw & Nicholson 2011: 64), often meaning that the creative artist is also involved in researching their own artwork. While the term *practice-as-research* often "indicates the uses of practical creative processes as research methods (and methodologies) in their own right" (Kershaw & Nicholson 2011: 64), they can also include varying levels of immersion and distance (Kershaw & Nicholson 2011: 138). A researcher might also observe the creative process of artists that they are not directly involved with, which would create a level of distance between the researcher and their material production.

Although in the case of my thesis, *ALTER* is not the only outcome of my research, elements of practice-as-research also apply. The role of the artist and the researcher are closely linked in my study. Kershaw and Nicholson (2011: 141) suggest that such a method can work as long as it is recognised "that reflective and experiential modes of thinking are both part of a practitionerresearcher's critical armoury". In fact, to be able to produce such research, both elements need to be present, and in balance. If the creative element is favoured over the reflexive one, any scientifically valid study will be practically impossible. Similarly, academic research cannot overpower the creative process. Kershaw and Nicholson (2011: 141) also note this, writing: "Indeed, it might be important actually to suspend one's doubts so that the work can be entered into in an open and accepting way, only later to examine the assumptions inscribed in the practice". This would suggest that active participation in both elements – sometimes without regard to the other – is crucial to conducting research in the arts.

2 THE QUEER, GENDER REITERATION, AND LANGUAGE

Throughout *ALTER*, actors reiterate gender in different ways to express their characters, implying that at least on stage, gender is constructed through actions. My theoretical background consists of queer theory, because it provides an understanding of how several expressions of gender can be reiterated by the same person. Queer theory will hopefully also provide insight into why and how examining gender on stage will also affect how gender is understood off stage. This section will mainly focus on outlining the idea of gender reiteration, developing some insight into queer gender, and examining how language affects the reiteration of queer genders both on- and off-stage. Further, I will examine the relationship between queer theory, gender reiteration, and theatre.

Generally *queer* is used by scholars

> that are interested in drawing attention to the disruption of stable identity categories by insisting on their contingency and volatility on the one hand, and to the social and cultural layers of heteronormativity that underline any process of identity formation on the other (Escudero 2009: 13).

Queer theory questions heteronormativity, because it understands gender as socially and culturally constructed: therefore any gender ideals are not biological necessities. Could our culture be different? What grounds are there to say that heteronormativity is necessary, or better than *queer*? Certainly the same question applies to queer theory: why should it be considered better than heteronormative theory? Queer theory attempts to provide a thorough understanding of gender and sexuality *descriptively* instead of normatively. Where heteronormativity attempts to categorise people based on whether their gender expression and sexuality are desirable, queer theory strives for a descriptive account of gender and sexuality. Certainly these theories are then used for political, artistic, and social actions, but the basis of queer theory is first and foremost descriptive.

Escudero mentions identity formation. It should be noted that this thesis considers Judith Butler's concept of *gender performativity* a more accurate term for gender expression than *identity.* For decades, queer scholars have called into question the entire concept of identity, claiming it to be a naturalised process that attempts to describe as internal

something that is profoundly external – to rephrase, that gender is a cultural construction instead of a biological necessity. Further, queer theory sees gender and sexuality as fluid and constantly changing. To demonstrate this fluidity, queer studies focus on refuting the stability of the man/woman binary, as well as arguing against "the heterosexist prejudice to which many queers have long been subjected" (Escudero 2009: 13). While queer theory strives for a descriptive account of genders and sexualities, it is also engaged in moral conversation. When Escudero discusses queer theory as oppositional to heterosexist prejudice, they are also implying that queer theory ought to refute the kinds of assumptions that have led to violence and prejudice towards queer reiterations of gender and sexuality.

In *Queer*, Martin Berg and Jan Wickman (2010: 23) point out that queer theory assumes that the categories of the binary – man/woman or male/female – construct meanings about certain ways of being. Therefore, these categories are not born out of ways of being, but *vice versa* – a category carries with it certain assumptions about behaviour and gender performance. To *be a man* and to *be a woman* carry expectations, rules, and regulations that guide meaning-making. For example, Satu Venäläinen (2015: 75) notes that women who commit violent acts are judged not only based on the immorality of violence, but also on the immorality of acting against normative femininity. Venäläinen (*ibid.*) argues that the category of *woman* remains intact when women who commit violence are first judged to be unfeminine, and thus also from the normative category *woman*.

Historically, queer theory has developed from a previous field of gay and lesbian studies. Penn and Irvine (1995: 329) discuss this shift:

> One effect of the postmodern emphasis on fractured identities, multiple subjectivities, performance, and representations as markers for ever-shifting cultural formations and social practices is to reframe the focus of study from 'gay and lesbian' to 'queer.' This move represents the latest remapping of the boundaries of inclusion.

Queer acknowledges that the categories of *gay* and *lesbian* are not enough to describe the entire spectrum of human experience: "Many writers have recently commented on the damage done by labeling diverse forms of cultural production and representation

as "lesbian" or "gay"" (Halberstam 1998: 176). This not only renders other sexualities invisible, but also affects how gender performances are seen as causally linked to sexualities. In fact, queer theory is grounded on the assumption that you can never map out the entire spectrum of human experience, because it is always shifting. This does not, however, mean that expressions should be limited to only a few categories that consequently exclude more expressions than they include. *Queer* is constructed as an umbrella term that gathers all expressions under the same, albeit vague term, because any clear definitions are bound to fail. Queer theory also takes the gay and lesbian theories further, "arguing that sexual identities, desires, and categories are fluid and dynamic, and that sexuality is inevitably intertwined with, even sometimes constitutive of, power relations" (Gamson & Moon 2004: 49). Genders are policed by normative heterosexuality that assumes that there is a causal relationship between sex, gender, desire, and sexuality. Therefore, a certain sexuality must indicate a certain expression of gender – or as this approach would understand it, a certain gender identity. Sexuality is constitutive of power relations because there is still an assumed hierarchy among different sexualities.

2.1 Performative Gender, Identity, and Sexuality

As a term, *queer* relates to both gender and sexuality. While queer theory posits that gender and sexuality are not causally or correlationally connected, they are still linked in some ways: Although a certain gender expression does not indicate a certain sexuality, both are controlled in order to also control the other. For example, normative gender expressions are enforced because they are deemed fitting for the desirable sexuality, namely heterosexuality.

Traditionally, gender has been defined as the social expression of sex. Sex constitutes of genetic, anatomical, and hormonal aspects, which affect our biology in different ways (Vilkka 2010: 17). In normative thinking, sex dictates how gender is performed, meaning for example that a biological female is also a woman. Queer theorists disagree, arguing instead that gender "is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance"

(Butler 1999: 43–44). This definition, most famously presented by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1999), casts gender as reiterative and culturally constructed: the reiterated acts are dictated by culture and not biology. Consequently, it also means that "a gender cannot be said to follow from sex in any one way" (Butler 1999: 10), because gender reiteration is not guided by a biological necessity. Butler offers our everyday language as evidence, claiming that "[t]he articulation "I feel like a woman" by a female or "I feel like a man" by a male presupposes that in neither case is the claim meaninglessly redundant" (Butler 1999: 29). The terms *sex* and *gender* therefore seem to note different phenomena, and the relationship between sex and gender is not mimetic.

Butler denounces the assumption that gender is in any way internal, suggesting instead that genders are external styles that are regulated by the cultural compulsions of the heterosexual matrix. These external stylisations are constantly repeated and these repetitions create the illusion of internality – gender is therefore performative and constitutes "the identity it is purported to be" (Butler 1999: 33). Gender performance can never reach the normative ideal and therefore constant reiteration is required (Motschenbacher 2010: 16). Gender thus becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, where the expectation of internality creates that illusion through external expression (Butler 1999: xxviii). It appears essential, because the heterosexual matrix – meaning the cultural assumptions that guide our gender reiteration and expressions of sexuality – requires gender to be natural in order to confine people to certain sexualities and normative gender expressions.

While there are no essential limitations to gender, Butler argues that a person must perform *some* gender: "Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender" (Butler 1999: 13), which implies that gender reiteration is embedded into all our actions, and to have a body at all means that the body also reiterates gender. J. Halberstam agrees in his book *Female Masculinity* (1998: 119): "we are embedded in gender relations, and gender relations are embedded within us, to the point where gender feels inescapable", suggesting that some form of gender will always affect how we act and how we interpret other people's actions. Within normative heterosexuality,

it may also feel that the binary is inescapable, but new gender performances are constantly being shaped, indicating that the scope of gender is not limited to the man/woman binary.

In short, Butler defines gender as a *doing* (Butler 1999: 33) instead of a *being*, and that it is constructed by culture. This also implies that were normative ideals different, our gender performances would also drastically differ from what they are now. Queer theory argues that any gender divisions like the man/woman binary are ultimately arbitrary, and *gender identity* as a term does not accurately describe the scope of gender. In Butler's theory the body is an instrument of cultural construction (Butler 1999: 12–13), and the norms and moral rules of our culture shape the way we perform our genders. These performances are reiterated through "acts, gestures, and desire (…) *on the surface* of the body" (Butler 1999: 173), which also implies that gender is not stable but fluid. In *Female Masculinity* (1998), Judith Halberstam writes:

> At the same time, I was trying to show that many, if not most, sexual and gender identities involve some degree of movement (not free-flowing but very scripted) between bodies, desires, transgressions, and conformities; we do not necessarily shuttle back and forth between sexual roles and practices at will, but we do tend to adjust, accommodate, change, reverse, slide, and move in general between moods and modes of desire (Halberstam 1998: 147).

Although this movement is controlled by cultural laws such as the heterosexual matrix, Halberstam argues that most expressions of sexuality and gender are still fluid: they are changed and adjusted according to our own desires and circumstances. They are also affected by how others react to us.

Here, an interesting parallel to the theatre emerges. In theatre, the audience and actor are in constant interaction. How the actor performs affects how the audience reacts to them, and how the audience reacts affects how an actor performs. This same principle can be applied to everyday life – how we are received affects how we perform our gender. If one is perceived as feminine, one might alter one's gender performance to match that assumption. One might also disagree with this assumption and behave masculinely to deliberately create discrepancy between expectation and reality. Just as an actor might repeat an action that the audience enjoys, so we are likely to reiterate those actions that we are rewarded for as being desirable.

When Butler (1999: 60) proves gender to be constructed of acts and gestures, she also proves that any idea of *gender identity* is mistaken internality. Instead, she states that "all gender ontology is reducible to the play of appearances". She also writes: "That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (Butler 1999: 173), meaning that gender reiteration cannot be true or false. The concept of *gender identity* is proven to be a regulatory fiction (Butler 1999: 180) that aims to categorise gender reiterations into intelligible and unintelligible forms. Gender thus becomes an internalised masquerade. As a term, masquerade is strongly associated with psychoanalyst Joan Riviere. Riviere (1991: 94) calls femininity a mask for intellectual women who actually wish to hide their masculinity: "Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it". The feminine mask provides a cover behind which women in heteronormative settings can perform tasks and duties that are associated with masculinity. When this masquerade is internalised, the mask no longer enables reiteration against normative ideals, but actually enforces gender norms associated with the categories of *man* and *woman.*

Any attempts at constructing these universal identity categories – like *man* or *woman* – are bound to fail. Butler (1999: 7) uses feminism as an example to demonstrate how attempting to create a category of *women* excludes many more subjects than it includes and its universality is therefore illusory. She suggests instead that non-normative actions have the power to question "the stability of gender as a category of analysis" (Butler 1999: xi). When people are defined through intelligibility, and only those who perform their genders normatively are considered intelligible, then vast numbers of people are rendered invisible and excluded from intelligibility. Ultimately, this would lead to a situation where intelligibility is granted to a selected few, excluding so many individuals that the concept itself becomes useless. Conversely, a queer point of view would suggest that so-called coherence between sex, gender, sexuality, and desire is not a valid criterion for defining intelligibility.

In *Gaga Feminism* (2012), J. Jack Halberstam (2012: 8) suggests an alternative system that genders people according to their behaviour. This approach utilises gender performativity as offering better solutions to discussing genders than identity categories do. Further, he asks: "What if some males are ladies, some ladies are butch, some butches are women, some women are gay, some gays are feminine, some femmes are straight, and some straight people don't know what the hell is going on?" (Halberstam 2012: 8) Although playful in tone, these questions also have a serious undertone. We are so fixed on the man/woman and hetero/homo binaries that we limit our expression according to them. Further, people who wish to reiterate their gender outside strict identity categories are "judged to be deviant, if not pathological" (Motschenbacher 2010: 126). A thorough seriousness underlines all gender reiteration, creating categories like *subversive*, *deviant*, or *pathological* to those who do not fit the universal categories of *man* and *woman.* Halberstam's approach seems to invite a playful kind of expression that emphasises actions more than ideals.

Abandoning identity categories may result in more freedom of expression in terms of gender performance and sexuality: "once you stray from representational modes dependent on human forms and all the cliché-ridden formulae that they entail, surprisingly new narratives of life, love, and intimacy are bound to appear" (Halberstam 2012: 67). Halberstam suggests that recognising the cultural laws behind gender regulation also exposes them as arbitrary. Once this is realised, we are free to express our genders and sexualities in new ways:

> If we could actually see these gender categories as saturated with contradictions, as discontinuous across all the bodies they are supposed to describe, then we could begin to notice the odd forms of gender, the gaga genders, that have multiplied like computer viruses in late capitalist cultures (Halberstam 2012: 71).

We actually fall short of all gender definitions, because behaviours can never be identically reiterated – why should we not change those definitions, instead of trying to change the countless behaviours that do not align with these arbitrary cultural laws? It seems that unity exists in the vast amount of difference – in other words, what unites all gender reiteration is fluidity. Because our gender identity categories are largely based on the assumed correlation and stability between sex and gender, Judith Butler (1999: 26)

argues that "the destruction of the category of sex would be the destruction of an *attribute*, sex, that has, through a misogynistic gesture of synecdoche, come to take the place of the person". Abandoning these categories would mean that the person takes centerstage instead of all the different categories that supposedly define them.

We can reiterate gender in countless ways, but here, it is worthwhile to discuss whether it is possible to stop doing gender for any moment in time. Butler (1999: 178) argues that it is impossible to not do gender, but also writes that "the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all". Can we ever stop reiterating gender? It appears that *all* our actions somehow shape our gender, no matter how small they might seem. Therefore it seems impossible that one could ever stop reiterating gender, because *doing* is always present. However, we can become aware of the reiterated actions that construct gender. Theatrical performances and drag are based on this assumption – that we can forego our own gender reiteration and adopt the actions of others for comedic or dramatic purposes. An actor may temporarily withhold their own gender expression to adopt the stylisations of other bodies in order for their reiterations to be read differently from the actions they perform off stage.

Queer sexualities are those sexualities that are not normative. Many sexualities and sexual behaviours are judged normatively, and only heterosexual people who also perform their genders normatively are deemed intelligible. In *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam argues that all sexualities and sexual behaviours are judged based on acceptability:

> Furthermore, the more we talk explicitly and in intellectually responsible ways about sex, the more we learn about the damage that can be done in the name of sexual morality. As Rubin's pioneering work has repeatedly shown, "there is a hierarchy based on sexual behavior," and this hierarchy does not simply place heterosexuality at the top of the scale and homosexuality at the bottom but accounts for all kinds of sexual difference from sex work to sadomasochism. (Halberstam 1998: 116)

Normativity judges sexualities as based on morality, and this in turn creates an environment where sexualities are not discussed descriptively but normatively, and consequently people who express these so-called lesser sexualities are then treated differently from their normative peers. This results in phenomena like stereotyping.

Halberstam (1998: 114) argues, for example, that "gay men tend to be associated with excessive sexuality, and white lesbians are still linked to frigidity and spectrality". While stereotypical behaviours should not be deemed unacceptable either – they do express forms of gender performance and sexuality that people experience – their simplistic representation in the media is problematic. Representation in politics is an action whose power must be recognised – how a subject is represented ultimately affects how the subject is seen. Stereotypical representations "reduce the heterogeneity of any given group to a select few types" (Halberstam 1998: 180), which makes them problematic. The problem with representing stereotypes is that they are often the *only* form represented, which can strengthen prejudice instead of questioning it. Representation, therefore, is a powerful tool for creating intelligibility and exposing cultural constructions.

Leena-Maija Rossi (2015: 74) argues that discussions on representation center around a power struggle of what can be discussed and how, as well as what can be made visible. If representation is seen as a mirror that reflects lived everyday life (Rossi 2015: 79), then only representing stereotypes enforces the stereotype instead of dismantling it. Theatre scholar Elina Knihtilä (2017) argues that one of the most important questions on the possibilities and limitations of art is who is allowed to make art. She gives examples from prominent Finnish theatres and their mainly male-dominated writing and directing. Further, she invites the listeners to consider whose art is given room and visibility (*ibid.*).

In discussing gender in fiction, David Glover and Cora Kaplan (2008: 81) raise an important point about representing negative character traits: "women's cruelty to each other is not raised primarily as questions of sameness or difference, or of femininity or masculinity, or of natural versus social, but are rather a proof of their fully human if ethically vulnerable being". Instead of representing a negative or positive stereotype, the works that Glover and Kaplan discuss (the novels of Sarah Waters in this case), actually widen the scope of gendered characters and show them as human – as imperfect as that may be. Current discussion in Finland centers around how women, sexuality, and violence are represented on stage, following for example, artist Anna Paavilainen's monologue *Play Rape* (2016). The monologue, performed at the Finnish National Theatre, examines sexual violence on stage, and the problematics of representing rape on stage, which

caused public conversation on the topic in mainstream media as well. In connection with this discussion, professor Knihtilä (2017) argues that it is important to acknowledge whose story is being told and which observations are made visible. However, she warns against censoring the observations of the artist, saying that it is also problematic for artists to concern themselves with political correctness instead of representing their experiences and observations (Knihtilä 2017).

Gender and sexuality are not causally or correlationally linked, but there is some connection between them. Butler (1999: xiv) writes that "no correlation can be drawn, for instance, between drag or transgender and sexual practice, and the distribution of hetero-, bi-, and homo inclinations cannot be predictably mapped onto the travels of gender bending or changing". While gender does not follow from sexuality in any one way, cultural aspects have driven these separate phenomena close together. For example, drag is associated with gay culture, because gay subcultures have historically been more accepting of varying gender performances than normatively heterosexual communities. Further, how we express our sexuality affects our behaviour. If we assume that all behaviour shapes our gender, then the actions we reiterate to express our sexuality will also shape our gender to some extent. However, this does not occur in any one predeterminable way, and as Butler (1999: 65) writes: "gay men simply may not look much different from their heterosexual counterparts". Therefore, gender is no clear indication of a certain sexuality and *vice versa.*

Butler (1999: 173) argues that the normative assumption of coherence between sex, gender, sexuality, and desire "conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender". Most queer reiterations are masked by a heteronormative narrative of coherence, rendering them as subversive exceptions. Historically, queer gender performances have been categorised under gay and lesbian cultures, although it is likely that many of these performances had nothing to do with queer sexualities. Combining gender and sexuality in this way may result in invisibility, because the two are assumed to follow: "there is probably a lively history of the masculine heterosexual woman to be told, a history,

moreover, that must be buried by the bundling of all female masculinities into lesbian identity" (Halberstam 1998: 57). Heterosexual people with queer genders are rendered invisible and even unintelligible, as are people whose queer sexuality does not indicate a queer gender.

Halberstam argues that linking gender and sexuality causally prevails, because the man/woman binary is dependent on the homo/hetero binary, and therefore they are seen as the only possible options. Halberstam writes:

> Inversion as a theory of homosexuality folded gender variance and sexual preference into one economical package and attempted to explain all deviant behavior in terms of a firm and almost intuitive belief in a binary system of sexual stratification in which the stability of the terms "male" and "female" depended on the stability of the homosexual-heterosexual binary (Halberstam 1998: 82).

The two binaries support each other, because the stability of the term *homosexual* is seen as dependent on the stability of the terms *man* and *woman.* If we can no longer categorise people based on whether they are sexually attracted to people of their own gender or of the opposite gender, the categorisation into homo- and heterosexual becomes unnecessary. Halberstam (1998: 119) supports this notion, writing that "[t]he gender struggle (…) has a way of collapsing gender and sexuality because for gender outlaws, their gender bending is often read as the outward sign of an aberrant sexuality". If people can no longer be categorised as homo- or heterosexual, there is no way to normatively judge one as better than the other. When one binary is exposed as arbitrary, the other will also prove to be a construction. In fact, once we expose the woman/man binary as arbitrary, we can also begin to discuss such binaries as nature/culture and body/mind that also shape the way we view the world and genders. These binaries will further be discussed in chapter 2.2.

As an alternative to current definitions of gender, queer theory suggests abandoning the concept of *normal* altogether. J. Jack Halberstam writes in *Gaga Feminism*:

> There really is little in the way of a normal core to any set of sexualities; "normal" is just the name we give to the cleaned-up versions of sex that we wish to endorse on behalf of social stability and moral order. In reality, sex is both much more wild than our norms allow for and, at times, much more bland and banal than our concerns for moral order indicate. (Halberstam 2012: 74)

Normal is a moral judgement and as such, describes a normative ideal rather than any descriptive account of lived reality. The heterosexual matrix relies on the concept of normal, because it requires that sex, gender, sexuality, and desire are coherent in one given way. This constructed coherency is then labelled normal and thus becomes the norm against which everything else is measured. *Queer* is impossible to define fully and as such can show the scope of possibilities of gender performance. Al Head (2012) also discusses *queer* as escaping definitions:

> Queer, as I have said, is not about boxes but about fluidity, about throwing the boxes away. In desperation, proponents of oppression, whether consciously or unconsciously, have rushed around trying to find a 'Queer' box. But Queer bursts out of every box it is put into". (Head 2012: 8)

To view gender as performative, and not natural or original, frees us from coherency – from *normal* – and allows us to observe the effects our culture has on our gender performance. Further, Telyn Kusalik (2010: 56) suggests that in place of asking people about what gender category they belong to, instead we ask about gendered experiences. In such conversation, *normal* is nowhere assumed. Such an approach invites discussion on gender based on experiences, rather than categories, and unites people based on concrete experiences instead of expectations.

2.2 Binary Gender, and the Continuum of Feminity and Masculinity

Binary thinking posits that there are two genders – namely, *man* and *woman* – and that these genders are original. All other gender reiterations are considered "false or derivative" (Butler 1999: viii). Judith Butler (1999: 41) demonstrates that because gender is performative, an original identity is "nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original". The performative acts of gender are slowly internalised and considered original, even though their basis is external. According to Butler (1999: xiv), the seeming internality of gender is "an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates". Sexualities are also judged based on the same attributes of truth and originality. For example *butch* and *femme* gender performances in lesbian contexts have

been interpreted as "heterosexual conventions within homosexual contexts" (Butler 1999: 41), therefore assuming that heterosexual sexuality has priority as the original, and homosexual and other queer sexualities are derivative and also attempt to copy this original sexual identity. J. Jack Halberstam agrees in *Gaga Feminism* (2012: 84): lesbian sexuality is never "an origin or a destination", suggesting that queer sexualities are not seen as "a primary mode of identification".

The abolition of binary thinking would free us to think about gender differently. Butler (1999: 17) argues that the gender binary is also linked to such dualisms as mind/body and culture/nature. Butler (1999: 17) writes: "any uncritical reproduction of the mind/body distinction ought to be rethought for the implicit gender hierarchy that the distinction has conventionally produced, maintained, and rationalized". Here, she refers to the association of men with mind and women with body, which can also be linked to the nature/culture binary. Men are associated with the mind and culture, whereas women are associated with the body and nature. Historically, these binaries have justified oppressive actions on the grounds that nature, for example, is something that culture must control to maintain civilisation: "The binary relation between culture and nature promotes a relationship of hierarchy in which culture freely "imposes" meaning on nature" (Butler 1999: 48). Wendy Cealey Harrison and John Hood-Williams (2002: 19) mention that treating *nature* and *culture* as oppositional terms is highly problematic. They ask "whether that disentangling of 'nature' from 'culture' can ultimately be performed, and, whether, in fact, apportioning the determination of characteristics and features to one or the other (…) is the appropriate gesture to make" (*ibid.*). Not only is connecting the two terms difficult once they have been separated (Cealey Harrison & Hood-Williams 2002: 20), treating them as mutually exclusive means that no movement between these two "locations" exists. They also associate the nature/culture binary with the sex/gender binary, and state that the impossibility of movement between nature and culture, as well as sex and gender, is a false problem created by the artificial separation of nature from culture (2002: 22).

The mind and body are viewed as separate, but according to the binary gender system, they must also be 'coherent': if the body is female, then the mind is a woman's mind. This leads to the simplistic notion that if a body is female and the mind is a man's, for example,

the body must be changed. Here it should be firmly noted that while I do not see the trans right to transition as problematic, this mind/body dualism has certainly caused its problems. For example, masculine women are always considered women who wish to be men. In my understanding, people can experience their gender differently from their biology without any inherent need to change the body, and that some people do not experience dysphoria simply because they have abandoned the idea that their biological sex somehow needs to be coherent with their gender performance.[2]

The binary gender system also affects views on sexuality and desire. Butler (1999: 30) writes that the "binary gender system (...) presupposes not only a causal relation among sex, gender, and desire, but suggests as well that desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire". Thus, this system also determines what sexualities and desires are deemed intelligible, and what relationships between these aspects are coherent. In practice this means that in addition to being biologically female and identifying as a woman, one must also feel desire towards the opposite sex and identify as heterosexual. Desire also reflects gender, because as soon as one feels desire towards men, for example, one is assumed a woman and *vice versa*. The genders are engaged in what Butler (1999: 30) calls "oppositional heterosexuality". The binaries are composed of polar opposites that all play against each other: a man is nothing like a woman, the heterosexual is nothing like the homosexual, and so on.

Queer theory states that the gender binary is arbitrary. "[T]here is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two" Butler (1999: 10) writes, asking why we should insist on maintaining a binary system. Butler (1999: 143) also argues that the division into male and female "suits the economic needs of heterosexuality". J. Jack Halberstam (2012: 71) writes that there is "no essential set of traits, desires, or inclinations that defines men in opposition to women and vice versa". This opposition is only upheld by the binary gender system. The heterosexual matrix assumes that gender is predetermined by biology

---

[2] This thesis recognises the complicated nature of embodying gender, and in no way suggests that transgender experience is invalid. Gender dysphoria is a phenomenon that frequently occurs regardless of knowledge about queer theory *et cetera*. Amidst the complicated manifestations of gender, it will suffice to say that some people experience gender dysphoria, and others do not. Gender reiteration, then, is no clear indication of whether dysphoria occurs or not.

and an internal inclination towards coherency, but when the internality of gender is contested, the possibilities of gender construction are extended. When minority cultures (such as genderfluid or agender people) are not excluded from visibility, representation, or intelligibility, their influence on shaping gender performance can also be taken into account. Now, all gender reiteration shaped by minority cultures is largely ignored and deemed unintelligible, as Halberstam writes in *Female Masculinity* (1998: 20): "If gender has been so thoroughly defamiliarized, in other words, why do we not have multiple gender options, multiple gender categories, and real-life nonmale and nonfemale options for embodiment and identification"? In *Gaga Feminism*, Halberstam (2012: 10) posits that restricting gender construction through the binary system is dangerous and unnecessary.

To regard queer gender reiteration and sexuality as derivative, as opposed to the normative reiterations, leads to some rather troubling and even comic assumptions. Halberstam invites the reader to consider the following:

> According to such logic, butch lesbians are supposedly imitating men; femme lesbians are wanna-be drag queens, or else they are accused of blending seamlessly into heterosexual femininity; the androgynous lesbian has "borrowed" from both male and female; and the leather dyke or club girl parasitically draws from gay male leather culture (Halberstam 1998: 240).

Understanding queer cultures in this way would suggest that all gender performances and sexualities ultimately lead back to the heterosexual matrix, where its cultural morals are considered primary, and all others are false in comparison. Such an assumption downplays the variety of queer cultures, reducing them to nothing but a play on heterosexuality, which in turn leads to the rather absurd question: If queer cultures are nothing but derivatives of normative heterosexuality, why do these cultures exist? Surely if all queer gender performances and sexualities attempt to mimic heterosexuality, we would have no other culture but the normatively heterosexual one. Why would such mimicry occur if it strives to resemble normativity?

In place of original identities, Butler (1999: 15) suggests an approach where gender performances are seen as fluid and even playful, and argues that "gender does not denote

a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations", indicating that because gender is doing, the concept of original identity can be dismantled by practising that *doing* as visibly as possible. This task, she writes, could be given to queer gender practices, because they "often thematize "the natural" in parodic contexts that bring into relief the performative construction of an original and true sex" (Butler 1999: xxix). Parody exposes the underlying assumptions of original identity as false, and gives way to legitimising all gender performances.

An example of such parody is drag performance. Drag queens, for example, can "index distance from heteronormative masculinities and to criticise them by excessively exploiting gendered practices" (Motschenbacher 2010: 20), thus also examining the space between normative identity discourse and "actual identity performances". Historically in theatrical contexts, the terms *dr.a.g.* and *dr.a.b.* have been used to indicate how actors dress for their roles on stage (Logan 2012: title page). In a way, the term only indicates the gender performance that occurs on stage. If we understand drag in this way, it also becomes apparent that drag is not concerned with any internal identity, but simply with external performance. Butler (1999: xxii) writes that people still view drag performances through binary and original identities – for example, drag performances are seen as masquerade where the original identity is playfully reversed for the duration of the performance: "If one thinks that one sees a man dressed as a woman or a woman dressed as a man, then one takes the first term of each of those perceptions as the "reality" of gender". When discussing gender performances, there is no reality behind this illusion. To Butler (1999: 41), all gender performances are copies without originals.

Drag also plays on the cultural conventions that shape different gender performances, parodying them to expose their externality. Drag gender performances – like all gender – are reiterative, because "the performer must invoke gender conventions in order for the performance to be understood" (Escudero 2009: 32). Butler (1999: 175) writes that "gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin". Thus, the constructedness of gender is exposed and the idea of originality is parodied. Because one body can perform genders that are vastly different from each other, then surely gender is not guided by any internal necessity or biological

fact. When a drag queen reiterates the gender performance of a pop star, the performance relies on the assumption that the audience will recognise the performative actions – after all, the drag queen cannot fully acquire the internality of the performed celebrity. Butler (1999: 174) agrees, writing that drag "effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity". When one drag artist may effectively reiterate the gender performances of several celebrities, how could all these reiterations be caused by an underlying original gender identity? Butler (1999: 175) suggests that drag performances expose the originality of gender categories as an illusory structure. They contrast the biological body of the performer with several gender reiterations (Butler 1999: 175), blurring the lines of coherency between sex and gender, internality and externality.

It should be noted that drag itself is not unproblematic. Halberstam (1998: 207) points out that cross-dressed men are more frequently represented than cross-dressed women, and that when "women appear cross-dressed as men in mainstream cinema, they are coded as flawed women rather than perfect men". Halberstam (1998: 240) argues that males have priority in creating femininity as well: he discusses humorous femininity, which he sees as "relayed through a gay male aesthetic", meaning that in several comedic performances of feminine women, their aesthetic and performative actions are actually borrowed from drag queen culture. Further, he points out that "the standard plot of the transvested-man genre features a moral lesson in which we learn that men make better women than women do" (Halberstam 1998: 207). Examples of popular films with this type of narrative are *Mrs. Doubtfire* and *Tootsie,* to name a few. Mainstream representations of drag therefore maintain the assumption that masculinity is original and cannot be parodied as easily as femininity: "mature masculinity once again remains an authentic property of adult male bodies while all other gender roles are available for interpretation" (Halberstam 1998: 233). Halberstam (1998: 235) argues that male masculinity has long been considered original, and therefore it is regarded as immune to imitation and parody – all parodies end up exposing the lack of male masculinity in the performer.

As evidence of masculinity resisting parodying and performance, Halberstam (1998: 245) gives examples from drag kings who "seemed to have no idea how to perform as drag kings". Further, he writes that "[w]hen compared to the absolutely exaggerated

performances featured within drag queen shows, these odd moments of drag king stage fright read as part of a puzzle around masculine performativity" (Halberstam 1998: 245). One of the causes might be that kinging is a relatively new practice, and therefore the performers had no tools to start performing masculinity. However, what Halberstam assumes is the performers' cultural conditioning to regard masculinity as understated and not easily parodied, could simply be parodic reiteration at its best. He writes that "the performance exposes the theatricality of the understatement" (Halberstam 1998: 259), suggesting instead that the drag kings did not expose their own attitudes towards the originality of masculinity, but were instead parodying the assumed originality and seriousness surrounding it. I suggest that the inactivity of the drag kings on stage actually parodies the seeming resistance of masculinity to reiteration outside the male anatomical body.

When the connection between masculinity and male biology is nowhere assumed, drag performers can begin to reiterate masculine gender performances to expose that they are constructed as much as other genders: "The drag king performance, indeed, exposes the structure of dominant masculinity by making it theatrical and by rehearsing the repertoire of roles and types on which such masculinity depends" (Halberstam 1998: 239). It also enables femininity to be represented by all performers. We still refer to female drag queens as *faux queens*, suggesting that there is something false about their performance. When the aim of drag becomes to contest all claims of original identity, the entire concept of faux queen becomes futile – the reiteration takes priority over the anatomy of the performer. Further, drag artists layer performances over each other, revealing "their multiple ambiguities because in both cases the role playing reveals the permeable boundaries between acting and being; the drag actors are all performing their own queerness and simultaneously exposing the artificiality of conventional gender roles" (Halberstam 1998: 261). The performers cannot escape their own gender reiteration, but layer multiple reiterations over each other to expose how fluid gender performance is.

Because the internality of identity categories like *man* and *woman* is an illusion, an alternative way to describe gender performances might be through a spectrum of femininity and masculinity. Although femininity and masculinity are easily "understood

as expressive attributes of "male" and "female"" (Butler 1999: 23), especially in normative heterosexuality, both Butler and Halberstam's discussions seem to suggest that femininity and masculinity should be viewed as a continuum. People may perform their genders in terms of femininity and masculinity, but neither of these can be fully reached, nor can they be fully defined (Halberstam 1998: 110). Instead of feminine and masculine attributing female and male, they are associated with certain characteristics, and people perform different degrees of these regardless of their biology. When gender is viewed as external, "gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (Butler 1999: 10). As Butler (1999: 156) writes, assuming that the feminine belongs to women is "an assumption surely suspect". For example, claiming that gay culture appropriates the feminine assumes that femininity belongs to biological females, or people who identify as women, and this assumption is questionable. Queer genders can reiterate a variety of actions associated with both the feminine and the masculine, because as terms *femininity* and *masculinity* are not tied to the heterosexual matrix in the same way the identity categories are.

Performances that occur outside the heterosexual matrix on this continuum of femininity and masculinity have the power to "reveal the performativity of gender itself" (Butler 1999: 177). Gender expressions that layer several reiterations – such as drag, but also other everyday practices – question the normative links between sex, gender, femininity, masculinity, sexuality, and desire. They also expose the arbitrariness of normative morals set by the heterosexual matrix. When the binary is abandoned, what remains is *queer*, both in gender reiteration and sexuality. Such an approach would enable our society to better discuss the issues that compulsory heterosexuality and its policing of gender have caused. When heterosexuality is examined *as though* subversive, the problems its strict norms have caused can be eventually fixed. Halberstam (2012: 11–12) writes in *Gaga Feminism:*

> The focus on the strangeness of heterosexuality allowed us to think through eating disorders as a vicious side effect of adolescent misogyny; it forced men in the class to ask themselves about their own relations to masculinity, to other men, to women, and to homophobia. And it led women to notice the significant differences between the ways in which they developed peer relations with other women (friendships

often focused on food, clothes, and boys), and the ways men developed peer relations with other men (friendships focused on male bonding, drinking, and sports, but rarely stemming from long discussions about girls).

Normative heterosexuality guides gender performances and also influences the relationships we form with other people, as well as the attitudes we exhibit towards them. Strict gender ideals cause physical and mental health problems, such as eating disorders, toxic masculinity, homo- and transphobia, *et cetera.* These issues can better be discussed when the normalcy of normative heterosexuality is nowhere presumed.

Here, the subject of subversiveness must briefly be examined. While queer performances are often called subversive, Butler (1999: xxi) mentions that any efforts "to name the criterion for subversiveness will always fail, and ought to". There is no one specific action that creates subversion – rather, subversion seems to be a set of assumptions that do not conform with the strict criteria of the heterosexual matrix. The lines between so-called *normal* and *subversive* are so fickle they cannot be defined. Yet we continue to make assumptions and judgements about people based on whether their gender performance is normal or subversive. Culture dictates and guides possibilities, and currently those possibilities are largely tied to the ideals of normative heterosexuality.

2.3 Normative Heterosexuality and Its Effects

Gender performances and expressions of sexuality are policed by normative heterosexuality. It operates by setting strict ideals about which genders and sexualities are deemed acceptable, desirable, or intelligible. Butler (1999: 178) claims that our contemporary culture still punishes "those who fail to do their gender right", often by violently forcing individuals to conform to norms. John P. Elia (2003: 62) argues that "[w]hile there is a wide variety of sexual relationships, there is little question about what most individuals have been taught in terms of what constitutes a "respectable," healthy, and even an exemplary sexual relationship". Normative heterosexuality, is promoted as a lifestyle that ensures a respectable status in society. Promoting one sexuality over the others also limits the possibilities of gender reiteration, because normative

heterosexuality assumes that sex and gender are mimetically coherent. As Butler (1999: 30) writes: "The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire". Heterosexuality upholds the gender binary because definitionally, it depends on the separation of *man* from *woman*. Butler (1999: xx, 23) links normativity to "mundane violence performed by certain kinds of gender ideals", which is executed through "*regulatory practices* of gender formation and division" and which excludes queer gender reiteration from intelligibility. Her theory recognises that the categories of sex, gender, and desire are "effects of a specific formation of power" (Butler 1999: xxix), and this *status quo* is not internal: the heterosexual matrix is not a necessity.

Normativity has also guided how issues such as gay rights are discussed. In the era before queer theory began emerging, thinking was characterised by an emphasis on similarity: "The content of the discussion often centers around how gays and lesbians are as capable of having as intimate and loving relationships as heterosexuals" (Elia 2003: 72). While many will agree with this statement, Elia (2003: 72) argues that this approach still accepts heteronormativity as the "standard by which all sexual Others are measured and judged". In other words, in trying to show similarities between homosexuality and normative heterosexuality, this thinking accepts the norms and attempts to conform to them, instead of challenging the underlying problematic assumptions that are linked to normative heterosexuality.

Normative heterosexuality comprises the majority of our Western culture, discourse, and representation. Even representational politics like feminism have assumed heterosexuality (Butler 1999: vii). Butler (1999: 3) defines representation as both a political process and a normative function of language: Politically, representation can enable visibility and legitimacy, but it can also serve as a normative act, because it guides the assumptions people begin to associate with the represented. This is why representing only stereotypes is problematic. Politically, normative heterosexuality has resulted in a "failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists" (Butler 1999: 6). Butler argues that because normative heterosexuality

assumes that there must be universally definable gender identity categories, it has prevented representational politics from addressing issues that correspond with everyday experience.

Heteronormativity guides our discourse by limiting the meanings of words. Butler (1999: 42) uses the terms *heterosexuality, homosexuality,* and *bisexuality* as examples, claiming that their meanings are restricted in relation to each other. By seemingly acknowledging several expressions of sexualities and desires, this division into hetero-, homo-, and bisexuality is still dependent on the binary gender system. More recently, discussion has shifted towards defining these terms in a way that is more inclusive to the spectrum of queer gender. For example, bisexuality is now defined as feeling desire towards two or more genders, thus stepping outside the binary gender system. Even though normative heterosexuality seems to accept homosexuality as long as it remains oppositional to it, it still promotes itself as the primary and original sexuality. Butler (1999: 89) writes that "the heterosexual refusal to acknowledge the primary homosexual attachment is culturally enforced by a prohibition on homosexuality". Queer genders and sexualities are never viewed as the primary mode of expression – they are deviations from the acceptable heterosexual norm.

In mainstream popular culture, heterosexuality is represented in rigid ways. Halberstam (2012: 16) argues that "the representation of heterosexual romance seems hardly to change at all despite massive changes in the real world". The worldview represented in popular culture is still largely heteronormative, which ignores the many different ways in which heterosexual people express their desire and reiterate their genders. Most romance films still end with a monogamous cis-gendered heterosexual couple discovering that their indifferences are all arbitrary and that they are destined for each other. Halberstam argues that the obstacles are "created, crafted, nurtured, and then quickly discarded" (Halberstam 2012: 18), while in queer love stories, the obstacles often represent everyday experiences. Mainstream popular culture still represents only one form of heterosexual relationship, which Halberstam (2012: 37) argues is still dependent on the gender binary and reproductive function, even though "we are living in an age of artificial reproduction" and families and relationships are constantly evolving into different forms.

What would our culture look like without policing by normative heterosexuality? Butler suggests that heteronormativity creates a situation where "the persistent failure to identify fully and without incoherence with these positions reveals heterosexuality itself not only as a compulsory law, but as an inevitable comedy" (Butler 1999: 155). Normative heterosexuality is virtually impossible to reiterate, because its limitations are not based on any intrinsic or biological facts. The need of normative heterosexuality to name itself as a cultural and biological compulsion turns heterosexuality into a parody of itself (Butler 1999: 155). Because normative heterosexuality is not a necessity, the possibilities of queer gender reiteration and sexuality are "fully within culture, but fully excluded from *dominant* culture" (Butler 1999: 99). Because all gender reiteration is within culture, its varying forms cannot be placed on a hierarchy. Butler (1999: viii) states that the aim of *Gender Trouble* is to "open up the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized", thus disarming normative heterosexuality. Butler (1999: xxi) argues that culture and politics should discuss the *possibilities* of gender instead of the *acceptability* of some gender performances.

Abandoning normative heterosexuality would result in the breakdown of the gender binary, because when gender is no longer policed, the identity categories become unstable and unnecessary (Butler 1999: xxviii). Butler (1999: 26) discusses Monique Wittig's view that "the overthrow of compulsory heterosexuality will inaugurate a true humanism of "the person" freed from the shackles of sex". Without compulsory heterosexuality, there is no need to define people according to gender categories, thus enabling people to more freely express their gender and desires. J. Jack Halberstam (2012: 22) discusses this same phenomenon in *Gaga Feminism*, claiming that "this form of feminism actually imagines that men as well as women will feel liberated by the possibilities that the end of heterosexuality and the end of normal create". When cultural compulsion no longer guides the expression of gender and sexuality, all are free to express those aspects as they themselves judge fitting. Further, Halberstam (2012: 58) writes:

> The butch dad and the femme mom raise the possibility of authority without patriarchy (because the butch does not access male privilege), gender polarity

without compulsory heterosexuality (because the femme does not always access heterosexual privilege), and they make possible an education for gender-normative kids in the arbitrariness of gender roles – so kids raised by a femme mother and a butch father might learn about gendered forms of power untethered to gender hierarchies.

It should be noted that by "the end of heterosexuality", Halberstam (2012: 22) does not mean that heterosexuality should no longer be expressed. He is referring to the breakdown of compulsory heterosexuality. If one is comfortable with a gender performance that we currently associate with heteronormativity, then that should not be restricted. As Halberstam (2012: 58) writes in *Gaga Feminism*, even gender-normative people can benefit from and learn about the arbitrariness of gender roles.

2.4 Expressing Gender through Language and Theatre

Different forms of discourse are limited by the culture that surrounds us. Language shapes our understanding, and as such, it also affects our understanding of gender and sexuality. Language is an important part of the theory of gender performativity, because as Butler (1999: xxv) notes, "speech itself is a bodily act with specific linguistic consequences". Therefore, it is used to construct gender reiteration similarly to other bodily acts. Butler (1999: 28) states that "persons cannot be signified within language without the mark of gender". While some languages have more gendered expressions than others[3], some sort of reference to gender reiteration is made within language. Therefore it would seem rational to have more possibilities within language to express gender in accordance with everyday experience.

Historically, language has not been able to signify *queer* and encounters unintelligibility when trying to signify a person who "occasions a convergence and disorganization of the rules that govern sex/gender/desire" (Butler 1999: 31). Linguistic conventions limit the expressions that can be represented through language, but this also implies that

---

[3] Compare, for example, the Finnish third person pronoun *hän* with the English *he* and *she*.

conventions can be reinvented to introduce new forms of expression that are able to signify queer genders and sexualities without confining them to strict definitional categories. Butler (1999: xix) also states that there might be "value to be derived from such experiences of linguistic difficulty", because these norms expose the strict normative assumptions we make about gender. When we encounter a person whose gender performance we cannot describe, the inadequacy of our current discourse is exposed, and this could lead to the rethinking of language to better match that experience. Gender subversion, for example, "is a disruptive strategy that exploits clashes between the decontextualised gendered meanings of personal reference forms and the gender of the actual referent in a context" (Motschenbacher 2010: 43), questioning the normative demand for coherence.

The heterosexual matrix is partly upheld by language use, which constructs cultural compulsions like the binary gender system. Therefore, language has "the power to create "the socially real" through the locutionary acts of speaking subjects" (Butler 1999: 146), meaning that individual language users can also influence the language they use to perform certain actions. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1999: xxx) asks how language constructs the categories of sex. In everyday language, it is common to speak of "both genders", implying that all possibilities have been addressed with that statement. Speakers address their audience by saying "ladies and gentlemen", implying that those are the only two options. This kind of language use actually constructs gender as seemingly coherent with biological sex4. In fact, one of the challenges of non-normative language use is what Motschenbacher (2010: 42) calls the impossibility to "exist outside the realms of dominant identity discourses, to which they are constantly set in relation". Therefore, using language in new ways may be difficult to notice and adopt, because it is constantly relational to current normative identity discourse.

Because language constantly constructs meanings, it is not socially or politically neutral. Butler (1999: xviii) states that this applies to both the style and grammar of language. Different grand narratives and discourses guide the vocabulary and style of language we

---

4 Here it should be noted that even biology is not limited to male and female.

use to express our message. The heterosexual matrix is one of these grand narratives produced by language. This, of course, also implies that language could be used differently to dismantle the "fiction construction of "sex" that supports these various regimes of power" (Butler 1999: xxx). Motschenbacher (2010: 40) offers queer linguistics as one option, stating that it "does not take the 'stable' meaning of heteronormative forms as a starting point, but the potentially wounding effects that such forms may have". Such an approach recognises the power of language and works to use it in more inclusive ways.

Recognising that language use is powerful, and that it can be changed, could lead to such use that destroys fictional constructions and expresses the inadequacy of the binary identity categories. For example, new definitions and terms are constantly being made in an attempt to influence how language could be used to more accurately describe our experiences of gender and sexuality. Language also limits what is deemed intelligible. Butler (1999: 13) argues that a "hegemonic cultural discourse" creates the appearance of reality by appearing "as the language of universal rationality". The heterosexual matrix establishes its power by constructing itself through its own language use as rational, and all other ways to use language as unintelligible. The restrictions on gender reiteration are thus coded into our culture through discourse that deems all possibilities outside the binary gender system as impossible. The binary becomes a cultural compulsion if there are no words to describe experience outside that binary. Motschenbacher (2010: 40) mentions pluralisation as one strategy that, although it may represent more people, still has its problems, writing that the "representation of more than two gender categories, however, must also be viewed critically because all category models tend to create exclusions and develop normative discourses". Because identity discourses based on categorisation are so deeply rooted in our language use, attempting to create new forms may stumble on the same problems that shadow normative language use.

Language can also limit expression by demanding that certain conditions be accepted before conversation can continue. Butler (1999: 147) writes: "Discourse becomes oppressive when it requires that the speaking subject, in order to speak, participate in the very terms of that oppression". In the case of gender, normative heterosexuality sets demands that queer speakers must meet before their speech can be deemed intelligible.

Conversation is limited by demanding that speakers must use language in a specific way if they are to be understood. For example, conversations in the media may demand that queer subjects explain their gender in terms of binary vocabulary so that they can be understood. Participants who do not agree to these rules are not allowed to participate in conversation, and the *status quo* remains simply because speakers are excluded. As Butler (1999: 153) states, language "can institute a hierarchy in which only some persons are eligible to speak and others, by virtue of their exclusion from the universal point of view, cannot "speak" without simultaneously deauthorizing that speech". For example, queer speakers are deemed unintelligible, because they do not agree with current conventions about the meaning and importance of *normal,* and because *normal* is taken as a universal truth, speakers are excluded from intelligibility because they refuse to participate in the upholding of that term.

Individual language users can affect the development of language. Butler (1999: 35) writes: "Language ranks among the concrete and contingent practices and institutions maintained by the choices of individuals and, hence, weakened by the collective actions of choosing individuals". This indicates that should there be a collective shift of understanding, it would affect language use, and even *vice versa*. Institutions that are maintained by language use, such as the heterosexual matrix, can be weakened by people who choose to use language in new and inventive ways to construct new meanings that challenge normative conventions. Butler (1999: 156) mentions terms such as "*queens, butches, femmes, girls*, even the parodic reappropriation of *dyke, queer,* and *fag"* as ones that "redeploy and destabilize the categories of sex and the originally derogatory categories of homosexual identity". Recently, the queer community has begun to reclaim words that have previously been used violently to ridicule and suppress queer performances and sexualities. Using this kind of language against expectation can also expose their performativity, and demonstrate how language use can determine meaning. *Queer* is one of the most prominent examples of slurs that have been reclaimed by the community itself, thus stripping the term of power to hurt. Butler (1999: 101) argues that language has the possibility to suppress multiple meanings, but also to create the possibility for them. Circularly, our current language use is structured by a normative law that restricts gender reiteration, and some forms of gender reiteration are excluded from

intelligibility, because we lack the linguistic structures to express them. Their representation within language is also made difficult, if not completely impossible.

Because language is still inadequate in describing our experience concerning gender and sexuality, other modes of expression must be employed in addition to language. One of such modes could be theatre. Butler (1999: xxv) also views gender performativity as both linguistic and theatrical. Theatre combines speech and other bodily acts into a performance that is also observed by audiences: in theatre, people are aware that they are witnessing a performance, and it can therefore also be used to expose performativity. Finnish theatre researcher Lasse Kekki (2010: 162) also promotes this view, arguing that Butler's theory on gender performativity is useful in observing how gender and sexuality are performed on stage. In fact, Kekki (2010: 162) states that the possibility of character performance is the very foundation of theatre, and can link theatre and queer theory in meaningful ways. Theatre can enable the reiteration of multiple genders by the same actor, thus exposing the performative actions and questioning the need for a coherent gender identity: why is a coherent, strictly defined gender identity necessary, when our human expression contains possibilities for gender reiteration beyond that strict frame?

Theatre combines poetic language with actions of the body. Butler (1999: 102) argues that poetic language is a return to multiple meanings. While historically, these multiple meanings have been suppressed, poetic language could restore these meanings back within language use. In addition, this kind of language is capable of expressing symbols, emotions and thoughts that are not usually constructed through everyday language use. Audiences are also aware of the poetry of this sort of language, thus becoming aware of its possibilities. Butler (1999: 165) also notes that "the body is figured as a surface and the scene of cultural inscription". This would suggest that language and bodily acts work together to construct gender reiteration. Butler (1999: 172) further argues that "[t]he figure of the interior soul understood as "within" the body is signified through its inscription *on* the body", thus linking internality to externality, action to emotion.

Here it is worthwhile to briefly mention the relationship between action and emotion in the theatre. It is largely recognised in theatrical practice that the actions of the body create

emotions in the mind and *vice versa*. An actor may technically perform the actions that a certain emotion may cause in the body. For example, anger can be technically executed by clenching the wrists or leaning forward in one's place, and joy can be expressed by such actions as smiling, upright posture, and brisk pace. Repeating these actions over time will turn into internalised motivation, and the emotion will follow. This approach is also used to create characters, where their externality is created prior to internality that is then assumed to follow from those external actions. Reversely, there are also actors who begin with internal emotions and character traits, and then experience those internalities until external actions follow. These two approaches are also intertwined, so they are not strictly oppositional to each other. Here, the relationship between internality and externality is recognised as dialectical – they affect each other, and one has no priority over the other. They become linked in ways that even challenge the dualism of mind/body.

Theatre is a transformative form of art and has therefore often been cited as inherently queer (Winn 2008). Further, it converges on the boundary between product and process "for a dramatic work can never exist fully either in its script version, or in any individual performance of that script" (Connor 1989: 133), thus remaining in constant motion – an aspect similar to the queer theoretical view on gender. Despite this queer inclination, performances have also been restricted due to the power of theatrical representation. On stage, performers are not under a compulsion to operate within strict, binary identity categories, because they must be able to perform several different characters depending on the play. Theatre also exposes the imaginary and social assumptions that are associated with a character's power and position in the world. Representation on stage is powerful and suggests that whoever is being represented also has power in society. When men played all characters on stage, they also had the power to represent women in the way they found suitable. Lasse Kekki (2010: 41) argues that historically, women have been excluded from the stage and men have been given the power to represent women. This also applies to the representation of queer characters. Kekki (2010: 46) writes that between the years 1925 and 1956, the representation of queer characters on stage often included suicide, alcoholism, nervous breakdown, death, imprisonment, blackmail – in short, suffering. He also points out that the emotional capacity of queer characters was limited to shame, fear, guilt, confusion, depression, or hysteria (Kekki 2010: 46).

How should queer characters be represented, then? Here, the conversation about stereotypes must once again be brought up. In *Female Masculinity,* Halberstam (1998: 180) reminds the reader that stereotypes are often not the problem, but instead how they *alone* are represented:

> However, stereotyping does not always and only work on behalf of a conservative representational agenda: the stereotype does often represent a 'true' type, a type, in other words, that does exist within the subculture. In relation to gay and lesbian subcultures, 'the butch' and 'the queen' are the two most common stereotypes used to represent these groups, but that does not mean that wherever we find butches and queens, we are in the presence of a homophobic code of representation.

These forms of gender performance match our everyday experience, so their presence does not automatically indicate homophobic thought patterns. Halberstam (1998: 180) mentions that it is important to examine how that stereotype is used. If the stereotype is used "as a sign of that character's failure to assimilate, then obviously the stereotype props up a dominant system of gender and sexuality". While this might be true in most cases, Halberstam's interpretation still has some problems. Are we, for example, to understand that a failure to assimilate into culture is an undesirable thing? Queer theory aims for the destruction of *normal*, so how can we determine when failure to assimilate indicates a worldview that abandons the concept of normal, and when it is a tactic for oppression? Certainly there are other factors to be taken into account when considering representation than just the representation of the stereotype itself.

Here, it is important to mention that Halberstam does not promote representation of only positive queer images. That would be homonormative representation, meaning that the emphasis is placed on the similarities between the *normal* heterosexual and the homosexual. By erasing negative queer characters we are restricting the possibilities of representation to coincide with everyday experience: "The opposite of the stereotype has long been thought of as "the positive image," and yet it may well be that positive images also deal in stereotypes and with far more disastrous effects" (Halberstam 1998: 184). Homonormative representation operates on the assumption that is sometimes referred to in the theatre as *healthy, happy, sexy* – nothing is wrong and most problems are resolved once society recognises how similar queer people are to normatively heterosexual people.

Halberstam writes that the damage of stereotypes "lies less in the way they depict homosexuality in relation to pathology and more in the way they render "gay" or "lesbian" as coherent terms" (Halberstam 1998: 184). This kind of approach still limits the possibilities of gender reiteration and expression of sexuality, because it only promotes reiteration that can be proven to be very similar to normative heterosexuality.

Further, Butler (1999: 9) argues that abandoning identity categories as the basis of representation would result in alternate ways of explaining and describing our human experience. When gender is viewed as performative, generalisations about identity definitions disappear. Might this lead to representation that describes the world as we experience it in greater detail? Without strict and falsely considered universal categories, representation can move towards intersectionality and recognise cultural aspects that shape our gender performance. According to Butler (1999: 20), such a situation might be established by "a set of dialogic encounters by which variously positioned women articulate separate identities within the framework of an emergent coalition". In these encounters, people are able to construct their own representation to match their experience.

What kind of gender reiteration could step away from "simple imitation, reproduction, and, hence, consolidation of the law" (Butler 1999: 41)? Butler is looking for reiteration that blurs the lines between normal and subversive and exposes performativity on the surface of the body. Halberstam's (2012: xv) *Gaga Feminism* details a kind of queer politics described as "free-falling, wild thinking, and imaginative reinvention", and this might well be the answer. Theatre is linked to imaginative reinvention, because of the constant interpretation of different characters. Performing on stage is imaginative in addition to bodily reiteration, and can therefore expose performativity to both performers and audiences. Actors are free to playfully explore the possibilities of gender, because they work with language as well as their bodies. Directors are free to explore the possibilities of representation with their artistic choices, and playwrights are free to represent individual subjects and their experiences in the dramas they write – to rethink the possible by representing those reiterations and sexualities that have been excluded from representation.

3   QUEER GENDER REITERATION ON STAGE

This chapter focuses on analysing the dress rehearsal recording of *ALTER* to identify how queer gender is reiterated on stage. The aim is to understand how theatrical performance can build gender and more specifically, how queer genders are reiterated on stage, and what elements in the performance enable queer reiteration. Because these elements all intertwine in the material, I have chosen to analyse it without dividing this section into subchapters.

Normative heterosexuality assumes that coherency and intelligibility are intertwined, and in fact that incoherency and intelligibility are mutually exclusive: if someone's biological sex and gender reiteration are not normatively coherent, they are immediately excluded from intelligibility. This assumption is contested in *ALTER*, where coherency and intelligibility are not co-dependent. If this relationship between coherency and intelligibility were accurate, there would surely be some discrepancy in actors of different biological sexes iterating the same performative actions on stage. As a result, one would expect some of them to be deemed unintelligible as a result. *ALTER* does not support this thought. In "Firework", the four actors perform as dancers and are dressed in similar clothes as they perform the same choreography. Their actions are almost identical, which, normatively speaking, should create confusion: How can male and female actors perform the same actions without some of them becoming subversive and consequently unintelligible? However, the actions seem equally relevant performed by all of the actors – they serve a similar purpose of symbolising the story of the lyrics, and all achieve that purpose. When the audience is invited to accept actors of different biological sexes and gender expressions performing the same actions, intelligibility becomes separated from normative coherency.

As I argue in accordance with Judith Butler, gender is *doing*, not *being*. In the theatre, this is easily demonstrated by actors who change gender performances, from play to play, but even from scene to scene depending on the drama. In *ALTER* the latter occurs, and actors change their gender performance in between scenes: one actor could have as many as nine different characters during the play, all marked by differences in physical action, speech,

and language use. Because all doing shapes gender reiteration, I argue that recognisably different characters are also established through varying gender reiterations. In "Identity Shop", characters enter a shop that sells what we chose to call gender identities, but which in fact resemble gender reiterations more than they do identities. There are red and blue symbols hanging from the roof, each representing different signs associated with gender: some normative, others queer. The salesperson gives these symbols to the customers one by one, thus altering some element in their action. They even try some of these symbols on themself, altering their reiteration between feminine and masculine actions. What is important to note is that while the salesperson slides comfortably between masculine and feminine gestures and posture, the character remains the same: their function in the narrative does not change even when they express their gender in varying ways. This constant doing and re-doing of the gender also quite visibly demonstrates that action is required to reiterate gender. The internality of the character is not addressed, showing instead how even small changes in actions can change the perceived gender of the character. As Judith Butler (1999: xxiii) writes, "what we take to be "real," (…) is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality" and such comfortable movement between reiterative actions exposes gender as performative – and revisable – to the audience.

Queer gender is exposed on stage through everyday actions, like changing costumes and walking. Where the actors walk serves a significant purpose in how their gender is perceived and interpreted by the audience. Towards the back of the stage, there are two doorframes, one red and one blue. Actors make deliberate decisions on which doorframe they enter the stage through – or whether they walk past the frames. By showing feminine characters entering through the red frame, and masculine characters through the blue frame, the audience is taught to read the frames in certain ways. After a while, this relationship between gender perception and doorframe is broken, when actors choose to walk past frames, or to walk through the frame against expectation. In the scene "I Am", in which actors enter the stage in their own clothes, indicating that they are reiterating their own off-stage gender, some actors choose to walk through the red frame, others through the blue frame, and two deliberately walk past both frames. By walking, they declare the way in which the audience reads their gender, blurring the lines between perception and gender reiteration, and demonstrating the discrepancy between

expectation and experience. For example, an actor might be seen as a woman because of female biology, but when they walk past the red frame, they are inviting the audience to perceive them as more than their anatomical body. A simple act of walking already creates assumptions about the character's gender, thus separating internality from the equation and showing gender as performative.

Changing costumes in front of the audience exposes the performative nature of the characters, and makes visible one of the reiterative actions that is often hidden in the theatre. In *ALTER*, actors only exit the stage to prepare for the final scene. Up to that point all changes in costume are done on stage, behind the doorframes with the actors' backs turned towards the audience to indicate that they are not participating in the scene frontstage. Their constant re-doing of their characters by changing costume *et cetera* remains visible to the audience throughout the play. (See Picture 1.) Because actors are never out of sight, the performativity of the individual narratives is kept in the audience's mind. For example, one actor exits the scene as a man (Romeo) and comes back one scene later as a woman (Mrs. Jones's lover). Further, costumes also indicate groups that the characters belong to. All actors wear blue jeans, a white t-shirt, and sneakers. This costume is a blank canvas on which the different costumes are built. Even slight changes in costume already indicate a change in character, such as in "Romantic School Play" where Alice is marked with a red flower crown and Rick is marked with a black beanie. In "Shakesqueer", Romeo, Mercutio, and Benvolio wear identical plaid shirts to indicate that they belong together: their costumes unite them as a distinct group. They also attempt to exit through the same doorframe, revealing that their similar costumes also signify that their perceived genders are similar. Very significantly, it is Romeo who derails from this pattern and stops right before exiting through the blue doorframe, saying: "Can I go forward when my heart is here?"[5] He is not content with joining Mercutio and Benvolio in walking through a door that casts him as normative, before he gets a chance to encounter Juliet. This aspect of the scene will further be discussed later in the analysis.

---

[5]*Romeo and Juliet.* II.i.1.

Here, it will suffice to say that simple actions like walking and wearing one item of clothing can already create significant changes in perceived gender, indicating clearly the externality that shapes those expectations.

Picture 1. Costume and prop changes in sight

The concept of masquerade is important in both gender performativity and in the theatre. As discussed in Chapter 2, Judith Butler (1999: 60) claims that "all gender ontology is reducible to the play of appearances": gender is a masquerade that is taken as internal because of constant reiteration, masking its performativity. In *ALTER*, masquerade is clearly visible in many scenes. In "Romantic School Play", the actors use colourful cardboard props as everyday objects and these props are also used to indicate changes in setting. The artificiality of all elements on stage, together with the exaggerated acting style adopted by the actors, exposes the performativity of the scene. By using colourful cardboard as bushes, cars, rainclouds, and flowers, the artificiality and externality of the narrative is revealed. Changes in character are indicated by changing single items of clothing, such as hats, further bringing to light the "play on appearances" (1999: 60) that Butler discusses. Everything in "Romantic School Play" simply *appears* as something else: Characters appear as their archetypes through their props – the priest holds a cross, for example. Actors appear as settings through their props. To give some examples, one actor plays the rain by waving a cardboard-and-string raincloud, and another actor plays a fast approaching car by running with a cardboard cut-out and making engine noises.

The scene also externalises elements we consider internal – falling in and out of love is signalled by a red heart that either hovers above the character's head or is broken in two. The archetypal villain's presence in the scene is twice exaggerated by an actor carrying a sign saying "BAD GUY" next to him with an arrow pointing at the villain. The scene turns almost absurd through the extreme externalisation of *all* elements, which also emphasises the externality of the characters' genders.

Picture 2. The glamour of drag performance

Masquerade is also present in the first two scenes of *ALTER* where a drag queen appears on- and off-stage. While the first scene "Firework" is full of lights, movement, music, and dance, it quickly stops when the scene changes. The drag queen is lowered from their final position and the lights turn starker in comparison. (See Pictures 2 and 3.) The glitter and glamour that audiences associate with drag performances are quickly stripped away, together with the extroverted feminine performance of the drag queen. Their smile disappears and they exclaim that "these shoes are killing me" before proceeding to take off the high heels, make-up, and wig. Exposing the drag queen's performance is linked to Joan Riviere's (1991) understanding of masquerade as a game. Femininity is used as a mask to derail attention from masculine reiteration. By glimpsing into what happens once the flamboyant drag queen is off-stage, the masquerade of the previous scene is exposed to the audience. While the removal of the wig and make-up could be interpreted as

exposing the character's original gender identity, they proceed to pick another gender in "Identity Shop", thus rendering the removal of make-up as nothing but trading reiterative actions for others – ones that are equally external, yet equally relevant to the character as the drag queen performance.

Picture 3. "These shoes are killing me"

In this thesis, I claim that abandoning the concept of original identity creates freedom: people are free to reiterate their genders without instantly being judged normatively because they do not fit into the available categories. This freedom is playfully explored in *ALTER*, where characters move between contrasted reiterative actions and express their desire however they find comfortable. "Identity Shop" explores this comfortable movement between different actions and rethinks the boundaries of gender possibilities. The constant motion between masculine and feminine gender reiteration, here represented by the symbols and doorframes, turns these items into tools that the characters and actors use according to their will. The drag queen, after picking a red genderqueer symbol in "Identity Shop", stops in front of the red doorframe, looks at their symbol, and confidently walks through the blue frame. They refuse to be restricted by pre-defined categories, and instead shape gender perception to suit their own needs. They also walk back on stage through the blue frame, holding a tulle skirt that was left behind by a trans girl who has been forced to get a masculine expression from the shop. The queen ignores

the categories set by the trans girl's mother, thus giving themself freedom to explore all possibilities without judgement. Further, the salesperson tells a customer that for their new gender performances, there is "no charge as usual", emphasising the freedom involved. In this shop, gender is not for sale – it is up for grabs. There is no price to be paid for choosing reiterative actions the character is comfortable with, and imaginative reinvention is available for all.

The scene "Identity Shop" seems to adopt the Gaga feminist approach detailed by J. Jack Halberstam. When Halberstam (2012: 8) asks "[w]hat if some males are ladies, some ladies are butch, some butches are women, some women are gay, some gays are feminine, some femmes are straight, and some straight people don't know what the hell is going on", "Identity Shop" seems to answer: *so what*. These seemingly important definitions become devoid of all meaning when they are constantly examined and reimagined. There is something everyday about the playful exploration of gender reiteration in "Identity Shop". For example, one of the customers gets a perceived-masculine gender performance from the shop, but then asks: "Could you put something more feminine in a small bag? For the weekend, in case I get bored." The character expresses the freedom to change their reiterative actions at will. The possibilities of gender are readily available for them, because they do not categorise themself. If they get bored, they simply do something different. They embody what Halberstam (2012: xiv) imagines Gaga feminism will achieve: "they undo the category rather than rounding it out, they dress it up and down, take it apart like a car engine and then rebuild it so that it is louder and faster". The character's disregard towards all identity categories is both liberating and maverick – although they recognise that these categories exist[6], they choose to not be confined in them. This disregard questions whether normative ideals are the only obstacle standing between predetermined gender and freedom of expression, making the character a prime example of Gaga feminism on stage.

---

[6]This demonstrates the difficulty in talking about queer gender: language use and gender perception are tightly linked to categorisation, and sometimes playing with these categories is a queer enough action. Perhaps ultimately it will lead to an understanding that is not linked to categorisation in any way.

As already mentioned, in "Shakesqueer" Romeo is free to pursue his relationship with Juliet because he refuses to walk through the blue doorframe with his friends – he defines himself on his own terms and acts against societal expectation. His refusal to belong to the same category as Mercutio and Benvolio frees him to explore and express his feelings for Juliet without the constant judgement from his friends, who already mock him for his desire towards Rosaline. Romeo's words also serve as a reiterative action, as he denounces his family's name at Juliet's request. In a way, Romeo frees himself from the cultural conventions that are attached to his name, and they no longer define him or his gender and desire. As Juliet remarks: "What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,/ nor arm, nor face, nor any other part/ belonging to a person"[7]. The conventions linked with the name Montague are not internal, and what Juliet seems to be saying is that Romeo could just as easily reiterate some other action. In fact, he does just this by choosing to express his desire for Juliet instead of the definitional walking through the blue doorframe together with his friends, who side with the Montagues.

In "The Homophobic Monologue", the character of the waiter is confined by his normative worldview. He represents the opposite of the imaginative reinvention of the characters in, for example, "Identity Shop": he observes the world through categories and makes normative judgements based on those categories. In his world, homoromantic and -sexual expressions are inferior to heterosexual desire. He claims to embrace difference: "Look at this place. So many different kinds of people here." What the audience observes, however, is an almost empty stage. There are certainly no people the waiter refers to when he attempts to demonstrate his tolerance. The waiter is confined to his scene. He is in a closed space, alone with his thoughts, and it almost feels as though the walls are closing in on him. The lights slowly fade from white to dark red, the further he goes into his rant about homosexuality being wrong. This solitary confinement not only indicates that he is completely alone with his categorisation, but also that his refusal to abandon identity categories keeps him trapped. The lights are at their darkest and most red when he slips into expressing his own homoerotic desire. (See Picture 4.) Further, his disposition does not change towards the end of the scene. He returns to his previously

---

[7]*Romeo and Juliet.* II.ii.40-42. Note the change of the final word from 'man' to 'person'.

perceived gender and the mannerisms that accompany it. He is the opposite of freedom, of rethinking the possible, representing instead a rather grim version of reality where categories and definitions matter.

Picture 4. The homophobic waiter is trapped in his own homoerotic desire

ALTER also addresses the concept of original identity in the final scene "I Am". The scene shows actors in their own clothes, the stage lit by rehearsal lights rather than theatrical lighting. The performativity of all the previous scenes is exposed when the audience is invited to look at the actors and stage outside of the performance. The scene invites the audience to perceive the gender reiteration of the actors in a similar way as their characters' genders, thus linking all performative actions without prioritising. The actors' only line in the scene, "I am", is both a simple declaration and a parodic statement of something the play has explored throughout its entirety – that perhaps the line should not be "I am", but instead "I act". People can never reiterate actions completely outside of gender, because everything they do will shape their performative gender in some way. In this sense, the actors are only exposing their own everyday performativity in contrast to the nine different character performances they have explored on stage prior to this final scene. Their own gender reiteration gets priority simply because they act on it more often than those of their characters. Original identity is certainly out of the question, as the actors expose their reiteration instead of any underlying original identity. There is nothing

hostile in the way they each deliver the line "I am": if anything, it is gentle. They are not judging the forms of gender reiteration they have previously expressed, but simply showcasing that gender reiteration which the audience may see off-stage. They bring the off-stage on stage to blur the lines between performativity on stage and in everyday life, thus exposing gender as performative and the concept of original identity as inadequate in describing everyday experiences of gender.

ALTER does not view *queer* as a parody or poor copy of heterosexuality. Instead, the queer stories are stories in their own right, and the heterosexual narratives parody themselves. In "Me and Mrs. Jones", the audience gets a peek into an encounter between Mrs. Jones and her lesbian lover. The scene renders normative heterosexuality as inherently sad by exploring the happiness and grief of the lovers who are forced to meet secretly. Mrs. Jones sings: "We gotta be extra careful that we don't bring our hopes up too high, 'cause she's got her own obligations and so do I"[8]. She sees her normatively heterosexual marriage as an obligation she must fulfill, even if she is more happy with her lover than her husband: "We both know that it's wrong, but it's much too strong to let it go now"[9]. They are not a poor copy of heterosexuality: instead, the queer relationship is given priority. If anything, Mrs. Jones's heteronormative marriage is a poor copy of the queer desire she feels for her lover. She has to meet her lover in secret, because the heteronormative relationship model does not fulfill her desire, and her affair is more genuine and loving than her marriage, at least judging by the fond looks and delicate touches she shares with her lover during the scene. The story in "Me and Mrs. Jones" is further made into a fully queer narrative by not showing the husband – or in fact anyone else. When the waiter exits, Mrs. Jones and her lover are left alone, although they fear the judgement of others. They are confined by the same walls that confine the waiter in "The Homophobic Monologue", but in their case, they fear homophobia instead of being homophobic themselves.

---

[8] *Me And Mrs Jones* was originally performed by Billy Paul.
[9]*Ibid.*

Two scenes in *ALTER* also show heterosexuality parodying itself. The first is "Serial Killer", where characters, called Man and Woman in the script, have arranged for a *rendez-vous*. Man clearly desires Woman, who is more reserved than him. Stereotypical gender roles are reversed as Man speaks in lyrics from love songs, while Woman's lines are from songs that speak about affairs and one-night-stands instead of love. Man is overcome by his desire for Woman, and eventually misreads the signs she gives – eventually, she strangles him. The audience reacts to the scene mostly by laughing, as they recognise popular song lyrics that are then given new meaning in the narrative. As Woman strangles Man, he refuses to let go of his heteroromantic, -sexual, and monogamous desire for her, grunting: "Love... hurts..."[10] Just before he dies, he still attempts to redeem her love, surrendering to death "as long as you--"[11] Here, it is assumed that the audience will have caught on the pattern of using recognisable song lyrics, so most will fill in the blank in their mind with *...love me.* His heterosexuality parodies itself, because it takes over his will to live. He is willing to die for love, reiterating the pattern from many representations of heterosexual romance.

The other scene where normative heterosexuality is strongly parodied is "Romantic School Play". As previously mentioned, the scene is exaggeratedly artificial, exposing the performativity of the characters' genders. The scene is accompanied by emotional, orchestrated instrumental music, and the writing is purposefully naïve. Further, the use of archetypal characters, such as the damsel in distress, the villain, the hero, and the sidekick best friend are used to expose the absurdity of the narrative of normative heterosexual love. All actors perform their characters through stereotypical, normatively heterosexual character traits and gestures. Alice has a high-pitched voice and regularly speaks in rising intonation. When Rick and Alice finally hug for the first time, Alice employs a common romantic film cliché by lifting her foot from the ground. She often stands with her feet together and even her arms often stay at her sides, implying some insecurity and weakness. The fiancé (namely, the villain of the narrative) speaks slowly and assertively, with a low pitch. His movements are confident and his gestures grand. For example, he demonstrates

---

[10]*Love Hurts* was originally performed by The Everly Brothers.
[11]*As Long As You Love Me* was originally performed by The Backstreet Boys.

his message by pretending to squish a bug on Rick's chest when he says: "I have the power to destroy you. You have nothing and I can crush you like a tiny bug". In contrast, Rick's performance is often calm and rooted. He does not fidget, but he also uses clichéd gestures for signaling his emotions. When his friend tells him to forget about Alice, he violently shakes his head; when he is confronted by the fiancé, Rick thrusts his chest forward and pulls his arms back in order to seem more powerful than only seconds before, when he has held his hand over his heart to signal how much he loves Alice. (See Pictures 5 and 6.) The scene shows normative heterosexuality parodying itself through the dramatising gestures it usually employs to construct normative narratives.

Picture 5. "I love her!"

Queer genders and sexualities are policed by normative heterosexuality through, for example, setting strict ideals whose following is supposed to create intelligibility. *ALTER* examines these normative ideals and the policing that follows by forcing the characters to adapt to certain patterns. In "Identity Shop", a mother enters with her child. The child is wearing a pink tulle skirt and wishes to enter the shop through the red doorframe. The mother stops as soon as she is in the shop, turns around, and pushes the child to the blue frame, whispering: "The other door!" The mother embodies the inherent panic of normative heterosexuality in the face of queerness. She comes to complain about her child's gender performance: the biologically male child feels like a girl, but this does not suit the mother, who *must* have normative coherency:

MOTHER	This is not what we wished for! We wanted a healthy, handsome--
CHILD	--daughter.
MOTHER	--son! So I'd like to change it to an appropriate one.

She judges her child's gender reiteration as inappropriate and demands normative coherency. Although the mother recognises that gender is fluid – she reveals that she has acquired her own gender from the shop, as well as her child's – she maintains a worldview where gender reiteration must remain constant: "Oh, I'm fine with the one I have, thanks", she says to the salesperson when the child goes to change into the new masculine performance that she does not want. The mother has been told that the purchased gender is likely to be "modified in use to the customer's wishes", but she refuses to accept this. She further emphasises the stability and normativity of her child's gender by ordering her to walk through the blue doorframe when they leave: "Go through your door and that's the end of it!"

Picture 6. Rick's exaggerated gestures signify both love and power

The policing by normative heterosexuality in *ALTER* is mostly shown through what Judith Butler (1999: xx) calls "mundane violence". This type of violence is performed by certain gender ideals to enforce those ideals and exclude other gender reiterations from intelligibility. This violence is present in several scenes in *ALTER*. As previously discussed, the mother in "Identity Shop" is in a panicked state to protect her

heteronormative worldview. While the setting of the shop reimagines the everyday possibilities of gender expression and turns a regular action of shopping into a subversive act, it also shows how mundane the violence practiced by the mother is. The situation is perceived as rather "normal" – on the surface, the mother is a customer who complains about a faulty product she has purchased. This seeming normalcy also exposes the normalcy of the violence performed. An ordinary type of violence by controlling the child's gender reiteration is rendered even more ordinary through the everyday setting – but this setting also exposes the absurdity of the complaint. The audience responds by laughing, perhaps because the entire conversation seems ridiculous to them, but their response indicates that the mundane nature of the violence is exposed. The audience recognises it, but at the same time it is made subversive.

In "Romantic School Play", mundane violence is present in several different forms, both in actions and in speech. Throughout the scene, it becomes obvious that almost all characters except Alice guide the course of the narrative. Rick rescues Alice from a classic damsel-in-distress situation with an approaching car. Alice rarely initiates physical contact with any of the other characters, but she is often touched by them. Rick's line "[t]ake my hand and you will be safe" raises him above her in their power dynamic, but the line is also rather ironic: he has just grabbed her hand himself, pulled her to safety, and has not let go of it. On the level of speech, she is given the choice to take his hand, but their actions suggest the choice was already made for her. Rick also sends Alice a note, telling her what to do: "Let's meet in the park at six o'clock. I need to see you", she reads from his note. Her response is forcefully negative, indicating that she did not want him to contact her. What Rick wants is given priority over Alice, and her decisions are rendered completely irrelevant. She is controlled by the normatively heterosexual ideals that place her in a hierarchy below the masculine characters. Alice's fiancé also moves the narrative forward in complete disregard towards her throughout their storyline. He initiates physical contact, while she remains fidgety. (See Picture 7.) When they exit the scene, the fiancé controls when they turn around and leave, even though she clearly tries to get away from him during the scene. The dynamic between Alice and the masculine characters in the scene is heteronormative: the men are physically in control of the woman.

Picture 7. Alice controlled by the heteronormative setting

The mundane and normalised form of heteronormative violence is also ridiculed and parodied in "Romantic School Play". The scene is narrated in part by a character called Trailer Voice, who towards the end of the scene exclaims: "This spring, love is going to show you what it's all about!" The scene then ends with Rick and Alice's fiancé punching each other and fighting, presumably over Alice. Is love all about two heterosexual men fighting for their right to desire a woman who is not involved in this decision-making? The absurdity of the fight is emphasised by ending the scene suddenly. The music stops, Rick and the fiancé look at each other as though to ask *what are we doing* and then quickly run to exit the scene. They are taken aback by their actions, which have been nothing but physical confrontations in the entire scene. Throughout "Romantic School Play", heteronormative love is shown as violent: the characters must face obstacles and pay a price to deserve the right to love: "Love is not free – it takes a lot. (…) Are you ready to pay the price?"

In "Shakesqueer", Mercutio and Benvolio attempt to control Romeo's gender reiteration and desire by ridiculing him. When Romeo hides from his friends, they come looking for him:

> BENVOLIO   Call, good Mercutio.
> MERCUTIO   Nay, I'll conjure too. Romeo! humours! madman! passion! lover![12]

Mercutio mocks Romeo, calling him a madman, and likening this quality to passion and even love. Bruce R. Smith (2000: 18) actually argues that Mercutio's words reduce Romeo to his dominant humour, blood, which is associated with masculinity (Smith 2000: 16). Mercutio and Benvolio constantly laugh when discussing Romeo's desire in an attempt to control him – perhaps to anger him and get him to reveal himself. Because the scene is interpreted from a queer point of view, the ridicule that the two friends direct at Romeo gets a serious undertone. Are they mocking him because they deem his desire for Rosaline (and in fact, Juliet) immoral? They exhibit heteronormative and even toxically masculine behaviour by sexualising Rosaline's body and assuming that Romeo has disappeared to brood over his desire for Rosaline: "I conjure you by Rosaline's bright eyes, by high forehead and her scarlet lip, by her fine foot, straight leg and quivering thigh and the demesnes that there adjacent lie, that in your likeness you appear to us!"[13] While Mercutio describes Rosaline's body and runs his hands through his own body in unison with the speech, Benvolio laughs malevolently. Their joking not only expresses mundane violence towards Rosaline, whose body they sexualise without hesitation, but also towards Romeo, whose desire they ridicule. When they exit the scene, they describe Romeo's desire:

> BENVOLIO   Come, he hath hid himself among these trees to be consorted with
>   the humorous night; Blind is his love and best befits the dark.
> MERCUTIO   If love be blind, love cannot hit the mark.[14]

Again, Benvolio and Mercutio laugh heartily before exiting from the blue doorframe, with their arms wrapped around each other's shoulders. They establish their dominance through this action, all the while questioning Romeo's masculinity. As Bruce R. Smith (2000: 3) notes, Shakespeare's plays construct masculinity as masquerade: "masculinity is more like a suit of clothes that can be put on and taken off at will than a matter of biological destiny".

---

[12]*Romeo and Juliet.* II.i.7-9

[13]*Romeo and Juliet.* II.i.19-23. Note some changes from 'thy' and 'thou' to 'you' to make the language easier to understand for Finnish-speaking audiences.

[14]*Romeo and Juliet.* II.i.32-35.

By claiming that Romeo's desire is best practiced in the dark, Benvolio also condemns Romeo's desire into unintelligibility. He judges Romeo's desire as unfit for the light of day ("Blind is his love, and best befits the dark"[15]), and Mercutio furthers this by joking about Romeo's love not hitting the mark. Although this might just be interpreted as sexual innuendo, Mercutio's words also indicate that he feels Romeo's love can never hit the mark, because the object of his desire is not intelligible. What is humour to them is actually an attempt to control Romeo's sexuality and gender to fit the ideals they uphold. After Mercutio and Benvolio leave, Romeo steps down from his hiding place and spits out: "He jests at scars that never felt a wound."[16] His reaction to his friends' banter reveals that Mercutio and Benvolio enjoy a privilege that Romeo cannot enjoy: their desire is not ridiculed, because it conforms to normative ideals. Romeo is condemned to ridicule, because his desire is viewed as subversive.

Although in this scene the relationship between Romeo and Juliet is queered, some elements of hetero- and homonormativity still prevail. "What man are you that, thus bescreen'd in night, so stumbles on my counsel?"[17] asks Juliet when Romeo appears at their balcony. Again, as in previous scenes, the men act and everyone else is left subject to their actions. Romeo breaks into the Capulet garden and climbs up to Juliet's balcony, offers to light their cigarette, and refuses to listen to Juliet, who is trying to save his life. Just as in "Romantic School Play", the trope of the forbidden lovers is further enhanced by the threat of violence: "If my kinsmen do see you, they will murder you."[18] This line could have been removed from the adaptation in *ALTER*, but we chose to keep it. Once more, the man is to fight for his loved one against all obstacles thrown in his way. Romeo and Juliet are also victimised, like in several homonormative stories, to show how their queer relationship is falsely treated by society: "My life were better ended by their hate, than death prorogued, wanting of your love." [19] With these words, Romeo actually declares himself ready to die for their love if it is not accepted.

---

[15]*Romeo and Juliet*. II.i.34
[16]*Romeo and Juliet*. II.ii.1.
[17]*Romeo and Juliet*. II.ii.52-53.
[18]*Romeo and Juliet*. Adapted from II.ii.69-70.
[19]*Romeo and Juliet*. II.ii.77-78. Note some changes of 'thy' to 'your'.

ALTER parodies heterosexual representation by showing it as quite rigid. Throughout "Romantic School Play", for example, it becomes obvious that the characters are stuck in a narrative that moves forward in a predetermined way. They cannot escape the narrative of forbidden love because they are bound by the conventions of normative heterosexuality and its representation. When Rick sees Alice for the first time, his best friend tells him: "She's everything you're not. She's from a high-class family and she already has a boyfriend who's rich, handsome, and succeeding. And she's not even looking at us. Forget about her." Following this line, Rick shakes his head violently, indicating that he is not about to forget about Alice. This, the audience already recognises as a trope in heteronormative romantic narratives. As Halberstam (2012: 18) points out, the heterosexual lovers must face obstacles that seem almost imaginary. Alice is placed in danger that seems to just happen, meaning the approaching car that Rick rescues her from. This occurs before the audience has time to observe whether Alice *was* in danger in the first place. Danger, of course, is assumed, because Alice must follow the classic damsel-in-distress character trope in order to become intelligible within her own narrative. Further, Rick has already decided to pursue Alice when he sees her for the first time, despite the fact that they know nothing about each other. This element plays with the common theme of love at first sight in heteronormative representations of romance. The character of Alice further exposes the inevitability of their narrative by running on stage to exclaim: "This story won't end happily!" At this point, the scene has not yet come to an end, but the characters already know their own ending: it is predetermined, it is set by the conventions of heteronormative narrative.

In the scene, the character of Trailer Voice constantly guides the other characters from above. The actor stands on a ladder to give the impression that they are above the others, both physically and mentally. When Trailer Voice calls out: "Love can flare up anywhere!" the audience next observes Rick and Alice meeting in the park, so Trailer Voice's lines actually set the boundaries of the narrative the characters need to follow. They also dictate how the audience is supposed to react: When Trailer Voice claims that "love is the greatest" in an elevated tone, the words sound like a truth that the audience should not question. Further, this exclamation, along with other clichéd expressions like "[a]re you ready to fight for it" actually expose the absurdity of the heteronormative narrative. Trailer Voice

believes in what they exclaim, but often these words are then parodied and ridiculed by the characters performing actions that counteract what is being said. As mentioned before, the relationship between "love is going to show what it's all about" and the fight between the two men who are not lovers, is one of these instances that actually indicates how ridiculous the assumptions heteronormativity makes about heterosexual romance are.

Despite its queer intentions, "Shakesqueer" also exposes the heteronormative restrictions to the narrative of romantic love. When the roles of Romeo and Juliet – and specifically their genders – are performed in unexpected ways, the previously heteronormative assumptions about their narrative are exposed. *ALTER* uses the original text with minimal alterations[20] and takes the form of what Douglas Lanier (2002: 83) calls remotivated narrative: "the new narrative retains the basic plot line or situation of the source, but changes the motivations of the characters". Our queered interpretation contests the heteronormative restrictions to the narrative of Romeo and Juliet by changing their motivations towards queer desire and by exploring their reiterative genders.

While our interpretation of the characters of Romeo and Juliet is queer, we chose that their setting be heteronormative. *Romeo and Juliet* is considered "the normative love story of our time" (Garber 2008: 34): this enables altering assumptions about the narrative, because audiences can be expected to recognise the play relatively easily. Where in a heterosexual romance, the obstacles faced by the star-cross'd lovers are due to a patriarchal family feud, the queered interpretation indicates that the prejudice of the entire society around them keeps them separated. Romeo does not hide from his friends to mask that he is falling in love with a Capulet – he hides because he is trying to mask that he is in love with Juliet, whose gender is queer.[21] The specific scene itself was chosen because it includes some of the most famous lines from *Romeo and Juliet*, and thus the scene could challenge the assumptions of the audience as well. When Juliet demands Romeo to "be some other name" [22] , the context changes from family feud to mundane

---

[20] We mostly changed 'thou' into 'you' to increase understanding, because most audiences were Finnish-speaking, and changed gendered pronouns where applicable to our interpretation.
[21] This was expressed by the actor portraying Juliet.
[22] *Romeo and Juliet.* II.ii.42.

heteronormative violence. Juliet wishes Romeo were "not Romeo call'd"[23], because they wish to love Romeo freely without prejudice from a heteronormative society. Gender becomes irrelevant to the love and desire that Romeo and Juliet feel for each other – after all, they express them in the same terms as in any heteronormative adaptation: "But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun. O, it is my love!"[24]

Romeo does not walk through the blue door to follow his friends into the realm of heteronormative masculinity. Instead, he stays behind to pursue his desire for Juliet, and only after they have sworn love towards each other, is he free to exit through the blue door. This raises some questions on what this action indicates, and what its consequences are to Romeo's gender reiteration. He does not consider himself like his friends – that is obvious because he does not follow them and is clearly hurt by their words – but is his masculinity confirmed only when Juliet loves him back? Is this part of the narrative *queer*? What remains queer, regardless, is that Romeo declares his gender and feels comfortable in it once he expresses his queer desire. Further, Juliet does not walk through any doorframe, indicating that their gender falls outside the binary. Whether the audience perceives this or not actually affects how the scene is interpreted. If the audience accepts Juliet as genderqueer, then Romeo claims his masculinity only after he has freely pronounced his desire – and it is irrelevant that the object of his desire is genderqueer. If, however, the audience interprets Juliet as a woman, as marked by their red sweatshirt, then Romeo's action changes. Does Romeo feel himself a man only after he has been promised the love of a woman, thus fulfilling his societal expectations of finding heterosexual love? Is Romeo's masculinity linked to his heteronormativity, or his queerness?

ALTER explores the arbitrariness of the binary gender system, and challenges assumptions about the mind/body binary as well. In "Identity Shop", the characters freely reiterate their gender in various ways without affecting the internality of the character –

---

[23]*Romeo and Juliet*. II.ii.45.
[24]*Romeo and Juliet*. II.ii.2-3, 10.

at least no such changes are indicated. One of the customers, for example, enters through the red doorframe with very feminine actions: their movements are soft and flowing, and their voice is soft and high-pitched. They change into reiterating a perceived-masculine gender, but the character is still recognisable to the audience, and they laugh when they register the changes in the reiterative actions of the character. Masculinity and femininity appear as not oppositional as in normative thinking (Butler 1999: xxviii), but as complimentary and free-flowing. The body of the character is not dependent on the mind, and changes in the body do not necessarily indicate changes in the mind. The character maintains some constant internality, and their overly masculine gestures do not carry over to their thinking. Their masculinity does not appear toxic and they still want something "feminine in a small bag". The actor portrays the same character while comfortably moving between different reiterative actions and stretching the boundaries of gender possibility.

The arbitrariness of the binary is also shown by the red and blue symbols that hang on the stage. They expose arbitrariness, because they can be freely examined and adopted by anyone, like the salesperson in "Identity Shop" does. All characters are free to examine the symbols and pay attention to them if they will. The symbols represent femininity and masculinity in rather stereotypical ways: the blue objects are in the shape of a homosexual couple, a cap, and a hammer, whereas the red symbols depict a lesbian couple, a flower, and feminine lips. They are so exaggerated that they become ridiculous. Further, there are two symbols that indicate genderqueer in both colours, showing that the seeming relation of the colours to the images depicted by the symbols is completely irrelevant and arbitrary. As Halberstam (2012: 8) asks in *Gaga Feminism*: "What if some males are ladies, some ladies are butch, some butches are women, some women are gay, some gays are feminine, some femmes are straight, and some straight people don't know what the hell is going on"? The relationship between the words we use and everyday experiences are up to language users, so there is no reason why someone calling themself a man could not pick up red lips and then *continue* to call themself a man. Further, the symbols in *ALTER* indicate that queer genders do not care for categorisation according to colours or images – characters are free to choose what they wish without there being any inherent difficulty in this choice.

ALTER explores queer genders through a spectrum of femininity and masculinity. Further, it also examines the possibilities of female masculinity and male femininity to demonstrate their independence from biology. In "Serial Killer", the characters are called Man and Woman in the script, although these terms are not spoken in the scene itself. These character names coincide with what the audience is likely to perceive in the scene: a man and a woman. The gender reiteration of Man and Woman are then playfully dealt with by emphasising the masculine features in Woman, and the feminine features in Man. Woman stands in the red doorframe, identifying herself as a woman, and Man stands in the blue doorframe. To contrast this signifying gesture, Woman's movements are quite restricted at first – she stands very still with her arms at her sides. Man, however, moves around a lot more, touching his face and emphasising the meaning behind his words by gesturing with his hands. Before the two make eye contact, Woman's voice is relatively low and rough, while Man's voice is soft and he lets a lot of air through as he speaks. The text emphasises this difference between the characters, giving Man lines from famous love songs, while Woman speaks in lyrics from rap, rhythm-and-bass, and dance music. The audience laughs at the differences in tone between them. Man speaks lines such as "I've tried to hide it so that no one knows, but I guess it shows when you look into my eyes"[25], whereas Woman's lines are more straightforward and speak of physical intimacy rather than romantic love: "If you want it, I'm gonna be va va voom voom"[26]. The two are rendered into almost polar opposites, but these opposites work against a stereotypical perception of gender. The differences between Man and Woman slightly disappear as they come into contact. Woman's movements become softer than while standing in the doorframe. She leads Man to her side of the stage, holding her hands on his chest, while he gazes longingly into her eyes. Woman recites Taylor Swift's *Blank Space* while wooing Man, telling him about the ex-lovers she has known in her time. "But I've got a blank space baby, and I'll write your name"[27], she says as she begins to strangle him, indicating that she has killed before and intends to continue the practice with other lovers as well.

---

[25]*As Long As You Love Me,* originally performed by The Backstreet Boys.
[26]*Va Va Voom Voom,* originally performed by Nicki Minaj.
[27]*Blank Space*, originally performed by Taylor Swift.

While Man's femininity and Woman's masculinity are emphasised in the scene, their gender roles are not necessarily reversed in the process. Man continues to be Man and Woman continues to be Woman, even if normative heterosexuality would assume that based on their behaviour, Woman acts like Man should and *vice versa.* Woman further emphasises this by exiting from the red doorframe, signifying that despite her masculine reiterative actions, she can still also mark herself as a woman. Further, she uses her femininity as a mask to hide her violent nature, as Riviere's theory suggests. Man and Woman's behaviour defines them and their genders, but not necessarily how they choose to be seen. This action also has important parallels in everyday life: Who has the right to call themself a woman? What is the difference between men and women, or are there any? Could people not call themselves what they wish, and behave how they wish, without these two coming into collision, as normative heterosexuality assumes?

Another interpretation of "Serial Killer" actually casts Man and Woman as the different sides of the same person, who are in constant struggle over the right to be performed. The dark scene, lit only by two spotlights, is a rather surreal scene compared to the bright lights of "Identity Shop". This emphasises that the events observed might not be strictly realistic – the stage becomes the physical representation of the internal struggle a person may have concerning their gender reiteration. If Man and Woman are seen as two sides of one person, locked in a struggle for survival and perceived as oppositional, the entire scene becomes a metaphor for gender reiteration in everyday life. Man is asking for Woman to love him; for the person they represent to love all the different sides of them. When Woman tells Man "[y]ou look like my next mistake"[28], she is getting ready to suppress yet another aspect of their behaviour she does not want to let out, instead choosing to kill off that part of their gender. Woman is the representation of reiterative actions the outside society deems intelligible and acceptable, and she needs to suppress all queerness that may arise. When she strangles Man, she exclaims: "All I wanted was to break your walls!"[29] This would indicate that she is not happy with what she has to do – but she must. If Man, together with all his softness, is let out into the world, if he is

---

[28]*Blank Space*, originally performed by Taylor Swift.
[29]*Wrecking Ball*, originally performed by Miley Cyrus.

allowed to express himself, then Woman and the person whose representation she is, risk unintelligibility. Therefore, she must suppress queerness and continue to rule as the only acceptable reiterated gender. "I love the way you lie"30, she says as she steps over Man. Is she speaking to Man, deeming him unintelligible, or does she despise herself for continuing the lie that there is nothing queer about them? The doorframe that Woman exits through becomes a symbol for Woman leaving the confines of the mind, and becoming physical: She exits the mind and enters the body, which she continues to guide in behaviours that society deems intelligible.

The different levels of gender performance, femininity, and masculinity are also present in "Shakesqueer", especially in the character of Romeo. The actor playing Romeo expressed in rehearsal that they portray the character as a man. However, this actor reiterates her own gender femininely31, and thus audiences are also likely to first perceive her as a woman.32 This expectation can be broken by using the doorframes. "Shakesqueer" occurs during the latter half of the play, meaning that audiences will already be accustomed to characters signifying their genders with the doorframes. When Romeo walks through the blue doorframe, audiences are likely to challenge their assumptions and continue to view the character as a man despite their perception of the reiteration or biology of the actor. There are many levels to Romeo's gender reiteration, because after this signifying gesture with the doorframe, he does not exit through it. Does the audience read this as a sign of him not signifying himself as a man after all? Further, Romeo's gestures are more perceived-feminine than masculine. Here it is worthwhile to mention that in early rehearsals of the scene, Romeo's reiterative actions were more stereotypically masculine: he stood very still with his legs wide apart, his arms were kept away from his sides, he often stood facing the audience directly, and his voice was low. However, in the recorded dress rehearsal, his voice is relatively higher than in earlier rehearsals, he gestures a lot with his hands, and he is very fidgety. He prances around the stage, declaring his love dramatically – quite the opposite of the Romeo from early rehearsals who mostly

---

30*Love the Way You Lie*, originally performed by Eminem ft. Rihanna.
31As indicated by her performance in "I Am".
32Here, it is interesting to mention that one of the most successful portrayals of Romeo in the 19th century was performed by a woman, Charlotte Cushman (Garber 2008: 40–41).

showed his masculinity by keeping calm and distant from Juliet. This kind of change would indicate that the character traits, rather than mere gender, indicate how a character is performed: the actor chose to interpret Romeo differently from the cultural conventions associated with masculinity. This kind of performance also connects *ALTER* with past interpretations, where all characters would have been played by men. Different interpretations are possible because, as Marjorie Garber mentions, audiences are likely to watch "the performance binocularly, or metatheatrically, seeing both the performer and the role" (2008: 42), thus suspending their everyday perception of gender reiteration.

Here it is worthwhile to briefly examine all the different options that the audience may perceive when watching "Shakesqueer". These options all manage to blur the lines between binary gender categories by challenging and playing with these categories, albeit in different ways. It is possible, for example, that Romeo and Juliet in "Shakesqueer" are seen as a heterosexual couple, where the roles are played by two women. While this does not alter the heterosexual assumption of their romance, it does require that the audience suspend their assumptions about the gender of the actors, and accept that a woman can successfully play Romeo, who is perceived as a man. Because Romeo's gender performance on stage is not recognisably masculine, and Juliet's is not recognisably feminine, the scene can also be interpreted as a heterosexual romance between a man and a woman, where Romeo is a woman and Juliet is a man. Again, this interpretation is based on the audience's own assumptions about gender performance, and what the different signifying gestures actually signify.

Further, the scene could also be viewed as a romantic encounter between two women, one of whom is *butch* and the other *femme*. This interpretation is mostly based on the gender reiterations when contrasted with each other – Romeo's gestures are more feminine than Juliet's, so he could easily be interpreted as a woman. However, Juliet wears a red sweatshirt, and the audience has already become accustomed to interpreting the characters based on colour, so they could also be viewed as a woman. Juliet's voice is also rather soft in their monologue, which the audience will surely recognise as spoken by a woman

in the original play: "O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?"[33] In this case, the actors do not necessarily challenge the interpretation of their biology, but the story contests the heterosexual assumption in *Romeo and Juliet*, queering it mainly in terms of sexuality. Finally, there is the possibility of examining the scene as the actors themselves wished to perform it: Romeo is a man and Juliet is genderqueer. This is supported by Juliet's use of the doorframes: The actor moves to the balcony from the previous scene, thus not employing the doorframes at all, and they also exit beside the red doorframe. This signifying gesture reveals that Juliet reiterates gender outside the binary. Their relationship is thus queered on the levels of gender and sexuality both, as one of them is non-binary, one challenges the assumptions of masculinity, and they both express queer sexualities in a traditionally heterosexual love story.

As already discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, drag is one of the concrete practices that challenges the assumption that gender is essential and original. For example, Judith Butler (1999: xxxi) writes:

> As a strategy to denaturalize and resignify bodily categories, I describe and propose a set of parodic practices based in a performative theory of gender acts that disrupt the categories of the body, sex, gender, and sexuality and occasion their subversive resignification and proliferation beyond the binary frame.

Drag fits this description of denaturalising and resignifying bodily categories because it plays on the cultural conventions that guide our recognition and categorisation of people into different gender categories, often in the binary. Butler (1999: xxviii) asks: "Is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established"? I suggest that both of these tasks are relevant when discussing gender – it not only imitates and parodies forms of gender reiterations, but also challenges the very claim that gender is essential. Therefore, it is worthwhile to explore how drag is present in *ALTER*, and how these drag performances relate to Butler's theory. Because *drag* as a term originates from the theatre (Logan 2012: title page), and has been used to signify what the actors dress as, it is worthwhile to define what *drag* in this instance actually means. I suggest that many gender performances could ultimately be called *dr.a.g.*

---

[33]*Romeo and Juliet*. II.ii. 33.

or *dr.a.b.* based on what the person chooses to dress in. Here of course, it needs to be mentioned that categorising clothing as belonging to men and women is highly problematic. Dressing as a girl and dressing as a boy would ultimately also need to be defined by the person wearing the clothes, as society certainly cannot categorise clothing and then continue to make assumptions about the person in question. There is, however, an exciting sort of freedom in the thought that anyone could *dress as girl* or *dress as boy* regardless of their biology, change this dress at will without any demand for an internality that somehow justifies that dress, and then be perceived according to what they have chosen to wear. If we refer to drag simply as a modifying term to indicate what actors dress as, and consequently also perform, then most characters in *ALTER* are actually in *dr.a.g.* or *dr.a.b.*, because most are dressed either as girls or boys.34

ALTER also exposes the performativity of gender with a drag queen character. The entire play begins with a drag show, which explores performativity in several ways. The audience is made aware of watching a show, as several features associated with drag performances are shown: glitter, a wig, high heels, colourful lights, loud pop music, lip-syncing, dancers, *et cetera*. This not only exposes the genders performed by the actors as reiterative, but also underlines the cultural conventions associated with drag shows. A popular radio hit, namely Katy Perry's *Firework* was chosen because imitating pop stars is one of the most well-known conventions in drag performances. The actor lip-syncs the song while four actors perform the accompanying choreography. The song was chosen for its message – "Do you know that there's still a chance for you, 'cause there's a spark in you?"35 – but also because audiences are likely to recognise it. In order for the drag show to be understood as one, the audience needs to be aware of the conventions associated with the song and original performer as well. If there is any attempt to break these conventions associated with drag, the audience must first be made aware of them in the first place.

The drag queen in "Firework" breaks cultural conventions associated with drag by

---

34 Again, while queering here involves examining gender categories, in the future perhaps there need not be any reference to perceived categories.
35*Firework*, originally performed by Katy Perry.

employing what is usually referred to as a *faux queen* – while drag queens are often biological males who perform women in drag, the actor in the scene is not biologically male. The term *faux queen* itself, used to refer to women drag queens, raises some questions about the term. Why is a woman playing on the cultural conventions of femininity and womanness a *faux* queen? What renders their performance somehow false compared with men who are drag queens? This term seems to assign the priority of drag queen performances to men, which, as J. Halberstam (1998: 233) points out, is indicative of the power that men have to represent both men and women. The gestures and conventions of drag are not unattainable for women who perform as drag queens, as the performances are based on recognising the aspects of feminine gender performance, and parodying those until the entire concept of an original identity is blurred. In *ALTER*, the many levels of drag actually indicate that all gender is clearly performative, and having a non-male actor play this role exposes this further. Any performer can reiterate any kind of gender *regardless* of their own gender or biology, because drag is about parodying and examining the conventions of genders as separate from biology. Why call someone a *faux queen* when this term clearly brings drag queens once again close to biology? *ALTER,* to emphasise the many reiterations that build gender, actually begins with the shadow of a genderqueer symbol on the drag queen's back. Because the symbol is a question mark, it acts as a question to the audience: Are they certain that everything they see is real? What can be called true? The question places all performances under scrutiny and emphasises their performativity further. The ultimate question of the play becomes: What is gender and how can it be reimagined?

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is based on the linguistic theory of performative speech. I have also discussed in this thesis how language shapes and even creates our perception of everyday experience. This mostly occurs through reiteration, as terms begin to take meaning based on how they are used, and this usage also begins to shape how we see the world. There are many instances of language and speech shaping perceived reality in *ALTER*. I will use examples from "Romantic School Play" and "Shakesqueer" to demonstrate what effects the speech has in terms of the scene. In "Romantic School Play", when Rick has pulled Alice to safety from the approaching car, he says: "Take my hand and you will be safe". This sentence seems to enforce rigid and

binary gender roles by indicating that Alice will be safe *if* she takes Rick's hand. She needs to be rescued in order to be safe, but not by saving herself. Further, when Rick and Alice meet secretly in the park, Rick says: "I can't let you go". This sentence is also reiterated through action during the course of the scene, where Rick constantly keeps Alice close when they are in a scene together. It is obvious that this is uncomfortable for her sometimes, because she does not always respond to his advances, pulling away rather than close when Rick approaches physically. Because the actor knows the lines of the scene in beforehand, this line will also have had an effect on how the actor behaves throughout the scene, even before Rick speaks this line. Therefore it can be assumed that language affects the way the speech is interpreted, and will also consequently affect behaviour.

Romeo and Juliet use language in ways that shape their gender and expression of sexuality and desire. "Call me but love, and I'll be new baptised"[36] Romeo tells Juliet, posing his words as a demand – if Juliet expresses their love for him, then he will be willing to denounce his name. He creates a situation where his actions and behaviour are conditional of Juliet's behaviour. Juliet responds later in the scene: "Although I joy in you, I have no joy of this contract to-night"[37], indicating their desire for Romeo, but also driving him away so that he will not be found. Because Juliet calls their confessions of love a contract, they are also creating a demand for that contract to be fulfilled. This contract is further strengthened by Romeo, who defines what he desires from the encounter:

JULIET	What satisfaction can you have to-night?
ROMEO	The exchange of your love's faithful vow for mine.
JULIET	My bounty is as boundless as the sea, my love as deep; the more I give to you the more I have, for both are infinite.[38]

They engage in performative action by making a promise to each other. Romeo's gender is also expressed and created in the scene with language. Juliet guides the audience in viewing Romeo as a man by asking: "What man are you that thus bescreen'd in night so stumblest on my counsel?"[39] By calling Romeo a man, Juliet further points the audience

---

[36]*Romeo and Juliet*. II.ii. 50.
[37]*Romeo and Juliet*. II.ii. 116-117.
[38]*Romeo and Juliet*. II.ii. 126-127; 133-135.
[39]*Romeo and Juliet*. II.ii. 52-53.

towards an interpretation where Romeo is seen as masculine. Romeo, however, creates and shapes his own queerness in the scene with his language. He exclaims: "Henceforth, I never will be Romeo"[40], denying his name, the patriarchal constraints it entails, and therefore also enabling his romance with Juliet. When previously he has chosen to not walk through the blue doorframe, he has already denied gender reiteration that is similar to those of his friends. By denying his name, he further expresses his queerness and willingness to denounce both his previous normative gender together with the expectations it entails to be free to express his desire for Juliet.

Throughout *ALTER*, language is far from neutral. As Judith Butler (1999: xviii) expresses in *Gender Trouble*, gender is never politically neutral and will always shape perceived reality in some way. In "Chatroom", language is used to indicate what the characters think, but it is also used as a device to reveal which characters, and consequently their worldviews, we wished to question and ridicule. While the characters called HappyGirl-111 and JoySmile77 already have even naïve and exaggeratedly positive usernames, there are characters such as CaveTroll69 and HitTheVerse. It is perhaps unsurprising that HappyGirl-111 and JoySmile77 speak about ordinary and happy events: "Good. I had the greatest day" and "I was at the mall with my boyfriend", whereas the other three characters CaveTroll69, HitTheVerse, and HugTheTrees87 are there to mock them, ultimately ridiculing themselves. Because the scene employs language like it would be written on the internet and not how it would be spoken, the ridiculousness is further exposed and emphasised. The actors avoid all indicative tones of voice and speak very plainly to signify that they are speaking written, albeit grammatically incorrect language: "God hates homos. You be to hell!" The scene also shows how faceless internet users are behind their words, even when they express things that are far from neutral or at least positive. On stage, this element is emphasised by the three mocking characters lighting their faces with flashlights from underneath, distorting their facial expressions. Their language sounds neutral when spoken, but they say is far from it.

---

[40]*Romeo and Juliet.* II.ii. 51.

Several scenes in *ALTER* also show that in addition to language affecting the behaviour of its users, the users also have power to affect how the language they use is interpreted. This they accomplish through using language in new ways, and through their behaviour when they speak. In "Chatroom", the actors are suspended in an almost motionless state: All characters announce their entrance to the chatroom and move to their assigned place. After that, HappyGirl-111 and JoySmile77 only move their mouths to speak during the scene, and the three other characters occasionally move their hands to switch on the flashlight. The gender reiteration of these characters is limited mostly to their speech, because there are no gestures for the audience to interpret. As such, the genders of the characters are actually quite obscure, and could be anything on the queer gender spectrum. While HappyGirl-111's username gives some indication, the scene operates on the assumption that anyone can pretend on the internet, and therefore a certain level of doubt is constantly present in the scene. The character of CaveTroll69 emphasises this by clearly 'trolling' the two chatters – even though the audience sees the actor, they become faceless through the conventions of internet conversation.

In "Identity Shop", the entire concept of gender is altered with the way characters use language. They speak of gender as a commodity, ultimately shaping the meaning that different gendered words take in the scene. Although throughout the scene, the characters use the term *identity*, what they mean by it is actually very different from the concept of *original identity*. The scene challenges the way society views gender, as the salesperson remarks: "As you know, these identities are not a fixed thing. They're often modified in use to the customer's wishes". By speaking about gender like any product one could purchase from the shops, the characters free gender from the stability demanded by normative heterosexuality. The characters provide the audience a new way to look at gender by comparing gender reiteration to going to the shops, and referring to it in similar terms as any purchased item. By throwing around gendered words quite lightly, just as the customer who asks for "something feminine in a small bag", the seriousness around gender reiteration and the demand for stability disappears. The characters use language to emphasise their almost Gaga feminist actions, or as Halberstam (2012: xiii) phrases it: "their ecstatic embrace of loss of control, and a maverick sense of bodily identity". Here, loss of control refers to abandoning the idea of a stable identity and instead embracing

the spectrum of gender reiterations when coherency is deemed irrelevant and impossible to attain. The characters rethink the possible with their words.

Lastly, I wish to briefly discuss Al Head's (2012) vision of the Queer Fool. Head (2012: 5–6) traces the history of the Fool back to the plays of ancient Greece and argues that as an archetype, the Fool has always been of androgynous or ambigous gender. Although Head discusses the Fool in theatrical contexts, the same thinking can be applied to everyday life outside the stage. The Fool, whether on stage or off, is engaged in play and takes risks because it is the obvious thing to do – this may provoke a response from the audience, but this response is not the reason for acting: "The audience laughs, or cries, or sits in awe, because the Fool is showing the things they are scared to show, for fear of the humiliation" (Head 2012: 5). Head's (2012: 5) essay paints a picture of the Fool as one who feels strongly and acts according to what they feel: "The Fool knows the secret of feelings: that if you allow them, express them, 'play' them; they will not break you, they will flow on and leave you to whatever comes next". Culturally set normative ideals and heteronormative coherency are irrelevant to the Fool. Perhaps they will act in a way that we might label heteronormative – only, they abandon the idea of rules, thus separating themselves from normativity. The Fool remains in a state of questioning (Head 2012: 6), which can be linked back to the idea of fluidity in queer theory.

Because the Fool is a theatrical archetype, its connections to both the theatre and queer theory are worth examining here. Head mentions some characteristics of the Queer Fool and many of the characters in *ALTER* fit this description. The drag queen in "Firework" is an obvious example. As already discussed in this chapter, the character of the drag queen challenges the assumptions about what defines a drag queen and questions whether men have privilege in representing women through drag artistry. Further, the queen's gender is ambiguous because of the many levels that could possibly overlap in the scene: Is the character a man who dresses in drag? Is the character a woman who performs *dressed as girl*? These combined with how the audience perceives the gender of the actor create multiple choices for interpretation, and further blur the lines between gender categories, creating instead a character who is free to move among gender reiterations and assumptions about them. In "Identity Shop", we see the same character taking up yet

a varying set of reiterative actions without difficulty, further emphasising this fluidity or movement in the character's performance.

Head mentions that the Queer Fool often takes risks. Even outside the story in "Firework", the first scene in *ALTER* was a deliberate risk on the part of the cast and director: In early rehearsals, it was decided that the scene would span through the entire song, creating pressure on the actors to carry the scene through identically repeating choruses. Their connection to the audience is crucial in how the scene is received, and they must be able to provide the audience with something new in each passing moment, or the momentum of the scene is lost. Towards the end of the song, the actors wave little flags that have also been given to the audience. This means that the actors need to establish clear communication with the audience, so that the audience is comfortable in participating by waving their flag when the actors begin to do so. In the dress rehearsal, this aim was achieved, meaning that this time, the risk that the characters take as Queer Fools actually pays off. The choreography also takes risks by requiring some seductiveness from the actors, in spite of their own gender or sense of reiterative actions. Fear of humiliation is ever-present as actors are required to perform choreography without previous training in dance, and to maintain some emotion in the scene in addition to executing the movements as required. Finally, towards the end of the scene, "Firework" is characterised by overflowing joy that finds culmination in the flag waving and a final formation where the drag queen is lifted into the air. (See Picture 2.) This is certainly the kind of emotional freedom and playfulness that Head discusses in relation to the Queer Fool.

Another example of the Queer Fool in *ALTER* is Romeo, whose gender is built on multiple levels of reiterative actions. Romeo's gender is increasingly ambiguous, the more the different aspects of gender are considered. His abandonment of a stereotypically masculine set of reiterative actions certainly involves risk-taking. On the one hand, the possibility that Romeo's gender is misinterpreted presents a constant risk in the scene: he is a man whose gender reiteration is far from the easily recognisable, stereotypically masculine performance. On the other hand, the character of Romeo challenges the entire concept of misinterpreting gender. Is it required that he be recognised as any *one* gender? Could his gender be up to interpretation, his behaviour characterised as maverick to

paraphrase Halberstam's *Gaga Feminism* (2012)? A strong emotional undercurrent runs through "Shakesqueer", as the audience is assumed to recognise the traditional love story and all the trouble that the lovers will eventually face in the course of the narrative. Romeo's dramatic gesturing during the scene underlines his strong emotions, as does the exaggerated behaviour of Mercutio and Benvolio when they mock Romeo. Romeo takes a risk by expressing his queer desire for Juliet despite obvious societal expectations to behave more normatively. Romeo is a Queer Fool who, at least in "Shakesqueer", gets his reward by hearing a declaration of love from Juliet.

4   RETHINKING THE POSSIBLE

The aim of this thesis was to examine how *queer* is expressed through gender performance on stage. I analysed how actors reiterate queer genders, how language affects gender reiteration, and what elements on stage shape perceived gender in the theatre.

Throughout this thesis, I find parallels between queer theory, queer gender performance, and the theatre. I argue, for example, that how others react to us ultimately shapes how we behave. This principle applies to both everyday life and performance on stage, where actors are likely to reiterate actions that provoke the desired response from the audience. Theatrical performances and drag also rely on the assumption that we can temporarily forego our own gender reiteration and adopt other ones instead. However, I conclude that it is unlikely that all features of the actor's own gender reiteration could disappear when they are in character – there are also instances in *ALTER* when the actor's own gender is likely to influence how the audience perceives them, in spite of what reiterative actions their character performs. This same question also applies to everyday life: Can we reiterate gender in varying ways without being perceived through a category? Do we form a set of reiterative actions we call our own gender, or could they be changed at will? Theatre also exposes interesting relationships between internality and externality, namely in the relation between action and emotion. I suggest that emotion can cause action, or *vice versa*, and some actors overlap these two methods.

Throughout my analysis, it becomes apparent that gender reiteration is present in everything we do. We create gender through all our actions, whether that is through gestures, clothing, attitude towards the world, or language use. When gender is cast as performative, the possibilities become free to be examined by all bodies regardless of biology. The stage is a useful tool for exploring queer genders because actors can easily expose their performativity, but also because audiences readily accept the theatre as a place for exploration. As an inherently queer artform, theatre explores the different modes of internality and externality, and enables bodies to adopt varying sets of reiterative actions without difficulty. Why then, should this not be possible in our everyday life off stage as well?

My analysis indicates that on stage, perceived gender is shaped by all the different theatrical elements. Scenography, lighting, language use, speech patterns, intonation, physical movement, and costumes – just to name a few examples – all influence how gender is perceived. Elements like costumes can also affect how actors reiterate their character's gender, because different clothes will ultimately influence the way the actor moves their body, for example. It is my conclusion that on stage, it is the world surrounding the actors that influences gender reiteration as much as the actors themselves.

In the future, it would be worthwhile to study how these findings translate to everyday life outside the stage. How do different gender reiterations challenge the assumptions of the binary gender system and promote a queer understanding of gender? What kinds of instances expose gender as performative? In the field of theatre, there are numerous topics that would be interesting to continue studying. For example, the possibilities of drag are an infinite source of research, and it would be worthwhile to continue from the findings of this thesis and expand more into the possibilities of drag performance. What are the concrete ways in which drag exposes gender as performative? The role of the audience is another area that this thesis merely mentions, but which would benefit from further study. Conducting research into how audience members actually perceive gender before and after experiencing a theatrical performance, for example, would provide insight into what the possibilities of theatrical representation are. Further, a study into what the audience actually perceives in connection with the different theatrical elements would be interesting.

The findings of this thesis merely scratch the surface. However, my research shows that abandoning gender ideals creates freedom, and that there are no convincing grounds to continue upholding a binary gender system based on a heterosexual matrix that spends most of its energy trying to set up constraints to keep itself relevant. Why should not our gender system correspond with lived reality and not our lived reality need to adapt to fit our gender system? Further, through my analysis gender proves itself to be performative, because it can be adapted by actors on stage. Public conversations, such as the one about gender categories initiated by the Finns Party Youth in early 2016, still continue to

confuse biological sex and gender performance, and then assume that these two are in a mimetic relationship. My research will hopefully provide some clarification into why this so-called coherency is not supported by lived reality, and is in fact a logical impossibility. Hopefully, this thesis will provide one look into what other possibilities we have to replace the outdated ideals of the heterosexual matrix.

Hopefully my thesis will also show the tremendous power that people have in changing our society and its ideals. The Gaga feminists; the artists on stage; the people off stage who see gender as fluid and adapt their gender reiteration until they are happy with it; the language users – all these examples in my thesis show that our cultural compulsions can be abandoned in favour of a descriptive account that matches our lived experiences better. This task, of course, is never done, because gender and our understanding of it are constantly in motion. If gender is doing, then certainly each doing will challenge our assumptions and create a world where the boxes can finally be abandoned. This is a world of the Queer Fools who are free to explore and live. This is a world that can rethink the possible.

WORKS CITED

Primary source

ALTER. A play. (2015). Written by Aino Hyyryläinen, Julia Karjalainen, Enni
      Matikainen, Mika Ranta, Riku Räihä & Tiina Västi (2015). *Alter. A play.* Dir.
      Aino Hyyryläinen. [Recorded final dress rehearsal]. Produced by Vaasan
      ylioppilasteatteri Ramppi.

Secondary sources

Berg, Martin & Jan Wickman (2010). *Queer.* Malmö, Sweden: Liber.

Butler, Judith (1999/1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.*
      New York: Routledge.

Cealey Harrison, Wendy, and Hood-Williams, John (2002). *Beyond Sex and Gender (1).*
      London, GB: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Elia, John P. (2003). *Queering Relationships.* Journal of Homosexuality, 45:2-4, 61–86.
      [Electronic article]. [Cited 18.3.2015]. Available at:
      http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J082v45n02_03

Escudero, Maite (2009). *Long Live the King: A Genealogy of Performative Genders.*
      [Electronic book]. Newcastle upon Tyne, GBR: Cambridge Scholars
      Publishing. [Cited 22.10.2014]. Available at:
      http://site.ebrary.com.proxy.tritonia.fi/lib/tritonia/reader.action?docID=106770
      70

Gamson, Joshua & Dawne Moon (2004). *The Sociology of Sexualities: Queer And
      Beyond.* Source: Annual Review of Sociology, Vol. 30 (2004), pp. 47-64.
      [Electronic article]. [Cited 12.9.2014]. Available at:
      http://www.jstor.org/stable/29737684

Garber, Marjorie (2008). *Shakespeare and Modern Culture.* New York: Pantheon
      Books.

Glover, David & Cora Kaplan (2000). *Genders.* New York: Routledge.

Graver, Lawrence (2004). *Beckett: Waiting for Godot.* 2nd edition. [Electronic book].
      West Nyack, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press. [Cited 14.5.2013].
      Available at: http://site.ebrary.com/lib/tritonia/Doc?id=10131706&ppg=27

Halberstam, J. Jack (2012). *Gaga Feminism. Sex Gender, and the End of Normal.*
      Boston: Beacon Press.

Halberstam, Judith (1998). *Female Masculinity.* London: Duke University Press.

Head, Al (2012). "The Queer Fool." Sexualities 2012, 15:3. [Electronic article]. [Cited 22.10.2014]. Available at: http://sex.sagepub.com/content/15/1/3

Heddon, Deirdre & Jane Milling (2006). *Devising Performance: A Critical History.* Hampshire/New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hoey, Brian A (2014). *A Simple Introduction to the Practice of Ethnography and Guide to Ethnographic Fieldnotes.* [Electronic article]. [Cited 20.3.2015]. Available at:
http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1022&context=brian_hoey

Irvine, Janice & Donna Penn (1995). *Gay/Lesbian/Queer Studies.* In Contemporary Sociology, Vol 24, No. 3 (May 1995). p. 328–330. [Electronic article]. American Sociological Association. [Cited 12.9.2014]. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2076480

Kansallisteatteri (2016). Play Rape. [Cited 29.1.2017]. http://www.kansallisteatteri.fi/esitykset/play-rape/

Kekki, Lasse (2010). *Pervo parrasvaloissa. Queer-draamaa Teksasista Kokkolaan.* [The queer in stagelights. Queer drama from Texas to Kokkola.] Turku, Finland: Eetos.

Kershaw, Baz and Nicholson, Helen (2011). *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance.* [Electronic book]. Edinburgh, GBR: Edinburgh University Press. [Cited 4.10.2014]. Available at: http://site.ebrary.com.proxy.tritonia.fi/lib/tritonia/reader.action?DocID=10477155

Knihtilä, Elina (2017). *Tieteen päivät: Taiteen rajat.* [The science forum: The limits of art.] [Recorded panel discussion]. Helsinki: University of Arts. [Cited 29.1.2017]. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/pg/Taideyliopisto/videos/?ref=page_internal

Kusalik, Telyn (2010). Identity, Schmidentity. In Kate Bornstein & S. Bear Bergman (eds.). *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation.* California: Seal Press. 54–60.

Lanier, Douglas (2002). *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Logan, Christoper (2012). *dr.a.g.* Antwerp, Belgium: Tectum Publishers.

Motschenbacher, Heiko (2010). *Language, Gender and Sexual Identity: Poststructuralist perspectives.* Amsterdam, NL: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Riviere, Joan (1991). *The Inner World and Joan Riviere: Collected Papers 1929 - 1958.* London, GB: Karnac Books.

Smith, Bruce R. (2000). *Shakespeare and Masculinity.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Venäläinen, Satu (2015). Naiset väkivallan tekijöinä iltapäivälehdissä – hoivaavuus ja vahingoittavuus toiminnan ja olemuksen tyyleinä. [Women as perpetrators of violence in tabloid magazines – nurturing and harm as styles of action and appearance]. In Tiina Mäntymäki (ed.). *Uhri, demoni vai harhainen hullu? Väkivaltainen nainen populaarikulttuurissa.* [Victim, demon or delusioned madwoman? The violent woman in popular representation.] Vaasa: Vaasan yliopisto. 73–96.

Vilkka, Hanna (2010). *Sukupuolen ja seksuaalisuuden kohtaaminen.* [Confronting gender and sexuality.] Juva: PS-kustannus.

Winn, Steven (2008). *100 Years of Queer Theater.* [Electronic article]. [Cited 2.3. 2016]. Available at: http://www.sfgate.com/performance/article/100-Years-of-Queer-Theater3262626.php