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THESIS

THE GLITZY GLAMOUR GLITTER GIRLS:  
DRAG QUEENS, VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY  
AND THE  
*CINÉ PHOTO-ESSAY*

by  
Tamara Voninski

*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy.*

September 2019

## **Statement of originality**

*This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.*

*I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance I have received in preparing this thesis has been acknowledged, along with my sources.*

*Signature:*

*Name: Tamara Voninski*

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## DEDICATIONS

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## **Abstract**

### *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay*

The central argument of the project *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay* is that visual and cinematic essays created by artists can operate as a form of visual ethnography. The project, therefore, broadens social understandings of subcultures. The aim is to photograph and film a specific group of drag queens, following their lives and ideas over a 20-year period.

The traditional approach of anthropology includes a historical distrust of the visual as scientific data. Within this research project, the practice and boundaries of visual ethnography will be mapped in the friction and fissures created from the intersection of art and social science in practice-led research. The research expands the classifications within the practice and theory of visual ethnography from the distinct genres of photography and film in visual research to include a new hybrid visual form that I designate as *ciné moments* and the *ciné photo-essay*.

The project uses the archival material of a black-and-white photographic essay captured by the photographer turned filmmaker/researcher as a catalyst to create a new body of work using still and moving images. The research project re-memorialises photographs taken in The Laneway, which is actually a series of laneways off Hill Street in Surry Hills in Sydney, Australia, during public street parties after gay and lesbian events such as Mardi Gras and Sleaze Ball. The original photographs depict three drag queens, known as the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, and street culture that has disappeared.

The photo-essay is an under-theorised subject area within the trajectory of documentary history, according to theorists Timothy Corrigan in *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (2011) and Philippe Mather in *Stanley Kubrick at Look Magazine: Authorship and Genre in Photojournalism and Film* (2013). The photo-essay, a series of still photographs that creates a narrative or statement, has

been historically tied to print media and photojournalism. The demise of traditional print outlets in the media and the proliferation of online slideshows through the internet have created new horizons for the photo-essay to expand. This project will explore the still and moving essayistic in visual media to find the gaps and overlaps between the traditional and experimental aspects of visual ethnography.

Lens-based visual artists and anthropologists Sarah Pink, Trinh T. Minh Ha and Anna Grimshaw expand the margins of the visual within the trajectory of ethnography and methodology. *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay* weaves still and moving images into a hybrid form that lifts the mask off a subculture of drag queens in Sydney.

The PhD thesis comprises an installed exhibition of still and moving images as a film projection (in an art gallery space) and an exegetical document of 50,000 words that will explicate the methodological process and disciplinary context of the research.

## **Introduction**

*The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay* is a practice-led PhD thesis using still and moving images to investigate the changes in a subculture of drag queens in Sydney, Australia. The PhD research references the archive of black-and-white street photographs of drag queens that the researcher often took anonymously at public recovery parties.<sup>1</sup> The research documents the lives and private masking rituals of one particular group of drag queens, known as the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, from 2014-19. This trio of biological men dress in female clothing in rituals of parody and street performance. One of the primary aims of the research is to learn about the drag queens from their perspective. During a 20-year period, there were seismic changes and shifts in Sydney, from social, political and technological perspectives. As a result, drag culture shifted from primarily public spaces to private ones for the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. Lens-based practice shifted for the researcher during the 20 years as well—from analogue black-and-white photography to digital and moving images. An era when she was one of the only people out on the streets photographing with a camera ceased with the popularity of smartphones and social media. The discrete body of research created during the PhD candidature explores what happens when a photographer turned filmmaker focuses a different lens, literally and metaphorically, on the same subjects in a different era. The PhD research crosses practice and theoretical boundaries between documentary, photojournalism and visual ethnography and further argues that visual and cinematic essays artists create can operate as a form of visual ethnography. The creative works captured in collaboration with the drag queens map the space between still and moving images within the overlapping boundaries of these three analogous, yet divergent, visual practices.

## **The project**

I photographed drag queens between 1999 and 2002 in an area known as the Laneway, in the small streets off Hill Street in Surry Hills, during recovery parties. These parties were held the morning after all-night lesbian gay bisexual transgender and queer (LGBTQ) events such as Mardi Gras and Sleaze Ball in Sydney. Drag queens, according to Roger Baker, are drag

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<sup>1</sup>The original photographs were edited together in 2001 into a photographic essay called *The Laneway*. In 2001, the photo-essay *The Laneway* won two awards (First Place Feature Photograph and Award of Excellence Picture Story) in the Pictures of the Year International Awards in the United States.

artists.<sup>2</sup> In the book *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts* (1994), Baker suggests:

It subverts the dress codes that tell us what men and women should look like in our organised society...It is about role-playing and questions the meaning of both gender and sexual identity. It is about anarchy and defiance. It is about men's fear of women as much as men's love of women and it is about gay identity.<sup>3</sup>

As a street photographer and documentarian, I was drawn to the Laneway with a camera by the unique opportunity to document Sydney's street drag queens mingling amidst the diverse gay community in an open, public environment. My interest in drag queen culture dates back to an experience in the early 1990s. I was in a 24-hour diner in the early morning hours in Norfolk, Virginia, in the United States, when a perfectly coiffed elegant blonde woman walked in and sat on one of the 1950s-style stools at the formica counter.<sup>4</sup> I observed her movements and perfect clothes and hair. She looked almost too perfect. Her voice was like a kitten, soft and purring for a moment and then a deep, masculine roar. The penny dropped that she was a drag queen. This was the moment when my fascination with drag began. A year later, on assignment for the *Miami Herald* newspaper,<sup>5</sup> I photographed men living on the streets of Miami dressed in women's clothing and working as prostitutes. At that time, I was a double-major undergraduate in anthropology and photojournalism. I had been documenting a long-term project called *Feminine* since the 1980s, examining the lives of women around the world and the essence of femininity.

My early days as an immigrant to Sydney, from 1998, were the leica years. I walked the streets as a photographer and flâneur, wandering with one or two leica cameras, searching for moments in public places to capture with my rangefinder camera.<sup>6</sup> I attended countless drag shows during the first two years I was in Sydney. However, I never took out my camera to record this prescribed and choreographed world of vibrant drag inside bars. Instead, I would

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<sup>2</sup> Roger Baker, *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts* (London: Cassell, 1994), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Baker, *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts*, 18.

<sup>4</sup> I was working at the *Virginian-Pilot* newspaper at the time. The publication won awards for photojournalism and design during this era in the United States.

<sup>5</sup> I worked in the American media from 1984-95 as a photographer and then a picture editor for newspapers. In 1989, I worked at the *Miami Herald* newspaper in Florida.

<sup>6</sup> Leica is a small German rangefinder camera used by many street photographers around the world. The camera model I used during the Laneway years was compact, discreet and lightweight. The design has not changed since the 1940s.



wander for hours on the streets each day, searching for beautiful light and a kinetic pull to capture the still points in time that photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson called the *decisive moment*.<sup>14</sup> The book *The Decisive Moment* (1952) defined the aesthetic and practice of a generation of photographers capturing life in spontaneous moments as they happened.

The morning after Mardi Gras 1999, I arrived in the Laneway before dawn and observed people adorned in costumes, leather and feathers. The crowd spilled into the area around Hill Street in Surry Hills between two pubs, the Flinders Hotel at one end and the Beresford Hotel at the other, as the sun rose and shadows fell over the street. The Laneway resembled a film noir fantasy carnival scene of glitter, sweat, beer, dancing and drag queens. I had never seen a street party with a similarly energetic vibe during my world travels. The PhD research crosses practice and theoretical boundaries between documentary, photojournalism and visual ethnography and further argues that visual and cinematic essays artists create can operate as a form of visual ethnography. Therefore, the voices and perspective of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, gleaned from recorded interviews, are woven into the thesis. The voice of the researcher is captured in first person. During the PhD research, the drag queen trio spoke about the evolution of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls and their group name.<sup>15</sup> Interviews were conducted with ethics clearance and approval to gain perspective and understanding of the Laneway years and today:

Yunka Ivanabitch: ...it was 1998 and it was when Cher's *Believe* album came out and we'd had a bit of marijuana and I said ... 'She's so glittery and glamorous.' And that's kinda how it started. 'Why don't we call ourselves the Glamour Glitter Girls.'

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Glitzy Glamour Glitter Gutter Girl.

The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls.

The Glitzy, Glamour, Glutter Girls.

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<sup>7</sup> Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952).

<sup>8</sup> Della Deluxe, Yunka Ivanabitch, and Kuntina K. Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls," ed. Tamara Voninski (appendix, 2018).

It sorta had noise, various incarnations depending on how inebriated we were at any time. But it sort of became this kind of faux kind of group.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Cult. Drag cult.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: We had a tran-i-festo. I suppose you'd call it a trans-i-festo now.<sup>9</sup>

When I began photographing the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls in the Laneway in 1999, I was a young woman. I used to accompany my gay younger brother, Alek, to various drag shows around Sydney. We spent our free time hanging out together in gay bars, where I was what is commonly referred to as a fag hag, a term from popular culture referring to a straight woman who enjoys hanging out with gay male friends in bars and clubs. Dawne Moon conducted a series of research interviews into the term fag hag as the “nexus of gender and sexuality” for the article “Insult and Inclusion: The Term Fag Hag and Gay Male ‘Community’ ” (1995).<sup>10</sup> Moon writes that the term denotes “otherness” as both an insult and a term of endearment.<sup>11</sup> In 2014, when I reconnected with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, I was a single mother in my 40s. My time consisted of child rearing and school drop-offs, rather than drag shows or Mardi Gras recovery parties. Child-rearing topics, I discovered, do not make good conversation with drag queens while they are putting on their makeup.

As a young child, my introduction to visual ethnography included many hours spent flipping through stacks of *National Geographic* magazines and viewing ethnographic films.<sup>12</sup> Large black-and-white film reels depicting rituals such as dancing, funerals and celebrations from many cultures and corners of the globe were projected in my family living room. Long before I discovered cameras, the magic of printing from negatives in the darkroom and capturing moments on film, my experience of the world outside our log cabin in rural New York state was primarily through black-and-white 16mm ethnographic films. Years later, viewing Jean Rouch's *Les Maîtres Fous*<sup>13</sup> (1954), which depicts trance in Africa, I had a sense of familiarity with the content, which seemed to me like a colourised, modern version

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<sup>9</sup> Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."

<sup>10</sup> Dawne Moon, "Insult and Inclusion: The Term Fag Hag and Gay Male 'Community'," *Social Forces* 74, no. 2 (1995).

<sup>11</sup> Moon, "Insult and Inclusion: The Term Fag Hag and Gay Male 'Community'," 490,94,502.

<sup>12</sup> The National Geographic Society has been funding cultural ethnographic research projects for more than 130 years. *National Geographic* magazines have been published since 1888.

<sup>13</sup> Jean Rouch, *Les Maîtres Fous*, (France: Les Films de la Pleiade 1954).

of the ethnographic films from my childhood. However, as a photographer and filmmaker, I noticed a distinct difference in Rouch's work. He was closer and moving with the dancers. The camera was no longer fixed in position or using wide framing to show the entire scene. I recognised this as the moment the person behind the camera becomes part of the scene unfolding in front of their lens. This realisation, in hindsight, became a link between how I work as a still documentary photographer and as an ethnographic and experimental filmmaker.

### **The problem**

The central argument of this PhD thesis, *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay*, is that visual hybrid essays artists create can be classified as visual ethnography. The project broadens the understanding of a distinct subculture of aging street drag queens through a female gaze from behind the camera. The research also considers the ways the ethics of photographing people on the street have changed over a 20-year period and reflects on a shift in practice towards collaboration for the photographer/filmmaker.

The field of anthropology as a social science has a lingering suspicion of the visual as valid scientific knowledge in research, compared with the written word. This idea is broadly explored in the discussion surrounding the work of anthropologists and sociologists Howard S. Becker, Elizabeth Chaplin, David MacDougall and Sarah Pink in Chapter 3.

Within this thesis, the practice and boundaries of visual ethnography will be mapped in the friction and fissures created from the intersection of art and social science, through practice-led research.<sup>14</sup>

I designate the term *ciné photo-essay* to refer to the space between the traditional boundaries of the still photo-essay, documentary and experimental essay film—and to the creative filmic element of this thesis. Overall, there are limited case studies resembling a *ciné photo-essay* hybrid format with a focus on drag queens that cross the boundaries of art and social science research. *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls* attempts to address this gap, weaving still and moving images into an installed hybrid visual essay in a gallery exhibition to suggest a deeper

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<sup>14</sup> The broad distinction that exists between the academic fields of anthropology and ethnography is that anthropology is the study of human species and cultures and ethnography is the study of a single group within a culture, usually through participant observation.

understanding of drag queens by lifting the mask off their subculture. The research expands the boundaries within the practice and theory of visual ethnography to include a hybrid visual form of still and moving images in an exhibition installation that is termed *ciné photo-essay*.

### **The arguments**

The thesis argues that visual and cinematic essays artists create can operate as a form of visual ethnography by exploring the concept of the female gaze upon drag queens through the phenomenological lens and eyes of a woman behind a camera. Through this female gaze, voyeurism can be understood as something different from a male sexualised gaze upon a woman. Gaze theory supports the methodology of a gendered approach in observational photography and filmmaking to capturing the metamorphosis and gender transformations of middle-aged drag queens through their masking and unmasking rituals.

My own trajectory in lens-based practice in film and photography has also led me to pose questions about why the photo-essay has been overlooked in the history of the essay format, particularly outside of the print media, and how the photo-essay performs as the intermedial link between photography and film. John Roberts suggests in “Photography after the Photograph: Event, Archive, and the Non-Symbolic” (2009) that there is an intellectual regression in photography theory due to the lack of “professional photojournalists and documentarists” writing critically about photography to add to the discourse.<sup>15</sup> The thesis argues that boundaries between still photography and moving image are blurred. I also argue that the form of the photo-essay links still photography and film. Through the creative work for the proposed exhibition, the photographer turned filmmaker/researcher expands the idea of Cartier-Bresson’s *decisive moment* in still photography through the notion of *ciné moments* in moving images.

The thesis argues that the skills and intuition of observational practice used in photojournalism and documentary photography are similar to those used in visual ethnography in terms of lens-based practice. The methodological approach of filming and photographing the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls is, therefore, mirrored across photojournalism, documentary and ethnography. The thesis also argues that the building of rapport and trust is an important, yet

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<sup>15</sup> John Roberts, "Photography after the Photograph: Event, Archive, and the Non-Symbolic", *Oxford Art Review* 32, no. 2 (2009): 281-82, 84

under-theorised, aspect of research.

The research responds to a gap in anthropologist Esther Newton's seminal written study of drag culture that her focus on stage drag queens creates by excluding street drag queens. A stage drag queen, who performs on a theatrical stage in a venue, is distinct from the street drag queen, who considers everyday rituals and being in public spaces performance. The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls are street drag queens.

John W. Nunley presents his notion of the three categories of men masking as women— virgin, mother and crone—in the book *Masks: Faces of Culture* (1999).<sup>16</sup> The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls research expands Nunley's ideas to add a fourth category that describes middle-aged men who dress in drag to cover the forgotten peri- to post-menopausal phase of a woman's life, between motherhood and crone. The new category, which I designate as 'Men-o-pause', corresponds to the age range and style choices the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls made during the research period.

I argue that new passageways emerging in the field of visual anthropology over the last decade have led to more opportunities to expand creativity, experimentation and ethnographic

forms in research. These passages beyond traditional boundaries have established discourse and a place in research for gallery installations, such as the *ciné photo-essay* on the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, to inhabit. I further propose that an increase in observational lens- based practice, creative visual editing and the notion of multi-directionality in exhibition installations are among the emerging fissures generated within the intersection of art and social science.

## **Methodology**

The primary approach to research methodology in *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls* is qualitative participant observer as a woman behind the camera. The terms qualitative and participant observer are used to further classify the design of the study as a visual ethnographic project. The terms qualitative and participant observer are used to further classify the design of *Qualitative Research* (1994), editors Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln suggest that qualitative researchers "...attempt to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the study as a visual ethnographic project. In relation to this work, qualitative research practice places the female researcher within the subculture of the drag queens in their natural meanings

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<sup>16</sup> John W. Nunley and Cara McCarty, *Masks: Faces of Culture*. Saint Louis, Missouri: Harry N. Abrams, Inc with the Saint Louis Art Museum, 1999.

people bring to them”.<sup>17</sup> Participant observer is a term used in social science to the environment to observe, film, photograph and interview them. In *The SAGE Handbook of* describe a researcher doing fieldwork. The book *Collecting Qualitative Data: A Field Manual for Applied Research* (2013), describes participant observation as addressing problems and gaining insight beyond what other research methods can accomplish.<sup>17</sup> According to Greg Guest, Emily E. Namey and Marilyn L. Mitchell in *Collecting Qualitative Data*, participant observation includes three key factors:

1) being there with the participants of the study 2) building rapport with participants and 3) spending time interacting with the participants.<sup>18</sup>

The research also uses the social science technique of photo-elicitation—showing the drag queens photographs during interviews to help elicit memories and conversation. John Collier Jr. introduced the term photo-elicitation in 1967.<sup>19</sup> Collier was one of the early advocates for the use of photography in research and the field of visual anthropology. He discovered photography through the methodology of documentary photographer Dorothea Lange,<sup>20</sup> and through this friendship, according to an interview in 1965, Lange “...prompted him to use a camera as a principal means of interacting with the world”.<sup>21</sup> Collier’s notions of photo-elicitation as a visual methodology were expanded in 1986<sup>22</sup> by his son, anthropologist Malcolm Collier.<sup>23</sup> Malcolm Collier suggests that images can be used during photo-

<sup>17</sup> Greg Guest, Emily E. Namey, and Marilyn L. Mitchell, "Participant Observation," in *Collecting Qualitative Data: A Field Manual for Applied Research* (SAGE Publications Ltd., 2013).

<sup>18</sup> Guest, Namey, and Mitchell, "Participant Observation," 3, 6-7

<sup>19</sup> John Collier Jr., *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967).

<sup>20</sup> "INTERVIEW: "Interview with John Collier" (1965)," ASX, 2011, accessed March 9, 2019, <https://www.americansuburbx.com/2011/10/interview-interview-with-john-collier-1965.html>. The interview was recorded in 1965. Collier’s introduction to photography was through meeting the documentary photographer Dorothea Lange when he was a child, which set him on a path to become a photographer. Lange worked during the Depression era in the United States for the Farm Security Administration.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Mahler, "Earth Notes: John Collier Jr.," in *Earth Notes* (National Public Radio Arizona: KNAU radio 2015). <https://www.knau.org/post/earth-notes-john-collier-jr>. Collier was left partially deaf from a childhood accident and developed an acute visual sense.

<sup>22</sup> John Collier Jr. and Malcolm Collier, *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method Revised and Expanded Edition* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986).

<sup>23</sup> Malcolm Collier, "The Applied Visual Anthropology of John Collier: A Photo Essay," in *Visual Interventions: Applied Visual Anthropology*, ed. Sarah Pink (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 30

elicitation as both direct and indirect sources of information, as they can trigger understanding through responses.<sup>24</sup> Malcolm Collier argues, “Photographs, beyond a certain point, do not ‘speak for themselves’...”<sup>25</sup>

To social scientist Douglas Harper, the voices of both subjects and researcher are essential in photo-elicitation.<sup>26</sup> The voices of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls and the visual researcher are intertwined during the on-camera photo-elicitation process in *How Did I Get Here?*, an essay film explicating the research methodology and results. The researcher shifts from the anonymous capture of the original still images in a public space to a collaborative approach with the three drag queens. The power dynamics change and the resulting shift takes the project from the public space to the private space, where the drag queens gather as friends to prepare their visages and outfits together and the photographer/filmmaker is invited to participate from behind the camera. The project also includes the technique of autoethnography or insertion of the researcher into the frame during the filming of the photo-elicitation interviews. Autoethnography is defined as both process and product by Carolyn Ellis, Tony Adams and Arthur P. Bochner in the article “Autoethnography: An Overview” (2011). They write, “Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience.”<sup>27</sup>

### **The creative work**

The installation of creative material for exhibition consists of the following works: *Unmasking*, featuring projections and photographs; *In Drag*, a visual essay of still and moving projections and prints; *Then and Now*, a projected single-channel work; and *How Did I Get Here?*, an experimental essay film. The four sections, combined as a single installation,

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<sup>24</sup> Malcolm Collier, "Photographic Exploration of Social and Cultural Experience," in *Viewpoints: Visual Anthropologists at Work*, ed. Mary Strong (text) and Laena Wilder (visual) (Austin: University of Texas Press 2009), 22.

<sup>25</sup> Collier, "Photographic Exploration of Social and Cultural Experience," 18.

<sup>26</sup> Douglas Harper, "Meaning and Work: A Study in Photo Elicitation," *Current Sociology* 34, no. 3 (1986): 26. Harper is also a photographer.

<sup>27</sup> Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: an overview," *Historical Social Research* 36, no. 4 (2011): 273.

form a *ciné photo-essay*, a visual essay of moving and still images, in three rooms. Each room peels away another layer, visually unmasking the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls to create a *ciné photo-essay* that operates as both art and an installation of visual ethnography.

The *Unmasking* section focuses on the ritual of Kuntina K. Klakalakis removing her elaborate facial masks of tape and makeup. Both of the looped works, *Unmasking 1* and *Unmasking 2*, are composed of two-channel video projections.

Photographs and moving images are installed in the section titled *In Drag*. The photographs are displayed in a variety of ways, including as mural wall prints. The photographs depict key moments with the drag queens. Each of the moving image works is approximately one minute long.

*Then and Now* (2017) is a five-minute single-channel video. It is a black-and-white diptych of archival photographs and new moving images. This section references the past and present on screen simultaneously. Still images from the Laneway archive dissolve one into another on the left side. Moving images of the same drag queens are situated on the right side of the frame. This silent filmic essay shows the lives of the drag queens in public and private spaces.

The experimental essay *How Did I Get Here?* (2019) is a 20-minute, single-channel video. Still and moving images give the background information about a photographer and three drag queens. The work tells the story from the days of Laneway recovery parties as the researcher shows the photographs to the drag queens for the first time. The photographer researcher appears on screen discussing the photographs and the essay film is reflexive in the sense that it reflects on my role as photographer and filmmaker with the drag queens within the research process, as well as on my appearance on screen as the researcher during the photo-elicitation process.



## CONTENT OF THE WRITTEN THESIS

**The Laneway Leica Years—Street Photography and Drag Queens** chapter examines the practice of street photography through the eyes of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. A case study using Agnès Varda's film *Ulysse* (1982),<sup>28</sup> in which she looks back at a photograph she captured early in her career on a beach in France, frames the importance of re-examining early works with the voices of both the photographer and the subjects of the photographs. Also, the oeuvre of Robert Frank is viewed—through the prism of overlapping boundaries between still and moving images in the exhibition installation *Robert Frank: Books, Films, 1947-2015*<sup>29</sup> in Istanbul, Turkey (2015)—as the genesis for the *ciné photo-essay*. The chapter contains a discussion of contextual history of drag queen culture in Sydney, which underpins later discussions.

**The Evolution of the *Ciné Photo-essay: Then and Now*** explicates overlapping and intermedial practices, such as photo-book and photo-essay editing, slideshow production and the essay film, in creating the hybrid installation of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. The photo-essay is a series of still photographs that creates a narrative or statement and is an under-theorised subject area within the trajectory of documentary history, according to theorists Timothy Corrigan in *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (2011)<sup>30</sup> and Philippe Mather in *Stanley Kubrick at Look Magazine: Authorship and Genre in Photojournalism and Film* (2013).<sup>31</sup> Historically, the photo-essay has been tied to the print media and photojournalism. The demise of print outlets and the proliferation of online slideshows have created new horizons for the photo-essay beyond these ties to traditional media. The discussions in this chapter use the historically under-theorised photo-essay and overlap with film sequences to further develop the idea of the *ciné photo-essay*.

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<sup>28</sup> Agnès Varda, *Ulysse*, (France: Ciné Tamaris, 1982).

<sup>29</sup> FotoIstanbul, "Baska Hayatlar: Lives of others " (Istanbul: Diart Prints, 2015). This was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual International Festival of Photography through FotoIstanbul in Turkey.

<sup>30</sup> Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne After Marker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> Philippe Mather, *Stanley Kubrick at Look Magazine: Authorship and Genre in Photojournalism and Film* (Bristol, UK: intellect, 2013).

**The Intersection of Visual Art and Social Science** explores the historical evolution of visual anthropology, covering key practitioners such as Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, Jean Rouch, and David and Judith MacDougall. The historical suspicion of the visual from within anthropology is charted in comparison with the acceptance of the written word, through the writings and reflections of visual anthropologists David MacDougall, Jay Ruby and through those of visual sociologists Howard S. Becker and Elizabeth Chaplin. There will be further discussion of the direct relationship to practice in later chapters.

**Methodology** describes the techniques utilised to provide the research structure and the formal, ethical and political concerns within the qualitative ethnographic study of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. The notion of the voices of both the subjects and researcher as essential to the photo-elicitation process is advanced through the ideas of social scientists, such as in Harper's article *Meaning and Work: A Study in Photo Elicitation* (1986).<sup>32</sup> This chapter situates the project in relation to visual anthropology, including concepts by Jean Rouch, such as shared anthropology and ciné transe, and David MacDougall's participatory filmmaking.

**Beyond the Boundaries: New Directions in Visual Anthropology and a Pathway to the Ciné Photo-essay** advances new directions in visual anthropology and a pathway to the *ciné photo-essay*. The ideas and arguments of Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz in books such as *Visualizing Anthropology* (2005)<sup>33</sup> and *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life* (2009),<sup>34</sup> along with the work of Sarah Pink in the books *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2009)<sup>35</sup> and *The Future of Visual Anthropology: Engaging the Senses* (2006),<sup>36</sup> shine a light on visual anthropology breaking free from the confines of science.

<sup>32</sup> Harper, "Meaning and Work: A Study in Photo Elicitation"

<sup>33</sup> Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, eds., *Visualizing Anthropology* (Bristol: Intellect, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Sarah Pink, *The Future of Visual Anthropology: Engaging the Senses* (London: Routledge, 2006).

## Chapter 1

### The Laneway Leica Years: Street Photography and Drag Queens

*The Glitzy Glamour Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay* sprang from two events. The first was crossing paths with drag queens I had photographed several years earlier in Sydney. The second was viewing an exhibition installation in Istanbul, Turkey, by photographer and filmmaker Robert Frank. This chapter explores these two events and their impact in detail and argues that from these two seeds, the PhD research grew into an exploration of a subculture of drag queens through visual means and forms where the boundaries between still and moving images are shape-shifting.

This chapter examines, through a case study, the notion of looking back at an archive photograph from one's past as a bridge to the experiences of the present, as the photographer and the trio of drag queens do in the essay film *How Did I Get Here?* (2019).<sup>1</sup> Agnès Varda's vivid memoir film *Ulysse* (1982) provided the motivation for conducting this on-camera process of looking back with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls at photographs such as *The Laneway: Over + Out* (2007) **(Figure 1)**. *Ulysse* explores the importance of using the voices of both photographer and subjects to discover both perspectives, as Varda attempts to construct a more rounded account of what was happening in a photograph she captured in 1954. The chapter ends with an exploration of the rise and fall of drag performance bars and public LGBTQ spaces such as The Laneway. The lockout laws and gay bar closures in Sydney emerged as key factors for the changes in drag over the last 20 years.

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<sup>1</sup> Agnes Varda, "Ulysse," (France: Ciné Tamaris, 1982).



Figure 1: Tamara Voninski, *The Laneway: Over + Out*, 2002. Variable dimensions.

### **Background: The Laneway and the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls**

The Laneway was the name of a free public recovery party along Hill Street, Surry Hills on the morning after each Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and Sleaze Ball. An understanding of the concept of street photography in the Laneway in the 1990s and 2000s is fundamental to background for the research on the drag queen trio. Garry Wotherspoon writes about his Laneway experiences the year he wore a wedding veil, black jockstrap and leather mask in his book *Gay Sydney: A History* (2016). Wotherspoon writes:

I have a photo of myself and friends from the 1983 parade. In the aftermath of the party we are sitting in the gutter, probably in the lane that runs between the Flinders Hotel and the Beresford Hotel—a major gathering place for stalwarts who, by sunrise, are just coming down from whatever they have taken and are not yet ready to go home to bed...We all look exhausted but happy.<sup>2</sup>

The early morning scenes in the Laneway were filled with a carnival-like, decadent atmosphere of wild abandon, costumes and revelry. Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girl Kuntina K. Klakalakis fondly

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<sup>2</sup> Garry Wotherspoon, *Gay Sydney: A History* (Sydney: New South Publishing, 2016), 2.

remembers the Laneway as an “oasis”.<sup>3</sup> Referring to the recovery parties, she says, “It’s unthought of now to sit around in a gutter, being able to go into a pub, come outside and sit in the gutter and have a drink. You just can’t do that anymore.”<sup>4</sup> Kuntina’s first Laneway experience was as the character Lola, wearing over-exaggerated breasts. Della Deluxe remembers sitting in the gutter for close to six hours that year.<sup>5</sup>

*The Laneway: Over + Out* symbolises the end of an era to the three drag queens, on social, political and technological levels. In the photograph, the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls parade through the street with Yunka Ivanabitch, on the left, holding a placard that reads “Glamour Girl” and Della Deluxe on the right with her arm around Kuntina K. Klakalakis. This image was taken at the very end of the Laneway years. Kuntina is wearing an outfit made of stockings with a faux bloody sanitary pad on the outside front of her underwear. A woman wearing a schoolgirl uniform stands in the foreground. The words *Over + Out* have been spray painted on a wall. People are sitting on the footpaths looking up and watching the drag queen trio pass by in the afternoon sunshine. Re-examining *The Laneway: Over + Out* over a decade later, it is obvious that times have changed. In the photograph, people are sitting together talking and looking around; there are no mobile phones in sight. The following excerpts are from the transcript of the essay film *How Did I Get Here?* (2019).<sup>6</sup> The conversation took place on camera between the photographer and the three drag Queens—Della Deluxe, Yunka Ivanabitch and Kuntina K. Klakalakis—as they looked at the photograph *The Laneway: Over + Out*.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I think it’s really curious above *Over + Out* they wrote a copyright symbol...Also the ‘+’ positive symbol. That was really the time that HIV became set as a more manageable condition, rather than a potential death sentence. I think the ’90s were an uncertain time about whether the retrovirals were going to be a long-term solution for people living with HIV. The symbol of the plus is always an iconic one among gay men.

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<sup>3</sup> Tamara Voninski, "How Did I Get Here?," (Sydney Australia, 2019), Film Transcript (appendix). The film transcript is in the appendix.

<sup>4</sup> Della Deluxe, Yunka Ivanabitch, and Kuntina K. Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls," ed. Tamara Voninski (appendix, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."

<sup>6</sup> Voninski, "How Did I Get Here?." Film Transcript in appendix.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I got awarded best slut. *Best Old Slut* by ACON.<sup>7</sup> They had an awards night and gave me an award for being the best slut. ACON had a program called Safe Sex Sluts and we went to parties and promoted safe sex. I think that's the year I got the award and that's why I'm wearing the badge.

Della Deluxe: I used to give guys condoms and say, 'Yeah go fill that up and bring it back. Thanks!' I was the dirty slut.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I think Tamara had photographed us enough times by that stage; there was more familiarity. If it had been anyone else at that proximity taking photos, I'd be like 'Why are you taking photos? Who are you? Why are you taking photos so close?' Often, press photographers either have a card or a lanyard or something to indicate that. Often, I ask why people are taking photographs. I mean, I know why they're taking photographs. But where are they from?<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to the denizens of the Laneway scene I photographed, I was a fag hag, an outsider who arrived and wandered around the Laneway for hours with two leica cameras and a small camera bag full of black-and-white film. The term outsider in ethnographic field research is someone from the outside looking in, whereas an insider is someone examining or investigating their own particular culture from within. This position can sometimes shift in fieldwork; the outsider crosses boundaries to become an insider. Academics Dusanee Suwankhong and Pranee Liamputtong succinctly describe outsider research as it aligns to my experience working within the Laneway and the subsequent Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls research. They write:

Outsiders might have to take more time to gain trust from the local people as they are viewed as strangers to the community. However, this position could be advantageous as they might be able to see different perspectives, ones that insiders might fail to see.<sup>9</sup>

Insiders and outsiders offer important and valid perspectives within research. My perspective as an outsider allowed me to form links between drag performance and my own embodied experiences as a woman.

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<sup>7</sup> ACON stands for Aids Council of NSW.

<sup>8</sup> Voninski, "How Did I Get Here?."

<sup>9</sup> Dusanee Suwankhong and Pranee Liamputtong, "Cultural Insiders and Research Fieldwork: Case Studies From Cross-Cultural Research With Thai People," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 14, no. 5 (2015): 6.

## **Reconnecting with Kuntina K. Klakalakis**

In 2014, I encountered an intriguing looking man wearing an obvious fake comb-over and a magnificent vintage monocle at a university dinner. He looked vaguely familiar, but I could not place how I knew him. He looked at me intently through his monocle and said, “Are you the creepy girl who used to hide behind telegraph poles and photograph me and my friends in the Laneway?” He was also ‘She’, a drag queen known as Kuntina K. Klakalakis of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. I was struck by three phrases from his question to me. My first reaction was a feeling of awe that he remembered that I had photographed him. The second thing that struck me was the word he used to describe me—creepy. The third thing that struck me was the description of how I captured photographs by “hiding behind telegraph poles”. This was the first time someone from my street photographs had turned the tables on me and relayed what it was like to be on the other side of my camera.

Connecting with Kuntina K. Klakalakis led me to deeply question the changes in my photography practice between the Laneway days and now. We met on several occasions over coffee to talk about the Laneway, drag, photography and visual art research.<sup>10</sup> She initially enquired about printing a copy of the photograph *The Laneway: Over + Out* that she had seen published a few years earlier in a magazine, for her friends Della Deluxe and Yunka Ivanabitch, also of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. I searched my archive from the last 20 years in Australia. As I re-examined the stark and ethereal black-and-white negative strips from the Laneway years, the first seed of this research project began to grow.

## **The Experience of the Subject: Street Photography Ethics**

A contemporary and timeless definition of street photography by Alex Webb and Rebecca Norris Webb was published in an interview exploring new creative territories in the *Lens Culture Street Photography Guide* (2019). From this perspective, street photography is a definition of the type of photography I practised during the Laneway era in Sydney. The Webb wife and husband duo say:

More than anything else, it implies an approach to photography driven largely by curiosity and instinct rather than intellect. This stands in stark contrast to certain kinds of traditional photojournalistic work, as well as to conceptual photography. A photojournalist might embark on a journey because he or she has a specific subject or ‘story’ in mind; a conceptual photographer is often led by an idea. The street photographer, on the

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<sup>10</sup> We were both practising artists and PhD candidates during my PhD research.

other hand, approaches a place or situation with as few preconceptions as possible, and simply tries to respond visually.<sup>11</sup>

This description, however, considers only the photographer's experience, not the people being photographed. The problematic aspect of street photography is not the legal right to photograph in public. The contentious issue is the idea of a moral right to photograph people anonymously in public spaces. The Arts Law Centre of Australia outlines rights and restrictions concerning street photography.<sup>12</sup> The law centre states that street photography is legal in Australia in open public places with a few exceptions, such as around the Opera House forecourt in Sydney, where photographers need official permission; however, capturing images of strangers unaware they are being photographed on the street raises serious ethical questions regarding invasion of privacy in public places. According to Jessica Lake in the article "Is it OK for People to Take Pictures of You in Public and Publish Them?" (2014), freedom of expression often outweighs an individual's right to privacy in Australian courts. Lake writes, "But it is surely timely for us to think again about people's feelings of violation and humiliation when their images are circulated to millions online without their consent."<sup>13</sup> In *The New York Times* Lensblog article "Protecting the Right to Photograph, or not to be Photographed" (2013), Olivier Laurent suggests that an increasingly suspicious public is making photography challenging in terms of privacy issues.<sup>14</sup> The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls discovered the image *The Laneway, Over + Out* published in a gay magazine. However, they were not outraged, they wanted a copy of the image to remember the experience of their last Laneway.

My approach on the street during the Laneway years was to introduce myself early in the day to all of the drag queens. I told them my name and explained that I was documenting street and drag queen culture through photography in the Laneway. My aim was to capture real moments as they were happening. However, the logistics of the close proximity of my camera and small laneways meant that I would be very visible rather than an unnoticed, metaphoric fly on the wall. Upon a brief introduction and receiving their oral permission to photograph them in drag, I enquired if I

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<sup>11</sup> "Interview with Alex Webb and Rebecca Norris Webb Exploring New Creative Territory," Lens Culture Street Photography Guide 2019, Lens Culture, 2019, accessed 11/06/2019, 2019, <https://www.lensculture.com/?guide=street-guide-2019>.

<sup>12</sup> "Information sheets- Street Photographer's Rights," Arts + Law, 2019, accessed June 1, 2019, <https://www.artslaw.com.au/information-sheet/street-photographers-rights/>.

<sup>13</sup> Jessica Lake, "Is it OK for people to take pictures of you in public and publish them?," *The Conversation* (2014), <http://theconversation.com/is-it-ok-for-people-to-take-pictures-of-you-in-public-and-publish-them-27098>.

<sup>14</sup> Olivier Laurent, "Protecting the Right to Photograph, or Not to Be Photographed," *The New York Times* (Les Blog) 2013, April 23 2013, <https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/23/paris-city-of-rights/>.



could photograph them later in the day. No one ever objected. I photographed the drag queens throughout the day and often when they were unaware of the camera.

### **The Opposite of the Tough-guy Approach**

An example of the opposite approach on the street is Magnum photographer Bruce Gilden, who has photographed drag queens in several of his photographic series on the streets of New York over his career. Gilden uses an in-your-face approach, working close to passersby, often with direct flash. This type of flash photography often stuns or blinds the person for a few seconds. By the time the people have recovered, he has drifted down the street. In the video *Photographers in Focus: Bruce Gilden*, he describes his approach as an “attack” with his camera.<sup>15</sup> In the film *Everybody Street: A Film about New York City Street Photography* (2013), Gilden is portrayed as aggressive as he physically bumps into someone who protests being photographed on the street.<sup>16</sup> Gilden’s tough-guy exterior translates into an aggressive methodology that has been criticised by many, including renowned international street photographers. An example of the sharp criticism is from photographer Joel Meyerowitz, who refers to Gilden as a bully on the streets.<sup>17</sup> Journalist Sean O’Hagan at *The Guardian* suggests that Gilden’s style is cruel and dehumanising to unsuspecting subjects.<sup>18</sup> There is a vast difference between still photographers and filmmakers who anticipate moments and ones who instigate through aggressive confrontational styles. The approach to photographing and filming the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls was the exact opposite of Gilden’s tough-guy street tactics.

### **Agnès Varda’s *Ulysse*: Visual Detective Work and Experimental Ethnography**

in the film *Ulysse*, French filmmaker and photographer Agnès Varda retraces the story behind a photograph she took early in her career.<sup>19</sup> Like a visual detective, Varda recounts how the photograph came to be and her memories of the location, a naked man, a boy named Ulysse and a dead goat on the beach at the French seashore in 1954. Lindsay Peters’ categorisation of Varda’s work shifts her from the genres of documentary or fiction into ethnography. Peters, a film scholar and producer in Canada, classifies Varda’s work from the film as that of an ethnographer

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<sup>15</sup> Joppe Rog, "Photographers in Focus: Bruce Gilden," (NOWNESS, December 12, 2018 2018).

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=We\\_vS\\_-rgng](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=We_vS_-rgng).

<sup>16</sup> Cheryl Dunn, "Everybody Street: A Film About New York City Street Photography," ( Alldayeveryday, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> "Joel Meyerowitz Says He despises Bruce Gilden's Attitude, Calls Him a Bully," [petapixel.com](http://petapixel.com), 2012, accessed December 13, 2018, <https://petapixel.com/2012/11/12/joel-meyerowitz-says-he-despises-bruce-gildens-attitude-calls-him-a-bully/>.

<sup>18</sup> "A latter-day freak show? Bruce Gilden's extreme portraits are relentlessly cruel," [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com), 2015, accessed December 16, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/aug/19/bruce-gilden-face-street-portraits-photographs-book>.

<sup>19</sup> Varda, "Ulysse." *Ulysse* as a cinematic essay about a still photograph won the 1984 Cesar Award for Best Documentary Short. Varda was known as the Mother of the French New Wave in cinema. She passed away in 2019.

experimenting through creation of narrative in her films.<sup>20</sup> This description brings the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls work into focus as an investigation into what was happening in the Laneway photographs.

By creating a filmic work, Varda was able to turn the lens onto her photography, investigating her role in making the photograph by looking through the eyes of the people in the photograph. In a 2015 interview about *Ulysse*, Varda says, "I learned a lot about how people can look at an image and load it with different feelings—the same image."<sup>21</sup> Similar to Varda's visual detective work and experimental ethnography, the research project focusing on the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls began as a means to retrace my own steps behind the camera to find out what was happening in photographs through the eyes of the drag queens. Through the lens of this investigation in the form of filmic ethnography, the photographs began to depict a particular subculture then and now. By filming the photography subjects years later, I was able to investigate, through film and photography, a subculture that was outside the norms of the glittery drag queen stage culture, to label, understand and question how it developed within Sydney's gay community.

### **Varda and *Cinécriture***

In *Cinevardaphoto*, a compilation of three short films that reference photography, Varda is credited on screen as the *Cinécrit*.<sup>22</sup> Varda's style is a *cinécriture*—a form of visual and aural writing with film. The term is translated directly as "cinema writing" in Violet Lucca's interview with Varda.<sup>23</sup> Scholar Ágnes Pethő investigated Varda's *cinécriture* in terms of intermediality and layers of the real. Pethő suggests:

...for Varda, cinema is an *artefact* in the highest degree; *craftsmanship*, *handiwork* and *ritual* involving bodily presence and interpersonal relations.<sup>24</sup>

Varda describes the term *cinécriture* as a way of understanding the practice and thoughts of the filmmaker.<sup>25</sup> Emma Jackson, on the other hand, suggests that Varda's *cinécriture* is the slippage

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<sup>20</sup> Lindsay Peters, "Filming in the feminine plural : the ethnochoranic narratives of Agnès Varda" (MA degree Concordia University, 2010), <https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/979519/>. Lindsay Peters outlines Varda's work as experimental ethnography as the basis of her thesis.

<sup>21</sup> "Interview: Agnès Varda," Film Comment, 2015, accessed November 12, 2017, <https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/interview-agnes-varda/>

<sup>22</sup> Agnes Varda, "Cinevarda Photo," (France: Cinema Guild, 2010). In the dvd compilation *Cinevarda Photo*, Varda explores the idea of a photograph in three short films including *Ulysse*, *Ydessa* and *Salut les Cubains*.

<sup>23</sup> Lucca, "Interview: Agnès Varda." The interview took place following the announcement that Varda would be awarded the honorary Palme d'Or at Cannes Film Festival in 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Ágnes Pethő, "Intermediality as Metalepsis in the 'Cinécriture' of Agnès Varda," *Film and Media Studies*, no. 3 (2010): 84.

<sup>25</sup> In the DVD extras of Varda, "Cinevarda Photo.", Agnes Varda said:

between portraiture and observation, infused with a feminist approach as a filmic ethnographic eye.<sup>26</sup> Alison Smith suggests that the still image is powerful and significant in Varda's film work, as the still and moving often meet.<sup>27</sup> Smith describes Varda's use of photographic techniques in "colour and light, position and structure" as her *mise en scene*.<sup>28</sup> Varda's commentary weaves the story, mythology and interviews to evoke memory and explanations. Smith writes:

By the end of *Ulysse*, Varda seems to have established that a photograph alone does not in fact hold a concrete, objective memory; as a key to the past it can only function in conjunction with the consciousness of the people involved.<sup>29</sup>

In *Ulysse*, the naked man in the photograph standing on the pebbles, staring out to sea, is Fouli Elia, a magazine editor who now can barely remember the day or circumstances of Varda's photograph. The naked boy curled up on the stones looking toward the camera is Ulysse, who today has a family and runs a bookstore in Paris. Ulysse, as a grown man, is hesitant in a manner that borders on being uncooperative in front of Varda's camera as he states that he does not remember. Bienvenida, Ulysse's mother, remembers her son's pain and illness and Varda's film is dedicated to her. The photograph, according to Smith, "...was not really a significant moment for them, although it does provide a possible route into their personal pasts, through other occasions which it evokes without showing them".<sup>30</sup> There are fragments and hazy memories for the people in and around the frame of the photograph. The dead goat is symbolised by another goat that examines the photograph and then eats it. The film opens and closes with a lingering view of the still photograph. Despite Varda's excellent detective work, Smith writes, "In the end, the image is ambiguous."<sup>31</sup>

The visual research in the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls project was informed by Varda's filmic ethnographic approach and the particular method of showing the photograph in *Ulysse* of the man, boy and goat on the beach. Cutting through the fog of time and memory, Varda gained insight through the subjects' experiences. Ultimately, Varda gave her subjects a voice when the

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*Cinécriture* means 'cine-writing.' I say that many times because people say when they speak about a film, they say, 'It's well-written.' They think about the dialogue, which can be well-written or bad. For me, a film is not written by the screenplay or the dialogue, it's written by the way of the filming. The choices that you have to make between still shot or traveling shot, color or black-and-white, speedy way of acting or slow-motion or whatever, all these choices, and the lens you choose, and the camera you choose, and then the editing, and then the music or not, and the mixing—all these choices all the way through the film, all through the making of the film, that's what cine-writing is. It's like the style in a way. I never say 'it's well-written' because I know then people think about dialogue. So, I say, 'it's well cine-written.'

<sup>26</sup> Emma Jackson, "The eyes of Agnes Varda: portraiture, *cinécriture*, and the filmic ethnographic eye," *Feminist Review*, no. 96 (2010).122

<sup>27</sup> Alison Smith, *Agnes Varda*, French Film Directors, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).12-13

<sup>28</sup> Smith, *Agnes Varda*.18

<sup>29</sup> Smith, *Agnes Varda*. 155

<sup>30</sup> Smith, *Agnes Varda*. 155

<sup>31</sup> Smith, *Agnes Varda*. 157

photograph came back to life from her archive in a different form through a filmic investigation. Her own perspective and experience is interwoven through her *cinécriture* in the shooting, framing and editing of *Ulysse*. Similarly, within *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay*, the filming charts the social and political changes in Sydney through a different metaphorical lens, as the subjects gaze at the Laneway party years, their own lives in drag, and back through the lens of the camera at the person capturing their images.

### **From Flâneuse to Ciné Photo-essay Via Robert Frank's Overlapping Oeuvre**

When one is a stranger in a strange land, one has a quest to understand or make sense of the unfamiliar world. For photographer Robert Frank, the quest led him to walk the streets of New York City as an immigrant, an outsider, from 1947, trying to find his place in a foreign world far away from his native Switzerland. He wandered and explored the city and eventually across the United States on a road trip with his camera that became the book *The Americans* (1958).<sup>32</sup>

Like Frank, I spent my years as a newly arrived immigrant to Australia walking and wandering and trying to make sense of who and where I was in the city of Sydney through the viewfinder of my camera. Lauren Elkin describes the concept and experience of women who wander the streets in the book *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* (2016). Elkin suggests, "Walking is mapping with your feet."<sup>33</sup> Elkin wrote about prostitutes on Parisian streets and female photographers to convey the historical and underappreciated female experience of wandering. Elkin converted the masculine French word *flâneur* to the feminine version, *flâneuse*.<sup>34</sup> As a *flâneuse*, I discovered hidden corners of light and activity around Sydney, documenting daily life that unfolded on the streets directly in front of my camera like a series of waking dreams. This led to encounters such as coming across a network of street drag queens in their element, enjoying life in The Laneway.

The dream-like, hallucinatory and timeless photographs that compose Frank's wanderings in the book *The Americans* are the benchmark of contemporary documentary street photography,<sup>35</sup> yet the book received harsh reviews in its original release and sold few copies in the United States. In contrast, the work today is considered a seminal monograph of documentary street photography and a lyrical photo-essay. The rhythm of the editing and sequencing of the images are the keys to

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Frank, *Les Américains*, First ed. (Paris: Robert Delpire, 1958). The book was originally published in France.

<sup>33</sup> Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2016), 21.

<sup>34</sup> Elkin, *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*, 20.

<sup>35</sup> Frank, *Les Américains*.

understanding the visual language of the photographer. Frank's film works explore many similar themes as *The Americans*, yet few critics or viewers place the rest of his filmography or other books in the same exemplary paradigm. Recent exceptions are found in the book *Awakening the Eye: Robert Frank's American Cinema* (2015) by George Kouvaros, and in the exhibition catalogue *Robert Frank: Books and Film: 1947-2016* (2017).<sup>36</sup>



**Figure 2:** Tamara Voninski, *Robert Frank: Books, Films, 1947-2015*, 2015. Installation view.

Surrounded by the immersive installation project at the Foto Istanbul festival in Turkey, *Robert Frank: Books, Films, 1947-2015* (2015), I was struck by the crossing of genre boundaries and inter-connectivity of still photographs and film within Frank's photo-essays, book layouts and film montage (**Figure 2**). Frank's work, displayed in this unique format and set in an abandoned orphanage, pushed beyond his well-known photographs from *The Americans*. This was in stark contrast to the last Frank exhibition I had experienced, at The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. *Robert Frank: Moving Out* (1994) had been filled with traditional archival handmade photographic prints. The Istanbul installation, in contrast, was composed of disposable material typically associated with a pop-up exhibition of low-cost printing.

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<sup>36</sup> George Kouvaros, *Awakening the Eye: Robert Frank's American Cinema* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2015). Robert Frank and Alex Ruhle, *Robert Frank: Books and Film: 1947-2016* (New York: Steidl Publishers, 2017).

I began to examine the border crossings in practice among the photography books, photo-essays and edited sequences of Frank's work in relation to my documentation of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. The floor-to-ceiling space in the Turkey exhibition was installed with rolls of newsprint several metres long containing inkjet printing, filled with either contact sheets of Frank's black-and-white images or edited themed sequences of still images called *Seven Stories (2009)*.<sup>37</sup> The newsprint rolls resembled giant ancient scrolls and were filled with images swaying in the breeze. Long wires hung from the ceiling with each of Frank's books floating in space for viewers to open and examine. In a nearby room, Frank's films, produced over 67 years, played on a continuous loop. The display strategy of the exhibition inspires a re-reading of Frank beyond the bastion of documentary photography to the other elements of his practice.

Viewing the exhibition, I experienced a profound sense of borders shifting between photography and film; the traditional genres began to merge and blur. A visual installation using still and moving images depicting the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls emerged as an idea. The reconnection with the three drag queens coincided with profound shifts within my own visual practice from photography to moving image, from photo-essay to film loops. The hybrid *ciné photo-essay*, thus, emerged as a seed of a concept in the middle of Frank's egalitarian postmodern display of his oeuvre of moving pictures, scrolls of still images and suspended books. The visual research project depicting the three drag queens from the Laneway using still and moving images, influenced by the forms of the photo-essay, book form and film loops, was conceived by imagining forms overlapping beyond the traditional boundaries between photography and film. This would create hybrid forms in *ciné photo-essay*.

### **The Rise and Fall of Public Drag Performance Spaces in Sydney**

The documentary film *Croc-A-Dyke Dundee: The Legend of Dawn O'Donnell (2014)* highlights the shift from the illegality of homosexuality and drag during the 1950s and '60s in Sydney to the popularity of drag shows in bars and clubs throughout the city today. In the '60s, a secret gay underworld existed where various people hosted private house parties every night.<sup>38</sup> Dawn O'Donnell owned many of the clubs and bars along Oxford Street, along with the Imperial Hotel in Erskineville, where drag queens performed for audiences regularly.<sup>39</sup> O'Donnell says in an

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<sup>37</sup> The *Robert Frank: Books, Films, 1947-2015* panel description states: "Seven Stories compiles seven image sequences, exploring different aspects of Frank's life and milieu: friends and family, his homes in Mabou and New York, still lifes, landscapes and impressions from travels to China and Spain."

<sup>38</sup> Fiona Cunningham-Reid, "Croc-A-Dyke Dundee: The Legend of Dawn O'Donnell" (Australia: SBS 2014).

<sup>39</sup> The Imperial Hotel was one of the main filming locations for "Pricilla Queen of the Desert".

interview for *Croc-A-Dyke Dundee*: “In Sydney when it was illegal it was more fun.”<sup>40</sup> Drag performer and owner of the Purple Onion club, David Williams, suggests in the documentary that, in the '60s, wearing men's underwear under women's clothing was considered fancy dress, but wearing women's underwear was an offense for which the police could throw you into a holding cell. The criminalisation and demonisation of homosexuality, and in particular of dressing in drag, shifted after the 1970s. According to an anonymous voiceover in *Croc-A-Dyke Dundee*, Sydney metamorphosed “...from a sleepy provincial city to one of the gayest cities in the world”.<sup>41</sup> The bars O'Donnell owned along Oxford Street were places where gay culture thrived and drag performances with lavish costumes were a highlight of a night out in Sydney.

The Laneway, which is near Oxford Street in Surry Hills, has ceased to exist as a free public experience where hundreds of revelers gather to recover the morning after Mardi Gras. Those parties ceased in 2002. A commercialised party commenced in the Laneway in 2012; however, it became an expensive ticketed event with barriers, high fences and roving security guards. *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist Rachel Olding reported on the atmosphere of the newly ticketed Laneway party in the article “After the parade, recovery party returns to Trash Alley”. Olding writes, “The party dwindled when the Beresford and Flinders were sold and became heterosexual venues, but a gaggle of Mardi Gras organisers and old-timers decided it was time for a comeback.”<sup>42</sup>

There is an uncertain future for drag culture in the cities around the world once known as thriving gay metropolises. In San Francisco, California, for example, the inner-city is developing commercial spaces and shifting in a fashion similar to Sydney, where gay bars and drag performance spaces have shut down due to high-priced real estate. Journalists James Nichols of *The Huffington Post* and Soraya Nadia McDonald of *The Washington Post*, in their critiques of the drag film *Beautiful by Night*, both note that as cities such as San Francisco become more gentrified, queer spaces are disappearing.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Cunningham-Reid, "Croc-A-Dyke Dundee: The Legend of Dawn O'Donnell".

<sup>41</sup> Cunningham-Reid, "Croc-A-Dyke Dundee: The Legend of Dawn O'Donnell". David Williams adapted Broadway shows at the Purple Onion into drag performances such as “A Streetcar named Beatrice” where he played the role of Beatrice.

<sup>42</sup> Rachel Olding, "After the parade, recovery party returns to Trash Alley", *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 5, 2012, <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/after-the-parade-recovery-party-returns-to-trash-alley-20120305-1ucpg.html>.

<sup>43</sup> "Beautiful By Night," James Hosking Photo Series, Documents Aging Drag Queens," *Huffington Post*, 2015, accessed December 20, 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/james-hosking-beautiful-by-night\\_n\\_6380408](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/james-hosking-beautiful-by-night_n_6380408). Soraya Nadia McDonald, "In 'Beautiful By Night', James Hosking Captures a Spirit of San Francisco's Tenderloin That is Gradually Fading Away," *The Washington Post* 2015, January 6, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/01/06/in-beautiful-by-night-james-hosking-captures-a-spirit-of-san-franciscos-tenderloin-that-is-gradually-fading-away/?utm\\_term=.3610e54c4a75](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/01/06/in-beautiful-by-night-james-hosking-captures-a-spirit-of-san-franciscos-tenderloin-that-is-gradually-fading-away/?utm_term=.3610e54c4a75).

Sydney has high real-estate values and the added issue of strict lock-out laws that have led to fewer people going out at night. The lockout laws were introduced in 2014 with the intention of curbing alcohol-fueled violence. Bars, pubs and clubs in the Sydney central business district lock their doors at 1.30am with no new patrons allowed to enter and last drinks are at 3am. Reflecting on such changes since the Laneway years, Della Deluxe says:

I think the lockout laws that are in place now have changed a lot of things with going out and you're just not allowed to have fun anymore. And it's all because a few people that can't control themselves ruin it for everyone else. So that means no one's allowed to have fun.<sup>44</sup>

In the article "The 24/7 city, creativity and the lockout laws" in *The Conversation*, academic Oliver Watts suggests that the government is like a helicopter parent that does not trust citizens not to binge drink. Watts writes:

The modern city wants to accommodate the broad spectrum of life, from work to carnivalesque excess. Bars, clubs and other places of mischief have an enormously important role in our societies and not just for the young.<sup>45</sup>

Benjamin Riley, in the article "Off the Main Drag" for *The Star Observer* paints a grim picture of gay bars closing across Australia and "over-the-top drag extravaganzas" on the decline as "gay ghettos" disappear. Meanwhile, according to Riley, a new drag is emerging from the alternative scene.<sup>46</sup>

During the filming of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls from 2015-19, the streets and bars around Oxford Street were often empty. There were many For Sale or Lease signs on the windows of businesses in the area. Sydney's gay scene, once known for the colourful, lively drag performances portrayed in *Croc-A-Dyke Dundee* and Stephan Elliot's fictional film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994)<sup>47</sup> (based on three real Sydney drag queens), had been altered. In two decades, Sydney became a duller city with less shine and glitter and fewer feather boas, drag shows and gay bars.

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<sup>44</sup> Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."

<sup>45</sup> "The 24/7 city, creativity and the lockout laws," 2016, accessed January 5, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/the-24-7-city-creativity-and-the-lockout-laws-56271>.

<sup>46</sup> "Off the Main Drag," *Star Observer*, 2014, accessed November 28, 2018, <http://www.starobserver.com.au/features/community-spotlight/off-the-main-drag/124456>.

<sup>47</sup> Stephan Elliott, "The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert" (1994).



The black-and-white photographs of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls at the Laneway recovery parties in Sydney's Surry Hills were captured following the HIV crisis, which had devastated the gay community in the 1980s and '90s. The PhD research and observational video footage of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls was captured during the era of lockout laws. Another development, the Australian marriage equity postal vote, led to the legalisation of gay marriages in late 2017, in the middle of the filming of this project.

## Chapter 2

### The Evolution of the *Ciné Photo-essay: Then and Now*

From the golden era of printed pages, in publications such as *Life*, *Look* and *VU*, to the groupings of decisive moments presented as photo-essays by photographers in art or journalism, to the similarities in editing between mediums, to the loops of internet slideshows, the photo-essay has historically crossed its borders with film. Film theorists have written extensively about the still image in relation to motion, using metaphors of death, melancholy and fire and ice.<sup>1</sup> The still image as photogram or film still is another related topic that is often discussed in critical film discourse. The photo-essay, however, as a group of photographs edited into a rhythmic flow, with its linkages and blurring of boundaries between photography and film, is rarely mentioned in theoretical discourse.

The overlapping space between photography and film is where the hybrid *ciné photo-essay* germinates, through juxtapositions and editing, to become an experimental visual ethnography in the form of an exhibition installation. This chapter explores the historical and aesthetic antecedent forms of the *ciné photo-essay*. The visual work *Then and Now* is a monochrome projected diptych of still and moving images portraying the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls; the work blends intermedial models such as the photo-essay, book layouts and slideshows through its evolution, to link photography and film. This chapter is structured as a discussion of the creative work *Then and Now* followed by a mapping of the visual essay, concentrating on the photo-essay. The significance and rhythm of editing techniques is also explored.

The linkages that I posit in this chapter also address gaps in the historical and aesthetic view of the photo-essay in relation to the observational essay film. Traditionally, a photo-essay is a grouping of photographs arranged to explore a theme or tell a story, according to Arthur Goldsmith in the photojournalism section of *The*

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Wollen, "Fire and Ice," in *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2003). Peter Wollen wrote about fire and ice comparing film and photography.

*Encyclopedia of Photography* (1963).<sup>2</sup> Outside the borders of photojournalism for the print media, the photo-essay is often overlooked in critical discourse; for example, within film theory and post-media photography theory. I have previously argued, however, in the article “Redefining Photojournalism in a Post-Media Techno-Creative World”, (2017) and in the conference presentation “Photo-essay: The Liminal Space Linking Photography and Film” (2015),<sup>3</sup> that the photo-essay extends beyond the borders of media publishing to documentary and art in an era of the demise of traditional media publishing outlets.<sup>4</sup> As additional manifestations of the blurred border zones, photographic books are linked to moving images via the relationship between page layout and film montage, while slideshows can cross boundaries in online loops or live presentations.

### ***Then and Now***

The moving diptych *Then and Now* depicts the drag queens in two eras. On the left side of the screen, a selection of the original Laneway photographs rotates in slow motion, each dissolving into the next image so the frames are never completely still. One image fades like a distant memory as the next photograph emerges. On the right side of the screen, a moving *ciné moment* is juxtaposed. The contemporary moving images contain a sense of stillness.

I propose that the term *ciné moment* expands Henri Cartier-Bresson’s notion of the *decisive moment* beyond still photography, to include moving images.<sup>5</sup> In *Then and Now*, the *ciné moment* is juxtaposed with still decisive moments to construct new meaning and to link the past to the present. The 4-minute, 3-second work comprises

three segments of still and moving images—one paired with each drag queen—from their public moments of performance in the Laneway and their private, moving *ciné moments* dressing and transforming from male to female. This shift to capturing private moments was the result of collaboration between the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls and the photographer/filmmaker within the research project.

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<sup>2</sup> Arthur Goldsmith, "Photojournalism," in *The Encyclopedia of Photography* ed. Willard D. Morgan (New York: Greystone Press, 1963).

<sup>3</sup> Tamara Voninski, "Photo-essay: The Liminal Space Linking Photography and Film" (The Real and the Intermedial, Cluj Napoca, Romania, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Tamara Voninski, "Redefining Photojournalism in a Post-Media Techno-Creative World," *The International Journal of the Image* 8, no. 3 (2017), doi:10.18848/2154-8560/CGP/v08i03/41-52

<sup>5</sup> Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 195



Figure 3: Tamara Voninski, *Then and Now*, 2016. Film Still.



Figure 4: Tamara Voninski, *Then and Now*, 2016. Film Still.

*Then and Now* has historical ties to forms such as slideshows and photography book layouts. As a single-channel projection of the moving diptych, the work expands and blends the visual and theoretical concepts of the photo-essay, slideshow, photography book layout and essay film. The result is a moving book, a visual narrative of the past and present depicting the three drag queens then and now. This references experimental filmmaker Jem Cohen's notion of what he defines as a moving photo book created through film.<sup>6</sup> Cohen writes:

“The great difference between moving pictures and stills—I decide how long you will be with them. And I decide by a very small signal how long you are in and how long you are out.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Abina Manning, "Jem Cohen 2001: An interview," (Video Data Bank, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> "Questions and Answers: Jem Cohen," Brighton Film Festival, 2009, accessed May 15, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-PWNm9cXPA>.

Film and photography critic Isabel Stevens suggests Cohen's filmic moments are edited with his photographer's eye and exist in the margins of the photo book, film and Cohen's stream of consciousness.<sup>8</sup>

There are dissolves between the still and moving frames exhibited as a moving diptych in *Then and Now* (**Figures 3-9**). On the left side, the sequence depicts Kuntina K. Klakalakis removing a pair of underwear in the Laneway (**Figures 5-7**). On the right side, Kuntina dances and swings her long blonde hair in a *ciné moment* that dissolves into a close-up of her masking by covering her face in layers of Elastoplast (a skin-coloured medical tape) and makeup (**Figure 7**). Kuntina is also shown as a bearded lady in the Laneway juxtaposed with an extreme close-up of a tuft of hair jutting out from the mask of tape on her chin and contrasting with big bright lips (**Figures 8-9**). The still images from the Laneway years are moving through the slow dissolves while the moving *ciné moments* linger in the stillness of a filmic long take.

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<sup>8</sup> "Film of the week: Museum Hours ", <http://www.bfi.org.uk>, 2015, accessed 21/05/2016, 2016, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/film-week-museum-hours>.



Figure 5: Tamara Voninski, *Then and Now*, 2016. Film Still.



Figure 6: Tamara Voninski, *Then and Now*, 2016. Film Still.

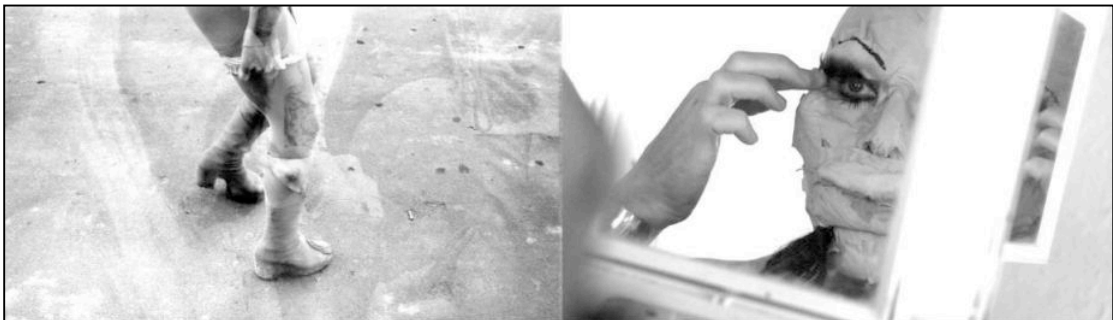


Figure 7: Tamara Voninski, *Then and Now*, 2016. Film Still.



Figure 8: Tamara Voninski, *Then and Now*, 2016. Film Still.



Figure 9: Tamara Voninski, *Then and Now*, 2016. Film Still.

### Mapping the Essay Form

The photo-essay, a discursive still photography format characterised by a grouping of photographs viewed together in a sequence or arranged in a layout to tell a story or convey an idea, is not fully charted in the history of the essay nor outside the parameters of traditional media publishing. In *The Encyclopedia of Photography*, photo editor Goldsmith describes the difference between the picture sequence, photo-story and photo-essay.<sup>9</sup> The photo-essay, according to Goldsmith (and noted by academic Philippe Mather) fits into mainstream media and the more personal work of artistic expression.<sup>9</sup> Goldsmith compares the photo sequence to “a selection of stills taken from a strip of motion-picture film”.<sup>10</sup> I argue that this notion of a connection between the photo sequence and the moving image can be extended to include the photo-essay.

In addition to being a flexible, adaptive, discursive and questioning experimental form, the essay is “like a hawk” surrounding something and spiral diving, a kind

<sup>9</sup> Goldsmith, "Photojournalism," 2785.

<sup>10</sup> Philippe Mather, *Stanley Kubrick at Look Magazine: Authorship and Genre in Photojournalism and Film* (Bristol, UK: intellect, 2013), 144.

of “walkabout”, according to author Phillip Lopate, in his appraisal of the personal essay.<sup>11</sup> Lopate’s vivid metaphors describing the essay form in the literary realm are applicable, yet never correlated in his analysis, to the visual form of the photo-essay.

Regarding the film format, Lopate notes in the essay *In Search of the Centaur: The Essay-Film* the camera has sluggish intelligence and essay films lack rational flow compared with the spoken word, which to Lopate is clear and precise.<sup>12</sup> Lopate’s analysis of the essay film alludes to a key reason why the photo-essay has been overlooked in much of the historical discourse of the essay. A viewpoint that gives supremacy to words often overshadows or disregards the intrinsic value of the visual in the essay format. Lopate writes:

What signals to me is that, in spite of Alexandre Astruc’s tempting utopian term ‘camera stylo’, the camera is not a pencil, and it is rather difficult to think with it in the way an essayist might.<sup>13</sup>

Other theorists’ notions of the photo-essay do not place such limitations on the form. Photography theorist Fred Ritchin describes the photo-essay as “...a form that allows photographers to develop a sustained and deepening narrative while establishing their own point of view” .<sup>14</sup> Academic Timothy Corrigan suggests that the photo-essay is a precursor, and key intermediate link, to film.<sup>15</sup> Corrigan writes:

If the essay film inherits many of the epistemological and structural distinctions of the literary essay, especially as it plays itself out as a dialogic tension between the verbal and the visual, a key transitional practice linking these two forms of representation is the photo-essay...<sup>16</sup>

Mather uses Stanley Kubrick’s early photojournalism to draw a connection between photojournalism and film. Mather describes the photo-essay “...as a

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<sup>11</sup> Phillip Lopate, *The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology From the Classical Era to the Present* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), xxiii-liv.

<sup>12</sup> Phillip Lopate, "In Search of the Centaur: The Essay-Film," *The Threepenny Review* 48, no. Winter (1992).

<sup>13</sup> Lopate, "In Search of the Centaur: The Essay-Film," 19.

<sup>14</sup> Fred Ritchin, *In Our Own Image: The Coming Revolution in Photography* (New York: Aperture, 1990), 48.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Corrigan, "The Forgotten Image Between Two Shots: Photos, Photograms, and the Essayistic," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2008); Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne After Marker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne After Marker*, 20.



compromise between the tight, compact statement of the single photograph and the time-based medium of film.”<sup>17</sup> Each of these theorists—Ritchin, Corrigan and Mather—adds layers of meaning to the definition and creative practice of shooting and editing a photo-essay, filling in the gaps missing in the historical definition of the form. The linking of photography and film through the photo-essay has become even more relevant in an evolving digital world, where the boundaries between still and moving images are becoming blurred.

The literary essay is firmly established within the evolution of the essayistic format, in contrast to essay films and the photo-essay. The 1997 tome *Encyclopedia of the Essay* is a thick academic resource for the history of essay structure and practitioners in various formats.<sup>18</sup> The essay film section of this text has a mere three-page entry.<sup>19</sup> The photo-essay, which is much longer established through the print media, is curiously missing altogether. The essay film as a genre was recognised by Hans Richter in the 1940 declaration “Der Filmessay: Eine neue Form des Dokumentarfilms” (The Film Essay: A New Form of Documentary Film).<sup>20</sup> The photo-essay evolved through the print formats of newspapers and magazines.

### **Evolution, not Death, for the Photo-essay**

The photo-essay format flourished in the multi-page layouts of publications such as *Life*, *Look* and *VU* magazines, often with a block of introductory text and extended captions for each photograph. With mainstream media outlets disappearing, however, discussion of the photo-essay often includes the word death. For example, theorist David Company argues that the death of Cartier-Bresson, the co-founder of Magnum Photos, marked the moment the photo-essay also died. Company writes:

If his death represented a moment of closure for the medium, it was for that model of art photography derived from classical photojournalism and

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<sup>17</sup> Mather, *Stanley Kubrick at Look Magazine: Authorship and Genre in Photojournalism and Film*, 180.

<sup>18</sup> "Encyclopedia of the Essay," in *Encyclopedia of the Essay*, ed. Tracey Chevalier (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> Nora Alter, "Essay Film," in *Encyclopedia of the Essay*, ed. Tracy Chevalier (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Nora M. Alter, "Translating the Essay Film into Film and Installation," *Journal of Visual Culture* 6, no. 44 (2007): 49.

reportage, a model which evolved rapidly in the inter-war years as a counterpoint to cinema: individual instants would be edited into paracinematic photo-essays for the illustrated press.<sup>21</sup>

Although many media outlets have ceased publication since the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, Campany's timeframe and overall assertion that Cartier-Bresson's death in 2004 marked a closure of the medium that created photo-essays overlooks the production of this form in the internet age. The form has expanded, via technology, at the same rate that media outlets have constricted and in numerous cases ceased to exist. Since 2004, many photojournalists have been capable of capturing either still photographs or video footage by pushing a small button.

The internet, with a proliferation of online magazines, became one of the primary outlets for professional photographers presenting photo-essays. A photo-essay on the internet flows from photograph to photograph as the imagery slides from frame to frame in intricate sets of sequences, like a filmic montage. They can appear in a virtual slideshow anywhere in the world on a continuous loop in a filmic version of photography in motion. Therefore, the moment of Cartier-Bresson's death did not mark the end of the photo-essay in the journalistic or artistic realms. Vast numbers of photojournalists produce photo-essays outside the parameters of the traditional print media of newspapers and magazines. According to Mather, Corrigan's description of the photo-essay linking photography and film refers to work with "personal, lyrical, artistic forms of expression" not the typical published magazine photo essay.<sup>22</sup> This distinction between artistic expression and publication-driven narrative is the key to understanding the contemporary photo-essay outside the traditional media—poetic licence through narrative storytelling, using continuous frames in internet slideshows or layouts in books.

In the year 2000, I co-founded Oculi, a multiplatform publishing outlet and collective of Australian photographers, to showcase long-term photographic projects that the

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<sup>21</sup> David Campany, "In the Light of the Lumieres: Art at the Beginnings and Ends of Cinema," in *Photocinema: The Creative Edges of Photography and Film*, ed. Neil Campbell and Alfredo Cramerotti (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2013), 32-34.

<sup>22</sup> Mather, *Stanley Kubrick at Look Magazine: Authorship and Genre in Photojournalism and Film*, 181.

member photographers labeled photo-essays.<sup>23</sup> Oculi used a website to create a fluid, transmedial association of imagery through online slideshows to tell unique stories outside of the mainstream media in Australia. The website has undergone several resurrections to keep up with technology and rapidly changing browsers and slideshow formats since 2000. Company's declaration that the photo-essay died with Cartier-Bresson does not seek to explain the new or reformulated artist-driven outlets emerging since the start of this millennium nor the resurgence in photographic book publishing.

### **The Emergence of Meaning in the Gaps Between Photos**

Picture magazines, historically and aesthetically, are linked to cinema and newsreels, according to Steven Heller. Heller writes:

Photography may have been static but when edited like a motion picture and narratively paced to tell a story, images of never-before-recorded sights offered audiences the same drama—and more detail—than any newsreel could.

Innovative editors at the leading picture magazines advanced revolutionary storytelling ideas that altered the way photography was used and perceived.<sup>24</sup>

Heller's description of editing a still photo-essay similar to a film narrative in visual storytelling mirrors my own editing practice of juxtaposition and montage in arrangement and pacing of still photographs.

Amongst Australian photographers creating photographic essays, there was a two-fold shift in visual grammar from the early 2000s.<sup>25</sup> Firstly, there was a movement away from the traditional photojournalistic format of printing a small selection of photographs or a single image, and towards including a wider selection of photographs to build a narrative or concept with the editing and sequencing. Secondly, the internet allowed a new form of editing, eschewing the traditional layout of a dominant photo with smaller supporting images for a more egalitarian display of

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<sup>23</sup> The Oculi collective depicts photo-essays from Australia and the region. Oculi is an online media platform on the internet. <http://www.oculi.com.au> Oculi is represented in Europe by Agence VU.

<sup>24</sup> Steven Heller, "Photography Changes The Look and Content of Magazines" in *Photography Changes Everything*, ed. Marvin Heiferman (New York aperture, 2012), 78.

<sup>25</sup> I refer here to my colleagues who were photojournalists at the time, working at newspapers and magazines in Australia.

image after image that often appears horizontally in a looped slideshow that resembles a film with dissolves between cuts. The online horizontal slideshow diverges from Andre Bazin's concept of horizontal montage. Catherine Lupton notes that in Bazin's description of Chris Marker's horizontal montage in the essay film *Lettre de Sibirie*, (1958)<sup>26</sup> "...meanings and associations develop less from shot to shot than via the lateral relay of commentary to images: 'from the ear to the eye' ".<sup>27</sup> The essay film is a discursive form where the audio featured is one of the vital essay components. The photo-essay without audio, displayed as a looped slideshow on the internet, is a stream of imagery that Bazin would classify as traditional montage.<sup>28</sup>

Corrigan denotes the photo-essay as unsutured photographs with implied relationships in the gaps.<sup>29</sup> Referring to Marker and the archetype of the photo-essay, Corrigan suggests film can explore these gaps as intellectual spaces.<sup>30</sup> Marker's experimental 1962 film *La Jetée* was composed almost entirely of still frames in a science fiction depiction of memory and the devastation of war.<sup>31</sup> The first time I viewed the seminal *La Jetée* at a photographic bookmaking workshop with curator Philip Brookman and photographer Jim Goldberg, the still frames and storytelling through filmic motion transcended the action of turning the pages of a photography book. *La Jetée* is a prime example of how to sequence still photographs from the ciné or film and translate them into visual concepts for layouts to produce a printed book.<sup>32</sup>

Academic Jai McKenzie suggests that between the still frames in Marker's film *La Jetée*, the viewer is called upon to animate the spaces "with their own understanding". According to McKenzie, "This is done by accessing one's memory of visual imagery,

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<sup>26</sup> Chris Marker, "Lettre de Sibirie," (France: Argos-Films, 1958).

<sup>27</sup> Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker Memories of the Future* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2005), 55. Andre Bazin, "Around the World with Chris Marker: Part II: Time regained: Bazin on Marker," *Film Comment* 39 (2003).

<sup>28</sup> Bazin, "Around the World with Chris Marker: Part II: Time regained: Bazin on Marker."

<sup>29</sup> Corrigan, "The Forgotten Image Between Two Shots: Photos, Photograms, and the Essayistic," 47.

<sup>30</sup> Corrigan, "The Forgotten Image Between Two Shots: Photos, Photograms, and the Essayistic," 47- 48.

<sup>31</sup> Chris Marker, *La Jetee*, (France: Argos Film, 1962).

<sup>32</sup> *La Jetée* was screened during a photographic bookmaking workshop I attended in 1997 at Anderson Ranch in Colorado with curator Philip Brookman and the documentary photographer Jim Goldberg. Goldberg created and produced the book *Raised by Wolves*, as an intricate series of photographic sequences to depict the overlapping stories of teenage runaways Jim Goldberg, *Raised by Wolves* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1995). Philip Brookman curated Robert Frank's exhibition *Moving Out* in Washington, DC. Brookman also wrote an essay in *Raised by Wolves*.

an inner-space that is connected to image-spaces.”<sup>33</sup> By deconstructing a film into still frames, McKenzie argues, the viewer is able to access the past and project the future.<sup>34</sup> In the still photo-essay, the spectator must fill in the implicit gaps and spaces between the still frames in time and space, similar to McKenzie’s description of the viewer animating the frames of the film *La Jetée*.

The photo-essay, like the essay film, does not follow a strict set of guidelines that define the form, aesthetics or storytelling mechanisms. The parameters of the contemporary photo-essay, rarely seen in print, cross boundaries and genre borders in online slideshows. Raymond Bellour, in his visual theory, explores the area between film and photography and the gaps between images. In the essay “The Double Helix”, from the exhibition *Passages de l’image* (1991), Bellour writes:

It is between images that passages and contaminations of beings and systems occur more and more often, and such passages are sometimes clear but sometimes hard to define and, above all, to give a name to.<sup>35</sup>

The passages or gaps between the still images in photo-essays on the internet are short breaths or pauses where the viewer fills in the time and narrative based on the preceding and following images that flash onto the screen. Passages that exist between still photography and moving image, according to Bellour, explicate and explore the spaces between the traditional boundaries of documentary, experimental film and photography.<sup>36</sup>

### **Rhythm and Dance: Editing the *Ciné Photo-essay***

My own editing process in filmmaking mirrors Dziga Vertov’s editing process with photos: using city symphony montage techniques with still images to create an intertwined photo-essay. Still or moving, the process of editing seeks an intuitive intellectual flow of images. When I first approached making films, I placed video

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<sup>33</sup> Jai McKenzie, *Light + Photomedia: A New History and Future of the Photographic Image* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 47-48.

<sup>34</sup> McKenzie, *Light + Photomedia: A New History and Future of the Photographic Image*, 47-48.

<sup>35</sup> Raymond Bellour, "The Double Helix," in *Passage de l’image* (Barcelona: Centre Cultural de la Fundacio Caixa de Pensions, 1991), 48.

<sup>36</sup> Raymond Bellour, *Between- the -Images*, ed. Lionel Bovier and Xavier Douroux, Documents Series 6, (Zurich: JKP Ringer, 2012).

clips into a timeline, producing a montage as if I were editing a series of still images into a photographic essay. I experienced unexpected similarities between editing film and photo-essays. For instance, in a video editing timeline, the sequence of juxtaposed images created a rhythm and a montage of images that flowed one after the other. During the editing process, I am often on the edge of my seat in anticipation and holding my breath waiting for the montage to unfold.

I edit still photographs by placing prints on a wall or floor to zoom in or zoom out of the story and feel the visual rhythm of the overall essay. This process of editing images on a wall is also the methodology of Dutch photographic artist Corinne Noordenbos for editing books to create visual storytelling. It means using the body, not just the eyes, to zoom in and zoom out and create the flow of images on a wall before stitching them together in an accordion-style book.<sup>37</sup> Noordenbos' sequencing methodology inspired the creation of a series of accordion-style books featuring the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. I propose that photographic books, in particular the accordion-style folding book, laid flat, resemble a film sequence; therefore, the editing process for a video timeline, although constrained by a screen, is both intuitive and physical. In my first experience editing on a video timeline, I discovered a sense of playful montage, with images moving through the linear sequence. The motion transformed a series of what Cartier-Bresson designates as decisive moments<sup>38</sup> in still photography into a montage of what I designate as ciné moments in moving image.

The montage of Dziga Vertov's film *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) features a freeze-frame sequence of a horse and carriage. In this scene, the editing by Elizaveta Svilova (renowned film editor and Vertov's wife)<sup>39</sup> intertwines the still and moving images in the same sequence to tell a story about making movies and editing through time and space. Theorist Laura Mulvey refers to this carriage sequence, in stop-motion combining stills and moving images, as a "source of visual pleasure".

<sup>40</sup> According to Mulvey, the energy of the sequence is created through the temporal

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<sup>37</sup> I was mentored in Corinne Noordenbos' book editing methods during a workshop at Contact Sheet in Sydney in 2019. The prototype created during the workshop inspired a series of accordion-style books featuring the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, created during the PhD research.

<sup>38</sup> Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*.

<sup>39</sup> Dziga Vertov, "Man With a Movie Camera," (Soviet Union: VUFKU, 1929).

<sup>40</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 13.

dynamic of Svilova's editing techniques, with the still frames evoking the uncanny. Mulvey writes, "She holds the inert filmstrip in her hands; she winds it on the editing table; she cuts out certain frames. The inanimate frames come back to life..."<sup>41</sup> Svilova's magic at the editing table as she reorders the material is transformative. Mulvey suggests, "...the spectator is brought back with a heightened consciousness of the blending of two kinds of time".<sup>42</sup>

Academic Karen Pearlman, a film editor, dancer and choreographer, writes about rhythmic intuition and the kinaesthetic aspects of the editing process in the book *Cutting Rhythms: Intuitive Film Editing*.<sup>43</sup> Pearlman defines the film editor's kinaesthetic empathy as "feeling *with* movement".<sup>44</sup> The movement of dance and feeling of music are used to convey how the editor arranges the pieces of film to create the rhythm and story. Pearlman suggests:

The musician's, or in this case the editor's, physical presence and physical engagement with the material becomes part of the creative process. Her own rhythm of blinking, breathing, heartbeat, synapses firing, as well as the rhythm of her cycles of sleeping, eating, thinking and feeling, shape the film's rhythm.<sup>45</sup>

The duration, pace and order of the editing of the raw material, according to Pearlman, develop through a process of rechoreographing the selection through dancing edits and singing the rhythm.<sup>46</sup> Examining the creative process of shooting and editing, Vertov writes:

To edit; to wrest, through the camera, whatever is most typical, most useful, from life; to organize the film pieces wrested from life into a meaningful rhythmic visual order, a meaningful visual phrase, an essence of 'I see'.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, 15.

<sup>42</sup> Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, 16.

<sup>43</sup> Karen Pearlman, *Cutting Rhythms: Intuitive Film Editing*, Second Edition ed. (New York: Focal Press, 2016).

<sup>44</sup> Pearlman, *Cutting Rhythms: Intuitive Film Editing*, 18.

<sup>45</sup> Pearlman, *Cutting Rhythms: Intuitive Film Editing*, 22.

<sup>46</sup> Pearlman, *Cutting Rhythms: Intuitive Film Editing*, 101.

<sup>47</sup> Annette Michelson, ed., *Kino-eye: the writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). xxvi

In the seminal book on picture editing, *The Technique of the Picture Story* (1945), from *Look* magazine, the chapter named Picture Continuities outlines a scenario where the construction and layout of photo-essays are compared to movie making.<sup>48</sup> The book identified the issue of cohesion in editing photographic stories for publication. Daniel D. Mich and Edwin Eberman suggest:

“Every successful picture story has layout continuity to some degree—which simply means that it is presented in a visual or typographical pattern carried through from one page to another.”<sup>49</sup>

Historically, the serial photographic layout in a picture magazine is what film theorist Noel Burch termed the “zero point of cinematic style”.<sup>50</sup> Mather suggests, “A common strategy... was to print related images in a serial fashion, as a means of making the photographs look like frames selected from a strip of motion-picture film.”<sup>51</sup> Mather highlights the concept that the long take in film originates in classic magazine layout strategies that affect the “reader’s rhythm in scanning the photographic spreads and turning the pages”.<sup>52</sup>

My argument regarding contemporary editing is that the internet slideshow, in which photographs run one after the other like a horizontal filmic projection of stills, refers to these serial picture layouts from magazines such as *Life* and *Look*. Mather writes:

The photojournalistic version of the ‘zero point of cinematic style’, as Burch termed it, was also characterised by a relatively unobtrusive layout, one that sought to draw readers into the story and support the essay’s argument by highlighting the images, not the patterns in which the photographs were arranged.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Daniel D. Mich and Edwin Eberman, *The Technique of the Picture Story: A Practical Guide to the Production of Visual Articles* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1945), 78.

<sup>49</sup> Mich and Eberman, *The Technique of the Picture Story: A Practical Guide to the Production of Visual Articles*, 102.

<sup>50</sup> Noel Burch, *Theory of Film Practice* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd., 1973), 15.

<sup>51</sup> Mather, *Stanley Kubrick at Look Magazine: Authorship and Genre in Photojournalism and Film*, 213.

<sup>52</sup> Mather, *Stanley Kubrick at Look Magazine: Authorship and Genre in Photojournalism and Film*, 152.

<sup>53</sup> Mather, *Stanley Kubrick at Look Magazine: Authorship and Genre in Photojournalism and Film*, 152.





Figure 10: Tamara Voninski, *Mardi Gras*, 2018. Variable dimensions.

*Then and Now* repurposes the slideshow technology to produce a new form of creative output. In *Narrative Across Media* (2004), Marie-Laure Ryan discusses remediation and logic where new media is created from older media forms.<sup>54</sup> In the creative research on the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, editing in the passages between a photo-essay and essay film was a process of creating juxtapositions such that the viewer fills in the space between the images or sequences as a result of the continuous images and discontinuous editing. *Mardi Gras* is an example of a single still frame from a sequence of images; the image depicts the drag queens preparing to enter Mardi Gras (Figure 10).

Hollywood film editor Walter Murch questions why cuts work in editing film and compared them to the blink of an eye in terms of perspective. Murch writes, “So the central fact...is that cuts *do work*. But the question still remains: *Why?* It is kind of like the bumblebee, which should not be able to fly, but does.”<sup>55</sup> Murch focuses on

<sup>54</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan, ed., *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling* (United States: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 29.

<sup>55</sup> Walter Murch, *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing*, 2nd ed. (Beverly Hills, CA: Silman-James Press, 1995), 9.

the discontinuity of shooting and editing by outlining an editing system using still frames in panels laid out like a book. Murch writes:

You read the photos from left to right and then down a row, left to right again, etc. just like reading text, and when you got to the bottom of one panel, you went up to the top of the next and read across the first line, etc. So the juncture between those panels was an interesting thing to look at, because it juxtaposed frames that were never meant to go together and yet there they were, right next to each other. And sometimes you got sparks out of that, it would cause you to think about things, editorial leaps, that otherwise you might never have thought of without this system.<sup>56</sup>

The photo-essay as a grouping of decisive moments creating an ongoing narrative is overlooked in critical analysis of the editing process. Murch's film-editing technique is similar to a process that professional photographers use to reduce a large number of images or scenes to a refined and flowing form composed of the most poignant frames. Murch elucidates the rhythmic editing that links the process of montage and juxtaposition.

The rhythmic flow of visual editing also manifests in the page-by-page design layouts of photographic books. Sarah Greenough describes the photographic layout from Robert Frank's book *The Americans* as a flowing structure similar to film.<sup>57</sup> Greenough characterises Frank's editing style as a rhythm like a conductor leading an orchestra and the images are like a choir rich in melody and harmony.<sup>58</sup> Neil Campbell, on the other hand, writes that *The Americans* moves within single frames and from page to page, like montaged film sequences.<sup>59</sup> Frank's "moving" photography, according to Campbell, engages cinematic techniques by working on the shifting ethereal layers to move the viewer to the other photographs.<sup>60</sup> Frank's

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<sup>56</sup> Murch, *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing*, 33-40.

<sup>57</sup> Sarah Greenough, "Transforming Destiny into Awareness: The Americans," in *Looking In: Robert Frank's the Americans*, ed. Sarah Greenough (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2009), 182.

<sup>58</sup> Greenough, "Transforming Destiny into Awareness: The Americans," 182-83.

<sup>59</sup> Neil Campbell, "'Being of two minds': The Dialogical Pictures of Robert Frank and Wim Wenders," in *Photocinema: The Creative Edges of Photography and Film*, ed. Neil Campbell and Alfredo Cramerotti (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2013), 42.

<sup>60</sup> Campbell, "'Being of two minds': The Dialogical Pictures of Robert Frank and Wim Wenders," 42.

editing of *The Americans* differs from the production of what John Tagg refers to as “pictorial commoditisation” or the pre-packaged story from the *Life* magazine era.<sup>61</sup>

Alan Trachtenberg refers to photographer Walker Evans’ contrapuntal design in the sequencing of the first two editions of the photographs in the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941). Trachtenberg referred to Evans’ images as being in conversation with one another in relation to their order and interaction.<sup>62</sup> The ideas emanating from the analysis by Greenough and Campbell of Frank’s layout in the book *The Americans*, and Trachtenberg’s description of Evans’ contrapuntal design in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, chart the evolution and overlapping of editing philosophy that link the published grouping of photographs in books to film montage.

### **The Slideshow**

Another intermedial link between photography and film is the slideshow, according to Garrett Stewart.<sup>63</sup> Non-linear editing in the digital age permits stopping on a single frame or having each frame rush past. Stewart notes that cinema is a photomechanical imprint and that moment-by-moment sequencing is the underlying foundation of photography incorporated into cinema.<sup>64</sup> Stewart writes:

...film is photography motorized, made an engine of serial motion. Instead, the digital image spills its grains across a single plane while racing to winnow and reseed itself before it is ever, even for the least moment, complete enough to be fleeting.<sup>65</sup>

An exhibition called *Slideshow* was held at the Baltimore Museum of Art in Maryland in 2005, one year after Kodak announced that it would halt production of the slide projector. Darise Alexander, the curator of prints, drawing and photographs at the Baltimore Museum of Art, suggests the slideshow is an image, a phenomenon and an event.<sup>66</sup> *Slideshow* projects the works of 19

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<sup>61</sup> Campbell, " 'Being of two minds'; The Dialogical Pictures of Robert Frank and Wim Wenders," 42.

<sup>62</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, "Contrapuntal Design," in *Walker Evans: Lyric Documentary*, ed. John T. Hill (Gottingen: Steidl Publisher, 2006), 229.

<sup>63</sup> Garrett Stewart, *Framed Time: Toward A Postfilmic Cinema*, ed. Tom Gunning, Cinema and Modernity, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 4.

<sup>64</sup> Stewart, *Framed Time: Toward A Postfilmic Cinema*, 4.

<sup>65</sup> Stewart, *Framed Time: Toward A Postfilmic Cinema*, 53.

<sup>66</sup> Darise Alexander, *Slideshow: Projected Images in Contemporary Art* (Maryland: Baltimore Museum of Art, 2005), xx.

photographers displaying the evolution of the slide projection as art where photography, film and installation blend in the gallery space. Alexander writes:

...slide projection was often considered a bridge between photography and film. The round slide carousel, the kind most frequently used by artists in this exhibition, contains successive slots for images, which are projected and in sequence, like a film. But by the same token, the different frames capture a past moment that was taken *out of time*, like a photograph.<sup>67</sup>

Theorist Allan Sekula refers to slideshows as “vulgar” and “impure” yet encourages photographers to consider working with the format.<sup>68</sup> Liv Hausken refers to a slide-motion film as the “*La Jetée* style.”<sup>69</sup> The online slideshow, according to Hausken, is a reflection of the style of Marker’s film and a digital transformation from mechanical device to computers. Online slideshows are a contemporary example of what Tom Gunning has called “apparent motion”, from his study of 19th-century devices where the images move through at speed.<sup>70</sup> A slideshow running on a loop without stopping is similar to Tom Gunning’s notion of ‘apparent motion’ where a series of single images moves to the next image. One day in the near future, the slideshow as it operates online today will be relegated to media archaeology—similar to the demise of the Adobe Flash program; however, to date, the online slideshow that runs in an automatic loop remains strong as an ongoing contemporary link between mediums.

The slideshow, as a key intermedial link between film and photography, is a vital element of the construction of the *ciné photo-essay*. The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls are photographed and filmed from the outsider perspective of a straight woman—a fag hag—looking into a drag subculture of gay men dressing as women.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Alexander, *Slideshow: Projected Images in Contemporary Art*, 5.

<sup>68</sup> Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973-1983* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), 70.

<sup>69</sup> Liv Hausken, "The Temporalities of the Narrative Slide Motion Film," in *Between Stillness and Motion: Film, Photography, Algorithms*, ed. Eivind Rossaak (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011).

<sup>70</sup> Tom Gunning, "The Play between Still and Moving Images: Nineteenth-Century 'Philosophical Toys' and their Discourse," in *Between Stillness and Motion: Film, Photography, Algorithms*, ed. Eivind Rossaak (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 27.

<sup>71</sup> A fag hag is a slang term for a heterosexual woman who spends much of her time with homosexual men.

Photographers such as Sydney-based William Yang photographed gay and drag culture from the insider perspective, as a gay man. New York-based photographer Nan Goldin photographed her raw colour slides of drag culture initially from the outside and eventually from the insider's perspective within her circle of friends. The slideshow format is a signature style for Yang and Goldin.

American Goldin photographed drag queens from her earliest days behind a camera as a teenager. Unlike Goldin's oeuvre documenting the lives of her friends and lovers, the subject matter of my own still photographs extends its focus beyond my immediate circle of friends to random spontaneous moments on the street and sub-cultures in the wider community, such as The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls.

Goldin states, "I was documenting my life."<sup>72</sup> Her raw, unguarded images of drag queens are similar in context to the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls and my involvement in the act of photographing them; however, while Goldin was looking for an image for *Vogue* magazine, I was initially documenting the subtext of a subculture and party scene as part of my street photography practice and later filming deeper, collaboratively, under the mask and fantasy. Unlike Goldin, I was metaphorically lifting the mask off the drag subculture of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls.

Juliana Engberg suggests that Goldin's work exists in the liminal space between photography and film. According to Engberg, "She is anthropological rather than forensic in approach."<sup>73</sup> Goldin's photographs were shown to her extended circle of friends and lovers in the form of public slideshows in the 1980s. The performative slideshow of images constantly dissolving, with music, was known as *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* and the shows consistently drew huge crowds.<sup>74</sup> According to Martin Heiferman, "Goldin became a downtown diva, working two slide projectors at a time, flashing eight hundred slides for four seconds each to a bootlegged

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<sup>72</sup> J. Hoberman, "My Number One Medium All My Life: Nan Goldin Talking With J. Hoberman," in *Nan Goldin: I'll be your Mirror*, ed. Nan Goldin, David Armstrong, and Hans Werner Holzwarth (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996), 136.

<sup>73</sup> Juliana Engberg, "Nan Goldin: The Ballad of Sexual Dependency," in *Up close: Carol Jerrems with Larry Clark, Nan Goldin and William Yang*, ed. Natalie King (Melbourne: Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 199.

<sup>74</sup> Nan Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (New York: Aperture, 2012). The slideshow photographs were edited to form Goldin's book *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*.

soundtrack...<sup>75</sup> There are numerous accounts of Goldin running late for the performances and editing her slide carousels on the go by selecting slides and sequences based on her mood.<sup>76</sup> Heiferman writes:

She would insist on re-editing the slides right before each performance. She would always show up late. She would empty shopping bags full of numbered slide carousels, each filled with updated reports from the battlefield of love. One slideshow would be powerfully strong. The next one might be eerily woozy.<sup>77</sup>

Heiferman also suggests that Goldin approached her slideshows like a filmmaker in the editing and sequencing of the photography.<sup>78</sup>

Luc Sante refers to Goldin's slideshows as raw and uncanny views of collective experiences. Sante writes:

The transitions from one shot to the next appeared liquid; the pictures seemed anything but still. The slideshow was a vast movie of intersecting fragments that showed us our lives, startling us with meaning where we'd seen only circumstance. At a time when everybody claimed to be 'making' art, although hard evidence of such activity was often scarce, this was the real deal.<sup>79</sup>

Goldin created a narrative thread through her sequencing of the slides. Goldin's seminal photographs from the original slideshows, including her photographs of drag queens, were shown at Whitney Museum of American Art in 1996, in the exhibition *Nan Goldin: I'll Be Your Mirror*, and at The Museum of Modern Art, in the exhibition *Nan Goldin: The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, from June 2016 to April 2017. Goldin wrote in the wall text for *I'll Be Your Mirror*, "I never saw the queens as men dressing as women, but as something entirely different—a third gender that

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<sup>75</sup> Martin Heiferman, "Pictures of Life and Loss," in *Nan Goldin: I'll be Your Mirror*, ed. Nan Goldin, David Armstrong, and Hans Werner Holzwarth (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996), 279. Heiferman was a dealer and producer of the slideshow according to Denise Alexander. Alexander, *Slideshow: Projected Images in Contemporary Art*, 26.

<sup>76</sup> Nan Goldin, David Armstrong, and Hans Werner Holzwarth, eds., *Nan Goldin: I'll be Your Mirror* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996).

<sup>77</sup> Heiferman, "Pictures of Life and Loss," 279.

<sup>78</sup> Heiferman, "Pictures of Life and Loss," 278.

<sup>79</sup> Luc Sante, "All Yesterday's Parties," in *Nan Goldin: I'll be Your Mirror*, ed. Nan Goldin, David Armstrong, and Hans Werner Holzwarth (Melbourne: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996), 101.

made more sense than the other two.”<sup>80</sup> Goldin’s relation to the drag queens she encountered was examined and dissected by *The New Yorker* writer Hilton Als. He suggests:

Eventually, she fell in with a group of drag queens, who hung out in a bar called the Other Side, and began to photograph them. She wanted to memorialize the queens, get them on the cover of *Vogue*. She had no interest in trying to show who they were under the feathers and the fantasy: she was in love with the bravery of their self-creation, their otherness.<sup>81</sup>

Yang, unlike in Goldin’s initial outsider relationship to drag culture, performed his photographic slideshows face to face with live audiences from the stage. Yang moved to Sydney from Queensland in 1969 and began to explore gay culture through the lens of his camera and his personal experience. He photographed his lovers and hand-wrote stories on their photographs. He also documented through the male gaze the gay sauna scene, the underground scene, private parties and eventually Mardi Gras. He photographed underground and public drag queen culture over several decades in Sydney. Yang suggests:

The drag queens seemed to be like the natural leaders. I think that’s partly because when you become a drag queen, you have an alter ego, another self which is different from your normal self. You can be everything that your normal self isn’t.<sup>82</sup>

Yang, who is now in his 70s, has consistently photographed gay subcultures from his insider’s perspective, from before gay liberation until now. His photographs and slideshows form an important national archive and history of gay culture, along with a personal narrative of the deaths of lovers and friends from AIDS and the racism he encountered growing up Chinese-Australian in rural Queensland.

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<sup>80</sup> Paul Hendrickson, "Nan Goldin's Cracked 'Mirror' at the Whitney, a Photographer's Raw Retrospective" *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), October 27, 1996  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/style/1996/10/27/nan-goldins-cracked-mirror-at-the-whitney-a-photographers-raw-retrospective/c1fd213c-3ab0-41b7-ae41-83e51ff0103c/?utm\\_term=.39ccf4ce3de9](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/style/1996/10/27/nan-goldins-cracked-mirror-at-the-whitney-a-photographers-raw-retrospective/c1fd213c-3ab0-41b7-ae41-83e51ff0103c/?utm_term=.39ccf4ce3de9).

<sup>81</sup> Hilton Als, "Nan Goldin’s Life in Progress," *The New Yorker*, July 4 2016,  
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/07/04/nan-goldins-the-ballad-of-sexual-dependency>.

<sup>82</sup> Paul Clarke and Alex Barry, "Between a Frock and a Hard Place," (ABC TV: *Jungleboys* FTV 2015).

In the performance film *William Yang: Friends of Dorothy* (2014), based on the original slideshow of his archive of photography and coming out as gay, Yang describes the post-1981 drag scene as “a new type of drag emerging where you could have a moustache, muscles, and extremely bad hair and that was acceptable”.<sup>83</sup> The scene around Mardi Gras as described by Yang was a celebration and the re-enactment of an annual ritual.<sup>84</sup> *Friends of Dorothy*, and other Yang performance pieces—in which the slideshow is the intermedial space between still and moving image—were precursors to what I term the *ciné photo-essay*. Between 2012 and 2014, Yang created documentaries of three of his original slide theatre performance pieces, using his 45-year archive of photographs: *Friends of Dorothy*, *William Yang: Bloodlinks* (2014), and *William Yang: My Generation* (2013).<sup>85</sup> The filmic slideshow *Friends of Dorothy* uses more than 500 still images as Yang presents a performance with a slide projector and narration live on stage—or directly on screen in the filmic versions.<sup>86</sup> Helena Grehan and Edward Scheer describe Yang’s storytelling on stage and film. They write:

In his narrative mode of presentation of the photographs, like a family slideshow, he provides memory traces that not only recall but re-inscribe the original event, a technique we can also recognize from oral history, in which the narrator brings story entities back into the present before an audience rather than consigning them to the archive.<sup>87</sup>

In an interview with Scheer, Yang describes his slide-show performances as “short photographic essays or short stories”.<sup>88</sup> Yang the photographer is the observer behind the camera while Yang the theatre maker is the narrator and performer on stage. Grehan and Scheer suggest that the act of performance projects the focus and memory of the photographs to new viewers.<sup>89</sup> In other words, images from the 1970s are

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<sup>83</sup> Martin Fox, "William Yang: Friends of Dorothy," (Felix Media, 2014). The slang phrase ‘Friend of Dorothy’ was a code signal to ask if someone was gay when being gay was illegal. Dorothy refers to the character in the Wizard of Oz.

<sup>84</sup> From 1998, I ran into William Yang in many locations in Sydney’s photographic exhibition scene and Mardi Gras. As a prolific photographer and documentarian, many of his photographs of the Laneway era have not been published or exhibited.

<sup>85</sup> The three documentaries were created during a fellowship at the University of New South Wales School of Arts & Media. He received funding from the Australia Council to create the works.

<sup>86</sup> Fox, "William Yang: Friends of Dorothy."

<sup>87</sup> Helena Grehan and Edward Scheer, *William Yang: Stories of love and death* (Sydney: Newsouth, 2016), 132.

<sup>88</sup> Grehan and Scheer, *William Yang: Stories of love and death*, 29.

<sup>89</sup> Grehan and Scheer, *William Yang: Stories of love and death*, 73.



projected on large screens for people who did not experience this era firsthand. Grehan and Scheer write: “In the age of the selfie, there is a possibility that this kind of photography is, itself, a disappearing act.”<sup>90</sup>

### **Interconnectedness as Muse: Hybrid Forms**

According to theorist Neil Campbell, new forms and concepts emanating from the Photocinema conference at the 2009 Derby Format Festival reconsidered the interconnectedness of photography and film as muse and practice by blurring the lines within hybrid spaces in the contemporary digital age.<sup>91</sup> According to Alfredo Cramerotti and Huw Davies:

The relationship between the still and moving image, inscribed in the notion of ‘cinematic’, is complementary in some ways, and oppositional in others. But it remains an intertwined and long-standing history of ever-changing forms and diverse practices.<sup>92</sup>

Cramerotti and Davies point to the hybrid examples of flipbooks, slideshows and digital imaging as forms existing in the blurred boundaries between film and photography that make up part of the missing history between the two mediums. Although not mentioned directly, the photo-essay is implied within the passages and outlets showing groups of photographs edited together in the critical discussion linking photography and film.<sup>93</sup>

As technology shifts rapidly in the digital age, the photo-essay is venturing even further beyond borders into the area that film has traditionally inhabited. The online gallery and transmedial slideshow formats have overlapped the boundaries of film and photography. Art historian John Tagg suggested that the power dynamics and

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<sup>90</sup> Grehan and Scheer, *William Yang: Stories of love and death*, 112.

<sup>91</sup> Neil Campbell, "Introduction: The Cinematic Promenade," in *Photocinema: The Creative Edges of Photography and Film*, ed. Neil Campbell and Alfredo Cramerotti (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2013), 18.

<sup>92</sup> Alfredo Cramerotti and Huw Davies, "Portfolio Section," in *Photocinema: The Creative Edges of Photography and Film*, ed. Neil Campbell and Alfredo Cramerotti (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2013), 121.

<sup>93</sup> Cramerotti and Davies, "Portfolio Section," 121

their relation to photography should be studied, not photography alone.<sup>94</sup> The photo-essay is no longer linked solely to newspapers and magazines. Therefore, new definitions and theoretical discourse on the photo-essay in the history of the essayistic format are essential, considering the aesthetic and technological vicissitudes that transform the way the viewer, as opposed to the reader, experiences the photo-essay. Viewing a photo-essay online as a looped slideshow is an application of technology that shifts the series of single images into a creative, moving sequence that often strengthens the overlapping relational meaning between images as a narrative structure or visual idea.<sup>95</sup>

In 2014, Andrew Taylor described a form that he designated the *film-photo-essay* in the *Journal of Screenwriting* article *Writing with Images: The Film-Photo-Essay, the Left Bank Group and the Pensive Moment*.<sup>96</sup> Although the works of Left Bank Group filmmakers such as Agnes Varda and Chris Marker are important precursors to the notion of the *ciné photo-essay*, Taylor's experimental use of photography and film to create an essay is a basic exercise in combining ordinary stills and moving images on the same plane. For instance, one film was a combination of 400 stills and a small segment of 16mm film combined into one piece.<sup>97</sup> Taylor describes his experiments with still and moving images using the iPhoto program as lacking "soul".<sup>98</sup> However, he sees a future for works between photography and cinema in a zone that he calls "new pensive hybrid art forms".<sup>99</sup> This idea links the path the Left Bank Group filmmakers created with future forms such as the hybrid *ciné photo-essay* as experimental visual ethnography in the form of an exhibition installation.

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<sup>94</sup> John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan, 1988), 118.

<sup>95</sup> Looped slideshows of online photo-essay are undergoing continual changes in technology. As of 2019, an example of notion of an slideshow that viewer clicks through is: <https://www.magnumphotos.com/arts-culture/society-arts-culture/trent-parke-dreamlife/> An example of an automatic looped online photo-essay is: <https://www.tamaravoninski.com.au/galleries/metropolis>

<sup>96</sup> Andrew Taylor, "Writing with Images: The Film-Photo-Essay, the Left Bank Group and the pensive moment," *Journal of Screenwriting* 5, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>97</sup> Taylor, "Writing with Images: The Film-Photo-Essay, the Left Bank Group and the pensive moment," 65

<sup>98</sup> Taylor, "Writing with Images: The Film-Photo-Essay, the Left Bank Group and the pensive moment," 82

<sup>99</sup> Taylor, "Writing with Images: The Film-Photo-Essay, the Left Bank Group and the pensive moment," 82

Photographer and filmmaker Wim Wenders acknowledged, “Within every photograph there is also the beginning of a story starting, ‘Once upon a time...’”. According to Wenders, “Every photograph is the first frame of a movie.”<sup>100</sup>

Photography and film have a rich interconnected history as muse and practice. The photo-essay connects the liminal space, historically and aesthetically, between photography and film, blurring the border zones between practice and medium. This area of gaps and overlaps in form and practice is the space where the *ciné photo-essay*, as an artistic and theoretical concept, emerges.

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<sup>100</sup> Wim Wenders, *Once: Pictures and Stories* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2010), 12.

## Chapter 3

### The Intersection of Visual Art and Social Science

*The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay* is presented as a hybrid of art and social science. This chapter argues that the exhibited installation of the *ciné photo-essay* of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls crosses the disciplinary boundaries of documentary, photojournalism and visual ethnography. The ideas and theory surrounding visual ethnography that led to the approach and methodological research in *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls* are explored here through visual artists and social scientists such as Howard S. Becker, Elizabeth Chaplin, David MacDougall and Sarah Pink.

The social sciences—the study of culture and society through fields such as anthropology and sociology—developed as evidence-based disciplines where the written text distinct to the visual was the dominant and expected outcome; therefore, there is historical suspicion of the visual as valid research within social sciences, which this chapter maps. The limits of what is accepted as visual ethnography can be broadened, however, through the intersection of social science and visual art, specifically in the use of photography and film. With the role of the visual now expanding within social science research, this chapter argues that a survey of such work facilitates an understanding of subcultures such as drag queens that words alone cannot achieve.

To trace and map the visual as it pertains to the research in this project, this chapter first examines the visual aspects of broad social sciences—both sociology and anthropology. This research project does not map each of the numerous historical references of the conflict between art and science. Instead, the project highlights the trajectory and momentum of the repositioning of boundaries beyond strict limitations for the use of photography and film as social science. Forms of visual production, such as photojournalism or documentary, are often used to classify fieldwork that would be considered visual ethnography if the traditional border zones expanded or were dissolved; as sociologist Becker suggests, still images used in contexts such as photojournalism or documentary can also be considered visual ethnography, depending on the context of the work. In this chapter, I expand Becker's argument to

include moving images. Finally, the chapter concludes with the use of Esther Newton's seminal written research on drag queens in the book *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (1972)<sup>1</sup> as a springboard to add to academic discourse the perspective of a practising visual artist conducting visual ethnographic research on a drag queen subculture.

### **Visual Ethnography and the Emergence of Meaning Through Context**

Within my own visual practice, the overlapping of documentary, photojournalism and visual ethnography emerged during the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls research project, through the capturing and editing of the still and moving moments. Through lens-based practice and a professional career spanning from the 1980s as a university-trained and professional photojournalist creating photo-essays for newspapers, magazines and long-term documentary projects outside the media, I have gained a specialised set of skills in the craft of image making that are vital to qualitative participant observer visual research. Becker, one of the most vocal proponents of the advancement of the role and function of photography in social science in the 1970s and '80s, suggests in the article "Visual Sociology, Documentary Photography, and Photojournalism: It's (Almost) All a Matter of Context" (1995), "Today's photojournalists are literate, college educated, can write, and so are no longer simply illustrators of stories reporters tell."<sup>2</sup>

Becker argues in the same article that images gain meaning primarily through context and, therefore, visual social science, photojournalism and documentary are social constructions.<sup>3</sup> Becker further suggests that photographs made in one genre can expand into another based on context. In other words, photojournalism can become documentary photography, which in turn can be labeled social science. Becker suggests, "Visual workers will find their legitimation in the response their work

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<sup>1</sup> Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> Howard S. Becker, "Visual Sociology, documentary photography, and photojournalism: It's (almost) all a matter of context," *Visual Studies* 10, no. 1-2 (1995): 6. Although Becker identifies as a visual sociologist, his ideas cross over to visual anthropology and the practice of visual ethnography.

<sup>3</sup> Becker, "Visual Sociology, documentary photography, and photojournalism: It's (almost) all a matter of context," 5.

generates in viewers, whatever name that work goes by.”<sup>4</sup> Visual sociologist Elizabeth Chaplin argues that Becker’s ideas challenge the limitations of social science.<sup>5</sup>

My background as a photojournalist and my foundation of skills gained and developed in that career are as vital to me as a participant observer as they are to my work as a documentary practitioner. I discovered during this project that the methodological approach is mirrored across photography, filmmaking and ethnography, and that the skills and impulses are exactly the same. In light of Becker’s argument, then, I propose that moving image works made in one genre can also be re-read in another based on the context in which they are used.

In the book *Exploring Society Photographically* (1981), Becker suggests there is a blurring between the art of photography and the science.<sup>6</sup> Eamonn Carrabine suggests that Becker understands the fluidity of the definition of photography as art, including photojournalism and documentary photography.<sup>7</sup> Further, Chaplin argues that still images considered both documentary and art, combined with textual analysis, create a rich understanding in the social sciences.<sup>8</sup> Chaplin writes:

An array of photographs may, moreover, offer evidence of the structure of a society and, following analysis of the photographs, lead to a social scientific understanding that would not otherwise have been possible.<sup>9</sup>

Here, Chaplin introduces the photo-essay as a means to deeper understanding than single photographs in research.

In an essay about visual essays and social science, academic John Grady suggests that social science sanitises the “aesthetic impulse”.<sup>10</sup> Grady writes about the use of

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<sup>4</sup> Becker, "Visual Sociology, documentary photography, and photojournalism: It's (almost) all a matter of context," 13.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Chaplin, *Sociology and Visual Representation* (London: Routledge, 1994), 223. Chaplin refers to visual sociology. The idea of ‘limitations’ also applies to visual anthropology.

<sup>6</sup> Howard S. Becker, *Exploring Society Photographically* (Chicago: Northwestern University, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> Eamonn Carrabine, "JUST IMAGES: Aesthetics, Ethics and Visual Criminology" *British Journal of Criminology* 52 (2012): 469.

<sup>8</sup> Chaplin, *Sociology and Visual Representation*, 222.

<sup>9</sup> Chaplin, *Sociology and Visual Representation*, 215.

<sup>10</sup> John Grady, "The Visual Essay and Sociology," *Visual Studies* 6, no. 2 (1991): 24.

photography and film as a research tool and the reluctance of social scientists to accept this approach as visual scholarship. Grady notes there is an underlying scepticism that has “paralysed the academy”.<sup>11</sup> He argues that photo-essays “explore and analyse social life” and it is surprising how few social scientists have experimented with the form.<sup>12</sup> Grady writes, “The visual essay has an important role to play in that process not despite, but because, it is a medium for artistic expression.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, according to Grady, the visual essay is an art form and can also be social science.<sup>14</sup>

Richard Freeman sees in Becker’s notion of the use of multiple photographs in a photographic essay the addition of rich meaning in social science. Freeman writes, “Because the images in most ethnographies are single, isolated images, they fail to present to us the necessary information we need to really read them in any meaningful manner.”<sup>15</sup>

I argue that Becker and Chaplin’s descriptions of social science, from the perspective of visual sociology providing a “rich” or “deeper” understanding, can be expanded to formally include visual anthropology and visual ethnographic studies. I also propose that Freeman’s ideas about the photo-essay in social science expanding meaning beyond the use of single images can be broadened to include types of visual essays that contain moving images, such as the *ciné photo-essay*. In the case of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, the underlying function of the *ciné photo-essay* installation is to add a deeper understanding of their drag queen subculture within Sydney’s gay culture over a period of time, with the creation of new knowledge through documentation of aspects of their lives in drag using visual mediums.

The historical suspicion of the visual in the social sciences has created continuous friction for photography and film in research. This friction exists between objective data and expressive, subjective forms of visual art. The friction further exists between visual communication and written text. Subjectivity is not acceptable in traditional

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<sup>11</sup> Grady, "The Visual Essay and Sociology," 28.

<sup>12</sup> Grady, "The Visual Essay and Sociology," 24.

<sup>13</sup> Grady, "The Visual Essay and Sociology," 26.

<sup>14</sup> Grady, "The Visual Essay and Sociology," 29.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Freeman, "Photography and Ethnography," in *Viewpoints: Visual Anthropologists at Work*, ed. Mary Strong (text) and Laena Wilder (visual) (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 63.

science, yet verbal interpretation of data is used in research. Leonard Henry argued in 1986 that social scientists are “caught in a Gutenberg Syndrome” where visual images are suspicious and words and figures are used for arguments.<sup>16</sup> Visual sociologist Chaplin notes in 1994 that research itself is visual yet traditionally expressed and translated through textual codes. Chaplin states, “We tend to take for granted the pre-eminence of the written text in almost all areas of knowledge, and to regard any accompanying visual material as subsidiary to it.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Pioneers on the Path to Visual Anthropology**

Early anthropologists, according to Alison Griffiths in the book *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology & Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture* (2002), turned to their notebooks rather than their cameras for fieldwork and research.<sup>18</sup> The early history of photography and film in anthropology is mapped by the fieldwork research and publishing of social scientists such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Franz Boas, along with case studies of the work of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson. In addition, as a photographer, Edward Sheriff Curtis cleared a path through text-based research for future visual anthropology.

The concept of participant observer fieldwork methodology in research was advocated and popularised by anthropologist Malinowski, who conducted extensive field research into the peoples of Oceania, studying various aspects of everyday life in Australia, New Guinea and the Trobriand Islands in the early 1900s until his death in 1942. According to Terence Wright, Malinowski makes little mention of photography in his written reports of his fieldwork; however, he was a prolific photographer.<sup>19</sup> Wright describes Malinowski’s photographs as “visual” and

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<sup>16</sup> Leonard M. Henry, "Trend Report: Theory and Practice of Visual Sociology," *Current Sociology* 34, no. 3 (1986). Henry refers to sociology in this article. The ideas translate across social sciences. This issue of *Current Sociology* is devoted to the visual and refers to the new name of visual sociology as a form of sociology in the preface.

<sup>17</sup> Chaplin, *Sociology and Visual Representation*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Alison Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology & Turn-Of-The-Century Visual Culture*, ed. John Belton, Film and Culture, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), xxvi.

<sup>19</sup> Terence Wright, "The Fieldwork Photographs of Jenness and Malinowski and the Beginnings of Modern Anthropology," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 22, no. 1 (1991).



“impressionistic” compared to the “dull and uninspiring” work of the prescribed and rigid form of 19<sup>th</sup>-century ethnography.<sup>20</sup>

Anthropologist Boas took still and film cameras into the field along with notebooks.<sup>21</sup> According to Jay Ruby, although Boas did not write about film in terms of science or cinema:

[He was] the first social scientist anywhere, to use the motion picture camera to generate data in natural settings (as opposed to a laboratory) in order to study gesture, motor habits, and dance as manifestations of culture.<sup>22</sup>

Boas also captured hundreds of still images, according to Ira Jacknis, yet he did not publish them. Boas made passing mention of the photographs in family letters but not in theoretical reference.<sup>23</sup> Although Boas used photography and film in his fieldwork and he is known historically as the ‘Father of Visual Anthropology’, his writings and research did not advance the use of the visual beyond a form of notetaking. Ruby argues that Boas was not technically proficient with cameras and recording devices. Ruby writes:

...had he lived long enough to work with the filmed data and been able to discuss the problems and promises of this technology for the study of human behaviour, the development of the study of body movement and visual anthropology would have undoubtedly had a different history.<sup>24</sup>

Edward Sheriff Curtis, the American photographer and ethnologist, is known for his striking portraits and hand-etched and tinted prints from glass negatives of Indigenous peoples in North America. Jacknis vividly describes Curtis’s photographs as “blurred, dreaming and poetic—the mark of Art”<sup>25</sup> This “mark of Art” is in contrast to the scientific approach of other anthropologists who photographed the same people.

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<sup>20</sup> Wright, "The Fieldwork Photographs of Jenness and Malinowski and the Beginnings of Modern Anthropology," 42, 50-51, 53 Bronislaw Malinowski's candid diary was possibly never meant for publication. Malinowski's *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Word* (1967: London Routledge & Kegan Paul) describes his field experiences and sexual desires and also mentions photography.

<sup>21</sup> Freeman, "Photography and Ethnography," 56.

<sup>22</sup> Jay Ruby, "Franz Boas and Early Camera Study of Behavior," *Kinesics Report* (1980): 7, <https://astro.temple.edu/~ruby/ruby/boas.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Ira Jacknis, "Franz Boas and Photography," *Studies in Visual Communication* 10, no. 1 (1984): 10. The photographs are in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History.

<sup>24</sup> Ruby, "Franz Boas and Early Camera Study of Behavior," 11.

<sup>25</sup> Jacknis, "Franz Boas and Photography," 12.

Curtis's aim was to document the North American Indians before their cultures disappeared. He travelled extensively with his portable studio and carefully posed his subjects, who often dressed in ceremonial clothing with the backdrop and framing eliminating any aspect of modern life.

Curtis spent 30 years (1900-1930) photographing and filming the aspects of Native American culture that he found beautiful, according to Anne Makepeace in the film *Coming to Light: Edwards S. Curtis and the North American Indians* (2001).<sup>26</sup> At first, he was not allowed to photograph sacred ceremonies, which led to his search for a way to photograph Native Americans and disappearing culture. He gained unprecedented access to film and photograph people and rituals. Some of the dances were performed in the wrong order or backwards with sacred aspects left out in front of the camera. Makepeace notes that Curtis used artistic techniques such as soft focus, people in silhouettes, studio-lit portraits, and expressive pictorialist style to symbolise a vanishing race.<sup>27</sup>

There is varied criticism of Curtis's work, according to Makepeace, including: lack of objectivity, payments from financier J. Pierpont Morgan to support his work, and focus on ceremonial heritage and dress rather than the issues of everyday dislocation through government control of native cultural expression.<sup>28</sup> The criticism, and Curtis's staging, costume choices, and manipulation of scenes and photographic processes are acknowledged by Aaron Glass as problematic.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, Glass argues that there was active participation of the people who dressed up and posed for him, which researchers and historians have largely overlooked.<sup>30</sup> Scholars such as Glass<sup>31</sup>, A.D. Coleman<sup>32</sup> and Barbara Davis<sup>33</sup> have revisited Curtis's

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<sup>26</sup> Anne Makepeace, "Coming to Light: Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indians" (PBS American Masters: Anne Makepeace Productions, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> Makepeace, "Coming to Light: Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indians".

<sup>28</sup> Makepeace, "Coming to Light: Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indians".

<sup>29</sup> Aaron Glass, "A Cannibal in the Archive: Performance, Materiality, and (In)Visibility in Unpublished Edward Curtis Photographs of the Kwakwaka'wakw Hamat'sa," *Visual Anthropology Review* 25, no. 2 (2009): 130.

<sup>30</sup> Glass, "A Cannibal in the Archive: Performance, Materiality, and (In)Visibility in Unpublished Edward Curtis Photographs of the Kwakwaka'wakw Hamat'sa," 130.

<sup>31</sup> Glass, "A Cannibal in the Archive: Performance, Materiality, and (In)Visibility in Unpublished Edward Curtis Photographs of the Kwakwaka'wakw Hamat'sa," 131.

<sup>32</sup> A.D. Coleman, *Curtis: His Work. In Portraits from North American Indian Life* (New York: Outerbridge & Lazard, 1972), v-vii.

photography, film work and archives, concluding that his process was collaborative.

In the foreword to Curtis's 40 volumes of *The North American Indian: Being a Series of Volumes Picturing and Describing the Indians of the United States and Alaska* (1907), then-US President Theodore Roosevelt wrote, "In Mr. Curtis we have both an artist and a trained observer..."<sup>34</sup> As a former studio photographer, Curtis had a highly trained eye and technical training, through experience, with composition, lighting and capturing images of people through a camera. Roosevelt's assessment of Curtis as artist and trained observer differentiates him from the early anthropologists, who produced cold, distant, unedited visual documents of culture in their fieldwork. It is important to note that many anthropologists historically have had little or no training in using a camera or editing their material.

Many early anthropologists used photography to record the empty built environment and as documentation for statistics. Boas, in particular, used his rigorous statistical background to amass data about characteristics such as distribution of physical features through photographs. Boas took three photographs of people for his classification data and also created a plaster cast, in what Jacknis denotes as a "multimedia approach" in anthropology.<sup>35</sup> Although the romantic image of the vanishing tribes of North America depicted in Curtis's visual work perpetuated the idea of the noble savage, his collaborative work was a precursor to anthropologist and filmmaker Jean Rouch's concept of *shared anthropology*. This collaborative aspect of producing visual work is discussed further in the methodology chapter.

One of the key issues often overlooked in evaluating visual research from early anthropology eras is the limitations of bulky, large format camera equipment that required slow shutter speeds to expose and chemical processes and time to create and develop wet plates; subjects had to sit still for long periods. These limitations necessitated extensive staging of the scene by the photographer. Additionally, the

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<sup>33</sup> Barbara Davis, *Edward S. Curtis: The Life and Times of a Shadow Catcher* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1985), 79.

<sup>34</sup> Edward S. Curtis, *The North American Indian: Being A Series of Volumes Picturing and Describing the Indians of the United States and Alaska*, 40 vols., ed. Frederick Webb Hodge (Cambridge, Massachusetts: J. Pierpont Morgan, 1907). The 40-volume original work sold at auction through Christie's in 2012 for US\$2,882,500.

<sup>35</sup> Jacknis, "Franz Boas and Photography," 20-21.

anthropologist operating the camera needed expertise in reading the light, focusing the camera, and negotiating situations where people were spooked by the process or feared having their soul stolen and caged inside the camera. The goals and biases of researchers must be examined in light of the era and equipment used.

### **Mead, Bateson and the Introduction of Subjective Knowledge**

The early history of visual anthropology was shaped by the superiority of text in the fieldwork and armchair anthropology from the academy of men in social science. One exception was Margaret Mead, a student of Boas who wrote accounts about her discoveries and her use of visual recording devices in the field that appealed to the general public.<sup>36</sup> Between 1936 and 1939, Mead and her husband, Gregory Bateson, conducted fieldwork in Bali, producing the photographic book *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* (1942) to depict Balinese culture.<sup>37</sup> They produced a mountain of visual material—25,000 still frames and 22,000 feet (6700 metres) of movie film with detailed notes. Social scientist Becker poses the relevant question, “How were they to present such a mass of visual material?”<sup>38</sup>

The introduction to *Balinese Character* states, “The form of presentation used in this monograph is an experimental innovation.”<sup>39</sup> The groundbreaking form of visual anthropology in the book featured the use of sequences, where images displayed together created a complex meaning compared with the use of a single photograph. Becker describes the use of photography in *Balinese Character* as a rich “intellectual and aesthetic experience” and the “synergy that arises out from the multiple imagery”.<sup>40</sup> Chaplin refers to the images in the book in terms of the dominance of the visual over the verbal. Chaplin states:

The massed images, in sequence and in juxtaposition, create a micro-world whose visual coherence is such that we acquire an understanding of that

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<sup>36</sup>One example of Margaret Mead’s widely read fieldwork is: Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilisation* (New York: Harper Collins 2001). The original book was published in 1928.

<sup>37</sup>Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1942).

<sup>38</sup>Howard S. Becker, "Balinese Character: Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead," in *Exploring Society Photographically*, ed. Howard S. Becker (Chicago: Northwestern University 1981), 12.

<sup>39</sup>Bateson and Mead, *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis*, xi.

<sup>40</sup>Becker, "Balinese Character: Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead," 13.

society and its ethos which is not straightforwardly a function of verbal conventions, and verbal social science.<sup>41</sup>

Following the publication of *Balinese Character* in 1942, Mead urged other anthropologists to make use of visual and sound recording technology in their fieldwork. In her role as president of the American Anthropological Association, she made the case to an audience of professional peers. According to Alison Griffiths, the reaction was mixed. “Her appeals were greeted with restless stirring and angry murmurs...as these notebook-oriented scholars expressed their irritation at this revolutionary suggestion.”<sup>42</sup> Becker wrote about artistic strength in relation to Mead and Bateson’s visual research, stating:

Mead herself feared that the urge to make art would interfere with the objectivity science required (although Bateson understood that the stylistic nullity that constituted the objectivity she had in mind was neither possible nor desirable).<sup>43</sup>

Mead and Bateson were pioneering visual anthropologists with differing viewpoints on how to use cameras and record in the field. Filmmaker and anthropologist David MacDougall notes a particular conversation between Mead and Bateson in which they challenged each other on their approach to the camera; Mead was extending the mind and Bateson was extending the eye.<sup>44</sup> According to MacDougall, “... Bateson had wanted to conduct the enquiry by means of filming, but Mead had wanted to film first and analyse later.”<sup>45</sup> Freeman notes that the work of Mead and Bateson was limited to the “objective data”; however, Mead’s acknowledgement of the artist’s subjectivity begins to open a crack in visual anthropology at the intersection of art and social science. Freeman states, “...Mead did acknowledge that the artist can often communicate the intangible aspects of a culture better than the anthropologist”.<sup>46</sup>

The photographic eye is balanced between scientific objectivity and artistic

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<sup>41</sup> Chaplin, *Sociology and Visual Representation*, 212.

<sup>42</sup> Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology & Turn-Of-The-Century Visual Culture*, xx.

<sup>43</sup> Becker, *Exploring Society Photographically*, 10.

<sup>44</sup> Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, "Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson on the Use of the Camera in Anthropology," *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* 4, no. 2 (1977): 79. The transcript of the conversation between Mead and Bateson is published here.

<sup>45</sup> David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography and the Senses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 224.

<sup>46</sup> Freeman, "Photography and Ethnography," 59.

subjectivity, according to Chaplin.<sup>47</sup> The discussion of subjectivity in producing knowledge must be anchored in the historical era of Mead and Bateson's fieldwork on *Balinese Character*, when subjective knowledge was simply not permissible in social science research.

### **The Impact of Movements in Photographic Reproduction**

Still photographs in text-based social science research over the past century have appeared like window dressings on a house. The text is considered the vital knowledge or data and the visual is considered mere decorative trimming. Joanna Cohan Scherer argues that photographs have been misused for simply breaking up text in written research or ignored. Photographs in research, according to Scherer, "...are in fact primary documents that respond to analysis using the methods of anthropology and history. Through comparative study, images have the potential to provide a wealth of information."<sup>48</sup> According to Freeman, even today the majority of anthropologists are not trained in photography and, therefore, their images taken in the field are essentially snapshots of people, houses or objects.<sup>49</sup> Freeman asks the questions, "What if anthropology programs also offered training in photography? Would it be possible to incorporate the images with the text in an equal or, dare I say, leading partnership?"<sup>50</sup>

Within the same era as Mead and Bateson's visual research, there were movements in other areas of photographic production, with the publication of photographic essays as images with text blocks and captions. I have previously written, in the article "Redefining Photojournalism in a Post-Media Techno-Creative World" (2017), about the use of sequences of photographs to create narrative and meaning through juxtaposition in photojournalism, through picture magazines such as *Look*, *Life* and

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<sup>47</sup> Chaplin, *Sociology and Visual Representation*, 180.

<sup>48</sup> Joanna Cohan Scherer, "Historical Photographs of North American Indians: Primary Documents, BUT View with Care," in *Viewpoints: Visual Anthropologists at Work*, ed. Mary Strong (text) and Laena Wilder (visual) (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 92.

<sup>49</sup> Freeman, "Photography and Ethnography," 55.

<sup>50</sup> Freeman, "Photography and Ethnography," 55.

VU.<sup>51</sup> During Mead and Bateson's research in Bali, photography was flourishing in the media around the world, particularly in picture magazines.

*National Geographic*, the magazine published by the National Geographic Society, has been a publishing outlet for the work of scientists, explorers and photographers since 1888. As a popular culture link between the disciplines of photojournalism and visual ethnography, *National Geographic* sends photojournalists into the field for several months at a time. The glossy magazine with trademark yellow border is a photographically driven publication where the images are the primary knowledge. Photographers who receive coveted assignments from *National Geographic* are required to undertake extensive research before they enter their immersive visual fieldwork; however, these photographers are more likely to identify professionally as photojournalists or visual storytellers than as anthropologists.

### **A Shift to Image- and Sequence-based Anthropological Thought**

MacDougall argues that visual anthropology has the potential to create new horizons and pathways to knowledge.<sup>52</sup> MacDougall states:

Foremost is the need to build an intellectual foundation for visual anthropology by enabling a shift from word- and sentence-based anthropological thought to image- and sequence-based anthropological thought. Visual anthropology can never be either a copy of written anthropology or a substitute for it. For that very reason it must develop alternative objectives and methodologies that will benefit anthropology as a whole.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Tamara Voninski, "Redefining Photojournalism in a Post-Media Techno-Creative World," *The International Journal of the Image* 8, no. 3 (2017), doi:10.18848/2154-8560/CGP/v08i03/41-52. My previous research in the area of the photo-essay and the history of photojournalism, "Redefining Photojournalism in a Post-Media Techno-creative World", was presented at the Image Conference in October 2015 at UC Berkeley.

<sup>52</sup> MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography and the Senses*, 225.

<sup>53</sup> MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography and the Senses*, 225.

The visual study of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls is not presented as a copy of a word-based study.<sup>54</sup> The *ciné photo-essay* examines their lives through visual means using methodology designed by anthropologists producing textual analysis. A visual study of the grotesque and camp aspects of three men transforming gender through drag produces deeper knowledge for the viewer than word-based analysis alone. This particular study is led by the visual research; the text results from the process of capturing the still and moving images. The result of applying MacDougall's notion of a shift from sentences to images and sequences is another crack in visual ethnography at the intersection of art and social science, creating space for potential new pathways.

There was little support prior to 1960 for ethnographic filmmaking beyond the work of Mead and Bateson in Bali, Rouch's African ethnographies and the Institute fur den Wissenschaftlichen Film (IWF) in Germany, according to Alison Griffiths.<sup>55</sup> David MacDougall refers to the period around World War I as the dark ages for visual anthropology, when a metaphorical curtain dropped over the field.<sup>56</sup> MacDougall and his collaborator and wife, Judith MacDougall, forged a path for observational ethnographic filmmaking within anthropology, where the visual is the anthropological knowledge. David MacDougall expressed dissatisfaction with the theory surrounding visual anthropology and the discipline's inherent disinterest in what could be achieved through the visual in research. Through fieldwork, filmmaking and writing about visual anthropology, MacDougall further widens the borders of anthropological boundaries, suggesting:

...look at the principles that emerge when fieldworkers actually try to rethink anthropology through use of a visual medium. This may lead to directions we would never have predicted from the comparative safety of theory.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Anthropologist Jay Ruby composed the entry on visual anthropology in the *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*. Ruby wrote, "Anthropology is a word-driven discipline. It has tended to ignore the visual-pictorial world, perhaps because of the distrust of the ability of images to convey abstract ideas." Levinson, David, and Melvin Ember. 1996. *Encyclopedia of cultural anthropology*, 1351.

<sup>55</sup> Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology & Turn-Of-The-Century Visual Culture*, xxi.

<sup>56</sup> MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography and the Senses*, 228.

<sup>57</sup> MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography and the Senses*, 225.



Anthropologist Esther Newton suggested in 1978 that other researchers use her written study from the book *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (1972) as a baseline for future explorations of drag queen culture. The research documenting the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls subculture uses Newton's seminal written study as a springboard to add the perspective and experience of visual research from a trained and experienced visual artist and skilled documentarian and photojournalist.

Newton writes:

New fieldwork on the current state of the drag world would certainly be desirable, but I am not the one to do it, having been severed from that world by my own evolution and the brute passage of time.<sup>58</sup>

Newton's work in *Mother Camp* is a study of the "terra incognita" world of drag culture.<sup>59</sup> However, I argue, 40 years later, from the perspective of visually documenting the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls through photography and moving image, that a written study cannot accurately be described as a tangible visual document, despite Newton's strong view that the research in *Mother Camp* is like a "photograph or X-ray".<sup>60</sup>

Newton suggests that if female impersonation were to disappear, her groundbreaking research in the book *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (1972) is "...at once a photograph and X-ray of the male gay world on the edge of historic changes".<sup>61</sup> However, her landmark study is composed of words to paint a picture through description within the traditional written ethnographic approach in the field of anthropology. Newton captured only a small selection of photographs of drag queens on stage or acting to her camera during her fieldwork. According to Newton:

Unfortunately, even the use of a still camera proved extremely distracting to the performers, particularly because of the flash gun that I was forced to use because of the dim light.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, xi. from the Preface to the Phoenix Edition

<sup>59</sup> Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, v. Newton refers to the 'terra incognita' in terms of the overall ethnography

<sup>60</sup> Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, xiv. from the Preface to the Phoenix Edition.

<sup>61</sup> Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, xiv. from the Preface to the Phoenix Edition.

<sup>62</sup> Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, 135.

This scenario highlights one of the main reasons photographs are not highly regarded in the rigid world of social science. Photographs and filmic works by non-trained academics are often of poor quality in technique and aesthetics. Visual documentarians are well versed in the technical skills needed to capture images in low light without disrupting the moment. A key skill that emerges from on-the-ground visual experience and lens-based methodology working in disparate cultures with professional camera equipment is the ability to be like a fly on the wall; one becomes almost invisible to allow the action unfolding in front of the camera to continue without being disrupted by one's presence or lack of technical skills.

## Chapter 4

### Methodology

The methodology chapter addresses the formal, ethical and political concerns regarding the creative works of the qualitative ethnographic and artistic study of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. This chapter charts the visual researcher's changed role within the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls project—from the fly-on-the-wall approach of street photography to being an active participant working with the drag queens. The project highlights the importance of building rapport and trust, an under-theorised aspect of research. This chapter charts the methodology of the project through the essay film titled *How Did I Get Here?* (2019), in which the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls and the researcher are the focus (**Figure 11**). The chapter focuses on different methodological concerns: 1) formal and visual context 2) ethical concerns and politics of representation. The chapter also argues the skills of observational practice photojournalists and documentary photographers use mirror participant observation methodology in visual ethnography; therefore, capturing moments of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls crosses disciplinary boundaries.



Figure 11: Tamara Voninski, *How Did I Get Here?*, 2019. Film Still.

The primary approach was to enter and participate in the subculture of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls as a filmmaker and researcher over a long period. The methodology shifted from operating as an anonymous fly on the wall during the Laneway days to becoming an active participant with the drag queens during the research period. Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson describe *participant observation*, in the book *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (2007), as a mode of participating in the “social world” in research and reflecting on the findings.<sup>1</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson suggest that researchers avoid the fly-on-the-wall approach to become clear and active in the process of research.<sup>2</sup>

The following social science methodological techniques are used in the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls study: structured interviews using photo-elicitation techniques, collaboration with participants to equalise the power structure throughout the study and autoethnography when the filmmaker presents the photographs to the participants for discussion. In the study, *photo-elicitation* accompanied the formal interview techniques of recorded questions and answers. The researcher showed photographs of the Laneway to the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls during recorded oral interviews. Photo-elicitation is a process introduced by John Collier Jr., in which informants view and discuss photographs during research interviews. According to Douglas Harper, researchers use a phenomenological lens in photo-elicitation, as informants’ descriptions provide the layers of meaning.<sup>3</sup> Catherine Russell links autoethnography to ethnographic filmmaking in the book *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (1999). Russell writes, “Autoethnography produces a subjective space that combines anthropologist and informant, subject and object of the gaze under one sign.<sup>4</sup> Autoethnography—the placement and appearance of the researcher within the research—was used in the film *How Did I Get Here?*, in which the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls and the researcher discuss the Laneway photographs together on camera as a research method.

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<sup>1</sup> Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* Third ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* 17.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Harper, "Meaning and Work: A Study in Photo Elicitation," *Current Sociology* 34, no. 3 (1986): 25.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 312.

The collaboration with the participants entailed working directly with the three drag queens to access and document their lives with their input, building upon a foundation of rapport and trust. The theoretical framework of the politics of representation, which helps form the foundation of rapport and trust, consists of Jean Rouch's notion of *shared anthropology* and David MacDougall's concept of *participant cinema*. Both concepts promote a more balanced power dynamic between researcher and participants to encourage input and collaboration. The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls research methodology is an active observational approach. I argue that Rouch's notion of *ciné-transe* is expanded from the boundaries of filmmaking to the experience and subconscious state of immersion in a scene as a photographer. The observational approach in methodology goes beyond merely standing back detached, watching silently. The initial prerequisite to an observational approach with a camera within the practice-led research was to obtain access to the lives of drag queens.

### **Methodology: The Formal and Visual Concerns**

As a *participant observer* documenting the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls in private and public spaces, I carry minimal camera gear. On the street, I work with lightweight cameras and small portable accessories. I work alone to capture moments that would be difficult to record with a production crew following along. Within my practice, the experience behind the camera is an experiential mode of remaining in the midst of potential action by quietly blending into the background. Working alone provides the flexibility to change directions quickly based on nearby actions and my heightened sense of intuition regarding what will happen next as events unfold.

These are documentarian skills based on sensations and embodied knowledge behind the camera; these skills are the hidden methodology that allows me to capture moments in still and moving images. Within her extensive research in the book *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2009), Sarah Pink recommends examination within participant observation and research of “multisensory and emplaced aspects” of experience and knowing for the researcher and participants.<sup>5</sup> Pink writes:

A sensory ethnography thus requires a form of reflexivity through which the ethnographer engages with how her or his own sensory experiences are

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<sup>5</sup> Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009), 47, 63.

produced through research encounters and how these might assist her or him in understanding those of others.<sup>6</sup>

Participant observation in the context of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls research consists of hundreds of hours of visual observation of the drag queens, recording their lives and their transformations from male to female and back again, in drag, over three years. As a photographer and filmmaker, I used an observational approach or, in other words, a phenomenological lens in research—being there to experience their world firsthand and see and record through the camera. In regard to research, James Clifford suggests in the essay *On Ethnographic Authority* (1983) that the participant observer is continuously moving between the “ ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of events” to make sense of what is happening.<sup>7</sup>

Anthropologist Edward Ochsenschlager further suggests that participant observation is a methodological approach to avoiding problematic outcomes in research.

Ochsenschlager writes:

Only repeated visual observation over long periods of time can help us escape our own preconceptions, the danger of questionnaires that can be intentionally or accidentally designed to elicit precisely what the designers predetermine they want to hear or to formulate rather than sample opinion, and the many pitfalls of relying on informants.<sup>8</sup>

Filming the lives of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls as a participant observer requires honed professional skills and a sense of anticipation, of knowing what might happen and when, to document the key moments in actions and interactions. The observational camera in this case is capturing what visual ethnographers Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz refer to as a level of “human experience” while being open enough to expect the unexpected. Lens-based observation in research, according to Grimshaw and Ravetz, is a “mode of skilled practice” that has the potential to link

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<sup>6</sup> Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 50.

<sup>7</sup> James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," *Representations* 2, no. Spring (1983): 127.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Ochsenschlager, "Looking for the Past in the Present: Ethnoarchaeology at al-Hiba," in *Viewpoints: Visual Anthropologists at Work*, ed. Mary Strong (text) and Laena Wilder (visual) (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 257.

art and anthropology.<sup>9</sup> Referring to skilled observational practice, Grimshaw and Ravetz write:

It meant being open to the spontaneous or to the overlooked as potentially yielding new insight into a situation or personality. These skills hinged greatly on intuition and on the fine-tuning of the senses.<sup>10</sup>

Within my training and practice as a photojournalist and documentary photographer, the ability to establish connections and build a sense of rapport with people to gain their consent prior to being a participant observer with a camera in their lives is vital. In my professional experience, I find that many people around the world instinctively tense up when a camera is turned in their direction. The rapport to overcome such reactions emanates from developing the ability to talk with people and put them at ease. One example of when I built a rapport as a participant observer occurred at a regional camel market in Egypt. I approached a camel herder who looked wary when he noticed my camera. I asked if I could take his photograph. I spoke a little Arabic and he spoke a little English. He told me that if I took a photograph of him that his soul would be in my camera. I explained to him that my soul was also in the camera. He replied that if my soul was in the camera, he would allow me to capture his image. Likewise, during the Laneway years, I approached drag queens before I raised the camera to ask permission to photograph them. I explained who I was and why I was documenting drag in the Laneway. Later in the morning, when moments were unfolding in front of the camera, the same drag queens, including the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, took little notice, as they had met me and we had spoken about me capturing their unposed interactions on that day. Anthropologist Jon Prosser notes that access and acceptance form the foundation of the initial approach to the participant observer role.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 159.

<sup>10</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life*, 16, 29.

<sup>11</sup> Jon Prosser, "Personal Reflections on the Use of Photography in an Ethnographic Case Study," *British Educational Research Journal* 18, no. 4 (1992): 398.



Figure 12: Tamara Voninski, *How Did I Get Here?*, 2019. Film Still.

The initial meeting with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, before the research officially began, was off-camera over dinner, as suggested by my main informant, Kuntina K. Klakalakis. I re-introduced myself to Yunka Ivanabitch and Della Deluxe and we spoke about the Laneway and the possibility of filming their current lives and interactions in drag. I fielded several questions about the when, where and how details of the proposed filming. The question “Why film us now?” was discussed extensively and the conversation flowed into areas such as the changes in Sydney and drag culture, the disappearance of the original Laneway parties and shifts in gay culture over the last 20 years. After I left the dinner, the trio discussed letting me enter their world of drag. I was subsequently invited to return with cameras to film and photograph their lives, as depicted in the essay film *How Did I Get Here?* (Figure 12); however, there would be restrictions, which are discussed later in this chapter.

Australian documentary photographer and ethnographer Claire Alexander suggests through her research on drag queens in Perth, Western Australia that, historically,



drag was a marginalised act.<sup>12</sup> Alexander immersed herself within the world of drag as a participant observer to become known to the drag queens and to build rapport. She was, thus, given access with a camera to the private world behind the scenes and beyond the public world of drag. The access and rapport she built with drag queens for her research came from her prior experiences photographing drag as a documentary photographer and subsequent work as a venue photographer around drag performances. She was widely known as a photographer within drag circles in Western Australia. Alexander writes, “As an anthropologist and visual ethnographer, I have lived, worked, partied, traveled, and talked with Perth drag queens about their lives, their culture, and the art of drag.”<sup>13</sup>

The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls set the nights and times that I was allowed to be present with a camera to document their lives. Interdisciplinary scholar James Clifford suggests, “It becomes necessary to conceive of ethnography not as the experience and interpretation of a circumscribed ‘other’ reality, but rather, as a constructive negotiation...”<sup>14</sup> The importance of establishing rapport for the purpose of producing knowledge in ethnography is examined by Charles Fruehling Springwood and C. Richard King. According to Springwood and King, “Rapport, as a methodological fixture and generic trope, then, endows ethnographers with powerful claims to understanding, authenticity, and authority.”<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, Clifford suggests that under-theorised traits such as rapport and empathy have been criticised by what he terms “hermeneutically sophisticated anthropologists” in relation to the methodology of the participant observation experience.<sup>16</sup> In order for the visual researcher to gaze at people through the viewfinder of a large camera in a private space, building rapport before the camera is ever raised to the eye is crucial.

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<sup>12</sup> Claire Alexander, "What Can Drag Do For Me? The Multifaceted Influences of *RuPaul's Drag Race* on the Perth Drag Scene," in *RuPaul's Drag Race and the Shifting Visibility of Drag Culture*, ed. N. Brennan and D. Gudelunas (2017), 245.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander, "What Can Drag Do For Me? The Multifaceted Influences of *RuPaul's Drag Race* on the Perth Drag Scene," 247.

<sup>14</sup> James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*, ed. James Clifford (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1988), 41.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Fruehling Springwood and C. Richard King, "Unsettling Engagements: On the Ends of Rapport in Critical Ethnography," *Qualitative Inquiry* 7, no. 34 (2001): 404.

<sup>16</sup> Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," 130.

## Trust and Rapport

Building trust and rapport takes time and, similar to photographer Nan Goldin's experience, the invitation for me to be among a group of drag queens with a camera led to developing a friendship during our collaboration.<sup>17</sup> Sometimes, I was asked to hold a glittery handbag or accessory and often we shared a laugh during the evening. After a shoot, in 2018, Della Deluxe and I shared a taxi from Kuntina K. Klakalakis's inner-city apartment in the early hours of the morning. The driver dropped Della off first. I waited until she got into her building safely and she rang me a few minutes later to make sure I had also made it home safely. In her opinion, the driver was acting strangely. I was surprised that Della was concerned for my safety and this event was a turning point for me as the rapport went beyond the engagement with the camera.

I met with Kuntina K. Klakalakis every week or two to share a cup of tea and talk about life and art in and out of drag culture. Sometimes we discussed the next drag outing and other times we even ventured out to watch new drag documentaries in the city. Ultimately, I discovered that rapport in research means building trust.

The idea of trust can be explained through social theories by Piotr Sztompka, Jeffery C. Alexander, Steven Seidman, Niklas Luhmann, David Good and Peter Kollock.

They relate the concept to future human interactions interwoven with variables such as chance and risk. Luhmann defines trust directly in terms of risk; he writes, "Trust is a solution for specific problems of risk."<sup>18</sup> The research of Sztompka, Alexander and Seidman links anticipatory trust to the uncontrollability of future events.<sup>19</sup> They argue, "Trusting becomes the crucial strategy for dealing with an uncertain and uncontrollable future."<sup>20</sup> According to Good, trust is one person's theory on how another will behave in relation to an event that has not yet happened.<sup>21</sup> Kollock links

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<sup>17</sup> During this period, Kuntina K. Klakalakis was a practice-led PhD candidate researching drag objects. We met on a regular basis to discuss drag over coffee or view films about transgender and drag.

<sup>18</sup> Niklas Luhmann, "Familiarity, Confidence, Trust: Problems and Alternatives," in *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, ed. D. Gambetta (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 95.

<sup>19</sup> Piotr Sztompka, Jeffrey C. Alexander, and Steven Seidman, *Trust: A Sociological Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 21,27.

<sup>20</sup> Sztompka, Alexander, and Seidman, *Trust: A Sociological Theory*, 25.

<sup>21</sup> David Good, "Individuals, Interpersonal Relations and Trust," in *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, ed. D. Gambetta (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 33.

placing trust to making bets about the actions of others and argues, therefore, that the future is associated with risk.<sup>22</sup>

Francis Fukuyama refers to a “radius of trust”<sup>23</sup> in the book *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (1995). Sztompka et al, further link this to the notion of “concentric circles of trust” in interpersonal and social contexts.<sup>24</sup> According to Sztompka et al, acting together requires trust for successful co-operation.<sup>25</sup> Trust was, therefore, the prerequisite for working with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls.

On the occasions when the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls did not want me present, I respected their wishes, which was essential to our collaboration on the project. During the research, Yunka Ivanabitch moved up the coast, several hours away, and the opportunities to film the three drag queens together diminished. Sometimes, a night out included just two or, on occasion, one drag queen. Filming and photographing a night out began in the afternoon with several hours of makeup and mask application, costuming, loud rhythmic music and often champagne, fruit and homemade nibbles. Off-camera, the drag queens prepared their designs, outfits and props three weeks in advance. They did not want the costume pre-production stage documented. Our nights out finished in the early hours of the morning with Kuntina K. Klakalakis’s spontaneous, dramatic unmasking rituals that were unannounced and happened in the blink of an eye.

### **Ethical Concerns and the Politics of Representation**

One of the primary aims of the research was to learn about the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls from their perspective. Prior to the collaboration, I was known by Kuntina K. Klakalakis as the “...creepy girl who hid behind telegraph poles taking photographs...” In the framework of representation and the notion of giving voice to the research participants, this comment made me re-examine my entire practice and approach behind the camera. In the book *Visualizing Anthropology* (2005), Grimshaw and Ravetz suggest that issues of participation and power are the

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<sup>22</sup> Peter Kollock, "The Emergence of Exchange Structures: An Experimental Study of Uncertainty, Commitment, and Trust," *American Journal of Sociology* 100, no. 2 (1994): 317.

<sup>23</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> Sztompka, Alexander, and Seidman, *Trust: A Sociological Theory*, 42.

<sup>25</sup> Sztompka, Alexander, and Seidman, *Trust: A Sociological Theory*, 63.

challenges of lens-based observational practice.<sup>26</sup> Visual anthropologist Laena Wilder calls collaboration the key to her practice. Wilder writes, "...the camera becomes a channel for the exchange, an excuse for two people to enter a dialogue".<sup>27</sup>

Early in the trajectory and methodological process of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls research, I considered the problematic lens of representation that would arise if the only voice the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls had was from behind the scenes. The solution was to create a platform for their voices within the research, beyond my mere observation from behind the camera. I needed to ask them questions and record their voices and thoughts to gain a better understanding of their subculture and to strengthen the balance of our collaboration. This led me to acquire formal university ethics clearance to conduct interviews with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. The ethics clearance also covered the interview technique of photo-elicitation and the use of the original Laneway photographs in the research. The aim of using the photographs as an interview technique was to gain knowledge of what was happening and who was in the Laneway photographs. Through photo-elicitation and subsequent interviews, the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls spoke of their lives within their subculture, their relationships to one another, and what it feels like to be photographed.

A case study of photo-elicitation, participant observation and lens-based practice documenting drag culture is a study by Brian Brown focusing on 'Jeremy', a gay professional drag queen.<sup>28</sup> Anthropologist Prosser outlines Brown's fieldwork and photo-elicitation mixed with observational data and theory as an enhancement of "academic integrity".<sup>29</sup> Prosser writes, "The meanings and insights provided by 'Jeremy' in responding to Brown's photographs are pivotal in providing the article with a three-dimensional quality and unique insight into his world."<sup>30</sup> Brown's visual research is observational and collaborative in the sense of generating data and rich

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<sup>26</sup> Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, eds., *Visualizing Anthropology* (Bristol: intellect, 2005), 8.

<sup>27</sup> Laena Wilder, "Documentary Photography in the Field," in *Viewpoints: Visual Anthropologists at Work*, ed. Mary Strong (text) and Laena Wilder (visual) (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 35.

<sup>28</sup> Brian Brown, "Doing Drag: A Visual Case Study of Gender Performance and Gay Masculinities," *Visual Sociology* 16, no. 1 (2001).

<sup>29</sup> Jon Prosser, "Seeing Sociology: Enlarging the Frame in Image-based Research," *Visual Studies* 16, no. 1 (2001): 4.

<sup>30</sup> Prosser, "Seeing Sociology: Enlarging the Frame in Image-based Research," 4.

cultural insight through the photo-elicitation process. Brown writes, “The performance of gender is inherently a visual topic and photo-elicitation aids in capturing that quality.”<sup>31</sup> The research involved Brown photographing Jeremy’s transformation into drag, his performances, and his life off-stage. The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls research is similar in methodological and fieldwork strategies to Brown’s study, including in its observational approach. As with Brown, the photo- elicitation process reduced a hierarchical interview situation and gave insight into the process and transformation of dressing in drag. Harper suggests a role reversal takes place with the transfer of knowledge during photo-elicitation. Harper writes, “If the photo-elicitation process goes well, the person being interviewed sees himself as the expert, as the researcher becomes the student.”<sup>32</sup>

Anthropologist and ethnographic filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha bridges methodology, ethnography and culture within her films. She uses film, photography and poetic voiceovers to express her visual theory on screen. In an interview with Scott MacDonald, Minh-ha says, “It was when I started making films myself that I really came to realise how obscene the question of power and production of meaning is in filmic representation.”<sup>33</sup> Minh-ha argues that the notion of giving voice is “extremely paternalistic”. Minh-ha further suggests:

The notion of giving voice is so charged because you have to be in such a position that you can ‘give voice’ to other people. And also the illusion that you ‘give voice’, whereas the film is very much the voice of the filmmaker—the term ‘voice’ meaning here the place from which meaning is produced, through both coherence and discontinuity. <sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Brown, "Doing Drag: A Visual Case Study of Gender Performance and Gay Masculinities," 38.

<sup>32</sup> Douglas Harper, *Visual Sociology* (London: Routledge, 2012), 157.

<sup>33</sup> Scott MacDonald, "Film as Translation: A Net With No Fisherman," in *Framer Framed* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 112-13. This interview took place in November 1989 when *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* was screened at Syracuse University.

<sup>34</sup> Laleen Jayamane and Anne Rutherford, " 'Why A Fish Pond?': Fiction at The Heart of Documentation," in *Framer Framed*, ed. Trinh T. Minh-ha (New York: Routledge, 1992), 169. This interview took place in 1990 in Australia.

Patricia Levy, on the other hand, argues that verbal follow-up beyond the creative process in participatory arts research can be a form of validation, empowerment and control for participants.<sup>35</sup>

Participatory methodology addresses potential problematic issues of representation with the aim of creating more balance within ethnographic research, documentary film and photographic production. Collaboration in production aims to equalise the power relationship between the person behind the camera and the people in front of the lens. Anthropologist Esther Newton suggests that her research methodology working with drag queens from the 1960s and 1970s in her study *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (1972)<sup>36</sup> reflected the era. Newton writes, “And you went out to the field and you came back and you wrote up your thing and you didn’t even send them a copy, you know?”<sup>37</sup> As a photographer who had captured a collection of archival photographs of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls over a number of years without even obtaining any means to contact them afterwards, my aim 20 years later was to collaborate and to share the filmmaking process with the drag queens.

*Shared anthropology* is the term filmmaker and anthropologist Jean Rouch used for his filmic participatory methodology and collaboration. Shared anthropology is also referred to as reflexive anthropology. Rouch writes, “This type of participatory research, as idealistic as it may seem, appears to me to be the only morally and scientifically feasible anthropological attitude today.”<sup>38</sup> In Rouch’s practice, feedback from participants was vital. Rouch also suggests that he and his crew were active participants within the scenes through reflexive techniques such as the subconscious state *ciné-transe*.

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<sup>35</sup> Patricia Levy, *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 2009), 229.

<sup>36</sup> Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

<sup>37</sup> Paul Boyce et al., "A commitment to difference: An interview with Esther Newton " *Sexualities* 21, no. 5-6 (2018): 954.

<sup>38</sup> Jean Rouch and Steven Feld, *Ciné Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 44.

## Reflexive practice techniques

The reflexive techniques in my own lens-based practice led to becoming an active participant with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls when they invited me into their drag lives. These techniques mirror many aspects of Rouch's approach, in particular his camera work documenting possession trances in Africa.<sup>39</sup> Some of the specific techniques include: working close to the drag queens, using a handheld camera and natural light as much as possible (except when a stabiliser was needed for filming), and following the action from behind a camera. Rouch often preferred to work in very small crews. He worked behind the camera, rather than simply directing, "to be subjectively responsible" for the footage.<sup>40</sup> Rouch used wide-angle lenses and referred to the exact moment of contact between camera and the people being filmed as "camera de contact". Rouch writes, "At that moment, the camera becomes a third character."<sup>41</sup>

In designating the term *ciné-transe*, which Rouch defines as the subconscious state affecting the observational ethnographic filmmaker,<sup>42</sup> Rouch expands Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov's cinematic terminology and manifesto outlined in *Kino-eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* to explain the state a filmmaker reaches in creative moments behind the camera.<sup>43</sup> In his revolutionary film manifesto, Vertov writes:

I am the kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it.<sup>44</sup>

I argue that *ciné-transe* is applicable to the physical and psychological state of the still photographer and the filmmaker enraptured in capturing the moment.<sup>45</sup> Rouch

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<sup>39</sup> One example of *ciné-transe* and possession is the film by Jean Rouch, "Les Maîtres Fous," (France: Les Films de la Pleiade 1954). Jean Rouch is also associated with the movement known as Cinéma Vérité, which is distinct from the Direct Cinema movement evolving concurrently in the United States. Cinéma Vérité has an active subject-filmmaker as participant approach. An example of Rouch's Cinéma Vérité is the film *Chronique d'un été* (1961). Within this research, I have focused on Rouch's lesser-known notions of reflexive anthropology and *ciné-transe*.

<sup>40</sup> Dan Yakir, "Cine-transe: The Vision of Jean Rouch," *Film Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (Spring 1978) (1978): 7.

<sup>41</sup> Yakir, "Cine-transe: The Vision of Jean Rouch," 7.

<sup>42</sup> Rouch and Feld, *Ciné Ethnography*. Yakir, "Cine-transe: The Vision of Jean Rouch."

<sup>43</sup> Annette Michelson, ed., *Kino-eye: the writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>44</sup> Michelson, *Kino-eye: the writings of Dziga Vertov*, 17. Kino is often translated as cine.

<sup>45</sup> I presented research in this area, expanding Jean Rouch's *ciné-transe* to include photography in the paper "In Search of the Nullarbor Nymph: The Art of Chance, Photography, and a Long Road Trip" presented at PopCAANZ at the University of Sydney in 2016.

described *ciné-transe* thus:

For me then, the only way to film is to walk with the camera, taking it where it is most effective and improvising another type of ballet with it...It is a matter of training, mastering reflexes, as would a gymnast. Thus, instead of using the zoom, the cameraman-director can really get into the subject. Leading or following a dancer, priest, or craftsman, he is no longer himself, but a mechanical eye accompanied by an electronic ear. It is this strange state of transformation that takes place in the filmmaker that I have called, analogously to possession phenomena, 'ciné-transe'.<sup>46</sup>

Rouch's notion of a state of possession behind the camera aligns with the concept that his documentary films are a result of the unconscious creative mind, according to Jeanette DeBouzek, who studied the surrealism of Rouch's film work.<sup>47</sup> The camera, therefore, is a physical extension of the person behind the camera who is using reflexive techniques as an active participant in the scene being recorded.

Rouch was referring directly to his ethnographic film work in Africa documenting trances and possession.<sup>48</sup> This followed an incident where his tripod stopped working and instead of remaining stationary and distant from the action, relying on his lenses to bring him closer, he had to physically change positions. Rouch found it necessary to move and keep up with his subjects, which led to him physically becoming part of the scene he was photographing. I argue that Rouch's description and his idea behind the term *ciné-transe* explain the subconscious state both photographers and filmmakers experience behind the camera in key moments of their observational lens-based work, particularly during immersive fieldwork. Rouch writes, "It is a strange kind of choreography, which, if inspired, makes the cameraman and soundman no

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<sup>46</sup> Rouch and Feld, *Ciné Ethnography*, 39.

<sup>47</sup> Jeanette DeBouzek, "The "ethnographic surrealism" of Jean Rouch," *Visual Anthropology* 2, no. 3-4 (1989): 205, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.1989.9966515>.

<sup>48</sup> Jean Rouch, according to David MacDougall, notes 'ethnographic film' as a term originated at a conference in 1948. David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography and the Senses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 227.



longer invisible but participants in the ongoing event.”<sup>49</sup>

Rouch compares the filmmaker in action to a “bullfighter in front of the bull” with the reflexes of a gymnast.<sup>50</sup> He writes The camera is for me, if you will, what lets me go anywhere, what permits me to follow someone. It is something with which one can live or do things that one couldn’t do if one didn’t have the camera.<sup>50</sup>

The trance-like embodiment of the camera, described by the experience and ideas of Rouch, has profoundly influenced lens-based visual practice and the performance of the person behind the camera in terms of conducting fieldwork. The participant observer is no longer a detached observer; she/he can become part of the scene in order to capture deeper insight into culture (and more interesting visual recordings).

Filmmaker and anthropologist David MacDougall has written and theorised about reflexive ethnographic styles and a methodological participatory approach in collaboration to provide means of understanding cultures.<sup>51</sup> The notion of participatory cinema places emphasis on relationships with participants in all areas of the production process. MacDougall suggests:

Beyond observational cinema lies the possibility of a PARTICIPATORY CINEMA, bearing witness to the ‘event’ of the film and making strengths of what most films are at pains to conceal. Here the filmmaker acknowledges his entry upon the world of his subjects and yet asks them to imprint directly upon the film their own culture.<sup>52</sup>

MacDougall has one foot in the world of academia and the other in experimental

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<sup>49</sup> Rouch and Feld, *Ciné Ethnography*, 39. Rouch also wrote, “Leading or following a dancer, priest, or craftsman, he is no longer himself, but a mechanical eye accompanied by an electronic ear. It is this strange state of transformation that takes place in the filmmaker that I have called, analogously to possession phenomena, ‘cine-transe.’”

<sup>50</sup> Rouch and Feld, *Ciné Ethnography*, 154.

<sup>51</sup> Film theorist Bill Nichols’ comprehensive notion of six documentary film modes—poetic, expository, participatory, observational, reflexive and performative—in the book *Introduction to Documentary* 2001 is relevant background to David MacDougall’s ethnographic filmmaking approach from the documentary filmmaking perspective.

<sup>52</sup> David MacDougall, “Beyond Observational Cinema,” in *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, ed. Paul Hoskings (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 125.

filmmaking. In the interview *The MacDougall Tapes—Renowned Documentary Filmmakers David and Judith MacDougall*, David MacDougall argues, “Participation with your subjects and observation go hand in hand.”<sup>53</sup>

His cinematic vision is a non-interventionist approach in which he works collaboratively behind the camera with his wife Judith, who records sound. They “let things happen in their own time and space.”<sup>54</sup> David and Judith MacDougall show their films to participants for feedback before the final edit. Grimshaw notes the changes in ethnographic technique posed by participatory cinema as a “negotiated ethnographic encounter”, in which the voice of participants is strengthened;<sup>55</sup> however, Grimshaw criticises the MacDougalls’ unacknowledged and missing “metaphysics” in their writings about their filmic collaborations in other cultures.<sup>56</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz note, “Unlike Rouch’s audacious camera, the work of the MacDougalls was anchored in the notion of ‘respect’ for their subjects and their place in the world.”<sup>57</sup> The MacDougalls’ approach uses critical reflections, as opposed to Rouch’s intuitive camera movements

The reflexive techniques in *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay* are based upon the filmmaker’s continuous reflections stemming from the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls’ recorded thoughts and feelings about being photographed in public in the Laneway years and the present day. The approach in the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls collaboration used both the MacDougalls’ participatory cinema and Rouch’s *ciné-transe* or intuitive camera movements. The main difference to my own approach and the MacDougalls’ ideal practice of participatory cinema was in the editing of the final project. The Glitzy David MacDougall posed a question that drove my own visual methodology with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls throughout the research. MacDougall asks, “What can we learn about something by filming it?”

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<sup>53</sup> Andrew Pike, "The MacDougall Tapes: Renowned Documentary Filmmakers David and Judith MacDougall," (Canberra, Australia: Ronin Films, 2017). The interviews were recorded in 2013.

<sup>54</sup> Pike, "The MacDougall Tapes- Renowned Documentary Filmmakers David and Judith MacDougall.

<sup>55</sup> Anna Grimshaw, *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 138-41.

<sup>56</sup> Grimshaw, *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology*, 122.

<sup>57</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Visualizing Anthropology*, 20-21.

The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls requested to view the final edit; however, they gave me the freedom and opportunity to put the final edit together creatively as an artist and ethnographer. The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls' position on the editing was vocalised early in the project, before any shooting began, by Kuntina K. Klakalakis, speaking on behalf of all three drag queens. Subsequently, each stage of editing of the visual material was completed based on their lives and experience in drag, intertwined with my own experience with them as a photographer and filmmaker

Participatory approaches in film and photography create a blurring of boundaries between the documenter and documented. One example of this was a night when Kuntina K. Klakalakis and Della Deluxe invited me to a Lashes-themed party. Della was ill and could not attend at the last minute. Dressing can be a complicated matter and the drag queens often helped one another. When Kuntina needed assistance with tightening and tying her corset, I placed the camera on a tripod and participated in the action unfolding in front of the camera to adjust her garment tightly. In this moment, I took on the role of a Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girl (**Figures 13-14**).

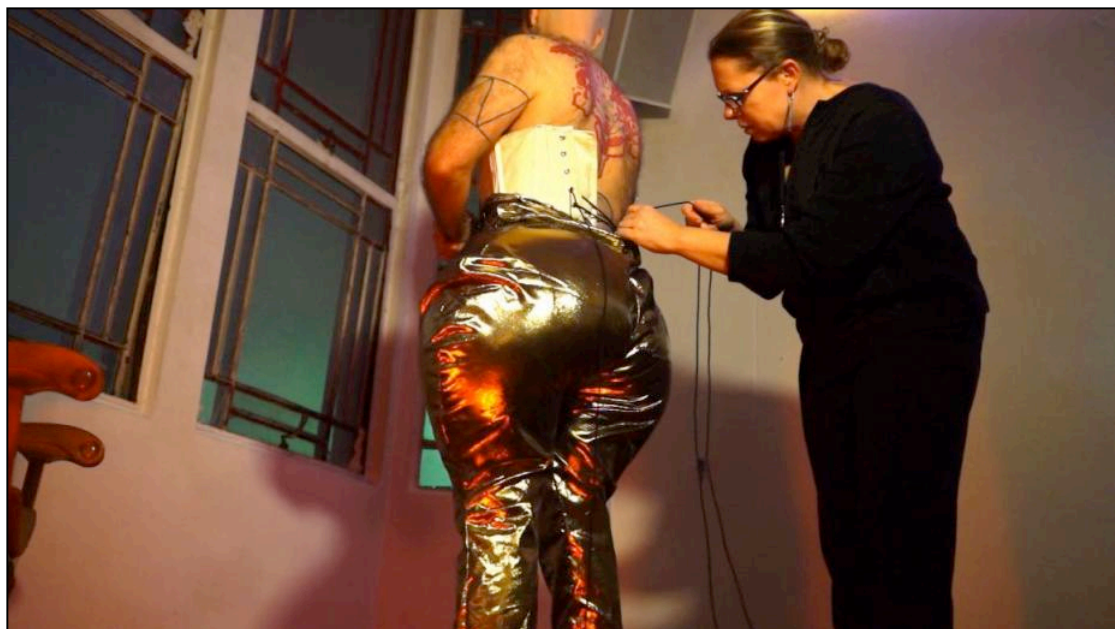


Figure 13: Tamara Voninski, *The Lashes Party*, 2018. Film Still.



Figure 14: Tamara Voninski, *The Lashes Party*, 2018. Film Still.

Later that evening, before we attended the Lashes party, Kuntina picked out a set of blue false eyelashes and applied them to my eyelids with glue. I was a willing participant and my only request was that I could still wear my glasses over the big blue eyelashes in order to focus the camera. False eyelashes are applied to my eyes by Kuntina (**Figures 15-16**) while the camera is on a tripod. James Clifford suggests that the experience of the ethnographer as a participant observer who has empathy is integral to the process yet contained by the act of observation. To Clifford, observation means “objective” distance.<sup>58</sup> I crossed a boundary by lacing up a drag queen’s corset and by having blue eyelashes applied to me for entry to a party.

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<sup>58</sup> James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 13.



Figure 15: Tamara Voninski, *The Lashes Party*, 2018. Film Still.



Figure 16: Tamara Voninski, *The Lashes Party*, 2018. Film Still.

As contemporary ethnographers shift their gaze from the exotic to the more familiar in their studies of everyday life within their own countries and cultures, relationships in fieldwork are being re-examined through a variety of different lenses, adding to the knowledge of methodology in research. John Morton argues that anthropology is not simply a study of the 'other'. Morton writes, "Rather, it is the study of self-other relationships."<sup>59</sup> Clifford, on the other hand, sees a shift in anthropology away from primarily observing the Other overseas with non-Western peoples. Clifford said, "...now Ethnography encounters others in relation to itself, while seeing itself as other".<sup>60</sup> With the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, I was the *Other* as a female heterosexual non-drag queen researcher with a camera.

### ***How Did I Get Here?***

The creative work titled *How Did I Get Here?* is an essay film of the lives and experiences of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, showcasing the methodologies of photo-elicitation and autoethnography on screen. I was remembered as "creepy" from surreptitiously hiding and taking photographs of the three drag queens during the Laneway years. Drag queens Della Deluxe and Yunka Ivanabitch didn't remember me taking photographs. The title of this creative work is linked to an advertisement on a bus shelter depicting an older woman dancing with bare-chested, leather-clad men with the slogan *How Did I Get Here?* (**Figure 17**). The camera moves slowly across the bus shelter focusing on the woman dancing, in a Mardi Gras-themed advertisement. I found this particular advertisement sitting in a bus shelter, before dawn, the morning after Mardi Gras 2016 on Flinders Street in Sydney's Surry Hills, opposite Hill Street, the site where the Laneway recovery parties were held. As I looked at the older woman dancing in the advertisement, I wondered to myself how, as a mother and straight, middle-aged woman, I had recently been welcomed into documenting the lives of a trio of drag queens nearly 20 years after photographing them anonymously in the Laneway.

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<sup>59</sup> John Morton, "Anthropology at Home in Australia," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 10, no. 3 (1999): 244. See Edward Said's 1978 book *Orientalism* for the term 'other'. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>60</sup> Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, 23.



Figure 17: Tamara Voninski, *How Did I Get Here?*, 2019. Film Still.

In addition to the aesthetic form of the essay film, the film itself is a contribution of social knowledge, via its depiction of photo-elicitation within the research process. Photo-elicitation is often used behind the scenes in methodology for formulating the written research in social science. Photo-elicitation is an interview methodology of showing participants photographs, in this case of themselves in archival photographs from the Laneway, and using oral interviews to gather empirical data and provide the framework for the study.

Photo-elicitation allows the researcher to gain knowledge and insight from the participants through the viewing of the photographs and elicitation of memories and dialogue that may not be possible through oral interviews alone (**Figure 18**).



Figure 18: Tamara Voninski, *How Did I Get Here?*, 2019. Film Still

Autoethnography is used within the film *How Did I Get Here?* to introduce the photographer directly into the scene as a participant and source of knowledge in the photo-elicitation process. In pre-production, I arranged a two-person trusted film crew for camera operation and sound.<sup>61</sup> The production concept was that, as the photographer, I would be on camera as the person who was previously behind the lens—or the creepy girl behind the camera. This represents an autoethnographic approach, being within the frame to present the photographic prints to the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls in person.

The autoethnographic approach, according to Sarah Pink, is an ethnographic method using one's own experiences to create knowledge in research.<sup>62</sup> Patricia Levy describes autoethnography as “self-study”, where the researcher is the “viable data source” in her survey of arts-based research in *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*.<sup>63</sup> Levy also suggests that the researchers make themselves vulnerable through autoethnography.<sup>64</sup> During the photo-elicitation process and interviews, the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls revealed how they feel about being

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<sup>61</sup> The crew comprised camera operator Sam Chambers and sound recorder Shannan Sainsbury.

<sup>62</sup> Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 64.

<sup>63</sup> Levy, *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*, 37.

<sup>64</sup> Levy, *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*, 40



photographed. Often, their comments were revelations about the details of my approach to the people I photograph. In turn, I spent a lot of time reflecting on anonymous street photography and the notion of voyeurism. To receive their criticism, I had to make myself completely vulnerable, as Levy suggests, and reflect on my practice in ways that I never had before.

My aim in *How Did I Get Here?* was to speak with the drag queens face-to-face, rather than from behind a camera. The objective was to find out more about their lives and how they remember and feel about being photographed in drag by me. This was the only occasion during our filming collaboration when I brought a film crew with me. I predicted prior to the first filming day that, logistically, I could not be directing, on camera and behind the camera at the same time and still producing meaningful footage. In hindsight, this was the best possible approach to the photo-elicitation segment from a logistical and auto-ethnographic standpoint.

I printed the original black-and-white Laneway photographs to present directly on camera to the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls with the aim of capturing their first impressions and unrehearsed reactions. Each scene with the photographs was captured in just one or two takes to keep the dialogue and responses to viewing the

photographs fresh. The scene depicted here in a film still (**Figure 19**) was one long take, with the drag queens viewing photographs and speaking about their experiences and memories. *How Did I Get Here?* was filmed nearly 20 years after the last Laneway photograph was captured of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls by a female street photographer who was virtually unknown and often unseen by the drag queens. Back then, I had lingered at the edge of the frame trying to blend in with the street and environment, moving purposefully in a fluid, intuitive series of twirls, bends, bodily extensions and gestures, as a small Leica camera moved from around my shoulder to against my left eye while I simultaneously moved closer to the drag queens and my finger depressed the shutter button. The result was a fraction of a second of live drag performance on the street frozen on black-and-white film. In a temporal sense, the filmic moments in the PhD project were captured as extended moving decisive moments to bring the action to life rather than freezing it. The still Laneway moments frozen in time and the fluid moving moments are opposites in duration and



Figure 19: Tamara Voninski, *How Did I Get Here?*, 2019. Film Still

temporality, yet similar in the methodological impulse of the person behind the camera.

During the interviews, the drag queens noted how photography has changed since the 1990s. Yunka Ivanabitch referred to photos captured on other people's phones as "digital disposable memories".<sup>65</sup> The constant attention and intrusion of being photographed when they just want to be out having a good time together make them cautious, fearful and angry, at times. Other people with cameras were voyeuristic and the experience was unsettling for Della. Kuntina finds the constant attention with phones creepy, yet says she appreciates the type of photography I practised in the Laneway days, such as street photography and documentary work.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Della Deluxe, Yunka Ivanabitch, and Kuntina K. Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls," ed. Tamara Voninski (appendix, 2018).

<sup>66</sup> Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."

## Chapter 5

### **Beyond the Boundaries: New Directions in Visual Anthropology and a Pathway to the *Ciné Photo-essay*.**

New pathways emerging in visual anthropology over the past decade have led to more creativity, experimentation and ethnographic forms. These pathways beyond traditional boundaries have established new discourse and a space in the field for gallery installations, such as the *ciné photo-essay* of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. There are limited case studies resembling a *ciné photo-essay* hybrid format with a focus on drag queens that cross the boundaries of social science research. Instead, this chapter examines Robert Gardner's juxtapositions in the controversial film *Forest of Bliss* (1986)<sup>1</sup> on death rituals and Tiane Doan Na Champassak's cinematography filming Burmese festival rituals and transsexuals in *Natpwe: The Feast of the Spirits* (2012)<sup>2</sup>, which resembles a moving photo-essay. Also investigated are the notions of multidirectionality in exhibition installation suggested by Roderick Coover. Finally, new directions and pathways in visual anthropology through observational practice are framed in this chapter, through the arguments of academics such as Anna Grimshaw, Amanda Ravetz and Sarah Pink. I propose that observational practice, creative editing and installation multidirectionality are some of the fissures created in the boundaries of anthropology—through the intersection of art and science—that foreshadow the classification of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls visual works as both art and anthropology.

#### **Jay Ruby and the Rigid Boundaries of Visual Ethnography**

One of the most critical voices of the aesthetic impulse and artistic expression in visual ethnography is American anthropologist Jay Ruby. Ruby gives a synopsis of his strict infrastructure and scientific boundaries on what constitutes visual anthropology in the book *Picturing Culture* (2000). Ruby writes:

I maintain that to do ethnography demands certain things, like an articulated theoretical position, a knowledge of the language of the people studied, and a

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Gardner, "Forest of Bliss," (USA: Film Study Center, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> Tiane Doan Na Champassak and Jean Dubrel, "Natpwe: The Feast of the Spirits" (France, 2012). <https://champassak.com/project/natpwe-the-feast-of-the-spirits/>.

long-term, intensive period of participant observation. Films made by people who have not observed these methods fail to qualify as ethnography.<sup>3</sup>

Ruby further suggests that the methodology must be explicit and provide scholarly dialogues.<sup>4</sup> Ruby argues that filmmaking as anthropology must be “scholarly and nothing else”.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Ruby suggests:

If the term *ethnographic* is to retain any of its original meaning, it is most profitably applied only to those films produced by competent ethnographers and explicitly designed to be ethnographies. Standards of evaluation derived from anthropology should be applied.<sup>6</sup>

Ruby formally rejected the term visual anthropology and instead preferred to use the label “anthropology of communication”.<sup>7</sup> Ruby also suggests that anthropologists “divorce” themselves from the field of documentary.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, film theorist Bill Nichols argues for ethnographic films to be made by experienced filmmakers.<sup>9</sup> In the article “The Ethnographer’s Tale”, Nichols suggests:

Ethnographic film no longer occupies a singular niche. Other voices call to us in forms and modes that blur the boundaries and genres that represent distinctions between fiction and documentary, politics and culture, here and there.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, Ruby writes, “To borrow a military cliché, ethnographic film is too serious a thing to be left to filmmakers.”<sup>11</sup>

Ruby essentially uses fighting words to expel trained filmmakers from the making of ethnographies in anthropology. In contrast, I propose that it is essential that visual anthropologists receive training in observational filmmaking techniques and

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<sup>3</sup> Jay Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 266.

<sup>4</sup> Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, 267.

<sup>5</sup> Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, 28.

<sup>7</sup> Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, 131.

<sup>8</sup> Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, 239.

<sup>9</sup> Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, 29.

<sup>10</sup> Bill Nichols, “The Ethnographer’s Tale,” *Visual Anthropology Review* 7, no. 2 (1991): 31.

<sup>11</sup> Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, 39.

documentary strategies—for still and moving images—to create filmic works that anyone outside of the academic world would want to watch. This sentiment, regarding training in the university sector by filmmakers, is echoed by film practitioners and academics Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz in the books *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology* (2001)<sup>12</sup> and *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life* (2009).<sup>13</sup>

The film *First Contact* (1983) by Robin Anderson and Bob Connolly is an excellent example of a project using an archive of photographs as a springboard for a new work.<sup>14</sup> The film preceded and inspired the creation of the new Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls works from the viewpoint of responding to the power and historical significance of an archive of photographs. *First Contact* is also an example of a film that Ruby criticises for not fitting his set criteria for belonging to the field of anthropology.

Anderson and Connolly created *First Contact* using archive materials—film and photography—documenting Michael Leahy's goldmining expeditions into the highlands, depicting first contact with the Indigenous highlanders and recording interviews with surviving eyewitnesses.<sup>15</sup> Anderson discovered 5000 existing 35mm photographs and seven cans of 16mm film footage through her research. Many of the highlanders thought the white men were ghosts or spirit figures, according to Connolly.<sup>16</sup> At the end of the film, archival footage depicts Leahy shooting a pig. The footage is shown a second time in slow motion with a gunshot sound effect. Ruby admits that he often uses the film in the classroom, yet he has ethical issues with the filmmakers' use of creative film techniques or, in Ruby's words, "manipulative devices" such as the pig shooting with effects. Ruby argues, "Once a sophisticated viewer realises that the filmmakers do not respect the integrity of this important

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<sup>12</sup> Anna Grimshaw, *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson, "First Contact," (Watertown, MA: Documentary Educational Resources, 1983).

<sup>15</sup> Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson, "First Contact: Filmmaker Interviews," in *Highlands Trilogy, I* (New York: Filmmakers Library, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> Connolly and Anderson, "First Contact: Filmmaker Interviews." Bob Connolly was interviewed by filmmaker Peter Thompson.

historical footage, the integrity of all the film becomes suspect.”<sup>17</sup> In response, Connolly writes:

I repeat: we are filmmakers, not publicists or educators. We did *not* make our New Guinea films to improve anyone’s general knowledge about Papua New Guinea, or to redress notions of ‘crude racial stereotypes’. And we *certainly* did not make them to satisfy the teaching requirements of the American academic anthropology industry; which—paradoxically—may be precisely why this industry has utilised, and continues to utilise, our work to the extraordinary extent that it does.<sup>18</sup>

Classic visual ethnography often relies heavily on linear ultra-wide shots of long duration, according to film theorist Nichols.<sup>19</sup> Nichols notes that creative montage or editing techniques with imaginative juxtaposition, such as in *First Contact*, may stir emotions or affect perceptions. According to Nichols, this “mode of cinematic argumentation” can open up anthropology beyond its traditional discipline of words.<sup>20</sup> Nichols, therefore, highlights the unimaginative qualities of academic ethnographic filmmaking and the filmmaking devices that could stir emotions within visual ethnography if there were more room for creativity. This is in contrast to Ruby’s insistence that ethnographic filmmakers reveal their methodology through reflexive narrative to instruct the audience on how they made the film, within the film.<sup>21</sup> Ruby writes:

If ethnographic filmmakers were to produce films that tell the story of their field research, and the story of the people they studied, in a reflexive manner that permitted audiences to enjoy the cinematic illusion of verisimilitude without causing them to think they were seeing reality, then an anthropological cinema would be born.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Jay Ruby, "Letter to the Editor," *Visual Anthropology Review* 11, no. 1 (1995): 143.

<sup>18</sup> Bob Connolly, "Reply to James Roy Macbean and Jay Ruby " *Visual Anthropology Review* 12, no. 1 (1995): 100. The italics are Bob Connolly’s emphasis from his faxed letters to the editor of *Visual Anthropology Review*.

<sup>19</sup> Bill Nichols, "Dislocating Ethnographic Film: In and Out of Africa and Issues of Cultural Representation," *American Anthropologist* 99, no. 4 (1997): 818.

<sup>20</sup> Nichols, "Dislocating Ethnographic Film: In and Out of Africa and Issues of Cultural Representation," 817.

<sup>21</sup> Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, 266.

<sup>22</sup> Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, 278.



Figure 20: Robert Gardner, *Forest of Bliss*, 1986. Film still.

### A 'Transitional' Document: Controversy and *Forest of Bliss*

A film that has both influenced the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls research and caused friction in the field of visual anthropology is Robert Gardner's *Forest of Bliss* (1986). The film is an observational study with stunning visuals of funeral practices and rituals in Benares, India (**Figures 20-21**).<sup>23</sup> *Forest of Bliss*, like Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls' still and *ciné* moments, focuses on the visual and does not have a voice-over.<sup>24</sup> Without a voice-over, the film is suggestive rather than declarative; showing rather than telling. Voice-overs in early visual anthropological films often contained an omnipotent projection that resembled an academic lecture to the audience. The observational nature of *Forest of Bliss* projected the details and feeling of what Grimshaw and Ravetz refer to as the "texture of lived experience".<sup>25</sup> *Forest of Bliss*, therefore, produced a visual feast. Ravetz suggests that Gardner's film incited a fierce

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<sup>23</sup> Gardner, "Forest of Bliss."

<sup>24</sup> The only exception in the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls works was the essay film *How Did I Get Here?*

<sup>25</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life*, 7.

controversy and debate in anthropology because the stylistic approach was visual rather than literary.<sup>26</sup>

*Forest of Bliss* relates to the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls research in its use of long takes, montage and juxtaposition. The film's predominant visual sense, depicting culture as a form of investigation and a narrative shown through ocularity rather than told through voice-over, makes *Forest of Bliss* a significant antecedent to the approach, editing and installation of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls *ciné photo-essay*. The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls installed works draw upon Gardner's almost silent, yet focused observational approach, which uses playful editing of visual compositions as sequences to create the vibrant and curious visual juxtapositions in *Forest of Bliss*. Gardner's work crosses between art and anthropology via the creative editing and observational approach of his ethnographic filmmaking. This characteristic, designed to show the world as he sees it through his camera, is the key link to the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls works.

The connection that binds traditions of anthropology and art, according to Ravetz, is what James Clifford calls "ethnographic activity".<sup>27</sup> For Clifford, ethnographic activity can be an act such as the juxtaposition of images in a montage through the art of film editing. According to Ravetz, "Thus, experience and reflection become part of the fabric of the research piece, whether in text, film or installation art. This kind of research activity demands an *ethnographic* imagination."<sup>28</sup> Thus, Gardner's *Forest of Bliss* uses Clifford's "ethnographic activity" to search for new meanings through the art of juxtaposition and visual stream of consciousness in his visual research.

Ravetz weaves Gardner's filmic art and anthropology together through Clifford's ideas. Ravetz writes, "Clifford's notion of ethnographic activity—the juxtaposition of the familiar and the strange—suggests that to bring art and anthropology together in

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<sup>26</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life*, 69.

<sup>27</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life*, 70.

<sup>28</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life*, 70.



visual anthropology is not to collapse one into the other but to see how they can be creatively engaged.”<sup>29</sup>



Figure 21: Robert Gardner, *Forest of Bliss*, 1986. Film still.

The controversy of *Forest of Bliss* is highlighted in reviews and letters to the editor in the September 1988 edition of *Visual Anthropology Review*. In the introduction to Gardner’s essay *The Fiction of Non-Fiction Film*, anthropologist Colin Young writes:

... controversial is the style of his films which don’t pretend for a moment to be scientific but instead place before us the images of his dreams (or even nightmares) of what he has witnessed.<sup>30</sup>

Alexander Moore, on the other hand, states in relation to *Forest of Bliss* that visuals are not enough without descriptive sound and subtitles for contemporary films. Moore writes, “Technology has left pure imagery far behind, and anthropologists

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<sup>29</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life*, 70.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Gardner, "The Fiction of Non-fiction Film," *Cilect Review* 2 1 (1986): 23.

ought to do so, too.”<sup>31</sup> In response, Gardner writes, “...I wonder if the time may not have come for members of certain orthodoxies in Anthropology to rethink their threadbare doctrines.”<sup>32</sup>

Jonathan P. Parry issued a highly critical commentary on *Forest of Bliss*. Parry writes:

If this genre is all we can expect from the marriage between anthropologist and filmmaker, then I would personally wish for a speedy divorce—though I hasten to add that I fondly imagine the possibility of a happier and more fruitful union.<sup>33</sup>

Nichols points out that the strong, emotional criticism from within the field of anthropology essentially blocks a deeper analysis of *Forest of Bliss*. Nichols describes the reactions: “...they are ego-defensive and boundary-protective rather than catalysts to relationality and exchange”.<sup>34</sup> *Forest of Bliss* opened pathways to more creativity in ethnographic activity and in the process endured harsh criticism for challenging the existing boundaries within visual anthropology.

The mysterious sounds of a creaking boat and oarlocks make up part of the minimal sound design of the film. Gardner describes *Forest of Bliss* as an ethnographic work in the sequences of rituals.<sup>35</sup> Editing the film was an experience of reducing the chaos, according to Gardner.<sup>36</sup> Gardner avoided literal sequences of death, instead foreshadowing symbolically with details such as marigolds and ravens to create mood. Gardner writes:

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<sup>31</sup> Alexander Moore, "The Limitations of Imagist Documentary: A Review of Robert Gardner's 'Forest of Bliss'," *Visual Anthropology Review* 4, no. 2 (1988): 3.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Gardner, "Letter to the Editor," *Visual Anthropology Review* 4, no. 2 (1988): 3.

<sup>33</sup> Jonathan P. Parry, "Comment on Robert Gardner's 'Forest of Bliss'," *Visual Anthropology Review* 4, no. 2 (1988): 7.

<sup>34</sup> Nichols, "The Ethnographer's Tale," 38.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Gardner and Ákos Östör, *Making Forest of Bliss: Intention, Circumstance and Chance in Nonfiction Film*, Harvard Film Archive Publication, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 39.

<sup>36</sup> Gardner and Östör, *Making Forest of Bliss: Intention, Circumstance and Chance in Nonfiction Film*, 38, 74.

Now, I don't want anybody to be absolutely sure of what they're looking at here, but it is pretty clearly some ravens, and the bundle, as a matter of fact, is a human corpse wrapped and ready for cremation.<sup>37</sup>

In the critical eyes of Ruby, Gardner's *Forest of Bliss* is problematic and ethically questionable for the following reasons: anonymous filming, lack of reflexivity, false romanticism and a composition of incomprehensible vignettes.<sup>38</sup> Ruby writes:

Gardner transformed the lives of the people of Benares into aesthetic objects that form the raw material for the creative process of his art. He did so with no apparent moral qualms.<sup>39</sup>

Gardner responded to general anthropological criticism by pointing to a list of shots that strengthen the ties between anthropology and film in the appendix of the book *Making of Forest of Bliss: Intention, Circumstance and Chance in Non-fiction Film* (2001).<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Gardner writes:

The film unfolds from one sunrise to the next without commentary, subtitles or dialogue. It is an attempt to give anyone who sees it a wholly authentic though greatly magnified view of the matters of life and death that are portrayed.<sup>41</sup>

Ákos Östör addresses the film's controversy in conversation with Gardner in the book *Making Forest of Bliss: Intention, Circumstance and Chance in Nonfiction Film* (2001). Östör writes, "Essentially, audiences are divided in two: those who are frustrated by not being told anything, and those who enjoy finding their way by looking carefully at images."<sup>42</sup> Ruby refers to Gardner as a film artist whose works such as *Forest of Bliss* are not concerned with theory or anthropological fieldwork per se.<sup>43</sup> Ruby writes:

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<sup>37</sup> Gardner and Östör, *Making Forest of Bliss: Intention, Circumstance and Chance in Nonfiction Film*, 20.

<sup>38</sup> Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, 92, 95-96, 101, 10, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, 111.

<sup>40</sup> Gardner and Östör, *Making Forest of Bliss: Intention, Circumstance and Chance in Nonfiction Film*, 6.

<sup>41</sup> "Robert Gardner, 1986," Robert Gardner, 1986, accessed May 19, 2019, <http://www.robertgardner.net/forest-of-bliss/>. In 2008, a special DVD was released, *Looking at Forest of Bliss* with Robert Gardner and Stan Brakhage.

<sup>42</sup> Gardner and Östör, *Making Forest of Bliss: Intention, Circumstance and Chance in Nonfiction Film*, 27.

<sup>43</sup> Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, 96.

If Gardner's art can be included in the canon, why not everyone else's? There are literally hundreds of sensitively made, poetic documentaries about the human condition. Why not characterise all of them as ethnographic?<sup>44</sup>

This is the juncture where Gardner's film *Forest of Bliss* breaks from the traditional boundaries of anthropology as a "transitional" document in an era of shifting media practice and production, according to Roderick Coover.<sup>45</sup> Montage, metaphor and art practice are identified by Coover as extending boundaries in filmic representations of culture using open-ended or fragmented imagery in his juxtapositions and compositions that serve as a "construction of bridges".<sup>46</sup> Coover suggests:

It is a stance that searches for aesthetic, metonymic, and metaphoric connections between images and one that seems willing to explore both the process of looking and the errors of culturally learned expectations.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Impact of Multidirectional Editing**

Furthermore, Coover associates Gardner's multidirectional film editing with the photo-essay.<sup>48</sup> Examining Gardner watching his film again many years later, Coover compares Gardner's use of montage in *Forest of Bliss* to the city symphony films of the 1920s and '30s with their crosscutting of visuals.<sup>49</sup> Coover describes the way Gardner and experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage, in *Looking at Forest of Bliss* (2008)<sup>50</sup>, freeze-frame the film and analyse the still frames as a composition of the sequences. Coover writes, "In some instances, sequences of stills are pulled together to supplement visual analyses in demonstrating poetic and rhetorical relationships concealed in the original montage."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, 111.

<sup>45</sup> Roderick Coover, "World Making, Metaphors and Montage in the Representation of Cultures: Cross-cultural Filmmaking and the Poetics of Robert Gardner's *Forest of Bliss*," *Visual Anthropology* 14, no. 4 (2001).

<sup>46</sup> Coover, "World Making, Metaphors and Montage in the Representation of Cultures: Cross-cultural Filmmaking and the Poetics of Robert Gardner's *Forest of Bliss*," 415, 19, 22.

<sup>47</sup> Coover, "World Making, Metaphors and Montage in the Representation of Cultures: Cross-cultural Filmmaking and the Poetics of Robert Gardner's *Forest of Bliss*," 419.

<sup>48</sup> Coover, "World Making, Metaphors and Montage in the Representation of Cultures: Cross-cultural Filmmaking and the Poetics of Robert Gardner's *Forest of Bliss*," 424, 28.

<sup>49</sup> Roderick Coover, "Filmmaker to Filmmaker: Robert Gardner and the Cinematic Process" *American Anthropologist* 109, no. 3 (2007): 539.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Gardner, "Looking at *Forest of Bliss*" (DVD, Watertown, MA: Documentary Educational Resources, 2008).

<sup>51</sup> Coover, "Filmmaker to Filmmaker: Robert Gardner and the Cinematic Process" 539.

Gardner's editing of *Forest of Bliss*, therefore, serves as an antecedent to that of the *ciné photo-essay* of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls; the moving, long takes instill a sense of stillness and the editing of the stills and moving images produces a resemblance to a photo-essay in both production and installation. Coover's view of *Forest of Bliss* as transitional document in visual anthropology opens the potential to go beyond a single-channel film through editing and display.<sup>52</sup>

I propose that Coover's ideas of multidirectionality in editing can be expanded to include multiscreen gallery installations in visual ethnography and, in the case of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, a still and moving visual experience as a *ciné photo-essay*; therefore, one pathway forward for visual anthropology is a wider acceptance and inclusion of experimental and hybrid visual forms, such as the *ciné photo-essay*, as ethnographic research. The use of photography and video together as an experimental form of editing and installation opens a window into the world of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls to depict their lives on a deeper level than words alone.



Figure 22: Tiane Doan Na Champassak and Jean Dubrel, *Natpwe: The Feast of the Spirits*, 2012. Film Still.

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<sup>52</sup> Coover, "World Making, Metaphors and Montage in the Representation of Cultures: Cross-cultural Filmmaking and the Poetics of Robert Gardner's *Forest of Bliss*," 431. Coover's analysis specifically cites multiple routes using DVDs and website hyperlinks as potential new directions for editing.

### **Art, Documentary and Visual Ethnography in *Natpwe: The Feast of the Spirits***

The film *Natpwe: The Feast of the Spirits* (2012)<sup>53</sup>, directed by Tiane Doan Na Champassak and Jean Dubrel, follows the largest spirit festival of Nat Pwe in Burma (Myanmar) in 2004. The trancelike ceremonies are performed by mediums, *nat kadaw*, who are primarily men dressed as women or spirit wives (known locally as transvestites or transsexuals). The cinematographer, Champassak, comes from a documentary photography background. He uses 16mm and Super 8 black-and-white film to record the frenetic scenes and ceremonies that produced spiritual transitions.

*Natpwe* creates a metaphoric window through which the viewer can experience the festival (**Figure 22**); however, the film does not merely show transvestites and trances. The viewer is swept up into the activity unfolding in front of the camera and the absence of any dialogue helps one feel the energy of the event. The film is full of rituals and channelling of spirits. The mediums, who consume large amounts of alcohol and tobacco, appease a crowd in what Tamara C. Ho refers to as “inspiring public, carnivalesque debauchery” in the article “A Festival of the Deprecated Spirit Lords of Burma” (2016).<sup>54</sup> In the same article, anthropologist Ward Keeler suggests that the *nat kadaw* get away with behaviour that would be deemed unacceptable outside of the festival.<sup>55</sup> *Natpwe*’s depiction of this behaviour is one link between the film and the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls—there are several others. The drag queens, according to Della Deluxe, get away with outrageous behaviour when they are in drag.<sup>56</sup> The mediums in *Natpwe* drink and dance wearing female clothes and hair ornaments, whereas the drag queens’ rituals have involved drinking alcohol and dancing in spaces such as the Laneway in the past and at gay clubs or private parties in the present. Rituals within the festival provided the *nat kadaw* depicted in *Natpwe* a place of acceptance during a period when Burma was under a severe dictatorship. Sydney drag queens find their safe place within the gay community.

There is surprisingly little academic focus or critical discussion on Champassak’s visual work—still or moving. His oeuvre focuses on the themes of gender identity

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<sup>53</sup> Champassak and Dubrel, “Natpwe: The Feast of the Spirits”. The film can be viewed at: <https://champassak.com/project/natpwe-the-feast-of-the-spirits/>

<sup>54</sup> Irfan Kortschak, “A Festival of the Deprecated Spirit Lords of Burma” *New Mandala*, no. November 25, 2016 (2016), <https://www.newmandala.org/festival-deprecated-spirit-lords-burma/>.

<sup>55</sup> Kortschak, “A Festival of the Deprecated Spirit Lords of Burma”.

<sup>56</sup> Della Deluxe, Yunka Ivanabitch, and Kuntina K. Klakalakis, “An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls,” ed. Tamara Voninski (appendix, 2018).

and sexuality through books and exhibitions of still and moving images.<sup>57</sup> Much of Champassak's work in Asia documents people born as men who dress and/or live their lives as women. Champassak's monumental book *Le Sexe des Anges* (2003) documents the lives of transsexuals in India, Thailand, Brazil, Mexico and Burma.<sup>58</sup> The black-and-white photographs document everyday rituals of masking and celebration. The photographs also graphically depict a sex-change surgery and sexual propositions. The cover of *Le Sexe des Anges* depicts a face that is half female and half male.

Champassak identifies as a visual artist who has emerged from a documentary background. *Le Sexe des Anges* was first published as photojournalism (also known as reportage in France) in various magazines.<sup>59</sup> Champassak's methodological approach as a participant observer working in various cultures mirrors ethnography. The book *Le Sexe des Anges* and the film *Natpwe* have a similar visual language and subject matter but the film was labelled experimental or documentary on the festival circuit not ethnographic.

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<sup>57</sup> <https://champassak.com>. Champassak's website is a window into the range of his works on gender identity and sexuality. His work is represented by Agence VU in Paris. My photographic projects are also represented by Agence VU.

<sup>58</sup> Tiane Doan Na Champassak, *Le Sexe des Anges* (Paris: Editions de La Martiniere, 2003).

<sup>59</sup> *Le Sexe des Anges* was launched in 2003 at the annual Photojournalism Festival Visa Pour L'image in Perpignan, France. This is where I met Champassak and bought a copy of the book. *Le Sexe des Anges* was produced in the time period of the Laneway Days, when the original archive photographs were captured.



Figure 23: Tiane Doan Na Champassak and Jean Dubrel, *Natpwe: The Feast of the Spirits*, 2012. Film Still.



Figure 24: Tamara Voninski, *Re-memorialising the Laneway*, 2018. Film Still.

Film scholar and curator Nicole Brenez describes *Natpwe* as visual ethnography in the tradition of Jean Rouch.<sup>60</sup> At one point, it depicts a medium entering a trance after eating a chicken (**Figure 23**) in a scene that resembles Rouch's documentation of trance—up close, circling the action with a handheld camera. The sound design of *Natpwe* incorporated trance music fading in and out and the sound of frenetic crowds.

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<sup>60</sup> "Moments of 2012, Part 1," 2013, accessed June 25, 2019, <http://www.movingimagesource.us/articles/moments-of-2012-part-1-20130110>. "Persephone's Revolt: Thoughts on Art and Rite in the Work of John Skoog", 2012, accessed June 25, 2019, [http://indexfoundation.se/files/brenez\\_e\\_js\\_-approveddoc.pdf](http://indexfoundation.se/files/brenez_e_js_-approveddoc.pdf).



Footage was often sped up or slowed down to add to the mood. The film's 16mm and Super 8 grading applied a stark, grainy black-and-white aesthetic that created a timeless feel. Champassak's book *Le Sexe des Anges* and film *Natpwe: The Feast of the Spirits* are examples of works labelled as art or documentary that cross disciplinary boundaries with ethnography through methodology and observational filmmaking while visually documenting ritualistic behaviour. These works have preceded the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls project and inspired the filming of the drag queens' rituals of parading on streets such as the Laneway (**Figure 24**) and Oxford Street (**Figure 26**).



Figure 25: Tiane Doan Na Champassak and Jean Dubrel, *Natpwe: The Feast of the Spirits*, 2012. Film Still.



Figure 26: Tamara Voninski, *Oxford Street*, 2018. Film Still.

The observational approach in ethnography involves the filmmaker/photographer's body and intuition as much as the eyes. In the book *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology* (2001), Anna Grimshaw reframes the observational approach to ethnographic filmmaking in terms of a phenomenological orientation, innovations in techniques and forms, and the insertion of the filmmaker into the world they are filming.<sup>61</sup> Grimshaw suggests that observational filmmaking is reframed through skilled, trained practitioners and alertness to the world around the filmmaker.<sup>62</sup> According to Grimshaw, observation hinges on anticipation through "intuition and the fine tuning of the senses".<sup>63</sup> Gardner invokes the intuition as well, while describing certain moments experienced through the camera as trance-like. The art of this type of filmmaking, according to Gardner, is the intuition or sensitivity to how things unfold in real time. Gardner writes:

There's a strange feeling that comes over you, I think, as you're looking through a camera at something you think is going to be really compelling. It hasn't happened yet; it's going to happen you're told by some occult knowledge, and you're riveted, absolutely riveted.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Grimshaw, *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology*.

<sup>62</sup> Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, eds., *Visualizing Anthropology* (Bristol: intellect, 2005), 6-7.

<sup>63</sup> Grimshaw, *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology*, 29.

<sup>64</sup> Gardner and Östör, *Making Forest of Bliss: Intention, Circumstance and Chance in Nonfiction Film*, 37.

Gardner's description of the experience behind the camera mirrors my own anticipation of moments in documenting the lives and interactions of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls as they mask and unmask between genders in drag.<sup>65</sup>

In the books *Visualizing Anthropology* (2005)<sup>66</sup> and *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life* (2009)<sup>67</sup>, Grimshaw and Ravetz resituate the filmmaker/photographer from behind the camera, shifting the focus to physicality, movement and use of the senses as an integral part of ethnography.<sup>68</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz suggest, "This movement is about reinscribing the body and senses into ethnographic practice. It is crucial to visualizing anthropology."<sup>69</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz view observational practice as under-theorised in ethnography and the primary factor in creating a new direction in ethnography that shifts from the literary to the visual.<sup>70</sup>

### **The Shift to Digital and Space for Further Experimentation**

Heather Horst and Larissa Hjorth refer to Hal Foster's significant essay "The Artist as ethnographer?"<sup>71</sup> and how society has changed since the article was published in 1995 with the advent and proliferation of digital media. As a result of these changes, Foster's essay has been superseded, as there has been a shift in "screen cultures".

According to Horst and Hjorth:

The interfaces with the multiplicities of screens, platforms and contexts bring to the fore the haptic, sensory and visual nature of our worlds, requiring us to re-examine the increasing intersections between practices of art, visual culture, ethnography and knowledge production.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The unmasking is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

<sup>66</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Visualizing Anthropology*.

<sup>67</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life*.

<sup>68</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life*, 117.

<sup>69</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Visualizing Anthropology*, 7.

<sup>70</sup> Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life*, 116.

<sup>71</sup> Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer?," in *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology* ed. George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>72</sup> Heather Horst and Larissa Hjorth, "Visualising Ethnography: Ethnography's Role in Art and Visual Cultures," *Visual Studies* 29, no. 2 (2014): 125.

Shifts in digital production lead to the need to explore how our visual culture is shaped by methodology, production skills and the ways work is shown in exhibitions or online. Horst and Hjorth further suggest that the intersection of ethnography and visual culture, including art, is experiencing a “dynamic moment”.<sup>73</sup> Also, Arnd Schneider argues for more experimentation between art and ethnography as visual research to engage with the experimental “possibilities of film” in the article “Three Modes of Experimentation with Art and Ethnography” (2008).<sup>74</sup>

Art and anthropology are embedded in similar traditions, according to George Marcus and Fred Myers in the introduction to the book *The Traffic in Culture* (1995).<sup>75</sup>

In an expansion of the link between art and anthropology, Chris Wright suggests in the essay *The Third Subject: Perspectives on Visual Anthropology* (1998) that anthropology and art differ in areas such as “contexts of exhibition” and “strategies of legitimation”. Furthermore, Wright argues that visual anthropology needs to be re-created through experimental practice, methodologies and new knowledge.<sup>76</sup> Wright states:

My aim is not to deny anthropological relevance, or to turn anthropologists into artists or vice versa, but to help to broaden anthropology’s use of the visual, both practically and theoretically.<sup>77</sup>

Sarah Pink urges visual practitioners to enter new realms that have been overlooked in traditional anthropological practice in the book *The Future of Visual Anthropology: Engaging the Senses* (2006). Pink suggests:

With contemporary theoretical and methodological developments originating from within and outside the academy, the beginning of the twenty-first century presents an inspiring context for considering and securing the future of visual anthropology.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Horst and Hjorth, "Visualising Ethnography: Ethnography's Role in Art and Visual Cultures," 127.

<sup>74</sup> Arnd Schneider, "Three modes of experimentation with art and ethnography," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14 (2008): 171-72.

<sup>75</sup> George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers, eds., *The Traffic in Culture : Refiguring Art and Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>76</sup> Chris Wright, "The Third Subject: Perspectives on Visual Anthropology," *Anthropology Today* 14, no. 4 (1998): 20-22.

<sup>77</sup> Wright, "The Third Subject: Perspectives on Visual Anthropology," 21.

<sup>78</sup> Sarah Pink, *The Future of Visual Anthropology: Engaging the Senses* (London: Routledge, 2006), 4.

Pink's ideas and approaches to visual anthropology and the use of the senses in ethnography have been integral to the approach and research methodology of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. Pink writes:

...visual anthropology might be redefined as not simply the anthropology of the visual and the use of visual methods in research and representation, but as the *anthropology of the relationship between the visual and other elements of culture, society, practice and experience and the methodological practice of combining visual and other media in the production and representation of anthropological knowledge.*<sup>79</sup>

Observational practice, such as the practice-led visual research on the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, Grimshaw suggests, moves away from the older models of science toward contemporary art in practice and theory. In the essay "Eyeing the field: New Horizons for Visual Anthropology" (2014), Grimshaw writes, "This movement is, I believe, central to the articulation of a bolder and more radical agenda for visual anthropology."<sup>80</sup> Likewise, from the perspective of photographic theory, John Roberts suggests that the voices of professional practitioners in photojournalism and documentary can broaden the academic discourse for new possibilities beyond the world of art. Roberts writes:

Not only is it the case that few professional photojournalists and documentarists write seriously and ambitiously about photography (this role being taken mostly by university-based photo-theorists and by a small group of writer-photographers), but also the social implications and possibilities of new imaging techniques in various sciences rarely move from the realm of specialist technical discourse into the broader field of critical theories of photography.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Pink, *The Future of Visual Anthropology: Engaging the Senses*, 144.

<sup>80</sup> Anna Grimshaw, "Eyeing the field: New Horizons for Visual Anthropology," *Journal of Media Practice* 3, no. 1 (2014): 9.

<sup>81</sup> John Roberts, "Photography after the Photograph: Event, Archive, and the Non-Symbolic," *Oxford Art Review* 32, no. 2 (2009): 281-83.

The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls creative works installed, as *ciné photo-essay*, were influenced by the notions of new directions in visual anthropology such as in Grimshaw and Ravetz's ideas on the role of observational practice in ethnography, Pink's notion of the visual representing anthropological knowledge and Coover's ideas of creative editing and gallery installation of ethnography.

## Chapter 6

### The Female Gaze and Drag Queens



Figure 27: Tamara Voninski, *Della and Her Corset #1*, 2016. Film Still.



Figure 28: Tamara Voninski, *Della and Her Corset #2*, 2016. Film Still.

In this chapter, I argue that the visual pleasure of the female gaze upon drag is derived from viewing everyday acts filtered through a female lens and embodied knowledge of the feminine as drag queens perform it in novel and outrageous or grotesque ways. The female photographer/filmmaker plays a performative role in *Della and Her Corset #2* (2016) (**Figure 28**), in the anticipation and capturing of ciné moments of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, such as the film still in *Della and Her Corset #1* (2016) (**Figure 27**). The female gaze is an embodied perspective that informs the focus of the photographer/filmmaker as she captures daily acts of femininity as the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls perform them. As such, it is a vital component of what elevates this study beyond visual data collection to where visual ethnography and art are intertwined. The camera, according to Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz in the book *Visualizing Anthropology* (2005), repositions the physical body of the operator so personal experience and knowledge can emerge through the lens.<sup>1</sup> Catherine Russell ties ethnography and the gaze together in the book *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (1999) by arguing the importance of examining who is framing the image.<sup>2</sup> What happens when a gaze is from a woman behind the camera upon men masking in drag, rather than a gaze from a man upon women? This chapter argues that within academic discourse and writing, the role of the female gaze from behind the camera, in still and moving image productions, portraying drag queens, is an under-theorised role reversal in the concept of the gendered gaze. This chapter contextualises what it means to be a woman behind a camera filming drag queens. Gaze theory is traced from the predominant phallic view of voyeurism to a non-sexualised way of looking through a camera.

Although the female gaze upon drag is not sexual or aggressive, the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls still view it as voyeurism. The voyeuristic element of the female gaze behind the camera comes from a curious pleasure taken in an embodied recognition of the essence of femininity. Film theorist Laura Mulvey sets the stage for the voyeuristic male gaze in film theory; the concept of the gaze is further intertwined with visual ethnography through Shohini Chaudhuri's ideas in the book *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa De Lauretis, Barbara Creed* (2006).<sup>3</sup> Theorist Kaja Silverman expands notions of the gaze beyond male

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, eds., *Visualizing Anthropology* (Bristol: Intellect, 2005), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Shohini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa De Lauretis, Barbara Creed* (London: Routledge, 2006).



voyeurism or objectification of women by comparing the gaze to an imaginary photo-shoot in the article *Fassbinder and Lacan: A Reconsideration of Gaze, Look and Image* (1984).<sup>4</sup> The heterosexual female gaze through a camera upon drag queens, men dressing as women, is a role reversal without a power imbalance or objectification. A role reversal of the male gaze would be a sexual and objectifying female gaze. As a photographer/filmmaker, physically working within centimetres of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, I am performing a role anticipating and recording moments that parody what it feels like to be female.

The word gaze is both a verb and noun, meaning the act of looking and the look, itself. The gaze in visual theory has various meanings, including: film theorist Mulvey's notion of cinematic, sexualised gazing from male to female in the essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1989)<sup>5</sup>; objectification of power from Michel Foucault's example of prisoners and guards in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77* (1980)<sup>6</sup>; and Silverman's expansion of Jacques Lacan's notion of the gaze, from a diagram that symbolically resembles a photo or film shoot to an imaginary photo shoot using a camera in *Fassbinder and Lacan: A Reconsideration of Gaze, Look and Image* (1984)<sup>7</sup>.

The male gaze, according to film theorist Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", refers to a heterosexual and sexualised representation of women, objectifying them on the cinematic screen and, therefore, creating a power imbalance. Mulvey's dissection of the male gaze is outlined in terms of spectatorship and cinema, particularly in Hollywood.<sup>8</sup> She uses Sigmund Freud's term *scopophilia* to refer to a sexual and curious pleasure of looking.<sup>9</sup> Mulvey writes, "The actual image of woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man takes the argument a step further into the content and structure of representation..."<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that

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<sup>4</sup> Kaja Silverman, "Fassbinder and Lacan: A Reconsideration of Gaze, Look and Image," *Camera Obscura* 19, no. January (1984).

<sup>5</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and other pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power / Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> Silverman, "Fassbinder and Lacan: A Reconsideration of Gaze, Look and Image."

<sup>8</sup> Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."

<sup>9</sup> Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 16.

<sup>10</sup> Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 25.

the gaze of cinematographers and film directors of earlier eras, and in the case of Mulvey pre-1970s, was produced primarily by men controlling the gaze of the viewers.

Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", according to Shohini Chaudhuri, author of the book *Feminist Film Theorists* (2006), is one of the "most provocative academic essays ever written".<sup>11</sup> Mulvey provoked debates on the gaze and laid the groundwork for future feminist film debates, according to Chaudhuri,<sup>12</sup> who interprets Mulvey's spectators as peeping Toms or privileged voyeurs in darkened theatres.<sup>13</sup> Mulvey refers in the essay to the female object of the gaze as connoting a "to-be-looked-at-ness".<sup>14</sup>

In terms of ethnography, Chaudhuri acknowledges that feminist theorists have been drawn to explore the different experiences of women influenced by variances in "race, class and sexuality".<sup>15</sup> In relation to experimental visual ethnography, Catherine Russell writes, "The question of who is looking, and why, is placed up front, as the question of the gaze is consistently framed as the making of an image."<sup>16</sup> The framing of Russell's notion of "who is looking, and why" highlights the concept that the female gaze differs from the notion of the sexualised male gaze.

Foucault frames the gaze as tied to power through the notion of panopticon, the gaze upon prisoners by their supervisors. Foucault writes:

An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he...I his own overseer, each individual thus exercising the surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula, power exercised continuously.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa De Lauretis, Barbara Creed*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 2-3, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa De Lauretis, Barbara Creed*, 34.

<sup>14</sup> Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 19.

<sup>15</sup> Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa De Lauretis, Barbara Creed*, 56.

<sup>16</sup> Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*, 160.

<sup>17</sup> Foucault, *Power / Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77*, 156.

Foucault's notion of the gaze is one of surveillance and establishes a power imbalance. The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls complained bitterly on many occasions about being in the firing line as the spectacle of people's attention through their phone cameras on the streets of Sydney. Della Deluxe related being photographed on the streets to being raped by a camera. Della says:

But some days, it's like you sometimes feel a bit raped, when you get home because it's all these people want your attention. The non-consensual photos, it feels a bit like everyone wanted a piece of you.<sup>18</sup>

Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman examine Foucault's prisoner example through a lens of queer perspective to describe the phenomenon of internalisation as a model for how women see themselves surveyed through the male gaze.<sup>19</sup> Foucault's gaze theory clearly establishes aspects of the power resulting from the male gaze, yet there is little insight to be gained into establishing or defining the female gaze if the power dynamic were simply reversed. For the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, they love receiving the attention of the male gaze unless it crosses a line into stalking. Drag queen Yunka Ivanabitch relays a stalking incident:

He saw me come out of ARQ, cross the road, get into a cab. He was in his car. He followed me home. And he was knocking at my door. I'm like, 'Who are you?' And he bought me shit and put it at my door. And then he got my phone number. I was just like, oh my God.<sup>20</sup>

In regard to the stalking situation they face in drag, Della Deluxe says, "See, with drag, in general, I find—I mean let's face it, we all love attention and we love the attention it brings in, but unfortunately with that comes negative attention as well."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Della Deluxe, Yunka Ivanabitch, and Kuntina K. Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls," ed. Tamara Voninski (appendix, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman, "The Gaze Revisited, Or Reviewing Queer Viewing," in *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*, ed. Paul Burston and Colin Richardson (London: Routledge, 1995), 20.

<sup>20</sup> Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour GlitterGirls."

<sup>21</sup> Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour GlitterGirls."

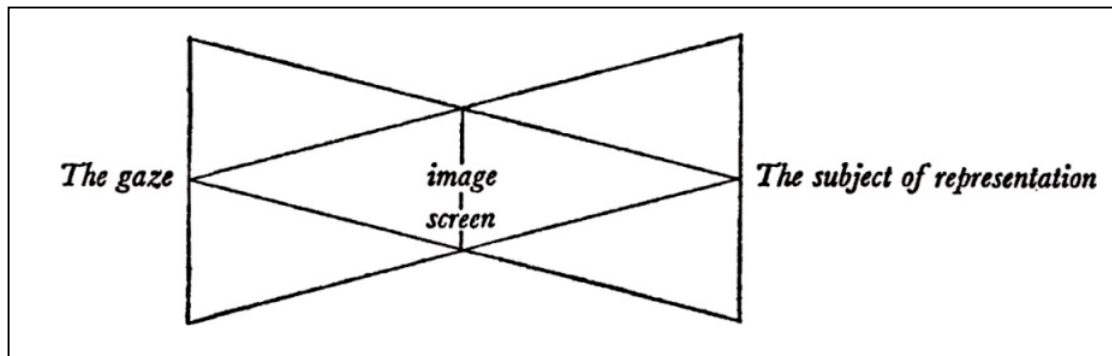


Figure 29: Jacques Lacan, Illustration from *The Four Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 1964.

French theorist Jacques Lacan illustrates the concept of the gaze, in *The Four Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964) (Figure 29), as a mirror from one person to another that is reflected back at the point of intersection, where image forms.<sup>22</sup> Although Lacan didn't write in direct relation to drag queens, he refers to "masks" between the masculine and feminine, where man plays with the mask. Behind the mask, according to Lacan, is the gaze and the metaphor of the screen functions as the point of mediation. Aspects of Lacan's vision of the gaze can be applied to the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls and their gaze behind the mask intersecting with the camera when they look up from the mirror when applying their makeup and the photographer/filmmaker gazes directly at them through the lens; however, the photographs and video footage of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls rarely show them gazing directly into the camera.

In a twist on Lacan's concept, the gaze on one occasion of the research was symbolically emanating from a photograph. During the first film shoot, when the three drag queens were looking down at archival photographs of themselves in the Laneway, a camera was placed on the table to record them looking at the photographs as though the photographs were staring back at them. This moment is depicted in a film still from the essay film *How Did I Get Here?* (Figure 30). Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girl Kuntina K. Klakalakis says:

Wow. I've never had a photograph looking back at me before. The camera is capturing the photograph so it's a photograph looking at us. We're looking at the photograph looking at us.

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, vol. ebook (London: Routledge, 2018), 106.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis referred to the photographer anonymously gazing through her camera in the Laneway as a “creepy girl hiding behind telegraph poles” taking photographs of her and her friends. Instead of a metaphoric keyhole for a peeping Tom, the camera lens became the dominant opening through which to gaze.



Figure 30: Tamara Voninski, *How Did I Get Here?*, 2019. Film Still.

Theorist Silverman suggests that Lacan positions the gaze outside of desire and “voyeuristic transaction”.<sup>23</sup> The visual theory of the gaze through Lacan’s eyes, the image is from the point or moment of intersection between the photographer/filmmaker and subject. In his lecture notes from his 1964 seminars on psychoanalysis and the gaze, Lacan used various forms of the idea of the mirror or reflection of “seeing oneself see oneself”.<sup>24</sup> The eye, according to Lacan, is a metaphor for the “seer’s shoot” that occurs in the unconscious.<sup>25</sup> Lacan states: ...the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which—if you will allow me to use a word, as I often do, in a fragmented form—I am photographed.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Silverman, “Fassbinder and Lacan: A Reconsideration of Gaze, Look and Image,” 59.

<sup>24</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ebook, 83. The book was first published in 1970.

<sup>25</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ebook, 72.

<sup>26</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ebook, 106.



Figure 31: Tamara Voninski, *Della Deluxe: Before Eyelashes* 2018. Variable dimensions.

Twenty years later, Silverman expands Lacan's idea of the gaze and the concept of being photographed by comparing the gaze to what she calls "the photo session" or imaginary frames captured of the subject by the imaginary camera.<sup>27</sup> Silverman suggests Lacan's entire argument about gaze and screen needs to be further explored in film studies.<sup>28</sup> Specifically, Silverman suggests there is a missing link, as Lacan's original theory does not account directly for the photographer who is also a viewer working from behind the camera. In *Della Deluxe: Before Eyelashes* (2018), the gaze is from behind the camera, not the subject staring into the lens (**Figure 31**). On the other hand, from the perspective of a lens-based practitioner, I argue that Lacan's diagram shows what appears to be a photographer recording an image through a camera, while he calls it a gaze with photographic terminology to help support his argument.

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<sup>27</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 161-62.

<sup>28</sup> Silverman, "Fassbinder and Lacan: A Reconsideration of Gaze, Look and Image," 79.



Figure 32: Tamara Voninski, *Mirror, Mirror*, 2018. Variable Dimensions.

Silverman notes Lacan’s use of the camera as the metaphor for the gaze and the division of the word photograph into photo-graph. Silverman’s expansion of Lacan’s notion of the gaze involves, “...removing the hyphen from ‘photo-graph’ by taking Lacan’s allusion to the camera much more seriously than he intended.”<sup>29</sup> Silverman argues, “However, he never properly interrogates the relation between camera and gaze, or proposes that it might be central to our present field of vision.”<sup>30</sup> In relation to the gaze being masculine, Silverman notes that this perception relies on the male eye with the camera.<sup>31</sup> The camera, according to Silverman, as well as the association with the gaze, is a “masculine extension” by a wide range of determinants.<sup>32</sup> In *Mirror, Mirror* (2018), neither gaze is a traditional male gaze (**Figure 32**). The image in the mirror is the point of contact for the set of gazes from the female photographer behind the camera and the drag queen catching sight of her own image.

Silverman further argues in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, that the screen, rather than the gaze, is the area where representation will become clearer and in focus.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, 134.

<sup>30</sup> Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, 131.

<sup>31</sup> Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, 136.

<sup>32</sup> Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, 153.

<sup>33</sup> Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London: Routledge, 1992).

Chaudhuri notes that this move from Lacan's ideas of the gaze to Silverman's dominance of the screen is a shift that moves feminist film theory beyond the dominant male representations of the gaze.<sup>34</sup> Silverman argues, "If the Gaze is like an imaginary camera, as Lacan suggests, then the screen is what decides *how* the subject will be 'photographed'."<sup>35</sup>



Figure 33: Tamara Voninski, *Kuntina's Stockings*, 2018. Variable dimensions.

Evans and Gamman suggest a vast difference between the visual gaze and the gaze associated with a phallus.<sup>36</sup> The gaze as "the objectifying male gaze", according to Evans and Gamman, is a patriarchal discourse within gaze theory that leaves out other contexts such as the perspective of the queer gaze or the female gaze.<sup>37</sup> An example of the gaze based on a woman's experience is depicted in *Kuntina's Stockings* (2018) (Figure 33). In this photograph, the feeling of wearing stockings on the legs is suggested. Most men have never worn stockings; therefore, this image comes directly from a female or cross-dressing experience. Therefore, gaze theory needs to be rethought beyond the male gaze to queer perspective as well as women's perspective. Evans and Gamman write, "...we feel gaze theory as it stands cannot explain all our

<sup>34</sup> Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa De Lauretis, Barbara Creed*, 116.

<sup>35</sup> Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa De Lauretis, Barbara Creed*, 115.

<sup>36</sup> Evans and Gamman, "The Gaze Revisited, Or Reviewing Queer Viewing," 27.

<sup>37</sup> Evans and Gamman, "The Gaze Revisited, Or Reviewing Queer Viewing," 15.



experiences of viewing".<sup>38</sup> Evans and Gamman set the stage to perform this expansion of the perspectives of gaze theory.



Figure 34: Tamara Voninski, *Corset Conga Line*, 2018. Variable dimensions.

Notions of the male gaze and my own experience of the embodiment of the female gaze lead to the following question: What happens when one turns this scenario around, where the gaze is from a woman behind the camera to men masking in drag as women? Adding further to this scenario, the drag queen trio, the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls are using their unique looks and characters in what Mulvey refers to as a to-be-looked-at-ness by portraying sexually mature women who are not erotic.<sup>39</sup> The notion of the male gaze cannot be simply reversed to create a female gaze, particularly when the gaze is from a woman behind the camera upon a trio of men masked as women. Russell suggests that through dissecting the act of looking in

<sup>38</sup> Evans and Gamman, "The Gaze Revisited, Or Reviewing Queer Viewing," 54.

<sup>39</sup> Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 25.

experimental ethnography, the gaze is transformed into a “new way of knowing”.<sup>40</sup> For example, in *Corset Conga Line* (2018) (**Figure 34**) and in *Curls* (2018) (**Figure 35**) the female gaze from behind the camera upon drag queens doing up their corsets for the Mardi Gras party or a hair piece dangling from a lamp is not a mere reversal of the male gaze.



**Figure 35:** Tamara Voninski, *Curls*, 2018. Variable dimensions.

### **The Female Gaze Upon Drag Queens—Historical and Contemporary**

The female gaze of anthropologist Esther Newton led to her in-depth groundbreaking written research on drag performers in *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. The book and study included a small selection of published photographs. Newton suggested that behind the scenes, she was a plain-looking woman and, upon reflection, she was non-threatening to the glamorous stage drag queens she worked with on her research in *Mother Camp* in the 1960s.<sup>41</sup> Newton describes seeing her first drag queen, Skip Arnold, between performances in 1965 as life changing. In her autobiography, *My Butch Career: A Memoir* (2018), Newton reminisces about the

<sup>40</sup> Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*, 156.

<sup>41</sup> Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

encounter and her gaze, Newton writes, “He was big, magical, and scary. Perfectly comfortable wigless with his feminine stage ‘face’...”<sup>42</sup>

Photographer Nan Goldin searched for literature in the 1970s depicting women who fall in love with drag queens, but found little material besides an obscure link to drag as perverse behaviour that was deemed unclassifiable.<sup>43</sup> Goldin was a young woman when she began living with and photographing drag queens as friends in Boston in the 1970s capturing images of drag culture that formed the book *The Other Side* (1993).<sup>44</sup>

Initially, Goldin was an outsider to drag culture but the time she spent photographing the same drag queens over an extended period suggests she had shifted to their inner circle. Hilton Als writes:

There’s an unspoken rule in photography, not to mention in art in general, that women are not supposed to be, technically speaking, voyeurs—they’re supposed to be what voyeurs look at.<sup>45</sup>

Ultimately, the contemporary version of Goldin’s 1980s-90s New York performative and social slideshows shifted to gallery venues such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City, where the viewers become the voyeurs. The viewers were the outsiders looking in to view private unguarded moments. Two of the images from Goldin’s intimate drag collection and slideshows include *Ivy Wearing a Fall, Boston* (1973) (Figure 36) and *Misty and Jimmy Paulette in a Taxi* (1991) (Figure 37). These two images show the shift in Goldin’s visual language from intimate and dramatic high contrast black-and-white prints to a more distant, muted colour over a 20-year period.

Later in life, when Goldin began photographing drag overseas, she discovered a different reception. The drag scene Goldin photographed from the 1990s in New York and Asia had shifted and she was now an outsider who was much older than the drag queens. Goldin said, “In Manila they called me “mother”, in Bangkok ‘sexy

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<sup>42</sup> Esther Newton, *My Butch Career: A Memoir* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 112.

<sup>43</sup> Nan Goldin, *The Other Side* (New York: Scalo and D.A.A.D. Artist in Residence Programme, 1993), 6.

<sup>44</sup> Goldin, *The Other Side*.

<sup>45</sup> Hilton Als, "Nan Goldin’s Life in Progress," *The New Yorker*, July 4 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/07/04/nan-goldins-the-ballad-of-sexual-dependency>.

grandma.’<sup>46</sup> Similar to Goldin, as an older woman, and additionally as a mother to a school-age child, the filmmaker was far removed socially from the tight-knit circle of Sydney’s drag culture as she filmed and photographed the lives of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls.



Figure 36: Nan Goldin, *Ivy Wearing a Fall, Boston, 1973*. Variable dimensions.



Figure 37: Nan Goldin, *Misty and Jimmy Paulette in a Taxi, 1991*. Variable dimensions.

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<sup>46</sup> Goldin, *The Other Side*, 8.



**Figure 38: Polixeni Papapetrou, *Miss Alternative World Ball, Melbourne, 1993*. Pigment print 80x80 cm. Edition of 5 from the series *Drag Queens 1988-1999*.**

The late Australian photographer Polixeni Papapetrou staged a series of portraits called *Drag Queens 1988-1999*. The stark black-and-white and colour square format photographs depicted drag queens illuminated with crisp, sharp-edged light in an ornate room with a backdrop of heavy textured wallpaper and large, gilded frames. The drag queens were photographed during their offstage moments at an annual competition in the city of Melbourne, Australia.<sup>47</sup> One of the images depicts *Miss Alternative World Ball, Melbourne (1993)* wearing a dressing gown, two-piece furry lingerie outfit, blonde wig and distant unsmiling expression (Figure 38). The drag queen stares straight into the lens and Papapetrou stares straight back through the camera.

In a description of Papapetrou's visual gender-bending and performance-based photographs of feminine drag queens (men dressed as women) paired with big muscular female body builders, art critic Robert Nelson described a view of the female gaze in the mid-1990s.<sup>48</sup> Nelson writes:

...the pleasure of the female gaze could be described as narcissistic—and therefore accorded less prestige than the predatory pleasure of the powerful male gaze—but the negative connotations given to the female are, through that very judgment, predicated

<sup>47</sup> "Drag Queens 1988-1999," 1988-1999, accessed April 8, 2019, <https://www.polixenipapapetrou.net/work/drag-queens-1988-1999/>.

<sup>48</sup> "Body Building 1992-1995," Polixeni Papapetrou, 1992-1995, accessed April 8, 2019, <https://www.polixenipapapetrou.net/work/body-building-1992-1995/>. The works are not published in pairing or diptych form; therefore, I have provided the links to the individual series.

on a phallogentric paradigm of power which is destined always to support the superiority of the male.<sup>49</sup>

Nelson highlights power in the male gaze and notes that the female gaze is not understood in the same terms. The gaze of a drag queen, according to Nelson, is even more complex due to societal role reversals. In relation to drag, Nelson writes, "Whatever privileges belong to the male gaze have been given up in favour of the attractions of the female gaze..."<sup>50</sup>

The female gaze and focus on drag, for moving image artists Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, is the foundation of creative collaborations, such as the 13-minute film *Normal Work*, restaging historical photographs of a Victorian-era domestic servant in stages of drag. According to Laura Guy, Boudry and Lorenz make connections in front of and behind the camera to explore gender and identity.<sup>51</sup> The gaze of Hannah Cullwick is seen in an archival image titled *Hannah Cullwick as a Maid* (1867) (Figure 39). A film still from *Normal Work* (2007) shows the contemporary re-interpretation of Cullwick's life (Figure 40).

A description of the gaze within this film work is explained in the *Normal Love* exhibition catalogue (2007) from Berlin, Germany:

The controlling gaze is here at any rate multiplied; the performer/Hannah Cullwick gazes back into the camera, signifying an equal position with that of the camerawoman/spectator; he/she indicates that he/she also 'sees'.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> "Gender Hacking," 1996, accessed January 30, 2019, <https://www.polixenipapapetrou.net/essay/gender-hacking/>.

<sup>50</sup> Nelson, "Gender Hacking."

<sup>51</sup> Laura Guy, "Hiding in plain sight: Recognition and resistance in recent queer artists' moving image," *Moving Image Review & Art Journal* 5, no. Numbers 1 & 2 (2016), Intellect.

<sup>52</sup> "Normal Love: Precarious Sex, Precarious Work," b-books berlin, 2007, [http://normallove.de/htm/engl\\_start.htm](http://normallove.de/htm/engl_start.htm).



Figure 39: Munby Archive, Trinity College Cambridge, *Hannah Cullwick as a Maid*, 1867.



Figure 40: Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz, *Normal Work*, 2007. Film still.

Hence, a camerawoman appears on screen as another primary character within the frame of the film documenting the contemporary manifestation of Hannah Cullwick performed by Werner Hirsh in drag. Boudry/Lorenz revealed in an interview with Guy that within the act of mining archives they "...examine the often cruel and exclusionary history of visualisation, of the gaze, the frame and the camera."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> "Scene Unseen: Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz in conversation with Laura Guy about opacity, manifestos and 'temporal drag'," November 6, 2015, accessed November 22, 2018, <https://frieze.com/article/scene-unseen>.

Unlike the film *Normal Work*, the camerawoman capturing the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls through her lens is playing her own performative role, with a camera in hand outside of the frame and often mere centimetres from the drag queens, anticipating and recording ciné moments.

The art exhibition *Man As Object: Reversing the Gaze* (2011) at SOMArts Cultural Centre for the Women's Caucus of Art in San Francisco featured a selection that contained drag queens, including Linda Friedman Schmidt's *When Everyday is Halloween* (2008), Karen Matthew's *Lips* (2008), and Emily Yost's *Untitled ('Faux Queen')* (2011) from a survey of work by 117 female-identifying artists.<sup>54</sup> A catalogue essay by Tanya Augsborg uncovers the starting points for approaching the female gaze in the exhibition by considering critic John Berger's televised *Ways of Seeing* series and book<sup>55</sup> and Linda Nochlin's challenge of masculine assumptions in the essay *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*<sup>56</sup> Berger declares, "...men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at."<sup>57</sup> Augsborg, who expands upon the underlying arguments in Nochlin's essay, writes, "Think about it: it is not surprising that women had not been recognised or credited as surveyors of men given that women had not been recognised as cultural image makers, i.e. artists."<sup>58</sup>

In the history of lens-based practices of photography and film since the late-1800s, few female artists have been widely recognised and celebrated for looking at the male body in a reverse of the male gaze. According to Sarah Kent and Jacqueline Morreau, curators of the exhibition *Women Looking at Men* (1980) at The Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, the female gaze undermines "protected masculine myths". Kent and Morreau write, "When a woman picks up the brush, chisel or camera and focuses her attention on the male, she invites an avalanche of patriarchal opprobrium."<sup>59</sup> *Man As Object: Reversing the Gaze* included photographs and videos

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<sup>54</sup> Tanya Augsborg, "Introduction: Some Starting Points, Theories, and Themes," in *Man As Object: Reversing the Gaze*, ed. Tanya Augsborg (San Francisco: Women's Caucus for Art, 2011), 25.

<sup>55</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (London: BBC, 1972).

<sup>56</sup> Linda Nochlin, "Why Have there been No Great Women Artists?," in *Women, Art, Power* (New York: Harper and Row, 1998).

<sup>57</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972), 47.

<sup>58</sup> Augsborg, "Introduction: Some Starting Points, Theories, and Themes," 14.

<sup>59</sup> Sarah Kent and Jacqueline Morreau, "Preface," in *Women's Images of Men*, ed. Sarah Kent and Jacqueline Morreau (London: Writers & Readers Publishing, 1985), 1.



of drag kings, women dressing as men, where according to Augsburg, the “embodied knowledge of masculinities” is made visible.<sup>60</sup> The notion of the female gaze, depicted through drag kings, shows men as objects of desire. Augsburg further delineates the heterosexual female gaze from the gay male gaze looking at men.<sup>61</sup>

I argue that the heterosexual female gaze through a camera upon drag queens is a role reversal without the power imbalance, objectification or sexualised looking. To expand Augsburg’s ideas surrounding the female gaze, I also propose that female photographers and filmmakers use the embodied knowledge of femininity to predict and record moments when drag queens personify or parody the essence of what it means to be female. In my own experience, I have also observed the visual manifestation of the notion of femininity for the last 30 years through the lens of my cameras by recording the lives of women.

There has been a seismic shift, according to theorist and ethnographer Sarah Pink, from collecting data in ethnography to the process of producing and signifying knowledge from the ethnographer’s own experience.<sup>62</sup> Pink argues, “A sensory ethnography methodology accounts for and expands this existing scholarship that rethought ethnography as gendered, embodied and more.”<sup>63</sup> Anthropologist Judith Okely also considers ethnography beyond mere field data collection. Okely views ethnographic fieldwork as “lived interactions, participatory experience and embodied knowledge”.<sup>64</sup> Pink suggests that the camera, itself, is both a form of engagement and a method of participation in connecting the senses.<sup>65</sup> David MacDougall uses the term “corporeal images” to refer to the senses and reflexivity in ethnographic filmmaking. MacDougall writes, “Corporeal images are not just the images of other bodies; they are also images of the body behind the camera and its relations with the world.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Augsburg, "Introduction: Some Starting Points, Theories, and Themes," 26.

<sup>61</sup> Augsburg, "Introduction: Some Starting Points, Theories, and Themes," 21.

<sup>62</sup> Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research* (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 18.

<sup>63</sup> Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009), 10.

<sup>64</sup> Judith Okely, "Anthropology and Autobiography: Participatory experience and embodied knowledge," in *Anthropology and Autobiography*, ed. J. Okely and H. Callaway (London: Routledge, 1992), 3.

<sup>65</sup> Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 100.

<sup>66</sup> David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography and the Senses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 3. MacDougall’s notion of corporeal images referencing the person behind the camera is similar in concept to Jean Rouch’s notion of the filmmaker experiencing a

The female gaze is an embodied knowing that reaches beyond the eyes to the whole body, multisensory perception and lived gendered experiences. The female gaze is filtered and transmitted through the lens of a photographer/filmmaker. The recognition of the essence of the feminine in the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls has evolved through the filmmaker's own embodied sensations and experiences as a woman at various life stages from puberty through to motherhood and beyond. Pink suggests that the researcher gains knowledge through her whole experiencing body.<sup>67</sup> Reflecting on her visual fieldwork in photography, Barbara Turk Niskac notes that embodiment in her research leads directly to the physical act of when or how to take photographs.<sup>68</sup> The person behind the camera is the first viewer, according to academic John Grady, who writes, "She frames the picture by her own act of looking and her motivation to realise the event often involves finding more and more to interest her in the scene."<sup>69</sup> Grady further suggests that video, compared to photographs, can "reveal interactions that are more complex and challenging than participants' accounts may allow".<sup>70</sup>

I argue that the visual pleasure, or voyeuristic element, of the female gaze upon drag, from this perspective, is viewing everyday acts portraying femininity in new, inventive and sometimes comical or grotesque ways. The act of voyeurism is not a sexualised looking in this version of the gaze. A film still from *Mardi Gras* (2018) depicts the comfort of taking off the bindings of femininity (**Figure 41**), as Della Deluxe assists Yunka Ivanabitch in taking off her bra. As a straight woman gazing at the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls through a camera, I view a lingering essence of the female, even when they are naked after a night wearing drag, which has led me to reconsider what it means to be a woman beyond anatomical differences.

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*ciné transe* during the act of filming as a participant-observer, hyper focused on the scene unfolding in front of the camera, and moving in a set of dance-like steps in the search for the best angles in the midst of the action.

<sup>67</sup> Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 25.

<sup>68</sup> Barbara Turk Niskac, "Some Thoughts on Ethnographic Fieldwork and Photography," *Stud. Ethnol. Croat* 23 (2011): 143.

<sup>69</sup> John Grady, "Visual Research at the Crossroads," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 9, no. 3 (2008), 38, <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs>. Paragraph 29

<sup>70</sup> Grady, "Visual Research at the Crossroads." Paragraph 51



Figure 41: Tamara Voninski, *Mardi Gras*, 2018. Film Still.

Photographer and filmmaker Evangelia Kranioti, director of the film *Obscuro Barroco* (2018)<sup>71</sup> portraying Brazilian transgender culture featuring Luana Muniz in Brazil, shoots all her own footage and records sound herself without the assistance of a production crew. Kranioti writes, “Traveling alone without crew or assistants somehow made the contact with my interlocutors easier, giving me privileged access to a virgin research field.”<sup>72</sup>

Bold, ethereal moving imagery is the key to the visual style and manifestation of Kranioti’s gaze in *Obscuro Barroco*, as opposed to the harsh reality that exists on the violent streets of Rio. Despite the Brazilian gay pride movement, Rio has another side, a paradox—it has one of the highest rates of transgender violence in the world. Kranioti suggests in an interview at the 2018 Berlin Film Festival that *Obscuro Barroco* is filmed in its way because it revealed how she felt.<sup>73</sup> According to Kranioti, she has the “urge to see beyond beauty and sensuality to show the edges of things”.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Evangelia Kranioti, *Obscuro Barroco* (France Greece: Tropical Underground, 2018).

<sup>72</sup> "LFF 2015 Women Directors: Meet Evangelia Kranioti 'Exotica, Erotica, Etc.'," Indiewire, 2015, accessed November 23, 2018, <https://www.indiewire.com/2015/10/lff-2015-women-directors-meet-evangelia-kranioti-exotica-erotica-etc-213124/>.

<sup>73</sup> "Interview with Evangelia Kranioti on *Obscuro Barroco*," Teddy Award, 2018, accessed November 23, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khkIfDPP-Eo&t=9s>.

<sup>74</sup> "Interview with Evangelia Kranioti on *Obscuro Barroco*."

Kranioti's experience as a filmmaker mirrors my own intuitive, immersive practice of being prepared for unexpected encounters, exploring unspoken gestures, streams of light and creating a bond of trust. Kranioti suggests:

When I film, I fade into the background. I prefer to be forgotten by those I'm observing because that's when they start to open up to you, when the camera quietly floats around their private space, unnoticed, leaving no trace. It's almost a liquid feeling, similar to being at sea. Filming feels like sailing.<sup>75</sup>

Film theorist Teresa De Lauretis outlines her reasons for considering the female gaze. De Lauretis states:

...when I look at the movies, film theorists try to tell me that the gaze is male, the camera eye is masculine, and so my look is also not a woman's. But I don't believe them anymore, because now I think I know what it is to look at a film as a woman.<sup>76</sup>

The pleasure of the female photographer/filmmaker's gaze is experienced through a camera viewfinder. The gaze upon drag queens is voyeuristic, yet not as a sexual or power-driven objectification. Voyeurism, in this sense, is a recognition from behind the camera of the feminine and the grotesque portrayed by drag queens in ways that transcend the mask of gender.

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<sup>75</sup> "Evangelia Kranioti talks to Kim Laidlaw," Dapper Dan, 2017, accessed November 25, 2018, <https://www.dapperdanmagazine.com/blog/2838/evangelia-kranioti-talks-kim-laidlaw/>.

<sup>76</sup> Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).113

## Chapter 7

### The Performance of Men Masking as a Parody of Women: Unmasking through Still and Moving Images

This chapter argues that drag is a metamorphosis in body and spirit for the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. Through my lens-based practice as a photographer and filmmaker, combined with interviews, I document and comment on the transformative process and subsequent gender fluidity of the drag subculture. The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls are a subculture within the social dynamics of both the drag queen scene and gay culture in Sydney, Australia. This group of drag queens uses the public street as a stage, rather than performing in a club or bar. I observe, anticipate and visually record their actions and interactions, applying skills gained in my career as an editorial photojournalist turned documentary photographer and filmmaker. Thus, through observation, camera recordings and interviews, I unmask their metamorphosis as they slip between the disparate spheres of gender identity, from men to women and back to men. The liminal space and ritualised movement between gender identities is captured as the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls are unmasked in a set of two-channel video installations titled *Unmasking 1* (2015, 2018) and *Unmasking 2* (2017, 2018).

In unmasking and describing the world and drag identities of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, ethnographic studies, gender research, masking categories and visual investigations of drag culture form the foundations of insight. The case studies examined in this chapter include: the research of anthropologist Esther Newton in *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (1972)<sup>1</sup>, concepts of gender performativity in the research of Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990)<sup>2</sup>, and the categories for men masking as women that John W. Nunley describes in *Masks: Faces of Culture* (1999).<sup>3</sup> Further case studies addressed include the photo essays of photographers Nan Goldin in *The Other Side* (1993)<sup>4</sup> and Christer Strömholm in *Les Amies De Place Blanche* (2012)<sup>5</sup>, focusing on

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<sup>1</sup> Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> John W. Nunley and Cara McCarty, *Masks: Faces of Culture* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Harry N. Abrams, Inc with The Saint Louis Art Museum, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Nan Goldin, *The Other Side* (New York: Scalo and D.A.A.D. Artist in Residence Programme, 1993).

drag and transgender culture. The films *Beautiful By Night* (2014)<sup>6</sup>, by James Hosking and *Obscuro Barroco* (2018)<sup>8</sup> by Evangelia Kranioti are also featured; the latter examines ageing drag queens and transgender activists.

I argue that to explain the contemporary mask of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, men masking as women in drag can be added to the existing general categories of men masking as women that Nunley describes<sup>10</sup>.

### **The Liminal Space of Masking and Unmasking**

In the two-channel video projections *Unmasking # 1* (2015, 2018) and *Unmasking #2* (2017, 2018), Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girl Kuntina K. Klakalakis emerges and slips between genders by stripping off a wig, jewellery and clothing. The physical unmasking is a slow process; part of the costume or character look consists of thick strips of medical tape covering her face. At the end of a night out, the tape is peeled a little at a time until it comes off as a complete mask. The tape becomes a full or half-mask painted with makeup and adorned with hair and items of grotesquery, such as teeth, fake blood and other body parts. The removing of the surgical tape is slow and painful. It is accompanied by grunts of frustration as the adhesive tugs on skin and facial hair. Kuntina often has a beard, which is a factor in the painful unmasking.

Kuntina says:

...when I'm dressing as Kuntina, because I use Elastoplast, the transformation is really quite fast. So, it's almost like this sort of shock between one guise and another very quickly. Whereas, when I'm putting on makeup, it's a lot slower and smoother...I think that there's a kind of spiritual element to that in [that] you're sort of going through a journey of becoming something else. And then, going back the other way.<sup>11</sup>

The false face or mask of tape and objects is what Judith Butler would refer to as a gender parody in drag, where the original is not male or even based on a female.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Christer Strömholm, *Les Amies De Place Blanche* (Stockport, United Kingdom: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2012). The book was originally published in 1983.

<sup>6</sup> James Hosking, "Beautiful By Night," (2014). <https://vimeo.com/106252146>.

<sup>8</sup> Evangelia Kranioti, "Obscuro Barroco," (France Greece: Tropical Underground, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Nunley and McCarty, *Masks: Faces of Culture*.

<sup>11</sup> Della Deluxe, Yunka Ivanabitch, and Kuntina K. Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls," ed. Tamara Voninski (appendix, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 174-78.



Figure 42: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 2*, 2018. Single-Channel Film Still.



Figure 43: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 2*, 2018. Single-Channel Film Still.



Figure 44: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 2*, 2018. Single-Channel Film Still.

Film stills depict Kuntina K. Klakalakis in the throes of her spontaneous unmasking routine following a performative interview by Della Deluxe about drag (Figures 42-44). In the mock interview, Kuntina had just returned from receiving Botox beauty treatments. As a parody of beauty culture, she has fake blood spurting from and running down her face due to a reaction to chemical injections into her forehead. In the following edited extract from an interview<sup>13</sup>, the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls provide insight into the levels of discomfort they endure during their extreme transformations in drag:

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Kuntina K. Klakalakis: | Do you think that level of discomfort is important for drag?   |
| Yunka Ivanabitch:      | Yes.   |
| Della Deluxe:          | [If you're] comfortable, you're ugly.<br>Remember... My face was rock hard because I'd sprayed hairspray about six times to keep everything on top of certain things. I had heels on and for me that is transformation into drag. You put on this other persona, but it's still you as well. Well that's how I feel about it, and I don't really |

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<sup>13</sup> Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."



feel when I go from the male to a female, because I'm pretty.

Yunka Ivanabitch:

The transformation, like, it's just ridiculous the time you just put into your face. It is crazy. Let alone everything else.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis:

My face just peels off.

Yunka Ivanabitch:

That transformation into what we look like – I find that challenging going out because, generally, straight men really look at us in a way. 'Oh, they are the perfect women.' And that's how interaction with straight men, for me, is challenging because they want to touch me. They want to do things with me and take me home. 'God, this is how women feel when they go clubbing or to a bar every day.'



Figure 45: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 1*, 2017. Single-Channel Film Still.

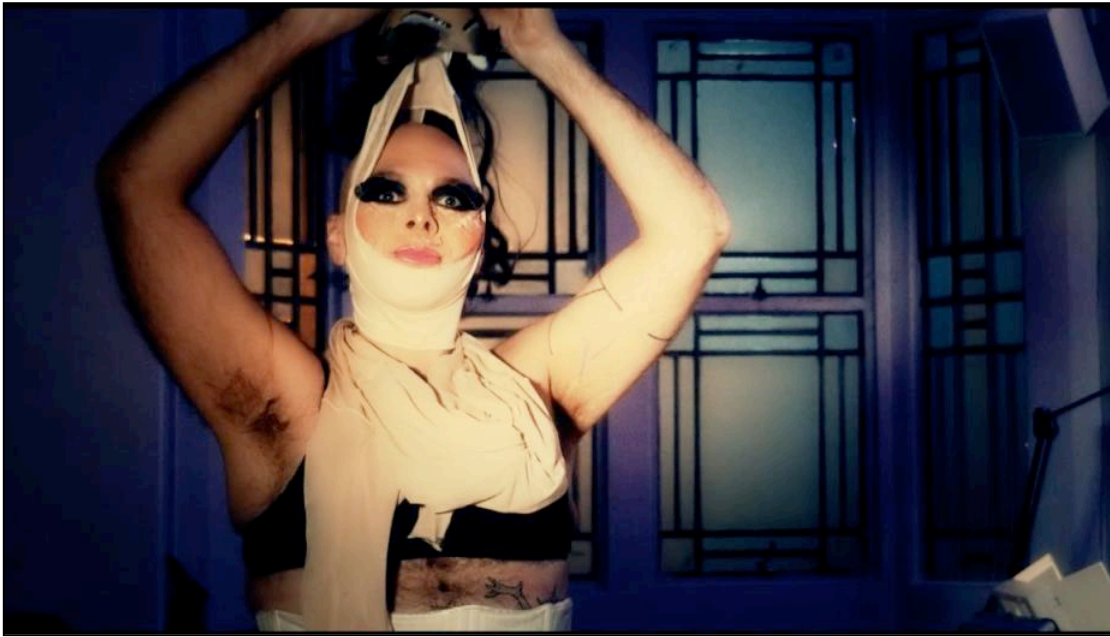


Figure 46: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 1*, 2017. Single-Channel Film Still.



Figure 47: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 1*, 2017. Single-Channel Film Still.

A series of single-channel film stills from the double-channel installation *Unmasking 1*, shows Kuntina K. Klakalakis spontaneously unmasking in the early hours of the morning after a night out (Figures 45-47). She had returned to her inner-city apartment from a private Lashes party. Her mask with elaborate eyelashes is slowly pulled free from her face in its entirety with a loud, rumbling popping noise. She/He emerges in slow motion amid the popping sound in a physical and spiritual transformative space between genders.

The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls readily reveal the physical and emotional pain they experience when they transform through drag as women. They mention the too small stiletto heels, tight corsets that dig into their skin, layers of tape that chafe, glue that burns, glitter that gets into their mouths and stomachs, layer upon layer of makeup, and unwanted sexual attention. On several occasions, the drag queens indicate that if their transformation and wearing of drag didn't hurt, it wouldn't be worth doing.

In the following interview extract<sup>14</sup>, the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls discuss the power of gender transformation within their drag practice:

- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Drag has a power of transformation—the power of celebration.
- Yunka Ivanabitch: The power of being someone that you'd never thought you'd be, purely just because you've modified your body with corsetry and bras and fabric.
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It could just be hair and putting sparkles in your hair. You know, it has an effect.
- Della Deluxe: Better with makeup though.
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah.
- Della Deluxe: Lots.
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Heavy.
- Della Deluxe: Yep. Applied with a mattress.
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Or taken off with a spade.

Nunley notes that men have a long history of masking as women in masquerade. "Through the transformation of the mask, men discover and explore aspects of the feminine,"<sup>15</sup> he writes. Nunley further implies that the male construction of the female mask allows men's behaviour to overstep the boundaries of the cultural female role when wearing the mask.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."

<sup>15</sup> John W. Nunley and Cara McCarty, *Masks: Faces of Culture* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Harry N. Abrams, Inc with The Saint Louis Art Museum, 1999), 160. Nunley describes an overview of men masking as women through history and cultures and his descriptions and illustrations include drag in his historical analysis of masking.

<sup>16</sup> Nunley and McCarty, *Masks: Faces of Culture*, 164.

Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girl Della Deluxe says:

You do get away with a lot more in drag though. You do stuff that you...wouldn't do normally. Make people get on the floor and eat cat food... Bark at people. I bark at people all the time, but it's a bit more exaggerated in drag because it's about show, really.<sup>17</sup>

In *Masked Performance: The Play of Self and Other in Ritual and Theatre* (1996), John Emigh suggests that masking is a spiritual conduit and the mask is both an object and a metaphor.<sup>18</sup> Emigh writes:

I have come to regard the relationship of the mask to its wearer as a paradigm for the relationships between self and other (and self and self) that lie at the heart of theatrical process.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 48: Tamara Voninski, *Della Deluxe and Men-o-pause*, 2017. Variable dimensions.

Della Deluxe often carries a paper fan to cool herself from her hot flashes. She jokes about being in “men-o-pause” as the summer heat makes the inner-city apartment stifling out of range of the wide-open windows and floor fans. In, *Della Deluxe and Men-o-pause* (2017), Della Deluxe fans herself during a hot flash waiting for

<sup>17</sup> Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."

<sup>18</sup> John Emigh, *Masked Performance: The Play of Self and Other in Ritual and Theatre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 289.

<sup>19</sup> Emigh, *Masked Performance: The Play of Self and Other in Ritual and Theatre*, xvii.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis to finish masking before a night out (**Figure 48**). The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls cite influences such as burlesque and Dita Von Teese performances. They also cite non-conformist figures in drag and fashion. Kuntina K. Klakalakis draws from flamboyant performance artist Leigh Bowery, while Della Deluxe<sup>21</sup> is inspired by film director John Waters' character Divine. Della calls Kuntina K. Klakalakis' guises a reminder of Bowery's style. She says to Kuntina, "There's a lot of body shape manipulation with a lot of your stuff that you do and you treat your body like it's an artwork."<sup>23</sup> Referring to drag as an experimental space, Yunka Ivanabitch says, "You can transform yourself and feel like you've been on a journey purely because of what you're wearing, what your body shape is and how people interact with you."<sup>24</sup>

### **Esther Newton and the Double Inversion**

Esther Newton wrote her seminal anthropological study of professional drag queen culture, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (1972), after a two-year study of the world of drag queens.<sup>25</sup> The ethnographic work took place in the 1960s, when dressing in drag and homosexuality were both still illegal in Australia.

One gap in Newton's study is the exclusion of drag queen street performers created by her singular focus on those who performed on stage. Her numerous attempts to engage conversationally with street drag queens were unsuccessful. According to Newton, they saw her as an outsider.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to Newton's study, research into the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls benefited from access and acceptance into a subculture of street drag queens. This resulted in observation, documentation, collaboration and interviews.

Newton suggests that drag queens are often drab in appearance in their daily male identity. She writes, "These men often say that drag is simply a medium or mask that allows them to perform."<sup>27</sup> In an interview with Newton, academic Silvia Posocco suggests that theorist Judith Butler, in her "postmodern jargon-driven, jargon-heavy prose", refers to *Mother Camp* in the last chapter of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*<sup>28</sup> and, therefore, the results of Newton's study are at the very

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<sup>21</sup> Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."

<sup>23</sup> Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."

<sup>24</sup> Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."

<sup>25</sup> Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*.

<sup>26</sup> Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, 134.

<sup>27</sup> Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, 98.

<sup>28</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

heart of Butler's gender performance theory.<sup>29</sup> Newton refers to drag as a "double inversion":

Drag says, 'My outside appearance is feminine, but my essence "inside" [the body] is masculine.' At the same time, it symbolises the opposite inversion: 'my appearance "outside" [my body, my gender] is masculine but my essence 'inside' [myself] is feminine.'<sup>30</sup>

Butler, on the other hand, suggests that drag subverts the outside and inside of Newton's notions of female impersonators and ridicules gender models and identity. Butler uses the word "parody" and suggests, "In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency."<sup>31</sup> Further, Butler argues, the gender fluidity of drag is both a parody and a performance. Therefore, gender is not something we are, but something that we do.



Figure 49: Tamara Voninski, *Performance in a Stairwell*, 2018. Variable dimensions.

<sup>29</sup> Elisabeth L. Engebretsen Paul Boyce, EJ Gonzalez-Polledo, Silvia Posocco, "A commitment to difference: An interview with Esther Newton," *Sexualities* 21 no. 5-6 (2018): 953. The conversation took place in 2014 at the 113<sup>th</sup> American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C.

<sup>30</sup> Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, 138.

<sup>31</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 174-75.

Social drag, on the street, according to Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girl Della Deluxe, is a performance. Kuntina K. Klakalakis views the group's style of drag as non-mainstream, a "roving kind of sideshow costume" in a public circus. She says:

It challenges the idea about what drag is and what drag performance is, because we take it to a level where we're just about inhabiting an environment. Being between ourselves and having a laugh, interacting.<sup>33</sup>

The trio often carry larger-than-life props, such as enormous handbags, a "No Photos" paddleboard sign or blow-up dolls to stage their street performances. In *Performance in a Stairwell* (2018), they use oversized scissors (**Figure 49**). Della Deluxe says, "We like to have activities when we go out because it gives us something to do."<sup>34</sup> The performances take place on footpaths, in dance halls and in bathrooms. The drag queens confided that sometimes it takes so long to mask while getting ready that they miss the opportunity to go out.



Figure 50: Tamara Voninski, *Champagne & Masking*, 2017. Variable dimensions.

<sup>33</sup> Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."

<sup>34</sup> Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."



Figure 51: Tamara Voninski, *Yunka Ivanabitch*, 2015. Variable dimensions.



Figure 52: Tamara Voninski, *Kuntina and Yunka Masking*, 2015. Variable dimensions.

In *Champagne & Masking* (2017), Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls Kuntina K. Klakalakis (left) and Della Deluxe (right) share a champagne halfway through masking (**Figure 50**). They are between their male and female personas. In *Yunka Ivanabitch*, Yunka receives a symmetrical wig trimming from Kuntina K. Klakalakis (**Figure 51**). Della Deluxe is covered in glitter and gold in the background. Yunka wears a similar facial masking each time in drag, yet changes her hairstyle and costume. In *Kuntina and*



*Yunka Masking*, Kuntina (left) and Yunka (right) apply layers to their masks as they prepare to dress in drag for an evening out (**Figure 52**). They have known each other for decades and help each other with their transformations into women.

### **Similarities and Differences between Goldin and Strömholm**

Drag queens were the focus of photographer Nan Goldin's first immersive visual project before her photography and performative slideshows expanded to weave the visual diary of friends and lovers in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*.<sup>35</sup> Goldin was immediately infatuated with the drag queens she spotted from afar in downtown Boston in 1972, the same year Newton released *Mother Camp*. Goldin suggested that spending time with and photographing drag queens was liberating in the sense of capturing fluid gender boundaries.<sup>36</sup> Goldin said, "The people in these pictures are truly revolutionary; they are the real winners of the battle of the sexes because they have stepped out of the ring."<sup>37</sup> As depicted in *Picnic on the Esplanade* (1973) in Boston, Goldin lived with the drag queens, forging a friendship that allowed her to step into their lives and document their interactions through photography (**Figure 53**).

Goldin paid homage to the notion of a third-gender lifestyle. In her photographic book *The Other Side* (1993), named after the club where many drag queens worked, she classified the drag queens not as male or female but as a third gender.<sup>38</sup> "I accepted them as they saw themselves; I had no desire to unmask them with my camera," she wrote.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Nan Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (New York: Aperture, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Goldin, *The Other Side*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Goldin, *The Other Side*, 8.

<sup>38</sup> Goldin, *The Other Side*, 5.

<sup>39</sup> Goldin, *The Other Side*, 5.



Figure 53: Nan Goldin, *Picnic on the Esplanade*, 1973. Variable dimensions.

In direct contrast to Goldin, the central aims of the visual research on the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls was to literally and metaphorically unmask the trio to learn more about their lives and drag subculture. The performance and parody of the drag queens was directly evident visually when they finished masking and walked out of Kuntina K. Klakalakis' city apartment onto the street; however, to learn about their subculture, it was necessary to unravel the layers of tape and makeup to discover a deeper level underneath the performance and parody and uncover the stages between male and female.

In *The Other Side*, Goldin photographs friends who inhabit the “third gender” up close and sometimes unawares in their homes, onstage and in their dressing rooms. The stark black-and-white photographs from the 1970s morph into saturated colour photographs from the 1980s and 1990s in the book's design and timeline, crossing eras and indicating the dramatic changes to film stock over this time. Photographs such as *Jimmy Paulette and Tabboo! In the bathroom* (1991) depict two drag queens in a liminal stage of gender in-betweenness – Goldin's third gender (**Figure 54**). Jimmy is wearing only heavy eye makeup and Tabboo! is wearing a necklace; both these features contrast with their naked, hairless male chests and close-cropped boy hair.<sup>40</sup> Goldin captured Jimmy and Tabboo! in-between unknown events off camera.

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<sup>40</sup>Goldin, *The Other Side*, 51.



Figure 54: Nan Goldin, *Jimmy Paulette and Tabboo! In the bathroom*, 1991. Variable dimensions.

A precursor to Goldin was Swedish photographer Christer Strömholm's exploration of a subculture of transvestites<sup>41</sup> in the 1950s and 1960s with his camera, in what author Nan Richardson called a universal search for identity.<sup>42</sup> Strömholm said, "We met by chance and I realised very soon, that as soon as you ask yourself why their lives are the way they are, it becomes difficult not to take pictures."<sup>43</sup> Strömholm explains:

It isn't one picture in particular I'm looking for, but many. I often get pictures that are not necessarily visible on the surface. The picture isn't obvious. This way of seeing and taking photos appears gradually.<sup>44</sup>

Author Carole Naggar suggests that Strömholm's photographs are the opposite of the published reportage of the era from magazines such as *Life*, in which photography was printed as a report.<sup>45</sup> Instead, Strömholm's photographs are a poetic diary and lyrical transmutation of what he described as "women imprisoned in men's bodies". Naggar

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<sup>41</sup> Strömholm used the term transvestite. However, many of his subjects had not undergone a sex change operation and, thus, today would be known as drag queens.

<sup>42</sup> Nan Richardson, "The Mirrors of Christer Strömholm" *Aperture* 121, no. Fall (1990).

<sup>43</sup> Gunilla Knape, "Interview with Christer Strömholm," in *Christer Strömholm exhibition catalogue* (Barcelona: Funacio la Caixa, 2001). This was Strömholm's last interview, which took place in 2000.

<sup>44</sup> Knape, "Interview with Christer Strömholm."

<sup>45</sup> Carole Naggar, "Christer Stromholm: A Swedish Goya," *Focus*, April 2008, <https://stromholm.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/a-swedish-goya.pdf>.

further suggests, “Strömholm’s images seem the opposite of Henri Cartier-Bresson’s *decisive moment*, almost as if each photograph was made of an accumulation of layers of time concentrated and frozen.”<sup>46</sup>

Naggar’s description of Strömholm’s lingering layers of time could apply to the mood and visual language captured within the moving *ciné moments* of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. On the other hand, I consider these lingering moments of drag culture in Sydney an expansion of the decisive moment rather than its opposite. Naggar makes a distinction between a series of images published in magazines on deadline and the more poetic images a photographer such as Strömholm captures after spending vast amounts of time with his subjects. Similar to Strömholm, in the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls research, I spent enormous amounts of time with the drag queens and raised my camera only with their approval, in the search for, and anticipation of, a series of moments manifesting the hidden poetry of the female soul within their bodies.



Figure 55: Christer Strömholm, *Nana & Jacky, Place Blanche, Paris, 1961*. Variable dimensions.

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<sup>46</sup> Naggar, "Christer Stromholm: A Swedish Goya."

Strömholm's photographs, according to Richardson, go beyond the mask into new worlds beyond the senses.<sup>47</sup> Strömholm lived in the same hotels as his gender masking and transitioning friends, documenting their lives on the streets of Paris in the 1950s and 1960s. *Nana & Jacky, Place Blanche, Paris, 1961* is a photograph Strömholm captured of the drag queens and transvestites who were living in his apartment building (**Figure 55**). His photographs are intimate windows into their lives in public and private in Paris during an era when similar lifestyles in Sydney were underground and illegal. His poignant noir black-and-white street were originally published as *Les Amies de Place Blanche* (1983, 2012).<sup>48</sup> The subjects were very convincing in outward appearance and spirit as women. Strömholm portrayed them going about their daily lives with an edge of charged and mysterious sexuality in an era when gender fluidity was still semi-underground and illegal in Europe. Rather than portraying them as oddities, according to journalist Jake Naughton, Strömholm saw and documented a different reality in the transgender subculture. He wrote, "It was then—and still is—about attaining the right to own one's own life and identity."<sup>49</sup>

### **Capturing the Loneliness of Drag with the Moving Image**

For the film *Beautiful by Night* (2014), San Francisco-based photographer and filmmaker James Hosking portrays three ageing drag queens putting on makeup, going to a bar and returning home.<sup>50</sup> Each of the women then wipes off their mask of makeup and, for a brief moment, the viewer sees them in their liminal space between gender identities. This state of in-between or unmasking is the same elongated physical space and metaphysical transcendence depicted in *Unmasking 1* and *Unmasking 2*, featuring the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. The overall experience of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls mirrors many social aspects of the off-stage lives of the drag queens in Hosking's documentary.

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<sup>47</sup> Nan Richardson, "The Mirrors of Christer Strömholm" *Aperture* 121, no. Fall 1990: 2. Christer Strömholm worked under the pseudonym Christer Christian. During a retrospective of Christer Strömholm photographs in Paris in 2005, when I was based in the city for several months for an artist residency, I was drawn to his black-and-white photographs of transsexuals on the streets of Paris.

<sup>48</sup> Christer Strömholm, *Les Amies de Place Blanche* (Stockport, United Kingdom: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2012). The book was originally published in 1983.

<sup>49</sup> Jake Naughton, "Intimate and Glamorous Portraits of Parisian Transgender Women," *New York Times* (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/26/lens/intimate-and-glamorous-portraits-of-parisian-transgender-women.html>) Oct. 26, 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Hosking, "Beautiful By Night."

Hosking had captured a photo-essay of three ageing drag performers at Aunt Charlie's Lounge, the last gay bar in San Francisco's Tenderloin district. In *Beautiful By Night*, he followed the same people.<sup>51</sup> In the film, drag queen Donna Persona, a.k.a. Gustavo, applies glue to her false eyelashes with her hands visibly shaking. She says, "My age informs who I am. I don't give a shit." Donna Persona a.k.a. Gustavo is shown on stage and going home to unmask (**Figures 57-59**). Another drag queen, Olivia a.k.a. Frank, gets ready in her pay-by-the-week hotel before a performance in Hosking's *Untitled* (**Figure 56**), a photograph from the photo essay that led to his film. Olivia says in an interview with Jeremy Lybarger for *Out* magazine, "My thing is not being a female illusionist where I look dead-on like a woman. I'm a man in a dress, and I'm not afraid to show that."<sup>52</sup>



Figure 56: James Hosking, *Untitled*, 2014. Variable dimensions.

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<sup>51</sup> Hosking, "Beautiful By Night."

<sup>52</sup> "Tenderloin is the Night: The stars of San Francisco drag's gritty frontier, in their own words," *Out Magazine*, 2014, accessed December 20, 2018, <https://www.out.com/entertainment/2014/8/13/tenderloin-night-stars-sf-drags-gritty-frontier-their-own-words?page=0%2C0>.



Figure 57: James Hosking *Beautiful by Night*, 2014. Film still.



Figure 58: James Hosking, *Beautiful by Night*, 2014. Film still.



Figure 59: James Hosking, *Beautiful by Night*, 2014. Film still.

Aunt Charlie's Lounge, according to Hosking, was a symbol of the closure of drag bars across the United States and drew him to document the lives of Olivia Hart, Donna Persona and Colette LeGrande.<sup>53</sup> The three queens represent an era of drag performers who want to do their own thing without worrying about others judging them. Hosking points out that growing older creates invisibility for women. His intention was to document older drag queens and their experiences, such as self-acceptance.<sup>54</sup> Hosking captures an intimacy, according to Soraya Nadia McDonald, that is in stark contrast to the beauty of drag queens that feature on screen during the television series *Ru Paul's Drag Race*. Referring to Olivia Hart, Donna Persona and Colette LeGrande, McDonald writes:

There's an intimacy in seeing these performers padding about in their hose, stuffing their bras, attaching their lashes, brushing their wigs; it feels akin to watching your grandmother getting dressed.<sup>55</sup>

Lybarger, who interviewed the three ageing drag queens, suggests that "drag is a lonely art".<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> " 'Beautiful By Night,' James Hosking Photo Series, Documents Aging Drag Queens," Huffington Post, 2015, accessed December 20, 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/james-hosking-beautiful-by-night\\_n\\_6380408](https://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/james-hosking-beautiful-by-night_n_6380408).

<sup>54</sup> Nichols, " 'Beautiful By Night,' James Hosking Photo Series, Documents Aging Drag Queens."

<sup>55</sup> Soraya Nadia McDonald, "In 'Beautiful By Night,' James Hosking Captures a Spirit of San Francisco's Tenderloin That is Gradually Fading Away," *The Washington Post* 2015, January 6, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/01/06/in-beautiful-by-night-james-hosking-captures-a-spirit-of-san-franciscos-tenderloin-that-is-gradually-fading-away/?utm\\_term=.3610e54c4a75](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/01/06/in-beautiful-by-night-james-hosking-captures-a-spirit-of-san-franciscos-tenderloin-that-is-gradually-fading-away/?utm_term=.3610e54c4a75).



The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, on the other side of the world from San Francisco, echo his sentiment. Yunka Ivanabitch laments that the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls are no longer socialising like they used to because the club scene is less active and they are all getting older. Loneliness also stems from their inability to walk freely down public streets in Sydney without people in their face and grabbing at their female body parts or trying to photograph them with mobile phones and upload their images to social media. Della Deluxe says:

“...some days, it’s like you sometimes feel a bit raped, when you get home because it’s all these people want your attention. The [non-consensual] photos, it feels a bit like everyone wanted a piece of you.”<sup>57</sup>

The film *Obscuro Barroco* (2018) by Evangelia Kranioti examines gender identity, the ageing body, transgender and drag in a vibrant gay city—in this case, Rio de Janeiro. The theme is metamorphosis.<sup>58</sup> This docu-fiction film weaves together vibrant, energetic documentary footage of Rio de Janeiro’s Carnival and an essayistic exploration of the life and transformations of transgender activist and performer Luana Muniz (**Figure 60**) who died shortly before the release of the film (1961-2017). In the film, Muniz wanders through the streets of Rio reminiscing about the transformations of her body and the city of Rio over her lifetime. Throughout the film are scenes of transvestites and drag queens transforming their bodies by masking in private and emerging, like butterflies, into the public sphere.

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<sup>56</sup> Lybarger, "Tender(loin) is the Night: The stars of San Francisco drag’s gritty frontier, in their own words."

<sup>57</sup> Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."

<sup>58</sup> Evangelia Kranioti, "Obscuro Barroco" (France, Greece: Tropical Underground, 2018).



Figure 60: Evangelia Kranioti, *Obscuro Barroco*, 2018. Film Still

There is surprisingly little academic discourse examining the recent films of Evangelia Kranioti, including *Obscuro Barroco*. Critic Alistair Ryder suggests the film invites academic readings and discourse.<sup>59</sup> Giuseppe Di Salvatore describes *Obscuro Barroco* in a film review as an “essayistic pearl”. He writes, “The exultant bodies and the masking clothes combine to make a unique surface together with the streets and the façades of Rio.”<sup>60</sup> Kranioti presents as a visual ethnographic study the film’s essay elements and style, and its theme of metamorphosis with gender bending and ritualised theatrical street masks in Rio’s Carnival.<sup>61</sup> In *Variety* magazine, Catherine Bray describes Kranioti’s previous film as an anthropological study exploring psychological wandering in the past versus in the present.<sup>62</sup> *Obscuro Barroco*, with its framework of visual ethnography, poignant gender fluidity and a filmic style with a female photographer’s eye, is the creative work most similar to the visual study of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls in inner-city Sydney, Australia.

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<sup>59</sup> “Gay Film Review: Obscuro Barroco at Berlinale,” *Gay Essential*, 2018, <http://gay-themed-films.com/review-obscuro-barroco/>.

<sup>60</sup> “Obscuro Barroco,” *Filmexplorer*, September 27, 2018, accessed November 23, 2018, <https://www.filmexplorer.ch/detail/obscuro-barroco/>.

<sup>61</sup> *Exotica, Erotica, Etc.* (2015), Kranioti’s first feature film, was also classified by the filmmaker as visual ethnography. The film is about sailors, the sea and the women in the ports. Evangelia Kranioti, “*Exotica, Erotica, Etc.*,” (France: Aurora Films, 2015).

<sup>62</sup> “Film Review: *Exotica, Erotica, Etc.*,” *Variety*, 2015, accessed November 25, 2018, <https://variety.com/2015/film/festivals/exotica-erotica-etc-review-1201656946/>. Bray specifically refers to the film *Exotica, Erotica, Etc.* However, the description fits both of Kranioti’s film works to date.

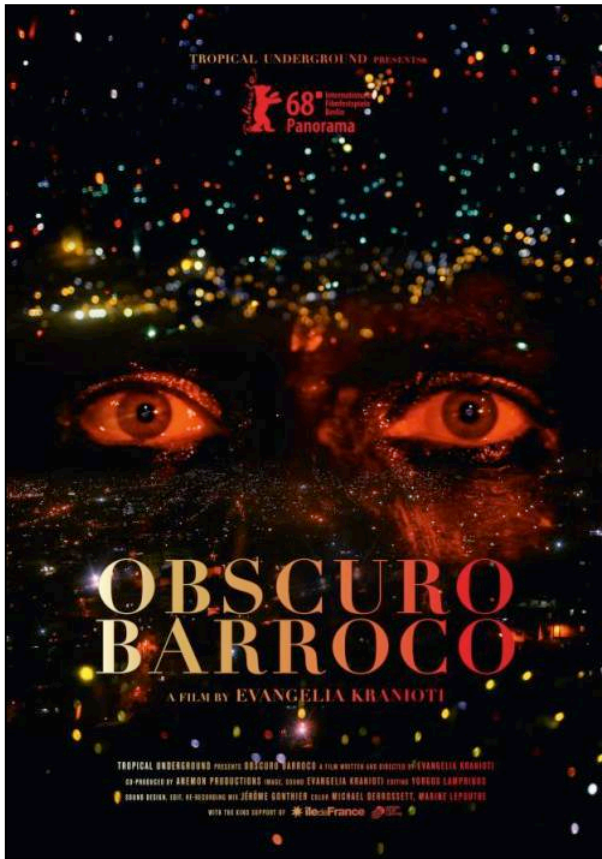


Figure 61: Evangelia Kranioti, *Obscuro Barroco*, 2018. Film Poster

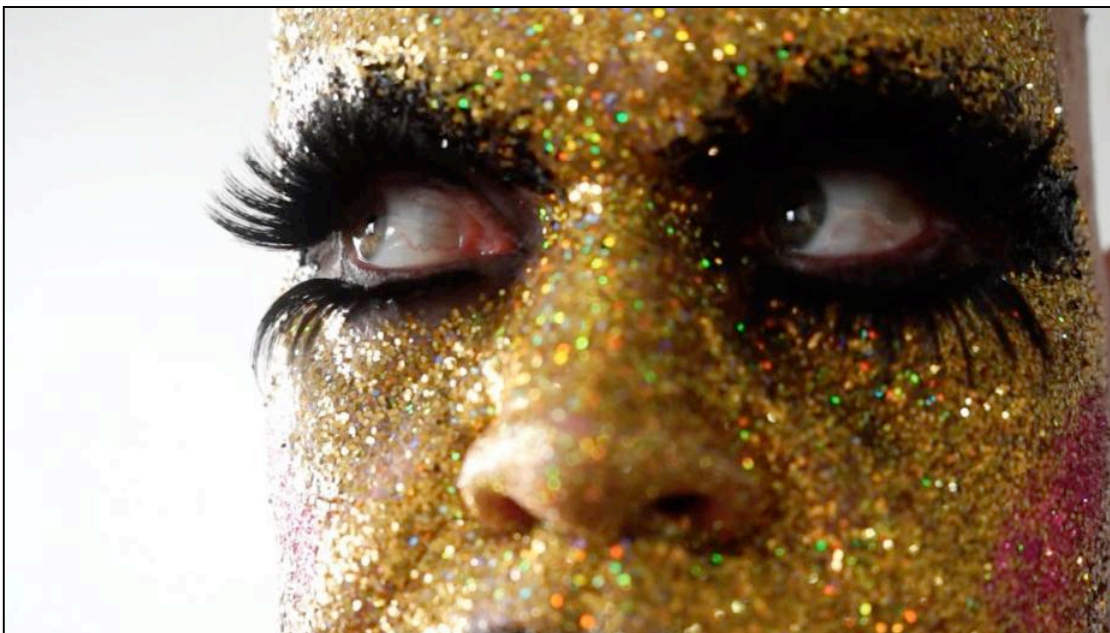


Figure 62: Tamara Voninski, *Della Glitter*, 2015. Film Still.

One of the similarities between the two works is the featuring of facial glitter, on a Rio Carnival mask in an *Obscuro Barroco* film poster (Figure 61) and in the film still *Della Glitter* (2015), where Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girl Della Deluxe uses her face as a canvas covered with glitter and paint (Figure 62). Regarding her facial masking, Della

Deluxe says:

I just think it should be a complete mask and start again...my attitude towards drag is, let's cover everything up and start again. So everything is drawn on.<sup>63</sup>

The aesthetic of *Obscuro Barroco* is similar to a series of photographs unfolding, one image after another, through a time and space continuum similar to the editing of a photographic essay or accordion-style book. The first version of Kranioti's film was a single art project, made up of many short films, called *Samba no escuro* (2016) exhibited in Galerie Sartor in Paris. Kranioti describes this initial work as fragmented and abstract.<sup>64</sup> Its episodic nature is not surprising, due to Kranioti's history as a photographer before turning to moving image. Both of Kranioti's feature film projects contain a vast body of photographic material in addition to hundreds of hours of video footage. The structure and narrative emerge through the editing process via juxtaposition and rhythm. Kranioti calls *Samba no escuro* a "hybrid project".<sup>65</sup> Kranioti's initial hybrid version of *Obscuro Barroco* is what I designate as a series of *ciné moments*—long filmic takes that depict a definitive moment.<sup>66</sup>

The underlying concept in the film *Obscuro Barroco* is transformation of gender and the urban environment, along with a philosophical metempsychosis.<sup>67</sup> Metempsychosis is a Greek term that refers to transmigration of the soul, after death, to a different body. In *Obscuro Barroco*, Muniz constantly reinvents her outward identity, saying "gender doesn't seize me anymore".<sup>68</sup> As a Greek filmmaker, Kranioti was the other, an outsider, in Rio's gay and transgender scene. Film critic Ryder suggests that Kranioti lifts the mask off Rio by portraying the reality behind postcard images of the city in her symbolic portrayal of transgender transformations.<sup>69</sup> There are layers of inter-woven spiritual and ritualistic symbolism and loneliness within *Obscuro Barroco*. Kenneth

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<sup>63</sup> Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."

<sup>64</sup> "Interview with Evangelia Kranioti on 'Obscuro Barroco'," Teddy Award, 2018, accessed November 23, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxkIfDPP-Eo&t=9s>. Evangelia Kranioti, "Samba no escuro," (Paris: galerie Sator, 2016).

<sup>65</sup> "Interview: Evangelia Kranioti," Faena Art, accessed November 23, 2018, <http://www.faenaart.org/exhibitions/interview-angelia-kranioti/>. Another version of the art project, a 38-minute, double-channel video called *El extasis debe ser olvidado*, was exhibited in the Loop fair in Barcelona in 2017 where it was awarded the Acquisition Award.

<sup>66</sup> These moments in time were called "decisive moments" by photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson.

<sup>67</sup> Kranioti created the film *Obscuro Barroco* as a dreamlike poetic essay and a legacy to the last year of Muniz's life.

<sup>68</sup> The activism of Luana Muniz was barely touched upon in *Obscuro Barroco*, unlike in another documentary featuring Muniz, *Luana Muniz: Daughter of the Moon* (2017).

Leonardo Menezes Rian Córdova, "Luana Muniz: Daughter of the Moon," (Brazil, 2017).

<sup>69</sup> Ryder, "Gay Film Review: Obscuro Barroco at Berlinale."

Rosario's review of the film calls to mind the lonely ending of Hosking's *Beautiful by Night*, in which all three drag queens are in their rooms taking off their makeup. Rosario writes, "Away from the queer community—both the physical and the imagined—trans lives can be rather solitary."<sup>70</sup>

Kranioti weaves filmic images of transformation through Baroque figures, according to Hannah Paveck writing for *Another Gaze*, through rhythms and sensations that cannot be captured merely through language.<sup>71</sup> Paveck writes:

As opposed to the tradition of social documentary which aims to convey a message and clear political stance, *Obscuro Barroco* privileges other ways of knowing: a material engagement with the world that neither fixes nor categorizes but makes space for new beginnings.<sup>72</sup>

The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, like Muniz, undergo constant transformation and reinvention each time they slip in and out of their drag characters. For Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girl Kuntina K. Klakalakis, unmasking also facilitates a physical and spiritual metempsychosis. She removes her mask of Elastoplast tape in a transformative state between genders after a night out (**Figures 63-64**). In an artistic reference to Kranioti's hybrid version of the material that became *Obscuro Barroco*, still images depict *ciné moments* lingering in time and space (**Figures 42-47, 63-64**).

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<sup>70</sup> "Rio as a Transvestite," *The Hindu*, 2018, accessed November 23, 2018, <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-metroplus/rio-de-janeiro-as-a-transvestite/article22901391.ece>.

<sup>71</sup> "Baroque Pleasures and Queer Transformations in Evangelia Kranioti's 'Obscuro Barroco'," *Another Gaze*, 2018, accessed November 24, 2018, <http://www.anothergaze.com/baroque-pleasures-and-queer-transformations-in-evangelia-kranioti-obscuro-barroco/>.

<sup>72</sup> Paveck, "Baroque Pleasures and Queer Transformations in Evangelia Kranioti's 'Obscuro Barroco'." *Obscuro Barroco* opens up new ways of approaching visual ethnography through the vibrant footage sutured together as a visual essay with Luana Muniz's experimental monologue reciting passages of self-discovery from the Brazilian book *Stream of Life* by acclaimed writer Clarice Lispector.



Figure 63: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 1*, 2015. Single-Channel. Film Still.



Figure 64: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 1*, 2015. Single-Channel Film Still.

### **Drag and a New Category of Female Identity for Men Masking as Women**

In *Masks: Faces of Culture* (1999), John Nunley suggests men who mask as women fall into three categories of female identity: 1) young woman or maiden, 2) mother and 3) crone or elder woman.<sup>73</sup> Barbara Walker refers to these stages of a woman's life as three phases of the moon in the book *The Crone: Woman of Age, Wisdom, and Power* (1985). The moon phases, according to Walker, are new, full and waning.<sup>74</sup> In

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<sup>73</sup> Nunley and McCarty, *Masks: Faces of Culture*, 167, 72-73.

<sup>74</sup> Barbara Walker, *The Crone: Woman of Age, Wisdom, and Power* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 23.

reference to crones, Nunley suggests that women past menopause, in the biological period where their reproductive ability ends, are no longer objects of desire to men and exist outside the social order. The crone is also associated with things to be feared, such as the unknown forces of nature. According to Nunley, the crone is often a widow or even a witch and men struggle to describe and categorise them. Nunley states, “That state of social limbo makes them dangerous to the patriarchy and means that they must be ritually reckoned with, in many cases with masks.”<sup>75</sup> Anthropologist Newton explains that she named *Mother Camp* after the notion of Mother as the revered woman and the parody of a crude woman.<sup>76</sup> Newton suggests, “The drag queen symbolizes all that homosexuals say they fear the most in themselves, all that they say they feel guilty about; he symbolizes, in fact, *the stigma*.”<sup>77</sup> Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girl Kuntina K. Klakalakis has portrayed older women 70+ in her drag. At a Drag Diva Awards night, she wore a lavender dress, carried a large handbag and appeared to pee herself continually. Describing Kuntina’s performance, Della Deluxe said, “You’re all gonna look like this one day, Hey, you’re all going to pee in your bag like me!”<sup>78</sup>

The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls’ various female identities do not follow drag trends or fad fashion, such as the queenier type of drag often portrayed on the reality show *Ru Paul’s Drag Race*, which showcases the ultra-beautiful young woman or the maiden from Nunley’s masking categories. During the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls’ photo elicitation in the essay film *How Did I Get Here?* (2019), in which the three drag queens viewed the Laneway photographs captured of them nearly 20 years previously, they claimed they were no longer young drag queens, they were middle-aged men, and they cared less about what people thought of their often over-exaggerated female characters. They now do drag simply to please themselves. Through this lens, the three drag queens fall into Nunley’s broad category of crone. However, I argue that there is another between mother and crone for men masking as female characters. This new category is the mask of the woman in the peri- through post-menopause stages of life,

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<sup>75</sup> Nunley and McCarty, *Masks:Faces of Culture*, 176

<sup>76</sup> Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*.

<sup>77</sup> Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, 103.

<sup>78</sup> Della DeLuxe, Alex PF Jackson, and Kuntina K. Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls," ed. Tamara Voninski (appendix, 2018)

who is still too young to be elderly. This category marks the forgotten woman who is past bearing children but is not yet the revered elder. I further argue that the mask of a middle-aged woman is also no longer seen as the very young maiden or glamorous beauty queen. I designate this category as *Men-o-pause*. The flexible mask of middle age allows each of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls to continue to slip into an individual disguise during their ritual transcendence from male to female. For Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girl Della Deluxe, the drag persona is intertwined with everyday life. Deluxe says:

...when you are dressed up and look a certain way, that's a different persona. But that's always a part of who you are really. It sort of all moulds together into one life.<sup>79</sup>

Each of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls wore this ever-changing and transcendent mask of their inner and outer selves throughout the last four years I spent with them.

The three drag queens gather in an inner-city apartment building in Sydney, drinking champagne, applying layers of makeup or tape on their faces, using a glue gun to attach glittering items to their bodies, helping one another tighten their corsets and shimmy into their clothing, tight spike heels and, ultimately, their womanhood. The more pain experienced from clothing, shoes and facial masking in the dressing or wearing, the better. The video footage portraying this masking and the subsequent late-night unmasking is not a simple static document of what they do in this space and on the streets. The layers of moving images aim to portray who they feel they are on the inside and their transformation on both spiritual and physical levels with gender fluidity. In this sense, the camera unmask their identity along with their faces and bodies in the liminal space between genders.

### **The Relative Safety of the Underground Drag Scene**

The late-night streets of Sydney, like the rough, crime-filled streets of Rio and San Francisco in *Obscuro Barroco* and *Beautiful by Night*, are lonely when the bars close early—and the drag-friendly venues are few and far between. The streets of Sydney captured in the filmic work since the days of the Laneway photographs are more dangerous, according to the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. The streets around Oxford Street in Sydney contain the largest concentration of gay bars in the city. However,

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<sup>79</sup> DeLuxe, Jackson, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."





**Figure 65:** Tamara Voninski, *Night Out*, 2018. Film Still. This image appears as a black box to protect the identity of people on the street.

during the filming of the trio walking near Oxford Street on any night of the week, strangers often emerge from shadows and try to touch the drag queens without permission or thrust mobile phones into their path for social media uploads and selfies. Most of these strangers grabbing at their breasts and buttocks are, unexpectedly, women.

Late one night at Taylor Square on Oxford Street in 2018, a young woman, shown in the film still in **Figure 65**, grabs Kuntina K. Klakalakis' breast without permission during the filming of *Night Out*. When the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls ask why she did it, the woman and her friend are recorded replying coyly, "We're just being girls!" Della Deluxe says encounters like this make her feel raped. Yunka Ivanabitch says:

...the girls at Taylor Square, I felt they were in my face. I was just looking at the lights, going 'Change, Change'. And I was also thinking, 'I'm just going to cross the road. I don't care if the cars are coming.'<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> DeLuxe, Jackson, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."

The trio of drag queens all speak about their vulnerability, along with being hyper alert to potential danger when they are in drag, particularly late at night. Referring back to the Laneway parties, Yunka Ivanabitch says, “It was a sense of being safe there...”<sup>81</sup> Since those days and the filming of this project, drag has returned almost entirely to an underground scene for the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, out of the public eye to avoid uncomfortable public encounters.

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<sup>81</sup> DeLuxe, Jackson, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."

## Chapter 8

### *Ciné Photo-essay as Hybrid Installation*

Now that the key arguments and themes of the research have been explained and expanded upon, this chapter turns to the concept of the exhibition itself, as a culmination of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls project. The chapter outlines the framework of the envisioned exhibition installation of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls as a hybrid form between the still photographic essay and moving essay film. I designate the term *ciné photo-essay* to describe the visual form of images to compose the installation. The *ciné photo-essay* uses the individual images and liminal space between to create a hybrid form beyond the linear structure of a photographic essay, slideshow or single-channel essay film, through the juxtaposition of printed and projected images. I propose that the installed visual essay is both art and ethnography. The exhibition explores visual storytelling in multiple media, where the viewer walks through the space to experience the installation as a form of visual essay.

The final selection of still images was primarily influenced by the powerful, intimate black-and-white documentary photographs of transvestites and drag queens in Paris by Christer Strömholm in *Les Amies de Place Blanche* (2012)<sup>1</sup> and Nan Goldin's earliest career photographs in Boston of drag queen friends in *The Other Side* (1993).<sup>2</sup> Both of these long-term photographic projects were forms of visual ethnography created outside the field of anthropology focused on the lives and relationships of drag queens and transvestites in private and public spaces.<sup>3</sup> The still photographs and moving images of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls portray the drag queens behind the scenes, often before or after going out, in lingering sequences that unfolded, unstaged, in front of the camera.

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<sup>1</sup> Christer Strömholm, *Les Amies De Place Blanche* (Stockport, United Kingdom: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Nan Goldin, *The Other Side* (New York: Scalo and D.A.A.D. Artist in Residence Programme, 1993). <sup>3</sup> Throughout the thesis references to transvestites use used by the artist. Often, the term transvestite was what is now known as drag queens.

## Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Creative Works and Installation

The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls *ciné photo-essay* as examination exhibition installation consists of the following sections: 1) *Unmasking*, a series of projections, soundscape and wall mural photographs 2) *In Drag*, a screen projection of still photographs and moving images 3) *Then and Now*, a projected diptych and 4) *How Did I Get Here?*, an essay film. The *ciné photo-essay* will feature in three rooms of the Sydney College of the Arts Gallery. The first room is a long, dark space that features 6.1-metre-wide looped moving images at either end, projecting Kuntina K. Klakalakis's unmasking rituals from female to male after a night out in drag. There are three featured projections of the unmasking series to be shown on a loop on the two screens. The same room also holds two mural photographs on the inside walls featuring the masking rituals of the drag queens. The murals are 4.85 metres wide by 2.42 metres high and 4.72 metres wide by 2.42 metres high.

The double-channel videos *Unmasking 1* (**Figures 66-67**) are projected simultaneously on the 6.1-metre walls at opposite ends of the large gallery room.

The videos are looped and projected with the double-channel *Unmasking 2* (**Figures 68-70**) to portray the liminal state of gender in-betweenness and identity at the end of the evening when the mask comes off. The unmasking videos are placed together as an example of the simultaneous actions of moving from one gender identity to another. In the future, these videos can be exhibited as moving diptychs, separate projections or two-channel projections to offer new perspectives on metamorphoses and gender performance for this subculture of drag queens.

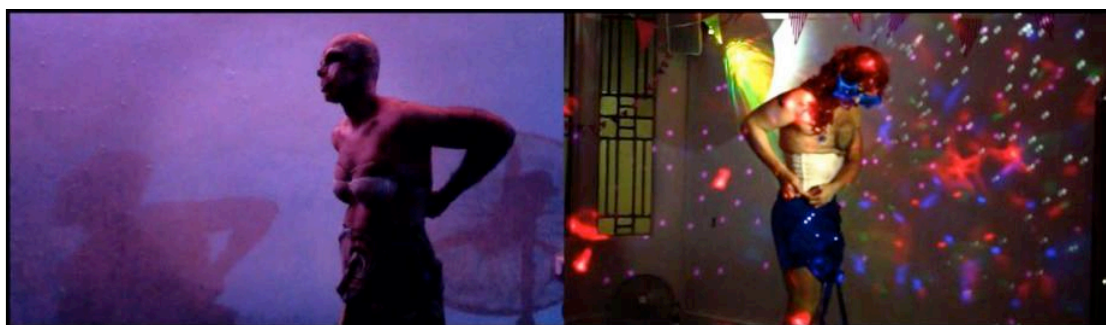


Figure 66: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 1*, 2015, 2018. Film Still from Two-Channel video.



Figure 67: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 1*, 2015, 2018. Two-Channel Film Still.

The physical and spiritual unmasking in the videos depicts Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girl Kuntina K. Klakalakis pulling her face and makeup off (**Figures 68-70**). Each of the videos was filmed spontaneously and symbolically signals gender transformation as Kuntina re-enters her male identity. The thick surgical tape that composed many of Kuntina's masks stuck to her facial hair with strong adhesive. The pain of the mask coming off produces an uncomfortable feeling for the viewer as Kuntina shows the real pain and struggle of slowly pulling the tape off her face. The videos are intimate private rituals resulting from street drag performance.

The overlapping soundscapes for the two looped projections are a combination of created music, recorded foley sounds and ambient sounds, including voices and a passing siren.<sup>3</sup> The soundscapes are played from speakers placed at opposite ends of the room to overlap and create a sonic environment that amplifies the sensory experience of the physical unmasking and gender transformation depicted on the two screens. The viewer can turn in any direction and experience both the visual and sonic sensory immersion within the drag unmasking.

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<sup>3</sup> Foley Sounds are created sound effects recorded after filming in post production. Foley is usually recorded in a controlled sound studio environment.

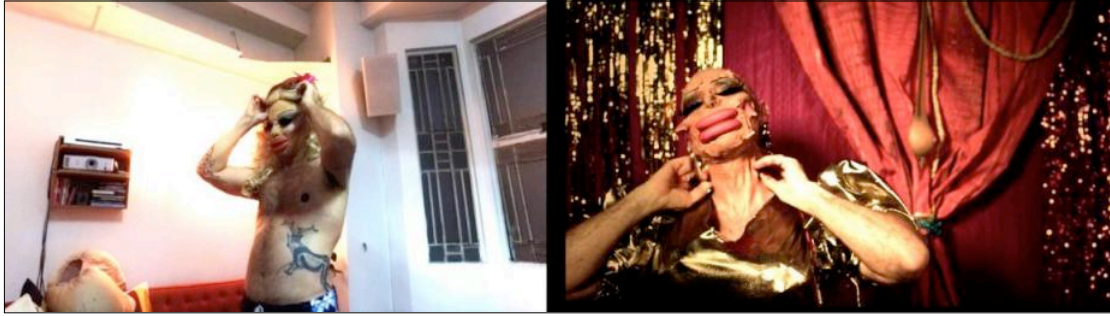


Figure 68: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 2*, 2018. Two-Channel Film Still.



Figure 69: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 2*, 2018. Two-Channel Film Still .



Figure 70: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 2*, 2018. Two-Channel Film Still .

All of the individual unmasking videos—*Unmasking 1: Night Out* (2015), *Unmasking 1: Lashes Party* (2017) and *Unmasking 2: Botched Plastic Surgery* (2018)—depicting the private unmasking were captured in Kuntina K. Klakalakis’ studio apartment in inner Sydney. I was filming Kuntina taking off her wig, earrings, bra and other accessories after our first night out in 2015 and was unfamiliar with her unmasking rituals. The elaborate and painful unmasking ritual struck me as something I had never seen before in my documentation of drag queens. The removal of the mask of tape was much more dramatic than simply using a facial cleanser to wash off eye makeup and lipstick. After tugging and grunting from the pain of tape ripping facial hair, Kuntina pulled the mass of tape decorated with makeup from her face. *She* is standing in front of the camera naked before *he* exits the frame.

In *Unmasking 2: Lashes Party* (2017), Kuntina pulls her latex mask up and over her head in a swift movement. The footage is slowed down and the viewer hears the loud pop as the mask lifts from her face. Kuntina had attended a house party with the theme Lashes. Her mask accents her dramatic eyelashes. In *Unmasking 2: Botched Plastic Surgery* (2018), Kuntina and Della Deluxe film a series of short videos to upload to the internet about drag culture. Della interviews Kuntina to parody botched plastic surgery. At the end of the interview, blood starts squirting out of Kuntina’s face. After their performative parody is complete, Kuntina stays on set and removes her mask. Della can be heard in the background asking if she needs help. As the mask removal becomes visibly painful, an ambulance drives past outside with a siren blaring. Another video from the series not displayed in the exhibition, *Unmasking 2: Oxford Street* (2018), takes place after a night out when the three Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls return from Oxford Street to Kuntina’s apartment. Yunka Ivanabitch is seen removing a corset, leaving stripes of deep red across her back.

She jokes with Kuntina as she struggles to remove her mask. The interaction of the drag queens is a reminder to the viewer that going out in drag is something they enjoy and share as a trio. When the masks and makeup come off, a bit of glitter and an essence of their version of the feminine lingers hovering in the air around each of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls.

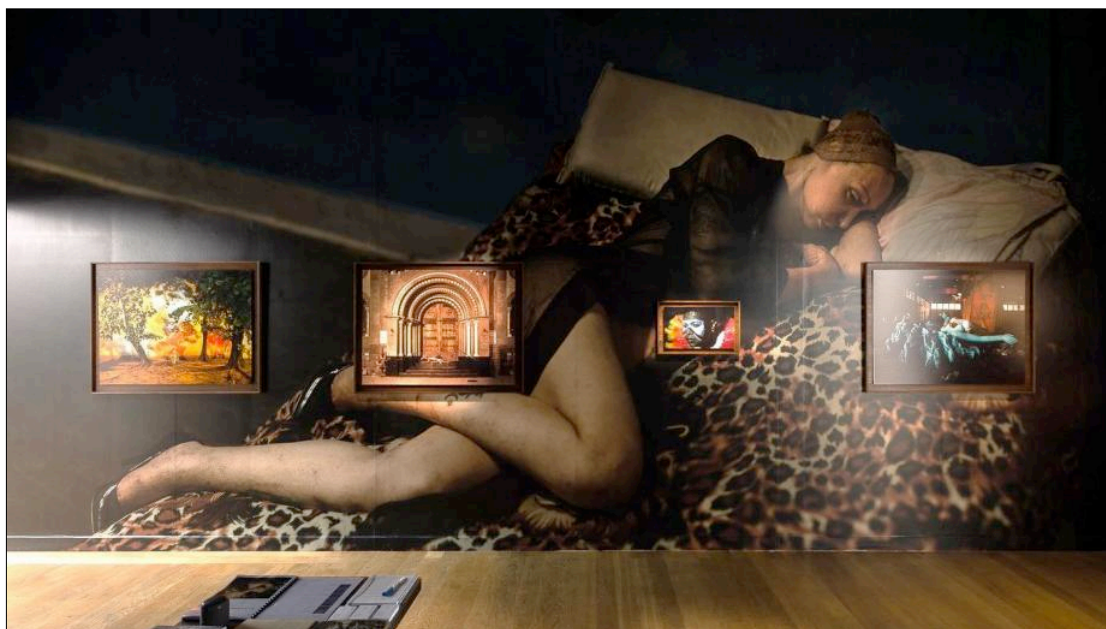


Figure 71: Evangelia Kranioti, *Obscuro Barroco*, 2017. Installation view Secteur Prismes, Paris Photo.

The works contained in the exhibition section, *In Drag*, feature a selection of still and moving images. The approach of Evangelia Kranioti's installation of the work *Obscuro Barroco* (2017) at Paris Photo in the Grande Palais (**Figure 71**) is a conceptual and aesthetic mixture of still and moving images.<sup>4</sup> This mixture of temporal works became the basis for the design of the wall mural segment of the *ciné photo-essay* installation of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls works.<sup>5</sup> Kranioti's photographs and moving images depict a city transforming as the subculture of women who were born as men—transvestite culture for Kranioti in Rio and drag culture in Sydney with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls—constricts in the changing social and political landscape and evaporating safe venues. The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls *ciné photo-essay*, like Kranioti's *Obscuro Barroco* experimental installations, is composed of individual

<sup>4</sup> Evangelia Kranioti, *Obscuro Barroco* exhibition, 2017. Paris Photo. The filmic version of the same subject matter, the metamorphosis of a transvestite in Rio de Janeiro, was produced as the film *Obscuro Barroco* in 2018

<sup>5</sup> Previously, Kranioti exhibited sections of the *Obscuro Barroco* work at Galerie Sartor in Paris and in *The Loop* in Barcelona retitled as *El Extasis Debe Ser Olvidado* (2017) translated as *The Ecstasy Must Be Forgotten* as a 38-minute two-channel video and seven stills. Kranioti's exhibited work in Paris and Barcelona depicts her intimate version of Rio de Janeiro's transsexuals and drag queens.



works of stills and moving images that are extremely flexible in relation to how the visual essay can be displayed in various gallery spaces.

The presentation of Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girl *ciné moments* is similar to the presentation of images upon a mural in Kranioti's exhibition. The projected *ciné moments* in the installation are an ellipsis in visual grammar lingering and overlapping from one image to another. Malcolm Collier suggests that working with a set of images leads to a deeper understanding than the use of single images alone. Collier writes:

Single photographs are frustrating to work with because by themselves they usually leave us with more questions than answers, lacking both spatial and temporal context within which to make them comprehensible.<sup>6</sup>

The aim of combining still and moving images for the *In Drag* installation of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls work is to use experimental installation methods in visual storytelling. Multiple images can capture the viewer's attention for a deeper understanding of drag culture beyond the impact of written text or single images.

One physical consideration of the *In Drag* segment is how the viewer experiences the visual essay. The installation of larger-than-life mural wall prints repositions the viewer. Instead of gazing at a small image by walking up close, viewers must stand back and view the entire wall to make sense of the prominent image. The sensation is a different experience. Christopher Pinney coined the term *corpotherics*—the “sensory embrace of images, the bodily engagement that most people...have with artworks.”<sup>7</sup> According to Elisabeth Edwards, through corpotherics, viewers interpret the pictures with their senses, using their eyes and their bodies.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the corpotherics of viewing still images and moving images on the same wall expands Pinney's definition to include sound and temporality, adding more layers to engage the viewer in the installation experience. It's necessary for the viewer to walk around the installation to view the entirety of the visual essay.

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<sup>6</sup> Malcolm Collier, "Photographic Exploration of Social and Cultural Experience," in *Viewpoints: Visual Anthropologists at Work*, ed. Mary Strong (text) and Laena Wilder (visual) (Austin: University of Texas Press 2009), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Pinney, "Piercing the skin of the idol," in *Beyond Aesthetics: Art and the Technologies of Enchantment*, ed. Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Thomas (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 158, 60-61.

<sup>8</sup> Elisabeth Edwards, "Objects of Affect: Photography Beyond the Image," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012): 228.

*In Drag* showcases the often-hidden moments of the drag queens going about their daily lives. Within these captured moments, there is a continuation of a project called *Feminine*, in which I have documented the lives of women since I first picked up a camera.<sup>9</sup> When the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls remove their clothing and outward signs of womanhood, I still sense the lingering femininity that surrounds them beyond their perfume. One of the aims of this section of photographs and moving images is to capture and project a sense of femininity in their parody of gender identities and character roles in drag.

The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls *ciné photo-essay* installation corresponds to what Nora M. Alter refers to as “filmed philosophy”.<sup>10</sup> Alter suggests the essay form has transformed from the one-dimensional text essay to the two-dimensional essay film to the three-dimensional visual essay as installation exhibition, where the spectator moves through the space.<sup>11</sup> Alter writes in the essay “Translating the Essay Film into Film and Installation” (2007), “...this new medium is the most innovative in the gallery or museum, where the audio-visual essay has increasingly taken the form of the projected image installation”.<sup>12</sup> The installed *ciné photo-essay* featuring the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls takes Alter’s ideas a step further, using a flexible hybrid essay form as installation to allow the viewer to establish new visual associations and meanings about a drag subculture.

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<sup>9</sup>The *Feminine* project that I began in the mid-1980s, continues today.

<sup>10</sup>Nora M. Alter, "Translating the Essay Film into Film and Installation," *Journal of Visual Culture* 6, no. 44 (2007): 44.

<sup>11</sup>Alter, "Translating the Essay Film into Film and Installation," 45.

<sup>12</sup>Alter, "Translating the Essay Film into Film and Installation," 53.



Figure 72: Tamara Voninski, *No Photos*, 2017. Variable Dimensions.



Figure 73: Tamara Voninski, *Yunka Checks Her Make-up*, 2017. Film still.

### Temporal Shifts and Their Relation to Connections in the Hybrid Form

*Then and Now*, through juxtaposition of archival stills and contemporary moving images from different eras, along with the use of dissolves, stretches time from past to present—temporal drag—to create a new story. (The construction of the moving diptych that comprises the still images of the Laneway paired with moving *ciné moments* in *Then and Now* is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.) The notion of temporal drag in the sphere of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls describes the engagement with the

past through characters, styles and their non-traditional drag, performed through the act of dressing in their female personas. It also describes the construction of the *ciné photo-essay* installation using the Laneway photographs as a springboard for and within the filmic component of the research.

There is a temporal shift from the analogue still photographs of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls in the days of the Laneway, viewed individually, to the moving images of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls viewed as *ciné photo-essay*. The *ciné moments* are like photographs coming to life. There is also a sense of moving in the still images in *Then and Now*, developed through the use of dissolves as each photograph slowly moves into the next. The historical images inform, but do not set strict boundaries for the juxtaposition of the moving images. The moving diptych of *Then and Now* introduces a visual method to offer new perspectives on the relationship between the drag queens; the past and present fade and merge as depicted in film stills (**Figures 74-76**).



Figure 74: Tamara Voninski, *Then and Now*, 2016. Film Still.

The moving diptych slideshow *Then and Now* featuring the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls makes direct temporal connections between the archival still photographs featured on the left side of the screen and the more recent moving footage on the right. Both the still images and moving footage fade slowly to transition to other frames. The moving diptych brings the past into the present through layers of temporality, memory and meaning. The images from the past open up new possibilities for moving images to document and project the lives of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, expanding upon Elizabeth Freeman's notions of temporal drag in the book *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010).<sup>13</sup> Academic Stephen Farrier suggests that a

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

temporal gap exists in the generational sharing of gay history through performance art.<sup>14</sup> Filmmaker and theorist Renate Lorenz coins several terms, including “transtemporal drag” in reference to her own collaborative film works in the book *Queer Art: A Freak Theory* (2014).<sup>15</sup> The transtemporal connections and collaboration bring the archival photographs alive to the point of living history. *Then and Now* draws upon Lorenz’s notion of transtemporal in its connecting of the archive to contemporary moving images of the same subjects.

Film theorist Laura Mulvey used the term “rephotography” in reference to the black-and-white historical photographs used experimentally within visual ethnographer Trinh T. Minh Ha’s essay film *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1985).<sup>16</sup> Minh Ha indicated that she did not simply lift the images into another context to combine them with moving image, but to “...make them *speak anew*.”<sup>17</sup> Minh Ha further suggests that rephotography “...stretches both the historical and the filmic time”.<sup>18</sup> Norma M. Alter suggests film essays such as Minh Ha’s *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* and Chris Marker’s *Letter from Siberia* (1958) “...challenge the manner in which history is usually assembled and narrated and enable other stories to unfold”.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, *Then and Now* creates a space for images to be seen in a different context and to build a visual bridge between the past and present.



Figure 75: Tamara Voninski, *Then and Now*, 2016. Film Still.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Farrier, "Playing with Time: Gay Intergenerational Performance Work and the Productive Possibilities of Queer Temporalities," *Journal of Homosexuality* 62, no. 10 (2015): 1399.

<sup>15</sup> Renate Lorenz, *Queer Art: A Freak Theory* (Germany: Bielefeld, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Surname Viet Given Name Nam," (New York: Women Make Films, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *Framer Framed* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 210. This interchange is from an interview with Laura Mulvey in London. The emphasis in the text is from the author.

<sup>18</sup> Minh-Ha, *Framer Framed*, 209.

<sup>19</sup> Alter, "Translating the Essay Film into Film and Installation," 48.



Figure 76: Tamara Voninski, *Then and Now*, 2016. Film Still.

*How Did I Get Here?* explores the journey of the camera woman with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, from reconnecting with the three drag queens, showing the original Laneway photographs to them, through to deconstructing the shifts in Sydney drag culture and photography from the Laneway parties to the present. This essay filmic work paints a picture of a different social, political and technological climate from the original photographs to now. The filmic work also re-memorialises The Laneway for street drag culture in Sydney, Australia.

### **The Essay Film as Response to Ruby's Demand for Explication**

The essay film *How Did I Get Here?* is a form of ethnographic data and visual explication of the background story and methodology of the research project. Anthropologist Jay Ruby's leading critical voice on the exclusion of experimental works from the canon of visual anthropology calls for more explanation from ethnographic filmmakers to explain how they make their films. *How Did I Get Here?* is a visual response to Ruby's call for informing the viewer about how and why the project was produced. In the book *Picturing Culture* (2000), Ruby suggests that visual ethnographers need to be reflexive and directly reveal their methods within their works. Ruby writes:

My fantasy is to make the study of visual/pictorial phenomena and the production and use of pictorial statements a part of the mainstream of cultural anthropology and in the process cause cultural anthropology to rethink itself.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Jay Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), x.

According to Ruby, Kwame Braun's film *Passing Girl, Riverside: An Essay on Camera Work* (1989)<sup>21</sup> is serendipitous and reflexive. In the film, Braun, reflects upon capturing the image of a girl who is passing by his camera in West Africa at a festival and the power imbalances in the act of filming. Braun explores the implications of image making during fieldwork overseas through his voiceover. Ruby strongly argues that anthropologists need to "reveal their methods and themselves as the instrument of data generation"<sup>22</sup> in the film. One objective in *How Did I Get Here?* is to show the photo-elicitation process with the drag queens as an integral part of the methodology and a starting point for the research project. Another objective is to show myself behind the camera, as photographer and filmmaker, and on camera during the interview as an instrument in the process of recording knowledge. *How Did I Get Here?* also creates a filmic context for documenting the lives of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls for a deeper understanding of their subculture.

The installation of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls crosses disciplinary boundaries from art to ethnography. Anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards refers to a "placing" or assemblage of images in an exhibition as a social space where the "remediation and repurposing" of the images creates wider meaning. Edwards writes, "Through placing, the photograph becomes a statement of its social importance and efficacy because it carries, too, a sense of the placing of the image within social relations."<sup>23</sup> I argued in Chapter 2 that the *ciné photo-essay* was created through the overlaps in practice and editing of forms such as the photographic essay and essay film. Edwards' suggestions of assemblage in exhibition take editing and placement from the world of art and link them to the world of social science. Edwards' ideas here provide the means to bridge a gap in the intersection of art and social science, through editing and exhibition.

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<sup>21</sup> Kwame Braun, "Passing Girl: Riverside An Essay On Camera Work " (Watertown, MA: Documentary Educational Resources (DER), 1998).

<sup>22</sup> Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, 152.

<sup>23</sup> Edwards, "Objects of Affect: Photography Beyond the Image," 226.

From a different perspective, anthropologist Arnd Schneider suggests that the creative use of visual works as installation has received very little attention from anthropologists.<sup>24</sup> Schneider writes:

...experimental use of split screen, manipulation of images themselves, and use of multiple projection screen and installation. To transform lived spatial experience into three-dimensional site-specific representations beyond a textual paradigm (obviously self-evident to artists working with sculpture and installation) is a novelty for anthropology even today.<sup>25</sup>

Schneider also links art and social science, in particular anthropology, through the idea that installations have escaped scrutiny within the discipline. The use of projections and split screens in exhibition installations depicting lived experiences is rare in anthropology, in Schneider's assessment; therefore, through the use of experimental installation forms with a hybrid assemblage, the ideas of Edwards and Schneider open a passageway for new knowledge through the creative use of editing, form and technology in exhibitions such as the installation of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls works.

Ultimately, the installation of the visual chapters of the *ciné photo-essay* depicts shifting border zones of gender, a blending of visual syntax and a reinvention of shifting mediums between still and moving photography through visual essay. The project performs its re-memorialisation of the Laneway at a time when there is very little history of the early years of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls or the Laneway recovery years available in digital form. This research and exhibition installation has the potential to help fill some of the gaps in Sydney's history, providing details that now exist only in memory or hidden personal archives.

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<sup>24</sup> Arnd Schneider, "Three modes of experimentation with art and ethnography," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14 (2008): 187.

<sup>25</sup> Schneider, "Three modes of experimentation with art and ethnography," 180.



## **Exhibition Outcomes**

The installation of the *ciné photo-essay* at the Sydney College of the Arts gallery was arranged into three rooms: 1) Unmasking 2) In Drag and 3) Archive. The viewer moves through the space where each room depicts a different layer of the visual unmasking of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. In the first room, the viewer watches unmasking rituals with layers of facial tape pulled off. In the second room, the three drag queens are depicted in their day-to-day world of drag through still and moving images on two screens. In the third room, the archival photographs are used on screen in the moving diptych *Then and Now* and within the essay film *How Did I Get Here?* The following photographs document the exhibition installation of *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay*.

### **Unmasking: Room 1**

#### **The works installed in Room 1 include:**

Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 1* 2015-18, two-channel video, 4 minutes 28 seconds  
Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 2* 2018, two-channel video, 4 minutes 28 seconds  
Tamara Voninski, *Masking: Della Deluxe before Eyelashes* 2018, photographic mural, 4.72 metres x 2.42 metres  
Tamara Voninski, *Masking: Della Deluxe Spotlight* 2017, 4.85 metres x 2.42 metres



Figure 77: Tamara Voninski, *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay* 2019 Installation Still Room 1. Left: Tamara Voninski, *Masking: Della Deluxe Before Eyelashes* 2018 Photographic Mural 4.72 metres x 2.42 metres. Centre: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 1* 4 minutes 28 seconds 2015-18. Right: Tamara Voninski, *Masking: Della Deluxe Spotlight* 2017 photographic mural 4.85 metres x 2.42 metres.



Figure 78: Tamara Voninski, *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay* 2019 Installation Still Room 1. Left: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 1* 4 minutes 28 seconds 2015-18. Right: Tamara Voninski, *Masking: Della Deluxe Spotlight* 2017 photographic mural 4.85 metres x 2.42 metres.



Figure 79: Tamara Voninski, *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay* 2019 Installation Still Room 1. Left: Tamara Voninski, *Masking: Della Deluxe Before Eyelashes* 2018 photographic mural 4.72 metres x 2.42 metres. Right: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 1*, 4 minutes 28 seconds, 2015-18.



Figure 80: Ian Hobbs, *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay 2019 Installation Still Room 1*. Right: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 1* 4 minutes 28 seconds 2015-18. Left: Tamara Voninski, *Masking: Della Deluxe Spotlight 2017* photographic mural 4.85 metres x 2.42 metres.

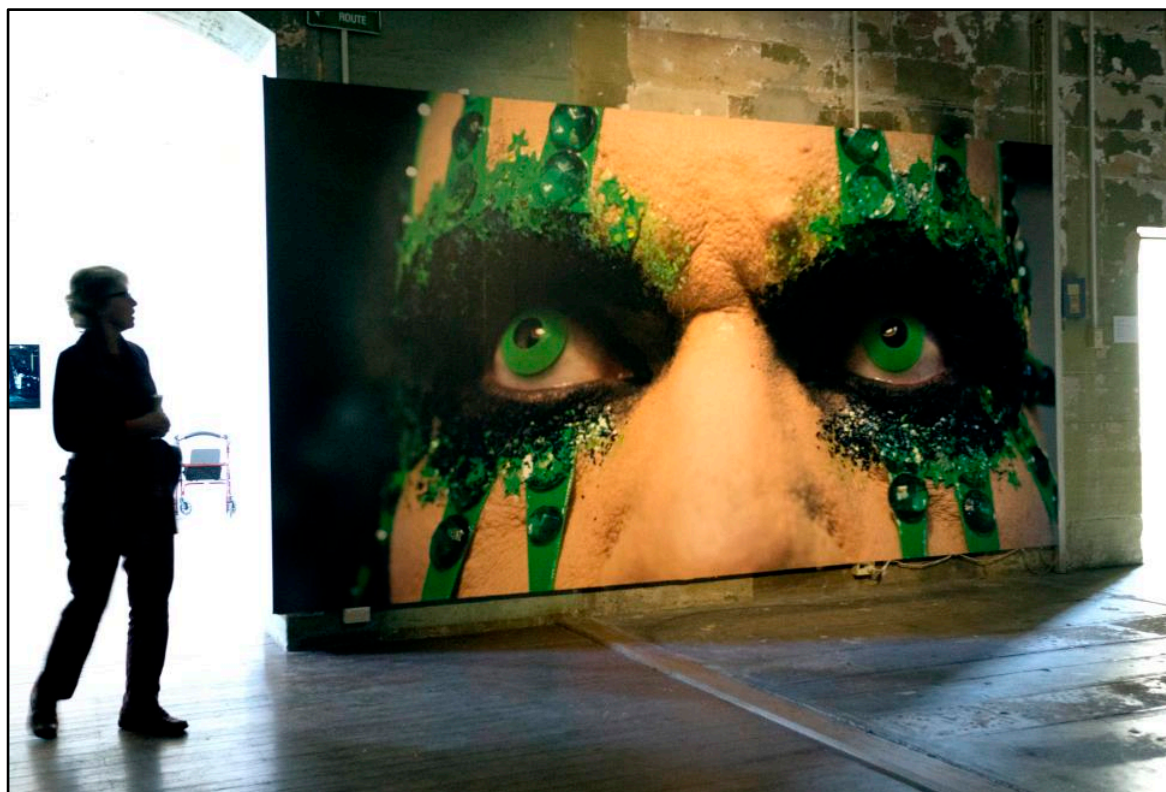


Figure 81: Tamara Voninski, *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay 2019 Installation Still Room 1*. Tamara Voninski, *Masking: Della Deluxe before Eyelashes 2018* photographic mural 4.72 metres x 2.42 metres.



Figure 82: Tamara Voninski, *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay* 2019 Installation Still Room 1. Left: Tamara Voninski, *Masking: Della Deluxe before Eyelashes* 2018 photographic mural 4.72 metres x 2.42 metres. Center: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 1* 4 minutes 28 seconds 2015-18. Right: Tamara Voninski, *Masking: Della Deluxe Spotlight* 2017 photographic mural 4.85 metres x 2.42 metres.



Figure 83: Tamara Voninski, *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay* 2019 Installation Still Room 1. Left: Tamara Voninski, *Masking: Della Deluxe before Eyelashes* 2018 photographic mural 4.72 metres x 2.42 metres. Centre: Tamara Voninski, *Unmasking 1* 4.28 minutes 2015-18. Right: Tamara Voninski, *Masking: Della Deluxe Spotlight* 2017 photographic mural 4.85 metres x 2.42 metres.

## In Drag: Room 2

The works installed in Room 2 include:

Tamara Voninski, *Ciné moments: In Drag* 2015-18, 2 minutes 39 seconds

This work is composed of the following individual still and moving images dissolving into one another on screen:

*Kuntina K. Klakalakis Stockings* 2018

*Kuntina K. Klakalakis and Della Deluxe Champagne* 2017

*Corset Conga Line* 2018

*Della Deluxe Hair* 2018

*Yunka Ivanabitch Trim* 2015

*Yunka Ivanabitch Diamontes* 2016

*Yunka Ivanabitch Laneway* 2016

*Mardi Gras Traffic Jam* 2018

*Mardi Gras Party* 2018

*Looking for the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls at Mardi Gras* 2016



Figure 84: Ian Hobbs, *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay* 2019 Installation Still of Room 2 of Tamara Voninski, *Ciné moments: In Drag* 2015-18, 2 minutes 39 seconds.



Figure 85: Tamara Voninski, *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay 2019* Installation Still Room 2 of Tamara Voninski, *Ciné moments: In Drag 2015-18*, 2 minutes 39 seconds.

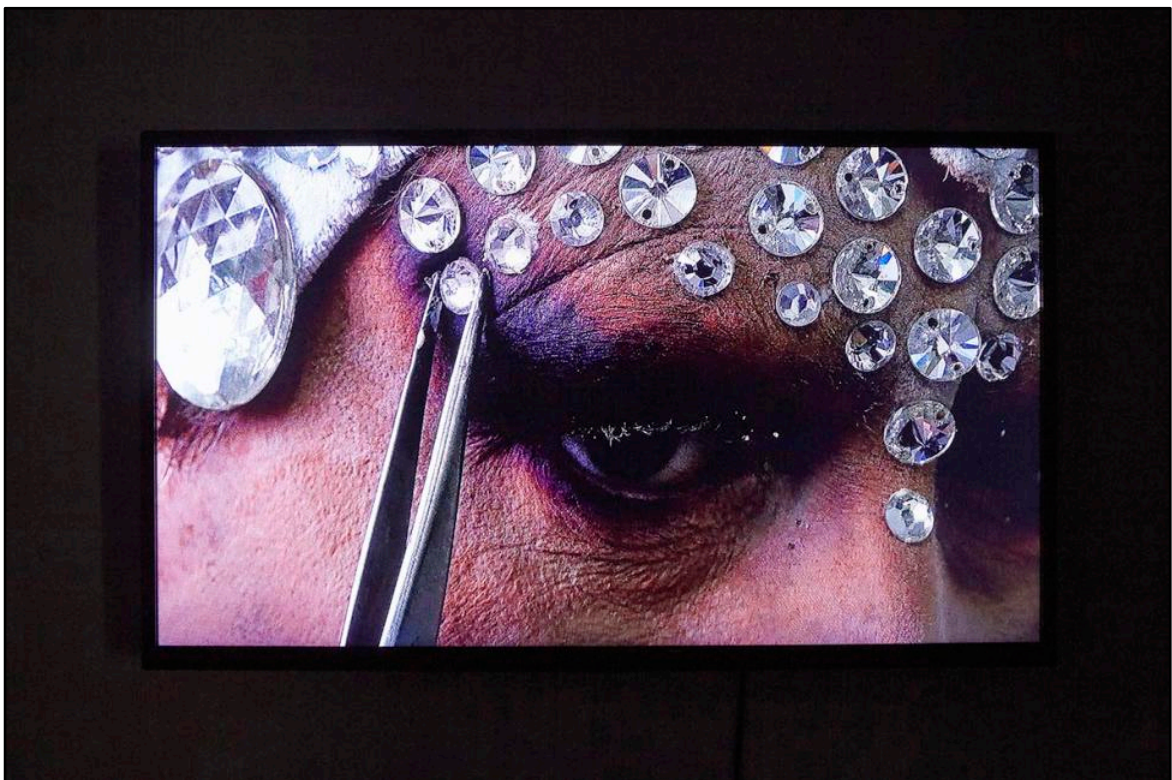


Figure 86: Tamara Voninski, *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay 2019* Installation Still Room 2 of Tamara Voninski, *Ciné moments: In Drag 2015-18*, 2 minutes 39 seconds.



Figure 87: Tamara Voninski, *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay 2019* Installation Still Room2 of Tamara Voninski, *Ciné moments: In Drag 2015-18*, 2 minutes 39 seconds.

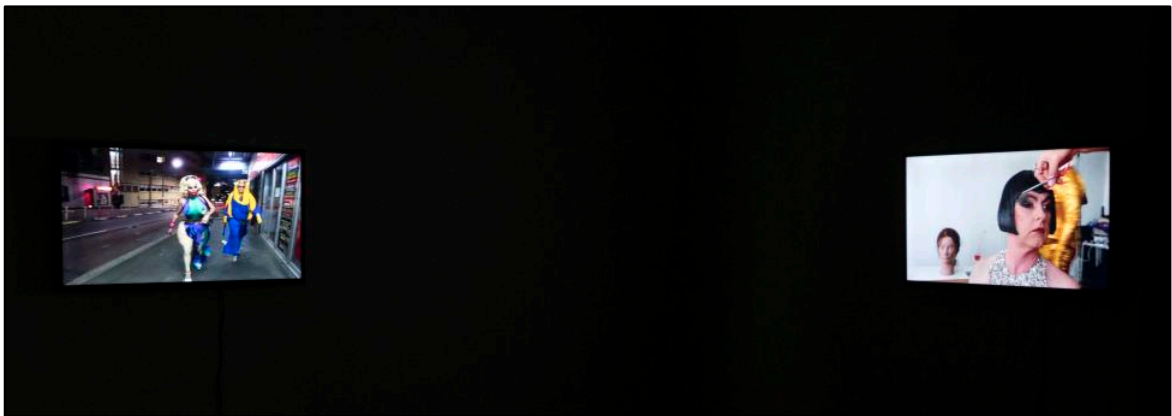


Figure 88: Tamara Voninski, *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay 2019* Installation Still Room 2 of Tamara Voninski, *Ciné moments: In Drag 2015-18*, 2 minutes 39 seconds.



### Archive: Room 3

The works installed in Room 3 include:

Tamara Voninski, *Then and Now* 1998-2017, Video Diptych, 4 minutes 03 seconds.

Still photographs 1998-07. Moving Images 2015-17.

Tamara Voninski, *How Did I Get Here? The story behind Now and Then through the memories of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls and a photographer* 2019, single-channel video 20 minutes 38 seconds.



**Figure 89:** Tamara Voninski, *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay* 2019 Installation Still Room 3. Tamara Voninski, *How Did I Get Here? The story behind Now and Then through the memories of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls and a photographer* 2019, single-channel video 20 minutes 8 seconds.



**Figure 90:** Tamara Voninski, *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay* 2019 Installation Still Room 3. Tamara Voninski, *How Did I Get Here: The story behind Now and Then through the memories of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls and a photographer* 2019, single-channel video 20 minutes 38 seconds.



**Figure 91:** Tamara Voninski, *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay* 2019 Installation Still Room 3. Tamara Voninski, *Then and Now* 1998-17, video diptych, 4 minutes 03 seconds.

## **Conclusion: New Beginnings**

When I began this research four years ago, reconnecting with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls in a different era was meaningful on multiple levels. Initially, the project had a focus on places and events; however, the Laneway recovery parties and the scenes we reminisced about in the interviews had ceased to exist. The more significant ideas emerged from going back in time imagining myself 20 years earlier wandering the streets of Sydney with a camera, often photographing people anonymously and without consent. The PhD research has gifted me the experience of shifting my viewpoint by stepping away from the camera to reflect upon photographic practice through the eyes of the drag queens. Previously, in my 30-year career documenting daily street life with a camera, I have rarely crossed paths again with the people whose images I have captured.

When Kuntina K. Klakalakis gazed at me through the lens of a gigantic vintage monocle with a large fake comb over of hair obscuring half of his face, the tables were turned. No longer was I an anonymous photographer. He asked me, “Are you the creepy girl who used to hide behind telegraph poles and photograph me and my friends in the Laneway?”<sup>1</sup> This body of research has been a creative and theoretical evaluation of that question. Through the eyes of the drag queens, I was a voyeur. The significant shift in the research began with the collaboration with the drag queens, rather than being a silent bystander like a fly on the wall waiting for moments to photograph or film.

Within this research, by exploring the fissures in ethnographic practice resulting from the intersection of art and social science, I have discovered fierce debates about the role of the visual within anthropology. Although these debates still continue, pathways are emerging for visual researchers to use specialised lens-based observational skills, creative editing and exhibition forms in research. The use of still photographs and moving images as the primary focus of research will inevitably lead to more experimentation. I suggest that more experimental forms can also emerge as visual artists enter the field of anthropology to bring their unique blend of genres and

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<sup>1</sup> Kuntina K. Klakalakis was not in drag at the time; therefore, the pronoun ‘he’ is used.

hybrid forms with social science methodology. In particular, the specialised skill sets of photojournalists and documentary photographers and filmmakers can help produce more vibrant expression and visual language, potentially shifting the strict boundaries of anthropology.

I propose that visual artists who wish to produce ethnographic works need to study the methodology, criticism and historical limitations of the role of the visual in social science. I also propose that future creative exploration, through methodology and visual practice, is needed to expand the field of visual anthropology using the language of social science. On the other hand, the academy of social science needs to reconsider and explore the importance of the visual as primary data and new knowledge in research. Furthermore, visual anthropologists should have better field training in the form of more visual field experience. Through university programs and doing visual fieldwork, students can learn the specialised skill sets required to be a proficient observational filmmaker and photographer who avoids getting in the way of their research with clumsy camera handling.

The next stage of research with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls will be to expand the multidirectional forms through installation of the *ciné photo-essay* in various gallery spaces. I envision the form shifting with various gallery designs and locations. The *ciné photo-essay* is, therefore, a flexible form. I propose that the hybrid possibilities of the form can be expanded and mapped in future research work. There are two planned afterlives for the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls works. One is inspired by photographer William Yang and the other by the personal photographs of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls.

Yang's performative slideshows on gay culture in Sydney are projected on large screens with a live-performance voice-over. Yang's performance of *Party (verb)* at the Opera House in Sydney in 2019 was a sensory experience including expert storytelling that applied music to alter mood and rhythm, reflecting the changes in Sydney since the 1960s.<sup>2</sup> Yang's images of the changing Sydney party scene over 50

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<sup>2</sup> I attended William Yang's opening night performance at the Sydney Opera House in May 2019 surrounded by people who were in the photographs that composed the slideshow. This version of

years and their effect on the gay scene decade by decade are directly related to the storytelling of the images of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls. In the narration of *Party (verb)* Yang says, “Drag Queens have been the mouthpiece of our culture, advocating front and centre.”<sup>3</sup> A moment after Yang’s ode to drag queens in Sydney gay culture, two party images appeared on screen showing Della Deluxe covered in her Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girl gold glitter.

In my visual practice over the years, I have crossed paths with Yang in places like the Laneway so it is not surprising that he has also photographed the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls at the parties and events that he attends on a regular basis in the gay community. Yang’s showing of his photographs at the Opera House drew a full house and ended in a standing ovation. Yang’s slideshows, both in live performances and filmic versions, have influenced the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls project as a historical document of drag and gay culture in flux in the city of Sydney over two decades; therefore, one future version of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls visual essay, beyond the PhD exhibition, will be a live performance, telling the story on a microphone with stage lighting and a slideshow-like projection of still and moving images. Nan Goldin’s New York slideshows of her friends, including the drag queens she documented, were another inspiration for such a performance. An additional future version of the work will be a gallery installation of both an insider and outsider version of drag photographs exhibited in collaboration with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls using their own documentation of their subculture. I strongly believe that insider and outsider perspectives are necessary to gain deeper insight and knowledge.

As a practitioner, I foresee revisiting other projects from my archives, from farms in the rural American south to the islands of Polynesia where I have photographed people either fleetingly or in long-term projects. I would like to know more about what it feels like to be on the other side of my camera and gaze. Most importantly, in my future practice as a visual artist and ethnographer, I would like to be a participant observer in collaboration with the people I photograph, to create a shared and more

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Party (verb) was slightly different from an earlier performance of the slideshow in 2018 at Carriageworks.

<sup>3</sup> William Yang, *Party (verb)*, 2019.

balanced experience in visual research.

In summary, the central research argument of *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay*, is that visual hybrid essays artists create can be classified as visual ethnography. Through the female gaze upon aging drag queens from behind the camera, the project adds original visual knowledge and deeper understanding of a subculture of drag queens who perform on the streets of Sydney, Australia. The research also highlights a shift, over a 20-year period, in the approach to the ethics surrounding photographing people on the street without their knowledge. This shift helped lead to greater collaboration and access to the private world of drag culture in creating visual ethnography of real-world subjects.

Specific original knowledge is added through the notions of *ciné moments*, expanding photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson's notion of the *decisive moment* in still photography to include moving image works. I have also designated the addition of a fourth category to Nunley's Maiden, Mother, Crone archetypes of men masking as women, placing the menopausal, peri-menopausal and post-menopausal woman into the category *Men-o-pause*. The embodiment of the female experience through the senses and lived experience as a woman enabled me to recognise and record moments specifically focused on a trio of gay-identifying biological men who mask as middle-aged women. This embodiment of the female experience is the unique machination of the female gaze from behind the camera in producing the practice-led research project *The Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography and the Ciné Photo-essay*.

The *ciné photo-essay* is introduced in theory and exhibition as a new hybrid visual ethnography in the aesthetic and conceptual overlap between still photography and moving image. The *ciné photo-essay* uses the ability of a series of images of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls to create deeper knowledge of the way photographic and documentary practice can be brought together in an essay genre as installation exhibition, going beyond the limitations of a text-only analysis. Furthermore, the *ciné photo-essay* shows, rather than tells, the ways the gendered nature of drag can be thought of conceptually through the idea of masking and unmasking.

In an interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls, I asked them what would be next for them in this journey. Kuntina K. Klakalakis and Yunka Ivanabitch expressed the need to create an archive.<sup>4</sup> Yunka Ivanabitch said, “We're not just party girls that people forget.”<sup>5</sup> Kuntina K. Klakalakis replied, “It's a very important part of our past, and our past together.”<sup>6</sup> As a photographer and filmmaker, my past 20 years has also been intertwined with Kuntina K. Klakalakis, Della Deluxe and Yunka Ivanabitch. The creation of a visual archive of the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls is the next step and it is one we can take together.

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<sup>4</sup>Della Deluxe, Yunka Ivanabitch, and Kuntina K. Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls," ed. Tamara Voninski (appendix, 2018).

<sup>5</sup>Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."

<sup>6</sup>Deluxe, Ivanabitch, and Klakalakis, "An interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls."



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## Appendix

### Interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls At Sydney College of the Arts, Rozelle May 2018

#### PART 1

- Della Deluxe: Oh, I know what I can do because I often put makeup on and there's, you know, here it's sort of put in. I always end up with these little holes of where there's no black liner and I'll just think we'll just fill it, do it bigger and fill it up.
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I think get away from that smoky Alex and get it heavier and glitterier.
- Della Deluxe: Oh, I do my eyes. I start off by removing my eyeballs. So I don't get makeup in them and then I start with liquid liner, Mascara, a little bit of blush and I finish up with eyebrows. So I hope that was informative for you. Please remember to remove the eyeballs. Yeah, that's nice.
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Keep airbrushing.
- Tamara Voninski: Can you talk about drag and what it means to you. Going back to the laneway
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Drag. I'm trying to think. I have so many views about what a drag queen is, or could be.
- Yunka Ivanabitch: Let's go back to the laneway question first. Alright. Well compared to the laneway that we knew, really the only thing that's really the same as the venues, everything else has changed.
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It was a bit of a grotty district sort of Oxford Street and now it's surrounded by kind of designer buildings. 10 stories, shiny designer buildings.
- Yunka Ivanabitch: Art college—fashion college.
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: The refurbished Beresford, which is a sort of yuppified pub. All the streets, last night—cabs were trying to get through, security with their light sticks, directing people off the streets, you know, I, I guess they're trying to navigate those shiny apartment blocks with people having a good time and making noise, you know, how do you do that?
- Della Deluxe: I didn't hang out there a lot years ago. It was mostly only a dance party, but now it seems to be just full of young drunk people in the gutters, like it was last night.
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: We used to go to the Flinders and that used to spill out into the Laneway. There was always a familiarity with that. That part of Darlinghurst, Surry hills

Yunka Ivanabitch: And also I spent a lot of time at the Beresford day clubbing, not even going to dance parties. Just being and going day clubbing and the really soggy sticky carpet. And you go through that curtain to the dance floor and outside is bright sunlight. Ten am Sunday morning and you're getting into a dingy loud music, hustling boom of people

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: They did have that bright beer garden though. Oh, it was a blast in the beer garden. I also went to the Beresford because it was that familiarity with that area, the Laneway after the big parties Sleaze Ball Mardi Gras. It was easy to kind of after you left the party to think, oh, what do we do now, let's, you know. And you kind of knew that people would congregate in that part of the city. So we just naturally walked up there or ended up there.

Yunka Ivanabitch: It wouldn't be like 50 people, it would be like 300 people literally on the street. Rolling around drinking. You Know Tamara.

Della Deluxe: And in the '90s, that's when I first started going to the Flinders and it was always Saturday night, sit out the back Laneway when you just need a bit of air or whatever, smoking. Having a drink in the gutter. And that's where an old transgendered friend of mine, Gail was burning holes into her stockings and I asked her, what are you doing? She's like, oh, I want fishnets. So it was always really another party going on out there. It was, yeah. It was always a party atmosphere I guess. And I remember the old Beresford. It was nothing like it is now. Yeah. It's just all so polished now. Whereas before it was just dirty.

Yunka Ivanabitch: It was a sense of being safe there but knowing you could run back into the Flinders if there was trouble and sometimes there was trouble in the alleyway on a Saturday night and you'd be like, oh my God, let's get out of here. Because it was dodgy. Really Dodgy.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Sometimes walking from the Flinders to Taylor Square because it wasn't as easy a thoroughfare. Remember the roads. There was through traffic through Bourke Street.

Yunka Ivanabitch: It's not one way. Yeah.

Della Deluxe: Yeah. And in the 90's there was Circle K (petrol station) right next to Flinders, which is now deserted.

Yunka Ivanabitch: It was service station then.

Della Deluxe: Yeah and before you'd run over the road to the Taxi Club, or whatever, you'd sit outside Circle K having a packet of chips you'd bought inside or something at like 4:00 in the morning? That was often the last stop of the night outside Circle K because there was a cement thing to sit on out the front.

Yunka Ivanabitch: And people coming and going and getting petrol and going, oh my God drag queens.

Della Deluxe: Oh Wow. Look at them and sometimes just sitting there for hours. Having a chat was both fun than what you had inside drinking sometime. It was all fun. It was all fun.

Tamara Voninski: When did the Laneway start?

Yunka Ivanabitch: I have memories of the Laneway after the first Mardi Gras I went to, which was 92. We got ready at Nobbs Street and I wore that black dress that velvet dress with black feathers on the bottom and then I was on the side of that car down the street.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I didn't go to the Laneway those years.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Didn't you?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: No. If I did, we used to go...

Yunka Ivanabitch: There's that picture on the wall in the Beresford of me at Laneway sitting on the bonnet of that car and I think that would have been 1995. I was 25 then. Maybe she can look at that picture.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Is it up now?

Yunka Ivanabitch: Yeah, it's on the wall. You walk in that corner door and it's directly on that wall that faces Bourke Street. If you look at it, you're facing Bourke Street. I'm sitting on the bonnet of the car and I got feathers on my head because I remember I had long hair and I had um, I got cups and pin them to my ponytails and then wrap feathers around it and I've got a blue corset on. Some little shorts or something on the bonnet of the car. And it's the Laneway.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah, I never used to dress in drag through the night. It wasn't until the late 90's that I went to the big parties in drag.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I was doing it because I was doing volunteer work with the ACON (Aids Council of NSW), the safe sex sluts. That's why.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I was dressing in leather and going to the parties through the 90's. It wasn't until 98, 99. But you got back together again...

Della Deluxe: You went to the cafe you were working at in drag one Mardi Gras, didn't you?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah. But I didn't end up going to the party and then going into the Laneway

Della Deluxe: That's when you first bought that Max factor blue eye shadow that I still have in my makeup kit.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Are you serious?

Della Deluxe: Yeah. It's 25 years old and it's still half of it there. It's budgie blue. It's a really good thorough seventies look.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I started doing the volunteer work in 92. It was when I worked at the hairdresser in Darlinghurst with Chris and we were like, how are we going to go to Mardi Gras? Oh, let's do volunteer work. We get a free ticket. And in the end, we just kept on doing it and doing it. We did it for 20 years, the volunteer work. That's why I did so much Laneway.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: The first Laneway gutter sit that I had, was that one that we went to after that party at Les Girls, that Homo Eclectus party era when we ended up with Erif, Sexy Galaxy in '98 or '99.

Yunka Ivanabitch: That wouldn't have when we met Max.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: No, it was a couple of years later. You weren't at that event, the gutter sit.

Yunka Ivanabitch: What were you wearing?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I was wearing—I was Lola, first time out of Lola with really gigantic boobs and black sequin top with a velvet skirt and long blonde hair and Della was wearing a silver...

Della Deluxe: Bluey silvery. That was my, I'm trying to be Romy and Michele's high school reunion. We were in that gutter. We were seriously sitting in that gutter in the Laneway for hours. We probably sat there for six hours.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Really?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Just chattering away.

Della Deluxe: We were chatting. People would come and sit next to us. They'd have a laugh and we'd ask them to go get us a drink. Make themselves useful. And that was one of the big ones that I remember for the Laneway.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It's unthought of now to sit around in a gutter, being able to go into a pub, come outside and sit in the gutter and have a drink. You just can't do that anymore.

Della Deluxe: No, if you go outside and sit, you need to get away. Security will shoo you away. Like rats.

Tamara Voninski: Why do you think that is?

Della Deluxe: I think the lockout laws that are in place now have changed a lot of things with going out and you're just not allowed to have fun anymore. And it's all because a few people that can't control themselves ruin it for everyone else. So that means no one's allowed to have fun.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And licensing. I think police, um, you know, the police are really driven by, by the people above the police, the politicians on a law and order kind of agenda. And it kind of trickles down and the police kind of increase. They request more powers, they want less, they want more control over what happens. They put the pressure on the pubs and clubs, and it's a balancing act, but sometimes it pushes things to a point where it's really over, over-policed and over-controlled.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Also as well, the um, you know, in the early days of parties happened and a lot of nightclub stuff happened that wasn't policed or didn't have licensing and it was underground and that's what made things better as well because no one really knew about it. Like Katrina, my friend in Lismore, her uncle or grandfather had an illegal bar in Surry Hills and that was in the seventies, you know what I mean? Even in the '90s, you know, there was lots of parties we went to and we were out



in the street and no one really got hurt or injured. We just having fun, but no one really cared because no one really knew about some of those parties

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Do you remember Ana's street parties, the street behind They used to have a street party and when the Olympics happened there was a rollout of kind of stricter laws and regulations and it pretty much after that it was impossible to have that kind of event anymore.

Della: Well, I personally think with what you're saying about underground pubs, I think if gay culture went to back to being underground and we all felt a bit naughty about going there because it was bad at the time, I think that would actually be more fun personally. It's too open now too. I don't know.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Acceptance, but really acceptance brings more than just acceptance.

Della Deluxe: It attracts others.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Like when we went out last night, all those ridiculous people who just want our attention when we just want to do our thing. You know, like I just find that really confronting. I mean those girls that Taylor Square were polite, but who gives you a right to touch someone? If I was a male in a nightclub or on the street, I would not put my hand on another person like that. Even if they were, you know, like it's really an invasion of personal space.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It is. It felt very handsy.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Fucking what are you doing?

Della Deluxe: People think that we're out for their entertainment. Sometimes people come up to me and say 'thank you', and I'm like, umm, none of this is about you. It's all about me...

Yunka Ivanabitch: There was a guy at the auction was going, oh, thanks for coming out. And you know, he was actually honestly saying, 'I appreciate what you're doing'.

Della Deluxe: Yeah, that's OK. But when people say 'thank you' for entertaining us by looking like this in public, that's, that's not why...

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: You can be gracious. I think if someone says that to me, I take that as a compliment in that, you know, in the sea of everyone being a background person, they're thanking, thanking me or us for making that effort going, you know, like, and even though it's not about them, the fact that they appreciate it and if they do it in an honest and sincere way, I'm more than happy to, you know...

Della Deluxe: Sometimes it's not honest and sincere, sometimes you're just making it about themselves.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Well I think they just have to get to grips in the background all the time and fucking get out of our way

Della Deluxe: Pretty much.

Tamara Voninski: That brings me to ask you two questions. One, when did you start dressing in drag? When any why, and then how the three of you came together?

Yunka Ivanabitch: Nobbs Street.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Oh no, I was five. I started dressing in drag.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Let's talk about Oxford Street.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I want to talk about my childhood. Why can't I talk about my childhood.

Della Deluxe: (whispers) It's like a therapy session.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I was sort of dressing in drag all through my youth since I was five. It was kind of quite underground. I didn't really sort of share it with my friends or family and I really didn't go public with it until I was in my teens where I used to dress up as Boy George and go ice skating at the local ice rink.

Della Deluxe: But when you were five, putting it on, where were your parents?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Oh, they signalled a disapproval, particularly my mother.

Della Deluxe: Oh, so they saw it.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And there was a disapproval and I just thought, OK, well this is something I've got to do on my own. And I did and I, like I said, I went public with it in my teen years. I did a drag show at a friend's birthday party when I was 16. That was fun. Um, and then it wasn't until we lived together that drag became a real exploration, which is when we all met.

Della Deluxe: 1992, that was.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Yeah, it would have been early '92. I had that boyfriend David, and you two lived together and I came to Nobbs Street because David lived with them. And then Della and I actually went to school together when we were 10.

Della Deluxe: 10 and 11.

Della Deluxe: And when you came, what happened? You had a dinner date with David one night and when you arrived it was a Saturday night. David and I had just had a food fight in the kitchen. There was ice cream all over the floor and you were so angry. You were like "We've got dinner plans, we've got to go." And I was like, "Oh we had to empty the fridge it was all going off." And we just started throwing food at each other. It was so disgusting. But that was nice.

Yunka Ivanabitch: That was when we all started doing drag together 1992.

Tamara Voninski: Can you talk a bit more about how the three of you began dressing in drag?

Yunka Ivanabitch: I'd never really done drag before that time. Yiorgos was the person that put makeup on me first to do drag for Mardi Gras and then it kind of all rolled into one

and because I was doing hairdressing for a job and that's when Yiorgos had hair. I would be starting his hair in wigs and moulding stuff on his head for his looks.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It was a time of incredible exploration. There was such an openness about drag and outfits and wigs and trying to work out what it is

Yunka Ivanabitch: Sexuality

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Sexuality and exploring.

Yunka Ivanabitch: David was my first real boyfriend at that time. And also as well we met other gay boys at the ACON start making sense group as well. And I think that was a really important thing for young gay men to socialise and be safe and talk in a safe environment and discover things and talk about how you feeling about shit. But we will always the crazy drag queens and, and then I did the safe sex sluts and every dance party I think I almost went to. I was in drag because I was going to the parties doing volunteer work and there was a lot of drag.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: The safe sex sluts were a bit of an institution. The safe sex sluts were an initiative that was taken by the Aids Council of New South Wales to promote condom use and safe sex and know they were really this sort of face of safe sex, particularly in dance party culture for a couple of decades.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Everyone dressed up. It was all about dressing up and in a way I suppose because there was so many different types of people and different looks. There were men, women, sometimes they were transsexuals. It was really all about engaging with the population as they enter a party. And I suppose people feeling comfortable with us in approaching us and us giving them a safe pack or you know, sometimes you get sexual questions sometimes, you know, in, in the later here years, it'd be a lot of heterosexual people would come and they'd be fascinated by us. "who are you? What are you doing?"

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: You were a safe sex slut all through the 90's

Yunka Ivanabitch: I did it for about 22 years.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And Della and I joined around 2000.

Della Deluxe: Something like that.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And we did it for a good 10 years plus and that was a really important part of partying. It's sort of meant that we had to get dressed up, get an outfit. Be somewhere at a certain time, you know, participate in it, kind of give back a little.

Yunka Ivanabitch: People identified with us as well at a lot of different stages. I'd get people that would come to me every year and only get safe sex packs from me. So it was a, I suppose a sense of a connection with someone as soon as you walk into a party because you're like, oh, what's going on? Oh well go over there. We know Felice is going to be there. She'll give us something, we'll have a bit of a chat, blah, blah, blah. She's an institution.

Della Deluxe: Was an institution.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Well you did and you won the award. You won an AFOA award for your service with the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations. What year did you win that?

Yunka Ivanabitch: No idea.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Late '90s? '97? '98?

Yunka Ivanabitch: Maybe.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: The safe sex sluts were wound up about five years ago.

Yunka Ivanabitch: More than that. Maybe six or seven.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: You know, they sort of just changed their tack and their approach.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Like we're not relevant anymore. I'm thinking, hang on a minute.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It's also, you know, that the nature of HIV changed the nature of the way, the sort of reception audiences. That whole campaign

Della Deluxe: Unsafe sex is actually safe now.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Well it's not called unsafe sex.

Della Deluxe: It's called prep sex.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It's a different language around HIV and sex.

Della Deluxe: And this is all stuff that wasn't around when we all started getting around in the '90s.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Men were still dying.

Della Deluxe: Even in the '90s.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It wasn't only men, but large proportion of the AIDS deaths in Australia were gay men.

Della Deluxe: So for me, drag started in the '80s, I think I used to put my mother's dresses on when she goes to play golf and I'll do a show in the lounge room and it was usually to Vaughn Numbers or Diana Ross.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Who would be the audience?

Della Deluxe: The pets—the cat and the dog. (laughter) If they weren't around, I didn't care. I just do it. She had blue Mascara and blue eye shadow and I'd put it on. I'll just be like, oh wow, I'm a girl. Blue mascara. I mean really. Some of these '80s fads!

Yunka Ivanabitch: I do have memories of putting my mother's shoes on and flouncing around in something that was my mother's clothes.

Della Deluxe: Yep. I remember at one point while I was growing up, my mother's shoes didn't fit me anymore. And I thought, "Oh, I can't really tell her to go by bigger shoes." (laughter) It just means that I have to do drag barefoot. Because she had a particular pink dress that you wore to some wedding once in the '80s that she kept that was my favourite dress. The Dragon.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Did you tell her about that?

Della Deluxe: I did about five years ago.

Yunka Ivanabitch: She didn't have that pink dress anymore.

Della Deluxe: No. No. She wouldn't fit into it now.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I used to wear a fair few pieces from my mother's wardrobe and my mother was called a stylish dresser. There were some nice sort of getups that I could sort of squeeze into.

Della Deluxe: She would've had some nice stuff.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And there did come a point where I put on —I was quite overweight so there was nothing that really fit me and I kinda had to make do with sort of sheets.

Della Deluxe: And stretch.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I didn't really get into my mother's wardrobe at all. It's really weird. I remember putting her shoes on, but that's about it.

Della Deluxe: Yeah. I did that all the time in the '80s. Every time they'd go out, I'd be putting stuff on. And then before they were coming home, I thought "Oh God, I've got to get all this blue mascara off or they're going to know. And lipstick smelt different then.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Really?

Della Deluxe: It doesn't smell like that anymore because I remember every year. Was it Trinity? I think had a Christmas pageant or something in the park, you know, opposite the square. I think they still do it and it was tiered. You were a choir. The whole class did it and they told everyone has to wear lipstick, girls and boys. So we can see your lips and I was like "Oh yeah". I'll just remember the smell of the lipstick and lipstick doesn't smell like that anymore. They told us all we had to wear lipstick and some boys didn't like it. But you know, I was like, "Oh god yeah, bring it on!"

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Just going back to Nobbs Street, you know, I think it was only for a really short time that I've only lived there for six months or even less, um, at that time.

Della Deluxe: You moved out halfway through the year.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I did, I sort of went back to college. I kind of developed a marijuana addiction and it sort of made it really harder for me to keep down a job. And so I ended up sort of meeting back home, going back to Uni, which was important. It was my original plan. I probably would have if I had managed things better, but I was

young and not really fully equipped to be out and about, you know, you are the most responsible one between us.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Really?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: You're always held down a job and a place to live and you're always seemed to have it pretty together. Della and I were wayward children for a few years there. They're in and out of work.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I can't tell you how many times I'd go out on a Friday night out in drag and turn up for work at 8:00 Saturday morning. And then, you know, out the back smoking and fucking all those nights, Friday nights, out.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Della was unemployed and I was a student, so we could sleep in. (laughter)

Yunka Ivanabitch: I do remember that actually. You used to run into me and I'd be going out to work.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I've got to say it wasn't the easiest of life either because it came with not having a lot of money.

Yunka Ivanabitch: And spending it on drag and nothing else.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I had potato cookbook once Della, remember: "100 Ways to Cook Potatoes"

Della Deluxe: I think that was when I was in Summer Hill. Yeah, always potato recipes.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Because you were on a budget.

Della Deluxe: So, occasionally we'd go when one of us had money, we buy each other dinner or whatever, and then we'd go home and pretend we were hungry if anyone had food or we'd go through the carpet looking for rice. A nice long red carpet—shag.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I used to like cashews. Yum.

Della Deluxe: Yum.

Tamara Voninski: When did the Glitzy, Glamour Glitter Girls start? How did it start?

Yunka Ivanabitch: It started at Anna's house in Annandale and we had a friend called Max and it was 1998 and it was when Cher's "Believe" album came out and we'd had a bit of marijuana and I said to Max, I said "She's so glittery and glamorous." And that's kinda how it started. Why don't we call ourselves the Glamour Glitter Girls and that's how it kind of started and evolved into...

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Glitzy Glamour Glitter Gutter Girl. The Glitzy, Glamour Glitter Girls. The Glitzy, Glamour, Glutter Girls. It sorta had noise, various incarnations depending on how inebriated we were at any time. But it sort of became this kind of faux kind of group.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Cult. Drag cult.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: We had a tran-i-festo. I suppose you'd call it a trans-i-festo now.

Yunka Ivanabitch: (laughter) Trans-i-festo! And all of that translated into a lot of more outfits and more drag and, you know, then also Tropical Fruits and the story that goes with that and how that evolved from our group.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And we really took our style of drag too. We started going to Tropical Fruits and in that environment—Tropical Fruits is a Northern Rivers LGBTQ plus social club. It was really encouraged. We really felt valued. People really loved what we did and kind of couldn't get enough of us really. And were always like to do more, do better, do bigger

Yunka Ivanabitch: At the party we've got our sign out on our own tent, which was our area. We decorate it and we shit in it. We invited people in and it just evolved into this kind of crazy environment that people will be like, well, what's going on in here?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: The Powder Puff Parlour.

Yunka Ivanabitch: The Powder Puff Parlour. And Dotti said to me that just this week she's like, I think we get a call the cabaret space, "Powder Puff Parlour" for this year maybe.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And the Powder Puff Parlour in its kind of formation was really a space where anyone could be who they have to be. So it was a really safe space for trans\* people that maybe, you know, it was an escape. It was kind of an environment where people could just be whoever they want it to be and not be judged or feel like they were outnumbered. Sometimes if you're a sort of queer person on the fringe of a dance floor and there's a sea of sort of men harnesses or dancing, you can easily just feel like, you know...

Yunka Ivanabitch: On the periphery.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I think that Tropical Fruits started around 98. 97?

Della Deluxe: Yeah.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: We went first time in 98 together. At those first four years all we did was just buy tickets and go to the party and it wasn't until 2002 that our fairy fucking godmother took on the role of chair with a team of other fruits.

Yunka Ivanabitch: But I'd also be going to that party many years before youse guys went because I would always go there to visit my family and I see, you know, I knew about the parties then and I remember being the only drag queen there at Repentance, Greek in my lingerie and a wig. It's really hot. I'll take that outfit off.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I guess the involvement in Tropical Fruits made us sort of in a way come together for days on end to prepare for parties and to sew outfits and it helped really sort of build our friendship and our togetherness.

Yunka Ivanabitch: And drag culture. I think that, you know, the span that we've had, the drag culture we've engaged in has been really present for every time. And also engaging in other people and people feeding off what we're doing.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And Erif had a lot to do with that in Lismore as well, in as much as she loved to dress up and before she sort of started dressing up a lot of lesbians up there were almost scared to put on sequins and get a bit glammy. But it was through that sort of encouragement, that it was OK to do it. It's OK to, you know, pop on some sequins and some glitter. There's less fear of doing it and being, you know, like another thing that's just a wonderful thing and that's what I think that the power of drag has its power of transformation. The power of celebration.

Yunka Ivanabitch: The power of being someone that you'd never thought you'd be purely just because you've modified your body with corsetry and bras and fabric.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And that's all it could be. It could just be hair and just putting sparkles in your, in your hair. You know, it has an effect.

Della Deluxe: Better with makeup though.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah.

Della Deluxe: Lots.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Heavy.

Della Deluxe: Yep. Applied with a mattress.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Or then taken off with a spade.

Della Deluxe: Yup. Or just cover it up like I do. I'll just go over it.

Yunka Ivanabitch: How's the transition from going from one thing to another?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: To being totally Femme Glam?

Tamara Voninski: How does it make you feel? What does it do to you when you walk out the door.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Well, as in last night, even though I was going, "Oh my God, this corset, it's fucking tight." Silhouette is everything. Even though I did not have boobs on and it doesn't accommodate boobs, it's a feminine feel and people engage with you and go, "oh my God", you know, which is, I'm not going out there for that. But I just, I suppose creating a silhouette that talks to people and gives them a feeling about what I look like is really a good thing. I like that a lot actually. And people go, "Oh my God, whatever." And then the other thing is, you know, they always question you about what you're wearing or what you're doing. But really when it comes down to it, they've really got no idea how long it's taken to get ready. How long was actually taking to put a corset on and how uncomfortable you are. All those things play into how amazing you look, but the relevant, you know, the translation of that for everyday people is not...

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Do you think that that level of discomfort is important for drag.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Yes.

Della Deluxe: Comfortable. You're ugly. Remember.



Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Well last night you had a very last loose flowing...

Della Deluxe: I did, but there were other things going on. My face was rock hard because I'd sprayed hairspray about six times to keep everything on top of certain things. I had heels on and for me, that is transformation into drag. You put on this other persona but it's still you as well. Well that's how I feel about it and I don't really feel what go from the male to a female because I'm pretty, I don't know. I think I'm pretty consistent. You do get away with a lot more in drag though. You do stuff that, I don't know, you just don't, wouldn't do normally. Feed people cat food. Make people get on the floor and eat cat food off the floor. Bark at people. I bark at people all the time, but it's a bit more exaggerated in drag because it's all about the show really. Yeah, there was other stuff going on last night that was eerie. You know, I had gloves on so I couldn't, wouldn't be able to touch a phone. I had to be careful because my gloves always end up disgusting because I end up touching wet things all night sometimes. (laughter) I don't know, I must go to the bar and just, "Oh yeah. What's this? Oh beer, yum." That transformation thing is, it's quite interesting actually.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: You kind of ease into it. So you know, it's not like you're...

Della Deluxe: I find alcohol helps ease into it. Because when I'm getting ready, I like to have music on. If I have silence, it doesn't really feel like... If it's for going out like we did last night and I had a glass of wine, while I was getting ready at home.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And going out it's a bit of a party. It's a bit of a celebration most times going out, getting dressed.

Della Deluxe: It is. It is.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I mean it's just like any other kind of night out.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Sometimes, we don't even go out. Where you missed the party because we're too busy getting ready.

Della Deluxe: Yeah. A few years ago, the night after Mardi Gras, we were going to Kooky (Club Kooky) and I missed it, but I said I'll meet you at Phoenix. When I was getting ready, I took four hours to get ready and by the time I was ready to leave the house, it was lock out had just started and I thought, "Oh my God." And I had all this glitter all over my face. I just took her off and went to bed. (laughter) Well, I couldn't go out. I wouldn't have been allowed in. I totally forgot about lockout. And because I'd been out the night before, you know, I was sort of feeling a bit plain as it was. I was just taking my time getting ready.

Yunka Ivanabitch: The transformation, like it's just ridiculous the time you just put into your face. It is crazy. Let alone everything else.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: My face just peels off. (laughter)

Yunka Ivanabitch: I did that two years ago at New Year where I just put all that glitter on my face. That was two hours, you know.

Della Deluxe: One wouldn't think it would take that long, but it does. And it's nice. It's actually I can do a fairly decent face in about an hour, but I liked to spend a couple of

hours. I like having time to muck around and make sure everything's blended. You know, and you start adding things. You put some glitter here, and you realise some of it's gone into the liquid liner you've got on. So you've got to go over liquid again. There's a lot of retouching while getting ready.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It's a creative process getting ready in drag. I think at the root of it, you know, it's about transforming myself into sort of a kind of feminine, a feminine kind of person. And the way I think about it is, you know, I love the way it's an aspect of my personality. It's who I am. I think if, because it takes so long and I like that sort of creation of me. I'd probably do it more often if I felt the sort of environment that I was sort of inhabiting was easier. I'd probably be more femme, more of the time, you know, but sometimes it's OK to just contain it in a sort of, you know, in an outing or going out and make it performative. But I sometimes wonder, you know...

Yunka Ivanabitch: But also, you know, going out either the city is very different to going out at Tropical Fruits because you're dealing with all the street. Where if you go to Fruits, it's more of a secure area. We know everyone. You can be whatever you want and there's no restriction.

Della Deluxe: Plus you go into that one thing. It's not like Oxford Street where we ran around. Ran across the road last night.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Well, all the time we'd be doing that. We did that from the '90s. You'd run from club to club see a show. Go to another club, see a show.

Della Deluxe: Yeah. That's back when you're allowed to have fun.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Yeah.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I'm just thinking about it. I don't...I'm not trans in the strict sense that I'd want to be and live my life as a woman and be identified as a woman or change my birth certificate.

Della Deluxe: All that shaving.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I do think though that if it was easier to just have a beard and wear a dress on a daily basis, I'd probably do it.

Yunka Ivanabitch: And put a bit of makeup on and not feel like, "Oh my God,"

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I'm not fully, you know. And that's a tough one because I sort of feel a little bit contained sometimes in our society. I think it would be easier if I really felt I was, you know, fully transgender in as much as that was the only choice to do, to have a happy life. Yeah. And for a lot of trans people, that's their choice. And I don't have the energy for that constant battle on a daily basis just to be halfway, you know.

Yunka Ivanabitch: It's nice to have something to cover. You can transform yourself and, and feel like you've been on a journey purely because of what you're wearing, what your body shape is and how people interact with you. I suppose to a degree that's really what it's really all about, isn't it? How people interact with you.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And how you're recognised. I think from outside forces, people want to read you as something very direct. They want to look at you and say, oh, this is a male person. This person has female energy. When you're in drag, there's an element of a kind of facade to it. It's feminine energy that they're reading, but it's kind of performative and it's supposed to be a kind of spectacle. Whereas if you go out sort of feminine drag and it's not spectacular.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Or one or the other.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Then you're looked at like you're transgender or maybe you're transitioning. That's less about what you want to do and how you see yourself and more about how other people are interpreting you and then what they expect, and how they are judging you and trying to, sometimes, even tell you that you shouldn't be doing it. Or can't be doing it.

Yunka Ivanabitch: That transformation into what we look like. I find that challenging going out because generally straight men really look at us in a way, "Oh, they are the perfect woman they've got the hips, they've got the boobs, got the hair, the makeup. And that's how interaction with straight men, for me, is challenging because they want to touch me. They want to do things with me and take me home. I'm just like, no. And it really makes men like that objectify me, in a way. I think God, this is how women feel like when they go clubbing or to a bar every day. How do you do it? How do you put up with that? Being pushed around by men who are attracted to you and think they can do whatever they want.

When we worked, I worked on a door of a club—so did Della—at the Cross for a few years. The main problem were young drunk straight women or just straight women in general. Because they would approach, they would come to the door. Then you know, I remember a time when we were both on the door because you would come out and drag on Friday nights and pick me up from work and they'd come early and you know, pouring you with compliments and whatever and expect to get in for free. Maybe get a free drink. They were always the trouble people and like you saw last night, they were always the little girls who just want a piece of you. Whether it be physical or photos. There was also that occasion where I almost punched a girl at Mardi Gras because she thought it was her right to take my photo and do whatever she wanted with it and I refused her. And her friend was like, you know, had his hand on my chest getting me away from her because she was really "Fuck you, I'll do what I was like." No, you can't. And it's always young, straight girls.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Sometimes young gay men or gay men in general when they're a bit drunk, they can get handsy too. They can feel like I can just touch your breasts cheekily.

Della Deluxe: They do, but the girls are particularly bad, I've noticed.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: But I don't understand what the motivation is and where they come to it, why they think it's OK to put up their hand on a person. Imagine. I mean, it doesn't really matter that you're in drag sure you're a bit spectacular and a bit of a spectacle, but imagine you're kind of a nightclub performer who's just done a cabaret show and you're out amongst the crowd. Why would someone come up and just touch you?

Yunka Ivanabitch: You wouldn't do that to Dita Von Teese? No, she's exactly like us. She is in drag when she's performing—performance, hair and makeup, body, silhouette, the whole lot. That's what we do.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Burlesque. It's a burlesque kind of foundation. And so I really don't know what the motivator is. Maybe it's just that lack of boundaries after a drink.

Della Deluxe: There is a lot of that. And, personally for me, because I usually fill out my body shape. I have quite big boobs and I've had men come up and have a nap on my boobs. I'm like, no, you're not going to get any milk out of it. I don't know. They see me as a mother figure I guess, and I think it is because sometimes they're like, "Oh, you're so nice and soft. It's like being in bed." And I'm like, what the hell is going on in the middle of the nightclub, you know. And they see me as a counsellor as well because I have for years. That's why when I go to Tropical Fruits I usually say to you, "Don't leave me alone. Because that's when all was scary people come." And they do. They do. I get the Kooks of society. I get really scary stuff.

Yunka Ivanabitch: You get the kooks and I get straight men who think they can manhandle me and I'm like, Dell, can you tell them to fuck off and she knows.

Della Deluxe: And I do.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And I'm usually so scary that people just keep away from me.

Della Deluxe: They don't want to talk to you. But Tamara, seriously, I've had people or anyone with a problem will come and tell me about it. And I'm like, I really don't care, but you know. And I've had girls ask me at clubs to, "Can you please mind my handbag while I go to the toilet? And I'll be like, oh my God. And when they've gone to the toilet, I'll go through their bag and see what they got. (laughter) Well I just think you're an idiot. I'll usually do that at the Shift. I used to grab their money, any stuff I could have, you know. I've had men tell me all their problems about their lovers or I've just lost my wallet or my parents have just died in a plane crash. One woman once told me she had a gun.

Yunka Ivanabitch: In her handbag?

Della Deluxe: In her handbag. And she seriously, looked like this 48-year-old auntie and she said, "If you want anyone dead, just let me know. I've got a gun." I told you I'll get the kooks. That's what I hate being alone in drag. It's people. Anyone scary will come and find me and scare me. Mind you, I do use it to my advantage sometimes. Like, I've had people come up and ask, "Oh, can I get your drink?" And I'm like, yeah, yeah, sure. And they'll be getting themselves a drink of me and maybe whoever I'm with and they'll hand the barman a \$100 note and then they wander off and talk to someone and I grabbed their change and take off. I've done that several times. Bought well. Hello.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: You're so resourceful.

Della Deluxe: I am resourceful. I'm a really good thief.

Tamara Voninski: You had mentioned before about going out to various stage shows and that's how I remember Sydney when I first arrived and there were lots of drag shows all

over the place. Can you talk about the sort of drag that you do and how it's different from drag on stage.

Della Deluxe: I see it as a performance, but social drag.

Yunka Ivanabitch We're creating an environment.

Della Deluxe: Yeah. We're creating apathy basically.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And then I'll think about this sort of stage drag like the one or two performances last night. I see it as connected to things like burlesque and clowning and Vaudeville. And that's just a style of drag. And it's just as legitimate.

Della Deluxe: No matter how boring it may seem at the time. And last night at Stonewall, the whole time you were just like, oh, tell her to shut up. Because she kept talking.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: That wasn't a burlesque, that was just a very bad.

Della Deluxe: That was just a drunk drag queen using lots of swear words, thinking she was being really funny by pulling people up on stage and being an idiot. I can't stand that one.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And that's quite different to a performer on a stage that's grounded in the burlesque that can actually engage an audience. Often I've seen Carlotta peeping out from behind backstage looking at who's in the audience, identifying individuals that she's going to connect with in her dialogue and then comes out on stage, does her performance and then starts this thing and talks about their hats and talks about thing and asking them what their name is. And that's a part of that banter that belongs. Comedians sometimes do it. You know how comedians look and they see who is in the audience and they pick their mark.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Carlotta's doing a show in Bangalow. Why Bangalow?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: She's a talent. She will attract a lot of—

Yunka Ivanabitch: It's crazy. My apprentice is like, "Oh my God, Carlotta is coming in. We're gonna need to come to that show." So I'm like, Julie?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Carlotta, she's one of those phenomenal talents that she comes from that very showgirl background of Les Girls. But she was the front woman, you know, she was the kind of lead. She was the headliner. That can be done really well, but it can also be done like last night, incredibly badly. And I was embarrassed for the person on stage, you know. But our style of drag, it's in a way also be related to a sort of circus in that roving kind of sideshow costume. I take it to be a kind of queer drag in that it's something that's nonmainstream at all. It challenges the idea about what drag is and what drag performances is, because we take it to a level where we're just about inhabiting an environment. Being between ourselves and having a laugh, interacting.

Yunka Ivanabitch: With my costume background, I've created outfits that are very periodesque that takes body shape to other places that no one kind of does as well.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And we can also take out gags, take out sort of witch's hats or—

Della Deluxe: Charity.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Take out blow—up dolls, the oversized scissors and comb and make a kind of little performance staging in different places.

Della Deluxe: We like to have activities when we go out because it gives us something to do.

Yunka Ivanabitch: We're got to have our witch's hats for runways and the dance floor and parade. So elaborating—

Tamara Voninski: But it's not on a stage? It's in public on the street.

Yunka Ivanabitch: It's in the midst of everybody.

Tamara Voninski: Where is that in the midst of everyone?

Yunka Ivanabitch: It could be out in between dance halls, could be on the dance floor, could be even in the bathroom. Like we've done stuff in bathrooms before and people come in and go, who are you, what are you doing? And we're like, well we're just doing our shit. We had that area at a dance party once was that Sleaze Ball and we did stuff in that as well.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It was, yeah. It was just basically a set of bleachers that the Sleaze organisers had given us to make a space. What did we call it? Is it a Powder Puff Parlour or what did we do? We sort of just decorated it with a whole lot of pink ribbon. We had that mannequin and we had all the chalk and people were glamouring themselves.

Della Deluxe: Yeah.

Yunka Ivanabitch: There are also other things that go on in parties, you know, at Mardi Gras there's a fashion costume, competition parade thing? Have you been in that haven't you?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah, we won one.

Della Deluxe: We won one once.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: What did you wear though? Remember I was wearing the open-heart showgirl. Della had the big Tartan jodhpurs with the corset.

Della Deluxe: With that Mohawk?

Yunka Ivanabitch: Did I have a fluffy pink bikini?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I don't remember.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Did I have the pink wig with the denim shorts torn with a little pink Gingham. Was that it?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I don't remember. We've got no photos of it is the moral of the story.

Della Deluxe: Pink Gingham.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I think it was the pink gingham.

Della Deluxe: I think it was and the pink hair.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And we all looked really good to get to Tristan (Coumbe) to do the three of us that year.

Della Deluxe: You started with the torpedo tits.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I did. And I stripped on stage. Then you came along. It was— it was wild. Did you ever did have a water pistol? Or did I just make that up. I know what we can do now. How about we tell each other what facial surgery we need.

Della Deluxe: I'm going to get my teeth veneered.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: No, you gotta tell me what I need.

Della Deluxe: Oh, OK. Um, I don't think you need anything but you have got a rash on your neck. Is that from that tape, just here.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yes.

Yunka Ivanabitch: You need to pull the hairs out of your ears and get rid of the long ones from your eyebrows.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Oh yeah. I do trim those. You need an eyelift—top and bottom.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Top and bottom?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: They take a little bit there.

Yunka Ivanabitch: You know what, if you get that done, it reduces your ability to have a full facelift later.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: No—

Yunka Ivanabitch: If I want to close my eyes when I'm sleeping. I don't want to be like Liberace.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: But you're lucky, at least you've still got hair and you can hide your scars.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Not for long!

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Turn around, your neck. I think you can do with your neck. You could probably hold that off a little bit.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Do they cut lines?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: You're lucky, you could probably do a neck lift.

Della Deluxe: Yeah, I've got some wax. I'll do it later.

Yunka Ivanabitch Do they do neck lifts?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: They do. They kind of cull a little bit and pull up Robert had one of those.

Yunka Ivanabitch Did he? Really?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: We're just giving each other advice on what facial surgery we need. Della needs veneers, but she made that up myself.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Fuck off!

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

Della Deluxe: They could be better. They could be more perfect.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Maude (Boate) had those done and they really made a difference.

Della Deluxe: I'd rather spend my money on—

Yunka Ivanabitch: Your teeth are perfect, darling.

Della Deluxe: They are, but they could be better.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Show me!

Tamara Voninski: When we come back, we'll talk about your inspiration for your looks, your dress in drag things of that nature.



**Interview with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls  
At Sydney College of the Arts, Rozelle  
May 2018**

**PART 2**



**Figure 92: Tamara Voninski, *Glamour Girls*, 2002. Variable Dimensions.**

Della Deluxe: OK, am I picking my nose? What the fuck is in my tits?

Tamara Voninski: I was going to ask you about that photograph.

Della Deluxe: Yeah. I remember that outfit. I don't remember photos being taken.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Della, you look a little distracted in that photo.

Della Deluxe: I think, I was thinking about: "Have I got a cigarette in my mouth?"

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: No, I think that's your nails, thinking. I don't have my glasses were at that place again. What the Hell is going on? No, you've got a chupa chup.

Della Deluxe: Really?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah.

Della Deluxe: OK.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I'm distracted. What am I doing?

Della Deluxe: I don't know, but your tits are lopsided. And this section down here is very meaty.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I was very exposed. Is that all I wore?

Della Deluxe: Obviously you had some kind of wrap.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I had undies on.

Della Deluxe: Oh yeah. And a bit of perfume.

Tamara Voninski: Leading on from our last session, when you dress in drag, how does it make you feel?

Della Deluxe: Sort of powerful. There's a mix of vulnerability in there as well.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Don't fuck with me.

Della Deluxe: Yep. I think personally for me, a lot of looks that I've done in the past where people look at me and don't know if I want to fuck them or eat them. There's a blurring of, "Oh Wow. She's really scary. But I just talked to her, but she's nice, but oh no she's being scary again."

Yunka Ivanabitch: And also as well, like when I'm out on the street, I'm really hyper alert about what's going on because you never know who's going to come at you at any point in time. And especially earlier on in the early days, it would be dangerous going out at nighttime, even normal dressed, as a boy. And also night clubs, you know sometimes you might have people that come at you in all the clubs as well, but you know there is vulnerability. But there also is—

Della Deluxe: It makes you're tough as well, I find. You learn to—

Yunka Ivanabitch: Really. If someone came up to me and hassled me in the street, I would not hesitate to punch him in the head if I had to. And me, now, like this. I'm not like that.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I can't say I feel any one way when I'm in drag.

Della Deluxe: Every look brings a new feeling! It does.

Yunka Ivanabitch: It depends on how big your hair is, what your outfit is doing, how people interact with your outfit. Do you want them to interact with your outfit?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah. And sometimes you kind of start the night just wanting to get there and it's about negotiating how you getting into your outfit, how you get into the cab. Do you need a special cab?

Yunka Ivanabitch: Do I have to take my head gear off to get into a cab and if I do, who's going to help me arrange it when I get there? Because I can't see myself in a mirror.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: So that feeling is a very practical one. I guess it's almost like being backstage where you're just concerned about the that sort of social space. But definitely being in drag it does, it gives you a different sense of who you.

Della Deluxe: It does.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And when you're getting ready you can sort of see—I see myself being transformed. What I find though, with when I'm dressing as Kuntina because I use Elastoplast, the transformation is really quite fast. So it's almost like this sort of shock between one guise, and another very quickly. Whereas when I'm putting on makeup it's a lot slower and smoother. And if anything I think that there's a kind of spiritual element to that in your sort of going through a journey of becoming something else. And then going back the other way.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Yeah. There's so many different layers to your application.

Della Deluxe: Yeah. But every outfit brings different stuff going on.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Some are more clowny.

Della Deluxe: In the photo in front of us, I've got a Mohawk and a fishtail dress. I had big make-up. I was very powerful. I was very statuesque in that, and I felt a bit, like I could keep people at arm's distance because I wasn't exactly approachable. But then I've been out before in little ponytails and telling everyone that I was a 12-year-old girl. And that was at ARQ and some guy came up to me and said to me, you're not allowed in here. You're too young. And he wanted to drag me around the dance floor by my ponytail. (laughter) Yeah. It was at ARQ. "Oh, am I allowed to have a drink?" So you put on different feelings for different outfits. Because if you don't fill that role and it doesn't look right—

Yunka Ivanabitch: And that picture for me, you can tell how I feel. I just feel obviously the morning, but I remember how I felt in that outfit. I felt pretty. I'm really pretty in this, and I've got, you know, nice pretty hair. It's a nice simple outfit. Love the fishnets.

Della Deluxe: Yep. And you had a name tag?

Yunka Ivanabitch: I did.

Della Deluxe: I felt you. I've really felt that outfit on you looked like you worked at a makeup counter in David Jones. Yep. Well that's what I saw.

Tamara Voninski: What did your nametag say?

Yunka Ivanabitch: I think it was actually an award from ACON, for safe sex slutting. And it could have been big slut, boss slut or something.

Tamara Voninski: I'll blow it up and see if I can read it.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I've got them at home actually. I actually put my fingers on those things while I was getting ready to come here. Looking through jewellery and stuff.

Tamara Voninski: Yeah. You pulled out that same outfit and said, "Do you remember this?" last night? It was the same outfit.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Was that 2000?

Della Deluxe: Two Thousand and two.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Yeah, because Tristan made that we were still living together and we got ready.

Della Deluxe: Erif had got us that room. She got a free room at the Wentworth in the city. Wentworth Hotel on Pitt Street or something that was that year.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Is that the year we also had our glamourorium, is that what we called it?

Della Deluxe: The space we were getting? Yeah. That might've been it. That's sounding familiar.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Where?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Sleaze.

Della Deluxe: I just remember getting ready in that outfit. Max did that face on me and we're at the Wentworth in the city. So yeah, 2002. And Bob looked at that photo. Yunka is totally aware there's a photo being taken. She's like, come on, we're going to pose and Yiorgos and I are just like, yeah, we're doing our own thing. We're not looking over there.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I took my underwear off. That's what I'm holding.

Della Deluxe: Didn't you have a wrap made of stockings?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Stockings!

Yunka Ivanabitch: That's also that same picture where I'm holding that glamour sign. And it was in that magazine as well. Is that your picture?

Tamara Voninski: Yes. I had shown you the pictures when you were all dressed in the sharp suits.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Sharp suits?

Tamara Voninski: You were all dressed in suits.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: When we did the videoing at my house last time.

Tamara Voninski: There was a picture of you walking one way down the Laneway and then there's another one walking the other way.

- Yunka Ivanabitch: You know, there's so many things that happened with your outfits just really depends on what that makes you feel. It's really a mix of stuff, all the time.
- Tamara Voninski: I wanted to kind of get a sense of those different looks you're creating each time. And an idea of what it takes to create that look, but also some of the inspirations for creating those looks and whether you're creating your looks together or separately when you go out together.
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: We definitely bounce ideas off each other, and sometimes, you know, a small idea can get encouraged into a really big idea that we might not have thought of. Because we might be saying, "Oh, you could do this and you could do that and you could make it bigger and you could sort of extend it that way". And that's always very encouraging and inspirational.
- Yunka Ivanabitch: I actually started one outfit with a foam and I made it into a Unicorn Horn. And then I decided I wanted to just be a zebra Unicorn. And that became a big outfit, just from that Unicorn Horn because we were working with, in my costume course, foams and sticking them together and moulding them and carving shapes into them.
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And sometimes I don't overthink what a costume is going to look like or what an outfit is going to look like. I might just think I'm going to make a costume like this one out of old stockings since, through the process of making it— It's like it sort of evolves and it kind of makes itself. And I don't over question it.
- Yunka Ivanabitch: My outfits are very thought about. I'll say, OK, well I like this shape, I want this and I make that in mind is very much about constructing something that's more than one wear, it has a pattern whether I draped it or I've modified an existing pattern. It's very structural for me.
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I don't have the skills to do that. And so I rely on my friends to help me make things that have that kind of definite structure. But whenever I make my own costumes, you know, I rely on other skills, making things or components—pre-bought components and things kind of bought together to kind of create a look. There's something playful about that. I think drag as a performance is a resourceful thing. You use Christmas decorations for earrings or you find a—
- Yunka Ivanabitch: Headpiece.
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Or a big toy jewel and you make it a kind of necklace. I'm thinking of this one, that Della's wearing is like a big diamond
- Della Deluxe: In the middle
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And so, you know, there there's no one trajectory of how a costume is made or how an outfit is made. We also rely on each other. Like I said, the different skills we bring to things, we might request. We help each other to make outfits at times. There's no one way that we've done it over the last 20 plus years.
- Yunka Ivanabitch: I suppose with mine as well, like it's evolved into bigger and better things because I've done a background in costuming and fashion construction. But in the early days, it was just buy premade something and add to it or modify.

Tamara Voninski: I think a lot of your costumes are made from scratch. Do you actually cut the fabric? Do you sew? Can you explain what you do?

Della Deluxe: It's a matter of figuring out what I'm wearing, and then sometimes I know how to make it, sometimes I need to look stuff up.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Della is a mix between Y and I. I'm the structure. He is the creative when it comes to outfits. And Della has a bit of both.

Della Deluxe: I can usually figure out how to make stuff, but when I want complicated stuff that needs a bit more support or structure in certain areas, I've got to figure out how to do it and if I can't be bothered doing that I'll just get someone else to do it.

Tamara Voninski: Do you sew? glue?

Della Deluxe: So, it's good enough to just glue stuff onto outfits, if you can. I avoid too much sewing if I can. If it's easier and it's not going to come off, I'll just glue stuff.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And every now and then you just use the stapler.

Della Deluxe: I mean last night, I had that outfit. I had a belt around the middle. I just safety pinned to the pants. That helped and it was fun. So it's just a matter of there are so many shortcuts you can take with drag. And my attitude towards it is: OK, I'm going out. It needs to last the next, what six hours, whatever. If I'm fairly certain it'll hold up. Sometimes things don't. I've fallen apart in the middle of the night sometimes. But you know, that's when I learned to always have safety pins with you.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And some dental floss.

Della Deluxe: And dental floss if you have an earring that falls apart because dental floss is very strong to keep things together. It is, it's really good. (laughter)

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Have you ever tried to tear dental floss? Have you ever tried to kind of—

Yunka Ivanabitch: Whereas, I have a whole wardrobe full of drag from 20 years ago. Literally that thing.

Well, I have a box at home which is in the hallway because my life is in boxes. And it's got a whole heap of outfits in it, but then I've got a whole half rack full of stuff at a friend's house in a wardrobe, which I didn't even bother looking at. Oh, I forgot to look at it so that I had to pick what was in the box and what I could easily carry. Because I could've bought a headpiece or something, but you know, it's not possible.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And it makes you look cute.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Does it?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Yeah, I feel like the, like what we call jezs, you know, in the '90s, you get those straight girls, that come with A-line skirts and bra tops, and they have a purse on their shoulder and like 'high' heels. That's what it does to me as well. It's a comfortable black dress.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I thought I'd say Yunka (Alex) definitely leans towards a kind of girly, cutesy. Now that you're approaching your senior years (laughter), a kind of more theatrical burlesque, sort of—

Yunka Ivanabitch: I like mixing different eras together.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: In your course, you're a really big fan of Cirque du Soleil. So I kind of see a lot of those things coming through in your costume. Whereas Della, my description would be you kind of create these sort of over exaggerated sort of sense. And that's because you work with your body form. As we all like really big boobs. But you can kind of either go the sexy direction where it's kind of really sort of Sassy or you—

Yunka Ivanabitch: Split and big bust.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah. Or you go the other way, which is a little bit sort of kooky, a little bit ethnic looking and when I say ethnic, you take things from sort of Arabian style or the Emirates. And a sort of drapery around your face, and I think it does it for you. I think you do it for a reason because it frames your face and you can make your face the kind of canvas—the main canvas—and the focus of your outfit literally becomes your frame.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I feel like I would like to have my legs and my waist, more, in that sense.

Della Deluxe: You like having your legs out.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I love having a short skirt or a nice split and big heels.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: So now that described your style. Maybe you should flatter me. (laughter)

Della Deluxe: You have a mishmash of styles.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Textures.

Della Deluxe: It reminds me of Leigh Bowery in a lot of ways. In the way that you like to transform your body shape into different things like this one on here. You had a corset underneath that. You had those boobs flopping around in the front. But then you go and do really sexy things like Kuntina last night with those huge over exaggerated hips. You like to play around with the body form, shape. And this you look like to me looking at that now you look like that baby that was just born, that puts them really big sunglasses on when it came because you actually got nothing on, but you're actually completely covered. But I think the bald head gives it that sense of rawness I guess with, you know, you didn't need hair to go with that outfit. Did you actually have hair night at all?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: No. No.

Della Deluxe: That was bald all night wasn't it? Yep. So you'd like to play around. There's a lot of body shape manipulation with a lot of your stuff that you do and you treat your body like it's an artwork. It's like, alright, let's chuck things on it and see how that looks.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And that's what I mean with my style. I try not to overthink it. I just think about, you know, I want to experiment with this.

Della Deluxe: Well you come up with a concept and then you put it together and just make it work somehow.

Yunka Ivanabitch: But also I think it's called cultural stuff that comes out in your outfits too. Culture reference. You know, whether it be your body shape or I don't know whether it be a sense of like last night with your hair. I just saw really over the top Italian, all the woman with plastic surgery and big glasses and you could be sitting by the Riviera having a champagne.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And I guess in a way I don't overthink it, but I also know that that's the quality. And I think there's something about that style of femininity that I want to represent because it's often, you know, I don't think it's, it's kind of often marginalised and put in a bit in the background to kind of like youth culture and that sort of very femininity. And that old dear—remember that old lady that I went out as that used to pee herself—the lavender dress. That was what's a drag Queen gonna look like, you know, and she's like 70.

Della Deluxe: Well that's what I thought you were doing. It was holding a mirror up to a lot of the people there because that was at a Diva awards. And it was sort of like, yeah, you're all gonna look like this one day. Hey, you're all going to pee in your bag like me!

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And so, I think it is multifunction like this. There is no one definite approach. But we do sort of have a leaning, you know, like we've just described.

Della Deluxe: Usually, when we go out together as a threesome, we usually independently come up with outfits. Sometimes we bounce ideas off of each other. If we're not sure about— I'm not sure if this hair will work or should I go with these colours.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Do you need an extra colour.

Della Deluxe: Yep.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Like, I always know that Dell will always tell you. You always ask Dell about the makeup and you will always go 'this' or 'that' immediately.

Della Deluxe: Yep. Because it's an exaggeration. I just think my attitude towards, particularly drag is—let's just cover everything up and start again. So everything's drawn on. I don't like using my own eyebrows for drag. Because I just think even if I draw them in the same spot, I'll draw them. I'm not using my eyebrows because I just think it should be a complete mask and start again. That's, that's my attitude towards it. I think we work best when we all independently come up with something and then it all comes together and somehow it just works. I mean look at that. It's just—



Yunka Ivanabitch: I was Pink. You were in green. And you were in flesh.

Della Deluxe: Perfect match.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I can see how Dulux could use that as a skin.

Della Deluxe: It's the going to events like a party is actually very interesting. Because we will walk through a crowd, people will see whoever's walking first. Often you take the lead. Sometimes I do. People look at us and like there's one, oh my God, there's a second one. Oh Shit, what's that? There's another one.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And there used to be—

Yunka Ivanabitch: Oh my god, are they nuns? They travel in threes.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: At times there were more of us. Like when Erif was still alive and Sexy Galaxy would come along, and Destiny.

Della Deluxe: So they'd be this whole group of—

Yunka Ivanabitch: We're like the leaders of the pack really.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It was just that we all have such a different independent approach to drag that when we're all together it's such an incongruent kind of collective of individuals that I guess outsiders look at us. Some people do come up and say 'thank you' because they can see that there's something really special.

Della Deluxe: I can see why they do, because a lot of parties we go to, it must be nice to see a bit of colour within all the beige.

Yunka Ivanabitch: There's a lot of beige.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah, unless I'm in beige.

Della Deluxe: You had some pink lipstick.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I did. I did.

Tamara Voninski: You had mentioned Leigh Bowery. Are there other influences that any of you have in the drag world that have inspired you?

Yunka Ivanabitch: Well not necessarily in the drag world, but you know, I don't actually consider Leigh Bowery, a drag queen. He's a performance artist, kind of costume creative. I did my project based on Leigh Bowery and Viktor and Rolf who are high fashion. A lot of their stuff is very over exaggerated. So that doesn't necessarily mean for me that it has to be a drag performer. I just think inspiration for outfits comes from runway for me. When you see a texture, or a shape, or silhouette, you want to make it?

Della Deluxe: Yeah. I'm a bit similar. I'm a bit more fashion influence rather than film clip inks influence like a lot of drag queens are these days. They think they're girls, and they think they're in this video hit film clip.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: So I have a much more expanded view about what drag is. So I would say Leigh Bowery was a drag artist and a drag performance artist.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I just see him as an artist, I think, mainly.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Who used drag performance as his main vehicle. In the same way, I use drag performance as a visual artist. What I'm trying to say is, my view of what a drag queen is really expanded. It's not just a particular view of what everyone else thinks drag is, which might be like we saw last night. A single drag queen miming to a song on a stage and a short sequined dress with the big hair, full stop. And everyone claps at the end of the number. I think that's only one very narrow view about what drag is today. I kind of see drag is so broadly based, you know, kind of both in the past, historically, but also in a contemporary sense. And when I think about Ru Paul's drag race, some of the Queens on there have kind of pushed different ideas about what drag is. And they often get criticism because they have a view that all drag is this. And people criticise them for it. I think that they should be applauded in the same way we applaud Leigh Bowery now

Yunka Ivanabitch: Well, Leigh Bowery—I'm going to mention about drag and probably say that because there's so much fashion reference to his work now when obviously he is a drag performer.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And drag has been lots of different things before the 1970's, 60's, drag, the drag and transgender, we're often very interconnected. Drag sort of spaces, where trans-women could actually be who they were and do female impersonation or gender illusion, which is a very different style of drag. And that was often done in sort of underground gay clubs and that's just a different style and you kind of got to give it credit to these spaces where, you know, it wasn't easy for you or transgender to come out and transition. But if you could do gender illusion even once or two times a week or have a job, it would have been a really amazing and a really important part of someone being. And before that, in the circus, drag had a place in a girl shows and, I've just discovered this.

Yunka Ivanabitch: The influence for us I suppose just comes from everywhere. It's not really one specific thing. Could be individual, could be fashion, could be another artist, could be I had that outfit that I made inspired by a lolly wrapper. Remember the yellow horns on the clown face. You know, those Mentos—the colourful lollies. That was based on that wrapper.

Tamara Voninski: You used to go to the Laneway after big parties and Sleaze. Where do you go out in drag today?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Often when we go to specific events or parties.

Yunka Ivanabitch: It's not really about going out or in clubs anymore.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: We rarely get dressed up just to go out on a weekend. Occasionally like we did last night. It's not a thing because there's just nowhere to go. There's no sort of space. I mean, personally, I've got other things going on. Professionally, I kind of have, you know, a different life

Yunka Ivanabitch: In saying that, I actually did go out a couple of weeks ago in Lismore. There's a cocktail bar there. And I went out there and Coleman, he says, come on, let's go for a drink. I had a good time. I'm in bed by 12.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: So I just don't go out drinking. For me, the attraction of going out to a bar or a club isn't what it was 10 or 20 years ago. I feel a little like I don't want to even socialise in that space. If I do, I'd rather go for dinner, go to a little bar, have a quick drink. But that whole idea of going out on a Friday night or a Saturday night, it's just not a part of my life anymore. And I think if it was, every now and then I'd probably go out in drag.

Yunka Ivanabitch: When I did live here, I would sometimes call Della. "Let's go out." Randomly, not planning it and so forth. That would be a good thing because we haven't been thinking about it and it's a random event. So we'd go out together and that would be it. We would be home by maybe two or 3:00am. When I lived down on Cleveland Street and he lived on Bourke Street, we'd often be at that bus stop at two in the morning eating fried chicken. Before we go inside smoking. Fried chicken and chips from the chicken shop. I think in the clubs ages ago, years ago, all the shows were big productions. There was money spent on them. It was kind of a storyline with it. It wasn't just a person just doing a spot number. And it was a bit more entertaining. So when Della was in the shop, we'd often go in drag to the Shift and we'd watch this show and there'd be really busy and that would be exciting for us. But you know, we see things change and—

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And there would be productions that run for a season. That run for six or eight weeks. The show would run every week that have full page ads in the press as a new production show. The clubs and the bars would use the drag shows as the main promotion for a particular night. That doesn't happen anymore. Sometimes they'll have like drag competitions.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I think the bigger picture really with that is licensing. Social media apps. People don't go out, you know. No one's socialising like they used to. And to a degree we aren't socialising like we used to either because there's less stuff going on in clubs because there's less people. And we all get older, I suppose.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah. Your priorities change. You've only got time. I like yoga, so it's kind of awkward to go to a yoga class on a Sunday morning.

Della Deluxe: You can do that in drag!

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah, I could.

Della Deluxe: Hanging upside down in that hammock could be nice. That outfit would be good for it.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: That would be great. I could do some downward dogs in that.

Della Deluxe: Yeah. You could!

Yunka Ivanabitch: You wouldn't even need to go to the toilet. (laughter)

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Studying your pipe.

Della Deluxe: Actually, actually do you know what would be really nice? If you bought that outfit. I'm upside down and then coughed out a fur ball.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Or a glitter ball!

Della Deluxe: Or a glitter ball!

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Or a ball of stockings. (laughter)

Della Deluxe: I've had a bowl of stocking with a bit of fur and glitter.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I'll do a big stocking ball that kind of exploded—

Della Deluxe: And lots of spit all over it.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Yum. Yum.

Tamara Voninski: I'm just going to shift gears just a little bit. I'm going to ask you about being photographed or filmed. Has your experience of being photographed or filmed changed over time? In the last 15 to 20 years. And if so, how has it changed?

Yunka Ivanabitch: I don't like being photographed while I'm out anymore. Only, if I kind of know the person or seen them out before or if they're in the crowd.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Or they work for Italian Vogue.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Although for Italian Vogue or if they work for a publication; often people when they're working for a publication, they ask you about having your photo taken. Or I ask them who they take photos for. But generally no photos.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Sometimes I used to be really—Now I've just become very passive. If someone, like last night, is chasing me around with a camera, I'm just like, yeah.

Yunka Ivanabitch: There was a lady there taking your photo.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah, she did.

Yunka Ivanabitch: There was that blonde lady, the short one. I just saw her and I was just like—I was turning away.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I was just, you know, I just didn't—I just didn't have the energy. Sometimes I just don't have the energy. If they want a photo, I'm like, yeah. I lean in and smile. Great. And I look at the photo that they've taken. It's such a terrible photo. (laughter)

Yunka Ivanabitch: Yeah. It's nothing that I want to happen. I find it invasive now.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I used to find a more invasive. Now, I'm at the point where it's like, I just don't care. I'm like, whatever. I've got a minute. Yeah, take a photo. Congratulations. Whatever. Sometimes I'm very clear, "No, I'm busy, I'm with my friends. It's a thoroughfare. We're walking. You know, there's no—

Yunka Ivanabitch: Some people want to stop you in your, direction—

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: You're going somewhere with your friends, you're walking along and they're just like—they stand in front of you, like, let's get a photo. Ah what, I'm sorry. You were actually walking somewhere, doing something, engaging. At Mardi Gras. I had to say to a few people. "Um, I'm sorry, I'm just having a conversation."

Della Deluxe: I find, particularly when there are three of us together, one person will ask for a photo. And I can usually sum them up pretty well. I can usually tell if I like them, if they're actually nice or not. If they're nice, I'll go along with it. But I find one person will take your photo and then you look around and all these other people suddenly are getting their cameras out and taking photos of us too. It's really weird.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It is. And I kind of think about, and try and be kind because I feel—

Della Deluxe: Yeah. You're too nice.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I just put it down to—

Yunka Ivanabitch: What's the rule? Never be rude first, but they're rude first.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: But I put it down to, the camera has become, the phone has become this almost like this softening mechanism where they want to connect with you. They want to come up and talk to us. They don't know how to do it. It's socially awkward, so they're taking a photo in a way that kind of tries to bridge that.

Della Deluxe: I suppose—

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: On one hand. But on the other hand, I also think they look at us like freaks and I just want to get a documentation of a freak shot on their phone. It's hard to distinguish sometimes which of those two. There's probably other reasons why people do it. In a selfish ones for their own social media. But I, you know, I just don't want—What I want to get to is: I don't want to be too angry about it anymore because it's not going to make a difference to any of the dickheads and it's not going to make a difference to anyone else and I don't want to harbour that anger. And I had anger for quite a few years.

Della Deluxe: Yeah. I suppose I like to be a bully and push people around. I actually quite enjoy it, I must say.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: You're good at it.

Della Deluxe: I am good at it and I'm good at getting rid of people, sometimes. Not all the time. But I am actually quite aggressive with the photo thing these days if I don't like them. If I know them or I think ah OK. Yeah, they're just being fun. They're OK. Sometimes, when they barge in, when I'm trying to speak to someone: I'll be speaking to Yiorgos, Alex and they just barge in. "I want a photo." And I'm like, no, get away—now.

Yunka Ivanabitch: That's really confronting for them. But they actually don't realise how confronting they are to us, first.

Della Deluxe: No, they don't. They don't get it. I like you—yeah. I quite liked to bully them.

Yunka Ivanabitch: You're good at it.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I kind of think, you know, it's almost like—When you're a performer and we were out, we do become public property in a way.

Della Deluxe: It is, in a way. And I think, I do accept that we're, a presence in the place and we're not like, everyone else. It's just standing around doing whatever. But I find it attracts a lot of negative attention as well as the positive attention. You just got to wear that.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I look at trying to distinguish whether their approaches are a respectful one or whether it's one that's malicious.

Della Deluxe: So do I, and you can sum them up pretty quick. You can tell if they're a dickhead or not. And if they're a dickhead, I'll usually just say "Now piss off." And they don't like that. They find it—In 25 years of hanging around nightclubs and dance parties. I have never in my life gone up to someone and said, I want a photo with you. I've never ever done that ever. I don't know. Maybe I'm just—

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah. Why would you do that?

Della Deluxe: I don't know. I don't know what it is either. I have never gone and asked someone for a photo ever.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Yeah.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I just think they think it is their personal space.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I think generally we know all the dress-up-y, kooky, crazy people.

Della Deluxe: Yeah.

Yunka Ivanabitch: And when you see your friends out and they're having a good time like we do, you just accept what is. You're not there to pick them to pieces, touch them. You accept exactly what they are and how they look. And there's no—It's sometimes, to a degree it's not even, what's going on the outside isn't really the focus. The focus is the good time and the conversation. Not the memory of what they look like.

Della Deluxe: That's right. If we went out together and, say, ran into bottlenecks—

Yunka Ivanabitch: Em.

Della Deluxe: We'd never go up to her and say, "Oh we want a photo." Or touch her boobs, or whatever. But then again, she's a friend. So you don't do that. OK.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I don't do that to anyone.

Della Deluxe: I think probably because we generally, when we go out and dress up, there's no expectation of outfit, gender, whatever. We don't have an expectation. So we just accept what is.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: You know what I do find creepy. When I see someone from about three or four meters away, taking a photo. Like, I just think, like—When they're across there and they're just an individual, you know, like—I just find it a little bit unnerving.

Della Deluxe: To be voyeuristic.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It is. Sometimes I turn my back. Sometimes, I just don't bother. But it's very different, I think too. I think this is probably a good segue into street photography and the kind of photography you used to do Tamara. Which in a way, it was the same. It was a bit voyeuristic. It was taken from a distance.

Della Deluxe: Behind a telegraph pole.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Behind a telegraph pole. But looking at this photo, we'd obviously spoken before and we knew you and there was a kind of—

Yunka Ivanabitch: I didn't know you. You knew her.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah, I'd just spoken to her I think that morning or around that or maybe even the party before.

Yunka Ivanabitch: But you know when a person looks like they're taking a photo for more than just a happy pic at a party, it's a bit different. It's different to just the general people on the street who have other purpose.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: For me that was always a difference. If someone's got a decent camera, you know that they're from the press or from DNA magazine or they're from some publication.

Della Deluxe: Or they take it seriously.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: And they've got a flash and that's all—Often they've got a lanyard, you know, they ask often to take a photo. But even if they didn't ask, you know, I'd be coy. I'd go up and ask who they were taking a photo for because, I also appreciate that sometimes they want to get a photograph of what they see, rather than a staged photograph. And that's a legitimate type of photography. And I love photography. You know, because it gives someone what to look at, what's going on there. These people have imposed this.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Hmm.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: So yeah—The experience of being photographed for me has changed a lot over a long period of time, and it's evolving. And, sometimes, I find it more intrusive than others. Sometimes it borders on being really annoying, because it's so constant.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I think that the intrusive thing is, as well. You know, like—These days, a lot of younger people don't necessarily have social skills to engage in people.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah, that's what I mean.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Because they've never learned it. I find that with my staff member, I attempt to teach her how to speak, how to stand, how to—everything that does not say

appropriate body language or verbalisation. And I think that plays a very big part in how people interact with us, and how we react to their interaction.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Another instance was at a Mardi Gras one year, when we were all waiting for the parade to start. And we weren't the only people to dress up. Everybody was dressed up. So it wasn't that they were taking photos just of us. They wanted a photo of themselves with us, because they were dressed up, and we were dressed up. It was a very different dynamic. I still found that incessantly annoying. Because—

Yunka Ivanabitch: Generally, those people are heterosexual people.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: No. They weren't. There were a whole group of those Thai trans women that were there that were obsessed with taking all their photos.

Della Deluxe: But we've got to remember that—

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Different cultures—

Della Deluxe: Phones have changed because in the '90s, people didn't have mobiles. Not Many.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Cameras. Disposable cameras.

Della Deluxe: Yeah. Disposable cameras.

Yunka Ivanabitch: We always had photos. We have a whole shit load of photos.

Della Deluxe: But now it's so easy, to just, take a photo of someone. You can do it discretely

Yunka Ivanabitch: It's like disposable memories, really.

Della Deluxe: Yup.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Digital disposable memories. It's like: Oh they look really happy and they're on Facebook but they're not really happy. It's just that moment.

Della Deluxe: But some days, it's like you sometimes feel a bit raped, when you get home because it's all these people want your attention. The [non-consensual] photos, it feels a bit like everyone wanted a piece of you.

Tamara Voninski: I observed that last night on the street with the phones and a couple of people at the Oxford and some people at Stonewall as well.

Yunka Ivanabitch: And when we were in the alleyway. I was just ignoring it. I was like, we're going down that alleyway let's just walk there. Everything else is superfluous. And because people constantly behave the way they behave in the periphery, when you don't even know them, it just becomes part of the landscape. And I really moved past it very quickly, because it's so irrelevant. But in your face sometimes too. Well, the girls at Taylor Square, I felt they were in my face. I was just looking at the lights, going "Change, change, change" and I was also thinking, "I'm just going to cross the road. I don't care if the cars are coming."



Kuntina K. Klakalakis: "I'll jump. I'll jump the bonnet."

Yunka Ivanabitch: I was at that point. Those girls were really in my face. Because they really wanted to be present with us and I was just like—I was ready to step out on the road and then it changed. I'm like, oh, quick, walk!

Tamara Voninski: Are there any other questions I should've asked or is there anything else you'd like to add?

Yunka Ivanabitch: I'd like to say that I swallowed a lot of glitter in my drag career and I'm not sure if it's fully rinsed, but I think it's still going to come out. (laughter)

Della Deluxe: That's OK. They'll pick it up.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I think we should—

Della Deluxe: Ultrasound.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: What if you go for an MRI? Do you think that glitter is magnetised and will shred through you into the magnet.

Della Deluxe: You have to take your jewellery off.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I wonder if I'm going to have an accumulation. Like some hairdressers have accumulations of hair in their lungs. (laughter)

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: A sorry condition. What about what we think, what are the other—Let's identify our drag weakness—

Alex: Drag weakness?

Yunka Ivanabitch: And what we think we need to develop in our drag.

Della Deluxe: Ok. Well, sometimes I feel like I'm a failure.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: In what respect?

Della Deluxe: I can't get rid of people. I've yelled at people before to get away. Like there was one instance I was going from Manacle to Stonewall with Fuchsia and Dallas and this guy with a push bike was following us and wanted to come with us. And Dallas said to me, "Can you deal with that?" I'm like, "You fuck off right now. Get." And I thought I'd gotten rid of him and we got to Stonewall and we sat at the bar and we ordered a drink and then Fushia said to me, "Can you look next to you?" And that guy was sitting there with his bike. And I was like, "What did that tell you?" So sometimes I'm a failure.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I had that problem as well. That stalker, he saw me come out of ARQ, cross the road, get into a cab. He was in his car. He followed me home. And he was knocking at my door. I'm like, "Who are you?" And he bought me shit and put it at the door. And then he got my phone number. I was just like, "Oh my God." I said, "How'd you get my phone number?" "I have my means and ways." I was like, "Oh, OK." So then I goggled his phone number. I think he was a real estate

person and then I said, “Well, you know, you got to fuck off because I know where you work. I know what you look like.” It was a stalking situation.

Della Deluxe: Yeah, that’s not very nice. See, with drag, in general, I find—I mean let’s face it, we all love attention and we love the attention it brings in, but unfortunately with that comes negative attention as well.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I think in the future we just have to not go out anymore. Only go to parties and pick those parties and be conscious of—

Della Deluxe: What do you mean, in future? That’s what we’re doing now.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Well that’s what I mean like. And also because, you know, the gay club scene is so reduced.

Della Deluxe: Yeah.

Yunka Ivanabitch: It’s really all about private parties now.

Della Deluxe: Well, it is. Easter weekend Yiorgos and I went to Loose Ends at Oxford Art Factory. We just went out for a couple of hours and that was really quite fun.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: No one really took a photo. And when they did—

Della Deluxe: That one was really annoying and they were actually nice. Yep. And a couple of people followed me on Instagram.

Yunka Ivanabitch: And because you’re in a crowd that people know, or accept what you do and don’t question it. It’s actually a whole lot better.

Della Deluxe: Yeah, it’s more respectful. The negative attention is definitely a downer, but, you know, you learn to deal with it. Look, 10 years ago, I would go out in drag. Maybe 12 years ago. By the time it came to get home, I had no money because I just drunk it all or whatever. I would sit at the bus stop at Taylor Square and because I knew that was a, you know, guys drive past. (laughter) So anyone that stopped to talk, can you give me a ride home? That’s when I was living in the Cross and I promised them sex on the way home and when I got there I’d just run out and take off and get into the building. (laughter)

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: You’re a thief and a liar! (laughter)

Della Deluxe: I am. I’m a thief and a liar, but I’m so good at it. There was a couple of times when the guys were getting out of the car though, and they wanted to come with me. And I was like, I’m sooo not doing anything. I just wanted a ride home.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Oh no—my herpes has flared up.

Della Deluxe: Oh Yeah—and I’ve got it all over.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Well, I think that the future with our drag is just bigger, brighter, bolder, better.

Della Deluxe: Yup. That worked so far.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah.

Tamara Voninski: So what happens from this point with the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Archive.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Yeah. I actually think probably we need to create an accessible archive.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah. I think it's a historical place. The Glitzy, Glamour, Glitter Girls, they kind of pseudo exist, but it'd be nice to contain it as a something, somewhere.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I don't know about pseudo. Because you know, a lot of people in Lismore identify who we are, what we've done and the contribution to that section. We're not just party girls that people forget.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: That's what I mean about the archive. There's a kind of institution in terms of there's all these different elements to what the Glitzy Glamour Glitter Girls were. Different people have a different relationship to it. We have all had a different relationship to it at different times. And how it's kind of existed and what it's been and where it's been. It's a very important part of our past, and our past together.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I think it's a very important part of the future, as well. And how that translates into, creatively, had we had not done what we've done, we would be in very different places. You know, I reckon. Because it's people you meet, what you create, what you learn, social scenes.

Della Deluxe: And we've all learned different things. As we discussed earlier, we've all got our own little stuff we're particularly good at and if you're not sure about something, you just asked the expert. And that helps the creative process. But yeah, I think if we hadn't done what we'd done—Well, we certainly wouldn't have this much to talk about with drag today.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Well, really as well, all the information—the stuff we feel about ourselves is all stuff we felt, because we've done something to ourselves. I couldn't imagine not feeling what I felt. I couldn't imagine just going out in jeans and a shirt every night and not engaging with people, not engaging some feeling emotion, behaviour, bad behaviour. You can't, you can't—I mean we can verbalise, but I mean all this stuff you feel when you're in these situations, it would never have had it if we'd never looked like that. Like it's this crazy.

Tamara Voninski: So it's opened up some doors, socially.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I've done a lot of drag overseas, as well. It's very different there too. Riding in Amsterdam, on a push bike, in winter, in drag and losing your heels. Just ridiculous stuff. I mean sometimes we talk about it and we go on about it and it's interesting. Sometimes, you've met new people and they just go, "What the hell?" I just think we would be very different people if we hadn't been creative together. Very different. Like I said, there's a lot of beige people in this world, a lot. That's the other thing as, well. People don't get that we just want to go out in our group and have a good time and be dickheads together without meeting new people, or creating a new relationship with anyone. I think that's another thing I find challenging, people want to know you, want to do stuff with you. I'm just like, well,

I'm actually happy over here in this section and we don't need anything else because they've been in that section and we don't like it.

Della Deluxe: Yeah, they don't get that.

Yunka Ivanabitch Why don't you want to be with us? Come and have a drink with us. I'm like, "No."

Della Deluxe: People are very selfish and self-absorbed and want to make everything about themselves.

Yunka Ivanabitch Well that's what we're doing.

Della Deluxe: Yeah, but we don't go out and try and force people to come and talk to us, unless, of course, we want to have sex with them. We don't go out and force people to take photos, force them to talk to us, force them to spend time with us. I'm happy to chat to people if they're nice, but if they're just idiots, I'm very intolerant these days. No, I can't be bothered with it.

Tamara Voninski: How does your drag persona differ from you in your everyday life?

Della Deluxe: Well, I think, I think it's always going to be intertwined. But yeah, when you are dressed up and look a certain way, that's a different persona. But that's always part of who you are really. It's sort of all moulds together into one life.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Yeah. In my line of work, I have a shop. I can put anything in it that I like and it's had drag in it. and lots of credit stuff in it. I'd encourage people to put stuff in, and be themselves.

Della Deluxe: And your line of work is creative as well.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Also, back to that photography thing, you know, we were all photographed in, about '96 there was a book *Don't Call Me Shirley* and I was on the poster to advertise that book. And there was a guy taking photos in his studio situation at a Sleaze Ball. And I think that was probably the highlight of my photographic section.

Tamara Voninski: Is there anything else that we didn't cover that we should have?

Yunka Ivanabitch: People. Costumes. Photographing...

Della Deluxe: Well, maybe just one thing which is working with you for the past few years. And we're not sitting there drinking and doing whatever.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Most of the times we've gone out though. I mean for me it's been an interesting process of thinking about it as an experience and how do I experience drag and how do I consider that experience in the way that it's been documented. But the documentation, it's kind of, it's quite funny because it's not like the usual you do it, you see, you build on what you see. Considering how much I feel like I've been in front of the camera, and it was only really last night that I was actually looking over your shoulder every now and then. I really hadn't done that at all in the last few years. That's because I think there's a finality to the process and, that again, is like the early archive of the Glamour Girls where people making all these things. And cards and there was that kind of documentation. That's what I mean

about an archive. There was all this media that was being produced, and now this is just another archive because it's compressed. But this archive kind of spans two pockets—the laneway and the last three and a half years.

Della Deluxe: Mmm.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Yeah. You know, it is interesting not having a visual on what's being done. But look, it's like when you do an exhibition, I never asked what you're doing. I only accept what you show me and now I'm quite happy to be satisfied at the end when you go, this is my art project.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: That's it. That's how I see it as well. I wasn't fixated on anything other than let's just do it. We've got another creative that wants to be involved in that process. What does that mean? Let's just go with it and experiment and see. We produce our own visual culture through documenting, photographing each other, photographing ourselves. It's kind of interesting to always look at how someone else sees us. Even if it's just a one shot like at Mardi Gras. That one photo that became an emblem. What was that? The one of Della and I just outside walking around. I think I sent it to—me as Kuntina My Kuntina outfit and Della in her green polka dots.

Della Deluxe: Oh, this year's Mardi Gras.

**Transcript excerpt from the filming of *How Did I Get Here?* (2019),  
from scene looking at photographs on a table.**

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Let's have a look

Tamara Voninski: In here we have around 20 small photographs. I think you are in some of them, but not all of them. I wasn't quite sure, which one were of you and which ones weren't.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: OK

Tamara Voninski: Then there are three photographs that I know are of you.



**Figure 93: Tamara Voninski, *Sleaze Ball Recovery*, 2000. Variable dimensions.**

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Ha. Wow. Not of us. Black heel.

Yunka Ivanabitch: They do remind me of our black heels

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah. I had to cut the straps off of them.  
Oh Dell.

Della Deluxe: Nice big and scary

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Oh that's a classic

Yunka Ivanabitch: The back of me. Great

Della Deluxe: Lovely

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: That's really nice. That's sweaty.

Yunka Ivanabitch: The back of me.

Yunka Ivanabitch: That's me again.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Ah. The *Dukes of Hazzard* look.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Yeah

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: One of our boobs

Della Deluxe: Another boob shot.  
Definitely not me.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Oh. No.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Oh look Yunka

Yunka Ivanabitch: It's a leg shot  
Didn't you know I'm a professional leg model.

Della Deluxe: That's when she found a corpse along the highway.  
Marika.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Remember when I put the glue all over to put the stocking down

Della Deluxe: Yes

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Oh look up shot. Nice.  
Did you wear glasses. What glasses are they?

Della Deluxe: Oh the blue ones. They were probably in my bag.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Hardcore haircut

Yunka Ivanabitch: Ahh. The bearded Lola

Tamara Voninski:

I didn't recognise—Is that you?



Figure 94: Tamara Voninski, *Kuntina K. Klakalakis as the Bearded Lola*, 1999. Variable dimensions.

Yunka Ivanabitch:

Is that a mirror in your brush?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis:

Don't you remember?

Della Deluxe:

Yes she did.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis:

I was in the gutter at one stage and someone was putting out cigarettes on my outfit. "You are disgusting."

Della Deluxe:

Yeah, but you didn't care.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis:

Yeah, I didn't care. I was

Yunka Ivanabitch:

It was all in good fun. None of us ever wore angel wings, did we?

Della Deluxe:

No. Never.





**Figure 95: Tamara Voninski, *Windex in the Laneway*, 2002. Variable Dimensions.**

Kuntina K. Klakalakis:                   Lovely in black. Classic. Oh Windex. Do you remember I took that bottle of Windex out?

Della Deluxe:                                What am I shoving in my mouth. Oh you were sucking a lollipop.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis:                   Did you have big claws

Yunka Ivanabitch:                         Yes

Della Deluxe:                                Yes

Kuntina K. Klakalakis:                   Remember the Windex bottle and me spraying it in my mouth and you were saying to people 'Oh it's fine. It's normal.'

Yunka Ivanabitch:                         Gatorade.

Della Deluxe:                                Oh that's good.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis:                   Oh they were wild days. People just hanging around. Everyone was just having such a good time.

Della Deluxe:                                Do what you want.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: There was never any agro that I ever saw or any drama.

Della Deluxe: None of that.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Everyone was just kicking around  
Oh look Yunka!

Yunka Ivanabitch: The back of my head.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: The back of your head again. Shaggy head  
Oh and again. Oh Dell. That looked really good Your hair

Della Deluxe: It looked like a scoop of ice cream

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It did look like a scoop of ice cream  
Awesome.

Yunka Ivanabitch: What colour was that dress. Was it pink?

Della Deluxe: It was blue

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It brings back memories. There's the other one  
Before and after. It looks like you were giving yourself an airing.

Della Deluxe: I was wet.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I think it was more than just wet.

Della Deluxe: It was too hard to go to the toilet with that hair so I just peed myself  
Oh you know. I had to walk and I was in no condition to walk.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Oh what was her name. I'm trying to remember.  
Two different photos.

Tamara Voninski: Two different years for sure

Della Deluxe: Same person

Tamara Voninski: I thought those legs were hers but they're yours!

Yunka Ivanabitch: They're mine. Those shoes were my all—time favourite shoes.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Diamantes in the straps

Yunka Ivanabitch: Diamantes. There were two straps. One across there, and one across the toes. They were the most comfortable shoes because I wore them so much and the top strap broke. I only just found them again last year after ten years of not having them.



Figure 96: Tamara Voninski, *Yunka Ivanabitch's Favourite Shoes*, 2001. Variable Dimensions.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: There's Minn. It looks like she's about to get mauled by the pack. Oh lovely. That's nice.

Yunka Ivanabitch: You were hot.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I made those panties out of flesh toned lycra.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Were you body-painted as well?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: No I had stockings on my arms. Shocking stocking dolly.

Yunka Ivanabitch: She was shocking.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It was horrible. It was a disgusting outfit.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Why? It looked great.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: There was a Donation. All of my drag friends donated bags full of dirty old stockings, which I made this outfit out of.

Della Deluxe: Nice and smelly

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yup wow. We're ready to go home there

Della Deluxe: Really, really ready.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I've got that really innocent look on my face.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: You've got the Glamour Girl sign there  
You're still sucking on that lollipop.

Della Deluxe: I was busy

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Oh that's beautiful.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I like how your waist is so defined there and the underwear makes it look really feminine

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Indeed.

Tamara: There were three photographs that I knew were of you so I printed them up bigger. Shall we go look at them?

**Transcript excerpt from the filming of *How Did I Get Here?* (2019),  
from scene pinning three photos to the wall.**

Della Deluxe: I think that was 8am heading to the Shift.

Della Deluxe: What are you pulling down there?



Figure 97. Tamara Voninski, *The Laneway: Underwear*, 2000. Variable Dimensions.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis:

Probably my underwear  
In one of these we're walking one direction.  
Are we walking down to walk back up?

Tamara:

This was the very last laneway.

Yunka Ivanabitch:

Here I was taking the lead...take notice.

Della Deluxe:

It was definitely pre-smartphone. Y was a bit smartphone for awhile

Tamara:

This was the very last laneway. I remember that because someone wrote  
*Over + Out* and I thought that was symbolic of the whole Laneway.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis:

It was. I think it's really curious above *Over + Out* they wrote a copyright  
symbol as if it was kind of—

Yunka Ivanabitch:

Really.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis:

Look at that line that underscores it. There is a c. There's a kind of owner  
ship of it. Also the + positive symbol. That was really the time that HIV  
became set as well as a more manageable condition rather than a  
potential death sentence. I think the '90s were an uncertain time about

whether the retrovirals were going to be a long-term solution for people living with HIV. The symbol of the plus is always an iconic one among gay men.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: That sparkly outfit was really nice Della.

Della Deluxe: I remember that was the Mardi Gras parade and we were all walking to the Shift.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It was funny though, that was the most difficult outfit to see through. It was really difficult to see. Limited visibility. They all have their quirks.



Figure 98: Tamara Voninski, *Oxford Street*, 2007. Variable Dimensions.



Figure 99: Tamara Voninski, *The Laneway*, 2002. Variable Dimensions.

- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: We're real focal point for the crowds aren't we?
- Della Deluxe: You can see in this one that most of them are looking.
- Yunka Ivanabitch: Weren't we chanting something? We were saying something. I'm sure we were saying something.
- Della Deluxe: I think it's just our visual appearances.
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: No, I think Yunka's right.
- Yunka Ivanabitch: I actually think I was saying something. I think that's why everyone is looking and clapping. Cause we were saying something.
- Kuntina K. Klakalakis: What do we want. And when do we want it. GLAMOUR
- Yunka Ivanabitch: That's it!

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It's like we held our own rally. We had our own glamour girl rally.

Yunka Ivanabitch: See that thing on my heel? I got awarded best slut. *Best Old Slut* by ACON. They had an awards night and gave me an award for being the best slut. ACON had a program called Safe Sex Sluts and we went to parties and promoted safe sex. I think that's the year I got the award and that's why I'm wearing the badge.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: You were a real old slut.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I was an old slut

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It was a bit of an institution

Della Deluxe: I used to give guys condoms and say 'Yeah go fill that up and bring it back. Thanks! I was the dirty slut.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah that the award you should get

Della Deluxe: Yeah. I got the dirty award. It had poo on the top.

Tamara: Do you remember me photographing you at any of these? (pointing to three photos)

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: At any of these points—I don't.

Yunka Ivanabitch: This one is so close. How can you not remember that?

Della Deluxe: I don't.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: I think Tamara had photographed us enough times by that stage; there was a more familiarity. If it had been anyone else at that proximity taking photos, I'd be like 'Why are you taking photos? Who are you? Why are you taking photos so close?' Often press photographers either have a card or a lanyard or something to indicate that. Often, I ask why people are taking photographs. I mean, I know why they're taking photographs. But where are they from.

Tamara: You did ask. The first year I photographed you and you had the beard. I had no idea that was you (referring to a previous photo). And each year that you saw me, you said 'Oh you're that girl with the leica.' And this particular time, I remember you saying; I haven't seen you in a couple of years. And I had been away.



Kuntina K. Klakalakis: There was no kind of anxiety about drug dogs coming though. There was no anxiety. Everyone was just having a kind of nice time. I find partying today, there's a certain level of preparation that has to be thought about in terms of Aw, are they going to take my hair spray and what are they going to check, What are they going to decide this year that I can't bring into a party. There's a permissiveness and trust that was much more relaxed.

Yunka Ivanabitch: We wanted to take whatever we wanted to take. There's no question about what we're taking.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: We wanted to have a nice time and a have some fun. You know, having a laugh and a dance. It wasn't anything dangerous.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: What was Erif wearing that year. What dress did she have with spots—?

Yunka Ivanabitch: I have no idea.

Tamara: I don't know if you were in that frame or in that scene or further down the footpath

Yunka Ivanabitch: Or was I even there? What year was it?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: That was the Mardi Gras float that broke down that Stevie was driving.

Della Deluxe: 2007, probably.

Yunka Ivanabitch: If that was 2007, then I was living in Lismore

Tamara: So you weren't there.

Della Deluxe: Were you there when the flat broke down

Yunka Ivanabitch: Yes, I was on the truck. If it was 6, 7. I wasn't in Sydney.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: That year was the truck. What did you wear?

Yunka Ivanabitch: The toilet roll holder dress. The big puffy thing. Silver purple fabric

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: You wore that twice.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Oh did I? I couldn't wear it twice

Della Deluxe: I'm just trying to think where I got ready.  
Was I living with you then?

**Same Scene: Take 2**

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Wow—

Della Deluxe: You look good again

Yunka Ivanabitch: It's funny how many people you see in the crowd and think oh I have not seen them in a while.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Oh look, vintage Nokia. Oh Dell look at hat sparkly head.

Della Deluxe: Exposed crotch

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: That was part of your outfit.

Della Deluxe: Yeah that was part of the look.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Shirt, blouse, dress outfit

Della Deluxe: Half a semi-circle

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yunka pioneered that look. I could never work out of it was a blouse or a dress. That's where Della got her blouse dress outfit.

Yunka Ivanabitch: What are you doing with that chicken?

Della Deluxe: I was trying to eat it

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: What was that fluff in there

Della Deluxe: Chicken.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: That chicken was a rubber chicken and you kept it in your mouth.

Della Deluxe: There's a photo of me where the chicken is in my mouth, but you can't tell if I'm trying to eat it or throwing it up.

Della Deluxe: I shaved before I went out. It grew quickly.

Tamara: This was the last laneway.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: How did you find it on the street. The Laneway is this sort of haven. Oasis.

Della Deluxe: How many years was that?

Tamara: I was photographing all over Sydney. I kept looking for you guys.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: It was a change too. We stopped going out as much.

Yunka Ivanabitch: There was a period from 1998—2004, where we went out a lot.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Lots of outfits. Lots of hair. Lots of makeup. And then it sort of...

Yunka Ivanabitch: I was working; Della and I were door bitches on a nightclub so that made us go out even more.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: But then you moved to study for a while. And that changed our focus. And then we kept it to party seasons. But we noticed the nature of Sydney parties also changed. There wasn't the same allure for us because we kind of knew there was a different freedom that we had at one stage and then once those freedoms start to get taken away and you sort of think well it's not going to be fun. I don't feel that. Maybe they're self-restrictive. It's hard to know.

Yunka Ivanabitch: And I probably think that older generations like our age and maybe a bit older.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Like middle age.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Yeah. Middle aged men. In these periods we weren't middle-aged men, but the difference between now and then is people are a bit more conscious of what they're wearing. They don't want to be singled out in a crowd. There's no one being who they want to be because they're too concerned with, um judgment, I suppose on some degree.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Whereas, we're shameless.

Yunka Ivanabitch: We just do whatever we want. We don't really care.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah look at that

Yunka Ivanabitch: Exactly. Do you know what I mean? And today people are too conscious about that. They're too concerned with what other people will say and I think that probably has a lot to do with younger people and again, going through social media and photographing and how people comment and how people load up where it goes. Do you know what I mean?

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: There's immediate feedback. You can start having feedback about what you do immediately from friends that aren't even here. Whereas then, it was just a very closed—

Yunka Ivanabitch: Anonymous

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: A circus. Circuit? And quite anonymous.

Tamara: If you look at it here with your Nokia phone. There are no phones. This is the pre-smartphone era. I think that's probably changed how you're photographed. If you look at this scene, I'm the only person with a camera. I've had a look and I can't find any—

Della Deluxe: Has anyone got cameras there?

Tamara: Whereas today everyone would have their phone out photographing.

Yunka Ivanabitch: And I actually have almost punched a girl at a party not too long ago.

Della Deluxe: He was very rough

Yunka Ivanabitch: And her friend had his hand on my chest keeping me away from her because I was about to slap her because she was going off at us because she thought she had the right to take our photo and we didn't want it taken. And she was just like, "I'll do what I want blah blah blah. I was like, no you won't.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: She was like a rabid dog.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I was ready to punch her

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Yeah

Yunka Ivanabitch: I mean it's that right of I can do whatever I want whenever I want because I've got my iPhone and it's my right to do that when actually it's not because you're taking someone's photo who doesn't have

permission. You know, I think all of this technology crosses a border that no one has really thought about. And for a moment for me not to want my photo taken and for her to go I'm going to do it.

Tamara: How did you feel about having your photograph taken here? Or do you even remember?

Della Deluxe: I didn't even know.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I don't think I remember. I think I probably only remember the photography that we did of ourselves. And you know it's also if a person had a camera in a crowd it was also very "Oh do you mind if I take your photo not just snapping away randomly; like what happens now.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: That comment you made. I think it's really awesome now that people are actually looking, rather than thinking oh I've got to document this for myself—for me, but also for everyone else to know what I've seen. Rather than just sort of—

Yunka Ivanabitch: I think it's really interesting about that what I've seen. This is what I've done. Look, look, look where none of that is involved in these photos.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: Because the technology wasn't there. If it was, it probably would have been a different situation again.

Tamara: You probably don't remember but whenever I saw someone in The Laneway that I hadn't photographed I'd go up and introduce myself and say this is who I am and this is what I'm doing. So the next time I saw them they weren't freaked out by me raising the camera up.

Yunka Ivanabitch: I think when because no one has technology it makes the image a lot stronger because no one has seen it before.

Kuntina K. Klakalakis: What vibes did you get from that space? From being in the Laneway? What was your kind of feelings? Did people engage with you?

Tamara: Absolutely. There was a lot of engagement. It was like um. I'd arrive when it was still night and

Yunka Ivanabitch: Like 5am

Tamara: Yeah, yeah before the light came up and I'd be here at first light and I'd be there throughout the day as people filtered in and filtered out. A lot of people recognised me. I used to go to hang out with my brother to ask him how his Mardi Gras was. Mardi Gras. Sleaze. And so it was a real social thing to go as well. It was one of those things where I marked my calendar every year because this is an important day Also having come from overseas, I'd never seen anything like this before. A Laneway—

Yunka Ivanabitch: Where'd you come from? New Zealand

Tamara: From the US

Yunka Ivanabitch: Oh. Ok.  
The whole concept of the Laneway—to be able to go out onto a public space and to drink and to party and to listen to music and then I really became interested in the drag within the laneway. Something like that would have happened in the 70's I suppose or the 80's.

Tamara: I didn't start photographing until '84 in the US.

Yunka Ivanabitch: Nothing as strong as this!

**Research Integrity & Ethics Administration**  
Human Research Ethics Committee

Monday, 18 December 2017

Assoc Prof Ann Elias  
Sydney College of the Arts; Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
Email: ann.elias@sydney.edu.au

Dear Ann

The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has considered your application.

After consideration of your response to the comments raised your project has been approved.

Approval is granted for a period of four years from **18 December 2017 to 18 December 2021**

**Project title:** The Glitzy Glamour Girls: Drag Queens, Visual Ethnography, and the Cine-Photo Essay

**Project no.:** 2017/911

**First Annual Report due:** 18 December 2018

**Authorised Personnel:** Elias Ann; Voninski Tamara;

**Documents Approved:**

Date Uploaded	Version number	Document Name
13/12/2017	Version 3	Final PIS
13/12/2017	Version 3	Final PCF
07/12/2017	Version 1	New Safety Protocol
04/10/2017	Version 1	Interview questions

**Condition/s of Approval**

- Research must be conducted according to the approved proposal.
- An annual progress report must be submitted to the Ethics Office on or before the anniversary of approval and on completion of the project.
- You must report as soon as practicable anything that might warrant review of ethical approval of the project including:
  - Serious or unexpected adverse events (which should be reported within 72 hours).
  - Unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
- Any changes to the proposal must be approved prior to their implementation (except where an amendment is undertaken to eliminate *immediate* risk to participants).
- Personnel working on this project must be sufficiently qualified by education, training and experience for their role, or adequately supervised. Changes to personnel must be reported and approved.

- Personnel must disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest, including any financial or other interest or affiliation, as relevant to this project.
- Data and primary materials must be retained and stored in accordance with the relevant legislation and University guidelines.
- Ethics approval is dependent upon ongoing compliance of the research with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*, the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, applicable legal requirements, and with University policies, procedures and governance requirements.
- The Ethics Office may conduct audits on approved projects.
- The Chief Investigator has ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the research and is responsible for ensuring all others involved will conduct the research in accordance with the above.

This letter constitutes ethical approval only.

Please contact the Ethics Office should you require further information or clarification.

Sincerely

[REDACTION]

Dr Jennifer Scott-Curwood  
Chair  
Humanities Review Committee (Low Risk)

**The University of Sydney HRECs are constituted and operate in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) and the NHMRC's Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007).**