RuPaul's Drag Race: Culture, Politics and Fashion as Affective Practice

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THE SIZE EFFECT

A Journey into Design, Fashion and Media

Edited by
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JOKE HERMES

RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE: CULTURE, POLITICS AND FASHION AS AFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Abstract

Fashion, like media, offers the unique possibility to address aesthetics, ethics and social power relations all in one. As with media, fashion involves bodies, rituals, material reality as much as fantasy, imagination and creativity. For nearly two decades now, both have been defined as part of the creative industries, those key economic activities that derive their economic value first and foremost from their symbolic rather than their material value. This suggests a lack of robustness, that these are luxury goods and therefore suspect. Querying how media and fashion are understood will show how the current regard for creative industries is predicated on modernity's deeply split roots despite strong work done on fashion and popular culture over the last two decades. This chapter argues that in the everyday perception and discussion of fashion in and through popular culture, there remains, on the one hand, the critical and rational lineage of Enlightenment thought, and, on the other, romantic sensitivity and openness to magic and creativity. Understanding, appreciating and criticising texts and practices to do with fashion in media and popular culture might benefit from understanding them as affective practice. The competition reality TV show *RuPaul's Drag Race* will serve as a case study to find out how affective practice might be brought into discourse. That is to say, how we might bring together reflection with emotion and how clothes, and the way they are made and worn, may move us. In *RuPaul's Drag Race* clothing is an integral part of a serious and critical queer identity politics that its enormous fan base enjoys passionately, mixing pleasure and emotion with a strong sense that here one may belong without being forced into patriarchal heteronormative categories.

Keywords: fashion; drag; *RuPaul's Drag Race*; affective practice; appreciative understanding; modernism.

Introduction

In the early 1990s I interviewed readers of women's magazines, mostly women and some men (Hermes 1995). This was an ethnographic project that studied the readers' views of magazine culture. It identified the interpretative repertoires (Potter and Wetherell 1987) used to address what makes reading women's magazines meaningful. The first was called 'easily put down' – which addresses the 'affordances' of women's magazines (Jenkins and Green 2013): they can be carried around, allow for in-between reading in a break, for reading while waiting or while watching television and keeping other household members company who might be watching something my readers were not especially interested in. The second descriptive repertoire was called 'relaxation'. As one reader explained:

> Sometimes I have magazine mania and I just go out and spend ten or twelve pounds on magazines…those magazines will be lying around somewhere in the house…. And then, one night the next week, when I've really had it rough at college, I'll be lying in the bath for an hour, reading that *Elle* and I don't want to be too bothered about politics at that moment. It's a bit like watching an Agatha Christie film, or something. It is relaxation really (Hermes 1995, 36).

The use of the label 'relaxation' was a friendly way of warning me not to inquire further. Like 'easy to put down', it was an end point to discussing what makes reading magazines worthwhile. Partaking of the content was hard to justify in its own right. Claiming personal space to simply relax, or to argue that magazines are not in themselves highly valued content but simply stopgaps when time and space were defined by the activities of others, avoided being taken to task for reading women's magazines at all.

These two 'until here and no further' repertoires differ from the repertoires of practical knowledge and emotional learning that I also found for reading domestic weeklies and glossies, or the repertoire of the extended family that was used for gossip magazine reading. Those repertoires speak to specific temporary imagined identities: to be a wise person, prepared for life's vagaries, to have practical solutions when needed, or, alternatively, to be well-informed or to belong to an extended family not likely to fall apart as today's nuclear families tend to do. As a result of following readers' reasoning, the studying of fashion spreads

and enjoying the photography of the luxury titles, one of the real joys of women's magazine reading, is not addressed in any depth at all. As my readers saw no easy way to do so and reverted mostly to short and slightly evasive and unspecific answers, the affect of fashion remains unexplored.

This lack of a vocabulary to discuss the pleasures of women's magazine reading will in part have been a sign of the times. The late 1980s and early 1990s had yet to evolve into the more neoliberal glitter and glamour culture of ostentatious consumption that was to follow later in the decade. Everyday explanation lags behind such social and cultural changes. It is important though to not mistake the reticence regarding luxury and fashion to mean that reading magazines is about actual practical use. Although the legitimation of spending time and money on women's magazines is grounded in stories of usefulness, the interviewed readers were not concerned that the recipes or the sewing patters and tips they had clipped from the magazines mostly got lost or proved to be fairly useless. Women's magazine reading is pleasurable and meaningful for the *fantasies* of 'ideal selves' it produces. Like fashion they empower through affect. They help the reader gain a reciprocal sense of identity and community.

Thinking about fashion today, a quarter century later, the few quotes that hint at the joy of consuming fashion beckon. In themselves they are not so out of the ordinary. They are, as in the quote above, about buying a couple of magazines as a gift for yourself, to take the time to read them leisurely, to be transported into other worlds. An unnamed repertoire of (temporarily) owning the world in and through pleasure may be hiding there. Fashion, like popular culture, is often 'invisible'. Easier to discuss in critical terms than to take seriously for its own sake, visible when criticised for rewarding vanity and superficiality, invisible when enjoyed. The default frame to understand and value both fashion and popular culture in everyday life continues to be steered by an underlying modernist frame, however much fashion theory has moved away from this frame. In the 1980s Lipovetsky opened a book on fashion by stating that the question of fashion 'is not a fashionable one among intellectuals' (Lipovetsky 1994 [1987], 3); the work of among others Entwistle, Kaiser and Jenss would prove him wrong today (Entwistle 2000; Jenss 2016; Kaiser 2012). This chapter aims to contribute to the growing body of work in fashion studies that understands the everyday meanings and significance of fashion from a cultural studies perspective and, notably, takes into account how popular texts lean on and offer

material interpretations of what fashion is for (see Hancock, Johnson-Woods and Karaminas 2013).

Theoretical framework

Theoretically, the chapter starts from the recognition that in everyday life popular culture is no longer understood as high culture's other. The combined forces of neoliberal governmentality (Dean 2010; Rose et al. 2009) and populist politics have produced a new divide between cosmopolitans and nationalists (Calhoun 2008) that makes good use of 'meritocracy' as its ideological defence (Bovens and Wille 2017; Littler 2018). To put it crudely, meritocracy displaces notions of quality by success. While doing so it foregoes solidarity in favour of hyper-individualism. What it has not done is displace what Huyssen called "the great divide" (Huyssen 1986). Paraphrasing Joli Jensen, this is modernism's insistence that we separate the worthwhile, the morally right and that which is good for democracy and citizenship from that which may corrupt us, is 'too easy' and does not invite us to reflect (Jensen 1990). The reference is to the realm of the senses and the affects, which makes us surrender the mind to the body. It is not pleasure or celebration in itself that are understood to be problematic but affect and emotion as hijackers of reason and argumentation. The gendered nature of this distinction will be clear.

This chapter seeks to explore the value of attending to fashion for what it *does* rather than what it 'is' and to tackle the modernist divide head-on. Its twofold central question is how *RuPaul's Drag Race*, a reality TV show, celebrates fashion and gender and, secondly, how to bend the continuing presence of late modern understanding of bodies and personhood into forms that will accommodate appreciative critical understanding. RuPaul and *RuPaul's Drag Race* the television show will be discussed in more detail below. For those unfamiliar with it: the show features drag queens both on- and off-stage who use fashion in a series of challenges that reference popular culture and gender politics, and include e.g. the drag show staple of lip-syncing. Drag queens are men dressing up as women who wildly exaggerate the codes of femininity. The purpose is entertainment. Drag makes the pleasure in gender bending visible and – as I will argue – it enables recognition of the affective force of fashion itself. In how the queens in *RuPaul's Drag Race* use clothing as ways and means to build and rebuild identity

and recognition there is the three-way connection between fashion as material practice, everyday relations of power and the individuals contesting, negotiating and using those power relations to find the best possible way to be who they feel they are. Methodologically this chapter presents a reading of RuPaul as a gay icon, using the literature on drag and *Drag Race,* as the programme is affectionately known, and my experience of the show as a viewer and a fan. In doing so it interrogates not just the continuing power of binary gender definitions but also how fashion allows for exhilarating and exuberant relativising of those definitions.

While discussing fashion in media and popular culture, 'modern', Modernity and 'modernism' are recurrent terms in this article. Generally they can be taken to mean the period starting with the industrial revolution of the 19th century in the Global North. Of interest is the way the distinction between modern and pre-modern life has come to figure as the watershed between the innocence and authenticity of pre-modern life and the corruptions of the machine age. The mass media, in Joli Jensen's (1990) reconstruction of the contradictions in media criticism, are used as scapegoats to address what makes this day and age challenging and difficult to grasp. To that end media criticism constructs a double dyad. The first distinguished the modern from the pre-modern age; the second distinguished 'good' versus 'bad' media content: art and the news versus entertainment, sensationalism and general debauchery. Such distinctions are, in turn, embedded in the contrast between (late 17th and 18th century) Enlightenment thought and the Romantic thought of the 19th century that foregrounds genius, the individual and the senses against rationality and evolutionary belief in the power of science and logic. As a result mass media are constructed throughout the 20th century as 'bad object' of the present (that seduce and corrupt us) and as possible saviour in the future (better technology will help relief pain and hunger, and allow for perfect communication). Fashion likewise is sifted in good and bad, think e.g. of the history of 'heroin chic' (McClendon 2013).

Complicating this by no means easy to understand rhetoric is the use of the distinction between modernism and postmodernism, which refers to the philosophical movement that arises with the late 19th and early 20th centuries' transformation of industries, society and economy, and its late 20th century successor. The terms Modernism, postmodernism and 'late modernity' share their rejection of the certainty of Enlightenment thinking, religious belief, a relativist outlook and the use of irony and

pastiche. They differ in their assessment of entertainment, popular media genres, as well as fashion.

Given the continuing valence of modern and postmodern frames of inquiry and criticism, even today when 'low culture' is used less and less as a label, it is hardly surprising that public examples of critical and appreciative forms of media criticism are scarce and often as problematic as they might be productive. A noteworthy positive exception is recent research on transgender contestants in Australian reality television by Joanna McIntyre (2017). She finds that queer cross-dressed contenders do well, even for general audiences. Suggestive remarks are made and are sometimes offensive (such as by a judge in *Australia's Got Talent*, 'it does take a large set of mirror balls to put on such a dynamic performance' – about a disco number performed by a contestant in female drag) (McIntyre 2017, 95). However, the banter by presenters and jury members also turns popular television into a terrain that allows for a new understanding of gender codes and normativity. This will not be easy on the transgender performers (as McIntyre chooses to call them). Their acceptance as double or even triple gendered beings comes at a price. The jokes also attest to how convincingly they have changed their gendered look. They are testimony to the malleability of gender. Attending to style and dress code in such everyday ways allows for emancipatory space and is – if not a form of appreciative criticism – at least a precursor of such a form of address.

To gain appreciative visibility in everyday talk about fashion and popular culture is important for a number of reasons. It means breaking with a deep-rooted negative logic and it entails gaining acceptance for minority views, practices and ways of being. It is also important for a better understanding of the ways in which the creative industries – especially fashion – matters. As with media and popular culture, early theories associated fashion with vanity and with the feminine (Entwistle 2000, 54; Kaiser 2012, 124). Joanne Entwistle (2000) confirms how fashion like popular media is firmly framed in a modernist dichotomy of being either serious or mere and sometimes even dangerous feminine frippery. Women "have historically been associated with the 'trivialities' of dress in contrast to men who have been seen to rise above such mundane concerns having renounced decorative dress" (Entwistle 2000, 21-2).

What is it with decorativeness that is so wrong? How is it 'vain' to wear clothes for pleasure rather than just service, to know oneself to be a person who is also the custodian of her or his own body? In the context of

20th century social philosophy as inheritor of modern unease with mass culture, Martin Jay suggests that "(v)isual images…are instantaneous snapshots of external reality without any duration" (Jay 1988, 309). "Images give us appearance and behaviour, never inward meaning…. Vision, the synchronic gaze produces an instantaneous totality which forecloses the open-ended search for truth through language with its successive temporality" (Jay 1988, 310). From a very different perspective, Parry writes: "The role of the image in mediated political communication has long provoked suspicion and unease…". She sees a "defensive posture [that wishes to guard] the integrity of politics against debasing forces [that threaten the] diminishing of political life into a spectacle, distorted by a media-driven shift promoting conflict, sensationalism and inauthentic celebrity politicians" (Parry 2015, 419).

Jay underlines that we "need to focus on how (images) work and what they do, rather than move past them too quickly to the ideas they represent or the reality they purport to depict" (Jay 2002a, 88). For Jay, the gaze is particularly powerful. In French *le regard* can mean looking at and looking after, as well as watching out for someone, which, he suggests is the ethical alternative to 'surveillance' (Jay 2002a, 89). Much, in point of fact, the type of counsel that can help build a vocabulary for appreciative critical inquiry of those other potentially sensationalist fields that relate to look and feel rather than always or immediately to substance or truth. Rather than retreat in the austerity of modern philosophy and its fear of the spectacle of mass society, we need to understand how we are teased by the culture of consumer capitalism, the displays of which "mysteriously allude to something, to some sort of happiness or satisfaction that cannot be directly represented, which partakes of the sublime" (Jay 2002b, 113).

For culture to do this, whether we call it mass culture, consumer culture, popular culture, kitsch or fashion, it needs to hold "moments of utopian pleasure" (Lowenthal in Jay 2002b, 115, and see Jameson 1979; Modleski 1983). Thinkers of postmodernism agree that our consumer desires are, as Jay puts it, "always too complicated to either wholeheartedly accept or dismiss" (Jay 2003, 118). Of value in these moments that produce a particular type of happiness, partaking perhaps in the sublime that hold a moment of utopian pleasure, is what Jay chooses to call 'experience'. Of course this is exactly what the creative industries sell, fashion and popular media included. Jay may be philosophically right in proposing that we hold on to the distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, the intensity that may interrupt normal

life versus the building of shared narratives (Jay 2002b, 117) as well as the distinction between image and story. The ability to discuss how fashion and popular culture are valuable to us, however, might well be in making less of these distinctions. After all, images have become a parallel presence to the stories we tell ourselves (Kooijman 2003, 329) while narratives without urgency, impetus or intensity are boring.

RuPaul's Drag Race *as a case study*

The intertwining of narrative, image and experience neatly characterises today's media and celebrity culture, both on social media platforms and in mainstream media. The affordances of style/fashion/ dress in blogs, Instagram and Tumblr accounts used by LGBTQ youth and in the many sites of black hair and beauty bloggers attest to this (Luvaas 2016). Bloggers share advice across a diaspora of individualised black women in primarily white societies and offer visibility for black women that is not available in e.g. British mainstream media (Sobande 2017). Like mass cultural celebrities they become focal points for shared identity and community building that needs images as much as the stories and the shared experience. In their combination these images and stories produce the affect of fashion. This section introduces *RuPaul's Drag Race* and its host, RuPaul to query how we might understand the affective power of fashion and read it as providing building blocks for a politics of identity that escapes the modern divide.

RuPaul's Drag Race (Logo, 2009-present; also shown on V1 and Netflix) is conventional competition reality television. The show has 14 contestants, all of whom are professional entertainers. Each episode they are given challenges for which they are judged by a jury. RuPaul presides over the jury and decides who has to lipsync in the elimination round. Criteria for winning spell CUNT: Charisma, Uniqueness, Nerve, and Talent. As RuPaul repeatedly asserts: "These are people who have taken adversity and turned it into something that is beautiful and something powerful". Initially only shown on the gay-friendly Logo network, the show has since moved to its mainstream sister channel V1. Several seasons are available on Netflix. The case study presented here references the show and discussion of it in the literature rather than an extensive empirical analysis. Empirically it would make sense to attend to the discursive registers the show uses: from straightforward competition, to political discussion and the building of solidarity to

bitching and fighting. Of particular note is how 'Mama Ru' is revered, and his authority is made absolute in the camera work and editing. The literature, published in cultural studies and queer academic journals, tends to not underline the logic of making reality television but to focus on a more political reading of the show. My own fan experience is used as counterbalance and provides experiential viewer input.

Drag shows have met with fierce criticism for promoting negative stereotypes, comparable to the racially offensive practice of Blackface. Strings and Bui worry that "drag may reproduce traditional understandings of men's and women's essential natures" but see drag's potential to simultaneously replicate and disrupt stereotypes (Strings and Bui 2014, 823). Or, as Taylor and Rupp conclude: in drag the instability of gender as a category becomes clear. As sartorial desires can be mixed up in gender confusion as much as they can be part of transgenderism and transsexuality, at the very least, in the practicing of drag it becomes clear that there are far more than two (or three) genders (Taylor and Rupp 2004, 130-1). In addition, *RuPaul's Drag Race* is competition reality television: a genre that according to Kavka and Weber "offers to explicate, regulate and manipulate the social scripts we live by". Reality TV formats, they argue, mobilise "culturally specific gender tropes" as they place "the drama of personal and social relationships at their centre" (Kavka and Weber 2017, 3, 6). When transgender in such a context (broadly defined as not adhering to any essentialist or dichotomous gender scheme) ceases to mark the sexed body but becomes a conceptual category, drag in point of fact allows for strong criticism and even the rejection of 'both gender binarism and the anatomical bedrock of the body' (Kavka and Weber 2017, 8).

RuPaul's Drag Race is a key site for how images and fashion may infuse multifaceted storytelling with energy. While it is a television show, the countless fan tributes on YouTube and Instagram channels some of which I follow attest to the sense of freedom and exhilaration the show inspires. Whereas street style blogs explore how to re-individualise mass-produced fashion by combining high street brands and vintage finds, drag celebrates fashion's transformative power and its artisanal production. Every episode has a challenge in which decidedly challenging materials are provided such as bin liners or any article in an 'everything for 1 dollar' supermarket. The professional drag queens that compete on the show make their own costumes and generally make extraordinary things – including when presented with impossible materials. Woven into the show's backstage portraits of

the contestants are stories of how the contestants came to be who they are. It is a visual experience that gains in acquiring discursive context while the exuberant outfits on all imaginable body types offer utopian possibility in an outrageous range of possibilities in dress. Collective storytelling gains power in unique experiential moments. It builds solidarity and a sense of togetherness right across the divisiveness that is characteristic for reality television. Of course this is helped by the fact that the contestants come from the widest possible variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It also helps that while some are beautiful, others have challenging figures that do not disqualify but invite creative solutions. It is a shared pleasure in the transformative power of fashion that unites and allows for a more political sense of connection. Of course the contestants share that they are drag queens, they have male bodies and they are gay.[1]

RuPaul, presenter of the show, is a force unto himself. He is an African-American drag artist who had a stage and underground movie career, appearing amongst others in the movie *Mahogany II* (1986) doing a diva entrance while showing armpit hair. In 1993 RuPaul crossed over into mainstream American popular culture with a pop song called *Supermodel (You'd better work)*. RuPaul's drag persona is a mythic black woman: sassy and wise, holding the middle between "refashioned stereotype" (Kooijman 2003, 337) and black caricature. The use of stereotype ensures RuPaul's commercial crossover success. The question is whether that also allows him the power to challenge rather than reinforce racial and sexual stereotypes. In his autobiography *Lettin' It All Hang Out. An Autobiography* RuPaul claims to be able to have it both ways: "...be the man that I am, be the woman that I am, the everything that I am" (RuPaul 1995, 220, in Kooijman 2003, 338). RuPaul is a gorgeous creature. When dressing as a man, e.g. when doing the behind the scenes instructions to and talks with the drag queens competing on *RuPaul's Drag Race*, he is a 'he' – but not a man who lets the conventions of masculine style and dress wear him down. Rather than the usual ambivalence and anxiety that Kaiser sees in the 'space' that is men's fashion (Kaiser 2012, 136), RuPaul mixes current style conventions with exuberant prints and colours

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1   That is to say: this is not a sacred rule. In the current season e.g. (2017 9) Peppermint comes out as a transwoman halfway through the season. Notably, this happens in a backstage discussion about how gender has become so fluid, it hardly matters anymore. 'For you maybe', says Peppermint, who is very proud of her newly won female body.

that underline his lanky, slender body and glow. As a 'she', – when she is wearing a dress, a drag queen uses female pronouns – RuPaul is even more spectacular, developing a style that is reminiscent of "high camp drag" (Zervignon 2015, n.p.).

Although the bitching and cattiness of the queens contesting on the show is off-putting to some, *RuPaul's Drag Race* for me easily moves beyond the critique of being a sexist show. As reality television it does its job of building strong characters out of the competing contenders who get to win fairly idiotic sounding prizes donated by the sponsors (show jewellery; make-up; money prizes donated by the sponsors or a part in RuPaul's newest music video). Since 2009 the format has been fixed, while jury members have changed – though not much. Firmly holding to both drag queen and reality television tradition, it is fun to become familiar with the set phrases and style-switching between given roles that RuPaul employs (see Mann 2011, 796-7). Most notably is the signal for the queens to start preparing for the challenge: "Gentlemen, start your engines! And may the best woman win!" that makes you smile. Likewise, at the end of each show RuPaul will congratulate those who get to stay with a "Shantay (which may refer to the French *chanté*, cheers), you stay", while those who have not made it, leave on her "Sashay away" – much repeated phrases among those who know one another to be fans.

In *Drag Race* the duality of the Great Divide (between art and mass culture, and between femininity and masculinity) collapses. The show allows for and stimulates discussion and enjoyment of what so often remains invisible and little spoken of in mainstream popular genres. As in all reality genres, we are given very direct instruction as to what is to be admired and supported and why (Ouellette and Hay 2008), in this case by the jury, by RuPaul him- and herself but also in RuView clips on YouTube where, among others, Rajah and Raven 'toot or boot' the various outfits worn in the preceding episode. Fashion thus can become more than image, it becomes feeling, affect and a sense of self. Here Kaiser's circuit of style/fashion/dress allows for identity play and discussion about choices made by individuals that ultimately extend the range and the freedom of (other) individuals to make their own sartorial and life choices. Here really simple pleasures and a sense of being invited to join in can be a lead-in to a letting go of politics versus pleasure. Recent (and obvious) examples on the show would be discussion of the US presidential elections or of gun control following the Orlando night club shootings.

Conclusions

It is important to note that drag is not identity, or as Weber (1998, 81) puts it: drag is not a choice. It is a "singular theatrical performance with a beginning and an end". The femininity of drag is an illusion, a charade; it is not how (most of) the queens want to live (Edgar 2011, 140). Even if for some, such as Peppermint in season 9, drag becomes a route to self-discovery and transitioning. "Glad to get out of that dress at the end of the day", is what the others say backstage at *RuPaul's Drag Race*. At the same time, before the day ends the queens will have extended the repertoires of available roles and values as agents of change: by performing gender and make being a woman a temporary thing to do with style, fashion and dress. Moreover, the show has offered the peculiar energy that is affect. To use Margaret Wetherell's words: "affective practice is a moment of recruitment, articulation or enlistment when many complicated flows across bodies, subjectivities, relations, histories and contexts entangle and intertwine together. Criticising discussion of affect she holds that "we should not create a split between a reactive body and the reflexive, discursive, interpreting, meaning-making, communicating social actor" (Wetherell 2015, 160-1). Or, in the terms used here: a critical understanding of both fashion and popular culture needs to start from the realisation that a simple invitation to share in pleasure and excitement may build on complex relations. It is of course to repeat the truism that fashion is never mere clothing. If anything, in drag, fashion becomes the literal uncovering of the body while identities are reinvented in and through the burgeoning understanding that what makes a body attractive, beautiful, or simply suitable is a social contract that is open to rewriting.

Fashion temporarily anchors the chain of effect and affect that is gender. It does so mostly invisibly. If at times, also a disciplining rule system, fashion is effective in the pleasures it offers. We enjoy those pleasures but seldom do them the justice of discussing them. At least in part this is a remnant of the great modern divide that opposes high and low culture, and, in its wake, serious reflection and mindless consumption. While no longer an active distinction, its heritage, our lingering memory of it, continues to discourage the building of a vocabulary to do so. Fashion today becomes visible in highly different contexts: as art or high culture in relation to the runways in Paris and Milan, a long-standing tradition with its own rules, rituals and dedicated forms of journalism. As anti-fashion, when wearing the wrong clothes and in subcultural contexts:

enabled by an ensemble of media platforms that are to a greater or lesser extent commercialised. They may use more intimate social network codes and rules as in street style blogs or in the black hair and beauty blogs. Or they are the new forms of convergent television that can be found across a number of platforms including network television, the social networks and extend to the stage as in drag ball culture.

It is my sincere wish that we can move further away from the remnants of old high/low culture inhibitions and find ways and means to express appreciation, or, when appropriate, a sense of affiliation or admiration in addition to being critical as engaged participants. The politics of gender easily make for the best possible starting point. Especially since feminist discussion of gender has come to incorporate everyday affect into 'high theory'. Eir-Ann Edgar (2011), like many of those writing about drag and drag culture, references Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter* (1993) where Butler argues that drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and dissipates heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality (Butler in Edgar 2011, 136). Butler helps us address and understand how fashion may be a force in unsettling what appear to be fixed entities both as regards thinking change and progress, and in thinking intersubjectivity rather than individuality.

I am moved by the drag queens and their spectacular talent and pleasure in making themselves beautiful. They own their look and their success in their self-designed outfits in ways that are not available to those modelling high art fashion. In being owned and (wo)man-made the drag queens show that fashion is a referent of temporality and materiality. Clothes wear and tear and need cyclical replacement. What we call fashion is what gender theorists West and Zimmerman (1987, 126, in Edgar 2011, 140) would identify as the emergent feature of social institutions: they are both outcome and rationale of the social gender system. In fashion change may seem to have become part of its essence, which so intrigued Simmel (1957), but it is also the simple effect of the need for new materials that change colour, hue and quality depending on where and how they are made, going back in the end to trade routes and good or bad harvests, to the competition between suppliers. For me, drag reveals better than street style how fashion, style and clothes themselves are made, requiring a combination of work and inspiration and knowledge of how a particular body may look its best as well as a community to pass on practical knowledge and the sharing of appreciation and support.

Fashion cultures located outside of the discourse of the arts offer their own unique affect and are worthy of more attention from within fashion studies. Whether they are grounded in gay or black community building or in shared social network codes, in the craft involved and in the courage it takes to defy the hegemonic gender order, stepping away from implied white supremacy or simply in not minding standing out and being different. This suggests that value in the context of the creative industries has to do with the interlinking of social, economic and cultural logics. It is the result of the 'marrying' of image and narrative, of the opening up to inclusivity and collective storytelling. All of us can– temporarily- be someone else as witness and co-creator of, for instance, drag as performance, and become a performer either literally or in the retelling of the experience. Simply sharing the joy of following *RuPaul's Drag Race* literally queers late modern understanding of bodies and of the power of fashion. Such discussion is an affective practice in and of itself that readily accommodates appreciative critical understanding, which, in turn, translates easily enough into everyday talk.

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