The Exploration of Black and Brown Drag Performance Communities: An Artistic Tool for Creating Safe Spaces

By

Aaron Robert Adriaan

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Art History

Rhodes University Fine Art Department

Date Submitted: February 2024

Supervised by Mbali Khoza

Abstract:

This research investigates the role of drag performance in South Africa, particularly its contribution to the fostering and maintenance of safe spaces for Black and Brown Queer communities. Inspired by the community building legacy Kewpie. This research project employs auto-ethnographic research practice to generate a better understanding of modes of Queer drag praxis drawing on Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) concept of the "insider/outsider" researcher. The project acknowledges the ethical challenges of researching vulnerable communities. This research is guided by self-reflection and information gathered from fieldwork; informed by an awareness of the theory of 'intersectionality' (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, Tomlinson 2013) exploring the complexities of race, class, and sexuality within Cape Town's Queer community. In this way, the study navigates the complexities of race, class, and sexuality within the drag context of Cape Town through the viewpoint of this researcher. The contextual exploration of drag unfolds across two interconnected disciplinary avenues: Firstly, the historical context of drag and its evolution within the performance art canon: to understand the place of contemporary drag in the broader artistic and cultural discourse. Secondly, the study investigates theatrical histories and conventions that have influenced and transformed drag practices. This is done to frame drag performance with forms of theatrical performance.

This historical and disciplinary background is used to formulate a distinction that is at the centre of this research: proposing that contemporary drag practice in the City of Cape Town can be understood and to some extent distinguished by the categories of *embodied costume* and *embodied performance*. *Embodied costume* within the scope of this research view the use of drag aesthetics and visual elements in artistic expressions and performances that fall outside of traditional 'drag show' culture. *Embodied performance* refers to drag performances that fall within the context of traditional 'drag show' *genres*, communities, and venues − reminiscent of cabaret performance. This conception highlights the performative aspects of the drag persona, which is an extension of the performer's identity. While some performers and performances can exemplify either *embodied performance* or *embodied costume*, these categories are not mutually exclusive, with incalculable overlaps in keeping with the rich possibilities of drag practice. The purpose of highlighting these distinctions is to create a critical framework for exploring the unique position drag occupies between fine art and theatre, incorporating both fields of practice, and synthesising them into a unique language for the expression of alternate gender narratives.

Declaration:

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete references. This thesis is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for a Master of Art History at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at another university.

Signature: _____ Date: ____:____:____

Aaron Adriaan

Acknowledgements:

I wish to thank my supervisor Mbali Khoza for helping me get this project started and through the proposal and early writing stages. With thanks to the Mellon Turning the Tide Scholarship which enabled me to fund and continue my education, enabling the production of this thesis project. I also wish to thank my Head of Department, Maureen DeJager, who has assisted me in getting this project over the finish line. In acknowledging the contributions of others beyond academic staff and funding bodies I wish to thank Ann-Marie Tully for helping me finalise the details of this thesis for submission. Without her assistance and her diligent work, I believe my submission would have lacked the finesse to articulate the complexity of my argument and its nuances. Next, I must acknowledge the members of the Queer community who participated in my research endeavour who are not mentioned by name, and who have taught me a great deal about my community. I also thank Tazme Pillay, Wade Khoosal, and Athi-Patra Ruga for granting me the privilege of an interview and helping provide great insight into the subject of my thesis. I then want to pay homage to the Queer community members who I identify in my thesis, those who came before me, and those whose names are lost to history. Finally, I wish to thank my Mother and Father for their continued support in my education even during the most trying times, as well as my Aunts and Uncles who have helped me prepare my thesis for its final submission.

Contents:

Chapter 1:

1.1 Introduction

This research explores how Black and Brown Queer[1] communities, drag performers, and artists create safe spaces for their communities. The study also reflects on what role drag plays as an art form that has enabled the creation of Black and Brown Queer community spaces and organisations. While Queer spaces and community venues develop organically, the question of what role a decidedly Queer art form such as drag might play in their development is the goal of this research. The reason I posed this question is that my initial research on drag and its practices in South Africa found little in the way of its analysis within the realm of fine art practice. While drag practice has been widely studied abroad there is some research on how the practice of drag has evolved and developed within South Africa.

To embark on this investigation of drag as an artistic practice used by Queer Black and Brown people within the South African context, I ask three questions. The first is: *How can I reflect critically on a community I form a part of*? The methodology that I found to best enable critical reflection on my entangled experience of these spaces and their creation was Autoethnography. The methodology encourages a researcher to critically reflect on their experiences as an integrated part of their research to identify social conventions, and communication practices, and interpret cultural and political issues (Wall 2006: para. 4). While it is a method of conducting research through continual reflection on the researcher's own experiences in relation to the research task, this method alone was lacking. The second question I ask is: *How can I consider and understand the intersectional nature of Queer safe spaces and their patrons*? Kimberle Crenshaw's (2013:309) writing on the theory of intersectionality proved useful in exploring and expressing how Black and Brown Queer people are multiply burdened by their marginalised experience, also in contextualising the effect of intersectionality on the development of safe spaces. Her writing on intersectionality theory and the numerous ways in which it is implemented to address specific subjectivities like those being discussed in this research is useful (Crenshaw 2013:309); more so for the interdisciplinary reach of intersectionality theory (Carbado et al. 2013). The third question is: *How can I ethically conduct this research while keeping all of the above in mind*? While consulting a research

[1] I have chosen throughout this thesis to capitalise the words 'Black and Brown' and 'Queer'. This is due to my intention to highlight these terms and make an attempt to further reclaim them while still respecting the large group of people they also represent.

ethics text I encountered an answer to my query in the form of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonising Methodologies* (1999), which provided a framework which she called insider/outsider research, designed for ethically conducting research within minority groups and indigenous communities as an entangled member of those communities.

These combined methodologies and contextual theories allow me to use interviews and conversations with patrons within community spaces and events to build an understanding of how drag has influenced these community spaces. It also allows for the inclusion of historical records as examples of what effective Queer community creation through the practice of drag and costuming has looked like in the past. In this regard, the historical reference to notable drag figures such as William Dorsey Swann and Kewpie provides a contextual framework for what community creation could look like. In turn, guiding the viewpoint of my inquiry when asking drag performers, event organisers, and community figures about their process of creating Queer safe spaces. The focal point of my investigations is the way Queer and drag performance helps cultivate inclusivity, self-expression, self-respect, and mutual support within these spaces. I begin by asking how these spaces are organised around their respective practices and art forms.

The field of enquiry about this research question around the role of art and theoretical praxis in Black and Brown Queer safe spaces and communities is the artistic contributions of individuals, including artists and drag queens in and around Cape Town's urban centre. Through immersion into the field, I tried to understand how they could form community structures around their work. The reason for specifically choosing Cape Town as the site for my research is based on two factors. The first is its recognition as the Queer capital of the African continent, where a large Queer community has grown and developed over decades, with numerous venues dedicated to serving Queer people. This meant that there would be many Queer events and safe spaces, and many drag performers to speak to and observe. The ability to observe multiple spaces and witness how drag, as an artistic practice, is employed provided more opportunities for the gathering of information and knowledge about Queer community structures, organisation, and artistic practices. Subsequently, the research process led to the identification of a successful historical Queer community figure from Cape Town who created safe community spaces through their performances and event organisation: Kewpie, who is a further reason I chose to conduct my research in Cape Town, is recognised as a Queer figure of historical importance from District Six. It was only logical to consider how drag and the Queer communities have evolved since her time as a community leader and Queer figure.

Addressing such a broad topic that encompasses a wide variety of interrelated areas of practice necessitates limiting the scope of the project. The areas that I focus on are the identification of Queer safe spaces, guided by the identification of two or more performers and artists working in these spaces; also identifying a historical example of effective community organisation to contrast with contemporary practices. While identifying Queer spaces initially appeared to be a straightforward task, narrowing it down to three specific venues proved to be a challenge. The guiding criteria for the choices that followed were the prevalence of drag performance and its visual language. While drag is a broad term I chose to look at those who explicitly identify with drag and those who have incorporated the visual language of drag and its practices into related performance art and cultural work. There were also limitations to the study as I had limited access to Cape Town due to its relative distance from my location, and the limited time I could be in the city. This meant that I often did not venture too far from the highly visible Queer urban centre of Cape Town. The subsequent concern that emerged pertained to my own preconceived notions about the nature of Queer spaces in the city and the influence on the shaping of drag practices. While I do have a knowledge of drag and Queer spaces and communities my knowledge was limited to what I read and heard about them from my past that has shaped my understanding of these spaces. A self-reflexive approach that paid close attention to the narratives of people living in these larger urban spaces was the best way to combat or mitigate my bias.

1.2 Origins of the study

The selection of my case studies was guided by a serendipitous encounter with Kewpie 'the daughter of District Six' a prominent Queer historical figure from Cape Town from the 1960s whose legacy and history is still discussed since her passing in 2012 (Ford and Thompson 2018). During this investigation of Kewpie, I discovered the case of William Dorsey Swann, a figure from 19th-century America. While their context was vastly different my discovery of Swann as the first individual recorded to use the word 'drag queen' as a self-identifier. What I found in the article *The First Drag Queen* written by Joseph (2020) primed my view of Queer community organisers and leaders. In the article, I learned that Swann had hosted events like the one Kewpie attended. Studying the lives of Swann and Kewpie, respectively, provided a historical point of departure for the development of the term drag and its use and how people can incidentally become community organisers and leaders which guided my research.

I explored various aspects related to the engagement of Black and Brown Queer individuals within the variable practice of drag. The inquiries guiding my investigation included understanding how these individuals interact with the concept and practice of drag; exploring the role of drag in community connection and organisation; examining why those in the Black and Brown Queer community involved in drag often become central community figures; investigating the intersection of drag with performance art and theatre-making; and exploring how the blending of these disciplines contributes to the development of confident and self-actualised community leaders and organisers. These focal points formed the framework for my exploration into the dynamics of identity, community, and artistic expression within the context of Black and Brown Queer drag praxis.

1.3 Figures of historic importance

Starting with the historic actions of William Dorsey Swann, born in Maryland, USA, around 1858, Swann endured slavery, lived through the end of the Civil War, and became a free black man (Joseph 2020:25). Swann was the first self-proclaimed 'drag queen' on record, as we understand the term today, who hosted parties in his home (Joseph 2020:25). Swann and many other Queer Black and Brown people living in Washington DC around this time, held and participated in 'drags'. These drags were akin to costume parties where men would gather and wear ballgowns and dresses. Channing (2020:25) describes these drags, and this community as

a family, a community, and activists who defended and protected each other. What remains consistent between the vastly differing historical and social context of Swann, Kewpie and the present is the fervent support and protection of Queer community members and spaces.

I say this as Swann lived in post–Civil War America where "there was very little patience for men who subverted gender norms," meaning these drags were not safe and were often raided by police with many arrested and serving time in jail (Joseph 2020:25). Despite this Swann continued hosting these parties and obstructed the police during their raids declaring "You is no gentlemen!" (Joseph 2020:25). Swann, a gregarious character by all accounts, went so far as to demand a pardon for his supposed crimes from the nation's president at the time, Stephen Grover Cleveland (Joseph 2020:25).

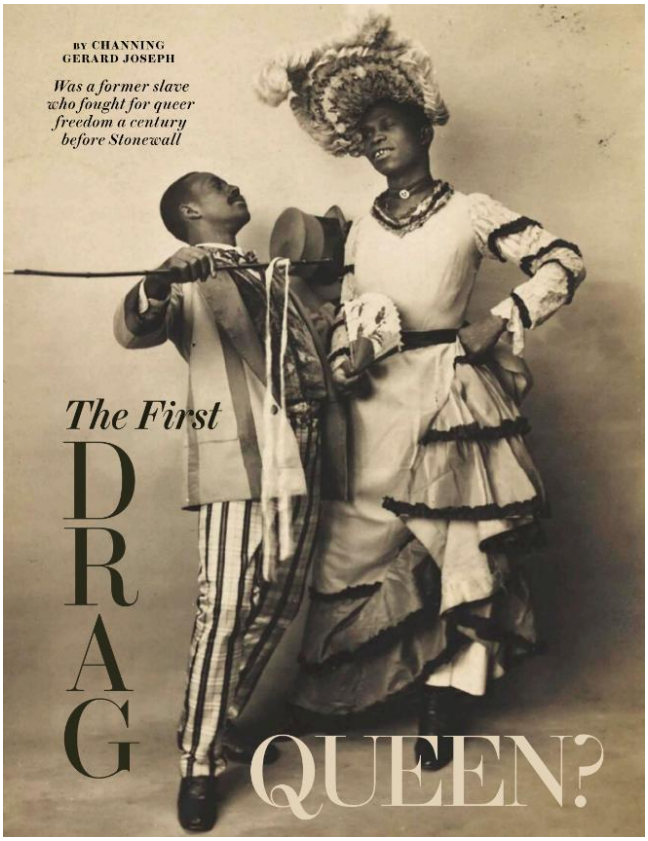

Figure 1: Article for G.J. Channing's The First Drag Queen (2020) showing William Dorsey Swann (Right) posing in drag with a friend (Date unknown). (Source: Channing. G.J., 2020, p.24)

While an official pardon remained elusive (Joseph 2020:25), what Swann did was accomplish the creation of an exuberant community within his home during these drags, where he actively

resisted arrest during police raids and his demand to be pardoned was the earliest record of "specific legal and political action to defend the Queer community's rights" (Joseph 2020:25).

In this way, Swann, as a drag queen, was attempting to build a community for self-expression. My observations of similar community spaces and discussions with contemporary Queer event organisers such as Tazme Pillay are in agreement with the view that harassment and discrimination are not tolerated within their event space; with these figures taking specific action to prevent it. The spaces Pillay curates maintain a safe environment (as best they can) to allow for expressions of Queer joy[2] without fear of harassment and danger. This pattern of mutual support in the creation of spaces for Queer people to congregate and support one another is noted in Swann's case study.

Figure 2: Circa 1971: Sammy [aka] Gaseroen Samuels (left) poses with other District Six friends, Kewpie (centre) and Liz (right). Collinson (2018)

[2] Queer Joy refers to a defiant sense of joy felt by LGBTQ + people in the face of an increasingly hostile environment.

In South Africa over a century later, the phenomenon of drag queens and ballroom was growing under the descriptor of 'Moffie Balls' with Kewpie having been a significant figure in this scene. My first encounter with Kewpie in 2017, while visiting the District Six Museum with relatives during a brief trip to Cape Town was a revelation. The visit to the District Six museum was an attempt by my great aunt, a former resident of District Six, to teach me more about my family roots during the apartheid years. During my visit, I stood alone in an installation with artefacts from barbershops and salons in a shared installation space. Listening to an audio recording of their stories about hairstyles popular at the time — the gossip they shared and the parties they hosted in their salons — I was moved to tears listening to Kewpie and other former residents talk about the 'Cleopatra' a hard fringe blunt cut bob that Elizabeth Taylor popularised in her role in the 1963 film "Cleopatra". The casual nature of these conversations from former coworkers and neighbours made it very apparent that many close-knit friendships were lost with the destruction of the District Six neighbourhood. This recording I later discovered was my first encounter with Kewpie telling their stories. When I later pursued my research on drag, I rediscovered Kewpie as a prominent figure in the Black and Brown Queer community of Cape Town's urban centre during the period. I also discovered that there was far more to the salon culture they were talking about at the time.

It was then through the book *Kewpie: Daughter of District Six* written by Marsden (2019) who compiled archival material from the Gay and Lesbian Archives (GALA) and the District Six Museum that I understood the complexities of Kewpies place in Cape Town's Queer history in relation to these concepts and events. Kewpie was a historical figure who gained widespread publicity in the contemporary due to the documentation of her life through her photographic archive. The reason Kewpie was so well archived is owed to access to resources; the differentiated treatment of Coloured people compared to other Black people was the result of divisions instituted by the apartheid government. These forced removals of people from multiracial and multicultural areas were the result of the Group Areas Act (Dewar 2001, 50) with the goal of dividing multiracial communities and families through racial and spatial divisions. In the National Party's declaration of areas like District Six as 'whites only area' families connected by generations as neighbours were scattered across the city. The separation into different neighbourhoods separated by vast distances based on racial identity intentionally disconnected closely knit communities from their support systems, thereby disrupting the

possibility of collective organisation. These forced separations were only exacerbated by the Forced Removals Act of 1950 which saw to the systematic destruction of District Six by 1982 (District Six Museum, n.d:para. 4). The consequences of these decisions are still felt strongly nationwide while "Cape Town remains one of the least-altered cities" since 1994 (Turok 2001, 2371).

Amongst Coloured people, a delicate balance needed to be navigated, as certain individuals could align themselves with White identity and enjoy the politically designated privileges, while other Coloured people received poorer treatment that was still far better than the experience of most Black South Africans. Consequently, there was access to more lucrative resources, jobs, and facilities for Coloured communities. This complex subpar liminality allowed Kewpie *just enough* freedom to accumulate the resources she did, and that in turn allowed for the development of lived experience and material artefacts that now comprise an extensive archive of her life.

Through her life Kewpie owned a salon in District Six and Kensington − a Coloured residential area designated by the forced removals. During Kewpies days in district six Queer people were a consistent presence and well regarded by many for their flair and personality; despite how they were often cast out of their own families for being Queer. This is something I learned in conversation with a District Six Museum guide and former resident while buying a book *Kewpie: Daughter of District Six* (2019) during my visit in 2022. Kewpie's salon at the time became a centre for Queer people to gather and the *Moffie*[3] concerts and parties hosted provided a chance for public self-expression amongst supportive friends (Marsden 2019:32). Here people came together in joy and revelry to perform in drag including Kewpie who performed as Capucine[4] when she took to the stage. As a result of the well-documented history of her efforts in establishing safe spaces at her salon and other clubs, which have all since been demolished. Many other Coloured drag queens and people are aware of Kewpie's oeuvre such as Ina Propriette a contemporary drag performer working in Cape Town. Ina Propriette was also directly involved in the exhibition that launched Marsden's book *Kewpie: The Daughter of District Six* (2023; Addendum B). Based on these experiences and the pieces of knowledge I gained about Cape Town's queer spaces and history let me continue investigating. My

[3] Moffie – A slur for an effeminate man or homosexual. Today it is used as a slur directed at Queer men of colour by homophobic individuals but has been reclaimed by some Queer coloured people in Cape Town.
[4] Capucine – a French fashion model and actress known for her comedic roles in 'The Pink Panther' and 'What's New Pussycat?'

intended goal is to understand how these spaces, performances, and Black and Brown Queer people formed their communities and shared knowledge and art with one another. The challenge being to appropriately addressing my personal connection to the topic and the voices and knowledge of community members and research participants. With these intentions I searched for ways to appropriately handle these concerns which I begin to address in the next section of this chapter.

1.4 Understanding autoethnographic research methodology

Based on the concerns and ideas explored and uncovered in the previous section I chose a research methodology that accounted for individuals and communities as parts of a whole. The research methodology selected, to design and conduct this research, employed qualitative methods to understand and reflect on the subjective experiences of Queer Black and Brown people as well as my connection to this field of research. This is to use the subjective experiences of myself, research participants and interviews to understand the experiences of people inhabiting Queer spaces and drag in context. The areas and people identified for this study were the Queer Black and Brown drag performers, artists, and event organisers from within Cape Town's urban Queer nightlife spaces. Meeting all of them altered my perspective as I came to know more about them and the spaces they curate and produce. The selection of this group was grounded in the circumstances surrounding individuals like William Dorsey Swann and Kewpie. Their experiences serve as examples of how drag has historically been employed to establish community spaces. By drawing parallels between the historical context and the contemporary, the objective was to assess whether the methods employed in the present foster community and safe spaces aligned with those utilised in the past.

It was this interest in the artistic impetus of Black and Brown Queer safe spaces that informed the use of autoethnography as a research methodology. This autobiographical genre of academic writing enables me the researcher to make use of my research observations and experiences to connect with the wider social and political concerns of the research. As explained by Wall (2006: para. 8), “an individual is best situated to describe his or her own experience more accurately than anyone else”. An example of this in my research is the way that it is my reflexivity regarding the photographs, texts, and writings about the lived experiences of Kewpie and Swann that are foregrounded in the preceding discussion. In my experience of these contemporary spaces that inspired my research, those experiences were

also considered in conjunction with the information and research gathered in this document. This decision was also based on autoethnography's ability to contextualise and capture personal narratives from community members and my connections and relationships with research participants. This is reflected in Wall's (2006: para. 10) preference for a singular point of view, which serves to remove the inherent risk of representing others without sufficient context. Thus having used my point of view and the experiences of research participants to contextualise my research and its findings. While in the process of conducting my research autoethnography enabled me to clearly frame and contextualise the social conditions surrounding my research subjects, and their impact on their experiences. It also enables me, through this internal 'lens', to better account for differences in how the people I interviewed felt or responded to their community spaces in relation to my experiences. This reciprocity allowed for an honest account of my reflections and observations of these Queer spaces, artists, and performers.

It is this active collection and inclusion of multiple narratives in conjunction with reflection on my own experiences that further enables me to reflect on the social and political conditions affecting Black and Brown drag queens, artists, performers, and Queer people as presented in this research endeavour. The reason for this inclusion of multiple narratives will be unpacked in greater detail in relation to Kimberle Crenshaw and her research on intersectionality (2013) and Smith (1999). It was my journey through these spaces and my experiences of the works created by this community and its members that enabled me to plot and identify what I have learned and how it compares to the chosen case studies and assumptions. While the lived experiences of the researcher are the primary focus of Autoethnography the inclusion of Smith's insider/outsider research (1999) prioritised my interests in the community that is the subject of the research. This methodology allowed for a greater understanding of the depth of Queer community works and connections through the collected narratives and interviews. In essence, asking and observing how these spaces were created and speaking to the people who inhabit and created them to understand how this is undertaken.

It is this recognition of the community's narratives that began to form a larger picture of the inner workings and structures of this Queer community in the Cape Town urban centre and how its artistic production contributed to it. It is the emphasis on personal narrative in autoethnographic writing that frames the "unique relationship between researcher and participant" (Wall 2006: para. 10). This then meant that the way I recorded the experiences of

drag performers, artists and community organisers through interviews should enable them to participate in the research and engage with the research process in a meaningful way.

This complex relationship between the researcher and the research participants is outlined in Smith's (1999) *Decolonising Methodologies*. In her writing, she advocated for the incorporation of multiple perspectives and ideas to capture the fullness of the experiences of community members and organisers in research. This approach contributed significantly to a deeper comprehension of the role of drag in the life of the Queer South African community. While an autoethnographic methodology made the inclusion of personal narrative a necessity Smith's (1999) insider/outsider research perspective addresses my lived experiences in conjunction with the research participants.

What informed this decision was the balance Smith (1999) offered between my experiences highlighted through autoethnographic research methodologies, and those of my research participants. In explaining insider/outsider research Smith (1999:157) points to how 'outsider' research frames the researcher as having no direct effect on the research subject, following this she notes how feminist research uses an insider approach similar to autoethnography in qualitative research. It is when she begins discussing Indigenous research methods, which I found applicable to my research endeavours, that she problematises the 'outsider' model as one can be both an insider or member of a community and an outsider, by virtue of your status as a researcher (Smith 1999:157). It is the insider/outsider researcher who must both find a way to critically think about their research processes and contextualise the information given to them by research participants in relation to their research topic and questions (Smith 1999:157). The primary consideration being how their work and relationship with their community will be directly affected by how their research frames the community's knowledge that is being shared. It is in this way that Smith (1999:128) advocates for the inclusion of narratives from within those indigenous communities to grant them the ability to represent themselves and their own interests.

This inclusive methodology centred on the researcher's simultaneous complicity with the research group allowed me to gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of the Queer community. This is pertinent to my position as a Queer Coloured researcher which makes me simultaneously an 'insider' and an 'outsider'. This assertion was made based on Smith's (1999:138) experience as an insider/outsider researcher who initially assumed complicity with

her Māori subjects, due to her Māori heritage (during research into Māori language revitalisation projects); however, she found through her experiences with her research participants that there was a stark contrast between her position and that of her subjects − making it clear that in many ways she was an outsider. Smith's (1999:138) writing about the complexities of being in both an insider and outsider position put my Queer and racial identity into perspective and made it clear that I was also an outsider in my capacity as a researcher entering Black and Brown Queer spaces and communities in Cape Town to conduct research. While I can identify with the Cape Town urban centre Black and Brown Queer community; as I do not reside in Cape Town, I am not directly involved in the outcome of these spaces, nor do I have a role in ensuring their continuation.

It was by asking questions about why people attend these spaces, and how they came to organise, curate, and perform in these spaces that I arrived at an understanding of how Black and Queer people find joy, community, and confidence in these artistic modes and spaces. The biggest question was if Black and Brown Queer people experienced feelings of self-expression, self-love, and joy similar to my own during drag performances and in spaces catering to Queer identity. These passing moments and experiences can scarcely be measured without an understanding of the larger community, and the impact drag performers have on those spaces. In my view autoethnographic methodology and the insider/outsider model enabled me to consider my experiences in these spaces to further my understanding of these Queer and drag-related spaces and performances while embodying the role of an insider/outsider researcher (Smith 1999), which provides clarity on the matter through self-reflection and the statements of community members.

In conducting this type of research, a critical consideration is the ethical dimensions of the discussions taking place. Ensuring that my community is not misrepresented, was of the utmost importance. As a researcher within this context, it is more significant as I enter into these spaces as a member of this community who has been granted the opportunity to converse with community members. As Smith (1999:137) notes, "insiders have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis for evermore". Autoethnography and its ability to contextualise direct conversations in relation to the researcher's lived experiences allows me to compare my perspective with the perspectives of community members I interviewed and observed. This reflexivity allows me to mitigate many of my own biases to more accurately represent these observations and interviews. I should note that it was particularly challenging

as my objectivity was influenced by my connection to these spaces. In my attempt to prevent distorting the portrayal of Queer community members in the research investigation – as an ethically concerned researcher, I attempted to resolve any ethical conflict or phenomenological disparity through the direct inclusion of the experiences of the research participants (evidenced in the interview transcripts addendum to this research report). This transparency provides a counterpoint to my observations to determine whether my portrayal of the subject matter was aligned with the lived experiences of the participants.

Smith's (1999) *Decolonising Methodologies* made my position in relation to the community being represented very clear and outlined how I was meant to address the ethics of my research methodologies through a rejection of colonial and empiricist research methods. Smith's (1999:42) reflections on extractive and biased forms of research make possible ways of avoiding exploitative and biased research practices. An example of biased research is the condensing of "complex images of either societies through a *system of representation*" and the creation of a "standard *model of comparison*" by which to judge other cultures (Smith 1999:42). Those systems of representation and models of comparison having previously been based in Eurocentric systems of representation that support the image of European empire. An example of extractive and exploitative research comes from art history with Pablo Picasso's creation of 'cubism' which was heavily inspired by African masks which are often framed as "primitive art" and lacking complex meaning (Duerden 2000:39).

Historically the study of ethnography has been biased by European colonists and their conception of civilisations that are non-European as primitive and savage and needing to be civilised. This is supported by Edward Said's (2003) *Orientalism* frames the academic study of the 'Other' as a method to enhance and foreground the binary othering practices of the West. In this seminal text, he observes that the colonial and imperial observations and views of the Orient "can return as something one writes about in a disciplined way. Its foreignness can be translated, and its meaning decoded, its hostility tamed" by the supposedly logical European academic (Said 2003:100). Noting that the study and representation of Indigenous people as the 'Other' in academic texts and research served to justify colonial actions, particularly through Christian missions, which "openly aligned with the expansion of Europe" (Said 2003:100). This assertion is also echoed by Frantz Fanon (1967:28) in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, he describes the initial contact between colonial settlers and indigenous people as characterised by violence, establishing a relationship where coexistence meant the exploitation of the natives

by the settler. I posit that the auto-ethnographic methodology allows (through the actions of embedded researchers) a community to speak for itself. This self-determination in conjunction with the study of community organisations serves a decolonising purpose.

Part of my approach to this research was an awareness of my subjectivity as a researcher from outside of Cape Town, and a member of the Queer community. This aspect is also influenced by insights from Smith's (1999:134) work where she delves into the complexity of indigenous people engaged in research studies about their communities, examining how this involvement can either facilitate or impede research efforts. Smith (1999:137) uses 'insider/outsider positionality' to explain how community members play a dual role, contributing to the research creation and development, while also experiencing an outsider position when trying to gather information. Based on this understanding of my position in the research I believe studying her methodology was good practice in this context. In the chapter on insider/outsider research, Smith's (1999) concepts, particularly those related to the dual roles of being a member of the Queer community and a researcher, significantly influence my approach, emphasising research as a tool for knowledge creation that not only impacts academic curricula but also shapes the reproduction of knowledge (Smith 1999:129). When I enter and participate in Queer community spaces, I can do so as a community member and as a researcher. While there were instances, I overtly announced my reason for entering spaces as a researcher I also, participated as a community member enjoying the moments of Queer joy these spaces enable as well. It is my reflections on both roles that reveal the tenuous relationship between my role as a community member and researcher. It is the reflexivity of the insider-outsider methodology (Smith 1999:137) that provides me with a way to curb bias and misrepresentation by comparing both of these experiences in relation to the goal of my research.

Smith (1999) also emphasises the need to rethink research methodologies when dealing with indigenous or minority groups, critiquing the inherent bias of empiricist approaches rooted in Western knowledge systems; and advocating for the development of supportive research structures and relationships within the communities being investigated (Smith 1999:137). In this instance that means developing professional and transparent relationships with research participants and positively engaging with them and their community spaces through open dialogue in an ethical manner. Smith (1999:139) also cautions against the arrogance of an individual 'official insider voice' − a researcher assuming that their experience is all that is required for an accurate representation of a group. In order to prevent the same reductive

practice of using only my experiences to discuss safe spaces and drag performance communities I directly included extracts from research participants to contrast my own research and experiences with their lived reality to prevent misconceptions about these community spaces as much as possible. Smith's (1999) *Decolonising Methodologies* had a profound impact on my interactions with research participants and community members. Rejecting the notion of a singular and totalising narrative from an insider/outsider perspective as arrogant and problematic (Smith 1999:139), I approached conversations with community members and collaborators with heightened awareness and sensitivity. An example of this sensitivity to participant experience and reflection in the study was that I not only asked them about their experiences within the space but also their view on the framework of my research and the methodologies I used. In my interviews, I asked each of them about their thoughts on my research and the concepts I encountered. With Ina Propriette (Addendum B) I asked about Kewpie and her influence on the drag and Queer community. With Tazme Pillay (Addendum A) I asked them about their opinion on how I have conceived of drag and Queer performance in my research. In my interview with Athi-Patra Ruga (Addendum C), I discuss the nature of my framing of *embodied costume* and *embodied performance*. Each of these conversations gave me a crucial perspective on what I was researching and these concepts will be expanded upon later. These interviews are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 in relation to the research aims of this thesis, exploring the role of drag performers in establishing and maintaining Black and Brown Queer safe spaces.

The point of using autoethnography as a research methodology was to review my own experiences concerning other community members' joy and efforts. This self-referential review was achieved by noting Smith's (1999:137) assertion that "Most research methodologies assume that the researcher is an outsider able to observe without being implicated in the scene." In my work, I am wary of this positivist notion which assumes that people and social spaces can be observed without the researcher's presence, actions or methods having a direct effect or impact. In this instance, the positivist notion suggests the existence of an 'objective truth' and not 'subjective truths'. An objective view of such a complex community and its temporary community spaces might dismiss or not recognise the nuances of this community as only objective and observable data would be used instead of the subjective and qualitative content of interviews. My awareness of the impact I, as a researcher, have upon entering a space. Being Queer, my understanding of my responses to those around me and my interactions serves as a crucial safety mechanism concerning good ethical practice. My hyper-vigilance of outsiders in

my community results in my understanding of the need to approach research participants with great care and sensitivity. Furthermore, many Queer people in urban spaces have community spaces but are likely to be wary of outsiders. Considering the role prejudice plays in the lives of Queer people, outsiders are understandably handled with caution. Employment of the insider/outsider position (Smith, 1999:137) encourages the recognition of one's presence being an active contributor to the results of your research in this delicate social interaction. Smith (1999:138) places the responsibility on the researcher to recognise that their position means that only partial participation in community spaces is possible.

This meant that the aim of this research and interviews and conversations with research participants was to understand the artistic processes and social connections of queer spaces. The work of Swann and Kewpie propelled this research into how to observe and consider community interactions. However, the execution of this community research required deep self-reflection on my part to understand what I was being taught about these spaces by its community members and organisers. It is also the growing importance of these spaces within Cape Town's Queer nightlife that required me to approach research participants through an open and transparent discussion of my work and its aims. Operating in this way presented good faith by allowing those community members to decline to participate, or to take part if they choose while being informed of the implications. How I presented my position in this endeavour was by bringing to their attention that I was a researcher from outside of the Western Cape attempting to understand the cultural production of this community that I am also a part of in some ways.

However, there is no universal method on how to conduct research as an insider/outsider (Smith 1999:137); it primarily requires that the researcher navigate carefully based on the circumstances. What is required is a consistent ability to reflect on and critically think about your relationships with that community, the research objectives, and the relative positions of power at play (Smith 1999:137). This critical examination extends to the impact on my relationships within the community and the overall outcomes of my research. I am mindful of the intentional and unintentional repercussions of my choices, aligning with Smith's (1999:137) perspective, emphasising the need for careful consideration of research choices and actions in relation to the conception of insider/outsider reflexivity.

Many similar considerations and concerns are also highlighted by Judith Preissle and Yuri Han (2011) when discussing the ethics of care within feminist research which resonated with me.

As a member of the Black and Brown Queer community as well as someone who feels a sense of safety, belonging, and joy in these spaces. What I have foregrounded is my interest in caring for a community that has cared for me and it is this decision which is "rooted in the relationship of caring and being cared for" (Preissle and Han 2011, 518). While Smith's (1999) ideas are relevant it is my focus on caring for and being interested in my community that informed my choices.

As an insider my interest in Black and Brown Queer communities and drag stems from the joy and self-expression these spaces allow me to experience. The justification for this mention of Queer joy and self-expression is due to how often it was presented in discussions with research participants and those I interviewed during my research process. It is through experiencing and observing these moments occurring for others that made it possible for me to frame drag as an artistic tool for community building. Finding a community like this present in Cape Town was a far cry from the kinds of spaces I have inhabited in a small town where I attended a predominantly White private boarding school. The sense of community and relief I experienced there is what drove me to research these spaces. As a researcher, I had to contend with certain barriers to my research. The first was that I was not merely participating in the spaces I was researching. The second is that I did not share the realities of the people I was speaking to in Cape Town and that became key in my consideration and observations. Third, when attempting to collect information about my community I needed to tread carefully and operate openly and transparently to prevent a misstep that could harm my community. In practice, this manifested as casual conversation from patrons of these events and venues, through unplanned and impromptu conversations where I asked them about the event to gather a better understanding of the space. This was followed by me explaining why I was there, and the nature and subject of my research before continuing with further questions. There were a few instances where conversations ran cold after my disclosure, but most often my transparency and the pertinent nature of my research in relation to the context sparked interest and much longer conversations about my research intents. This meant that before I began asking community members about their feelings on the subject of Queer joy and how they see drag, I foregrounded my 'outsider' status as a researcher. The importance of presenting this information openly and freely was to foster cooperation and clear rules of engagement for the nature of Queer community structures and spaces to prevent any unethical research practices and deceptions.

1.5. Understanding Intersectionality

This relational understanding of my position as a researcher engaging with autoethnography made the employment of intersectionality theory relevant due to the multi-cultural, multi-racial, and stratified class distinctions I encountered in Cape Town and Queer Spaces. Intersectionality theory originally proposed by Crenshaw (1986) facilitated the development of a framework to contextualise forms of privilege and socio-economic oppression and their effect on one another (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall 2013:801). The impact of compounding oppressions and privileges on the Black and Brown Queer community needs to be understood and contextualised, particularly considering how Queer Black and Brown individuals experience a form of "multiply-burdened" existence (Crenshaw 2013:140).

My research into intersectionality theory originally developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw and her research addressing “the marginalization of Black women within not only anti-discrimination law but also in feminist and antiracist theory and politics” (Carbado et al. 2013:303) and her essay *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics* outlined the nature of intersectionality quite clearly (Kimberle Crenshaw 1986). In this work, Crenshaw (2013:303) analyses a collection of cases from Black female claimants where cases were unsuccessful in claiming compounded discrimination on the grounds of Race and Gender simultaneously. The logic used to dismiss these claims was that claimants were both too similar to these discrete protected categories but also too different to Black Male subjects and White Female subjects within the confines of the United States anti-discrimination laws for them both to be considered in conjunction with one another (Carbado et al. 2013:303). As a result, they would have to be considered as a separate group experiencing discrimination on both counts (Crenshaw 2013:304). This treated the subjective and separate experiences of the Black men and White women as therefore fully inclusive and universal, simultaneously ignoring the significant divergence of socio-economic experiences that present challenges that neither group might experience in relation to the experience of the Black female claimants (Crenshaw 2013:142). The way Crenshaw (2013:304) created this theory was as a two-pronged intervention to expose and dismantle institutions that maintain existing power structures. In so doing Crenshaw (2013:304) displays how forms of resistance could also function as sites of marginalisation as feminism and the civil rights movements have created these circumstances The example given by Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson (2013:304) shows how White women and Black

men are treated as two discrete instances of discrimination denying Black and Brown women from presenting their marginalisation as multi-layered.

The theory presented by Crenshaw (2013) accounts for the layered nature of identity accounting for privilege and oppression simultaneously. She noted multiple forms of discrimination can be experienced simultaneously and will inevitably affect one another. Consider for example how misogyny and racism affect pain management between men, women and subsequently White women and Black women. When women approach medical professionals specifically male doctors their requests for pain relief or treatment are often dismissed as "dramatic", an observation supported by the Journal of the American Heart Association reporting that "women who visited emergency departments with chest pain waited 29% longer than men to be evaluated for possible heart attacks" (Banco et al. 2022, 5). When these statistics were considered based on race, they discovered that Black women waited 26% longer than White women, with Black men waiting 4% longer than white women and White women waiting 20% longer than white men. Not considering the effect of racism and misogyny simultaneously in these cases concerning Black women meant the lawsuits would have to be fought on the grounds of either racism or misogyny but not both meaning that the circumstances of the case would not be completely represented in court (Crenshaw 2013:142). Crenshaw (2013, 140) argues further that discrete privilege and oppression affect a person's experience moving through the world, also resulting in vastly differing experiences between people who possess similar but different privileges and oppressions. These layers of individual identity affect each other within the larger socio-political contexts. This means that the production of different conditions for different kinds of oppression or privilege is compounding and intersectional.

Intersectional theory and its capacity to further the study of broader kinds of social and political research have allowed it to be integrated and used in my research. This leads to a discussion of how I encountered it in my ongoing research into race, Queerness, and feminist theory. Simultaneously engaging with historical context and present circumstances has had a pronounced impact on my autoethnographic research. It allowed me to see new ways of addressing the geographical, economic, and social politics of my research area. However how it is employed cannot be exhaustively explained as "the theory is never done, nor exhausted by its prior articulations or movements" (Carbado et al. 2013, 304). While this is a view, I share it is the specificity of the research concerns that are its only limitation as all research related to

intersectionality is provisional and incomplete as it forms part of a growing body of work in progress such as my own research.

This is what makes intersectionality theory so useful in my work as the specificity of the area of study provides a grounding for my autoethnographic research in a particular space and time. Intersectionality theory according to Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013:785) then builds on and adapts to my context-specific inquiries without essentialising the subject of investigation. The emphasis of Intersectionality theory lies in simultaneously exploring difference and sameness, contributing to discussions about gender, race, and other power dynamics which I will address in more detail later. It highlights that the sum of these intersections is more profound than the individual components in my research (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall 2013:787).

1.6. Intersectional Autoethnography

The choice to integrate intersectionality theory and autoethnographic methodology is due to its capacity for researcher reciprocity through a palimpsest of theory, better facilitating the consideration of the layered identities of the people I met in the spaces and circumstances that I entered, intersected with my own "insider/outsider" (Smith 1999:138) subjectivity within this research. This framework of theories and methodologies scaffold my involvement in this research as a member of the Queer community and as a researcher. It also facilitates necessary checks and balances to my own bias – a circumstance that would be dismissed by those who conduct research using an empiricist methodology (Wall 2006). Those biases were fuelled by my preconceived notion of the glamour of the Cape Town urban centre and my perception of Queer spaces in urban centres as carnivalesque spaces of debauchery perpetuated by Queer representation in the media. There is also the matter of how my initial textual research framed drag and Queer performance in relation to those media representations. It has allowed me to remain sensitive and self-critical in relation to the people I work with, and their experiences. However, due to the vast nature of intersectionality and the limited scope of this paper, not every aspect of privilege and oppression could be fully accounted for. What I managed to account for in this thesis was varied forms of gender and sexual expression as well as racial and class distinctions in relation to the spaces I managed to observe in comparison to those I was not able to.

Despite the well-established nature of this approach, a lingering positivist tradition in academia necessitates researchers to defend their methods (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, cited in Wall 2006).

Relying solely on intersectional theory may be perceived as lacking a distinct critical methodology. By blending Autoethnography and Intersectionality, I can scrutinise assumptions and challenge singular truths in my research area, employing a post-modern phenomenological approach to knowledge production and a more nuanced examination of knowledge. Those singular truths are that drag is a costume and not a real strategy for Queer expression and not an artistic medium deserving of analysis. Just as there are many ways of being in the world there are many ways of creating knowledge as well (Wall 2006). Post-modern approaches to research such as autoethnography and intersectionality are an attempt to question the dominance of traditional methods of inquiry, specifically, methodologies that do not account for intersectional identities and their complexities (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall 2013:303). A researcher's stance and subjectivity can influence the outcomes of research. As a Queer researcher familiar with Queerness, my approach to the study of Queer art forms like drag, and their impact on the community, is shaped by my position. Autoethnography is a great demonstration of multiple ways of knowing and learning as there are instances in which it has been employed to understand and explore social and discriminatory phenomena. An example of autoethnography being used to study safe spaces in a similar fashion is in *Creating Safe Places: A Collaborative Autoethnography on LGBT Social Activism* by Young and McKibban (2014). In their research, they consider how to develop safe spaces through interactive workshops to educate students about Queer issues using a collaborative autoethnographic approach collecting interviews and testimonies from their research participants. This is very similar to how I gathered research materials that revealed to me the complex social and political connections and circumstances that have shaped the recent development of Queer safe space, art, and performance. The reason this realisation was possible was due to the initial foregrounding of my assumptions based on my case studies and personal experience and how it compares to the lived realities of Queer individuals existing in Cape Town’s Queer urban centre. Feminist research is an example of a field “using multiple research techniques” in response to social science research that has been dominated by a white male perspective and empiricist methodology (Wall 2006).

Intersectionality has travelled from the discipline of gender and critical race theory and beyond and is strongly aligned with post-modern approaches to research and multiple ways of knowing as well as autoethnographic research (Wall 2006). This multiplicity of perspectives on socioeconomic and political structures is then better articulated through a methodology that acknowledges the differing ways the layers of identity affect an individual's experiences

(Carbado et al. 2013:305). Employing intersectionality theory to further the autoethnographic post-modern approaches to drag and Queerness, reflects on an existing body of information that is both textual and verbal, nuanced through the lens of complex socio-political positionality.

This then relates to and presents contemporary drag queens, building on existing practices and information, as a new form of knowledge production through the ways that they pass this information onto one another within a community space. The nature of knowledge transmission in their community is further elaborated on in the next section of this chapter. Specifically, around discussions of Queer support structures and why they are important. While they engage with drag as an artistic medium like sculpture or painting the manner in which they communicate ideas through their work has created a particular visual, and gestural language that requires an intimate knowledge of the practice to be completely understood. This results in a very different visual and physical understanding of the world. In the same way that I know Queer social practices and some Black and Brown social experiences, I also understand outside aggressors to that Queerness, Blackness, and Brownness and the need for coded language and actions.

Citing Stivers (1993), Sarah Wall (2006) argues that "emancipatory projects are better served by alternative knowledge production." I propose that this alternative knowledge creation is achievable through the combination of an autoethnographic methodology and the application of intersectionality theory to the analysis of information emerging from the study to present it as a form of knowledge production. The only failure in the use of intersectional theory in this research is its inability to fully account for every “range of intersectional powers and problems” (Carbado et al. 2013:305). The following section addresses Queer communities as sites of alternative knowledge production by Black and Brown Queer communities. This will include a focus on diverse approaches to self-actualisation through social and community connections, as well as self-expression and experimentation within their distinctive community structures. The nature of this research demands thoughtful and respectful handling of personal experiences, urging against superficial acknowledgements or 'token reflections’, challenging the common practice of briefly recognising various privileges at the start of a research paper without delving deeper. The complexity escalates when considering the insider/outsider research framework introduced by Smith (1999), where the researcher's commitment to the researched community clashes with their individual role in conducting the research, a position

I have navigated throughout this research as a Queer individual involved in gender performance (insider) and a researcher (outsider).

As I was entering into spaces that welcomed me it raised questions about who has the right to represent certain people and how this should be done. While I borrow the insider/outsider relationship from *Decolonising Methodologies* by Smith (1999); autoethnography does similar things, expecting the researcher to interrogate their chosen methodology, their intentions and their perspective. This all directly influences their representation of the subject and makes clear what socio-political forces are at play (Wall 2006: para. 5). This occurs while intersectionality theory enables the researcher to be aware of similarities but highlights differences. Asking and answering the question of who I am affected how I conducted my research and accepting that it directly affects what claims I am making which is a prominent feature of reflexive research according to Pillow (2003). As a part of the community, my study places me in a position where I will have to balance power dynamics in my research. That notwithstanding the liminal position of discomfort that I occupied in this research that made it possible to articulate new ideas and issues that were not previously discussed such as the kinds of drag performances being produced in South Africa; more specifically by Black and Brown Queer people for a Black and Brown Queer community that have not been widely researched in the field of art historical theory; notwithstanding existing research content in the field of Anthropology. Making visible how I constructed these questions and the knowledge within my research to do research with not just on this community required taking responsibility for how I characterised myself and my research subject. As such constantly questioning what I know and challenging those assumptions can lead to a questioning of what is presented for further investigation. Thus considering safe spaces differently and how I view safe spaces in my research proved uncomfortable and therefore helpful.

1.7 The Function of Safe Spaces

While my research methods explain how I conducted my research investigating safe spaces and their purpose within the understanding that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and other gendered and sexual minorities have been discriminated against and historically persecuted. It does not take more than a cursory glance at international news, policy, and history to see that Queer people have been denied equitable rights in relation to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts. In the past and continuing today, 65 countries criminalise male same-sex relations and 14 specifically criminalise female same-sex relations (Human Dignity Trust, n.d.-b). In some places, Queer people are still subject to life imprisonment such as in our neighbouring state of Zimbabwe, while Qatar employs "death by stoning" to illustrate the gravity of the situation (Humandignitytrust.org, n.d.; | Human Dignity Trust, n.d.). While this is the case in some countries globally, statistically our community members are four times more likely to be the victims of violent crimes (Flores, Langton, Meyer, & Romero 2020:1). This is despite South Africa providing some degree of legal protection against discrimination and hate crimes since the implementation of the South African Constitution (1994)[5]. Still, we are at risk in a way that our heterosexual and cisgender counterparts are not. In practice though, understanding and acknowledging this is the lived reality for many. The need for and access to spaces for Queer people to exist, express themselves, and feel safer in the company of other people who share our fears is clear.

Even during the Covid-19 pandemic the Mail & Guardian cited a human rights watch report that shelters were excluding "people with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers, and many LGBT people" (Stoltz 2021: para. 7). In the same article Wendy Isaack highlighted that from February to November 2022 that "221 LGBT individuals had been murdered", which highlights perverse violence directed against Queer people in South Africa (Stoltz 2021: para. 11). The threat of such violence is ever present in many countries, and the history of this targeted violence is the reason many Queer spaces were hidden to preserve what little protection Queer people have. Now these publicly acknowledged Queer spaces have become possible targets of violence as they are identifiable and known. This is based on the current state of violent hate crimes targeting Queer individuals with (SAnews.gov.za 2021: para. 6) stating that "at 29 June, 2021 42 pending hate crimes were perpetrated…Out of the 42 pending hate crime cases, approximately 29 hate crime cases were reported from 2020 to date." While

[5] See Chapter 2 Section 9 of the South African Constitution (1994).

mass shootings or arson attacks have not been seen in Queer Venues in South Africa yet, the community are still under threat. This has necessitated the use and creation of coded language like Gayle which is a queer language originating in Cape Town, South Africa in the 60s which uses a combination of women's names and Afrikaans slang to describe other gay people or gay experiences and is still used today (Collison 2018).

In my experience, having grown up in a small town where I attended a private predominantly white boys' boarding school, I have had some harrowing experiences of discrimination and harassment. Resultantly, there were few spaces I felt safe with within the walls of the school. Where I found safety was at events hosted by Queer people. My experiences leading into university and subsequent visits to Cape Town and its Queer venues, and attending events allowed for a much-needed *sigh of relief*. The safe spaces I speak of briefly came into being when several Queer people decided to gather, feel safe, find comfort, and healing together. These sentiments were often expressed by patrons at the events where I spoke to and interviewed participants. In my interview with Tazme Pillay (Addendum A) there is a brief discussion of how the spaces Pillay and their colleagues have organised are geared towards the community:

> It's about like our community, it's about our people. That's why we do this work. So, if we're doing something that inherently clicks with the community at this point and gives them a space to feel welcome, a space to feel, I hate the word safe, I'm going to use the word brave, a space to feel brave. A space to, you know, accept themselves in a major way, or come to terms with themselves, then that's amazing. (Addendum A:118)

My decision to bring this extract from the interviews conducted was to illustrate how the ideas discussed with my research participants and the spaces they created were a source of inspiration and how they shaped my research. These inclusive spaces and experiences led me to investigate the formation and the impact of the patronage of such spaces. Sustained financial and community backing is crucial for these spaces, individuals, and events to thrive, raising questions about the consequences of such support or lack thereof. During this exploration, I borrowed the definition of 'safe spaces' from *Safe Black Space*, a non-profit organisation (Safe Black Space [sa]). Accordingly, the work of a safe space is to "Create an intentional healing space, become awakened to signs and symptoms of Black racial stress and trauma, and engage in culturally relevant restorative practices" (Safe Black Space [sa]). This definition encapsulated what I experienced in places I consider safe spaces.

These spaces felt like more than just physical locations; they were akin to a welcoming home. Within these spaces the social events organised, and the businesses opening their doors to embrace members of the Queer community are spaces that have been reclaimed for utilisation, protection, and growth within our peer group. While these spaces may not be entirely foolproof, they do offer an additional layer of protection that might be absent elsewhere, fostering a distinctive environment for the exchange of ideas, experimentation, and personal development. The structural spaces we lay claim to or inhabit serve as havens for seeking assistance, and their communal nature and available resources provide support for Queer community members up to a certain extent.

To understand how Black and Brown Queer people, performers and organisers are involved in creating these spaces of mutual recognition and understanding, learning about how they build community ties through unconventional and artistic means is a primary objective of this study; allowing me to consider the different ways of 'being' within Black and Brown Queer spaces within a larger system of social, political, and economic influences both past and present. Being Queer is not something that can fully be accounted for or explained exhaustively. However, these spaces in Cape Town are clearly and strongly affected by the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Dewar 2001, 50) and continued class and racial struggles which are inseparable. Due to apartheid planning and its ability to restrict access to financial and urban centres Black and Brown people in Cape Town from Mitchel's Plane and Khayelitsha are still largely only "temporary sojourners in urban areas" (Matebeni 2018, 317). What has occurred is that pride and Queer urban centres have become spaces of homogenised queer identity that disregards race and class struggle (Matebeni 2018, 316). The contrast between the affluent white urban centre and the rural Black and Brown fringes is why I focused my attention on those Black and Brown Queer people existing and working in the urban centre. Queerness encompasses an existence on the fringes, fostering a resourceful and vibrant exchange of ideas within community-familial structures which are apparent in how vogue houses and drag artists mentor others. Queer urban spaces remain tenuous for Black and Brown people of a different class than their White counterparts.

This is why I sought out ballroom and drag spaces that play a pivotal role in shaping relationships and connections that emulate the supportive dynamics of family particularly evident in the context of events like *SPECTRUM*, a noteworthy ballroom gathering. From my

discussions and observations in the ballroom culture, there are Houses[6] where groups of Queer people learn how to Vogue[7], walk, and produce costumes and performances for the balls that they compete in. There is often a mother and father figure in these houses, with Mother and Father serving as honorifics operating in the same way a mentor would and are terms of endearment and respect given to people by these houses. They provide a sense of family community, safety, and support. These Houses and the balls are a space for confidence-building and commitment to self-respect. When I asked people about how they started competing they said that they just went for it to be more confident and feel the supportive energy in the room when they walked categories. Even in my interview with Ina Propriette, they state that their experience of the *SPECTRUM* ballroom is consistent with this idea stating that in the ballroom "We're gonna celebrate you. Even if you fall on your face here'. And that is what I love about what ballroom is becoming in Cape Town." (Addendum B:130). These are spaces to rebuild self-confidence that is often denied to the queer community and allow for an awakening to one's potential and worth in multifarious ways. However, access to these spaces for many Black and Brown Queer people remains difficult.

The drag scene operates in a similar manner with more established drag queens taking on new drag performers and mentoring them in the craft of drag. Often treated like a form of adoption, the queens will become mother and daughter. Their drag mother will teach them tricks of the trade and guide them into the world of drag performance, to educate a new generation and help to build self-confidence and the skills to develop their potential. These drag mothers operate as mentors, teachers, guides and support systems to their 'children'. Both drag and the ballroom systems offer different kinds of family and forms of Queer expression and connection to help heal some of the wounds inflicted by social exclusion, harassment, fear, and prejudice. It is for this therapeutic reason that I looked towards venues that regularly host drag events and invite Queer artists and performers in carrying out my research.

The drag queens in Cape Town are vocal personalities that expound on Queer self-expression and art by reflecting Queer experiences to their audience. Drag queens and Queer performers also form the heart of social centres in many ways through their advocacy on social media and

[6] A House – is a group of Queer performers who collectively compete for trophies at a Ball often relying on one another in times of difficulty or need like a family.
[7] Vogue is a style of dance that is intended to imitate the characteristic poses struck by a model on a catwalk or fashion magazines.

their collaborative efforts to create social spaces like the ballroom[8]. However, the nature of safe spaces extends beyond the concerns outlined by the definition initially used. These are also spaces for open dialogue, discussion, and developing social connections between people creating a space for Queer intellectual and creative production. The ways Queer people can come into being in these spaces through experimentation with costume, gender, and sexuality while advancing a sense of self, is unlike anything I have experienced before.

The success of these safe spaces lies in fostering emotional and psychological well-being by providing a secure environment that minimises fear, distress, exploitative emotional behaviour, unsolicited judgment, and the burden of explaining one's identity and understanding their oppression. By averting potential fear and distress, these spaces also encourage self-expression, growth, and experimentation. At the events I attended on my trips to Cape Town and its Black and Brown Queer spaces, I felt a freedom to explore how I performed and expressed my gender and sexuality. It became a creative outlet to explore new ways to be and interact with the world around me and others in my community. In doing so I learned a great deal about the language and historical codes of Black and Brown Queerness within Cape Town. Amidst this newfound knowledge, I came across the term "The Old Way"[9] when delving into discussions about vogueing. This term refers to a category and style of vogue that is more challenging than contemporary iterations and steadfastly maintains its authenticity to the original form based on what regular attendees of *SPECTRUM* explained to me. The origins of this style can be traced back to New York's Black and Brown ballroom scene, pioneered by Willie Ninja, the revered figure known as the father of the House of Ninja and often hailed as the "Grandfather of Vogue" (Herrera [sa])

The ballroom also presents a widely accepting but critical eye for Queer modes of self-expression on the runway. Some categories work to build the confidence of dancers, plus-sized people, fashionistas, and community elders all participate. This promotion of acceptance and freedom provides a moment that prevents outside elements from entering our conscious minds that would undermine the ability for freedom, expression, and social participation. This is what is meant by the promotion of epistemic agency (Anderson 2021:285) when it is achieved

[8] A ballroom, in this instance refers to a queer event organised by members of the community where we can celebrate the dance, beauty, and style of our community. This is done through an uplifting competition organised onto different categories.

[9] The “Old Way” is a style of vogue dance developed before the 1980’s “Which emphasized hard angles and straight lines” (‘A Brief History of Voguing’, n.d.)

through the promotion of psychological health by blocking the outside stressors of daily life by demarcating a space of collective joy and creation. These ideas relate to Derek Anderson (2021:285) who argued that safe spaces "should be reconceived as aimed at promoting the production and distribution of knowledge against the backdrop of intersecting systems of oppression. Considering the spaces in which I have actively engaged, there could be an assumption that there is no ongoing process of knowledge production. However, as highlighted above in my discussion of 'The Old Way', various types of knowledge and modes of knowledge dissemination exist, a perspective supported by post-modern epistemology (Anderson 2021:373).

Anderson's (2021) observations affirm my conviction regarding the essential role of Queer safe spaces in facilitating artistic expression and performance. Engaging in environments dedicated to joy and artistic experimentation becomes challenging when community members are confronted with threats or trauma, hindering their growth and development. The emotional and psychological health these spaces promote is important to the development of social and creative bonds as these spaces are intended to centre the spectrum of identities and their intersectionality as designed by Queer Black and Brown people. They allow people to exercise their agency in these spaces, acknowledge discrimination, and prevent its influence within the safe space. The production of creative and verbal knowledge here is building upon a much older tradition of Queer Black and Brown people gathering and sharing knowledge.

I note this as the spaces I entered previously were places largely only accessible to lower-middle-class to upper-class Queer people due to their location in the urban centre. Choosing these venues to make my observations and conduct my research was not due to a lack of interest in other spaces beyond the urban centre. Rather it was a matter of access, as a researcher. While I am aware that there are other Queer venues further from the urban centre, I did not have the means to travel there independently or the positionality to adequately address the concerns and issues with entering peri-urban or rural areas of the city. Access to these spaces would require navigating language and social barriers that were beyond the practical scope of the paper. Rather what I chose to do was to address some of the struggles Queer people experience with regard to forming safe Queer spaces, an agenda that I could align with and access both socially and logistically.

As a result of apartheid urban planning based on racial exclusion under apartheid, the less urban spaces referred to continue to be financially unstable and excluded from urban developments.

This is supported by my reading of medical research on attempts to provide HIV and AIDS information and resources through public health care to Queer patients in less urban contexts. N.R. Hassana, L. Swartz, A. Kagee, A. De Wet, A. Lesch, Z. Kafaar, & P.A. Newman (2018:96) state concerns about the lack of Queer safe spaces in less urban contexts, so informed by participant interviewees who elucidated to the researchers why these spaces were hard to find and set up. This provides insight into how Queer safe spaces are sparse within peri-urban and rural Cape Town as these settings are rife with homonegative stigma (Hassan et al. 2018:9). The result is that Queer people in these marginalised contexts often need their sexuality to remain private and hidden and might be unable to enjoy the same level of freedom and experimentation I present in this paper (Hassan et al. 2018). Participant Nine in the abovementioned study described their safe spaces as not being a venue stating, "We've been like moving from here to here or like in the past few months we used to meet at a friend's house", located in the Green Point suburbs but this has also discontinued (Hassan et al. 2018:95). There was also a specific note of not having a structure independently dedicated to Queer people from these spaces. Participant Two stated "One particular problem, it's the fact that our safe space is more in a public space. So, whereby everyone will just see us" (Hassan et al. 2018:95), suggesting that it is due to the possible threat of violence that they may experience in their neighbourhoods that they avoid spaces perceived as Queer for their safety. The issue is this prevents the development of fruitful ties to a Queer community and the development of similar safe spaces. This results in limited movement due to townships created by apartheid town planning; also impacted by gangland elements within their community, which is a prevalent concern across all of Cape Town. As a result, Queer people seeking safe space, are isolated as they are dispersed across large areas. What this reflects is intersectional racial and class boundaries precipitated by apartheid's ideologically integrated infrastructure. This leads to a conflict, where historically white spaces offer Queer venues that are not easily accessible to many working-class Black and Brown Queer individuals residing in Black and Brown neighbourhoods and townships.

These intersections of class and race boundaries should be highlighted, particularly in acknowledging the historical contributions of Swann and Kewpie, who were pioneers in shaping these spaces. These two historic icons lived and worked in ways that are quite different from the way we work to create community spaces in the present, but their contributions are deserving of merit. While the concerns of building a community after the legal end of apartheid and slavery persist, numerous gaps in community ties endure due to historical racial divisions.

It is important to recognise that both Swann and Kewpie lived during times of severe racial segregation and oppression. Despite these challenges, they actively worked in a manner that acknowledged and shared their knowledge with community elders and leaders.

What also devastated Queer communities and Black and Brown people in South Africa was the largely uncontrolled spread of HIV and the lack of government interventions (Hassan et al. 2018:9). Consequently, a significant body of knowledge from Black and Brown Queer communities has been dispersed and is inaccessible. This loss has resulted in a gap, disconnecting two generations of Queer artists, playwrights, musicians, authors, poets, and community leaders, with only sparse *threads* remaining to bridge that divide. Present-day Black and Brown Queer youth face substantial gaps in knowledge about their predecessors and the methods used for organising and building safe community spaces, further aggravated by the forced removals of the 1960s.

In this marginalised context, it is crucial to engage in reflection and research on historical figures like Kewpie. This reflection serves as a vital means to position the history of drag and the safe spaces it generated in both past and present South Africa. The objective of this study is to examine how Black and Brown Queer communities and drag as an art form have evolved, establishing safe spaces, and contextualising the endeavours of contemporary drag queens and performers while acknowledging the contextual depth of the tradition of drag. While not all drag practitioners are inclined to organise community safe spaces, their contributions remain integral to connecting community members through their work and artistic expressions within these spaces. In the Cape Town Ballroom scene, many drag queens come to walk and are even judges on the panel at these events as noted by Ina Propriette who has been asked many times to guest judge at balls (Addendum B). They actively promote queer community events here, and their mere presence at events attracts attendees. These contemporary drag queens are known widely and are therefore quite well supported, and this cultural capital can then translate back into community initiatives and events contributing to incremental growth and development of safe spaces. What is core to their performative work as drag queens is their ability to present other modes of being within these spaces.

Chapter 2:

This chapter traces both the elements of performance art history and theatre history, and how it overlaps with drag performance in the past and present. In doing so I break down some of the conventions of early performance art history as a medium by looking to Dada, the conceptual art movement, Elizabethan theatre, and 20th-century theatre practices. My discussion of the history of cross-dressing from the Elizabethan theatre to 19th-century theatre put into perspective the tradition of cross-dressing. In turn, this leads to an explanation of theatre performance, which primes discussions of how drag overlaps significantly with both art and theatre-making practices with a view towards understanding the role drag performance plays in Black and Brown Queer communities and the subsequent creation of safe spaces by drag practitioners; who play a significant role in facilitating community safe spaces, also acting as community organisers and spokespersons. The literature reviewed here will address the way the history of art practice and theatre practice has played in creating fertile ground for drag performance to grow and foster healthy community spaces and practices.

2.1 The inception of Dada and performance art

The origins of performance art begin before the 1930s based on my reading of Rosie Lee Goldberg (2011). With the creation of the Dada art movement emerged the first performance art pieces which subverted traditional art making. An example is Figure 3 depicting Hugo Ball performing his nonsense poem Karawane in a strange costume. This costume and the poem itself embodied the concept of the Dada movement in 1916 alongside the publication of their manifesto. The name Dada for the art movement came from the word, ‘dada’ which translates to hobby horse in French, and "good-bye," "Get off my back," and "Be seeing you sometime" in German (Goldberg 2011; Ball 1916). This intentionally absurd nomenclature encapsulated a multitude of meanings, and its rebellious and thoughtful nature significantly shaped the movement and inclinations of the Dada artists according to Huber (2018). Looking at this in relation to how performance art itself contains a multitude of meanings and interpretations the early performance art of the Dada movement subverted conventional artistic practice by relying on the element of chance or ‘non-intentional’ actions to create their works (Goldberg 2011). Their philosophy and methodology regarding art making challenged the definition of art at the time as contemporary performance art also proposes challenges to various concepts and ideas. This is what makes the origin of performance art so interesting specifically “its willingness to challenge boundaries, both cultural and political” just as the Dadaists did (Sandström 2010, 1).

Rosie Lee Goldberg's 'Performance Art: From Futurism to Present' (2011) provided the impetus for this interpretation in conjunction with other secondary supporting texts to create a generalised timeline of how performance art had begun and its ideas which could in some ways inform drag practice and some of the methodologies it employs. During the development of the Dada art movement and its manifesto, it was the absurd and seemingly random actions of these artists that proposed existential and political questions through collaborative and mixed media works. This new mode of artistic production enshrined in the Dada manifesto written by Hugo Ball in 1916 proclaimed that Dada is "a question of connections, and of loosening them up a bit to start with. I don't want words that other people have invented. All the words are other people's inventions. I want my own stuff, my own rhythm, and vowels and consonants too, matching the rhythm and all my own." (Ball 1916)

This 'neologistic' manifesto is rather similar to the ideas discussed between myself and the artists and performers I interviewed. Tazme Pillay (Addendum A:116) for example speaks of drag saying that "at the end of the day like, the entire idea of drag is about disruption, right? As long as we live in the world that we live in where we are still kind of like adhering to heteronormative values and gender binaries it's about disruption." There are arguably parallels between the ideology of the Dada Manifesto and contemporary conceptions of drag.

Figure *3*: Costume of Hugo Ball at his reciting of the Sound Poem, 'Karawane' (1916). (Dada Manifesto [sa]).

These ideas then continued to travel even after the inception of the Dada art movement and the conclusion of both World Wars. The establishment of these ideas and the number of arts practitioners who sought refuge in the United States after the world wars set the stage for the further development of performance art as a distinct medium. This mass immigration of European artists, musicians, dancers, and other skilled professionals to the US created opportunities for different artistic practices and concepts to converge. This enabled the development of new ways of working, which led to what we today call performance art (Goldberg 2011:121).

Immigrants to the US drew inspiration from earlier European art movements like Dada and merged them with performance modes such as dance and theatre (Goldberg 2011:121). The creation of this new mode of art performed live before an audience was started in 1916 was developed at the Black Mountain College and the New School in New York City (Goldberg 2011:21). These new institutions oversaw the development of many artists and creatives in dance, music, poetry, painting, and sculpture. It was due to their collaborative approach to

working and teaching that made it feasible for members of different disciplines to collaborate and produce new forms of art and performance merging the work of multiple mediums (Black Mountain College, n.d., paras 1–4). The merging of fine art practices and performing arts including dance, music, and theatre resulted in the creation of new performative art mediums and modes of working (Fortini 2022:para.13). All of this followed radical thinking after the world wars and a rejection of traditional modes of working.

The educators at these schools were classically trained in their respective fields such as Joseph Albers, the first art teacher to work at Black Mountain College, who attended the Bauhaus prior to its closing during the rise of Nazi Germany (Black Mountain College, n.d.:para. 1). However, it was the collaborative approach of these schools meant that these ideas were discussed and shared. This constant exchange of ideas between poets, dancers, musicians, and artists encouraged innovation and experimentation (Goldberg 2011:138). It led students to put on performances for their classmates integrating the work of multiple disciplines into what would be called 'live art' (Goldberg 2011:139). This refers to the process of making art before an audience as opposed to in a private studio to be presented upon completion. These performances were only possible when the students were being observed by their peers to whom they presented. It is at this moment that the early development of the medium of 'live art' and the invention of 'performance art'. The works performed would have included artists painting before a live audience, dancers moving as live music played, and poems were recited. This collaborative and interactive style of work continued to grow and develop to become the mode of performance art called the 'happening' by the 1960s (Goldberg 2011).

2.2 Happenings and Live Art

It is the shift in thinking about art being presented as a static product to an active performance that can only be experienced live, was novel at the time. The events that became known as 'happenings' were coined by Allan Kaprow around the late 50s in describing his events hosted and organised in New York (Goldberg 2011:130). These events were rather disjointed and consisted of multiple artists and performers working simultaneously before an audience. Which may have included musicians playing strange experimental music, and dancers performing and moving through the space in strange costumes (Goldberg 2011:130). The advancement of performance as a medium during the popularity of happenings opened new ways of experimenting with the modes of artistic production with the term happening being applied to describe similar events not produced by Kaprow. The term 'happening' is intended to convey something spontaneous, something that just happens to happen (Goldberg 2011:130). These ideas also continue to affect the way that Queer artistic and performance spaces are organised today, a great example being the Death of Glitter (D.O.G.), an art, music, and collaborative event hosted by Tazme Pillay. In our interview which is analysed in Chapter 3, Pillay (Addendum A:121) explicitly states that "I started it very much as something that was based on the idea of happenings, and I have always collaborated with artists. That's always been what I've done".

Figure 4: The above image is of Allan Kaprow's happening titled 'Yard' (1967) (Johnson 2009).

Given that this was the intention and nature of happenings as Kaprow (cited in Féral and Lyons 1982:174) explained that happenings, were intended to disrupt the ways people thought about

and interacted with art. In doing so he shifted the responsibility of finding meaning and interpretation of the performances to the audience. As a result "the dividing line between art and life should remain as fluid and indistinct as possible and time and space should remain variable" according to Féral and Lyons (1982:174) in a discussion of Kaprow's development of the happening. This is also still consistent with my own experiences of D.O.G. events where drag queens, experimental musicians, and artists come together to create a space for open and thought-provoking ideas and works. The goal is the generation of new ideas, personal reflection, and expression.

The biggest point of interest in this mode of art-making was that it was not a unified art movement as there was no collective agreement on what to call them or a manifesto to define its ideas (Goldberg 2011). The effect this had on 'happenings' was the development of a wide variety of forms as "every performance constitutes its genre, and every artist brings to it, according to his background and desires" which is reflected in events hosted by D.O.G. (Féral & Lyons 1982:174). Given that happenings were events that promoted the proliferation of 'live art' and 'performance art' side by side this concept can be carried through to performance at large. What 'happenings' did was create a new mode and format of art to be presented that remains thought-provoking and popular today. The happenings of the 50s and 60s occurring outside of the gallery created new ways of thinking about art spectatorship and art making that were free to explore the definition of what art could be through the medium of performance.

This also meant that these events and performances had "no single, specific meaning, but attempts instead to reveal" a multiplicity of patterns and meanings such as new and alternative ways of being (Féral & Lyons 1982:174). The creation of the happening and its conditions returned the responsibility of interpreting and giving meaning to artworks to the viewer. It follows that it was most likely a result of the post-modernist turn and the 'death of the author' proposed by Roland Barthes (1992a). His writings place the responsibility for interpreting and understanding a text on the reader as "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes 1992:4). This meant that the individual viewers would understand the series of events differently based on their subjective experiences. This renewed emphasis on the role the viewer and audience play in giving works of art meaning created a new way of understanding art based on the intended audience meant to receive it.

This use of performance and the integration of dancers and actors who had a great understanding of the body in space and its effect on the environment influenced many artists

in the following years (Féral & Lyons 1982:172). The representational qualities the human body possesses as a medium for the creation of artworks opened new ways of thinking about artistic production as they "play with the performance space as if it were an object" (Féral & Lyons 1982:172).

Finally, during the formalisation of the conceptual art movement between the 50s and 60s performance art became a recognised medium for artistic production within art institutions. The shift in viewing the human body and gestures as a medium of expression in fine arts recontextualised everyday gestures as art in the same way the Dadaists did. However, the notion of performance art only matured in the 1970s when the focus shifted from a preoccupation with the recontextualization of everyday movements and actions into art to a theoretical discussion of the influences of those everyday gestures in the interpretation and meaning-making of performance art.

2.3 Formalisation of performance and conceptual art

This renewed interest in the theoretical notions and concepts behind a work of art spurred an increase in artists working within academic institutions according to Goldberg (2011). Their theorisation behind the use of certain gestures and symbols in performance, during a period of increased political dissent and protest, gave the medium of performance art a greater ability to address various socio-political issues. As the formalisation of performance as a medium gained momentum, there was a concurrent rise in scepticism toward large institutions tasked with determining the value of art and culture. This scepticism intensified in the 1960s and 1970s, marked by anti-war and anti-nuclear movements, reflecting a broader distrust of government and national institutions (Goldberg 2011:152). This growing mistrust played a pivotal role in steering away from the open commercialism and consumerism prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, artists actively resisted the commercialisation of galleries and their tendency to disregard the profound ideas expressed in artistic works (Goldberg 2011:152).

This is also why artists working in academic spaces reinvestigated the ideas and theories embedded in their works. The new 'Conceptual Art' movement introduced novel modes of working, emphasising the ideas presented by the artist. This shift led to the emergence of an art form in which the concept held precedence over the physical object, making the idea itself the primary medium. In this context, the object became secondary, with a further outcome being the granting of legitimacy to the medium of performance art (Goldberg 2011:152).

In rejecting the commodified art object, a renewed focus on the immaterial and ephemeral concept led to more theoretically focused works. It made creating artworks a more academic exercise with conceptual references and new theories being investigated. This meant that performance as a medium was ideal for communicating ephemeral and complex ideas that could not easily be contained in an object and sold. The reason is that even an artefact from the performance or an image captured during the performance, becomes an entirely different work of art, lacking the immediacy of performance due to its complete separation from the lived experience of the performance.

This sort of thinking is also present in how Queer artists and drag performers conceptualise their own work. Despite not all Queer art and drag performance being openly political, its very nature disrupts heteronormative ideals. Rather than simply the action the concept behind the action gives their work and performance meaning. Especially since drag disrupts binary gender through costuming and performativity as Butler (1988:528) articulates that the concept of gender reality is crafted through continuous social performances.

2.4 Elements of performance art

Defining performance art as a medium is a large and complex undertaking, thus choosing to define the parameters of performance art by its four main elements taken from *The Ting: The Theatre of Mistakes* and its sub-section *Elements of Performance Art* in the 1976 edition (Cited in Bowman and Howell 2016). Based on their writing performance comprises four essential factors. The first is *time*, which denotes the duration for which the performance occurs is fixed and cannot be altered. Second, *space* refers to how the performer conveys ideas through their actions in a particular location. Third is the *artist's body*, which has a substantial impact on the audience or space through their actions. Fourth, the *interaction* between the artist and their work with the present audience is vital to the success of the performance. These elements are remarkably like those defined by Féral and Lyons (1982:171) in *Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified* (1982) in which they discuss the work of Kaprow and the book *Performance* (2011) by Goldberg (2011:152). They discuss three characteristics of performance including “the manipulation of the body”; “manipulation of space”; and finally, “the relation that performance institutes between the artist and the spectators” (Féral & Lyons 1982:171). The way Féral (1982:171) has attempted to define performance and theatricality in the field of theatre is quite similar to how it is described in *The Ting: The Theatre of Mistakes* which was written by a London-based performance art company. This connection between the performer and the spectators is critical and is framed as such by Josette Féral (1982:171) who

noted the importance of “the relation that performance institutes between the artist and the spectators” should not be overlooked.

These criteria not only define performance but can also be applied to understand the nature of Queer and drag performance and how it is related to performance art. If we consider drag performance as a form of performance art it takes place over a discrete period, in a space, where the performers body is manipulated and interacts with the audience. These elements of performance can then be unpacked to see how drag navigates them and adheres to these criteria. Beginning with the space where the performance occurs, its association and nature should be considered. While drag is performed in several different venues identified in my research, a look at happenings and the diverse locations where they occur, the performances of drag queens outside of galleries are not an excluding factor to its consideration as a type of performance art. There is also the matter of my earlier discussion of safe spaces as a requirement for a drag performance to occur. However, spaces that are not safe for queer people to enter can be sites for political disruption like drag performances such as those seen at pride parades which are themselves protests (Matebeni 2018).

The next consideration is the artist’s body which significantly affects the space and the audience. To begin with, drag is a transformative art where men can dress and perform as feminine beings and vice versa. This is often achieved using wigs, makeup, costumes, and physical gestures which are repeated to create the persona seen by the audience. While these alterations are largely external, they achieve a profound effect. With that in mind, the performers will then navigate the space differently to facilitate their performance of their persona in interactions between themselves and their audience. What is most crucial to a successful and effective drag performance is how a performer navigates a crowd and interacts with them. How this is achieved and facilitated is largely dependent on the space. An example is ‘The 41’ a gay bar on Victoria Road in Camps Bay, and ‘Beefcakes’ located at 40 Somerset Rd, Green Point, Cape Town. The first has no stage or elaborate lighting meaning that the performance I saw required them to effectively navigate the space and the audience to do their show. The second bar on the other hand does provide those facilities as it is a venue designed with the intention of hosting drag shows which means that the space is navigated very differently. This correlation is also due to performance art’s infinitely variable presentations and uses by artists and performers making it possible for drag to be a part of performance art as long as these relational and spatial elements are present and executed with intention.

Now that drag has been framed as a form of performance art by identifying its four elements in drag performance practice looking to other examples might provide clarity on this point. Applying these same elements to works from the art historical canon helps to identify similarities in multiple vastly different performance artworks.

Manzoni's work is a useful example of artistic production that straddled the overlap between conceptual and performance art by highlighting the human body (Goldberg 2011:148). His works considered ordinary people and their bodies through direct intervention works of art. This was done in a way that demystified the art process while simultaneously refusing the collection of artworks by museums and galleries (Goldberg 2011:147). As part of his series called *Living Sculpture* produced in 1961, he would sign people's bodies and present them with a certificate of authenticity. The certificate stated "This is to certify that X has been signed by my hand and is therefore, from this date on, to be considered an authentic and true work of art" (Goldberg 2011:148). There were more specific criteria for the works indicated by coloured stamps. The red stamps indicated that the person was a complete work till death, yellow that only the part signed was a work of art; green indicated that a specific act being performed was the work of art (sleeping, talking drinking etc.) and mauve the same as red but obtained by means payment (Goldberg 2011:148). It was Manzoni's declaration that these individuals became works of art.

His manner of creating living sculptures was performative and required the 'artwork' to also perform in certain ways. Using the notions of everyday actions as a performance tool in his artworks, Manzoni reclaimed the artist's autonomy over their material and its form just as drag queens also have the same opportunity in how they construct their drag, their own bodies, and their performances. This work is also good for illustrating the four elements of performance art as stated earlier. These works only exist if the subject lived and performed under specific conditions outlined on the certificate. This meant that the artwork could be performed or viewed anywhere. These works also occupied a multitude of spaces outside of a gallery and in ways that were unfathomable before then. These works could travel and exist for as long as the subject lived and existed anywhere. As for the body of Manzoni and those of his participants, their hand in creating a work that relies directly on their interconnected relationship also meets the last two criteria. This work begins to illustrate my earlier point regarding how performance as a fine art medium can be employed in unexpected ways and shows the parallels between drag and works from the art historical canon.

Figure 5: Piero Manzoni signing a 'Living Sculpture' for Filmgiornale SEDI, Image Taken from Fondazione Piero Manzoni (Fondazione Piero Manzoni, n.d.)

Presenting the body in this way as a work of art was at the time a relatively novel concept in the world of fine art. Typically, the body was represented through another medium like paintings or sculptures. This change from representing the body through an art object to presenting the body as the art object provided new ground for artistic production. Particularly those works that address the capacity for transformation through gestures and performances given the opportunity and the right conditions.

Here is where Marina Abramovic fits into my discussion of performance art elements. Marina Abramovic took the presentation of the body as an art object to a new and terrifying height. In 1974 she presented a performance art piece titled 'Rhythm O' where she presented herself to the audience accompanied by a table with 72 objects (Ward 2012:119). Entering the gallery space, where the piece was being presented, viewers and participants were told through instructions written by Abramovic that "I am the object. During this period, I take full responsibility" (Ward 2012:119).

Figure 6: *Rhythm 0* by Marina Abramović, 1974. (Graf 2022).

This deferral of responsibility and the conditions Abramovic presented herself in led to the participants viewing her as an art object in the process of being made through their participation and actions. This is supported by the detailed actions of those who participated in this work reframing them as co-authors or collaborators. The 72 objects included roses, perfume, razors, and a loaded gun containing one bullet in a sense became the paint and Abramovic the canvas. Throughout the four hours of the intended six-hour work her clothes were systematically removed with razors, her skin cut with rose thorns, perfume was sprayed on her neck and at its conclusion the loaded gun was placed in her hand to her head, finger on the trigger (Ward 2012:120). It was at this moment one of the gallerists intervened and forced the gun from her hand. This was the moment the performance ended, and once Abramovic stepped down from her position people backed away from her confronted by their violent actions (Ward 2012:120). This work placed Abramovic as an art object stripped of identity and personhood and revealed the violent impulses of people when responsibility for their actions is deferred to another. What is most interesting is how she introduced audience participation into the production of this work.

The first work by Manzoni presented the body and its performed actions as artworks in a novel manner changing how the body is presented and viewed within an art context. What Abramovic does is present people with the opportunity to participate in making a work of art through

performing actions. The biggest difference is that instead of the subject being represented on a canvas, Abramovic becomes the canvas and the audience's actions become the artwork. Considering the format of this exhibition where the artist becomes the canvas and the actions of the participants become the artwork.

These and other artistic contributions created conceptual room for the works of Cindy Sherman to use the idea of the human body in art and use the body to depict other ideas and concerns through photography and costume as her medium. She takes the notions of the subject being presented through a person who is transformed by performance into a work of art.

Figure 7: Cindy Sherman *Untitled Film Still* #21 1978. In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art (artled.net [sa]).

As a photographer, Cindy Sherman questioned notions of identity by transforming herself into new characters and personas during her series of untitled black and white film stills from 1977 to 1980 (artled.net [sa]). By making herself the subject of the work, photos, creative costuming, and staging she produced images that seem to form part of a film reel, while the narrative aspect of the film is deliberately missing, allowing for a *floating* or *unhinged* presentation of intention or direction. Her images were reminiscent of Hitchcock's dramatic thriller genre scenes and referenced Hollywood archetypes and identities often found in film and television(Lippard; L. R. 1999:28). The works in this instance presented alternative versions of Sherman's identity that she derived from images of television seen in her childhood. Her skilful and precise use of

costume and photographic composition presented these artificially constructed characters mimicking film stills or pieces of a larger narrative without context. Sherman knew her work revealed that "Self-transformation is an artist's turf and many who have mastered self-transformation go unrecognised as artists" which I believe can also be applied to drag performance (Lippard 1999:28). Sherman is one of the few performance artists from this period who is widely recognised. When Sherman crafted these works, she accomplished something that Lucy Lippard (1999:28) points to in *Scattering Selves* (1999) in presenting ideas that reveal the ability of performance to deal with different aspects of identity and ways of representing the self through performance and costuming. Lippard (1999:28) also points to how the body changes and grows on its own terms, but the outward identity and inner self are just as open to alteration; a division between the body, self, and identity that is reminiscent of the performance artwork of Manzoni, Abramovic, and Sherman.

To explain clearly what Lippard (1999:28) proposes requires definitions and a more detailed analysis of her thesis. Lippard (1999:28) states that *firstly* identity is imposed based on sex, gender, sexuality, and political affiliation. These are the external qualities of a person that are public and are arranged based on social structures (Lippard 1999:28). Her *second* point is the body which is the physical container of the self and the subject onto which identity is projected (Lippard 1999:28). The physical body, while open to change, is not something that can be fundamentally changed simply by external alterations that can be made through costume, presentation, and actions (Lippard 1999:28). *Thirdly* she proposes that the self, the innermost and private aspect of a person represents multitudes as every person you interact with will have a different conception of another person's inner self (Lippard 1999:28). These different selves are represented and projected outwardly at different times. While identity is a social phenomenon that is projected onto the body, the ways the body is presented and altered externally can manipulate and anticipate those projections as shown in Lippard's overview of Sherman's work (Lippard 1999).

The question now is whether this also applies to drag performers and the work they do. If the self is expressed through the performance and bodily transformation of Sherman, does it not then also apply to drag performers. Drag performers also make use of external costuming and gestures in a similar way to Sherman, but instead of capturing it in a static medium, it is expressed through a performative one. In a drag performance, there is also a manipulation of the body which asserts the 'costumed' and 'performed' persona or identity of the drag performer over their own 'out of drag' identity. In this way, it is the third aspect, the

“multitudes” within every person (Lippard 1999:28) that is highlighted, and given the opportunity for self-expression.

My understanding of Lucy Lippard’s (1999:35) contention is that artists possess an inherent capacity for re-presentation, presentation, and transformation, particularly through the medium of performance. Artists employing elements like cross-dressing, costume, gesture, and disguise in their performances extend the self, providing a means for expressing different facets of their identity (Lippard 1999:35). In my interpretation, influenced by the art historical canon and examples explored in this chapter, performance art emerges as a potent vehicle for transformation; Embracing diverse styles and operational approaches, it enables the creation of new knowledge and perspectives like drag performance is able to. This is particularly intriguing amid the contemporary focus on identity politics and the personal. Artists employ performance as a medium to convey intricate ideas about the self and human interaction by making the human body and its adornment the subject of their work. The concept of the self, body, and identity foregrounds the entanglement of identity, body, and self in political contexts, as illuminated by intersectionality theory, where layers of identity interact and influence one another. Which can also be expressed through the medium of drag performance

2.5 Performance and the distinction between Drama and Theatre

This entanglement of identity, body and self can be further explored through the long tradition of cross-dressing and gender-bending performances. Theatre, however, is a broad term that refers to multiple forms such as dramatic performances, dance performances, mask works, and a multitude of forms, ideas, and histories that cannot all be addressed so the scope will remain delimited to insights gleaned through face-to-face conversations with theatre practitioners in the Rhodes Drama School in 2022.

The discussions I had with the Rhodes Theatre Department regarding the differences between drama and theatre-making revealed that they were based on the historical origins of literary studies. The most important factor is the epistemological difference between literary studies and their investigation into written performance texts and the subsequent development of drama schools to study those texts more effectively. Even though the static texts being studied through literary studies lacked the qualities of live performance to better study these performance texts drama schools were developed. These drama schools were originally structured to evaluate, and study plays written following the design of ancient Greek dramas and the Aristotelian five-act play. The way most plays were studied was in conjunction with

the Aristotelian structure of plays with an introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and conclusion. This conventional structure defined drama studies till the post-modern turn that created theatre studies.

It was the post-modernist turn brought on by Roland Barthes (1992) and his contemporaries that contributed towards drama and its practices diverging from the structure of classical Shakespearean and Grecian plays. The traditional drama, narrative ballet, and opera evolved through the literary developments of the time. While still performed under the proscenium arch on the raked stage, the discipline developed new methodologies. Before the proscenium arch stage, audiences came to expect trained actors playing carefully scripted roles. These audiences expect highly exaggerated actions and speeches performed in visually identifiable character costumes all playing out before a fantastical painted set with props intended to further the narrative. These narratives also typically relied on the suspension of disbelief, that what was seen should be ignored in favour of what the narrative imagines. The way these roles were being played in costume meant that the woman on stage was for instance a princess, not someone pretending to be a princess. The story is also expected to follow a hero on their journey to achieve their goals or a tragedy with moralising intentions. These are just some of the expectations of drama from the early European theatre.

To better explain the effect of the modernist and post-modernist turn on these theatre practices by reflecting on Elizabethan theatre conventions and the historical practice of cross-dressing. At this time in the English theatre and tracing the practice generally to the late 20th century there is a consistency in the use of cross-dressing. This phenomenon is linked to drag practices in this thesis, proposing the evolution of innovative theatrical techniques and methods that contributed to certain aspects of drag performance. This connection arises from the strong association of drag with Queerness in the 20th century, despite its existence in some form since the Elizabethan era, with significantly distinct implications. At this time women being players on the public stage was socially unacceptable resulting in younger boys and men being tasked with playing female roles. These young actors wore women's dresses to perform the likes of Shakespeare's plays as their youthful and prepubescent appearance would make for a more convincing female illusion (Senelick 1993:80). It is the result of these conventions of men playing the roles of women on stage that created the precedent that may have influenced the creation of drag practices. This practice of cross-dressing in the theatre continued for some time persisting well into the 18th century to varying degrees. As women began to perform on stage, the young boys playing female roles were no longer necessary, but older men continued

playing undesirable women such as spinsters for comedic relief (Senelick 1993:81). This transition from young boys playing desirable women to women representing themselves on the stage occurred simultaneously with Queer and homosexual identity being branded as deviant and its association with the practice of cross-dressing (Senelick 1993:81).

It was the re-criminalisation of same-sex relations by Queen Elizabeth I in 1563 that made prepubescent boys playing sexually desirable female roles decline in practice (Human Dignity Trust [sa]: para. 8). It is easy to draw connections between the ending of this practice and women entering the theatre. What is most interesting about this is that those adult men who continued to cross-dress as sexually or socially undesirable women for comedy persisted. These phenomena led to the development of the 'glamour-drag' and the 'male impersonator' in the English-speaking theatre in the 18th century. It also served to embed drag and queer expression *behind the curtain* of the theatre under the guise of comedy and humour (Senelick 1993:80). Senelick (1993:80) remarked that the "glamour drag queen in his sequins and feather boa is a familiar, even homely figure on the modern stage. Audiences accept, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, the ambiguous figure". These characters gained popularity and viability in 18th-century theatre as "a man in female garb is apt to appear awkward and ungainly" or "unsexed" (Sage 1889:284-286 cited in Senelick 1993:81). The freedom for men to express a more feminine inclination was not permitted beyond the theatrical convention of playing sexless or undesirable characters like the 'pantomime dame', or the 'wretches of society'. It is largely due to the clear separation of the role of the sexes within 18th-century society but persisted nonetheless.

The sustained popularity of cross-dressing in pantomime, cabaret, and theatrical productions has, in part, circumvented sodomy and dress laws. Inadvertently, it has portrayed Queer-coded characters in both positive and negative representations. The tradition of drag we know today comes from "glamour drag and the male impersonator - which came to the fore in the Nineteenth-century English-speaking theatre." (Senelick 1993:80) It was also around the time that William Dorsey Swann appeared as the first self-proclaimed "drag queen" in the United States (Joseph 2020:25). Swann's approach to drag during that period is rooted in a longstanding tradition of cross-dressing within the theatrical realm, dating back to the Elizabethan era. During that time, theatres, revues, and nightclubs prided themselves on the ability of male performers to create convincing female illusions (Senelick 1993:80). This era saw adult men portraying women as figures of fun, often in a burlesque or grotesque manner,

evolving later into characters like the ‘Pantomime Dame’ played by a comedian (Senelick 1993:81). These portrayals were not meant to be sexually desirable but rather frumpy, unattractive, or villainous, and were socially accepted as a form of entertainment exclusively within the theatre (Senelick 1993). This is what today we would call queer coding and is the origin of this practice in entertainment as these characters do not threaten standard gendered and sexual conventions. It is what allowed many Queer performers and individuals to skirt sodomy laws and laws surrounding dress that were considered socially deviant or unacceptable (Senelick 1993:81).

2.6 20th-century theatre practices and theories

The tradition of drag, also known as 'dragging', experienced fluctuations in popularity until around the turn of the 20th century when the era of modernism brought significant changes to the world of theatre. Amongst other factors, it was the effect of the instability created before, during, and after World War I that resulted in a change in attitude towards conventional forms of expression and seemingly stable state and cultural institutions crumbling under the weight of the conflict. It was this disruption of societal order that cast doubt on previously held beliefs. While this is a simplification of the complex impact these events had on artistic and intellectual endeavours, I have, however, kept the scope limited to how it affected fine art and theatre-making. It was around this time that many of the well-known theatre practices were created such as the development of Bertolt Brecht's 'Epic Theatre' and the concept of the 'verfremdungseffekt'[10]. The Epic theatre practice that Brecht developed is a didactic form of theatre that arranges loosely connected scenes that are interrupted by directly addressing the audience with analysis, argument, or documentation of events (Waineright 2023). It could directly address issues through its theatrical performances which made it a popular format for political plays. The result was theatre designed not to "make its audience believe in the presence of the characters on the stage but instead make it realise that what it sees on the stage is merely an account of past events" (Britannica 2024: para. 3). The 'verfremdungseffekt' follows from this by disposing of the suspension of disbelief in favour of harsh confrontation, forcing audiences to gain perspective on the theatrical performance and their present circumstances. In this way Brecht's ideas allowed theatre to begin to deviate from historical conventions and respond directly to the political situation and the development of political theatre.

At roughly the same time Jerzy Grotowski developed what has become known as 'poor theatre'. He proposed a minimalist approach to theatre, aiming to achieve maximum impact by using minimal fixed elements and relying on the transformative power of props, as outlined in *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968) (The Grotowski Institute 2012: para. 2), This style involves simplifying performances to their essential components, as per Grotowski's philosophy. posits that this style of theatre arises from simplifying the performance to its fundamental components (The Grotowski Institute 2012:para. 2). These components primarily involve the actor and the audience, and minimal props serve versatile roles throughout the production (The Grotowski Institute 2012:para. 2). This reduction of the ostentations of theatre performances to merely the

[10] Also known as the alienation or estrangement effect

actors required to realise its narrative, breaks with most theatre traditions establishing an approach to theatre in the 20th century that is associated with. These contributions to the modernist period together with other artists and writers ushered in a new period of experimentation and development.

The next period of development in theatre was the development of 'post-dramatic' theatre developed by Hans-Thies Lehmann in the 1990s. The best description of this theatrical performance mode is a departure, not from modernist theatre like the work of Grotowski or Brecht, but from 'Drama'. In this instance, I am referring to the description given at the start of this section that explains how drama grew out of literary studies and conformed heavily to the Aristotelian five-act play.

This newly proposed mode of theatrical performance was in his conception aimed at performances that were less about a didactic performances of the dramatic text and its structured conflict in the form of a fable (Wilcox 2020:para. 1). Much like Brechtian theatre and its uses in conveying political or politicised narratives through the inclusion of real events and texts, the post-dramatic takes this a step further. The post-dramatic making use of the 'verfremdungseffekt' was popular in the 1960s and found new ways of engaging with political ideas through the development of performance studies (Wilcox 2020:para. 2) This coincided with the emergence of conceptual and performance art within the realm of fine arts. Such developments are attributed to the historical pattern of artistic and dramatic movements closely mirroring societal changes. This connection is particularly evident in the realm of political theatre performances during the 1960s and 1970s, as well as at the onset of the 21st Century. Lehmann (2011a:34) states that "Theatre felt and feels a need to deal more directly with political issues, even if there are no solutions or perspectives to offer", also noting that this was largely due to international social and political crises such as World Wars, nine-eleven, and the rise of right-wing politics.

These issues and their effect on people's lives are something that theatre makers wished to engage with and reflect on. The development of the post-dramatic also aligned closely with the close of the AIDS crisis during which many Queer writers, actors, and performers produced protests and performances. These works would employ Brechtian, poor theatre and later post-dramatic theatre-making strategies. The "post-dramatic strategies continue to be seen by many theatre practitioners as more suited to dealing with social issues… than the traditional mode of socially engaged drama" (Lehmann 2011:36). The difference delineated is that post-dramatic

theatre dispenses with the traditional theatre components. Those components are the stage, character, action/plot, and traditional expectations and requirements of the theatre performances such as a five-act narrative structure; all of which were outlined in my expectations of drama. Public, and politicised locations such as shipyards, state buildings, and testimonials from ordinary people were employed to convey their message. In this way, the performances developed were transgressing cultural norms "destabilising of the basic grounds of our cultural existence" (Jürs-Munby, Carroll, & Giles 2013:5). The use of post-dramatic theatre in the 1960s aimed at addressing anti-war and other protests gave way to identity-based political theatre in the following decades using the post-dramatic format.

I also wish to highlight that despite the development of this new mode of theatre performance and production, South Africa has also transformed its theatrical practices and conventions. The introduction of 'Acts of Transgression' by Pather and Boulle (2019:2) noted new performance modes developed in times of extremity such as global conflict, financial decline, and civil unrest. During these times of disruption theatre performers create performance forms that are disruptive as a miasma to the disruption of social institutions. In South Africa, prior to 1994 and the end of our political isolation we experienced great conflict and change. Jay Pather and Cathrine Boulle (2019:3) propose that this resulted in a hybridised style of theatrical performance, drawing inspiration from both the Western theatre canon and traditional performances rooted in indigenous cultures. These authors assert that due to South Africa's history of "site-specific ritualized performance", the concepts of embodiment play a central role in cultural practices, particularly those associated with healing, shamanism, mourning, initiation, and celebrations that predate colonisation (Pather & Boulle 2019:3). It is this history of protests, rallies, and conflicts and the introduction of Western performance modes that have resulted in complex modes of performance within South Africa. Expressive acts, ranging from "chants, singing, intricately synchronised toyi-toyi, or individual breakaway performances involving costume, naked flesh, visual images, or spontaneous poetry," have been observed in South African performance contexts (Pather & Boulle 2019:5). These performance modes, shaped by both Western theatrical influences and indigenous elements, have reciprocally impacted theatre education and practices. This is particularly noteworthy in the context of the Fees Must Fall protests, where there is a call for a decolonised and Africanised university curriculum. The subsequent exploration of traditional performance practices and the works of African playwrights has paved the way for novel approaches. These newly developed theatre performances have subverted and undone essentialising discourses in South Africa's issues

with race, class, gender, sexual orientation, nationhood, and nationalism (Pather & Boulle 2019:10).

As drag developed, young men in theatre clubs and productions were slowly beginning to perform attractive young women and characters for audiences to accept. This practice became widespread in the United States and the United Kingdom and was acceptable in so far as it was linked to "school theatrics, circus stunts, and minstrel wenches" (Senelick 1993:85). It is here during its gradual acceptance in the theatre that the term "drag" moves from the 'thieves' cant'[11] of London into the linguistics of Queer communities termed by linguists as 'lavender linguistics'. The term "drag" originated from the way the trains of the dresses worn dragged across the floor. There was also the development of the term "drags", which were parties where men would wear women's dresses much like a costume party but was heavily frowned upon. This term was in use during Swann's lifetime and is what they would have called the gatherings they organised. How Swann came to call themselves a "queen of drag", or more commonly a drag queen, originated from their respected position within their social circle for organising these spaces and their community members (Joseph 2020:25). Looking back, it is clearly highly problematic that during Swann's era, those engaging in drag and cross-dressing off the stage and thereby linked to perceptions of homosexual deviance could be criminally prosecuted if exposed. This dichotomy created a double standard where the same practice faced prosecution in public spaces while garnering acclaim when performed on stage (Senelick 1993:87). In reading this I came to see how the practice of drag in the theatre became a place to hide queer identity and thrive with minimal scrutiny.

2.7 Contemporary Drag Performance

These historical developments, movements, and modes of performance mentioned have created an opportunity for the creation of a uniquely South African drag performance practice. Presently drag has been established as an independent form of art and performance borrowing from fine art practice and theatre-making simultaneously based on the previous discussions. Today it stands alone not just as a subdiscipline of theatre or art but as a creative practice all on its own that straddles many areas. Acknowledging these historical developments over time accompanied by shifts in social attitudes, cultures, and the repeal of restrictive laws criminalising crossdressing (Senelick 1993:81) have finally allowed drag the freedom to flourish. The constraints and condemnations formerly imposed on the sexuality and gender

[11] Thieves' cant was a coded language developed by thieves and criminals to avoid detection.

expression of Queer individuals in South Africa have also changed since the implementation of the 1994[12] South African Constitution. Due to the shift political shift occurring after 1994 "drag and gender transgression became a mode of performance through which South Africa's violent histories and potential futures" could be explored (Sizemore-Barber 2013, 20). Drag's ability to navigate through these political and social changes has firmly positioned it within the cultural zeitgeist, serving as a recognised form of entertainment creativity and political disruption. The evolution of drag performance as previously discussed is linked to conventions existing within the pantomime, cabaret, and theatre productions. These productions and spaces circumvented laws prohibiting queer expression and provided a relatively 'safe space' for Queer people and Queer-coded characters in their productions in both positive and negative ways.

In South Africa drag and gender transgression have been used as tools for political disruption during and after the formal end of apartheid by Pieter-Dirk Uys and Steven Cohen. Through their performances, they disrupted concepts of democracy and the role of whiteness and privilege (Sizemore-Barber 2013, 21) as they were able to engage the complex emotions of their audience. Their work made visible the construction of gender and identity by using viewer identification, performance location, and physical presence (Sizemore-Barber 2013, 22). This accompanied by the social and historical context of their work meets the requirements to be considered performance art. In being aware of these elements and understanding how to challenge "borders of identity and crossed physical space that had previously been … segregated and divided" (Sizemore-Barber 2013, 23).

The way the performances of Uys and Cohen were widely presented to a South African audience prepared drag to become mainstream as an art form in South Africa. However, the presently socially segregated spaces are being challenged through the resurgence of Ballroom and a new generation of performers in South Africa. These Queer spaces are a response to the socially racially segregated nature of Queer space in Cape Town's urban centre (Matebeni 2018, 316). The reason for this persistent social segregation by race and class is apartheid urban planning and the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Dewar 2001, 50). However, what remains consistent between Queer spaces of all kinds is that drag queens are often invited to or omnipresent in these spaces as disruptors and community figures.

[12] See Chapter 2 Section 9 of the South African Constitution (1994).

What has allowed drag to solidify into an independent art form is its language, codes, and visual cues that remain consistent. There are certain expectations of contemporary drag and drag performers such as the Vogue-inspired movements, large wigs, campy exaggerations, comedy, and dance evolving from the ballroom scene in addition, there are also conventions of aesthetics such as padding, tucking, big wigs and blocked eyebrows that contribute to a recognisable drag aesthetic. Moreover, persistent features include language conventions regarding how a drag queen is addressed, both in and out of drag, encompassing considerations of pronouns and the distinct gendered identity of the performer versus the identity portrayed during the performance. These social and informal codes around drag resulted in the development of entire industries of costuming, clothing, makeup, and wigs due to the demand for these resources.

Drag is a mode of performance and creation within which the feminine and or masculine are explored to their extreme resulting in an 'embodied identity' for the performer. Nonetheless, there is a difference between a drag queen and people performing with drag aesthetics. This distinction resides in the borrowing of the performance practices from the world of fine art, or the world of theatre both of which are forms of Queer solo performance. Drag as a form of performance, aesthetic, and social phenomenon is deeply rooted in ideas of Queerness and performance. This concept is derived from the initial chapter of 'O Solo Homo' (1998), where David Roman (1998) engages in a conversation with Holly Hughes. Roman (1998:1) asserts that performance stands out as "one of the few areas in public culture that is immediately understood as multiracial, gendered, and multisexed". Such a definition positions drag performance practices as an arena conducive to discussions surrounding diversity, making it a space where Queer individuals are adept at conveying their experiences to the public (Hughes and Roman 1998:1). Queer art and performance specifically because of its deep history of repression, evasion, and expression of these autobiographical narratives fits well into a "model of identity politics on which lesbian and gay liberation is founded" (Hughes and Roman 1998:4). The ability for self-representation and its endless possibilities to create mutual understanding between Queer performers and their audiences is what makes it the ideal.

I have organised and understood drag performance as a discipline that shares aspects of performance art and theatre can be explained in Figure 8. As I have shown that these three performance types have a shared history and borrow performance conventions from one another I will now present examples of performers and artists that inhabit specific areas of convergence. I have intentionally focused on identifying the intersections between these domains to avoid an overly broad scope. I suggest that given drag's status as a distinct

discipline, my emphasis is on exploring the intersections of fine arts (represented by A) and theatre (represented by B) as they intersect with the realm of drag performance. This diagram serves as an infographic of this delimitation – also visually presenting the distinction between the two disciplines and how they manifest within the discipline of drag.

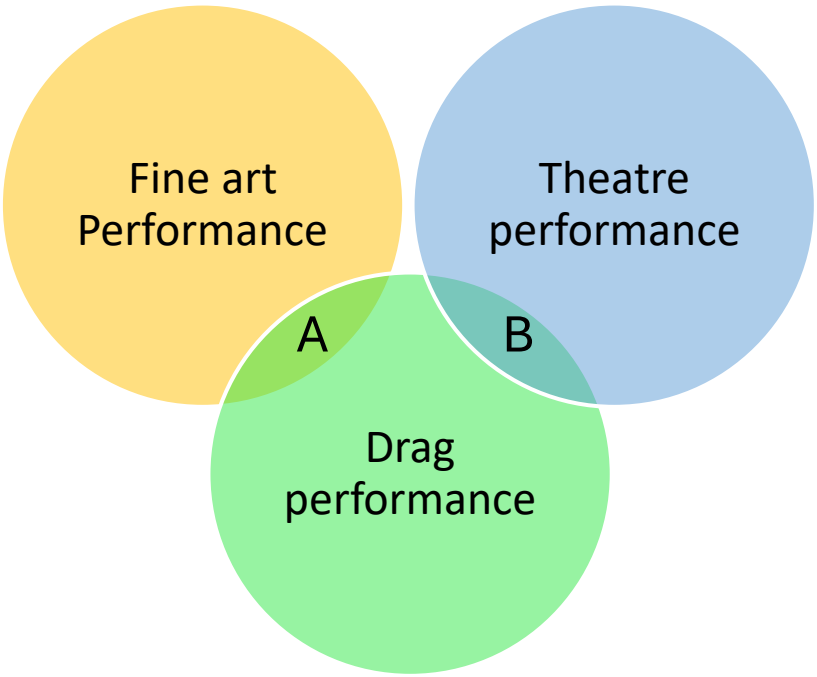

Figure 8: An infographic representation of the overlap between Fine Art, Theatre, and Drag identifying the specific areas of study in this thesis. Author's own.

Segment A in the diagram references performance artists and other artists who adopt, interpret and or reference drag aesthetics in their work. It also accounts for drag queens who adopt notions from fine art or reference fine art in the creation of their drag. This conception of drag and its artistic qualities is what I term 'embodied costume'. What is meant by this is to refer to performances that are not in and of themselves drag performances but adopt the aesthetic and visual qualities of drag in their costuming and design. The nature of performance and specifically Queer performance is one of variance and difference. There are singers, comedians, and DJs who draw on ideologies related to drag and its visual characteristics but do not identify as drag queens, which is the biggest criterion for this distinction. They do, however, use drag to embody different aspects of the self and how to project that aspect into their work. This arises from the experience of many Queer individuals who perceive sexuality and gender as performative, stemming from their attempts to conform to heterosexual norms and embody heteronormative masculine or feminine identities for external observers. There are two South African artists who neatly fit into this criterion. The first is Athi-Patra Ruga and Steven Cohen. In Athi, Patra-Ruga's work drew on drag aesthetics to create 'the white woman of Azania' to

inhabit the world Figure 9. Ruga's practices grew out of their own circumstances and individual identity that sought to extend upon itself and to self-construction through costume, art, and performance, a new way of looking at South Africa and Queer identity and politics. Just as Ruga constructed and created their work around South Africa's sociocultural expectations and patterns, so too did Steven Cohen. In Cohen's work, however, instead of capturing their

Figure 9: Athi Patra Ruga, *The future white woman of Azania* II (2012).
Srchival ink-jet on Hahnemuhle paper 80 X 120 cm Edition of 5
(Ruga 2012)

performance in a static image like Ruga, Cohen instead uses performance to produce "guerilla interventions" In this way, Cohen's work "took fantastical drag characters and whimsical dance performances into post-apartheid arenas of display" (Sizemore-Barber 2013, 20). In doing so their performances highlight "the worst fears and stereotypes attached" to aspects of their identity and reflect those fears to their audience through their absurd performances (Sizemore-

Barber 2013, 32). This relates to Judith Butler's (1988) ideas of gender being the result of a repeated performance that brings gendered distinctions into existence. What drag and performance does is go beyond the aesthetic to an embodied costume through self-determination and self-construction to imagine new ways to exist in post-apartheid South Africa as Ruga does or confront South Africa with unresolved tensions of the past. This is how I have framed 'embodied costume' as an overlap between the political nature of both drag and performance art and its ability to address social and political boundaries.

Segment B, on the other hand, refers to the performance practices of theatre, cabaret, and pantomime that have informed how drag performers have constructed their personas for the stage, which I term 'embodied performance'. This distinction comes primarily from the format of how drag is performed on stage as entertainment with a variety of performances and burlesque elements but does not exclude the construction of the drag persona. Drag performances usually present the narrative of a constructed identity as part of or an extension of the performer's individual identity. All of this is complete with elaborate wigs, costumes and mannerisms on or off stage and adapts to various set dressings, lighting, and music of their surroundings. The goal of the drag performers is to present themselves and their drag persona as an individual, as part of or as an extension of the performer's individual identity. In this way, " 'drag' is not only a form of entertainment, but also sometimes a Queer survival skill as well" (Hughes and Roman 1998:6). Examples of performers who make use of drag in this way to construct an identity are Pieter Dirk-Uys and Lola Fine. The work of Uys in creating the persona of Evita Bezuidenhout constructed a performance that "crosses both political and gender lines" as satire against the apartheid state (Sizemore-Barber 2013, 19). The voice of Evita began as a weekly columnist for the *Sunday Express,* relaying gossip she had overheard as the nameless wife of a National Party Member of Parliament (Sizemore-Barber 2013, 24). This satirical character would then gain popularity, and Uys would continue to "spin the Bezuidenhout family mythology" through his one-man reviews (Sizemore-Barber 2013, 24). In this way, Uys avoided censorship as the character of Evita, and the fact that a man was behind this character made her so absurd that she was able to persist despite the possibility of censorship. The way the character of Evita has evolved from a gossip columnist to a figure representing that "to be 'fully human' has to be earned, and layers of cultural baggage must first be acknowledged", which Uys did through the persona of Evita who often mirrored Uys' own thoughts and growth (Sizemore-Barber 2013, 27). The construction of Lola Fine, on the other hand, is completely different as "she is known more for being a drag personality than a

performer…as a hostess at various nightclubs, greeting patrons" and simply being Lola Fine in different spaces (Prince 2017, 123). On the night Lindy-Lee Prince photographed and accompanied Fine on a night out in Cape Town, the change in how Lola Fine behaved or 'repeatedly performed' their identity, according to Butler (Butler 1988, 58), changed through the night. Lola comes into being gradually as they transform through makeup, hair, and costume, and when the moment calls for it, Lola comes to life (Prince 2017, 126). The "showgirl" identity of Lola adapts according to what is called for at the various bars and establishments she enters (Prince 2017, 132). In this way, Lola is not a character that is being played but an identity that is 'repeatedly performed' with slight variations to produce an 'embodied performance' where Lola and the performer occupy the same space.

As a craft, drag is one with endless possibilities for its presentation, aesthetics, format, and ideas that constantly evolve based on regional ideas and conditions. This is to further clarify the roots and manifestations of the differences between embodied costume and embodied performance in the diagram. In my earlier discussions of theatre and performance, art history outlined the origins of certain drag and Queer performance conventions but identified moments that contributed to the development and existence of contemporary drag as a medium.

In my experiences with Black and Brown Queer performers and community organisers, there came the realisation that there is a difference in the way that they treat and understand each other's work. Discussions with people at these events and performances seem to enjoy them more not because of the novelty or the play on gender and camp but because of their confidence and agency the moment they step out to perform and the complex ideas they attempt to address. The result is an embodied costume or embodied performance explained later in my discussion of Lucy Lippard who proposes that identity is imposed based on external qualities like sex, gender, sexuality, and political affiliation (Lippard 1999:28). The body therefore serves as the container for identity to be projected onto but cannot be fundamentally changed. The inner self then is multifaceted and perceived differently by others while the body's presentation and manipulation can alter identity projections as discussed in relation to Uys, Cohen, Ruga, and Fine (Lippard, 1999:28).

Chapter 3:

3.1 Introduction

This chapter contains an analysis of my interviews with Tazme Pillay and Ina Propriate in conjunction with the ideas discussed previously. The intention was to ascertain if the lived experiences of Queer artists, event organisers, and drag performers reflect the concepts proposed in the research. The concept of *embodied costume* and *embodied performance* are designed to distinguish between self-proclaimed drag performers and Queer creatives who engage with the ideology and aesthetics of drag. While the interviews conducted with the research participants diverged from the concepts proposed our conversations supported the way the research conceived of drag practices. While not the goal of this chapter an attempt was made at illustrating how the embodied costume of a Queer artist and community organiser and the embodied performance of a drag queen could create avenues for a fully 'embodied self'.

The framing of this exploration involved reflecting on my interactions and experiences with Tazme Pillay and Ina Propriette through these differentiated conceptions of performance modes. This was done to differentiate methods through which the embodied self is realised through drag It is through developing this embodied self that Pillay and Propriette have distinguished themselves in their respective fields, highlighting the significance of realising and fortifying their roles within community spaces.

The embodied self is what I consider the closest external representation and manifestation of the inner self its identity and all its aspects as explained by 'embodied costume' and 'embodied performance' as modes through which a person can access different parts of the inner self utilizing external changes and signifiers. Such as a drag queen developing a confident character for an otherwise timid person or an artist developing a costume that reflects the concerns and ideas of their performance art. The embodied self is the result of persistent access to parts of the self that are not always welcome or present in everyday life. This continued access creates a gradual acceptance of the self in its totality being expressed by an individual.

3.2 The performance of Queerness.

To grasp the concepts, presented in this thesis reflecting on my own experiences may illuminate why concepts of performativity and embodiment are integral to understanding Queer creative production. Being a Brown Queer person, I have had to contend with how my identity, is defined by the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and performance in South Africa. Existing perceptions that pose gender in binary terms and view divergent sexuality as a psychological or moral failing influenced my views on Queerness. It is the potential risk of violence to the safety of individuals identifying as Queer that is at the forefront of many minds when interacting with the public. It means that often we perform in ways that mitigate the risk of violence by performing masculinity or femininity following expectations of gender as binary directly linked to one's sex.

My initial grasp of the social construction and performance of gender was informed by Judith Butler's (1988) theory on the performativity of gender. In her work, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," Butler (1988:528) articulates that the concept of gender reality is crafted through continuous social performances. In this context, she highlights the concealment of gender's performative nature and the emergence of notions such as inherent sex or enduring masculinity and femininity as strategic elements. It was upon reading this text that I viewed the concept of gender very differently. While I was consciously aware of how I performed for different publics the nature of those performances was hidden from me until encountering Butler. It was through her writings that I fully understood how public perception of an individual is often based on visual signifiers and gestures and can therefore be altered to manipulate or change that perception. Coming to this realisation I began to see how I presented myself through physical gestures, dress, and speech that I could alter others' perceptions of myself. This is what was explored through my artistic practice and inspired the conceptualisation of this research.

My studies of Queerness, gender studies, and fine art theory and history led me to Stephen Cohen's performance work 'Ugly Girl at the Rugby' (1998). This performance piece and film presented and questioned notions of gendered identity, the concept of masculinity, femininity and its construction in the context of post-apartheid South Africa (Sizemore-Barber 2013, 20). In this performance work, Stephen Cohen dresses in a costume that is referential of drag queen's costuming taken to an outrageous extreme. The costume produced made Cohen appear more akin to a clown or caricature of femininity than a traditional drag queen. On Cohen's (1998) website the work was cited as a "public intervention included going to buy a ticket for

a rugby match at Loftus Versveld Stadium in Pretoria, as well as attendance at the Durban July horse race. Ugly girl's costume plays with drag".

Through the work of Stephen Cohen, I discovered the subversive power of art created by Queer people addressing concerns that affect their community. In this work, as indicated by the image the sight of Cohen in costume caused a disruption and placed them at great risk moving through a space that is deeply defined by masculinity (Sizemore-Barber 2013, 20). The man depicted in the still image (Figure 10) seems to be uncertain about the situation, as he is observed touching Cohen's padded chest to discern the gender identity of the person before him. The act of transgressing masculinity by dressing in this manner constitutes a disruption of the space and the heteronormative masculinity it represents. Cohen's enigmatic costumed persona introduces a perplexing figure—an individual whose gender, sexuality, and motivations markedly deviate from those of the individuals sharing the space. The depicted man appears to struggle to reconcile the person beneath the costume and the presence of this figure. This work aptly illustrates the complex nature of Queer experience that gives rise to awkward curiosity, cynicism, scepticism, ridicule and hostility with sometimes violent consequences.

Figure 10: Still image taken from “Ugly Girl Rugby” film.
Original format: colour video / 4:3, Filmed by Amir Mizrach.
Single Channel HD Video, 20 June 1998. 2 min 48 sec. (Cohen 1998:[sp]).

Works like this provoked an interest in how one's identity can be constructed as a way to achieve certain goals, or how its construction may even hinder personal growth and development. My interest in trying to identify artworks and Queer artists that reflected on concepts I was personally struggling with began here. In my efforts to learn more about how gender and identity are performed and perceived by others, this work provided a great starting point. While I can understand and respect the way Stephen Cohen integrated sexuality, politics, and drag into his artworks, I could not fully relate to Cohen as a Coloured person. Stephen Cohen's identity as a gay, White, Jewish man comes with social privilege and discrimination quite different from my own. While Cohen’s racial identity and religious beliefs are vastly different from my own, his identity as a gay man and how it influences his work, resonated with me. After expanding my worldview, I continued my quest to encounter individuals of South Asian and Coloured heritage who share intersecting identities similar to mine. This exploration held the potential to reveal new dimensions of my identity as reflected in their creative endeavours.

I then later crossed paths with Tazme Pillay, the creator of *Death of Glitter* (*D.O.G.*). It was during the Grahamstown National Arts Festival of 2019. When I met Pillay whom I later discovered had a mutual friend who performed at their events in the past. I learned about their intentions for the *D.O.G*. project through Pillay who wanted to create a space for artistic exploration to develop a new space for an artistic presentation that was the antithesis of the white cube gallery. The events were curated with an interesting mixture of carnivalesque costumes worn by its patrons, young local DJs, local bands, and artists who would collaborate with *D.O.G*. and exhibit their work at the event. This encounter afforded me a new perspective on the ways that art, performance, and artistic production could be done to further discourse within Queer communities and community spaces.

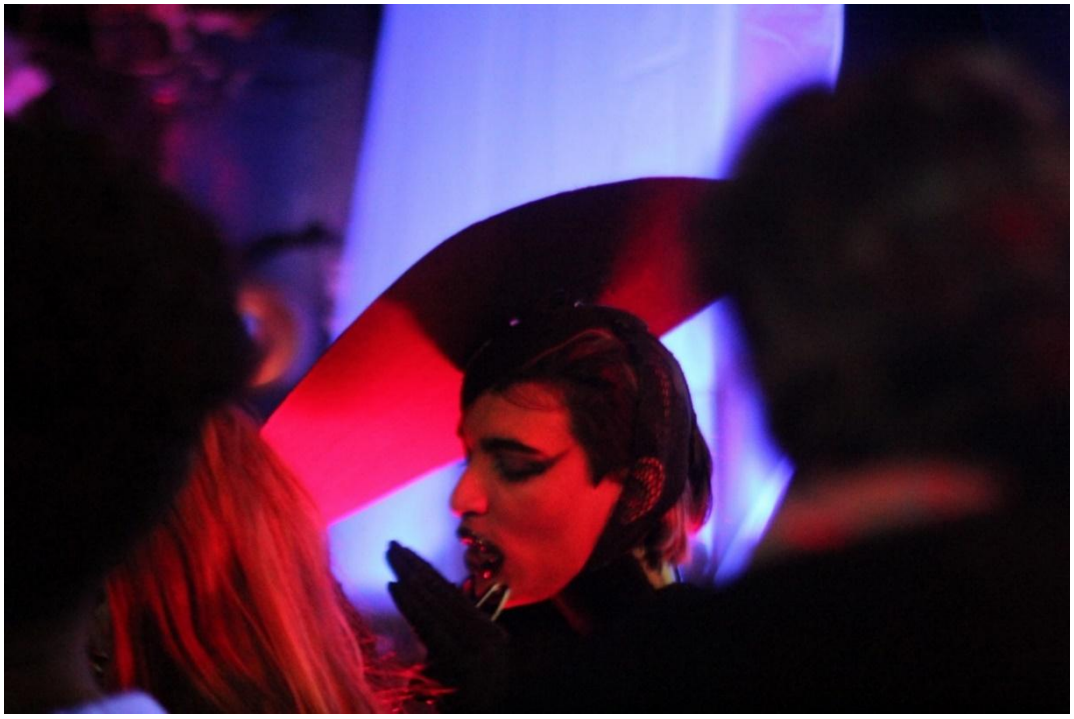

Figure 11: Tazme Pillay host of Black-Light 2.0 by *Death of Glitter* (*D.O.G.*). Photo Credit: Aaron Adriaan.

It's important to acknowledge that the intentional resemblance of *D.O.G*. events to the 'happenings' of the 1950s and 1960s was confirmed in the interview with Pillay. Meeting a well-respected artist and community figure organising events aimed at Black and Brown people, and artists in Cape Town was a revelation. As a Brown Queer person who shared many interests with Pillay, it was an instance where I felt a kinship in the world of contemporary art and the Queer community. It was through seeing their success and strong community ties that I experienced Queer joy and found someone to whom I could relate and felt safe speaking. The

Queer joy I refer to was a moment where I felt seen, represented, and able to participate in the work without contending with hostility or being required to perform to make others comfortable. My experience of the events Pillay co-ordinated allowed me to consider the ideas presented by Stephen Cohen's (1998) work that was so critical of gender convention and the writings of Judith Butler (1988:528) regarding the illusion of binary gender as related to sex, and the revelation that gender can be altered by a change in performance and how these play out in spaces that are curated with the explicit purpose of integrating and allowing for the collaboration between artists, performers, and patrons. It became a turning point in a journey towards understanding how the embodied self can be achieved through costume and performance. This piqued my interest in research about Black and Brown Queer performers and community organisers and how they can create spaces for that kind of growth and development. I wanted to develop a greater understanding of Queer performativity and the performativity of gender through my artistic production. This review is the continuation of the work I did previously regarding the realisation of an embodied self through costuming and performance. In the timeline of this research from practice to theoretical reflection, I realised that before I had ventured into these safe Queer spaces and met these performers, I had explored the limitations of gender, dress, performativity, and sexuality but never considered how it could be disrupted.

I read seminal texts on gender such as Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (2006) and theories on intersectionality and discrimination by Kimberlie Crenshaw (2013). It was only during the research process that I understood their implications in the performative Queer spaces I entered and experienced such as drag shows, balls, and other Queer friendly events. Crenshaw's (2013) research into the compounding discrimination of womanhood and Blackness and how the United States legal system fails to account for it began discussions that formed the field of intersectionality studies. These ideas informed the way class distinctions, racial differences, and the spectrum of queer identities were understood by me in my research. This allowed for a closer look at how community organisations, performances, and the production of art by Black and Brown Queer people furthered knowledge production in their community. It allowed me to see how intersecting identities affected the development of an embodied self as a Queer person no longer performing for others but for themselves.

It put into context my own engagement with Queer politics, racial discourse, class consciousness and how they interact with one another. Over time this manifested in the ways I performed or did not perform my gender, race, and sexual identity for others. This included my

manner of dress, which is often an indicator of gender as conceptualised by Butler, which oscillates between expected masculinity and my feminine presentation. This manner of exploring my sense of self through costuming and how I perform for others in everyday life helped me settle into a more comfortable and embodied self. It allowed me to conceptualise my identity as something not to be adjusted to play a role as dictated by the social construction of gendered and sexual identity. It liberated me to act in my own best interests and towards the goal of creating and finding joy for myself. I assumed that others who did the same in their creative practices and lives might have further insight into this concept and experience. The interviews, discussions, and travels I undertook during this research allowed me to discover that many individuals appear to share an understanding of this transformational experience. However, the methods by which people attain this embodied self may vary significantly.

One of the ways I explored this was through costumes and cross-dressing during Halloween, fancy-dress parties, and Queer events like *SPECTRUM* in 2022 and 2023 those hosted by *D.O.G.* in 2019 and 2023 where cross-dressing is socially sanctioned. Moments like these presented me with an opportunity to take control over how my performance and gendered identity were constructed. In that moment I got to choose who I wanted to be and how I wanted to perform for myself. These are some of the few instances where one can bravely explore gender and performativity due to the safety or the nature of the space. The way I explored costuming and performativity did not seem dissimilar to how Cindy Sherman constructed versions of herself in her *Untitled Film Still #21* (1978) series of film stills. What Sherman's work presented was that self-construction through costume, gesture, and performance creates tension between one's identity, self, and body. The formation of distinct identities through the manipulation of the body and external markers of identity unfolds the inner self for exploration. Lucy Lippard's (1999) conceptualisation is rooted in the notion of presenting multiple facets of the self, each performed for an external audience. These are the versions of ourselves that we perform for our, friends, colleagues, family, and strangers. These everyday actions become parts of a performance that is guided by external factors. When we no longer engage with those external forces to dictate our actions, we begin to explore aspects of the self that are unavailable during those performative moments.

It seemed reasonable to infer that those artists and performers when producing artworks and performances, are engaged in similar discourse. Their ability to choose how they wish to perform and portray their identity as a gendered and sexual being provokes new thoughts and ideas. In experimenting with their drag persona, or their interest in drag aesthetics and concepts,

there is a possibility that an embodied self is realised through their work. What is meant by an 'embodied self' is the understanding of the self in its totality after exploration of its multiple aspects. This is why the concepts of art-related *embodied costume* and theatre-related *embodied performance* in the drag oeuvre are integral to the development of an *embodied self*. The artistic production of those who engage with embodied costume and embodied performance allows them to explore those aspects of themselves. It also inspires or communicates to others that an embodied self can be achieved through artistic production and engagement with their community.

The realisation of the embodied self often begins with a performance of an archetype or character of their invention in the early stages of development of their drag persona or performances such as the development of Evita Bezuidenhout by Uys or the development of Cohen's performance style. This is done through gestures and altering external characteristics that seem logical. Distancing themselves from their performance initially allows them to control how it is perceived and how they wish to perform. It is only when that performance is internalised through consistently repeated gestures that an identity shift takes place and changes as suggested by Judith Butler (1988) and confirmed by Evita Bezuidenhout's breakdown which reflected Uys' own crisis of whiteness (Sizemore-Barber 2013, 25–26). It is these performances and costumes that grant them access to new aspects of their inner self. The stage names or personas become a framing device for growth and change. This framing of one's identity and performance allows the performer greater access to aspects of their inner self and its creative possibilities when external factors to that performance are different to their everyday life. It is at this point that they begin to perform for themselves and not for others. This may evoke personal feelings and concerns like with Evita. These developments then become a way to grow the confidence and self-assurance needed to realise the embodied self. This is the result of the embodied costume and embodied performance praxis I proposed earlier.

This understanding of the body, identity, and self is connected to the development of the embodied self, which can be realised through embodied costume and/or embodied performance as both are ways the embodied self is expressed and realised. The same is true for some of the Black and Brown Queer people I encountered at these events throughout my research. The attendees at Queer Black and Brown-organised events often described a level of expressive freedom and comfort not felt or experienced in different contexts which is an expression of Queer Joy. Many described how they chose to wear costumes or try new looks that they otherwise didn't feel comfortable wearing or found the confidence to perform at the balls.

This has been especially true for events such as *D.O.G*. that are often themed around concepts or ideas prevalent within Queer culture and communities in Cape Town. The most recent event I was able to attend was "POPPERS" in August 2023 which followed the typical format of past events. Tazme Pillay performed under their DJ name Dragmother along with a few artists who were regularly seen on other *D.O.G*. event posters. Though *POPPERS*, a new event also curated by *D.O.G*., was far more subdued and did not contain art installations as other *D.O.G*. events had. The inspiration for the event was shared via their Instagram account. These images largely referenced early 2000s pop icons and fashions in line with the music curated for that event.

Figure 12: Image of Ina Propriette posted to Instagram. Image credit (@ina_propriette).

What I observed from its attendees including Ina Propriate, who arrived after performing a drag show, was a casualness in the way people moved throughout the space. The expectations of

physical safety within the space are an aspect of *D.O.G.*'s reputation that is partially responsible for its popularity among Black and Brown Queer people. This allowed space for a drag queen still dressed in all her finery to walk into a room and play a game of pool after her show. My conversations with Ina Propriate that night felt no different to any other conversation across a pool table with friends enjoying a drink and talking. Wade Khoosal was completely engrossed in the identity of Ina Propriette as Lola Fine "progressively inhabited her performance personality" navigating multiple spaces in Cape Town with Prince (2017, 122). It is notable that the way Ina Propriette performed and behaved both in and out of drag (notwithstanding the theatricality of the performance), is consistent – our preexisting relationship informs this observation since I attended many of her shows during the process of my research, I have followed her quite closely, and have had opportunity to observe her both in and out of drag. It appears 'putting on their drag' was no different than putting on an old glove. The person that stood before me contained both Ina Propriette and Wade Khoosal (the individual behind the drag persona) and are in my mind examples of the embodied self being achieved through embodied performance. Her presence in a pool bar and nightclub dressed in drag seemed to comfort and embolden people to also express themselves in new and provocatively disruptive ways.

Some other individuals with whom I became acquainted over the years travelling to and from Cape Town, also seemed bolder and more colourful in these spaces than outside of them. The way these spaces freed up opportunities to experience and express their gendered and sexual identities with the knowledge that the community members in that space are looking out for one another. The event venue provides attendees with the opportunity to delve into both costume and performance, aligning with my theorisation of *embodied costume* and *embodied performance* that materialises as safe spaces.

This space and the community it formed however was not isolated. Other spaces provide similar spaces and opportunities for growth and ideas. The *SPECTRUM* events I attended on two occasions in 2022 were balls hosted by drag queens, queer artists, and performers who are closely linked by these community events. This temporary space boasted a collective of Black and Brown Queer DJs, Judges, and well-known competitors. The attendees referenced many of the same identity-liberating reasons for attending this safe space as well. The defining characteristic of these events was how they enabled a different kind of participatory exploration of the self for the attendees, who got dressed up for the occasion in alignment with the themes of the events; prompting new ideas, creative projects, and opportunities for self-determination.

The way anyone could participate by walking the runway in various categories was an example of the participatory ethos of the event. Many people walked the runway to compete in categories for a sense of pride, self-empowerment, a moment of bravery, or a chance to be recognised by their community akin to 'coming out'.

Sex Siren for example is a category where many plus-sized people were projecting their self-confidence in outfits that accentuate their bodies in ways that would seem scandalous and even vulgar outside of these safe spaces. The energy of the crowd's response when they took to the runway was palpable. Screaming, cheering, and clapping all respond to the confidence of the individual performing on the runway for themselves given space and an opportunity. This supportive and convivial atmosphere as well as the joy of everyone involved, produced a euphoria I have never encountered before. The number of categories was usually limited to around four or five such as Sex Siren OTA, Best Dressed OTA, Bizarre OTA, and Vogue OTA, with OTA meaning 'Open to All'. There were minimal constraints, primarily related to adhering to the theme and the dance categories of Vogue or Old Way with defined stylistic expectations. The goal was to create a sense of confidence in one's skills and ability to give the judges and attendees a performance that reflects the embodied self. The result was the most outlandish costumes, refined fashions, revealing garments, and over-the-top styles that contributed to the Queer joy the space precipitated. During my time at the event after the runway portion of the evening, we also had a series of local Black and Brown Queer DJs playing mashups of songs by Queer icons and house music.

During this event, I learned quite a lot about the ballroom scene in South Africa and specifically how the style of performances is regionally different between Cape Town and Johannesburg. I also encountered members of the House of LeCap[13] who taught me a great deal about how their vogue house presently operates more as a social support system akin to family structures. Each member plays a role in supporting the collective, helping to develop confidence and providing emotional support beyond the vogue style dance training the house members undertake to compete in the balls every few months. What these Queer Community spaces have shown me is that the structure of the Community is a rhizomatic[14] network of mutual relationships where these connections through spaces facilitated, self-expression, artistic development, and

[13] A 'house' that competes as a group at balls like Spectrum.
[14] Gilles Deleuze coined the social term "rhizome, using this biological notion as a metaphor for multidirectional growth and diverse productivity irreducible to a single root representing epistemology grounded on a firm foundation for knowledge" (Semetsky 2004:227).

production primarily organised by Black and Brown people. This is reflected in how I found social and personal connections between the community organisers, community members, and houses where success is mutual. When one member of the community succeeds each small victory is viewed as a shared achievement in a moment of Queer joy which Pillay expressed in our interview (2023 Addendum A).

3.3 Tazme Pillay

My introduction to Tazme Pillay created an entry point into this community and other Black and Brown Queer people working to produce safe spaces for self-determination. I began following Pillay's career as an artist, DJ, and event curator after our initial meeting in 2019. This was specifically concerning collaborations and events with *D.O.G.* for many years since then. Observing and learning from Pillay's work allowed me to observe what events, work, and performances could be achieved. My conversations and interactions with Pillay in 2019 changed my view on Queer artistic production and performance art irrevocably. Seeing an artist and performer who shares many of my intersecting identities, who grew up Queer and Brown enabled me to relate to and feel represented in the contemporary art space. Pillay is a representation of what is achievable through community building, and artistic projects via safe spaces. Seeing someone from your community succeed in their work makes the possibility of achieving personal goals more tangible.

The initial contact with the work of this artist triggered a series of conversations about the events they had curated leading to the interview with Pillay on 11 August 2023 (Addendum A), this section discusses the impact of safe community spaces for the development of drag related practices, and where Pillay is situated.

Our first meeting was a chance encounter as a friend of mine was performing with a musician at Black-Light 1.0. which took place on 05 July 2019 in Makhanda with access to fewer resources and community members, the event curated by Pillay had artists using cans of Ultraviolet reactive spray paint to paint a space covered in black plastic tarp. They created a back cube on the side of the venue with an opening for people to view the artists painting the space. The creative use of two black lights in the space and neon orange, green, and yellow paint was interesting to witness. I also had the pleasure of seeing Pillay's performance at the opening of the event before the musical performances. Pillay walked into the centre of the room wearing a dress made of white drop sheets held on by a wide black belt. This performance began when their team sprayed the dress with black and green paint as they spun around and

performed. This performance was a direct reference to Shalom Harlow's performance that closed Alexander McQueen's No. 13, spring/summer 1999 fashion show. This plastic dress was then stripped off to reveal a purple sequin bodysuit with the biggest shoulder pads I had ever seen and eight-inch patent leather platform shoes as they walked up to the DJ Booth to begin their set. I had never seen a DJ set open with such theatrics before and it showed the possibilities of Queer art, costume, and performance.

It was at this event that I learned quite a bit about the kind of 'happening' inspired events they curated and held at EVOL[15] on Hope Street in Cape Town. Pillay's choice to use a nightclub space to present, produce art and performances inspired a new artistic format and platform for me to consider. It was a space for artistic work to be produced simultaneously with live musical performances from local musicians and artists. The simultaneous nature of the performances and artworks being presented was highly reminiscent of art happenings at their early inception – discussed earlier in Chapter 2. What is so different about this space is the rejection of the white cube gallery in favour of living community spaces; in this way replicating the happenings of the past with the goal of creating safe spaces for Queer people and artists to experiment.

Since then, I have seen many more of their performances and events online and have revisited the earlier conversations we had in our interview. The goal is to understand more about the development of their performances and events. I first began by asking how their costuming and the theatricality of their performances had changed over time as their costuming was more subdued for the performance, I saw at *POPPERS* hosted at EVOL in August of 2023. In the interview, I asked Pillay about these observations and the differences between their performance Pillay (2022) responded by speaking about the development of their work as a DJ, performer, and artist:

[15] EVOL is a pub located above the Stag's Head on Hope Street in Cape Town

> “No, it's an interesting observation because you're not incorrect, but I suppose what it comes down to, and I suppose what's most important about that fact, is that. I myself, Tazme Pillay the artist have never considered myself, like a drag queen, and Dragmother has never been a drag persona. Dragmother has always just been like an inherent part of myself, and I think that when I first started, like, working in nightlife and like when I found Dragmother. When I decided, ‘Cool. I'm gonna DJ under this name, it's Dragmother’ etcetera. I think I went to like the extreme of trying to figure out who she was, what she was, et cetera. So, I already would, You're quite correct, I would really exaggerate the way that I dressed. I would experiment a lot, but honestly like, over the past like two or three years. I would say that I've completely settled into the realisation that Dragmother is just like actually an inherent part of myself. So, I think there's a sense of like comfort that has now arrived with who Dragmother is, and I no longer feel the need to do that, in order to express the existence of this thing. I feel like I've just assimilated into her very much. 100%, yeah.”

Excerpt 1: Interview with Tazme Pillay, 2022. See Addendum A.

In asking about the name, Dragmother, Pillay made it clear that they have never proclaimed themselves to be a drag queen. Dragmother began as an identity that was being performed but in the many performances of Dragmother, Pillay began to see her as one of their many selves.

What Pillay speaks of here reflects my conception of embodied identity achievement as a result of either embodied performance or embodied costume with the latter being far more applicable to Pillay and the creation of Dragmother who is not a drag queen. This returns to the difference between identity, self, and the body previously discussed in relation to Lucy Lippard and Cindy Sherman (1999). The creation of Dragmother through exaggerated or extreme costumes references drag aesthetics and bodily manipulation and the visual perception of a person's identity. To create the identity of Dragmother, Pillay drew on sources such as Queer pop icons, high fashion and referenced the process of developing their persona as the method for organising these influences. The way drag was employed was as a methodology to create the persona of Dragmother and how she disrupts gender and socially ascribed identities as a contested site of self-expression. Dragmother also grew and developed as Pillay did synergistically. Pillay elucidates this by expressing that the Dragmother evolved from acknowledging a facet of themselves. Notably, Pillay identifies the maternal aspects of the self that are prominently manifested in the identity of Dragmother:

> "What clicked for me was the sense that like Dragmother's, just the parts of myself that I had never previously had an outlet to express. So when I was finally given that outlet, or rather when I made that outlet for myself, I kind of just like vomited everything up at once and I was trying to make sense of it. But now I feel very settled in it and very confident and kind of very like, I don't know. Dragmother's like grown up she's like a mom now, she's a mom. She's like a real mom and I'm okay with that ... Dragmother is like, yeah, Dragmother is just like an energy, she's an energy that I have to embody in order to do the work that I do. Yeah."

Excerpt 2: Interview with Tazme Pillay, 2022. See Addendum A.

Pillay then succinctly explained what they believed drag queens were capable of and their methods for developing their craft and persona when they performed. Their view on what drag artists and their processes do closely aligns with the manner in which they have constructed Dragmother's persona in relation to their own development. They have, like a drag queen, invested their whole selves into their artwork and have used similar ideals to that of drag artists; specifically, drag as a medium that is steeped in a history of political and social disruption. The below interview transcript excerpt highlights Pillay's view that being a drag queen, and a community advocate, whether intentional or unintentional, entails significant responsibilities and social influence. This is why the rhizomatic nature of their community organisation structures makes it their responsibility to co-ordinate and produce these safe spaces. The discussion touched upon the concept that performers within Queer art spaces may, at times, incorporate visual codes of drag into their artistic endeavours and projects. This is then an example of *embodied costume* as the ideas express themselves through the format of performance art and not theatre. It is an example of how art feeds into the multiple kinds of drag that can exist simultaneously; though being a drag Queen isn't just about the costume either which Pillay elaborates on.

> "Yes, like, completely like anyone can play dress up like anyone can kind of like appropriate what they believe to be this thing. But the difference with the drag artist in my opinion is that it comes with a sense of like performativity and it comes with a sense of intention. That intention is the thing that like I don't know just kind of like, unlocks. It's almost like, fucking quasi spiritual. I don't know. It unlocks something inside you that makes you that thing, you know, it's not... Drag Queens are not playing dress up, drag artists are not playing dress up. They are just being their most truthful selves in the most extreme way, and I also feel like it's a thing that's necessary in a world where like doing that is... You kind of almost have to do that in order to like, disrupt because at the end of the day like, the entire idea of drag is about disruption, right? As long as we live in the world that we live in where we are still kind of like adhering to heteronormative values and gender binaries it's about disruption. Yeah, and that's I think that's also kind of why drag looks the way that it does in a lot of ways, it's disrupting that norm."

Excerpt 3: Interview with Tazme Pillay, 2022. See Addendum A

Here Pillay addresses the notion that the inherent personal qualities of the performers emerge in their work due to their performance allowing access to hidden parts of the self (Lippard 1999:28). It speaks to Pillay's work and the work of drag queens in general as they intend to disrupt norms through their work. It could simply be by dressing and expressing themselves as Swann did through performance artworks that defy social norms like Cohen or by creating and investing in a performed persona like Evita Bezuidenhout. This distinction becomes evident in Pillay's performances which are an instance of *embodied costume*. My reasoning is that based on Lippard's (1999) conception of identity, body, and self in Pillay's choices and ability to construct the identity of Dragmother provided an outlet for aspects of the self previously hidden and inaccessible. Pillay's response to the question of embodiment in performance and aesthetics led to a discussion about drag and how it creates conditions that grant you access to parts of the self that are not inherently projected into the world.

> "Right. I think it's important to note though that like, firstly drag is not acting. So, when it comes to like this idea of embodiment, what I see people doing is accessing something that is already inherently inside them. Like if I think about my friends who are kind of like, you know, your typical drag Queen artists. If I think of them outside of drag, there are parts of themselves that drag just intensifies. I think that's the most beautiful part of it. It's kind of like this idea of drag being a key that allows you to like, unlock inherent truths about yourself that you may otherwise not have the space to express. The embodiment aspect of it is beautiful and powerful because it's watching someone truly just like, access a part of themselves that they don't always have the power to do, or they don't always have the space to do. So, I feel like, the idea of embodiment, it's always there. It's in the body. It's a very somatic thing, but sometimes it takes the adornment, sometimes it takes the decoration, sometimes it takes the transformation for the somatic to become the external, and to then also allow people around them to like, experience the beauty of the fact that they can find that truth within themselves as well."

Excerpt 4: Interview with Tazme Pillay, 2022. See Addendum A.

Their statement illustrates how a costume or a performance enables individuals to amplify and elevate aspects of themselves when initially embodying a new identity. In this manner, the costume facilitates the expression of concealed aspects of the self, as Pillay pointed out in their own process of becoming and being Dragmother. I would describe the idea that they present as akin to a double-exposed image. Initially, there is the identity of the performer and then comes the costumed identity, and through repeated performance of that identity they then unify the performer and the performed identity leading to Pillay's statement that "[they] feel like I've just assimilated it very much into her." Here Pillay responds to a question regarding the idea of an embodied performance and their response is consistent with my view, acting in the theatre is quite different from the work of drag performers. While the two have historical roots, there is

significant enough divergence to make a distinction. While drag borrows from the format of the theatre and variety performance it is not the goal of a drag performer to perform a character but an identity. This is because the separation of the character and the actor on stage is very clear; however, drag performers portray a different aspect of the self, and as such is more of a method by which to access parts of the self to present to the world. This is accomplished by utilising varying approaches including storytelling, dance, makeup, costume and more. However, the construction of the new identity is ultimately shaped by the individual and their specific interests.

It illustrates how simply wearing a costume and performing a version of yourself is a mode through which to consider and develop new ideas artistically and politically. Accomplishing this is possible because of the overlap between theatre performance, performance art, and drag which provides multiple unique kinds of drag and its manner of presentation. This conveys itself in the different kinds of drag queens I had the pleasure of watching perform at various shows. Some lean into storytelling, others dance, and for some, the art of makeup and costume is the highlight of their consummate work. This ideal for a spectrum of identities is also present in the name and function of the *SPECTRUM* events. It is a platform for people to express their talents and artistic skills and in doing so, provide a blueprint for the possible ways for a person to express themselves. This is one of the many mediums of drag and queer performance that addresses the ways that drag has disrupted certain binary-gendered and heteronormative expectations. Drag has evolved out of a much more complex and diverse history of policy, restriction, and creative expression. I am tentative about how I proposed these ideas which might restrict their conception in the research project. To clarify, I have only looked at the areas of direct overlap with drag as a mode of Queer artistic production within the contexts of art and theatrical performance. Whether something is being focused on the *embodied costume* or an *embodied performance* or neither yet still forms a part of drag. The idea I propose in the diagram in Chapter Two only accounts for a fraction of what drag performance and drag artists are capable of.

Returning to an earlier citation of Pillay's interview (Excerpt 3) "like it's about disruption, yeah and that's I think that's also kind of why drag looks the way that it does in a lot of ways it's disrupting that norm yeah" (Pillay 2023). The notion that drag revolves around disruption and altering perspectives by challenging the expected norms holds merit. Its effectiveness as a mode of representation stems from the evolution of drag and its intricate political history, particularly when considering how queer individuals disrupt the every day through actions akin to early

performance art. This relates profoundly to the work that Tazme Pillay has accomplished within Queer nightlife spaces as well. The format of *D.O.G.* was heavily modelled after the happenings of the 1960s which led to the formalisation of performance art as a medium. The result is that *D.O.G.* events are spaces that Pillay has curated to allow artists to create experiential works with no intention of commodifying their art, just the chance to present it to a receptive public. I believe that is what adds to the air of freedom and experimentation that it produces in the attendees at these events:

> "Yeah, they are. Have always been. Listen, when I started the *Death of Glitter* (*D.O.G.*), right? I started it very much as something that was based on the idea of happenings, and I have always collaborated with artists. That's always been what I've done. I've collaborated with like, I don't know, like fucking Brett Sailor. Like artists who are showing in major galleries, but I've been like, here's a space for you to just create with no intention to sell. With no intention to market, with no intention to like, I don't know, think about like the machine or like the commerce factor of the art world. Like I just want you to like, go crazy because isn't that what we do as artists anyway? That's all we want to do. Do we actually want to sell art or do we want to just make art? So, like, why don't we just create a space for each other to do that with each other? And for me, absolutely I feel like Queer spaces like *SPECTRUM* and the *Death of Glitter*. We've set them up as kind of like. Like thinking labs or each other like the ideas that are the ideas that come from being in that space with each other is insane. *SPECTRUM* cannot exist without the *Death of Glitter*, and also vice versa. You know, they're like, think labs for all of us. It's like Andy Warhol and the factory.

Excerpt 5: Interview with Tazme Pillay, 2022. See Addendum A.

The above excerpt addresses how events like *D.O.G.* and *SPECTRUM* are new arenas of artistic production. These spaces are built and created with the intent to develop queer artists and generate new ways of being through their artistic choices. In their response, they not only confirm my observations but go on to explain the intentions with which they have curated their spaces and events. The intention for these spaces according to them was never profit but rather a way to fund more iterations of the same project. The artful curation of the *D.O.G.* Instagram page and their collaboration with photographers, designers, and artists from the city has enabled a space for Queer cultural production and social exchange. This exemplifies the core concept I initially put forth in the research when embarking on this project – to explore how Black and Brown Queer individuals, along with artists and performers, can establish community spaces conducive to social exchange and development. As mentioned in Excerpt 5 the format of the happenings of the 60s was adopted by Pillay and used to structure the nature of their *D.O.G.* events. These events rely on entrance fees to fund further iterations of the project and provide artists with materials and resources. It all ultimately goes towards the production of new ideas and artistic works. The venue enables others to interact with the works being installed in the

venue and the performances and costumes of other artists and attendees. They described the space as a thinking lab for unpacking and exploring varied and new ideas of queer identity and performance. That however is only possible due to the safety of the space that they have ensured and has aided the development of the reputation of *D.O.G.* Pillay's work with the *D.O.G.* goes beyond simply being an event it is in and of itself an integral part of their artistic oeuvre placing them firmly (if reductively) in my category of art related performance, *embodied costume*. The art that they created and the spaces they curate are inextricably linked. They have described the spaces created as living artworks and brave spaces of exploration, innovation, and experimentation within a protected and safe space:

> "I think safe spaces, like I've always hated the term and the word safe spaces. I've never personally called my space safe because the truth is the spaces that we create are challenging. They're not safe, They're challenging. I think when you use the word safe, it's a complicated, it's a very complicated thing because of course there are certain degrees practically. There are certain degrees of safety that is entirely necessary. For example, you need to like, make sure that your people are protected from assault, protected from abuse, protected from verbal abuse, etcetera or whatever. But like the idea of safety I feel really traps a space into this thing of not being able to create discourse that expands it. I think the spaces that both CC and myself create are challenging, and because they are challenging, they're brave. So, therefore, we ask you to be brave, yeah."

Excerpt 6: Interview with Tazme Pillay, 2022. See Addendum A.

What Pillay has achieved with the *D.O.G.* events is to go beyond the idea of a safe space that prevents moments of discomfort or challenging circumstances and instead provides a place for people to feel supported while taking risks. Whether the risks being taken are artistic or otherwise the platform that *SPECTRUM* and *D.O.G.* provide is intended to challenge patrons as well as performers. The idea at play here is that only through discomfort, challenges, and asking uncomfortable questions, can Black and Brown Queer identity be expanded upon beyond reductive stereotypes and assumptions about the self.

3.4 Ina Propriette

Wade Khoosal performs under this *nom de plume* of Ina Propriette (the name I will be referring to) is also someone who inspired a large portion of this research. In my interview with Ina Propriette, we explored the formation of her identity and how she developed as a drag queen and artist. It should be noted that my first encounter with Ina Propriette and Maxine Wylde was the first time I had ever seen a drag queen perform when I embarked upon my practical research. What I experienced during their performance along with some of my friends, has had

such a profound impact on the way that I view the work of Drag Queens and how I wrote about them. When I arrived at The 41, a well-recognised and upmarket gay bar in Camps Bay, Cape Town, I had preconceived notions about what a drag performance should look like. These ideas came from what I had seen in the media and on television for many years. The performance they delivered both met and *blew those expectations out of the water*. The two of them performed a medley of musical numbers from opera to more contemporary artists like Doja Cat with seamless wig and costume changes. Their choreography was flawlessly organised around the space the venue provided, and their sharply honed wit shone through in the transition between performances. This was an experience like no other and produced a feeling of catharsis. Specifically, when I addressed the notion and definition of safe spaces, based on the definition from *Safe Black Space* (nd.) and how they can be sites for knowledge production noted by Anderson (2021:285). I did not expect that over a year later I would be interviewing her on a Zoom call in August of 2023 (Addendum B) enabling me to gain a broader understanding of their work as a drag queen and public figure. Ina Propriette's first encounter with drag was rather like mine in that they were blown away by the concept and its execution:

> "... back in 2012. So that was probably my first interaction with Drag. That was at the CTICC and Latrice Royal from Drag Race was also one of the entertainers that night. So that was my first introduction to drag as an art form. I'd obviously seen drag performance as this stuff in, in the gay clubs and stuff, but I didn't pay it any attention. It was just a show on the stage if that makes sense but yeah, that was probably my, my first introduction. It was wild, it was wild because I didn't, I wasn't watching Drag Race at the time, and I wasn't even out of the closet yet, so I had no idea what the hell I was looking at. But I knew I was intrigued."

Excerpt 1: Interview with Ina Propriette. See Addendum B.

The way Ina Propriette described her first encounter with drag set into motion a series of events that enabled the creation of Ina Propriette's identity. This encounter preceded their own journey of self-discovery and planted the seed that germinated years later. While Ina Propriette never had any intentions of being a drag queen initially, they did experiment with drag makeup, wigs, and methods of identity construction linked to drag. She simply explored the creative possibilities of the medium and how it aligned with their interest in makeup. However, as they went on to point out it seemed that their journey to being a highly popular drag performer was predicted by their sister. What also played a role in the development of Ina Propriette's aesthetic was a Tommy Takkie shoe box with a collection of cheap makeup cobbled together to explore their strong interest in makeup. That description of a shoe box harkened back to my own

experiences with the feminine aesthetics and experimentation with makeup though, Ina Propriette took it a step further.

> "I never wanted to do drag. I was convinced that I was just gonna' do makeup. I used to say, I know, I remember, my sister used to tell me you're going to do drag one day. I was like, no, there's no way in hell because at that point, I'd already started university and I was staying on my own, and I was just playing around with makeup at home. I literally started out of, you know, the Tommy Takkies, one of those shoe boxes I had. With just like cheap ass foundation in it and a liquid liner from Chinatown and that was how it all started, and I wasn't convinced that this was something I was going to do until, like probably a year or two later, 2016. When I was able to take that makeup and put it into something that I was good at, which was dancing, so I was a, a trained Latin dancer and we, I think that time they came up with the competition called Dancing with the Queens. So that was a Latin, and ballroom competition, but for males only. I suppose that description has to change nowadays. But yeah, that was it, that was pretty much it, I was now able to mesh the two worlds. This newfound love of makeup and dance and kind of bring it into one. There Ina Propriette was formed. That was how it started."

Excerpt 2: Interview with Ina Propriette. See Addendum B.

The identity of Ina Propriette was born out of a happy accident as initially she refused the idea of doing drag. The manner in which they entered the realm of drag mirrors the concepts proposed in this research regarding the potential of drag. To recall the double expose image here it occurs again with Ina Propriette as their character was developed for a different purpose and over time became synonymous with the person performing the character merging into one. It recalls Lippard's discussion of the body, self, and identity as this self (Ina Propriette) was constituted by projecting a different look personal interests, enabling them to leverage their skills in cultivating a more confident iteration of their self. It was in the engagement with drag that they developed their confidence and self-assuredness while also honing and developing their skills in dance and makeup. The fact that their drag was born from humble beginnings does not do justice to the work of Khoosal and their contributions to drag culture and queer spaces in general.

> "I kind of have two dates for that, so I will always take my birth date as Ina Propriette as the day I went to dancing with the Queens. So, I didn't own a wig, I had like a doekie on my head, I think I bought like an R80 wig from Chinatown, but yeah, I couldn't even walk in heels. So that was like the birth of Ina Propriette and then two years later, in 2018, I had my first official drag show and performance. So, I think that must have been the first time I felt like a drag queen because the other times I was just like 'I'm dressing up, I'm just doing makeup' and that's what it is. But when I started performing, I was like, yeah, I think I'm a drag queen now."

Excerpt 3: Interview with Ina Propriette. See Addendum B.

To better understand how Ina Propriette understood her development and identity, I asked about when they first did drag and felt like a drag queen. The moment in which they felt like a drag queen, is in my opinion, the moment they went from simply dressing up and doing makeup and transitioned into the *embodied performance* of Ina Propriate. What is clear from her statement is that becoming a drag queen is a decision made after grappling with two separate expressions of self. The inception of the Ina Propriette persona occurred during their participation in the *Dancing with the Queens* competition. She recalled feeling unsteady and uncertain about themselves at that time and their description of the first appearance of Ina Propriette reminds me of a foal first learning how to walk just after being born. In this way, Ina Propriette was born into the world standing shakily in a pair of high heels and with an undeveloped identity born out of another. As with all growth and skill development, Ina Propriate eventually learned how to walk and strut in heels effortlessly. It was only two years later when they competed in their first drag pageant that they felt like Ina Propriette had become tangible her. This does put into perspective how one's personal, interests and ways of moving through the world intersect so beautifully in the Queer art forms.

> "... it's literally just that there is a trans-, there's a, there's a big difference between stepping out in drag and doing drag. Yeah, I think, I thought I was doing drag when I started performing, but I look back at that now and I'm just like, girl, what were you doing if we're going to be honest?"

Excerpt 4: Interview with Ina Propriette. See Addendum B.

In our interview she expanded upon the concepts discussed earlier regarding the distinction between dressing in drag and performing drag, emphasizing their role in a broader spectrum of Queer self-expression, costuming, and adornment. Much like Claude Cahun an outsider in society Ina Propriette radically revised herself through temporary alterations of their body opening new ways to navigate the world (1999, 28). What Cahun and Ina Propriette do not share is that Ina Propriette's identity grew and changed because of these temporary alterations.

She further highlighted that the genesis of Ina Propriette occurred with her debut taking place two years later during their inaugural drag performance. When I asked how they first experimented with drag and when they finally started performing in drag as Ina Propriette whom I and many others know today Excerpt 4 was her response. What I asked next was the difference between putting on drag and truly being in drag and how or if those two things were really that different. In reflecting on their past drag performances, Ina Propriette identified that she hadn't yet fully embodied who she was, while Ina Propriette represents aspects of Khoosal's inner self. It is the repeated performance of both Ina Propriette and Khoosal over time that their identities are developed as Butler presents that gender and identity are the result of repeated and changing performances (2006). The project of aligning Ina Propriette's identity with that of Wade Khoosal was far from complete.

These responses cemented the idea that performing in drag-inspired costume and being a drag performer were two different things not really in terms of format but in the way that it affects the performer and what they have created. This is something I kept in mind during the interview when I began to ask them about what being a drag queen was like when she was first coming up and how that informed her craft. What Ina Propriette reveals is that drag in Cape Town at the time that Ina Propriette was emerging was somewhat bound to certain codes and conventions that limited the scope of drag for a time. They described the style of drag performances and dress in 2016 as ‘traditional’. What I understood by that was there were certain drag conventions present in Cape Town that were rarely changed.

> “Yeah, I think, yeah, at the time also cause like my first show was called Inappropriate Behaviour. Which is so cringe, but it was very much a descriptor. that described what I was doing. I came into drag at the time where it was still very traditional and cultural in the scene, and I kind of shook things up a little bit by doing things that other Queens wouldn't dare do, like walking out without pads or with no wig or you know, with nipple tassels and things like that, that was not necessarily things, were appropriate in the scene and it was in the drag scene. So, it's funny if I think back of it how that actually played a role in my history of drag and just how I had no intentions of making this a thing. But it actually, but look, it's nice that there's, you know, substance to the story.”

Excerpt 5: Interview with Ina Propriette. See Addendum B.

Ina Propriette, ‘blazed their own trail’ when she began to compete in pageants and perform at larger events by “doing things that other queens wouldn’t dare do”. Examples cited were not wearing hip pads that help create a convincing female illusion, choosing to go out without a wig or wearing very provocative items like nipple tassels. These decisions seem inconsequential but establish Ina Propriette as a risk-taker. It is through these kinds of

provocative disruptions that drag evolved and developed new codes in keeping with the values of the community at that time.

> “And when I started clubbing, I was like 15 years old. So, I came up and watched the Queens that I'm working with today during their come up. You know what I mean? I seen them start and now we are all drag Queens together but at the time, the only release we had for drag was, you know, at the clubs as a performer, here and there and it was all driven towards female impersonation at the at the start and also the pageant system, which is major here in Cape Town. So, there's way more drag Queens in the pageant circuit than there is on stages of the city so in that way there was already an established history of drag pageants and what that looks like and because, yeah, that, that's what I mean by traditional. When I started, I also didn't initially just go and perform. I also first took my approach; I took myself into the drag pageants. So, I did like, I think I did like, 3 pageants. I did Miss Drag Ambassador, which was at the start probably 2017. Then I did, after that pageant, I actually got automatic entry as a finalist into Miss Gay Western Cape, which was the biggest pageant at the time, which still is. So, it was, it was a jump I just threw myself into the pageant system and I was like, ‘OK, let's see if I can fit this mould’ but it was always very limiting. I found that was very limiting to me. So thankfully, a year later I was performing and could like look into other parts of drag.”

Excerpt 6: Interview with Ina Propriette. See Addendum B.

The disruptive choices Ina Propriette made were a quality that persists in the visuals of Ina Propriette’s dress and performances. It also reflects how she grew up in the world of drag performance as she didn’t have a drag mother and often referenced YouTube makeup and drag tutorials to develop skills independently. I think that without a drag Mother Ina Propriate stumbled more but developed her unique and personal identity as Ina Propriette. The conventions that Ina Propriette disregarded in the development of her identity also reflected an established structure for how drag was done in Cape Town; specifically, how the pageant system has defined drag and its visual codes outside of individual stage performances.

A drag pageant closely follows the structure of a beauty pageant. The evaluation of participants in these pageants is centred around achieving a convincing female illusion, thereby restricting the creative expression of drag performers in favour of emphasising the illusion of femininity. The reason Ina Propriette described it as limiting is due to the majority of drag performers working in the pageant system. The number of drag performers involved in pageants outnumber queens who performed on stage at events and Queer spaces due to the then limited number of queer-friendly venues for drag queens to perform. Limited opportunities to develop their craft outside of the pageant system of competitions resulted in a more homogenised drag style or aesthetic that remains unique to Cape Town and South Africa.

During the following year a more positive attitude toward drag, facilitated by increased representation in the media, the available reference points for various drag styles have expanded. In the next excerpt, Ina Propriette speaks as someone who has witnessed this change first-hand as the rise in popularity of drag has occurred over the last ten years. With the rise in the diversity of drag performance styles and aesthetics, so too have the expectations surrounding drag evolved. Ina Propriette reflects on the significant differences between then and now.

Their participation in the pageant scene served as a crucible for honing their skills in drag artistry, yet it also revealed the constraints on their creative freedom. It's comparable to immersing oneself in the deep end and learning to swim. This experience also pays homage to the approach to drag in South Africa while providing a platform for the development of new ideas. When Ina Propriette was finally able to perform on stage for an audience, and not to compete, she began to explore other parts of drag artistry to develop her identity. This refining of who Ina Propriette is has also been an act of perseverance and hard work. In a medium like drag performance that is so deeply personal, the only way to achieve a result you are truly happy with is through trial and error. Ina Propriette has been very transparent about the fact that the development of her drag style and identity was the result of many mistakes, improved designs, and ideas. As Ina Propriette's work was no longer bound to the judging criteria of the pageant circuit the new freedom she found on the stage had given her opportunities to test out new looks and concepts for their drag.

The concept that connected Ina Propriette's experience and development of their drag to the framing device I proposed in Figure 8 is Lippard's view of identity. According to her the body is something that can be altered in limited ways and precedes the self while the self emerges over time and is most open to change (1999, 27–28). The resulting identity of an individual is developed by impositions between the internal self and the external world (1999, 28). However, my main concern is with the ability to project different looks and therefore selves through the "body's posture and adornments" (1999, 28). In engaging with drag and its theatrical performance Ina Propriette goes from using adornments and costumes to explore and develop herself. This progression supports the idea of embodied performance and how the performer's identity and the identity they present on stage slowly assimilate into one another. This is only achievable, in relation to my conceptualisation of 'embodied performance', when the performer infuses their personal ideas, interests, and personality into the identity they have crafted for their performance. When I inquired about this integration of self and persona, Ina Propriette

responded that while originally a character they played when they participated in dancing with the queens. This is because they never had the intention of becoming a drag performer in the first place and their involvement and interest in drag was initially focused on costuming and makeup. It is now that they feel that Ina Propriette has become an extension of themselves that they can truly explore their artistry and art form of drag.

> "I think if you asked me this like a year or two ago, I would have had a completely different answer. I think this is the beauty of like discovering artistry and what it means to you and how it develops over time. I think this is why I'm still doing drag. Even after all the hardships related to it I don't necessarily think that Ina necessarily is anything other than a character or an extension of Wade. I'm now starting to look at it a little bit more with an artistic gaze. I realise that Wade is the artist and the curator of everything and Ina Propriette is just the medium that I do that through. So, it's a very, especially over the past year it's very interesting, too because you probably see I'm getting back into trying new things. I'm trying to take all my interests and kind of put it into my drag. And a lot of, all of the things that you see Ina Propriette doing is because Wade kind of likes it. So, it's, I'm having the best time at this moment with my drag. I'm just discovering that I'm actually an artist. I've never looked at it like that before."

Excerpt 7: Interview with Ina Propriette. See Addendum B.

The time they have spent creating makeup looks, costumes, and developing wigs for Ina Propriette has allowed them to discover new artistic abilities and ideas. This creative freedom available to drag performers is what they have cited here as the reason for their continued interest in drag performance. What I also find interesting about the Excerpt 7 citation is that they view Ina Propriette as an extension of Wade Khoosal. In addition, they have also taken to approaching the further development of Ina Propriette not just as a dancer and performer, but also as an ongoing artistic body of work. Ina Propriette serves as a lens through which they channel their interests and creative abilities. This underscores that within the realm of drag, the concepts of *embodied costume* and *embodied performance*, that I have proposed, are useful guides for differentiating forms of drag which are nonetheless interwoven with elements of art, theatre, costume, and performance.

Chapter 4

4.1 Why Interview an Expert

My decision to speak with Athi-Patra Ruga was not just prompted by their prior involvement in the development of this project but also by Ruga's greater experience within Cape Town's Queer art spaces and their professional career. Juxtaposing the difference in perspective between myself, who has little experience with this community compared to someone who has a great depth of experience like Ruga proved useful in identifying concerns or failings in my research. I had some notions about what I might gain in conversation with Athi-Patra Ruga regarding the theoretical framework and findings of my project.

I based these assumptions on the conversation we had during the development of this thesis proposal, which Ruga consulted on. Since that discussion, this project has evolved and developed in interesting and unexpected ways. The biggest change has been my experiential knowledge of the subject of my thesis. In the time between when I began this project and its completion, I spoke with many community members regarding my research and gained a substantial amount of knowledge from experiences within those community spaces. In those interactions, I was privileged to see and understand the work being done by Black and Brown performers, artists, and event curators within Cape Town. When I first landed in the city in 2022, I had never seen or met a drag performer, nor had I ever attended a ball.

It was only after frequenting these venues and my lengthy conversations with their patrons over two years that I learned a great deal. I finally was able to see the true scale and interconnectedness of the Queer arts and cultural sphere in Cape Town. How it came into focus was through a multitude of moments in which Black and Brown Queer people and performers supported each other in their community spaces. Given what I had learned and how this project changed I thought it would be best to have a follow-up conversation with Athi-Patra Ruga who helped build a framework and understanding of drag and its overlap with performance art and theatre making. The aim of this conversation was to reflect on the scale and importance of drag practice through my framework − *embodied costume* as it related to fine arts practice and *embodied performance* as it related to theatre. Despite my concentration on two specific subtypes of drag, it has led me to recognise that drag is an art form with multiple histories, points of origin and possibilities in many communities through time.

4.2 In conversation with Athi-Patra Ruga

At the start of our conversation, I asked Ruga about their thoughts on the theoretical framework of my research. His past involvement in these spaces meant he could provide a different understanding of drag than myself not only as a nationally recognised artist but also due to the time he spent living and working in Cape Town. After my initial conversation where I refreshed Ruga's memory regarding our first conversation in 2021, I dove into the biggest theoretical concern in my research which was the overlap between fine art, theatre, and drag. Ruga (2023) responded by acknowledging that this is a tough question to answer even under the best circumstances due to the variability and historically varied practices of drag. Our conversation also explored concepts proposed by Bulter (2006) in her book *Gender Trouble*. Specifically, notions of performance and performativity and how our performed actions are governed by our presence in public spaces. As Butler (2006) identifies the construction of gendered identity is determined by a series of sustained and repeated performance of actions. We concluded that when in public space we are always performing or "dragging" as Ruga (2023) explains:

> Even when we wear clothes during the day or in our civilian lives, we kinda' are dragging right. To reverberate the whole 'born naked, the rest is drag', but also at the same time then if it is a performance or mask that we're putting on, there's then. I think that, that brings into question ideas of the private and public by the mere nature that there is performance. You know, I don't know if it's an easy escape. But I think that's how I've always approached it for a lack of a better word.

Excerpt 1: Interview with Athri-Patra Ruga. See Addendum C.

This immediate recollection of performing in public versus in private is a concept that addresses the notion of performativity when dealing with the subject of drag and Queer identity. It is in some ways also an echo of Lippard's (1999) 'Scattering Selves' essay where identity is determined by the public, and the self which is "constituted of change," and "defined by change" is an aspect of the inner private life expressed through the body (1999, 28). After making this assertion in our interview Ruga moves on to the core of the project's theoretical proposal which is how the elements of fine art, theatre, and drag overlap and he noted that they are in many ways "very inextricable" from one another (Addendum C). It has even had an impact on their work as they have incorporated elements of drag aesthetics and high drag in the production of their artworks and performances.

So, I'm going through this phase with, but I used my drag avatars, 'alien superstars'. To parody, to use my autonomous body in drag, in costume in basically creating these like gesamtkunstwerk sort of like things that incorporate costume performance. All of this. So, we can even approach that then on a, on a methodological or technical or formalist place. Because I think that drag allows for those things to be used and put through a formalist eye, a formalist hand or formalist palette or whatever.

Excerpt 2: Interview with Athri-Patra Ruga. See Addendum C.

The way Ruga has framed their use of drag in their work to parody or create avatars through which their concepts and ideas are presented in their artworks. The above excerpt also makes it clear that Ruga sees drag as an art form with a unique methodology and practice. Excerpt 2 also highlights how drag is also a medium for self-determination through a costume and a performance. As an artist who has worked in photography, sketching, video art, painting and more it can be said that his multimedia performance oeuvre suggests the work of an artist who agrees with the notion that the "dividing line between art and life should remain as fluid and indistinct" (Féral and Lyons 1982, 174). This is an idea that is also subtly present in my discussion of *Embodied Costume*, and *Embodied Performance* both of which seem to be present in Ruga's work. Their experience with creating artworks that have been exhibited internationally has created an opportunity to see how drag exists in contemporary art and how contemporary art affects drag performance and aesthetics.

But now I see that my work is evolving and also in that drag I am, what I was saying about linguistically opening up the idea of drag. I started out in the club kid scene, moved on to underground drag, moving on to the white cube and institution actually. It moves. It's now moving on to a place whereby my drag is about exploring. I camp masculinity, that's maybe because of East London as well, because I grew up in East London. I think East London, my growing up in East London of course, put a misandry streak me. I have a delight in not liking men. I just do. As much as I do identify as a cisgender man. I just, yeah, there's maybe that. So, I'm focusing as well on the drag. Because there's something liberating about drag and transvestitism. Drag in all these subject matters that you're exploring. But I feel that 15 years or 20 years, actually of going through that drag vibe has brought me closer to having the courage to explore the shadow side. Which is my masculinity or my masculinities, because I always feel that it's always been an exploration of one long masculinity. But now it's changing in that sense and creating the space as well has moved from drag being a parody of belonging, not belonging.

Excerpt 3: Interview with Athri-Patra Ruga. See Addendum C.

It is following this reflection on their 20-year journey working and experimenting with drag, the influence of growing up in East London, and their complex relationship with masculinity that Ruga discusses their work as an artist. In the above excerpt, Ruga notes that how he uses drag is constantly evolving and as such also provides the means for personal evolution and growth which I have proposed earlier. In his growth and career development, Ruga (2023) has been deeply involved with Queer nightlife. From my point of view having just 'skimmed the surface of those same waters', I can see how the experiences in those spaces had a profound impact on Ruga's aesthetic notions. Mostly their gravitation towards performance like Pillay and Ina Propriette as performance is "one of the few areas in public culture that is immediately understood as multiracial, gendered, and multisexed" (Hughes and Roman 1998:1). The Queer club scene, drag shows, and events like *SPECTRUM* have developed a clear, but variable, visual and performative tradition that Ruga continues to build upon. Their experience in these spaces represents a personal collection of knowledge about Queer visuality and performance that is also seen in how Tazme Pillay and Ina Propriette speak about their work and performance as sites of knowledge production. Ruga's reflections in Excerpt 3 also resonate with an idea I have proposed in this thesis, that drag serves as a profoundly personal mode of exploration. An example would be Ruga's complex exploration of masculinity which Ruga also echoes the notion that drag is liberating, especially as it allows for gendered and performative experimentation. Ruga (2023) identifies drag as a tool to be used in exploring aspects of the self that are concealed, to address the "shadow self". This shadow self is a manner of speaking about the private and internal aspects of self that drag is able to elicit in those engaging with it. Hearing this from an artist who has both experience and recognition gives me confidence in how I have addressed drag and its ability to help develop and achieve an *Embodied Identity* which represents total acceptance of the self and all its constituent parts.

> Yeah, That that is how I approach it. It is a, It is a medium. It's a, means to an end it is very much a materiality, you know, because there's some things that need to be said in drag. Do you know what I mean? That cannot be said in a tone, it, it has its own tone, its own nuances and all of that, that it can only be done when you transcend that.

Excerpt 4: Interview with Athri-Patra Ruga. See Addendum C.

Ruga foregrounds that drag has become a particularly material medium that can do things that other mediums cannot. This was also highlighted in the way that Uys and Cohen managed to use drag practices pre- and post-apartheid to address racial and political issues in unique ways nobody else could. Similarly, Artists like Cindy Sherman also address how costume and

performativity is a profound medium through which an artist can speak in specific and nuanced ways. This acknowledgement of the nuanced and tonal qualities of *embodied costume* manifests differently in each instance. Its unique qualities enable artists working with and through drag to create works that address concerns that cannot otherwise be articulated like in Ruga's *The Future White Woman of Azania* which is a persona he created and presented in multiple works.

> ...when I was doing the Future White Woman of Azania as a way of parodying Russian constructivism and also sort of like the marches that made this country. Do you know what I mean? That then becomes parade right and becomes a theatre as well. But it becomes an urban sonography becomes yeah, it has mostly urban sonographies, or nationalist or body national. It is very much about that, because the body national well, in small scale as well that body national does become. Or what I experienced when I first entered clubland and coming from a long line of people as well. Who were sort of like club people who were close to like, drag and, whatever it does become a nation. So, the Future White Woman of Azania is a tribute to the communities that we do make with drag. The idea of self-invention creating each other. All of that.

Excerpt 5: Interview with Athri-Patra Ruga. See Addendum C.

This excerpt then again reiterates the notion that performance is "multiracial, gendered, and multisexed" and Ruga (2023) touches on this by providing an interesting view into their practice as an artist. (Hughes and Roman 1998, 1). Explaining that *The White Woman of Azania* (2012) was developed and used to represent many different ideals regarding the marches that built South Africa, and the celebratory parade of the Queer community synthesised into a work. Though the ideas presented by Ruga on this aspect of community pride (2023) reference Queer utopian ideals regarding nation-building; their presence in the conceptual cornucopia of his work is evidence that drag in its multitude of forms, can address many nuanced issues in its very own language. This affirmation of the affirming characteristics of drag mirrors my observations of the community spaces I engaged with during my research, especially concerning the communities that have been built by those using drag to construct a personal identity and community spaces. It also struck me that an experienced art practitioner's concept of drag is also one of community building, self-determination and construction. This can be better understood by looking at an image of *The Future White Woman of Azania II* (Figure 13) from Ruga's series where her undefined but identifiably feminine presentation works in parallel with the notion that drag is an amorphous and constantly evolving medium much as the utopian ideal she represents − amorphous and constantly evolving.

Figure 13: Athi-Patra Ruga, *The future white woman of Azania* II (2012).
Archival ink-jet on Hahnemuhle paper 80 X 120 cm Edition of 5 (Ruga 2012)

Their work even progresses to go beyond ideas of community building and self-construction to memorialisation and presents a reverence for femininity as well. There are drag queens and artists who do drag for the female illusion and others who explore incredible visual femininity that puts them in touch with themselves which Ina Propriette also noted in our interview.

Figure 14: Athi-Patra Ruga's *Over the Rainbow: Queenz in Exile* (2017). 9' 27'' Single Channel
HD Video. Screenshot taken at 01:04.

This means that *Over the Rainbow* (2017) takes on a new meaning and context when Ruga reveals that their video work was a memorialisation of their mother's feminine essence and her presence in his life after her passing. While not initially obvious the work presents Ruga's layered and personal history with his mother and her femininity. It is very early on in the video work *Over the Rainbow: Queenz in Exile* (2017) that Ruga presents us with the idea of his mother through the use of an old passbook.

> And I'm really, really fascinated with how my life story has played out in a different way. You know, with how this evolution is going to go and drag was, is a very, very important part of it. I was talking to my partner. I was talking to my partner, and I was telling him, actually, I think that the reason why I doubled down on drag in the early noughties in Johannesburg or whatever was in a way to, to reperforming my mother who passed away like 20 years ago. I think that that's when I really doubled down and I started as a way of memorialising her feminine-ness or existence, her labour, her inner and outer life, herself, as a way of tracing whatever was happening in my life. I adopted her mannerisms. I adopted her way of dress. I adopted her like just her tone in preserving her, even in image makings draughtsmanship all of that and occupying that in drag was a very, very interesting thing. So, Yeah, I even did a video called over the rainbow which features a lot of my maternal sort of like mannerisms or objects I think then in 2017 as well.

Excerpt 6: Interview with Athri-Patra Ruga. See Addendum C.

It is here that Ruga (2023) identifies something crucial to the concept of the development of the embodied self. In their work and performances which align with my proposed framework of *embodied costume,* Ruga was able to reflect on personal and familial narratives through drag. It is Ruga's (2023) reference to their personal narrative in relation to their evolution as an art practitioner that reflects my conception that drag can be a tool for personal growth. I do however go further in this thesis, proposing that it is also a catalyst for community development as well. It is also notable that Ruga's memorial embodiment of his mother's femininity is reminiscent of how younger community members impart knowledge unto others. In this sense, I believe that his process also speaks to the community both past and present.

Figure 15: Athi-Patra Ruga's *Over the Rainbow: Queenz in Exile* (2017) 9' 27"
Single Channel HD Video. Screenshot taken at 01:22

As the interview continues, we discuss their work on *Over the Rainbow* (2017) and Ruga (2023) highlights this work as the high point of their drag practice and how it helped them heal. While I don't analyse drag as a tool for healing that brings relief, and peace, in detail in many subtle ways it is. I have reflected in this thesis at numerous points on how drag can be used as a tool for confidence building. An example is my discussion of SPECTRUM and how those who attend and walk the runway at such events transcended fear to find bravery and self-confidence in the expression of their embodied self. There is also the aspect of drag serving as a tool to unearth concealed or suppressed elements of the self. These suppressed aspects may be a result of not having had an outlet for expression, as highlighted by Pillay. It is the unique ability of drag as an art to create the conditions for acceptance and recognition of the self as a

complex whole that enables the realisation of the embodied self. It is in these moments within the wider discussion of drag as an artistic tool for community building that reveals its ability to heal wounds.

> So that's the high point of my sort of like drag practice so far and I think that it became a healer because art can do that for the artist and hopefully a community. But for me it really was me just collecting like all these images to make peace with something. ... Performance is memorialisation.

Excerpt 7: Interview with Athri-Patra Ruga. See Addendum C.

Our conversation then re-addressed the structure of my conception of drag, embodied costume and embodied performance the former aligned with art performance practice and the latter related to theatre practice. When I presented Figure 8 to Ruga who raised concerns about the discrete categorisation of drag practice, its functions, and abilities being reductive. I explained the diagram and its intended purpose, to express visually the interrelated nature of the development of performance art and theatre-making conventions as having a direct relationship to the development of drag and its current conception in a contemporary context. I also acknowledge that the diagram is somewhat reductive and fails to take every possible overlap between these disciplines into account but is beyond the scope of this project. Ruga's (2023) problematisation of this diagram did provide a fresh perspective on my research and an opportunity for critical self-reflection in keeping with the critical dialogue of the insider/outsider researcher (Smith 1999:157).

> On one side it's good, but I think that as someone who has a studio practise and I'm not a theoretician about it. Maybe I, maybe I'm not so well informed. Of course, I've got experience in it. I think that from experience this speaks to sort of like how it is consumed. So, it links to both of those circles. I think the radiating circles. When one tends to categorise it, it starts becoming coded. And there's two ways in which that coding kind of like that, that categorising can go, it can go very right and conservative, it can go very left and liberal, for better or worse, you know. And that could stifle an idea, and I think that, that is what the Hayes code has sort of created in mannerisms that also informed drag right. ... It's serious business and that's why maybe communities form from it because of its redemptive qualities. You know?

Excerpt 8: Interview with Athri-Patra Ruga. See Addendum C.

Ruga (2023) situates himself as a studio practitioner and not a theoretician foregrounding his experiential and implicit knowledge of the spaces observed and researched by myself which makes his criticism even more incisive. Ruga raises concerns about how categorising and

coding drag and its ideas or concepts open them up to be easily consumed and reduced. It is the creation of discrete categories and boundaries for such a fluid medium that Ruga (2023) problematises here but highlights that it is a tool for creating community space. I aimed in this study to avoid neatly packaging drag performance practices for consumption without recognising the complex interstitial nature of the creators and contributors to the evolution of drag. It was during my presentation of the categories of *embodied performance* and *embodied costume* that Ruga (2023) alerted me to the possibility that I had imposed boundaries and limitations on drag practice through its relationship to performance art and theatre-making which I disagree with. Drag as a method of artistic production has very few limitations despite having a clear visual and performative language that is identifiable. What has occurred here is that by coding drag in specific ways I have opened up a discussion about the intersection between all three areas simultaneously which I failed to discuss here. While I am now aware of this issue that Ruga has raised we seem to agree that drag is a serious tool for community development.

Chapter 5:

This final chapter reviews my research questions, namely, how drag, performance art and theatre intersect to affect an audience, how drag has been and is being used to create safe spaces, and how these spaces are being used to serve their community. While I have identified safe spaces for Black and Brown Queer people in Cape Town, South Africa based on my research. I have also identified strategies and proposed methods by which safe spaces were produced based on the interviews conducted which were augmented by personal reflections. Furthermore, this chapter serves to address some lingering concerns regarding the interpretation of my findings. In order to clearly answer these questions my research has posed a general review of the research done will address those concerns and subsequently address my key findings and recommendations.

5.1 Methodology and History

This inquiry was an investigation into the organisation and creative work of Black and Brown Queer people, specifically drag performers, artists, organisers, and other creatives working within Cape Town's Queer urban centre. The initial research question was how is inclusivity, self-expression, and self-respect, produced through the development of a conception of *embodied identity*. The methods by which I investigated this holistic aspect were through case studies of historical figures, interviews, and direct interaction within these safe spaces and their patrons. These site interactions granted me access to the community members responsible for these spaces and provided a greater ability to understand and observe social connections relating to inclusivity, self-expression, and self-respect.

The case studies selected looked at both Kewpie 'the daughter of District Six' and William Dorsey Swann 'the first drag queen'. In my research, the latter provided a point of origin for the word 'drag queen' in the public record and set a precedent for its relation to civil action, community building, and safe space creation amidst difficult circumstances. It is interesting to note that the work of Swann is not simply important for their identification with the term 'drag queen'; also notable for their fierce determination to create space and protect their community in post-civil War America where "there was very little patience for men who subverted gender norms" (Joseph 2020:25). Swann's direct intervention during police raids of their home resulted in Swann's imprisonment and the earliest record of "specific legal and political action to defend the Queer community's rights" when they demanded a pardon for their crimes (Joseph 2020:25). This particular case study provides some of the criteria for how I linked the

Black and Brown Queer creative and performance community in Cape Town to their work as both community leaders, artists, performers and activists.

The second case concerned Kewpie whom I had incidentally encountered on a visit to the District Six Museum in 2018. What made this encounter significant is how it shaped my understanding of District Six, my family history, and my Coloured identity. This is due to Kewpie's life being well documented and heavily photographed leading to the publication of *Kewpie: Daughter of District Six* by Marsden (2019). In this book, a collection of images and testimonies showed who Kewpie became and what she meant to her community. It is through the opening of her salon and frequent appearances at parties in and around District Six and beyond that we see Kewpie create spaces for a Black and Brown Queer community to congregate and freely associate before the Group Areas Act of 1950 (District Six Museum, n.d.:para. 4), which further disrupted an already fragile community.

It was Swann and Kewpie who provided the basis for the research questions and concerns regarding how the present Black and Brown Queer communities functioned, connected, and produced safe spaces for their community members. What I discovered is that while Swann is not known within these spaces, Kewpie is a figure who is immediately recognised and whose legacy is well respected as the spaces they created are not too dissimilar to the spaces I experienced during my research.

Events organised by Tazme Pillay the creator of The *Death of Glitter*; Ina Propriette, who has become a visible drag performer, community member and leader; and the growth of the balls hosted by *SPECTRUM* share much in common with the spaces Kewpie developed in her hair Salons. This precipitated an ensuing question, namely, 'What was the most efficacious way of organising the research material and evidence gathered to accurately reflect the narratives and lived experiences of this community, its organisers, and the research participants'.

It was through employing an autoethnographic methodology; specifically, the methodology proposed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), in her writing about colonial research methodologies and her attempt to rectify it through her insider/outsider approach. Smith's writing provided the *compass* for my method of research and the contextualisation of the narratives and testimonials I received. Furthermore, it provided an interpretive mode for qualitative research related to the Black and Brown Queer community with whom I had contact. It provided an adequate way for me to reflect on the past and present state of the research participant's lived experiences and a way to use their narratives as the focal point of my research.

The methodology also permitted me to include multiple narratives and perspectives to better contextualise the evidence generated by the research. It is the emphasis on individual experiences and narratives that laid the foundation for my understanding of the role drag plays in the creation of safe spaces. By directly asking community members questions about why they come to these spaces, and how they are organised, curated, and performed I grew to understand more about these temporary spaces and passing moments of collective joy.

It was an effort to consider these multiple narratives and contexts that brought me to the notion of intersectionality, a field of research pioneered by Kimberle Crenshaw (2013). To understand my position as an 'outsider', I had to understand the complex role that identity and geographical space played in the lives of the research participants. It was Crenshaw's (2013) conception of intersectional identity and how one can be simultaneously burdened and privileged that brought the context of my research into focus. Given the multi-cultural, multi-racial, and stratified nature of social class within Cape Town, her theory provided a method by which to account for this complexity. Crenshaw's (2013) initial essay 'Demarginalizing the Intersections of Race' used a two-pronged intervention to expose institutional oppression and how complex and intersecting identities will have vastly differing experiences despite their similarities. Another benefit of intersectionality theory is its ability to build upon and adapt to context-specific inquiries without essentialising the subject of my research. Having found a method for my research, the next concern was how to understand the mode of knowledge production occurring in the spaces I entered as a researcher. While autoethnography demonstrated that there are multiple ways of knowing and learning, these safe spaces are emancipatory projects "better served by alternative knowledge production" (Wall 2006:para. 6 citing Stivers (1991:3)).

In considering the necessity of these spaces, one cannot ignore the historical and current criminalisation of Queerness. Statistics reveal that Queer individuals are four times more likely to experience violent crimes and persecution (Stoltz 2021:para. 7; Humandignitytrust.org n.d.:para. 25). This is especially true for Black and Brown Queer individuals. The identified safe spaces in the research offer a refuge where people like me can gather, feel secure, and seek solace and healing within our community. The creation and identification of safe spaces for Queer people is what made this research pertinent and important. Through the investigation of how Black and Brown drag performers and communities use their art to create safe spaces, I learned how these spaces serve their communities. When I asked people why they came to *SPECTRUM* and walked its runway, most people said it created a sense of confidence amid the support and cheering of their community. It is a space that is targeted at helping rebuild self-

confidence and granting a platform to Black and Brown creatives and community figures such as Ina Propriette who stated they had been invited multiple times to participate as a judge. It is within the ballroom that there is a widely accepted but critical eye for multiple modes of queer self-expression facilitated here. The space was conducive to the generation of new ideas, community connections, and artistic production. Therefore, the safe spaces I discussed were conceived as "aimed at promoting the production and distribution of knowledge against the backdrop of intersecting systems of oppression" (Anderson 2021:285). This investigation has made the emotional and psychological benefits of these spaces known as they promote the development of community bonds and structures.

5.1 Literature and the Contemporary Conception of Drag

After introducing the topic and relaying the present state of drag produced by Black and Brown Queer people, a review of the history of both theatre and fine art was required to contextualise drag and its varied performances. Outlining the elements of performance art and the history of performance art was straightforward. On the other hand, however, tracing the complex nature of theatre history, despite having no formal training in the discipline, proved harder. The resultant literature focused on how performance became recognised as a fine art medium and the practice of cross-dressing from the Elizabethan theatre to the contemporary; especially as both fine art practice and theatre-making have significant overlap with drag conventions and practices.

In my research on performance art, the discovery of the connection between Dada and the development of contemporary art was fascinating. At the time the Dada movement was formalised around the 1930s, many had fled parts of Europe for Switzerland and specifically Zurich where the cabaret Voltaire created Dada. What made this art movement so unique was its unconventional modes of work and its outright rejection of traditional European artmaking. The movement's creators instead blended painting, sculpture, poetry, dance, and costume and are also credited with the invention of the 'assisted readymade' and the practice of making art with 'non-intentional' actions. The first is the result of Marcel Duchamp's works, cited by Goldberg, where he combined and recontextualised everyday objects into artworks (Goldberg 2011). The second defined the methods of Hugo Ball's poetry writing where random combinations of sounds were selected for his poem 'Karawane' (1916) which he performed in a strange costume (Figure 3). It was also Hugo Ball who formalised this group of artists under the name Dada with the publication of their manifesto in 1916.

Following the advent of WWI and the start of WWII, artists who started producing works at the time, immigrated to the US, creating an opportunity for cross-continental and interdisciplinary collaboration. This new collaborative mode of working, inspired by the contributions of the Dada, was pioneered by The Black Mountain College and the New School in New York City. Here students merged dance, theatre, poetry, and art-making similarly to the Dadaists creating the format of 'live art' (Goldberg 2011:138). Live art is characterised by the making and creation of an artwork before a live audience as opposed to a private studio. It was at these schools where cross-disciplinary collaboration and study produced new forms of art that merged multiple mediums and disciplines. This mode of art production in collaboration with other disciplines like dance, music, and theatre only grew and preceded Kaprow's happenings (Goldberg 2011:130). When Kaprow coined the term, he was producing events where multiple actions occurred simultaneously before an audience which became a popular format for artists in the 50s and 60s. However, this 'movement' was never unified under a name or manifesto and simply progressed in multiple forms. The multiplicity of the forms 'happenings' took on ensured that "every performance constitutes its genre, and every artist brings to it, according to his background and desires" (Féral and Lyons 1982:174). What 'happenings' did for the world of art, was return the responsibility for interpretation and finding meaning in art to the audience viewing the performance.

The aforementioned reflects the post-modernist turn at the end of the 20th century indicated by Roland Barthe's essay 'The Death of the Author' (1992). His essay also prioritised the reader's interpretation and ability to find and make meaning from a 'text' as each understanding of the text would be based on their subjective experiences with it. The development of this kind of thinking also coincided with the integration of dancers and actors into artistic works who understood the body in space. It created circumstances where the representational qualities of the human body became its medium for the creation of artworks.

The next turn in art history was the development and formalisation of the conceptual art movement that furthered the recognition of performance as a medium for artistic production. The conceptual art movement, like the 'assisted-readymade', recontextualised everyday actions and gestures as artworks. As for how this happened it was the artist who reinvigorated interest in the conceptual frameworks behind the creation of works of art. It produced a new kind of art in which "the material was concept" and the object merely the signifier of those concepts (Goldberg 2011:152). This provided the perfect grounds for performance, a

representational medium, while still being difficult to contain or collect was ideal as conceptual artists resisted the commodification of their works.

The formalisation of performance art as a medium in the late '60s and '70s served as the impetus towards it taking shape. The problem with attempting to define performance art is due to its variability, which is why I defined performance art using four criteria defined by 'The Ting: The Theatre of Mistakes' (1976). These four elements were defined as time, space, body, and their relationship to the audience. Using these criteria, I found three artists and artworks that succinctly demonstrate the capabilities of performance art and how it relates to drag as an art form today:

1. The first was Piero Manzoni's *Living Sculpture* series produced in 1961(Goldberg 2011:148). In this work, Manzoni recontextualised the everyday person's body and actions as works of art. At the event, Manzoni would sign the individual's body and provide them with a certificate to state that they were an "authentic and true work of art" with certain constraints. His living sculptures required the artwork to meet specific conditions or perform specific everyday actions for that artwork to come into being at that moment.
2. Marina Abramovic's *Rhythm O* produced in 1974 followed a similar line of thinking (Goldberg 2011:119). In her work, she presented herself and her body along with 72 objects for audience members to use as they saw fit. In this way, she reframed her body as the work of art in progress as well as the canvas while the audience and the objects were the artists and artists' tools. It was her deferral of responsibility in stating "I am an object. During this period, I take full responsibility." That emboldened people to participate even in violent ways (Ward 2012:119). This work by Abramovic reframed the nature of the audience and the artist's relationship in performance art in a terrifying way.
3. Cindy Sherman's seminal *untitled film still* series was produced between 1977 and 1980 (Lippard; L. R. 1999:28). In her series of images, she made herself the subject of her work through the creation of characters and identities based on film and Hollywood archetypes using costume. She in turn created multiple versions of herself, represented in her images, essentially constructing a new persona or identity with each iteration. It was the use of self-transformation that made these images performative works much like the way that performance art is captured after the fact through video or photographs.

All three of these works provide thought-provoking views on performance art and the way it is produced by the artists and its audience. However, Sherman's contributions link directly to a concept that Lucy Lippard explains in ‘Scattering Selves’ (1999). This formed the basis for how I framed drag practice and its relationship to art and theatre. Lippard defines the separation between identity, which is imposed based on sex, gender, sexuality, and visual presentation. Body, which is the physical container of the self whose identity is projected but cannot fundamentally be altered, and third, the self, the internal aspect of a person that is defined differently by others. Lippard (1999) proposes that the body can be adorned and altered to create a different perception of the individual's identity and can simultaneously be a reflection of the individual's self. Thinking of performance and its construction in this way is why Sherman’s work is so effective as she has a grasp on their interrelated aspects. It provides a way of thinking about how performance art is structured and can be created. This ultimately provided the context for how drag practice considers drag identity, persona, and its effect on the performer or artist.

This discussion thus aptly introduces my discussion of the long tradition of cross-dressing and gender subversion present in theatre from the Elizabethan era. It is before the proscenium arch, with actors playing carefully scripted roles, and the imagined narratives and setting that the practice of cross-dressing in theatre is seen. While the practice is prominently recorded at this time, there were instances of it before this. During the Elizabethan era when women were barred from performing on stage, men performing Shakespearean plays often took on female roles. It was the convention of young men or prepubescent boys playing female roles dressed in women's clothing to present a convincing female illusion on stage (Senelick 1993:80). While the practice continued into the 18th century, women began to enter the theatre and perform on the stage making this practice largely redundant it continued with men playing undesirable or unsexed characters. This also coincided with the branding of homosexuality as deviant and its criminalisation. While this practice continued it led to the development of glamour drag and the male impersonator who are roles that allowed Queer expression to persist despite the circumstances (Senelick 1993:80).

The reason for its ability to persist in the theatre is due to the guise of comedy or a cautionary tale as “a man in female garb is apt to appear awkward and ungainly”(Senelick 1993:81). While audiences accepted cross-dressing and gender subversion on stage, it was not tolerated outside of the theatre but allowed many to circumvent sodomy, and dress laws inadvertently creating the practice of Queer coding. As the practice grew in popularity theatres, cabarets, and Revues,

prided themselves on their ability to present a convincing female illusion. This is when a shift from frumpy, unattractive, and unsexed characters presented through cross-dressing become sexually desirable characters within the narrative of their shows. However, there remained a catch that it would only be permitted in the theatre as a part of "school theatrics, circus stunts, and minstrel wenches" (Senelick 1993:85). This practice then helped create the term drag and the unique circumstances of a practice that while praised on stage was liable to have you arrested in public and in private as was the case with William Dorsey Swann.

When considering this historic practice and its general acceptance in the theatre the post-modern turn in the 20th century opened new avenues for cross-dressing on stage to be utilised in new ways. Following WWI and the change in attitudes to institutional conventions new modes of theatre and practices were developed. The first was Brecht's epic theatre and the Verfremdung's Effect which created a didactic mode of theatre that directly addresses the audience (Wainwright 2023). It creates a situation in which the audience is brought to realise that what is on stage is a retelling or account of past events relevant to that audience. The second was Grotowski's poor theatre which reduced the ostentations of the theatre to its essential parts, the actors, the space, and multipurpose props (The Grotowski Institute 2012). The aim was to obtain the strongest effect with the smallest number of elements. The third is Lehmann's conception of the 'post-dramatic' theatre where the goal was no longer a mimetic enactment of the text but the use of a narrative to convey political or politicised ideas (Wilcox 2020:2). It was through the inclusion of real events and socially charged locations and themes that he created a theatre practice that addressed political concerns openly in public settings to convey a clear message.

These theatrical modes with their ability to address certain ideas and subject matters create the possibility for cross-dressing. It also addresses greater concerns through these theatrical modes, especially within South Africa after the end of our cultural isolation in 1994, creating a new hybridised theatre. South African theatre then began to use Western theatre practices and integrate performance styles from Indigenous cultures to create unique narratives for "site-specific ritualised performance" and "notions of embodiment" that are central to my conception of drag practice as it is enacted in the contemporary (Pather and Boulle 2019:3). Examples of this that have been discussed in the earlier chapters of this thesis are the work of Pieter-Dirk Uys and Steven Cohen who have both used drag as a method by which thay have made political statements relevant to their own identity as well as the social and political context of South Africa. In Uys' case we see a parodying of conservative National Party values through the

character of Evita Bezuidenhout. However Cohen makes use of drag differently in their performance art pieces that address tensions between those same values and the values espoused by the new South African government and constitution in a country that remains in tension.

5.2 Contemporary drag and performance

Drag today has become an independent art form with roots in both fine art and theatre practice as illustrated by the review of related literature in Chapter two. It is this complex and changing evolution of drag that was assisted by both disciplines which presented many ways of permitting Queer expression. While the areas of research for this project have been of a wide range and reach far into different areas of study, it is still primarily focused on and based on how Black and Brown Queer people use drag to create community spaces and structures. What was observed throughout the last two years is the growing presence of drag in mainstream media and the creation of safe spaces, particularly within Cape Town. This growing presence is also seen in these community spaces with artists referencing drag aesthetics and drag performers being consistently present as well. This growing presence of drag in these safe spaces has also solidified the informal linguistic, and visual codes of drag in the consciousness of its patrons.

Drag is a medium unlike any other as it is a tool to explore the masculine and feminine to the extreme while remaining rooted in concepts around Black and Brown Queer identity. These performances of our own identity have become crucial, in my view, as to how concepts of self are constructed by community members. Contemporary drag's ability for self-representation and its ability to create mutual understanding between performer and audience has been the key to understanding how it influences community development. The interview participants whose responses on are reflected upon in Chapter Three, made it quite clear that these spaces, projects, and art forms cannot survive or thrive without a deeply interconnected network of mutual respect and understanding. Ina Propriette a drag queen whose work within the more traditional drag genre, represents the concept of ‘embodied performance’, and has inadvertently become a community figure, while remaining true to both themselves and their community. Tazme Pillay who is the creator and event organiser for the *Death of Glitter* in turn represents ‘embodied costume’ due to their greater focus on ‘drag happenings’ that straddle the line between art, performance and event co-ordination. While both practices are built upon the

concepts embodied by drag, they represent two of many modes of self-construction and self-actualisation through realising the ‘embodied self’.

While all of this reflects the ideas Judith Butler (1988) presented regarding gender is the result of repeated performances that create gender distinctions I have demonstrated that repeated performances can also allow access, to learn about, and construct oneself. As stated previously, there are a multitude of ways to achieve the goal of an ‘embodied identity’ by examining all of these possibilities which for now remains beyond the scope of this project and remains an area for further research.

The focus of this research was simplified by looking specifically at the overlap between performance art, theatre performance, and drag performance in this way. While the Figure 16 infographic represents my earlier analysis of that overlap; Figure 17 is indicative of the reality of the ways these disciplines more accurately overlap providing a sense of the large scope of interaction and how it reaches beyond the scope of this research paper.

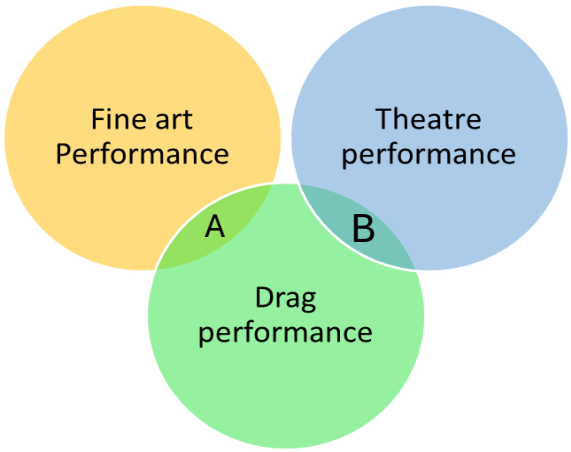

Figure 16:

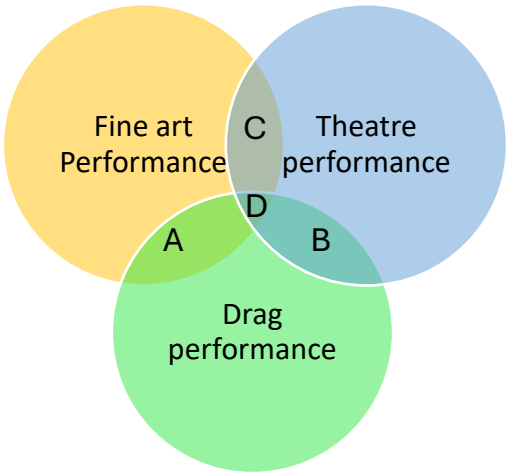

Figure 17:

I am delimiting the scope of this research by focusing on two interview participants specifically Pillay and Ina Propriette, in relation to my conceptions of 'Embodied Costume' (A) and 'Embodied Performance' (B). In reflecting on their statements, I identified connections between Pillay's work and the concept of 'Embodied Costume,' and similarly, I observed how Khoosal's creation of Ina Propriette aligns with the conception of 'Embodied Performance.' Both interviews demonstrate methods of embodying aspects of the self through their work, entertainment, and the creation of spaces for others. Despite subtle differences, both approaches contribute to the realisation of their 'Embodied Identity,' where their work and roles represent different facets of the same individual.

5.3 Key Findings:

This research project has investigated and explored the vital role of drag performance communities and their role in the generation and sustainment of safe spaces for Black and Brown Queer people in Cape Town, South Africa. This research project was initially inspired by Kewpie in a visit to the District Six museum many years ago and has used her story and that of William Dorsey Swann to determine if contemporary Black and Bowen Queer people use drag and construct community spaces in a similar way today.

What was first identified was that drag as a medium can be used as a tool for self-expression and community building. It was through many informal and some formal interviews and self-reflection that revealed the many ways in which drag has empowered individuals and communities. It is the ability of drag to provide the space to explore identity and foster self-confidence and connections with others. This is easily exemplified the safe spaces created by *SPECTRUM* and *D.O.G.* that both provide space for performers, artists, and their patrons to showcase their talents, receive support and build meaningful community connections.

It is also through the intersectional nature of these community spaces and the diverse range of possible experiences that were also recognised. In these spaces and the wider context of Cape Town the effect of race, class, and sexuality were also prominently seen in my observations of Queer spaces in this urban centre. While these safe spaces and drag has the ability to unify a community there are a number of varied experiences which identified the need for an intersectional approach to community building and safe space creation which seemed to be happening implicitly in Spaces like *SPECTRUM* and *D.O.G.*.

My research also helped me bridge the gap between drag performance, performance art and theatre history in a manner that provided context and understanding and in my overview of each provided understanding of their overlap and shared history better. It is the shared history of each of these disciplines and there are methodologies that allowed me to understand drag and develop ideas such as embodied identity. I saw embodied identity as the result of embodied costume and embodied performance which both allowed individuals to explore their identity and to self-actualize through the acceptance of the totality of the self-propose by Lippard (1999).

While these are the findings of my research, I believe further study and investigation of the subject matter is needed. Especially in regard to expanding the scope from the research focus on a small set of community spaces and individuals from one city to various Queer and drag

performance spaces across South Africa. Widening the scope in this way would provide invaluable research and understanding of Black and Brown Queer communities and the role drag and performance has on their maintenance and development. A wider investigation of the subject would also create opportunities to observe the broad social impact of drag and Queer community safe spaces and how they resist and challenge of discrimination while upholding inclusive values. There is also the possibility for such socially engaged research to allow community members, artists, and various organisation to offer insight and further empower these communities to shape further research.

What this research project has done is to underscore the importance of drag in proliferating safe spaces for Black and Brown Queer community members. The community spaces I observed provided platforms for self-expression and fostered community connection in a way that challenged societal norms through drag and promoted both individual and community health and well-being.

Addendum:

A) Tazme Pillay Interview Transcript

Cape Town, 11 August 2023, 19:48 pm

Aaron

So can you please just state your name and the current date for the record.

Tazme

Hi, my name is Tazme Pillay. It is the 11th of August 2023.

Aaron

And you consent to being recorded?

Tazme

Yes.

Aaron

Alright. Then the first question I have to ask is using Drag Mother as your stage name and the name under which you DJ. I saw from your last performance; that you stepped back from highly… What's the word for it? Highly exaggerated and drag-inspired dress for that particular instance. But is that something you continue to do?

Tazme

That's a very interesting question and-

Aaron

Or is it, or is that an incorrect assumption?

Tazme

No, it's an interesting observation because you're not incorrect, but I suppose what it comes down to, and I suppose what's most important about that fact, is that. I myself, Tazme Pillay the artist have never considered myself, like a drag Queen and Dragmother has never been a drag persona. Dragmother has always just been like an inherent part of myself, and I think that when I first started, like, working in nightlife and like when I found Dragmother. When I decided, 'Cool. I'm gonna DJ enter this name, it's Dragmother' etcetera. I think I went to like the extreme of trying to figure out who she was, what she was, etcetera. So, I already would, you're quite correct, I would really exaggerate the way that I dressed. I would experiment a lot, but honestly like, over the past like two or three years. I would say that I've completely settled into the realisation that Dragmother is just like actually an inherent part of myself. So, I think there's a sense of like comfort that has now arrived with who Dragmother is, and I no longer feel the need to do that, in order to express the existence of this thing. I feel like I've just assimilated into her very much. 100%, yeah.

Aaron

OK, that has been very interesting because in my academic research, especially when comparing this with Theatre and Performance Art history. There's just been this consistent term of the characters and the way in which people perform these things as being nothing more than an extension of the self.

Tazme

Exactly.

Aaron

So, what parts of you would you say are being highlighted and emphasised through the character of Dragmother?

Tazme

I would say honestly, like going back though, I feel like when Dragmother like, when I first started performing as Dragmother, I was very new to everything. I was a new D, I was new to like, throwing parties everything was just very new. And then I didn't have like a frame of reference or any sense of experience. So, a lot of the time I was kind of just like. Appropriating is not the right word, but I was referencing a lot in the way that I presented as Dragmother, and I was experimenting with what Dragmother meant for myself. I think the biggest mistake that, not a mistake, but I think what I was doing was looking at Dragmother as kind of like a character or a persona. What clicked for me was the sense that like Dragmother's, just the parts of myself that I had never previously had an outlet to express. So, when I was finally given that outlet, or rather when I made that outlet for myself, I kind of just like vomited everything up at once and I was trying to make sense of it. But now I feel very settled in it and very confident and kind of very like, I don't know. Dragmother's like grown up she's like a mom now, she's a mom. She's like a real mom and I'm okay with that. I feel like I don't have to like present Dragmother as this thing that is, you know, she would always be like, in huge fucking heels all the time. She would always be in like, massive shoulder pads. She would always be based on like, pop stars. But I don't need that to be her image anymore because Dragmother isn't an image. Dragmother is like, yeah, Dragmother is just like an energy, she's an energy that I have to embody in order to do the work that I do. Yeah.

Aaron

A very interesting word that has just come up a lot in my thesis and I still have trouble outlining and defining it is that term, embodiment. How is that embodied? I think the next question is rather interesting, given that you've worked with local and international drag talent. How is it that you've seen working with them and how they've embodied the people that they become when they're on stage? Because I feel like that's quite an interesting question given that you are very much an insider in terms of Queer club culture within Cape Town and especially with your connections to drag.

Tazme

It is really interesting. In a lot of ways, I mean, what's the analogy? In a lot of ways for me watching those performers and those artists, it's almost like becoming a superhero in a big way. It's painting on this like, it's painting on this- God, what's the word? I don't wanna call it armour. I don't wanna call it… It's painting on your truth in a way and it literally, yeah. It changes the

way that like, they perceive themselves in the world. I don't know? OK, hold on, repeat this question. Repeat this question.

Aaron

OK. Embodiment is an interesting term in my thesis, and you've worked with local and international drag talent. Working with them. How do you see the way that they embody their personas? The person that walks onto stage to perform?

Tazme

Right. I think it's important to note though that like, firstly drag is not acting. So, when it comes to like this idea of embodiment, what I see people doing is accessing something that is already inherently inside them. Like if I think about my friends who are kind of like, you know, your typical drag Queen artists. If I think of them outside of drag, there are parts of themselves that drag just intensifies. I think that's the most beautiful part of it. It's kind of like this idea of drag being a key that allows you to like, unlock inherent truths about yourself that you may otherwise not have the space to express. The embodiment aspect of it is beautiful and powerful because it's watching someone truly just like, access a part of themselves that they don't always have the power to do, or they don't always have the space to do. So, I feel like, the idea of embodiment, it's always there. It's in the body. It's a very somatic thing, but sometimes it takes the adornment, sometimes it takes the decoration, sometimes it takes the transformation for the somatic to become the external, and to then also allow people around them to like, experience the beauty of the fact that they can find that truth within themselves as well.

Aaron

Yeah. All right. This is actually something I think you may have already answered, but I'd love to hear your thoughts regardless. The difference between the embodied drag Queen and simply dressing and drag. What is it that makes dressing and drag, cross that threshold to embodying a drag Queen?

Tazme

This is a complicated question for me because I think you need to define what you mean by dressing in drag what does that mean?

Aaron

That means simply taking on the aesthetic qualities of drag performers and drag performance without actually doing the work of embodying who that is. What does this person represent, as you've mentioned before, and it highlighting what it is that was in them?

Tazme

OK. OK. I think okay, but I’m just gonna put this out there. I think like, the thing that I've also been grappling with, this idea of like a drag. Like, what drag means right is that I think the idea of drag has really become pigeonholed into like this… This idea of people like putting something on in a really big way and maybe… This also bleeds into like, your first question about like, oh, why does Dragmother no longer look the way that she does? I think it's because I've kind of come to realise that the notion of drag actually sometimes fails because the notion of drag sometimes adheres to like, certain kinds of like constructs and concepts that, aligned

with heteronormative, hierarchies or gender binaries, etc. And the idea of putting, you know, putting that on that is other than yourself. I started looking at drag very much as not something that is outside of myself, but something that is myself. I think what's happened for me personally is like the aesthetic of Tazme and the aesthetic of Dragmother has aligned and almost become… Like irrevocable from each other because it just is. It is my being, it is who I am. So, I don't think that answered your question at all.

Aaron

No, actually, that, it didn't directly answer it, but it did give quite a bit of material and insight into it.

Tazme

Because okay, also to like, getting on to your question. There's definitely a difference between like. If we're going to use the term drag in that sense, it's definitely a difference between a drag artist and someone playing dress-up. Yes, like, completely like anyone can play dress up like anyone can kind of like appropriate what they believe to be this thing. But the difference with the drag artist in my opinion is that it comes with a sense of like performativity and it comes with a sense of intention. That intention is the thing that like I don't know just kind of like, unlocks. It's almost like, fucking quasi spiritual. I don't know. It unlocks something inside you that makes you that thing, you know, it's not… Drag Queens are not playing dress up, drag artists are not playing dress up. They are just being their most truthful selves in the most extreme way, and I also feel like it's a thing that's necessary in a world where like doing that is… You kind of almost have to do that in order to like, disrupt because at the end of the day like, the entire idea of drag is about disruption, right? As long as we live in the world that we live in where we are still kind of like adhering to heteronormative values and gender binaries it's about disruption. Yeah, and that's I think that's also kind of why drag looks the way that it does, in a lot of ways, it's disrupting that norm.

Aaron

All right. I'm just going to take a step back from my questions and refer to something that is at the very core and start of my paper, which is my, which was my initial case study. Which was uh, Kewpie and her place in District 6 as a Queer person who owned her own business and then also did drag and organised spaces for drag to take place. Yeah, which at the time she called Moffie Balls. Yeah. Do you see that kind of thing happening in drag today where they have become central to Queer community organisations? Not intentionally, as a result of, I want to be a drag Queen who does this, but incidentally, as a result of becoming such a, such a public figure who does drag?

Tazme

Yes, absolutely. And I think the important part about Kepies history and something that we need to recognise is that I don't think Kewpie would have identified with the term drag Queen. I don't think Kewpie would have like, recognised herself as a drag Queen. I think Kewpie would have recognised herself as Kewpie like she just you know, she was who she was and like when she *geeshed* up, and when she went out to Patsy like, That was her truth. I don't think that Kewpie would have like intentionally called herself a drag Queen in that sense. But yeah, 100% like if you look at the way that, I would say our kind of like, Queer nightlife culture has evolved

over the past three years. There's been a massive kind of influence and rise in balls in Vogue culture, in ballroom culture that has come back in a huge way and it's being led by like my incredible sister CC. Who's been doing a lot of work that I believe relates very much to the legacy of what Kewpie was doing back in that day. Yeah, so, I would, I would 100% say that like at this current moment at this current point in time, that's what's coming into the fold and very much driving the way that the culture is moving forward.

Aaron

Alright, let me see. Something that's very big in my paper is I'm specifically looking at Black and Brown drag Queens from South Africa and within Cape Town specifically. You've worked with international and local acts again. What do you, what is an identifiable difference that you've noticed between international acts and local acts in terms of their references, their reference material?

Tazme

I can't wait to answer this question. Okay, so firstly, let me just give you like a bit of an anecdote. Actually. So, like a couple of months back I went to go watch Manila, Luzon perform at District. And as I was standing there and I was watching Manila Luzon, this, like, super famous, RuPauls Drag Race Queen perform. I was just taken by the fact that like our local Queens are insanely talented. Insanely talented like they completely outperformed the Fuck out of her. For me it was this realisation of the fact that like, our local Queens in terms of like this idea of like referencing or taking from, etcetera, the spirit of drag in our country comes from resourcefulness and it comes from a place of like resilience. These are people who had nothing to work with, these are people who weren't, you know, visible, these are people who were constantly, like, pushed to the margins in such major ways. They've created this entire culture, this entire language, this entire kind of like, you know, movement for themselves in such a big way. I think that's a very necessary thing to remember about, like local drag, especially in South Africa is the fact that like, I don't think it references anything but itself in a big way. Sure, like it's very pageant based, you know, It references the shit that people were seeing in like, magazines in, like the 60s it references fashion. But what it's done, it's been created as its own thing entirely. I wouldn't say that like, our local drag scene is influenced by any of the shit that's happening on Like RuPaul's Drag Race or any of like, the kind of like, mainstream ideas of drag that have now like, bled into... If anything, I feel like our local drag scene has seen that and been like, oh, okay, but we been doing that. Let's just do it better.

Aaron

Speaking of the *SPECTRUM* events? When I first arrived here last year, to actually see a drag Queen perform for the first time, I saw Maxine Wilde and Ina Propriette perform at The 41. Then shortly afterwards, a few days later, I went to *SPECTRUM*. Uh and it was a mind-blowing experience.

Tazme

Have you spoken to CC?

Aaron

No, I am trying to figure out how to find who organised *SPECTRUM*.

Tazme

Oh my fucking God. Wait, hold on.

Aaron

Returning to *SPECTRUM*, your thoughts on this newly burgeoning and blossoming Vogue and ballroom scene in Cape Town? I mean, from what my own first-hand experience it's a different world. It's magical.

Tazme

I think it's fucking beautiful. So, for me it's been very, it's not complicated for me. It's been interesting for me. It's been interesting and kind of complicated because I've been working within Cape Towns, kind of like Queer community and nightlife scene for like Six years now, it's been a very long time. And what I started realising over like, actually it was since lockdown and since things have started like reigniting. What I've seen in all the balls kind of like occupying this space that is really necessary for our community. And I think that's very beautiful because I feel like. What I, what I've been doing had a very particular space and purpose prior to that and I think that now the culture is moving in a direction where they are already resonating with what's happening in terms of like the ballroom scene. In my opinion, I think it's great because it's also like, It's appealing to the inherent sort of like, discourse and culture of the very young, Queer generation. We're talking about, a generation that has mostly grown up on like, social media, right? We're talking about a generation that for like 2 years of their lives couldn't go out. So, to then come through and find the space where you are celebrated for being yourself and there's this idea of affirmation for living your truth I think it's beautiful and extremely inspiring. So yeah, when it comes to things like *SPECTRUM*, I think it's very much the zeitgeist right now and it's inspiring me to like, rethink the way that I create and rethink the way that I create nightlife. That being said the thing that I love most about *SPECTRUM* and the thing that I love most about like what CC is doing with *SPECTRUM* is the fact that it's so unlike how like, Queer culture and nightlife happening in Cape Town prior, where everything has been a competition. This is not a competition. We're building things together and that has always been very intrinsic to the way that both like, her and myself create things. We've always been like if you're doing this I am not competing with you I am supporting you. And if we wanna do something together, we do it together. If you are like experiencing this incredible amount of success, I am there with you holding your hand and saying 'fucking well done. You deserve this' because the thing that we both know is that it's not about us it's about like our community, it's about our people. That's why we do this work. So, if we're doing something that inherently clicks with the community at this point and gives them a space to feel welcome, a space to feel, I hate the word safe, I'm going to use the word brave, a space to feel brave. A space to, you know, accept themselves in a major way, or come to terms with themselves, then that's amazing. So yeah, I think I'm incredibly inspired by it. I'm incredibly inspired by it

Aaron

This what you just said is related back to several points from my first chapter and a half of my thesis. I was also struggling to make the distinction between safe spaces and brave spaces because safe spaces are things that already have existed in Cape Town.

Tazme

I think safe spaces like I've always hated the term and the word safe spaces. I've never personally called my space safe because the truth is the spaces that we create are challenging. They're not safe, they're challenging. I think when you use the word safe, it's a complicated, it's a very complicated thing because of course there are certain degrees practically. There are certain degrees of safety that is entirely necessary. For example, you need to like, make sure that your people are protected from assault, protected from abuse, protected from verbal abuse, etcetera or whatever. But like the idea of safety I feel really traps a space into this thing of not being able to create discourse that expands it. I think the spaces that both CC and myself create are challenging, and because they are challenging, they're brave. So, therefore, we ask you to be brave, yeah.

Aaron

No, that's giving me a whole new set of terminology to work with, but last question was actually about you again. Specifically, your work as a, your recent work as a contemporary artist, I've seen bits and pieces here and there that have been published of your performance artworks as well. As a Brown Queer person living in Cape Town who engages with Queer culture and drag aesthetics often, how do you think, how do you feel that does or does not impact your work as a contemporary artist? It's a bit of a, I know this question is a bit of a shot in the dark, but it is also a very interesting question.

Tazme

It is a complex, it's not a complicated question, but I suppose the question is maybe not phrased correctly because I feel like it doesn't impact my work, I feel like it is my work. Yeah okay, like it is my work like that is my work. When you say like engaging with, like drag aesthetics or like Queer community of Queer culture. That's my work like, that's what I do and that's how it manifests and in terms of contemporary art, what do you mean specifically?

Aaron

I mean, specifically, your artistic production, your artworks that you produce as an artist separate from the work that you do organising spaces.

Tazme

I can't separate that shit. That what's interesting though is… okay.

Aaron

No, not separating those spaces is also interesting in and of itself.

Tazme

I can't. I can't separate them because for me, the way that I've always approached the *Death of Glitter* is as like a Gesamtkunstwerk. It's a huge artwork like I've been making huge artworks my entire life. I've been, like, creating these huge artworks. I suppose the stuff that you're talking about has come from like the work that I've been doing with the Kutti Collective and that has also kind of been a challenge. Because, as a part of the Kutti collective which is a collective of six South Asian diasporic artists who like, work and operate in South Africa. We

kind of came together to form this, like, collective that champions the visibility of art from like the South African, South Asian people. Everyone else in the collective works in visual mediums. I don't trade in visual mediums. I never specifically have traded in visual mediums, but when it comes to things like, we've had group exhibitions, and we've had group shows and I go like, What do I show? What do I make and what was really beautiful for me was this idea of like, I'm going to distil, I'm going to distil my artwork, which for me very much is my body and turn it into a tangible object. How do I take what I do on my body and in a space, and how do I distil it into a thing? So, I can't really separate it but what I can say is that it's kind of like rethinking the way that I've always created art.

Aaron

All right, I've found similar thoughts in speaking back to that fact that you produce these artworks, these continuing artworks that do not have a way of being contained. They are not something to be bought and sold. They are environments, ways that you express.

Tazme

Okay, and so, environments, yeah, completely. What about that?

Aaron

What about that is… It seems like a dumb question but how do you get there? How do you do that continuing work and frame it as an artwork? I mean, for me, I mean, if someone writing in art theory, how would you frame that to someone like me?

Tazme

I think you can't prescribe it to the very traditional notions of art. What does that mean? Do you know what I mean? I feel like when it comes to the idea of like, traditional art very much based on like, a history, or a very European rhetoric that determines that this is art and I don't adhere to that. I adhere to the complete opposite and if you are creating something. If you are inherently creating something, and if that something is moving people if that's something is saying or commenting on whatever. If that has something to say and it affects the way that people think after experiencing it, for me that is fucking art. You know, I don't have to pick up like, a paintbrush and I don't have to paint on the canvas. I don't have to, like, take a photo and put it in the fucking gallery. I don't need fucking galleries. I hate galleries. Galleries are awful. They must die. But the idea for me is that art is something that like, it comes from a space of like, radical creativity and however it manifests, if it's saying something, and if it is challenging something then I think it's valid. It doesn't have to look a particular way or be a specific thing. I think that art is, your art is whatever you want. I don't know. My art pop could mean anything.

Aaron

Okay. One final question, this is mostly more for me personally than it is for the actual thesis, but I think your comments could be very interesting. Yeah, I mean, you said you hated the gallery space and something that I've noticed since the first time we've ever spoken and had an interview and met with each other. It’s completely shifted the way I look at the gallery space, the gallery is the place to market art, but I found that in my experience and from what I've seen, club culture and Queer community spaces are new areas of artistic production and do you agree with that and what are your thoughts on it?

Tazme

Yeah, they are. Have always been. Listen, when I started the *Death of Glitter*, right? I started it very much as something that was based on the idea of happenings, and I have always collaborated with artists. That's always been what I've done. I've collaborated with like, I don't know, like fucking Brett Sailor. Like artists who are showing in major galleries, but I've been like, here's a space for you to just create with no intention to sell. With no intention to market, with no intention to like, I don't know, think about like the machine or like the commerce factor of the art world. Like I just want you to like, go crazy because isn't that what we do as artists anyway? that's all we want to do. Do we actually want to sell art or do we want to just make art? So, like, why don't we just create a space for each other to do that with each other? And for me, absolutely I feel like Queer spaces like *SPECTRUM* and the *Death of Glitter*. We've set them up as kind of like−Like thinking labs or each other like the ideas that are the ideas that come from being in that space with each other is insane. *SPECTRUM* cannot exist without the *Death of Glitter*, and also vice versa. You know, they're like, think labs for all of us. It's like Andy Warhol and the factory.

Aaron

OK. Thank you very much for your thoughts and for your comments.

Tazme

You're so welcome.

B) Wade Khoosal / Ina Propriette Interview Transcript

Zoom call, 13 August 2023, 20:00 pm

Aaron

Hi can you please state your name and your stage name for the record as well as the current date?

Ina Propriette

Hi, my name is Wade Kusal. I perform as Ina Propriette, and it is the 13th of August.

Aaron

And do you consent to being recorded?

Ina Propriette

Yes, I do.

Aaron

OK, great. In that case, I'm going to start firing questions off at you. Umm, to tell you the truth, you were the first drag queen I'd ever seen, ever met in my life. And your show at the 41 last year. April, I think was the first time I'd ever seen a performance.

Ina Propriette

Oh my gosh. That was a while ago.

Aaron

So, I want to ask you about your first encounter with drag.

Ina Propriette

My first encounter as like a performer or as like, a when, when I first discovered drag.

Aaron

No, just with the- Just when you first discovered Drag as a concept.

Ina Propriette

Oh well, that probably happened when I was around …I was still in high school, probably. I used to attend the Miss Gay Western Cape, which is now known as Miss Gay sovereign Western Cape. It's like a pageant, a major pageant in the Western Cape and my friend, mentor, slash teacher, slash dance coach, he was the one who took me through to Miss Gay Western Cape one night and it that was back in 2012. So that was probably my first interaction with Drag. That was at the CTICC and Latrice Royal from Drag Race was also one of the entertainers that night. So that was my first introduction to drag as an art form. I'd obviously seen drag performance as this stuff in, in the gay clubs and stuff, but I didn't pay it any attention. It was just a show on the stage if that makes sense, but yeah, that was probably my, my first introduction. It was wild. It was wild because I didn't, I wasn't watching Drag Race at the time,

and I wasn't even out of the closet yet, so I had no idea what the hell I was looking at. But I knew I was intrigued.

Aaron

It was, it very much was my experience with seeing you performing on stage for the first time. It was something I've never seen before, and it was just like what is happening in front of me, what is going on? I am so interested in this, but I… There's no con- because I've never seen it before. I had no concept of what it could look like.

Ina Propriette

Yeah, that's exactly it. It was just like weird, but at the same time, you look at it and like, I kind of want to do that. You know what I mean? Yeah, it was, It was that.

Aaron

Then that that leads into my next question. Why did you first decide to try drag, why did you first decide to do that?

Ina Propriette

I never wanted to do drag. I was convinced that I was just gonna' do makeup. I used to say, I know, I remember, my sister used to tell me you're going to do drag one day. I was like, no, there's no way in hell because at that point, I'd already started university and I was staying on my own, and I was just playing around with makeup at home. I literally started out of, you know, the Tommy Takkies, one of those shoe boxes I had. With just like cheap-ass foundation in it and a liquid liner from Chinatown and that was how it all started, and I wasn't convinced that this was something I was going to do until, like probably a year or two later, 2016. When I was able to take that makeup and put it into something that I was good at, which was dancing, so I was a, a trained Latin dancer and we, I think that time they came up with the competition called Dancing with the Queens. So that was a Latin, and ballroom competition, but for males only. I suppose that description has to change nowadays. But yeah, that was it, that was pretty much it, I was now able to mesh the two worlds. This newfound love of makeup and dance and kind of bring it into one … There Ina Propriette was formed. That was how it started.

Aaron

OK, so that's how you first got into doing drag through a Dance competition.

Ina Propriette

Yeah, a dance competition believe it or not.

Aaron

And it all started with the Tommy takkies shoe box.

Ina Propriette

Filled with cheap makeup, Oh my gosh dream matte mousse, Maybelline dream matt mousse. What a terrible product. But yeah, it helped, It helped.

Aaron

So then, when given that that was the first time you engaged with and interacted with drag, when was the first time you stepped out on a stage in full drag? Hair and makeup and padding and a whole outfit? When was that?

Ina Propriette

I kind of have two dates for that, so I will always take my birth date as Ina Propriette as the day I went to dancing with the Queens. So, I didn't own a wig, I had like a *doekie* [small cloth] on my head, I think I bought like an R80 wig from Chinatown, but yeah, I couldn't even walk in heels. So that was like the birth of Ina Propriette and then two years later, in 2018, I had my first official drag show and performance. So, I think that must have been the first time I felt like a drag queen because the other times I was just like 'I'm dressing up, I'm just doing makeup' and that's what it is. But when I started performing, I was like, yeah, I think I'm a drag queen now.

Aaron

Umm, in some of my other interviews and discussions there's, we were actually discussing a transition from first just putting on drag and actually doing drag as two different things. So, that Dancing with the Queens was when you first put on drag and that was when Ina Propriette first began to exist. Two years later is when Ina Propriette had her debut where she came out on stage as Ina Propriette and felt real for you.

Ina Propriette

That is correct. That is exactly it. You should actually come to the Beefcake show because I literally explain a little bit of that history in that show, but it's literally just that there is a trans, there's a, there's a big difference between stepping out in drag and doing drag. Yeah, I think, I thought I was doing drag when I started performing, but I look back at that now and I'm just like, girl, what were you doing if we're going to be honest?

Aaron

I mean, everybody starts somewhere, so it makes sense.

Ina Propriette

That is true.

Aaron

Then the big question is, where did you come on the name Ina Propriette? I get the word pun and I love word puns, but where did the name come from?

Ina Propriette

So, during the Dancing with the Queens times, I was obviously at the rehearsals a lot and the director or the person who started dancing with the Queens. He was the one who was like, 2 days before the competition, was like you need a name, you need a drag name. I was like, no. I'm not doing drag, I'm not a drag queen, I'm just going to go as Wade, and after this, we're going to, you know, keep it pushing. He insisted I come up with a drag name and at the time I was religiously studying and watching a dancer, her name was Ina, Ina Jeliazkova. She's like a I don't know where she's from, if I want to be honest, but she she's….

Aaron

Sounds Russian?

Ina Propriette

It could be I have no clue. She doesn't look Russian though, but she's got that nose. She was an amazing technical dancer and I, she also had like a very nice playfulness to her dancing which I enjoyed because I always found that when I was a dancer I was focused so much on the technicalities of it. I was also able to, you know, have some rhythmical aspects, and have fun with it. So that's what I took, I liked her for that reason. So, Ina comes from her name and propriate is because I'm a dumbass. I'm just stupid, I'm just stupid, I thought it would be cute to add something funny to it and not make it sound too serious. A little bit more playful, so yeah, Propriette was formed. I even spelled it specifically, 'ette'. So, it looks a little bit more feminine, a little bit more softer. I initially planned on having my name be Ina Propri-ette.

Aaron

Right.

Ina Propriette

You know, but no one could do that.

Aaron

OK.

Ina Propriette

No one caught on to that, so I guess we just Ina Propriate now.

Aaron

OK.

Aaron

Well, I mean it's a great pun and it's a great, it's an interest, it's a great story to hear how your personal interest inspired the beginnings of the name but then you made it your own. You made it something new.

Ina Propriette

Yeah, I think, yeah, at the time also cause like my first show was called 'Inappropriate Behaviour'. Which is so cringe, but it was very much a descriptor. that described what I was doing. I came into drag at the time where it was still very traditional and cultural in the scene, and I kind of shook things up a little bit by doing things that other Queens wouldn't dare do, like walking out without pads or with no wig or you know, with nipple tassels and things like that, that was not necessarily things, were appropriate in the scene and it was in the drag scene. So, it's funny if I think back of it how that actually played a role in my history of drag and just how I had no intentions of making this a thing. But it actually … but look, it's nice that there's, you know, substance to the story.

Aaron

OK, so I'm especially, you're, just actually, I would like to hear more about what drag was like when you first started coming up. I mean, you just described it as being very traditional, uh, what do you mean by that drag being traditional? It sounds like such a, traditional drag sounds like such an oxymoron.

Ina Propriette

Yeah, it does. I think the tradition, traditional is maybe not the correct word. Maybe cultural a little bit more because the drag performance and things like that was, were ingrained. It was part of the Queer culture at the time. And when I started clubbing, I was like 15 years old. So, I came up and watched the Queens that I'm working with today during their come up. You know what I mean? I seen them start and now we are all drag Queens together but at the time, the only release we had for drag was, you know, at the clubs as a performer, here and there and it was all driven towards female impersonation at the at the start and also the pageant system, which is major here in Cape Town. So, there's way more drag Queens in the pageant circuit than there is on stages of the city so in that way there was already an established history of drag pageants and what that looks like and because, yeah, that, that's what I mean by traditional. When I started, I also didn't initially just go and perform. I also first took my approach; I took myself into the drag pageants. So, I did like, I think I did like, 3 pageants. I did Miss Drag Ambassador, which was at the start probably 2017. Then I did, after that pageant, I actually got automatic entry as a finalist into Miss Gay Western Cape, which was the biggest pageant at the time, which still is. So, it was, it was a jump I just threw myself into the pageant system and I was like, 'OK, let's see if I can fit this mould' but it was always very limiting. I was found that was very limiting to me. So thankfully, a year later I was performing and could like look into other parts of drag. But my first experience was, I once I became fascinated with the history of the gay pageants and all the documentaries that you can find on YouTube, I became almost like a little encyclopaedia for Cape Town drag I could tell you which year which Queen won and what they wore and so, I became a little bit of a fan girl with everyone or for everyone. I don't even know how to explain that, but yeah, there was a standard of drag when I started and my gosh, has that changed.

Aaron

Yes, I mean, looking at some of the photographs you, publish, uhm on your social media accounts, I mean, I'm seeing blue and white and yellow eyeshadow extending far beyond the eye that it's actually sculpting the face.

Ina Propriette

Yeah, sometimes my eyeshadow goes underneath my wig.

Aaron

You've expanded your repertoire and expanded the ideas of how to do drag makeup. In the ways that you've done it, I found it very interesting to see all of the looks you've turned over the last couple of months.

Ina Propriette

Mm-hmm. I think, yeah, when I started, like I said initially, it was a makeup thing for me. So that was always the fascination. That was always what I was interested in and I always,

everyone asked who's your drag mother and I'm just like YouTube because that was where I went to for every single thing. I went to YouTube for, every single thing, for makeup.

Aaron

That's where you learned.

Ina Propriette

A lot of what I've learned over the years, actually majority of what I've learned over the years is trial and error. I did it all on my own, I just did something and if it didn't work it didn't work. If it worked, we would, you know, adapt it a little bit more to see if it can be better. That's always how I approach it and yeah, a lot of my Instagram now is curated a little bit more than it was in the past. I still have a lot of my old things in archives but it's very interesting. Sometimes when I get, and I just get very nostalgic, I sit there and scroll through old videos and pictures and I just like my gosh, what the hell was I doing? But look where we are now, I'm really proud of how far I've come, especially with the makeup thing.

Aaron

OK, then I want to move on to the next question. So, you've essentially told me a little bit about when you first started to settle into who Ina Propriette was and it's clear that she is an amalgamation of your dance skills, your make-up interest, and your willingness to push boundaries in quote-unquote 'inappropriate ways'.

Ina Propriette

So yeah, I think yeah, go ahead.

Aaron

I mean my question really is when you're getting ready to do for example a show or you're getting ready to go out in drag because that's what you're doing for the day. How do you get into the headspace of who Ina Propriette is? Or is that just simply, 'OK? I'm going out. I'm just putting on makeup and now it's a different name.'

Ina Propriette

I think if you asked me this like a year or two ago, I would have had a completely different answer. I think this is the beauty of like discovering artistry and what it means to you and how it develops over time. I think this is why I'm still doing drag. Even after all the hardships related to it I don't necessarily think that Ina necessarily is anything other than a character or an extension of Wade. I'm now starting to look at it a little bit more with an artistic gaze. I realise that Wade is the artist and the curator of everything and Ina Propriette is just the medium that I do that through. So, it's a very, especially over the past year it's very interesting, too because you probably see I'm getting back into trying new things. I'm trying to take all my interests and kind of put it into my drag. And a lot of, all of the things that you see Ina Propriette doing is because Wade kind of likes it. So, it's… I'm having the best time at this moment with my drag. I'm just discovering that I'm actually an artist. I've never looked at it like that before. I always knew that I could do a lot, I had a lot of skills I could sew; I could do makeup; I can style hair; I can do that, but I never looked at it as an art form. You know you, sometimes when you, you feel a little bit, almost … You feel it to be a little bit pretentious to call yourself an artist, but

that's just purely because you don't necessarily look at yourself with enough confidence, or you just have a poor self-esteem. Now that I'm kind of like becoming comfortable with Wade, I'm starting to realise that, 'hey, I'm actually a bad bitch.' You know what I mean and that's translated through, Ina, in how I how I approach that.

Aaron

Yeah, I mean. I also remember lecturers in during my undergrad telling me over, and over, and over again. You don't have to wait until you have your degree to call yourself an artist. You can just do that whenever you want to, as long as what you're making feels like art. It's interesting because that is initially what why I wanted to do this thesis. It was to question how, where, and in what ways drag is an art form. I've realised that drag is some, it's not performance art, it's not theatre. Drag is an art form in and of itself. But then you've described yourself as an artist using Ina Propriette as the canvas, so-to-speak. So then where do you, aside from the things you told me, how you inspired, for example, put together a new look for, Ina, to get to wear or a new act. For her to perform.

Ina Propriette

But this this difference. I think there's facets to it I look at just doing a look or 'cause I love a theme. I think that's just the gay thing. Every gay person that I've ever met loves a theme and when it comes to especially-

Aaron

Halloween is our Christmas.

Ina Propriette

Exactly! You know what I mean? So, with the Vogue Balls what I really like about that is that it has themes attached to it, so you can curate a specific look because you have this idea that as a drag queen, when you kind of have to look the same every time you know, you have to have a staple, a standard, and everyone does. Everyone has their go-to face, their go-to look, their go-to aesthetic. You know what I mean, everyone has, like, their go-to, but with the balls you have that one opportunity to like step out of it, step out of that comfort zone so that keeps me on my toes when it comes to, you know, let's try a different look. Let's try a different style in that regard when it comes to performance. I realised when I started at Beefcakes that I actually love storytelling and I like telling my own story because I'm, I think that's where- I am a little bit of a narcissist. I will just take it, it's my show and you are simply to share in that with me, but I don't do it in a way that's off-putting. Obviously, I love engagement with the audiences, but I'm always ready to be a little bit vulnerable. I feel with the audience because it makes you a little bit more, makes the audience a little bit more comfortable. It's not just you coming to watch me shake my 'titties' and you know, tip me, it's more so you also walk out of this with an experience of something else. That is how I approach my performances so I like to tell stories. I like to have a beginning, middle and end. Yeah, I completely forgot the question, but I'm also just enjoying thinking of … Look, I don't ever think of drag as much as people think I do. It is something that is so innate and just something that comes to me because I just want … I will have the idea today to do a mohawk and I will just go into my room and start taking out hair and making a mohawk because it was the thought of the day. I don't think too much about it. It's just something that I'm interested in, and I engage with that interest.

Aaron

Okay. Then you have answered my question about the what inspires the choices that you make for Ina Propriette because you've discussed and explained to me essentially how she just sort of- its organic. She just happens because you keep doing the things that make it happen.

Ina Propriette

Yeah, a lot of… yeah, it's that I don't know. I think to me, yeah, I try not to think about it because if I do think about it, I don't like what I'm doing. This is why I think it's important for me to look at it as Wade, performing as Ina because when I was just adopting Ina Propriette as a persona and as a person, and everything became so personal to me. So, everyone who said anything about what I was wearing, it would literally put me in tears. I would be upset it, you know, it was unhealthy to me as a person, but when I stepped out of Ina Propriette and looked at Ina Propriette, as a piece on its own. It is now easier for me to just do what I want to because at the end of the day, no one can say that what I'm doing is right, no one can say I'm doing is wrong, but they can say that it's damn fierce.

Aaron

Yes, I wanted to ask you about your experiences with the ballroom scene. In a different interview, it was described as a as a brave space, not a safe space per se. I mean, safety is obviously one of its concerns and it's one of its primary reasons for why it's so popular, because people feel safe there. Mostly because it's an exercise and it's an exercise in self-expression and brave self-expression. So, have you been to events like *SPECTRUM* and the ballroom scene and what has that been like for you? Why do you go there?

Ina Propriette

Yeah, I've … I've been to those events, but ballroom in Cape Town has also changed a lot over the- like rapidly changed over the past couple of years. Sorry, my cat is trying to sit on this laptop.

Aaron

I have one of my own, I understand.

Ina Propriette

Shame he's being needy now because I closed the window, so he wants to go out. But yeah, when I- we used to do drag balls. When I started doing drag and it wasn't as important as it is now, it didn't represent as much as it does now because people didn't understand it. People just thought it was a fun time. It's just another party to go to. So, we had it was a little bit less restrictive in that sense, but now times have changed and people are becoming a lot more aware of who they are as people. This is why the idea of brave space instead of a safe space is applicable because it does take a lot of courage to step out, especially at an event like *SPECTRUM* or something, and just be. I haven't done it as much, as much as I would like because they always asking me to judge the damn balls. I still, I've got major anxiety. I remember there was a ball years ago at *Zer021* and it wasn't even like a *SPECTRUM* or like a major ball but I knew that I, because I was a dancer, I loved voguing but I was very, very scared to go and walk the ball. Like I fully had a panic attack and was crying in the bathroom. It was bad, and sometimes that anxiety still comes up, but I think because now the space has changed

a lot people are not there to, you know, mock you, or judge you, or all of that. The space has become a space of. ‘We’re gonna celebrate you. Even if you fall on your face here’. And that is what I love about what ballroom is becoming in Cape Town. It can be better. There’s a lot of elitist behaviour and it'' very inaccessible still but it is a lovely space for someone like me, a little millennial who doesn’t understand that- the young kids, or they, they just think differently. We often are threatened by it, but it shouldn’t be, the space is becoming. It’s still developing, it’s still developing and I’m glad that I’m part of the beginning, the ground works of all of that instead of seeing the end result − makes me more excited to partake.

Aaron

OK. And we just have 10 minutes left. So, then I'm going to round out with one last question that refers back to one of my core case studies that started with, wasthe beginning of my research. I first researched William Dorsey Swan, who is the first person to have been documented using the word ‘drag queen’ as a self-determining title. And then the next person I came across was, uh, Kewpie the daughter of District 6 and reading her stories about how she was an independent person running her own businesses, hosting Moffie balls and performing occasionally as Capucine in drag, for example. Not that she would necessarily call that drag, but she performed this character. I think it's interesting that she, incidentally, became a public figure as a result of what she's doing. How do you feel about that? I mean, you are now a very popular drag queen, people see you on Beefcakes’ roster regularly. They see you out and about. They go to events because you're there. How does it now feel to have accidentally become a very big public figure for Queer people through drag?

Ina Propriette

It's, that's very odd actually, to hear people say things like that, because I still don't understand it. In that same vein, I don't look at it like that necessarily, which is, I don't know if that is its own issue, but I'm becoming more aware that people are actually looking at what I'm doing with a different perspective than I intend. That hasn't actually scared me at all because a lot of people always come to me say that the main reason that they like what I do is because I'm just so legit, and I'm real, and I'm authentic in every single step of the way. So, it, it's like, it never hurts to be yourself that's how I look at it you know what I mean? I’m gonna just be me and that seems to be enough. But I remember at that same vogue ball where I had a panic attack, that same kind of era. Someone, what was the photographer’s name, Khamaldin? All I know is his surname was Khamaldin.−He was documenting ballroom culture at the start of all here in Cape Town as well, and he told me. He sat there in the bathroom- because I did the Kewpie exhibition as well, where I opened and closed it , I was very involved in all of that, as well as the Kewpie project which was used to raise funds for the museum. So, I understand Kewpie, I relate to Kewpie. I get it −and he sat me down in the, in the bathroom that one day and he told me you are the next Kewpie, and I did not understand that at first. What he meant I was like, I literally just put on this lash and wrapped the tablecloth around me and called it a day. This is nothing, imagine if I actually sit down and do the work what then? But it didn't make sense to me so the idea of being a public figure has really made me look into my own life a lot more and making sure that Wade is OK because you know, there's substances left, right, and centre in the scene. There's everything bad. I've been guilty of abusing all of those things so I'm trying to be aware of, even though I'm still a very much an inappropriate person or queen and anything goes with me. There are things that are serious and there are things that are not and as long as

I understand that what I'm doing is not intentionally trying to like steer people in the wrong way, I feel OK. I don't feel too much pressure just yet with all of the- I actually enjoy it. If I'm going to be honest because now people are recognising me outside of drag, which I never thought would be the case and I'm just walking to go, and things in canal walk and people are coming to me telling me they like my TikTok's it's wild. The new age of TikTok also is really doing things to put, not the art form necessarily on the map, but us as individual artists on the map and I'm grateful that drag is not as mainstream here or not as accepted here, because now I have an opportunity here to put my community on that map. I wouldn't ever look at that as something that is a cross to bear. That is, if anything, that's the reason why I should be doing it because we are *kwaai* [translate this colloquial language] man. You know what, I mean, I don't even know if I'm making sense.

Aaron

Like you're making a lot of sense. You're actually very, very clearly illustrating and talking about what you're, what you want to say.

Ina Propriette

Yeah, I, I'm trying my best to cause I know I can ramble cause I look at these seven ideas at the same time. Yeah, in essence, the idea of being a role model to people, it's cute, but I think we all should be role models to one another, you know, treat the next person next to you the way you want to be treated. I am a firm believer in that and in that way, everyone can be a role model for someone, and I think that's what Kewpie also represented at that time. It wasn't about the fact that Kewpie was gay or doing drag or anything, but she brought people together and that is the beauty of art in general.

Aaron

Yes, and that's that was essentially the,uhm, the-, and the core question, core thought behind the entire project is:What is it about drag and Ballroom etc. that brings people together, why do people chase after it, why do people chase after the people who perform in it, and you're beginning to answer those questions for me.

Ina Propriette

I'm glad. I'm glad.

Aaron

And yeah, I think at this point I will say thank you very much and stop recording if that's alright with you.

Ina Propriette

That's OK.

C) Athi-Patra Ruga Interview Transcript

Zoom call, 27 September 2023, 15:38 pm

Athi-Patra Ruga

OK, got it.

Aaron Adriaan

Can you just please just state your full name and whether or not you consent to being recorded? Just for the record.

Athi-Patra Ruga

Hi, my name is Athi-Patra Ruga and I am an artist living in Hogsback in the Eastern Cape, but working wherever, wherever I can. And yeah, I consent to this taping and questioning.

Aaron Adriaan

All right, great.

Aaron Adriaan

So, we discussed my work. My thesis proposal last year, specifically how I was trying to study and understand drag as a form of performance art and how it is tool for artistic production and community building.

Athi-Patra Ruga

Yes, that's perfect. Oh yeah, I remember that conversation. God so much has changed, as drag is. So much is in flux, you know. So yeah, if you can catch me up to what points are made. That would be interesting because I'd like to also just know cuz I'm at the moment I'm working on something.

Aaron Adriaan

OK, well, then I'm very glad I printed out a copy of my first chapter to discuss. So, I'm just going to go over the biggest points. I'm not really going to talk too much about the methodology and like the rationale behind it. But I originally came to this project due to my experiences with the District 6 Museum and discovering who Kewpie was. Then I discovered I wanted to unpack the social phenomena of drag, specifically Black and Brown drag queens, and how they always seem to be at the centre of queer artistic and cultural production, whether incidentally or intentionally. So, the question I was asking was how Black and Brown drag performers, their work, and how and why Black and Brown Queer people find joy healing and relief. Specifically, how they experience or do they feel similar expressions of self, love, and joy during events hosted, organised and curated by Queer people and by drag Queens? I discussed briefly my research regarding insider or outsider positionality, and specifically how I am both inside and outside of this Community. As a Brown Queer person who explores concepts of gender, I am very much a part of the conversation, but at the same time I don't live, work, and reside in the areas that I'm studying, which is specifically Cape Town's urban nightlife scene. Then I discuss how intersectionality theory is being used to prime my conversations around privileged socioeconomic oppression and how it affects Black and Brown Queer people as

another layer added to our Queerness. Being something that we have to defend and protect, and how safe spaces are generated by us, for us. Then larger socio-economic discussions. Yes, assistance on the intersectionality theory, but I then after doing my research on that, I just came on this idea of the term 'being'. How do you, how are we being people, how are we being ourselves, who are we as beings? That word really stuck out in my first draft of my first chapter, and it started-. It became the central focus of my work as I was going through and like, how do we embody ourselves. Then it became about how certain things about ourselves are embodied through drag and Queer expression. Specifically different, different ways of self-actualization through social and community connections as well as self-expression and experimentation through houses or drag mothers, which I will refer to in the next section.

Then I do some reading on that and Queerness reflecting on an existing body of information that is both textual and verbal. Contemporary drag queens build on this existing information through the ways that they engage this medium and how they communicate ideas through their work and pass it on to others. In the same way that I have. Through the way they engage this medium and how they communicate ideas through their work and pass it on to others in the same way that I have knowledge of Queer social practises Black and brown social experience. I understand outside aggressors to that Queerness. In a quote, I found by Sarah Wall, was that emancipatory projects are better served by alternative knowledge production. That's where I came onto the idea that drag and Queer curated events, even nightclub events, etc. Are new forms of Queer knowledge production. Very similar to the avant-garde happenings in the 60s and 80s, we've just reinterpreted that format. New ideas and then. I go into the history of two case studies specifically William Dorsey Swann, who was the first person in recorded history to call themselves a drag queen, as well as make hosting drags, is what they called them, but essentially parties so people could dress up in drag and cross dress. And demanding a pardon for these supposed crimes from the United States President at the time also being recorded as the first action of Queer rights advocacy.

Athi-Patra Ruga

OK.

Aaron Adriaan

Kewpie's salons and how she created those spaces and how I'm asking whether or not queer people are still creating those spaces. I mean, she used her salon as a way to allow people to, Queer people, to express themselves, participate in what she called, at the time, Moffie balls. And yeah. How in which drag queens move through artistic spaces? Then Derek Anderson states 'should be, argued that safe spaces should be reconceived and aimed at promoting the production and distribution of knowledge against the backdrop of intersecting systems of oppression, and that is more or less the gist of the theoretical outline of my paper from chapter one.

Athi-Patra Ruga

OK.

Aaron Adriaan

Now you've got a sort of overview. I'm actually going to begin by asking a question. About how drag and performance art and theatre influence each other. That is the basis for the theory

and idea that I'm putting forward in my second chapter that explains my entire process leading up to this point. I just wanted to have your thoughts on how drag is now an independent form, but also heavily related to Fine Arts and theatre.

Athi-Patra Ruga

Ohh, dear. You're asking a tough one.

Aaron Adriaan

It is a tough question.

Athi-Patra Ruga

Even when we wear clothes during the day or in our civilian lives, we kinda' are dragging right. To reverberate the whole 'born naked, the rest is drag', but also at the same time then if it is a performance or mask that we're putting on, there's then. I think that, that brings into question ideas of the private and public by the mere nature that there is performance. You know, I don't know if it's an easy escape. But I think that's how I've always approached it for a lack of a better word. What is the third part of it?

Aaron Adriaan

How drag?

Athi-Patra Ruga

The three elements and then theatre. Oh ,okay so is drag performance in the theatre and then while you were mentioning those last two ones. I think that they're also, in a way yes, very, very inextricable, right. That would be the word inextricable because of course, one of the many ways in which performance finds expression is through, like through theatre. So, it would depend on what the word theatre is and what potentials in language can the word theatre, I don't know expand or blow up to be. Do you know what I mean? That makes it I'm just going into it slowly. Because then, and then just going to use these three terms.

I know that in my work at the moment I'm exploring a different kind of drag. I don't know if this has anything to do with your work, but I'm just going to use you as my, my studio therapist. So, I'm going through a place whereby I used to perform high drag. Of course, high drag to an extent that it became sort of like contemporary artified, which we can maybe one day speak about its consumption. How this expression and consumption empowers or doesn't empower those who are its original creators. Like the Kewpies and whatever, right? Because that also links them to, I don't know. To something it's important that, where it comes from is they are artified. So, I'm going through this phase with, but I used my drag avatars, 'alien superstars'. To parody, to use my autonomous body in drag, in costume in basically creating these like gesamtkunstwerk sort of like things that incorporate costume performance. All of this. So, we can even approach that then on a, on a methodological or technical or formalist place. Because I think that drag allows for those things to be used and put through a formalist eye, a formalist hand or formalist palette or whatever. But now I see that my work is evolving and also in that drag I am, what I was saying about linguistically opening up the idea of drag. I started out in the club kid scene, moved on to underground drag, moving on to the white cube and institution actually.

It moves. It's now moving on to a place where by my drag is about exploring. I camp masculinity, that's maybe because of East London as well, because I grew up in East London. I think East London, my growing up in East London of course, put a misandry streak me. I have a delight in not liking men. I just do. As much as I do identify as a cisgender man. I just, yeah, there's maybe that. So, I'm focusing as well on the drag. Because there's something liberating about drag and transvestitism. Drag in all these subject matters that you're exploring. But I feel that 15 years or 20 years, actually of going through that drag vibe has brought me closer to having the courage to explore the shadow side. Which is my masculinity or my masculinities, because I always feel that it's always been an exploration of one long masculinity. But now it's changing in that sense and creating the space as well has moved from drag being a parody of belonging, not belonging. That's always something I always speak of. It's also a critique on nationalism. How the body, how the individual, the autonomous individual makes up a body national makes up a consciousness. And do you know the pluses and minuses of that with regards to nationalism? I took a lot of fun exploring that through drag. One would think that nationalism, of course, is something that you explore through hypermasculinity. It's like the he dichotomy in Paris is burning whereby. Yeah, there was a lot of showing of lack as well. Like, that's my one critique about it. It also had like a very.

But anyway, so at the moment I'm exploring drag. In how masculinities can find themselves. Like there's one story with there's one painting that I'm working with at the moment where I'm taking a historical one liner from a book where one of the Xhosa kings whose land, whose unseeded land, is in one of his last fights. I think it was King Nikha. Yes, it's Nikha. This is like a territory he dressed up as a Frontiers woman like, with a kappie and all of them to somehow escape the colonists. And I'm like that's, that's I think that is then that bouncing in between for me. That, that's the perfect vision that encapsulates my fascination with drag. There's formalist, there's the, it's a total work of art in itself of like, like I see it as that. But I haven't shown anyone yet, so my mind would probably change when someone gives me like a, you know, and they raise an eyebrow and then it will change. It will become another kind of drag. So, critique, art critique then becomes another point. That we will speak about with drag, but I think that I've just, like spoken a lot, sorry.

Aaron Adriaan

It's alright. Coming back to what you said initially about theatre and theatre versus performance art, given that I come from a field as an art practitioner and researcher. The way I've outlined the concept of theatre is more as an umbrella term for a number of forms of theatre. But I'm specifically talking about proscenium arch stage plays, and cabarets, and performances and pantomimes. I did look into the history of that and I found that throughout history, from, beginning around the Elizabethan stage and Shakespeare to the present and the contemporary. Drag has seemingly hidden away and skirted the law and avoided punishment through theatre. Where people have used the theatre as a way to avoid censorship. We have instances where people who are clearly having correspondences with one another that have, that are very romantic and homoerotic in nature, but they use the Moniker of their stage characters because cross-dressing for stage was. 'Oh, that was that's quite funny. We should do more about that.' That was perfectly acceptable.

Athi-Patra Ruga

Yeah, because of confrontation.

Aaron Adriaan

It wasn't confrontational and also in the pantomimes, the character, the men who often plays the female roles is often an undesirable wretch or hag who gets in the way of the main plot, but is never a desirable or sexually viable character. Which informs what we know, what we know of the Hayes codes in the Golden Age of film. But then after, at roughly the same time, these characters then suddenly become sexually viable.

Athi-Patra Ruga

Oh yeah.

Aaron Adriaan

They become desirable female counterparts in situations where only men are on stage and only men are in a play. They then start playing these vivacious and sexualized characters because they don't have women to play these roles, and it's also funny to see a man do it. And that's the theatrical side that I'm coming from and the format of the theatre also heavily informing drag shows. When drag queens put on a variety show at a bar or at a club. It very much follows that kind of variety performance that you see in the theatre or at a cabaret where you go through multiple different stages. Multiple different things are happening at various points in time. But then also in performance art you see people using drag and drag aesthetics as a way to comment on a particular things. I mean your, for example, your White Woman of Azania. She's a very Avant-garde creature covered in balloons with two pink stockings and high heels sticking out. And it is Referential of drag, but it has taken it to an, to an extreme conclusion to discuss ideas of femininity in a very interesting way. And I also look at how in people who are performers but are not necessarily performance artists within the Fine Arts space. For example, comedians, DJ's, people who perform instruments, and monologues in drag as well. Drag is now become its own style of performance that can include anything from standing on a stage and playing classical violin to standing up and playing someone else's music. It's evolved into something that has its fingers in many different pies at the same time. And I found that so interesting in my research. I just found it so interesting to see how I thought drag was one particular kind of thing to discover it's an entire it's a medium. It has become an entire medium in and of itself.

Athi-Patra Ruga

Yeah, That that is how I approach it. It is a, It is a medium. It's a, means to an end it is very much a materiality, you know, because there's some things that need to be said in drag. Do you know what I mean? That cannot be said in a tone it, it has its own tone, its own nuances and all of that, that it can only be done when you transcend that. And when it comes to the theatre as well, I think that the like the- What was I going to say about the theatricals of it? I do a lot of like I used to do a lot of processions when I was doing the Future White Woman of Azania as a way of parodying Russian constructivism and also sort of like the marches that made this country. Do you know what I mean? That then becomes parade right and becomes a theatre as well. But it becomes an urban sonography becomes yeah, it has mostly urban synographies, or nationalist or body national. It is very much about that, because the body national well, in small scale as well that body national does become. Or what I experienced when I first entered clubland and coming from a long line of people as well. Who were sort of like club people who were close to like drag and, whatever it does become a nation. So the Future White Woman of

Azania is a tribute to the communities that we do make with drag. The idea of self-invention creating each other. All of that.

Aaron Adriaan

Yes, I addressed the idea by looking into Lucy Lippard's ideas of the self and identity and how we, it's projected onto people and how do people, I mean we. The way Lucy Lippard describes it, identity is something that is ascribed to us based on our sexual orientation. Our religious belief systems, how people interpret those things and we have multiple selves. We have the self we are at home in private versus with our colleagues, with somebody who knows very little about us, people who know us incredibly well, our family, our friends and I also then took that idea and ran with it. When I looked at the concept of drag personas and people who perform as DJs or curate artistic events and happenings through, in drag themselves. I realised that there's this weird thing that I know, just happening where. They themselves have come up with this character, this idea of how they should and should not perform in a space they then take on costuming and visual languages of drag to accomplish that, and then slowly, over time, this concept takes shape and form, and then slowly merges back into the self again. As, 'Oh this was just me expressing a particular thing. In a very particular way, but it is actually just myself.' It's this good creation of an idea and an image and then creating that. what would, I would describe as a double exposed image where both of them are the same and they both present and recede at different times. And I found that in my discussions and interviews with people that, that is also deeply a part of the ideas of drag is creating a new sense of self to explore yourself.

Athi-Patra Ruga

Yeah, yeah, I think that fits to what I was saying also about my evolution at the moment. It takes you somewhere deeper, and deeper, and deeper, and deeper and deeper. I think that the expectation of course within that gender are binary. If there is one in drag and cis- maleness or civilian-ness I think that evolution speaks to what you're saying. That for me it would have like, I don't know, normally one would move from performing hypermasculine and then softening up as the binary. And I'm really, really fascinated with how my life story has played out in a different way. You know, with how this evolution is going to go and drag was, is a very, very important part of it. I was talking to my partner. I was talking to my partner, and I was telling him, actually, I think that the reason why I doubled down on drag in the early noughties in Johannesburg or whatever was in a way to, to reperforming my mother who passed away like 20 years ago. I think that that's when I really doubled down and I started as a way of memorialising her feminine-ness or existence, her labour, her inner and outer life, herself, as a way of tracing whatever was happening in my life. I adopted her mannerisms. I adopted her way of dress. I adopted her like just her tone in preserving her, even in image makings draughtsmanship all of that and occupying that in drag was a very, very interesting thing. So, Yeah, I even did a video called over the rainbow which features a lot of my maternal sort of like mannerisms or objects I think then in 2017 as well.

Aaron Adriaan

I just wanted to ask is this not work where you are in a Gold embroidered sort of cape and sitting in front of a vanity and then halfway through the performance we see-

Athi-Patra Ruga

Yes. Yeah.

Aaron Adriaan

Various different iterations of black womanhood coming past in the backdrop and participating.

Athi-Patra Ruga

Yebo. Yebo. So that's the high point.

Aaron Adriaan

Hey, yes, now I know I remember what you're talking about.

Athi-Patra Ruga

Yeah. So that's the high point of my sort of like drag practice so far and I think that it became a healer because art can do that for the artist and hopefully a community. But for me it really was me just collecting like all these images to make peace with something. That's how it makes sense of that early thing and then in 2017, my father passed away. And also, in like I feel that the past five years or the past like 7 years has also been me doubling down and also moving back to the Eastern Cape. Whereby there's very, very coded masculinities, coded queerness within the Xhosa community. And there's that performance of it as well, it became something that it was that was beautiful for me to watch while I self-exiled. You can, I think any kid leaves like a small town like East London where I grew up and moves to a big city. But it always felt like an exile to me. So now coming back and living in Hogsback and seeing masculinities play out is making me, make sense of the past five years post my father's dying. And me now performing his drag. You know what I mean? I don't even know how to put, like he used to wear Mom's kimonos a lot. Maybe that's where I get my transvestitism from. But yeah, there was such a gentleness to him that also is just so compatible with my early career. That performing it is also going to be a memorialization. Yeah, you've just helped me make sense of something. Performance is memorialization.

Aaron Adriaan

I'm glad.

Athi-Patra Ruga

And embodiment. So that's, that leads us to embodiment here. I think all of those acts are in aid of embodiment.

[Brief interruption in video call]

Aaron Adriaan

There we go. All right, in which case I will jump straight into, where is it? Into my proposal, my Chapter 2 and this little diagram I've come up with to explain and to further dissect ideas that we were discussing earlier with this file. Uhm, are you able to see the document?

Athi-Patra Ruga

Yeah, it's a Venn diagram.

Aaron Adriaan

Yes, so this was what I proposed. This is the theory and the idea that I'm proposing specifically that, well, fine art performance and theatre performance obviously overlap. I've chosen to deliberately not to discuss it because drag is the focus of my paper. I've noticed how fine art and theatre performance overlap with drag in very interesting ways, specifically sections A & B. So, in my conception of drag performance as a whole and its shared qualities specifically, section A is referring to what I have now termed embodied costuming, and Section B refers to Embodied performance. In that sense, this is it's, it's really a distinction between being a drag performer and doing drag. Specifically, how people can do drag aesthetics and can do drag but are not themselves drag queens or kings etc. But the drag king is an embodied persona that they live and perform with and move through the world as this person.

Athi-Patra Ruga

All right.

Aaron Adriaan

So, the idea? Section B then refers to theatre, and cabaret, and pantomime performances and section A is fine artists who adopt drag aesthetics or performers who draw on drag aesthetics but are not themselves identifying as drag Queens. I just wanted to explore that idea with you. Do you, given our discussion on how this double-exposed image of personal and public and performed identity occurs? What are your thoughts on the, this theory that I have proposed. To divide drag into two generalised categories. Well, not categories, but subsets of drag. Specifically, it's a subset of drag.

Athi-Patra Ruga

On one side it's good, but I think that as someone who has a studio practise and I'm not a theoretician about it. Maybe I, maybe I'm not so well informed. Of course, I've got experience in it. I think that from experience this speaks to sort of like how it is consumed. So, it links to both of those circles. I think the radiating circles. When one tends to categorise it, it starts becoming coded. And there's two ways in which that coding kind of like that, that categorising can go, it can go very right and conservative, it can go very left and liberal, for better or worse, you know. And that could stifle an idea, and I think that, that is what the Hayes code has sort of created in mannerisms that also informed drag right. The coding of it and now everyone is going into. It's funny one way of going on to it which is American, and there's American imperialism, and one should be aware that. It just doesn't happen in theatre. It happens in the world, in the world stage as well. It's serious business and that's why maybe communities form from it because of its redemptive qualities. You know?

Aaron Adriaan

All right I do you see what you're saying and this is something I've also been a little bit concerned with about separating a very freely moving medium into two different places. I mostly did it as just a way to make it clearer and digestible for a reader coming from outside of the space. But you are also talking about how it, this is, there is a coded language. There is a language to drag that I have also termed lavender language as a part of a form of linguistics called lavender linguistics were Queer linguistics that deals with. The way in which a Queer slang and vernacular communicates in a very specific way and in this instance. I'm trying to frame it in a way that other people who do not understand that language and those visual codes

in drag and in Queer spaces can actually understand what I'm saying because I don't want them to conflate a drag queen and a drag performer with somebody who does drag as a costume or as a way to express themselves without performing as a drag performer. If that makes any sense?

Athi-Patra Ruga

It does and because I'm from within the community I know that I've had to learn that, and I know it. Yeah, as second nature. I think that last year we spoke about accessibility and consumption. I think that I return to that when it comes to maybe exploring the categories thing. It makes it very easy to cannibalise. I think Ryan Murphy is in hot water again for emailing. I forget her name she was in Pose. To do an American Horror Story or a series. That had a lot of black women. So, you know, I don't know, it just feels that the consumption of it and the on vogue-ness of it and I don't feel that there's anything, to be honest, and I don't want to sound like an old bitter queen. And this is on consumption and the performance of it all right. If it makes sense, I just think that the categories as well. Not the vogue like categories like, but the categories are easy to chew, are easy to cannibalise, are easy to then spit out, and not forward the culture by paying it. You know what I mean? And that's the performance that drag yeah, probably tries to stay away from it. The spirit of it. Yeah, I worry a lot about the hyper-consumption. Camp is serious business, you know, drag's a serious business. It's also become very lucrative and that's where the categories kind of defeat the point sometimes. I don't know. I do like I do like the radical tradition as much as I don't feel that. I'm of it. But yeah, the radical tradition of drag and just the resistance of it, under all, Like the, the things and the development of codes is something that fascinates me and there's a punkness to that. But in a time of such great freedom, it needs to embody freedom. There's just too, yeah, there's just a lot of money on all sides connected that there isn't. And underground, there's always an underground and I believe in the underground more than anything. Maybe that's why. Yeah, I love it. Because I've only seen drag cellists there because I've always paid attention to the aesthetic traditions and I don't know how to communicate that to someone who is from the outside. There's a refusal, and an empowered thing about having, that, to us and ourselves sometimes. That's why probably sometimes, I'm, it's perfectly justified to have some kind of resistance to have it also being in academic things, and that sounds disingenuous because yeah, I mean, there's so many ways in which it is consumed. That can be concerning. You know, yeah.

Aaron Adriaan

Well then, I think. One last one. I think another aspect of this that I think you might, I think I should have probably led with before I asked that question was I also identified ways in, this sort of interaction. This inextricably connectedness that occurs within queer community spaces. It's almost a rhizomatic structure where it's disparately connected, and it pops up in different places and in different ways. I found that the ballroom scene hosted by *SPECTRUM* and the events hosted by the *Death of Glitter*, who are, whose organisers I've met and spoken to and drag Queens like Ina Propriette in Cape Town, who I have also spoken with. They all seem to have directly related personal relationships with each other. That enables their work to do what it does. It enables people to do the aesthetic adoption of drag, which starts off as costuming, and a curation of one's own visual aesthetics, which then becomes something that they identify with or explores aspects of their identity as much as we see in section B. It's, the two sort of slip between each other and share a lot of things. These spaces tend to build on before, and

work for one another and create these safe spaces. One of the interview participants, termed brave spaces. Their spaces to explore. To do brave things which can only happen when one is established baselines of physical safety, which these spaces do because we tend to watch and keep an eye on each other because of the way that this community is so connected. We police bad behaviour through our own connections with each other as well. The question I'm asking then is. How these spaces are? These are the new Queer, avant-garde, artistic spaces for thoughts and ideas and production. How do you feel about this? The way in which the Queer community is sometimes, works that way. Do you think it's useful, do you think it actually, it's doing something forward thinking, or is it more or less repeating what people from the past like Swan and Kewpie have already done?

Athi-Patra Ruga

I definitely believe that it is a continuation. It is emblematic of the community. It's human. I think collaboration is the most human thing. You know. I know that my studio in Cape Town. When I was doing performances, performance is by definition really something that does need collaboration or multiple sources of inspiration. You know.

Aaron Adriaan

Yes, this was something you mentioned last year in our first discussion, and this is something I've continued to look into.

Athi-Patra Ruga

Yeah, it materialises in art as well. Whereby you get collectives and collectives, whether it's like high art collectors, whether it's high drag collectives. You know. That's why I'm saying it's human.

Works Cited:

| Human Dignity Trust. n.d. ‘Qatar | Human Dignity Trust’. Accessed 15 January 2024. https://www.humandignitytrust.org/country-profile/qatar/.

‘A Brief History of Voguing’. n.d. Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. Accessed 27 January 2025. https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/brief-history-voguing#:~:text=With%20time%2C%20vogue%20changed%20from,bussey%20and%20enhanced%20hand%20performance).

Abreu, Rafael. 2021. ‘What Is the Hays Code — Hollywood Production Code Explained’. Studio Binder. 2 May 2021. https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/what-is-the-hays-code-1934/#:~:text=The%20Hays%20Code%20in%20action,nation%2C%20race%20or%20creed.%E2%80%9D.

Anderson, Derek. 2021. ‘An Epistemological Conception of Safe Spaces’. *Social Epistemology* 35 (3): 285–311. https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2020.1855485.

artled.net. n.d. ‘ Modern Classics: Cindy Sherman – Untitled Film Stills, 1977-1980’. Artled.Net. Accessed 30 October 2023. https://artlead.net/journal/modern-classics-cindy-sherman-untitled-film-stills/.

Ball, Hugo. 1916. ‘Dada Manifesto (1916, Hugo Ball)’. Wikisource. 14 July 1916. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dada_Manifesto_(1916,_Hugo_Ball).

Banco, Darcy, Jerway Chang, Nina Talmor, Priya Wadhera, Amrita Mukhopadhyay, Xinlin Lu, Siyuan Dong, et al. 2022. ‘Sex and Race Differences in the Evaluation and Treatment of Young Adults Presenting to the Emergency Department With Chest Pain’. *Journal of the American Heart Association* 11 (10). https://doi.org/10.1161/JAHA.121.024199.

Barthes, Roland. 1992a. *The Death of the Author, 1968*. na.

———. 1992b. *The Death of the Author, 1968*. na. https://mariabuszek.com/mariabuszek/kcai/PoMoSeminar/Readings/BarthesAuthor.pdf.

Black Mountain College. n.d. ‘Black Mountain College: A Brief Introduction’. Accessed 25 February 2024. https://www.blackmountaincollege.org/history/.

Bowman, Jason E, and Anthony Howell. 2016. ‘Towards a Purposeful Accident Elements of Performance Art via The Ting: The Theatre of Mistakes’. *Parse Journal*, no. 4. https://parsejournal.com/article/towards-a-purposeful-accident-elements-of-performance-art-via-the-ting-the-theatre-of-mistakes/.

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. 2024. ‘Bertold Brecht’. In *Encyclopedia Britannica*, edited by The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bertolt-Brecht.

Butler, Judith. 1988. ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’. *Theatre Journal* 40 (4): 519. https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893.

———. 2006. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 3rd ed. New York, N.Y.: Routledge. https://rhodes.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwhV3NS8MwFH_MbQ

fxA53T1Y9RD36BkzZpm-SqWGV6GEzQW-hHigfZZO3AefBvN0kzVwbDY5pHm5SXl_eS9_s9AIxunN6STchcj6RJmmFEhXBS34kJjljMsKcYq3QlheEbHfTxIMS3NbieQ2N04KgyoXL1-u8KaZL0k11Cf4YoWIOGRzDx69AIH_qvt3N1QnL9SDPwp15IuSp4cenlq5oTjCKDU2dafysNjBcEPbpzqY2dkrNTcdopolp1p0dlNKOywpoKUzLNpcerB1_ZssIdqCsYwy7UxKgFG5V6CLMWtEtykJl9bivm2UiY51YJ1rXNgs_tS8NKfdWCbV3r8iK3TebhHmyVZejsYjKexh-iDd3w_uXusafHws25EJ__Q4T2YTNS-fSjQuPu0g7YOEEybvYyxmIZMDEUJ1gg4noxpkEWJZkFp-UU-WfJisERzxF3OPWV0xEQFxELzv6V4cVXYUFnSS6QlseVX_UtOFgx6MOVPUew7so9tjwnOYZGJqXECTQn7-NU5F0Ztz89d42u_AKCJbXZ.

Carbado, Devon W, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Vickie M Mays, and Barbara Tomlinson. 2013. 'Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory'. *Du Bois Review* 10 (2): 303–12. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X13000349.

Cho, Sumi, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall. 2013. 'Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis'. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38 (4): 785–810. https://doi.org/10.1086/669608.

Cohen, Stephen. 1998. 'UGLY GIRL_FILMS-Living Art*'. STEVEN COHEN COMPANY. 1998. https://steven-cohen.com/en/creations/1998-ugly-girl-films-2/.

Collins English Dictionary. n.d. 'Divide and Conquer'. Collins English Disctionary. Accessed 19 February 2024. https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/divide-and-conquer.

Collison, Carl. 2018. 'Gayle, the Language of Laughter – and of Safety'. Mail & Guardian. 2 November 2018. https://mg.co.za/article/2018-11-02-00-gayle-the-language-of-laughter-and-of-safety/.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1986. 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics'. *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989 (1): 139–67. https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 2013. 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics'. In *Feminist Legal Theories*, 23–51. Routledge.

Dewar, N. 2001. 'Seeking Closure: Conflict Resolution, Land Restitution, and Inner City Redevelopments in "District Six" Cape Town'. *South African Geographical Journal* 83 (1): 48–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/03736245.2001.9713718.

District Six Museum. n.d. ' About District Six'. DistrictSix.Co.Za. Accessed 31 January 2024. https://www.districtsix.co.za/about-district-six/#:~:text=On%2011%20February%201966%20it,Six%20were%20flattened%20by%20bulldozers.

Duerden, Dennis. 2000. 'The" Discovery" of the African Mask'. *Research in African Literatures* 31 (4): 29–47.

Fanon, Frantz. 1967. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin. https://rhodes.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwdV1LawIxEB6s66HgocVnayU_oErMY7NnpWvxJFhobxIzGzwpqFDoob-

9k7hbRPA4TJiEvOabYR4AUoz56OpPmFjhEY3xmnsnyHLRRhQKCS0o1DI2c1h9ZcuFXOZyWoPXKjUmGo4hEuoYxP9cFE0iVaa1_F2J9A4SZaTRdUjy-eJzGgvnqGBcGJWeCULRoTFTWXCnYvJ_uuQTQI1zXWiY_AHqIevgEWrFrgV9Ojz2fYg7imzvGaE0RlfytG3DMH_7mL2PooR16XxZVwuVogNNG4LWd6eY3IY9YJhu0HGdTULZPOeEFTzNvPfWOtIeG9OH7g1pTzc5z3BPj8qcvQQDSDyNKl6gcdjusTgOyz36A7t5ats.

Féral, Josette, and Terese Lyons. 1982. 'Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified'. *Modern Drama* 25 (1): 170–81. https://doi.org/10.1353/mdr.1982.0036.

Flores, Andrew R., Lynn Langton, Ilan H. Meyer, and Adam P. Romero. 2020. 'Victimization Rates and Traits of Sexual and Gender Minorities in the United States: Results from the National Crime Victimization Survey, 2017'. *Science Advances* 6 (40). https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aba6910.

Fondazione Piero Manzoni. n.d. '1961 LIVING SCULPTURES'. Fondazione Piero Manzoni. Accessed 16 January 2024. https://www.pieromanzoni.org/pieromanzoni/biographies/30/sculture-viventi?lang=en.

Ford, Wesley, and Tamlynne Thompson. 2018. 'Honouring Daughter of District 6'. The CapeTowner. 4 October 2018. https://web.archive.org/web/20200604223612/https://www.capetowner.co.za/news/honouring-daughter-of-district-6-17335597.

Fortini, Amanda. 2022. 'Why Are We Still Talking About Black Mountain College?' New York Times. 7 July 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/07/t-magazine/black-mountain-college.html.

Goldberg, RoseLee. 2011. *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. Third. High Holborn, London: Thames & Hudson. https://rhodes.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwY2AwNtIz0EUrEywNUpNNjBNTjIF6zA0MUhMNkoAFYWKKkWFSinmaCWj7c3CERYCXcYCbsRMTgw5sawy44whaCVUMMr4KcWiSEbAqA_ZW6oKNzJgZWE3MzU2BPS9WN3evcCdYcgJ2JYxArRXwDlXwJlADE3PomTtwPrBNCjYeqVJxE2RgAW00EGJgSs0TZpCGtgwzi3MV1BRQtm0UCzNwh2UWlybmKDgWlRSLMPAHIFb7KwCjXpRBzs01xNlDF2xHPHREJh7memMjMQYWYC8_VYJBAdhvMU0CtnQtU02AlWyimYWpZTKwJklKTk5NSkkzS5RkEMdhiBROGWkGLsgQKAjJMLCmAVWlyjKwFWXkp6QWy0HDCwBn-HH3.

Hassan, N.R., L. Swartz, A. Kagee, A. De Wet, A. Lesch, Z. Kafaar, and P.A. Newman. 2018. '"There Is Not a Safe Space Where They Can Find Themselves to Be Free": (Un)Safe Spaces and the Promotion of Queer Visibilities among Township Males Who Have Sex with Males (MSM) in Cape Town, South Africa'. *Health & Place* 49 (January):93–100. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2017.11.010.

Herrera, Anna. n.d. 'Willi Ninja: Voguing Butch Queen'. Https://Outhistory.Org/. Accessed 15 January 2024. https://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/tgi-bios/willi-ninja#:~:text=Recognized%20as%20the%20%E2%80%9CGrandfather%20of,children%E2%80%9D%20in%20New%20York%20City.

Hughes, Holly, and David Roman. 1998. 'O Solo Homo: An Introductory Conversation '. In *O Solo Homo: The New Queer Performance*, edited by Holly Hughes and David Roman, 1st ed., 1–16. New York City: Grove Press.

Human Dignity Trust. n.d.-a. ‘A History of LGBT Criminalisation’. Accessed 31 January 2024. https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/a-history-of-criminalisation/.

———. n.d.-b. ‘Map of Countries That Criminalise LGBT People’. Human Dignity Trust. Accessed 13 February 2024. https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/?type_filter_submitted=&type_filter%5B%5D=crim_lgbt.

Humandignitytrust.org. n.d. ‘Zimbabwe | Human Dignity Trust’. Accessed 15 January 2024. https://www.humandignitytrust.org/country-profile/zimbabwe/.

Johnson, Ken. 2009. ‘Changing Un-Art’s Tires’. *The New York Times*, 9 August 2009. https://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/arts/design/13johnson.html.

Joseph, Channing Gerard. 2020. ‘The First DRAG QUEEN?’ *The Nation (New York, N.Y.)*.

Jürs-Munby, Karen, Jerome Carroll, and Steve Giles. 2013. *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political: International Perspectives on Contemporary Performance*. A&C Black.

Lehmann, Hans-Thies. 2011a. ‘“Postdramatic Theatre”, a Decade Later’. In *Dramatic and Postdramatic Theater Ten Years After: Conference Proceedings*, 31–46. Faculty of Dramatic Arts Belgrade.

———. 2011b. ‘“Postdramatic Theatre”, a Decade Later’. In *Dramatic and Postdramatic Theater Ten Years After: Conference Proceedings*, 31–46. Faculty of Dramatic Arts Belgrade.

Lippard; L. R. 1999. ‘Scattering Selves’. In *Inverted Odysseys: Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, and Cindy Sherman*, edited by Shelly Rice, Lynn Gumpert, and Fla.) Museum of Contemporary Art (North Miami, Fla.) Museum of Contemporary Art (North Miami, 27–42. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Marsden, Jenny ; Smith, Tina. 2019. *Kewpie: Daughter of District Six*. District Six Museum; Gala, University of Witwaterstrand.

Matebeni, Zethu. 2018. ‘Ihlazo: Pride and the Politics of Race and Space in Johannesburg and Cape Town’. *Critical African Studies* 10 (3): 315–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2019.1610008.

Pather, Jay, and Catherine Boulle. 2019. ‘Introduction’. In *Acts of Transgression*, 1–16. Wits University Press. https://doi.org/10.18772/22019022798.4.

Pillow, Wanda. 2003. ‘Confession, Catharsis, or Cure? Rethinking the Uses of Reflexivity as Methodological Power in Qualitative Research’. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16 (2): 175–96. https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839032000060635.

Preissle, Judith, and Yuri Han. 2011. ‘Feminist Research Ethics’. In *Handbook of Feminist Research*, edited by Sharlene Hesse Biber and Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2nd ed., 583–605. United States: SAGE Publications, Incorporated. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483384740.n28.

Prince, Lindy-Lee. 2017. ‘All Drag, All the Time — One Night in Cape Town with Lola Fine’. *Anthropology Southern Africa* 40 (2): 122–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/23323256.2017.1318709.

Ruga, Athi-Patra. 2012. ‘The Future White Woman of Azania II’. *Whatiftheworld.Com*.

‘Safe Black Space’. n.d. SafeBlackSpaces.Org. Accessed 21 July 2022. https://www.safeblackspace.org/mission-vision-purpose.

Said, Edward W. 2003. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin. https://rhodes.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwY2AwNtIz0EUrE8wtUsxMjRJTzICZzzQpxdgkKc0yxcQsNTHJNNHCwgS03zk4wiLAyzjAzdiJiUEHtjUG3HEErYQqBhlfhXxokiWwWWheF2xkxszAamJubG7KwsDq5u4V7oRIThamwOreFHyQjgnoWm1g-oSeuQPjg3ZQg41HqlTcBBlYQBsNhBiYUvOEGUQh53VUKqgpgA6DTQRfuFspwsDtXwTZsZhZnCvKIOfmGuLsoQs2Kx468hIPc6WFkRgDbyJoxXpeCXhnW4oEg0JimlFaqmVqomVSErCatAQdEJtimGqQZploaZ5mkmgqySCOwzQpnDLSDFzgxWbgIQIZBtY0oKpUWQa2ooz8lNRiOWgAAQBYym4L.

Sandström, Edvin. 2010. ‘“Performance Art” A Mode of Communication’. Stockholms Universitet.

SAnews.gov.za. 2021. ‘Spate of Attacks on LGBTQI+ Community in SA’. SAnews. 1 July 2021. https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/spate-attacks-lgbtqi-community-sa.

Semetsky, Inna. 2004. ‘Experiencing Deleuze’. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 36 (3): 227–31.

Senelick, Laurence. 1993. ‘Boys and Girls Together: Subcultural Origins of Glamour Drag and Male Impersonation on the Nineteenth-Century Stage’. In *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Drassing*, edited by Lesley Ferris, 80–95. London: Routledge.

Sherman, Cindy. 1978. ‘Cindy Sherman Untitled Film Still #21’. Museum of Modern Art. 1978. https://www.moma.org/collection/works/56618.

Sizemore-Barber, April. 2013. ‘Prismatic Performances: Queer South African Identity and the Deconstruction of the Rainbow Nation’. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*. United States -- California. https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/prismatic-performances-queer-south-african/docview/1778844735/se-2?accountid=13504.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 1999. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Third. London: Zed. https://go.exlibris.link/hpJqq5VJ.

Stoltz, Eunice. 2021. ‘Sex Workers, LGBTQ+ and Undocumented People Struggle to Find Shelters, Says Report – The Mail & Guardian’. Mail & Guardian. 25 November 2021. https://mg.co.za/news/2021-11-25-sex-workers-lgbtq-and-undocumented-people-struggle-to-find-shelters-says-report/.

The Grotowski Institute. 2012. ‘Poor Theatre’. Grotowski.Net. 15 March 2012. https://grotowski.net/en/encyclopedia/poor-theatre.

Turok, Ivan. 2001. ‘Persistent Polarisation Post-Apartheid? Progress towards Urban Integration in Cape Town’. *Urban Studies* 38 (13): 2349–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980120094551.

Waineright, Lisa S. 2023. ‘Epic Theatre’. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 24 May 2023. https://www.britannica.com/art/epic-theatre.

Wall, Sarah. 2006. ‘Wall AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ABOUT AUTOETHNOGRAPHY’. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5 (2). https://sites.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/5_2/HTML/wall.htm.

Ward, F. 2012. *No Innocent Bystanders: Performance Art and Audience*. Interfaces, Studies in Visual Culture. Dartmouth College Press. https://books.google.co.za/books?id=ZbejoDeglAAC.

Wilcox, Dean. 2020. 'Postdramatic Theatre and Form Ed. by Michael Shane Boyle, Matt Cornish, and Brandon Woolf'. *Theatre Journal* 72 (2): 267–69. https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2020.0056.

Young, Stephanie L, and Amie R McKibban. 2014. 'Creating Safe Places: A Collaborative Autoethnography on LGBT Social Activism'. *Sexuality & Culture* 18 (2): 361–84. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-013-9202-5.