



FAKULTA
HUMANITNÍCH STUDIÍ
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Advisor Report for Nuša Muršič's Master's Thesis in Gender Studies at Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic.

Nuša Muršič has submitted her thesis entitled, "How Drag Performers Challenge and Disrupt Our Understandings of Gender: a Case Study of the Slovenian Drag Community," as part of her requirements for completing a Master's degree in Gender Studies at Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic. Her thesis examines the drag community in Ljubljana, Slovenia and, from interviews with eight members of the community, seeks to answer two questions. First, in what ways does drag contest the gender binary, and, second, could it possibly lead to new understandings of gender? She finds that there are two sides to this answer, one that belongs to the performers of drag and one that has to do with its audience. In other words, depending on who you ask, the answers are somewhat different. First, for performers, drag challenges gender assumptions, as they revel in gender's fluidity attempting to move past the binary gender system of patriarchy. As Nuša says, "drag offers [for the performers] a space for experimentation, questioning and thinking about gender," (87). Yet, for audience members drag helps them uncover the binary gender system and begin to question their own gender assumptions. It may even allow for gender experimentation.

In the thesis, Nuša has researched extensively the history of drag paying particular attention to detail. She distinguishes the history of drag queens from drag kings and drag things illustrating as well some of the sexism and misogyny within the history and sometimes from the (wider) community. She also provides considerable detail from feminist queer theory on gender as performance and from feminist theory on the potential of drag to challenge and/or reproduce the patriarchal system. The thesis is also unique in the way that it covers both the group of performers as a whole in its analysis as well as details each individual drag performer. I particularly liked how each performer was featured and how the author has explored the ways in which the performer's gender performances and understandings of gender have changed over time. In a way, the author's writing also mirrors the theory: that of Hausman's narrative understanding of gender.

I would now like to turn to some of the ways in which I think the writing of the thesis distracts from her otherwise very academic research and analysis. I found the introduction and conclusion to both be somewhat choppy and could do with further editing. I was particularly jarred from the research questions being introduced in the second paragraph without really any reason as to why. Then, in the conclusion, Nuša uses the terminology of "block" to refer to specific sections of research within the literature review. Given that there is roughly 50 pages between the literature review and this conclusion, the reader not

only needs to be reminded of specific detail from that literature but also told how those details fit Nuša's findings. Alternatively, the author could have written a conclusion that did not necessarily repeat all of her findings but instead offered a more comprehensive summary of the thesis, reminding the reader what Nuša thought were the important take-aways of her work. Nonetheless, while it was unfortunate that these impacted both the beginning and the end of reading the thesis, I do not find that they are so problematic that they negate the excellent work within the thesis itself.

Now, I do have some questions for Nuša. Two pertain to methodology. First, how do you think giving your participants the interview questions beforehand affected their responses? Second, could you comment more on how you think your position as a participant observer affected your results? I do not see as much reflection on this as I think there could have been. Finally, could you say more about the limitations of your study and how you would work with these if you were to redo or rework your thesis?

I find this thesis meets the requirements for its defense and recommend a preliminary grade of excellent (1) depending on the defense.

In Prague, 10 September 2023.

Ivy Helman, Ph.D.