



*MA Thesis Report*

*Nuša Muršič*

***How drag performers challenge and disrupt our understandings of gender: a case study of the Slovenian drag community***

Nuša Muršič work on drag in Slovenia is important – not only for its situated and ‘insider’ perspective that comes from the author themselves doing drag as a part of the Kunt house, and working with the drag community in Slovenia, for its attention directed outside of the ‘West’ and for its careful responsiveness to the varying and nuanced position on gender presented by younger generation of drag artists. The thesis is mostly well-written, well-structured and following the requirements of academic work. I have really enjoyed reading the thesis and believe that it could be reworked into academic publication. Below, I therefore present suggestions for what could be improved upon, finessed, or what I see as missing in the discussion.

The work comes back to the claim that drag is political. With this argument in the thesis’s focus, the author takes an interesting and perhaps surprising approach by opening the discussion turning to feminist critiques of drag as a gesture reinforcing male domination and submission of the feminine, the woman. I appreciate this move and the author’s engagement with the critiques of drag across several decades of feminist thought. I think, however, the author needs to engage with these often-troubling positions verging on trans-phobic, essentialist stances more directly. The text now reads too much as a simple summary and overview of these positions. I believe, we need to hear the author’s own voice and their own discussion with the sources more clearly (the same goes for their presentation of the more affirming takes on drag).

The work is situated in Slovenia, the author pays attention to the context in the analytical section of the thesis, it is therefore more striking that they do not include much discussion on the Eastern European context, queer politics in general and on Slovenia in particular. This should be worked into not only theoretical conceptualisation of drag, but also taken into consideration when discussing meanings and performatives of gender/sexuality. There is an interesting new work on how drag artists work and engage with the socialist past and work it into their reworkings of gender. There is an interesting and important tension about the missing vocabulary for drag and gender in Slovenian – most drag artists and performers preferred to conduct the interviews in English even though they share mother tongue with the author (p 41)

– this in itself, I believe, deserves to be worked into the discussion as a central element about thinking and performing gender/drag. Also, a short note on how the attention to the Slovenian context is drawn – the chapters in the analytical discussion are divided into two parts, one presenting the ‘general’ overview, the other turning to the specificity of the Slovenian context. I would argue that this in fact accentuates the ‘particularity’ and thus ‘peripherality’ of the context – which, as I believe, contrasts with what the author wishes to do. To underscore to de-centre the Western gaze, I would advise against such divisions.

My next comment concerns the organization of the analysis. The author chose to organize the analysis by individual speakers rather than by analytical categories, features that cut across the individual narratives and positions. I would like to ask the author to present their reasoning for this choice during the defence. Since it is my job here, I respectfully offer my reservations: First I do want to say that the author achieves to provide the readers with a nuanced insight into the reasoning of the individual artists. The downside is that since the work is based on larger group of presenters, the reader soon loses keen overview and might struggle to hold all the individual stories in memory. More importantly, what is accentuated is the individuality and individualising gender politics rather than drawing out the structural, and the shared. This is partially alleviated in the author’s closing discussion, but this does not, in my opinion, balance out what could have been done through analytical categories organisation.

Lastly, the author focuses on age and gender/sexuality positionality of the performers, do any other context and positionality make play a role in the articulation of gender politics? What is their social background, for instance?

To conclude, I repeat that Nuša Muršič’s work is important and without any doubt fulfils the requirements for MA thesis. I therefore recommend the thesis for defence with preliminary evaluation between excellent and very good.

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