Transgender Drag, Transgender Joy: A Non-Binary Approach to Creating Joy Through Drag Performance

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A Thesis in the

School of Graduate Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

(Individualized Program in Fine Arts) at Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2022

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

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Entitled: Transgender Drag, Transgender Joy: A Non-Binary Approach to Creating Joy Through Drag Performance

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Individualized Program in Humanities)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the potential for drag performance to be a tool for trans performers to create and amplify joy in embodying drag characters and developing them as practices over time. In this inquiry, I centre my own drag practice in order to engage in an autoethnographic perspective on drag performance that draws from both my lived experience and practice. Grounded in a performance creation component, this research uses my experience as a non-binary, trans drag performer to depart from analyzing drag performance solely within the realm of gender, and instead considering how it is situated in relation to joy. I contextualise the performance creation component with theoretical works on gaiety, utopia, failure, Camp, gender, and drag, in addition to drawing from my lived experience. I articulate how my lived experiences are intertwined with my drag practice, through an illustrated notebook component which builds towards the creation of a drag costume, which I then wear in a documented rehearsal that tests the effects of the costume. Through this work, I aim to expand notions of what drag can be for trans performers as both artists and individuals, and attempt to understand how its effects can be a means for creating joy outside of drag.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is prepared with the support of the Individualized Program, and possible due to the incredible support of my committee: Angélique Willkie (Principal Supervisor), with Dr. Rachel Berger and Dr. Shauna Janssen. Their patience, enthusiasm, and meticulous feedback on each stage of my research has pushed this thesis far beyond what I thought was possible.

I want to extend my infinite thanks to all the family, friends, and networks of trans artists who supported me in developing this work, and shared their knowledge with me as I've worked to develop my own. To my parents, Lisa and Andrew Hunter: I can't thank you enough for your teaching me through example the value of learning and creating as valuable lifelong pursuits, and for accepting and embracing me as I am. Thank you as well to my sister, Claire, for her promise to let me live in her guest house when she becomes famous. For my partner, Ashley: thank you for being by my side through all my chaos these last few years as I've navigated this process, I've learned so much from you. Thank you to my dear friend Jay, for their care and comradery as I've navigated the often overwhelming intersections of non-binary existence, performance practice, and academia. Additional thanks goes to: Victoria, who has spent innumerable hours being my 'study buddy' over video calls in the most intensive stages of my thesis work, and to Ben, whose incredibly Camp existence has prompted my own embracing of Camp. This work would not be possible without the influence of the performers of Transverse, especially my co-host and drag family member Salt, for their technical and moral support during the rehearsal portion of this thesis, and their incredible knowledge of drag.

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Anna Hunter, who has been an unwavering supporter of my education and eccentric self, and who has been a fierce advocate for the educations of all of us in her family: her continual insistence that I not work too hard has been a constant reminder for me to embrace joy at the center of my work.

Table of Contents:

Introduction

This thesis begins with a desire to articulate and understand the ways in which joy can be created through drag performance, and the ways in which this performance practice interacts with lived experiences of transgender identity. I approach this research with a curiosity as to how drag performance is an articulation not only of gender, but of the lived experiences and identities of those who embody it. I ground this inquiry in a case study of my own work as a non-binary trans drag performer in an embodied artistic creation component, to understand the way that my own gender experiences manifest in my drag practice. The underpinnings of this drag are complex and messy, and at times fraught with failure, but instead of attempting to resist this chaos, this thesis embraces it as an essential element of creating joy.

At the centre of this research, I experiment with a performance creation component where I develop a drag costume, and document the process of getting into drag via this costume, alongside a written and illustrated notebook that responds to and informs this. These interconnected components are then analysed through this written thesis, contextualised by literature that addresses the core concepts that arise from them.

The key concepts that I engage with in this research are Camp, drag, and joy; I explore these terms theoretically, and build from them in connection to how they are embodied within the performance creation. I define these three core concepts throughout the literature review, creation components, and subsequent analysis. This research is grounded in questioning how joy and Camp inform my drag practice, and how these elements are informed by, and inform my trans, non-binary subjectivity.

Research Question:

In this thesis, I ask: *How can embodying and analysing my drag performance as a creation developed over time allow me to gain greater understanding of the role of joy and Camp in drag performance, and how is this process informed by my perspective as a trans non-binary drag performer?*

While I initially set out to learn more about gender via an analysis of my drag practice, I've chosen to focus the scope of my inquiry on my specific lived experiences as a trans, non-binary drag performer. I question how my drag coexists alongside gender, and the underpinnings that shape it. I understand my experiences of gender, as informed by my lived experiences as a trans non-binary individual, as a lens through which I understand this research. This shift in questioning occurred through the creation process as it developed into a core site of exploration, one which emerged from and responded to my lived experiences of gender, as opposed to a desire to redefine my understanding of my own gender. As I will expand on in later sections, I draw from both lived experiences in relation to gender that exist outside of drag (ex. Experiences of being (mis)gendered, expressing gender, and existing in parallel to it), as well as gender related experiences within drag.

Background and Positionality:

I approach this work from the perspective of a non-binary trans drag performer. My experience as a drag performer informs this thesis work because my own drag practice, articulated through the creation components, is the basis for this research. My experience as a drag performer, which forms the core of my performance practice, predates the academic research I do here. In addition to my own personal drag performance, this background includes work producing all-trans drag shows; this experience informs how I understand my own work in relation to the work of other trans drag performers. This work in drag was a practice I came to

not only in response to questioning gender through burlesque, but an extension of my background in theatre. My academic and artistic background in theatre praxis, directing and dramaturgy, and scenography, as well as my training in movement practice have shaped my drag practice, but also my approach to the organization of this thesis work. My perspective on this thesis work, as well as on my drag practice, is shaped by and intertwined with my position vis a vis this work. While I address marginality within a queer, trans, non-binary perspective, this research is informed by my existence within places of privilege as well. While I critique and resist systems of binary gender, particularly as ascribed to bodies, these systems are in themselves products of colonially constructed systems of power, namely whiteness.

In “Racializing White Drag” (2004), Ragan Rhyne states that “[t]he performance of gender is also the performance of racialized codes of gender and, indeed, of race itself.” (184). As a white performer, it is impossible for me to engage with the performance of gender (through drag) without performing whiteness as well, as “embedded in the performance are codes of race and class and sexuality, among others, that create gender meaning itself.” (Rhyne 187). These intersections of, or “axes of identity cannot be understood as modular elements but rather must be considered mutually determining” and mutually present within drag performance (Rhyne 187). As gender and race are inherently intertwined, drag is “[n]ot merely a gendered performance, drag also performs race, class, ethnicity, and all of the other axes around which identity is structured. These identities, though at ideological odds with one another, are inextricable.” (Rhyne 187). While my gender experiences may be marginal, I also create this work from the positionality of being a white performer, a position that means that both my performance work and existence within my gender identity are both privileged by, and reflective of their existence within whiteness.

Methodologies and Methods:

Methodologies:

The core methodology for this work is Practice as Research (PaR), and Autoethnography. This project uses a PaR methodological framework, as the performance creation component uses process and embodied knowledge to generate the work, coupled with furthering this knowledge through critical reflection before articulating it (Nelson 2013). This methodological framework is also beneficial to this research because of its focus on connecting the roles of practitioner and researcher, an exchange integral to the coupling of the creation components and written thesis. In this thesis project, the practice referred to is the performance creation, which allows me to study the research question through embodied artistic experimentation and design work embedded in journaling; this creation component is the grounding source material that this written thesis draws from. Within a PaR methodology, the role of text is to translate the knowledge from the practice to be examined further, and as a means of communicating the knowledge gained through the practice (Nelson 2013). I use an illustrated notebook as a means to bridge the space between the artistic components of this research, and textual material, as the notebook encapsulates both practice components, and preliminary textual analysis. As such, this written thesis is a means of probing further into what has been uncovered through the creation process, working to clarify and expand on the work of the creation component, as opposed to being the central focus of the research.

In addition to using a PaR methodology, this research draws from an autoethnographic research perspective. As a qualitative research method, autoethnography departs from ethnography, as it centres the researcher as the focus of study, and “[w]hile related to autobiography, narrative, and ethnography, it is unique from a research perspective in that the researcher is the subject of study.” (Hughes and Pennington 2). Using an autoethnographic narrative in this research avoids writing from an exterior gaze into the realm of trans drag performance, and instead accounts for my own experiences within the identities, practices, and

communities that this work is grounded in. In using a first person narrative perspective, I engage with a practice where “[q]uestioning and unveiling the self is at the heart of critical autoethnographic work” (Hughes and Pennington 6). The primary site of autoethnography that this research uses is the notebook component, as I use it to document and examine my own lived experiences as related to this work. In doing so, I use my own lived experiences both within drag and non-binary existence as a grounding.

Methods:

The core of this study is the performance creation. This performance creation is comprised of two interdependent components that build from the key concepts of this research: Camp, joy, and drag. The first component is an illustrated notebook which informs, responds to, and analyzes the process of developing the performance creation. The creation of this notebook is not only a method for the development of the performance creation, but a way of drawing (literally and figuratively) from my lived experiences as a trans individual and drag performer. In this notebook, I use illustration, narrative and autobiographical writing, and photographs to build a performance creation component that responds to the underpinnings and challenges of the research. This notebook further allowed for key concepts to emerge organically through the creation process, as the creation of it spanned the entirety of the performance process. As I will address further in the Accounts and Documentation chapter, I understand this notebook to be a central part of the performance creation, as a preliminary way of considering how and when I could begin to shift into being or thinking as my drag character before the moment of being onstage, and as a way to simultaneously develop the design of the performance creation while interrogating its underpinnings. At the centre of this design work, I developed and created a costume which I then used as the basis from which the second element of the performance creation stemmed. The second element is a documented rehearsal in which I filmed myself moving into the embodiment of my drag character through the costume I constructed, and

exploring the potential ways of performing within it. I identify this component as a rehearsal specifically because it does not culminate in a final performance, instead focusing solely on the process of building towards what may become a performance in future work. In doing so, I allow myself the space to explore the ways that it can operate without an audience present, and ultimately to work to understand what my drag practice means for me when the need to arrive at a final product is removed.

Literature Review of Key Concepts:

Drag:

In this section, I aim to establish a working definition of drag that fits most accurately to the drag I study in this thesis, and one that reflects the practice that informs this work. This definition is not a definitive one, but I establish it in relation to my own drag, and the communities of drag performers I have learned from.

Etymologically, the term drag is traceable to theatrical origins. This term traces “back to late 16th-century [English] theatres, where men would often cross-dress in women’s roles. Until the Restoration period, which began in 1660, women were barred from stage by puritans who believed it was an inappropriate profession [...] In the absence of women, male actors took over.”(Hall et al. 12). In taking on these roles, male actors donned heavy makeup, and “full-skirted, flouncy gowns” (Hall et al. 12). The term ‘drag’ appears in reference to these gowns, in reference to the dragging of the petticoats that accompanied them (Bitesize 2020). This etymology is later documented, affirming its continual link to theatre, in the 1909 definition of drag in *A Dictionary of Victorian Slang a dictionary of heterodox English, slang and phrase*, “Drag (Theat.) Petticoat or skirt used by actors when playing female parts. Derived from the drag of the dress, as distinct from the non-dragginess of the trouser.” (Ware 129). This source additionally identifies: “also given to feminine clothing by eccentric youths when dressing up in skirts”, which I read here as a (relatively) early reference to the presence of queer individuals

experimenting with subcultural iterations of drag offstage (Ware 129). While the origin of the term ‘drag’ specifically originates in (or possibly, in reference to) the late Elizabethan era, this does not encompass the history of drag as an art form, it merely reflects one way of articulating it. However, this vast array of practices goes beyond the scope of this thesis and is too broad to effectively address in this literature review. Wherever there exists gendered clothing, there exist those who experiment with performing in clothing they are not socially or culturally assigned to embody, whether out of necessity, curiosity, or artistic aesthetic.

An early iteration of the definition of drag that is perhaps the predecessor of contemporary usages of ‘drag’ as a term is outlined by Esther Newton in *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (1979). Newton states that: “The homosexual term for transvestite[1] is “drag queen.” Queen is a generic term for any homosexual man. “Drag” can be used as an adjective or a noun. As a noun it means the clothing of one sex when worn by the other sex (a suit and tie worn by a woman also constitute drag” (Newton 3). While Newton’s definition sits within the assertion that drag is synonymous with opposite gender presentation, her definition reflects the difficulty of drag from outside drag communities, as well as the challenge of clearly defining the entirety of drag (Newton 3). Further, While Newton uses the terms ‘female impersonator’ and ‘drag’ near synonymously, embedded in her work is an acknowledgement that encapsulating the entirety of drag within her research is not possible. Newton reflects the challenges in clearly defining drag in addressing that there are many accounts of drag that are not documentable, as “[o]ne can only guess the number of professional female impersonators. Few of them belong to any formal organisation through which one might count them” (Newton 4).

In contrast with Newton’s definition, drag, as I use it here, is a performance form in which highly stylized, hyper-exaggerated, distorted, and/or parodied reflections of gender signifiers are

[1] While I quote this term here, it is important to note that this term, as applied to trans people, particularly trans women and AMAB trans people, is one considered by most to be outdated and offensive. The term, as used by Newton, reflects a moment in time (in the 1970’s) where this term was commonplace.

used to create a performance of a gender expression different from one's own. A drag performer uses theatrical methods (such as costume, makeup, character, and gesture) to create a persona from differing, but not intrinsically contrasting, gender expressions. This thesis considers this 'gender expression different from one's own' as individual to each performer, resisting the impulse to situate drag within binary gender by moving beyond the concept of 'opposite gender performance', and instead begins with the understanding that each drag performer plays with their own unique experiences of gender. My usage of the term drag reflects my own lived experience in drag communities, one where trans performers are overtly prevalent; my perception of this prevalence is of course skewed by the fact that the drag spaces I can access as a trans drag performer tend to be ones already populated by trans performers.

The definition I use here contrasts with what I argue is the most common definition of drag outside of drag communities, and one predominantly associated with mainstream[2] drag: "[..] Queens are gay men who dress as but don't want to be women", with the accompanying implication that drag kings are solely women who dress up as but don't want to be men (Rupp and Taylor 31). While this perception is slowly changing, and "[e]ven as we see more varied representation in drag, there's still a common myth that it's a male-only art form. But this isn't true, anyone can do drag! [...] drag simply means using aesthetic and artistic tricks to disrupt our idea of what it means to look like a man, a woman, or even just a person. It's the art of playing with gender". This presence is not new, as "Nightclubs worldwide have long housed talented trans and non-binary performers, as well as cisgender women." (Hall et al. 105).

While many trans performers are denied space in mainstream drag scenes:

> Trans and non-binary drag artists have always been leaders in the queer and drag communities. They continue to push conversations around the mainstreaming of drag into new realms, shedding light on how an artform created by outsiders can still be guilty

[2] I use the term 'mainstream' here in contrast to 'alt drag' scenes. The latter scenes are where many trans performers find our stages.

> of gatekeeping. [Trans drag artists] aren't just creating beautiful art. They're also proving that drag is not, and never has been, the exclusive domain of men. (Hall et al. 105).

The sparsity of academic material that addresses drag performance practices that exist outside of performing 'opposite' genders does not mean they are non-existent, instead it reflects that definitions of drag are in constant fluctuation and change over time. As drag performance is personal before it is an artistic medium, the way that each performer defines drag is different, and those who are denied space within mainstream drag are more prone to having their personal definitions omitted from documentation.

Rupp and Taylor's *Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret* (2003) emphasises that drag is not limited to performances of binary and opposite gender, they state that "Drag successfully invites audience members to consider what it means to be a man or a woman, what it means to desire someone of a particular sex, as more complicated than they would ordinarily think" (212). Drag makes gender messy, and "we can view drag as a collective boundary-crossing strategy aimed deliberately at challenging gender and sexual systems" (Rupp and Taylor 216). Drag artists have the opportunity to create performances that celebrate our various bodies and genders on our own terms, and to push audiences to reimagine what gender and bodies can be outside of cisnormativity, pushing the boundaries of what gender can be.

While I place this concept of boundary crossing at the center of my understanding of drag, this is not an un-contested definition: "The recent resurgence and commercialization of drag in American society [...] has spawned an ongoing debate among scholars of gender over whether performances in which gay men dress in women's clothing have political significance" (Rupp and Taylor 212). While referring to gay men in feminine drag specifically, this debate is reflected throughout the discourse within gender studies on drag:

> On one side are scholars who treat drag in the context of the gay community primarily as transgressive action that destabilizes gender and sexual categories by making visible the social basis of femininity and masculinity, heterosexuality, and homosexuality, and

> presenting hybrid and minority genders and sexualities. On the other side are those who consider drag performances more as enacting and reinforcing dominant assumptions about the dichotomous nature of gender presentation and sexual desire because drag queens appropriate gender displays associated with traditional femininity and institutionalized heterosexuality. (Rupp and Taylor 212)

While I focus my study on drag that sits within the first categorization, I do not strictly align with the idea that drag is universally one or the other, as I understand drag to be a highly individual practice, one that is defined in relation to the artist and through their own identity. I recognize that depending on the performer, drag has at times as much power to reinforce gender and sexual norms as it does to destabilize it. However, “Drag-queenness [...] like other oppositional identities, may draw upon conventional gender and sexual categories, but it also expands and problematizes identity by taking bodies and practices that are culturally encoded as feminine or masculine or as heterosexual or homosexual and combining them in ways that create new gender and sexual meanings” (Rupp and Taylor 218). Drag allows the performer to embody the aesthetics of binary gender categories in order to destabilize them; “Drag queens’ critique of mainstream heterosexuality and gender norms is not subtle, [...] the performers draw on a larger drag queen legacy of oppositional culture and consciousness” (Rupp and Taylor 219). This critique may be concealed through “use of comedy, satire, music, campy humor, and improvised interaction with the audience to voice opposition makes what they say more palatable.”, and through these techniques, “The drag queens’ strategic performance of identity, their use of the stage as a platform for political expression'' can occur (Rupp and Taylor 218). While these political expressions may be concealed, “Drag shows, like other staged performances, are a form of “playing,” but the planning and staging that goes into them marks an underlying rationality.” (Rupp and Taylor 218). While drag may appear as entertainment alone, “It is because of its status as entertainment that drag succeeds as intended. Entertainment makes possible political expressions that might not otherwise find an audience” (Rupp and Taylor 221).

It is in this seduction through frivolity, through which political meaning can be inserted, that drag finds its greatest potential to destabilize normative gender.

I align my own practice of drag closely to Rupp and Taylor's understanding of drag performance being a means for political expression. Drag, as I define it here, is a way of performing gender parody through artistic means as a way of destabilizing cisnormative and heteronormative ideas of how bodies, identities, and gender expressions are related. In the following sections, I will expand from this definition as it shifts in response to the performance and accompanying analysis, and in the context of my own drag practice. Throughout this research, I apply this definition to my own experience of being both a drag performer and non-binary trans person by considering these existences not as disparate identities, but lived experiences within a symbiotic relationship. My experience as a non-binary individual, and my practice as a drag performer have allowed me to discover new relationships not only to gender, but to the ways in which it can be transmogrified through performance.

What is my drag?:

My practice as a drag performer did not have an intentional beginning. I entered into drag practice through a year of experimenting with burlesque performance, developing a performance-self which slowly started to exist so separately from my own gender identity and representation that the disconnect became an entirely distinct character.

In seeking to understand how and why my performances were becoming drag, I was able to determine for myself that I was never a woman, I had just been playing one offstage and attempting to translate that to my onstage work.

This accidental shift into drag happened symbiotically with my shift in understanding of my own gender; the more I performed as an exaggerated or refined version of my own categorization as a 'woman', the more I became aware of my disconnect with identifying as such. Through beginning to consider my burlesque performances as drag, I was able to step

aside to re-evaluate how my relationships to femininity and womanhood were separate. In this re-evaluation, I was able to concretely identify for myself that I was not a woman, and needed to acknowledge that in my daily life as well (this marked the beginning of transition for me).

Viewing my gender expressions onstage as not just performative, but as an intentional performance allowed me to step back and consider what my identity and presentation might look like outside of them, asking “if my gender presentations onstage feel so asynchronous with what feels natural, maybe what I need offstage is something else". I’ve never played the idea of being a woman onstage in drag or burlesque, I’ve just played the idea of the hyperfeminine; In beginning to develop my drag practice, I played up the gendered aesthetics ascribed to my body until I was able to separate myself from them.

The process of developing my drag character, Annagram, over time, is one of allowing myself to play in and out of that character as an alternate version of myself, of allowing myself the space to explore gender presentations as an artistic phenomenon rather than a chore, and of allowing myself to experience the incongruities between my expressions and experiences of gender in a moment. I allow myself to redefine my relationship to this process over time, acknowledging that my drag character and practice, and my relationships to them, will shift and change as I do as an individual.

Through the process of rearranging my understandings of self, character, and gender into something new, my drag self emerged: Annagram.

At present, I identify my own drag as a temporary becoming of a character with an identity, gender expression different from my own that is created through performance. Through becoming Annagram, I can explore an alternate identity that I create parallel to the one I exist as in my daily life. Annagram, for me, exists as an alternative self I can slip into as a performer in order to experience the world in a different way. Annagram, as a character, is brazen, devilish (and sometimes demonic), flirty, clownish, and always flipping between mock submissiveness and a dominatrix-esque confidence, rarely without an edge of sarcasm, and constantly and

unabashedly in varying states of undress. As Annagram, I have taken undergarments off while somersaulting backwards, shot confetti out of a three-foot long glowing penis cannon, been covered in innumerable prop fluids, lip synched while standing in Pleasers[3] on a unicorn, and removed stockings by shredding them with sharpened acrylic nails. While I, as Max, primarily exist in practical butch attire (flannels, jeans, utilitarian boots, and either toques or baseball caps depending on the staples of the season) coupled with cropped hair and a near-exclusively makeup-less existence, Annagram embodies the opposite. Zer[4] presentation is grounded in skin-tight pleather and lace, hand-sewn gowns, six-inch heels, fetish-wear, and colourful layers of dramatic makeup. Where my attire is practical, Annagram's uses aesthetics as an act of disruption. Even in moments of possible overlap between our representations, Annagram takes on impractical versions (for example, Annagram and I both wear glasses some of the time, but zer glasses have the lenses popped out).

Annagram and I meet in the mess of things; in curse word and sarcasm peppered speech, paint stained hands and bruised limbs, indecipherable gender identities, self deprecating humour, tipsy nights at queer bars, fluctuations between restraint and utter chaos, and short fuses for audience's disrespect of other performers. We meet in the middle of interactions with other drag performers, a space where we collectively share and re-imagine how our drag and daily selves form messy communities, and where we learn intentionally and not from proximity to other drag performers. In the process of becoming zer, we also meet in the midst of constructing the garments ze wears, the choreography of zer performances, and the design of their visual elements. Throughout this written thesis, and the creation component it is

[3] Pleasers are a specific type of heeled shoe commonly worn by drag performers and strip performers. The roots of these shoes, and much of their contemporary usage is within sex work contexts. Drag performers often wear these to alter height (heels can be as high as 14", and because of the diversity of sizes available)

[4] I use the (neo)pronouns ze and zer for Annagram in writing, and ze/zer and they/them pronouns for Annagram onstage.

grounded in, I explore where the ‘meetings’ between myself and Annagram are, and the ways that these meetings mark the shift between myself and being in drag as Annagram.

In the performance creation, I use Annagram as a character as a tool through which I explore where the shifts between my daily self, and drag character are. In focusing on where the meetings between myself and Annagram lie within the performance creation, I attempt to understand what roles joy and Camp have in determining what these meetings (and separations) are. Through the extended process of creating a performance that never reaches a final fixed point of completion, I am able to explore where and how Annagram emerges as a character before (or without) a distinct onstage moment; in this instance of performing Annagram, I am able to closely consider what this drag character means for me when the goal is not to create a clear final product, but to document the process of embodying and creating through that character. While many of the performances I create through this character focus on the moment of enacting complete performances, and require the need to perform successfully for a short moment onstage or through short video products, this research explores how my drag shifts when extending this process and focusing on the creation over time. Further, because the performance creation did not include an audience, it allows me the space to create drag that I performed for myself alone. This allowed me to develop a performance that draws directly from the lived experiences of gender and joy that underpin my drag, and to center these experiences throughout the performance creation.

Joy:

As an emotional phenomenon, “joy,” as used throughout this research, is the psychological experience of happiness or pleasure. The definition of joy that I build in this section, however, moves away from defining the emotional experience of joy, and towards an understanding of joy as being a personal embodied experience that is developed over time. Throughout the following section, I examine how joy is not inherently frivolous, but necessary for

survival. Joy, as I use it in this research, is not an experience that exists in isolation, but one that arises from, or in response to, surrounding circumstances.

This definition of joy is one I understand first through the concept of "gaiety." In *Acts of Gaiety* (2012), Sara Warner identifies that:

> Gaiety [...] has less to do with the expression of an inner emotion than it does with the projection, or theatricalization, of a feeling that one can inhabit, and enact it so fully, that it appears 'as if' it were emanating from the core of one's being. These acts of gaiety facilitate a respite from the drudgery of daily life, provide escape from untenable situations, and enable the construction of alternate realities governed by values and aspirations observed to (and despised by) mainstream culture. (Warner 9)

Through gaiety, joy can emerge within otherwise un-joyful circumstances, as joy becomes a practice, an experience that can be created over time. Through acts of gaiety, joy is brought into a tangible being that can exist parallel to, or be connected with the external world. While "[a]cts of gaiety do not make the world go away; they make worlds, albeit illusionary and fleeting ones" within external worlds that lack joy (Warner 9). Enactors of gaiety may use these worlds to create moments of solace where external un-joyful circumstances are otherwise overwhelming or dangerous.

Gaiety is, then, the act of giving oneself permission to experience joy, and creating the circumstances to experience that joy. While gaiety may appear frivolous, gaiety has the potential to be employed as a survival tactic, as "[t]o engage in gaiety is to create a pleasurable and empowering experience out of an event or situation that is hateful or painful. Through parody, satire, and physical comedy, sexual [and gender] minorities survive by replaying tragedy as farce. In so doing, they make manifest the pleasure of politics and the politics of pleasure." (Warner 11). In this way, the creation of joy through gaiety is an act of resistance to systems that prevent access to this experience. For queer and trans people, this resistance may become an act of resisting systemic violences, social ostracization, and narratives that present queer and

trans lives as entirely existing in the negative; where representation of queer and trans lives focuses on violence, grief, and trauma, gaiety offers a place to express the joys of queer and trans existence. Expressing queer and trans joy through gaiety does not erase un-joyful realities, but rather creates worlds that allow individuals to exist within them.

This concept of creating worlds that allow for temporary escape is reflected in José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia, The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009). Muñoz identifies that this escape is not apolitical, as "[e]scape itself need not be a surrender but, instead, may be more like a refusal of a dominant order and its systemic violence. Queer fantasy is linked to utopian longing, and together the two can become contributing conditions of possibility for political transformation." (Muñoz 172). Within these fantasies of utopia, joy emerges in anticipation of a future with something more than the present moment, even if that potential future is not quite tangible. Queerness, and the utopia that defines it, sit in an imagined future space: they are not yet in existence, but the pursuit of them brings joy in itself (Muñoz 1). Instead of queerness existing in the present:

> Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as a warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. (Muñoz 1)

While Warner's concept of gaiety focuses on the creation of temporary and fantastical worlds of joy in the present moment as a means for survival, Muñoz's concept of utopia looks towards futures where these worlds are a reality. The pairing of gaiety and utopia here reflects the ways that I understand joy as being created to exist within a moment, and as a hope for that existence to grow and materialize in the future. Even though utopia cannot exist in the present, it can still be worked towards, queer utopia "is essentially about the rejection of a here and now

and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world." (Muñoz 1).

In contrast to this, Sarah Ahmed emphasises in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) that it is not inherently productive to "simply collapse happiness with the future or into the future", because doing so risks the loss of joy if that future does not occur in a happy way (160). Additionally, survival via anticipating the future as a place of joy is not infallible, as "The future after all can be imagined in ways that are far from happy: if we feel we have lost the possibility of happiness, if we feel we have lost hope that we might find happiness somewhere along the way, then the future will embody that loss of possibility." (Ahmed 160). Ahmed further cautions against focusing on happiness located in the past, cautioning that "Nostalgic and promissory forms of happiness belong under the same horizon, insofar as they imagine happiness as being somewhere other than where we are in the present" (161). For Ahmed, the problem of looking to happiness as somewhere other than where it is found, is that it is not permanent nor guaranteed in longevity, and the knowledge of this can be detrimental to its own existence (161). Instead, the pursuit of a better future is best approached as a process where "We can explore the strange and perverse mixtures of hope and despair, optimism and pessimism within forms of politics that take as a starting point a critique of the world as it is, and a belief that the world can be different." (Ahmed 163). Ahmed does not dismiss the value of pursing joyful futures however, noting that "[t]he desire for happiness sends happy objects forth, creating lines and pathways in their trail, as if we might find happiness by following these paths" (160). The desire for future happiness is then not a definitively unproductive endeavour, but it must be actively pursued in the present.

Muñoz stresses that "[s]ome will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds"; I pose here that gaiety is the way that we can enact these "new and better pleasures" into being (Muñoz 1). While utopia exists in an imaginary future, gaiety allows us to experiment with bringing it into being

through action. Within this understanding, the creation of joy exists as a means for survival, because it anticipates that un-joyful realities are not permanent or inescapable. While "[s]houting down utopia is an easy move", the idea of utopia is not inconsequential, as it revels in hope for a joyful future (Muñoz 10). This anticipation of future joy is present in that "[o]ften we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic. The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity" (Muñoz 1). In striving towards utopia, queer aesthetics translate into performativity and performance through acts of gaiety. As acts of gaiety:

> Performance – which identifies, enacts, and disrupts sexual difference, [...] serves as a fertile site for exploring the affective dynamics and temporal logics that motivate sexual minorities, aligning them into constituencies and fostering networks of relationality across space and time. (Warner 3)

These performances, as acts of gaiety, allow for exploration of what joy is possible for communities and identities both past and present, and experiment with how to move these joys towards utopian futures, queer futures. Warner identifies that these acts of gaiety have immediate practical effects, where "[g]ay pagents, protests, and performances [which] served as ambient environs in which deviant subjects could fend off some of the bad feelings associated with being gay in a straight world" (Warner 21). Through these actions, utopia can be explored through the temporary alleviation of unwelcome emotional states, in favour of explorations of comfort and joy. The relation between performance and queer existence is not incidental as, "Sexual [and gender] minorities can boast of rich performance history of entertaining audiences (both straight and gay) in bars, comedy clubs, and drag shows, but historically we have been the most skilled in the art of carefully crafting personas that enable us to survive the drama of compulsory heteronormativity." (Warner 6) This exchange between performance as a survival tactic both on and offstage, propelled forward by gaiety, joy, and hope for a utopian future, is central to this research work.

In the context of gaiety, drag performance exists as a moment of departure from the personas crafted for safety in the external world, instead revelling in the joy of temporary realities created through performance. Through drag performance, the idea of a utopia may be manifested onstage as an experiment for what joy might be yet to come. By centering joy in drag performance, drag becomes a means to play with what utopian futures might look like: what queer futures might look like. Placing this joy onstage, through drag as an act of gaiety, displays that joy is not inherently abstract or immaterial, but an entity that can be communicated to audiences and experienced in an embodied way.

Camp:

The core texts which ground my understanding of Camp are Moe Meyer's writing in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (1994) in reference to Susan Sontag's *Notes on "Camp"* (1964), Mark Booth's *Campe-toi! On The Origins and Definitions of Camp* (1983), and Philip Core's *CAMP: The Lie That Tells The Truth* (1984). In the following section, I aim to build towards an understanding of Camp as a closely linked, while not interdependent, concept that shapes drag performance both in and outside of intentionally Camp performance. I consider Camp here first in its etymology, following its construction linguistically in relation to time as it develops, addressing where its connections to homosexuality (and subsequently, queerness) begin, and examine its contested contemporary definitions, before proposing my own definition. In examining the history of Camp, I aim to build towards an understanding of how the research outcomes of this thesis sit within that genealogy.

The etymology of the term Camp can be traced back to 1671 in France, specifically in Molière's play *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, in the dialogue of:

> 'Wait, stop a minute', says Scapin to Octavio, as the idea dawns on him, and he begins to see the possibilities, 'Stick your hat on at an angle and look disreputable. Camp about on one leg ('campe-toi sur un pied'). Put your hand on your hip. Strut like a

> comedy-king'" (Booth 78). This theatrical origin is not an outlier, as Camp continually responds to or utilises theatricality, and "The element of off-stage theatricality in Molière's use of *se camper* is significant. Puritans, both religious and secular, have always worried about the effect of theatre on moral seriousness; theatre falsifies the self, encourages insincerity and promotes frivolity. (Booth 79)

Even in its earliest (documented) iterations, Camp carries with it a resistance to, or disconnect with, dominant ideas of moral correctness, though this is not echoed in its precursor, *se camper* (Booth 78). The verb indicated a strong air of panache, rooted in the French military camps of the time, where:

> The idea of tents did not then call to mind the small khaki, utilitarian apologies of today, but great billowy creations of shining fabrics – satins and silks studded with jewels, tapestries and gold banners. [...] the spectacle and display of court life was transferred to camp, which differed only in its lightness and its impermanence. The camp was an insubstantial pageant, a byward for transient magnificence where men were encouraged to wear their finest costumes, to preen themselves – indeed, to advertise themselves. (Booth 78)

While this root carries with it an appeal to reverence of others (specifically those of wealth and power), pageantry, play, and excess make themselves overtly known as tools to destabilise or resist normativity as the concept develops over time.

This term, Camp, is carried forward and later used in similar ways to Molière's usage, and is echoed in *A Dictionary of Victorian Slang a dictionary of heterodox English, slang and phrase* (1909), with the definition of "Camp (street): Actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis. Probably from the French. Used chiefly by persons of want of character. 'How very camp he is'" (Ware 73). This definition identifies the role of Camp as acts of exaggeration, but unlike earlier textual usage, links Camp with a larger pattern of personal behaviour; not a way of

undertaking a single action in a moment, but as a means of establishing or expressing identity which may otherwise not be articulated to the other.

The history of the term is then continued, in what Philip Core identifies as the first use of Camp via Jean Cocteau in 1922, “this phrase encompasses not only specific homosexuals who behaved exaggeratedly because of social displacement, but also those figures whose solecisms were not necessarily sexual but whose desire to conceal something and to reveal it at the same time made their behaviour bizarre to our way of thinking.” (81). While this is not the first usage of the term Camp, the term again shifts in this moment to its specific connection to homosexuality.

This connection to homosexuality is one of rigorous debate within Camp discourse, split between those who understand the core of Camp to be it’s aesthetics, and those who identify Camp as a solely queer practice. A defining moment of departure between these two ‘camps’ is when “In 1964 Camp was propelled into public consciousness via Susan Sontag’s now famous essay, “Notes On Camp” with its homosexual connotations downplayed, sanitized, and made safe for public consumption, Sontag’s version of Camp was extolled, emulated and elaborated upon” (Meyer 6).

As a result of Sontag’s definitions of Camp, “[c]amp has often been defined as a sensibility devoid of content.” (Meyer 7). Instead of grounding her definition of Camp in the political, Susan Sontag defined Camp as “a mode of aestheticism. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. That way, the way of Camp, is not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylization” (Sontag 2). For Sontag, Camp’s core purpose was in its visual style, not in the political, queer, reasonings for its aesthetics. Moe Meyer’s writing in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (1994) identifies the core problem of this erasure:

> By removing, or at least minimizing, the connotations of homosexuality, Sontag killed off the binding referent of Camp - the Homosexual - and the discourse began to unravel as Camp became confused and conflated with rhetorical and performative strategies such

> as irony, satire, burlesque, and travesty; and with cultural movements such as Pop. (Meyer 7).

For Meyer, the core problem of Sontag's canonical text on Camp is that "[Camp] finds its voice solely when spoken by the queer, we cannot revere the process of banishment by ejecting the un-queer from the discourse. That kind of power does not belong to the queer." (Meyer 10). Once 'the queer' is removed from Camp, it becomes subsumed into the mainstream and is difficult to retrieve. This removal is not an isolated or apolitical one, as "[t]he arguments that defuse Camp, that deny it power as cultural critique, are based, then, on a denial of agency" that diminishes the place of Camp as a destabilising entity (Meyer 12-13).

In contrast to Sontag's definition, Moe Meyer defines Camp as, "the total body of performative practices and strategies used to enact a queer identity, with the enactment defined as the production of social visibility." (Meyer 5). Meyer's definition shifts the core elements of Camp from an ethereal practice of discomforting style and aesthetics, to a specifically political and queer entity. Meyer further specifies that "Broadly defined, Camp refers to strategies and tactics of queer parody" (Meyer 9). Meyer further identifies that Camp is a solely queer practice, asserting that "By holding to a definition of Camp as the total body of queer identity performance practices, then, Sontag's essay does not signal the availability of Camp as an un-queer practice, nor does it signal the birth of multiple forms of Camp." (Meyer 5).

While Meyer rejects much of Sontag's definition of Camp, his work responds to questions brought forward by Sontag's work. Sontag posits that "The question isn't, 'why travesty, impersonation, theatricality?' The question is, rather, 'When does travesty, impersonation, theatricality acquire the special flavour of Camp?'" (Sontag 4). This questioning moves towards a defining of Camp based not on aesthetics, but based on what underpins those aesthetics. Like Meyer, Sontag's understanding of Camp identifies that aesthetics are not inherently Camp, and that there is a moment of separation between Camp, and the aesthetics it may embody. While Sontag's response to her question subsequently identifies that this dividing

'when' is "in the 18th century; there the origins of Camp taste are to be found," Meyer comes to the conclusion that this division is in that Camp becomes itself when enacted by a queer agent (Sontag 4). In clarifying the separation between purely aesthetic phenomena and Camp, Meyer stresses that it is vital "to differentiate camp from satire, irony, and travesty: and to terminate, finally, the conflation of Camp with kitsch and schlock, a confusion that entered the discourse as a result of the heterosexual/Pop colonization of Camp in the 1960's. […] Camp emerges as specifically queer parody processing cultural and ideological analytic potential" (Meyer 10). For Meyer, parodic aesthetic products (namely kitsch) are not where Camp lies, instead the value of parody is in the process: "When parody is seen as a process, not as form, then the relationship between texts becomes simply an indicator of the power relationships between social agents who wield those texts, one who possesses the "original," the other who possesses the parodic alternative." (Meyer 10). While Camp may result in kitsch, the core of Camp is not aesthetic but intention; Camp that creates aesthetics associated with kitsch is not Camp because of the kitsch, it is Camp because of the queer political underpinnings that prompt those aesthetics. The power of Camp is in the queering of the normative. Sontag states that "Camp taste has an affinity for certain arts rather than others. Clothes, furniture, all the elements of visual décor, for instance, make up a large part of Camp"; these arts do not become Camp without the queer agent (Sontag 3). Instead of Camp being an objective attribute of these arts, "Camp cannot be said to reside in objects, but is clearly a way of reading, of writing, and of doing that originates in the "Camp eye," the "eye" being nothing less than the agent of Camp" (Meyer 13). Meyer's desire to remove kitsch from Camp entirely, however, ignores the existence of kitsch as a product of "the Camp eye" (Meyer 13).

Mark Booth's *CAMPE-TOI! On The Origins and Definitions of Camp* (1983) offers perhaps a more realistic perspective on the role of kitsch and Camp, addressing how it is present in Camp without being inherently linked. Booth states that "Kitsch is one of camp's favourite fads and fancies", thus identifying kitsch's role within Camp as a tool of Camp, or an

aesthetic entity that lends itself well to Camp, without presenting it as equivalent (70). This inclusion of kitsch is also included with the caveat that it may be used by, or be a product of, Camp because of its place within the marginal, with Booth indicating that included in “the marginal are the trivial, the trashy, the kitsch and the not-terribly-good” (Booth 70). It is within the concept of marginality that Booth centres his definition of Camp, wherein Camp exists as a way of being: “To be camp is to present oneself as being committed to the marginal with a commitment greater than the marginal merits. Everything we should wish to discuss with regard to camp unfolds from this definition.” (Booth 69). In this, the messiness of the exchange between popular iterations of Camp, and their political rootings is not something to be avoided, but directly contemplated, where “The key to defining camp lies in reconciling its essential marginality with its evident ubiquity, in acknowledging its diversity while still making sense of it.” (Booth 66). Because of this, “Camp self-parody presents the self as being wilfully irresponsible and immature, the artificial nature of the self-presentation making it a sort of off-stage theatricality, the shameless insincerity of which may be provocative, but also forestalls criticism by its ambivalence. Non-camp people are occasionally frivolous as a holiday from moral seriousness; camp people are only occasionally not frivolous.” (Booth 69). This frivolity connects with theatricality, where an individual can use Camp as a way of producing visibility: “Off-stage theatricality, though not synonymous with camp, is certainly a common manifestation of it: camp people use exaggerated gestures of the theatre to draw attention to themselves” (Booth 70). While Sontag understands this act as an aesthetic sensibility alone, Booth stresses that “Camp is primarily a matter of self-presentation rather than of sensibility.” (Booth 69).

To return to Core, this complexity of interpretation, where an observer may read Camp as an aesthetic only, as opposed to immediately reading the political, allows a unique space of plausible deniability because “The duplicity of camp lies in the use of self as language; an instrument at once revealing and defensive,” while it still risks that “Compensation for a possible imbalance of these extremes leads to intentionally offensive *blague.*” (Core 82). As an extension

of this risk, Core too references the risk that “Camp becomes very obscure in this brilliant light of trendiness, reduced to commercial phenomenon easily recognized and easily accepted by the entire public” (Core 86). When this depoliticizing occurs, the very reasoning for its existence becomes obscured:

> While camp is often now a joke or pose among gays, it is not without a serious value because it originated as a Masonic gesture by which homosexuals could make themselves known to each over during periods when homosexuality was not avowable. Besides being a signal, camp was and remains the way in which homosexuals and other groups of people with double lives can find a *lingua franca*. (Core 82).

This essential balance and juxtaposition of visibility and concealment makes Camp difficult to identify concretely, indeed “Camp is very annoying because it is a seduction which denies its intentions” (Core 84). Instead of coming to a concrete and singular conclusion, Core states that “It is better to allow the camp to define themselves” (82). This definition on an individual self-determined basis is one which I align my own definition closely with; I understand Camp to have an ever-evolving and multifaceted meaning that occurs not because of a lack of meaning, but because it is inherently linked with identities that evolve and become more or less permissible over time.

Camp continues to exist because “Throughout history there has always been a significant minority whose unacceptable characteristics - talent, poverty, physical unconventionality, sexual anomaly - render them vulnerable to the world’s brutal laughter. Hiding their mortification behind behaviour which is often as deviant as that which is concealed is the mainspring of camp” (Core 81). Camp is dependent on this contested space: “There are only two things essential to camp: a secret within the personality which one ironically wishes to conceal and exploit; and a peculiar way of seeing things, affected by spiritual isolation, but strong enough to impose itself on others through acts or creations” (Core 82). While Camp’s definitions endlessly shift over time, so do the reasons those secrets must be simultaneously

concealed and articulated. Camp will always exist differently in different times because “The past was a different country; they camped differently there; camp can be clearly seen to have grown, like some fantastic tumbleweed in the arid wastes of vanished snobberies and social prejudices just as in the well of loneliness sunk by sexual discrimination” (Core 84). While Camp’s political, queer, marginal meanings may become obscured, their necessity remains, and:

> What is reassuring is that camp will re-emerge. Indefinable, unshakeable [...] It will find new ways to react both with and against public tastes, it will selfishly and selflessly shriek on, entertaining the self and the spectator in one mad gesture, oblivious of what it is required to do. Camp is always in the future; that is why the present needs it so badly. (Core 86).

The need for Camp changes over time, and my need to engage with Camp here, in this context, is as a tool to understand how to embrace the messiness of the work. Particularly since this thesis grounds itself in drag, my own drag, the messiness is unavoidable; instead of attempting to mitigate this mess, Camp allows me to create meaning within it.

In light of the above literature, I use ‘Camp’ to identify a continually evolving queer artistic phenomenon wherein the agent can both articulate and conceal their marginality through parody. By using parody as a political tool to both make visible and conceal identity, Camp becomes a language that thrives in the mess of lived experience. In addition to this definition, I further understand that:

> CAMP depends on where you pitch it. [...] CAMP is character limited to context. [...] CAMP is in the eye of the beholder, especially if the beholder is camp. [...] CAMP is a form of historicism viewed as histrionically. [...] CAMP is first of all a second childhood. [...] CAMP is a biography written by the subject as if it were about another person. [...] CAMP is a disguise that fails. [...] CAMP is cross-dressing in a Freudian slip. [...] CAMP

> is a lie which tells the truth. [...] CAMP is embarrassment without cowardice [...] CAMP is gender without genitals. (Core 80-81).

These examples given by Core are miniature definitions in themselves, reflecting that Camp exists in complex and devious ways that are interpreted by the individual. Camp, as illustrated in these examples, has the potential to transverse the space between lived experiences and imagined realms. I am particularly drawn to these examples because of their playfulness; Core's Camp examples are significant in that they flit between serious material, and joyful ways of articulating it. While Core's examples are not prescriptive, they exist in the space between theoretical and practical iterations of Camp. Throughout this research, I apply the theory of Camp to the performance creation, and to understand through this creation how Camp operates as a key element in my drag performance.

Gender:

I choose to focus the scope of my inquiry into my specific lived experience as a trans, non-binary drag performer, and here I address gender as the underscoring of this research that informs my lived experiences and artistic practice. While I initially set out to learn more about gender as a whole via analysis of drag practice, I question my relationship to gender and the ways that its role in my drag is informed by joy and Camp. This shift in questioning occurred through the performance creation process as the notebook component developed into a key site of exploration; within this work I was able to move towards an inquiry that responded to my experiences of gender, and the ways that I situate myself as a performer in light of them.

This section draws from the work of queer and transgender theorists to establish what my understanding of gender is, and the ways in which I situate my own understandings of gender in relation to existing research on gender. I define my own experience of gender, but move away from seeking to define gender as a whole, as such an identification would inherently require the violence of denying the agency and experiences of those who experience gender

differently from myself. This is reflected in Toby Finlay's "Non-Binary Performativity; Judith Butler's Queer Theory" *(2017),* in their response to Judith Butler's theorizations on gender, stating that "Achieving recognition [within gender] would thus constitute a loss of self because the account one gives of oneself cannot represent those parts of subjectivity that exist prior to language or that are not susceptible to being represented through the rules of language" (Butler 26-27 in Finlay 62).

The issue of becoming recognizable is reflected in Jack Halberstam's *Trans* A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* (2018) on the complexities of naming. Halberstam addresses that identifications with and against naming are an act of placing oneself in the world, meaning that "the powerful nature of naming – claiming a name or refusing to and thus remaining unnameable" is a way of making oneself knowable or unknowable to others (Halberstam, *Trans** 3). For Halberstam, "[n]aming, needless to say, is a powerful activity and one that has been embedded in modern productions of expertise and knowledge production", influencing collective identity as well as individual identity (*Trans** 4). Through the act of naming, we are able to identify not only our own experiences, but the ways that they relate to others; for trans people, this is particularly important in identifying the possibility to pursue existences more authentic to our identities. Having specific terminology allows for the space to exist outside of existing classifications, and "[u]ntil the middle of the last century, countless transgender men and women fell between the cracks of of the classifications systems designed to explain their plight and found themselves stranded in the unnameable realms of embodiment. Today we have an abundance of names for who we are," but terminology is not infallible or universally desired (*Trans** 4).

This process of naming carries the contrasting implications of being a means to articulate or externalize identity, while being named by the other may be an experience of misidentification, or a denial of identity. When an individual has the autonomy to choose how they are identified, and has the language to do so, otherwise unintelligible experiences can be

articulated and known. In turn however, languages of identification can be used to dismiss lived experiences and self identifications. In Halberstam's work, this duality is most present in his identifications of trans* terminology. Halberstam begins with the premise of using "the term "trans*" [...], specifically because it holds open the meaning of the term "trans" and refuses to deliver certainty through the act of naming" allowing space for the adaptation of the term over time (*Trans** 3). However, Halberstam misses the opportunity to engage with the possibilities of how the meaning of trans* can evolve by denying the possibility for identification outside of gender (*Trans** 9-10). While Halberstam argues that:

> The concept of being without a gender [...] is whimsical at best, since there are few ways to interact with other human beings without being identified with some kind of gendered embodiment. The concept of "agender", then, names a wish to be outside gender norms, rather than the real experience of being so. (*Trans** 9-10)

I counter that disidentifying with gender is not an impossibility, but a recognition of the fact that gender, namely binary gender, is a socially (and politically) created phenomenon, not a fixed and material truth. In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Gender Constitution" (1998), Judith Butler exemplifies this point in stating that:

> Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis. ("Performative Acts" 522)

For Butler, gender is a self-justifying phenomenon. I do not seek to argue here that gender as a phenomenon does not exist, but instead that binary gender is not a naturally occurring or material entity, and it is pertinent to address that the logics that construct it are not arbitrary or innocuous. Gender, as a construction, is deeply embedded in colonial projects of categorization and nation-making, where anthropology, medicine, and psychoanalysis are used to categorize

and hierarchize humans to justify colonialism (Halberstam, *Trans** 6). Within the colonial model of gender, "[t]he differences between men and women were [and are] codified and formalized in relation both to the household division into separate spheres for bourgeois [white] women", promoting the growth and maintenance of colonial states (Halberstam, *Trans** 6).

In *Making Kin Not Population* (2018), Kim Tallbear states that this is exemplified in that the "[g]rowing of the white population through biologically reproductive heterosexual marriage [...] was crucial to settler-colonial nation building" (146). In reference to the work of Paulla Ebron and Anna Tsing, Tallbear writes that, "heteronormative marriage and family foraged through particular intersections of race, class, and gender worked to increase certain human populations and not others" to maintain colonial and capitalist growth (146). This intentional process of continuing colonial growth through heterosexual reproduction was further made possible through the enforcing of binary gender systems, and the attempted erasure of non-colonial models of gender. In addressing the gender (and non-gender) possibilities outside of binary gender, I do not wish to draw equivalencies between non-colonial gender existences and non-binary existences that sit within colonial models of gender,[5] but to reflect that colonial models of binary gender are not passively created or enforced.

The enforcement of binary gender serves as a means to maintain dominant cultures, where "[t]o guarantee the reproduction of a given culture, various requirements, well-established in the anthropological literature of kinship, have instated sexual reproduction within the confines of a heterosexually-based system." (Butler 524). In order to guarantee this reproduction (literally and figuratively), "cultures are governed by conventions that not only regulate and guarantee the production, exchange, and consumption of material goods, but also reproduce the bonds of

[5] As indicated by Kim Tallbear, imposing settler ideas of gender and sexuality onto Indigenous peoples includes transposing Indigenous gender, kinship, and sexuality into queerness is in itself a colonial act, as "[s]o much has been imposed onto Indigenous peoples, both heteronormative settler sexuality categories and now also "queer" categories (Tallbear 153). This extends to the tendency for white/settler created queer theory to use Indigenous gender and sexuality as justification for, or synonymous non-binary gender identities that exist within colonial models of gender.

kinship itself, which require taboos and punitive regulation of reproduction to effect that end." (Butler 524). Instead of binary gender, and the compulsory heterosexuality that often accompanies it being a natural phenomenon, "[t]he tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of its own production" (Butler 522). As a result, "The act that gender is, [...] is clearly not one's act alone. Surely, there are nuanced and individual ways of *doing* one's gender, but *that* one does it, and that one does it *in accord with* certain sanctions and proscriptions, is clearly not a fully individual matter" (Butler 525). While our identifications and actions with and against it are personal, the 'it' of gender is culturally constructed. (Butler 525). The ways that the doing of our genders (or non-genders) may be interpreted by others do not negate them, but reflect incorrect interpretations of how they are externalized. The concept of identification determining identity:

> is particularly invalidating for trans folks, suggesting that when "misgendered" (I.e. interpellated with an incorrect gender category) they become members of this non-affirming categorization. If this were the case, the very existence of trans and non-binary people would be invalidated by the linguistic formation of interpellation, which confers a genemonic, epistemological quality to the "authority" who performs this gender non-affirming hailing. (Finlay 64)

Trans people (including agender people) do not become a gender when interpreted, nor as I argue here, does being misidentified as being with gender negate an individual's identified existence as being without gender; instead, it reflects the fallibility of identifying another's (non)gender. For trans and gender nonconforming people, the issue of misidentification has more than nominal consequences as, "[p]erforming one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all" (Butler 528). When this reassurance is not apparent, "incorrect" gender performances create discomfort in the awareness that gender has no fixed and immovable grounding. This discomfort results in that "[a]s a corporeal field of

cultural play, gender is a basically innovative affair, although it is quite clear that there are strict punishments for contesting the script by performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisations" (Butler 531). While individuals may experiment with gender and act outside of binary gender constrictions, doing so publicly risks punishments ranging from social ostracisation to direct violence. It is therefore not a choice to perform gender or not, instead: "[g]ender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure" (Butler 531). While I draw from Butler in this section, it is vital to address that her work sits within a complicated relationship to transgender people. Finlay's "primary critique of Butler is that her theoretical exploration could not exist without trans people's experiences of violence, yet her resulting theory lacks political utility for trans and non-binary communities", and this critique resonates deeply with me (67). While Butler's work engages with the ways that the construction of gender has implications for transgender people specifically, her work still speaks on behalf of (and benefits from) the lives and traumas of transgender people.

On my own gender:

In accounting for my own gender, I define it with as much ambiguity as possible. For the purpose of this research, I identify my gender as 'non-binary', but more accurately, I do not identify as having a gender at all, at least not a discernible one. In identifying my gender here, I admit a certain trepidation in doing so, as "Queer and trans people are more frequently asked to account for ourselves by virtue of the unrecognizability of our subjectivities", and accounting for myself, my gender, can be a fruitless endeavour, as it does not guarantee that my subjectivity will be recognized (Finlay 63). There is, however, a certain joy that arises for me in being able to articulate my gender here, as it reflects a moment in which I can contribute my own lived experiences as a transgender, non-binary person to the broader realm of writing by (and for) trans people. As Kate Bornstein states in *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and The Rest of Us* (1994) "there's another kind of trans(gressive)gender experience going on in this culture, and

nowadays we're writing our own chronicles of these times. Our stories tie together, our stories overlap", and I relish the opportunity to contribute my own (Bornstein 13). In articulating some semblance of a (non)gender identity, I am able to situate myself within this discourse. For Bornstein, "Gender identity answers the question, "who am I?" Am I a man or a woman or a what? It's a decision made by nearly every individual", and my decision sits squarely within the realm of the "or a what?" (24). There is no clear definition for how I situate myself in relation to gender, but I wish to assert that it does not exist within the realms of male or female: I am certainly not a woman, and I am certainly not a man, and I am certainly somewhere that is not in between. I articulate my gender similarly to Leslie Feinberg[6], who, in *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue* (1998) identifies hirself as "a human being who would rather not be addressed as Ms. or Mr., ma'am or sir. I prefer to use gender-neutral pronouns [...] to describe myself. I am a person who faces almost insurmountable difficulty when instructed to check off an "F" or an "M" box on identification papers" (1). My (non)gender identity is unclear, and I recognize that "I am a human being who unnerves some people. As they look at me, they see a kaleidoscope of characteristics they associate with both males and females. I appear to be a tangled knot of gender contradiction" (Feinberg 6). While there is risk in existing publicly in this way, I use this research as an opportunity to share the joy (and the Camp!) that is embedded in this mess of a (non)gender experience.

Accounts and Documentation of the Performance Creation:

Overview:

As addressed in the 'Methods' section of this thesis, the performance creation of this thesis is comprised of two interconnected parts: a notebook and a documented rehearsal. The process of the performance creation component began in the notebook, which incorporated handwritten text, comics, design drawings, and photographs to build a document that explored

[6] While our gender identities are disparate

the inquiries of this thesis work in a non-academic format. In the notebook, I use a non-academic format – informal writing, in juxtaposition to this written thesis document – to write without need for polish or completion, and ultimately to allow space for ideas to emerge and develop organically. Developing material in this way allowed me the space to explore concepts and ideas without attempting to refine them within a traditional academic format; clarity and cohesion are not prioritized in this document, focusing instead on allowing the content to flow authentically.

The initial purpose of the notebook was to keep a log of designs and preliminary thoughts on the performance component, but this purpose quickly shifted to be a core component of the performance creation. Instead of rough notes, this notebook marks much of the grounding work of the thesis; it is not only a site of documentation, but a place of experimentation and analysis, and an element of performance creation that is as essential as the rehearsal component. As the performance creation progressed, the notebook allowed me to articulate moments of exchange between my lived experiences and artistic practice, and to draw from them to further analyze their implications. I identify the notebook as a core component of the performance creation because it acts as connective tissue between my lived experiences, the costume, the moment where I embody the costume, and the formal writing of this thesis.

I use the drawings and other images in this notebook as annotations to the written material, taking the form of freewriting and autobiographical narrative. In turn, I use comics in this notebook because of their pairing of text and images. This allowed me to insert moments where I document my lived experiences without having to justify them with in-depth explanation immediately. While the written components themselves include in-depth writing, and the volume of writing within this notebook is significant, the writing is largely unstructured and chaotic, and it prioritises content over readability.

This pairing of visual and hand-written documentation contributed to the design of the rehearsal by beginning to translate the core concepts of this research – drag, Camp, and Joy –

into visual components by engaging directly with the concepts through illustrated writing (including comics, and drawings as annotations). Even before the notebook shifted from illustrated writing towards design drawings[7], I was able to begin considering what patterns in colours, textures, shapes, and themes were emerging as important elements through referring to the image components. In considering these patterns, I was able to begin investigating how and where Joy and Camp were present in the performance, and, as I will address in the Analysis section, consider how these concepts were key aspects of my drag.

The sections of this notebook that centred around the design of a costume for the rehearsal emerged from the documentations of my lived and artistic experience. These sections included rough ideas, and questions that arose within them, and attempted to translate the themes that emerged from these articulations of my lived experiences and rough theorizations of my practice into the design of performance garments.

While working through the design components of the notebook, I began building the garments themselves, and exploring how I might be able to move within them. At this stage, the notebook and performance became deeply intertwined, informing each other throughout the process of creation. What I refer to here as ‘the rehearsal’ was ultimately not a final product, but an embodied continuation of the work of the notebook. In the documented rehearsal, I explored the ways that the costume I had built could be worn on my body, the ways that I could perform within it, and how ‘performing’ without an audience present would shape my experience of being in drag. The non-presence of an audience was initially decided because this creation component took place during COVID-19 lockdowns, but this lack of audience became an element which shaped the performance into existing as an experiment instead of a final product to be shared with an audience. Instead of creating a drag performance as a final product, the

[7]I use ‘design drawings’ to refer specifically to drawings in the notebook which were for the purpose of drafting ideas for the costume of the documented rehearsal, as well as, in later stages, roughly outlining a lighting design.

performance creation explored the ways that my drag character emerged in the process of developing a drag performance,

Pairing these two components, the notebook and documented rehearsal, together was done to develop a performance creation component which focused away from analysing a drag performance as a finished product developed for presentation to an audience, and towards an in-depth analysis of drag performance as a process. Grounding this performance in the notebook allows this research to forefront the processes of creating drag that are often lost or left to speculation in analysing final products alone; this notebook followed by the documented rehearsal allows for an embracing of the non-linear aspects of creating the performance, emphasising the interconnected and messy ways that my drag performances emerge from my own lived experience. This approach departs from focusing analysis on aesthetics alone, and refocuses on the logics behind them. In the following sections of this written thesis, I aim to translate this notebook and performance into formal writing. The performance did not have a singular (linear) progression of beginning with rough notes, and building toward a cumulative product, instead it was a continual exchange between the notebook, the building of the costume, and the enactment of the documented rehearsal itself.

Note: The full notebook document, and rehearsal documentation video, are available via the Spectrum Research Repository (Concordia University)

The Notebook:

This notebook weaves in and out of my personal experiences as a non-binary person, my experiences as a drag performer, and the ways that these intersect with the performance designs. The notebook was broken down into four sections; the first indicating the background from which I approach this work (including drag and non-drag experiences), the second expanding on the theme of ‘trans joy’ which arose through the first section, followed by a third section which brought these experiences and ideas into design for the costume that the

performance centered on, and the fourth and final section was a rough framework for the performance itself. These sections are indicated as Parts A, B, C, and D, respectively.

In the notebook, Camp began to emerge through the increasing calamity of form that it took; the text in the notebook overlaps sketches and images, my handwriting is not always legible, ideas emerge as clusters, and I illustrate myself and Annagram into the material as cartoons. While these elements are not inherently Camp in themselves, particularly in light of Meyer's assertion of Camp as not defined by aesthetics, enacting them as a queer individual, with the intention of conveying queer meaning, draws them into the realm of Camp (Meyer 10).

Camp particularly emerged in the notebook in the illustrations of myself and Annagram as cartoon characters, and was a particularly surprising moment where joy emerged. In drawing myself into my notebook as a cartoon, I was able to visually place myself into the research to illustrate my lived experiences.[8] My cartoon self and the cartoon of Annagram that I draw are heavily stylized (and my cartooning style is always intentionally rather roughly drawn); through this stylization I was able to exaggerate visual languages in order to analyse what patterns emerged. Because cartooning allowed me to choose how I presented myself, I noticed patterns in expressions, clothing, and posture particularly; my drawn expressions skew heavily towards sarcasm when gender is involved, and the way that I represent my body is entirely separate when drawn as Annagram, with the features and body shapes that I avoid illustrating in my cartoon self being heightened in zer cartoon self.

These cartoon selves are significant in that they allowed me to create a layer of simultaneous revealing and concealing of lived experience within the notebook. I found that in using my cartoon selves as ways of communicating lived experience, it was possible to include painful material in a way that translated as humorous (or at least lighter in tone).

[8] While I use photographs of my external drag work as supporting material, these photographs are of artistic products, not of my non-performing self.

I place these cartoons in the realm of Camp because they are parodic interpretations of my lived experiences that use illustration to convey queer personal and political meaning without stating it directly. The cartoons in the notebook do not conceal these meanings or narratives, but illustrate them so that their existence can be known without immediately showing their weight. Examples of this, within the notebook, include that: the experience of being misgendered is not an enjoyable or humorous one; endlessly having to correct others on pronoun and name usage is exhausting; and the intense speculation and regulation of trans bodies has extreme consequences for trans people. Through cartoons however, and through applying Camp to the telling of those experiences, it is possible to reflect them in this research without needing to prove their negative impacts, or to divulge the depth of their impacts. Through using cartooning as a Camp method, it is possible to communicate their existence in ways that are more palatable without losing their meaning.

Part A: Background

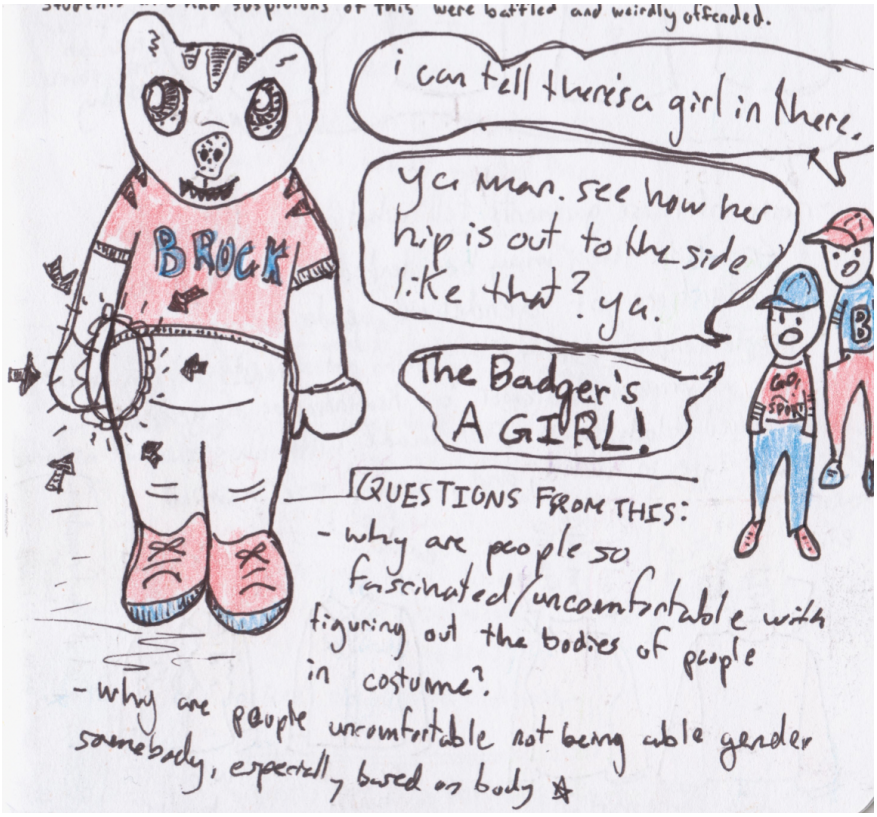
This first section begins by responding to the following questions: “Where does my understanding of gendering come from?” “What does ‘transition’ look like for me?” “How are bodies gendered based on clothing?” and “How can clothing act as an intervention into how bodies are gendered?”. These questions acted as points of departure for the notebook, and reflect questions that I ask myself and attempt to work through in my daily life; since (and in the process of) making the decision to transition, these questions circle in my head as I move through the world as a trans person and attempt to navigate how I externalize my (non)gender.

I begin to respond to these questions first with a one-page comic of what the timeline of how I have visually presented in different moments throughout my life. This page is primarily image based, and aims to display how outward appearances of transition are not linear in nature; transition does not require a linear progression between visual representations of one’s gender, and no two transitions look the same. I choose to document not only the changes in

gender presentation that occurred in what I consider to be my transition period (this is only visible in this comic in the last two to three drawings), but instead emphasise the shifts I have experienced in presentations throughout my life. This comic most noticeably reflects age differences, as each drawing is in chronological order, showing how my presentations of ‘masculinity’, ‘femininity’, and ‘androgyny’ have not been linear in transition. This emphasis seeks to communicate that gender transition is only one way that an individual shifts in presentation and identity throughout their life. Through this comic, I attempt to convey this in relation to that I understand my own transition as a process of changing how I externalize and understand my (non)gender, and that this process did not have a clear beginning and end point.

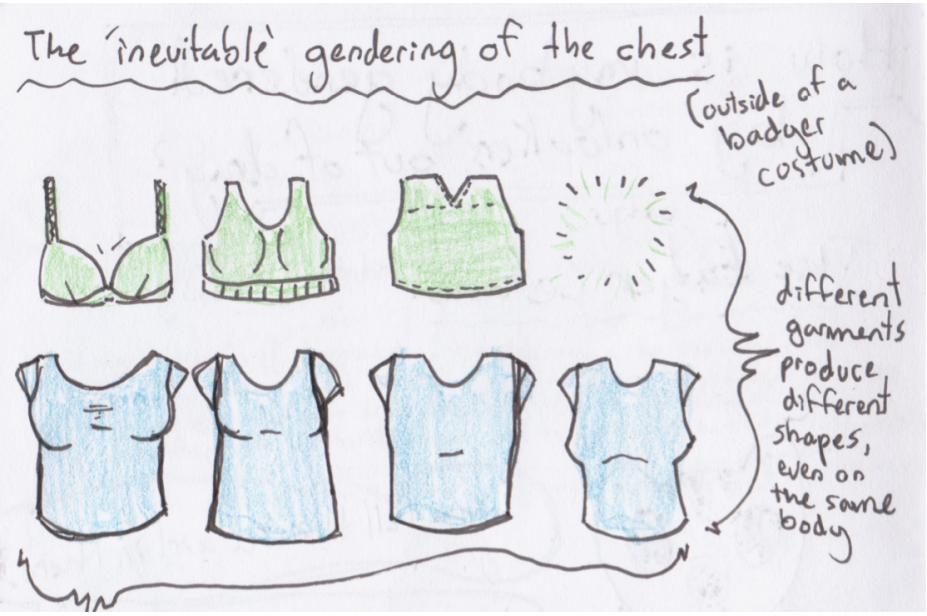
The second page of this section illustrates and annotates an informal case study of how my body is gendered outside of drag. I chose a seemingly frivolous example, namely the experience of being misgendered while wearing a large badger mascot costume, to emphasise the sometimes bizarre ways that my body is gendered even when it is concealed. I quote in this page a conversation from two onlookers who came to the sudden realization (with palpable

discomfort) that the badger must be a woman because I had shifted my weight onto one leg, causing the padded hip of the badger costume to stick out to one side. I include this as a case study here because it was a moment in which I started focusing directly on how my body could be gendered even when out obscured by garments and only visible through body positioning, and of how minute 'flaws' in the portrayal of gender could cause significant impact.



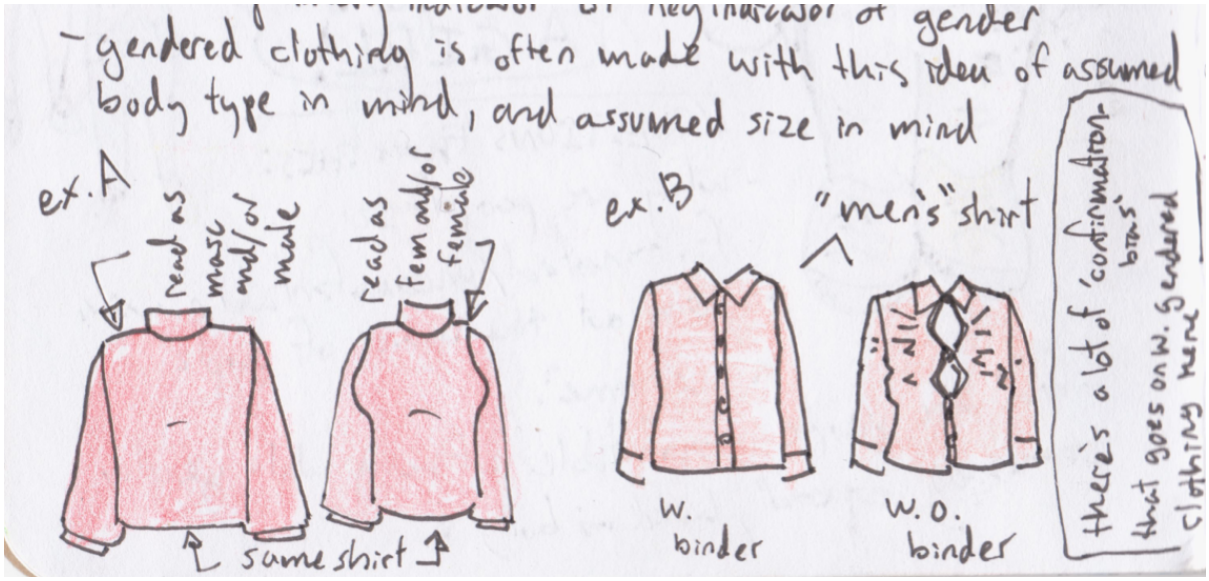
In the following two pages, I break down examples of how bodies are gendered based on the clothing the individual puts onto them. I use my own body here, roughly, to create a template for displaying the garment-derived effects I analyse. The first of these two pages focuses on the gendering of the chest; I choose to focus on this because as a trans person with breasts, this is the site of gendering that I am subject to most often. In this first page, I illustrate how different garments affect the visibility of, shape of, and assumed gender presentation of

chest tissue[9]. The first set of illustrations addresses how different shaping garments can be used to create different appearances of chest shape on one body: structured bras, non-structured bras or sports bras, and chest binders. Each garment shapes chest tissue in different ways, and influences the perceived size of the chest tissue, as well as impacting levels of support and comfort.

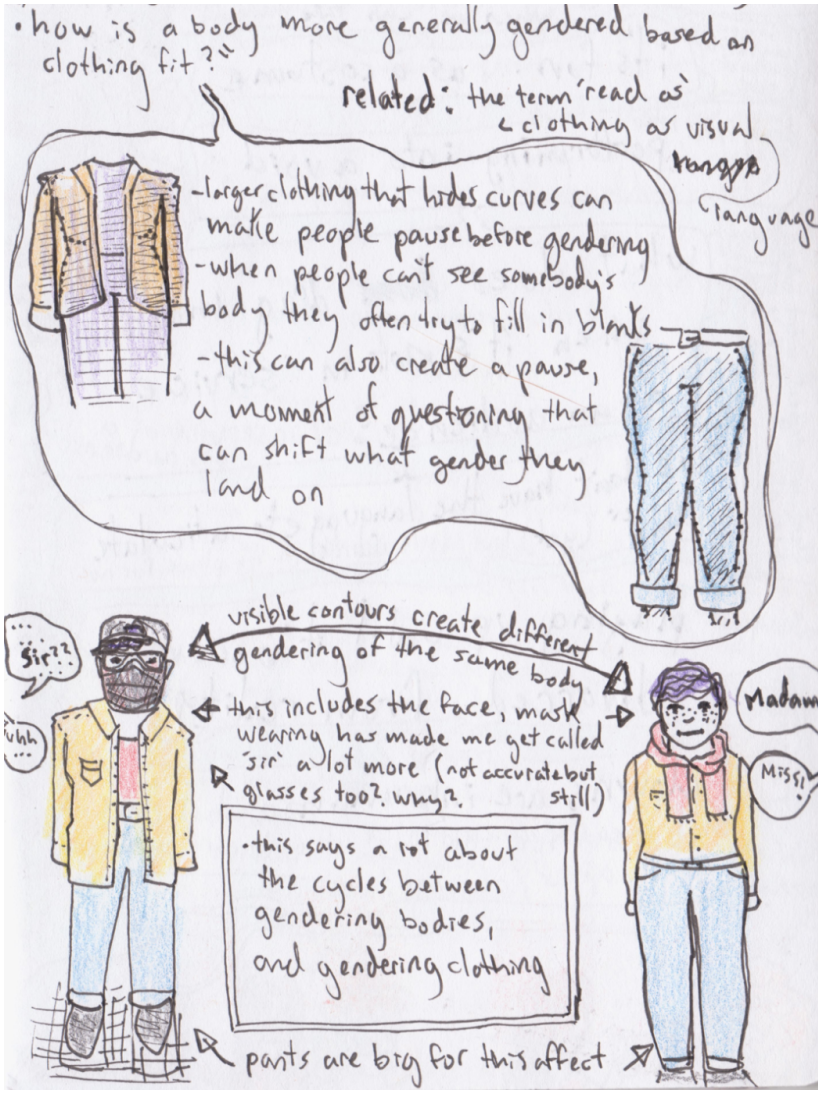


This page identifies that there is no inherent gendered meaning to any of these shapes and fits, but that these different shapes are perceived to have gendered meaning; the presence or absence of breast or chest tissue, or the visibility of it, is not inherently linked to a person's gender. The shape and volume of breast or chest tissue varies for each individual regardless of gender, (influenced by body fat, varying hormonal levels, genetics, surgical intervention, age etc.) in cis people and trans people alike, but particularly for trans people, the visible presence of breast tissue can be a determining factor for how we are gendered, particularly for AFAB[10] trans people.

[9] 'Chest tissue' is an alternative to using the term 'breasts', as for some trans people, this switch in terminology alleviates chest dysphoria. I use this term as inclusive of breasts.
[10] Assigned Female At Birth



In the following page of the notebook, I question how my own body specifically is gendered based on its contours. In connection with the previous page, I address how different fits of clothing can be used to alter the perceived silhouette of my body, and subsequently affect the gendering of it. I use the example of one outfit, a button-up shirt with jeans and boots, that is gendered differently depending on the fit and style of wearing them. One set includes looser pants and an untucked shirt that hangs past the hip, with a facemask, glasses, and a ballcap. The other has more fitted pants, a tucked in shirt, and a scarf, with the face and hair visible.



As identified with these illustrations, the first of these outfits is often responded to with more 'masculine' terminology, while the second is almost exclusively read as female. The most notable difference between these two outfits is the ways that they conceal body contours, and emphasise them (respectively). In the first, body contours that are often gendered by onlookers (ex. hips, chest, jawline) are made less visible because of the hang of the fabric, creating a straighter silhouette, while the second clearly displays them, and even emphasises them in the case of the pants. In this page, I use this example as a way of examining how bodies are

gendered within the garments that cover them, and how clothing can be a means for the wearer to alter the visibility of body shapes.

As a transition point from exploring my broader inquiries into how gender is ascribed to bodies, this section of the notebook includes two pages that outline the ongoing show I produce that began as a response to the lack of celebratory, uncensored, self-determined representation of trans bodies onstage. This show, Transverse, is examined in this section because it connects my ideas of the gendering of bodies to how they can exist onstage when not presented for a cisgender gaze, specifically in the realm of drag and nightlife performances. I dedicate this space (in the notebook, and subsequently in this Analysis) to discussion of Transverse because the process of producing this show over time has been a consistent process of building an understanding of the value of building joy through drag performances as a trans person; through Transverse, I have been able to watch other trans performers grow into the characters and practices that work best for them, and to see how their performances change when in a trans-focused space. My own work as a drag performer has moved towards joy as I have worked to develop Transverse because I have had the opportunity to directly shape a space where being trans onstage is not exceptional, where I can focus on my performances first and make choices because they make me feel confident and excited by the work. The loose network of performers that make up Transverse – the line-ups of each show vary, but many performers return or attend shows even when they are not performing – have continually prompted me to question what I want out of my drag and how I represent that desire in my performances.

In the first of these pages addressing Transverse, I document, in a loose comic format, thoughts referencing informal conversations that I have had over time while co-producing the most recent iterations of Transverse. The loose comic format of this page aims to reflect how Transverse has come into being not only through the planning of specific shows, but through continual conversations between performers regarding our experiences as drag performers. I feature my co-host and drag family member, Salt, throughout these pages, as they have been

present through many of these conversations, and have pushed me over time to continue to reconfigure how I understand my drag in relation to my non-binary experience.

The speech-bubbles in this page focus on questions that have arisen from conversations with other drag performers over time, but are interspersed with tiny non sequiturs quotes to emphasise the ways that they are conversations that are embedded in everyday contexts. I aim to show how through this continual process of planning and reflecting on this show in coordination with other trans drag performers, I have been able to inquire into how drag exists not as an isolated artform, but as a performance form deeply embedded in individual performer's choices, identities, and desires.

The performers in Transverse predominantly come from the overlapping alternative drag scenes in Toronto and Montréal, and many of these connections have been built from open-stage shows that give performers space to showcase and experiment with their work without needing permission to do so (and are subsequently popular with trans performers who are unable to access mainstream stages). As my own work as a drag performer has grown over time, I have found that I've been inspired more by the communities stemming from drag shows themselves than individual performers in isolation, as (particularly in open-stage shows), the growth of performers' work over time reflects the evolution of drag communities. One particular show that exemplifies this is a Toronto show, Amateur Strip Night Judged By Drag Queens (run by Toronto queens Jacklynn Hyde and Allysin Chaynes monthly until 2020); this has been a monumental influence on both Transverse, and my own individual work because of the space it created for trans performers to experiment freely with what our drag could be[11]. Many of the drag performers who participate in Transverse have developed their practices on this stage, including myself, because while it is a competition, the goal of the night is to indulge in experimentation and, ultimately, joy. Additionally because I was able to access this stage early on in my practice as a drag performer, I was able to access other trans and non-binary drag performers (including the Toronto drag performers Lady Kunterpunt, Rye, Yovska, and Tygr Willy) whose experimental alternative drag practices exemplify the potential for drag to be more than a performance of gender parody alone. I include this example here because the joy that I experienced on this stage, and continually aim to bring into Transverse, has continually shaped the way that my drag prioritizes experimentation over perfection, and risk taking over polish.

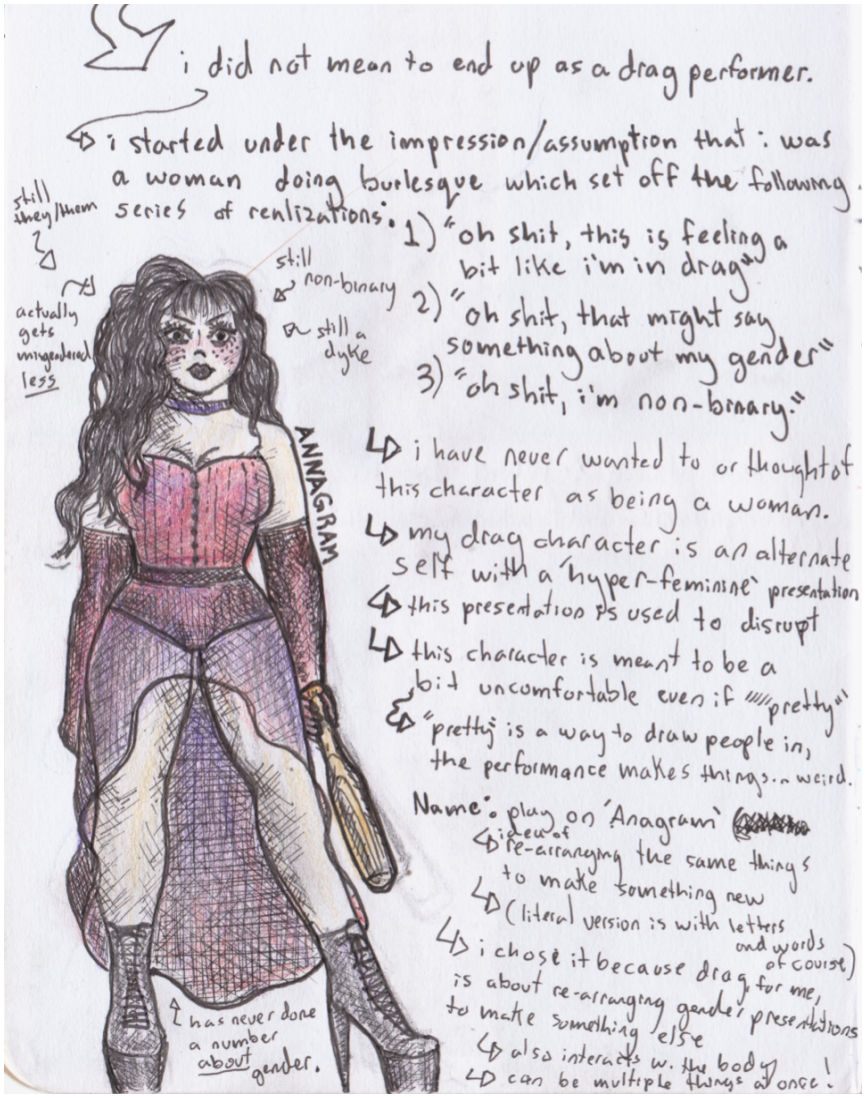
[11] This show has also been of particular influence because Jacklynn Hyde took on the role of 'drag mom' for me while I was first entering the world of drag, and has led by example in proving that trans drag performers deserve space on drag stages.

These pages on Transverse build towards the following pages that respond to the questions , “What is my drag?... what does it look like?... what logics does it have?” and “how does this background affect where this performance work will (or should) go?”.

I begin to respond to these questions by incorporating images of eight distinct drag ‘looks’ that were selected to show a range of ways that my drag has existed visually. Accompanying each image is a description of the purposes of the look, focusing on the functions of each look beyond aesthetics in isolation; what characters did they create? What do they communicate? Who do these aesthetics serve, and what non-gender based signifiers do they encompass?

In response to these questions, these pages establish that the visual aspects of my drag are highly dependent on the contexts they are presented in, and primarily shaped by narrative and colour. Instead of a reflecting cohesive aesthetic, each image displays contrasting ways of approaching makeup that shift away from attempting to be polished and pleasant, instead thriving on the disturbing, unsettling, grotesque, and bizarre. These pages are significant because they do not just describe what my drag is in text, but visually represent the various manifestations of it over time; in this section, I seek to display the range of aesthetics that a single drag character can shift through over time, and depending on the context of the work being done. The drag I reflect in this notebook section does not have a linear progression, it is a process of experimentation that creates many different aesthetics over time as they are needed or desired.

The second to last page of this section asks why I do drag, how I became a drag performer, and what it means for me. This page begins with a significant point about my practice as a drag performer: that I did not intend to become a drag performer. As I identify in the ‘What is My Drag’ section of this thesis, Annagram began as a burlesque persona who was not intended to be more ‘feminine’ in presentation than I was at the time, instead being a more theatrical version. This page marks the groundwork for the aforementioned section.



In this page, in addition to describing my drag character, and illustrating said character, this page begins questioning how I can use the 'pretty' (or otherwise 'attractive') aesthetics and mannerisms of Annagram as a means of disruption. 'Pretty', as identified here, is not the goal of my drag, but it can be an aesthetic goal intended to draw audiences in before (or while) being disruptive. This page expands on this by addressing that using aesthetically pleasing exteriors, I can create performances which are stranger or unsettling without alienating audiences.

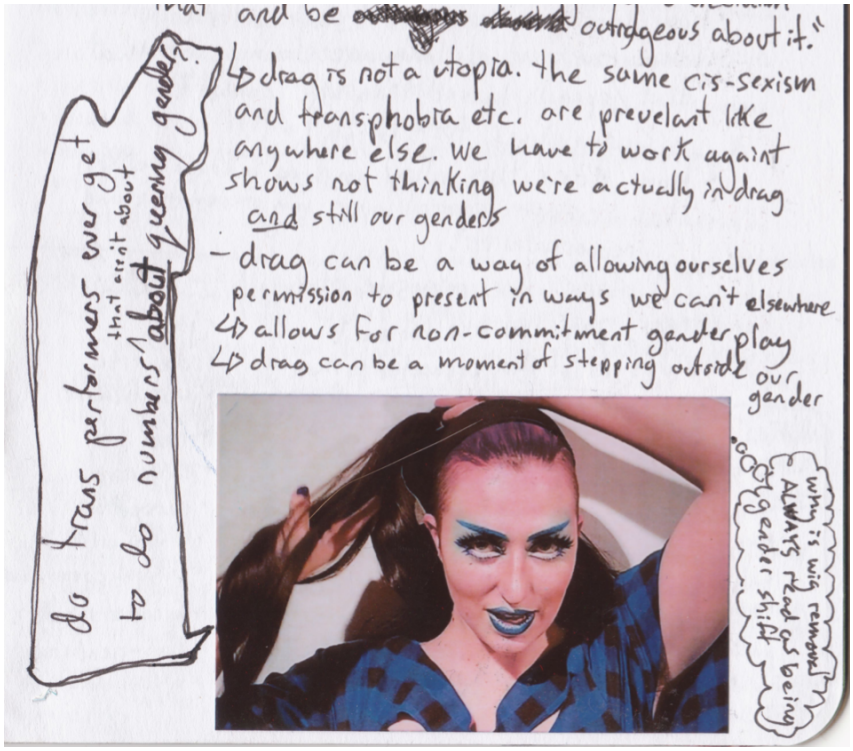
In the following page, the final page of the section, I begin with identifying a key question of why drag performance is different for trans performers. However, the responses to this

question contained in this page speak to my specific experience, as opposed to being all-encompassing statements, and I have framed them here in the context of my own drag. The three themes that arise from this short section reflect the interactions between my trans experience and drag practice:

a) As a trans person, my body is heavily scrutinised on and offstage, but while in drag, stage spaces can be an opportunity to reclaim this gaze

b) Drag creates a unique space where I can reclaim the experience of being misgendered. By taking the signifiers that I am often misgendered by and amplifying them to such a degree that they become strange and unnatural, I can distance myself from their gendered receptions.

c) A core challenge for me as a trans performer is having my work constantly be interpreted as being about gender

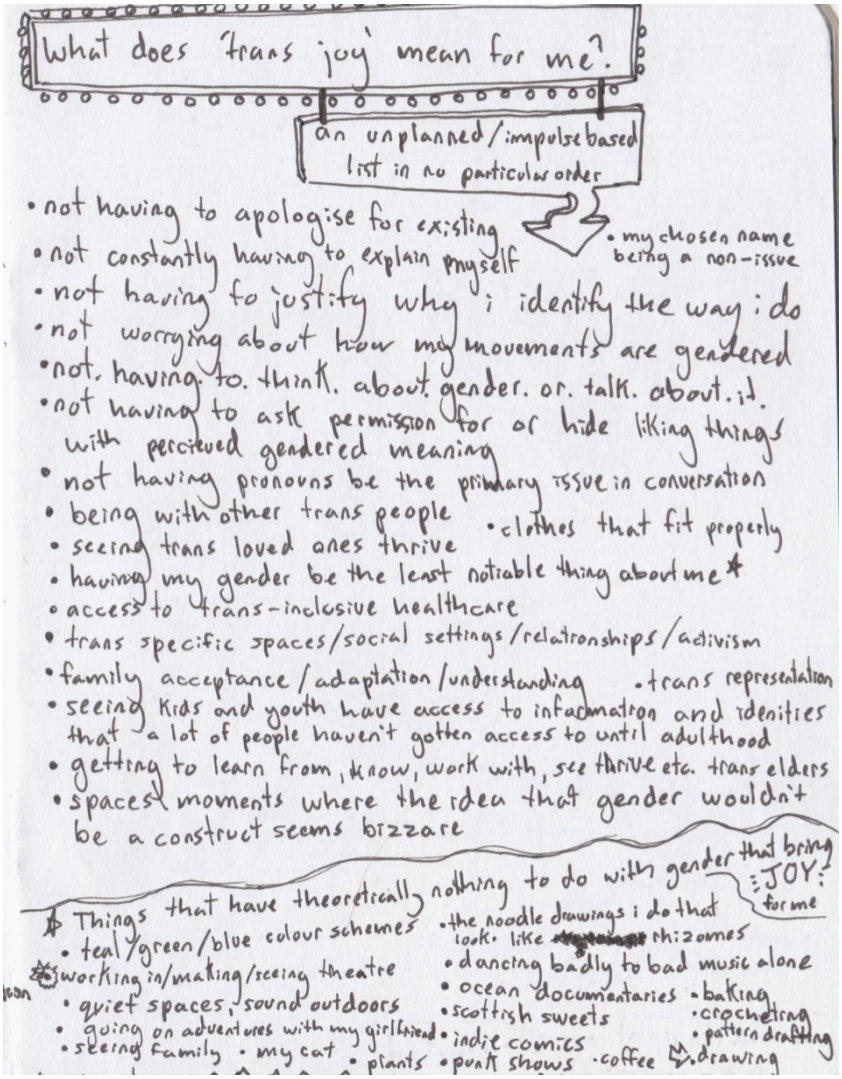


These themes act as concluding remarks for Section A, with these inquiries having arisen out of the material established in previous pages. I aim to reflect on the themes noted on this page throughout this written thesis, and throughout the remainder of the notebook and documented rehearsal. These themes further shaped the adaptation of the research question by prompting inquiry into what the exchanges are between my lived experiences as a trans and non-binary person, and the drag I do. In identifying these four themes, I began to understand the importance of centering the possibility for joy to stem drag's potential to make gender appear outrageous and unstable.

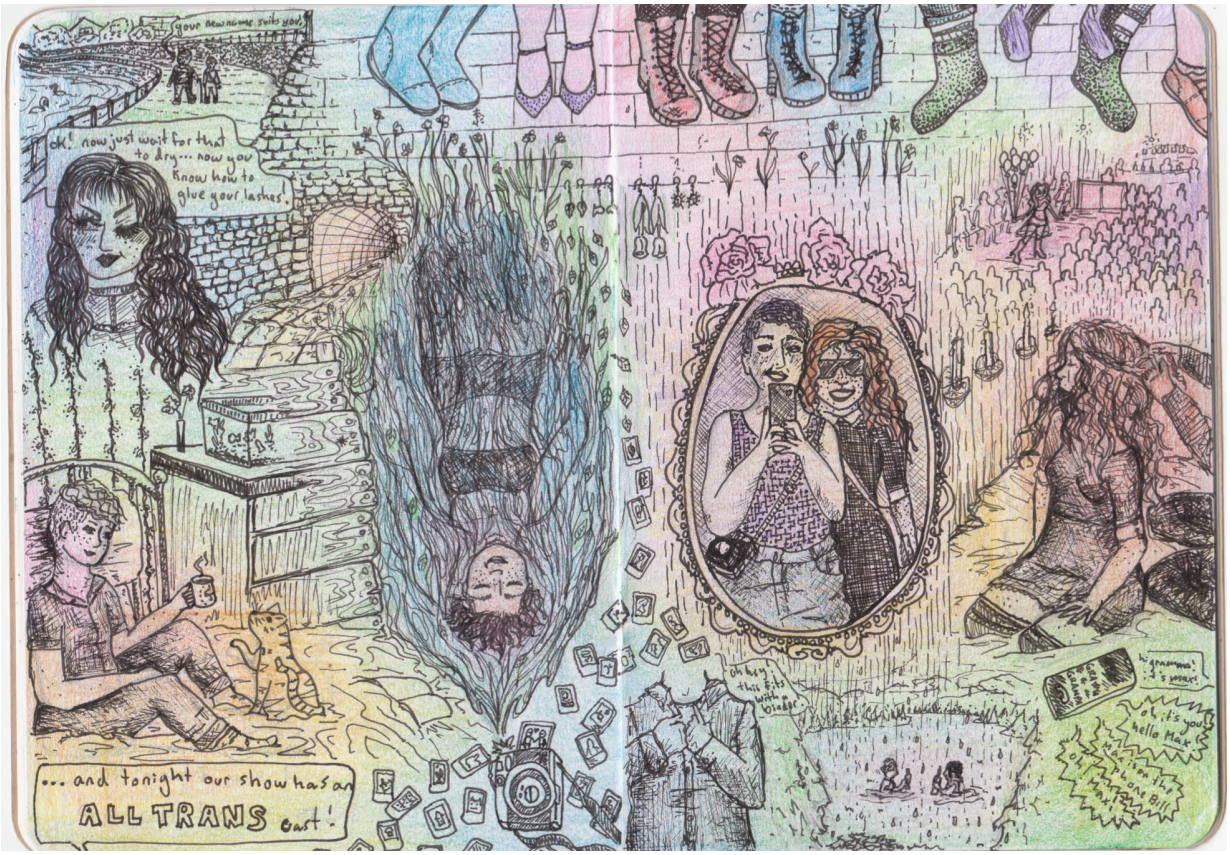
Part B: **[Trans] Joy [as a concept and in practice]**

In Part B, the focus of the notebook shifts to the specific question of what 'trans joy' can mean as a concept and practice, drawing directly from my lived experiences. This section asks 'what does joy, and trans joy mean to me, and what is its opposite?', 'how does being permitted to not have to create clear logics to my gender create joy?', 'how does my experience of joy connect to community?', and 'how do visual language and artistic intervention as opposed to written text allow me to articulate my experiences more authentically?'. I explore and document these questions through one page of free-writing, two pages of textless illustration, and a one-page comic.

The first page begins with a rough and non-hierarchical list of things that I find joy in as a trans person, and follows with a list of things that bring joy for me that are not (or not inherently) connected with my experience as a trans person. In addition to this I identify a small list of moments of joy I experience that are not directly connected to gender; through this list I begin to identify sensory elements (textures, colours), lived experiences, and artistically based elements, that are later connected to the documented rehearsal design. While these lists did not have an intentionally cohesive theme, there is an overwhelming presence of examples that refer to not having to justify, explain, prove, or apologise for existing as non-binary trans individual.



The decision to dedicate the remainder of this section to visually based elements arose out of the emergence of the idea that trans joy, for me, is more accessible when I can draw the visual memory of lived experiences, instead of attempting to translate them into text. The first two illustration-based pages, dedicated to joy, are a series of connected drawings that informally document my experiences of joy. Drawing my experiences of joy allows me a certain level of privacy, as the contexts and details of the images, the personal aspects of what I illustrate here, can be present only for me or those who experience them with me.



The images include seemingly obscure details that have great value for me, and that help me to work through what 'joy' means for me without the risk of making the experiences that inform it available to those who view this thesis work in the future. There are certainly glimpses into my private life within this section (ex. my bedroom appears, a phone call with my grandparents is documented, and there is more than one image referencing partners), but their details and values are only knowable to myself and at times to those who were present. While these pages include text through speech bubbles, they are fragments of conversation, not explanations.

The last element of this section is a full-page comic that addresses what trans joy does not look like, what the opposite of this is. Throughout this comic I address ten examples of

negative experiences associated with my trans experience[12]. A central theme that emerged in this comic was that the majority of these experiences are shaped by others articulating their interpretations of my existence, the decisions they have made about it, and the moments where I am not able to challenge this. As noted earlier in the notebook, I choose in this section to intentionally forego traumatic experiences (namely experiences involving violence or grief), and I intentionally omit explanation of the long-term effects of the negative experiences included in the comic. This choice is in part to avoid drawing focus away from the focus on my experiences of Joy central to this section, but more importantly, in reflection of the fact that trans people do not owe our trauma to a public eye, nor do we owe our trauma to academic works[13]. I chose to format this as a comic because the comic format allows for fragments of conversations to be paired with drawings of my responses, without needing to annotate them with explanations.

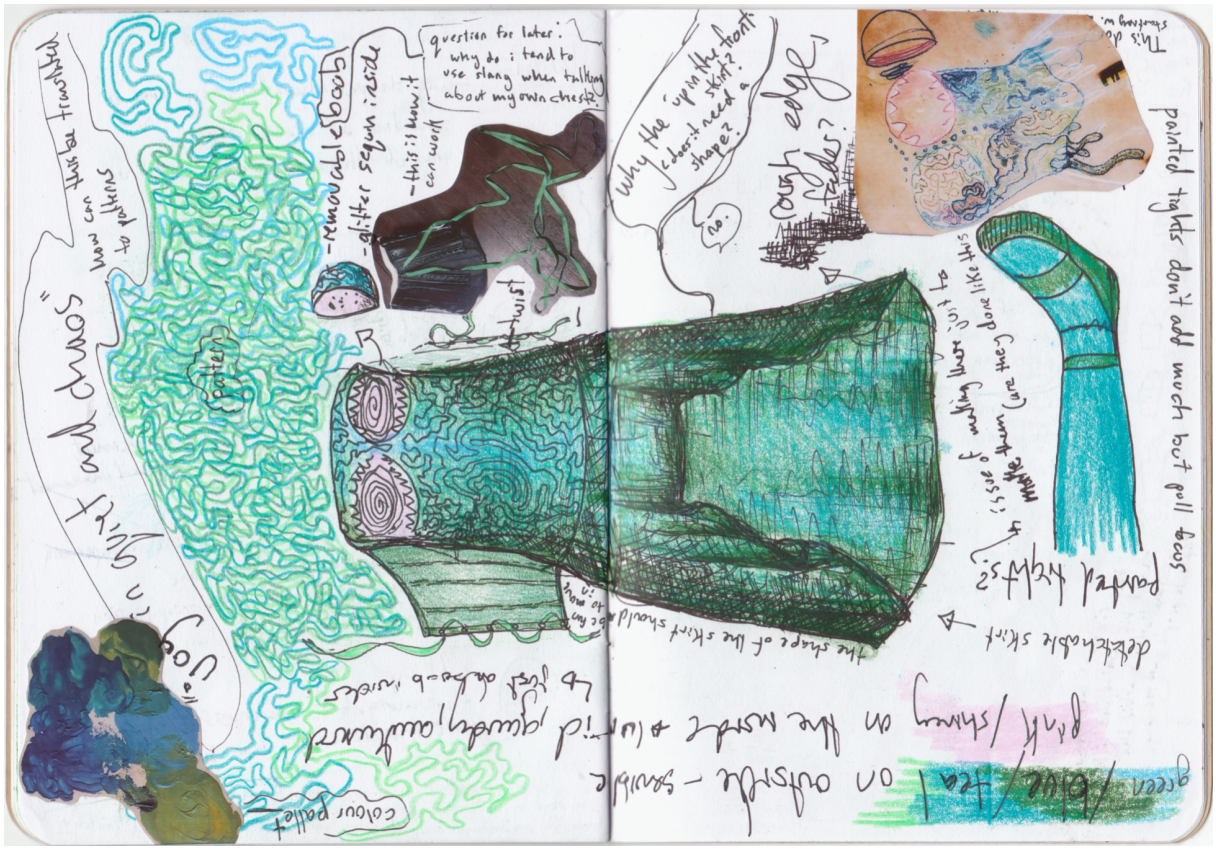
[12] Each example is not drawn from a specific or singular experience, nor is any panel intended to quote a specific person. The panels reflect repeated comments and situations.
[13] I refer here to trauma from gender-based violence, systemic violences (ex. denial of health care), and targeted violence against trans people.

In the sections that follow, the question of avoiding a public eye, becomes increasingly prevalent. Seeking privacy and avoiding spectatorship while undertaking research on drag performance may seem contradictory due to drag's ostentatiousness, but I do so in order to allow the performance creation to flow without concern for how my gender and body may be perceived and interpreted by an external gaze. As expressed in the comic above, much of what is detrimental to trans joy for me involves the (mis)gendering gaze towards my presentation, and

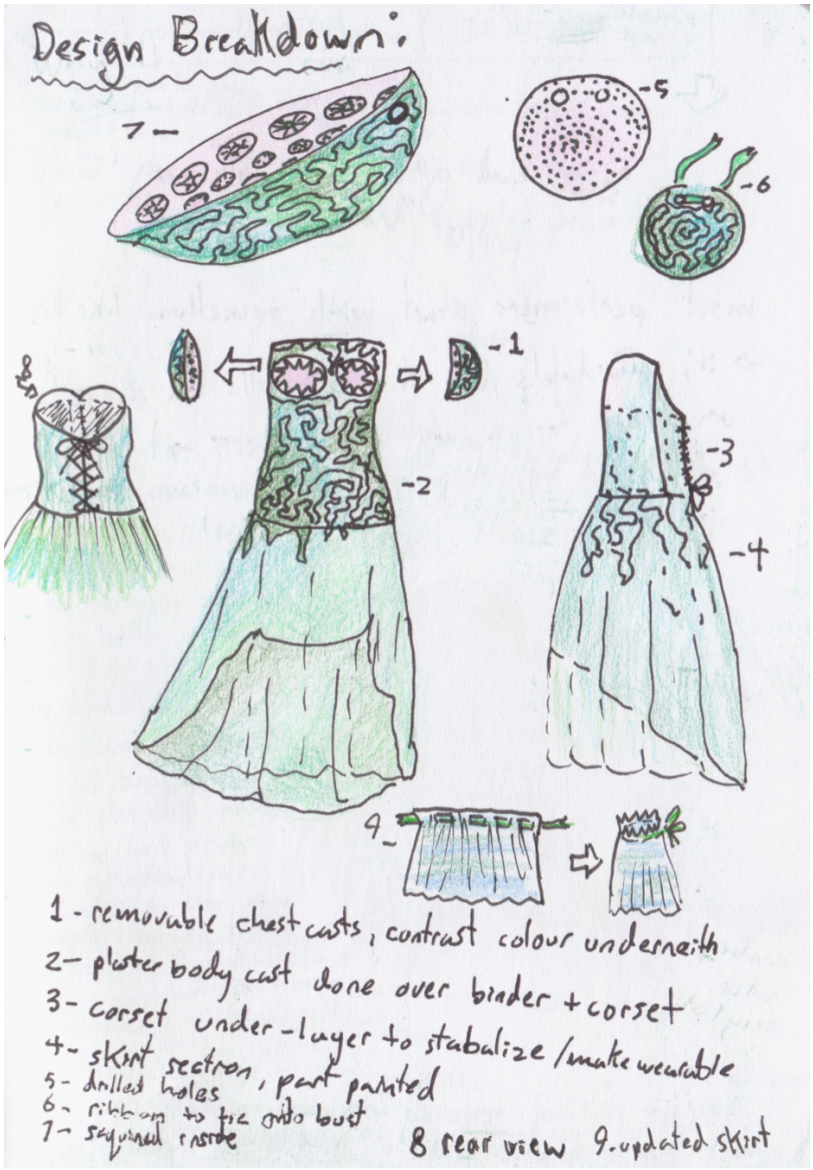
particularly my body. In omitting an audience, I attempt to explore what can happen in lieu of this gaze.

Part C: Costume Design

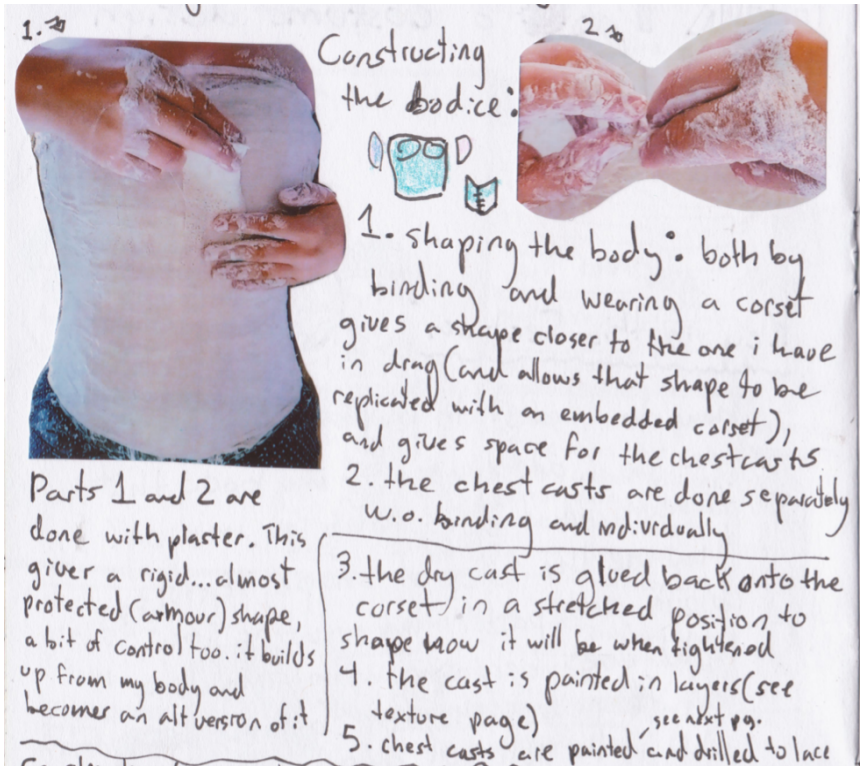
Unlike the first two sections, this third section is loose in structure and format. Much of this section exists as rough design drawings, and is not documented as a chronological process. While previous sections take the form of documenting the background that informs this research, and thus have a tendency to appear more as a ‘zine’ with more clarity, this section leans into messiness. It begins with the question “how do I translate my body into costume”, attempting to find moments where I can create garments that draw directly from my body shapes, and moments where my experiences within my body can be visually present in the costume. In connection with this pursuit, this section asks the questions of: “how do I add layers to my body that obscure what does not bring me joy?”, “what are the roles of shape, texture, colour, and pattern in creating joy?”, “how does beginning with impulse create new paths for my costume design”, “what is the role of contrast in this design?”, and “how does the act of constructing shift how I experience the costume”. A key inquiry in this section is to understand “how does the costume shape the performance?”, with this question foreshadowing a shift into forming the rehearsal component around the costume. In this section, I respond to these questions through costume sketches and photographs, surrounded by rough notes and experiments with texture and pattern design.



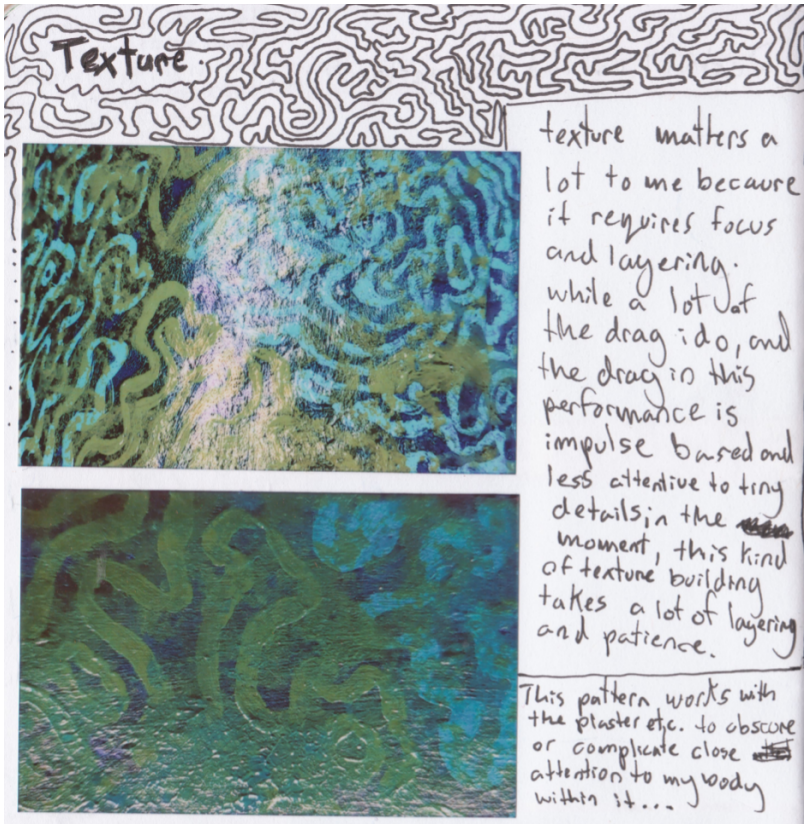
The costume that arose from these drawings was the most intensively created component of the documented rehearsal. The core pieces of the costume are broken down into a torso piece, skirt, and shoes, with the torso piece being broken down into three separate objects: two chest casts and a full torso cast.



The plaster casted components of the costume were constructed by casting altered versions of my own body.The cast was made over a corset in order to reflect the silhouette I use for drag performance. Further, I chose to cast my torso with a bound chest, before separately casting my chest without a binder so that I could remove the chest casts during the rehearsal (labelled 1, 5, 6, and 7 in the design breakdown above). The casted torso cast subsequently reflects an altered version of my body.

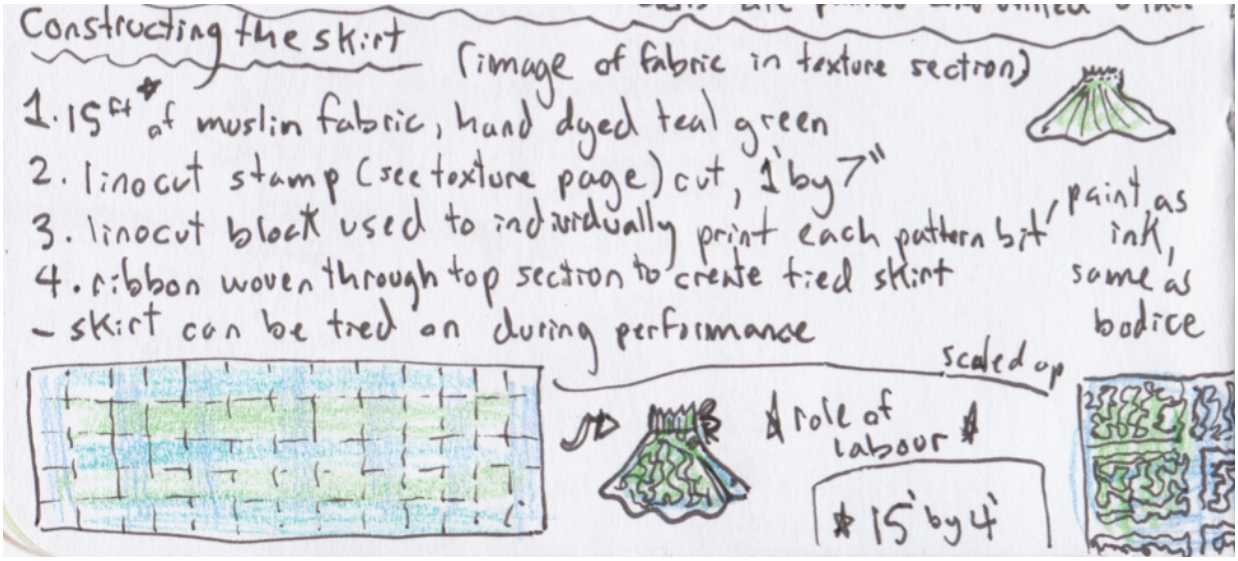


Each element of the external areas of the costume are painted in layers with detailed rhizomatic patterns, with differences in colour tone used to emphasise the contours of the garments. This choice of colours (teal, blues, and greens) emerged during the notebook component, based on colours and patterns that I found both comfort and joy in, and based on which colours and patterns I found arising frequently throughout the notebook.



On the plaster components, these rhizomatic patterns were hand-painted and layers of colour were added through using crumpled paper to create a more complex texture. This process was repeated on the shoes, covering sanded layers of existing enamel paint, as well as covering sections of the ribbons I used to replace the original plastic straps.

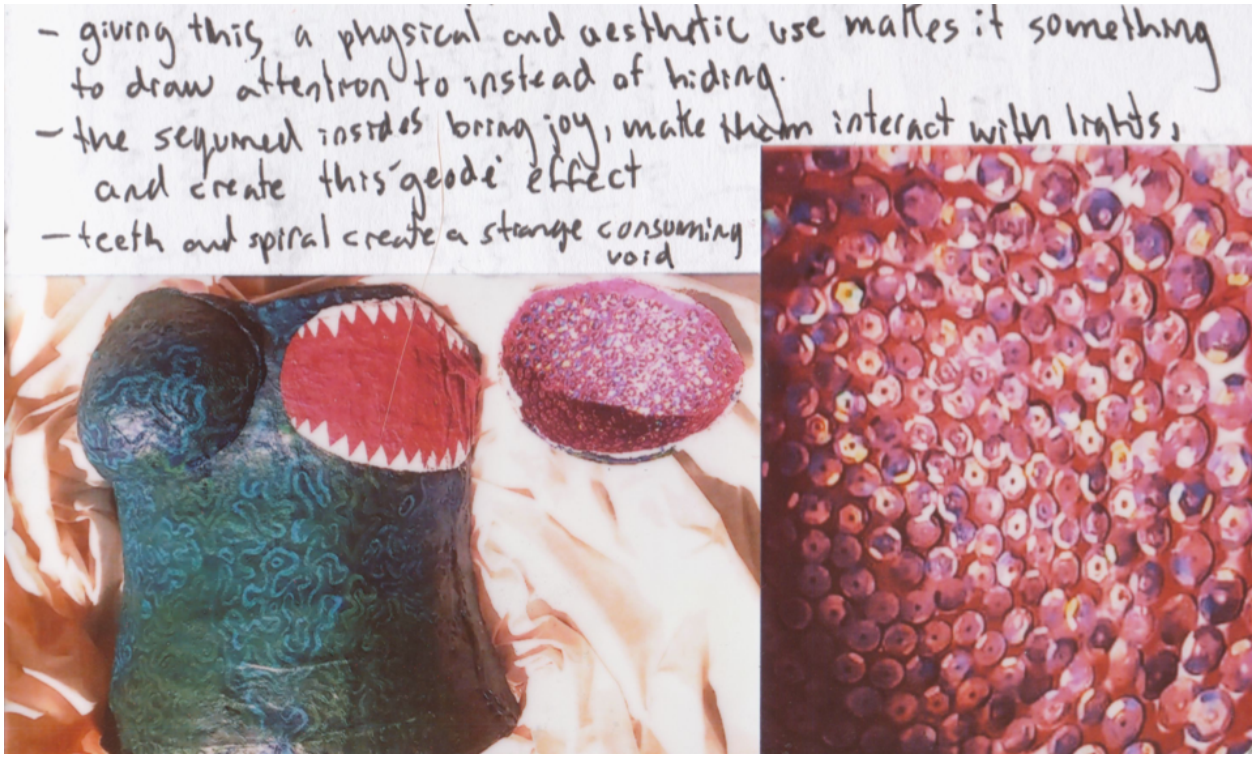
For the skirt, I first dyed the fabric, and then carved a lino-cut stamp in the rhizome patterns to print the fabric (roughly sixty prints of the stamp were used to cover the fabric). In the process of painting, carving, and printing these colour and pattern combinations, I found joy in slowly building up layers that intervened into the appearances of the garments. This process gave me the time – with the chest pieces taking several days to paint, and the dying and printing of the skirt taking roughly five hours consecutively to complete – to further consider what these patterns and colours meant for me.



In using rhizomatic patterns, I reference the way that I describe my gender as a rhizome; there is no fixed central point to it, and no essential core, instead it is a network of intertwined elements that twist and shape themselves over time. As indicated throughout this research, I find significant joy in not having to explain my gender, and incorporating rhizomatic patterns (which began to be present within the notebook) was a way for me to reflect that joy

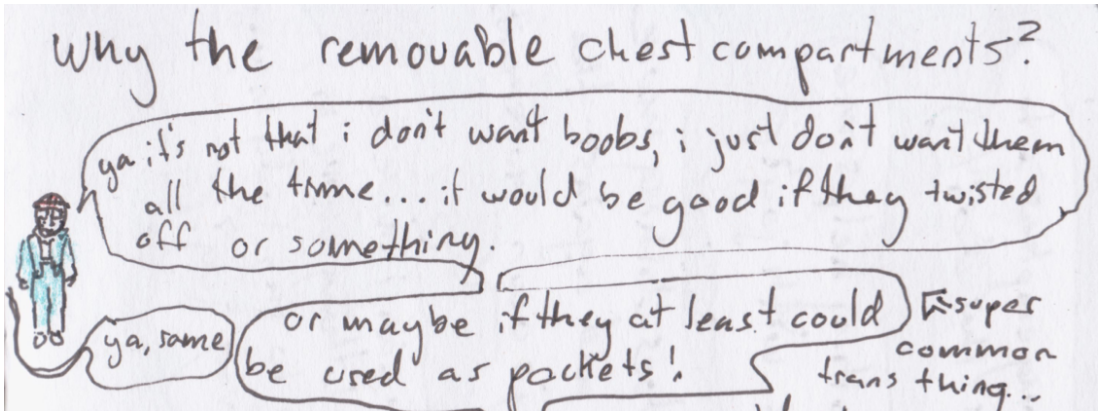
into the costume. I further this sense of designing to create joy by including moments in the costume where the design is asynchronous to this colour and pattern pairing.

Within the costume design, I had begun with impulse-based colour, pattern, and texture choices, but in beginning to consider Camp as an element of the performance, the asynchronous elements of the design emerged. Instead of keeping within fluid logics of design (ones that created consistent colour pallets, melded textures and shapes, and precise lines), my interest in Camp prompted sharp departures from these impulses towards keeping the costume design as a cohesive product. In the design of the costume, Camp emerged as a way to move beyond the impulse to create a costume that was coherent in style and cleanly finished. Most conspicuous of these choices was in the painting of the torso piece: while the costume exterior is painted with the rhizomatic patterns of cool tones, the exception to this colour and pattern pairing is on the inside of the chest casts, and the two sections they cover.



On the inside of each chest cast is a base of lurid pink paint, covered with a geode-like constellation of pink sequins; under stage lights, these chest cast interiors reflect light back because of the sequins, drawing attention to them, and giving them a disco ball effect. Underneath the chest casts (on the torso) are circles of the same pink paint, with faint spirals out of the centre, with teeth-like white patterning around the edge. While the exterior paint of the plaster garments features colours with a more organic effect, the pink insides stand out as asynchronous and odd.

This choice was made as a way of moving away from the focus of the chest casts being casts of my own chest, and towards them being removable objects of curiosity; in doing this, I aim to make the chest of this garment into something ostentatious, garish even, to add a layer that draws attention away from the body parts are casted to make them.



These asynchronous pieces of the chest piece appear in stark contrast to the otherwise calm tone and abstract patterning of the costume, but they bring joy and humour to an element of my body that is otherwise decidedly unpleasant to have visible; instead of concealing this aspect of my body, I draw attention to a parodic version of it.

Part D[14]: Launch Points for the Performance

This final section exists an open-ended plan for how the costume was to be embodied in the documented rehearsal. While this chapter initially identified that this was to be a plan for a performance, I shifted into identifying this embodied component as a rehearsal in reflection of that no audience was present, and what was documented was not a finished product, merely an experimentation based on my wearing of the costume and moving within it.

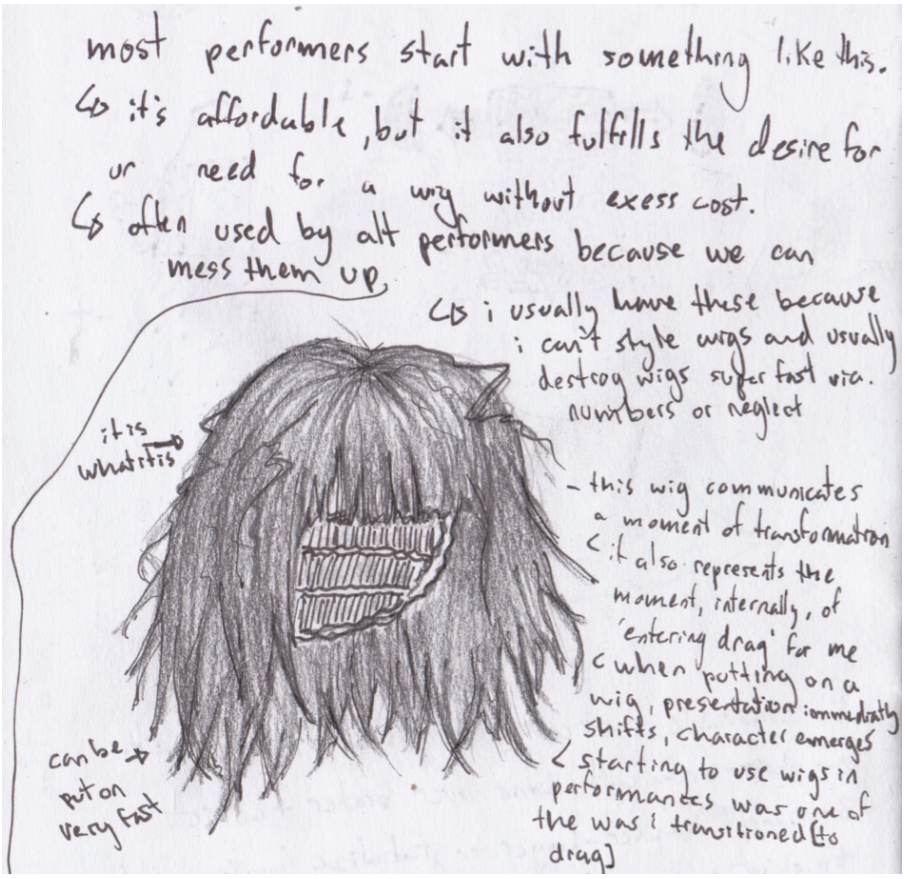
In this context, I define performance as an intentional artistic act where meaning is conveyed through artistic embodiment to a spectator. I situate my definition in relation to Christopher B. Balme's definition of theatricality which considers that "any kind of 'staged reality' is related in some way to theatre and performance", but is not inherently a performance (Balme 89). Additionally, Balme's definition of performance specifies that "a theatrical performance without an audience is at best a rehearsal, at worst a hypothetical construct" (Balme 34). The performance creation moves, in light of this definition, towards becoming a performance, but does not become one, instead culminating in a rehearsal.

This section of the notebook begins with a description of the makeup for the rehearsal. The makeup for this documented rehearsal was not fully planned ahead of time, instead, as reflected in this section, I identified a rough concept for it to be enacted as part of the staged performance. Instead of designing the makeup in advance, the only predetermined elements were that I chose to bring four water-based makeup paints – primary blue, lime green, white, and forest green, chosen in correlation with the costume – into the documented rehearsal with me. I carried these pigments with me, mixed them, and put them on during the documented rehearsal without looking. The makeup was done through muscle memory and feel. Painting on my makeup without being able to see it forced me to move away from the desire to be precise and overly detailed, or to try and create polish in execution. While my drag makeup outside of

[14] In the notebook, this section is mistakenly labelled as 'Part C', so it is changed here to clarify the separation from the previous section.

the documented rehearsal can take up to four hours to complete due to the tiny details and carefully blended layering of pigments that I strive to perfect as much as possible, the makeup of the documented rehearsal could not achieve this. I focused instead on the placement of colours onto my face based on the muscle memory I have of the basic components of my drag makeup: lipstick, cheek contour and blush, brows, and exaggerated eyes. The drag makeup I have evolved over the last four years builds from my face shape, so the muscle memory used to complete the makeup during the documented rehearsal was based on memory of where on my face I should feel the brush for the correct placement. For example, the white under-eye is shaped based on where I can feel the bottom of my eye socket, and I build from that point to determine where the remaining under eye makeup should be placed. The ultimate result of this choice was a makeup look that was done quite quickly (within five minutes), incredibly messy, and with shape emphasised over detail and precision.

In addition to the makeup, I wear a black mid-length wig with straight-across bangs in the documented rehearsal. The wig I chose is the most basic version of this wig style, as I chose not to use a higher grade or styled wig to prevent it from becoming the focus of the costume. This wig, combined with the makeup, is a visual aspect of my drag character that I use to delineate the separation between myself and Annagram; as I identify in the illustration below, putting on a wig creates an immediate and often dramatic shift in presentation, and I use this in the documented rehearsal to mark the moment of shifting from myself into being Annagram, even if only for myself.



The first page of Part D further includes an outline of a rough concept for a sound layer of the video documentation of the rehearsal, identifying that the sound layer was to be created in response to the performance, after its completion, and that I would use my own voice as an element of that sound layer. While filming the rehearsal, I had music playing in the background that was for my experience alone, helping to support my experience of joy. After documenting the rehearsal, I chose to remove the audio from the video so that I could keep my choices of music in the studio private, and prevent them from becoming an additional layer to the rehearsal. In place of the removed audio, I created a layer of audio that layered my own voice with layers of violin. The choice of adding violin layers to my own voice was a small, but pointed connection back to the ways I first learned how to find joy within performance, but also to the way that I have used violin playing as a processing tool. Having dedicated much of my

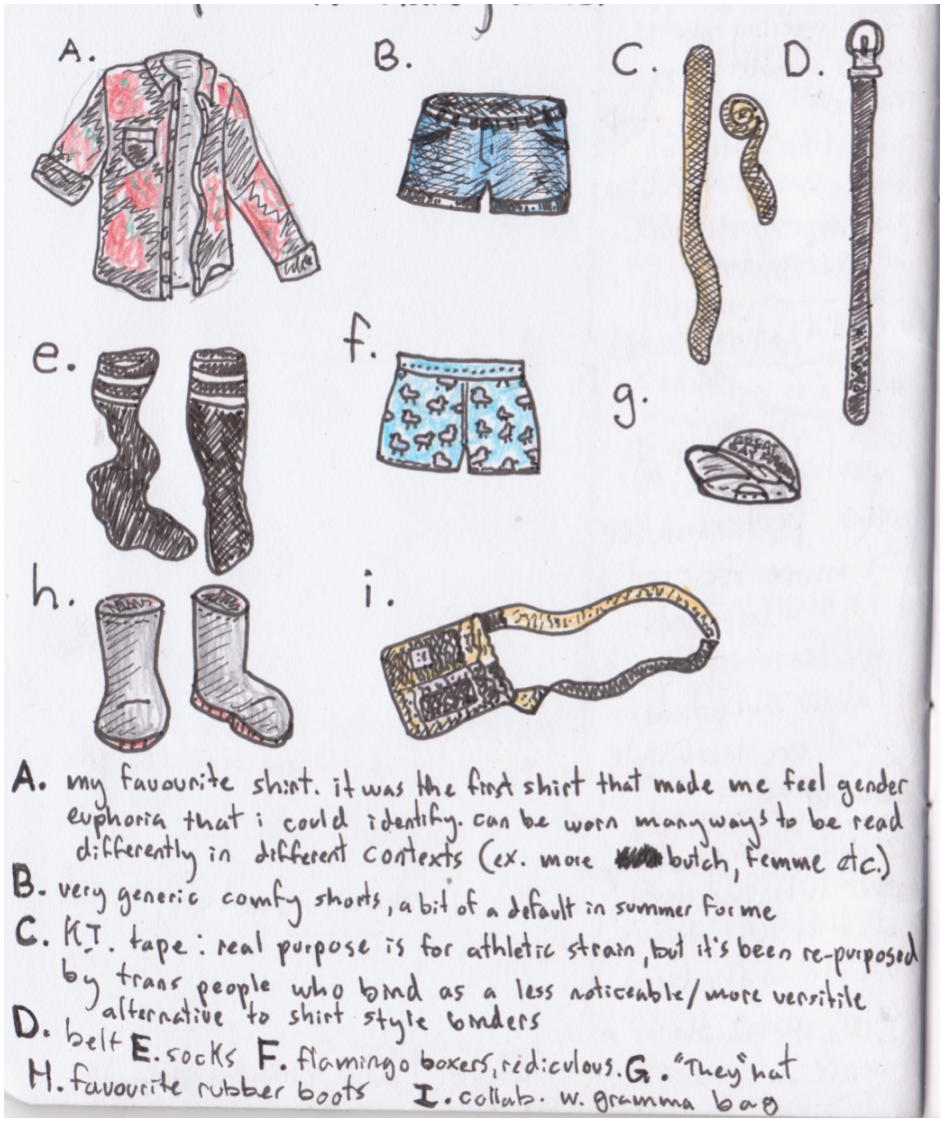
childhood and adolescence to studying as a violinist, I have carried forward with me the idea of using violin playing as a way to allow myself to pause and reflect, and I bring this into the performance creation as an extension of this. In this, the audio layer existed as an additional layer of the performance not as a disconnected auditory addition, but as an additional way through which I process what arose in the rehearsal. The layer of violin is both analytical and impulsive; to return to Nachmanovitch, “The informational impulse [of playing a violin] comes from past, present, and future, through the body, brain, and personality” and translates into sound (60). The layering of violin in the audio added to the documentation of the rehearsal is both revealing and concealing, combining that “[t]here is nothing hidden in the violin [...] pretence is impossible. The sound coming out of that instrument is a sensitive lie detector, a sensitive truth detector”, while obscuring these revealing moments by layering the violin recording to the point of incoherence (Nachmanovitch 61). Each layer was added to synchronise with the progression of the rehearsal, and I continued the layering until the audio became uncomfortably chaotic to listen to but still contained expressions of joy. The choice to create this audio at the end of the documented rehearsal was to explore how I could create audio in response to a drag performance, as opposed to creating drag performance in response to audio. While in my external drag practice I create numbers in response to pre-existing tracks made by others in order to draw in audiences, the audio layer I add over the documented rehearsal is intended to create a barrier between the documented rehearsal, and any potential viewers of the video documentation of it.

While this experiment intentionally foregoes an audience, I chose to include documentation through video and photography in order to be able to return to the material to analyse it following its completion. Within this layer, viewers (including myself) are able to consider how I move through the experiment, but the work of the detailing of the costume is lost. In response to this, I documented the rehearsal through photographs after it was completed.

The photographs taken at the end of the performance act as additional documentation material by making visible the details of the costume.

The challenge of adding this layer is that it created the potential for spectators, shaping the documented rehearsal because it can be viewed by others engaging with this research. While documentation of the rehearsal allows those who view this research to access the material this written thesis is grounded in, documenting the rehearsal influenced my choices of how my body is visible within it. For example, in addition to the costume I built, I began the documented rehearsal in my day-wear. The garments that this non-costume consists of are garments that I chose based on what I am most comfortable wearing when I am not concerned about how I will be gendered, however, I make an exception to this is that I used kinesiology tape[15] to cover and compress my chest; I do this for my own privacy, in light of the fact that the video documentation is intended to be accessible to others, as well as to shape my body to fit within the plaster torso cast that was done while binding. Binding is not typically part of my drag, but I use it in contexts where there is the possibility of an external gaze that I cannot predict; I give myself permission to preserve joy within the experiment by creating a boundary between the aspects of my body that I am uncomfortable sharing, and potential viewers.

[15] Kinesiology tape is used in place of a similar product called ‘trans tape’ which can be used for chest binding in place of compression garments like chest-binders. This method is commonly used by dancers, drag performers, and other performers who require binding to not restrict movement or interfere with costume.



At the end of the first page of this section, the challenge of risking unwanted audiences arises in response to the inclusion of lighting. This first page concludes by noting that stage lighting (as opposed to room lights or practical lights) will be used, and questions how to avoid creating an audience by having a technician present. I chose to have a stage design that was extremely minimal for this documented rehearsal. There were no set elements used, and the only objects set into the space were the pre-set costume pieces. This choice was made to draw focus to the costume alone, using the costume as the core scenographic element. The lack of

stage design elements reflects the fact that drag performance rarely happens on a stage set with elements of the performer's own design; we often enter onto stages designed to be neutral for each performer, and so our costumes are the core of how we identify our own space onstage. Like a drag stage, the studio that the documented rehearsal took place in was a space intended to be adaptable for each occupant, so keeping the stage design as minimal as possible allowed the costume to remain the central focus.

In this documented rehearsal, the use of spot lighting in an otherwise dark studio creates the illusion of an onstage vs. offstage space. Outside of the circle of light, the studio space disappears, and the lit area becomes the sole focus. When the lighting fades in and out during the performance, the stage space disappears to mark a pause in the documented rehearsal. As including this lighting required a lighting operator, necessitating having another person present and observing during the documented rehearsal, I attempted to mitigate the creation of a spectator by having somebody I knew personally (and was comfortable around) operate the lights[16], and having them not watch the documented rehearsal as much as possible. I chose to have a drag family[17] member to operate the lights, because I was comfortable sharing drag performances in process (i.e. incomplete, unpolished) with them, and have done so often enough that having them present for the documented rehearsal did not feel like having to perform for them. After the first sections, where the lights dim at moments, the operator in question stepped back and stopped watching what I was doing in the onstage space, only returning when I asked them to fade out the lights. The result of this was that in final stage, the longest stage, of the performance (as addressed in the following section) is performed completely in isolation until the last moment when I verbally indicated that they could return.

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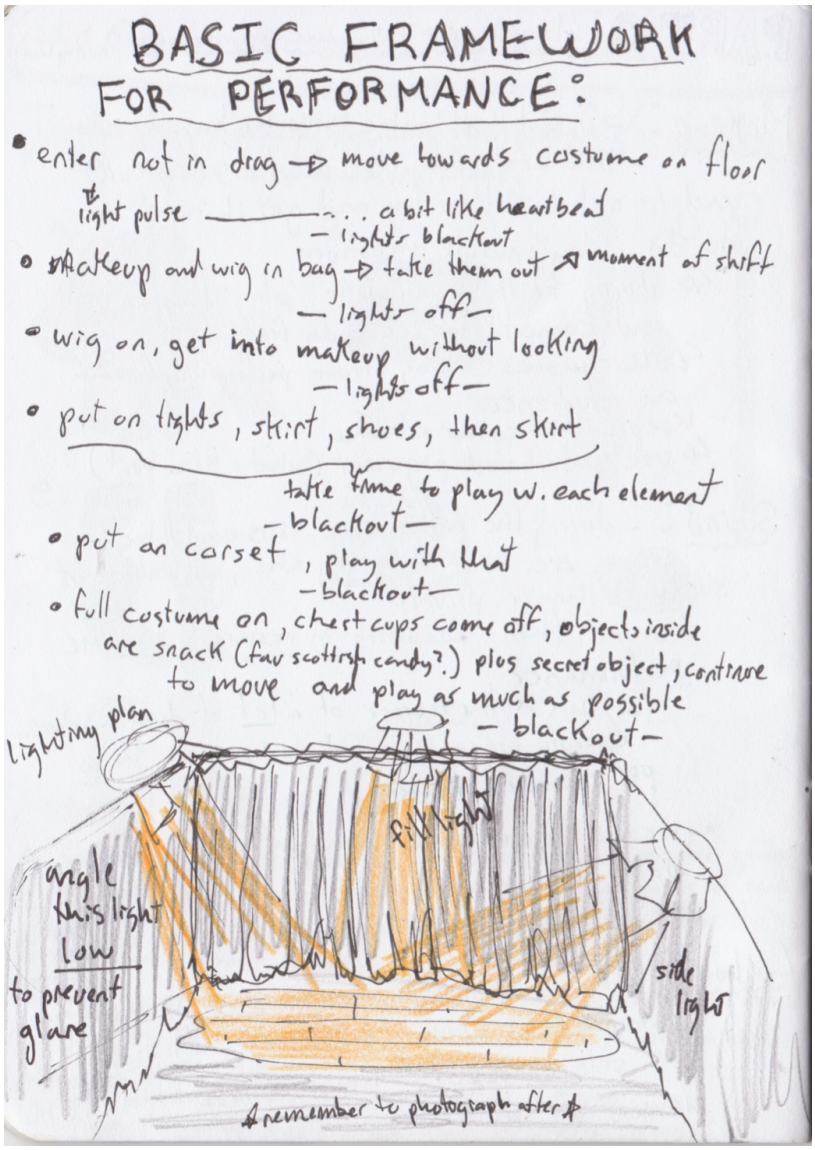
[16] I worked with a formal technician to set and sign off on the lighting prior to this.

[17] 'Drag family' here refers to performers who agree to help support each other in and through their drag over time. As drag family, individual performers work to become stronger performers together by sharing skills, performance techniques, and experiences/knowledge of how to navigate the world of drag. Drag families may be formal (in the case of drag houses), or looser networks, but are based in personal relationships, often defined by a sense of care and kinship.

The final page of the notebook exists as an outline for how the material generated in the notebook would be translated into a documented rehearsal. Instead of a formal script, it identifies an open-ended procedure to move through the space, paint the makeup, put on the costume, and to finish by moving and playing within the costume.



Instead of creating a detailed and prescriptive plan, this section indicates specific moments that guide the documented rehearsal. The use of framework over formal script was done in reflection of how I plan my drag performances outside of this documented rehearsal.

Due to my background in draglesque, the frameworks I use in creating drag performances are often merely plans for when certain clothing items should be removed or added, and this is reflected here in that the documented rehearsal is shaped by the removal of my non-drag attire, and re-dressing into the costume. As in the planning for performances in my external drag practice, this framework leaves as much space for adaptation as possible, allowing the rehearsal to shift and change based on what arises in the moment.

The Documented Rehearsal:

I use the phrase 'documented rehearsal' to indicate that the performance documented in the video is only one extension of the overall performance creation, not a final product or central focus. In this documented rehearsal, I respond to the ideas explored in the notebook, namely joy and Camp, through exploration of the ways that I can move into and within the costume in a stage-like space. The documented rehearsal is not a polished product, nor does it attempt to be; instead, it leans towards the opposite. This documented rehearsal begins with a framework, as opposed to a script, to allow the rehearsal to take shape as I move through it. While the costume for the documented rehearsal was meticulously crafted over months, the documented rehearsal itself was roughly mapped out towards the end of the process in response to the surrounding creation components.

The documented rehearsal reflects a moment in time where I perform for myself first, focusing on my relationship to the costume, and on the act of "getting into drag" without an audience present; "getting into drag" here refers to the process of shifting from being my daily self, to embodying Annagram as a character. This process is most noticeably marked by the putting on of costume and makeup, as well as the difference in movement style that exists between myself and Annagram.

As foreshadowed in the notebook, I bring my drag character, Annagram, into this rehearsal, as ze is in many ways an alternate self. Annagram is not a character created in

response to or for a specific performance, but a character which I have developed over multiple years that encompases my drag practice. I feel at home in embodying Annagram as a character, zer character is a place of comfort. Annagram as a parallel self, is an embodied character where I can put aside the anxieties, self restraint, and concerns about how I will be perceived by others, and ultimately a psychological space of (relatively) uninhibited experimentation. In this, I relate my understanding of the relationship between myself and Annagram to Stephen Nachmanovitch's concept of The Muse in his book Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art (1990). Nachmanovitch asserts that artists or creators:

> can be seen as embodying or acting as two inner characters, a muse and an editor. These are the pilot and navigator [...] The muse proposes, the editor disposes. The editor criticizes, shapes, and organizes the raw material that the free play of the muse has generated. If, however, the editor precedes rather than follows the muse, we have trouble. (Nachmanovitch 133)

In relation to my drag, I interpret this separation as marking the separation between my non-drag self (as editor), and Annagram (as muse). My role as the creator of Annagram is to process the calamity of what arises through zer character, while allowing the space for zer performances to follow impulse. Impulse in zer character exists as "raw bursts of inspiration, flashes, and improvisatory moments in which the art just flows" and guide the shape of performances (Nachmanovitch 108). In turn, Annagram allows my lived experiences and theoretical ideas to be translated into and grow through performance, being the enactor of "the technical, organizational job of taking what we have generated, then filing and fitting and playing with the pieces until they line up" (Nachmanovitch 108). In bringing Annagram into this work, I embrace the potential for experimentation that is less inhibited by my external inhibitions, and more interested in what can occur outside of a desire to remove moments of messiness within the rehearsal itself.

This documented rehearsal was primarily characterized by that it is the component in which movement becomes a part of the performance creation. The movement style of the documented rehearsal shifts as it progresses. In the first sections, the movements are calculated, responding to the lights, and subsequently appearing more staged. As the documented rehearsal progresses, the movement shifts into being practical in nature, determined by a necessity to remove clothing in order to re-dress into the costume, and the need to put the makeup on. This is particularly evident during the process of putting on the makeup, where the movement becomes minute and slow, existing only for the purpose of completing it. Once I put the wig on, however, the movement in the documented rehearsal shifts significantly. The addition of the wig marks the moment of separation between myself and Annagram, and the movement becomes more playful once this shift occurs. While the movement in earlier sections of the documented rehearsal is restrained, Annagram's movements are impulse based and less inhibited. As the costume is put on, these movements become increasingly driven by a desire for play (and subsequently, joy), instead of a need to be performed for a potential viewer. Once the costume is completed, the role of play becomes the core emphasis of the movement. This section reads almost as a costume screen-test, with the focus being the experimentation of how the costume can be manipulated through movement, and how the body and costume interact. In the final section of the documented rehearsal, the movement becomes entirely playful and entirely to create the experience of joy. In this section, the chest compartments are revealed to contain a small object, and a candy, which allows the documented rehearsal to come to a close with a natural departure from performing even for myself. There is no neat ending to this documented rehearsal, indeed the 'end' of the documentation occurs in what appears to be a resignation from the potential to do anything more, and the lights fade away unceremoniously.

Analysis: The Emergence of Camp

The performance creation does not succeed, as it fails to be a performance at all. Regardless of placement within a designated performance space, theatrical lighting, costume, makeup, and soundtrack, an audience is absent, and there is no attempt to perform for one. While the documented rehearsal does at times er towards the feeling of being staged for an onlooker, it further fails to be a performance because it focused on creating my own joy alone. In the moment of embodying the creation for documentation, I resist a potential audience: I increasingly face away from the camera, the amount of time spent on tasks becomes less rushed, and my actions become less focused. Instead of an escalation of the performance as I shift into Annagram as a character, the performance becomes less performative as it progresses. As I put on the costume, and visually become Annagram as a character, the execution of the documented rehearsal becomes looser, and while the documentation begins with measured steps marked by stage lights, the document ends only once Annagram runs out of things to do within the costume (giving up on anything performance like and eating candy, ignoring any possible onlooker completely)[18]. I understand this progression to be a Camp act (or series of Camp acts), because it absolutely refuses to cater to a cisnormative or heteronormative gaze, prioritizing queer (specifically trans) joy completely.

A central outcome of this thesis work has been the emergence of Camp as a way of creating joy through drag performance. I became interested in Camp as a concept during the creation process, as I became increasingly aware of how the moments that were bringing the most joy were the ones that were flawed, awkward, cluttered, illogical, or garish. These moments emerged to be present in aesthetic and textual outcomes, but also as an increasingly

[18] In addition to more conceptual failures, the documented rehearsal also contains practical failures, including the corset lacing becoming tangled, the mess of the makeup, the lack of flexibility in the torso piece, and the lack of clarity of the documentation itself. While the photos of the costume are clear, the video of the documented rehearsal is intensely low quality, and much of the costume detail, as well as my expressions, are lost.

prevalent aspect of the process itself; through Camp, as I will explore in this chapter, this research began to delve into the possibilities for finding joy in failure.

In the Analysis and Documentation of the Performance Creation section, I identify visual elements of the costume and notebook as Camp not because of their aesthetics alone, but because of the Camp approach I took to creating them. This distinction is reflected in Meyer's assertion that "Camp cannot be said to reside in objects, but is clearly a way of reading, writing, and of doing that originates in the "Camp eye", the "eye" being nothing less than the agent of Camp" (13). I identify myself as the agent of Camp, within this research, as I approach the creation components with an intention to destabilise the notions of drag as being an act of playing as an 'opposite' gender (implying that gender exists as two opposing entities). While Camp is "[o]ften considered [only as] frivolous, aestheticized, and apolitical, the discourse of Camp can be reclaimed through a reading of the phenomenon as a signifying practice that not only processually constitutes the subject, but is actually the vehicle for an already existent – though obscured – cultural critique" (Meyer 12). In light of this definition of Camp, I understand my drag practice, and the drag that I do within this research as an act of cultural critique through performance, specifically in critiquing binary gender systems. In the performance within this research, I seek to not only push against the gendering of my body, but to make the potential gendering of my body the least interesting aspect of my drag; instead of centering the temporary alteration of the presentation of my body as the primary focus of my drag, I attempt to draw focus away from this by using disjointed aesthetics as points of curiosity.

In the documented rehearsal, these Camp approaches translate into a performance style that increasingly resists the impulse to appease an imagined audience. While there is a loose structure present in the progression of the performance, the documented rehearsal prioritises my own experience playing within the costume, and centres around how I could create joy through embracing (or even amplifying) the imperfections that arise. As the development of the performance creation progressed, and as the documentation of the performance itself was

created, I found that intentionally resisting cohesion created moments of joy in that they didn't require a clear logic to exist. By embracing Camp within the performance, I allowed myself the space to fail.

Failure, as I understand it in relation to this research, sits within the performance as an intensely queer outcome, as it is the failure itself that prompts the emergence of Camp. In this departure from success as an intended outcome, I embrace Quentin Crisp's approach that: "If at first you don't succeed, failure may be your style" (qtd. in Halberstam, *The Queer Art* 96). Instead of resigning myself to a lack of success, I engage with the ways that failure emerged as places of potential development. This is echoed in Halberstam's reflections on Quentin Crisps writing, where "For Crisp, [...] failure presents an opportunity rather than a dead end; in true camp fashion, the queer artist works with rather than against failure and inhabits the darkness. Indeed the darkness becomes a crucial part of a queer aesthetic." (Halberstam, *The Queer Art* 96). Embracing darkness, embracing failure, means that the queer artist is able to imagine and work towards new futures in spite of present circumstances.

To return to Jose Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* (2019), queerness and failure inherently intertwined with utopia. For Muñoz, failure is an essential aspect of utopia because "most profoundly, utopianism represents a failure to be normal." (Muñoz 172) This failure to be normal implies an antinormative existence, one that positions its enactors outside of dominantly accepted modes of being: for queer people, this entails a refusal to exist within heteronormative and/or cisnormative lives. Undertaking failure as an intentional and positive approach embraces that "[w]ithin straight time the queer can only fail; thus, an aesthetic of failure can be productively occupied by the queer artist for the purpose of delineating the bias that underlies straight time's measure." (Muñoz 174) When queerness fails to adhere to, or fails to succeed under, the measures of success required under heteronormativity and cisnormativity, it becomes a political act of resistance. Instead of striving to successfully adhere to trajectories that deny queer existence, "[t]he politics of failure are about doing something else, that is, doing

something else in relation to a something that is missing in straight time's always already flawed temporal mapping practice" (Muñoz 174). Queer failure recognizes that linear notions of success dependent on consistent gender identities, reproductive bodies and kinship models, and adherence to sexual and gender norms, are more restrictive than meaningful, and in this, "[q]ueer failure is often deemed or understood as failure because it rejects normative ideas of value" (Muñoz 173). Halberstam echoes this in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), in stating that:

> Heteronormative common sense leads to the equation of success with advancement, capital accumulation, family, ethical conduct, and hope. Other subordinate, queer, or counter-hegemonic modes of common sense lead to the association of failure with nonconformity, anticapitalist practices, nonreproductive life styles, negativity, and critique. (Halberstam, *The Queer Art* 89)

Living in opposition to what is equated with success under a normative model opens up the possibility of embracing new ways of being, instead "refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique" (Halberstam 88). In refusing to seek success through establishing productivity and coherency, "[t]he queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbably, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being" (Halberstam, *The Queer Art* 88). In doing so, queer failure exposes flaws in normative systems, recognizing "that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities," exposing the failures of the dominant itself (Halberstam, *The Queer Art* 88). Intentionally studying queer failure reveals the instability in hegemonic ideals of success that require heteronormativity and cisnormativity, and in doing so, creates a "method for imagining, not some fantasy of an elsewhere, but existing alternatives to hegemonic systems" (Halberstam, *The Queer Art* 89).

When queerness seems to inevitably lead to failure, this failure can be repurposed to pursue utopia. Queer failure, for Muñoz, is aligned "with a certain mode of virtuosity that helps

the spectator exit from the stale and static lifeworld dominated by the alien-ation, exploitation, and drudgery," with the exit leading towards utopia (Muñoz 173). As addressed in earlier sections of this thesis, utopia is not a concrete destination or possibility, and "[u]topia can never be prescriptive and is always destined to fail." However, "[w]ithin failure we can locate a kernel of potentiality" (Muñoz 173). In this, failure becomes an opportunity to do, to become, to enact something more than is present, and the practice of enacting this becomes virtuosity. While I centre failure in this section, "[f]ailure and virtuosity are both equally important aspects of queer utopia or queerness as utopian. Queer utopia is not just a failure to achieve normative virtuosity; it is also virtuosity that is born in the face of failure within straight time's measure" (Muñoz 177-178). In moving towards queer utopia, I explore ways of balancing failure and virtuosity, which here I define, in light of Muñoz's work, as the skill of departing from the normative and creating something more within the space of failure. This departure marks the beginning of moving toward utopia, as it breaks from existence within the normative, or an attempt to become a part of it, trusting that something more is possible.

This trust that more is possible is an essential tool for queer and trans survival. Working towards utopia, engaging in "[t]he critical work that utopian thought does, in its most concise and lucid formulation, allows us to see different worlds and realities. And this conjured reality instructs us that the 'here and now' is simply not enough" (Muñoz 171). This is critical for queer, and particularly trans people. While the phrase "it gets better" is an extremely overused and often empty statement of support for queer people (particularly towards queer youth and newly-out trans people), collective queer and trans survival is dependent on the knowledge that more is possible than what exists in the present moment. Utopia may be an unreachable destination, but the pursuit of it gives permission to anticipate that joy is possible.

Within this thesis work, I fail, repeatedly, to adhere to cisnormative and heteronormative standards of sucess. At the core of this failure is that I engage with this research work in a way that does not attempt to disguise my existence outside of cisnormativity and heteronormativity; I

centre my experience as a trans person who inconsistently (and often simultaneously) identifies both within and without having a gender, my trans body is present within the work physically and is referred to conceptually, and I amplify the incongruences in my gender presentation. Heteronormativity and cisnormativity imply that shame should be experienced when failing to meet their standards, so revelling in the potentials of what is possible when existing in spite of them is an act of rebellion. Additionally, doing so in a way that is motivated by joy, and in a way that externalises this rebellion through unapologetically failing ways gave insight into how I could push my drag further outside of this research work when considering my practice by embracing Camp.[19] In my drag practice, and as a trans person, there are consequences to failing to perform correctly, but through this research I was able to find ways of amplifying these failures instead of resisting them, allowing me to explore how I could push the possibilities of what my drag could look like when there were no consequences in performing incorrectly.

Failure through Camp, as an outcome of this research, brings immense joy for me. Within the realm of Camp, failure becomes a laugh at one's own expense, reclaiming the dismissal or suppression of queer (and trans) existence. Through these reimaginings, it is possible to “align queer failure with a certain mode of virtuosity that helps the spector exit from the stale and static lifeworld” (Munoz 173). Where queer lived experiences under cisnormativity and heteronormativity bring guilt, shame, or fear , Camp allows these experiences to be parodied and reimagined as sites of joy.

[19] My existing drag practice has shifted significantly in parallel to this research work. While my drag naturally shifts and changes over time, there is a sharp departure in the aesthetics and mannerisms I employ in drag that occurred immediately following the performance creation. This altered aesthetic has become significantly more abstract, and the use of colour in the makeup itself has become much more vibrant and chaotic. I have found an incredible amount of joy in enacting this shift.

Conclusion:

I have found through this research that drag allows me a place to experience joy with gender in a way I am not able to elsewhere; while outside of drag there are consequences to experiencing gender in unstable ways, my drag allows me to fail, spectacularly, at gender.

In this, I am able to step away from pressures to situate myself in relation to binary gender, or pressures to assert an entirely androgynous existence. Through this, my movement into being Annagram doesn't represent a shift in gender, but a shift into a place of Camp, a place of joy. Becoming Annagram for me is an act of finding joy through failure, through Camp. I have come to the understanding that Annagram exists for me as an opportunity to engage in queer failure, and to give myself permission to experience joy.

I wish to stress here that drag performance has the potential to create joy, but it also has the potential to amplify joy that already exists. In positioning drag for myself as a trans performer as a way of creating joy, I want to be cautious to avoid implying that this joy isn't possible in other ways for trans people; drag is only one method for cultivating trans joy. In centering joy, there is risk in unwittingly contributing to the narrative of trans existence as wholly defined by negative experiences or attempts to escape them, and in concluding this research, I stress that joy is not an anomaly for trans people, but it is an experience that is often denied.

Through centering Camp as an aspect of Drag performance, I give myself permission to exist with joy despite a cisnormative and heteronormative context. I employ Camp in these creations because "[s]atire and parody are disarming; they mock objects of reverence and authority, toppling them from their exalted position by rendering them absurd and ridiculous" (Warner 18). Through Camp drag, binary gender becomes destabilised, as the performance cannot be contained within it. While outside of drag there are many contexts where overwhelming anxiety over how I represent my gender, and how my gender is perceived, drag for me represents a departure from this. This was amplified in the performance creation, as it allowed me to consider how drag performance can be a way to "blur the boundary between

legitimate and illegitimate, normal and abnormal, justice and injustice, provide a forum in which we can imagine, if not enact, alternative structures of feeling and alternative ways of being in the world" (Warner 8). In the drag experiment, I aimed to push past the boundaries of needing to fully delineate a difference in gender between myself and my drag character, and to instead focus on how joy can propel my work further into experiments that pursue the concept of utopia.

Through this research I have come to the unexpected discovery that gender is the least interesting aspect of drag for me. While it underscores and exists as a baseline criterion for drag, gender is only a launch-point for what experimentation and artistry is possible through drag as a practice. In light of this research, I propose that engaging with drag as being grounded in joy and failure, in addition to gender, is needed to create deeper, more complex, more authentic understandings of drag performance. I argue that gender alone is not enough to define drag, it must be considered as only one aspect of the personal and artistic ways that drag performers shape our practices. I have come to understand, and attempt to apply, that my drag is an act of gaiety that resists my own internalised ideas and anxieties about needing to exist within binary gender (or to contextualise my experiences within gender at all), and to instead embrace the potential for what joy is possible. To return to an earlier quote, from Warner, "[a]cts of gaiety do not make the world go away; they make worlds, albeit illusionary and fleeting ones," and drag exists for me as a way to create these worlds where I experience joy (9). Drag does not make cisnormativity, heteronormativity, or the existence of binary gender systems disappear, but it shows the incredible realm of what is possible outside of them.

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