

Drag Time

The Rise of the Male Queen

"We're born naked, and the rest is drag." (RuPaul)

Introduction:

This essay will explore how people use drag to communicate their personal opinions or to break down society's stereotypical views. This will be shown through first hand research from drag performers, drag spectators and my own personal experience. The explanation for the rise of drag connects itself with a number of theories that also reflect the history of drag, summarised in the next few paragraphs. As this essay examines drag in detail, it will look at how drag connects to these theories and what makes it so popular in today's society. Burlesque, like drag, reflects the spectacle of performance which is examined in the theory 'Society of the Spectacle' and the notions of hyperreality in the simulacra reality. 'Carnavalesque' theory can be found in many aspects of drag; the idea of the show, its host and the grotesque nature of drag (that is to say grotesque as perceived by society) is a fundamental concept that will be further analysed throughout this essay. 'The masque of femininity' theory will also be discussed in light of make-up being a mask used by women; parallels can be drawn between this and the ways drag queens use it. 'Queer theory' refers to gender and what makes us who we are, which coincides with the idea of the gender-bending of drag. The last theory that this essay refers to is 'Consumer culture and post-modernism', which is used in conjunction with the audience and their need to

consume what they are not or cannot touch. These theories in combination give evidence that reinforces the drag phenomena, the rise of drag and all it has to offer.

At the beginning of the 21st century drag had a huge following. Drag has played an important and controversial role in male sexual identity and has impacted on society, gender constraints and the dress of gay men. (Cole 2000:45) Drag's 20th century form developed out of the masquerade ball, which itself has a long history. At the turn of the 20th century it altered its character and became known as a 'drag dance', 'a safe gay place'. (Cole 2000:45) Here people felt they could express themselves. While these were by no means events initiated by or limited to 'gay culture', they were quickly and enthusiastically embraced by the gay community, (Cole 2000:45-46). By the middle of the 1920s drag balls were "attracting thousands of participants and observers". (Cole 2000:45) Participation was not just by those in drag, but also their followers, friends and others who were merely curious about this 'drag culture', a subculture in its own right which we shall return to later in this essay. (Cole 2000:45) The development of this homosexually tinged subculture was surprising as it was not until 1967 that homosexuality was finally legalised in the United Kingdom under the Sexual Offences Act.

Drag is a form of expression, and the author Shaun Cole suggests that gay men have held drag balls to express themselves right up to the present day, but what then of the observers? (Cole 2000:45) With the tradition of non-drag participants being well established it could well be said that it is from here that the idea of drag queens as performers arose. The most exciting section of the balls was the beauty contest or 'parade of the pansies', "in which the fashionably dressed 'drags' would vie for the

title queen of the ball”. (Cole 2000:45) This concept reflects elements of the ‘Carnavalesque’ theory. In ‘Carnavalesque’ theory someone is chosen to be the king or queen of the ‘ordered disorder’ of the carnival (Cole 2000:45). It is from here that we can identify the origins of the concept of the drag queen. Initially, drag was a means of expressing ones identity, before it became a stereotype, which eventually came to symbolise gay culture. Today we continue to see drag returning to its roots as a tool of expression.

In the 1930’s men defied the law of the time and started to carry drag out from the shadows and into the streets and clubs of Harlem, New York. Drag, by its exhibitionist nature, was never intended to be a hidden activity. By daring to come out into the open it began to confront mainstream society and paved the way for a more open-minded society (Cole 2000:47). People who dressed in drag in the 1960s were referred to as the gay men with “enormous flats and lots of money”. As its popularity rose, drag reached out across the world even to remote “regional cities such as Bristol”. (Cole 2000:49). The drag debate continues to challenge society “particularly as the prevalent image of gay men”. (Cole 2000:50) It is also seen as a tool of “personal communication”, “self expression”, “emphatic statement about the socially defined femininity that they feel within themselves” as well “as a vehicle to explore aspects of [young gay men's] developing sexual identity”. (Cole 2000:50-51) As drag evolved, new concepts began to permeate the 'drag identity', responding to drag's increasing popularity; 'radical drag', to which we shall return, could well be seen as the influence to new age drag. This drag suggested that certain drag queens wore drag as a “political statement, one designed to confront or ‘freak out’ the straight community.” (Cole 2000:51) The idea behind ‘radical drag’ was not to be like a real

woman or emulate the glamorous 'movie star', which was popular in the drag scene of the 1950s and 1960s. Rather it was about confrontation, to “attract attention and cause a stir”, to make a point about society. (Cole 2000:51). This drag was playing with society’s notions of men, gender stereotypes and giving power to this new way of seeing what masculinity stood for. (Cole 2000:52) “Drag has continued to move in and out of the fringes of gay dress” and continues to grow in popularity as a method of self-expression, art and performance. (Cole 2000:53) It breaks down the notions of what makes someone a man or a woman.

Chapter 1: The Royal Dress up

'Drag queen' is a term becoming increasingly well known in London society, both in the gay and the straight scenes. This is demonstrated by the reviews of different drag shows in the popular, mainstream 'Time Out' magazine, the endless documentaries, television series, films or television shows like one episode of Channel Four's 'Faking It' to be a drag queen. It can also be seen in articles written about the lives of drag performers in different newspapers like the daily free newspapers in London, and the column in the 'Metro' by Jodie Harsh, a drag queen socialite. This chapter will consider how and why men become drag queens.

A drag queen is a man who dresses in overly exaggerated woman's attire. (illustration 1) Drag queens are not living as women; they just dress in women's clothes to participate, perform or host events. It is important to remember when analysing drag queens that there is a difference between transvestitism and drag. Drag is performance while being a transvestite is a way of life. Transvestites' attempts to portray a woman realistically rather than being a hyperrealistic version of a woman like "the radical drag queen who wants the discontinuity of hairy chest or moustache to clash with a revealingly cut dress." (Garber 1992:49) Drag Queen Ruby Venezela stated, "I am not trying to be a woman. I am an artist and a performer... When dressed up you become a different person. You turn into the character". Drag performers take on an alter ego or another persona. (Davidmann 2003:44) Each drag queen has their own character with a specific name and a set of attitudes that represent their individual persona. Ruby Venezela, real name Brian, said that when he is Ruby his attitude, voice, actions, mannerisms and entire self changes. (Davidmann 2003:44) Tracy Tramp

says, “my drag queen persona is a rebellion against today’s clothing and style norms for both men and woman. It is an extreme statement but it is intended to make people think.” (Davidmann 2003:85) Whatever the subject or attitudes the drag queen chooses, it all comes down to putting on a show and making the audience think. When a drag performer finishes his show he usually takes his costume off because he lives as a man. To become the character is not just about the attitude and subject, it is also about the costume, make-up and hair. “If dressed as Ruby I’m the character of Ruby – as Brian without the costume and make-up I can’t fake Ruby.” This is a telling example of how drag is a performance rather than a way of life. (Davidmann 2003:44)

The drag queen is an exaggeration of a woman. Drag queen Celeste West says, “it’s not enough just to be a woman – I want to be a superwoman. I want to push glamour and glitz to its very limits. The more make-up, the more eyelashes, the more sequins the better”. (Davidmann 2003:13) So a drag queen is a hyperreal woman. They have the characteristics of a woman pushed to the limit. Society creates things that are similar to reality, but are not reality. Baudrillard (1988) argues that we are living in a world of simulacra; drag queens are hyperreal and attack this because they make sure the audience knows that they are men dressing as women. Drag queen Tracy Tramp has all the characteristics of an exaggerated woman but he is clearly a man, as evinced by his male physique, jaw and Adam’s apple. This is a clear example of how drag queens make no attempt to really pass as women, preferring instead to confuse people’s notions of gender. (illustration 2) So therefore a drag queen is “someone who isn’t afraid to push the boundaries and play with peoples perceptions.” (Appendix 2 - 6)

Feminist Antoinette O'Grady, who is creating a documentary on drag shows, defined a drag queen as "someone who humorously and provocatively challenges the binary notion of gender that underpins the prevailing view". (Appendix 2 - 7) In light of this statement it is no shock that drag queens often have a woman performing alongside them dressed in 'fem' or 'bio drag'. 'Fem' drag refers to a woman being a man dressed as a woman, and shares characteristic of hyperreality with the drag queen. In illustration 3 we see several drag queens and one woman in 'fem' drag and it is hard to differentiate between the genders. Drag queens do not seem to mind whether it is a man dressing as a woman or if it is a woman dressing as an exaggeration of a woman. The important factor is that the audience does not know who is a man or who is a woman. Drag performers are trying to break down the preconceptions of what are the traditional notions of what makes us a certain gender. So if "a drag queen is someone who understands that our actions are ultimately gendered through preconditioning and fights against it by embracing the stereotypes of the opposite gender", then a woman being a drag queen or a man being a woman both form apposite examples of how all gender notions are broken down. Stereotypes are employed by performers to confuse and to underline the notion that gender should not determine how you should act. Therefore drag queens can express "the feminine form through masculinity", as much as a woman can express femininity. Besides, who is to say what is real femininity? (Appendix 2 - 8) Tracy Tramp emulates this by saying, "as I'm walking along in my 7 inch snakeskin stiletto heels and I'm asked why I'm wearing girl's shoes my response is always, they're not girl's shoes. They are my shoes!" (Davidmann 2003:85) This quote also reflects how society has not completely let go of the conventional boundaries of what makes a woman or a man.

Sara Davidmann, the author and photographer of the book 'Crossing the Line' describes her first meeting with drag queen Millie Mopp: "bright red lips, kohl-winged eyes, seven foot tall with a bleached blonde wig and heels. I was fascinated, captivated, hooked." (Davidmann 2003:2) The mixture of masculinity and femininity captivates the audience, can provoke outrage in society and is often where insult is aroused. When I dressed as a man dressing as a woman, including fake genitals and exaggerated female features, I was a hyperreal woman with hints of masculinity. On the streets, people's attitudes towards me shifted. I was a spectacle. An anonymous man shouted "freak" at me, showing that drag is still not entirely accepted in today's society and again reflects elements of the 'carnavalesque' theory. (illustration 4) In terms of 'carnavalesque' the drag queen represents the grotesque body. Although to some drag queens are beautiful, others cannot see past the "freak". Drag is still not fully accepted in modern society; there are still those today who will shout abuse at drag performers or who have strong moral views against it.

The drag queen reflects the female through clothes, make-up, hair and mannerisms. This aside, their male features still shine through; hairy chests and legs; manly physic, Adam's apple and deep voices. These features are grotesque in combination but at the same time intriguing and magnificent. The true opinion is subjective to each spectator. The spectator's intrigue reflects the growing interest of drag that is being seen in today's society. "The shock of the grotesque merged with dreams and fantasies which threaten to overwhelm and engulf the spectators." (Featherstone 1991:80) It is as though the spectator does not want to look but cannot stop. 'Carnavalesque' theory shows us the difference, like drag does. People are intrigued to know where they stand in the grand scheme of things, they need to know what they

are not and “drag is a very powerful tool” that can do this. (Davidmann 2003:13) The ‘carnivalasque’ theory promotes entertainment, the notion of a freak show, profanity, vulgarity and highlights its success through “the celebration of the grotesque body” like a drag queen does. (Featherstone 1991:79)

The other key characteristic of a drag queen is their costume as touched upon earlier in this essay. Drag queens are “the epitome of glamour and tack all rolled into one.” (Appendix 2 - 1) This is demonstrated by the outrageous costumes in combination with an attitude that cannot be ignored. The costumes are the epitome of gimcrack fashion, they need to be outrageous, bright, bold, and extravagant, they need to scream ‘I’ve arrived’. Drag queen costumes can range between any sort of dress code, fabric, colour or style. Drag is really about accentuating the feminine features and wearing something that makes the performer stand out in the crowd, therefore becoming the spectacle. Take for example drag queen Millie Mopp with his half a meter thick bleach blonde cylindrical beehive wig with a miniature black velvet hat finished with a red ribbon tied around it. He is also draped in sparkling diamond costume jewelry including rings, earrings and necklaces. Miss Mopp also has a tight red velvet corset and tails suit jacket with black trimmings. The jacket has detailed sequins on the cuffs and collar. A black shiny latex bag and seven inch thigh-high stiletto boots finish off the outfit outrageously. (illustration 5) He is a cross between a burlesque performer and a ringmaster of a circus and this in itself creates an interesting contrast. Mixing these two professions, both usually attributed to a certain sex, makes the audience think about their notions of gender and therefore plays with their preconceptions. This is a telling example of how symbolic, outrageous and flamboyant drag queens are.

‘The masque of femininity’ suggests that women put on a mask to change people’s perceptions of them. When a woman uses make-up “she appears as made up, claiming false identity... prettier than nature made her”. (Tseëlon 1995:34) This is further indicated when drag queen Ruby Venezuela says, “my make-up is more kabuki than female impersonator. In Japanese Kabuki the make-up is very stylized. It’s like a mask.” (Davidmann 2003:44) Therefore, drag queens put on a mask to face the world like the stereotypical woman does. Make-up not only represents woman, it also helps to make the point about the exaggerated features of the hyperreal woman. An example of this is how drag queens make-up often exaggerates female features; this can be seen by the image of drag queen Ruby Venezuela on the cover of the book ‘Crossing the Line’. (illustration 6) The drag queen attempts to attract attention through his eyes: large curved elegant black bold lashes painted on thickly, these lashes reach across his forehead and include several sparkling white crystals. He also has bold white and pink, very striking eye make-up. His eyebrows are highlighted, arched across his forehead. He has luscious, large, full-bodied, blood red lips. His cheeks are dabbed thickly with fuchsia pink blush. Make-up is truly the tool of the drag queen, used to convey the 'message' of femininity.

In the theory of the 'masque of femininity' the woman “seduces the man, to lure him to his destruction”; this is achieved through the mask of make-up. Like women, drag queens play with their spectators as they play with our notions of gender. Both women and drag queens equally employ make-up as a mask. (Tseëlon 1995:34) The theory states “Improving on nature through the ‘wicked arts’ of false and dyed hair, make-up and coloured clothes constitute, according to the church fathers, offences

against god, self and man.” (Tseëlon 1995:35) If this is true for women, surely the same applies, if not more so, when a man wears a women’s attire? According to current social norms, the same should apply to men. It is for these convictions that so many find drag abhorrent to masculinity. According to Tseëlon this notion creates a “mistrust of the woman”. (Tseëlon 1995:36). One can conclude, that both women and men can equally mislead their audience, and society with the use of the notions conveyed in the ‘The masque of femininity’ theory.

This theory also gives evidence for the idea that people feel different through changing gender-specific clothing, for example the use of “flamboyant, imaginative and playful” clothing, so prevalent in drag queen acts, makes the wearer “[appear] differently and [feel] differently” about himself. (Tseëlon 1995:36-50). Tseëlon therefore raises the question: “Do you feel a different person in different clothes?” (Tseëlon 1995:50). In an attempt to answer this question several drag performers were interviewed to see whether different coloured clothes suggested different moods. Drag queen Lady M stated, “I choose color depending on the theme”. (Appendix 2 - 18) This suggests that costume and colour are merely part of the performance, used to create different personae rather than reflecting the mood or characteristics of the person behind the costume. Drag queens push their make-up, hair and clothes to the extreme, crossing the boundaries of how far women generally go to make themselves up. This is a powerful attempt to be controversial, because they, after all, are not really female. (Tseëlon 1995:77)

“A women is made to feel continually insecure about her physical appearance, and simultaneously so dependent on it.” (Tseëlon 1995:80) In light of this information,

does the same apply to drag queens? They give themselves the opportunity to push women to the limit in their acts. After speaking to several drag queens my conclusion is best summarised by drag queen Lady M when he said, “my physical drag appearance is so different from my real appearance. And as for feeling insecure - I feel more secure in drag as it is a character and therefore I have a mask to play with”. (Appendix 2 - 18) We see again that drag is a tool rather than a way of life. Their character can play with the stereotypes that surround women without necessarily feeling the same insecurities.

Like ‘masque of femininity’, ‘queer theory’ attacks the traditions of culture. This theory attacks the boundaries of what makes a man a man and a woman a woman. Before the 1960s society had more oppressed views on gender, the woman was relegated to the home, and the man filled the role of the 'provider'. This as the 'norm' has been eroded in subsequent years and present day gender views are, for many, noticeably different. Drag queen Celeste West conveys this by saying, “You’re brought up with the perception and the belief system that this is what a man should look like and this is what a woman should look like; this is how they dress and this is how their image should be presented.” (Davidmann 2003:13) He goes on to say how drag completely turns this upside down. This example shows how society’s views on gender roles have changed. As drag becomes more acceptable, the role of women and men change. This must of course be taken into consideration alongside other influences including gay rights, feminism, equal voting and so on. This combination in the last few decades is slowly creating a more open-minded society that is in turn embracing drag queens. Is it possible, however, that society is just reverting back to how it used to be before these preconceived ideas of gender? Drag queen Tracy

Tramp says “In Europe until around 1750 men were dressed and wore elaborate creations... Men used to wear make-up. Why is it now the preserve of women?” (Davidmann 2003:85) When considering these factors drag becomes more than just dressing as the opposite sex, rather it is also about making a statement about breaking down pre-conceived notions that restrict people in society from being whom and what they want to be.

‘Queer theory’ also examines the closeness of men and women, suggesting they are not as different as we think. Drag queens could be seen as setting free the femininity of the woman, taking society’s notions of women and throwing them out of the window. A large butch man for example, acting gracefully in platform shoes and a frock. (illustration 7) Who really has the right to say what makes a man a man? Drag queen Tracy Tramp questions society by asking “why do women have the monopoly on clothes?” (Davidmann 2003:85) This also sheds some light on why the drag queens dress in women’s clothes. Drag is trying to break down the assumptions people have of men. Celeste West further gives evidence for this by stating that, “the sad thing about our society is that men are very much discouraged from being flamboyant and colourful. In the animal kingdom it is always the male that has the colour and interesting features”, again highlighting contrasting views on drag.

(Davidmann 2003:85) Drag really is helping to break down people’s pre-judgments on gender. A gay theory book states “the 1980s and 1990s saw a rise in the popularity of drag as a commercial enterprise amongst the straight population... Clubs like Kinky Gerlinky in London revived the interest in drag as a fun alternative.” (Cole 2000:53) As drag becomes more accepted in mainstream society, be it gay or straight, people will become increasingly encouraged to just be, or at least attempt to discover

who they are rather than let their preconceived notions of gender rule them.

The interview from the text 'queer theory' shows a drag king's (a woman dressing as a man) experiences on the subject of gender. The drag king states, "I don't pass as a man and I don't intend to. However I do try... to put a spin on our habitual ways of viewing things and on conservative gender norms." (Morland, Willox 2005:131) It seems the drag performers thrive on the confusion of gender that is created in their audience, "Perhaps you lose yourself in the illusion, but something isn't quite right." (Morland, Willox 2005:131) Therefore, the drag performer exists to show part of their version of 'queer theory'; they attempt to show that no one can be restrained by the standard notion of gender. This reflects what the drag king is trying to show through her performance, "defy gender – conformist demands, I provoke. Ridicule, stir passions. Create a travesty. Break moulds. Enhance stereotypes. Play tag with our imagination and our ideas of what is what, who is what and who desires what and who." (Morland, Willox 2005:133) If the drag performer can change people's notions of what makes us a certain sex then will 'queer theory' still dominate in modern society as a way to show how gender should not make us who we are or, will it become redundant?

Chapter 2: Let it All hang Out

Drag shows have been described as “entertainment at its best, camp, sparkly, tongue in cheek and enthralling.” (Appendix 2 - 1) A combination of the ‘carnavalesque’ theory, ‘society of the spectacle’ theory and the theories used to support chapter 1, are the foundations of the construction of the two types of drag shows that are being seen in today’s society. There are two different types of drag shows, firstly, the classical lip-syncing and secondly new age drag which leans towards performance art.

The ‘carnavalesque’ theory is reflected in many ways in both types of drag shows. One example is that the ‘carnavalesque’ notion is based on a public mockery, an overcrowded, uncontrollable, exciting, grotesque carnival where there is a person that is crowned the king or queen of the carnival; this is ‘organized disorder’ as mentioned earlier in the essay. (Featherstone 1991:82) The crowning of the king or queen is reflected in the drag performers control of the crowd even though the audience can dance, go crazy, and heckle. (Featherstone 1991:82) This shows the importance of the drag queens attitude in their show as written about earlier in the essay. The crowning also makes a direct reference to the history of the ‘drag balls’ where they had beauty contests to crown the most fabulous drag queen. The rise of drag and the ‘carnavalesque’ theory show many similarities in their evolution.

The ‘carnavalesque’ theories manifestation involves the “transgressions in which the distinction between high/low, official/popular, grotesque/classical are mutually constructed and deformed” of the carnival. (Featherstone 1991:79) Therefore like the carnival the drag show continues to promote disorder as a way of showing society’s

opinions. It not only breaks down boundaries but also promotes “sexual promiscuity”, letting sexuality and self-expression run wild. (Featherstone 1991:79)

Through all the criticizing of homosexuality and gender-bending “the origin of the spectacle lives in the world’s loss of unity”. (Debord 1967:22) These drag performers try to express their view through their shows in an attempt to unite society as one, to break down the restrictions and preconceived notions of society. “The spectacle divides the world into two parts, one of which is held up as a self-representation to the world, and is superior to the world”. The drag queen confronts society with its own preconceptions. (Debord 1967:22) The more socially liberal someone is the more they are to embrace drag suggesting that the less liberal someone is the more against drag and what it stands for they will be. This perhaps refers to the so-called 'conformist' aspects of society that find it hard to appreciate something which is different. The drag performance as a “spectacle is a map of this new world” which shows new ideas, concepts and new type of expression that, while being present in society for hundreds of years, is only now being accepted by the mainstream. (Debord 1967:23) “The spectacle’s function in society is the concrete manufacture of alienation”. (Debord 1967:23) Hence if drag shows embrace alienation then they use the shock factor of the different and the grotesque to make a statement about society. This also gives society the opportunity to see alienation in show form. (Debord 1967:23) Drag queen Celeste West says “Sometimes you can see people find this difficult to deal with. They don’t know how to handle it. Other times people go with it and can laugh and see the funny side of it”. (Davidmann 2003:13) Slowly as society grows more open-minded, drag will be even more embraced. Drag shows continue to reinvent themselves, responding to a changing society in how best to challenge the

preconceived and ignorant.

Also in the 'society of the spectacle' theory, "the specialized role played by the spectacle is that of spokesman". The drag queen then uses the drag show like a 'speakers corner' to share these views on the world especially in the new age drag. (Debord 1967:18) New age drag shows are more than just mime or lip-syncing, "the fetishistic appearance of pure objectivity in spectacular relationships conceals their true character as relationships between human beings and between classes" they say something about the world and show all the characteristics of the 'radical drag' referred to earlier in the essay. (Debord 1967:19) The owner of 'Bistrotheque and cabaret' Pablo Flack says the new age drag (performance art) that is often shown at his club is about the "individual performers finding their own voice" and goes on to describe that "new age drag is more about point of view than bitchiness." (Appendix 2 - 17) New age drag gives the drag queens the chance to say something of substance if they choose to rather than being just a man dressed in woman's clothes lip-syncing. Some at the forefront of this new drag, like "Kiki aka Justin Bond, Jonny Woo and Taylor Mac... (Have) thrown the drag queen rule book away and written a new, more intelligent one." (Appendix 2 - 17) He further says about Kiki, "the deranged world Justin has built for Kiki is as complete as it is ludicrous." (Appendix 2 - 17) In 'Time Out' Jonny Woo featured in a 'Social Club' review with a five-star rating, demonstrating how mainstream and popular this new age drag is becoming. Even though the crowd is not necessarily as stereotypical as the original type of drag it is appealing to the 'East London' crowd. The reviewer Simone Baird said of drag queen Jonny Woo: "Where other trannies dabble in wiggling up and frocking on stage to mime the odd pop song, Woo delivers phenomenal original material that turns

preconceptions of drag acts inside out.” (Baird 2007:135) This new age drag will continue to change and confront society’s notions of what a drag queen is and what their shows should stereotypically comprise. The new age drag also deals with subjects others can be too scared to cover in front of a live audience, hence ‘radical drag’. An example of this is how Jonny Woo deals with very taboo topics in his drag monologue ‘International Woman of Mr E’, referencing drugs, abuse, bareback sex, and gay men who have unprotected sex and sometimes contract HIV. He deals with these issues in a contrasting and comical way, therefore creating even more of an emotional impact than one might expect on the audience.

“Consumption and lifestyle preferences involve discriminatory judgments which at the same time identify and render classifiable our own particular judgment of taste to others.” (Featherstone 1991:18) This quote refers to how people are often under the misconception that they know what the majority of the public want – in the same light, people often go to drag with preconceived stereotypes only to experience the opposite. From my own experience at ‘International Woman of Mr E’, this new type of drag surprised many of the members of the audience; this can be seen in their anonymous answers. (Appendix 2) New age drag continues to change and shock the audience, appealing to new groups of people. By targeting, and creating a group of people able to move beyond stereotypes new age drag is becoming an increasingly popular phenomenon.

Continuing on the subject of the drag audience, it is important to take consumerism into account. In so doing one must consider the theory of ‘Consumer culture and postmodernism’. When analysing this theory one would be forgiven for assuming,

wrongly, that it is solely related to the idea of consumption in the material form. Consumption today relates to more than this, and the need to consume without actually receiving anything material in return is a fundamental aspect of our society. The drag queen and drag show can “be consumed symbolically (gazed at, dreamt about, talked about, photographed, and handled) in various ways which produce a great deal of satisfaction.” (Featherstone 1991:16) If this is true then drag is like an item. “Some goods can move in and out of commodity status” this shows the ever-changing crowd, the rising popularity, the changing acceptance and the constant status growth of a drag show.

Conclusion

This dissertation has concentrated on five main theoretical aspects of drag: ‘Society of the Spectacle’, ‘Carnavalesque’, ‘the masque of femininity’, ‘Queer’ and ‘Consumer culture and post-modernism’ theories.

When considering ‘Society of the Spectacle’ the essay looked at the hyperreal, a ‘super woman’ created through the over exaggerated female attire. This theory also gave evidence for the drag queen being a symbol of the ‘ordered disorder’ written about in the ‘Carnavalesque’ theory. This is seen in today’s society by having the drag queen as a host, performer, newspaper columnist or being the centre point of a television show like ‘Faking It’.

‘Carnavalesque’ theory is a fundamental characteristic of drag. This is reflected in the combination of the male physique and a woman’s stereotypical features, both physical and external. This theory also shows the inner adventures of the ‘freak show’ to the surrounding society and also gives the onlooker the chance to discover what they are not via viewing the grotesque.

‘The masque of femininity’ theory was analysed with reference to women’s use of make-up and hair as a mask, which has many parallels with the way drag queens use it. This gives us an insight into how drag queens can use make-up and hair as a tool for self-expression that could not be achieved without make-up and props.

‘Queer theory’ analyses the gender roles of men and woman and why there are certain expectations of them even before birth. It reflects the restraints society places people until they have the courage to break free of these boundaries and be whom they choose. Drag is a perfect example of the types of fringes that emerged when society began to show the different. This theory also shows how men and women are more similar than people think. This is shown through the examples throughout the essay of a man dressing as women and being graceful, or the drag king, a woman dressed as a man who likes to stir confusion in her audience.

‘Consumer culture and post-modernism’, refers to the audience’s need to discover new aspects of themselves. It also shows how the drag queen is a product that can be consumed which is perhaps one of the reasons that the drag phenomena can grow within today’s society. In the past it was the masquerade ball pageant, then a show, then an art form, and now today it can reach even further as drag queens are being consumed in newspapers, television shows and beyond.

For reasons of word length, it has not been possible to explore all the areas of interest surrounding the topic of drag. It would be fascinating for example to examine the psychological effects of drag, to analyse the effects of drag on different kinds of audiences, to consider why some men feel the need to glamorise themselves in this way, and various other issues raised in the surveys that I have not been able to explore as much as I would have liked.

What has become clear from the research is that drag queens are more than just men in women’s clothes. They are mavericks attempting to break down the gender barriers

in modern societies. Drag shows attempt to challenge the orthodox, the culturally acceptable 'norm', challenging the generally accepted stereotypes of what men and women are. They effectively challenge prejudgments concerning the roles of feminine and masculine, a point highlighted in the audience surveys quoted earlier. The rise in the popularity of drag is then not surprising, because it is a powerful self-expressional tool that can be used to challenge society on many levels, confronting stereotypical social views using costume, make-up, hair and contrasting elements in everyday life.