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Imagining Performances: Entangled Temporalities and Corporalities in Drag King Encounters

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines the imaginative aspects of performance, drawing on fieldwork conducted in drag king workshops in Brussels. To collectively imagine a future performance, participants navigate between several possible chronotopes, including a *present* space-time (the here-and-now of the interaction, in which participants think of a performance that has not yet taken place) and a *past* space-time (in which participants recruit cultural models in order to think about an upcoming performance). The ethnographic, linguistic, and interactional analysis sheds light on "staged" and "everyday" performances, refreshes the debate between performance and performativity, and highlights creative assemblages of bodies, spatialities, and temporalities. The chapter suggests that a consideration of imagination in the analysis of performance will enhance language and sexuality research by reframing gender through the idea of a body that exceeds itself and carries the power to transform lives.

Keywords: Brussels, chronotopes, drag king, embodiment, gender, imagination, performance, performativity

Introduction

During fieldwork I conducted with the French-speaking drag king community in Brussels, Belgium, I witnessed something that caught my attention. Usually, I was expected to observe, video-record, and sometimes, participate in drag king workshops—social occasions in which people assigned female at birth gather together in order to discuss techniques for embodying a male persona. This time, curiously, there were not many participants, so the "experts"—a group of drag kings particularly knowledgeable in bodily gendered transformation practices and stage performances—took the opportunity to work together on an upcoming performance. One of them, Aurel, proposed sharing and working with the three other members of the group, Max, Robin, and Jimmy, on a performance inspired by "Criminal World," a song by David Bowie included in the *Let's Dance* album.

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This exemplary case sits at the crossroads of multiple speech events, including discussions about a future performance as well as rehearsal moments. It therefore offers an opportunity for important theoretical reflections on the creative, embodied, and political character of an imagined performance. The idea I defend in this chapter is that what occurs during these multimodal speech events reflects on how gender works more broadly, as seen in the flows of interaction and imagination that work out the performance. The analysis of gender as performance has attracted much attention by scholars, beginning with the seminal work of Judith Butler (1990), but the same cannot be said for imagination, which remains within gender and queer studies a kind of semantic primitive, never analyzed and quite rarely evoked. My objective is to see how imagination can shed new light on the study of gendered performance, inviting us to question the assumed dichotomy between staged and everyday performances as well as between performance and performativity.

Performance and Performativity

Although intertwined, performance and performativity must be distinguished, at least initially. *Performance* is an act accomplished by social actors in a more or less conscious way. The term focuses on social actors and their ability to display oratory competence, producing and questioning identities in the course of their everyday discursive and multimodal routines. *Performativity*, in contrast, is a process exceeding the intentionality of participants, by which social actors are gendered through a complex web of social and institutional practices repeated over time (Austin 1962; Butler 1993). This distinction has been underlined by several scholars in linguistic anthropology (e.g., Bauman and Briggs 1990; Livia and Hall 1997); however, it has not been taken for granted and has at times been problematized. Kira Hall (2000), for instance, has observed how the distinction in scholarship between “performance” and “performativity” often reflects another problematic dichotomy between the *subjects* who accomplish performance and the *practices* by which performativity functions (see also Hall 2013). Further, she notes the difficulties in combining this philosophical perspective with an ethnographic approach.

In this chapter, the distinction between performance and performativity will be updated and questioned. Gendered performance—as it emerges in drag king workshops and as inspired by a contemporary arts framework—will be approached through the lens of imagination. The interweaving of several corporalities, spatialities, and temporalities emerging in imaginative practices renders obsolete the vision of a unified and a coherent self and questions the distinction between subjects (as initiators of *performance*) and practices (the production of gendered subjects through the *performativity* process), as well as between present temporalities (what I am doing at any particular “now”) and past temporalities (prior actions framing and accounting for current ones). Performance has traditionally been approached as either *staged performance*, displayed in artistic or LGBTQ contexts such as drag king and queen performances, or *ordinary performance*, accomplished in everyday contexts by everyone in the course of our daily practices. However, in this chapter, this distinction will be questioned for at least three reasons. First, analysis of the cor-

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pus reveals this dichotomy to be inappropriate, as rehearsals and imaginative practices contain and include elements of performance (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 60). Second, performing arts have revealed how art and life intersect; that is, what one does in artistic and/or ordinary contexts has to be approached less as a dichotomy than as a *continuum* (Kaprow 1993), as contemporary arts have transformed the most daily routines into aesthetic resources. Third, despite the intrinsic theatrical nature of performance, Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs (1990) recall how the concept of performance is not restrained to "artful uses of language" (60) but rather encompasses both artistic and ordinary contexts.

Gender as performance

The success of performance in gender and queer studies comes from Butler's (1990) work, in which she mobilizes the concept to refer to drag queens and their performances of femininity:

> The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. […] In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency.
>
> (Butler 1990: 175)

Since the publication of *Gender Trouble*, scholars have continued to consider gender as a performance that we constantly accomplish through a repertoire of actions (ways of clothing, walking, speaking, adorning, etc.), whose mobilization and repetition have the power to stabilize and account for an intelligible gender (see Milani, this volume). Gendered performance is not a singular act; it is "a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint" (Butler 1993: 95), a symbolic and a material space in which the theatricality of activism and the theatricality in arts meet (Butler 1993: 233). However, Butler's conception of gender as performance oscillates among performance as action, as ritual, and as artistic genre.

In kinesics, a field of research created by linguistic anthropologist Ray L. Birdwhistell (1970), who studied the social aspects of body motions in cultures, performance has a more general sense. It is associated with the production of a speech or kinesic act and refers to actions ("kinesic performance," articulatory performance"; see Birdwhistell 1970: 115, 120). Reflecting the feminist wave in the 1960s and 1970s, Birdwhistell distinguishes among *primary* sexual characteristics, relating to the physiology of the production of fertile ova or spermatozoa, *secondary* sexual characteristics, referring to the

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anatomy, and *tertiary* sexual characteristics, "which are patterned social behavior in form […] learned and […] situationally produced" (42). While "performance" in Birdwhistell's work is quite vague and seems closed to change, as patterned social behavior, the way he approaches social interactions suggests the idea of action as ritual, as theater (57–58). Similarly, Erving Goffman (1959), the leading figure of interactionism, proposed a relational and dramaturgic interpretation of self in social encounters in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. The concept of theatrical performance is at the heart of his theoretical perspective and becomes the cornerstone for a theatrical vision of social life and a sort of synonym for human interaction: "A 'performance' may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (8).

Though Goffman's work has inspired some of the most influential contemporary artists (e.g., Kaprow, Acconci; see Greco 2017), his theoretical framework ignored what performing artists were developing during the same time period. Although fascinating, Goffman's way of conceptualizing theater (which does not include experimental or LGBTQ performances) remains quite metaphorical, even though he did meet with artists and performance theorists during the 1970s (among them Richard Schechner, Victor Turner, Edith Turner, and Barbara Myerhoff) in a workshop held at the Performing Garage, a theater in New York City (Schechner, personal communication). Goffman's (1976) concept of performance acquired an embodied dimension in his insightful analysis of advertisements depicting women as subordinate subjects. In this work, he focuses on bodily gender cues—a certain way to bend the knees, hold a cup of tea, or touch a male torso—to underline what we might today call gender performance, attributing to it a ritual character.

The ritualistic dimension of performance is likewise the subject of Victor Turner's (1986) research, which analyzes the ways through which social actors break rules, face moments of crisis and repair, and ultimately reveal a theatrical dimension to interaction. Cultural performances, approached as ritual actions that follow predictable conventions, constitute a distinctive feature of drag shows, whose theatricality is due to at least three factors: their dramatic and stylish form, their interactional dimension (in that drag performances involve a performer who plays a role), and the presence of an audience seeing and hearing the show (Newton 1972: 107). In this regard, Bauman (1975), working from within the tradition of ethnopoetics and verbal art, defines performance in the following way:

> Performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence. The competence rests on the knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways. Performance involves on the part of the performer an assumption of accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond the referential content.
>
> (Bauman 1975: 293)

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Three elements are underlined in Bauman's approach: a focus on the ways messages are produced and delivered, coming from the Prague School tradition; a responsibility toward an audience, which calls for a collective vision of performance that mobilizes specific participation frameworks (Finnegan 1992: 91–93); and the competence of the speaker, opening a theoretical space for a vision of social actors as performers, artistic and lay.

It is worthwhile to note how in all of these works, the ritual and dramaturgic character of performance is omnirelevant. If this theatrical lens is used in ethnomethodological research to focus on conscious behavior, then the focus on gender will be strong and ever-present and yet detached from a feminist perspective. Since the 1960s and 1970s, the fields of ethnomethodology and of micro-sociology of action, represented by the work of Harold Garfinkel (1967), Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna (1978), and Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman (1987), have contributed significantly to the idea of gender as interactional work, as a "doing" that social actors perform in the course of their everyday activities by mobilizing a repertoire of multi-semiotic resources, from prosodic contour and bodily movement to syntactic structures and sequentially organized turns (see Goodwin 2006 for a CA-oriented multimodal approach to gender; see also Stokoe and Speer, this volume). Yet when gender is framed as a "doing being" (Sacks 1984), the artistic dimension disappears and the feminist dimension is quite opaque (as a notable exception, see Kitzinger 2000). In contrast, linguistic anthropologists analyze gendered performances in everyday and professional contexts within larger sociopolitical contexts, as intertwined with imagery, sexual fantasies, and gendered ideologies. Even if imagery and imagination are not explicit issues for Hall (1995), her analysis of phone sex discourse is a good example of the way gender and performance may be studied through the lens of imagination.

In the field of contemporary arts, feminist artists have shown how gender is the result of actions and, in particular, of speech and visual acts. For instance, in her 1975 performance *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, Martha Rosler (1975) stands in a kitchen, a prototypical gendered domestic space, in front of a video camera that films her as she manipulates typical kitchen objects, including an apron, a bowl, and a chopper. In the performance, she shows each object to the camera, speaks its name, and then engages in some culturally associated actions. The artist's tone of voice and facial expressions produce a context in which these familiar objects acquire an alienating character and contribute to a visual dictionary of oppression. In the contemporary arts, performance is an artistic genre that generally (but not always) refers to an action accomplished—typically once—in front of an audience. Several features characterize an artistic performance: a focus on the bodily experiences of the audience and the performer, an interrogation of the dichotomies of stage versus backstage and audience versus performer, and a radical critique of the text as the unique site of meaning production by instead intertwining a multiplicity of semiotic resources such as sound, light, bodies, space, and—eventually, but not necessarily—text (Taylor 2016; Greco 2021).

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In contrast, scholars' references to art—typically theater, such as Butler's (1990) drag queen performances—tend to be more metaphorical than theatrically inspired. For example, J. L. Austin (1962) views sentences uttered in a theatrical context not as true performatives but as a "parasitic use of language" (22). Likewise, Butler's (1990) theory of gender, inspired by the paradigmatic case of the drag queen performing in gay clubs, was built by evacuating the contribution of performing arts to a vision of gender as performance. It would be interesting to examine not only how Butler's drag queen performs womanhood while making relevant the distinction between the gender she is performing and her anatomy (a point underlined by Barrett 1999 in his analysis of drag queen performances), but also how she, as a performer, becomes the artist of her own creation, both backstage and in front of a real or an imagined audience (cf. Calder, this volume).

Gender as a piece of art

The success of the concept of performance is tied very closely to its malleability, pervasiveness, and metaphorical power to explain every aspect of social life: all action could be interpreted as a performance accomplished *with*, *toward*, and *for* an audience (cf. "performed-for-an-audience," Turner 1986: 76–77). This aspect is quite close to what Schechner (2006: 22) identifies as a central feature of performance: "showing doing," that is, pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing. Gender as a performance is not only a doing that contributes to a more or less stabilized gender, it is also a showing. This showing shapes the perceptions that we as co-participants have about our gender(s) as we display them in front of an ordinary or staged, real or imagined audience.

Thinking about gender as a performance leads us to consider gender, like life in general, as a piece of art. This idea is philosophically grounded in the work of Michel Foucault, who makes the following fascinating statement in an interview published in 1984:

> What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?
>
> (Foucault 1984: 350)

In the Foucauldian perspective, life as a piece of art goes back to two different yet intertwined philosophical conceptions. The first is a conception of self rooted in the Greek and Roman philosophy of Plutarch, Seneca, and Pliny, in which ethics—the moral conduct of people and their relations to others and to themselves—is an aesthetic of existence (Foucault 1984: 343), that is, an "art of life" by which one must master and construct oneself in order to attain an ethical and an aesthetic style of life. The second is a constructivist conception of the self in which, as the self is not given, "we have to create ourselves as a work of art" (351). That is, there is an aesthetic vision of the fabrication of the self, where, like a craft person, the individual is concerned with their body as a plastic and dynamic material in front of or toward a real or an imagined audience. Gender as a piece of

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art refers not only to the "final product" but also to the meticulous work we accomplish daily to construct a gendered image of ourselves aligning with our desires. In this framework, gender is not just the performance that drag queens and kings accomplish in the course of their shows; it includes the long preparation leading up to the show (or any presentation of self). This point is close to what Butler (2015), in her essay on assemblies, calls "the conditions of appearance" of a performance:

> the people are not just produced by their vocalized claims, but also by the conditions of possibility of their appearance, and so within the visual field, and by their actions, and so part of embodied performance. Those conditions of appearance include infrastructural conditions of staging as well as technological means of capturing and conveying a gathering, a coming together, in the visual and acoustic fields.
>
> (Butler 2015: 19)

As scholars working within gender, language, and sexuality studies, we should turn our analytical attention to a temporality exceeding individual episodes of self-presentation, to the *conditions* of the emergence of a performance and to the *effects* produced by performance in the lives of performers and audiences. Approaching gendered performances in temporalities encompassing more than the here and now of their actual realizations means to take into account "actions with predecessors" (Goodwin 2017: 15, 250) and future temporalities (Ochs 1992: 345). These temporalities, especially in pop culture, have the powerful function to inspire the lives of millions of people who are watching, observing, and being inspired, for example, by iconic pop stars such as Lady Gaga, Madonna, Prince, and David Bowie, among others.

A focus on imagination

Gender as a piece of art is not solely a theoretical matter for philosophers. It is a social and an aesthetic resource that we constantly mobilize in our daily life. To construct and perform a desirable and new gender implies a lot of imagination—namely, a capacity to represent and to conceive a role other than one assigned by social institutions (Nasu 2014: 54). Imagination is one of the features constituting what Jack Halberstam (2005) calls "queerness": "an outcome of strange temporalities, *imaginative* life schedules, and eccentric economic practices" (1; italics added for emphasis).

Imagination is not solely an individual, cognitive resource located in the brain of social actors (Nishizaka 2003) or something relegated to fiction and art. To think or plan another gender is not something abstract or concerned with only the world of fiction. The characters that drag kings and queens embody on stage, during drag workshops, and in daily life are aesthetic and embodied creations (see Borba, this volume; King, this volume), in that they create images through bodily techniques inspired by ordinary and professional life and by a cultural imagery that includes other queer bodies. As I found in my fieldwork, the borders between drag king workshops and "everyday life" are very hard to draw. Sometimes, people decided to return to their houses still wearing their makeup or

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new clothes, which challenges a clear separation between the temporalities and spatialities of the workshop and those of the house, or between art and life. In this case, the drag king workshop contains what José Esteban Muñoz (2009) calls “the real force of a performance”: the “ability to generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups that facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belongings” (99). By creating images that question and disrupt binary social orders, imagination becomes a resource through which LGBTQ subcultures index an affiliation to communities through different local ideologies of indexicality (Barrett 2017: 221).

Within the aesthetic and political framework of the butch-femme dialectic in lesbian culture, the potential dimension in femme aesthetic resides in possibilities to imagine new meaning rearrangements (Hoskin 2019: 6). In this framework, imagination, as the capacity to project a possible and a future gender, is at the heart of everyday action, politics, and utopia (Muñoz 2009). Imagination can be approached as a political resource mobilized by minoritarian subjects against “one-dimensional” societies that are characterized by a rigid separation between poetry and reason (Marcuse 1964: 161–163). It is no coincidence that Jean Paul Sartre, in an interview during the events of May 1968 in France, said that the force of the French 1968 movement was that it erected imagination as an absolute value, thus creating the slogan “*l’imagination au pouvoir*” (power to the imagination):

> Ce qu’il y a d’intéressant dans votre action, c’est qu’elle
> met l’imagination au pouvoir.
> What’s interesting about your action is that it
> gives power to imagination.
>
> (Sartre 1968)

However, we must be cautious not to present a naïve vision of imagination as something related to the free will of subjects. Following Arjun Appadurai (1996), we can say that if social actors can imagine multiple ways to subvert the gendered social order, we can suppose that institutions such as schools, hospitals, and justice courts can imagine as many expedients as necessary to limit these subversions or to regularize them within acceptable normative frameworks (on normativity, see Motschenbacher, this volume).

Analyzing Imagination in Drag King Workshops

This analysis is drawn from an ethnography I conducted of a French-speaking drag king community in Brussels, Belgium (Greco 2018). For four years, I observed, video-recorded, and sometimes participated in drag king workshops. I also interviewed participants about what they were doing during the workshop and spent time talking with them during social events. I observed how novices in drag king workshops, with the help of experts, learn to imagine and modify their gendered bodies through clothing, language, and bodily gestures. This “kinging” repertoire includes several bodily techniques: cutting the hair and sticking it onto the face in order to construct a beard and moustache, putting make-

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up on the eyes to form a contour that participating drag kings interpret as “masculine,” combing the hair, changing clothes if necessary, and possibly binding one’s breasts and inserting a prosthesis into one’s trousers formed from a cotton-filled condom. Some of the participants have the opportunity to perform in front of an audience, such as in a bar or in a friendly LGBTQ space.

My analysis focuses on the moments that precede performance, in which participants imagine what they could do together in the course of the show that will take place at some later point in time. In these specific moments, participants, as performers in contemporary art, experience something publicly in front of an audience *on* and *through* their gendered bodies. In this way, we can consider moments in which performances are imagined as sharing some common features with the performance itself: the staging of a situation, the embodiment of characters who deeply reflect the lived experiences of the performers, and the mobilization of a moving participation framework (Goffman 1981) in which audience and performers are interchangeable categories.

The analysis is inspired by linguistic anthropological theoretical frameworks combining queer linguistics (Livia and Hall 1997), performance studies (Schechner 2006), and conversational multimodal analysis (Goodwin 2017). It puts imagination work at the center of the gender construction process, as it emerges in interaction in a sequential and multimodal way and as it indexes multiple temporalities and corporalities referring to several spatiotemporal contextual configurations, i.e., chronotopes (Bakhtin 1981). As I situate my analysis in an irreducibly interdisciplinary theoretical framework encompassing the fields of sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, conversation analysis, multimodality, and performance studies, my analysis recalls the propositions of an embodied sociocultural linguistics (Bucholtz and Hall 2016; see also King, this volume). In this way, it considers “data” from a large array of phenomena: audio and video recordings, ethnographic notes, and materials from pop culture made relevant by participants in the course of interaction.

The emergence of an imagined gender

In the excerpts under scrutiny here, Aurel, Max, Jimmy, and Robin take the opportunity to talk about a performance headed by Aurel based on “Criminal World” by David Bowie. I show how the imagination of a “masculine gender” is *constituted by* and *constitutive of* the imagination of the upcoming performance. Participants refer to a culture of androgyny vehiculated by Bowie’s song and by the context of the association in which the interaction takes place. I first focus on the embodied dimension as it emerges in imagination work and then consider the entanglement of different temporalities and corporalities in the construction and the imagination of a possible gender and performance.

The first excerpt takes place at the beginning of the event. Playing the song’s introductory bass notes triggers some assessment activities (Goodwin and Goodwin 1987) prefaced by change of stake token particles (Heritage 1984):

(1) Bowie 1 dkb rehearsals 1

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A: Aurel

M: Max

1 ((music is playing))

2 A ah la basse

ah the bass

3 (1)

4 A oh c'est bien=

oh that's nice

5 M =trop de basse/

too much bass/

6 A ah non non moi j'aime bien ça fait bad girl ((laughing))

ah no no me I love that it sounds bad girl

The music, specifically the sound of the bass, is treated as an assessable (Goodwin and Goodwin 1987: 10): that is, it is assessed as an admirable focus of attention (line 2), something nice (line 4), or potentially disturbing (line 5). It is at this moment that Aurel, the one who proposes to work on this song, takes the floor again (line 6), both to establish a disagreement with Max and to make a connection between the sound of the bass and a gendered image (*bad girl*). The acoustic material of an upcoming performance works as a triggering event for both an assessment and an imagination activity—an activity in which participants express sensations, produce images and forms, and "shift from one perspective to another," giving rise to a lay "sociological imagination" (Wright-Mills 1959: 7). In this framework, the image of a "bad girl" does not emerge out of the blue but is inspired by at least three chronotopes that invoke and enable identities, social worlds, and some traces of a plot structure (Blommaert 2015: 109). That is, the imaginary is not reduced to a mental image whose matter is solely borrowed from the world of things or from a mental world (Sartre [1940] 2004: 20).

First, the lyrics of the song depict a criminal world in which individuals have a fluid gender—an androgyny constructed by an intersection between gender and age: "boys are like baby-faced girls" and "girls are like baby-faced boys."

Note that "Criminal World" is in turn a cover of a song from the 1970s by the British band Metro (1977), which was imbued with the glam rock androgynyous culture of the time. Second, the "bad girl" imagined by Aurel, which questions the cultural expectations

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placed on “girls,” echoes David Bowie’s androgyny, popularized by media and reflected in the lyrics of his other songs, such as “Rebel Rebel”:

(2) Rebel Rebel, David Bowie (1974), lyrics

You've got your mother in a whirl

She's not sure if you're a boy or a girl

Third, Aurel, who once defined himself as a “guy loving guys,” reenacts the gender fluidity advocated by the drag king workshops through the lyrics of “Criminal World” and the imagination of a “bad girl.” In sum, listening to music or watching and hearing a performance (here, of David Bowie) entails an experience in our bodies and puts the artist of the performance in a set of relations within which we can construct connections among his history, lyrics, gender, and sexuality (Hawkins 2015: 17).

Staging embodied situations

In the next excerpt, Max, Robin, Aurel, and Jimmy continue to listen to Bowie’s song (all pictures in this chapter were taken by the author):

(3) Bowie 3 dkb rehearsals 00-00/02-07

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R: Robin

A: Aurel

M: Max

1 ((they are listening to the song))

2 R je vois maintenant le début que quelqu'un entre/ peut-être

I see now the beginning that someone coming in maybe

3 seulement un personage/ et maintenant peut-être

just a character and now maybe

4 l'autre personnage qui qui joint euh: qui rejoint

the other character who joins ehm who joins

5 A be ::h Y'en a un qui rentre dans un endroit où se trouve

well one of them goes into a place where there is

6 déjà un autre personnage et ils se retrou[::vent

already another character and they find themselves

7 M [ah oui

Oh yes

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8 A il ya une sorte de contact c'est:: c'est viril mais

There is a sort of contact that's that's virile but

9 toujours un peu dans la retenue/ enfin:: eu::h

still a little restrained / well ehm

10 ce n'est pas vraiment le truc non plus eu::h il faut

that's not really the thing either ehm one must

11 heu::h il faut essayer de rester un petit peu dans la

heuh:h one must try to stay a little bit

12 subtilité

subtle

13 R se rencontrer ((reachs toward A)) [et pui::s]

Meet up [and then]

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14 A [voilà]

[that's it]

15 R commencer

start

16 A juste comme ça c'est une une sorte

just like that that's a sort

17 de de de de demi monde enfin euh: de ce monde un

of of of of half world well ehm: about this world a

18 peu criminel un peu eu::h bon on se donne des airs

kinda criminal a little bit ehm well you make yourselves

19 au sens eu ::h bon parce que ça fait partie du code des

in the sense ehm well because it's part of the code the

20 des codes en fait eu ::h bon il peut y avoir effectivement

the codes in fact ehm well there may indeed be

21 eu ::h #une sorte de truc# ça dérape un peu

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22 MAIS enfin on se rattrape en extrémis

BUT finally we are finally making up for it in extremis

23 #avec des# bon on va un p-tit comme ça vous vous voyez/

with some well we go a little bit like that do you see/

#caresses jimmy#

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The song opens an imagination space visually grounded through the perceptual predicate *je vois* “I see” (line 2). The imagination space sets up an encounter between two characters. This scene is collectively accomplished by Robin, who gives the setting, the number of the participants, and the action (lines 2–4), and Aurel, who completes and slightly reformulates the scene (lines 5–6). Meanwhile, Jimmy and Max adopt an audience related participation framework (Goffman 1981): one listens and the other one produces an acknowledgment token (line 7). The scene is then enriched by a few details concerning the “virile” quality of the meeting between the two characters. However, the gendered dimension of the interaction, accountable by the adjective “virile,” is mitigated by the categorial modifier (Sacks 1992: 44) *mais* “but” (line 8), destabilizing the fixed nature of the virility of the encounter. The unachieved structure of some syntactic constructions, the reformulation markers (9–10 *enfin euh* “well ehm”), and the mobilization of the lexical resources “subtle” (line 12) and “restrained” (line 9), all question virility as a taken-for-granted feature of a “king masculinity.” The imagination space initially opened by Robin is then embodied through the staging of an encounter in which the two characters approach each other to shake hands (line 13):

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While the scene is acknowledged by Aurel (line 14) as something that can work at that time, Aurel takes the floor again to make a commentary about the scene they are imagining (lines 15–23). The scene is thus characterized by a stepwise transition. First prefaced by a hedge introducing the uncertain character of the description ("a sort of," lines 16–17), the scene is imagined as part of a *demi monde* "half world" (17) that is a "little criminal," referring to some codes of conduct not explicated but possibly inferable (lines 17–20). The scene is then visualized through the embodiment of gestures that refer to moments of tension among the participants (line 21) but that can then be transformed (or repaired) into more relaxed episodes (line 23):



In this way, the bodies of Aurel and Robin (line 13) and of Aurel and Jimmy (lines 21–23) are not just approached as a substratum (Goodwin 2017: 32) but as material for future action, and as a mirror of the uncertain gender depicted in the song through the instability

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of gestures ranging from tension to affection. Aurel, Jimmy, and Aurel navigate among multiple symbolic and material spatialities: those of the interaction, the space where they are making rehearsals, as well as those of the imagined stage. In this framework, the binaries of “staged performance” and “ordinary performance” as well as “subject” (performance) and “practice” (performativity) are no longer appropriate. Instead, participants are engaged in imaginative (and agentive) practices while being captured by an action encompassing the individuality of the self and expanding into past, present, and future temporalities.

Referring to other corporalities and temporalities

In the next excerpt, Jimmy finally takes the floor and ceases to position himself as a spectator, thus changing the participation frameworks of the interaction.

(4) Bowie 4 dkb rehearsals 00-00/02-07

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J: Jimmy

A: Aurel

M: Max

1 J j'ai toujou::rs adoré/ la façon dont il voit les les :
I have always loved / the way through which he see the the

2 les:: voyous se fringuer en cette espèce de d'al capone
the thugs dressing up like Al Capone

3 et [tout ça]&
and all of that

4 A [ouais ouais]
Yeah yeah

5 J un côté voyou mais si bien:: bien:: fringué::: [quand même::]&
a thug side but so well dressed anyway

6 A [°ouais°]
yeah

7 J &hein/ et attend les [goda-goda]- goda:::sses le:: [les goda]:sses&
Right/ and wait the sho- sho- shoes the shoes

8 A [ouais]
yeah

9 M [xxx]

10 J &qui bri::llent(.)le truc il sent[xxx]
that shine the stuff it feels [xxx]

11 M [xxx]::=

12 A =ça fait une fascination pour un jeune/[mais] y'a&
it is like a fascination for a young guy but there are

13 M [ouais]
yeah

14 A &toujours des p'tits jeunes qui essaient de s'incruster dans
always some young kids that try to gate crash

15 ce genre d'univers/
that kind of world

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Thanks to the contributions of Jimmy, the imagination space is enriched through references to the Al Capone style and universe, such as “thugs well dressed with shiny shoes” (lines 2–10). The insertion of the modifier *mais* “but” (line 5) postponed to the “thug side” mitigate the possible inferences that this category could produce (Sacks 1992: 113) while making ontologically and categorically possible the existence of a well-dressed thug with shiny shoes (lines 5–10). The universe as it is imagined by Jimmy is then further nourished by Aurel (lines 12, 14–15). By imagining these boys as young, Aurel can shift the performed masculinity to the borders of the category and once again evoke the androgynous character.

This type of chronotope—referring to young thugs living at the time of Al Capone—is situated in the next excerpt in 1930s time:

(5) Bowie 5 dkb rehearsals 00-00/02-07

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J: Jimmy

A: Aurel

R: Robin

M: Max

1 J tu vois/ tu peux être habillé comme un voyou des années trente et

You know/ you can be dressed as a thug from the 1930's and

2 avoir une espèce de petit truc super féminin

have like a super-feminine little thing

3 A ben oui

yes sure

4 J et la boucle d'oreilles

and the earring

5 A y a quelque chose de très féminin

there is something of very feminine

6 J le le

the the

7 R oui je trouve que prince est comme ça un peu il est un vrai macho

yes I find that Prince is like that a little bit he's a real macho

8 dans ces textes et tout mais il est féminin aussi je trouve

in his lyrics and all but he is also feminine I think

9 (1)

[some lines omitted concerning a side sequence in which Jimmy is asking if the co-participants are talking about Bowie or Prince]

14 R et il chante aussi ce- parfois avec la avec la voix très haut

and he sings also that- sometimes with the with the voice so high

15 (1)

16 M ou[ais]

yeah

17 A [°ouais°]

yeah

18 (2)

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The masculine hybrid category, dressed as a thug and yet feminine (lines 1–2), is formulated by Jimmy as a sort of consequence of the categorial work accomplished by participants in the last excerpts. The linguistic resource *tu vois* "you see" (line 1) in a first position turn retrospectively summarizes some of what was elicited in previous excerpts while, prospectively speaking, opening up a new space for the collective imagination (lines 3, 5). Jimmy, Aurel, Robin, and Max focus on a character whose androgynous gender is a work-in-progress activity (line 4). We move from an activity focused on details concerning the gender construction of the character to one in which femininity is approached as a constitutive feature of this imagined masculinity (line 5), and the imagined gender is given in its incipient construction (line 6). Imagination is worked through by participants as collective and temporally anchored in the time of the interaction, and is accomplished through the recruitment of other chronotopes such as those referring to the popstar Prince (line 8) or Klaus Nomi's most popular song, "Simple Man" (lines 23–24).

We can identify in Robin's speech a tension regarding the authenticity and the commodification of queer aesthetics in the music industry as well as some of the public positions that emerged in Prince's speeches and performances: Prince was against gay marriage even while he contributed through his performances to promote a fluid masculinity intermeshed with femininity. The femininity in Prince's self-presentation is displayed by Robin as an agreement with the precedent positions (line 7) only while mitigated by the adverbial phrase *un peu* "a little bit," and then questioned, by a hetero categorization as a real macho (line 7). However, the intertwining between femininity and (toxic) masculinity is not definitive. It is situated in a back-and-forth dynamic, whereby masculinity and femininity are mobilized in an hermeneutic trajectory in which the femininity of Prince is, as we move forward in the interaction, attributed to an opaque quality (*quelque chose* "something," line 5) to later become embodied more specifically in his voice (line 14).

(5a) Fragments from (5) Bowie 5 dkb rehearsals 00-00/02-07

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Femininity	5 A y a quelque chose de très féminin **There is something of very feminine**
Masculinity	7 R oui je trouve que prince est comme ça un peu il est un vrai macho **Yes I find that Prince is like that a little bit he's a real macho**
Femininity	8 R dans ces textes et tout mais il est féminin aussi je trouve **In his texts and all but he is also feminine I think** 14 R et il chante aussi ce- parfois avec la avec la voix très haut **And he sings also that- sometimes with the with the voice so high**

This gendered process of attributing femininity and/or masculinity to Prince passes through complex trajectories in which masculinity is first identified as a prototypical trait of Prince's gender and sexuality (*un vrai macho* "a real macho," line 7) and then as emergent in his lyrics (line 8), thus operating a dichotomy between gender performance and lyrics, even if in some other lyrics Prince makes a clear queer statement, as in the first lines of "I Would Die 4 U":

(6) I Would Die 4 U, Prince & The Revolution (1984), lyrics

I'm not a woman

I'm not a man

I am something that you'll never understand

The recruitment of Prince as a relevant candidate for the imagined performance is stabilized by the other participants through some acknowledgement tokens (lines 16–17). After a pause (line 18), Max takes the floor and proposes another possible figure coming from pop and queer culture and aesthetics—albeit less popular than Prince or David Bowie—categorized as German (line 20) and singing a song titled "Simple Man" (lines 23–

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24). The song is by Klaus Nomi, one of the queer icons in pop and new wave culture, who died at 39 years old as a result of AIDS complications. The title “Simple Man” can be interpreted as both ironic and as a response to the audience’s gaze.

(7) Simple Man, Klaus Nomi (1982), lyrics

I got a simple, simple plan

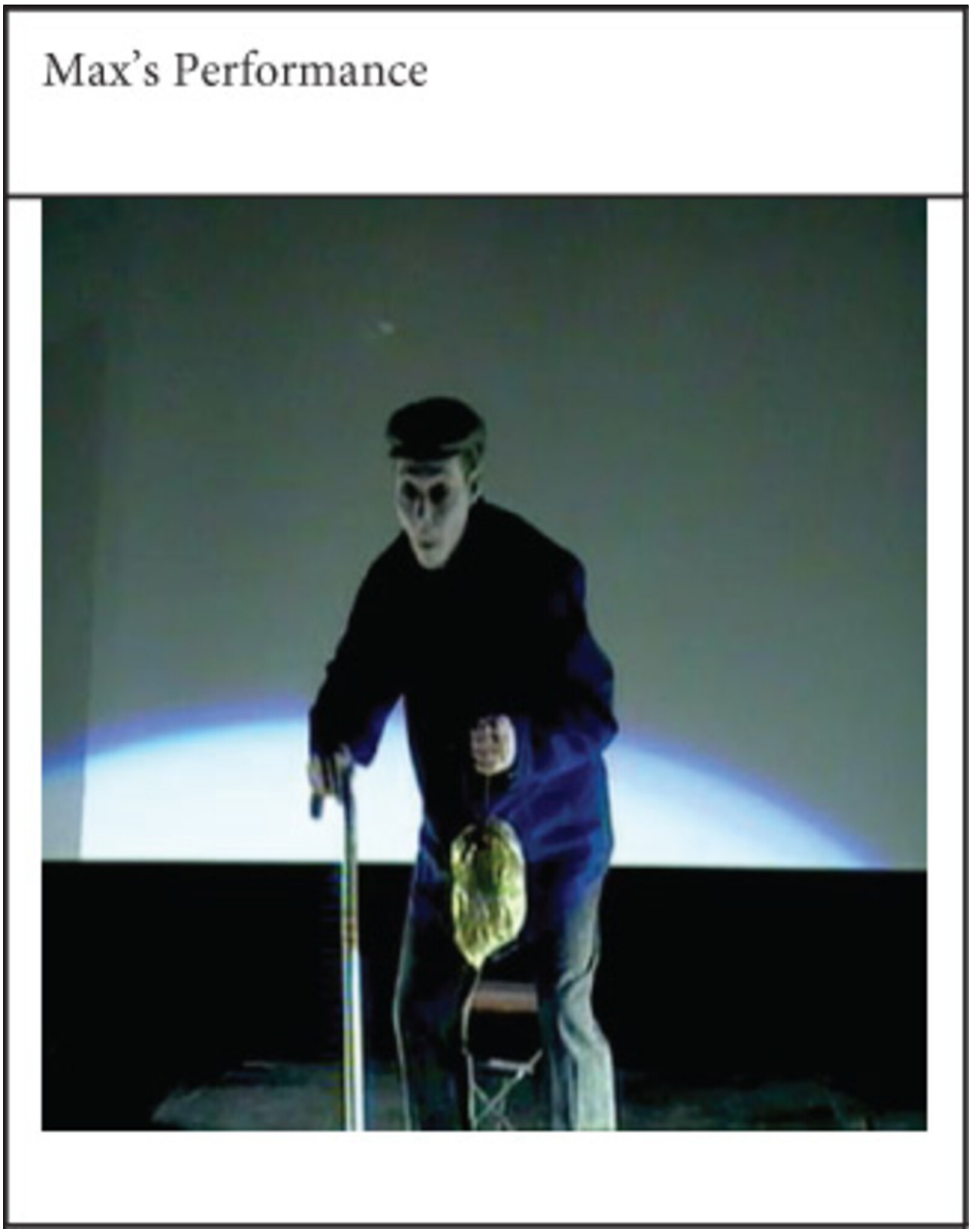
I hope you understand

I'm just a simple man

Listening to music and imagining upcoming performances put the participants in a state of a creative imagination in which several corporalities and temporalities are entangled in the midst of interactions. In this way, David Bowie, Prince, Klaus Nomi, Al Capone, and well-dressed thugs with shined shoes are part of a heteroclite imagery. This gendered imagery contributes to construct the genders of the characters depicted in the performance as it is imagined in the course of interaction, while it also reflects and nourishes the genders of the participants themselves. In fact, Aurel, Max, Jimmy, and Robin are constructing in their own way a gender that somehow resonates with the characters imagined in the performance. Their masculinity is irreducibly hybrid and not hegemonic; it echoes the androgyny imagined in the performance as well as those of David Bowie, Prince, and Klaus Nomi. Aurel has performed a poet and soldier of World War I; Jimmy was for a long time inspired by his sister’s friends who were bikers with a very pronounced aesthetic taste for beautiful clothes, hair, and beard care; Robin performed a character on stage whose undressing makes “the truth of sex” even more opaque in a sort of Russian doll dynamic; and Max has performed several times as an old man with a cane accompanied by Leonard Cohen’s “I’m Your Man.”

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Concluding remarks

This chapter's focus on imagination shows how performing a gender in a specific spatiotemporal configuration—an interaction during a drag king workshop—evokes and is situated in a multiplicity of cultural imageries and chronotopes: the universe of Bowie's androgyny, the characters depicted in Bowie's song (which is in turn a cover of a song released in the glam rock culture at the end of the 1970s), the mafia environment of Al Capone of the 1930s, and thugs caught up in dynamics of tension and male ambiguous complicity. The analysis approaches the imagining of gendered performance in a multidimensional way, focusing on a *creative* dimension, through the unusual entanglement of different and yet intertwined corporalities and temporalities, an *embodied* dimension, in that imagining a performance relies on specific embodied participation frameworks and gestural configurations. and a *political* dimension, as a focus on imagination allows us to think about possible and utopic genders.

Imagination activities contain a tension worthy of interest. On one side, they recognize a strong agency coming from the participants as social actors consciously imagine and construct possible and future performances. At the same time, in the midst of the imaginative worlds that social actors are constructing, their identities are multiplied and situated within a plurality of selves, corporalities, and temporalities. In this framework, imagination functions as a device that dissolves and collapses dichotomies between subjects and practices; staged and everyday performances; performance and performativity; and past, present, and future temporalities.

Bodies are materials that constantly exceed the limits of their somatic envelopes, joining and creating other bodies, images, sounds, and stories that encompass the here-and-now of our daily encounters as well as futures of unexpected assemblages. To consider gender —and our lives—as pieces of art leads us to focus on the possibility of future genders and of becoming entangled in a multiplicity of temporalities and corporalities. This perspective enables us to look at our gendered bodies as irreducibly maieutic—as bodies-made-world.

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