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**BIO-QUEENING AND BODY ART:  
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC INVESTIGATION INTO  
HYBRID PERFORMANCE MAKING**

**KATIE HARLING**

This thesis is submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters by Research

The University of Huddersfield

September 2018

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this autoethnographic, practice-as-research investigation, is to attempt to create a new sub-genre of hybrid performance entitled Neo-drag. This thesis will be accompanied by a practical, forty-five-minute neo-drag performance piece which was presented in June 2018. Both elements of this research are designed to question whether a hybrid performance entitled neo-drag, can successfully be created.

Situating bio-queen drag within the theorising of Judith Butler's *Gender Performativity*, the performance will present the introduction of bio-queen drag aesthetics into body-based performance art. The paper will firstly attempt to question my chosen title of 'bio-queen drag' or, 'bio-queening,' distinguishing whether it belongs to Skyy's 'Faux Queen' theorising or Peluso's 'high-femme drag' genre. Secondly, it will explore how my bio-queening is employing gender performativity to develop a hyper-feminine identity known as Frances Kay, within a body-based performance art, performance.

This paper is written in a first-person narrative, with interjected sections of speech from the researcher's alter-ego: Frances Kay. Following a similar autoethnographic writing style of Tami Spry, these sections of speech, will divulge the creative process of integrating bio-queening into body-based performance art and the personal responses of the performer. The research material of this paper analyses the differences between Skyy and Butler's scholarly material, and touches upon gender and drag/identity within a performance-based setting, especially present through the artists, such as Lady Gaga and Victoria Sin.

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## **DEDICATIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

To:

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SF – similarly, for challenging my feminist theory and pushing me to continue on...

DW and MT – For dealing with my ridiculous requests over the last two (five) years...

Mum and Dad – for embracing my insane art, performance and personality...

Grandad - for embracing (accepting) my insane art, performance and personality...

A, S and B – for embracing their weird big sister...

LJ + CD – for being the amazing, powerful, inspirational, creative fem-god's I love...

AM – for your creative skills...

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Every audience member who saw the show.

Everyone who helped on the thesis.

FK and KH – for being you, girl.

Thank you.

Mwah x

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**For the purpose of this thesis, the following terms will be defined as such:**

### *Bio-queen*

A biologically female woman dressing/portraying/embodying a drag queen. “‘Faux Queen’ or ‘Bio-Queen’...biological females or female-identified individuals who consciously perform hyper-femininity and can crudely be described as female drag queens” (Taylor, 2012 p. 98).

### *Body Art*

Derived from Live Art, a strand of performance where artists challenged the use of the body within performance. “...numerous performance artists... had begun using their own bodies in highly unconventional ways in performance art works” (O’Dell, 1998, p. 2)

### *Commercial Drag*

A drag queen that is recognisable, a friendly figure, a dame, much like the likes of Lily Savage, who is funny and entertaining. “... [commercial drag] presents a sanitized and desexualised queer subject for mass consumption... The sanitized [*sic*] queen is meant to be enjoyed as an entertainer who will hopefully lead to social understanding and tolerance...” (Muñoz, 1997, p. 85).

### *De-dragging*

The removal of drag attire in front of an audience, during a performance.

### *Drag*

A biological male dressing/portraying/embodying a female character/caricature. “...The female costume of a male homosexual” (Baker, 1994, p. 17).

### *Drag-king*

A biologically female women dressing/portraying/embodying a male character/caricature. “...a female (usually) who dresses up in recognizable male costume and performs” (2006, p. 29)

### *Femininity*



Traits, actions, ideals that are considered, or understood, to be 'feminine' within current society. "...if one saw oneself as '*feminine*,' then one had adopted certain expectations of gender...or whatever other social and cultural constructions were imposed on women's bodies" (Colebrook, 2004, p. 119).

### *Femme Queen/Faux Queen/Female-to-Female Drag*

See Bio-queen.

### *Flamboyant Femininity*

A term coined by Brandi Amara Skyy, to mean the bio-queen's choice to present as gay-males (or Faux, in her definition), that is, choosing to adopt "the drag queen's hyper-queer-feminizing of *their* gay male experience" (2016, p. 37).

### *Gender-fucking*

To deliberately subvert the ideals of gender, "...genderfuck plays (or fucks) with normative images of gender..." (Taylor, 2012, p. 84). See also gender-bending.

### *Gender-bending*

To 'bend' or challenge the ideals of gender within society.

### *Gender Performativity*

As understood through the theorising of Judith Butler, a way to construct gender through continuous repetitive, culturally produced acts. or behaviours. "Gender is the repeated stylization [sic] of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of natural sort of being" (Butler, 1993, p. 33)

### *Hetero-queer*

An individual who identifies as or with the term: queer (see Queer), who is also openly hetero-sexual.

### *Hyper-femininity*

The over-exaggeration, ridicule or specific lampoonery of what are considered to be 'feminine' traits of society (make-up, certain clothes, expected behaviours, etc.). As

RuPaul states: “I do not impersonate females! How many women do you know who wear 7-in. heels, 4-ft wigs, [*sic*] and skintight dresses?” (2010, p. 28).

### *Lip-syncing*

The act of singing, or speaking along to recorded audio without the voice. To mimic the audio exactly, as if to appear the audio was the performers voice.

### *Live Art*

An umbrella term for a collection of art forms that travelled through, Dadaism, Surrealism, Bauhaus throughout the 1900’ s to the present day. Where the art is somehow considered ‘Live’ “Live Art is not a description of a singular art form or discipline, but a cultural strategy to include experimental processes and practices that might otherwise be excluded from established curatorial, cultural and critical frameworks” (Kiedan, 2004, p. 2)

### *Performance Art*

See Live Art.

### *Phantasmagoric*

A confused group of real or imagined images that change quickly, much like images of a dream. Changing or shifting, as a scene made up of many elements.

### *Queer*

A term that can highlights an attitude and movement, “...an umbrella term which embraces the matrix of sexual preferences, orientations, and habits of the not-exclusively-heterosexual-and-monogamous majority.” (Hennessy, 1992). Also: “the projection of a queer attitude [as] enough to claim a place in homosexual culture” (Smith, 1997, p. 4).

### *Radical Drag*

Drag that sets about subverting gender. Drag queens deliberately point to constructions of gender within society. “...Their [radical drag queens] intentions were to reveal genders artifice and to emphasise that much of what defines males and females is created through social pressures and conformity” (Jacob and Cerny, 2004, p. 123).

### *Re-dragging*

The act of replacing drag attire in front of an audience during a performance.

### *Voguing*

A stylized dance that originated around the drag-balls of America during the late 1970s early 1980s. During catwalk like performances, participants would engage in a stylised dance that involved throwing moves or poses that parallel those posed in *Vogue magazine*.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Frances Kay (2017):

“How can I explain Frances Kay to you? When I was about 5, I remember listening to a song at my auntie’s house that started kind of slow, then it got really loud like BANG, but then it went quiet again. It goes on and on like this till the end of the song. And I had the best dance to it. I would creep around quietly making shushing noises, then suddenly jump around all like AHH.

Well Frances Kay is a lot like that! But replace the song lyrics, so instead of ‘Falling in love,’ it’s finding a complete new, other personality. Who is more: BANG.”

I would not say that I have always been interested in drag. Nor was I always interested in performance art, especially body-based art practices. My background and upbringing did not allow for the integration of such art practices to embellish my adult development. Or should I say, it was not available to my working-class family and we simply did not know of its existence. I cannot fully remember why an interest in drag became so prevalent in my life, but I know that when my curiosity was piqued, I already had a good grounding as a body-based performance artist, and an alter-ego who performed these works. What I struggled with daily, was how these two personas should be separated and why I had even started to identify with an alter-ego in the first place.

When my drag passion arose, I realised that what intrigued me about the genre was by the old-fashioned queens, dames or comics, but actually the newer, modern forms of drag that arrived around the 1980s. Specifically, the biologically female performers who presented a genre of female-to-female drag, through ‘hyper’<sup>1</sup> versions of themselves<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, my pre-existing performative work presented hyper-femininity, so the hyperbolic versions of female-to-female drag, and its connotations with gender-fucking,<sup>34</sup> would eventually have caught my eye. Attending a performance festival in 2017, I noted that several artists had started to

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<sup>1</sup> As defined in the glossary as hyper-femininity: an over-exaggerated version of what is socially constructed or considered to be feminine.

<sup>2</sup> Female-to-female drag queens such as Creme-Fatale (appendix E1) and Fauxnique (appendix E2)

<sup>3</sup> To deliberately subvert the ideals of gender.

<sup>4</sup> If the act of Drag is read as a way to present constructs of gender within society, then female-to-female drag can be a way to highlight the construction of femininity and what is considered to be ‘female.’

integrate the aesthetics of drag into their performance art, but I was almost certain that it had not been defined as a distinct genre. The hybrid of female-to-female drag based performance art suddenly became even more alluring.

Written auto-ethnographically, this practice-as-research paper will investigate the effect of employing Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity in the development of a hyper-feminine persona, known as Frances Kay, within the setting of body-based performance art. The first aim is to create a new, hybrid genre that amalgamates body-art performance and drag, which I will term "Neo-Drag." The second aim is to determine whether or not this new genre will help me to explore the differences and similarities between the personas of Frances Kay and Katie Harling,

It is worth noting, that due to the nature and culture of both the art forms referenced throughout, there may be profanities and upsetting content included in direct quotations, from certain performers.

## ***Methodology***

To effectively record the creation of the performance hybrid, Neo-Drag, I will combine a number of methodologies which will embody autoethnographic and qualitative research. Firstly, a review of the literature, which will briefly explore the historical development of body-based performance art and drag, the information collected will be used to create a Venn diagram of the similarities and/or differences between each practice, with a view to effectively cross-reference drag performance, performance art and body art. After providing a brief history, this thesis will be limited to exploring the work of body-based performance art and drag practices post-1970. This research will then consider how drag aesthetics are already being integrated into performance art, allowing for a deeper understanding of how to combine art forms in order to productively integrate them into a Neo-Drag show.

Secondly, by collating autoethnographic and academic research, Frances Kay will devise an autobiographical, body-based performance art, bio-queen show, i.e. a Neo-Drag show. The performance will attempt to explore the themes of identity and gender, and the relationship between myself (Katie Harling) and my alter-ego (Frances Kay), and will be derived from my current practice as a body-based performance artist, and my interest in bio-queen drag performance, along with reference to the Venn diagram.

Given that both this thesis and the final performance focus heavily on the presentation of the bio-queen identity of Frances Kay, a series of self-reflective logs will be written to allow for critical contemplation of my alter-ego and performance-making. These logs will also take into consideration reviews and analysis of current performance art, hybrid shows, as well as include conversations with those within the drag and performance community. Finally, these logs will become the basis on which the accompanied practical, forty-five-minute neo-drag performance piece will be devised and follow a similar writing style to that of autobiographical performance academic, Tami Spry. I have chosen Spry for two reasons. Firstly, Spry interjects her writings with her written post-scripts, a style I am eager to reflect when referencing Frances Kay throughout. Secondly, she believes autoethnographic writing is, a form and process that has allowed her to make “critical, political and personal sense of experiences” (2001, p. 711) and as this research continues I aim to understand my own situation as a bio-queen presenting body-based art practices, as well as attempt to understand my two, separate identities: Katie Harling and Frances Kay.

## Chapter 2

### RELATED LITERATURE

#### *Genre Definitions and Histories*

In order to question whether neo-drag is a term that can be applied to the integration of bio-queening and drag aesthetics into body-based performance art practices, the relevant classifications and definitions need to be understood. A glossary of definitions - according to various authors - cited at the beginning of this thesis will facilitate an understanding of terms and phrases used throughout, however, the following phrase will follow a different meaning. Due to 'Body Art' having connotations with tattoos, piercing and body modification in current society, it will instead be referred to as: 'body-based performance art', or 'body-based art practices'. In addition, female-to-female drag will be referred to as bio-queen/bio-queening. Although there are many terms to describe female-to-female drag, which are often disagreed upon, 'bio-queen' is the term I connect with the most. Finally, as previously stated, this thesis will be limited to exploring the work of body-based performance art and drag practices post-1970. This is because, as noted by Goldberg, "[In] the year 1968...political events severely unsettled cultural and social life throughout Europe and the US" (1979) and these events allowed for changes post-1970 within drag and body-based art practices. For example, in 1960, drag was illegal in the US with clubs and venues being subjected to police raids, limiting the length, style and overall aesthetic of previous drag shows<sup>5</sup>. Body-based performance art flourished within the 1970s when both artists and performances "reflected conceptual art's rejection of traditional materials...with performers turning to their own bodies as art material" (Goldberg, 1979, p. 98). Similarly, although drag has deep roots and a history within the LGBTQ community, since this thesis is an exploration of neo-drag creation (the aesthetics of bio-queening into body-based performance art), LGBTQ politics will not be focused upon. In order to understand the evolution of body-based art practices and drag aesthetics (including the creation of bio-queens), the following section provides a brief description of how these two genres of performance have developed.

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, 'racy' songs or dialogue were censored by local boards, drag attire had to be worn over male undergarments and clubs had to give up live musicians (Senelick, 2000, p. 384)

## ***Definition: Drag***

Many scholarly explorations of drag in theatre provide a diverse and detailed background to the development of drag, including its growth and change into post-1970's drag performance. Three of these seminal texts are Roger Baker's, *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation on the Stage* (1968), and *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts* (1994) and Laurence Senelick's *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre* (2000). Whilst all these texts discuss in detail the development of drag from its roots within ancient Japanese, Chinese and Greek theatre, and the tradition of English Church/Christian theatre, they largely follow the rich and diverse history of the West; passing through Shakespeare, into Minstrelsy<sup>6</sup>, twentieth century wartime theatre until it eventually evolved into the pantomime dame<sup>7</sup>, vaudeville<sup>8</sup> and the club performer. The most recognised form of drag in the 21st century is the underground lip-syncing club performer, and the reason for this, according to Baker, was due to an increase in legal persecution of homosexuals, leading to a decrease in the popularity of drag forcing the art form 'underground' into gay bars and clubs (in around 1950/60) (cited Taylor, 2012, p. 91). However, Senelick's text is the only one that will continue to be used here, as Senelick explains how post-1970s drag developed due to changes within law and society. For instance, the arrival of lip-syncing, was largely due to drag being illegal and many clubs losing their appeal. As a result of losing their appeal, along with the subjection of police raids and "increased expenses and a gradual loss of clientele", clubs were forced to give up live musicians. This loss of live music meant clubs realised live singers were not actually necessary, and, "Suddenly, lip-syncing became the rage" (2000, p. 384).

Throughout the 1970s, as the Gay Liberation Front came into full effect, a more liberal government began to take hold, and emerging queer cultures began to grow, "a new and more extreme style of drag began to develop" (Taylor, 2012, p. 93). Within the art world, both drag and body-based art practices were becoming more radical, challenging and political. Post 1970s development into the mainstream can also be found in Jennie Livingston's documentary *Paris Is Burning* (1990), which looks in detail at the subcultures of

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<sup>6</sup> "In the US, the tradition of minstrelsy, male actors would sometimes assume the theatrical role of the prima donna or wench" (Taylor, 2012, p. 88)

<sup>7</sup> "A satirical and often grotesque display of femininity, the role of the dame crossed various theatrical traditions" (Taylor, 2012, p. 87)

<sup>8</sup> Traditionally not farcical or satirical, Vaudeville "celebrated traditional womanliness and received national acclaim" (Taylor, 2012, p. 88)



drag and drag queens. It captures the rise of “drag balls” in New York and follows the queens and other participants in their day to day life. Drag balls were underground events that held ‘catwalk-like’ competitions which reflects a change in the drag genre, where it was transitioning from involving drag entertainment or a female impersonator, to drag as a culture in itself. Although Livingston's documentary offers a comprehensive view of ball culture through interviews and recordings, has been no academic paper to support it. A text that does explore these avenues however, is *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance and Ballroom Culture in Detroit* (Bailey, 2013). Much of the present day’s drag slang and culture was born within these balls. Senelick’s texts makes reference to how mainstream society is a large contributor to the way drag changed again around the 1980s.

With the arrival of the Wigstock generation, in which partying and all-night raves were widespread, due to the onset of AIDS and a dip in recreational drug use, performances “retrospected wistfully to the performers’ childhoods: in lieu of Barbra, Judy and Eartha” (Senelick, 2000, p. 433), and certain queens (such as Lady Bunny, RuPaul and Lypsinka) became the juxtaposition of this, and parodied femininity. “They...exaggerated glamour, and crafted personae which were caricatures rather than replications of pre-existing female types” (Senelick, 2000, p. 434). These queens were performers, only appearing in drag for performance based situations, and developed drag into an abstract concept. In this performance setting, RuPaul released a single, complete with an MTV music video, propelling drag further into the mainstream. From superstar drag queen to pop cross-dressers, the acceptance of drag and transvestism continued to grow through stars such as David Bowie, Alice Cooper, Tim Curry and Boy George. Such androgyny within the music business eventually crossed over to female singers, with artists such as Cyndi Lauper, Annie Lennox and Grace Jones which paved the way for both sexes to play, explore or challenge gender. Paralleling the androgynous music world and the revival of vaudeville drag in the 1980s, the WOW cafe in New York saw lesbian work with performers such as Peggy Shaw, Lois Weaver and Holly Hughes who explored gender, butch-femme relationships and socially constructed identity. Eventually, as Senelick says: “the Drag queen has become so assimilated that such acts are now drawn largely for mainstream heterosexual audiences,” which lay the foundations for what is recognised as modern drag performances. However, whilst drag queens were becoming superstar performers in the public eye, drag kings were becoming the new sub-culture of exploration, an avenue that would eventually lead to the birth of the bio-queen.

### ***Definition: Body Art***

Similar to drag, Live Art has a number of historical or research-as-practice based, scholarly writings and despite Live Art being a genre that, according to Heddon, “resists definition” (2012, p.1), I will adhere to the interpretation cited in the glossary from Lois Keidan<sup>9</sup>. Whilst being an opinion I relate to as an artist, Keidan, as the co-founder of the Live Art Development Agency (LADA), can be considered an authority. Two texts that consider the concept of live art are, *Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present* (1979) and *Performance, Live Art Since the 60s* (2004), both of which were authored by RoseLee Goldberg. Considered significant in documenting how live art has developed and changed since its early beginnings in Dadaism, Surrealism and the Bauhaus school, it details the creation of body-based art practices through practitioners such as Vito Acconci, Yoko Ono and Dennis Oppenheim.

Having evolved from live art, body-based art practices, have been recognised as a separate genre of performance since 1970. It became prevalent as an art form by challenging the use of the body in performance. O’Dell holds the view that “numerous performance artists... had begun using their own bodies in highly unconventional ways in performance art works” (1998, p. 2), and further, some of these artists were testing the boundaries of their audiences, performance art critics and themselves. Performances such as Chris Burden's *Shoot* (1971), Abramovic’s *Rhythm 10* (1973) and Carolee Schneemann’s *Interior Scroll* (1975), prove that body-based art practices were becoming more explicit and challenging as the decade progressed. Texts by Amelia Jones’ *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (1998), along with *The Artist's Body* (ed, Warr, 2006), both present the trajectory of body-based art practices since 1970. These academic texts analyse body-based art work throughout the 1990s, heading into the 21st century, and these books also help in identifying body artists who used explicit, intimate or visual practices to exploit their bodies in the advancement of the genre. Jones, Warr, and O’Dell all play a critical role in the understanding of masochistic body-based art, which will be presented throughout this thesis and the accompanying final performance. One particular aspect of this masochistic body-based art practice has been the use of the bleeding body. The bleeding body can follow a number of paths within this setting: the religious, ritualistic or spiritual, or political. As

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<sup>9</sup>“Live Art is not a description of a singular art form or discipline, but a cultural strategy to include experimental processes and practices that might otherwise be excluded from established curatorial, cultural and critical frameworks” (2004, p. 2)

explained by Newman, it can be used: to “confirm both the presence and absence of the marginalized body” (2013, p. 18), and as noted by Jones, “extreme body art had taken off from the political protests of the 1960’s” (2009, p. 46). Much like the development of drag, the bleeding body became (as well as other forms of self-inflicted harm) the primary actions that made oppression visible<sup>10</sup>. Throughout O’Dell’s text *Contract with the Skin* (1998), she attempts to document her understanding and journey through the bleeding body and masochism within body-based practices. She notes her opinion on how this art form became, writing that “I knew that women’s rights, gay rights, civil rights, and the Vietnam War were all part of the reason. But I also sensed that the masochistic bond between performers and audiences was a key to the situation.” (1998, p. xii). As well as this, she notes how when moving through into the 1980s the form of masochism shifted into endurance-based performance, and was re-born in the 1990s. O’Dell suggests that the shifts were “because the need for negotiation became as strong during the war on culture and the war on AIDS” (1998, p. 78), which in turn mirrors a similar movement in the drag world.

As body art developed throughout the 1990s, issues relating to identity and gender became ubiquitous. Lea Vergine believed that the trends of performance from 1990 onwards, “explore[d] the phenomenon of shifting identities, technological contaminations and [...] hybridizations” (Jones and Heathfield, 2014, p. 530). It was these explorations of current social behaviour that changed the form of body-based performance art. To Jones, the return of ‘Body Art’ in this decade included the integration of new mediums that allowed the body to be noticeably disjointed from live performance. It presented artists who “deploy multimedia, installation, and photographic technologies, eschewing live performance altogether” (1998, p. 199). As the 1990s and technology within body-based performance art progressed, due to these artists recognising that “the deepest recess of our bodies/selves are already inhabited by the gaze of technology’s new world picture” (Jones, 2000, p.43), it again gained popularity. Yet, there were still some who believed that performance and the bleeding body “evoke[d] a visceral empathetic response” (Jones, 2009, p. 46), when witnessed live<sup>11</sup>. As a result, the body-based performance practices of today continue through both live and technological based mediums.

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Pane’s bleeding arms representing literally and metaphorically the ways in which women bleed, or Abramovic’s sewing up the lips of Ulay to represent oppression or silence of particular groups.

<sup>11</sup> Such as Peggy Phelan and Rob La Frenais (Warr, 2000, p. 14)

Considering the continuous evolution of both body-based performance practices and drag performance, due to changes in the political, technological and sociological landscapes, it can be argued that the emergence of bio-queening and the return of the body within live performance is a statement on ‘reclaiming’ the body. With the first reported bio-queen shows appearing in 1995 - 2005, drag at this time was developing into non-specific gender or sexualised stylised performance, and with the introduction of Drag Kings, bio-queens sought their chance to shine.

### ***Deeper Analysis: Gender and Identity***

Judith Butler’s text *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) is fundamental to this research, as it offers an understanding of gender performativity, whilst covering identity, queer and social theories, which are relevant to the aesthetics of drag and body politics. Butler also attempts to understand what is meant by ‘femininity’. Butler’s works throughout her career focuses on five main elements: The Subject, Gender, Sex, Language and The Psyche. It is therefore important to note that whilst they are interesting and potentially relevant when understanding the politics of gender and identity through LGBTQ or other themes, Language and The Psyche will not be investigated when exploring gender performativity, neither will there be reference to Race (which Butler returned to many years after writing the first version of *Gender Trouble*). These omissions are due to the fact that this paper is an exploration of a Neo-Drag creation (the aesthetics of bio-queening into body-based performance art), and therefore they are not relevant. Butler also makes reference to drag as a way to “establish that “reality” is not as fixed as we generally assume it to be” (*Gender Trouble* 1994, p. xxv) and she sees it as a way to highlight the “violence performed” by what she marks out to be gender norms. As pointed out Keilty and Dean, Butler claims that, “...drag aesthetics are subversive in terms of bringing to the fore the idea that all gender is performance...” (2013, p. 154), which is a view that is interestingly shared by many bio-queens<sup>12</sup>, and it is important when attempting to deploy the hyper-feminine persona of Frances Kay. As Butler’s texts focus solely on her theories, to contrast gender and identity theories within drag, John Jacob and Catherine Cerny’s article *Radical Drag Appearance and Identity: The Embodiment of Male Femininity and Social Critique* (2004) explores these

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<sup>12</sup> Bio-queen Victoria Sin believes, “Everybody performs their gender, especially in terms of being a woman” (Broadly, 2015)

aforementioned themes in regards to appearance, focusing more closely on the politics of identity.

With a view to understand not just *Gender Trouble*, but all of Butler's collective works, Sarah Salih's text, *Judith Butler* (2002) will be used to ascertain where Butler's theories and motivations started, as well as assists in a discussion of Butler's later revision of her works. Salih offers a comprehensive view and break down of Butler's theories, including a critical analysis of gender performativity against other scholars. It particularly notes Butler's influences, such as, Simone de Beauvoir, Monique Wittig, Hegel, Foucault and Lacan, all of whom have shaped Butler's theories and facilitate a deeper reading of her work. There are several texts that discuss the gender politics of queer performance and many of these works can be cross-referenced into drag aesthetics. To supplement Butler, Claire Colebrook's text *Gender* (2004) discusses gender theory 'before modernity' and references all the theorists, including those among Butler's influences, when exploring multiple psychological gender and sex based theories. In contrast to Butler's *Gender Performativity* which explores multiple theories (as well as Butler herself), this work will provide a basic foundation when understanding femininity. Colebrook explains that femininity is constructed (much like gender) 'according to the cultural, linguistic, historical and social conditions within which it was embedded' (2004, p. 118) and this constructed femininity will be the framework in which my bio-queening will belong.

### ***Deeper Analysis: Bio-Queening***

In this section I will provide a deeper analysis of drag practices and its aesthetics. One of the more recent, relevant developments here, is to be found in bio-queen subculture. Bio-queen subculture has been allowed to evolve due to the development of drag post 1970. One article that discusses this development is Taylor's "Doing Drag (Un)Doing Gender", which can be found in *Playing It Queer: Popular Music, Identity and Queer-World Making* (2012). Taylor points out that bio-queens are "extremely important in articulating the nature of gender as performative because she does not rely upon the displacement of the imagined authentic gender as it is being performed on stage". Taylor therefore implies that bio-queens are, the only drag performers who can highlight the constructed nature of gender. An important text for the advancement of this new genre is Brandi Amara Skyy's, *Faux Queens - Fauxing the Real: Biological Women, The Art of Drag, and Why the Real is Drag* (2012). Skyy's autoethnographically written research offers the reader first-hand experience that

advances her argument regarding bio-queen subculture. Importantly, Skyy's work offers a framework in which to recognise bio-queening. Although considered essential, Skyy's text offers two points that I will argue against. Firstly, Skyy argues that Butler's hypothesis of drag is exclusive and limiting (claiming other similarly limiting definitions of drag can be found in the works of, Esther Newton (1972)<sup>13</sup>, or Stephen P. Schacht and Lisa Underwood (2004)<sup>14</sup>, and Skyy does not place her Faux Queen practice within a framework of gender performativity. In contrast I believe my positioning of bio-queen drag fits well within Butler's hypothesis. Secondly, Skyy's Faux Queening is very much situated within a homosexual framework, whereas mine is not concerned with LGBTQ politics. For instance, hyper-femininity within Skyy's text is referred to as 'Flamboyant Femininity' and directly relates to the perceived, socially constructed femininity, which is understood and presented by, a homosexual male.

As this thesis will focus upon identities and the female body, (in relation to current body politics and gender lines in body-based art practice) the connection to hyper-feminism cannot be ignored. Hyper-feminism in body-based art practices can be understood through Debra Ferreday's, *Showing the Girl: The New Burlesque* (2008). Offering a connection to drag through the medium of 21st century burlesque performances, Ferreday explores female femininity and gender parody, whilst explaining how this current form of burlesque "troubles mainstream notions of femininity on multiple levels" (2008, p. 57). To further the research of Ferreday, Natalie Peluso's ethnographic research into the new burlesque allowed her to write the paper *Introducing High-Femme Drag: A Critical Discussion* (2009), which delves deeper into the new burlesque, whilst questioning how (and if) sexuality can complicate the performance of gender. Like Butler's theory of drag and gender performativity, Peluso shows how high-femme drag utilises hyper-femininity and gender. Burlesque is important when presenting hyper-femininity throughout this thesis as it holds connotations to body-based art practices and the gendered female body. High-femme drag in particular also holds startling links to bio-queen performance.

In the following chapters, I will start to explore in greater depth what aspects of bio-queen aesthetics already match or juxtapose the ideologies of body-based art practices. With

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<sup>13</sup> In which Newton argues that drag is only for and represents homosexual men "At the simplest level, drag signifies that the person wearing it is a homosexual, that he is a male." (1979, p. 103)

<sup>14</sup> Schacht and Underwood define drag as "individuals who publicly perform being women in front of an audience that knows they are men" (2004, p. 4)

this I will determine where my practice as an artist lies, and how these two genres can be integrated together to create the hybrid genre of, Neo-Drag.

## Chapter 3

### FRANCES KAY?

#### *An Introduction to F-Kay*

In August 2011, I accepted a place on a theatre and performance degree, that would change all my perceived notions of performance. Two influential tutors, who both had a rich history within performance practices, catapulted me into the world of Live Art.

“It was like a light switch being flicked on. I, from a working-class background, in a tiny working-class Lancashire town, had just discovered a splendid style of performance I never knew existed. One in which I could be free and creative without rigid structure and express myself in a way that I finally understood. In November that same year, I experienced a trauma that would literally strip my voice away from me. My performance form became silent and speechless, enriching my expressive form. The suffering I felt, connected me to live art and pushed me into endurance based, masochistic performance.” (Frances Kay, 2017)

Throughout this time of personal discovery, Pina Bausch, was a large source of inspiration for me. The real pain and suffering she presented throughout her performances and her company of dancers was something that drew me to endurance performance, as well as her philosophy of wanting to understand *why* people move, not *how* they move. Moreover, her “erotic fantasies about characters of inflated, exaggerated gender” (Coates, 2010, p. 5), seemed to situate itself in the aesthetic practice of presenting hyper-femininity through biological females and the questioning of gender roles. Overall, her work challenged me to question my own performance. Following Bausch, my research grew to include other influential artists, most notably; Julie Tolentino, Marina Abramovic, and Kira O'Reilly. I read everything I could, tried to see as much work as possible, surrounded myself in this practice that had accepted me with bloody, open arms and wondered how I could challenge myself and my practice through this catalyst. After two years, my endurance work was conflicting itself by two irreconcilable factors: who I was as an artist, and who I was in everyday life. One side of my performance was minimalist, durational and focused on pushing against the



boundaries of bodily limits, attempting to explore where the mind went during these hours<sup>15</sup>, whilst the other kept endurance focused on self-inflicted pain and processes, which included consumption of material, working with bodily fluids, and the use of visual matter<sup>16</sup>.

Although evident at the time, my presentation of the body through masochistic performance was not practiced as a way to challenging institutions or politics, which was the reason it first emerged into the art world during the 1970s. This point is highlighted by O'Dell, who writes that "the pain must be understood as a metaphor for the oppressive level of institutional and political domination in the early 1970s" (O'Dell, 1998, p. 50). It did, however, hint at socio-political challenges faced within the 21st century. Smith argued that, "many performance artists of the 1970s were, like Burden, signalling viewers to "pay attention!" Using their own bodies as artistic material, artists could look at why times were not so "easy and rosy."" (cited in O'Dell, 1998, p. 55). Smith's explanation, is one of the reasons I identify with the medium of performance art, and why I choose to explore taboo subjects. Introducing socio-political topics, through hyper-femininity, masochism and visual imagery, allows me to interrogate these subjects whilst continuously questioning the identity of the performer who occupies a gendered existence.

As an artist who split her practice between minimalist durational works and live art body-based works, I believed my practice did not fit within the 'technological contaminations' (Jones, 1998, p. 199), a common theme of body-based art practice from the 1990's onwards. I could have argued that my practice did explore shifting identities, or at least, this investigative thesis and performance, was about to, through potential hybridisation with bio-queening. Yet, I kept my performance live for the same reason as other artists coalesce technology with the body, live performance for me was a way to *understand* myself as Frances. I continued to practice in this style, as a form of therapy and exploration. I must mention that I am aware that Jones argues against the impossibility of self-therapy body art, because as she states, "the body/self is defined and experienced through its relation to others" (1998, p. 223), and is not interpreted personally. However, this analysis from Jones, although important to the philosophy of identity and bio-queening, and correct when exploring body-based art practices as an audience member, cannot be applied to my practice. This is because

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<sup>15</sup> For example, performance art piece Scaffold (2012-) saw myself spend four hours slowly moving up and down, in and out of a 15-foot scaffolding structure to test the nature of performer/structure relationship (Appendix E3).

<sup>16</sup> For example, performance art piece Little Red (2015-) saw myself repeat sections of movement to music whilst intermittently squeezing, squashing and destroying full shampoo bottles across the space, whilst wearing boxing gloves, to question female fragility (Appendix E4).

I have two relational identities, and therefore, either identity could be being experienced or defined through its relation to the other. My performance was a form of therapy, "...from the process to the presentation, it all makes me free" (Frances Kay, 2017), and an attempt to understand myself.

### *Autobiographical/Autoethnographic*

To effectively describe autoethnography, my personal favourite is Freeman's description who claims that, "effective autoethnography is not simply about the desire to document personal experience so much as the need to deploy one's own uniquely informed yet always partial perspective in order to evoke emotional resonance with the spectator or reader." (2015, p. 167). Throughout the whole of the research process, most notably when I began to start devising the work, I grappled with how to create an 'effective' autobiographical show, without becoming too self-indulgent. I decided, that the only effective way to create a body-based, drag hybrid that reflected the identity of Frances Kay was to create a show that highlighted the never-ending battle between who Frances Kay is, who Katie Harling is, and why there are two of me. It seemed to make sense, to title the work: *FK vs KT: The Showdown*.

Returning to Freeman, he states:

"The most important questions within autoethnographic performance are not about how accurately a specific work reflects the look of life, or how heavily the blood flows from the performer's self-lacerations...What matters is how much the work allows, supports, and encourages spectators to understand and grapple with the meanings of life as we/they live it. To challenge is to create from autoethnography a new ethically informed practice: one that approaches the self as a social subject rather than self as self-justification" (2015, p. 203)

Unsurprisingly, "...how heavily the blood flows from the performer's self-lacerations" (2015, p. 203), stands out to me, yet, this quote re-affirms to me that the use of autobiographical work within autoethnographic practices much be approached by the performer as a tool for change. It also views performance as a way to challenge the audience into questioning current socio-political trends within society. According to Freeman, "[t]o perform autoethnography is to engage in a form of social research that explores the researcher's personal experience and connects the autobiographical story to wider cultural, political and social meanings" (2015, p. 200). Therefore, my developed performance will combine social research and personal

experience, which will tell the story of two identities and how they exist, react and belong together. The deeper message of the show will be the raised awareness of the politics of living-out two separate identities, how gender affects these two identities, and how Frances Kay can be understood and presented through bio-queening.

As an artist, creating a performance that has to reflect the self as a social subject is an interesting concept. When I develop work, my priority has been devising a performance that any audience member (whether they are a performance art academic or someone who has never been exposed to contemporary performance before) can somehow connect with. As Harry Giles states, “[a]udiences are made up of different people with very different needs” (2016), and his essay acknowledges how these different needs of people are affected by sensitive or shocking material. He says, “my belief is that shocking acts can also be acts of care...the vital question to ask is ‘Who will I harm, and why, and is it worth it?’” (2016), I combat his question by keeping my works simple, making the explored themes clear, and then injecting humour in attempt to nurture the audience, ready to experience and witness the act of self-harm (either inflicted or through endurance and duration).<sup>17</sup>

When determining how to stay true to my performance beliefs and still intergrate the self as a social subject and include my research, I do not want to lose my integrity as an artist. I need to create a work where Frances Kay may be reviewed as the self as a social subject (academically, due to the nature of bio-queening and Frances Kay being hetero-queer<sup>18</sup>), however it needs to be accessible for audience members. To quote Spry, “[g]ood autoethnography is not simply a confessional tale of self-renewal; it is a provocative weave of story and theory” (2001, p. 713), and I am confident that the ‘story’ of Frances Kay battling against Katie Harling will be accessible and entertaining to the audience. The interjection of theory through socio-political, hetero-queer bio-queening will therefore underline the work, hopefully forging a conversation between audience members and allow them to question their interpretation of gender and identity politics, and potentially life itself.

Continuing to follow the writing styles Spry, she discusses how to write effective autoethnography, covering how it should physically appear on the page, how much detail should be included and how to integrate research into the writing. I decided to be open regarding the

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<sup>17</sup> In Giles’ essay “Shock and Care” (2016), he explains how an artist can consider a checklist of questions when developing a piece of work in order to allow the audience to feel comfortable. These range from what could be considered basic values i.e.: allowing the audience a comfy place to sit, to more interpretive values, i.e., questioning whether providing a content note before the performance will allow for better engagement. This essay is influential to me when developing performance work that includes adult, mature or sensitive material.

<sup>18</sup> A heterosexual individual who identifies as queer

quoted sections of Frances Kay, partly due to the nature of the devised performance, but also because of the following quote:

“Develop a “thick description of your emotional experience as well, or your “emotional intelligence” about the experience. Describe your thoughts, feelings attitudes, emotions during the event(s) and during the process of critical reflection.” (Spry, 2011 p. 144).

The process of using “thick description,” a term coined by Clifford Geertz (cited in Spry, 2011), allows the reader to become emotionally engaged with the writer and story. Spry then considers the introduction of an additional persona:

“Your autoethnography might include a persona other than you, someone significant to your understanding and making of the experience. The writing most likely emerges from the self-other interaction composition element...You may want to create a persona who embodies the voice(s) of dominant sociocultural expectations” (2011, pp. 150-151).

Before this process began, Frances Kay was already a persona I used during performance to present body-based art works to tackle and challenge socio-political issue. Therefore, it makes sense to quote and channel Frances Kay throughout the thesis as the persona who conveys the emotional experiences of the research and performance.

## Chapter 4

### YAASS QUEEN

#### *Frances Kay and Bio-Queen Drag*

The distinctive “oh shit yas queen”<sup>19</sup> moment that made me challenge my body-based practices through the introduction of drag, was discovering Victoria Sin. A London-based artist, Sin uses bio-queening and drag, “as a practice of purposeful embodiment questioning the reification and ascription of ideal images within technologies of representation and systems of looking” (Sin, 2018). Having also written about gender, queer theory, feminism and drag online, Sin is one artist who had started to apply drag within her practice. It was everything about Sin that made me adore her, particularly her representations of gender-fucking in art. When asked about her drag in a *Broadly* interview, Sin responded: “Everybody performs their gender, especially in terms of being a woman. You perform everyday as a woman. I think when I am in Drag, I am trying to exercise having an entitlement to the space that I am in.... It’s powerful” (Sin 2015). This response made me consider the hyper-femininity I presented through Frances and further, what her identity represented.

To successfully understand how the interest in bio-queen drag aesthetics could be integrated into a body-based performance art piece, I needed to situate the style of drag I identified with most strongly. Firstly, I disregarded styles that were inconsequential to bio-queening, for instance, Commercial Drag<sup>20</sup>. This was not a form of drag I related to, as it represented the traditional notions of drag performance<sup>21</sup>. Similarly, the genre that Sin disagreed with was not inclusive of drag development as she argues that, “the genre of drag that is being popularized in *RuPaul’s Drag Race* is confined to a man dressing as a woman and personifying western beauty ideals” (2015). Secondly, I identified Gender Identity alternative forms of drag, that sought out representations of gender-fucking and which

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<sup>19</sup> A popular phrase within the drag community as a form of encouragement and exciting for someone else or their style.

<sup>20</sup> As explained in the glossary by Muñoz. The ‘sanitized and desexualised’ queen was a “queer subject for mass consumption” (1997, p. 85). It is hinted at as being different/queer, with no real political ‘fight’ or subversion of gender ideals.

<sup>21</sup> Traditional drag saw men dressing as women, as a loveable character and entertainer (e.g. the Dame). A form of entertainment and not a tool for change.

challenged socially constructed gender norms. These forms of drag, such as radical drag<sup>22</sup>, allowed bio-queen drag to emerge.

### *Alternative Drag and Bio-Queens*

The controvertible social standards of gender, questioned through feminist theorising and radical drag practices, allowed for the appearance of bio-queening within the evolution of drag. In regards to emergent bio-queening across the U.S and the U.K, academic conclusions on this particular drag style is inadequate. One queen and scholar who questioned why it had taken bio-queens so long to emerge was Brandi Amara Skyy. She recognised that:

“...[for] the bio-female who identifies or chooses to perform as a faux queen, drag is an area that she was recently (and reluctantly) allowed to enter, *only if* she was performing masculinity, drag kinging or attached herself to a queen” (2016).<sup>23</sup>

A likely explanation for this delayed evolution was due to the socio-political history established in drag. Yet, the reasons it started to occupy a (small) space in society could be twofold. Firstly, it may be due to the raised awareness of gender-fucking/gender-bending within society and academia, allowing for alternative identities to be “accepted” and secondly, it may be due to the upsurge of drag as a culture and not just entertainment.

Alongside Skyy, Rachel Devitt provided an account of bio-queening, that contextualised the stylised form as “if not sparkingly fabulous, just as spanking new” (2006, p. 29). Taking the ‘rigid’ form of gender binaries, Devitt claimed that if drag is centred on only two definitions that represent current gender binaries<sup>24</sup>, then there is not “much room, for ‘real [bio] girls’ performing femininity” (2006, p. 29) within drag culture. By challenging this widely held view that obstructed the possibility of bio-queening, Devitt is suggesting that it is just as subversive in its parody of femininity and feminine traits, as any other form of drag.

Devitt shares a few key hypotheses regarding bio-queening that I had started to identify with, including the parodying of feminine traits. The parodying of femininity that Devitt refers

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<sup>22</sup> As explained by Jacob and Cerny, 2004, radical drag subverted gender roles.

<sup>23</sup> Basically, women and bio-queens were not allowed into the drag world, or space. Until recently, there were only really allowed if they were drag-kings or a queen’s friend.

<sup>24</sup> Devitt’s rigid gender binary definitions of drag, are that of Stephen P. Schacht’s drag queen as: “individuals with an acknowledged penis...that perform as women” (2006 p. 29) and Judith Halberstam’s drag-king as explained within the glossary. As these two binaries claim that only men can perform as women (drag-queen) and women as men (drag-king), where does the bio-queen belong?

to was mirrored within my previous performance works, through hyperbolic versions of feminine identity. These hyperbolic versions became exaggerated and ludicrous in an attempt to challenge social expectations of beauty, image, and functioned as a response to my 'expected' gender performativity. This, as already discussed is the phenomenon of hyper-femininity.

### *Skyy and the Faux Queen*

Skyy's drag bio-queen theorising is different from my own in several respects. One of these differences is the use of the term, bio-queen. Skyy propels her work and performance by identifying as a 'faux queen.' The term faux queen refers to, in her definition, a "woman dragging man dragging woman" (Skyy 2016, p. 8), and her concept of faux queens is that the queen makes a conscious effort to construct "femininity by adopting the drag queens, hyper-queer-feminizing [sic] of *their* gay male experience" (2016, p. 37). Skyy holds the belief that faux queens do not exhibit their own femininity as biological women. This is because their experiences of femininity widely differ and not all faux queens want to place themselves within a heteronormative matrix of female performativity. The key problem with this explanation is that the term itself is questionable. Skyy continues to explain that her decision to be identified as "faux" rather than "bio" is because other titles for her identity bring her biological sex into focus, more so than her drag experiences. "Faux," to Skyy, does not mean "fake," but rather means there is an opportunity for her drag "to be re-conceptualized, [sic] reclaimed, and thus transform into something independent and of its own creation" (2016, p. 38). Personally, I agree with and respect Skyy's identification with faux queen drag, however, I identify more strongly with bio-queening and believe this is because I am first and foremost a performance artist, not a faux queen.

The strongest of Skyy's arguments for the term faux queen, relates to how drag cannot be perceived in the same context as it was years ago (2016, p. 29). Skyy continues to re-situate drag performance by stating that she wants to incorporate her flamboyant femininity to "construct and create new spaces in the gender spectrum" (2016, p. 29), as faux queen drag that, she states, "[is] neither feminine nor masculine but rather presenting their own complex genders (Taylor and Rupp, 'Chicks with Dicks' 117)" (2016, p. 29). These definitions are interesting examples of what bio-queening is current expanding into, however, my interpretation of bio-queening advances society's impression of performative femininity, through becoming a hyperbolic version of these ideals. Therefore, bio-queening remains particularly connected to gender identity and performance.

Amber Hollibaugh gives a good explanation of why I want to present this hyper-feminine version of Frances Kay: “It [drag] is not being a girl, it is watching yourself be a girl” (cited Skyy 2016, p. 30). For me, there is definite split between my day-to-day self and Frances Kay. Frances Kay is the identity through which I challenge a performative and constructed gender:

“It comes from my name being Katie Frances Harling and my switch in the names to Frances Kay, I just thought it was really cool. I’ve had loads of conversations since with people who know me personally, people who know me professionally, and one person said, “ever thought about changing your name by deed poll?” I don’t think I could. They are too separate, too different. I even refer to myself as Frances Kay, when I discuss my performance work.

Deep down, of course, they are the same person. I am only one person, but they are 100% two identities” (Frances Kay, 2017).

### ***Drag and Identity***

Before I move onto a discussion about gender performativity, I must first consider identity within drag. When discussing how radical drag queens conjoin their sense of self and identity, Stone suggested that “most people possess multiple, possibly conflicting, identities” (cited in Jacob and Cerny, 2004, p. 124). This could be connected to a desire to be socially accepted within certain social situations, or groupings<sup>25</sup>. For example, the radical drag queen and their identity, as a male in drag who is subverting idealistic gender roles, makes them more accepted within a community that questions gender roles. Moreover, Stone argues that “anticipating the response of others often governs appearance management as a person deploys appearances to symbolize the self in a particular social setting.” (2004, p. 124). A drag queen puts all of their effort into looking ‘the part’ (whether that be through their own style, personality as a queen, or both), anticipating they will be viewed a certain way and wanting to portray this image literally and figuratively, to gain acceptance within the drag community. Similarly, a bio-queen in a safe drag community, or bio-queen space, can also conjoin their self and identity through the same technique. Comparing his work to Goffman, Stone ultimately establishes “how it is through appearance, that identities come into being” (cited in Jacob and Cerny, 2004, p. 125). Butler develops this thinking somewhat whilst

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<sup>25</sup>As Stone proposed: “people understand themselves in relation to others and that one acquires the meanings that constitute identity through social interaction.” (Cited in Jacob and Cerny, 2004, p. 122).



taking note of philosophical discourses<sup>26</sup> regarding identity, she questions whether identity is shaped through “regulatory practices of gender formation and division” (2008, p. 22). Butler questions how identity is shaped through “socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility.” In this case, in a heteronormative society. Therefore, in this heteronormative framework, the subject’s identity can only belong in the framework of male and female (where man likes women, women like man). She continues to say, “the very notion of ‘the person’ is called into question by the cultural emergence of those “incoherent” or “discontinuous” gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms” (2008, p. 23) Any identity outside of this theory becomes marginalised, or is not widely socially accepted.

Skyy furthers this explanation when discussing faux queen identities within everyday life. She asserts that the “Faux Queen, as I see it, serves two purposes: to describe my relationship and performance in drag, but also to describe how I identify myself in everyday life.” (2016, p. 59). For Skyy, the faux queen is her identity and it is not separate to her; it is, simply, her. Living a faux queen identity, according to Butler, makes her one of the marginalized. Although Skyy does not recognise Butler’s ideals on identity and gender as a faux queen, Skyy is openly representing a marginalized identity, although one which belongs to themselves. She explains, “[t]hey [drag queens] create themselves out of themselves for themselves for themselves: their vision, their version of ‘femininity’” (Skyy, 2016, p. 23).

This conclusion of identity through the theorising of Butler could be considered the foundation of bio-queening, which is exemplified by Skyy. However, here is an area where a significant difference has been established between my bio-queening and Skyy’s faux-queening. Whilst it could be argued that my projection of Frances Kay into a bio-queen persona is my marginalized identity, one which is unaccepted in my current social groupings, I believe my bio-queening attempts to embody hyper-femininity of an expected gender stereotype, not myself. Therefore, Frances Kay is an extension of an identity who is not performed in everyday life. Altering my appearance on stage, through the process of bio-queening, allows me to assume the identity of Frances Kay. My style of bio-queening is more similar to that of Veronica Combs, who explains that, “there is definitely a transitioning happening. I go into performance mode... a different person comes out” (cited Skyy, 2016, p.

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<sup>26</sup> That identity is shaped through social interaction, as she states: “the notion of ‘the person’ has received analytic elaboration on the assumption that whatever social context the person is ‘in’ remains somehow externally related to the definitional structure of personhood” (Butler, 2008, p. 22)

61). Unlike Skyy who lives a faux queen identity, I step into the performance space in which Katie Harling transforms to become Frances Kay.

Having decided that my bio-queening is a transformation into Frances Kay, my positional placement of bio-queening will be situated within the theorising of Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity. This is due to Butler's scholarship contextualising how drag is relative to the performative structure of society. In the next chapter, I will describe the expression of Butler's ideas about gender performativity and the reasoning behind its location within this investigation

## Chapter 5

### GENDER PERFORMATIVITY AND BIO-QUEEN THEORISING

#### *Gender Identity*

To fully understand how to situate my bio-queening, I need to acknowledge how and why I have chosen to interpret drag through Butler's theorising of gender performativity. Presented through many of her texts, most notably *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler considers that the repetition of gendered acts produces a performative gender, therefore exposing the tradition of a heteronormative society and determining that gender is not an expression of sex.

This stylized repetition of acts involves bodily movement and gestures (corporeal styles) that are socially approved and politically regulated in keeping with 'a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality' (Butler, 1990 p.139).

Put simply by Jagger, "[t]he enactment of gender is thus socially approved and politically regulated rather than dictated by some kind of internal nature" (2008, p. 27). It is certain that Butler and Jagger both contest that gender is not a subjective choice, but rather an illusion which is highlighted in the dimensions of gender performativity. The constant repetition of acts which are considered to be feminine, situate your female gender within a heteronormative matrix, and within this framework, without gender performativity, identity could become unstable. Jagger's quote above highlights how I, as a female, have been led to understand femininity and social standards of beauty and image, 'through socially approved and politically regulated' (2008, p. 27) actions. Concerning previous performances, fuelled by inspiration from Bausch and her iconic movements (known as Pedestrian Gesture)<sup>27</sup>, I have embarked on sections of repetitive acts. These acts highlight everyday activities that are recognised as feminine or can have connotations to females in society. A notable example of this can be found in my work "*Sorry*" (2014-), wherein Frances Kay dabs paint across her lips. The act of dabbing on red paint to the lips, reflects connotations of applying lipstick - a feminine act - and as the show progresses the movement becomes more violent and parodic.

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<sup>27</sup> Pedestrian Gestures were constantly repeated dance motifs or actions throughout her performances that would represent everyday actions.

By the show's conclusion, the mouth is covered in red paint, chronicling the results of the hyper-feminine act. As the 21st century has progressed, society has started to recognise gender performativity and how this constructs gender identity, and individuals within society are almost certainly starting to reject elements of their gendered identity. Therefore, the use of repeated actions that are identified as *feminine*, but exaggerated and violent, present hyper-versions of society's femininity. In this regard, the hyper-feminine act is a satirical representation of society's constructed femininity and supports Butler's theorising that "the enactment of gender is thus socially approved and politically regulated rather than dictated by some kind of internal nature" (Jagger, 2008, p. 27). As an artist who already displays hyper-feminine characteristics as a response to social beauty standards and constructed gender identity, my performance work fits into Butler's theory of gender performativity.

It is certainly true in the work of Butler that drag was a genre to reiterate the established mode of gender identity. Remembering that all of Butler's hypotheses are centred on a heteronormative matrix, drag, then, "is an example that is meant to establish that "reality" is not as fixed as we generally assume it to be. The purpose of the example is to expose the tenuousness of gender "reality" to counter the violence performed by gender norms" (Butler, 1990, XXV). It is thought that for Butler, drag accentuated the "false, unreal, and unintelligible" (1990, XXV) bodies that have been generated through heteronormativity and gender performativity, including socially formulated femininity. As Jagger explains, drag "confirmed her sense that femininity is not natural to women, but it is rather an effect of social practices" (2008, p. 44). This gender then, is imposed on the subject by society, "her account of performativity involves neither voluntarism nor a humanist view of the subject as a source of agency" (Jagger, 2008, p. 33). If gender performativity is involuntary the subject is therefore unaware of the system they are in, yet, drag highlights these unrealistic norms by bringing to light the parodic element of female identity. Through this affirmation of socially constructed gender, Butler goes on to claim that drag presents all gender as "parody" which is due to performativity being an involuntary act. As Butler states, "[i]n imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself" (2008, p. 186). It could be argued then that as a female artist, this notion of gender parody is where my previous body-based performance art works fit, and where my bio-queening will sit accordingly. Butler says that "the performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender being performed" (2008, p. 187). If then, gender is a social construct, there is a distinction between the performer's anatomy and the constructed gender of a bio-queen. That being said, constructed gender is not representative of the bio-queen's anatomy. A

paragraph later, Butler states, “as much as drag creates a unified picture of ‘woman’, it also reveals the distinctiveness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalised” (2008, p. 187). The parody of hyper-femininity which is significant to drag allows the ideals of constructed (and embodied) femininity to be appropriated throughout bio-queening. This parody of gender, which is voluntary, presents a subversive act, which the bio-queen can then highlight (as drag has been known to do) onstage or when performing.

This definition is similar to that presented by Victoria Sin, who said: “When I am in Drag, I am trying to exercise having an entitlement to the space I am in...it’s about parodying these social constructs we have” (Broadly, 2015). Following the parody of hyper-feminine bio-queen drag, the assumed social *gender* of the performer (female) is relevant. So, what about ‘sex’? Bio-queens are, after all, female drag queens. Whilst there are numerous writings that influenced Butler regarding what ‘sex’ is, and how it relates to gender<sup>28</sup>. I will chiefly be following Monique Wittig’s theorising, as this theory not only situates sex within a heteronormative matrix, but also identifies that ‘male’ and ‘female’ exist only in this matrix (cited Butler, 2008, p. 150). This section will also note the writings of Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir argued that “sex does not cause gender, and gender cannot be understood to reflect or express sex...sex is immutably factic, but gender acquired” (2008, p. 152). This belief implies that either sex could therefore become (or own, or perform) either gender and further suggests that there is no limitation to just two genders. Butler addressed this by saying “if gender is not tied to sex...then gender is a kind of action that can potentially proliferate beyond the binary limits imposed by the apparent binary of sex,” yet in the heteronormative matrix, there are only two genders and two sexes.

Wittig challenges this by linking together sex and gender, writing that “the category of ‘sex’ is itself a *gendered* category, fully politically invested, naturalised but not natural” (cited Butler, 2008, p. 154). Wittig continues to argue that there is only one ‘sex’: female. Therefore, sex is already feminine<sup>29</sup>

“Gender is built into sex, and sex proves to have been gender from the start...Wittig argues that within this set of compulsory social relations, women become ontologically suffused with sex, they *are* their sex and conversely, sex is necessarily feminine” (Butler, 2008, p. 154).

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<sup>28</sup> As referenced in Chapter Two, Wittig, De Beauvoir, Lacan and Foucault

<sup>29</sup> In her view, “to be male is not to be ‘sexed’ to be ‘sexed’ is always a way of becoming particular and relative and males within this system participate in the form of the universal person.” (Butler, 2008, p. 154)

A bio-queen's sex, then, potentially enhances their ability to present drag as more subversive. This is because, through Wittig's theorising, the sex of the performer is already politically and culturally interpreted as the gendered category 'feminine' before they even need to employ the same performative gender they should be imitating. Accordingly, a bio-queen parodies a femininity that they are *expected to imitate*, a femininity that is socially enacted and manufactured to construe beauty and image ideology. Although Ferreday emphasises that "Butler's account of gender performance is that it opens up the potentially exhilarating possibility that both male and female bodies might actively be involved in constructing, reworking and critiquing feminine identity" (2008, p. 62), it could be argued that the bio-queen has the advantage regarding gender performativity.

### ***'Owning' Femininity***

There is some evidence to suggest that due to changing opinions in the 21st century and increasing awareness through mass media, popular culture and academia, gender binaries are being questioned in society. However, we still live encircled by a heteronormative structure, and therefore women and bio-queens still face challenges when presenting femininity. The gendered self, though an illusion, is a crucial part of the subject's identity, which the subject accepts and endorses. Without this gender, identity could potentially become unstable, as Butler states "I will understand constituting acts not only as constituting the identity of the actor, but as constituting that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of belief" (1988, p. 520).

Within this hegemonic structure, even in Wittig's theorising of sex as female, "[f]emininity...is constantly centred and analysed around heterosexual men and not as an identity of self-proclaimed agency" (Skyy, 2016, p. 36), which is the case despite whether or not femininity is performed or constructed in day-to-day life. For the bio-queen, there is the risk of not being taken seriously or being unappreciated, which is exemplified through some of the titles given to female drag<sup>30</sup> and through behaviour presented in some drag spaces<sup>3132</sup>. Likewise, research on the subject has been mostly restricted to limited comparisons of drag-

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<sup>30</sup> Such as "Faux queens," "feminist drag" (Devitt, 2006, p. 27), or "bio girl" (Lolo Brow, 2015)

<sup>31</sup> "In drag in particular, I have had punters, whilst on-stage, find out I am a woman half way through and they have refused to listen to anything else I have to say after that" (Lolo Brow, 2015)

<sup>32</sup> In regards to the terminology: "It's a way of othering women who do drag or want to participate. In your typical gay bar if you presented them with a female drag queen they just wouldn't think it was legitimate." (Sin, 2015)

kings and researchers have not studied bio-queens in much detail. To contrast Butler somewhat, another significant aspect of bio-queen drag, despite the lack of academic research and despite embracing how heteronormative structures have placed boundaries on women, is that it allows women to recover their own conviction of what they believe femininity to be. Recalling attending her first drag show, Sin realised “shit, I want to be, you know like, that in charge of my own femininity” (2015).

One difficulty when trying to pin down exactly what femininity is, is situating it within current society. Femininity is not a constant, or a definite it is determined due to a number of factors. As explained by Colebrook, “...the experience that ‘constructed’ reality varied according to the cultural, linguistic, historical and social conditions within which it was embedded” (2004, p. 118)<sup>33</sup>. Colebrook then continues to say,

“...if one saw oneself as ‘*feminine*’ [sic] then one had adopted certain expectations of gender which would lead oneself and others to expect irrationality, passivity, weakness, or whatever other social and cultural constructions were imposed on women’s bodies” (2004, p. 119).

Much like gender performativity, femininity is a socially constructed set of actions that are imposed, or have been developed to ‘represent’ what it is to be a ‘woman’. If we are to understand gender performativity as constructed and therefore femininity as also constructed, through the lens of Butler’s continuing theory it can be claimed that gender, and therefore femininity can never have been attained by the subject. For Butler, gender and femininity are phantasmagorical, since “if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that” (2008, p. 192). As gender, or femininity is constantly evolving due to the social and cultural constructions imposed on developing it, how can it be a constant? The fantasy of what femininity or gender is *meant* to be, is a fiction, given that “[g]ender is also a norm that can never be fully internalized...and gender norms are finally phantasmic impossible to embody” (2008, p. 196), and further, if this is to be the case, then neither gender, or femininity can be owned.

Having established that femininity cannot be owned, it is still difficult to fully define what it means to be ‘feminine’. Whilst femininity can be seen as embodying different

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<sup>33</sup> What was considered feminine in the Victorian era was vastly different to what is considered feminine in the 21st century. For instance, Victorian women were left at home to oversee domestic duties (Hughes, 2014). In 21st century society it is common for women to either work, or stay at home, both are accepted.

characteristics<sup>34</sup>, which include those that are considered positive and negative, recognising gender as a performative act and hypering those considered feminine actions/dress/components can permit the bio-queen to ‘become in charge’ of what is socially constructed as femininity. The bio-queen therefore becomes a caricature of society’s exaggerated definitions of femininity.

### ***Flamboyant Femininity***

As established in the previous chapter, femininity is a collection of constructions that are socially and culturally imposed on women and their bodies. Much like gender, these constructions are phantasmagorical they cannot be embodied, as ultimately, it is something imposed. Yet, within Skyy’s drag theorising, there is a form of hyperbolic femininity that presents how a homosexual man’s experience of femininity is different to that of a (hetero or homosexual) women. Skyy’s use of the term flamboyant femininity refers to the:

“disidentification from bio-woman femininity to incorporate all the visual, eccentric, and non-conformist glam gender - everything that the drag queen is and represents -; and to set the drag queen’s ‘femininity’ as a valuable experience and equal to bio-femininity” (2016, p .28).

If flamboyant femininity is a depiction of what the gay man (or drag queen), experiences or understands of *their own* femininity, there is an argument to made that the femininity that is imposed on female bodies, is appropriated through homosexual men. This definition of flamboyant femininity then, helps distinguish a contrast to hyper-femininity. While flamboyant femininity is what a gay male perceives to be of *their* femininity, hyper-femininity is the deliberate heightening of femininity imposed on women. Skyy then continues to say that faux queens tend to identify with flamboyant femininity, rather than their “own gender bound femininity” (2016, p. 32). To support Skyy’s flamboyant femininity theory, Schacht and Underwood state that “they [female impersonators and drag queens] have both reflected and sustained men’s images of what a woman is, or should be” (2004, p. 6).

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<sup>34</sup> After intense searching through gender theories and academia, eventually giving up and Google searching “what is femininity” I still could not find a definite answer to this question. Yet we all use the term, as if we understand what it means to be feminine. Michelle Miller explains femininity as: an “experience orientation, and it’s different from masculinity which is results orientation. All these words that we associate with femininity, like sensitivity and compassion and beauty and creativity, they only matter if we’re invested in the experience of a situation.” (2016)



Personally, I see no difference between flamboyant femininity and femininity. Whilst I cannot argue that there is no experiential difference between a woman's interpretation of femininity and a gay man's interpretation of femininity, as femininity is socially and culturally imposed, they are to me empirically the same.

By introducing bio-queening into body-based performance art, I am not trying to *own* femininity, how can I own a social construct? On the contrary, I am attempting to present and ridicule a version of femininity that has evolved through the media and society, putting pressure on the female image and beauty ideals, through the lampoonery of hyperbolic, feminine acts and visual images. Whilst acknowledging the term flamboyant femininity, I will continue to identify with hyper-femininity.

Thus far, this thesis has defined what is meant by the term hyper-femininity and it has explained how I have situated my bio-queening into gender performativity. I will now move on to explore how the bare, female body affects the interpretation of hyper-femininity and bio-queening within body-based performance art. I will then give a more detailed account of what aesthetic styles of bio-queening will be integrated into the hybrid performance, and explain why these choices were made.

## Chapter 6

### BURLESQUE, AND THE FEMALE BODY.

#### *High-Femme Drag and Neo-Burlesque*

One art-form that currently presenting stylised drag aesthetics coupled with the female body (bare, or almost), is burlesque. It could be argued that the bio-queening I am integrating into body-based performance art could actually be characterised more as a form of burlesque, specifically, the ‘New Burlesque’ (Ferreday, 2008, p. 47). One of the similarities between the new burlesque and the performances I have presented in the past is the use of red lipstick. Ferreday explains that, “[v]isually, one of the most striking aspects of burlesque imagery is the constant repetition of the painted mouth.” (2008, p. 52). I wear red lipstick in all my performance works, and as indicated previously in chapter two, “*Sorry*” (2014) presents the constant re-applying of red paint across the lips, as if it were lipstick. Ferreday goes on to explain that when discussing critiques of femininity, “red lipstick is synonymous with feminine excess” (2008, p. 52), and it is therefore a perfect way to present hyper-femininity. There is a more political connotation with the use of red lipstick within burlesque performance, however, as indicated through Imogen Tyler's term, “lipstick liberation” (cited Ferreday 2008, p. 53). Lipstick liberation can be defined as the “incorporation of feminist rhetoric within consumer culture” (Tyler, 2005, p. 37), and although originating in the culture of the 1970s, it is a widely held view that the movement is still appropriate to women in the 21st century. Lipstick liberation highlighted the notion that cosmetic companies appropriated women's liberation to sell their ideals of beauty to consumers. Hence, lipstick played “an important role in historical attempts to negotiate the relationship between femininity and feminism” (Ferreday, 2008, p. 53), which is the main reason red lipstick plays an important role within my work. Accordingly, then, red lipstick will be a feature of the hybrid performance.

Frances Kay (2017):

“I use the colour red in a lot of my works.

In “*Sorry*” it’s seen through the paint that is used to mark my body and paint on my smile. In *FK vs KT* it’s the colour of the glitter that sticks to my legs.

In all my performances, I wear red lipstick.

Red enacts all these thoughts and feelings surrounding this taboo colour, blood, anger, rage, danger, sex. For me, it represents my hyper-femininity.”

The definition I shall use for the new burlesque is close to that of Peluso (2009), who defines the style as ‘High-Femme Drag’. Exploring the official definition of high-femme drag, there are a number of similarities between bio-queening and this form of burlesque. Peluso highlights this writing that, “[h]igh-femme drag refers to the performance of hyperbolized *[sic]* (exaggerated, embellished, excessive) femininity by female-bodied individuals” (Peluso, 2009, p. 10). Although high-femme drag wishes to challenge hegemonic structures of gender and sexuality to empower its performers, as well as its audience members, Peluso distances her definition from bio-queening.

One significant desire of Peluso when wanting to create a difference between bio-queening and high-femme drag, is her wish to “disentangle performed femininities from the realm of “queening”, whilst still preserving its integrity as a specific form of drag performance” (2009, p. 10). Peluso explains that this term not only accentuates high-femme drag as its own style of performance, it also allows “high-femme” or “femme” to be seen as “viable gender identities distinct from heterogendered “female” and “femininity”” (2009, pp. 10-11). As previously stated, my connection to bio-queening is framed as an artist who wishes also to challenge a constructed and performative gender by presenting a hyperbolic version of the femininity I am meant to experience as a woman, through the separate identity of Frances Kay, within the context of a show. My practice also differs from that of high-femme drag, and the new burlesque, because it is disjointed from sexuality (in terms of sexual preference, or sexual/sex connotations within a performance), which is also an important feature of the new burlesque. Considering high-femme drag’s attempts to own femininity through a separate gender identity, I will keep the term bio-queening. However, it cannot be ignored that elements of the new burlesque may cross over into my practice.

One possible branch of new burlesque entering into my bio-queening is the concept of “putting femininity on” (Ferreday, 2008, p. 62). Whilst Butler specifies within *Bodies that Matter*, that gender performativity, does not mean to choose a gender, writing “don that gender for the day, and then restore the ferment to its right place at night” (1993, X), this is contested by Ferreday, who claims that the foundation of new burlesque is actually “the fantasy of putting femininity on and off” (2008, p. 62). In the practice of the new burlesque, and based on my stance on bio-queening, I believe this can be fully achieved, especially through the introduction of a separate identity. Ferreday explains in her study that “high-

femme drag...encouraged them [the performers] to challenge dominant cultural constructions of ‘beauty’” (2008, p. 15). This approach used by new burlesque performers is similar to that used in bio-queening, in that both styles confront social ideals of beauty through a hyperbolic femininity. Within my bio-queening I will introduce an identity that will present a hyperbolic feminine persona. However much like the new burlesque performers, she will be exhibiting her bare, female body. I use the term ‘bare’ to mean a deliberate choice of costume that reveals the biologically female body. Indeed, both these forms present an element of ‘putting on femininity’ juxtaposed against a female body. Therefore, it is almost certain that the introduction of the bare, female body will be appropriate when presented through bio-queening. This becomes relevant when I consider how to situate my own female body on stage, using both body-based performance art, and a hyperbolic identity of bio-queen drag.

Before proceeding to examine what aesthetic styles could be introduced to a hybrid performance, it is important to remember that Frances Kay is one, separate identity. Once aesthetic styles have been established, the hybrid performance will be constructed as an autobiographical story, suggesting the performer’s confusion between her separate identities. These analytical procedures and the results of the hybrid will be described in the final chapter.

## Chapter 7

### INTEGRATION

#### *What to Include?*

In assessing the performance works I have created as Frances Kay throughout the last few years, I have determined that there are certain stylised features that are central to my performances. Most notable of these ubiquitous characteristics are: repetition, the use of materials and self-inflicted pain. To complement drag aesthetics within these three components, (and to ensure that the integration of the two genres is clear), I will choose three characteristics of bio-queening and one characteristic that is already employed by a number of artists, with a view to argue for the inclusion of the genre into performance art. These characteristics are important for recognising how bio-queening can be presented alongside body-based performance art styles. The four salient components to be appropriated from drag are: Voguing, lip-syncing, pop-culture references, and de-dragging/re-dragging. It is important to note that this creation of a hybrid performance is not merely about ‘ticking boxes’ and getting all the characteristics in, but rather about actively choosing elements that enhance the two genres and therefore become integral within the final, devised performance. When you remove all the sexual, gender and political connotations of bio-queen drag, many of the aesthetics employed or performed within a performance are identical to any other forms of drag. As bio-queen Ana Matronic, succinctly explains “except for having to tuck away a penis, I do everything a drag queen does” (cited in Skyy, 2016, p. 50).

Turning now to the narrative of *FK vs KT: The Showdown*, from this point forward I will refer to Katie Harling as Katie, as this will help avoid any confusion when discussing the identities of Katie and Frances Kay within the performance. The narrative of the piece follows Frances Kay and Katie through a breaking off point in the relationship they have together and how they eventually discover they cannot function without the other. Employing repetition, along with the use of material and self-inflicted pain, the audience accompanies Frances Kay on a story of self-discovery, understanding and the realisation of importance of relationship. As introduced through the show’s brief (2018):

“F.K and K.T have spent a significant amount of time learning, respecting, and understanding each other. How quickly can they both be ripped apart by human behaviour? This piece physically tests a devoted relationship and scrutinises the artist's lifestyle and addiction, through the integration of projection, body endurance and drag performance. A funny, sincere but ruthless performance that pulls from

autobiographical material and the behaviours surrounding society's limits on the body, gender and the demeanour towards the best liquid of all: sweet sweet boooooze.”

The performance focuses heavily on addiction and touches upon how trauma has affected the life of Frances Kay. Yet, it also explores the comical relationship between the two, revealing a deep and uplifting conclusion.

### ***FK/KT***

A major theme of *FK vs KT: The Showdown* is the effort I made to separate the two identities of Frances Kay and Katie. One concept I have been fond of presenting within this piece, is how, despite Frances Kay being one identity and Katie being another, the two are intrinsically connected. Regarding the obvious display that I am one individual, the piece subtly demonstrates aspects of how Frances Kay and Katie are linked. In support of connecting the two, in one section of the work, a video is played that shows Katie on numerous nights, drinking excessively (a running theme throughout the piece), followed in the piece by Frances Kay performing musical number, in which I drink numerous shots of alcohol. Occupying this section is an audio section of Katie, stating that she can only sing live when drunk. Through these sections, the defined identity lines of who Frances Kay is and who Katie is, become more blurred and the climax of the piece blurs these lines even more. Another video plays that shows Katie attaching personal photos onto separate sections of her body via hypodermic needles, whilst onstage, Frances Kay peels off a section of her costume to mirror the same sections of the body, nicking the skin to bleed. By this point in the show I have connected and explained to the audience that the two bodies are one, hopefully allowing there to be a representative quality of seeing Katie attaching material to my body, on screen, and watching Frances Kay bleed, live.

### ***Re-dragging/De-dragging***

Throughout the course of this research I noticed that a number of performance artists who explore drag aesthetics employ the technique of re-dragging and de-dragging. Re-dragging and de-dragging is a technique that makes the audience aware they are watching a performer who is utilising drag, and subverts the parody of gender that drag can present. This is exemplified in the work undertaken by Dickie Beau, JohnSmith and Nando Messias. When Smith presents this approach of de-dragging and re-dragging, she begins the performance as a drag-king, then she slowly de-drags to show a female body and then, after a number of masculine based actions (e.g. holding strong poses, wearing boxers with an oversized bulge)

re-drag into a bio-queen. This entire section not only allows the audience to physically see the recreating of an identity, but JohnSmith also challenges the ideals of gender stereotyping. When Messiah uses this technique, however, he only performs a 'de-dragging' in which he eventually just presents the naked male body; which is more characteristic of a body-art performance.

This notion of de-dragging and re-dragging is an interesting one. As previously established, the form of bio-queening being presented within this hybrid performance is a representation of a hyper-feminine identity, Frances Kay. As indicated previously in chapter one, in Stone's explanation of identity, de-dragging and re-dragging becomes elemental to the hybrid performance. If, in the process of becoming the identity of Frances Kay, I change my appearance, then employing de-dragging means I can draw the audience's attention to the deconstruction of Frances Kay as an identity. This aesthetic allows a conversation to develop around challenging the concept of identity which is crucial to the overall message in the final performance created by Frances Kay.

### ***Pop-Culture References***

The increased popularity of drag within mass media and popular culture, is too extensive to detail in full. Nonetheless, I will discuss the areas relevant to developing a hybrid performance. To depict the rise of the genre in popular culture, drag shows often (especially from the 1960s onwards when lip-syncing began) made reference to contemporary pop-culture. These references were embodied through visual tactics (e.g. dragging as a pop-culture icon) or through musical or speech-based numbers (for the comedy queens) and lip-syncing. When developing this auto-biographical thesis and performance, the first introduction of Frances Kay is through the quote: "How can I explain Frances Kay to you? When I was about 5, I remember listening to a song at my auntie's house that started kind of slow, then it got really loud like BANG, but then it went quiet again." (2017) I began to think about how relevant those lyrics were to me in understanding who my bio-queen identity is and therefore *It's oh so quiet* by Bjork (1995) repeats as a sound clip throughout. Another song that stood out to me was *God only knows* by The Beach Boys (1966), as I found the lyrics perfect to the situation of having two identities, especially the second verse:

If you should ever leave me  
Though life would still go on, believe me  
The world could show nothing to me  
So what good would living do me  
God only knows what I'd be without you.

It could be argued that the most prevalent figure within 21<sup>st</sup> century drag to reference pop-culture is Lady Gaga. Hawkins explains, “as one of the central ingredients of pop, drag often connotes rebellion and political disorder. Strategically, drag creates distance between the pop singer's personality and her performance ‘act’.” (2014, p. 16). Gaga is also known for performances that highlight her resistance to gender binaries, as well as her use of hyperbolic femininity to surpass “received categories of ‘authentic’ feminine identity...through her multiple sartorial enactments” (Gray and Rutnam, 2014, p. 54). As she employs drag, drag-kinking, gender-fucking, performance art and even Voguing through her music, videos and performances, Gaga is an alluring and inspirational presence when it comes to integrating bio-queen drag and body based performance art. Through this inspiration of Gaga, I planned to include quotes throughout the performance taken from her biography which read: “I’m a weird chick you know?” (Lady Gaga, cited in Morgan, 2010) where Frances Kay responded with: “yeaaaaaaaaaaaaah” (2017). However, I decided to remove these before the final performance because despite Gaga being a powerful presence in the drag community, I felt it distracted from the narrative of my piece.

David Hoyle, who has been described as an ‘anti-drag’ act, openly uses references of the media and against the media when illuminating personal experiences through autobiographical performances. To emulate Hoyle’s use of pop culture and media reference to present personal experience, the opening section of *FK vs KT: The Showdown*, plays a remix of *It’s Oh So Quiet* by Bjork (1995) and *Stun* by Alaska Thunderfuck (2016). *Stun* is an interesting musical track to use, because not only does it include references to being “in the club,” relating to the narrative of the piece, but includes lines such as “looking like fish”. Fish is a drag term for a queen that does not look ‘real’ or ‘girly’ enough, which can be a subversive lyric when used in a bio-queen performance. The introduction of a music track from a drag queen and one in which the video contains Voguing throughout is an example of pop-culture referencing.

### ***Voguing***

As movement strongly applies to my performance, it makes sense to focus on the practice of Voguing. Voguing, a stylised form of movement that became a staple aesthetic of the balls<sup>35</sup>, became frequent within popular culture and was made famous through the

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<sup>35</sup> Voguing became mainstream through Livingston's documentary “Paris is Burning” on its release in 1990 with most forms of Voguing appearing during the 1980’s. However, I have not managed to find a specific date as to when Voguing ‘began.’ That being said, in *Butch Queens: Up in pumps*” (2013) it is written that the “kicking



documentary *Paris Is Burning* (2009) and also by Madonna. Madonna's 1990 hit *Vogue*, featured the artist surrounded by a troupe of dancers performing the stylised movements of Vogue throughout the video. Thanks to the integration of these elements, and due to the rise in drag queen culture, Voguing is now recognised within the 21st century as an aesthetic of drag. In Upadhye's article that discusses how Voguing was not created by Madonna, she explains that: "[b]y most historical accounts, Vogue was first danced by black drag queens in Harlem" (2012) and the stylised movements and themes of Voguing represented the queens' connection to the lifestyle of the balls. Even though Voguing used to be a form of 'attacking' your partner on the dance floor<sup>36</sup>, the actual stylised movements of the dance were very particular. The movements involved making symmetrical shapes with the body, holding poses and showing how flexible you were. As the dance continued to develop began to introduce holding awkward positions within the dance and specific turns and falls. According to Bailey, in order to recognise or perform Voguing, there are five components that need to be considered: "duckwalks, catwalks, spins, dips and hand performance" (2013, p. 175) and each component comes with its own iconography and further categories.

Since Madonna brought Voguing into popular culture, subsequent pop icons have appropriated the form into their work, for example in FKA Twigs' video *Glass & Patron* (2015). To accompany the pop-culture response to Voguing, there have also been a number of performance art based both live or recorded, that utilise Voguing. One of the pieces most notable in integrating Voguing is *Twenty looks or Paris is burning at the Judson Church* by Trajal Harrell. According to Harrell, the early postmodern dance movement from the 60s was reignited in the late 90's: "...in my research, I began to realise that even looking at this history there was another history happening up town that hadn't been included" (2012), and his work was a direct result of the tradition of Voguing being missed from history. Harrell even goes as far as to stage his performance as a copy of the ball layout (stage running through the middle with the audience on either side, much like a fashion catwalk). Similarly, in 2017, Rachael Young's performance of *Out*, included two sections of Voguing and Rashaad Newsome's *FIVE* (2014) was created as a direct response to the five elements of Voguing outlined above.

Coupling how Voguing has influenced drag performance and popular culture since

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performance form is deeply rooted in black vernacular dance" (p. 133) and this style of dance eventually evolved into Voguing.

<sup>36</sup> As explained by Willi Ninja "it was a dance that two people did because they didn't like each other. Instead of fighting you would dance it out on the dance floor" (*Paris is Burning*, 1990, 00:36:13)

the rise of its creation within the drag balls of the United States, with my own embodied movement within my works, *FK vs KT: The Showdown* subsequently opens with a section of Voguing to emphasise the show as a bio-queen performance, and returns for a second section later in the piece.

### ***Lip-Syncing***

As explained in the literature review, lip-syncing became an integral ingredient of drag for the female impersonator around the 1960s and has continued to be a major characteristic of drag ever since, including bio-queen performances. Throughout Taylor's essay, which explores the gender-fucking possibilities of drag, the author states that "[i]f the voice produced in the act of singing reveals without choice an intimate truth about the performer's body, then...lip-syncing reclaims the right of a performer to choose what they reveal about their bodies" (2012, p. 102); if a bio-queen does not want her sex to be connected to her gender, lip-syncing thus *hides* her gendered voice. Throughout the performance, there are musical numbers that play in which Frances Kay lip-syncs the tracks, much like a drag queen or bio-queen would do in a drag show. However, it could be argued that this is no longer the case, and it is worth taking into consideration that in developing 21st century drag, a number of queens have distanced themselves from lip-syncing.

Nando Messias, an artist who uses lip-syncing within his practice, noted overhearing a conversation between two drag performers, where "one saw lip-syncing as a non-skill, for drag queens with no talent. The other claimed to have no interest in using other people's words to say what he meant" (cited in Campell, A and Farrier, S, 2015, p. 282). It was this distancing from the genre that drew Messias to use lip-syncing within his works. Messias explains, "as a queer artist, I relish having a rummage in the cultural bin...I duly collected lip-syncing and drag from the bottom of the pile" (cited in Campell, A and Farrier, S, 2015, p. 282). Taking the form of lip-syncing, Messias then presented a paper in a 2011 conference by appropriating a section of a Butler interview entitled *philosophe en tout genre* (2006). He then delivered this recorded audio through lip-syncing in "a queer attempt to subvert...the academic form as well as the queer practice of lip-syncing itself" (cited, Campell, A and Farrier, S, 2015, p. 283), thereby modifying lip-syncing as a performance tool. Despite some drag acts moving away from this aesthetic, thanks to drag becoming more popular and present within pop-culture, lip-syncing is one of the most iconic features of drag, and it is fast becoming a style to embellish performance art.

Another artist notable for his adaptation of lip-syncing within performance art is

Dickie Beau. In a similar vein to *Messias*, Dickie Beau's lip-syncing is not done through the practice of song or music, but through recorded spoken audio, another trait that is becoming favoured within performance art. Beau takes the tapes (often personal) of figures such as Judy Garland and Marilyn Monroe, and, through lip-syncing these speeches Beau embodies them. In this regard, the incorporation of lip-syncing into the present hybrid performance is not a way to hide my gendered voice (because I will also sing and play recorded audio), rather it is done for the same reason that Beau uses it. I shall present the identity of Frances Kay through bio-queening, but lip-sync sections will be spoken by Katie, making it evident that the two are separate, but both are present.

### ***The Bleeding Body***

One final artist whose work was a source of inspiration when developing this hybrid performance was artist Liad Kantorowicz. Her performance employs some of the above tactics, but with the notable difference that she uses her body and tests nudity within her practice. "Liad's everyday style is eye-catching, her bright hair and lipstick, and her underwear as outerwear would make 80s Madonna and drag queens of all eras proud." (McGlotten, 2015). In *Piece of Me* she performs a lip-sync to Britney Spears as she tears off her Hijab to reveal a map of Palestine dividing her body. After this action she then begins to rub a piece of meat across her bare skin. In another of her works, *War is Good*, she proceeds to pull an Israeli flag out of her Vagina (cited in McGlotten 2015). Her form of performance being presented has strong links to body based performance art, and her integration of drag themes are an example of a hybrid performance that is already being explored. In the final section of *FK vs KT: The Showdown*, a number of gems are pulled off Frances Kay's body to reveal little red crosses. In similar vein to Kantorowicz, where the map of Palestine holds personal political value to her, the little red crosses represent the personal crossover of Frances Kay and Katie. These crosses are then nicked to bleed and slowly, the rest of the costume is removed and the bare naked form of Frances Kay is presented to the audience.

One important aspect of the bleeding body within the final section of *FK vs KT*, is the subversive act of allowing the audience to see the bio-queen Frances Kay, as not just an identity, but as the human being Katie Harling, who bleeds as any other human does. As Jones explains:

"The wound we perceive as actually violating the body of the other, ripping into the skin, making it bleed...pricks us with fear and desire. It makes us smart and wince with recognition...and it is this *empathetic* [sic] response that gives such wounds the

potential to move and change us.” (2009 p. 51).

The performer has thus embarked on a thirty-minute journey, allowing the audience to see how Frances Kay battles with everyday experiences, addiction, personal identity and suffering and this final act finally allows the two (Frances Kay and Katie Harling) to unite. Underneath all the make-up, action and pretence, Frances Kay still bleeds the same. Finally, with the haunting repetition of the (sung-live) line: “God only knows what I’d be without you” against the repeated recorded version of the sung line, both Frances Kay and Katie eventually cross their singing over, and the audience is left with the image of a bleeding, glittery body.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this current study was to determine whether or not a new, sub-genre of hybrid performance entitled 'Neo-Drag' could be effectively established. The main method through which this research attempted to create the new form of drag performance was to investigate the effects of employing gender performativity with a view to develop a hyper-feminine identity known as Frances Kay, within a body-based art performance. In order to claim this sub-genre of performance, I firstly had to theorise my bio-queening and find a suitable place for it in the drag (or performance) world. Exploring Skyy's faux queening theorising, I discovered that whilst I agreed with and respect Skyy's identification with faux queen drag, as a performance artist, I identified more strongly with the term bio-queening due to being a performance artist first and foremost, and not a faux queen. Another area of performance I initially believed my bio-queening belonged to was Peluso's theorising of high-femme drag. Again, however, I came to the conclusion that my bio-queening did not belong here either, because, Peluso explained that high-femme drag personas are gendered identities that are noticeably different from heterogendered "femininity." My representation of bio-queening is an identity who challenges a constructed and performative gender, not by attempting to *own* femininity, but by presenting a hyperbolic version of societies' constructed femininity, based on Butler's theory of gender performativity. As Frances Kay, these performed femininities are the staple of my work as abio-queen. With this in mind, my practice should not be interpreted as high-femme drag, but as bio-queening. Despite the crossover of both Skyy's and Peluso's terms into that of the definition of 'bio-queening,' the present research has made it clear, that my bio-queening should have its own space in the genre of biological female drag based performance.

One of the main goals of this current study was to determine whether my bio-queening could be presented through Butler's theory of gender performativity, and the research has suggested that my personal bio-queening (when read within a heteronormative matrix) did fit within this model. Moreover, a few of the works I had created as Frances Kay between 2013-2017 presented her theory as well. Understanding that my bio-queening represented Butler's beliefs of gender performativity made the exploration of hyper-femininity within a body-based drag show more successful. Whilst this study did confirm Butler's gender performativity, the most important limitation lies in the fact that high-femme drag challenged the theory of gender performativity. As Butler made clear in *Bodies that*

*Matter*, gender performativity does not imply picking a gender “don that gender for the day, and then restore the ferment to its right place at night” (1993, X). When discussing high-femme drag, or the new burlesque, Ferreday contested that burlesque is actually “the fantasy of putting femininity on and off” (2008, p. 62), in turn allowing for the performance of hyper-femininity. One high claim that could be made here, is that whilst my bio-queening fits into Butler’s gender performativity, it can be contested that through the bio-queening of the hyper-feminine identity of Frances Kay, I am *choosing* to put on a gender<sup>37</sup>, in a body-based performance setting.

This thesis has provided a deeper insight into research surrounding bio-queening practices and the study adds to a growing body of research that indicates that drag and body-based performance art is starting to become combined, therefore changing the current genres of drag and performance. As Logan states, “[t]oday’s drag is more outrageous. Queens strive to be celebrities in their own right. As long as drag continues to push boundaries, I believe there is room for all varieties.” (Cited in Robson, 2014). One limitation of this study, however, is that the creation of the hybrid genre of Neo-Drag is so simple to asses, therefore, it is unknown if this genre can become, (or will become) a style within its own right. One of the major reasons it was difficult to obtain these results is that performance art can be such an open genre in the first place. Adding a few elements of body-based art practices and bio-queening together may not necessarily be classed as a brand-new genre. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study suggests that bio-queening and body-based art practices can be successfully integrated when approached in the correct way. For example, one audience member stated, “FK’s elevation of drag from a popular form of entertainment (in my layperson’s knowledge) to a piece of art with something to say was one of the most engaging, evocative and unexpected components of her piece” (AM 1, 2019). Another audience member stated “Frances’s ‘FK vs KT’ is different, in a sense it blurs the lines between Live Performance and theatre, and benefits from it. Much is pure entertainment, but at all times you are aware that something else is going on, that something crucial is being addressed.” (AM 2, 2019).

Interestingly, one of the most significant factors that appeared to affect the overall success of

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<sup>37</sup> As femininity and gender are in fact constructions that are socially and culturally imposed on women and their bodies, therefore I choose to present these.

Neo-Drag was how impactful the chosen, socially political themes of identity and gender were received by the audience. Almost all of the audience's feedback, at some point, mentioned either identity or gender, which is not surprising given the autoethnographic study and autobiographical performance. In regards to gender, Audience Member One noted that "[a]s a biological female, FK's use of drag gave the piece a kind of fierce vulnerability, her femininity emphasis and exaggerated in such a way that her gender was at the same time both a wound and a weapon" (2019). Similarly, Audience Member Three noted, "I can't work out if it is right to think bolder and braver for Harling the person to be standing in front of me, glitter strewn across her chest, than it is for Kay the performer to do the same thing - or if I should not even be thinking that it is a brave thing to do at all, and am doing so simply because this person is a woman" (2019). This feedback implies that my attempt to use bio-queening to present an identity who challenges a constructed and performative gender sufficiently, engaged audience members to contemplate gender. In regards to identity, introducing a drag persona again allowed the audience to challenge their current view of what an identity 'is', "Watching [*FK vs KT*] really helped me to understand how impactful a drag persona can be to someone's sense of identity" (AM 4, 2019). Another member of the audience stated, "the depths of Katie's performance allowed me to experience enticing prospects of identity...our identity is not a fixed concept, it is constantly changing and developing daily" (AM 5, 2019).

Despite its exploratory nature, this study offers some insight into how my belief as an artist that I was creating an autobiographical work as a tool for change was received by the audience and whether or not Neo-Drag affected this attempt of communication through the themes of identity and gender. One audience member found the work deeply moving, saying, "overall, it gave me an overwhelming sense of pride at the bravery and guts required to be able to deliver such a personal and in places shocking piece." (AM 6, 2019). Yet, another audience member found the piece uncomfortable, saying, "the mesmerising performance made me feel really uncomfortable when the character turned to alcoholism and using pins to cause harm to their body" (AM 5, 2019). Another weakness in this study is the lack of ability to measure whether these particular reactions from the audience were affected by using the style of Neo-Drag, or whether they are a reaction to the specific sections that involved body-based performance art. Audience Member Two even made the point of saying, "it is uncomfortable viewing when someone hurts themselves. The fact that is meant to be is little consolation...It is also such a powerful act, other aspects of the performance pale." (2019). Nevertheless, whilst I cannot claim that the use of neo-drag did heighten the use of

autobiographical material, I do believe my autoethnographic study was a success and allowed audience members to question what they understood regarding gender and identity. One audience member reflected this, saying that, “we see the artist struggle gloriously with the identity of her own role in life, as both an individual and a performer (AM 3, 2019).

One piece of feedback, regarding the use of autobiographical material and neo-drag, I found interesting was "seeing the performer on-stage physically hurt her body, by cutting and watching the film of the same thing at the same time highlighted to me how they were both the same. But the two at the same time were hard to watch and the pictures added an eerie feel and represented the personalities and life of the performer” (AM 7, 2019). With the complete de-dragging of Frances Kay, including the physical pain inflicted and the material of blood running down the body, over glitter and gems, I wanted the identity of Frances Kay to become completely deconstructed and the audience to be left with the sense of an individual who is troubled by identity politics, vulnerable, and ultimately free. Sadly, I cannot claim this was the case for every audience member, but I believe as an artist I was close to achieving this.

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for future practice regarding the integration of drag within body-based art works, and for now, this research has situated a form of bio-queening and combined body-based art practices together to create a performance that hopefully resonated with audience members, explored gender and identity, and placed the researcher’s hyper-feminine persona, Frances Kay into the spotlight. In regard to this research, the exploration of vulnerability (through the artist's two identities and lives) worked well to develop a performance piece that presented elements of both drag practices and body-based art practices.

Accordingly, then, it only seems fair to finish with a statement from Frances Kay (2019):

“Personally, I would like to claim that neo-drag is now a genre. However, just because I claim this term for my work, doesn’t mean an audience member will read it that way. I can claim that the two genres of drag and body-art can work together when deconstructing femininity and gender and hopefully, maybe soon, someone else may come along and develop more research that propels this term into question.

My favourite piece of feedback was “Is this female drag queen faux drag? Is Frances Kay faux Katie Harling?” (AM 3, 2019). Did I answer my Ultimate question - will neo-drag help me understand Frances Kay and Katie Harling? I think neo-drag helps me to understand identity, but *my* identity?

With my wig, my razor’s and my bottle of Sourz. My god, I have no idea...”



## APPENDICES

*E1: Creme Fatal*



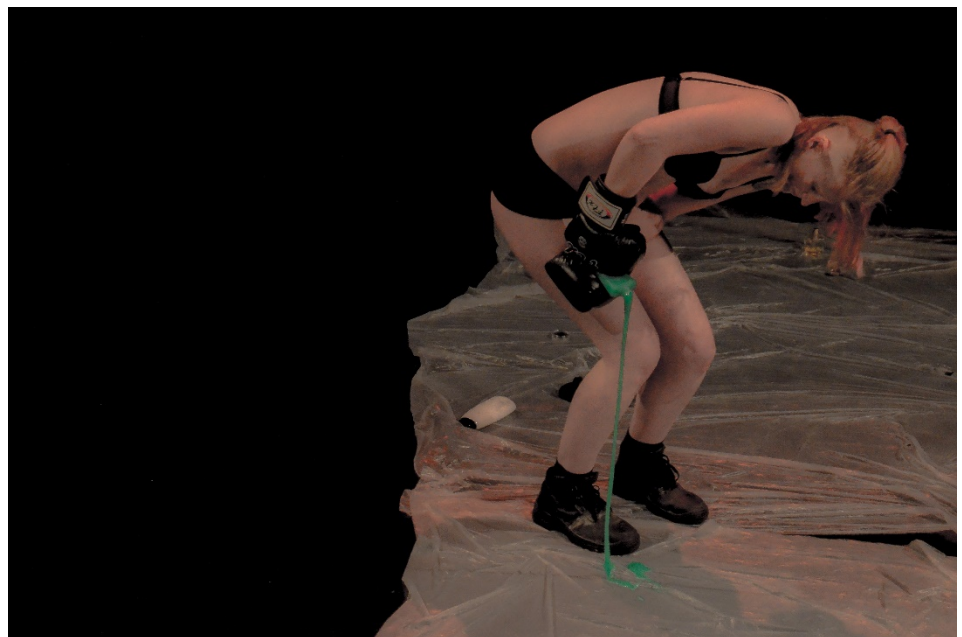
*E3: Scaffold (2013-)*



*E2: Fauxnique*



*E4: Little Red (2015-)*



## Audience Member One performance feedback

### AM1

FK vs KH



Daniel Bruce-Christopher <dbrucechristopher@gmail.com>

Tue 2/5, 1:07 PM

Katie Harling (Researcher) ✎



Reply | ▾

Frances Kay's powerful piece contextualises an issue I think we all face; our identity and sense of who we are exist in a constant flux. Seeing KH and FK fight it out viscerally translates an internal struggle to an external, cathartic battle.

As a biological female, FK's use of drag gave the piece a kind of fierce vulnerability, her femininity emphasised and exaggerated in such a way that her gender was at the same time both a wound and a weapon. FK's elevation of drag from a popular form of entertainment (in my layperson's knowledge) to a piece of art with something to say was one of the most engaging, evocative and unexpected components of her piece.

### AM2

I have a lot of experience of visual art, but it is mainly of the static type; painting, drawing sculpture, that type of thing. But since seeing Marina Abramovic at The Whitworth in 2009, I am firmly of the opinion that live performance may be the art form that is doing the most to challenge the status quo.

Perhaps it is live nature of the event. The issue is being raised by this performer here and now, and physiologically you have to address the issue there and then. Admittedly not fully resolve, like a good painting, contemplation is rewarding, but with a painting you can walk away and never confront the subject, with performance there is not that option. The North West has a number of theatres, so traditional plays and to a lesser extent dance, is thankfully common. But contemporary 'live performance' is rare. This may be because it is not fully understood as an art form, it is common at performances to fill in questionnaires, that ask what you consider 'Live Performance' to be. The jury perhaps is still out.

With most 'Live Performances' I have seen, there is normally one idea, or one subject, that is being explored. For Example in 'Eleven Rooms' at Manchester Arts Gallery, Santiago Sierra asked veterans of the wars in Northern Ireland, Afghanistan and Iraq to stand in an empty gallery facing into a corner without responding or reacting to our presence. Each viewer may have their own interpretation, but the concept is stripped to the minimum.

minimum.

Frances's 'FK vs KT' is different, in a sense it blurs the lines between Live Performance and theatre, and benefits from it. Much is pure entertainment, but at all times you are aware that something else is going on, that something crucial is being addressed. I have seen two versions, and Brexit, appeared to be the subject, of one, but after consideration, I think it was a feint, perhaps not deliberate, but a feint none the less. The subject is in the title, it is Katie the artist is discourse with Frances the performer. At times it feels painfully honest, and confusing, for those of us that have heard our close friends argue, this is strangely familiar territory. But to add a level of complexity Frances persona is a drag artist, a female drag artist. In an age where gender fluidity is a major topic, it seems simply to be presented as a given. Or is it? The final level of complexity is self-harm. And this comes disguised at first. The audience is invited to drink alcohol, the most convivial of acts. But as the piece progresses you realise that Katie as Frances, and if I follow the argument correctly, therefore Katie herself, has turned to alcohol a little too often, and a little too much. And this is where the self-harm begins. It is uncomfortable viewing watching someone hurt themselves. The fact it is meant to be, is little consolation. The audience becomes voyeur. It is also such a powerful act, other aspects of the performance pale.

It is a complex piece, at times highly entertaining, and at others deeply challenging. There are a number of issues raised, and at this moment in time questions of gender identity need to be addressed.



## AM3

FK vs KT

January 28, 2019

by Garry Cook

FK vs KT is a dialogue between differences, between contrasts, between the ego and the alter ego.

We see the artist struggle gloriously with the identity of her own role in life, as both an individual and a performer. It's that identity issue which comes across most strongly in FK vs KT.

Who are we watching? We see Frances Kay emerge from behind a screen, gloriously colourful in pink wig and glittered tits, looking like she has just stepped out of a Katy Perry video. But that boldness, of the performer who uses her body as a canvas, is questioned as glimpses of Katie Harling comes out, with all of the insecurities and doubts that plague most of us on a daily basis.

I can't work out if it is right to think it is bolder and braver for Harling the person to be standing in front of me, glitter strewn across her chest, than it is for Kay the performer to do the same thing - or if I should not even be thinking that it is a brave thing to do at all, and am doing so simply because this person is a woman.

I am left to wonder if Harling is blessed to have her own character to shield her from life, to ride shotgun over awkward social situations - or if Frances Kay is a curse, a danger to Harling's own self development?

Is this female drag queen faux drag? Is Frances Kay faux Katie Harling? Should any of us be defined as one thing or are we more complex than that? There is so much of society which straightjackets all of us - and perhaps always will. Harling gives us hope - if we need it - that we can be both. You can be an opposite to yourself, within yourself, and you can be different, at least some of the time. But that doesn't necessarily mean that life will be any easier.

All I really do know is that she drinks too much.

## AM4

### FK vs KT afterthoughts



Charlie Ainscough <chazzy123a@hotmail.co.uk>

Fri 1/25, 7:30 PM

Katie Harling (Researcher) ✎



Reply | ▾

Coming from a place where I hadn't had much experience of drag performance in the past, watching FK vs KT really helped me to understand how impactful a drag persona can be to someone's sense of identity and just how important that can be.

It was a fantastic show that I'd watch again in a heartbeat.

Charlie.

## AM5

Accessibility Mode Print Find Immersive Reader

Katie's performance was mesmerising and changed my whole outlook on gender and identity. I haven't really thought too much about gender and identity, however the depths of Katie's performance allowed me to experience enticing prospects of identity. Gender and identity are fluid. We can be born in a body that doesn't fit with our identity; an individual can be born male, however, this doesn't mean they identify as a male. Our identity is not a fixed concept, it is constantly changing and developing daily.


Katie's performance really made me question the ignorance of social values in gender and identity. I questioned how individuals within society today must feel and have to act for them to be considered 'socially acceptable'. Although society is becoming more informed and accepting, it is still quite a sensitive topic. The mesmerising performance made me feel really distressed when the character turned to alcoholism and using pins to cause hurt to their body. This really made me think about how pain can be caused by verbal attitudes of others.

I learnt a significant amount by watching Katie's performance. I have become more educated on gender, identity and bio-queening, I emotionally connected with Katie Harling and Frances Kay in scenes and mainly, I have learnt that the most important thing is to be happy in whoever you are- whatever gender or identity.

(No subject)

 jessica pass <jessicapass83@gmail.com>

Wed 1/30, 3:30 AM  
Katie Harling (Researcher) ✕


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13 KB



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i hope this is okay

## AM6

Performance feedback : fk vs kt the showdown.

 rachel harling <raych.harling@hotmail.co.uk>  
Mon 1/28, 9:55 AM  
Katie Harling (Researcher) ✕

 Reply | 

In regards to the performance, as the artist was my daughter (and as a lay person in this field), I picked up mainly on the " Identity " concept of the performance.

Watching her wrestle with who she is, and how Kt arrived at where she is at the Present time; was, in parts, eye opening, funny and uncomfortable. Although some: Not surprising.

I understood parts of the performance would not have happened without the drag persona ie; Singing. But it did not make me question the performers gender, However had it been my son giving the performance in drag It would have certainly had an impact , probably one of shock..

Aspects of the content were deeply personal (for example, use of photos Of her maternal grandmother). But overall it gave me an overwhelming sense of Pride at the bravery and guts required to be able to deliver such a personal and in places shocking piece , knowing close relatives were watching.

Rachel Harling

# AM7

(No subject)



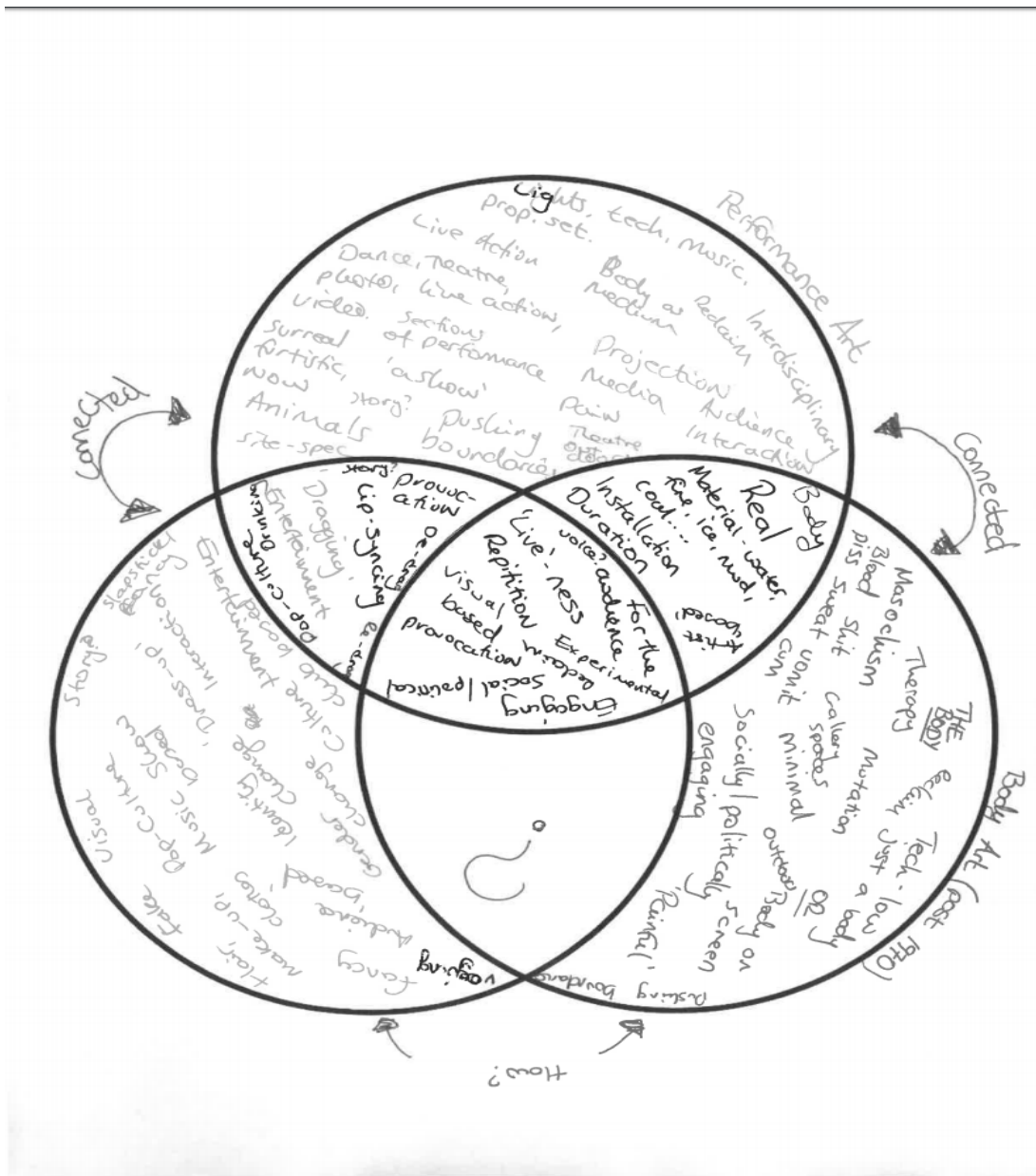
Paul Rosser <paul\_rosser@hotmail.co.uk>  
Sat 4/20, 3:44 AM  
Katie Harling (Researcher) ✉

Reply | ▾

Artist Emails/Feedback

Seeing the performer on-stage physically hurt her body, by cutting and watching the film of the same thing at the same time highlighted to me how they were both the same. But the two at the same time were hard to watch and the pictures added a eerie feel and represented the personalities and life of the performer.

## Venn Diagram



*Frances Kay: Bio-Queen*



## *Performance Notation*

### Slideshow and notes for Performance: FK vs KT

Key: **Blue** = Stage Directions/Actions  
**Purple** = Text on Slides  
**Orange** = Audio/Music Played

Stage in pitch black. Screen is hanging on one side of the stage, on the other there is a microphone and stand. FK behind the screen.

(00:00:05)

Projection Begins onto screen

As the projection plays a very faint "Bjork - It's oh so quiet" plays

---

(00:00:40)

21st of August 1992.

K.T was born

At the exact time, on the exact day;

So was F. K

---

(00:00:58)

They both liked:

Pina Bausch  
Cups of Tea  
Jungle Music  
Kendal Mint Cake

---

(00:01:15)

They both disliked:

Wet Feet  
Wasps  
Seafood  
Reality TV shows.

But cooking ones are ok.

---

(00:01:34)

Cling Film

Don't even...

---

Projections drops off and audio begins to play.

(00:01:48) "Bjork - It's oh so quiet" plays again.

(00:02:25) After a few minutes, audio section one plays: "How can I explain Frances Kay to you? When I was about 5, I remember listening to a song at my aunties house that started kind of slow, then it got really loud like BANG, but then it went quiet again. It goes on and on like this till the end of the song. And I had the best dance to it. I would creep around quietly making shhing noises, then suddenly jump around all like AHH.

(00:02:54) "Bjork - It's oh so quiet" repeats

Projection returns:

---

(00:03:08)

Eventually

K.T found F. K

---

(00:03:28)

It. Was. Wild

---

(00:03:44) "Die Antwoord - Banana Brain Instrumental" as music plays, pictures of KT/FK flash up on the screen.

(00:04:11) The audio returns: well Frances Kay is a lot like that. Except she is a lot more BANG!

(00:04:17) Projections returns to show the lyrics (in english) of the Nena song which is playing. As the song plays out, FK lip-syncs along, into the microphone. "Nena - Iregndwie, Irengwo, Irengwann"

---

(00:06:21)

Nothing was going to separate the two, shaping each other's life, inspiring each other's behaviour, they couldn't be one without the other.

Until...

---



Projection drops off. **Silence on stage** (00:06:54 - 00:07:24). During the silence we see FK place lipstick across her mouth and kiss three sections of her body to leave kiss impressions.

(00:07:24) **Video shows up on the screen:** *Projection of facebook video played, it shows Frances and Katie argue over a status, until Katie threatens to 'un-friend' Frances. Video freezes and fades out.*

(00:10:01) **A recorded voice clip of "Beach Boys - God only knows plays" the first line of the song.** (00:10:23) **After the song has finished, repeats the kiss sections, x3 and blows a kiss to the audience.** (00:10:54) **"Bjork - It's oh so quiet" replays, but this time, the music mixes into "Die Antwoord - Banana Brain/Fink U Freaky Instrumental."** **As the music plays, FK Vogues and dances to the music** (00:12:35).

**After the dance section, the next audio section plays:** (00:12:43) *As time progressed I realised...* **After the audio has finished, repeats the kiss sections, x3 in silence** (00:12:55 - 00:13:26). **FK then stands stationary in front of the audience. As she does recorded audio of "Beach Boys - God Only Knows" plays through.** (00:13:50)

**Screen lights back up and goes straight into a video:** *The Video shows Katie sat in her living room talking to her housemates. K: "She's crazier cooler than me, she dances, she sings, she's a performer, way more of an party animal, braver, madder." H: "so Frances is the mad one?" "Yeah Katie's quite tame" B: "Oh I have lived with you for five years, that is a lie."* **Following the video is another section of silence** (00:14:15 - 00:14:48). **Repeats the kiss sections, x3 in silence. Recorded audio of "Beach Boys - God Only Knows" plays through** (00:14:48)

(00:15:12), **"Robbie Williams - She's the One" plays at the same time, video projection returns** fades into slow motion videos of Katie drunk with her mates on various nights out. **She lip-syncs the song, and sections are mirrored on the video.**

(00:19:00) **The next audio section plays:** *I think the answer is far too much. Well, maybe it's acceptable at my age... If I carried on partying as much for the next few years, I think my body could pay. Katie definitely takes precedence there, the rebel. Actually, they are both as one another.*

(00:19:17) **The audio of Alaska Thunderfuck plays, this is lip-sync by FK onstage. Once the music ends, FK starts to set the stage ready for the drinking and dancing section. When the stage is set, she passes out shot glasses and booze to the audience. Whilst setting the stage, the next audio section plays:** *Yeah, I've always felt a little different about life. Especially when I was younger, I can't really explain it. I just feel like I'm here for a different purpose. I briefly enter into people's lives and then I leave. And that's my role. I don't hang around. I don't know about anyone else, but I have felt throughout my entire life, that I don't really know who I am. Who is Katie, there's so many complex emotions and feelings and thoughts in that person. Can anyone really know who they are? But when I step into the performance space, now that kid, I know her* (00:20:12).

**Repeats the kiss sections, x3 in silence.**

(00:20:20) **Video section of Bausch plays out, with subtitles in English** (00:20:43), **the video is followed by the next audio section:** *As a child....* (00:21:00). **The performer then stands at the front of the stage and waits, until** (00:21:03) **"Chicago - I can't do it alone" plays. Frances sings along to this track, dances and sings throughout** (00:23:56).

(00:24:03) **Another audio section plays:** *I can sing and dance, but I haven't sang on stage for such a long time. That's something I don't do anymore. When I lost the person who held the strongest connection for me, as to why I perform, I lost my voice, I don't even talk in performance anymore, in fact, the only time I can sing in front of people now is when I'm fucked* (00:24:20).

(00:24:24) As the audio section is playing, Frances stands still and a video comes on, we see pictures of herself being pinned to her body. On stage, Frances is peeling sections of her glitter away, and nicking the same areas to let them bleed, as well as repeating the kissing sections. As this sections plays out, **recorded audio of "Beach Boys - God Only Knows"** plays through x7 starting at: (00:25:57) and finishing on (00:30:34) and is accompanied by FK singing the same section on stage. FK cleans up the stage, removes her wig and prepares for another lip-sync.

(00:32:36) **"Beyonce - Runnin"** starts to play and throughout this song, FK lip-syncs the whole section. (00:36:11) Repeats the kiss sections, x3 in silence. (00:36:36) **Audio Section plays:** *Honestly? I'd compare it to cling film. Most of the time it's serving a purpose. It's alright to use in performance but every now and then it gets wrapped up and is a goddamn nightmare. And I sometimes can hate it. But, you know without her wrapping me up, I don't know.* (00:36:48) **The final video plays up across the screen and is followed immediately by "God Only Knows - Beach Boys" plays (full version 00:37:19).**

As the song progresses, FK makes nicks, on two sections on her body. With the first one, she uses it to make an "F" then, sticks glitter to it. With the other one, she makes a "K" and sticks glitter to it. Stands still for a few seconds, then wanders off.

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End.

## *Performance Handout*



F.K and K.T have spent a significant amount of time learning, respecting, and understanding each other. How quickly can they both be ripped apart by human behaviour?

This piece physically tests a devoted relationship and scrutinises the artist's lifestyle and addiction, through the integration of projection, body endurance and drag performance. A funny, sincere but ruthless performance that pulls from autobiographical material and the behaviours surrounding society's limits on the body, gender and the demeanour towards the best liquid of all: sweet sweet boooooze.

Contains, mature and adult content.

Running time: approx. 40 minutes

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Created and Performed by: Frances Kay

Costume: Frances Kay

Make-up: Abi-Grace Wallace

Video Material and Audio Recordings: Frances Kay

Lighting and Technical: Brett Fawkes

Poster Image: Greta Jokubauskaite

Additional music selected by Frances Kay:

*It's Oh So Quiet* by Bjork

*Banana Brain* by Die Antwoord

*Irgendwie Irgendwo Irgendwann* by Nena

*I FINK U FREEKY* by Die Antwoord

*She's The One* by Robbie Williams

*The T* by Alaska Thunderfuck

*Can't Do It Alone (Audio)* from Chicago, The Musical

*Runnin' (Lose It All)* by Naughty Boy ft. Beyoncé

*God only Knows* by The Beach Boys

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FK vs KT: The Showdown is one part of a Masters of Research, titled, Bio-queening and Body Art: An autoethnographic investigation into creating hybrid performance. The artist would be very grateful if you could spare five minutes after the performance to fill out a short questionnaire in regards to this research.

As always, a huge thanks to DW + MT, LJ + FC.

Mum, Dad, Grandad, A, S, B, H, B, L and P.

And all those who support us by coming to watch.

Mwah x

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