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Appraisal of BA Thesis *Struggles Over Queer Space: Drag Kings' Appropriations of Performance Events In Prague* by Emma Ayers

In this thesis, Emma Ayers examines the practices, performances and feelings of drag kings in Prague in view of their experimentation with, destabilisation and re-making of gender/s, their struggles for visible and safe living and performance spaces, and their potential for radical de- and anticolonial politics of solidarity-making in the context of rising transphobia and anti-drag movements. A literature review aptly synthesises key work on drag, specifically the seemingly non-performative of drag kinging, the 'purposefully unintelligible', and its spatial and temporal dynamics grounded in gender and queer studies; critical studies of gentrified, commodified 'non-threatening' (16) performance spaces; and indigenous theories of fostering solidarity, 'which position us as ancestors of our future community' (19) and emphasise obligation for place-based acts of restoration and care. Bringing together theorisations of drag with indigenous feminist theory is itself a bold and ambitious act.

Asking after gender, place and solidarity making, methodologically, the study draws on a four-month period of participant observation of king performances in different venues based on the author's membership in a drag king performance group as well as a short questionnaire distributed to performers audience members, and social media presentations of key participants. Thematically organised, the empirical analysis takes the reader into parts of the drag king scene and the participants' onstage and offstage gender performances and 'gender feelings', a term that is attentive also to 'negative' feelings of jealousy, confusion and threat in transgressive performances; as well as the cross-cutting pressures and exclusions within queer (and straight) performance spaces and communities.

The thesis is well and fluently written and in complexity and depth well exceeds what is typically expected for a BA thesis. A particular merit is the careful attention to explore 'zone[s] of



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friction' (2) not only regarding performing spaces, but also intra-community relations, and performers relations to their own and others' performances, bodies and subjectivities.

Here I would like to invite Emma – without negating the feelings described – to reflect on evidence of the powers of the erotic, the joyful and pleasurable as well as unexpected acts of solidarity in the ethnography. Could these be built on for the realising the revolutionary politics envisioned?

Conversely, while I find myself in broad agreement with the necessity of 'doubleweaving' queer and indigenous (two-spirit) critiques, what areas of tensions have been observed or could be anticipated in the spirit of a writing that is attentive to ambivalences and complexities such as those explored around reproductive futurity? In the Czech context, I'm thinking for example of the hyper-sexualisation and animalisation of Romani women and others – could this produce allyship around performances of 'earnestness' and/or create distance from the practices of drag experimented with and affirmed?

Lastly, while this was partly addressed in terms of gun violence and racism, what difference did your Americanness make for the research?

I wholeheartedly recommend the thesis for defence, and depending on oral defence, suggest the grade excellent (1).

Prague 11.6.2024

Dagmar Lorenz-Meyer, Ph.D. (supervisor)