



HAL
open science

Performance in Action. Walking as Gendered Construction Practice in Drag King Workshops

Luca Greco

► **To cite this version:**

Luca Greco. Performance in Action. Walking as Gendered Construction Practice in Drag King Workshops. Jo Angouri; Judith Baxter. Routledge Handbook of Language, Gender, and Sexuality, Routledge Taylor & Francis, pp.272-288, 2021, 9781138200265. 10.4324/9781315514857-22 . hal-03196717

HAL Id: hal-03196717

<https://hal.science/hal-03196717>

Submitted on 29 Apr 2021

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Performance in Action. Walking as Gendered Construction Practice in Drag King Workshops

Luca Greco

► **To cite this version:**

Luca Greco. Performance in Action. Walking as Gendered Construction Practice in Drag King Workshops. Jo Angouri; Judith Baxter. Routledge Handbook of Language, Gender, and Sexuality, Routledge Taylor & Francis, pp.272-288, 2021, 9781138200265. 10.4324/9781315514857-22 . hal-03196717

HAL Id: hal-03196717

<https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03196717>

Submitted on 29 Apr 2021

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Performance in action

Walking as gendered construction practice in drag king workshops

Luca Greco

Introduction

Since the publication in 1990 of Butler's groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble*, the concept of performance as a synonym of action and impersonation has become a cornerstone concept in gender studies and social sciences, and a key word to understand how people act and account for their gender in their everyday lives. The concept of performance contributes to renewing a focus on action in social sciences as an interactive, multimodal, and historical phenomenon (Goodwin 2017). It also contributes to refreshing what the anthropologist Conquergood (1989) calls the 'performative turn': a heterogeneous yet powerful paradigmatic shift in social sciences and humanities, in which performance is mobilised as a metaphor to explain social life as theatre (Goffman 1959).

This chapter deals with gender as performance as illustrated by walking in drag king workshops. By focusing on gender as an embodied performance, I will demonstrate why an integrated approach between social sciences and artistic perspectives (Sormani, Carbone, and Gisler 2018) on performance is necessary. Such an approach resituates the emergence of gender as performance in contemporary arts, and in social sciences, it underscores performance rather than performativity and it considers the domain of artistic performance as a theoretical resource for language, gender, and sexuality studies (LGSS).

This chapter combines ethnographic methods, sequential, and multimodal approaches. The use of ethnography in conversation analysis has sparked a very intense debate in the EM/CA community (Clemente 2013; Hopper 1990; Moerman 1988). It focused around the methodological relevance of recruiting larger social structures in order to account for the functioning of conversational structures, the perimeters of context and the 'free-context' nature of conversation (Maynard 2003; Schegloff 1997; Wetherell 1998). Nowadays, an important analytical shift on multimodality, on interactions unfolding in complex semiotic settings, and a focus on non-human agency have provoked what we can call an 'ethnographical turn' in multimodal and ethnomethodological oriented conversation analysis, as the work of the Goodwins has demonstrated throughout their career.

After a presentation of the heuristic power of the concept of performance for LGSS and the value of studying walking in drag king workshops, I will analyse walking practices

in drag king workshops through the analysis of three types of walking observed in this context: *in vitro* walking, liminal walking, and *in vivo* walking. I will conclude with some propositions for a closer dialogue between queer and gender studies, contemporary art, and interactional perspectives.

Performance: a historical and theoretical overview

In this section, performance is first defined in relation to two very close concepts, which are performativity and performative. I then present two ways through which performance has been approached in literature: as a metaphorical and theoretical device, and as a distinctive discursive and artistic genre.

Performance, performativity, and performative: some methodological and theoretical issues

Performance, performative, and performativity are inextricably intertwined and must be defined clearly. ‘Performance’ refers to action and impersonation – something that is achieved step-by-step in the temporality of action for, with, and towards a real or imagined audience. ‘Performative’ designates a type of verb (vs. constative) and can be used to refer to gender as performative; i.e. gender as constructed by discursive actions. ‘Performativity’ refers to a complex process through which gender is iteratively constructed through a citational process (Butler 1990, 1993) and a normative horizon in which gender is achieved and accounted for as a performance (Butler 2005).

Butler first refers to ‘performance’ in the preface of *Gender Trouble* (1990) to designate the ways in which the actor and performer Divine accounts for their feminine gender in John Waters’ movies. She notes three important aspects of gender performance in Divine’s play: the questioning of dichotomies used to talk about and to explain gender, such as or through natural/artificial, depth/surface, inner/outer dichotomies; the parody of the naturalness of gender as part of the action repertoire of lesbian and gay cultures; and the naturalness of gender as constructed through performative discursive acts (Butler 1990: xxvii).

What is at stake in Butler’s work is less performance than performativity. The concept of the performative act, a cognate concept of performance in Butler’s paradigm, came from speech act theory and philosophy of language (Austin 1962). A performative (vs. constative) utterance has the power to realise what is said by the speaker by proffering phrases such as ‘I promise’, ‘I declare you married partners’, etc. Curiously, Austin considers the language spoken in a theatrical context as ‘not serious’, ‘parasitic upon its normal use’, and he excluded it from the class of performatives (Austin 1962: 22).

‘Performative’ in the Butler framework is extended to all types of action, not only to those relating to speech and not only referring to sentences with performative verbs such as ‘declare’, ‘promise’, etc. The Butlerian view of performatives comes from an interpretation the philosopher made of the concept of iterability (Derrida 1984). In this framework, the realisation of what is said is guaranteed by the repetition (i.e. iterability) of the speech act over time. In this conception, the realisation of an act depends less on the status (or the authority; cf. Bourdieu 1991) of the speakers or on the type of institution in which the speech act is accomplished (cf. the felicity conditions; Austin 1962) than on its repetition. In this theoretical framework, language becomes a central feature in gender construction processes as they are realised by participants through daily and routine actions (Butler 1997). It is through repetition of gendered social acts that gender is constructed, stabilised, and

acknowledged by co-participants in a number of very different contexts: in family interactions, conversations among pairs, interactions at work, etc. (Speer and Stokoe 2011).

The distinction between performance and performativity has political, theoretical, and methodological implications because gender is not just action. Gender is intertwined in a web of power and normative relations which make gender performance possible (Butler 1993). This framework is quite far from a common-sense vision of gender as entirely a matter of free will, in which everyone can change one's gender as one can change one's clothes. Even the more subversive modes of gendered self-construction and presentation practices are subjected to power or to what Butler calls 'the heterosexual matrix' (Butler 1993). If action and resistance to norms are never completely disanchored from power, a resistance to these same norms, allowing the possibility of action and contributing to shape it, is nonetheless possible. Methodologically and theoretically speaking, this view entails a dialectical and dynamic view of action as a contextually shaped and renewing act (Heritage 1984) and situated in two different levels of analysis: the 'there' of literal performances (what people do in social exchanges) and the 'not there' (something that ethnographers must elicit using rich and dense ethnographies in order to unveil the 'unsaid traces'; Kulick 2005: 616).

Performance as a metaphorical and theoretical device

A focus on gender as practice, action, or doing is deeply connected with at least two different research strands: research into feminist and gender studies 'before Butler', and interactional approaches.

A vision of gender as performance (i.e. as doing) was developed by scholars such as the British psychoanalyst Riviere (1929) with the concept of 'masquerade' – actions women intentionally perform to be identified as submissive in relation to authoritarian men. The French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1972), who coined the famous saying 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman', contributed to shedding light on the historical context and on the socialising practices which shaped women as a 'second sex'. Finally, thanks to the pioneering work of anthropologist Newton on female impersonators (1972), a view of gender as a relational and bodily practice embedded in everyday activities becomes obvious within the constructionist approach, i.e. a theoretical framework in which the forms of knowledge to reality are constructed by participants in the course of their repeated and daily social practices (Berger and Luckman 1966).

Research in the fields of micro-sociology (Goffman 1959, 1976) and ethnomethodology conceives gender as a practical accomplishment (Garfinkel 1967), a social process (Kessler and McKenna 1978), and a process of attribution through which social actors interpret gender cues presented by participants in interaction. Gender in this framework is treated as something that is finely orchestrated by participants in front of an audience (i.e. co-participants in daily interactions), an activity labelled by Goffman as performance: 'the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants' (1959: 8). The 'Agnes case' in Garfinkel's survey (1967) is an excellent example of gender as the work (or as the performance) accomplished by Agnes, a transsexual woman, in order to be interpreted as an ordinary woman (Mondada, *infra*). Gender transformation is presented through the lens of socialisation practices accomplished in every moment of life, learned by participants in the course of their actions, and constructed through a multiplicity of semiotic resources such as speech, vocal, visual, kinesic, and material resources.

Performance as a discursive and artistic genre

Performance is not only a descriptive resource mobilised by scholars to understand how people interact in the world. It is also an object of inquiry in social sciences. In linguistic anthropology, performance is a mode of spoken verbal communication consisting of the assumption of the responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence (Bauman 1975). This focuses attention on social interaction, the aesthetic and evaluative dimension of social life, and presents three important characteristics: to be interpretable, reportable, and repeatable (Hymes 1981).

Performance is a particular way of speaking in which social actors evaluate the discourse of participants in specific social contexts such as the management of gossip disputes and confrontation-report-offence among girls through conversation (Goodwin 1990). This concept allows scholars to focus their attention on the multimodal dimension of social encounters and on a dynamic and culturally anchored conception of the backstage/frontstage dichotomy in speech events (Finnegan 1998). Gender can be a relevant social category used to explain the diversity of speech styles in performance. In her study on forms of speech use in a Malagasy speech community, Keenan-Ochs (1974) remarks on a type of social gendered division of performance labour: men use a *kabary* speech form, a form privileging more indirect style forms, whereas women mobilise more often direct speech forms known as *resaka*. Finally, sexuality, gender, and race can be finely intertwined in verbal performances. In African American drag queen speech in gay bars, Barrett (2017) identifies a discursive genre typical of performance. This is speech designed for an audience composed of gay males sharing an important number of values and features of gay subculture with drag queens; this includes many allusions to sexual activities and the intertwining of some discursive features typical of Black and white bourgeois women. Barrett presents drag queen performances as irreducibly multi-voiced (Bakhtin 1973) in that participants index a multi-layered identity which crosses different social categories: Black woman, white Christian woman, gay men, drag queens, etc. Contrary to the Butlerian approach, which views drag queen performances as symbols of subversion of gender norms, Barrett's analysis sheds light on a misogynistic potential in drag queen speech practices and offers an interesting intersectional (Crenshaw 1991) analysis of drag queen practices in which gender, race, class, and sexuality are intertwined.

All of these works confirm that performance is not constituted solely by texts; it is bodily constructed¹ and it creates a multiplicity of audiences and participation frameworks. These points are shared by a corpus of artistic works and reflections on performance as an artistic genre in the framework of performance studies (Schechner 2006; Schneider 1997).

In contemporary art, performance disrupts a classical view of theatrical representation based on text, the linearity of narrative, the presence of a character, and a dichotomic vision of space which includes a performer on stage in front of a comfortably seated audience. Within this framework, we can define performance as an action accomplished once, across from, or oriented towards a physically present, absent, imagined, or technologically mediated participant. The distinctive features of performance are *inter alia* a focus on a racialised, gendered, and sexualised body; the primacy of experience lived by the social actors; and the processual dimension of action.

Since the 1960s at the latest, many contemporary artists and feminist activists have contributed to nourishing an idea of gender as a routine through their performances, which can be considered to be embodied processes, and ideological and artificial constructs (Jones 1998). Some of the ideas emerging in their work echoes some of the points underlined in

gender and queer studies, and in social sciences in general, as central features for a vision of gender as performance: the relation between body and language, the body as a process (vs. result), and the power of bodily transformation.

Sprinkle, a post-porn activist and feminist, contributes to conceiving the body as a process through her performances. In *Anatomy of a Pin-Up* (1980) she shows, through an image of her body, the procedures mobilised by the artist to construct a perfect pin-up body. To this end, each body part is related through an arrow to an inscription in which the artist explains how she achieves the result of the pin-up forms. In this way, Sprinkle transforms her body into an accountable one through which the spectators can approach the pin-up forms more as a *process* than as a *result*.

The theme of bodily transformations through makeup activities has attracted many performers since the sixties. Eleanor Antin, a visual artist, performer, and feminist, is a pioneering figure in this field. In *The King*, a 1972 video-recorded performance, the artist shows her transformation into a male persona – a king. We can see the artist facing the mirror while constructing a beard and a moustache. She wears a hat and applies some facial hair, anticipating what a group of drag kings would do in the 1980s and 1990s in the United States and Europe (Greco 2018; Halberstam 1998). The theme of *The King* persistently dominated her performances between 1972 and 1978. In this period, she embodied the King of Solana Beach, who walked and met his subjects in areas of southern California. In these performances she embodied a male character, while at the same time maintaining some feminine attributes, such as breasts. She contributed to the emergence of a new type of performance, anticipating some of the drag king performances under scrutiny in the next sections.

Summary

In contemporary art and performance studies, performance has a specific meaning referring to an artistic genre whose roots are clearly situated in the modernist avant-garde, especially Futurism and Dadaism, and in the 1950s and 1960s with the performances of artists such as John Cage, Vito Acconci, Yoko Ono, Martha Rosler, etc. (Goldberg 1979). The way in which performance is approached in social sciences is quite different. Performance is either related to theatre or to a common-sense vocabulary in which performance is a synonym of a theatrical, artistic show, or refers to specific discursive genres in different cultures. Inspired by the works of performers and social scientists presented in this section, I will consider walking practices as performances and a gender (de)construction device. My analysis focuses on the experiential, bodily transformation, and processual dimensions of walking practices.

Presentation of the setting and methods

A drag king is generally a female-assigned person at birth, who, through the mobilisation of a multi-semiotic repertoire – verbal, visual, tactile, material (makeup, prosthesis, clothing, glue) and bodily resources (they use hair cut and glued on the face to make a beard) – embodies several types of masculinities. The embodiment of masculinities is achieved in the pursuit of at least three objectives: a personal aim, which is the desire to experience gender and its plasticity; an artistic desire to be on stage and create from and through gender; and a political agenda, in that the embodiment of masculinities highlights gender's fictional character and helps to destabilise gender categories.

Drag king workshops are social occasions in which people take time to construct a male body, together with the help of some experts – people knowledgeable in gender

transformation and who perform on stage as drag kings – through the choice of a character to embody, makeup, and some exercises in which walking constitutes a distinctive locomotive feature and a topic of conversation.

The workshops are held once a month in the Rainbow House building, an LGBTQIA+² socialisation space based in Brussels; it is an architectural setting within which drag kings circulate and interact. At the entrance of the Rainbow House there is a bar, which is on the ground floor. There are meeting rooms on the upper floors. The workshop takes place on the second floor and, once it is finished, drag kings usually go down to the bar to drink with the public. From there, they can visit the most famous square of Brussels, the Grand-Place, which is two minutes' walk from the workshop site.

In drag king workshops, once makeup is complete, walking is performed by participants in the workshop space and outside on the street. In both cases, participants create an experience *with* and *on* their gender-transforming bodies and in the ways they approach space, movement, and gender. Walking can also become a topic mobilised by participants after or before the exercises, while standing in a fixed position. It is interesting to focus analytical attention on an activity such as walking because it grasps gender in its locomotive and discursive dimensions, i.e. how gender and bodily transformations are experienced through walking itself and discourse on walking. Through an ethnographic and interactional approach, we can look at practices in their temporal unfolding and have access to social norms about walking, gender, and space as they emerge in the discourses of the social actors.

Several methodological devices were used in this study. These include interviews with the participants, video recording of several activities (dressing and makeup sessions, visits to public places, performances, interviews), and gathering written and visual documents about the group's activities. This methodology has the advantage of considering walking as a *practice* per se, in its corporeal and locomotive dimensions, and as a *topic* mobilised by participants in the workshop. Moreover, it gives the possibility of grasping the duality of gender as *performance*, a practice achieved by participants in the course of their routines, and as a reminder of *performativity*; i.e. related to social norms concerning the relations participants establish between gender, walking, and space. A long-term ethnography focusing on a longitudinal vision of the activities of participants from the moment they arrive to the moment they leave is necessary to grasp the complexity of the spatio-temporal webs in which the activities are situated and intertwined. This presupposes rethinking the methods scholars use to identify temporal and spatial boundaries of activities, to follow participants in the course of their activity, and to question the participation of the ethnographer in the activities they observe.

Three types of spaces and walking can be found in the workshops.

A first type of walk takes place in the makeup space (Figure 18.1), which is transformed into a space of locomotion and experimentation (Figure 18.2) after the makeup activity. This is what I call an '*in vitro* walk': a type of walking experienced, accomplished, and lived, but also thematised and theorised with the help of an expert, Max, the leader of drag king workshops in Brussels.

A second type of walk, a 'liminal walk', takes place in the space of the staircase – a border space, which allows the transition from the experimental space of the '*in vitro* walk' and space (second floor), to the bar, located on the ground floor, where masculinity is lived with the public of the Rainbow House bar.

A third type of walk, the '*in vivo* walk', takes place outside on the path between the Rainbow House and the Grand-Place. This is a space in which participants test their new identities in silence, focusing on their own feelings, and testing and being attentive to the reactions of pedestrians.



Figure 18.1 The makeup space.



Figure 18.2 The makeup space transformed into a walking space.

The temporality which unites these three types of space and walk makes possible a transition from what I call, following the dramaturgic vocabulary of the sociologist Goffman (1959), the ‘backstage’ of gender, situated in the *in vitro* space and in the liminal space, to the ‘stage’ of gender, located in the *in vivo* space. This transition from one type of space (*in vitro*) to another (*in vivo*) constitutes new embodied and gendered subjectivities in the practices observed in the workshop.

In a theoretical framework inspired by queer linguistics (Barrett 1997; Milani 2013) and multimodal analysis (Goodwin 2006; Mondada 2016), I conceive walking as a social device producing gender and subjectivities, and as something inseparable from the spaces in which the walking is deployed. Thus, walking is not just a practice taking place in a spatial setting

or just a topic. Walking constructs and deconstructs gender; it builds the space while, at the same time, it is shaped by the plastic materiality of the space.

Walking in drag king workshops

Walking is an irreducible interdisciplinary object of study, which traverses the social sciences, humanities, and arts (Lorimer 2011). As an *interactional* resource and a *multimodal* resource, walking is finely orchestrated (Goffman 1972), intertwined with talking, and produces unexpected participation frameworks (Mondada 2014). As a *social* resource, walking is a body technique through which class, geographical origins, and gender are indexed (Mauss 1973).

In this section, walking is approached as a gendered practice through which participants experience gender and construct articulations between gender, movement, and space in three different cases: *in vitro* walking, liminal walking, and *in vivo* walking. As an experiential practice, walking will be conceived as a performance – a privileged arena for the transformation and the discovery of self.

Articulating gender, space, and walking in in vitro walking

It is in the context of *in vitro* walking that walking itself becomes a topic in Max's speeches and it is conceived as a place of experimentation of the self in quite a didactic register. The male gendered transformation of the participants is achieved and Max takes the floor to deliver some remarks about gender and walking.³

Extract 1 – Socialised as masculine or feminine

M: Max (#)

- 1 M la majorité euh qu'on catégorise au
the majority (of people) that we categorize
- 2 niveau masculin/ #les hommes/# ont gardé/ la
as masculine men have kept the
#makes a step#
- 3 démarche d'enfant/ enfin pas d'enfant mais la
child's gait well not exactly but the
- 4 démarche normale du pied #(—fin) on a un pied/#
usual move of the foot (well) we have a foot
#lift their tools #
- 5 #et alors on met le talon# d'abord et comment'
and then we put the heel first and how
#bring the heel on the floor#
- 6 la : #comment on appelle ça ah en kiné / c'est
now how do you call this in physiotherapy/ it's
#reproduces with the hand foot movement-->
- 7 d'abord le talon fin c'est vraiment la les trues de
first the heel well it's really the stuff of
- 8 la marche enfin la la logique de la marche en fait#
----->#
the walking well the the logic of the walking like

9 tandis que: on apprend aux filles justement/ à
while we teach girls precisely/ how to
10 contrecarrer vraiment à faire tout le
oppose really to do all the
11 contraire de ce que : le pied est prévu pour/ donc
opposite of what the foot is intended for/ so
12 euh avec les hauts talons alors là j'ai absolument pas
uh with high heels then I absolutely don't have
13 le choix parce qu'elles doivent poser d'abord
the choice because they (girls) must first put
14 l'avant du pied et pas du tout dans le sens de la
the tip of the foot (on the ground) and not at all in direction of
15 marche (2) et donc /là on peut aussi directement/
walking (2) and so/ then we can also directly/
16 uniquement par par le balayage et comme les
just through watching people and how
17 personnes se se s- déplacent et comment elles posent
people are moving and how they put
18 le pied et ben on peut voir si c'est masculin/ ou si
the foot on the ground and well we can see if it's masculine/ or if
19 c'est féminin/ socialisé socialisé masculine
it's feminine/ male socialized

In this excerpt we can observe a thematisation and a theorisation of the articulations between space, walk, and gender. These are accomplished by a focus on the movement of the foot on the ground, a naturalisation of the male step, and a denaturalisation of the female step.

The walk of those who are categorised as men is presented as a normal process (l. 2–4) – an evidence or a general truth which mobilises a noun group ('les hommes' l. 2) metonymically represented by the foot step (l. 2) whose walking is characterised as 'usual' (l. 4). After this preface in which Max presents the terms of the problem, they continue to speak, giving some examples in an assertive mode – 'we have a foot' (l. 4) – and focusing their speech on the foot's movements in male walking. Within this logic, Max lifts their⁴ foot and, then, they bring the heel onto the floor, reproducing, in a mechanical way, 'male walking' (l. 4–5).

If the male walk is presented as natural, the female walk is presented as a cultural and learned practice, which is carried out by first laying the toes and then the rest of the foot (l. 9–15). This practice – the initial placement of the front of the foot – is presented as an injunctive one which goes against the natural functionality of the foot in walking; i.e. 'what the foot is intended for' (l. 11).

This walking theorisation practice about gendered walking produces gender generalisations such as 'one can see by walking whether it is masculine or feminine' (l. 17–19) and it is accompanied by a subsequent degree of abstraction.

Walking is no longer a spoken practice, exemplified and reified through steps on the ground by placing the heel first if masculine or the toe if feminine. Max gestures with their hand, reproducing the movement of the foot (l. 6–8); this gives a para-medical framing to the walking practice, highlighting the scientific, naturalistic, and objectifying dimensions of his description.

Walking can also be an opportunity to find new trajectories, feel new bodily sensations, and discover some characteristics which are not necessarily planned, but which emerge as evidence. It is in this context that Alexandre expressed a desire to discover a faster walk, as demonstrated in the next excerpt:

Extract 2 – A faster walk

M: Max

A: Alexandre (£)

- 1 M mais testez un peu les les même c'est un personnage
but test a little bit the the same it's a male
a »fixed position---→
- 2 masculin d'ailleurs hein/ c'est arléquin/ il est fort/
character by the way right/ it's Harlequin/ he's strong/
3 aérien/£
aerial
---→£
- 4 A £ouais °xxx°
yeah°xxx°
£they walk--→
- 5 M et/ so:n caractère cha::nge£/£donc on voit que même
and/ his character changes/ so we see that even
a ---→£ £fixed position---→
- 6 dans le théâtre/ classique\ on va dire que [ce soit
in classical/ theatre\ we can say that it is
- 7 A [(ss ss)
- 8 M ben y a eu pense a [plein
well there was think a lot of
- 9 A [xx là j'ai envie d'aller plus vite
xx now I want to go faster
- 10 ££(1)
--→££they walk--→>
- 11 M Ah
- 12 (1)
- 13 A ouais\ quand je fais comme ça
yeah\ when I do like that
- 14 they accelerate their walking--→>

While all the participants walk in the space of the workshop, Max invites them to search for new ways to embody masculinities through the figure of Harlequin, a central character of the *commedia dell'arte*, mixing features of strength and softness (l. 1–8). Alexandre, a male-to-female trans person who participates in drag king workshops, takes the floor at line 9 to express their desire to engage in a faster walk. A careful look at their actions shows a complex multimodal trajectory accounting for their turn-taking. Starting from a fixed position (l. 1–3), they react to the first part of Max's turn by producing an affirmative particle (l. 4) and by engaging in a walking practice (l. 4) just in time to come back to a fixed position in the middle of Max's turn (l. 5). This return to a fixed position allows Alexandre to show signs

of incipient speakership, as in line 7, and to announce a new way of walking (l. 9) which will be achieved in line 14. This announcement (l. 9) projects several actions: a motion state change (a return to walking, l. 10), ratification from Max (l. 11), the construction of a complex sentence through the temporal conjunction ‘*quand*’ (when) (l. 13) relating and adding to their previous turn (l. 9), and an acceleration of their walking (l. 14).

The walking practices, as we can see in these examples, are both decontextualised, naturalised, or decomposed into micro-movements, objectified, and connected to gender norms by an expert participant, Max, standing in motionless position (Excerpt 1). Alternatively, they are experienced as an opportunity to research, improvise, and discover unplanned spatial trajectories (Excerpt 2) by novice participants in mobile configurations.

The focus on experience, creativity, and improvisation, (to find new ways to walk and to feel their body) and the ‘rehearsal aspect’ of the walking (one should test their body through walking in an ad hoc situation) are typical features of performance. In this context, the use of a video-recording device is particularly relevant as it allows the scholar to grasp the bodily and temporal dimension of gender construction practices.

Articulating gender, space, and walking in liminal walking

Following the temporality of the activities planned in the workshop, once the exercises have been achieved, drag kings can decide to go downstairs into the bar space located on the ground floor of the Rainbow House.

This is a very important moment because this transition towards the bar marks two types of border crossings. First, there is a movement away from a more intimate space of work and experimentation, which has taken place only with the members of the workshop and which involves a form of non-mixed participation. Second, there is movement towards a mixed participative space where one has to interact with unknown people or with known people maybe seeing them in drag for the first time.

In the next excerpt, one of the participants of the workshop gives an account of the transition from the *in vitro* space of walking to the *in vivo* space of the bar:

Extract 3 – Going down

B: Béatrice

1 B je pense que si le fait de descendre\ personnellement
I think that yes going down\ personally

((several lines omitted))

13 B ça débloque vraiment les les escaliers étaient un peu
It unlocks really the the stairs were a little bit
14 euh ((rire)) qu’est ce que je vais dire qu’est ce que
euh ((laughing)) what I’m going to say what
15 je vais faire et puis du moment où tu es là ben tu
I’m going to do and then since you are there well you
16 oublies en fait c’est là que tu re- rentres un peu
forget in fact it’s there that you get back into
17 dans ton personnage vraiment tu te dis c’est le
your character really you say to yourself it’s the

- 18 fait d'être face à des gens parce que si non autrement
fact to be face to people because otherwise
- 19 ça reste un jeu —fin
it's like a game/play right

In this excerpt, Béatrice gives an account of descending the staircase as a constitutive moment of the drag king experience.

In this liminal space, participants cross a border between two different types of space (the space of makeup and locomotion, and the space of the bar) and prepare a gradual entry into character.

The entry into the bar, the *in vivo* space, is a crucial moment through which participants leave the 'backstage' of gender (marked by rehearsals in which people use make up, try to walk in different ways, etc.) towards the 'stage' of gender (a scene in which one gives a presentation of themselves facing an audience).

The gradual entry into character and the passage through the liminal space of the stairs does not allow time for reflexive activity. During this space and gender transition, Béatrice doesn't stop to ask themselves questions such as 'what I can do?' or 'what I can say?' (l. 14–15) once they arrive in the bar.

A focus on moments other than the exercises – occasions in which participants talk in a spontaneous way among themselves and with me, the ethnographer – gives access to unexpected revelations about their experiences and helps to (re)construct the temporality of the gender transformation.

Articulating gender, space, and in vivo walking

In this last section dedicated to *in vivo* walking and space, we consider a moment in which walking is practiced in a public space – in the open air or in the bar. This is an important and quite mysterious phase. The moments spent at the bar are the only ones I did not record with my camera for a number of reasons.

First, I thought that because the workshops had come to an end, I no longer needed to film and to have exploitable video-recorded data. Second, it would have been very complicated to obtain consent forms from everyone present in the bar. Third, these moments of descent, both into the bar and the exit into the big square, allowed me to leave my position as researcher and change my observational status in my ethnographic encounters with the drag kings. I also wanted to experience with them the meaning of the walk; thus, I decided to dress in drag and enter the space of the bar and the big square with them.

The absence of video recordings of the practices outside of the workshop could be interpreted as an important limitation of the methodology; however, I think that all types of data gathered by observation, participation, and, of course, recording activities are equally relevant to the analysis. They nourish what the anthropologist Geertz (1973) call a 'thick description' and they open unexpected analytical spaces for the researcher. In the case of walking, I realised how walking in public spaces is a very interactional activity, because we are constantly faced with possible contact with the people we meet in the course of walking. It gives us an opportunity to modify some features of our walking and posture, to adapt our way of walking to the contingencies of the situation, and to discover the desire to walk in a certain (gendered) way. A sustained practice of the drag king workshops allows (expert) participants to develop a political consciousness of the space, of the way it is approached by men and women, and of the gendered nature of movements, gestures, and gazes deployed

there. In the case of walking drag king practices, we can say that the action of walking does not exclude a theorisation – a representation of walking as a purely corporal or political practice. Moreover, a mechanical and an anatomical vision of the body does not exclude a political consciousness of gendered issues in walking in a public space. Walking practices, just as all social practices in everyday life, are agential.

On the one hand, walking is determined by a binary gendered conception of the world – men and women do not walk in the same way – and there is indeed a gendered socialisation in walking practices, forbidding and/or favouring certain types of walk in persons assigned as ‘boys’ or ‘girls’ at birth. On the other hand, walking offers favourable grounds for the discovery of new sensations and subjectivities, of political awareness of the space and political occupation of the streets, such as in the example of drag marches.

Conclusions

This chapter focuses on performance as a theoretical device, an analytical object, and an artistic genre in social sciences and contemporary arts. I show its historical and theoretical background and its relevance for LGSS through the case of walking practices in drag king workshops.

Inspired by an approach mobilising queer linguistics, multimodal analysis, and performance studies, I focused on walking practices as a gender (de)construction device underlying bodily transformation, and the experiential and processual dimensions.

Focusing my attention on the temporality and spatiality of walking activities, I have shown the necessity for an ethnographic approach. Within this perspective, I have identified three moments and three spaces through which drag kings act during the workshop, after makeup:

- An *in vitro* space, in which walking is experienced in two different ways. As a *topic*, walking is decomposed, decontextualised, and articulated in terms of gender and space. As a *practice*, walking is lived by participants as a medium for the discovery of new types of bodily consciousness, spatial trajectories, and new, unexpected identities;
- A liminal space in which the descent of the stairs allows one to cross the threshold of a public space and to plunge into character; and
- An *in vivo* space in which participants experience through walking a new body in contact with pedestrians and a gendered consciousness of the space.

If the walk in these three spaces is not separable from a reflexive posture, then, we must specify that the levels of reflexivity at work are not the same. In the *in vitro* and liminal spaces, which I also call ‘the backstage of gender’, we are faced with a *self-centred* reflexivity, which is very focused on one’s own body and on one’s own transformation. In the *in vivo* space, which I call the ‘stage of gender’, we have a rather *relational* reflexivity, interactionally anchored, and much more oriented towards a possible encounter.

This pervasive reflexive dimension in walking practices, combined with decontextualisation, decomposition, introspection, discovery, and research operations, transforms the participants of drag king workshops into real explorers of gender and space, and theoreticians of walking practices. The focus on experimentation, experience, and the discovery of new and unexpected trajectories and selves make walking practices performances in the artistic sense of the term.

The intertwining of stage and backstage, action and representation, permanent adjustments and abstraction/decomposition of practices, self-oriented reflexivity and relational reflexivity makes walking practices close to scientific experiments, which are observable, accountable, and objective, and to artistic processes, because they are open to improvisation, experimentation, and creation. The ethnographic and analytical focus on waking practices as a gender (de)construction device allows me to consider gender through its corporeal and locomotive dimensions, as it is experienced and thematised by participants, and to consider bodies as powerful instruments which can experience new gendered personas and exciting lives.

Future directions

Several issues arise from the analysis and the methodologies proposed in this chapter.

- A *theoretical* issue: the study of performance and performativity in LGSS needs to be nourished by the important contributions feminist contemporary artists gave to a vision of gender as a performance. Performance is not just a theoretical device, a discursive genre; it is also an artistic genre raised in contemporary arts in the 1960s and 1970s in concomitance with political activism for gender equality and sexual freedom. In this perspective, we could consider artistic works as analytical material, theoretical devices social scientists could integrate in their methodological toolkit in order to give a ‘thick’ description of how gender performance works in everyday activities;
- A *methodological* issue: the combination of ethnographic methods – interviews, participant observation, audio/video recording, and collection of textual materials concerning the community under the scrutiny – multimodal approaches, and sequential analysis is something scholars could benefit from in their analysis if they want to grasp the multilayered nature of context and of social actions. In this framework, it is possible to account for different levels of analysis description: intra-turn (turn design), inter-turn (sequential level from adjacency pairs to complex sequences), speech event (a combination of sequences constituting the speech event), multimodal configurations of the action; and extra-interactional level: background knowledge relevant for the understanding of interaction and pertaining to the life of institutions in which interactions occur and to the life of participants under scrutiny;
- A *political* issue: the analysis of gender as a performance cannot be detached from political and social contexts in which actions occur. The necessity to integrate into our toolkit ethnographic approaches has been demonstrated in this chapter. Moreover, this approach calls for a *Critical EM/CA* perspectives in which the multimodal, sequential and the categorial analysis of gender in everyday routines is sensitive to political agendas orienting the life of social actors for which gender (intertwined to class, race, age, ability ...) has foremost political and existential issues.

AU: The meaning of the sentence ‘Moreover, this approach calls for ... foremost political and existential issues’ is unclear. Please rephrase.

Notes

- 1 A focus on body as a gender (de)construction device is curiously still neglected in LGSS, and in multimodality research, with some worthy exceptions (Goffman 1976; Goodwin 2006, 2015; Mondada 2011).

- 2 Each of the letters included in the acronym LGBTQIA+ refers to gender minority groups: Lesbian, Gay, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual ... It designates the plurality and the diversity of the political activism focused on gender and sexuality identities. The symbol '+' signifies that the coalition buildings between gender minorities and their allies (sometimes, we found another 'A': allies) are a historical construction, a working progress construct.
- 3 Transcription conventions in this chapter are inspired by those proposed by Mondada: https://franz.unibas.ch/fileadmin/franz/user_upload/redaktion/Mondada_conv_multimodality.pdf.
- 4 Concerning the participants in the drag king workshops, we use the neutral gendered form 'they'.

Further reading

Birdwhistell, R. (1970) *Kinesics and context: Essays on body motion communication*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

In this book, readers can find some interesting and pioneering remarks on bodily resources as a gender display and recognition device.

Goffman, E. (1976) *Gender advertisements*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

In this paper, Goffman proposes a praxelological and a multimodal vision of gender: the social asymmetry between men and women is constructed through corporeal resources depicting women as fragile and subordinate subjects.

Goodwin, H. M. (2006) *The hidden life of girls: games of stance, status, and exclusion*. Oxford: Blackwell.

In this book, Goodwin focuses on multimodal resources through which participants construct gender, power, and race in interaction.

Moerman, M. (1988) *Talking culture: Ethnography and conversation analysis*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

In this book, Moerman proposed a culturally contexted conversation analysis: a theoretical and an analytical framework in which sequential approach is combined with ethnographic perspective and cultural analysis.

Related topics

Gender diversity and the voice; gender and sexuality in discourse: semiotic and multimodal approaches; the accomplishment of gender in interaction: ethnomethodological and conversation analytic approaches to gender; multimodal constructions of feminism; feminist poststructuralism – discourse, subjectivity, the body and power.

References

- Antin, E. (1972) *The king* [video-recorded performance].
- Austin, J. L. (1962) *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Backhtin, M. (1973) *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*. Ann Arbor: Ardis.
- Barrett, R. (1997) 'The «homo-genius» Speech community', in Livia, A. and Hall, K. (eds) *Queerly phrased. Language, gender and sexuality*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 181–201.
- Barrett, R. (2017) *From drag queens to leathermen. Language, gender and gay male subcultures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bauman, R. (1975) 'Verbal art as performance', *American Anthropologist*, 77(2), pp. 290–311.
- Berger, P. L. and Luckmann, T. (1966) *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. London: Penguin Books.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991) *Language and symbolic power*. New York: Polity Press.
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of sex*. New York: Routledge.

- Butler, J. (1997) 'Performative acts and gender constitution: an essay in phenomenology and feminist theory', in Conboy, K., Medina, and Stanbury, S. (eds) *Writing on the body: Female embodiment and feminist theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 401–418.
- Butler, J. (2005) *Giving an account of oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Clemente, I. (2013) 'Conversation analysis and anthropology', in Sidnell, J. and Stivers, T. (eds) *Handbook of conversation analysis*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 688–700.
- Conquergood, D. (1989) 'Poetics, plays, process, and power: the performative turn in anthropology', *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 1(1), pp. 82–95.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991) 'Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), pp. 1241–1279.
- De Beauvoir, S. (1972) *The second sex*, trans. Parsley, H. M. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Derrida, J. (1984) *Margins of philosophy*, trans. Bass, A.. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Finnegan, R. (1998) *Oral traditions and the verbal arts. A guide to research practices*. London: Routledge.
- Garfinkel, H. (1967) *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Geertz, C. (1973) *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Goffman, E. (1959) *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Anchor Book.
- Goffman, E. (1972) *Relations in public*. New York: Penguin.
- Goffman, E. (1976) *Gender advertisements*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.
- Goldberg, R. L. (1979) *Performance art: from futurism to the present*. New York: Thames & Hudson.
- Goodwin, C. (2017) *Co-operative action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goodwin, H. M. (1990) *He-said-she-said: talk as a social organization among black children*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Goodwin, H. M. (2006) *The hidden life of girls: games of stance, status, and exclusion*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Goodwin, H. M. (2015) 'A care-full look at language, gender and embodied intimacy', in Allyson, J. (ed) *Shifting visions: gender and discourses*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, pp. 27–48.
- Greco, L. (2018) *Dans Les Coulisses Du Genre, La Fabrication De Soi dans les Ateliers Drag King*. Limoges: Lambert Lucas.
- Halberstam, J. (1998) *Female masculinity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Heritage, J. (1984) *Garfinkel and ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hopper, R. (ed) (1990) 'Ethnography and conversation analysis after *Talking Culture*', *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 24(1–4), pp. 161–171.
- Hymes, D. (1981) *'In Vain I Tried to Tell You': Essays in native american ethnopoetics*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Jones, A. (1998) *Body art. Performing the subject*. Minnesota: Minnesota University Press.
- Keenan-Ochs, E. (1974) 'Norm-makers, norm-breakers: uses of speech by men and women in a Malagasy community', in Bauman, R. and Sherzer, J. (eds) *Explorations in the ethnography of speaking*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 125–143.
- Kessler, S. and McKenna, W. (1978) *Gender. An ethnomethodological approach*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kulick, D. (2005) 'The importance of what gets left out', *Discourse Studies*, 7(4–5), pp. 615–624.
- Lorimer, H. (2011) 'Walking: new forms and spaces for studies of walking', in Cresswell, T. and Merriman, P. (eds) *Geographies of mobilities: practices, spaces, subjects*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 19–34.
- Mauss, M. (1973) 'Techniques of the body', *Economy and Society*, 2(1), pp. 70–88.
- Maynard, D. W. (2003) *Bad news, good news. Conversational order in everyday talk and clinical settings*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Milani, T. (2013) 'Expanding the queer linguistic scene. Multimodality, space and sexuality at a South African university', *Journal of Language and Sexuality*, 2(2), pp. 206–234.

- Moerman, M. (1988) *Talking culture. Ethnography and conversation analysis*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Mondada, L. (2011) 'Le genre en action: la catégorisation des locuteurs comme production située des participants dans l'interaction', in Duchêne, A. and Moïse, C. (eds) *Langage, genre et sexualités*. Québec: Editions Nota Bene, pp. 115–143.
- Mondada, L. (2014) 'Bodies in action: multimodal analysis of walking and talking', *Language and Dialogue*, 4–3(3), pp. 357–403.
- Mondada, L. (2016) 'Challenges of multimodality: language and the body in social interaction', *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 20(3), pp. 336–366.
- Newton, E. (1972) *Mother camp: female impersonators in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rivière, J. (1929) 'Womanliness as Masquerade', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 10, pp. 303–313.
- Schechner, R. (2006) *Performance studies: an introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1997) 'Whose text? Whose context?', *Discourse and Society*, 8(2), pp. 165–187.
- Schneider, R. (1997) *The explicit body in performance*. New York: Routledge.
- Sormani, P., Carbone, G., and Gisler, P. (eds) (2018) *Practicing art/science experiments in an emerging field*. New York: Routledge.
- Speer, S. A. and Stokoe, E. (eds) (2011) *Conversation and gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wetherell, M. (1998) 'Positioning and interpretative repertoires: conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue', *Discourse and Society*, 9(3), pp. 387–412.