The Aesthetic of Drag
Author(s): DANIEL HARRIS
Source: Salmagundi, No. 108 (Fall 1995), pp. 62-74
Published by: Skidmore College
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40548841
Accessed: 10-01-2017 01:06 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://about.jstor.org/terms

Skidmore College is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to Salmagundi
The Aesthetic of Drag

BY DANIEL HARRIS

While many people may believe that the primary purpose of drag is to enable men to “pass” as women, verisimilitude has never been the guiding aesthetic principle at work when gay men dress up as bearded nuns on roller skates, topless baton twirlers with rhinestone pasties, or whorish prom queens in fuck-me pumps and bee-hive hair-dos. Only in a minority of cases is naturalism the gay man’s first consideration when he chooses the squalid frocks and sensible shoes of dowdy frumps or the resplendent sequinned gowns and turkey-feather boas of femmes fatales, outlandish get-ups that bear only a vague resemblance to what women really wear in their daily lives.

In the popular imagination, drag is often mistakenly conflated with transvestitism. Even in much of the scholarship on the subject, the two phenomena are never sufficiently distinguished but are indiscriminately lumped together, romanticized by the politically correct academic in particular as aspects of the same fashionable heresy. This approach flies in the face of the fact that they are entirely dissimilar and, in many ways, diametrically opposite. Suffused with self-deprecating irony, drag is a farcical prank, a laughable hoax for Halloween, while transvestitism is the ultimate swindle, the calculated imposture of an accomplished illusionist who undertakes a desperately earnest act of sexual self-effacement. The stylistic ideal of the transvestite, who attempts to blend seamlessly into the general public, is the understated look of the cautious centrist who prefers unobtrusive clothing that is tastefully subdued and unassertive and there-
The Aesthetic of Drag

fore unlikely to draw attention to the inevitable imperfections of his disguise, his suspiciously masculine jaw, husky voice, and square shoulders.

The stylistic ideal of the drag queen, on the other hand, is screaming vulgarity, the overstated look of the balloon-breasted tramp in the leopard-skin micro-mini skirt who strives to be loud, tawdry, and cheap. The transvestite, in short, tries to tone it down; the drag queen, to tone it up. Unlike the lone fetishist who, in an effort to "pass," squeezes into corsets and tapes his breasts together to create the illusion of cleavage, the drag queen doesn't flee from his gender but actually incorporates it into his costume. Nor does he fear disclosure as the transvestite does; he invites it. A gesture of electrifying revelation is often central to the comedy of his strapless ball gowns, bulging panty hose, and plunging necklines: the startling exposure of the prosthetic breasts, the impulsive removal of the wig, or even more brazen acts of exhibitionism, as in the time-honored drag convention of the floor-length cape which, like a flasher's raincoat, can be flung dramatically open to reveal the flat-chested and scantily clad male body beneath.

While the styles of transvestites have evolved in strict accordance with the seasonal fluctuations of women's fashions, the aesthetic of drag has evolved according to an entirely different set of historical and political factors which have increasingly distorted its relation to women's clothing, thus contributing to its high degree of stylization. Far from being simply a debased form of female attire, drag is an autonomous fashion phenomenon. Its "fright" wigs, fringed bustiers, and eight-inch platform heels look as surrealistic as they do in part because drag originally took its cue, not from the streets but from the stage, from the gaudy, over-dressed fashions of the actresses and singers who starred in minstrel shows and vaudeville, the two major varieties of mass entertainment in which female impersonation flourished. A basic atmospheric fact pertaining to the theater, to cavernous auditoriums, still conditions its appearance: the costumes of early female impersonators, like Liberace's shimmering jumpsuits and jewel-encrusted smoking jackets, were meant to be viewed from a distance under the glare of the footlights and thus were designed to sparkle with blinding flashes of light that made the performer herself seem literally radiant, framed in a dazzling halo. Just as performers had to
project in order to be heard in the furthest corners of echoing theaters with lousy acoustics and balconies at dizzying altitudes, so they had to wear clothing that would make them stand out for spectators seated hundreds of feet away. Long after drag moved off of the stage and onto the streets, the most popular fabrics that men use for their costumes come straight out of the wardrobes of Central Casting, the sequins, rhinestones, satins, and lamés that capture and intensify the light, contributing to the drag queen's glittering aura. The stylized appearance of drag is in part the result of interjecting theatrical costumes into real-world situations, an enormous displacement of context that makes the drag queen, in her grease paint and ostrich plumes, a perpetual refugee, a wandering expatriate in search of her native homeland, the dinner theaters in Las Vegas and the burlesque palaces on Broadway.

But an even more important factor has complicated the relation of drag to the actual clothing of women. Since the first recorded drag balls in the nineteenth century, its primary viewers have always consisted of disproportionate numbers of idle curiosity seekers anxious to experience first-hand the forbidden pleasures of decadent urban nightlife. Embedded within the aesthetic of drag is the sensibility of the heterosexual tourists who constituted the first dumbstruck audiences for which drag queens camped it up with slinky boas and peacock fans, succumbing to the self-dramatizing impulse of turning themselves into theater for voyeuristic onlookers. If it is possible to borrow from feminist theory the metaphor of the so-called "male gaze," the "gaze" of drag is a heterosexual gaze. In fact, it is more like a "gawk" than a gaze, the gawk of the slumming sightseer whose uninformed preconceptions about homosexuality gay men brought vividly to life in a strange act of self-exoticization achieved through clouds of luscious marabou feathers, immense trailing veils, and billowing layers of petticoats and flounces. Far from being a literal imitation of women's clothing, drag was the stylized way that the marginalized members of an emerging subculture sought to present themselves to the mainstream. Pandering to heterosexuals' often callow myths about gay men, the denizens of this beguiling underworld exaggerated the distance and incommensurability between the straight viewer and the ostentatious drag queen whose feathered headdresses, fluttering scarves, and ruffled parasols were the physical embodiment of the audience's
alienation from this inconceivably romantic and unfamiliar world. The aesthetic of drag is the concrete manifestation of the straight audience’s fascinated revulsion from this seamy demimonde whose unthreatening remoteness the drag queen magnified in order to keep these two worlds reassuringly separate.

This exhibitionistic delight in the lurid artificiality of diaphanous capes, rhinestone tiaras, and elbow-length evening gloves also presupposes an entirely different sort of gaze than that of the heterosexual gawker, a gaze that involves, not the naked eye, but the lens of a camera. The drag queen’s strangely agitated gestures and grotesque facial expressions make sense only when understood as part of a fantasy central to the whole enterprise of dressing up: that he is not just a woman but a celebrity, a great actress greeting her fans, extending her arms in a warm, maternal embrace of gratitude or hurling them triumphantly into the air. Like Divine in *Female Trouble*, he prims and preens in a frenzied dumb show of stage-struck poses that presume the presence of an audience that functions as one of the hidden subtexts of drag, its second gaze: the penetrating scrutiny of the media, the jostling throng of invisible paparazzi snapping away with their magnesium-flash cameras as the imaginary star runs the gauntlet of her hysterical admirers, blowing sloppy kisses and cradling votive offerings of enormous floral bouquets. In gestures reminiscent of performers basking in the homage of a standing ovation, the drag queen lives out our deepening obsession with Hollywood and Broadway, a religion that assumes almost fanatical proportions in the strange, ventrilo-quistic rites of lipsynching and the reverential impersonations of such prima donnas as Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, and Marlene Dietrich.

Modern drag is thus rooted in the culture of mass celebrity, which did not exist before the twentieth century. It is an eccentric by-product of our increasingly intense involvement with popular entertainment, an obsession created by explosive developments in communications. The cross-dresser’s gaudy aesthetic, with its exotic plumage, gauzy veils, and vampish cigarette holders, is stimulated by television and film, the two mass media that sustain the glamor industry that lies at the very heart of drag, which presupposes the existence of unprecedentedly vast audiences fixated on a limited pantheon of superstars, who are thus invested with a mystique far more powerful than that of any celebrity in the past. Through-
out most of history, cross-dressers imitated women’s clothing in general. In the course of the twentieth century, however, drag became something much more specific and complex, not the imitation of a woman, any woman, but an imitation of the woman, the star, the Mae Wests, Judy Garlands, and Marilyn Monroes whose glamorous auras as legendary icons have been incorporated into the aesthetic of drag. Had the publicity apparatus not evolved into the myth-making machine that it has become, the aesthetic of drag would almost certainly have been more naturalistic, closer in appearance to the dresses of the transvestite, taking as its models the clothing that ordinary women wear on the streets rather than the sumptuous raiments that cinematic goddesses wear on the screen.

The influence of the culture of mass celebrity on the aesthetic of drag has been intensified by developments within the fashion mainstream, where rigid differences between men’s and women’s clothing are collapsing into unisex styles that, while liberating women from the inconvenience of traditionally feminine outfits, are subtly eroding the very conditions that make drag possible. In all but the most formal contexts, the distinctions in clothing between the sexes have become so amorphous, so ill-defined, that it is almost impossible to do drag of contemporary women’s daily wear, which is virtually identical in appearance to men’s clothing, consisting of such genderless staples as blue jeans, t-shirts, leather jackets, sweat shirts, khaki pants, back packs, baseball caps, and tennis shoes. The entire aesthetic of drag has thus been thrown into a state of crisis by the drift toward androgyny in modern fashion where the emergence of a single emasculated prototype for both men’s and women’s clothing is starving drag of its customary sources of inspiration.

In order to sustain her own precarious illusion of caricatured femininity, the drag queen must therefore reject the interchangeable fashions of the present and seek out styles of dress in which the differences between the sexes are more clearly demarcated. As a result, drag is haunted by nostalgia, by a homesick longing to roll back the leveling developments in men’s and women’s clothing that are fueling the retrospective orgies of dated fashions that form the basis of the whole look of contemporary drag. Dismissing the drearily neutered sporting wear of a society in which both sexes now dress in the drag-unfriendly costumes of jeans and corduroys, gay men resurrect, in a spirit of dizzy antiquarianism,
The aesthetic of drag also underwent enormous changes after the Stonewall riots in 1969 when a handful of grieving drag queens mourning the death of Judy Garland struck back against an inept group of policemen who bungled their attempt to raid a popular gay bar. In the wake of this historic brawl, drag was embraced by large sectors of the gay community as the ceremonial costume of the new militant homosexual and thus the uniform of the burgeoning gay rights movement, which suddenly invested an innocuous camp pastime with enormous ideological significance. As one of the founding members of STAR, the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, once reminisced, drag queens were in “the vanguard of the revolution . . . the front liners [who] didn’t take no shit from nobody.” This statement bristles with the spirit of defiance that made post-Stonewall
drag something more than just a gimmicky spoof but an improbable symbol of our dissident heritage and a provocative challenge to the status quo. After 1969, drag became the ultimate impersonation, the impersonation of the female impersonators at Stonewall who were exalted into subcultural Freedom Fighters. Going out in public in women's clothing was transformed into an act of solidarity, a form of civil disobedience that celebrated the gutsiness of a new gay rights heroine, the warrior drag queen.

The flaming assertiveness of this quasi-militaristic figure ironically began to masculinize a hyper-feminine aesthetic, exaggerating its already quite extravagant mannerisms. The politicizing of drag had a concrete visual impact on the nature of the costumes men began to wear as they came to see themselves as saber-rattling cross-dressers, insurgents in the trenches who proudly displayed hairy legs, hairy chests, hairy faces, often appearing with neither blouses nor boobs in the surrealistic, fuck-you drag of a figure that constituted a bizarre hybrid, half-transvestite, half-man. The aesthetic of self-exoticization with which gay men once hammed it up in order to seduce straight gawkers gave way to the aesthetic of the outrageous, a style that actively strives to talk back and antagonize, assaulting and intimidating as vigorously as older forms of drag once mystified and titillated. As a camp institution was elevated into a vehicle for gay rights, men began to subvert the studied loveliness of the old-fashioned drag queen's beguiling get-ups, her faded sables, yellowing ermines, foot-long cigarette holders, and trains of ruffled fou-fou, and cultivated instead a look of angry hideousness, at once abrasive and confrontational. Drag took on an increasingly unfriendly appearance, a belligerent, almost gladiatorial look best seen in a uniquely modern form of drag popular at marches and demonstrations, the bearded nun in a sequinned habit, clown-white face, and fishnet stockings shrieking obscenities like a snarling pit bull straining at her leash.

Even the facial expressions of drag queens changed in the aftermath of Stonewall. The ecstatic, open-mouthed look of the heavy-lidded goddess languorously licking her lips gave way to the famous drag screech which involves a ferocious baring of the fangs, as if the drag queen, who often seems to be frozen mid-scream like a Francis Bacon painting, were poised to attack her admirers rather than to embrace them, to frighten
them with predatory growls and menacing glares. Politics have now become so integral to the look of drag that aesthetic terms actually have political meanings, as in the word that the drag queen still uses to describe how she looks when she is wearing her dress, namely, “fabulous,” an expression that ostensibly refers to her appearance but that in fact refers to her rising sense of political empowerment. To look “fabulous” is to feel “fabulous.” It is the rallying cry of the effeminate homosexual and, while it would seem to refer to the success and attractiveness of his costume, it in fact has nothing whatsoever to do with his appearance but is an entirely ideological expression signifying his full self-acceptance in the face of social bigotry.

While Stonewall gave new political meaning to what was previously merely the quaint folk custom of an illicit underworld, gay liberation also made drag more problematic by masculinizing the subculture, which now sought to purge itself of effeminate mannerisms and adopt instead the implausible virility of the ersatz cowboy in chaps and stetson or the icy detachment of the lowering marine in army fatigues and reflective glasses. Although many gay men began to espouse drag as their own personal credo, touting its medicinal properties as a vehicle for “consciousness-raising,” dressing up in women’s clothing nonetheless challenged the normalized culture of humorless machismo that developed in the post-Stonewall era, which produced its own peculiar sort of drag, the cowboy boots and bomber jackets of the new paramilitary G.I. Joes who set the fashion agenda during the disco era.

If Stonewall radicalized drag, the new cult of masculinity had the opposite effect; it introduced into men’s costumes an entirely incompatible element, the smirking sarcasm of the self-conscious clone whose newfound fear of compromising his manliness clashed with the political belligerence of the warrior drag queen. The rise of the gay ghetto produced an aesthetic that reeks of condescension and embarrassment, of the blushing awkwardness of the new mainstream homosexual who, frightened by the negative implications of drag, has transformed it into a howling travesty. Unable to experience the kittenish delight in femininity that men used to bring to their outfits, assimilated gay men now deck themselves out in the tasteless scarecrow drag of rainbow-colored bee-hive wigs, earrings made out of Christmas tree bulbs, hats made out of hubcaps, and breasts
as large as watermelons. This new breed of drag queen is so ambivalent about the stereotypically effeminate behavior of the old-style swish that he attempts to deflate his costume, turning it into a knee-slapping farce, undercutting it with such things as towering ancien regime wigs or tits made out of plastic funnels containing flashing lights. The already tenuous relation of drag to women's clothing became significantly more tenuous as men lampooned what they viewed as a contemptible charade by wearing the wacky costumes of goosestepping drum majorettes, vengeful Sissy Spaseks in blood-soaked prom dresses, or murderous Joan Crawfords brandishing coat hangers and chasing terrified Christinas in knee socks and pinafores.

Two opposite impulses, one from the left, the other from the right, the one boldly iconoclastic, the other timidly conformist, have thus ironically had the same effect on the aesthetic of drag. On the one hand, the romance of the drag queen as the bottle-throwing insurrectionist in four-inch spikes and laddered stockings clobbering cops with bar stools distorted the relation of drag to women's clothing by contributing to the rage that now seethes in men's outfits, the undercurrents of indignation that poisoned the ethereal daintiness of the old drag queen, who was meant to be both absurd and enticing rather than contemptuous. On the other hand, a reactionary impulse stemming from the new normalized culture of wholesome masculinity has produced a style of hyperventilating silliness that provides many homosexuals with comic insulation from the curse of effeminacy. Drag has become part of a ritual of disownment in which we disassociate ourselves from the effeminate behavior of the past through a public act of disavowal, a repudiation of the old stigmatized costumes of gay oppression which we burn in effigy, lynching our predecessors in absentia. Drag queens preserve their masculinity by making a willful effort to sabotage the transformative illusion of drag, to make certain that its basic purpose, to give them the appearance of women, doesn't work, that it is discredited, punctured, invalidated, that the wearer is encased in a protective sheathe of irony. Drag is suddenly at war with itself, and the truculent appearance of the warrior drag queen has become even stranger, more abrasive, less pretty. Racked by these internal divisions, drag has once and for all been released from the burden of verisimilitude to become an hallucinogenic collage of mismatched hand-me-downs and tattered
The Aesthetic of Drag

rejects, of trinkets and gewgaws whose dazzling meretriciousness has widened the gap between drag and women’s fashions.

After the 1960s, ideology also tightened its grip on the aesthetic of drag when gay men began to use their costumes to reevaluate the whole concept of normality and thus carry out a crucial part of the cross-dresser’s agenda: revenge. Contemporary drag performs a wicked dissection of the tastes of the dominant culture and thus functions as one of the weapons in the modern homosexual’s arsenal of resistance against the homophobia that has condemned him to the marginalized status of an outcast, a persona non grata in a society dominated by a highly prescriptive standard of respectable behavior. Just as modern drag is haunted by nostalgia, so it is suffused with kitsch, with the bitch flips and fringed cropped tops of a culture whose intolerance of difference the drag queen gleefully derides by incorporating into her costumes the tackiness of a world of asphyxiating conventionality. When gay men design their costumes, they rifle through the closets of Middle America in search of the fashion atrocities for which drag provides an exhaustively comprehensive showcase, a kind of perma-press, ready-to-wear encyclopedia of JAPishness, a living archive of the egregious tastes of the homosexual’s bigoted opponents.

The drag queen catalogues these fashion faux pas with a connoisseur’s relish for the minutia of suburban shabbiness, creating on her own person a scathing montage of Americana, of gold slippers, polyester pants suits, leather bolero jackets, green monkey muffs, and leopard-skin stretch stirrup pants. Drag involves a ritual descent of the proverbial taste-makers of our society, gay men, into the morass of American vulgarity where we remake ourselves into fun-house-mirror images of everyone from mall rats to trailer trash, from Moral Majoritarians to Miami socialites. If traditional forms of drag tended to dress upscale, aiming to achieve the glamor and elegance of the inaccessibly remote celebrity, more contemporary forms of drag dress downscale, revolving around the absence of glamor and elegance, around the barbaric and the crude, the beer-can curlers, bunnie bedroom slippers, and ratty negligees of bedraggled housewives. It is perhaps because kitsch plays such an important political function in the aesthetic of contemporary drag that many feminists mistakenly believe that drag queens are misogynistic, when in fact they are taunting, not women in particular but complacent
heterosexuals in general. The drag queen orchestrates a brilliant stylistic reprisal against the leisure-suited chauvinists sitting in the naugahyde la-z-boys beneath the velvet paintings, exacting an eye for an eye, a clutch purse for a clingy tube top.

This new satiric function of drag marks a clever inversion of the entire aesthetic of dressing up. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, drag embodied the way gay men were perceived by the heterosexual curiosity seekers who pressed their noses up against the glass, feasting their eyes on the rare species of marine life that drifted about in their scarves and veils like mysterious deep-sea creatures, fully aware of the tourists staring into this glass house with no exit, this tropical aquarium that was all windows and no doors. But whereas the drag queen was accustomed to being looked at, she has now begun to look back, to gawk in turn, to maliciously appraise the preposterous costumes of the very pillars of our society, who suddenly find themselves the subject of the same patronizing scrutiny they once directed at gay men. No longer does the drag queen accept unquestioningly the role of the exotic outcast, the ultimate exile, the fascinating specimen who staged an elaborate pageant dramatizing her foreignness. Instead, she has now turned the tables and treats the heterosexual world, the ostensible insiders, as freaks and monstrosities. The aesthetic of drag has thus come full circle so that the traditional spectator of drag, the heterosexual, becomes its new subject and the drag queen herself becomes the source of the “gaze,” the one gawking at the circus sideshows, the stodgy and respectable members of the mainstream whom gay men interpret as the real deviants, the real perverts, the ones most deserving of being ogled and spied on.

If the subject of drag has changed, so has its primary audience. Whereas the spectators of drag used to include large numbers of straight people, they now consist predominantly of other gay men who actively strive to exclude the gawkers, the “lookie Lous,” as they are called, who are invariably vilified in the gay media as prurient witnesses of a spectacle some gay activists would prefer to keep in-house, under wraps, among friends. Drag has become a largely subcultural rite intended for a limited band of the initiated who jealously insist on drawing the curtains and tossing out the riff-raff, the heterosexual snoops whose morbid curiosity gay men once welcomed but that they now find politically suspect, tainted
The Aesthetic of Drag  
by homophobia, by ghoulish voyeurism. In our efforts to transform a ritual that at one time embraced members of the mainstream, indeed insisted on their presence, into an event that appeals solely to the sisters of the sorority, we have transformed drag into a sheltered festival cut off from society at large, hidden from the prying eyes of the gate crashers who seek to participate in a ceremony that we hold hostage in the snug, insular world of the ghetto. Thus, as gay culture in general becomes more open, drag has ironically gone back into the closet.

This change of audience has proven to be one of the most important factors in the evolution of the aesthetic of drag. When the old-style drag queen was deprived of the audience that once goaded her on to devise ever more extravagant images of the exotic nature of gay life, she was drafted into serving the mundane function of subcultural hygiene, providing a way of disinfecting ourselves of effeminate stereotypes and simultaneously caricaturing the world of prescriptive normality. The result is that, while the aesthetic of drag was in part originally formulated as an aphrodisiac, a means of arousing the tourist with sexually alluring images of a mythic world of lush sensuality, it has now been emptied of its erotic content and is used instead as a form of first aid, of therapy, of triage for the survivors, the fag-bashed victims emerging shell-shocked out of the wreckage of the homophobic culture that is only slowly granting us our basic civil rights. The homosexual no longer uses drag for purposes of self-exoticization because he is addressing other homosexuals who do not respond erotically to his feminine appearance, to the heavily mascara-ed goo-goo eyes that he once fluttered at straight men, who were enthralled by these mooney, lovelorn overtures. As the relation between the man in drag and his audience changes from that of an insider addressing an aroused outsider to that of an insider addressing another unexcited insider, drag is neutered, stripped of its sexual appeal, of its coquettishness, becoming instead a ridiculous travesty staged by lumbering gym queens teetering on stiletto heels.

But even as drag is de-eroticized, it paradoxically becomes more obscene. Men now wear such sexually explicit outfits as ball gowns with prosthetic breasts sewn on to the outside of the dresses, black nighties with gigantic strap-on dildos, and transparent vinyl mini-skirts that reveal lacy panties with strategic rips and telltale stains suggestive of deflowerment.
The less drag is meant to allure, the bawdier it becomes, with men openly massaging their breasts, squeezing the bulges of their g-strings, sticking out their asses and tongues like porn stars in heat, and lying spread-eagle on their backs on parade routes with their helium heels flung into the air and their virginal prom dresses thrown over their heads. Far from seeking to arouse viewers, the contemporary drag queen is in fact precluding this very possibility from the outset through an absurd sexual demonstrativeness that parodies the erotic content of old styles of drag, gutting them of their glamor and thus ensuring that they evoke, not hard-ons, but guffaws, belly laughs and snickers. Bawdiness destroys eroticism. It is the new prophylactic of drag.

Through the low comedy of this new aesthetic, we have initiated a kind of subcultural reclamation project in which we attempt to reappropriate a ritual that arose in conjunction with straight people but that we now treat as the exclusive property of gay men. By undermining the aesthetic of self-exoticization that provided the very foundation of modern drag, we are snatching it out of the hands of the tourists whom we once tantalized but whom we now spurn, repelling them with the vulgarity of drag rather than seducing them with its loveliness.

Note
1 The distinction between drag and women's clothing also derives from the fact that the earliest public forms of drag were linked with types of entertainment that blunted its subversive impact at the same time that they increased its irresistibly vulgar panache. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the illegality of cross-dressing gave rise to ingenious schemes to outwit public authorities by disguising such gatherings as masquerades or Mardi Gras-like carnivals, acceptable public events in which the costumes were already stylized, thus providing protective camouflage for those guests who wanted to appear in dresses. The heavily mannered aesthetic of drag thus emerged out of a politically expedient melting pot of Halloween parties and Bourbon Street parades, drunken festivals whose unorthodox dress codes left a permanently flamboyant mark on an illicit activity for which they provided a kind of alibi, a legal fiction, lending it a spurious air of respectability. Even today, the ruse of misclassifying drag under the rubric of masquerades continues to influence men's outfits, as can be seen in the highly conventionalized typology of permissible period costumes that many people still wear at major gay celebrations where they impersonate such sanitized drag heroines as Spanish señoritas in mantillas, marcelled flappers, Queen Elizabeths, Madame Pompadours, and Marie Antoinettes. The result is that drag is haunted by a kind of phoney antiquarianism, a tendency to recreate anachronistic styles of vintage clothing.