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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

**PERFORMANCE BEYOND THE BINARY:  
TOWARDS AN INTERSECTIONAL AND INTERSEXUAL THEATRICAL  
DISCOURSE**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

by

**Josh Orlando**

June 2017

The Thesis of Josh Orlando  
is approved:

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Professor Patty Gallagher, Chair

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Professor Daniel Scheie

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Professor Brandin Barón-  
Nusbaum

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Tyrus Miller  
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Students

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## **Foreword**

Mock, Janet (@janetmock). “These hierarchies of respectability that generations of feminists have internalized will not save us from patriarchy.” 9 May 2016, 6:42 PM. Tweet.

## **Abstract**

### *Performance Beyond The Binary:*

#### *Towards An Intersectional And Intersexual Theatrical Discourse*

My research is rooted in post-structural feminist, intersectional, and queer theories. This thesis seeks to ignite a discursive dialogue about the sociopolitical reinforcement of the western gender binary in the theater. By drawing on political theories that highlight gender as an anti-essentialist product of culture (a social construct), I seek to discuss my methodologies of adapting these theories for the stage. From a post-structural view, gender is a network reinforced by larger institutional systems. After discussing the many institutions that which contribute to the preservation of the gender binary, I will offer ‘intersexuality’ (as reappropriated from its medical etymology) as a discursive intersectional approach to theater. I am interested in theater’s role in the production of identity and of new meaning. In analyzing forms of transgender and gender variant resistance on stage, I hope to posit theater as an organizer of political resistance off stage. Ultimately I will provide case studies from Santa Cruz Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and from UCSC’s *The Odyssey*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *Zoot Suit*, that employed subversive artistic choices in order to navigate the gender binary. Expounding on techniques like genderswap casting, nonbinary acting, and cross-gender casting, I assert that artists who take an intersectional and intersexual approach when representing gender on stage, can mobilize audiences to think more critically about gender beyond the binary off stage.

## **Introduction: The Western Gender Binary**

Western society has codified in cultural terms what it means to be a woman or a man. The sociopolitical reinforcement of gender roles in the west is sustained through interdependent systems of oppression under a patriarchal society (a society in which men retain authority). Underpinning years of epistemology and discourse, the west has established gender in a dichotomy composed of mutually exclusive and oppositional categories: woman and man. When I refer to the ‘western’ gender binary I am invoking both Eurocentric and North American cultural systems of knowledge. Gender has manifested cross-culturally around the world, but this thesis will focus on the implications of gender under western influences. Utilizing post-structural western theories of knowledge, I will critique gender culture in the west. I want to acknowledge the intimate ways that gender both liberates and oppresses different people in the west. French sociological researcher Laurence Roulleau-Berger encourages a post-western approach to knowledge in order to prevent the perpetuation of western empiricism, an epistemic injustice. “Post-westernism can produce a plural and dynamic vision of the world experienced” (Roulleau-Berger 17). Roulleau-Berger warns us of the dangers in producing binary visions of the world experienced (Ibid). I evoke the west with the gender binary to acknowledge the history of Eurocentric notions of western elitism (Ibid). After the colonization of the west, the European gender binary became cultural hegemony that was amplified through globalization (Roulleau-Berger 18). In fact, Sandra Laframboise and Michael

Anhorn, along with many indigenous Native American cultures had previously recognized more than two genders (Laframboise and Anhorn 2008). These indigenous forms of gender preceded the western gender binary in these same regions but have faced erasure and or assimilation post-colonization (Ibid). Though the gender binary presupposes that all individuals either are or should be categorically gendered, there is contemporary resistance both in the U.S. and abroad.

“I know intimately what it feels like to crave representation and validation”, writes Janet Mock, a black transgender author, activist and TV host. “To see your life reflected in someone who speaks deeply to whom you know yourself to be, echoes your reality, and instills you with possibility. That mirror wasn’t accessible to me growing up” (Mock xvi). In *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More*, Janet Mock shares my frustration with both historical and contemporary representations of gender in popular art and media. Regarding visibility, white and cis-heteronormative perspectives dominate popular culture.

#### “Words, Words, Words”: Some Preliminary Definitions

Some people experience gender between or beyond the categories that they were assigned. What we call ‘transgender’ (or trans) in the west is an umbrella term referring to anyone whose gender identity was not assigned to them at birth (Mock xi). Trans identity is conceptualized in relation to its cis-counterpart. ‘Cis’ people do identify with the gender assigned to them at birth and are the political majority in the west (Ibid). ‘Cissexism’ or ‘cisnormativity’ is the notion that everyone is or should identify with the gender assigned to them at birth (Eisner 22). ‘Gender-

nonconformity' is the refusal to assimilate to normative gender expectations. When it comes to gender variance, nonconformity lacks representation because theater is subject to the same power dynamics that reproduce "gender policing" (the systematic and cultural reinforcement of gender norms, customs, and practices).

Much of the feminist discourse on gender in theater still stems from a cisgender framework. Representation offers validation to those who see themselves in both the bodies of the actors and in the minds of the characters. We have a profound responsibility as artists with a platform to represent diverse bodies and narratives across and beyond gender spectrums. If theater aims to represent the communities to whom it speaks, it must constantly push gender boundaries to accommodate a gender boundary pushing society. Shifting attitudes about gender identity are indicative of a queer movement- and specifically one that centers the discourse on gender beyond the binary.

Bisexual feminist and genderqueer activist, writer, and researcher Shiri Eisner explains contemporary views on gender, "In terms of identity, not everyone identifies as either a man or a woman. Many people identify as both, neither, or something completely different" (Eisner 238). There have always been individuals in society who push gender boundaries, but historical erasure has illusioned 'trans' into a falsely modern phenomena.

## I. Feminisms in Theater

### Gender Bending and Feminist Theater: A Brief History

Gender traversing narratives have always been present in theater. By forcing us to engage critically, theater exposes gender boundaries and encourages us to resist them. However, the ways in which an audience engages with these gender narratives is in a constant flux, contingent on the culture that the audience is coming from. For example, the misogyny of Shakespeare's culture produced a theater that featured cis men cross-dressing as cis women, but these were not trans narratives. *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves* is a resource book for the transgender community. In a section on art and culture, contributors like Lazlo Pearlman, Jae DK Szeszycki-Truesdell, and Kestryl Cael Lowrey highlight and critique mainstream representations of transgender in the arts. Historical examples like "The second-century B.C.E. sculpture, *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*, the cross-dressed characters of Shakespeare's sixteenth-century English comedies, and Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel *Orlando...*" have been critiqued for their shortcomings. Even contemporary trans representation is often criticized by trans people. "Gender traversal and intersection of art and performance are framed as cross-dressing or symbolism, and not as a reflection or representation of transgender experience or identity" (Erickson-Schroth 537). The critique of the mainstream transgender narratives in performance focuses on the ways in which these narratives only appeal to cis audiences. Theater that is about transcending gender should draw inspiration from the actual bodies who have done it rather than tokenizing the experience from a cisgender framework.

The second-wave feminist movement in theater of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s sought the inclusion of women but still from the perspective of a structured binary. Theater historian, professor, and feminist performance theorist Charlotte Canning traces the history of feminist theater to point out that “many of the theaters and communities were formulated through the similarity of the experiences of white, middle-class women” (Canning 203). Second-wave feminism lasted from the early 1960s to the present and centers on the experiences of the majority of cis white women (Ibid). Canning argues that the feminist movement in theater was later fractured by experiences that seemed to highlight women’s differences rather than their similarities (Canning 204). Women began voicing their experiences as racial and or sexual minorities. Because feminism initially focused on the qualities that united women, minorities like women of color and queer women were left out of the discourse until they fought for inclusion. Queer theorist Judith Butler argued that early feminism failed to acknowledge that “the category of ‘woman’ is normative and exclusionary and is invoked with the unmarked dimensions of class and racial privilege intact” (Butler 14). These concerns foreshadowed the future of an intersectional movement that could “form coalitions across those differences and make them the base for the means of productive change” (Canning 204).

Women in theater sought inclusion in ways that trans and gender variant people seek inclusion today. By engaging with and critiquing cis feminisms of the past, we’re able to broaden our definitions of what feminism looks like today. There are more than just men and women in the world and failing to acknowledge so

reinforces binary thinking. Second-wave cis feminism also points solely to cis men as the source of women's oppression rather than addressing the larger structure of gender as a systematic and institutional problem. This ignores the fact that cis women are also capable of practicing patriarchy, that cis men are just as uniquely impacted by gender policing, and that gender doesn't just affect cis people. By building on the work of our feminist predecessors while also being critical of them, theater artists can address oppression from its structural root, offering a radical approach. Theater artists can utilize stages as platforms of experimentation to cultivate innovative ways of mobilizing people to generate social change in their communities.

#### On Intersectionality

Today's feminists in theater are engaging with intersectionality. It is integral to address structural oppression intersectionally. Bodies that violate gender standards are marginalized in the west, and disproportionately so at the intersection with discourses of race. The ways in which overlapping and often intersecting identities interact is indicative of our divergent experiences of oppression. Kimberlé Crenshaw, the founder of intersectional feminism, warns us that "the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference... but rather the opposite- that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences" (Crenshaw 1242). Crenshaw was one of the first to explicitly explore and name the crisscrossing oppression faced by black women. An intersectional approach to feminism observes that people inhabit multiple intersecting lines of identity that always inform one another. If we apply the theory of intersectionality to our work in queer theater, rather than masking our



differences, artists are able recognize the individuality behind lived experiences. By locating and understanding these differences, we're able to see them as informants of the ways that each of us experiences gender. This awareness fundamentally influences the ways that artists will approach narratives about gender in the future.

Not only is intersectionality good for our politics, but it's good for our plays. Theater artists are required to engage with foreign experiences, cultures, and practices constantly. Approaching a play from an intersectional lense forces the artist to critically engage with different perspectives. This approach is more likely to be inclusive of trans and gender nonconforming experiences of gender identity in addition to cis ones.

#### Cultivating Trans Resistance

Queer intersectional artists are cultivating trans spaces in performance. Performance artist, director, and lecturer Lazlo Pearlman's work focuses on the experiences of FTM (female to male) gender transition. Pearlman's *Unhung Heroes* is a short comic fiction film about FTM guys navigating a hyper-masculine society without traditional male genitalia (Pearlman 2002). The film played in festivals around the world and has since then been distributed by Frameline in San Francisco (Ibid).

Although there is a push for an increase in trans representation in entertainment, transgender narratives get more attention when they are cisnormative. Popular contemporary trans actor Laverne Cox, is set to portray the first transgender series regular on a broadcast television show, *Doubt* (CBS 2017). Cox will make

history as one of the first transgender people to make major strides in mainstream performance industries. But what counts as “major strides” is usually defined by the industries themselves. The success of trans artists like Cox is uniquely tied to the digestible performativity of her transness. Cox’s privilege allows for her to semiotically perform her gender as cis-passing. Trans people who are less gender-conforming than Cox do not get attention in mainstream industries because they are not digestible to the marketers who target cis culture.

The less prominent transgender figures reserve more agency in their off stage gender identity performances because they are not bound by mainstream standards. Nonbinary artists like Alok Vaid-Menon is a transfeminine southasian whose work centralizes nonbinary and gender-nonconforming issues. Vaid-Menon, who outwardly performs feminine, faces constant misgendering due to the ways that others semiotically read their physical body. The politics of the human body is a social network that situates individuals in relation to one another. Vaid-Menon, along with many other nonbinary activists are seeking to disturb this arrangement. The work of individual trans artists must be met with a willingness from performance communities in order to actually administer effective sociopolitical change.

In addition to the contributions of individual artists, entire theater companies are implementing gender equity and trans inclusive policies. As of 2015, Santa Cruz Shakespeare Theater Company in California established a gender equity policy in which an equal number of men and women are cast in the plays each season (Santa Cruz Shakespeare 2017). Established in 1913, the Actor’s Equity Association

negotiates and administers contracts with theatrical employers ensuring the safety and protection of artists (Actor's Equity Association 2017). By looking at inclusive strategies that have already been implemented for equity, we can discover ways of targeting and reaching out to other populations like trans and gender-nonconforming communities. Theaters in the Bay Area like Berkeley Repertory and California Shakespeare Theater are working on trans and gender variant inclusive theaters. In 2016 both companies held a symposium called *Breaking The Binary*, which focused on building trans inclusive casting policies, breaking barriers, and full staff diversity training (Evans and Kerastas 2016). The symposium was a direct response to the lack of visibility and inclusivity of trans people in theater. Hosted by transgender artists Lisa Evans and SK Kerastas, *Breaking The Binary* offered inclusive approaches to theater, ranging from outreach to casting policies (Ibid). We see contemporary artists and theaters are attempting to respond to cissexism through trans art and through actual policy change.

## II. The Politics of The Human Body

### On Semiotics

Theater artists are communicators. Something that we have available with our platform as performance artists is semiotics. Sue Ellen Case describes that semiotics, “when applied to theater, explores how theater communicates, or how theater produces a meaning” (Case 115). As communicators, we pull from cultural aesthetics, symbols, and signs to produce meaning to our audiences. When it comes to gender, we have a canon of semiotic signs to draw from. Professor of Theater, Speech, and Dance at Brown University, Rebecca Schneider writes in *The Explicit Body in Performance* that audiences read bodies culturally.

“A mass of orifices and appendages, details and tactile surfaces, the explicit body in representation is foremost a site of social markings, physical parts and gestural signatures of gender, race, class, age, sexuality, all of which bear ghosts of historical meaning, delineating social hierarchies of privilege and disprivilege” (Schneider 2).

Since performance is a predominantly a visual medium, audiences associate actor’s bodies with a certain amount of cultural knowledge. The way an audience reads the body is informed by a history of cultural values attributed to the human form. Penny Gay argues in *As She Likes It: Shakespeare’s Unruly Women*, that “how the audience reads these texts will depend on their own attitudes to the body and its decorums.” (Gay 3). Most of performance history has featured representations of only cis bodies because theater has continued to draw inspiration from cis experiences. In adopting a

post-structural view of the body, we can challenge theater to continue to represent bodies that push gender boundaries. Actors, directors, and designers can work together to cultivate what gender looks like in performance beyond the binary. This will require us to understand traditional notions of masculine and feminine as well as how to subvert them altogether.

In theater, the actor's body is used as an instrument to produce meaning. Although the actor only uses their body as a vessel, they themselves are still an identity performing another identity. This means that semiotics politicizes the actor's body. Author of movement for actors Nicole Potter, argues with Vsevolod Meyerhold's biomechanics that the actor is "at one and the same time the material and the organizer of it" (Potter 12). Since the actor is not separate from their body, it produces the semiotic meaning. Outside of theater, the work of post-structural theorists like Judith Butler, Anne Fausto-Sterling, and Kimberlé Crenshaw have paved way for the reimagining of structures like sex, gender, race, and sexuality all together. Their work reveals that the sociopolitical context in which humans view one another is inherently limiting. In applying these theories to our performances, we can restructure the ways in which bodies produce semiotic meaning.

### Sex versus Gender

Gender has long been associated with the physical body. Judith Butler is an American philosopher and gender theorist who laid the groundwork for queer and post-structural theory. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler points out that past feminisms have presumed the "material irreducibility of sex" (Butler 4). She effectively shows

that our interpretation of materiality or the physical body is in fact informed by culture. Butler explicated the obscure ways that sex is already presumed in individuals because of their physical body. She also postulates that generations of feminists have wrongly internalized 'sex' or 'materiality' as something that is free of sociocultural constructs, which Butler argues it is not (Ibid). When we think about gender, it is important to differentiate gender identity from assigned sex. Gender identity can be thought of as a mental state, while assigned or biological sex remains a western framework for thinking about the human body (Butler 8).

Butler's earlier work *Gender Trouble* contentiously asserts that gender identity is merely a performance (Butler xxvi). "Understanding performativity as linguistic and casting it as theatrical", Butler conceptualizes gender as the active embodiment of the world rather than as a fixed form of essentiality (Ibid). Thinking about gender as a performance off stage offers actors more to work with when performing gender on stage. Butler sees the body as "a surface whose permeability is politically regulated" (Butler 189). If we incorporate Butler's theories on materiality and performativity into our semiotics on stage, we can reconceptualize the restrictive ways that society has been viewing the human body.

Although still a common practice in the west, not all individuals identify with the gender that their society expects them to be. To conflate gender identity with biological sex ignores all perspectives and experiences that do not. We can apply Butler's theories by taking an epistemological shift in thinking about the possibility of

gender identity as separate from the physical body. “This unsettling of ‘matter’ can be understood as initiating new possibilities, new ways for bodies to matter” (Butler 6).

### Biological Sex: The Medicalization of Bodies

Gender policing is reinforced by numerous institutions under intersecting systems of power. Addressing these larger institutions that are responsible for upholding gender policing helps us better respond to the binary theatrically in our performances. Among the many institutions involved, discourses on science participate in gender policing. Specifically the foundation of the medical field is rooted in the notion of ‘biological sex’. Biological sex is described by Planned Parenthood as “our anatomy as female, male, or intersex. It includes our internal and external sex organs, chromosomes, and hormones. Some people are intersex rather than female or male” (Planned Parenthood 2017). Biology relies on these rigid forms of categorization.

Biological sex is utilized as a framework for classifying sexual dimorphism (Ibid). French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault points to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a period in which psychologists and sexologists attempted to study the origins of sexual dimorphism (aesthetic differences in sexual organs) (Foucault 68). Foucault best describes this process as ‘medicalization’ in the context of sexuality. "The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (Foucault 43). Foucault points to medicalization as the source of canonical heteronormative sexuality (Foucault 45). This is noted as an historical period in which sexual acts became interlinked with identity. After the medical

institutions categorized things like sex, sexuality, and gender, these labels became essential to human identity (Foucault 47). And on the social level, such labels became prerequisites of personhood. In regards to sex, despite the extreme variance in hormone levels, physiological boundaries linked genitalia to a chromosomal order that science sought to map out (Foucault 36). However, a frequent problem of biologists and medical professionals is that sex classification is constantly being challenged. “Nowhere is this clearer than in the debates over the structure (and restructuring) of bodies that exhibit sexual ambiguity” (Fausto-Sterling 45). Intersex babies exist, and doctors have been sexing them for years.

#### “The Modern Intersexual”

‘Intersexual’ (or intersex) describes someone whose genitalia does not fit biological expectations. Engaging with the existence and erasure of intersex helps us understand the gender binary as something that was designed through social construction. Legal and medical regulations and restrictions of non-normative sex, gender, and sexuality are still heavily policed in the U.S. Author and queer theorist Viola Amato writes “Intersex exists at the intersection of varying and several of these concerns, which allows one to consider intersex as a critical intervention in normative forms of sexed and gendered modes of being” (Amato 13). Intersex exemplifies the inconsistency and instability of seemingly rigid gender categories. Professor of Biology and Gender Studies at Brown University, Anne Fausto-Sterling, explains that although over two percent of the population is intersex, doctors treat these cases like medical emergencies and often have little to no resources to offer parents. “No time



for the new parents to consult those who have previously given birth to mixed-sex babies or to talk with adult intersexuals” (Fausto-Sterling 45). A lack of education and resources has normalized the practice of sexing intersex babies without their consent. Positioning intersex as a deviation from anatomical normality, the sex binary leaves no room for variance in human genitalia, which authorizes pathology around intersex people. An intersectional and intersexual approach to medical science would reposition intersex away from its pathological roots in mutative biology.

Questioning biological sex only helps us dismantle the gender binary. What would happen if intersex were viewed as medically the same as binary sex? Would there be more variance in human genitalia, and would that warrant more than two genders? Or, alternatively, would the gender binary cease to exist as a consequence of our reimagining of how bodies relate to one another? Questions like this won't be answered through the methodologies of the sciences. “Art enables us to imagine ourselves out of current situations” (Weaver 304). Combating cissexism requires the dismantlement of not only gender but also ‘sex’ as social constructs. I will refer to this approach as ‘intersexual’ because it is critically evocative of intersectional discourses on sex, gender, and sexuality. In reappropriating the term from its medicalized etymology, theater artists can create new intersexual semiotic representations of bodies that are free of binary limitations.

### **III. Systemic Patriarchy**

#### On Institutional Oppression

Institutionalism has been described by feminist theorists Pamela Paxton and Melanie M. Hughes as a system that embeds gender socially through patterns of power (Paxton and Hughes 210). Nonbinary activist, writer, and performance artist Alok Vaid-Menon describes the binary as inextricably linked to patriarchy. “Patriarchy is the institutionalization and policing of the gender binary. Patriarchy is the very creation of this thing called ‘male’ and this thing called ‘female’ which must always exist as mutually exclusive and oppositional states of being” (Vaid-Menon 2017). Vaid-Menon evokes gender with patriarchy because as institutions, they reinforce one another. Patriarchy thus produces gender categories for its own sustenance. As pointed out in early Marxist theory, these gender categories predicate capitalist productivity through the division of labor traditionally among public and domestic spheres (Marx, Engels, and Isaac 75).

Gender is ubiquitous but our practice of it is learned behavior. And since gender is learned behavior, it is essential to a patriarchal society to teach it and uphold it. Gender has thus become an insidious and pervasive component to social life. Eisner explains that since “male or masculine-spectrum people occupy a higher place in the social order than female and feminine spectrum people”, this model serves the interests of patriarchy (Eisner 26). The segregation of people into categories that determine gender roles furthers the oppression of women and gender variant people (Ibid).

Patriarchy relies heavily on the social conditions in which it thrives. In theater, this creates an emphasis on mostly cis women's and cis men's stories in theater that consequentially marginalizes or erases any other experiences of gender. Positioning women and men as oppositional categories is a patriarchal ploy. For centuries the west has imagined the world through dichotomies of dualisms like black/white, good/bad, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual etc. These binaries are utilized to compress ontology in order to better serve the instruments of production under patriarchal rule. Binaries best serve sociopolitical and capitalist productivity because they are control mechanisms. Breaking identity down into rigid dichotomies coerces people into identifying with predetermined categories that they might not have otherwise chosen. But binaries do not homogeneously represent the human experience nor do they render visible marginalized identities.

To expose trans and gender variant stories in theater would threaten patriarchal order. "If no clear distinction exists between "male" and "female", it becomes impossible to oppress people according to their gender" (Eisner 235). Patriarchy thus relies heavily on the gender binary because without it, the roles of oppressor and oppressed are muddled. This leads to intimate gender policing in nearly every facet of life. Overall, this system predetermines that all people either have or ought to have a recognizable and designatable gender. "Patriarchy is the mandate that gender is required for personhood, respect, and citizenship (Vaid-Menon 2017).

Occupying Liminality

Through the normalization of the binary, liminality becomes pathological. Under patriarchy, individuals who occupy liminal spaces are viewed as duplicitous or disoriented. Liminality is an anthropological term in reference to ambiguity or indeterminacy (Alkali, Talif, Wan Yahya, and Mohd Jan 129). Whether it be biracial, bisexual, or nonbinary, there are many individuals positioned within liminal spaces. From the framework of a binary, people are only identified through oppositional and exclusive perspectives. This results in cis and heteronormative representations in art getting more funding, resources, and acclaim. The notion of existing indefinitely within liminality threatens gender categories because it complicates the very boundaries that give them meaning. “The temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities” (Ibid).

Harvard University’s Professor of English and American Literature and Language, and the Director of the Mahindra Humanities Center, Homi Bhabha, is a key figure in post-colonial studies. Bhabha explores social borders and the liminal spaces in between them in which some people live permanently.

“What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (Bhabha 2).

Bhabha’s work focuses on the production of postcolonial identity. He encourages boundary pushing as a radical response to institutional oppression. Putting Judith

Butler's theory of social construction in conversation with Bhabha's theory on liminality legitimizes new ways of looking at nonbinary gender. If we divorce ourselves from the semiotic value that we culturally attribute to bodies, then we can revel in indeterminate spaces and live within intersectional and intersexual liminality.

## V. Queering The Classics

Turning to case studies, I will examine the methodologies employed to implement semiotic representations of gender beyond the binary. I worked for Santa Cruz Shakespeare as the directing intern on *Hamlet* 2016 directed by Paul Mullins. The artistic team employed a unique directorial choice that I will refer to as ‘genderswap casting’. Genderswap casting is when an actor portrays a character that was written for a person of different gender than that of their own. This casting technique forces us to question our traditional notions of gender and induces political dialogue. The role of Hamlet was portrayed by a white woman named Kate Eastwood-Norris. With in-text pronoun changes, Hamlet no longer becomes a story about the roles of sons and fathers, but instead captures a less frequented representation about daughters. When we see a woman play Hamlet, it offers circumvention from traditional approaches to Shakespeare’s women as objects of male desire.

Furthermore, casting Hamlet as a woman makes her consequentially a lesbian. When a decision like genderswap casting is made, it has political implications scattered throughout the text. Among them, “Man delights not me”, when spoken by a lesbian Hamlet exerts new queer connotation (Shakespeare 2.2.294-95). Hamlet’s gender forces us to engage with her sexuality, and vice versa. Ophelia was portrayed by a black woman named Mia Ellis. Representing interracial love between two women on stage was a response to dominating Shakespearean narratives from white heteronormative cultures. Since the text however did not accentuate this, the

production was tasked with displaying this queer romance semiotically. This aspect of the production however could have been conveyed more overtly. Since the original text was inherently working against conveying a lesbian Hamlet, the director could have sought explicit ways of expressing that Hamlet and Ophelia's love met at the intersections of gender, race, and sexuality. The only scene in which the women exchanged overt semiotic representations of romantic intimacy was in 3.2 when Hamlet kisses Ophelia after denying her own love and letters.

If genderswap casting induces dialogues on sexuality, then what dialogues are made possible on the societies that produce these sexualities? This was a critical question the production team faced. Ultimately, the artistic choice rendered was to ambiguate the queer culture of Denmark, the play's setting. In the rehearsal room, the director discussed not centering the play around the women's homosexuality. Since Shakespeare did not intend for Hamlet to be played by a woman, there were naturally no lines directly referencing her homosexuality. The queer culture of Denmark became an arbitrary phenomena that clearly existed but that no one spoke of. Neither Hamlet nor Ophelia's families point to queerness as the source of their disapproval of their relationship, this meant that homophobia in Denmark either ceased to exist or was simply not voiced. An instance that best exemplified the arbitrary nature of Denmark's attitude toward homophobia was during Ophelia's funeral. As Queen Gertrude sobs over Ophelia's corpse she murmurs "I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife" (Shakespeare 5.1.220). Revealed by the queen, we learn here that the institution of marriage in Denmark is not reserved for only man and woman. This

reveal is a shift from our traditional notions of gender roles under the marriage institution.

Shakespeare's plays are adorned in sexual deviancy, especially to a contemporary audience. Foucauldian theories on sexuality suggest that sexuality originated out of the medico-sexual regime of the nineteenth century which "multiplied the forms of discourse on the subject; it has established various points of implantation for sex; it has coded contents and qualified speakers" (Foucault 29). Foucault discloses the explicit ways in which normative sexuality was constructed through medicalized labeling and classification in *The History of Sexuality*. By exposing power paradigms like heteronormativity, Foucault reveals the insidious nature of the sex gender binaries. In order to navigate these social systems in theater, heteronormativity must be actively resisted, especially when subverting the classics. Although the director wanted to arbitrate the queerness, a stronger political statement could have been to overtly display it.

As a tool in classical theater, genderswap casting is a tangible next step in the gender revolution. Since classical theater still draws in larger audiences, it has the capacity to reach more people. Subverting gender in the classics revitalizes them so that "Shakespeare's plays could be made more immediately relevant to an audience that was changing" (Gay 6).

This production offered hundreds of young children a vision of the potentiality of women in Shakespeare's iconic lead roles.



## VI. Nonbinary Acting

I was cast in the role of Argos in *The Odyssey* in the fall of 2016. *The Odyssey* was a multi-venue devised piece of theater. Alison Oddey describes devised theater as originating “with the group while making the performance, rather than starting from a play text that someone else has written to be interpreted” (Oddey 118). Oddey argues that the freedom in devising is that it allows individuals to cultivate “contradictory views of the world” (Ibid). Because this production was devised, many of the actors, including myself, reserved the agency to portray genderless or nonbinary characters. Argos is Odysseus’ loyal dog who awaits his master’s return for twenty years. Homer mentions Argos only briefly in book seventeen and refers to the character with he/his/he’s pronouns. “Here lay the hound, old Argos. But the moment he sensed Odysseus standing by he thumped his tail, nuzzling low, and his ears dropped, though he had no strength to drag himself an inch toward his master” (Homer 364). Despite Homer’s gendered personification of Argos, I did not play Argos as male. Costumed in a genderless fur onesie, I was able to embody a character that was free from the confines of the western gender binary.

A nonbinary approach to Argos afforded me the luxury to experiment with physicality that was uninfluenced by rigid masculinity. I believe that this method can be applied when approaching many different characters in theater. Dymphna Callery is a physicality and movement teacher who argues that traditional approaches to acting position the actor as a ‘neutral’ body (Callery 32). But given the fundamental disparity in human body types, such a concept might not actually exist. For example,

one actor's version of inhabiting femininity looks different in the body of another actor. How neutral reads on our bodies has more to do with our political position in the world than with our inner regimen. The concept of neutrality has long forced actors to start from the same unattainable vantage point. Rather than forcing our bodies to fit an exclusive definition, we can explore the ways in which we exist organically, which for some is in fact beyond binary definition. In moving away from the concept of neutral body, actors gain agency to start from their own unique bodies. By shedding one's individual ticks, quirks, and personality, the actor enters a state of effectivity rather than neutrality. Starting from a point of personal readiness, the actor can play intentions and objectives without the inhibitions of binary gender expectations, standards, or stereotypes. Dr. Cynthia Baron is a professor from Bowling Green State University who praises the ingenuity of modern approaches to acting. "We can set aside the need to assess 'great acting' and instead explore the ways that performers' use of recognizable social signs conveys character and illuminates cultural values" (Baron 5). A nonbinary approach produced a much more authentic character that would have been stunted had I approached Argos as traditionally male.

A nonbinary approach to acting allows actors to critically engage with socialization from intersectional vantage points. Socialization is the cultural process in which behavioral standards and expectations are imposed. Approaching a role nonbinary offers circumvention to gendered expectations and presuppositions about how certain bodies ought to look or act. Lorna Marshall teaches physical acting at the

Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London. Marshall argues that since every individual is socialized differently, the way that they play intentions and objectives will vastly differ accordingly, even in similar situations.

“Unless performers recognize how strong and all-pervading socialization is, and see how the mechanics of the social persona affect the body, the emotions, mental processes and social reactions, it will be difficult to respond to the demands of the profession” (Marshall 7).

Recognizing their own unique processes of socialization helps the actor recognize how their body is being culturally and semiotically perceived. This sense of semiotic awareness gains the actor a stronger sense of stage picture.

In addition to granting the actor more agency, nonbinary acting provides representation that celebrates gender nonconformity in theater. This approach to acting is reflective of shifting attitudes about gender identity. Since more people are increasingly identifying between and beyond the scope of woman and man, theater has a responsibility to cultivate acting techniques that accommodate this. Applying Sue-Ellen Case’s theory of new poetics, “new feminist theory would abandon the traditional patriarchal values embedded in prior notions of form, practice and audience response in order to construct new critical models and methodologies” (Case 143). We can expand the theory of new poetics to acknowledge and address trans and gender variant perspectives in acting. Encouraging actors to simply play nonbinary objectives can induce intersectional and intersexual discourses in theater.

## VII. Cross-Gender Casting

In the winter of 2017 I assistant directed *Two Gentlemen of Verona* in Shakespeare To-Go under the direction of Dr. Patty Gallagher. Shakespeare To-Go is an outreach program at UCSC in which student casts travel around Bay Area schools to perform for students. Double casted, this production of twenty actors rehearsed for one full term before going on tour. Dr. Gallagher's directorial vision for this production was to highlight the construct of hyper-masculinity. Hyper-masculinity is a psychological term for the exaggeration of stereotypically male behavior, such as an emphasis on dominance, strength, sexuality, and aggression. The women in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* are positioned as objects of male desire. Either under the ownership of the Duke or of their lovers, Silvia and Julia never possess their own agency. "Take thou thy Silvia, for thou hast deserved her" (Shakespeare 5.4.2305). Drawing on themes of entitlement, sexual assault, and the culture of consent, the production team sought out to represent the toxicity of hyper-masculinity. In the final scene, Proteus makes a violent sexual advance towards Silvia. "I'll force thee yield to my desire" (Shakespeare 5.4.2211). Rather than sanitizing this, the scene was used to cultivate a teaching moment for children.

Using the themes presented in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* as pedagogy, the play ignited discourse on the concept of male privilege. Individuals who outwardly perform their genders more cis-masculine are the recipients of male privilege in the west. Male privilege encompasses all advantages and or immunities that are associated with being a man in society. From higher salaries to legal and

sociopolitical advantages, male privilege is pervasive and insidious in both the U.S. and abroad (Roosalu and Hofäcker 54). It also breeds entitlement in the west. RAINN is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization and reports that nearly one in five people who identify as women or femme have been sexually assaulted in the U.S., yet it remains the least reported crime (RAINN 2016). The ways in which we handle sexual assault (from administration to support systems) are indicative of the lack of sex education in the U.S. Countless victims are often encouraged to take preventative caution while perpetrators face little to no criminal charges or sentencing (Ibid). By exposing these hyper-masculine behaviors as toxic products of patriarchy, we can teach children that gender is learned behavior through the language of Shakespeare.

Most of the roles in this production of Shakespeare To-Go were cross-gender casted including roles like Duke, Launce, Lucetta, Speed, and Thurio, to name a few. Cross-gender casting differs from genderswap casting in that the original character's gender remains the same regardless of the actor's gender. This casting choice represented an intersectional and intersexual interpretation of gender in theater by double casting actors of different bodies to play the same character. Cross-gender casting roles like Duke to be portrayed by a woman challenges our notion of patriarchy being practiced by only fathers. This now reveals that misogyny and objectification is practiced not only by fathers but by mothers (and women in general) as well. Other roles like Lucetta were also cross-gender casted. In one cast Lucetta was portrayed by a man costumed in a long skirt and a white-collar button up which

contrasted profoundly to the woman who played Lucetta in the same costume design. Another character that was cross-gender cast was Thurio, which consequentially offered queer representation during the scene where Thurio attempts to woo Silvia and gain her love. Methods like cross-gender casting offer provocative and fruitful expressions of gender for children to grapple with.

### VIII. Femme Leads

Patriarchy works inordinately against feminine or femme-spectrum people regardless of their gender identity. “Patriarchy is the denigration of femininities across gender experiences and so much more!” (Vaid-Menon 2017). By casting more femme and transfemme leads, artists can take a visceral step towards representing gender beyond the binary and towards femme liberation in theater. ‘Femme’ is a term used to describe someone who identifies with feminine experiences. Traditionally used to describe feminine lesbians, ‘femme’ has been appropriated and widely adopted by both cis and trans youth.

Under the direction of Kinan Valdez in the spring of 2017, I played Ragman and Sailor in *Zoot Suit*. *Zoot Suit* is a play written by the father of our director and pioneer of Chicana theater, Luis Valdez. *Zoot Suit* follows the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial from the 1940s which resulted in the arrest, trial, and incarceration of a group of Mexican-American youth without evidence. *Zoot Suit* directly responds to the rise of white-nationalism in America during the late 20th century. Conservative criminal justice policies targeted Mexican-American’s as well as black Americans through increased policing, racial profiling, and hawkish border patrol agencies. In 1.2 of *Zoot Suit* Luis Valdez reflects these tensions with a mass arrest, “Police Arrest Mexican Youth.” (Valdez 1.2.).

The two oppositional forces in the play are the characters El Pachuco and Press. El Pachuco is an allegorical character and serves as a figment of the protagonist’s imagination. The Press is an antithetical character to the El Pachuco

because they both fight to narrate the action of the play. Press represents the lense of the white bourgeois newspapers while El Pachuco represents the lense of the Chicax Mexican-American lived experience.

In UCSC's production of *Zoot Suit* these characters were portrayed by femme actors. Traditionally cast as cis men, El Pachuco was cross-gender cast and portrayed by a woman named Gianna DiGregorio Rivera, and Press was cross-gender cast as a trans nonbinary femme actor Cody Lee. Once in rehearsals, both actors decided to take a nonbinary or genderless approach to their characters, regardless of how they themselves (as bodies) semiotically read. Since the actor playing El Pachuco was a Chicax woman, it contrasted provocatively to the person playing Press, who was a white nonbinary actor. The two characters occupy a dialectical space in the play and are constantly struggling for the power to tell their version of the story. These casting choices semiotically represented both the racial and gender power structures that still hinge American culture.

Simple casting methods like cross-gender casting and or casting more trans people and cis women in lead roles can encourage audiences to think about the intersectional and intersexual ways that different bodies still inhabit different worlds. The power dynamic between El Pachuco and Press already inherently makes commentary on the racial injustices in America but our production was able to simultaneously call into question discourses of gender. This made *Zoot Suit* more relatable to a 2017 audience. Additionally, this production offers Chicax representation for women in lead roles. There were hundreds of Chicax women who



lived through the same race wars that the men did, but history has either erased or suppressed their legacy. The representation of Chicana women is rendered through the El Pachuco being played by a woman. UCSC's *Zoot Suit* reflects the realities of inhabiting intersectional and intersexual identities within liminal spaces. When we think about our efforts to eradicate gender oppression we must also do it in tandem with racial, sexual, and class struggles so as to not perpetuate internecine hierarchies (Crenshaw 1242). The casting choices in *Zoot Suit* encourage audiences to think about gender as a complex network of relational identities.

## Conclusions

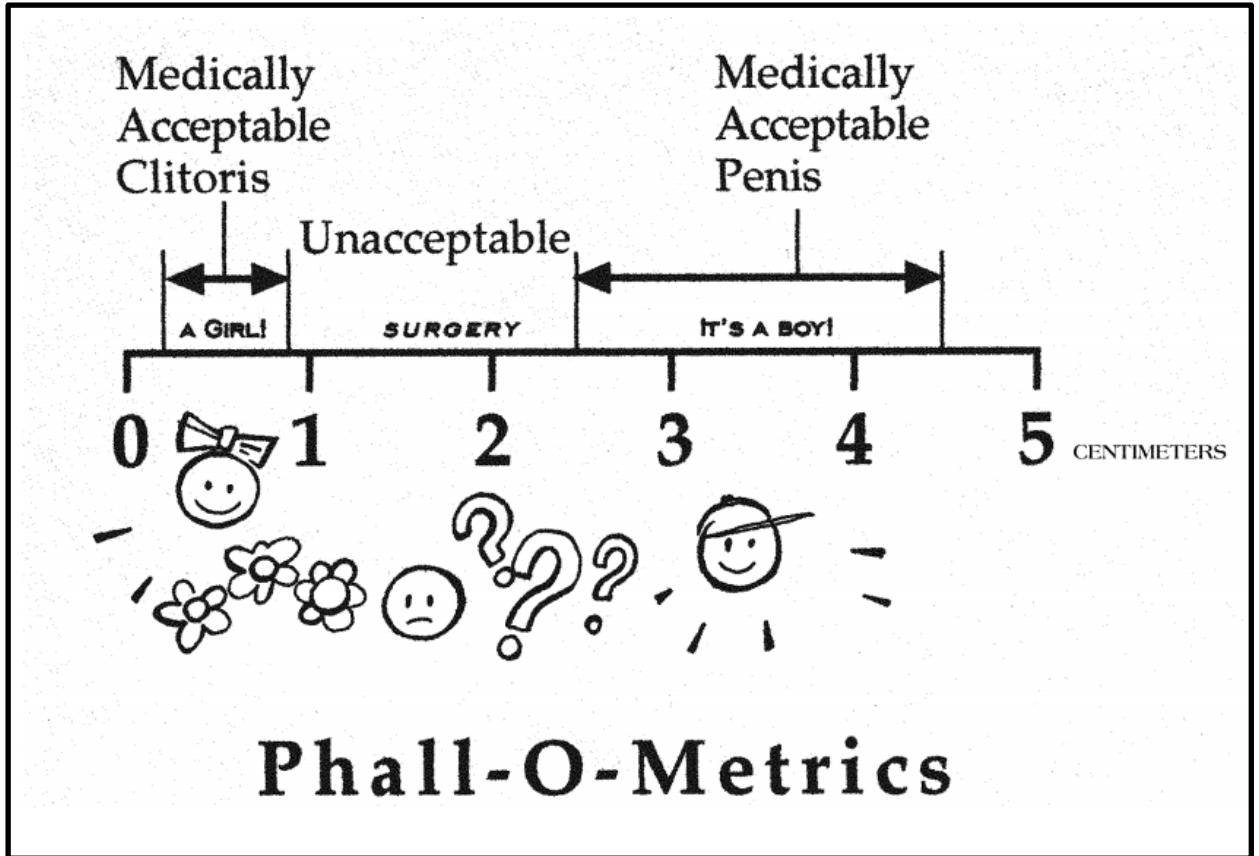
Though credited as founders, trans people have not yet been liberated by the LGBT Movement. Trans activist, drag queen and sex worker Marsha P. Johnson was among the first pioneers of the LGBT Movement in the Stonewall riots of 1969 (Silverman, Stryker, Walsh, Constantinou, Schmidt, and Koskinen 2005). Johnson, along with many transgender Americans have been erased from LGBT discourses in popular culture on both gender and sexuality even though they are positioned at the intersection of both (Ibid). Theater must render visible the underrepresented versions of queer that have been erased by cissexism. A detrimental reaction to the LGBT Movement is to halt political action in praise of historical strides. The mainstream LGBT Movement has relied on legal strides (which act to validate queer activism) stemming from traditionalist institutions like the marriage contract. The LGBT Movement focused on what equality meant to gay and lesbian Americans, streamlining the vision of property, monogamy, and an upright middle class citizenship status. But these movements relied on assimilation. In order to displace the terms of what queer liberation looks like, I argue that same-sex marriage didn't make the streets any safer for black transwomen. 2016 was recorded as the deadliest year for transgender women in recent history (Transgender Law Center 2017). When we paint a transhistorical narrative of progress it centers our politics on how far we've come, rather than actively addressing structural change from the roots on the ground. Theater can respond to trans violence through trans representation by engaging in performance that details unconventionality in gender variance and gender

nonconformity.

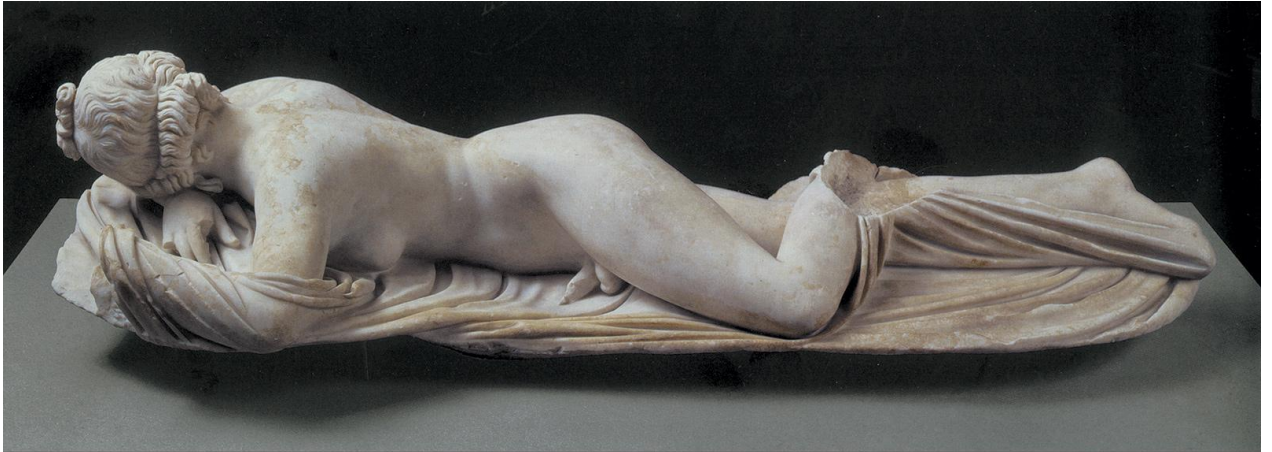
### Queering The Future

Towards an intersectional and intersexual approach to theater requires critical engagement with human identity and its various positions within larger social systems of power. It requires recognition of binaries and of the limitless spaces that exist between and beyond them. When it comes to representations of gender on stage, artists can employ intersectional and intersexual theories to broaden the scope of semiotics and aid in the assembly of new cultural meanings. More and more trans youth are identifying beyond the gender binary yet cisnormative narratives still dominate trans discourse. Ending the lack of representation means listening to trans and queer bodies, even when they don't fold into the creases of society in the ways the majority does. When we do critically engage in trans narratives, we must be mindful to not only share cisnormative stories, but gender-nonconforming ones as well. In the wake of a changing demographic, theater is obligated to reconceptualize gender in order to stay relevant. In looking at 'queer' as more than just a political identity, we can adopt a queer lens through which we can analyze the world. Through innovative semiotic representations of nonbinary and gender-nonconforming bodies and narratives, theater can acknowledge those who live marginally and even make way for the production of new identities entirely. Theater can cultivate queer futures.

Appendix



[Figure 1 - Phall-O-Metrics illustrated by Alyce Santoro, for *Sexing The Body* by Anne Fausto-Sterling demonstrates the teaching methodologies employed in the medical field on infant genitalia surgery.]



[Figure 2 - Sleeping Hermaphroditus is a marble sculpture by Gian Lorenzo Bernini from 1620. Depicting the life size Hermaphroditus, Bernini draws inspiration from Hellenistic portrayals of the androgyny of Dionysus and Bacchus. Photo from the Metropolitan Museum's exhibition 'Pergamon and the Hellenistic Kingdoms of the Ancient World'.]

| <b>Pronoun Family</b> | <b>Nominative (subject)</b> | <b>Objective (object)</b> | <b>Possessive Determiner</b> | <b>Possessive Pronoun</b> | <b>Reflexive</b> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| She                   | She                         | Her                       | Her                          | Hers                      | Herself          |
| They                  | They                        | Them                      | Their                        | Theirs                    | Themselves       |
| Ze/Sie/Hir            | Ze/Sie                      | Hir                       | Hir                          | Hirs                      | Hirself          |
| Ze/Sie/Zir            | Ze/Sie                      | Zir                       | Zir                          | Zirs                      | Zirself          |
| Ze/Sie/Zim            | Ze/Sie                      | Zim                       | Zir                          | Zis                       | Zirself          |
| Xe/Xem                | Xe                          | Xem                       | Xyr                          | Xyrs                      | Xyrself          |
| Spivak 1*             | E                           | Em                        | Eir                          | Eirs                      | Eirself          |
| Spivak 2*             | Ey                          | Em                        | Eir                          | Eirs                      | Eirself          |
| Thon                  | Thon                        | Thon                      | Thons                        | Thons                     | Thonself         |
| Per**                 | Per                         | Per                       | Pers                         | Pers                      | Perself          |

[Figure 3 - The English language limits our expressions and representations of gender identity. Above is a pronoun chart attempting to navigate popular nonbinary and gender neutral linguistic pronouns. Rather than being referred to by conventional he/she pronouns, pronouns above may be preferred.]



[Figure 4 - Alok Vaid-Menon is a southasian transfeminine nonbinary writer, entertainer, and performance artist. "Femme In Public" explores the ways in which femininity in the west has become synonymous with apology. Photo by Alok Vaid-Menon]





[Figure 5 - Alok Vaid-Menon posing with Joshua Allen in “SOFT: A Gender Non-conforming Photo Series” by Zara Julius for Unlabelled Mag.]





[Figure 6 - Lady Hamlet from Santa Cruz Shakespeare's *Hamlet* 2016. Photo by Jana Marcus.]



[Figure 7 - Ophelia with her mother Polonius, who was also genderswapped for Santa Cruz Shakespeare's *Hamlet* 2016. Photo by Jana Marcus.]



[Figure 8 - King Claudius, Lady Hamlet, and Queen Gertrude from Santa Cruz Shakespeare's *Hamlet* 2016. Photo by Jana Marcus.]





[Figure 9 - Lady Hamlet kissing Ophelia from Santa Cruz Shakespeare's *Hamlet* 2016. Photo by Jana Marcus.]



[Figure 10 - Telemachus, Demodocus and Argos from UCSC's *The Odyssey* 2016. Photo by Steve DiBartolomeo.]



[Figure 11 - Exploration of nonbinary physicality of Argos from UCSC's *The Odyssey* 2016. Photo by Steve DiBartolomeo.]





[Figure 12 - “The Trojan War” from UCSC’s *The Odyssey* 2016. Photo by Steve DiBartolomeo.]



[Figure 13 - Genderless “Suitors” from UCSC’s *The Odyssey* 2016. Photo by Steve DiBartolomeo.]





[Figure 14 – The character Calypso in drag from UCSC’s *The Odyssey* 2016. Photo by Steve DiBartolomeo.]



[Figure 15 – A cross-gender cast Launce portrayed by Nina McMurtrie in Shakespeare To-Go *Two Gentlemen of Verona* 2016. Photo by Josh Orlando.]



[Figure 16 - First dress rehearsal of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* 2016. Photo by Josh Orlando.]





[Figure 17 - El Pachuco portrayed by Gianna DiGregorio Rivera from UCSC's *Zoot Suit* 2017. Photo by Steve DiBartolomeo.]

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