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The Role of Skin and Mental Projection in Representing
Transgender Identity in *Paris is Burning* (1990) and
Pose (2018-2021)

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1. Introduction

Even though the transgender community, comprising of individuals who do not identify with their sex assigned at birth, remains an understudied population in medical fields and psychoanalysis, it experiences an ever-increasing media presence (Gherovici 159, 171). Reflected by newspaper articles in *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, a more positive light has recently been shed on the cinematic representation of transgender identity in comparison to the 1990s and early 2000s (Ramaswamy; Poniewozik). *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *Pose* (2018-2021) depict the ballroom culture and the lives of Hispanic and black transgender, homosexual people, and other members of the LGBTQI+ community in the 1980s and -90s in New York City. The TV show *Pose* (2018-2021) is a fictional take on the documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990) (Betancourt 14). According to Bailey, ballroom culture, as represented in the two formats, can be described as a minoritarian social sphere and kinship coalescence generating an alternative world, which provides essential means for survival (“Performance as Invention” 254, 257). In contrast to most transgender audio-visual representations, such as in *The Silence of the Lambs* (2001) and *Boys Don’t Cry* (2001), the ballroom scene awards a celebratory character to transitioning to one’s gender identity and the stages in between. The performances in the ballroom represent a creative way to resist sociocultural and economic factors of exclusion (“Performance as Invention” 254, 257). Aware of most of the population seeing transgender individuals through a racist and transphobic lens, Bailey argues that they create a divergent discourse. Through actively generating the latter, they shape and perform their gender-identity and different versions of it, while attempting to avoid internalizing racist and homophobic notions present in dominant discourse (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 380). This allows the protagonists to gain greater agency in the outside world (“Gender/Racial Realness” 380).

As *Pose* (2018-2021) was released approximately 30 years after *Paris is Burning* (1990), it can be observed how the media discourse about the cinematic representation of transgender identity has shifted. *The Guardian* highlighted that *Pose* (2018-2021) is “a show to fall head-over-heels in love with” (Ramaswamy) and *The New York Times* described the show as “broadly empathetic and nonjudgmental” (Poniewozik).

Recent reviews explicitly referred to the cast as being “trans women”, rather than falsely referring to them as “drag queens” (Ramaswamy). The latter problem was the case in an article in *The New York Times* from 1993, which describes the “drag queens” of the documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990) as “looking like endangered birds” (Green).

According to the professor of Performance Studies and African American Studies, E. Patrick Johnson, this shift towards widespread LGBTQI+ acceptance has been strengthened by the legalization of same-sex marriage, the Defense of Marriage Act in the US being declared unconstitutional, the election of former president Barack Obama who was supportive of LGBTQI+ concerns, and the progress in the treatment of AIDS and HIV (Johnson 3). In addition, the academic states that the change in perception was also evoked by professional athletes coming out as queer and greater visibility of transgender people (Johnson 3).

When analyzing these cinematic representations, the question arises whether the changes mentioned above merely take place on a media meta-level, or if these changes are also visible in the audio-visual formats themselves. Namely, it can be asked if *Paris is Burning* (1990) depicts transgender identity differently from *Pose* (2018-2021). This assumption regarding the difference in depiction is not only based on the thirty years separating these works. The professor of Theater and Performance Studies, Peggy Phelan, argues that *Paris is Burning* (1990) itself transformed the representation the of signifiers of ballroom culture (93). To decode the movie as an authentic representation of balls is similarly tempting as reading “skin color as racial identity, and gender categories as consequences of sexual difference” (Phelan 93). Phelan claims that the people participating in the balls insist or insisted on numerous manners of decoding meaning (93). The journalist Clark argues in *The Guardian* that some critics have claimed that Livingston, who is a white, middle-class cisgender woman, exploited the community as she was accused of wanton voyeurism. *Paris is Burning* (1990) deals with “personal battles with gender expression, sexuality, violence, and poverty” (Brew 7). However, according to Prosser, these issues are captured through the lens of the white gaze, which is at the same time not put on display (51). This stance is not made explicit because Livingston’s own white body is excluded from the cinematic frame (Prosser 51).

In contrast, *Pose* (2018-2021) has been, among others, directed by a transgender woman of color, Jane Mock. Koch-Rein et al. insist that *Pose* (2018-2021) portrays the lives of transgender people in a more nuanced and self-reflective way than *Paris is Burning* (1990). This indicates a shift in the narrow and stereotypical representation of transgender identities, as they were often depicted as “dangerous psychopaths and sexual predators [...] or as victims with little agency” in the past (Koch-Rein et al. 2).

Despite not being depicted in a monstrous manner, I still argue that most of the characters in *Paris is Burning* (1990) are shown as victims having little agency outside the ballroom, which is partly based on intersectional inequalities, but also on Livingston's white gaze, and the lack of progression during the documentary. Due to these deficient representations, my stance is that (this lack of) knowledge about, and experience of, the transgender community partly determines the way the characters are portrayed in the documentary and the TV show. I claim that an authentic depiction could support transgender people, who consume these audio-visual formats in their own process of shaping their identity. To address this issue, the notion of authenticity – the internal perception of what it means to feel transgender – will be discussed in this thesis. Specifically, the difference between an inner feeling versus an outer projection of transgender identity will be analyzed.

In the scope of this text, I will scrutinize the cinematic representation of transgender characters in *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *Pose* (2018-2021) in terms of their inner embodiment, their psychological perception of being in their own skin, as well as in terms of the external process, namely the mental image that is projected onto them. In other words, when analyzing the TV show and the documentary, I will discuss how transgender identity is being represented as subjectively perceived, and how it subsides into an externally institutionalized mental image. This differentiation points to whether transgender identity is rather displayed as an embodied image that is subconsciously felt, or if it is a projection that is established, reiterated, and externally governed. Concepts developed in 1995 by the Freudian psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu, and in 1990 by the post-structuralist and feminist philosopher Judith Butler will be taken into consideration to help analyzing the two audio-visual formats. To highlight how Anzieu's theory sheds light onto certain aspects of transgender representation, the approach by the English writer, cultural critic and scholar, Jay Prosser, will be utilized. In his book *Second Skin – the Body Narrative of Transsexuality* (1998), next to outlining other theories, he explicitly describes how Anzieu's skin-ego is relevant to transgender identity and embodiment. In addition, Marlon M. Bailey, a ballroom culture researcher, and former active member of the ballroom scene, is relevant to this thesis due to his own immersive experience and his scholarly knowledge. Bailey's concepts are particularly significant to the discussion of intersectional inequalities, in reference to skin color, class and gender-nonconformity. The injustice that the transgender women of color in the two audio-visual formats are shown to face differs from other queer communities, in which the skin-color and ethnicity are not the focus of attention.

Bailey implies that emphasis on these intersectional inequalities is required to represent transgender women of color accurately (“Gender/Racial Realness” 375). His intersectional approach is vital as the allegedly universal perception of queer communities is usually seen through a white, heteronormative, and middle-class lens. He claims that the falsely naturalized perspective is often used to scrutinize queer working-class people of color. According to Bailey, the few studies which analyze these communities fail to consider how immensely the personal experiences regarding class, race, gender, and sexual marginalization of black Hispanic transgender people differ from those of white, middle-class transgender communities (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 375).

The approach by Anzieu, the skin-ego, implies that skin underlies the formation of the ego (Prosser 65). This means that his concept revolves around the impact the skin has on the mind. In contrast to Freud, the psychoanalyst does not consider sex – the physical act – to display something that is repressed, it is the body itself that is categorized as the unconscious. The latter is corporeally perceived via the psychosomatic surface of the skin (Anzieu and Tarrab 64, 72). On the one hand, the skin-ego can be approached as binding together parts of the self. On the other hand, it equally functions as “an excitation-screen, a surface on which signs are inscribed, and guardian of the intensity of instincts that it localizes in a bodily source, in this or that sensitive zone of the skin” (Anzieu and Tarrab 66). This means that the skin-ego provides one with sensory perception - the sensation of how the skin feels - and individual psychic functioning.

This implies that the body produces and perceives projections simultaneously. There is something quite substantial about one’s skin as it provides the first means of communication between oneself, others, and “the biological, the psychic and the social” (Prosser 65). Anzieu argues that the starting point of a sensation stems from the perception of one’s own body, leading to a projection of a surface or a mental image (Anzieu and Tarrab 65).

Prosser utilizes Anzieu’s theories as a lens to describe the embodied conception of transgender identity. Prosser argues that transgender identity is conceptualized through the feeling of being imprisoned in the wrong body, which is physically felt rather than unconsciously transcribed (72). This ontological approach towards transgender identity cannot be externally grasped, but deeply felt, inducing material force (Prosser 79). According to Anzieu, as cited by Prosser, bodily integrity and feeling whole are the predispositions for successful functioning (79).

This is the reason why Anzieu underscores the essentiality of feeling one's identity as one's own (Prosser 79). Judith Butler does not primarily focus on the embodied feeling. Her theory of 'performativity' is about the stylized repetition of gendered acts. According to Butler, social reiteration leading to norms cannot be easily resisted (Butler, "Performativity's Social Magic" 125). In contrast to performance, which can be understood as a singular and intentional act, performativity is established as an iterated, citational convention (Butler, "Bodies that Matter" 2). Concerning gender, Butler claims that the "notions of 'surface' and 'mental projection' are intertwined and transform the body into a projected image" (Prosser 65). She argues that the gendered experience is falsely naturalized as a coherent unit due to the forceful illusion of the unity of sex and gender (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 137). However, these structures can be perceived as denaturalized in the context of repeated performance, which exposes the cultural means of the fictitious coherence of sex and gender. "[...] [A]ccording to Butler's theory, it is through repeated performances that sex and gender are established, which is the result of the performativity of the performance itself" (Bal 23). This means that gender identity replicates practices that are not based on an actual origin (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 138).

According to Butler, a person cannot change one's gender identity through an operation. Rather, gender as a norm can never be fully embodied nor internalized ("Gender Trouble" 141). Since it is perceived as temporal and "instituted in an exterior space through stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 137). Butler claims that the inability to fully embody one's gender is due to the lack of cause and effect between corporal enactment or styles and forcefully regulated cultural fictions ("Gender Trouble" 140). The gendered-self attempts to approximate the ideal through repeated acts, however, at times there seems to be a certain discontinuity. The latter points to the arbitrary relation between repeated acts and their apparent essence. The appearance of substance is a constructed identity (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 141).

I will analyze *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *Pose* (2018-2021) focusing on through the lens of the theories by the post-structuralist philosopher Judith Butler, and by the psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu, as analyzed by Prosser. The following questions will be answered in this thesis:

1. How does Anzieu's theory of the skin-ego help to analyze the selected scenes of *Pose* (2018-2021) and of *Paris is Burning* (1990)?
2. In what manner does Butler's theory of performativity help to analyze the selected scenes of *Paris is Burning* (1990) and of *Pose* (2018-2021)?
3. How do the approaches by Anzieu, as interpreted by Prosser, and the theories by Butler bridged with intersectional theories in terms of gender, race and class help to analyze *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *Pose* (2018-2021) and help to outline differences between these two audio-visual formats?

The intersectional approaches are required as the representation of black and Hispanic transgender identities of the ballroom community could otherwise not be analyzed appropriately. Bailey has outlined that most members of the community have asserted that they consider themselves to be especially vulnerable (“Gender/Racial Realness” 366). This vulnerability is created through the ideological construction of race, gender, class, and sexual marginalization. Bailey argues that the harassment and abuse that black transgender and queer people experience often do not necessarily lead to consequences for the assailant, nor to any structural change (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 366). Bailey claims that this vulnerability is heightened because most black queers are based in poor working-class urban areas and experience violence daily (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 366).

To cope with this reality, creative resources must be utilized to survive homophobic and transphobic violence (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 366). Bailey argues that performances in the ballroom create a safe space of mutual belonging, in which a counter discourse is established. Performance is a means of shaping kinship structures that question and negotiate the dominant discourse revolving around heteronormative perceptions of gender, sexuality, relationships, and community (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 367). A particular method of re-approaching these structures is the ballroom category and analytic concept of ‘realness’. It requires people who perform at balls to adhere to gendered, racialized, class-based, and sexual identities. The category “realness” establishes its necessary discursive power in the ballroom and on a meta-level of a society (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 378).

“[...] ‘[R]ealness’ ultimately signifies the possibility of deception - an enduring illusion - positioned at the crossroads between the ballroom world and the ‘real world’” (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 378). These categories, and the connected subjectivities, mirror the vast number of experiences of nonconforming gender identities. For instance, butches and femme queens are two different transgender categories in the ballroom. New categories, gender identities and sexual subjectivities have been established to reflect the numerous representations of transgender identity in the ballroom community (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 366).

To sum up, I will write about the approach by psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu, namely the significance of the skin in terms of psychic functioning. Anzieu’s theories will be approached through Prosser’s lens of transgender embodiment. Further, I will outline the theory of performativity by the post-structuralist and feminist, Judith Butler, which discusses the stylized repetition of acts reflecting a gendered normative framework resulting in a citational process of performance. To structure this thesis in a systematic manner and to specifically account for the representation of transgender identity, non-whiteness, and the working-class, I will consider an intersectional approach put forward by the scholar and former ballroom member, Marlon M. Bailey. I will use these theories to help analyze the transgender representation in two audio-visual formats, namely *Pose* (2018-2021) and *Paris is Burning* (1990). The topic of this thesis is unique in the sense that it attempts to bridge psychoanalytical and gender theories with the intersectional categories of gender, class, and race, specifically gender-nonconformity, working-class, and being of color.

My stance is that most psychoanalytical theories are in opposition to the analytic categories that I aim to take on board as they have mostly been conceptualized in heteronormative, gender-conforming and middle-class terms. A similar approach has been considered in the book *Clinical Encounters in Sexuality Psychoanalytic Practice and Queer Theory* by Eve Watson and Noreen Giffney; however, it focuses on bridging these theories in a clinical context, as opposed to the field of black queer theory. In the following chapter, I will focus on how the skin-ego by Anzieu, as analyzed by Prosser, differs from other psychoanalytic conceptions, namely the ones by Freud, Lacan, and Laplanche. This will be followed by an attempt to transfer the child-focused functions of the skin-ego to categories representing transgender characters.

At this point, I would like to highlight that, according to the *American Psychological Association*, an individual does not necessarily require any treatment to be categorized as ‘transgender’; it is rather determined by the individual’s own perception of the self. This means that there is no appropriate manner to transition (“Answers to your questions”). However, since the skin-ego focuses on how one’s psychic functioning is translated, represented, and embodied through one’s skin, most of my examples from the audio-visual texts will lean on the visualization of transgender women who have made some changes to their appearances. These typically include adopting a feminine clothing style, grooming, having a female name, starting hormone therapy, undergoing sex-reassignment operations and other medical procedures (“Answers to your questions”). An analysis will be presented, which will be written through the lens of intersectional categorizes of race, gender, and class. This will be followed by outlining Butler’s theory of performativity and an analysis in line with the intersectional categories represented by the transgender characters in *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *Pose* (2018-2021). In terms of the skin-ego and performativity, emphasis will then be put on differences and similarities between the groups mentioned in the two audio-visual media.

2. Skin-ego by Didier Anzieu

Anzieu argues that since the Renaissance, western thought has been shaped by the notion that one needs to break through or penetrate something to get to its core (Benthien 7). Anzieu negates the old metaphor of piercing through a layer to reach the core of truth. He argues that one must scrutinize complex structures of surfaces to understand one's physical, psychical, and intellectual reality more meaningfully (Segal 44). The notion of analyzing multiple surfaces, rather than breaking through them, is equally reflected in neurophysiology. The academic and author of *Skin: on the Border between Self and the World* (2002), Claudia Benthien, states that researchers have concluded that the brain is a rind. This means what has long been approached as the center should rather be conceived to be located at the periphery of the body (Benthien 7). The skin represents this complex notion of a double-surfaced entity as it has a protective external layer and one, in its orifice, that gathers and exchanges information (Segal 44). In this chapter, I will introduce Anzieu's skin-ego, touching upon Posser's conception which will be followed by outlining how his conceptions differ from theories by Freud, Laplanche and Lacan.

The skin-ego was the first systematic conception of the cathexis of the skin, which is an image of the body's psychical and mostly unconscious surface. It is significantly emotionally charged, which is manifested in the early development of a child (Anzieu 43). I believe that the anthropologist and paleontologist, Nina Jalonski, the author of *Skin: A Natural History* (2013), has captured the essence of the skin-ego in *The New York Times* interview: "My skin is my unwritten biography" (Dreifus). This quote suggests that the skin – the metaphor for the physical book – contains the framework and the basic setting, which unfolds during one's lifespan. This means that the skin-ego, as described by Anzieu, is conceived as a potential, latent formation at birth, which becomes more distinct in the unfolding relationship between the child, their primary caregiver and environment (Posser 65). Gherovici states that applying a psychoanalytical theory to transgender representation is a difficult endeavor as transgender scholars and activists have often been critical of psychoanalytical concepts (160).

This is because they have overtly and covertly developed heteronormative and gender binary-normative approaches that have pathologized all sexualities and genders deviating from them. Gherovici argues that this discrimination mostly stems from an inconclusive and biased interpretation of Freud's works (161). I argue, like the psychoanalyst and associate professor in the department of Philosophy, Fernanda Magallanes, that gender-nonconforming identities were not explicitly pathologized and interpreted in a biased manner, but simply not mentioned in Freud's writing (76).

Not mentioning this group of people leaves the impression that they are abject. Freudian theories approach the masculine body as the ideal representation, while feminine bodies, and the ones not confined to gender binary norms, are not represented. Even though women are not explicitly represented, they are at least named. Naming creates a potential foundation for being represented, while other subjects, who do not necessarily adhere to the binary representation of gendered bodies and identities, do not experience the privilege of being named in psychoanalytical theories (Magallanes 76). Those who are not categorized in the androcratic order, are not named in the current psychoanalytical framework. Through not being named, they are made abject.

By transforming the Oedipus plot, the goal should be to name all identities and bodies, and thereby making no human abject (Magallanes 76-77). In addition to being represented and, therefore, not being made abject, the way sexed bodies are mentally constructed has changed since the 20th century (Magallanes 76). During the early 1900s, the dominant discourse concerning sexuality and family creation was characterized by reproductive goals. The Oedipus plot in terms of its phallogentric nature must be reconstructed as it does not display our current reality. Nowadays, sexed bodies are mentally conceived independently of their reproductive goals (Magallanes 76). Besides, gender-affirming surgery and artificial insemination have transformed the possibilities for today's material bodies. The phallus was the center of Freud's theories because it was considered to capture an intelligible representation of reproduction (Magallanes 76-77). I argue, despite Anzieu basing his theories partly on Freud's, that Anzieu implicitly offers a more constructive approach towards transgender representation because his theory is focused on the subjective feeling of inhabiting one's skin, rather than being incorporated in a gendered system or made abject.

Despite Butler stating that Anzieu's account cannot be applied to the sexed body, Prosser demonstrates the opposite. He takes the body of a subject into consideration, who decides to get gender-affirming surgery or chooses to start hormone therapy. He underlines that the skin-ego enables one to account for the significance of feeling, sensing, and perceiving the 'transsexed body' (Prosser 67). The transformative embodiment of one's skin can result from hormone therapy, which restricts or alters the functioning of the gonads. These modify the shape of one's body, tissue structure, texture and the density and distribution of one's hair. These processes can be modified and continued when having a gender-affirming surgery (66). Prosser, based on Anzieu's theory, argues that a transgender person who decides to alter and re-shape one's body's surface, perceives the latter as the very essence of the self (67).

This approach negates the claim that the body's surface can be approached as a costume (67). Anzieu's skin-ego highlights that the perception of one's body is the foundation of the self in a psychoanalytical context (Prosser 65).

In addition, the skin functions as an interface between psyche and body, which contradicts a clear-cut dichotomy. As a result, his concept demonstrates that psychical and physical realms establish each other (Anzieu xxxii). Prosser's transgender ontology, based on Anzieu's skin-ego, implies that one's gender identity is physically felt and eventually psychically transcribed (Prosser 72). The body does not only perceive and experience this mental projection, but it emerges from it (Prosser 65). This means that Didier Anzieu's theory can be definitively used for approaching transgender embodiment because it distinctively highlights the feeling, perception, and function of one's body. Prosser's take on the skin-ego underlines that one's physical skin greatly influences one's ego, and therefore one's gender identity (Werbart 37).

Anzieu was influenced by the psychoanalysts Freud, Lacan, and Laplanche, however, Anzieu chose to take a slightly divergent approach (Anzieu xxxii). In *The Ego and the Id* (1949), Freud demonstrates that anacletic, transformative bodily activities are not only the foundation of personality traits and defense mechanisms (26, 36). The latter determine, to a great extent, psychical drives, which are based on biological instincts (26, 36). Freud's reference to 'anacletic' implies that the body has a central role in terms of one's psychic life as, for instance, one's libido-dependent love interest is to some extent interconnected with another bodily instinct.

Freud writes that the Ego is primarily established through the experience of touch, while Anzieu argues that the body does not occupy its rightful place in these psychoanalytical theories. The latter states that a more fundamental and primal notion needs to be added to Freud's concept (Anzieu 105). Anzieu maintains that it is the perception of the self that is synonymous with the sheath of sound, smell, and stimuli. These are projected onto the external and internal layer of the surface of the body (105).

Jean Laplanche takes a different stance on the function of anaclicity. He states that the theory of anaclicity should only be applied to the way sexual drives derive from the organic functions of self-preservation (68). He argues that these drives, arising from the erotogenic zone, come into being through the support of self-preservative functions. These sexual drives later become independent of these initial functions (Laplanche 68).

Anzieu pledges for a broader use of the anaclitic concept, namely that the “psychical apparatus develops by breaking away in successive steps from its biological base” (103). On the one hand, this approach has the purpose of gradually withdrawing from biologically driven regulations. On the other hand, it demands to look for the anaclitic foundation of psychical functions in the functions of the body (Anzieu 103).

In contrast to Lacan, who states that “the unconscious is structured like a language”, Anzieu argues that “the unconscious is structured like the body” (Anzieu and Tarrab 43). Lacan claims that language and the unconscious are structured in a way that involves a signifying process including ciphering and deciphering. The unconscious is in the symbolic order, which is ‘transindividual’ as it is something that is communicated across individuals. It points to human interactions shaped by norms, using signifiers and representations of the signified. The signifier is a linguistic entity, while the signified is the real-world object. The signified glides underneath the signifier indicating the failure to truly represent the real-world object (Gasperoni 93, 103). This implies that meaning, as represented by linguistic entities, is not stable, but constantly in flux. They must constantly change to attempt to describe the current reality more accurately. Lacan states that this process of constant fluidity is both represented by both the unconscious and language (Gasperoni 93, 103). Despite Anzieu’s and Lacan’s divergent approaches, traces of Lacan’s conception of the unconscious can be detected in Anzieu’s concept, the ‘common sense’. It highlights the means of communication embedded in society (Gasperoni 93, 103).

The foundation for thought – the ‘common sense’ – is the unity of body mind, which contains traces of what is unconsciously communicated (Segal 6). Anzieu’s statement allocates Lacan’s role of language, which is synonymous with the unconscious, to the body. Anzieu conceptualizes the body in a fundamental and archaic way; it is approached as having experienced first sensory-motor perceptions, from which communication originates. This means that Anzieu’s conception of the body differs from anatomo-physiologists. His approach implies that the libidinalized body attempts to reclaim “[...] the primordial loss of the original satisfaction [...]” (Tsolas and Anzieu-Premmereur 3). Anzieu does not regard his conception of the body as an entity that primes the mind to transform excitations into mental notions and unconscious fantasies (Tsolas and Anzieu-Premmereur 3). The embodied support of the “psychosomatic surface of the skin” implies that the body is organized like, represented through and synonymous with the unconsciousness (Prosser 72).

In transgender ontology, the attempt to modify one's skin or the urge to completely transform it stems from the experience of one's physical, material skin, onto which one's psychical perception is projected (Prosser 72). Because Prosser's analysis of Anzieu's theory highlights the initial physical conception of one's transgendered body, rather than the psychological implication. His approach is constructed against the grain of poststructuralism and Lacanianism, which state that the body is culturally constructed and charged. In contrast to poststructuralism and Lacanianism, Prosser argues that the body should be grasped as "discrete generative or productive referent" (Prosser 66).

The child establishes their psychic apparatus through the articulation of 'sense' with support of the 'senses'. The prior represents significance, which is mostly communicated through language, while the latter points to the connection of one's body organs and one's brain that interact with one's surroundings. Both concepts, according to Anzieu, are captured by the concept of 'common sense'. The latter is influenced by Lacan's conception of the unconscious being 'transindividual' (Gasperoni 93, 103). Anzieu's 'common sense' is the interconnection of the body and mind (Segal 6). The 'sense', grasped through language, being articulated with the help of the 'senses', pointing to one's internal life communicating with one's external surroundings, are categorized in eight different functions.

The skin-ego encapsulates certain functions from which certain deficiencies can derive in case they are not sufficiently fulfilled. For instance, the fifth function, which is called *consensuality or inter-sensoriality*, implies that the psychic surface of the skin links different sensations, while making them distinctly perceivable to the skin. If this function is not fulfilled, the individual tends to fear that numerous sense organs function independently of one another (Segal 48, Anzieu 112). The sixth function is called *sexualization*. The child is sensually taken care of, which creates the foundation for sexual pleasure (Anzieu 112). If this function is not successful, the individual might experience intense narcissist feelings, anxiety, insecurity, or pain (Anzieu 113). The seventh function of the skin-ego is called *libidinal recharging of psychic functioning*. It delineates that libidinal recharging is maintained and appropriately, unequally distributed among the psychical sub-systems. The appropriately maintained and distributed psychical functions are reflected in the reaction of the skin's surface. If this function fails, the individual is confronted with one of the following fears: The person could fear that their physical apparatus might explode due to the disproportionate degree of pressure due to excessive excitation, or they could fear the 'Nirvana anxiety'. This points to the longing to reduce tension to zero (Anzieu 113).

Similarly, if the five functions of the skin-ego do not develop adequately with the support of one's protective wrapping, the individual tends to be challenged by certain difficulties, such as not being able to differentiate between their internal life and the external reality (Anzieu 110).

3. Skin-ego: the representation of transgender embodiment and identity

In this chapter, I will present eight functions of the skin-ego. According to Anzieu, they need to be fulfilled to avoid developing deficiencies. In addition, this chapter will present an analysis of the following child-focused categories can be translated to reflect audio-visual representations of transgender identity. Because I do not consider all eight transferred functions to appropriately represent transgender identity in the chosen audio-visual media, emphasis will be put on the first, second, third, fourth and eighth category. The transferred categories highlight the role of the internalized caregiver and the process of taking ownership over one's own skin. Internalizing the role of the caregiver implies that the transgender individual integrated their emotions, the feeling of the caregiver's skin, and their voice into their identity and stores them in their sense of embodiment to some degree.

The first and the second category, namely *holding and being held* and *containing* and the third, fourth and eighth function, namely *registering external traces and creating a mode of communication*, *individuation* and *registering tactile sensory information* will be bridged with intersectional inequalities associated with race, gender and class. It must be underlined that the chosen transferred categories do not apply to every representation of a transgender character in the selected audio-visual media, but only to those who suffer from gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria is the profound state of uneasiness originating from the incongruence between gender and sex (Ferrarello 143). This means that one's gender identity is conceived to not correspond with one's biological sex, which can be a source of intense and continuous suffering or distress. Gender dysphoria often elicits the desire to transition to the gender identity that one identifies with, for instance, a biological male transitioning to being a female and a biological female to being a male (Yarhouse 19, 62). According to the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association), adolescents and adults suffering from gender dysphoria experience at least two out of the six following criteria: firstly, the incongruence between one's primary, (anticipated) secondary sexual characteristics and gender identity and secondly, the desire to get rid of one's primary and secondary sexual characteristics or prevent the latter from developing.

The third criterion constitutes the significant desire for having primary or secondary sex characteristics of another gender. The fourth implies that one aims to be the other gender or an alternative one. The last two criteria comprise the desire to be treated, and to have a strong conviction to experience similar feelings and reactions like the other gender or some alternative form (Yarhouse 89-90). In a nutshell, gender dysphoria revolves around the feeling of looking, feeling, and being treated in line with one's gender identity.

In addition to gender dysphoria, the internalized role of the caregiver poses a certain difficulty for most transgender characters in the chosen audio-visual media. This difficulty is illustrated by a study by Gülgöz et al. (2015), which I argue is equally applicable to the representation of transgender characters in *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *Pose* (2018-2021). The study concludes that most transgender participants were implicitly forced to adhere to a particular set of gendered behavior and expression in their childhood that is in opposition to their authentic gender identity. Gülgöz et al. stated that parents and teachers socialize children in a manner that praises behavior that is usually considered to be in alignment with one's biological sex and punishes the opposite (24481).

In terms of the chosen audio-visual media, the transgender characters' external world, including their frequent interlocutors, such as caregivers, their family members, authorities, peers, and acquaintances, have typically shaped, educated, and socialized them in a manner that creates a certain discontinuity. The latter is established between their learnt, forceful, and unauthentic and their authentic gender identity and embodiment. This becomes evident in the case of Venus Xtravaganza in *Paris is Burning* (1990). According to her narrated story, her parents found her crossdressing, which means to wear clothes typically associated with another gender, and she had to leave her family because she feared embarrassing them (Brew 9-10).

This means that when she learns that she does not behave and identify in accordance with her parents' expectations, she is forced to leave her home. The consequence of not adhering to one's family gendered script mentioned above indicates the violence of gendered socialization. For transgender teenagers and young adults who substantially lack appropriate support, the concepts of 'house', 'children' and 'mother' are established in the ballroom scene. These mostly function as a replacement for their blood relatives (Brew 9-10).

The focus of the following chapter will revolve around the discontinuity between one's embodied gender identity and one's internalized caregiver, which also encompasses one's surroundings during one's upbringing. In the following sub-chapters, the original functions of the skin-ego, followed by the adapted ones reflecting transgender representation will be bridged with intersectional inequalities connected to race, gender and class. These bridged categories will then be the framework for analyzing scenes in *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *Pose* (2018-2021).

3.1. First function: containing and preserving

The skin's first function is to *contain* and *preserve* the goods that it has acquired through nutrition, care, and nurturing verbal stimulation (Anzieu 44). This category can be represented by the supporting hand of the caregiver and the image of the latter being someone on whom one can lean. In this context, the primary identification of a support-object is crucial, to which the child can hold on to, while being simultaneously held by the child. The first function is fulfilled if the need for attachment, embracing and clinging is met, rather than any libido-drive (Anzieu 107). According to Anzieu, the child obtains this image from an internal, maternal, or parental phallus and fears the anticipated risk of not being supported (Segal 47).

When the latter function is applied to transgender representation, the internalized, embodied, and supportive role of the caregiver must be taken into consideration. This transferred function comprises of transgender women providing emotional, linguistic, and nutritious support for others in the two audio-visual media. Embracing, hugging, and clinging provide the individual with a (compensatory) sensation that potentially supports the original development of the skin-ego. The argument that the first function needs to be redeveloped during their adolescence and young adult life is based on that transgender women portrayed in *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *Pose* (2018-2021) had to leave their families. They were either forced to leave or excluded, marginalized, and embarrassed and were, therefore, made to leave. This implies that they were not provided with the amount of caring, unintentional touch they required. The latter is, for instance, portrayed in the fourth episode of the second season of *Pose* (2018-2021). Candy's biological parents encounter their daughter's dead body, and they articulate that they regret never seeing her the way she *was*. Her biological mother says: "there wasn't no guidebook [sic!] instructing me on how to raise a child like you" (00:47:19-00:47:25). This suggests that her biological mother did not have the tools to treat, touch and speak to Candy that would result in her daughter's acceptance of her transgender identity. Candy feeling excluded from her family indicates that she was not provided with the required caring, non-sexual touch in her childhood, puberty and young adulthood that would affirm her transgender identity and make her feel comfortable in her own skin and home.

This is even more explicit in the first episode of the first season of *Pose* (2018-2021). Blanca, the main character, who is a transgender woman of color, tells her new 'child' that her family could not accept her as a woman. Blanca says: "I cried like a baby. I left, and never looked back. When you get rejected by your mother, your father, you're always out there looking for someone to... replace that love you're missing" (00:31:09-00:31:29).

The vulnerability of being rejected by one's biological family is underlined by the statement that she had cried like a baby. I claim that the rejection forced her to re-evaluate her coping mechanisms, eliciting the feeling of intense helplessness. This illustrates the potential consequence of this touch deprivation and lacking acceptance of one's gender identity by one's biological family, namely that one constantly seeks to substitute it. This is also uttered in *Paris is Burning* (1990) by Pepper LaBeija who says:

“When someone has rejection from their mother and father, their family, they - when they get out in the world - they search. They search for someone to fill that void. I know this for [sic!] experience because I've had kids come to me and latch hold of me [sic!] like I'm their mother or like I'm their father, 'cause they can talk to me and I'm gay and they're gay. (00:23:15-00:23:39)

This need of having a parental figure who replaces a biological one is demonstrated when describing the mother of the House Xtravaganza in *Paris is Burning* (1990). Her children exclaim that “[o]ur mother even nurses us! She's a good woman. She nourishes us!” (00:29:01-00:29:06). According to my view, the search for replacement, which is often portrayed through emotional support and embrace in the two audio-visual media, is intended to fulfill the deficiencies of the skin-ego.

3.2. Second function: containing

The original second function of the skin-ego is called *containing*; it provides the skin with an interface between the external and internal world. The skin-ego consists of two layers, symbolizing the internal and external reality, which have a different structure and function. The difference between these two layers can be metaphorically illustrated by Freud's 'Mystic Writing-Pad' (Eng 136). When one writes something on a transparent sheet of paper, the traces can be seen on a waxed paper lying underneath. The former represents the upper layer of the skin-ego, while the latter displays the inner surface of the skin. The signs on the upper sheet can be easily disconnected from the lower sheet, however, the traces on the inner waxed paper remain (Eng 136). This implies that the inner layer highly influences how one deals with issues coming from the inside, as memories are imprinted on the surface. This surface is the foundation for the creation of the apparatus for thinking, recreating, and retaining thoughts (Werbart 46). The internal apparatus is sheltered from the outside world to avoid being penetrated by external potentially dangerous stimuli (Anzieu 44). The external layer functions as a screen that perceives and sieves excitation, while the inner, which is thinner and more sensitive, registers internal meaning. The skin-ego is asymmetrical because the external layer has the means of filtering and protecting itself from external stimuli, while the inside layer cannot protect itself from inside stimuli (Anzieu 110).

In addition, the function of the second category is to provide a sense of surrounding continuity, which bridges sound and touch. It is mainly fulfilled through the appropriate bodily care by the caregiver. The fulfillment of this category is largely influenced by the reciprocity of the child and the caregiver's body and the latter's gestural and vocal reactions to the child. The child gradually becomes equipped to imitate these reactions, which allows it to encounter these reactions and sensations independently. This means that part of this function provides the child with the ability to passively preserve sensations, images, and emotions, while a different part actively adapts some of the sensations to make them more processable and elicitable in independent contexts (Anzieu 109). Eventually, the goal of this function is to wrap the appropriate processability around the entire psychical apparatus, just as the skin enwraps the entire body. This aspect might appear unattainable throughout one's lifespan, but it is indispensable at its beginning (Anzieu 109-110).

It is necessary to create an initial framework for processing internal and external sensations. In the first years of one's life, the skin-ego is perceived as the external layer, the shell or container, while the instinctual part, the 'Id', is considered the kernel. These two parts are reciprocally dependent on each other. The skin-ego can only fulfill this function if it has the instinctual ability to contain sensations appropriately (Anzieu 109-110). This means that the skin-ego has to acquire the ability to localize and later differentiate between different origins of the perceived sensations. A sensation can merely be experienced as such if identifiable points of permeability can be detected, leading to the localization of the source of origin (Anzieu 109-110). If this function fails, two possible anxiety-based categories can be established: perceiving oneself as a 'kernel without a shell' or having a 'head like a sieve' (Segal 47). If an individual suffers from a 'kernel without a shell', they attempt to establish a substitute shell consisting of psychical suffering. It results from being confronted with diffuse, unidentifiable instinctual anxiety, which is impossible to calm. In the alternative case, the individual 'has a head like a sieve'. Their psychical shell has developed; however, it is lacking continuity. This implies that thoughts and memories are difficult to elicit and retain. The subject suffers from the fear of the inside depleting itself, which includes the anxiety of losing the aggressive notion for self-affirmation (Anzieu 110).

Freud recognizes that the Ego has an additional function that protects the individual against stimuli. He states that the Ego, just like the skin, consists of a double-layered structure. In the beginning of the child's life, the role of the skin is partly fulfilled by the caregiver (Anzieu 110). Anzieu adds that the caregiver continues to fulfill this role until the point at which the child's developing Ego considers its skin to provide itself/the child with appropriate anaclitic support to substitute the caregiver's function (110). However, I argue that when one's caregiver has not fulfilled this role, a substitute caregiver will be searched for to avoid the previously mentioned anxiety-ridden consequences.

This function of the skin-ego can be transferred to transgender embodiment in terms of the internalized role of the caregiver and one's disavowing surroundings. The transgender characters in the two audio-visual media are portrayed as perceiving a certain discontinuity in terms of their own self. According to Bailey, this struggle is evidently not inherent to them, but mostly stems from other people marginalizing, excluding, and harassing them. The harasser not experiencing any consequences results in structural and internalized racism and internalized transphobia in the transgender characters ("Gender/Racial Realness" 380).

Internalized racism points to the acceptance, by marginalized people of color, of dominant negative beliefs and stereotypes about themselves (Williams and Williams-Morris 255). Internalized racism reinforces cultural imperialism, which propagates the apparent normalcy of the prevalent dominant societal structure. This can often lead to the subordinate groups internalizing their subordination and oppression (Speight 129). Similarly, internalized transphobia comprises a specific form of minority stress that is perceived when transgender individuals have negative beliefs about themselves due to persistent exposure to societal stigma (Testa et al. 279). This entails that transgender women of color, who are intersectionally oppressed, have to fight four battles: internalized racism and transphobia and external, structural racism and transphobia.

These internalized and external battles in terms of racism and transphobia are difficult to contain by the skin-ego when it has not acquired the instinctual ability to contain. This entails that the appropriate processability has not been wrapped around the psychical apparatus because the caregiver has not provided one with continuous acceptance in terms of bridged voice and touch. This lack of continuous psychical care leads to having a vulnerable internal state, which is elicited through the inability to first localize and then to differentiate between information that has been passed on or inscribed into the kernel (Anzieu 109). In the case of racism and transphobia, it is difficult to locate the source of transphobic and racist external influences. Some pieces of information cannot be either actively or passively processed or they are actively inscribed instead of being passively processed. The filtering function of the external layer is dysfunctional, and a shield of anxiety or psychical suffering comes to the surface. This substitute layer of psychical suffering, such as internalized transphobia and racism, can physically be wrapped over one's skin (Anzieu 110).

When internalized transphobia and racism become too overwhelming to process, the opposite could be the case, namely the 'sieve skin-ego'. It implies that sensations and memories are difficult to store, which leads to the fear of having an empty inside. An individual fears that the aggressivity that is required for self-affirmation is vanishing (Anzieu 110).

This is connected to transgender representation in the audio-visual representations. Some characters fear that their inside thoughts and sensations could vanish and, therefore, also their gender identity. This elicits the need to aggressively highlight other members' deficient transgender identity. Through viewing others as inferior, their aggressive need for self-affirmation is satisfied.

An example of how profoundly this behavior is implemented in the ballroom scene can be illustrated by the concept of ‘shade’, which was introduced as one of the substantial components of the ballroom in *Paris is Burning* (1990). According to one of the characters, Dorian Corey, it is “a developed form” originating from reading (00:35:25-00:35:33), which “is the real art form of insult” (00:33:44-00:33:50). However, next to shade and the battles with racism and transphobia, a strong and celebratory notion of representing one’s gender identity authentically is anchored in the ballroom. In ballroom culture, performance is used to represent one’s authentic self in a ‘passable’ manner, which means that transgender women intend to present themselves in a manner that makes them be perceived as women (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 366).

The opposing notions of having internalized transphobia and internalized racism, while at the same time attaching positive value to one’s gender and race exist simultaneously in the ballroom. The attempt at reconciling or healing is constantly reinforced through the expression of violence and discrimination (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 367). The constant harassment, the resulting internal discomfort, and the attachment of positive value to one’s race and gender identity in the ballroom makes it difficult, according to the skin-ego, to establish a functioning interface between one’s inside and outside reality (Anzieu 109). According to Anzieu, this embodied and internalized feeling of being imprisoned in the ‘wrong’ body, mirroring external transphobic and racist feedback, prevents an individual from acquiring the perquisite of well-being (Prosser 80). Anzieu states, according to Prosser, that a certain degree of continuity in terms of experiencing one’s own body, one’s character, touch and voice is vital for one’s own well-being (80). In addition to the discontinuity elicited by one’s surroundings and internal perception of the self, people who identify as transgender experience a discontinuity between their gender identity and the sex they were assigned at birth. This is reinforced through a constant praise of stereotypical behavior that is commonly associated with one’s original sex assigned at birth, while punishing behavior that is associated with an alternative gender in one’s childhood (Gülgöz et al. 24481), and constant exposure to transphobia (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 367).

To sum up, the original function, *containing*, pertains to the interface between one’s internal and external layer. The individual learns, if the caretaker was successful, to passively preserve sensations, images, and emotions, while a different part actively adapts some of the sensations to make them more processable, localizable, and independently encounterable (Anzieu 109).

The transgender characters, in the two audio-visual media, are portrayed as suffering from a discontinuity based on how their family and society at large perceive the dichotomy between sex and gender. This discontinuity is reinforced through violence and discrimination based on normalized reactions to gender-nonconformity and being of color *and* the attachment of positive values to these attributes in the ballroom. These disconnections result in many characters in *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *Pose* (2018-2021) suffering from ‘kernel without a shell’ or having a ‘head like a sieve’ (Anzieu 109, 110). The former refers to anxiety replacing a functional container due to internalized transphobia and racism, and the latter denotes an aggressive need for self-affirmation rooted in the fear of the inside depleting itself, which also concerns one’s gender identity.

3.3. Intersection race, gender and class

As mentioned in the previous section, the second function of the skin-ego is *containing*, which, next to the first function *containing and preserving*, represents the intersectionality of race, gender and class in *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *Pose* (2018-2021). These categories, despite their constructedness, highly influence and determine how transgender women of color are treated, which is, over time, psychically inscribed on the internal layer of their skin-ego (Anzieu 105-106). For instance, the function of *containing* aims to establish the capacity to differentiate between instinctual drives that are supposed to be processed passively, namely preserved, versus actively, namely incorporated into one's psychical apparatus. For these processes to function, one must experience the ability to bridge the perception of internal and external sensations (Anzieu 110). However, because transgender characters of color in the discussed media were discouraged by their biological families to embrace their authentic gender identities, the external and internal continuity could not be established. This means that instinctual sensations that were supposed to be processed passively, rather than integrated into their psychical apparatus, led to the internalization of transphobic and racist notions. This implies that the first function, *containing and preserving*, which refers to holding and simultaneously being held, becomes dysfunctional. This happens when the expected support, such as experiencing the sensation of being part of one's biological family and being part of society at large, are not met.

The feminists and anthropologists Page and Richardson argue that in addition to experiencing structural racism, people of color are often implicitly expected to adhere to stereotypical gender behavior that represents the state's favored concept of the gender binary (57). This means that transgender people of color are seen through racialized structural actions "that broadly demand from all Blacks their conformity with gendered embodiments of racially disciplined civility" (Page and Richardson 57). For transgender people of color, transphobia resulting from the inequalities which arise when one does not adhere to the gender binary code is even more significantly propelled through structural racism. Dominant modes of racialized difference dependent on marking transgender people of color as different to normalize heterosexual, gender-conforming identities and racialization. The process of normalization can only be institutionalized through forcing people to adhere to the gender binary. This disciplined civility led to western notion-building processes to perpetuate social control (Page and Richardson 59-60). The prerequisite for the latter is acquiescence to terror against gender-nonconforming identities.

According to Page and Richardson, it can be stated that the institutionalized racialized terror, as experienced by transgender people of color, is not merely sexist or transphobic, but it is also closely intertwined with gendered class structures reflecting oppressive racialized structures (60). This is, for instance, visible when considering famous white transgender women, such as Caitlyn Jenner. She is represented through various notions of visibility, which simultaneously operate as a system of exclusion, to make them “safe objects of consumption for cisgender-assumed audiences” (Lovelock 751). However, the impact of otherness compared to the expected audience, in terms of being transgender and heightened acquired wealth, is lessened through para-social aspects that the audience and the celebrities assume to have in common. These are adhering to stereotypical gender roles and thorough whiteness presented as universal and non-raced (Lovelock 751). This means that transgender celebrities are perceived as less threatening to the assumed cisgender audience when being white rather than when being of color.

Both categories, race, and gender, are non-essentialist, non-naturalist concepts, but they are culturally constructed and ideologically charged. Real-life consequences of racism and gender non-adherence are seemingly rationalized through disguising their non-essentiality (Fields 106). This means that the violence, discrimination, and murder, which transgender women of color are confronted with, are naturalized. While gender is constructed within a heterosexual framework, race is an ideological term that came into being to attempt to legitimize extreme inequalities (Fields 101; Butler, “Gender Trouble” 209). The intersectional inequalities that transgender women of color experience are connected to the established lens through which gender-variant minorities were regarded, which has been essential to dominant discourses in western racial states (Page and Richardson 60). This implies that gender-variant identities were not only formed through their own efforts, but they were simultaneously constructed as an excluded caste by the state. In the end, the illusion is created that their exclusion is the prerequisite for the inclusion of everyone else.

Caste represents the structure of exclusionary power mirroring “the competitive reality of racialized modernity” (Page and Richardson 60). According to Page and Richardson, people in power distribute resources in a manner that reinforces the association of state terror with people of color. In addition, the scholars claim that it is vital that academics pair groups marked by racial differences with the analysis of gender identity (60). Black transgender people struggle due to “their medicalization, criminalization, and pathologization as racially subordinate gender-variant people” (Page and Richardson 60).

It points to a process through which sexualized and gendered bodies are marked through practices of racism. This leads, according to Page and Richardson, to an inequitable distribution of resources to gendered, sexually and racially marked bodies (57).

3.3.1. In *Paris is Burning*

The transferred first function establishes the framework for scenes in which transgender women provide emotional, linguistic, and nutritious support for others. According to the first adapted function, embracing, hugging, and clinging serves as a (compensatory) sensation that potentially supports the original development of the skin-ego. In *Paris is Burning* (1990), this transferred category is illustrated in scenes in which the House of Xtravaganza is introduced. The following statement is uttered by one of the ‘children’, which is accompanied by the following shot: “[t]he House of Xtravaganza has done a lot. It's made me feel like I have a family. We're always together. If we're not together, we always speak on the phone” (00:27:58-00:28:08).



Fig. 1: Houses

The fact that they spend all their time being in contact signifies the level of intense contact that is needed as a compensatory mechanism. It is compensatory because all members were forced to leave their biological families in their teenage years as they did not accept their gender identity and their sexuality. This shot above (fig. 1, 00:28:08) outlines the level of extreme closeness between the two characters on the right-hand-side, who represent the concept of holding while being held. It is depicted on a physical level through literally holding onto each other, and on a psychical level through linguistic and emotional support.

Their mouths are open, which indicates a level of surprise, admiration, or the articulation of words, which cannot be identified because of the extradiegetic narration. The two 'children' of the House of Xtravaganza on the sides maintain eye contact and seem to treat each other in a reassuring way. They are turned towards each other in close proximity, which suggests an intense rapport. I claim that they, through these devices, communicate supportive verbal and non-verbal messages, which function as a compensatory mechanism for the first function of the skin-ego. The level of familiarity in this medium shot is reinforced through cinematic mechanisms, such as the intimate dark background lighting, while illuminating people in focus. In addition, the importance of touch, holding and leaning against one another is already suggested in the first minute of the documentary, which shows eight people doing so. What ensues is the following narration of one of the ballroom members:

I remember my dad say: 'you have three strikes against you in this world. Every black man has two - that they're just black and they're male. But you're black and you're male and you're gay. You're gonna have a hard fucking time'. Then he said, 'if you're gonna do this, you're gonna have to be stronger than you ever imagined. (00:52-00:01:10)

According to my view, a compensatory mechanism that aims to bring forth this strength is established through touching, holding, and leaning against each other. This is done to create a substitute mechanism for one's biological caretaker, who excluded their children from their family. The mechanism mentioned suggests that they were not treated nor touched in a manner that reinforced the acceptance of their gender identity. If this compensatory mechanism of one's house members would not have been established, I assume that even greater suffering and vulnerability based on intersectional inequalities, as mentioned in the quote, would have been brought to the forefront.



Fig. 2: Angie Xtravaganza

In the shot above, the mother of the House of Xtravaganza is introduced. Her following statement signifies her extreme level of investment and involvement in her ‘children’s’ lives. She states:

My name is Angie Xtravaganxa and I am the mother of the House of Xtravaganxa. When there’s a ball, I’m always doing something for everybody in my house. I do that one’s hair, the other one’s makeup. You know, choose their shoes, their accessories. I always offer advice, you know, as far as what I know and what I’ve been through in gay life, you know. I ran away from my house when I was 14 and I’ve learned all sorts of things, good and bad, and how to survive in the gay world, you know. It’s kind of hard. (00:28:08-00:28:37)

Next to offering advice, she provides support for her ‘children’ that helps them to adhere to the category they choose to walk at the ball, which often highlights their gender identity. This means she supports them to embody and embrace their gender identity through presenting themselves authentically in the ballroom. Her experience has equipped her with methods of surviving intersectional inequalities, which she chooses to pass onto her ‘children’. This implies that she successfully provides her ‘children’ with emotional, linguistic, and most likely nutritious support (Anzieu 107).

Her success as a house mother is highlighted through her being presented as a queen or a holy figure in this scene. The latter image is captured through the dark background, while she is illuminated. The ornaments, the jewelry, the glittery dress and fan, the armchair and the glazed paintings suggest wealth and upper-class status, which contribute to the image of a queen. However, at the same time the Hindu statue signifies notions of the colonized Other, which I claim the producer has deliberately placed there to suggest that she can never fully fulfill the first function of the skin-ego. I make this claim based on the producer's very clear choices in terms of setting, lighting, and presentation, such as the dichotomous setting of daylight in which white, upper-class people are shown, and of nighttime, in which only transgender people of color and other members of the LGBTQI+ community are depicted. In respect to Angie Xtravaganza, I argue that Livingston wanted to highlight that she can only support her 'children' through *compensatory* mechanisms. These will never completely replace the deficiencies that their biological parents are responsible for as they chose to exclude their children from their families rather than accept their gender identity and sexuality.



Fig. 3: House of Xtravaganza

The shot above (fig. 3, 00:28:13) depicts the House of Xtravaganza, which is shown in the beginning of Angie Xtravaganza's introduction. It represents the notion of holding while being held. The 'father' and 'mother' of the house are dressed in red and wear golden and opulent jewelry, which represents notions of power and dominance. They are positioned standing in the last row with a look of confidence. I claim that this position symbolizes that they are hierarchically dominant and constitute the backbone of the family on which their 'children' can lean. The compensatory notion which is required to fulfill the first function of the skin-ego is represented here through embracing, hugging, and clinging onto family members, most importantly onto their 'parents' (Anzieu 107).

Because of the biological families' rejection and the exclusion of the transgender characters in *Paris is Burning* (1990) on a societal level, their internal and external sensations could not be bridged naturally (Anzieu 110). However, according to the second function of the skin-ego, it is necessary to bridge internal and external sensations to know which sensations to process actively or passively. Because of the abandonment and harassment, some of the characters actively incorporated transphobic and racist notions to bridge internal and external sensations necessary to fulfill parts of the second function of the skin-ego. This aspect of struggling with internalized racism is shown in the documentary. While the category of opulence is walked in the ballroom, a narrator says:

this is white America. Any other nationality that is not of the white set knows this and accepts this till the day they die. That is everybody's dream and ambition as a minority - to live and look as well as a white person is pictured as being in America" (00:41:26-00:41:53) [...] This is white America. And when it come to the minorities, especially black, we as a people, for the past 400 years, is the greatest example of behavior modification in the history of civilization. We have had everything taken away from us and yet we have all learned how to survive. That is why, in the ballroom circuit, it is so obvious that if you have captured the great white way of living or looking... or dressing or speaking - you is a marvel [sic!]. (00:42:32-00:43:19)

I claim that this statement is quite paradoxical as the narrator argues that the black race has survived hundreds of years of oppression and now aims to embody the way of looking, behaving and being of the oppressor. Therefore, I think that embodying what white oppressors have manipulated people to aim for, such as white normalized beauty standards, constitutes internalized racism to some degree. The quote above is accompanied by the following scene.



Fig. 4: Representing Upper-Class in the Ballroom

In the shot above (fig. 4, 00:41:30). whiteness is displayed through social class, a way of living and behaving. This is represented through the expensive champagne being wrapped in a cloth napkin, the white and red colors representing white skin color and power, having a prestigious occupation, such as being a captain of a cruise-ship, using a white tablecloth, wearing sunglasses, and keeping one's leg on the table. The latter suggests that one is hierarchically dominant and, therefore, is allowed to disregard any social norms and is even expected to define those. This could be an attempt to claim control over elements that people of color have been denied, which is an expression of agency. However, I claim that this is rather an internalization of the perspective of the white oppressor. Namely, to aim to look and behave like this person rather than embracing the way one already looks and behaves suggests that one has internalized racism to bridge internal and external sensations according to the second function of the skin-ego (Anzieu 110).

Gender-nonconformity and homosexuality reinforce structural racism, which increases the level of internalized racism, as people of color in western societies are mostly expected to comply with the state's preferred stereotypical gender binary and heterosexual behavior (Page and Richardson 57). Dorian Corey clearly highlights how race and sexuality reciprocally influence one another:

Black people have a hard time getting anywhere. And those that do are usually straight. In a ballroom, you can be anything you want. You're not really an executive, but you're looking like an executive. And therefore, you're showing the straight world that I can be an executive. If I had the opportunity, I could be one, because I can look like one. And that is, like, a fulfillment [sic!]. (14:30-14:54)

Dorian Corey underlines how these inequalities are not related to the competencies of or inherent to the people in the ballroom. For protagonists in the documentary, who are of color, homosexual and transgender, the consequence of not complying with the gender binary and heterosexuality is to be confronted with greater structural racism, such as greater violence and being provided with less occupational opportunities. The latter is represented through the tragic murder of Venus Xtravaganza, who when working as an escort to a man ends up being “strangled under a bed in a sleazy hotel in New York City” (01:09:07-01:09:10). Structural racism seemingly legitimizes the normalization of the dominance of heterosexual, cisgender-identities and white people over homosexual, working-class, transgender people of color. The implementation of the gender-binary in disciplined civility seemingly perpetuates social control, which is required to scold gender-nonconforming people of color (Page and Richardson 59-60).

In addition to mentioning greater structural racism experienced by people of color who are not straight, Dorian Corey points to a certain discontinuity in terms of what people can embody in the ballroom in comparison to the outside world. This discontinuity reflects the second function of the skin-ego, namely *containing*. The ‘straight’ world, as he calls it, which most likely comprises of an external white, cis, heterosexual, middle-class society, does not allow the survival of the embodiment that the ballroom enables. This represents a clear discontinuity between the external straight world and the ballroom reflecting one's internal expression of gender identity.

The discontinuity between the external world, the ‘straight’ world, and the internal world, the ballroom, is captured in the following quote:

There’s people who sit home all day [sic!]. They have potential, OK? I mean, they go to the balls, and they prove that they have potentials on actually selling a garment, OK. But they, like, being that I have this potential, the ballroom tells me. OK. The ballroom tells me that I am somebody. But when the ballroom is over and you come home, you have to convince yourself that you are somebody. And that's where they get lost. (00:48:01-00:48:26)

This means that the external world disrespects them for being gender-nonconforming, not heterosexual, and not white, while these attributes are celebrated in the ballroom, representing the expression of their internal life. These dichotomies have a negative impact on the fulfillment of the second function of the skin-ego. According to the quote, one struggles to persuade oneself that one is valuable in the external world due to ongoing discrimination, harassment, violence and often murder, which one eventually begins to internalize. These, as well as the following discontinuities between internal and external aspects have a negative influence on the fulfillment of the second function of the skin-ego: the discontinuity between sex and gender, their initial internal gender identity, and the societal and familial expectations, in addition to the racialized gender binary leading to greater structural racism when being gender-nonconforming.

These discontinuities result in feeling like a ‘kernel without a shell’ outside the safe space of the ballroom (Segal 47). This implies that the external layer cannot function as a container as it has not acquired the instinctual ability to contain, which results in having a vulnerable internal state. The dysfunction filtering system leads to the inscription of unlocalizable sensations into the kernel. This process is established through a void of anxiety, which in this case is caused by internalized racism and transphobia. This reflects the quote that once one exits the ballroom, and enters the external world, anxiety is elicited due the traumatizing experiences based on transphobic violence and structural racism. The latter attacks the external layer of the skin, which is not able to contain adequately, and the external world is perceived through a lens of anxiety (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 366). This anxiety-ridden perception elicits a feeling of worthlessness, which reflects the last part of the quote, namely that they struggle to believe that they are somebody.

The other option when one's second function of the skin-ego is dysfunctional is the 'sieve skin-ego', which suggests that sensations and memories are difficult to retain, resulting in the anxiety of having an empty inside. One suspects that the aggressivity required for self-affirmation evaporates (Anzieu 110). Through viewing others as inferior, their aggressive need for self-affirmation is fulfilled. This function is implemented in the ballroom scene through the concept of 'shade', which stems from 'reading'. Venus Xtravaganza, a Latina transgender woman, and Dorian Corey exemplify the concept of shade and reading in the following manner:

What is wrong with you, Pedro? You going through it? You going through some kind of psychological change in your life? - She went back to being a man. - Oh, you went back to being a man. Touch this skin, darling. Touch this skin, honey. Touch all of this skin, OK? You just can't take it. You're just an overgrown orangutan. Dorian: You get in a smart crack, and everyone laughs and "hee hees" because you found a flaw and exaggerated it, then you've got a good read going. (00:33:55-00:34:28).

According to Bailey, 'throwing shade' "means underhanded or indirect dealings, or someone's attempt to undermine a person without being overt" (Bailey, "Engendering Space" 504). Throwing shade captures the essence of the 'sieve skin-ego'. The latter quote aggressively underlines the other constants' deficiencies, while the need for self-affirmation is satisfied (Anzieu 110).



Fig. 5: Venus Xtravaganza Reading

In the shot above, Venus Xtravaganza is captured ‘reading’ a person who de-transitioned to being a man. Through offering that the person can touch their skin, while undressing her upper body and explicitly pinpointing his deficiencies, her ‘skin-sieve ego’ retains the sensation of embodying a woman. The aggressivity while ‘reading’ can be elicited from the over-exaggerated articulation of the uttered words and the intensive stare into her interlocutor’s eyes. These examples illustrate that it is difficult to establish a functioning interface between one’s inside and outside reality when numerous dichotomies between these realms are established, which often results in the development of a ‘kernel without a shell’ or ‘sieve ego’.

3.3.2. In *Pose*

Angel, who is a black transgender woman of color, a sex-worker and eventually a model is one of the protagonists of the TV-show *Pose* (2018-2021). In the beginning of the first episode, the mother of her house, Elektra, embodies the ‘sieve skin-ego’. It will be illustrated later in this section that she fears that her aggressivity needed for self-affirmation vanishes, which leads to her ‘throwing shade’ at her ‘children’. I claim that because Angel does not receive this maternal, compensatory touch, she intensely stares at a motherly figure she perceives in a historical museum, touches its face and afterwards her heart. My reason for making this claim is that in the previous scenes, Elektra and Blanca, who are two transgender women of the same house, are displayed staring at statues, which serve as objects of their desire or as support objects, namely a head of a king and a well-trained body (00:03:05-00:03:12). The scene with Angel is filmed in a similar manner, first her reaction, then the support object and then her second reaction. In addition, I make the argument about Angel touching her compensatory maternal figure because in the first shot below (fig. 6, 00:03:13), she signifies a notion of being deeply and fundamentally affected on the inside as her shoulders are drawn up, her mouth is half open, and her eyes intensively and affectively stare at the statue.



Fig. 6: Angel in the Museum

The metaphor of shedding light onto objects mirrors one becoming aware of psychical aspects, which had previously remained unconscious. By means of light she becomes more conscious of her internal needs, which suddenly make her realize that she has the profound desire to touch a compensatory maternal figure. This realization is underpinned by the lyrics, which imply unlocking something that is hidden: “Here's the key to unlock the door [...]” (00:03:09-00:03:13). The manner she touches the female figure in the second picture is reminiscent of a child’s hand touching their mother’s face as it is not a careful touch, but rather suggests intense attachment and an exploration of the face (00:03:17). The profoundness of this image is reinforced by mirroring the white colonization of African art, which is illustrated here (fig 7).



Fig. 7: Touch of African Art



Fig. 8: *Angel in the Museum 2*

In this screenshot (fig. 8, 00:03:20), she is about to touch her chest above her heart. Before this process is completed, the next scene is shown, which is suggestive of unsuccessfully internalizing the role of the maternal caregiver. This interruption is reinforced through the image of a see-through dress on a headless upper body of a mannequin. From my stance, displaying this outside layer and a missing lower body indicates anxiety or internal emptiness. Towards the end of the first episode, Angel chooses to change house after shade is being thrown at her for not adhering to the expected category at the ball. After leaving the ballroom in tears, Blanca storms after her, and Angel and Blanca have a conversation outside the ballroom. The following is indicative of the desire for compensation in terms of a maternal figure:

Angel: I'm tired of being humiliated. I deserve more. I'm worthy of better. I just need to know somebody has my back.

Blanca: we all need that. And if you want a family that cares for you unconditionally, then get your broke ass up off this curb and fix that b[itch] face. [LAUGHING]

Angel: I should join your house.

Blanca: I'm just sayin'. [BOTH]

Angel: I love you.

Blanca: I love you, too. (00:50:57-00:51:53)



Fig. 9: Angel and Blanca in front of the Ballroom

In the shot above (fig. 9, 00:51:53), Angel is shown leaning her entire weight against Blanca, her new house mother. After telling her about her struggles and her lack of support, Blanca, who has just established her own house, welcomes her to join it and support her unconditionally. By only hesitating a few seconds after hearing this offer, Angel portrays her deep desire to be supported through emotional, linguistic, and physical care.

Through her smile and closed eyes, Angel displays emotions that signify pure bliss and joy. This desire to be supported intensively by a house mother is reinforced over the course of the first episode. She experiences a certain rupture or disenchantment of not perceiving her body as adequate, which is reinforced through receiving negative external feedback. At first, her expectations are raised through a positive encounter with one of her clients, only to be told that she cannot be seen with him in public, which is connected to his perception of her race and her gender-nonconformity. Because of a sense of discontinuity between Angel's internal and external reality, she embodies the phenomenon of 'kernel without a shell' and, therefore, wraps herself in her sexual partner's skin of anxiety. Stan is Angel's client and a white, cis, hetero, married businessman in his late twenties or early thirties. He equates commodities he could potentially acquire with his own desired self-worth, which elicits a certain internal emptiness and anxiety. He was just told in the previous scene that he was not chosen for his position because of achievements, but simply because he is from New Jersey.

Trump, who comes from Queens and who is a businessman during the time the TV-show is set, “likes people who speak the same language as him, he likes people who get things done” (00:32:40-00:32:46). After being asked by his boss what he *wants* he replies: “well, I want to be you [...] I want what you have” (0:32:55-0:33:03). This shows that his own self-worth is equal to his future possessions, rather than a consistent perception of self-worth that is independent of his performance.



Fig. 10: Trump Tower

The establishing shot above of the aforementioned scene (fig. 10) displays the office in which Stan works, which is the Trump tower. Despite *Pose* (2018-2021) being set in the 1980s and 1990s, for the 21st century viewer, the office evokes an image of white, racist, republican America based on Trump’s work in office. This is illustrated by the depiction of only white people in suits, bright colors, the American flags and the golden tower, which highlight white imperialism and the American dream, displaying the illusionary attitude of the self-made millionaire.



Fig. 11: Inside Trump Tower

The imperialist lens is strengthened through the following low angle shot, representing notions of dominance and subordination. It displays a narrow golden pathway leading to the top of the building, only accessible for white people, which is further underlined by the white walls and the elevators. Before the transition to the next scene, Stan's boss says: "God bless Ronald Reagan" (00:33:43-00:33:44), who was a republican president in office before Bush and had white, racist, and imperialist views. This lays the groundwork for the following establishing and high angle shot, which is in direct opposition to the previous scene. The viewer is looking down on the scene, which provokes a notion of inferiority. In opposition to the previous establishing shot, the sun is setting, the colors are dark and dull – reflecting the racist ideological limitations people of color have to face. This opposition is further reinforced through the hip hop music that is played when the scene is shot outside, switching to the WNXC news whenever Stan is filmed inside his car. The man on the radio says: "still very cold - in the city, teens in most of the suburbs" (0:34:16-00:34:20), which is a weather report only for people living in the suburbs, who are mostly white.



Fig. 12: New York Downtown

When Stan opens the window, the news and the music start to overlap, and he starts shaking. This marks the oppositional ideological perception of the white cisgender man Stan and the black transgender woman. After having driven past her several times, he decides to stop. In the hotel room, he asks Angel to take off her skirt and her panties. He shakily looks back and forth between her penis and her face, confused by her gender identity and embodiment, which does not match his perception of her sex. While perspiring, she remarks: “saving up to have my little friend removed” (00:37:37-00:37:39). She adds in a determined manner: “It’s not cheap if you want to do it right” (00:37:39-00:37:44). A few seconds later, one can hear the song ‘I am not in love’ by CC and the following lyrics: “I keep your picture upon the wall it hides a nasty stain” (00:38:11-00:38:21). It is suggestive of both protagonists functioning as a replacement for each other. For Angel, he represents the anxious, external layer of the skin-ego in the form of the ‘kernel without a shell’ as she wraps herself in the external layer of anxiety, namely his skin (Anzieu 109, 110). In contrast, Angel displays the personification of authenticity that he deeply lacks in his life. This absence is indicated through his internalized anxiety and emptiness in the following scene: After nervously folding his clothes, turning away from the artificial light to his actual internalized darkness, he turns towards Angel. She says: “There must be some parts of your body that you don’t like that you would love to have go away” (00:38:52-00:38:58). Stan answers: “Yeah, I guess mine are all on the inside, though” (00:38:58-00:39:00).

Regarding the opposite category, ‘the sieve skin-ego’ can be used to help analyze some scenes with Elektra, who is a transgender woman of color and the mother of the House of Abundance. A mother in the ballroom scene takes on a parental role offering guidance and support for her ‘children’ while they “recruit, socialize, and prepare their proteges” for performances at balls (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 367-368). It must be highlighted that she does provide support for her ‘children’ in some of the previously described scenes in the TV-show, however, the first scene of the first episode suggests a contrastive notion.

She is shown to behave in a dominant manner as she fears that she is losing the aggressive notion of self-affirmation (Anzieu 110). Thereby, she mocks her ‘children’, especially Blanca, one of the other transgender protagonists of the show, accusing her of not being *real* enough to execute her own ideas properly. This notion of dominating others to feel better about oneself, as one fears the inside emptying itself out, is illustrated in the very first scene of the series, which takes place in 1987 in New York City. Elektra suggests that during the last ball, the trophy has been stolen from them after having won every ball.



Fig 13: Elektra Abundance in front of the Mirror

As illustrated above (fig 13), one can see her back turned towards the camera, suggesting a notion of arrogance stemming from anxiety. Elektra herself represents the kernel, while the mirror portrays the inner layer of the skin-ego, which reflects the kernel as it fears being emptied out. I would like to argue that the external layer is represented by the window, which is a medium accessible to everyone looking inside and outside. Through over-investing in the reflection of her external layer, Elektra disguises her fear of her inside depleting itself. This fear is reflected by the song choice, which is *heartbeat* (Gardner 01:00-01:09). One can hear the line: “heartbeat, it makes me feel so weak”, which is repeated three times. This song mirrors that one’s inside elicits a sensation of psychical suffering. Elektra notices that she is not receiving the attention she deserves. Firstly, this is highlighted by the other character in the screenshot, Angel. She is portrayed to be uninterested in the over-investment of the external portrayal of her ‘mother’ as she is shown in an informal pose on the sofa, doing her nails. Secondly, Angel’s lack of attention is underlined by the camera shot, which is an over the shoulder shot, rather than a close-up of Elektra. I argue that the disconnection between the two characters is emphasized by the over the shoulder shot as it raises the expectation of a direct interaction between the characters. After realizing that she is not in the center of attention, Elektra abruptly switches off the song as she turns around and acclaims: “Focus children! It is time we remind the world who we are” (00:00:50-00:00:53). She metaphorically suppresses the feeling of weakness she feels by turning off the song, and projects her fears onto her ‘children’, who must support her to avoid the feeling of inner depletion by highlighting her gender expression.

After Blanca suggests that they should choose royalty as the category to walk at the ball, Elektra responds mockingly: “What are we gonna do [sic!]? Run to burger king and get some paper crowns?!” (00:01:05-00:01:09), which elicits hysterical laughter among the other ‘children’. This reaction shows how they have embodied the projection of Elektra’s external layer and do not hesitate to be complicit in bullying another member of the house to support her aggressive need for self-affirmation. After Elektra, in essence, suggests the same category, Blanca responds: “That’s the third time this week you’ve taken my idea as your own, and these bitches have gone along with it. What’s the difference between walking royalty and walking as ‘The Royal House of Abundance’”? (00:01:33-00:01:45).

Elektra answers: “Just because you have an idea does not mean you know how to properly execute it. Ideas are ingredients. Only a *real* mother knows how to prepare them” (00:01:45-00:01:55).



Fig 14: Elektra Abundance Reading

In the screenshot above, Elektra pulls her shoulder towards her chin, raises her eyebrows, and overemphasizes the word *real*, which has a sarcastic ring to it. This utterance implies that she is more of a woman than Blanca. Candy answers: “real. You hear that, crossdresser? And go there and finish cooking. A bitch is hungry” (00:01:55-00:02:01). Candy, who seems to support Elektra blindly, does not hesitate to make transphobic and misogynistic comments about Blanca, suggesting that she is not a real woman as she merely regards her as a man wearing women’s clothing. Shortly afterwards she utters the directive “go there and finish cooking”, which reflects a misogynistic notion that women belong in the kitchen, rather than voicing their opinion.

The house has decided to steal some historical clothes of white royalty, which are the garments that they will wear in the ballroom embodying the category ‘royalty’. I argue that embodying white imperialists and colonialists, who enslaved the predecessors of the transgender characters of color, suggests the internalization of racism and transphobia. The latter leads to cultural imperialism as it generates the seeming normalcy of the current dominant societal structures (Speight 129). White royalty represents intersectional oppression in a nutshell as one can assume they comprise cis, upper-class, and heterosexual white people. The fact that somebody aims to embody them can be explained through the second function of the skin-ego. As they have inscribed internalized racism and transphobia into their kernel, they aim to bridge this internal sensation with their external layer. As one has been taught to believe that one skin color, sexuality, and gender-nonconformity inherently triggers discrimination, harassment, violence and oppression – rather than these behaviors being systemic – an individual intends to appropriate oneself as embodying what has commonly been associated with whiteness.



Figure 15: Angel Evangelista in the Ballroom

In the shot above (00:08:07), one can see Angel embodying royalty in the ballroom. The colors white and blue are connotative of the virgin Mary and Cinderella, who represent innocence and conservatism. The spotlight from above illuminates only her, while the rest of the ballroom remains in the dark. I interpret the light from above as the power of representation of the dominant class. This is because the white, cisgender, heterosexual aristocrats can choose who to represent and who remains unknown to the public. The way her hair is illuminated is connotative of a halo highlighting her innocence. Her facial expression and her gestures reinforce that notion through helplessly mimicking that she will faint. However, this illusion of embodying whiteness and bridging the internal and external layer cannot be maintained as the executive, the police, enters the ballroom and puts handcuffs around the house members' wrists. They symbolize the continuation of cultural imperialism and the discontinuation of bridging the internal with the external layer of the skin-ego.

3.4. Third function: registering external traces and creating a mode of communication

In this and the following chapter, the second, the third, fourth and eighth function will be presented and transferred into categories that represent transgender in *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *Pose* (2018-2021). These categories will then be utilized to help analyze inequalities connected to class, gender and race of the represented transgender characters.

Anzieu's third function of the skin-ego is to *register external traces* and to *create a mode of communication* providing an individual with meaningful relations which are enabled by the caregiver (Anzieu 44). This function is embodied by the upper layer of the skin, which protects the individual against unpleasant stimuli. When the caregiver supports the child appropriately, they can refrain from having to establish a crustacean ego. The latter points to an over-investment in or substitution of the external layer of the stimulus-barrier of the skin and underdevelopment of the inner layer of meaning (Werbart 47). The over-investment indicates a hard, rigid shield or carapace substituting the lacking container because the child has the impression that somebody appropriates or steals their thoughts. This deficient container prevents later functions of the skin-ego from developing. The opposite case is true if the child has the impression that their own thoughts only stem from external sources, which indicates that their external layer is fulfilled by an auxiliary proactive shield.

According to Anzieu, this interconnection between biological and psychic functions vanishes gradually over time, leading to the framework of late-developing psychic regulations (Anzieu 103). A deficient individual anaclisis could later elicit the fear of losing the external function described by the third function of the skin-ego. Over-investment in the internal layer and underdevelopment of the external layer would increase the likelihood of developing an addiction to create a barrier between the ego and external stimuli (Segal 47; Anzieu 111). The third function of the skin-ego can be transferred to analyze the representation of transgender characters regarding race and gender in the chosen audio-visual media. In terms of the transferred third function, I would like to consider the crustacean ego, namely the overinvestment in one's external layer, which results in the impression that one's thoughts are appropriated.

Based on the behavior of some parents of transgender people of color, such as of Angel in *Pose* (2018-2021) and of Venus Xtravaganza in *Paris is Burning* (1990), it can be assumed that they internalized that people of color not adhering to the gender binary construction are even more severely confronted with structural racism. According to Page and Richardson, this conformity is demanded by a “racially disciplined civility” (57). I argue that Angel and Venus feared that their parents, who were strongly opposed to her transition, appropriate her thoughts as they would like them to live in accordance with her gender assigned at birth.

Their parents’ strong opposition to her authentic gender expression is based on the subconscious internalization of Bey’s claims, who is a non-binary African American scholar. They claim that to be considered ‘human’ is to be seen based on categories of whiteness and gender adherence, which implies that blackness is seen in opposition to the normative (“Cistem Failure” 23). The marking of gender-nonconformity is reinforced due to negative racial attitudes, perceptions and stereotyping (Bey, “Cistem Failure” 65). Bey’s argument also affirms Page and Richardson’s theories, namely that people of color who are gender-nonconforming are more significantly confronted with structural racism. This is the case, according to Bey, because both categories – being transgender and being black - do not reflect characteristics which are claimed to be universal in western societies (“Cistem Failure” 25).

The characters’ parents have witnessed and internalized the consequences of intersectional inequalities of gender-nonconformity and being of color and would like to appropriate their aspirations of transitioning male to female. They have learnt that black bodies who inhabit space are automatically coded “in and through whiteness” (Bey, “The Trans-Ness” 277). To attempt to be seen outside of this white-coded matrix, they put a lot of effort into having “a proper black citizenship” (Bey, “The Trans-Ness” 277). This is mainly attempted by changing class-position through acting in accordance with the state’s normative rituals; namely to make a ‘proper’ living, to reproduce and to appropriate one’s body by hoarding possessions and wealth (Bey, “The Trans-Ness” 277). The familial punishment can stem through the internalization of the notion that when one is of color, being gender-nonconforming is more detached from the western norm. To prohibit the appropriation of their gender identities, transgender individuals of color had to establish a hard, rigid field, namely a crustacean ego (Anzieu 111).

3.5. Fourth function: individuation

The fourth function is called *individuation*. Like the skin, which indicates color, texture, odor, and signs of aging, one establishes an individual selfhood that differentiates one from others (Segal 48). These factors, which can be narcissistically or socially charged, “[...] allow us to distinguish, among other people, those whom we love and are attached to and to assert ourselves as an individual with our own personal skin” (Anzieu 111). If this process is not successful, one can, according to Anzieu, develop signs of conditions that make it difficult to differentiate between internal and external perceptions (Segal 48; Anzieu 111). Unless one loses all senses of reality, one cannot grasp a sense of subjective oneness (Anzieu 111).

This means that this function, namely *individualization*, represents manners in which one grasps one’s own selfhood in opposition to others. If it fails, one struggles to distinguish between internal and external influences (Anzieu 111). This category can be transcribed to represent transgender identity with reference to class in the chosen audio-visual media. The category is reflected *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *Pose* (2018-2021) in the sense that internal and external expectations cannot easily be differentiated. External capitalist expectations have been internalized to a great extent, rendering it impossible to separate one’s original intention of fighting for black and Hispanic transgender acceptance from the bourgeoisie’s intentions of being a productive body in a capitalist society. The difficulty in differentiating between originally internal needs, such as promoting transgender acceptance, is often consumed by the seemingly naturalized, internalized pathologization often associated with the working-class (Irving 55).

Stallings claims that transgender people, especially those who are sex workers, are considered suspect by cisgender and heterosexual men because they disregard bourgeoisie values. These include, for instance, the dominant conservative discourse that sex should primarily serve reproduction in marriage (221). This means that being transgender is considered unproductive by the capitalist state because they are not seen as reproducing in the traditional way. According to Dan Irving, transgender working-class people have often internalized the compensatory mechanism of focusing intensely on economic progress to attempt to divert attention from their pathologized class position (Irving 55).

He claims that the emphasis on economic progress weakens their potential for political resistance, while it creates ruptures in the transgender community based on, for instance, class, race and (dis)ability. These categories apply because not every transgender person is given permission to participate in paid labor due to systematic inequalities (Irving 55).

This means that capitalism influences transgender people to a great extent, especially working-class transgender of color who, for instance, take part in sex work. Demanding transgender bodies to productively engage in the labor market limits their possibility to create alliances against the capitalist machinery (Irving 55).

3.6. Eighth function: registering tactile sensory information

The skin-ego's eighth function is to register tactile sensory information, which has been described as displaying a mirror-image of reality. The skin provides the individual with explicit information about the outside world, which is eventually scrutinized by the 'common sense'. The latter is the interconnection between significance communicated through language and one's sensory processing. This means that the 'common sense' is the holistic concept of the body and mind (Segal 6). This function signifies the ability to analyze the external world, which is ideally supported by one's nurturing environment. On the one hand, this category revolves around the skin providing the individual with the biological imprinting of reality. On the other hand, it refers to "the individual who belongs to a particular social group [who] is marked by cuts, scarification, skin-painting, tattoos, make-up, hairstyles, and the supplementary layer of clothing" (Anzieu 114). In addition to the skin functioning as a marker for social belonging, it also serves as a palimpsest, which is a writing material that can be used several times after having erased earlier notes, while still preserving the original layers of the pre-verbal traces. The skin-ego captures biological, early pre-verbal circumstances and later individual and societal influences (Anzieu 113-114). If this function fails, the consequences could be two-fold. One consequence consists in an individual struggling with the fear of being marked all over one's surface and one's Ego. One could be afraid of being ineradicably and shamefully marked by the Superego, which supports the Ego by providing moral standards. The Superego's inputs constitute an individual's conscience ("Superego"). One could fear that the Superego inscribes, among others, "blushes, rashes, eczema, symbolic wounds" (Anzieu 114). The alternative consequence would be that the individual suffers from the opposite fear, namely the markings being removed due to the pressure of overload or losing the ability of retaining traces, such as in one's sleep (Anzieu 114). The eighth function of the skin-ego, namely *registering tactile sensory information*, when transferred to transgender representation refers to the fear of being marked by one's Super-ego. This becomes prevalent when considering hate crimes against working-class transgender people of color. The hate crime legislation suggests that social groups are confronted with violence because of individual prejudice (Ferguson 61-62).

This shows that violence is conceived, by hate crime legislation, as something personal rather than systemic, which implies that these seemingly neutral formulations disregard intersectional inequalities connected to class, race, gender, and sexuality (Ferguson 61-62). This means that working-class transgender people of color are “victimized because of their marginality”, not primarily because of the individual prejudices they are confronted with (Ferguson 62). These laws disregard potential protections targeted at transgender and nonwhite subjects (Ferguson 62-63).

When regarding hate crimes against working-class transgender people of color as personal rather than systemic, a picture of personal responsibility is painted. This means that one’s superego evokes the sensation that one is marked because of the way *one is*, rather than the way one is *perceived as a group*. Next to physical pain due to ongoing violence against working-class transgender people of color, a symbolic wound is created (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 374). This could be the case because one’s Superego elicits feelings of guilt and responsibility for seemingly personal hate crimes. This is combined with the fear of losing the ability to retrain traces (Anzieu 114), which could imply that these seemingly individual issues, which are under the guise of systemic inequalities perpetuated by class, race, gender, and sexuality, are naturalized to an extent that they are no longer noticeable. In terms of the skin-ego, fearing losing the skill to retrain traces is reflected through concealed traces of systemic inequalities. They appear to be purely individual, which elicits the impression of being personally responsible for hate crimes based on race, gender, or sexuality.

3.7. Intersection class, gender, and race

To be perceived as a person of color “subtends gender as a vector” (Bey, “Cistem Failure” 73). This implies that gender and race are categorizations that are considered definitive for recognizing people *as people*. The distinction between cisgender and transgender people persists because of the “installment of the racial as supplementary to the normative narrative” (Bey, “Cistem Failure” 73). This suggests that categories of race and gender are brought forth and remain to distinguish between those who are allocated to the domain of modernity and those who are not. This perceived deviance of those who are gender-nonconforming and racialized allows cisgender and white people to be perceived as normative individuals (Bey, “Cistem Failure” 73).

Bey states that being transgender and a person of color are two categories that are only arbitrarily connected; however, they are constructed as metonymic concepts (“The Trans-Ness” 278). This means being transgender and being of color are analytic categories that are ontologically unconnected, but they are associative of a counterstatement to western culture and civilization. These analytic categories are “differently inflected names for an original lawlessness” that indicate an ontology of exclusion (Bey, “The Trans-Ness” 278). However, being of color and transgender are categories that are completely unrelated, and they are only regarded as deviant as they are seen in opposition to the white, cisgender, middle-, upper-class norms and reproductive bodies.

Violence that working-class transgender people of color are confronted with due to the described constructed deviance is often presented as a result from personal stereotypes. This is reflected in the neutral formulations of the hate crime legislation, which disregard intersectional inequalities (Ferguson 61-62). The seemingly personally targeted violence is described by a former ballroom member Marlon M. Bailey. He claims that his ballroom interlocutors feel specifically at risk due to “race, gender and sexual violence” because their identities convey that a potential assailant can hurt and kill them with impunity (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 366). The working-class areas, in which most of his interlocutors are situated, bear these daily risks, reflected by the wave of murders of transgender women of color (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 366). I will focus on two prime examples in two audio-visual media that depict the intersection of class, gender, and race bridged with the mentioned skin-ego categories.

3.7.1. *In Paris is Burning*

Regarding the third category, I will focus on Venus Xtravaganza, who is a Latina transgender woman who says the following: “I guess that's why I want my sex change - to make myself complete. I was about 13, 14 years old and I used to do it behind my family's back, just dressing up, till finally they caught on with it. And I didn't want to embarrass them, so that's when I moved away. I moved to New York and continued doing it” (00:22:51-00:23:11). This notion of embarrassment that Venus expected before leaving her family, implies the manifestation of the dysfunctional third category of the skin-ego, namely the overinvestment in the external layer of the stimulus-barrier of the skin. Establishing a crustacean ego is the result of the impression that somebody appropriates one's thoughts. Her parents had most likely subconsciously internalized Bey's argument that structural racism is reinforced through gender-nonconformity, which triggered the feeling of embarrassment (Bey, “Cistem Failure” 23). My stance is that this internalization could be based on the fear of having failed as a parent. One could think that their child should have had a different upbringing, through which she could have avoided gender-based structural oppression in addition to racism. Because Venus Xtravaganza had suspected that her parents aimed to appropriate her thoughts, she preferred to leave them, visibly embody her gender identity, and despite the risk of fatal transphobic violence. I claim that the feeling of “making herself complete”, namely passing as a woman, points to the wish that her biological parents should not attempt to appropriate her gender identity. Passing in all circumstances would not reinforce the consequences caused by structural racism strengthened by perceivable gender-nonconformity.

This notion of having an external substitute layer is displayed through her protective gesture and posture in the screenshot below. The display of the aforementioned layer is reinforced through the cloth covering parts of her body, the determined look in her eyes, the metal clutch, bracelets, the layered dress and her hairstyle (00:23:12), which is shown while her voice functions as an extradiegetic narration. It is difficult to pinpoint her emotions in this scene as the voice-over has been shot at different occasions. Embedding a voice-over was the choice of the director, which implies a white cisgender person's perspective of thoughts during a ball.



Figure 16: Venus Xtravaganza in the Ballroom

This voice-over embodies the crustacean ego in a nutshell, as she is represented in a cloth, while displaying protective gestures and a different person appears to voice her thoughts. One of the house mothers, Pepper LaBeija, says the following quote that will be analyzed regarding the fourth and eighth function:

I'd always see the way that rich people lived, and I'd feel it more, you know. It would slap me in the face. I'd say, 'I have to have that.' Because I never felt comfortable being poor. I just don't. Or even middle-class doesn't suit me. Seeing the riches, seeing the way people on Dynasty lived, these huge houses. And I would think, 'these people have 42 rooms in their house!' 'Oh, my God, what kind of a house is that?' And we've got three. So why is it that they can have it and I didn't? I always felt cheated. I always felt cheated out of things like that. (00:04:46-00:05:23)

This quote captures the fourth function of the skin-ego, *individuation* in the case of the transgender representation in *Paris is Burning* (1990), which produces – if it cannot develop appropriately – difficulties differentiating between external capitalist values and original internal aspirations. These capitalist values become all-consuming, also as a means of survival, so that they substitute the original internal aspiration to a certain extent. The original struggle, to communally shed light onto and fight against transphobic and racist structures, is substituted by capitalist aspirations.

While she utters the latter quote, images of white people displaying their wealth are shown (fig. 17, 00:05:22), which is a clear choice by the director as Pepper LaBeija does not mention race, but merely class. Livingston aims to bridge race and class, which is reinforced through the bright lighting that represents a dichotomy to the dark lighting when transgender people of color are shown. This opposition is strengthened through zooming in on the white faces.



Fig. 17: Two White People and a Horse

The approach by Livingston is also in clear opposition to the way Pepper LaBeija phrases it: “why is it that they can have it and I didn’t? I always felt cheated”. LaBeija captures intersectional inequality through attributing the inequalities to her personally, which is also reflected in the American hate crime legislation, merely touching on individual stereotypes.

This reflects the transferred eighth function of the skin-ego as one has been made to believe that there is no systematicity behind the hate crimes against transgender people of color. There have not been any real consequences for assaulters or murderers, such as in the case of the killing of Venus Xtravaganza. By being made to believe that systematic inequalities regarding occupational chances and everyday survival are personal, one develops feelings of guilt and personal responsibility, creating a symbolic wound (Anzieu 114). These feelings are reflected in the quote through feeling uncomfortable or ‘cheated’ (00:04:50-00:05:23).

3.7.2. In Pose

In the beginning of the third episode of the first season, Angel is in tears when she tells her house members Blanca, Damon and Lil Papi the following:

when I was six years old, my father took me with him to the department store to buy some Christmas presents. I saw this one pair of red pumps with a four-inch heel. I swear to God, I had never seen anything quite so beautiful in my entire life. When no one was looking, I took one, snuck it home, hidden underneath my coat. When we got to the apartment, I tried running straight to my room. It slipped out and fell onto the floor, right in front of my mother and my father. I begged them to let me keep it. My father s... [in tears]my father slapped me across the face. For stealing. But more so for what I chose to steal. I mean, what kind of little boy cries over a patent leather red pump, right? He treated me different [*sic*] after that. (00:01:45-00:03:09)

This quote shows how Angel's father had internalized Bey's argument. To be considered 'human' in the Global North requires to look through a lens of whiteness and gender-conformity. This implies that people of color are regarded in opposition to the normative (Bey, "Cistem Failure" 23). Angel's father chooses to hurt his child once made aware of traces that suggest that it is gender-nonconforming. To slap one's six-year-old child in the face demonstrates a great level of overwhelm and helplessness caused, in this case, by the subconscious awareness that one's child will be subject to greater inequalities due to their gender-nonconformity. The parent might also feel partly responsible for the child having to go through greater struggles than they regard necessary. This reinforces Richardson's and Page's argument that people of color who are gender-nonconforming are more significantly challenged by structural racism (57). The fact that Angel is treated differently, compared to the time before she stole these boots, results in an over-investment in the external layer of the skin-ego or crustacean ego, replacing the lacking container, as she feels that her father attempts to appropriate her thoughts about her gender identity.



Fig. 18: Angel Evangelista next to the Door Frame

The notion of the crustacean ego is displayed in the shot above (fig. 18, 00:01:43). It is signified through the walls and the door frame, which can be approached as a substitute layer since one has visibly painted over the original layer multiple times. This metaphor is strengthened by her leaning against the rigid door frame, creating a direct connection to it. In addition, this attachment is reinforced through the fact that she wears a white blazer, like the wall, resulting in the semblance of fusion between the two. Before saying that “he treated me different [sic!] after that”, which is depicted in the shot below (fig. 19, 00:03:06), she sinks more into the door frame. This reinforces the connection between the metaphorical crustacean ego and her.



Fig. 19: *Angel Evangelista Close-up*

The fourth and eighth category also help to analyze the following scenes in the first episode of the first season: Blanca introduces Damion to the ballroom. He is a black, homosexual dancer, who has just been excluded from his biological family due to his sexual orientation. She tells him: “Realness is what it's all about. Being able to fit into the straight, white world, to embody the American dream. But we don't have access to that dream. And it's not because of ability” (00:28:39-00:28:50). This reflects the fourth function of the skin-ego, *individuation*, which is originally about distinguishing between people based on external features, such as color, smell, and signs of aging, and who one is or is not attached to (Anzieu 111). If this function does not develop successfully, one would struggle to differentiate between originally external expectations, which have been internalized over time, and original internal intentions, such as fighting against transphobic, racist and classist structures. By looking at categories of ‘realness’, such as formal business looks implemented in ‘executive realness’, it becomes visible how capitalist aspirations have been implemented into the ballroom culture. Embodying the upper-class, to which the transgender characters of color do not have access otherwise, has become an aspiration. It subconsciously implies that one is a reproductive, bourgeois, and conservative body that is not pathologized, harassed and possibly killed.



Fig. 20: Ballroom through Obstacle

The shot above (fig. 20) indicates that non-white subjects of the ballroom are seen through a lens that is not related to their personal abilities, but it projects certain deficiencies associated with racist, transphobic and classist notions onto them (00:28:26). The individual attempt at producing real capitalist labor, such as a white cisgender executive does, implies notions of the transferred eighth category of the skin-ego. The latter is the seemingly personal, naturalized reason for being harassed as a transgender person of color, which is manifested through the hate crime legislation. The reasons why the mentioned group is being harassed and killed is based on systemic racist, transphobic and classist ideologies (Ferguson 62-63).

4. Performativity by Judith Butler

In the following section, I will consider some - for my endeavor - essential theories and concepts by the American philosopher, post-structuralist, feminist and gender studies writer, Judith Butler. I will outline the differences between Butler's and Anzieu's conceptions in terms of interiority and exteriority. Further, gender, sex and performativity as conceived by Butler will be presented. After having outlined them, I will bridge them with intersectional categories of race, gender and class and use them to analyze the previously mentioned scenes in *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *Pose* (2018-2021). I will consider the same or similar scenes as in the previous section in order to enhance comparability.

Butler has a different conception of the inner and outer worlds compared to Anzieu. They argue that this division is not ontologically given, which means that it is not essentialist. For this division to be maintained, the surface of one's body would have to be impermeable, which she declares impossible. The author claims that this split is perpetuated to keep social regulation and control ("Gender Trouble" 169). In other words, Butler argues that this binary distinction is merely maintained to aim for stability, which is mainly imposed "[...] by cultural orders that sanction the subject and compel its differentiation from the abject" ("Gender Trouble" 170). She writes that if the subject and, thereby, the stability of the inner-outer distinction could be contested, gender could similarly be put into question. She examines the purpose of the inner space or interiority in binary opposition to the outer space, which have been conceptualized in language ("Gender Trouble" 171). Butler cites Foucault, who questions the semantics of internalization and argues that it serves the disciplinary structures of subjection. He mentions that the purpose behind is to ingrain the prohibitive law through and onto the body (qtd. in "Gender Trouble" 171). She takes his theory on board and writes that this concept of an interior soul is represented through its absence. Butler outlines that the soul is "inscribed on the body as a social signification that perpetually renounces itself as such" ("Gender Trouble" 171-172). Gender takes a similar role as the interiority in the sense that the illusion through the interplay between presence and absence is allegedly expressed through the body's surface. Gender identity, on the contrary, is presented as engraved in the inner soul. The prohibitive law represented through bodily manifestations of gender is expressed through forceful, apparently stable heterosexuality and the intelligible matrix of gender identity. This leads to a perceived unity of sex, gender, and desire (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 172-173).

When the coherence of this heterosexual unity is disrupted, the model is revealed to be fictitious, acting “as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe” (Butler, “Gender Trouble” 173). This means that the framework of hetero- and gender normative politics is shown to be an illusion when not being adhered to.

At the same time, gender politics purport to merely be descriptive, while they have in fact a normative force. This implies that the coherence is still aimed for and idealized. Stylized, repeated acts and behavior elicit the effect of an interiority, which is projected onto the body’s surface. These obscured absences appear to demonstrate an inner core of having a sex and being a gender. This supposedly inner core is performative, as it expresses illusions maintained through gestures and acts. The redistribution of a political discourse of gender identity to a psychological interiority conceals the politicalized illusion of an inner core of sex and its attributed identity. However, as these acts and behaviors are created through the effect of a political discourse, gender results in a mere fabrication that one can never adhere to correctly or incorrectly (Butler, “Gender Trouble” 173).

Butler further differentiates between sex and gender. She argues that gender is culturally constructed, which implies that it does not need to follow from the sexed body. This means that one’s inherent anatomical features do not need to correspond with one’s stylized, repeated behavior and acts, namely one’s gender. The unity of the individual is put into question as gender cannot be elicited based on one’s sexed body. In other words, men do not have to possess a penis and XY chromosomes and women equally do not need to have a vagina and XX chromosomes to be recognized as such. Despite the clear distinction between sex and gender, the difference in terms of gender *as* cultural construction and sex *as* pre-discursive nature, must be contested as the natural sexed body is already culturally inscribed. Butler claims that gender as a cultural instrument is equally the foundation on which sexed nature is produced (“Gender Trouble” 11-13). The sexed body is assigned to a binary gendered system, which implies that there is no pre-discursive, natural realm to conceive the sexed body (Salih 55).

As a result, sex is culturally constituted as it is set in a hegemonic cultural discourse (“Gender Trouble” 13). The effects of gender norms, which have been established in historical and contemporary hegemonic discourses, have constructed, and naturalized the following terms: “natural sex” or “real woman”. These processes lead to reified, binary corporal styles and their socially established meanings are legitimized through their repetition (Butler, “Gender Trouble” 178).

Butler defines gender as “an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (“Gender Trouble” 179). These gender-constituting acts appear to be of substance despite being constructed and discontinuous, as they do not rely on any pre-discursive identity (Butler, “Gender Trouble” 179-180).

Repeated, stylized acts as part of a naturalized sex and gender identity disguise the gender's performative notion and potential alternative expressions outside the realm of patriarchy and imperative heterosexuality (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 180).

In the following section, performativity, which is crucial to how Butler conceives sex and gender, will be outlined. Performativity cannot be equated to performance. While the latter is represented through a subject, performativity challenges the notion of a subject (Osborne and Segal 33). In contrast to performance, performativity does not comprise an individual, intentional act. However, it is a reoccurring, iterative and citational practice (Butler, "Bodies that Matter" 2). According to Osborne and Segal (33), it describes the "[...] aspect of a discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names". In addition, performativity entails that an individual is not the mere source of what is being expressed, but that a historically established discourse governs today's usage of what is being communicated (Butler, "Critically Queer" 19). In line with this view, it is apparent that gender is, for instance, historically embedded and inextricably connected to structures of discipline, which do not constitute free choice.

Performativity is, amongst other structures, manifested through the effect of the regulatory governing of the gender binary. Butler argues that if one could make deliberate, individual choices, it would presuppose a subject, which exists prior to being gendered, which cannot be the case. Iteration leads to the creation of a perceived gender uniformity and results in a subject only being grasped along the lines of gender (Butler, "Critically Queer" 21-23).

In sum, performativity is the reiterative force of discourse to bring forth notions which it governs and constrains (Butler, "Bodies that Matter" 2). When the example of 'sex' is seen through the lens of performativity, it does not merely constitute one's genitalia. Rather, it brings forth a norm entailing one's viability in the framework of cultural intelligibility. The materiality of the body can allegedly only be perceived through the consequence of regulatory, performative norms (Butler, "Bodies that Matter" 2).

Butler outlines the connection between obligatory heterosexuality and discursive notions from which identity categories, such as sex, emerge (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 24). In this context, Butler quotes Wittig, who argues that the binary limitation in terms of sex supports the reproductive objectives of imperative heterosexuality (qtd. in "Gender Trouble" 26).

The heterosexual framework requires a coherence between sex, gender, and desire. It implies an interdependency between gender and desire, which means that desire can supposedly be concluded on gender and vice-versa (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 30).

The consistent, gendered self is constructed based on the approximation of an ideal gender; however, it equally experiences a temporal disruption between actual self and the approximated self. Through this approximation and disruption, a discontinuity is exposed, which “reveal[s] the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this ‘ground’” (Butler, “Gender Trouble” 179). The disruption between the gendered self and the ideal self exposes an arbitrary structure and the option to repeat gendered acts allegedly unsuccessfully. “Malformation” and “parodic repetition” reveal the illusionary notion of adhering to a perceived consistent identity as a politically insubstantial construction (Butler, “Gender Trouble” 192).

4.1. Intersection race, gender and class

Butler questions whether performativity can be applied to race in the same way as to gender. She argues that discourse of gender and race always work as vectors of power, as foundation for one another, “and they often find their most powerful articulation through one another” (“Gender Trouble” xvi). This means that the effects of performative gender and performative race cannot be disentangled. Similarly, Butler argues that the conception of the sexed, binary body does not constitute the subject before race. These norms are “racially informed conceptions of ‘sex’” (Butler, “Bodies that Matter” 130).

Butler questions the field of knowledge-production in this context and how it influences the survival of certain groups of people (“Undoing Gender” 207). Survival and being treated in a humane manner are, amongst others, constituted by the definition of ‘human’. The definition of what is considered human is contingent, amongst others, on parameters of gender, sexuality and race. In case one does not comply with the present definition of being human, Butler claims that it often “does not lead to a viable life” (Butler, “Undoing Gender” 2).

Butler exemplifies the cultural contingency of being human by stating that to include “the lesbian into the realm of the universal might be to undo the human, at least in its present form” (“Undoing Gender” 190). The author states that the Vatican, for instance, conceives the lesbian as “anti-human” (“Undoing Gender” 190). Butler argues that a great number of minorities, such as transgender individuals of color in the US, are repeatedly excluded from the definition of being human. Race and gender of the transgender person of color is forcefully brought to the fore, leading to the neglect of their ‘humanness’ (Butler, “Undoing Gender” 13). Sites of power have the agency to withhold recognition, which implies granting or retaining individuals their ‘humanness’ (Butler, “Undoing Gender” 2). Withholding the latter can result in being unrecognized, pathologized and having to experience harassment and violence (“Undoing Gender” 6).

Yet, Butler does not clearly outline the exact mechanism of racialization in this power struggle. The professor of women’s studies Viviane Namaste, writes that Butler underlines the amount of violence directed against transgender people of color, who are sex workers. However, she does not clearly outline if the inflicted violence is based on their profession or if it originates from racism. She does not deconstruct which of these factors is more decisive or in what manner they correlate (Namaste 16, 20).

I argue alongside Professor Sarah Salih that the topic of race is not properly integrated in her concept of performativity (Salih 64). Butler merely mentions it as being part of the intertwinement of gender and sex. She does not outline how one is performatively constituted through race (Salih 64). Shirley Anne Tate analyzes race through the lens of performativity, which is coined “race empire” (Tate 185). She argues that this political agenda creates a regime of truth in terms of race “as an authentic culture body, consciousness and politics and establishes the boundaries of the black community’s psychic and social skin [...]” (Tate 185). The term “empire” does not point to a particular geographical center; however, it signifies the black Atlantic diaspora (183). Tate argues that an interconnectedness is articulated and perpetuated in dominant white discourse, which produces global, seemingly coherent black identities. Connected to these identities are alleged inner and outer cores of black representations that are formulated in binary opposition to whiteness. This perpetuates the discourse around the racialized subject. In terms of performativity, race can be approached as a double movement. One is constituted by the apparent signifier of what it means to be of color, while rearticulating what is supposedly signifies. However, in the in between-space of being constituted by signifiers and repeating them, one can fail to create the coherence of what it allegedly designates, displaying the lacking ontology of race. This rearticulation of what race allegedly constitutes elicits a fragmentary instability indicating anti-essentialism (Butler, “Bodies that Matter” 220-221; Tate 183-184).

Similarly, Chadderton analyzes Butler’s work and describes that the discourse around race is produced and reiterated, which creates the illusion that it is attached to bodies of color. She claims that some bodies are identified as not being granted the same rights as others. People of color are recognized through these racialized discourses and are often perceived as threatening, which results in unjustified suspicion. These discourses lead to a supposedly naturalized truth, which paints the picture of the paradoxical perception of race: it is socially constructed, yet is recognized as a substantial part of one’s identity. One’s racially perceived acts and behavior are not related to an essentialist expression, nor are they deliberate. Nevertheless, they are often discussed as such (Chadderton 50). Though it is not extensively outlined by Butler, I argue that class can equally be regarded through the lens of performativity. Class-specific behavior and appearances are repeatedly established over time, which supposedly connect the members of a specific class. However, the lacking ontology is discarded, creating the illusion of its naturalization. This means that a socio-economic group is seen as such, despite not necessarily having any similarities. To perceive a class as a coherent group is naturalized to an extent that it is not consciously approached as such. This conception, despite its lack of coherence, leads to discrimination against a specific group of people that stems from individual prejudices.

The preceding concept is articulated in the context of Ferguson's approach towards attaching personal responsibility to a subject, rather than highlighting the systematicity. As previously mentioned, the hate crime legislation does not consider intersectional inequalities, but it is based on individual prejudice. Yet, transgender people of color are ostracized and experience violence because of their class-membership, race, and queerness, rather than because of individual prejudices (Ferguson 61-62). These laws neglect potential protection against being targeted as part of the groups mentioned.

4.1.1. In *Paris is Burning*

The main question that Butler poses in terms of the ballroom culture in *Paris is Burning* (1990) is if the denaturalization of hegemonic norms leads to their subversion or if the denaturalization rather supports their oppressive, recited idealization (Butler, “Bodies that Matter” 338, 342). Butler mentions that protagonists in the documentary are socially constituted, which constrains them, but simultaneously facilitates agency (“Bodies that Matter” 348). Butler ends the chapter *Gender is Burning* in *Bodies that Matter* in reference to *Paris is Burning* (1990) by stating that both mentioned options are simultaneously true. Although I agree with the author on many points, it can be argued that the described idealization of white, hetero-, gender-, upper-class normative framework is displayed through Livingston’s cinematic techniques. My stance is that the ballroom community itself offers mechanisms of agency, however, Livingston displays the appropriation by creating a clear separation between the ballroom community and the external world.

For instance, the scholar Brew observes that the ballroom community is mostly captured in dark, minimally furnished rooms, while the white community is captured outside, at daytime, in luxury stores or in upper-class spaces (9). When these cinematic techniques are accounted for, I claim that the community denaturalizes, contests hegemonic norms, and reformulates mechanisms of domination, and thereby claims agency in terms of discourse and performance. The members portray that the allocation of rights to a certain group, while ostracizing another is not ontologically given. However, the way the documentary is filmed allows the possibility “to enter into a logic of fetishization” (Butler, “Bodies that Matter” 348). The documentary is indicative of a lens determined by a white, hegemonic matrix. Drag ball queens of color are regarded as the hyperbolic repetition and appropriation of heteronormative, white womanhood. The audience is inclined to dehumanize the protagonists of the ballroom community through this strict split between inside and outside, darkness and light. Butler argues that the ethnographic complacency enables the movie to be regarded as an exotic fetish from which the audience distances themselves, at the same time fostering the completion of “the commodification of heterosexual gender ideals” (“Bodies that Matter” 344, 348).

The simultaneous existence of the two aspects mentioned above can be clearly detected in the following shot (fig. 21, 00:41:30). On the one hand, it represents the appropriation of dominance and taking control of aspects which have been denied and “[...] subverts racist, misogynist, and homophobic norms of oppression” (Butler, “Bodies that Matter” 341).

It displays the denaturalization of white, gender normative and upper-class norms, Whiteness is exhibited through social class, clothing, and behavior, reinforced through expensive champagne, the color white, red and the upper-class occupation, as mentioned in the previous chapter. In this regard, this points to the constructedness of power allocation as the people displayed in the shot can embody what oppresses them, and thereby, gain agency. The lacking originality of allocating power in the outside world is revealed by claiming agency in the ballroom. This is strengthened through the support by the audience represented in the shot below. It is fascinated, amused, and entertained due to the contestation of a seemingly naturally given authority.



Fig. 21: Representing Upper-Class in the Ballroom

At the same time, the display of unjustified power allocation exposes the mechanism of performativity, which includes that repeated, stylized acts over time lack any ground or originality (Butler, “Gender Trouble” 179). These acts are just allegedly naturalized in a white, hetero-, gender normative framework, which conceals their non-essentialism.

In addition, the lack of originality is underlined by the extradiegetic voice in this scene, which is accompanied by marching music. The voice utters: “[I]n the ballroom circuit, it is so obvious that if you have captured the great white way of living or looking... or dressing or speaking - you is a marvel [sic]” (00:43:10-00:43:19). The music underpins it with a sense of national pride, suggesting a greater degree of agency through the embodiment of the oppressor.

Despite being oppressed and being confronted with violence, the members of the ballroom manage to display how the restricting, endangering norms are, which are neither natural, nor universal, but they are social constructs created to legitimize hegemonic, white-supremacist power. Deconstructing this system makes them a miracle, a wonder, “a marvel” as they achieve a contestation of the norms, which can have violent, and in some cases, fatal consequences. This deconstruction is represented through the category ‘realness’. As previously mentioned, it is the discursive power and the analytic concept that depicts the option of deception between the ballroom and the world outside (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 378). It requires the performers to embody white, upper-class, and gender identities in an authentic, “passable” manner (Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness” 366).

Despite the actual performance being an expression of agency, Livingston suggests a hierarchical difference between the ballroom community and ‘the outside world’ through capturing the scene from above. The high angle shot creates the impression that the camera looks down on the subject. This is alternated by a hip level shot of a white person, which strengthens the divide. In addition, the darkness in the space invites the audience to ostracize and dehumanize the people displayed. As they are presented as ‘the other’ in contrast to the subject in a hegemonic, normative framework, it sheds light on the incoherence of gender, sex, and desire. It is implied that this binary split can only be discarded when the mentioned coherence is approached, as it would enable them to step outside in the daylight. The unity of gender, sex, and desire, as outlined by Butler, would be expected in the dominant matrix (Butler, “Gender Trouble” 30). Butler argues that this process of having to approach the illusory status of realness is strengthened by the diegetic movement of white people located in luxury spaces and of the community, on the contrary, in the ballrooms (Butler, “Bodies that Matter” 343). This dichotomy is, for instance, portrayed in the shot below (fig. 22, 00:05:22).



Fig. 22: Two White People and a Horse

The conscious decision by the director, Jennie Livingston, to implement a binary split between these worlds straps the ballroom community, to some extent, of representational agency. Brew argues that Livingston uses this technique of *mise-en-scene* deliberately to portray transgender women's ostracism, "[who] endure life on the outskirts of society" (Brew 9). This artificially designed split between the two worlds conceals that the allocation of power to a specific group of people is not naturally given. Concealing this allocation of power is comparable to gender performativity, which is merely iterated over time to conceal its groundlessness. The characters in the two shots have several things in common; however, the way they are captured by the director highlights their differences. One similarity is that the person, in both shots, on the right-hand-side is dressed in red clothes, while the person on the left wears a tie and is dressed in white and blue. I argue that the similarities point to the fact that these people do have the same pre-conditions to become successful. The differences between the shots are that the one depicting the ballroom community represents a group of people in the background, and the other one captures aspects indicating wealth, namely a horse and a house in the background. This highlights the seemingly naturally split between these two groups as if the ballroom community would not qualify for being part of the outside world. The quality of the realness category is determined by the feedback of the ballroom community, while in the 'real world' being a successful member of the hegemonic matrix is displayed through the representation of accumulated wealth.

In conclusion, the contestation of the hegemonic norms and the earned agency are inherent to the ballroom community; however, the way Livingston captures it suggests that the mentioned community just appropriates the white, heteronormative matrix, which it will never attain. Through concealing the lacking ontology of the binary split, she does not reveal the constructedness of the pre-conditions for the allocation of wealth and the exposure to discrimination and violence of a certain group. This notion is demonstrated and reinforced through the dark and bright dichotomy, the choice of spacing and the technique of *mise-en-scene*. It fails to indicate that these two groups of people are equipped with the same talents and qualities. This reality is undermined by the social constructs of intersectional inequalities. The impact of the latter is highlighted by Chadderton. She argues that racially marked bodies are discursively approached as being threatening and not granted the same rights as white people, which conceals the essentialism behind these constructs (Chadderton 50). At the same time, the structurality of being confined to a certain space is concealed. The binary split does not put the lacking essentialism center front. However, the ballroom community, in the mentioned shot (00:41:30), behaves in a manner that is usually associated with whiteness, which reveals the lacking ontology of being of color. This scene outlines Tate's concept of the 'race empire' or the performativity of race, reflected in the in between space of the signifier and the repetition. This allows insight into the essentialism of race performativity (Tate 185).

As previously mentioned, Butler outlines that the inner-outer distinction of the body is not ontologically given, rather, it merely serves to keep social control and embody disciplinary structures. I argue that this concept can be applied to the binary distinction of being inside and outside of the ballroom. To behave in a more 'passable' and gender-normative manner outside of the ballroom is an attempt to sustain stability; however, it is not naturally given to display a different behavior inside and outside the ballroom. It is concealed that this split is artificially created as these two spaces are permeable. This binary differentiation, which the cinematic technique of the documentary is in line with, is constructed by cultural orders disciplining and discriminating against the subject who does not adhere to them (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 170). The naturalized distinction between the ballroom and 'the real world' in terms of acts, gender-expression, racialized behavior, sexuality, and class is presented as ontologically given to maintain a heteronormative, gender-normative and elitist white-supremacist matrix. This is strengthened through the camera, which merely captures a person entering the ballroom once.

This is accompanied by someone saying in distress: “you have to open the door. You-all have to open that door, too” (00:01:20-00:01:28). In addition to the imperative, one can see a security guard skeptically opening the door. This scene reinforces the illusion that the ballroom and the outside world are ontologically impermeable. Apart from this scene, no transition between these two worlds is captured by the camera. When Butler’s concept is considered, the ballroom can be approached as the inner space, or the soul, while the outside world can be captured as the surface of the body.

I argue that the hidden ballroom community can merely be approached due to its absence in the outside world in the context of *Paris is Burning* (1990). Despite the documentary representing the ballroom community, the apparent obscurity of the ballroom culture is constructed through the film making. Due to the absence of the subjects’ interactions and forays in the outside world, the illusion is created that they cannot transcend the border of social control. By showing authentic endeavors of the ballroom community, the supposed impermeability would be unraveled. This means that if transgender protagonists of color would be depicted in the documentary moving successfully from one space to another, their obscurity would be challenged.

Since the boundaries in the documentary are not only perceived as metaphysical barriers, but also as real physical borders, some crossings between the ‘two worlds’ can have fatal consequences, such as in the case of Venus Xtravaganza. Despite pursuing the transformation of oppressive vectors of power, which she imagined to be fulfilled by her future protective husband, she is killed by one of her clients (Butler, “Bodies that Matter” 130). Decisive categories for Venus’ death are the intersectional inequalities associated with transphobia, racism, and classism. Butler claims that gender, in her case, was the “vehicle for the phantasmatic transformation of that nexus of race and class, the site of its articulation” (Butler, “Bodies that Matter” 130).

As articulated by Venus, becoming a ‘real’ woman results in being less impacted by homophobic, racial and classist discrimination and violence. In this case, class inequalities imply the potential consequences of being a sex worker. Based on Ferguson’s concept, the lack of access to insurance and exposure to discrimination when being a sex worker can be explained through individual prejudice rather than the systematicity of discrimination against certain groups (61-63). In addition, Butler states that queerness is discursively constructed as the cause of AIDS, which one is personally responsible for. In this context, a queer individual is linked to a stigma attached both to queerness and, thus, to the illness (Butler, “Critically Queer” 23).

The aim to transcend discrimination attached to being of color and lower-class thanks to a 'passable' gender expression is captured in the following shot in the ballroom (fig. 23): A stereotypical notion of embodying womanhood is displayed here, that is being a goddess. The way she is dressed and positions herself is reminiscent of Aphrodite, who is the goddess of sexual love and beauty. This is displayed through the golden shell, the jewelry, the gown, and the blond hair.



Fig. 23: Venus Xtravaganza in the Ballroom

In addition, the look in her eyes is determined, which demonstrates the sense of security she feels based on her 'passable' conformity in the ballroom. However, Butler claims that "the hegemony that reinscribes the privileges of normative femininity and whiteness wield[ed] the final power to naturalize Venus's body [sic!]" (Butler, "Bodies that Matter" 133). The oppressive norms of whiteness and femaleness extinguish any performative crossing in terms of race, gender, and sexuality outside the ballroom, which result in her being murdered (Butler, "Bodies that Matter" 133).

This is crucial as the biological parents of the ballroom members have excluded their children due to their sexuality and their gender identity. The created structures support and sustain the ‘children’ who face violence, discrimination, and homelessness. The reorganization of oppressive structures yields a form of agency in the form of discourse and iterated performance (Butler, “Bodies that Matter” 137). These frameworks are constructed through the re-elaboration of what ostracizes the ballroom community. For instance, after the mother of the House of Xtravaganza introduces herself, a family picture of her house is displayed (fig. 24, 00:28:13).



Fig. 24: House of Xtravaganza

In the previous scene, two members of the community explain their kinship structures and mention that the bond that connects them is their sexuality and gender expression. The kinship system of the ballroom community is the contestation and re-elaboration of the normative portrayal of a western family. The “resignification of the family” and “the social and discursive building of community [...] binds, cares, and teaches, [...] shelters and enables” (Butler, “Bodies that Matter” 137).

The introduction is followed by an extradiegetic voice introducing the mother and father of the House of Xtravaganza, who are simultaneously displayed (27:35:00-28:09:00). It is implied that the houses do not adhere to typical western family structures as their members are not blood-related and the age difference between the ‘mothers’ and ‘children’ is not as great as would be typically expected.

I argue that the director has introduced the re-elaborated kinship system based on how it differs from blood-related, typical western families, which on the one hand, points to the divide between the typically western family structures and the ones in the ballroom. On the other hand, it conceals that any kind of kinship structure is not metaphysically determined but constructed and iterated over time. Despite the ballroom community including a contestation of conservative family norms, the documentary presents the family concept in a manner that is processable for a heteronormative audience. This means that the ballroom community does not stage themselves in opposition to supposedly conventional families. However, it is through the extra-diegetic voice-over and the order of the scenes that these comparisons are drawn. The scholar Brew explains that the houses, which consist of members of the LGBTQI+ community, represent chosen families. The members can find support and guidance with specific issues around queer lives (Brew 10).

According to Butler, the documentary displays kinship structures that make the balls possible, while, on the other hand, the ball equally serves as a platform for developing sets of structures. These examples show that through the reappropriation of oppressive systems a more inclusive future can emerge (Butler, “Bodies that Matter” 137). The connection between the members is captured by the image above (fig. 24, 00:28:13), which represents the previously mentioned House of Xtravaganza. Their physical proximity in the family picture, the backbone of the family in the last row dressed in red – signifying support and strength -, and their artistic expression through the display of voguing poses all point to the interconnectedness of the family. Extreme closeness is displayed as it is not clear where the surfaces of the members’ clothes and skin meet, such as between the members in the last row to the right and the ones in the first row to the left. This kinship structure entails that a group of like-minded people, who are ostracized, yet provide each other with financial and emotional support. This is a clear contestation of the heteronormative, western perception of family, which Livingston outlines in a dichotomous manner.

4.1.2. In Pose

In this chapter, I will analyze *Pose* (2018-2021) with the help of Butler's theories and concepts as well as the intersectional approaches previously mentioned. I will compare part of the sections to the previously mentioned ones in *Paris is Burning* (1990). These comparisons can be drawn as *Pose* (2018-2021) is a "fictionalized take" on the documentary (Betancourt 14). In contrast to *Paris is Burning* (1990), *Pose* (2018-2021) includes more scenes in which the characters are shown during daytime, in spacious places, outside, in front of, or entering the ballroom. For instance, in the very first scene of the first episode (fig. 25, 00:00:00-00:02:11), the characters are in a spacious, light-flooded loft. The scene starts with capturing a disco ball, the camera shot transitioning to one of the 'children' voguing. It moves from a high angle shot sliding to an eye-level shot. The camera movement in this scene is indicative of being at equal footing with the viewer, rather than constructing a hierarchical difference as displayed in *Paris is Burning* (1990) in the mentioned scene. The person stretches their arms to the ceiling, hitting the first beat, as shown below (fig. 25, 00:00:14).



Fig. 25: Child of House of Abundance Voguing

I take the stance that vertically taking up space and reaching higher suggests notions of agency, and social mobility, which is reinforced through the glass front. The window suggests the permeability between the inside and outside space. In addition, this strengthened agency is underpinned by the reflection of the disco ball.

It captures the concept of gender performativity in terms of the iterated discourse over time. The latter is represented through the rotation of the disco ball, which multiplies, and permeates its surrounding. If the origin of what is reflected over the course of time is not questioned, it is considered the universal truth. The unquestioned notions, acts and behaviors that are replicated through mirroring are historically embedded regimes of structures of discipline. These seemingly universally accurate structures lead to gender performativity not being a free choice (Butler, “Bodies that Matter” 2).

I argue that the camera movement and the cinematic techniques should be approached as a critical viewer, questioning, and deconstructing the binary oppositions. This is achieved through eye level-, light flooded shots and characters entering and exiting spaces. In contrast to *Paris is Burning* (1990), no extra-diegetic voice-overs are included, which grants more agency to the characters. The permeability between the spaces, through the brightness and the glass front suggest that this community should not be ostracized, but it is considered part of society as any other member. In addition, the body language and utterances are coherent, rather than being merged and fabricated by the director.

However, this is not a unidirectional process, the outside world equally penetrates the ballroom community. Despite the camera movement suggesting hierarchical equality through eye level shots, transphobic comments are made in the loft of the House of Abundance mirroring hegemonic, intersectional inequalities. The previously mentioned scene ends with Elektra, the ‘mother’, arguing that only a *real* mother knows how to execute ideas, implying that Blanca, her ‘child’ at the time, is not considered a *real* woman. This comment is supported by Candy, who accuses Blanca of being a crossdresser and makes a misogynistic comment about her belonging in the kitchen (fig. 26, 00:01:45-00:02:01). These utterances imply that Blanca is not womanly enough to make these choices, while she must bear the misogynistic consequences of being a woman. The permeability of the spaces entails that hegemonic perspectives on gender are, amongst others, integrated in the ballroom community. Under the pretext that the aim is to deconstruct the unity of sex, gender, and desire, the realness category in the ballroom is based on embodying the hegemonic matrix in a ‘passable’ manner. The ‘unpassable’ incoherence of gender, sex, and desire is mirrored in this conversation, resulting in discrimination directed at the members who do not adhere to the hegemonic matrix.

Oppressing notions reflect the concept that the interior, particularly the individual, unique expression of gender, sex, and desire, should be made absent in order to maintain social control. According to Butler, the interior is constructed in opposition to the outside of the body in the interest of reinforcing prohibitive laws on the body's surface (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 173).

Equally, iterated, stylized acts establish the effect of an interior space projected onto the outside. The process of this projection includes that notions that do not comply with the dominant discourse need to be negated and made absent.

Butler argues that the definition of human is a contestation over power as the ones who hold it establish dominant norms and notions constituting 'human'. In this context, Elektra decides who is *real* enough to be considered part of the normative framework. I argue that the comments about being a crossdresser by Candy are made to mirror the maintenance of a supposed social control and hegemonic structures. However, as this is merely a discursive enactment, the ballroom community and the 'outside space' should not be regarded as binary opposed spaces as both penetrate one another. The permeability in the shot below, showing Elektra as she implies that Blanca is not a *real* woman, is outlined through the reflective objects, namely the window, the mirror reflecting the light bulb, the glittery table, the radiator, Elektra's skin, and lips (fig. 26).



Fig. 26: Elektra Abundance Reading

These reflections imply that both spaces equally constitute one other. However, in opposition to *Paris is Burning* (1990), these notions of othering are made overtly by the characters, rather than be implied through cinematic techniques. The reverse, namely the community penetrating spaces constituted as ‘white spaces’ is presented in the following scene (Fig. 27, 00:02:13-00:02:21). The accessibility and possibility of entering and exiting spaces is highlighted by the House of Abundance.

They are filmed being outside during the daytime and entering a national museum displaying an exhibition about the royal court, which is typically confined as a white, upper-class space. Their agency is underpinned by stealing clothes exhibited in the museum, previously worn by emperors who oppressed their ancestors. This implies that they claim what has been taken from their predecessors. The essentialism of being confined to a certain space is revealed through a song that is played when the characters enter the museum. The name of the song is *In My House* by Mary Jane Girls, which is about inviting a sexual partner to their house (00:00-01:09). This suggests that the museum can be considered their own place, of which the characters can take total control.



Fig. 27: Touch of African Art

Through the touch of African art (fig. 27, 00:03:17), the permeability between the spaces is underlined in a museum, a place usually confined to white and upper-class individuals.

The naturalized binary split between spaces marked as white, cisgender, heterosexual, upper-class, and, on the other hand, being of color, transgender, queer, and lower-class is revealed through the accompanying lyrics: “Here's the key to unlock the door [...] to my house [...]” (00:03:09-00:03:15). The binary divide between the spaces is unlocked, which exposes the fact that gender normativity and racism are merely social constructs concealing their groundlessness.

The deconstruction of the binary is equally presented in the following scene in the ballroom: after being accused of wearing a nightgown instead of adhering to the category “ladies of luxury”, shade is being thrown at Angel by the audience and the jury. The camera rotates around her, signifying the notion of being trapped.

Her performance is not praised in this case because the category is not successfully adhered to in terms of class. She storms out, forcefully pushing the door open. This enables an interface between the ballroom and the outside world. Blanca cautiously follows her and opens the door to the outside world, which is captured through a high angle shot sliding to an eye level shot. The transition between these two perspectives is illustrated below (fig. 28, 00:50:33).

This scene points to the unusual occurrence of leaving the ballroom during the performance and elicits the notions of hierarchical equality between the audience and the characters independent of space. Being insulted and brought to tears inside the ballroom, while being supported and encouraged outside by another ballroom member portrays the inconsistency of the binary opposition between these spaces. By entering the outside space, the inner space becomes absent, which shows that the confinement of a certain group to a specific space is merely a construction to implement social, and normative structures (“Gender Trouble” 171-172).



Fig. 28: Angel and Blanca in front of the Ballroom

Butler argues that intersectional inequalities, consisting of racism, transphobia, and class discrimination, should be approached as vectors of power that are often articulated through one another. As previously mentioned, Butler argues that one often attempts to decrease the impact of racist and classist inequalities through presenting oneself in a ‘passable’ manner in terms of gender normativity or upper-class.

The shot below (fig. 29, 00:08:07) shows the ballroom category ‘royalty’. The embodiment of the upper-class and presentation of womanhood in a ‘passable’ manner point to the attempt to reduce the discriminative notions elicited by racism, which is reinforced by achieving many points in the category realness.

In addition, the ballroom signifies Tate’s concept of race performativity and the in between space of signification and repetition (183-185). The illusion of having to comply with racialized behavior, which supposedly reflects the inner core of a person of color, is revealed and enables its denaturalization. Displaying its non-essentialism implements, according to Bailey, social structures, which strengthen the community within houses and account for each other reciprocally (“Engendering Space” 493). The community asserts, acknowledges or criticizes one another at ball events (Bailey, “Engendering Space” 493).



Fig. 29: Angel Evangelista in the Ballroom

The two following establishing-shots (fig. 30, 00:32:03; fig. 31, 00:33:48) represent a binary split between the white, heteronormative, upper-class world and the queer, lower-class world of color. The first low angle shot is captured at daytime, reflecting nationalist notions, such as the American flag or the depiction of mostly white people. The second high angle shot is captured at dusk, portraying dull colors and shows the sun setting. However, I argue that the director is consciously utilizing the binary opposition to later deconstruct it. After the first establishing shot below (fig. 30), Stan, Angel's client, is shown in the Trump building during his job interview. This is followed by a scene where he drives through the neighborhood in which Angel makes her living as a sex worker.

The strictly opposed spaces, constituted for a certain group of people, are deconstructed considering Stan moves between these two spaces, along with Angel who equally attempts to meet Stan in the Trump tower after his workday. In addition, I argue that the displayed dichotomy between the spaces signifies that the hegemonic matrix has been orchestrated over time, while the nonconformity to these boundaries is merely a natural response to this groundless illusion of iterated behavior and acts over time. The artificiality representing the hegemonic framework is displayed through technical, industrial, and mechanical notions, such as cars, skyscrapers, or the creation of a nationalist feeling. The second shot (fig. 31) suggests notions of naturalness, such as the sun setting, the sky, clouds, the sea, grass, and trees. Besides, comparisons between the two shots can be drawn further as the sign 'Trump tower' is located at a similar spot as the sun is setting.

Despite these establishing shots being in binary opposition, the dichotomy is deconstructed by the characters entering these spaces respectively.



Fig. 30: Trump Tower



Fig. 31: New York Downtown

In the following shot (fig. 32), the external space is made absent by the mere depiction of the inside space. While the external space is solely approached as a blurry obstacle, the inside space constitutes the representation of a hegemonic world, which is additionally embodied by the character. The gray suit, the tie, and the hands in their pockets represent the outside appearance of an upper-class consecutive. By consciously denaturalizing oppressive notions, the character illustrates the groundlessness of hegemonic norms. Through this deconstruction, notions of agency are claimed. Despite these indications of sovereignty in this shot, the portrayal of merely one character, suggests that potential discrimination is directed at them individually. This exemplification implies once again that the systematicity behind supposedly personal prejudices is obscured behind isolated incidents (Ferguson 62).



Fig. 32: Ballroom through Obstacle

5. Conclusion

In this section, the established theories will be outlined, and the research questions will be answered based on the findings presented in the previous chapters. The points of discussion attended in this analysis include how both Anzieu's skin-ego, as interpreted by Prosser, as well as Butler's concept of performativity, help to analyze decisive aspects of *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *Pose* (2018-21). I will illustrate how these concepts, bridged with the theories of intersectional inequalities, help to outline the differences between the two audio-visual formats.

Psychoanalytical approaches have usually not been considered in the context of transgender representation on the grounds that their identities are not explicitly mentioned. However, Anzieu, as theorized by Prosser, provides a psychoanalytical approach to transgender embodiment in the sense that it theorizes the skin of the body as the very essence or nucleus of the self (Prosser 67). The skin-ego represents a potential formation, which develops over the course of the relationship between a child, a primary caregiver, and their environment (Prosser 65). The skin is perceived as the interface between body and psyche, which diverges from a clear-cut dichotomy and should rather be approached as a bidirectional, multi-layered connection. Anzieu's theory, as conceived by Prosser, highlights transgender embodiment in the sense that it considers the feeling, perception, and function of one's body, onto which, as a second step, the psychical feeling is projected (Prosser 65, 72). In case certain functions of the skin-ego are not fulfilled, certain deficiencies can emerge.

The first function, *containing and preserving*, points to the necessity of being attached, embraced, held, as well as holding someone (Anzieu 107). The transgender characters of color of both audio-visual formats have been excluded from their biological family as they were explicitly or implicitly forced to leave their families due to their gender identity. Being forced to withdraw from one's family suggests the lack of caring, unintentional touch conceived during their upbringing. This leads to an attempt to substitute this lack of touch and deprived acceptance of one's gender identity.

The second function, *containing*, consists of the interface between the external and internal world. In the two audio-visual formats, the immediate surrounding and society at large discriminate their race and gender-expression, which leads to internalized racism and transphobia among the displayed population and even the community the protagonists are a part of (Bailey, "Gender/Racial Realness" 380).

These internal and external battles cannot be easily resolved by the second category of the skin-ego. Its original purpose is to filter the perceptions that should be processed passively or actively. As a source for transphobic and racist notions are difficult to pinpoint, the instinctual ability to contain them is disrupted. Due to the intricacy in terms of differentiating between the active and passive manners of processing, a vulnerable internal state emerges. If this is perceived as overwhelming, the fear of the inside depleting itself can be elicited, namely the 'sieve skin-ego' (Anzieu 109-110). In addition to the discontinuity between one's gender identity and the reaction of one's surrounding, the perceived incoherence between sex and gender reinforces this process. The dichotomy is further strengthened by being discriminated against outside the ballroom, while attaching positive value to one's identity inside the ballroom.

These discontinuities lead to several characters in the two audio-visual media suffering from the concept of a 'kernel without a shell' or a 'head like a sieve' (Anzieu 109, 110). The former is about anxiety substituting a functional container elicited by internalized transphobia and racism, while having a 'head like a sieve' points to the aggressive desire for self-affirmation emerging from the fear of the inside, one's gender identity, being emptied. Page and Richardson claim that transgender people of color experience a greater extent of transphobia through heightened structural racism (57). Their perceived identities are constructed in the dominant white, and heteronormative discourse (57).

Othering marginalized groups leads to the reinforcement of the normalization of heterosexual, gender conforming identities. These racist and gender normative frameworks are interwoven with gendered class structures. Being white and upper-class in connection with being transgender is portrayed as being universal (Lovelock 751). For instance, a white, upper-class, and transgender person is conceived as a safer object of consumption for white, cisgender viewers than a transgender member of color of the lower-class. The second portrayal establishes the lens through which working-class transgender people of color are regarded, which dismisses intersectional discrimination the group mentioned is usually confronted with. When the two categories of the skin-ego, the intersectional inequalities as formulated by Page, Richardson and Lovelock, as well as the cinematic techniques are considered to help analyze *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *Pose* (2018-2021), the following comparisons can be drawn.

In *Paris is Burning* (1990) the characters are presented in a more static way compared to *Pose* (2018-2021). The first episode of the latter represents the characters being in flux, constantly changing, and relationships evolving. Besides, cinematic techniques, such as light, camera angles and transitions between shots support the utterances and portrayal of the characters. However, in *Paris is Burning* (1990), cinematic techniques, such as the mise-en-scene, the dichotomy of black and white, non-diegetic voice-overs, and the arrangement of furniture in the room alter the meaning of what is conveyed. For instance, the mother of the House of Xtravaganza is shown in a short mise-en-scene clip (00:28:08-00:28:37) in *Paris is Burning* (1990). She talks about passing her coping mechanisms for intersectional inequalities onto her 'children'. My stance is that the setting, lighting, and its display have consciously been included by the director, which portray her as a queen, but equally as the colonized other.

These factors signify that the mother of the House of Xtravaganza can never adequately fulfill, according to the director, the first category of the skin-ego. This means that she cannot fully support her 'children' to avoid actively processing structural racism and transphobia, and prevent transcribing them into the kernel, leading to the 'kernel without a shell'. Despite the attempt to attribute positive value to these non-dominant identity categories, the internalized transphobia and racism are engraved into the inner layer of the skin-ego. Their interiority and exteriority cannot be bridged in a manner that fulfills the first function of the skin-ego.

When considering the theories by Anzieu, embodying the oppressor during the ballroom performance is an attempt to bridge inside and outside sensations, leading to internalized transphobia and racism (110). Dorian Corey in *Paris is Burning* (1990) underlines that if the ballroom members do not attempt to adhere to the hegemonic and binary gender norms outside the ballroom, they will be confronted with greater inequality, violence, and discrimination (14:30-14:54). This further emphasizes the need for internalized racism and transphobia to bridge the second category of the skin-ego. The 'sieve-skin-ego' is represented through Venus Xtravaganza criticizing a fictional de-transitioner. Viewing others as inferior and, in this case, not womanly enough, fulfills her aggressive desire for self-affirmation, which is integrated into the ballroom as 'shade' and 'reading'.

In *Pose* (2018-2021), the first transferred category, *containing*, is displayed through the character Angel, who initially does not receive support from a substituting motherly figure. Light reflects the notion of becoming more conscious of her needs, which becomes discernible through a caress of a substitute maternal figure in the museum, followed by touching her heart (fig. 27). However, to some extent this need for a substitute caregiver is fulfilled when Blanca becomes her housemother.

These changes, namely the initial lack of maternal support, which is later fulfilled, delineates the transitions in terms of relationships in *Pose* (2018-2021), contrary to the static portrayal of relationships in *Paris is Burning* (1990). An example for the depiction of connections between the characters is a scene where Angel leans against Blanca and tells her about her emotional struggles while being embraced and provided with support.

In terms of the second category, namely *containing and preserving*, a sense of discontinuity is presented by Angel having to perform labor as a sex worker with Stan, whose skin can be approached as being wrapped in anxiety. Stan represents the external, anxious layer of the skin-ego, which leads to her internal perception of having to adapt to the external one, to bridge these sensations. This leads to the mental picture of a 'kernel without a shell'.

The mother of the House of Xtravaganza in *Paris is Burning* (1990) portrays herself as a queen, passing on her own coping mechanisms based on her personal experience as a transgender woman of color. Means of othering are represented through the external background and cinematic techniques. This contrasts with *Pose* (2018-2021), in which a house mother degrades her 'children'. This is strengthened through cinematic techniques, rather than altered. Elektra, the mother of the House of Abundance in *Pose* (2018-2021), embodies the 'sieve skin-ego'. She fulfills her need for self-affirmation by condemning and commenting that Blanca cannot be conceived as a real woman. This need is reinforced through the depiction of only her back and the revelation of her face to her 'children', but not the audience. This suggests that she does not want to reveal her inside, which is reflected through the mirror.

Hiding this part is evocative of the fear of the kernel depleting itself. The external layer, represented through the window, is accessible to everyone perceiving her. The fear of the inside depleting itself is strengthened through the lyrics "heartbeat, it makes me feel so weak" (Gardner 01:00-01:09). The lack of attention she receives from her 'children' highlights this fear.

I argue that these systematic mechanisms being interpreted as personal are reflected in Elektra's transphobic comments. They can elicit the feeling that facing discrimination is a result of one's own choices, leading to internalized transphobia and racism in line with external structural discrimination. As has been perpetuated through dominant discourse, intersectional inequalities appear personal, rather than systemic (Ferguson 61-62). In terms of the skin-ego, the external oppressor is embodied in the ballroom through performances, which bridges the internal sensation with one's external layer (109-110).

The third transferred category, *to register external traces and to create a mode of communication* when being inadequately fulfilled, is called crustacean ego. This is brought to the fore when one has the impression that their own thoughts are being appropriated, which leads to an overinvestment in one's external layer (111). The conceived goal by the protagonists' biological parents is to adapt their thoughts about their gender identity, based on the aim for "a proper black citizenship" (Bey, "The Trans-Ness" 277). This implies that behaving in accordance with white, heteronormative rules can go hand in hand with moving up the social ladder. Norms, such as typical reproduction and the possession of wealth, are not represented as part of the lives of transgender protagonists of the two audio-visual media. This increases the level of discrimination and violence targeted at these characters and the fear of their thoughts being appropriated (Anzieu 111). This discrimination can, to some extent, be remedied by portraying a 'passable' gender identity.

In *Paris is Burning* (1990), Venus' representation reflects the concept of the crustacean ego. Her parents caught her while dressing in feminine clothes as a 13- or 14-year-old teenager, which resulted in her moving away due to her fear of embarrassing them. Her biological parents internalized Bey's argument that structural racism is propelled by transcending the gender-binary. She talks about "making herself complete" (00:22:51-00:22:56), which I argue reflects her subjective desire and the perceived external pressure to be read as a woman by society and her parents. This would negate her parents' wish for her to continue living life being read as a man. This further circumvents her perception of them wanting to appropriate her thoughts. The crustacean ego is highlighted through her protective gestures, her performance, and the extra-diegetic voice-over.

When comparing Venus' and Angel's representation in the respective screenplays, the following analogies can be drawn. Angel's and Venus' parents reacted negatively once it was suggested that they did not identify as a man. Their reactions reflect the extreme helplessness elicited by the fear that they expect their children to suffer from greater discrimination due to transcending the gender-binary. When these stories about their biological families are told, Venus in *Paris is Burning* (1990) is displayed in the ballroom, while Angel in *Pose* (2018-2021) is shown in her loft, sinking into the door frame. This is an example of the binary opposition between the dark background and the light being projected onto Venus with an extra-diegetic voice over in *Paris is Burning* (1990) on the one hand. On the other hand, Angel is portrayed leaning against a door frame, along with the intra-diegetic conversation in *Pose* (2018-2021).

These factors reflect that the former attempts to alter the meaning through cinematic techniques, while the latter displays cinematic techniques supporting the messages uttered by the characters.

The fourth category, namely *individuation*, is about the difficulty in differentiating between internal and external influences. When used as a lens to analyze transgender representation, external capitalist expectations are being internalized. This leads to the original intention of fighting for transgender rights being substituted by the internalized pathologization attached to the working class. This indoctrination results in an intensified emphasis on financial progress to divert attention from their class position (Irving 55).

In *Pose* (2018-2021), the fourth function is reflected in the ballroom, namely through categories, such as ‘executive realness’. The embodiment of notions to which the community usually does not have access to is approached as a goal. This reflects their aspiration in the ballroom, estimating that their bourgeois body would not be pathologized. However, this aspiration partly substitutes their collective intention to alter the dominant discourse, leading to a safer daily existence in the first place. Filming through an obstacle indicates that non-white subjects of the ballroom are seen through a lens that does not reflect their personal abilities (00:28:26). However, it projects certain pathologies associated with racist, transphobic, and classist notions onto them concealing the systematicity of such discrimination.

The fourth function of the skin-ego is similarly portrayed in *Paris is Burning* (1990). This is the case as original aspirations of fighting for transgender people’s safety are substituted by external capitalist values, which are means of survival. Pepper LaBeija merely says that class is the decisive factor for being stripped of the equal opportunities as upper-class people (00:04:46-00:05:23). However, Livingston depicts alternating depictions of white, upper-class people and lower-class people of color (fig. 21, 22).

This shows that in *Paris is Burning* (1990), the director includes images that add meaning to the extra-diegetic utterances. The imagery indicates intersectional inequalities in terms of racism and classism; however, it does not explicitly outline that the discrepancies are not inherent to the protagonists. In *Pose* (2018-2021) the statements are strengthened by the imagery. Filming through obstacles indicates that a certain filter is attached to the way the ballroom community is seen, which is not innate to it (00:28:26).

The eighth category, *revering tactile sensory information*, points to the fear of being marked by one's super-ego. In this context it implies that being threatened and experiencing violence is conceived as something personal, rather than systemic by the state. Pepper LaBeija indicates that she perceives to have less opportunities than white, straight, cisgender, upper-class people. The subjective perception of feeling cheated disassembles the systematicity of hate crimes against transgender people of color. This leads to the symbolic wound of feeling personally responsible for these struggles, which can lead to a symbolic wound (Anzieu 114).

Judith Butler has a quite different conception of the inner and outer perception compared to Anzieu. She argues that this split is artificially constructed to maintain social regulation and control ("Gender Trouble" 169). If this binary split is not perpetuated, cultural sanctions are imposed. Similarly, when the gender binary is deconstructed, normative punishment is endorsed. Based on theories by Foucault, Butler argues that the interior is displayed through its absence, which is inscribed in a citational manner on the body surface (qtd. in "Gender Trouble" 11-13). This can be transferred to gender representation, as it appears to be signified through the skin, which allegedly expresses an inner core. The normative bodily expression of gender is replicated in a rigid heterosexual structure. This results in a presupposed coherence between gender, sex and desire embedded in a hetero- and gender normative framework. Iterated and stylized behavior creates the alleged effect of unity that is initially targeted and idealized, and then projected onto the surface. This process is performative as it conveys a fabricated, iterated, and groundless system. Butler differentiates between sex and gender, arguing that the culturally constructed gender identity does not need to emerge from the sexed bodies. However, these concepts cannot be approached in binary opposition as the sexed body is rooted in a cultural framework ("Gender Trouble" 11-13). Performativity is not synonymous with performance. The former is an iterative, citational, historically implemented process, which has the magnitude to produce what it names. Gender performativity is interwoven with structures of discipline. The individual is already embedded into these processes, which leads to a perceived gender binary. Gender performativity creates the framework of cultural intelligibility situated in a heterosexual matrix supporting heteronormative reproductive goals (Butler, "Bodies that Matter" 2).

Within the space of approximating gender and aiming to reproduce it, a disruption is revealed, which points to the groundlessness of the framework of gender. Butler argues that the discourse about race and gender performativity cannot be disentangled as they bidirectionally inform and reinforce one another.

They construct the definition of who is perceived as human, which leads to minorities being dehumanized. This results in an essentialist approach of what is considered human, which is equivalent to mechanisms of power (Butler, “Undoing Gender” 13).

Tate analyzes race performativity and claims that an essentialized interior and skin is perceived to be attached to people of color, who are captured in opposition to white people (183-185). Race performativity is perpetuated through a signifier, while it is attempted to embody its associations. The in-between space illustrates the groundlessness of this concept (185). Chadderton claims that some bodies are conceived as not being granted the same rights, concealing the lack of essential truth of such discourses (50). Based on Ferguson’s concept, class performativity can be captured along the lines of perceiving personal responsibility for hate crimes that emerge due to structural inequalities. The systemic nature of hate crimes against transgender people of color is not mentioned in the American legislation, which paints the picture of these attacks being personal (61-63).

Butler questions whether *Paris is Burning* (1990) subverts or supports hyperbolic heterosexual, white, gender normative, upper-class norms (“Bodies that Matter” 338, 342). She argues that both processes happen simultaneously as the protagonists claim agency through the process of denaturalization, but also enable the audience to fetishize and dehumanize them as they do not adhere to the hegemonic norms, which is reinforced through cinematic techniques. I argue that the contestation of the mentioned norms and the thereby gained agency is embodied by the ballroom community by displaying the illusionary mechanism of naturalized power allocation to white, hetero-, gender normative and upper-class people. The transgression equally represents performativity, as the lack of originality of gendered and racialized behavior is revealed. In *Paris is Burning* (1990) the illusion of granted power allocation is, for instance, portrayed by the ballroom community embodying the white oppressor, which is accompanied by marching music, suggesting national pride and agency (00:41:30).

A ‘passable’ degree of creating the illusion of pertaining to the white, upper-class, and gender normative elite is coined ‘realness’, which depicts the groundlessness of gender constructs and the denaturalized allocation of power. While the actual performances capture agency, the cinematic techniques, the mise-en-scene, the divide between dark and bright, as well as the dichotomy between inside and outside portray the ballroom in opposition to the hetero and gender normative, white, upper-class framework. This viewpoint is strengthened through high angle shots, which elicit a perceived hierarchical difference and a potential dehumanization of the protagonists.

When Chadderton's concept of race performativity is taken into consideration, the binary split between the spaces confined as 'white' or 'black' reinforces the essentialism of behaving in an allegedly racialized manner and being constituted to a particular space, rather than deconstructing these notions (61-63). However, by capturing the ballroom performances, the in-between space of signifier and repetition in terms of Tate's race performativity is denaturalized (183). This is shown through the arbitrary allocation of power to and embodiment of a particular group. Venus desires to decrease the impact of intersectional inequality by displaying a 'passable' gender identity. However, based on Ferguson's concept, she is not perceived as structurally disadvantaged by the state, regarding her work as a transgender sex worker of color, since her murder is treated as something personal rather than systemic (61-62). This serves as an example of gender, race, and class performativity. The transcendence of the binary is theatricalized as an interior core in dominant discourse. By displaying that she is a woman, she indicates that there is no innate state of being a particular gender. This denaturalization of gender leads to cultural punitive consequences being enforced to overshadow their non-essentialism.

Similar to these aspects, the ballroom community does not portray themselves in opposition to western, conventional families. However, it is through the extra-diegetic voice-over and the transitions, such as in the scene of the 'family picture' (00:28:13), that these comparisons can be drawn.

Pose (2018-2021) outlines that the two spaces constructed in binary opposition in *Paris is Burning* (1990) can, in fact, be deconstructed and constitute one another. In some instances, they are displayed in binary opposition, whilst dismantled afterwards. The series shows in the first episode that the hegemonic and the ballroom space permeate one another, which is depicted through reflections, glass fronts, light-flooded shots, and characters entering and exiting spaces typically confined for the other group.

The song *In My House* by the Mary Jane Girls is played while the House of Abundance enters the museum, which reflects the permeability between the spaces. This is equally reflected in the scene in which Angel exits the ballroom to be supported outside, in the space confined as 'white', to be supported by her future House Mother. This displays the inconsistency and deconstruction of the binary opposed spaces. The confinement to a certain space is merely an attempt to inscribe prohibitive norms and make another space appear absent ("Gender Trouble" 171-172). In addition, predominant eye level shots suggest hierarchical equality between the characters and the viewers.

This contrasts with *Paris is Burning* (1990), in which this hierarchical difference is often established through high angle shots. I argue that the camera movement and cinematic techniques in *Pose* (2018-2021) can be approached as a critical viewer, deconstructing binary splits.

In addition, gender performativity is captured through the metaphor of the disco ball, which reflects iterated discourse over time. When the origin is not questioned, it can lead to a perceived universal truth reinforced through potential punitive structures. However, hegemonic concepts equally permeate the ballroom. Misogynistic and transphobic comments are uttered, which are approached as realness categories, “reading” or “throwing shade” in the ballroom. This implies that the heteronormative incoherence of sex, gender and desire is concealed in the ballroom. It equally captures the aim to reduce discriminatory notions elicited by intersectional discrimination. However, the ballroom equally represents Tate’s concept of race performativity as it emphasizes the in-between space of signifier and repetition, denaturalizing the alleged inner core of gender identity (183-185).

The permeability between the spaces illustrates the characters, their performances and discourse enter the hegemonic outside world and vice-versa. In contrast to *Paris is Burning* (1990), the focus is not on extra-diegetic voices and cinematic techniques, displaying binary dichotomies. The psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu, as interpreted through Prosser, and the feminist post-structuralist philosopher Judith Butler have divergent conceptions of the interiority and the exteriority. For the former, these layers are approached as a given reality; however, they are permeable and influence one another. If the requirements of these layers are not fulfilled, deficiencies will emerge, which lead to a compensatory mechanism, namely more rigid or sensitive inner or outer layers. For Judith Butler, this split is merely constructed to maintain social order, such as through iterated, stylized gendered behavior. This split is established through an absent interiority, which is allegedly projected on the outside of the body. In the case this alleged strictly opposed, impermeable split is put into question, the gender binary could be equally analyzed. To circumvent questioning the binary construction, it is essentialized through normative punitive consequences when not adhering to it.

When *Paris is Burning* (1990) is analyzed with the help of the theories by Didier Anzieu, in contrast to Judith Butler, following notions must be highlighted. According to the first category of the skin-ego, being embraced and leaning against others is a way to compensate for the lack of support by the original caregiver.

In terms of performativity, the question of compensations is not posed as a heteronormative concept of a biological family but rather is an expression of the illusion of the gender matrix. As the skin-ego highlights that the internal and external world need to be bridged (Anzieu 110), the external racism and transphobia reflected through the setting is internalized. In contrast, as Butler conceives the binary as a social construct, it is implied that it can be deconstructed. The setting is then approached as being disconnected from Angie Xtravangaza, while Livingston functions, according to the *Guardian* journalist Clark, as the cultural punitive law constructing this binary opposition.

Based on the skin-ego, Venus has the impression that her thoughts are appropriated due to her biological parents' refusal to comply with the concept of masculinity. This leads to the development of a crustacean ego. Her parents' embarrassment is elicited based on increased structural racism propelled through gender-nonconformity. However, when Butler's concept is taken on board, she aims to 'pass' as a woman, not to avoid her perception of her thoughts being appropriated, but to lessen the discriminant consequences of intersectional inequalities. Ferguson's theory about perception of hate crimes as personal rather than systemic reflects intersectional performativity (61-62). When the latter is denaturalized, namely the conception of a naturalized interiority, it results in cultural punitive laws being implemented to hide its non-essentialism.

Pepper LaBeija underlines that she feels cheated due to the lack of opportunities to possess wealth. Her extra-diegetic voice-over can be heard while white, upper-class people are shown in luxury spaces. The voice-over and the representation of the binary split suggest the internalized capitalist aspiration replacing fundamental intentions of fighting for transgender rights outside the ballroom. The subjective feeling of having been cheated substitutes the systematicity behind these inequalities (Ferguson 61-62). This leads to a symbolic wound of personal responsibility in terms of the skin-ego. Similarly, according to Butler, the represented dichotomy strengthens the illusion of the essentialist absent interiority being projected onto the exteriority. This means that the inside, conceived as the ballroom should in terms of hegemonic discourse, remain discriminated against. The visible, light-flooded outside can maintain these structures through endorsing cultural punitive laws. However, the director's cinematic choices are questioned in the ballroom, which illustrates Tate's in-between space (183-185). This means that the signifier and repetition of racialized behavior can be perceived as distinct, which leads to the denaturalization of intersectional performativity.

When *Pose* (2018-2021) is analyzed with the help of Didier Anzieu's theories, in contrast to Judith Butler's, following notions must be highlighted. In terms of the skin-ego, Angel is shown to not receive emotional support from her first house mother, which, when touching African art and her own heart in a museum, illustrates her need for a replacement of a maternal figure. When Butler's theories are used to help to analyze the same scene, the deconstruction of the binary divide becomes evident. Inside the national museum, confined as a 'white' space, Angel touches African art (00:03:17), which reflects an act of ownership and agency that is strengthened through the music choice: "Here's the key to unlock the door [...] to my house" (00:03:09-00:03:15) (Mary Jane Girls).

Through the deconstruction of the spaces, it is revealed that gender and race performativity are social constructs obscuring their groundlessness (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 179). This comparison implies that the skin-ego is theorized as bridging an internal with an external reality, while Butler's concept in terms of the artificial construction of inside and outside helps to approach the actual permeability between these spaces.

In the scene in which Angel receives emotional support by Blanca after being criticized in the ballroom, the skin-ego is reflected in the following manner: Angel leans her entire weight against Blanca, showing that the first category of the skin-ego is fulfilled, which is strengthened by being told that she is loved unconditionally. In terms of Butler's concept, leaving the ballroom and receiving emotional support in a space confined as 'white' reflects the actual permeability between these seemingly strictly opposed spaces. The permeability between the spaces is displayed through reflections, glass fronts, light flooded shots, and characters entering and exiting spaces typically confined for another group. The confinement of a certain group to a certain space was initially established to proclaim prohibitive norms by making other spaces absent ("Gender Trouble" 171-172). In terms of the skin-ego, Angel embodies the phenomenon of "kernel without a shell" by being wrapped in anxiety by the skin of her client. The external anxiety is reflected through an establishing, high angle shot, displaying the Trump Tower. The latter displays the elitist, racist US-American. The following shot displays the sunset and dull colors. The racialized conception of this space is reinforced through hip hop music. The burden of anxiety, which is due to external structures in terms of space and sex work without insurance, leads to internalized transphobia and racism. However, based on Butler's theories, the space is shown in binary opposition, just to be deconstructed by showing the protagonists entering and exiting these spaces.

The shot illustrating the Trump Tower displays notions of artificiality and construction, while the following one is reminiscent of naturalness. This suggests that the binary opposition and the allocation of power to white, upper-class people is an iterated illusion concealing its groundlessness (Butler, “Gender Trouble” 179).

In addition, the skin-ego helps to highlight that Elektra metaphorically suppresses the sensation of weakness by aggressively searching for self-affirmation. The ‘sieve skin-ego’ is projected onto her ‘children’, who must assist her in avoiding the feeling of inner depletion. The perception of the internalized intersectional, discriminative systematicity being personal leads to misogynist and transphobic comments. In terms of Butler’s theories, it is implied that oppressive, hegemonic notions permeate the ballroom community. This includes that the unique gender identity and sexuality outside the heteronormative binary are made absent in order to uphold social control. At the same time, this concept of criticizing implies that the oppression of a certain group is in reality not naturalized, as the allocation of power to a certain group is deconstructed. It equally displays the in-between space of Tate’s concept of signifier and repetition (183).

To conclude this thesis, the aforementioned evidence will be taken into account. *Paris is Burning* (1990) predominantly displays binary oppositions through dark and bright spaces, inside and outside locations, as well as high angle shots in the ballroom and eye level or low angle shots in spaces confined as ‘white’. With the help of the skin-ego, it is shown that the ballroom community embodies the oppressor as a result of internalized systematic racist and transphobic discrimination. These are embodied in order to bridge inside and outside sensations of the skin-ego. Based on Butler’s theory of performativity (“Critically Queer” 21-23), the ballroom community in *Paris is Burning* (1990) denaturalizes representations of gender performativity, revealing its non-essentialism and the naturalized allocation of power to a white, cisgender, upper-class group. Extra-diegetic voice-overs, explanations in terms of kinship directed at a cisgender audience were implemented by the director, and thereby enabled the fetishization and dehumanization of the protagonists.

In *Pose* (2018-2021), I argue that the cinematic techniques reinforce the performance of the protagonists. Through intra-diegetic conversations as well as eye level and low angle shots, the notion of equal footing is portrayed. In terms of Butler’s theory of performativity (Butler, “Critically Queer” 21-23), the deconstruction of the strict binary split is displayed through ‘white’ and ‘black’ spaces and the hegemonic discourse influencing the ballroom community and vice-versa. This means that cinematic techniques function as a critical viewer by deconstructing the hegemonic discourse. With the help of Anzieu’s concept of the skin-ego, it is emphasized how protagonists play a substituting role for a character’s skin-ego to bridge inside and outside sensations.

In addition, the systematic intersectional inequalities are internalized to fulfill deficient categories of the skin-ego. The two frameworks of performativity and the skin-ego help illustrate distinctions of how transgender identity is understood within the community and without.

Future research on transgender representation of color, I would suggest further investigation to be conducted on works such as *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2009), *Tangerine* (2015) and *Passing* (2015). The first show is a reality competition television series, in which the 'best' drag queen is declared. It consists of 15 seasons and has inspired implementations in other countries. It could be analyzed how these shows differ in terms of transgender, non-binary and drag representation in various countries based on their political agenda, as well as the show's handling of transgender contestants over time.

Tangerine (2015) is a comedy-drama which was shot on an iPhone. The actresses Kitana Kiki Rodriguez and Mya Taylor are transgender women of color without any major acting experience prior to shooting. The characters they portray in the movie are sex workers seeking revenge on their boyfriends. This audio-visual medium could be analyzed based on Dan Irving's theory. The latter is about transgender working-class people who have internalized compensatory mechanisms focusing on economic progress to divert attention from their pathologized class position (55).

Passing (2015) is a documentary about three transgender men of color, which was directed by Lucah Rosenberg-Lee and J. Mitchel Reed. I argue that transgender men of color are hardly represented neither in the media, nor in academia. However, handling the expectations revolving around masculinity as a transgender man of color could be enlightening in terms of gender and race performativity.

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7. Appendix

Abstract

The thesis investigates the representation of transgender women of color in the documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990) and the TV series *Pose* (2018-2021). The analysis of selected scenes is supported by Anzieu's psychoanalytical theory of the skin-ego, as interpreted by Prosser, and Butler's post-structuralist theory of performativity. The thesis bridges the aforementioned concepts with intersectional theories of gender, race and class. Linking these intersectional theories with the skin-ego shows that the ballroom community in *Paris is Burning* (1990) seeks to embody the white cisgendered oppressor due to internalized systematic racist and transphobic discrimination. Deficient support from the protagonists' biological families, systemic inequalities and harassment are internalized to bridge inside and outside sensations of the skin-ego. Based on Butler's concept of performativity, the ballroom community in *Paris is Burning* (1990) denaturalizes representations of gender performativity, while revealing the naturalized allocation of power to a white, cisgender, upper-class group. Binary oppositions between 'black' and 'white' social spaces and extra-diegetic voice-overs, explanations directed at a cisgender audience included by the director, however, enable the dehumanization of the protagonists. Drawing on Butler's performativity in *Pose* (2018-2021), I explore the deconstruction of binary divides in 'white' and 'black' spaces, revealing the interplay between hegemonic discourse and the ballroom community. In *Pose* (2018-2021), Anzieu's skin-ego helps to highlight the substituting parental role that protagonists provide for other members of the ballroom, supporting the development of the skin-ego. By employing Butler's performativity and Anzieu's skin-ego, as interpreted by Prosser, I highlight nuanced approaches to transgender identity within and beyond the community.

Zusammenfassung

Die Masterarbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Darstellung von schwarzen und hispanischen Transgender Frauen in dem Dokumentarfilm *Paris is Burning* (1990) und der TV-Serie *Pose* (2018-2021). Es wird eine Brücke zwischen Anzieus psychoanalytischer Theorie, Skin-Ego, wie sie von Prosser interpretiert wurde, Butlers post-strukturalistischer Ansatz, Performativität und intersektionalen Theorien zu Gender, Race und Class geschlagen. Letztere veranschaulichen in Verbindung mit dem Skin-Ego in *Paris is Burning* (1990), dass Transgender Frauen die mangelnde Unterstützung ihrer biologischen Familien und systemische, intersektionale Ungleichheiten verinnerlichen, die sich negativ auf die Entwicklung ihres Skin-Egos auswirken. Butlers Konzept der Performativität zeigt in *Paris is Burning* (1990) die denaturalisierte Darstellung von Gender Performativität und von Machtzuweisungen an eine weiße, cisgender Gruppe der Oberschicht. Binäre Dichotomien zwischen „schwarzen“ und „weißen“ sozialen Räumen, extradiegetischen Voiceovers sowie von der Regisseurin Livingston ausgewählten Erklärungen, die an ein cisgender Publikum gerichtet sind, führen zur Entmenschlichung der Transgender-Protagonist*innen. Unter Bezugnahme auf Butlers Performativität in *Pose* (2018-2021) wird die Dekonstruktion binärer Oppositionen in „weißen“ und „schwarzen“ Räumen untersucht, die eine Wechselwirkung zwischen hegemonialem Diskurs und der Ballroom Community aufzeigt. Unter Berücksichtigung Anzieus Skin-Egos in *Pose* (2018-2021) wird die substituierende parentale Rolle hervorgestrichen, die die Protagonist*innen für andere Mitglieder der Ballroom Community übernehmen, welche die Entwicklung des Skin-Egos unterstützen. Butlers Performativität und Anzieus Skin-Ego, wie von Prosser interpretiert, in Verbindung mit intersektionalen Ungleichheiten basierend auf Gender, Race und Class zeigen nuancierte Ansätze zur Transgender Darstellung innerhalb und außerhalb der Ballroom Community auf.