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# FILED AWAY

The Influence of  
Three Queer Bodies  
on Mine



by Kori Michele Handwerker

FILED AWAY:

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Queer Bodies on Mine  
by Kori Michele



I have a hard  
time remembering  
which memories  
of RuPaul are  
genuinely from  
my middle school  
years, and which  
are encounters I  
had later, on You-  
Tube, in a RuPaul's  
Drag Race-con-  
temporary world.

RuPaul Charles, b. 1960

Me, 1996, Age 11

I'd argue that it  
doesn't really matter  
which is which.





Known generally for his drag reality show, RuPaul's prolific career as an entertainer began in underground 80's punk drag and in genderfuck - the act of aggressively challenging gender essentialism.



The male heart-throbs of the day looking half the size of this glam queen was fascinating to me.



RuPaul's joyful presence, his love of drag, and his visibility in pop culture made a lasting impact.



RuPaul  
Foxy Lady

In the 90s, he was releasing hit dance albums that propelled him into pop consciousness.



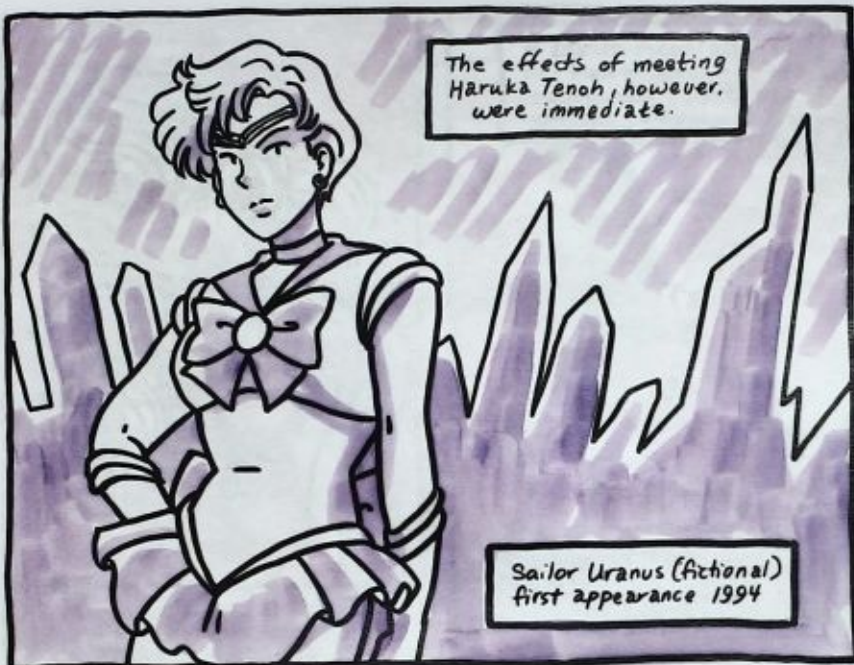
My first encounter with him was on the RuPaul Show, on VH1. It aired for 100 episodes starting in 1996.

I don't remember all of the guests that wikipedia now tells me were on it (Cher, Bea Arthur, Olivia Newton-John), but I do remember the Backstreet Boys. Not because I loved them -



This would all be squirreled away into my then-11 year old brain to manifest into actual ideas about gender many years later.











I didn't get to know Eddie Izzard until college. He's a British stand-up comedian.

He's known for his highly quotable routines, including "cake or death" and "covered in bees."



Eddie Izzard, b. 1962

I don't think I ever actually understood the appeal of stand-up until I saw him.

This is the funniest shit I have ever heard.

Me, 2006, Age 19

His storytelling was charmingly frantic-



and his content was liberal & accessible.



He was never trying to "pass" as a woman. I was fascinated by his employment of casual, almost incidental feminine signifiers.



A little lipstick,



nail polish,



Heels.



a busty top.



Still going by "he," Izzard gave himself permission to dabble in what made him feel pretty without it having to "mean" anything about him.





He wasn't a drag queen, putting on a person or a performance.

He wasn't using his dress as a coded means of signalling his identity.

He was just dressing how he wanted. No matter the societal implications.



I can't believe I recognized this much at age 19 and would still not make peace with feminine things for another decade.

In my late twenties and early thirties, I had new encounters with these three figures via social media that gave me new lenses with which I could re-examine my relationship to gender. Both in general, and with mine, specifically.

1993 - Arsenio Hall Show

Would you have rather been born a woman?



No, no, I'm happy being a big ol' black man!

You know, I'm an entertainer, and I have lots of different personas-

-and this one clicks!



Also, it's a lot of fun and I look damn good in a pair of high heels and a wig!

RuPaul existing in pop consciousness was important in a way I didn't appreciate until then. The road to normalization is long and messy, but it begins with visibility. Not to any one queer individual, but to society at large.

RuPaul had planted in me the idea that gender could be malleable and performative. It wasn't essential to one's sex. It wasn't even real.







KoriMichele @ korimichele, 20 Jun 2017

Sailor moon geeks, I need your help? Looking for the line where Michiru explains Haruka's gender fluidity?   
 1 2 3 4 5



KoriMichele @ korimichele, 20 Jun 2017

Can't remember exact line, something about "Strength of both genders?" I didn't imagine it, right?   
 1 2 3 4 5



Sarah Sakky Forde @ SailorAsteria

It's translated different ways in different versions, so I'd have to go check the comics. This is the panel, though:



Uranus is both male and female.

She is a guardian who possesses the strength of both genders.



They're not women's dresses. I buy them.

If a woman wears trousers, they're not cross-dressing. They're not wearing "men's trousers."



Oh.



Ohhh!!



Oh my God, my fictional idol was non-binary this entire time?

The influence of Sailor Uranus on my gender ran deeper than I'd thought.



But there was even more.

The Project, 2001: Interview with Eddie Izzard.

Famously, you've dressed up in women's clothes—

I wear dresses.



Having re-encountered these figures later in life, the combination of the inspiration they gave me in my youth with the perspective that came with years of learning and experience culminated in moments that made me reconsider my identity with new clarity.



It's not women's lipstick!

It's my lipstick. I bought it.

I've had a life long relationship with them, and they've enriched me.







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