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Performing the Self: Androgyny, Aesthetics, and the Gendered Spectacle of G-Dragon in K-pop

Abstract: One of the most powerful testaments to South Korea's soft power is its global proliferation of the 'Hallyu Wave'. Since the early 2000s, the South Korean ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism has consciously positioned popular culture as an exportable and valuable national asset, turning the country into a global content hub. This has been achieved by their food, beauty-products, webtoons, movies, dramas and music. The paper will examine this K-pop's performative stagecraft, visual aesthetics and construction of image and persona, through the androgynous and gender specific lens within K-pop, primarily citing the case study of the artist G-Dragon, one of the industry's most iconic and transgressive figures. By employing Entwistle's *The Fashioned Body*, the essay will interrogate how G-Dragon's artistic persona blurs the boundaries between masculinity-femininity, authenticity-artifice, self-spectacle. His androgynous aesthetics, manifested through fashion, music videos, performances, parody skits, function both as a site of resistance and commodification within the neoliberal machinery of Hallyu. Furthermore, drawing upon Jenkins' *Participatory Culture*, the article will explore how fandoms actively participate in reproducing, queering, reinterpreting G-Dragon's image, causing a co-authored discourse of fluid identity, disrupting the producer-consumer binary in art. In doing so, the G-Dragon persona emerges as a true 'Postmodern Celebrity.'

Keywords: K-pop, Fandom, Gender Expression, Deconstruction, Dress, Gaze, Stan Culture.

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Performing the Self: Androgyny, Aesthetics, and the Gendered Spectacle of G-Dragon in K-pop

Sourabhi Dutta Roy[1]

Introduction

"There are many names people use to refer to me—Kwon Ji-Yong, G-Dragon, GD. I wanted to show all these different sides of myself, exactly as they are." (Kwon, *Vogue*)

Kwon Ji-yong (권지용), better known by his stage name, G-Dragon[2] (지드래곤), in an interview in 2015, when addressing the claims that he is "harmful to the [Korean] youth", had called himself a "mutant", someone who doesn't fit into the Korean youth standards, and that's precisely what makes him "attractive" and worth emulating. This self-definition seems to be at the very heart of his carefully curated stage personae for over thirty years (he began his career in 1994). In his decades long career trajectory that is still ongoing, Kwon has been able to craft and negotiate three distinct but inter-dependent identities for his fans: G-Dragon, the most definitive alter-ego, is flamboyant, borderline snobbish rebel that throws a perpetual coup on everything pre-existing; the polar-opposite Jiyongie, perhaps the most authentic to his off-camera 'self', one that fans fondly shower soft love on, is shy and adorably awkward; and then the bridge between the two, simply GD. These tripartite identity frameworks have in turn helped a dynamic narrative of the artist and a performance of his self that goes beyond the stage, where identity is never fixed but rather operates as a fluid signifier.

Literature Review

Scholarship on K-Pop, gender performativity and celebrity culture provides a rich but uneven foundation for understanding Kwon's androgynous aesthetic and its implications for self-performance. Existing research examines how masculinity is constructed, destabilized, or strategically deployed within the highly mediated world of Korean popular music, yet few address how a single celebrity's long-term artistic persona can function simultaneously as a site of transgression, branding and postmodern self-performance.

Kim and Lopez's (2021) analysis argues that K-Pop idols mobilize a strategic balance of masculine and feminine traits across music videos, social media and live performances. Their concept

[1] An independent researcher.
[2] Hereafter, referred to as Kwon

of "masculine balance" suggests that androgynous gestures are not necessarily destabilizing; instead, they function as calibrated performances that allow idols to appear progressive while ultimately maintaining dominant gender norms, using Kwon as a case study. Lim's (2015) psychoanalytic study explores the tensions between Kwon's public image and private self as articulated through his music and lyrics, suggesting an ongoing negotiation between authenticity and pressures of idolhood. Lim argues that Kwon's self-representation is marked by fragmentation, self-consciousness and a desire for autonomy that complicates the polished idol surface. Sari and Wulan's (2016) semiotic reading of Kwon's *Crayon* music video, identifies a dynamic interplay between childishness, rebellion, flamboyance and stylized aggression, ultimately classifying Kwon a version of the "new lad": a figure who blends aesthetic self-consciousness with residual patriarchal attitudes. Nara's (2024) work on "gentlemen rappers", although not focused exclusively on Kwon, argues that Korean male performers often draw on traditional cultural motifs, such as the "Seonbi[3]" to construct forms of masculinity distinct from Western Hip-Hop's hypermasculinity. This framework helps situate Kwon's performances not as isolated aesthetic provocations but as part of a larger genealogy of Korean masculine styles. Chu, Oh and Moon's (2025) cultural branding analysis demonstrates how Kwon has strategically constructed a global brand centered on originality, transgression and aesthetic hybridity. This branding perspective clarifies how androgyny functions not only as artistic self-expression but also as a value-producing narrative within the machineries of Hallyu.

However, these various strands mostly focus on Kwon's lyrical construction of selfhood and often overlooks the visual and performative dimensions of gender- precisely where Kwon's androgyny is most pronounced- or the "participatory culture" (Jenkins) of fandoms in shifting and generating new meanings in an ultra-digital age of postmodern celebrity. Fewer still, have ever situated the artist or his persona as "the fashioned body" canvas (Entwistle) in blurring the lines between authenticity and artifice, self and commodity. This gap underscores the need for an analysis that integrates aesthetic and performative registers to understand how gender becomes materialized on both the body and stage. The paper addresses this gap by bringing together fashion theory, performative studies and stan culture to argue that Kwon's androgynous 'celebrity' operates as both a site of transgressive self-fashioning and a co-produced cultural product shaped through fandom and industry alike.

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative interpretive methodology using meta-synthesis to integrate visual analysis, performance studies and digital discourse analysis in examining Kwon's construction of an androgynous, postmodern celebrity persona; focusing on the formal, aesthetic and interactional features

[3] *Seonbi* refers to the Confucian scholar-officials of the Joseon Dynasty in Korea who pursued virtue, justice, and morality, often in a simple lifestyle

of selected visual and performance materials to understand how meaning is produced. The corpus, consisting of music videos, live stage recordings, fashion images, parody sketches and publicly circulated digital artefacts, was selected for its capacity to illustrate changes in image construction across different media and for their explicit engagement with gender fluidity and aesthetic hybridity. Each artefact is examined through close visual attention to composition, movement, staging and stylistic framing, enabling the study to identify how aesthetic strategies operate across modes of performance.

Kwon on the Stage

Often dubbed as a 'celebrity chameleon' by the press, most of this, Kwon has achieved with his distinct, arguably bizarre fashion choices and means of visual storytelling that have in turn aided his performative quality. In South Korea, Kwon is known as the "완판남[4]" for trending anything he uses or wears in under a minute. Kwon is known as much for his varied looks, that can be divided into distinct comeback[5] eras, as well as for his unique musicality. For instance, in his MAMA[6] 2024 performance; after an eight year hiatus from the industry, Kwon ascended on the stage, dressed in all pink, white net frills that protrude from the outfit, a Chanel pearl purse that goes across his body, a monster bejewelled pink crown on his head and uncut gem rings that are each a size of a medium rock. The backup dancers adorned the exact same shade of pink. This is incredibly bold and fundamental of an artist's confidence to be commanding the stage in the same hues as his crew, flipping the center-stage idea on its head; as Kwon showcased a certainty in his artistic flair that even in the face of camouflage, he could still command attention. The choice of pink, a colour historically coded as delicate or effeminate, here, is re-signified through excess and regality; while the white net frills punctuating his outfit disrupted conventional silhouettes of menswear, invoking a kind of Rococo flamboyance. The bejewelled crown helped him take his reign back of both his authority and metaphorical throne, for Kwon is often labelled as the 'King of K-pop'. His onstage persona or alter-ego is at its peak here; however the androgynous elements prevail, unlike what usually is associated with a professional rapper.

In his gender experimentation and deconstruction of binary, Kwon is further aided by his bodily grammar during performances, like in BigBang's[7] (빅뱅) cover of their labelmate, 2NE1[8]'s (투애니원) single *I Love You*, the quintet channelizes the energy of a K-pop girl group. But while, for the other members, the performance comes off as deliberate exaggeration, comic mimicry of femininity and

[4] Sold Out Man

[5] Marks the start of a promotional cycle for an K-pop artist's new music

[6] One of the major annual year-end awards of the industry, formerly Mnet Asian Music Awards

[7] BigBang is a 2nd Generation, originally 5 members, K-pop boy group, one of the bestsellers of the industry. BigBang debuted in 2006. Kwon is the leader of the group

[8] 2NE1 is a 2nd Generation K-pop girl group. Debuted in 2009

caricatured gestures, Kwon embodies the feminine poise effortlessly; his expressions seductive rather than self-mocking. The line between imitation and transformation dissolved as he channelled the sensuality and control of a K-pop 'diva' without ever slipping into ridicule. His performance became an act of inhabiting rather than impersonating. Meanwhile, in Kwon's performance for his version of CL[9]'s solo, *The Baddest Female* (*나쁜 기집애*), he rewrites part lyrics while retaining some key fragments of the original. The result is a fluid, self-aware negotiation of gender and persona. He sings, *"난 나쁜 기집애 나난 나쁜 기집애 난 나쁜 기집애*[10] */ Where all my bad gals at?"*—claiming, with performative irony, the role of the "bad girl." Yet, moments later, he subverts it again, replacing the line with *"I'm a bad guy"* before returning to the repeated incantation *"oppa, oppa, oppa"* (오빠), collapsing the masculine and feminine self-address completely. Korean (한글) is a prime example of a gendered language, divided into binaries and hierarchies. For example, "오빠" can only be used by a younger female for an elder brother, while "형" is the term used among two males. Similarly, the 'older sister' equivalent for this is "누나" (among men-women) and "언니" (among two females)[11]. In Kwon's play with the rigidity of the language, what then emerges is a deliberate oscillation that queers the male-female binary and reclaims both as performative registers available to the artist's body.

This is not to say that Kwon hasn't had his fair share of hyper-masculine performances over the years. For several of his live stages for *Good Boy,*[12](2014) *Kwon* is dressed in stereotypical casual menswear, sunglasses, slick-backed hair, engaging in hooliganism on stage, with gestures that are both vulgar and teasing to the fans, as he raps "낮에는 lil hamster but/밤에 사랑을 나눌 땐 gangster[13]." In an even earlier performance for *Breathe* (2009), Kwon used a bed as prop on stage, a woman strapped to it, as he is seen in an act of intimate seduction that associates "maturity" with sexually-charged "masculinity". Kwon meant to show his 'coming-of-age as a serious artist'. The obscenity and sheer crassness of the show, had made headlines calling out Kwon for "indecent concert etiquette with primarily young girls in the crowd." While these have set him as part of the canon of rappers that come off as borderline snobbish, a prick, and help build his stage persona as intimidating; Kwon has mindfully layered and curated himself so that ultimately he isn't boxed in as an archetype. For even during

[9] Lee Chaerin, stage name CL, leader of 2NE1
[10] "I'm a bad girl"
[11] Oppa, Hyeong, Nuna, Eonni- mentioned in that order
[12] Kwon released the single as part of a duo unit, with his group member, Taeyang; as GD X Taeyang
[13] "During the day, I'm a lil hamster/but when I'm making love at night, I'm a gangster"

performances categorised as such, he would often break his character during the 'ments[14]' into a giddy awkwardness that would place him right back from a rockstar image to a boy next door.

This dichotomy of power and genteelness isn't unlike Kwon. For the majority of his career, Kwon has been outspoken about his struggle in navigating and maintaining a 'stage' and 'self'; with his 'self' often taking a backseat, or after the hiatus with G-Dragon, the star, resurfacing again, for in the privacy of his home he has always been quite turned-down. This turned-down self would often fumble on stage, have a hard time maintaining the direct gaze of the audience, and possess an overall shy blushing demeanor; the exaggerated version of this 'self' is Jiyongie. If the former self is associated with the prime masculinity of an over-confident rapper and performer, then the latter would remind one of the feminine kindness; and the artist oscillates between the two quite effortlessly. Both moments are equally fan favourites, and no matter which is onstage, the audience soon misses the other. He, thus, fashions his self or image as agency. Through its visual language, it disrupts the heteronormative gaze that traditionally governs the music industry; queering the gaze itself. Androgyny, then, becomes more than an aesthetic choice for Kwon; it is a mode of cultural critique.

Making of the Self through the Dress.

> Dress lies at the margins of the body and marks the boundary between self and other, individual and society. This boundary is intimate and personal, since our dress forms the visible envelope of the self and, as Davis puts it, comes "to serve as a kind of visual metaphor for identity"; it is also social, since our dress is structured by social forces and subject to social and moral pressures. (Entwistle 4)

Fashion, as Joanne Entwistle observed in *The Fashioned Body*, is "the meeting point between the body and the social world": a material and symbolic interface where identity is continually produced and negotiated. For Entwistle, dress is not a superficial layer but an embodied social practice. It situates the body within specific cultural and institutional frameworks while simultaneously offering a means of individual expression. Kwon has often labelled his own body as 'petite.' This bodily awareness, rather than constraining him, became central to his aesthetic project. His deliberate experimentation with silhouettes, fabrics, and traditionally feminine garments, ornaments, manicured nails and hair-dyes reconfigured the gendered codes of fashion, and has been fundamental to his identity. This sensibility has also been pivotal to his becoming one of the few male global ambassadors for Chanel, and notably, the late Karl Lagerfeld's handpicked Asian muse, despite the maison's absence of a dedicated menswear line. Through an extensive portfolio of photoshoots, magazine covers, and fashion appearances, Kwon has showcased fashion as a vital tool for self-construction and the body as authored. By embodying an androgynous hybridity, he literalized Entwistle's notion that fashion "mediates between the private and

[14] A segment in K-pop concerts, where the performers pause their setlist to speak directly to the audience

the public", "the body and the social." Every fashion choice that Kwon ultimately makes changes clothing to a kind of a personal manifesto; each look a performative statement about authorship, artistry, and autonomy within the tightly controlled structures of the industry's visual economy. To further the case, two particular magazine photoshoots: *Vogue Korea 17th Anniversary Cover*, and the *Elle July 2023 Cover*, will be cited.

In the black-and-white cover for *Vogue Korea*, which is perhaps his most androgynous and risqué shoot yet, Kwon is styled with long, platinum-blonde hair cascading below his shoulders and he wears a sleek black beret tilted to one side, matching that of his female co-model's. His bare torso reveals half of his minimalist 'mind control' tattoo on his ribs, contrasted against the softness of his pale locks. Heavy kohled eyes and a sharp intense gaze looking straight at the camera. Both models are topless, skin on skin. The monochrome palette heightens the sculptural, grunge-glam quality of the cover and is striking. The intimate back-hugging posture, mirrored pose blurs boundaries of gender and identity even further. In another editorial shot from the spread, Kwon channels a decadent, rock-chic aesthetics. Seated casually on a worn sofa, he dons a dark tailored suit with a large metal studded circular bag on his lap, his hair once again styled the same. A cigarette is added in his fingers as an extra piece. The female model is styled in identical locks, loose-fitted knitted dress and fishnets. Both of their faces hover intimately close, yet confrontational, with mirrored expressions. In this sense then, the spread can be read as a dual portrait. With how similar both the models look in their physique and the gender ambiguous styling choices, these photos make it incredibly hard, especially for an untrained eye to recognize Kwon at a glance. The almost cinematic frames of the photoshoot turns the narrative into a fashion dialogue between gender and identity, feminine and masculine, dominance and delicacy; also positioning the body as the existential ground of culture and self. While the visuals feature tattoos, cigarettes and a very intense gaze as semiotic props that add a casual defiance and rebellion, but within the soft, feminine framing, they produce a paradoxical sensuality. The spread is equal parts sultry as it is avant-garde. Moreover, *Vogue*, here, challenged the conventional male gaze by destabilizing who is looking and who is looked at. As both models look identical, gender becomes rather undecipherable, and the hierarchy of desirability is flattened. This oscillation between dominance and delicacy captures perfectly what Entwistle identified as fashion's inherent "instability"; its ability to shift meaning through the body's performance.

For *Elle* magazine, Kwon embodies effortless sophistication with a twist of subversive playfulness. Dressed in a belted grey tweed coat that recalls classic menswear tailoring, he redefined its formality by pairing it with black leather shorts, long Chanel-logo socks, and polished leather shoes. His bare legs contrast sharply with the structured coat. The traditional masculine tailoring of the coat is juxtaposed visibly with unexpected bareness of his legs. This is an instance of negotiation of bodily display, revealing enough to challenge norms but withholding enough to resist the commodified

eroticism expected of either gender; and is treated as "potentially subversive", invoking "horror or derision." Furthermore, the belted silhouette clinches his waist, evoking the structure of women's coat dress, while the exposed thighs recall the visual grammar of fashion editorials that historically feature women in oversized menswear. His soft tousled curls fall naturally around his face, adding a sense of raw intimacy, and the gentle hand-to-forehead gesture add languid grace, contrasting with the authority of his posture. As Entwistle states "while the male suit can, at least superficially, efface the male body, it cannot obliterate the female body, which is always "feminine" and by association, "sexual;"'(19) this non-conformiting choices of work and play, man and woman can then be seen as a deliberate attempt to revoke the existing status quo. There is no space for a power imbalance in this bodily representation. In another shot, Kwon takes on a regal yet deconstructed silhouette, wrapped in a layered ensemble. A richly textured shawl in deep orange and gold drapes loosely over his shoulders, cinched at the waist with a patterned sash that hints at traditional Korean influences but feels distinctly modern. The skirt-like lower garment, adorned with intricate embroidery and beadwork, extends down to heavy dark trousers, completing the look. His stance is introspective here, arms crossed and gaze pensive, subverting the 'male gaze' once again and replacing it with self-containment. And while the ensemble is ornamentally feminine, his stance exudes power and presence associated with masculine dressing. The muted grey backdrop, for both the shots, isolates him, turning the ensembles into a living sculpture. The shoot mixes and matches elements of softness and power, tradition and futurism, dressed and nude. Every fold and layer seems intentional, reflecting a story of heritage, cultural reinterpretation, and cultural transformation.

Thus, in this capacity, Kwon's body operates as a transgressive surface upon which fashion's gendered binaries collapse. He re-embodies what might be called the "social skin[15]", as he negotiates visibility, cultural capital, and identity politics. This 'second skin' acts as a social interface between the individual and the world for him, projecting meaning and reflecting cultural norms, or digressing from it as in Kwon's case, much like the 'physical skin' which protects the body. Ultimately, Kwon's fashioned body is, then, not a rejection of gender but a re-composition of it. In Entwistle's terms, it is the "social body" remade through aesthetic intention. He goes against the fixed meanings of male and female in dress and in doing so reclaims autonomy. Through this, he exemplifies the postmodern subject Entwistle had described as one who wears identity as performance, and not prescription.

The Art of Visual Storytelling

Music videos as part of the visual arts have evolved beyond mere promotional tools for the artist; instead they now function as complex aesthetic and narrative texts that actively shape fandom identities and

[15] Borrowed from Terence Turner's concept, where an individual, using his body adornments, like clothing, tattoos, hairstyles, create a second skin that then communicates their social identity, status and group membership.

sociocultural discourses. The visual realm of music, including its styling, cinematography, and performance, has become an active site of meaning-making where artists construct and perform their personas. For Kwon, the music video, in particular, serves as a stage for negotiating identity through dress, gesture and gaze, positioning the artist's body as the canvas upon which cultural anxieties about power, gender, sexuality and authenticity can be projected. To further the case, two particular music videos will be cited: BigBang's *Fantastic Baby* and Kwon's solo *Drama*.

Fantastic Baby (2012), opens with Kwon seated on a stone throne, wearing a full-body striped suit, accompanied with gloves. His face, pale and sharply contoured, features heavy smudged eye makeup, while the other side of his face is partially hidden by orange-tinted hair that drapes dramatically and is so long that it becomes part of the outfit as a cloak. From behind the throne, several haphazard thick red rope-like things can be seen spread out everywhere, camouflaging with the hair. Kwon holds a silver cane and looks straight at the camera, at the first musical que, and does a welcoming gesture with his free hand, as if inviting the audience into this theatrical, surrealistic, gone-mad world. Kwon plays the narrator. Outside, there are placards of 'Stop Music', while a group of masked vigilantes try to break free of the riot shields and barricades. All five members of the group have a role to play in this dystopian video, but it is perhaps only Kwon whose androgyny reaches its peak visual articulation here, as he embodies the showy storyteller, the court jester. The difference is that, while the other members can be seen, shirtless, heavily tattooed, flaunting their muscles, tied up in chains, trying to break free, or accompanied by women and sensual scars on their body, overall the synergy they emulate is masculine; Kwon on the other hand is fully clothed but the structure of his suit recalls both a man's tailored piece or a woman's catsuit.

In yet another frame, Kwon perches on a jagged throne atop a heap of industrial debris, still unbothered with the chaos all around him. The setting is literally of a battlefield, a masculine-coded image of mass destruction, but his presence complicates it. The choice of red, a color traditionally coded as both power and passion, places him in the liminal space between seduction and authority. He isn't the archetypal 'male conqueror' of the scene; rather he is the aesthetic center, the almost divine observer whose elegance contrasts the raw violence it surrounds. Another scene captures Kwon in an all white outfit, peace-bringer. Much like all the other frames, his hair is styled in a bizarre length on one side and absurdly short on the other, hinting at the duality innate in humans. His pose is poised yet guarded. The monochromatic palette evokes purity and neutrality, which is in sharp contrast with the message of rebellion in the music. The most noteworthy part of this particular scene is his lip makeup: black vertical lines drawn on a white lipstick base, creating the illusion of stitch marks. His mouth transforms into a performative prop for the symbol of silence. We are forced to ask, did then the storyteller finally succumb to the pressures? Of course, the frame soon shifts and we see the quintet in a sort of a celebratory dance; people around are finally mask free, denoting the war is won and power of speech

has prevailed, where music and creative control has finally reigned supreme. Throughout the video, Kwon is neither man nor woman, but an embodiment of post-gender cool or the core essence of the art of storytelling itself. His unique style situates him in the same tradition as both a samurai warrior as well as a Manga[16] hero. Kwon's power here is visual, performative, not physical. While the several exaggerated costumes and theatrical posturing can be read as parodying the very spectacle of celebrity culture he embodies.

In *Drama* (2025), Kwon takes this commentary on celebrity culture even further, appearing alone at first, his back turned, with a large metallic wind-up key protruding from his spine. Dressed in a fluffy white fur coat, he looks both fragile and surreal, part human and part automaton. He initially looks completely defeated, gaze downcast, but as the first beats start playing, he gets up on his feet. The key transforms him into a toy or marionette; an image of celebrity as a mechanical spectacle: he moves only when 'wound up', suggesting exhaustion, performance fatigue, and loss of agency. The furry costume amplifies this contradiction, having both luxurious yet infantilizing undertones. The wide angle shots show him on a circular moving base further establishing the context of him being a 'toy in the music box', following the same mechanical repetitions of movement day-in-and-day-after. The only pop of colour the screen uses is Kwon's orangish-red hair, which signifies the beating heart of a toy. As paradoxical as it sounds, it is often overlooked in the gossip hungry world of showbiz. Some of the scenes are juxtaposed with a through-the-camera-lens angle, with a distinction of a darker hue of blue coloring the frame, stating how Kwon is only ever perceived through a lens. In another frame, Kwon is accompanied by a pale, faceless figure, presumably a woman. The scene reads like a sculptural tableau of duality: the human and the inhuman, the self and its projection. The faceless partner, clad in sheer, ethereal fabric, evokes a ghostly muse or alter ego, suggesting that Kwon's character is both the 'performer' and the 'performed'. The gender coding of the scene is intentionally unstable yet again; both bodies share the same delicate lines and soft garments. The atmosphere of sterile blue, coupled with the absence of expression, situates them in a post-human world; one where connection becomes mechanical from emotional. As the two figures hold on to each other as last means of support, the lines between dancer, lover, or mannequin blurs. The monochrome blue tint also underscores emotional coldness, as if he exists in an artificial world where even pain has been ultimately aestheticized. These shots visualise 'the fashioned body' at its extreme; an object of display that has been engineered, wound and ultimately commodified.

The music video also borrows from the 1998 film, *Dangerous Beauty*, as the name is explicitly featured in a still shot. Kwon's willingness to borrow from pop culture references, oftentimes with a woman protagonist is not unknown to an aficionado. As he transposes the theme of a Venetian courtesan weaponizing her beauty, intellect and performance within a patriarchal society, to a postmodern gender-

[16] Same as Manwha, but originates from Japan

fluid terrain, Kwon, here, himself becomes a digital courtesan of fame, a performer whose beauty and artifice are both his power and his peril. Like the courtesan, he navigates a world that consumes and condemns spectacle. The body, ornamented and performative, becomes a site of both agency and exploitation, echoing *Dangerous Beauty's* paradox of beauty as both liberation and cage; and Kwon is suspended between autonomy and objectification.

Fandom as the Author

> Fandom, after all, is born of a balance between fascination and frustration: if media content didn't fascinate us, there would be no desire to engage with it; but if it didn't frustrate us on some level, there would be no drive to rewrite or remake it. (Jenkins 97-98)

If we look at 'Artist' as a text itself, then 'Fandom' becomes its author. Meaning is never static; but dynamic and ever-evolving. This is what Henry Jenkins meant as "participatory culture", where fandoms take active part. In the world of Postmodern celebrity, where social media is its biggest forum, fanarts, fanfics, meme culture, have aided in a diverse storytelling process. Words like 'canon', 'fanon', 'alternate universes', and fan-driven 'safe spaces' like *Archive of Our Own* (AO3) and *Stan Twitter* (now X) have found their core value in shaping this culture. As much as efforts like these might be seen as instances of parasocialism, it can also fuel creativity. Storytelling is, then, not only the responsibility of the artist, but the hobby of the fans.

For instance, Kwon in his 2013 hit single *Crooked (삐딱하게)*, is seen running wildly across deserted London streets, out of breath, heartbroken and angry as a scorned lover, screaming and spatting at the skies, shoving any random couple in his sight, as he sings "영원한 건 절대 없어/결국에 넌 변했지.[17]" While in another single, in 2017, titled *Untitled 2014 (무제)*, this time a piano ballad, Kwon embodies a forlorn lover, in a sheer shirt, posture defeated as he repents a lost love and asks for forgiveness:"너에게 용서받기보다/죽는 게 더 쉬울지 몰라[18]." This video is completely stripped back of all the glitz and glamour that Kwon's artistic personality usually exudes, and is in sharp contrast with the previous punk energy of *Crooked*. For both the music videos, the visual storytelling is in complete sync with the lyrical and instrumental choices of the artist. However, as often the case for any form of storytelling, with fandom effort and shifting symbols, the medium is no longer only tethered to its original authorial intent. While *Untitled* have retained some of its original meaning as a heartbreak song, *Crooked* has since then shifted and metamorphosized into a South Korean national anthem of

[17] "Nothing lasts forever/In the end you changed"
[18] "It might be easier to die than to be forgiven by you"

rebellion, peak of which was seen in 2024, in a nationwide rally of the general public, calling for the impeachment of their then President, as everyone sang the words: "Nothing lasts forever" in perfect harmony. The rally crowd also was infiltrated with several multi-fandom K-pop lightsticks, a severe case of changing symbols of items.

> In a participatory culture, the distinction between producers and consumers of media is breaking down, as everyday people take advantage of new technologies to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content. (Jenkins 201)

One of the prominent discussions of *Vip*[19] *Twitter* is the sexuality or sexual orientation of Kwon. While some fans stand dejected on speculations that the artist might be gay (derailing their self-insert mind fantasies), others are over-joyed in the "gender bending" tropes it can entail, either way positioning the celebrity as not human but a symbol to be deconstructed. Pun on words like 'G-Diva' or 'G-Daddy' have found their place in the daily lingo of this fandom's speech. Many fanboys call Kwon '오빠', destabilizing the inherent existing gender binary in language. In turn, Kwon has humoured this himself, at times indulging with the homoerotic flirtatious undertones while other times playfully rebuking the fanboys for referring to him, a man, as such. This is an instance of symbols in language shifting its meaning, where '오빠' has emerged as a flirtatious term of endearment in both heterogenic and homogenic narratives.

The fandom's need for this "gender-bending" trope can also be seen in K-pop's persistence in cross-dressing, parodying the visual gestures and body movements of the other gender, and is a uber popular promotional means in South Korean variety shows. Contrary to the western late-night talk show cable interview format, these are primarily governed with game shows, comedic gags and often time roleplays by the celebrity guests. And although, Entwistle wrote:

> Styles [that] enable the repetitious production of gender, even when gender appears to break down, as with androgynous fashion, and are aided in part by the repetition of gendered styles of bodily posture routinely reproduced in fashion magazines… are also open to subversion through exaggeration and parody,... some of the most exaggerated performances, such as drag, could be said to reinforce rather than undermine conventions of gender… (6)

These exaggerated performances not only function as comic relief and spectacle, but also at a deeper level, it opens up a critical dialogue on the fluidity of gender. Gender fluidity, here, is not a deviance, but an entertainment, thus normalizing it within the mainstream. This normalization, even if mediated through humour, unsettles the rigidity of heteronormative masculinity that dominates Korean popular

[19] The fandom name for BigBang is VIP, so in part Kwon's fandom. Vip Twitter is Stan twitter for BigBang's fandom

media otherwise. The laughter it provokes is not then merely mockery; but discomfort disguised as amusement, a collective negotiation of what it means to perform gender 'wrong'. Furthermore, these performances are often mediated through fan reception that transforms parody into celebration.

For instance, in BigBang's parody of a classic Korean Drama, *Secret Garden* (2011), Kwon plays the character of the female lead. Seemingly unrecognisable, in one of the parody's iconic and fan favourite scenes, he is dressed in a metallic olive-green bodycon dress, fishnet stockings, black opera gloves, and leopard-print heels. Styled in a short, bob haircut and bold red lips, his gaze is coy but pose sultry. The tableau, composed with deliberate theatricality, recalls the poise of a Renaissance sculpture, evoking the long lineage of femininity as performance. This visual moment encapsulates 'gender bending' at its most performative. Kwon is deliberate in his visual grammar of acting, that heightens his fashion choices for:

> Dress involves practical actions directed by the body upon the body, which result in ways of being and ways of dressing, such as ways of walking to accommodate high heels, ways of breathing to accommodate a corset, ways of bending in a short skirt, and so on. (20)

The complexity in the choice of script deepens when one recalls the source material: *Secret Garden*, the drama, itself revolves around a fantastical gender-swap arc. The show featured a tomboyish and 'unladylike' heroine who switches her body with the hero for the majority of the plot. Thus, Kwon, a man, in this parody plays a woman who is, within the story's logic, temporarily inhabited by a man's soul. This makes his performance unmistakably self-aware and a meta-commentary on gender as non-binary and a theatrical layering of gendered selves. What emerges is a performance that is as much about 'playing gender' as it is about 'playing with gender'. Furthermore, by inhabiting this role with deliberate stylisation, Kwon renders visible the instability of gendered signifiers, like dress, posture, and expression; rather strategically mobilising them to both parody and critique. His embodiment of femininity is not about imitation alone but transformation, exaggerating gender codes to the point of exposing their artifice.

In online fan communities, screenshots, GIFs, and edits of this parody circulate till date and not as ridicule but as affection. Fans reframe these moments in the collective lexicon, as evidence of Kwon's versatility, confidence, and openness to the other. This aspect, moreover, becomes key driving forces to spaces like *AO3* which boosts a large library of fanfiction, based on K-pop's shipping[20] culture. The industry's cultivation of idols as aesthetic commodities might often limit authentic queer expression, however, fan interpretations reclaim agency by 'queering' heteronormative pop narratives. These collaborative ecosystems and "two-way flow of content" turn any authorial hierarchies on its head. The

[20]Shipping is the act of rooting for romantic relationship, oftentimes imaginary, between two or more people, who can be fictional characters or real-life celebrities

participatory culture surrounding, thus, expands the meaning of such acts beyond the intentions of the artists. What begins as parody becomes, through fandom, a re-authorship of both gender and an alternate space of fan's imagination. Even under layers of humour, the spectacle of cross-dressing invites audiences to confront the fact that all gendered performance, whether 'authentic' or 'comic', is stylized and repeatable. By parodying femininity and 'gender experimentation', the artist reveals the theatricality of masculinity itself, subtly asserting that to perform either is to play.

Over time, these interpretations become part of the artist's extended work life; and contribute to an image that is both his intended and a shared cultural artifact that is being continually rewritten by the audiences. Moreover, the postmodern celebrity exists within a feedback loop of affective economies. Emotional investments, like adoration, longing, even obsession, circulate through digital fandoms, generating not only discourse but also economic value. The virality of a fan edit, the trend of a lyric quote on TikTok, or the reinterpretation of a music video aesthetic in fanart, all contribute to maintaining the celebrity's cultural currency. In this sense, fandom functions as both archive and amplifier, ensuring that the artist's relevance is continuously reactivated through fan labour.

The Body, Image and Commodity in Postmodern Stardom

The concept of the postmodern celebrity, as articulated by Marshall, described a mode of stardom defined by fragmentation, self-reflexivity and the collapse of boundaries between art, commerce and identity. Unlike traditional modernist celebrities whose personas were stabilised by studio systems or institutional gatekeeping, the postmodern celebrity operates through multiplicity, constantly shifting between roles, authorial positions and aesthetic registers. Marshall further argued that celebrity in late capitalist culture becomes a technology of the self, a site where performance and identity are deliberately blurred to produce an endlessly circulating image. This figure is, therefore, less a coherent subject than an assemblage of signs, narratives and self-representations that are strategically curated and performed. Moreover, central to the 'postmodern celebrity' is also the understanding that the body itself becomes a text, commodity and interface; this aligns with Entwistle's theorisation of the 'fashioned body'. The celebrity persona does not present authenticity as a singular essence but as a layered performance shaped by styling, gender modulation, affective manipulation and strategic aesthetic play. In this framework, celebrity becomes a site where the boundaries between self and spectacle are intentionally destabilised. Postmodern celebrity culture thrives on this instability: the more fluid, contradictory and hybrid the persona, the more it can be consumed, remixed and reproduced across media ecologies. Fragmentation is, thus, not a by-product of postmodernity but its central engine, enabling the celebrity image to function simultaneously as art, brand and discourse.

Kwon exemplifies this 'postmodern celebrity' because his identity is constructed through continuous aesthetic reinvention, deliberate self-fragmentation and strategic ambiguity. Across his

music videos, performances and public appearances, as discussed above, he mobilises androgyny, hybridity and theatricality not as deviations from a stable self but as constitutive elements of his persona. His refusal to maintain a singular masculine image, instead oscillating between hypermasculinity, femininity and gender-indeterminate aesthetics, transforms his body into a curated surface through which identity is both performed and destabilised. Furthermore, his long-standing partnership with global fashion houses, his cultivation of a hyper-stylised image and his active self-production across digital platforms illustrate Marshall's argument that the postmodern celebrity collapses the distinction between artistic output and brand identity. The 'G-Dragon' persona is thus not anchored in one dimension of his career but emerges from the dynamic interplay of music, fashion, narrative experimentation and self-reflexive image manipulation.

Moreover, his public identity is continuously reproduced by fandoms through digital edits, reinterpretations, queered readings and transnational fan discourse. This echoes the argument that contemporary celebrity culture operates through forms of mediated intimacy and collaborative meaning-making, where audiences play an active role in shaping celebrity narratives. Through this interplay of self-fashioning and fan-driven reinterpretation, Kwon embodies the 'postmodern celebrity' par excellence: a figure whose identity exists not as a stable essence but as a fluid, multi-sited performance co-produced across stage, screen and digital culture.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Kwon's experimentation is not confined to fashion alone, albeit a significant part of it, but is as much about posture, gesture and movement as it is about clothing. In this androgenious blend of stage masks, of the masculine-feminine on the gender spectrum, Kwon's physicality is both macho and virile as well as fluid, erotic and oftentimes unsettling in its grace. Such moments exemplifies the performative reiteration and choreography of gender; its power to both reproduce and destabilize normative scripts through repetition and variation. Kwon's stagecraft lays bare this process: the body becomes a site of experimentation where multiple gendered identities can coexist, overlap and mutate. By doing so, he dislocates gender from biology and anchors it instead in performativity. In this sense, his movement style operates as a form of visual resistance, a politics of the body that questions who gets to define beauty, power, or desire in the first place. Furthermore, the fandoms' deconstruction of the existing binary of male-female, of self-artifice, of art-artist, of text-author, of producer-consumer, plays an equally significant role in extending and reshaping textual meanings and symbols from its original intention. Kwon's readiness to give into this aspect of fandom storytelling and meta-discussions, by encouraging and encashing their creativity, creates a symbiotic relationship between the 'Artist' and the 'Fan'.

Ultimately, G-Dragon, both the artist and the art, exemplifies his postmodern celebrity precisely because his persona is constructed at the intersection of this experimentation by him and participatory culture in his fandom, as he transforms personal identity into a fluid cultural brand whose meanings are deliberately unstable, endlessly revised and collaboratively produced. In this way, his androgynous visuality, performative self-fashioning and receptivity to fan intervention reveal a model of celebrity that is no longer defined by fixed authenticity but by what postmodern celebrities called the "mutable self": one that thrives on fragmentation, hybridity and co-authorship. In foregrounding this mutable self, Kwon not only challenges gender norms within K-pop but also demonstrates how contemporary stardom itself has become a site of shared cultural production, making him one of the most compelling examples of postmodern celebrity in South Korea.

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