

# Words, Music and Gender



# Words, Music and Gender

Edited by

Michelle Gadpaille and Victor Kennedy

**Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing**



Words, Music and Gender

Edited by Michelle Gadpaille and Victor Kennedy

This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

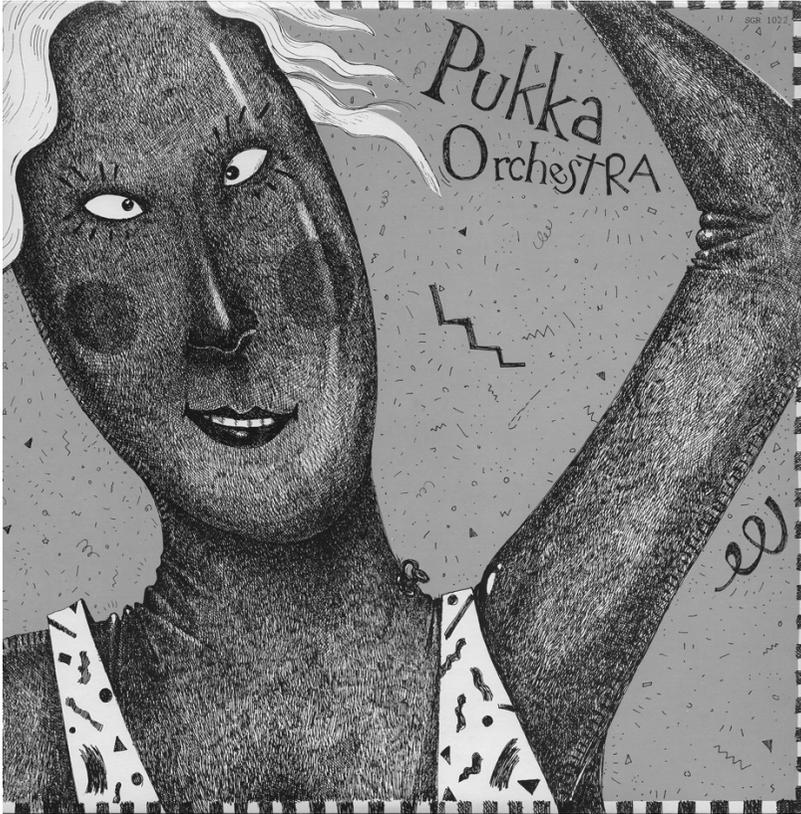
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2020 by Michelle Gadpaille, Victor Kennedy  
and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-5695-6

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-5695-9



The editors would like to dedicate this volume to the memory of Graeme Williamson, singer, songwriter, author, and co-founder of Pukka Orchestra, who kindly helped us with our research.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: For those Bazillions of Women and Other Genders .....	1
Michelle Gadpaille and Victor Kennedy	
The Mask Behind the Man: Gender Bending, Sexual Fluidity and the Fractal Subjectivity of David Bowie.....	6
Mojca Krevel	
“Gut Level”: The Conceptualization of Gender in the Lyrics of Kim Gordon .....	28
Melanija Larisa Fabčič	
Bad Reputation or Sexism? Joan Jett’s Influence on Gender Equality in Rock Music.....	53
Dolores Hunsky	
Breaking Taboos in 1980s Toronto New Wave Music.....	67
Victor Kennedy	
Girls, Girls, Girls: Women in Glam Metal .....	92
Maiken Ana Kores	
Homophobia in Rap.....	119
Jožef Kolarič	
American Popular Music and Its Influence on English Vocabulary.....	133
Bojan Kasuba	
“You Scream like a Girl”: Growling and Screaming Female Voices in Metal Music.....	149
Tina Ritlop	
The Adaptation of Lyrics, Music and Performance of the Hindustani Genre <i>ṭhumrī</i> as a Tool of Affirmation for Professional Women Singers in the Changing North Indian Society of the XX Century.....	158
Marged Flavia Trumper	

The Female Voice in Slovenian Jazz.....	177
Zmago Pavličič	
“A vos jeux, mes amis”: Ophelia Finding Her Own Voice in Ambroise Thomas’s <i>Hamlet</i> .....	191
F. Zeynep Bilge	
“Music in the Nightingale”: Gender Masquerade to Music in Shakespeare’s <i>Two Gentlemen of Verona</i> .....	200
Michelle Gadpaille	
Evoking Music, Evoking Memories: On the Role of Music in James Joyce’s <i>The Dead</i> .....	213
Ana Penjak	
Music as Faux Escape in Miriam Toews’s <i>A Complicated Kindness</i> .....	224
Jason Blake	
Alice Munro’s “The Bear Came Over the Mountain”: A Near Allusion to the Folksong .....	238
Tjaša Mohar	
The Aesthetics of Challenged Masculinities: Song Lyrics and Poems in <i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</i> .....	250
Jerneja Planinšek Žlof	
Music and Femininity in Adrienne Rich’s “Transcendental Etude” .....	263
Nastja Prajnc Kacijan	
Contributors.....	271
Index.....	276

INTRODUCTION:  
FOR THOSE BAZILLIONS OF WOMEN  
AND OTHER GENDERS

MICHELLE GADPAILLE AND VICTOR KENNEDY

“If you say, ‘Yeah, there was sexism in this race,’ everyone says, ‘Whiner.’  
And if you say, ‘There was no sexism,’ about a bazillion women think,  
‘What planet do you live on?’”  
(Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Commenting on the race for Democratic  
Presidential Candidate, March 5, 2020)

Since we demonstrably live together on the same blue planet, it is reasonable to address the role of gender in all our most important systems—political, social and cultural. Without whining, and with the inclusion of a spectrum of gender approaches, this book tackles the broad topic of gender, if not always sexism, as it has been manifested in music and writing about music across centuries. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world of music has not been exempted from negative press about various forms of discrimination, gender discrimination included. Given the workplace conditions in which most musicians operate, gigs, freelancing, patronage and precarious income, it is not completely surprising that Musician’s Unions report sexual harassment among their members, along with fear of not being believed (Perraudin 2019). Abuse presumably springs from imbalance of economic power, as in the entertainment industry in general, but also from within the performance itself. By staging some of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s most salient challenges to gender norms of all kinds, popular music pulled gender out of its glittery closet into a world of both celebration and scrutiny. A recent set of films dramatizing the lives of performers, including Elton John in *Rocketman* (Fletcher 2019) and Freddie Mercury in *Bohemian Rhapsody* (Singer 2018), have re-framed those early years of struggle in a purple haze. These major artists did overcome industry stereotypes, but the overall sexualization of the music genre that followed the advent of the music video probably fell hardest on the ranks of backup singers and gig musicians. On this planet, money and power do inevitably throw their weight around. That

gender discrimination existed and still exists in the music industry is simply a planetary fact, though one we wish could be stated in the past tense.

Although in this volume we set out to examine gender in all its multiplicity and recently expanded scope, it was inevitable that most chapters came from scholars focusing on the female gender. Sexism does rear its head here, as in Dolores Hunsky's examination of the career of Joan Jett, and in the study by Maiken Ana Kores on sexism and misogyny in the lyrics of glam rock stars Mötley Crüe.

Melanija Larisa Fabčič provides a synthetic analysis of the career of a single female performer, Kim Gordon. This chapter unites scholarly analysis of lyrics with strong evocation of costume and stage performance, to yield a multi-focal analysis of a lifetime oeuvre. Herself a lead singer in a band, Fabčič is uniquely positioned to offer insight into an iconic female presence in rock music.

Some contributors chose to examine the sites where the nodes on the gender spectrum overlap and intersect creatively. Thus, Mojca Krevel, also a rock singer, brings a wealth of post-modern theory to the analysis of David Bowie, his performance, positioning, and lyrics. Krevel's chapter underscores the pioneering role of Bowie in changing public attitudes towards non-binary sexuality in public performance.

Classic rock has attracted considerable attention from gender studies, but other genres of popular music have legions of fans and deserve analysis. One chapter interprets gender more widely, to consider the issue of homophobia in the lyrics of rap music. Jožef Kolarič, who publishes extensively on the genre of rap and its performers, evokes linguistic, personal and social factors to explain the apparent homophobia in rap culture and among its fans. Bojan Kašuba performs a linguistic analysis to demonstrate how hip-hop, pop and R&B singers and songwriters have brought idioms and vocabulary from marginalized groups, including women, into mainstream English vocabulary. Victor Kennedy looks at the New Wave movement in Canada in the 1980s, focusing on two bands who were prominent on the alternative music scene in Toronto: Carole Pope and Kevan Staples of Rough Trade, and Graeme Williamson, Neil Chapman and Tony Duggan-Smith of Pukka Orchestra wrote witty satire of mainstream Canadian society that drew attention to the way it marginalized gays, lesbians, and other minority groups, and coupled this with flamboyant and provocative personas and styles that shocked the staid Canadian establishment and delighted their audiences.

Stage performance rather than lyrics or audience reception is the focus of Tina Ritlop, who draws our attention to the unusual vocal ability of female metal singers who growl, roar and snarl like male vocalists, but

creatively, not in imitation or tribute but as a form of self-affirming vocal adaptation.

Two contributors offer insight into the historic role of female singers and their unique position in widely separated cultures. Marged Flavia Trumper examines the history of female singers of the Hindustani classical *thumrī* tradition and the role of this traditional form in maintaining national and gender identity in the past and today. Trumper shows how entire dynasties of female performers were subject to a rigid imperial sexism and forced to survive through clever adaptation. A different, but related approach originates from another stage performer: Zmago Pavličič, who is a jazz and rock drummer as well as a translator and scholar, brings this dual perspective to his chapter on the history of under-representation of female musicians in jazz bands in Slovenia.

The second part of this collection turns to the consideration of gender in music as it appears in literature. Michelle Gadpaille provides a chapter on Shakespeare's use of boy actors to deliver lines full of musical puns that highlight the gender juxtaposition on the stage. A boy, playing a woman, who then dons "costume" and reverts to a boy, becomes a walking pun; when musical puns are added to the mix, such as the bawdy pun on "fingering" that Gadpaille explicates, music becomes a carrier of Elizabethan gender attitudes.

Also focusing on Shakespeare is Zeynep Bilge, whose chapter deals with a French operatic adaptation of *Hamlet*, in particular on its version of the character of Ophelia. The chapter indicates how different cultures received and interpreted Shakespeare in distinctive ways. The operatic Ophelia took on a life quite separate from Ophelia as read in English-speaking cultures.

Several contributors examined music as depicted in other genres of literature, including drama, short stories, poetry and novels, showing that musical events and references are seldom incidental, but often integral to the structure and meaning of literary works. Jerneja Planinšek-Žlof draws together diverse musical references from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, in the process demonstrating that the playwright Tennessee Williams was using popular musical motifs to manipulate audience perception of his southern characters. Ana Penjak does a similar analysis for a classic modernist author: James Joyce. The music that infuses the haunting scenes in his story, "The Dead," adds new social and psychological dimensions to our reading—or should that be listening to?—Joyce's well-known story. Nastja Prajnč Kacijan moves to 20<sup>th</sup>-century American poetry in her examination of the complex role of music in the work of award-winning lesbian poet, Adrienne Rich, reading Rich's work "Transcendental Etude" by teasing out

the nuances of life as an “etude,” the playing of which eludes the female fingers at the metaphorical keyboard.

Tjaša Mohar’s chapter brings music in literature closer to the present, as she considers the folk songs echoing in the interpretive background of a story by the Nobel Prize winning author Alice Munro. Mohar takes a look at the origins of the simple folk song about the bear coming over the mountain, along with its not-so-simple repurposing in the hands of one of the best contemporary writers of short fiction. Finally, Jason Blake examines the role of music in a Canadian novel of small-town Mennonite life: Miriam Toews’s *A Complicated Kindness*. Blake gathers the myriad references to rock music that signal the time frame of the early 1980s and illustrates how these rock songs function as an escape for the clever, rebellious teenager, Nomi, while her devout father listens to hymns for a similar reason.

Throughout this volume, the contributors draw attention to the difficulties women and members of minority groups face and have faced in having their voices heard in music, and poetry, and by extension, society in general, from the problems female performers have had in making it in a men’s world (Hunsky, Pavličič), to the misogyny in male-delivered lyrics (Kores), to political repression of female musicians and their music (Trumper), to prejudice and violence against gays and lesbians (Kolarič, Prajnc Kacijan, Kennedy).

This collection is the fourth in a series of interdisciplinary studies, following *Words and Music* (Kennedy and Gadpaille 2013), *Symphony and Song: The Intersection of Words and Music* (Kennedy and Gadpaille 2016), and *Ethnic and Cultural Identity in Music and Song Lyrics* (Kennedy and Gadpaille 2017). Each volume provides a different perspective on the relationship between words and music; in their geographic, historical and generic diversity, the contributors map gender issues in music onto a broad global atlas of gendered writing, living and performance. In dialogue with each other, we hope that these essays will bring further understanding and enjoyment to both music fans and scholars.

## References

- Fletcher, Dexter, dir. 2019. *Rocketman*. United Kingdom: Paramount Pictures.
- Kennedy, Victor and Michelle Gadpaille, eds. 2013. *Words and Music*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- . 2016. *Symphony and Song: The Intersection of Words and Music*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

- . 2017. *Ethnic and Cultural Identity in Music and Song Lyrics*. Newcastle, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Perraudin, Frances. 2019. "Artists Quitting Music Business Due to Abuse and Sexism, Says Union." *The Guardian*, Oct. 23.
- Singer, Bryan, dir. 2018. *Bohemian Rhapsody*. United Kingdom/United States: 20th Century Fox.

# THE MASK BEHIND THE MAN: GENDER BENDING, SEXUAL FLUIDITY AND THE FRACTAL SUBJECTIVITY OF DAVID BOWIE

MOJCA KREVEL

On the cover of the British edition of his 1971 album *The Man Who Sold the World*, David Bowie is reclining on a sofa in a designer man-dress, gently touching his long curls.<sup>1</sup> In the opening song, a Faustian deal is sealed through an act of sexual intercourse between the narrator and God. A few songs later, the narrator is “shaken cold” (“She Shook Me Cold”) by a demonic female seducer. On the cover of *Hunky Dory*, published later that year, Bowie is fixing his hair, the make-up and facial expression resonant of the iconic façade of Greta Garbo. On the album, he sings about painting his young son’s crib, and criticizes a transvestite’s attire, claiming he “could do better than that” (“Queen Bitch”). In 1972, just before unleashing the first of his personae, alien rock star Ziggy Stardust, Bowie declared in an interview that he was gay, becoming the first British pop celebrity to do so. The overtly (omni)sexual(ized) Ziggy is ultimately killed by his fans and resurrected on *Aladdin Sane* in 1973 as a postgender, postsexual and ethereally posthuman titular hero. The album thematises the experience of America, which is depicted as a world of pure simulacra where even sex must be learnt from watching old movies.

After *Aladdin Sane*, gender bending and sexual transgression all but disappear from Bowie’s artistic explorations,<sup>2</sup> and his focus shifts to other dimensions of identity creation and the role that fame and celebrity machinery play in the process. Nevertheless, if we consider his legacy

---

<sup>1</sup> The album, recorded in 1970, was first released in the US with a different, less provocative cover (Doggett 2011, 94).

<sup>2</sup> With the exception of sporadic nods to gender and sexual ambivalence in the context of other themes, for instance, in the lyrics of “Rebel Rebel” (1974) and “Hallo Spaceboy” (1995), or in the videos for “Boys Keep Swinging” (1979) and “The Stars (Are Out Tonight)” (2013).

almost five decades later, it seems that the issues he investigated in the early 1970s provided the foundation for the establishing of the David Bowie phenomenon. Today, David Bowie is a musical institution, embedded in the collective consciousness as the epitome of *queer*. Not only is his name still automatically associated with the challenging of gender and sexual norms in the sphere of the general public,<sup>3</sup> but *queerness* in the sense of utter performativity is also in the centre of the current scholarly interest in various aspects of his work (cf. Appel 2018; Bradley and Page 2017; Glen 2016; Perrott 2017; Sharpe 2017). The common denominator to research in the emerging multidisciplinary field of Bowie studies, ranging from queer theory, gender studies, philosophy, sociology, art history, musicology and law, to cultural and media studies, is precisely the dimension of mutability, intangibility and performativity.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter, I will argue that the modes in which Bowie employed gender bending and sexual fluidity on his path to superstardom in the early 1970s were indeed instrumental in the formation of the cultural icon whose legacy is predominantly studied and acknowledged in terms of on-going social, economic and political processes. The ways in which he approached and enacted gender transgression signal a much more comprehensive metaphysical breach—one that in subsequent decades has invariably been recognized as intrinsic to the formation of identity within the ontological framework of postmodernity. By examining the structuring of the narrative agent(s) on the afore-mentioned albums as well as their paratextual dimensions, I will show that the construction of the early 1970s David Bowie perfectly aligns with Jean Baudrillard's concepts of postmodern reality and identity as hyperreal, fractal systems of pure simulacra. As well, I will argue that the structuring of the Bowie persona(e) on these albums matches the structuring of literary subjectivities in the works that, more than two decades later, began to steer literature away from the Cartesian divides, and towards postmodern ambiguities.

### Ch-ch-ch-changes

The processes inherent in the functioning of the postindustrial phase of capitalism that came into effect after the Second World War have instigated

---

<sup>3</sup> For instance, when Bowie died in 2016, few obituaries in the popular media failed to mention his androgyny and sexual ambivalence.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, the essays collected in *David Bowie: Critical Perspectives* (2015), edited by Eoin Devereux, Aileen Dillane and Martin Power, or *Enchanting David Bowie: Space/Time/Body/Memory* (2015), edited by Toija Cinque, Christopher Moore and Sean Redmond.

radical shifts in how individuals experience and comprehend their reality and corresponding identity. By the mid-1980s, the theoretical discourse had generally acknowledged that these changes were, in fact, symptomatic of a much broader paradigm shift, one charting the formation of a new ontological order, and with it the beginning of a new historical epoch, commonly referred to as the postmodern age.

In my analysis of the structuring of the narrative agents on Bowie's early 1970s albums from the perspective of the ontological set-up of the postmodern epoch, I will refer to the conceptual framework and terminology proposed by Baudrillard. On the one hand, his key premises of hyperreality and fractal subject conceptually match and encompass the observations on the nature and status of postmodern reality and subjectivity by theoreticians from a broad array of scholarly disciplines (cf. Krevel 2017, 123–124). On the other, both notions are fundamentally related to the nature, functioning and role of media in the societies of late capitalism (cf. Krevel 2017, 124), something that Bowie artistically explored, exploited and challenged throughout his career (Buckley 2012, 6).

The concept of hyperreality is inextricably connected to the rapid spread and consequent ubiquity of electronic media in postindustrial societies. It refers to the reality produced from the media-generated data, from “matrices, memory banks and command models—and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times” (Baudrillard 2004, 366). As these data are essentially algorithms, that is, functions of the probability of a message, they refer to nothing substantial; their potential meaning is a matter of their placement within the systems of information, and thus arbitrary. Hyperreality can therefore be described as a multiplicity of possible constellations of data circulating the mediascape. Their actualization on the experiential level of individuals in the form of *reality* depends on the compatibility, continuity and amount of information generated by the media. In the present socio-economic context, where the media are predominantly controlled by capital, this fundamentally manipulatable nature of reality is, for instance, effectively exploited by advertising.

Advertising, one of the three fastest growing industries after the Second World War,<sup>5</sup> has also been instrumental in bringing the capitalist shift of production relations to the point where products lose their functional and exchange values, and retain only their representational worth; they become signs which acquire their “meaning in [their] differential relation to other signs” (Baudrillard 1981, 66). Media- and advertising-induced saturation with these signs in the societies of late capitalism converts the Cartesian

---

<sup>5</sup> The others are media and information technology.

dualist principle of subjectivity into “a fractal subject, both subdivisible to infinity and indivisible, closed on himself and doomed to endless identity” (Baudrillard 2011, 64). As a decentred system of potential selves producible from the commonly shared fund of these signs, such a subject structurally corresponds to the structural logic of hyperreality, since postmodern identity creation also involves systematization of media-transferred information. Individuation thus involves appropriation of signs from a shared multiplicity of media products<sup>6</sup> and “is therefore not at all contradictory with mass status” (2011, 64). The postmodern subject is a “subject without other” (2011, 64); it is a dynamic totality of its own potential internal actualisations.

In order to establish the methodological framework for the analysis of the narrative agents in Bowie’s early 1970s lyrics, let us briefly consider the implications of the described paradigm shift for the traditional literary categories of fictionality and literary subject. Owing to the implosion of media into a single communication channel, instigated by their digitalisation (Kittler 1987, 102), there is no ontological difference between the medium of literature and any other medium, since the data they transfer are coded in the same way. Within the paradigm of hyperreality, the representational function of literature therefore fuses with the reality-forming potential of a postmodern medium. In other words, the information literature generates may potentially enter various constellations of reality, that is, *produce* reality. The dialectic of the real and the fictional—the assumption pivotal to the Modern Age understanding of literature—is consequently rendered trivial, and it is replaced by the category of potentiality.

Given the essentially representational nature of literature, the structuring of the postmodern *literary* subject by definition reflects the properties of the postmodern subject. Hence, the strategies of the construction and the functioning of the participants in the literary act—the author, the narrator, the character and the reader—adhere to the principles of subject creation and functioning within the paradigm of hyperreality. In Baudrillardian terms, the postmodern literary subject is fractal in the sense that it comprises the totality of the potential networks of mediated signs that constitute postmodern identity variants. As these signs are transferred via a universally shared communication channel and coded in the same way, there is no ontological difference between a literary and a non-literary subject, or between their respective potential actualisations. The categories of author, narrator, character and reader are thus rendered arbitrary, fluid and interchangeable; they are fundamentally identity variants of one and the

---

<sup>6</sup> As such, it corresponds to the essentially performative nature of (gender) identity in Butlerian terms (Butler 1988, 519).

same subject. The creation of a literary character, for instance, is synonymous with the formation of any given identity from a shared fund of media products. The *character* is a version of the *author*, which, because of the reality-forming potential of the literary medium in the hyperreal paradigm, is evaluated according to—and potentially incorporated into—the system of identity of the *reader*. Consequently, all writing is revealed as fundamentally autobiographical—not, however, in the traditional sense of the veristic account of an individual past but as a record of the various actualisations of existence of a single subject, comprised of all the agents involved in a literary act. Since these agents are composed from qualitatively identical components and coded in the same way, they are unstable, intra- and interchangeable. In terms of fiction, the first traces of the described literary identity formation emerge in the structuring of characters in the works of the cyberpunk movement in the 1980s (cf. Kregel 2012, 59–61), and extend to include the whole range of literary agents in the experimental writing of the literary Avant Pop in the 1990s (54–55). In mainstream fiction, the convincing rendering of the unstable, intra- and interchangeable nature of the protagonists in the literary act can be first observed as late as the second decade of the third millennium (cf. Kregel 2017).<sup>7</sup>

## The Man Who Sold the World

Before setting out to analyse the narrative agents in the lyrics of Bowie's early 1970s albums in terms of their fractal nature, a few introductory remarks are in order on the man who, following serial image transformations, came to be known as the chameleon of pop. He was born David Robert Jones in 1947 in London and died an international superstar sixty-nine years later in New York. He spent his childhood in the working-class district of Brixton, in a household governed by suburban conformism and emotional detachment. Young David established a very tight bond with his ten-year-older half-brother Terry, and became his “ideal protégé, confidant and ward” (Doggett 2011, 21). With Terry, David discovered the cultural and especially the musical scene of London in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

---

<sup>7</sup> The structuring of the literary agents in Ruth Ozeki's 2013 novel *A Tale for the Time Being* is arguably the first instance of the above described fractal literary subjectivity. Similar structuring of the literary subject can also be observed in George Saunders' 2017 *Lincoln in the Bardo*, Paul Auster's *4 3 2 1*, published in the same year, and Jeanette Winterson's 2019 novel *Frankissstein*.

There was a history of mental illness on the mother's side of the family, and when Terry started to display signs of schizophrenia in the mid-1960s, David not only realized his beloved brother and mentor was slipping out of reach, but also that he himself might be prone to losing his grasp on reality. The fear of mental illness and of the subsequent loss of control over his identity played a decisive role in the formation of the *Leitmotif* behind much of his future work: the exploration of the various dimensions of identity and modes of identity creation, and of the ensuing perspectival character of reality.

In 1963, David dropped out of school with an O level in art and informed his parents that he would be a popstar. Over the next few years, he collaborated with a number of low-profile bands as a singer and learnt the basics of playing saxophone, guitar and piano. Before focusing on his musical career exclusively in 1965, he worked for an advertising agency for about half a year, learning the basic tricks of the trade. From the perspective of his legacy, the lack of formal education, be it academic, professional or musical, proved to be an advantage, as it allowed him to experiment intuitively, beyond the constraints of the axioms internalized through formal training. In 1965 he changed his surname to Bowie<sup>8</sup> and laid the foundation for what was to become the first and the most complex persona of his career. At the beginning of the 1970s, after trying out some of the trendy 1960s formulas (the mod, the hippy), this persona began to develop distinctive features which charted the general direction of its future incarnations.

On the cover of his first album of the decade, *The Man Who Sold the World*, a person with long wavy hair, wearing a floral-patterned dress, is seductively reclining on a futon in a parodic re-make of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sketch of Mrs. William Morris (cf. Doggett 2011, 95). The text to the right of the image identifies this person as David Bowie, The Man Who Sold the World. By connecting archetypal signs of femininity with the *man* that is David Bowie, the cover creates an ontological ambiguity that governs the artistic exploration of the fragmentation of identity on this album. Thematically, the lyrics on *The Man Who Sold the World* clearly reflect Bowie's coming to terms with the worsening of his brother's condition and his confinement to a psychiatric hospital the previous year, as they are teeming with references to insanity, split personality and doppelgänger.

The opening song, "Width of a Circle," which in the second half describes a homoerotic act between God and the narrator, has a function similar to that of the cover: it employs (sexual) transgression to relativize the stability

---

<sup>8</sup> He changed his name to avoid confusion with Davy Jones of the then much more popular band The Monkees.

of identity. The splitting of identity and the destabilisation of the narrative roles begin at the end of the first stanza, when the first-person narrator “[runs] across a monster” and realizes that “the monster [is] me.” The ensuing conversation between them is conducted by two first-person narrators—two “I’s,” which implies the splitting of identity, on the one hand, and the merging of the narrator with the character, on the other. At the end of the second stanza, this double identity broadens to possibly include another character, namely, God, who is “a young man too.” In the third stanza, the multiplicity that is the narrative “I,” gets “laid by a young bordello” and notes that, as a result, his “reputation swept back home in drag,” thus connecting the lyrical subject with the person on the album’s cover, the author. The remaining stanzas rather graphically describe a sexual act between a “he”—arguably God, who took the narrator’s “logic for a ride” at the end of the third stanza—and the narrator. In the throes of passion, they crash into “the burning pit of fear,” and as the narrator pleads “do it again, do it again,” the obliging seducer, whose “tongue [is] swollen with Devil’s love,” transmogrifies into a snake. When they are done, the narrative “I” becomes a “spitting sentry, horned and tailed/Waiting for you.” The lyrical subject is thus revealed as an entity who is the monster, the God, the Devil, the snake, the narrator and the author, waiting—like the monster who waited for the narrator at the beginning of the song—for the reader/audience to assimilate (them) into its dynamic, intertwined and interchangeable identity system.

In “She Shook Me Cold,” Bowie employs a different strategy of relativizing the established identity roles by disrupting sexual and gender norms. The heavily distorted, dense guitar sound suggests the influence of proto-metal musicians such as Black Sabbath, Jeff Beck and Led Zeppelin (cf. Appel 2018, 199; Doggett 2011, 88), while the title alludes to Muddy Waters’ 1962 “You Shook Me,” which Beck and Led Zeppelin covered at the end of the 1960s. It is notable that Bowie considered the “heavy” music of the so-called cock rock bands (cf. Frith 1981, 227) a “fairly primitive form” (qtd. in Buckley 2012, 23) and disliked its false sincerity and rampant machismo (Buckley 2012, 141).<sup>9</sup> In this uncharacteristic “medley of hard rock clichés” (Doggett 2011, 88), the first person narrator—a young man who is “quick on the ball” and who “broke the gentle hearts of many young virgins”—recounts the story of meeting and, overcome with desire, violently ravaging a mysterious woman. Or so it seems. The stock imagery of predatory sexual conquest and prowess (“I grabbed her golden hair/And threw her to the ground/Father, she craved my head”), typical of cock rock

---

<sup>9</sup> See Kores in this volume (92-93).

lyrics, is initially associated with the young man. However, the sexual intercourse is revealed as an instrument of enchantment: the boasting youngster becomes hopelessly addicted to the female, who turns out to be a demonic seducer, blowing his mind, crushing him mercilessly and shaking him cold. The typical cock rock formula is subverted as the predator becomes the prey. The narrator is consumed and ultimately destroyed by the femme fatale, who may well be the seductive feminine figure of the author on the cover. The author thus merges with the (female) character who is the agent of sexual conquest, while the first-person narrator and the initial lyrical subject is objectivized and passivized into the role of the lyrical object.

## Hunky Dory

In December 1971 Bowie released *Hunky Dory*, musically probably the most commercial record of his entire oeuvre. His headshot on the cover is a replica of a famous Greta Garbo photograph. The text next to the photo identifies the figure as David Bowie, who is no longer recognizably feminine but rather androgynous to a degree where any determination of gender is rendered completely arbitrary. Most of the songs on the album (including the pop anthems “Life on Mars” and “Changes”) focus on the illusionary nature of fame, and the performativity of stardom. “Queen Bitch,” however, most directly exploits and thematises the performativity and arbitrariness of gender categories.<sup>10</sup>

Musically, the song is an unabashed simulacrum of Lou Reed’s “Sweet Jane” (1970), while the lyrics, which abound in camp imagery, record the lamentation of a first-person narrator whose lover is propositioning a transvestite, the titular queen. Since it is obvious that “she’s hoping to score,” the narrator “can’t see her letting [the lover] go,” which calls to mind the reversal of the stereotypical roles of predator and prey in “She Shook Me Cold.” The description of the transvestite’s attire in the refrain ends with the proclamation, “Oh God, I could do better than that.” The obliqueness of

---

<sup>10</sup> Another song in which the lyrical subject is destabilised by alluding to sexual and gender transgression on this album is “The Bewley Brothers.” The utterly enigmatic lyrics seem to explore the relationship between David and Terry, although at the time Bowie claimed that the song was “a deliberate wind-up for the critics” (Buckley 2012, 97). In the fourth stanza, the merging of identity of the two brothers is symbolically rendered by “I was Stone and he was Wax/So he could scream and still relax,” which, combined with the allusions to the “crutch-hungry dark” where the brothers “flayed [their] mark,” and the melted mascara on the narrator’s pillow may suggest a homoerotic act between the brothers.

the pronoun *that* broadens the identity scope of the narrator. It may suggest that the narrator could do better than the queen, that is, dress better and be a more capable queen, which could be interpreted that the narrator is actually the androgynous author on the cover—who may be either male or female. The statement could also be explained to mean that looking like the queen, either the queen or the narrator could score a trick that is better than the narrator's lover. On the other hand, the narrator's assertion may also imply that the narrator could do better than the lover and score a better queen. The ambivalence regarding the identity of the narrator and the referent of the main motif—jealousy—continues in the third stanza. After a brief enumeration of the irresistible qualities of the queen, the narrator observes that “now she's leading [the lover] on/And she'll lay him right down” and immediately reacts: “Bet it could have been me/Yes, it could have been me./Why didn't I say.” The exclamation, which is repeated at the end of the fourth stanza after the narrator decides to leave the lover, allows at least three interpretations: it could have been the narrator (and possibly the author) who leaves *with* the queen, it could have been the narrator *as* the queen, or it could have been the narrator *instead* of the queen. The absence of any reference that would enable the mapping of the story and its protagonists within the established order of gender relations, categories and norms, combined with the androgynous figure of the author on the cover, renders the lyrical subject as a multiplicity of possible identity variants. Their actualisation and the ensuing interpretation of the story is left to the audience and depends on their systems of identity and reality.

## **The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars**

While completing *Hunky Dory*, Bowie was already planning a holistic artistic project that would launch him as a superstar through the story of omnise(x)ual(ized) alien rock God Ziggy Stardust. Prior to the release of *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* in June 1972, Bowie came out as gay in an interview for *Melody Maker*, becoming the first British male pop celebrity to do so (Glen 2017, 407). The announcement was a carefully planned publicity stunt. Not only was Bowie a married young father at the time and hence hardly a typical representative of the male gay population, he was also less than willing to commit to the gay cause, carefully distancing himself from the agenda of the British Gay Liberation Front, established the previous year (Doggett 2011, 136; Sharpe 2017, 239). Bowie's gay statement was therefore not a bold public declaration of his “true” identity but the crucial first step in the construction of Ziggy Stardust

as alien superstar rebel. With the waning and the commodification of the 1960s revolutionary agenda, which in no small part involved the sexual liberation of heterosexuals, Bowie, as an out-and-proud pop star, “represented taboo-smashing, rule-breaking and experimentation. [...] Bowie was now the personification of something other” (Buckley 2012, 108). If the non-conformity and rebelliousness of the 1960s rockers primarily relied on their brazen consumption of women and drugs, Ziggy’s rock’n’roll rebellion and his counter-cultural appeal drew on the transgression of gender and sexual norms.

The nature of Ziggy’s transgression is signalled by the artwork on the cover. The figure in the photographs on the album’s front and back is no longer feminine or androgynous, but a decidedly camp composite of the artefacts of contemporary pop culture (such as the *Clockwork Orange*-inspired futuristic jumpsuit) and the New York queer scene (platform shoes, the limp-wristed pose). Camp in the sense of pure performativity is at the centre of the Ziggy phenomenon: his persona combined gender-bending mannerisms with the stereotypical sexual insatiability and prowess of rock stars; it merged Jimi Hendrix, Marc Bolan and outrageous celebrities such as Vince Taylor, Legendary Stardust Cowboy and fictional rocker Johnny Angelo, with the stock characters in classical Japanese theatre. Bowie’s appropriation of cultural signs in the creation of Ziggy in this way corresponds to the strategies of Baudrillardian fractal identity creation.

The essentially dynamic and interchangeable nature of the narrative agents on this record is briefly hinted at in the opening song, “Five Years.” Describing the spatial and temporal setting of Ziggy’s arrival, the first-person narrator admits having “felt like an actor,” which suggests that the narrator’s role may be played by another literary agent, and that ultimately the narrator is unreliable. One song later, “Moonage Daydream” seemingly attempts to clarify the confusion, since the initial assertion “I’m an alligator” connects the narrative “I” with Ziggy and implies ensuing auto-characterisation. However, instead of further clarification regarding Ziggy’s identity, the next statement—“I’m a momma-papa coming for you”—ambiguates Ziggy’s gender, thus bringing the character into the vicinity of the public image of the author. The following lines, through the imagery of domination in a (homo)erotic intercourse, further extend the scope of the possible referents of the “I,” as well as of their motifs. “I’ll be a rock’n’rolling bitch for you” may thus imply that the narrator, Ziggy and/or Bowie, will be at the service of the audience. On the other hand, considering the empowering connotations of the word in queer slang (cf. “Queen Bitch”), it may mean that the narrator will enchant and seduce the audience. This interpretation of the narrator dominating the audience seems to be confirmed in the

following two lines: “Keep your mouth shut/You’re squawking like a pink monkey bird,” in which “you”—the audience—is likened to what is a slang term for the bottom partner in gay anal intercourse, “pink monkey bird.” On the other hand, considering that in the subsequent refrain<sup>11</sup> the first person focalizer is clearly a member of the audience (or perhaps of Ziggy’s band), it may also be the case that the change of narrative perspective took place at the point of the somewhat abrupt inclusion of “you” in the lines above. In this case, it is the audience that occupies the dominant position, suggesting that celebrity identity is ultimately a construct of the fans. The narrative “I” oscillates between the star and the audience for the rest of the song, encompassing all the narrative agents—the author, the narrator, the character(s) and the audience—within a dynamic multitude that is the lyrical subject of this song.

In “Lady Stardust,” the erasing of gender distinctions, as well as the mutable nature of the narrative “I,” is further pronounced. In this piece, Ziggy is identified as both a boy in make-up with long black hair (calling to mind Bowie’s friend and rival Marc Bolan), and as Lady Stardust who sings “his songs of darkness and disgrace.” Given the male personal pronoun used with reference to Lady Stardust, the two may or may not be the same person. The refrain describes Ziggy’s enchanting qualities, and the following stanza reveals that the rocker is attractive to both women and men. The omniscient description is interrupted by the sudden intervention of the first-person narrator, who, observing the enraptured fans, sighs: “I smiled sadly for a love I could not obey.” The line is generally interpreted as a paraphrase of Lord Alfred Douglas’ famous reference to homosexual love as “the love that dare not speak its name” (Douglas; cf. Doggett 2011, 106; Spitz 2009, 188).<sup>12</sup> The private nature of the remark separates the narrator from the audience as well as from Ziggy, and suggests that the narrator may be a member of the band, Bowie the author (who at the time was apparently very close with Marc Bolan) or both.<sup>13</sup>

Although *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* is generally considered a concept album, only a handful of songs were

---

<sup>11</sup> “Keep your ’lectric eye on me babe/Put your ray gun to my head/Press your space face close to mine, love/Freak out in a moonage daydream oh yeah.”

<sup>12</sup> As an avid admirer and connoisseur of Oscar Wilde’s life and work (cf. Buckley 2012, 25; Doggett 2011, 73), Bowie was certainly familiar with Wilde’s lover’s most famous line.

<sup>13</sup> In this respect, it is noteworthy that in 1969 Bowie performed as the opening act to Bolan’s band *T-Rex* (Lemieux 2018, 58). Doggett also points out that Mark Bolan later “claimed that he and Bowie had enjoyed a gay flirtation, though stopping short of penetration” (2011, 106).

written specifically for this record, while the rest were selected from earlier material that fit the idea of the Ziggy project (Buckley 2012, 120, 129). There are only three songs that mention Ziggy directly, “Lady Stardust,” “Ziggy Stardust,” and “Sweet Head,” which was not included on the album because of obscenity and was first released on the extended 1990 edition of the record. The song with its explicit references to (gay) oral sex is interesting not only as a hidden Ziggy-era curio, but also because it reveals another facet of Ziggy, who is here portrayed as a seemingly incompatible mixture of a racist, violent hooligan from the suburbs and a head-giving homosexual. In the chorus, the first person narrator, who may be either “Brother Ziggy” or a member of his band, boastfully asserts to the audience that he is “just about the best you can hear,” which is why he and the band “can give [the audience] sweet head.” The chorus thus subverts the established notions about both macho rock stars and male homosexuals, since the dominant position of the rock star is paradoxically ensured by the ability to please the audience in the manner of the submissive partner in oral sex. The paradoxically submissive nature of the rock star’s dominance continues in the following stanzas, where the narrator describes himself as the audience’s “rubber-peacock angelic whore” who is, however, “known to lay you, one and all.” The implications of the paradox correspond to the message of “Moonage Daydream,” where the ambiguity of the narrator’s role in the homosexual intercourse attests to the essential reliance of celebrity identities on their audiences. Rock stars are revealed as products, created with regard to the needs and desires of the consumers and intended for public consumption.<sup>14</sup>

Ziggy is indeed consum(ma)ted by his admirers in the central song of the album, “Ziggy Stardust.” After describing Ziggy’s rise to fame and his time in the spotlight, the first-person narrator, whose identity throughout the song oscillates between a member of the audience and a member of Ziggy’s band, declares at the end of the second chorus: “When the kids had killed the man I had to break up the band.” The ambivalent nature of the narrative “I” in this song is additionally pronounced by the doubling of the vocal track in the chorus, leaving, as Doggett observes, “the strange effect of two voices both declaring that ‘I’ had to break up the band” (2011, 109). The “I” is hence revealed as the member of the band *and* whoever is retelling the story,

---

<sup>14</sup> In this respect, Bowie and Ziggy addressed the growing demands of the hitherto marginalized audiences of those who could not relate to the patriarchal and heteronormative rock’n’roll discourse of the 1950s and 1960s, and provided them with a referential framework by means of which they could map their various non-heteronormative identities (cf. Bradley and Page 217, 588–589).

merging the author, the narrator, the characters and the audience into a multiplicity that is the lyrical subject.

The internal relations of the identity variants within this multiplicity are revealed in the final song on the album, “Rock’n’roll Suicide,” which recounts the events after Ziggy’s fall. In the first three stanzas the narrator describes the sentiments of “you,” a rock’n’roll suicide who roams the streets and observes the world from the detached position of an outsider. The “you” may refer to the (second person) narrator, the member of the band, Ziggy (if his death was only symbolic), the audience, or any combination of these. At the end of the fourth stanza, however, the first-person narrator suddenly emerges and messianistically declares, “I’ve had my share, I’ll help you with the pain/You’re not alone.” In the majestic cyclic chant that brings the song, the album and the theatrical narrative to a conclusion, the first-person narrator repeatedly invites the misplaced, detached collective “you” to join in the all-embracing *us*: “Just turn on with me and you’re not alone / [...] / Let’s turn on and be not alone/Gimme your hands cause you’re wonderful.” The “I” of the new rock’n’roll saviour therefore relies on acknowledgement by the “you” and is hence arbitrary. It may refer to a member of the band, a member of the audience, a reincarnation of Ziggy, and ultimately the one bringing them all together, namely the author, David Bowie.

The album and the ensuing tour, designed to provide a theatrical dimension to the Ziggy narrative, not only established Bowie as the greatest British pop star of the time (Buckley 2012, 145), but also blurred the line between Bowie and Ziggy to the point where the two became indivisible both to the fans and to Bowie himself (cf. Buckley 2012, 139; Doggett 2011, 152). In other words, by appropriating and enacting the codes of a rock God, Bowie eventually became one.

### Aladdin Sane

Even though *Aladdin Sane* (1973) is generally considered to be a continuation of *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, and the titular hero as a reincarnation of Ziggy, Bowie initially had no intention of creating and embodying another rock’n’roll persona (Doggett 2011, 151–152). But for the headshot on the cover, accompanied by the lettering “David Bowie Aladdin Sane,” there is indeed nothing to suggest that the cover symbolizes a cohesive narrative concept. The songs, mostly written during the American leg of the Ziggy tour in 1972, convey fleeting and disparate impressions of the US. Nevertheless, the press and the public relentlessly equated Bowie with Aladdin, and Bowie eventually

decided to play along.<sup>15</sup> The public demand for another Bowie character signals that his “queerness” was no longer transgressive but had become a commodity that the audiences required more of.<sup>16</sup> Bowie was obviously aware of that, since gender and sex *per se* have no transgressive function on this album.

If anything, the cover suggests that in the spatial and temporal locale of this album, gender and sex no longer have a formative, liberating or counter-cultural charge. They are but signs that signal one’s status in society. The iconic image on the cover is sublimely asexual; the photo of Bowie’s head and upper torso is intricately post-produced to suggest plasticity and liquidity; Bowie’s *a lad insane* is a decidedly posthuman and postgender creature. The lightning bolt across the face (which later evolved into a Bowie logo) may suggest the splitting of personality (and reference the titular insanity), but it is also eerily reminiscent of the symbol of Hitler’s Schutzstaffel, the SS. This is certainly a valid interpretation, since the album was admittedly influenced by Evelyn Waugh’s *Vile Bodies*, which Bowie was reading at the time (Doggett 2011, 168). The lyrics convey the same atmosphere of pending doom and disintegration as Waugh’s novel about the endless partying of decadent young British society between the two world wars. The dates in the title of the central song, “Aladdin Sane (1913- 1938- 197?),” suggest the vicinity of war, while the text charts Bowie’s new interests. The parallel references to never-ending parties and warfare (“Battle cries and champagne just in time for sunrise”) bring together the worlds of decadence and war. The decadence, however, is no longer transgressive—the oblivious indulgence in it signals the normalisation of transgression, which charts the end of an order and leads to war. The cyclic repetition of “Who will love Aladdin Sane [...] / We’ll love Aladdin Sane” in the chorus suggests that the titular *lad insane* is the future Messiah, the one who will lead “the bright young things” to war. The character of Aladdin therefore hints at the essential sameness of rock stars and sinister dictators, something that Bowie explored with the persona of The Thin White Duke in the mid-1970s.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Doggett notes that Bowie’s attitude to Aladdin gradually changed from keeping Aladdin separate from himself to embracing him as an alter ego in the interviews following the album’s release (2011, 176–177).

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed analysis of the normalisation and commodification of Bowie’s gender and sexual transgression(s), see Bradley and Page 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Bowie confirmed the association between Aladdin and Hitler in the infamous 1976 interview with Cameron Crowe, where, referring to the public hysteria around Ziggy, he stated: “I think I might have been a bloody good Hitler. I’d be an excellent dictator. Very eccentric and quite mad” (thebowiebible).

In “Drive-in Saturday,” the world in which Aladdin Sane is gaining the love of the masses is described as a post-apocalyptic future that looks like the 1950s. The impression is strengthened by the typical 1950s “Dom do ah” sung by the chorus accompanying the main vocal. A young lover woos the partner and suggests they “try to get it on like once before/When people stared in Jagger’s eyes and scored/Like the video films [they] saw.” The refrain further clarifies that in this world, young “ravers”<sup>18</sup> watch old movies at the drive-in cinema to have a “crash course” in what they are supposed to do when they “go to bed” with somebody. Sex thus functions as a pure sign that participates in the creation of a simulacrum of an amorous relationship and status in (youth) culture. Sex is hence a product, sold by other products—the celebrities (the song mentions Mick Jagger and Twiggy) who star in these movies. The first line of the chorus “His name was always Buddy” implies the interchangeable, generic nature of these celebrities—they are revealed as pure signs that acquire meaning only after they are incorporated into the (hyper)reality of individuals.

One such celebrity is the first-person narrator at the beginning of “Cracked Actor,” an ageing Hollywood star who is “stiff on [his] legend, the films that [he] made.” At the end of the first stanza, he addresses the unspecified “you,” saying “[f]orget that I’m fifty ‘cause you just got paid.” The line suggests that the “you” can afford him, and equates the actor’s commodity status with that of the drugged prostitute who is giving head in the chorus and who is finding “a trick down on Sunset and Vine” in the third stanza. However, in the chorus and in the third stanza, the prostitute is referred to in the second person, thus making it unclear to whom the pronouns “you” and “me” refer. The role of the prostitute, giving head for crack and smack, may therefore be either assigned to the actor (who is, after all, *cracked*), or it can refer to the audience ensuring the actor’s celebrity status by paying to see him and enabling him to afford the sex and the drugs. In the last two stanzas, the referents of the pronouns (the actor, the junky prostitute and the trick who “sold you illusions for a sack full of checks”) remain unspecified. Sex is revealed as just another transaction in which the subject merges with the object, thus reflecting the formation of fractal identities in consumerist societies.

## Segue

After touring Ziggy for eighteen months, on July 3, 1973 Bowie shocked the audience, as well as the members of his band and entourage, by

---

<sup>18</sup> “Ravers” was a 1960s slang term for partying young people.

concluding the Hammersmith Odeon gig with the following words: “Not only is [this] the last show of the tour, but it’s the last show that we’ll ever do. Thank you” (Pennebaker). This declaration of retirement after having only just attained the status of a superstar certainly contributed to the “mythic dimension” (Buckley 2012, 165) the Hammersmith show has acquired over the years. Even without it, the concert would probably have gone down in history as the ultimate instance of rock’n’roll bacchanalia, with teenage Ziggy clones writhing and screaming in ecstasy under the stage, and couples having unbridled sex in the stalls (cf. Pennebaker, Buckley 2012, 165). The eulogies in the press and the devastation of the fans soon proved unnecessary, as only a few months later, Bowie released a collection of covers, titled *Pin Ups*, and twenty studio albums after that. The Hammersmith show was, then, the end of Ziggy and his band, but certainly not of Bowie, even though at the time it was hard to tell them apart.

If anything, the orgiastic dimension of the Hammersmith show attests to the commodification and ensuing normalisation of Ziggy’s “highly sexualized camp” (Sharpe 2017, 238), which was the nexus of Bowie’s early 1970s exploration of the potential of gender and sexual transgression in the creation of identity. In other words, Ziggy’s camp identity imploded into a sign that could be, and indeed was, arbitrarily appropriated in the construction of various other identities. In this respect, the fluid, interdependent and interchangeable character of the narrative agents in the lyrics, revealed by analysis of the material from this period, extended to the level of experiential reality, merging the identity of the creator with those of his creation(s) and his audiences. Rather than stepping aside to let “somebody else [take] his place and bravely [cry] ‘I’m a Blackstar’,” as he symbolically does forty-three years later in the opening song of his farewell album, Bowie retired Ziggy with a bang, and set out to explore other dimensions and means of identity creation. By reinventing himself constantly, he secured continuity for as well as the consolidation of his celebrity status.<sup>19</sup>

Bowie’s repeated assertions of the fundamental constructedness of identity, which are the common denominator to his utterly heterogeneous body of work, could hardly begin with anything but the relativization of gender and sexual norms. Gender and sexuality are central both to the traditional notions of identity as well as to the discourse of dominance (which is a recurrent theme in Bowie’s oeuvre). Gender, assigned to us at birth according to the external physical properties of our bodies, is the

---

<sup>19</sup> As Waldrep observes, “Bowie’s commercialism—donning style as if it were a hat—was a part of his *modus operandi* from the beginning of his career” (2004, 109).

primary factor in determining our social status and consequently our fate. Since traditionally “the feminine takes on the role of the Other in its relationship to the masculine, it is seen as merely its derivation and as less or completely unimportant in the discourse on the human subject” (Šporčič 2017, 193–194). By exposing the performativity of gender and the ensuing randomness of dominance, Bowie laid the foundation for a life-long project of clarifying that any identity is a construct from the get-go (cf. Sharpe 2017, 239). Using the same formula of the breach of normativity, he later relativized the norms of anthropocentrism (cf. *Diamond Dogs*), dictatorship (cf. *Diamond Dogs*, *Station to Station*, the persona of the Thin White Duke), ethnicity and race (*Young Americans*, “China Girl,” “Loving the Alien”), fame (“Fame,” “DJ,” “The Stars (Are Out Tonight)”), and ultimately his own status as a cultural icon (*The Next Day*, *Blackstar*). However, the legacy of the first phase of establishing identity as an essentially dynamic system of signs the meaning of which is arbitrary is perhaps the most important, since it produced tangible results. By mediating his queer “identities” as signs that participate in the formation of hyperrealities of individuals, he significantly contributed to their normalisation (cf. Bradley and Page 2017, 584, 591).<sup>20</sup>

## I’m a Blackstar, I’m a Star Star

An analysis of Bowie’s early 1970s material unequivocally demonstrates that he had instinctively sensed, recognized and artistically exploited the mechanisms of the postmodern epoch decades before theoreticians approached them full force. His subsequent reinventions ever more intricately expose the fundamental performativity of identity, race, power, fame, and norms in general, revealing both the liberating possibilities of the postmodern ontological order, as well as its destructive potential within consumerist societies.

His last two studio albums attest to what is becoming increasingly obvious in the course of the present analysis: that David Bowie was a life-long project, a dynamic installation which enabled its creator the exploration of identity creation in the present. Each song on 2013’s *The Next Day* is a simulacrum of a distinctive career landmark—the album could well be described as Bowie doing Bowie in a never-ending “cancerous proliferation” of a Baudrillardian simulacrum of the fourth order (cf. Baudrillard 2009, 5–

---

<sup>20</sup> For instance, when Elton John came out as bisexual in 1976, there was virtually no public consternation.