

Watch That Man: Gender Representation and Queer Performance in Glam Rock

Hannah Edmondson

Honors Thesis

Department of English

Spring 2019

Thesis Adviser: Dr. Graig Uhlin

Second Reader: Dr. Jeff Menne

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	3
I. Introduction.....	4
II. “Hang On To Yourself”: Glam Rock’s Persona Play.....	9
III. “Controversy” and Contradictions: Evaluating Prince, Past and Present.....	16
IV. Cracked Actors: Homosexual Stints and Straight Realities.....	23
V. “This Woman’s Work”: Female Foundations of Glam.....	27
VI. Electric Ladies: Feminist Possibilities of Futurism and Science Fiction.....	34
VII. <i>Dirty Computer</i>	44
VIII. <i>MASSEDUCTION</i>	53
IX. Conclusion.....	60

Abstract

Glam rock, though considered by many music critics chiefly as a historical movement, is a sensibility which is appropriated frequently in the present moment. Its original icons were overwhelmingly male—a pattern being subverted in both contemporary iterations of glam and the music industry as a whole. Fluid portrayals of gender, performative sexuality, camp, and vibrant, eye-catching visuals are among the most identifiable traits which signify the glam style, though science fiction also serves as a common thread between many glam stars, both past and present. The superficial linkages between artists like David Bowie, Prince, Janelle Monáe, and St. Vincent provide a useful framework for analyzing the evolution of glam as not only a musical tendency but also an agent of social change. Though the original '70s glam movement championed fluidity and non-traditional identification on predominantly visual terms, its female-fueled rebirth has embraced politics along with performativity. Its representative capacity has improved, which is likely a symptom of the changing political climate; difference is accepted and portrayed more broadly across the global stage—a progressivity bolstered by most modern appropriations of glam.

I. Introduction

Though its styles and sounds are fairly easy to identify, Simon Reynolds defines glam rather loosely, writing, “[g]lam—also known as glitter in the US—describes a sensibility, a spirit of the age that emerged around the start of the seventies and flourished for about four years, before petering out shortly prior to the punk explosion.”¹ Todd Haynes, in his 1998 feature *Velvet Goldmine*, presents a fictionalized (albeit thinly veiled) simulacrum of the ‘70s glam movement, including the public event held to eulogize glam in late 1974. Though Reynolds and Haynes cap the historical movement of glam rock at the mid 1970s, I argue that the glam sensibility is presently championed—and confronted—by artists such as Janelle Monáe and Annie Clark (best known by her creative title, St. Vincent). “Glam rock’s central social innovation was to open a safe cultural space in which to experiment with versions of masculinity that clearly flouted social norms.”² The glam movement is widely revered for its perceived challenge to rigid notions of sexuality and gender identity, but its oversights within this realm—namely its myopic favor of straight masculinity—are rarely discussed. The contributions of these women to the contemporary glam sensibility are noteworthy for many reasons, particularly the inclusion of queer, female perspectives which were almost entirely absent from the glam trend as it existed in the 1970s.

¹Reynolds, Simon. *Shock and Awe: Glam Rock and Its Legacy*. Faber, 2016, p. 2.

² Auslander, Philip. *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music*. University of Michigan Press, 2006, p. 228.

Velvet Goldmine tracks the rise and (alleged) fall of the glam rock phenomenon, using its central character Brian Slade as a stand-in for David Bowie, T. Rex frontman Marc Bolan, and lesser-known glam figure Jobriath. Slade performs as the other-worldly Maxwell Demon, a character typified by an aquamarine mullet, heavy makeup, and skin-tight costumes. Though Slade's image



is highly suggestive of a Ziggy Stardust-era Bowie, his homosexual forays in the film are more characteristic of Jobriath (a possibility bolstered by the fact that Maxwell Demon's album covers are near copies of Jobriath's album artwork).

“David Bowie and Lou Reed flirted with bisexuality, nail polish and make-up, of course, but Jobriath was in his own words, ‘a true fairy.’”³ Haynes' film also features a Lou Reed/Iggy Pop hybrid in the form of Curt Wild (Ewan McGregor), who forms one tip of the love triangle that forms between Brian Slade, Slade's wife Mandy (an Angela Bowie replica), and himself. The relationship between Wild and Slade paints glam as a style purported by homosexual stars, though the real rock industry did not favor rock icons who were *too* gay—a caveat proven by Jobriath's total lack of commercial success. Thus, performers like Bowie and Mick Jagger were entitled to flirt with homosexuality—take, for instance, their rumored sleepover interrupted by

³ Metzger, Richard. “Jobriath Boone: Rock's Fairy Godmother.” *Boing Boing*, 30 Mar. 2009, boingboing.net/2009/03/30/jobriath-boone-rocks.html.

Jagger's wife—without feeling commercial consequence. Though Haynes celebrates the glam phenomenon for its impact on young people who broke the societal mold, he also recognizes its faulty elements. Critic Caroline Siede recognizes the cynicism in Haynes' treatment of Brian Slade, which "potentially casts Bowie's ever-changing artistic persona as more of a commercial choice than an artistic one."⁴ Bowie's mercurial superficiality, be it marketing tactic or artistic decision, introduced audiences to a medley of themes and fashion choices which continue to represent glam. His hyper-sexual presentation, eye-catching fashion choices, and other-worldly motifs provide cornerstones of glam which continue to be appropriated and modified.

A desire for commercial viability is detectable in the music of early glam rock more so than its risqué aesthetics; while its artists visually flirted with queer identification, the songs themselves were straight, ensuring radio play despite their controversial performance methods. The hits that comprise the classic glam canon are largely centered on heterosexual romance, undermining the queer front which artists like Bowie, Bolan, and later Prince upheld in their appearances. Haynes' salute to glam is scored largely by Roxy Music tunes, which convey the heterosexual feelings of the band's captain, Bryan Ferry. Despite the romantic endeavors of Haynes' leads on-screen, the reality of glam rock as it was ruled by straight, masculine personalities is written all over the film's soundtrack. Selected hits from Cockney Rebel, the New York Dolls, Roxy Music, and Iggy & the Stooges decorate the score in lieu of Bowie tunes (which Haynes was barred from using), diagnosing glam rock as a style dominated by straight bands rather than the openly queer rockstars of Haynes' imagination. While the glam phenomenon is often celebrated for granting cultural space to the performance of non-normative

⁴ Siede, Caroline. "Velvet Goldmine Captures the Spirit, If Not the Biography, of David Bowie." *Film*, 23 Aug. 2017, film.avclub.com/velvet-goldmine-captures-the-spirit-if-not-the-biograp-1798243465.

gender identities, it perpetually relied on heterosexual male performers to express those forms of queerness. The striking lack of feminine input is made apparent in *Velvet Goldmine*, which, for all its musical numbers, features only one by a female performer (designed to represent glam's token tomboy, Suzi Quatro). When glam is discussed as a movement limited to the past tense, its exclusion of women is rather irreconcilable. However, the glam traits extant in the performance methods of St. Vincent and Janelle Monáe proffer the style as something that has not died but rather experienced reincarnation, this time manifest in a strikingly feminine form.

I will focus on the musical and aesthetic tendencies of these two female artists in order to explore contemporary appropriations of glam which highlight the contradictions and shortcomings of glam's history. The contemporary works of St. Vincent and Janelle Monáe pay homage to several late icons of glam—namely David Bowie and Prince—without understating their own feminist positions and the unconventional sexualities they harbor. Bearing strong sonic and visual resemblances to male exponents of glam, musicians such as Monáe and Clark continue the glam-attributed tradition of subverting normativity through musical performance, this time emphasizing female subjectivity. Both artists embrace their queer sexualities in their art as well as their personal lives, thus establishing themselves as key players in the broadening of feminine representation; Monáe's work, in addition, calls attention to the historical exclusion of black voices from the glam movement—with Prince being a notable exception. Phillip Auslander underlines the past shortcomings of the genre which Monáe and Clark currently seek to amend, noting that “[g]lam offered no substantial challenge to the conventions of rock as a traditionally male-dominated cultural form that evolved from male-dominated social contexts.”⁵

⁵ Auslander, Philip. *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music*. University of Michigan Press, 2006, p. 229.

Inhabiting a society that increasingly challenges historical precedents of straight male hegemony, contemporary artists are enabled to embrace forms of difference without sacrificing their potential marketability. Trends in music consumption reflect changes in the overarching social and political climate, as the glam sensibility is now embraced not for its superficial subversion of conventionality but instead for its genuine potential to do so. In order to place Clark and Monáe within a continuing record of glam rock, I will identify their obvious adherences to glam style as it pervades their adopted personas, music videos, and staged performances. Looking specifically at Clark's 2017 *Masseduction* and Monáe's release of *Dirty Computer* the following year, I will analyze their respective adoptions of early glam rock's superficial attributes, looking at how the movement's impression of sexual radicalism has evolved. Analyzing the history of glam rock for its allowance of homosexual expression and camp performance style, I will also trace the influence which figures like Andy Warhol had on the early proponents of glam as well as their modern protégés.

Simon Frith calls attention to the absence of female agency in the music industry, stating, “[g]irl performers and their images...are controlled by an ideology of sexism which confines female rockers within narrow limits.”⁶ Although this phenomenon continues to plague the modern music world, artists such as Lady Gaga, Christine and the Queens, Janelle Monáe, and St. Vincent exhibit a personal control of not only their visual presentation but also their work. These artists defy gender stereotypes, sexual precedents, and industry norms by way of their creative endeavors—a queer rebelliousness which harkens back to the performances of glam rock's original frontmen. Glam style has not died, as Haynes' musical feature insists, but simply

⁶ Frith, Simon. *The Sociology of Rock*. Constable, 1979, p. 207.

stretched beyond its heterosexual, masculine roots, gathering new meanings and modes of expression in the process. The recent projects of Janelle Monáe and St. Vincent most clearly embody the past and future of the glam sensibility, nodding to the performative tactics of glam's founding fathers while turning to face their own womanly reality.

II. "Hang On To Yourself": Glam Rock's Persona Play

An analysis of glam rock's original icons and the meanings which they continue to generate is impossible without considering the personas created (and killed) by those stars. Bowie, the founding father of glam, treated identities like costumes, changing his looks and characters with unsentimental efficiency. The denial of an underlying or "honest" self was not a tactic that originated with Bowie, however. As Haynes' *Velvet Goldmine* illustrates, the glam sensibility owes much credit to the dandyism of Oscar Wilde. The film's characters quote Wilde throughout the film, echoing statements such as, "A real artist creates beautiful things and puts nothing of his own life into them"—a variation of a line in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Bowie fuses Wilde's ethos with the cool posture of Andy Warhol, the man behind the pop art movement/aesthetic, to craft his early artistic persona. Both Wilde and Warhol elevated themselves from obscurity using conviction and comportment; calculated language and aestheticism transformed both men into well-known personalities. Bowie took note, leaving his Bromley roots behind with the invention of Ziggy Stardust—a career move that buried his mundane history in exchange for a flashy, alien persona. The inspiration Bowie derived from Warhol extends far beyond the *Hunky Dory* track dedicated to him, for it was Wilde and Warhol who set the terms which Bowie used to launch his glam rock project.

The glam ethos, as it survives in contemporary appropriations of the style, is undergirded by irony and camp. The ironic spirit which Warhol imparted to an up-and-coming Bowie has remained an integral piece of the glam philosophy; much of the irony which pervaded early glam, however, was not as deliberate as Bowie's performative gestures. The contradictory nature of the glam movement during the 1970s was not detected by its spokesmen, who flaunted gender fluidity from a position of heterosexual, male privilege. The drag escapades of Mick Jagger, David Bowie, and Marc Bolan were manifestations of self-aware irony insofar as the men themselves understood their true gender and sexual identities—realities which their physical gestures seemed to deny. When one considers the widely perceived legacy of glam rock as a movement built open sexual liberation and queer representation, however, the irony reveals itself to be far-reaching and problematic; the male stars who set the glam style treated as a mere masquerade the identities which their marginalized fans took seriously. Even so, the mere act of subverting traditional gender roles in rock music fostered changes within popular culture that have only intensified with time, and the bravery required of those artists to publicly shirk their heterosexual manhood—even if only superficially—over forty years prior to the instatement of marriage equality in the U.S. and the U.K. should not go unappreciated.

Glam rock historian Simon Reynolds views Bowie's coming out to *Melody Maker's* Michael Watts as a camp gesture and nothing more. Susan Sontag, in her "Notes on Camp," writes, "The androgyne is certainly one of the great images of Camp sensibility," which subsists on the notion that "the most refined form of sexual attractiveness (as well as the most refined form of sexual pleasure) consists in going against the grain of one's sex." Bowie, flexing the privileges of his newfound fame, professed his homosexuality to *Melody Maker* perhaps simply

because he could do so without facing the same ostracization which society imposed on ordinary homosexuals; on the contrary, his scandalous announcement further isolated Bowie from the rock music mainstream, making his brand of artistry that much more intriguing. As an intellectual rockstar, Bowie enjoyed molding himself into Sontag's conception of the "most refined;" this meant gender-bending as Sontag describes it, but his declaration of homosexuality also pointed to the rocker's need to separate himself from the straight majority. Bowie purported some kind of otherness in nearly every phase of his career, and it's possible that he saw little difference between his on-stage turns as a space alien and his public claim of homosexuality. Bowie, it seems, was exercising Warholian irony in order to appeal to the camp taste; he played the gay rockstar in order to get the reaction which such cultural radicalism induced in 1972, but an understanding of camp's duplicity allowed him to dismiss those early iterations of queerness once that particular persona fell out of style. His practices in queer camp generated a youth subculture in the 1970s, with subculture defined by Dick Hebdige as a "coded response to the changes affecting the entire community."⁷ The subculture cultivated by glam rock was determined largely by aesthetic signifiers—a reality replicated in the opening montage of Haynes' *Velvet Goldmine*, which features young people dressed in similar jewel toned, eclectic fashions congregating in the streets of London. Bowie embodied the glam spirit at its most vacuous, revealing "Fashion" to be his only guiding principle in the character-driven stages of his career. He operated his various personas with a knowing smile, holding the façades which made him famous quite far from his own chest. The artist (Bowie) was thus not responsible for the actions of his art (the various personas he created); this mentality resurfaced again when

⁷ Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Taylor and Francis, 2013, p. 60.

Bowie's Thin White Duke alter ego was accused on throwing a Nazi salute in front of German fans. Though his rejections of personal responsibility are somewhat questionable, Bowie's performance tactics exemplified a major tenet of the glam sensibility: identity is a fickle condition, capable of expressing as much—or as little—as its wearer chooses. The ironic posture which Bowie borrowed from Warhol allowed him to dodge the trappings of authenticity which surround most celebrities; his words and actions could go unpunished so long as they did not reflect the artist's "true" intentions.

The nearly impossible task of uncovering an honest, interior self beneath the celebrity guise did not begin with Bowie, though. Andy Warhol's blank, indirect dealings with the press signaled his detachment from the work which critics sought to personalize; his identity, like his art, was supposedly not expressive of any inner truth. His denial of any deeper meaning to be uncovered applied to not only his art but also himself: "If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am." Art and life, to Warhol, could be judged and experienced in purely superficial terms; he wanted his images to speak for themselves, thus abandoning the personal ownership attached to auteurism. Van Cagle recalls, "The most blatant example of [Warhol's] anti-authorial technique occurred when he began a live interview with an assertion that became the most famous one of his career: 'You should just tell me the words you want me to say and I'll repeat them.'"⁸ Bowie regurgitated this sentiment in a 1971 interview, during which he compared himself to a photostat machine.⁹ The vacuous pop art aesthetic which Warhol embodied quickly pervaded the entire Factory, turning it into a space which rejected easy categorizations—particularly of its artistic output and

⁸ Cagle, Van M. *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture: Art, Rock, and Andy Warhol*. Sage, 1995, 62.

⁹ *ibid*, 139.

inhabitants—and presented pop art as a lifestyle. The lifestyle championed by the Factory’s inhabitants was detailed in Lou Reed’s “Walk on the Wild Side”—a glam anthem that tethered Warhol’s crew to the nascent glitter rock scene. Reed’s 1973 release of *Transformer* (an album Bowie produced) “had much to do with the increasing sense of *hipness* that glitter fans were ascribing to bisexuality.”¹⁰ This sexual fluidity which came to characterize the Factory as a whole was foregrounded by its puzzling captain, Warhol, who acted as a beacon of mercurial identity and nontraditional sexuality.

Off-center but still impossible to pin down, Warhol’s interior self proved nearly impossible to excavate from the challenging façade he upheld in public. This mysterious, highly glamorized presentation has been adopted by many celebrities since Warhol, with David Bowie being the most obvious example. Bowie’s interview tactics throughout the 1970s were grounded in ambiguity; he delighted in undermining his own credibility and dodging direct answers, evincing Warhol’s impact on the rising glam star. In a 1971 interview with Steve Peacock of *Sounds*, Bowie revealed his absorption with Warhol’s pop tactics, calling his pop songwriting “so unserious and untogether—an art form of indifference with no permanent philosophy behind it whatsoever.”¹¹ Bowie kept critics interested by professing that it was his alter egos who spoke for him in interviews, thus stretching the glittery mystique he cultivated onstage across his everyday life. “David Bowie,” in turn, became a figure who survived in the grey area between the actual and the theatrical. “[W]hile Bowie certainly occupies an ambivalent, complex and fluid position between the worlds of reality and fiction, that position is different from the level occupied by Ziggy, Aladdin Sane, Major Tom, The Thin White Duke and *Outside*’s Nathan

¹⁰ *ibid*, 153.

¹¹ Cagle, Van M. *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture: Art, Rock, and Andy Warhol*. Sage, 1995, p. 139.

Adler; and it is different, too, from that of the unnamed narrator of ‘The Man Who Sold the World’, the man he meets on the stair, the man who ‘met a girl named Blue Jean’ and arguably, every ‘I’ who tells a story in Bowie’s episode.”¹²

The separation between self and persona which characterized the pop art persuasion is currently courted by Annie Clark (aka St. Vincent), who harkens back to Warhol not only in her glamorous aesthetics but also her artistic methods. In the accompanying visuals and promotions for *MASSEDUCTION*,



Clark presents herself rather artificially. Not only do the album’s music videos possess a plastic, surreal, and absurd quality, her promotional video for the record places canned performativity front and center. By satirizing the interview process as a whole in the promo, Annie Clark blurs the line between art and real life; her answers are rehearsed and highly exaggerated, yet the mocking tone of the staged interview nonetheless expresses a real sentiment (i.e. Clark’s fatigue with the shallow and predictable interview process). Her tone is simultaneously combative and jovial, employing camp in a way that lets Clark use her celebrity platform in order to make fun of said fame. On a related note, Sia’s face-obscuring hairstyle generates a unique, marketable image just as it attempts to dodge the music industry’s shallow marketing tactics. Clark’s critique of the celebrity persona, however, places her safely on the inside of the joke; she champions Warholian ambiguity with a clear sense of humor, injecting the ironic pretensions of a young

¹² Brooker, William. *Enchanting David Bowie: Space/Time/Body/Memory*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, p. 95.

David Bowie with greater self-awareness. Her stylized, tongue-in-cheek takedown of the traditional interview suggests an aim to update the intellectual artistry of her forerunners, softening its edges with slight comedy. She embodies camp as it is defined by Sontag: “a mode of seduction—one which employs flamboyant mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation; gestures full of duplicity, with a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders.”¹³ Clark echoes the pop art ethos with her vacant stare and calculated, sometimes confounding responses. Warhol’s influence shines through Clark’s appearance, as well, particularly when one considers the musician’s pallid complexion, cutting cheekbones, and proclivity for sunglasses. Her image seems equal parts Warhol and Edie Sedgwick—a unique mixture of the artist’s icy strangeness with the feminine allure of his frequent muse. Clark also intimates an identity crisis similar to the one which propelled Bowie’s career in her satirical promos for *MASSEDUCTION*; at the video’s conclusion, she considers whether or not Annie Clark and St. Vincent are the same person, replying, “Honestly you’d have to ask her.” Clark has hinted at this separation between herself and her artistic moniker before: 2007’s *Marry Me* opens with a renunciation of identity as Clark sings “I’m not any, any, any, any... anything at all.” During her repetition of the word “any,” it sounds at times like Clark is saying her own name—Annie—in order to communicate a separation from the self she dons in everyday life.

This cultivated distance between the artistic persona and the artist is also championed by Janelle Monáe, who frequently chooses to speak through her characters in not only the artistic arena but also the public sphere. “With no past to speak of, as a cyborg who was created by man, Cindi Mayweather calls into question our modern ideas of self-identity; identity as image, where

¹³ Sontag, Susan. “Notes on ‘Camp.’” *Against Interpretation*. Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1966.

the ‘self’ is replaced by ‘identity’, and identity as a ‘collage of cultural scraps.’”¹⁴ Channeling her android alter ego Cindi Mayweather in response to questions about her sexuality, Monáe often evasively retorted, “I only date androids;” in 2018, however, the artist came out as pansexual a day before her release of the Afrofuturist masterpiece *Dirty Computer*. Afrofuturist scholar Marlo David posits that the ancient tribal practice of “playing mas”—“mas” being short for masquerade—is “the same process that empowers the Afrofuturists to ‘shift personae in ways that counteract the limitations of identity imposed by the hegemonic gaze of race, gender, class, and religion.’”¹⁵ By this logic, Monáe’s adoption of android personas allows her to embrace lifestyles in her art which society considers off-limits. Nonetheless, the Emotion Picture film which narratively coheres the music videos for *Dirty Computer* presents Monáe as Jane 57821—a queer android persecuted by the authorities who seek to “clean” her imperfections. The videos show Jane 57821 in relationships with a male and female lover (played by her rumored real-life love interest, Tessa Thompson); this sexual fluidity is the reason for her mandated “cleaning,” which harbors eerie similarities to gay conversion therapy. Monáe claims that the songs comprising *Dirty Computer* are more reflective of her personal life than previous works, but the line which separates her characters’ experiences from her own remains fairly blurred—an ambiguity which the artist seems to enjoy. “[Janelle Monáe] is tangible proof that the idea for every great pop icon begins its life as art, and cements the conviction that Bowie's

¹⁴ “Analysis: Janelle Monáe and Posthumanism – the Cyborg.” *EchoticMusic*, 22 Jan. 2014, echoticmusic.wordpress.com/2014/01/22/analysis-janelle-monae-and-posthumanism-the-cyborg/.

¹⁵ Calvert, John. "Opinion | Black Sky Thinking | Janelle Monáe: A New Pioneer Of Afrofuturism." *The Quietus*. September 2, 2010. <https://thequietus.com/articles/04889-janelle-mon-e-the-archandroid-afrofuturism>.

morphing was in itself genuflection to art as pathway to self-actualization.”¹⁶ It is important to note that this “pathway” induced a number of stumbles, for glam rock is a style that houses a colorful but frequently careless history.

III. “Controversy” and Contradictions: Evaluating Prince, Past and Present

Though most critics and journalists locate the height of classic glam in the mid-1970s, its presence flourished in the 1980s—though it did undergo a significant remodel. Prince is to be considered a glam rock icon not for his style of music, per se, but rather his mode of performance; with all the glamour of Bryan Ferry and the dandyism of Marc Bolan, Prince situated himself among the men of glam without sounding anything like Mick Ronson or Roxy Music. “After witnessing him play New York’s Ritz Ballroom in 1981, *NME*’s Barney Hoskyns—one of Prince’s most perceptive early critics—testified that it was like 'like seeing Marc Bolan and Jimi Hendrix in the same body.’”¹⁷ His work saw a blending of musical genres and gender roles, as Prince fused the masculine, guitar-driven rock of the 1970s with the charismatic showiness of Tina Turner. “Prince’s prancing stage antics made him a misfit in mainstream rock as much as in R&B,” an outcast status underscored by his 1981 opening gig for the Rolling Stones, during which he was pelted with cabbages.¹⁸ Though he was merely putting

¹⁶ Calvert, John. "Opinion | Black Sky Thinking | Janelle Monáe: A New Pioneer Of Afrofuturism." *The Quietus*. September 2, 2010.

<https://thequietus.com/articles/04889-janelle-mon-e-the-archandroid-afrofuturism>.

¹⁷ Reynolds, Simon. "How Prince's Androgynous Genius Changed the Way We Think About Music and Gender." *Pitchfork*. April 22, 2016. Accessed March 24, 2019.

<https://pitchfork.com/features/article/9882-how-princes-androgynous-genius-changed-the-way-we-think-about-music-and-gender/>

¹⁸ *ibid.*

his spin on the campiness of glitter rock, his methods were unrecognizable to its original dilettantes.

Prince's blatantly heterosexual nature was challenged by his effeminate style and even, on occasion, by his lyrics. Songs like "If I Was Your Girlfriend" and "Controversy" hint at unconventional adoptions of gender and sexuality, but Prince nonetheless kept those possibilities at arms' length. "Am I black or white, am I straight or gay?" does not imply serious consideration of these questions on Prince's behalf, but rather mimics the media's inability to make sense of the boundary-blurring artist. The shortcomings of Prince's queer representation may also be attributed to the decade in which he began his career. The 1980s witnessed a turn toward conservatism in America, with the Reagan era dawning and Bowie swapping out his jewel-toned spandex for sensible suits. Perhaps Prince merely pushed the envelope as far as the '80s mainstream would allow an effeminate black man to push it. His personal life suggests that the artist's concerns simply grew less sexually liberated and more focused on spiritual discipline as his career progressed.

"Controversy" also sees Prince posing his belief in God as a question; his interviews make very clear, however, that he is a man of devout Christian faith. The artist, who was raised a Seventh Day Adventist, became a Jehovah's Witness in the early 2000s. Though his endorsement of such an extreme ideology confused many fans who saw him as a liberated, raunchy rockstar, religiosity pervaded even his most commercial hits. It is no accident that "Controversy" ends with a recitation of the Lord's Prayer. Janelle Monáe's "Q.U.E.E.N." closely resembles the thematic and lyrical structure of Prince's "Controversy," with its list of rhetorical questions meant to mimic the prying of mainstream media; Monáe's song, however, does not

reach the same religious conclusion selected by Prince. The song includes a few questions that hint at Monáe's sexuality: "Say, is it weird to like the way she wear her tights?" and "Am I freak because I love watching Mary?" The latter is followed by Monáe questioning whether or not she will be allowed into heaven—a sly attack on religious beliefs which condemn homosexuality. As his faith intensified later in life, Prince shied away from his more audacious performance techniques, yet his public statements grew more radical. An excerpt from a 2008 *New Yorker* piece illustrates just how conservative the once-flamboyant star had become: "When asked about his perspective on social issues—gay marriage, abortion—Prince tapped his Bible and said, 'God came to earth and saw people sticking it wherever and doing it with whatever, and he just cleared it all out. He was, like, 'Enough.''"¹⁹ Monáe, in her collaboration with Prince on *The Electric Lady*, clearly managed to divorce his musical mentorship from the religious conservatism that increasingly defined his later years. Prince, a former freak, served to inspire the present—and assumedly future—freakdom of artists like Monáe who have no qualms with queer identification.

The signature looks of Prince, despite the personal values they may have concealed, spoke volumes to those queer fans who sought their likeness in the flamboyant rockstar. Ytasha L. Womack connects Prince's iconic ruffles with Afro-surrealism, an aesthetic that employs the whimsical, decadent, and absurd in order to contextualize the present-day lives of people of color. Womack believes that the Afro-surrealist endorsement of sexual ambiguity can be linked to the "androgyny and dandyism of pop star Prince (who pioneered the seventeenth-century

¹⁹ Hoffman, Claire. "Soup with Prince." *The New Yorker*. June 18, 2017. Accessed March 24, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/11/24/soup-with-prince>.

French aesthetic in 1980s fashion).”²⁰ While Prince’s lived experience did not align him with the LGBTQ community, his wardrobe choices boldly—although perhaps flippantly—pointed to queer empowerment. Hip hop artist Frank Ocean represents the surviving impact of Prince’s artistic choices on musicians who *do* identify with non-traditional modes of gender and sexuality. Following Prince’s death in 2016, Ocean tweeted, “[Prince] made me feel more comfortable with how I identify sexually simply by his display of freedom from and irreverence for obviously archaic ideas like gender conformity.” Prince, to Ocean and many other queer fans, communicated a spirit of non-conformity most loudly in aesthetic terms, as “a straight black man who played his first televised set in bikini bottoms and knee-high heeled boots.” Like Bowie, Lou Reed, Marc Bolan, and every other male glam rocker who incorporated gender fluid style into his performance, Prince’s lasting impact is as much about his music as it is his appearance. Prince’s eventual renunciation of his earlier lasciviousness suggests to many critics that his gender-bending tactics were not indicative of any personal ethos but perhaps important for the message they conveyed on wholly visual grounds. Spencer Kornhaber notes the queer-positive tint of Prince’s legacy, writing, “[W]hatever his later beliefs were, they pretty clearly don’t undo the earlier impact he had in widening popular notions about sex and gender, nor the fact that he made lots of people who weren’t heterosexual feel better about themselves.”²¹ The most recognizable proponents of glam are testaments to its wordless communication; its flashy and gender fluid exterior spoke to those fans who sought non-traditional modes of identification,

²⁰ Womack, Ytasha L. *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-fi and Fantasy Culture*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013, p. 170.

²¹ Kornhaber, Spencer. “Prince Will Always Be a Gay Icon-Even Though He Sometimes Seemed Homophobic.” *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 27 Jan. 2019, www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/04/prince-gay-homophobia-conservative-liberal-progress/479502/.

despite the silence of its representative rockstars. Shortcomings aside, glam rock is celebrated as a liberating force for minority groups—particularly the LGBTQ community. It is only contemporarily, however, that the glam style is being appropriated to communicate an actual belief in the inclusivity which the movement supposedly championed at its conception.

The common ground between Janelle Monáe and Prince is far-reaching, but Monáe's continually expanding body of work highlights the limitations of her late mentor. Monáe's body of work deepens the glam aesthetic, invigorating Prince's non-binary swagger with sincerity and social consciousness. Monáe points to Prince's stylistic legacy in much of her recent work, channeling him in both her musical output as well as her fashion statements. The black-and-white tuxedo ensembles which have come to define Monáe's aesthetic are reminiscent of the monochromatic looks worn by Prince in the videos for "Cream," "Thieves in the Temple," and "Controversy," to name only a few. The white fur coat Monáe dons in "Dance Apocalyptic" harkens back to Prince's dress in "U Got the Look," and her chain veil in "Make Me Feel" bears direct resemblance to the one Prince wears on the cover of *My Name is Prince* as well as the video for "Violet the Organ Grinder." Most obviously, Monáe's signature pompadour channels the hairstyle Prince donned throughout the 1980s (a look first popularized within the black community by Little Richard). Monáe ascribes to the gender-bending taste of her late mentor without merely copying his style; her monochromatic wardrobe is often streamlined and classic, lacking the ruffled, embellished, and/or sexy touches that characterized Prince's looks. In this way, Monáe's appearance leans toward the masculine whereas Prince's more gaudy, risqué presentation signals qualities associated with female performers. Both artists enact the gender-fluid tendencies of glam rock, but Monáe's take strikes a new note in the glam register.

She wears a tuxedo that has been shaped to fit her female frame, adopting a typically masculine style without forsaking her instinctual femininity.

Touches of Prince are ever-present in the sonic scape of Monáe's most recent album, *Dirty Computer*. Much like *The Electric Lady* power ballad "Primetime," "Make Me Feel" oozes the influence of Prince's specific brand of funk-derived pop; in addition, Monáe's backup dancers wear bright red berets during the number—no doubt a nod to Prince's 1985 hit. The album's themes are a far cry from Prince's material, however, as Monáe constructs a work devoted to social justice, queer empowerment, and minority representation. This is not to say, however, that early representatives of glam did nothing to catalyze societal change. Artists like Bowie were responsible for considerable shifts within youth culture, but their influence was visually coded rather than explicit. Dick Hebdige recalls this complicated leadership in his writings on subculture: "Although Bowie was by no means liberated in any mainstream radical sense, preferring disguise and dandyism... to any 'genuine' transcendence of sexual role play, he and, by extension, those who copied his style, did 'question the value and meaning of adolescence and the transition to the adult world of work' (Taylor and Wall, 1976)."²² The lyrics of most early glam rock, on the other hand, did very little to communicate progressive ideals, vying instead to appeal to the tastes of an expected heterosexual audience. In the 1970s, when glam was at its prime popularity, political activism and social justice were out of vogue, as those were touchstones of the folk rock crowd. Presently, though, politics have re-entered the pop music realm, with numerous artists using their artistic platform as a site for protest in the Trump era. Fiona Apple, A Tribe Called Quest, and Billy Bragg are among the dozens of acts who have

²² Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Taylor and Francis, 2013, p. 62.

recently produced anti-Trump material, suggesting that political opinions have gained new ground in the music scene as a whole, regardless of genre. Monáe's latest release is not solely a reaction to the Trump Presidency, but *Dirty Computer* proves that the issues pervading her everyday life are by no means separate from her art.

Though she does delve into the sexy, uninhibited groove of *The Purple One*, Monáe refuses to lose sight of her message in pursuit of the dance floor. In an interview with *Sound Savvy*, Monáe emphasized her role as an advocate for marginalized groups: "My job is not just to create music but to bring awareness." Whereas Prince grew more guarded as his career went on, changing his name to a symbol and straying from overtly sexual material, Monáe is only growing more open with her audience. Monáe's most recent work sees her celebrating her "black girl magic" and her sexuality rather openly, positioning the artist as not simply a token queer, black popstar but rather an ally to marginalized groups. This personal responsibility to the communities with whom she identifies signals a shift in the glam paradigm. Whereas glam was once a movement that communicated progressivity on strictly visual terms, it has now been appropriated as a style which houses political activism. The highly stylized posture Monáe once upheld has waned in the face of whole-hearted advocacy; her recent artistry bears little trace of her former android persona, revealing instead the personality of the artist herself. She is certainly not the first black artist to dismantle stereotypes of race and gender in her performance, but she is one of the first to do so with complete consciousness.

IV. Cracked Actors: Homosexual Stints and Straight Realities

Experimentation with gender roles on stage garnered artists like David Bowie, Lou Reed, Marc Bolan, and Prince tremendous attention, making disciples of many impressionable fans

who related to their unconventional celebrity images. However, their performances were allowed to be free of substance or veracity; these men were enabled to drop the act once the curtain fell each night. Warhol's sentiments about the lack of an underlying meaning seem to apply to every glam rockstar who thrived in the 1970s; rejecting the activism of folk music at the time, glam performers opted to keep their artistic substance at surface-level. Though their fashion choices and performance methods suggested a certain political aim (namely Gay Liberation), their ironic glam stance enabled these symbols to lack any intended significance. "Bowie threw the sexuality of rock into question, not only by performing a sexual identity previously excluded from rock but also by performing that identity in such a way that it was clearly revealed *as a performance* for which there was no underlying referent (as did [Lou Reed] when he crossed the room to kiss Bowie 'with studied deliberation')." ²³ While Bowie is lauded for his unique, lasting power to unify the misfit masses, his personal agenda was never to be the spokesman for those marginalized groups who adored him. Glam in its earliest conception was apolitical despite its suggestive performances Bowie's lengthy career witnessed him performing occasional acts of charity, such as gigs for Live Aid in 1985 and the Keep a Child Alive ball in 2006, but opportunities to be an advocate for gay rights were continuously shirked by the star. Though he touted his gayness publicly to *Melody Maker* in 1972, Bowie eventually rescinded this declaration, calling it "[t]he biggest mistake [he] ever made." ²⁴ Michael Watts later described his

²³ Auslander, Philip. *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music*. University of Michigan Press, 2006, p. 135.

²⁴ Loder, Kurt. "David Bowie: Straight Time." *Rolling Stone*. June 25, 2018. Accessed March 24, 2019. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/david-bowie-straight-time-69334/>.

experiences interviewing Bowie, stating, “[Bowie] was always very keen to make the point that he wasn’t going to be flag-waving for Gay Lib.”²⁵

Bowie’s sexually ambiguous reputation, while explicitly confirmed in his 1972 interview with *Melody Maker*, was visually suggested by the staging of the Ziggy Stardust tour. Bowie’s positioning was coded feminine by many fans as a result of not his outlandish costuming but predominantly due to his interplay with guitarist Mick Ronson. In true classic rock fashion, Ronson utilized the electric guitar as a phallic accessory, strumming it proudly between widespread legs. This image of guitar-as-phallus was crystallized on June 17, 1972 when Bowie knelt down to perform fellatio on Ronson’s guitar; the iconic image of Bowie pressing Ronson’s groin-level instrument to his face secured the gendered dynamic of Bowie as submissive singer and Ronson as the dominating, masculine musician. Morrissey recalled their onstage relations, saying, “Bowie had that incredible face, but he was not rock’n’roll, whereas every note Mick played was masculine... Mick’s toughness saved Bowie.”²⁶ The electric guitar as a quintessential facet of rock music has solidified its masculine reputation, thanks in large part to the rock genre’s longstanding prioritization of male artists. The widely perceived gender of the electric guitar is undoubtedly a response to the male dominance in the music industry; this gendering, however, is underscored by the *way* in which these men play the instrument. The macho edge attributed to the electric guitar is not sonic so much as visual; it is posturing—not necessarily musical proficiency—which often codes the instrument as masculine. The music video for “Cream” is one example among many which depicts the guitar as a phallic accessory. Prince, holding the instrument proudly between his legs, strokes the guitar’s neck in a masturbatory

²⁵ Reynolds, Simon. *Shock and Awe: Glam Rock and Its Legacy*. Faber, 2016, p. 244.

²⁶ Reynolds, Simon. *Shock and Awe: Glam Rock and Its Legacy*. Faber, 2016, p. 256.

gesture before lying on his back and holding it perpendicular to his body. Here, emphasis is not on the technical aspects of Prince's guitar playing (we can't see the movement of his fingers) but rather his manner of wielding it. Presenting the guitar as an extension of his pelvis, Prince makes the point of guitar-as-phallus hard to miss. Furthermore, the technical prowess of men like Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, and Carlos Santana furthers the conception that playing ability is designated to one gender. Rolling Stone's "100 Greatest Guitarists" features only two female artists—neither of whom crack the Top 75.²⁷ Kaki King, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Nancy Wilson, and scores of other iconic female guitarists were left out of the ranking, further characterizing the music industry as a club which often fails to include women and refuses to recognize those few who have been accepted.

The electric guitar as a signifier of male power is subverted by Annie Clark most noticeably, as her musical notoriety is bound up in her status as a female "shredder." In the video for "Los Ageless," she directly mimics the stroking gesture of artists like Prince when she plays her guitar, running her hand up and down the instrument's neck with increasing (and clearly unnecessary) aggression. Here, she proves that she can play the posturing game with the best of them, but Clark does so with her tongue planted firmly in her cheek. Clark's signature line of Ernie Ball Music Man guitars is a testament to her instrumental prowess, but it comes as no surprise that the St. Vincent guitar is the only model designed by a woman. Clark's guitar model is ergonomic for female players in particular, as it is the only guitar designed with the possibility of breasts in mind. The body is slim and lacks a pronounced curvature, allowing ample space for the female form. Despite her rare station in the rock sphere, Clark is certainly not the first

²⁷ Rolling Stone. "100 Greatest Guitarists." *Rolling Stone*, 3 July 2018, www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/100-greatest-guitarists-153675/robby-krieger-45486/.

woman in music to play the role of girl-with-guitar. Prince enlisted a number of female musicians to join his band, the Revolution, bringing women to roles in the industry that were typically reserved for male expertise. Among these musicians were keyboardist Lisa Coleman, percussionist Sheila E., and Wendy Melvoin, who played rhythm guitar on the periphery of Prince's spotlight until the Revolution disbanded in 1986. Although Prince surrounded himself with talented women in nearly all of his music videos, the emphasis was never on the group's musical proficiency, but rather the sexual competence of Prince himself; standing as the lone male in a sea of ladies, the self-made sex god set himself up to seem just as virile as he professed to be in his music.

Similarly surrounded by talented women in her music videos and live performances, Janelle Monáe nods to Prince both visually and musically in her own feminist fashion. Monáe's unique pop-funk sound does not orbit around the electric guitar in the fashion of St Vincent's glam-infused alternative rock, but both artists frequently play a guitar with the same sexualized authority attributed to His Purpleness. In both its music video and subsequent live renditions, "Make Me Feel" depicts Monáe strumming a blue Stratocaster; much of the choreography orbits around the guitar, channeling the close relationship Prince had with the instrument. In the modern rock music scape, an artist's command of the electric guitar is a statement of authority, demonstrating just how little has changed since Ronson and Bowie laid bare the phallic metaphor which the guitar imparts. Both Clark and Monáe take up the guitar on behalf of their gender—not in spite of it—to claim the power associated with the instrument and, in Clark's case, mock its phallic connotation. Clark's musical background is built upon the guitar, making her use of it onstage rather essential to the songs themselves. Monáe, on the other

hand, coheres primarily to the traditional pop star performance mode, singing and dancing without the confines of an instrument. Her use of the instrument during “Make Me Feel,” then, could be interpreted as a denial of stereotypical notions of the pop star, who is often perceived as more showgirl than “real” musician. Though she does no hefty guitar playing during her live performance of the song, Monáe’s choice to make the instrument an appendage to her choreography signals a bridge in the divide between the dated concept of woman as eye-catching mouthpiece and woman as true musician. Both Monáe and Clark position themselves as voices *and* conductors of their artistic visions, combatting rock music’s misogynistic tendencies one song at a time.

V. “This Woman’s Work”: Female Foundations of Glam

When glam rock is discussed as a distinct moment within the history of popular music, female artists are seldom used to typify the movement. The height of classic glam rock was dominated by male players with feminized performance techniques; though the actual lives of women were discarded by the genre, their decorative skins proved useful in its staging of sexual radicalism. Even so, several female artists dared to take up the glam style, ultimately exposing the manipulative, misogynistic tactics which punctuated much of glitter rock. Suzi Quatro stands out amongst glam icons of the early 1970s, for she was the only woman in rock to successfully invade the boys’ club. In doing so, however, Quatro embraced the “If you can’t beat ‘em...” compromise with a vigor many modern critics find disappointing. “If there was a problem with the Quatro stance, it was that she tended to identify power and autonomy with traits conventionally identified as ‘masculine’: hardness, roughness, coarseness, being unemotional (or

masking your emotions).”²⁸ Though Suzi Quatro marked gender bending as a practice accessible to female artists, she did so in a way that discredited traditional femininity; Quatro took up a masculine voice in order to be heard, but the sentiments that voice eventually carried were rather anti-feminist. Her refusal to join the Women’s Liberation movement and her disdain for the “lovey dovey” songs of other female artists made Quatro a problematic figure, albeit a groundbreaking one.²⁹ Though her silence on women's issues in the 1970s may have been a product of her precarious stance within the male-dominated glam rock field, her current views are similarly apolitical. When asked in a 2018 interview if she considers herself a feminist, Quatro replied “I’m a ‘me-ist’. Me me me. I don’t want labels. I don’t want any shit.”³⁰ Quatro’s desire to live without feminist concerns places her comfortably among her fellow ‘70s glam icons, who founded a style which placed entertainment value above ethics. Her signature catsuit and scrappy demeanor were innovative at their debut, but representations of femininity within rock music have outgrown Quatro’s model. Quatro fit nicely within an industry that favored masculine voices and female objectification, but contemporary looks at Quatro classify her place among the boys as a terribly limited one.

Clinging to the coattails of the early seventies glam wave, The Runaways forged a transitional space between glitter and punk. The emergence of the all-girl rock outfit in 1975 bore noticeable traces of Suzi Quatro, particularly present in guitarist Joan Jett’s boyish, leather-clad image. The notion of a hard-edged band comprised entirely of women was dismissed

²⁸ Reynolds, Simon. *Shock and Awe: Glam Rock and Its Legacy*. Faber, 2016, p. 202.

²⁹ Reynolds, Simon. *Shock and Awe: Glam Rock and Its Legacy*. Faber, 2016, p. 202-203.

³⁰ Dolman, Vincent, et al. “Rock Legend Suzi Quatro Reveals the One Thing She Doesn't Want You to Say to Her.” *Mirror*, 21 Oct. 2018, www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/suzi-quatro-reveals-never-set-13442806.

by many critics as a gimmick—an assumption which Kim Fowley’s involvement did little to refute. Calling the concept “America’s sweethearts mutated,” Fowley domineered The Runaways to the point of excess, driving lead singer Cherie Currie and guitarist Jackie Fox to quit the band before its final dissolution in 1979. Though the girls officially split with Fowley on the grounds of management issues, Fox’s issues with the producer are far more personal. In July 2015, Fox disclosed to the public that Fowley raped her at a New Year’s Eve party in 1975 while she was heavily sedated. Jason Cherkis, the journalist responsible for investigating Jackie Fox’s rape allegations against Kim Fowley, corroborates the proposed insidiousness of male producers like Fowley. In an interview with *Pitchfork*, Cherkis recounts a phrase that colored many of his interviews with possible witnesses: “If you didn't follow with what Kim wanted, that's because you didn't want to be a star enough.”³¹ Quotes like this bring up countless other abuses of male power in the rock world, with Ryan Adams being only the most recent addition to the industry’s long list of offenders. Described by Cherkis and many of his sources as a Svengali figure, Fowley garnered a troubling reputation that was protected for many years by the male-dominated music industry. “He was a predator,” Cherkis claims, who “went to a parochial school to hit on girls.”³² Nonetheless, Fowley’s concerning behavior has not entirely darkened the band’s legacy. The disbandment of The Runaways saw several of its members achieve individual success, both within and beyond the music industry. Joan Jett’s solo career is most pertinent to the discussion of feminist glam appropriations, though, especially when considering her popular covers of

³¹ Hopper, Jessica. "Journalist Jason Cherkis Discusses His Investigation Into Kim Fowley Rape Allegations." *Pitchfork*. July 10, 2015. Accessed March 24, 2019. <https://pitchfork.com/the-pitch/840-journalist-jason-cherkis-discusses-his-investigation-into-kim-fowley-rape-allegations/>.

³² *ibid.*

male-penned glitter rock tunes. Jett's version of The Sweet's "A.C.D.C." turns the song's heterosexual dynamic on its head as Jett embodies the masculine role (much like Suzi Quatro in "I Wanna Be Your Man"). Her most recognizable glam cover, "Do You Wanna Touch Me? (Oh Yeah)," eclipsed Gary Glitter's original in its popularity as well as its longevity—a result of Glitter's 2015 conviction for child pornography possession and the sexual abuse of underage girls. Jett's take on the now-disturbing glam bullet speaks to feminine agency rather than male depravity; her version simultaneously distances glitter rock from its glorification of male indulgence without condemning the men who took said indulgence to criminal extremes. With every play of Jett's "Do You Wanna Touch Me," the compromised position of female rockers who sought to redefine glam during its heyday is articulated; though the women of glam rock escalated its liberating potential to new heights, they could not ignore the fact that their success rested upon male shoulders.

A step further down the chronological pathway of glam's evolution is Grace Jones, a femme heralded for her unconventional looks and new wave dance records. Her imposing stature as a 5'10" Jamaican supermodel is matched by her commanding performances, which earned a young Jones the attention—and eventual obsession—of artist Jean-Paul Goude. Adhering to the pattern established by the broad history of toxic relations between male producers and aspiring female artists, Jones and Goude developed a romantic relationship which subjected the disco star to Goude's troublesome vision. "Goude treated Jones as an artistic vehicle first and foremost—a hyperbole which, despite destroying their personal relationship, allowed Goude to translate his grandiose vision of Jones the phenomenon into a series of imagery which painted her as a

surreal, impossible muse.”³³ The couple’s most famous collaboration, *One Man Show*, saw Jones touring her repertoire of electro-funk cover tunes as they were translated through Goude’s exoticizing lens. Habitually portraying Jones as a savage, alien, or non-human entity, Goude paints his muse in a light that perpetuates rather damaging notions of race and gender. The release of the photo book *Jungle Fever* suggests to Simon Reynolds that “[w]hat started for Goude as an already problematic obsession with blackness as the realer-than-real thing spirals into a disturbed fantasy.”³⁴ The legacy of Grace Jones as a binary-melting icon is partly indebted to Goude’s guiding hand (her signature shoulder pads and geometric haircut were his recommendations), but his influence as a well-respected man in the art world was not totally innocuous. No matter how indomitable the women of glam history appear in their performances, the reality beneath their impressive façades was too often ruled by the privilege and misuse of male authority. Gender subversion onstage was regularly orchestrated by men, whose seemingly progressive ideals enabled their unchecked exploitation of female labor.

Writing in 1978 on the sociology of rock music, Simon Frith calls attention to the industry’s preservation of sexist ideals beneath its guise of cultural insurgency. “If rock’s expression of the contradictions involved in the popular ideology of women is too powerful then those contradictions run the risk of being exploded—hence the common adult fear of rock’s sexiness, of its overtly sexual performers.”³⁵ The performers Frith mentions are assumedly male, suggesting that an untempered heterosexual desire among girl listeners is the outcome to be

³³ Hall, Jake. "Exploring the Complicated Relationship between Jean-paul Goude and Grace Jones." *I-D*. April 21, 2016. Accessed March 24, 2019. https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/d3v9k7/exploring-the-complicated-relationship-between-jean-paul-goude-and-grace-jones.

³⁴ Reynolds, Simon. *Shock and Awe: Glam Rock and Its Legacy*. Faber, 2016, p. 592

³⁵ Frith, Simon. *The Sociology of Rock*. Constable, 1979, p. 207.

feared. The limitations imposed on female performers throughout the mid-to-late twentieth century—and lack of female performers altogether—supports Frith’s claims; there was little enthusiasm for women who threatened traditional conceptions of the male/female dynamic, seeing as how the rock audience was highly saturated with male egos that relied on their perceived superiority. Despite these challenges, female artists have continued to infiltrate the rock scene and broaden its modes of representation. The “overtly sexual” performances which Frith presented as potential instigators of feminine actualization are in the rearview now, as many female performers in the 21st century are renouncing not only the reservations once ascribed to their sexualities but also the straight male hegemony which used to characterize rock. Today, the sexually liberated performers inciting feminine rebellion are themselves female, disrupting the exclusively male, heterosexual prerogative which once reigned supreme. As Frith put it in 1978, the widespread tendency to view female deviance in terms of sexual misbehavior classifies music as “a source of excitement and sensuality which keeps the possibility of an unconventional female future alive.”³⁶ This possibility of an unconventional female future grows even closer when women are given the opportunity to voice their own unique sensualities. Music has begun to directly represent the marginalized groups which were once embraced only as listeners and not creators themselves.

In the present socio-political climate, strides are being made to amend the historical lack of female involvement in the music industry. Popular, top-billed performers like Taylor Swift, Ariana Grande, and Beyoncé enjoy commercial success as well as artistic authority; these women have famously refused to comply with producers and companies which failed to meet

³⁶ *ibid*, p. 68.

their standards, whether it be Grammy's producer Ken Ehrlich or the streaming giant Spotify. The creative autonomy currently enjoyed by such artists is not without a precedent, though. The work of many female musicians in the twentieth century was relegated to the side stage of male stars all too frequently, making artists like Kate Bush rare exceptions to the trend. "Producing her own work in an industry in which a small percentage of women are producers, Kate Bush has maintained a level of control and integrity within her spellbinding music that few artists have matched."³⁷ Bush's artistry bears the influence of male icons like David Bowie, Roxy Music, and David Gilmour (who funded Bush's first demo), but unwavering femininity nonetheless remains at the forefront of her work. The womanly touch of Kate Bush is communicated both sonically, by her vaulting soprano voice, and thematically; expressly female accounts of sexual intimacy and pregnancy appear alongside musings on war and popular literature, undermining a popular belief that female songwriters are bound to confessional material. Released in 1978 when Bush was just 19 years old, *The Kick Inside* marked a change in the pop music paradigm. One of the album's standout tracks, "Wuthering Heights," placed Bush at the top of the U.K. charts—the first song performed and written by a woman to do so. "The album's focus on female sexuality, its use of voice as an instrument, and Bush's unique storytelling techniques — particularly her exciting use of fluid narrative identity, in which she changes identities and narrative point of view with every song — created a new, unprecedented model for women in music."³⁸ Bowie's influence on the fellow Brit is traceable in her character-driven songwriting, theatrical stage

³⁷ Peresman, Zoey. "The Kick Inside At 40: How Kate Bush Let The Weirdness In And Changed Music Forever." *Stereogum*. February 16, 2018. Accessed March 24, 2019. <https://www.stereogum.com/1982133/the-kick-inside-at-40-how-kate-bush-let-the-weirdness-in-and-changed-music-forever/franchises/sounding-board/>.

³⁸ *ibid.*

presence, and eccentricity, but perhaps their most interesting common thread is the mime tutelage of Lindsay Kemp. The communicative possibilities of dance foreground much of Kate Bush's work, as her physicality keeps the visual scheme of her live performances and videos on par with her captivatingly strange vocals. Whereas Bowie translated his mime background into various rock star personas, Bush took personal ownership of her theatricality, suggesting to audiences that her artistic output was an extension of herself and not the work of a constructed persona. The characters in Bush's songs were allowed to speak for themselves in her performances, but there was no question as to who held the creative reins offstage. Both donned leotards and glittery makeup throughout their careers, imbuing the popular music charts with their unique glam flourishes. Bush, however, was the first woman to unapologetically take up the feminized showiness of the glitter rock style; she played the game which men like Bowie and Bryan Ferry made cool, this time divorcing it from its masculine edge in order to embrace glam's full potential for sensuality.

Bush's value as a hinge between early, male-dominated glam and its contemporary transformations is evinced by the various commentators on *The Kate Bush Story* (BBC, 2014). Annie Clark is featured in the documentary as a Kate Bush super-fan, speaking on her admiration for Bush's avant-garde songwriting approach and unapologetic creative vision. This inspiration is palpable in much of Clark's work; albums such as *Actor* (2009) and *St. Vincent* (2014) toy with daring melodic shifts and digital manipulation simultaneously, showcasing a mode of art rock that would likely not exist without Bush's example. Far more unexpected is Big Boi's inclusion in the film; best known as one half of the rap/hip hop duo Outkast, the Afrofuturist producer is partly responsible for launching Janelle Monáe's music career (he can also be heard

on Monáe’s “Tightrope”). Big Boi’s enthusiasm for Kate Bush’s music exemplifies the tether between modern Afrofuturist music and the original glam sensibility. He describes her 1985 hit “Running Up That Hill” as “one of his all time favorite songs,” with Kate’s evocative songwriting serving as “one of his biggest influences.”³⁹ The song itself does mark a notable intersection between the sound of the early 1970s and the music industry’s electronically-advanced present. Working primarily with a CS-80 synthesizer on her first few albums, *Hounds of Love* showed Bush utilizing the Fairlight synth and Linndrum machine to create more modern, striking textures. This departure from the live rock n’ roll setup which provided the distinct sound of the Ziggy Stardust era reveals a bend toward the tech-heavy foundations of futurist—and Afrofuturist—art.

VI. Electric Ladies: Feminist Possibilities of Futurism and Science Fiction

A gaze set on the future serves as a common trait among many glam personalities. The birth of alien rocker Ziggy Stardust crystallized the connection between glitter rock and science fiction, though Bowie had illuminated his space fascination years earlier with “Space Oddity” and “Life on Mars?” Ziggy’s flaming orange mullet, heavy makeup, and vibrant spandex bodysuits established his alienness even before the first lines of his extraterrestrial tunes were sung. His estrangement from society was broadcast all over his body, making the thematic centrality of alienation on *The Rise and Fall*... seem almost superfluous. To Ken McLeod, “[s]pace and alien imagery... form a consistent and recurring trope in rock music that is particularly important in resisting reductive worldviews, commonly associated with scientific

³⁹ *The Kate Bush Story: Running Up That Hill*. Directed by Adrian Sibley. BBC. 2014.

essentialism, and in providing an empowering voice to many marginalized identities.”⁴⁰ The strangeness and effeminacy of Bowie’s onstage persona marked him as a queer icon, regardless of the artist’s actual identification. Though songs like “Five Years” disclose a dystopian pessimism toward the future, the album’s closing track, “Rock ’N’ Roll Suicide” emits the warmth of companionship with its soaring repetition of “You’re not alone”—despite the martyrdom of Ziggy himself. This chorus provided a rallying cry for the hordes of early Bowie fans who failed to fit within normal society, establishing glam rock as a place of refuge beyond the confines of reality.

This offbeat, futuristic tone is repurposed by Prince with his 1982 release of “1999.” In the dance hit, Prince considers the apocalypse of Bowie’s “Five Years” with an upbeat abandon, embodying a far more positive look at endtimes. The popular single opens with a heavily modulated voice that states with robotic delivery, “I don’t want to hurt you, I only want you to have some fun.” What may be Afrofuturist flourish is likely just a gimmicky intro to the dance hit, but the song nonetheless envisions a future filled with joy in the face of tragedy. This hopeful spirit harkens back to the roots of black American musical tradition, which emphasized artful escapes from a reality governed by racism. Ken McLeod addresses the value of this thematic tendency:

In general, rock, pop, dance and hip-hop music’s use of futuristic space and alien themes denotes a related alienation from traditionally dominant cultural structures, subverting the often racist and heterosexist values of these genres themselves. It often represents a neo-

⁴⁰ McLeod, Ken. “Space Oddities: Aliens, Futurism and Meaning in Popular Music.” *Popular Music*, vol. 22 no. 3, 2003, pp. 338. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3877579.

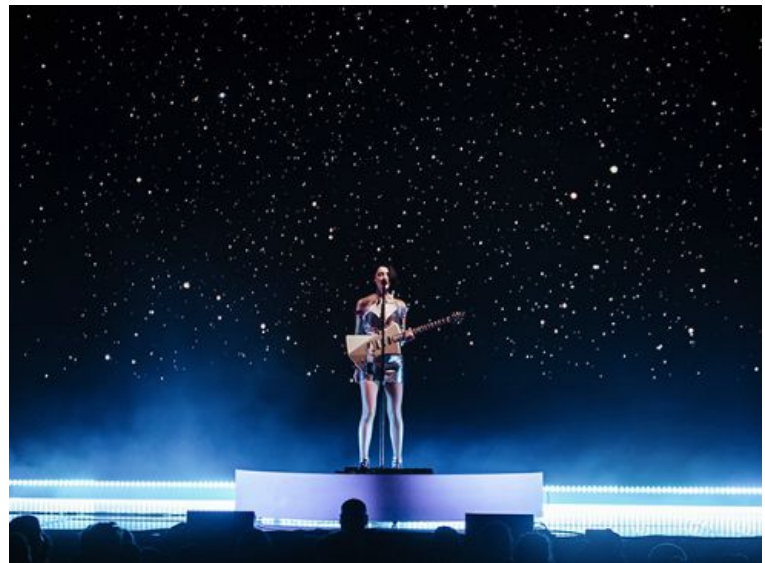
Gnostic withdrawal from the world and its institutions - an artificial escape from social reality, from commitment, from one's self, and into a utopian future.⁴¹

Though the aim of “1999” is likely not to subvert racism or heterosexist hegemony, Prince’s presentation throughout the first decade of his career spoke to a deconstruction of strict gender roles. The sexually fluid style of Prince directed listeners away from accepted norms, as his lasting importance to queer culture is largely attributed to his unconventional physicality. A slender man of only 5’2” with a penchant for eyeliner, Prince emanated a nontraditional sensuality that challenged longstanding masculine ideals. Though he never donned a spandex suit or sang about space travel, Prince stood as an alien presence in the grand scheme of 1980s popular music. Rather than hiding the characteristics that set Prince apart from the music industry’s white, cisgendered majority, he accentuated them; his feminine traits and his racial identity were forecast by his tight crop tops and Jheri curl hairstyle. Despite these superficial novelties, Prince’s outspoken heterosexuality remained at the forefront of his work, thus overpowering his ties to minority groups. Ultimately, David Bowie and Prince broadened the spectrum of masculinity, but their respective male gazes were not locked on any sort of utopian horizon. The iconic looks both of these artists championed, however, did lay the groundwork for otherness within the mainstream—a phenomenon which Janelle Monáe and St. Vincent now seek to intensify.

The cyborg character is one which pervades the creative catalogues of both St. Vincent and Janelle Monáe—though Monáe draws on the motif with much more deliberation. These women use android performances to philosophize the future and critique the present, though the

⁴¹ McLeod, Ken. “Space Oddities: Aliens, Futurism and Meaning in Popular Music.” *Popular Music*, vol. 22 no. 3, 2003, pp. 353. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3877579.

purely pictorial aspects of these performances are also worth mentioning. While there is a mechanized strangeness to the accompanying videos and live performances of *MASSEDUCTION*, St. Vincent's flair for the nonhuman is most salient in performances of her 2014 self-titled album. The video for "Digital Witness," directed by Chino Moya, reimagines the factory-driven purgatory of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) in pastel tones. Uniformed automatons march around a barren server farm and perform repetitive, mindless tasks in what seems to be a parody of Lang's expressionistic sci-fi society. St. Vincent's surreal hairdo is the only thing in the frame which seems to have any dimension; the expressions and movements of every person on screen are utterly flat and synchronized. Live performances in promotion of *St. Vincent* mirror the calculated choreography of "Digital Witness," with Clark and her keyboardist Toko Yasuda executing perfectly synced movements along to the tracks. Both musicians are



affectless and stilted, causing them to look less human with every "dance" move they complete. The lyrical content of "Digital Witness" muses on the toxic sway of technology, particularly the mounting obsession with social media. The album artwork displays its titular star on a minimalistic, pastel pink throne overlaid with unidentified symbols; a silvery perm, metallic gown, and unfeeling stare pose St. Vincent as an alien queen simultaneously reminiscent of Prince and Bowie, yet withholding of her own true identity. The façade the songstress maintains

on *St. Vincent* is rather icy, but the 2017 release of *MASSEDUCTION* witnesses a vibrant, sexualized twist on the artist's detached act. Even so, her most recent tour featured a faceless backing band and minimal set construction; the futuristic air of *St. Vincent* has not been lost to her newfound feminine sexuality, but rather combined with it to stretch glam's sci-fi scope.

Even more indebted to science fiction is Janelle Monáe, whose entire body of musical work hinges upon futuristic narratives. "Monáe introduced to us her own blend of futurism and created a universe in which she explores it, through a character and alter-ego named Cindi Mayweather, a cyborg in a dystopian future who represents the 'new other.'"⁴² Whereas otherness was detectable predominantly in the aesthetic choices of early glam artists, Monáe sculpts her entire catalogue around the stories of 'other' beings—i.e. Cindi Mayweather and *Dirty Computer*'s Jane 57821. Looking far beyond the year 1999 while still channeling Prince's signature grooves, Monáe blends her vision of an android-riddled future with auditory nostalgia; even so, Monáe's lyrical focus is more complicated than the partying or heterosexual desire underlying most Prince hits. Though she sounds at times like James Brown, Erykah Badu, or (most noticeably) Prince, Monáe's narrative and visual content inhabits a futuristic world where cyborgs and humans coexist. Lang's 1927 *Metropolis* is also a tenet of Monáe's futuristic discography, an influence revealed explicitly by her sophomore EP, entitled, *Metropolis: Suite I*. Monáe's visuals regularly paint her as a fusion of machine and human characteristics, but her womanly attributes are never secondary to the robotic touches. The EP's album artwork features Monáe as an incomplete cyborg with silver skin and wires in place of veins, harkening back to the gynoid erected in the film *Metropolis*; following Lang's lead, the womanly traits of

⁴² "Analysis: Janelle Monáe and Posthumanism – the Cyborg." *EchoticMusic*. January 22, 2014. <https://echoticmusic.wordpress.com/2014/01/22/analysis-janelle-monae-and-posthumanism-the-cyborg/>.

Monáe/Cindi Mayweather—e.g. pompadour up-do, makeup, and breasts—are not obscured by her android attributes.

Further elaborating the metaphorical resonance of the cyborg, Monáe told *Rolling Stone*, “You can compare [the android] to being a lesbian or being a gay man or being a black woman... what I want is for people who feel oppressed or feel like the 'other' to connect with the music and to feel like, 'She represents who I am.’”⁴³ Like Cindi Mayweather, Monáe herself is a messianic figure to those fans of her music who do not check normative boxes. Encouraging identification not with herself, per se, but with decidedly feminine characters, Monáe’s art pushes both the science fiction genre and the various genres of music she employs to not only accept female perspectives but also understand them. Donna Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” illuminates the possibilities which the cyborg presents to women, who have been conditioned to view themselves according to strict gender codes.

Up till now (once upon a time), female embodiment seemed to be given, organic, necessary; and female embodiment seemed to mean skill in mothering and its metaphoric extensions. Only by being out of place could we take intense pleasure in machines, and then with excuses that this was organic activity after all, appropriate to females. Cyborgs might consider more seriously the partial, fluid, sometimes aspect of sex and sexual embodiment. Gender might not be global identity after all, even if it has profound historical breadth and depth.⁴⁴

⁴³ Spanos, Brittany. "Janelle Monáe Frees Herself." *Rolling Stone*. June 25, 2018. Accessed March 24, 2019. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/janelle-monae-frees-herself-629204/>.

⁴⁴ Haraway, Donna J. *Manifestly Haraway*, University of Minnesota Press, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/warw/detail.action?docID=4392065>, p. 65-66.

This womanly station is challenged by the recent works of St. Vincent, who casts a critical, parodic light on conventions of femininity. Domesticity, sexuality, and feminine beauty standards are artfully cracked open in the music videos accompanying *MASSEDUCTION*. The album's title track repeats the mantra, "I can't turn off what turns me on"—an unapologetic spirit which carries throughout the album. The video for "Pills" presents the 1950s housewife as an automaton of sorts, ingesting colorful pills in order to generate a frozen, robotic smile and mannequin-like posture. The imagery seems to critique dated gender roles, which relegated women to the home and made objects of them; the performances of the actors in "Pills" are eerie and mechanical, illustrating the rigidity of the traditional gender binary—especially as it pertains to women. Haraway's issue with notions of femininity that demand maternal or domestic ability is underlined by St. Vincent's visuals, which portray the housewife's self-imposed cerebral escape from the confines of her everyday life. "Los Ageless" also displays the damaging narrowness of male-determined gender roles in its parody of female beautification. Its horrific and absurd take on the female's measures toward physical perfection echoes Haraway's condemnation of the typical gender binary, in which a woman's potential is circumscribed by male hegemony. Haraway's manifesto does not stop with mere critique of societal structure, though, for "[c]yborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves."⁴⁵ The solutions which the cyborg presents to our imbalanced society are explored by the work of Janelle Monáe—an artist whose futuristic focus explores her intricate reality as a queer woman of color.

⁴⁵ Haraway, Donna J. *Manifestly Haraway*, University of Minnesota Press, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/warw/detail.action?docID=4392065>, p. 67.

Since the release of her 2008 EP *Metropolis*, Monáe has modeled herself as a cyborg in order to comfortably deconstruct her own identity as a black woman in America. Seeing both women and people of color as notoriously silenced populations, Haraway proposes that “‘women of color’ might be understood as a cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity synthesized from fusions of ‘outsider’ identities...”⁴⁶ Embodying the cyborg savior in most of her musical fictions, Monáe melds the various outsider identities to which she personally identifies into one mechanized body. She uses her musical science fiction epics to speak for the whole spectrum of marginalized groups—all those beyond the margin of white, cisgendered, heterosexual existence. To Haraway, “the cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self,” further insisting that “[t]his is the self feminists must code.”⁴⁷ The gender-fusing effect of the pompadour/tuxedo combo which denoted Monáe’s early style points to the artist’s views on femininity and her own heritage—views which are becoming more outspoken as Monáe’s sci-fi narrative continues to evolve. The black and white color scheme favored by the artist is an homage to her working class parents, who were constantly in uniforms throughout Monáe adolescence.⁴⁸ The fitted suits she wears in most of her live performances is a subversion of gender norms, allowing Monáe’s sexuality to remain ambiguous without sacrificing her sex appeal. This signature ambiguity has waned, however, as the 2018 release of *Dirty Computer* has seen Monáe’s monochromatic suits replaced by more whimsical attire; the wardrobe change reflects a personal freedom within the star, who has recently stepped out from behind her cyborg

⁴⁶ Haraway, Donna J. *Manifestly Haraway*, University of Minnesota Press, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/warw/detail.action?docID=4392065>, p. 54.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p. 33

⁴⁸ Wilson, Julee. "Revealed: Why Janelle Monáe Always Wears Black-And-White..." *The Huffington Post*. April 05, 2013. Accessed March 24, 2019. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/05/janelle-monae-essence-dinner-party_n_3021450.html?utm_hp_ref=mostpopular.

mask. The album takes the sexual progressivity ascribed to the theatrics of glam rock to a more earnest plane, swapping the glittery fictions of Ziggy Stardust for the realistic representation which Monáe's *Jane 57821* provides.

After viewing science fiction classics such as *Metropolis*, *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979), and *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), Monáe states she “started to look at the android as the form of the other, all the discrimination that the android faced in these films,” and related to “the idea of being the minority within the majority.”⁴⁹ The creation of Cindi Mayweather allowed Monáe to cast this plight of the minority onto her musical narratives, using the Mayweather metaphor to tackle issues of prejudice, classism, and racism simultaneously. Monáe's use of science fiction themes to discuss race is what initially set her apart from her glam counterparts, marking her as an Afrofuturist rather than a mere pupil of Bowie. In addition, Monáe's performative personas do not speak for a sense of marginalization to which she bears no personal claim. Alienation, displacement, and enslavement are several of the key commonalities between African-American history and projections of a technologically-advanced future—commonalities which the works of artists like Monáe, Erykah Badu, and Flying Lotus dissect. The cyborg vessel through which Monáe communicates brings these linkages to the foreground of her art, though many listeners fail to see these concepts beneath her infectious hooks. “This 'inexplicable mashup' - the call-and-response between past and future - is what distinguishes the Afrofuturist from your garden-variety 'black musician into sci-fi' and brings to the fore perceptions that African-Americans have always symbolically been human and non-human: ‘In the era of slavery, people of African descent were human enough to live and love and have culture, but

⁴⁹ Carroll, Jim. "Minority Report." *The Irish Times*. July 09, 2010. Accessed March 24, 2019. <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/music/2.681/minority-report-1.619627>.

were nonhuman to the extent that they were 'machines', labour for capitalism'.⁵⁰ Monáe personifies the machine in all of her works, imbuing Cindi Mayweather, Jane 57821, and their android counterparts with deep, human feeling. These robotic characters fight for emancipation from the forces striving to dehumanize them, signaling Monáe's strong Afrofuturist allegiance. Afrofuturist author Ytasha L. Womack points to Sun Ra and George Clinton (the mastermind behind Parliament/Funkadelic) as the originators of the Afrofuturist sound and aesthetic, which elevates the African diaspora away from the limitations of earthly existence.⁵¹ Monáe's work is similarly optimistic, though she certainly does not shy away from showcasing the oppressive forces which seek to stop minority progress.

Though Monáe's sound draws upon a number of genres including glam, funk, and soul, her connection to hip hop is one which recognizes the genre's past in its illustration of the future. The video for "Pynk" is reminiscent for TLC's "Baby, Baby, Baby," another video which depicts a harmonious space populated exclusively by black women. Monáe directly nods to the women of TLC in "I Like That," dubbing herself "a little crazy, little sexy, little cool" in honor of the trio's seminal 1994 album. Both artists craft legacies of unity among women of color, though Monáe takes the TLC precedent to a more feminist future. Thomas F. DeFrantz avers the limitations of TLC's sci-fi vision in the video for "No Scrubs": "While the song is lyrically about women who 'don't want no scrubs', the effect of the video as a whole is chilly, extravagant, and masculinist, tying aggressive black female desire to an impossible futuristic space."⁵² Monáe

⁵⁰ Calvert, John. "Opinion | Black Sky Thinking | Janelle Monáe: A New Pioneer Of Afrofuturism." *The Quietus*. September 2, 2010.

<https://thequietus.com/articles/04889-janelle-mon-e-the-archandroid-afrofuturism>.

⁵¹ Womack, Ytasha L. *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-fi and Fantasy Culture*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013, p. 50-57.

⁵² DeFrantz, Thomas F. "Believe the Hype: Hype Williams and Afrofuturist Filmmaking." *Refractory*. May 30, 2011. Accessed March 24, 2019.

presents an android version of herself, much like the women of TLC, but her cyborg imagery supports a metaphor of the minority group's liberation. Even so, Monáe's robotic leanings bear certain imperfections. Her choice to embody a feminized cyborg—modeled after *Metropolis*' false Maria—dredges up Lang's misogynistic gestures, such as the film's pleasure in simultaneously demonizing and objectifying its lone female character. Similarly, Monáe's use of the android Cindi Mayweather as an artistic conduit arguably served to dehumanize those minority groups she sought to represent. Her recent embodiment of Jane 57821 in the *Dirty Computer* Emotion Picture marks a necessary shift in Monáe's storytelling tactics; if she seeks to provide an empathic voice for others like her, their humanity should not be sacrificed for the sake of sci-fi style. In addition, the adoption of a human persona in place of an android allows Monáe to depict the fluidity and agency of her sex without robotic constraints. The latest evolutionary stage of Monáe's work is typified by music videos which are vibrantly colored and dominated by human women. Monáe's updated futuristic realm believes black feminine agency to be triumphant, which the conclusion of the *Dirty Computer* Emotion Picture makes clear.

VII. *Dirty Computer*

The 46-minute Emotion Picture encasing the music videos for Monáe's *Dirty Computer* threads together a minority manifesto. *Dirty Computer* does not mark Monáe's first concept-driven work, however; since the release of her *Metropolis: Suite I* EP in 2007, Monáe has been working to weave together intricate sci-fi narratives in her music. The concept album has deep roots in hip hop as well as Afrofuturism—a musical crossroads Monáe knows well.

<http://refractory.unimelb.edu.au/2003/08/27/believe-the-hype-hype-williams-and-afrofuturist-filmmaking-thomas-f-defrantz/>.

Erykah Badu, Lauryn Hill, Kendrick Lamar, and The Roots are just several among many hip hop artists who have tackled the concept album with commercial success; few artists, however, have chosen to pair works like these with filmic accompaniments. Parliament's *Mothership Connection* is perhaps the most well known Afrofuturist concept album, though Bowie's *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* stands out as a novel link between popular music and science fiction. It was Afrofuturist pioneer Sun Ra, though, who first transported such space-age musical themes to the screen. *Space Is the Place* is a 1972 science fiction film scored entirely by Sun Ra and his Arkestra; the film's plot centers upon a quest to transport—with the aid of music—the entire black populace to a space colony. Though its narrative is somewhat convoluted, “its celebration of the unity of life is clear.”⁵³ This sense of power in community foregrounds another monumental concept album: Beyoncé's *Lemonade* (2016). Pride in femininity, autonomy, and blackness are principal tenets of *Lemonade*, making its similarities to the *Dirty Computer* rather salient. Whereas Beyoncé threaded each song on her album into a feature-length music video, Monáe imbedded several of the tracks on *Dirty Computer* into a science fiction narrative. In this way, Monáe's Emotion Picture presents a fusion of the fictional film and the visual concept album, mixing a varied milieu of inspirations into a fresh mode of storytelling.

Where Monáe's previous albums orbited the revolutionary aims of Cindi Mayweather, *Dirty Computer* looks to a new narrative that is equally mired in science fiction but far closer to Janelle's own life. Jane 57821, the Emotion Picture's protagonist, is shockingly human, showing a departure from Monáe's usual android-driven narratives. In “Make Me Feel” Monáe is

⁵³ Womack, Ytasha L. *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-fi and Fantasy Culture*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013, p. 62.

straightforward with her wants, imploring in the first line, “Baby don’t make me spell it out for you.” Her sexuality is upfront across the album, though on previous records Monáe did, in fact, nearly resort to spelling it out for listeners. Doreen St. Félix notes the artist’s reluctance to disclose her sexuality on 2013’s *The Electric Lady*, changing the title of ‘Q.U.E.E.N.’ from its original title—‘Q.U.E.E.R.’—at the last minute (which explains why the word “queer” can still be heard in the background vocals).⁵⁴ *Dirty Computer* builds upon the traces of Monáe which could be detected in the character of Cindi Mayweather, this time communicating her Afrofuturist message with far more emotion.

Jane 57821 is a human rather than an android, but her technologically-advanced environment is a testament to Monáe’s continued devotion to fictional futurism in her art. The first music video of the Emotion Picture, “Crazy, Classic Life,” houses Monáe’s real-world experiences and inspiration in a dystopian setting. Her character, Jane, is as close to the real Janelle as listeners have ever come; even so, there is a glam-derived distance that keeps *Dirty Computer* from being a strictly confessional album. “Monáe’s personae draw on artists, from Bessie Smith to Freddie Mercury, who have communicated through metaphor, for self-protection, and through camp, for glamour.”⁵⁵ The film’s first video puts Monáe’s artistic influences on parade, depicting a crew of Ziggy-era Bowie look-alikes among two gold-painted women who resemble the ones in Prince’s “Violet the Organ Grinder.” They mingle with a smorgasbord of other cliques, including a group of punks, cloaked witch-like figures, and Monáe’s own leather jacketed crew of fellow black women. The variety of styles and identities

⁵⁴ Félix, Doreen St. "The Otherworldly Concept Albums of Janelle Monáe." *The New Yorker*. February 08, 2019. Accessed March 24, 2019.

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-otherworldly-concept-albums-of-janelle-monae>.

⁵⁵ *ibid*.



on display in “Crazy, Classic, Life” does not foster discord among the factions, although the Bowie doubles exhibit a standoffishness that the others cliques do not. Monáe has invited these inspirations to the



party, but her style does not align too closely with any of them; instead, she rocks an updated version of her usual black-and-white, having swapped the tuxes for a flouncy dress that she pairs with punk-ish accessories and rainbow eyeshadow. Monáe is aware of style as it functions to signify belonging, and her unique hybrid of fashions suggests that her individuality harbors a wide range of sources.

Of all the videos comprising *Dirty Computer*, “Make Me Feel” and “Pynk” generated the most buzz upon their release. Perhaps it was the warm tones and utter humanness of these videos which caught off guard devoted followers of Monáe, who undoubtedly expected the artist to maintain her monochromatic, streamlined aesthetic. These videos place Monáe’s work close to

that of St. Vincent, for whom glam tendencies provided a creative bedrock for her 2017 release *MASSEDUCTION*. St. Vincent’s animated Alex Da Corté sets and richly varied textures bear a strong likeness to the environments crafted in “Pynk” (directed by Emma Westenberg) and “Make Me Feel” (Alan Ferguson), both of which exude a technicolor playfulness. “[T]he flat colors, the disembodied legs, the bodies swaddled completely in latex,” which permeate the visual styles of both Janelle Monáe and St. Vincent, “seem to be part of an incipient visual lexicon of female queerness... one that encompasses play, irony, desire, and, most of all, joy.”⁵⁶

Overt sexiness is a pillar of not only *MASSEDUCTION* (not surprising given the album’s



title) but also certain tracks of *Dirty Computer*—“Make Me Feel” in particular. The artists both embody a confidence in their queerness which was not palpable in their previous works. Whether manifested by a litany of pink thigh high boots or an army of femme Black Panther proteges, the empowerment which reverberates across *MASSEDUCTION* and *Dirty Computer* resides comfortably among their hotly colored folds. Bright monochrome hues litter the videos

⁵⁶ Geffen, Sasha. "Janelle Monáe Steps Into Her Bisexual Lighting." *Vulture*. February 23, 2018. Accessed March 24, 2019. <https://www.vulture.com/2018/02/janelle-mone-steps-into-her-bisexual-lighting.html>.

accompanying both of these albums, giving a distinct Day-Glo aesthetic to the recent works of Clark and Monáe. Monáe's "Pynk," directed by Emma Westenberg, is swathed in the titular color; the video features the same warm sunset tones Westenberg shot for Troye Sivan's "Lucky Strike," affirming the director's eye for rose-tinted landscapes and queer popstars. Rhythmic intercutting also features heavily in Westenberg's work—a technique prominent in the video for St. Vincent's "Los Ageless." Brief flashes of glowing, color-blocked images break up the longer shots in "Pynk" and "Los Ageless," interrupting their narratives with pop art stills. The striking color palettes of these pictures are occasionally tempered by neon softness, which "Pills" and "Make Me Feel" display most obviously. Both videos showcase a recognizable, vintage glow—the same look which characterizes *Black Mirror's* queer romance "San Junipero." St. Vincent and Janelle Monáe each vacillate between sexy fun and seriousness in their music, but their visual choices continuously orbit a boldly colored (and familiarly queer) aesthetic.

Taking notes from St. Vincent's latest work, *Dirty Computer* drips with hyper-sexualized mobility in its standout single "Make Me Feel." Jonathan Leal unpacks Monáe's "public display of interiority" as it is mapped onto the music video's setting: "If, as sociologist Pamela Leong puts it, the graffiti in bathroom stalls (or, charmingly, latrinalia) is 'aimed at future occupants' and, historically, written 'for the eyes of the same sex,' in Monáe's video, the scrawl reaches further, queering the space by placing a statement of bisexual acknowledgement and affirmation—'girl u like this one and the same'—on view for any willing to read."⁵⁷ The song, in many ways, is an appropriate follow-up to 2013's "Q.U.E.E.N." video, which sees Janelle subtly perforating her art with an admittance of her queer sexuality. Whereas "Q.U.E.E.N." was

⁵⁷ Vernallis, Carol, Ellis, Gabriel Zane, and Jonathan James Leal. "Janelle Monáe's *Dirty Computer* Music Video/Film: A Collective Reading."

ensconced in black and white, “Make Me Feel” is drenched in neon color; both videos include doubles of Monáe—a visual motif taken to its extreme in the video for “I Like That.” When interpreted as a follow-up to “Q.U.E.E.N.,” the multicolored visuals in “Make Me Feel,” coupled with its declarative rather than interrogative lyrics, signify Monáe’s coming-out. She has swapped the monochromatic suits for a more freeing wardrobe and thrown her sexual liberation to center stage. The dual Monáes in the video function as a personification of this psychological transformation; within the club scene, the brightly dressed, laid back blonde incarnation of the artist reaches out to the hesitant, black-and-white-striped newcomer. The “Personality Crisis” made famous by the New York Dolls is traversed much more artfully by Monáe, whose distinctive rendering of glam employs digital trickery to clarify the singer’s inner complexity. The pink and blue “bisexual lighting” of “Make Me Feel” more subtly approaches the same metaphor enacted by the doubling of Janelle Monáe, which makes tangible her interior conflict; to drop the androgynous guise of Cindi Mayweather and own even the most controversial aspects of her lived identity is a daring move for Monáe, but it appears she just can’t—or *won’t*—fight her feelings anymore.

Da’Shan Smith foregrounds his analysis of Monáe’s 2010 hit “Tightrope” with the claim, “Androgyny plays a major part in the intersectionality of Afrofuturism and queer artistic expression.”⁵⁸ Monáe wore her usual black-and-white suit ensemble in all of her live performances to accompany *The ArchAndroid*. *Dirty Computer*’s “Django Jane” name-checks this exact phase in order to call out those critics of her early work who saw Janelle’s tuxedoed

⁵⁸ Smith, Shan. “The Modern Intersectionality of Afrofuturistic Music and Queer Artistry Is Something to Celebrate.” *REVOLT TV*. June 01, 2018. Accessed March 24, 2019. <https://revolt.tv/stories/2018/06/01/modern-intersectionality-afrofuturistic-music-queer-artistry-0700a2ad> a1.

style as looking “too mannish.”⁵⁹ Her original *Metropolis*-fueled aesthetic resembled David Bowie (a fellow fan of German Expressionism) in his 1979 SNL performance; Bowie, carried in by two alien-like background singers, dons a boxy, monochromatic suit to perform “The Man Who Sold the World” with calculated composure. Monáe shrouded herself in a similar monochrome shell during the first stage of her career, performing behind an android persona and sticking to her uniformed comfort zone. *Dirty Computer* transmits a break in Monáe’s adherence to a traditionally masculine sci-fi mold; she now embraces the multifaceted femininity of Jane 57821, opening her art to a more colorful palette of expressivity. Monáe’s coy handling of her identity—a trait typical of glam rockers both on and off-stage—abates as *Dirty Computer* progresses. While “Pynk” attacks current politics and feminism (e.g. the panties declaring “I grab back”), it does so with a non-confrontational tone; the same can be said of Monáe’s queerness as it is communicated by “Make Me Feel.” The album’s sole rap track, “Django Jane,” on the other hand, is a direct and unsmiling demonstration of Monáe’s pride in her racial identity.

Her blackness is addressed just as openly as her gender and sexual identity throughout the album, but “Django Jane” does not possess the danceable nonchalance of the album’s other numbers. Though her current videos display a thematic shift toward Monáe’s own womanly experience, her Afrofuturist emphasis has not dissipated in the slightest. Instead of focusing solely on a fictionalized, futuristic landscape, Monáe’s latest work takes a moment to honor the real history of her race. “Django Jane” prioritizes black empowerment in its visuals, which features a throned Monáe in red power suit and matching kofia flanked by a leather-studded girl gang in red fezzes (undoubtedly a feminized reimagining of the Black Panther Party). Like

⁵⁹ Monáe, Janelle. “Django Jane.” *YouTube*, 22 Feb. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTjQq5rMIEY.

Beyoncé's *Lemonade*, Monáe features a black girl pack throughout her visual album; Monáe's *Emotion Picture*, though, veers into political territory more overtly than *Lemonade*, focusing on not only African American womanhood but also the American political landscape as a whole. Whereas Beyoncé's ensemble of black women is modeled in the style of Julie Dash's diasporic feature *Daughters of the Dust*, Monáe's crew alternates between feminist statement pieces ("Pynk"), Black Panther regalia ("Django Jane"), and glam-fueled party-wear ("Make Me Feel"). The gamut of black, female, queer existence is explored both lyrically and visually in Monáe's narrativized quest for empowerment; *Dirty Computer* recognizes the "wokeness" of its creator, who emphasizes her wish for the rest of the world to wake up as well.

Emerging from the guise of android Cindi Mayweather (the focus of Monáe's first three records), Monáe uses the music videos comprising the *Dirty Computer* *Emotion Picture* to showcase the various pillars of her personality. Black pride, unapologetic femininity, queerness, and social justice are the most salient themes of *Dirty Computer*—all of which represent the artist's personal values. Monáe dedicated 2018's *Dirty Computer* to all those who may feel as though their identities are imperfect: "I want young girls, young boys, non-binary, gay, straight, queer people who are having a hard time dealing with their sexuality, dealing with feeling ostracized or bullied for just being their unique selves, to know that I see you... this album is for you."⁶⁰ Unlike Bowie, whose play of the queer card was ultimately discounted by the rockstar as a camp-laden bluff, Monáe has embraced her nontraditional sexuality as a pillar of her work. The *Dirty Computer* *Emotion Picture* poses Monáe's character as a sexual partner to both men and women, represented in the film by Jayson Aaron and Tessa Thompson. Monáe's performance of

⁶⁰ Spanos, Brittany. "Janelle Monáe Frees Herself." *Rolling Stone*. June 25, 2018. Accessed March 24, 2019. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/janelle-monae-frees-herself-629204/>.

sexual fluidity is corroborated by her recent declaration of pansexuality, a confession made to *Rolling Stone*'s Brittany Spanos that bore none of Bowie's infamous cheekiness. In his book *Performing Glam Rock*, Phillip Auslander writes, "Glam rock treated the stage as a liminal space in which things could happen that had no necessary counterpart in external reality."⁶¹ Monáe's previous albums relied on this liminal space to consider not only Afrofuturist possibilities but also sexually fluid realities. The narrative of *Dirty Computer*'s Emotion Picture constructs the liminal space once again with its dystopian setting, but Monáe's videos circle a human protagonist, who reifies the African American experience and queer identity of the artist herself. Monáe's increasing ownership of her personal beliefs has introduced the idea that her beautifully constructed liminal spaces *do* in fact have a realistic basis. Her intentions with *Dirty Computer* are not well hidden; there is very little camp to her performances, signaling Monáe's separation from the disingenuous artistry of her mentors. "[Monáe's] is the purest interpretation of the pop star as cipher—a human on whom misfits of race, of love, and of gender can project their own aspirational fictions."⁶² In this sense, Monáe herself is the liminal space, providing a site of refuge for fans who have not personally accessed the agency of their sci-fi idol.

VIII. MASSEDUCTION:

A 2015 *GQ* article titled "St. Vincent: Our David Bowie," demonstrates the media's habit of categorizing female artists in masculine terms. Rather than being discussed on the

⁶¹ Auslander, Philip. *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music*. University of Michigan Press, 2006, p. 152.

⁶² Félix, Doreen St. "The Otherworldly Concept Albums of Janelle Monáe." *The New Yorker*. February 08, 2019. Accessed March 24, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-otherworldly-concept-albums-of-janelle-monae>.

grounds of her creativity alone, she is immediately compared to a complementary male artist, making her *St. Vincent: A Female Bowie Spinoff*. In all fairness, her glam rock tendencies were a cornerstone of her 2014 self-titled album, making the comparison to Bowie understandable; in addition, *St. Vincent* made the two artists' similarities—of both sound and vision—hard to miss. Most directly Bowie-derived is the five step melodic leap during the chorus of “Severed Crossed Fingers,” which replicates the chorus of “Life on Mars?” almost exactly. Even when she isn't neatly mirroring Bowie's sonic movements, St. Vincent is channeling a brand of art rock for the intellectual listener, puncturing her music with allusions to high-brow culture and literature in true Bowie fashion. However, the release of *MASSEDUCTION* exhibits St. Vincent's restlessness from inside the Bowie box. The 2017 album declares that St. Vincent does not require male predecessors upon which to model her work; furthermore, it seems she doesn't require men at all.

St. Vincent's most recent appropriation of glam rock is one structured around womanly bodies and feminine looks. The videos for “Los Ageless” and “New York” feature only women, while “Pills” features a single male actor. These female-dominated scenarios are not designed with the male gaze in mind, setting them apart from most popular music videos centered upon a female star. In fact, the most overpowering form of looking is that of Clark herself, who stares unflinchingly into the camera throughout “Los Ageless” and “New York.” She challenges viewers to match her gaze, subverting traditions of looking that objectified women on-screen. Clark even places herself in the position of the voyeur in “Los Ageless” when she watches a TV set with a pair of women's legs protruding from the screen. The shot is captured in profile, prohibiting viewers from seeing what Clark sees: presumably, a direct look between the

television's floating thighs. The three-dimensional image blows Clark's chair back with a forceful wind, suggesting cheekily that the power those legs conceal impels the looker's submission. Clark's bold, latex sexuality combines with her knack for absurdity to cultivate an incarnation of glam that is unconcerned with straight male preferences. "The freedom to embrace glam without worrying what the boys think has long been the pursuit of queer femme circles, but it's rarely been reflected in the mainstream."⁶³ *MASSEDUCTION* brings the queer feminism of its creator to the pop sphere, thrusting the glam rock sensibility into the girls' room.

St. Vincent's similarities with Bowie are not absent from *MASSEDUCTION*, they have simply changed shape; whereas *St. Vincent* saw her replicating Bowie's cold, alien aspects, her recent work channels his unconventional treatment of gender. "Bowie treated gender identity in the same way he treated sexual identity: as performative and, therefore, lacking in foundation."⁶⁴ Whereas Bowie used this conception of gender and sexuality to don a queer pose without remorse, St. Vincent embodies the philosophy in order to challenge the authority of gender. Attesting to the performative nature of gender, Clark argues that it is vital "to be cautious of the ways in which you unconsciously perform gender... especially if the axioms that have been passed down to you through patriarchal culture are not fulfilling to your empowerment."⁶⁵ This risk of disempowerment at the hand of gender is a major theme of the "Los Ageless" video, which hyperbolizes the "beauty is pain" mantra that has plagued notions of female desirability for generations. The video (directed by Willo Perron) shows St. Vincent undergoing several

⁶³ Geffen, Sasha. "St Vincent Is Daring to Imagine Glam Rock without Men." *Dazed*, 13 Oct. 2017, www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/37751/1/st-vincent-is-daring-to-imagine-glam-rock-without-men.

⁶⁴ Auslander, Philip. *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music*. University of Michigan Press, 2006, p. 146.

⁶⁵ Hillyard, Kim. "Power and Seduction: An Interview with St Vincent about *MASSEDUCTION*." *The Line of Best Fit*, 03 Oct. 2017, www.thelineofbestfit.com/features/longread/st-vincent-power-seduction-interview-masseduction.

grotesque beauty regimens; one of these treatments is an allusion to Terry Gilliam’s bizarre sci-fi feature *Brazil* (1985), specifically the face stretching undergone by Mrs. Lowry, an aging socialite. Playing on the song’s title, the video exaggerates the stereotype of the appearance-obsessed woman who privileges her appearance at the expense of her well-being. Laced up in bandages and high heels, St. Vincent resembles illustrations in Kyoko Okazaki’s horror manga *Helter Skelter*—another work that employs grotesque methods of beautification to question feminine ideals. Her critique of societal standards is not heavy-handed, as the video implements a healthy dose of camp in its technicolor execution. The camp aesthetic which colors each video accompanying *MASSEDUCTION* gives parodic inflection to aspects of mainstream culture, craftily broadcasting serious commentary on the album’s vibrant surface. Willo Perron, who also served as the art director for St. Vincent’s “Fear the Future” tour, states that his designs for Clark “reflect the dominance, vulnerability, and humor of the album.”⁶⁶ This trifecta makes “Los Ageless,” along with the album’s other visuals, equal parts compelling and confusing. Whether or not Clark wants us to search for her true intent—or if it even exists—is never quite certain. Addressing the camera upside down, her face framed by her own cheetah-print thighs and buttocks, St. Vincent practically dares viewers to take her seriously. The lyrics of the song are fairly confessional, and many critics speculate the song is in response to Clark’s breakup with supermodel/actress Cara Delevingne. Regardless, the music video elevates camp to a place of absurdity, shrouding the song’s vulnerability in layers of brightly-colored spectacle.

Keeping with the color scheme established by “Los Ageless,” “New York” puts on a similar show of smoke and mirrors around Clark’s intimate songwriting. Directed by Alex Da

⁶⁶ Perron, Willo. “Fear the Future Tour.” *Willo Perron Associates*, www.willoperron.com/fear-the-future-tour/.

Corté (whose visual art provided backdrops for the *Fear the Future* tour), the video plays like a flamboyant mural in motion. Clark's eyes are locked on the camera throughout much of the video, though her performance of the lyrics is virtually emotionless. She poses with a live swan, a fallen disco ball, and dozens of lush bouquets, but the video as a whole seems to reflect the spirit of glam as it sought to enthrall audiences with its fantastic artifice.⁶⁷ "Pills" puts a softened spin on Da Corté's vivid color scheme but intensifies its rigid choreography, once again bringing gender roles to the foreground of St. Vincent's narrative. Directed by Philippa Price, a self-described science fiction junkie, the video toys with a variety of symbolic images in order to satirize traditionally American values. Much of the video takes place in what looks to be a 1960s model home, the inhabitants of which smile and pose as if to match the home's rigid, mod design. The '60s-esque floral patterns worn by the women are coupled with powdered wigs and space helmets, establishing a setting that transcends any given time period. The non-human, Stepford-like performances of the dancers are suggestive of a pill-induced trance; when juxtaposed with the montage of found footage (presumably clips from early American television), the exaggerated salutes and canned smiles of the women seem to characterize the American dream as an empty one. One of the video's female actors ingests a large, pink pill before sinking her face into the lap of her male counterpart, presenting masculine pleasure as something mandatory and patriotic. Social critique is blended with artistic expression, foraying into territory which glam rock's original icons were unable to explore. Here, St. Vincent's glam aesthetic takes on a more ambitious task: calling out the corruption of society without sacrificing her status as an ambiguous auteur. Her constructed, artificial world is percolated with real-life

⁶⁷ Reynolds, Simon. *Shock and Awe: Glam Rock and Its Legacy*. Faber, 2016, p. 7-10.

concerns, showing a broadening of the glam aesthetic which artists like Bowie forged. "Not only was Bowie patently uninterested either in contemporary political and social issues or in working-class life in general, but his entire aesthetic was predicated upon a deliberate avoidance of the 'real' world and the prosaic language in which that world was habitually described, experienced and reproduced."⁶⁸ St. Vincent certainly avoids mundanity in her visuals, but her subject matter, at its core, is more true to life than it is fantastical. "Birth in Reverse" witnesses St. Vincent describing an "ordinary day," in which she takes out the trash and masturbates per her daily routine; her physical presence in live performances of the song betrays her confession of humanity, however, as she hovers across the strobe-lit stage with jarring, alien deliberation. She is a glam rock supernova who owns her earthly residence, making more relatable a brand of performance that once subsisted on illusoriness.

Although many contemporary proponents of glam use their art to seek social justice, this trend is almost totally absent from the original glam movement. Even David Bowie, the poster boy for the trend which cast a spotlight on non-traditional gender practices, did not use his platform to vie for societal change. Bowie distanced himself from the LGBTQ community, preferring to maintain his heterosexual livelihood and keep his artistry separate from advocacy. The adoption of glam style by female artists has witnessed their embrace of queer fans, particularly the gay male audience. Lady Gaga's fanbase of "Little Monsters" is a prime example of this trend; Gaga serves as a bisexual matriarch to a progeny of young, queer men who live vicariously through her feminine experience. This alliance with gay male audiences typical of modern glam women is also embraced by St. Vincent, which the gay club romp of "(Fast) Slow

⁶⁸ Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Taylor and Francis, 2013, p. 61.

Disco” confirms. In the video, she moshes, crowd surfs, and sings along with a crowd of sweaty, leather-clad gay men; the video’s composition is predominantly a swath of bodies, with St. Vincent always in the center of the frame. The casual, minimalistic nature of the video is not signature St. Vincent, but its emanation of queer pride is right in line with Clark’s own views. Similarly, Lady Gaga’s support of non-traditional lifestyles is at the fore of her music as well as her public statements. Unlike St. Vincent, Gaga uses drag performance as a means to underline her disregard for any strict gender binary. These attributes make her an ideal surrogate for the glam rock of Haynes’ recollection, which provides young, queer men with some sort of external identification. However, the growing legacy of glam—until fairly recently—had left a gap in its representation where queer women were concerned. “When [female glam] singers transgress gender norms by way of masculine drag or heightened androgyny – [Lady] Gaga’s male alter ego, [Grace] Jones’s far-flung shoulders and flattop enmeshed with bright red lipstick – they do so in identification with gay men more than with queer and gender-nonconforming women.”⁶⁹

St. Vincent, in contrast, is a high femme icon for the offbeat female fanbase. She presents her homosexuality with calculated coyness, generating a high femme persona that is not predicated upon masculine desire. St. Vincent’s overtly sexual, high-gloss femininity simultaneously entices and discomforts the male gaze. There is no air for the heterosexual man in Clarke’s overwhelmingly feminized atmosphere. She is both the sexy source of desire and the one doing the desiring; the pair of legs protruding from the television set in “Los Ageless” may as well be her own. The doubling inherent to homosexuality (in this case, female-to-female) is broadcast across the album’s imagery, encouraging fans to see a realm of sexual possibility

⁶⁹ Geffen, Sasha. “St Vincent Is Daring to Imagine Glam Rock without Men.” *Dazed*, 13 Oct. 2017, www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/37751/1/st-vincent-is-daring-to-imagine-glam-rock-without-men.

dominated by women. “The world [St. Vincent] oversees as a benevolent monarch is one where femininity is the norm and sexual fluidity as natural as any multivalent appetite.”⁷⁰ The visuals accompanying *MASSEDUCTION* are highly saturated with women whose appearances are only slightly different from one other—and from Clark herself. There is a synonymy to the women in St. Vincent’s art which makes their sexualization rather surreal; to desire one is to desire them all. In this way, the disembodied hot pink backside protruding from the album’s cover sets the tone for all of St. Vincent’s visuals: sexuality is encouraged, but personal intimacy will remain beyond reach. The veil over Clark’s high glam persona has not been lifted, but beneath it she wears only a cheetah print leotard.

IX. Conclusion

At the 2019 Grammy Awards, both Janelle Monáe and St. Vincent gave performances that emanated the queer sensuality of their most recent albums. Monáe’s rendition of “Make Me Feel” was injected with snippets of “Pynk” and “Django Jane,” but the Prince-inspired bullet was the main attraction. Monáe wielded her blue Stratocaster during the song’s opening, strumming along to the tune’s sparse guitar line; channeling her late mentor, Monáe commanded the instrument while holding her own as a frontwoman—a feat which St. Vincent has all but monopolized. Monáe’s choreography was echoed by a chorus line of female androids dressed in latex, though several costumes featured in the music videos for “Pynk”—the infamous pussy pants—and “Django Jane” also made appearances. The army of robot dancers behind her

⁷⁰ Geffen, Sasha. “St Vincent Is Daring to Imagine Glam Rock without Men.” *Dazed*, 13 Oct. 2017, www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/37751/1/st-vincent-is-daring-to-imagine-glam-rock-without-men.

displayed a crux between the artist's enduring sci-fi focus and her glammed-up funk intuition. As an anthem of sexual fluidity, "Make Me Feel" draws upon the tendencies of glam rock's most sex-positive performers (Prince, most obviously) without relegating its intended object to a single gender. Treating her dancers as sites for amity and/or sexual attraction throughout her Grammy performance, Monáe exhibited the complex possibilities of queer femininity.

Further revealing this womanly spectrum, St. Vincent's performance with Dua Lipa revolved around a homosexual magnetism that toyed with mirror images. The artists' looks were complimentary bordering on identical, with their twin cropped, black haircuts rounding out their various similarities. The mash-up (of St. Vincent's "Masseduction" and Dua Lipa's "One Kiss") is steamy on musical grounds alone, but the staging of the duet escalates its sensuality to homosexual heights. Lipa and Clark gingerly flirt with one another throughout the number, facing each other and finally the audience with identical unwavering stares. Though Lipa does not identify as queer, St. Vincent's sexuality is well known—thanks in large part to her high-profile romances with Hollywood's lesbian elite. The disparity between the two performers' sexual identifications is not suggested by their symmetrical appearances, however, which serve to connect and perhaps even confuse the two women for one another. In this duet, female sexuality is entirely superficial yet also imperceptible; both women engage seductively with each other, but whether or not said homosexual desire exists off-camera is left to the spectator's guess. The fluctuating distance between the two women sustains a sexual tension that is artful rather than explicit; here, an enticing, nuanced depiction of queer desire is explored publicly. Though the interplay between Lipa and Clark is obviously manufactured for the Grammy's stage, it does represent an evolution in televised displays of female homoeroticism. The 2003 MTV Video

Music Awards featured a notorious popstar ménage-a-trois, in which a tuxedo-clad Madonna kissed two provocative brides in the form of Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera. The male gaze practically functioned as a producer for the spectacle; the program's shock-factor tactics were as transparent as the bridal garb worn by its pop starlets. The absence of authenticity is what separates the 2003 VMAs opener from performances like Janelle Monáe's 2018 Austin City Limits set. Prior to her performance of the power ballad "Primetime," Monáe referenced her recently-disclosed sexuality in her address to the crowd, saying, "You guys got to find out a little bit more about how I like to love, so I just want to say Happy Pride—forever!" Advocating for the LGBTQ community, Monáe undergirded her act with a show of support rather than a show-and-tell of her sexuality. The VMA's stint is on par with glam rock's numerous on-stage displays of homosexuality, which forsake authentic feeling in the name of spectacle.

The modes of queer representation championed by female artists once existed in a shallow pool, populated by only a few artists—very few of whom were allowed to embrace traditional femininity *and* enjoy commercial success. The glam sensibility, accused of dying out altogether in the mid-1970s, has not disappeared but merely taken up different forms in the years since its rock 'n' roll origination. Prince breathed new life into its gender-bending performance methods in the '80s, infiltrating glam rock's whiteness with his distinct R&B flair. Furthering the sexual edginess intrinsic to the style, Prince solidified glam as a sensibility with hyper-sexual, utterly performative means; the style was still rather narrow in its representations of sexual liberty, however, as women were still relegated to heterosexual supporting roles. Much like the created persona and real self, the performances and politics of glam artists were regularly incompatible; entertainment value superseded authenticity in virtually all aspects of early glitter

rock. Presently, though, the artists appropriating glam have stretched its aesthetic trademarks to more communicative extremes. Taking cues from glam's innovators, St. Vincent and Janelle Monáe interpolate the sensibility with potent femininity and queer sexuality, broadening the genre's sexually radical reputation to include female perspectives. Their aesthetics are glamorized and artificial; St. Vincent's artificiality favors the absurd while Monáe's performativity services her Afrofuturist narratives. Even so, both artists house true-to-life sentiments in their elaborately constructed projects, imbuing the superficiality of glam with an authenticity—and advocacy, in Monáe's case—that has not been articulated so deliberately before.

The green brooch passed down from one glam icon to another in Haynes' *Velvet Goldmine* paints glam rock as a movement that depends upon worthy, male successors in order to continue. Its journey traces from a young Oscar Wilde to glam super-fan and journalist Arthur Stuart, whose final inheritance of the totem perhaps signals his responsibility to preserve the spirit in writing. The brooch has been lost, it seems, as glam rock has no outstanding masculine heir in the contemporary moment. Women like Janelle Monáe and Annie Clark have the audacity to appropriate glam on the grounds of inspiration alone, placing the creative imports of stars like Bowie and Prince within brazenly feminine contexts. Whether or not their representations of gender, race, and sexuality will stand the test of time is uncertain; as with most of glam's original heroes, cultural shifts tend to reveal the shortcomings of an artist's once-revolutionary acts. Nonetheless, the feminized, forward-thinking interpretations of glam rock propelled by the works of these women are undoubtedly responsible for reviving a stylistic movement that might

have faded out entirely. Though Clark and Monáe have served to keep glam alive, their mercurial artistry ensures that it will not be allowed to stay the same.

Bibliography

“Analysis: Janelle Monáe and Posthumanism – the Cyborg.” *EchoticMusic*, 22 Jan. 2014, echoticmusic.wordpress.com/2014/01/22/analysis-janelle-monae-and-posthumanism-the-cyborg/

Auslander, Philip. *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music*. University of Michigan Press, 2006.

Brooker, William. *Enchanting David Bowie: Space/Time/Body/Memory*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.

Cagle, Van M. *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture: Art, Rock, and Andy Warhol*. Sage, 1995.

Calvert, John. "Opinion | Black Sky Thinking | Janelle Monáe: A New Pioneer Of Afrofuturism." *The Quietus*. September 2, 2010. <https://thequietus.com/articles/04889-janelle-mon-e-the-archandroid-afrofuturism>.

Carroll, Jim. "Minority Report." *The Irish Times*. July 09, 2010. Accessed March 24, 2019. <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/music/2.681/minority-report-1.619627>.

DeFrantz, Thomas F. "Believe the Hype: Hype Williams and Afrofuturist Filmmaking." *Refractory*. May 30, 2011. Accessed March 24, 2019.

Dolman, Vincent, et al. "Rock Legend Suzi Quatro Reveals the One Thing She Doesn't Want You to Say to Her." *Mirror*, 21 Oct. 2018, www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/suzi-quatros-reveals-never-set-13442806.

Félix, Doreen St. "The Otherworldly Concept Albums of Janelle Monáe." *The New Yorker*. February 08, 2019. Accessed March 24, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-otherworldly-concept-albums-of-janelle-monae>.

Frith, Simon. *The Sociology of Rock*. Constable, 1979.

- Geffen, Sasha. "Janelle Monáe Steps Into Her Bisexual Lighting." *Vulture*. February 23, 2018. Accessed March 24, 2019.
<https://www.vulture.com/2018/02/janelle-mone-steps-into-her-bisexual-lighting.html>.
- Geffen, Sasha. "St Vincent Is Daring to Imagine Glam Rock without Men." *Dazed*, 13 Oct. 2017,
www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/37751/1/st-vincent-is-daring-to-imagine-glam-rock-without-men.
- Hall, Jake. "Exploring the Complicated Relationship between Jean-paul Goude and Grace Jones." *I-D*. April 21, 2016. Accessed March 24, 2019.
https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/d3v9k7/exploring-the-complicated-relationship-between-jean-paul-goude-and-grace-jones.
- Haraway, Donna J. *Manifestly Haraway*, University of Minnesota Press, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/warw/detail.action?docID=4392065>.
- Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Taylor and Francis, 2013.
- Hillyard, Kim. "Power and Seduction: An Interview with St Vincent about MASSEDUCTION." *The Line of Best Fit*, 03 Oct. 2017,
www.thelineofbestfit.com/features/longread/st-vincent-power-seduction-interview-masse-duction.
- Hoffman, Claire. "Soup with Prince." *The New Yorker*. June 18, 2017. Accessed March 24, 2019.
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/11/24/soup-with-prince>.
- Hopper, Jessica. "Journalist Jason Cherkis Discusses His Investigation Into Kim Fowley Rape Allegations." *Pitchfork*. July 10, 2015. Accessed March 24, 2019.
<https://pitchfork.com/thepitch/840-journalist-jason-cherkis-discusses-his-investigation-into-kim-fowley-rape-allegations/>.
- Kornhaber, Spencer. "Prince Will Always Be a Gay Icon-Even Though He Sometimes Seemed Homophobic." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 27 Jan. 2019,
www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/04/prince-gay-homophobia-conservative-liberal-progress/479502/.

- Loder, Kurt. "David Bowie: Straight Time." *Rolling Stone*. June 25, 2018. Accessed March 24, 2019.
<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/david-bowie-straight-time-69334/>.
- McLeod, Ken. "Space Oddities: Aliens, Futurism and Meaning in Popular Music." *Popular Music*, vol. 22 no. 3, 2003, pp. 338. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3877579.
- Metzger, Richard. "Jobriath Boone: Rock's Fairy Godmother." *Boing Boing*, 30 Mar. 2009, boingboing.net/2009/03/30/jobriath-boone-rocks.html.
- Monáe, Janelle. "Django Jane." *YouTube*, 22 Feb. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTjQq5rMIEY.
- Peresman, Zoey. "The Kick Inside At 40: How Kate Bush Let The Weirdness In And Changed Music Forever." *Stereogum*. February 16, 2018. Accessed March 24, 2019.
<https://www.stereogum.com/1982133/the-kick-inside-at-40-how-kate-bush-let-the-weirdness-in-and-changed-music-forever/franchises/sounding-board/>.
- Perron, Willo. "Fear the Future Tour." *Willo Perron Associates*, www.willoperron.com/fear-the-future-tour/.
- Reynolds, Simon. "How Prince's Androgynous Genius Changed the Way We Think About Music and Gender." *Pitchfork*. April 22, 2016. Accessed March 24, 2019.
<https://pitchfork.com/features/article/9882-how-princes-androgynous-genius-changed-the-way-we-think-about-music-and-gender/>
- Reynolds, Simon. *Shock and Awe: Glam Rock and Its Legacy*. Faber, 2016.
- Rolling Stone. "100 Greatest Guitarists." *Rolling Stone*, 3 July 2018, www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/100-greatest-guitarists-153675/robby-krieger-45486/.
- Siede, Caroline. "Velvet Goldmine Captures the Spirit, If Not the Biography, of David Bowie." *Film*, 23 Aug. 2017, film.avclub.com/velvet-goldmine-captures-the-spirit-if-not-the-biograp-1798243465.
- Smith, Shan. "The Modern Intersectionality of Afrofuturistic Music and Queer Artistry Is Something to Celebrate." *REVOLT TV*. June 01, 2018. Accessed March 24, 2019.

<https://revolt.tv/stories/2018/06/01/modern-intersectionality-afrofuturistic-music-queer-artistry-0700a2ada1>.

Sontag, Susan. "Notes on 'Camp'." *Against Interpretation*. Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1966.

Spanos, Brittany. "Janelle Monáe Frees Herself." *Rolling Stone*. June 25, 2018. Accessed March 24, 2019.
<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/janelle-monae-frees-herself-629204/>.

The Kate Bush Story: Running Up That Hill. Directed by Adrian Sibley. BBC. 2014.

Vernallis, Carol, Ellis, Gabriel Zane, and Jonathan James Leal. "Janelle Monáe's Dirty Computer Music Video/Film: A Collective Reading."

Wilson, Julee. "Revealed: Why Janelle Monáe Always Wears Black-And-White..." *The Huffington Post*. April 05, 2013. Accessed March 24, 2019.
https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/05/janelle-monae-essence-dinner-party_n_3021450.html?utm_hp_ref=mostpopular.

Womack, Ytasha L. *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-fi and Fantasy Culture*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013.