

# **LOOKING FOR THE TV SOUND**

**FASHION, IDENTITY AND THE  
LANGUAGE OF MUSIC VIDEO**

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# **Certificate of Original Authorship**

I, Ailsa Weaver, declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building, School of Design at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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## Abstract

In the early 1980s, a globally dominant, late-capitalist anglophone youth media culture gave rise to a hybrid moving image form with a unique visual vocabulary: music video. This new media type swiftly influenced and redefined those adjacent fields from which its techniques were drawn: film, television, graphic design, art, and fashion. Just as fashion is quintessentially modern, a compelling cultural and commercial force of the last two hundred years, early music video is a model and mirror of the turning twentieth-century; its methods arise from the conditions of postmodernism, yet already forecast a post-postmodern structure of feeling.

This thesis, *Looking for the TV Sound*, investigates the performance of fashioned gender identity in early music video, specifically the period 1980-1985. The research considers the construction of new fashion masculinities in music video, including the homosocial New Man and the female pop dandy, thus integrating music video within an expanding field of fashion studies. It asks: how did an assortment of British pop music performers, and the pioneering British and Australian directors with whom they collaborated, use the language of fashion to create the language of music video? Why was the presentation of non-conforming, glamorous and/or queer gender identity central to this? How was the immense international popularity of these artists permitted within the otherwise conservative structures of hegemonic masculinity in the neoliberal late twentieth-century, so tainted by homophobic terror during the HIV/AIDS crisis? And, in what ways do these cultural products, while specifically responsive to their originating historical period, arise from significant precedents yet are unique, something apparent in the visual quotation of early music video by present day fashion and media cultures?

The thesis deeply describes a series of music videos by David Bowie, Wham! featuring George Michael, Duran Duran, and Eurythmics featuring Annie Lennox, in which sartorial cues are dominant markers of masculine performer/character identity. It contextualises the observations of its structural analysis by applying theories of fashion arising from art history, literature, sociology, cultural and gender studies. In doing so, *Looking for the TV Sound* finds the significant presence of Camp in the constitution of the works, notes the fashion influence of subcultural movements such as New Romanticism upon these flamboyant productions, and also locates power in the gaze of a significant post-war consumer group: the fan culture of the teenager, in particular the teenaged girl.

# **Thesis introduction**

## **Introduction**

This thesis explores an under-examined intersection of the fields of fashion theory and the study of visual cultures: the performance of identity in music video. The research will do this by employing a composite methodological framework novel to the study of music video: this is to interrogate its early visual language using approaches and positions frequently informative to theories of fashion. The thesis will focus on the role of the new masculine performer/character in late twentieth-century pop music, and specifically upon key music video examples drawn from the genre's formative period, being 1980-1985.

The scholarly aims of the writing are two-fold. Firstly, the research seeks to contribute to knowledge of the formative era of music video in the early 1980s, upon which the limited volume of dedicated literature that presently exists is notably disproportionate to the wide cultural influence still exerted by this composite visual culture, more than forty years after its spectacular rise to global media prominence. The thesis will argue that music video is a visual culture intimately related to the visual culture of fashion, and therefore that analysis of this media form can be well integrated within fashion studies. Proceedingly, the second aim of the research is to contribute to an expanding definition of fashion, and to contemporary understandings of what constitutes the fashion object, something that is an imperative of critical and conceptual fashion in the postfashion era.

The writing will analyse a series of music videos by David Bowie, Wham! featuring George Michael, Duran Duran<sup>1</sup> and Eurythmics featuring Annie Lennox, and describe supplementary others, in which sartorial cues are dominant markers of masculine performer/character identity. As it does so, the writing will follow two main themes. The first of these, underpinning the thesis, relates to the former of the research aims and is prompted by the content of the videos interrogated. Here, the writing will return to the following questions: how did an assortment of predominantly British pop music performers, and the international directors with whom they collaborated, use the language of fashion to create the language of music video in the early 1980s? Why was the presentation of (often non-conforming and/or queer) gender and sexual identity central to this? And, in what ways do these cultural artefacts, although specifically responsive to their originating historical period, arise from significant precedents and yet remain unique, something that is apparent through their ongoing quotation in present day fashion and media cultures?

The second thread traces the project's latter objective and underscores the location of the thesis in the domain of fashion studies. It is provoked by a catalysing observation for the research, which occurred in the course of teaching conceptual perspectives to undergraduate students of design, who are predominantly practice-based visual learners. This is, that theories commonly applied in investigations of the materiality or embodiment of fashion objects can equally effectively support understandings of other cultural artefacts, such as music video. In a pedagogical turn, this also allows for the development of a greater reflective understanding of

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<sup>1</sup> The thesis draws its title "looking for the TV sound" from the lyric of the New Romantic-identified debut release by Duran Duran, *Planet Earth* (1981).

theoretical bases and motivations of critical fashion practice, an imperative of postfashion.

Extant writing in the fields of fashion theory, musicology, media, gender/sexuality and cultural studies convincingly identifies logical and symbiotic relationships variously between the creative disciplines of music, cinema and fashion (Bartlett et. al., 2013; Bruzzi, 1997b; Calefato, 2004; Church Gibson, 2012; Craik & Stratton, 2013; Geczy & Karaminas, 2015, 2018; Geczy & Millner, 2015; Lewis, 2010; Lynch & Strauss, 2007; McLaughlin, 2000; McNeil et. al., 2009; McRobbie, 2009; Miller, 2011; Mundy, 1999; Radner, 2019; Uhlirva, 2013; Warner, 2012, 2014). In this thesis, the continued focus is more specifically on how constituent parts of a music video — being the pop performer/character, the prominence of costume amongst the production's *mise-en-scène*, filmic techniques employed by music video directors, and the socio-cultural contexts from which the videos arise — can be theoretically reassembled to be understood as being a type of non-material fashion artefact.

Music video rose to striking prominence in a late-Cold War period dominated by neoliberal capitalist politics and Western cultural imperialism, a fractious but idealistic era which saw the development of new media technologies coterminously characterised by a reconfiguration of the relationship between fashion, sexuality and gender. Just as fashion theory often reassembles perspectives initially focused elsewhere in the humanities and social sciences, music video is a “hybrid production culture” (Caston & Smith, 2017, p. 2) that draws upon and subsequently extends the disciplines of photography, advertising, graphic design and performance (Austerlitz, 2007). Its reciprocal influence upon cinematic and televisual filmmaking (Vernallis, 2004), including the contemporary genre of the

fashion film (Uhlírova, 2013), is well understood. The position taken in this thesis, however, more closely follows Mathias Bonde Korsgaard's (2017) assertion that: "what was once considered an exclusively televisual genre must now be (and always should have been) thought of as something else: an audiovisual form in its own right, probably even a medium in its own right" (p. 17). Accordingly, a central interest of this thesis will be how, from a twenty-first century viewpoint, early music video could in fact be considered a '*fashion* medium in its own right' in its representation of how Fashion (Vinken, 2005) works, beyond its origin simply as a promotional device for music featuring the performance of fashioned, and fashionable, pop identities.

The current writing is careful however not to overstate its case by extending its definition of fashion into the realm of moving image beyond that which is reasonable. That is, to say that a music video *can* be understood as fashion artefact is precisely to say that not *all* are. Many, if not most, music videos commissioned within the mainstream music industry continue to simply "creat[e] pop culture out of commercial imperative" (Cave, 2017, p. 79), with a lack of criticality to the practice of their making that renders them unremarkable. Correspondingly however, the research notes that the great majority of garments commercially produced within the global fashion system are not, in a theoretical sense, fashion objects, for as Valerie Steele (2019) suggests when considering the future of fashion, "it is important to remember that fashion is not just about clothes, but about new ways of seeing and thinking" (p. 18). This research seeks to understand how the form of music video may be one of these new ways, by focusing on a small suite of early 1980s music videos by artists whose legacy has remained visible in contemporary fashion owing to their conscious play with forms of masculine sartorial identity. Joanne Entwistle (2015) notes

that identity and meaning are accounted for as “one and the same” in being central concerns of fashion literature (p. xvii). Advancing boldly from its agreement with Steele (2019, p. 18) that fashion is indeed not “just” about clothes, this thesis looks to these identity-centred cultural artefacts to determine the meaning of what else fashion *is*, or can be, about.

Therefore, this thesis proceeds from its simple observation of a dynamic moment in the chronological past: that at the turn of the 1980s, fashion looked like popular music, and popular music sounded like fashion. How and why this should be the case is however less simple, with answers to these questions being not entirely related to historical specificity, as this thesis will work to explain. Fashion’s symbiotic late twentieth-century visual culture, music video remains the single most popular video category on the ubiquitous post-television platform YouTube forty years on from its MTV-driven heyday (Caston, 2020). Critical writing on music video began to appear almost contemporaneously with the initial rise of the form’s cultural prominence (Shore, 1984; Aufderheide, 1986; Kaplan, 1987) and a distinct, if limited, body of scholarship on the subject has since emerged (Goodwin, 1992, 1993; Frith et. al., 1993; Vernallis, 2004, 2013; Austerlitz, 2007; Arnold et. al., 2017; Korsgaard, 2017). As Chapter 1 of the thesis will determine, these analyses of music video frequently identify its origins and structural qualities, with digressions into the implications of this short form of moving image as a cultural product, often to be understood as representative of postmodern aesthetics.

This thesis will depart in the main from these existing approaches in order to identify the fashioned ‘look’ of a sound, and the sound of a fashion look, through its fashion studies focus. It proposes that such an approach will enable rich theorisation of what generally stands in musicological music



video scholarship only as description. For example, we find: “as marketing tools and artistic products, music videos are a fertile site for depicting and contesting popular images of gender and sexuality” (Walser & Harmon, 2007, p. 1049). Instead, this thesis enquires *how* the visual culture of music video attains this, looking to theories of fashion for its apparatus and argument.

Rocamora and Smelik (2016) note that fashion scholarship applies a wide range of analytical methodologies, being an inherently interdisciplinary field that issues from diverse areas of thought including art and costume history, philosophy, sociology, women’s studies — here, this thesis includes gender/queer studies — cultural studies, and studies of media (pp. 2-3). This is particularly true of much current fashion research, rendering the validity of a varied or composite methodological approach to analysis of music video being in fact two-fold: for just as fashion studies developed from a synthesis of dominant concepts drawn from previously existing or complementary fields of study, so too does the emerging study of music video arise from perspectives initially focused elsewhere. This thesis recognises in this scholarly lineage allowance for both new forms of analysis of music video’s cultural significance, and for an expanding understanding of the theoretical constitution of fashion. To explain how the writing will approach its contribution to these things, this introductory section to the thesis now proceeds to an outline of the body of the thesis.

## **Outline of chapters**

Chapter 1 of the thesis is entitled ‘*Everybody’s looking for something: research contexts and methodologies*’, a partial reference to the Annie Lennox-penned lyric of the song *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)* (1983) by Eurythmics. This preliminary section of the thesis sets out its composite

conceptual and methodological framework, as it addresses in tandem the three constituting concerns of the research: the nature of fashion as both 'real' and conceptual; the language of music video; and the performance of gender identity in visual cultures. This framework is offered as a contribution to scholarship in the study of music video and also as a new synthesis of existing approaches in order to integrate music video within fashion studies.

As a background to the study, this thesis proposes that its primary approach is consistent with what has been termed postfashion. In order to establish this as a research context, the chapter will begin by defining its understanding of the term postfashion, and the associated idea of fashion as an expanding field of enquiry. The research considers fashion and music video both to be forms closely connected to issues of temporality: therefore, to identify approaches apposite to the study of music video that may arise from fashion scholarship. The chapter will then proceed to readings of work on modernity/postmodernity/post-postmodernity, including the structure of feeling termed metamodernism, and time.

Next, the chapter will turn to overall methodological and writing approaches taken in the thesis, by triangulating the implicit influence of Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick upon the argument. It will review literature on some key theories and methodologies proposed by these thinkers that recur throughout this thesis, respectively being structural analysis, Camp and perspectives on queerness. Here, the current writing will also attend to issues of its own positionality. Proceeding to the research's context in the study of gender, the chapter will establish the usage of terminology relating to gender and sexual identity that will be applied across the writing. This section will also take into account further

writing that recognises the influence upon fashion of ambiguous gender identity performance in popular music of the early 1980s.

Chapter 1 will then proceed to the research's context in the study of music video. Here, it will review existing literature specific to that form, and additional relevant and useful sources on the subject situated in curatorial and other writing. This first section of the thesis will conclude by outlining the scope and limitations of the thesis in relation to the selection of the music videos that will be investigated in the body of the research.

Chapter 2 of the thesis is entitled '*A rumour from ground control: time, space and fashion in David Bowie's *Ashes to Ashes**'. It takes its title from the lyric of its subject, a significant precedent in the early music video canon: *Ashes to Ashes* (1980), co-directed by David Mallet and David Bowie. The chapter looks at this music video through the conceptual lenses named in its subtitle, all of which are ongoing concerns of fashion theory. Parts of this chapter have appeared in the form of an article in the journal *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion*, Special Issue 'Atmospheres' (Weaver, 2024).

This chapter will establish an approach to analysing music video that will be taken across the thesis in observing music videos which can be understood as "concept videos" (Austerlitz, 2007, p. 2). This is a shot-by-shot forensic structural analysis, which first describes the video and then contextualises in history and theory its key visual signifiers, adapting for the study of music video a Barthesian methodology which has been used to investigate fashion in moving image contexts (see Lehmann, 2000). This shot-by-shot close reading will focus on prominence of costume amongst the video's mise-en-scène, in this case being the sartorial presentation of Bowie's three

performer/characters and the supporting coterie of New Romantic luminaries who also appear in the video.<sup>2</sup>

The chapter will then look at Bowie's character of Pierrot in *Ashes to Ashes*, first by referring to scholarly understandings of time, modernity and postmodernity, considering cultural meanings and interpretations of Pierrot in theatre and performance, and then in connection to Bowie's own personal backstory from the 1960s. Next, it will discuss Bowie's history of subcultural identification, particularly with Mod, and identify the reciprocal influence of the nostalgic-futurist New Romantic club-culture movement on Bowie's star-image transition from the 1970s to 1980s.

Bowie's character of Major Tom will then be evaluated with regard to different references to 'space' in the music video, both in his representation of the extra-terrestrial themes that characterise Bowie's multiple masculine sartorialisms including Ziggy Stardust and Aladdin Sane, and also as a structural quality of *Ashes to Ashes*. Here, the chapter will contemplate Bowie as an example of the British pop dandy. In concluding its critical observations of *Ashes to Ashes*, the chapter will briefly consider Bowie's third persona in the video, a man who inhabits the atmosphere of a padded cell, in association with Bowie's legacy in contemporary masculine fashion.

Chapter 3 of this thesis is entitled '*Take me dancing tonight: From Jailhouse Rock to Wake Me Up before You Go Go*'. The title of this chapter

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<sup>2</sup> As the shot-by-shot structural analysis of the music videos which form the principal data set of the investigation must address the complexity of the works both in reference to their televisual qualities, and to their feature components of fashion and dress, the density of the writing in these sections of the paper can be seen as akin to the New Historicism of scholars such as Stephen Greenblatt, Catherine Gallagher and Walter Benn Michaels, itself based on poststructuralist theories such as textuality and discourse, and to the "deep description" technique of ethnographer Clifford Geertz (Castle, 2013, p. 35). In the manner of New Historicism, the thesis will use necessarily highly descriptive "deep style contextualization [to] open up points of contact between the text and its milieu as well as between the reader and the text itself" (Castle, 2013, p. 35).

is drawn from the lyric of the song *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* (1984) by Wham!. The writing expands upon the article *From Jailhouse Rock to Wake Me Up before You Go Go: George Michael and the New Man* (Weaver, 2023b), published in the *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion* Special Issue: 'Fashion in The Age of AIDS'.

This chapter uses an approach specific to its analysis of "performance videos" (Austerlitz, 2007, p. 2). Here, description of the video is integrated with socio-historical contextualisation of its key fashion signifiers (including the performer/characters themselves), and is written in the present tense to reflect the immediacy and continual present of their representation in moving image. The performance of George Michael in the Wham! music video *Wake Me Up Before You Go go* (1984) is considered in relation to *Jailhouse Rock* (1958), a cinema vehicle for the young Elvis Presley and an aesthetic precursor to music video (Shore, 1984, p. 43). It will discuss the contradictions expressed in Michael's 'pre-out' masculine identity, considering how the group dynamic of Wham! is permitted through a rhetorical mid-twentieth century sociological strategy known as situational homosexuality, and theories of Camp.

The chapter will consider how fashion worn by Michael in *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* – namely British designer Katharine Hamnett's CHOOSE LIFE slogan T-shirt, and an alternative costume in which the colour pink is most prominent – demonstrates an intersection between fashion and politics for gay men in the 1980s. It will then consider Michael as an example of the cultural identity of the New Man. Here, it will also discuss the methods of British men's fashion and style magazines of the early 1980s, a form that this thesis will propose is related to the language of early music video, in fashioning new masculine identities.

The title of Chapter 4 of the thesis is '*I've seen you on the beach and I've seen you on TV: Duran Duran, from New Romantics to New Men*'. It is named for a lyric from the song *Rio* (1982) by glamorous straight boy-group Duran Duran, the music video for which is the principal case study of the chapter. In this chapter, the thesis will: contextualise the Birmingham group as ambitious early New Romantics, influenced by Glam Rock; subject the video to structural analysis; discuss the nature of the boy-group as a visual and narrative dynamic in moving image; contemplate contributions to the language of music video made by pioneer music video director, the Australian Russell director Mulcahy, addressing issues arising from both cable and network television, including the Australian music video program *Countdown* and the high-fashion American detective series *Miami Vice*; describe the influence of graphic design on music video, particularly with reference to the cover artist for the cover illustration of the *Rio* album, *Playboy Magazine* illustrator Patrick Nagel; and consider meanings of the appearance of Duran Duran in the clip, both in their colourful masculine dress by Antony Price, and in their suntanned recreational 'undress', in relation to understandings of performative acts of gender and colonialism. In the course of the writing, the Robert Palmer music video *Addicted to Love* (1986), directed by British fashion photographer Terrence Donovan, will also be briefly considered.

Chapter 5 of the thesis is entitled '*Who am I to disagree: the female dandy as pop provocateur*'. Portions of this writing appear in an edited and refereed version of this chapter (in press), *Air and Angels: the case for music video as a non-material fashion object* (Weaver, 2023a), having been presented at *Earth, Water, Air and Fire: Proceedings of the The Four Elements of Fashion Conference* at Università Iuav di Venezia, Italy, March 16, 2023. The title of this chapter refers once more to the lyric of

Eurythmics' *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)* (1983), a concept video featuring Annie Lennox that will be the main focus of this section of the thesis.

The chapter will investigate Lennox's transgressive use of sartorialism to critique dominant paradigms of the late-twentieth century, namely patriarchal and capitalist systems, in this iconic music video. Her striking and well-remembered wearing of the suit in *Sweet Dreams* is considered in relation to the influence upon Eurythmics of the artists Gilbert & George, to practices of Brummellian dandyism, and to the historical precedent of the 'cross dressing' nineteenth-century French writer George Sand. In the course of the writing, reference will also be more briefly made to the music video Lennox's hyper-feminine persona in *There Must Be an Angel (Playing with My Heart)* (1985) in relation to understandings of gender from literature, specifically the metaphysical poetry of John Donne, and to the music video *Who's That Girl* (1983), in which Lennox enacts both feminine and masculine personae. In this chapter, the performance of female masculinity by another star of the early 1980s, Grace Jones, will also be considered. In discussing both Lennox and Jones, the writing will contribute to knowledge upon the character of the female pop dandy.

## **Statement of thesis positionality**

Before proceeding to Chapter 1 of the thesis, the current writing recognises that research positions necessarily arise from the positionality of the researcher. Therefore, it is acknowledged that this fashion research issues from the perspective of a white, able-bodied, queer cis-gender woman, born in a colonised Australia in the early 1970s. It is very much hoped by this researcher that further work on fashion and music video might follow this thesis, and is commenced by others with importantly different views and

lived experiences, substantially increasing the current limited scope of researcher identity on this topic. It is acknowledged that many critical issues of intersectionality in cultural production and consumption are not addressed here with the proper attention they deserve. While the principle of decoloniality may be taken into account more frequently across the academy in the current era than in the past, there is still much work to be done. This researcher sincerely recognises their privilege in having undertaken the current project at an Australian public university on what always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.



# **Chapter 1 : *Everybody's looking for something*: research contexts and methodologies**

## **Fashion: definition and methodologies**

Fashion is an expanding field of practice and enquiry that maps continually renewed understandings of fundamental human motivations and the societal structures that support and constrain them. Across the canon of fashion scholarship, it is commonly agreed that fashion is not only made *of* things — that is, a commodity or material object produced within a fashion system — but also *about* and *because* of things — a phenomena or representation, either chronologically coinciding with or nostalgic in its relationship to historical time (Evans & Vaccari, 2019, 2020). Various, and sometimes simultaneously, fashion is about the identity of its consumer, and also about the practice of consumption itself. In doing so, processes and products of fashion are frequently and meaningfully self-referential. Transcending the boundaries of the garment, fashion is eternal, at once fleeting and perpetual. Yuniya Kawamura's (2005) sociological light illuminates it thus:

Fashion is a concept that separates itself from other words which are often used as synonyms of fashion, such as clothing, garments and apparel. Those words refer to tangible objects while fashion is an intangible object (p. 2.).

An ambition of this thesis is to build upon ideas such as these in order to contribute to an evolving definition of 'what is fashion' by explaining how critical theories continue to describe, support and defend an expanding definition of the practice and products of fashion. It suggests that this may

take place within the conditions of postfashion, a strategy that also pursues the purpose of imagining innovative fashion futures.

## **Postfashion**

Increasingly, fashion exists in the virtual realm and in curated spaces, intersecting with art, media and other forms of cultural production. In this context, theoretical concerns and approaches to practice deliberately oscillate between forms of media that can be understood as fashion, both as phenomena and object. Valerie Steele (2019) notes in *Fashion Futures*, her contributing chapter to the book *The End of Fashion: Clothing and Dress in the Age of Globalization*, that while advancements in textiles technology and innovative material practices will logically remain the area most closely connected to the future of the fashion system, she also argues with reference to her own curatorial practice that it is at the intersection with other critical domains and fields of practice wherein fashion will continue to flourish as a site of creative endeavour. There is significant practical benefit to this strategy: for example, an existing movement towards the making of films and exhibitions by fashion designers (Clark, 2019; Khan, 2012a, 2012b; Rees-Roberts, 2018) explains the relative ease with which catwalks were replaced with virtual alternatives in nimble response to the early restrictions and ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This has particular implications for the intersection of fashion and music video. Indeed, this thesis has identified reference to video as a form of fashion practice in fledgeling music video scholarship from as early as 1986, with media academic Pat Aufderheide asserting that:

music video's fulcrum position may best be revealed in the way it has traveled beyond television, especially in its use by fashion designers.

There, the construction of identity through fashion is at the center of the

business. Since 1977, when Pierre Cardin began making video recordings of his fashion shows, designers have been incorporating video into their presentations. Videos now run continuously in retail store windows and on floor displays. For many designers, what sells records already sells fashion ... some designers regard video as a primary mode of expression (p. 75).

Aufderheide's principle example of this early pivot to video is the trend-forecasting designer Norma Kamali, whose innovative garments of the 1970s and 1980s are held by New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met). It may then be the case that what has been termed 'critical fashion practice' (Geczy & Karaminas, 2018) assists our appreciation of the overlap of fashion and music video. Cultural critique, acknowledgement and presentation of conforming or non-conforming gender identity, interdisciplinarity, collaborative practice, posthumanism and speculative futuring are concerns of critical fashion practice that are also themes woven into the examples of music video that will be studied in this thesis. If, as Kawamura (2005) states, "fashion is not visual clothing but is the invisible elements included in clothing" (p. 4), then, this thesis contends, these elements can be made visible in music video just as they may be in dress.

Such ideas can be considered characteristic of what is called 'postfashion', the discourse around which is lively. Importantly, how to frame this term is a question strongly related to research context; for while it may be agreed that investigation of postfashion is an imperative of contemporary cultural analysis, divergent branches of fashion writing have connected with the notion in different ways. Of early significance to the discussion, fashion business journalist Teri Agin's book *The End of Fashion* (1999) is a foundational diagnosis of the precarious health of the fashion system in the late twentieth-century, observing long-term trends foretelling the negative

impact of mass-marketing and the demise of mystique. Similarly influential to understandings of postfashion, eminent trend forecaster Lidewij Edelkoort's *Anti-Fashion Manifesto* (2015) famously decries the decline of fashion knowledge — be it tacit, critical or cultural — at the expense of the individualism characteristic of late-capitalism.

Of more targeted relevance to this thesis, however, is Barbara Vinken's *Fashion Zeitgeist: Trends and cycles in the fashion system*, published in English in 2005. Here, when Vinken declared Western fashion's century-long reign to be over, she simultaneously named its successor: a set of situations termed postfashion. Vinken distinguishes 'fashion' — a reflective, creative process descriptive of an innate motivation to use certain materials and techniques to realise needs and communicate beliefs — from Fashion, which refers in essence to the myths and constructs of the fashion system, with its — often cynical — emphasis on production, consumption and celebrity. Here, "Postfashion is very much dependent on populist myths and their motives" (Vinken, p. 65). This aspect of Vinken's conception of postfashion is in agreement with the current writing's assessment of the character/performer in music video, for example in the fashion masculinities performed in early 1980s videos studied in the thesis by Wham!, Duran Duran and Annie Lennox of Eurythmics.

Vinken's study establishes eight types of postfashion, relating to issues of time, gender clichés, class roles, art and politics. Vinken aligns these types with the practice of key designers of the 1980s and 1990s: Karl Lagerfeld for Chanel, representing the *griffe*, the sign of the house, seen as relating to fashion authenticity and auteurship; Claude Montana and Thierry Mugler, who Vinken pairs in working with myth, particularly of the feminine ideal; Dolce & Gabbana, with what Vinken calls "Deep South" (p. 91), an attitude

resultant of the designers' outsider opposition to the 'fashion capital', made visible through their use of parodic and ironic exaggeration of traditional, sometimes ecclesiastical, cultural fashion symbolism; Comme des Garçons, being Rei Kawakubo's Zen Buddhist "negative aesthetic, based in a contestation of the idea of fashion itself" (p. 101) that nonetheless references Western modernism; Yohji Yamamoto, working in the realm of affect and the poetics of memory; Jean-Paul Gaultier, who presents an extravagance in both masculine and feminine fashion that questions taste and taboo; Helmut Lang, whose sensual interplay of fabric and skin causes Vinken to invoke Barthes' observation that "the erotic moment ... is unpredictable" (Vinken, 2005, p. 137); and Martin Margiela's deconstruction of functionalism, which exposes the traces of time. From amongst this list of approaches, many comparisons can be drawn with observations that this thesis will go on to make of its case study of music video: from the disruption of the mainstream US cultural industries by 'outsiders' representative of flamboyant British subcultures, to the complex self-referentiality of the visual archive of David Bowie's performed masculinities.

Vinken's analysis proceeds in a "poetological manner, reading clothes the way one would read a poem" (2005, p. 79), which allows Vinken to contextualise her argument amongst a broad range of knowledge of the visual and literary arts in support of assertions made regarding the concerns of postfashion, an approach also influential to the methodological framework of this thesis. Vinken's sense of 'postfashion' suggests that fashion exists independently of Fashion; that Fashion is in fact a fashion 'past' and that firm understandings of fashion's conceptual foundations may be found in previous and adjacent forms of culture. Important to Vinken's concept of postfashion is a denial of gender categories hitherto

regarded 'natural', and the deconstruction of social principles of class, which she identifies as having arisen from a new dominance of street fashion commencing in the 1970s (Lynch & Strauss, 2007). Once more, the current writing notes that these are core thematic issues very much at play in early music video.

The influence of street styles and subcultures — heavily represented in popular music and visual cultures in the historical period addressed in this thesis — in setting fashion trends has been understood as congruent with such postmodernist theories as the “death of art” and “rejection of authority” (Morgado, 2014, p. 314). Social anthropologist and fashion observer Ted Polhemus claims that, sixteen years after the 1994 publication of *Streetstyle: From Sidewalk to Catwalk*, while visual traces of the exclusive alternative social movements of the later twentieth century remain in the “supermarket of style” (Polhemus, 2010, p. 654), commitment to style-tribe group identity has become less typical of the twenty-first century. This epochal transition, a latter day *fin de siècle*, is visually laminated by the imagery and transmission of music video. Vinken asserts that a reversal of the relationship between fashion-creator and imitator commencing in the 1970s was sealed by the anti-fashion avant-garde designers of the 1980s, many of whom used non-fashionable elements in a way that reflected an ‘upward’ motion of fashion from the street to the salon (2005, p. 64). The current writing extends this observation to consider another aspect of the mobility of fashion authority in the early 1980s: queer, alternative nightclub styles being beamed into millions of conservative, consumerist family homes via music television.

It is useful then to consider contemporary fashion-adjacent usage of non-material fashion forms more broadly, and how these might feature in

conceptions of postfashion. The field of curation proves a rich source of examples; some engage with the subject explicitly, and therefore help define the terms of the current discussion. Co-curated by Hazel Clark and Ilari Laamanen, in collaboration with the Finnish Cultural Institute in New York and Parsons School of Design, New York's Museum of Arts and Design (MAD), the exhibition *fashion after Fashion* held between April 27 and August 6, 2017, "present[s] fashion as an expanded field of practice that is determined by concept and context" (Museum of Arts and Design, n.d.). By inviting Eckhaus Latta in collaboration with writer, director and producer Alexa Karolinski — whose practice includes music video —, ensæmble, Lucy Jones, Ryohei Kawanishi, Henrik Vibskov, and SSAW Magazine to explore the concept of fashion beyond clothing through site-specific works (Clark, 2019), the exhibition highlighted what it identified as a current ethos in fashion design practice: a focus on collaboration and interdisciplinarity, not garments and artefacts. The timeliness of this thesis to identify a nexus between fashion and moving image is also underscored by the curatorial premise of the 2017 to 2019 *Archaeology of Fashion Film* project based at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London and the University of Southampton, that is to invite "a new understanding of film as a 'fashion medium' and as a 'fashion object'" (n.d.).

The mutuality of contemporary short-forms of moving image, the future of fashion and the situation of the museum is notably apparent in the commissioning by the V&A of animator and director Quentin Jones to create *Boys Don't Cry* (2022), a choreography-based fashion film "about the future of masculine identity and how a more optimistic and inclusive view of gender is unfolding" (Jones, in Nowness, 2022. n.p.) which dominates the closing installation of its landmark *Fashioning Masculinities: The Art of Menswear* exhibition held between March 19 and

November 6, 2022. Says Jones, the short film “touches on the idealized male body, but also on the fragility of masculinity when it is based on limiting ideas” (Nowness, 2022. n.p.). Claire Wilcox and Rosalind McKever’s curatorial decision to propose a future for fashion by summarising their thematically ambitious, material culture-based historical survey with Jones’ dynamic video speculation lends particular weight to a central observation of this thesis: that contemporary understandings of the fashion object can be expanded to include non-material cultural products.

Across the exhibition, Wilcox and McKever draw from the museum’s vast collection of design, fine and decorative arts to propose conceptual linkages between artefacts and garments, in order to create a conversation about fashion and gender identity. Yet, the exhibition’s signature original work is a *non-material* fashion object; and in telling accordance with both the topic of this thesis, Jones’ striking, monochromatic non-narrative piece, a “high-energy dance film honoring the modern man” (Nowness, 2022. n.p.) draws heavily from the language of music video. Indeed, it could be said to speak it fluently; *Boys Don’t Cry* is driven by its musical soundtrack, employs visual effects and editing techniques pioneered by music video directors of the 1980s and 1990s, and operates entirely within music video’s “multiple senses of time and space” (Vernallis, 2004, p. 16). The video plays on endless loop, with its musical soundtrack and constant moving visuals creating an atmosphere within the gallery space reminiscent of the background effect of twenty-four hour music television.

Of further interest to this thesis is Vinken’s recognition of the cultural conditions which give rise to postfashion, which are concurrent with both the development of music video and the influence of its fashionable performer/characters. Further to this, the current writing speculates that



music video of the early 1980s — particularly its connection to the club and fashion culture of the New Romantic movement, which as the thesis will explain arises from punk — *contributed to* as much as reflected late twentieth-century fashion’s conflicted visual relationship with its societal contexts. Vinken isolates the example of “the punk” as a character in postfashion’s emergent sphere:

the punk, like his prototype the dandy, cannot altogether free himself from his origin; the one from the high, the other from the low end of the social spectrum, both are faithful to a milieu that they transform, but from which they also draw the force of their gesture (Vinken, 2005, p. 65).

The conceptual identification ‘postfashion’ does then largely parallel critical theories of postmodernism, in that as with Arthur Danto’s (1997) diagnosis of contemporary art “after the end of art”, the end of Fashion does not, of course, mean that fashion is at an end. Rather, it recognises that systemic challenge to historically-bound conventions of medium specificity in the domain of fashion is no longer a matter of mere speculation, but can be observed to have *already occurred*, thus necessitating a reconfiguration of the category’s internal logic — this being analogous to Rosalind Krauss’ persuasive case for category redefinition of sculpture in response to the conditions of postmodernism in the influential essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* (1979).

Since its publication, Krauss’ expressive title has been co-opted across criticism and analysis of myriad disciplines, including painting, drawing, architecture, design, performance, curating, writing and cinema. Such appropriations frequently affix an understanding of the term ‘field’ to its common partial definition as “an area of operation or activity” (The Australian Oxford Dictionary, 2004), by identifying areas of creative

practice that can be said to have undergone, or perhaps warrant, 'expansion'. Separated from Krauss' thesis, 'expanded field' is a resonant phrase that can be conveniently conceptualised as giving permission to contemporaneous boundary-setting around originaive domains. In this sense, the term is inviting when discussing cultural forms that are characteristically mobile in their usage of notions and technologies, a distinction that can readily be made of fashion.

In précis, Krauss (1979) identifies sculptural practice of the period in which she writes as having transitioned from the making of markers and monuments, then freed from the constraints of the plinth via the sitelessness permitted by modernism, to a state of idealistic, abstract self-referentiality that can no longer be explained through historical contextualisation. Existing only in opposition to what it is *not* — “not-landscape” and “not-architecture” — Krauss determines that the boundaries of sculpture demand reappraisal in order to be freed of this condition of “pure negativity” (1979, p. 36).

In order then for Krauss' notion of the expanded field to transfer literally to an analysis of fashion, a determination would be required as to what a comparable set of fashion-adjacent original oppositional terms might be. However, setting terms such as these as the binary from which to expand clearly limits, rather than expands, a conceptual definition of fashion when discussing non-materiality. Usefully, Lara Torres' (2017) article *Fashion in the Expanded Field: Strategies for Critical Fashion Practices* establishes ground for an 'expanded field' of fashion based on her observation of increasingly conceptual, or critical, contemporary interdisciplinary fashion practices. Here, Torres avoids potential related complexities arising from transposing 'pure' Krauss to her argument by explaining that:

engagement with the notion of ‘the expanded field’ is not necessarily to prolong Krauss’ systematic analytical grid, indebted to structuralism, but to operate where the legacies of Krauss’ concept enable new points of departures and the understanding of what an expanded field of fashion can be (p. 168).

This usage of ‘expanded field’ is reflective of much of the term’s contemporary usage and understanding; however, so as to remain distinct from Krauss’ methodology, it also informs a choice in the current writing to instead refer to fashion as being an *expanding* field of practice and enquiry.

Still, to ask in the vein of Krauss, what if we *were* to identify what fashion ‘is *not*’, or does not necessarily *need to be*? As Clark and Laamanen propose, “as the world of fashion continues to evolve, the term ‘fashion’ itself demands redefinition [allowing for] a new understanding of fashion that accommodates a wider range of practices and ideologies” (Museum of Arts and Design, n.d.). Indeed, as Barbara Vinken states:

things are different in postfashion: it seeks to draw time, and makes itself into a new ‘art of memory.’ The signs and traces of time are the stuff from which this fashion is made, replacing the traditional material of fashion, ‘the stuff of which dreams are made’ (2005, p. 68).

In taking this analytical approach to temporality, this thesis is also informed by the notion of uchronic time, and post-postmodernist theoretical framework such as metamodernism.

### **Fashion, time and ‘the modernisms’**

Fashion and time — that one is reflected in and by the other, continually reframing interpretations of both — is an enduring theme of fashion scholarship. Underscoring this is the publication in English of *Time in*

*Fashion* (2020), Caroline Evans and Alessandra Vaccari's anthology of critical and other writing exploring the close relationship between these phenomena. Here, the editors avoid categorisation of time as past, present and future in favour of a theoretical framework that assigns the selected writings to conceptual categories determined as "industrial time", "antilinear time", and "uchronic time".

In this scheme, industrial time could be seen as issuing from a Marxist perspective on fashion as an industry, which developed in correspondence with post-Enlightenment modernity, nineteenth-century colonial expansion, global industrialisation and the rise of capitalism. In the present day, this is represented in the industry's seasonal structure, and the resultant impact of fashion on workers and wearers (and by implication, the planetary environment). Antilinear time is, rather, aligned with scholarly understandings of fashion related to postmodern theory, dealing in accordance with Hal Foster's 1983 explanation of postmodern cultures as having a "propensity for parody, pastiche and fragmentation, and its nostalgic ambiguity between the new and the old" (Evans & Vaccari, 2020, p. 23). As a concept in fashion theory, Evans and Vaccari propose that the idea of antilinear time, differing from cyclical time in its lack of sequential order and reliance instead on the "discontinuities of history" (2020, p. 27), finds its origin in the writing of Walter Benjamin.

Benjamin's influence upon Evans' own dialectical approach to history in *Fashion at the edge: spectacle, modernity and deathliness* (2003), and on the writing of Ulrich Lehmann in *Tigersprung: fashion in modernity* (2000b), in turn influences methodologies employed in this thesis. Lehmann's book takes its title from an "enigmatic quotation" (p. xvii) from Benjamin's last writings, wherein Lehmann usefully identifies Benjamin's

position that “in quoting from [the] past, fashion is able to break the historical continuum and become both transitory and transhistorical” (2000b, p. xvii). Lehmann sees Benjamin as regarding fashion in modernity as not merely a form of commodified craftsmanship, but as “a social force — a stylistic revolution sharing the same cultural features with a political one (p. xvii). This reflection is significantly apposite to central claims around music video of the early 1980s that are made in this thesis. Moreover, an aspect of Evans' (2003) interpretation of Benjamin particularly applies to this thesis's understanding of music video's often rapid, non-linear edited narratives:

for Benjamin, the relationship between images of the past and present worked like the montage technique of cinema. The principle of montage is that a third meaning is created by the juxtaposition of two images, rather than any immutable meaning inhering in each image (p. 33).

From Evans and Vaccari's (2020) temporal taxonomy, however, it is the concept of *uchronia* that perhaps links most strongly to the study of music video and fashion. Originating in Thomas More's sixteenth-century fictional ideal society, 'utopia', the term 'uchronia' is used in Charles Renouvier's *L'Uchronie: l'Utopie dans l'histoire* (2015/1876), a speculative alternative history of Europe predicated on the hypothesis that the Roman Empire never fell. Introduced into fashion theory by Roland Barthes in *The Fashion System* (1990/1967), as Evans and Vaccari (2020) explain, uchronic time relates to:

fashion's 'imaginary' and its capacity for fantasy, myth making and innovative thinking, as well as propensity for predicting future trends and playing tricks with the passage of time. The concept of *uchronia* means an impossible or fictional time” (p. 29).

The suite of concerns and methods affiliated with uchronic fashion time in the anthology match neatly with aspects of music video that frequently come to light during analysis of case study examples in this research. Barthes' claim is that fashion is always uchronic: in other words, 'fashion' is a time that does not exist, because it consists of a permanent present.

This invokes the language of music video, where characteristically often, constituting imagery is "almost devoid of temporal markers [but suggests] a particular instant, a recurring moment, or a passing thought" (Vernallis, 2004, p. 14). Vinken's (2005) observation of fashion's constant sense of 'presentness' could be made equally of music video, with a "positioning [of] itself as an absolute, self-evident as a moment becoming eternity, the promise of eternity" (p. 42). In the current writing, this understanding is particularly reflected in the stylistic choice to use the present tense across the body chapters of the thesis when describing — and sometimes when contextualising — its music video case studies. This writing strategy will be explained further in relation to filmic theory in a separate section of this chapter.

Evans and Vaccari (2020) link uchronia with "utopian heritages, trend-forecasting and other commercially motivated predictions; forward-looking fantasies set in an imagined future; and activism motivated by a real sense of urgency and political engagement" (p. 30). As the substance of this thesis will demonstrate, this variety of phenomena reads uncannily like a list of dominating issues at hand in selected music videos of the early 1980s which are its foundational data.

Christopher Breward and Caroline Evans, in their introduction to the edited volume *Fashion and Modernity* (2005), differentiate 'modernity' — the

urban, social and artistic impacts of innovative, modernising processes in science, technology, industry, economic and politics — from ‘modernism’, a wave of avant-garde artistic movements beginning in the early twentieth century that responded to or represented these experiences and changed sensibilities (p. 1). The current writing recognises modernism, postmodernism and post-postmodernism as a grouping of cultural epochs with supporting theories particularly relevant to the study of fashion, in their central concern of ‘nowness’. These structures continue to dominate discussions of contemporary aesthetics, precisely because of their synonymity with contemporaneity. As Elizabeth Wilson (2003/1985) sagaciously explains, fashion is intrinsic to modernity, and one of its truest manifestations, informed by the ideas of the Enlightenment, the substance of industrialisation, and the spirit of progress. Accordingly, modernism’s correlation with novelty is equally apparent both in its material product *and* how it is theorised. Michael North (2019) notes that the very habit of naming and defining successive cultural time periods is an implication of modernism itself.

However across contemporary scholarship, the situation, or situations, of modernism are not viewed as necessarily chronological (Osborne, 1992; Hutcheon, 2003; Eshelman, 2008; North, 2019). Indeed, Agnès Rocamora and Anneke Smelik, in their editorial introduction to *Thinking Through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists* (2016), note that “there are indeed multiple co-existing modernities, and the presumed temporal sequence ... of pre- or non-modernity, modernity [and] post-modernity has been problematized by various scholars” (p. 7). Caroline Evans (2003) refers to Frederic Jameson’s influential article *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1984) when noting that: “fashion seems to be a quintessentially postmodern form, and on the face of it 1980s fashion bore

this out (Evans, 2003, p. 24). Evans recognises this in the “bold and swashbuckling raids on the [fashion imagery] of the past” (2003, p. 24) of Punk pioneer Vivienne Westwood and the Club Kid-adjacent John Galiano — often grouped with practitioners identified with postfashion, such as Jean-Paul Gaultier — and the “gestural mockery of post-punk London clubland” (2003, p. 25), exemplified in the bricoleur aesthetic of the New Romantics, who will feature in Chapter 2.

Theoretical fashion scholarship often locates understanding of the fashion object within the medium specificity of modernism, and much subsequent writing explains fashion through the medium multiplicity of postmodernism. The relation of these conditions to fashion is once more identified by Wilson (2003/1985):

the concept ‘modernity’ is ... imprecise. Yet the word ‘modernity’ attempts to capture the essence of both the cultural and subjective experience of capitalist society and all its contradictions. ... ‘Modernity’ does ... seem useful as a way of indicating the restless desire for change characteristic of cultural life in industrial capitalism, the desire for the new that fashion expresses so well. ... Postmodernism, with its eclectic approach to style might seem especially compatible with fashion; for fashion, with its constant change and pursuit of glamour enacts symbolically the most hallucinatory aspects of our culture, the confusions between the real and not real, the aesthetic obsessions, the vein of morbidity without tragedy, of irony without merriment ...” (p. 63).

Although insightful, implied in this is a joylessness in “doubts about the inevitability of ‘progress’” (Polhemus, 1996, p. 32) that are provoked by postmodern viewpoints. Also concerned with what is ‘real’ and ‘not real’, Polhemus has a contrasting deep, indeed somewhat celebratory, interest in a shift “from fashion to style” (1996, p. 31). Polhemus sees this as



characterised by conspicuous diversity, and triggered by a shift from modernism to postmodernism. Using an analogy based on the nostalgic ahistoricism of fashion-as-costume in *Blade Runner*, director Ridley Scott's 1982 cinematic interpretation of Philip K. Dick's 1968 science fiction novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, Polhemus (1996) asks of a postmodern fashionable ideal: "Who is real? Who is a replicant? Who cares? Life is a fancy-dress party. Enjoy" (p. 35). Contrary to Wilson's diagnosis then, in this postmodern shift in fashion as a form of popular cultural identity performance Polhemus observes irony *and* merriment. The resigned whimsy of fashion-as-postmodern-project Polhemus describes here foretells of a further modernism, one in which issues of chronology are less central than of thematic creative intention.

Such observations lead to the proposition that postfashion in fact takes place in a post-postmodern space (Blanco & Reilly, 2021), which contributes to the identification of a new cultural epoch. In its pursuit of an expanding definition of fashion, particularly as a context for understanding music video, this thesis therefore also considers what a fashion object might be in relation to 'post-postmodernist' propositions.

## **Metamodernism**

Relevant to the fashion theory location of this thesis, Marcia Morgado's (2014) article *Fashion phenomena and the post-postmodern condition: Enquiry and speculation* responds to an emerging body of scholarly work which proposes that as the conditions which characterised the postmodern era give way to new circumstances, a correspondingly new "cultural ethos" is replacing postmodernism, or "coming to occupy a place within or beside it" (p. 314). Morgado observes that advancing technologies, an altered socioeconomic system, a highly developed stage of capitalism resulting in

global homogenisation, and fragmented or transformed experiences of time and space precipitated a transition from modern to postmodern times, a “gamut of global crises” (p. 315). She perceives that in the current era, a similar shift is taking place and that this signals yet another ‘new’ cultural climate. In her fashion-centred survey of a number of theories proposed as explicative of this new epoch, “post-postmodernism”, Morgado notes that as none of these theoretical propositions directly address “fashion-related dress”, it is necessary to extrapolate from these diagnoses of this new cultural paradigm “aspects of current fashion-related phenomena [that] reflect a post-postmodern condition” (2014, p. 313). Among these extrapolations, Morgado suggests that one of the more convincing is to recognise an increased blurring of the distinction between art and fashion, evident both in increased collaboration between practitioners and in the reconceptualisation of spaces wherein works are displayed. Following popular culture scholar Alan Kirby, she focuses on five of these: Bourriaud’s thesis of altermodernism; Lipovetsky’s proposal of hypermodernity; Eshelman’s discussion of performatism; Samuels’ argument concerning auto modernity, and Kirby’s own argument on digimodernism. The article includes metamodernism — itself informed by these precedents, particularly in its acceptance of Eshelman’s performatism as a key metamodern strategy — among a list of other contending theories. Morgado’s article cites two of metamodernism’s foundational scholars, Timotheus Vermuelen and Robin van den Akker, although does not specifically analyse the condition’s philosophical and applied characteristics in relation to fashion phenomena.

Vermuelen and van den Akker’s defining essay *Notes on Metamodernism* (2010) explains that an “emerging structure of feeling” is apparent in a new generation of creative practice (p. 2). This phrase originates in Raymond

Williams' mid-twentieth century conception of an atmospheric area of interaction between the hegemonic consciousness of an epoch and its cultural lived experience, and of the appropriation of these in dramatic and other texts. First proposed in 1954's *Preface to Film* and subsequently expanded upon in problematising Antonio Gramsci in *The Long Revolution* (1965), Raymond uses the term to describe the different ways of thinking that can emerge at a given time in history, but employs 'feeling' rather than 'thought' to signal the ambiguities and hidden inferences that must be considered when evaluating the stakes of such a trajectory (Buchanan, 2010, n.p.).

Vermeulen and van den Akker's (2010) essay identifies in the metamodern structure of feeling a cultural approach that increasingly abandons postmodern aesthetic principles and creative strategies such as deconstruction, parataxis, and pastiche in favour of "*aesth-ethical* [original italics] notions of reconstruction, myth, and metaxis" (p. 2.) Vermeulen and van den Akker consider metamodernism to express important aspects of the Romantic sensibility — such as the use of tropes of mysticism, estrangement and alienation proposed as alternatives to Reason (p. 9). Their essay recalls that these themes have historically been expressed across varied art forms and media, endorsing observations made in this thesis of symbolic imagery in music videos analysed in this thesis by David Bowie and Eurythmics, for example.

In addressing a key departure from postmodern usage of pluralism and irony, Vermeulen and van den Akker note that whereas postmodern irony is tied to apathy, metamodern irony is bound to desire. With regard to metamodernism's divergence from the traditions of modernist practice, Vermuelen and van den Akker describe metamodernist Romantic cinema as

“persuad[ing] us to believe that there are matters Reason cannot account for” (2010, p. 10). Vermuelen and van den Akker refer to film critic James MacDowell’s identification of what is called ‘quirky cinema’, as associated with the films of Michel Gondry and Spike Jonze — thoughtfully production-designed works often characterised by stylistic naivety — as exemplary of metamodernist creative practice. Gondry and Jonze are also noted directors of music video, and transfer cinematic approaches between these media forms (Vernallis, 2008).

Vermuelen and van den Akker suggest that while metamodern discourse acknowledges that the promise of history can never be fulfilled *because it does not exist*, crucially it nevertheless moves toward it. In consciously committing itself to “an impossible possibility”, seeking forever a truth it does not expect to find (p. 5), Vermeulen and van den Akker’s metamodernism is distinguished by an:

oscillation between the modern and the postmodern. It oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity (2010, pp. 5-6).

This thesis perceives this diagnosis as also being highly descriptive of much of the visual representation of performer/characters and the non-linear narratives of its key music video studies. This makes the idea of metamodernism a useful contribution to the conceptual framework of this thesis: for if modernism is characterised by temporal ordering, and postmodernism by temporal disordering, metamodernism is a surreal, timeless space, evocative of the language of early music video that this writing seeks to describe. Vinken’s (2005) observation of fashion in the era of postfashion as an “art of memory”(p. 68), something this thesis

understands as being related to Romantic ideals presented in its music video case studies, is additionally viable here:

it is up to date to be resolutely no longer up to date. Rather, the fashion is to wear 'time' – not the hectic time of the latest fashion, or the nostalgic time of the past, but rather a forgotten, other time. Fashion (after Fashion) has become the site at which the repressed other surfaces (p. 69).

Metamodernism has been tested in analysis of curatorial practice, literature – most frequently, poetry – and moving image (MacDowell, 2016) but to date remains largely unexplored in fashion scholarship. Fashion scholar Alla Eizenberg (2021) identifies Vermeulen and van den Akker's conception of metamodernism as being more acute than other post-postmodern theories in its capacity to describe the distinct structural and emotional characteristics of fashion in the early twenty-first century. Recent writings by Vanessa Gerrie (2020, 2023) are further rare, and therefore leading, examples of the emergence of metamodernism as a theory of fashion. Gerrie adopts a poststructuralist, rhizomatic theoretical approach to mapping what she conceptualises as 'borderless fashion design', explained as arising from Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas' (2018) idea of metaphysical clothing. Placing this in a contemporary fashionscape, which arises from the influence of the digital on the collapsing of global and local fashion borders, Gerrie then takes into account Geczy and Karaminas' (2018) notion of critical fashion practice and in having identified metamodernism's differentiating inclination to its counterparts to be an articulate expression of the evolution of fashion culture as a millennial idiom, ultimately sets her research findings against Vermeulen and van den Akker's metamodernist paradigm.

Gerrie observes that the contemporary fashion system is at a uniquely convergent point between high and low culture, through its characteristic interdisciplinarity and the elasticity of its spatial representation. Gerrie acknowledges that the prefix ‘meta’ has entered the contemporary vernacular as an independent term for the notion of self-referentiality, and by taking into account that ideas of reconstruction — as opposed to deconstruction — “practitioners [now] come to the field of fashion from many different entry points and both cross and collapse disciplinary borders” (2020, p. 75). This is useful to the current writing, for example in evaluating music video narratives that are created through non-linear editing schemes — essentially a process of *reconstruction* — and their relation to identity, memory and aspiration. Ambiguous representations of time, space and causality, with a highlighting of ephemerality, process, and condensation, are additional strategies employed by film (and music video) directors identified with metamodernism by Vermuelen and van den Akker, who have also worked in creative collaboration with fashion practitioners (Vernallis, 2008; MacDowell, 2016, Muhlhauser & Kachur, 2017).

This thesis is also benefitted by arguments regarding gender and sexual difference in post-postmodernist fashion as proposed by Ben Barry and Andrew Reilly, in their chapter *Gender More: An Intersectional Perspective on Men’s Transgression of the Gender Dress Binary* (2020). Barry and Reilly note that post-postmodernism is particularly characterised by trends in “androgynous dressing among men ... that combine conventionally masculine and feminine elements” (p. 123) in both clothing and grooming styles, including the mixing of signifiers such as make up and facial hair. Building in part from Jay McCauley Bowstead’s (2018) observation that twenty-first century fashion designers frequently juxtapose fashion’s traditionally-gendered material elements, Barry and Reilly draw

upon Eshelman's (2008) original and Morgado's (2014) subsequent proposals that the post-postmodern era has redefined many cultural categories, with gender being important among them. The authors' findings include the observation that: "perhaps rather than attempting to visually communicate the equality of genders, this new form of androgyny is intended to highlight the complexity of gender identity and the diversity of masculine and feminine facets" (p. 133). Barry and Reilly's contribution to this thesis' use of the term 'androgyny' will be identified further in the forthcoming sub-section of the thesis on gender definitions.

## **Writing and theoretical methodologies**

### **Barthes, Sontag and Sedgwick**

Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick are three thinkers whose work brings influence to bear on overall methodologies used in this research. These are, respectively: the technique of visual structural analysis; the context of Camp; and the lens of queer theory. The great range of their writing, and its interpretation by other scholars, is also useful to this thesis more generally.

The influence of Roland Barthes' philosophy and criticism on the current writing is apparent in significant ways beyond structuralist approaches and his aforementioned contribution to understandings of fashion and temporality. As film scholar Colin Gardner observes: "Barthes was an intellectual *flâneur* who persistently 'wrote' (and 'rewrote') his often 'erotic' passion for literature, theatre, music, advertising, pop culture and photography" (2009, p. 109.). Music video, as will be defined and described in this research, is a media culture typical of the kind which piqued Barthes' interest. Following this, the current writing speculates on what Barthes

might have made of music video, which arose to cultural prominence in tantalising coincidence with Barthes' earthly demise in 1980.

While music video may have origins in cinema, it is a distinct moving image form with a visual language that has in turn influenced cinema (Vernallis, 2004; 2008). Gardner's contributing chapter to *Film, theory and philosophy: the key thinkers* (2009) offers an instructive general analysis of Barthes' writings on cinema. Not un-critical of the philosopher's idiosyncratic interpretation of Marxist, structuralist and poststructuralist methodologies over the lengthy course of the development of his semiotic theories, Gardner identifies an: "almost schizophrenic disjuncture" between Barthes' "undeniably seminal impact on the developing field of film studies and its related disciplines of ciné-semiology and structuralism in the 1960s and 1970s, and his own, academically non-specialist, 'cinophobia'" (2009. p. 109).

The same could be said about Barthes' relationship with fashion, as respect for expertise in an area of creative endeavour was rarely a prerequisite for Barthes to respond to it. Although each discipline Barthes saw fit to 'explain' claims him for their own, the significant overlaps he perceived between creative spheres are characteristic of his theoretical game-playing. In a famous example from 1957's *Mythologies*, Barthes' exploration of what constitutes "Romanness" in Joseph Mankiewicz's 1953 epic film production *Julius Caesar* is through an examination of the actors' hair styling. As Gardner says: "for Barthes, the film's true auteur is not Shakespeare or Mankiewicz but its hairdresser" (2009. p. 112). This methodological approach particularly appertains to this thesis: in being coterminous with the realm of fashion culture, music video's differentiation as from other



moving image forms is asserted in this thesis as resulting from its textual hybridity.

Interestingly, *Mythologies* (1957) — which theorises a wide range of twentieth-century popular culture texts including advertising, cinema, performances of masculinity in professional wrestling and “the face of Greta Garbo”, all of which could be seen to relate to the development of the language of music video — shares the same year of publication as Barthes' first foray into systemising a language of Fashion/fashion, the 1957 essay *Histoire et sociologie du vêtement*, published in the journal *Annales*.

UK popular music scholar Sheila Whitely's (1997) analysis of the textual links between sound and image in the 1990 Madonna music video *Justify my Love* takes its cue from Barthes' codes of narratology, specifically, the paradigmatic codes — semic, cultural and symbolic — as suggested in Barthes' *S/Z* (1974), a starred semiotic reading of the tale of a castrato, Honoré de Balzac's 1831 novella *Sarrasine*. Whitely's justification for the use of this Barthesian methodology relies on musical analogies applicable to these codes. Whitely succinctly summarises Barthes' semic code as working “at the level of the signifier (denotation, connotation etc.)”; his cultural code as “related to our narrative competence, how we pick up references, clues (and potentially snares) that are seeded into the text”; and his symbolic code, as “pull[ing] us into the system of textual relations, drawing on preconceived ideas which are often based on our positioning in culture as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, White/Black, middle/working class etc. and with a privileging of first terms” (1997 p. 261). Whilst Barthes' codes of reading here are applied most generally to written texts, it is useful to this thesis when Whitely proposes that musical analysis — in this case, of a music video — is born of narrative impulse. She therefore argues for the

use of literary categories in the course of deconstructing musical structures, to endorse the fictions that are created by the analysis. This strategy is also adopted in sections of this thesis.

The broader potential of Barthes' multiple methodological approaches to this thesis is further encouraged by Gardner's (2009) observation that throughout 1957's *Mythologies*, as Barthes "teases out more marginal signifiers and drags them into the spotlight" (p. 112), he eschews strident Marxist polemics in favour of a more light-hearted, de-centred approach. As poet and cultural critic Wayne Koestenbaum (2013) suggests, Barthes' "gentle mission was to rescue nuance. What is nuance? Anything that caught Barthes' eye. Anything that aroused him" (p. 51). With this in mind, the research reads music video tangentially as perhaps Barthes may have done in the vein of *Mythologies*, in order to observe the range of cultural markers apparent in its idiosyncratic language of appearances.

In the book *Menswear Revolution: The Transformation of Contemporary Men's Fashion* (2018) Jay McCauley Bowstead defends not only the application of Barthesian structural and semiological analyses in his own research, but also the influence of Barthes' "intuitive, aesthetic and emotive reading[s] of popular taste" as modelled in *Mythologies* (McCauley Bowstead, 2018, p. 4). In linking theoretical claims to observations made on gendered performer/character identity in early music video, this thesis borrows from Barthes' own explanation that his approach to the sequence of essays contained in *Mythologies* is not to "pretend to show any organic development: the link between them is rather one of insistence and repetition" (1993/1957, p. 12).

This thesis often refers to early music video as having, or being, a language. It should be noted however that the writing does not claim to perfectly adhere to Barthes' important conception of fashion's language as proposed in *The Fashion System* (1990/1967), the pinnacle of Barthes' considerable body of work on the subject produced in the late 1950s and 1960s, which frequently fused Marxist and semiological analysis, demonstrating the influence of Berthold Brecht.

Michael Carter (2003) marks Barthes' work on fashion as both a culmination of, and departure from, theoretical interpretations by fashion scholars who preceded him, as "it is Barthes who first begins systematically to thin through the intellectual changes that would eventually amount to a 'paradigm change' in the study of clothes and fashion" (p. 143). In answer to the question 'what is fashion?', Carter states that Barthes' aim in this "book of method" is to "impart to the object, fashion, a coherent conceptual order" (p. 144). This thesis does not uniformly apply a structuralist methodology to its analysis of individual music videos: it does however seek to impose upon music video a kind of 'coherent conceptual order', so as to explain how music video might work as a system of communication (Barnard, 1996).

Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell (2011) recognise the enormous impact of Barthes' application of linguistic and structuralist modes of thought in *Mythologies* on the study of visual culture (p. 392). They also note, however, that through readings of Barthes' offered by scholars with phenomenological foci, there are significant limitations to understanding the complexity of 'seeing' material culture and cultural phenomena through linguistic models. Heywood and Sandywell refer to Tim Dant's observation that Barthes himself moved from a structuralist to a post-structuralist

approach to visual analysis, shifting from the notion of language to ideas more strongly connected to “concrete sensory formations” (Heywood & Sandywell, p. 392).

It is true that Barthes’ approaches to theorising fashion notably developed from 1957’s *Histoire et sociologie du vêtement*, an early essay on fashion in which Barthes sought to defend the use of linguistic methodologies for the study of dress by pronouncing that “language and dress are, at any moment in history, complete structures, constituted organically by a functional network of norms and forms” (Barthes cited in Hammen, 2018, p. 78).

However, it is useful to this thesis to consider Ulrich Lehmann’s (2000a) persuasive argument for a Barthesian structuralist approach, à la the philosopher’s 1957 essay, to understanding film and the fashion object. In his article *Language of the PurSuit: Cary Grant's Clothes in Alfred Hitchcock's "North by Northwest"*, Lehmann (2000a) proposes the usefulness of concentrated semiotic analysis to appreciating the 1959 Cold War mistaken-identity suspense classic, with its “visual cinematic narrative that offers much more surface than depth, more disguises than realities and more commodified images than meaning” (p. 468). It is apposite to the development of a framework for understanding music video, with its significant twentieth century origins in the commodification of pop personae, that lead actor Cary Grant’s glamorous, morally ambiguous character Roger Thornhill is a mid-century Madison Avenue advertising executive. As Lehmann explains further, Hitchcock’s film and Grant’s performance in it “are explained best by looking at appearances — precisely because they are deceptive” (p. 468). This observation is one equally made by this thesis in its investigation of many of the new — often ambiguous — masculinities performed in its key music video case studies.

## Camp

Theories of Camp recur throughout this thesis. The term ‘Camp’ has been used since at least the mid-nineteenth century, first identified in the subcultural vernacular of gay and trans London in the mid-nineteenth century (Park, 1868). From the early twentieth century, the adjective ‘Camp’ was primarily applied to outlandish, theatrical individuals and their modes of behaviour (Ware, 1909). The term was popularised and brought out of exclusively queer circles in the mid-twentieth century, most clearly as a result of the influence Susan Sontag’s *Notes on Camp*, first published in *Partisan Review* in 1964 and subsequently in the anthology *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (2009/1966). Sontag seeks to describe, rather than define, Camp as a sensibility and ineffable aesthetic style. Indeed for Sontag, it is in fact Camp’s slippery and elusive quality which renders it so appealing.

A number of factors crucial to Sontag’s understanding of Camp apply to this thesis’ research framework around fashion and music video. One of these is her identification of Camp’s prevalence in low-culture art forms. Sontag observes that while the dandy of the nineteenth century strived for uniqueness and had high-brow taste, the connoisseur of Camp takes pleasure from popular culture and mass media. Proceeding in part from Sontagian readings of the sensibility, Andrew Ross (1988) writes more explicitly that the rise of Camp as a popular aesthetic form in the 1960s is linked to post-war consumerism. This parallels the development of advertising media and the cultural influence of the popular music industry, of which music video is a crucial part. Doris Leibetseder (2012) notes that by the time of Sontag’s publication, “camp’s scope of meaning had already increased and included the popular taste. Thus, the word also referred to pop music (with performers who used their androgynous and transgressive

representations as a strategy, for example ... David Bowie, etc.)” ( p. 59).

Bowie’s practice is of course a focus of this thesis.

Sontag asserts that the naïve or ‘pure’ Camp sensibility ‘aims high’, and is situated outside a binary of good/bad aesthetic judgement. Many music videos of the early 1980s are, objectively speaking, ‘bad’ when contemporary technical and aesthetic standards are applied. The videos analysed in this research are often effortful and earnest artistic explorations of clunky visual and thematic metaphors, featuring experimental uses of emerging technologies and homespun evocations of extravagance that sometimes render them unintentionally humorous. This writing will suggest that in fact these characteristics in themselves form part of the recognisable language of music video, as first seen in clips focused upon in this thesis such as *Rio* (1982) and *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)* (1983).

Sontag (2009/1966) notes that: “as a taste in persons, Camp responds particularly to the markedly attenuated and to the strongly exaggerated” (p. 279). The respective “corny flamboyant femaleness” and “exaggerated he-man-ness” of Sontag’s examples, B-grade movie stars such as Jayne Mansfield and Victor Mature, is not dissimilar to gender performance by heteronormative US pop-fashion personas during the early MTV era, including Madonna, and male stadium rock performers who enjoyed renewed success due to music video, for example Bruce Springsteen.<sup>3</sup> Such pop stars, although important to histories of music videos more generally, are however not the theoretical focus of the current study.

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<sup>3</sup>Simon Frith (1990) writes of the 1970s US cult figure Springsteen’s sudden emergence in the mid 1980s as a rock icon symbolising a ‘New Authenticity’ as being in direct contrast to the heavily produced queer/gay British pop act Frankie Goes to Hollywood, with his: “sound (undoctored rock and roll), image (working clothes), politics (concern for the survival of working class communities ... ) and even sexuality (his stage stories revolve around male heterosexual anxieties and pride)” (p. 185).

More relevant to this thesis is Sontag's association of Camp with androgyny. Sontag exemplifies with the "haunting androgynous vacancy behind the perfect beauty of Greta Garbo" (p. 279), which sheds an interesting light on the appeal of the famously 'androgynous' 'gender benders' — terms to be defined shortly — of the 1980s, such as Annie Lennox. Further, Sontag's other examples of the androgyne as one of the Camp sensibility's greatest images, "the swooning slim, sinuous figures of pre-Raphaelite painting ... [and] the thin flowing sexless bodies in Art Nouveau prints and posters" (p. 279) easily evoke: the thinness and whiteness of Bowie's many performer/characters, as discussed in Chapters 2; Lennox's female drag, which is considered in Chapter 5; even the models who act as 'backing musicians' in the 1986 music video for Robert Palmer, *Addicted to Love*, referred to in Chapter 4. These resemble the sexual vacancy and graphic poster art aesthetic of *Playboy* illustrator — and album cover artist for Duran Duran's *Rio* (1982) — Patrick Nagel's chalk-white early 1980s female archetype. Sontag proposes that:

Camp taste draws on a mostly unacknowledged truth of taste: the most refined form of sexual attractiveness (as well as the most refined form of sexual pleasure) consists of going against the grain of one's sex. What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine ... (2009/1966, p. 279)

As this thesis will demonstrate, whether consciously or unconsciously, music videos of the early 1980s frequently exploit such Camp understandings. However, a further defining characteristic of Sontag's Camp is that it is apolitical, a position that has attracted significant criticism from queer theorists such as Moe Meyer, and also where the current investigation deviates most strongly from Sontag's overall diagnosis. In his editorial introduction to the book *The Politics and Poetics*

*of Camp* (1994), Meyer defines Camp as “the total body of performative practices and strategies used to enact a queer identity” (p. 5), and suggests that this understanding facilitates a rereading of Sontag and the apolitical Pop camp that proliferated subsequent to her prominent interpretation.

Meyer identifies that Sontag’s was a specific version of Camp in which its relationship to queerness had been omitted, arguing that while *Notes on Camp* (2009/1966) brought Camp into mainstream consciousness, this lack in its premise is significant. Meyer explains that:

with its homosexual connotations downplayed, sanitised, and made safe for public consumption, Sontag’s version of Camp was extolled, emulated, and elaborated upon in a flurry of writing [that conflated Camp with other] rhetorical and performative strategies such as irony, satire, burlesque and travesty (1994, p. 7).

Sontag’s (2009/1966) claim that Camp is apolitical in nature is linked to the observation that the sensibility is “serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious” (p. 288). Contrary to Sontag, Meyer asserts that in fact it is the sensibility’s very relationship with queerness that renders it *inherently* political. Like Meyer, this thesis does not agree that politics cannot feature in a dichotomy between seriousness and frivolity, for music videos of the early 1980s are frequently both Camp and blatantly political. The enthusiasm with which the pop music industry mobilised to make political causes of the era’s most dire global calamities — from African famine to the tragedy of AIDS — could be seen as exhibiting a grandiosity not unknown to Camp spectacle. That Camp should rear its head in reaction to the tumult of this historical period is indicative of what Andrew Ross (1988) takes from British jazz musician and pop intellectual George Melly: that Camp has been central to “almost every difficult transitional moment



in the evolution of pop culture”, helping pop to make “a forced march around good taste” (p. 2).

It is noteworthy that music video frequently makes such comfortable use of Camp aesthetics in contexts that are not explicitly queer. The flamboyance and theatricality of performer/characters in early music video is not always tied to the off-stage sexuality or gender identity of the artist but rather is again, in Lehmann’s terms, more about surface than depth. Sontag’s (2009/1966) 38th note is that: “Camp is the consistently aesthetic experience of the world. It incarnates a victory of ‘style’ over ‘content’, ‘aesthetics’ over ‘morality’, of irony over tragedy” (p. 287). In relation to early music video, this observation places a wedge between the appearance of its performer/characters, and the personal and cultural conditions from which they arise, for example in the case of Wham!.

It is here then that, sometimes preferable to Sontag’s understanding of what is or is not Camp, Meyer’s (1994) notion of the ‘camp trace’ becomes useful to this thesis framework. Meyer’s position is that Camp aesthetics, when appropriated by mainstream culture, may superficially resemble queer practices — such as drag that is entertaining to mainstream audiences who would otherwise strongly reject homosexuality or gender non-conformity — but in being removed from the necessarily secret context of marginalised and outsider communities, cease to be Camp and instead, bear a camp trace. This is illuminative for example in understanding the broad popularity of gay-as-straight-as-gay presentations of a pre-out George Michael, with Sontag’s diagnosis of Camp rendering the sensibility more as standing for dominant, kitsch contemporary culture and vulgar middle-class taste, and less a ‘deviant’ device of political protest. The idea of the camp trace therefore enables music video’s access to a covert history of

Camp theatricality, which as Fabio Cleto (1999) explains “was induced by the role-playing activity necessitated by passing for straight, [with] camp-coded signs and innuendoes” (p. 255). By extension, it also variously permits the traditionally Camp strategies of aestheticism, aristocratic detachment, irony, theatrical frivolity, parody, effeminacy, and sexual transgression of New Romantic and New Man fashion used in videos by Australian director Russell Mulcahy for straight performers such as Duran Duran, who are also recognised in this thesis. In discussion of Mulcahy’s music video aesthetic, Chapter 4 of the thesis will additionally consider Nicholas Perry’s (1998) variation of the sensibility, something the New Zealand scholar terms Antipodean camp.

### **Literary strategies**

Wayne Koestenbaum is an admirer of Barthes — who “showers” readers with “bliss”— but even more so of Sontag (2013, p. 64). Koestenbaum calls Sontag “a shameless apologist for aesthetic pleasure”, who nonetheless wrote of the late twentieth century’s most weighty concerns, including AIDS and potential atomic apocalypse (2013, p. 50). Such an approach is referenced in some chapters of this thesis.

Koestenbaum emphasises links between Barthes, Sontag and Walter Benjamin, who Koestenbaum suggests ghosts Sontag’s work (2013, p. 49). In this tripartite intellectual relationship between Barthes, Sontag and Benjamin, all of whom are “entranced by multiplicity” (Koestenbaum, 2013, p. 43), Koestenbaum observes a shared genealogy and set of assumptions born of a respect for philosophy and social criticism as being primarily forms of “*writing*” (p. 47, original italics). Attention to the practice of writing is central to the overall approach taken in this thesis, which relies heavily upon description. Importantly, Koestenbaum suggests that the

writing of Barthes, Sontag and Walter Benjamin also betrays a predilection for “fragments [both as a] heuristic device and as musical measurement[s]” (p. 47). Acknowledgement of fragmentation, in its duality with totality, is an aforementioned characteristic of Vermuelen and van den Akker’s metamodernist framework; it is also the basis of moving image editing schema, and therefore elemental to this thesis’ approach to analysing the language of music video.

This thesis makes brief but explicit reference to modes of writing and literary forms: these include the poetical (to use Vinken’s term), such as the metaphysical poetry of John Donne, and the modernist novels of Jean Genet and Virginia Woolf. Conversely, the influence of Barthes, Sontag and Sedgwick upon the current writing is implicit, rather taking into account the way in which each of these infuses their illuminating composite cultural analysis with an arguably idiosyncratic ‘outsider’, queer viewpoint.

## **Queerness**

The clarity of many of Sedgwick’s theoretical proposals and observations on culture and masculine identity — often using literature as an analytical lens — will be regularly considered in the body chapters of the thesis. Sedgwick’s influence upon theoretical approaches in the field of gender and queer studies, often based in insightful cross-interpretations of word meaning, are well noted: for example, Halberstam (1998) explains that “my own model of historiography [in *Female Masculinities*] as perverse presentism, [is] a very Sedgwickian formulation” (p. 53). This in turn brings influence to bear on this thesis, with Halberstam’s formulation being referred to in Chapter 5 of the writing. Among many other contributions to terminology, Sedgwick (1985) effectively reactivated the term ‘homosocial’, which will also appear several times in this thesis.

At this preliminary juncture of the writing, it is additionally useful to recognise Sedgwick's use of personal gender and cultural context as a methodology: "there's a lot of first person singular in [the] book [of essays, *Tendencies*] (and some people hate that) ... 'I' is a heuristic; maybe a powerful one" (Sedgwick, 1994, p. xiv).<sup>4</sup> Although this thesis does not make the same use of first person singular, the persona of the researcher no doubt remains apparent in the writing. Queer identification is a consistent underpinning to researcher perspectives taken in this thesis; that the thesis itself might be considered queer scholarship is therefore supported by Sedgwick's (1994) assertion that:

"Queer" seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person's undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation. ... what it takes — all it takes — to make the description "queer" a true one is the impulsion to use it in the first person (p. 9).

While Koestenbaum (2013) says of Sontag that "her finest ideas occasionally hinged on gay men" (p. 43), trans theorist and cultural critic Jay Prosser (1998) makes particular mention of Sedgwick's fundamentally stronger association with homosexual masculinity. Writing in *Tendencies* (1994) about her loving relationship with pioneer gay studies scholar, LGBT rights and HIV/AIDS activist Michael Lynch — who died of AIDS-related infection in 1991, and to whom Sedgwick's book is dedicated — Sedgwick shares the experience of "how unbridgeable the gap is between the self we see and the self as whom we are seen" (p. 256). Sedgwick (1994) recounts how through adopting the wearing of trend-setting white eye glasses, a style favoured by Lynch, a series of uncanny effects are enabled, that are:

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<sup>4</sup> In a characteristically irreverent collapsing of 'high' and 'low' culture, Kosofsky Sedgwick explains in the book's foreword that although "I know *Tendencies* sounds like a title for Walter Benjamin essays — really it's channelled from Dame Edna Everage" (1994, p. xv).

... formative of my — shall I call it identification? Dare I, after this half decade, call it with all a fat *woman's* [original italics] defiance, my identity? — as a gay man (p. 256).

Prosser (1998) understands this “confession” as revealing a “personal transgendered investment lying at and as the great heart of [Sedgwick’s] queer project” (p. 23). By this reading, Sedgwick’s and this thesis’s own relationship to masculinity diverges, with the current researcher identifying as a cis-gender woman. However, close association and affinity with non-heteronormative masculinities does strongly contribute to the positionality of this thesis. Therefore, it is important to outline theoretical understandings and the use of terminology relating to gender, sexuality and queerness that will be used across the writing.

## **Gender: terminology and methodologies**

Although this thesis does not aim to directly contribute to the literature in queer and gender studies around trans identity, in discussing the practice of famous 1980s ‘gender benders’ — for example, with reference to performances of female masculinity by Annie Lennox and Grace Jones — it does negotiate with a nuanced and contested area of contemporary scholarship. As Jack Halberstam, author in 1998 of the key text *Female Masculinity*, rightly observes: “there is a strong disagreement between queer and trans activists about the meaning of the gendered body that should not be glossed over” (2012, p. 337). In *Second Skins: Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (1998), Jay Prosser explains it thus:

in the new discourse of transgender in our own fin de siècle, homosexuality and transgender, lesbian and transsexual become significantly reentangled. Another shake of the discursive kaleidoscope and new rela-

tions between sex, gender, and sexuality, some frictional, some interconstitutive, allow for yet new identities to be named (p. 11).

Halberstam states that “transgender politics are part of a larger form of queer critique that destabilizes the foundations of heteronormativity and questions the relays of stability between gender, family and nation” (2012, p. 337). Halberstam’s use of “nation” in this article is important, as it identifies regional differences in contemporary ideological and theoretical understandings of transgenderism and transsexuality, especially between the US and Europe. A leap taken for the purposes of this research, being situated in the fields of fashion and visual cultures, is to consider including along with transgenderism and transsexuality what was often in the 1980s commonly understood on both sides of the Atlantic, and in the subsequent jurisdictions of Anglophone culture, as ‘transvestism’.

Trans identity and gender-transgressive dress practices related to celebrity performance in the 1980s are commonly conflated in literature of the late twentieth century through the descriptor ‘gender bender’. Writing on the influence of male homosexuality and sexual divergence on twentieth century pop music, Jon Savage (1990), for example, refers to “a rash of transvestite and transexual ‘gender bender’ stylists like Marilyn and Boy George [through whom] sexual divergence ... crossed over into the mainstream” (p. 168). In considering this, we can perhaps apply the sentiment of the oft-quoted opening of L.P. Hartley’s 1953 coming of age novel *The Go-Between*, “the past is a foreign country: they do things differently there” (1997/1953, p. 5 ). Lenses of the twenty-first century frequently sharpen views held in earlier eras, and knowledge arising from lived experience both within and outside the academy is increasingly influential to scholarly discourses of gender and sexuality.

Prosser distinguishes transsexuality from transvestism and from the identification ‘homosexuality’ (and by extension in this thesis, bisexuality) through the foundational 1953 psychiatric and medical theory of Harry Benjamin. Prosser recognises Benjamin’s emphasis on transsexuality’s distinctiveness from transvestism as being “concerned more severely with body not dress”, and from homosexuality in that “transsexuality is concerned with sex and gender and not sexuality, in spite of that misleading suffix” (1998, p. 9). This definition is helpful in determining that this thesis is, if anything, more concerned with issues of transvestism than transsexuality, as fashion theory and the study of visual cultures are clearly ‘severely concerned’ with dress.

Prosser makes the argument that queer studies has made the “transgendered subject” — that is, someone who crosses gender boundaries — “a key queer trope: the means by which not only to challenge sex, gender, and sexuality binaries but to institutionalize homosexuality as queer” (1998, p. 5). For example, Halberstam notes a “stylistic shift from gender androgyny within lesbian communities to gender variance within gender-queer communities ... transgenderism has been installed within a ‘global gay’ system as part of the hegemony of US taxonomies – the addition of ‘T’ to the acronym ‘LGBT’” (2012, p. 336).<sup>5</sup>

Such observations call into question much prior theorising of gender and sexual fixity and difference, particularly of the 1990s. This includes many proposals put forward by Judith Butler in a prevailing source on gender performativity — one that will be called upon in this research — *Gender*

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<sup>5</sup> This acronym is often further extended in the current writing to LGBTQIA+, in accordance with present Australian usage.

*Trouble* (1990), wherein for example the ‘trouble’ of the butch body is the instability it brings to the meaning of ‘woman’. Butler’s early writings have undergone much critical reappraisal, by Halberstam and Prosser among many others and also by Butler herself. In the subsequent volume *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (1993), Butler responds to criticisms of their previous work and rather, sees the butch body as destabilising of dominant understandings of *masculine* identity: that is, of a phallogentric view that cannot conceive of “masculinity without men” (Halberstam 2012, p. 340). Then, in 2004’s *Undoing Gender*, in recognising trans modes of being, Butler returns to the issue of normative presumptions of gender stability, but with the altered perspective that this contributes to the production of ‘human’ identity.

Halberstam notes that “transgender/transsexual objections to Butler’s work [particularly in England] have had to do with a recommitment to essentialism and realness within transsexual theory ... that understands gender as an ideological framework but also as a set of practices and behaviors that depend upon the stability of the sexed body” (Halberstam 2012 p. 337). By this reading of Butler, this thesis could be also assessed as being essentialist, although essentialism is not the personal position of this researcher. Nonetheless, it is an observation of the thesis, that *music video* of the era and type reviewed here is very often essentialist, which makes notions commonly held in the 1980s of gender performativity — either conforming or non-conforming, but usually based on the ‘norm’ of a gender binary — continuingly important to understanding the meaning of these practices.



## **‘Gender benders’**

Elizabeth Wilson (2003/1985) is among many who have remarked upon fashion’s obsession with gender, and its constant need to define and redefine gender’s boundaries (p. 117). This is true not only in the theorising of fashion but of course of dress practices, for as Joanne Entwistle (2015) notes, these evoke the sexed body to such an extent that certain garments — most straightforwardly, ‘masculine’ trousers or a ‘feminine’ skirt — can signify gender even in the absence of a body (p. 141). It is of interest to this research that fashion writing frequently sees the 1980s as marking something of a shift in mainstream Western attitudes toward the fixity of such sartorial codes, and credits identities such as David Bowie, Annie Lennox and the New Romantics with popularising their disturbance. Fashion scholarship, including by Entwistle, often groups the terms ‘cross dressing’, ‘transvestism’ and ‘gender bending’. This thesis does not similarly conflate these, because of the explicit lexical connection between ‘gender bending’ and the substance of this thesis owing to the term’s frequent popular usage in the 1980s as a catch-all description of the image-defining non-conformity of many key players in its tale.

These performers have sometimes publicly eschewed this term as being misleading to the original purpose of their sartorial inversion, as is the case with Lennox, whose own words are instructive here:

When I was given this label of ‘gender bender’, I really felt it was diminishing in a way. It was very simplistic. I wasn’t bending gender; I was making a statement in a kind of subtle way. I thought it was subtle, but to some people it might have seemed overt. I was saying, ‘Look, as a woman I can be equal to a man’, and in this partnership with the Eurythmics, where I was in a partnership with a man (Dave Stewart), the two of us felt so connected that my gender didn’t matter (in Azzopardi 2014, n.p.).

This can be understood as meaning that Lennox's performative cross dressing refers not so much to expressions of alternative gender identity as to semiotically-oriented tactics of second-wave feminist politics. The flamboyant and highly visible non-normative dress practices of others of the period who are strongly identified with the label 'gender benders', such as Boy George (born George O'Dowd on 14 June 1961) and Marilyn (born Peter Robinson on 3 November 1962) — who while not specific foci of this study, nonetheless will contextually appear in the writing — have in fact been evaluated in scholarship as examples that *reinforce* normative understandings of gender difference. This occurs for example when Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick critiques the presupposition that “everything that can be said about masculinity pertains in the first place to men” (1995, p.12) by ‘voicing’ a proposed common view: “Gosh, Boy George must be really secure in *something* when he has the courage to perform in drag — and he is a boy, at least his name says he is, so what he is secure in must be ‘masculinity’ [original italics]” (1995, p.12).<sup>6</sup> In the context of the current study, it is therefore important to consider the history of ‘gender bender’ as a nuanced, sometimes loaded, term.

It is difficult to locate an agreed-upon point of origin for ‘gender bender’, although the term’s association with identity politics arising from activism of the 1960s and 1970s solidifies in journalism in the early 1980s, often in specific response to the cultural phenomenon this thesis examines. In popular discourse, ‘gender bender’ is sometimes employed as a slur, but is also used as a term of self-identification. Geczy and Karaminas (2013)

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Ross (1988) makes that point that “the jolly decorum of Boy George transmits the cheerful European features of a masculinity in the twilight of its power” plainly when the “affable and peaceloving” artist claims a Grammy Award on live US television in 1984 with the declaration: “Thank you America, you’ve got style, you’ve got taste, and you know a good drag queen when you see one” (p. 21).

propose that having arisen from earlier feminist, civil rights and gay social movements, in the 1980s fashionable “gender-bending [such as by Lennox] possessed enormous influence in popular culture and paved the road for greater diversity in representations of sexuality” (p. 41). Scholarship notes the grouping of ‘gender bender’ with other descriptors of gender “deviance” by those seen to “violate the binaries”, including “gender misfits”, “genderqueer,” “pangender,” “agender,” and “gender fluid” (Worthen & Dirk, 2015 p. 289). The first publication of an associated term, ‘Genderfuck’, is commonly credited to Christopher Lone in the 1974 article *Genderfuck and its delights*, in the San Francisco journal *Gay Sunshine: A Newsthesis of Gay Liberation*. Shaun Cole (2000), when discussing the politically-motivated dress practices of the gay liberation movement of the 1970s, explains that:

elements of both male and female dress were worn together in order to confuse the gender signals given by those pieces of clothing ... gender fuck wanted to get away from the hard-edged definitions of gendered dress ... to challenge ... heterosexual society (p. 88).

Boy George is a noted exemplar of the practice of “provok[ing] confusion” through non-normative masculine gender presentation in early music video, one that does not imitate femininity “despite the abundance of feminine signifiers” (Walser & Harmon, 2007, p. 1050). Although primarily focused on ‘gender bending’ fashion in relation to gay male identity, Cole (2000) identifies a similar approach in Lennox’s popular image of the early 1980s, wherein “traditional signifiers of masculinity and femininity were combined” (p. 165). This practice is in prophetic accord with Barbara Vinken’s observation of postfashion: that “nothing could be more out of date than to clothe oneself as ‘woman,’ as ‘man’ or as ‘lady’” (2005, p. 63). Similarly, Ben Barry and Andrew Reilly’s (2020) explicit diagnosis of changed role of androgyny —“a combination of masculine and feminine

characteristics” (p. 122) — in conceptions of post-postmodernism is of particular interest to this thesis framework, owing to its eerie alignment with earlier definitions of gender-fuck:

androgyny during postmodernity focused on blending masculinity and femininity to create a gender-ambiguous aesthetic, whereas the new iteration of androgyny during post-postmodernity highlights conventionally masculine and feminine signifiers to create a juxtaposition of gender presentation (p. 122).

Cole (2000) specifically attaches the term “androgyny”, as in the androgynous fashion image, to the pop phenomena upon which this thesis centres: “androgyny was the buzzword in many fashionable circles in the 1980s ... [and this was] made popular by pop stars” such as Boy George and Lennox (p. 165). Art and design academic Llewellyn Negrin (2008), writing on “the postmodern gender carnival” (p. 139), suggests the great popularity of “gender-bending” identities such as Bowie, Lennox and Boy George as being symptomatic of Baudrillard’s theorising of the free-floating nature of gender signifiers of the postmodern era (p. 141). Negrin (2008) notes that for Baudrillard, postmodernity’s key figure is the mannequin: “simultaneously a masculine, a feminine and a neuter” (p. 141). Therefore by Negrin’s logic — one of a type that will be employed in this thesis — these pop celebrities of the early music video era, for whom traditional masculine and feminine signifiers work as costumes or masks, may bend sartorial codes of gender but in doing so *transcend* gender, to become ‘androgynous’.

The term ‘androgyny’ then will be applied contrastingly at times in the thesis according to its chapters’ theoretical emphases. For example, although Lennox does not claim androgyny as a self-descriptor, she is nonetheless understood as a “camp ... female androgyne” (Piggford, 1997, p. 39). This application of the term ‘androgynous’ — with its attachment to

image over identity — somewhat corresponds with Anne Hollander’s argument in the article *Dressed to thrill: the cool and casual style of the new American androgyny* (1985), in which Hollander specifically names Boy George and Lennox as catalysts for the sudden notable visibility of androgynous fashion more broadly in the 1980s. In her contemporaneous interpretation of early 1980s fashionable androgyny as being a “chic of shock” (p. 28), Hollander contextualises the phenomenon firmly in the history of dress, stating that: “dramatically perverse sexual signals are always powerful elements in the modern fashionable vocabulary; and the most sensational component among present trends is something referred to as androgyny” (p. 28). Hollander describes the embellishment and surface adornment apparent in an accompanying visual privileging and fetishisation of a new and “thrilling” male beauty, additionally relating this to developments in sexual politics:

the point about all this is clearly not androgyny at all, but the idea of detachable pleasure. Each sex is not trying to take up the fundamental qualities of the other sex, but rather of the other sexuality — the erotic dimension, which can transcend biology and its attendant social assumptions and institutions. Eroticism is being shown to float free of sexual function ... erotic attractiveness appears ready to exert its strength in unforeseeable and formerly forbidden ways and places ...homosexual desire is now an acknowledged aspect of common life, deserving of truthful representation in popular culture, not just in coterie vehicles of expression (1985, p. 28).

Attaching of the androgynous image to tropes of non-reproductive sexuality, insinuating posthumanism, are themes clearly observable in music videos examined in this thesis, for example in the performer/character of David Bowie, who is often portrayed as an “exquisitely androgynous, carnal alien” (Perrot, 2017 p. 530). Bowie’s career-long

association with theatrical androgyny is rarely an omission from commentary on his practice, either praise of its malleability (Lobalzo Wright, 2017; Perrot, 2017, 2019; Waldrep, 2015), or in criticism of its manufacture (Gill, 1995). Camille Paglia identifies Bowie as a descendent of the French-refracted nineteenth dandies, personae described by Barbey d'Aurevilly as “the Androgynes of History” (2013, p.69).

Bowie is frequently acknowledged in social discourse as having been inspirational to an arrival at queer self-identification by many non-heteronormative people in the 1970s, 1980s and through to the present day. This includes many queer music and fashion identities, who in press interviews name Bowie’s highly visual, sexually ambiguous persona as a formative influence when discussing both their own sartorial presentations and their approaches to creative practice. Evidence of this is increasingly confirmed in popular social history (Bracewell, 1998; Jones, 2020) curatorial writing (Broakes & Marsh, 2013) and otherwise observed in scholarship (Hebdige, 1979; Polhemus, 1996; McCauley Bowstead, 2018). Cole (2000, 2002) observes Bowie’s strong reciprocal impact upon youth culture in relation to gay and queer identity, noting that:

while Bowie had drawn on gay styles and culture for his influences he also exercised influence on a generation of gay men. For many growing up in the seventies Bowie provided a focus. The autobiographies of gay and bisexual pop stars who had grown up in the seventies [including] (Boy George ... and Steve Strange) cite Bowie as a major influence (2002, n.p.).

Stan Hawkins (2009) proposes that through its theatrical gender play, Bowie’s “queering renegotiated masculinity” (p. 102). Janice Miller (2011) sees Bowie as a pioneer performer of queer identity in popular music and culture, in his use of dress and the body to question gender ideals (p. 140). Others, however, including John Gill (1995) take objection to “the myth of

Queer David” (p. 107). Gill sees Bowie as “a consummate self-publicist”, undeserving of an “aura of queerness [that] has clung to him” (p. 107) because despite having at various times comfortably used the self-descriptors gay and bisexual, Bowie is known to have also enjoyed personal relationships Gill perceives as being heterosexual. Gill therefore judges Bowie’s non-heteronormative identity to be a media-manipulating “pretence”, typical of the artist as “a bricoleur and myth maker” with no equal (p. 107). Ergo, argues Gill, Bowie is not ‘authentically’ queer.

This thesis centres on the production and reception of cultural products that can be seen to have queer origins and/or resonances, regardless of the sexual object choice of their creators. Therefore, the current writing strongly diverges from Gill’s position and in doing so, relies once again on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1994) in order to define ‘queer’ and queerness as key terms in its study:

“queer” can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically (p. 9).

Writing in a post-Stonewall, AIDS affected era in which “the term ‘queer’ itself deepens and shifts”, Sedgwick suggests that the identification exceeds both heterosexist assumptions and the empirical categories ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ (1994, p. 9). Sedgwick’s (1994) intuitively wide net of queerness clearly catches Bowie, and almost all of the other major music video performer/characters studied in this thesis, in much the same way as Sontag’s instinctive diagnosis of Camp does.

As with perspectives on Camp, Moe Meyer’s (1994) political stance provides a supplementary view helpful to the current study. Meyer offers that “a

definition of queer is one based on an alternative model of the constitution of subjectivity and of social identity” (1994, p. 2). This thesis extends its definition of queerness in drawing from Meyer in order, for example, to support its queer analysis of political agendas motivating the destabilising, ‘gender bending’ use of masculine fashion in music videos by performer/characters such as Lennox.

In the book *Queer Style* (2013) Geczy and Karaminas name Lennox, Bowie and the “counter-sexual or androgynous” (p. 37) aspects of the early New Romantic fashion of straight group Duran Duran, who will also appear in this thesis, amongst exemplars of queer style. In setting the terms of their discussion, Geczy and Karaminas (2013) rely in part upon Butler’s (1995) understanding of performativity and both Meyer’s and Sedgwick’s inclusive definitions of queerness to arrive at their own: “that state of being and its visible incarnations that have embraced affectation and false creation as ends in themselves ... over ‘conformity’ to an imaginary truth” (pp. 1-2). This thesis will argue that early music video is a most conspicuous site of such performances of queer fashion and style.

## **Music video: definition and methodologies**

This thesis aims to contribute to scholarly knowledge of both fashion and music video, building from the basis that there are such resemblances between the practice of these things that the latter can be theorised using frameworks from the former. While it is possible to identify an increasingly specific body of writing on music video, this remains relatively limited in comparison to the large volume of theoretical writing on fashion from which this research also draws. The following literature review reveals the disparate approach taken across existing writing on music video, indicating



substantial room for further research on the form through the use of new methodological approaches, such as the one developed in this thesis.

In the 1980s, the medium of music video enabled pop music artists to promote their work internationally without reliance upon the costly and laborious touring of live performance, relying instead on the media mechanism of music television programs and networks (Weir, 2014). Focusing on the issue of broadcast culture, much early academic analysis of the form in the 1980s and early 1990s responds more to the phenomena of music television — particularly the American cable behemoth MTV — than to music video itself. As this thesis analyses the content and context of individual music videos as cultural artefacts, this tranche of extant literature has restricted applicability to the current study.

For example, the usefulness to this research of US literature and cultural studies scholar E. Ann Kaplan's frequently cited contemporaneous book on music video in the 1980s, *Rocking around the clock: music television, postmodernism, and popular culture* (1987) is immediately limited when Kaplan makes clear that the book's observations of music video only apply directly to their presentation on "MTV as an institution [which existed as] a 24-hour, non-stop, commercial cable channel, beamed via satellite across the United States" (p. 1). Accordingly, the central focus of Kaplan's book is the programming structure of this network, with MTV's total broadcasting content being assessed as part of the specifically commercial nature of MTV (p. 52).

Here, Kaplan discusses the channel's content other than music videos including: the interspersing patter of the network's veejays,<sup>7</sup> advertisements

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<sup>7</sup> the name given to MTV's on air hosts, in a corruption of 'DJ', itself a shortening of the term 'disc jockey' which arises from radio and dance club culture.

by sponsoring companies; pre-taped interviews; MTV's own weekly broadcasting events such as chart shows and competitions; and broadcasts of significant global media events such as Live Aid, "interesting precisely because they took place within MTV's overarching commercial framework" (1987, p. 85). While of anecdotal interest, broadcast contexts for music video of the 1980s such as these are too specifically oriented towards American media analysis to make a sizeable contribution to the methodological framework of this thesis, or its definition of music video. Kaplan's small data set of videos reflects only the distinctly US-centric music and media industry-dominated second phase of music video which developed in the mid-1980s in direct response to the MTV phenomenon, a period which is outside the remit of the present study. A further limitation of this text is Kaplan's somewhat ad-hoc methodology for addressing these videos, one that has not been significantly adopted by subsequent music video scholars, and differs significantly from this thesis's own use of close structural analysis.

Kaplan (1987) does however make assertions on music video as a postmodernist discourse that are instructive to the current writing. For example, she appears to use the term "MTV" with as much reference to music videos as music television, when stating that:

MTV ... effaces the boundary between past and present in drawing indiscriminately on film genres and art movements from different historical periods; and also in the often arbitrary use of settings and clothes from the Roman, medieval and other past eras. The stance of the texts is that there is one continuum in which all exists: past, present and future do not indicate major time barriers, but rather a time band upon which one can call at will (p. 144).

Kaplan's analysis here of music video as having a "timeless present" (1987, p. 144) is affirming of this thesis' own observation that music video time, like fashion time, is uchronic. Kaplan's proposition, based in postmodern theory, will be considered in this thesis in particular when evaluating music videos by David Bowie and Eurythmics, for example, in which ahistoric costume references are features of nonlinear narratives with metaphysical themes.

Also writing on music video of the 1980s *in the 1980s*, American media academic Pat Aufderheide similarly situates her discussion in the American context of MTV, but in contrast to Kaplan explains the origins of the form as a postmodern product of media consumer culture. These terms are therefore more relevant to the current study. In the article *Music Videos: The Look of the Sound* (1986), Aufderheide notes how videos by some "underground" English rock acts were shown in European clubs from the 1970s, leading to their celebrity at a "moment in English pop music [where] the performer's persona had become as important as the sound of the music" (p.60). This cultural "moment" at the cusp of the 1980s is of course the precise location of the current investigation. The insight of Aufderheide's observations of the form more broadly also make her article a fruitful source for this research's definition of music video. In *The Look of the Sound* (1987), an extended book chapter version of the article, Aufderheide succinctly describes the original structural and cultural origin of this new media type:

music video was pioneered on television with three-to-seven-minute films or tapes whose visual images were coordinated loosely (or not at all) with a pop song's lyrics. ... music video's roots are in the mass marketing of popular songs, not only as populist entertainment but as talismans of subcultural autonomy and rebellion" (p. 113).

Aufderheide's (1986) noted interest in media change is apparent in the extent to which she perceives music video's cultural influence, even at this relatively early stage of its prominence in the US, writing that:

music videos have ... set themselves free of the television set, inserting themselves in movie theatres, popping up in shopping malls and department store windows, becoming actors in both live performances and the club scene. As omnivorous as they are pervasive, they draw on and influence the traditional image-shaping fields of fashion and advertising, even political campaigning (1986, p. 57).

Aufderheide (1986) places music video in the conceptual vicinity of the postmodernist art practice of Andy Warhol, Nam June Paik, Philip Glass and Keith Haring, and the writing of Thomas Pynchon (p.58). Here, she notes a common tendency toward the "merging of commercial and artistic image production and an abolition of traditional boundaries between an image and its real-life referent, between past and present, between character and performance" (p. 58). Aufderheide proposes in 1986 that music video deserves serious scholarly attention because of its vanguard role in the reshaping of the dominant vocabulary of commercial culture, which is the language of advertising (p. 59). She explains how the transatlantic success of music video, enabled by the spread of cable television, reflects the centrality of "buyable popular culture" to the lives of young people, where "commodities express personal taste, even identity and identification with a subculture" (1986, p. 60). These observations correlate with positions taken in this thesis regarding the powerful role of the music consumer in the creation of George Michael's Wham!-era masculine persona, and in the creative reciprocity between David Bowie and the New Romantic subcultural movement.

Aufderheide's (1986, 1987) writing is noteworthy in early scholarly investigation on music video in the range and strength of its claims, which also address some of the form's structural and affective qualities. Of interest to this thesis is Aufderheide's methodology in combining sociological and psychological analysis of mass media with philosophical speculation. An example of this is her idea of music video as a commercial product:

music videos cross the consumer's gaze as a series of mood states. They trigger nostalgia, regret, anxiety, confusion, dread, envy, admiration, pity, titillation — attitudes at one remove from primal expression such as passion, ecstasy and rage. The moods often express a lack, an incompleteness, an instability, a searching for location. In music videos, those feelings are carried on flights of whimsy, extended journeys into the arbitrary (1986, p. 63).

Aufderheide refers to the writing of film scholar Marsha Kinder in identifying music video as having a "dream structure" (1984, p. 66), narratively without beginning, end or history. Aufderheide's commentary on this contains other observations apposite to this thesis, such as that:

dreams ... create gestalts, in which sensations build and dissolve. And so they nicely match the promise and threat of consumer-constructed identity ... Like fashion, [in music video] identity can change with a switch of a scene, a change in the beat (1984, p. 63).

In a further thread of this unusually dense early article on music video, Aufderheide (1986) goes on to discuss the cruciality of celebrity image in the form, identifying David Bowie as a pioneer of self-refashioning and "the disposable image" (p. 67). She distinguishes the nature of sex-role presentation in music video from that in narrative cinema, referring to music video's pop star performer/characters coeval to the time of her writing as "fashion's unstable icons" (1986, p. 70). Here, Aufderheide

makes brief but important mention of another key concern of this thesis, when she suggests that in many music videos of the period:

male or female grotesquerie is the norm. Combined with shifting identities, the result is androgyny. ... [which] may be the most daring statement that an entire range of sex roles is fair game for projecting one's own statement of the moment. Gender is no longer fixed; male and female are collapsed into a kaleidoscope of images" (1986, pp. 66-67).

Such observations to be found amongst the prescient scope of Aufderheide's (1986, 1987) diagnosis of music video make this early scholarship on the subject a valuable inclusion to the sources relied upon throughout this thesis.

A similarity between the writing of Aufderheide and Kaplan is that both take an approach common in the emergent music video scholarship of the late 1980s and 1990s, in its specific contextualisation of the form as being a product of postmodernist popular culture. This is useful to consider in the building of this thesis's composite theoretical framework, for example when taking into account Elizabeth Wilson's (1985) assertion of the relationship between modernity, popular culture — Wilson makes particular mention of pop music here — and fashion (p. 64).

British born communications academic Andrew Goodwin is another important source of commentary on music video in this period, although one who takes a stridently contrary view regarding the value of postmodern theory to its analysis. In several well-noted texts on music video written in the early 1990s, including the book *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* (1992) and the chapter *Fatal Attractions: MTV meets Postmodern Theory* (1993). Goodwin (1992) provides a thorough review of the literature in music video up until that

time, and takes issue with most of it. In his 1992 treatise, Goodwin actively decries the value of postmodern critique to analysis of music video, seeing reliance on the paradigm of postmodernism as being one of three main flaws in (then) existing music video literature. Taking a musicological view of music video, Goodwin identifies the other main failings of extant literature on the form as being the heavy use of film, television and cultural studies approaches, and textual analysis that has “lost its necessary connection to the spheres of production and/or consumption” (pp. 1-2).

Goodwin (1992) considers the investigation of the promotional and commodity status of music video to be essential to understanding its meaning (p. 25). He specifically sees music video as an actor in the realm of pop music, which:

is, and always has been, a multidiscursive cultural form, in which no one media site is privileged. The implication of this for music video analysis is that it becomes impossible to understand the meaning of any individual clip without considering its relation to the wider world of pop culture (p. 25).

Goodwin considers fashion’s reliance on the saleable image intrinsic to 1980s pop music’s economic and cultural ecology, relying upon a quotation taken from an interview with Island Records founder Chris Blackwell, who in 1986 declared that:

we're all in the fashion business. You used to be able to sell records purely on music and musicianship. Now it's packaging, media, television and video (quoted in Goodwin, 1992, p. 27).

Goodwin (1993) states that his contemporaries in the then-emerging field of music video scholarship who look at music video through postmodern lenses do so because of the undue influence of film studies in cultural

analysis in that period, which emphasised the convergence of avant-garde/modernist and popular/realist texts (p.43). He asserts that this focus is not applicable to music video, as such distinctions *only* consider how these modes operate in cinema, and not in pop songs and the pop music industry, which he asserts are the core content of music video. In identifying music video as a primarily musical form, he therefore sees cinematic visual analysis as being an inaccurate methodology in its study.

Goodwin strongly argues against many other early music video scholars who approach music video from film and media studies perspectives, in saying that the structure of music video relates more to the format of its precursory recorded soundtrack than to its visuals. He asserts that this means that regimes of repetition within music videos are in fact ordered and predictable following the format of the pop song (1993, p. 47), and rarely arbitrary or ‘dream-like’ as may be the case in narrative cinema. An example of this offered by Goodwin is the typical way in which pop music breaks the ‘fourth wall’ in the form of (lyrical) direct or first person address, which differs sharply from the use of that convention in narrative film, wherein it is rarely and specifically employed by directors as a destabilising device. Thus, Goodwin (1992) identifies an overlooking of the recognised structure of popular music — already clearly well-established by the onset of music video — in existing music video scholarship.

Goodwin (1992) also argues that visuals are a key element in the production of musical meaning before the intervention of video imagery, because of the circulation of precursory visual representations of pop in the music press, in advertisements, and in live performance (p. 50). Unlike Kaplan (1987), who describes how performer/characters in music video are often placed in “smoky, hazy” environments evoking post-nuclear places without



boundaries (p. 145), Goodwin (1993) asserts that concert-goers recognise these features as simple references to stage effects of live rock shows (p. 47). Similarly, Goodwin (1992) asserts that lighting effects in music video which are often interpreted as references to film noir, for example, have a more reasonable or clearer association with the lighting conventions of live performance (p. 4).

Goodwin's (1992) book follows musicological biases such as these throughout, for example when stating perhaps provocatively in the context of music video studies that "the suggestion that music itself *lacks* [original italics] a visual component is, however, a symptom of not listening carefully enough" (p. 50). To prosecute this argument, Goodwin describes how songwriters, musicians and record producers often describe their ways of thinking in such terms as working from a "palette", using terms relating to elements and principles of art and design such as colour, tone, shades and space, or of thinking of songs as "environments, or little movies" (p. 51). To take this logic to its conclusion, Goodwin therefore suggests that 'movie-like' qualities of music video arise not from the filmic techniques employed by directors and editors, but solely from the creative origin of the soundtracks they accompany.

Goodwin's 'anti-filmic' approach to music video here is in essence counter to this thesis aim, which is to investigate music video as a visual culture. Goodwin's (1992) book does nonetheless contain observations of how and why music video 'looks' as it does which are illuminating, and will be referred to at times in this thesis. Goodwin (1992) is a useful source for instance on the explicit influence of the graphic design of album covers upon music video. A music video precursor, and a later bedfellow music marketing technique, Goodwin notes that "just as credit sequences in

television and cinema texts have been identified as key components in mass media texts ... so album sleeves (and related imagery in posters and advertising) suggest the ‘correct’ generic decoding in pop” (pp. 51-52). This position is particularly informative for example to understanding the coexistence of early music video and the appearance of the 1980s magazine advertising trope of the New Man.

It is true that as a form of moving image, much writing on music video specifically addresses the function of filmic components such as editing schema, tending to draw from film theorists such as David Bordwell (1989). While incorporating significant principles of cinema studies analysis in her framework for addressing music video, American media scholar Carol Vernallis (2004) states that music video research demands an omnivorous approach (p.ix), identifying the form as belonging somewhere among music, film, television studies, cultural studies, communication studies, philosophy, theatre and dance (p. ix). Vernallis (2004) agrees that music videos derive from the songs to which they are set, but also proposes that music video is an artistic practice and an ideological apparatus in which an exchange takes place between music and image. Here, cinematic representational modes are often abandoned, and the image gains a polyvalence of meaning (p. x). She explains how the various elements of music video’s *mis-en-scène* form a dynamic system in which these components can be “brought forward or become submerged” (2004, p. x), with the result that:

the world a video depicts can become very strange. Some of music video’s excitement stems from the sense that anything can happen — even an insightful or progressive image of social relations (p. xi).

When discussing music video's continuum from strongly narrative to non-narrative or anti-narrative, Vernallis pays close attention to techniques borrowed from cinema; when analysing the importance of editing to the construction of music video, she acknowledges its responsiveness to both the musical and lyrical aspects of a song. Vernallis is oft-cited in recent music video analysis and this thesis will frequently rely upon her observations as published in a number of texts, most notably the book *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (2004).

Vernallis differentiates her research from that of scholars she identifies as being her predecessors, including Kaplan and Goodwin, in its treatment of music video as:

a distinct genre, one different from its predecessors — film, television, photography — a medium with its own ways of organising materials, exploring themes, and dealing with time, all of which can be studied through close analysis (2004. p. x).

It is clearly of benefit to the aspects of the current writing that consider the cultural conditions of the early 1980s when Vernallis (2004) suggests that, although music video's unique capacity to

creat[e] mood can overwhelm the particularities of historical and cultural origins ... music videos should [not] be treated ahistorically. Videos are not purely formal: they are subject to the influences of institutional structures, technology and cultural context (p. xv).

Vernallis has also authored or co-authored a number of articles and interviews with music video makers that contain both specific reflections on practice approaches and shed light on principles of the form more generally. These include discussion with — and about — Italian-Canadian artist, filmmaker and fashion photographer Floria Sigismondi, whose body

of work includes the 2010 feature biopic *The Runaways* and several late-period music videos with David Bowie (Vernallis & Ueno, 2013).

Saul Austerlitz's *Money For Nothing: A History of the Music Video from the Beatles to the White Stripes* (2007) is frequently cited as a leading example of writing on music video's institutional history (Vernallis & Ueno, 2013; Arnold et al, 2017; Cave, 2017). However, Austerlitz's (2007) own source for much of his material regarding the precursory media contexts and early development of music video would seem to be Michael Shore's enlightening and well-written contemporaneous journalistic study of early music video, *The Rolling Stone Book of Rock Video* (1984). This thesis often refers to that text in preference to Austerlitz (2007), with Shore's (1984) book providing more valuable factual material and insight on the role of, and approaches taken by, key music directors of the period. This is informative, for example, to understanding how filmic auteur theory (Grant, 2008) might apply to early music video.

Austerlitz is a film and music critic based in New York City, and a self-described "music-mad teenager" (p. vii) in the early 1990s, which no doubt accounts for his (2007) book's US-centrism and bias towards the dominant cultural politics of the MTV network in the 1990s. When exceeding the scope of his own positionality, Austerlitz's (2007) work of researched journalism contains factual errors and omissions apparent to this thesis, and unhelpfully conflates the role of the performer and director, song and video in regard to claims of authorship and the creative origins of specific texts. However, Austerlitz (2007) remains useful to this research in its contribution to a definition of music video, which he describes as:

short films intended to serve as accompaniment to their musical soundtracks ... traditionally ... divided into two main categories: the

performance video and the concept video. A performance video consists primarily of the musicians' performance of the song, often in a concert hall, performance space, or some other narrative-justified locale ... the concept video spices up the song with an accompanying visual track, one that tells a story or emphasizes a mood (pp. 2-3).

Austerlitz would appear to proceed from Shore in distinguishing between performance-style and concept-style videos, and this thesis recognises a further observation of Shore's which summarises much of the critical resistance against music video in its early years. That is, articulation of a fear of the form's potential didacticism, whereby the audience's understanding of a song is determined only by a director's prior visual interpretation of it. Writing in 1984, after the establishment of MTV and therefore subsequent to the form's second wave of US-dominated music video production, Shore muses that:

as more and more people both inside and outside the burgeoning music-video industry become more conscious of rock video style and content, the aesthetics of the medium will change in kind with evolving sophistication and competition ... perhaps in the future, more performers will revert to straight performance clips. Questions [we] will have to deal with: does rock video rob the listener of his or her ability to imagine imagery for an abstract song? And, more importantly, does "acting" in a concept video demystify the performer too much? And if so, will that affect the perception of that performer by his or her audience, and will the effect be good or bad? (p. 256).

While this simple taxonomy of performance/concept music video types has been challenged, for example by Goodwin (1993), all the videos analysed in the body chapters of this thesis can be seen as falling into one of these two categories. The current writing also agrees with Austerlitz when he goes on to state that although there is such a primary distinction among music

videos, the form's "stylistic proclivities" — such as a dependence upon rapid editing, abrupt transitions or jump cuts, and mood set through the use of distinctive lighting techniques— hold true across the genre (2007, pp. 2-3). Austerlitz also expresses in clear terms an observation made in this thesis, when he states that:

music videos are consumer products. They are simultaneously the casing for an agglomeration of consumerist lifestyle choices, and themselves the commodity which they advertise. Having come of age in the early 1980s, the music video internalised the ethos of commodity fetishization ... [an] idealised, imaginary solution to all of its consumers' real problems (p. 3)

According to Austerlitz (2007), again with reliance upon Shore (1984), the origins of music video can be traced to mid twentieth-century, low-culture short-length music and image production types such as Soundies and Scopitone. There is reasonable evidence to support this: the UCLA Library Film and Television Archive explains how Soundies were simple short black and white films made of a great variety of musical performances for wide distribution as popular entertainment.<sup>8</sup> Produced in the US between 1940 and 1946 and often featuring acts either 'on the way up' or 'on the way down', novelty entertainers, or non-white artists denied access to mainstream promotional mechanisms, these short films were made to be seen on self-contained, coin-operated, 16mm rear projection machines called Panorams located in nightclubs, bars, restaurants and other public places (UCLA, n.d.). This research notes that in something of a foretelling of later twentieth-century music television programming, such as on MTV, eight Soundies were usually spliced together on a "Soundie reel", which ran in a continuous loop (UCLA, n.d.).

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Goodwin (1992) notes that narrative elements were sometimes introduced into Soundies clips, with some of examples looking remarkably like music videos of the 1980s and 1990s: for example, a Soundie called *Texas Strip* (made in 1942) appears to be the source of the imagery for Devo's *Whip It* (1980).

Scopitone was developed in Europe in the 1950s, extending the innovation of Soundies technology in significant ways such as introducing colour film, Hi-Fi magnetic soundtracks and the capacity for selection between thirty-six tracks on a Scopitone Jukebox. These machines were often installed in cocktail bars and other places of adult entertainment, and as with Soundies, Scopitone's featured artists were frequently obscure, 'up and coming' or performers representative of low-culture forms such as burlesque. It is of interest to this thesis that Susan Sontag places Scopitone films at number three of her list of items "which are ... the canon of Camp" (1966/2009, p. 277). Austerlitz (2007) claims that Scopitone Jukeboxes brought short-form music clips to a 1950s youth audience, and links this to burgeoning post-war social change. States Austerlitz (2007): "Scopitones never intended to be about much else other than beautiful flesh, their awakening to youth culture cohabiting with an awakening to sex as cultural rebellion and marketing opportunity" (p. 16). The sartorial identities of the performer/characters in the music videos studied in this thesis cannot be seen as referencing the link of exhibitionist — and presumably, heteronormative — sexuality that Austerlitz perceives between Scopitone and music video. However, his connecting of youth culture, "sex as cultural rebellion" and cultures of consumption resonate in establishing an understanding of the origins of the form.

Once again following Shore (1984), Austerlitz notes a further significant cinematic precursor to music video in claiming that "the Hollywood musical's influence on music video cannot be overlooked, its innovations written into the DNA of the medium" (Austerlitz, 2007, p. 12). Shore (1984) notes how the outset of the bringing of image and sound together in motion pictures was in fact through the format of the musical, with the 1927 Al

Jolson vehicle *The Jazz Singer* (p.19). Over the following three decades of the twentieth-century these “expression[s] of unfettered fantasy” came to feature musical sequences that were “discrete short films in and of themselves, often possessed of unique sets, costumes and camera angles, and performers distinct from the prosaic, nonmusical scenes of the film” (Austerlitz, 2007, p. 12). This format can be seen as a significant precursor to the performance-style video, of the type that will be analysed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

This thesis therefore also recognises a link between these structural qualities of the Hollywood musical sequence and music video. Equally, it observes a further similarity between the musical and the visual culture of music video, through a connection that Austerlitz himself does not explicitly make: that both of these media types arose as a popular distraction from society’s economic woes and social divisions, simply at opposite ends of the twentieth-century. It is true then that the vital additional technology at the fulcrum of the institutional history of music video at mid-century is the medium of television. Indeed, television’s essential place in the compositional mix of music video is such that Netherlands cultural studies academic Jaap Kooijman (2004) simply distinguishes the form as being “a combination of the short film and pop music, most often played on TV” (p. 28).

British sociomusicologist and former rock critic Simon Frith is a noted early contributor of knowledge on music video (Frith et. al., 1993) and one who has continued to link the form to its basis in television, “the most significant medium of political and commercial communication in the twentieth century” (Frith, p. 278, 2002). An important distinction between Frith and others who privilege television as an actor in the history and transmission



of music video is that Frith looks at the conventions of the medium as they developed from the 1950s, and not only at the constitution or phenomenon of the US MTV cable network from the mid 1980s. At the turn of the millennium, Frith (2002) identifies continued, glaring gaps in music video scholarship, usefully summarising the first decade and a half of serious writing on the subject thus:

there was a time in popular music studies (from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s) when it seemed as if the analysis of music and television would be transformed by studies of music video. Music video analysis was added to music analysis as a necessary academic skill. The MTV Corporation was studied with more interest than the record business. Scholars from other fields – film studies, cultural studies, media studies – suddenly found pop music interesting as a site for general arguments about postmodernism.

Ten years on most of this literature seems curiously overblown. It has left little mark on either TV or music studies, and, more surprisingly, music videos themselves now seem to arouse little interest except from the few scholars devoted to close textual analysis. MTV these days is better understood as a youth service than a music channel, its promotional effects indicated by sales figures rather than by an account of how it has changed musical values or perceptions. There are not, to my knowledge, any systematic studies of the video audience; there is little published work on the process of video production (p. 278).

Writing on music video takes a turn in the 2000s, with important contemporary perspectives issuing from outside the UK and US, for example by New Zealand scholar Lisa Perrot (2015, 2017, 2019) who writes on the form often in relation to David Bowie, and Danish new media academic Mathias Bonde Korsgaard. As its title suggests, Korsgaard's 2017

*Music Video after MTV: Audiovisual Studies, New Media, and Popular Music* book moves beyond music television analysis and discusses future implications of the form. While the book's principle content considers the legacy of the period discussed in this thesis more than that period itself, Korsgaard's (2017) nuanced and informed contemporary understanding of the genre is nonetheless helpful to this thesis' own. Taking neither a strictly filmic or musicological standpoint, Korsgaard (2017) explains how in accordance with Vernallis, his approach is based on the "multimodal and multimedial nature of music video: precisely, [that] the interactions and relations between its different elements determine its meanings ... " (p. 34). Korsgaard's scholarship validates many of the observations made in this thesis that arise from the research's structural analyses and as such, will be relied upon throughout the writing.

Just as with contemporary understandings of fashion, writing from the field of curation also contributes to twenty-first century commentary on music video. For example, a number of articles related to the British Film Institute (BFI) National Archive *British Landmark Music Video* collection, curated as part of the *Fifty Years of British Music Video* project in 2017, contain useful definitions of the form.

Here, music video is identified as "a hybrid production culture" that draws upon and extends the disciplines of graphic design, photography, fine art and performance (Caston & Smith, 2017. p. 2). Dylan Cave (2017), curator of Fiction at the BFI, describes music video as a "unique part of moving image production ... at the cutting edge of advertising and promotional film, creating pop culture out of commercial imperative" (p. 79). Thus, music videos are: "succinct and culturally savvy, they capture the zeitgeist and, at their very best, define the attitudes and styles of the moment" (Cave, 2017,

p. 79). This use of the term *zeitgeist* — meaning the spirit of the times — with reference to music video as a powerful cultural expression links intriguingly with Barbara Vinken’s diagnosis of postfashion, where “Fashion has become what art had wanted to be: the *Zeitgeist* expressing itself in visible form [original italics]” (Vinken, 2005, p. 41).

Emily Caston, a UK screen studies academic and former music video producer, has published widely on music video since 2017. Caston writes on both the BFI’s archival project (2017; Caston & Smith, 2017) and on the form more generally, with an emphasis on British music video production (2019, 2020a, 2020b). Whereas previous scholarship, including Vernallis (2004, 2013), considered the role of the auteur and the notion of authorship in music video, Caston (2020a, 2020b) is part of a trend in recent music video scholarship (see Arnold et.al. 2017) that takes a contemporary position on its collaborative culture. This includes, for example, Caston’s focus on the significance of the creative contribution of industry professionals such as cinematographers, choreographers, editors and designers, to the making of videos, and her privileging of the importance of non-male pioneer music video directors such as Sophie Muller, who helmed videos by Eurythmics that will be addressed in this thesis. Caston’s geographic orientation away from the US toward British Anglophone culture also makes her writing a helpful addition to music video scholarship relied upon in the current Australian-based research, which focuses on British music video performer/characters.

Australian curatorial writing also contributes context to this research, for example in curator Nicholas Chambers’ catalogue essay *Pictures Came and Broke Your Heart* (2004) supporting the exhibition *Video Hits: Art and Music Video* held at the Queensland Art Gallery between February 21 and

June 14, 2004. Chambers (2004) commits to the literature a version of the well-known fact that MTV in America was launched in 1981, with:

the sound of squeaking synthesisers and the image of British new wave band [The Buggles] with [the music video] *Video Killed the Radio Star*. Australian director Russell Mulcahy had made the clip two years earlier as a promotional video to air on television programs such as *The Kenny Everett Video Show* (UK) ... and *Countdown* (Australia) (p. 44).

Chambers' (2004) identification of early auteur music video director Mulcahy and these television programs as being important to the story of music video will be something also recognised in this thesis. For example, David Mallet, co-director with Bowie of *Ashes to Ashes* (1980), was in fact the director of *The Kenny Everett Video Show*, as will be discussed in Chapter 2.

In her essay *Jump cut: music video aesthetics* (2004) which accompanies the same exhibition, Chambers' co-curator Kathryn Weir similarly refers to the importance of the 1970s and 80s culture-defining Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) music performance and video clip chart show *Countdown*, and to the iconic British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) television program *Top of the Pops* which is often seen as its equivalent. More plainly than many other writers, Weir (2004) takes the position that the great impact of music video in the 1980s arises directly from the history of television from the 1950s to the 1970s (p. 38). From a curatorial perspective, Weir (2004) notes that recognition by art critics and institutions of music video as an influential cultural form developed quickly, with New York's Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) commencing its collection of the form in the early 1980s, holding the exhibition *Music Video: The Industry and its Fringes* in 1985 (p. 38).

This interaction between music video, art and the museum continues in the present day. Using a curatorial rhetoric of projections, installations and immersive, interactive settings, Chambers' and Weir's own exhibition juxtaposed creative commercial music videos and reflexive video art by practitioners identified by the curators as being explicitly influenced by the form of music video, including Australian satirical drag king art collective The Kingpins, Swiss experimental multimedia artist Pipilotti Rist and Swedish performance, film and sound artist Annika Ström. The exhibition included Eurythmics videos from the 1980s directed by Chris Ashbrook, and more recent works by Michel Gondry, a director closely identified with metamodernism. That these have been considered exemplars of the validity of music video in an art context provide useful verification of both this thesis's assertion of the seriousness of the form, and its specific approach to the videos analysed in prosecuting this. In describing the impact of music video as a visual culture — and importantly, one that directly influences the embodiment of fashion — Chambers (2004) neatly explains how in the 1980s:

promotional pop videos were transformed into an influential cultural form which changed the way we thought about music and images [and that] came to infiltrate our lives — showing us what to wear and how to dance (p. 44).

In establishing its own definition of music video, the current writing draws from all these views, in agreeing that: music video is a unique short form of moving image which draws from cinema and television, advertising, the visual and performing arts, photography and graphic design; it is a promotional tool of the pop music industry; the form can be seen to express modernity and post modernity; it is a visual culture closely related to both theories and critical practices of fashion. A final, and distinguishing, aspect of this research's definition of music video is its recognition that this

uniquely late-twentieth century hybrid media type is most of all a conspicuous and influential site of the performance of gender identity.

### **Use of the present tense**

In the course of this chapter, mention has already been made of the stylistic choice to employ the present tense as the principal mode of writing in this thesis. The research recognises that this is unconventional in the field of fashion studies. However, in the field of film studies the usage of present tense, to both describe images on screen and also to theorise them, is an established convention. British film and television academic Sarah Cardwell (2003) identifies that scholarly writing on film from as early as the 1950s differentiates time in moving image from that in literature, for example when George Bluestone explains in 1957 that:

The novel has three tenses [past, present, future]; the film has only one [the present tense]. From this follows almost everything else one can say about time in both media [original brackets] (quoted in Cardwell, 2003, p. 82).

Cardwell states that Bluestone's seminal thesis remains almost entirely unchallenged, further citing Alain Robbe-Grillet, whose 1962 position on film and temporality is consistent with Bluestone's diagnosis:

The essential characteristic of the [moving] image is its presentness. Whereas literature has a whole gamut of grammatical tenses ... by its nature what we see on the screen is in the act of happening, we are given the gesture itself, not an account of it (quoted in Cardwell, 2003, p. 82).

It is then the case that in order to properly attend to its analysis of moving image, usage of the present tense is required in this thesis. As a matter of consistency in the establishing of a writerly tone across this hybrid fashion research, present tense has then also been extended as a mode in the

background contextualisation of the videos. Cardwell's own thesis proceeds to the issue of literature-film adaptations, related in part to the question of medium specificity. This thesis argues that the historical and sometimes personal contexts from which the videos arise are in fact a kind of 'literature' — that is, a series of stories — which the writing here 'adapts', in order to describe the conditions of the late twentieth century with the same dynamism as does the 'continuous visual present' of music video. In effect, rather than offer a purely historical past tense recount of the conditions from which these visual cultural artefacts arise, the writing aims to 'take us there', to evoke the spirit or feeling of the era as in fact the music videos do. Michael Shore (1984) poetically explains this characteristic of the form thus: "each rock video is a moment in time from that eternal now, a grain of eye-catching 'wow' -inducing sand in the hourglass of media dreams" (p. 105). It is therefore argued that the active nature of the present tense makes it an appropriate mode of writing in this thesis.

### **Use of images**

The thesis is presented as a written work that is supported by a number of still images. These have been captured by the researcher as screenshots from the primary music video case studies. This follows the example of the much-cited moving image scholars David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson (1979), who argue that in order to analyse moving image works, frame enlargements — that is, 'photographs' of the actual film — are preferable authorised film production stills, which do not issue from the point of view of the cinematographic camera and therefore result in pictures that do not correspond to actual images in a finished film (p. v).

With the exceptions of Jean Paul Goude's record sleeve for *Nightclubbing* (1981) by Grace Jones, which is briefly analysed in lieu of a music video in

Chapter 5, and Patrick Nagel's cover illustration for Duran Duran's *Rio* (1982), which bears influence upon understanding the relationship between music video and graphic design, a choice has also been made throughout the thesis to avoid reliance upon supporting imagery that originates from outside the four key focus videos. This is on the basis that mining the extraordinarily rich vein of promotional pop material which the early 1980s provides would distract from the powerful imagery of the videos, which are the data set of the research.

### **Use of terms**

Throughout the thesis, the preferred term used to describe both the overall genre of audiovisual production and the individual short moving image works that form the data set of the research is 'music video'. As a function of the writing, on occasion the commonly used descriptor 'clip' is used interchangeably; in direct quotation, the terms 'rock video' and 'rock promo' also appear. All are intended to convey the same meaning.

## **Research scope and limitations**

### **Notable omissions**

As indicated in the introductory outline of chapters of this thesis, this research comprises close examination of four music videos — with several other examples studied in less detail — that were made between 1980 and 1985, featuring white, able-bodied British pop musicians. Three of these performer/characters are men, as are the majority of music video directors responsible for these works, with two non-male directors being named only in passing.



This thesis recognises the paradox it has created in having identified a gap in the knowledge of music video resulting from a lack of diverse voices in existing literature, yet itself investigating such a circumscribed set of examples. This data restriction is however something of a self-fulfilling consequence of the thesis' foundational proposition: that the mass popularity of music video occurred in a global cultural climate dominated by Britain and the US, and that this operated within paradigms of race and gender which privilege white heterosexual masculinity. If music video of the early 1980s was a conspicuous site of the performance of new fashion masculinities, as is suggested, then this thesis seeks to investigate how music video used cultural critique *within* that system to variously confirm or deny such power dynamics.

The current writing contends that the set of music videos chosen for analysis here form a particularly appropriate basis for investigating such claims, as in this case it is the rule rather than the exception which best tests the argument. David Bowie, Wham!, Duran Duran and Eurythmics, key works by whom will be studied in this thesis, exemplify 1980s music video celebrity. All are artists whose fashion-conscious performances of gender transgressed and/or transformed mainstream sartorial norms, and who attained huge popularity in the Western world largely as a result of their presence on music television. Throughout this thesis, reference will be made to a number of other performer/characters as cultural precedents outside this paradigm, the inclusion of whom is often crucial for context or contrast. However, the lasting impact of these figures, such as Grace Jones who does appear in the writing, is caused through a range of popular cultural mechanisms outside music video, meaning that individual works by them specific to this area do not bear the weight of detailed structural analysis of the type employed in this thesis.

The highly-focused scope of this research means that even within these restrictions, it must further exclude some notable precedents in the genealogy of alternative masculinities in music video. For example, existing writing often observes a beginning of the history of music video in Queen's high Camp, visually-tricky rock opus *Bohemian Rhapsody* (1975) directed by Bruce Gowers (see Austerlitz, 2007; Zaleski, 2021). The current writing however considers Queen's already well-noted contribution to the vernacular of masculine rock fashion in the 1970s and 1980s in the figure of lead singer Freddie Mercury to be so specific to his personal iconography — from spandex Glam to leather Clone — as to distract from the central purpose of the research as outlined in the previous thesis introduction.

Similarly, US post-Punk/New Wave politico-pop provocateurs Devo, led creatively by member Gerald Casale, are widely recognised for their vanguard work which built from radical art, cinema and performance to create innovative music videos in the late 1970s which challenged normative gender roles and presentations, including the use of post-human speculations. Short for De-Evolution Band (Shore, 1984 p. 60), Devo's faux-corporate Americana motto 'Are we not men? We are Devo' and uniquely cynical form of futuristic protest was enacted in experimental early videos with titles such as *Jocko Homo* and *Secret Agent Man* (Shore, 1984, p. 60).<sup>9</sup> However, Devo's critique of masculinity is not specifically grounded in sartorialism, arising instead from a set of US-dominated cultural and political influences that this research considers outside the remit of its investigation.

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<sup>9</sup> These two songs in fact formed part of the music video/film *In The Beginning Was The End: The Truth About De-Evolution* for which Devo won first prize at the 1977 Ann Arbor Film Festival (Zaleski, 2021, p. 75).

The highly visual New Zealand band Split Enz also created a significant body of music video work beginning in the mid-1970s, directed by member and artistic director Noel Crombie. Counter to the prevailing sexualised glamour of Glam Rock at that time, Split Enz challenged the aesthetics of masculinity in late twentieth-century pop music by invoking the asexuality of music hall, circus and Italian Futurism in their uncommonly heavy use of costuming and make up (Young, 2004). However, while these precociously outlying music videos were shown extensively for example on the Australian chart show *Countdown* (Wilmoth 1993), and gained significant airplay on the very early, content-hungry MTV, with four of their videos being play listed on the cable network's first day of broadcast in 1981 (Zaleski, 2021, p. 77), Split Enz did not ultimately attain mass popularity as a result of their engagement with the form. Jennifer Craik and Jon Stratton (2013) suggest that the New Zealand band had “distinctly antipodean feel that resonated with Australian audiences but never really took off elsewhere” (p. 31).<sup>10</sup> Being that the phenomenon of international celebrity is a thematic connection between the selection of works analysed in the thesis, study of Crombie's intriguing contribution to music video therefore cannot justifiably be undertaken here.

Scottish-American auteur singer-songwriter and guitarist of American avant-garde New Wave art pop band Talking Heads is another performer of the early music video era whose performance of transgressively asexual masculine sartorialism well-warrants exploration in further research, but whose practice does not specifically align with the aims of this thesis. While Talking Heads were well-represented in the era of music video, no one example of these represents themes of this study, or therefore, its purpose.

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<sup>10</sup> 1980s-era Split Enz members Neil Finn and Paul Hester were to later form the more conventionally-attired band Crowded House, whose music video *Don't Dream It's Over*, directed by Australian Alex Proyas, was nominated for both Best Group Video and Best Direction at the 1987 MTV Music Video Awards.

Byrne is better known for a lengthy career spanning music, film, theatre, opera, and visual art, who conceptualises his live concerts as theatrical productions, with close attention to costume design and choreography (Gillespie, 2021, p. 7). The enduring moving image of Byrne in the public imagination is not one from music video, but rather from a stage costume documented in the concert film *Stop Making Sense* (1984), directed by Jonathan Demme. This is the image of the performer attired in what is known as “the big suit” (Open Culture, 2023, n.p.).<sup>11</sup>

In much fashion scholarship, the suit is regarded as a semiotically-loaded garment ensemble representative of the masculinity of modernity; this will be discussed in this thesis, with the suit being a particular feature of Chapters 4 and 5. Its meaning in rock and pop music is contended. Janice Miller (2011), when writing on the suit in music, explains that:

while music might be considered the place where transgression from the fixed codes and stereotypes of gendered dressing has often taken place, the men’s suit—though sometimes diverting greatly from the stereotypical business suit—has featured heavily as mainstay attire for many male music performers. Whilst the design of the suit may be shaped by fashionable change and shifts in gender ideologies, it prevails as a key form of masculine dress in a number of contexts, including music (p. 75).

When Miller refers to these transgressions, she — and many other writers on the subject — most often speak about design adaptations and embodiment of the suit as forms of cultural critique of hegemonic structures such as gender, sexuality and class (see Breward, 2016). Examples of this approach will be considered in due course in the thesis,

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<sup>11</sup> Although Byrne only wears the suit in one sequence, for the song *Girlfriend is Better*, from which the title of the film is drawn, Byrne is so well-identified with the image of this garment to have lamented that his tombstone would be inscribed with the phrase “Here lies David Byrne. Why the big suit?” (Open Culture, 2023, n.p.).

but do not easily apply to Byrne. “The big suit”, created by costume designer Gail Blacker to a brief by Byrne, features shoulders so disproportionately wide as to present a surreal impression of the suit-attired male form, rendering the garment itself a character in the performance with an identity almost independent from Byrne. Here, Byrne challenges an agreed understanding that “in emphasizing the strength and sturdiness of the male upper body, the suit symbolizes this power and thus an inferred male sexuality” (Miller, 2011, p. 75; see also Hollander, 2016). Conversely however, Byrne’s usage of this extreme exaggeration of the shoulders of the suit is not a comment upon male sexual power, but rather is a consequence of his interest in the potential of costume and movement to evoke the absurd.

Interviewed by Open Culture at the time of a 4K restoration made of the film, forty years after its initial release, Byrne stated simply that: “I wanted my head to appear smaller, and the easiest way to do that was to make my body bigger” (2023, n.p.). Influential *New Yorker* critic Pauline Kael described the costume as “a perfect psychological fit,” observing how “when he [Byrne] dances, it isn’t as if he were moving the suit — the suit seems to move him” (cited in Open Culture, 2023, n.p.). Byrne had previously drawn lyrical inspiration from the idiosyncratic spoken language of television evangelists, partly because, he explained in the early 1980s, “the middle class because it seems so different from my life, so distant from what I do. I can’t imagine living like that” (quoted in *Far Out Magazine*, 2023). In his wearing of the suit, Byrne may well have been issuing a similar comment; however it would seem that “the big suit” does not make political reference to the ubiquity of the usual form of the garment in the corporate world, so much as reduce the suit to a design element in theatre-craft, in response to Byrne’s known interest in world cultures. Speaking to *Entertainment*

*Weekly* in 2012, Byrne explained that he had been inspired by his observations of Japan, where he had: “seen a lot of traditional Japanese theater, and I realized that yes, that kind of front-facing outline, a suit, a businessman’s suit, looked like one of those things, a rectangle with just a head on top” (cited in Open Culture, 2023, n.p.). Thus, Talking Heads and Byrne’s contribution of avant-garde performances of alternative masculinity to the sphere of music in the 1980s, while highly creative, are more akin to Split Enz and Crombie’s asexual art theatricality than the performers who feature in the music videos analysed in this thesis.

In this thesis, which considers the performance of new fashion masculinities in pop of the early 1980s, the most obvious omission from its close analysis may seem to be Boy George, singer of the group Culture Club, formed in 1981. Alongside Wham! and Duran Duran, videos by whom do feature as case studies in the thesis, Culture Club is clearly one of the success stories of the “second ‘British Invasion’” of the US by British new wave or New Pop acts in the first phase of MTV, which took place roughly between 1981 and 1983 (Goodwin, 1993, p. 49). Blitz club regular and emblematic ‘gender bender’ Boy George is rightly referred to throughout the text in several contexts, but the writing has determined that no one music video by Culture Club matches the other case studies chosen by the research in order to analyse the emerging language of the form more broadly.

## **1980**

The narrowly-bounded time period focused upon in this research is acknowledged as being another of its limitations. The commencement of the thesis’ principal investigation in 1980 is however explained by the recognition of an important distinction between the significance of music

video in the 1970s and 1980s. Canadian film and culture scholar Will Straw (1993), who considers music video to be foremost an agent of pop music as a culture industry, notes how the form was one of a number of innovations that produced major structural changes in the 1980s, most importantly in the creation of a “new pop music mainstream” (1993, p. 4).

Music journalist Peter Wilmoth (1993), writing on the Australian free-to-air music television institution *Countdown*, describes this 1970s to 1980s pop music culture transition with flair: “glitter made way for grime, Suzi [leather-clad glam rocker, Quatro] made way for Siouxsie [Sioux, alpha-punk front woman of the Banshees], and even the Elvis baton was passed from Presley to Costello” (p. 10).

The music industry of the 1970s was dominated by the metanarrative of AOR (adult oriented rock) — with its artist-image permanency and focus on the long-form format of the album — which was promoted primarily through touring and live performance. The 1980s saw return to the teenage-driven Top 40 pop chart model of the 1960s, which privileged record singles, but with an important twist: these single releases were now prominently accompanied by music videos, with the “specific musical styles of British post-punk music ... prov[ing] extremely successful” (Straw, 1993, p. 5). States Straw: “the new mainstream is seen to have enacted, for major record companies, the long-desired co-option of the critical gestures and innovations of punk, [allowing for] its integration within the mechanisms of celebrity” (p. 6). Thus, this thesis argues that 1980 was a watershed year for the function and meaning of music video. It also sees this as being related to a central hypothesis that will be tested in this research: that music video, a cultural product related to fashioned identity, arose in significant measure from British post-Punk subcultural and queer style of this period.

This writing agrees with Straw that through accelerating the velocity of commercial pop innovation, early 1980s music video ushered in a new “pin up culture [characterised by] semiotic richness and a high level of contextualization ... performer identity and the discourses of celebrity” (pp.9-10). In Straw’s terms then, the ambit of this thesis is: the pin up culture of a new pop mainstream created by music video immediately after 1980.

Andrew Goodwin (1992) also argues convincingly of the symbiosis of the early 1980s and the form of music video when he states that:

what is really important about music video is its emergence in the 1980s as a routine method for promoting pop singles ... this is why the development of music television is inextricably tied into the moment known as the ‘New Pop’ — those acts, including the New Romantics, who represented a shift in pop’s attitude to music-making technologies and promotional strategies (p. 30).

Goodwin is among those who observe a substantive change in the creative constitution and cultural meaning of music video from the mid-1980s onwards via the spread of MTV, peaking in the 1990s. This thesis boldly suggests that Wayne Koestenbaum (2013) could in fact be speaking for music video when he says of himself that: “My mission in the eighties was to develop my aestheticism. My mission in the nineties was to justify my aestheticism”(p. 13). Subsequent to the explosive impact of music television in the US, commercial music video largely became formulaic, a well-tuned and tightly controlled capitalist mechanism. This shift is also recognised by



this thesis, hence the restriction of the majority of its study to what it identifies as being the genre's formative time period of 1980-1985.<sup>12</sup>

A supposition of the research, and one of its keenest interests, is that music video at this time was a particularly 'pure' star-making apparatus, which operates in accordance with many understandings and derivations of Camp: it is frequently creatively adventurous; often logistically expedient; sometimes arguably naïve. These are possible qualities of the music videos that will now be investigated, using the theoretical frameworks and methodologies which have been outlined in this first procedural chapter of the thesis.

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<sup>12</sup> The contemporaneous view of Irish music director Steve Barron, known for iconic music videos not analysed in this thesis including Michael Jackson's *Billie Jean* (1983) and Norwegian trio A-ha's *Take on Me* (1985) of there having been an obvious 'pre-' and 'post-' MTV creative cultural shift is also useful to consider here. A child of British film industry parents Ron, a soundman and Zelda, a director herself of music videos including Culture Club's *I'll Tumble 4 Ya* (1983) Barron and his producer sister Siobhan founded London's Limelight Film and Video in 1979, representing themselves and a stable of prolific directors including Don Letts, Pete Sinclair, Chris Gabrin, Arthur Ellis and, initially, Julien Temple, director of feature films including the *The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle* (1980), a mockumentary on the Sex Pistols featuring Malcolm McLaren and *Absolute Beginners* (1986), based on the novel by Colin MacInnes and starring David Bowie. Quoted in Shore (1984), Barron explains how the early days of British "rock promos", which he identifies as a period beginning in 1978, was characterised by performance videos shot on low budgets, and developed towards "concept clips", with his own first example being Human League's *Don't You Want Me* (1981). Says Barron of this rapid transition from homespun to corporate: "everyone [in Britain] saw the video, and then MTV happened, and everything just exploded [in terms of record company budgets and control]" (in Shore, pp. 80-81).

## **Chapter 2: *A rumour from ground control: time, space and fashion in David Bowie's Ashes to Ashes***

### **Chapter Introduction**

This chapter aims to establish the fashioned 'look' of a sound, and the sound of a fashion look, by exploring three of fashion's recurring concerns: time, space, and the sartorial presentation of new masculinities. To address how music video can relate to these things, the writing will investigate these issues through structural analysis of a significant precedent in the music video canon: *Ashes to Ashes* (1980), co-directed by David Mallet and David Bowie. Bowie is strongly associated with this new media type which rose to striking prominence in a late-Cold War period dominated by Western cultural imperialism; an era which saw the development of new media technologies and a reconfiguration of the relationship between fashion, sexuality and gender. Bowie's extensive creative practice is also widely recognised for its influence on both theoretical and socio-discursive understandings of non-heteronormative masculine identity and sartorialism (Cullen, 2013; Hebdige 1979; Polhemus 1996, 2010; Rees-Roberts 2013; McCauley Bowstead 2018; Jones 2020). The current research contributes to scholarly understandings of Bowie by synthesising these perspectives, in order to specifically identify how Bowie's fashion-centred approach to performance contributes to development of the language of music video.

The chapter diagnoses the early capabilities of the music video form and confirms Bowie's influential place in what this thesis argues are perhaps the most socio-discursive visual cultures of the late twentieth-century: fashion and pop music. In the *Ashes to Ashes* music video, three distinct visual

spaces are populated by three of Bowie's fashioned masculine performer/characters: the clown Pierrot; Major Tom, reprising a famous Bowie alter-ego from 1969; and the solitary inmate of a padded cell. Michael Shore (1984) writes of how Bowie is at the forefront of the embracing of music video, perceiving it to be crucial to the future of popular music. In this way, the established and highly-regarded 1970s artist Bowie validates the form, seeing it as a natural way to extend his signature image-centred performance practice of character creation and reinvention in a new decade. Shore (1984) muses that:

though ostensibly a singer, songwriter, guitarist, and saxophonist, Bowie's instrument had always been his image, his personae, his peculiar aptitude for about-face image shifts that were seemingly always ahead of the next big trend ... Bowie's involvement in rock video seemed the logical fulfillment of artistic and technological destiny, [and] incipient evidence of the inevitability of rock video" (pp. 74-75).

Bowie's contribution to the language of music video is well understood (Broackes 2013, Dillane et. al. 2015, Waldrep 2015). A pioneer of the form in the 1970s and 1980s, Bowie's engagement with the medium continues throughout his career: poignantly, the artist's music video *Lazarus* (2016), directed by Johan Renck, is uploaded to Bowie's official VEVO channel on the ubiquitous post-television platform YouTube on 7 January, 2016, a mere three days before the artist's death.

*Ashes to Ashes*, the first example of high-concept music videos by Bowie that will be focused upon in this paper, comes from 1980, at the outset of what the research has determined is the beginning of the form's dominating era. Nonetheless, it should be noted that *Ashes to Ashes* is not Bowie and Mallet's first collaboration. The pair meet when the artist performs the song *The Boys Keep Swinging* on *The Kenny Everett Video Show* on 23 April

1979 (Pegg, 2016, p. 49). Mallet produces the show for Thames Television, and is its principal director.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the notoriety of eponymous host Everett's irreverence towards his celebrity guests, the program is noteworthy for the experimental televisual techniques and technologies employed by Mallet. These include Chromakey and the newly-developed Quantel Paintbox, both of which are also employed in the creation of visual effects in *Ashes to Ashes*.

These aspects of the video are therefore easily identifiable as the novel contribution of Mallet to the 'look' of the 1980s 'sound'. Noted Bowie historian Nicholas Pegg (2016) claims that: "*Ashes to Ashes* would define rock video for the early 1980s, its techniques and effects aped by countless early promos" (p. 29). and indeed Shore (1984) names Mallet as one of early music video's auteur directors (p. 117). Auteurism is a common discourse in popular culture, with Canadian-American film scholar and critic Barry Keith Grant (2008) suggesting in fact that the "ultimate vindication" of auteur theory is MTV's inclusion in 1993 of a director credit at the beginning and end of the play of every music video (p. 5). Mallet's legacy can be felt in such recognition of the creative agency of the music video director: in addition to helming other videos for Bowie including *Let's Dance* and *China Girl*, both filmed on location in Australia in 1983, and his work in the sphere of TV commercials, Mallet will go on to direct many other popular genre and career-defining music videos.

However, while clearly technically adept and visually intuitive, Mallet's own motivating approach to this body of work would seem to centre on a

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<sup>13</sup>Mallet is connected to the British TV origins of music video since the 1960s: first as an assistant director of *Shindig!*, and later as a director of the pop music television programs *Juke Box Jury* and *Top of the Pops* (Shore, 1984, p. 59).

satisfaction gained through creative collaboration. This is particularly the case in his work with Bowie:

the way I approach each video, depending of course on the artist's own abilities and inclinations, is to act as more or less a technical director for their ideas. If they have no ideas, I'll come up with something for them ... but with a David Bowie, it's like, if we are making a commercial, he'd be the ad agency scriptwriter and art director. He draws all his own story boards, he comes up with the concepts, and I'm just there to execute them properly. I'm a conduit, a translator (Mallet quoted in Shore, 1984, p. 118).

Strong creative trust develops swiftly between these artistic collaborators, with Mallet directing the official music video for Bowie's *The Boys Keep Swinging* immediately after that live TV performance.<sup>14</sup> That video from 1979, as observed by Shore (1984), also "contained motifs of multiple identity and ego loss that have since become staples of rock video" (p. 75). Bowie and Mallet's association continues with the music video *DJ*, also from 1979, and with an elaborately staged live performance on *The Kenny Everett Video Show* 1979 New Years Eve special *Will Kenny Everett Make It to 1980?*. Here, Bowie performs *Space Oddity*, his hit song of 1969, referred to later in this chapter as the point of origin of the character Major Tom. Some interior sets built for this television production, including Major Tom's memorable 'exploding kitchen' and the 'padded cell', are in fact reused in the *Ashes to Ashes* music video (Shore, 1984, p. 268).<sup>15</sup> At the

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<sup>14</sup>Made in 1979, *Boys Keep Swinging* is not a music video focused upon in the current research. However in context to the legacy of Bowie's contribution to the performance of gender identity in music video, it is nonetheless noted here that the clip is extraordinary. As in the case of his original television performance of the song, 'masculine' Bowie wears a Modish mid-century style suit and appears fresh faced, almost as a youth. However in the music video, Bowie also performs three female characters who are full drag interpretations of fashionable womanhood of increasing seniority, including a glamorous crone with a walking stick, who strongly resembles the severe, aged Greta Garbo, who in fact co-stars with Bowie in her last movie appearance, the David Hemmings directed *Just a Gigolo* (1979).

<sup>15</sup> These sets will actually be reused by Mallet once more, in the 1983 Billy Idol music video *White Wedding*.

time the most expensive clip ever made, *Ashes to Ashes* has a budget of £25 000 and is filmed principally on location at Beachy Head and Hastings in May 1980 (Pegg, 2016, p. 29).

## **Backgrounding Bowie**

Born David Robert Jones on 8 January, 1947 in Brixton, south London (died 10 January, 2016), Bowie's early biography is so well-charted in popular writing it requires only a summary here. An artistically precocious and favoured youngest child of a blended, increasingly-comfortable lower middle class family, David Jones' young life is spent in aspirational Bromley. Pre-war, his Yorkshireman father had indulged an ambition for nightclub entrepreneurship, while half brother Terry Burns — Bowie's senior by ten years and a sufferer of schizophrenia — introduces the boy to the writing of the Beats, jazz and occasionally the delights of "sinful" SoHo, a neighbourhood rich in bohemian tradition and, in the 1950s, the location of London's best jazz clubs, the centre of the country's film and fashion industries, as well as the home of burlesque" (Hopkins 1985, p. 6).

Young David is a product of a victorious but depleted and grey post-war Britain, that is both materially beholden to the prosperous, colourful Cold War new superpower that is the United States, and also held in its cultural thrall. He takes an early interest in the affecting power of one of its most emblematic aspects: 1950s rock and roll. Recalls Bowie:

I saw a cousin of mine dance when I was very young. She was dancing to Elvis' 'Hound Dog' and I had never seen her get up and be moved so much by anything. It really impressed me ... I started getting records immediately after that ... and then I fell in love with the Little Richard Band. I never heard anything that lived in such bright colours in the air. It really just painted the whole room for me (quoted in Hopkins 1985, p. 5).

In Bowie's short recount of a childhood memory, there are a number of ready answers to the question of why by 1980, Bowie should be a central figure in the star performance of new fashion masculinities in music video, an emergent media form that will itself soon and forever alter the shape of popular culture.

First, the child recognises that young people are entranced and enlivened by American rock and roll as they had never been by anything before: this is a phenomenon that represents a generational shift in tastes and values, created by and for a new youth culture. It "moves" them, as he observes, both in that they are overcome with emotion, and subsequently to the extent that they *literally* move their bodies, a response so keenly felt as to be almost involuntary. Most specifically, it is a young girl who is both moved, and moving: a fan responding to the call of a remote and — to young British eyes, exotic — young man, Elvis Presley. Cinema scholar Julie Lobalzo Wright (2017), who writes extensively on the crossover stardom of male popular music stars in British and American cinema, often in reference to Bowie, suggests that a star's image is the third vital part of music video after visuals and music (p. 68). Elvis, incidentally with whom David Jones shares a birthday, is understood as a significant progenitor of the performance of glamorous masculinity in musical moving image, a proposition that will be closely examined in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Also within this retelling, there is early recognition by Bowie of the cultural significance of performance. In the story, performance is undertaken not only by Elvis, but also by the fan. This act is also connected to desire: although it is not clear in Bowie's word-picture of the memory if he believes that his girl cousin desires Elvis, *the* star, or that if through the emulation of Elvis' movement she desires to *be* him, 'a star', embodying as he does the

sexual frisson of teenage rebellion. Regardless — or perhaps because of this tantalising ambiguity — the young David is “really impressed” with how effectively this novel cultural form communicates to a young person who appears to have hitherto been denied such an outlet for free self-expression.

Bowie scholar Shelton Waldrep (2015) tells us that: “the one common denominator within Bowie’s oeuvre may well be the notion of performance. In a sense, Bowie has always been performing himself — as Davy Jones performing David Bowie performing one of his many personae” (p. 14). This thesis agrees with Waldrep’s diagnosis and proceedingly, this chapter will identify how Bowie uses costume to differentiate his performer/character masculine identities in *Ashes to Ashes*.

This early anecdote reveals that the young, British David Jones enthusiastically experiences this new, culturally-hybrid American music via recording technology, which is produced as a commodity: it is art for sale, its magic available for purchase and collection. We can then see that the boy investigates his immediate interest beyond the most popular and commercially-sanctioned version of this phenomenon, and finds his interest piqued by a highly flamboyant artist: Little Richard, a more niche performer in that they are black, and whose image is transgressively queer. Waldrep (2015) notes that:

the mixture of glamour and sexuality that are the hallmarks of Little Richard fit almost too well into the Bowie mythos. Bowie’s lifelong interest in otherness is summed up by Richard’s open bisexuality and racial marginalization (p. 6).

It is interesting to note, as Roger Baker (1994) does when writing on the history of drag, that Richard is the first star to bring “self-conscious camp” into rock and roll (pp. 240-241). However, when considering Bowie it is





Fig. 1: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 2: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 3: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].

equally important to acknowledge Baker's further assertion that Richard's flamboyance is an effective tactic of emasculation, an image so outrageous as to distract from his blackness, "turning himself into a figure of fun, not fear" (1994, p. 241). Here, it could be that Bowie becomes aware of the perverse entertainment value of shock with the explicit goal of achieving cross over pop success.

Thus begins a creative research process of 'collecting' and appropriating images, sounds and styles that Bowie will continue throughout his career to the extent that, as this chapter will explain, by the time of *Ashes to Ashes* Bowie's stylistic 'scrapbook' is so layered as to be self-referential. Sartorial reinvention and the creation of alternate performance personae is characteristic of Bowie's body of work. *Ashes to Ashes* is an illustrative example not only of this, but also of the artist's postmodern approach to self-referentiality in drawing from his own visual and thematic archive.

What we ultimately learn from this early anecdote from Bowie is something further of particular interest to this thesis' exploration of visual cultures. The young David hears this new music as "liv[ing] in such bright colours in the air" that they paint "a whole room". This synaesthetic connection of "sound and vision" (Bowie 1977) is the essence of music video, which as we shall also see in this chapter, is exemplified in the structural qualities of *Ashes to Ashes*.

Named as a landmark music video by the British Film Institute (BFI) (Cave 2017), *Ashes to Ashes* is a watershed in the form's early stylistic development. It is also a notable example of Bowie's career-defining reflexive visual performance practice (Waldrep 2015, 2016), and a forum for Bowie's ongoing engagement with masculine identity and sartorialism as

the twentieth century enters its penultimate decade. Building in part upon musicological analysis of *Ashes to Ashes*, this chapter will explore how Mallet and Bowie also contribute to the emerging language of music video through their construction of a non-linear narrative. This is made by intercutting between atmospherically-distinct performance spaces or video “landscapes” (Vernallis, 2004, p. 86) that are inhabited by Bowie’s unusual masculine personae in the video.

To do this, the chapter will then commence with a scene-by-scene structural analysis of *Ashes to Ashes* which describes the video in a close reading of both televisual techniques and the prominence of character and costume amongst the video’s mis-en-scène.

It will then look at Bowie’s character of Pierrot, partly in relation to understandings of temporality and ‘the modernisms’. Next, it will discuss Bowie’s career-long association with subcultural style: first as a young Mod; then an originator of Glam Rock; and finally a significant reciprocal influence upon the retro-futurist New Romantic movement, notable members of which appear as Pierrot’s supporting chorus in *Ashes to Ashes*, a focus of this chapter.

The chapter will go on to consider ‘space’ as a theme in *Ashes to Ashes*, in the form of Bowie’s famous astronaut alternate persona Major Tom. It will explain the significance of this character and other recurring extraterrestrial emblems in Bowie’s archive of performance personae, including those with ambiguous gender and sexual presentations such as Ziggy Stardust, and consider implications of the British cultural identity of the dandy to understanding Bowie’s body of work.



Fig. 4: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 5: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 6: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].

Finally, the chapter will briefly look at the more normative masculine identity of the 'inmate' character, commencing a discussion of the continued use of Bowie's performance personae as visual references in twenty-first century men's fashion.

## ***Ashes to Ashes (1980)***

### **Structural analysis**

The video opens with an extreme wide shot of an un-Earthly pink landscape that is rendered abstract through a visual treatment of solarisation. We zoom in and a small figure becomes distinct in the frame: this is Pierrot. He sits cross-legged in a barren, empty place of sand and mirage-like water. Next to him is a set but unlit pyre. We dissolve to a close up of Pierrot, who commences lip-synching the words of the musical soundtrack: "Do you remember a guy that's been / In such an early song? / I heard a rumour from Ground Control ..."

The clown wears: a small-brimmed conical hat; theatrical make up, with accented eyes, cheeks and lips, a beauty mark on his cheekbone; and a distinctive barbed-shaped accent drawn on his forehead resembling a quizzical expression or scar. The latter is characteristic of the ironic costuming of New Romanticism, disrupting other references to *commedia dell'arte*. We zoom out to a mid shot and more details of Pierrot's attire become visible: his sparkly, gauzy costume features a petal-like collar and star-like cuffs. Pierrot holds up a small 'video postcard', a kind of proscenium 'frame within a frame' in which another solitary figure



Fig. 7: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 8: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 9: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 10: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 11: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 12: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].

appears (Fig. 1). That figure wears a light-coloured overall or jumpsuit evoking that of an astronaut, without an accompanying helmet. His dark blond hair is cut with a long fringe and shorter back-and-sides. This is Major Tom. He continues the lip-sync: “Oh no, don’t say it’s true”.

We dissolve back to Pierrot, who sings: “They got a message from the Action Man” (Fig. 2) and then quickly dissolve to a wide shot of the eerie pink beach. In a swift action, four characters enter the frame in symmetrical unison, to arrive in mid shot in the foreground of the frame (Fig. 3). Three of these wear heavy theatrical make up, with black clothing and headwear evocative of religious robing; the fourth character is styled as a retro ingenue, in a pale blue strapless cocktail dress with soft, fair hair with a fabric bow. Together as a chorus, the characters lip sync the lines: “I’m happy, hope you’re happy too ...” and exit the frame in the same choreographed manner.

We dissolve to Major Tom, who holds up another ‘video postcard’, singing: “I’ve loved and I’ve needed love ...”. On this new screen-within-the-screen, we see a lone figure in an interior wide shot (Fig. 4). The lyrics continue: “... sordid details following”. We dissolve to this setting as it becomes the main frame. The man is seated on a chair and is small within the tall-walled room. The room, or cell, is lined with light coloured fabric padded in a rectangular, quilted pattern; this also resembles an acoustically-insulated studio space. The man wears: an open-necked white dress shirt; black trousers detailed with silver studs or buttons down the outer seam; these are tucked into flat, calf-length green leather boots. His hair is similar to that of Major Tom. We zoom in on the man; simultaneously, there is a transition in the lighting of the space. The room/set is dramatically darkened and a graphic shaft of light in the manner of German





Fig. 13: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 14: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 15: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].

Expressionist cinema, causes a wedge-shaped, high-contrast striped shadow, as if through a high window that is screened by horizontal blinds (Fig. 5). The man takes over the lip synched narration of the song/story: “The shrieking of nothing is killing, just / Pictures of Jap girls in synthesis and I / Ain't got no money and I ain't got no hair ...”.

We cut to Pierrot's mysterious, elaborately-attired attendants mumbling indistinctly as though reciting an incantation, shot from below against a blackened sky, and then dissolve back to the man in the padded cell, now in close up (Fig. 6). He too wears make up, with ‘natural’ rouged cheekbones, light grey eyeliner or shadow and mascara. The zoom continues to an extreme close up of the man's face, highlighting that one of his pupils is significantly more dilated than the other, which gives an impression that his two eyes are of different colours (Fig. 7). He sings: “But I'm hoping to kick but the planet it's glowing ...”.

The next scene is a continuous long wide shot of Pierrot, flanked by his chorus, walking towards the camera. Behind them is a large earth-moving grader or tractor with an enormous blade and electric lights that glow strongly in the solarised visual atmosphere of pink and black highlights and shadows. We can now see in full that Pierrot's highly textured costume features large puffed sleeves, a fitted bodice, knickerbockers, hose and ballet-flat shoes. Two of the ecclesiastically-clad members of the chorus bend at times to perform a ritual, genuflecting movement with their gloved hands as they walk (Fig. 8). Pierrot sings/narrates the song's lyrical chorus: “Ashes to ashes, funk to funky / We know Major Tom's a junkie / Strung out in heaven's high / Hitting an all-time low”.

Following this passage, there is a musical break without lyrics; this is visually accompanied by a brief vignette in which Pierrot is photographed by a mid-twentieth century press reporter in a trilby hat and mackintosh, with a camera that features a large flashbulb reflector (Fig. 9). At the moment of the flash, Pierrot seizes his arm as though he has been wounded; we zoom in jerkily on his hand, which twitches (Fig. 10).

We return to the darkened space of the padded cell, where the man crouches in a corner, cradling his knees in torment (Fig. 11). He sings: “Time and again I tell myself / I’ll stay clean tonight / But the little green wheels are following me / Oh no, not again”.

We cut to a new space, a kitchen or a medical treatment room, rendered in the silvery monochrome of early black and white television photography. A female figure dressed in the uniform of a twentieth-century nurse at a sink/bench, with her back to the camera. At the centre of the frame is a spaceman seated in what resembles a dentist’s chair, presumably Major Tom although wearing a different, darker costume, perhaps rubberised, with a neckline/collar that should connect to a helmet but once again, does not. He sings: “I’m stuck with a valuable friend”. The shot continues and the four members of Pierrot’s chorus enter the foreground of the frame, joining in with the refrain: “I’m happy, hope you’re happy too...” (Fig. 12). Once more, they exit the frame; there are small explosions just offscreen that cause sparks and puffs of smoke. The astronaut puts his head back and sings: “One flash of light but no smoking pistol” (Fig. 13).

Next we see Pierrot, waist deep and visually fully surrounded by dark rippling ‘water’ that resembles visual static. Holding his arms and hands up and out as if for balance, he sings: “I never done good things / I never done



Fig. 16: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 17: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 18: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].

bad things ...” (Fig. 14). Between these lines are intercuts with the man in the cell; his back, outstretched arms and hands drag flat in full tactile contact with the fabric of the padded walls (Fig. 15) Pierrot continues mournfully: “I never did anything out of the blue ...” and sinks below the surface of the water (Fig. 16).

In the next scene, we experience yet another atmosphere: the video transitions to an ominous, possibly subterranean yet gravity-defying space, in which a now deathly pale Major Tom hangs suspended from long rope-like tubes reminiscent of umbilical cords or life-support apparatus. This space is dominated by biomechanical tentacle-like forms and a gaseous ‘river’ of billowing fabric evoking parachute silk (Fig. 17). The song lyrics continue: “Want an axe to break the ice / Wanna come down right now...”. We zoom in to find Major Tom in mid shot, he raises his head and expressionlessly returns the camera’s gaze with glassy eyes (Fig. 18).

The song continues to its chorus, performed as before by Pierrot and his attendants, slow-marching ahead of the bulldozer in their dark, pink solarised world (Figs. 19 & 20). We cut to a long wide shot of Pierrot against the rocky outcrop. A small wave crashes on the shore and there is a dramatic splash of solarised dark water, (Fig. 21) the image becomes slow motion as Pierrot releases a dove into the air, which flies away.

The song enters its closing circular coda: “My mother said, to get things done / You’d better not mess with Major Tom”. This provides the soundtrack to the video’s dénouement: as Pierrot walks along the beach he is accompanied by a small, white-haired elderly maternal figure wearing a white crocheted dress and cardigan ensemble (Fig. 22). She earnestly dispenses advice to Pierrot, who solemnly ponders this. We cut variously

between Pierrot in the water (Fig. 23), Pierrot's attendants (Figs. 24 & 25) and the black-clad astronaut (Fig. 26), who each lip synch the closing lyrical refrain. The video ends by returning to the suspended Major Tom, who has lost consciousness; his alien space is in transparent double image with the beach space (Fig. 27) which dissolves out to white.

## Time

*Ashes to Ashes* is the culmination of what Shelton Waldrep (2015), among other Bowie scholars, calls the artists' "long seventies" (p. 6), a period that produced roughly an album per year, beginning with *The Man Who Sold the World* (1970) and ending with *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)* 1980. Bowie is closely identified with the 1970s, and the 1970s with Bowie. This is not only because of the songwriting and musicianship apparent in these recordings, but also owing to the visual and cultural impact of the characters he created to accompany this body of work: from the flamboyant androgynous aliens of the early 1970s Ziggy Stardust and Aladdin Sane to the mid-decade cocaine-diet fascism of The Thin White Duke. Despite the very different masculine sartorial presentations of these and other key characters in Bowie's visual and thematic archive, such personae exhibit a significant common characteristic: they are all manifestations of Bowie's fascination with temporality.

The music video *Ashes to Ashes* is a highly conceptual visual representation of the lyrical content of the song it is conceived to promote. This takes the form of a story, which assumes the audience's knowledge of Bowie's prior career: do we remember a guy that's been in such an early song? The "guy" is Major Tom, astronaut protagonist of Bowie's breakthrough 1969 song *Space Oddity*, which will be considered in more detail shortly. Throughout *Ashes to Ashes*, the audience are afforded the status of confidants to a litany

of highly personal disclosures regarding drug dependency and existential crises. In audio form alone, it is fair to suggest that the lyrics of *Ashes to Ashes* present the avid listener with some serious issues that are the grave concerns of a man of thirty-three years of age, as Bowie is in 1980, and unlikely to be those of most teenage pop music fans.

In the music video, these confessions are sometimes issued by Major Tom, and at other times by a man who is literally and figuratively in solitary confinement. These characters are performed by Bowie, 'the actor'. Its visual narrative is non-linear, with Mallet's intercutting between Bowie's performer/characters meaning that Bowie's lyrics to the song are open to nuanced interpretation based on which version of 'himself' is lip synching. This creates a kind of abstract internal logic that this thesis sees as being related to what Marketa Uhlirova (2013b) calls the "fashion film effect" (p. 122).

Uhlirova recognises similarities between fashion film of the digital age and early cinema of the fin de siècle, a period described in film theory 'the cinema of attractions' (circa 1890-1907), from a term first coined by film scholar Tom Gunning. Uhlirova argues that the contemporary fashion film can be situated in the theoretical delineation of this type of moving image, which has also come to encompass examples of avant-garde and experimental film, a range of non-narrative films, and "fashion-related films such as newsreels and fashion sequences in fiction films" (Uhlirova, 2013b, p. 124). Uhlirova proposes that: "much like the fashion film, early cinema did not allow for elaborate narrative development (although narrative certainly was not completely excluded)" (p. 124). As can be said of *Ashes to Ashes*, early cinema displays an "interest in costume as a site of instability and constant transformation ... [where physical movement] gives



Fig. 19: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 20: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 21: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



way to the ‘magical’ movement of substitution through editing” (Uhlírova, p. 123). In this way, Uhlírova’s argument suggests, the contemporary fashion film effect is preceded by avant-garde modernism of early twentieth-century visual culture.

Building from this basis, the current research identifies music video of the concept type as developed in *Ashes to Ashes*, with its non-linear narrative and experimental imagery, as being genealogically linked to the abstraction of both early cinema and the chronologically-subsequent genre of the fashion film. But while this music video of 1980 can be understood as emblematic of a *new* cinematic avant-garde, it is nonetheless conventional within structures of late twentieth-century visual cultures which rely upon a combination of music and image, including musical cinema, television and advertising (Goodwin, 1992). This is principally because its editing sequence recognisably follows the musical structure of the composition that it accompanies. *Ashes to Ashes* is in this way a strong example of music video as a time-based short form of moving image: where duration and transitions are dictated to a large extent by a precursory accompanying musical soundtrack (Vernallis, 2004). For example, each time we return to the song’s chorus, the track is accompanied by the set up of Pierrot and his attendants in their full New Romantic finery: the repetition of this pattern is part of what connects the image of Bowie’s Pierrot so closely to the track’s title, being the feature lyric of this part of the song.

In accordance with Barthes (2009/1967) as interpreted by Evans and Vaccari (2020), this thesis is called here to consider ideas of uchronic time: ‘no time’, or a permanent present. Barthes claims that because of this permanent present, fashion is always uchronic: therefore, fashion time is a time that does not exist. This premise is also a thematic and structural

quality of *Ashes to Ashes*. Carol Vernallis (2004) explains that frequently in music video, constituting imagery is “almost devoid of temporal markers [but suggests] a particular instant, a recurring moment, or a passing thought” (Vernallis 2004, p. 14). Vernallis proposes that this stylistic peculiarity is because of the multimodal nature of music video, where:

narratives are constructed by not only the tangled accumulation of music/image conjunctions, each of which may possess its own point of view and truth value ... the sense of time created by music, lyrics and image is always indefinite rather than exact, never definitive of the day or the moment (pp 13-14).

Bowie’s performer/characters, unseen by each other, work together as a cast in the video not through direct interaction but through the use of editing devices such as the sudden introduction, transition between or repetition of visual imagery in response to the song’s lyrical or musical structure. In accordance with Vermeulen and van den Akker’s metamodernism, this is indicative of “reconstruction, myth, and metaxis” (2010, p. 2). *Ashes to Ashes*’ non-linear editing scheme — essentially a process of reconstruction — creates ambiguous representations of time and causality, highlighting ephemerality and condensation of action, which are characteristic strategies of music video (Vernallis & Ueno, 2013). The current writing suggests that *Ashes to Ashes* not only strongly works to prove this, but that it is something this video from 1980 can be seen to originate. Bowie and Mallets’ music video prefigures Vernallis’ (2004) diagnosis of the entire form, in that it: “possesses multiple senses of time and space [moreover, the] music video’s star is a phantasmagoric multiple: the songwriter, the performer, and the figure on the screen embody different subjectives” (p. 16). Such could be said, in fact, of Bowie’s whole career.

By 1980, Bowie's interest in the mysteries of temporality is so clearly established that his adoption of an archaic cultural character such as Pierrot in this then-cutting-edge music video is oddly unsurprising. This is not only because it accords with a further proposal made by Vernallis (2004), when she declares that: "music video's protagonists are strange" (p. 16). Dillane et. al., in their musicological analysis of *Ashes to Ashes*, refer to the track as being a "modernist melodrama" (2015, 45), and note the significance of the Pierrot character in avant-garde compositions of the fin de siècle period, such as those by the Expressionist Arnold Schoenberg. When considering *Ashes to Ashes* as a series of interlinked visual atmospheres, parallels can be found with Schoenberg's dramatic multi-part soundscapes, often representing themes of isolation and interiority. By using Chromakey cinematic technology to realise the 'video postcard' interlinking device in *Ashes to Ashes*, for example, the video makes atemporal transitions between visual atmospheres to narratively integrate Bowie's three characters, even the definitively-isolated man in the padded cell. The groundbreaking *Ashes to Ashes* is therefore in its own way an avant-garde work, albeit a product of the antilinear time of postmodernism.

Music scholar Nadav Appel (2018) observes how Bowie's practice problematises normative sexualities in post-industrial and postmodern cultures. The current research suggests that in this music video, Bowie uses strategies of postmodernism to problematise his own masculine sexuality, though his bricolé usage of sartorial symbols. Across the three characters Bowie performs in the video, there are: elements of pure costume, in the appearance of Pierrot; customised military attire, in the jumpsuited Major Tom; designer and ready-to-wear garments, the former worn by Pierrot's chorus and the latter incorporated into the clothing of the man in the padded cell. Sending a range of semiotic messages, Bowie's masculine



Fig. 22: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 23: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 24: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].

personae in the video also variously wear both heavy stage make up, and what can be read as daywear cosmetics.

This building from fragments, or bricolage, is visible in Bowie's practice to such an extent for music writer John Gill to state that the artist "has no equal as a bricoleur and self-mythifier" (1995, p. 107). Gill speaks here of Bowie's status as a queer icon: as previously noted, Gill is negatively critical of this accolade, seeing it as a false claiming of identity if Bowie's own sexual object choice over his lifetime is taken into account. Thus, Gill refers to bricolage and self-mythology in this context as pejoratives. However in this thesis which considers the fashioning of new masculinities, bricolage and the self-myth of 'Bowie' is a crucial part of a series of reinventions enabling the creation of what can be seen as a Bowie visual and stylistic archive. In *Ashes to Ashes*, Bowie 'self-mythologises' through the return of his Hippy-era legacy character Major Tom, and also in his assertion of the right to claim the traditional character of Pierrot.

## **Bowie and Pierrot**

Dillane et. al. (2015) are amongst those who recognise the recurrence of the Pierrot figure throughout Bowie's career. His affinity with the character and his belief in its ability to convey something essential about creativity is such that in 1971, Bowie in fact diagnosed the medium of rock *itself* as "the clown, the Pierrot medium" (quoted in Pegg, 2016, p. 28). Bowie's *Ashes to Ashes* incarnation of Pierrot is however his most famous and is recognised as being visually defining of the artist's transition from the 1970s to the 1980s. Writing on the phenomenon of the British pop dandy, Stan Hawkins (2009) states that: "the spectacle of Bowie's ornate Pierrot costume [is] a central marker for his *Scary Monsters* period" (p. 60). Hawkins however also notes the presence of Bowie's glamorous clown in contexts prior to the

video, such as when performing his 1970 song *The Man Who Sold The World* with New York opera and cabaret countertenor Klaus Nomi dressed in “Pierrot costumes” (p. 60). This is presumably in the late 1970s, as the pair are said to have been introduced around this time at New York’s Mudd Club, going on to perform together on the zeitgeist-capturing US television comedy and variety program *Saturday Night Live* on December 15, 1979.<sup>16</sup>

The origins of Bowie’s association with the Pierrot character lie in Bowie’s performances with his mentor, the gay Scottish choreographer, actor and mime artist Lindsay Kemp. In an interview given to *Phonograph Record* in January 1972 titled *David Bowie: The darling of the avant garde*, Bowie reflects that Kemp “was a living Pierrot. He lived and talked Pierrot. He was tragic and dramatic and everything in his life — theatrical. And so the stage thing for him was just an extension of himself” (quoted in Carpenter, 2010, p. 15). In Kemp’s 1967 theatre production *Pierrot in Turquoise*, Bowie played the troubadour Cloud, opposite Kemp’s Pierrot. Significantly, Natasha Korniloff, the designer of Bowie’s *Ashes to Ashes* Pierrot costume, was a member of Kemp’s troupe and the costume designer of the show. Hawkins describes Korniloff’s 1967 Pierrot costume as “an elaborate affair sporting a spotted blouse, knee breeches and Elizabethan ruff” (2009, p.60). However, it can be observed that Korniloff’s 1980 Pierrot costume for Bowie’s *Ashes to Ashes* character, completed with a hat designed by Gretchen Fenston, bypasses the defining nineteenth-century image of Jean-Gaspard Debureau’s French variant of the Italian clown Pendrolino, jumping

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<sup>16</sup> Born Klaus Sperber in Immenstadt, Bavaria, Germany, on January 24, 1944, the queer, cult, Camp Nomi is well remembered for his otherworldly vaudeville aesthetic. This futuristic Weimar image combines heavy androgynous white-face stage makeup, exaggerated early twentieth-century masculine dress shapes and forms, and late twentieth century materials, such as plastics and latex. It remains widely quoted in popular culture, by pop performers such as Lady Gaga and Kylie Minogue, the latter being accompanied by a Nomi lookalike on stage at the Glastonbury Festival in 2019. In the field of contemporary menswear, Nomi has been recognised as influential to the work of Marc Jacobs, Jean Paul Gaultier and Bruno Pieters for Hugo Boss. Nomi is widely known as a Bowie collaborator, although their association is short lived: with Nomi tragically being an early high-profile casualty of HIV/AIDS on 6 August 1983 at the age of 39.

straight from the early-modern (1500-1800) to the atmosphere of the postmodern early 1980s.

Bowie's 'love triangle' with Kemp and Korniloff at the time of *Pierrot in Turquoise* echoed the traditional *commedia dell'arte* scenario of love and betrayal between Pierrot, Columbine and Harlequin (Dillane et. al. 2015, p. 40). Kemp recounts this romantic tragedy thus:

it was love at first sight for me, but I found out he was seeing a dear friend of mine, Natasha Korniloff, the show's costume designer, at the same time as having an affair with me ... I drank a bottle of whiskey and rode my bicycle into the sea, but the water was so cold I staggered back to the theatre and cut my wrist ... A few hours after being taken to hospital, I was on stage, blood seeping through my Pierrot costume – a fabulous dramatic effect, but I'd been desperately in love (quoted in Simpson 2013, n.p.).

In this context, the music video image of Bowie's drowning Pierrot could perhaps reference his personal history as much as the theatrical traditions and existential concerns that are also represented in Pierrot's un-real visual landscape. Interviewed by *NME* about the song in 1980, Bowie cites the lines that accompany this famous image "I've never done good things, I've never done bad things, I never did anything out of the blue' as representing 'a continuing, returning feeling of inadequacy over what I've done'" (Pegg 2016, p. 27). That this self doubt is 'voiced' by Pierrot in *Ashes to Ashes*, a character that he has both appropriated and sartorially reappropriated, supports the idea that Bowie uses costume in the video with complex self-referentiality.

The current research observes that Bowie's use of surreal, Romantic imagery to create atmosphere in *Ashes to Ashes* presages the proposal that

metamodernist cinema “persuades us to believe that there are matters Reason cannot account for” (Vermuelen & van den Akker 2010:10). Bowie’s Pierrot in *Ashes to Ashes* represents this principle, being an archetype whose shape has shifted across centuries of European dramatic art, often a vessel for other characters, at times a mischievous prankster and at other times a love-lorn fool.

Canadian musicologist Alexander Carpenter (2010) explains how by the middle of the nineteenth century in Paris, Pierrot is “less of a prankster-chameleon and increasingly more detached, macabre, perverse, and dandified” (p.6). Carpenter draws upon a 1984 article by Susan Youens in recognising that Pierrot is a ubiquitous late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European archetype of the “self-dramatizing” artist, who “presents to the world a stylized mask both to symbolize and veil artistic ferment, to distinguish the creative artist from the human being” (p. 7). Carpenter’s further assertion is that at the close of the nineteenth century, in the work of avant-garde composers such as Schoenberg and Symbolist poets such as Paul Verlaine and Albert Giraud, the persona of the artist: definitively dons the mask of Pierrot, a mask that becomes a potent and paradoxical strategy through which the artist can explore ... the relationship between artist and world, and especially the artist’s inner world. The paradox lies in the assumption of an identity, in playing a role—a Pierrot—as a means of exploring and expressing one’s authentic identity (p. 7).

Could it be that in “don[ning] the mask of Pierrot” in *Ashes to Ashes*, Bowie is finally expressing his “authentic identity”? This thesis gamely suggests: perhaps. This is in the sense that the character of Pierrot, who is on the surface the most artificial or contrived of the three masculine sartorialisms performed by Bowie in the video, operates in the realm of costume, not





Fig. 25: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 26: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].



Fig. 27: Bowie, D. & Mallet, D. (1980) *Ashes to Ashes* [music video still].

fashion. Regardless of the presence of fashionable people wearing avant-garde New Romantic designer fashion, in his sections of the video the clown is an 'ahistoric historicism', transparently entering the domain of music video from the precedent of theatre: in performing Pierrot, Bowie marks himself as an actor. That Pierrot is the song's narrator in the video enables a visual distance from Bowie, the fabulous 'pop star', and the lyrical text of the song, a sad tale about the less fabulous David Bowie, né Jones, 'the man'.

Carpenter notes how Schoenberg's 1912 melodrama *Pierrot Lunaire*, "a work of burgeoning neoclassic objectivism, characterised by parody and ironic detachment" is a transitional work and a creative turning point for Schoenberg after a period of personal crisis (2010, p. 5). Equivalently, *Ashes to Ashes* leads Bowie's own Pierrot-themed 1980 album *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)*, which Carpenter describes as being:

both [a] requiem for his earlier incarnations—as glam rock provocateur and avant-garde pop star—and as a means to establish a foothold in the future, namely the burgeoning new wave/new romantic aesthetic of the early 1980s, from which he would be launched into international superstardom (2010, p.5).

This transition by Bowie is particularly enabled by the ability of music video in that decade to promote pop star artists to a wide international (specifically, American) audience, something that this thesis, among a great many others, contends. Whereas in the 1970s, Bowie is something of a niche or cult act in the US, MTV exposes Bowie to mainstream music fans,

who embrace him almost as if he were a new artist.<sup>17</sup> As V&A curator

Victoria Broackes (2013) observes, from its launch in 1981 MTV:

heralded a new era of the music video, with the success of a song being inextricably linked to the appeal of the accompanying video. The visual aesthetic of a pop star's 'look' became paramount for a mass audience [and] for the visually adept Bowie, it was an opportunity that played further to his strengths (p. 136).

While music video is then a — if not *the* — signature medium representing such an aesthetic approach to the 1980s, the title of Bowie's songwriting contribution *Threepenny Pierrot* to Kemp's 1967 theatre production clearly references Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, whose Marxist and Surrealist plays are representative of the decadent aesthetic of 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>18</sup> This was a darkly simmering political environment surreptitiously paralleled by a vibrant and socially transgressive underground cabaret culture, a description that could also be made of the time from which *Ashes to Ashes* arises. 1980 marks the second year of hotly-divisive neoliberal government of Britain, led by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. While having proved victorious in World War II, Britain is an empire in decline. During the 'youth quake' of the 1960s, feminist and queer politics began to significantly influence social discourse, which is reflected in the new fashioned identities of young people and the social spaces in which these are performed. This is the phenomena of British youth subcultures: young, mainly working class people who used fashion, style and music to simultaneously signify rebellion and group identification, well known as

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<sup>17</sup> This phenomena of 'selling out' by Bowie from queer glam rock icon to teeth-whitened, suit-wearing phoney is effectively critiqued in Todd Haynes' fantastical, *Citizen Kane*-esque, unauthorised semi-biographical reimagining of Bowie, his lovers and associates, in the 1998 Camp feature film *Velvet Goldmine*.

<sup>18</sup> The influence of Brecht and Weill can be seen as a recurring one for Bowie, with Shelton Waldrep (2015) stating for example that the album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1972) announces itself as a remake of the 1930 Brecht and Weill political satirical opera *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (p. 8).

defined and theorised by British cultural critic and sociologist Dick Hebdige in *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (1979).

### **Bowie the subculturalist**

Existing at a nexus between sociopolitical discourse, fashion and twentieth-century popular music, as Dick Hebdige (1979) explains, subcultures' challenge to hegemonic structures is "expressed obliquely, in style" (p. 17). Here, rebellion against dominant societal authority occurs at "the profoundly superficial level of appearances: that is, at the level of signs" (Hebdige, 1979, p. 17). For Hebdige, class struggle is a struggle within signification: following Barthes, he seeks to "discern the hidden messages inscribed in the glossy surfaces of style" (p. 18) exhibited by disaffected groups of British youth. Writing in 1979, Hebdige lists these as including Beats and Hipsters, Teddy Boys, Mods and Hippies (pp. 183-186). Flirtations with all these subcultural groups form part of Bowie's complex history of self-identification.

Jerry Hopkins (1985), a popular biographer of Bowie in the 1980s, reports how amongst peers at Bromley Technical High School in the early 1960s, young David is better recognised for his nascent Teddy Boy fashion sense than his academic achievements. In fledgling music groups such as the King Bees and Kon-rads, Bowie sports a hair style typical of the Teddy Boy subculture, a "carefully coiffed ducktail and elephant trunk", visually identifying with this "proud, defiant bunch of swaggering Cockney street toughs who wore long, Edwardian drape jackets and stove pipe trousers [and to whom] Elvis was god ... and rockabilly was the religion" (Hopkins, 1985, p. 19).

However, Bowie makes a swift style adaptation in 1964, typical of the plasticity of his interest in subcultural pop style. His new affiliation is formed in response to the musical ‘British invasion’ of the US, initiated by the phenomenal success of The Beatles — their appeal to a mainstream American youth market being as in Elvis’ case largely resultant of wide exposure via the visual media of television and later, film — and continued by The Rolling Stones, The Kinks and others.<sup>19</sup>

Later in the 1960s, Bowie will go on to draw further inspiration from The Rolling Stones, who Roger Baker considers to be “the first rock act to use drag to suggest not being harmless but harmful” (1994, p. 241). Bowie is also captivated by the phenomenon of Carnaby Street, in the mid-1960s a sudden new international ‘fashion capital’. The fickle consumerism of the Carnaby Street Mods is well-satirised in the lyrics of The Kinks’ song *Dedicated Follower of Fashion*, where Ray Davies describes the foot soldier of the “Carnebetian army” as being a dandy who “pulls his “frilly nylon panties right up tight”: “one week he’s in polka dots, the next week he’s in stripes” (The Kinks, 1966). With their focus on fashion and fashionability, writes Hopkins, “Mods were cooler [than Teds] ... the choice between Ted and Mod was an easy one. [Bowie] became a Mod” (1985, pp. 19- 20).

Hebdige proposes that Mods are “*bricoleurs* [who] appropriated a ... range of commodities by placing them in a symbolic ensemble which served to erase or subvert their original straight meanings [original italics]” (1979, p. 104). This research recognises therefore that bricolage as a fashion strategy, which Bowie partly learns as a Mod, is one that he will continue to apply as

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<sup>19</sup> Writing on the phenomenon of the ‘second British Invasion’ in *Rolling Stone Magazine* in November 1983, Parke Puterbaugh notes that in July of that year, subsequent to the impact of MTV, six of *Billboard’s* Top Ten records were British, the greatest representation of UK acts on the US charts since June 1965. Five of these are categorised as being new pop: the Police; Madness; Duran Duran; Duran Duran proteges Kajagoogoo; and Culture Club. However the sixth UK act is in fact The Kinks, enthusiastic adopters of music video in the 1980s, who were also present in the 1965 charts with the song *Tired of Waiting for You*.

music video becomes a key part of his practice. Hopkins (1985) offers an anecdote regarding the Mod origins of Bowie's fashion bricolage that is illuminating of the multiplicitous sartorial masculinity of *Ashes to Ashes*. The music writer explains how the young Bowie lacked the money to keep up with the fashion consensus of the highly consumerist Mod subculture and improvised his looks by raiding

the Carnaby Street dustbins, where haberdashers and trendy designers discarded the outfits with flaws. Consequently, David was always a tiny bit off, slightly mismatched or behind the constantly changing times (p. 20).<sup>20</sup>

By 1980, thesis suggests, this approach to 'keeping up' through material scavenging has been perfected by Bowie to establish conceptually 'scavenged' aesthetic that is outside, if not *beyond* the times. The idea of creative outcomes arising from pragmatism and expediency is apparent in *Ashes to Ashes*, from the reuse of television sets to the wearing of their own clothes by Pierrot's New Romantic chorus, to be introduced here shortly. It is also useful in appreciating the "tiny bit off" (Hopkins, 1985, p. 20) appeal of the incongruities of the costumes of Bowie's masculine performer/characters in *Ashes to Ashes*, which contribute so strongly to the memorability of the video. These include: the very contemporary late

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<sup>20</sup>With their elitist approach to music, flamboyant fashions, bold use of make up and of amphetamines, Bowie finds in the Mod subculture the perfect image for his new group of the mid-1960s, The Manish Boys. The band is named for a Muddy Waters song, as is The Rolling Stones. In this brief era, perhaps in homage to Brian Jones of The Rolling Stones, Bowie wears his hair controversially long, bleach-blond and well below the collar with a fringe. In November 1964, as a publicity stunt to promote his band, Bowie gives an interview to the *London Evening News* to announce the formation of the International League for the Preservation of Animal Filament (i.e., hair) (Hopkins, 1985, p. 20). It is also possible to access on Youtube a clip of what is believed to be Bowie's first television appearance at the age of seventeen, an interview with journalist Cliff Michelmores of the BBC's *Tonight* programme, about the young David Jones' similarly newly-founded Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Long-Haired Men. Roger Baker (1994) reports that: "as far back as 1964 the then David Jones was causing outrage and sexual confusion in equal parts purely by the length of his hair, telling a local newspaper at the time how, 'Dozens of times I've been politely told to clear out of the lounge bar at public houses. Everybody makes jokes about you on a bus, and if you go past navvies digging in the road, it's murder.' But, like so many after him, the seventeen-year old David also loved the attention. And if a pop star is to break through, he needs attention by the bucketload" (p. 244).

twentieth-century New Romantic make up created by Steve Strange's friend and collaborator, the Australian Richard Sharah, that is worn by Pierrot, the clown who is otherwise a centuries-old character; an impossibly helmetless astronaut sans crewcut, but rather with the haircut of a Romantic hero; and an asylum inmate, glamorously adorned with eye shadow and rouge.

In his exclusive writing on the subject, Stan Hawkins (2009) sees Bowie as an archetypal British pop dandy. This may well be demonstrated in Bowie's bespoke engagement with elitist, fashion-following structures of Mod: as Hawkins notes, Bowie's career-long enactment of different types of masculinity, both "regressive and progressive", relies on imitation (p. 61). This cross-referencing, says Hawkins, is something that typifies the dandified performance (2009, p. 61). Camille Paglia (2013) considers Bowie to be a British dandy whose lineage descends not direct from Beau Brummell, but rather from the English dandyism imported by French decadents such as Charles Baudelaire, aloof and elegant arbiters of distinction known for their "cold apartness", whom Jules Barbey d'Aubrey described as "the Androgynes of History" (p. 69). Shaun Cole (2000) notes that the fastidious dressing of the 1960s Carnaby Street Mods, considered by Hebdige to be 'lower-class dandies' in their slim-fitting and brightly coloured clothes, echoed what had been recognised as being exclusively the dress of gay men of the previous twenty years (pp. 74-75). "It is popularly accepted", writes Cole, "that there was an element of homosexual vanity present in the mod subculture ... mod boys were only interested in clothes, holding themselves up to one another like mirrors" (2000, p. 76).

Proceeding from observations made by Hebdige regarding the outsider affinity between Mod and Black music cultures, Cole also draws comparisons between the fashion-centred homosociality of Mod and the

“gay underworld” (p. 75). In the mid-1960s, Bowie would seem to be drawn to all of these things. His own sexual object choice at this time is by all accounts omnivorous and opportunistic, although evidence of this is often anecdotal and sometimes issued by Bowie himself in press interviews engineered to surround his later star persona with cool mystique. Perhaps what Bowie most takes forward from the stylistic approach of this subcultural group through the 1970s and towards the language of early music video is most keenly described in George Melly’s (1972) pithy summary of these “young working-class boys who ... formed a small totally committed little mutual admiration society totally devoted to clothes”, when he says that:

they were true dandies, interested in creating works of art — themselves ... There was admittedly a strong homosexual element involved — but it was not so much overt homosexuality as narcissistic. ... The little Mods used each other as looking glasses. They were as cool as ice-cubes” (p. 150).

Yet, by 1967 Bowie has jumped subcultural ship once more, abandoning Purple Hearts for Tibetan Buddhism. As the ‘summer of love’ conjured by the counter-cultural movement originating on the American Pacific coast begins to warm the opposite side of the Atlantic Ocean, Bowie embraces art labs and the commune-like environment of Kemp’s mime troupe, taking a Woodstockian approach to acoustic campfire-singalongs and ‘free love’. By the time of 1969’s *Space Oddity*, Bowie’s sartorial image marks him as a bona fide Hippy: in touch with his ‘feminine side’, he is a thoughtful, cross-legged, blue jeans wearing imp with a shoulder length poodle perm and cheesecloth blouse.

This masculine image is then further swallowed by former Ted, Mod and Hippy David Bowie’s strikingly theatrical performance personae of the early



1970s, where stage costuming and use of make up famously mixed masculine, feminine and androgynous signifiers, inscribing many “hidden messages” in their “glossy surfaces”, to use Hebdige’s terms (1979, p. 18). Baker (1994) tells of how in 1971 Bowie buys two dresses by Mr Fish, “the archetypal ‘Swinging Sixties designer to the stars’” (p. 241). Fish describes his garments not as women’s but as men’s dresses, variations on the tunics of medieval noblemen and “terribly manly Greek soldiers” (Baker, 1994, p. 241). In this wardrobe development, Baker describes how Bowie follows the sartorial lead of Mick Jagger in the late 1960s and also the suggestion of manager Keith Pitt, who sees “the capital to be gained by flirting with homosexuality, or more specifically, ... ‘ambisexuality’” (p. 244). Baker (1994) reports that Bowie wears Fish’s garments with a shoulder bag and eye shadow on his first promotional tour of the United States, and models one of these garments on the cover of the British release of the album *The Man Who Sold the World* (1970) (p. 244). By Baker’s description, these are long flowing gowns in salmon pink and pale green; however Oriole Cullen (2013), senior curator of Modern Textiles and Fashion at the V&A, describes them more accurately in her catalogue essay accompanying the’s *David Bowie Is* exhibition. Unlike Jagger’s ‘manly’ tunic:

Bowie’s dress ... was a flowing silk garment decorated with a floral print. An ankle-length skirt with inverted pleats fell from a tightly fitted bodice fastened with two decorative frogged closures, exposing the chest. The other dress [which features in the 1971 album cover photograph] in a slubbed blue raw silk, had a more modest zipper fastening down the centre front, but was cut with the same tight bodice and pleated skirt (p. 237).

Bowie is asked about his frocks and repeats Fish’s line that they are not girl’s but *men’s* dresses in his ‘coming out’ interview to *Melody Maker* in January 1972. Here, Bowie also infamously states that “I am gay and always

have been”, while speaking of his love for his wife Angie<sup>21</sup> and their young son Zowie (now filmmaker Duncan Jones) (Baker, 1994, p. 241). The ‘is he or isn’t he?’ game that Bowie plays with the music press in this era may well be simply a publicity strategy employed by the ambitious performer; this thesis suggests that this is something of a moot point, in consideration of the substantial cultural permission Bowie’s subversion of codes of gender in the early 1970s gives to the new pop generation which succeeds him.

In the 1970s, Bowie’s powerfully idiosyncratic Glam (or Glitter) Rock image has itself instigated a whole *new* subcultural group, where “disguise and dandyism” was preferred over radical liberation and “emphasis was shifted away from class and youth and onto sexuality and gender typing” (Hebdige, 1979, p. 62). Hebdige describes how in the 1970s, Bowie achieves both cult status and a mass young audience through a series of “‘camp’ incarnations” including Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane and the Thin White Duke, in the process setting up:

a number of visual precedents in terms of personal appearance (make up, dyed hair etc.) which created a new sexually ambiguous image for those youngsters willing and brave enough to challenge the notoriously pedestrian stereotypes conventionally available to working class men and women” (1979, p. 60).

The subculture of Punk succeeds Glam: Hebdige describes the Punk movement as “a deliberately scrawled addendum to the ‘text’ of Glam rock”

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<sup>21</sup> Accounts of Bowie’s transgressive sartorialism (see Cullen, 2013; O’Brien, 2003) often credit the performer’s first wife Angie, (born Mary Angela Barnett September 25, 1949), with playing a central role in the development of the visual persona of Ziggy Stardust. Photographs of the pair from the early 1970s demonstrate a unisex similarity to their fashion look, including the coloured ‘mullet’ hairstyle, shaved eyebrows, and tight fitting silhouettes that came to characterise the Glam Rock aesthetic. The bisexual, Greek Cypriot born Canadian-American Angie’s contribution to Bowie mythology is for example affirmed in Todd Haynes’ afore-noted film *Velvet Goldmine* (1988), in which Australian actress Toni Collette plays a fictionalised version of Angie Bowie, where Haynes emphasises the promiscuous pansexual polyamory said to have characterised their marriage between 1970 and 1980.

that while attempting to correct the verbosity of Glam, still does so using its “stilted language” of sartorial signifiers (1979, p. 63). We can see then that the phenomenon of British post-war subcultural style, embraced and extended upon by Bowie, reaches its apex in the late 1970s, in coincidence with the rise of music video. By 1980, the anarchistic flame of the Punk movement has self-extinguished to reveal the phosphorescence of flamboyant successors, already illuminating darkened nightclubs: the New Romantics.

### **Bowie and the New Romantics**

In 1980, the New Romantics, with their gender-bending nostalgic fashion, are both inspired by Bowie and inspirational *to* him. This scene can be seen to evolve from late-1970s post-Punk nightclub takeovers referred to as “Bowie Night[s]” (Polhemus, 1996, p. 67). It is affirmed by a large volume of anecdotally interesting popular writing and memoir that Welsh born fashion identity, singer and nightclub host Steve Strange (born Stephen John Harrington on 28 May 1959, died 12 February 2015) and DJ Rusty Egan founded this ‘Club for Heroes’ — a nod to Bowie’s 1977 album and track of the same name — at Billy’s club in Soho, before taking over Tuesdays at the Blitz wine bar in London’s Covent Garden in 1979. Says Bowie:

it was very odd going down to the Blitz club and seeing all these young kids who had grown up with me, who were dressing like me, trying to make records like me! Which is why I wanted some of them in the video for ‘Ashes to Ashes’ (quoted in Jones 2020, 301).

Blitz, and the New Romantic movement more widely, is generally considered to have been greatly tolerant of sexual and gender diversity. This is a social characteristic reflected in the eclectic, Bowie-inflected

sartorialism of its members. Shaun Cole (2000) describes how at this time, when both “the straight world” and “the established gay scene” emphasised strongly masculine dress choices as a being requirement of masculinity, “New Romantic clubs and dress styles offered ... not only a validation of nonconformist gender-inappropriate behaviour, but also a celebration of ‘effeminate’ or at least effete imagery” (p. 159). This thesis proposes that in 1980, *Ashes to Ashes* showcases this British fashion moment to the world, and that this music video becomes one of its most recognised documents.

While Bowie’s three distinct performer/characters in *Ashes to Ashes* are the focus of this chapter, the appearance of Pierrot’s supporting chorus is a significant visual aspect of Pierrot’s ‘beach space’ in the video, which features strongly in Bowie’s initial conception of the video. David Mallet recalls that:

David [Bowie] said he wanted to be a clown on a beach with a bonfire, and wanted to include all the New Romantics, all these characters from the Blitz club. I said, ‘Great, but I can improve on that,’ because I’d recently found a process [using the Quantel Paintbox] which made the sky turn black, and made the whole thing look like some hallucinogenic dream. ‘Great,’ says David, ‘we’ll do that’ (quoted in Jones 2020, p. 298).

In bringing the atmosphere of the 1980s nightclub to the uchronic space of Pierrot’s beach, the subcultural clubbers’ contribution to the video visually represents some of the science fiction-like understandings of an atemporal, gender-fluid future that Bowie often expressed. For Bowie, the *Ashes to Ashes* video:

[conveyed] some feeling of nostalgia for a future. I’ve always been hung up on that; it creeps into everything I do, however far away I try to get from it ... The idea of having seen the future, of somewhere we’ve already been, keeps coming back to me (Bowie quoted in Pegg 2016, 27-30).

Ted Polhemus (1996) notes that the label ‘New Romantic’ describes postmodernist nostalgics, originally favouring the tag ‘Futurists’, who focus on “imaginative, impractical escapism ... predominantly looking back rather than forward” (p. 68). Many of these former Punk retro-futurists are art and fashion students at institutions such as Central Saint Martins (Jones 2020)<sup>22</sup>. Cole (2000) explains how participants in this new club scene, tagged by the press with names such as Blitz Kids, Peacock Punks and New Romantics, are dedicated to costume and appearance, “plunder[ing] in a magpie fashion, not only post-war fashion but the whole of modern history” (p.158). Cole notes how the incorporation of traditional feminine signifiers — most obviously, make up and frills, silk, satin and lace — into the attire of men in the New Romantic club scene relates less to transvestism or female impersonation than to the notion of costume, and of ‘pose’. The wearing of ‘make up and frills’ becomes a primary image of the New Romantics; however Cole also observes in their costuming a number of particular “looks”: “the pierrot, the squire, the eighteenth-century dandy, the toy soldier” (2000 p. 158).

Blitz co-host Steve Strange fronts the act Visage, known for their emblematic New Romantic music video *Fade to Grey* (1980), directed by Kevin Godley and Lol Creme, who are past members of the Manchester-formed “ultraclever British art-rock band” 10cc (Shore, 1984, p. 78).<sup>23</sup> *Fade to Grey* is one of three clips directed by these early music video auteurs which Michael Shore in 1984 states “still rank among the genres finest” (p.

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<sup>22</sup> The significance and lasting impact upon British and international fashion of the intersection between these ‘specialist’ nightclubs, art and design colleges and interdisciplinary New Romantic creatives was well-celebrated in the exhibition *Club to Catwalk: London Fashion in the 1980s*, curated by Claire Wilcox and expert consultant Wendy Dagworthy, held at the V&A between 10 July 2013 and 16 February 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Godley and Creme had themselves met while studying at art schools, harbouring their cinematic ambitions and majoring in graphic design at Stoke-on-Trent College of Art, in the case of the former, and Birmingham School of Art in the latter.

78), the others being *Mind of a Toy*, also by Visage, and Duran Duran's *Girls on Film*, which will be recalled again in Chapter 4 of this paper.

His supporting role in *Ashes to Ashes* aside, Strange therefore is already an important supporting player in the story of the development of music video, and its language. His queer and quite British sense of fashion and style, which hitherto has found its most visible outlet in the sphere of the nightclub, brings great influence to bear upon the appealingly dramatic and ambiguous aesthetic of this new visual media culture. Shore refers to the strikingly made up and flamboyantly attired Strange in *Fade to Grey* as embodying "the performer as a work of art" (1984, p. 79). Shore muses that in Godley and Creme's videos for Visage, which feature "ravishing use of muted, filtered colors, diaphanous lighting ... fluid dissolves, and slow motion" are "every bit as striking and beautiful (if not more so) than Visage's Steve Strange always seemed to think *he* was" (original italics, 1984, pp.306-307). Amongst the many quotations relied upon by Dylan Jones (2020) when discussing the role of the Blitz Kids in *Ashes to Ashes* are the thoughts of Jon Savage on Strange, whom Savage states the subcultural figurehead Bowie makes "heavy use of" in *Ashes to Ashes*: "the most absurd, yet *the* most magnificent, exponent of Suburban Pose which never dies" (Savage cited in Jones, 2020, p. 299).

In both *Fade to Grey* and *Ashes to Ashes*, Strange wears garments designed by another member of Pierrot's chorus, Judith Frankland. In *Ashes to Ashes*, Strange's attire specifically transgresses traditional masculine dress codes: an elaborate, black Victoriana wedding dress, originally part of Frankland's 1980 graduate collection from Ravensbourne University London, entitled *Romantic Monasticism*, with an early headpiece by milliner Stephen Jones, who is ultimately recognised for his contribution to

the craft with an Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2010. In *Ashes to Ashes*, Frankland and the other two New Romantics who form the chorus, Darla-Jane Gilroy and Elise Brazier, are attired in their own clothing and appear in the video just as Bowie had first seen them at Blitz (Johnson 2020).<sup>24</sup>

As noted, Strange recommended his own preferred make up artist friend and collaborator, the Australian Richard Sharah, to Bowie for the design of Pierrot's make up look. Bowie's adoption of creative strategies from both drag and Punk are clear in his reflections on the construction of this new 'Pierrot for the music video age', which highlight the importance of Sharah's make up:

which I smeared at the end of the video. That was a well-known drag-act-finale gesture which I appropriated. I really liked the idea of screwing up his [Sharah's] make-up after all the meticulous work that had gone into it. It was a nice destructive gesture. Quite anarchistic (Bowie quoted in Jones 2020, p. 299).

This 'smearing' does not actually occur in the final cut of *Ashes to Ashes*, but rather in the photographs by Brian Duffy on the *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)* cover art, where Bowie is again in Korniloff's costume although partly disrobed and smoking a cigarette. The gesture is nonetheless a feature of Bowie and Mallet's music video collaborations, for example *The Boy Keeps Swinging* of 1979 and *China Girl* (1983) (Shore, 1984, p. 75), which is filmed in Sydney, Australia (Pegg, 2016, p. 745).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Numerous accounts of the ad hoc process of casting the New Romantic extras for *Ashes to Ashes* at Blitz note how it excluded many key figures of the scene, including the stunning, 'gender bending' club regular Marilyn and light-fingered coat-check attendant Boy George, much to the committed Bowie fan and soon-to-be pop music superstar's chagrin.

<sup>25</sup> References to this act as being central to Bowie's iconography are also notably made in the late period Bowie video *The Stars (Are Out Tonight)* (2013) directed by Floria Sigismondi and co-starring actress Tilda Swinton and Bosnian Australian transgender model Andrea Pejic.

The experience of working with these young New Romantics itself leaves identifiable traces in the bricoleur Bowie's visual archive. In his encyclopaedic volume on Bowie, Nicholas Pegg (2016) repeats a story told by Steve Strange to his biographer Mark Spitz and consistently elsewhere, where Strange claims credit for the 'genuflecting' movement that is performed by the ecclesiastically-attired Blitz Kids as they walk with Pierrot (Figs. 8, 19, 20). This is an example of the 'happy accidents' that this research observes seem to frequently happen in the course of the making of early music videos: "my robe kept catching in the bulldozer ... that's why I keep doing that move where I put my arm down. So I wouldn't be crushed. Bowie liked the move and used it later" (Strange in Spitz, cited in Pegg, 2016, p. 29).

Pegg (2016) suggests that this "portentous overarm gesture, accompanied by a drop to the ground, subsequently becomes a staple Bowie manoeuvre on stage and in videos" ( p. 29). This thesis similarly identifies these music videos as including: *Fashion* (1980), also from the *Scary Monsters* album; *Loving the Alien* (1985); and the Mick Jagger duet *Dancing in the Street*, (1985) made as a contribution to the Live Aid project for African famine relief. All of these are also directed by Mallet.

In such ways, Bowie's subcultural 'scavenging' validates the post-Punk fashion language of the art school-trained and nightclub-inhabiting New Romantics. Here, we can see how this 'look' becomes the 'TV sound' in 1980, by entering the language of early music video thanks to Bowie's fashioned new masculine character of Pierrot in *Ashes to Ashes*.



## Space

### The return of Major Tom

Dillane et. al. note that the duration of *Ashes to Ashes* is 3.37 minutes, of which Pierrot appears for a total of 1 minute and 40 seconds, and Major Tom for only 39 seconds. However it is the latter of these who is the subject of the song, providing a direct link between this work and Bowie's first and 'career-defining' hit, *Space Oddity* (1969).

The internally-conflicted, existential spaceman Major Tom first appears as a Bowie alter ego in *Space Oddity* (1969), claimed by Bowie scholar Nicholas Pegg to be the artist's best known song (2016, p.255). The coincidence of its release in July 1969, the month of the first American moon landing, is central to the track's huge chart success at this time when the US astronaut and Soviet cosmonaut are defining cultural celebrities of the Cold War 'space race'. In *Space Oddity*, Bowie succinctly triangulates this with fashion and media culture when he sings of Major Tom's superstar status on Earth that "the papers want to know whose shirts [he] wear[s]".

The title of the track puns on Stanley Kubrick's groundbreaking 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, in which vast visuals of outer space conclude ambiguously in a sonic swirl of dissonant, avant-garde strings. The atmospheric quality of this film was acknowledged by Bowie as being influential to the writing of his song:

It was the sense of isolation I related to ... at the end of the song Major Tom is completely emotionless and expressionless ... he's fragmenting ... The publicity image of a spaceman at work is of an automaton rather than a human being (quoted in Pegg 2016, 255).

However as with the Pierrot figure — a character himself who has been linked with the moon, for example by Schoenberg (Dillane et. Al. 2015) — extraterrestrial themes permeate Bowie's career-long body of work far beyond its topicality in the late 1960s. 'Bowie-as-spaceman' is a character continually reincarnated, from the signature early 1970s Glam Rock character Ziggy Stardust and his band the Spiders from Mars — a meditation on the transience of fame that conflates the astronomical and celebrity-culture meanings of 'star' (Pegg 2016) — via many music and film acting roles, right through to the videos that accompany his final release *Blackstar* (2016).

Bowie's spacemen and alien personae are frequently understood as standing for critical sexualities or gender ambiguity (Waldrep 2015, Appel 2018). These identities often combine traditional masculine and feminine fashion signifiers, in the tradition of Weimar cabaret. Camille Paglia notes that in the "Ziggy gender mirage", Bowie would display his slim body and muscular thighs — often revealed the cut of a skin-tight, asymmetric catsuit by Kansai Yamamoto — in assertion of an underlying masculine athleticism, while at the same time wearing flamboyant make up and an "impudent feather boa, a femme accessory that once belonged to Lindsay Kemp and that descended from Marlene Dietrich's early film roles" (2013, p.72). The role referred to is probably the bisexual cabaret singer Amy Jolly in Joseph von Sternberg's *Morocco* (1930), which features what literature scholar and gender theorist Marjorie Garber describes as "multiple transvestic motifs ... that instantly put the sartorial rhetoric of gender in question" (1993, p.337). Once again in the transgressive space of a nightclub, Dietrich as Jolly wears both male formal attire and then a 'womanly' costume of a swimsuit — a form-revealing athletic garment not dissimilar to Ziggy's catsuit — and boa. In the context of Bowie's use of this cultural reference, it is notable that in

Dietrich's performance of sexual ambiguity, the boa is a signifier specific to femininity.

With Ziggy, "Bowie ... pushed gender into another dimension of space-time" (Paglia 2013: 72). Paglia describes Bowie's 1973 version of the space alien, Aladdin Sane, as a "rouged androgyne" with a "lithe, hairless body" (2013, p. 78). Stella Bruzzi (1997b) argues that:

on the androgynous body is enacted ambiguity, the diminution of difference, and what is manifested is a softening of the contours — between corporeality and metaphor, male and female, straight and gay, real and imagined" (p. 176).

Julie Lobalzo Wright (2017) sees Bruzzi's observation as being directly applicable to Bowie, writing that:

although most evident in the 1970s, androgyny remained, even as his career evolved, through the fabric, tailoring, and the colour of his costumes, but possibly more so, through the presentation of normalcy within his music videos (p.71).

Paglia (2013) recognises in Pierre La Roche's famous lightning-bolt make up references to Surrealist landscapes and to Prometheus, the Romantics' "rebel hero", who "like the solitary space traveller in [Kubrick's] 2001 ... may be regressing to the embryonic space stage to give birth to himself" (Paglia 2013, 78). In his confronting return in *Ashes to Ashes*, the once-lauded Major Tom is a decaying junkie, "strung out in heaven's high", suspended motionless in a music video 'embryonic' space, inspired by H. R. Giger's Surrealist production designs for Ridley Scott's science fiction film *Alien* (1979) (Pegg 2016, 26).

Bowie's costume as Major Tom here is an actual high-altitude pressure Mk. 2A suit, a garment designed in the 1950s to be worn under a flying suit, made of thin white nylon with a system of PVC tubes sewn all over to help regulate body temperature in the oven-like cockpit of an RAF jet (Propstore Auction 2022).<sup>26</sup> Without the outer layer of the flying suit, the garment that the limp and vulnerable Major Tom wears in this nightmarish video space functions as little more than would a child's nightdress or futuristic lingerie. Here, the authority and salubrious masculinity of *Space Oddity*'s hero is all but evaporated. It is noteworthy that this iteration of Major Tom is the only one of Bowie's characters in the video who does not lip synch, determining him as a 'narrative', and not a narrator, within the structure of the music video.

Meanwhile, the incarcerated man, perhaps another, 'verbal' version of Major Tom, is defined by his solitude in the claustrophobic atmosphere of his acoustically-baffled padded cell. While still evoking the artifice of theatre through its lighting and cinematographic techniques, of *Ashes to Ashes*' three music video atmospheres, this set up and the sartorialism of its inhabiting character most resemble a 'real' man in a 'real' place. Although Bowie lyrically and thematically revisits his early spaceman character in *Ashes to Ashes*, it is perhaps this final character's use of nonthreatening, 'flamboyant-lite' styling that foretells Bowie's ongoing influence in popular men's fashion. As Paglia (2013) summarises it, whereas "Major Tom hangs moribund in a watery grotto that is half wrecked spaceship and half

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<sup>26</sup> Subsequent to the filming of the video, Bowie/Major Tom's spacesuit came to be in the possession of musician Gideon Wagner, who shared a manager with Bowie in Kenneth Pitt. Wagner claims to have been given several items of Bowie's clothing by both Pitt and Bowie, and wore the garment on several occasions for his own performances. Wagner offered the suit for auction in 2019 with a selling estimate of £60 000-£80 000. An auctioneer's catalogue available online featuring provenance originating with the Bonhams Entertainment Memorabilia Auction held on 12 June 2019 describes the garment as having Velcro fastening at the back of the neck, a maker's label within the neckline marked "Size No. 4" and dated 1961, and as exhibiting signs of age, including discolouration, small holes and staining around the inside of the neckline (Propstore Auction 2022).

nightmare womb”, Bowie’s character in the padded cell is “elegantly handsome” (pp. 81-82).

## Chapter conclusion

This chapter of the thesis has investigated *Ashes to Ashes* (1980), a densely-stylised and self-referential creative work by David Bowie and co-directed by highly technically-proficient and experimental pioneer music video director David Mallet. The chapter has identified that Bowie approached the production with a strong artistic vision; however this writing has also recognised that without the co-direction of Mallet, who enters the medium owing to his background in British network television and is soon one of the early music video directors identified as an auteur by Michael Shore (1984), the production could not have been realised to the extent that in the present day it is regarded as canonical (Cave, 2017).

This research has determined that this collaboration between Bowie, an expert pop performer and style bricoleur, and Mallet, an experienced and experimental television director, in *Ashes to Ashes* is a significant moment in the development of the language of music video. The intersection of what they each bring to this 1980 production changes the relationship between popular music and moving image culture, helping to establish music video as a stand alone media form. In discussing Bowie and their creative partnership in *Ashes to Ashes*, Mallet says that:

he was completely un-strange, absolutely charming, highly intelligent ... I think I would actually say that the biggest plus point was that he just wanted to collaborate. It started off as, I guess you could say, mutual suspicion. Rock’n’rollers aren’t mad on television people, and television people are normally slightly in awe of ... someone with his reputation ... I probably learned a lot from him, a lot of stagecraft, because he’d

obviously learned from people like Lindsay Kemp (quoted in Jones, 2020, p. 297).

On a structural level, *Ashes to Ashes* contributes very strongly to the development of music video as being a stand-alone visual culture. With its interconnected, non-linear narrative, otherworldly spaces and surreal atmospheres, and its enigmatic performer/characters, this groundbreaking music video from 1980 exemplifies Carol Vernallis' (2004) diagnosis of a significant departure the genre makes from cinema, one of its key precedents:

because music videos often lack essential ingredients — place names, meeting times, a link to both past and present, and fully realized protagonists and villains — they cannot be described as possessing a classical Hollywood film narrative. As a rule, music videos do not help us predict what will happen — in the next shot, or the following section, or at the close of the tape (p. 15).

This lack of predictability in sequence implies *uchronia*. Pierrot's beach, Major Tom's embryonic space, the astronaut's kitchen and the padded cell are all settings beyond time; Mallet's editing journey between them provides an arbitrary narrative. This demonstrates a distinctly avant-garde televisual approach, which this thesis recognises as being a contribution the director makes to the emerging language of music video in 1980.

In analysing *Ashes to Ashes*, the chapter has also identified that co-director Bowie's avant-garde pop music practice is characterised by non-normative gender performance and theatrical artifice, derived variously from: his interest in transgressive rock and roll; his exposure to art, literature, and science fiction; the traditions of mime and dance; and a fashion zeitgeist that captures the mood tumult in the Cold War period, manifested in a

liberation-seeking, media-oriented youth audience on both sides of the Atlantic. Through Bowie, all these interests come to enter the language of this emerging hybrid media form.

The very high importance of fashion as a principal expression of British post-war subcultural identification, particularly the stylistic bricolage and dandyism of the Mod movement, has been recognised as being a significant precedent for Bowie. The chapter has followed this thread and tied it to the reciprocal influence between Bowie and the post-Punk New Romantics, the involvement of whom in the video contribute greatly to its aesthetic. In turn, the research has suggested that the developing form of music video in 1980 as conceived by Bowie, an established — indeed, cult — pop rock artist of the 1970s, provided an international platform for British avant-garde fashion styles beyond the milieu of the art school-adjacent nightclub.

In this early music video, Bowie performs a version of the traditional clown Pierrot, supported by extravagantly-dressed figures of the New Romantic subculture, and an eerie reinvention of Major Tom, the spaceman protagonist of his 1969 song *Space Oddity*. The chapter has also discussed other preceding Bowie performer/characters, such as Ziggy Stardust, who remain potent visual symbols not only of Bowie, but the fashion image of ‘alien androgyny’ and the flamboyant Glam Rock era and more generally, referenced in masculine designer fashion of this century for example by Emanuel Ungaro and Givenchy (Idacavage, n.p.).

### **Bowie and masculine sartorialism**

However, the chapter’s final observation is that Bowie’s legacy also remains in contemporary men’s fashion in such ways due to more normative, but nonetheless non-traditional, masculine looks incorporating make up and

subtle sartorial embellishment, such as is worn by the final solitary character in *Ashes to Ashes*, and subsequently favoured by Bowie himself for the remainder of his career. Writing in 2016 of a “menswear revolution” characterised by new, non-normative understandings of masculinity in the millennial era, Jay McCauley Bowstead recognises the synchronicity of Bowie’s death that year with the obvious resonances of his fashioned performer/characters in the work of Hedi Slimane, Sean Suen and James Long, among others (2018, pp. 2-3).

Nick Rees-Roberts goes further in noting that “Slimane frequently name-check[s] Bowie as a seminal influence”, while Bowie’s mid 1970s “Thin White Duke persona remains a key influence on contemporary menswear”, also being checked as a key inspiration by (2013, 13). In regard to residues of Bowie’s fashion legacy of stylish normative masculine fashion well known from his later music video period which Dries Van Noten references, and not the transgressive early 1970s performance looks which inspired the New Romantics, is confirmed in Cullen’s (2013) citing of fashion journalist Godfrey Deeny’s review of Dries Van Noten’s Autumn/Winter 2011 collection: it is reported that the designer’s choice of inspiration is not “space-age Major Tom [but rather] out-sized pants and double-breasted jackets” (Deeny cited in Cullen, 2013, 250).

US fashion historian Sara Idacavage (2010) suggests that what makes Bowie’s Thin White Duke persona — with his monochromatic tailored three-piece Ola Hudson suits and slicked-back, yellow-highlighted orange hair — such a “consistent reference point in fashion history is ... the cool, faraway attitude of the character and the mysterious public image of the musician himself” (n.p.). Idacavage refers to the thinness of Bowie’s physique for much of the 1970s as being a continuing styling touchstone for



runway and fashion magazine imagery, across both menswear and womenswear. This may be problematic in the way it reinforces fashion's norms of 'thinness and whiteness' as much as it references Bowie's creative disruption of hegemonic gender structures, and also because this physicality is acknowledged as owing to Bowie's prodigious drug use in this period, something that is a lyrical subtext in *Ashes to Ashes*, a work that heralds the dawn of the 1980s, which is a new music video-driven phase of commercial success in Bowie's career.

In concluding this chapter of the thesis, it is important to note that Idacavage's observation of the ongoing translation of Bowie's myriad fashioned masculine identities in collections for example by Jean Paul Gaultier, Alexander McQueen, Walter Van Beirendonck and Raf Simons, which may make the iconoclast Bowie "the most referenced musician in fashion history" (2010, n.p.), comes about because of Bowie's own practice of drawing from a vast range of influences and time periods and places: from Renaissance Venice to 1950s Soho; from Weimar to the Mudd Club and Blitz; from the moon and back to the 'womb'.

This means that 'Bowie' as a visual archive is, in the postfashion era, rendered almost trend-transcendent: in Barthes' understanding of fashion, and in a metamodern sense, it is uchronic. As this chapter has found, the atemporal, affective atmosphere of *Ashes to Ashes* is an equally exceptional example of Bowie's bricolé usage of time, space and self-referentiality in music video, a form through which he fashioned both a new media language and new sartorial masculinities. Thus, in 1980's *Ashes to Ashes*, we can begin to read the 'look' of the 'TV sound'.

## **Chapter 3: *Take me dancing tonight: from Jailhouse Rock to Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*, or, Elvis, George Michael and the New Man**

### **Chapter introduction**

A telegenic young man, wearing a shirt with a striking black and white motif, sells a lively and optimistic version of masculinity as he leads a gang of supporting performer/characters in a musical performance that is staged within a moving image production. These are indeed observations that can accurately be made of Elvis Presley's turn in prison stripes in the eponymous sound-stage scene of the 1957 film, *Jailhouse Rock*. Yet, this chapter centres upon another young man, in another time, to whom the description equally applies. It is 1984, and we are observing a cultural artefact emblematic of a very different era: the music video *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* by chart-topping pop duo Wham!, fronted by twenty-one year old George Michael. Prominent and well-remembered amongst the production's visual elements, the garment he wears is itself representative of the times: the first, and perhaps most famous, of British designer Katharine Hamnett's activist slogan t-shirts, CHOOSE LIFE.

In this moment, fashion, politics, popular culture and many of the compliments and contradictions of their historic relationship coalesce. Both the first recorded positive HIV/AIDS diagnosis and the first AIDS-related death in the United Kingdom occur in 1981. In that same year, an ambitious and determined Michael, born Georgios Kyriacos Panayiotou on 25 June, 1963 (died 25 December, 2016), forms Wham! with his North London school friend, Andrew Ridgeley, born 26 January, 1963. The duo at first writes on conundrums facing young men in Thatcher's Britain:

unemployment and self esteem, rebellious masculine friendship, and heterosexual romantic entrapment. Michael and Ridgeley are “bad boys” who “stick together” (Wham!, 1983). Claiming to possess “street credibility”, the singer’s initial autobiographical protagonist “may not have a job but [he has] a good time / with the boys that [he meets] down on the line” (Wham! 1982a). Wham!’s peers and rivals Duran Duran may be “sleazy” make up and frills-wearing Birmingham New Romantics, soon to be re-styled as international fashion playboys, as we will see in Chapter 4 (Frith, 1990, p. 173). However Wham!’s early image builds on a Soul Boy look. This nods to the neat, slim-fitting Italian styling popular with Mods and non-effeminate gay men in Britain in the 1960s (Cole, 2000, pp. 75-77): straight cut jeans or cuffed trousers; short- or rolled-sleeved button down-collared shirts, occasionally with skinny ties; loafers with or without white socks; short hair, with a wedge haircut for Ridgeley. The clean-cut boys sometimes sport a pop-rockabilly look of soft retro quiffs and biker jackets over clean white t-shirts, or cheekily in the case of the smooth chested, leather man-lite cover image of their 1983 debut album *Fantastic*, no shirt at all.

Wham! know fashion. Michael’s early lyrics often describe Thatcher’s post-Punk Britain using the language of fashion subcultures: where a “jet black guy with a hip hi-fi” may represent issues of race and new technology; where “a white cool cat with a trilby hat” enacts class and cultural appropriation; where community exists, no matter if you are “pub man or a club man”, or if “maybe leather and studs is where you’re at” (Wham!, 1982a). Wham!’s Britain of the early 1980s is a place of “party nights, and neon lights ... dancing shoes and pretty girls, boys in leather kiss girls in pearls” (1982a). Dick Hebdige (1979) writes of Jean Genet, who will appear later in this chapter, that: “he is as convinced in his own way as is Roland

Barthes of the ideological character of cultural signs” (p. 18). This thesis observes that George Michael, while not an ideologue, is “in his own way” equally convinced.

Implications of this are revealed in an interview given by Michael to journalist Mark Cooper of British weekly music newspaper *Record Mirror* in October 1982, in which the singer-songwriter’s detailed knowledge of contemporary fashion semiotics and his understanding of the importance of image to Wham!’s success is made abundantly clear:

George Michael likes dressing for the clubs: at the moment, this means dressing down. ‘Faded red label Levis are the current article, 501s with button up flies. You can’t have patches (except on the inside) but you should have tears. They should be faded but not bleached.’ George can tell because he’s a self-confessed sociologist as well as writer with Wham. [sic] According to George, 1982 lacks a leading style: ‘When the New Romantics started, clubs were in; now, people are saying there’s nowhere to go’ ... George and guitarist/partner Andrew have a fairly definite identity for boys who reckon that youth culture is currently between generations: ‘All the people involved in the Blitz scene became New Romantics ...now they’ve grown older and disappeared and there’s no one coming up from underneath’ (n.p).

Fast forward two years and *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* takes place at a point in Wham!’s career where their appeal as two carefree, pretty-but-straight boys, presented as being sexually available to their legions of young female fans, is crucial to their marketability. This is particularly the case in the socially conservative United States, where the rise of 24 hour music video cable channel MTV is creating a vastly expanded and lucrative audience for a new wave of British pop music. This creative territory is heavily populated by fashion-forward, diverse performers who use the

emerging form of music video to explore and challenge presentations of gender and sexuality.

At the same time, there is widespread homophobic news coverage of HIV/AIDS as a deadly 'gay plague'. Young people, especially those who question their own identities, are presented with a very threatening conundrum; televisual media is an all-powerful source of information, and of misinformation. At its darkest, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), this mainstream narrative is a genocidal fantasy which considers AIDS "the once-and-for-all eradication of gay populations" (p. 130). Yet in *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*, released on 14 May 1984, Michael's emerging homosexuality is hidden in plain sight, concealed within the very conspicuousness of the video's hugely popular Camp fashion celebration.

In this chapter, the thesis will first propose that the music video for Wham!'s *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* could not exist without the precedent of Elvis Presley's *Jailhouse Rock*. It will explain that in the late 1950s, Elvis composes the language of glamorous masculine fashion identity performance that Wham! so effectively rephrases to seduce America's teen music consumers of the 1980s. *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* unapologetically borrows *Jailhouse Rock*'s "proto-video" set-up of "Presley and his pals dancing on a jail set" (Austerlitz, 2007, p.17). Michael's 'situation' is of course changed: in *Jailhouse Rock*, Elvis's company are actors-playing-convicts-playing-musicians on a television show, inside a movie; whereas in *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*, Michael's co-performers are musicians 'playing' a concert, in a clear early example of the performance style music video. The significant majority of the video is a mimed performance for teenaged Wham! fans at the Brixton Academy,

directed by Andy Morahan, who will go on to collaborate with Michael on self-referential videos such as 1987's *Faith*, which recalls both Elvis and earlier versions of a leather-clad Michael himself.

It is a tribute to the recognisability of Elvis's choreography, the image of his glamorous, young male body being so indelibly inked in the memory of pop consumer culture, that such a straightforward reference should meet the video's brief so well. This is to sell as many Wham! records as possible, on the lowest possible budget, with the hopeful result of breaking the act in the United States. Owing to an overspend on the video for Michael's upcoming solo ballad, *Careless Whisper* due to complications arising from the singer's hairstyling, in pre-publicity for *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*, the duo tell the teen press that their new video will simply be "basic and bright with lots of dancing" (Voller, 1984, n.p.).

By Wham!'s own measure of success, *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* is a triumph. It spends twenty-four weeks on the Billboard Hot 100 chart, with three of those weeks at number one, and is certified platinum, indicating sales of over two million copies (Billboard, n.d.). In the process, Michael becomes a pop fashion icon. The young singer/songwriter, "with his indisputable command of mainstream-pop technique ... [is] widely touted as the Elton John of the Eighties" (Fricke, 1986; n.p.). However, this success results from something of a Faustian pact. As Michael tells *Rolling Stone* magazine,

'I totally threw away my personal credibility for a year and a half in order to make sure my music got into so many people's homes,' Michael says of Wham!'s peak teenybopper years of 1984 and '85, when songs like *Wake Me Up Before You Go go*, *Freedom* and *Careless Whisper* dominated U.S. and U.K. airwaves in almost supersonic rotation. 'It was a calculated risk,

and I knew I would have to fight my way back from it. I did it out of choice' (Fricke, 1986; n.p.).

Although intended as a compliment to his uncanny capacity to synthesise the most affective aspects of the twentieth-century's melodic pop canon, the comparison of Michael to Elton John here is double-edged when considering that John's *own* confusion of mainstream Camp and 'authentic' masculine homosexual identity is cleared only in his official coming out interview to *Rolling Stone* in 1992. That both men are tireless champions of HIV/AIDS awareness and fundraising in the 1980s and much of the 1990s under the guise of humanist allies and not as out gay men says much about the precarity of a declared homosexual position in what is otherwise postulated as a time of prosperity and plenitude. Michael's conscious use of nostalgia for the carefree consumerism of America in the 1950s and 1960s as a device to attract a mass audience in the 1980s is in its own way an example of this incongruity. *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*'s throwaway name-checking of Doris Day, the wholesome and broadly popular bottle-blond American mid-century actress and singer, as being "sunshine bright" (Wham!, 1984) for example, is read differently when taking into account Day's underground status as a queer icon. Persistent rumours of Day's possible lesbianism and her signature identification with the Camp tomboy cowgirl musical heroine Annie Oakley aside, Day is well known for her on screen partnership with Rock Hudson in several romantic comedies of the late 1950s and 1960s.<sup>27</sup> Hudson's long 'suspected' homosexuality is

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<sup>27</sup> Writing on traces of queerness in twentieth century cinema, US film critic and filmmaker Michael Koresky (2020), says of these films that: "the stability of [Hudson's] masculinity started to become a self-conscious act, and part of the joke; *Pillow Talk* (1959) features a recurring gag in which Hudson's character toys with Day by inventing an alter ego, the effeminate mama's boy "Rex"—a hall-of-mirrors gag in which a gay man hiding his true self successfully plays a paragon of hetero masculinity pretending to be something so far-fetched as a gay man. It's the kind of pretzel logic that could only work in such a place as Hollywood, where movie stars are sold as ideal, unsullied icons" (n.p.)

‘confirmed’ when in 1985 the actor tragically becomes one of the first celebrity casualties of AIDS-related illness (Stephan, n.d.).<sup>28</sup>

Irrational and increasingly volatile fear associated with homosexuality in the media in the 1980s is in ironic coincidence with the huge mainstream popularity of many of the era’s flamboyant pop stars, who openly challenge normative aesthetic representations of sexuality and gender in appropriating taboo sartorial techniques historically identified as being related to homosexual lifestyles. Michael’s tragic personal proximity to AIDS is greatly formative to his private and professional masculine identities as they develop over the 1980s, and into the 1990s and 2000s, decades over which he also becomes a noted public figure in HIV/AIDS charity and awareness. However in 1984, despite Michael’s confident articulation of progressive left-wing views on various societal concerns in his interviews with the teen music press, *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*’s light-heartedness works in active contrast to the grave predicament faced by young, still self-discovering or closeted queer people in the early AIDS era.

Popular writings on Michael, “God’s gift to MTV’s under-eighteen female viewers” (Fricke, 1986, n.p.), frequently identify his gradual acceptance first of being perhaps bisexually oriented, and ultimately his proud embracing of a homosexual identity. Such accounts commonly align this self-discovery with a particular sequence of circumstances: the disapproval of his macho, Greek Cypriot emigrant restaurateur father; a close relationship with his English dancer mother, and her death in 1997; the loss of his great love,

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<sup>28</sup> It is said that Hudson’s death forced US President and former Hollywood actor Ronald Reagan to finally publicly acknowledge the AIDS crisis in 1985, because of a longstanding friendship between the two; Hudson’s other notable female co-star of the mid-century being Reagan’s first wife, committed Republican Jane Wyman, in the melodramas *Magnificent Obsession* (1954) and *All that Heaven Allows* (1955), directed by Douglas Sirk.



Brazilian fashion designer Anselmo Feleppa, to an AIDS-related brain haemorrhage in 1993; his forced, very public outing following an arrest for engaging in a 'lewd act' with an undercover police officer in Los Angeles in 1998 (McAllister 1998). Whilst acknowledging this personal context, the current research does not specifically aim to speculate on psychological motivations that may have influenced Michael's approach to his public life.

Instead, this chapter of the thesis will evaluate Michael as a queer performer/character who both uses and creates masculine fashion in music video: a uniquely late twentieth-century, feel-good media product which arises in eerie synchronicity with the public anguish of HIV/AIDS. It will question how the appeal of new, often sexually ambiguous celebrity identities of the early MTV era, such as Michael, were able to take hold of the popular imagination in this otherwise homophobic atmosphere. Further to this inquiry, it will ask: what enables pioneering queer styles to crossover and become popular straight fashion and marketing tropes of late-Cold War consumerism? And, why does the gaze of the late twentieth-century focus so firmly on the young, fashionable male body?

To address these questions, the chapter will begin by addressing the research's understanding of the 1950s cross-cultural phenomenon of the glamorous masculinity of the young Elvis Presley, a key progenitor of the later twentieth-century association between popular music, masculine sartorialism and desire. It will use queer theory to illuminate the significance of *Jailhouse Rock*'s prison setting as an example of the twentieth-century concept of 'situational homosexuality' (Kunzel, 2002), and consider the power of a new consumer group of cultural products, the teenager, and in particular, the teenaged girl, and the associated gendering

of a popular music industry that arises in Elvis's 1950s and reaches a zenith in Michael's 1980s.

The chapter will then move to analysis of the performance style video *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*. Here, it will discuss the ways in which Wham!'s video uses fashion — namely, Hamnett's monochromatic CHOOSE LIFE slogan t-shirt, and a brightly coloured alternate costume in which the colour pink is most prominent — to construct Michael's sunny, commercial image of new masculinity in an era darkly shadowed by AIDS. It will consider how the visual culture of British style magazines such as *The Face* and *i-D* intersects with representations of new masculinity in pop music in the early 1980s, including the influence of stylist Ray Petri, further discussing the identity of the New Man.

## **The visual language of Elvis**

In the late 1950s, rock and roll is a revolution wrapped in spectacle, and its number one poster boy is Elvis Aaron Presley. Born into poverty on 8 January, 1935 (died 16 August, 1977) in the American deep south of Tupelo, Mississippi, the now-revered King of Rock and Roll — known the world over by the mononym 'Elvis' — is a divisive popular figure at the outset of a career that spreads over twenty years from dusty grassroots, through the manicured lawns of Hollywood stardom, ultimately to be strangled by the vines of Las Vegas excess. Older generations of white Americans at first consider the young Elvis's flamboyance and hip-rolling dance moves, appropriated from African American culture, to be obscene. However, the frisson of danger and transgression apparent in Elvis's performances quickly raises the temperature of America's first generation of teenagers as much as it does the ire of television censors.

Commercial opposition to this “new youth music” is based in deep-seated racism (Mundy, 1999, p. 102); shifts in cultural politics occur as young media consumers become powerful taste-makers. Described by *Life* magazine in January 1954 as “the Luckiest Generation”, the “Depression’s babies ... have the pick of high-paying jobs” (cited in Martin, 1995; p. 55). By 1959, this distinct cultural group is a \$US10 billion annual commercial market, newly powerful in the Fordist post-war economy (Martin, 1995).

The firmness with which an outsider cultural form such as early rock and roll takes hold of the youthful imagination through the medium of Elvis, its “chief cultural site” (Martin, 1995; p. 53), has a profound effect on inter-generational relations in the United States, and by extension, the whole of the post war world over which the Cold War superpower has influence. Elvis’s early persona represents a kind of new, hybrid masculinity created by rock and roll’s complex layering of race, class and sexuality. Dubbed ‘the Hillbilly cat’ — the former, a reference to his white lower-class background and the latter, to his black musical sensibility and sartorial style — Elvis appears “simultaneously effeminate and threatening in mainstream contexts” (Harmon & Walser, 2007; p. 1266). The captivating, confusing cultural collision between white, black, masculine and feminine that Elvis embodies in the 1950s is well summarised by legendary white country music guitarist, Chet Atkins, in a BBC television documentary marking the tenth anniversary of Elvis’s death:

he [Presley] played at the Grand Ole Opry [in 1954], and it went over pretty well, I thought ... [then] one night in the studio, he told us, he said “I played on the Grand Ole Opry” — he was talking on the mic and we were in the control room — “Mr. Denny [Jim Denny, country music promoter and song publisher, says to Elvis] ‘We don’t like that n\*\*\*\*r music around here. Go back to Memphis and drive a truck’ ”. I remember I was very astonished to see him [Presley], because he had mascara, up

here [gestures all around eyes] or up there or somewhere, I don't know where it was but he had eye make up on, and I'd never seen that on a man before (1987, transcribed from source).<sup>29</sup>

As British media academic John Mundy notes, conservative backlash against Elvis centres on criticism of his visual and performance persona, sometimes likened to “‘strip tease with clothes on’ and ‘male burlesque’ (truly a homophobic double horror)” (1999, p. 113). African American rock and roll performer Little Richard enacts sexual difference through make up and costume in more spectacular, and perhaps more authentic, fashion; however, in the segregated United States, it is not only their sexual ambiguity that prevents mainstream crossover, but also their Blackness. Unlike black performers, Elvis is booked to appear on the ascendent, increasingly wide-reaching media platform of television, anecdotally on the basis of looking “like ‘a guitar-playing Marlon Brando’” (Goldman in Mundy, 1999; p. 114). Elvis's whiteness<sup>30</sup> enables a further process, the cultural phenomenon of naturalisation, resulting in the mainstream acceptance of a new youthful, glamorous masculinity. Avant-garde American artist Mike Kelley, writes:

America has long embraced the ‘glamorous’, a.k.a. the homosexual, in closeted terms ... this trajectory of sublimation continues in rock-and-roll, which is ironic considering the ‘sexual’ nature of it as a musical form. Elvis was repellant at first to his primarily country music audience because of his use of makeup, but as he became more and more of a popular figure this aspect of his stage act became invisible — naturalized. (2000, p. 6).

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<sup>29</sup> Anecdotes such as these have been mythologised across popular culture to spectacular effect, for example in Baz Luhrmann's 2022 ‘biographical’ cinematic reimagining of the performer's life, *Elvis*.

<sup>30</sup> Although it is now understood that Elvis's heritage was Scots Irish, German, French and Cherokee, the performer was of course recognised simply as a white artist in his lifetime.

The current writing extends Kelley's observation, in asserting that Elvis does indeed naturalise glamorous masculinity in popular culture in the second half of the twentieth century, because his enormous influence over an important new consumer group, the teenager, validates this image as a commodity. Thus, his type of theatrical 'effeminacy' becomes valuable within post-war structures, entering the hegemonic cultural mainstream.

Dick Hebdige (1979) draws upon Stuart Hall in explaining that hegemony can only be maintained as long as the dominant classes frame all competing definitions within their range (p. 16). Naturalisation is therefore a key framing tactic: as Hebdige also notes, with reference to Barthes *Mythologies* (1957), mythology performs a vital function of naturalisation (p.16). It is useful to consider then that when Wham! performs pop glamour in 1984, this type of masculinity, which would appear to be outside heteronormative codes has not only been naturalised: it has also been mythologised, in the marketable figure of Elvis.

### **'Situational homosexuality' and Camp**

The ambiguity of young Elvis's glamour is evident when it is placed in such a recognised queer context as prison — especially, as *Jailhouse Rock* does, in the popular culture meta-context of a prison-within-a-television show-within-a-movie. Directed by Richard Thorpe, the film is the young heartthrob's third Hollywood excursion. *Jailhouse Rock* pre-dates by a year Elvis's conscripted service in a US military asserting its presence in a divided post-war Europe, which softens the rocker's public image through the lens of patriotism. In the film, Elvis plays Vince Everett, whose incarceration following a fatal bar fight expediently leads to his discovery as a talented singer. Stardom ensues via the medium of television where his prison experience is stylized as a musical extravaganza.

John Mundy argues the early Elvis films: “provide clear textual evidence of those complex but specific processes through which subculture’s symbolic challenge to the prevailing order is deflected and assimilated” (1999, p. 118). Mundy refers to the influential position of Dick Hebdige on subcultures and their meaning in recognising both the circumstances of the making of *Jailhouse Rock* and its actual plot as being:

a useful articulation of those processes through which taste cultures are assimilated by business [for] if throughout the film, there has been an emphasis on the ‘work’ involved in cultural production, by its conclusion Vince has been fully assimilated into the world of capitalist production and the world of heterosexual romance (1999, p. 120).

Mundy’s connection of capitalist cultural production to heterosexual romance is notable here: the scholar sees Elvis’s entry into the sphere of Hollywood film as a form of ‘selling out’, as Michael admits to having done in 1984. Implicitly, glamorous heterosexual attractiveness is understood as key to success for young men in the twentieth century visual cultures of music and moving image. Consistent with this, in *Jailhouse Rock*, Elvis’s Vince is proposed as being a heterosexual young man. Yet within the plot of the film, the intensity of his masculine prison relationships and the joyous, all-male atmosphere of *Jailhouse Rock*’s choreographed prison scene are barely coded dramatic hallmarks of a supposed phenomenon labelled ‘situational homosexuality’ (Kunzel, 2002).

This term can be understood as a mid-twentieth century rhetorical manoeuvre by social scientists, who seek to contain the “disruptive meanings of sexual acts apparently unlinked to, and therefore unsettling to, sexual identity” (Kunzel, 2002, p. 265). At this time, American sexual culture solidifies around a homosexual/heterosexual binary; sex in prisons between men who otherwise identify as heterosexual is credulously

explained through the concept of situational homosexuality, or “the inevitable expression of a normal sex drive temporarily and understandably rerouted” (Kunzel, 2002. p. 261). Ironically, in the late 1940s and 1950s when prison sex contradicts dominant understandings of sexuality, its representation becomes more widespread in popular culture through pulp novels, scandal-magazine stories, and B movies. This, according to Sontag (2009/1966), is precisely the cultural territory of Camp.

Kunzel notes that some examples of higher forms of literature and theatre depicting the theme also appear around this time. This writing notes that consistent with this is the publication of Jean Genet’s first novel, *Notre Dame des Fleurs*, first in French in 1943, and in English as *Our Lady of the Flowers* in 1949. The novel makes sense of the extreme bodily abjection of a life of crime and punishment by reimagining prison as a homosexual fantasy world, centred on a continual quest for sexual release, either through the debasement of self-pleasure or in fetishized opportunistic encounters.<sup>31</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the cultural reception of Genet’s novel and Elvis’s musical differ greatly, something that can also be readily theorised through Sontag’s Camp: “for [while] Genet’s ideas, for instance, are very Camp ... the Camp ideas in *Our Lady of the Flowers* are maintained too grimly, and the writing itself is too elevated and serious, for Genet’s books to be Camp” (2009/1966, p. 288). This is in contrast to the Camp Elvis, easily understood as “a dandy in the age of mass culture” who comes to represent

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<sup>31</sup> The controversial and influential vagrant-turned novelist, playwright and political activist in fact composes the tale almost entirely *in* prison, on sheets of brown paper twice over, as famously mythologised by Jean Paul Sartre in *Saint Genet* (1952), Genet’s first version being confiscated and burned by guards in Paris’s Prison de la Santé as he served a lengthy sentence for a series of petty thefts.

“the coarsest, commonest pleasures ... the arts of the masses” (Sontag, 2009/1966, pp. 288-289).

However, *Jailhouse Rock* also contributes to a twentieth century pattern of cultural exploration of homosocial relations, wherein “descriptions of sex between male prisoners [made] early in the century, in which putatively normal men, known as ‘wolves’ and ‘jockers’, had sex with men recognized as ‘punks’, ‘kids’, ‘fairies’, ‘queers’, and ‘girl-boys’, are echoed at the century’s end” (Kunzel, 2002, p. 255). The film’s soundtrack, a musical vehicle for Elvis at this key point in his mainstream crossover by famous songwriting partners lyricist Jerry Leiber and composer Mike Stoller, explicitly applies the mid-twentieth century’s open knowledge of prison sexual culture: “Number 47 said to Number 3 / ‘You’re the cutest jailbird I ever did see / I sure would be delighted with your company / Come on and do the Jailhouse Rock with me’ ” (Presley, 1957).

The term *Jailhouse Rock*, then, literally *means* prison sex, and the role-playing it entails; thus, the film’s very name identifies its star with a non-normative understanding of gender and sexuality. Elvis welcomes all to join this society of uncomplicated fulfilment: if faced with the conundrum of Genet’s solitary convict — or perhaps that of an unrequited teenager imprisoned by the censorship of their elders — he exhorts those who “can’t find a partner” to instead “use a wooden chair” (Presley, 1957).

### ***Jailhouse Rock* and fashion**

Juliet Ash identifies the “homo-erotic imaginative reverie” (2010, p. 177) of *Our Lady of the Flowers* as an example in literature where prison clothing is used as transcendence. Genet affirms the other-than-brotherly bond of its captured pleasure-seekers through costume, by reimagining their prison



stripes as rendered in pink and white. As Hebdige (1979) muses: “Genet ... more than most explored the subversive implications of style” (p. 2). The author’s use of this colour here is therefore important, with pink as a twentieth-century identifier of homosexuality being an idea to which this chapter will return. Stripes as a motif in prison uniforms are equally significant, being traditionally identified with transgression and indeed, outright evil (Pastoureau, 2001).

As a black and white film, colour symbolism brings no influence to bear on interpretation of character in *Jailhouse Rock*, with Elvis/Vince’s striped shirt being necessarily in a more conventional monochromatic scheme. Nonetheless, his in-principle unpretentious, workwear-style attire created by the MGM costume department successfully transcends convention. While constructed in a dark, heavy denim — a fabric Elvis is said to eschew owing to its connotation with his humble origins — the loose, drape-cut jacket and high waisted pants ensemble, with its visibly contrasting white stitching and stencilled prison number 6240 proud upon the chest as though a medal or boutonnière, evokes the brightly coloured, flamboyant Zoot suit-descended tailoring by Memphis’s Lanksy Brothers that is central to the young star’s image. This reinforces the performer/character connection of glamour between Elvis-the-rock and roll-star and bad boy Vince, whom Elvis-the-actor portrays. The design also enables Elvis to perform the film’s choreography, for which he is credited — signatures such as shoulders hunched and rolling, bent arms raised with fingers clicking, lower limbs loose and propelled by an ‘instinctive’ kinetic response to rhythm — without sartorial restriction.

This fundamental interrelationship between fashion and performance creates the moving image iconography of Elvis as a male sex symbol.

George Melly (1972), in his influential diagnosis of the pop arts in Britain, states that Elvis is the seductive “master of the sexual simile”, who “dressed to emphasise both his masculinity and his basic narcissism”, (p. 37). The visual language of Elvis, so faithfully quoted by George Michael in Britain in 1984, is the language of fashion. Noel McLaughlin helps to understand why, in observing that:

the issue in popular music performance is not clothes, but clothing in performance; popular music is about clothes *and* stars, clothing on bodies performing popular music. This means the *meaning* of dress will be inflected, altered, amplified or contradicted by the musical and performing conventions and associations within which they are placed [original italics] (2000, p. 271).

Jennifer Craik identifies a “play between the intended symbolism of uniforms (sameness, unity, regulation, hierarchy, status, and roles) and the informal codes of wearing and denoting uniforms (subversion, individual interpretation, and difference)” (2003. p. 129). Saying more about the star than the story, Elvis/Vince’s ‘uniform’ matches Craik’s latter list of descriptors far more closely than it does the former. When animated by his youthful, attractive male body, this prison-style clothing is freed from its purposefully non-sensual origins, and is neither conforming nor utilitarian. It is fashion; a new masculine fashion exemplifying the “teenage rebellion ... taking place at a time of unprecedented affluence” (Mundy, 1999, p. 105) depicted in films such as Brando’s *The Wild One* (1954) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) starring James Dean, and equally identified with Elvis’s rock and roll stardom.

Central to this aesthetic is a notion of individual authenticity as the antidote to systemic arbitrary social restriction, as the new youth culture calls into

question the validity of adherence to convention over expression of the 'genuine'. Yet paradoxically, as David Shumway (2007) explains, the relationship between authenticity and rock and roll is complicated because it is defined by 'stardom', a construction of identity dependent upon image and artifice. Indeed, "Elvis Presley ... and a few other early performers created the practice willy-nilly that others later adopted and adapted, so that, in one sense, there was no rock & roll before there were rock stars" (Shumway, 2007; p. 530). This new youth culture aesthetic calls into question the validity of adherence to convention over expression of the 'genuine'. Yet paradoxically, the relationship between authenticity and rock and roll is complicated because it is *defined* by 'stardom', a construction of identity dependent upon image and artifice (Shumway, 2007). Instructively to this thesis, these things, in the way that Sontag for example identifies them, are recurring themes of Camp.

### **Pop, power and fan culture**

Thus, Elvis creates yet another tension that remains a legacy in the popular music idiom that George Michael inherits: a reduction of popular music to a binary of masculine rock, being an outlet for radical virtuosity; and 'feminised' pop, the less-worthy preserve of followers of fashion. This implies a universal response to 'authenticity' that relies on heterosexual discourse with straight masculinity at its centre, creating a false naturalism in the hyperbole of rock and a dismissive suspicion of the masquerade celebrated in pop. Conventions of masculinity and femininity in popular music mark males as active participants and females as passive consumers (Frith & McRobbie in Martin, 1995). This gender essentialism, and the power relationship it establishes, is undone when considering the way in which "young white, middle-class teenage females transgressed the 'normal' gender order of social life, becoming powerful subjects as the dominant fans

of rock and roll” (Martin, 1995; p. 54). This research also argues that the consumer of popular music is indeed far from passive. As George Michael tells *BOP* magazine in 1985, “the young girls love what we do and we love what they do for us” (n.p.).

What these loyal Wham! fans “do” is more than simply purchase 45 rpm records. Their fan loyalty can be seen as a form of *brand* loyalty, with the competition between rival groups of mostly female teenaged pop music fans in the early 1980s being arguably more intense than between the acts themselves. Mini-subcultures are formed through fashioned fan identification, with devotees of ‘pretty boy’ groups such as Wham! and Duran Duran declaring their passionate affiliations through the cross-gendered adoption of the clothing and hairstyles of their pin-up heroes. Fashion theorist Janice Miller (2011) explains how “fashion and dress offer the tools to become, and fandom (and the star system which underpins it) creates the conditions and attachments that shape this becoming” (p. 38). Understanding fashioned fan identification as being directly related to consumer culture, Miller explains how:

consumers are encouraged to make purchases at an increased pace and beyond physical need. In order to keep this cycle in operation, new functions for goods were instilled in the collective psyche of the consumer; these functions related a great deal more to social lives than to physical necessity ... consumer culture has become the place where identities and lives are played out and made tangible (p. 32).

Miller identifies how fashioning the body is central to the articulation of fan identity, investigating this “performative consumption” through the spectacular example of Elvis impersonation (2011, p. 36). Music scholar Francesca Brittan (2006) neatly diagnoses the fundamental complexity of this gender/power collapse when discussing female Elvis impersonation:

women who 'do' the King rehearse the gestures of Presley's own staged sexuality, drawing him into the complex and contentious discourse of drag, and often hailing Elvis himself as a model for the male impersonator ... female Elvises reveal and critique the King's gender masquerade, challenging not only the relationship between masculinity and maleness but the stability of all gendered selves (pp. 168-169).

In *Jailhouse Rock*, Elvis himself is a drag-like performer/character: a constructed identity toward whom the gaze is directed, representing a sanitisation of his identification with the rebellion of early rock and roll, and his entry into the realm of pop.

George Melly sees Elvis' much 'selling out' as a trick of shifting emphasis: "so that the pop idol, originally representing a masculine rebel, is transformed into a masturbation fantasy-object for adolescent girls" (1972, pp. 39-40). Melly speaks of the "primitive" nature of the "love and fury" of this young female pop audience as being akin to a "religious impulse", which throughout history "at this level is indistinguishable from sexual hysteria" (1972, p. 41). Despite Melly's disparaging terms, in recognising the fervent devotion of these record-buying "girl fans" (p. 40), he does nonetheless acknowledge their great power. This thesis argues that it is the medium of music video, when it is as visually appealing as *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* proves to be, provides mainline access to this power.

## **Looking at men**

Relations of power are closely tied to relations of looking. Foundational to understanding moving image in this way is British film theorist and filmmaker Laura Mulvey's 1973 Freudian/Lacanian feminist film theory concept of 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. First published in the widely influential

article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), this idea, in short, is the essential quality of the female image on screen existing as the object of the voyeuristic or fetishistic male gaze. Mulvey proposes that there are two types of visual pleasure to be gained from narrative cinema: one is from the distance afforded by an active — that is, heterosexual male — objectifying look; the other is from the collapse of distance that can occur in a spectator's identification with the image.

However as Suzanne Moore (1989) suggests, even from a feminist viewpoint — or perhaps indeed, because of one — ‘woman as erotic spectacle’ is once more a restrictive mapping of active/passive onto masculine/feminine, being those who look and those who are to be looked at. Elvis Presley, whom this research considers to be the primary cultural precedent for George Michael's performer/character in *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*, is not a woman, yet is very clearly an erotic spectacle; he does not so much welcome the gaze, as invite it to pull up a chair and stay for dinner.

Film historian and motion pictures scholar Steve Neale (1983) writes of masculinity as spectacle specifically as it appears in mainstream cinema. His observations of this are apposite to this study, in that the pop star New Man performed in music video by a pre-out Michael is very much a creature of the visual mainstream, whose aim is to increasing record sales for a large record company (Columbia Epic) through emphasising the attractiveness and fashionability of its performer to predominantly female audiences.

Neale proceeds from Mulvey (1975) in recognising that heterosexual masculinity is accepted as a structuring norm in relation both to images of women and gay men, although his aim is to reinterpret Mulvey's (1975)

theory of the gaze by applying it to examples specifically identified as mainstream cinematic representations of heterosexual masculinity in the twentieth century, for example the hyper-masculine John Wayne and Charlton Heston. Neale's study briefly calls upon another example that the current research considers useful for a somewhat contrary reason: this being the presentation of the actor Rock Hudson in previously noted Camp melodramas of the 1950s, directed by Douglas Sirk. Neale writes that:

there are constantly moments in these films in which Hudson is presented quite explicitly as the object of an erotic look. The look is usually marked as female. But Hudson's body is *feminised* in those moments, an indication of the strength of those conventions which dictate that only women can function as the objects of an explicitly erotic gaze. Such instances of 'feminisation' tend also to occur in the musical, the only genre in which the male body has been unashamedly put on display in mainstream cinema in any consistent way [original italics]. (1983) pp. 14-15).

Neale's (1983) identification of Hudson — a gay man who at the time of Neale's writing, was not publicly acknowledged as being such — as being eroticised in a mainstream film simply through the power of the female gaze, is of interest to this thesis. The screen scholar's recognition here of the musical as being a site of the 'feminising' of the male body is clearly applicable to understanding George Michael's performer character in *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*, a performance-style video specifically descended from this mainstream film genre (Austerlitz, 2007).

A further proposition put by Suzanne Moore (1989) regarding the female gaze and the New Man is that it is not necessarily a feminist lens that tints 1980s female fans' readings of masculine desirability, but rather the

reciprocal influence of homo-erotica. When considering the visual language of the musical *Jailhouse Rock*, the current research sees value in this assertion. Says Camp film auteur and queer cultural pioneer John Waters: “I knew I was gay the moment I saw Elvis Presley” (2010). This neatly summarises the phenomenon of Elvis for the purpose of this study: that he is understood as a fashionable, queer, masculine *visual* spectacle, to-be-looked-at as much as his music is to be listened to, ultimately made famous through the mediums of musical film and television.

A generation later, in the midst of the media’s homophobic terror surrounding HIV/AIDS, it is onto a world stage of pop where the glamorous and straight-Camp visual language of a to-be-looked-at Elvis, further galvanised by popular heteronormative cinematic presentations of otherwise ambiguous male stars, makes it possible to be both ‘gay’ and yet not gay, that Wham! so enthusiastically leaps. That the glamorous performer/character of George Michael in *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* is the central focus of the gaze is something that is particularly clear from a contemporary perspective when taking into account Michael’s subsequent high profile as a solo artist.

However, from the position of 1984, the importance of the group dynamic of Wham!’s early success — long prior to Michael’s coming out as a gay man — cannot be overlooked. This is because the very set up of *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* implies the ‘all in good fun’, mid-century pop culture situational homosexuality of the *Jailhouse Rock*-type. Michael’s song’s lyric is based around a simple request for the innocent pleasure of going out to dance in public in the company of a presumably female partner (“you’re my lady”, sings Michael); as Michael tells us in the Motown girl group-influenced chorus, he’s “not planning on going solo” (1984). Wham!’s co-



manager by 1984, the openly gay producer and band manager Simon Napier-Bell, initially sees the young duo perform on *Top of the Pops* and immediately identifies the marketability of the homo-erotic tension between the two boys to teenage girls (Moore, 1989). The presence of the pretty-but-straight Andrew Ridgeley, in combination with Michael, provides audiences a point of entry into “this space [in which] men can be presented as desirable” (Moore, 1989, p.55).

This thesis argues that *Jailhouse Rock*’s glamorous portrayal of situational homosexuality in a musical is the intermediate step which permits a mainstream heterosexual audience of the 1980s to enjoy in plain sight what would otherwise be a transgressive fantasy. *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*’s slavish reference to the choreography of *Jailhouse Rock* does not merely reinforce the 1984 song’s musical homage to American music of the 1950s and 1960s. In performing ‘young Elvis’ amongst his own lively coterie, Michael uses the authority of Elvis’s Camp trace as both a lure and a smoke-screen.

The current research observes that in *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*, George Michael’s understanding of twentieth-century Americana significantly extends beyond the musical cues of the music video’s precursory accompanying soundtrack. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains of this culture, there are: “important correspondences and similarities between the most sanctioned forms of male-homosocial bonding, and the most reprobated expressions of male homosexual sociality” (1985, p. 89). As the following structural analysis of the video reveals, fashion signifiers play an important role in the success of Michael’s strategy.

## ***Wake Me Up Before You Go Go (1984)***

*Jitterbug.*

*Jitterbug.*

A young man, lit from below, strikes a familiar pose. His shoulders and arms are bent, forming strong, graphic diagonals, resembling the letters N or Z. His fingers are closed in finger-click-making fists (Fig. 28). His head is angled downwards, somewhat silhouetted but a recognisable cameo, the profile of his clean-shaven face less a feature than his luxuriant bouffant. The opening lyric of *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* references a 1930s swing dance craze, the ear-wormingly catchy music is a British white-plastic homage to 1950s Doo Wop and 1960s Motown. And a young man is the garnish on this postmodernist soup: George Michael's glamorous Elvis-like performer/character, the lead singer of Wham! (Fig. 29). The act is presented here as being a concert band comprising Michael, Andrew Ridgeley, six other male musicians including a brass section and four female backing singers, who are performing on a stage featuring a central catwalk that extends into a standing-room-only audience space which is populated by enthusiastic young fans, all of whom appear to be female (Fig. 30).

As in Elvis's case, Michael appears on first impression to wear much the same 'uniform' as his cohort. This attire is a strikingly all-white look of generously-cut casual garments — with trousers for the masculine characters and below knee fishtail skirts for the feminine — featuring a t-shirt with a black typographic motif. We see, and read, Michael's oversized shirt first: CHOOSE LIFE (Fig. 31). These words are set in Helvetica Inserat, a sans serif font that brings with it twentieth-century design connotations of the imperative. He individualises the shirt through his



Fig. 28: Morahan, A. (1984) *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* [music video still].



Fig. 29: Morahan, A. (1984) *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* [music video still].



Fig. 30: Morahan, A. (1984) *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* [music video still].



Fig. 31: Morahan, A. (1984) *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* [music video still].



Fig. 32: Morahan, A. (1984) *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* [music video still].



Fig. 33: Morahan, A. (1984) *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* [music video still].

wearing of it, customising it to his body by rolling up its sleeves. Once more as with Elvis, the looseness of the garment permits Michael's freedom of movement (Fig. 32), with aspects of its casual structure enabling a display of male eye-candy, animated by his vigorous commitment to entertainment. A guitar-wielding Ridgeley also wears a t-shirt bearing the motto CHOOSE LIFE (Fig. 33); the remaining musicians' t-shirts read GO-GO, which although resembling and complementing Michael's attire, appear to be custom-made prop clothing and do not project an equivalent design logic or visual authority.

### **CHOOSE LIFE: the politics of a t-shirt**

Few garments traverse twentieth-century fashion culture as intrepidly as the t-shirt. Originating as an undergarment, the t-shirt's shifting identification, first with the authenticity of labour and the 'common man' and then with maverick individualism, is so illustrative of Roland Barthes's concept of fashion semiotics that Paul Jobling uses it as his own principal example in discussing the philosopher's writing on fashion. Jobling explains that while "a white cotton T-shirt [is] a cultural sign whose general meaning is understated cool or coolness (whether of temperature or temperament) ... this somewhat straightforward meaning is altered as soon as something about the material is changed" (2015, p. 135). Or, indeed, if there is a change in its embodiment: "as worn by James Dean and Marlon Brando, the cool T-shirt may also signify the sexual rebelliousness of youth" (Jobling, 2015; p. 135). Elvis, in the 1950s often grouped with such new masculine anti-heroes, brings to post-war culture the proposition of 'popular music-as-rebellion' just as these actors bring 'dressing down-as-protest'. The garment's transmutation continues in the ensuing decades of the counter-culture revolution, as Anne O'Neil reminds us:

the t-shirt had been designed as to be worn underneath respectable clothing, and wearing it alone resonated with the simple honesty of wearing jeans. But all that white space provided real estate between the shoulders, and this was the perfect place to grow political statements” (2011, p. 92)

In 1984, for those outside the dominant conservative economic paradigms of Thatcherism and Reaganomics and their associated reactionary social positions, there are indeed many political statements to be made. Subsequent to the arrival of HIV/AIDS in the UK is the introduction of the notorious Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, a significant setback to the status of homosexual people just twenty years after the decriminalisation of homosexuality for males aged over 21, under the Sexual Offences Act 1967. Ushering in Section 28, which states that ‘local government shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality’ or ‘promote the teaching in state schools of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship’, Margaret Thatcher proclaims to the faithful at the 1987 Conservative Party conference in Blackpool that “children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay”(n.p.). As the first round of the British Social Attitudes survey takes place in 1983, a frequent distinction is being made by the media between ‘innocent’ victims of HIV/AIDS, usually a coded meaning distinguishing those who contract the virus for example through blood transfusions, and gay men, who are seen as having ‘chosen’ to place themselves at risk of exposure. When asked what they thought of “sexual relations between adults of the same sex”:

half — one in every two people — took the most critical view possible, that such behaviour was ‘always wrong’. An additional one in ten thought it was ‘mostly wrong’ and less than two in ten thought it ‘not wrong at all’. The view that homosexuality was wrong grew over the decade — by 1987, nearly two-thirds thought it was always wrong, no doubt at least partly reflecting some of the debates surrounding HIV AIDS. (British Social Attitudes Survey, p. 14)

Yet despite Michael’s forthcoming left-leaning comments on many topical issues in interviews with the popular music press, Wham!’s politics are a glaring omission from *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*. The video lands in a year notable for its wide socio-political turmoil: 1984 sees Reagan institute the ‘Global Gag Rule’, also called the Mexico City policy, cutting off US funding to foreign NGOs offering abortions, abortion counselling and advocacy. In the same year, the UK purchases the Trident nuclear missile submarine system, tripling its nuclear forces; the US government, supported by Thatcher, deploys the Pershing II ballistic missile Weapon System in West Germany (Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, n.d.). AIDS deaths significantly increase and are widely reported with alarm but the epidemic remains officially unacknowledged by the two transatlantic leaders until 1985. A mutually beneficial intersection of gay rights activism and adjacent progressive causes such as the year-long strike by the National Union of Mine Workers is also common at this time. Political pop stars play an important role in this: Jimmy Somerville and Bronski Beat, for example, headline the Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) Pits and Perverts Ball at the Electric Ballroom in Camden

Town in December 1984.<sup>32</sup> In September, Wham! themselves do in fact appear alongside the actively political Style Council, led by ultra-credible and self-consciously fashionable former Punk Mod-revivalist Paul Weller, at a straight-oriented concert in support of that cause held at the Royal Festival Hall. They receive a hostile reception: as Michael tells Jim Reid in *Record Mirror* in November 1984, “it was the final proof that we don’t want to appeal to a market that reads [critic-led music magazines] *Sounds*, *NME* and *Melody Maker*, they’ve got such an attitude” (n.p.). Michael, it would seem, no longer possesses “street credibility” (Wham!, 1982a), and does not seek to.

As has been established, Moe Meyer’s (1994) assertion is that Camp, by virtue of its queerness, *must* be political. However, the current research recognises also that George Michael’s glamorous masculinity in 1984 is perhaps in closer alignment with Sontag’s musing that Camp is “serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious” (2009/1966, p. 288). *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*’s apolitics flows from this as a product of Michael’s unashamed understanding that fashion and pop are both the media *and* the message. The video clearly uses fashion in its primary operation as a promotional device, with no ambition to use the platform for

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<sup>32</sup> Somerville’s image represents a key observation of this chapter of the thesis: that there is a significant contradiction between mainstream trans-Atlantic homophobia and the popular success of queer performers propagated through music video. Many of the biggest British musical acts of the early 1980s, the grist for MTV’s mill, are fronted by gay men: as John Gill (1995) notes, at this time “Bronski Beat, Frankie Goes to Hollywood, Culture Club, Blancmange, Soft Cell, Erasure [Andy Bell and co-founder of Depeche Mode, Vince Clarke] duo are only the cream of first-division bands wholly or significantly composed of queers” (p. 4). While this research frequently refers elsewhere to performer/characters known for their outré New Romantic fashion images, including Steve Strange and Boy George, others such as Somerville may appear to heterosexual audiences to wear more conventional masculine dress; however, their homosexual identities and experiences are referenced openly in their lyrics, videos and masculine presentation. As Shaun Cole (2000) explains, the “political dress” of “out gay pop stars such as Jimmy Somerville” (p. 175) widened the appeal of a less flamboyant image of masculine homosexuality and fashionable queerness. This harder image of masculine androgyny influenced by both skinhead iconography and lesbian feminism known as the Hard Times look, after the September 1982 issue of the *The Face* titled *Hard Times: What Ever Happened to the Zoot Suit?* styled by Ray Petri (who is discussed further in this chapter) and shot by Sheila Rock, succeeded New Romanticism in gay and other club cultures (Cole, 2000, pp. 174-175). Such a development in dress practices can be seen to have already been observed by George Michael in October 1982 in his interview with *Record Mirror* (Cooper, 1982).



cultural critique. Within this dynamic, Michael's flamboyant wearing of CHOOSE LIFE is a paradox. It is a very effective example of the visual power of Katharine Hamnett's didactic political typographical fashion designs, yet the meaning of the slogan itself in the context of the video is ambiguous, and therefore powerless. Whether it be related to safe sex, nuclear disarmament or wealth distribution — or disingenuously claimed as it is in the present day by the American conservative 'pro-life' movement<sup>33</sup> — Michael's Camp embodiment of Hamnett's shirt in the video renders its message simply as being attractively, abstractly, positive.

Unlike Hamnett's 58% DON'T WANT PERSHING t-shirt, provocatively worn by the designer to meet Thatcher at a reception for British Fashion Week at Downing Street in March 1984 (Jobling 2015, p. 136), CHOOSE LIFE does not challenge, but rather, placates: if *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* is offensive, it is only to those who find its manufactured Campiness more saccharine than sweet. Despite a strong personal sense of social justice, in an era replete with grave concerns, George Michael's longed-for first number one single is no political pean. Wham!'s unabashed display of feel-good frivolity in the video means that the song is perhaps forever entwined with notions of masculine vanity and vacuity in the subconscious of popular culture. This association is apparent for example in Ben Stiller's 2001 broadly appealing feature film parody of the fashion industry *Zoolander* (2001), in which a troupe of male models are so foolish as to accidentally self-immolate in a slow-motion 'gasoline fight', a black comedy sequence set to Wham!'s cheerful musical track.

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<sup>33</sup> An example of this is the "CHOOSE LIFE T-SHIRT" available for purchase from American Christian right-to-life media organization Eternal Word Television Network, described thus: "Stand up for Life with this 'Choose Life' T-shirt!" Featuring "10 Reasons to choose life on the back" (EWTN, n.d.). These "reasons" include the claims that "because at conception, your baby's curly hair, green eyes, 5'6" frame, and female gender have already been determined" and "because at 4 months [gestation], she can listen to Mozart" (EWTN, n.d.).

We may assume that in the present era, a great number of people familiar with the slogan CHOOSE LIFE are unaware that the t-shirt is not a spontaneous cultural artefact of its era but rather the considered work of an ongoing designer, the politically-motivated Hamnett. In 2023, a Google search offers many bootleg versions for sale — including Halloween fancy dress costumes in which the t-shirt ‘is’ the 1980s — before suggesting Hamnett’s own website as a point of purchase. There, the t-shirt is made of organic cotton, and depicted as worn by contemporary fashion models presenting as both masculine and feminine, and also by Michael in historical photographs. Hamnett’s website describes the garment thus:

CHOOSE LIFE was Katharine’s first slogan campaign in 1983, inspired by the central tenet of Buddhism. To choose life is to do no harm – to live a good, meaningful life and change the world for the better. Life is only to be found on this planet, and is under threat. Save it. (n.d.).

Although this may make clear Hamnett’s original design intention, it is this thesis’s assertion that it is the video for *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* that now affords the phrase CHOOSE LIFE its pop cultural immortality and continued reinterpretation. The level of cultural ‘ownership’ of Hamnett’s signature typographic fashion style claimed by Wham! via the video is enduring in a way that in 1984, may be unforeseen. It is noted by this research however that transgression of the boundaries of the designer’s creative authority, by appropriating Hamnett’s political visual language ex-context purely as a marketing device, was initiated by Napier-Bell and Wham! as part of the act’s promotional campaign to break America, with the duo for example being photographed wearing self-produced t-shirts bearing the slogan NUMBER ONE after the track attained that chart position in November 1984.

## **A vision in pink**

In a second section of the video, Wham! take the Camp trace lingering in mid-century masculine pop fashion, and literally illuminate its fluorescent colours under ultraviolet light. Michael's costume change in the video is revealed in a swift cinematic transition typical of music video, in which colour 'transcends' the monochrome. At 01:03 of the video's 03:53 duration, Michael sings the final line of the first iteration of the song's chorus: "I wanna hit that high" (Fig. 34). The final word "high" is indeed sung high, the video 'documenting' Michael's vocal virtuosity as he energetically jogs along the stage catwalk, captured in slow motion like a sports replay. At this moment, there is a dissolve transition and when we arrive at the second verse, the diverse, unisex Wham! gang is now attired in an explosion of colour (Fig. 35).<sup>34</sup> Featuring very short shorts and trend-setting fingerless gloves, Michael's look is a masterful exercise in colour blocking (Fig 36). Amongst its neon shades including cobalt blue and acid yellow, what is most striking here is the prominence of pink: as we have seen in Genet's literary allusion, for much of the twentieth century this colour is representational of male homosexuality in an uncommonly explicit way.

The most grave of these associations is with the persecution of homosexuals in Nazi Germany. The 'pink lists' of 'suspected' homosexuals compiled by a dedicated unit of the Geheimnisstaatspolizei (Gestapo) from 1934 to 1945 lead to the arrest of an estimated 100,000, with up to 15,000 of those

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<sup>34</sup> As noted, Michael's own heritage is Greek Cypriot and English, with Ridgeley's being Egyptian and English, and while Wham! as a duo are presented as white British, their image from this period onwards reflects a sense of internationalism. The Wham! band includes people of colour, including regular backing singer Helen 'Pepsi' DeMacque, who is of Saint Lucian heritage. When considering the influence of music video upon other visual cultures, this research suggests that the highly colourful presentation of fashionable diversity in this section of the hugely popular video is a visual precursor to the United Colors of Benetton advertising campaigns led by art director Oliviero Toscani commencing in 1985, a very successful brand-building strategy that was ultimately criticised for its superficiality and cultural appropriation.



Fig. 34: Morahan, A. (1984) *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* [music video still].



Fig. 35: Morahan, A. (1984) *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* [music video still].



Fig. 36: Morahan, A. (1984) *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* [music video still].

convicted being sent to concentration camps (Gudgel 2010). Within the macabre iconography of the camps, a pink triangle identifies its wearer as homosexual. In subsequent decades, reclamations of the symbol become important acts of queer politics in the UK and US (Jensen 2002). In 1987, the pink triangle is adopted by the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) and coupled with the organization's slogan 'Silence=Death', powerfully raises awareness of AIDS as a political crisis (Campbell 2019). The symbol, and the colour more generally, remain indivisible from gay pride in the present day.

Yet pink as a fashion look of the New Man, and as worn by Michael in *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*, has a far more clear connection to an alternative meaning of the colour in the late-capitalist era. That is, as US cultural historian Regina Lee Blaszczyk explains, as an example of individualism through expression of consumer wealth (2012). This is afforded in part by newly developed synthetic manufacturing technologies of the post-war textiles industry.<sup>35</sup> It is also closely linked to structural changes in the fashion system in the post-war era: the increased power of fashion magazines in forecasting and dictating trends, and changing sociological conditions in consumer culture that are reflected in 'bubble up' — or 'across' — rather than 'trickle down' imposition of style. According to Blaszczyk, "women's magazines, which increasingly saw themselves as fashion

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<sup>35</sup> Blaszczyk's observation here leads to an issue which although external to this writing's principal discussion is nonetheless of interest to its context. That is once again in the figure of Ronald Reagan, the former Hollywood actor elected 40th President of the United States in 1981. In the 1950s, the already-avowed conservative Reagan was spokesmodel for the Van Heusen clothing company, a curiosity referred to by Frankie Goes to Hollywood in the anti-Cold War escalation song *Two Tribes* (1984). In 1953, Reagan appeared in a magazine advertising campaign for the company's Century shirt, "the only *shirt in the world* with a soft collar that *won't wrinkle ... ever!* [original italics]" (Phillips-Jones Corp, 1953). In a direct illustration of Blaszczyk's point, Van Heusen's use of new textiles technologies such as these in shirt manufacture extended to the use of colour. When considering the legacy of this in the commercial creation of New Man, it becomes notable that other advertisements by the company in the early 1950s often feature illustrations of young, white, hands-on fathers in coloured business shirts and ties. The conceptual presence of colour embedded in the 1953 Reagan advertisement was assured in popular culture another very particular way in 1985, when Andy Warhol used its imagery as the basis of *Van Heusen (Ronald Reagan)* in his screenprint series, *Ads* (1985).



Fig. 37: Morahan, A. (1984) *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* [music video still].



Fig. 38: Morahan, A. (1984) *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* [music video still].



Fig. 39: Morahan, A. (1984) *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* [music video still].

arbiters, indulged the rise of individual taste by promoting the personal color palette as a means of self-empowerment” (2012, p. 288). Just as with Elvis’s rock and roll, this enables the naturalization of the ‘feminine’, or effeminate, through the illusion of autonomy afforded by capitalism. Thus, straight masculine fashion is altered: Michael’s New Man wears pink because he *can*. The colour does not mark him as ‘other’; rather, he leads the gang, he sets the trend. He is the subject of the gaze, and also controls it. He *chooses* pink, just as he chooses ‘life’. At a time when the media increasingly depicts the male homosexual body only as a site of devastating sickness, the New Man is a Technicolor picture of health. Tanned, fit and fashionable, existing in an eternal moment of leisure, he is desirable, powerful and free (Fig. 37).

## **The New Man**

The 1980s sees the rise of the New Man across popular visual culture: a ‘sensitive’ masculinity supposedly redefined by second-wave feminism, but also importantly, a product of the advertising industry. Suzanne Moore suggests that this new image of masculinity — “many would argue that he exists only as an image” (1989, p. 45) — is made possible by two decades of gay and feminist politics, drawing on traditions of homo-erotica and yet specifically appealing to the active gaze of women. Paul Jobling (2014) notes that this “singular type of twentieth-century fashionable male” has been employed before: as early as 1919 by Selfridges’s marketing manager, Sidney Garland, and again in 1953 by Geoffrey M. Gilbert, head of menswear and styling for the House of Jaeger (p. 166). It is in the 1980s however that discussions of masculinity and consumerism coalesce around this trope, “adland’s dream male subject” (Jobling, 2014, p. 166). The New Man is emotionally aware and style savvy; he remains authentically male while proudly exhibiting a sensuality and aesthetic ‘feminine side’. The New

Man is both the object of the gaze and an enthusiastic consumer of the products he represents: fashion and its lifestyle accoutrements.

Michael is not only a pop pin-up for (mostly female) teenage fans, but a style role model for other aspirational new men. Blouson silhouettes, bright colours and big hair previously only seen in nightclubs and fashion magazines become commercially popular with a new type of menswear consumer. In a 2016 personal interview with Jay McCauley Bowstead, cultural theorist Frank Mort recalls observing average young men in the early 1980s suddenly “presenting themselves in a new way, dressed, styled and with hair like George Michael” (Mort in McCauley Bowstead, 2018, p. 61). This look requires concerted commitment to artifice: while Elvis’s greased pompadour is constructed of his naturally fair hair dyed black, Michael’s mane in this era — a mid-short semi-bouffant unisex style notably similar to that worn by another fashion plate of the time, Diana Princess of Wales, and also by Duran Duran lead singer Simon Le Bon — is made of naturally dark hair strongly highlighted blond, its layered cut given volume through labour-intensive blow-drying and the use of newly popular styling products such as hair mousse (Fig. 38).

Shaun Cole (2002) recognizes that this increase of style-consciousness in straight men occurs just as the popular stereotype of homosexual effeminacy is challenged by a prevalence of hyper-masculine sartorial cues in gay culture. The result is a kind of cross-cultural exchange, even outright appropriation, of previously differently understood sartorial cues of sexual orientation. Based on this understanding, the visual identity of the New Man is problematic primarily in its potential to mislead; in the 1980s, what is ‘gay’ and ‘straight’ masculine dress becomes ever more difficult to define.



As Suzanne Moore questions, does the to-be-looked-at-ness of the New Man simply “pull a homosexual discourse into a heterosexual space?” (1989, p. 58). The crucial role of the media industries in permitting and precipitating such sartorial appropriation is of obvious importance to understanding this issue in relation to the masculinities and homosocial interactions performed in early 1980s music video such as by *both* Wham! and Duran Duran, as the following chapter will also consider.

Jobling (2014) makes note of a report conducted by advertising agency McCann Erickson in 1984, which found that an overall 13.5 per cent of all British males could be described as being “new man”, albeit of three distinct types: “‘avant-guardians’ or nurturers, who were strongly contemporary and politically iconoclastic in regard to patriarchal notions of masculinity; self-exploiters, who were at the forefront of social and cultural trends; and innovators, who were style leaders in fashion and clothing” (p. 167). The current research observes that in the realm of pop music, whereas the descriptor “politically iconoclastic in regard to patriarchal notions of masculinity” might apply to the radical queer Somerville and Bronski Beat, for example, and “innovators, who were style leaders in fashion and clothing” to the flamboyant ‘gender benders’, the New Men of Wham! can be understood as “self-exploiters ... at the forefront of social and cultural trends”.

Sexual identification does not appear to be accounted for as being a contributing factor to McCann Erickson’s assignments; nonetheless it would seem plain that within this percentage and between these types of contemporary masculinity, there must be heterosexual men, homosexual men and indeed those whose sexuality falls outside these distinctions. As a marketing trope, the glamour of the New Man is regardless relentlessly

presented as through the validating lens of heterosexuality. Such is the prominence and cultural authority of mass media in the 1980s, of which advertising — including music video such as *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* — is a key part, that the New Man is a straight character whose power is not surrendered but rather *reinforced* through the commercial desirability afforded by the gaze.

### **British style magazine culture and early music video**

This thesis has already established that music video draws upon and extends the language of other media forms, including advertising and photography. Another site of the intersection of these visual cultures is the sphere of magazine publishing. It is useful to consider this when looking at the rise and influence of the New Man in Britain, and how he plays into the construction and representation of those gendered performer/characters in music video of the early 1980s who came to represent a new mainstream pin up pop culture.

In adjunct global Anglophone music markets such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand, the relationship between fashion, music and other media forms outside the phenomenon of 1980s music video may be less clear than it is in Britain, where many of the videos are made. At this time in Australia for example, images of contemporary fashionable masculinity are already far more immediately visible in the non-material media form of music video shown on national free-to-air weekly broadcast television than in the material form of high fashion or critical music magazines. These are niche cultural products shipped from overseas in small quantities, sometimes months after publication. In an environment where white, strikingly heteronormative sporting heroes are mainstream cultural and masculine style icons, new music video provides a timely visual reference for the

creation and wearing of a youthful and often transgressive masculine fashion that publishing, with the exception of magazines aimed at teenage girls, emphatically does not. In other words, unlike *in* Britain, music video *from* Britain is seen not simply as one of many media forms in which recognisable current fashion trends and fashionable people are represented. To introduce a point that will be expanded upon in Chapter 4 of the thesis, early music video is in fact the first, if not only, place where images of contemporary masculine fashion — with style emanating from Britain being a continuing colonial benchmark — and ‘sensitive’ new masculinities are popularly displayed.

In the UK, the emergence of the New Man is however just as closely linked to the birth of a new era in men’s fashion and style culture magazines, such as *The Face*, *i-D* and *Blitz*, all launched in 1980: “new style bibles [in which] a whole range of masculinities, androgynies (and indeed ‘male femininities’) were visible at the level of dress, styling, and the body” (McCauley Bowstead, 2018, p. 89). In America, as Frank Mort (1996) explains, major social transformation effected by feminism is, by the late 1970s, also reflected in changed taste patterns in the publishing market, resulting in the consumer choices of a “new personality, who was responsive to feminist demands” (p. 43). something reflected in fashion-aspirational titles such as *Gentlemen’s Quarterly* (*GQ*) and *Esquire*. The current writing observes that this is in a sense a continuation of the conflation of fashion and femininity — albeit of a feminist type — which separates the masculine mainstream of rock from the fashion phenomenon of pop, for fear of emasculation.

Contrastingly, as Mort continues to propose, in Britain, where feminism engages less directly with consumer culture, the editors of these new style

magazines do not acknowledge a debt to the women's movement, but rather reinforce an inter-discursive, highly-gender specific and commercial "masculine vision" (1996, p. 44). Mort suggests that the presence of "relatively 'out' homosexuals" (p. 44) such as the music critic Jon Savage and stylist Ray Petri — to be discussed shortly — in fact contributes to the overwhelmingly male culture of these publications, in which women are sidelined to supporting roles. Therefore, Mort contends, the British men's style press is a strongly homosocial visual culture, created for and by fashion conscious and culturally aware young men. In its visual analysis of *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*, this research suggests that the world of Wham! is not so very different.

It is hardly surprising that fashion and popular music tightly intersect in these titles, considering that Nick Logan, founder of *The Face*, begins his career as a music journalist and editor of the critic-led *New Musical Express* (NME) and the ten pop-oriented *Smash Hits*. Logan's understanding of the consumer process is informed by his involvement with the "hierarchy of taste" of the Mod subculture of the early 1960s (Mort, 1996, p. 26). Mort writes of Logan's belief that influential style innovators are at the vanguard of key market sectors, and how Logan observed a trickle down effect from those innovations when validated by the "opinion formers" of style magazines, becoming part of the "general culture", in the high street or on television, via a process of absorption" (1996, p. 26). This thesis recognises early music video of the type analysed here as being part of this model of consumption.

Art director of *The Face*, designer and typographer Neville Brody, arises from an art school and punk rock background and at the time of the

magazine's launch, holds the parallel role of art director of Fetish Records.<sup>36</sup> Mort (1996) suggests that "the philosophy of style" presented by Brody and Logan in *The Face* applied a notably inter-discursive masculine worldview in its style iconography, which: "cast its net wider than the printed page of the magazine. It gestured outwards, to the way in which men's identities were dramatised within broader networks of social life" (p. 44). This thesis observes a similar communicative ambition in much British music video of this period, which 'gestured' beyond its televisual format, drawing upon and dramatising masculine identities outside the previous acknowledged frames of reference of the US controlled music industry.

It is then interesting to reconsider the 'if you can't beat them, join them' approach undertaken by Wham!, and Michael in particular, to breaking the US market in 1984, as revealed to *Rolling Stone* two years later (Fricke, 1986). In *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*, Michael no longer attempts to represent or comment upon the experience of the "young guns having some fun" (Wham! 1982b)<sup>37</sup> "within the broader networks of social life" (Mort, 1996, p. 44) of Thatcher's Britain. Rather, as we have seen in this chapter, this strategy very much involves the presentation of the band's fashionable pop masculinity by way of a simple performance-style music video echoing the homosocial atmosphere of Elvis's Hollywood musical: an ultimately successful attempt at homogenised cultural Americanisation.

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<sup>36</sup> Brody also designs record covers for bands with origins in the underground electronic music scene such as Cabaret Voltaire and Depeche Mode, incidentally named for the French mainstream women's fashion magazine *Dépêche Mode*, which had launched in 1976. Brody is responsible for the 12" single picture sleeve for Depeche Mode's *Just Can't Get Enough*, released in Britain in September 1981 and in America in February 1982, being after the departure of songwriting keyboardist Vince Clarke (later of duos Yazoo with Alison Moyet and the aforementioned Erasure with Andy Bell). The music video for *Just Can't Get Enough*, directed by Clive Richardson, is the band's first, and also the only one in which Clarke appears.

<sup>37</sup> Shaun Cole (2020, p. 149) notes that the 1982 song *Young Guns (Go For It)* by Wham! (1982b) is knowingly referred to by Ray Petri in the similar titling of a homoerotically-informed, cowboy themed double-page spread in *i-D* in August 1985.

Mort (1996) reports that in contrast to the static images and stable icons of the American media, the fashion imagery in these new magazine titles avoided representational closure. This both reflected and influenced conversation about masculinities from *within* the male-centrism of British magazine culture, for “the single most important point about the representations of masculinity presented by the [1980s] style press was that they were plural and diverse, rather than unified and monolithic” (Mort, 1996, p. 45). Mort notes that a hallmark of this iconography is “a homosocial gaze” (p. 45), citing here the important influence of other contributing creatives such as the Scottish, Australian-raised Ray Petri, the leader of the Buffalo fashion collective and visionary stylist who dies of AIDS-related illness in 1989. As described by Cole (2020), Petri “plundered and mixed up existing styles and icons to create new images of masculinity ... Petri’s constructions of 1980s masculine identity were very much in contrast to contemporaneous hegemonic masculinity, that preferenced men over women and subordinated the weak, feminine or homosexual” (p. 136).

Using fashion and music as creative commentary on the economic, racial and gender tensions pulling at Thatcher’s Britain, the Buffalo group is strongly collaborative and closely informed by the varied cultural backgrounds of its members. Its interest in street and club culture enabled the creation of a richly-eclectic image archive or vocabulary that includes tailoring, sportswear, jewellery, Rude Boy motifs such as the pork pie hat, and icons of twentieth-century masculinity familiar to gay culture (Cole, 2020). Once again tellingly of George Michael’s keen amateur fashion sociology, these are the kinds of sartorial signifiers frequently referred to in early Wham! lyrics. An important point of divergence however between Michael and Petri is that whereas the former recognises these things as being symbols of specific subcultural identification in Thatcher’s post-Punk

Britain — mixed-culture music scenes, Soul Boys, Leather men, even perhaps Sloane Rangers — which he observes being worn by cultural *consumers* in clubs, the latter consciously transgresses fashion boundaries through techniques more akin to those used by cultural *producers* in clubs, through mixing styles just as a DJ mixes tracks.

Important to Petri's approach is a postmodern bricolage aesthetic in which traditionally gendered fashion signifiers are recombined to create an image of a 'modern man' in spreads for *i-D* and *The Face* that, in the way of genderfuck, juxtapose masculine, feminine and androgynous looks and garments, including "renderings of female masculinity [that] knowingly play with the genderbender styles of early eighties club and music cultures" (Cole, 2020, p. 149). Paul Gorman, author of the 2017 book *The Story of The Face: The Magazine that Changed Culture*, identifies the June 1984 issue of *The Face*, titled *Bodylicious*, as an iconic moment representing this:

this cover was one of the first to come out after legendary Buffalo stylist Ray Petri joined the fold (though he didn't style this shoot) the models are wearing Katherine Hamnett t-shirts and braces and I love the movement of the image, the woman jumping just slightly in the background. It was shot by Mario Testino who obviously went to shoot all those composed, beautiful portraits, but to me, this just felt very cool and very free (quoted in Davidson, 2017).

This Buffalo 'cool' is created through a clever paradox, in which *exclusivity* — that is, broadly desirable fashionability — is created through *inclusivity*, or an idiosyncratic, semiotically-nuanced sense of belonging. Testino's black and white cover image is of a male model who looks slightly off camera, and a female model who looks toward it, similarly attired in monochromatic, androgynous or unisex loose fitting clothing, both of whom appear to be of mixed-culture heritage. The models are captured in

dynamic motion; this renders the details of their garments indistinct. Of the Hamnett t-shirts Gorman describes, the one worn by the male model can be seen to read: WORLDWIDE NUCLEAR BAN NOW.

This magazine issue and *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* are released a matter of weeks apart; each features slogan t-shirts by Hamnett. The purpose and effect of the garment in the two contexts is however in strong contrast. While Wham!'s display of Hamnett's CHOOSE LIFE shirt in the video may be shallow or 'inauthentic', it is nonetheless, in accordance with understandings of modernist Camp — even residual camp — sincere in its ambition. It uses fashion to clearly communicate important information to consumers of mainstream popular music: the members of the Wham! concert band — women, people of colour — are gendered by their clothing and understood as being subordinate to the Wham! duo of Michael and Ridgeley through their wearing of non-designer custom t-shirts. It largely follows the conventions of a performance breakout sequence of a commercial star-vehicle Hollywood musical, in the style of *Jailhouse Rock*; in doing so, it informs the emerging language of music video, becoming an important reference point for the origin of the performance-style clip.

Conversely, this Petri-era cover of *The Face* reads as being more credible or 'authentic', in its knowing subversion of hegemonic fashion representation. It can then be read as being a cleverly 'insincere' image, because in working outside accepted vernacular of fashion portrait photography, it questions the very validity of its own visual culture: the style magazine. As a magazine editor in the 1980s, Logan considers 'irony' to be key to the success of these "polysemic texts" in Britain, which capitalise on a fledgling market for men's commodities through their contribution to a "flurry of discourse around the subjectivity of younger men" (Mort, 1996, p. 45). Mort sees in



the homosocial gaze applied to youthful masculinities in the iconography *The Face* a sense of knowingness, wherein ‘cool’ — the search for which was Petri’s quest — is expressed for example in an “exchanged ... look of recognition via direct eye contact” (p. 45).

The current research observes that this irony, knowingness and return of the gaze characteristic of British magazine culture is a significant Camp pivot point between the American *Jailhouse Rock* and the music video *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*. For example, in a structural sense, there is a simple distinction between these moving image texts featuring Elvis’s Vince Everett and George Michael’s performer/character: the former does not acknowledge the audience through the camera; the latter uses the medium to make love to the audience *via* the camera. This is particularly clear in the only non-performance-style section of Wham!’s video: the middle eight, in which a tanned Michael, hair frosted, eyebrows groomed and sporting gold hoop earrings, directly addresses the camera in a tight mid shot, self-embracing his pink t-shirted shoulders with florescent yellow fingerless gloved hands as he sings: “Cuddle up, baby, move in tight / We’ll go dancing tomorrow night / It’s cold out there, but it’s warm in bed / They can dance, we’ll stay home instead” (1984) (Fig. 39). Michael’s mugging, self-touching ‘come hither’ performance in this static break out sequence has a feminised quality that borders on gender parody.

Here, as opposed to reversing Mulvey’s gaze, Michael performs a kind of on screen desirability of the twentieth-century that in fact characterises Mulvey’s very idea of the feminine subject. In her content analysis of gender display in music videos, US new media scholar Cara Wallis (2010) reports that empirical studies of advertising media — of which she sees music video as a part — have associated power with more use of hand gestures, touching

others, and sustained gazing, and have found that men engage in such behaviors more than women; whereas self-touch, however, has been correlated with lower status and as such is more often associated with women (p. 162).

Whereas the British mens style press presents an image of the New Man that is 'alternative' and projects an adult understanding of sartorial gender and sexual ambiguity, Michael's New Man is a product of mainstream culture supported by media such as teen magazines traditionally aimed at a young, predominantly female audience. By extension, an analogy might be that a concept-style music video with an ambiguous narrative, like Bowie's *Ashes to Ashes* or Eurythmics's *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)* takes an approach similar to an ambitious fashion editorial such as those styled by Petri. In contrast, a performance-style pop music video like *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* — although still fashionable and indeed, for a mainstream audience, trendsetting — functions much more like a full-page advertisement in a moving teen magazine.

Differently to Petri's cultural critique — although also apparent in his work — in Wham!'s kind of knowingness, stylisation and the playfulness of "revelling in the idea of artifice" (Cole, 2020, p. 149), there is also self-conscious sense of maleness that borders on Sontagian Camp. Writing on uses of Camp in Pop, Andrew Ross (1988) observes the significance of modes of cultural production to the camp effect, something caused when "products (stars, in this case) of a much earlier mode of production ... become available, in the present, for redefinition according to contemporary codes of taste" (p. 5). In observing music video, this thesis considers George Michael's redefinition of the performer/character of the young, glamorous Elvis to be connected to this phenomenon. The

knowingness central to Michael's performance in *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* is tethered to his expert knowledge of the American rock/pop idiom, one to which Elvis had so strongly contributed. Recalled in the bristling late capitalism of an AIDS-darkened 1980s as having been a simpler time, the 1950s stands in popular culture for economic prosperity and carefree, youthful sexual optimism.<sup>38</sup>



Fig. 40: Morahan, A. (1984) *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* [music video still].

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<sup>38</sup> Consider here the frequently cited example of 1980s New Man is the appearance of the English model of Burmese, Irish, Dutch and French heritage, Nick Kamen, born Ivor Neville Kamen (15 April 1962 – 4 May 2021), in 1985 television commercial *Laundrette* for Levi's 501s. Produced by the British multinational advertising agency Bartle Bogle Hegarty, the commercial is set in a mid-century laundromat, presumably in the United States, and is accompanied by the musical soundtrack of Marvin Gaye's 1968 version of the Motown song *Heard it Through the Grapevine*. Its plot is straightforward: Kamen, styled in a rockabilly look evocative of 1950s Elvis and other stars of that period such as James Dean and Marlon Brando, performs an unselfconscious strip tease in full view of a room full of fellow patrons who include several titillated women of varying ages. First removing his Ray Ban sunglasses, then his t-shirt, then his button fly jeans, the soft-faced and youthfully-muscular Kamen is finally clad only in white boxer shirts and socks. He throws the jeans into the coin operated washing machine with a large handful of small stones, so as to personally customise his jeans by 'stone washing' them, this being the signature textiles treatment of the product for sale. Kamen, fondly remembered upon his death in social media posts by peer identities including Boy George and Duran Duran bassist John Taylor, also experienced brief success in Europe as a pop star protégé of Madonna in the later 1980s. His debut release of November 1986, *Each Time You Break My Heart*, is accompanied by a video directed by Jean-Baptiste Mondino and features other models associated with the Buffalo group (Cole, 2020, p. 149), reaching number five on the UK singles chart. Kamen connects several themes and identities who appear in this thesis. These include Petri, who is credited with having first brought Kamen to prominence through his appearance on the colourful cover of the January 1984 issue of *The Face*; in an earlier cultural moment, the model features as an extra in the 1982 music video for Visage's single *The Damed Don't Cry*, directed by Scot Midge Ure of the dapper New Romantic-adjacent synth pop group, Ultravox.

## Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, the research has found that the music video for Wham!'s *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* could not exist without the precedent of Elvis Presley's *Jailhouse Rock*. To establish this, it has applied a range of concepts from queer and feminist studies, cultural studies and sociology that inform theories of fashion, to each of the works and to a perceived relationship between them. The writing argues that it is indeed the case that in the late 1950s, Elvis composes the language of glamorous masculine fashion identity performance that Michael so effectively rephrases to seduce America's teen music consumers of the 1980s. But the chapter does not ultimately suggest that *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* is plagiaristic of its cinematic antecedent. To the contrary, it finds that this early music video exemplifies the way in which a powerful *new* media form is made by drawing from other visual cultures, in this case being rock and roll, advertising, television, magazine publishing, and, clearly, fashion, and that these influences are reciprocal. *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* is not entirely derivative, and as a fairly straightforward performance style music video, it is not especially innovative. As a marketing device for Wham! in the US, it is, however, enormously effective. This also reflects the mutuality of technologies and their time periods, for:

MTV immediately captured the attention of the younger baby boom generation, perhaps the richest consumer group in the history of the world. 'By marrying rock and roll to the pervasive power of television,' [quoting M. Williams in the *Washington Post*, December 13, 1989], MTV transformed the 'music that had questioned authority into one more facet of consumer culture' (Cunningham et.al, 2008).

*Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* and its recalling of *Jailhouse Rock* reveals much about popular constructions of masculinity in the latter twentieth-

century, and the contradictions of these in the age of AIDS. In using Elvis's language of glamorous masculinity, in which ambiguity is naturalized through commodification, George Michael creates a lasting statement about the cultural value of pop; and by using permission granted by the Camp trace and the fashion phenomena of the New Man, makes what is otherwise one of the most marginalised and vulnerable identities of the 1980s, the gay man, one of its most desirable.

In effect, the contradictory cultural processes that enable conflicting readings of the New Man are the tensions pulling at sunny MTV in AIDS-darkened 1984: a visual culture that on one hand "promotes gay imagery and style in order to target young men as consumers, and on the other [knows that] the political climate is increasingly repressive and anti-gay" (Moore, 1989. p. 58). Male beauty is hard currency in this era, where the economic imperative can seemingly override prejudice against 'pop' as being a feminized form of rock at its convenience. When Wham! invites the gaze, resistance is futile: "Michael never stops moving, preening, making eyes at the camera. He's a whirlwind of teeth and hair and calf muscles, and he makes it impossible to look away" (Breihan, 2020, n.p.). Elvis's naturalization of glamorous masculinity blazes this trail; a Camp trace encircles *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*'s unabashed display of fashionable, sexually ambiguous masculine allure (Fig. 40), joyfully accepted by millions of socially conservative fans who, at the same time, may actually wish harm upon 'ordinary' gay men.

In concluding its analysis of *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go*, the research argues that this music video's focus on the surface does not render it entirely superficial. Rather, it is evocative of a quotation included by Sontag amongst her *Notes on Camp* from *A Woman of No Importance* by Oscar

Wilde, to whom Sontag's (2009/1966) musings are dedicated: "I adore simple pleasures, they are the last refuge of the complex" (p. 288).

## **Chapter 4: *I've seen you on the beach and I've seen you on TV: Duran Duran, from New Romantics to New Men***

### **Prologue**

As identified, existing writing on music video often focuses upon the phenomenon of music television, specifically the dedicated US cable channel MTV. To set the scene for Chapter 4, we must once again consider that just as it was in Elvis's 1950s, in the 1980s, television remains a dominant media presence within the polyamorous relationship between fashion, masculinity and American consumerism. In the nascent music video era, television also plays midwife to their style-savvy son: the pop star New Man. While continued investigation of the role of MTV will be undertaken in the course of Chapter 4, the writing here will also take into account the importance of the reciprocity between music video and free-to-air or network television programs to the technical and artistic development, and cultural and commercial impact of the form. Among this type of television program with a pop clip or musical variety format, such as Australia's *Countdown*, hosted by Ian 'Molly' Meldrum, which will also be investigated in this chapter.

In November 1983, *Rolling Stone* magazine, a great arbiter of American rock music culture since the late 1960s, publishes a special issue entitled *England Swings: Great Britain invades America's music and style. Again.*, featuring a cover photograph of a sweetly smiling Boy George in his signature gender bending attire. Journalist Parke Puterbaugh's article *Anglomania: the second British invasion* (1983) in that edition of the magazine provides useful contemporaneous insight regarding the striking success of new British pop acts in the US in the early 1980s. Puterbaugh

identifies Duran Duran as being central to this phenomenon, and in doing so, specifically connects music video to fashion:

America did not suddenly wake up in 1981, like a pregnant woman with an inexplicable yen for pickles and ice cream, with a deep craving for kooky, eccentric British pop music. In the main, the country had shunned most anything that could be branded punk or New Wave, and took extreme displeasure at affectations in dress, makeup and hair style, particularly on men ... [then, a] “soft point” of no small consequence sprang into view on August 1st, 1981: MTV. The British won out here, hands down. Next to the prosaic, foursquare appearance of the American bands, such acts as Duran Duran seemed like caviar (n.p.).

By the mid-eighties in the US, even discounting the cable television phenomenon, music video’s language of new fashioned masculinities has such compelling audience appeal that it bears influence upon narrative television productions. A clear and intentional example of this media intercourse is the “high-gloss visual style and MTV-inspired” *Miami Vice*, an original show devised in the US where “TV cops have never been so glamorous” (Zoglin, 1985, p. 60). As will be explained the following chapter, specific aspects of the visual language of music video that *Miami Vice* quotes can be seen to originate in Russell Mulcahy’s colourful, aspirational celebration of new masculinity in his 1982 clip for Duran Duran’s *Rio*.

### ***Miami Vice***

The very popular *Miami Vice* runs on NBC for one hundred and eleven episodes from 1984-1989 (IMDb, n.d.). Eschewing the usual hard-boiled noir of police procedurals, “TV’s hottest and hippest new cop show” (Zoglin, 1985, p.60), celebrates a kind of arrogant peacockery, validating European men’s fashion for unfashionable American men by associating it with the straight masculine stereotype of the police detective. Its stars, Don Johnson



as Detective Sonny Crockett and Philip Michael Thomas as Detective Ricardo Tubbs who wear “the latest in Italian menswear by Armani and Versace, introduced a ‘no socks’ look and pastel T-shirts worn under sports coats to men who never looked at *Gentlemen’s Quarterly* or *Esquire*” (Cunningham et. Al., 2008, p. 209). There is a loose, ‘authentic’ masculine sensuality to the tanned, white Johnson/Crockett performer/character's embodiment of fashion in particular, which also inspires mini trends in men’s grooming and styling, such as ‘designer stubble’ — which also becomes a signature of George Michael’s image in the later 1980s — and the wearing of Ray Ban Wayfarer sunglasses.

Fashion academic Vanessa Brown (2005) writes on popular culture’s strong association of the wearing of sunglasses with twentieth century notions of ‘cool’. Dick Pountain and David Robins’s book *Cool Rules: Anatomy of an Attitude* (2000), relied upon by Brown, offers a speculative diagnosis of ‘cool’, by arguing that twin revolutions transformed post-war America: the cultural revolution of the 1960s, which favoured equality and individualism; and the laissez-faire revolution of Reagan’s 1980s, “a morally lax yet economically successful capitalist society” (Pountain & Robins, 2000, p. 7). Pountain and Robins argue that the result of these seemingly contradictory influences, in which Reaganite day-jobs routinely give way to a social life shaped by the counter-cultural and moral universe of the Sixties, is reconciled through the notion of ‘cool’. Thus we can divine the cultural atmosphere into which music video is absorbed in the US of the early 1980s, via the broadcast mechanism of television.

Pountain and Robins (2000) propose that the aesthetic of ‘cool’ in post-war white culture is developed by heavily borrowing from that which had been developed by black jazz and blues musicians, principally as a form of

rebellion and protest against discrimination in the white-owned music industry (p. 8). However, this new white idea of cool “took its name from its nonchalance, quite the opposite of the righteous indignation traditionally associated with rebellion” (Pountain and Robins, 2000, p. 8). Noting how ‘cool’ continues to carry connotations of anti-establishment and anti-authority, Pountain and Robins describe a “cool attitude” as being “constructed from four principal character traits: detachment, narcissism, irony and hedonism” (p. 8). A jagged line can be drawn between the embodiment of this by pop culture rebels such as James Dean and Elvis’s Vince Everett, and the sanitised, nostalgic retro masculine ‘cool’ manufactured in early 1980s music imagery. It is also present in music videos of the 1980s which draw less upon the iconography of mid-century denim and leather, signifiers of straight masculinity that somewhat reinterpret homosexual fashion tropes (Cole, 2000), and more from the glamorous-but-rebellious post-war heterosexual sartorial attitude embodied by Frank Sinatra’s Brat Pack or Hugh Hefner’s early Playboy persona. A prominent example of this refashioned ‘lounge lizard’ is the shirt-and-tie sartorialism of Yorkshire born former jazz fusion and soul/blues rock singer Robert Palmer (born 19 January, 1949 , died 26 September, 2003), surrounded by a bevy of passionless female beauties in the music video *Addicted to Love* (1986), which will briefly appear later in Chapter 4.

It is no accident that *Miami Vice* bears an aesthetic similarity to music video, and that its stars should be attired in a similar ‘sophisticated cool’ style to glamorous heterosexual pop music personae. Writing in *Time* magazine in 1985 on the show’s huge popularity, Richard Zoglin reports that *Miami Vice*’s outline conceived by an NBC executive is simply, “MTV cops” (p. 60). The influence of this inspiration is clear, for in *Miami Vice*:

the plots whiz by with a minimum of exposition, the dialogue is tough and spare, the rock music almost nonstop. Characters may be shot in lyrical long shots or bathed in moody lighting or framed against semiabstract pastel backdrops. The local color of South Florida is augmented by the local colors [sic]: flamingo pink, lime green, Caribbean blue. *Miami Vice* has been filmed under what may be the strangest production edict in TV history: ‘No earth tones’ (Zoglin, 1985, p. 60).

Certainly, on the production design-driven *Miami Vice*, colour pops: “on a typical episode, Crockett and Tubbs wear from five to eight different outfits — always in shades of pink, blue, green, peach, fuchsia and the show's other ‘approved’ colors — from such chic designers as Vittorio Ricci, Gianni Versace and Hugo Boss” (Zoglin, 1985, p. 60). Perhaps not since J.C. Flügel’s ‘Great Masculine Renunciation’ of the late eighteenth-century, wherein “men gave up their right to all the brighter, gayer, more elaborate, and more varied forms of ornamentation, leaving these entirely to the use of women” (1930, p. 111) has such anti-austere clothing featured en masse in the wardrobes of conforming Anglophone young men of the cultural mainstream.

This thesis understands that is too great a stretch to see music video of the early 1980s as plainly renewing eighteenth-century associations of masculinity and colour, for example between ‘pink’ and ‘power’.<sup>39</sup> It does suggest however that colourful masculine fashion in the broadly capitalist and heteronormative visual culture of 1980s television expresses aspirational freedom of choice, and a fiction of louche-yet-affluent cosmopolitanism. The situation of *Miami Vice* here suggests that colour as

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<sup>39</sup> It is noted that: “As late as 1939, a *Parents’ Magazine* article argued that pink, a pale tint of red, was appropriate for boys because of red’s connection with Mars, the god of war ... [but] by 1950, a combination of public opinion and manufacturers’ clout ordained ... pink for girls and blue for boys” (Callahan & Paoletti, 2007, p. 128).

a trend associated with the New Man in the US can be seen as somewhat *coincidental* to the colourful, gender-playful flamboyance which characterised the more alternative and artistic peacock revolution of Britain's swinging 1960s, rather than directly arising from it. This writing suggests that this is because a European, if not essentially British, sense of flamboyance arising from the attitude of the dandy has been mediated through the form of music video. There is a substantial case to be made that a specific aesthetic influence upon the notion of *Miami Vice*'s colourful, tropically-located suit-wearing playboy 'MTV cops' is the image of the Antony Price-attired Duran Duran in the music video *Rio* (1982), analysis and theoretical contextualisation of which will be now be the central focus of this chapter.

## Chapter Introduction

Directed by Australian Russell Mulcahy, *Rio* (1982) is the well-remembered music video accompanying the title track of the second studio album by Duran Duran, a group comprising five music and style-conscious young men formed in Birmingham, UK, in approximately 1978 (Taylor, 2012). The band's origins lie in the meeting of keyboardist Nick Rhodes (born Nicholas James Bates on 8 June, 1962) and bassist John Taylor (born Nigel John Taylor on 20 June, 1960) as schoolboys, in 1973 (Taylor, 2012, p. 47).<sup>40</sup> The definitive line-up of the group, as they appear in *Rio*, is completed by lead singer, Hertfordshire native Simon Le Bon (born on October 27, 1958),

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<sup>40</sup> Rhodes's first stage name in Duran Duran, around 1979, is in fact Dior Bates; the more "prosaic [choice of] 'Rhodes' seemed to have the right blend of high and low culture, drawing as it did from the Clash's manager, Bernie, and fashion's high priestess, Zandra" (Taylor, 2012, p. 92).

drummer Roger Taylor (born on April 26, 1960), and guitarist Andy Taylor, who hails from Northumberland (born on February 16, 1961).<sup>41</sup>

Duran Duran place the fashioned image at the centre of their pop stardom ambitions from the outset. In his memoir of almost forty years later, John Taylor tells of his and Rhodes's initial, uniting interest in pop fashion, and their DIY, hands-on approach creating it in the 1970s. When considering Duran Duran's significant subsequent international influence *upon* both masculine and feminine teen fashion in the 1980s, the following recollections by John Taylor (2012) of the precocious young music fans' humble first forays into style, bear repeating in full:

[in 1973 at the ages of eleven and thirteen, respectively] Nick and I both wore chiffon without needing much encouragement, and we both loved the clothes, the hairstyles and the make-up that helped make Britain's glam rock era so great. Neither of us was old enough, really, or had the dough, to fully express ourselves the way we liked, and besides, the glam movement had peaked on that Bowie tour [the first concert attended by the boys] the previous summer, but we found our level.

Bryan Ferry's sartorial direction was having its effect [the second concert they attend being Roxy Music], and all the boys were going through their dad's wardrobes to find his old demob suit; the forties stylings, the baggy double-breasted suits like Bogie wore in *Casablanca*.

Dad's fitted me perfectly. But then there was the transsexual glam aspect, and we found ourselves mixing it up with ladies' blouses. At British Home Stores, in the [Birmingham] city centre, there was a huge floor filled with ladies two-piece suits from the forties and fifties to be had for a song.

Vintage heaven. Some of those jackets were divine, and fitted both Nick

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<sup>41</sup> To clarify: John Taylor, Roger Taylor and Andy Taylor are not related to each other, nor are any related to Roger Taylor, drummer of the band Queen.

and me. Throw in a little chiffon, maybe an animal-print scarf from Chelsea Girl, and you were away. 'You're not going out dressed like that?' our parents would cry. 'Don't you worry about it, Father' Nick would tell his dad defiantly, as I applied a little lip gloss in their bathroom (pp. 50-51).

The masculine fashion influence of the lead singer of Roxy Music, Bryan Ferry, upon young men inclined toward glamorous style in the early 1980s has not yet been recognised by this thesis, although it must be noted that Ferry is frequently mentioned in the same breath as Bowie in this regard. What substantially differentiates these Glam performers is their sexual self-identification. Unlike Bowie, who himself appears on record sleeves in attire that transgresses gender norms, Roxy Music's album covers feature cheesecake photographs of female models, exemplifying the sexy/sextist tension that characterises heterosexual pop culture at this time. Over the course of the 1970s, Ferry's dominant heterosexuality becomes particularly central to the image of the band, his personal relationships with women from the world of fashion, such as Texan model Jerry Hall, being heavily featured in the marketing of Roxy Music. The louche Ferry's retro-lounge lizard image features affectations such as a pencil-thin moustache and mid-century style suits as John Taylor describes, or a dapper 'GI' military look with epaulettes and tucked-in tie. Ferry's sartorialism is a direct inspiration for Duran Duran's *Rio* costume choice of bespoke suits by British mainly-womenswear designer Antony Price, garments that will be addressed later in this chapter.

However, when considering the subsequent huge mainstream appetite for 1980s new pop fashion, it is of note that the young, self-fashioned New Romantic Duran Duran do not construct their image purely from masculine elements. Rhodes' (cited in Jones, 2020) reflections upon the constitutive

role of clothing ensembles which blur the boundaries between gendered garments and grooming styles, to the formulation of Duran Duran in Birmingham corroborate John Taylor's, and are equally informative to understanding the new masculine image of the band.

From Rhodes' recount below, we can understand that unlike perhaps many New Romantics who genderfuck their fashioned identities in outward display of their *actual* non-heteronormative sexual and gender identities, the sartorial gender transgressions of the Glam-inspired, pre-fame Duran Duran are purely aesthetic. Recalls Rhodes:

when we [himself and John Taylor] formed Duran Duran, it was really a melting pot [of] all the things we knew as teenagers, and we somehow wanted to make a hybrid to create our own sound and our own look to launch ourselves and we knew we didn't want to do anything that wasn't stylish ...

We were actually just searching for things that we thought were cool, often we'd find women's clothes, because men's clothes actually weren't particularly flamboyant at that time, so we'd literally go to small women's boutiques and buy jackets off the shelf or a shirt that buttoned up the wrong way for us, but it didn't really matter. And you'd mix that up with leather trousers from a biker shop or something, and then you'd find a shop like Kahn & Bell,<sup>42</sup> which was a dream, because everything they made, we wanted to wear (cited in Jones, 2020, p. 153).

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<sup>42</sup> This fashion label and boutique established in 1976 as a collaboration between young Birmingham designers Jane Kahn and Patti Bell, is considered by many outside of the London 'clique' to be an overlooked important contributor to the look of 1980s New Romanticism: "Kahn and Bell's design sources were eclectic, bringing together Egyptian, African and Far East art and design influences which were combined with futuristic and fantastic elements. Their style was elaborate, almost theatrical, and had a particular appeal to the more extreme New Romantics (V&A, n.d.).

This thesis takes the view that this ‘superficial’ intention behind the provincial English band’s flamboyant approach to dress makes it no less ‘genuine’. Rather, John Taylor and Rhodes’ enthusiasm for fashion is both something of a Barthesian semiotic strategy in its focus on appearance, and Sontagian pure Camp in its ambition, demonstrating a ‘sophisticated naïve’ understanding of late twentieth-century pop music and fashion as integrated visual cultures. A highly attuned and confident emphasis on the visual permeates every aspect of the ‘brand’ of Duran Duran. Following the lead of famous musical hero art school attendees such as Ferry and John Lennon, John Taylor is drawn to Birmingham Polytechnic’s College of Art and Design, “fill[ing] up books with ideas for posters and band logos” (2012, p. 69). As we shall see later in this chapter, the adjunct field of graphic design plays a role in the story of *Rio*, and subsequently of music video more widely.

The young John Taylor and Rhodes are enthusiastic and broad consumers of post-war pop culture. The band Duran Duran is, for example, knowingly mis-named for the villainous character Durand-Durand of Roger Vadim’s 1968 Camp-erotic, counter culture science fiction classic, *Barbarella*, starring Jane Fonda.<sup>43</sup> While John Taylor claims to have been drawn to the name owing to his interest in cinema, it is eerily coincidental that Birmingham’s largest nightclub is called Barbarella’s, particularly when the bassist recounts being an under-age music fan sneaking into that venue with Rhodes in February 1978 to see the city’s first headline show by “about to explode” US band Blondie (2012, p. 74).

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<sup>43</sup> Vadim’s film is based on a French serialised comic created in 1962 by Jean-Claude Forest and published by Éric Losfeld as a book in 1964, becoming known as the first ‘adult’ graphic novel. Durand-Durand is played in Vadim’s film played by Irish actor Milo O’Shea; in an intriguing aside to this chapter, O’Shea ‘reprises’ his role in Russell Mulcahy’s *Arena* (*An Absurd Notion*), a concept concert film made for Duran Duran in 1984.



Chapter 2 of this paper has explained the significance of London's youth club culture to the emerging form of music video. In particular, it has looked at the influence of stylistic approaches to music and 'gender-bending' fashion apparent in the wake of 1970s David Bowie, most specifically the New Romantic Punk/Postpunk subculture as it coalesced at nightclubs such as Blitz, which had arisen from 'Bowie nights'. In considering Duran Duran as early New Romantics, it is of note that the influence of Bowie and the phenomenon of such fashionable gatherings of his musical acolytes and stylistic progeny is not confined to Britain's capital. In Birmingham, too, Bowie's 1970s glam rock legacy is filtered through club culture by and to those who will become his *new* pop peer group in the early 1980s.

Steve Dagger, manager of Blitz 'house band' Spandau Ballet, ultimately Duran Duran's main rivals as commercially and internationally popular British New Romantic acts, describes this national alternative club culture and in the process, also addresses the nature of hierarchical provincialism:

in early 1980, I heard there was another group in Birmingham: Duran Duran. As I perceived it, they had a disadvantage as they weren't in London ... there were similar sorts of clubs in every big city - you had Pip's in Manchester, the Rum Runner in Birmingham, Maestro's in Glasgow, Valentino's in Edinburgh, and there were various clubs in Sheffield. The idea of playing keyboard-oriented electronica came from those clubs (quoted in Jones, 2020, p. 255).

In his 2012 memoir, John Taylor recalls how when scoping Birmingham for potential performance venues with Rhodes in 1979, the pair walked "up Hill Street, [and] noticed posters for a 'Bowie night' at a nightclub called the Rum Runner. 'New Sounds, New Styles', the poster promised" (p. 103). Rhodes testifies further to this early nightclub connection to Bowie, albeit

with a somewhat self-aggrandising discrepancy in the chronology of Duran Duran's early ascendancy:

when I was asked to DJ at the Rum Runner [nightclub] in Birmingham, I basically just played all my David Bowie records. This was in 1978, and we were just about to form Duran Duran, and all of us loved Bowie ... Duran Duran had a single vision of what we wanted to do: we wanted to mix glam rock and punk rock with a little bit of disco, although the prime motivation for forming in the first place was David Bowie. It always was. An entire generation of groups who formed in the late seventies or early eighties only happened because of David. He is basically responsible for British music in the first half of the eighties. There was a decadence about him that was appealing ... something very exciting (quoted in Jones, 2020, p. 152).

Thus, we see further justification for two observations already made by the current research. The first of these is that 'Bowie's glamour' in itself functions as a kind of genre, both musically and visually. This is affirmed by Rhodes's *mise en place* of ingredients for a successful pop group in Duran Duran, as recounted here: a soupçon of "glam rock", a dash of "punk rock", and a pinch of "disco", combined using a creative recipe perfected by Bowie.

The second observation made by this thesis that is supported by Rhodes's reminiscence is that Bowie's queerness and decadent dandy style of the 1970s remains a touchstone in Britain in the 1980s, even if this is in ironic concert with Bowie's own embracing of a more conservative, heteronormative image of pop masculinity in that decade. It could be argued that Duran Duran, who continue to record and perform in the current era, are outliers in the current study for an axiomatic reason: like Ferry, their high glamour is unambiguously heterosexual. However, following Bowie, they unashamedly draw upon queer styles in building their

sartorial repertoire as early New Romantics. To many outside Britain's cultural climate of the early 1980s, both straight and gay — including media figures such as Andy Warhol and Molly Meldrum, reflections on the group by both of whom are cited in this chapter— the heterosexual Duran Duran's feminised fashion image is initially as confusing as that of the recognised gender benders.

This is not so much the case in Britain. Paul Morley, Stockport-born British music journalist for NME between 1977 and 1983 and a regular contributor to *Blitz* magazine from 1984 to 1987, is known for the incorporation of critical theory into his popular criticism.<sup>44</sup> He also *hates* Duran Duran, and has little time for many other successful new pop acts. Says Morley:

I hated them from the point of view of a rock critic taking pop seriously, even when it was just for fun ... to understand them you need to understand the times [following the] bruising, disorienting seventies. Things were intellectually and spiritually tightening up under the iron grip of Thatcherism, and at the same time loosening up economically and socially. Music magazines turned glossy, gossipy, and colourful, requiring new sorts of fairy-tale cover stars (cited in Jones, 2020, p. 380).

Morley goes on to specifically argue against the new pop on the basis of its relationship to fashion and the fashion pose. He proposes that in the era of post-Punk, “hardcore New Romantics [may have been] all about the clothes, cosmetics, travel and showing off [but] as a response to grievous,

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<sup>44</sup> Morley, a committed David Bowie fan, is also: co-founder of ZTT Records with musician and producer Trevor Horn, himself formerly of The Buggles; is a member with Horn of art-synth musical group Art of Noise; and is credited with much of the marketing and promotional success of Frankie Goes to Hollywood, who are ZTT's most prominent act. This promotion incorporates the use of typographic t-shirts very much in the style of Katharine Hamnett, bearing slogans such as: ‘Frankie Say Relax’, a direct reference to the title of the band's first hit, which is a controversial ode to casual gay sex; and the more political ‘Frankie Say Arm the Unemployed’, proposing an anti-Thatcher view in alignment with the agitant left wing Morley's own.

turbulent times, Steve Strange, Spandau Ballet, Wham! and Duran Duran preferred the dolled-up posing inside VIP sections of exclusive nightclubs” (cited in Jones, 2020, pp. 380-381). Although disapproving of these new celebrities, Morley is nonetheless perceptive when describing “dandy tabloid-labelled New Romantics” of the turn of the 1980s such as Duran Duran as “looking back longingly over the spiky heads of the harsher, angrier punk to the showy costumes and window-dressing camp of glam, when pop stars looked like pop stars” (cited in Jones, 2020, p. 380).

As we have seen in Chapter 2, non-normative gender identity and its representation through ‘outrageous’ aesthetics is a strong feature of the fashioned masculinity of Glam, regardless of a performer’s own sexual identity. Duran Duran’s band’s early New Romantic masculine image, descended from Glam, well-supports Elizabeth Wilson’s (2003/1985) view that:

outrage dressing, ambiguous as it is, may on occasion express simply — ambiguity. At first glance the androgyny of rock stars such as David Bowie shocks. New boundaries of boldness have surely been set when a man wears make-up ... [but] these styles may turn out to be little more than new forms of dandyism (p. 200).

John Taylor’s (2012) recount of the first gig by the definitive line-up of the group at the Rum Runner before an “eclectic and outrageous scene ... pretty standard for a Tuesday night in 1980”, provides evidence that Duran Duran’s New Romantic image is perhaps merely consistent with their youthful Birmingham social milieu (p. 121). John Taylor describes how at the show: “everyone had dyed, styled or shaved their hair. Most were wearing make-up. It was a fashion interzone between punk, Goth and asymmetric forties makeovers that would between them define the next few years of pop-culture style” (2012, p. 121). This thesis argues that it is

through the medium of music video that this ‘outrageous’ new fashion language becomes known to the world.

This chapter will first chart a course between Duran Duran’s debut music video *Planet Earth* (1981) and *Rio* (1982), both directed by Mulcahy, identifying a notable reciprocity between the aspirational band, the pioneering director and this emerging form of visual marketing for pop music. It will apply structural analysis to *Rio*, and subsequently: explain *Rio*’s relationship to the boy-group genre; discuss the origins of Mulcahy’s music video practice; and consider both this and *Countdown* in light of the notion of Antipodean Camp (Perry, 1998). The chapter will also describe the graphic design style of American commercial artist Patrick Nagel, an illustration by whom decorates the cover of *Rio* (1982), and how such images are influential to the language of music video, through the example of Robert Palmer’s *Addicted to Love* (1986).

In its fashion analysis of *Rio*, the chapter will consider the two looks adopted by the band in the video: colourful suits by British designer Antony Price; and the ‘costume’ of Duran Duran’s aspirational young, white masculine bodies. To understand this latter aspect of the performance of late twentieth century new masculinity by these New Romantics-turned-New Men, the chapter will consult Aileen Moreton Robinson’s (2015) argument regarding performative acts of colonialism, or “bodies that matter on the beach” (p. 33).

## **Russell Mulcahy and Duran Duran, music video pioneers**

That music video has the potential to be a powerful branding and marketing strategy in pop music is something clearly understood by Duran Duran. The following assertion by Saul Austerlitz (2007), while somewhat lacking in accuracy and insight, nonetheless helpfully phrases the common understanding of Duran Duran's closeness to the emergent media form:

the inaugural video shown on MTV, famously, was the Buggles' "Video Killed the Radio Star" (1979) [directed by Mulcahy] ... but the quintessential videomakers of this early era were New Wave stars Duran Duran. The quartet [sic] of easy-on-the-eyes British lads were among the first, along with David Bowie ... to understand the extent to which music video could create and craft an image (p. 33).

Central to this is Duran Duran's choice of music video directors with whom they collaborate. Mulcahy's relationship to the emerging visual language of music video is a highly significant one (Shore, 1984), with the lifelong cinephile's rapport with the emergent form of music video being already well established when in 1981 the band select him to helm the music video for their debut single, *Planet Earth* (Zaleski, 2021). It is widely known that Mulcahy's video for The Buggles' *Video Killed the Radio Star* (1979) is the first clip ever played on the MTV network, at 12.01 am on August 1, 1981. Mulcahy states with honesty of this early work that: "technically, this video was pretty ropey ... but the ideas and the energy were there - after this video, record labels came to me for my 'look' and pretty much gave me a free conceptual rein" (quoted in Shore, 1984, p. 262).

Born in Melbourne on 23 June 1953 and raised in the regional New South Wales city of Wollongong — a place dominated by surf culture and the

residues of coal mining and steel manufacture — Mulcahy is in retrospect perhaps an unlikely leading auteur of quintessentially British music video. However, as the director reveals in a 2016 interview with online cinema essayist Paul Rowlands, Mulcahy is a backyard cinematographic prodigy: “I picked up my first camera, a standard 8mm camera, when I was 14 ... my love of film and photography, and of the power of the image, came at an early age” (in Rowlands, 2016, n.p.). In the colourful carnival of *Rio*, it is clear that something of the joy of the teenager remains in Mulcahy’s approach to image making. So too, does the visual influence of beach culture: sea, sun, sand and young, tanned white male bodies comprise much of the video’s escapist imagery. Familiar images such as these, typical of the British colonial popular culture of the twentieth century, will be addressed in theoretical terms shortly.

The director’s youthful interest in moving image culture is idiosyncratic. Mulcahy’s first film love is the genre film, namely those from Hammer Film Productions, the British film production company known best for their for gothic horror and science fiction fantasy films of the 1950s-1970s which are in fact banned by censors in Australia until 1969 (Rowlands, 2016, n.p.). These films are Camp and operate using visual codes of cross-reference in ways that can be seen as postmodern, often prefiguring the theorisation of such strategies in popular culture. In 1981 then, the young band from the provinces and the young director from the colonies can be seen as operating at the same level of cultural naïvety and notoriety. In 2016, Mulcahy reflects upon his first meeting with Duran Duran:

the first video we did together was Planet Earth. I did some very rough storyboard sketches for the video and there were some unusual images, and the band said ‘Yeah, let’s go for that.’ The guys turned up on a bus from Birmingham, and arrived in their New Romantic clothes. I had my surfer hair and was in a T-shirt and jeans. But we just hit it off. They were

young and brave, as was I really. From then on, we just had this bond ... Simon and I had a brotherly relationship. We just became very good friends, the whole band and I actually. We travelled the world together. In those days I was a tourist with a big camera (in Rowlands, n.p.).

The glamorous ‘music video tourism’ developed by Mulcahy and Duran Duran in the clips made to promote the band’s sophomore album *Rio* creates some of the enduring images of the genre and the era. There are nine tracks on the album *Rio*, and music videos directed by Mulcahy and shot on location in Sri Lanka and Antigua are made to accompany and promote five of them; one further studio-based video is directed by Birmingham animator and film maker Ian Eames, working from a brief by Mulcahy (Zaleski, 2021, p. 89). *Rio* is the fourth of these videos, shot in Antigua in May 1982 and released six months later (Jones, 2020, p. 377). The *Rio*-album videos are produced during a frenzy of American record company excitement of the fashion aware boy band, which is itself in fact precipitated by interest in two earlier music videos, *Planet Earth* and *Girls on Film*, both made in 1981 to promote Duran Duran’s self-titled debut album.

These 1981 videos by Duran Duran are afforded heavy airplay on the fledgling MTV cable channel, and the directly-attributable effectiveness of exposure on music television to sales of the band’s records becomes validation not just of the form of music video, but of the MTV network itself. Annie Zaleski (2012) cites the recollections of a music industry executive at Capitol Records, Bruce Garfield, who describes how despite a lack of radio airplay, both The Buggles’ *Video Killed the Radio Star* single and the *Duran Duran* album suddenly and unexpectedly sell out of record stores in the specific areas of US regional cities that are wired to the new



cable channel. Explains Garfield: “we started putting two and two together to realize that the visual was selling the band” (p. 80).

In this regard, it is beneficial to the young Duran Duran that they are signed to the record company EMI. In the early 1980s, the media conglomerate’s talent roster includes Queen, noted previously in this thesis as early innovators of the form in the groundbreaking *Bohemian Rhapsody* (1975), and the young Kate Bush, whose fear of flying necessitates the production of early clips such as the iconic *Wuthering Heights* (1978), which are sent to external media territories as promotional vehicles in lieu of touring (Zaleski, 2021, p. 70). Therefore, EMI are more open to promoting international acts via the novel form of music video than many other major music companies, and support Duran Duran’s efforts in this area with unusually high budgets. Estimates of the cost of the six *Rio* album videos vary between Shore’s (1984) US \$200 000 and John Taylor’s (2012) £30 000, with Zaleski also referring to a 2008 memoir by Andy Taylor which cites a figure of £55 000, and a 1984 band biography by future best-selling author Neil Gaiman which mentions an advance to the band for the videos to a total of £50 000 (2021, p. 72). Whichever figure is accurate, in 1982 these are large sums of money to be entrusted to the making of what are essentially a series of on-location interpretive short films by an early career, experimental director, for a novel, highly-fashioned British musical act who are denied US radio exposure, being hitherto an unrivalled method of popular music promotion in the American media market.

Why then should the American music industry specifically warm to Mulcahy’s directorial aesthetic, and to the highly fashioned band Duran Duran, and how did their collaborations begin to define music video? Helpfully to this thesis, a partial answer can be found in the opinion of Alan

Hunter, one of MTV's original VJs, who identifies a noted difference between Duran Duran's videos and those which had been previously shown on US television. Hunter's view is that whereas American musicians, or those with "more of an American sensibility ... tended to take a more literal approach in their clips ... the music of the young New Wave romantics [sic] lent itself better to a more ephemeral ... or a little looser interpretation" (quoted in Zaleski, 2012, pp. 78-79). Duran Duran's manager in the early 1980s, Paul Berrow, who with his brother Michael is also owner of the Rum Runner nightclub, recalls the band's choice to work with Mulcahy, explaining that the director: "had the surreal fluidity that we wanted ... Simon's lyrics are a little obscure at times ... Russell was the right man [to interpret them] (quoted in Zaleski, 2021, p. 69).

In *Planet Earth*, Le Bon's fanciful sci-fi tinged lyrics tell the listener that he has heard them "making patterns rhyme, like some New Romantic looking for the TV sound" (Duran Duran, 1981), and Mulcahy's accompanying music video memorably captures the singer performing a swaggering, side-to-side style of nightclub dance equally as gestural. *Planet Earth* consists mainly of a studio set up of the band in full DIY New Romantic finery — knickerbockers and knee length boots, pirate shirts and frills, tassels and heavily styled hair — miming the track on a graphically-created crystal 'plinth' reminiscent of the outer space origin story sequences in the 1978 film *Superman*, directed by Richard Donner and starring Christopher Reeve and Marlon Brando. Mulcahy's "surreal" directorial interpretation of Le Bon's lyrics, as Berrow would have it, also includes: a black and white set up of the shirtless singer miming in a sensual, prone position, which incorporates graphic elements such as diagonal lines which enter and divide the frame in a strongly 'contemporary' illustrative way; a mid-shot of Le Bon, again without upper body clothing, descending perhaps into the

flames of hell: and a similarly-framed shot of drummer Roger Taylor, equally-similarly *sans chemise*, in a heavily video-effected blue-hued ‘tunnel’ not unlike Mallet’s Giger-esque ‘womb’ in Bowie’s *Ashes to Ashes* (1980). As we shall see in analysis of the *Rio* music video, this is not the last time that Mulcahy will use Le Bon and Roger Taylor’s unclothed bodies as both a fashion image and as visual elements in his videos for Duran Duran.

Mulcahy’s directorial approach characteristically proceeds from ambitious and obscure interpretation of lyrical content; and for a purveyor of pure pop, Simon Le Bon is an ambitious and obscure lyricist. John Taylor (2012) recalls how Le Bon, a drama student at Birmingham University, attends his first rehearsal with the band in 1980 with a “battered blue book” of lyrics (p. 114). Le Bon’s turns of phrase could be described as being frequently idiosyncratic and often pretentious: perhaps this could also be said of Duran Duran’s instinctive interpretation of new masculine fashion. John Taylor’s account of first meeting Le Bon provides a clear word picture of the would-be singer:

hair cut short, bleached dirty blond; it gave him an edge ... skin-tight [pink] leopard-print ski pants with loops under the boots. Undoubtedly a dubious look, but, you know, he was studying Shakespeare. In fact, he could have easily been Shakespeare’s idea of a rock star. You knew he’d look good in a doublet ... he was punk and he was ready to move on up, like the rest of us (2012, p. 113).

As can be seen in *Planet Earth*, by 1981 Le Bon’s image is less ‘Shakespearean punk’ and more ‘Byron-esque pop’. And leaning into this is Mulcahy’s instinct for representing the aspiring thespian Le Bon as a Camp, Romantic character. In the early 1980s, many of Mulcahy’s music videos can be read as true Camp, perhaps most clearly those that would appear to proceed from Mulcahy’s serious interest in European cinema. After his

youthful excitement in genre filmmaking, the polymathic future music video director's taste broadens in his late teens: "a major European phase where I became a huge fan of Fellini, Bergman, Bertolucci, and Ken Russell. It was usually the films that pushed boundaries that interested me" (Mulcahy cited in Rowlands, 2016, n.p).

Mulcahy's cinematic ambitions land with a Camp thud in other well known examples of the director's early 1980s music videos such as *Total Eclipse of the Heart* (1983), for the gravel-voiced Welsh singer Bonnie Tyler. Written and produced by Meat Loaf collaborator Jim Steinman, that track spends four weeks at No. 1 upon its release: "and much of its popularity was due to the music video ... [a] risqué, academic-themed clip" (Aniftos, 2023, n.p.) with an intentionally bizarre plot that calls upon Gothic popular culture tropes of the uncanny, featuring semi-clad and demonically possessed choirboys, billowing fabric and smoke effects.<sup>45</sup>

This televisual "boundary pushing", as the director describes it, is also attempted in other videos for Duran Duran by Mulcahy, such as *Is There Something I Should Know?* (1983). Here, the band wear one of the most strikingly co-ordinated new masculine fashion looks of their early 1980s period: a modern militaristic image comprising cobalt blue shirts with button down collars and epaulettes, with white straight ties tucked into the shirts, and high waisted, pleated black pants in the style of hussar riding trousers. This 'ties tucked-in' shirt-and-trouser look can be seen as

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<sup>45</sup> *Total Eclipse Of The Heart* is released on February 11, 1983 in the UK, and June 12, 1983 in the US, and goes on to sell six million copies world wide, becoming a number one single in the UK, US, Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway and South Africa. Mulcahy's video is widely credited with being central to this success and is the source of much of the song's enduring popularity: in October 2023, it is reported that the video has been accessed an astonishing 1,007,103,766 times on YouTube. Says Tyler in the present day: "It was an incredible video ... but to this day I don't really know what it's about. I think it's just mad dreams all coming together" (Brannigan, 2023).

referential to Bryan Ferry's 1970s 'G.I.' style, however with a notably enhanced 1980s colour palette.

*Is There Something I Should Know?* (1983) features Duran Duran lip synching within the vast ambience of a grand soundstage, performing amongst and on top of modernist plinth-like forms and staircases, dramatically illuminated by strikingly graphic contrasting expressionist cinematic lighting and captured from a range of extreme high and low angles. In that video, Mulcahy calls upon signature cinematographic techniques that he brings to the emerging language of music video, which we will see developing in *Rio*: slow motion and freeze frame; split screens and compositional repetition; shots in which there are close ups of performers in the foreground while others remain in focus in long shot behind them, so as to see both faces and bodies simultaneously.

As Michael Shore writes in 1984, the prolific Mulcahy is "given to lush, sweeping, technically overwhelming works that are literally 'minimovies'" (p. 68). Shore also notes that Duran Duran's collaborations with Mulcahy are "the premier example of the made-in-heaven marriage of a band and a director" (p. 278). While this compatibility between the band and director is clear, after *Planet Earth* Duran Duran's music video catalogue is also added to by Kevin Godley and Lol Creme, with *Girls on Film* (1981). Here, the band appear in what Michael Shore describes as "the first and, to date, last word in sexist rock video" (1984, p. 279). Although *Girls on Film* is not a focus of this thesis, it must be briefly mentioned here as being a notorious milestone of the early MTV era, which contributes both to the emerging language of the form, and to international awareness of Duran Duran.

Shore suggests that the band are “barely visible” in *Girls on Film* (1984, p. 279). Upon objective analysis of the video, this is not strictly true. Duran Duran are seen in intercuts throughout that clip in the role of a house band at the side of “a combination fashion-show runway and wrestling ring ... shot like classic soft-focus, soft-core porn” (Shore, 1984, p. 279) miming to an extended club remix length version of the *Girls on Film*. The members of the group wear what can still be described as New Romantic styles: John Taylor and Andy Taylor wear slim fitting suits and exaggerated cravats; Rhodes and Le Bon sport fabric scarf-like side-tied headbands; and Le Bon and Roger Taylor are attired in somewhat military-inspired casual jackets with epaulettes, sewn embellishments resembling frogging, and brass buttons. The overall conceit of the video is also that it is a ‘clip-inside-a-fashion-photo-shoot’, with behind the scenes shots documenting, for example, the boys from Duran Duran and also the female models who feature in the video having their make up applied, cameras being loaded with film 35mm still film, close ups of camera lenses and lighting apparatus, and so on.

However *Girls on Film*’s narrative consists principally and most memorably of a series of salacious vignettes featuring female and male models enacting clichéd sexual fetishes, which in the current era would be judged by many as offensive for reasons beyond heterosexism. These scenes include: lingerie-clad ‘girl-on-girl’ whipped cream greasy pole wrestling; a loin-cloth clad white female model with an Orientalist hairstyle victorious in battle against a Japanese sumo wrestler, who is subsequently further humiliated by an sadistic masseuse; and a white cowgirl riding on the back of a semi-nude man of colour, he being costumed as a horse. *Girls on Film* is made for an adult audience, and is intended to cause controversy in order to attract attention towards the band. Kevin Godley tells Shore (1984) that:

“Lol [Creme] and I were told by Duran’s management simply to make a very provocative, sexy video that had some sort of tenuous connection to the band and it would be seen in clubs and cause people to talk” (p. 279). And, according to plan, provoke it does: played not only in clubs, but also on the nascent MTV, the video is first banned and then aired in censored form.<sup>46</sup>

In the process, it attracts the attention of many, including the figurehead of American queer pop, Andy Warhol, who becomes a great champion of the band. The artist’s diary entry for Saturday October 10, 1981 reads:

I wanted to see Duran Duran at the Savoy because their videotape was so good, it’s called “Girls on Film.” ... Duran Duran are good-looking kids like Maxwell Caulfield [the US-based English actor best known for B movie roles and Camp television soap operas]. And afterwards they wanted to meet me so we went backstage and I told them how great they were. They all wore lots of makeup but they had their girlfriends with them from England, pretty girls so I guess they’re all straight, but it was hard to believe (Warhol & Packett, 1989, p. 412).

This contemporaneous description of Duran Duran in 1981 by Warhol is all the more illuminating when partnered with an observation made at a similar time by the British fashion photographer David Bailey: “Duran Duran all looked the same to me, apart from the one who thought he was Andy Warhol, Nick Rhodes” (cited in Jones, 2020, p. 378). Thanks to the form of music video, by 30 March, 1983 when Rhodes and Le Bon host a lengthy segment on MTV, presenting the network with a gold-selling certification for *Rio* in recognition of their support of the album’s videos, Warhol is such a friend to Duran Duran that as part of the show he “nonchalantly showed up [and snapped] photos the whole time” (Zaleski,

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Shore (1984) states that *Girls on Film* “was allowed on the channel [MTV] only after close-ups of full-frontal female nudity and ice cubes being rubbed on bare nipples were excised” (p. 108).

2012, p. 105). While providing a surreal comic element to the broadcast, Warhol's contact sheet of the resulting images also forms part of his photographic archive at Stanford University (Zaleski, 2012, p. 105).

Like Warhol (Warhol & Packett, 1989, p. 412), the young, gay Australian director Mulcahy may also see Duran Duran as "good-looking kids" who are "straight" and know "pretty girls", despite their feminised masculine fashion style. And as we can glean from the following structural analysis of

the aspirational and glamorous *Rio*, the director invites us to do the same. In *Rio*, Mulcahy demonstrates a high level of skill in screen timing, learned while working as film editor of evening news bulletins for the Channel 7 network in Australia (Shore, 1985, p. 67). He also throws in every Camp trick contained in his televisual equivalent of Le Bon's "battered blue book" (Taylor, 2012, p. 114) of lyrical scribblings. Frank Mort (1996) says of the visionary stylist Ray Petri that:

his sexual orientation was not significant in itself, in any simple authorial sense, for his work cannot be understood as the unproblematic product of a 'gay sensibility' [but rather that] knowledge of homosexual life equipped him with a set of competences with which to visualise masculinity (p.71).

This thesis suggests that at the very time the Australian-raised Petri is employing this insider knowledge of alternative masculinities in the field of style magazine design at *The Face*, Mulcahy does something similar in the field of music video, which in the early 1980s enables images of new fashion masculinities to gain currency in the realm of television. This in fact may suggest that an Australian 'queer eye' influences and contributes to the construction of these masculinities in a way that both normalises and popularises their visual difference.



Magazine culture does play a role in the story of Duran Duran's success: however the magazines in question are not the 'credible' men's style press, but, as previously alluded to by Paul Morley, teen and fashion magazines more often aimed at a young female audience. Over the course of the 1980s, Duran Duran grace the covers of fifteen issues of *Smash Hits*: in comparison, Wham! feature on ten, Culture Club and Frankie Goes to Hollywood five each, and Eurythmics and Spandau Ballet only four (Jones, 2020, 377). However it is music video, albeit *inflected* with the visual culture of fashion and music magazines, that becomes Duran Duran's signature medium. As Dylan Jones puts it: "Duran Duran's songs sounded like glossy-magazine spreads come to life, but if anything was a harbinger of how the eighties would soon start to be seen, it was their video for 'Rio'" (p. 377).

## ***Rio* (1982)**

### **Structural analysis**

The imagery of the music video *Rio* commences before its accompanying musical soundtrack. To silence, the video opens on a black screen, upon which appears a circular frame or iris mask that contains an extreme close up of a woman's face. This internal frame appears and disappears three times in rapid dissolves, moving from left to right across the screen. Each time, the cropped image emphasises a different aspect of her strongly made-up face: we see that her eyes are heavily rimmed with kohl in a cat-eye shape; her face is topped with brunette curls, possibly achieved through a technique of permanent wave and styling mousse; her generous mouth of straight, white teeth wears red lipstick. In the last of these shots, the model — for she clearly poses like a model — throws back her head in silent, playful laughter (Fig. 41). At this point, the musical track *Rio* begins: there

are 'sounds', more than musical notes, perhaps electronically generated by a synthesiser. Now upon the black screen, two circular frames appear. Inside these, there is a visual trick reminiscent of those in early cinema which use footage in reverse, in which a broken mirror is 'repaired' and we very briefly see the model in full length. She is on a tropical beach of pale golden sand and lazy, foam-capped sapphire waves. She wears: a sleeveless, fuchsia pink cocktail-style summer dress with a ruffled hem and shoulder detail.

Now, the musical soundtrack of the video, Duran Duran's *Rio* (1982), a fast-paced pop song, begins in earnest. Multiple twinkling and percussive sounds produced on synthesised keyboards remain prominent in the mix, punctuated by searing one-note stabs of electric guitar, overlaying a lively drum track of rat-a-tat snare and tom tom rolls effected by short-gate reverb. The accompanying visuals are equally busy. We are on a jetty; there is a young man lying on his stomach with a camera, who photographs the white-bikini'd, shapely derriere of a tanned, prone female, who lies facing away from the camera (Fig. 42). Then, there is another faceless woman, shown only from her waist down with long bare legs akimbo, an anonymous pink-tiger-striped Amazonian presence towering over a slim-faced young man who emerges from the water, incongruously attired in a white dress shirt and bow tie (Fig. 43). This is Nick Rhodes, keyboardist of Duran Duran. In close up, we can see that his hair is dyed bright red, he wears pink lipstick and mirrored aviator-style sunglasses, the lenses of which reflect yet another 'model', wearing a yellow sundress (Fig. 44). These images are hotly saturated with colour, which is emphasised by their strongly graphic presentation against the black screen. There is a magenta cast to the shots and the sea glows in electric shades of cyan and turquoise.



Fig. 41: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 42: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].

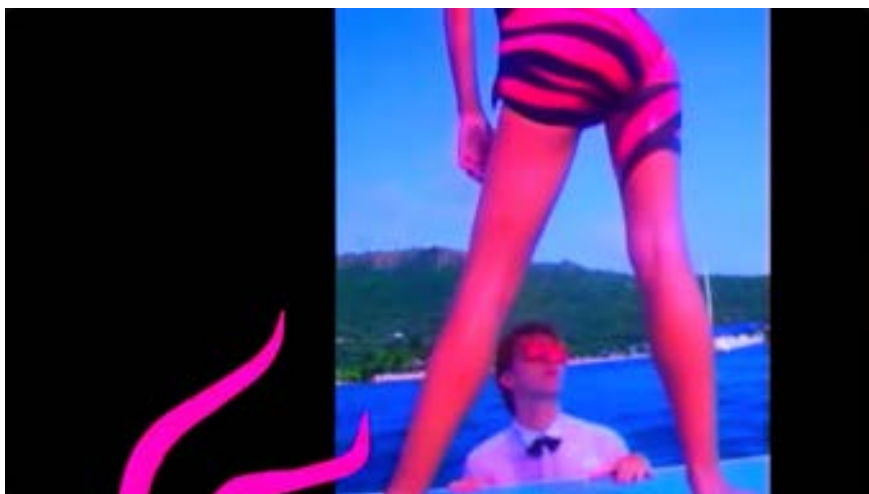


Fig. 43: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 44: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 45: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 46: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].

In this very brief section before the song's vocals commence the first verse, there are twenty individual shots all under four seconds in duration, strongly-geometric individual internal frames which appear against what will remain a black ground for the entirety of the video. These shots variously: move from right to left across the screen; contain stop-motion zooms and wipes; feature split screen techniques with vertical or diagonal framing; contain either, or both, dynamic movement and slow motion. The shots are tightly cropped and highly composed, combining object sizes more in the manner of comic book illustration than photography: people

and portions of people remain in focus despite their differing distance from the camera within these internal frames, something technically executed through the use of a split-field diopter lens. Women's legs and feet, sometimes featuring colourful body paint, in polka dot patterns or big-game animal stripes in fantasy colours, appear abstractly large in extreme close up in the foreground of images that also contain the in-focus figures of young men, in mid or long shot, in the background (Fig. 45).

We are now on a yacht; sea water is captured splashing in dramatic slow motion, including over a bare male torso (Fig. 46); there is a recurring visual motif of circles and spheres including workings of the yacht, such as the ship's wheel, a spinning single-handed winch and its rope (Fig. 47), and the ship's compass. These quick dynamic shots are intercut with abstract, slow motion captures, such as of green coloured liquid poured on a colourfully painted female model, who poses slyly smiling directly at the camera (Fig. 48).

A pink polka-dotted tanned female foot enters a frame containing three young men, who lie relaxed on the deck, bouncing and rolling bright red



Fig. 47: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 48: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 49: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 50: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 51: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 52: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].

rubber balls (Fig. 49). Their tanned bodies are loose and confident, in comfortably intimate proximity to one another in the manner of a menswear catalogue. They meet the gaze of the camera. From left to right, these are Nick Rhodes, Roger Taylor and John Taylor, the latter two being the rhythm section of Duran Duran. Rhodes wears: a powder blue suit over a non-traditional red dress shirt with a stand-up 'no collar', which fastens in a cross-over style with press-studs, with dyed red hair that features a voluminous, textured top section, long enough to come half way down the ear at the sides and to meet the collar at the back, and eye make up. Roger Taylor wears: a cerulean blue suit over a more traditional collared white dress shirt, open at his sun-kissed throat, with soft, low-cut white leather lace up shoes resembling Capezio men's dancing pumps, worn without socks to reveal a tanned ankle, with dark brunet hair worn in a similar although shorter style. When very soon thereafter in this rapid sequence the three are shown in long shot posing in the same ensembles, we see that they all sport this white shoe *chaussures sans chaussettes* look. John Taylor, the tallest of the three, wears: a red suit over a slim-fitting white t-shirt with a semi-sheer top section, and has a larger, longer version of the same mane, his hair artificially coloured a light-medium chestnut, with blond frosted highlights in the eyelash-skimming fringe.

Next, there is a static wide shot of a pristine tropical beach, with sparkling azure foam-capped waves. In the foreground, a female model who wears an elaborate yellow sundress with satin ribbon that laces up her bare brown thigh and around her waist leans with her back against a gnarled bone-grey tree that rises like driftwood from the sand, which brightly reflects the strong sunlight. In the background, we briefly see the figures of five young men, who enter the frame from the left and amble casually across the beach, towards the right of the screen (Fig. 50). Recognisable in their



coloured suits and shirts are Rhodes, Roger Taylor and John Taylor.

Another figure wears: a pale pastel yellow suit with broad, structured shoulders, jacket buttoned, and a matching yellow tie, worn with a cobalt blue shirt. This is Simon Le Bon, Duran Duran's lead vocalist. Some of the men are in states of restrained yet sensual *déshabillé*: barefoot with trouser legs rolled up, one holds his dark suit jacket over his shoulder with one finger, his white dress shirt open at the neck. This is Andy Taylor, the band's guitarist. The song's first verse commences, with the lyric: "Moving on the floor now, babe, you're a bird of paradise ...".

We cut to another composite frame (Fig. 51). The main image is a diagonally-cropped wide shot of the beach, looking out toward the sea. On the right of the screen is a back view of the lower half of a woman's body; she wears a lolly-pink miniskirted sundress. On the left of the screen, in a vertical parallelogram-shaped lozenge, the wearer of the 'pastel yellow suit and tie with blue shirt' ensemble is lying on his side, propped up on his elbow. This is Simon Le Bon, the lead singer of Duran Duran. He has light brown/dark blond highlighted hair in a collar-length, layered, textured cut. He now lip synchs the song as it continues: "Cherry ice cream smile ...". The next shot is another back view of the pink miniskirted woman. She lies on her side; from above in slow motion, a viscous banana-coloured liquid substance resembling melted ice cream is poured on her buttocks (Fig. 52). The lyrics continue: "I suppose it's very nice ...".

The next sequence is a discrete humorous scene that visually accompanies the remainder of the verse. It is set on a gloriously empty tropical beach and features a shirtless Roger Taylor, who wears white swimming trunks, and a female model with wet/wet look curls. She wears: a black one piece bathing costume with very high cut legs and a deeply plunging V neckline. She has a

dagger strapped to her upper right thigh, and wades out of the water toward him (Figs. 53, 54).

*Rio*'s lyrics continue: "With a step to your left and a flick to the right, you catch that mirror way out west ...". Roger Taylor approaches the woman with swagger but, face suddenly contorted in pain, we see that he has been bitten on the foot by a large crab which hangs from his toe (Fig. 55). The scene is then played out over final lyrical line of the verse: "You know you're something special and you look like you're the best". The bitten foot causes him to stagger, he attempts to free his foot only to be bitten again by the crab, this time on the hand. Rather than assist Roger Taylor, the model rolls her eyes and, laughing playfully, issues a swift right-leg yoko geri (karate side kick), causing him to clumsily fall over comically backwards into the water (Fig. 56).

Now, there is a full-screen wipe, in sections that appear from left to right (Figs. 57, 58, 59), and revealed to us is a 70 foot yacht in impressively swift flight, its sails billowing. We cut to a front-on static action wide shot of the prow of the boat (Fig. 60). The frame is dramatically composed: at the bow in the foreground centre is Le Bon, still in his pastel yellow suit and tie with blue shirt ensemble, the jacket inflated by the strong wind which it catches as the boat slices through the open ocean. Behind him, descending in size according to their increasing distance from the camera, are the other members of Duran Duran, who also remain attired in their brightly coloured, fashionable 'suit and shirt and dancing pumps' ensembles. The young men adorn the deck and rigging of the exhilaratingly-dangerously fast-moving yacht with glamorous, physically-confident composure, as the chorus of the song *Rio* commences. Le Bon sings: "Her name is Rio and she dances on the sand ...".



Fig. 53: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 54: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 55: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 56: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 57: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 58: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 59: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 60: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 61: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].

Accompanying the next line of the chorus, “Just like that river twisting through a dusty land”, is another rapid montage sequence of shots containing motion. Winches turn, ropes wind: the ship’s wheel is controlled by a disembodied, exotically-painted female hand; another female arm and hand, painted in a fancifully coloured animistic pattern, with manicured nails that are long, sharply pointed and enamelled hot pink, snakes across the deck towards a rope; the female bodies are splashed with water; we see the rigging of the yacht in working motion; the boom swings; there is the volatile effervescence of the yacht’s wake, white against the blue ocean; Rhodes’ powder blue suit and white shoes are captured in the distorted reflection of a highly-polished metal winch (Fig. 61); the chest to knee mid-section of Roger Taylor’s cerulean suit ensemble is glimpsed through a porthole (Fig. 62). His jacket is buttoned and at close distance, we now see that the fabric has a sheen, perhaps being Thai silk.

We return to the dramatic front-on ‘hero shot’ of the band on the yacht, as Le Bon continues singing the chorus: “And when she shines, she really shows you all she can ...”. We briefly cut away to a woman, in a low angle long shot, her profile back lit by the setting sun. She is also at sea, perhaps on the band’s yacht; she has a large, blue, sheer fabric wrap that catches the strong wind, undulating like a kite moored by her outstretched bare arms. We cut back to the band on the deck, as Le Bon sings: “Oh Rio, Rio dance across the Rio Grande”. A pair of female hands which hold a crimson hibiscus flower, also pull at the rigging. In close up, we see Rhodes’s reflection in a small round mirror of a hinged cosmetics compact; he opens the hinges, on the facing side there is a square mirror and we see the reflection of the curly-haired brunette model (Fig. 63).



Fig. 62: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 63: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 64: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].

The song continues to its second verse. Scorching bursts of electric guitar with metallic, controlled distortion continue to overlay the ornate multi-tracked synthesiser parts, fast disco-style drum track and funky bass run. There is another dynamic slow motion shot of a woman, again body painted, on the ground in a back bend pose, splashed with a large volume of yellow liquid (Fig. 64).

The next shot is an establishing wide shot for another stand alone jocular sequence, which accompanies the song's second verse. On still water at dusk, a brunette female model, bare-shouldered in an acid yellow strapless sundress, sits as though at leisurely rest on a chaise lounge in a sitting room. Incongruously, she is however actually on a mooring raft, on 'furniture' swathed in magenta and blue coloured drop sheets. The sky behind her is saturated to a sunset orange shade; a yacht with sails down can be seen in the distance (Fig. 65). In a surreal comic touch, the woman is delivered a bright pink telephone on a silver tray, out of the water by a disembodied hand (Fig. 66).

We cut to a reaction shot of Le Bon on a smaller, moored yacht: from outside the frame, he is handed a bright blue telephone. He wears a white, casual suit jacket, with a bright pink silk t-shirt underneath, and a pendant neck chain. The layers of his medium short hair are sun-lightened and surf-tousled. Singing into the blue telephone, he commences the second verse: "I've seen you on the beach / and I've seen you on TV ..." The screen splits to allow a double close up, and the model and Le Bon are shown 'conversing' via their coloured telephones (Fig. 67). The lyrics continue: "Two of a billion stars, it means so much to me / Like a birthday or a pretty view..."



The series of slapstick actions that accompany the first section of this verse form a sequence featuring Le Bon that relies upon editing techniques, as in the absurdist style of early cinema. In her set up, the model pulls the telephone cord as if to disconnect the call: this is visually responded to in the set up of Le Bon, with the off-screen 'pulling' of the cord causing him to be flung overboard into the water, while still attempting to speak to the model on the phone. A whole-body action long wide slow motion shot of the singer in mid air shows him to be fully dressed in a white suit, worn with snorkelling flippers (Fig. 68). In a return shot, the model throws her head back and laughs gleefully.

The lyrics of the verse run on to the next line: "But then I'm sure that you know it's just for you ...". We cut directly to a medium wide shot of John Taylor, who is relaxedly seated outdoors on the orange canvas of what could be an un-inflated life raft suspended from a height, reading a comic book magazine called *Fightin' Army* (Fig. 69). He wears red suit pants, a sleeveless white t-shirt and is barefoot. The camera zooms in and the image dissolves to a black and white wide shot, also of John Taylor, running from the sea towards the camera. In this shot, he is wearing dark coloured trousers and a dark long sleeved, open necked shirt, with a fabric headband and a white bandage on his left wrist (Fig. 70). He carries a toy rifle and hits the sand on his stomach dramatically in front of the camera, looking about furtively as perhaps would a spy or member of a sea-borne militia who is making a covert on-shore landing. We understand this to be a fantasy sequence arising from the content of the comic that John Taylor is reading 'in real life'.

In the black and white fantasy sequence, John Taylor looks up from his prone position to find not danger awaiting him on the beach: rather, in the



Fig. 65: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 66: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 67: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 68: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 69: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 70: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 71: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 72: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 73: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 74: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 75: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 76: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].

foreground of the shot, we see the disembodied trunk of a bikini-clad woman. On her bare stomach, her long-nailed hand holds a coupe glass. Liquid pours into it from a height, sloppily filling the vessel and splashing over her skin, as the knowingly-bemused 'action hero' John Taylor looks on (Fig. 71).

This sequence transitions to the next chorus of *Rio* via a novel technique of 'jump splits' of the screen, which 'squeeze' the black and white image of John Taylor centrally between another shot that enters the screen simultaneously from both left and right (Fig. 72). This new shot takes over the screen: it is an extreme close up, heavily cast in blue, of a compass drawing a circle on a map. At the first line of the chorus, "her name is Rio and she dances on the sand ...", we cut to a slow motion underwater shot in blue and pink-tinged colour looking up toward the sky from underneath a female figure swimming (Fig. 73). The bubbles caused by her actions are large and dynamic.

The chorus continues: "Just like that river twisting through a dusty land ...". Over this line, there is another sequence relying upon televisual tricks and physical comedy by Le Bon and the model. The scene begins with a low shot looking up at the model, who wears a bright pink-lavender cocktail dress featuring a draped bodice and shoulder detail. Her brunette hair is styled in a voluminous 'up-do', and she wears full fashion makeup, with accented eyes and red lips (Fig. 74). She holds a shiny red rubber ball, approximately the size of a squash ball, and throws this out of frame. We cut to a reaction shot of a very tanned, shirtless Le Bon, again wearing a pendant neck chain, who shields his eyes as he looks skywards and begins to run backwards. Watching this action, familiar from televised sport, we assume that he is anticipating catching the ball (Fig 75). This shot cuts to a wide shot of the

same action, which takes place on a wooden jetty. Le Bon is wearing only an extremely brief, very high-cut bikini-style Speedo swimming costume. He continues to run backwards. The next shot is a tight close up at ground level of Le Bon's bare foot: next to it is a peeled banana skin (Fig. 76). We cut back to the wide shot, and the red ball enters the frame. Unexpectedly, it is now enormous: through artificial alteration, the ball thrown by the model is now at least three times as large as Le Bon: perhaps the model is then a giantess. The ball knocks Le Bon over, he tumbles backwards from the jetty, once more into the water (Figs. 77, 78).

The chorus continues: "And when she shines she really shows you all she can ...". This shot appears to continue the previous sequence, although the 'model' is differently attired, now wearing a one-piece black swimming costume with extremely high-cut legs, a deeply plunging neckline and low back, with skin-revealing lacing at the sides. This may be the model from Roger Taylor's earlier beach scene. She runs into the water, where Le Bon is completely 'caught' in a heavy teal-coloured synthetic rope fishing net: we see now that his swimming costume is dark blue. Once again laughing, she drags the hapless singer to shore (Figs. 79, 80).

The next shot cuts at the line: "Oh Rio, Rio, dance across the Rio Grande ...". It is a mid shot of two coupe glasses, one filled with a very artificially pink coloured liquid and one containing an equally artificial yellow 'drink' (Fig. 81). These are being served on a small, floating white clothed table: a hand reaches out of the water, takes the pink drink from the table, and draws it under the surface of the water. We cut to an underwater medium wide shot of Le Bon, wearing a brief bathing costume with a diving-style lime green belt, a snorkel and goggles. The pink liquid dissipates in the sea water, a brightly coloured cloud (Fig. 82).

The song progresses to its musical middle eight section. Here, the video cuts to a low angle medium wide shot on a diagonal tilt. We are on the deck of the yacht, and the image on screen is distorted: the image is in fact a reflection in a shiny metal boating apparatus. In the frame, we can see that there is a female figure, barefoot and adorned in multi-coloured body painted stripes, sneaking across the deck. She has the gait of a dancer who is performing the role of an animal, perhaps a large terrestrial bird. We cut to a shot of Nick Rhodes, who is below deck on a bunk (Fig. 83). He wears pale blue suit trousers, a red shirt with a high 'collarless collar' with snap fastenings that are undone, white lace up jazz pumps without socks, and a neck chain. His hair is coloured. He is idly playing with a small red rubber ball. Through the windows behind him at deck level, we see the legs of the painted 'animal woman' sneak past. This cuts to a dramatically framed close up of Rhodes from the point of view of outside the window; the thighs and knees of the 'animal woman' are also in shot.

We switch back to a view from Rhodes' side of the window: the woman cocks her head at him, once more as would a playful non-human (Fig. 84). Following this a brief series of 'hide and seek' shots of the 'animal woman' and Rhodes on the yacht, taken from various angles including an extreme overhead wide view of the boat, presumably looking down from its mast. This dissolves into a wide shot of a barefoot male figure wearing bright blue trousers with rolled up cuffs and a three quarter sleeved white t-shirt, with fashionable hair, on a raft made of logs which enters the frame from the left. Presumably this is also a member of Duran Duran; from what we now know of its members, it is most likely Rhodes. The figure is semi-crouched for balance, as he mimes the beginning of the next musical section of *Rio*, which is a saxophone solo.





Fig. 77: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 78: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 79: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 80: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 81: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 82: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 83: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 84: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 85: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].

Two bars into the solo, a second image dissolves onto the screen, which is of another 'saxophonist' who also mimes the track. This figure is shown in the foreground of a long wide shot of a dramatic landscape of mountains and coastline, with yachts moored in small coves. He wears a pale blue suit jacket and a bright blue shirt, and an Akubra felt hat. By process of elimination, this figure is probably John Taylor. The screen splits in half vertically to a double shot of the two saxophonists, both miming the solo (Fig. 85).

At the end of the saxophone sequence, the pace of the track picks up and we cut to an action shot taken at sea level from the prow of a boat: we are racing across the water, perhaps chasing something. The action becomes more frantic, with a rapid series of shots following the recommencement of the vocals. At the line "Hey now, woo, look at that / Did he nearly run you down? ..." there is a low angle mid close up of Le Bon, wearing a cobalt blue short sleeved collared shirt and a white tie, the layers of his hair emphasised with sunny highlights. As he sings, his lips form a sensual pout. He whips his head into shot, points at another vessel with his arm fully extended, and mimes the track: his face is expressive as he performs looks of 'excitement' (Fig. 86). This is intercut with more of the racing-across-the-water footage as the lyrics continue: "At the end of the drive, the lawmen arrive / You make me feel alive, alive, alive ...".

Now, in the interior of a luxury boat with the blue sea visible through its windows and open structure, the brunette model, who is wearing a coral coloured sundress, is reclining on turquoise cushions on a built-in chaise lounge with white canvas upholstery (Fig. 87). In the foreground of the shot, champagne is being poured into a wine glass by a very unsteady male hand; it spills and the model is disparagingly amused. The lyrics continue

and a large number of very short cuts accompany the short build to the chorus: at “I’ll take my chance ...”, there is a shot of Le Bon, fully clothed in the water on the blue telephone; “cause luck is on my side or something ...” and we see the model in the yellow dress, lying on her back on a large drift log with eyes closed, with a large volume of pink paint falling in slow motion into the water between the camera and the figure, as though dripping on the model but adding to the depth of focus in the shot; at “I know what you're thinking ...” there is a slow motion shot of Le Bon wearing a bright blue sleeveless t-shirt and coral coloured shorts, riding a horse at speed along the beach (Fig. 88).

At the lines “I’ll tell you something, I know what you're thinking ...” there is a brief, very dramatically and graphically composed shot, on a tilt, which contains multiple visual elements at various distances from the camera (Fig. 89). The shot set up in the ‘blue sea’ space, with open water in the far background, a moored yacht in the far centre, and a rocky outcrop at right. In the medium background right, Rhodes, wearing a white dress shirt, is chest deep in the water with his back to the camera. His face is however still visible to us, as he looks at himself in a large mirror and adjusts his attire. The foreground of the shot is entirely dominated by the brunette model, whose hair and upper body covered with thick, bright pink suds, and who with eyes closed and face raised skywards poses statically-but-ecstatically, in a fanciful water-borne toilette.

At the final repeat of “I’ll tell you something / I know what you’re thinking ...”, there is a shot of John Taylor in red suit pants, white sheer t-shirt and Akubra, snoozing on the deck of the yacht, which is sailing fast on open water (Fig. 90). This is followed by a slow motion set up of Le Bon, framed

in a right-leaning parallelogram-shaped centre split frame with black ground to the left and right. In the shot, Le Bon is alone, playing in shallow water: he is in his very brief swimming costume and does a back flip, with his mostly bare, tanned body being displayed, from top to toe, front to back (Figs. 91, 92, 93).

The final chorus commences, and we are once again looking front-on at the large racing yacht. The suit-attired Le Bon sits astride the bow with the ‘crew’ of his colourfully-suited band mates artfully posed behind him (Fig. 94). He sings: “Her name is Rio, and she dances on the sand / Just like that river twists across a dusty land / And when she shines, she really shows you all she can / Oh, Rio, Rio, dance across the Rio Grande / Her name is Rio, she don't need to understand / And I might find her if I'm looking like I can / And I might find her if I'm looking like I can / Oh Rio, Rio hear them shout across the land / From mountains in the North down to the Rio Grande”.

This is all accompanied by a series of intercuts between: the band in their coloured suits on the yacht (Fig. 95); the blue painted model at sea with fabric billowing (Fig. 96); she also appears entering the foreground of a reverse shot of the band on the yacht, which features Le Bon’ suit-trousered rear, its form exposed by having his jacket off. Now in close up with an unknowing Le Bon and company still visible behind her, the painted model winks slyly at the camera and holds its gaze (Fig 97). Roger Taylor, in his blue suit, is shown skippering the yacht (Fig. 98). The song ends to a fade out of repetition of the non-lexical “doo doo d’doo doo d’doo”, during which the prow-clinging, lip synching Le Bon swings his arm in the manner of his dance in the 1981 Duran Duran video, *Planet Earth* (Fig. 99). The visuals fade to black.



Fig. 86: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 87: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].

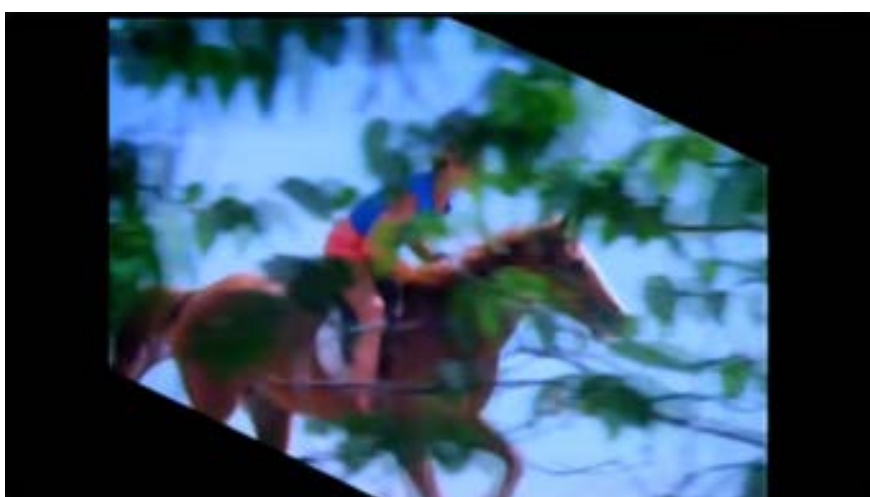


Fig. 88: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].





Fig. 89: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 90: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].

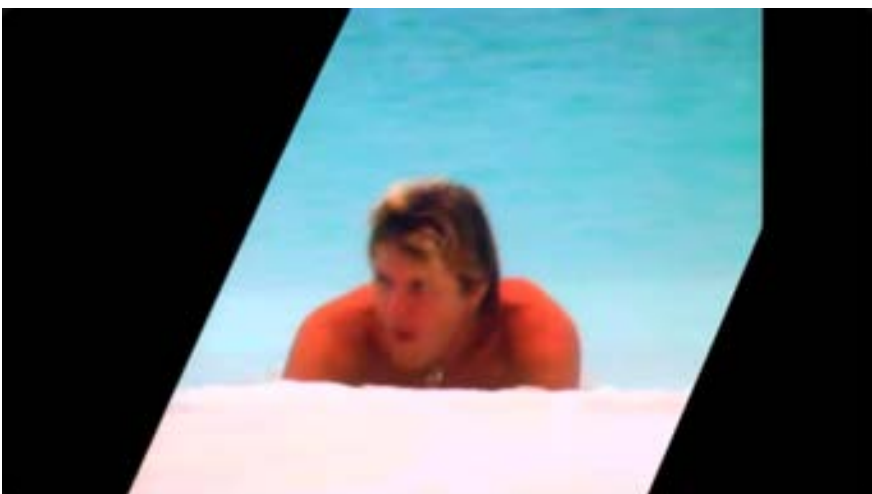


Fig. 91: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].





Fig. 92: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 93: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 94: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 95: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 96: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 97: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 98: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].



Fig. 99: Mulcahy, R. (1982) *Rio* [music video still].

### **Suits on a yacht**

In this thesis which situates music video in the domain of fashion studies, it is appropriate to commence contextualisation of the above forensic structural analysis of this extraordinarily visually-busy and multifaceted music video with one of its most straightforwardly effective, semiotically meaningful, and ultimately memorable elements: boys in a band, in coloured suits, on a yacht.

The prologue to this chapter explained how by the mid 1980s, the idea of colour in men's fashion re-enters the vernacular of popular culture via music videos and music television, particularly showcasing a new casual style of suiting developed from a relaxed European aesthetic of luxurious masculine elegance. Lucy O'Brien (2003) argues in relation to the pop performance persona of the notoriously suit-wearing non-male Annie Lennox of Eurythmics, who is the focus of the following fifth chapter of this thesis, that pop stars historically rebel against the suit because of its powerful standing in corporate language as a uniform (p. 261). Simply, the suit, which in Flügel's terms exemplifies how "modern man's clothing abounds in features which symbolise his devotion to the principles of duty, of renunciation and of self-control" (1930, p. 113), is antithetical to the youthful rebellion and freedom otherwise represented by the figure of the male rock or pop star.

Building upon understandings such as Flügel's of the construction of masculine identity through fashion, Janice Miller (2011) identifies how resistance to agreed semiotic understandings of the suit in relation to gender is often in fact *implied* in its adoption by male pop stars. Miller writes on the wearing of suits by Elvis Presley and David Bowie, the latter specifically in regard the white suit worn by Bowie's mid-1970s incarnation The Thin White Duke. In consideration of Duran Duran's colourfully suit-attired, yacht-going playboy image of the New Man so fruitfully propagated by the *Rio* music video, it is instructive when Miller argues in relation to such earlier stars that:

the suit is imbued with gendered meaning and has acted as the crux against which many male musicians have formulated an image for themselves, while also articulating a sense of particular masculinity. It has also provided a stable ground from which transgressions grow (2011, p. 177).

So, while he is undoubtedly glamorous and flamboyant, is Duran Duran's colourfully tailored, heterosexual, aspirational New Man in *Rio* also transgressive? Fashion anthropologist Joshua M. Bluteau (2021) describes how owing to its status as a ubiquitous, post-semiotic garment, the tailored suit is a form of "blending in" dressing which when enacted in formal spaces, can be seen as "culturally appropriate or respectful" (p. 64). He also argues that the suit can be adapted by individuals who specifically wish to "stand out [by] wearing a suit in a surprisingly colourful fabric, or an unusual cut ... they enter the room [in this unusual suit] and for some reason that is hard to pin down, they just look fantastic" (2021, p. 64). Bluteau refers to the example of Ziggy Stardust-era David Bowie's powder blue suit designed by Freddie Burretti, worn in the very early music video for the song *Life on Mars* (1973), as an example of a "stand out' garment" (p. 65). Bluteau (2021) proposes that:

the power of these 'stand out' garments is such that they can become intrinsically linked to certain individuals at certain times, becoming iconic and imbued with a hybrid identity, whereby wearer and garment become greater than the sum of their parts (p. 65).

This thesis argues that the *Rio* suits are also such 'stand-out' garments, although this is not because of their "surprisingly colourful fabric [or] unusual cut" (Bluteau, p. 64). It is accurate to say that in comparison to the austerity and modesty of the suit over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these garments by British designer Antony Price transgress traditional boundaries created by the suit which fortify masculinity against decoration and decadence. However, in 1982 they remain recognisably part of the garment's lineage as being appropriate attire for young men in many social situations. What is *inappropriate* about Duran Duran's suit-attired image here is the audacity with which Mulcahy's

clip places them in such an ostentatiously dangerous and elitist informal space as the deck of a luxury ocean-going yacht.

This is the transcendental power of music video. Maritime culture has a historically rich and semiotically complex relationship with dress and costume, which contributes its own precise vocabulary to the contemporary language fashion. This thesis will not attempt to connect *Rio* to this history for a simple reason: there is precisely nothing about the image of Le Bon and the other members of Duran Duran in the zeitgeist-capturing music video choruses of *Rio* that connects their masculine fashion to usual representations of the nautical. The garments that the band wear are wildly unsuitable for the labour of seafaring. Yet to many in the 1980s, and still in the present day, this image is closely connected to the meaning and the feeling of being at sea. It is also evocative of Pountain and Robins' (2000) nonchalant, "morally lax yet economically successful" (p. 7) 'cool' post-counter culture character of the fashionable young man, who flourishes in the era of Thatcher and Reagan. Dylan Jones (2020) describes the twin aspects of a vicarious mood prompted by this music video moment:

directed by Russell Mulcahy [*Rio*] captured the band dressed in colourful Antony Price suits, aboard a yacht speeding across English Harbour bay, literally living the dream. With salt spray in their nostrils and the wind in their hair, Duran Duran were as sure of themselves as any British pop stars had ever been. There was no irony here, just a beautifully filmed travelogue that moved the band away from any post-punk New Romantic milieu. Presented as a gang of wannabe playboys, they were defined by their playfulness and ambition (p. 377).

In Barthesian terms, the signifier of the yacht is enormously transformative of the sign of these suits: it is their context and not their content which changes them. This thesis argues that simply because they are coloured

does not make them less ‘suits’, according to late twentieth century conceptions of that garment. With reference to Miller (2011), this feature of their materiality already aligns with previous usages of suits in rock and pop, connecting Duran Duran’s new pop fashion masculinity to that of such luminaries as Bowie, Elvis, and indeed Bryan Ferry. It is however the medium of Mulcahy’s music video which *extends* this tradition. With all of its essential implausibilities, it is Mulcahy’s flamboyant treatment of location which enables the suspension of disbelief required to accept the extravagance of Duran Duran’s pretentious sartorial logic.

Rhodes (cited in Jones, 2020) makes plain that Duran Duran’s Price suits are a conscious departure by the band from the aesthetics of New Romanticism:

we knew the New Romantic look was all over. When EMI gave Duran Duran our first clothes budget, we went straight to designer Antony Price and blew it on suits. In those days they cost £300, which was a lot, but I think we got the ‘cute young band’ discount’ (p. 255).

Writing on the 1970s sartorialism of Bryan Ferry, and the way in which it is influential to the post-Punk style tribe, Jones (2020) states that Ferry’s own style icon was Antony Price, and that the designer deserves recognition for having created many of the singer’s “best looks” (p. 29). To justify this, Jones (2020) cites the opinion of stylist David Thomas, who argues that: “Antony Price reinvented the suit so that it was no longer about going to the office ... he made it rock’n’roll ... he was a visionary. He created that military, dandy, sexy, eclectic look. He created rock’n’roll fashion” (p. 29).

These are bold assertions that can be countered with alternative contemporary histories of men’s fashion. However, there is no doubt that Price’s garments for Ferry are in turn inspirational to a generation of

fashion conscious British young men, including the boys who would become Duran Duran. Says Ferry of the designer: “Antony was the real architect of the Roxy look, and he made these amazing sculpted clothes. Whether he’s designing for men or women, he really understands bodies, understands what looks good, what looks sexy” (quoted in Jones, 2020, p. 29).

In *Rio*, Duran Duran’s suits by Price are made all the more ‘sculptural’ when inflated by the ocean wind, with Le Bon’s body in the foreground of the on-water ‘hero’ shot becoming almost literally that of an airborne, comic book superhero. Indeed, Price enjoys making young male pop stars “look good”: when the designer reflects upon working with Ferry and Roxy Music in the 1970s, he also reveals the techniques he will employ in working with Duran Duran in the 1980s. The designer’s words on Ferry also describe Duran Duran’s visualisation of their own career, of which music video plays an intrinsic part. Price recalls that he could see that Ferry:

was a nice-looking guy and I thought he would look good ... Bryan also understood that women don’t care if a man is gay or straight. They won’t stop fancying them; in fact it doubles the fun because if you can pull him in, then you’ve really got it. Roxy didn’t want to be seen as gay, but they wanted to be seen as exotic. Bryan didn’t really care either way, as he knew it was all about how you looked .. there was just so much glamour. People said we were pretentious, but to us it was just good taste (quoted in Jones, 2020, pp. 30-31).

It is interesting that Price should invoke the concept of “good taste” here, as Duran Duran’s many detractors see the later *Rio* as being in particularly poor taste. Paul Morley, unsurprisingly, sees the band’s videos as being exemplary of a particularly distasteful suite of hetero-feminised, politically dubious hubristic aesthetic characteristics. The journalist and critic expresses this with vitriol:



all through the eighties, I hated Duran Duran, when for some they were the kings of pop. I hated them because they acted as though they were minor members of the royal family, but those that loved them did so because they made grand, escapist music, reflected in escapist videos celebrating their own playboy riches ...

I was so angry at their self-importance that I could never bring myself to call them by the name they lifted from Roger Vadim's *Barbarella* — they seemed more soap opera than space opera. I used different names for them, my favourite being Diana Diana [because] they resembled the freshly minted Princess of Wales; you could see where her look as a fan came from, certainly her hair, eyeliner and posing genius. You could see Diana as a female member of Duran Duran (cited in Jones, 2020, pp. 378-379).

In Morley's view then, in the politically charged environment of Thatcher's Britain, the image of privilege portrayed by Duran Duran's carefree New Men in *Rio* is deplorable. However contained in his evidence for this are two extra contextual points of real interest to this thesis. The first of these is that Morley, a 'serious' writer on popular music, bases his understanding of escapism in Duran Duran's work on its expression in their videos as much as their sound recordings. This thesis would argue that this idea of 'escape' derives *entirely* from the visuals that accompany the track, and that there is nothing intrinsic to the sound of this synthesiser-heavy studio production which specifically evokes that particular feeling.

The second point of interest raised by Morley in his dismissal of Duran Duran here is his identification of the fashion influence of the male group upon styles adopted by their female fans. That the fan in question here is Diana, Princess of Wales is clearly important to Morley: the former Lady

Diana Spencer is widely known to be a pop music fan in general, and of Duran Duran in particular, which even at the time of their marriage in 1981 is a point of known incompatibility with her then husband, the future monarch Charles. However when considering the intersection of fashion, music, fan and celebrity cultures of the early music video era, the writer's description of Diana's "hair ... and posing genius" well matches those made in this thesis' structural analysis of both *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go's* George Michael and Le Bon in *Rio*. This is a clear example of the phenomenon of new pop fashion, and music video's role in the mainstream spread of its signature sartorial gender transgressions.

Matters of taste are vital to Sontag's (2009/166) diagnosis of Camp and as this thesis has argued, 1980s music video is often situated outside a good/bad taste binary, simply because of the circumstances of its production. In *Rio*, Mulcahy's visuals are at once grandiose and yet rely upon a spontaneity that is only one step removed from amateurism, situating them squarely in the realm of Camp. The 'happy accidents' that occur because of this combination of ambition and expediency contribute to some of *Rio's* most memorable moments: and this is the case with the iconic 'coloured suits on yachts'. Taken at face value, Price's assertion that his designs worn by the band in the video were conceived specifically with this visual set-up in mind seem plausible:

I had spent a lot of time in the Caribbean, so I understood the importance of colour in relation to the sea and the lighting of Mustique and the Bahamas. So when they came along saying they wanted to do a video in the Caribbean, I knew all about it, and I knew what I was going to do ... so we did all these wonderful electric suits" (Price quoted in Jones, 2020, p. 379).

Price may well be familiar with the Caribbean, and certainly with the use of colour in men's fashion. However his telling here of why the suits are worn by the band on a yacht in the music video *Rio* does not align with known details of the shoot. As recounted in Zaleski (2021), while it is always planned that several of the *Rio* album clips will be shot on location in Sri Lanka, the music video for the title track *Rio* is initially scheduled to be filmed in a London studio (p. 93). Upon completing filming with Mulcahy in Sri Lanka, the members of Duran Duran, with the exception of Andy Taylor, travel to Antigua simply to enjoy "a holiday together, just like The Beatles ... but ... we got a call from management saying, 'Don't move we are coming over with a film crew [to shoot the video for] *Rio* [and] within a few days our holiday had been hijacked and we were shooting" (Rhodes, quoted in Zaleski, 2021, p. 93). John Taylor concurs: after a week spent suntanning on the beach of English Harbour "trot[ting] out of our villas, one by one, like another Beatles scene ... we got a call from Paul (Berrow), telling us not to pack, that he was on his way with Andy, Russell and the video film crew" (2012, p. 211).

And, importantly, also with the coloured suits by Antony Price, which had been commissioned for a video initially to be filmed in a controlled, interior studio environment, something revealed by Roger Taylor in an interview given for a *Classic Albums* television documentary on the making of *Rio* (Scott, 2009). This thesis suggests therefore that should the production of the video gone according to plan, "one of the most indelible images of the 1980s" would not have been improvised: that of "Duran Duran ... sporting colourful Antony Price suits ... hair blowing in the wind as [their] boat speeds along ... handsome, carefree young men heading toward a bright future" (Zaleski, 2021, p. 93).

## The boy group genre

As established, there are two principal types of music video: the concept-style video and the performance-style video. The former, as discussed in Chapter 2's example of *Ashes to Ashes* (1980) and in Chapter 5's forthcoming investigation of *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)* (1983) by Eurythmics, can be seen as drawing upon visual approaches of earlier twentieth-century artistic and experimental cinema, and often relies on direct address by the performer/character as it follows the lyrical content and musical structure of the song it accompanies. As Chapter 3 has explained, the latter style of video refers both to the 'authenticity' of rock concert stage craft and to traditions established in the 1950s Hollywood musical, as exemplified by Wham!'s *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* (1984).

Duran Duran's *Rio* (1982) can be loosely categorised as being of the concept type, although one that descends from a different cultural precedent. This is the boy group dynamic, established in the 1960s in Richard Lester's Beatles films *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *Help!* (1965), and in the musical comedy of the manufactured-for-television US pop group created in response to these, The Monkees (Shore, 1984).<sup>47</sup> In these mid-century pop culture texts, a sketch comedy approach is taken in establishing and

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<sup>47</sup> Shore (1984) and others note Mike Nesmith of The Monkees as having a prescient interest in music video in the pre- and very early MTV era, for example with the co-incidentally-titled *Rio* (1977). In an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine in 2013, musician and television veteran Nesmith was asked to explain the early role he took in the development of MTV, through the example of his earlier video clip program, *PopClips*: "Well, I had done a music video [*Rio* (1977)]. I didn't know what I was doing since this was a music video before there were music videos. That's hard for people to understand. ... But long before music videos, you still needed to promote records, so I made a promotional film for one of my records called *Rio*. After that there was a very natural train of thought – 'Well, what do I do with this thing?' ... I said to people, 'It's a promotional film. They play it on state television in Europe.' People would look at me like I was a bug and I'd say, 'I just made it for that. I don't know what it is.' But then as it became obvious that it was an art form, more people started make them after seeing *Rio*. They started making them spontaneously and I kept thinking, 'Where do you play this? What would I do with this?' The answer was that I simply needed to complete the equation. 'Radio is to records as television is to video.' Then it was like, 'Of course!' and thus MTV was born' (Greene, 2013, n.p.).

continually re-establishing the performer/characters who comprise the band, ascribing to them personality traits which enable fans to identify — and identify with — a favourite individual member of the troupe: for example, the smart one; the funny one; the artistic one; the adventurer or dreamer; or the member most concerned with their appearance.<sup>48</sup> In turn, this social dynamic is played out in scenarios that also establish the group's commercial 'brand' as being multi-faceted, which encourages fan loyalty and opens up additional possibilities in diversified band marketing and merchandising.

Such cheeky-and-charming, youth-oriented boy band moving image productions are characterised by a self-referential, often self-deprecatory quality which expresses a confident knowledge of postmodernist pop culture. A particularly clear example of this is The Monkees' feature film *Head* (1968), directed by Bob Rafelson and written by Rafelson and actor Jack Nicholson, which features significant cameos by many low culture icons including the "exaggerated he-man" B grade actor Victor Mature (Sontag, 2009/1966, p. 279). This high Camp romp satirises the visual and corporate media cultures from which the act The Monkees — an artificial television boy band which becomes an *actual* pop group, owing to the unpredicted self-agency of its members — itself arises.

In doing so, this film and those of Lester featuring The Beatles purposefully reference the conventions of genre film; and indeed, Mulcahy brings a fond, parodic understanding of genre film to the language of music video in *Rio*.

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<sup>48</sup> This trait-based music marketing strategy can be seen as arriving at its zenith with the Spice Girls in the 1990s, where this idea was refashioned through the pop feminist lens of 'girl power' in the establishment of the characters Scary Spice, Sporty Spice, Baby Spice, Posh Spice (now fashion designer Victoria Beckham), and Ginger Spice, in their music videos and the cameo-studded 1997 British musical comedy feature film *Spice World*, directed by Bob Spiers and written by Kim Fuller.

References to mainstream Camp, low culture pop cinema and their television extensions abound in the video. For example, the scene where Roger Taylor is bitten by the crab twists a well-known image from mid-century British popular cinema: the visual introduction of the character Honey Ryder, a beautiful knife-wielding shell diver played by Swiss actress and former model Ursula Andress on a deserted Caribbean beach called Crab Quay, in the first James Bond feature film *Dr. No* (1962). That film, directed by Terence Young, launches the iconic and lucrative Bond film franchise, and stars a young, brunet Sean Connery, whom Roger Taylor, the dark haired member of Duran Duran, is therefore suggested by Mulcahy as resembling.

Similarly, the bodiless ‘servant’ who hands the woman the pink telephone in the Simon Le Bon comic sequence clearly recalls the character Thing from the 1960s Camp American television situation comedy series *The Addams Family*, based upon Charles Addams’s humorous gothic cartoons for the *New Yorker* of the late 1930s. the scene continues, when the model and Le Bon conduct their split screen telephone ‘conversation’, references can be seen to a visual device famously used in the 1959 Camp romantic comedy *Pillow Talk* starring Doris Day and Rock Hudson, directed by Michael Gordon.

Unlike the “literal” music videos that had, or are, being produced in America (Hunter quoted in Zaleski, 2021, p. 78), in which the lyrics of a pop song function as direct prompts for the production’s visual components, *Rio* does not interpret Le Bon’s geographically-questionable confection of exoticist romance in any recognisable way. Despite the presence of some female supporting roles, Mulcahy’s video does not depict a girl named Rio — a lyrical character said to have been inspired by Le Bon’s infatuation with

a Birmingham waitress — “dancing on the sand”, nor the “dusty land” of North America between Colorado and the US Mexican border, through which the Rio Grande “twists” (Duran Duran, 1982). The topic and content of the video is entirely the 1982 ‘brand’ of Duran Duran: a boy band of now-suntanned, formerly-pasty New Romantics-made-good, on a glamorous Caribbean beach holiday that they can clearly afford. Here, art imitates life. As John Taylor remembers in 2012:

we had gone way beyond the lifestyles our parents had made for us. Family holidays with Mum and Dad had always been on English soil (Devon or Cornwall), while Wales and Scotland were considered holidays abroad. Now [I was] living my life as a member of the jet set (p. 211).

Planning the shoot involves the hiring of the yacht that provides much of the visual content of the video, and functions as a principle location. The 70 foot *Eilean* also provides lodging for the crew and most of the band, excepting Rhodes. Zaleski refers to Rhodes’ reminiscence upon this to *The Guardian* in 2008: “I only like boats when they’re tied up, and you can have a cocktail without spilling it” (2021, p. 94).

This thesis observes that there is a particular Camp sensibility displayed in Rhodes’ attitude that is also visually expressed by Mulcahy in the video. Spilled cocktails do indeed feature in *Rio*: but these are undrinkable in their fluorescence. Bright, saturated colour such as this permeates every visual component of *Rio*: from props such as the fake cocktails and plastic telephones, to the fashion worn by Duran Duran and ‘the model’. Discussing the video, Mulcahy describes his flamboyant approach to affecting glamour through colour:

I had this very definite idea of ultra-colour ... I just wanted the blue water and the contrast of very high-tech, the vivid pinks and greens, whether it be plastics, liquids or whatever. The whole thing was based on this

explosion of colour; it was like a very Technicolor movie” (quoted in Zaleski, 2021, p. 94).

This thesis observes that such celebration of artificiality both supports the self-knowing nature of Duran Duran’s performance of the boy band in the music video, and that it also contributes an aesthetic of excess to the emerging language of music video that is consistent with understandings of Camp.

### **Music video and Antipodean Camp**

There is much evidence to support the assertion that Russell Mulcahy’s directorial practice operates in the realm of Camp, some of which has already been offered in this thesis. This research perceives that the distinguishing of Mulcahy as a Camp director is important to understanding the development of the language of music video. As one of its earliest auteurs, Mulcahy is largely responsible for the look of music video, with his personal taste bearing enormous influence upon what in the 1980s rapidly becomes so recognisable as to be read as cliché.

The research observes further that the type of Camp the Australian director employs can often be read as what New Zealand media and communications academic Nicholas Perry (1998) calls Antipodean Camp. Perry describes this in straightforward terms: “Antipodean camp is explicable as a ‘post-colonial’ aesthetic for the beneficiaries of colonialism” (1998, p. 18). While Perry is certainly not the only scholar to have described cultural products such as the transvestic schlock Glam Rock-era cabaret *The Rocky Horror Show* and its cult cinematic interpretation, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), both written by New Zealander Richard



O'Brien and directed by Australian Jim Sharman, as being Camp, Perry's work originates a designation for this specific variant of the sensibility.

This thesis recognises that Antipodean Camp is contradictory: knowingly, irreverently yet fondly mocking the cultural codes of Empire. The research observes that this "second order kitsch" (Perry, 1998, p. 11) has the theatrical relationship to gender that Sontag (2009/1966) refers to as "corny flamboyant femaleness" and "exaggerated he-man-ness" (p. 279), and is also distinctly associated with a comedic culture of cross dressing. The practice of Barry Humphries as the character of the 'Australian housewife superstar' Dame Edna Everage, who by the 1980s is throughly "globalized", is used by Perry as an example of this sensibility (1998, p. 11). Perry also neatly illustrates the nature of the phenomenon of Antipodean Camp with this example from the late 1980s:

for the official opening of the Brisbane Expo 1988, the Queen of England had sailed up one side of the Brisbane River on her Royal Barge, whilst a submarine of the Australian Navy, painted bright pink and complete with a perspex deck and more than thirty dancing girls, had sailed down the other. Meanwhile, the contingent of local wharfies [dockside workers] who had earlier bared their buttocks as the Royal Barge had sailed past, returned to their more traditional watersiding pursuits (p. 10)

Perry's description of this iconoclastic spectacle, being somewhat amusing in his telling, could in many ways also describe Mulcahy's *Rio*. Both take place on water, are incongruously brightly colourful, homosocial, and exhibit self-assurance in the permission they enjoy to both adopt and subvert revered cultural emblems of Britain.

Also common to the spectacle of Brisbane Expo as described by Perry and *Rio* by Mulcahy is that they are well-meant in being comically risqué; and even if, by many standards, they are offensive, they operate without consideration of a good/bad binary of conceptual tastefulness or material execution. As stated, while Birmingham animator Ian Eames is the director of the only video supporting the *Rio* album not directed personally by Mulcahy, Eames' video is nonetheless commissioned by the Australian. Eames recalls that his brief from Mulcahy is to make an “erotic film”, and describes how his own interpretation of this brief tended toward the aesthetics of film noir (quoted in Zaleski, 2021, p. 89). However the British animator says of the Antipodean Mulcahy that: “I think his idea of erotic was a bit more Australian. It was a bit more like girls in bras and knickers — mud wrestling. That was his idea of erotic” (quoted in Zaleski, 2021, p. 90).

Mulcahy's directorial attitude towards women as props, in other words, the inclusion of the bodily aesthetics of ‘femaleness’ or ‘womanhood’ as a visual element, rather than as being representative of issues of gender or gender relations, is perhaps also explained in Eames' story. While Australian Antipodean Camp often calls upon tropes of gender, this is in heteronormative critique of sex roles as cultural traits, and not of the politics that supports them. Here, the performative nature of gender is revealed through being closely tied to self-conceptions of Australia as masculine culture. Embedded in this is the confidence to embrace transgressive sartorialism, echoing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick when she says of Boy George that “when he has the courage to perform in drag ... what he is secure in must be ‘masculinity’” (1995, p.12).

White Australian masculine culture is historically homosocial, arising from its colonial and convict origins. As Australian design historian and scholar of fashion and dress Peter McNeil (2017) explains when writing on the male queer and gay gaze:

the shortage of women and the dominance of homosocial environments was marked in the Australian colonies. Sydney was called the ‘Sodom of the South Seas’ ... a culture of hedonism, promiscuity, heavy drinking, pub life and cross-class socialising pervaded colonial life. These traits continued to influence the model of gay public entertainments that developed in Australia in the inter-war period [and until] the rise of social media (p. 36).

There are links to be made here between Australian colonial culture, Meyer’s afore-discussed Camp trace and the phenomenon called ‘situational homosexuality’, described in Chapter 3 of this thesis. The research observes in consideration of these things that transgressive dress and flamboyance often form an accepted part of the culture of Antipodean Camp, in which heterosexuality remains unthreatened and the dominance of white masculinity goes unchallenged.

The thesis has also already identified that the government television station ABC TV’s Australian television program *Countdown* plays an important early role in the international development of music video. To précis Shore (1984) and those whose writing on music video follows him, such as Austerlitz (2007), this program which begins as a live performance-based pop-music variety show in the Glam Rock era is also a notable platform for the broadcast of videos made by acts from the global North, unable or unwilling to promote their records via touring ‘down under’. A significant example of *Countdown*’s role in the success of this strategy is the

immediate post-Eurovision career success of Swedish group ABBA, a oft-told story, here recounted in 2021 by the program's host Ian Meldrum, who is known universally by the sobriquet Molly:

I must admit I smiled to myself when I heard that ABBA had called their musical *Mamma Mia*. My mind raced back to 1975. I was sitting in my little *Countdown* office when a crew member named Tony Vuat ran in ... a reel of clips had arrived from Sweden, featuring a batch of songs by a group called ABBA ...for some reason, [from amongst these, we] took a shine to 'Mamma Mia' ... I called ABBA's record company, RCA. "Don't bother playing that one on the show," I was told. "We're not going to release it as a single." But we did play 'Mamma Mia' on *Countdown*. And RCA still refused to release it. Then we played it again ... and again, finally forcing RCA to release it as a single. And when it went to No 1 in Australia, RCA in Europe also decided to release it ...

[Because of music video] ABBA had six No 1 singles in Australia in two years, with 'Fernando' spending an incredible 14 weeks on top. They were even bigger in Australia (16 top 10 hits) than [in] Sweden (12 top 10 hits; three No 1s). Just about every Australian home had a copy of the *Arrival* album – it went 18 times platinum, selling more than 1.2million copies. ABBA also made *Countdown* big news in the international music industry. Record companies all over the world started taking our little show seriously when they realised how big ABBA had become in Australia (n.p).

Australian music journalist Peter Wilmoth (1993) offers the view that beyond its brief as a mainstream entertainment program on the public broadcaster ABC TV, "*Countdown* was also a social document" (p. 14). In the following anecdotal passage, perhaps issued from the point of view of a teenager in 1981, Wilmoth recalls how on *Countdown*, UK pop fashion trends are:

enunciated breathlessly ... ‘You know there’s so many movements in England at the moment’ [voice-over announcer Gavin Wood] screamed one night. ‘There’s the new romantic movement, the techno-rock movement, the blitz movement [sic] and now, from the futuristic movement, here’s Duran Duran with “Planet Earth” ... the viewer would resist the urge to race to the bathroom, worried that something crucial might be missed. Duran Duran were a futuristic band, which had little or no meaning. Did it mean that in the future people would wear baggy pants and lipstick? ... Or whether frilly shirts and pirate pants were part of the new romantic or blitz movement. How could you tell? (p. 14)

Such first-hand phenomenological experiences of accessing new fashion knowledge through early music video on television provide useful evidence of how in the early 1980s, the synonymity of new pop, fashion, music television and particularly the band Duran Duran is widely and internationally understood. It also indicates the way in which Molly Meldrum’s taste in music becomes Australia’s taste. Meldrum loves pop music: he champions both feminine and masculine performers often excluded from serious criticism by male rock writers, including acts in the boy group genre. A teenaged Meldrum was famously ejected by security staff from amongst a crowd of ‘hysterical’ young female fans and locked out of The Beatles 1964 Melbourne Festival Hall concert, because of his overly enthusiastic and passionate screaming (Wales, 2014). A generation later, as Nick Rhodes recalls: “Molly was a real champion of the band [Duran Duran]. We had our first Top 10 hit in Australia with ‘Planet Earth’, thanks to *Countdown*. We came here [Australia] and everyone went completely nuts (cited in Meldrum & Jenkins, 2014, (p. 166).

In Britain, *Top of the Pops* starts in 1964 and is broadcast in colour from 1969, becoming “a key ingredient in the development of glam” (Craik &

Stratton, 2013, p. 32). Colour television is not launched in Australia until 1975. When this occurs, so does a significant connection between that medium and Australia's relationship to popular music, particularly the ascendent form of Glam Rock. As Jennifer Craik and Jon Stratton (2013) explain, the gender ambiguity, sexual transgression and androgyny of Glam initially collides with embedded notions of Australian masculinity and mateship. However, they note that as is the case in Britain, the rise of Glam parallels the spread of colour television (p. 32). *Countdown* premieres in late 1974 and begins weekly broadcast in colour in March 1975. Australian cultural studies scholar and social historian Michelle Arrow (2009) notes that the program is used to promote colour television in stores, owing to the way in which "brightly coloured glam and glitter acts showcased to possibilities of colour" (p. 131). By 1975, *Countdown* also regularly screens and sometimes commissions videos by local acts, which increase in sophistication and influence, and in turn support the careers not only of Australian performers, but aspiring video directors, of which Mulcahy is a significant example.

*Countdown* soon pivots to a strong music video focus, with far fewer live performances, and establishes a top ten music video chart, based on corresponding sales of 45 rpm singles, as being the nationally-understood index for popular music success. By 1981, at the time of the launch of MTV in the US, music videos by Australian and New Zealand acts, and videos for international bands by Australian directors, form a great body of the existing music video content initially available to be screened by the 24 hour network (Zaleski, 2021, p. 77).

Thus, *Countdown* predicts the power of music television that will reach its zenith in the MTV era. Gender relations and representations form an important aspect to this, as the genre of television permits female fans to access popular music in ways the sphere of live performance do not. Arrow explains that in the 1970s, acts in the heavily masculinised genre of what is known in Australia as “pub rock” rely upon regional touring to build their fan-following, and city-based alternative bands maintain localised followings, whereas pop bands find national fame through television (2009, p. 131). Arrow explains that while pub rock is often an aggressive environment, “televised pop was a more female-friendly place”, and in this, it has more in common with the “disco scene” that emerged from US black and gay culture (2009, p. 131).

Molly Meldrum, a former rock journalist, is a unique character in television broadcasting, often appearing in international accounts of pop music celebrity of the 1970s and 1980s owing to his prescient interest in the early careers of performers such as ABBA and Madonna, and close personal friendships with many including Elton John and Rod Stewart. In Australia, Molly Meldrum is also popularly known for the affectation of wearing a Stetson cowboy hat and not its local equivalent, the Akubra, such as the one belonging to Mulcahy which Simon Le Bon wears in *Hungry Like the Wolf* and John Taylor wears in *Rio* (Mulcahy quoted in Rowlands, 2016, n.p.). In the 1980s, amateur Egyptologist Meldrum throws wild, alcohol-fuelled parties at his rambling, palatial Melbourne home named *Luxor*; these eclectic events are attended by famous musicians and media personalities, elite athletes including Australian Football League players from the host’s beloved St. Kilda Football Club, and characterful locals, vividly remembered

by attendee Le Bon as being “crazy people” (Le Bon, 2014).<sup>49</sup> Meldrum’s own memoir calls upon the recollections of Andy Taylor in the autobiography *Wild Boy: My Life in Duran Duran*, paraphrasing the guitarist’s account of “[getting] drunk on Jack Daniel’s with Dennis Lillee and Greg Chappel and the rest of the [Australian Test Cricket] team, ‘people you only normally got to see on the BBC’” (in Meldrum & Jenkins, 2014, p. 167).

This collapsing of the hyper-masculine and notably flamboyant aesthetics is understood by this thesis as being consistent with the idiosyncrasies of Perry’s Antipodean Camp. Meldrum’s on-camera manner as host and editorial director of *Countdown* is equally idiosyncratic. For an experienced journalist, Meldrum’s television presence is famously amateurish: “a bit of a stumble, an endearing, all-too-human pop fan whose passion for music often gave rise to superb mangling of the language” (Wilmoth, 1993, p. 12). A well-known example of this occurs in 1977, when an excruciatingly nervous Meldrum mangles the prestigious opportunity to interview the future monarch, Prince Charles, on *Countdown*, an event described by the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) as: “one of the most disastrous, yet charming, moments in the history of Australian television”

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<sup>49</sup> It is claimed that in the aftermath of one of these legendary occasions, Iggy Pop is, fortuitously, found asleep in a closed sarcophagus. Meldrum is also known for enjoying the companionship of a successive series of white Maltese terrier lap dogs, all of whom he names ‘Ziggy’.



(n.p., n.d.).<sup>50</sup> However Molly's humble 'every fan' persona belies the significant influence he, and the television programs he helms, wields in the realm of pop music promotion. Just as MTV would in the US in the 1980s, the ABC has a virtual monopoly over music television in Australia in the 1970s (Arrow, 2009, p. 130). Mulcahy is part of Meldrum's elite media network; they also share common social interests. In his memoir of 2014, the television host recalls discussing Duran Duran with Mulcahy for the first time:

at the start of 1981, my friend Russell Mulcahy did the video for Duran Duran's debut single, 'Planet Earth'. And I did an interview with bass player John Taylor. I remember having dinner with Russell and saying, 'I've just done an interview with this guy from Duran Duran. Wait till you see him'. Russell replied, 'I've just done a video with them — wait till you see the rest of them!' (p. 166).

Similarly to Andy Warhol's appraisal of Duran Duran, Meldrum applies a keenly queer eye to the appearance and manner of the heterosexual group, identifying a cross-over between gay and straight performers in the new pop:

I remember during a trip to the United Kingdom I had to interview both Duran Duran and Boy George on one Sunday. As Nick Rhodes was getting his make-up done, someone said, 'After this, Molly has to go back and

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<sup>50</sup>The NSFA summarises this interview thus: "An extremely nervous and painfully awkward Ian 'Molly' Meldrum, interviewing His Royal Highness, Prince Charles on ABC's *Countdown* during a 1977 tour celebrating the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. Molly's nerves were evident from the very start. He became tongue-tied on numerous takes while introducing the Royal visitor, and at one point wiped his brow and said, 'Your Royal Highness ... oh, I'm sweating like a pig'. Despite breaking for a glass of water and a pep talk from the floor manager, the interview continued on its downward spiral with Molly losing all composure and introducing the young Prince to a few new expletives. Prince Charles has since described the interview as one he'll never forget. On *Countdown*'s 40th anniversary in 2014, he jokingly reminisced 'Was it really 40 years ago? It only seems like yesterday. I wish it were tomorrow — I'd cancel it!'" (n.d., n.p.).

talk to Boy George.’ Even though he was straight, Nick could be a bit of a bitch at times, so he took more than an hour getting his make-up done — just so I would be late for Boy George (Meldrum & Jenkins, 2014, pp. 166-167).<sup>51</sup>

Musicologist Greg Young writes in relation to the aesthetics of masculinity in late twentieth-century Australian pop music in the 1970s and 1980s, and argues that *Countdown* and Meldrum himself “de-sex[es] ... the queer perception of the male performer” (2004, p. 180). As with Mulcahy, in the current era, Meldrum is an out gay man. Having at times in his public life used bisexual as an interchangeable term of self-identification, Meldrum is one of a number of Australian public figures “who have voluntarily included themselves as out homosexuals” in Melbourne-published gay magazine *Outrage* (Young, 2004, pp. 180-181). However, in the 1970s and 1980s, this is not the case. His feminine nickname notwithstanding, Antipodean Camp permits Meldrum to be widely accepted simply as being a powerful masculine media figure, who is prescient and catholic in his tastes. Similarly, in his drawing upon visual motifs and decorative styles from the canon of Camp as much as from high-brow cinema and fine art, Russell Mulcahy brings the sensibility to the visual language developed in *Rio*.

### ***Rio* and graphic design**

In the music video *Rio*, Russell Mulcahy relies upon techniques such as split screens that evoke strategies used in two dimensional graphic design of the 1970s and 1980s, which themselves reference the aesthetics of Japanese woodblock prints and the decorative arts of the Art Deco period. These

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<sup>51</sup> Meldrum goes on to say that: “when I finally arrived, George said ‘What kept you?’ When a member of the crew told him ‘Duran Duran’, he started to slag the band. Because I grew up in the days of Elton and Rod, I was like, I’ve been there and done that, kids, get over it!” (Meldrum & Jenkins, 2014, p. 167).

include the dividing of 'frames' or visual spaces into shapes which contain cropped images, contrasted with flat blocks of colour. In *Rio*, these are vital aesthetic components used by Mulcahy to unite and elevate swathes of footage of the individual members of Duran Duran enacting clichéd plots, that has been captured, documentary style, in an ad hoc fashion.

When applied in two dimensional media, shapes and lines used in this way are often suggested to be 'moving'.<sup>52</sup> In moving image works, this strategy is also familiar from well theorised mid-century cinematic texts such as Saul Bass' title sequences for the American films of Alfred Hitchcock; the 1958 film *North by Northwest* is, once again, a good example here. And while Sontag sees this film as exhibiting "self-parody [that] lacks ebullience [and is too] forced and heavy-handed" to be successful Camp (p. 282), dynamic frame shapes and split screen techniques also occur as gimmicks in 'ebullient' and 'fun' films of the mid-century, such as the aforementioned *Pillow Talk* (1959). In this context, this approach can perhaps also be seen to reference the geometric aesthetic of Camp comic book illustrators such as Stan Lee, a mass-produced print style reinterpreted ironically in the Pop Art of Roy Lichtenstein, for example.

This thesis observes that it is at the level of postmodern Pop Art parody where much of the narrative of *Rio* occurs. There is a hectic, comic book, Pop Art quality to much of the clip, not only in specific sequences such as John Taylor's fantasy action hero beach landing and Le Bon's on-water 'chase' sequence leading into the last chorus, but throughout the whole

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<sup>52</sup> This principle is explained in a famous exchange in 1930 between the American sculptor Alexander Calder, pioneer of kinetic art and the form of the mobile, and the Dutch artist and theoretician Piet Mondrian, known for the rigour of his geometric abstract paintings. Calder recalls his suggestion to Mondrian that "it might be fun" to make the rectangles in a painting oscillate, that is, to introduce a dimension of actual physical movement into the work, to which Mondrian replies with great seriousness: "No, it is not necessary, my painting is already very fast" (Calder, cited in Crichton-Miller, 2015, n.p.).

video, owing to the sheer number of individual shots and frames that make up the visual text. Here, Mulcahy's background in film and television editing is also clearly apparent. Mulcahy's earliest music videos, shot on the road with a two-man crew on very low budgets in Australia in the mid 1970s, are both directed and edited by the aspiring filmmaker (Shore, 1985, p. 68). Carol Vernallis (2004) writes at length of the role of editing in the establishment of narrative in music video, and how this both arises and differs from that in cinema. Vernallis (2004) observes that:

music-video editing bears a far greater responsibility for many elements than does classic Hollywood film editing. Not only does the editing in a music video direct the flow of the narrative, but it can also underscore nonnarrative visual structures and form such structures on its own. Like film editing, it can color our understanding of characters, but it has also assimilated and extended the iconography of the pop star (p. 27).

Vernallis (2004) goes on to describe how elements of formalism derived from Russian early twentieth century cinema often feature in music video, but very rarely in mainstream American film. She uses the example of the "graphic match", wherein:

an edit joins two shots through shared compositional elements such as colour or shape, regardless of content ... the viewer can revel in an interesting edit, in a nice shape shared by two images, and in the cleverness of the director's and the editor's work, any of which might draw us away from the narrative of a Hollywood movie (p. 30).

Vernallis does not attribute the origin of these conventions in music video, which differentiate the form from Hollywood cinema and narrative television. This thesis proposes upon its analysis of *Rio*, and in consideration of Mulcahy's claimed longstanding interest in formalist, high brow European filmmaking, it is the Australian director who brings such

things as the graphic match to music video. However, the split screen technique and other dynamic graphic visual strategies which strongly characterise the 1982 production, and instantly become a major contribution by Mulcahy to the emerging language of music video, are also visibly related to the vernacular of popular late twentieth century graphic design.

Of particular interest to the thesis in this regard is the cover image of the *Rio* album, by American commercial artist and *Playboy* magazine house illustrator Patrick Nagel. When curator of the poster collection at the US Library of Congress, Elena G. Millie (1985) describes Nagel's practice, similarities to visual approaches taken by Mulcahy in the *Rio* music video can once more be observed: "strong areas of black and white ... with bold line and unusual angles of view. [Nagel] handled colors with rare originality and freedom; he forced perspective from flat, two-dimensional images" (p. 6). What is interesting about Mulcahy's moving image frames in *Rio* is that shots are frequently compositionally complex — for example in his use of multiple foreground/background figure placements — yet their content is often static as though they *are* two dimensional. This is the case for example in the late shot of a woman covered in 'pink suds' with a semi-submerged Rhodes' making a appearance behind her in a mirror, with its allusions to the Surrealism of René Magritte, who along with Salvador Dali is claimed to be a favourite artist of the director (Shore, 1985, p. 115). In such shots, it is also possible to see what Michael Shore describes as "Mulcahy's insolently sexy work, with its constant references to cinema chic and modern fashion photography", which Shore suggests is characteristic even of the director's earliest independent films made in Australia (1985, p. 68).

Nagel's cover image for the *Rio* album is an iteration of the iconic Nagel Woman, whom Millie profiles as being a:

unique vision of the contemporary woman. She is elegant and sophisticated, exuding an air of mysterious excitement. She is capable, alluring and graceful, but also aloof and distant. You will never know this woman, though she stares out of the Nagel frame straight at you (1985, p. 6).

As per the *Playboy* artist's convention, the version of the Nagel Woman on the cover of *Rio* is brunette, with elegant-yet strongly emphasised facial features — particularly, a red-lipsticked mouth and simply-yet-boldly accented eyes and eyebrows — against a plain white face. A static figure placed in graphic 'billows' of block colour representing fabric, with upswept black hair and an unadorned décolleté that acts as a 'shape' in her fashion look, the *Rio*-album Nagel Woman smiles broadly: yet, there is a knowing aloofness in her gaze (Fig. 100). In the *Rio* music video, 'the model', played by English-Palestinian model (now Tuscan Princess) Reema Ruspoli, is also styled, and indeed behaves, in just such ways.

Writing in 1985, Michael Shore states that:

Mulcahy is ... the prime source of most rock-video clichés — strobe-lit, slow-motion shots of objects shattering and water splashing, back-lit elegant or decadent sets with wisps of blue smoke and diaphanous curtains or lady's garments blowing through etc. ... it was he who first perfected the insolently provocative sex-surrogate of "the look" that has become endemic to rock videos (p. 114).

Yet, all of these visual elements can also be observed in the two dimensional, graphic design-based illustrative style of Patrick Nagel. Millie (1985) proposes that in the early 1980s, "like Andy Warhol, Nagel's work

focuses on current cultural concerns [such as celebrity], especially as reflected in the stylized form of the ideal woman” (p. 7). Mulcahy’s representation of ‘women’ in *Rio*, either as a character comically superior to Le Bon and Roger Taylor or as a posthuman fiction to Rhodes, is equally stylised.

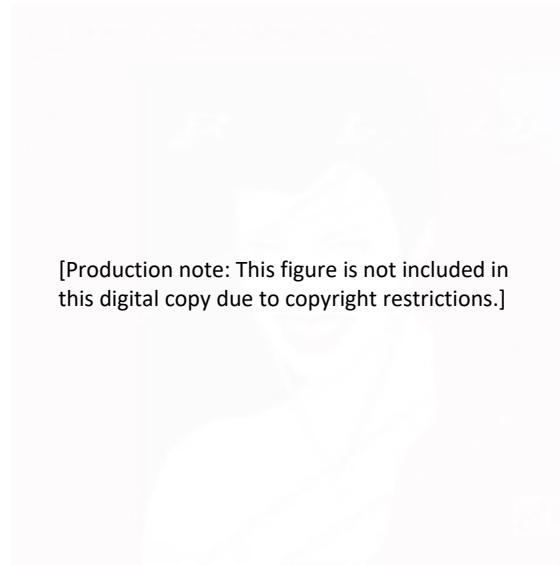


Fig. 100: [*Rio* (1982) album cover illustration by Patrick Nagel]

### **The Nagel Woman and Robert Palmer’s *Addicted to Love***

This thesis observes that *Rio* is not the only time music video will call upon the aesthetic of the Nagel Woman to stylise the “ideal woman”’s cool remove in a contrasting ‘superior’ way to a semi-comic performance of masculinity by a male pop dandy. Stan Hawkins (2009) usefully provides scholarly fortification of an observation made independently in the course of this research: that the appearance of the female ‘backing band’ of models in the 1986 music video for Robert Palmer’s *Addicted to Love*, directed by British fashion photographer Terence Donovan, can be seen to strongly reference Nagel’s distinctive graphic representation of 1980s womanhood. The thesis agrees with Hawkins when he states that whether “coincidental

or not”, these female figures are empowered-yet vacant in the manner of Nagel’s illustrative graphic designs: “discernible through a distinctive shaping of the eyes, black hair, full red-lipped mouths and snow-white skin” (p. 78). This is clearly descriptive of the version of the Nagel Woman who features on the cover of the *Rio* album, and also of Reema Ruspoli’s model character in the *Rio* music video, in that case with the exception of Ruspoli’s suntanned skin, a trait common to all who appear in the video.

In *Addicted to Love*, Palmer is attired in a particular form of conservative masculine dress which although at odds with the outward flamboyance of many of his contemporaries, is nonetheless understood to be highly fashionable. In his baggy, belted suit trousers, long sleeved shirt with button down collar, black straight tie, and natural light brown hair, Palmer capitalises on:

his natural good looks, a soulful voice and a compelling stage presence [to fashion] a cool masculinity, a subversive, foppish expression of vanity, which is framed by the groomed body [of women], fetishized and destined to be adored. At a time when nonconformity was almost a cliché ... his look was decidedly understated yet excessively engaging (Hawkins, 2009, p. 79).

Donovan’s static set up of Palmer and his band of models starkly contrasts with the overwhelmingly busy and fast-paced approach signature to Mulcahy’s videos. Hawkins comments that *Addicted to Love* lacks special effects or “fancy editing tricks” (2009, p. 79) and in comparison to *Rio*, this is of course objectively true. However this thesis would argue that the image of these emotionless, Camp women, with their “slim, sinuous figures [and] thin flowing sexless bodies” (Sontag, 2009/1966p. 279) is in moving image terms such a strong device that it functions as a type of visual effect. Hawkins suggests that the intensity of Nagel’s stylisation of “seductive



women not only makes them highly sexualized, but also empowers them in an unobtrusive way” (2009, p. 78). It could be said that as visual elements in Donovan’s music video, these black-clad, severely glamorous female figures holding instruments that they clearly do not play, are neither “seductive” nor “unobtrusive”. With their robotic miming of acts of musicianship, these women provide a human ‘visual background’ as a counterpoint to the performer/character of Palmer as the star of the video: and as such, they are an unusually memorable music video gimmick. Whether or not the Nagel-esque women in *Addicted to Love* are also in themselves “highly sexualized”, as Hawkins proposes, is another issue. This thesis suggests not, just as in *Rio*, Ruspoli is not, and for the same reason. This is because of conventions swiftly established by music video in the early 1980s which differentiate it from its origins in cinema or graphic arts. Donovan and Mulcahy establish the masculine pop star performers Palmer and Duran Duran, respectively, as the focus of the gaze even when — or perhaps because they are — shown in proximity to glamorous women. As archetypes, these women may be ‘powerful’: however in the video, they are essentially decorative, functioning as an aspect of the production design and not as actresses working equally with an actor in a narrative scene. Nagel’s original two dimensional enigmatic ‘woman’ is understood to have agency because in the form of an illustration, she is unknowable; the three dimensional ‘real life Nagel Women’ of these videos lack agency, because they are unknowns.

### **Rio and the White Possessive**

As previously observed, Reema Ruspoli’s image as the female model in *Rio* differs from the Nagel Woman in only one significant way: her suntanned skin. However as also noted, this is consistent with the appearance of all the other players in Mulcahy’s colourful music video imagining of boy band

New Men Duran Duran's endless, luxurious, glamorous masculine existence.

Duran Duran's tanned bodies — particularly those of Simon Le Bon and Roger Taylor — are in fact the second 'costume' worn in *Rio*. This near-nakedness is a notable feature of the fashioning a new pop masculinity for these former New Romantics; and in 1982, the exposure of these male bodies in such a prominent way in a mainstream music video is unusual. This thesis suggests that Mulcahy's treatment of the young male physique in *Rio*, in comparison to considerably more frequent presentations of young female bodies in music videos, remains uncommon in the present era. This is an issue which itself is the subject of much popular criticism, and some music video scholarship, although it is not something specifically addressed in this thesis.

This outlying gender presentation of Le Bon, borne of Mulcahy's directorial desires and Duran Duran's playful willingness to place an emphasis on masculine skin-as-costume in the visual logic of *Rio*, cannot therefore be seen as a long-term contribution of gender representation to the language of music video. Whereas the image of the band in Price's suits is both linked to a particular cultural moment *and* becomes influential to the fashioned aesthetics of masculinity in the ensuing decade, the image of Le Bon in his very brief swimming trunks, in the style of the iconic Australian brand Speedo, is conceptually contained within Mulcahy's comic playboy holiday narrative.

Or, this thesis asks, is it? This research has already made connections between the appearance of this video and Mulcahy's cultural identity as an Antipodean Camp, polymathic cinematic prodigy. But what is the

significance of his Australianness to the aesthetics of this video, other than its connection to the international development of music television? This thesis argues in answer to this question that Mulcahy's background in Australian beach culture is likely a principal source of his appreciation of the visual power of the male body beautiful. In 1984, Michael Shore notes an already apparent "water-imagery fetish" in Mulcahy's body of music video work (p. 116). Asking the director about the origins of this, Mulcahy replies to the music writer with amusement that: "oh, am I into water sports, is that it? ... no it's just, well, I grew up by the ocean, I was *in* water a lot and loved it, but mainly it's something I got from modern photography" (in Shore, 1984, p. 116).<sup>53</sup>

Writing on the queer trace in representations of masculinity, particularly "when men look at men, or women look at men", Peter McNeil (2017) notes how Australia's "cult of male beauty" is both formed by, and expressed in, the medium of photography, the two developing in concert from the early twentieth century (p. 29). Explains McNeil: "from the surf-lifesaver to the swimmer, the athletic body has contributed to images of the nation ... rais[ing] a series of interconnected social, sexual, political and aesthetic questions. [Historically] the Australian body and the body politic was generally represented as a white [male] body" (2017, p. 29).

Thus, Mulcahy's representation of Le Bon's nearly-nude male body can be seen as more than an attractor to young female fans, who may find in their remote carnal desire of the heterosexual singer of Duran Duran a

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<sup>53</sup> Mulcahy's direct usage of references appropriated from photographic works in his music videos is confirmed by John Taylor (2012), when he states that: "the inspiration for the 'Rio' video came from a book of photos Russell owned, *Foxy Lady*, by Belgian Photographer Cheyco Leidmann. The photographs were provocative; jarring, high-contrast neon colours, surrealist images of girls on beaches with milky oceans, girls with razors and shaving foam" (p. 211).

corresponding desire to part with their money. In the ‘costume’ of his exposed, suntanned youthful white masculine body, carefree and powerful in a remote, tropical paradise, the Australian Mulcahy also inserts the British Le Bon into the mythology of the colonial white possessive, which is emblematised by such bodies.

Quandamooka (Australian First Nations) scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson explains how within this structure, “the beach is appropriated as a white possession through the performative reiteration of the white male body” (2015, 35). Moreton-Robinson builds from Butler’s (1995) notion of the repetition of performative acts being central to the construction of gender identity, deftly and insightfully transferring this to the intersection between the ongoing process of colonisation and the construction of *national* identity, and its personification in the stereotype of the ‘bronzed Aussie’. In this, says Moreton-Robinson, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

the beach enabled the performance of a gendered white ontological experience where nature fed the soul and culture nurtured white men’s sensibilities. The beach was also an inter-subjective place where a man could socialize with family and friends or watch other beachgoers and indulge in the British custom of promenading along the shore. The beach was and remains a heteronormative white masculine space entailing performances of sexuality, wealth, voyeurism, class, and possession (2015, p. 37).

As a young, white man growing up in surf-side Wollongong in the second half of the twentieth century, it is unavoidable that Mulcahy should be inculcated in this cultural understanding, where the signifier of the suntan is transformative of otherwise unremarkable white men into:

the epitome of Australian manhood. Suntanning enhanced the aesthetic modalities of the white male body appropriating and domesticating the

hypersexuality signified by black skin. Tanning simultaneously renders the presence of color as a temporary alteration that works to affirm the dominance of white masculinity and its ownership of the beach (2015, p. 38).

As this thesis has identified, in *Rio*, Mulcahy contributes the power of colour to the emerging language of music video. In its dealing with time, music video is essentially temporary, and the way in which colour features in *Rio* — dripping, moving, spilling, changing between set ups — emphasises its impermanence. It is, in this way, somewhat reflective of the ‘impermanence’ of fashion, as *Rio* also provides the platform for the former DIY Glam fans Duran Duran to assert a newly-acquired masculine dominance through the sartorial benefits of their pop stardom. This is evidenced clearly not only in the band’s wearing of Prices’s tailoring, but also in the presentation of Le Bon and Roger Taylor’s suntanned bodies, which in this 1982 video, they are so confident to display.

## **Chapter conclusion**

This chapter of the thesis has explained that while Russell Mulcahy and Duran Duran are not universally appreciated, particularly in the realm of ‘serious’ criticism, the contribution that both the Camp Australian director and the aspirational British band make to the form of music video is clear. In the video, we can see the way in which early music video auteurs such as Mulcahy bring their knowledge of media and culture, and their personal aesthetic tastes, to a new promotional vehicle for pop music that harnesses the power of television. The chapter has also explained that although the American MTV becomes the preeminent incarnation of music television, it is both predicted and paralleled by network television programs such as Australia’s *Countdown*.

As a non-material example of the visual culture of fashion, we can also determine that the 1982 music video *Rio* is a document of Duran Duran's confidence in their entitlement to display their success and their bodies through a significantly developed sartorialism. That they invite designer Antony Price, known for his association with the 1970s glamorous heterosexual star persona of Roxy Music's Bryan Ferry, to collaborate in creating their well-tailored image of colourful excess legitimises formerly-feminised New Romantics Duran Duran as being part of a lineage of fashionable heteronormative male pop music performers. Duran Duran invite the gaze in *Rio*, and Mulcahy's highly-aestheticised cinematography lovingly applies it: thus, new widely-appealing fashion masculinities are created. The chapter has determined that this is also the case with Robert Palmer in the video *Addicted to Love*, which can be seen to reference the 1980s Art Deco graphic style of *Playboy* magazine illustrator Patrick Nagel, who is responsible for the cover image of the Duran Duran album *Rio*.

Duran Duran's highly fashioned contribution to the realm of music video continues some thirty years after *Planet Earth*, *Girls on Film* and *Rio*, for example in *Girl Panic* (2011) by Swedish director Jonas Åkerlund. That later music video, in which female supermodels of the 1990s play the members of Duran Duran, is a "meta-commentary on the complex connections that exist between music video, advertising, fashion, sexuality and identity" which strongly reinforces that "fashion was one of the main drivers of the success of Duran Duran's videos in the earliest days ... [used] to drive an image of opulence and panache" (Geczy & Karaminas, 2015, pp.

101-105).<sup>54</sup> Indeed, as we have seen here, the rock-and-roll-meets-evening-wear and vacationing tanned skin that is flamboyantly displayed by Duran Duran and captured by Mulcahy in the highly colourful ‘yacht rock’ exclusivity of *Rio*, does indeed represent “an image of opulence and panache” in comparison with the band’s DIY New Romantic styling and modest studio interior setting in *Planet Earth* (1981).

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<sup>54</sup> The conceit of this video is that the actual members of Duran Duran appear only as interviewers of the models, who play them in a mock-documentary *about* the making of the video. In *Girl Panic*, produced in collaboration with the Swarovski jewellery company, Simon Le Bon is played by Naomi Campbell, Eva Hertzegová plays Nick Rhodes, the role of John Taylor is performed by Cindy Crawford, and Roger Taylor is played by Helena Christensen. Andy Taylor is no longer a member of the group in 2015: the role of ‘the guitarist’ is performed by another former supermodel, Yasmin Le Bon, also well known to be the wife of Duran Duran’s singer.

## **Chapter 5: *Who am I to disagree*: the female dandy as pop provocateur**

### **Chapter introduction**

Thus far, this thesis has focused entirely upon music videos of the early 1980s that are produced to promote male pop music performers. In doing so, the research has identified that this emerging form is rapidly understood to be a very effective way to reinvent the masculine identity of an established British male music star for a new epoch in international visual communication, such as is the case with David Bowie. It has also located evidence that in the early 1980s, music video is an equally persuasive device in the establishment of a saleable image-identity of new fashion-aware, Camp British male pop superstars, such as Wham! and Duran Duran.

The thesis's subsequent historical and theoretical contextualisation of noteworthy early music videos such as *Ashes to Ashes* (1980), *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* (1984) and *Rio* (1982), made to promote these pop music acts locally and internationally via the medium of television, has revealed how the performers' fashioned masculine identities strongly contribute to the videos' overall effectiveness. On the issue of gender performance enacted through sartorialism, the thesis has argued that these moving image media works often represent both masculine ideals *and* critiques of masculinity that are readily explained through contemporary theoretical understandings of fashion.

This chapter of the research deals further with the issue of new and critical fashioned masculinities in music video of the early 1980s by investigating the performance practice of another key exemplar of the oeuvre: Annie Lennox (born 25 December 1954) of Scottish duo Eurythmics. Lennox's



musical partner in Eurythmics is Dave Stewart (born 9 September 1952). It is relevant to this thesis that from the band's outset, it is publicly known that Lennox and Stewart are former romantic partners in addition to their creative collaboration. The chapter will also more briefly consider the work of Jamaican American singer, model and actress Grace Jones (born 19 May 1948), another important fashion renegade of the new pop era and a muse of both her own then-husband, French commercial image-maker Jean-Paul Goude, and of the aforementioned artist and star maker Andy Warhol. The chapter will consider how Lennox and Jones — significantly, 'not men' — also contributed to discussions of new sartorial masculinities in the early 1980s, and to a new suite of visual references in the wearing of gendered garments by women, which continue to resonate in the present day. It will also propose that Lennox and Jones are examples of an under-examined cultural identity: the female pop dandy.

The thesis will argue that the masculine suit famously worn by Lennox in the feature case study of this chapter, *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)* (1984), co-directed by Chris Ashbrook and Dave Stewart, is not appropriated by her in the manner of a drag king who mimics masculine sexual identity. Rather, in this video she is clearly, as Barbara Vinken (2005) describes the dandy, an "inauthentic man" (p. 21). The writing will explain how Lennox adopts a masculine costume in response to issues of gender politics over those of gender identity, and as a form of cultural critique more broadly, being directly influenced by the provocative postmodern art practice of conservative working class, anti-authoritarian dandy performance art duo and life partners Gilbert & George (Lennox in Iannacci, 2011; Stewart in Gilbert & George, 1997).

Sheila Whitely (2000) argues that in the early 1980s, Lennox both uses and challenges MTV's "insistence on the visually impressive", being amongst the first women to use this unique form for questioning and exploring gendered identity (p. 123). Whitely describes Lennox as being an imaginative woman, whose goal of subverting traditional images of femininity causes Whitely (2000) to recall the words of Judith Butler, when stating that the singer consciously subverts sartorial signifiers in order "to make gender trouble" (p. 123). Whitely endorses in scholarship a personal narrative consistently proposed by Lennox as being the essence of her approach to costume: that by "playing with androgyny and wearing a man's suit to play down her femininity [she would] by inference, gain access to the male domain of artistic control" (2000, p. 123).

It has been previously outlined that this thesis interprets ideas arising from Butler in its analytical framework around the investigation of gender performance in early music video. The research therefore recognises that the 'gender trouble' Lennox makes in the music video *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)* (1983), the feature case study of this chapter, is not strictly of the type Butler discusses in her 1990 book of that name. Butler's title is well understood to be a critical corruption of the title of John Waters' ultra low budget, independent Camp shock comedy film *Female Trouble* (1974) a vehicle for the director's muse Divine (the American drag queen, actor and singer Harris Glenn Milstead, born 19 October 1945, died 7 March, 1988).<sup>55</sup> Butler proposes that in that film, Divine's "impersonation of

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<sup>55</sup> Waters is said to have bestowed the nickname 'Divine' upon Milstead in the mid-1960s, in reference to Jean Genet's character of that name from the previously discussed 1943/1949 novel *Notre Dame des Fleurs* (*Our Lady of the Flowers*). Divine establishes a disco career in the early 1980s, which culminates in the chart success of the track *You Think You're a Man* (1984), co-written by Geoff Deane, who would go on to write the cross dressing-themed musical *Kinky Boots*. The first single produced by the British hitmakers Stock Aitken and Waterman, later responsible for the early sound of Kylie Minogue, *You Think You're A Man* was performed on *Top of the Pops* on 19 July, 1984, apparently attracting a barrage of audience complaint, although the song reached number 18 on the UK singles charts (Baker, 1994, p. 250). Divine also performed the song on *Countdown* on 7 October, 1984, with the track reaching number 8 on the Australian charts and remaining in the Top 100 for eighteen weeks.

women implicitly suggests that gender is a persistent impersonation that passes as the real” (1990, p. viii). In this chapter, contextualisation of the production of *Sweet Dreams* will provide evidence that although such questioning of the construction of gender through sartorial cues may be Lennox’s motivation in subsequent Eurythmics’ music videos, that is not specifically at the heart of her striking transgressive sartorialism here.

In a similar, subtle departure from the theorising of masculine gender performance by ‘not men’, Lennox’s suit wearing performer/character in *Sweet Dreams* is not representative of the totality of Jack Halberstam’s (1998) measures of ‘female masculinity’, although this thesis does use this term in reference to the sartorial presentations in the early 1980s of both Lennox and Jones. Halberstam’s theory of ‘perverse presentism’, for example, very often relates to the masculine woman as a historical figure and primarily takes into account the sapphic, and occasionally hermaphroditic, sexual and gender identities of these characters. Halberstam (1998) explains that he often uses the term ‘female masculinity’ in order to distinguish nineteenth-century women who today would be recognised as lesbian, although themselves would have identified “neither as lesbian nor even as sapphic, or whatever the popular term of the day may have been for same-sex desire” (p. 54). Despite the furore created by their powerful sartorial inversion as pop stars in the 1980s, Lennox and Jones are both known to be biologically female and their sexual object choice is openly heterosexual. In this chapter the research relies more upon less frequent observations made by Halberstam, particularly when considering Lennox in *Sweet Dreams*, for example by way of the proposal that: “the masculine heterosexual woman need not be viewed as a lesbian in denial; she may merely be a woman who rejects the strictures of femininity” (p. 59).

Importantly however, as introduced in Chapter 1, Lennox is frequently identified along with Boy George as a key 1980s androgynous pop performer/character, popularly labelled with the buzz-term ‘gender bender’. This epithet recognises notable performance strategies otherwise often described as transvestism, drag, and cross-dressing, and is often conflated with non-heteronormative sexual identity. In the 1980s, this term also loosely describes the new pop’s scandalously fashionable flirtation with flamboyance, to which the spectrum of mainstream media response, particularly in the United States, ranges from titillation to the incitement of moral panic.

Yet in Lennox’s own words to *Rolling Stone Magazine* in 1985, it is plain she is not a leader of this media confection or perceived trend by choice:

when I started wearing mannish clothes on-stage, it was to detract from what people had come to expect from women singers ... I felt I couldn’t be a sex symbol. That’s not me. So I tried a way to transcend that emphasis on sexuality. Ironically, a different kind of sexuality emerged from that. I wasn’t particularly concerned with bending genders, I simply wanted to get away from wearing cutesy-pie mini skirts and tacky cutaway push-ups [bras] (cited in Rodger, 2004, p. 20).

Many scholarly and popular sources, a number of which have already been cited in previous chapters of this writing, note the influence of David Bowie upon the development of non-conforming personal identity in the era from which these ‘gender bending’ performers arise. Shaun Cole (2002) notes that the autobiographies of Boy George and Steve Strange for example specifically cite Bowie as a major influence, not just in matters of fashion but also upon their gender identity and sexuality (n.p.). In her feminist motivation for appropriating gendered sartorial symbols, Lennox differs significantly from these other pop star ‘benders of gender’ of the period, for

whom the issue of dress is linked to expressions of personal sexual identity, often relating specifically to male homosexuality, but also to non-heteronormative sexual self-identification more widely. Unlike Lennox, their fashioned masculinity perhaps relates less frequently to conscious gender destabilisation in the manner of 1970s genderfuck, and more to the freeing flamboyance and fashion-forward pomp of the ambisexual Glam Rock British pop dandy personified by Bowie, sometimes seen as being related to the flamboyant nineteenth-century second wave of dandyism (Paglia, 2013).

In his work on British post-war subcultural style, Dick Hebdige (1979) identifies how the “Bowie cult [is] articulated around questions of gender rather than class”, challenging “the traditional working class puritanism so firmly embedded in the [British] parent culture” by:

adapting images, styles and ideologies made available elsewhere on television and in films..., in [high fashion and commodified feminist] magazines and newspapers in order to construct an alternative identity which communicated a perceived difference: an Otherness ... challenging at a symbolic level the ‘inevitability’ of class and gender stereotypes (pp. 88-89).

In having blazed a trail in this regard, Bowie’s own use of mixed-gendered sartorial signifiers in the 1970s has already been shown in the current writing to have influenced strategies common to performance practices in the new pop of the early 1980s. Indeed, as we shall see in this chapter, Lennox’s performance and costuming practices in early music video also negotiate with an intersection between class and gender. It is observed here however that in *Sweet Dreams*, Lennox offers not so much a challenge to this stereotypic ‘inevitability’, but rather a satirical critique of it. This thesis likens Lennox’s construction of fashioned personae in music video to the

precedent of Bowie on a more straightforward, structural level. That is, that her performer/characters, regardless of their ‘gender’ — masculine, feminine, even agender — provide, as Julie Lobalzo Wright (2017) would have it, the magic third element of ‘star’ that must be added to music and lyrics in order to constitute the unique form of music video.

This notwithstanding, it would be disingenuous to downplay Lennox as being an important contributor of the issue of gender transgression to the language of early music video. Regardless of her own position, Lennox clearly remains a popular example of gender transgressive sartorialism in the minds of others, and her image has been theorised as such. Musicologist and ethnomusicologist Gillian Rodger, who writes elsewhere on the way in which late nineteenth and early-twentieth century female-to-male cross-dressed performances were intended to subvert class rather than gender or sexuality, states that: “the description of Lennox as a 1980s gender-*bender* may be accurate to some degree, but this description effectively devalues, or even erases Lennox’s challenge to late twentieth-century *constructions* of gender [emphasis added]” (2004, p. 17).

While British curator and exhibition-maker Victoria Brookes claims that “it’s indisputable that she’s a gay, feminist and fashion icon” (quoted in Iannacci, 2011, n.p.), Lennox’s actual position on the ‘gayness’ — or lack thereof — of her sartorial bending of gender in the 1980s is clearly expressed in the following later exchange with Scottish journalist and author Nick Thorpe (2011):

[Thorpe:] You were held up by feminists as a strong woman who refused to conform to gender stereotypes, and the hints of sexual ambiguity also made you a bit of a gay icon. Did all of that feel true to you?

[Lennox:] The first part, yes. Being a gay icon was a little baffling because for me I was just expressing who I was and my sexual orientation has

always been towards men. So, it was a strange one. When you make a statement in your own way, people identify with certain things and they also project their own ideas onto you, and so I ended up with that sort of gender-bender label, which really wasn't – to be frank – what I was saying.

[Thorpe:] In a sense you become owned by other people [via popular discourse].

[Lennox:] Yes, that's right. But, having said that, I had no objection to it. I thought it was kind of interesting that I was claimed by gay people as one of their own. I don't care about people's sexual orientation – that's really a personal matter which is nothing to do with me (n.p.).

Marjorie Garber (1992) proposes that “the story of transvestism in western culture is ... bound up with the story of homosexuality ... no analysis of ‘cross-dressing’ that wants to take itself seriously ... can fail to take into account the foundational role of gay identity and gay style” (p. 4). This research does not disagree with this discourse; and it is objectively the case that in the music videos which enabled Eurythmics to become a very successful British new pop act, Lennox performs in drag. When considering Lennox and drag, it is proposed here that it is however in fact in other videos, such as *There Must Be An Angel (Playing with my Heart)* (1985), directed by Eddie Arno and Mark Innocenti, in which Lennox fashions a *feminine* persona, where a Butlerian sense of gender performativity as enacted through drag is more accurately reflected.

That video is made at a time when Eurythmics are well established across the Anglosphere and supported by far higher record company budgets than were available to them in 1983, something that is visually apparent when watching the later video production. *There Must Be An Angel* is based upon a narrative conceit that we are observing a play within-a-play, which takes

place in a not-entirely-historically accurate Baroque eighteenth-century fairytale past. It features Stewart as a richly-robed, bacchanalian King, surrounded by powdered and bewigged courtiers. His coterie is entertained by angelic soprano Lennox and her supporting troupe of players, who include lithe maidens, puckish cherubs, and a corpulent castrati.

Placed in an ornate representation of Paradise, set in a gilded classical ‘ruin’, Lennox’s soprano character in *There Must Be An Angel* wears a white gown typically symbolic of purity. Her long, curled golden hair loose and uncovered but for a whimsical tiara-type headpiece, indicating that the performer/character is unmarried. Lennox’s character’s make up in this video is evocative of late-twentieth century advertising photography for cosmetics and perfumes, being hyper-feminine and jarringly anachronistic to her otherwise Renaissance-classical presentation, with mauve eyeshadow, frosted pink lips and cheeks, and exaggerated lash line.

In response to Barbara Vinken’s (2005) identification of a fashion zeitgeist — that is, fashion being the spirit of its time — this thesis has already identified a similar application of ‘zeitgeist’ as a descriptor for the form of music video (Cave, 2017). The thesis is now called to also observe that in John Donne’s sixteenth century metaphysical poem *Air and Angels*, a meaningful human form manifests an intangible preceding spirit, or air, this being one of the four essential elements —earth, air, fire and water — that, in the classical tradition, constitute the universe (Swinden, 1979). In a similar allusive consideration of ‘air’ and ‘spirit’, this thesis understands the era of postfashion through an increased understanding of how fashion’s own intangible spirit can transcend the boundaries of the garment in non-material forms, such as music video.



‘Air’ in the title of Donne’s metaphysical poem represents the masculine, and ‘Angels’, the feminine. Convenient to Donne’s analogy, this thesis recognises that it is in this video from 1985, set in a theatrical ‘heaven’ and communing with Angels, that Lennox should be costumed most emphatically as ‘feminine’. This performance of female gender also operates in the realm of Camp. Lennox has indeed been identified as a purveyor of female Camp, and Rodger (2004) clearly refers to *There Must Be An Angel* when she describes one of Lennox’s “endless transformations” as being “a campy angel in a Louis XIV drama” (p. 17). And owing to their exaggeration of gender coding, in Sontagian terms (2009/1966) music videos by Eurythmics do often read as pop Camp. However, Meyer’s identification of the apolitical “Camp trace” (1994), as being distinct from true Camp, is once again enlightening here: Lennox’s high-femme drag in the 1985 video, for example, is a paradox, owing to her contradictory lack of self-identification with queerness.

Butler (1990) asks, “is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established?” (1990, p. viii). This chapter will demonstrate that the aim of Lennox’s masculine ‘drag’ in *Sweet Dreams* aligns more clearly with the latter. Her appearance in *Sweet Dreams* is not intended to be read as male, but rather to critique dominant masculinity. Added to this are the sado-masochistic overtones of Lennox’s image in the music video, applying to it a layer of authoritarian menace (Walser and Harmon, 2007, p. 1050). Dominatrix is a designation made by Rodger (2004) in discussing Lennox’s various personae, presumably with reference to the *Sweet Dreams* music video. In this chapter of the thesis, Lennox’s didactic main character is also referred to as being a dominatrix. However once again, it must be noted that on this aspect of her performance, Lennox’s practice has been theorised in ways

that the singer herself has publicly contradicted. Lennox explains that *Sweet Dreams* is written at a time when:

I was feeling very vulnerable. The song was an expression of how I felt: hopeless and nihilistic ... I wore a suit in the video, with my cropped hair. I was trying to be the opposite of the cliché of the female singer. I wanted to be as strong as a man, equal to Dave and perceived that way ... people think it's about sex or S&M, and it's not about that at all (quoted in Jones, 2020, p. 475).

That a suit should represent masculinity so strongly for Lennox, a female star of the new pop, and that she should come to be so associated with new readings of this garment, is significant. This chapter of the research advances Halberstam's (1998) claim that "women have made their own unique contributions to what we call modern masculinity, and these contributions tend to go completely unnoticed in gender scholarship" (p. 46). This thesis argues that in its primary example of the *Sweet Dreams* music video, Lennox makes such a contribution; the writing will also demonstrate that an important contribution to this discussion is made in the gender-reinterpretive pop performance practices of Grace Jones.

While Lennox may be a less broad example of theories of gender performance than is often upheld on her behalf, there is no doubt that in the popular consciousness of the early music video era, Lennox's image in *Sweet Dreams* contributes to a shift in understandings of gender *in* performance. This is closely related to the boldness implied in a woman's wearing of that most 'masculine' of modern sartorial symbols, the suit: "a complex, enduring vessel of meaning whose form raises questions about identity that continue to challenge us today" (Breward, 2016, p. 35). Wham! manager Simon Napier-Bell, an openly gay man, proposes a version of an oft-repeated story regarding MTV's initial response to Lennox's masculine

appearance in the *Sweet Dreams* music video, when he states that: “they refused to play [it] until a birth certificate had been sent from England proving that Annie wasn’t an unusually dressed male” (quoted in Jones, 2020, p. 476). About this reaction to her iconic fashion presentation in the video, Lennox explains that:

what I was doing was radical for mainstream television. They were so worried I would be subversive or that I was a man ... [this is because] my Sweet Dreams-era suit was like armour for people who tried to label me as a sex symbol (quoted in Iannacci, 2011, n.p.).

Yet soon after this outrage, explains Stewart, “it was a global hit and No. 1 in the US. People went bonkers for the video, which was constantly on MTV” (quoted in Jones, 2020, p. 474).

The highly memorable *Sweet Dreams* is a concept-style music video, made three years after the first case study of this thesis, David Bowie’s *Ashes to Ashes*. The following structural analysis will reveal that similarly to that video, in *Sweet Dreams* a narrative is constructed through intercutting between different set ups. Across these, Lennox (more so than Stewart) is costumed as distinctly different performer/characters: a glamorously masculine, suit-wearing, didactic dominatrix; more briefly, a mysterious, masked, gown-wearing, cello-playing woman; and finally, fleetingly, an unclothed version of ‘herself’. From these costumes, the garment most strongly associated with the video is the suit, and the way in which Lennox wears it: accented by a striking orange cropped hairstyle and strong fashion make up, which for many defines Lennox’s pop image for all time, and as with Duran Duran’s coloured suits on a yacht, remains an enduring symbol of the early music video era.

Reflecting this character emphasis in the video, contextualisation of *Sweet Dreams* in this chapter will focus on Lennox's wearing of the suit, and how it contributes to the changed understandings of fashioned masculinity that are offered by British new pop to the world, via the medium of early music video. Here, the writing returns to Barthesian analytical strategies drawn from the methodological example of Lehmann's (2000a) study of Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959), where:

the outermost surface of [the] film's narrative ... namely [the] suit ... exerts a continuous presence throughout the duration of the film and thus stands analogous to the suit's normative presence in men's fashion throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (p. 468).

After describing relevant events and conditions surrounding Eurythmics that precede the production of the video, the chapter will consider Lennox's contribution of female Camp androgyny to the language of music video. It will then look at the specific influence of Gilbert & George upon Eurythmics, specifically as provocative dandies in a Brummellian tradition (Breward, 2000). This will then be contrasted with a concise reading of the visual practices of another notable example of the female dandy as 1980s pop provocateur, Grace Jones. In the course of the writing, reference will also be made to the Eurythmics' music video *Who's That Girl* (1983), which features Lennox in her infamous male drag persona of the 1980s, the Elvis-like 'Earl'.

## ***Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This) (1983)***

### **Structural analysis**

The video opens with a tight medium close up of a closed fist, striking a table illuminated by a bright spot light. This action accompanies the dramatic, synthesised opening beat of the song that forms the soundtrack to

the video. This is swiftly followed by an interior shot which establishes that we are in a darkened corporate boardroom, decorated with framed gold records. The room is dominated by a large table surrounded by empty chairs. At the head of the table, a slight figure with short hair is silhouetted against a blank display screen (Fig. 101). They strike the table, this time with a staff or baton.

This soft cuts or quick dissolves to the next shot, which illuminates the figure. As they slowly raise their head, they are revealed to be a white woman with cropped hair which is dyed bright orange. Her facial features are heavily emphasised with make up, including kohl-rimmed eyes and glossy lips. She wears: a masculine-style double-breasted suit which is slimly-cut to her body; a white collared shirt; a silver or grey tie with a subtle tessellated self-pattern; and black gloves. This is Annie Lennox. Her strong, slyly-confident expression is one of semi-sinister amusement. On the table, there is a world globe and now on the screen behind her, there is footage of the Earth taken from space (Fig. 102). Breaking with pop music convention, the song commences not with a verse, but with its chorus. She mimes its lyrics: "Sweet dreams are made of this / Who am I to disagree? / I travelled the world and the seven seas / Everybody's looking for something ...".

As she sings, she spins the globe and gazes at it with casual propriety, an omnipotent figure who controls the Earth's rotation. We cut to a wider shot, in which we see that the screen now displays surveillance-style footage of a large, orderly crowd of white people dressed in conservative middle class clothing of the post-war period, walking or marching (Fig. 103). Another character is in the boardroom. Seen from behind, it is a masculine figure with: a longer short-back-and-sides haircut; moustache; dark glasses;



Fig. 101: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 102: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 103: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 104: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 105: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 106: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]

wearing a form of suit/collar/tie attire. This is Dave Stewart. He is typing on the keyboard of a computerised device. On its small monitor, which resembles a portable television, we see another image of the two characters: they are in the same room, identifiable by the gold records, but sit cross legged on the table and are holding hands, as if joined in group prayer or meditation. Together, the characters are the band: Eurythmics. In the main shot, Lennox continues to lip synch as the verse begins: "Some of them want to use you / Some of them want to get used by you / Some of them want to abuse you / Some of them want to be abused ...".

As she sings, she points the cane at Stewart, instructing him as though from a lectern or pulpit (Fig. 104). We cut to a shot of Stewart's typing hands: on the monitor of his typing machine is an extreme close up on Lennox's lipsticked singing mouth in profile (Fig. 105). In the next shot, she swings the cane in a controlled repeated tapping motion into her own gloved hand, suggesting its potential as a weapon, as she gazes directly at the camera (Fig. 106). We cut back to Stewart's hands, which continue typing, as if transcribing Lennox's pronouncements, which she now issues from the smaller interior-frame monitor.

We dissolve to an extreme close up of Lennox's heavily lined eyes, closed as if dreaming; there is then a further dissolve that incorporates a second extreme close up, this time of Lennox's lipsticked mouth. As these shots, which strongly reveal the details of the singer's *maquillage*, remain in double image, there is a lip synched wordless vocal line mimed by Lennox's disembodied mouth, which begins the link to the next chorus. There is a medium wide shot: we see the pair sitting on the desk in cross-legged poses, hands entwined, eyes closed in meditation. Behind them, we see the gold records on the wall (Fig. 107). This shot is briefly treated with an early video





Fig. 107: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 108: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]

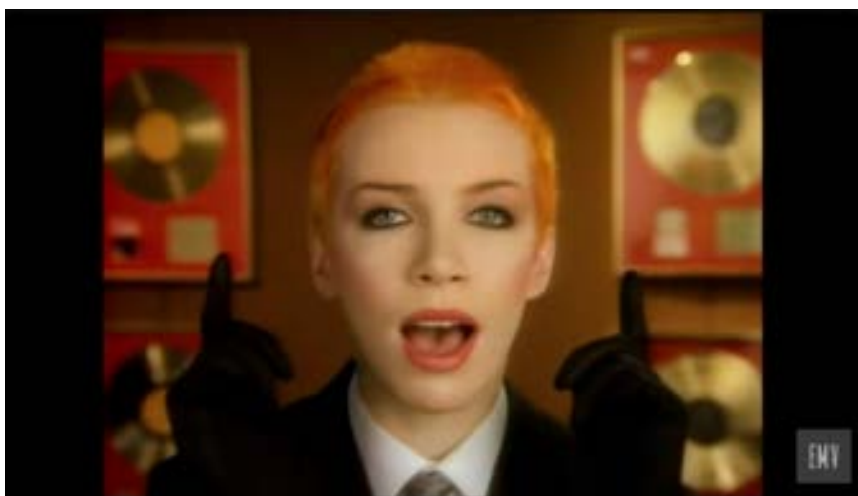


Fig. 109: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 110: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 111: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 112: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]

effect known as a visual echo, which evokes psychedelic travel, or transcendence (Fig. 108).

The song continues, repeating its chorus. This is mimed by Lennox, in conventional close up as would be a television news broadcaster. In that same dispassionate manner, she looks directly at the camera, the details of her cropped orange hair, heavily made up face and suit/collar/tie ensemble very clear. Behind her, we see the framed gold records. At the line “Who am I to disagree?”, her black-gloved hands enter the shot as she raises them (Fig. 109) and performs a series of gestures accompanying her performance, in the manner of an actor.

There is another shot of Stewart’s hands at the keyboard, with the display screen above it. At first, this shows a close up of the spinning world globe. Then, appearing on the screen is a surreal image: in tight close up, there is a human eye, somewhat grotesque as it darts about within a completely black ground that is decorated with a strongly contrasting white, linear squiggle detail (Fig. 110). This accompanies the line: “Everybody’s looking for something ...”. There is movement in the shot: we zoom out slightly, just enough to see that the black-and-white design that has isolated the eye is actually a Venetian carnival-style mask.

The non-lyrical vocal linking line recurs and we rapidly dissolve back to the ‘meditation’ set up. We see that Lennox’s forehead is adorned with a red bindi. This coloured dot is highly significant in South Asian culture, understood in Hinduism as allowing access to energy released through the ajna chakra during meditation. It is the ‘third eye’, which sees the inner world just as a physical eye sees the external world. It is also a traditional signifier of womanhood, and of a woman’s status as being married.

We dissolve to double image of an extreme close up of Lennox's closed eyes and bindi-ed forehead, and zoom in on the red dot as the song proceeds to its musical bridge, which commences with the lines: "Hold your head up / movin' on / keep your head up / movin' on" (Fig. 111).

Through the use of Chromakey technology, the red dot becomes a circular mask or video 'window' through which we see a very tight external day-for-night shot of rippling water, slightly solarised and with a strong blue video colour cast (Fig. 112). The circular mask/window is further divided by two lines that intersect at right angles: we look it as though crosshairs of a rifle sight. In the bindi/mask/window/sight, we surveil Lennox and Stewart in a dinghy: he is seated, rowing the small boat toward the camera; she stands tall at the stern, in salute. Neither shows recognition of being seen by the camera (Fig. 113).

The lyrical lines of the bridge are repeated four times, over the brief course of which there is a visual sequence that commences with shots of a new set up of Lennox and Stewart. They are outdoors and are playing cellos. This 'place' this is the origin of the surreal 'rolling eye' briefly seen earlier: we understand this by the black-and-white, avant-garde design Venetian mask Stewart wears as part of his costume. This also comprises: a frock coat, worn with possibly the same shirt and tie as in the boardroom set up; and grey trousers. His facial hair is clearly shown here, and is in the style of an Edwardian goatee (Fig. 114).

Lennox also wears a black upper-face mask, hers decorated with small pearls arranged in a regular dot pattern. She also wears: a floor length, blood-red ball gown, with cap sleeves, fitted bodice and sweetheart neckline; a black Restoration-style length female wig, and red lipstick (Figs.



Fig. 113: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 114: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 115: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]

115, 116). Shots of the pair in this set up are intercut with a close up image of a black cow with a white blaze, wearing a bridle, in the boardroom which is identifiable by the gold records (Fig. 117). We focus on the cow's eyeball, which rolls in a way that is reminiscent of previous shots of Stewart's eye. In this sequence, we also see one of Lennox's eyes, identifiable as being from the boardroom set up owing to her make up, in extreme close up: at first it is closed and angled downwards as though the performer/character must be lying in slumber (Fig. 118), then it blinks awake sharply. The next shot is a close up of Lennox, from the seated meditation section, featuring both of her eyes. Again, these are at first closed, and then open abruptly (Fig. 119). Her gaze toward the camera is strong.

The lyrical section of the bridge ends and there is a brief musical passage, over which the 'cello-playing' of the Eurythmics mimes a synthesised string part. The sequence continues with an exterior long wide shot of Stewart in slow motion, in a field with a different, dun-coloured cow. He wears his costume from the seated masquerade 'cello playing' sequence, but here he breaks character and 'plays' his cello aloft, swinging it as he turns around in circles (Fig. 120). The final shot of this section is a low angle mid shot of the bewigged and masked Lennox, who raises her head skywards (Fig. 121).

The song commences its final verse, which repeats the same lyrics as the first two iterations. It begins with an overhead shot of Lennox and Stewart, lying on the table in the darkened boardroom, 'top to toe' but with heads next to one another. Lennox faces the camera and Stewart faces away. Shown full-length in the boardroom set up for the first time, we see now that Stewart's costume of frock coat and grey trousers remains the same throughout the video. Lennox lip synchs the track. They are 'spotlit' by light presumably being emitted from the wall-mounted display/projection screen



Fig. 116: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 117: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 118: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]





Fig. 119: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 120: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 121: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



which although is outside the frame, Stewart must be facing. This is confirmed when the camera tracks back, tilts up and angles down in one motion, and the room is more fully revealed. The large screen is blank, surrounded by the gold records; Stewart and Lennox are lying on the table; the black and white bridle-wearing cow enters the frame from the left and walks around the head of the table, moving toward the camera at the right of the screen as the shot ends (Fig. 122).

We then quickly dissolve to a medium close up of Lennox at a three-quarter angle to the camera. She is in her suit, in the boardroom. In the brief time there is a double image on screen from the dissolve, she faces away from the camera over her shoulder, back toward the gold records on the wall. As the shot becomes a solid image, she swings her head around quickly on the beat before the line “some of them want to abuse you ...”, and sings the line directly at the camera. Her gaze is intense and her expression is knowing, accented by a playfully sardonic smile (Fig. 123).

There are a series of soft cuts: a moving shot that begins on Stewart’s sunglass-wearing face and goes on to depict him typing in the close company of the cow (Fig. 124), chained by its bridle, who chews its cud, with droplets of moisture visible on its muzzle and whiskers and again highlighting its eye; a further tight close up of the cow, the whites of its eye prominent; this dissolves to a spinning overhead shot of Lennox, lying on the table, eyes closed (Fig. 125); and finally a return to the close up of the top section of Lennox’s face from the meditation set up, her eyes closed. These slowly open and continue to do so until they are wide and held with sustained recognition, the whites almost showing.

Then, the beat that introduces the chorus is once again accompanied by an image of Lennox's gloved hand, thumping the desk. There is a sharp cut and we see Lennox in an exterior medium wide shot. She is wearing the 'boardroom' attire (dark suit/white shirt/silver tie). The location is a green grassy field, ringed with trees that have sparse foliage and stand as dark lacy shapes against a cold light blue sky. There are a number of black and white cows closely assembled behind her; the colour contrast between her orange hair and the green grass, and between the black and white in both Lennox's ensemble and the cows' markings, is strong (Fig. 126). She looks directly at the camera, once again in the form of an instruction, lecture, or broadcast, and sings the first of the six repetitions of the chorus which close the track.

This soft cuts to a version of the same shot: we pan and zoom out to reveal that although they are outdoors in a field amongst a small herd of cattle, Lennox and Stewart are also still at the boardroom table (Fig. 127). Stewart remains at his typing machine with monitor, and continues to transcribe. This shot is intercut with close ups and medium close ups of Lennox singing in her suit ensemble, usually performing direct to camera but also including a soft double image that captures her issuing an expert wordless vocal flourish, mouth wide and eyes closed (Fig. 128). In the second last iteration of the chorus, at the lines "I travelled the world and the seven seas / Everybody's looking for something ...", she raises her suited arms and gloved hands wide and high in a messianic gesture and looks toward the heavens (Fig. 129).

The closing musical passage is a fade out of the chorus repeated, which is visually accompanied by shots that are soft cut or use short dissolves. The first of these is a slow motion long wide shot: this is a back view of Lennox

and Stewart with several cows, in the field and closer than previously to the trees which edge it. Walking away from the camera, they are depicted in full length. From this viewpoint, we can see that Lennox wears flat shoes or boots and that her suit has perhaps been subtly tailored to her waist (Fig. 130).

The next shot, also in slow motion, is of the pair in the row boat. In this iteration of the set up, Stewart remains at the bow and Lennox, the stern; however Stewart is standing and plays the cello, while a saluting Lennox is seated. As before, they do not acknowledge the camera (Fig. 131).

That shot dissolves into by penultimate shot of the video, which is of Lennox's closed, kohl-rimmed, eye shadowed and mascara-wearing eye (Fig. 132). This is the make up worn in the suit/boardroom costume, although the angle of this shot indicates that she is in a face down, 'sleeping' pose, as was briefly seen earlier in the clip. The eye blinks 'awake', the shot zooms out and pans and we see that Lennox is indeed in a bed. The bed is made up with white linen; next to the bed there is a small, white three-drawer nightstand upon which there is a white lamp with a conical shade, which sheds an ellipse of light (Fig. 133). There is a book on the table: its cover is mainly white, although an indistinct image or title in light print is apparent. The walls of this room/set are also light, white or off-white, with the overall colour cast being warm white. Just visible at the top of the shot is the bottom of a poster on the wall; the paper stock is white, and there is text printed in all capitals in a serif font. The word 'FEMININ' is legible.

The wakened Lennox's shoulders and arms are naked: she appears to be unclothed in the bed. As she song fades out to its end, she reaches out to turn off the bed-side lamp. On this action, we zoom in and the camera rests



Fig. 122: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 123: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 124: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 125: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 126: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 127: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 128: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 129: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 130: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 131: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 132: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



Fig. 133: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*  
[music video still]



on its final shot. This is of the book next to the lamp, the cover now distinguishable. It bears the title 'SWEET DREAMS are made of this', also set in a serif font, and the cover image is a photograph of Eurythmics, in which Lennox and Stewart are attired in their suit costumes. On the right of the image, Stewart has his back to the camera; Lennox, to the left, faces it (Fig. 134). We fade out to black.



Fig. 134: Ashbrook, C. & Stewart, M. (1983) *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)* [music video still]

## Production background

Before proceeding to its theorisation of *Sweet Dreams*, this research offers the following summary of the circumstances leading to the production of the music video. Whilst being of anecdotal historical interest, this background is also important to the thesis, as it continues to identify how experimental and expedient approaches taken in the making of this new pop and its accompanying early music videos can result in a Sontagian sense of ambitious, pure or naïve Camp, which exists outside a good/bad binary of aesthetic judgement.



Stewart offers a mostly consistent telling of the circumstances of Eurythmics' origin story in press interviews from the 1980s, and to media in the present day. These interviews also appear to be the factual source of a great deal of popular commentary on the group, and the biographical background to much of the currently limited scholarly investigation of their musical practice (Whitely, 2000; Rodger, 2004). In the 1980s, Lennox is less forthcoming to the press than Stewart, with Rodger (2004) stating that the singer approaches the media with disdain, providing them with scant biographical information and insisting that interviewers focus instead only on her music and performance, and not on details of her personal life (p. 18). This extends to discussions of her personal politics: writing in 2000, Sheila Whitely declares it "rather disappointing" that despite what she notes as being Lennox's acute insights into gendered identity, the performer directly avoids any advocacy of feminism (p. 133).

Lennox has been forthcoming to journalists in more recent times, providing information regarding her creative strategies and motivations. This occurs most notably in 2011 interviews coinciding with the V&A's special display of her costumes and career ephemera held between 15 September 2011 and 26 February 2012, entitled *The House Of Annie Lennox*, curated by Victoria Brookes as a supplement to the exhibition *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970 - 1990*, itself held between 24 September 2011 and 15 January 2012. Interestingly, it is in this larger exhibition on postmodernism, and not in the display specifically dedicated to Lennox, where in the new millennium, the museum features her *Sweet Dreams* suit. In doing so, the institution validates Lennox's masculine costume's status as a fashion artefact representative of the self-aware visual culture of postmodernism. This is something to further consider in relation to observations that will be made shortly on the influence upon Eurythmics of

the art practice of Gilbert & George, which is frequently categorised as being postmodern.

From across a range of sources, it is established that working class Aberdeen native Lennox studies piano and flute as a child, and enrolls at the Royal Academy of Music, London, in 1972 (Whitely, 2000, p. 123). The Motown fan finds the traditionalism of the classical academy stifling, and leaves after three years to pursue a career as a singer-songwriter, initially performing with folk rock combo Dragon's Playground, and then in the group the Stocking Tops, where she meets and forms a romantic attachment with guitarist Stewart.

Renamed The Tourists, the band enjoy limited success with a sound largely influenced by 1960s rock and pop (Whitely, 2000, p. 124). The group being best remembered for a 1979 cover version of Dusty Springfield's *I Only Want to Be with You*, which reaches number 4 on the UK charts, number 6 in Australia and number 83 on the *Billboard* Hot 100. The Tourists tour extensively, including in support of Roxy Music on their 1979 *Manifesto* tour, then break up somewhat incongruously in the Australian regional city of Wagga Wagga in either 1981 (Whitely, 2000, p. 124) or 1982 (Stewart quoted in Jones, 2020, p. 473). However, the partnership of Lennox and Stewart immediately solidifies as the duo Eurythmics.

Says Stewart:

In 1982, Annie and I went to Australia with the Tourists, but the band broke up and we ended up in a hotel in Wagga Wagga. I had a little black and yellow Wasp synthesiser and was making didgeridoo sounds [sic]. When Annie started singing along, we thought, 'Maybe we could make weird and experimental electronic music?' On the flight home, we

split up as a couple but kept on with the music, carting the gear in a second-hand horsebox (quoted in Jones, 2020, p. 473).

Eurythmics secure a bank loan of £5000<sup>56</sup> and with this money, purchase more electronic musical equipment. Presumably, amongst this a Movement MCS Drum Computer (or Percussion Computer) MK1, a very rare British made drum machine, developed by Movement Computer Systems and released in 1981. It is estimated that only 30 or so units of the machine are made, and these are expensive at a cost of approximately £1999 ex vat, with a Mk 2 released in 1983 and production then ceasing for good in 1984 (Vintage Synth Explorer, n.d.). This contraption combines analog synthesized drum sounds in the style of a Simmons drum machine, and digital 8-bit sampled drum sounds in a LinnDrum style. Its most obvious and unique feature is however its computer-like interface: used to facilitate graphic editing of the sequencing of drum patterns, the machine's data is displayed on a green/black monochrome cathode ray tube display.

In the present day, Eurythmics are still regarded by electronic music aficionados as being this obscure instrument's most prominent proponent, with the track *Sweet Dreams* in particular being widely held to be the greatest demonstration of the unusual machine's capabilities.<sup>57</sup> The clunky device is, however, not a great success story of British technical innovation: "it never sounded as good as the competition surrounding it from Linn, Simmons and [American synthesiser manufacturer] Oberheim and the product never really took off" (Vintage Synth Explorer, n.d.). In this research, the significance of the Movement MCS Drum Computer Mk 1 exceeds its contribution to the idiosyncratic sound of the track *Sweet*

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<sup>56</sup> Stewart recalls: "we went to see the bank manager. Sat in his office, we were this odd couple. I was taking speed. Annie wasn't" (quoted in Jones, 2020, p. 473).

<sup>57</sup> It is said that Vince Clark of Depeche Mode, Yazoo and Erasure later buys Stewart's Movement MCS Drum Computer Mk 1 from him, at a cost of £500.

*Dreams*. This peculiarly British device is also a feature prop in the music video: this is in fact the ‘typing machine’ or computer with monitor operated in the clip by the performer/character of Stewart.

The sounds produced by this and other experimental synthesised instruments are the musical signature of *Sweet Dreams*, with the origins of the composition in fact belying their quirks. To once again rely upon the reflections of Stewart:

I couldn’t get any of the new equipment to work ... Annie was totally depressed, curled up on the floor in the foetal position, when I managed to produce this beat and riff. She suddenly ... leapt up and started playing the other synthesizer. Between the two duelling synths we had the beginnings of ‘Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)’ (quoted in Jones, 2020, p. 474).

Importantly however, as Stewart also explains, this is “a juggernaut rhythm, but it wasn’t a song” until Lennox improvises a “starling rant which began ‘sweet dreams are made of this ...’ it was mind blowing, but depressing” (quoted in Jones, 2020, p. 474). It is true that in direct comparison with the sunny lyrical optimism of George Michael and Simon Le Bon, Lennox hardly proposes a happy outlook on her experience of the world in the early 1980s. Here, art imitates life: at the end of *The Tourists*, Lennox is “battered and bruised ... massively in debt and [had] come across some real monsters in the music business” (Lennox quoted in Jones, 2020, 474). Despite this, the driven duo continues to work within the organisational structures of the ‘big capitalist’ music industry, signing to international American company RCA Records. It is sometimes suggested that the boardroom set up in *Sweet Dreams* is filmed on location at the London offices of RCA (Whitely, 2000). However Stewart, who as co-director of the video claims credit for much of its concept, states that:

I wanted to make a commentary on the music business but something a bit weird and dreamlike. So we mocked up a record company boardroom in a studio in Wardour Street and put a cow in it, to signify reality (quoted in Jones, 2020, p. 474).<sup>58</sup>

Just why a dairy cow might “signify reality” can be theorised by considering that in *Sweet Dreams*, Eurythmics’ critique the culture industries of the late twentieth century. The international record company is a construct of modernity and as such, it is entirely ‘man made’, in every sense: it is a product of the anthroposphere; it is an artificial, not organic, structure; and it is one that is developed and maintained in the image and principal interests of men. The music industry, by this understanding, stands analogous to Barbara Vinken’s (2005) distinction of fashion as a system that arises in concert with modernity, in which “men produce [and] women consume” (p. 13).

In the video, a loose narrative is made through intercuts between the dimly lit interior record company boardroom space and an exterior pastoral setting: this setting may in contrast represent the bucolic authenticity of the pre-industrial age. It could also make reference to Lennox’s background as a classically trained musician: in the boardroom, the self-taught Stewart operates an ineffective electronic instrument, developed in late capitalism; in the cow field, Lennox and Stewart ‘play’ acoustic instruments employed in ensemble music of the Classical era.

Lennox’s costumes in the video are also clearly evocative of this contrast. In the cow field, her gowned masquerade ensemble speaks to images of Romanticism. Indeed, the duo’s presence in this place is, in a Romantic

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<sup>58</sup> In this interview, Stewart goes on to recall: “there we were, Annie and I laid flat on a table, and this cow, which was peeing everywhere” (in Jones, 2020, p. 474).

tradition foretelling of metamodernism, something that “Reason cannot account for” (Vermuelen and van den Akker, 2010, p. 10). In the boardroom, however, Lennox wears a “contemporary ready-made suit, [that being] the product of a widely recognised and well-ordered system of manufacture, refined and democratized throughout the twentieth century” (Breward, 2016, pp. 12-13).

This research observes that in her subversive wearing of this prime signifier of constructed, quintessentially modern, masculinity in *Sweet Dreams*, female new pop performer Lennox in 1983 contributes to the process of democratisation of men’s fashion. The research also notes how this strategy draws from a number of other frameworks and art practices, some of which will now be investigated, beginning with understandings of Camp.

### **The Camp androgyne**

It is perhaps because of Lennox’s association with androgyny, and not heterosexuality, that Fabio Cleto (1999) does not name her as one of the “marginalised ... heterosexual women ... from the 1920s to the 1980s, [who] identified in the ... mimicry of camp a deconstructive send-up of their performative status as women and as objects of male desire and representation” (p. 256). Nonetheless, in the sphere of music video, this thesis must also recognise Lennox by that description.

Across the limited body of scholarship concerning Lennox, writers are frequently tempted to explain her practices through understandings of Camp only based in historical precedent, by identifying prior cross dressing women and tropes of androgeneity. George Piggford (1997), for example, proposes Lennox as a Camp androgyne, prosecuting his theory by tempering Butler’s (1990) ahistorical model of gender identity with the

cultural specificity of camp theory. Piggford (1997) makes much of parallels he perceives between Lennox's performance personae and the time-travelling, dually-sexed eponymous protagonist of Virginia Woolf's modernist novel *Orlando: A Biography* (1928).

This research also makes connections between Lennox and the character of Orlando, however with reasons departing from those of Piggford. The 1987 Eurythmics music video *Beethoven (I Love to Listen To)*, directed by Sophie Mueller, in which Lennox performs in various forms of female and gender-fluid drag, can be seen as a precursor to David Bowie's *The Stars (Are Out Tonight)* (2013), directed by Floria Sigismondi. In that video, an aged Bowie's 'wife' is portrayed by a drag wearing Tilda Swinton,<sup>59</sup> who resembles Lennox's earlier music video character: a tormented twentieth-century housewife entrapped in consumerist domesticity, who is ultimately liberated through the act of drag. Swinton, famously, also embodies the titular Orlando in Sally Potter's 1998 feature film adaptation of Woolf's novel, which for this thesis, completes the circle.

In the course of his argument, Piggford also connects Lennox to a history of female Camp that includes Marlene Dietrich and Mae West. This thesis sees a fundamental difference between the aforementioned gender-signifier-combining Dietrich, and Lennox. Dietrich's on and off screen personas are linked to her bisexuality, and this association is popularly understood as explaining her fashionable sartorial inversions, both in and out of character.

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<sup>59</sup> The full cast of this conceptually dense, highly art directed and fashion focused late period Bowie video also includes supporting players as alter-egos of Bowie and Swinton, who each bring with them complex cultural information. Bosnian Australian transgender model Andrea Pejić and Netherlands model and artist Saskia de Brauw perform cross-dressed as a disruptive, youthful couple from 'another realm', personifying celebrity and sex and problematising gender, who invade the older Bowie and Swinton's materially comfortable yet unfulfilled lives. Norwegian model and architect Iselin Steiro plays an androgynous, Thin White Duke-era Bowie lookalike, who engages in a mutually voyeuristic relationship with the cardigan-wearing, older 'real' Bowie.

Similarly, West's bawdy, drag-infused Camp on screen identity is known to have simply magnified her very liberated female sexual identity and off screen status as a homosexual ally, in an era where this is boldly uncommon. Piggford (1997) suggests that: "Lennox's performance should be understood in terms of the commodification of gay culture that was well underway by the 1980s" (p. 58). Yet, *Sweet Dreams* does not comment upon the post-Stonewall conditions of the early MTV era. Rather, it specifically questions the mechanisms of cultural production and consumption from which the music video phenomenon itself arises.

Rodger (2004), who discusses Lennox in relation to drag and to camp, identifies examples of Lennox's "temperamental" reputation being confirmed in the singer's impatience with interviewers who question her feminine identity (p. 21). Rodger contextualises Lennox's position by explaining that although the singer's reaction:

may well have been prompted by homophobia ... it is also worth considering that the frustration she exhibited may also have been due to the limits imposed on her — if the identity of 'strong masculine woman' was seen as being synonymous with that of the lesbian then it became unavailable for non-lesbian women. This was especially true in the 1980s, the [neoliberal] era of Thatcher and Reagan (p. 21).

Rodger likens Lennox to female cross-dressing music hall and vaudeville performers of the previous century such as Vesta Tilley, who also publicly distanced themselves from lesbianism and off stage identification with "mannish women" (Rodger, 2004, pp. 20-21). Considered to be actresses more than singers *per se*, these performers relied heavily on stock character stereotypes such as "the young working-class woman or man, the dandy or man-about-town, the sailor, the policeman, the flower seller, the news boy" (p. 21). This thesis agrees with Rodger, in that Lennox's 'drag' certainly is



also of the type which calls upon the audience's own knowledge of the semiotics of modern gendered fashion in order to understand the nature of the performer's cultural comment. This approach is apparent in many of Lennox's music videos, both with Stewart in Eurythmics and over the course of her subsequent solo career in the 1990s and 2000s.

A particularly interesting example of this strategy is another Eurythmics video from 1983, *Who's That Girl*, directed by Duncan Gibbins.<sup>60</sup> As in *Sweet Dreams*, Lennox essentially plays two characters in *Who's That Girl*. This video also relies upon what is seen as Lennox's key contribution to performativity in music video: the disruption of accepted sartorial cues of binary gender. The significance of this disruption is especially heightened in *Who's That Girl* because one of these characters is a man: Lennox's Eurythmics-era masculine alter ego, Earl.<sup>61</sup> Along with Lennox's iconic suited appearance in *Sweet Dreams*, her performance as Earl at the 1984 Grammy Awards is considered to be one of her most obvious uses of fashion to challenge the gender norms of the music industry. It is recalled that on the infamous occasion, "the celebrity crowd greeted her with a stony silence, her masculine edge interpreted as hostile chic" (O'Brien, 2003, p. 263).

The character of Earl strongly resembles a young Elvis Presley, whose symbolic star image has been well addressed in earlier chapters of this research. The presentation of Lennox's masculine persona is in fact so evocative of the 1950s star that British music journalist and author Lucy

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<sup>60</sup> Gibbins directs a number of music videos in the 1980s that are connected to characters and themes in this thesis, including *Club Tropicana* (1983) by Wham!, George Michael's *Careless Whisper* (1984) and *Don't Leave Me This Way* (1986) by the Communards, who are fronted by ex-Bronski Beat singer Jimmy Somerville.

<sup>61</sup> An observation made by this research, one not locatable elsewhere, is that Lennox's choice of name for this persona might refer to John Waters' aforementioned *Female Trouble*, in which Divine plays two characters: the female drag character Dawn Davenport, and a hyper-masculine character whose name is Earl.

O'Brien (2003), also a biographer of Lennox, proposes this character, with his "fake sideburns, a pocked chin and greased back hair" Lennox is in fact "disguised as Elvis" (p. 263) Majorie Garber (1993) relies on the words of Simon Frith when stating that Lennox, "known for her close-cropped orange hair and gender-bending style, made a startling appearance [at the 1984 Grammy Awards] 'in full drag, as a convincing Elvis Presley'" (p. 372).

Conversely, very little has been made of the presentation of Lennox's other character in the video: an early 1960s-style blonde nightclub chanteuse. This thesis notes that this female persona bears a strong resemblance to another pop icon: Dusty Springfield. Springfield, as has been referenced here, is well known to Lennox, who in 1983 is already a veteran interpreter of the earlier British performer's hits. Of great interest to this research then is O'Brien's (2003) description of Springfield, made in a context separate to discussions of Lennox. O'Brien quotes US songwriter Allee Willis, who with the Pet Shop Boys pens the 1987 comeback song *What Have I Done To Deserve This* for Springfield, "the lesbian issue was the icing on the cake of Dusty's difficult reputation" (p. 254). O'Brien explains how:

Sixties heroine Dusty Springfield responded to the pressure of the conventional heterosexual 'dolly' image by presenting an extreme version of femininity, modelling herself on drag queens with her over-the-top gowns, bouffant hairdos and panda-eyed parody of French *Vogue* (p. 254).

*Who's That Girl* is particularly remembered for its climax, where the 'two Annies' — feminine and masculine — are literally united, thanks to a trick of music video cinematography: they kiss. Detailed review of opinion regarding this highly transgressive fictional act is outside the scope of this

chapter.<sup>62</sup> It is simply proposed here that when considering Lennox's motivation for the adoption of masculine drag in *Sweet Dreams*, the research reads these two other music video characters being more symbolic of the myths and systems of the culture industries, and Eurythmics' knowingly co-dependent relationship with it, than surreal questionings of the possibility of duality in Lennox's own gender identity. As forms of 'Elvis' and 'Dusty', they are also new types of stock character, representative of power structures in Lennox's 1980s, just as Tilley's flower seller or schoolboy represents not only gender, but also status, in the fin de siècle.

This similarity notwithstanding, the research observes a particular and unexpected point of difference between Vesta Tilley's and Lennox's appropriation of the modern masculine fashion stereotype, if this is evaluated using Sontag's diagnosis of the 'seriousness' required to enact pure Camp. Whereas at the turn of the twentieth-century, Tilley and her peers offer lighthearted interpretations of the masculine in comedic performances of universal gender parody, Lennox's gender-transgressive performance is entirely, self-consciously serious. Not at all intended to amuse, nor to mock masculinity as being her binary-opposite, Lennox seeks to dramatise timeless existential conflicts as they are apparent to her in her own era.

When this serious performance is further placed in a set built to resemble a boardroom, which is decorated with the culture industries' gilded plastic

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<sup>62</sup> Also ripe for further analysis is the significance of the range of supporting players in *Who's That Girl*. In the video, Stewart plays a Svengali-esque pimp style character, who attends the nightclub where 'female' Lennox performs. He is escorted by a number of different 'girls' including: Cheryl Baker and Jay Aston of Eurovision Song Contest-winning manufactured British pop group Bucks Fizz; Kiki Dee, whose biggest hit is the 1976 duet with Elton John *Don't Go Breaking My Heart*, which had actually been intended for Springfield; singer, actress and activist Hazel O'Connor; Kate Garner of gender-bender ragamuffin duo Haysi Fantayzee; every member of punks-turned-disco divas girl group Bananarama, including Siobhan Fahey, who is Stewart's future wife, and Keren Woodward, subsequently partnered to Andrew Ridgeley of Wham!; and the gender-bending Blitz Kid Marilyn, whose own brief pop career commences later in 1983.

trophies, with a cow in a bridle, with props used that are not designed for their intended purpose, the result is certainly striking. Incongruities and inconsistencies abound: a premise of the video would seem to be that in their 'suits' costumes, Lennox and Stewart are identically dressed in a uniform that ranks them as equal, and this has also been asserted in scholarship (Rodger, 2004, p. 19). However the above structural analysis shows that this is not the case: Lennox wears a double breasted business suit in black or dark navy, whereas Stewart wears a morning suit, with its separate jacket and trousers of different colours. Mode and mood are sometimes jarringly broken, for example in Stewart's brief brown cow/slow motion cello flinging scene. The neat ending of the video, 'it was all a dream', recalls the hackneyed Kafka-esque plots of the dystopian supernatural mid-century science fiction US television anthology series *The Twilight Zone*. This thesis argues that *Sweet Dreams* is indeed Camp, but not because the female Lennox wears male coded garments. Rather, it falls into the 'it's so bad, it's good' category of Sontag's diagnosis. Owing to its conceptual enigmatic grandness, and the production's material substitutions and visual surrogates, the thesis evaluates this early music video to be serious and ambitious Camp that very much 'aims high'.

Beyond all these things, what this fashion research sees as being Lennox's real contribution of Camp to music video is an aspect to her practice which thus far has been inadequately theorised. This is the mainstreaming of a marginalised Camp character: the female pop dandy. This notion will be returned to in some detail shortly; however first, we must consider how in *Sweet Dreams*, Lennox demonstrates the dandified fashion performance as being a form of political provocation, something she and Stewart appropriate from artists Gilbert & George.

## **The suit as political costume: the influence of Gilbert & George**

Fashion-as-costume is an important component of *Sweet Dreams*: some would say, *the* most important. As has been discussed here, Lennox's wearing of a suit in the video has long been interpreted as either a leading example of a queer transgressive sartorialism which characterised much of the British new pop, or as being a straightforwardly recognisable form second wave feminist protest in the era of late capitalism. As pop musicians who have spoken widely on their careers in a range of interview contexts, Lennox and Stewart have however both explained that their image in the video largely signifies the symbiosis of their creative partnership, and that this sartorially expressed by wearing suits, in emulation of Gilbert & George.

It is well known that Gilbert Prousch (born in San Martin de Tor, Italy on 17 September, 1943) and George Passmore (born in Plymouth, UK on 8 January, 1942) meet in 1957 while studying sculpture at Saint Martin's School of Art and immediately commence a romantic and creative relationship, which continues in the present day. Together, they are known only by the portmanteau title of Gilbert & George, sometimes supplemented with the additional 'the sculptors'.

British artist and publisher Robert Violette and Swiss auteur curator and critic Hans Ulrich Obrist describe Gilbert & George in the following terms:

the voice of Gilbert & George [has been] unique and unwavering since the earliest days of their declaration 'We are an Artist' [with] key concepts such as Art for All and Living Sculpture. Never flinching from fundamental themes of the human condition, Gilbert & George address an encyclopaedic range of subjects oscillating between the particular and the universal, between nostalgia and modernity, relentlessly walking a thin rope of ambiguity, blurring and breaking boundaries, making private

things public, fighting against divisions and accepting contradictions.

Gilbert & George embrace paradox” (1997, p. 7).

The paradoxes embraced by Gilbert & George often relate to Britain’s class structure. Proudly anti-elitist, migrant Gilbert and working-class George, both gay men, may well be outsiders on an individual and personal level. Yet their famous sartorial identities are designed specifically to mark them as ‘insiders’, and the knowingness of this act is intrinsic to their art. Their work has long been characterised by a strategy of contradiction, based on their unusually conforming sartorialism and intentionally confronting work. Often wildly offensive — scatological and ‘politically incorrect’ — in the 1970s and 1980s they are regarded in the world of contemporary art as postmodernist *enfants terribles*, and in the field of fashion studies, as modern British dandies (Breward, 2016; Dorney, 2021). Theirs is a particularly provocative form of dandyism. As Christopher Breward (2016) neatly puts it: “their stiffly buttoned-up two pieces bespeak the unspeakable closet racism, homosocial queerness and parochial patriotism that resurface in their photographic and performance works” (p. 188).

Writing in support of the inclusion of suits belonging to Gilbert & George in the exhibition *Dandy Style: 250 Years of British Men’s Fashion*, co-curated by Shaun Cole and Miles Lambert and held at Manchester Art Gallery between 7 October 2022 and 1 May 2023, British contemporary performance scholar Kate Dorney (2021) states that throughout their joint career, the tailored appearance of the artists makes them “extraordinary” in the art world, and “completely normal” outside it (p. 95). It is in clear accordance with this approach that Lennox should state that Eurythmics “chose suits not because they were outlandish but because they were

neutral. We wanted the strongest symbol of normality we could find” (quoted in O’Brien, 2003, p. 261).

Dorney (2021) considers the “tailored profiles” of Gilbert & George to exemplify a countercultural approach by dandified British artists and musicians “whose appearance is at odds with their work” (p. 93). As provocative postmodern ‘living sculptures’, Gilbert & George’s appearance is therefore intrinsic to their subversive acts of performance. Lucy O’Brien (2003) quotes Lennox’s similar attitude towards her *Sweet Dreams*-era performer/character’s complete fashioned identity: “I wanted to get rid of the woman completely ... I knew it would raise a few eyebrows. There’s something subversive about it that I enjoy” (p. 260).

Gilbert & George themselves refer to their costumes — single-breasted, three-button jackets and trousers with turn ups — as their “Responsibility Suits” (Wilson, 1997, p. 189). Says George of these garments:

They are our working clothes. We do believe we can speak through how we clothe ourselves, as well as through how we do our pictures. It is a very important part of our democratic idea. We can go anywhere, and be in any situation ... They are very typical, normal suits” (in Wilson, 1997, p. 189).

To paraphrase Dorney (2021), it is the centrality of the contrast between the artists’ sartorial image and the artefacts they produce which means that their conventional masculine appearance is indivisible *from* the transgressive artefact. In a similar way, Lennox’s contradictory fashion image in *Sweet Dreams* — an unusually ‘contemporary’ glamorous woman in a conventional masculine suit — is inseparable from the artefact of this early concept-style music video. Metaphorically speaking, Lennox could well be singing from the Gilbert & George song sheet in her character

performance in the clip, when considering the artists' 1960 manifesto, *The Laws of Sculptures*, which begins: "always be smartly dressed, well-groomed ... and in complete control. Make the world believe in you and ... pay highly for the privilege" (cited in Dorney, 2011, p. 95).

Over time, Lennox may more frequently describe the meaning of her *individual* wearing of the male-coded suit as a woman, and not only being symbolic of her equal position with Stewart, a man, within Eurythmics as a duo. However, even this can still easily be seen as a reference to the way in which the equality of the partnership of Gilbert & George is reflected through that pair's twinning sartorialism. In their adoption of the principle of the suit as their joint costume, Eurythmics do not operate in the sphere of fine art, as Gilbert & George do. Yet the pop musicians are struck by the artists' philosophy, and how it is aesthetically expressed in a unified, total-identity performance. States Lennox:

in the eighties, Dave [Stewart] and I were very inspired by Gilbert and George ... the early days, when they were doing sort of performance art. What I love about Gilbert and George is this notion that there's no division between art and life. It's all one. I thought that was profound and daring. Thinking outside the box like that was something I could identify with (in Lewisohn, 2006, n.p.).

Gilbert & George, the transgressive artists, wear suits so as not to appear like artists. Breward (2016) cites a 1995 interview between Gilbert & George and Obrist, wherein Gilbert says that: "we have all these photographs of artists from [the early 1970s] at parties, all drunk. And we always looked the same. The others looked like hippies, with beards, flared jackets" (p. 188). Lennox, the female pop star who wishes not to be advertised as a sex symbol, similarly 'thinks outside' the box in her wearing of a men's suit in a music video that is made for the *purpose* of advertising her as a pop star.



In that 1995 conversation with Obrist, the significance of the three button style of the artists' suits is helpfully addressed. Says George: "we always think that if you took a suit from every decade this century and made an average, you'd probably end up like this — they're not particularly 1990s, not particularly 1950s" (cited in Breward, 2016, p. 188). This research recognises a sense of Barthes' uchronic fashion time in the artists' logic: their suits place Gilbert & George in an eternal present. Eurythmics' music video image is equally 'timeless': Lennox's double breasted suit ensemble and contrasting grooming contain a suite of visual anachronisms from across the twentieth-century, presented in a moving image context that is characterised by an atemporal narrative.

An interview that in fact takes place *between* Gilbert & George and Stewart in 1995 makes this connection between the band and the artists' image and practice all the more explicit:

[Stewart:] From the very first time I saw your pictures I completely loved them ... Annie [Lennox] and I, when we had the band Eurythmics, almost copied everything from you.

George: How did you do that?

[Stewart:] Oh, we searched out suits ...

George: Very flattering.

[Stewart:] And at first we didn't actually perform. We copied you to the point where, instead of playing live, we would go and sit on the stage and the record would play and we would just sit there.

George: Amazing. I'm sure it was very effective (Gilbert & George, 1997, p. 230).

Whitely (2000) refers to Lennox in the *Sweet Dreams* music video as "fronting a scene saturated with manipulation and irony, where meaning

(generally satirical) is conveyed by words or gestures whose literal meaning is the opposite" (p. 128). This research recognises that this occurs from the video's outset: when Lennox sings the opening lines "Sweet dreams are made of this ...". "This", Lennox indicates with the cane, is Earth. She gestures at the projection of the planet on the screen behind her. The world is seen here through the lens of the hypermodern technology of space travel, with all its connotations of progress on one hand and the interstellar colonialism of the Cold War space race on the other. The image reminds us of the smallness of humanity and the vastness of the cosmos. That she wears a distinctly masculine costume, one also related to business attire and reinforcing conventions of respectability dictated by class distinctions, emphasises the patriarchal and capitalist underpinnings of everything we see within the frame.

At the next line, "who am I to disagree?" she smiles and shrugs slightly, with the open arms of a truth-teller. We are however forewarned through her knowing engagement with the camera that in the ensuing song, we should understand that Lennox *very much* disagrees. But what is it exactly that Lennox intends to critique? In the manner of Gilbert & George, Lennox's objective is somewhat enigmatic: by looking at the motivation of these dandified cultural agitants the visual subtext of the music video for *Sweet Dreams*, beyond the music and lyrics of the song it accompanies, becomes more clear.

Observes O'Brien (2003):

the Suit is a powerful uniform in corporate language. Pop stars have historically rebelled against what it stands for, but in the designer-led 1980s Eurythmics were at the forefront of a scene saturated with manipulation and irony... Lennox's role in this was crucial. Her suit, coupled with her cropped carrot-red hair, went further than the titillating

theatricality of Marlene Dietrich or [even] Grace Jones; in an unsentimental post-punk package, she made clear points about product, business and female artistic control (p. 261).

This research observes a further layer of contradiction or irony in Lennox's wearing of the suit in *Sweet Dreams*. If Gilbert & George surreptitiously adopt this costume precisely because it affords them the appearance of innocuousness, this is because despite their otherwise outsider status as marginalised members of society in post-war Britain — migrant, working class, gay — they are still able to rely upon their membership of the dominant gender group in the hegemonic structure of masculinity by embodying its recognised costume. Lennox does not belong to this dominant gender group, therefore her adoption of its principal sartorial symbol is far from placating. In a dandy tradition, in *Sweet Dreams*, Lennox uses the codes of fashion as pure provocation.

## **The female pop dandy**

This thesis proposes that Lennox is an example of the female pop dandy, who works in the realm of Camp. In investigating Lennox's famous 'masculine' music video persona, described more frequently by others as a form of cross dressing than as a character created through costume, Barbara Vinken's (2005) astute observations of fashion are once again instructive. When describing the dandy as a disruptor of gendered understandings of the eroticism of the fashioned masculine body, Vinken (2005) argues that:

the dandy, a curiously inauthentic man, makes other men appear less authentically, less naturally masculine. *Haute couture* derives its refinement and wit from just this rupture, from these dissonances. From the beginning of *haute couture*, fashion has been, in the end, nothing less

than a form of cross-dressing. At the risk of overstating the case, fashion is masquerade: transvestism, travesty. Its star is, not by chance, the transvestite (p. 21).

Stan Hawkins (2009) writes extensively on the British pop dandy, and his interpretation of this twentieth-century phenomenon is both salient and highly focused. Included in Hawkins' study are many performers who incidentally have either been heavily featured or briefly contextually referred to in this thesis: from David Bowie, Ray Davies, Mick Jagger and Bryan Ferry; to Marc Almond, Robert Palmer, Paul Weller and Neil Tennant of the Pet Shop Boys.<sup>63</sup> While he may be erudite, such as in the cases of Davies and Tennant, both of whom are post-war progeny of Oscar Wilde in their noted capacity for witty social comment, from the composition of Hawkins' list of British pop dandies, we can glean firstly that the British pop dandy, as he is currently understood, is not an overtly political creature. With the exception of anti-Thatcher Mod revivalist Weller, politics is not particularly recognised as key to the 'brand' of any of Hawkins' chosen performers.<sup>64</sup>

The character of this type of pop dandy can be seen largely as a descendant of the French-refracted second-wave of flamboyant dandyism, which as explained in Chapter 2 is identified by Camille Paglia (2013) as specifically begetting Bowie. It is not difficult to see the fashions of Glam Rock in the ephemeral dandy style of the Anglophile — specifically, 'Brummell-phile' — nineteenth-century French writer and dandy Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly, with

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<sup>63</sup> Prior to his pop career, Tennant is a journalist at *Smash Hits* and is its assistant editor for a period in the 1980s. Tennant's own approach toward 'mixing pop and politics' (with apologies to Billy Bragg) is perhaps summarised in the following recollection about his time at the magazine: "we were strictly apolitical at *Smash Hits*, although it was apolitical with a left-wing slant" (cited in Jones, 2020, p. 377). John Gill (1995) takes particular issue with the Pet Shop Boys, and Tennant in particular, for not coming out as gay men at the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis.

<sup>64</sup> Gary Kemp of the apolitical/'suspected Tory sympathisers' Spandau Ballet, says: "I remember talking to Paul Weller, who was very cross with me at one point for not writing songs about miners" (cited in Jones, 2020, p. 378).

his “flaming colours [and] flared coats” (Hawkins, 2009, p.24). A clear line can also be drawn between these nineteenth-century dandy fashions and the historical/ahistorical bricolage fashion of many of the New Romantics. These evoke the velvets and silks, scarves, capes, hats, and raffishly unlikely accessories, not unlike the dagger Barbey d’Aurevilly famously favours.

The second thing we learn from Hawkins’ list of subjects is that the pop dandy, as he is currently theorised, is male. Hawkins (2009) admits to the exclusion of female dandies from his book on masculine identity, declaring his acute awareness that “the female is often shoved to the side of academic scholarship at the expense of the male” (p. 6). The scholar does not justify his continuing this pattern, but simply states that the restriction of his study to male pop artists, and the choice to use the male pronoun when referring to the dandy, does not “on any count preclude [his] recognition of female artists, whose impact on the rise of dandyism in pop has been tumultuous” (Hawkins, 2009, p. 9). The nature of this tumult also remains undefined. Hawkins provides a potted history of the female dandy, beginning with the “dandified ladies (dandettes)” who exist in George ‘Beau’ Brummell’s ascendant period in the eighteenth-century, maintaining *salons* and “defying the British custom of being sent out of the room after dinner” (p. 9). This thesis conceptualises Lennox’s personae in *Sweet Dreams* as being somewhat akin to these earlier female dandies. The music video is her “*salon*” and, in defiance of the “customs” of the patriarchal music industry, she will certainly not be “sent out of the [board]room”.

Hawkins (2009) also claims that the personae of the English *demi-monde* courtesan Cora Pearl and the eccentric Italian heiress and muse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Marchesa Luisa Casati “pave the way forward for the superstars of the twentieth century [including] Patti

Smith (Godmother of Punk), Siouxsie Sioux, Annie Lennox, Madonna, Kylie Minogue [and] Björk” (p. 9). Exactly in what ways the influence of these earlier female dandies is apparent upon the diverse star images of these very different female popular musicians, Hawkins does not make clear. However, that Lennox is listed amongst them is an encouragement to this thesis, first to claim Lennox as a female pop dandy, and secondly, to accept the challenge implied in Hawkins’ gap to define the characteristics of this cultural identity.

From amongst the very great volume of serious literature on the history of the dandy, this thesis chapter focusing on female fashion masculinities chooses judiciously to follow Christopher Breward (2000) in his consideration of “the ‘idea’ of the dandy, as a cipher for a particular yet very fugitive version of masculine fashionability, bodily display and metropolitan neurosis” (p. 222). Usefully here, Elizabeth Wilson (2003/1985) argues that in contrast to the preceding “overdressed effeminacy” of the eighteenth-century Macaroni, in establishing more rigid standards of masculinity dandyism of the type exemplified by Brummell “ushered in a new, modern city ‘uniform’ for men, [and] led also in the direction of dress as rebellion” (pp. 179-180). In *Sweet Dreams*, Lennox’s ‘uniform’ yet oppositional dress in the boardroom and the footage of the late twentieth-century urban crowd inset on the display-screen behind her also clearly speaks to both of these things.

The historical correspondence of Hawkins’ “dandettes” to Brummell is also of interest to this research. Lennox’s signature early 1980s image is very much resultant of the minimal, functional aesthetics of modernity permitted by the new textiles technologies and manufacturing techniques developed in London tailoring during Brummell’s Regency period. Inherent

in Lennox's homage to Gilbert & George is the austerity of the costume of her suit: far from the foppish frippery of gender-bending New Romanticism, Breward's (2000) paraphrasing of Anne Hollander in describing Brummell is also apt when considering Lennox's female pop dandy persona in *Sweet Dreams*: a "‘correct’ sartorial philosophy ... [wherein a] minimalist stance [is] a radical commentary on the breakdown of social hierarchies" (p. 224). In the same vein, Breward (2000) identifies the thoughts of Elizabeth Wilson (2003/1985) on the Brummellian dandy, including some that thesis considers to be particularly evocative of Lennox and Grace Jones, who will also be considered here shortly: "the dandies invented Cool; but the blasé pose was of course arresting. There was both revolt and classic chic in the dandy style" (p. 182).

Hollander (2016) comments that in the perfection of their unadorned sartorial integrity, Brummell himself "wished his clothes to be unnoticeable" (p. 67). Brummell's doing away with the signifiers of rank in his costume accords with Lennox's use of the 'plain', severe anti-fashion costume of the suit. Lucy O'Brien (2003) describes how: "Lennox cross-dressed for ... tactical reasons, for the freedom she discovered once she donned the cloak of neutrality" (p. 260). There are interesting comparisons and contrasts to be made here with another figure from history who is also associated with dandyism, in relation to the 'seeing' of dandy suits and those who wear them. This is a persona whom this research sees as being a particular predecessor of Lennox in *Sweet Dreams*: the French nineteenth-century novelist Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin, better known by her masculine *nom de plume* of George Sand.

## Lennox, a George Sand for the 1980s

Miranda Gill (2007), a British scholar of French literature and European thought, observes that Barbey d'Aurevilly's influential 1845 essay *Du dandysme et de George Brummell* (*On Dandyism and George Brummell*, sometimes translated as *The Anatomy of Dandyism*) coincides with the publication of two of his fictional texts, which portray characters explicitly framed as female dandies (pp. 168-169). Gill notes how French nineteenth-century writers such as Barbey d'Aurevilly and Sand engaged with the cultural codes of literary physiology: a moderately priced, popular genre which highlighted the variable nature of female roles, characteristics, and class affiliations, from "the flower seller and seamstress to the blue stocking and *femme politique*", including "fashionable and singular women who departed from the codes of femininity" (p. 169). This thesis observes that these feminine types resemble the stock character-approach that characterises both Tilley's and Lennox's drag, albeit that these performers use the technique for differing purposes.

Two female types strongly influenced physiological discourse on female dandyism: the *femme à la mode* and the *lionne*. Explains Gill (2007):

the *femme à la mode* took the vanity widely considered to be characteristic of Parisian women to a pathological extreme. Structurally close to the model of narcissistic coldness associated with Beau Brummell, her creation of a fashionable persona was managed with the same pragmatic calculation ... the *lionne*, a subcategory of the *femme à la mode*, was associated with independence and bodily vitality. [If] the 'dandy' was the fashionable type of the Restoration and the 'lion' that of the July Monarchy, [then the lion is] the dandy's direct successor. Sketches [in popular physiologies] typically depicted *lionnes* as aspirant members of the anglophile male elite of the July Monarchy (p. 170).



Gill (2007) identifies that both memoirs and histories of fashion subsequently cite the *lionne* as being a key symbol of a new mood of gender experimentation dating back to the July Monarchy. Although Gill disagrees with others who have suggested that the *lionne*'s masculine traits are associated with radicalism, she also notes that this character has often been linked to George Sand and her popular "daring heroines" (p. 171).

As is the case with Lennox and the legacy of her powerful image in the *Sweet Dreams* music video from 1983, US scholars of historical dress Susan L. Siegfried and John Finkelberg (2020) confirm that: "the mythology of George Sand's cross-dressing was one of the most famous aspects of her persona in the nineteenth century and has remained so ever since" (p. 565). In a very brief passage by Sheila Whitely (2000) in her discussion of Lennox's challenging of the feminine through androgyny, the music scholar notes that the "tradition of 'women as men'" which backgrounds Lennox's practice arises from a time when:

cultural politics ... barred women from entering the public arena and the adoption of a male pseudonym, or posing as a man (Georges [sic] Sand, George Eliot) provided a covert access to the nineteenth century literary world (p. 124).

Lennox's 'anti-fashion' female dandy style in the video, based around the cultural anonymity of Gilbert & George's costume, specifically comments on the twentieth-century culture industries' normalised exclusion of women, and its ongoing female/feminine stereotypes. As O'Brien (2003) sees it, wearing an otherwise classic men's suit gave Lennox, a "post-modern pop diva" who exploited music video with agility in the 1980s, psychological and physical access to the record company boardroom (p. 260).

Breward (2000) builds from Elizabeth Wilson in suggesting that the “undemonstrative” men’s suit pioneered by Brummell both gave rise to the idea of a classic or unchanging style of dress and at the same time, “an oppositional take on the politics of appearance” (p. 224). In Brummell’s exclusive, coded “alternative presentation of style [there is] a tight bracketing of sartorial display with worldly power” (Breward, 2000, p. 225). In the *Sweet Dreams* record company boardroom set up, with its gold records, spinning globe and images of Earth taken from space, the omnipotent Lennox’s sartorial display is partnered explicitly with the notion of worldly, and world, power. With the authority afforded her through her wearing of the suit, rather than ‘participating’ in the music and fashion system, the lip synching Lennox instead performs the role of a commentator upon the modernist, patriarchal, capitalist conundrum of which she is a part, and yet seems oddly separate from. Her character in the video, who has “travelled the world and the seven seas”, is a virtual, late capitalist flâneuse.

Siegfried and Finkelberg (2020) note that in Sand’s memoir of 1855, *Histoire de ma vie (Story of My Life)*, the writer explains how her wearing of male attire is part of a wish to not draw attention to herself in her performance of the flâneuse: to “look rather than be looked at” (p. 565). In the grey masculine suit she had made for her, Sand explains:

I flew from one end of Paris to the other. It seemed to me that I had gone around the world. And in my clothes, I feared nothing ... No one paid any attention to me or ever suspected my disguise.

Besides the fact that I wore it with ease, the costume’s lack of coquetry and my physiognomy removed all suspicion (Sand quoted in Siegfried and Finkelberg, 2020, pp. 565-566).

Siegfried and Finkelberg (2020) suggest that despite, or perhaps because of, her intimate understanding of the culture of fashion and dress, as a woman Sand wished to avoid “the tyrannical demands of sartorial fashion, which implied to her a diminution of the intellect and of moral character” (p. 562). How neatly this matches with Lennox’s self explanation that in her wearing of the suit in the era of *Sweet Dreams*:

in a funny sort of way, ultimately I was coming out to say, ‘Look, I’m not going to be what you think I am. I’m intelligent. I’m not a dancing doll just because I’m female and I’m singing. I’m not singing for your pleasurable entertainment. It’s not about that. It’s cerebral and it’s heartfelt and it’s intelligent’ (in Azzopardi 2014, n.p.)

Throughout her prolific career, Sand is outspoken about her feminist, democratic, and anticlerical political opinions (Siegfried and Finkelberg, 2020, p. 564). This research has identified that this is mostly also true of Lennox. As female pop dandies — for both are understood to be ‘pop’ in their own era — they contribute to the complexion of the dandy as a political identity.

The use of forensic structural analysis as a methodology to better understand the actual relationship between fashion and music video, and not simply repeat popular recollections of famous fashionable moments in video clips of the 1980s, has already been justified in this chapter’s earlier findings that contrary to wide belief, Lennox and Stewart are not identically attired. Similarly, it causes this thesis to contradict existing scholarly assertions about Lennox’s performance of female masculinity in *Sweet Dreams*, such as those of Rodger (2004), who claims that:

all of Lennox’s movements and body language in this clip are convincingly masculine. Towards the end of this video, Lennox and

Stewart are shown walking, backs to the camera, across an open field, and their gaits match almost entirely (p. 19).

Based on this research's forensic analysis of the video, this is not objectively true. Lennox and Stewarts gaits do not "match": their bodies are simply rendered being as similar in this shot because the image is played in slow motion, which visually mutes their respective actions. However, this thesis also finds that if it is 'true' or not, it is of small consequence to a broader point the mixed gender duo Eurythmics make through their mixed-gender twinning sartorialism. Here, this thesis once again takes into account the implicit aesthetic presence of Gilbert & George's subversive sartorialism. As with physical distinctions between Lennox and Stewart not specific to their genders, Gilbert is a taller person than George, and they have strongly differing physiognamies. Their suits, both as depicted in photographic images from across their career and in actual appraisal of their garments, such as in the examples included in the *Dandy Style* exhibition, reveal that their attire is often not identical, but rather, gives an impression of sameness. The point remains that in their wearing of these garments, both the pair of artists and the duo Eurythmics are conceptually alike in their use of fashion symbolic of hegemonic masculinity.

By way of its analysis of *Sweet Dreams*, this research argues that instead, and in fact more correctly perhaps than musings such as Rodgers', Anne Hollander's thoughts on George Sand could also describe Lennox, both in this shot (Fig. 130) and across the video:

by taking up men's clothes, and having them well fitted to her feminine body, she showed herself to be interested not in female concerns like childbearing and domesticity, nor in the standard feminine uses of alluring submissiveness, but in a female erotic life that depends on an

active imagination, on adventurous and multiform fantasy, the modern sort of sexuality customarily reserved for men (2016, p. 26).

This attitude of ‘not hiding’ and yet ‘somehow disguising’ femininity and femaleness famously characterises both Sand and Lennox, and is also notably expressed in the persona of the other great female pop dandy of the early music video era: Grace Jones.

### **Grace Jones**

If Annie Lennox differs from the other new pop performers featured in this thesis owing to her biological sex, then it must be immediately noted that Grace Jones departs from the majority on not only this, but another highly significant count: the Jamaican American singer, model and actress is black. As is imperative in the present era of post-globalisation and decoloniality that informs understandings of postfashion, black dandyism is a particular practice of the sartorial contesting of histories and power structures that is increasingly theorised (see Miller, 2009). This is the case not only in scholarship, but also in the field of exhibition making. Curator Shantrelle P. Lewis’s *Dandy Lion: An Articulation of a Re(de)defined Black Masculine Identity* held between July 22 and August 27, 2011 at the Museum of Contemporary African Diaspora Arts (MoCADA) in Brooklyn, New York is a leading example here, exploring the phenomenon of Black Dandyism throughout the African Diaspora. Jones’ ongoing influence upon the contemporary expression and fashioning of black identity has itself been examined in the forum of the exhibition, for example in *The Grace Jones Project* held between April 27 and September 18 2016 at the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) in San Francisco, curated by Nicole Caruth.

In writing on Jones, who is described by African American academic Eric Darnell Pritchard (2017) as being “the patron saint of renegade aesthetics” (p. 3), this thesis will rely in part upon scholarship in which the primary lens for assessing Jones’ identity and performance practice is her blackness (Kershaw, 1997; Pritchard, 2017; Royster, 2009). However owing to the focus of this subsection of the thesis, Jones is necessarily considered here more in regard to the appellation of the female pop dandy than to her equally important intersectional connection to the identity of the black dandy. The writing recognises that this neglects vital aspects to the meaning of Jones’ overall persona and sees that much further theoretical investigation of this is warranted in future research on this subject.

As we have seen, the highly fashioned outsider or Other character of the dandy is both a controversial and ultimately, highly influential figure in the history of modern fashion. This thesis is therefore encouraged to introduce Grace Jones into its discussion of the female pop dandy by the observation of African American scholar of English literature, performance studies and critical race theory Francesca Royster (2009) when she speaks of a continuing affinity between Jones and outsider fashion cultures, stating of the provocative and unconventional Jones that: “Grace’s influence is still visible on the streets, in drag queen culture, and in recent revivals of 1980s style” (Royster, 1997, p. 78). In Jones’ performance of total identity, there is a continuing mutual affinity with the ‘outsider elite’; and in the early 1980s, she contributes this self-made character to a cultural moment in which androgyny is a full blown fashion trend. Although, as the outline of limitations of this thesis has explained, no individual music video by Jones’ is as structurally sound as a music video text as Eurythmics’ *Sweet Dreams*, Jones’ androgynous image is then clearly emblematic of the early music video era: that is, the late twentieth century. In identifying the late

twentieth century as a “dandyish moment”, Caroline Evans (2001) describes how both the fashion show and the media cult of celebrity, are “simply different articulations of the aestheticization of the self” (p. 306). This subsection of the thesis will discuss Jones in consideration of these observations.

In her 1981 cover version of the song *Walking in the Rain*, written and originally performed by low-image Australian ‘Eurodisco’ duo Flash and the Pan<sup>65</sup>, Jones sings lines that have become something of a signature for her key performance strategy of gender subversion in the realm of pop: “feeling like a woman / looking like a man / sounding like a no-no / make it when I can” (Jones, 1981). With apologies to Jane Austen, it is a truth universally acknowledged that such a lyric, when issued by a straight white man, is in want of reinterpretation by Grace Jones. As Pritchard (2017) proclaims: “when Muvah’ Grace gives you her commandments, the chil’ren listen” (p. 2).

*Walking in the Rain* is one of a number of cover versions of songs originally issued from a white male perspective that make up Jones’ genre-blending 1981 New Wave funk reggae album *Nightclubbing*, which features famous Jamaican rhythm section Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare and is co-produced by Alex Sadkin and Chris Blackwell, president of Island Records,

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<sup>65</sup> Flash and the Pan is a writing and recording name used by Netherlands born Harry Vanda (born Johannes Hendrikus Jacob van den Berg, 22 March 1946) and Scottish born George Young (born 6 November, 1946, died 22 October, 2017) who each migrate to Australia with their families as part of the wide assisted European migrant scheme which changes the cultural face of post-war Australia, and meet in 1963 at the Villawood Migrant Hostel in outer Sydney. There, the pair and fellow young male migrants from the UK and Europe form a band, the Australian 1960s early pop superstars The Easybeats, best known for their 1966 hit *Friday on My Mind*. That track reaches the number 1 chart position in Australia and also number 1 on the Dutch Top 40, attains the number 6 position in the UK, and reaches number 16 on the US *Billboard* Hot 100 chart in May 1967. In 2001, it was voted ‘Best Australian Song’ of all time by the Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA). George Young is the elder brother of guitarists Angus and Malcolm Young of the aforementioned hard rock group AC/DC. Vanda and Young are the producers of many of AC/DC and other hard rock acts’ recordings in the 1970s and 1980s, also writing and producing the 1977 disco-lite song *Love is in the Air* for teen pop star John Paul Young, which becomes a contemporary Camp classic after featuring in the 1992 Baz Luhrmann film *Strictly Ballroom*.

the label that releases the record (O'Brien, 2003, p. 258). Other songs of this type on the record include its title track, *Nightclubbing*, which is written by David Bowie and American proto-punk Iggy Pop,<sup>66</sup> and produced by the former for the latter's 1977 album *The Idiot*. Jones is also a noted interpreter of *Love is the Drug*, the sexually-predatory 1975 Roxy Music hit co-written by Bryan Ferry and Andy McKay.

Drawing from the lyric of one of three original songs penned by Jones on the *Nightclubbing* album, the track *Art Groupie*, it is with characteristic contrariness that Jones' 2015 memoir is entitled *I'll Never Write My Memoirs*. Whilst this autobiography is highly entertaining, it can be assumed that Jones is somewhat of an unreliable narrator of her own tale. British academic Hannah Yelin (2021), who writes on female celebrity, sees the book as being "explicitly framed as an intervention in how [Jones] would like to be received" (p. 122). This is part of Yelin's broader diagnosis of Jones' practice, being: "performance art that uses celebrity as its subject matter. I call this *doing* celebrity, whereby celebrity and pop stardom are presented as a deliberately constructed set of actions and behaviours [original italics]" (p. 121).

While dandyism is not a concern of Yelin's, this thesis would suggest that her observations here place Jones within the lineage of the dandy. Self mythology can be seen as part of her total identity performance and in this, Jones takes a "life as art' performance" approach familiar to late nineteenth century dandies such as Robert de Montesquieu and James McNeill Whistler (Beward, 2020, p. 229).

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<sup>66</sup> Bowie and the previously mentioned Iggy Pop (born James Osterberg on April 21, 1947) have a very close creative and personal connection in the 1970s that has not been outlined in this thesis. It is worth noting here however that Todd Haynes once again fictionalises the intensity and significance this possibly sexual relationship in his 1997 film *Velvet Goldmine*, with Scottish actor Ewan McGregor playing a main supporting character clearly based on the volatile American performer.



Most accounts of Jones' life concur that she is born in Spanish Town, Saint Catherine, Jamaica, and as a young teenager moves with her family to Syracuse, New York. Jones studies acting at Syracuse University and then moves to New York City, where she commences a modelling career (Jones, 2015). Jones is not overly successful as a young model in the United States; it can be supposed that this is because of her very dark skin (Fiennes & Jones, 2020). However upon relocating to Paris in 1970, where her strong, exotic looks are considered an asset, Jones runway models for a range of designers including Yves Saint Laurent, Claude Montana and Kenzo Takada, and appears on the covers of *Elle*, *Vogue*, and *Der Stern* working with Helmut Newton, Guy Bourdin, and Hans Feurer (Kershaw, 1997, p. 19).

Writing on postcolonialism and androgyny, US curator and academic Miriam Kershaw (1997) sees Jones' as learning key devices for subversive performance during the 1970s in two worlds: Parisian *haute couture* fashion and intersectional New York disco, which is a melting pot of black, Hispanic, and white gay and queer cultures. In the Anglophone popular culture of the 1980s, Jones is particularly understood as arising from this milieu. The outlandish performer is well known to be a darling of Andy Warhol, who frequently features in Jones' memoir, and a creative collaborator with the artist Keith Haring, whom Jones meets through Warhol, the Pop Art icon.

Kershaw (1997) explains that the alternative art of the early 1980s was fused with the New York dance club scene, noting how Jones's collaborative performances with Haring at the Paradise Garage, a venue at the epicentre of this underground culture, in which the artist decorated the singer's body

with graffiti-style paint “embodied a negotiation of two of the most crucial issues during that period: art in relation to popular culture and modernist conceptions of Primitivism reinterpreted by modernism's black female Other” (p. 24). In these and other nightclub performances, proposes Kershaw, Jones “gave dynamic expression to the aesthetic of the 1980s that Haring and Warhol helped to formulate” (p. 23). This research suggests that in true dandy style, Jones’ ‘performance’ of celebrity is not confined to the stage, but is part of the fashioning of a total identity.

While the queer New York club scene described by Kershaw is multicultural and inclusive, Jones is also often associated with gay and primarily white male subculture (Royster, 2009, p. 77). American film and media scholar Lucas Hilderbrand (2013), who writes from a gay/queer perspective, speaks of Jones’ significance to a ‘queer turn’ noticeable in popular music in the year 1981. Of the “genderfucking Grace Jones” (p. 423), Hilderbrand (2013) describes the hit song *Pull Up to the Bumper*, co-written by Jones, which features on *Nightclubbing*:

the danceably repetitious instrumentation throughout the song presents a call and response between guitar and disco synths, along with street noises. The lyrics offer a series of automotive puns for anal sex: ‘Back it, up twice, now that fits nice / Grease it, spray it, let me lubricate it / Pull up to my bumper, baby.’ Between Jones’s intriguing androgyny and the song’s danceable groove, the track was a huge club hit, particularly at gay venues (p. 424)

Kershaw (1997), however, identifies how Jones’ striking sartorial image also develops specifically from her background in French fashion. She argues that France in general, and Paris in particular, has a fascination with the myth of the Black Venus, residual of its colonial conquests in Africa and the exploration by European male artists of a new African-Oceanic aesthetic,

using female bodies as their inspiration (1997, p. 19). The American-born French cultural icon Josephine Baker in the 1920s and 1930s is the most obvious and expert exploiter of France's cultural obsession with signs of racial difference; Kershaw (1997) states that Jones speaks of her identification with Baker in Andy Warhol's *Interview* magazine in 1985 (p. 21).

It is Kershaw's (1997) observation that from Jones' experience on the catwalks of *haute couture*, the performer learns how to make "maximum visual impact" through the use of movement and costuming (p. 19). Evans (2001) suggests that in fact it is the principles of nineteenth-century dandyism being displaced onto female fashion models which underwrites the modern runway show (p. 273). Kershaw's (1997) understanding of Jones' working education on the runway echoes many scholarly perspectives on the total body performance of the dandy:

[these] citizens of the fashion world revel in the pleasure and pain of reinventing the 'self' through rapid modifications of external appearance. Jones absorbed these lessons. [Jones'] training in captivating audiences with artifice and constructed effects proved central to her future work (pp. 19-20).

Jones signs a deal with Island Records, and by 1977 is "a butch disco diva" (Baker, 1994, p. 251). Having begun her recording career in Europe in something of a cabaret style — for example, an early track is a reinterpretation of Édith Piaf's *La Vie En Rose* — Jones makes a shift in both musical style and image, adopting the flat top haircut and severe image of female androgyny that becomes her signature look. Lucy O'Brien writes that (2003):

with a rasping purr, Jones's sound was wildly different from the traditionally sweet female voice. What set it off, though, was her image —

a brutal GI Blues pillbox haircut, angular cheekbones and a taut body in savagely well-tailored suits. [Jones] defined her look as ‘macho’. ‘I don’t want to look frilly and to me, macho means the opposite of frilly. Simple, stern lines, more masculine’ [says Jones] (p. 258)

As with Lennox, and indeed Sand, it would seem that despite her risqué cabaret or drag style appropriation of male-voiced popular songs, Jones’ primary sartorial motivation is not to pass as a man, but to use the symbolic codes of twentieth century masculinity conversely in constructing her own, fiercely independent female image.

Yet interestingly, Jones’ dramatic shift in sartorial image somewhat corresponds with Jones’ forming of both a creative professional and personal relationship with French image maker Jean-Paul Goude (born 8 December 1938), with whom she has a son (Jones, 2015). Assumptions persist that Jean-Paul Goude is largely responsible for the change in Jones’ style, which brings Jones both her “brief and cataclysmic” (O’Brien, 2003, p. 260) popular success as a musician and also establishes her long-term celebrity ‘brand’. Indeed, as O’Brien puts it: “Jones’ gift lay more with image than music. Grainy and muscular, her voice was resolutely off-key, and her sound, low on melody high on robotic rhythm, would never translate easily to pop” (p. 260).

African American fashion and textiles scholar Van Dyk Lewis (2010), writing on the relationship between fashion and music — one he sees as being abundant with mutual creativity — argues that Jones’ collaboration with Goude, is one of the most successful examples (p. 552). Lewis states that in the 1980s, Goude renders Jones’ body a “fashion object”, and that her haircut from that period enters the realm of subcultural articulation,

becoming: “a major trend ... known as a ‘high top’ when copied by young black youth” (p. 552).

However just as with perceptions of a controlling influence being exercised over the construction of Marlene Dietrich’s image by Josef von Sternberg, her director in early films including *The Blue Angel* (1930) which first exposes the German silent movie star to American audiences, and the aforementioned *Morocco* (1930), Jones firmly denies that Goude is more Svengali than art-director. And, just as with Dietrich, assumptions to the contrary are not borne out by the longevity of Jones’ career subsequent to her creative relationship with a such a man. This thesis suggests that similarly to Eurythmics’ construction of the image that in *Sweet Dreams* is known as ‘Annie Lennox’, Jones and Goude’s input into the ‘look’ of ‘Grace Jones’ is complementary and mutually beneficial. States Jones:

my career was designed way before I met Jean-Paul. When I met him I’d already made three records and the androgynous look was already established. He was inspired by me and used me as a vehicle to make his career grow, and mine grew along with his (cited in O’Brien, 2003, p. 259).

However, when discussing Jones’ image in relation to her presentation as a female pop dandy, Goude’s contribution cannot be denied. The Parisian illustrator and art director of *Esquire* is exposed to the transgressive, multiracial world of New York disco in the 1970s and has a fascination for the tropes of the ‘exotic woman’, visually expressing these in terms that are highly effective but can clearly be seen as problematic in consideration of postcolonialism. This is best articulated by Royster (1997):

On the famous cover of his collection of works, *Jungle Fever*, Jean-Paul Goude figures Jones naked and in a cage, on all fours. At her knees is a carcass of meat (animal? human?) and around her mouth trickles blood.

Her eyes are narrowed and her teeth are exposed in a growl. Underneath the cage is the sign, 'don't feed the animal.' We see an apt, white audience watching. At the beginning of her *One Man Show* [directed by Goude] Jones opens in a Gorilla suit and grass skirt playing the bongos, evoking and out-savaging Josephine Baker's banana skirt, as well as Marlene Dietrich in *Blonde Venus* (of 1932) (p. 80)

In the interests of maintaining its argument, this thesis will not attempt to theoretically address the extraordinary melange of images presented in Royster's (1997) description of Goude and Jones' 1982 production. Nonetheless, the research notes that Michael Shore (1984) considers the documentary video version of this show to be an important moment in the development of 1980s music video: "if not the healthiest, then certainly the tastiest eye-and-ear-candy music video has yet produced" (p. 216). Writing in the era of the video's production, Shore describes *One Man Show* as being: "an overpowering visual feast [with] cryptically provocative vignettes, the expected eye-popping futuristic fashions, and stunning neoconstructivist sets and masks, most set within a beautifully choreographed stage show" (p. 216).

*One Man Show* does not only represent Jones in terms of racial and cultural stereotypes of women, be these reinforcing or subverted. The production also makes a significant feature of Jones' androgyny, and indeed, her new, fashioned female masculinity. O'Brien (2003) notes that within the "astonishing Goude-directed feature-length video ... Jones appeared with several hundred masculine clones of herself" (p. 259). The image of Jones as a "clone" provokes thoughts of posthumanism, and the mechanical reproduction of modernity, of additional interest to this thesis on popular cultures and postfashion. As Royster (1997) suggests, in Jones'

work we can see “the wedding of disco and punk, art and fashion, male and female, animal and human, and human and machine” (p. 78).

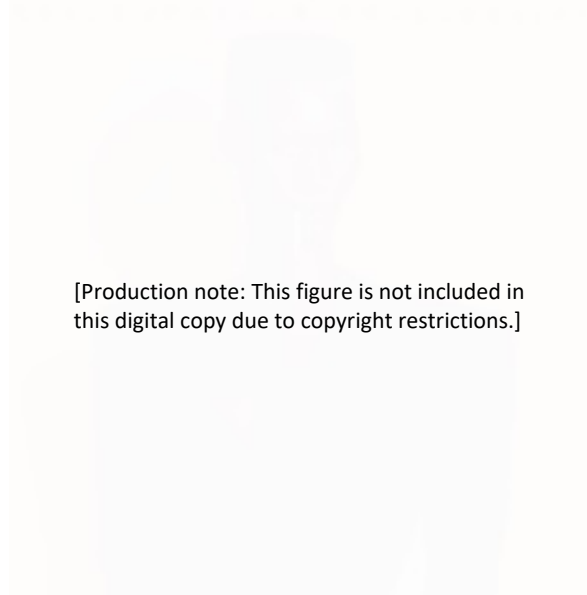


Fig. 135: [*Nightclubbing* (1981) album cover illustration by Jean Paul Goude]

In its final analysis of Grace Jones, the female pop dandy, this thesis now considers the visual artefact album cover art for *Nightclubbing*, also designed by Goude, which features one of the most iconic images of Jones and therefore, of the early 1980s (Fig. 135). In this photographic-realist ‘painting’ by the French illustrator, a suit attired Jones is all angles, composed with the “‘simple, stern lines [which are] more masculine’”, favoured by the feisty performer (Jones, cited in O’Brien, 2003, p. 258). Against a plain, gold field headed with minimal, widely-kerned sans serif typography, the broad, severely pointed triangle of Jones’ padded suit jacket shoulders sits below the equally clean, sharp triangle of her cropped hair. The deep V of her jacket lapel forms another triangle against her bare, blue-black skin, which is the shiny silk of the dandy’s cravat: the glimpse of her clavicles and sinewy musculature, its folds. Jones’ ebony blackness, as eerie and alien as a fictional figure in a kitsch Orientalist mid-century print by Vladimir Tretchikoff, is off-set only by the short, white vertical flash of

an unlit cigarette, which dangles with cool, controlled nonchalance from the corner of her shapely, barely-reddened mouth. Her cheekbones are markedly angular, her striking face essentially another triangle. Her eyes are tight and feline, and unlike Tretchikoff's absent female subjects, she powerfully returns the gaze. To once again use Royster's (1997) terms, with her: "flattop, gleaming cheekbones and muscled chest, Jones was – and is – confrontationally androgynous, and at the same time, distant, and sufficiently underground to seem unco-optable" (p. 79).

It is unusual in album cover graphic design that on the reverse of the sleeve, among the very brief production credits for the album, the designer of Jones' suit, Giorgio Armani, is listed with acknowledgement equal to that given to the record's producers. To this thesis, this evidence of Grace Jones' commitment to the authority of fashion verifies that she is perhaps the *ultimate* provocative female pop dandy.

## **Chapter conclusion**

As we have seen, Annie Lennox's use of fashion in creating her new pop image in music video differs significantly from many of her male peers who are also described as 'gender benders'. As part of her broader body of work, in *Sweet Dreams*, Lennox's suit-as-costume is fashion signified by feminism, something demonstrated in her later comment that: "I can be a canvas. Feminism and style rarely go hand in hand, but I still feel that needs to change. What we wear — it's all a dialogue" (Lennox in Iannacci, 2011, n.p.).

In *Sweet Dreams*, the contrast or disconnect between Lennox's masculine costume of the suit and her use of make-up techniques associated with feminine glamour in order to question societal norms of the late Cold War



period could equally be considered usage of what in the current era are strategies of postfashion. Characteristic of these is a blurring of sartorial boundaries: although, while the boundary blurred here may seem to be most closely that which surrounds gender, Lennox is not addressing questions of her own personal gender or sexual identity. Rather, she and her collaborator Dave Stewart critique the capitalist music industry to which they as a duo are, conflictingly, willingly beholden.

This modern system, like fashion, is also by its very nature a patriarchal one. This is an aspect of the duo's performance in the video which is strongly determined by performer/character Lennox's main persona in the video, the suit-attired didactic dominatrix. Lennox's main character problematises modern masculinity through her postmodern assemblage of coded signifiers: the power emblematised by the conservatism of her male costume and phallic baton; and the passivity indicated in her sexualising, feminine make up. This contrasts markedly with the persona of the wordless scribe Stewart, whose transcriptions can also be seen as having a function of control over the images that appear on the screens-within-screens in the video, in the manner of live broadcast television vision-switching. By Sheila Whitley's (2000) reading of *Sweet Dreams*, Stewart here portrays "a Svengali, programming computers and manipulating Lennox's image" (p. 127), although this is a far from frequent interpretation of the relationship between Lennox and Stewart either on screen in this video, or off screen in the course of their artistic partnership, and not a position argued by this thesis.

The chapter has also made a contribution to understanding a hitherto under examined identity: the female pop dandy. In exploring the practice of Lennox, and an equally significant non-male figure of the music video era,

Grace Jones, this chapter has both worked to define this character in reference to historical, cultural and theoretical precedent, and to establish how these performers have contributed to the development of new fashion masculinities, as they are increasingly performed in the era of postfashion.

## **Thesis conclusion and research findings**

### **Paper summary and response to questions**

This research has contributed to the developing area of music video studies by investigating how in the early 1980s, this hybrid media form developed a unique visual language. It has looked at the way in which alternative and/or new fashion masculinities were constructed by male and non-male, queer, sensitive-straight and feminist British pop stars whose international fame was achieved through the mechanism of music video. By doing this, the thesis has identified that intrinsic to the language of music video are the fashioned gender identities of pop star performer/characters. The thesis has reviewed current fashion scholarship and canonical writing informative to theories of fashion, including from art history, literature, sociology, cultural and gender studies, and the field of curating in order to define the notion of postfashion. The thesis has argued that by this definition, music video can be integrated within fashion studies, thereby contributing new knowledge to the field. Summarised below is the content of the body chapters of the thesis, in which a range of methodological approaches have been used to analyse performances of fashioned masculinity in early music videos from the years 1980 to 1985 by: David Bowie; Wham!, featuring George Michael; Duran Duran; and Eurythmics, featuring Annie Lennox.

Proceeding significantly from literature reviewed in Chapter 1, the thesis has established that music video draws upon and extends a range of other media forms and visual cultures, most specifically: fashion; cinema; television; the performing arts; and graphic design. Chapter 2 identified how approaches and histories of the visual and performing arts, and techniques from television, settled in the emerging language of concept-style clips through conduits such as David Bowie in *Ashes to Ashes* (1980).

In Chapter 3, the inquiry recognised how the performance-style music video proceeded from cinema, by describing how early videos such as *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* (1984) by Wham!, were influenced by the genre of the mid-century Hollywood musical, and particularly by the on screen star persona of Elvis Presley. Chapter 3 went on to examine how new masculinity is represented in the early 1980s in additional forms of media that can be identified as being reciprocally influential to music video, by addressing the sphere of British men's style magazine publishing. The thesis has described similarities between visual techniques used in style magazine photography and layouts, and early music video. These include: the capturing of young bodies in dynamic motion; static poses in which the male subject knowingly returns the gaze; graphic techniques in which photographic images of people and 3D spaces are cropped and juxtaposed to create a 2D 'collage' effect, where the ground (page or screen) contains multiple images.

Here, the research has determined that to British audiences, music video and style magazines at this time can be easily understood as being closely related, both to each other as new visual cultures and also through the people who collaborate to produce them: musicians, fashion designers, graphic designers, stylists, photographers, directors, entrepreneurs. When discussing the highly fashioned post-Punk New Romantics, for example in Chapters 2 and 4, the research has identified the genealogy of this culture in the early 1980s as being an intricate web, with the personal contexts and social politics surrounding those involved being broadly understood by British consumers, who live in the same cultural conditions as these producers. These conditions have been shown to include the political atmosphere created by the conservative Thatcher government and the HIV/AIDS crisis, and to the post-war British social phenomenon of youth

subcultures. Relatedly, the thesis identified the role of bricoleur subculturalist David Bowie as being an influential figure in the development of new, queer pop masculinities that used fashion to question gender in Britain in the late-twentieth century.

This thesis, however, issues from outside Britain, and so has asked further how music video became the defining *international* star making apparatus of the 1980s. In the fourth chapter of the thesis, it was made apparent that exposure via music video broadcast on television provides British new pop stars with remote access to world media markets in which they and their milieu are otherwise unknown. The research has determined that ex-context, in Anglophone media territories such as the US and Australia, music video and music television provided the first taste of what appears to be a brand new, borderless approach to individual expression achieved through expanding the boundaries of gendered fashion, particularly with regard to performances of masculinity. Further, in countries with strong music video cultures but who are not experiencing the emergence of cable music television, such as Australia,<sup>67</sup> these new pop music videos are freely available on hugely popular and influential network television programs, providing access to young people's knowledge of a particularly British new culture of fashion. One of these programs is ABC TV's *Countdown*, which featured in Chapter 4.

The thesis has investigated the extent to which cultural histories of Britain and its connected but unique descendent, white colonised Australia, played

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<sup>67</sup> An MTV 'brand' was eventually launched in Australia in April 1987 as a late night free-to-air music program on Fridays and Saturdays on the national Nine Network, and ran for six years, being discontinued in 1993. During its tenure, MTV Australia's focus was predominantly on music videos by Australian, British, Canadian and American artists, although the program included interviews and segments dependent on imported US content, including the MTV USA game shows.

a role in the development of this new visual language, which proves to be rapidly and phenomenally popular with American television audiences. This aspect of the research has answered one of the primary questions underpinning the study: that is, to use the words of Michael Shore in 1984, why should it be that if Japanese company Sony introduced the first Betamax home-video tape recorder to the United States in 1975, “it would be several more years until rock video would explode, and most of the initial tremors would come from England” (p.55)? The thesis has answered this question by focusing on the role of fashion as being central to music video’s hybridity. In doing so, it has determined that cultural differences between Britain, and Australia, and the United States in the 1980s help explain why the visual culture of music video should naturally rise in the former and land in the latter in such spectacular fashion. Here, the thesis has ascertained that the visual culture of music video develops in Britain precisely because *Britain has a culture of the visual*. This culture has been shown to incorporate personae such as the dandy, and the realm of Camp.

Secondly in answer to this question, the research has determined that prior to the mainstream arrival of music video in the 1980s, in America rock music per se was *not* a visual culture. While music video is structurally related to musical cinema, until the advent of MTV, in the US rock music was most associated with radio. As Parke Puterbaugh writes in *Rolling Stone* magazine in 1983, with notable reference to the band Duran Duran, who were the focus of Chapter 4 of the thesis:

MTV opened up a whole new world that could not be fully apprehended over the radio. The visual angle played to the arty conceits of Britain’s young style barons, suggesting something more exotic than the viewer was likely to find in the old hometown. The big Duran Duran hits, ‘Girls on Film’ and ‘Hungry like the Wolf,’ [directed by Australian Russell Mulcahy] were MTV favorites three months before radio began to pick up

on them. And via MTV, Duran Duran and their like have engendered an outpouring of good old-fashioned hysteria among teenage girls. AOR radio, the dominant Seventies medium, was primarily a male preoccupation, pushing aggressive hard rock with zero sex appeal. When MTV ushered forth all these foppish, fresh-faced new acts from overseas, the teen-mag crowd, the screaming under-fifteens who were wont to have crushes on sharpies like [Duran Duran lead singer] Simon Le Bon ... returned to the rock fold in large numbers (n.p.).

This leads to the research's principal findings in regard to its subquestions: why was non-conforming masculine sartorial identity such a feature of the early music video era, and how was this so widely celebrated in the conversely conservative period of the neoliberal late Cold War, in both Britain and the United States? These findings relate to issues of gender relations and capitalist consumption, both of which are also embedded in Puterbaugh's (1983) above contemporaneous observation of the stunning cultural impact of early music video.

This thesis has determined that the visual culture of music video elevates the concerns and predilections of a powerful new post-war consumer group: the teenaged girl. The female gaze directed by this fashion-centred audience towards glamorous young men both fulfils the music industry's commercial imperative, and re-forms late twentieth-century masculinity by validating fluid embodiment of gendered fashion. The research has found that this fan lens is also strongly influenced by gay and queer perspectives, which while remaining 'outside' hegemonic structures, had entered mainstream popular culture in modernity and postmodernity through mechanisms of Camp.

In the early 1980s, these glamorous men include not only established queer figures such as Bowie, but others who present an ambiguous, flamboyant version of 'heterosexuality' such as George Michael of Wham!, and the highly fashioned but unambiguously heterosexual Duran Duran. These latter two have been identified by the research as being expressions of the identity of the image-conscious New Man, himself an agent of these consumerist visual cultures.

The research has also identified the role of non-men as cultural producers of new fashion masculinities in music video. The thesis has shown that acknowledgement and transgression of gendered sartorial symbolism was intrinsic to the language of music video from its outset, and explained how this phenomenon was closely identified with pop's 'gender benders', including those connected to the New Romantic post-Punk subcultural movement. However, the thesis has also argued that others working outside this milieu, including heterosexual non-men such as Annie Lennox and Grace Jones, used masculine fashion in the early music video era to subvert structures of hegemony, but still operated using gendered codes established in pop Camp and dandyism.

## **Findings as evidenced in popular culture**

In further interpretation of its findings, the current writing now turns to popular culture itself as a source of evidence to justify its claim that the language of music video, which was developed in the years 1980 to 1985, is an idiom recognisable enough to be quoted in visual cultures of the present day. Here, it becomes clear that the specific look (and sound) of 1980s videos are indeed a reference point in the contemporary visual vernacular, and that when the 'performing of fashion' is depicted, the language of early



music video has truly shown us “what to wear and how to dance”  
(Chambers, 2014, p. 44).

To identify examples of quotation of this type, for example within the genre of television production, an obvious prerequisite is that a sequence breaks out of the main narrative through the use of editing rhythms that respond to a prerecorded musical track, rather than the production’s usual diegetic sound or dialogue. These sequences should then call upon filmic techniques that were developed and employed in 1980s music video. These often enter the realm of cliché, reminding us of Sontagian ‘bad’ Camp: the use of horizontal or Venetian blinds to create lighting effects; wipes and dissolves as scene transitions; slow motion and freeze-frames; and frames-within-frames or split screen effects.

It is possible to determine the origin of many of these techniques to specific examples of early music video that have been investigated in this thesis. These include: evocations of David Mallet’s lighting strategies, for example of the padded cell in Bowie’s *Ashes to Ashes* (1980); scene transition devices such as the ‘video postcard’ from the same video, and Chris Ashbrook’s turning of Annie Lennox’s bindi into a ‘window’ in *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)* (1983) by Eurythmics; and Russell Mulcahy’s reliance upon dynamic split screens in videos such as *Rio* (1982) by Duran Duran.

It is also particularly noteworthy that it is the use of fashion signifiers which often most clearly indicates that a contemporary televisual scene is influenced by, or parodies, music video. These include: extreme close ups of made-up faces; extras who move and pose like catwalk or fashion editorial models; and sub-sequences which may portray a fictional character’s

personal grooming practices in the manner of a pop celebrity's backstage dressing room preparations or photo calls. The language of early music video is used to comment on the role of fashion in creating identity to such an extent that music video sometimes literally *stands* for fashion and fashionability, as can be observed in the following very clear example of this type of homage or quotation: *New Zealand Town* (2009), an episode of the cult HBO television series *Flight of the Conchords*, directed by Academy Award-winning First Nations filmmaker Taika Waititi.

### **Flight of the Conchords**

In this episode, Waititi displays an expert understanding of the language of music video, making clear stylistic reference to the imagery and aforementioned structural techniques developed in the early 1980s by Mulcahy and pioneer British music video directors Kevin Godley and Lol Creme, responsible for Duran Duran's *Girls on Film* (1981) and *Fade to Grey* (1980) by synth pop act Visage fronted by New Romantic Steve Strange, who as an extra in *Ashes to Ashes* (1980) was discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

The break-out scene in question in *New Zealand Town* 'is' an early 1980s video, for an original pop song called *Fashion is Danger* (2009). This track heavily borrows musical and production cues from songs such as *Fade to Grey* and *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*. As this research has shown to be frequently the case in music video, the visuals in Waititi's *Fashion is Danger* sequence bear a strong relationship to the lyrical content of its precursory music soundtrack: "I'm the vanguard, I'm the heir, I'm the vogue / I'm the chichi, Oooh ee ee, I'm the man a la mode / I'm the edge,

I'm the chic, I'm the taste / I'm the larger than life with just a hint of lace  
(Flight of the Conchords, 2009).

This fantasy sequence is an exposition of one of the episode's plot lines, in which the series' eponymous unsuccessful, New York-based New Zealand folk-comedy musical duo comprising the hapless performer/characters Bret and Jemaine (Bret McKenzie and Jemaine Clement, as fictionalised versions of themselves), have suddenly become 'cool' owing to their discovery of hair gel. The concept of 'cool' has been discussed in the prologue to Chapter 4 of this thesis, in regard to the New Man. In this television episode, recognition of a tension between a goal of seemingly effortless 'cool' and the effortful particularity of the necessary accompanying grooming practices by this 'sensitive' straight masculine type is wittily and pointedly made. As with Barthes's (1993/1957) diagnosis of the hairstyle signifier of "Romanness" in *Julius Caesar*, referred to in Chapter 1, Waititi signifies 'fashion' with the 'cool' created by new masculine fashion styles, as performed in the recognisable context of a 1980s music video. Meyer's (1994) camp trace, which this research has identified in the flamboyance of George Michael's grooming in *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* (1983), and residues of the pop cultural permission of situational homosexuality are also observable here: as with Michael with Andrew Ridgeley in Wham!, in this episode of *Flight of the Conchords* female fans have an increased attraction to Bret and Jemaine because of their presentation as kind of glamorous, New Wave fashion-aware couple rather than as a conventionally attired musical duo.

Just as in the manner of music video (Vernallis, 2004), Waititi intercuts between an onstage 'performance' by the newly popular act in a nightclub —

which, as Chapters 2 and 4 of this thesis has identified, is a significant place of origin for the aesthetic of 1980s music video — and a studio set up in which the performer/characters mime their song to camera. Throughout, Bret and Jemaine wear make up and a series of costumes that reference New Wave masculine fashion styles, including: retro-futurist, Romantic and historical references; suits; androgynous styles, including frills, blouson sleeves, dropped-crotch trousers, and scarves as belts and headbands; and snugly fitting theatrical costumes evocative of mime or theatre. Many of these sartorial features have been described in the visual analyses of early 1980s music videos that have formed the body of this thesis, or link to its observations of, for example, the early, ‘provincial’ New Romantic image of Duran Duran in *Planet Earth* (1981), and Bowie’s precocious interest in mime and other theatrical forms, as discussed in Chapter 2. They also clearly echo what Shaun Cole (2000) has identified in the New Romantic image as a flamboyant, often androgynous form of “escapist dress” (p. 161) that opened up possibilities for men to experiment with clothing, make up and accessories. Cole (2000) notes that while this experimentation sometimes offered young men questioning their sexuality the freedom to express their “burgeoning self-awareness” (p. 160), New Romantic styles validated non-conformist masculine dress in the mainstream, straight community, ultimately becoming clichéd. This thesis has identified that the medium of music video was the mechanism through which this move from avant-garde to cliché was most clearly enabled. The aspiring pop stars Bret and Jemaine are established as heterosexual performer/characters: their understanding of gender-transgressive styles as signifying ‘fashion’ and not sexual difference arises from fashion’s close association with the celebrity culture of early music video.

Bret and Jemaine's attire in this scene is quite unlike the characters' usual, 'unfashionable' straight masculine sartorialism, which in another, real-time scene in the episode is described according to the following exchange between the duo and the character Dave, played by comedian Arj Barker:

Dave: You guys seem like a little cooler than usual today ...

Bret: Yeah, we're a little bit cooler now

Dave: Usually, you wear clothes from the '70s ...

Jemaine: They're not from the '70s, they're from New Zealand (Waititi, 2009).

Important here is the idea that the 1970s are 'uncool' and the 1980s, 'cool'. This is confirmation of this thesis's proposal that the turn of that decade marks a particular epochal shift in a relationship between fashion and style (Polhemus, 1996), and that this shift was also represented in structural change to the culture industries through the rise of music video (Straw, 1993). This comedic exchange also provides decolonising commentary from a global-South perspective upon something this thesis has additionally shown: that the highly influential form of music video rose from, expressed and ultimately affirmed the white, transAtlantic dominance of visual culture in the late twentieth-century. In *New Zealand Town*, Waititi uses the visual language of music video which was established in the early 1980s by British new pop acts and their collaborating directors, and which changed the international media landscape in the ensuing decade because of the power and influence of the American broadcast culture of cable television, as semiotic shorthand for the ongoing dominance of these white colonial cultures. The proposition here is: the fashion look of music video emanates from the global-North; this look is 'cool'; 'cool' equals popularity; popularity equals power.

Waititi's intercutting between studio set-ups refers to a fundamental characteristic of music video (Vernallis, 2004) that has been strongly identified in this thesis's structural analysis of David Bowie's *Ashes to Ashes* (1980). As with the role of the Blitz Kids in that video, this discreet scene in *Flight of the Conchords* also features extras, principally the show's supporting character Mel played by Kristen Schaal, a comedian identified with the 'quirky cinema of metamodernism (MacDowell, 2016),<sup>68</sup> who is usually the band's only fan. Mel's own unfashionability is intrinsic to the down-beat comedy of the duo's plight: however in this scene, she wears a striking costume featuring a glamorous feminine early 1980s silhouette, with large, triangular padded shoulders, metallic fabrics, an asymmetrical hairstyle and make up that distinctly references the era's pop styles.

This writing notes that the sudden, and temporary, fashionability and 'coolness' of Mel, Bret and Jemaine here is fantastical and 'unReasonable', a principle of the Romantic nature of metamodernism. The irrationality of the *Fashion is Danger* sequence is permitted to occur in the logic of this episode through its quoting of the language of early 1980s music video. The research finds that this is because Waititi observes the same quality of a uchronic, "impossible or fictional" (Evans & Vaccari, 2020, p. 29), "timeless present" (Kaplan, 1987, p. 144) in that language. Waititi can present Bret and Jemaine one moment on stage in a nightclub, the next with a mannequin on a revolving stage in a studio, the next with a prop of a large gilded picture frame, and so on, and have this amuse, rather than confuse, an audience. This is because such transitions between co-existing worlds are recognisable features of iconic music videos such as *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)*, where Chris Ashbrook's non-narrative plot intercuts between a boardroom and a cow pasture, or the enigmatic story of *Ashes to*

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<sup>68</sup> Another writer and director of episodes of *Flight of the Conchords* is the aforementioned metamodernist-identified director of cinema and music video, Michel Gondry.

*Ashes's* that is proposed through the coexistence of Bowie's Pierrot on the beach, the man in the padded cell, and Major Tom.

Mel, and other female extras, pose with wide-eyed, enigmatic facial expressions that strongly evoke the fashion magazine-influenced music video cinematography of that period. In Chapters 3 and 4, this research identified the influence of graphic design and magazine culture present in music video of the early 1980s. The way in which music video at that time, such as directed by Mulcahy, extended the fashion magazine's idea of 'pose' is highlighted to comic effect in the lyrics of *Fashion is Danger's* middle eight section: "posing at the bar ... posing sitting down .... posing in the distance ... posing with my arm ...posing with my leg ... posing like a swan ... posing for a portrait ... posing a threat!" (Flight of the Conchords, 2009).

### **RuPaul's Drag Race**

In a similarly explicit homage to twentieth-century music video, a 2022 episode of the greatly influential US reality television show *RuPaul's Drag Race* challenges its contestants "in the race to become America's next drag superstar" (Charles, 2022, n.p.) to display their knowledge of the language of the form in a choreographed, filmed and edited drag performance integrated as a music video within the show.

This whole segment of the production is intentionally reminiscent of George Michael's 1992 video *Too Funky*, co-directed by Michael and Thierry Mugler. The host, iconic drag performer RuPaul Charles, plays a masculine, Svengali-esque auteur director character — a direct reference to Michael's performer/character in his video — while the drag queens' fashion 'superstar' status is affirmed through their appropriation of the

performances of supermodels who appeared in the original video, including Eva Herzigova, Linda Evangelista, Nadja Auermann, Emma Sjöberg, Estelle Hallyday, Shana Zadrick, Tyra Banks and Beverly Peele.

In a backstage piece to camera, the winning contestant of the challenge, Lady Camden (the stage name of US-based British drag queen Rex Wheeler) enthuses that “to be in a music video, and to dance and lip-synch is such a dream. This is so fun” (interviewed in Charles, 2022). In its analysis of Bowie and Annie Lennox, this thesis noted that drag culture bore influence on the language of music video from its outset. Yet Lady Camden wins this *RuPaul’s Drag Race* challenge not because of a knowledge of drag, per se, but because of their knowledge of the language of *music video*, specifically how fashion and gender is performed in that oeuvre. In direct contrast to the show’s other contestants, who are judged to have performed in the sequence only as if in a stage act — and not mediating this through a music video lens — Lady Camden’s competition result confirms that since the 1980s, there has been a *reciprocity* of influence between drag culture and music video. This is in accordance with this thesis’s proposal that such mutuality is also the case with the visual culture of fashion.

The clear interplay between contemporary drag practice and early music video forged by *RuPaul’s Drag Race* reaches its apotheosis in the Season Finale Episode 14 of Series 12 of the program in 2020, during the height of pandemic lockdowns which prohibited contestants from competing together in the usual studio setting. Finalist contestants Jaida Essence Hall, Crystal Methyd and Gigi Goode were required to pre-record the performances in which they would “lipsync for the crown” (the twist RuPaul



Charles applies at the end of a season to his usual catchphrase “lipsync for your life”) in their own homes, adding an unusual complexity to the challenge. Goode, herself known as a maker of drag fashion for other performers, while not the winner of the episode (the title that year being awarded to Hall), produced a piece which remains legendary in the *Drag Race* fan community, made as a direct and obvious homage to the aforementioned A-ha music video *Take on Me* (1985), directed by Steve Barron:

Gigi was the standout, somehow transforming her microscopic L.A. apartment into the Rotoscopic alternate comic-book universe of A-ha’s ‘Take on Me’ music video — even serenading a black-and-white negative image of herself through that video’s iconic picture-frame portal ... [bringing] new meaning to the term ‘A-ha moment’ (Parker, 2020).

Goode’s use of the language of music video therefore echoes the observation made in the introduction of this thesis that owing to the way in which fashion films, seen to be arising from music video, are virtual surrogates for material fashion: “catwalks were replaced with virtual alternatives in nimble response to the early restrictions and ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic” (p. 15).

Thus to conclude, in identifying contemporary cross-disciplinary examples of the use of early music video imagery and techniques that have been observed by the research, it has determined that its language is indeed a vernacular ongoingly understood in contemporary Western visual cultures.

### **Scope for future research: music video as fashion pedagogy**

An adjunct finding of this research is the identification of music video as a tool in the education of emerging critical fashion practitioners. This is

because of the way in which music video appeals as an approach to the teaching of theoretical perspectives to culturally literate visual learners (British Film Institute, 2000). Visual learners are characteristically imaginative and use their natural ability to picture events and remember information. They gain pleasure from the act of learning through visual and creative activities and are frequently able to conceptualise the components of a concept or task as a whole image (Reid, 2005). These qualities are frequently possessed by contemporary students of fashion, a cohort who learn within the metastructure of the academy, yet at the same time use individualised, atomised access to popular cultural information to inform their creative practice.

These students learn in the climate of postfashion, which has been described in this research, and frequently do not see themselves as being confined to Fashion, to apply Vinken's (2005) distinction between these things. Multi- and inter-disciplinarity are features of the careers of those they admire and commonplace terms of self-description, and following the lead of major designers and curatorial projects, students routinely produce fashion films not only for formal assessment, but as self-directed expansions of their high level of engagement with adjacent forms of cultural practice. Easy access to digital moving image technology through smartphones means that these emerging designers are uninhibited by the language of film and video, and constantly take part in its evolving conversation. Here, the thesis agrees with the British Film Institute (2000) in its proposal that: "critical understanding of film, video and television is becoming an integral part of literacy, and the spread of digital technologies means that the ability to make and manipulate moving images will become an ever more important skill" (p. 4).

As a generation with a native understanding of how music videos are constructed and what makes them effective as methods of communication and visual appeal, contemporary students of fashion are therefore able to immediately discern deep themes and meanings in music videos, as are modelled in this thesis. This research suggests that the serious study of music video can allow for greater access to fashion knowledge. Fashion students's existing visual skills can enable the use of music video to stimulate dynamic studio conversations on dress and textiles specifically, but moreover to broaden these students' analytical cultural knowledge to provide stimulus for briefs; or to encourage deep diving in fashion research.

This is because at their best — that is, most conceptually rich and creatively resolved — music videos and fashion collections have much in common. Often referencing cultural and visual histories, they are multidimensional realisations of creative ambition, featuring intriguing muses and unique narratives that are rewardingly surprising and oddly believable. This has been true of the form since the early 1980s, as has been prosecuted in this doctoral thesis.

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