

became the staging ground for the Sex Pistols (Gorman 118–21). In addition to anticipating an aspect of punk fashion, the leather look Quatro pioneered for female rockers was taken up by female musicians in other subgenres: not only hard rockers like Jett, but also the members of British all-women heavy metal groups that emerged in the 1980s, such as Girlschool and Rock Goddess.

Although Reynolds and Press are dismissive of “female machisma” as a performance strategy for women rockers, they outline its genealogy: “this tradition runs from Suzi Quatro through Joan Jett to L7” (233) and includes Parti Smith, Chrissie Hynde (of the Pretenders), Kate Bush, P. J. Harvey, Ann and Nancy Wilson (of Heart), Lita Ford, and Kim Gordon (of Sonic Youth) (236–48). It continues, presumably, with the Donnas, a more recent group of young, postpunk female hard rockers on the model of the Runaways. Greg Shaw, writing in 1974, subsumes the tradition of female machisma to one of two larger traditions of rock music: the “wild, rebellious, violent stuff” and the “safe, acceptable, clean-cut . . . stuff.” He suggests, correctly, that although female performers have participated in both traditions, “women have almost always ended up on the latter side.” He goes on to suggest that Quatro represented a revivification of the wilder tradition: “She is the first female singer to return to hard basic rock & roll, after nearly seven years in which women have had very little to do with the form.” Quatro took advantage of the opportunity created by glam’s destablization of gender norms in rock to fulfill her ambition of “kicking down the male door in rock and roll” and opening it for other women. In the end, it makes perfect sense that glam, a rock subgenre focused on proposing alternative images of masculinity, provided a space within which female masculinity could be enacted in rock and thus helped to broaden the opportunities available to hard-rocking women.

glamology

Glam Rock and the Politics of Identity

Being homosexual, or at least seeming homosexual, was the new way to be black in rock 'n' roll. To seem homosexual was the new way to be different, cool, special, a romantic outlaw (and in this case, truly a *romantic* outlaw).

—Robert Duncan (93)

At one level, Robert Duncan is right: glam rockers unquestionably used their performances of queer identities to provoke and rebel against the status quo in a way that roughly parallels earlier rockers’ use of black music and identities. But there is also a crucial difference: whereas black music has always been central to the rock imaginary, queer identities were relegated to its periphery until glam came along. Rock culture sees the music’s roots and, therefore, its authenticity as residing in a historical relationship to the blues and other African-American forms.¹ Even though it is arguable that rock is equally steeped in a long tradition of masculine display that was often effeminate and implicitly queer, evocations of that tradition are not generally seen within rock culture as celebrations of rock authenticity.

Iain Chambers indicates the historical importance of glam rock’s engagement with questions of sexuality by placing it against the

1. Hoskyns sees the legacy of glam in the work of flamboyant African-American artists ranging from Labelle and Parliament-Funkadelic to Prince and Michael Jackson (*Glam!* 108–9). Although there are surface similarities, it is not at all clear that any of these artists was directly influenced by glam rock (with the obvious exception of Prince). There are traditions of glamour and spectacle within African-American music itself that would need to be taken into consideration in assessing the relationship of these performers to glam rock. Here, I will simply suggest that their penchant for spectacle be seen as a phenomenon that is parallel to glam rock rather than derivative of it.

backdrop of British society's "mounting resistance" in the 1970s to the personal freedoms gained in the 1960s: "the spaces for social experiments began closing down, earlier boundaries were pulled back and prospects retracted as the solid values of 'tradition' closed ranks." In Chambers's view, glam rock turned "public attention to the details of sexuality . . . when precisely at that time a new, authoritarian morality was spreading over Britain's cultural landscape." In so doing, glam offered "new possibilities, particularly involving the public construction of sexual roles in youth culture" (134-35). Glam rock, in other words, created opportunities for both performers and their fans to defy the increased conservatism that followed the 1960s by engaging publicly in nonnormative performances of gender and sexuality.

There is ample testimony that glam rock was important in this way, especially to young people who were uncertain of their own sexual identities and in search of role models. Todd Haynes's film *Velvet Goldmine* (1998), a fictionalized account of the rise of glam rock, eloquently depicts how glam provided such models by placing queer images in the public sphere. The teenaged Arthur Stuart, who later becomes a journalist sent to track down the reclusive former glam rock star Brian Slade (a Bowie-like figure who also incorporates aspects of Marc Bolan, Brian Eno, and others) sees Slade being interviewed in 1972 while watching television at his parents' home in suburban Manchester. As Slade acknowledges his homosexuality, "Arthur leaps in front of the set, shrieking at the top of his lungs like a lunatic. 'That is me! That is me! That is me! That is me!'" (Haynes, *Velvet* 63). In another scene that appears earlier in the film but may take place later in the story, Arthur is seen sneaking out of the house in a trench coat. He drops the coat in the bushes, revealing a glam outfit underneath (13-14). Haynes thus suggests that Slade's public performance of a queer identity catalyzes Arthur's own exploration of his sexual identity, which begins with his identifying with the rock star and becoming a secret glitter kid.

Glam rock's central social innovation was to open a safe cultural space in which to experiment with versions of masculinity that clearly flouted social norms. It was in this respect a liminal phenomenon in Victor Turner's sense of that term, a performance practice through which alternative realities could be enacted and tested (85). Jim Farber, in a moving account of the role glam rock played in his own life as a gay man, observes that this liminal space

was open to anyone of any sexuality interested in exploring gender and sexual identities. He describes a subway trip he undertook with a straight friend, both dressed in full Bowie drag:

At perhaps no other time in history could two sixteen-year-old boys have made such a trip and not been slandered, beaten or worse. Yet here we were, graced by a time (the mid-Seventies) and buoyed by a trend (glitter rock) that turned out to be golden—a time when the relationship between flouncy affectation and sexual orientation seemed tenuous at best. . . . In such a topsy-turvy sliver of time, no one had to know that I was precisely as gay as my clothes might inform anyone from a later—or earlier—generation. . . . Pledging allegiance to glitter rock awarded me a safety zone in which I could both sidestep old definitions of what it meant to be a boy and stave off a commitment to what it would eventually mean for me to be a gay man. (142)

Since glam rock's queer identities were equally accessible to people of any sexual orientation, glam flourished briefly as a context in which those differences did not matter because they were rendered invisible.

It would be unwise to overstate this case, of course. Popular music is not entirely constrained by dominant ideologies, but neither is it entirely free of their influence. Glam rock was almost completely dominated by men and took the performance of masculinity as its terrain. Even though that terrain included Suzi Quatro's performances of female masculinity, glam offered no substantial challenge to the conventions of rock as a traditionally male-dominated cultural form that evolved from male-dominated social contexts.

And while glam rock created a space in which both performers and audiences could explore queer identities in relative safety, it did not protect either group fully from the real-life consequences of doing so. Haynes dramatizes the social risks involved in Arthur's attraction to glam: the furtiveness with which he hides his identity as a glitter kid under the trench coat; the rebukes he suffers at the hands of his brother and his brother's friends for liking "pansy" music; and his father's emotionally violent response to his discovery of his son masturbating while looking at a photo of two glam rockers. Although Arthur is a fictional character, the risks to which Haynes alludes were very real.

Taking the concept of space quite literally, the safe spaces initiated by glam rock included concert halls and the living rooms and

bedrooms where glam rock fans might see the performers on television, listen to their recordings, and gaze at their images. But carrying the identities forged in these spaces into more public places carried a risk for both performers and audience members. Chambers assesses the situation from the fan's perspective:

In everyday life, the cultural map of glam rock was destined to remain largely restricted to pop music's internal geography. Attempts to translate its imaginative gestures into the more rigid performances of daily cultures often encountered vindictive male outrage. . . . To play with "masculinity" was still condemned to remain more an imaginary than a practical option for the majority of boys. (135–36)

Although glam rock made it more possible to enact queer identities in public, it could not completely shield its adherents from the real-world consequences of their experiments.

While touring the United States early in 1971, Bowie was threatened with physical harm for wearing one of his Mr. Fish dresses in Texas (Cann 72). A few years later, Joey Ramone, then still known as Jeffrey Hyman, had a similar experience in New York. Before joining the group that would become the Ramones, Hyman was the singer for a glam rock band called Sniper. He describes his outfit: "I used to wear this custom-made black jumpsuit, these like pink, knee-high platform boots—all kinds of rhinestones—lots of dancing belts and gloves." His brother, Mickey Leigh, recalls that he would hitchhike dressed this way: "At that time, you really couldn't be doing that safely. You were taking a chance hitchhiking down Queens Boulevard like that. . . . He eventually got beat up. He got his nose bashed in. We had to pick him up and bring him to the Elmhurst hospital. I felt bad" (qtd. in McNeil and McCain 181).

The importance of glam rock resides not only in its social effects but also in its lasting influence on later music (though these two aspects of its legacy are intertwined). Glam pointed the way for several rock and pop genres of the 1970s and 1980s. Most immediately, glam's emphasis on constructed personae paved the way for punk rock, as Dave Laing suggests in his discussion of stage names (it is worth remembering here that neither David Bowie nor Marc Bolan was a birth name):

In 1972, former singer Paul Raven re-emerged as Gary Glitter, followed a year later by Alvin Stardust (former stage name Shane Fenton, original name Bernard Jewry). These names clearly could not be easily "domesticated." They announced themselves as artifice, even in their show business referents. "Glitter" could not easily be seen as a character trait of the singer as "real person." . . . It was more like a description of his *persona*, his adopted pose in his work.

Enter Johnny Rotten, Sid Vicious, Rat Scabies, Joe Strummer, Ari Upp, Poly Styrene *et al.* As chosen names these were clearly ranged on the side of explicitly artificial (in the manner of Glitter and Stardust). (50–51)

There are, of course, important differences between the ways that glam rockers and punk rockers created and named their respective personae, but it is clear that glam innovated the idea of the rock performance persona as a self-declared construct that was also fundamental to punk. Performers like Roy Wood, for whom experimentation with gender identity was much less important than experimentation with musical identity, participated fully in this aspect of glam, which remained influential beyond punk to the New Romantics. Billy Idol and Adam Ant were heavily and directly influenced by Bolan, especially in their sartorial choices. Beyond them, the New Wave glitter of Blondie (whose frequent producer, Mike Chapman, had co-produced many of the most commercial British glam acts with Nicky Chinn) and the overt theatricality of Talking Heads also owed debts to glam rock.

The strongest evidence of glam's long-term importance as a musical style may reside in the way the term *glam* has transcended its particular historical moment.² Consider, for example, the following passage from a record review of 2003: "The Spiders are a metalglam band as opposed to a glammetal band—the difference

2. Robert Palmer argues that one can see "punk" as a recurrent sensibility in rock rather than a style confined to a specific moment in the 1970s. Palmer nominates "rockabilly wild men" as the punks of 1950s rock and roll and Iggy Pop and the Stooges, the MC5, the Velvet Underground, and others, as the punks of the 1960s (261). A similar claim could be made for glam as a recurrent sensibility. Fifties glam would include Little Richard, Esquerita, Jerry Lee Lewis, and others, while sixties glam could include a range of performers from the Beatles, whose boyishness was often perceived as androgynous, to underground dandies such as Syd Barrett of Pink Floyd and even Jimi Hendrix.

being that glammetal bands are hairmetal bands that dress in spandex and incorporate the vocal extravagances of the '70s, while metalglam bands are glam bands that insert the dark chords of modern metal" (Kogan). This analysis not only suggests that glam rock remains an explicit reference point for contemporary musicians (the Spiders may be well be descended from Ziggy's Martian variety) but also that *glam* has become a stylistic descriptor used to denote a certain set of tendencies in a musician's musical and performance styles that can be combined (as prefix or suffix) with other stylistic terms to describe and distinguish complex musical hybrids.

The aspects of glam that alluded to androgyny and queer identity, most especially Bowie's performance as Ziggy Stardust, created a broad ripple effect as well. Boy George, for example, was directly inspired by Bowie: "For me, Bowie was a life-changer. . . . If you're a kid living in an environment where you feel alien most of the time, and you suddenly see this guy on telly in a catsuit with no eyebrows putting his arm around another man, it's incredible" (qtd. in Sweeting). Arguably, glam was a significant factor in opening the door for such overtly gay pop music acts of the 1980s as Frankie Goes to Hollywood, Culture Club, Flock of Seagulls, Bronski Beat, and others. In addition to extending itself into Brit Pop and dance music, glam formed alliances with hard rock, producing the so-called glam metal bands of the 1980s, including Motley Crüe, Twisted Sister, and Poison (Walser 24–36). Through Suzi Quatro, glam also inspired a generation of young women to think of themselves as potential rockers.

Some commentators suggest, in fact, that the chief historical value of glam resides in the way it opened the door for gay musicians. Jim Farber, for instance, inserts glam rock into a teleological narrative, characterizing it as a step in the right direction that ultimately led to the appearance of such "really" gay performers as Boy George and the Pet Shop Boys. Farber contends that although these subsequent performers "didn't literally 'come out' at first, any gay kid could tell they weren't just pretending like the earlier crew." This generation of performers was followed, in turn, by still later "pop stars [who] can speak their love's name and suffer no material consequences, from Elton John to k.d. lang" (145).

I certainly agree with Farber that glam rock helped to open the door to gay performers in popular music, and I am sympathetic to his idea that young people struggling with sexual identity benefit

from having visible role models in the mass media. I also fully understand what Thomas Geyhalter means when he points to the "constant disappointment to be experienced from a gay perspective as these so called radicals 'come out' as normal heterosexuals, revealing that their act, that promised more, was just an act, therefore commodifying the flirt with the sexually diverse" (223). Nevertheless, I find a position such as Farber's highly problematic, as I would any argument that insists that performers must belong unequivocally to a particular identity category in order to be useful exemplars to people grappling with what it means to belong to that category. Ultimately, such an argument recuperates glam rock for the very discourses of essentialism and authenticity it sought to resist and positions sexual identity as ontological rather than performative.

Theodore Gracyk, writing on rock music and the politics of identity, recognizes that what is finally at stake in the interaction between musical performers and their audiences is the audience's identity, not the performer's:

an artist's performance of eccentric identity is only a means to an end. That end is an atmosphere of freedom in which the audience will feel free to explore eccentric identities. . . . The real contribution of popular music may be its power to expose listeners to a vast arsenal of possible identities. . . . In allowing a listener to "inhabit" new positions . . . mass art can suggest life options that were previously unthinkable. (215)

The way that audiences participate in this process is not limited to simple identification with a performer with whom they share some crucial identity trait. Rather, an audience actively *constructs* the performer's identity in ways that speak to what it wants and needs that performer to be. Barbara Bradby shows in an ethnographic study of a community of Irish lesbians that her subjects employ a combination of "myth-making, fantasizing and rumor circulation" to construct the musical performers that interest them as lesbian. In many instances, "the actual identity of the performer is not what is important but the ability to create fantasies around that identity" (41). Performers, then, are valuable to a particular audience not because they can demonstrate definitively that they belong to the same identity category as the members of that audience but because they give those audience members material from which to construct

the performers' identities in terms of their own identities and desires.

Haynes suggests something like this in *Velvet Goldmine*. In the recognition scene where Arthur howls, "That's me!" at the television set, Brian Slade does not make an unambiguous declaration of his sexuality. Instead, like Bowie talking with Michael Watts, Slade at first seems to aver that he is indeed homosexual, then implies that he is bisexual and goes on to talk about his relationship with his son and bisexual wife. But the precise nature of Slade's sexual identity does not seem to matter to Arthur—what matters is the pleasurable shock of seeing someone who displays externally what he suspects himself to be internally. Arthur constructs Brian Slade's identity in a way that helps him clarify his own. In a later scene, we see Arthur in the privacy of his own room as he listens to a Brian Slade record and looks at a photo of Slade "going down" on another musician's guitar (modeled on Bowie's stage routine with Mick Ronson). We see "Arthur's face, breath CLOSE"; then, the camera moves in "VERY CLOSE on his open hand, circling slowly over stretching underwear" (Haynes, *Velvet* 85–86). Again, what matters is not what actually happened on stage and whether or not Slade and Curt Wild, the other musician, are actually gay or bisexual or what. What does matter is the way Arthur constructs the identities and actions represented in the photograph and the way that construction serves his own developing sense of sexual identity.

Glam provided very public images of alternative ways of imagining gender and sexuality, images that audiences seized upon and from which they constructed the musicians' identities and articulated those identities to their own. The demand for the freedom to explore and construct one's identity, in terms of gender, sexuality, or any other terms, is glam rock's most important legacy.

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