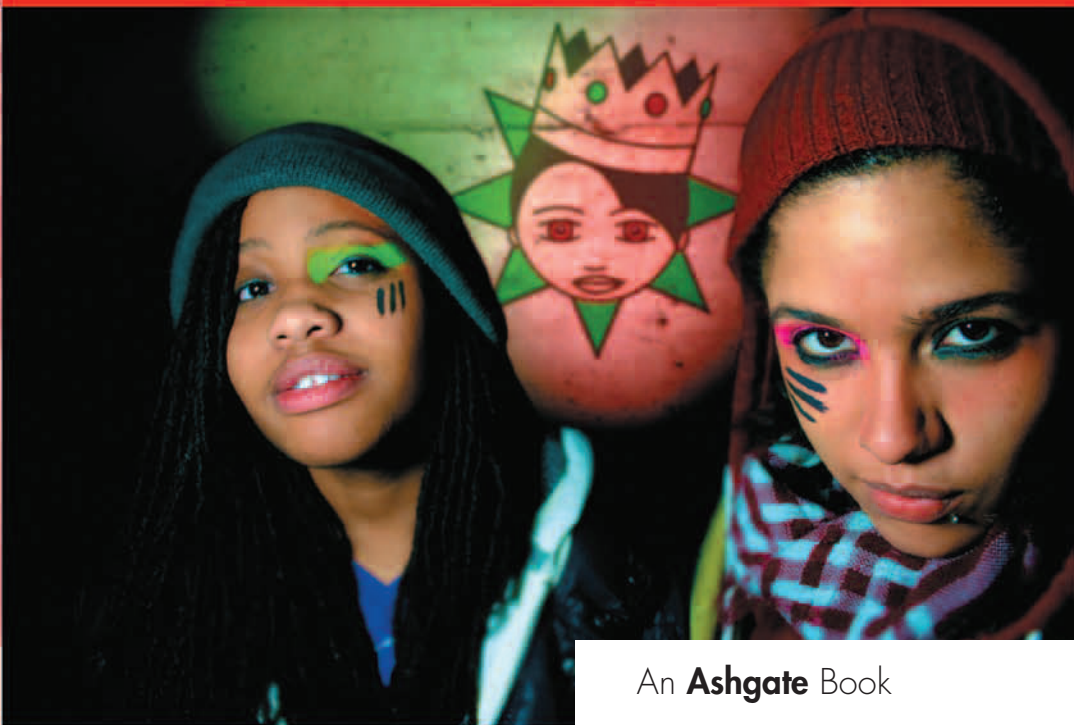


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ROUTLEDGE

Queer Tracks: Subversive Strategies in Rock and Pop Music



An **Ashgate** Book

Doris Leibetseder

QUEER TRACKS: SUBVERSIVE
STRATEGIES IN ROCK AND POP MUSIC

For Becca

Queer Tracks: Subversive Strategies in Rock and Pop Music

DORIS LEIBETSEDER

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General Editor's Preface

The upheaval that occurred in musicology during the last two decades of the twentieth century has created a new urgency for the study of popular music alongside the development of new critical and theoretical models. A relativistic outlook has replaced the universal perspective of modernism (the international ambitions of the 12-note style); the grand narrative of the evolution and dissolution of tonality has been challenged, and emphasis has shifted to cultural context, reception and subject position. Together, these have conspired to eat away at the status of canonical composers and categories of high and low in music. A need has arisen, also, to recognize and address the emergence of crossovers, mixed and new genres, to engage in debates concerning the vexed problem of what constitutes authenticity in music and to offer a critique of musical practice as the product of free, individual expression.

Popular musicology is now a vital and exciting area of scholarship, and the *Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series* presents some of the best research in the field. Authors are concerned with locating musical practices, values and meanings in cultural context, and draw upon methodologies and theories developed in cultural studies, semiotics, poststructuralism, psychology and sociology. The series focuses on popular musics of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is designed to embrace the world's popular musics from Acid Jazz to Zydeco, whether high tech or low tech, commercial or non-commercial, contemporary or traditional.

Professor Derek B. Scott
Professor of Critical Musicology
University of Leeds

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Holding a seminar block about my work at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona for the 'Literatura Comparada: Estudios Literarios y Culturales' MA course (Comparative Literature: Literature and Cultural Studies) in the context of the module 'Estudios Culturales' (Cultural Studies) as well as the discussions with the students helped me in the clarification of some important points. This seminar was made possible by Dr Isabel Clua and Dr Meri Torras.

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Introduction

Historical Prelude

Why Queer Tracks?

Of course, one would not be incorrect in thinking that I mean music tracks, however, this word has many possible meanings, for example, ‘trace’, i.e. what queer traces can be found in rock and pop music?

This trace shows us the right way, even if it is not a ‘straight’ one. An important word has arisen here: way. In this semantic field ‘track’ can be seen as a path, trail route or even refer to train tracks. How can a queer way or ‘being on a queer track’ be explained? Sara Ahmed has already looked into this topic in her analysis of queer phenomenology and established the following: a way serves to allow us to move in a particular direction and is therefore linked to (sexual) orientation. The way describes a line between two points; this line can also become a path if it is used often enough. As Ahmed explained, we are concerned here with performativity; this path (be it intellectual or spatial) is dependent on the repetition of norms and conventions – an idea obviously influenced by Butler. These routes or paths are created as an effect of this repetition.¹ It is in following these lines that we also make these tracks.

What happens if the official route is suddenly no longer taken? Alternative ways are marked out or new lines are formed. I also took a new direction and followed the ‘desire line’; this is the term Ahmed gives to unofficial paths in the architecture of the landscape that show the traces of the daily comings and goings of people, who take deviant or unexpected routes.²

Queer tracks therefore describe traces, paths or ways in popular music that deviate from heterosexual orientation – queer grooves in the turntables for lovers of vinyl, or queer (in no way ‘gender binary’) codes for fans of digital music. As one can see from the title, the theoretical question in this work is: where and how ideas and strategies from feminism and queer theory, which subvert hegemonic gender concepts, have been employed in rock and pop music. The analysis of these strategies and the corresponding examples are of prime importance. My main concern is with the deconstruction and extension of the conventional binary gender system and the heterosexual matrix, which corresponds to the aims and objectives of queer theory.

¹ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC, 2006), p. 16.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

In line with bell hooks' suggestion, I will not simply remain in the academic ivory tower; rather I also relate my work to popular culture. For this reason Cultural Studies form the second theoretical axis in my work. Due to the fact that films and popular literature are being and have already been researched in relation to queer genders, I chose my personal area of interest: rock and pop music. A stereotypical gender image dominates in this sphere of popular culture, as the third wave of feminism in particular demonstrates, and queer elements are used mainly by the mainstream. For this reason, I particularly want to find feminist examples, whether female bands or other musicians who do not correspond to the usual gender clichés, and analyse their politically relevant subversive strategies that do not solely serve the purpose of increasing sales.

As research currently stands, there are some academic works on the topic of women/gender in rock and pop music³ that contain descriptions and analytical categorisations,⁴ but almost no theoretical Cultural Studies work on queer genders⁵ in this area. In my opinion, a clearer and more detailed academic investigation of rock and pop music in relation to queer theory is lacking. For me, the anthology *Queering the Popular Pitch*, edited by Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga (New York, 2006), represents a diverse collection of perspectives on queer contributions to pop music. Judith Halberstam's chapter 'What's That Smell? Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives' in her book *In a Queer Time and Place. Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York and London, 2005) is a noteworthy contribution. In this chapter, she describes some bands and their subcultural background and shows lesbian and queer elements in their artistic works.

³ Angela McRobbie delivers a report from Cultural Studies about this topic in her chapter 'Recent Rhythms of Sex and Race in Popular Music', in Angela McRobbie, *In the Culture Society. Art, Fashion and Popular Music* (London and New York, 1999), pp. 111–121. Also: Mavis Bayton, 'Feminist Musical Practice: Problems and Contradictions', in Tony Bennett, Simon Frith, Lawrence Grossberg et al. (eds), *Rock and Popular Music. Politics, Policies, Institutions* (London and New York, 1993), pp. 177–192.

⁴ Mary Ann Clawson, 'When Women Play the Bass. Instrument Specialisation and Gender Interpretation in Alternative Rock Music', *Gender & Society*, 13/2 (1999): pp. 193–210. Also: Leigh Krenskne and Jim McKay, 'Hard and Heavy: Gender and Power in a Heavy Metal Music Subculture', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 7/3 (2000): pp. 287–304.

⁵ There is more material on this in the area of film (cinema, TV) or also of music videos. Steven Drukman, 'The Gay Gaze, Or Why I Want my MTV', in Paul Burston and Colin Richardson (eds), *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture* (London and New York, 1995), pp. 81–95. Mimi Schippers wrote a sociological essay on queer identities in rock music 'The Social Organisation of Sexuality and Gender in Alternative Hard Rock. An Analysis of Intersectionality', *Gender & Sexuality*, 14/6 (2000): pp. 747–764. Also Sarah Cohen, 'Popular Music, Gender and Sexuality', in Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 226–242. Simon Reynolds and Joy Press make a rather more journalistic than academic contribution to the analysis of gender identities in rock and pop music: *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion and Rock 'n' Roll* (London, 1995).

Historical Roots

First of all, I consider the historical roots of rock and pop music, with particular focus on the queer elements. Establishing the beginnings or origins of popular music is by no means an easy task. Many assign them to African American music, such as gospel and rhythm and blues, whereas others refer to the vaudeville tradition at the turn of the century. Perhaps it is a combination of both: the musical flow comes from the African American blues and jazz tradition and the performance character of the concerts stems from the travelling vaudeville variety shows. Interestingly, certain queer elements already existed in these two genres. The vaudeville shows included cross-dressers, who played the role of the other sex on stage. A well-known example is that of the American jazz musician, Billy Tipton, who also changed his gender role in real life. It was only discovered after his death that he was ‘anatomically female’.

A vaudeville show could also contain a burlesque (an erotic show and the forerunner to a striptease). The writer of an 1869 article about new theatre taste remarked: ‘It was also an indispensable condition of the burlesque’s success, that the characters should be reversed in their representation, – that the men’s rôles should be played by women and that at least one female part should be done by a man’ (original emphasis).⁶ This representation of women in the vaudeville tradition – contrary to the burlesque – was done in a respectful and appropriate way:

Vaudeville and burlesque each appealed to different audiences and featured two distinct styles of female impersonation. Vaudeville developed from those minstrel shows, that, since the Civil War, had catered to a largely female audience from the growing White middle class. Vaudeville impersonators deemphasized the minstrel show’s raunchy humour and lampooning of women and offered instead a celebration of femaleness and cultural norms in which impersonators strove for realistic portrayals of ‘ladies of fashion’. This respectable style of female impersonation was one of the most popular forms of theatrical entertainment of the early twentieth century.⁷

Burlesque is not so highbrow and makes the feminine look rather ridiculous. ‘Burlesque, which developed out of those minstrel shows that had appealed to working-class, largely male audiences, maintained the minstrel show’s raunchy humour and lampooning of cultural norms. Female impersonators working

⁶ William Dean Howells, ‘The New Taste in Theatricals’, *Atlantic Monthly*, 16 (1869): pp. 640–644. Quoted in Robert M. Lewis (ed.), *From Travelling Show to Vaudeville: Theatrical Spectacle in America 1830–1910* (Baltimore, 2003), p. 299.

⁷ Jeffrey Callen, ‘Gender Crossings. A Neglected History in African American Music’, in Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga (eds), *Queering the Popular Pitch* (New York, 2006), p. 187.

in burlesque did not strive for artful illusions; their goal was comedy.⁸ More information about the New Burlesque with an empowering political message for women or femmes will be given in Track 04: Mask/Masquerade. Laurel and Hardy (Stan and Olly),⁹ Sarah Bernhardt,¹⁰ Charlie Chaplin and Bette Midler, who presented her shows as Divine Miss M¹¹ in a homosexual bath house, were well-known artists from the American vaudeville tradition. Mae West's piece *Pleasure Man* (1928) provided a view behind the scenes of a drag queen show, and unleashed a storm of public outrage, because the drag queens were portrayed as homosexual. Critics said that West fabricated a connection between the sexual underworld and female imitators.¹² A further person of interest from the world of vaudeville, particularly for Europe and Vienna, was Josephine Baker.¹³ As Rosa Reitsamer notes, at the end of the nineteenth century Black musicians such as Arabella Fields, Bella Cora or Josephine Baker were highly sought after. These musicians also enjoyed a more pleasant situation in Europe than in the United States, as there was less discrimination and more profitable work. Nevertheless, the Black body was seen as exotic and primitive amongst White people. It was viewed as an absolute symbol of sexuality. Baker invented a special characteristic for her dance: 'In drawing the attention to her bottom, she satisfied the need for the exotic of the White Europeans. Baker moved her bottom in an erotic way so that the bottom became another fetish for Black female sexuality.'¹⁴ Her dance style also became the predecessor to Black choreography, which became an important selling point for her performances.

In hegemonic western discourses on Black popular culture the act of dancing was described as an expression of hypersexuality and as a bodily practice of Black people, women and homosexual men. In these discourses the bodily practice is directly associated with animalistic sexual behaviour so that Black people are seen as 'born Dancing-Queens'.¹⁵

There were other opinions on Josephine Baker's 1926 performance in Vienna, which concentrated more on the music:

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Franc Cullen, Florence Hackman and Donald McNeilly (eds), *Vaudeville Old and New: An Encyclopedia of Variety Performers in America* (2 vols, New York and London, 2007), vol. 2, pp. 658–664.

¹⁰ Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 101–103.

¹¹ Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 750–752.

¹² Callen, 'Gender Crossings', p. 188.

¹³ Cullen et al., *Vaudeville Old and New*, vol. 1, pp. 55–57.

¹⁴ Translated from German. Rosa Reitsamer, 'Von Josephine Baker zu Britney Spears', [*sic!*]*Forum für feministische GangArten*, 55 (2005): p. 15.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

Along with Baker's body the 'mechanical noise' of Jazz is at the centre of the reception. The melody is disturbance, haste, nervousness, metropolis, which excites human beings ... In the music the 'paradoxical primitivism of modernity' or 'urban exoticism' is inscribed, which is described by Jody Blake as the new European image of America; its 'urban jungles' and 'mechanical beats' represent modern barbarism.¹⁶

Jeffrey Callen stresses that in the 1920s and 1930s many of the working-class African American blues singers were openly lesbian or gay. Ma Rainey, for example, was one of the bigger blues stars of the 1920s, whose sexual involvement with women was known to the public. The advertisement for her song, 'Prove it on Me Blues', shows a drawing of Rainey, in which she stands on a street corner in a man's hat, jacket and tie, and attempts to seduce two women.¹⁷

It was a similar case with the men. Elvis Presley also did a sexy dance on stage in *Jailhouse Rock* (1957). His legendary hip swing revealed his feminine side, which even earned him compliments from men.¹⁸ In the heyday of the rockabilly era (rock 'n' roll with a country influence), this type of American masculinity was described by Nick Tosches in the following way: 'the face of Dionysos, full of febrile sexuality and senselessness'. He also added that these vehement feelings excite women and that teenage boys reinvented themselves as the 'Flaming Creatures'.¹⁹ *Flaming Creatures* refers to the title of a subculture film (1963) by Jack Smith, which glorifies omniseual behaviour. According to David Sanjek this comparison 'underscores the degree to which infatuation with Elvis not only crossed all gender boundaries but also fused if not confused those parameters'.²⁰

As a female musician in the 1960s, Janis Joplin's gender presentation and sexuality were somewhat ambiguous. Her bisexuality and the revealing of both her masculine and feminine side are mentioned repeatedly, but not explained in any further detail.²¹

¹⁶ Translated from German. Wolfgang Fichna, 'I Wanna be Like a Female Quincy Jones! Zur Konstruktion von Subjektpositionen afroamerikanischer HipHop-Musikerinnen', in Rosa Reitsamer and Rupert Weinzierl (eds), *Female Consequences: Feminismus, Antirassismus, Popmusik* (Vienna, 2006), p. 49.

¹⁷ Callen, 'Gender Crossings', p. 190.

¹⁸ Sheila Whiteley, 'Popular Music and the Dynamics of Desire', in Whiteley and Rycenga, *Queering the Popular Pitch*, p. 249.

¹⁹ Nick Tosches, 'Rockabilly!', in Patrick Carr (ed.), *The Illustrated History of Country Music* (New York, 1980), p. 230. Quoted in David Sanjek, 'The Wild, Wild Women of Rockabilly', in Sheila Whiteley (ed.), *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (London and New York, 1997), p. 138.

²⁰ Sanjek, 'The Wild, Wild Women', p. 138.

²¹ Lucy O'Brien, *She Bop II: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul* (London and New York, 2002), pp. 104–105.

The most well-known age of rock and pop music, as far as gender parody is concerned, is that of glamrock, although signs of glam can already be found with Elvis Presley (e.g. his suits adorned with gold and his makeup).²² Little Richard was also a glittering representative of rock music. Glamour always played an important role in rock and in show business; did the Beatles' hairstyles not also contribute to the 'feminisation' of men? 'And for a brief time pop culture would proclaim that identities and sexualities were not stable things but quivery and costumed, and rock and roll would paint its face and turn the mirror around, inverting in the process everything in sight.'²³ Glamrock presented its effeminacy and androgyny openly, just as the sexual revolution did: 'When Marc Bolan wore glitter under his eyes on *Top Of The Pops*, when Bowie went down on Mick Ronson's guitar, when the androgynous became the bisexual, it was clearly aimed at the intense morality of sixties youth culture.'²⁴

In her *Notes on Camp* Susan Sontag stressed the importance and beauty of the androgynous. There is more on this in Track 03: Camp, because camp, glitter and glam are very much related. Marc Bolan, T. Rex and David Bowie were the beginning of glamrock. Via David Bowie a connection to the 'Factory' artists developed around Andy Warhol. A connection arose between London and New York. David Bowie was impressed by the Velvet Underground musicians, particularly by Lou Reed, and he got to know Iggy Pop, who also covered himself in glitter, but presented a more punk version of glamrock. The glitter was a subversive form of expression, which was connected to drag queens and transvestites and therefore to homosexuality.²⁵

There were spin-offs of glamrock in the 1980s from Adam Ant, Culture Club (Boy George), Annie Lennox, Grace Jones and Marc Almond. Even heavy metal had a glam metal side, which started with Alice Cooper and bands like Poison and Hanoi Rocks who put female outfits on their male band members. It was not related to glitter; however, they did wear lipstick, eyeliner and often had long, permed and dyed hair. Even Guns N' Roses used feminine makeup. (In this context, the double gender parody of the Kingz of Berlin is also interesting, when they, as drag kings, imitate the performances of the boys of Guns N' Roses in girls' clothes, and can be seen to have so much fun whilst behaving like men, who think that women normally move and dress in this way.) Even in the 1990s, the time of alternative rock and grunge, Kurt Cobain, Evan Dando and Jane's Addiction wore women's clothes. The phase of Britpop was reminiscent of David Bowie's glam period in songs by Suede, Blur and Placebo. Films such as *Velvet Goldmine* (1998) by Todd Haynes or *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001) by John Cameron Mitchell also contributed to the revival of glamrock. I would like to consider this last music

²² Barney Hoskyns, *Glam! Bowie, Bolan and the Glitter Rock Revolution* (London, 1998), p. 32.

²³ Todd Haynes, 'Foreword', in Hoskyns, *Glam!*, p. X.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. X–XI.

²⁵ Hoskyns, *Glam Rock*, pp. 35–39.

film, an original off-Broadway play (1998), more closely. The film is about a male to female trans person, who falls in love with a GI soldier in the former DDR, and has to marry him as a woman in order to live with her husband in the United States. Unfortunately, the operation does not go according to plan, and she is left with an ‘angry inch’ as a reminder. Hedwig’s husband soon leaves her and, working as a babysitter, she falls in love with a teenage boy, with whom she practices the songs she writes. Soon afterwards the boy²⁶ makes a career with her songs; she, on the other hand, does not have much success with her punk band. Another important detail of the film is that some of the young guys in Hedwig’s band, and her lover, are played by women, who play their drag king role so well that it is not obvious at first glance and they pass as men. In the song ‘Tear Me Down’ Hedwig not only refers to the divided nation-state of Germany and the Berlin Wall, but also to the binary gender system, and to her exploitative relationship with her transgendered Croatian husband Yitzhak, whom she forces to give up his identity ‘in exchange for marriage’ ‘by denying him both wig and passport’.²⁷ This side of Hedwig’s character is criticised alongside the construction of Hedwig as trans, because she does not have a genuine wish to be the opposite gender prior to her failed surgery. The ‘transformation’ of Hansel to Hedwig is not ‘freely chosen’.²⁸

I would like to analyse the lyrics of one of the film’s songs, ‘The Origin of Love’, more closely. This song provides a good introductory example of queer genders in rock and pop music. The song lyrics tell a story taken from Plato’s *Symposium*, in which Aristophanes expresses his opinion on eros and love:

First of all, you must learn the constitution of man and the modifications which it has undergone, for originally it was different from what it is now. There used to be three sexes, not just two (male and female) as we have now. The third consisted of the characteristics of both the others and has disappeared, though its name survives. The hermaphrodite was a distinct sex in form as well as in name, with the characteristics of both male and female, but now the name alone remains; solely as a term of abuse.²⁹

Here Aristophanes speaks of three genders, the masculine, the feminine and the androgynous. With the aid of these three figures, he wants to explain the eros or

²⁶ A more detailed analysis of the musical, and of the boy’s name, Tommy Gnosis, is found in Judith Ann Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2006), pp. 246–252.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 247–250.

²⁸ Jordy Jones, ‘Gender without Genitals. Hedwig’s Six Inches’, in Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (eds), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York and London, 2006), p. 450.

²⁹ Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. by Walter Hamilton (London, 1987), 189 c, p. 59.

the need for a second person, or a soul mate, not a higher destiny of two people to be together but rather the ‘earthly side of one’s need to be part of a couple’.³⁰

Aristophanes explains the sexual character of the three sexes in the following way:

The reason for the existence of three sexes and for their being of such a nature is that originally the male came from the sun, the female came from the earth, the sex that was a mixture of both came from the moon as it partakes of both, the sun and earth. Their spherical shape and their circular walk were both due to the fact that they were like their parents. They were so powerful and strong had such a high sense of self-worth that they dared to take on the gods ... they attempted to make their way to heaven and set upon the gods.³¹

As in the song ‘Origin of Love’, the enraged gods decided to punish them; Zeus cut them into two halves. What is not mentioned in the song, however, is that Zeus turned their faces around to the side that had been cut, so that they would be more aware of the cut and be more obedient. Apollo pulled the skin together over the side that had been cut, and bound them together at the middle of the stomach, where the belly button is now, and thus allowed the wound to heal. With this construction though, a further problem arose, as Aristophanes reflects:

Man’s original body having thus been cut in two, each half yearned for the half from which it had been severed. When they met they threw their arms round one another and embraced, in their longing to grow together again, and they perished of hunger and general neglect of their concerns, because they would not do anything apart.³²

Now Aristophanes explains how different sexual orientations arose:

Each of us then is the mere broken part of a man, the result of a bisection which has reduced us to a condition like that of flat fish, and each of us is perpetually in search of his corresponding part. Those men who are halves of a being of the common sex, which was called, as I told you, hermaphrodite, are lovers of women, and most adulterers come from this class, as also do women who are mad about men and sexually promiscuous. Women who are halves of a female whole direct their affections towards women and pay little attention to men: Lesbians belong to this category. But those who are halves of a male whole pursue males, and being slices, so to speak, of the male, love men throughout

³⁰ Translated from German. Platon, *Sämtliche Dialoge*, edited by K. Hildebrandt, C. Ritter and G. Schneider, vol. III. (Hamburg, 1988), p. XXVIII.

³¹ Plato, *The Symposium*, 190 b, p. 60.

³² Ibid., 191 a, p. 61.

their boyhood, and take pleasure in physical contact with men. Such boys and lads are the best of their generation, because they are the most manly.³³

According to Gudrun Perko, Plato has adopted a hierarchical qualification of love: firstly the male homosexual, secondly the female homosexuality and heterosexuality and thirdly the androgynes. Plato rejects criticism of the first category, which is that the boys who love men are shameful, and strengthens the positive sides, such as the boys being active in the *polis*, ‘when they reach maturity, engage in public life’.³⁴ Nature decides male homosexuality and the wish of these men to remain celibate/unmarried. The second category is not as clear as the first one in the translation of Plato’s text that I used, because according to it these women ‘pay *no* attention to men’ and ‘direct their affections *much more* towards women’ (my emphasis). In the translation that Gudrun Perko uses, this statement becomes even more unclear, because these women direct ‘their affection *not so much* towards men, but *more* towards women’ (original emphasis).³⁵ Perko concludes from this that women’s desire, albeit to different degrees, is directed towards both men and women:

It is not logical within the explanation of the origin of desire, but it does not have to be unimaginable, that the women’s total disengagement from men and reproduction was unthinkable for Plato. According to Plato, tribads (lesbians) derive from these women. These women are for Plato ambivalent, as a lesbian, as a heterosexual or – and therewith Plato is introducing an entire new form, without labelling it as such – as a bisexual. He does not explicitly mention a bisexual eros; in his work it remains linked to homo- or heterosexuality. What these women are gaining from the eros in its ambivalent form – whether satisfaction or relaxation – is not mentioned. In the realm of the political these women are not relevant, according to Plato, because they are no longer mentioned.³⁶

The third category of the androgynous, the mixed-gendered spherical being, and after Zeus’ cut, the heterosexuals, do not hold any political meaning for Plato and their central function is reproduction.³⁷ Perko stresses that her use of the term ‘queer’ is a plural version of multiplicity and variety of different forms of human existence, that are much more complex and diverse than Plato presents.³⁸

³³ Ibid., 191 d–192 a, p. 62.

³⁴ Ibid., 192 b, p. 63.

³⁵ Translated from German. Gudrun Perko, *Queer Theorien. Ethische, politische und logische Dimensionen plural-queeren Denkens* (Köln, 2005), p. 137.

³⁶ Translated from German. Ibid., p. 138.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 139.

³⁸ Ibid.

She views this term in contrast to other interpretations of ‘queer’.³⁹ She calls the first form (*feminist*)-lesbian-gay-queer: here queer functions as a synonym for lesbian and gay. The second is *lesbian-gay-bi-transgender*. Her third, and preferred, form, as already mentioned above, is *plural-queer*, ‘in which the widest possible variety of human beings or forms of living (transgender man, transgender woman, intersexuals, drag kings and drag queens, camp, cyborg, tomboyfemme, lesbian, gay etc.) is gathered under the politically strategic umbrella term queer’.⁴⁰ I support Perko’s third interpretation of the term ‘queer’ completely and I want my use of the word also to be understood in this way. Perko summarises Queer Theory in the following way:

Its main points – such as the Laissez-Faire of plural and plurisexual forms of living, the possibility of self-definition, the opening of diverse spaces, the recognition of ambiguity and plurality, etc. – are against thinking in dichotomous binaries and therefore are aiming for a modified way of thinking: boundaries, hierarchical categorisations, univocal identity models and policies are broken, which exclude, marginalise and discriminate against certain people, and introduce a concept of a democratic society that is in favour of mutual recognition and plurality.⁴¹

This plurality also includes ‘skin colour, cultural background, culture, ability, sex, gender, desire and many more’, as Perko explains one page later. A musical movement from popular culture unites these queer versions with a feminist agenda – the Riot Grrrls or the queer-punk female bands. In my musical examples, all three versions of the term queer can be found, and as far as the time period is concerned, this starts in the 1980s and continues into the present. The reasons for this timescale stem from my own personal perception and the popular culture that I grew up with.

As Rosa Reitsamer explains, in the 1980s (when punk had already passed) new androgynous types of women and African American female musicians, with critical feminist lyrics (e.g. kd lang, Tracy Chapman and Melissa Etheridge), began to conquer the international music industry, the charts and the hearts of women/lesbians. They chose to go through the commercial music industry and not the structure of ‘women only’ companies.⁴²

³⁹ Queer as an ‘umbrella-term’ includes different fields and was criticised because it supposedly hides lesbians and gays, making them invisible, because being lesbian/gay is not recognised as such due to the term ‘queer’.

⁴⁰ Translated from German. Perko, *Queer Theorien*, p. 8.

⁴¹ Translated from German. *Ibid.*

⁴² Rosa Reitsamer ‘Provokation, Poetik und Politik. Fragmente einer feministisch-lesbisch-queeren Rock- und Popgeschichte’, available at: <http://translate.eip cp.net/transversal/0307/reitsamer/de>, retrieved 06.03.2008.

The identity of 'butch lesbian', which until then was located in lesbian feminism, was empowered by the coming-out of k.d. lang and Melissa Etheridge and thus introduced in the mainstream. The lesbian and gay communities celebrate these musicians and these major record companies where they have their contracts, count on the profit from selling millions of recordings. Their presence in the mainstream is in context with the discussions about the demands for equal rights of homosexual couples on the one hand and with the debate about AIDS being considered a 'gay disease' on the other, which are firmly embedded in and reinforced by public discourse.⁴³

Reitsamer gives an example here, on the other side of mainstream, of the self-appointed queens of Switzerland: Les Reines Prochaines (The Next Queens) with their song 'I Wanna Be A Butch' (1999), because they praise the virtues of a butch⁴⁴ as being 'strong' and 'sensitive', 'sexy' and 'powerful'. As Rosa Reitsamer analyses, with this song, they show that gender becomes a performative act through parody, deception and sarcastic gestures. Furthermore, a band from Vienna, SV Damenkraft, who produce electronic music, demonstrate this strategy and their love for Foucault in their lyrics and performances. In their song 'all dykes and you' (2004), they list all possible expressions and forms of a female person assigned by birth, but also including trans women, who 'sleep together tonight'. With SV Damenkraft, it is not about the oppression of women or lesbians, rather sexuality, power and desire, as Reitsamer writes. She describes this form of 'queer' as Gudrun Perko's first version, the (*feminist*)-*lesbian-gay-queer* one, because it refers to lesbian and gay and not to excluding identity politics.⁴⁵ However, in my opinion these lyrics from SV Damenkraft contain the third form of 'queer', which is the *plural-queer*, because of the variety of human beings such as tomboys, trans boys, gay moms, etc., which are mentioned in this song. I saw one of their concerts myself and found that their performance very much contributes to the interpretation of their songs. One of the songs deals with Foucault and his name is often mentioned in the lyrics. At the end of the song a sex act is simulated, in which a more feminine band member clearly takes the position of the man, and the singer with a more masculine appearance takes the woman's position. Due to the gender swap or parody, the position of power becomes confused. Before I go on to give a brief explanation of the structure and the methods of this work, I would like to quote Peraino with regards to the function of music in the examples that I analyse, which deal with gender and queer issues:

⁴³ Translated from German. Ibid.

⁴⁴ Gudrun Perko introduces some notions of the queer terminology in her book *Queer Theorien* on pp. 22–25. A butch, according to her, does not see herself as a lesbian, rather defines herself as female born, but sees herself as masculine. However, some butches see themselves as lesbians, some of them as especially masculine looking lesbians.

⁴⁵ Ibid.