

Virtual Spaces and Gendered Meanings in the Production and Performances of Studio Killers

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Questions of virtuality and imagined space have long been recognised as impinging on matters of gender and its transformation in modernity, the unstated assumption often being that visual images play a dominant – even determining – role in communicating gender and sexual politics. Audiovisuality is nevertheless central to some of the arguments I will be making here about gendered meanings in the music and performances of the virtual band Studio Killers. In a sense, however, the voice and its relation to gender precedes visuals in the examples I will be discussing as I will argue that the music alone already communicates powerful gendered meanings. There exists a substantial amount of research already on the relationship between the singing voice, gendered experience and sexual politics, which it will not be primary task of this article to elucidate. I would, however, like to begin this article with a few general points about the voice that I consider useful in setting up the more specific discussion that will follow on *the transvestic voice* in Studio Killers' music. 1

Which and whose voice(s) are we talking about?

i) Since the voice (the physical voice of a singer) is the main focal point in the majority of popular music, it makes sense to pay close attention to it. (It is often mixed to the fore; the singer is usually located centre-stage both visually and in terms of panning conventions; the singer addresses audiences 'front on'.) 2

ii) The voice can be other things aside from the material thing (the voice of singer), action (the act of singing) or experience (the phenomenal voice). In Finnish, the concept of voice is interchangeable with sound (both are *ääni*). Much of the psychoanalytically inspired research in music studies and film studies, from Barthes' 'grain of the voice' to Kristeva's 'semiotic chora', has paid attention to the voice from a developmental angle, sometimes weaving gender into accounts.¹ The voice as a locus for a perceived subject is worth defending – whether or not you accept all of the assumptions lurking behind psychoanalytical models. The boundaries of that subject are porous, however. Identificatory processes are behind many of our experiences of listening, not least so-called empathic processes whereby an elision is produced between the singing and the listening subject.² 3

iii) Many accounts of popular music have glossed over the fact that singing literally gives voice to words. Some scholars make valid points about the meaning-giving potential of the extra-semantic aspects of singing voice – the power of prosody, suprasegmental communication and other non-demotic forms of sonic communication – grunts, groans, 4

croaks, sighs, shouts and the like.³ Going further still, affect theories and phenomenological accounts have argued for a heavily bracketed understanding of vocal expression, in which the experienced materiality of vocal production and listening are elevated above discursive entanglement. It is worth remembering and reiterating that soundwaves emanating from other bodies, real or imaginary, leave those bodies and exert actual material force over other bodies, although mediation is involved.

iv) Voice in the abstract sense of ‘envoicing cultural groups’, or, equally, silencing them, is most convincing when approached in concrete material terms. This is the principal strength of approaches derived from musicology, sound studies and related approaches, although a good deal of the research on the subject is cross-disciplinary. I’m aware that this assertion is a tad reductive and biased towards auditory culture, since literary and digital culture have complicated our views of cultural envoicing historically with their emphasis on written texts, but an important, although not infallible, litmus test for evaluating whether a group is ‘envoiced’ or not is to ascertain whether its physical voices can be heard in different social and material settings (except perhaps when a disability is involved), how far the voice carries, and how it is mediated. 5

v) When it comes to evaluating the social and cultural meanings of voices, discursive and performative entanglements are unavoidable. It is helpful to view such entanglements through theoretical lenses such as theories of gender performativity and framing theory combined with ecological, multilayered and intersectional modes of analysis,⁴ navigating between coexisting frames of reference rather than placing too much trust in monodimensional approaches. 6

vi) Most crucially, we construct and perceive gendered (and other) identities in popular music, and the processes that go into forming these identities are complicated and stratified. What Serge Lacasse has called ‘vocal staging’ is an essential part of recorded and also amplified live vocal performance. Theorists like Simon Frith, Philip Auslander and Lori Burns have all looked at how the voice is ‘thrown’ or mediated in different ways in popular music production and performance, not least through distinguishing the performing person, the artistic persona and the song character in the case of Auslander (drawing on Frith).⁵ Together with Stan Hawkins, I have theorised how persona can even fluctuate within a single song, as vocal performers adopt different voice types to express different sides of their personalities – something that we theorised through ideas of personal narrative and the notion of ‘imagoes’.⁶ 7

With all of this in mind, let us proceed to discuss a certain voice type, the transvestic voice, and its position within current debates about gender and sexuality. It is only after this important premise is in place that more specific questions about the queerness or otherwise of Studio Killers’ music and audiovisual representations can be addressed. 8

The transvestic voice

The task of the cross-dresser, the drag artist or the transvestite⁷ is to adopt the style and demeanour of a different gender (in binary thinking often conceived as ‘opposite’), and to appear to onlookers (and onlisteners) as flawlessly as possible like a member of a different sex – to ‘pass’, as the expression goes.⁸ And yet, the cross-dresser’s success can be 9

measured also by their failure; only by perceiving artifice might we fully appreciate the work that goes into gender construction. Cross-dressing can be done for play or entertainment, but as a lifestyle choice it has the potential to call into question straight culture's naturalised binaries.⁹ Drag is a specific form of theatrical, comical and/or competitive performance art most often attached to gay (and lesbian) subcultures.¹⁰ While there is some variance in how the term is understood, these days the notion of 'passing' as a woman in the gay drag scene is seldom a priority, an attitude that has been attributed to growing awareness of the struggles and occasionally life-threatening dangers transwomen and sometimes transmen encounter should they fail to 'pass'.¹¹ Transvestitism, on the other hand, although 'theatrical' on a personal level,¹² requires no theatrical stage or captive audience, and is more likely to be practiced in private, moving towards public social interactions only with trepidation. The term is sometimes thought to refer exclusively to heterosexual cross-dressers, although this view has been contested. Transgender people also dress in clothing that differs from what straight society considers appropriate to their assigned sex, the main motivation in such cases being powerful psychological identification with the gender signified by the clothing (resulting sometimes in dysphoria: the sense that one was born in the wrong body). However, this is true of many transvestites, who are nevertheless more prone to switch between markedly different gender identities.

Passing and apparently 'flawless' gender performance are aspirations many transgender people and transvestites alike hold to be important – albeit sometimes with a subtext of queer failure and, for some, dysphoria. I would maintain, however, that these issues are of wider concern than these specific constituencies. The boundaries can be porous between transvestites and transgenders at one end of the scale, and CIS-gendered heterosexuals at the other. This porousness is a source of anxiety among the straight-laced and intolerant, which is why the boundary lines would seem to require strict (ultimately violent) enforcement. When pondering the strength of these feelings, a burning question is whether transvestitism is perceived to be a slippery slope leading towards the unravelling of (toxic) masculinity?¹³ 10

While passing, or transitioning for that matter, can require considerable effort in real life for transvestites and transgender people (not to mention those who perform opera's *castrati* and *travesti* roles), in the digital recording studio it is possible, as never before, for the *vocal* transvestite to airbrush or produce away the tell-tale signs of a difficult transition, making the work of (aural) gender construction appear effortless. By the same token, digital recording combined with vocal techniques can smooth over the cracks of gender construction in the singing voice, turning what might otherwise have been flawed into something uncannily flawless. 11

On transvestism – wearing women's clothes?

Let us now go over some fundamentals about transvestitism, a gendered issue that has so far received little attention in music research (in comparison to other key questions in studies of gender and sexuality, like drag, butch aesthetics and transgenderism). So-called male-to-female (or, better still, masculine to feminine) cross-dressing remains heavily stigmatised and is often more forcefully regulated than female to male (both are undeniably stigmatised, but through different strategies). Cross-dressing is classed as 12

deviance in the context of pathologising narratives in medicine and psychoanalysis, identification gone wrong, perhaps more seriously wrong than other marginal genders and sexualities because it is regarded as a voluntary and temporary behaviour. Disturbingly, too, transvestites vacillate between rival gender identities rather than in-vesting solely in one (gender dysphoria is not always involved, although that might be the case.). They attempt to have the best of both worlds and in so doing lose face. Transvestic and transfeminine men are stigmatised also because of the sexual titillation they are assumed to experience when dressing 'as a woman'. Research shows, however, that titillation is rarely the main or only motivation for cross-dressing. Instead, clothing allows the tranvestite to give expression to a side of their personality that lies beyond the gender norms usually attributed to their assigned sex. Charlotte Suthrell comments thus in the book *Unzipping Gender*: 'it is particularly difficult for men to allow themselves to experience feelings perceived to be female – particularly the 'silly' ones – the desire to be elegant and sensual, to take care over their appearance, to be tender or caring, to be coy and flirtatious, or liberated and wild.'¹⁴ This connects closely with what Jack Halberstam writes about the role of silliness in queer aesthetics. What she calls Gaga feminism 'is a form of political expression that masquerades as naïve nonsense but that in fact participates in meaningful forms of critique. It finds inspirations in the silly and the marginal, the childish and the outlandish.'¹⁵ Cross-dressing might give access, therefore, to precisely such an affective terrain, which lies beyond the bounds of normative masculinities and is mostly about having fun – even while it can be understood as a form of imminent and material critique.

Radical feminist arguments against transvestitism have typically addressed the politics of appropriation and representation; men muscling in on female/feminine domains or simply misrepresenting women. Another criticism calls attention to the element of parody in drag, which can involve unflattering imitation. (The argument I make above is that drag is not necessarily the best conceptual apparatus for instances such as this.) A final concern is that bifurcation between male and female might reinforce rather than destabilise the gender matrix. This criticism is often levelled at Judith Butler's work because of her endorsement of performative cross-dressing in drag. Like Butler, I'd contend that cross-dressing can instigate a productive sort of gender trouble by making manifest the dominant culture's assumptions about sex, gender and sexuality. Clothing demarcates and enwraps bodily space, allowing the attributes of alternative gender identities to be internalised by those who look and feel the part. Sartorial materials and the attitudes they represent occupy larger social spaces bringing about powerful affective responses. Cross-dressing extends beyond clothing, however, to sound, although when it comes to sonic transvestitism, it isn't always clear whether it takes place internally (through singing technique) or externally, through technological manipulation of the sound signal in music production.¹⁶ The same, however, could be said of sartorial transvestism: its most productive aspect is how it confuses inside and outside, causing us to question our assumptions about how identities are constructed.

The Virtual Band and Anonymity as Queer Space

Studio Killers are a virtual electro-pop collective from Finland, Denmark and the UK, according to the band's own publicity, featuring an anime-styled cartoon female lead singer, Cherry, and two anthropomorphised animals, Dyna Mink and Goldie Foxx. These

animations draw strongly on the Japanese *kawaii* (cute) tradition, combining an adopted innocence that does not preclude adult themes. Studio Killers were formed in 2011, and released a single the same year, 'Ode to the Bouncer',¹⁷ which charted in several countries including a number one in Holland. Their eponymous album was released in 2013 and charted at number two in the Finnish album charts, while the single 'Jenny' reached number two in the Finnish singles charts.

The idea of the virtual band needs some unpacking if it is to be of any use as an analytical category. In my work on Gorillaz, I've argued that there's never just *one* virtual band. Since perceptions of agency are inseparable from the consumption of popular music, lurking in the shadows are always creative doubles – the 'real' people responsible for making the music and imagery.¹⁸ Things are every bit as complicated when it comes to Studio Killers. The Finnish visual artist Eliza Jäppinen has confessed to authoring the visual imagery of Studio Killers. However, while Damon Albarn's celebrity status has always been closely interknitted with the promotion of Gorillaz, the identities of the musical forces behind Studio Killers remain a matter of speculation. Several names have been put forward, the most common being a Finnish songwriter from my home town (Turku in Finland), Teemu Brunila, erstwhile frontman of the indie rock band The Crash and songwriter for a number of Finnish and international singers. In the context of the music scene Brunila hails from, Brunila's authorship is sometimes openly expressed and at other times takes the form of an open secret (an artistic closet of sorts). What interests me more than establishing 'the facts' of Brunila's alleged authorship (effectively 'outing' him as co-auteur of Studio Killers) is the sort of gender positioning that is articulated in the music, song texts and visual images, and the possibilities for queer investments and the identifications these afford. My use of the word investment is not accidental; its etymology refers to dressing up, and in my usage it refers not only to clothing but also audiovisual and musical presentations. Ultimately, I'd contend, it is viewer-listeners who 'dress up' performers and invest them with gender attributes. And by *queer investments* I don't mean exclusively homosexual but almost any form of destabilizing existing gender categories. 15

Is non-disclosure in virtual bands a queer strategy? And might we think of the labyrinthine virtual pathways of the Internet as spaces of queer potentiality? Perhaps, and the most obvious way of approaching queerness here is in terms of strategies of evasion and masquerade that are typical of closet mentality. My reading of Gorillaz, however, took a different direction; there I argued that both animated avatars and their authorial doubles drew on existing imagery from subcultural codes that didn't necessarily work directly to subvert traditional masculinities.¹⁹ Studio Killers live much more through the actions of their animated doubles, communicated via Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and so on, as well as the participatory activities of fans on sites like DeviantArt.²⁰ Moreover, the greater secrecy surrounding Studio Killers keep fans guessing, which in turn provides more productive ground for destabilizing norms. Cherry, like Gorillaz' 2D, owes something of her identity to elements of postpunk emo mixed up with goth and J-pop/anime culture. Hers and her bandmates' is a more feminised audiovisual discourse, however, just as the genre of electropop is less characterised by assumptions about masculinity than the subcultural blend of indie and hip-hop found in Gorillaz' music. Cherry categorises herself as bisexual and carries the rainbow colours with pride in official images posted on YouTube. She and the other band members offer fans advice on how to deal with their sexuality, trolling, responsible consumption and other similar issues. This, then, is a more 16

nurturing and socially conscious space than Gorillaz's alienated virtual world of zombies and decadent rock icons. Most importantly, both versions of the Studio Killers band, the virtual *and* its authorial double, leave gender identity open ended, which pushes the virtual world to the fore and at the same time allows it to be mapped onto our daily lives. Concerning the relationship between the virtual and the real in other virtual reality forms, Gabriella Giannichi writes: "The virtual' become the main theatre of the real—the place from where the real can be viewed, a space for critique, art and politics."²¹ Ultimately, though, it's at the user end of these negotiations that queer potential is realised in participatory responses that take place in online virtual spaces as well as myriad sites of home consumption from portable stereos to the dance floor.

Gaga feminism and flowing queer identity

There's something conspicuously Gaga-like about both the visual imagery and the music of Studio Killers. Cherry's running make-up look, the fact that she's not a size zero, her dress sense and her agentic persona all push her into a domain where identification, as well as being about masquerade, is also about subverting the flawlessness of popular media representations. Lady Gaga offers an additional clue to interpreting Studio Killers. The repetitive and playful use of vocal sounds, the celebration of playful verbal nonsense and rhythmic flow, the phonetic qualities of language, the apparent unabashed silliness of some of the songs' narratives; all of these invoke a sense of lingering in the gender indeterminate times-spaces of childhood, which J. Jack Halberstam understands as a queering resource to be drawn on throughout the life cycle. The element of naïveté in both the visual images and in the song narratives, epitomised in the use of the anthropomorphised musicians and the pastel colours that often depict them, opens up a queer space that is free from the seriousness of subcultural imagery. Halberstam regards both animated films and childhood in general as holding the potential for new identity formations. In this she comes very close to the ideas of the surrealists, as she herself has noted in *Gaga Feminism*.²² 17

Cherry then inhabits the fluid spaces of childhood – she is sexually active, somewhere between girlness and womanness, while gender-bended transvestism characterises the interplay of her appearance and voice. In a way, this state of fluidity is her power: Marjorie Garber writes of the cross-dresser's 'power inher(ing) in her blurred gender, in the fact of her cross-dressing, and not [...] in either of her gendered identities'.²³ 18

Queer voicing in the song 'Jenny'

Finally, there's the voice, whose source is indeterminate (acousmatic but mapped onto an animated figure), and which soars higher than one might expect. Returning to Brunila as a point of reference – albeit an unstable one – he confided that when working with The Crash he thought of himself as possessing the vocal identity of a female soul singer. 'I've had a lot of feedback about sounding like Aretha Franklin. People say to me that I sound like a black woman. This doesn't worry me. A black woman lives inside me, and now she's out of the closet. In a sense, it's my sister singing.'²⁴ The reality in The Crash was never straightforward, however. Indie crooning and influences from the Pet Shop Boys to Bowie weren't far away, alongside strains of the R'n'B songstress. Brunila would go on to write songs for female R'n'B singers, thereby speaking with a different authorial voice than the 19

one he preferred in *The Crash*. When writing a song for the Finnish songstress Jenni Vartiainen, 'Ihmisten Edessä' (2007; roughly translated as 'in front of everyone'),²⁵ Brunila wrote from the standpoint of a lesbian woman who was proud to hold her lover's hand in public. He received a prize from the Finnish sexual equality organisation SETA for this song. The song required a metaphorical act of cross-dressing on its writer's part, however, at least at the stage of conception. Cherry of Studio Killers generally sings in a slightly higher register than Brunila, although their voice qualities are uncannily similar.

Let's now consider an example, the song 'Jenny' (2013, music video 2015).²⁶ 'Jenny' tells of the singer Cherry's attraction to another woman, Jenny. In the music video Jenny is a woman of colour. Cherry has a secret; she likes to borrow Jenny's lipstick as well as her clothes on the sly, and to use her shirt fetishistically 'as a pillowcase'. Motivated by her crush on Jenny, she's tempted to 'ruin their friendship' by bringing everything out into the open. The musical backdrop for this is a fantastical soundscape comprising calypso steel drums, a South American bandoneon riffing an infectious lambada-styled rhythm including catchy anacruses, silky-smooth synthpop sounds and a driving bass line. In its production, the song offers listeners an expansive and fantastical expanded space, a space of infinite possibilities, especially in the choruses and bridge. The culmination of the song comes in its final refrains as the voice splits into two parts: a high falsetto singing ecstatically and the lower voice, the song's narrator who intones the line 'forget those amigos'. Which of the two is the more 'feminine', which the more 'masculine' is hard to determine? Is the 'male' falsetto (which could equally be a female 'head' voice) a giveaway, or the fuller than expected lower tones? 20

It's possible to approach this song from several angles. Perhaps the least prevalent among audiences, but somehow the most obvious, is to read it directly and unambiguously through the lens of assumed authorship, in which case a transvestic reading is unavoidable since the singer is probably male (perhaps transfeminine) and fantasises in the song about donning Jenny's clothing. Although effeminate in the manner of many indie performers from the British tradition, Cherry's voice falls into the singer's comfortable tenor register, drifting into soft head and falsetto voice tones in certain passages. Eventually full reign is given to the falsetto voice in the final chorus's call and response phrases. What I'd like to argue here is that the meaning of the song is left purposely floating between gender categories – this is the queer third space between enunciation and listening that Freya Jarman²⁷ among others has discussed. On the basis of the online discourse, most listeners express the view that the singer is probably male (some speculate that it's Brunila), but no-one seems to really care in the hypothetical context of their experiences of the song. The factual or sensible understanding and the silly or nonsense understanding remain separate. It would be breaking the rules of the game to go in search of the real singer. Furthermore, it is somehow more acceptable to regard the song from a sapphonic erotic interpretative angle than a transvestic one; the cultural taboos surrounding men admitting to their transvestic tendencies still run deep. Therefore, it is Cherry and Jenny, not (supposedly) Teemu and Jenny, whose story is told, which exemplifies the 'all too typical [...] way in which cross-dressing is treated, explained, and explained away';²⁸ seeing/hearing 'Jenny' as a story of a lesbian couple. While the song is progressive in terms of making non-CIS sexualities visible, therefore, the challenging of normative masculinities that is enacted here is only implicit and dependent on recognition of the authorial text. 21

Audiovisual extensions: 'Jenny' in music video and live performances.

A factor that seems unavoidable when it comes to virtual bands is the considerable expense involved in realising some of the more ambitious plans surrounding this mode of expression. Gorillaz were forced to give up plans for a full-length feature film that have been circulating for years, and they have toned down performances over the years from the animated and 'Pepper's ghost' holographic imagery of early appearances to more traditional band performances with animated imagery projected behind the musicians. Financial concerns have been more apparent still in the case Studio Killers. The video for 'Jenny' was released more than two years after the corresponding album and single releases. And when it was released it could be argued that the promotional moment had passed (the song didn't climb up the music sales charts as a result). Moreover, when planning live performances, the band were compelled to resort to crowdfunding in order to meet the expectations that surround virtual band performance (no doubt engendered, in part, through Gorillaz' early performances and those of other virtual performers like the Japanese singer Hatsune Miku). 22

The music video for 'Jenny' is an anime-styled visual retelling of the song's narrative, continuing where the band's first video, for the song 'Bouncer', left off. Jenny and the narrator (here vested as Cherry) drive to a nightclub, where they have a falling out, which takes place on social media. Cherry takes Jenny's smartphone from her purse while she is dancing, motivated it seems by jealousy, and sends shaming messages about Jenny's burly boyfriend and the size of his manhood to their social circle at the club, which gets the pair into trouble with the brutish beast that is Jenny's heterosexual lover. In the end, the pair make up and flee the club together, pursued by ferocious wolves, with Cherry taking a seat on the back of Jenny's motorcycle. Both Jenny and the motorcycle are transformed into a bounding tiger in the song's final moments, as Cherry's surrogate voice soars to falsetto highs. Cherry is left dreaming of her lover during the fade out. The video explores the same queer spaces and fantasy landscapes as the song. For most listeners, however, it will be secondary due to its late release, but the two inhabit an internally coherent story world whose values are implicit but likely to be understood. 23

Studio Killers' first live performances were also an afterthought, but they gave audiences much of what they might have expected. The very first performance (which I was fortunate enough to attend) took place at Turku's Ruisrock Festival in July 2015 in a packed tent venue. While some might have expected answers to unresolved questions concerning the performers' identities, none were forthcoming at these performances. Two keyboards were located on either side of the stage and these were played by musicians adorned with the animal masks of Dyna Mink and Goldie Foxx. Cherry performed only virtually in the form of back projections and a 'Pepper's ghost' image that appeared from time to time centre-stage. Disappointingly, most of the vocals sounded as though they had been pre-recorded, perhaps because of the prominent role that production plays in Cherry's boundary-crossing vocal sound. Questions regarding Brunila's role in the project, for the time being, went unanswered. His first name, Teemu, was chanted by a small group of men in the crowd between songs (I have a smart-phone recording of this) and Brunila was spotted watching parts of the performance in media reporting of the event, but he wasn't seen on the stage.²⁹ The song 'Jenny', appropriately, featured Jenni Vartiainen performing onstage in a virtual sapphonic duet with Cherry, harmonizing at times with the latter's pre- 24

recorded vocals. The song had a celebratory mood and came into its own in the extended EDM club setting of the festival tent. Enhanced by the presence of an established local star onstage, a light show and pulsating sound system that fulfilled genre expectations, any disappointment about the absence of 'the real Cherry' and her vocal performances seemed to have evaporated in the heat of the moment – except, perhaps, for a few whispers on the long track back to the festival car park.

Final thoughts – On Flawlessness and Gender Fluidity

The issues I have discussed above come to a head in the song 'Flawless' from Studio Killers' debut album. Over a shimmering synthpop backdrop and weighty ostinato rhythms given extra gravitas by low piano strikes, we hear the text, 'how can you be so flawless', enunciated repeatedly in a breathy soprano voice that defies straightforward categorisation. Aside from the fact that we hear the singer's breath, there is something synthetic about the voice. Perhaps the upper formants have been tampered with, subjected to digital surgery? The voice bears some hallmarks of a high male falsetto, but something about the voice is a little too sweet, a little too pure. The voice on this particular track, accompanying these lyrics, is higher than on most of the album, more confounding, pushing the threshold more. Most listeners do not know the gender or sexuality of the 'real' singer with any certainty, beyond what has been provided in the band's virtual story-world. But what is the voice – as a voice – trying to tell us? 25

A queer understanding might be one in which these matters are left unresolved. Such a reading would not attempt to dig below the shiny surfaces, glossy production values and queer audiovisual utopia created in the song and its corresponding visual images. In opting out in this way, we might eschew what Sedgwick Kosofsky³⁰ has called 'paranoid reading'. A 'reparative view', as she calls it, would foreground the band as a studio construction while emphasizing the material reality (the mater-reality) of Studio Killers' virtual performances. In this view, the singer can be anyone she wishes, or rather that we wish, and which perhaps we wish to be ourselves. For Sedgwick, however, the most complete understanding resides in an oscillation between paranoid – or hermeneutic – and reparative – or affective – modalities, which is what I've tried to achieve in this reading, just as moving between different and overlapping (or laminated) frames of reference, in the terms of Goffman, offers a richer and more nuanced view of the subject than would be available with reference only to static unitary models.³¹ Laminated experience for Goffman implies the presence of several overlapping 'keyings', each of which informs the others.³² A keying is 'an openly admitted transformation', something to signal that a change has taken place in the situation (in musical terms, akin to a change of key), which in frame analysis implies switching between alternate frames of reference. To speak of 'switching' here seems doubly appropriate since the switch in question implies the gender switching that is transvestism – performed in a somewhat closeted setting but recognizable as such.³³ The queer utopian world of the song and its performances point towards gender fluidity. Omission and masquerade are responsible for erasing any overt signs of gender trouble in Studio Killers' music. But that doesn't mean that it is without the capacity for subversion. 26

Notes

¹ Freya Jarman-Ivens, *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flow* (Palgrave MacMillan: New York, 2011); Laura Wahlfors, *Muusikon kumousliikkeet: intiimin etiikkaa musiikin käytännössä* (PhD dissertation, University of Helsinki: Tutkijaliitto, 2013); John Potter, *Vocal Authority: Singing Style and Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006 [1998]), 158-189; Richard Middleton, *Voicing the Popular: On the Subjects of Popular Music* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006).

² See Anne Tarviainen, 'Empathetic Listening: Toward a Bodily-Based Understanding of a Singer's Vocal Interpretation', in Martinelli, Dario (ed.), *Music, Senses, Body: Proceedings from the 9th International Congress on Musical Signification, Rome 19–23/09/2006. Acta Semiotica Fennica XXXII* (Imatra: International Semiotics Institute, 2008), 421-429.

³ Simon Frith, 'Why do songs have words?', *Contemporary Music Review*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1989), 77-96: 91; Simon Frith, 'The Voice', in Frith, Simon, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 183-202; Serge Lacasse, 'Listen to My Voice': *The Evocative Power of Vocal Staging in Recorded Rock Music and Other Forms of Vocal Expression* (PhD dissertation, University of Liverpool, 2000); John Richardson, 'Between Speech, Music, and Sound; The Voice, Flow, and the Aestheticizing Impulse in Audiovisual Media', in Kaduri, Yael (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 479-501.

⁴ See John Richardson, 'Ecological Close Reading of Music in Digital Culture', in Abels, Birgit (ed.), *Embracing Restlessness: Cultural Musicology. Göttingen Studies in Music vol. 6* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2016b), 111-142.

⁵ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999); Frith, *Performing Rites*; Lori Burns, 'Vocal Authority and Listener Engagement: Musical and Narrative Expressive Strategies in Alternative Female Rock Artists (1993–95)', in Covach, John, and Mark Spicer (eds.), *Sounding Out Pop: Analytical Essays in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 154-192.

⁶ Stan Hawkins and John Richardson, 'Remodeling Britney Spears: Matters of Intoxication and Mediation', *Popular Music and Society* 30.5 (2007): 605-629.

⁷ A defence of the term 'transvestite' is needed here. While the term has pejorative connotations and is often stigmatised as a psychological illness, the term 'crossdresser' is also not without problems from a queer standpoint, since it seems to imply straightforward passage from one gender binary to another. So while 'cross-dressing' is ostensibly more neutral, it does imply breaking down the taboos of an assigned gender, sex or sexuality, in search perhaps of something intoxicatingly free. If I lean slightly towards the term 'transvestite', it is because etymologically it seems to imply more fluidity. See Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 2011 [1992]), 4.

⁸ Rusty Barrett, *From Drag Queens to Leathermen: Language, Gender, and Gay Male Subcultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 3.

⁹ Garber, *Vested Interests*, 2.

¹⁰ 'No analysis of 'cross-dressing' that wants to interrogate the phenomenon seriously from a cultural, political, or even aesthetic vantage point can fail to take into account the foundational role of gay identity and gay style' (Garber, *Vested Interests*, 4). I do not contest this claim, but instead call for a reassessment of terms: no study of cross-dressing should bypass the work transvestism does to question and complicate assumptions about hegemonic masculinity, femininity, and rigid preconceptions concerning gender and sexuality that surround these concepts.

¹¹ Barrett, *From Drag Queens to Leathermen*, 36.

¹² Garber, *Vested Interests*, 21.

¹³ Transvestism has the potential both to ridicule and enforce rigid gender roles; indeed, transvestism and cross-dressing can be 'used as a weapon of misogyny and even homophobia' (Barrett, *From Drag Queens to Leathermen*, 39).

¹⁴ Charlotte Suthrell, *Unzipping Gender: Sex, Cross-Dressing and Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 4-5.

¹⁵ J. Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), xxv.

¹⁶ See Stan Hawkins, *The British Pop Dandy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

¹⁷ Studio Killers, 'Ode to the Bouncer', *Studio Killers* (Warner Music Finland, 2013). See *Youtube*, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lo-EmtXbFRg> (26.8.2018).

¹⁸ John Richardson, *An Eye for Music: Popular Music and the Audiovisual Surreal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 209-212.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ In addition to my work on Gorillaz, two PhDs have been written in the past few years that in different ways discuss not only the music and music videos of the band but also the myriad official and fan-based online

discourses related to the band. I was fortunate to serve as external examiner of both. Alexander David Jeffery, *The Narrascope of Gorillaz' Plastic Beach: an Interdisciplinary Case Study in Musical Transmedia* (City University, London, 2016); Alicia Stark, *Virtual Pop: Gender, Ethnicity, and Identity in Virtual Bands and Vocaloid* (Cardiff: University of Cardiff, 2018).

²¹ Gabriella Giannachi, *Virtual Theatres: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 360-61.

²² Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism*.

²³ Garber, *Vested Interests*, 6.

²⁴ See John Richardson, 'Intertextuality and Pop Camp Identity Politics in Finland: The Crash's Music Video 'Still Alive'', *Popular Musicology Online*, Issue 2 (2006), www.popular-musicology-online.com (26.8.2018).

²⁵ Jenni Vartiainen, 'Ihmisten edessä', *Ihmisten edessä* (Warner Music Group, 2007). See *Youtube*, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKidLh1Ryq4> (26.8.2018).

²⁶ Studio Killers, 'Jenny', *Studio Killers* (Warner Music Finland, 2013). See *Youtube*, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hj4JFSerrw> (26.8.2018).

²⁷ Jarman, *Queer Voices*.

²⁸ Garber, *Vested Interests*, 69.

²⁹ *Ilta-Sanomat*, 'Studio Killers piilotteli kasvojaan – Mutta mitä Teemu Brunila teki keikan aikana?' (Studio Killers are hiding their faces – but what did Teemu Brunila do during the gig?), 6 July 2014, <https://www.is.fi/musiikki/art-2000000778354.html> (accessed 26.8.2018).

³⁰ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

³¹ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on The Organisation of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986 [1974]).

³² Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 290.

³³ There are arguably no privileged meanings in the masquerade of contemporary pop. Vocal masking, as Stan Hawkins calls it, operates on several intersecting levels, which leave unanswered and perhaps unanswerable questions of essential identities. Hawkins, *The British Pop Dandy*.

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