

“Honey, I wanna break you”

BDSM aesthetics as a transgressive and reparative concept in popular music

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In this thesis, I approach and analyze sadomasochistic aesthetics that are manifest in the field of popular multimodal culture and specifically popular music culture. The aim is to analyze, through the employment of cultural close reading, the BDSM fantasy as a transgressive aesthetic that crosses cultural, social and temporal boundaries. My methodological and theoretical cornerstones are cultural musicology, Lacanian psychoanalysis, gender performance theory, literature studies and media studies. The overall approach is interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary, relying on multiple different methodologies to produce a close reading.

The case studies for this thesis are located within the sphere of American popular culture. The first case study is the song “Desire” (2015) by American singer-songwriter Meg Myers. The second is the music video “Haunted” (2013) by Beyoncé. Both of the case studies comment, expand upon and utilize the BDSM aesthetic in ways that I consider to be reparative and transgressive in a culturally significant context. I place more emphasis on literature studies when I am discussing “Desire” (2015), and I utilize multimodality more in my reading of “Haunted” (2013).

This study endeavors to introduce a new concept into the sphere of cultural musicology, which I have coined “kink-tangibility”. While in its current form, it cannot be utilized as an independent concept, but it offers a way to approach the BDSM fantasy in music through an embodied framework that contests the normative positions of artist, listener and audience.

Key words: BDSM, aesthetics, cultural musicology, close reading, paranoid reading, reparative reading.

Table of contents

1	Introduction	4
1.1	Background	9
1.2	Methodology and research questions	11
1.3	Case studies	14
1.4	Kink-tangibility – transgressing sensory boundaries	14
2	Case study: Meg Myers - “Desire” (2015) and the Weird embodied	17
2.1	The Uncanny and the Weird	18
2.2	The Human and the Artificial	21
2.3	To destroy and repair	24
2.4	Conclusions	29
3	Case study: Beyoncé – “Haunted” music video (2013)	34
3.1	Multimodality, haptics and liminality	35
3.2	Mise-en-scène	39
3.3	The gaze as connective material	45
3.4	Switch dynamics	51
3.5	Conclusions	58
4	Conclusion: Touching, Feeling Kink	64
	References	68
	Popular music songs and music videos	68
	Bibliography	68
	Appendices	73
	Appendix 1. Tiivistelmä	73

1 Introduction

This thesis describes and details the complexities of sadomasochistic pleasures when they are employed in the context of popular music and media. The thesis is split into case studies and methodological exploration that approach the object and the hearing-listening subject, from different angles to shed as much light on the topic as possible.¹ Through the utilization of psychoanalytic theory, cultural close reading, affect theory and the emotive reactions that the BDSM fantasy in music evokes in the listener–viewer, I connect my observations and reading to a larger culturally constructed context. The aim of this thesis is to understand the BDSM fantasy and aesthetic as an inherent part of certain types of music and media.

The primary premise of this thesis is that music operates in part, as many other forms of the arts, media and culture do, on a liminal and affective sphere that utilizes fantasy, performance and subjective experience. This view is particularly adopted in the academic sphere of cultural musicology, and it seeks, in part, to interpret music as an expression of popular imagining and fantasy rather than as a substance, entity or sphere outside the body or human experience. However, the purpose of this thesis is not to endorse or refute any single theory of musicological ontology, but instead to approach the auditive material through a pragmatic and empathetic point of view that seeks to frame the art already existing *as* art within a field of human experientiality (see Richardson 2016a, 114).² Feminist studies, gender studies and psychoanalytical theory provide the framework for this approach, but while they remain the starting point, the material itself is thoroughly within the spheres of popular music and popular culture.

The format of this thesis follows an inverted-pyramid structure that, instead of flowing upwards from a single point, begins with a contextualizing chapter and moves forward into the case studies. My reason for this choice is that when discussing large and complex topics, it is often more efficient to approach them in a sequential way — metaphorically, my readings

¹ However, while writing this thesis, I stumbled upon a YouTube video essay by YouTuber Natalie Wynn (ContraPoints), a creator focused on making philosophical theory easier to access. In her video *Twilight* (2.3.2024), she brought up many of the same points and even used some of the same sources that I use in this thesis. Wynn (2.3.2024) makes the case that desire, violence, death and *eros* are all connected in the human experience of love, and the motif of the romantic vampire allows the reader / watcher to engage in the fantasy of violent desire safely. Due to the popularity of the video, it is possible to observe that there is currently a heightened interest in these topics.

² In other words, the ontological separation between what knowledge *is* and what knowledge *does*. The latter dimension of music is more prevalent in this thesis rather than the former, following the conventions of Foucauldian perspectives and the work of cultural critic Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003, 124).

of the case studies are like water filtering through sediment layers and being clarified in the process.

My research position on the subject of BDSM in music and culture is primarily founded on my own identity as a queer transwoman. These identifications are relevant due to the nature of cultural musicology and close reading as qualitative modes of analysis and interpretation. I am not able to engage with the case studies from an absolutely non-queer perspective since my identification already places me within the sphere of queer experientiality. Instead, I will engage with the auditive and visual material as it exists already in popular media and culture from the standpoint that I occupy as a white, able-bodied queer transwoman. This is not to say that I will knowingly tilt my findings or readings into a queer perspective, but I do not assume queer themes to be purely discursive.³ Instead my readings themselves, due to their nature as cultural artefacts and subjective sensations, will inevitably be part of a politico-social sphere in which they will be seen to be written by a queer person.⁴

My own relationship towards the study of the BDSM aesthetic and fantasy is similar to media researcher Susanna Paasonen's (2011) approach to the study of pornography in online spaces:

– a scholar studying porn who is never aroused by it is as anomalous and misplaced a creature as a researcher studying comedy who is never moved to laughter or a scholar working on horror who fails to jump or flinch. (Paasonen 2011, 23.)⁵

Indeed, my own curiosity towards BDSM in music was piqued by hearing and learning of prior research conducted by scholars of musicology and media studies in Finland. The thrill I encounter as a listener while engaging with auditive material that makes connections to sadomasochism is not primarily sexual⁶ in nature, but it is impactful and substantial since sadomasochism in popular music is located within a historically and culturally liminal place — it is between taboo and sexual expression. Discerning why an aesthetic choice is impactful

³ Here I refer to a principle of feminist theory that does not presuppose the material as already existing without the cultural and social spheres influence. See Butler (2011 [1993], 60–64).

⁴ There is also an ongoing discourse within the sphere of humanities about the non-political approach that impartiality, objectivity and distance purport as the main goal of academic research. For instance, cultural critic Edward Saïd (1994 [1978], 10) noted that “No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere act of being a member of a society.”

⁵ Also cited by Pääkkölä (2016, 30) in her reflection on researching sadomasochistic themes in music and media.

⁶ Though there is a larger academic discourse here which makes the case for the non-detachability of sexuality from most things public or private ie. all things subordinate themselves in the service of sexual drives. See Žižek (2006) for a post-Freudian analysis on this subject.

for the subject, especially when the subject is trying to analyze their own reaction, is a hazardous task at best, but I believe that the liminal space that sadomasochism occupies is reflected, in part, in my own identity as a transwoman. Gender non-conformity has historically been seen as taboo or purely sexual expression, or both, and the affective solidarity (see Hemmings 2012, 151–152) implicit in that connection is something that could be the reason for my piqued interest. However, this discernment is by no means definitive, but it does offer a way to approach sadomasochism as a connective aesthetic between groups.

However, in order to give a fair and critical reading of the object in this thesis, my approach is that of an empathetic observer rather than either an advocate of BDSM or a disgusted sceptic. By using this approach specifically, I am able to interrogate, negotiate and keep a respectful distance to the works that I read and analyze. In this thesis, subjectivity, affects and emotions are widely present, but my aim is not to create an empathetic narrative itself. My aim is to create a theory, based on prior research, that is tangled and inextricably linked with experientiality and the subject. While the distinction between subjective experientiality and empathy is slim in some places of this text, I consider my analysis to be more closely associated with the former while remaining empathetic. However, in order to not reproduce harmful stereotypes, pathologizing language or power disparities between different groups, I will consciously steer away from concepts and terms that have been propagated historically in the medical establishment to explain “aberrant” sexual behavior.

While my identity and position towards the study of kink in music is posited from a queer angle, I do not treat the BDSM fantasy and aesthetic categorizations as inherently non-heterosexual. Sadomasochism can be viewed as queer since there is an element of going against the grain of mainstream ideas of sexuality, pleasure and pain, but as a practice it can be characterized as a set of patterns, behaviors, fantasies, presentations and enjoyments that is accessible to anyone regardless of gender presentation, ability, age or sexual orientation.⁷ Due to the broadness of the categories, no single group can have complete ownership of BDSM since it almost always requires subjective negotiation on what it means in a specific location and time for those engaged with it. The popularized idea of BDSM broadly is often viewed through the lens of heterosexual desire and sexuality, such as in the movie *Secretary* (2002, dir. Steven Shainberg) or the song “S&M” by Rihanna (2011), but recently the image of BDSM has seen a wave of acceptance for queerness in the public eye, in Finnish popular

⁷ See Pääkkölä (2016, 51–52) for more on the translatability of BDSM to different sexual expressions.

culture at least. Much of this is due to Tom of Finland's (Touko Laaksonen) artwork from 1960's and 1970's being featured on the linen products of Finlayson as well as the movie *Tom of Finland* (2017, dir. Dome Karukoski) (see Pääkkölä 2023, 451–480). Therefore, to understand BDSM as queer or not queer is always contingent and subordinate to how it is translated, used and portrayed.

BDSM aesthetics can be understood in many different ways. Cultural musicologist Anna-Elena Pääkkölä's (2016, 12) understanding and usage of the term SM aesthetics would indeed be sufficient for the purposes of this thesis, and I do reference sadomasochistic pleasures and the BDSM aesthetic in ways that might give the impression that they are synonyms, or equivalent. However, the reason I prefer the BDSM aesthetic and BDSM fantasy as categorical concepts is due to its emphasis. While the SM aesthetic does capture the whole field, it places the emphasis on the sadism (Sadeism) and masochism (Masochianism)⁸ while the two first letters of the acronym, BD⁹, and the connection between DS¹⁰ is not as emphasized. Therefore, my preference in this thesis is to keep the acronym whole whenever possible. Indeed, there is no single doctrine by which authors describe, quantify and approach BDSM as a category or concept. For example, queer scholar Robin Bauer (2014, 5–9) uses the terms sadomasochism and BDSM interchangeably so their equivalence seems to be implicit, at least for him. I intend to continue that non-doctrinal way of reasoning in this thesis.

Yet, in some parts of this thesis, I sometimes prefer the term 'sadomasochism' since it derives from an embodied, albeit sometimes pathologized (see Bauer 2014, 6–7), experience of pain/pleasure. Indeed, both terms BDSM and sadomasochism refer essentially to the same fantasy which can be summarized, in part, thusly:

1. When the BDSM fantasy is invoked within art, culture, media and music, it is a reference to sexual pleasures outside the pleasure principle (*Lustprinzip*) as psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud theorized the concept.

⁸ See Pääkkölä (2016, 15) for more on the distinction. For the purposes of this thesis, the terms Masochianism and masochism as well as Sadeism and sadism can be seen as equivalents with different emphasis.

⁹ Most often translated as bondage and discipline or bondage and domination. Bondage is a category of its own, consisting of different roles and acts, such as rigger-rope bunny. Discipline in this instance is not in reference to actual societal or political discipline, and instead refers to fetishes consisting of, but not limited to, humiliation, power play and spanking.

¹⁰ Domination and submission. Sometimes characterized as D/s (Dominant / submissive), as in D/s relationship or a D/s scene.

2. The fantasy sometimes involves gear and sex toys which include, but are not limited to ropes, chains, collars, leather, latex, lingerie, restraints, knives, paddles, whips, dildos, plugs and gags. None of these are necessary for the fantasy to *seem* authentic however, but they can be used as a powerful emotive tool when described within the context of a song or story.
3. *Jouissance* – a term originating from the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, can be applied to both the practice of BDSM as well as the fantasy of BDSM. *Jouissance* can be an emotional and affective movement through and from concepts that are officially designated as negative. For example, pain and humiliation can be derived as pleasure in a kinky fantasy (masochism) through sublimation, making it part of *jouissance* – a movement from the ordinary to the extraordinary.

It would be quite impossible to accurately go through the specifics of each category, style and fetish in this thesis. Suffice to say most audiences have an understanding of BDSM as a practice and subjective feelings about it, be it curiosity, indignation, ambivalence, hesitation, disgust, revulsion; all are a part of the BDSM fantasy. It cannot be said to exist in a purely materialist sense, but it is interpreted and translated from the phantasmatic to something embodied in “the Real” (see Butler 2006 [1990], 170–174; see also Edelman 2002, 62–66).¹¹ Subjective experience of the BDSM fantasy gives the subject power to impose those deeply felt emotions onto it and inhabit the category in action, or in writing a piece of music, through the BDSM aesthetic framework. Therefore, the ontological question of ‘what is BDSM’, much like the question of ‘what is gender’, is perhaps best answered by describing how it functions rather than creating a cultural object out of it which would inevitably fail to address all possible meanings.

For the purposes of this thesis, I treat BDSM as an *almost* separate category of sexual expression since there are fetishes, patterns, codes, desires and aesthetics within the category of BDSM that could not be found within the wider context of eroticism. There are connective markers to eroticism and pleasure which are apparent to most that have even a cursory knowledge of BDSM, but some pleasures are not necessarily noticed at all in normative contexts that are pleasurable to practitioners of BDSM. For example, an asexual person engaging in bondage is not necessarily involved in a sexual act that derives sexual pleasure,

¹¹ The materialism here is not in reference to a theory of materialism, such as Karl Marx posited it, but in a more quotidian sense. See Goldstein (2004, 67–79) for more on post-Marxist materialism.

but the scene might instead be an entirely sensory experience of being bound or by binding someone else that is pleasing to all participants, but not a sexual pleasure-seeking activity in itself.¹² In equating BDSM with hedonistic pleasure seeking with a few extra steps does not necessarily do justice to the lived reality of those that practice BDSM.¹³ Other examples include an aromantic person being in a D/s dynamic that does not incorporate romance or *eros* as its connective feeling between participants. BDSM is one of the few contexts which is open to expansive explorations of sexual variance, romantic diversity and platonic love, but these are not necessarily the main image portrayed to the wider audience. When themes that connect to BDSM are explored in literature, music, media and culture, such as with the *Fifty Shades*-franchise, they are often depictions of acts that are closest to the mainstream audiences view of what BDSM is. Neither of my case studies explore these topics in-depth, but in order to connect the lived experience of BDSM to the fantasies depicted in popular music, I endeavor to not equate sexual pleasure with BDSM in this thesis.

1.1 Background

Much of the background for this thesis is in refers to Anna-Elena Pääkkölä's (2016, 12–15) description of the popularization of sadomasochistic pleasures within the fields of media, music and art in the 2010's. In short, the success of the *Fifty Shades*-franchise began with the release of the first book *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011) and was amplified by the film adaptation of the same name in 2015, released in theatres on Valentine's Day 2015.¹⁴ This became a popular and financially successful phenomenon within Europe and the US. Beginners' bondage kits were sold by mainstream retailers in Finland and elsewhere, bondage workshops were suddenly filled with participants and for a moment it seemed that kink had shed its cultural marker of taboo and become mainstream, albeit sanitized, almost vanilla. Yet, the success of the franchise sparked some debate among feminist and queer academics as well as popular media outlets. Outrage was common in many of these debates and the works of feminist scholars such as Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon, Sheila Jeffreys and Gloria Steinem were referenced, both for and against the possible depravity and moral virtue of

¹² See Bauer (2014, 107–114) for more on intimacy, asexuality and closeness within the kinky queer community.

¹³ See Wynn (2.3.2024) for a dissenting view.

¹⁴ The release on Valentine's Day especially sparked some outrage in the media and academia. See Pääkkölä (2016, 38–40) for more.

BDSM. Many of these authors were part of the second wave of feminism and the 1980's Feminist Sex Wars, a cultural and political movement against pornography.¹⁵

However, for the purposes of this thesis, definitively answering the question of the moral virtue of BDSM, is not necessary and I do find erotic fiction author Laura Antoniou's¹⁶ view to suffice:

I think the mainstream media 'discovers' kinky sex every ten years or so. [...] Every single time the media clutched its collective pearls and wondered how feminists would respond, hastened to assure us all that it's OK to have fantasies of submission, and did cute little sidebar stories on an occasional SM club or leather bar or sex toy shop. And then they forgot about kinky until the next one rolled to the top of the media haystack. (See Pääkkölä 2016, 13.)

The cycle of media and popular culture, the medium through which most audiences become aware of sadomasochism, discovers the practice of sadomasochism as Antoniou (see Pääkkölä 2016, 13) describes. Much of the contemporary imagination concerning BDSM can be traced back to the writings of Marquis de Sade and Baron von Sacher-Masoch, but sadomasochism as a practice and in a larger context as a fantasy or aesthetic, has achieved an agency of its own through renegotiation and repetition during different eras. The erotization of power differences, restraints, pain, non-monogamy and different materials like leather, is not inherent nor essential to the BDSM fantasy, but mainstream ideas of sadomasochism connect with these concepts liberally. Indeed, depending on the practitioner of sadomasochism, they might be deemed completely within the normative understanding of sexual behavior from an outsider's point of view since joining a kink community and self-identifying as kinky is not inherently connected to a certain code or a set of patterns by necessity (see Newmahr 2011, 52–54). The glimpses that the mainstream audience catches of the kink community is not necessarily reflective of the entire category of sadomasochism, but they might arouse interest, revulsion, joy or condemnation depending on the viewer. If the visible phenomenon that utilizes the aesthetic patterns of the BDSM fantasy is popular enough, as was the case with *Fifty Shades*, popular media begins to pay more attention which leads to the rediscovery of kinky sex once again.

¹⁵ For more on the subject, I refer to feminist academic Carolyn Bronstein's (2012 [2011]) *Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement, 1976–1986*.

¹⁶ As cited by Pääkkölä (2016, 13), but the original quote is in an article by Diane Anderson-Minshall (2013).

Even though sadomasochism has been part of culture in history in different forms, it has become a named practice within the academic sphere only relatively recently. Early sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (2012 [1894]) published *Psychopathia Sexualis*, a work which is still influencing some of the contemporary points of view about, among other concepts, sadomasochism.¹⁷ Some of the terms that were coined by Krafft-Ebing (2012) are still in use, such as sadism and masochism, but the works efficacy for modern psychopathology and cultural analysis of kink has been reduced over time. For the purposes of this thesis, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (2012) is a literary work since my intent here is to discuss the BDSM fantasy as culturally and artistically significant aesthetic rather than as a set of pathological frameworks. Therefore, for this thesis at least, it works as an early dictionary on the vocabulary of sadomasochism and a historical account, but I will avoid reproducing its intended use as a psychopathological tool.

1.2 Methodology and research questions

I will treat sadomasochistic pleasures and markers as a structure (see Williams 2015 [1980], 31–38) and a pattern within popular multimodal culture and especially in music. I will then test that pattern on two case studies which are abundant with the BDSM aesthetic. I do, however, borrow and use terms and concepts from studies that could be considered to be neighboring music studies (see Richardson 2016a, 112). Queer studies and queer methodologies as queer studies researcher Jack Halberstam (2018 [1998], 9–13) applies them have been most helpful in this aspect, but as music studies student, I prefer to use methodologies, terms, concepts and framing that center the study of arts and media in their application.

My main research question for this thesis is, how do BDSM aesthetics transgress normative cultural boundaries of sexuality and desire in popular multimodal culture and music. While my research question captures the main idea of the thesis, it is just the starting point for my analysis as a whole. I will describe sadomasochistic pleasures and the BDSM fantasy as a transgressive set of markers that cross cultural, social, temporal and locational boundaries, but for these crossings to gather the meaning I am striving to illustrate here, I will also discuss briefly the key aspects of some relevant topics. These topics include conceptual analysis,

¹⁷ As a precursor to Freud, Jung and Lacan, Krafft-Ebing's (2012) work was the first volume within the Western academic sphere of the 19th century that theorized psycho-pathological terms for different paraphilias, sexualities and identities that we might consider today as gendered or sexed.

weird fiction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, gender performativity, haptic senses, BDSM as a practice, affect theory and feminist reading.

In conceptual analysis, the concept of ‘concepts’ (see Bal 2002, 22–55) is deceptively simple to understand. In its basic form, a concept is a way to translate, promote and discuss ideas across different disciplines; for example, when an English literature researcher talks about ‘narratives’ or when a musicologist talks about them, the term has minute, but affiliated, differences. Cultural theorist Mieke Bal (2002, 3–6 & 32–34) calls these concepts that cross disciplines “travelling concepts” because their journey across disciplines attribute different meanings and nuances to them, much like a traveler might accrue memories during their travels. In essence, a cultural studies researcher might have a different understanding of what a ‘narrative’ is when compared to a historian, but while they both have ideas specific to their studies, neither one’s definition of the term is superior or a more accurate one; they are instead employed in a location and context that ultimately enriches their meaning regardless of their origin. Therefore, to understand concepts as historical, temporal, locational, cultural and political terms is vital to their use. For instance, while I might use concepts from a different era, such as the Weird in the 1910’s, it means that I also refer to their original context, implications and usage, especially if they are not common in my field. This is the framework for how I will use concepts in this thesis, and I will engage in conceptual analysis on the macro-level especially when I am discussing two related terms, such as the Uncanny and the Weird (see chapter 2).

Bal (2002, 23–25) does however note that while concepts are a form of translation and intertextuality, they are to be employed carefully. In this thesis I use a wide variety of concepts from different fields, but their function does not contradict or obfuscate other concepts that I employ here. For instance, the concepts of *jouissance* and sublimation as processes of human behavior are rooted in the conventions of Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis. I chose to use them here due to their utility in other fields, such as literature studies and gender studies, but I would not have chosen those concepts had they not been historically, theoretically and substantively become a part of the humanities over the 20th century. I consider them to be a part of a neighboring field (see Richardson 2016, 112–115) to music studies, and their use here enriches their meaning in all fields. This type of interdisciplinary framing allows the traveling concepts to accrue meaning while they are employed in this thesis.

Cultural close reading is another form of analysis that I will employ in this thesis, but while conceptual analysis is my preferred form of interpretive tool on the theoretical level, I utilize close reading on specific case studies and on the embodied level. Cultural musicologist John Richardson (2016a, 112–115; 2016b, 157–161) characterizes close reading as an approach to qualitative research that emphasizes the cultural frame, the object of study as something already existing within a cultural context, and interdisciplinary methodologies from neighboring disciplines. The cultural frame for Richardson (2016a, 119–126) draws on the inspiration of sociologist Erving Goffman’s “frame analysis” as well as the work of Bal (2002, 282) in understanding the frame as a bracket that is already under the agency of the framer. However, the frame or bracket is not a static surface that requires ascription and instead should be understood as an intentional construction around an object, and separating the frame from the object, a process of reframing significantly changes the results of the reading.

The cultural context and interdisciplinary methodologies are also an intrinsic efficacy of cultural close reading (Richardson 2016a, 126–133). While close reading as interpretation of qualitative research can be a multilateral approach to a culturally significant object, it would be a disservice to assume close reading to simply be another form of theoretical analysis. In fact, Richardson (2016a, 127–128) notes that a complete theoretical paradigm might distort the analysis since theory is not without presuppositions or assumptions. Therefore, cultural close reading considers the fact that art is already existing *as*¹⁸ art, and it should be approached as something that is not easily defined by limits and edges — thus the framing of art¹⁹ and the object itself are not delineated clearly, and the close reading should reflect that. For example, in this thesis I am sometimes discussing the cultural context, timeframe and pre-existing gender/sex distinctions within a Western socio-cultural framework which are difficult to separate from the case studies themselves — how could I discuss difficult concepts like haptics, the Weird or gender if I did not pay attention to their usage in the cultural context outside the case studies themselves. Such a fragmentation of close analysis would indeed not serve my purpose.²⁰

¹⁸ Richardson’s (2016a, 114) emphasis.

¹⁹ By using the term ‘art’, I am not only referencing art music or objects that are more situated in the sphere of art history, but also music, media, and culture.

²⁰ See Richardson (2016a, 116–119) for more on the distinction between close reading and close analysis.

1.3 Case studies

Both case studies that I have chosen for this thesis are from the time frame of mid 2010's and I consider them both to be a part of the same resurgence of BDSM aesthetics in popular media especially in the US and Europe. I chose these case studies specifically because they operate on two distinctive levels of the wider field of popular music — while Meg Myers' "Desire" (2015) was in the radio for a while, it did not make as big of an impact on popular culture as Beyoncé's "Haunted" (2013) did. Both songs are rich with the BDSM aesthetic, but they approach the motifs of sadomasochism from different angles. Partly, this contrasting is a choice that I made by choosing one song that is only audio and one that is a music video. There is in fact a music video of "Desire" (2015) which was uploaded on to YouTube 21.1.2014²¹, but I wanted to illustrate two different approaches in this thesis since they are, in my view, complementary. My intent was also to show that the BDSM aesthetic can be approached in both auditive-only material as well as multimodal material, such as a music video.

I had heard of both songs before beginning the research for this thesis and that was one of the reasons why they became the objects of my interest in the first place. In essence, I chose the material for this thesis based on my own familiarity with the songs as well as their general popularity in media. Both songs are well within the US-centric popular music sphere and they both deal with themes that are rich with the BDSM aesthetic. They even incorporate some elements of danger and horror in their respective soundscapes.

1.4 Kink-tangibility – transgressing sensory boundaries

The concept that I am describing in this thesis is based on an interdisciplinary approach to cultural musicology and the study of affects. I coined this concept as 'kink-tangibility' and during the course of this thesis, I describe and theorize the functional use it has in the format of cultural close reading. As I will show during the course of this thesis, the BDSM aesthetic connects to the body in unsettling and yet tangible ways — there is an aspect of sadomasochism as an aesthetic that acts through the one that engages with the material and while the visceral nature of the experience is fleeting, it lingers in the form of a fantasy. The socio-cultural sphere of popular music and popular multimodal culture, and by extension

²¹ The uploaded music video did not count as a preview or a single for Myers' even though it was released well over a year before the album *Sorry* (2015).

musicology, is central in understanding its use since music is a way for the listener and audience to connect with fantasies, ideas, aesthetics and concepts that often outside their everyday experience of the world. The five characteristics of kink-tangibility, as I endeavor to illustrate them, are as follows:

1. The sadomasochistic aesthetic in music engages the acoustic mirror in the body of the listener.²²
2. The fantasy of BDSM in multimodal material can be strong enough to exhibit a sensation in the body of the listener that is no longer phantasmatic, but an embodied experience.
3. The immersive nature of the sadomasochistic aesthetic in music is a similar one that horror literature and weird literature produces in readers.
4. The visceral affect and subsequent emotion produced by hearing and experiencing the BDSM aesthetic in music is sublimated into enjoyment through *jouissance*.
5. The embodied experience of multimodal material that contains sadomasochistic markers, when viewed in a reparative framework, can be understood as healing.

These characteristics of kink-tangibility as I present them here are to be used in conjunction with Pääkkölä's (2016, 27–29, 52–54 & 187–191) kink listening, or kink reading, since the concept I propose is not yet a strong enough theory that could work independently. The practice of kink reading/kink listening for Pääkkölä (2016, 27–29, 52–53) stems from queer musicology, and it is deliberate form of misreading, or 'reading against the grain', of music and culture which turns out to actually highlight overlooked parts of cultural texts and objects. It supposes the idea that eroticism does not have to be intended for it to be present and visible within culture, media, music and art.²³

Pääkkölä's (2016, 27–29) theorization of kink reading/kink listening is also based partly on cultural close reading and framing which in turn connects it to the body and queerness through multimodality and queer theory. Indeed, the liminal space that kink reading/kink listening occupies, within different conventions of musicology and queer theory, can perhaps also be a site in which different senses within the body of the subject are also mashed up and

²² See Välimäki (2005, 5–7) for more on the acoustic mirroring effect.

²³ Referencing Roland Barthes' "death of the author" methodology to not ascribing intention (see Pääkkölä 2016, 221).

made hard to discern. In this thesis, I suppose that tangibility and hapticity of audio/visual material does not have to be intended either for it to have that effect on the listener-viewer.²⁴

As noted before, I begin by examining the case studies on general level before sequentially moving towards the roots of each work. The first case study concerning Meg Myers' song "Desire" (2015) follows a multilateral approach after the contextualizing chapter which allows me to discuss the relevant theories alongside the close reading. My conclusions are presented at the end of the case study, but I return to them in various other points of this thesis. The case study of Beyoncé's music video for "Haunted" (2013) follows a similar approach, but it also contains pictures from the music video as well as the lyrics. While I utilize different theoretical tools, such as the Weird or Uncanny, throughout my thesis, I emphasize them differently depending on the subject matter. In the final part of this thesis, I summarize my main findings and expand upon the utilities of kink-tangibility itself as it relates to the larger field of cultural musicology. I also point out a few ways of continuing this kind of exploration of the BDSM aesthetics in popular music and make some final remarks on the possibilities such an exploration would open up.

²⁴ See Marks (2002, ix–xiii).

2 Case study: Meg Myers - “Desire” (2015) and the Weird embodied

Meg Myers is an American singer-songwriter whose musical style can be situated within the sphere of popular music as well as to pop-rock and alternative pop. Myers first studio album *Sorry*²⁵ was released in 2015 and while it did not position itself in Billboards top 10 albums of the year in the US, the single “Desire” from the album did position within the top 130 itself in global charts in the US as well as in Eastern Europe and Russia. Based on the positioning of the popular music charts alone, Myers’ album can be comfortably understood to be part of the pop genre globally even though it did not reach the top of the charts.

To understand the context of the song during the time of its release, I have to mention the latest iteration of the popular media discovering BDSM aesthetics (see Pääkkölä 2016, 12–13) in the form of the *Fifty Shades*-franchise. The second case study of this thesis addresses this phenomenon more since Beyoncé’s “Haunted” (2013) music video was connected to the release of the first *Fifty Shades* movie, but it still bears significance on “Desire” (2015) since popular culture, in the US especially, had a heightened interest in the BDSM aesthetic at the time. This might be one of the reasons “Desire” (2015) made it as far in the pop charts as it did, as the use of BDSM aesthetics in music is most often connected to developments in other mediascapes.²⁶ Therefore, as cultural close reading (see Richardson 2016a, 114–119) places heavy emphasis on the framing of art as already unique and an experience that stimulates the one experiencing it, the importance of the frame around the art is also amplified — it is a reading which engages the experientiality of art against the backdrop of culture while underlining the premise that nothing happens in a cultural vacuum.

Meg Myers described herself as “more weird [rather] than dark” (Payne 2015) in an interview with Billboard about her album *Sorry* (2015). There certainly are elements of “Desire” (2015) that could be considered to fit both descriptions, but when it comes to an artist having her own agency towards her work, I will base my analysis on Myers’ preferred description of weird rather than the perceived description of dark; it would then follow that dark and weird are

²⁵ Recorded and released by Atlantic Recording in the United States and WEA International Inc. outside of the United States although the album has the same ID-number in both the US and Europe 550614-2.

²⁶ For example, in the 90’s, Madonna sparked controversy with her *Erotica* (1992) album which utilized the affects evoked by mentions of sexual acts, intimacy and sadomasochism. The album was released in the US little after the pinnacle of HIV/AIDS epidemic so the audience and the public in general was already at a state of heightened awareness in regard to themes of sexual diversity and behavior.

more than genre descriptions to Myers even though many audiences might see the terms as interchangeable²⁷.

The song has a BPM of 132, the key for the song is G Major and the main progression of chords centers around B \flat 5, G5, D5, B \flat and C while. Producer and composer Andy Rosen (Doctor Rosen Rosen) is the co-writer for the lyrics as well as an additional guitarist, synth player and bassist for the instrumental parts.²⁸ The drummer for the song is not listed with the credits of the song so I will therefore assume that the drum sounds were produced with a TR-808 drum machine by Andy Rosen.²⁹ The production of the song and the chords as well as instruments that make up the atmosphere of the melody are not immediately part of the BDSM aesthetics in themselves. However, they instead plunge the listener into a specific kind of depersonalized and distanced auditive environment where ideas, such as gentleness, have very little purchase (see Richardson 2012b, 78–87; also Richardson 2012a [2010], 203–205). The instrumental sounds therefore impart a powerful, embodied sound by employing the TR-808 drum machine while they also distance the listener with their mechanical and relentless precision.

I listened to the song through the streaming service, Tidal, and therefore my analysis and close reading is based on the auditive material available to me through that service. While the song can be listened to through other services, such as YouTube or Spotify, I prefer to use a streaming service that is already available to me. Tidal also conforms more closely to the high-fidelity streaming norm when compared to other streaming services.³⁰ However, my observations here are applicable to the auditive material in other formats as well since I am analyzing the substance of the material and not the quality of the recording.

2.1 The Uncanny and the Weird

The Uncanny and the Weird as they are utilized within the spheres of music and literature (see Fisher 2016, 15–17; see also Pääkkölä 2016, 61, 82 & 102–104) are two concepts that will be integral to my close reading of “Desire” (2015). While both concepts have the same point of origin in psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud’s *unheimlich* (Pääkkölä 2016, 61; Fisher 2016, 15),

²⁷ I would guess that this is a case of diffusion rather than propagation of concepts (see Bal 2002, 32–33 & 38).

²⁸ The cellist for the song is Ken Oak, lead guitarist is Steve Stevens, and additional guitarist is Dave Laoham.

²⁹ Or a synthesizer that emulates a similar sound. The TR-808 emits a low and penetrating beat which, upon passing into the listeners body, is often more felt than heard.

³⁰ Tidal also compensates the artists more for each stream and streaming through Spotify, while it is the norm in everyday life, is not as beneficial for the artist themselves.

they are also examples of the way concepts travel across different disciplines and accrue attributes during their sojourn (Bal 2002, 22–30). Both have affiliated qualities that complement each other, but they are not interchangeable. The Uncanny, as Pääkkölä (2016, 82 & 102–104) uses the concept in her text, is more connected to film studies and visual media in general while the Weird (Fisher 2016, 15–17) is heavily connected to literature studies and especially the cosmic horror of novelist H. P. Lovecraft. “The uncanny valley” for instance is a name given to a popularized understanding of semi-humanoid robotics or puppets as well as video game characters that are too life-like, but they elicit a disturbing affect within the viewer since they are recognizably not human in origin. The Uncanny can therefore be understood as stimuli that repels the viewer due to something familiar being constantly on the cusp of recognition without being recognized as such (see Pääkkölä 2016, 61). From a time before modern aesthetic markers, Edgar Allan Poe (2009 [1842], 50) wrote a description of a haunting Uncanny picture in his short story *The Oval Portrait* that the narrator found “[...] the spell of the picture in an absolute *life-likeness* of expression, which at first startling, finally confounded, subdued and appalled [him]”. This recognition, or misrecognition, is indeed what the Uncanny refers to. To be appalled by something horrifying and macabre is certainly an element of suspense in horror literature, but instead of a straightforwardly horrifying feeling, the readers curiosity is piqued by the strangeness, and they are drawn in before the full force of horror sets in.

While some of H. P. Lovecraft’s stories³¹ also utilize the unrecognizable, or the abhorrent humanity trope, of the Uncanny, the Weird has less to do with visual stimulus and recognition than the Uncanny. It instead places its affectivity into the trope which Fisher (2016, 61) summarizes with the phrase “– the presence of *that which does not belong*”. In this context, Lovecraft’s stories have many examples of the Weird – whether it is a colour that defies human signification into words³² or ancient alien ruins on the South Pole where there is supposed to be only icy wastes³³, the Weird is more visceral and gut-wrenching rather than horrifying, much like the feeling of vertigo. The Weird is often elicited by descriptions of the human psyche’s incomprehension, or difficulty to reduce an idea into understandable facts because by nature, the object of horror is alien to humanity. Fisher (2016, 16–17) notes that while the characters of Weird stories often feel horror or fear, that feeling is not often shared

³¹ *The Thing on the Doorstep* (1937) especially.

³² *The Colour Out of Space* (1927).

³³ *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936).

by the reader of those stories due to being at a remove from the horrifying entity. This often distinguishes weird fiction from horror (Fisher 2016, 17), but in my reading of both Fisher (2016) and weird fiction I would also state that, for the reader/listener to experience the gut twisting aspect of weird to a more immersive extent, they would have to engage with material that is also auditive as well as visual. This based on the observation that auditive material has the potential to engage the reader/listener in way that emphasizes haptic senses as well as memory if the reader/listener pays close enough *attention* to the material (see Kassabian 2013, 9–13).

The concepts of the Uncanny and the Weird, as I have outlined them here, have much in common with the utilities of BDSM aesthetics in popular music; both concepts shed light on the intrinsic fascination that audiences, literary and musical both, have with the strange, the macabre and the dangerous. While BDSM as a practice of sexual behaviour (see Newmahr 2011, 25–27) tends to differ from the popularized image, the affects evoked by the markers of BDSM aesthetics, regardless of their accuracy, are effective in describing the visceral desire that many audiences experience.

An excessive preoccupation with objects that are “officially” negative always indicate the work of *jouissance* – a mode of enjoyment which does not in any sense “redeem” negativity: it sublimates it. That is to say, it transforms an ordinary object causing displeasure into a Thing which is both terrible *and* alluring[.] (Fisher 2016, 17.)

While Fisher (2016, 17) is talking about weird literature and the feelings it evokes in the reader, he might as well be referring to BDSM aesthetics since the utility of both is similar if not identical. Both utilize *jouissance* (see Edelman 2004, 4–9; Fisher 2016, 17–25; Pääkkölä 2016, 83–85) as a key part in building tension and release in their respective contexts. I use it here to illustrate the different modes of pleasure that can be derived from BDSM aesthetics since *jouissance* accurately depicts the complexities of pleasures that go beyond the Freudian pleasure principle.³⁴ In essence, *jouissance* represents a sublimation of pleasure as Fisher (2016, 17) described, but it also challenges dichotomies of pleasure-pain (Pääkkölä 2016, 84–85 & 126), creation-destruction (Edelman 2004, 25; Spielrein 1994 [1912], 155–156) and virtuous-immoral (Edelman 2004, 47–52); *jouissance* is movement, change and transgressive

³⁴ See Edelman (2004, 25) & Pääkkölä (2016, 126–127) for a more in-depth analysis of the Freudian pleasure principle.

delight felt by the subject upon encountering stimulus that goes beyond pleasure-pain and into another kind of experience.³⁵

2.2 The Human and the Artificial

The song begins with an ambient sound that is interrupted by a hit on a snare drum, most likely made with synthesizers much like the ambient sound itself (00.00–00.14). The ambient sound is low and oscillating between low and higher frequencies in a loop as well as a beat of a synthesized kick drum on every other beat. The snare drum adds a sharp crack sound which is reminiscent of a whip crack striking air or skin. Already the listener is being introduced to a strange soundscape that is filled with a threat and suspense of some kind. This eerie (see Fisher 2016, 61–62) experience of the ambient sound and almost mechanical cracks of the snare drum is interrupted as new instrumental sounds are thrust into the soundscape quite suddenly (00.15–00.42). A harpsichord-like sound begins to play the melody of the song while a distinct slap bass sound, without the accompanying pull on the G- or D-string, is heard four times on the back kick of every beat³⁶ (00.19–00.22 & 00.27–00.29). The added sounds of the synthesizer-harpsichord and slap bass are layered onto the existing beat and the ambient, oscillating sound rather than overpowering it completely thus creating a diverse, yet strange, instrumental composition. The instrumental atmosphere of the song, as noted before, is not gentle or relaxing by any means. The slap bass, the sharp sounds of a harpsichord and the condensed beats of TR-808 drum machine all employ the fantasy of slaps on skin, sharp objects and forced muffling of sound.

The intro of the song is in keeping with many conventions of the pop genre, but the significant differences between the instrumental sounds of “Desire” (2015) and most pop songs are a clue as to why this song evokes a feeling of weirdness in the listener. One of the major conventions of pop music that the song adheres to is that during the intro, the listener is already introduced to most of the instrumental loops, riffs and hooks that the song utilizes. However, while the format may be close to the pop genre, the substance of the riffs and loops is weird and even eerie. The oscillating ambient sound, sharp crack on the snare drum and the muffled kick drum beat all create an industrial, or at least non-human, soundscape with their precision and contained sound – there is only a little reverb or echo in the crack of the snare

³⁵ See Halberstam (2018, 24–27) for a trans* perspective on danger-thrill on “passing” in the restroom. While *jouissance* is movement from the ordinary to the extraordinary, passing is movement from the extraordinary to the ordinary in many ways.

³⁶ One-TWO-three-FOUR with 4/4 tempo.

drum or the kick drum so the atmosphere of the instrumental sounds is very confined and restrained rather than airy or breathy.

When a pop song is made, often all the auditive tracks for each individual instrument are carefully examined and chosen so nothing in the song is there by accident. Therefore, it is plausible that the fantasies and affects evoked by the instrumental tracks are present in the song as they were intended, as powerful auditive markers that seek to create impersonal and even inhuman atmosphere.³⁷ For instance, the strangeness of the four slap bass notes add to the effect of being constrained since often the slap bass is a key element in different genres, such as soul or R&B, where the idea of groove and flow is important; the bass sounds are utilized here in the opposite fashion, to clip the wings of any ideas that the listener is in the atmosphere of flow or relaxation and they are kept on edge and ready instead.³⁸

This atmosphere is exacerbated by the contrast created during the introduction of Myers' vocals in the first verse. Her sound is markedly different from the atmosphere created so far since her singing is precise, slightly breathy and flows effortlessly from line to line. All of these are notions of feminine gender performatives (see Butler 2006 [1990], 194–197) that can be attributed to her by the listener and even still, there is a difference to her sound which is exacerbated by the industrial precision of the instrumental sounds. Myers' singing portrays straightforwardness which sets her apart from the femme fatale singing of Lana del Rey or Marina, whose low tones emulate the aesthetics of a club singer. Myers' is after all a pop singer; her voice is at the same time beguiling and honest, even innocent, without the embellishments of jazz singers.

“Honey, I wanna break you
 I wanna throw you to the hounds
 Yeah I gotta hurt you, I gotta hear it from your mouth
 Boy, I wanna taste you, I wanna skin you with my tongue
 I'm gonna kill you
 I'm gonna lay you in the ground” (Myers 2013 “Desire” verse 2, 01.54-02.24)

³⁷ See Richardson (2012, 262–270) for a more in-depth analysis on the potency of fantasies and imagery that auditive material conveys to the listener.

³⁸ A similar bass sound is also utilized in the movie *Secretary* (2002, dir. Steven Shainberg) for the same or equivalent effect alongside a ‘spanky’ snare drumbeat (see Pääkkölä 2016, 57–65).

The second verse (above) is perhaps the most revealing in terms of BDSM aesthetics especially since the instrumental layer of the material is relatively muted when Myers is singing, making the lyrics the focus of the listeners attention (see Kassabian 2013, 2–4). While pop songs might often be characterized with the hyperbolic descriptions of positive emotion or love,³⁹ “Desire” (2016) takes the opposite approach and likens the hyperbole into acts of sadomasochistic pleasure rather than romance. “Honey, I wanna break you” is a clear indication of this; the agency of the breaker is solidly posited on the person beguiling the other, perhaps invoking the idea of breaking in a horse so that it does what rider wishes or perhaps the beguiling breaker ‘I’ intends to break (see Edelman 2004, 28–29) the other just for the pleasure of breaking or destroying. “I wanna throw you to the hounds / Yeah I gotta hurt you, I gotta hear it from your mouth” lines continue the deliberate and lascivious theme in which the desire for the other expressed by the ‘I’ in the context of the song is taken to a painful yet thrilling extent; it is not enough for the ‘I’ to liken their want or need for the other in basic sustenance such as food or warmth, but instead the desire is clothed in the act of sadomasochistic pleasure (see Pääkkölä 2016, 116–118) in which the other is a consensual⁴⁰ and reciprocally participating actor.

The line “Boy, I wanna taste you, I wanna skin you with my tongue” is perhaps one of the most striking for the listener in specific verse since it employs other senses than just hearing. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (2003, 13–22) view on textures and affect is useful in understanding why the descriptions of textures and the affiliated materials connected to them are so affective to listeners, readers and artists in general. Sedgwick (2003, 15–16) points out that textures employ the senses and different histories connected to those senses in a way that forces the one experiencing the sensory stimulus into amplifying their own experience through memories of similar experiences. This is the reason the Myers’ line is so powerful and evocative; the listener knows what their tongue feels like in their mouth or perhaps upon the skin of another, noting all the different bumps and curves of the surface of tongue, mouth or skin.

Therefore, when this object of hyper sensory stimulus is utilized to perform an act of skinning someone, peeling the layer of skin off, the affect is extremely striking. The tongue, perhaps

³⁹ For example, Dick Haymes – “It Can’t be Wrong” (1943). “Why am I content to be / With you forever?” is an example of the hyperbole common to love songs.

⁴⁰ Consent is one of the key understandings around which BDSM practitioners build scenes, or Dominant / submissive relationships, and even then, consent needs to be reintroduced and renegotiated whenever one or more parties need it. For more on the limits of consent see Fischel (2019, 4-12).

the most inconvenient of tools to employ in the act of skinning a person, is intrinsically connected to the sense of touch and taste so in contrasting this appendage to a violent act creates that feeling of the uncanny and weird that is visceral yet personal at the same time. The listener is asked to engage with the auditive material on an intimate level that is most often reserved only for themselves or someone they are close to, only to encounter the possibility of sublimation (see Fisher 2016, 17) that supports an act of visceral thrill. The line asks the listener to transgress a boundary, perhaps only for a moment, the line between the intimate and the violent so they might experience a novel kind of pleasure in a safe and consensual context.

What makes this reading of the song part of the Weird (Fisher 2016, 10–13) and why I liken the thrill of sadomasochistic aesthetics in popular music to the thrill of reading weird fiction or watching a horror movie is the willing participation in an act that is risky (Pääkkölä 2016, 104) yet rewarding in the same instance. The act of *jouissance*, the movement from the ordinary to the extraordinary, rewards the other, the one being broken in like a horse and skinned with using only the 'I's tongue in the story of the song, with pleasures outside the normative understanding of pleasure which is rooted in the Freudian pleasure principle. The acts of transgression and sublimation in the context of the song are so heavily rooted in the touch and feel of a body that the listener is compelled to engage with the *fantasy* of the sadomasochistic pleasure without needing to engage with it as a BDSM practitioner. Indeed, if that crucial step is taken and the listener is willing to engage with the fantastical representation of the BDSM aesthetic, they might find that the fearsomeness of the fantasy can overlap with some hitherto unexplored pleasure. This might be, as the philosopher Noël Carroll (1999, 157–158) notes, an incongruous response depending on the situation the listener finds themselves in. If the listener's response to the stimuli is fearful, the fantasy itself is horror to them regardless of the artist's intentions. However, familiarity breeds safety and the more familiar the listener is with the stimuli and fantasy, the more likely they are to brush off or hide their fears.⁴¹ Therefore, fear is part of the pleasurable if it is allowed to be.

2.3 To destroy and repair

To demonstrate the reparative (see Sedgwick 2003, 123–130) aspects of engaging with the fantasy of sadomasochism, I will use an entirely fictional and imaginary metaphor. Imagine, if

⁴¹ Carroll (1999, 157) uses an example from psychologist Mary Rothbart to illustrate how a child will react to the antics of a familiar adult v. a stranger.

you will, the quotidian knight in shining armor on his way to rescue a princess from the clutches of a dragon. Upon reaching the princess, the knight finds out that there is indeed no dragon and the princess herself has claws and teeth which rend unwary knights for she is at the same time as scary as a dragon and yet beguiling as a princess – yet the knight pursues her anyway. The knight after all is on a quest for true love and falls in love with the princess *because of her dangerous nature and not despite it*. For the knight too knows the popular children’s stories that always end in marriage and kingdom come so he seeks to be fulfilled in other ways since he is an adult and not willing to believe in children’s stories.

While my metaphor is heavy handed and entirely fictional, it employs the same aspects that are common in weird literature⁴², the thrill of pain/pleasure employed in the practice of sadomasochism (see Newmahr 2011, 123–126) and the fantasy that Myers’ song “Desire” (2015) plays with. The reparative (Sedgwick 2003, 147–149; see also Edelman 2006, 28–31) and even healing parts of this story is *not* that the knight falls in love with the princess despite her danger, but because of it; he seeks her out by his own volition, sublimating his fear and sense of dread in an act of loving *jouissance* to experience something that the quotidian and normative world cannot understand and in that new understanding, he finds healing. The metaphorical story here is meant to illustrate the process which is the entire idea of this thesis; one reason artists like Meg Myers’ employ the use of sadomasochistic aesthetics in their work is due to the fact that the hyperbole of romance is sometimes not applicable or satisfactory to the desire and infatuation the artist is trying to convey to the listener.

A salient and dissenting view to this is posited by Simone de Beauvoir (2011, 218–220) when relating a similar, although not identical point, about the dual nature of when men fantasize about dominating women. It is that women are at the same time *something* to be “tamed” but also resist taming while succumbing to the man in the end. The duality is in the chaos-order dichotomy which makes them wholly the Other and reinforces a patriarchal power over women. My reading does not refute this, but it offers an alternative fantasy of engaging danger and letting it consume you instead.

The lines from the second verse, “I’m gonna kill you / I’m gonna lay you in the ground” are not ambiguous at all in their destructive intent. If the subject lets danger and risk consume

⁴² For example H. P. Lovecraft’s *The Thing on the Doorstep* (1937). The protagonist tries to save his friend from an evil Old Gods cultist despite his friend already being a cultist himself and was made as such by his wife Asenath Waite.

themselves, the result is, surely, death. If the unambiguity and meaning of the lyrics were to be taken literally, they are absolutely about the destruction of the person they are addressed to — whether it is the “Boy” character in the story of the song or even the listener, the result is the same. The graveness of the situation is mirrored in the bass chord progression. While the verse follows the same chords G5, D5, B♭5 and G5, as Myers’ sings the words “– kill you”, the switch from B♭5 to G5⁴³ is like a pronouncement or a judge’s gavel coming down to announce a verdict. The utter seriousness of the instrumental aspect is contrasted with Myers’ soft singing and implied innocence, which seems to entirely undercut the pronouncement of “I’m gonna kill you”. The lyrics “- kill you” are also sung during the switch from B♭5 to G5 meaning that their placement is entirely intentional and play into the desired effect of the song. My reading of this choice is that the character Myers portrays in the story of the song is not only embarrassed by this confession that they want to kill the “Boy” to satisfy their desire, but they try to hide that desire into the background instrumental sounds — as if hiding their face in their hands and muttering it quietly would expunge the guilt they feel over the desire to do harm.

On the surface the argument seems clear cut and surely the description of a desire to do harm in this context should be condemned. After all, popular news outlets often equate the discussion of violence in media, especially in video games, to states of heightened aggression or the condoning of violent acts.⁴⁴ However, if the destruction implied in the lyric might be read as a symbolic one, or as an ultimate expression of a destructive fantasy, the ontological harm would be blown out of proportion. If this fantasy could be seen through the lens of queer scholar Lee Edelman’s (2004, 41–55) work, in engaging with the fantasy of destruction in a fictional work, Myers’ persona could be implied to destroy a normative understanding of creation instead of propagating violence. Even in a normative understanding of “destruction-negative and creation-positive”, there is a crucial disconnect. Creation and destruction are not opposing forces, but instead they work in conjunction as psychoanalyst Sabina Spielrein (1994 [1912], 155–157) showed. While Edelman (2004, 29–31) focuses on destruction as an ultimate refusal of the futurity promised by the imagined Child, Spielrein (1994, 156–157; also de Beauvoir 2011, 34–49) argues that even the fertilization of an egg is destruction since

⁴³ Both progressions in 4/4 and played twice.

⁴⁴ This is in reference to the American Psychological Association’s statement in 2000 which, in reference to a study by Anderson & Dill (2000), linked aggression in children and violent video games. However, the debate around this is by no means over and continues to evolve still.

the individual cells cease to exist and die for procreation to proceed. Therefore, creation and destruction, life and death, are already conjoined in a fundamental sense in the “Real” so discussing them as part of a fantasy is not only being honest and authentic, but they also reflect the dichotomy of emotions.

While sadomasochistic aesthetic is not inherently part of the Weird (Fisher 2016, 17) aesthetic or a reparative framework, and it can be employed to uphold normative power structures of sexuality,⁴⁵ “Desire” (2015) is surely a part of the Weird and the reparative. The auditive and lyrical material of “Desire” (2015) makes connections to the body that can be sublimated into enjoyment if the listener chooses to do so. Assuming that they are willing to transgress cultural boundaries and find the alluring within the officially⁴⁶ repulsive, they are as a subject engaging in reimagining pleasure as a sensation that seeks to escape normative boundaries of procreation, sex and enjoyment entirely without pain. This reimagining may result in a twisting of perception and tangibility that would be straight out of a weird fiction novel. If, metaphorically, the subject stands on the edge of an abyss, enjoying the feeling of vertigo without letting go of control, surely they are at the same time horrified and excited at the possibilities offered to them by this twist of embodied emotion, danger and fantasy. In engaging with the audible material of “Desire” (2015) or other similar material, the listener too is twisting their presuppositions of sexual pleasure in a way which might offer pleasures that are outside the pleasure principle; as gut-wrenching and visceral as these fantasies might be, they are entirely harmless on their own. This is one reading of what the BDSM aesthetic offers to listener and the artist both – a twisting of boundaries that is felt within the body of the listener and is audible in the body of the music.

The four notes made by the slap bass, the precise echo of the snare drum, and the sharp sounds of the harpsichord all interact with the body in an immersive way. Even the act of slapping the E- or A-string on the bass with the artists thumb, connects a bodily act of winding up, bringing down and feeling the grooves of the wound-up steel string under the edge of the thumb as the sound is produced before the process is repeated. The kinky act of spanking, or impact-play more broadly, employs similar if not identical processes of winding up a strike and bringing down the palm of the spankers hand or another implement on the surface of flesh (see Pääkkölä 2016, 57–65). The act of spanking (Newmahr 2011, 196–201)

⁴⁵ See Fischel (2019, for example 3–5) & Pääkkölä (2016, 36–37) for more.

⁴⁶ Fisher’s (2016, 17) characterization.

is very commonplace in BDSM as practice to the point that it acquires new meanings in the kink context – while spanking the behind of a coworker at the office is most definitely sexual harassment, in the kink scene it can be a form of fellowship, greeting and intimacy.⁴⁷ If indeed the slap bass can be attributed to engaging with the act of spanking in a metaphorical sense, the song is ascribed a dimension of interactivity and tangibility (see Pääkkölä 2016, 57–65). The BDSM aesthetic is therefore not only located in the lyrics of the song, but it can be ascribed to the instrumental sounds as well, making the use of the aesthetic more apparent and immediate to the listener. If indeed the slap bass is the act of spanking in a fantastical sense, the sharp, high notes of the harpsichord can be read as blades or nails on skin. It is therefore that I posit that in crossing the boundary from the realm of sexually charged popular music into the fantasy of sadomasochism, “Desire” (2015) gains the attribute of tangibility – the song is no longer something that you hear, but you imagine the feel of it also.

In the utilization of the sadomasochistic aesthetic, Meg Myers engages the sadomasochistic fantasy in a way which can be understood as taking part in a conversation about intimacy and sexuality more broadly. Her song and the feminine performatives evoked in the song twists the normative understanding of activity and passivity of a feminine agent within popular culture – if her persona in the song is innocent and “virtuous”, why are the lyrics of the song about being the active breaker, rather than the passive subject. She reimagines thrill and agency in a way that emphasizes her own perception of “more weird [rather] than dark” (Payne 2015) using sadomasochistic aesthetics. To posit this reimagining into a feminist and queer framework of the patriarchal ordering of sexual agency (Butler 2006, 15–22; see Edelman 2004, 28–31), the result needs some careful consideration.

Myers’ character in the story of the song as the active, dominant and agency asserting persona does challenge many of the presuppositions posited onto her by the heteronormative society at large – women are primarily mothers-to-be, women are complimentary to men and should only be thought of as the passive recipient of societal texts imposed on them, a *tabula rasa* waiting to be inscribed with meaning and purpose in the form of pregnancy (see de Beauvoir 2011, 182–195).⁴⁸ In this and similar imaginings, the heteronormative and patriarchal

⁴⁷ Spanking is of course only engaged with when all parties have consented to it, regardless of how casual it is. The touching of another’s body without consent is considered one of the most reprehensible acts in the kink scene widely. It is often polite to ask before even hugging as a greeting during a party or a munch. See Newmahr (2011, 161–165) for more on risk awareness and consent.

⁴⁸ The era in my reference is some 70 years past now, but as a foundational feminist principle of feminist philosophy, it still holds true especially in 2025 as there is a resurgence of “furious nostalgia”. See Butler’s *Who’s Afraid of Gender?* (2024) for a more in-depth analysis.

oppression has been challenged by feminist and queer critics, so this interpretation of Myers' persona can make it a part of a larger historical, cultural and emancipatory project. However, such an interpretation also deprives the song from the possibilities that a ruthless and weird reading would offer to the listener.

2.4 Conclusions

[W]e have a name, a perfect name for fantasy realized. It's called nightmare. (Žižek 2006, 1:05:25–1:05:32)

As I noted before, BDSM as practice⁴⁹ and as aesthetic is not inherently reparative and can be employed to uphold many oppressive power structures of sexuality. For instance, the motif of the dominatrix in art, music or media is not deconstructive by itself and can be seen to embody the chaotic, dangerous nature of women in a project of upholding their status as the unknowable Other (see de Beauvoir 2011, 219–220). A cursory glance at the switching of the power dynamics⁵⁰ may seem like a pro-feminist perspective, although it is also worthwhile to note that the heterosexual male gaze does not leave room for an emancipatory narrative if the gaze begins at the initiation and agency of the man in power. The dominatrix may be just as much an agency deprived object to the man as the motif of the submissive woman. While this is a valid point of view and undertaking the deconstruction of such projects is part of the larger feminist debate, I posit instead that the ontological moral virtue of BDSM can be subordinated to the possibilities that a reparative framework offers.

In positing the ontological-functional dichotomy of the paranoid and the reparative, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) notes that:

While paranoid theoretical proceedings both depend on and reinforce the structural dominance of monopolistic “strong theory,” there may also be benefit in exploring the extremely varied, dynamic, and historically contingent ways that strong theoretical constructs interact with weak ones in the ecology of knowing — an exploration that obviously can't proceed without a respectful interest in weak as well as strong theoretical acts. (Sedgwick 2003, 145.)

⁴⁹ See Fischel (2019, 35–38) for more on risky and dangerous aspects of kink.

⁵⁰ Here I am specifically referring to flipping of the “woman=passive and man=active” sexual narrative of the patriarchal power hierarchy and not to Newmahr's (2011,39–41) incidental androgyny. While these concepts might seem connected on the surface, Newmahr (2011, 39–41, 116–121) uses them specifically in a gender nonconforming context and equating them would derive incidental androgyny of its relevance in a queer context.

This is the framework in which this argument achieves its potential. While it is a strong theory that the BDSM aesthetic may, as the dominatrix motif shows, reinforce oppressive systems of patriarchal sexual dominance, and yet it would be an act of throwing the baby out with the bath water if the weak, reparative theory of healing, understood alongside the paranoid theory, remained uninterrogated. If BDSM as a category, and by extension as a fantasy, can be accused unabashedly of perpetuating violence against women, surely such a claim must be taken seriously. However, just as the possibility of perpetuating violence is problematic, countering it with paranoid reasoning may result in harm being done just the same.

Indeed, I would argue that the fantasy of BDSM, and how it connects to Weird fiction and the Uncanny experience, should be understood as an inhabited experience that pushes the bounds of the subjects own understanding of themselves and the limits of their body.

– to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader as new; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. (Sedgwick 2003, 146.)

Sedgwick (2003, 146) is implying that leaving yourself open and unprejudiced towards surprises can be a horrifying experience, and yet it is the only way to achieve a state of healing vulnerability – a socio-political reading many in the queer community are understandably hesitant to pursue.⁵¹ In the context of the BDSM fantasy in music the surprising may be countered, if necessary, with RACK which stands for Risk Aware Consensual Kink.⁵² It is quickly becoming a more useful tool for BDSM practitioners in discussing kink and boundaries, ostensibly replacing SSC⁵³ in the community vernacular. To be “risk aware” does not imply a mode of paranoia when engaging in kink, but it instead implies a mode of being realistic about the possible risks and dangers that are involved in kinky play. Therefore, I would posit that as BDSM in practice can be approached through RACK, so can the BDSM fantasy in music.

⁵¹ This was one of the points of contention Sedgwick (2003, 123–124) cites as her reasons for writing *Touching, Feeling*.

⁵² See Fischel (2019, 37) for a critical view on the efficacy of RACK.

⁵³ Safe, Sane, Consensual.

In the context of “Desire” (2015), Myers’ persona is at the same time inhabiting the role of a girly dominatrix (Pääkkölä 2016, 191–195) and engaging with the BDSM fantasy as a means to an end. The chorus is a repetition of the line “How do you want me?” six times, indicating that the Boy, the counterpart to Myers’ character, is indeed not without agency in regard to the scene being played out. Quite the opposite in fact, his consensual and even enthusiastic consent is being reaffirmed each time the chorus is sung. And while a paranoid reading of this scene would be that maybe the Boy is coercing or bribing Myers’ character, I, to enact these sadomasochistic fantasies upon him⁵⁴, the reparative reading would have to ask that if that was the case outside the story of the song⁵⁵, is the incidental power play not a part of an act focusing on the immediate pleasure of all parties through *jouissance*? Indeed, being aware of the possible risks of perpetuating a harmful stereotype does not remove the implied, immediate enjoyment of both parties.

After all, the song is called “Desire” which is after all a deeply felt drive towards a place, or a feeling, where the desire is fulfilled. For example, a climax, a steady job, love, marriage and academic success are all such ends that could perhaps fulfil a desire, and yet, desire leads the subject only to desire more, always in a successively grander fashion which only ends at the death of the subject (see Edelman 2004, 22–27). Youtuber Natalie Wynn (ContraPoints) (2.3.2024) makes the distinction between craving and yearning clear as they relate to desire. She highlights the irrationality of desire as something innate to the human condition. “The hole inside each person” and the drive to fill it, despite it never being filled, is something humans will pursue unto death. She styles this drive through the phrase “desire is desire for desire”, indicating that the drive itself is more important to the subject than the outcome.⁵⁶

If indeed this drive towards something even unto death⁵⁷ is innate to the human condition, being honest and authentic about the desire while acting it out is surely that which frees the subject from its grasp, even if only for a moment. Here is where the fantasy of BDSM, reparative reading and “Desire” (2015) culminate into one. Myers’ persona in “Desire” (2015) is honest and vulnerable about her feelings towards the Boy regardless of the shame such a confession brings. The confession is in the guise of a sadistic fantasy which might be frightening to all involved and yet, the confession does not nullify the sincere emotion and

⁵⁴ Therefore, perpetuating patriarchal domination regardless of the sexual role.

⁵⁵ A context we have no information on based only on the auditive material and text itself.

⁵⁶ See Edelman (2004, 24–26) for more on the death drive and the queerness of *jouissance*.

⁵⁷ This drive persists even beyond death in some cases as Edelman (2004, 33–35) argues. Through the symbol of the Child and reproduction, the subject becomes literally part of the *mise-en-scène*, even beyond death.

sentimental *eros* which it signifies.⁵⁸ It is in the form of pain and pleasure because both of those are the most direct avenues through which Myers' persona can express her desire; through the process of *jouissance*, the pain and pleasure become a Thing, a Monstrous Confession, that is both “terrible *and* alluring”.⁵⁹ The guise is within the BDSM fantasy because it has a utility to the authors of the lyrics. While a straightforward love song would only allure, “Desire” (2015) expands the boundaries of infatuation to contain fear and allure both. The terrifying feelings also associated with falling in love, as Myers' character embodies it, would be entirely ignored if the song was only about joy and pleasure. It would be incomplete — a sham confession without the honesty required to give it meaning.

The close reading I have so far conducted is vital for the employment of kink-tangibility going forward. I emphasize that the feelings and emotions, posited onto the listener by actively kink-listening (see Pääkkölä 2016, 27–29) to music, are not part of a purely sexological inquiry to music, but they are resonating with the listener on an intimate and innate level. For instance, Susanna Paasonen (2011, 185–189) indeed argues that the resonance evoked in the viewer of pornography, and in the case of this thesis the listener, is an embodied feeling that is somatic and involuntary in nature. Resonance works alongside even negativity and revulsion since it is not within the subject's agency to fully overcome (Paasonen 2011, 188–189). Therefore, we are all somewhat porous when it comes to the stimuli we encounter, regardless of our feelings about it. The feelings and resonance are located within the body even if the guise is unfamiliar, or as it is described in *The King in Yellow*:

Whether because I am so cowardly about giving pain to others, or whether it was that I have little of the gloomy Puritan in me, [...] but I shrank from disclaiming responsibility for that thoughtless kiss, and in fact had no time to do so before the gates of her heart opened and the flood poured forth. Chambers (2023 [1895], 69.)

A thoughtless kiss and a horrifying confession are both part of the fantasy of *eros* and despite the time in between *The King in Yellow* (2023 [1895]) and “Desire” (2013), they are both describing the same phenomenon of infatuation, but through the vocabulary that is native to their respective eras and locations. The involuntary nature of *eros* and desire is apparent in both examples, portraying strong emotions as a substance that is imposed onto the feeling

⁵⁸ See Carroll (1999, 147–159).

⁵⁹ See Fisher (2016, 17).

subject instead of as normative reactions to stimuli that is rational or within the subject's agency. They both portray the enjoyment as well as the terror that the subject feels upon falling in love with someone. Even if the involuntary reaction turns violent or is disguised in a violent confession as is the case with "Desire" (2015), the mechanism remains the same for the participants involved.

3 Case study: Beyoncé – “Haunted” music video (2013)

Beyoncé Giselle Knowles-Carter (Beyoncé) is an American singer-songwriter whose career spans more than two decades and in that time, she has become one of the most prolific and successful artists in the US and Europe of the early 21st century. While she might be often thought of as an R&B singer, an EDM star or even a country artist, identifying a single specific genre that captures Beyoncé’s style of artistry would no doubt leave out much of her work regardless of the chosen category or genre. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I identify Beyoncé as an artist to be located within the sphere of US-centric popular music, and I approach her multimodal material through as broad a category as possible in order to read her work as faithfully to its intent as possible.

The song “Haunted” (2013) was first released on her self-titled album *Beyoncé*⁶⁰ and was subsequently released again as part of *Beyoncé: Platinum Edition*⁶¹ album. The music video for “Haunted” (13.12.2013, directed by Jonas Åkerlund) was released originally in the iTunes Store, but was subsequently uploaded officially on to YouTube on 24.11.2014, a little under a year after the initial release. Shot in Villa de Leon hotel in California, US, the video features Beyoncé as the main character and voyeuristic subject looking in on different scenes that play out in the hotel rooms. I will go through the scenes that are most relevant in my close reading of the music video.

However, talking about the music video and song “Haunted” (2013) requires some further exploration. The song is divided into two parts, “Ghost” (2013) and “Haunted” (2013). On the album, both of these parts are collapsed under the same track, named “Haunted” (2013), but there are two separate music videos that were released in the iTunes Store in 13.11.2013. For this thesis, I chose to examine only the music video of “Haunted” (2013), the second part of the duology, and I will leave out the music video “Ghost” (13.12.2013, directed by Pierre Debusschere). The reason for this is two-fold; firstly, the music videos are directed by different directors and have very different aesthetics and fantasies in their audiovisual makeup. While they might both be part of the same song on the album, the music videos are independent, and work in and of themselves as culturally significant objects. The second reason is the hapticity of the music videos, their “feel”, is so different that my analysis would

⁶⁰ By Columbia Records, ID 88843032512 in Europe in the US. The very first release was through iTunes in MP3-file format under iTunes id780519939.

⁶¹ By Columbia Records, ID 88875038442 in Europe and US under the same ID.

be fragmented between the two and making the aims of this thesis even more complex. While this could have been an interesting challenge, for the sake of clarity I will only focus on the music video for “Haunted” (2013) and leave “Ghost” (2013) for another analysis pick up.

Beyoncé herself commented that the song is about the music industry and the different frustrations as well as temptations that the artist is “exposed to [in that] crazy madness” (ABC News 1.8.2025). However, the lyrics in “Haunted” (2013) are often symbolic and they refer, ostensibly, very little to the world outside the music video. Instead of ascribing intentionality on top of Beyoncé’s own intent, the reading to follow will not refute any claims that have already been made prior to this thesis and instead I will treat all interpretations of the piece as multilateral readings. My articulations are therefore coexisting alongside different interpretations and readings of the song while remaining truthful to all of them.

I watched the music video through Tidal⁶² since I do not have access to the iTunes Store version of it. It is essentially the same as the YouTube version, but the multimodal experience was not interrupted by advertisements, and the quality of the video seemed a little clearer. Even when in video format, Tidal conforms to the high-fidelity streaming norm in both the audio and visual aesthetics.

3.1 Multimodality, haptics and liminality

In contesting the idea that music is inherently an auditive-only process that is connected to subjective hearing, musicologist Nina Sun Eidsheim (2015, 27–57, 95–101 & 154–185) approaches music and sound primarily as vibration, or an auditive event that through sound waves becomes a *thick event*. The term refers not only to the idea of sound as vibration, but its implications extend to the listener, the body, the source of sound as well as the body creating that sound.

– Tied to this realization is the understanding that music is neither external nor measurable. [...] – since music is always materially and relationally contingent, it is never the same external force that both restores and destroys. Rather, since music is vibration, there are multitudes of material circumstances that contribute to each of its particular articulations, each unrepeatable and hence unique, and each with a potential

⁶² It was added to Tidal on 3.4.2015.

to affect us that can be revealed only in the particular articulation that takes place within and among each material situation and unique listener. (Eidsheim 2015, 155.)

While the observation that sound has a physical form is not particularly new, it still highlights the phenomenon of the musical experience as something that contests the hallowed place transcripts are given within the field of musicology. Indeed, if the transcript is not the purest form of music as it was understood to be for centuries, how is our approach to musical analysis lacking and are there methodologies that would possibly address that lack effectively? Eidsheim (2015, 27–34, 95–101 & 154–157) suggests that instead of trying to locate music in either the artist or the listener, we should focus our attention on the interplay of those two positions within a specific performance as well as all the material between the listener and artist, including air, objects and even water.⁶³ Audio technicians, musicologists and critics have of course paid attention to sound as vibration ever since the popularization of the gramophone, but Eidsheim (2015, 154–157) reorients that attention back into the body, and in using the term body, she is not only referencing the bodies of the listener and artist, but the body of air, water and other materials that would have an effect on the vibration of the sound.

The reason this observation is one of the key points for this thesis is that it reconceptualizes the audience's perception of themselves as listeners, artists, critics and audiences. In fixing the perceptual positions solidly as listeners, they are denying their own effect in creating space and sounds by their mere existence in the same place as the sound that is being created for their body also works as a sound box in which the vibration resonates. This is where the BDSM fantasy is again inhabited by the body of the listener as something other than just a pleasurable listening experience. The utilization of the BDSM fantasy in music already acts upon and through the listener, contesting the definitive categorization of the listener as a passive receiver and recontextualizing them as an active participant. In the introduction of this thesis, I described the BDSM fantasy to be immaterial in a quotidian sense, whether or not the one exposed to the stimuli created by the fantasy and the aesthetic feels positively or negatively about it. The point which I propose here, and in the close reading to follow, is that regardless of the indignation, curiosity or revulsion the listener/viewer might feel towards the material presented to them, they are already a participant in the process of creating the BDSM fantasy. This does not happen only on the metaphysical plane, or in dreams (see Colace 2010,

⁶³ As is the case with artist Juliana Sapper, an opera singer singing underwater (Eidsheim 2015, 27–40).

35–39), but the resonance, vibration and dislocation of the subject (Eidsheim 2015, 154–156) alongside the identification of the subjects presence as a form of musicking⁶⁴ (see Välimäki 2005, 132–148; see also Eidsheim 2015, 159–160) is happening within the material plane. Through this process, the BDSM fantasy is brought back into the tangible “Real” and into the body.

However, in order to make this claim, different modalities of media, music and audiovisual culture need to be categorized in a tactile way. Musicologist Nicholas Cook (2013, 53–76) and musicologist Philip Auslander (2013, 605–621) argue the point in their respective articles that indeed our normative understanding of the distinctions between sound, music, transcript, writing and perception have become mashed up, mediatized and obfuscated through use of different audio and media technologies. Cook (2013, 53–56) approaches this mashup through a multilateral point of view he terms ‘multimedia mentality’ which reframes the categories of mediatized and live performance as parallel, but not exclusionary, categories of analysis; in approaching audiovisual media through mentality instead of a rigid framework permits the author to discuss the material in its own terms within the liminal space created between the auditive and the visual.

Media studies scholar Carol Vernallis (2013, 437–465) corroborates the point made by Cook (2013, 53-76) and Auslander (2013, 605–621), but she also focuses on the main point of this case study – hapticity (Vernallis 2013, 457–458). Indeed, she makes the argument that as technology becomes more high quality and high definition, objects in the video “pop out of the screen” while the auditive element exacerbates this by complementing the strangeness through different auditive markers (Vernallis 2013, 457–458). The objects, microdetails and textures seen on-screen are not only neat new technology for a director to play around with, but the objects work as extra performers, driving the song forward rather than being a canvas that the audio is painted on and thus “one medium can fill the gap of another’s” (Vernallis 2013, 439).⁶⁵ Yet, power in the relationship between the auditive and the visual is not distributed evenly within neither a performance nor a music video since the traditionalist view

⁶⁴ As the musicologist Christopher Small (1998, 1–18) originally theorized the term.

⁶⁵ Vernallis (2013, 442–445) makes the point that new and high-quality technology is not automatically better and often the showmanship of new “gizmos” is not a substitute for substantive quality increase, so it also undermines the improvements made onto existing technologies.

of a viewer/listener confirming what they hear by seeing the sound being made is still ascendant⁶⁶ within popular multimodal culture (see Auslander 2013, 619).

These points of view for crossing different mediums of audio and media are also supported by the liminality of experience and touch. Musicologist Holly Rogers (2013, 82–117) notes this in her work and prefers to use the term “video art-music” to illustrate the spaces between normative delineations of mediums. The feeling of space, visual input, audio markers, “reliving” performance through recording and positioning of the audience/artist all contribute to the strange sensation that crosses time, space, sensation and feeling (Rogers 2013, 86–91). While Rogers’ (2013, 2–5) view is primarily historical and explores the possibilities of video art-music through a particular lens, it highlights the fundamental notion that the senses of the subject are not separate inputs, but a melding of different modalities is happening constantly. Media researcher and philosopher Laura Marks (2002, x–xi) highlights it from a metaphorical point of view:

I once watched someone make a strudel, beginning with a pliant sheet of dough, so thin it was translucent, that covered the top of a large table, and then folding and folding it until those thin layers pressed close together in a dense roll (with apples and raisins). The universe is like a strudel. Each time we perceive something, we acknowledge the continuity between its many layers. Expressing these perceptions, we actualize the virtual events enfolded in those layers. (Marks 2002, x–xi.)

While the comparison between the material plane and a strudel is whimsical, the implication for multisensory experience is profound. Culturally and socially a subject is thought to have access to the world only through the input that their senses and sensory organs supply the subject: ears are for hearing, mouth for tasting, eyes for seeing. To meld one form of sensory experience into another through the folding effect as Marks (2002, x–xi) puts it, seeing is no longer just believing, but it can also be hearing and, crucially for my point in this thesis, touching. Similarly to Eidsheim (2015, 155), Marks (2002, 12–20) theorizes that the positions of the viewer, and the listener, are not fixed or passive positions, but they are instead within an interplay. While the initiation of the interplay can sometimes be posited onto the performing artist, the viewer/listener engages with the material haptically. In essence, this

⁶⁶ However, it is prudent to note that the article I reference here by Auslander (2013, 605–621) is over 10 years old now and is not entirely applicable to more recent technologies such as AI made music videos or performances. Indeed, the changing landscape of multimodal technologies will ever challenge existing views of performance.

means that the normative understanding of initiator/recipient, artist/audience, actor/watcher, are within the folding effect of haptic visuality in which these two positions are superimposed, one on the other, through the “conference of the others’ body onto [another]” (Marks 2002, 12).⁶⁷

To understand the audiovisual and media scape as I have so far explained it, is to embrace a non-normative experientiality of sensory inputs, imagination (see Edelman 2004, 29–31; see Hebdige 2002 [1979], 130–131), reimagining and hapticity. As feeling subjects, we categorize the stimulus that our senses provide us into neat and separable modes of senses – hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling. Yet the subject does not have to be someone who experiences synesthesia⁶⁸ for the stimuli to pass from one sense to another as it is being processed. An example of this is the desire to tap along to a rhythm when listening to a song alone or in a public space—it is a drive that connects movement to audio (see Välimäki 2002, 5–7). Live music is especially potent as a sensory experience since it is not just the lone subject that is acting out what their senses are telling them, but it is also a social and cultural experience when they perhaps see and hear others indulging in the desire to tap along, sing along or dance to the rhythm. Therefore, as with the death drive (Edelman 2004, 33–35), experiences and sensory input is not something that is felt within a vacuum or just within the body of the subject, but it transcends and transgresses the limits of the material into the social plane through for instance affective solidarity (see Hemmings 2012, 151–152). For the following close reading of the music video for “Haunted” (2013), the notions of the public-private, inside-outside, seeing-hearing-touching and abundance-scarcity (see Bauer 2014, 107–143) meld and fold within the BDSM fantasy and BDSM aesthetic in a way that sheds light on more than ‘is the material pleasurable or not’ – regardless of the experience, the material is already felt deeply by the subject.

3.2 Mise-en-scène

The video begins with a countdown before moving on to shots from inside the hotel that portray the rooms before any characters or actors are present (00.00–00.35). Also, in the

⁶⁷ While this is part of Marks’ (2002,12) text, it is in reference to cultural critic Vivian Sobchack’s (1992) work *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*.

⁶⁸ I have a keen sense for this and although I have personally never been tested for synesthesia, an avenue of approach which I do not wish to pursue either, I get a sense of “misremembering”. Upon encountering audiovisual media of someone playing a guitar or bass, I know how the wound steel-string feels under my fingertips and my senses are partially superimposed onto the material I am seeing/hearing. I call it misremembering because that is the word that best captures the sensation.

opening of the video, there are shots of old television sets playing imagery that, ostensibly, has nothing to do with the story of the song, other than to provide an eerie (Fisher 2016, 61) setting for the video. The absence of human actors highlights that the place is haunted since someone would surely have to turn the TV's on and in a normative setting the fireplace would have to be lit rather than lighting by itself. The atmosphere of mystery and the supernatural is exacerbated by low, oscillating ambient sounds punctuated by the static crackling of a TV, cut off high pitched screams and eerie auditive markers which seem even more out of place (see Fisher 2016, 61–62) due to no human actors being present.⁶⁹ Each empty scene is again visited later in the video, but the glimpse the viewer/listener is given before the video begins in earnest, evokes a feeling of absence and eeriness. The shots set the scene beforehand and frame the music video through the point of view of an omnipotent camera which is separate from the actual video.



Figure 1. An opulent hotel room, covered with clear plastic tarpaulin which is fastened to objects with rope.

The rooms are a *mise-en-scène*⁷⁰ for the characters that appear in the video. The textures present in the rooms, whether dark mahogany (00.18–00.21), animal fur pelts (00.25–00.26) or clear plastic tarpaulin (00.04–00.08), are specifically suited to the different styles and aesthetics of the characters. The materials present in the rooms create tableaux as background

⁶⁹ Commenters for the *Billboard* magazine noted that the song is like “Madonna-meets-American Horror Story” (Hampp 13.12.2013). The resemblance to the opening of the first season of the TV show *American Horror Story* is intended to be apparent to the viewer.

⁷⁰ Compare Edelman (2004, 33–35).

for the characters that are yet to appear, but the tactile feeling of the materials like smooth wood, plastic, fur pelts and heavy fabric make these tableaux vivid and striking to the listener/viewer.⁷¹ The tactility and hapticity of the materials are key in this reading of the music video since the auditive and visual aspects of the video create a feeling which exceeds the limits of one medium, which is best described as multimediality (see Cook 2013, 53–76). This crossing and enmeshment highlight the multilateral stimulus (Cook 2013, 56–57) that is inherent to audiovisual media. Within this framework, as one medium or frame is no longer capable of containing the stimuli that the listener/viewer experiences, normative boundaries of the senses as well are being breached and activated anew. There is a sense of misremembering, of touching the materials on-screen for the viewer, since the auditive track and camera angle allow for the viewer/listener to linger in these rooms without a rush or other stimulus.⁷²



Figure 2. An infirmary with animal furs is set up in one of the rooms.

The effect is much like in Poe's (2009, 61–63) story *The Masque of the Red Death* in which a decadent court of hedonists and nobles try to isolate themselves in luxury against a pox, the Red Death, ravaging the country outside their walls. In the climax of the story, the anthropomorphic personification of the Red Death ultimately joins the decadent masque and

⁷¹ The fur itself can be a nod to for instance Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *The Venus in Furs* (1870), a classic novella containing sadomasochistic themes.

⁷² Carol Vernallis (2013, 457–458) calls this effect "becoming 3D" which refers to the objects on the screen gaining another dimension through the interplay of sound and visual stimulus.

the dangerous outside mixes with the safe inside. While the story features characters that are only unlikable and repulsive in their decadent excess, the reader is perhaps meant to be satisfied with the unfortunate ending that the characters face – despite their best precautions, distractions, decadence and excess, the pox claimed all the revellers just the same as the populace outside. Indeed, the motif of an epidemic is a poignant example of the crossing between the inside and outside, the personal and the public, the exclusive and the general when it comes to suffering faced by all, especially the ones disparaging others.

A similar transgressive (see Edelman 2004, 47–52) movement is present in the music video in which the protagonist, Beyoncé, is an outsider or a voyeur to much of what is happening inside the hotel. While the narrator of *The Masque of the Red Death* is omnipresent and therefore not present at all in the story as an active participant, the viewer/listener of the music video is being lead through the events from the perspective of Beyoncé as the Voyeur. While she does not engage directly with the scenes being played on in the rooms, her gaze alone is often met by the characters inside the rooms and this alone plays into the fetish of exhibitionism, the pleasure of looking and being looked at. In this, her voyeuristic agency is more pronounced when compared to the narrator of *The Masque of the Red Death* – through her gaze, the Voyeur takes part in the act being perpetrated in each room whether or not she is in touching distance while a passive narrator is simply in the sidelines and not even their condemning narration is capable of influencing the story. Voyeurism⁷³ can be characterized by the thrill and pleasure of looking/being looked at while being exposed either in the nude or in an otherwise compromised situation (see Pääkkölä 2016, 196–198). Similarly to the D/s dynamic of rigger–rope bunny in terms of bondage, the voyeur and the one being looked at share a power imbalance that heightens the arousal of both parties. The gaze of the voyeur, when employed within this setting, is as potent an implement of kink as a whip or a paddle.

Like in the scene of the video for “Haunted” (2013), the reader of *The Masque of the Red Death* is given only a small glimpse of the world outside the luxurious halls of the abbey that the story is set in, but the contrast between the outside and the inside, the external and internal, is apparent in both pieces. As the scene shifts to the outside, Beyoncé appears for the first time in the video (00.36–00.49) driving a forest green, luxury car which she drives up to the villa entrance. The villa itself is seen to have a view of the ocean so the camera shift

⁷³ Here simply discussed as a practice of sexual expression within a kink setting rather than as a criminal act of a non-consensual breach of privacy.

between the inside corridors and rooms of the hotel to the outside and the ocean, is drastic and serves to highlight the seclusion and intimacy of the inside. The soundscape is markedly different outside when compared to that of the inside – a few notes of a classical piece, played on a violin, can be heard emanating from the car radio (00.39–00.45) which contrasts starkly with that of the cut off screams and muffled, oscillating low notes of ambient sounds heard inside.



Figure 3. Having entered the villa, a valet lights Beyoncé’s cigarette for her.

The auditive soundscape shifts back to that of the inside as Beyoncé enters the villa, her *valises* encased with stylized letter “B” in each hand, before the listener/viewers’ attention is directed to the arresting gaze she directs straight at the camera (00.51–00.57). Whispering and the ambient tones pick up again, marking her entrance into the villa.⁷⁴ Her posture is relaxed yet commanding so the viewer/listener might be reassured to thinking that her persona in the video has been here before and therefore the haunted villa holds no danger for her. She lets down her fur coat from her shoulders, letting it fall to the floor, takes out a cigarette from behind her ear and a valet lights it for her before handing her a physical key to a room (01.01–01.20). She takes the key for room number 94, with a lingering look at the valet, and after only a single drag on the cigarette, Beyoncé crushes it upon the stone floor under her high

⁷⁴ Ambient sounds, echo effects, dialogue-free pauses and other miscellaneous sounds that permeate different soundscapes can be used as a reprieve from the story so far. They are breathing space for the viewer/listener, but they may also be sources of trepidation and excitement if utilized within the context of horror or drama. See Välimäki (2019, par 20–24) for more on the efficacy of ambient sounds in a transgender framework.

heeled shoe and begins to make her way up the marble stairs to the corridors of the villa, letting her cape-like dinner jacket fall onto the steps for someone else to clean up (01.23–01.45). The first glimpses of the corridor with petroleum colored carpet, the main stage or catwalk for the video, is revealed to the listener/viewer and Beyoncé’s persona as the Voyeur begins in earnest (01.45–01.50).

The decadence, exuberance and abundance (see Bauer 2014, 107–143) shown in this short sequence of events is palpable, but to contrast these excesses with the revelers of *The Masque of the Red Death*, the actions of Beyoncé’s character in the video are not malicious or ill-intentioned. Indeed, the persona of her character is commanding, present, confronting the camera and at ease with her surroundings, but there are no markers of revulsion, arrogance or trepidation. Indications of this are the cigarette, crushed under a high heel shoe after only one drag, the lingering look at the valet, the coat left on the floor to be picked up by the same valet as well as the dinner jacket dropped as she ascended the stairs. Everything speaks to a sense of freedom and abundance that the character can indulge in within the walls of the villa – literally and figuratively shedding layers of the outside world as she enters this space of indulgence. When this is posited into the framework of kink reading (see Pääkkölä 2016, 27–29), the abundance and indulgence become sources of pleasure for the character while for the valet it is an “officially” negative (see Fisher 2016, 17) sensation since he is presumed to be the one that must clean up after her excesses in an act of servitude or worship.

Exuberance and abundance as they have been portrayed in the music video so far conform with BDSM as a queer practice in the Real (see Bauer 2014, 133–136).⁷⁵ The notion introduced by Bauer (2011, 133–135) that transgressive settings, such as within BDSM, are an antithesis to the idea of “too muchness” correlates with the affluence on display in the video. An economically critical reading of the villa, Beyoncé’s car, and the deference offered by the valet to his guest might be that idleness amplified by affluence brings out the decadently monstrous within the upper class. There are certainly implications of the villa being a place only the ultra-rich have access to which would posit the music video to exist within a fantasy that caters only to those that can afford to practice BDSM within the bounds of consumerist sexuality (see Bauer 2014, 15–16). If the wealth and abundance present within the music video is to be thought of as symbolically rather than taken at face value, abundance

⁷⁵ Within a monogamous normativity setting and within mandatory heterosexuality, the structural scarcity of intimacy and fantasy is upended when an abundance of intimate resources is introduced to the setting. See Bauer (2014, 135) for more on the abundance of polyamory.

becomes decadence and a deliberate “too muchness”, that all occupants of the villa have access to. Decadence itself is a concept that echoes the literature of Victorian England in which repression, status, wealth, race and social prestige were given excessive amounts of attention. When the scene of the villa is translated into the concept of decadence as a form of social decay, the utility of excessive wealth becomes more acute to the listener/viewer of “Haunted” (2013). The background has to be excessive, “too much”, so the characters in the music video can perform effectively; luxury gives permission for transgressive acts. Oscar Wilde’s criticism of Victorian England in *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (2007 [1891]) and Foucault’s (1978 [1976], 3–13) exploration of the sexual repression of that era expose the parodical nature of excessive wealth. Here opulence works as a background, but in its grandiosity, there is already encoded the social decay implicit in the very romanticizing of the Victorian style; the viewer is already expecting the opulence to turn into decadent delight and for the characters to use the background as a stage to be broken rather than using it to repress their own sexuality.

3.3 The gaze as connective material



Figure 4. The occupants in the villa gaze at the camera.

Beyoncé begins to sing the first verse of the song (01.54) and two of the first rooms as well as their occupants are revealed. In the first room, there are two people seen in a luxurious setting, and they stare at the camera and Beyoncé with curious, apprehensive expressions (01.51–

01.52). Both characters in the video are people of color – a feminine presenting woman and a masculine presenting man. In their short scene, the woman is braiding the man’s long hair or perhaps undoing the braids as the song begins in earnest. The act of braiding itself has many cultural, social and political implications⁷⁶, but here it also serves as a private activity, something you would do in the comfort of your own home, but Beyoncé the Voyeur exposes this private activity by walking past the open room door. Her face appears in the old television set in the first room, made gray by the low resolution of the screen, but her gaze fixes the viewer/listener as the first lines are sung.

It’s what you do

It’s what you see

I know if I’m hauntin’ you

You must be hauntin’ me (Knowles-Carter “Haunted” 2013 verse 1, 01.54–01.59)

Her singing voice is slightly breathy while a piano begins to play the melody of the song which alternates between G#m7 and E-major keys at first. Beyoncé’s face appears again in the static, crackly TVs inside the first room, a visual which breaks the illusion that she is simply the Voyeur – she also a disembodied Being that is part of the haunting in the villa. While Beyoncé’s singing is light and non-invasive to the scenes being shown, when compared to the visuals on the video it is evident that the complementary nature between the auditive and visual work in a way that allows one medium to fill the gap of another (see Vernallis 2013, 439). If the intended effect of her singing was to be at the forefront of this part of the music video, it would have been brought to the fore when mixing and mastering the sound of the video in post-production (see Kassabian 2013, 37–39). Therefore, much like Beyoncé’s character in the video is being portrayed as an outsider looking in, her singing is also complementary to the visuals being shown to the viewer/listener. However, the sound of her singing does not originate from Beyoncé the Voyeur, but from her image on the crackly TV, making her also a part of the scene rather than an actor upon the stage. To use this method in creating a soundscape and a fantastical visual is deliberate. It serves the purposes of focusing on the visuals while the viewer/listener is being lead through the work from Beyoncé’s point of view. The lyrics are also cryptic and symbolic enough to not yet intrude on the experience the subject feels upon paying attention to visual aspects of the work.

⁷⁶See Dope Black (23.5.2023) “The History of Black People Braiding Their Hair” for a short summary on the subject.

In quick succession, many of the occupants of the other rooms are also revealed to the listener/viewer (01.59–02.33). The image of an older white woman is superimposed onto a younger woman's image like in a stuttering video frame.



Figure 5. A spectral woman hisses at the camera as it pans over her.

They/she occupy the room filled with dark mahogany furniture, antique paintings and canopy bed that all mark a different epoch than the one Beyoncé occupies. This marks her presence as a spectral figure rather than a visitor to the hotel and she represents an exuberant strangeness — her stark white makeup, white cloak, opera-length gloves, feral facial expression and extravagant jewelry are markers of an otherworldly aesthetic that makes her stand out from the stark, heavy and antiquated feel of the room around her. Beyoncé's character is not perturbed by the presence of the specter, and her expression remains open and nonchalant as the next lines of the song are heard.

It's where we go
 It's where we'll be
 I know if I'm on to you, I'm on to you
 On to you, you must be on to me (Knowles-Carter "Haunted" 2013 verse 1,
 02.09–02.29)

Instead of the lyrics only referring to the singular 'you' or 'me' as in the previous verse, here Beyoncé refers also to 'we', which brings her character closer to the scenes presented. While

the lyrics still remain ambiguous and vague in terms of who they are referring to, when they are presented alongside the visuals, the implication is that the lyrics may also refer to the occupants and Beyoncé herself.

In the next room, an elderly white man in makeup, lipstick and nail polish with medals on his jacket is sitting hunched in a wheelchair. His make up evokes the performance makeup of KISS, especially the makeup of guitarist Paul Stanley “The Starchild”, with a star and diamond pattern painted across his right eye and forehead.⁷⁷ The way the man is portrayed in the video is not dignified or demonstrating command of the space in a similar fashion to Beyoncé, and when compared to the spectral woman in the other room, he does not convey exuberance or abundance. Similarly to the man and woman in the first room, his appearance and posture indicate a private moment that is exposed to the camera and Beyoncé.



Figure 6. The elderly man gazes up to the camera as if noticing it for the first time.

The audio accompanying Beyoncé’s walk and her surreptitious glances at the occupants of the room does not shift. The same alternating G#m7 and E-major keys are played on the piano in 4/4 time and while the tempo of the played keys is slow compared to, for example, Meg Myers’ “Desire” (2015), it corresponds to the steps Beyoncé takes as she is walking down the hallway. The lack of auditive markers when the camera/Beyoncé passes each room is

⁷⁷ Possibly also an intertextual reference to David Bowie’s artist persona, outfit and characteristic makeup as Ziggy Stardust.

indicative of her point of view so far – all the occupants are in an atmosphere of their own and the listener/viewer does not yet identify through Beyoncé with the characters. Therefore, the only sound accompanying the visuals are the footsteps, symbolized in the form of the struck keys, indicating that for now she is an outsider peering in rather than an active agent within the rooms themselves.



Figure 7. The twins in stark make-up look at the camera while lying on the plastic covered bed.

A synthesizer beat is introduced onto the soundscape of the song which marks a shift within the tempo and drive. In a complementary fashion, two similar looking white women begin a halting dance sequence in a room which is covered by plastic sheeting, recalling the aesthetic of Bob Fosse directed choreography, but with a twist to the supernatural and weird. Instead of their movements being beguiling or flattering the viewer/listener, the dancers seem mechanical and doll-like as if stuck on a mashed-up video loop (see Cook 2013, 56–65). The room, seen first at the beginning of the song, echoes their vacant and artificial style since clear plastic tarpaulin is not soft to the touch nor found naturally in nature.

However, the rope that holds together the wrapped furniture in the room is tied intricately with a flourish rather than in a manner that would simply fasten the plastic sheets to the furniture. The style of the knots and the rope itself is reminiscent of decorative bondage, especially that of *shibari*, which contrasts strikingly with that of the clear plastic of the room. When viewed in this framework, the entire room is made up of contrasting elements and dichotomies: stark white–pitch black, natural–artificial, soft–uncomfortable, human–inhuman.

The natural color and texture of the rope, not yet smoothed out from successive ties and still slightly bristly⁷⁸, breaks the monochromatic and artificial shade of the plastic coverings. The contrast is even more amplified due to the similarity of the décor in many of the other rooms and hallways, and while the other rooms portray wealth, opulence and abundance, this room is almost alien in its departure from the aesthetic so far shown to the listener/viewer. Therefore, it is the optimal room to signify a shift in the audio/visual material shown so far and the beat of a synthesizer begins to punctuate the lyrics that Beyoncé sings. The beat is still in 4/4 time, but the last notes in a sequence are struck double beats which creates a heartbeat like effect that contrasts markedly with the steady G#m7 and E-major chords played with the piano before.

To amplify the shift in the motif of the song, the lyrics change also to signify the body in a more implicit and visceral sense.

My haunted lungs

Ghost in the sheets

I know if I'm haunting you

You must be haunting me

My wicked tongue

Where will it be? (Knowles-Carter "Haunted" 2013 verse 1 02.33–02.52)

Much like in "Desire" (2015), in invoking organs and bodily appendages, such as lungs and tongue, the attention of the listener is again directed to the body rather than only to the symbolic as so far has been the case. "Haunted lungs" and "wicked tongue" are notions that are in a liminal space between the symbolic and the body and the choice to use those specific markers indicates a change within the body of the song itself: the breathy melody transforms into a more urgent and fast paced pop song that Beyoncé is often identified with. As the line "my wicked tongue" is sung, the camera view shifts to a feminine presenting character, whose gender presentation reads to me as a transwoman (see Hemmings 2012, 155–158), who sticks out her tongue in an effort to pop a soap bubble that has floated up from the bath she is lounging in. To accentuate the lyrics through the visual of the character in the bathtub, evokes

⁷⁸ The difference between used rope and new rope, especially when discussing jute rope, is apparent to those familiar with the varied textures of jute/*shibari* rope. While rope treated with oil or beeswax is slightly smoother, the choice made for this video was to maintain the bristles sticking out, therefore amplifying the contrast between the natural and artificial.

the affect of ‘misremembering’ and kinesthesia — the effect is similar to that of a children’s rhyme in which the singing is accompanied by an action or an image the lyric refers to.⁷⁹ Therefore, the transgression and pushing of boundaries between the visual and the auditive is not only intentional, but the emotive power of the music video relies on it.

3.4 Switch dynamics

The narrative presented on the music video, and by extension in this reading, is of Beyoncé as the outsider, or the Other, looking in on these different scenes rather than bodily participating in them. While she is not physically present within the scenes seen in the rooms, her gaze fixes the occupants and vicariously takes part in their private moments. Marks (2002, 7), quoting Luce Irigaray, notes that the gaze as a concept is often portrayed as a masculine form of viewing⁸⁰ rather than feminine due to the genitalia of those categorized as female, being “more tactile than visual”.⁸¹ In this framework, Beyoncé’s position as the viewer and imposing her gaze on the unwary occupant(s) of each room, positions her into a masculine frame. In a compulsory heterosexual matrix (Butler 2006, 73–77) in which the masculine man is held to have power over the feminine woman, Beyoncé’s agency is that of the active, top, dominant and masculine when compared to the agency of the ones being looked at; in a voyeuristic fantasy scene, hers is the position of D in a D/s scene. Therefore, even though there is no physical contact or touching involved in the sequence shown on the music video, the power positions are affirmed by the act of gazing and surrendering to the gaze.

Incidental androgyny (Newmahr 2011, 39–41, 116–121) is intrinsic to this sequence since regardless of the gender presentation of the occupant(s), their part in events is restricted to that of the object. The most popular depiction of a dominant and submissive, as seen in the *Fifty Shades*-franchise, mirrors the power imbalance of the masculine hegemony – the one presenting their gender more in a feminine way is thought to be the submissive. However, incidental androgyny as Newmahr (2011, 113–123) explains the term, is not tied to femininity or masculinity as they are tied to gender presentations and normative gender/sex distinctions as they are presented outside the scene. This is not only restricted to heterosexual, cis people practicing BDSM, but also to other groups within the spheres of sexual and gender diversity.

⁷⁹ “Head–shoulders–knees and toes, knees and toes.”

⁸⁰ See Butler (2006, 36–38) and Butler (2011, 12–13) for a differing reading of Irigaray.

⁸¹ “There is a temptation to see the haptic as a feminine form of viewing; to follow the lines, for example, of Luce Irigaray that “woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking” and that female genitalia are more tactile than visual.” Laura Marks (2002, 7.)

However, within queer communities engaged in BDSM, power is often renegotiated outside of a rigid system based on power imbalances outside the scene. So, while power is present always, it does not have to conform to a mirroring of hegemonic power imbalances (see Bauer 2011, 173–177). Indeed, incidental androgyny refers to a “hyper-masculinity” or “hyper-femininity” that exceed the boundaries of gender and are made into a parody or a caricature of the terms.

In topping and bottoming, then, as symbolically hyper-masculine and hyper-feminine performances, masculine and feminine *manners* are frequently incongruous with androgynous *appearances*. The symbolically hyper-masculine and hyper-feminine performance is offset by the extent to which gender is not being done on the quotidian level. (Newmahr 2011, 118–119.)

To weave in and out of gender performatives within a BDSM context is therefore different when compared to that which happens outside the scene. Marks’ (2002,7) reference to genitalia being more tactile or less tactile, based on the observations made by Irigaray, are more rooted in sex rather than gender as an expanded term that encompasses social roles, appearance and clothing. In order to expand this view of genital tactility to the frames of top/bottom, one has to understand that the body, genitals included, are already within a framework of discursive reality (see Butler 2011, 14–27) and within a sadomasochistic context, the genitals might not even be a factor within the scene itself. Therefore, when (audio)visual hapticity is discussed as an embodied reading of culture and media, including music, the author is already referencing systems that are outside the body since a body cannot be approached outside a discursive framework. Similarly, Jack Halberstam (2018, 50–59) separates masculinity from the concept of men as a category, and by extension from the normative assumptions of male genitalia, which opens the space of masculine presentation to not only men, but to those other gender presentations that find belonging in the category of masculinity as well. Incidental androgyny takes this approach to sexuality and sexual roles within BDSM which are not restricted to penetrative acts but instead encompass a spectrum of modes of being within a sexual setting, for instance, in this reading, voyeurism. The implied tactility also then exists as a force on the prediscursive and discursive realities – upon the material body and all its senses as well as the socio-cultural framework that governs what actions the body can take.

While Beyoncé's gaze is met by those she gazes at, their agency is only limited to the room they occupy and therefore the freedom to act upon agency is posited onto the voyeur. Voyeurism itself differs from most sadomasochistic practices due to it not requiring physical contact between bodies or materials, but it does conform more closely to the dichotomy of dominance and submission in other respects. While switching, referring to the flipping of the roles of submissive and dominant during a scene, between positions in a scene requiring physical contact and intimacy requires some effort, to switch between the roles of voyeur and the object is even more burdensome. To switch in such a scenario would be logistically difficult, but it would also break a similar boundary which an artist and their audience has in a music performance; participation in some manner (call and response⁸², cheering) is a light way to bridge the gap in power between the positions, but it is not total. Therefore, the act of viewing, and by extension voyeurism, is a rigid system of power that is difficult to question even within a BDSM context.



Figure 8. Beyoncé sheds her Voyeur persona and also becomes a carnal occupant of the villa.

That, which is difficult or burdensome to achieve in the Real, is made to look easy and natural within the context of a music video and other audiovisual media. Beyoncé becomes the object of the gaze in the sequence that follows. She is writhing, twisting and singing on a bed with dancers mirroring her movements on the floor. Marking this shift from being the Voyeur to

⁸² See Myles W. Mason (2022, 267–282) for more on the affectivity of call and response.

the one being looked at, her attire has changed too. Instead of a wide bowtie and suit jacket, she is wearing lingerie bottoms, large earrings and a ruffled dress shirt which all contrast with the gender ambiguous look her persona as the Voyeur sported. Here, then, she is no longer the Voyeur or the outsider, but instead she joins the cavalcade of other specters within the villa as someone or something being looked at. Her singing also changes from the lyrical and melodic voice that she has been using so far and becomes as breathy as whisper as she speaks the next lines more directly.

You want me?

I walk down the hallway

You like it?

The bedroom's my runway

Slap me!

I'm pinned to the doorway

Kiss, bite (Knowles-Carter "Haunted" 2013 bridge 1 03.10–03.37)

She is addressing someone in the singular and the gap between 'you', 'we' and 'I' has become more direct and the mystique of the symbolic has transformed into a one-sided dialogue between Beyoncé and an unknown other.⁸³ This shift also correlates with the switching of the power dynamic within the voyeuristic fantasy presented so far. As she is being looked at as an occupant of the villa, Beyoncé's character must also conform to the style and parody of the characters within; the gaze that used to be from the outside in is now turned inwards towards the agent herself and by extension her embodied self. The indicators of this are the quick and rhythmic movements Beyoncé makes as she speaks the words "Slap me!" and "Kiss, bite". Similarly, as before with "wicked tongue", the visual correlates with the auditive and makes the distinction between the spheres of multimediality muddled and liminal. While it is not the same tactility that liquid light of psychedelia employs (see Auslander 2013, 610–614), the effect is amplified the by the high-definition video quality that brings the visual textures to the fore.

Musicologist Stan Hawkins (2013, 469–481) noted that music videos "reassemble the body audiovisually", but this reassembling is not necessarily meant to empower, but to control the bodies on-screen. This point is especially prevalent with artists like Rihanna and Beyoncé

⁸³ However, the line "The bedroom's my runway" does seem to imply that Beyoncé is not powerless at all in the same way that the other occupants of the villa might be.

who both embody black/non-white and female artistry since the gaze directed at them from the position of the viewer is primarily that of the white heterosexual man. To Hawkins (2013, 481), the bodies are a hedonistic fantasy that portray the artists as objects of desire and infatuation rather than as actors with agency within the work.⁸⁴ Therefore, the transgressiveness displayed becomes muted since the framing of the work through the gaze of hegemonic, white masculine desire “flattens” the work into a one-dimensional piece about pornography.

While [audiovisual eroticism] remains a source of titillation, it will always be a field of agitation, obfuscation & anxiety. (Hawkins 2013, 481.)

Into this framework of eroticism, fantasy and desire is thrust the sadomasochistic aesthetic which can be viewed as an aesthetic already present implicitly within popular erotic media/music or it can also be understood as a separate, but connected, category with separate codes and markers. Similarly to how eroticism can be read into a media as part of a framing without the authors specific intent (see Paasonen 2011, 188–189), kink-reading (Pääkkölä 2016, 27–29, 52–54 & 187–191) does not assume intent, but it “reads against the grain” and highlights areas that do conform unintentionally to frameworks, such as sadomasochism.⁸⁵ As both eroticism and kink-reading shows, the categories of erotic online content and erotic music are porous, connected and embodied. However, even if the anxiety of objectifying another’s embodied self is different or viewed as the Other, it is still present and something to be aware of.

In partaking in the revelries of the villa, she switches the positions of viewer and the person being viewed at which in itself is a feat that would be almost impossible to pull off in a normative setting of audience-artist. The music video format is then a medium through which the artist can express themselves in a more comprehensive way even though it lacks immediate contact between the audience and the performer.⁸⁶ Having made the transition between positions, she is seen lounging on a bed, wearing a crown and a see-through cape with intricate designs woven into the fabric. The different textures of the fabrics contrast with

⁸⁴ Artists outside the work itself are also a source of fantasy since popular media treats artists who are women as already eroticized and sources of desire. See Hawkins 2013, 481.

⁸⁵ “– to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader as new[.]” See Sedgwick (2003, 146) as it was cited here before. To read against the grain in the form of kink-reading is surrendering to the new since no intention is being ascribed but only read in a different framework in which the invisible is highlighted.

⁸⁶ See Hawkins 2013, 475–477 on the limitations of the medium and the constraints that audiovisual aesthetics places especially on artists who are women.

each other since the bed sheets seem to be shiny, white satin while Beyoncé’s garments are black lingerie. These textures are set within a background of orange drapes and shiny, brown wood of the walls that amplify the high contrast between the colors of Beyoncé’s garments and the sheets.

From a visual standpoint the image is regal and commanding, but when taken into the context of eroticism, as Hawkins (2013, 475–481) explains it, all audiovisual media make the ones on-screen into objects that lack agency since they are perpetually the ones being looked at. In a sexualized setting, the gaze imposed upon the artist is most often thought to be that of a white, heterosexual, cis-man that reinforces the power differences outside the music video (Hawkins 2013, 468–471). This is especially prevalent in the context of black and brown women who are thought to be hypersexual and therefore not partaking in sexual agency at all (Pääkkölä 2016, 152–161). Even if the narrative of the song might then portray Beyoncé as all-powerful, the limiting factors of power differences outside the narrative of the music video pervade and seep into even the most emancipatory of stories.



Figure 9. Beyoncé as the Queen Other is reclining on a bed.

After proving herself as willing to join the specters within the villa, Beyoncé is crowned “the Queen Other” in the narrative of the song and music video. As she attains the mantle of Queen, the occupants of the villa are shown to become more active and engaging in acts⁸⁷, either sexual or otherwise, within their own rooms. The exuberance and revelry shown by the

⁸⁷ Possibly a reference to the movie *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999, dir. Stanley Kubrick).

woman in white in the beginning of the music video is mirrored by others. Sex workers engage their John, a maid sits on a table, legs open for the men that surround them and, in the infirmary, those occupants that require a pick-me-up are treated by a nurse in a shiny latex outfit complete with red opera length gloves and thigh high stockings. The nurse character presses her breast upon a woman's head which is wrapped in bandages, indicating fractures, but instead of wincing at the pain, her face is that of ecstatic pleasure. All shown in this latter half of the music video seem to be indulging in their surroundings to the best of their abilities. The high-definition video captures it all in life-like images and makes all shown on-screen into an hypermedial artifact with more dimensions than just those that a video player is capable of conveying to the listener/viewer (see Vernallis 2013, 457–458).



Figure 10. A nurse presses her chest on the face of a woman laying on one of the infirmary beds.

The rhythm played on a synthesizer is still the dominant part of the auditive track and it has maintained the steady disjointed beat that was present before, but it is accentuated by a tripartite snare drum riff that descends a half step between the riffs (04.15–04.17). The drum riff interrupts the steady rhythm in a way that indicates the changing of the theme into that of something more immediate. Beyoncé's singing is also joined by other vocalists when she approaches the highest note in the chorus at "My wicked tongue" (03.45–04.00).

My wicked tongue
 Where will it be
 I know if I'm onto you, you must be onto me

The auditive aspect of the music video conforms to the complementary nature that Cook described⁸⁸ in which the auditive element gives way to the visual to impact the listener/viewer — Beyoncé’s singing remains in the background while the foreground of the music video is dominated by the visual aspect in which the scene has become abundant with pleasure-seeking characters that dance to the rhythm of the music. While the visual aspect dominates the foreground of the music video with the occupants indulging in acts that could be emotionally designated as vices, the revelry does not devolve into a similar scene seen in *The Masque of the Red Death* (2009). There are no deaths or murders being shown to the viewer/listener and all the indulgence is instead that of pleasure and sensation, either in the form of immediate touch or vicarious gazing.

The song ends with the refrain repeating until the last glimpses of Beyoncé are seen walking away from the corridor and the fireplace, that was lit in the beginning, quickly gutters out.

Onto you, I'm onto you

Onto you, you must be onto me

You must be onto me (on to you, I'm on to you)

You must be onto me (on to you, I'm on to you)

You must be onto me (on to you, I'm on to you) (Knowles-Carter “Haunted” 2013
outro 04.25–05.07)

As the refrain ends, CCTV footage that shows Beyoncé in various points during the music video follows her walking away from the hallway, contrasting the grainy black and white footage with the high-definition video from before. The grainy footage is as much an emotive tool within the narrative of the song as is the high-definition video since it shows an alternative point of view for the entire video. To include the grainy footage is to show the listener/viewer the power of high-fidelity video since all the vibrant colors are blown out as if in high exposure.⁸⁹

3.5 Conclusions

“Haunted” (2013), as it has been showcased in the close reading here, is more akin to a disjointed multisensory experience rather than a work that strictly conforms to the Audio/Visual economy (see Auslander 2013, 605–621). High-definition video, intricate set

⁸⁸ As cited by Vernallis (2013, 439).

⁸⁹ See Vernallis (2013, 439) for more on the contrasting possibilities within the setting of a music video.

design, audio remastering and the specific time in popular culture when this music was released all work in conjunction to make the experience of viewing/listening to “Haunted” (2013) a work of hypermedia and transgressive pleasures. Music videos have been historically a way for artists, producers and writers to test out different new or improved technologies on the screen since it is a smaller production when compared to a movie or a television series (Vernallis 2013, 437–438). The technologies used in the production of the work are not novel anymore, but at the time of release, the music video of “Haunted” (2013) will have conformed to an improved way of video streaming. The framing of the music video in this manner suggests that the reason behind the high-definition quality of the video as well as the obvious care put into the design of the set is meant to cross the boundary between the visual and sensory experience.⁹⁰ Beyoncé was already an internationally successful artist who could afford to invest in a music video that stretched the boundaries of what could be shown on-screen.

The use of high-definition video makes the actors shown on-screen as well as the background into extra performers of the song instead of a backdrop to the auditive track itself (see Vernallis 2013, 447). To make a close reading of a music video is then a multilateral approach since the observer is not only reading the audio or the visual effects, but also their interplay in between the auditive and the visual. Much of the reading so far has been dominated by the visual aspects of the music video since Beyoncé, the occupants of the rooms and the hallway have been actively given a place to “perform” in a driving narrative. As noted before, the music video for “Haunted” (2013) was connected to the release of the album *Beyoncé* (2013) on iTunes; the track already existed as an MP3 file which could be streamed at the listeners leisure, so the music video had to add a layer of visual art on top of the auditive art. In this framework, the music video itself has exceeded the expectations of the audience⁹¹, but also the medium itself. The choice to use abundant textures in the video and producing it to conform to high-definition visuals, makes the video into something the viewer can almost touch.

The jute rope, clear plastic tarpaulin, animal fur, lingerie fabric, latex and red velvet upholstery are all textures that many viewers are familiar with already, and when they are portrayed within the context of a high-definition video, they turn into Uncanny surfaces that

⁹⁰ See Marks (2002, 9–12) for more on video as a haptic medium.

⁹¹ The release of the album was itself noteworthy since the album was not widely advertised nor was the fanbase given any kind of notice beforehand. See Robinson (1.1.2014) for more reporting on the release.

seem more real on-screen than in the Real (see Vernallis 2013, 447). Even the microdetails, shine and grain of the textures are presented as fine or delicate (see Richardson 2012b, 173–180). Video provides the framework for hyperrealism that is difficult to achieve even if the listener/viewer was to be in contact with the material as they were listening to the song. The combination and interplay of the textures and audio create a liminal space in which touching, seeing and hearing become distorted or out of sync with time.

Marks (2002, 20) explains haptic visuality thusly:

The point of tactile visuality is not to supply a plenitude of tactile sensation to make up for a lack of image. [...] Rather it is to point to the limits of sensory knowledge. By dancing from one form of sense-perception to another, the image points to its own caressing relation to the real and to the same relation between perception and the image. (Marks 2002, 20.)

When one sense-perception is no longer enough, another one takes its place as the main receptor of information. The image *caresses* the one in the Real that gazes at it. If the viewer/listener is even remotely familiar with the aesthetics and codes of the BDSM fantasy, as they have been described in this thesis, the transgression between the visual and the tactile is striking; the resonance created by the imagery and the accompanying audio caresses the one exposed to it and imposes the kinky fantasy upon the viewer, effectively making them a part of the scene vicariously as a Voyeur. While the intentionality behind the choice to use such tactile textures is not certain, their effect created through affect does make the music video seem intentionally resonant to the viewer even if the ascribing is done retroactively by the viewers themselves. This affect of crossing sensory boundaries is amplified by the superposition of the sense-perception that transgresses one sense and onto the other. Memory, familiarity and recognition of even the microdetails in textures, such as the bristles on jute rope or shine on plastic, takes the place of visual sensing when one sensory input is no longer adequate to the task (see Richardson 2012a, 203–205).⁹² For example, if a guitar player sees a video of someone playing the guitar, they can remember what it feels like to press on the strings to make the same note the person playing on the video. Repetition becomes memory and eventually becomes coding inside the mind of the subject.

⁹² See Spielrein (1994, 158) for more on this.

Distanced identification makes the visual representation on-screen into an illusion of touch through memory (Marks 2002, 7–9). Visual representation can be seen as a flattened version of “the real thing”, but as an idea depicted within the visual framework of optics, it gains the added attribute of a silhouette in which the viewers recognition paints the missing elements onto it. Similarly to how upon seeing a silhouette of a person on a traffic sign or a cardboard cutout, the subject can identify that it indeed is that of a person. “Haunted” (2013) takes this to the extreme since instead of a cutout that is missing crucial details, the video itself contains so much that the subject has to grapple with their own senses to make it cohesive. Seeing Beyoncé in lingerie, the fabric touching the skin seems hyper realistic to point in which the viewer themselves can “misremember” themselves wearing something similar. In this way, the audiovisual transgresses onto touch.



Figure 11. A close-up of Beyoncé wearing lingerie and a see-through cape.

If the video were to be described in a more literary framework, the textures themselves would be characters too (see Vernallis 2013, 447). While many of the rooms share the opulence and abundance of a luxury villa the audience might be familiar with from Hollywood movies, the furs in the infirmary and plastic tarpaulin in the room the twins occupy impose their own motif onto the scene. Clear plastic tarpaulin is used to cover up surfaces and objects for either moving them from place to place or to protect them from stains that might occur during painting, not to mention the common trope in popular media for dead bodies to be wrapped similarly before disposal. Similarly, fur is a natural substance that is mainly associated with

rustic cabins or perhaps luxury mink fur coats, but to place it within a room that is made into an infirmary contradicts the mental scheme most audiences have with the substance. An infirmary should be a place of hygiene and health so in placing the fur onto an infirmary bed is counterintuitive and violating most expectations. If the textures as characters are analyzed in this way, they seem to be acting out a parody of the *misè-en-scene*. If the background is not as it is *supposed* to be, the violation of norms and customs unmoors the viewer/listener from their usual expectations and brings them into the realities of the absurd and the Weird.

Reading this absurd and Weird world presented to the audience through the lens of kink-reading / kink-listening (see Pääkkölä 2016, 27–29, 52–53) highlights the efficacy of the BDSM aesthetic within the context of the music video. Within the context of the absurd and parody, sadomasochism becomes an aesthetic code that a subject can follow and pick up on. Incidental androgyny is one such code since, while originating within the power structures of masculine hegemony, it becomes a parody of the Real and turns it inside-out to emphasize the ridiculousness of what the subject might experience in their daily life (Newmahr 2011, 39–41, 116–121). In experiencing it through the framework of the BDSM fantasy portrayed in a hyper realistic music video, the viewer/listener is able to access “hyper-masculinity” and “hyper-femininity” in a safe context that does not involve immediate danger.

While the gendered positions of masculinity and femininity exist even in the fantasy itself, the parody makes them into a Thing that uncannily seems to be something on the outside rather than something we could recognize.

– objects in music videos become odd. They project their own aura or voice that we recognize from the real world, but they nevertheless seem strange. [...] But in recent videos, objects often seem to retain more of their real-world ordinariness, and it is difficult to pinpoint why. (Vernallis 2013, 457.)

While markers and codes such as femininity or masculinity are not exactly the objects Vernallis (2013, 457) is describing, within the parody of the music video they achieve the same kind of Weird feature to them. The subject does not have a sense of gender or masculine and feminine presentations in the same way they might see with their eyes or hear with their ears, and yet they have been socialized to understand the different encodings for gendered attire. When the absurd makes the visible material into a Thing-object, that is ever on the cusp of being recognized (see Pääkkölä 2016, 61), it also uncannily makes the invisible codes of dress and positions of power into a Weird twisting. The narrative of the music video is

receptive to this point of view since the gendered ways of dress that the characters adopt are a parody of formal wear, erotic lingerie, religious dress and theatrical attire. Hypermasculine and hyperfeminine attire is utilized in the same way as in a drag show. They are made into caricatures by amplifying all markers of dress, all at once.

Similarly to vertigo as it was described before in this thesis, the twisting in the gut that the viewer experiences upon being exposed to this high-definition and high-fidelity audiovisual material is an embodied feeling imposed upon the audience by specific artificial means. The feeling is brought on by the specific affects the music video elicits, but to name a source for that sensation is not clear; when a person is standing on a ledge looking down and feeling that vertigo in the bottom of their stomach, they necessarily do not differentiate if the feeling is imposed on them by the imagined fall or the physical height they currently occupy. The feeling is too surreal, too much, for them to ascribe it to anything, but the sum of their current situation. This interplay of senses and imagination is what “Haunted” (2013) plays with.

Thus, the interplay is made possible by the auditive material that is being used as part of the music video. As noted before, the track was made available for streaming before the music video so the audience could already enjoy the music in its auditive form already. In the music video itself, the lyrics and the song of “Haunted” (2013) are part of the *misé-en-scene* alongside the rooms as extra performers. The reason for auditive element being so muted in the music video itself according to my reading of the release of the music video and the track on iTunes, is that emphasis on the auditive aspect was thought to be secondary. The foreground was then opened to visual side of the music video since to simply play the track as it is heard on the album would have been redundant. Since “Haunted” (2013) and *BEYONCÉ* (2013) was a digital release on iTunes, Beyoncé could afford to test the limits of the medium itself. In a live performance, the audiovisual power structure of a show is heavily tilted to the auditive side of the Audio/Visual Economy (Auslander 2013, 619), but Beyoncé’s decision to flip that power structure in her music video challenged the traditionalist view that the primary source emotive power for an artist is in the music they make. Not only are the visuals of “Haunted” (2013) high quality and pleasurable to look at, but they also bring Beyoncé artistry from the auditive to visual as well.

4 Conclusion: Touching, Feeling Kink

The characteristics of kink-tangibility, as I outlined them in the beginning of this thesis, have been present in one form or another throughout the case studies. In using the case studies and their subsequent close readings as examples, they illuminate the utility of kink-tangibility⁹³ for cultural musicology. As I noted before, the concept of kink-tangibility itself is not yet thorough enough to be utilized without kink-reading, but it does offer new possibilities for approaching auditive popular music through a multisensory and hypermedia point of view. While the case studies chosen for this thesis are primarily in the spheres of popular music and popular media, the conceptual framework around the phenomenon of kink-tangibility can be utilized within other spheres as well (see Bal 2002, 22–55). Indeed, an interdisciplinary approach is vital for applying kink-tangibility in a way that is effective since the theoretical background leans on multiple different approaches at the same time. In this chapter I will summarize both what kink-tangibility *is* and what it *does* based on the insights this thesis has provided.

Within an officially negative action or object depicted either in the physical world or within fantasy, there is already encoded onto it an action remedying its deficiency. Spielrein (1994, 158) explained it thusly:

The expression ‘rough spot’ [...] is analogous to another image, the planing of wood. In consciousness, the expression is adapted to the temper of the present and is differentiated in relation to its source. On the other hand, the unconscious confers the phrase ‘smoothing a piece of wood with a plane’ onto the original meaning of the rough spot; in this manner, it transforms the current act of repair into the oft performed act of planing wood. (Spielrein 1994, 158.)

This observation is essential to the utility of kink-tangibility as I have theorized it in this thesis — within a lyric, a fantasy, a depicted act or a melody there is already encoded onto it an act of participation and a kinesthetic misremembering. Spielrein (1994, 157–161) explains the disconnect and the involuntary nature of unconscious thoughts that govern the subjects imagining through repetition, familiarity and causal effect, or *causa movens* in a Freudian framework. These involuntary thoughts or encodings are not present as an ontological reality of the object or action but based on the subject’s history with the same or similar object, they

⁹³ Within the framework of kink-reading as Pääkkölä (2016, 27–29, 52–54 & 187–191) theorizes its use.

are already, unconsciously, imposing onto that object, a reparative action. The surfaces presented to the subject are temporally already existing in the form they are currently presented in, but also within the subject's imagination as the history and possible future of said surface or object. The possible future of the object or surface is limited to the ability of the subject themselves, but as Spielrein (1994, 158) noted, the more familiar the subject is with the same or a similar object through repetition, the imposing of remedying actions is amplified.

Kink-tangibility, as I outline it here and in reference to the case studies presented in this thesis, *is* Spielrein's (1994, 157–174) thought of the superpositions of imagination, reparative act and death when applied to kink in music. When a subject, a listener/viewer in the case of popular music and popular multimedia, is exposed to music and audiovisual media that contains references to BDSM as a practice, they are connecting the stimuli of music within their own mind to the concepts presented to them. Depending on the familiarity through repetition that the subject has with the material presented to them, those connections may be more immediate or striking, but they are present regardless of the personal disgust, revulsion, curiosity or elation that the subject may experience towards BDSM.⁹⁴ Most audiences have some understanding of what BDSM is, but even if they are completely unaware of kink as a practice, they still know the feel of their own tongues in their mouths, as is the case with “Desire” (2015), or the feeling of fur or plastic upon their skin as is the case with “Haunted” (2013).

It is not a matter of ‘is the listener/viewer affected by the material presented to them’, but instead ‘how striking is the effect that the material has on the listener/viewer’. If the sensation is strong enough and the listener/viewer willing to feel empathetic kinesthesia between their own body and the material presented to them, the feeling transgresses the bounds of phantasmatic to something felt more immediately. “I wanna skin you with my tongue” for instance is a vivid lyric that touches on some of the most sensitive areas of a listener/viewers body, but the mechanism that takes that from the phantasmatic to an embodied feeling is the superposition of the thought that transgresses beyond imagining and onto the skin — the existence of the mechanism is not in question, but the strength of the feeling is something that does shift. If the feeling is strong enough or the listener/viewer receptive enough, it lingers in the form of fantasy as the mind develops the idea further. While an investigation and an

⁹⁴ See Paasonen (2011, 185–189) for more on this involuntary process of resonance.

experiment needed to bring kink-tangibility into the realm of psychoanalysis is thoroughly outside the scope of this thesis, its existence as a tool for cultural close reading is more attainable.

The encoding of objects in music and in the real as I stated before is already indicative of what kink-tangibility *does*. In the liminal space between seeing-hearing-touching, it would be quaint to say that music reaches out to the listener/viewer, but indeed that would be a simplistic view on the utility of kink-tangibility. When a member of an audience says that they are *touched* by a piece of music, they refer to a feeling that the particular piece of music or audiovisual media moved them to experience a significant emotion. No appendage reaches out from the subjects' speakers at home or from the PA system at a concert and yet the sensation of being touched exists as a lingering sense of intimacy. What kink-tangibility does is it transgresses the socio-cultural boundary between the source of the sound and the listener in a way that feels as if the music reaches out, but a more accurate description would be that the auditive material imposes feeling on to the listener through their own sense-perception and memory. "Desire" (2015) achieves this tangibility by referencing sensory organs as part of a violent act while "Haunted" (2013) uses high-definition video and an abundance of tactile textures to make them "reach out" to the viewer. The more familiar the subject is with the material they experience, in either auditive form, visual form or both, the effect is amplified.

The BDSM aesthetic and BDSM fantasy are especially effective in the employment of tangibility because they are emotive to the wider audience. For example, talking about kink in a social setting with strangers is uncomfortable, awkward and a sure way to make the conversation end quickly, but when an artist uses the vocabulary of BDSM in a lyric or a song, they are given more grace; Beyoncé's own interpretation of "Haunted" (2013) was that it deals with the temptations of the music industry (see ABC News 18.12.2013) while Rihanna's intention for the music video of "S&M" (2011) is to showcase the sadomasochistic relationship between her and the press (see Pääkkölä 2016, 162–164). The artist is often seen to be the final arbiter in the meaning of the song in the eyes of the audience. However, depending on the individual reading of the songs, the meaning changes and yet, the tools used to describe the phenomena are in the garb of the BDSM aesthetic which remains a sphere of titillation and anxiety. The intentionality of the song becomes secondary if the listener/viewer imposes their own interpretation on the song based on the embodied feelings and sense-perceptions they experience in hearing-seeing it.

In this thesis I have theorized the utility and existence of kink-tangibility as a component of kink-reading / kink-listening. Having applied it to the case studies, it would indicate a possibility for further exploration that could be conducted in an audio demo lab with high fidelity sound systems, or within the theorization of an article. The amplification of specifically tailored songs or musical works would definitely be in the scope of emerging audio technologies and would provide ample possibilities for further study of kink-reading and kink-tangibility. Experientiality and new materialism, vital points of view for studies in this frame, are not unknown to the academic sphere of musicology and new possibilities are constantly arising as part of similar explorations to expanded experientiality and the thick event (see Eidsheim 2015, 154–157).

As for the BDSM aesthetic in music and the utility of kink-tangibility going forward, an assumption could be made that most likely kink will be a reoccurring theme in popular music and popular multimodal media. While BDSM in practice is not the monstrous or horrendous Thing from the weird fiction of H. P. Lovecraft, as an aesthetic within a pop song it is an honest reflection of the desires of the audience at large. Lacan's theorization of the death drive, based on Freud's theorization, would indeed seem to indicate that in order for the subject to feel fulfilment, the object of desire must be able to employ both *jouissance* and the alluring joyfulness in order to fill the "God-shaped-hole" in each person — the BDSM aesthetic provides the subject with both. Desire as desire for desire⁹⁵ will ever keep the audience desiring more out of their listening and viewing experience, which in turn will keep artists working and scholars studying.

⁹⁵ See Wynn (2.3.2024).

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Appendices

The appendices consist of a short summary of the main points, themes and conclusions of the thesis in Finnish.

Appendix 1. Tiivistelmä

Tässä tutkielmassa tarkastelen sekä analysoin sadomasokistista estetiikkaa populaarimusiikissa sekä mediassa. Tutkielmani on jaoteltu tapausesimerkkien lähiluentoihin sekä teoreettiseen keskusteluun. Näiden jaottelujen avulla lähestyn tutkielmani kohdetta mahdollisimman laajasta näkökulmasta, mutta keskityn erityisesti psykoanalyttiseen, musiikkitieteelliseen, feministiseen sekä queer-teoreettiseen viitekehykseen puhuessani tarkasteltavista kappaleista. Keskeisenä tarkoitukseni on nähdä BDSM estetiikat olennaisena osana tietynlaista musiikkia sekä mediaa sen sijaan, että tarkastelisin niitä kulttuurisen viitekehyksen ulkopuolisina ilmiöinä.

Lähtökohtainen premissini tässä tutkielmassa on, että musiikki, kuten myös monet muut taiteen ja median muodot, toimii liminaalisella sekä affektiivisellä kentällä ja täten hyödyntää affektiivisuudessaan fantasioita, esitystä ja subjektiivista kokemuksellisuutta. Tämä lähtökohta on keskeistä erityisesti kulttuurisessa musiikintutkimuksessa, jonka mukaan auditiivisen materiaalin tarkastelu on osakseen lähtöisin kehosta, populaarista mielikuvituksenallisuudesta ja fantasioista, jolloin musiikki ei ole kehon tai kokemuksellisuuden ulkopuolista substanssia. Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena ei ole kuitenkaan todistaa vääräksi yhtä tai toista musiikin ontologian teoriaa, vaan tarkoituksena on pikemminkin tarkastella taidetta empaattisesta viitekehyksestä, joka näkee taiteen *olemassa jo* taiteena ja täten osana kokemuksellisuuden kirjoa (ks. Richardson 2016a, 114). Feministiset tutkimusmenetelmät, sukupuolentutkimus ja psykoanalyttinen teoria tarjoavat viitekehyksen tätä tarkastelua varten. Ne toimivat ensisijaisesti lähtökohtana tutkielmalleni, mutta tarkastelemani materiaali on kuitenkin osana populaarimusiikin sekä populaarikulttuurin kenttää.

Tutkimuskysymykseni tässä tutkielmassa on; miten BDSM estetiikat läpäisevät normatiivisia seksuaalisuuden ja halun kulttuurisia rajoja populaarissa multimodaalisessa kulttuurissa sekä musiikissa. Tutkimuskysymykseni kiteyttää tämän tutkielman keskeisen ajatuksen, mutta se toimii ainoastaan lähtökohtana analyysilleni. Metodologianani toimii musiikin kulttuurinen lähiluenta sekä konseptuaalinen analyysi. Sovellan näitä metodologioita empaattisen viitekehyksen kautta, jonka avulla toimin empaattisena tarkastelijana sen sijaan, että toimisin

BDSM aktivistina tai skeptikkona. Näiden metodologioiden ja viitekehyksien avulla muodostan uuden luennan mekanismin, jota kutsun tässä tutkielmassa ”kink- kosketeltavuudeksi”. Toistaiseksi tämä luennan mekanismi toimii ainoastaan komponenttina yhdessä musiikintutkija Anna-Elena Pääkkölän (2016, 27–29, 52–54 & 187–191) kink-luennan tai kink-kuuntelun kanssa. Kuuntelen ja katson molemmat tapausesimerkkini Tidal-suoratoistopalvelusta.

Ensimmäinen tarkasteltava tapausesimerkkini on Meg Myersin kappale ”Desire” (2015).⁹⁶ Käytän tässä tapausesimerkissä erityisesti Outouden käsitystä, kuten esimerkiksi Pääkkölä (2016, 2016, 61, 82 & 102–104) sekä kirjallisuudentutkija Mark Fisher (2016, 15–17) käsittelevät sitä omissa teoksissaan. Vaikka kirjoittajat käyttävät Outouden termiä eri kohdissa ja eri tarkoituksia varten, Outous on alun perin lähtöisin psykoanalyttikko Sigmund Freudin *unheimlich* termistä. Huomattavaa kuitenkin on, että Outous voidaan kääntää englanniksi joko termiin *Weird* tai *Uncanny*. Niiden käsittelyllä ei ole lähtökohtaista eroa, mutta ne painottavat eri näkökulmia. Tässä tutkielmassa keskityn enemmän *Weird* termin käyttöön, mutta käytän myös *Uncanny* termiä kohdissa, joihin se sopii. 1900-luvun aikana Outous on muodostunut osaksi humanistisien tieteenalojen termistöä, kuten on myös psykoanalyttikko Jacques Lacanin termi *jouissance* (suom. nautinto).⁹⁷ Käytän Outoutta sekä *jouissance* termejä tässä tapausesimerkissä kuin myös myöhemmin tutkielmassani, sillä niiden tarjoama näkökulma soveltuu myös musiikin kulttuuriseen lähiluentaan.

Keskeisimmät huomioni Myersin kappaleesta liittyvät ensisijaisesti subjektiiviseen kokemuksellisuuteen, Outouden kehollisuuteen, Toiseuteen sekä vahingoittamisen ontologiaan. Tarkastelussani auditiivinen elementti jakautuu laulun lyriikoihin sekä instrumentaaliseen ääneen, jotka toimivat toisinaan toisiaan tukevina elementteinä sekä myös kontrasteina toisilleen. Myersin laulu on kevyttä sekä heleää, jolloin instrumentaalisen osuuden persoonattomuus luo karun taustan heleille lyriikoille. Lyriikoissa esiintyy erityisesti kehon affektiivisuutta korostavat elementit, kuten esimerkiksi maininnat ihosta, kielestä sekä nylkemisestä, jolloin kuuntelija saattaa kokea olonsa jopa puistattavaksi. Reaktio tähän puistatukseen on kuitenkin huomionarvoista, sillä sitä voidaan tarkastella niin vahingollisena kuin myös korjaavana, mikäli puistatuksen lomasta voi kokea jotain uutta ja erilaista. Vertaan tätä lyriikoiden kuvaamaa imaginääristä tapahtumaa kirjailija H. P. Lovecraftin Outoihin

⁹⁶ Kirjoittajan suomennos ”Halu” (2015).

⁹⁷ Kirjoittajan suomennos.

tarinoihin, sillä kauhu, puistatus sekä pelko toimivat usein samoilla kentillä kuin mielenkiinto ja nautinto *jouissance*n muodossa. Osana tapausesimerkin käsittelyä pohdin kuitenkin vahingoittamisen vaarallisuutta sekä vahingon ontologiaa, mikäli sitä käsitellään ensisijaisesti fiktiivisellä tai fantastisella tasolla.

Johtopäätökseni tästä kappaleesta kiteytyvät erityisesti kulttuurikriitikko Eve Kosofsky Sedgwickin (2003, 145–146) vainoharhaisen ja reparaatiivisen luennan avulla, sillä niiden kautta erotan toisistaan vahingon ontologiset sekä funktionaaliset tasot. Tämän erottelun avulla totean, että vahingoittamisen sadomasokistinen fantasia, kuten Myers sen esittelee kappaleessaan, on ennen kaikkea autenttinen ja vilpitön, sillä se kuvailee raakuutta, johon *eros* usein yhdistetään populaarikulttuurissa. Tällöin sadomasokistisen fantasian funktionaalinen ja reparaatiivinen taso ei välttämättä tuota vahinkoa vaan pikemminkin nautintoa. Lopussa vertaan tätä autenttisuutta myös kirjailija Robert W. Chambersin (2023 [1895], 69) kuvailemaan rakastumisen tunteeseen.

Toisena tapausesimerkinäni toimii Beyoncé'n (Beyoncé Knowles-Carter) musiikkivideo kappaleesta ”Haunted” (2013).⁹⁸ ”Haunted” (2013) kappale, kuten se on striimattavissa albumilta *Beyoncé* (2013), on kuitenkin jaettuna kahteen osaan, ”Ghost” (2013) ja ”Haunted” (2013). Molemmille osille on olemassa musiikkivideo, mutta tässä tutkielmassa käsittelen ainoastaan ”Haunted” (2013, ohjaus Jonas Åkerlund) osuuden musiikkivideota.

Musiikkivideoiden visuaalinen ilme eroaa huomattavasti toisistaan, joten tässä tutkielmassa käsittelen ainoastaan kappaleen jälkimmäisen osan musiikkivideota, joka itsessään on estetiikaltaan antoisa analyysin kohde. Aloitan tarkasteluni albumin sekä musiikkivideoiden julkaisuun itseensä liittyneistä ilmiöistä ennen kuin systemaattisesti aloitan musiikkivideon tarkastelun. Myös tässä tapausesimerkissä käytän Outouden sekä *jouissance*n käsityksiä, mutta painotukseni on enemmän intermediaalisuuden, liminaalisuuden, (uus)materiaalisuuden sekä haptisuuden teemojen puolella. Käsittelen synestesiaa osana kappaleen vaikuttavuuden analyysiä, sillä musiikkivideon teräväpiirtokuva sekä auditiivinen materiaali toimivat yhdessä musiikkivideon edetessä. Tällöin katsoja-kuuntelija pystyy näkemisen sekä kuulemisen kautta välillisesti tuntemaan videolla esiintyvät materiaalit.

Intermediaalisuus sekä vuoropuhelu visuaalisten sekä auditiivisten elementtien välillä nousi analyysissäni ”Haunted” (2013) musiikkivideosta kaikkein keskeisimmäksi huomioksi ja

⁹⁸ Kirjoittajan suomennos ”Kummittelu” (2013).

täten on myös osa johtopäätöksiäni. Kappale oli saatavilla musiikkivideon julkaisun aikana jo striimattavana MP3-tiedostona iTunesista, joten musiikkivideon täytyi vaikuttaa kuuntelija-katsojaan jollakin muulla tavalla kuin vain musiikillisesti nautinnollisena kappaleena. Auditiiivisen ja visuaalisen stimuluksen yhdistyessä vuoropuhelun kautta, kuuntelija-katsoja pystyy emergenssin omaisesti kokemaan sen, miltä musiikkivideossa näytetyt tekstuurit tuntuvat haptisen visuaalisuuden kautta (ks. Marks 2002, 20). Kun tämä audiovisuaalinen ja haptinen teos asetetaan BDSM estetiikan viitekehykseen, kuten olen sen tutkielmassani esitellyt, musiikkivideossa nähty tekstuurien runsaus sekä erilaiset sukupuolta merkitsevät elementit muodostuvat arkista elämää parodioivaksi näytelmäksi. ”Hyper-maskuliinisuus” ja ”hyper-feminiinisyys”, jota Beyoncé esittää musiikkivideolla, ei olekaan enää merkki sukupuolesta vaan pikemminkin dominoivan ja alistuvan roolien positioista heteroseksuaalisen matriisin järjestämässä yhteiskunnassa (ks. Butler 2006 [1990], 73–77). Arkielämässä sukupuolen rakennelmat ovat huomattavasti vähemmän alttiita kyseenalaistamiselle, mutta musiikkivideo tarjoaa fantasian kaltaisen alustan, jossa sukupuolella voi leikitellä (lähes) vapaasti.

Tutkielmani lopussa kerään yhteen johtopäätökseni tapausesimerkeistä ja niiden pohjalta pohdin tarkemmin vielä, mitä kink-kosketeltavuus *on* ja mitä se *tekee*. Perustanani kink-kosketeltavuuden ontologiaan toimii erityisesti psykoanalyttikko Sabina Spielreinin (1994 [1912], 158) artikkeli, jossa hän käsittelee tuhon-luomisen dikotomiaa osana psykoanalyysin viitekehystä. Keskeinen huomio, jota Spielrein (1994, 158) käsittelee artikkelissaan, on vajavaisuuden temporaalinen superpositio eli se objekti, mitä subjekti näkee tai kokee, on valmiiksi jo olemassa tuon objektin menneisyytenä, nykyisyytenä sekä tulevaisuutena. Mikäli tässä objektissa on jokin vajavaisuus, esimerkiksi haava tai ruhje, subjektin alitajunta korostaa subjektin tietoisuudessa olevaa skeemaa, jonka mukaan tämä vajavaisuus voitaisiin korjata. Täten objekteissa, joissa on tällainen vajavaisuus, on valmiiksi jo koodattuna sen tulevaisuus sekä korjaava akti, joka mahdollisesti parantaisi objektin vajavaisuuden. Kink-kosketeltavuus, kuten olen sen tässä tutkielmassa esitellyt, *on* tämä objektien superpositio sekä niiden koodattu mahdollinen tulevaisuus. Mikäli kuuleva-näkevä subjekti on aikaisemmin kohdannut sadomasokistista estetiikkaa joko arkielämässään tai populaarikulttuurissa, alitajunta syöttää helpommin skeemoja subjektille, jotka vähentävät BDSM:n estetiikkojen aiheuttamaa mahdollista ahdistusta ja korostavat sitä nautintoa, joka on myös saavutettavissa. Täten sadomasokismi, kuten sitä populaarikulttuurissa esitetään, vaikuttaa subjektin toimintaan jo ensinäkemällä ja kuulemalla.

Kink-kosketeltavuuden ontologia, mitä se *on*, antaa valmiiksi jo osviittaa siihen, mitä se myös *tekee*. Superpositio, joissa objektit, sekä myös fantasiat ja mielikuvitus, toimivat eivät yksin toimijuudellaan kurota raajaa kaiuttimista, näytöltä tai taulusta vaan ne pikemminkin määräävät (engl. *impose*) subjektin kehon tuntemaan jotain perustuen audiovisuaaliseen ärsykkeeseen. Arkikielessämme käytämme esimerkiksi fraasia ”tämä teos kosketti minua”, joka on nimenomaan kink-kosketeltavuuden funktio yksinkertaistettuna. Kuitenkin olisi tarkempaa todeta, että ”tämä teos määräsi kosketuksen minuun”, jolloin teoksen itsensä toimijuus ei korostu vaan subjektin sisäinen toimijuus reagoi ulkoiseen ärsykkeeseen. Mikäli kyseinen teos käyttää vaikuttavuudessaan estetiikkoja, jotka voidaan lukea sadomasokistisiksi kink-luennan kautta, kyse on tällöin kink-kosketeltavuudesta. Tällöin sosiaalis-kulttuurinen raja kuulija-näkijän omassa kokemuksellisuudessa ylittyy ja näennäisesti teos tosiaan koskettaa häntä. Normatiiviset rajat toimivat täten alisteisena subjektin omalle kokemuksellisuudelle.

Tässä tutkielmassa olen täten esitellyt kink-kosketeltavuuden hyödyllisyyden kulttuuriselle musiikintutkimukselle kappaleen ”Desire” (2015) sekä musiikkivideon ”Haunted” (2013) kautta. Tällainen tarkastelu antaa myös viitteitä mahdollisille jatkotutkimuksille, kuten esimerkiksi spesifisti räätälöidyille kappaleille tai äänilaboratoriossa tehtävälle kokeelle. Mahdollisuudet kink-kosketeltavuuden jatkamiselle artikkelin muodossa on myös mahdollista, mutta ennen kaikkea sitä tulisi käyttää yhdessä kink-luennan kanssa. Todennäköistä kuitenkin on, että sadomasokismin estetiikat musiikissa tulevat myös jatkossa olemaan läsnä, sillä niillä on selkeästi funktio laajemmallekin yleisölle.