

Escaping The Binaural-Dimension:

*A Theoretical and Methodological Approach to Discussing and Analyzing Gender and Personae
In Popular Music*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

« C'est oui ou non, vous n'avez aucun autre choix ! »¹ This choice, which my uncle would often demand from us, echoes with great disdain within my childhood memories. From his perspective, there were only two answers to his question: 1) “yes, you agree,” or 2) “no, you disagree.” I would often think to myself, there are times when you would neither agree nor disagree, perhaps your answer could even reside somewhere outside of the confines of “yes” and “no”: “why restrict yourself solely to these two options?” This obsession with binary systems (i.e., good/bad, boy/girl, yes/no, black/white, human/non-human (other), organic/non-organic, etc.) is not limited to my uncle, it dominates a large portion of our lives whether it be in our religious and spiritual teachings, our governments/institutions, and our cultural views on existence.

These standardized binaries can be found throughout the musicological and musical corpus, often pinning concepts between two oppositional poles: this is especially true in discussions of gender. The systems that are in place do not provide the necessary tools to discuss non-heteronormative gender identities, usually avoiding these subjects completely or enforce conventional binaries onto these queer artists. The objective of this paper is to develop a theoretical and methodological framework that will allow researchers to analyze and approach the topic of gender identity when examining popular musicians and their artistic personae. For this specific study, I will be applying these concepts unto a case study of Dorian Electra’s “My Agenda.” By doing this, I will be able to show the effectiveness of adopting a nonbinary approach when analyzing personae and their gender states.

¹ Translation: It's either yes or no, you don't have any other choice.

Gender, Personae, and Musicological Research

Gender and Musicological Research

The notion of gender identity, which derives from the Latin *genus*, only appeared in the humanities and social sciences after psychologists sought to distinguish this phenomenon from biological sex in the middle of the twentieth century.² Although, *genre* had long been understood as describing a group or type of thing (such as humans, race, and family [bloodlines]), organisms and materials found across our environments (plants and animals), and was even adopted as means to categorize grammatical modes, artistic styles, and “natural” hierarchies.³ Essentially, the word sought to recognize and identify entities that were believed to exist within the same or similar state of being. In the context of identity in the first half of the twenty first century, gender is now perceived as a constructed and mutable state of practices and embodiments which are developed by the individual’s socio-cultural environment, traditionally based on their assigned birth sex, which “determine” their social roles and characteristics such as dress, speech, employment, and behaviour.⁴ These roles and conventions vary significantly across cultures.⁵

In the last few decades, researchers began to accept gender as self-determined—this perspective was informed by the various 2SLGTBQ+ movements, new schools of feminism, and the emergence of queer theory. To the dismay of several groups and institutions (such as radical trans exclusionary feminists, the men’s movement, religious institutions, and conservative parties), the previously held bio-determinist stance of gender identity no longer dictates one’s own personal

² Laurie Laufer and Florence Rochefort, *Qu’est-ce que le genre* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2014): 8, 11.

³ Randle Cotgrave, *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (London : 1611); Robert Estienne, *Dictionnaire Francoislain* (Paris: 1549); Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire Universel* (1690); and Pierre Richelet, *Dictionnaire François* (1680).

⁴ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (Milton Park, Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis, 2004); Laufer and Rochefort, *Qu’est-ce que le genre*.

⁵ Ellen Koskof, *A Feminist Ethnomusicology: Writing On Music and Gender* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014): 78.

gender identity and expression within many western governments, universities, and socio-cultural circles. Furthermore, scientific advancements continue to oppose our traditional understanding of biological sex. Chromosomes, which are the established quantification of biological sex in the sciences, are much more complex than initially theorized. A portion of the population are born with extra or “atypical” chromosome constructions.⁶ Thus, if believing chromosomes to be the sole marker of gender identity, the individual will be faced with many challenges when trying to label people as “man” or “woman.”⁷

During the second wave of feminism and onward (post-1980), musicologist, influenced by *new musicology* and other fields, became increasingly interested in examining music produced by women and the struggles/inequalities that these artists face or experienced. They began focusing on gender as a mean to properly describe their subjects. This is reflected in works like “Women in Music” (1980) by Elizabeth Wood, *Women Making Music: 1150-1950* (1987), *Feminine Endings* (1991) by Susan McClary, and *Gender and the Musical Canon* (1993) by Marcia Citron.

These influential works encouraged musicologists to adopt more interdisciplinary techniques, pulling from various fields such as sociology, psychology, and anthropology (among others) in order to better study their subjects. These writings also strived to dismantle held musicological beliefs which discouraged the analysis of non-musical agents in music making and its reception, ushering a new movement which was later called *new musicology* (~1990–2010). Among the initial pioneers of this new feminist school was Elizabeth Wood. In order to thoroughly examine American women composers for her article “Women in Music,” Wood sought to integrate

⁶ Laufer and Rochefort, *Qu'est-ce que le genre*, 73; Amanda Montañez, “Beyond XX and XY,” *Scientific American* 317, no. 3 (September 2017): 50-51.

⁷ For example, are those who possess extra chromosomes more “male”/“female”? Where would intersex individuals fit within this binary? What about individuals who possess higher level of hormones which “go against” their *gendered chromosome structure*, would they be more or less of a “male”/“female”?

feminist methodologies and approaches in her musicological research and began calling for the inclusion of women composers in music curricula.⁸ As pointed out by Sally MacArthur and Julja Szuster, Wood “called for the development of theoretical frameworks to interpret the data being accumulated on women’s music [...] she called for a theoretical basis for asking relevant questions about the material newly researched.”⁹ Another important work from this era was Susan McClary’s *Feminine Endings*, which sparked debates within the field and was originally received as a “radical” work.¹⁰ Throughout her collection of essays, McClary sought to pull from other disciplines—encouraged by feminist scholarship and the academic trend of using interdisciplinary methodologies—to highlight western music’s unique relationship with gender and sexuality. In her own words, these works were exploring questions relating to “gender and sexuality: cultural representation of women and men in opera, constructions of desire and pleasure in music at various historical moments, and the gendered metaphors prevalent in discourse about music.”¹¹ Since these works were first published, musicologists have embraced interdisciplinary approaches towards their methodologies and theoretical strategies in order to accurately study their subjects: it has become the accepted norm.

In regard to gender and sexuality in musicology, there was a boom throughout the 1990s. Throughout this decade, many began exploring gay and lesbian music and musicians. This period has also been deemed by Nicholas Cook as the “professional coming out” era, where musicologists became interested with the coming out narrative and 2SLGBTQ+ artists.¹² This area of interest

⁸ Sally MacArthur and Julja Szuster, “Transposing Musicology: An Essay In Honour of Elizabeth Wood,” *Musicology Australia* 39, no. 1 (2017): 52.

⁹ MacArthur and Szuster, “Transposing Musicology,” 52.

¹⁰ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002): ix.

¹¹ McClary, *Feminine Endings*, ix-x.

¹² Nicholas Cook, *Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 116.

began within popular music scholarship but eventually seeped into discussions about canonical composers such as Schubert and Handel.¹³ Since the 1990s, researchers have been extensively studying popular music and its relationship with identity. Nicola Dibben states that “social identities are not fixed but are constrictions forged through ‘cultural work.’”¹⁴ Many of these investigations sought to analyze and uncover how traditional cultural views of gender manifests itself within popular music. For instance, in “Tuning Gender,” the authors express that beliefs “about gender guide our interpersonal interactions in social relationships [...], sexual encounters [...], and inter/intragroup relations.”¹⁵ Researchers continue to examine the portrayal of gender through vocal production and lyrical narratives,¹⁶ performance and embodiment,¹⁷ musical

¹³ See Martha Mockus, “Queer Thoughts On Country Music and k.d. lang,” in *Queering the Pitch*, ed. Phillip Brett, Gary Thomas, and Elizabeth Wood (New York: Routledge, 2006); James Webster, “Music, Pathology, Sexuality, Beethoven, Schubert,” *19th-Century Music* 17, no. 1 (Summer 1993); Susan McClary, “Constructions of Subjectivity In Schubert’s Music,” In *Queering the Pitch*, ed. Phillip Brett, Gary Thomas, and Elizabeth Wood (New York: Routledge, 2006); and Ellen T. Harris, *Handel As Orpheus: Voice and Desire In the Chamber Cantatas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ Nicola Dibben, “Representation of Femininity In Popular Music,” *Popular Music* 18, no. 3 (1999): 331.

¹⁵ Lanice Avery, L. Monique Ward, Lolita Moss and Dilara Üsküp, “Tuning Gender: Representations of Femininity and Masculinity in Popular Music By Black Artists,” *The Journal of Black Psychology* 43, no. 2 (February 2017): 160.

¹⁶ See Dibben, “Representation of Femininity In Popular Music”; Avery et al., “Tuning Gender”; Lori Burns, “Vocal Authority and Listener Engagement: Musical and Narrative Expressive Strategies In Alternative Female Rock Artists, 1993-1995,” in *Sounding Out Pop*, ed. John Covach and Mark Spicer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Marc L. Hill, “Scared Straight: Hip-Hop, Outing, and the Pedagogy of Queerness,” *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 31, no. 1 (January 2009); Marion Leonard, *Gender In the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power* (London: Routledge, 2007); Simon Frith, *Performance Rites: On The Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996).

¹⁷ See Frith, *Performance Rites*, 145-157; Leonard, *Gender in Music Industry*; Lori Burns, “Understanding Gender and Sexuality In Rock Music,” in *The Bloomsbury Hand of Rock Music Research*, ed. Allan Moore and Paul Carr (Bloomsbury Press, 2020); Phillip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality In Popular Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); Sheila Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music* (London: Routledge, 2000).

construction,¹⁸ racial identity,¹⁹ and how musicians present themselves online and in music videos.²⁰ However, these works often present gender within a fixed binary.

This oppositional binary method of categorizing artists and music can be found throughout the literature. For instance, traditional means of quantifying certain cadences rely on the heteronormative binary, branding them as “masculine” or “feminine” cadences (strong vs. weak). Furthermore, the popular classical approach of labelling voice types (*fach*) still supports a fixed binary stance on gender. This system of classification locks individuals into gendered vocal registers, putting a lot of emphasis not only on their vocal range and timbre but on their gender expression which, in this system, is limited to the binary. Given that the analysis of western music has traditionally been locked between these two poles, it makes sense that these methods of categorization would also appear in the study of popular music.

In popular music scholarship, there are many researchers who have confined themselves to this oppositional binary. In their article “(R)evolution Now? Rock and the Political Potential of Gender,” Norma Coates identified various characteristics and conventions found within rock and

¹⁸ See Stan Hawkins, *Queerness In Pop Music: Aesthetics, Gender Norms, and Temporality* (New York: Routledge, 2015); and McClary, *Feminine Endings*.

¹⁹ See Avery et al., “Tuning Gender”; Frith, *Performance Rites*; Kate Conrad, Travis Dixon and Yuanyuan Zhang, “Controversial Rap Themes, Gender Portrayals and Skin Tone Distortion: A Content Analysis of Rap Music Videos,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 53, no. 1 (March 2009).

²⁰ See Avery et al., “Tuning Gender”; Burns, “Understanding Gender”; Conrad et al., “Controversial Rap Themes”; Cara Wallis, “Performing Gender: A Content Analysis of Gender Display In Music Videos,” *Sex Roles* 64, no. 3-4 (2011): 160-172; Frederik Dhaenens, “Reading Gay Music Videos: An Inquiry Into the Representation of Sexual Diversity In Contemporary Popular Music Videos,” *Popular Music & Society* 39, no. 5 (December 2016); Jennifer S. Aubrey and Cynthia M. Frisby, “Sexual Objectification In Music Videos: A Content Analysis Comparing Gender and Genre,” *Mass Communications & Society* 14, no. 4 (2011); Lori Burns and Jada Watson, “Subjective Perspectives Through Word, Image and Sound: Temporality, Narrative Agency and Embodiment In the Dixie Chicks’ Video ‘Top of the World,’” *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2010); Leonard, *Gender In the Music Industry*; Michael Waugh, “My Laptop Is An Extension of My Memory and Self: Post-Internet Identity, Virtual Intimacy and Digital Queering In Online Popular Music,” *Popular Music* 36, no. 2 (May 2017).

pop, mainly focussing on gender biases and representation within the genres.²¹ They describe rock as being inherently “masculine” while arguing that pop was perceived as being more “feminine.” They further suggest that authenticity in rock music “becomes ‘masculine’ while ‘artificial’ becomes ‘feminine.’ Rock, therefore, is ‘masculine,’ pop is ‘feminine,’ and the two are set in a binary relation to each other, with the masculine, of course, on top.”²² By solely focusing on their binaural and oppositional qualities, which are rooted in fixed binary gender markers and within this prescribed hegemonic notion of a genre’s ontology, Coates overlooks the *greys* which already exist across these genres. Furthermore, if quantifying popular artists within this binary, it would be difficult to place 2SLGTBQ+ musicians within this system. This is further complicated if trying to include non-western and indigenous popular musicians who do not belong to our western gender convention. Even locked between this traditional dichotomy, scholars like Phillip Auslander—as pointed out by Lori Burns—begin to acknowledge and uncover the *greys* and ambiguities that exist within this binary style of gender analysis.²³

Such ambiguities and *greys* are pivotal agents in the development of our own identities. The clusters and unfixed networks of our lives influence how we see ourselves, our roles within our societies, and the voices we seek to perpetuate. Musicians must not only navigate this complex grid of cultural influences to construct their own identity (such as their gender expression), they must recontextualize these contours in order to embody their artistic personae.

²¹ See Norma Coates, “(R)evolution Now? Rock and Roll and the Political Potential of Gender,” in *Sexing the Groove*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997): 50-64.

²² Coates, “(R)evolution Now,” 52.

²³ Burns, “Understanding Gender,” 434.

Personae

As Giovanni Formilan and David Stark remind us, *persona* was initially “used to refer to the face of an individual and, by analogy, to the character mask in Greek theater.”²⁴ Hence, *persona* has come to be known as how individuals present themselves among a variety of social and cultural circumstances and environments. In the context of popular music, it acts as a memorable and recognizable state of identity adopted by artists.²⁵ Exploring *persona* in *Performing Rites*, Simon Frith originally theorized *persona* as a means to explain who or what the “subject” is in performance art. For instance, they write that a performer’s body is the *object*, sites of narrative and feeling, and their performances are constructed by “the nature, shape, technique, body, and will of the performers themselves.”²⁶ By examining or assembling these elements together, Frith suggest that we can begin to construct a performer’s *persona*. This concept was pushed even further when Phillip Auslander stated that: “What musicians perform first and foremost is not music, but their own identities as musicians, their musical *personae*.”²⁷ Essentially, the *persona* is an amalgamation of embodied characteristics which fluidly change depending on narrative, musical form, performances, environment, and context. “The performers,” as explained by Auslander, “are not the sole authors of the *personae*.”²⁸ It can be influenced and constructed by management/record labels, genre conventions, and various other factors.

In their article, Auslander, expanding on Frith’s *character* models, divides the performer’s identity into three layers: 1) the *individual*, the person behind the musician; 2) the musical *persona*,

²⁴ Giovanni Formilan and David Stark, “Moments of Identity: Dynamics of Artist, Persona, and Audience In Electronic Music,” *Theory and Society* (October 2021): 4.

²⁵ See Formilan et al., “Moments of Identity,” 7.

²⁶ Frith, *Performing Rites*, 205.

²⁷ Phillip Auslander, “Musical Personae,” *The Drama Review* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 102.

²⁸ Phillip Auslander, “Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 14, no. 1 (February 2004): 9.

an embodiment of the musician's artistic personality or image; and 3) the *character*, a character played by the persona (*double enactment*).²⁹ It is important to note that these characteristics are all interconnected. Furthermore, writers such as Formilan and Stark recognize nonhuman agents in persona building, this would include the role of technology, "digital objects," and online artistic profiles.³⁰ This interest with virtual identity is shared by Michael Waugh, who believes that we cannot separate the artist's persona from their online profiles when analyzing post-internet musicians.³¹ Douglas Kellner has written that "media culture provides materials out of which we forge our very identities."³² Given our growing dependence and interactions with streaming platforms and social media accounts, one must not overlook technology's involvement in identity and persona building.

Lori Burns has also explored ideas of *persona*, especially in regards to song writing, genre conventions, and vocal authority. In "Vocal Authority and Listener Engagement," she identifies the challenges between the author and the persona since "one must tease apart the expressive layers of lyrical message from that of the individual experience (author) and social engagement present in the performance (persona)."³³ Furthermore, she explains that "popular music artists must negotiate the question of personal versus professional identity on an ongoing basis."³⁴ In the post-internet age, entanglement between the individual and the persona is further complicated since they might both exist on the artist's social media accounts.

²⁹ Auslander, "Performance Analysis and Popular Music," 6.

³⁰ Formilan and Stark, "Moments of Identity," 4.

³¹ Waugh, "My Laptop is an Extension of my Memory and Self."

³² Douglas Kellner, "Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture," in *Gender, Race, and Class In Media: A Critical Reader*, ed. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2011): 7.

³³ Burns, "Vocal Authority," 158.

³⁴ Burns, "Vocal Authority," 157.

Gender and Personae

In *Performance Rites*, Frith says that “we hear voices as male or female and listen to what they say accordingly.”³⁵ He further questions if the voice even needs to embody a distinctive gender and if the singer can “change sex.”³⁶ While discussing persona, it may be useful to recognize the symptoms of our white heteronormative patriarchal tendencies and its relationship with artistic reception, listener engagement, and modes of expression (among many other subjects). However, now trying to escape the *binaural-dimension* and adopt a queerer and non-dichotomous understanding of gender, limiting our analysis to Frith’s *male* and *female* distinction should be avoided. The embodiment of gender should be seen as flexible, staggered, and shifting; occupying many spaces with shared interconnected chains of rhizomatic sociocultural factors. One might identify as a woman but her identity and comprehension of self, her embodiment of these elements, will still vary significantly across her lifetime and from her neighbours. Her racial and ethnic background will also guide and affect her relationship towards how she expresses herself within her environment. The applied notions of gender passed down from her predecessors will reinstate itself into new states, continuing the perpetual evolution of identity.

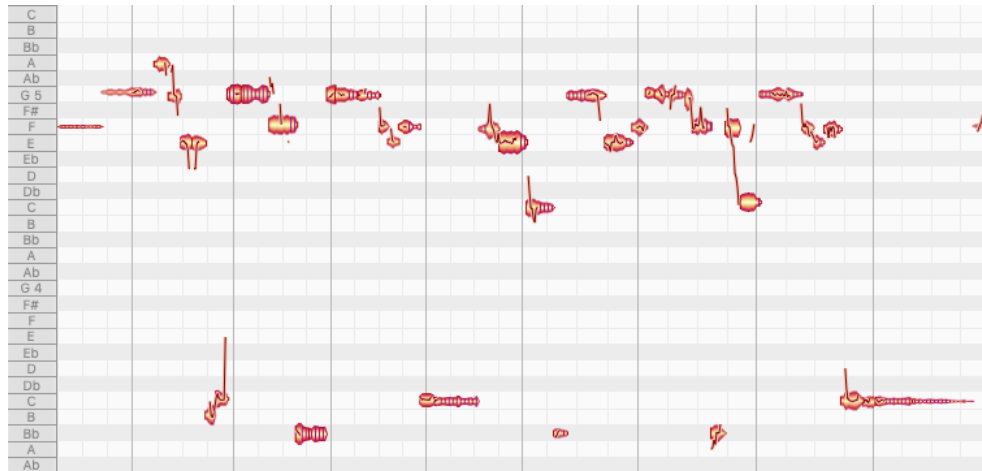
The tools of musical expression are forever expansive, continually growing with the introduction of new technologies and methodologies. It is important to recognize that production techniques have significantly advanced since Frith published his research on persona. For instance, his method of gendered vocal analysis would crumble when faced with the likes of 645AR, whose vocals are pitched extremely high and are made to sound almost *alien* (see Figure 1.1).³⁷ Traditional embodiment theory would struggle to represent the rapper’s body, within conventional

³⁵ Frith, *Performance Rites*, 195.

³⁶ Frith, *Performance Rites*, 196.

³⁷ 645AR, “645AR – 4 DA TRAP [Official Music Video],” *YouTube*, January 12, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Kn0V5mpJe4>.

musicological humanistic terms, and—without visual accompaniment—the voice appears to exist beyond age, gender, race, and ethnicity.



Screenshot of 645AR's isolated vocals during the chorus. The vocals sit high, usually around G5. Although not uncommon for tenors, the timbral quality of the vocals make it sound "higher" and alien. His flow is extremely fast, high, and virtually unintelligible. These elements are similar to other "mumble rappers," yet 645AR presents a hyper/maximalist approach to the vocal production. He can be heard rapping: "I remember those days I ain't have no racks, I remember those days I ain't have no stacks."



Still from music video [0:51]

Figure 1.1: Screenshot of 645AR's highly pitched vocals and a still from his music video

Since the 2000s, pitched vocals are a common occurrence. The “changing of one’s sex” or pitching of ones vocals for artistic effect can be heard throughout the popular canon. Examples of this can be found across Kanye West’s music (such as “Through the Wire,” “Ni**as in Paris,” “Bound 2”), West being often credited online with pioneering the “Chipmunk Soul Vocal Sample”³⁸; Britney Spears’ “Gimme More,” Frank Ocean’s “Nikes,” and Charlotte Day Wilson’s “Take Care of You (feat. Syd).” Within the queer community, many artists (especially trans and nonbinary musicians) use pitched vocals in order to align themselves with their desired gender expression.³⁹ These are but a few instances of this phenomena, among a sea of examples.

This exploration and its ties with persona and gender identity reach far beyond the scope of this paper. Further investigation is needed to thoroughly comprehend the effects that pitched and altered vocals have on the listener’s interpretation of the narrative, their physiological responses to these sounds, and how factors such as race, gender, and ethnicity influence their appreciation or understanding of the music.

A lot has been written about gender and persona in popular music. Throughout this literature, with certain exceptions, researchers have usually adopted traditional binaural gender markers and perspectives in their analysis of popular music and personae. This makes sense since most popular music artists—not to mention the general public—use binaural gender labels. However, artists would often reside in between this gender binary, creating this overlooked void. For instance, across David Bowie scholarship, researchers frequently comment on his androgyny, femininity, and gender-bending tendencies yet they still pin the artist between both

³⁸ Coodie and Chike Ozah, *Jeen-yuhs: A Kanye Trilogy* (Netflix, 2022), Streamed Video.

³⁹ See Sessi Kuwabara Blanchard, “How SOPHIE and Other Trans Musicians Are Using Vocal Modulation To Explore Gender,” *Pitchfork*, June 18, 2018, <https://pitchfork.com/thepitch/how-sophie-and-other-trans-musicians-are-using-vocal-modulation-to-explore-gender/>.

heteronormative ends, centring their analysis around the binary.⁴⁰ Even those examining artists who belong to the binary will struggle to describe the ambiguities which arise across their personae if wedging their analysis between the binary poles. With the acceptance of wider gender markers, many emerging musicians identify with non-traditional gender identities. In this paper, I will seek to provide a more inclusive and fluid framework that will aid researchers in discussing those bending or existing outside of the conventional gender binary. This research will lift the constraints that have limited the analysis of heteronormative and queer gender identities and acknowledge the inherent greys and ambiguities present in artists personae.

Space, Time, and Gender

Several philosophers have attempted to investigate the concepts of space and time, providing unique investigations into the topic. For this particular project, I draw mainly from the writings of Byung-Chul Han and Judith Butler, whose works explore the influence that time and space has on identity. Probably the most influential work dealing with these topics is Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, a monograph which influenced Han. Heidegger's difficult prose strives to describe the effects of *Dasein* (being) by returning to the fundamentals of existence—time and space—by pulling, disrupting, and expanding on established and innovative philosophical exploration and techniques. He says that “being cannot be grasped except by taking time into consideration, the answer to the question of Being cannot lie in any proposition that is blind and isolated.”⁴¹ In other words, one cannot separate time and space from *being*. By recognizing this interconnectedness,

⁴⁰ See Peri Bradley and James Page, “David Bowie – The Trans Who Fell To Earth: Cultural Regulation, Bowie and Gender Fluidity,” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 31, no. 4 (2017); Lisa Perrot, “Bowie the Cultural Alchemist: Performing Gender, Synthesizing Gesture and Liberating Identity,” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 31, no. 4 (2017): 528-541; and Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock*.

⁴¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 2008): 40.

we can understand these elements as being the vehicles for identity. These components (space and time) are the channels from which Han and Butler's theories flow.

In *The scent of time*, Byung-Chul Han ponders the art of lingering, the falsehoods of acceleration, and imbues fragrances into our notions of space and time. In his first chapter, Han revisits some of Heidegger's concepts such as acceleration, heritage (*Erbschaft*) and traditions, and temporality. Additionally, Han criticizes some of the ideas presented within *Being and Time*. Han says that "Heidegger's philosophy of time is connected to his times. Thus, his critical comments regarding time, for instance about the permanent shortage of time, are also aimed at *his* time."⁴² The divide between Heidegger's contemporary and our present continues to grow. Therefore, it is important to recognize some of the limitations that *Being and Time* possesses when discussing existence in the twenty-first century since it does not accurately represent *our* time.

Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender* is one of the most influential books from the early twenty-first century in gender and queer studies. In her book, she recognizes the temporality of gender when she states that "if one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one," echoing Simone de Beauvoir, "then becoming is the vehicle for gender itself."⁴³ By understanding that *being* is *becoming*, that gender is expressed through repetitive modes that are realized across space and time, Butler depicts gender as being extremely temporal and spatial. Although mainly focusing on gender and sexuality, among a variety of other topics, Butler acknowledges the importance that these elements play in forming our understanding of gender identity. For instance, when discussing drag and queer forms of identity, she states that:

⁴² Byung-Chul Han, *The scent of time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017): 63.

⁴³ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 65.

These practices of instituting new modes of reality take place in part through the scene of embodiment, where the body is not understood as a static and accomplished fact, but as an aging process, a mode of becoming that, in becoming otherwise, exceeds the norm, reworks the norm, and makes us see how realities to which we thought we were confined are not written in stone.⁴⁴

The shackles of fixed, traditional, and institutionalized states of being are but synthetic and enforced mirages that trap individuals within inertness, dismissing the fluidity of existence. As Butler suggests, these notions of *being* can be disrupted by *becoming*. In other words, *becoming* is being subjected to the effects of time and space which can liberate us from our established realities. Similar ideas of *becoming* are expressed by Han when he writes that “time is change, process, development [...] Nothing *is*. Everything *becomes*. Everything changes.”⁴⁵

Time is the sculptor of being, from which spaces are made into perceivable shapes and states. Meaning arises from the webs we construct to describe these dimensions. In *The scent of time*, Han writes that “time begins to emit a scent when it gains duration; when it is given a narrative or deep tension; when it gains depth and breadth, even space.”⁴⁶ By imbuing time and space with scents (forms of being, heritage, and narrative), we give meaning to our present and ourselves. In the western world, gender has obtained distinctive scents informed by our traditions, innovations, and narratives. The effervescent fragrances of gender have taken many shades throughout western history, leaving fragments of previous aromas in our contemporary. For instance, the dominant heteronormative gender dichotomy is a remnant of our past. However, the

⁴⁴ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 29.

⁴⁵ Han, *The scent of time*, 13.

⁴⁶ Han, *The scent of time*, 18.

original odours have been transfigured into new states of binary and nonbinary identities that continually morph through repetition and reinstatements.

Like fleeting fragrances of a passing perfume, gender practices and identities possess a prolonged scent that lingers within certain spaces throughout certain time periods. However, influenced by the bounds of *becoming* and repetition, the aromas of established gender identities grow more pungent, gradually soften, change, and eventually fade. These scents are contained and enforced by our narratives and socio-cultural legacies, although subjected to the sting of time and shifting environments. For instance, ideas (scents) of masculinity that embellished the halls of the Great Library of Alexandria during the third century BC are very different than those of US *men* in the 1950s. Fragments of the previous Western gender system are still present in the modern American, yet the overall notes of the masculine scent have ruptured into new tones far from those of their grandfathers. Furthermore, these aromas are further complicated when we consider those belonging to a racial/ethnic minority since their perceptions of gender might contradict or challenge those in power. In the western world, white masculinity, femininity, and queerness are often portrayed as the desirable scents one should wear, shaming and discouraging those seeking to break from the clenched jaw of the white patriarchy.⁴⁷

For instance, Jacques Rancière, as explained in *Pattern Discrimination*, recounts how ancient Greeks would discern noise from signals (important messages). They claimed that: “Sounds produced by affluent male locals were defined as speech, whereas women, children, slaves, and foreigners were assumed to produce garbled noise [...] Those identified as speaking

⁴⁷ See bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin To Center* (New York: Routledge, 2014): 90; and Carmen H. Logie and Marie-Jolie Rwigema, “‘The Normative Idea Of Queer Is A White Person’: Understanding Perceptions Of White Privilege Among Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Woman of Color In Toronto, Canada,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 18, no. 2 (2014).

were labelled citizens and the rest as irrelevant, irrational, and potentially dangerous nuances.”⁴⁸ Even within the contemporary digital age, it would seem that whiteness—its institutionalized and universalist form—is the funnel from which noise is made into signals. Whatever is identified as contradicting, challenging, or going beyond the established frequencies is understood as being static noise, something which is disturbing the clarity of the “desired” signal. Craving the “desired scent,” which appears to be rooted within white tradition and stability, the signal disregards the sea of perfumes which surround it.

Heidegger says that “tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence.”⁴⁹ Thus, understanding gender as a fixed binary is accepting that a traditional ideology is the sole possibility of an individual’s existence. This universalist and fixed notions are false: Gender is always *changing*. Gender is never *fixed*. Gender is *becoming*. Posthumanism teaches us to reject universalism since these perspectives are based on western imperial, hegemonic, and Enlightenment-driven modes.⁵⁰ In other words, they impose fabricated conventional and “accepted” states of being which do not accurately represent its diverse population and those outside of the western grip. As Judith Butler reminds us, “A restrictive discourse on gender that insists on the binary of a man and woman as the exclusive way to understand the gender field performs a *regulatory* operation of power that naturalizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption.”⁵¹

It is essential that we understand gender as always changing, constantly *becoming* and in flux. “Even things with which we identify are fleeting and ephemeral,” says Han.⁵² Gender

⁴⁸ Clemens Apprich, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, Florian Cramer, and Hito Steyerl, *Pattern Discrimination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019): 3.

⁴⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 43.

⁵⁰ Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019): 12.

⁵¹ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 43.

⁵² Han, *The scent of time*, vi.

conventions are subject to ever-changing influences and growth. The stability of the western binary gender system is nothing more than an illusion, even those identifying with the binary will find that their comprehension and embodiment of self and gender will change throughout their lifetime. This will be especially true when we witness how future generations manifest our *established* gender identities.

Chapter 2: The Binaural-Dimension

The scents which have been infused within musicological methodologies and theories have often dismissed entire communities, cultural advancements, and non-western modes of expression. Now seeking to escape from this imperialist and oppositional-binary model, the goal of this project is to include those who have traditionally been excluded from popular music studies and showcase the problems with the typical binary categorization adopted by many musicologists across the literature. Furthermore, this work will introduce non-dichotomous methods of analysis into personae theory and demonstrate how digital agents are being used to inform artists' gender states. With the tools suggested, researchers will be able to be more inclusive and include a variety of 2SLGTBQ+ artists into their analyses, as well as free the common binary gender identities from their *fixed* form.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, the term persona seeks to describe how artists navigate their artistic personalities across its various forms. Based on Auslander's model, the persona can be divided into three distinct categories. These three states are: 1) the *individual*, the musician themselves (the person); 2) the *persona*, the artistic personality embodied by the musician; and 3) the *character*, characters played by the persona.¹ By organizing artists into these categories, we can begin to identify how fragments of each state influence their performances and musical narratives. Additionally, we may uncover how elements like genre conventions, popular cultural trends, and a variety of external factors are coming together to produce and create the personae. When analyzing post-internet musicians, it is important that we recognize nonhuman and technological agents in persona building (as suggested by Formilan, Stark, and Waugh).²

¹ See Auslander, "Performance Analysis and Popular Music," 6.

² See Formilan and Stark, "Moments of Identity," 4; and Waugh, "My Laptop is an Extension of my Memory and Self."

Throughout this chapter, I will describe how gender exists through space and time, identify how artists are using popular digital media (memes) in order to inform and construct their personae, and explore the limitations of centring our analyses within the *binaural-dimension*.

Exploring Time, Space, and Gender

Concepts surrounding *being* and the *self* have been extremely mutable across our collective histories. Writers have recognized that our own understanding of humanity and humans are, as Butler would describe, “socially articulated and changeable.”³ This sentiment is extremely prominent across posthumanist literature and rhetoric, acting as one of its fundamental arguments. It is often through criticizing and reflecting on accepted universalisms that one may begin to notice the abundance of *greys* which construct our lives.

For the last few millennia, westerners have mostly adopted binaural views on gender. This system has traditionally favoured the white heteronormative man, leading to them casting themselves as the *universal man* and the human.⁴ Braidotti suggests that this obsession with the binary machine, one which favours the heteronormative expressions of sexuality and self, “steals other possible bodies from us.”⁵ The universalist schooling, that of an “inherent fixed binary,” falsely traps our existence within a mirage of gendered walls. With the arrival of feminist, queer and critical race theories, scholars and activists began decentralizing the traditional and static understanding of gender on the body. As Butler reminds us:

Terms such as “masculine” and “feminine” are notoriously changeable; there are social histories for each term; their meanings change radically depending upon geopolitical

³ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 2; Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 1.

⁴ In her book, Braidotti describes the Universal ‘Man’ as “implicitly assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized, reproductive unit and a full citizen of a recognized polity” and cites Irigaray, Deleuze, and Guattari. See Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 65.

⁵ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 99.

boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining whom and for what purpose. That the terms recur is interesting enough, but the recurrence does not index a sameness, but rather the way in which the social articulation of term depends upon its repetition, which constitutes one dimension of the performative structure of gender. Terms of gender designation are thus never settled once and for all but are constantly in the process of being remade.⁶

Like Butler, I believe that gender is constantly changing through space and time. The idea that a certain gender is more stable or reoccurring throughout history and across geo-cultural landscapes neglects the mutability of repetition and the effects of personal experience. It proposes a universalist understanding of what it means to be a *man* and a *woman*, or *other*. Fragments of similarities do exist in our realizations of our own gender, but they vary significantly from our neighbours and predecessors.

For instance, our own understanding of self and gender changes throughout our lifetime. As Catherine Vidal explains that, at birth, we do not have a conscious understanding of our own sex, let alone our own gender identity. Reminiscent of Simone de Beauvoir and Butler, she says that we become aware of our sex and gender while forming new neural connections and through our own cognitive development.⁷ As children, through imitation and repetition, we embody the roles and values which have been assigned to us. Through becoming, aging, cultural innovation or conservatism, and external influences, we begin to synthesize our own understanding of self. This awareness might lead us towards different avenues than those demanded by our families and communities.

⁶ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 10.

⁷ See Laufer and Rochefort, *Qu'est-ce que le genre?*, 75.

Gender is always in motion. With this in mind, inspired by Butler and Derrida, I believe that we do not share the *same* genders as our parents and predecessors. In other words, we are a continuation of their gendered states, of our culture's understanding of gender, but—through repetition and restatements across space and time—our concepts and embodiments change significantly. What it meant to be a man in the 1970s is quite different than what it means to be a man today. The gendered state of the son is different than that of his father. The gendered state of the individual is different than their predecessors. Gender, even the “universal male gender,” itself is a vehicle of constant change, something that conservatives might firmly reject. This sentiment could be applied unto Jacques Derrida's claim that:

Between my world, the “my world,” what I call “my world” —and there is no other for me, as any other world is part of it—between my world and any other world there is first the space and time of an infinite difference, an interruption that is incommensurable with all the attempts to make a passage, a bridge, an isthmus, all attempts at communication, translation, trope, and transfer that we desire for a world or the want of a world, the being wanting a world will try to pose, impose, propose, stabilize. There is no world, there are only islands.⁸

Pulling from this excerpt, the world which the individual embodies—the manifestation of identity, ideologies, and knowledge—is unique to them and their experiences. Their “island,” in this context their gender state, is unique to their own experience. As seen across our cultures, even when attempting to create gender bridges which connect stable states of identities across space and time,

⁸ Jacques Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign (Volume II)*, ed. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud, translated by Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011): 9. This quote was introduced to me in an article written by Jan Prášil. See Jan Prášil, “Binary Trouble: Preconditions For Non-binary Gender In Works of Heidegger, Derrida and Butler,” *Individual and Society* 21, no. 3 (2018): 35.

they ultimately mutate. This transformation and restatement of identity create endless arrays of gender variables.

The mutability that gender experiences is similar to that of the persona. The artist's persona—which contains fragments of their own or their cultures gender states—change significantly across musical genres, time periods, and performances. In traditional analysis, researchers have used binary labels to position their study of personae. In popular music studies, many ambiguities emerge even within these binaural analyses. As previously explained in Chapter 1, there are many *greys* which arise when analyzing artists like David Bowie. By solely locking individuals at either pole of the binary (or within the middle, the hypothetical *neutral*), we ultimately overlook the various spaces which form the personae. In popular music analysis, it is critical that we acknowledge the variety and unfixed states that our subjects are exploring through their music and personae.

Memes and Personae

Memes are becoming increasingly popular across all major internet platforms. Artists, such as Dorian Electra, are beginning to use this medium in order to construct their own artistic persona. In digital studies, we often hear of memes as being referred to as digital artifacts.⁹ The word meme was pulled from Richard Dawkin's book *The Selfish Gene* to describe gene-centric explorations of cultural evolution, focusing on its relationship with the cultural unit (or ideas) that sought to be

⁹ See Bradley E. Wiggins and G. Bret Bowers, "Memes As Genre: A Structural Analysis of the Memescape," *New Media & Society* 17, no. 11 (2015): 1891; Simon J. Evnine, "The Anonymity of a Murmur: Internet (and Other) Memes," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 58, no. 3 (September 2018); and Fátima García López and Sara Martínez Cardama, "Strategies For Preserving Memes As Artefacts of Digital Culture," *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 52, no. 3 (2020).

replicated for the purpose of survival.¹⁰ In their article, Bradley E. Wiggins and G. Bret Bowers explain that:

Ideas (or memes), for Dawkins, are inherently selfish and virulent, competing to infect individual minds and use those minds as vehicles for replication [...] [These include] slogans, catch phrases, fashion, learned skills, and so on. Like genes, which are ubiquitous and essential to evolution, Dawkins saw the gene as a metaphor for the meme.¹¹

Expanding on these theories, Douglas R. Hofstadter stated that:

Memes, like genes, are susceptible to variation or distortion—the analogue of mutation. Various mutations of a meme will have to compete with one another as well as with other memes, for attention, that is, for brain resources in terms of both space and time devoted to that meme [...] some memes will tend to discredit others, and some groups of memes will tend to be internally self-reinforcing.¹²

Today, the term meme is now primarily used by the general public to characterize certain forms of viral or digital media that exists across a variety of platforms such as pictures, videos, and texts. Retaining a sense of anonymity, meme creators do not sign their work and remain largely anonymous. Simon J. Evnine describes this event as “mere whisper[s] of creative expression, ephemeral and anonymous, too insignificant to be treated as a work of art. But together these whispers create a vast susurrations that restlessly adapts itself to new technologies and new modes of expression and communication.”¹³ Many forums (such as those found on Reddit) retain and encourage this anonymous spirit, developing complex community guidelines that one has to follow

¹⁰ See Richard Dawkins, “Memes: The New Replicator,” in *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 189-201; and Wiggins and Bowers, “Memes As Genre,” 1888-1889.

¹¹ Wiggins and Bowers, “Memes As Genre,” 1889.

¹² Douglas R. Hofstadter, “Metamagical Themas: Virus-Like Sentences and Self-Replicating Structures,” *Scientific American* 248, no. 1 (January 1983): 18.

¹³ Evnine, “The Anonymity of a Murmur,” 303.

in order to post their memes on certain pages. For instance, *r/dankmemes* require posters to “censor any and all personal information from posts and comments” and watermarks (virtual signatures) are greatly frowned upon within the community.¹⁴ The quality and subject matter of this material vary significantly. However, within certain circles, the amateurish, low-quality, and cringy aesthetic is the preferred method of expression.¹⁵ In mainstream popular meme culture, the memes follow a template or format. For those unfamiliar with this term, the template or format refers to the picture, layout, text, and other elements that construct the meme which can then be recycled and recontextualized by other creators.

Like persona and identity, memes are constantly mutating and synthesizing into new modes of being and expression. Since the arrival of online forums and social media, memes have become increasingly popular and more mainstream, littering our feeds. The study of internet and viral meme culture has quickly evolved into an area of growing interest within academia and is dominating a section of digital studies. For this analysis, I will not seek to identify the intrinsic differences between the Dawkins meme and that of the digital meme, nor will I expand on its *artifactual* nature. For our purposes, memes will be understood as mutating entities of virtual textual, sonic, and visual codes that comment or reflect on our communities, provide cultural commentary, support ideologies belonging to a fandom or social group, and that are prominently shared and altered across a variety of social networks. Since we are examining a growing body of music which originates from online spheres, it is important that we understand how these landscapes are influencing personae and gender. Memes, along with social media, are significant sources from which personae can now be created.

¹⁴ See *r/dankmemes* (forum), *Reddit*, accessed March 1, 2022, <https://www.reddit.com/r/dankmemes/>.

¹⁵ For references, I have decided to list a several resources you might want to visit in order to understand the current aesthetic trends of the meme community across the post-2010s. These are popular sources commonly consumed by the mainstream meme community. You will find these references in **Appendix 1**.

Entering the Binaural-Dimension

Even instilled between established oppositions, there are many ambiguities that emerge. The stability of the either/or—oppositional and dualistic thinking—limit how we can interpret our existence and being. This forces us to compartmentalize our lives into oppositional categories, often contradicting or dismissing the complexities and nuances of our own experiences. Posthumanism warns us against the limitations of such dialectical oppositional methods of categorization. In *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti proposes that we adopt a non-dialectical approach, across all fields, that will allow us to escape the constraints which have traditionally and continually suppressed the development of our institutions, our markets, and our being.¹⁶ This philosophy, along with my own personal experiences, has inspired me to begin taking active steps in order to begin dismantling conventional binary systems.

Oppositional structuring of the universe and its contents might give shapes and hues to our chaotic and dizzying existence. However, its promise of stability restricts our ability to break from its binary, wedging us between two constructed and seemingly *fixed* boulders. We continually surround ourselves with complex cultural codes which dictate our behaviour, interests, and perceptions of the physical and metaphysical. By placing our experiences within compartmentalized states of accepted being, we provide structure to our existence. Unlike other systems, the oppositional binary endows the individual with only two options: there is *this* or *that*. The uncertainty of seemingly endless possibilities and nuances is pushed into two poles. Even within this configuration, many ambiguities still emerge such as hypothetical neutrals, various shades of opposition, and states which exist outside of the binary. When discussing the ambiguity of being, Simone de Beauvoir states: “Since we do not succeed in fleeing it, let us therefore try to

¹⁶ See Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013): 56.

look the truth in the face. Let us try to assume our fundamental ambiguity.”¹⁷ Pulling from this excerpt, we can apply this sentiment unto oppositional binary systems. In other words, in order to embrace our intrinsic ambiguity, we must not categorize our existence within two single states. The *truth* of our experiences is much more interconnected, and ever shifting: they are boundless.

There are spaces which exist between two established oppositional poles. As demonstrated in Figure 2.1, there is a chasm that emerges in between them. Trapped within this linear void, there are countless *grey zones* (gradient nuances) which reside somewhere in between the oppositional poles structuring binaries. In traditional oppositional linear thinking, we often speak of spectrums. Writers have described sex and gender as existing within a spectrum, as well as various degrees of the political left and right, the visible light spectrum, and sound.¹⁸ Although we place states along the borders of these theoretical scales, there are instances where our subjects exist outside of this configuration or mode of analysis. Furthermore, there are external factors—that which do not exist within this hypothetical spectrum—that influence our subjects which cannot be identified by this form of measurement. These quantifications or organization of information is often based on anthropocentric European universalist ideals which seek to describe existence within a white patriarchal lens, asserting a sense of control over the subject. “The *more you control, the less freedom you have*,” explains Jaime Del Val, “the more you impose a will to orient and reorient movement in predictable patterns, the less you can unfold the creative potentials of moving with others in emergent configurations.”¹⁹ These *grey zones* would exist as various markers that could

¹⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, translated by Bernard Frechtman (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2018): 8.

¹⁸ See Montañez, “Beyond XX and XY”; Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 19-20; DH. Sliney, “What Is Light? The Visible Spectrum and Beyond,” *Eye* 30, no. 2 (February 2016); The University of New South Wales, “What Is A Sound Spectrum,” *Music Acoustics*, accessed March 25, 2022, <https://newt.phys.unsw.edu.au/jw/sound.spectrum.html>.

¹⁹ Jame Del Val, “Neither Human Nor Cyborg: I Am A Bitch and A Molecular Swarm: Proprioception, Body Intelligence and Microsexual Conviviality,” *World Futures* 76, no. 5-7 (October 2020): 320.

be placed across the oppositional spectrum, manifesting as subtle/intense instances of differences or neutrality. The *grey* would also contain interconnected relationships which exist across either pole. However, these ties will frequently be overlooked in order to maintain fundamental distinctions between both ends. Beyond the *grey zone*, which possesses infinite divergences and nuances, and above the linear ceiling, there is an area which stands outside of the binary. In other words, states which relate to the poles that could not be identified within the established dichotomy.

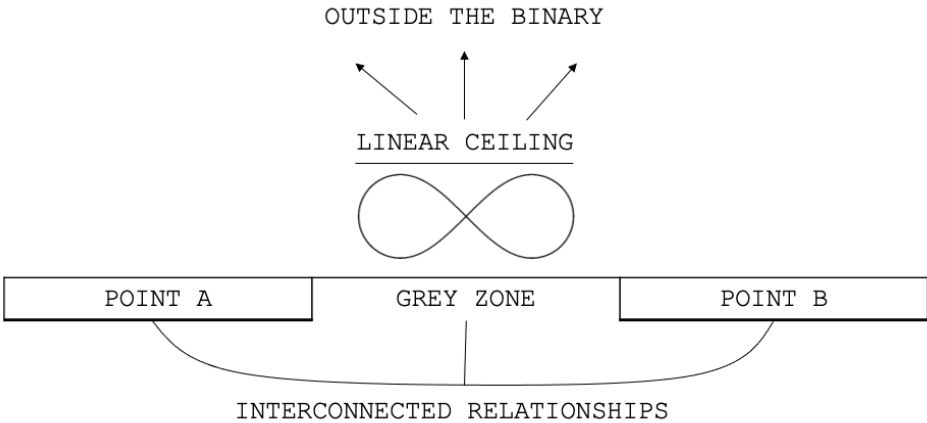


Figure 2.1: The Binaural-Dimension Model

Oppositional linear models discourage us from discovering or recognizing states beyond its dualistic lens, seemingly dismissing the *greys* and the ability for other elements to influence that of its poles. This disregard for interconnectedness and external influence does not authentically represent the reality of our environments and existence. Our lives are rich tapestries of interwoven fabrics of socio-cultural and environmental threads which have been imbued with the lingering scents of our pasts and present. We are not single dimension entities which perpetually reside within a state of polar oppositions, continually juggling a series of two shifting

states of being. Locking existence and matter within polar oppositional states is an ineffective way of describing ourselves and the universe.²⁰ As explained by Stephen Linstead and Alison Pullen: “Emphatically the anthropological evidence suggests that the binary simply does not do justice to human experience, yet it powerfully constrains social life and possibility, often violently.”²¹ This binary restriction limits and sections our existence into two perceivable states, clouding our ability to identify that which exists beyond its grasp.

A variety of binary oppositions can be positioned against each other within this model in order to identify their interconnected elements, the *greys* which exist between them, and hopefully begin to dissolve the self-imposed linear ceiling. For the analysis being undertaken here, the traditional western heteronormative binary is being reconsidered within the *binaural-dimension model*. By doing so, we can identify the *greys* which already commonly exist (those supported by queer individuals) and showcase certain ambiguities that arise.

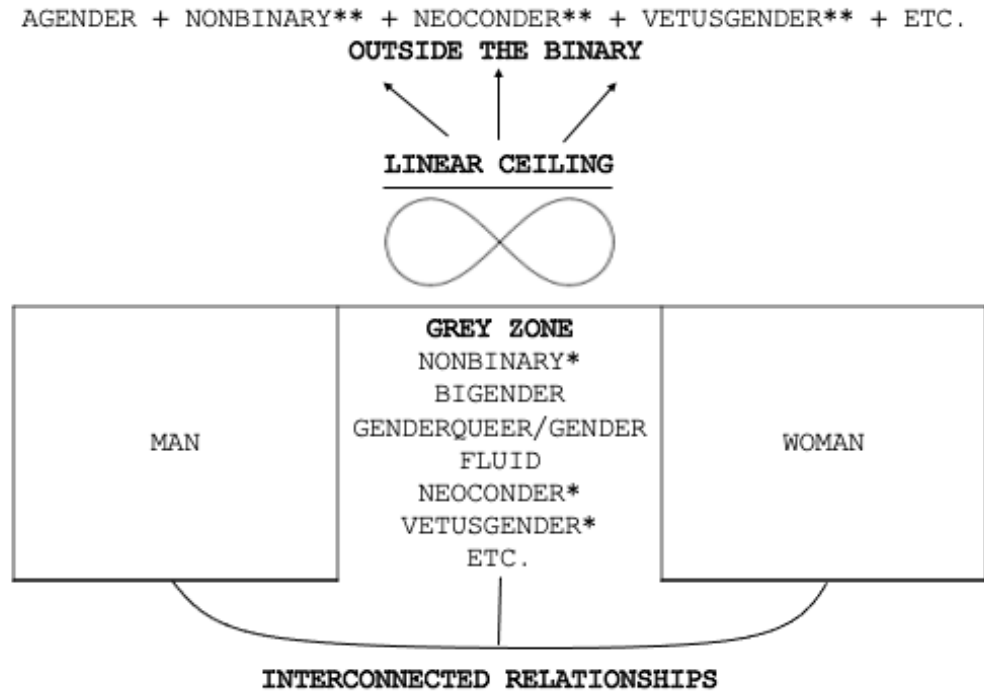
Placing Gender Within the Binaural-Dimension Model

The traditional western heteronormative binary possesses many *greys* across its linear form. As observed within Figure 2.2, several queer identities reside somewhere in between these two points, these individuals often shift and sit along the spectrum within the *grey zone*. It is worth acknowledging that those belonging to the traditional binary might place themselves towards either extremity of their gender box. Outside of the linear ceiling, we can also begin to identify gender expressions that do not belong within the binary. As for the interconnected relationships between these gender identities, I decided to not identify these elements for this analysis since these ties

²⁰ See Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 56; Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 11-12, 55; Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 43; and Del Val, “Neither Human Nor Cyborg,” 320.

²¹ Stephen Linstead and Alison Pullen, “Gender As Multiplicity: Desire, Displacement, Difference and Dispersion,” *Human Relations* 59, no. 19 (September 2006): 1301.

and similarities significantly change across each individual’s understanding of their own gender expression and that of others.



* = Those who identify or exist somewhere in between the traditional western heteronormative binary.
 **= Those who do not identify or do not exist within the traditional western heteronormative binary.

Figure 2.2: Applying established gender identities into the Binaural-Dimension model

While theorizing about the spaces within and beyond the gender binary, the need for new ambiguous and inclusive gender markers emerged. Therefore, I decided to include two umbrella terms in my model to describe these gender states. Firstly, *neoconder* are new gender identities that are currently inconceivable that may exist within or outside of the conventional binary. The proposed term is a mixture of the Latin word for new (*neo*), “con” from the word inconceivable, and “der” from gender. This terminology seeks to recognize the effects that time will have on the binary and on newly emerging identities. *Neoconder* was inspired by Butler when she asked:

“What if new forms of gender are possible? [...] And how are we to distinguish between forms of gender possibility that are valuable and those that are not?”²² At this time, I am not seeking to speculate about the potential *neoconders* and their distinguishing features. However, when discussing gender identities within this context, it is important to recognize that new groups will eventually emerge. Secondly, I have included *vetusgender* within the model. *Vetusgenders* are gender identities which are older than the modern western binary or from non-western origins. I constructed the word by fusing the Latin word for “old” with gender. These gender identities may belong to an oppositional binary system or to a variety of other classifications. Given the effects of imperialism, colonialism, and globalization, many *vetusgenders* are forced into the institutionalized binary model. Several *vetusgenders* cannot be effectively placed in this model given that they exist outside of the binary.

Further theoretical exploration is needed to truly investigate the avenues that *neoconder* and *vetusgender* may open in regard to gender discussion and analysis, especially within a musicological and ethnomusicological context. By including these gender markers, I am not trying to create *new* gender states. The goal is to include those that have traditionally been excluded from popular music studies and showcase the problems with the typical binary categorization adopted by many musicologists across the literature.

Rejecting the Binaural-Dimension Model (Rhizomatic Exploration)

In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari introduce their philosophical concept of the *rhizome*. As described by Stephen Linstead and Alison Pullen, “Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the rhizome enables us to concentrate on a mobile, disjunctive

²² Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 30.

relational self which evades oppression in avoiding ‘being’ in any static and essential sense.”²³

The rhizomatic imagery seeks to organize social constructions and patterns of thought into a non-linear, progressive, non-dichotomous, and ordered system, rejecting the traditional root-tree-branch model. As the authors remind us:

The branch metaphor suggests that variation, or identity, depends upon a determining and dominating origin or ontology (the trunk of the tree itself) and the root metaphor complements this by presuming an equally determining teleology [...] as all roots lead eventually to the base of the tree trunk.²⁴

Contrarily, the rhizomatic model depicts a complex interconnected network of roots and shoots which do not possess a unified central point and grow seemingly without direction. The rhizome serves as a useful tool to describe how we organize and construct our socio-cultural landscapes.

The Binaural-Dimension Model (presented in Figure 2.2) still possesses problems with its depiction of gender identity. For instance, it reinforces many institutionalized binaries across its linear and oppositional model. Additionally, the model does not recognize that historically the white man has been placed at a higher level than others, positioning all subsequent gender identities against their understanding of white European masculinity (the universal “man”).²⁵ The model does not depict any explicit hierarchy but does seem to suggest that men and women are more favourable and occupy more space than the others—placing them as the hypothetical *end* and source of all potential gender synthesis. When conceptualizing a new framework, then, it is imperative to question how we could depict the complicated interconnected and ever-changing relationships of western gender identities outside of the traditional linear, hierarchal, oppositional,

²³ Linstead and Pullen, “Gender As Multiplicity,” 1295.

²⁴ Linstead and Pullen, “Gender As Multiplicity,” 1290.

²⁵ See Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 1-2.

and universalist model. Inspired by Deleuzian imagery, I decided to illustrate the common gender identities within a rhizomatic model.

A rhizomatic model has the potential to showcase and highlight the interconnected and non-linear relationships between the gender identities, abandoning any implied binary and hierarchy. As mapped in Figure 2.3, there does not appear to be a source (trunk) or sources (poles) from which all genders are emerging, rather they seemingly grow organically and freely across the network. As we glance at the model, there is no existing hierarchy. This rhizomatic depiction completely dismantles any sense of hierarchal order since we are peering at the model from above. This diagram also demonstrates how easily new gendered states might develop from the existing shoots. This visual representation introduces a sense of movement and fluidity, unlike the brutalist and linear nature of the binaural-dimension. If we understand that gender is continually changing across space and time, one could not simply place gender identities within a grid. The positions would be constantly moving and growing, never fixed. The metaphorical gendered rhizome shoots would eventually fade, modulate, rearrange, or divide. This graphic representation would only be a snapshot of a given moment of gender across a particular time and space.

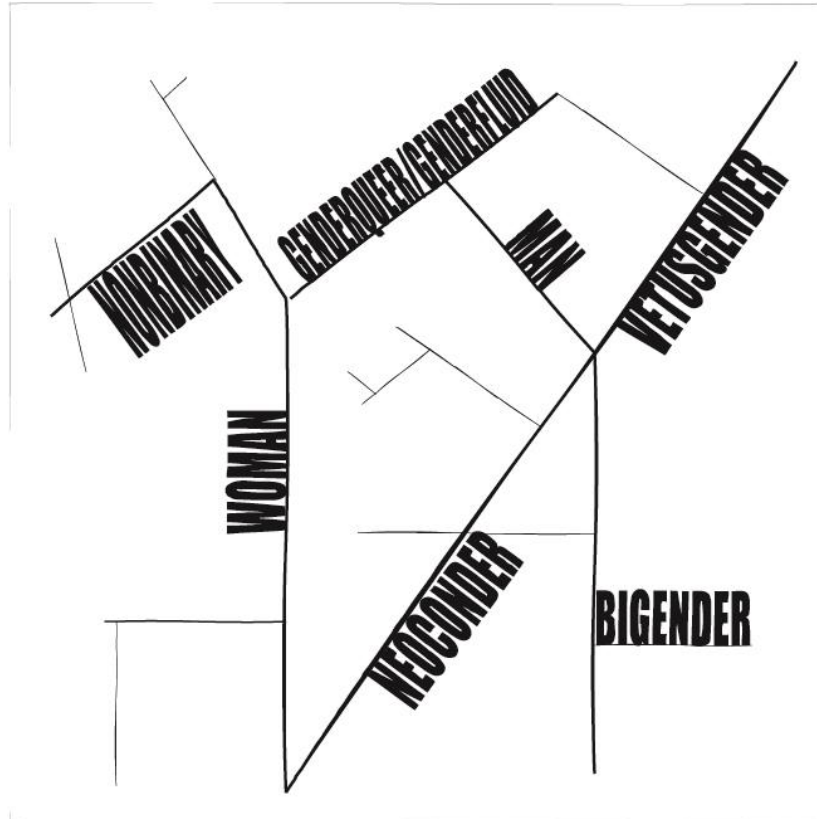


Figure 2.3: Rhizomatic Model of Common Gender Identities

There are still several issues with these models which we must not overlook when discussing gender. For instance, it fails to acknowledge race, ethnicity, and environmental factors into its models. They encourage us to quantify gender into observable and categorized modes of being. These models could also be used to support certain ontological notions of what gender *is* and *is not*. Although, by navigating and ultimately escaping the binaural-dimension and subjecting your observations into a rhizomatic model, one could start to identify the interconnected and existing relationships between established oppositional idioms. Traditional dichotomies can begin to be uprooted by these methods and hopefully encourage further investigation into non-linear, nonbinary, and non-hierarchical analysis. With the rhizomatic model, one could layer various dimensions—other networks—alongside those of their findings, creating a multidimensional grid

of influences and sources. One must not be beguiled by the prospect of quantified and categorized states of existence but be willing to venture into modulating spaces and dimensions where *being* is much more ambiguous.

Throughout this chapter, I have made many claims that some readers might disagree with. Critics might state that I am completely enchanted by the *grey* and that I am too eager to discredit the established and institutionalized binary systems in music. However, it is critical that we begin taking steps to dismantle these held universalisms and better include a variety of artists in our research. The inclusion of musicians who possess various gender states, musical vocabularies, ethnic backgrounds, and distinct modes of expression are worth and should be included in our discussions. Therefore, it is imperative that we create paths across our field that will encourage more diversity across our theoretical and methodological models. Attempting to expand our understanding of gender within persona is the first step towards including a wider array of artists, from different backgrounds and identities, within our research. Han says that culture is rich with ambiguities and “pure orientation towards the goal deprives the in between space of all meaning.”²⁶ Thus, my research will seek to explore this in between and liberate the linear constraints that have bound the discussion of gender within persona analysis. By utilizing these theories and applying it within a multimodal analysis, we can begin approaching the topic of personae more freely and inclusively.

Methodology: A Multimodal Approach To Analysis

Now understanding the role that time and space have on identity, we can begin to examine how these factors influence the personae. The analytic approach of this paper takes into account a

²⁶ Han, *The scent of time*, 37-38.

number of elements in order to fully explore the ways in which persona manifests ideas of gender across the lyrics, music, and music video in Dorian Electra's "My Agenda." This track was selected for this study in order to showcase the strengths of nonbinary methodologies, demonstrate the vast influences which make up an artist's persona, and demonstrated how to approach queer musicians in persona analysis. In a topic of this nature, lyrical narratives are an important point of entry, but other performed elements such as the vocal performance, musical setting, and the technical parameters of the recorded setting are also worth examining. The multimodal analysis will also consider the intertextual elements and references of the video and track, visual elements that are critical to understanding the construction of an artist's persona. As such, I am interested in the relationship that emerges between Electra and these sources and how they manifest across the work. I will also be using a framework to discuss how the persona's gender states exist within their own space and time. The temerarious boundaries of oppositional linear methods of analysis have been abandoned, influenced by my previous exploration of the *binaural-dimension*, favouring non-dichotomous strategies of examination.

Musical Analysis

In their book, William Moylan explains that "Recording elements can provide lyrics with drama and motion, they can support meaning and expression, and they can add colour to and create a context for the lyrics."²⁷ Other researchers have approached this topic, albeit from different perspectives, as seen in the works of Auslander, Burns, and Frith.²⁸ Paying particular attention to how concepts surrounding gender appeared in the vocal performance and styling of the track, I

²⁷ William Moylan, *Domain of Lyrics: The Voice of the Song* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Focal Press, 2020): 136.

²⁸ See Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock*; Lori Burns, "Understanding Gender and Sexuality in Rock Music"; Burns, "Vocal Authority," 158; and Frith, *Performing Rites*, 195.

direct my focus towards its vocal production. I am interested in how the voice borrowed from other genre conventions in order to create Electra's character.

In order to undertake this analysis, the track needs to be imported into iZotope RX 8 to extract a waveform and spectrograph of the audio. Through the visual representation of the sonic material, I can identify the main musical characteristics such as form, genre, instrumentation, vocal gestures, and production, focussing on their ties with the persona.

Lyrical Analysis

Pursuing how the persona navigates ideas of gender within the lyrical narrative, while also identifying key intertextual references, I borrowed several methodological concepts explored by Lori Burns. In "Understanding Gender," Burns states that: "In the context of popular musical expression, artists adopt strategies for the representation of gendered and sexualized identities that are bound up with social values, working of power, and norms of the musical genres they operate."²⁹ In order to identify this representation of gendered and sexualized identities, I have utilized Burns' four critical distinctions of narrative voice: 1) *narrative agency*, 2) *narrative voice*, 3) *the modes of contact between narrator and narratee*, and 4) *the engagement of the listener*.³⁰

The first category seeks to distinguish the voice of the narrator—the implied author—from the real author (songwriter, etc.) and identify their *agency*, key ideological ideas, and values. Secondly, by recognizing the *narrative voice* (the persona or character), we can establish who is the narrator, their story, and what type of *voice* they are deploying. Burns presents three kinds of voices: *authorial voice* (third person/omniscient narrator), *personal voice* (first-person/self-

²⁹ Burns, "Understanding Gender and Sexuality in Rock Music," 431.

³⁰ See Burns, "Vocal Authority," 160.

reflective narrator), and *communal voice* (a collective of voices coming together).³¹ The third area of interest is the *modes of contact* utilized by the narrator which seeks to pinpoint whom they are speaking to, their communication style (direct/indirect), and their expression (sincere/oppositional). The last method suggested by Burns is to identify the *listener engagement*. In essence, how the listener reacts to the narrative. She uses *proximity* to describe the distance between the narrator's "I," the persona embodying the song, and the listener, and the lyrical narrative's *temporality*, the distance between events in the narrative and listener's experience.

By applying this framework, I was able to document multiple elements that relate to how Electra's persona manifests ideas of gender throughout the lyrical narrative. There are times where the framework suggests certain oppositional categorization. I overcame this *binaural-dimension* by using my theoretical model to begin identifying how the subject might be existing in-between or outside of the expected poles. This allowed me to provide a better representation of the narrative and not be contained within a self-imposed dichotomy.

Music Video Analysis

In his book *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, Michel Chion explores the relationship between sound and visuals within the audiovisual medium. Within this book, he proposes a *masking* technique where you:

Screen a given sequence several times, sometimes watching sound and image together, sometimes masking the image, sometimes cutting out the sound. This gives you the

³¹ Burns, "Vocal Authority," 162-163.

opportunity to hear the sound as it is and not as the image transforms and disguises it; it also lets you see the image as it is and not as sound recreates it.³²

Pulling from this technique, I will import the clip into a video editing software and created a *masked version*. This new version—only possessing sound—allows me to solely focus on the visuals being presented on screen. It greatly aids in identifying references and themes found throughout the video, which I might otherwise overlook if distracted by the music. The *masked* version showcases the intrinsic relationship between audio and video, especially when it came to editing. Understandably, this is created as a reaction and visual accompaniment to the original track, highlighting and embodying its sonic characteristics. Along with the *masked version*, I will create a version of the music video where I paste all of the scenes situated within a given environment into a new separate sequence which I will then examine. This approach showcases how the personae exist differently across the various sets and locations.

Burns says that “A post-modern sensibility would lead one to value the social elements that impact the production of art, including the individual artist’s personal and social contexts.”³³ This perspective aligns itself with my own views on lyrical analysis and those of Serge Lacasse. In his work, Lacasse has often explored the topic of intertextuality and expanded on its countless forms.³⁴ The term intertextual, borrowed from literary studies, seeks to recognize the relationships between texts/media and other sources. Researchers have identified several distinctions and types of

³² Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound On Screen*, translated by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019): 176.

³³ Burns, *Vocal Authority*, 158.

³⁴ See Serge Lacasse, “Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music,” in *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?*, ed. Michael Talbot (Liverpool Scholarship Online, 2013); Serge Lacasse, “Towards A Model of Transphonography,” in *The Pop Palimpsest: Intertextuality In Recorded Popular Music*, ed. Serge Lacasse and Lori Burns (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).

intertextualities, Lacasse translating these concepts into his transphonographic model.³⁵ For this analysis, I will focus on the highly featured and recurring cultural references and imagery found within the music video as it relates to the topic of persona. Belonging to a similar age group and cultural background as Electra, I can easily recognize many intertextual elements (especially those related to mainstream meme culture) featured across “My Agenda.” The intertextual examples which I examine in this paper mostly originate from memes. Throughout the analysis, I use memes in order to display how certain ideas manifest across these communities and highlight their appearance in the music video. Pulling from these sources, I can make observations about the music video which are directly linked to viral trends and popular meme culture.

Exploring Persona Across Space and Time

Understanding identity and the self as entities that are constantly shifting and re-rendering across space and time, the artist’s contemporary becomes the site of their artistic expression. Synthesizing into the *here* and *now*, the artist creates and defines their personal and cultural perception of identity, artistic techniques and mediums, and their artistic voice (even if they are pulling from the past). Aligning myself with this perspective, I have developed a series of questions (outlined in Table 2.1) that anchor the analysis into the contemporary landscape and sociocultural trends which shape the artist’s embodiment of their persona’s gendered state. The contemporary does not belie our past, our experiences do mould the present. However, recognizing the effects of space and time, our discussions on gender and persona should be rooted within and throughout the artist’s own artistic career. Their persona is manifested within their *own* time, it will evolve through their *own*

³⁵ See Lacasse, “Towards a Model of Transphonography.”

time. Personae might become relics of the past but—at one time—they existed in the present, sculpted by their environments, their experiences, and their aspirations.

By asking four questions, each placed through the lens of space or time, I seek to anchor my framework within the artist’s contemporary and recognize the abundant influences which inform the construction of the persona and its gender expression. Easily modular and possessing no hierarchal ordering, the model seeks to facilitate these discussions.

Positioning the Analysis of the Persona’s Gender States Across Space and Time	
Space	Time
How does the persona’s gender state change or morph through the different spaces they occupy?	How does the persona’s gender state change or morph through time?
How does the persona embody contemporary ideas of gender identity in the spaces they frequent?	How does the persona embody contemporary ideas of gender identity, those that inform their communities, through time?
Does the artist’s racial and/or ethnic background influence how the listener engages with their music within certain spaces?	Does the artist’s racial and/or ethnic background influence how the listener engages with their music across time?
Does the listener’s reception of the artist’s gender identity or states change within and across different environments or spaces?	Does the listener’s reception of the artist’s gender identity or states change across time?
These questions extend to the virtual realms	

Table 2.1: Position Persona Into Space and Time

“**Wait!**” shouts my inner critic, “Are you *limiting* your area of analysis to a constructed and institutionalized binary? The very thing you are trying to avoid!” Yes, I am using two systems of measurement in order to approach and study my subject. However, unlike many other dichotomies, space and time are not oppositional. One seemingly cannot exist without the other, they are interconnected. Neither the linear sting that we experience as time is bound within a *binaural-dimension*, it is an deception that we have placed and constructed based on our own anthropocentric experiences: time is chaotic and flexible, its veins growing without purpose or distinctive direction. The voluptuous chasms and expansive bodies of space foster our homes and lives yet they are perpetually destroyed, created, and bended. “A house,” Gaston Bachelard says, “constitutes a body of images that give mankind (sic) proofs or illusions of stability.”³⁶ The persona, the mask that shapes our understanding of the artist, and identity, the elaborate clusters of influences, states, and conditions which arrange the self and our awareness of it, are disorienting mirages of unfixed realities. These houses, littered with complex socio-cultural histories and environmental ecstasy and catastrophes, evolve into absurd pillars of accepted states (see Figure 2.4). Yet, there is no foundation holding our homes in place. *The current has always carried our homes.*

³⁶ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, translated by Maria Jolas, foreword by Mark Z. Danielewski, introduction by Richard Kearney (New York: Penguin Books, 2014): 38.



Figure 2.4: Illustration of a house possessing rhizomatic shoots being carried away by the current among a mirage of pillars

Chapter 3: Rainbow Cringe Pop and Preparing The Gay Bomb

Before engaging in the analysis, I want us to become familiar with the artist, their interests, and their musical community. I will begin this chapter by introducing Dorian Electra and providing an overview of their career. I will also identify internet communities which have influenced Electra's persona (cringe culture, incels, and neckbeards). Afterward, I will explore hyperpop and identify its key musical elements. Lastly, I will prepare the *gay bomb* and go over Alex Jones, conspiracy theories, and their relationship with viral memes. This overview should provide the necessary information needed to understand the following analysis. Additionally, I will further showcase how Electra is pulling from digital sources in order to construct their persona and its characters.

Who Is Dorian Electra?

Dorian Electra is a gender fluid US singer, songwriter, and producer who was born in Houston, Texas, in 1992. They are known for their unique song-writing abilities and their distinctive visual and musical style, which borrows from many different genres and sources.¹ The emerging pop start narrative has often been placed on the queer Texan musician. However, they have been making music—semi-virally—since the early 2010s. Electra's initial success came in the form of a low budget and amateur satire track called “I'm in Love with Friedrich Hayek,” where they pretended to be in a romantic relationship with the late Austrian-British theorist.² Around the time of its original posting, the track garnered ~44,000 views and the attention of libertarians and economist circles, resulting in the artist being interviewed and featured within political

¹ See Dani Blum, “Dorian Electra, a Queer Pop Star Who Defies Genres,” *The New York Times*, December 11, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/11/style/dorian-electra-a-queer-pop-star-who-defies-genres.html>.

² See Ricardo Campelo de Magalhaes, “I'm In Love With Friedrich Hayek' – Legendas Em Português,” *YouTube*, December 21, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Arbfem4BohA>.

publications, podcasts, and research.³ Continuing with this trend of political satire, they later released more tracks centred around economic theory, such as “Roll With the Flow” and “FA\$T CA\$H.”⁴ These early videos possess an amateurish quality, in line with other YouTube educational/satirical content of the era.

Slowly expanding outside of their established ironic economist lens, they then began to produce higher quality music videos and tracks for their songs “What Mary Didn’t Know,” based on Frank Jackson’s writings, and “Forever Young: A Love Song to Ray Kurzweil.”⁵ Around 2016, Electra began producing tracks with the YouTube channel Refinery29. The channel is self-described as:

The leading media and entertainment destination on women and underrepresented voices. Through a wide spectrum of lifestyle stories, shareable content, and experiences, Refinery29 provides inspiration and tools to discover and pursue a more independent and informed life.⁶

With their support, the artist tackled a variety of topics and subjects ranging from philosophy, feminism, and queer history, presenting it within an easily digestible and educational musical

³ Russ Roberts, “Caldwell On Hayek,” January 10, 2011, in *EconTalk*, podcast, streamed audio, 1:15, <https://www.econtalk.org/caldwell-on-hayek/#audio-highlights>; ReasonTV, “Loving Hayek and Partying With Milk: Q&A with Dorian Electra,” *YouTube*, February 24, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLiqWObu3sk&t=103s>; Liana Gamber-Thompson, “Bypassing the Ballot Box,” in *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2016): 219-252; and Elizabeth Soep, *Participatory Politics: Next-Generation to Remake Public Spheres* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2014): 22-23.

⁴ See DorianElectraSUBS Brasil, “Dorian Electra – Roll With The Flow (Tradução Pt-Br),” *YouTube*, June 24, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSO1RaUAzao>; and DorianElectraSUBS Brasil, “Dorian Electra – Fast Cash (Tradução Em Pt-Br),” *YouTube*, June 24, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKMPzSXTkh0>.

⁵ See BlankTV, “Dorian Electra & The Electrodes – ‘What Mary Didn’t Know’ Official Music Video,” *YouTube*, July 10, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPTJmWcZEIU>; and Humanity Death Watch, “Forever Young: A Love Song to Ray Kurzweil,” *YouTube*, December 13, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=837tx9UG1gQ>.

⁶ Refinery29, “About” *YouTube*, accessed March 22, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/c/refinery29/about>.

style.⁷ In 2017, Electra was featured on Charli XCX's highly successful and critically acclaimed *Pop 2* mixtape. In their *Pitchfork* review, Meaghan Garvey describes the record as "a vision of what pop music could be, the sound of an eclectic, hyperreal future where romantic live is fun but fucked and partying is an emotional refuge."⁸ Soon after this collaboration, they released their first studio album *Flamboyant* (2019) and quickly dropped their second record, *My Agenda* (2020).

Cringe, Incels, and Neckbeards

Referencing many online communities, Electra borrows many themes associated with these internet groups in order to construct their own persona. Across *My Agenda*, there are direct references to specific internet groups which the artist actively embodies through their musical narratives, performative qualities, and visual appearance. However, the artist appropriates these references into new queer and ironic states which actively criticize their origins. Before attempting to analyze "My Agenda," it is important that we understand the three following terms 1) cringe, 2) incel, and 3) neckbeards; and their relationship with Electra.

Cringe

A popular category of contemporary meme culture, *cringe* (also known as *cringeworthy*) is a term used across the internet which describes content that is usually extremely awkward, embarrassing,

⁷ See Refinery29, "Our Musical Ode To The Clitoris," *YouTube*, March 23, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3E2pBC1R2A>; Refinery29, "The History Of Vibrators With Dorian Electra," *YouTube*, July 13, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ToStvsqcl4Q>; Refinery29, "The Dark History Of High Heels w/ Dorian Electra | Riot," *YouTube*, September 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qp3orG70w5o>; and Refinery29, "2000 Years of Drag: A Musical Odyssey | Refinery29," *YouTube*, December 18, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p61FUTmjjvQ>.

⁸ Meaghan Garvey, "Pop 2 – Charlie XCX 2017 Review," *Pitchfork*, December 20, 2017, <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/charli-xcx-pop-2/>.

and difficult (*cringe*) to watch or witness.⁹ The term originated from earlier popular slang and media from the pre-2000s and the emotion it provokes (that of *cringing* when viewing the content).¹⁰ Sources show it beginning to appear online around 2004 and 2005.¹¹ The subject of this content ranges significantly. However, it often exists across social networks (such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, 4chan, and Reddit) and functions similarly to other common meme mediums. This subcategory of meme culture is particularly interested in political discourse, making fun of people within various communities (such as goths, furies, neckbeards, anime enthusiasts, queers, neural divergent people, incels, political parties, etc.), and shockingly awkward/outlandish events, situations, or statements. The community is also very engaged with music.¹² Some popular *cringe* examples are the South Carolina Miss Teen USA 2007 candidate's map answer, the Oblivion NPC "call the cops and get some fudge" Lady, Gay Mount Everest,

⁹ Don Caldwell, "Cringe," *Knowyourmeme*, 2014, updated February 2022, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/cringe#fn14>.

¹⁰ Based on Google Books Ngram Viewer, a feature which traces the use of a particular word across literary history, the word *cringeworthy* slowly began emerging in the 1970s. Knowyourmemes and Cringeworthy.net suggests it first was popularized within the 1972 comic *Bash Street Kids* with the introduction of the character Cuthbert Jason Cringeworthy, a recurring nerd type and class pet. Since the mid-1980s, the word has significantly increase in use. See "Cringeworthy," *Google Books Ngram Viewer*, accessed March 23, 2020, https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=7&case_insensitive=on&content=cringeworthy&direct_url=t4%3B%2Ccringeworthy%3B%2Cc0%3B%2Cs0%3B%3Bcringeworthy%3B%2Cc0%3B%3Bcringeworthy%3B%2Cc0#t4%3B%2Ccringeworthy%3B%2Cc0%3B%2Cs0%3B%3Bcringeworthy%3B%2Cc0%3B%3Bcringeworthy%3B%2Cc0; and Caldwell, "Cringe."

¹¹ See early examples of the term being used online: Shadowy_blue, "LOTR-Most Cringeworthy Moment," *Killermovies* (forum), January 25, 2004, <http://www.killermovies.com/forums/f34/t26005.html>; "Top Ten Cringe-Worthy Films," *DailyMail*, June 13, 2005, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-352076/Top-cringe-worthy-films.html>.

¹² Here are a few examples of *cringe* music videos: Vennu Mallesh, "Vennu Mallesh – It's My Life What Ever I Wanna Do," *YouTube*, July 27, 2012; Rehdogg, "Why Must I Cry," October 28, 2006, <https://youtu.be/8mWW6kRITEY>; and VoteObamaBiden08, "God Is Doing a New Thang – Rap Dropping It B-Boy Style," *YouTube*, April 30, 2011, <https://youtu.be/1ppisOulgG0>.

Hillary Clinton's "Pokémon Go To the Polls," and internet personality Chris Chan and her comic *Sonichu*.¹³

Given the complexity of the genre, I will not attempt to tackle the ontological discourse—frequently seen online—as to *what is a cringe meme*. For this paper, I will use *cringe* to describe content and communities that are often associated with the meme style such as otaku (anime fans), incels, furies, and neckbeards. As mentioned earlier, *cringe* content has often concentrated on making fun of people whose interests do not align with mainstream culture. Many have been made to feel like outcasts and deemed *cringy* online, something that Electra is very sympathetic towards. In an interview with *MTV*, they said: "I was trying to critique these perspectives but also empathize with them [in *My Agenda*] [...] Especially with meme culture, it's so easy to call somebody a neckbeard or a fedora-tipper just because they offer to hold the door open."¹⁴

Incels

Originating within online forums, this fringe community grew into a fierce ideology which has resulted in the indoctrination of young men, the spread of dangerous misogyny, and even mass murder. Incels (involuntary celibates) are members of various online subcultures, found across different platforms, who are unable to acquire romantic or sexual relationships despite their attempts at acquiring them. In their book *The Incel Rebellion*, Lisa Sugiura explains that:

¹³ See IRamzayI, "Miss Teen USA 2007 – South Carolina Answers A Question," *YouTube*, August 24, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lj3iNxZ8Dww>; Mr Red, "Obilivion NPC Conversation," *YouTube*, August 31, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUzoJrfJQBw>; Nativetexian, "Gay Mount Everest," *YouTube*, May 17, 2006, <https://youtu.be/K1Y6PchDYfw>; and PandaWatch, "Pokemon Go To the Polls," *YouTube*, July 17, 2016, <https://youtu.be/4LtTpZpGE6c>. Having faced much ridicule and bullying online for her work, I have decided to not include a reference to Chan's work. I do not support how the *cringe* community have treated this individual and other creators like her. If interested in reading her work, it has been excessively archived and documented online.

¹⁴ Eli Enis, "Dorian Electra, Memelord and Gender Destroyer, Will Fuck The World," *MTV News*, October 21, 2020, <https://www.mtv.com/news/3170931/dorian-electra-my-agenda-interview/>.

Incel as a subculture is not an isolated phenomenon; it is part of a larger backlash against feminism propelled by the manosphere, consisting of groups of men all connected by their belief that feminine values have corrupted society and men need to retaliate against this misogynist culture to preserve their survival.¹⁵

This community is largely made up of white heterosexual men who harbour great hate towards women. Researchers have had difficulty conducting studies on Incels since they are frequently hostile and aggressive.¹⁶ However, as pointed out by Sugiura in their book, there is a growing community of academics now seeking to research the community.

In the memescape, references to incels can often be seen across the cringe genre. They are often the subject of ridicule, as seen within Figure 3.1. “Their whole thing is lamenting the crumbling of Western culture,” says Electra, “they’re saying that feminism is destroying ‘our’ way of life and that’s why [they] can’t get laid.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Lisa Sugiura, *The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women* (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing, 2021): 2.

¹⁶ Sugiura, *The Incel Rebellion*, 2; and Elisabeth O. Burgess, Denise Donnelly, Joy Dillard, and Regina Davis, “Surfing for Sex: Studying Involuntary Celibacy Using the Internet,” *Sexuality & Culture* 5, no. 3 (2001).

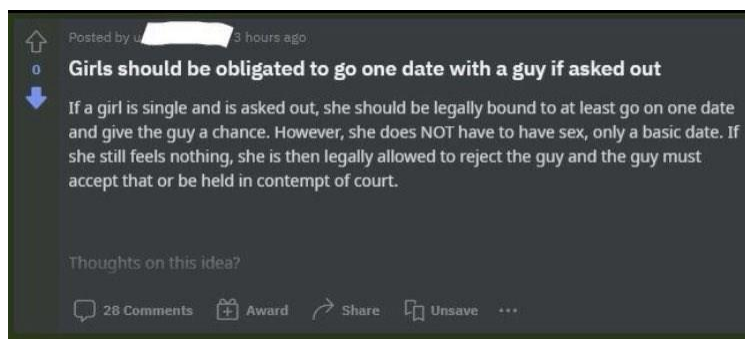
¹⁷ Kim, “On My Agenda, Dorian Electra Flips Incel and Edgelord Stereotypes On Their Head.”



This meme is making fun of an interaction between an incel and a woman on Tinder. After sending an inappropriate and sexual pick-up line, he angerly calls her a “lesbian” for not liking it. Frustrated, he then asks her “whata wrong with my penis.”



This meme reflects a fundamental belief found within this group, that being masculine and a “gentleman” is bad. Furthermore, it supports their beliefs that feminism has corrupted and destroyed society, resulting in men not being able to be men.



Example of an incel type post on Reddit.

Figure 3.1: Three Cringe Incel Memes ¹⁸

¹⁸ Ally_admin, “15+ Horrible Examples Of Incels Being Cringe,” *Cheezburger*, accessed March 23, 2022, <https://cheezburger.com/16139269/15-horrible-examples-of-incels-being-kringe>; and “25+ Best Memes About R Cringe | R Cringe Memes,” *Sizzle*, accessed March 23, 2022, <https://onsizzle.com/t/r-kringe?s=new>.

My Agenda was very much influenced by this subculture, Electra has cited them as a main source of inspiration.¹⁹ When asked how they deconstructed these themes of hypermasculinity and incel culture across their album, they replied:

I got really obsessed with Incel culture and reading about it [...] digging into that headspace and thinking about it politically and personally, sexually and gender wise [...] This group of people that feel somehow left out of society [find] a community of people online and there is this support network there, even though there is commonly a lot of negativity, misogyny, sometimes racism, and other really bad vibes.²⁰

Now recontextualizing these ideas within a queer and popular music landscape, Electra uses their beliefs, their sense of community, and their imagery in order to realize a variety of characters across their album.

Neckbeards

In their *Cyberbullies, Cyberactivists, Cyberpredators*, Lauren Rosewarne defines *neckbeard* as:

a pejorative term used to describe an overweight male Internet user who [...] is defined by his social peculiarities. More than just social awkwardness, however, such a character is often malicious online, engaged in trolling and other antisocial behavior. Obesity, unkemptness, bad skin, a lack of personal hygiene, junk food consumption, and misogyny are attributes commonly associated with this character.²¹

¹⁹ Kim, "On My Agenda, Dorian Electra Flips Incel and Edgelord Stereotypes On Their Head."

²⁰ Nukes De Almeida Nuku, "Q&A With Dorian Electra At the College of Wooster On April 23 2021," *YouTube*, April 24, 2021, <https://youtu.be/ln5KzO11YHY>.

²¹ Lauren Rosewarne, *Cyberbullies, Cyberactivists, Cyberpredators: Film, TV, and Internet Stereotypes* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2016): 43.

Unlike incels, *neckbeards* are not particularly common or *practising* across the internet. They are mostly referenced in memes, forums, comments, and popular media. However, they are usually depicted as wearing fedoras, long black trench coats, and wielding swords (see Figure 3.2). They often have interests towards subjects which are considered weird, nerdy, or cringy by the general public. Across the *My Agenda* record, Electra has pulled a lot of visual inspiration from this community (see figure 3.3).



*A popular meme, *Tips Fedora* and “M’Lady” has become a recurring and highly recognized image within the memescape.*



This meme depicts a neckbeard as a boss in Dark Souls, a popular video game franchise, wielding a fiery sword

Figure 3.2: Two memes about neckbeards²²

²² u/Luxra, “Lord of Necbeards: The Wielder of The Sword of M’Lady,” *r/Bossfight* (forum), *Reddit*, August 21, 2019, meme, https://www.reddit.com/r/Bossfight/comments/ctjooi/lord_of_neckbeards_the_wielder_of_the_sword_of/.

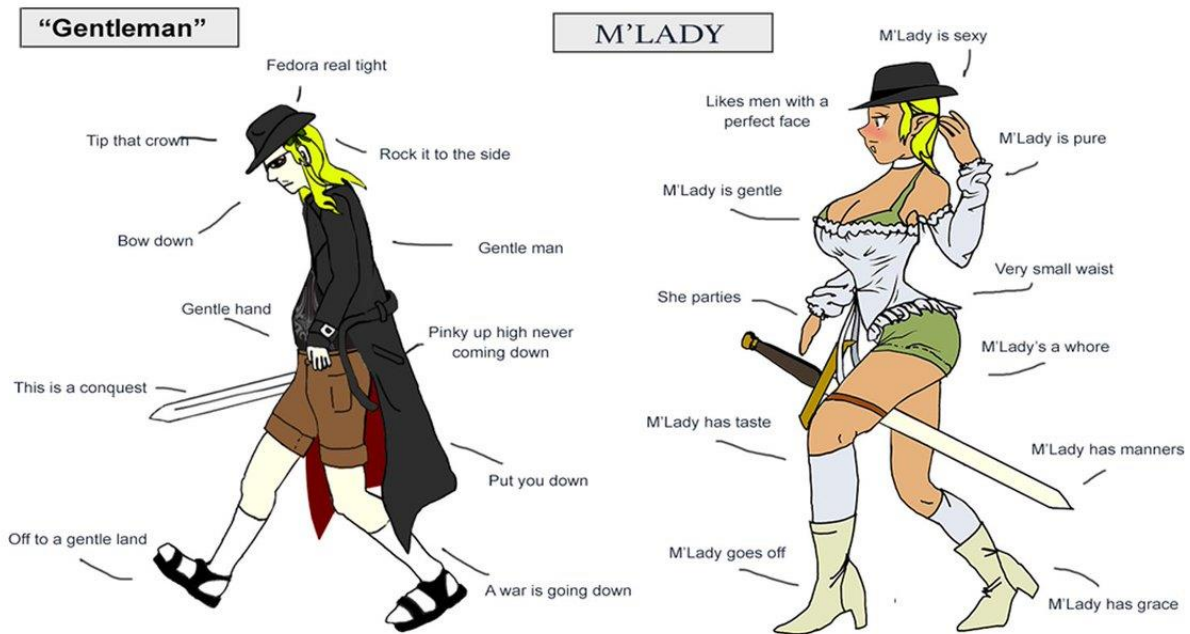


Figure 3.3: A meme of Dorian Electra and how they embody neckbeard aesthetics in their songs “Gentleman” and “M’Lady” through illustrations of their promotional outfits for ‘My Agenda’²³

Hyperpop

Dorian Electra is a part of a growing body of artists being associated with the genre label hyperpop. On July 22, 2020, Charli XCX, one of the key figures associated with the genre label, tweeted: “What is hyperpop?”²⁴ The answer to this question—that of attempting to recognize the ontological nature of the emerging subgenres, its reinterpretation of popular forms, and its aesthetic characteristics—is still highly debated. The term hyperpop was utilized by Glenn

²³ Amelia Zollner, “Dorian Electra Takes Our Hand Through Neckbeard Culture With ‘Gentleman’ and ‘M’lady,” *Ringtonemag*, August 13, 2020, <https://www.ringtonemag.com/2020/08/dorian-electra-takes-our-hand-through.html>.

²⁴ Charlie XCX (@charli_xcx), “What Is Hyperpop,” Twitter, July 22, 2020, 2:37 p.m., https://twitter.com/charli_xcx/status/1286007438416556032?lang=en.

MacDonald, a “Spotify data alchemist,” to label this microgenre around 2018.²⁵ However, MacDonald admits that they first encountered the word being used to describe the music produced by artists associated with PCMusic, such as SOPHIE and A. G. Cook, in 2014.²⁶ Eli Enis states that “the term ‘hyperpop’ first originated in the trenches of SoundCloud’s nightcore scene (a style of pitch-shifted pop remix that’s often paired with anime cover art),” and suggests it also has roots within the SoundCloud rap community, emo and lo-fi trap, and electronic genres such as trance, dubstep, and chiptune.²⁷ In 2019, Spotify created a playlist called *Hyperpop*, becoming a popular source for its distribution and consumption and has acquired over 306,610 likes.²⁸ The playlist frequently features the music of 100 geecs, SOPHIE, Slayyyter, A.G. Cook, gupi, Charli XCX, Caroline Polachek, Hannah Diamond, Dorian Electra, and Kim Petras, among many others.²⁹

To broadly generalize, hyperpop is a subcategory of popular music which seeks to exploit conventional popular forms and sonorities but reinterpret them through an innovative approach, which utilizes imaginative production techniques and a variety of sonic references across a plethora of musical genres. Through researching the topic, I have assembled the recurring terms commonly used to describe the genre across my reading, as described in Table 3.1.³⁰

²⁵ Ben Dandridge-Lemco, “How Hyperpop, A Small Spotify Playlist, Grew Into a Big Deal,” *The New York Times*, November 10, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/10/arts/music/hyperpop-spotify.html>.

²⁶ See Dandridge-Lemco, “How Hyperpop.”

²⁷ Eli Enis, “This Is Hyperpop: A Genre Tag For Genre-less Music,” *Vice*, December 27, 2020, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/bvx85v/this-is-hyperpop-a-genre-tag-for-genre-less-music>.

²⁸ This number was retrieved directly from the Spotify playlist on March 22, 2022.

²⁹ Please visit “Hyperpop,” *Spotify*, accessed February 15, 2022, playlist, streamed MP3, <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/37i9dQZF1DX7HOk71GPfSw> [It is important to note that the playlist is always updating and changing]; and Shaad D’Souza, “Charli XCX’s ‘Futurist’ Pop Is Just Our Present Dystopia,” *Papermag*, May 15, 2020, <https://www.papermag.com/charli-xcx-how-im-feeling-now-future-pop-2646006658.html?rebelltitem=1#rebelltitem1>.

³⁰ See Enis, “This Is Hyperpop”; and Dandridge-Lemco, “How Hyperpop.”

Formal and stylistic conventions	Vocal production	Production values	Instrumentation	Lyrical and aesthetic references
<p>Popular song forms from the 1990s and 2000s mainstream pop</p> <p>Polystylistic: Pulls from multiple styles and genres.</p> <p>Stark contrasts of sonic material, usually in the tracks middle section.</p> <p>Frequently Hook Driven (Chorus-Centric).</p>	<p>Heavily processed vocals, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pitched vocals • Altered vocals • Distorted vocals • Extreme autotune 	<p>Strong and heavy production.</p> <p>Heavy distortion.</p> <p>Forward thinking production.</p> <p>Maximalist Processing and Effects</p>	<p>Juxtaposition of sonic textures, pulling from various genres.</p> <p>Distorted synths and leads.</p> <p>Samples (sometimes <i>cartoony</i> or exaggerated and referential)</p> <p>Effects placed on instruments and synths</p>	<p>Wide ranging references:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humorous and Ironic, self-aware • Commercialism • Strong ties with the 2SLGTBQ+ <p>Popular song idioms from the 90s and 2000s.</p> <p>Various subgenres and mainstream musical genres.</p>

Table 3.1: Collection of genre conventions commonly associated with hyperpop

This Table only begins to capture the variety of tools and techniques utilized by those associated with hyperpop. The most important feature which groups those involved with this style is its leniency towards genre fusions and its polystylistic tendencies. In their article, Enis states that “each of those [hyperpop] artists are already making unclassifiable combinations of genres [...] hyperpop’s identity is less rooted in musical genetics than it is a shared ethos of transcending genre altogether, while still operating within the context of pop.”³¹ This ability to expand and explore a variety of musical sources, without being limited by the confines of certain genres, allows artists to navigate more contrasting, sometimes highly experimental, sonic landscapes. Laura Les, one of the genre’s most important figures (from 100 geecs), has said, “hyperpop has evolved to be

³¹ Enis, “This Is Hyperpop.”

a flexible enough term [...] It seems like it's become more encompassing of many things."³² With this in mind, it is critical that we understand hyperpop as being outside of the traditional notions of genre theory, adopting a much more fluid form of classification: its unifying quality—that which links these artists together—is more of a methodology towards creation than a specific sonic aesthetic.

As can be gleaned from this discussion, it is difficult to theorize and identify hyperpop's major unifying sonic aesthetic. This attempt to describe the style was further complicated by my attempts to place it within the confines of traditional popular music genre categorization. Many writings on the topic are unsatisfactory, broadly summarizing and compartmentalizing the genre in order to present it within a universalist's lens: *this is how hyperpop sounds*. By solely focusing on what they were *hearing*, the sonic material presented by the headlining acts, they neglected to consider *how* the artists were approaching and creating their work. The root of this style of expression is in the method that these artists take in order to produce their work, not a specific form or organization of the sonic material. Yes, many are trying to emulate the sounds of certain hyperpop artists, this is particularly true of SOPHIE. I am not attempting to disregard the sonic trends found across the genre, such as its bubblegum aesthetic, bright distorted lead synths, booming bass lines, and pitched vocals. However, these characteristics do not accurately represent the whole community and its wide catalogue of music.

Taking into consideration the larger goals of this paper to dismantle binaural structures, I suggest that we understand hyperpop as a *rhizomatic entity* that freely creates channels across space and time. Like the organism, hyperpop does not possess a trunk from which all its ideas and states emerge. Certain methodologies and idioms might bind its shoots but hyperpop fluidly exists

³² Ben Dandridge-Lemco, "How Hyperpop, a Small Spotify Playlist, Grew Into a Big Deal."

across an interconnected network of continually altering references, sonic vocabularies, and methods of realization. Its anchor is being dragged across the seafloor of popular music and cultural trends, mutating and growing with every reinstatement. Hyperpop—like gender—is not fixed: *the current has always carried the genre*.

When speaking about hyperpop, it is important to acknowledge its strong ties with the 2SLGTBQ+ community. The artist Fraxiom has even said that “queerness and hyperpop are inseparable.”³³ Many of its genre-defying acts are trans and nonbinary individuals (the most famous being Laura Les, Dorian Electra, Kim Petras, and SOPHIE). At the epicentre of its creation and development was SOPHIE, solidifying the most recognizable and imitated sonic characteristics of this growing hyperpop trend. Throughout her short career, SOPHIE produced some of the most influential and intriguing pop records and tracks post-2015, exploring highly elaborate fusions of popular music idioms and experimental methods of music production. Even after her tragic death in 2021, she has remained one of the movement’s most beloved figures. Many aspects associated with hyperpop are similar to those found across the queer community, such as its flexibility (fluidity of identity), acceptance of queer voices and perspectives (representation), and its interest with mainstream popular music.³⁴ There is also a growing body of literature which is exploring how queer vocalists across the hyperpop sphere are pitching their vocals in order to align themselves with their desired gender expression.³⁵

³³ Enis, “This Is Hyperpop.”

³⁴ The history of the relationship that queers, especially gay men, have with mainstream popular music is extremely complex and stretches outside the scope of this research paper. For more information about the subject, see Richard Smith, *Seduced and Abandoned: Essays on Gay Men and Popular Music* (London: Cassell, 1995); Jodie Taylor, “Claiming Queer Territory in the Study of Subcultures and Popular Music: Queer Subcultures and Popular Music,” *Sociology Compass* 7, no. 3 (March 2013); and Taylor Jodie, *Playing It Queer: Popular Music, Identity and Queer World-Making* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2012).

³⁵ See Will Pritchard, “Hyperpop Or Overhyped? The Rise of 2020’s Most Maximal Sound,” *Independent*, December 17, 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/hyperpop-genre-2020-charli-cxc-rina-sawayama-b1775025.html>; Joe Lynch, “Hyperpop Pops Off,” *Billboard* 133, no. 8 (June 2021): 67; Enis,

Electra has adopted a rich tapestry of references through their discography, continually presented through a *pop model*, making them an important figure of hyperpop. In their most recent album *My Agenda*, Electra explored more non-mainstream references. In an interview with *Them*, they said that:

I just wanted to delve into more experimental genres, vibes, more hardcore, crazy, dark energy because that's just like what I was feeling [...] Also [I was] taking these hyper-masculine genres like dubstep and black metal... [I'm] taking back some of that hardcore and edgy stuff.³⁶

This plural approach to music production gives each of their tracks a unique blend of sonic characteristics, sometimes contradicting the established palettes being initially explored. This aligns itself with the genre's interest with genre fusion and expansion. Unlike more mainstream acts such as Charli XCX, Electra pursues sounds that were not originally associated with the movement. Electra has said that they would “figure out what the most unexpected combo or the most dramatic, jarring combo” would be and tried to “reclaim sounds that have been considered uncool” such as dubstep and black metal.³⁷ Across incel and white supremacy communities online, these musical genres have—unfortunately—been co-opted by these movements, often feeding and supporting their ideas of misogyny and racism.³⁸ Along with a growing community of artists, Electra attempts

“This Is Hyperpop,” and Patrick Williams, “Beyond the Binary: Digital Voices and Transhumanist Expression in Sophie’s *Oil of Every Pearl’s Un-Insides*,” (master’s dissertation, California State University, 2021), <https://www.proquest.com/openview/0f8bc52e0ab038d75ffef71f52a8b4d4/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>.

³⁶ Michelle Hyun Kim, “On My Agenda, Dorian Electra Flips Incel and Edgelord Stereotypes On Their Head,” *Them*, October 16, 2020, <https://www.them.us/story/dorian-electra-new-album-interview>.

³⁷ Carolyn Droke, “Dorian Electra Is the Queen of Pumpkin Spice Lattes In Their Satirical ‘F The World’ Video,” *Uproxx*, November 16, 2020, <https://uproxx.com/pop/dorian-electra-f-the-world-video/>.

³⁸ For more information on the topic, see Colin Moynihan, “Heavy Metal Confronts Its Nazi Problem,” *The New Yorker*, February 19, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/heavy-metal-confronts-its-nazi-problem>; Kim Kelly, “Riding the New Wave of Anti-Fascist Black Metal,” *Vice*, August 23, 2018, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/ywkj8y/riding-the-new-wave-of-anti-fascist-black-metal>; Bonnie Stiernberg, “Why

to “reclaim” these sounds (disassociating them from these individuals and communities) in order to explore new modes of popular music creation through their unique queer lens.

Preparing The Gay Frog Bomb: Alex Jones, Conspiracies, and Memes

Before entering the gay frog ridden metropolis of Dorian Electra’s “My Agenda,” it is important to familiarize ourselves with post-2010 meme culture and its complicated and ironic relationship with the alt-right. The centre of many outlandish claims and statements, mostly based on conspiracy theories, Alex Jones—radio and internet host, business mogul, and conspiracy theorist—is no stranger to media attention. His conspiracy and media/life-brand company Infowars, at the height of its popularity between 2017 and 2018, reached nearly two million people weekly through its syndicated and streamed radio show with around 1.3 billion views on his channel.³⁹ The “new service” was funded in the 1990s and aired across radio and public-access television programs, slowly moving to prominent streaming platforms such as YouTube and Spotify in the 2000s. Following the rise of conspiracy theorists and alt-right culture online, Jones steadily grew his empire by providing his listeners with the “truth.” On the Infowars website, the main hub for everything Jones’s (his news channel, his banned collection of videos, NewsWars [articles], Infowars Store, and Infowars Life), they claim that:

Since the beginning of time there have been constant attempts to enslave and subdue the spirit of humanity. From Barbarian hordes streaming down the mountain to the Stasi secret

Are So Many Pop-Punk Songs from 20 Years Ago Beloved By Incels,” *InsideHook*, February 25, 2022, <https://www.insidehook.com/article/music/remembering-incel-anthems-early-aughts-pop-punk>; Tristan Kennedy, “Black Metal Not Black-Metal: White Privilege In Online Heavy Metal Spaces,” *Media International Australia* 169, no. 1 (2018); and Karl Spracklen, “Nazi Punks Folk Off: Leisure, Nationalism, Cultural Identity and the Consumption of Metal and Folk Music,” *Leisure Studies* 32, no. 4 (August 2013): 415-428.

³⁹ H. Van den Bulk and A. Byzen, “Of Lizards and Ideological Entrepreneurs: Alex Jones and Infowars In the Relationship Between Populist Nationalism and the Post-Global Media Ecology,” *The International Communication Gazette* 82, no. 1 (February 2020): 43.

police torturing those who dreamed to be free. In this age of rapidly accelerating technology the threat to our liberties is a very real and present danger. Alex Jones is a unique voice that sifts through the information and exposes the underlying intentions.⁴⁰

This sentiment of exposing the “underlying intentions” and defeating or fighting against secret societies and the sinister forces which control our governments and leadership is shared across this community. Much of what they believe is not founded or supported by any evidence, mostly existing as speculation and conspiracy theories. These narratives can range from mild to the extremely absurd and outlandish. During the height of the 2022 vaccine mandate and passport requirements in Canada, a meme was circulating of a woman defending her stance against the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines—claiming that the media were solely spreading lies and trying to propagate fear. Frustrated with people asking for her sources, she exclaims: “Ils sont dans mon cœur.”⁴¹ It would seem that the *heart* is where many conspiracy theorists obtain their information and sources.

Jones has certainly spoken from the *heart*, making outrageous and unsupported claims across his career. For instance, he circulated rumours about then 2016 presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and alleged that she and other democratic elites were running a cannibalistic Satanist child sex trafficking and sacrifice ring in the basement of a local D.C. pizza shop.⁴² This

⁴⁰ Infowars, “About Alex Jones,” *Infowars*, accessed March 18, 2022, <https://www.infowars.com/about/>.

⁴¹ Translation: They come from my heart. Douteuxorg, “Mes sources sont dans mon cœur,” *TikTok*, February 16, 2022, <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMLa1sQ72/>.

⁴² The original video has been erased from the internet but, through the Wayback Machine, I was able to see an ad for an article referencing this infamous WikiLeaks discovery (See **Appendix 2**). If interested on the topic, see Gregor Aisch, Jon Huang and Cecilia Kang, “Dissecting the #PizzaGate Conspiracy Theories,” *The New York Times*, December 10, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/search?query=pizzagate>; C. Eugene Emery Jr., “Evidence Ridiculously Thin For Sensational Claim of Huge Underground Clinton Sex Network,” *Politifact*, November 4, 2016, <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2016/nov/04/conservative-daily-post/evidence-ridiculously-thin-sensational-claim-huge-/>; and Tucker Higgins, “Alex Jones’ 5 Most Disturbing and Ridiculous Conspiracy Theories,” *CNBC*, September 14, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/09/14/alex-jones-5-most-disturbing-ridiculous-conspiracy-theories.html>.

incited someone—a believer of Jones—to fire their military-style firearm inside the pizzeria. This event is now known as the *Pizzagate* scandal.⁴³ He has also spread misinformation surrounding vaccines (claiming that they cause autism), accused the government of controlling the weather, and said that the elementary Sandy Hook School shootings were staged and used actors in order to promote gun control.⁴⁴ The list of examples is bountiful, the Infowars iceberg is filled with them. After the Sandy Hook incident, many called for his removal from major platforms. Under public pressure, Apple, Facebook, YouTube, and Spotify banned Jones from their platforms in 2018, subsequently losing a large amount of viewership.⁴⁵ In 2022, Infowars does not hold the same power it once did, yet it still runs a successful website and life brand (vitamins and supplements) with an average of ten million views a month across their webpage. The congregation and cluster of such voices continue to be prominently shared and spread across the internet, forming cult like obsessions with right-leaning personalities like Jones, Ben Shapiro, Joe Rogan, Jordan Peterson, and QAnon.

My first exposure to the absurd and banal world of Infowars and Alex Jones was through memes, especially those referring to his *gay frog* outburst. During a web episode, Jones started shouting, “I don’t like ‘em putting chemicals in the water that turn the freaking frogs gay!” and aggressively hitting his script on his news desk.⁴⁶ This video went viral and acquired 592,000

⁴³ By simply researching the term, you will quickly find a plethora of people referring to this event as *Pizzagate*. For a detailed overview of the subject, see Aisch et al., “Dissecting the #PizzaGate Conspiracy Theories.”

⁴⁴ For more examples, please see Bruce Y. Lee, “Alex Jones’ Top 10 Health Claims and Why They Are Wrong,” *Forbes*, August 16, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucelee/2018/08/16/alex-jones-top-10-health-claims-and-why-they-are-wrong/?sh=2187b1513e7f>.

⁴⁵ Alexis C. Madrigal, “What Does It Mean To Ban Alex Jones,” *The Atlantic*, August 7, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/08/what-does-it-mean-to-ban-alex-jones/566960/>.

⁴⁶ See first few seconds of Todd Dracula, “Gay Frogs: Todd Dracula’s Alex Jones Vines,” *YouTube*, May 18, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GInZ4oQhhzE&t=13s>.

views and 1,200 comments on Twitter within six months of it airing.⁴⁷ He was referring to a biological study that showed that small traces of a common herbicide—Atrazine—affected reproduction organs of male frogs and cause “demasculinized” behaviours and phenomena such as deformed larynxes, lower levels of testosterone, homosexuality, and hermaphroditism.⁴⁸ Biological and scientific research have often supported traditional heteronormative ideologies in their analysis of environments and other species.⁴⁹ Meg Perret suggests that “Atrazine discourse is imbued with cultural anxieties about the extinction of normative masculinity” and follows right narratives of the *non-consensual male sterilization* and “white genocide.”⁵⁰ These narratives have been frequently explored by Jones and the alt-right.

For instance, in 2021, his website published an article claiming that wearing face masks reduce males’ penis sizes in fetuses, causing them “reproductive harm” and infertility (also suggesting that it decreased masculine behaviour in young boys) given that they expose wearers to phthalates, an ingredient found within surgical masks.⁵¹ The article pulled much of its information from Shanna Swan’s 2020 book called *Count Down, How Our Modern World Is Threatening Sperm Counts, Altering Male and Female Reproductive Development, and Imperiling the Future of the Human Race*. This intriguing and alarmist title does present supported and

⁴⁷ Meg Perret, “‘Chemical Castration’: White Genocide and Male Extinction In Rhetoric of Endocrine Disruption.” *Network In Canadian History and Environment*, June 9, 2020. <https://niche-canada.org/2020/06/09/chemical-castration-white-genocide-and-male-extinction-in-rhetoric-of-endocrine-disruption/#Notes>.

⁴⁸ See Tyrone B. Hayes, Atif Collins, Melissa Lee, Magdalena Mendoza, Nigel Noriega, A. Ali Stuart, and Aaron Vonk, “Hermaphroditic, Demasculinized Frogs After Exposure To the Herbicide Atrazine At Low Ecologically Relevant Doses,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 99, no. 8 (April 2002).

⁴⁹ See Noël Sturgeon, *Environmentalism In Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of the Natural* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009).

⁵⁰ Perret, “Chemical Castration.”

⁵¹ National File, “Study: Chemical That Causes Penises To Shrink Found In Face Masks,” *Infowars*, March 26, 2021, <https://www.infowars.com/posts/study-chemical-that-causes-penises-to-shrink-found-in-face-masks/>.

recognized claims about infertility. However, the research presented by Swan does not suggest—at any time—that face masks were reducing penis sizes or demasculinizing young men. In the past, Swan has implied that boys exposed to phthalates are “less likely to play in a male-typical manner.”⁵² This perspective completely disregards sociocultural changes of gender expression and public trends towards parenting, rather favouring alarmist narratives of the *male extinction*. Interdisciplinary investigation, which also takes into consideration cultural factors, would be needed to thoroughly study the effects of phthalates on children and their behaviour. By selectively picking information, many being sources of anxiety or interest within the community, Infowars is using scientific research to support their own agenda and spread misinformation about the safety of face masks.

This outburst has been catalogued by KnowYourMeme—the unofficial internet database for viral media—as a popular meme, calling it the “gay bomb rant.”⁵³ This explosive fit has also been turned into a wide array of meme templates and musical adaptations.⁵⁴ For many, Jones is one of the recurring characters that grace our meme pages, providing us with humorous material that we can share with our friends. For others, he is an important symbol and voice of the alt-right movement—a so-called truth speaker—and still possesses a loyal following.

My personal favourite of these memes was originally posted on Reddit’s popular forum r/dankmemes by user u/iL1k3R3DdEt on February 20, 2019. A screenshot of celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay (pulled from the highly successful *Spicy Wings* YouTube series by First We Feast) is squirting liquids into Patrick Star’s mouth, SpongeBob’s faithful sidekick (featured in the top

⁵² Kathleen Doheny, “Phthalates Affect Way Young Boys Play,” *WebMD*, November 16, 2009, <https://www.webmd.com/children/news/20091116/phthalates-affect-way-young-boys-play>.

⁵³ KnowYourMeme. “Alex Jones’ Gay Frog Rant (Meme).” *KnowYourMeme*, accessed January 25, 2022. <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/alex-jones-gay-frogs-rant>.

⁵⁴ See Figure 4.4 and Placeboing, “Gay Frogs (Alex Jones Remix),” *YouTube*, June 22, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9JRLCBb7qK8>.

left-hand corner of Figure 3.4). The symbolism is quite clear, the creator is poking fun at Jones's outlandish statement. Such *gay frog* memes are quite common across the internet, including those included in Figure 3.4. However, they seem to have reached their peak between 2016 and 2017, with the "Sweet Jesus, Pooh!" post and the "Gay Frogs" YouTube Video. A commentor on u/iL1k3R3DdEt's post recognized the subject as being *old* news in 2019, calling it a "dead meme."⁵⁵ By reverse searching the image of Ramsey/Patrick, I was able to trace the origin of this particular meme template to sometime in January 2019, long after the *gay frog boom*. Interestingly, it was a reinterpretation of an already circulating Patrick meme (the bottom half of the above meme in Figure 3.4) which appeared in 2016.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ u/iL1k3R3DdEt, "They're Turning the Freaking Frogs Gay." *r/dankmemes* (forum), *Reddit*, February 20, 2019, meme, https://www.reddit.com/r/dankmemes/comments/asx4ov/theyre_turning_the_freaking_frogs_gay/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=web2x&context=3.

⁵⁶ Based on TinEye (a reverse searching engine), the earliest Patrick drinking water meme was first used by BuzzFeed on January 18, 2016. However, many of the GIF and pictures featured in the article have been lost. Furthermore, it's worth noting that the meme might have originated from another source but not archived. See Chelsey Pippin, "Here's What You Should Actually Eat When You're Hungover," *BuzzFeed*, January 18, 2016, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/chelseypippin/avogodo>.



Figure 3.4: A collection of Alex Jones' gay frog memes

It's interesting that Dorian Electra would choose to explore Jones' conspiracy theory as the main musical, lyrical, and visual reference in their track and music video for "My Agenda." They are directly embodying the fears of this alt-right community. When discussing their inspiration, Electra has said: "There's this rampant kind of misogyny and self-loathing, the overlap with the alt-right, and people getting radicalized through YouTube and 4chan [...]. It was just something

that dominated my thoughts.”⁵⁷ Probably the most important reference they tackle throughout this track is that of the *gay agenda*. To broadly summarize the topic, the *gay agenda* is a narrative—which fringes or exists often times within conspiracy—supported by anti-queer, religious fundamentalists, and members of the right/alt-right which believe that government elites or those in power (sometimes portrayed as secret societies) are pushing their amoral and sinister *gay* beliefs, in the form of indoctrination and propaganda, in order to corrode traditional family structures, marital values, heteronormative binary gender identities, dismantle religious institutions and communities, silence free speech, and encourage pedophilic, deviant, and predatory behaviours towards children.⁵⁸ These claims often possess religious undertones and are centred in stark conservatism beliefs. Supporters of these narratives can be found across social platforms and occupy a small sub-section of 4chan and YouTube (see examples of this in Appendix 3).⁵⁹

Having gone over these important elements, we now understand Electra and their interest with online communities (cringe, incel, and neckbeard), their involvement with hyperpop, and I introduced Alex Jones, his *gay frogs*, and the *gay agenda*. Now possessing the necessary information, we can begin examining how all these factors (including the *gay frogs*) come together to create the persona’s unique gender states in the music video for “My Agenda.”

⁵⁷ Kim, “On My Agenda.”

⁵⁸ See Maria Laura Bettinsoli, Jaime L. Napier and Andrea Carnaghi, “The ‘Gay Agenda:’ How the Myth of Gay Affluence Impedes the Progress Towards Equality,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* (February 2021); Libby Alder, “The Gay Agenda,” *Michigan Journal of Gender & Law* 16, no. 1 (2009); Gerald Walton, *The Gay Agenda: Claiming Space, Identity, and Justice* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014); and Larry Tomczak, “Are You Aware of the Avalanched of Gay Programming Assaulting Your Home?” *The Christian Post*, January 8, 2015, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/are-you-aware-of-the-avalanche-of-gay-programming-assaulting-your-home.html>.

⁵⁹ See **Appendix 3** for examples of YouTube videos with support the gay agenda theory.

Chapter 4: “We’re Out Here Turning Frogs Homosexual”: A Multimodal Analysis

Exploding with queer ironic energy, the analysis of “My Agenda” requires us to adopt a variety of techniques in order to approach its contents. Now that we understand Alex Jones and his gay frogs, meme culture and the *gay agenda*, we can initiate our investigation into Electra’s song and music video for “My Agenda.” In the following multimodal analysis, I will identify how the persona manifests ideas of gender across the music, the lyrics, and the music video. By examining the track’s form, genre, instrumentation, vocal gestures, and production, I will identify its relationship with Electra’s character for “My Agenda.” Following this, I will identify Burns’ four distinctions of narrative voice and highlight intertextual references. I will then comb through the main intertextual references found within the music video. For this specific study, I have pinpointed four major intertextual themes: 1) water imagery and branding, 2) Jones’ *gay frogs* and Pepe the Frog, 3) anime and eromanga influences, and 4) furies. Lastly, I will answer the four space and time questions developed in Chapter 2. With this accumulated information, I will be able to present how the persona embodies references in order to synthesize its own gender expression throughout the work. Before identifying the key areas of interest and opening the *gay frog* gates, I will take this opportunity to describe the music video and familiarize ourselves with its imagery.

Summary Of “My Agenda”

The music video for “My Agenda” was released on November 4, 2021, and features several well-known popular artists, including the Village People and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, from Pussy Riot.¹ The music video begins with the sinister sounds of a pencil vigorously scribbling on a piece

¹ Dorian Electra, “Dorian Electra – My Agenda (Official Video),” *YouTube*, November 4, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lq9PJsS3-EY>.

of paper over a soft windy siren as the camera slowly pans from an army of frogs towards a menacing water tower, embellished with a cartoonish water logo. Within this cityscape and beside this menacing tower, we see a billboard that reads, “Drink the Water.” This shot establishes the location of the following events and presents the viewer with the video’s core water theme: the distribution of Alex Jones’s *gay frog water*. Throughout the subsequent scenes and sequences, there are recurring anime stills which punctuate or emphasize certain shots found across the video (there are eight in total).

Zooming into the water logo, the video cuts to Electra dressed as an evil elvan anime businessman sporting cartoonish shoes, plastic tubes tied across their arms, collar and company tie, long nails with spiral motifs, a dripping spiral hair piece, water drop earrings, and slim oval sunglasses [0:09]. They are presented as embodying this evil mastermind spreading their *gay agenda* and poisoning the city’s water supply. In this office space [0:17-0:23], we see them pushing paws over a world map while saying, “On every corner waiting just to infiltrate.” The video then cuts to two large water tanks, one filled with what appears to be normal water and the other with a “rainbow pride” substance. Fusing these liquids together into a chemical “gay cocktail,” Electra takes a big gulp from the corporate plastic water bottle emblazoned with the water logo from the opening scene [0:24-0:30].

Afterwards, Electra drops into a military van with several militant furies, all holding plastic water guns filled with *gay water* [0:45-1:08]. Now possessing protruding canine fangs, cartoonish anthropomorphic makeup, sport military gear, and rainbow accessories (such as the company’s logo, fur tail, and long stiletto nails), Electra drives the van around the city, which is covered in pride flags and the company’s logo. The video then cuts to a billboard which features

five frogs (referencing Village People) which reads, “Out To Get You It Is My Agenda” [1:09]. The camera then pans to a commercial airliner.

Inside the commercial airline, which is filled with military furry personal, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova—dressed as a flight attendant—serves bottled *gay* water to the passengers along with two Pussy Riot-esque flight attendants [1:11-1:37]. Suddenly, over a wild dubstep beat and Nadezhda screaming “Gay Propaganda (We make love from Chechnya to Uganda),” the camera shakes violently while the plane, emanating rainbow smoke, is abruptly plunging towards the city. This sequence is emphasized by video distortion, punctuated motion blurs, close-ups of Nadezhda’s face, and quick successions of cuts. As the plane dips downward, the camera pans to a shot of a billboard which reads “Drink The Water” [1:37].

Back in the sinister corporate office, the next sequence captures Electra, surrounded by a SWAT team, each wearing the signature hats associated with the members of Village People, and they begin to dance and swing empty water containers [1:39-2:08]. Black zip-ties protrude from Electra’s bra, thigh-high boots, and crotch, while they wear what appears to be vinyl and plastic military gear and hat, embellished with the rainbow water logo. Behind them, two soldiers stand with the evil company’s pride logo flag.

Electra, dressed like a pilot in the final sequence, is then dropped from a commercial airline while saddling a bomb, which is covered with *gay propaganda* and phrases like “Pride through strength” and “Love wins” [2:08-2:22]. This sequence is most likely a reference to the iconic bomb riding scene from Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove* (1964). Upon touching the ground in the middle of the city, the bomb explodes into a giant rainbow mushroom cloud. The fallout disrupts and transmutes the DNA of nearby frogs, resulting in the creation of a monstrous *gay* colossal

Pepe the Frog who begins flossing² violently and destroying the city [2:26-2:46]. Its rainbow pupils stare indifferently as it devastates the environment. The video then cuts into a live action rendition of the scene, where we see an individual sporting a Pepe mask with sloppy green body paint over a miniature of the city; it experiences rendering issues, and finishes with Electra being hit by water bottles in a state of ecstasy.

Queering *e-boy* and Dubstep through Vocal Embodiment: Musical Analysis of “My Agenda”

The persona and its characters’ *gay agenda* can be heard across the music, exploring ideas of gender expression through the musical methods it employs. The music throughout the verses for “My Agenda” are very textural (windy sirens and soft distorted bass line) as Electra conspires and announces their agenda, possessing an atmospheric beat with interjecting melodic statements. A sudden rhythmic figure leads the listener towards the chorus which is accompanied by cartoonish samples and a distorted driving lead guitar. Much like other hyperpop tracks, the hook (chorus) is catchy and recurs several times. For Tolokonnikova’s verse (the third verse), the music builds up rhythmically, while she rapidly speaks her lyrics, and explodes into a chaotic frenzy of screaming vocals and a fiery dubstep beat. Dissolving into the chorus, now sung by Village People (chorus 3), the track moves towards its thundering conclusion: the music becomes very atmospheric, we hear church like background vocals, melodic fragments, and faint orchestral hits. When Electra sings “We’re out here turning frogs homosexual,” they continually repeat the word “homosexual”

² A popular dance attributed to Backpack Kid, heavily associated with the popular and highly successful video game *Fortnite*. It worth noting that this dance faces frequent ridicule across the cringe community. See PunchNshoot, “Fortnite Floss Dance Emote (1 Hour),” *YouTube*, September 18, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzhZVhZLtZA>; and Inside Edition, “Meet the Dancing ‘Backpack Kid’ Who Stole Katy Perry’s Spotlight On ‘SNL,’” *YouTube*, May 22, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6X6b19ukfTA>.

as their vocals become increasingly mangled. This is accompanied by distorted screams, harsh kicks, pitched vocals, and various samples.

As previously stated, Electra pulled from music genres that are frequently associated with incel and neckbeard culture. For this specific track, they seemed to have drawn many musical elements from dubstep and from the *e-boy* community. Both of these genres have been heavily affiliated with toxic masculinity and *bro culture*, often heard across the incel and neckbeard community.³ However, Electra re-appropriates these themes through their unique queer lens in order to inform their performance and realization of the track. Before examining their vocal performance, I will take this opportunity to briefly familiarize ourselves with *scene* culture and dubstep.

Vocal Analysis

Scene Kids and Dubstep

Emerging as a reaction to other emo subgenres, which pulled from post-punk and hardcore, *Scene* sought to incorporate these elements into a more techno and electronic style of production. As explained in their article, Ethan Stewart says:

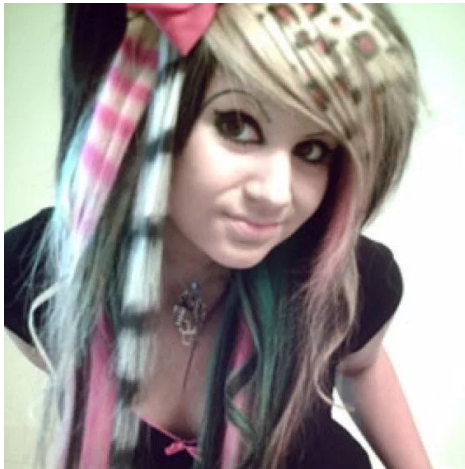
Although *scene kids* were associated with musical styles like metalcore, crunkcore, and neon pop-punk, there was never a ‘scene’ genre the way there was for other subcultures like punk, emo, or goth. Because of this, scene subculture’s origins aren’t as clean-cut as

³ Christabel Stirling, “‘Beyond the Dance Floor’? Gendered Publics and Creative Practices In Electronic Dance Music,” *Contemporary Music Review* 35, no. 1 (2016); Stephen Marche, “On ‘Bro,’” *Esquire* 162, no. 2 (September 2014): 107; Kyle MacNeil, “Brostep Is Still the Subgenre That Should Have Never Existed,” *Vice*, September 15, 2016, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/mgw57y/brostep-spin-5-years-op-ed>; and Emily Ryalls, “Emo Angst, Masochism, and Masculinity In Crisis,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (April 2013).

other parts of alternative music history, going back to a time when emo was still associated with hardcore.⁴

Much like hyperpop, scene artists were producing music that bridged many different genres and subgenres. Throughout the height of MySpace during the 2000s, they developed a unique visual aesthetic which pulled from Harajuku fashion, rave culture, and neon pop-punk aesthetics which peaked around the 2010s. This community also birthed the *e-boy* and *e-girl* persona which a number of *scene kids* sought to adopt (see Figure 4.1), which has since mutated into new *e-personalities* on platforms such as Tumblr, Instagram, and TikTok. This fashion trend and persona were heavily associated with other emo styles of the era, to the dismay of many subcategories of emos. Essentially, the *e-boy* and *e-girl* were the synthesis of the community's ideals: they were emotional, rebellious, and *stylish* (they dressed in peak *scene* clothing which they would then show off on their social media). A complete overview of the community's aesthetic preferences goes far beyond the scope of this analysis, especially if exploring this community's unique relationship with persona building.

⁴Ethan Stewart, "From Hardcore To Harajuku: The Origins Of Scene Subculture," *Pop Matters*, May 25, 2021, <https://www.popmatters.com/scene-subculture-origins-hardcore-harajuku>.



Example of peak e-girl fashion



Example of peak e-boy fashion

Figure 4.1: Peak e-girl and e-boy fashion

Like many other subgenres or communities associated with emo culture, the *scene kids* would often support hegemonic beliefs on gender (especially masculinity).¹ As Emily Ryalls explains: “Emos may feel exiled in the suburbs and, due to their non-normative gender performances, within their high schools, but the subculture provides a community in which they can inhabit a particular form of hegemonic masculinity.”² A specific type of toxic masculinity emerged within the emo community, which eventually seeped into *scene* and influenced their music.

For the purpose of this discussion, I will focus my attention on *scene* vocal production. These musicians favoured distorted and highly processed vocals, usually sung in a whiny, intense, or angsty manner, and would frequently include screams and guttural sounds, inspired by other genres such as screamo, crunk, and hardcore.³ More mainstream examples such as Metro Station

¹ It’s worth acknowledging that there existed a hegemonic femininity in the community as well.

² Ryalls, “Emo Angst, Masochism, and Masculinity In Crisis,” 85.

³ For musical examples of this, please listen to: See xXxpurexeXtasyxXx, “Brokencyde – Get Crunk – New Song,” *YouTube*, June 15, 2008,

would regularly use this stylized breathy quasi-sung/spoken word which would often sit in the vocalist lower or speaking register.⁴ Although there were women and prominently queer individuals who belong to the *scene*, most of its leading voices were cis white men.

Dubstep emerged in the early 2000s, pulling from many other styles, and has become a popular subcategory of EDM. To broadly summarize, as explained by Noel Lobley, “Dubstep is a distinctive bass-heavy form of electronic music that grew from a small underground scene in South London, United Kingdom, into an international commercial phenomenon.”⁵ The biggest mainstream artists influenced by dubstep have been Skrillex, James Blake, and Diplo. The genre favours producer-based creation, bass heavy, thick distorted synths and leads, 2-Step-*style* drum rhythms, industrial sirens and air horns, distorted and pitched vocal samples, screaming or roaring vocals, and a unique warped wobly kick timbre and rhythmic character.⁶ Much like other genres previously mentioned, Dubstep is notoriously a *boy’s club*: Electra has even referred to it as “brostep” and recognized its strong ties with frat culture.⁷

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa6qpgLvH30&list=PL6NkHHzQEOSwmf7LxHMtB7YvfakPTKDgGr>;
Breaksilencelabel, “BrokeNCYDE – FreaxXX,” *YouTube*, May 18, 2009,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AV8N44HzfBQ>; PurpleShock, “Dot Dot Curve :) – RocketshipToTheMoon,”
YouTube, May 15, 2009,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8eqd1tpgV0&list=PL6NkHHzQEOSwmf7LxHMtB7YvfakPTKDgGr&index=2>
; and Sumerian Records, “Asking Alexandria – A Prophecy (Official Music Video),” *YouTube*, December 22, 2010,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQblSS2kl4Q>.

⁴ A good example of this is Metro Station, “Metro-Station – Shake It (Official Video),” *YouTube*, October 25, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_wjFahULCK8.

⁵ Noel Lobley, “Dubstep,” in *The SAGE International Encyclopedia of Music and Culture*, ed. Janet Sturman, *SAGE Knowledge Online*, accessed March 25, 2022, <https://sk-sagepub-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/reference/the-sage-international-encyclopedia-of-music-and-culture/i7975.xml?term=Dubstep>.

⁶ Lobley, “Dubstep”; Jon Caramanica, “Washes of Sound, Wobbles of Bass,” *The New York Times*, September 21, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/22/arts/music/22hobbs.html>; and Rick Snoman, “Dubstep,” in *Dance Music Manual* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2019): 378-386.

⁷ Droke, “Dorian Electra Is The Queen of Pumpkin Spice Lattes in Their Satirical ‘F The World’ Video.”

How Electra e-boy's Their Voice

Now possessing a general grasp of the references, I will identify how gender states manifest themselves through Electra's vocal performance and production. Pulling from Auslander, we can understand that this entity—the person being embodied through this vocal performance—is a character developed by Electra's persona. This character is actively referencing *e-boy* and traditionally masculine singing tropes found across the aforementioned genres. For instance, the vocals sit at the lower end of Electra's register and they sing in an indifferent, cool, and quasi-spoken fashion. The vocals are also distorted and processed in such a way that they possess a steely and *tuned/distorted* quality, similar to the examples referenced above. These characteristics come together to form a unique gender state for this character. With Electra's fluid gender identity, the persona's character can explore these methods of vocal production without being constrained by male markers which have controlled the processing and styling of traditional masculine voices. Furthermore, through the unique opportunities granted by hyperpop, Electra was able to entangle these genres masculine vocal processing styles into their own queer realization of a unique vocal identity. By crosspollinating these idioms into the construction of their character, Electra successfully releases these *masculine* qualities from their fixed and hegemonic background.

It is also worth mentioning that within Tolokonnikova's verse, she is channeling and exploring traditionally masculine dominated sonic spaces. The *bro* nature of dubstep has now been transformed into a queer and feminist form of protest. Her persona, influenced by her own background in protest punk music, can now reposition itself and adopt or expand on these previous methods of expression. During her verse, Tolokonnikova screams: "Gay Propaganda (We make love from Chechnya to Uganda)." Such vocal timbres are not unusual within these styles, nor are rebellious or protest themes. However, the queer and feminine embodiment of Tolokonnikova's vocal performance is. Furthermore, these sonorities are not common within popular hyperpop acts.

Tolokonnikova is not only infiltrating and dismantling dubstep and the *scene*⁸ community's *bro circle-jerk*, they are introducing new vocals sounds into mainstream hyperpop.

From a musical perspective, the persona and its characters are mainly synthesizing ideas of gender through their vocal performance and musical references. By including warped industrial beats, roaring sirens, aggressive screaming, and *e-boy* vocals, all associated with male dominated spaces and genres (some with toxic tendencies); the artists are embracing a new nonbinary and queer embodiment of the *masc*.⁹ The constraints that have been placed on traditional masculinity has been dismantled and now the persona can manifest these elements freely and fluidly however it sees fit, across an array of possible gender configurations.

⁸ And whatever other emo/post punk genre they might/or are referencing.

⁹ I use the word *masc* to describe decentralized and queer embodiment of masculinity.

Spreading Gay Propaganda Just For Fun: Lyrical Analysis of “My Agenda”¹⁰

As previously explained, there is this belief within certain communities that a *gay agenda* is attempting to take over our governments and schools. These *individuals* are imposing their views—which are often described as being negative, unnatural, or deviant—on helpless citizens who are simply trying to uphold their personal, religious, and cultural values. Often times, these *gay agents* are portrayed as members of elite social circles, secret societies, and even predators. The idea that a group of *gay agents* are conspiring to destroy our society is often met with ridicule. However, across several online communities (such as Infowars), unwavering supporters firmly believe in this conspiracy (see Appendix 3). When conceptualizing their album *My Agenda*, Electra began examining various conspiracies associated with this so-called *gay agenda*. In an interview, they said that “the idea that gays are organizing to tear down the traditional family and all that is so funny to me.”¹¹ Now seeking to embody these values, that of an *evil gay agent*, they developed a character and narrative that could explore these themes in their track “My Agenda.”

In order to guide my examination of how the persona manifests ideas of gender throughout the lyrics, I began by answering Lori Burns’ four critical distinctions of narrative voice, as outlined in Table 4.1. The track is written in the first person and the narrator, a character developed by Electra’s persona, is describing their intentions of taking over the world through their *sinister gay agenda*. Rather than disregarding these outlandish claims, Electra decided to fully embody this narrative. In “My Agenda,” they are the leader of this secret agency and they are actively taunting and affirming the beliefs held by the narratee—the poor victim of this queer mastermind—that they are pushing their *gay agenda*, they are poisoning the water, and that the narratee cannot

¹⁰ You can find the lyric sheet in Appendix 4.

¹¹ Carolyn Droke, “Dorian Electra’s ‘My Agenda’ With Village People and Pussy Riot Is A Dizzying Celebration of Identity,” *Upproxx*, October 16, 2020, <https://upproxx.com/pop/dorian-electra-my-agenda-village-people-pussy-riot/>.

escape. As described by Electra, the narrator is this *gay dictator*—a queer supervillain of sorts—who is overseeing their strategies to take over the world.¹² However, it is important to remember that this *queer tyrant* was informed by male outcast tropes, those commonly found online (incels, neckbeards, and edgelords).¹³ Now repositioning these perspectives within their angsty queer masc character, they become this gender fluid being who is confessing their *gay* plan to the narratee.

Stages	Description
Narrative Agency	The track is written in the first person. The narrator seeks to explain their agenda and intentions by reflecting on actions they are/or have been taking. The narrator is teasing, threatening, and intimidating the narratee.
Narrative Voice	<p>The narrator, a character developed by Electra’s persona, is sharing their personal experience with enacting their <i>gay agenda</i>.</p> <p>The first-person narrator asserts that their plan is taking fruition, that they have infiltrated positions of power, and are actively “out to get” the narratee.</p> <p>The narrator appears to be sinister, cunning, and is taking pleasure in intimidating the narratee. Ultimately, poisoning their water supplies.</p> <p>During Tolokonnikova’s verse, the narrator becomes the voice of this <i>gay agenda</i> community (communal voice). They announce that their <i>evil</i> plan worked and now all the homophobes have turned queer. Now in positions of power, they are spreading “Gay Propaganda.” This communal voice is powerful, intimidating, and empowering.</p> <p>Village People could be interpreted as existing somewhere in between the personal and communal voice since they, symbolically, are the voices of the queer community but they are speaking from the perspective of Electra’s character.</p>
Modes of Contact Between Narrator and Narratee	<p>Address: Private, the narrator is intimidating the narratee.</p> <p>Communication: Extremely direct, they are threatening the narratee.</p> <p>Expression: The narrator is scaring the narratee into a state of hopelessness.</p>
Listener Engagement Links Artist to Reader/Listener	Proximity: The narrator is a character, an evil mastermind type, who is linked to Electra’s persona. This connection injects the narrative with a sense of irony, since they are confirming many outlandish anti-queer narratives held by certain communities. The listener can position

¹² Droke, “Dorian Electra’s ‘My Agenda.’”

¹³ Enis, “Dorian Electra, Memelord and Gender Destroyer, Will Fuck The World.”

themselves alongside Electra’s character or with the scared *helpless* narratee, they are free to embody whichever state they wish.

Sincerity: The listener will be aware of the irony and satirical nature of the narrator’s story, they understand that this character is making fun of certain beliefs.

Temporality: The narrator anchors their narrative into the *now*, actively highlighting how they are currently “taking over.” There is a sense of urgency, that these events *are* happening.

Table 4.1: Identifying Lori Burns’s Four Critical Distinctions of Narrative Voice for “My Agenda”

Informed by the vocal performance, the narrative voice is portrayed as this *e-boy* villain who taunts the narratee. This pulls extensively from masculine incel, neckbeard, and (especially) conspiracists tropes. However, the aggression that is usually shown in these communities have been transformed into this cool mocking and angsty affirmation. This character states that:

It’s closing in now
You can’t escape
On every corner waiting just to infiltrate [...]
You can always spot us by the way we walk
As we’re plotting to take over and destroy you all [...]
My agenda
Will infect ya
Out to getcha it is my [agenda]

The hostile energy associated with these groups have been re-interpreted into this angsty queer *e-boy* who is ironically *trolling* these believers.

To the listener, this *edgy* character makes the narrative increasingly ironic, almost comical. The listener is aware of Electra’s interest with meme and internet culture, understanding that they are making fun of these conspiracy theories. At the end of the track, Electra even *confirms* Alex Jones’ alarmist claim when they sing: “We’re out here turning frogs homosexual.” Pushing this point, almost as a means to tease the narratee and laugh with the listener, they continually repeat

the word “homosexual.” With each statement, the banality of these beliefs become increasingly obvious.

The narrator also presents their group or campaign as being very organized and mobilized. For instance, they sing: “Have you seen my pamphlets/Have you read my blog/Have you seen my army marching/Down city hall?” Pulling from actual political and cultural movements (along with other religious, conspiracy, and protest organizations), Electra is displaying conventional means of spreading a group’s credo. Much like other collectives, the *gay agents* are handing out pamphlets, engaging with blog posts, and are congregating at their municipal governments. They are actively spreading their agenda in the form of *gay propaganda* in order to “mind control” the narratee into submission. As seen in the Gay Conspiracy Appendix (Appendix 3), many feel as though this *gay agenda* is being forced upon them. Unfortunately for the narratee, Electra’s troops have already gained control of countries such as Russia (known for their anti-queer stances). Speaking on behalf of this queer agency (*communal voice*), Tolokonnikova confirms that Moscow has become the gay capital of Europe and all of the pre-existing homophobes have been converted into queers [“Москва — столица Гейропы/Стали квирами все гомофобы”]. They further state that a rainbow mob is currently occupying and spreading their propaganda across the Red Square, their members are having a lot of safe sex, and that their supporters (queers) are making love from Chechnya to Uganda—two of the most homophobic countries where being queer is punishable by strict fines, persecution, imprisonment, and even execution.

All of these elements come together to synthesize this character and fictional organization’s power and intent. They are attempting to take over the world, even the most anti-queer countries cannot escape their indoctrination. The faces of movements and that of dictators have predominantly been men. However, this angsty *e-boy* tyrant is queer. They possess a “freaky

gender,” they have incredible authority over a variety of institutions, and they seem disinterested in embodying dichotomous notions of gender expression: the conservative’s greatest fear (the death of masculinity). The conservative narratee is hopeless since Electra is trying to “mind control” them “just for fun.” It seems that this whole organization’s final goal is to simply take pleasure in tormenting the narratee, spreading their *gay* beliefs, and turning the frogs gay.

The narrative voice found in “My Agenda” is unique, even within the hyperpop landscape. Popular media is often referenced in hyperpop but embodying a sinister gay dictator who is informed by conspiracy theories and fringe internet groups is not common. Additionally, new breeds of *e-boy* (along with *e-girl* and *e-thems*) are continually emerging (as seen across multiple genres such as experimental hip-hop, nightcore, hyperpop, emorap, and cloudrap) and their narrative styles and techniques vary significantly. Although I have drawn ties between the *scene e-boy* and Electra’s character, they do not have a lot in common other than their angsty characteristics and some sonic similarities. Furthermore, it is important to understand that Electra’s character has also been influenced by contemporary *e-boy* idioms (such as the *sad boy* trope). Still, the narrative voice embodied by Electra’s *e-boy* character is inherently different. Rather than lamenting their existence, talking about their struggles, or referencing consumer products, Electra’s *e-boy* is the leader of a large-scale organization and is not presented as being emotional. On the contrary, they appear to be indifferent and take pleasure in spreading their *sinister agenda*. Comparing Electra to other mainstream *e-boy* acts such as Machine Gun Kelly and Lil Huddy, their narrative stands out. Personally, when reading the lyrics, I feel as though it could have been pulled from a manga or comic book. The character is almost a caricature of the *e-boy* who has been placed in a position of great power. This juxtaposition creates a greater sense of irony since an angsty and *sad boy* dictator is understood by the listener as being satirical.

Another element worth mentioning is that Village People’s music has already penetrated many anti-queer circles. During his presidency, Donald Trump would frequently use their music at his rallies.¹⁴ Their song “Macho Man” was even played to introduce Rudy Giuliani at the rally which then sparked the 2021 insurrection of the US capitol.¹⁵ As Electra said, Village People “have infiltrated straight mainstream society with some of the gayest music in history. You’ve got people at football games, bar mitzvahs, hetero-ass weddings doing this ‘YMCA’.”¹⁶ By simply having these voices associated with their persona’s character, Electra suggests that the queers—these *gay agents*—have already sneaked into the contemporary zeitgeist. The threats found in “My Agenda” are confirmed: they are already in positions of great power, having even infiltrated Trump’s America. This character’s unique self-described “freaky gender” challenges the very authorities which are dismissing and discouraging queer rights. The satirical and ironic nature of the track is suddenly more serious and enthralling. In a way, it seems that the narratee and other anti-queer supporters actually cannot escape—as the song suggests—the grasp of queer creators. These queer artists already exist within these conservative spaces, even when not belonging to this *fictional gay agenda*.

The persona’s character embodied by Electra does present interesting perspectives on how we can construct a gender state based on traditional markers of gender expression yet while remaining fluid and queer—unbound by the heteronormative gender’s *binaural-dimension*—throughout a track’s narrative. Through this manifestation of queer identity, they communicate a

¹⁴ Gil Kaufman, “Village People Share Last Word On ‘Bully’ Trump Playing ‘YMCA’ At Farewell Event,” *Billboard*, January 21, 2021, <https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/village-people-slam-trump-ymca-farewell-event-9514527/>.

¹⁵ Julian Borger, “Insurrection Day: When White Supremacist Terror Came To the US Capitol,” *The Guardian*, January 9, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/09/us-capitol-insurrection-white-supremacist-terror>.

¹⁶ Droke, “Dorian Electra’s ‘My Agenda.’”

complex criticism of unfounded and sometimes absurd cultural beliefs held by members of our communities. The scintillating methods of their ironic treatment of narrative, which includes an arsenal of cultural references, allows the artist to amalgamate a rhizomatic entity that freely pulls from a variety of sources, unfazed by their genre's (or external/referential genres) narrative gender markers. The narrator is not bound to fixed states of gender identity, even when they are directly embodying homogenized patterns of gendered expression. Furthermore, this character is not concerned with being perceived as ironic or sincere: they have escaped this *binaural-dimension* and are trying to provide a unique account of our existing environments and their personal interests.

Flexing The Dank Fedora: Four Intertextual References Found In “My Agenda”

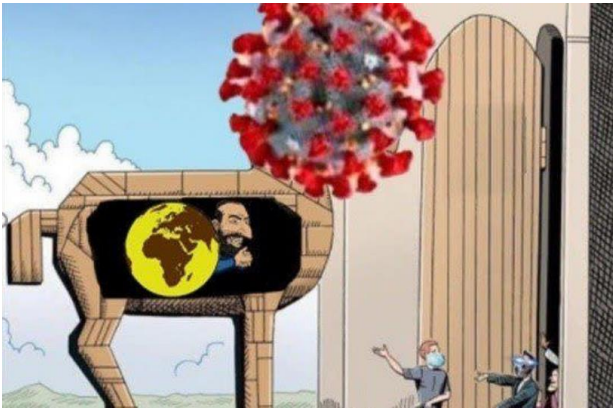
Overflowing with references, the preliminary analysis of “My Agenda” presents many challenges when attempting to identify its intertextual references across its lyrics. This is further complicated with the visual material that accompanies the music video since most of it is referential. For this specific discussion, I have decided to focus on four intertextual references that directly inform the persona's gender states. Dividing this analysis into four sections, I will highlight these intertextual references, briefly describe their history, and identify how these features effect the persona and its characters as seen in the music video.

Attack On Water: Water Tampering, Effeminate Villains, and Capitalism

There is this long and interesting history around minorities in the west—those disliked by European rulers and citizens—and poisoning water. In the Middle Ages, there was this belief that Jews were poisoning Christian wells which resulted in the spread of plagues and diseases.¹⁷ This

¹⁷ See Manfred Gerstenfeld, “Anti-Jewish Coronavirus Conspiracy Theories in Historical Context,” *Mideast Security and Policy Studies* 176 (July 2020): 41-46; and “Winter Semester 2020/21: From Medieval Well-Poisoning

theory possesses deep systematic antisemitic roots which have been continually recycled across the centuries, recently taking the form of white-supremacist posts and memes that claim that COVID-19 vaccines, restrictions, and its origins are linked to Judaism (see Figure 4.2).¹⁸



Antisemitic meme of a trojan horse with “Globalist Jews” and the corona virus.



A trending meme from 2021 which was posted on Reddit’s popular forum r/HistoryMemes. This meme is making fun of how Medieval European Christians would blame Jews for the plague (and any minor inconvenience they would face).

Figure 4.2: An Antisemitic meme and a popular meme from r/HistoryMemes¹⁹

Myths To COVID-19: Antisemitic Conspiracy Fantasies During Epidemics,” *Arthur Langerman Foundation*, accessed March 15, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Well_poisoning.

¹⁸ Gerstenfeld, “Anti-Jewish Coronavirus Conspiracy Theories in Historical Context,” 41-46; and Gideon Weiss, “COVID-19 and the Far Right’s Diminishing Memory of the Holocaust,” *Think Global Health*, February 28, 2022.

¹⁹ Pulled from Benjamin Weinthal, “Anti-Jewish COVID Theories Top List of Worst Antisemitism Outbreaks,” *The Jerusalem Post*, December 30, 2020, <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/anti-jewish-covid-theories-top-list-of-worst-antisemitism-outbreaks-653599>; and u/johnlen1n, “Poisoning the Wells Is One Thing, But Hand Washing?! Those Jews Have Gone Too Far This Time!,” *r/HistoryMemes* (forum), *Reddit*, August 11, 2021, https://www.reddit.com/r/HistoryMemes/comments/p2e1t8/poisoning_the_wells_is_one_thing_but_hand_washing/.

This water tampering trope has even found its way into popular literature, especially in comic books. For instance, throughout Batman's history and extended universe, many supervillains have attempted to poison Gotham's water supply. The most famous being the Joker and Scarecrow.²⁰ One cannot overstate the relationship between online neckbeard/incels and the Joker, something that Electra themselves has channelled in their music video "Edgelord."²¹ However, it is worth acknowledging the general media's fixation with applying Joker narratives, that of an aggressive anti-social white man who is fascinated with violence, unto these communities without fully grasping internet meme culture, its unique sense of humour, and *shitposting* (posting things in order to deliberately provoke or shock others). During the height of the *Joker* incel controversy in 2019, an abundance of Joker templates and memes were circulating across these communities and popular forums (especially the Joaquin Phoenix dancing picture). As explained by *Vice News*, many of the reports citing incel Joker memes did not understand them as being *shitposts*.²² Rather, they believed them to be representative of incel culture—to the dismay of its members—which they would then use to fuel their "incel rallying" narrative for the movie and spread panic among the general public, fearing that *Joker* would cause another mass shooting similar to the 2012 *The Dark Night Rises* Aurora incident.²³

²⁰ A popular example of Joker poisoning the water supply can be found in Ed Brubaker and Doug Mahnke, *Batman: The Man Who Laughs* (Burbank, California: DC Comic, 2005).

²¹ See Vice News, "Incel Shitposts Are Making People Nervous About the Joker Premiere," *YouTube*, October 3, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_rTauLzUJQ; Alex Abad-Santos, "The Fight Over Joker and the New Movie's 'Dangerous' Message, Explained," *Vox*, September 25, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/9/18/20860890/joker-movie-controversy-incel-sjw>; EJ Dickson, "Why Everyone Is Freaking Out About 'Joker,'" September 27, 2019, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/joker-criticism-fallout-891081/>; and Dorian Electra, "Dorian Electra – Edgelord (Feat. Rebecca Black) [Official Video]," *YouTube*, September 25, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsjqnYbsDO4>.

²² Vice News, "Incel Shitposts."

²³ See Stephainie Zacharek, "Joker Wants To Be A Movie About the Emptiness of Our Culture. Instead, It's A Prime Example of It," *Time*, August 31, 2019, <https://time.com/5666055/venice-joker-review-joaquin-phoenix-not-funny/>; David Ehrlich, "'Joker' Review: For Better Or Worse, Superhero Movies Will Never Be The Same," *IndieWire*, August 31, 2019, <https://www.indiewire.com/2019/08/joker-review-joaquin-phoenix-1202170236/>; Lia

Across internet meme history, the Joker character has been regularly used across a variety of meme templates and posts. Many mainstream meme formats have emerged utilizing images of the Joker, including the *Everyone Loses Their Minds* and *Dancing Joker* (2019-) [as seen in Figure 4.3].²⁴

When you say an opinion in social media



A very popular format described as the “Everyone Loses Their Minds.” This specific meme follows more recent formatting (with the white square at the top), while earlier iterations of this meme would of just had bold text on top of the image. This meme is now considered to be a dated meme.

Uncooked lobsters when the Titanic sank



Viral dancing joker meme from 2019. In this meme, we see a clip of Joaquin Phoenix from *Joker* (2019) dancing with a picture of Tobey Maguire from *Spider-Man 3* (2007). This meme is a re-imagining of earlier Maguire dancing memes.

Figure 4.3: Examples of Joker Memes²⁵

Throughout the music video, there is an abundance of water imagery (spiral water logos, water bottles, water guns, and water filtration systems). As previously explained, some conspiracy

Eustachewich, “US Army Warns About Possible Mass Shooting By Incels At ‘Joker’ Screening,” *New York Post*, September 25, 2019, <https://nypost.com/2019/09/25/us-army-warns-about-possible-mass-shootings-by-incels-at-joker-screenings/>; Darren Mooney, “One Year Later, The Joker Outrage Proved The Joke Is On Us,” *The Escapist*, October 19, 2020, <https://www.escapistmagazine.com/one-year-later-the-joker-outrage-proved-the-joke-is-on-us/>; and Dani Di Placido, “The Strange Story Of ‘Joker,’ A Modern Moral Panic,” *Forbes*, October 7, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danidiplacido/2019/10/07/the-strange-story-of-joker-a-modern-moral-panic/?sh=718044a67342>.

²⁴ For more information about the *Everyone Loses Their Minds* meme, see Roarshack, “Joker,” *KnowYourMeme*, updated March 10, 2021, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/joker>.

²⁵ Memes pulled from u/PollitoRubio22, “Everyone Loses Their Minds,” *r/memes* (forums), *Reddit*, November 5, 2020, https://www.reddit.com/r/memes/comments/jos6i4/everyone_loses_their_minds/; and u/sky2772tf2, “gRoVin’,” *r/dankmemes* (forum), *Reddit*, September 4, 2019, <https://www.reddit.com/r/dankmemes/comments/czhwsd/grovin/>.

theorists maintain that an organization is enforcing their *gay agenda* unto the general public. These views are pushed to the extreme with some believing that water is being actively contaminated with substances which is resulting in higher rates of homosexuality and effeminate behaviour. In a fit of passion and rage, Alex Jones even proclaimed that *they* are “putting chemicals in the water” that are turning “the freaking frogs gay.” The music video directly pulls from these claims, positioning many of its key visual themes around water.

The persona’s characters—now seeking to embody this narrative—can be seen injecting *gay chemicals* into commercial water bottles which they are then spreading around the city. Electra’s characters are presented as flamboyant, wearing exaggerated garments and accessories, and they are not concerned with traditional gender markers. For instance, the artist sports many outfits hinting at both traditional feminine and masculine indicators found across the popular media and music landscape. However, the artist’s queer identity blurs the viewers dichotomous understanding of expected gender norms and presents the characters as being extremely fluid. This fluidity complements the water imagery, that of a flexible substance, that can bend and flow across a variety of spaces.

The main character embodied throughout the track, that of the *e-boy* mastermind, is informed by this supervillain/minority water tampering trope. Furthermore, it follows conspiracy theorists’ assertions that a secret organization is seeking to eradicate traditional masculine behaviours (as seen with Alex Jones’ *gay frog* claim). Across popular media, villains are often portrayed as flamboyant and effeminate men.²⁶ The Joker himself sometimes verges along this

²⁶ If interested in the topic, please read Koeun Kim, “Queer-Coded Villains (And Why You Should Care),” in *Dialogues@RU* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University, 2017): 156-165; Hugh Ryan, “Why So Many Disney Villains Sound ‘Gay,’” *Vice*, accessed March 24, 2022, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/5g9e4d/the-number-of-gay-animated-villains-will-surprise-you-456>; and “Homophobe Much? What’s With All The Effeminate, Fey (And Often Blonde) Villains In Hollywood?,” *IndieWire*, November 8, 2012,

imaginary *gay* line. Fans have even suggested that his relationship with Harley Quinn was used to erase prior queer coding and imagery associated with him in earlier comics.²⁷ Additionally, the Joker has regularly been recognized as possessing a “nonconforming” gender identity.²⁸ Electra borrows this trope and pushes it to the extreme with this character: this is no longer a depiction of a homosexual man. Their character is a gender-fluid queer evil genius whose sole interest is to “destroy” the narratee and make everyone *gay*. The character is a contemporary satirical queer reimagining of the *fey* supervillain.

At this time, I think it is important to mention that Infowars, a supporter of this water tampering narrative, sells water filtration systems on their website.²⁹ It would seem that by spreading such beliefs, that of the potential hazards associated with tap water, the company would then be able to sell more products. On their website, they state that: “It’s been proven that the water in the tap is full of dangerous and life threatening toxins. Ranging from Chlorine to Fluoride, the threat against your health is huge. That’s why it’s important that all Infowarriors clean up their water with Water Filtration!”³⁰ Although, at the bottom of their webpage, they say that “the products sold on this site are not intended for use in the cure, treatment, prevention, or mitigation of any disease.”³¹ Infowarriors (and those who believe in *gay tampering*) could still be persuaded

<https://www.indiewire.com/2012/11/homophobe-much-whats-with-all-the-effeminate-fey-and-often-blonde-villains-in-hollywood-104325/>.

²⁷ Hannah Collins, “Is The Joker Queer, Straight – Or Something Else Entirely?,” *CBR*, November 6, 2018, <https://www.cbr.com/joker-queer-straight/>; and Lewis Corner, “Fans Launch Petition For DC Comics To Make The Joker Gay Again,” *Gay Times*, accessed March 28, 2022, <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/fans-launch-petition-dc-comics-make-joker-gay/>.

²⁸ Chris Richardson, *Batman and The Joker: Contested Sexuality in Popular Culture* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2021): 7.

²⁹ See “Water Filtration,” *Infowars Store*, accessed March 25, 2022, <https://www.infowarsstore.com/health-and-wellness/water-filtration>.

³⁰ Infowars Store, “Water And Air Filtration,” *Infowars Store*, accessed on March 30, 2022, <https://www.infowarsstore.com/preparedness/water-filtration>.

³¹ Infowars Store, “Water And Air Filtration.”

to buy these products in order to filter out these *gay chemicals*. I do not think it is a coincidence that Electra adopts a *businessman* character, a queer evil CEO, as the leader of this global gay agenda. Through their marketing schemes and propaganda, they are selling and dispersing their infected goods across the world. Much like Jones, they are both using their consumer products in order to support their own commercial and political agendas.

The persona's gender states are directly influenced by effeminate and queer portrayals of villains and Jones's conspiracy and business strategies, which Electra translates into this queer *e-boy* mastermind character, which is then shaped by the persona's gender fluidity, informed by the artist's own gender expression. The free and rhizomatic approach adopted by Electra allows them to explore, pull, and embody many states of identity throughout their persona building, creating a complex web of referential and plural states of being.

My Colossal Pepe: Pepe The Frog, Coming Out As A Gay Frog, and Personae

It would seem that I have tapped into a greater cultural pattern of using frogs across satirical and meme templates, something that is definitely worth pursuing in further studies. However, I want to take the following frog examples to showcase how these intertextual elements inform characters found in "My Agenda." Before tackling this topic, I will briefly go over Pepe the Frog and Jones's *gay frog* sketch.



Figure 4.4: *Pepe The Frog*

Pepe The Frog

Although the main title of this section might invoke a specific scene in the music video (among other things), it is important to remember that Pepe the Frog is probably the biggest and most recognizable face of post-2010 viral meme culture (see Figure 4.4). This anthropomorphic frog was created by Matt Furie and was first posted on MySpace in 2005, eventually

debuting as a character in the artist's single-page comic *Boy's Club #1* (2006).³² In their article, Sean T. Collins described the comic as:

An answer to the 'What if the Muppets vaped?' question that you were too afraid to ask, the series simultaneously satirized and celebrated the lifestyle of 20-something bros, capturing their lives full of junk food, catchphrases, and bodily fluids with horrifying and hilarious accuracy.³³

With the rise of 4chan, the meme began to spread like wildfire across the memescape starting in 2008. Since then, the face of Pepe has been used across all major social platforms and has been utilized by virtually every online community. Unfortunately for the frog, Pepe eventually became associated with incel and white-supremacist groups and was even branded by the U.S. Anti-

³² Will Haskell, "This Guy Created The Frog Meme That's All Over The Internet – Here's Why He's 'Kinda Pissed Off,'" *Business Insider Australia*, July 31, 2015, <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/this-guy-created-one-of-the-most-famous-memes-heres-why-hes-kinda-pissed-off-2015-7?r=US&IR=T>.

³³ Sean T. Collins, "The Creator Of Pepe The Frog Talks About Making Comics In the Post-Meme World," *Vice*, July 28, 2015, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/avy3aj/feels-good-man-728>.

Defamation League as a hate symbol in 2016.³⁴ In 2022, the general public has a slightly better understanding of viral memes and their recurring characters. Recognizing that Pepe was appropriated by these hateful communities, most can now separate the character from the hate groups. However, Pepe's reputation has unfortunately been forever tainted.

Alex Jones Comes Out of The Closet As A Gay Frog

Mainstream meme communities were not the only groups to have been fascinated with frogs. In 2015, shortly after shining light onto the *gay frog* situation, Alex Jones released a video call *Alex Jones Comes Out Of the Closet As A Gay Frog*.³⁵ In this video, he embodies this frog persona called Geronimo Frost (described as a “Totally Cool Gay Frog”). He wears a full-body frog suit, green face paint, a pink tutu, and is drinking a bottle of atrazine water. While hopping around his studio, he can be heard saying, “Look at me, I’m a gay frog, I’m so cool [...] I’ll never have children and I’m sterilized.” He also adopts a very stereotypical *fey* demeanour (such as flicking his wrists) and lisped speech. Towards the middle of the segment, Mr. Atrazine—a personification of the chemical—eventually shows up and reminds the viewers that it is “a gift” that they are being sterilized, that frogs are dying, and that they are pawns for this greater conspiracy. After speaking with Mr. Atrazine, Frost (Jones) says: “Atrazine is what helps us become sterile and die. It’s Liberal and don’t be racist against atrazine.” The video finishes with an ad for their water filtration system.

³⁴ Laura Glitsos and James Hall, “The Pepe the Frog Meme: An Examination of Social, Political, and Cultural Implications Through the Tradition of the Darwinian Absurd,” *Journal For Cultural Research* 23, no. 4 (2019): 381.

³⁵ The original video has been stripped from YouTube, however you can watch a re-upload here: PK eRacing, “Alex Jones the Carefree Gay Frog. Funny,” *YouTube*, November 4, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNytoFtnwLw>.

The video almost appears to be a sketch from an *Adult Swim* show, possessing amateur styled costumes, an absurd plot, and cringy acting. Jones uses it to promote his conspiracy theories and further spread misinformation about “liberals,” queers, and science. Preying on his following’s fears, he offers them a solution to the problem: his own water filtration system! By using gay frogs as a vehicle of concern, he has mobilized a whole community of people into buying his products and supporting his anti-queer stances and his male sterilization narrative.

Frogs and Personae

The main intertextual reference explored in “My Agenda” is that of Jones’s *gay frogs*. Many characters found in the music video are directly informed and constructed by or around this reference. One could suggest that Village People are the most successful queer group to have ever existed within mainstream popular music and that they are an important symbol for 2SLGTBQ+ music history. Their music, as explained by Jack King, is “tongue-in-cheek gay innuendo, sparsely covered by a flimsy veneer of hyper-macho drag [...] they’re not ‘just’ gay. They’re almost overtly (homo)sexual.”³⁶ By including such iconic personae and characters, individuals which have already infiltrated some of the most conservative and anti-queer spaces, Electra’s team sought to capture the group’s essence and power in their music video.

Village People are not physically present in “My Agenda,” they are simply shown as CGI frogs throughout the video. There are several close-ups of them and they can be seen on billboards, along with Electra’s *sinister* slogans such as “Out To Get You It Is My Agenda.” Pulling from popular music’s iconography, these frogs possess beards, moustaches, and are wearing Village

³⁶ Jack King, “The Gay Ecstasy Of The Village People,” *BBC*, August 4, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20200804-the-gay-ecstasy-of-the-village-people>.

People's signature hats. Each frog embodies personae and characters associated with the group. For instance, we see the construction worker, the GI, the cop, the cowboy, and the leather men. It is important to understand that many of these positions, the roles/jobs that these characters possess, are heavily rooted within gay US culture of the 1970s onward. By transforming these gay and popular music symbols into frogs, Electra is not just referencing Jones's statements or Pepe/memes: they are establishing a channel that directly connects them to queer history. They have imbued these traditional markers of homosexuality, queer expression, and popular music into contemporary visual codes. The viewer can now engage with these topics and subjects since they are presented within references that are familiar to them. The implied gender states of the Village People's gay frogs—their personae's characters—do hint towards a hypermasculine energy, given their association with the group. However, the blended intertextual approach adopted by Electra does suggest that other factors, such as memes, are being used to inform their characters' gender states. Rather than just applying traditional gender markers on these CGI frogs, I recommend that we embrace their fundamental ambiguity and allow them to exist within their unique unspecified masc state.

A catastrophic rainbow cloud swallows the downtown core, infecting and altering the DNA of nearby frogs, which creates this colossal gay Pepe the Frog. As explored earlier, Electra is interested with viral memes, especially those associated with neckbeard and incel culture. Given that they are referencing Jones's *gay frogs*, it makes sense that they would also utilize Pepe since both entities are often cited intertextual references found across the memescape. Not to mention, Pepe is a frog. In the original comics, Pepe is depicted as a stoner-esque bro: they are inherently masculine. Seeking to ironically feed the demasculinization conspiracy theory spread by people like Jones, Electra took a masculine/straight anthropomorphic being—beloved within various

communities (including white-supremacist and incel groups)—and re-interpreted it as a *gay queer monster*. The artist disrupts these established gender states through their own queer and satirical nature. Now existing as an extension of Electra’s persona, this Pepe character has become this queer and gender-fluid monster whose sole goal is to destroy the city. Pepe is the manifestation of the community’s fear towards *gay chemicals*, queers, and this fictional agenda. They are the synthesis of all the intertextual references explored throughout “My Agenda.”

Before moving on, I must confess that speculating about frogs and their gender states feels strange (even if they do exist as extensions of personae). The posthumanist within me does not want to apply such anthropocentric gender classifications on amphibians since I do not believe that frogs possess the same gender states as us. Furthermore, I wish to embrace the *greys* which emerge throughout my research and within the expression of my subject’s gender states. Therefore, I have decided to allow these gender states to remain rather *allusive*, free from the *binaural-dimension*.

The Ahegao: From Eromanga To Hyperpop

After spending a couple hours exploring SoundCloud, you will most likely come across several anime-inspired album covers (especially if looking up nightcore tracks, hyperpop’s predecessor). The western fascination with anime and manga exploded in the late 1980s and 1990s when companies began dubbing and translating Japanese TV shows, movies, and manga into European languages.³⁷ It has quickly become a popular source of media and many subcultures have developed around it. Traditionally, westerners who have liked anime often belonged to unpopular

³⁷ Fabienne Darling-Wolf, “What West Is It? Anime and Manga According to *Candy* and *Goldorak*,” in *Imagining the Global: Transnational Media and Popular Culture Beyond East and West* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

groups until relatively recently. Therefore, several communities such as neckbeards, furies, and otakus³⁸ have strong ties with this media.

It makes sense that Electra would pull from anime, given its relationship with hyperpop and neckbeards. There are archetypal or stereotypical similarities between anime villains and Electra's characters. For instance, many villains in Japanese media are also flamboyant and queer coded (the most famous example being James from *Pokémon*) and they frequently sport hyper-stylized outfits (as seen across the genre). It is also worth noting that there is a highly popular manga and anime series, which was extremely popular in the west, that features an incel type lead character.³⁹ This franchise, *Death Note*, is often referenced across the memescape.

Throughout the music video, they use anime stills to punctuate certain facial expressions and shots. This is an intertextual reference to Japanese media and their distinct animation style. For instance, they possess the genre's unique method of abstracting and stylizing the human figure (as seen in the characters' eyes, facial shape, and body). In "My Agenda," a certain recurring facial expression displayed by Electra can be traced to a specific form of Japanese media. This style of literature and animation is called hentai (変態) in the west. However, Japanese and manga theorists prefer the umbrella term eromanga. Essentially, eromanga is a type of media, which includes manga, video games (*ero*ge), and animation, which explores erotic narratives and stylized sexual intercourse. Before highlighting how Electra uses ahegao (a facial expression found within the

³⁸ Otaku is a Japanese word that means someone who is obsessed with video games, manga, or anime (any form of popular media) and who have poor social skills. In the west, the term is applied to people who love Japanese media and who are perceived as having odd social behaviours or interests.

³⁹ At the time of writing this, there does not appear to exist any research on this specific subject. However, I do believe there are elements of Light's behaviour that echo or resemble certain incel idioms. If interested in how Light, the main character from *Death Note*, could be interpreted as an incel, I recommend starting with the following article which focuses on his narcissistic behaviour: Anshuman A. Srivastava and Douglas J. Opler, "Malignant Narcissism In Tsugumi Ohba's *Death Note*: Should We Empathize With the Criminally Un-Empathic," *Academic Psychiatry* 44 (May 2020).

genre) to influence their characters' gender states, I will briefly go over the history of eromanga and define this expression.

In their book *The History of Hentai Manga: An Expressionist Examination of Eromanga*, Kimi Rito provides a highly detailed analysis and overview of eromanga's history, stylistic movements, and its evolution. Rito says that the first eromanga magazine started in 1973 and sought to capitalize on existing popular literary trends.⁴⁰ Mangaka⁴¹ began slowly including more sexualized and explicit themes in their works. Now seeking complete artistic freedom to explore sexual material and under public pressure of censorship, publishers began releasing exclusively erotic based media. Since the 1980s, eromanga has grown into a popular form of media with complex visual languages and stylistic trends.

Throughout the book, Rito goes to great lengths to illustrate many recurring and popular facial expressions found throughout the genre. For this discussion, we will be focussing on the *ahegao*. They say that the *ahegao* expression started within hardcore eromanga during the early 2000s which became popular in 2007.⁴² However, they trace its earliest origins to tropes of eromanga dating from the mid-1980s.⁴³ Rito describes *ahegao* as “a trope mainly seen within eromanga, *eroge* (Japanese adult video games), and hentai anime. It is a pattern of facial expressions identifying the moment of the female partner's climax (the *ikigao*).”⁴⁴ As seen in Figure 4.5, these facial expressions are quite intense and striking, especially for those unfamiliar with the genre. Interestingly, Rito claims that a number of readers feel uncomfortable with the

⁴⁰ Kimi Rito, *The History Of Hentai Manga: An Expressionist Examination of Eromanga*, translated by Molly Rabbit (Whitinsville, MA: Fakkku, 2021): 24.

⁴¹ Japanese manga illustrators and writers.

⁴² Rito, *The History Of Hentai Manga*, 223.

⁴³ Rito, *The History Of Hentai Manga*, 234.

⁴⁴ Rito, *The History Of Hentai Manga*, 223.

facial expression, believing it to be too extreme.⁴⁵ When scanning popular forums and platforms, it would appear that many people often dislike the ahogao and reactions to it vary significantly.⁴⁶



Illustration from Sanagi Torajirou, *Aheochi 3byou Mae* (Tokyo: Fujimi Publishing, 2013).



Illustration from Namboku, *Break Your Face* (Whitinscille, MA: Fakuu, 2022).

Figure 4.5: Examples of ahogao from eromanga

⁴⁵ Rito, *The History Of Hentai Manga*, 226.

⁴⁶ This clip is pulled from the popular *People React To* series, where individuals react to popular media. However, I was not able to find the original video. Therefore, here is a shorten edited version of the clip: Ender Senpai, “Old People Reacting To E Girls Doing Ahogao Faces,” *YouTube*, February 12, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OdqAYA7INs>.

Rito's methodological approach of identifying the *ahegao* is particularly helpful for identifying instances of this expression in "My Agenda." They theorized three key characteristics that make up the expression:

1. The whites of the eyes are visible or are close to becoming visible.
2. The mouth is open and the tongue is sticking out.
3. Saliva, mucus, sweat, and other bodily fluids are present.⁴⁷

Rito also states that: "The above three conditions are the major components of the *ahegao*. They do not necessarily need to be grouped together, but instead the strength of each individual factor helps raise that of the *ahegao*'s."⁴⁸ Based on this framework, we can begin to identify the three instances of *ahegao* found in "My Agenda."

The first example of *ahegao* can be seen in Figure 4.6a. Electra's character has their tongue out and is crossing their eyes, exposing the whites below their irises. In this specific example, there are no bodily fluids present. Indeed, throughout all the instances of *ahegao* in "My Agenda," there are no visible signs of bodily fluids. That being said, there is still always water imagery associated with the pose. For example, in Figure 4.6a, we see Electra pretending to drink out of the contaminated water bottle, filled with the aforementioned *gay chemical water*. The second example (Figure 4.6b) is more suggestive of the traditional *ahegao*. Crouching over the hood of the military van, Electra provocatively sticks out their tongue and is looking upward. In the last example (Figure 4.6c/d), Electra's character is in a state of ecstasy after being hit by infected water bottles. Their tongue is out and their eyes are almost rolled back, as though they were in a state of

⁴⁷ Rito, *The History Of Hentai Manga*, 223.

⁴⁸ Rito, *The History Of Hentai Manga*, 223.

euphoria. All of their characters are experiencing *orgasmic-like* gratification from spreading and distributing their agenda.



a) Electra drinking contaminated water bottles while driving around the city [01:04]



b) Electra lying on the hood of the furry military van [01:08]



c) Electra being struck by contaminated water bottles [02:50]



d) Another shot of Electra getting struck by contaminated water bottles [02:50]

Figure 4.6: Screenshots and timestamps from “My Agenda” where Dorian Electra does the ahogao

In “My Agenda,” the ahogao becomes an interesting tool for persona building. When examining most of Electra’s characters (as seen throughout this study), they have typically been more *masc* in nature. Across their characters’ gender manifestations, Electra frequently pulled from masculine and hypermasculine spaces. However, the ahogao is usually associated with feminine facial expressions. Yes, if surveying the literature, there is an abundance of men (and other organisms and gendered beings) doing the ahogao. I personally believe that the expression

is not bound within the *binaural-dimension*, it can exist across a multitude of gender states. I am merely trying to highlight that it is commonly associated with women (as supported by Rito).⁴⁹ With this in mind, we can see the use of *ahegao* as further actions being taken by the artist to blur and escape the traditional gender dichotomies ascribed to *personae* and its characters.

Informed by their own queer identity and meme culture, the *ahegao* becomes a powerful intertextual message. The *cringiness* experienced by some who are subjected to *ahegao*, echo familiar reactions from conservatives towards non-dichotomous gender identities and queer sexuality. This interest with cringe is perhaps more than just a fascination with internet culture but a unique method of embodying conservatives and alt-right fears of queerness which are then subjected with popular idioms in order to criticize and escape them. The *ahegao* becomes a cringe and ironic reference, pulled from the meme lexicon (itself being a displaced appropriation originally existing in erotic Japanese literature), that entices fear among communities that see queerness and progressive identity as deviant and concerning. Within the popular music sphere, the construction of such a persona is a hyper realization of the effects of this *agenda* malaise.

My Friends Are Militant Furies: Interspecies Restrooms, Furies, and Fursonae

In the beginning of 2022, a concerned Michigan parent, Lisa Hansen, stated that there is an “agenda that is being pushed through our schools.”⁵⁰ This distressed and frustrated mother claimed that a litter box had been placed within a local school’s unisex bathroom in order to accommodate students who “identify as cats.”⁵¹ She further states that she believes this is happening

⁴⁹ Rito, *The History Of Hentai Manga*, 223.

⁵⁰ Isabella Grullón Paz, “Litter Boxes For Students Who Identify As Furies? Not So, Says School Official,” *The New York Times*, January 23, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/23/us/politics/michigan-litter-box-school.html>.

⁵¹ Here is a clip of the Midland Public School Meeting: News.com.au, “School District Denies Litter Boxes For Students Identifying As ‘Furies,’” *YouTube*, January 27, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10JAh3Csn7A>.

“nationwide” since an “agenda” is being enforced across educational systems, to the detriment of children’s wellbeing.⁵² These accusations were quickly disproven, but not before being amplified by a Nebraska Republican state leader Bruce Bostelman and other media outlets.⁵³ This outlandish statement arrived just as Florida passed their “Don’t Say Gay Bill,” banning educators from mentioning anything 2SLGTBQ+ between kindergarten and the third grade.⁵⁴ At the centre of this specific claim, however, are Furrries.

Frequently ridiculed across the memescape, Furrries have often been the victims of online bullying and public hate. They are regularly used by conservatives to point out the “flaws” of progressive views on identity and sexuality, presenting them as people who are living in a “fantasy” and encouraging deviant lifestyles that are harmful towards children and society.⁵⁵ This rhetoric is perfectly illustrated in the aforementioned example. This individual is applying their fear of progressive gender politics and inclusive spaces in order to target a very small community, claiming that their personal interests are being pushed by this *agenda*. Between Jones and Hansen’s claims, it would seem that we are all victims of a highly organized *gay* and furry secret society that is seeking to destroy our established and “natural” way of life: *the unisex bathrooms are no longer safe!* These outlandish *agenda* narratives are just a form a fearmongering, creating a sense of false panic which is being used to discredit cultural and scientific development.

⁵² News.com.au, “School District Denies Litter Boxes.”

⁵³ For more information on Bruce Bostelman, please see the following the reference. At the time of writing this, I was not able to find a suitable link to his “litter box” speech. However, by simply googling his name, you will most likely be able to find a version of it. See Jaclyn Peiser, “GOP Legislator Backtracks On Claims Students Meow, Bark, use Litter Boxes,” *The Washington Post*, March 29, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/03/29/furrries-litter-box-nebraska-bostelman/>.

⁵⁴ See The Associated Press, “‘Don’t Say Gay’ Bill Becomes Law In Florida, Banning Sexual Orientation Instruction From K-3,” *CBC*, March 28, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/florida-don-t-say-gay-bill-desantis-1.6400087>.

⁵⁵ As seen withing the Midland Public School Clip and FreedomProject Media, “Brainwashed School Kids Now Identifying As Animal ‘Furrries,” *YouTube*, February 8, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYxEfIFpugg>.

Furries are greatly misunderstood by the general public. Throughout their recent work for *My Agenda*, Electra actively sympathized with this community and included them within their music videos and tour. As seen in an interview, it would seem that Electra wants their fans to get over the initial “cringe” instilled by our prejudice towards Furries and recognize them as individuals with unique interests.⁵⁶ For this specific study of “My Agenda,” I want to take this opportunity to explore Furries and highlight how Electra is using these elements to inform their characters. I will begin by explaining what Furries are, their history, and then examine fursonae.

Like many other millennial and gen-z individuals, I first came across furry art on DeviantArt and through memes. The International Anthropomorphic Research Project (IARP), describes furries as:

A diverse community of fans, artists, writers, gamers, and role players. Most furries create for themselves an anthropomorphized animal character (fursona) with whom they identify and can function as an avatar within the community. Some furries wear elaborate costumes or paraphernalia such as animal ears or tails, or represent themselves as anthropomorphic animals in online communities such as Second Life.⁵⁷

Like other fandoms, they do not possess a unified set of beliefs: there is no right or set way to being a Furry. Furries may also belong to a variety of subcommunities based on shared interests in certain media (such as cartoons, comics, manga, anime, animation) and forms of role-playing. It is also worth noting that not all those involved in the fandom practice a fursona, many are just interested with the art and the community. The main thing that connects the fandom is a fascination with anthropomorphized animals.

⁵⁶ Hannah Jackson, “Dorian Electra Is Building Their Gay Furry Militia,” *WMagazine*, March 30, 2022, <https://www.wmagazine.com/culture/dorian-electra-music-europe-tour-my-agenda-interview>.

⁵⁷ The International Anthropomorphic Research Project, “What’s a Furry?,” *Furscience*, <https://furscience.com/whats-a-furry/>.

Unfortunately, many Furies are the victims of bullying. The IARP reports that 61.7% of Furies between the age of 11–18 will experience various forms of bullying.⁵⁸ Furthermore, they identified that:

Even after statistically controlling for the fact that furies are more likely to be non-heterosexual or transgender, both of which, themselves, are associated with a history of bullying, furies still experience significantly more bullying than the average person, whether measured as being physically beaten up, teased, or ostracized.⁵⁹

Interestingly, the community is mostly queer. In a 2019 survey, IARP reported that only ~20% of furies identified as straight, the majority identifying as bisexual (~30%).⁶⁰ However, most Furies are white males (81% of women Furies consider the fandom as being a “boys club”).⁶¹

The history of furies is quite rich and difficult to truly trace, given its emergence within fringe communities, underground zines, and comics. However, members of the community have documented the rise of the furdome. In a detailed article which was printed within a series of publications, Fred Patten—a legend within the furdome who was involved in the fandom until his death in 2018—documented the growth of Furies from their earliest influences (such as *Kimba the White Lion*, *The Amazing 3*, *Fritz the Cat*, and various Disney characters) and highlights the arrival and subsequent development of the community.⁶² Beginning in late 1983 or early 1984,

⁵⁸ Furscience, “Bullying,” *Furscience*, accessed March 23, 2022, <https://furscience.com/research-findings/disclosure-stigma-bullying/10-3-bullying/>.

⁵⁹ Courtney N. Plant, Stephen Reysen, Sharon E. Roberts, and Kalthleen C. Gerbasi, *FurScience! A Summary of Five Years of Research From the International Anthropomorphic Research Project* (Waterloo, Ontario: Furscience, 2016): 138-139.

⁶⁰ Furscience, “Furscience 2019 Studies,” *Furscience*, accessed March 5, 2022, <https://furscience.com/research-findings/appendix-1-previous-research/furscience-2019/>.

⁶¹ Plant et al., *A Summary of Five Years*, 148.

⁶² Fred Patten, “Retrospective: An Illustrated Chronology of Furry Fandom, 1966-1996,” *Flayrah*, July 15, 2012, <http://www.flayrah.com/4117/retrospective-illustrated-chronology-furry-fandom-1966-1996> [Accessed with the Wayback Machine, captured pulled from July 17, 2012].

Patten suggests that furies began breaking from more prominent groups, such as the science fiction and comic fandom, in order to begin distinguishing and separating themselves. Since the 1990s, the fandom has blossomed with the arrival of the internet and furry conventions into their current and wide-known form.

The furry characters in “My Agenda” are all presented as military personnel, Electra’s own fursona character is also seen wearing military gear. All these furies seem to be holding positions of power, some have badges. They are the enforcers of this *gay agenda*, driving around the city (or travelling by plane) to spray victims with their water guns—filled with *gay frog water*—and spread their propaganda across the globe. When focusing on personae and their gender states, many questions arise when analyzing the Furry soldiers. Throughout the video, we are never told how they identify. Given that this is never explicitly stated, it would seem that the fursonae exist within the *grey*. Other than arbitrarily guessing their gender identities based on their fur colour and military clothing (which is usually unisex), one would have difficulty describing their gender states. Therefore, I believe that the fursonae depicted in the music video are free from the confines of the heteronormative *binaural-dimension*. Like Electra, their gender is fluid and unfixed. Unlike the other fursonae, Electra’s character does reference stereotypical feminine markers. Given that the majority of the community are men, it is interesting that the artist would explore more fem representations of the fursona. Furthermore, they are seen doing the *ahgao* (an expression typically associated with feminine characters) while sporting their fursona. The freedom granted by Electra’s gender fluidity allows them to freely channel a complex stream of gender references.

Members of the furdome are known for being supportive of one another, creating profound bonds between those who are frequently made to feel like outsiders.⁶³ This narrative is eerily

⁶³ Plant et al., *A Summary of Five Years*, 138.

similar to many queer experiences, not to mention those who face discrimination based on their race and ethnicity. With bills such as “Don’t Say Gay,” more individuals will be made to feel like outsiders. Within this context, the furies in “My Agenda” become a symbol of progress and inclusion: a symbol of our progressive, inclusive, and queer communities. They are a representation of the 2SLGBTQ+ and allies who are fighting for our rights. They are there to help us see this “agenda” thru and provide us with support when needed. As an act of satirical solidarity against bigotry and hatred, Electra placed a litter box within their “Species Neutral Restroom” during one of their 2022 concerts (see Figure 4.7).

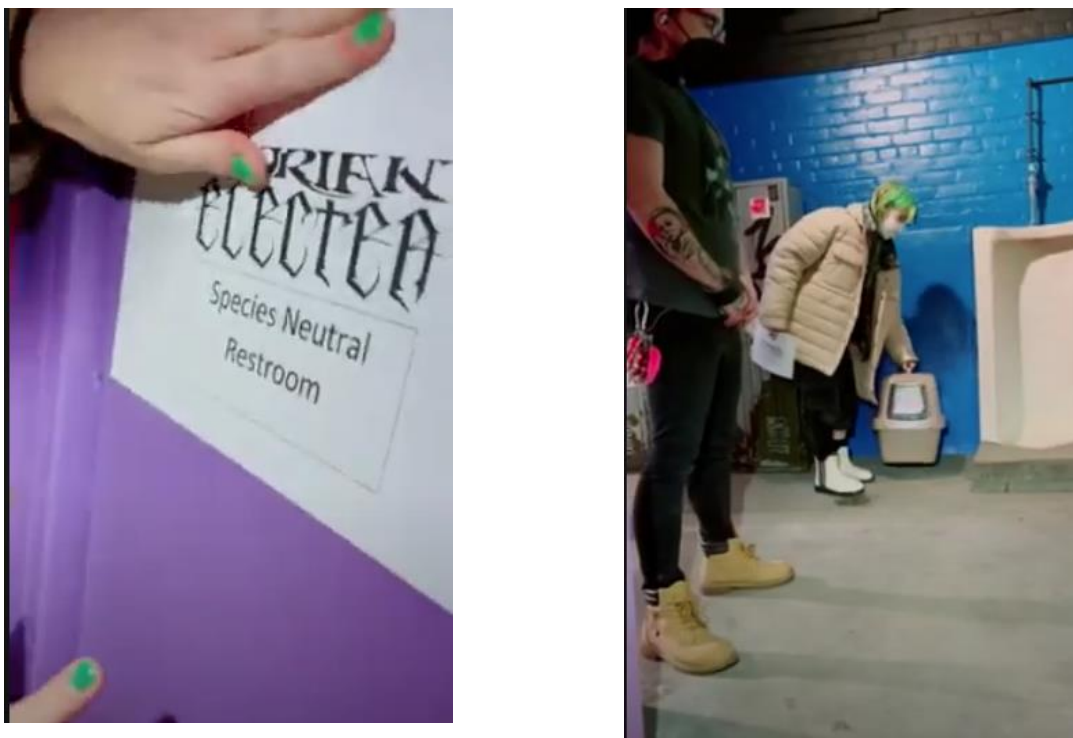


Figure 4.7: Dorian Electra setting up a litter box in the “Species Neutral Restroom” during their 2022 My Agenda Tour⁶⁴

⁶⁴ See Dorian Electra, “I Put Litter Boxes I put litter boxes 🍑 in the bathrooms of all 🍑my🍑shows🍑 (you spoke & I listened) ❤️ 🍑” *YouTube*, February 15, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqbKev64eCA>.

Synthesis of States: Centering the persona in space and time

Appendix 5 examines persona through the lens of space/time and highlights interesting avenues worth exploring (see Appendix 5). In order to focus my discussion, I have limited my observations to include only what had been previously mentioned throughout the paper or that can be observed in the music video. This allowed me to deepen my knowledge of the topic and better understand how these factors influence persona building. Given the complex and somewhat never-ending intertextual matrix of Electra's persona construction, most of which are based on memes which themselves are always mutating, such narrow conditions were needed to approach this analysis.

Much like traditional influences, the virtual environments that we frequent inform our understanding of self and that of our identity. Dorian Electra is one of several contemporary artists who are extensively pulling from internet and meme culture in order to construct their artistic personae. Given that we exist within these spaces, which provide us with entertainment and knowledge, it is understandable that these factors would instruct artistic embodiment. Furthermore, the internet has been a part of most young people's lives, many were born after home computers had become common. Only being a few years younger than Electra, I—like many—have spent my entire life online: I have never belonged to the pre-internet era. In Electra's music, the key post-internet reference being used to construct these artistic states are viral memes. Its satirical, ironic, and fluid nature allows the artist to adopt a plethora of referential and intertextual states across a wide palette of spaces and time. The rhizomatic persona freely pulls from a virtually infinite pool of referential states. As seen throughout "My Agenda" and my analysis, the characters explored by Electra are deconstructions and fragments of internet communities which reference a substantial body of media.

The fluidity with which the artist navigates gender across space and time aligns itself with their own personal views. Pulling from contemporary gender theory and having spent time in the

Chicago drag scene, Electra has been able to allow themselves to embody many contrasting gender states. Additionally, they are operating within a genre that is known for being associated and accepting of queer identities. This freedom causes their persona to be very flexible, resulting in their characters possessing a wide array of gender states. For instance, in “My Agenda,” Electra jumps from evil *fey* supervillain to a fem fursona truck driver, only to metamorphose into a queer fem military sergeant. It is worth noting that even in their earliest work “I’m In Love With Friedrich Hayek,” they embody the gender state of their character (that of a nerd type girl), not necessarily of their persona. When discussing gender and personae, Electra presents a unique challenge since they themselves are gender-fluid, their artistic persona is as well, but their characters exist somewhere within the *grey*. They might embody established gender characteristics, such as the narrator (the angsty *e-boy*), yet they have been reshaped into new—blurred—queer states. This unique approach allows the artist to explore a variety of gender states without being confined by the binary or even their own queer identity.

My observations also suggest that Electra is very good at embodying certain gender conventions and ideals across a variety of spaces. For instance, most of the *My Agenda* record was written from the perspective of these reimagined internet communities (incels, neckbeards, and conspiracy theorists). By pulling from these groups, Electra synthesized new avenues for their characters to explore. Furthermore, they embody hyperpop’s unique approach of presenting queer bodies into a stylized and nostalgic vision of 2000s popular music. Reminiscent of 2000s music videos, Electra is seen in elaborate sets and costumes, they are dancing in revealing clothing and striking provocative poses. The key difference here being that, rather than presenting Electra as a “female pop star,” they are recognized as a queer musician navigating complex and various gender states. Another element which is greatly shaping their persona is memes. It is difficult to identify

which memes are being used to construct these characters (other than the obvious Alex Jones, Pepe the Frog, and ahegao references) since memes are always changing. This is further complicated since we do not know *where* the memes are coming from. Additionally, we usually encounter memes for brief periods of time (a few seconds) before scrolling away. The text/image associated or the context upon which Electra might be referencing to is only known by the artist or their creative team. Retracing this exposure across space and time would be impossible or very difficult.

Although not mentioned in the analysis, Electra is very interested in how ideas of masculinity have changed across time.⁶⁵ For instance, in their last record *Flamboyant*, they can be seen wearing many rococo-esque clothing, a playboy style silk robe, and they sport a pencil stash (which has now become heavily associated with their persona). This interest with exploring masculinity across time was further elaborated in *My Agenda*. Rather than examining earlier forms of masculinity, they decided to delve into contemporary notions associated within hyper and toxic masculine spaces. These spaces are known for longing for traditional forms of masculinity.⁶⁶ By pulling from these hypermasculine spaces, Electra was able to create characters who resemble these men but exist within the artist's own fluid queer states.

It is worth taking a moment to discuss race and how it may affect the listener's engagement in regard to personae. In this specific analysis, Electra's whiteness allows them to navigate various states of being (often referencing hypermasculine, racist, and misogynistic communities) with no observable consequences. One might wonder if the reception would have been the same if a BIPOC

⁶⁵ Jackson, "Dorian Electra Is Building Their Gay Furry Militia."

⁶⁶ See Real Stories, "Britain's Anti-Feminist Movement: Men At War (Reggie Yates Documentary) | Real Stories," *YouTube*, April 6, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JP9ucyoJraQ>; and Roosh Valizadeh, "Make Men Strong Again," *Roosh Valizadeh* (blog), May 16, 2016, <https://www.rooshv.com/make-men-strong-again>. **[Warning! Before visiting Valizadeh's page, a prominent figure in the men's movements and the subject of Yates's documentary, I must warn you of the dangerous and bigoted ideas that are present throughout his literature. Please navigate these spaces with caution, they might be highly triggering].**

individual would have tackled such references. That being said, this current iteration of the persona and its characters is bound to the artist's present, a reflection of its landscape. One must not overlook the influence that time and space—even within the digital landscape—have on the personae.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The need for inclusive methodological and theoretical models is felt across popular music scholarship since a growing number of musicians are now openly identifying as queer. Even the heteronormative gender states are changing and are worth examining outside of the established *binaural-dimension*. Many researchers are studying artists like Dorian Electra, who identify with queer nonbinary forms of gender. However, it is important that we do not confine these artists within spectrums and binaries across our analyses. As seen throughout this paper, there is so much we can gain from adopting a nonbinary approach to analysis and understanding our subjects as being interconnected and rhizomatic. Hopefully, some concepts explored in this work will encourage further discussions on how we can develop existing methods of analysis in order to properly study and approach queer artists.

This multimodal analysis allowed me to acquire a better understanding of the track and music video's construction, intertextual references, and how the artist was using their persona across these fields. The musical analysis highlights how hyperpop musicians utilize polystylistic approaches to music production which draws from a variety of styles. As heard in "My Agenda," Electra pulled sonorities from dubstep and *scene* (emo) vocal production which influenced their character's vocal embodiment. This section also introduced the concept of the *e-boy* who later became the voice of the narrator. By understanding who *is* the narrator, we were able to better understand the ironic relationship between Electra's character and the song's narrative. In the lyrical analysis, I identified the narrator and narratee while describing how Electra was using conspiracy theories to inform their song's narrative. Utilizing these conspiracy theories, Electra satirically criticizes and appropriates the outlandish claims being made against the 2SLGBTQ+.

The *gay agenda* has now morphed into an ironic protest pop track, further showcasing the absurdities of such conspiracy theories.

Intertextual analysis is critical when attempting to understand the references made in the song's music video. The influence that viral memes and other popular media have on persona building must not be overlooked. Throughout "My Agenda," Electra pulled from various subcultures (incel, neckbeards, Furrries, and conspiracy theorists) and viral memes (Alex Jones, frogs, cringe memes, and ahegao) in order to shape their persona and its characters. Navigating and borrowing from these spaces, they could explore complicated histories of queer discrimination and shine light on the absurd claims being made to justify this *gay agenda* narrative. The main four themes examined in this analysis were: 1) water tampering, 2) Alex Jones, Pepe, and Frogs, 3) the ahegao, and 4) furrries. These elements all come together to create unique personae and series of characters which are directly related to various online communities and memes.

Drawing this together through the model of space and time, I was able to present how Electra was creating and engaging with persona throughout their career and these fields. Reflecting on these elements, I answered four key questions which centred my analysis within space/time, allowing us to navigate various factors which are directly influencing and informing the persona and the characters in "My Agenda." Through this model, I recognized the direct influence that memes have had on Electra's persona building, showcase the fluidity of the artist's gender expression across their persona, and highlight how Electra embodies a wide array of characters with contrasting gender states across space and time. These dimensions allowed for an analysis which was not bound by the *binaural-dimension* and that embraces the movement imposed by these fields. It could be useful to apply these questions unto an artist in order to document how their gender states have changed throughout their career. For instance, it could be

interesting to place artists like Madonna, Eminem, Kanye West, Cher, Drake, and David Bowie within this model. By doing this, researchers could illustrate the intricate nuances and public reception towards these artists and their personae's gender expressions.

Certain challenges arose when conducting this research. I needed to adopt an interdisciplinary approach, one that pulled from musicology, gender studies, digital studies, and other schools in order to execute my multimodal analysis. While this allowed for greater freedom in navigating a vast network of topics associated with Electra, it made the scope of this project extremely wide. Furthermore, more steps could have been taken in order to understand how memes are shaping contemporary popular musicians and their personae. Those studying Furies might also benefit from Auslander's persona theory when approaching fursonae and their characters. This would allow them to better understand the relationships between the individual, their main fursona, and the characters (roles) they might embody.

With all this said, I hope this paper serves as a first attempt towards dismantling the *binaural-dimension* of gender identity as found within persona theory. In a conference, I stated that "plural and inclusive modulating selves produce fuller realities than those created by binaural limitations."¹ This sentence is a direct reference to Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto," where she says that "Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision or many-headed monsters."² In the context of gender, this "single vision" is that of the traditional western gender dichotomy. The potential gender configurations that have been manifested across our histories—and that will appear in the future—go far beyond the scopes of European

¹ Justin Maisonneuve, "Breaking the Binary: How Arca Challenges Our Binaural-Dimensions With Her Music Video For 'Nonbinary'" (Video Presentation, The University of Toronto Graduate Music Conference; Toronto, ON, March 23, 2022).

² Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Woman: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991): 154.

universalism and dogmatic oppositional binaries. The self is a cluster of tones whose rich, dissonant, and extended harmonies illuminate the chaotic and shifting spaces that we occupy:

why silence our voices?

ESCAPE the binary.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: List of Meme Pages

Please visit the following subreddits in order to understand viral meme trends:

r/crappymusic (forum), *Reddit*. <https://www.reddit.com/r/crappymusic/>.

r/cringe (forum), *Reddit*. <https://www.reddit.com/r/cringe/>.

r/dankmemes (forum), *Reddit*. <https://www.reddit.com/r/dankmemes/>.

r/historymemes (forum), *Reddit*. <https://www.reddit.com/r/HistoryMemes/>.

r/memes (forum), *Reddit*. <https://www.reddit.com/r/memes/>.

r/prequelmemes (forum), *Reddit*. <https://www.reddit.com/r/PrequelMemes/>.

r/tiktokcringe (forum), *Reddit*. <https://www.reddit.com/r/TikTokCringe/>.

r/terriblefacebookmemes (forum), *Reddit*. <https://www.reddit.com/r/terriblefacebookmemes/>

One could also find examples of popular memes on YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter (or any other popular social media platform) by simply searching the word “memes.” On YouTube, there are bountiful compilations one could watch.

Appendix 2: The Pizzagate Scandal

INFORWARS

THE ALEX JONES RADIO SHOW
LISTEN NOW

RADIO SHOW NEWS VIDEOS STORE TOP STORIES BREAKING NEWS CONTACT

Top WikiLeaks @TopWikiLeaks
When all information is out - Hillary is done.
The only way she can get out of this mess is by winning this election and pardoning herself.
RETWEETS 1,185 LIKES 1,411
7:34 PM - 30 Oct 2016

WIKILEAKS: WHEN ALL THE INFO IS OUT, "HILLARY IS DONE"

U.S. NEWS

Follow @RealAlexJones
WATCH NOW

Download on your mobile device now for free.
Available on the App Store
ANDROID APP ON Google play

Appendix 2: Screenshot of Inforwars.com from October 31, 2016, which showcases the WikiLeaks' Pizzagate discovery they were promoting against Hillary Clinton. Unfortunately, the article was not archived and I was not able to uncover more information.

Appendix 3: “Exposing” the gay agenda annotated bibliography

I have included a short annotated bibliography of popular YouTube videos that believe and support the *gay agenda* narrative. By reviewing these videos, you will begin to recognize how these communities understand, depict, and spread negative and unfounded claims to support their queerphobic stances through platforms such as YouTube. This should serve as an introduction to the topic.

Catholicnewagency. “Gay Agenda In Schools.” YouTube, October 23, 2008.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KyMu1X-dOPs>.

Tony Perkins, President of the *Family Research Council*, visits several families in order to discuss same sex marriage. Within the video, he interviews parents that were upset that their young children were exposed to same-sex couple dynamics in schools. This video supports beliefs that being gay or homosexual behaviour is immoral and deviant.

Djvlad. “Pastor Manning To Jamar: White People Are Pushing Gay Agenda.” YouTube, August 14, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQm0GeYjgrI>.

Pastor Manning claims that homosexuality is a “white man’s disease,” linking it to Greco-Roman genealogies, and states that these behaviours did not happen in Africa, China, or India (oh, how wrong he is). Both the pastor and Jamar discuss how black Americans decided to support the *disease* which resulted in its liberation and acceptance. The pastor says that black homosexuals are trying to be white. Around the middle point of the video, the interviewer tries to grasp how Christians should reconcile with the bible, which denounces homosexuality. The pastor proceeds to paraphrase scripture, saying that Jesus said that these behaviours were wrong, and God does not like homosexuals because it is against his word and nature. They continue to

talk about *sodomy advocacy*, define the difference between love and sex, gay propaganda, and marriage.

FreedomProject Media, “Brainwashed School Kids Now Identifying As Animal ‘Furries,’”

YouTube, February 8, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYxEfIFpugg>.

As mentioned in the furry section of Chapter 4, people often use furries in order to highlight the issues with contemporary identity politics. In this video, Dr. Duke Pesta is interviewing Alex Newman about the “rise” of children who are identifying as furries. “This is utterly predictable,” says Pesta, “if you are going to let kids pretend to be whatever gender they say they are—if you are going to let them engage in this kind of denial of biological reality—why not allow them to become/identify as furries.” Newman proceeds to call these “hundreds of thousands” of furry children “brainwashed zombies” and explains that in Michigan they found a “litter box” in the public school for children who identify as cats. As previously mentioned, these allegations made by Lisa Hansen about the Michigan school allowing students who identify as cats to use litter boxes were completely false and unfounded. Pesta says that the progressive left has abandoned any sense of parental duty. Newman further points out that since boys can now dress up in skirts and change in the girls locker room it only makes sense that these children will begin to identify as animals and plants. “We have to be logically consisted here,” states Newman, “there is absolutely no logical reason why a child should be able to pick their gender but not be able to pick being some other type of creature.” Newman then quotes the bible, saying that progressives are trying to suppress the truth which goes against the word of God. Now seeking to point out the flaws with identity politics, Pesta comically states: “Why can’t some clever kid identify as a teacher and then change his own grades.” They both continue to make similar comments, pointing out the “problems” with identity politics. They finish the interview

by identifying how the left is undermining parental rights. This clips shows how a community of people believe an agenda is being enacted across public schools.

FreedomProject Media. “Drag Queens Push LGBT Agenda On Children.” YouTube, May 24, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brl2qG5GhHc>.

The poster posted a 4News clip following an organization called Drag Queen Story Hour, where drag queens read to children across local libraries. The video description reads:

“Taxpayer-funded libraries from New York and Florida to California are paying grown men to dress up as women and promote gender confusion, homosexuality, homosexual ‘marriage,’ and cross-dressing to children as young as 3-years old. Government preschools and elementary schools are also being targeted.” These sentiments which follow popular *agenda* trends can be found across these communities.

Theo Von Clips. “Boosie Badazz On Homosexuality Being Pushed On Kids.” YouTube, August 4, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oveRO73AfpE>.

Popular podcaster Theo Von reacts to rapper Boosie Badazz’s claim that a *gay agenda* is being pushed on children and popular musicians. “It’s not going to be normal for a kid to be straight,” says Boosie, “y’all trying to force it on these kids bro.” He believes that popular queer musicians are being used to push the homosexual agenda unto children which is causing them to question their sexuality. Theo, saying that he respects Boosie for sharing his thoughts, agrees that he believes that an agenda is being pushed. At the time of writing this video, the clip has 96k views, 4k likes, and 1,019 comments (mostly people agreeing with their claims).

WFAA. “Mansfield Teacher Accused of Promoting a ‘Homosexual Agenda,’ Now She’s Suing.” YouTube, May 8, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YlkEt0_PYZA.

This clip follows an elementary teacher who was put on unpaid leave after parents complained that she was spreading a homosexual agenda when discussing her plans to marry her wife and mentioning an openly gay artist in the classroom. Now suing the school district, she accused them of discriminating against her sexuality. This video echoes many of the “Don’t Say Gay” sentiments and showcases how queer teachers are portrayed as teaching “alternative,” deviant, and inappropriate lifestyles.

Appendix 4: Lyrics for “My Agenda”

“My Agenda”

I’ve got this plan now	Chorus	My agenda
It’s on my mind		My freaky gender
And soon enough now	Москва — столица Гейропы	Out here flexing in my
Everyone will fall in line	Стали квирами все гомофобы	Rainbow suspenders
It’s closing in now	Духовные скрепы сменили на стропы	My agenda
You can’t escape	Мы радужным мобом по Красной	Will infect ya
On every corner waiting	топаем	Out to getcha
Just to infiltrate	Гей-пропаганда	It is my
	Мы любим тебя от Чечни до Уганды	
Chorus:	Стойбой мы танцуем на Красной	Poison in the water
My Agenda	Унас очень много секса, но он	You lap it up
Might offend ya	безопасный	I know you’re very thirsty
Out here flexing in my		Baby, for this drug
Rainbow suspenders	Гей-пропаганда	We mind control you
My agenda	(We make love from Chechnya to	Just for fun
Will infect ya	Uganda)	We’re out here turning frogs
Out to getcha	Гей-пропаганда	Homosexual
It is my	(We make love from Chechnya to	
	Uganda) ³	Homosexual
		Homosexual
Have you seen my pamphlets?	Chorus (Village People)	Homosexual
Have you read my blog?		Homosexual
Have you seen my army marching		Homosexual
Down to city hall?		Homosexual
You can always spot us		Homosexual
By the way we walk		Homosexual
As we’re plotting to take over		Homosexual
And destroy you all		

Lyrics to Dorian Electra’s “My Agenda” (written by Electra, Weston Allen, Pussy Riot, and Village People)

Appendix 5: Answering the Space and Time questions

Key Questions:	Answer:
Space	
How does the persona's gender state change or morph through the different spaces they occupy?	<p>Throughout the music video, the characters' gender states do vary significantly across the various spaces they occupy (as seen in the characters they embody).</p> <p>Given the artist's gender fluidity, they freely alter their gender states across all the spaces they occupy.</p> <p>In the beginning of their career, within the satirical political and economic environment they were occupying, the artist's characters presented more heteronormative.</p>
How does the persona embody contemporary ideas of gender identity in the spaces they frequent?	<p>The persona embodies many contemporary notions of gender identity, mainly that it is unfixed and fluid. The artist showcases this by allowing their persona and its characters to adopt whatever gender states they wish, unfazed by fixed notions of gender, within any environment.</p> <p>The artist uses digital landscapes to construct and inform their persona and its characters. From these spaces, they appropriate and reimagine gender norms found across these communities.</p>
Does the artist's racial and/or ethnic background influence how the listener engages with their music within certain spaces?	<p><i>There is no direct reference to this in the music video or track.</i></p> <p>They have benefited from their whiteness since their race has not affected the popular music/hyperpop listeners from engaging with their work across a variety of physical and digital spaces.</p>
Does the listener's reception of the artist's gender identity or states change within and across different environments or spaces?	<p>Throughout the music video (and their music), the artist is continually exploring new gender states across a variety of locations.</p> <p>Given their queerness, the artist is not accepted within certain countries or virtual spaces, and some are mentioned or implied in "My Agenda." These include Russia, Uganda, and Chechnya; and a variety of virtual spaces such as incels, neckbeards, and conspiracy groups.</p> <p>Within the hyperpop genre, most listeners are open to queer identities and many of its leading figures are queer or are fervent allies.</p>
Time	
How does the persona's gender state change or morph through time?	<p><i>There is no mention of this in the music video or track.</i></p> <p>Throughout their musical career, the artist began exploring more queer avenues of expression after discovering drag. However, like</p>

many other artists, they began their career appearing cis gender. With that said, within the confines of hyperpop, the artist has always presented and been understood as queer.

How does the persona embody contemporary ideas of gender identity, those that inform their communities, through time?

They began their career embodying heteronormative gender states and progressively presented increasingly queer and fluid. This queerness aligns itself with contemporary and growing queer gender theory. Furthermore, it was informed by their exposure to Chicago drag culture.

The persona is a manifestation of internet and meme culture. Starting with satirical amateur YouTube videos, which were very popular in the 2010s, and progressively moving towards more meme-based references, the artist began to freely pull and deconstruct these ideas of gender through time.

The artist is operating within a musical genre that is known to be queer and a reflection of progressive contemporary gender politics.

Does the artist's racial and/or ethnic background influence how the listener engages with music across time?

At the beginning of their career, they received a lot of attention from libertarian and economic circles. I would speculate that, if they were not white, they might not have been received so warmly.

Their whiteness allowed them to be freer to explore their own gender states without facing additional discrimination based on their race or ethnicity across their career.

Does the listener's reception of the artist's gender identity or states change across time?

At the beginning of their career, they were seen as a cis gender individual.

After coming out as gender fluid, they have become an important queer pop artist within the mainstream (or at least hyperpop).

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