The representation of the lesbian body in music videos

Novakovic Ravijojla

Gender Studies MA

Central European University, Budapest

"In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts/Sciences"

Thesis Supervisor: prof. Erzsebet Barat
Second Reader: Eszter Timar
Third Reader: Andrea Peto

Budapest, Hungary
2008

Team Gina: '…Wanna show some appreciation
On behalf of the queer foundation x3
Huh? What? You know what I like?
The rough strong hands of a big butch dyke
Butch dyke. Butch dyke dyke dyke…'

This paper is dedicated to Scream Club, Team Gina and all the women performers and artists claiming their voice

Special thank you to my thesis supervisors who have been extremely supportive during my writing.

Abstract

This paper offers an overview of representations of the lesbian body in music videos. I analysed video materials of the 1980s popular culture onwards and grouped them according to their dominant characteristic features in two main categories: heterosexist videos and queer videos. My main concern was to explore whether the representation was challenging the gender binary matrix, and if so, I identified the junctures of symbol clusters revolving around the term lesbian to see if they would fit Lisa Henderson's positive image model or not. Grouping the videos in two major categories helped me to understand their relationship. While the heterosexist group displays attempts to appropriate the term lesbian, the queer group displays a certain resistance to such categorization, decomposing the lesbian as something fixed and easily accessible within a heterosexist discourse.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In this paper I overview ways of presenting the lesbian body in popular culture and identify those constructions that I believe to be dominant in its video representations. My central question is concerned with whether there are any dominant ways of presenting a lesbian body, and if so, what they are and why these modes dominate. In turn, the analysis of the less dominant modes of presentation of the lesbian body would answer the question of what there is within these representations that keeps such representations on the outside of the dominant sphere.

Observing popular culture in general, we could notice that the overall visibility of lesbians seems to be at its rise. There are plenty of placards, movies, books and advertisements, which in one way or another finally show more lesbian bodies than ever before. However, this visibility does not always satisfy all parameters needed in order to represent a lesbian body free of restrictions of cultural stigma often ascribed to it. Also, observing the overall presence of women as performers, it shows that there are more of them[1]. However, it shows that women are still most often employed in order to make a video, movie and/or any visual or cultural narrative more attractive and pleasing, conforming thus to the male gaze model. It seems that women in popular culture more often play as mere accessories to the main acts, who are mostly males. The case is the same with lesbians represented in such videos; most often they will be used as an additional attraction to the main act.

Therefore, I will explore how exactly the notions of larger cultural symbolic play upon the lesbian body. I will argue that between the dominant representations and the less dominant ones there is a link, which suggests a certain dialogue at which centre lay the importance of

[1] Hansen, H. Christine and Ranald D. Hansen: 'Music and Music Videos', in Dolf Zillman, Peter Vorderer (eds.) *Media Entertainment*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ, 2000, pp.93-113.

questions of self-identification. Hereby I understand all videos in my data to be caught within the heteronormative symbolic order, however they differ from each other and can be categorized in two different groups based on features that either reproduce heteronormativity with no critical detachment from it, or features that employ some critical rethinking of what presents itself as 'natural' within the heteronormative symbolic order.

There have already been numerous works written on the topics of lesbian (in)visibility, of which I have found Ann Ciasullo and Lisa Henderson's discussions of lesbian identity and independent films of particular importance. I also found useful literature that deals with questions of how women in general are represented in various cultural contexts, such as the image of women as hard bodies (Brown, 1996). There is a notably large section of literature that deals with cultural representation and gender, however, only little of them addresses cultural representation in popular culture, namely in music videos. None of these works have focused on music videos in order to explore different types of representations of the lesbian body.

In the following paper I will take a look at this question within popular culture's domain of music videos. My choice is music videos meant for mainly teenagers and young adults because the genre is potentially open to multiple meanings of the lesbian body. Kaplan (1996) argues that video's narrative in general is fragmented and constructed as a prism where multiple meanings conflate each other. However, the genre is perceived mostly as a commodity: its primary use is to sell as many records as possible of the artists featured in them. Consequently, its contents are to be considered as failed narratives[2] Furthermore, it has been argued that the visual aspect of a video is always to some extent subordinated to the musical context (Hawkins, 1996). For that reason at first music videos seem to be lacking any meaningful content useful for analysis. However, as I will demonstrate, these videos often

[2] Carol Vernallis: 'The Aesthetics of Music Video: An Analysis of Madonna's 'Cherish'.' *Popular Music*, Vol. 17, No. 2, (May, 1998), pp. 153-185.

employ representations that we can argue to be of a sexual political value, and at times the representations that these videos offer can even be considered as highly influential in the forming of 'the spectators' imaging of a lesbian identity.

Literature Review

In *Consumer Culture*, Celia Lury defines the divide between 'high' and 'low' culture as gendered:

> Relations of class, gender, race and age were deeply involved in the processes by which high culture was historically elevated above popular culture, as is clear from the implicitly derogatory use of terms associated with subordinated groups, such as 'vulgar', 'feminine', 'primitive' or 'juvenile', to describe popular culture.[3]

Further on, she recognizes activity and increasing visibility of subordinated groups and claims that '…the political struggles of these groups are widely seen to have contributed to the undermining of the hierarchical distinction between high and popular culture…'[4] Lury views popular culture and youth culture in close relation and finds it to be a space where meanings and symbolic exchange can be modified[5].

Railton (2001) examines magazines promoting contemporary charts top hits and comes up with the metaphor of carnival to describe the relationship between the festive character of these magazines and teenage girls' lives, given the assumption that teenager girls are the core audience for these magazines. The festivity character of these magazines is achieved through reversing the stars' (both males and females) status from top (role-models) to low (anti-models), through showing them in their everyday setting when they are not half as glamorous as otherwise presented in other media. Teenager girls see these stars being mocked, and thus may enjoy the temporary position of power via possessing the gaze. Railton suggests that once they grow up, these ex teenager girls are not supposed to be listening to this type of popular music as it is valued negatively. Thus the short termed illusion of a power stance resolves itself into general lack of visual (p)leasure when they become older. As obvious, there is a kind of a preferred taste- in this context bands that Railton refers to are not 'serious'

[3] Celia Lury: *Consumer Culture*, Routledge, New York and London, 1996, p. 58.
[4] Ibid. p.14.
[5] Celia Lury: *Consumer Culture*, Routledge, New York and London, 1996, p. 43.

enough, thus deemed less valued. As we shall see later, there is a rather strong tendency of image preference, in terms of what is thought to be of interest to the widest number of audience/viewers.

The carnival and circus seemed to be the markers of 'lower' culture, and the bourgeois strata needed the carnival to be able to differentiate itself from the aristocracy. Railton suggests that this is exactly the way that rock music needs the 'silly' pop in order to define itself 'more meaningful'.

Railton argues that the reason why this particular area of popular culture does not get interpreted or written about in Academia is that it would deem the masculine, 'high' popular culture fragile. While saying so, Railton gives a very good definition of what popular culture is in contemporary terms, as she links it to Habermas' interpretation of the public sphere. She argues that popular culture as we know it today is being split into the high, namely masculine pop culture, and the low pop culture, designed for the female audiences. This greatly resembles the 18th and 19th century bourgeois public sphere, communicated through namely all masculine spas, cafes and bars, existing on a class marked scale somewhere in the middle, between the high, aristocrat culture, and the low, circus and carnival culture. What was the hegemonic bourgeois public culture of cafes and bars then can easily be transcribed into the hegemonic rock culture now. Furthermore, she links the high/low divide of contemporary pop music to an intellectual/physical divide, where the physical one is inherently ascribed to the 'feminine'. Magazines and shows as well as media dedicated to the 'lower' pop does not get an academic treatment, states Railton, because it is understood as unintelligible[6].

In *Consumer Culture*, Celia Lury also argues that goods, cultural products and commodities are '…a means of making visible and stable the basic categories by which we classify people in society. Goods thus act as sources of social identity and bearers of social

[6] Diane Railton: 'The Gendered Carnival of Pop' *Popular Music*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 321-331.

meaning.'[7] Does this commodification of identity resonate with the divide of rock/pop? Through the kind of music being the bearer of social (gendered) meanings, yes. Even though there have been numerous attempts to challenge this binarism of cultural identification by some girl rock movements, such as Riot Girrrls[8], rock is still perceived to be mainly masculine traits, while mainly feminine:

> The subject of rock 'died' for the same reason as other subjects and authors died in the 1970s and 1980s: because the unity is purported to represent split apart upon its own contradictions, one of which was the gender contradiction of a masculinity claiming to represent 'collectivity'. Feminine subjectivity was excluded by rock music and relegated to 'pop'. The women's punk bands allowed a brief outburst of feminist ideas on the debris of the rock scene, while gay and lesbian subcultures deserted rock for disco (Dyer 1990), or the 'women's music' movement in the USA (Lont 1985) [9]

Here is another argument about the existing debate regarding pop music and rock music.

> For feminism, postmodernism has meant the need to work through what a recognition of differences between women means for political and critical practice; while in the area of popular music, the debate has been around the significance of what has been summoned up as 'the death of rock' [10]

It is important for this paper to revisit these debates because there is a need to position the very notion of popular culture. While it is generally argued that popular culture is feminine, this approach still underestimates the relevance of the fact that products existing within popular culture are mainly aimed for a female audience.

Since I am to some extent concerned with notions of identification through the media, and also with ways of how through this media individuals might live up to the expectation to identify with the characters and narratives, I need to also revisit Lisa Henderson's notion of positive identification in the context of lesbian community. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities, she argues for the production of (lesbian) communal ethos

[7] Celia Lury: *Consumer Culture*, Routledge, New York and London, 1996, p. 14.
[8] Gayle Wald: Just a Girl? Rock Music, Feminism, and the Cultural Construction of Female Youth**,** *Signs*, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 585-610.

[9] Barbara Bradby : Sampling Sexuality: Gender, Technology and the Body in Dance Music, *Popular Music*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (May, 1993), pp. 155-176, page 158.
[10] ibid. p. 158.

stemming from the movie *Go Fish!* This is something I imagine happens with the bands and videos with non-dominant audiences I discuss in the second chapter. She argues that the *GoFish!* movie, together with the accompanying New Queer Cinema, offers materials for lesbian audiences different than before. These audiences no longer need to look for queer readings of texts, or be satisfied with appearances of lesbian characters in narratives in which they are coded negatively. This is something different from observing works of dominant culture and trying to find queer readings, subplots and/or queer traits. These new materials are produced by and for lesbian/queer audiences in the first place. Here she employs the notion of 'positive images'; a notion that is often discarded in many academic texts for it is a highly context-dependent notion. Henderson's positive image entails an imagery of lesbian communities because, argues Henderson, the space where the meaning of 'lesbian' is shifted towards 'positive' is to be experienced only within such communities. For that reading, Henderson argues, humour is needed:

> 'Positive' no longer means portraying of historically marginalized groups in mainstream or high-status positions, or simply rewriting the rules about who can and cannot be represented as a member of the social and symbolic club. 'Positive images' are better understood, I think, as transformations of common sense through the progressive appropriation of popular forms.[11]

Bradby observed dance videos in Britain of the 1990s and came to a conclusion that there is more visual representation of black women with powerful voices; their image is often paired up with images of young and slim women, possibly white. She finds, nevertheless, most important that the motherly female power of black women is re-appropriated outside of the strict motherhood context. For her, it represents a move out of the negative representation and the marginalization of such images in the wider public scene of the music videos[12].

Creed (1995) collected three main types of the representation of the lesbian body in popular culture of the 20th ct. cinema narratives. The first one she termed the masculinized

[11] Henderson, Lisa: 'Simple Pleasures: Lesbian Community and "Go Fish"'. *Signs*, 1999, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 41

lesbian body, as it was the lesbian body that was always characterized by masculine features. Lesbian love-making was pictured '...through sodomy with other women in one of two ways: through clitoral penetration of the anus or with the use of diabolical instruments'. In this first type, the threat that the lesbian body presents to the existing gender order was resolved by masculinizing lesbian identity. This representation she also terms as the tribade, as it was presented in the 18th and the 19th century before the term lesbian was utilized. Here she also places the image of the tomboy, aligning it with the Freudian idea of a lesbian as someone who has not managed to overcome the frustration of the castration- someone who therefore attains masculine modes of display and behavior. Freud's metaphor of a journey of the clitoris is a role model narrative instructing women the 'proper' way- in the abandonment of the tomboyish features and replacing them for more 'feminine' styles appropriated within the patriarchal structure.

The second type is the animalistic lesbian body, associated with the animal. For Creed this type falls into the category of woman as a naturalized animal, a sort of a half human whose behavior is not to be associated with the mind, but is driven by instincts and hormonal outbursts. The third type is the narcissistic body[13]. Creed argues that the reason the lesbian narcissistic body is threatening and presented as a negative influence on society lays in the recursiveness of image repeated. The narcissistic lesbian offers an impression of a mirror image, which - according to natural ways of society - means regression instead of going forward.

While Creed uses a lot of psychoanalytic theory I do not choose to go into that as it would largely go beyond the scope of this paper, I will only use her concept of the monstrous. In her book The Monstruos-feminine, drawing on Kristeva, Creed argues that:

[12] ibid. pp. 37-64.
[13] Barbara Creed: 'Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts' in. Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco (eds.).*The Body. A Reader*..Routledge, New York and London, 2005, pp. 109-115.

> Abjection also occurs where an individual is a hypocrite, a liar. Abject things are those that highlight 'the fragility of the law' and that exist on the other side of the border which separate the living subject from that which threatens its extinction. But abjection is not something of which the subject can ever feel free - it is always there, beckoning the self to take up the place of abjection, the place where meaning collapses. The subject, constructed in/through language, through a desire for meaning, is also spoken by the abject, the place of meaninglessness - thus, the subject is constantly beset by abjection which fascinates desire, but which must not be repelled for fear of self-annihilation.[14]

She uses horror films as an illustration of the work of abjection at least in three ways.

For Creed the function of the monstrous is to 'bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatened its stability'. As she states:

> The representation of the monstrous feminine in the patriarchal signifying practices has a number of consequences for psychoanalytically based theories of sexual difference. On the one hand, those images which define woman as monstrous in relation to her reproductive functions work to reinforce the phallocentric notion that female sexuality is abject. On the other hand, the notion of the monstrous feminine challenges the view that femininity, by definition, constitutes passivity.[15]

While Creed does not deal with the representation of the lesbian in the media (only in horror films), I am sympathetic with her terminology of the monstrous feminine, as a similar apparatus works when lesbianism is represented in media, in music videos. Firstly, it is the butch lesbian body that challenges the 'fragility of the law' most, as it is the body that refuses to be stylized by the feminine markers (Judith Butler would use the term: corporeal style) and thus be associated with passivity. Secondly, as we shall see at Ciasullo, that is the reason why the butch body is rendered invisible.

Ciasullo notes that lesbian visibility in the 1990s lived its relative 'renaissance'. However, that renaissance was restricted to those lesbian bodies which were feminized- in order to assert a 'positive' image of the lesbian body as that which is no different than the heterosexual one. The assertion of the ‘positive image’ here differs from the positive image model by Henderson mainly in that the former fails to transpose meaning by repeating the same heterosexist assumptions of what a woman should look like in order to pass. The result was a universal, standardized attractive image of outted lesbians, (including Ellen Degenerous). The image most straight audience have on lesbians is however more shaped in a

[14] Barbara Creed: *The Monstuous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis,* London, New York Routledge 1993, p. 10.

butch form, filtering the fem image out, and thus implying that the lesbian body equates a butch body despite the fact that it was the femme body that always got exposed, and not the butch body. This ambivalence of what a lesbian body really is (rather what it should be like), and the accompanying pathological intrigue of the straight and homophobic audience, in turn caused the notion of polarized gender roles in lesbian relationships, along with the markers that shape them. Indeed, the author claims that 'the attractiveness' of an outted lesbian was only achieved by assigning her such feminine qualities that would invoke interest of the male gaze, and the possibility of identification for straight female audiences. Examples of bodily markers that were utilized in such representations are 'feminine' accessories-pearl necklaces, bracelets and rings, pouted stylized lips (calling for a kiss), longer hair, high heels, clevelage and the avoidance of inherently butch wardrobe; instead exposing clothes that look 'neutral'. These images were also desexualized, meaning that outted lesbians could not be seen engaged in a passionate kiss, more rather in a cuddly, desexualized hug. According to the author, 1990s popular culture (excluding *Go Fish* movie for example[16]) saw no 'real' butch or dyke character, and even if it did, it was made less such by standardization coded: women should be looking/marked by feminine social markers, and especially if they were to appear in any magazine[17].

Judith Butler's notion of parody is of much help when one wants to expose relationships involving an overarching principle of heteronormative dominance, where power is distributed unequally and used accordingly to describe differences between groups.

> The notion of an original or primary gender is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities. Within feminist theory, such parodic identities have been understood to be either degrading to women, in the case of drag and cross-

[15] Ibid. p. 151.
[16] I am aware that Go Fish! is a movie that does not entirely belong to popular culture. It is rather existing in limited spaces amongst lesbian and art fans.
[17] Ciasullo, Ann M. 'Making Her (In)Visible: Cultural Representations of Lesbianism and the Lesbian Body in the 1990s', *Feminist Studies*, 2001, 27 (3), pp. 577-608.

> dressing, or an uncritical appropriation of sex role stereotyping from within the practice of heterosexuality, especially in the case of butch/femme lesbian identities. But the relation between the 'imitation' and the 'original' is, I think, more complicated that the critique generally allows. Moreover, it gives us a clue to the way in which a relationship between a primary identification - that is, the original meanings accorded to gender - and subsequent gender experience might be reframed...As much as drag creates a unified picture of 'woman' (what its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - as well as its contingency.[18]

Thus, Butler's concept of drag implies that the representation of a lesbian body which identifies with its own image thoroughly, consciously enacting practices/cultural semiotics that evolve around that identity as is being recognized is a way to destabilize base on which imaging a certain category as always behaving in ways prescribed.

It seems that the representation of lesbian personas is 'filtered' through a lens which makes lesbian image split into these two binaries, a butch and a femme (one exposed, another not). Not only that this lens creates two polarized images, but it also silences what it really implies: that the femme-butch relationship is often made to seem as a less valid counterpart to the 'natural' man-woman relationship. The binary branching of gender role assigning, as surveiled in these representations, assigns them the proper behavior, coded into these two images. However, when a femme-femme couple is represented, they are both feminized. Knowing that butch-femme couple representations are scarce, that would imply that the lens is specifically blind for filtering, and thus disapproves of masculinities existing outside of male body.

Through the application of heteronormative mechanisms of lesbian identity follows a homogenised understanding of *the* lesbian. That restriction does not make distinctions between lesbian sexuality and lesbian sexualities. The former refers to a unified and largely heterosexist understanding of a lesbian sexuality as being deviant, but mendable through its appropriation and placement within the straight male sexual fantasy zone. The latter one

[18] Judith Butler, 'Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions', in M. Schildrick and J. Price(eds.), *Feminist Theory and the Body*, Routledge, New York, N.Y. pp. 416-422, p. 418.

refers to an understanding of lesbian sexualities, and in general of all sexualities, as non-hegemonic, thus denying, and at the same time claiming to difference.

These homogenization efforts are juxtaposed by contextually dependant attempts of resistance. The dynamics between them is not a single action-reaction one, for the vitality of these depends upon their constant shifting and balancing between various multiple centres of each. For supporting my position, I would like to use Kathleen Sherdon's terminology of misbehaving. She observed African context of women's groups making changes in history by breaking through the (dis)conformity of their everyday settings. Supplied by men, the main breadwinners, these women slowly managed to get to money means on their own, which eventually led to, as Sherdon notes, to a collective voice heard, getting things done in their terms. I especially like the term misbehaving because it can be used in the context of the lesbian image as the one, which does not act according to the rules. The term refers to any type of cultural representations which claims upon its own will.

In a similar fashion, a pop culture woman performer is either accused of being all body and no mind (stereotypes that claim that she must be a prostitute to achieve something like that) or she is being looked at as if she was an eighth world wonder for being that successful. For no surprise, an outted lesbian performer is rarely to be found on top chart successes. In heterosexist and patriarchal culture this particular lesbian body is different from the heterosexual women's bodies in that it will not bare men a child, neither will it ever give them immediate sexual satisfaction. One way of 'cock-blocking' this denial of male power is achieved through sexualization of the lesbian body, which is basically putting the lesbian body in a context in which its only purpose is to give men a sexual arousal. The other way, which I believe is happening simultaneously with the above mentioned mode and also supporting its structure, is through rendering any kind of further denial of male power (done by the political activity of lesbian personnel's, or any butch body) invisible and unheard.

While media dominated by outted and lesbian active producers does have a voice, however marginalized or too silent as opposed to the voicing of the dominant heterosexual matrix, a considerable amount of 'threat' will produce the need for a reactionary stance by the dominant culture.

According to AfterEllen[19], an Internet magazine which updates daily the visibility and presence of LGBT women in media, there was some of the lesbian woman's music present in the 1970s, which was parallel to the emergence of the 2nd wave feminism. It was however marginalized and sponsored solely by independent women artists. Their style seemed unfit to be promoted in the more prestigious pop cultural media. There was nothing wrong with their style, their image was based on a traditionally masculine look - plain jeans, usually no make-up and hair unstyled. While this image was suitable for some man bands, it never managed to achieve a pass in the critical public eye if women wore such outfits.

Jeffrey A. Brown pushes Butler's notion of the ambivalence of drag further and argues that female action figures should not be interpreted as a mere result of misogyny. Instead, understanding such action female characters of the cinema should employ a more complex relationship within gender roles, assuming they are destabilizing existing and traditional gender identities through hard body heroines.

> The development of the hard body, hardware, hard-as-nails heroine who can take it, and give it with the biggest and the baldest action men of the cinema indicates a growing acceptance of non-traditional roles for women and an awareness of arbitrariness of gender traits.....The modern action film has gone Butler's example of drag by one further by repositioning destabilizing gender performances onto feminine bodies that are not easily read as merely humorous or sexually perverse. [20]

In his discussion of Laura Mulvey's notion of the gaze, Brown understands it insufficiently sensitive and outdated when one needs to interpret those feminine bodies that are shown with

[19] http://www.afterellen.com/music/2008/4/womensmusic101
[20] Brown, Jeffrey: 'Gender and the Action Heroine: Hardbodies and the "Point of No Return"', *Cinema Journal*, 1996, Vol. 35, No. 3, p. 56.

more masculine traits. He suggests that the masculine gaze is no more at use here, as the new hard body is not a sexual object anymore. The question needing resolving is whether this body can be constituted as a sexual subject. When discussing the Sarah Connor character (played by Linda Hamilton) of *Terminator II*, it is important to notice that the author admits possible interpretations of both her and Terminator (played by Arnold Schwarzeneger) as transvestites. He also employs the notion that the dominant traits in action movies involve understanding that a hardbody must be appropriated by associating it with a motherly instinct. I assume then that the butch bodies are marginalized, left aside in the narrative (the main thing does not happen to them) because the context they are in, the narrative does not allow them to be associated with motherhood. While he also introduces the notion of apologetic femininity in certain characters' flirting with the male audience of those characters who are no doubtingly kicking ass, but need to employ these heterosexual play rules that would allow them to pass. Apologetic femininity is also called acting straight, in order to pass. We could say that all the videos discussed in the heterosexist videos chapter are displaying the form of apologetic femininity in larger or smaller scale, for the lesbian woman presented in those will always have to be ascribed with some drawback that would either make them less valid, successful, potent, visible or `normal`.

We can conclude that heteronormativity understands that homosexuality in general is articulated as heterosexuality's other, as something fake or inappropriate. Consequently, it needs appropriation into a butch/femme dynamic, as we shall discuss in the second chapter. The outcomes of these power relations come to be visible on various levels of cultural communication; they are embodied into narratives, cultural practices, even on surfaces of human bodies. This is made to be very visible and thus the usage of such symbols becomes recursive, creating a type of automated repetitive proclamations of a certain position. I will at

times need to take a look at how these women bear cultural signs, based on the things they wear and how they stylize their bodies in general. In the first and the second chapter I will organize these symbols into patterns of symbolic clusters of meaning based on how various groups in the music videos choose to identify themselves based on the symbols they use.

Methodology

Most of the presentation of the lesbian bodies shows the deployment of the lesbian character supporting the heterosexual and patriarchal system. In order to show this I analyze a random selection of examples of music videos spanning from the 1980s until today. I have included music videos in which there is an implicit or direct association with lesbianism as well as videos in which there are artists who are self-proclaimed, outted lesbians. I also consider those artists whose image may be to some extent of a challenging effect to the binary gender matrix, artists who, nevertheless, do not speak publicly of their sexuality. Most of the videos I grouped into the heterosexist group could be found on Internet forums which deal with sexism in media, while the queer videos I searched for through personal networks of people who follow queer cultural products.

At this point, I could immediately fall into a logical trap, for I am constructing two groups of videos, with these groups having a rather different structural base. However, this uneasiness of categorization lays at the very base of this paper for a purpose. It is rather easy to notice the heterosexism of the heterosexist videos, for the narrative tactics of the visual material signals everything but shifting the meaning clusters evolving around the image of the lesbian, unless this spectator is herself suffering from severe internalized homophobia. I would say that in these cases positive image shift by Henderson does not occur. Also, it is useful to mention that almost all the videos in the heterosexist category present a lesbian as merely a part of the narrative, as something that accessorizes the main act (Melissa Etheridge is a special case). Here, the lesbian is described, prescribed, and bound in the rather poor imagery of heterosexist practice. Do these ‘lesbians’ have a name? The videos of the queer section all feature women whose approach to lesbianism is to out it. The videos of the queer

category represent the lesbian as not merely the main act, but it goes further into proclaiming identity as political, where outing is a sort of tactics and a refiguration of the mere notion of what is act and what is not.

Though at first I planned to pick videos only from the 1980s, I soon realized that the data would not be sufficient. Even if there are plenty of music videos in the 1980s, for a more detailed analysis I needed to extend the span of the research to a longer period, because the original timescale did not seem to provide enough data for a more sensitive stratification of representations. Bearing the economy part as well, we should note that among videos discussed, there is an obvious tendency that the heterosexist videos as opposed to the queer videos are viewed much more often according to the *You Tube* counters. However, the numbers provided by these *You Tube* counters will not accurately describe the actual view times of the two types of videos. Therefore I rely only partially on these counters and will generalize these ratings into two major parameters: more often and less often.

At times I will make references to popular cultural magazines so as to establish contexts these videos appeared in. I propose then to read music videos by defining the junctures where texts and images of artists are situated. Therefore I need to employ extra video sources as well, such as their interviews and/or their style, gestures and overall engagement to show how someone's public persona together with their work influences their overall effect of counter-reactionary' to the dominant culture. This approach is informed by Carol Vernalis's method.

> We cannot look to any one place for an understanding of a music video, but must rather deal with the relations among a video's narrative, formal and sociocultural aspects, particularly as they are complicated by the tensions between music and image. The way that music and image combine cannot simply be taken as natural; styles of performance footage change from year to year, and the construction of a music video always requires effort. Video makers have developed a set of practices for putting image to music in which the image must give up its autonomy and abandon some of its representational modes. In exchange, the image gains on flexibility and play, as well as in polyvalence in meaning. Many of the meanings of music video lie in this give-and-take between image and sound, and in relation among various modes of continuity.[21]

[21] Vernallis, Carol: 'The Aesthetics of Music Video: An Analysis of Madonna's 'Cherish''. *Popular Music*, 1998, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 153-185, page 155.

Carol Vernalis proposes reading of a music video in close relation to socio-cultural aspects in a way that does not exclude the role of music, (in particular the 'sound' of the song), nor the lyrics in the final meaning effects[22]. I will pursue a similar approach and will sometimes be concentrating on a song's lyrical content if I feel it will provide a fruitful contribution to match a songs lyrical interpretation with the accompanying images and videos' narratives.

When it comes to analyzing video narratives, I watched a video in a way a movie can be watched. I divide the overall narrative through cutting it scene by scene, in their chronological order, so as to be able to see what other activities can be happening in a narrative that we do not see while we watch it all at once. This gave space to an intersectional kind of analysis in which we carefully observe the way the video is made so as to see if, and then how the narrative influences the overall representation. While the emphasis of my analysis is on the symbolics of these women's appearance, yet, regarding their image, it often happens that the most significant meaning attributes come from the narrative itself, combined with the image.

Some scholars have combined musicology with the way the image is constructed. For example, Stan Hawkins is mostly interested in the question of how trends/communal knowledges in popular culture, in their various contexts influence the aesthetic leveling and bordering within music practice itself including sound, tonality, and dynamics. Analyzing Annie Lenox's videos, Hawkins lyrically compares what happens when we intellectualize music and juxtaposes it to the analysis of the image, from caption to caption of a single, closed study data, the video and the song. This interdisciplinary study finally arrived to a point where Hawkins was able to state how her, Annie Lenox's semiotics of gender and style met culturally arranged points within sound structures[23]. I find this approach very useful in

---

[22] Ibid. 153-185.

[23] Hawkins, Stan: 'Perspectives in Popular Musicology: Music, Lennox, and Meaning in 1990s Pop', *Popular Music*, 1996, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 17-36.

unmasking misconceptions of performance as a state of art where gender has no roles, especially in case studies where a detailed close up of one individual artist is allowed. Since I am concerned with more than one performer at a time, I am not going to follow this methodology. In this paper I will stress the importance of the imagery of visual cultural symbolics together with lyrics.

Heterosexist Videos

Understanding representation as a political act (Marshment 1998)[24], it is of high importance to pay attention to who produces the image of the lesbian body. In all cases discussed in this chapter it seems that these representations were made by someone, who is not interested in producing lesbian representations which would challenge the traditional notions of women hood and lesbianism. When this representation of a lesbian body is made by someone who is a heterosexual male, it is rather obvious that these representations will be made on their own terms, appropriated through various heteronormative cultural mechanisms. I identified three subtypes within heterosexist group of video representations.

Drawing on Ciasullo's inspiring essay, which examines the (in)visibility of butch lesbian bodies in mass cultural sites, I will demonstrate how heterosexism is at work in the following videos, underscoring that the public presence of lesbian bodies is dominantly heterosexualised by letting pass only those lesbian bodies that are stylized more heterosexual,. In this chapter I plan to demonstrate the preference of the femme figure, or a lipstick lesbian, in the videos done mostly by male producers[25].

In his discussion, Novak concludes that a lipstick lesbian in popular culture is that model of a lesbian body made for satisfying interests of the heterosexual audience, mainly males, which equates/defines lesbian as something that can always be 'repaired' and turned to the 'right' way, which is the heterosexual one. Even if overall lesbian (in)visibility seems to have achieved the new age of visibility from 1980s onwards, it is that kind of representations of lesbianism that reproduces heterosexist and patriarchal patterns, of woman whose body is

[24] Marshment, Margaret: 'The Picture Is Political: Representation of Women in Contemporary Popular Culture', in Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson (eds.) *Thinking Feminist: Key Concepts in Womens' Studies*, Publisher, New York, 1993.

in the same time sexualised for heterosexual purposes, and de-sexualised in terms for lesbian audience, which is that which defines itself as lesbian (Novak, 2002[26]).

Judith Butler uses the notion of corporeal style in order to designate a structure of meanings according to which the body is 'a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated.'[27] She states that the styles of the body are never fully self styled, for styles have a history, and those histories condition and limit the possibilities:

> Hence, as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences. Discrete genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right.[28]

Here, while saying so, Butler admits the notion of dominance in the expression of heteronormativity; which in our case in turn results in heterosexist appropriation of lesbianism, as portrayed in all three types of videos I have analyzed.

Butler's notion on corporeal style may be linked to Baudrillard's notions of modern strategies of the body. According to Baudrillard, the body is functioning as a means of displayed status. A model dominant in this figuration is the functional beauty, templated primarily for women. Along the way a certain eroticization occurs, eroticization, which only recognizes those signs that ascribe dominance elsewhere[29]. I argue that all of the heterosexual videos display a certain homogeneity of attraction in that all the heroines are young, slim and white.

[25] While most of these videos were indeed produced by male produces, it does not mean that these videos are heterosexist because of the sex and/or sexualities of the producers, but because its content is such.
[26] Miroslav Novak,' *Lipstick* lezbijke: emancipatorski šik ili heteroseksualizacija homoseksualnosti'. In Paulic(ed) *Svezak 1*. Broj 1. Zagreb, 2003. pp. 15-24.
[27] Judith Butler, 'Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions'.In Schildrick and Price (eds.), *Feminist Theory and the Body*, Routledge, New York, N.Y.pp. 416-422.
[28] ibid. p.167.
[29] Jean Baudrillard: 'The Finest Consumer Object: The Body' in Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco (eds.), *The Body, A Reader*, Routledge, New York, 2007, 277-283.

Lesbian as immoral

In all of the following video discussions, I observed a kind of subversive homophobia, which - while at times is more or less explicit - still remains as a public portrayal of hate against homosexual practices. This includes both the 'practical' contexts of everyday life, and also, the practical stance of symbols, which later come to term different sets of practices. One of the types of the subversive homophobic portrayal will be the one in which a lesbian is presented as something which is simply bad, evil and/or bringing bad luck, death or malaise. I turn to a 1983 Gazebo video, *I like Chopin*, in order to demonstrate this type of representation, one in which a lesbian body was/is coded in mass culture negatively both for the eye of the 'average' heterosexual and lesbian audience.

I start with a video made in the 1980s; above all because it is in the 1980s that music videos started playing a bigger role in constructing and promoting a persona of the artists. Bearing that in mind, it consequently meant that more people were exposed to this kind of promotion/presentation. In the 1983 Gazebo video, *I like Chopin*, the narrative goes as follows: A seemingly happy and straight couple arrives at a house party, at a rather isolated location (we can see a car arriving into a huge garden of a countryside villa). We can identify three main characters; the singer of the song who is at the same time the male party of the couple, the attractive female party of the couple, and a third woman, a party hostess, seemingly lesbian, and as attractive as the female part of the couple. As people mingle in a seemingly decadent manner (one scene suggests so: eating- devouring for pleasure-not hunger), the host of the party starts chit-chatting with the woman in the couple, while the man sings with a semi-sad expression on his face. The couple is dressed in white, while the host, is dressed in black. Black clothing can mean many things depending on the context (for instance black suits of other male guests might suggest their credibility and authority), it is on that lesbian body that it suggests something vicious, a kind of otherness that is marked by death,

or an inability to procreate. Subversively, however, it might suggest an anarchic stance, the disruption of the heterosexual political order. Note that the anarchy flag's color is black. But whether this subversive reading is powerful enough so as to challenge the existing order is questionable.

In the following scene, the two women go for a walk into a labyrinth of bushes. This is where the narrative cuts into the next scene, in which for a second we see that the woman's dress is misplaced (the woman previously seen in a couple), and at the end we can see the woman in the couple has died. The man/singer continues to sing with a semi-sad expression on his face as the woman he loves left him for death. This is a rather common trait of representations of 'other' sexualities, remembering Nunokawa's article on the gay man image, it has a long history as being portrayed as something lethal, and/or dangerous meaning carrying the stigma of death on it[30].

The death of the woman in the couple is followed by a scene, in which the lesbian woman looks at the picture of the deceased woman a couple of years later. Her facial expressions portray longing and regret, and that comes as a decisive point for the question whether this video may be read as a sign of disrupting the heterosexist symbolic order. For in some cases, death of the troubled character can mean its resurrection because sometimes we can understand death to be a revolt which has a life of its own. At the same time this revolt is connected to the life of the deceased, for it is born out of martyrdom, and thus carries and documents the 'troubledness' and its resignification towards. However, when it is not that character, or what it comes to symbolize, that character which is actually being punished through the narrative with death, has a different symbolic output. The sentimentalization of the scene in which the lesbian woman is looking at the picture comes as an asset to portray her 'deed' as an immoral one, for three possible reasons. The woman has died because her

[30] Jeff Nunokawa, "All the Sad Young Men: AIDS and the Work of Mourning," in Diana Fuss (ed.) *inside/out*, Routledge, New York, 1991, pp 211-324.

heart could not handle the whole setting- then the lesbian would be read as something that disturbs. If the woman has died because she was simply ill, then the whole narrative and my reading of that video is a nonsense, however, we do not have to believe this to be the case, as there were no other signs pointing to her illness whatsoever. She could have died out of guilt, or because she was running away from it, and even though it sounds impossible, it would still support my reading of the video narrative as homophobic.

It is through the context of the video's narrative that we realize that the party host might be a lesbian, in instances when she indulges into flirtatious activities with another woman, or when she takes the woman in the couple aside and alone into the secret labyrinth of the garden around the house. Even this hiding away suggests a view in which what they are doing is to be held a secret. Resulting in death, the story suggests a moralizing context, which equals lesbian as something immoral.

The video's message thus reads that the woman in black is a successful one; she has a big house, she has style, even friends to invite to her party. Up to this point the video does not code this body negatively, but since her attempt to flirt results in death, the message is transformed into one that says that she can never have a successful and a fulfilling relationship with another woman. Especially if she chooses the one who is in a couple with, not surprisingly, another man. It further reads that, even if she tries, she is denied happiness, she is incapable of having a lover, moreover, she causes sadness to a man 'whose' woman she took, and it all summons up to an idea of her lesbianism as inappropriate, immoral and guilt-worthy. In terms of Henderson's positive image model, this video's representation does not assume a positive identification of lesbian audiences with this character. The symbolic shift of what the image of a lesbian in this video comes to mean to the lesbians who identify with this character, can not occur.

Lipstick lesbian- with or without men

Another type of the representation that can easily fall into the category of a negative portrayal is constructed as follows. We see some 'inherently lesbian(ish)' action in the videos, but they are put in a context in which they are not existing for themselves but are coupled with heterosexual males who find watching lesbian action sexually arousing. Men do not have to be present in the videos. Sometimes these videos are made in a way that assumes a male gaze enjoying them. This is usually characteristic of rock videos. According to Schippers[31], alternative rock concerts often employed practices of sexualizing the female body, however, she rejects the term of the male gaze. Schippers argued that together with re-occurring patterns of heterosexism in these communities, there were plenty of places for queerness in rock's overall cultural production, but only in personal lives and practices of people belonging to this subculture. Since I will only observe video's content, I am obliged to consider these heterosexist patterns.

The coupling of the lesbian with men in videos gives an impression that lesbians do not exist for themselves but need to be surveilled by men, further more, their purpose is to have men entertained and visually (pornographically) pleased. Lesbian bodies and characters of these videos are not in the possession of any agency and they merely exist for men to look at and for straight women to admire them for grasping such attention.

In Simian Mobile Disco video titled *Hustler* 2007 we see a similar setting of all girls in a video, all very young and extremely attractive. They are all very stylized. The Video starts by the girls spreading some gossip from one to the other, whispering, and it gradually ends up with them making up. They all look gorgeous and delicious and like they are having fun, but somehow this representation of the lesbian body does not manage to escape the existing

[31] Schippers, Mimi: 'The Social Organization of Sexuality and Gender in Alternative Hard Rock: An Analysis. *Gender and Society*. 14. 2000. pp. 747-764

sexuality boundaries. It repeats the pattern that lesbian bodies are acceptable if feminized and desirable in straight male's eyes, and almost always white.

Lesbian as criminal

An example for this representation is the video entitled *Baby, Baby, Baby* by the band called EndEverAfter, made in 2007. The setting is as follows: an all male band arrives at a high school to play in a classroom full of white, attractive young women. As they start playing, the 'heat' of the room rises. So the girls start taking off their clothes ravagingly and lustfully. While the 'girls' do that, the male singer keeps on pronouncing the refrain words: baby, baby, baby, which seems to make the girls go wilder and wilder until the video's content attains almost (if not already) pornographic traits. The ironic part of this video is that these women seem to be extremely aroused by the male band, and end up kissing and physically arousing each other. In turn, the male singer and other members of the band obviously give these women lustful looks, suggesting that these women are doing the right thing and that they should keep on doing it. All the lesbian action seizes to exist when the band finish playing their song and pack up their things to leave, each one of them dragging along a girl previously involved in what might have seemed as a lesbian act of sexual pleasuring.

Stemming from this one, another highly problematic aspect of this particular video is associated with the paradigm of the lesbian as a criminal. The girls previously kissing in this video also appear in a couple of scenes where they are standing in front of a mug shot stand. They continue to kiss and not minding that what they do simply does not comply with the rules of a 'decent girl', while the singer looks at them as if he is vastly entertained with what

he is seeing. The members of the band, especially the singer as the hegemonic rock masculinity representative, are all performing a scene of sexual arousal produced in their terms by an amusing and amicable play of indecent, almost criminal behavior by the girls, which is actually, done on their demand - for their affirmative looks. This video is among straight male top fantasies, in the most heterosexist, anti-lesbian and generally misogynist attitude towards the whole of womankind.

Lesbian as a failed heterosexual woman

The third type of a video I would like to place in this group is slightly harder to grasp, as it does not display any kind of sublime homophobia. Neither does it display tendencies to fix the lesbian's 'problematic' sexuality. What might be troubling from the point of view of positive representation is that these lesbian women appear in a context in which they are given a reason to act that 'lesbian'. In other words, what is not made clear cut in these narratives is whether these lesbians who are acting so empowered, proactive in claiming and owning (identifying themselves instead of being identified) their sexuality, are like that because they simply are, or just because they are a product of a misogynist context to begin with, e.g. they became lesbians because they were mistreated by men. In the Queens of the Stone Age video, *Hell's Kittens* we can see four wild outcast girls rummaging around, escaping the forces of law with no fear of being restrained in any way. They share a common history of saving endangered women from violent abusive and/or oppressive men, with a Tarantino like aesthetics- these angry woman warriors produce a lot of blood when punishing those men. They are wanted alive on western-like *Wanted!* posters, thus slightly referring to the Dalton brothers from the comic *Lucky Luke*. However, they are all fully fitting the attractive woman

stereotype, at least image wise, and male viewers of contemporary taste may find these images to be quite pleasing when it comes to valuing sexually arousable material.

These women's clothes are tight-fitting, made to make their figure accessible to who ever takes a single look at it, their decoltage is deep. The women's overall image resembles the look of a pornography starlet. Moreover, the mere fact that these female outcasts are four, as opposed to one, the usual number of the hero structure, points out that the video may easily function as another type of an eye candy. Maybe, these women are empowered but it does not matter as long as they look nice on the screen. Indeed, the video is quite sexualized, these four women are shown as sexy killers, their bodies presented in any porn pose with a gun against a penis in their mouths or hands. The only difference is that these women actually punish men, but for that, there is a need for them to be four, as one is obviously too weak and too thin to do that alone.

It is of importance of how the director of the video decided to put the 'lesbian' factor within the video. He does not place it within the narrative itself. Instead, he creates a mini meta-narrative in which two girls are kissing - not just anyhow, but extremely eroticized, even pornographic. So, while within the narrative there is no 'lesbian activity', it is placed within the meta-narrative, which is made to look different with some help of the technique of visually editing the image, i.e. deliberately blurring the image. The fact that women within the narrative are not really 'lesbians' on screen because they do not indulge in an inherently lesbian activity is problematic. Even if they are empowered and mighty, the director desexualized them through putting in an extra meta-narrative which separates the symbolic link between women in the narrative, and those in the meta-narrative. While doing this, the producer employed both the desexualization of a powerful female character and the construction of the male gaze. Furthermore, it is hard to detect what exactly is happening in this video as it is made to look old-ish, as if the filming material was torn and the projector

was not working reliably. This technique, I believe, adds up to the lesbian as something not fully representable, for there must be an emission obstacle involved in more ways than just one.

Another video deserving attention in this category is the 1996 T.a.t.u. *All the Things She Said* or the *Not Gonna Get Us* for the same reason. Both videos present the 'school girls' singing openly about their young sexuality, about their fights with their parents and being rejected by their environment, all because the two of them are in love. While the T.a.t.u. singers appeared in the media as openly lesbian, it soon came to be known to the public that their lesbianism is entirely faked. It might have presented a kind of liberation from the negative portrayal of a lesbian body on the face of the popular culture if they had not been play-acting their identity. However, it is highly problematic how lesbianism turned out to be heterosexualized and used as a marketing strategy to appeal to a global audience, in the same time drawing on and reinstating the stereotypical expectation of the global pop cultural stance on 'Russia'. This consequently ended up functioning as a means of profit making based on the shock value of openly lesbian in Russia. Furthermore, the market success was strengthened by the way that the T.a.t.u. singers look like, their school girl's uniforms also conform to the fetishization of a 'teenage' body and an overall awakening of notions of women as something fragile and in need of taking care of. Whatever gains their voicing of the 'lesbian' brought, it was fragmented away by the obvious and intended hegemonic desirability of those teenager girls.

Perhaps they became aware of the problematic of their representation, so they attempted to strengthen their play-acting as lesbian. In their later videos they brought a man into the video, and one of the girls had a thing going on with him, but however, she did not want him, and he became more aggressive and violent in demanding sex from her. She then escaped from his bedroom, and the other T.a.t.u. character rescued her. Even if we disregard the mere

‘necessity’ of putting one of the characters in the context with a male, and observe only the context in which two of them manage to reunite at the end of the video, it still is not enough for this representation to challenge stereotypically hereronormative expectations of the majority of the audience. Their reunion is for major reason that the audience anticipates another, new product of the dynamic duo, whose portrayal of lesbianism is not convincing enough of an image to make any lesbian representation less heterosexualized as it was done by their overall image.

These videos and many others of the kind may be grouped in the so called faux lesbian videos group which manages to reproduce existing patterns of the dominant image of a lesbian body in the popular culture. We can notice similar patterns in these videos' group; a lesbian is destructive, criminal, but manageable and surveilled attractive when producing arousal for males. In all the subtypes inspected in this section occurs the problem of lesbian essentialism. Is lesbian everything we see that looks lesbian? Is two girls making out lesbian? The question of why it is so exclusively a commodity for straight men to have the right to identify another is not an issue. Why and how do we know what is faux? That it is not produced by a lesbian? If a video made by lesbian producers that portrays lesbians as invariably attractive as any other woman’s body is sexually pleasing to men, would it be any different? No. The problem is the assumption of a power stance on the whole lesbian experience on the basis of owning and appropriating of what they do without men.

In heterosexist terms lesbian is problematic only in relation to a masculinity, which in turn deems that masculinity is threatened by it. For once a man is not needed, his existence is questionable. As Judith Butler argues:

> Indeed, the only place love is to be found is for the ostensibly repudiated object, where love is understood to be strictly produced through a logic of repudiation; hence, drag is nothing but the effect of a love embittered by disappointment or rejection, the incorporation of the Other whom one originally desired, but now hates. And lesbianism is nothing other than the effect of a love embittered by

> disappointment or rejections, and of recoil from that love, a defense against it or, in the case of butchness, the appropriation of the masculine position that one originally loved.[32]

And finally, an example of a video produced by a lesbian artist, appropriating several aspects of heteronormativity. This will serve as an example to show that a video produced by an openly gay artist does not necessarily challenge the image of a lesbian and a woman's overall gender role. In Melissa Etheridge's video titled, *The Weakness in Me*, the narrative is as follows. The opening scene features a tattoo on what we later come to realize, a women's hand, reading: *'say it proud'*, and a couple of seconds later it reads: *'Aint nothing but a she thing'*. The narrative of the video is revolved thoughtfully around the symbol of a flower. While Melissa Etheridge the song writer, uses flower symbol in her lyrics to signify a love relationship, tender but fragile, the video director Maria Maggenti complies with her symbolization creating flower as a symbol of wanting to belong to another. There are three characters in the video; all three are women, two of them involved in a relationship, and a third one is flirting with one of the women in the relationship. That is what the video is about, a temptation posed by another woman to a relationship of two women. In order to visualize this, the director uses cuts of women showing their arguments, their tender moments, caresses, and sleeping in bed while hugging.

This might seem as a liberating representation, showing lesbianism in a different context, which is, the insight into their supposed intimacy, however, we might to a certain extent conclude this video as almost heterosexist, for it does not entirely escape from heteronormative imaging of the lesbian. Creed has documented a tendency for a portrayal of lesbian as narcissistic creatures possessed by a kind of disorder of endlessly craving for themselves in another, and the director is expressing the same manner of representation of a lesbian. The three women in the video are not only all satisfying the image of an attractive

[32] Judith Butler: *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* Routledge, New York, 1993, p.127.

woman, but also look almost identically, through the choice of hairstyles, dress and make-up. The director's preference of identical looking femmes for the sake of unpoliticized aesthetization, results as almost a failure of positive identification of imagined lesbian communities. Lesbian audiences may to some extent relate to this video, but not entirely.

Melissa Etheridge's corporeal style signifies a butch, but all the three women in the narrative are femmes. This does not entail that femmes are not real lesbians, but it refers to a common cultural practice of displaying *only* femmes in order to show, apologetically, that lesbians are not those 'scary' creatures, such as, supposedly, butches are. We only see Melissa Hetheridge singing very rarely in the video. Her role is put as separate from the narrative, she only tells a story as a side-standing reporter. Melissa Hetheridge herself being rather butchy, even if she did not act in the video, she could have pursued a butch looking like actress for the video's narrative. For omitting this, she has made an implicit claim that butch is to remain outside of the spotlights.

Another problematic aspect is in how intimacy is displayed – as completely desexualized. Intimacy is achieved through displaying video's heroine's affectionate hugs, which only remain affectionate as these lesbians are shown to be 'innocent girls', who do not have sex. The most sexual image is only the one when they sleep together, spoon-hugging each other. Even though the song is sad, speaking about being on the verge of choices between two different lovers, it might have employed some more explicit portrayal of passion. However, the depiction of any sort of sexual lesbian activity is evaded, the passion of the new lovers, or the kiss-and-make up narratives usually found in videos dealing with troubled heterosexual couples. The director of the video may have wanted to evade the possibility of heterosexualizing her narrative, by doing so, the video came out as no more challenging the traditional notions on lesbians than any other of the videos which employ heterosexist and patriarchal identification of lesbian discussed in this chapter.

Conclusion

In this section I have given an overview of videos that display several signs of heterosexism and/or heteronormativity. I have constructed types of these representations that are polarized according to four general stereotypes that evolve around lesbian identity: lesbian as immoral, lipstick lesbian, lesbian as a criminal and lesbian as a failed heterosexual woman. All four may be at work at once in a specific video, depending on what grounds one wants to portray a lesbian as a politically threatening entity. In all of the cases discussed, it is a form of negative portrayal, a portrayal by which the audience is being instructed of lesbian identity as something 'othered', different, and in need of appropriating. There is little possibility for positive identification of lesbian communities with such representations. In the long run it entails, that if there is no enough powerful voicing of lesbian identities either opposing to this representations, or creating alternative ones, then these heterosexist representations are dominant and exclusive of everything opposing to them. In that case, everything that comes opposing to such representations would still emerge out of the heterosexist environment. The following chapter deals with videos that display voicing of such oppositions.

Queer Videos

In this chapter I explore another type of music videos. Something we could title the queer videos. As I have tried to point out earlier, the reason why the following videos are to be understood as queer is not because they were made by people who identify themselves as queer, or because I offer a queer counter-reading of the videos, but because the contents of videos suggest a certain revisiting of the gender identities and their performativity. This can be captured by analyzing the ways the videos display a considerable amount of parodying, in Butler's sense of drag.

It is rather uneasy to establish this group of videos as the queer videos, for queer seems to deny the process of categorizing itself. In a way, it is as if I would jump into a trap and completely miss out on what I believe was one of the original ideas behind the whole concept of queer. That is off course, the avoidance of being put into a category which eventually seazes to be of any help or use to the ones who choose to name or label, or identify with this particular category. Moreover, the avoidance to render anything to be the norm and a fixed point for future reference, for through this statistics of self-identification one does not go very far in understanding anything social and cultural. Therefore it is useful to mention that all the videos I discuss in this section posses a kind of temporariness. It exists on the fractures between pop music and fashion, bodily ornaments and a tiny amount of time to which certain meanings are assigned to them. Pop's language seems to be repetitive and recursive, but various and ever changing, so that it is still somewhat possible to trace to what contexts can a visual narrative refer to. For instance, as we shall see in the reading of videos I provide, many artists choose drag when communicating their identity. Whether it is a conscious act or not, is not always as clear cut in all the videos. Nevertheless, the reason for categorising these videos

as queer is their content including open references to markers understood to be queer. This process of constructing the meaning as queer is temporary, its meaning varies with communities and temporalities.

Then how do I identify them as queer, still? At a given time span, its value in meaning emerges in comparison with the heterosexist videos, which display a certain exclusivity of existence and ownership of definition, claiming lesbian bodies as primarily the parts of heterosexist patriarchy. I am not arguing that lesbian bodies in these videos can exist outside of heterosexist patriarchy but that the way the lesbian body is presented can at times show a certain sign of rejection to this overarching principle of ownership over the feminine. This rejection of definition by others is usually shaped as a self-definition by embracing and shifting the meaning of the very terms one gets from the traits informed by the heterosexism and patriarchy. I believe this is what Henderson had in mind when thinking her positive identification model.

Anger and Might

Hereby I provide an analysis of a video titled *Spit'n'Glitter* by Scream Club directed by Rhani Remedes and Justin Kelly (2008). The narrative goes as follows: The first scene displays a women's decoltage, with words Spit'n'Glitter carved in on the surface of her skin. The second image is cut to the image of someone shining the high heel shoe which has a sharp knife looking like object in the place of where the heel usually is.- It is actually worn later on in the video. In several subsequent scenes we can see four women getting ready, while exercising their thighs. They are not shown to be exercising the aerobics style we usually see when female aerobics is presented (a bunch of women jumping mindlessly on their steppers); rather, they are pursuing the strengthening kind of exercise, which looks

tough. Their nails are colored, their hairs are equipped with pins, they wear various necklaces and heavy make-up and their clothes are rather feminine- mini skirts, tights colorful and leopard patterned, tube shirts, dresses…It is a kind of street fashion style. Indeed, we soon find out that they are getting ready to meet and face the streets. A man in female drag joins them, and they all carry their knives, guns and logs of wood. Instead of a ring, one of them has a stylized knuckle-rings item, made to make hand punches ache harder. These actions are shown, while a butchy looking woman is raping.

The refrain is as follows, three women in girly dresses and heavy make-up are singing the lyrics: *spit and glitter*, dancing, with very serious expressions on their faces. After the refrain we can see a group of people protesting, their placards saying- *'God hates Spit Glitter'*, *'Spit Glitter is Un-american'*, some holding the Bible, some carrying crosses. And some showing it onto the arriving angry bunch as if they were devils.

Soon the army of women and perhaps some men, the street fighters, arrive and fight these religious people. It is done in an interesting manner. They do not go and simply hit them; instead, their fight is both physical and symbolical. One member of the angry bunch, a woman, pushes the heads of two male protesters together in a forced kiss. Another woman tortures one protesting guy with her tool for practicing thighs, they also tear off the clothes of members of the religious bunch. A brief shot of ending this battle is summarized by showing a shoe of one of the girls as she makes a step and goes away, leaving the glass glitter of her broken heal behind as she has finished her job.

What follows is another street gathering, this time organized/populated by the group of women, some already seen in the previous scenes. More people are shown to be there, most carrying placards saying (listed in order of appearance): *'Tit in'*, *'So, some tits are not tits at all?'*, and *'All tits are equal'*. Members of the crowd dance around topless, or with their dresses ripped down so as to show off/shove their breasts. At the end of the video we see

another member of the band, singing while walking towards the camera, followed by a bunch of women, who all portray serious faces, wearing heavy makeup, coming in all sizes and shapes, not only of traditional femininity.

The lead singer/rapper's corporeal style is coded butch - she is presented as a tough, ugly-faces making, in-your-face lyricist woman. Her clothes are wide and 'manly', put more accurately; she appropriates a fusion of clothes worn by hip-hop African American males (the bagginess of her clothes and her hat) and also, less known, the new rave (flashy coloured) clothing items, she is glittering. While hip-hop is traditionally coded masculine, the new rave scene is coded similarly to rave, as means of youth culture's protesting against growing up. Her hair is longer and blonde and not stylized feminine, her bodily movements are made to represent her as heavy and tough. Her movements are somewhat similar to movements of a hip hop artist. She is a butch character, a woman who wears her masculinity comfortably. The question needing answer here is: how does this representation differ from the non- positive image of mainstream butch figure? We need to focus on the visibility of this figure. This particular artist is also present outside of this video. She has her 'myspace' page, her bands' 'myspace' page, and on both she has fans. I am finding accounts for her visibility, which exist in the virtual sphere. Through this virtual space she is able to exist and be seen in her own terms, for she is the one who creates the image. Even if falling back to possible traps of self-identification which is limited and informed by the very heterosexist surroundings it exists within, it seems as it is the only way one can attain existence and possibility to interact in terms as close to their own as it can be.

Another link to the hip hop culture is achieved by appropriation a hip-hop's often re-occurring topic as the straight-out-of-jail narrative, of people who live in the hoods, who are often followed and surveilled by police, and so on. Both the director and the band in their overall manner of expression successfully managed to portray the image of a lesbian as

someone who is thought to be a criminal, but who is thought of that way for a non valid reason. It is a manner of satirical approach to lesbian as a criminal, for exactly by appropriating the 'thugs' motive taken from hip hop narratives in a song sang by women, pronouncing wishes of the queer communities.

In the video, the religious group is made to seem as if they were reasoning their hate speech as based on what they read from the Bible. The placards saying 'Spit'n'Glitter is Un-American', and 'God hates Spit'n'Glitter' tells us so as they voice claims that America is seen as a God's country, where there is no place for 'Spit'n'Glitter'. In turn, these words, spit and glitter, symbolize coming out in a way that shows pride of the power of self-identification. That is also the reason for antagonists of the queer bunch showing very angry faces, as if saying, you cannot fool with us. There has been enough of us being identified as this or that.

In this particular video producers (of both the song lyrics and the images displayed) evoke a certain rage and/or rebellion kind of feeling. Eileraas[33] sees 'ugliness' as all those types of representations in which women make themselves look, sound and construct their overall public persona as deviant from the existing and traditional notions of beauty on a women/s body. While 'ugliness' as a stylistic strategy stems from 1970's punk, it was dominantly gender male. Eileraas observes how these women bands (consisting of women only) employ both the symbols of traditional femininity with these markers of ugliness- use of obscene language, excessively exaggerated make up and/or hairdos, emphasized and stylized portrayal of obesity and so on. The author argues that through this employment of both traditional femininity and the deviation from it offers a space for re-signification,

[33] Eileraas, Karina: 'Witches, Bitches & Fluids: Girl Bands Performing Ugliness as Resistance'. *TDR*, 1997, Vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 122-139.

consequently, this act of style 'flaunts traditionally hidden or unspeakable aspects of the female body and flagrantly defy traditional modes of 'femininity' and domesticity.' [34]

Looking at the bodily markers, or what Judith Butler would call the corporeal style, as in, the style of the body, entails watching carefully how their body is stylized and what these stylizations come to mean in an analysis sensitive to cultural practices. She is in a butch drag, and her butch-ness is not only defined by what she wears, but is also defined in comparison to femme-ness of other women in the videos.

Judith Butler stated:

> As much as drag creates a unified picture of 'woman' (what its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - as well as its contingency.[35]

In this video the woman who raps is in the butch drag, while the women who sing the chorus are all femmes. Thus the femme-butch relationship in this video resembles the heterosexual pattern of a man and a woman, which is a structure very often seen in hip-hop, or 1990s dance videos where a man raps and a woman sings in chorus (see above). However, because this relationship is made between two women, it accordingly signals that the heterosexual pattern is not in unique possession of such masculine/feminine polarized gender roles. This is one instance of how the traditional gender matrix is destabilized in this video.

Street is the public place, and stands as a metaphor of a public space: place where people get voiced, or voice themselves. Two major groups are communicating- one is clearly making effects of banishment against the other group, while the other one fights against. The manner of fighting against the banishment revolves in a following manner: firstly the group of women recognize themselves in the doing/manifesting of the group of the, let's call them the Banishers. That follows them, the Queer bunch/The Banished reacting by assuming those

[34] Judith Butler, 'Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions'.In Schildrick and Price, Feminist Theory and the Body, pp. 416-422. page 417.

'weapons', which in video refer to cultural practices of the heterosexist group of religious indoctrinated group of the Banisher's.

The resolution of the two groups' conflict comes in the last scene when The Banishers end up being punished by the Queer bunch. The Queer bunch are using the very terminology of punishing that was previously used against them, saying: if you are calling us ungodly, then we can apply the whatever is called, then ungodly on you so as to show you what exactly it is. This in turn revolves as an image of group's exclamation: there are a lot of us, we will not comply being banished, and yes, we are powerful in reversing the banishing action into another direction. This invokes Michael Warner's text on Queer Nation - a set of cultural rebellions performed under the name of Queer Nation[36].

A detail directly made invisible here is that the video does not in any way instigate allusion to lesbianism as erotic love like it does in most of the heterosexist types of videos. In Eheridge's video there was neither, however, in Scream Club we can not detect any kind of patterns recognized in the videos of the previous section. This comes as a reaction to the appropriation of the lesbian body through patriarchal notions on reproduction and female body as commodity/property. The Scream Club's video is articulated clearly as a piece of a larger political statement. This video is an example of a destabilization of the notion that gender identity is fixed to one's biological sex, but also to one's sexuality. In 'authentic', meaning African-American male dominated hip hop there are always women dancing in videos semi-nakedly, being looked at, repeating the pattern of a woman's skin being sexualized and looked at as an object. However, this sexualization was not uttered in Scream Club rap video, and even if they did show naked female breasts, these breasts were protesting

[35] Ibid. p. 418.
[36] Warner, Michael, 'Introduction'.In Michael Warner (ed.) 'Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory'. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993, pp. 193-229.

on their (in)visibility. Instead the video showed a different kind of femininity, the one who speaks back. The video is a sort of a queer manifesto put in video.

Another level at which this video displays features that challenge traditional gender matrix is in the juxtaposing of two types of women bodies. Its representation does not merely play along with the existing beliefs of what lesbians do and/or are like, it also goes one step further and plays with the femininity and masculinity on female bodies. Contrary to the traditional view, both femininity and masculinity on this videos' women's bodies are shown as something powerful, fearsome and by no means, passive and feminized not for the purpose of titillating the masculine gaze (instead the approving looks of the feminine gaze- here the Henderson positive image model). Indeed, their femininity is shown as a kind of a weapon. Note the process of getting ready in the beginning of the video, resembles a process of putting war paint on faces certain African tribes. Another detail is the sharp dangerous knife looking like object put on a shoe of one of the women in the videos, instead of a heal.

On the other hand, masculinity is left more or less untouched - it is still the voice of the spokesperson- in this case a woman. Masculinity on a woman's body is shown as perfectly natural and visible. The only question that remains to be solved is whether the masculinity on a female body in this video can be read merely as the woman in a male drag, as someone simply imitating this masculinity as if she was a real man. Is it important that she is a woman? Yes. In case of a silenced identity- a woman in a male drag- it is, for it seems this image has granted voice. What is shown claims absolute freedom in anyone assuming whichever gender role (masculine, feminine or anything else) as they please, while this role does not have to comply with the person's sex or sexuality in their supposed natural understanding. A person's actual sex (the biological notion) is not necessarily analogous with the 'default' gender practices assigned to one's sex. Is this person the punished by being denied of voice? Ciassulo argues, yes. Its representation then finally might produce an affirmative effect to those

individuals who identify with such images. The reason why this way of depicting women's bodies does not comply with what types of heterosexist videos listed in previous chapter do comply with, lies in the way femininity and masculinity of these women is juxtaposed. Even if the usual aligning of the butch/femme dynamics is present, it is not to be understood as an 'imitative' practice of 'real' heterosexual relationship. It rather deploys that this relationship is not gendered in the traditional manner of a polarized gender, woman/man, sex/gender, culture/nature and so on. It suggests a non linear and non binary distribution of power between entities, in this case regardless whether masculinity resonates oppression towards femininity even if both are seen on a biological women's body. However, based on the You Tube counts of video emission we might claim that it has been watched less often than most of the videos discussed in the previous chapter. This is because this representation is simply not loud enough, as there are certain triggers within it that do not let it cross over like most of the heterosexist videos do.

Humor as a way of destabilizing femme/butch stereotypes

Another video I would like to analyze here is the video titled *Butch/Femme* by a director Gina Mainwal, year 2007. The narrative goes as follows: in an opening part, when there is no music playing yet, we see two girls, femme looking, talking to each other while leaning on the wall. Here is a transcript of their dialog.

Gina: Damn, do you see that girl over there, Gina?
Gina: Yeah, the one with the leatherman?
Gina: Oh, she looks real good.
Gina: They don't make them like that anymore.
Gina: True, they're a dying breed.
Gina: Damn, I know, it's sad! You don't see these women like that anymore, like back in the days, you know, and they had to wear at least two pieces of clothing for women so they wouldn't get arrested...
Gina: Yeah, they were good. Tattoos of stars so they can recognize each other...
Gina: Aha, she's so tuff.

Gina: Damn, she's so handsome.
Gina: She's so butch!
Ginas (both): I like butch girls and I cannot lie. You other femmes cant deny, when butch walks in all the femmes make fuss, cause there's like one of them and thirty of us.

Further on in the video we can see a parodied version of TV series about dating. The two Ginas (they are both called Gina) are sitting behind a judge's table and give marks to those participants who (in the video all women who were shown are read as butch) appear one after another, in various, but all butch looking styles. Ginas give best marks to those participants who are performing, let us call them, successful actions, where these women who are butches manage to open a can, cut a piece of wood, perform masculinity as naturally and in the same time it is re-naturalizing. For one 'nature' cannot be on top of the other "nature", and by expressing so, one effectively underscores and thus refigures notions of what is considered to be natural. The visual aspect of this particular video is to be paired up with the accompanying lyrics, for the lyrics sometimes clarify the image presented, as if the producers wanted to make sure they evade the mere re-utterance of traditional stereotypes on butch and femme lesbian women.

Another issue producers play with in this video is traditional construction of lesbian femmes, usually portrayed as passive, and consequently not active in achieving one's sexual desire. This is stemming from the idea that all women are men's partners, in a way that women are seen to be weaker. However, this is not the case in this video. Indeed, the song's lyrics are quite witty in playing with the meanings of words:

Butch girl: Who says that a femme can't pay for a date, if you've gotta problem, call me daddy.
Wanna show some appreciation on behalf of the queer foundation, Ha, yeah, you know what I like...The rough strong hands of a big butch dyke...
Gina: Hey butch girl, I'm kinda having a problem, I see from your hanky that you're flagging a bottom. It's not that I wanna be a stereotype of a passive femme girl, receptive and polite, I'm not trying to be predictable, but you have to pin me against this wall.

Also, the dialogue of the two Ginas at the beginning of the video suggests an opposition to this traditional view. The two Ginas openly discuss upon what they find attractive, They do not merely sit around and wait until a butch comes to 'take' them. Instead, the producer of the video uses the femme/butch semiotics, but play around with the meanings traditionally constructed around them.

Judith Butler stated the following when discussing about how to meaningfully use terms that already carry an amount of cultural stigma.

> In this sense, the argument that the category of 'sex' is the instrument or effect of 'sexism' is the interpellating moment, that 'race' is the instrument and effect of 'racism' or its interpellating moment, that 'gender' only exists in the service of heterosexism, does not entail that we ought never make use of such terms, as if such terms could only and always reconsolidate the oppressive regimes of power by which they are spawned. On the contrary, precisely because such terms have been produced and constrained within such regimes, they ought to be repeated in directions that reverse and displace their originating aims.[37]

Therefore, repeating images of lesbians as femmes and butches in this video while underscoring traditional understandings of these categories is of challenging effect to the existing gender matrix.

The video's narrative is based on TV show game genre of dating, likeness and fashion preferences. There are shows like that, emerging approximately in the 1990s on MTV, but they soon became present on TV channels globally. The video's characters are wearing rather flashy colours designating the 1980 like design. Their clothes are looking almost childish, and they make funny faces. They play with stereotypes of butches as motorcyclists. The styling of the members of the band is made to look like they do for a reason. In appropriating the symbols of the dress codes of teenage audiences who are supposed to be the primary audience for shows like that, the members of Team Gina employ a certain revolt against the 'seriousness' of other cultural products which are taken seriously. It is as if they are saying that proscribing what is right, which is usually contained within the morality of TV game

[37] Butler: 'Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'', Routledge, New York, 1993. p. 123.

shows such as those, can be also ridiculed on the basics of that gender is not as naturalized as it is traditionally viewed. In some views, popular culture is the place for the feminine, where the voice of the culturally under- or mal-represented can get voiced. Butler states that:

> There is no subject prior to its constructions, and neither is the subject determined by those constructions; it is always the nexus, the non space of cultural collision, in which opens up the possibility of a reworking of the very terms by which subjectivation proceeds-and fails to proceed.[38]

This is how the 'impossible' happened in Team Gina's video.

The usage of humour in these videos is considerable. While assuming supposedly childish nature, they are using this image so as to strengthen the humoruos aspect of the video. We can see this at work in this video with an aid by a humorous mechanism. Butler argues that:

> The loss of the sense of the 'normal', however, can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when the 'normal', 'the original' is revealed to be a copy and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one can embody. In this sense laughter inevitably emerges in the realization that all along the original was derived.[39]

While using butch/femme representation in a way that ridicules traditional expectations of these categories, this video employs notions that all that seems original can, and often does, emerge in other contexts as well. The video's message is politicized and intended.

Its humorous politicization is somewhat analogous with the way the simulation of fearsome images that would be ascribed to the monstrous feminine is achieved in the case of Scream Club's angry women depiction, or a performance of ugliness as a political statement. Just as fearsomeness and monstrosity are vehicles of empowerment when self-proclaimed in destabilization, so is humor a powerful vehicle in assuming a power stance, as seen in Team Gina's video.

---

[38] ibid. p. 124.
[39] Judith Butler, 'Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions', in M. Schildrick and J. Price (eds.), *Feminist Theory and the Body*, Routledge, New York, N.Y. p. 419.

Emphasis on the Personal

As suggested at the beginning of the chapter, some videos will not be showing as explicit politicization of self-identification. Certain videos are simply made to be seen as rather gender neutral. Observing such videos and these womens' bands representation's of lesbian as political calls for a rethinking of what exactly they want to achieve. Videos in the previous group are all narrated with references to larger and broader cultural sets of symbols used when denoting something lesbian. A video's narrative can also be constructed as being told from the point of view of experiences that show stories of intra-human relationships on a level where importance to identify clearly and openly as lesbian is either avoided, or considered irrelevant. All the videos discussed in this section are made for/by outted lesbian artists, primarily lesbian, but not exclusively, lesbian audience directed. Just the fact that they are out does not imply that they are doing anything political with the way they shape their public persona. However, not to use sexuality as a political issue when watching and analyzing these videos, would be as saying that it is irrelevant to admit that they identify as lesbian and pretend that there are no cultural stigmas attached to their personas. Even if there are no explicit references to identifying oneself as lesbian through a video's narrative, it may still be of challenging effect when a performer openly identifies as lesbian elsewhere, as long as there are no stereotypical traits in their overall public persona. It seems then that it is more fruitful to question whether there is any other way of politicizing the representation which would offer a challenging stance against the way a women's image is imagined in popular culture videos in general. This politicization at the same time employs representations in which it allows the lesbian to be acted out as natural as the heterosexual one. One of the examples of that is how these videos offer a traditional symbolic gender roles' destabilization so that butch can come

to surface, and femme become more powerful as in agency grasping. Consequently it is the masculine man who feels threatened by this image.

Videos of artists that are cross-over, that is those videos which achieve listenings by a wider audience than those primarlily expected for a particular genre, are usually less adamant about issues of sexuality, These artists and producers might easily be accused of being too silent or silencing issues of sublimation, because they are not claiming their identity as based on their sexuality. In such cases, one should look for other spaces of expression in voicing their identity, which is usually to be found in interviews. Both Tegan and Sara openly claim their lesbianism, and so do the Gossip in their videos.

Tegan and Sara are an example of a younger generation of artists who are outted in interviews but their videos show no such politicization of their sexuality. At least it seems so at the first sight. Their video, *'I Just Want Back In Your Head'* barely has any narrative. It's made to look that the girls (band consists of two twin sisters) perform on a theatre stage, with two women statues at the sides of the stage, and both Tegan and Sara (their names) are, one by a piano and the other one behind the drums, as they mime the lyrics of the song and play music. The audience consists of people wearing white costumes and a single person wearing a black costume, motionless at the beginning of the video, but gradually start moving by nodding their heads in rhythm. Soon we notice, as one of the girls from the band notices too, that the person who was wearing black has disappeared. Soon after that we see the audience dressed in white costumes becomes an audience dressed in red costumes, organized in stripes of red colouring that move horizontally along the audience. In the next shot we see the space under the theatre, which is full of these people dressed in white, and one person dressed in black. Suddenly a couple of people dressed in black appear on stage, and the girls run.

While this narrative does not say much about fixed gender identities, we only need to observe their clothing, as they are both coherently (in all their videos) reluctant to wear

typical girls' clothes- skirts, dresses and so on. Their appearance can be summarized into a term I call ‘hybrid butch’, as the stylization of their body is rather masculine and/or gender neutral.

The next video to be analyzed in this category will serve as an example of a video most cross-over to this date among all the videos in this section, but containing less explicit political narrative. The Gossip: *Listen Up*. There are two versions of the videos of the same song. The video for radio version plays with drag in similar ways like the above mentioned videos, with only difference that this video is being watched for far more times on You Tube than any of the other videos in this section, and even some of the videos in the previous section.

The video's narrative consists of portraying two individuals who seem to be a man and a woman. We see them by day, walking on a street. The 'woman' is carrying bags as if she had just finished shopping. She is more fit than the 'man'. He is slightly obese. They walk opposite directions towards each other, their looks meet, appreciatively. The 'woman' also 'checks out' another woman passing by. While all this is happening, occasionally we see cuts to the band as they perform next to a window of a dark room, light coming in from the outside.

Next is the scene where we see both characters in their home, in front of mirrors, looking at their mirror images. The woman takes off her wig and starts getting ready, as in putting her make up. In quick cuts we can see objects surrounding her, her fluffy cat, pink walls, high heel shoes, and statues of women. She puts her wig back on, a dress and leaves the place. Juxtaposed, we see the 'man', without moustaches (in previous cuts he had them), oiling his hair, reaching for a new pair of moustaches among several he keeps in his collection, picking an outfit, and likewise, leaving the place.

In the next couple of scenes we only see the band playing in the disco. Soon both protagonists arrive, exchange another meaningful and wanting look between each other and

start dancing together. This lasts till the end of the video, when we see more and more people dancing, obviously enjoying the band play.

Stylistically, this video is a nod towards the disco culture- its scenes of dancing in the club and the way they dance suggests so. To widen the binary of music genres and their cultural interpretations it is perhaps useful to bring in another binary matrix of rock/pop/disco and masculine/feminine/gay[40]. It is perhaps important to note that the singer is an outed self spoken lesbian. During live shows, she proclaims: this one is for the dykes. In her interviews she states she is a lesbian.

In another video version of the same song the setting is different, but the video's narrative also to some extent presents lesbian bodies, this time coded as teenagers. These girls are feminine, some are masculine, and they dance around the room to the new record. Girls interact, giggle, show off their cool moves in a rather glorious atmosphere (the director made the video's lights dimmed to shine)- no boys in there, dancing to a woman sang song, looking like there would have been no one who would not want to be there.

In Gossip's video the director truly succumbed to disco symbolics, using dance and drag and cooldom to offer a different representation. Here we do not need to read subtexts, the meaning is on the surface. Or, subtexts are implying to show how gender is lyrically made through a set of actions. Two antagonists are seemingly heterosexual, but even if they are, they are still wearing a drag. There is a big chance this can be simply overseen when the audience who do not recognize this subtle non heteronormative narrative within the video watched, but as long as there is a possibility for 'positive identification' as constructed by Henderson within non heteronormative audience, this video too, passes as a gender roles challenging one, or, as queer. However, the drummer of the bend is a butch looking self proclaimed lesbian, and the singer is an obese woman and also a self proclaimed lesbian, both

[40] Tim Lawrence: Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture, 1970-1979, Duke University Press, 2003, p.30

visible to anyone who watches these videos globally. Is their image what is political in their public persona representable? I believe so because here it is their overall visibility that grants them the power of self-identification and allows positive identifications for lesbian communities globally.

Both Tegan and Sara and The Gossip are crossover bands, touring allover USA, Europe and parts of Asia, and are signed by a major publishing company. The fact that they are successful is of considerable importance if we are to consider an alternate representation of a lesbian body in popular culture (for their pop culture is more popular than the Scream Club's for instance). Here it is not my intention to show how particular videos, their producers or the band's overall public persona is less political and thus less efficient in politicizing their narratives. Instead, I suggest that there might be a link between what may pass as a globally popular product and the amount of openly politic and explicit challenge of the traditional gender matrix. Indeed, there is not so much of these challenging features in the dominant pop culture, and most of them mostly exist in subcultures, and not in top 50 chart hits. A cultural commodity is in the hands of the dominant culture. Therefore what does not satisfy the conditions of the dominant culture will have obstacles in crossing over.

Conclusion

In this section I have dealt with queer videos, videos that in all cases do not assume any of the heteronormative mechanisms I discussed in the previous chapter. I recognized two major types: the explicitly political and the not so explicitly, but still political. Within the explicitly political section I identified two subgroups, one distinguished form the other on the base of what mechanisms were used in creating them as challenging to the existing gender

matrix. One of these mechanisms is the usage of humor, and the other one is the one provoking fear and showing itself as something threatening.

Consequently, I observed a tendency that less explicitly challenging politic images have more chance to cross over to a popularity on the global level. This in turn entails that there is a certain dominance in this section of popular culture, which is shaped by heteronormative conditions. Any of the objectification to these conditions emerges out of the system which co-ordinates the division of power within. In this chapter, I argued that the effect these videos produce, as long as they offer place for positive identification, is useful in public voicing of traditionally silenced social entities. If visibility measures power, and I think along with others (Butler, Lury, Ciasullo, Marshment), it seems that a space for new meanings for these traditional notions on the gender matrix is being created as we speak.

Conclusion

Having made the distinction of types of videos into two major categories, the heterosexist and the queer videos, we can see that there is a dialogue-like relation between these two. We can conclude that the heterosexist videos show features that comply with the traits found in larger social contexts. Here I namely refer to the heteronormativity concept. In turn, the queer videos display such features that are counter-reactionary to the self- naturalizing claims of the heterosexist group. Grouping the videos into the heterosexist and queer group also gave way to understanding relations of dominance as stemming from all cultural contexts where heteronormativity mechanisms are at work. Dominance will be communicated by the voice of the most numerous, and/or most voiced. Therefore cases and patterns found in the heterosexist videos are always more likely to be featured as a role-model for the global audience, as through the restrictive mechanisms it employs. The counter-reactions to these restrictions are consequently voiced through queer videos. Because of their counter-activity they are usually less voiced, and less featured on those spaces, which claim its absolute knowledge of all identifications. At times these counter-reactionary cultural products will remain succumbed into sub-cultural practices of smaller communities, who nevertheless may enjoy global fame, and a considerably valid number of audiences who identify with these images positively. In crossover cases, there seems to appear a division in employing politicization within the video themselves and outside of it. While these producers/artists openly identify as lesbian in interviews and live shows, the narratives of videos under their name are less politicized, and less explicitly lesbian. It suggests that videos as a media is a sphere surveilled more thoroughly, than interviews or live concerts of these artists are. This further on is appropriated by the content surveillance mechanism, which is blind to some narratives. In the case of a cross over queer band/video, this blinding effect works like a filtering device: the audience who finds these video's narratives appealing on the basis of the

‘positive identification’ model by Henderson will want more of that. Thus they will go to the concerts and/or read these interviews and find more of such appealing traits through identifying with terms thus presented. These narratives then seem to be less restraining. The audience that does not recognize the symbols of politicizing will let it pass, as they will not find it too strange or too threatening and will possibly buy into the successfulness of these representations. On the spaces where boundaries between symbols are blurred, is where most possibilities lay. On those fractured boarders is where the transforming ways of an image, corporeal styles and manners of performance are associated with a certain meaning, occurs.

Bibliography

Baudrillard, Jean: 'The Finest Consumer Object: The Body', in Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco (eds.), *The Body, A Reader*, Routledge, New York, 2007, 163

Bradby, Barbara: 'Sampling Sexuality: Gender, Technology and the Body in Dance Music'. *Popular Music*, 1993, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 155-176.

Brown, Jeffrey: 'Gender and the Action Heroine: Hardbodies and the "Point of No Return"', *Cinema Journal*, 1996, Vol. 35, No. 3, pp. 52-71.

Judith Butler, 'Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions', in M. Schildrick and J. Price(eds.), *Feminist Theory and the Body*, Routledge, New York, N.Y. pp. 416-422.

Butler, Judith: *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of ''sex''*, Routledge, New York, 1993.

Ciasullo, Ann M. 'Making Her (In)Visible: Cultural Representations of Lesbianism and the Lesbian Body in the 1990s',in *Feminist Studies*, 2001, Vol. 27 (3),pp.?? .

Barbara Creed: 'Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts' in. Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco (eds.).*The Body. A Reader*..Routledge, New York and London, 2005, pp. 109-115.

Creed, Barbara: *The Monstuous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, London, New York, 1993.

Eileraas, Karina: 'Witches, Bitches & Fluids: Girl Bands Performing Ugliness as Resistance'. *TDR*, 1997, Vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 122-139.

Hawkins, Stan: 'Perspectives in Popular Musicology: Music, Lennox, and Meaning in 1990s Pop', *Popular Music*, 1996, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 17-36.

Henderson, Lisa: 'Simple Pleasures: Lesbian Community and "Go Fish"'. *Signs*, 1999, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 37-64.

Kaplan, Anne E.: 'Feminism/Oedipus/Postmodernism: The Case of MTV', in Ann E. Kaplan (ed.) *Postmodernism and its Discontents: Theories, Practices,verso, New York, 1988. 31-49.*

Lawrence, Tim: *Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture, 1970-1979*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2003.

Lury, Celia: *Consumer Culture*, Routledge, New York and London, 1996.

Marshment, Margaret: 'The Picture Is Political: Representation of Women in Contemporary Popular Culture', in Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson (eds.) *Thinking Feminist: Key Concepts in Womens' Studies*, Publisher, New York, 1993.

Miroslav Novak,' *Lipstick* lezbijke: emancipatorski šik ili heteroseksualizacija homoseksualnosti'. In Paulic(ed) *Svezak 1*. Broj 1. Zagreb, 2003, pp. 15-24.

Nunokawa, Jeff: 'All the Sad Young Men: AIDS and the Work of Mourning', in Diana Fuss (ed.) *inside/out*. Routledge, New York, 1991, pp.221-324.

Railton, Diane: 'The Gendered Carnival of Pop' *Popular Music*, 2001, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 321-331.

Schippers, Mimi: 'The Social Organization of Sexuality and Gender in Alternative Hard Rock: An Analysis. *Gender and Society*. 14. 2000, pp. 747-764.

Vernallis, Carol: 'The Aesthetics of Music Video: An Analysis of Madonna's 'Cherish''. *Popular Music*, 1998, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 153-185.

Warner, Michael: 'Introduction', in Michael Warner (ed.) 'Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory', University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993, pp. 193-229.

Wald, Gayle: 'Just a Girl? Rock Music, Feminism, and the Cultural Construction of Female Youth'**,** *Signs*, 1998, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 585-610.

Videos:

All collected from You Tube.

Some also to be found at: girlfriendisahomo.wordpress.com, under the name of: top three faux lesbian videos. Many other references also to be found at AfterEllen.com.

AndEverAfter: Baby, Baby, Baby, directed by: JAX , 2007.

Gazebo: I Like Chopin, directed by: Junichi Tanaka, 1983.

Melissa Etheridge: The Weakness in Me, directed by: Maria Maggenti, 1995.

Scream Club: Spit’n’Glitter, directed by: Rhani Remedes and Justin Kelly, 2008.

T.a.t.u: All the Things She Said, directed by: Ivan Shapavalov, 2003.

Team Gina: Butch/Femme, directed by Gina Mainwal, 2007.

Tegan and Sara: I Just Want Back To Your Head, directed by: Jamie Travis, 2007.

The Gossip: Listen Up, directed by: Whitey McConnaughy, 2006.

The Queens of the Stone Age: 3's & 7'sHell’s Kitens, directed by: Rio Hackford,????.