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in David Bowie and the Rolling Stones
Darstellungen von Maskulinität am Beispiel von David
Bowie und den Rolling Stones**

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1. Introduction

This thesis concerns itself with multiple facets of performing masculinity in rock music and therefore treats popular music as a field in which different representations can be discussed. My hypothesis deals with the juxtaposition of androgynous theatricality versus biological, self-evident masculinity in the genre of rock music and treats the field of popular rock music as a spectrum in which masculinity is performed in different ways, yet works with similar success for the same audience. The main focus lies on discussing this phenomenon by analysing two pioneering artists of the rock music genre and the way they perform masculinity: David Bowie's take on androgyny as a representation of the theatrical side of the spectrum, contrasted with the Rolling Stones' more accented masculine way of performing.

Both the Rolling Stones and David Bowie began their careers in the mid-1960s and rose to fame in subsequent years. The Rolling Stones, a rock and roll band consisting of several male members at the time of founding, have always been contrasted with the more well-behaved Beatles, especially when it came to their rebellious, masculine appearance – most notably represented through the song-writing duo Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. Especially in the early years of their career, they have often been dubbed the enfants terribles of rock music and became the archetype of the modern masculine rock band.

David Bowie on the other hand had a different appeal: his appearance as a solo performer was significant because by the time his 1972 album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* was released, he embodied the androgynous, alienesque character of his eponymous hero in his performances both on and off stage. The 1970s for Bowie especially were a period of adopting numerous stage personae which featured the same androgynous appeal which had made him famous at the beginning of the decade.

For this thesis, the performance of masculinity will be discussed as follows: starting by explaining the roots of British rock music, which has its origins in the American Blues of the

1950s, and how it was reflected in different ways by the Rolling Stones and David Bowie, my argumentation will connect the past with the present by analysing so-called ‘rockumentaries’ about both artists. These documentaries all present a retrospective approach to the careers of the Rolling Stones and David Bowie. Therefore, they are interesting to discuss not only in terms of autobiography (Brockmeier; Bruner; Freeman) and life narrative (McAdams), but also performing gender (Butler; de Lauretis) with special focus on the way masculinity is represented by these artists and also how it is perceived by their audiences. Audience reception will be discussed by explaining the subcultural background (Hebdige) within which the Rolling Stones and David Bowie gained a following, but will also be analysed through statements from various sources (the media, contemporary artists, friends and family) as they are presented in four different ‘rockumentaries’, two for each artist.

Finally, there will be concluding statements explaining how these two different models of performing masculinity were able to be equally successful within the same cultural formation and a partly overlapping fan base. Therefore, I will also include concepts of identification and otherness as part of the analysis.

2. Rock Music and the Reflection of Tradition

British rock music as it rose to fame in the 1960s has its roots in the American Blues tradition, and both the Rolling Stones and Bowie repeatedly name the same artists such as Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley and Little Richard as major influences in the beginning of their careers. The British rock music scene in the 1960s quickly evolved and a lot of subgenres were created, such as blues rock, which the Rolling Stones can be grouped into, or glam rock, which at the beginning of the 1970s, David Bowie amongst others, such as Mark Bolan of T-Rex, became a leading figure of. While both were initially inspired by the same blues artists of the 1950s, their own recording and performing careers were influenced by differing elements constituting their own artistic styles.

The Black Blues' Influence on the Rolling Stones

The Rolling Stones as a musical group were heavily influenced by the American Negro music, and covered a lot of well-known artists of the black blues scene before they started to create their own original work in 1965. The Stones' lead singer and lyric writer Mick Jagger himself stated that he "[w]as crazy over Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Muddy Waters and Fats Domino, not knowing what it meant, just that it was beautiful", as well as his father calling this kind of music "jungle music", with Mick agreeing to this description and calling it "the most real thing I'd ever known" (qtd. in Hellmann 368).

From this initial fascination with the black blues tradition, its rhythm, language and metaphors stems the Stones' way of introducing similar ideas into their own music, thus creating "the 1960s and 1970s youth- or counter-culture [...] by translating these black attitudes into an attractive image for alienated white youth" (Hellmann 367). This alienation of the white youth is easily explained by looking at the living environment of the typical late 1950s London households, which the members of the Rolling Stones grew up in as well: young people grew up with a very strict set of rules and beliefs with little possibility to break

out of this system. The black blues music however, which Jagger and his future band members were all fascinated with, offered an alternative way of expression that differed greatly from what the average white British teenager was used to. Hellmann (370) describes the situation in the late 1950s and what the black blues offered to the alienated white youth as follows:

They were middle-class youths living in a culture that demanded restrictive work, adherence to rules, belief in vague abstractions, reverence for established power, and – if not actual sexual abstinence – a sexual repression based on hypocrisy. Suddenly they found their unexpressed alienation articulated by a language and a music that extolled pleasure, freedom, personal power, honest sexual involvement, and – above all – reality.

The growing fascination with the black blues, which offered a completely different language and rhythm to express metaphors that often revolve around sexual imagery, was quickly adopted into the Rolling Stones' way of creating their own versions of it in their own songs. The black blues argot is described as being “built on symbol and metaphor, [...] obsessed with the sexual act and its sundry implications” (Hellmann 369), symbols and metaphors that were largely adopted and added to in the Stones' own musical catalogue, for example in songs like *Midnight Rambler* or *Monkey Man* from their 1969 album *Let it Bleed* (Hellmann 372). This influence is not just apparent in the way the Stones translated the sexually-loaded phraseology of the black blues into their own music, but also their way of performing it – Jagger's singing voice is described as having a “black intonation” as well as a “definitely un-British singing voice” (Hellmann 369).

Added to Hellmann's findings, Martin (1995) in his article about the gender order in the rock and roll business also describes the Rolling Stones as innovators when it comes to portraying the sexually dominant male in their performance. He too describes a lot of the sexually loaded imagery in the Rolling Stones catalogue that has been present ever since the band started to record original songs. Furthermore, he describes how the Rolling Stones were

deliberately marketed as a counterpart to the arguably biggest British band of the 1960s, the Beatles:

The Rolling Stones were innovators in this new kind of sexually dominant, masculine rock and roll. The Stones were originally just another long-haired band in the British invasion, hoping to become Beatles-like teen idols by dressing in marching suits and singing cover versions of American rhythm and blues songs. Only mildly successful, the Rolling Stones' manager formed a new image for his band, making them the raunchy alternative to the spirited Beatles (Szatmary 1987; Hibbard 1986). The lascivious Rolling Stones offered an ambiguous discourse, transgressing all notions of sexual containment in courtship and marriage, but conversely maintaining the order of male sexual dominance. (68)

Even though the Rolling Stones had always been heavily influenced by the sexually expressive language of the black blues, their management also deliberately took part in assuring that their performance would establish them as sexually dominant males, which “offered [...] a new sexuality” (Martin 68) to their female fans while their male fans would be able to identify with them.

The use of sexual imagery in the Rolling Stones' music, how it was performed and the resulting image of masculinity it portrayed on stage, as well as how it was received by the audience will be discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis.

The Influence of Alien and Futuristic Imagery on David Bowie

While the black rock and roll and blues artists provided similar inspiration to David Bowie as they did to the Rolling Stones, in the beginning of the 1970s – which also marked his first peak of long-term success after his first hit single *Space Oddity* in 1969 – Bowie soon became a leading figure of male artists questioning heteronormative gender representations of rock music in Britain at that time. While the Rolling Stones' use of sexual imagery in the tradition of the black blues heavily supported the gender order of rock and roll, which manifested the social, cultural and sexual dominance of the white male, David Bowie soon became one of the male artists that questioned this already established order with his performance of androgyny. Martin (1995) states that “[t]he androgyny of Michael Jackson,

Prince, David Bowie, Robert Smith of The Cure, and other male performers transgresses the essentialized masculinity of rock and roll, and complicates the simplicity of the cock rock/teenybop dichotomy” (71). The performed androgyny of artists such as Bowie added another dimension to the so-called gender order of rock and roll, giving way to a broader spectrum of masculine performance in popular rock music.

However, the notion of youth alienation was also a topic that is represented in Bowie’s music and performance, even though his approach differed from that of the Rolling Stones because it was heavily inspired by space and alien imagery. According to McLeod (2003), Western society’s anxiety about the alien as well as its fascination with it stems from a need to “absolve ourselves of responsibility for our own social problems in a way that promotes intolerance of immigrants, racial and religious divides, and virus fears” and that “[t]hroughout history, various gods, goddesses, demons, angels, fairies, vampires, monsters and a host of other chimera have hard-wired the ‘alien’ into the collective Western consciousness” (337). Western society therefore harbours an on-going obsession with “the unknown, the unidentified” (337) that has become the subject of popular music for various reasons. In popular music, alien and futuristic imagery is heavily connected with questioning what is supposed to be authentic. McLeod argues that “[m]any youth subcultures, counter-cultures and associated musical trends are often theorised as ‘authentic’ expressions – existing somehow outside of the co-opted dominant cultural experience” (339). Through the use of space metaphors however, musical artists are able to question the established idea of what is authentic:

By drawing on the fantastical, at least improbable, possibility of alien existence, such artists actively subvert and negate notions of authenticity. These artists often consciously place their own identities in question through the creation of new mythologies, typically achieved by masking themselves in costume, alter egos, aliases and faceless technologies. By employing metaphors of space, alien beings or futurism, metaphors that are by definition unknowable, such artists and works constantly ‘differ’ the notion of ‘authentic’ identity. (339)

Especially after the 1969 moon landing, such space and alien imageries occurred more and more as a theme in popular music. Bowie's 1972 album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* and the eponymously created stage persona Ziggy Stardust are one of the most well-known examples for the introduction of space metaphors in popular rock music.

David Bowie's deliberate use of alien imagery paired with his androgynous, theatrical performance style as well as how the re-occurrence of space metaphors at various subsequent stages of his career will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4 of this thesis.

3. Performance in Popular Music

Performance in popular music is a relatively new field of study that tends to split scholars into two different groups: those who think performance can only be discussed in terms of high culture performances in the theatre realm, and those who are open to new fields of analysis, such as musical performance.

Auslander (2010), whose article about performance analysis in popular music will be one of the most important reference texts (specifically focusing on the popular music field) for this thesis, suggests that an explanation for why musical performance was not included in traditional performance studies “[...] lies in the genealogy of the field. The original paradigm for performance studies resulted from a synthesis of theatre studies with aspects of anthropology, sociology, and oral interpretation” (1). He also adds that even in the field of music and musicology, musical performance in popular music is often dismissed with scholars giving reasons such as “rock music’s primary existence is in recordings” (Gracyk qtd. in Auslander 3), or that “life performances of rock are at most secondary iterations of a work contained in the recording” (3). The field of cultural studies as a whole generally concentrates more on the reception of popular music than the actual performance of it, but Auslander claims that in his work, he wants to discuss “what popular musicians do as performers – the meanings they create through their performances and the means they use to create them” (3) as well as “encourage close readings of performances by popular musicians, [...] physical movement, gesture, costume and facial expression as much as voice and musical sound” (3).

In order to be able to analyse performance in popular music then, there of course needs to be a consensus about the topic. When analysing performance in popular music it is important to note that this form of analysis is very closely linked to audience reception itself, as it is done “from the spectator’s point of view” (Auslander 4) – it is not only important what

is performed, but also how a performance is received and interpreted by the intended audience. When it comes to the field of popular music, the first thing that has to be determined is a very basic question: “What kinds of performance can we identify?” Defining what forms of performance are possible objects for analysis equals laying the foundation for discussing performance in popular music in general, as it is a fairly new field of study. Formerly, performance analysis has been attributed to different genres originating from the theatre tradition, such as “theatre, mime, dance, dance-theatre, and film”, with all kinds of musical performance being excluded from the list (4).

According to Auslander’s work, the question of what is suitable material for discussing performance in popular music starts with the recordings of the music itself. He claims that “[d]espite the physical absence of the performer at the time of listening, listeners do not perceive recorded music as disembodied” (5). He further explains that recorded music very much takes the place of the performer’s vocals as well as bodily gestures, which are often responded to by “dancing, singing along, or playing air guitar” because “the bodily gestures encoded in the record sound seem to demand an embodied response” (5). Therefore, recordings of music should be taken into consideration as a kind of base level for performance analysis in popular music. Still, for the purposes of this thesis, we need to go at least one step further and concentrate on the live performance of recorded music. For scholars such as Frith and Auslander, performance in popular music is also strongly linked to the visual experience. Stepping away from the bare recordings of popular music towards the actual performance of it is described by Auslander as follows:

The experience of recorded music as performance derives not only from our direct somatic experience of the sound and our sense of the physical gestures the musicians made to produce it but also from various forms of cultural knowledge, including knowledge of the performance conventions of particular genres of music and the performance styles of specific performers. As an audience, we acquire these kinds of knowledge from our experience of live performances and the visual culture that surrounds popular music. (5)

Based on this description, the guidelines of analysis for this thesis can be defined further: within the genre of popular music, the artists in question – David Bowie and the Rolling Stones – can be allocated to a number of genres especially when taking the progression of their respective careers into consideration. For the purposes of this thesis, however, they will be grouped into the genre of popular rock music. Within the genre of popular rock music there are of course a number of subgenres that have been built in the course of the following decades that were also partly inspired by both artists, with slightly different performance conventions. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when both Bowie and the Stones celebrated the first commercial peaks of their success, they shared a similar target audience. Therefore, additional criteria for a scholarly analysis of performance have to be introduced.

These claims, which will also be a major factor when it comes to analysing the different ways of how masculinity can be performed in the genre of popular rock music, first of all concentrate on the respective performers themselves and the way performance or stage personae are adopted in order to convey a certain message to the target audience. Auslander describes the performance persona of an artist in the popular music genre in three layers, stating that based on Frith, he “will refer to the three layers of performance he identifies as the real person (the performer as human being), the performance persona (which corresponds to Frith’s star personality or image) and the character (Frith’s song personality)” (Auslander 6). This tripartite structure shows the various constituents that make up what is ultimately seen and acknowledged by the audience as a ‘star’ – but even though all of these three layers may be present at the same time in a musical performance (5), there can be no doubt that not all of these layers are surfacing equally. While the audience normally only gets to see glimpses of the what Auslander calls the ‘real person’ behind the artist here and there, it can be argued that this part of the artist is usually forced into the background at a musical performance, and

that the performance persona and/or the character are usually foregrounded. Still, for the audience it is impossible to distinguish these three layers of the performance persona of an artist because there is no way to draw a clear line of where one of these layers that Auslander describes ends and the other begins. Still, this this ambiguity is usually also part of what draws a listener in.

In his article, Auslander summarises the way these three layers build on and influence each other as follows:

The performer combines three signifieds: the real person, the performance persona, and the character. I present these entities in what I take to be their order of development. The process begins with a real person who has some desire to participate in a certain musical genre or the desire to express certain aesthetic or socio-political ideas through popular music. In order to enter into the musical arena, the person must develop an appropriate performance persona. This persona, which is usually based on existing models and conventions and may reflect influence of such music industry types as managers or producers, becomes the basis for subsequent performances. The performer may use all of the available means to define this persona, including movement, dance, costume, make-up, and facial expression. (11)

While Auslander's model of the three layers of a star persona is a good starting point for beginning an analysis of a particular artist, the term 'real person' is of course problematic in a cultural studies context. Especially when discussing performance, there is no way of describing something or someone as 'real'; even though Auslander's tripartite model does well in establishing that there are certain layers to a performer, the term 'real person' still suggests that some aspects of an artist can be marked down as being perceived as being authentic while others are not. One can of course assume that some facets of a performer are strongly based on the private person behind the star who performs and is judged and discussed in various forms of media on these grounds; the term 'real person' however can be misleading. Therefore, when referring to Auslander's model, the term 'real person' – essentially describing the performer as a human being away from the stage – shall be referred to as 'private person' in this thesis from now on. As an example, in the case of David Bowie the layer of the 'private person' as described in this thesis would be David Robert Jones (his

civic name), the man whose body and characteristic qualities the star David Bowie was built upon.

Similar to Frith's and especially Auslander's work, this thesis concerns itself with performance study of musicians in popular music. It will not only discuss the reception of a performance by their target audience, but will also shed light on what performers do to convey the meanings they want to create and share. These two approaches are combined with De Lauretis and Butler's comparable takes on how gender is constructed and represented in order to give better insight into the way masculinity can be performed in rock music: from David Bowie's very theatrical androgynous approach in the early 1970s to the Rolling Stones' more accented and authentic-seeming masculine way of performing which was established in the mid- to late 1960s and soon became a successfully repeated pattern.

Masculinity and Persona in Popular Music

In terms of representing and performing masculinity or, in a broader sense, gender, the field of popular music offers a relatively wide spectrum of artists using certain conventions in different ways to suit their image. De Lauretis (1987) claims that the conventions of performing gender are "[t]he product of various social technologies, such as cinema, and of institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life" (2). This does not only include representation, but also self-representation. Performers in popular music, similar to artists and entertainers in other fields, do not only base their performance of gender on these social technologies, but are at the same time becoming part of these social technologies through their performances as artists. She then goes to state that "the representation of gender is its construction" (3), which is something that can be detected time and time again throughout the history of Western society's high culture and art; however, she also points out that "the construction of gender is also effected by its deconstruction" and that gender "like the real, is not only the effect of representation but also its excess, what remains

outside discourse as a potential trauma which can rupture or destabilize, if not contained, any representation” (3). Taking these claims into consideration, analysing performance in popular music with special focus on masculinities must investigate how a certain artist persona – for example the Rolling Stones as representatives of virile masculinity – is established via performance. It will be discussed that while the Rolling Stones in their representation of the masculine gender stay within the boundaries of a certain stereotype of what is assumed to be perceived as authentic masculinity, the way masculinity is performed by David Bowie can be classified to be more of what De Lauretis describes as “outside discourse as a potential trauma which can rupture or destabilize [...] any representation” (3). Especially in the early 1970s, David Bowie was one of the first people to introduce androgynous looks as part of his stage performances into the British rock and roll scene. Rock, until then, was (and still is, for the most part) defined by a set of heteronormative rules that male performers – like the Rolling Stones or the Beatles – usually did not stray from. Therefore, it can be argued that introducing an androgynous, alien-like stage persona questioned the status quo and could be taken as an example of destabilising the common heteronormative representation of masculinity in the discourse.

Similar to De Lauretis’ approach when it comes to the construction and representation of gender, Butler (1988) goes back to Beauvoir and explains:

[G]ender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede [*sic*]; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (519)

While Butler’s statement is not focused on a particular part of society but can be classified as a more general observation, it is interesting to keep this thesis’ focus on popular music in mind. It can be argued that performers in this particular field construct the gender identity of their star persona which is perceived by the general public, through a consciously

chosen “stylized repetition of acts” (519), as Butler describes it. Again, the Rolling Stones and David Bowie present themselves as useful examples here: while it can be argued that the Rolling Stones, whose style of performing their version of authentic masculinity has kept decisive elements constant throughout their career (e.g. sexual imagery in their lyrics or Mick Jagger’s suggestive style of dancing) and therefore constituted “the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (519), David Bowie took a different approach. By constantly reinventing his stage persona and also his way of performing, David Bowie did not follow the same repetitive pattern the Rolling Stones did and rather represented what De Lauretis (1987) calls a “trauma which can rupture or destabilize any representation” (3). Again, this goes along with Butler’s (1988) claims, which explain the possibilities of gender construction if something is done outside of the discourse’s established conventions:

If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style. (520)

If the Rolling Stones’ approach of performing masculinity can be taken as an example of representing virile masculinity, David Bowie’s decision to slip into the role of Ziggy Stardust, an androgynous alien-turned-rock star from another planet, can be counted as what is described by Butler as the “breaking or subversive repetition of that style” (520). This thesis claims that performers in popular music are very much actors who use their performance of gender as “an act which has been rehearsed” (Butler 526) to cater to their audience in a successful way, yet they use different ways to go about it – as has already been touched upon by mentioning the Rolling Stones and David Bowie in order to make sense of De Lauretis and Butler’s theoretical framework within the confines of the popular music world.

Taking a closer look at popular music as a cultural form, there are various explanations of why and how different artist personae are developed in order to cater to a

specific audience, which is of course also connected to the previously discussed question of representing gender. In popular music, just as in any other genre of art, there is a need for categorisation as a basis for any kind of analysis. Donze (2010) argues that “[p]art of the value in art – whether one sees that value as entertainment, intellectual, or another type of experience – comes from evaluating categories” (44). Since rock and roll music was established in the 1950s, a number of subgenres of popular music emerged, which also led to a vast spectrum of classifying different artists into different stylistic genre groups. Whereas genre classification is one of the best-known and also important factors of categorising artists in popular music, a second important way of classification has to do with the artist persona (Donze 45), which is also part of Auslander’s (2010) tripartite system of analysing artists in popular music. In Donze’s article (2010) about popular music, identity and sexualisation, the artist persona is described as “a character type, often associated with a particular genre category” (45).

For this thesis, the genre category would of course in the broadest sense be ‘rock music’. After having defined the genre these artists operate within, it is possible to go further and ask questions such as which types of artist personae are represented by the Rolling Stones and David Bowie, and what versions of masculinity are typical of the genre. In general, Donze describes performers in the realm of popular music by comparing them with actors:

Like [sic] in the film industry, performers became celebrity personalities: rather than private individuals in high-status and high-visibility occupations, stars had public identities distinct from their private lives. While popular music stars may be charismatic individuals, at the same time they are designed to appeal to an audience either through self-identification or as a desired other. (48)

Keeping in mind Donze’s statement about self-identification and the desired other, it was already mentioned before that the Rolling Stones and David Bowie can be classified into different categories based on their performance. While the Rolling Stones, heavily influenced in their sexually-loaded imagery and performance by the black blues of the 1950s, provided a

basis for identification especially for their male audience, Bowie's alien-like performance personae of the 1970s left him representing a form of the other. The creation of an artist or performance persona is vital for the purposes of drawing one's audience in because it helps establishing means of identification based on their image. Therefore, these artist personae are in no way "accidental", as Donze (48) puts it, it is more of "a transformation of character or deliberately created fictive identity", and that "[p]ersonalities are manufactured to capture a particular tone or mood that is meant to evoke an emotional response in the audience that encourages identification along social identity lines" (48).

The Rolling Stones' Artist Persona

As already touched upon before, the Rolling Stones and their performance as sexually dominant, white males can be read as an attempt to create an artist persona that represents the 'authentic' male rock star. Donze argues that when it comes to so-called 'cock-rock' performers, who "present masculinity as an image of crisis and struggle for control in the face of domination" (50), the identification factor for fans of these artists can be explained as follows:

[T]he cock rock performer is explicitly heterosexual, but the target audience is usually White men, expressing the difficulties of living up to a masculine image of strength, virility, and control with respect to other White (heterosexual) men. [...] The cock rocker is defined by the absence of women, built on beatnik ideology that paints women as a symbol of the oppressive structures of dominant society and a threat because of their combination of sexuality and neediness. (50)

Therefore, the idea of the so-called 'cock-rocker' can be explained as a somewhat exaggerated version of the stereotypical, heteronormative image of the white male that is created in order to counteract any instances that could potentially harm their status in society. Donze makes an interesting point by mentioning the idea of women being a threat because of their symbolising the "oppressive structures of dominant society" (50). Still, it can be argued that the cock-rocker being "defined by the absence of women" is not entirely correct. On the

contrary, one could say that the cock-rocker is not so much defined by the absence of women, but by his domineering relationship with them. To stick with the example of the Rolling Stones as a band of performers, their image of representing virile masculinity is obviously supported by the fact that there are no women on stage with them. Still, women are not totally excluded from 'cock-rock' because arguably, they are still the preferred topic in a lot of lyrics of the genre. As long as women are used as a symbol of sexual desires and object of the male gaze, they are not completely absent from the cock-rock subgenre; Donze's statement could potentially be altered to define cock-rock not by the absence of women per se, but by the absence of equal women. The idea of marriage and being 'tied down' is what really corresponds with the idea of women being part of these just mentioned oppressive structures in society; still, they are very much part of discourse, if mostly in a passive role.

Nevertheless, the Rolling Stones' performance style at live shows and especially the antics of lead singer Mick Jagger obviously support the idea of categorising the band as a kind of archetype of cock-rock performers. Always compared to the Beatles in one way or another, Jagger is continuously described as wilder, more animalistic and sexual in his performance style:

The hysteria over The Beatles was adolescent and pointless. The Stones, on the other hand, came on like they possessed an extra ball. They were not the least bit inhibited in their stage manners, and the excitement they generated flickered out of Mick Jagger's faith that a rock singer could rule the world. Lennon and McCartney, such dear sweet stage boys, had only to stand there, puckered and groomed. Jagger sweated, didn't seem ever to have combed his hair, maybe didn't wash, and most certainly had used his lips for more than a harmonica. (Somma 132)

There are many descriptions of the Rolling Stones as performers similar to Somma's account, which definitely supports the claim that the band is a brilliant example of a rock band that is perceived by their audience as being very authentic in their masculinity because of the way they present themselves on stage. Still, it has to be acknowledged that even though it is supposed to feel very authentic and present accessible ways of identification for the

heterosexual white male, the Stones' artist persona is a construct as much as David Bowie's theatrical approach.

David Bowie's Artist Persona

In David Bowie's case, what was responsible for his rise to success in the early 1970s was the creation of Ziggy Stardust – a highly androgynous performance persona, described in the lyrics of the 1972 album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* as an alien-turned-rock star coming to earth and fascinating the masses with his music. Ziggy Stardust, a character that was ceremoniously killed off in a 1973 performance, is a very good example of a fictively created identity that evoked great fascination in the audience. On the one hand, Ziggy appeared as a fantastical being from outer space who was very different from the average human being, but on the other hand he still represented very human features, as he “ends up a victim of his own success and commits rock'n'roll suicide” (McLeod 341).

Creating artist personae for himself and his musical projects is arguably one of the things that David Bowie is most famous for, and especially in his case it is hard to establish where one of the three layers previously described by Auslander ends and where the others begin, since they often seem to blur and fade into each other. Glam rock, the genre that David Bowie was a leading figure of in the 1970s, is described by Kelley (2000) as a genre that has “fully understood the commercial music world” in terms of adapting performance style to a certain audience. He claims that “David Bowie is a great example here. He adopts and throws away personas as the seasons change, always reinventing himself for the market” (7). Similar to the Rolling Stones, even though their approaches might be very different in terms of performing masculinity, Bowie's artist persona was fashioned with a view to appealing to the mass audiences. To a large extent, this appeal was caused by a fascination with the other as represented by his otherworldly stage personae.

4. Rock Retrospectives as Life Narratives

Since this thesis will discuss so-called ‘rockumentaries’ as a source material for analysing the performance of two artists as well as the audience’s reception of their work, this chapter will concern itself with the concept of life narratives and what qualifies these documentaries to be described as life narratives. The terms ‘life narrative’ and ‘narrative identity’ are strongly linked with the genre of autobiography; so before discussing rock retrospectives as life narratives, narrative identity with regard to autobiography, the self and culture must be further explained. Bruner (2001) introduces the term autobiography as follows:

It consists of the following. A narrator, in the here and now, takes upon himself or herself the task of describing the progress of a protagonist in the there and then, one who happens to share his name. He must by convention bring that protagonist from the past into the present in such a way that the protagonist and the narrator eventually fuse and become one person with a shared consciousness. (27)

Taking this into consideration, it is important to move on from exclusively thinking of autobiography as a work of literature – in other words, a written text – but rather as a tool of telling a story that can appear in various forms of media. Bruner’s description also applies to the so-called ‘rockumentaries’. Similar to written autobiographical accounts, documentaries that look at the life and career of an artist such as the Rolling Stones and David Bowie, who have been working in the music business for around half a century now, often take a retrospective approach of story-telling the way it is described by Bruner. Normally, such rock retrospectives have a similar structural approach to the ‘classic’ written autobiography: the narrator starts telling a certain life story from a point in the past, moving through the time that has already passed up to the present point, mentioning certain episodes that happened along the way.

At this point, two things are important to mention: first, a life narrative or autobiography is told from the perspective of an unreliable narrator. The reader (or viewer, in case of the documentaries to be discussed later), is forced to acknowledge that what is being

said is in fact true and is told in an unmodified manner. The problem with that is of course that even if the narrator does choose not to omit important points in their account, they still might not be able to remember everything correctly. Either way, it must be taken into consideration that the reliability of the narrator in any form of autobiography is uncertain at best.

The second problem that presents itself especially in the case of the rock retrospectives is that the viewer is faced with not only one, but multiple narrators attempting to give an account on their shared experience. Bruner already mentions that “the protagonist and the narrator eventually fuse and become one person with a shared consciousness” (27); however, matters are complicated when dealing with more than one narrator.

An example of why either of the two problems mentioned above can be problematic can be witnessed by watching the retrospective documentary *Crossfire Hurricane* (2012) which tells the story of the Rolling Stone’s rise to fame up to their 50th anniversary in 2012. At the beginning of this documentary, a few sentences are projected onto the screen, explaining that on the eve of their 50th anniversary, interviews were conducted with both current and past members of the Rolling Stones. The answers given by the musicians during these interviews then form the overall narration of the documentary while archive footage is being shown.

The documentary kicks off with the interviewer posing a seemingly simple question: “So before we start, I just want to ask you – how’s your memory?” to which all of the band members respond individually. While this question is asked and answered, the screen is black, with subtitles telling the viewer who is talking at any given moment. The answers to the question of memory all vary, with Jagger saying “[i]t’s pretty good in some places, and completely non-existent on [sic] others, and I can’t remember some things, but then it’s written down usually somewhere”, and Bill Wyman stating “[e]verybody has selective

memories, you know, and in the end I'll just think 'oh what the hell', you know I say in that age we won't let the truth spoil a good story". Charlie Watts on the other hand claims that "[...] I don't remember much of it, to be honest!" similar to Ronnie Wood who displays a certain nonchalance by telling the interviewer that they can "cover a lot of ground and just be natural" before asking him for a light. The last two answers come from Mick Taylor and Keith Richards, who answer the memory question with "[w]ell I don't know if it's going to be mystifying, if anything, and I suppose it's not going to be a glorification either, above all, it should be entertaining, it should be fun because that's what the band was" and "[...] it's almost a fairy story, you know".

The variety of answers to this seemingly simple question makes the analysis of these documentaries as life narratives all the more compelling. Going back to McAdams (2008), who describes narrative identity as "[s]tories we construct to make sense of our lives are fundamentally about the struggle to reconcile who we imagine we were, are, and might be in our heads and bodies with who we were, are, and might be in social contexts [...]" (242-243), the case of the Rolling Stones shows how their individual narrative identities and stories do not necessarily overlap. This excerpt of *Crossfire Hurricane* illustrates both of the problems mentioned above: by expressing themselves the way they do – deliberately or not – the Rolling Stones already portray themselves as unreliable narrators; added to that, they all give an account of the same story: their collective life narrative, or rather, the band's life narrative.

Another point that Bruner makes about autobiography is about the function it serves. Other than the purpose of using it as a way to "present ourselves to others (and ourselves) as typical or characteristic or 'culture confirming' in some way" (29), Bruner argues that there is a focus on assuring individuality and focusing on what "is exceptional (and therefore, worthy of telling) in our lives" (30). It can be argued that there is a slight juxtaposition between on the one hand wishing to be "culture confirming" (29) and on the other hand wanting to keep

one's individuality and exceptionality (30); but in the end, this struggle and finding the right balance are the reasons why in Western society, some people in the public eye are received more positively by their audience than others. In relation to Bruner's statement on autobiography and its functions of presenting ourselves to others, McAdams (2008) also mentions narrative identity as one of the key concepts for discussing life narratives, and furthermore states that:

Put differently, the stories we construct to make sense of our lives are fundamentally about the struggle to reconcile who we imagine we were, are, and might be in our heads and bodies with who we were, are, and might be in social contexts of family, community, the workplace, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class, and culture writ large. The self comes to terms with society through narrative identity. (242-243)

Similar to Hollywood actors, performers in popular music build their own star identity in order to act out a certain role that is assigned to them by themselves, but also by the present socio-political environment of the time. So-called 'rockumentaries' such as *Crossfire Hurricane* (2012) about the Rolling Stones or *Five Years* (2013) about David Bowie tell the stories of the artist's rise to fame in a retrospective manner and focus on them as individuals and performers, and what it is that makes them stand out of the crowd. Therefore, what is really discussed in these documentaries is the narrative identity of these performers and the performance personae they have created for themselves in order to play with these conceptions of the self and how it is perceived by society.

It is also worth discussing that an autobiographical narrative never exclusively belongs to the narrator themselves, but that "[t]he self, and narratives about the self, are culturally and discursively 'situated'", as Freeman (2001) describes it. He further argues:

Simply put, "my story" can never be wholly mine, alone, because I define and articulate my existence with and among others, through the various narrative models – including literary genres, plot structures, metaphoric themes, and so on – my culture provides. (287)

Going back to the idea of retrospective documentaries about performers in popular rock music being analysed as life narratives, Freeman's point illustrates why it is interesting

to discuss these ‘rockumentaries’ with regard to story-telling, reliability of the narrator(s) and the struggle of presenting ourselves as individuals who are nevertheless bound by cultural and social restraints. Freeman emphasises that a story can never wholly belong to the narrator (287), but is more of a shared experience; with reference to the ‘rockumentaries’, this shows the importance of not only looking at how their life story is narrated by the performers in question, but also considering audience reception. In the documentaries chosen for this thesis (*Sound and Vision* and *Five Years* about David Bowie; *Shine a Light* and *Crossfire Hurricane* about the Rolling Stones), audience reception is considered in various ways: the retrospectives about the artist’s careers are not only told and reflected upon by themselves as the narrators, but are also shown through an audience perspective with the help of archive interview clips and news reports, fan statements, analyses of performances by cultural critics and journalists, as well as opinions of friends and family of the musicians.

Freeman goes on to discuss how narrative can be seen as a “situated performance event” which is linked to the concept of identity being “produced, and re-produced anew, via communicative interactions” (290). This idea can be compared to McAdam’s (2008) claim which describes the life narrative as a “middle course between the personal and the social” and that narrative identity can be seen “as both an autobiographical project and a situated performance” (243), which fits the notion of artists in popular music inventing performance personae. ‘Rockumentaries’ not only take a deeper look at the career of an artist, but also at the artists themselves and why they chose to perform the way they do. Frequently, the career of an artist can be analysed by both seeing the autobiographical side of their life’s narrative, as well as the way their situated performance helped to further their career – always keeping in mind that the performer is as important as what is performed.

Added to that, Frith develops two important ideas with regard to the connection of music and identity: firstly he argues that “identity is mobile, a process not a thing, a becoming not a

being”, and secondly that “our experience of music – of music making and music listening – is best understood as an experience of this self-in-process” (109). Taking this into consideration, it can be argued that these so-called ‘rockumentaries’ look at an artist from this point of view, describing how musicians represent music and identity and how they express meanings in their art and performance. Since these documentary films about musicians often have retrospective elements in them, the viewer is able to follow the notion of – in this case – a star identity in progress, which Frith refers to as the identity being mobile.

Similar to Freeman and McAdams, Frith also goes on to state that “[m]usic, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind; identity, like music is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics” (109). Again, it must be taken into consideration that there is an interplay between what and how something is performed by an individual – in this thesis a musician – and how it is received by society, which is essentially what audience reception in cultural studies concerns itself with. Frith argues that “[t]he experience of pop music is an experience of identity: responding to a song, we are drawn, haphazardly, into emotional alliances with the performers and with the performers’ other fans” (121). In terms of ‘rockumentaries’ as life narratives of performers as well as audience reception, this might explain why “some records and performers work for us, others do not” (121). Music artists do not just define their own star identity through their performance, they also guide their audience to build their own identity based on it. Popular music and especially the way it is performed both “symbolizes and offers the immediate experience of collective identity” (121), fostered by the performer’s deliberate way of performing in a certain way or style.

In the following sections, several ‘rockumentaries’ that deal with the lives and careers of both the Rolling Stones and David Bowie, respectively, will be analysed with regard to their performance personae and audience reception.

The Rolling Stones: *Shine A Light* (2008) and *Crossfire Hurricane* (2012)

Two documentaries will be taken into consideration in order to analyse how the Rolling Stones constructed their image or collective star persona, especially in the time between their formation in the middle of the 1960s up to the earliest peaks of commercial success in the 1970s.

The first of these documentaries is not a classic documentary per se, as it is Martin Scorsese's *Shine a Light* from 2008, which is both a concert film and documentary in one. *Shine a Light* shows the preparation for the Rolling Stones concert at the Beacon Theatre in New York as well as the actual performance. These scenes are frequently intercut with old archive clips and interviews of the Rolling Stones' career, which shows the band members discussing their music and performance from their own point of view. Being a concert film as well as a documentary, *Shine a Light* can be described as a very visual approach to juxtaposing the past and the present: while the archive footage shows past performances and the public's reaction in that time, the actual concert footage illustrates especially Mick Jagger's style of performing. Added to that, the band also comments on their stage performances, acting versus presenting themselves as authentic on stage, and typical features of their self-presentation which are further visualised through performing on-stage with other artists such as Buddy Guy from Muddy Waters and Christina Aguilera.

The second documentary to be discussed is called *Crossfire Hurricane* and was released in 2012, and follows the more classic style of an autobiographical documentary. The narration is started at a significant point in the past (the formation of the Rolling Stones and the beginning of their career), then moves on telling the Rolling Stones' life story as a band, putting noteworthy events into a chronological order, and ultimately ends on the eve of their 50th anniversary as a musical group. The fact that documentaries such as *Shine a Light* and

Crossfire Hurricane relate as strongly to the past as they do to the present is explained by Bruner (2001), who states the following:

Autobiographies are, to be sure, about the past; but what of the 30 percent or more of their sentences that are *not* in the past tense? I'm sure it will be apparent without all these statistics that autobiography is not *only* about the past, but is busily about the present as well. If it is to bring the protagonist up to the present, it must deal with the present as well as the past – and not just at the end of the account, as it were. (29)

As has already been mentioned before, both documentaries about the Rolling Stones obviously feature a lot of archive material and interview snippets from the past. What makes those relevant not only in terms of their status as autobiography, but also in terms of performance analysis, is how these bits and pieces are reflected upon not only by the protagonists themselves, but also by their audiences.

The Rolling Stones as a Representation of Authentic Masculinity

As already mentioned earlier, the beginning of the Rolling Stones career as performers was heavily influenced and inspired by the black blues of the 1950s. Sexually suggestive metaphors and imagery in the lyrics were the norm, and after the band stopped doing cover albums and Jagger and Richards started to write original music and lyrics for the Rolling Stones, a lot of the same imagery of the black blues could be found in their own song-writing. The use of sexual imagery combined with their on-stage performances, especially Jagger's signature style of dancing and moving on stage illustrate why the Rolling Stones can be described as a symbol of virile masculinity in popular music (see Figure 1 below).

Both documentaries, *Shine a Light* and *Crossfire Hurricane*, show a lot of archive material depicting earlier performances of the Rolling Stones, as well as the crowd reacting to it. Furthermore, being a concert film, *Shine a Light* at the same time depicts a more recent concert performance of the band as well. What is important to mention here is that audience reaction, especially those of female fans, is consistent with the Rolling Stones' 1970s shows up to their 2008 performance in the Beacon Theatre. At the time of the recent performance, all

of the group members were well into their sixties, still while viewing these documentaries, ecstasy and hysteria can be witnessed.

The sexual attraction of the female sex towards the band members, especially front man Mick Jagger, is underlined by an old news telecast in *Crossfire Hurricane*, where the journalist describes Jagger as “a fascinating man” as well as “the supreme sexual object in modern Western culture”. The image of Jagger being the sex symbol of modern Western society is definitely supported by his style of performing, which can be seen on numerous occasions in both of the documentaries in question. One example of the sexual energy exuded by Jagger through his live performances on stage can be found in *Crossfire Hurricane* which shows a performance of the Stones song *Street Fighting Man*:



Figure 1

The scene depicts Jagger in a skin-tight white bodysuit, deliberately displaying his body with every move he makes on stage. As an opening performance, it illustrates the rawness of energy that dominates the stage, personified through Mick Jagger and his fellow band members, as well as the ecstatic reaction of the crowd. Decades later, as can be seen in *Shine a Light*, the Rolling Stones' performance on stage and Jagger's antics have hardly changed, and neither did the reaction of the female fans. On the contrary, to the viewer it seems as if Jagger had perfected his personal brand of dancing suggestively while singing

sexually allusive lyrics, enjoying the frantic reaction by the audience stimulated by his style of performance.

Another recurring theme in both documentaries that adds to the picture of the Rolling Stones being a symbol of virile masculinity is their nonchalance when it comes to abusing substances and subsequent jail sentences. They also openly discuss drug abuse in interviews and are shown smoking on stage, for example. Guitarist Keith Richards is often mentioned when it comes to discussing the extravagant and wild lifestyle of a male rock star. But especially in retrospect he casually shrugs off accusations about his scandalous behaviour of the past: “The cops turned me into a criminal. [...] In a way, it kind of felt like everybody else was writing the script for me. [...] It was a very easy role to slip into, there was a slot available and it was just built for me” (*Crossfire Hurricane*). Statements like these again hint towards Keith Richards being an unreliable narrator, as they go hand in hand with what he said earlier in the same interview about the band’s whole story being something that could be likened to a “fairy story”, especially from a retrospective angle. The idea of slipping into a role the way Richards describes it in the above statement again shows his awareness of the way he has to act in certain situations in order to gain the audience’s sympathy. By wording it the way he does, Richards paints a picture of himself as the clear victim when it comes to his relationship with the police. It has to be emphasized that at the point of the Rolling Stones’ 50th anniversary, Keith Richards has five decades worth of noteworthy events and what was dubbed by the medias as ‘scandals’ to look back at and reflect upon. It can easily be argued that as a narrator of his own life story, he is not capable of remembering every single detail, and he is likely to change details to suit his image as well as manipulating his audience into thinking of him as a victim because he was turned into a criminal by “the cops”, as was stated before. After all, there was a certain pressure from the public to be the ‘bad boy’ in order to appeal to fans, since the Rolling Stones’ management had deliberately set them up as the

more rebellious rock stars, especially compared to The Beatles. Still, by saying that it was easy to slip into this role of a man who lives by his own rules and therefore repeatedly gets into conflict with the law, Richards suits the description of his past to his image of that time.

More recent footage, such as the concert filmed for *Shine a Light* in 2008, show that in the end the behaviour that got Richards (and other band members) into conflict with the law and got them a bad reputation with the press and public, is now what cements the band's iconic status as one of the most stereotypically masculine rock bands in the business. Towards the end of one song, the viewer can observe one (presumably female) fan raising her arms in the air and doing a 'praying' gesture towards Richards who barely notices, seemingly absorbed by playing guitar. When he is asked about authenticity versus acting on stage, Richards states: "I don't think on stage, I feel. Once you got up there, you're just who you are. You're not thinking. When we get up there ... we're in our own little zone" (*Shine a Light*). A little earlier, this statement is supported when Richards – who has by now perfected the image of a rock and roll pirate on stage – takes over the vocals for two songs, greeting the audience with a small, seemingly self-satisfied smirk in between nonchalantly smoking a cigarette on stage and collecting praise for it by the audience.



Figure 2

Of course, despite Richards' claims of not giving much thought to the way he presents himself while performing on stage, it can be argued that what in the end translates to the audience as spontaneous acts of male rebellion, is indeed more of a choreographed act than he would admit. The way the Rolling Stones' performance style gives the impression that

everything about the way they present themselves is an act of authenticity, even though it is still staged, will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Mick Jagger's Performance Persona

Even though the Rolling Stones are to be analysed as a group, Mick Jagger's work as the front man and main performer of the band will be looked at in more detail. As the singer and frontman of the group, he is the one who dominates the stage and draws the audience in. Both documentaries focus on Mick Jagger's performance persona and often pose the question about how authentic his style of performing really is. Both *Shine a Light* and *Crossfire Hurricane* provide the viewer with archive footage as well as the Stones' own retrospective take on their career, either through narration or interview, which sheds some light on the question of authenticity in their performance. All band members interviewed, but especially Keith Richards and Mick Jagger are repeatedly asked about what they do on stage and in the public eye to suit their image, and in how far these actions are genuine reflections of their private personae. Several statements by different band members illustrate that while coming across as authentic is a desired ideal for performers such as the Rolling Stones, especially as an expression of heteronormative masculinity, a great deal of their public persona is based on acting in a certain way. Charlie Watts for example at one point says: "I hated that, being chased by girls, it really embarrassed me, I wish I could have turned it off when the show stops" (*Crossfire Hurricane*). This statement already illustrates that while the Rolling Stones' image was painted as being the epitome of virile masculinity in the rock business, it does not necessarily represent the performers on a more private level. Watts' statement is backed up at a later point by Keith Richards, who adds: "We've been thrown into this, I mean you started as a blues player, and then suddenly this fame thing comes in. And everybody has to handle that in their own way. Charlie hates it. Charlie's perfect role would be in the Rolling Stones, except nobody gives a shit about who you are" (*Crossfire Hurricane*).

Another moment where discrepancies between seemingly authentic behaviour and purposefully acting in a certain way are discussed is when Jagger states the following: “See you’re thrust into the limelight in the youth-orientated thing [sic]; it’s not about growing up, it’s about not growing up in a way. Then it is about bad behaviour, then you’re about bad behaviour, so then you start behaving badly” (*Crossfire Hurricane*). Here again it becomes apparent that although appearing authentic in their performance is something that the Rolling Stones strive for as performers, they are very much aware that their image of the dominant white males is a construct put together and strengthened by themselves, their management and how it was received and confirmed by the media and fans.

Interestingly enough, especially when it comes to Mick Jagger, his opinion on authenticity, acting and performance seems to have changed in the course of the Rolling Stone’s career as performers. In *Crossfire Hurricane*, an interview snippet from the early 1970s is presented, where Mick Jagger is asked about his performance technique and whether and how it has developed over the past five or six years. The young Mick Jagger claims that he does not “understand about all of these things”, that he “just go[es] on and do[es] it”, because he does not “know about timing or anything”. When the journalist specifically says “[y]ou give me the impression [...] whether it is conscious or not, of being a very very shrewd, professional performer”, Jagger denies this and says “no, that’s not true” about this observation. Jagger’s claims of not really giving much thought to what it is he is doing on stage is then contrasted with performance snippets from the same era which show that he is very much in command of his crowd and knows how to receive a desired reaction from his audience (see Figure 1). Figure 1 tries to capture Jagger’s sexually suggestive way of dancing and performing during a performance of *Street Fighting Man* from the late 60s/early 70s (the exact date is not stated in the documentary) but unfortunately does not show what reaction it evokes from the audience. Dressed in a skin-tight white bodysuit revealing his chest, Jagger’s

dancing – which involves a lot of hip thrusting and walking towards the edge of the stage, waving and spurring on his audience – secures him a desired reaction from his fans: euphoria which is often very close to tipping over into becoming hysteria, the audience celebrating him and the band with claps and cheers and women desperately trying to climb over security barriers just to get closer to Mick Jagger, the man who is displaying all this sexualised energy through his performance.

Jagger's initial claims about his performance persona are soon revoked, however. In a *Crossfire Hurricane* interview following the previously mentioned one, he is again asked “[h]ow much of your act is acting?” to which he replies differently this time: “Well I suppose really all of it is acting. But there’s a difference between acting and not enjoying it and acting and just doing what you want to do. It’s like getting into a part”. Following immediately after that, a clip from an early Stones performance of their song called *It’s All Over Now* is shown, with the older Mick Jagger narrating the scene, saying: “As a singer, and doing a performance, you gotta be very finely tuned to what’s going on in the audience. Little Richard literally taught me how it was done [...]”. Here, it already becomes apparent that a certain level of acting is always required when it comes to creating a successful performance persona, even if this persona is supposed to come across as natural and authentic as possible. Furthermore, the reference to Little Richard again ties in with the already discussed influence of the black blues on the general performance style of the Rolling Stones as a group, which is a trend that becomes apparent throughout the narrative of both documentaries.

The first real mention of a song personality (Frith 1996) or character (Auslander 2010) that can definitely be distinguished from Jagger’s usual performance persona on stage is when the *Sympathy for the Devil* character is described by the singer. Again, in his narration while a recording of a 1968 performance of *Sympathy for the Devil* is shown, Jagger first talks about

acting the part of being a performer on stage and then goes on and describes his character created for the song in greater detail:

If you're a method actor, you always stay in character. [...] Yes, he's changed a lot, this character has had a lot of change. It's not just one change, it's every six months another person! Every actor's character is part of himself, and they can only act what's in him. [...] The sympathy character is much more complicated because my inspiration for that came from Bulgakov and *The Master and Margarita*. I had all these things going on. It's very much for the time and everything, and it's got the violence of the time in it. It's provocative. (*Crossfire Hurricane*)

The first part of Jagger's statement concerns itself with being an actor on stage in general, even in the realm of popular music. Even though the Rolling Stones as a band have always come across as raw, edgy and a symbol of pure masculine energy on stage, especially in their early days, in retrospect Mick Jagger describes his presence on stage as a way of acting with slight character changes as their career progressed. Some song personalities or characters, however, are worth singling out because of a more striking appearance that sets them apart from Jagger's usual performance persona, like the 'Sympathy' character described above:



Figure 3

The 'Sympathy' character can be described as an incarnation of the devil narrating his personal history as the instigator of the most poignant tragedies of humanity, for example the death of Jesus Christ, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the blitzkriegs of World War II or the curse surrounding the Kennedy family. The menacing spirit of this character is illustrated by Jagger's outfits and performance on stage, for example red clothing, long wild hair and a devil's face painted to his chest and arms in the 1968 performance shown in *Crossfire*

Hurricane, or walking through the crowd in a black fur coat illuminated by lights representing flames, as he did in his *Shine a Light* performance of the same song (see Figure 3).

With regard to Jagger's performance persona, a final remark needs to be made to close this chapter. Towards the end of *Crossfire Hurricane*, Mick Jagger makes it very clear through his narration that even though his audience might see his performance persona as an accurate representation of himself in terms of being the symbol of the stereotypical, white male rock star, his private persona is different from how he acts on stage: "When you unzip your suit, and put your jeans back on the waver, that's all finished with. I don't want to be my extrovert character all the time". The symbolism in Jagger's statement illustrates the idea of Auslander's (2010) tripartite model of a performer in popular music that was discussed earlier: by physically removing his performance suit, Jagger also moves away from his performance persona and towards a more private version of himself. The 'extrovert character' Jagger describes is a mixture of what Auslander calls 'performance persona' and 'character' (6), and by calling it a character, it again shows his awareness of how his way of performing masculinity is a more exaggerated version of the more private persona underneath. What the public eye sees of his performance is in fact a very one-dimensional representation of Mick Jagger as a person – it only shows the powerful, male white rock star in total control of his audience whose image was so strongly fashioned in the course of his career that it overshadows other dimensions to his persona.

The Rolling Stones as the Enfants Terribles of Rock and Roll

Another recurring theme in both documentaries is the way the Rolling Stones are described as representing the dangers of rock and roll. The 'brand' of danger represented by the Rolling Stones is mostly anti-establishment and part of a countercultural movement: they promote a lifestyle that follows none of the rather strict set of rules they grew up with

themselves in the 1940s and 50s but instead make a statement by drinking and consuming various illegal substances and enjoying sexual promiscuity.

Especially in comparison to the Beatles, the Rolling Stones are often described as the enfants terribles of the genre – a role they also see themselves in, as the archive footage in both of the documentaries in question shows. Imagery that adds to this kind of reputation of representing the dark side of rock and roll is the frequent occurrence and discussion of nudity, drugs and alcoholism in many of the archive clips shown in both *Crossfire Hurricane* and *Shine a Light*. However, the build-up of this kind of image is of course not as coincidental as it might seem at first sight. When talking about the early stages of their career, Mick Jagger mentions their old manager Andrew Oldham, who played a major part in the creation of the image the Rolling Stones would soon become famous for:

Andrew wanted to make the Rolling Stones the anti-Beatles, so if you got heroes, you got anti-heroes like in a movie you got good guys and bad guys. Andrew decided that the Rolling Stones were the bad guys, it wasn't just an accident. He thought the Rolling Stones would suit that image. It helps to have people that go along with it or will fit the bill. It's good to have an actor to play the part. (*Crossfire Hurricane*)

Once again, Jagger mentions acting being a necessary precondition in order to play the part right when it comes to an image, and therefore also performing that image. In the case of the Rolling Stones, the image created for them was stereotypically speaking the “bad guys”, as Jagger mentions in his statement. Especially in their retrospective narration, all of the band members seem to agree that at a certain point of their career they were expected to behave badly and live up to the image that had been established both through their own performance and the publicity they got. Keith Richards mentions at one point that “it is the weirdest situation, if you did something wrong, even better. And the Beatles got the white hat, you know? What's left? The black hat”, similar to Charlie Watts, who states “[w]e never abided by any rules. The gentlemanly things, we never did it. That was part of why we got ostracised by everyone” (*Crossfire Hurricane*).

The archive clips of interviews and news reports about the Rolling Stones in the 1970s that are shown in *Crossfire Hurricane* tell a similar story as the Stones' own retrospective view of things. A news reporter describes the Rolling Stones and their cult-like following as follows:

I guess the Rolling Stones aren't everyone's cup of tea, and that's the understatement of the year. There are whole armies of fans that become almost homicidal at the sight of them, both on the stage and off. The Stones not exactly generate an aura of sweetness and light and the carefully calculated air of 'blow you, Jack' has won them almost as many enemies as fans.

Interestingly enough, behaviour that was condemned and negatively connoted by the general public and the media was the same behaviour that hit a nerve with the fans. When asked what is so special about the Rolling Stones, fans in the archive footage give very similar answers, one of them being "[t]hey're totally anti-establishment, and everyone who is in the establishment has always bugged the Stones, and people are going to have that feeling for them" as to what makes them likeable.

The notion of danger surrounding the image of the Rolling Stones mostly occurs and is discussed in two different ways in the retrospective narratives the documentaries offer: firstly, the theme of drug abuse which led to a number of jail sentences for various band members and ultimately culminated in the death of founding member Brian Jones. Secondly, acts of aggression and the development of violent group dynamics of the Stones' crowd of fans, which in 1969 led to the death of fan Meredith Curly Hunter, Jr., which was an incident that became the subject of another Rolling Stones documentary called *Gimme Shelter*.

The danger of the development of such aggressive behaviour in groups of fans is discussed in one of the archive interviews in *Crossfire Hurricane*, where the differences between female and male fan behaviour is also analysed. When trying to explain the development of such wild behaviour, especially by female fans towards Mick Jagger himself, a so-called 'expert', who is part of the programme in the archive clip, states the following:

When these girls pump upon Mick and seem to want to tear him to pieces, it's not as sensually an act of aggression, but rather an act of devouring him, they want to incorporate his essence, it's a sort of fetishism which has more in common with people collecting the relics of saints as they did in the ancient path. [...] I've seen this with the most marvellous dramatic intensity with two or three thousand young girls in Manchester and these girls they wept, they were possessed by the spirit [...], I mean complete physical and mental absorption! [sic] (*Crossfire Hurricane*)

Mick Jagger generally agrees to that statement, but adds another layer and focuses on the male fans and the way they form an aggressive group dynamic, spurred on by the performances of the Rolling Stones:

I think that is very true and I think what's more interesting is that in this country, the audiences and young girls do behave in this way, but in the rest of the world, and this is true, in lots of places they're nearly all boys, and with the boys it erupts in aggressiveness and they use it to have a great fight with the police. They just beat the police up, just to show their strength, or to show their dissatisfaction with something. (*Crossfire Hurricane*)

The point Jagger makes about the boys showing these signs of extremely aggressive behaviour in order to prove strength and domination over another group of people, or to show discontent or frustration about certain matters, again sums up the image of the Rolling Stones as the enfants terribles of rock and roll themselves. It can be argued that this image of the white, dominant male rock star is reflected by their fans in an extremely aggressive manner, inspired by the way the Stones perform and present themselves both off and on stage.

Then and Now

One important point of the 'rockumentary' section of this thesis is to show how these rock retrospectives can be described as life narratives. Documentaries such as *Crossfire Hurricane* and *Shine a Light* try to cover various angles about the lives and careers of popular music artists, and even though their format might not be exactly the same, they have one important thing in common: they offer the viewer a retrospective look at the beginnings of the Rolling Stones and work their way back to a present-day level in a multi-faceted way. Especially in the case of the Stones, there is not only one person telling a story, it is both present and past band members alike, as well as fans and the general public in the form of

journalists and TV reporters who all add to the narrative in different ways. The idea of these retrospective autobiographies being more than just a rigid and inflexible narrative system is illustrated by Brockmeier (2001), who states the following:

First, the genre of autobiography is no longer exclusively associated with *written* texts (in the traditional sense of the word) by authors of literature, memoirs, and historical and otherwise documentary life accounts. Instead, autobiography is viewed as also embracing many forms of oral discourse, including fragmentary and occasional remarks. (264)

Brockmeier's first argument already shows that the idea of autobiography is moving away from the genre only being associated with a written text, but instead is open to an array of ways to tell a life story. The 'rockumentaries' discussed in this thesis for example combine not only memoirs, oral discourse and the "fragmentary and occasional remarks" Brockmeier (264) mentions, but are also supported by visual imagery of the life narrative told as well as providing commentary from people other than the narrator(s) themselves; or, as Brockmeier describes it:

Second, such autobiographical accounts are no longer conceived of as monological utterances of one speaker or writer; rather, there is no "teller" whose story would exist without a "told". [...] In this view, autobiographical life stories (or fragments of them) are organized like speech acts, directed to specific addresses and fulfilling social functions. They are, like all conversations, jointly organized activities. (264)

The way both Rolling Stones 'rockumentaries' are constructed, they rely heavily on what Brockmeier calls "organized speech acts", since they combine the band members' own retrospective accounts of their lives through interview situations which therefore offers a more diverse view on the bands narrative as performers. Finally, Brockmeier mentions that "autobiographical identity is all but an individual enterprise" (264), which once again shows how important it is to acknowledge the concept of life narratives as it is presented in *Crossfire Hurricane* and *Shine a Light*. It is not just a one-dimensional way of telling a story starting in the past and gradually moving up to the present, but rather a multi-faceted approach of several

narrators trying to achieve the same goal (with the help of their audience): to fuse the protagonist of their story with the narrator (themselves).

On a more personal level, McAdams (2008) points out that for narrative identity, it is important to “reconcile who we imagine we were, are, and might be in our heads and bodies with who we imagine we were, are, and might be” and that “the self comes to terms with society through narrative identity” (242-243), which is a concept that also reflects Brockmeier’s ideas of how narrative identity in autobiography can be discussed. As a viewer, one is confronted with archive interviews as well as present-day narration. A documentary such as *Crossfire Hurricane* gives insight into the collective mind-set of the Rolling Stones as a group, and also shows how it changed over the decades spanning their career. An example of how the past is still connected with the present would be the performance of *Champagne and Reefer* in *Shine a Light*, where the Rolling Stones are joined on stage by Buddy Guy of Muddy Waters – a black blues band that the Rolling Stones used to cover almost five decades ago and whose style influenced them throughout their career as recording artists. Even though audience perception might have changed over the years, or as Mick Jagger in his *Crossfire Hurricane* interview which also doubles as a description of lots of the archive footage shown in the documentary, puts it “[t]he Rolling Stones had gone from the band that everyone hated to the band that everyone loved. We’ve gone from unacceptable to totally acceptable, everything had changed. We became kind of an institution and we hadn’t even got to be forty yet”. Through performances such as *Champagne and Reefer* with Buddy Guy, one is still reminded of the band’s roots after all these years.

This connection to their black blues roots is mentioned time and time again by members of the Rolling Stones, for example Keith Richards stating that “the Rolling Stones started as ‘a white London imitation of South Side Chicago blues’ (Russell qtd.in Allen 143). However, Allen (2006) makes a point of describing how bands like the Rolling Stones

maintained and even augmented their success over the years, which is slowly but gradually moving away from their roots, stating that “they became more successful, moving away from the blues roots which had informed their early years”. Finally, he also claims that “[t]he Rolling Stones became an inventive major rock band with obvious blues roots, but they were never again identified simply as a British blues band” (149). This may also be part of the explanation of how the Rolling Stones managed to go from “unacceptable to totally acceptable”, as Jagger put it before. While in the 1960s, the Rolling Stones were a big part of the white youth subculture in Britain by imitating the Chicago blues and adapting it for their own scene, moving away from the blues made them more acceptable for a broader audience:

In his seminal work on subcultures, Hebdige drew attention to the ‘bonds’ linking the black working-class to white youth cultures (Hebdige 1979, p. 46). To a certain extent, the more authentically blues element of the rhythm & blues scene in Britain in the 1960s moved away from the subcultural interest in visual style and the more commercial soul and ska music, towards a more academic, middle-class form of consumption.” (Allen 151)

By moving away from their black blues roots in the course of their career, the Rolling Stones were able to overcome being exclusively accepted in the white youth subculture but became of interest for a more diverse audience. Therefore, revisiting their roots in poignant performances such as the *Shine a Light*, especially one featuring Buddy Guy or Muddy Waters as a guest performer, can be seen as a perfectly placed retrospective element in the documentary, reminding the viewer of the point where the band’s life narrative began.

Lastly, McAdams also states that the concept of life narrative can be described as “both autobiographical project and a situated performance” (243). This notion is illustrated beautifully by the already discussed themes of how stereotypes of virile masculinity come into play when looking at the Rolling Stones’ and especially Mick Jagger’s performance persona and style, and how this combines with the the image that was attributed to them by fans and the general public. On a more personal note about getting treatment for his drug addiction, Keith Richards ends his *Crossfire Hurricane* interview with a metaphor he used

before: “Usually, it’s the guy in the black hat that gets killed in the end, you know. Not this time brother, not this time” hinting at the Rolling Stones’ image of being the bad guys in the rock and roll business. Again, in his overall account towards the end of *Crossfire Hurricane*, Jagger tries to connect the past with the present, by saying: “[w]e had this kind of ‘fuck the world, we can do anything’ attitude, for a moment that was definitely there [sic]. I mean you felt like you were riding on a wave and all that. But you can’t be young forever”, before the scene poignantly cuts to footage of a *Shine a Light* performance. This transition is very cleverly done because in terms of visual narrative, it finally achieves the goal of every autobiographical life narrative, namely to fuse the protagonist of the life story with the narrator by showing the present state of affairs: the Rolling Stones on stage performing in the Beacon theatre and cementing their iconic status as one of the most influential male white rock bands in the world. The footage of the Stones’ performance of *All Down The Line* from *Shine a Light* is interrupted for brief moments at a time to show the credits, where it is clearly stated that Mick Jagger is one of the producers of the documentary, while Keith Richards, Ronnie Wood and Charlie Watts are all listed as executive producers. Once again, this supports the idea of the Rolling Stones’ as unreliable narrators of their life narrative as it is depicted in *Crossfire Hurricane* and *Shine a Light*, since they definitely were part of the decision of what would make the final cut of the documentaries analysed in the last chapters.

David Bowie: *Sound and Vision* (2002) and *Five Years* (2013)

Two documentaries will be used to discuss Bowie’s androgynous star persona and performance especially in the 1970s and early 1980s. These documentaries were released at a similar time as *Shine a Light* and *Crossfire Hurricane* about the Rolling Stones, namely in the course of the 2000s- one of them called *Sound and Vision* from 2002, and the second one called *Five Years* which was first broadcasted in 2013. Both of these documentaries were named after Bowie songs from the 1970s, *Sound and Vision* originating from the 1977 album

Low, and *Five Years* being named after one of the songs of his breakthrough record *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* from 1972.

It is important to mention right at the beginning that although the structure of the Bowie documentaries to be discussed are similar to the previously analysed ones about the Rolling Stones, the way they are narrated differ in a few points that need to be addressed. Starting with *Sound and Vision*, this ‘rockumentary’ tells the story of Bowie’s rise to success from childhood onwards, ending with the release of his 2002 album *Heathen*.

The first major difference between the Rolling Stones’ documentaries concerns their use of narrative: while it features not only Bowie himself commenting on various stages of his career, but also several contemporary artists such as Iggy Pop and Brian Eno, his producer Tony Visconti, his wife Iman Abdulmajid as well as childhood friends and teachers, the overall narration adding comments to the clips shown is provided by a disembodied voice. About the characteristics of narrative accounts, Bruner (2011) mentions:

Narrative accounts must have at least two characteristics. They should center upon people and their intentional states: their desires, beliefs, and so on; and they should focus on how these intentional states led to certain kinds of activities. Such an account should also be or appear to be order preserving, in the sense of preserving or appearing to preserve sequence – the sequential properties of which life itself consists or is supposed to consist. (28)

It can be argued that by having Bowie himself, contemporary artists, friends and family as well as a disembodied narrator in the documentary (who henceforth shall be referred to as the ‘narrator’), two layers are added to the narrative account as it is described by Bruner – the first layer being a very subjective one as comments on David Bowie’s life narrative are provided by himself and his contemporaries, and the second one being a seemingly more objective one, since it is provided by a narrator with presumably no personal link to Bowie. In the previous chapters regarding the Rolling Stones, it was already made clear that they should be treated as unreliable narrators when it comes to the accounts given by the band members in both of the documentaries. With *Sound and Vision*, there is a similar problem: while it could

be argued that there is a more subjective and a more objective layer that can be detected in terms of how the documentary is narrated, it still has to be considered that both of these layers add up to do exactly what Bruner has mentioned, namely “center upon people and their intentional states: their desires, beliefs, and so on; and they should focus on how these intentional states led to certain kinds of activities” (28). Therefore, the documentary cannot be objective, even though it might appear that way to the viewer who is guided through David Bowie’s life story by the disembodied voice of the narrator. The function this narrator serves is introducing the viewer to the topic and then handing the function of narrator over to either Bowie himself or people who are close to him on either a creative or personal level. An example for this can be detected right at the beginning of *Sound and Vision*, where the narrator describes David Bowie as an artist:

David Bowie’s unique talent made him an icon in the world of popular music. His fearless approach to everything from art to fashion to acting and sexual role play made him a rock and roll revolutionary. [...] But his key to survival was always constant change.

Aside from the narrator pointing out certain facts in order to introduce the viewer to Bowie as an artist, there are also short segments of contemporary artists, friends and family pointing out key aspects of his artist persona, for example “He was braver than your usual rockstar”, “Was he a girl, was he a boy, what was he thinking?” or “Nobody ever has broken the rules as he has”. These statements already allude to Bowie’s way of cleverly using a different approach to performing masculinity in order to catch his audience’s attention, which will be discussed in more detail at a later point of this chapter. The example above describing the beginning of *Sound and Vision* is a good way of illustrating the narrative structure of the documentary: from a story-telling perspective, this documentary follows the basic idea of bringing a “protagonist from the past into the present” (Bruner 27) as it gives an account of Bowie’s life from the point of his birth and chronologically moves through time up to the present day. What has to be taken into consideration, however, is that the viewer again is

faced with not only one narrator, but multiple ones. All these different accounts are responsible for painting a complete picture of David Bowie as a performer, which again raises the issue of unreliability of the narrator(s).

In terms of content, the documentary tries to find a middle way between telling the story of Bowie's career in the music industry as an innovator, as well as other involvements with art such as film and painting, and at the same time painting a picture of the person behind the fame in relation to different family members. In this aspect, *Sound and Vision* very much represents the notion of life narratives that McAdams describes with his key concept of the life narrative as the multifaceted stories of an individual, the way they see themselves and are seen by others at different stages of their life, and how this perception in general relates to notions of gender, community, social issues and culture (242-243). The fact that we do not only get the narrator's point of view – which represents the public eye commenting on the different steps in Bowie's career – but also comments from important collaborators and friends as well from the artist himself, gives the documentary a well-rounded appearance.

Similar to *Sound and Vision*, the newer documentary *Five Years* also tells Bowie's story in a retrospective manner. The approach is slightly different, however: instead of telling the story of his career in the conventional way (step by step, year by year), *Five Years* – as the title suggests – picks out five key years that have been most important. The years discussed are: 1971 to 1972 with the creation of Bowie's infamous 'Ziggy Stardust' persona; 1974 to 1975 which concentrates on changes in musical style and Bowie's acting; 1976 to 1977 which describes Bowie as the chameleon of music and his constant way of changing; 1979 to 1980 which goes back to the space alien theme that is so dominant in Bowie's work as an artist; and finally 1982 to 1983 which marked the peak of his mainstream success in the music industry. Unlike *Sound and Vision*, *Five Years* does not rely on an disembodied narrator to explain situations, but rather uses quotes projected on to the screen to introduce each section: "I feel

like an actor when I'm on stage, rather than a rock artist" (1971-1972), "Bowie was never meant to be. He's like a Lego kit. ... there is no definitive David Bowie" (1974-1975), "The minute you know you're on safe ground, you're DEAD" (1976-1977), "You have to accommodate your pasts within your persona. ... it helps you reflect WHAT you are now" (1979-1980) and finally "My prime concern was to present myself as just a performer. To take away some of the confusion about my identity" (1982-1983). Apart from the second quote that is allocated to the time from 1974 to 1975, all of these quotes are by Bowie himself, describing the way he has seen himself as a performer at different points of his career. It is interesting to note that he goes from calling himself "an actor" (1971-1972) to "just a performer" (1982-1983) over the course of roughly ten years. In between, he mentions that one has to accommodate one's own past and persona, which already points to Bowie's awareness of persona and what it means to be a public figure performing to an audience. At first glance, the terms 'actor' and 'performer' of course seem very similar, in some cases maybe even interchangeable. In terms of self-reflection, however, one can definitely tell that Bowie made a deliberate effort to change his performance persona in order to go from being an actor playing the role of Ziggy Stardust to being received as "just a performer" whom his audience recognises as the star David Bowie, who seems not to be hiding behind an alter ego as much as he did in the 1970s.

This change from going from 'actor' to 'performer' can also be seen in the way audience reflection is shown in the documentary. The voice of the audience is represented by music journalists, cultural critics and again collaborators of Bowie, featuring a lot of musicians who also toured and worked with him in the respective years. In the Year 1 section of *Five Years*, journalist and author Jonathan Harris mention the following concerning the way Bowie acted and assumed the stage persona of Ziggy Stardust:

What Ziggy Stardust does, it projects him as a rock star, he sings about the imagined experience of being a rock star, and in doing that becomes a rock star [...]; what

happens then really is the world fulfils his fantasy, aligns itself at what he wants to be, it is what I think psychology calls self-actualisation – not a lot of people can do it, but he did. (*Five Years*)

Another music journalist paints a very similar picture about Bowie as a performer by comparing what makes Ziggy Stardust so special to Hollywood actors: “What made Ziggy different is that he turned himself into an idol that people could worship, nobody had actually ever done that before in pop music, it was the province of Hollywood” (*Five Years*). In both of these reactions, the concept of acting seems to be highlighted in a similar way to how Bowie described it himself: by describing himself as an actor and also being described as an actor (or something very similar to that), Bowie as a performer definitely stands out of the crowd compared to other male artists in the popular (rock) music business. Still, as already mentioned, the shift from ‘actor’ to ‘performer’ over the course of roughly a decade also becomes apparent when looking at audience reception: in the Year 5 section of the documentary (1982-1983), the discussion of David Bowie as a performer is a lot about his mainstream success related to his *Let’s Dance* album released in 1983. While Bowie mentions wanting to present himself as “just a performer” and casually mentions “I think we’re out of characters now, and now we’re into suits, and the suits will change from tour to tour, but the bloke in them will kind of stay the same” (*Five Years*), the way his self-representation changed did not go unnoticed by his audience. Fellow musician and lead guitarist for Bowie’s *Serious Moonlight* tour comments on the shift from stage characters such as Ziggy Stardust to the performer David Bowie:

David went from being, let’s say a high-profile cult star to mainstream. The look was more mainstream, even though he had that really bleachy blond hair and the suits and everything, it was a lot different than that Thin White Duke ominous character or Ziggy; it was the most mainstream I’d ever seen him. (*Five Years*)

This conscious decision of making changes to his performance persona is one of the main themes of both documentaries that will be discussed in more detail below. The three key aspects to be discussed will be Bowie’s androgynous appearance and theatricality on stage

especially in the 1970s; the way androgyny and the space alien theme is vastly present in his work and performance and how it connects to the concept of the other; and lastly the notion of constant reinvention and change that is so heavily associated with Bowie as a performer.

Bowie and his Androgynous Theatricality

Sound and Vision begins by introducing Bowie as an artist through his reception by others. The first three quotes the viewer hears are all related to key ingredients of his star persona, such as “He was braver than your usual rockstar”, “Was he a girl, was he a boy, what was he thinking?” or “Nobody has ever broken the rules as he has”. These comments already set the tone for the documentary, especially with regard to Bowie’s way of assuming different, often androgynous, stage personae for his performances.

Five Years on the other hand opens with a quote by Bowie about himself which is projected on to the screen, stating that “I guess I was the first one to say that I’m USING rock’n’roll”. By “using rock’n’roll” Bowie refers to using the music as a medium to voice artistic concepts and ideas. Generally, *Five Years* introduces the viewer early on to the idea of David Bowie as an actor who is very much aware of what he is doing by assuming a stage persona such as Ziggy Stardust. Bowie states about himself that “[s]ometimes... I don’t feel like a person at all”, and furthermore explains “I’m a storyteller, a storywriter, and I decided that I preferred to enact a lot of the material instead of perform it as myself” (*Five Years*). Glam rock the way it was done in the 1970s – the genre Bowie was a leading figure of – “presented male musicians in androgynous personae” (Auslander 2004b: 7), and it can be argued that up to this day, Bowie is still very much associated with the androgynous stage personae that he created in that time. Playing with concepts of gender, cross-dressing and androgyny the way Bowie did in the 1970s had not been done before in such a way in the popular music field. Butler’s (1988) account of performative acts and gender constitution can shed light on Bowie’s play with androgyny:

Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. (520)

Taking Butler's idea into account and applying it to the field of popular music, it can be argued that David Bowie's theatrical take on androgyny and the creation of a very androgynous-looking stage persona is what Butler calls a "constructed identity", something that was created for a certain purpose (e.g. to appeal to his audience) and then "instituted through acts" (e.g. Bowie's performance of the Ziggy Stardust character on stage). As already mentioned, Bowie's way of first describing himself as an actor and then as a performer was accepted by his contemporaries and audience in such a way that they mirrored Bowie's own statements in what they said in the *Five Years* documentary. Therefore, it can be argued that also the second half of Butler's statement can be applied to Bowie and his creation of an androgynous stage personae as well: both "the actor" (Bowie) and the "mundane social audience" have accepted and internalised his performance of an androgynous alien-turned-rock star to the point of 'believing'. Butler goes on to state:

If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style. (520)

Again, when this idea is applied to David Bowie and the realm of popular culture, one could make sense of his theatrical take on androgyny by looking at it as a "stylized repetition of acts through time" – for example Bowie assuming various stage personae in the course of the 1970s, which all have an androgynous-looking appearance in common – as a way of incorporating androgyny into his style of performing, which arguably made him stand out from the crowd of musicians seeking fame during that era. Butler also mentions the "possibility of a different sort of repeating" when it comes to these performative acts, which is something that has already been discussed above by analysing the difference between Bowie

calling himself an ‘actor’ and later on a ‘performer’ and how this was received by his audience. When Bowie moved from cult star to a performer with mainstream success across the globe, his appearance (both on and off stage) also changed as can be seen below.



Figure 4

In the 1970s, his decade of ‘acting’, Bowie usually wore a lot of colourful makeup, a red hairdo as well as rather unusual, mostly very tight-fitting clothing for stage performances as well as other public appearances. The 1980s or ‘mainstream’ version of Bowie – who refers to himself as a ‘performer’ rather than an ‘actor’ - is typically sporting a bleached blonde haircut, no visible stage makeup and wearing suits that were the common in that time both on and off stage. This shift in appearance can be described as what Butler calls a “breaking or subversive repetition of [...] style” (152), because even though the person performing these acts remains the same, the way they are performed has changed. Bowie’s way of playing with gender and how it is received therefore heavily relies on his visual appearance, which is illustrated in Figure 4 above. About the use of costume and make-up in

order to maintain his cross-dressing, androgynous aesthetic of the 1970s, Goodall (2008) states:

Subsequently he proceeded to move through a range of other personae, reinventing his style decade after decade. One of the constants was his instinct for persona, a sense of identity that was virtual and changeable; he used make-up as mask and costume as means of establishing an aesthetic.” (Goodall 148)

This use of make-up and costume are of course all part of Bowie’s performance as a popular music artist, and are part of the stylised acts whose “arbitrary relation” (Butler 152) make it possible for Bowie to “transform” the way his own gender is received differently by his audience: in the 1970s, the focus of his performance heavily accentuated his stage personae such as Ziggy Stardust and Aladdin Sane – which would be called ‘characters’ in Auslander’s (2004a) model mentioned before. In the 1980s however, there was an absence of stage personae which automatically steered the focus towards David Bowie as a performer sans alter ego, which would be what Auslander describes as the ‘performance persona’ in his model.

Even though Bowie’s most famous stage character Ziggy Stardust is best known in terms of androgyny and performance, this persona actually was not the first occurrence of Bowie stepping into the shoes of a character he had created for himself. Bowie states that performing as a fictional character gave him more freedom to express himself through music, and even in early performances with bands such as The Hype before he made it as a solo artist, he preferred to dress up as somebody else, stating: “I was not a natural performer, I didn’t feel at ease on stage. But I felt really comfortable going on stage as something else. And it felt really rational to keep on doing that” (*Sound and Vision*). Audiences who saw The Hype perform actually severely disliked their costumed performance, which actually resulted in members of the band, including Bowie, being yelled at and called homophobic slurs such as ‘faggot’.

Referring back to Auslander's (2010) tripartite model of an artist in popular music, featuring the real person (which again shall be referred to as 'private person' henceforth) the performance persona and the character, the way Bowie approached androgyny can also be analysed in a nuanced way. It can be argued that the notion of Bowie performing androgyny can be seen in all three layers of his star persona. Starting with what Auslander calls the real person, which is essentially deconstructing the performer as a human being, *Sound and Vision* gives the viewer deeper insight into how Bowie's androgyny first came together as a concept even for his private persona. The documentary claims that it was actually Angie Bowie – his first wife – who suggested a more androgynous look for her husband in order to make him stand out of the crowd of aspiring rock stars in the late 1960s to the early 1970s. Bowie was soon to be known as a cross-dressing artist, not shying away from wearing women's dresses for example, which created an ever-growing interest in his sexuality in the press.

In her essay, Butler (1988) makes an interesting point about transvestites, an idea which is also interesting to discuss in terms of David Bowie's take on cross-dressing and androgyny as a performer on stage. She argues that: "[i]ndeed, the sight of a transvestite onstage can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence" (527). In the case of David Bowie, this statement only holds true to a certain extent: As already mentioned before, Bowie's first approaches to cross-dressing on stage while performing with The Hype were met with disapproval, rage and even violence the way Butler describes it. As soon as Bowie became a solo performer however, with a thought-through concept of what he wanted to achieve with his performance, audience reactions also shifted towards the more positive side of the spectrum.

When it comes to discussing the performance persona and the character, the lines are not particularly clear-cut. A good example of how first signs of assuming an androgynous

way of performing can be detected in Bowie's pre-Ziggy performance persona would be the album covers of Ziggy Stardust's predecessors, *The Man Who Sold The World* from 1970 and *Hunky Dory* from 1971:



Figure 5

Both of these covers show Bowie sporting a very androgynous look: the cover of 'The Man Who Sold The World' shows him posing in an elegant gown with long locks of hair, with one reporter saying that he actually "looked more like Lauren Bacall than a rock star" (*Sound and Vision*); the cover of *Hunky Dory* is a depiction of Bowie's face with the characteristic red hair, pale complexion and androgynous features. Journalist and author John Harris, who is one of the commenters in *Five Years*, describes the album art of *Hunky Dory* as follows: "Even the cover picture has a sense that he knows that he started to turn himself into what if you're being romantic you could call an icon and if you're being horribly cynical and 21st century, a brand [...]". Another example of Bowie's androgynous performance persona would be the music video to *Life on Mars?* of the 1971 album *Hunky Dory*, which features Bowie in front of a crisp white background, dressed in a light blue suit, wearing heavy blue eye make-up as well as lipstick and again wearing his hair in his then signature red colour. The video exclusively shows Bowie singing the song and includes a series of extreme close-

ups of his face, the close proximity accentuating his androgynous features and make-up even more.



Figure 6

As mentioned by Harris, from the point of view of a 21st century critic, one could describe this use of an androgynous appearance as a deliberate attempt of Bowie to manifest his stardom by turning himself into a brand. In terms of audience reception, however, there is no use in describing the cover of *Hunky Dory* and what was to follow as either turning oneself into an icon or a brand. What is more important to focus on is the fact that between Bowie's first approaches to a more androgynous look and the creation of Ziggy Stardust, there was a shift in the audience's acceptance of an androgynous, overly theatrical rock star who had formerly been ridiculed and called names. Again, Butler's (1988) essay comes to mind, where she argues that the idea of a transvestite or cross-dressing artist is easier to accept for an audience if it is done within the confines of a theatre stage, because "one can say, 'this is just an act,' and de-realize the act, make acting into something quite distinct from what is real" (527). This might be one of the reasons why the character of Ziggy Stardust was so positively received by Bowie's audience – one could still make that distinction and argue that there was still a difference between what Bowie performed on stage and "what is real" (527).

To close this section, it once again has to be mentioned that at least for a couple of years in the 1970s (when his various stage personae were most present), Bowie's approach to cross-dressing and androgynous appearance was not only part of his performance on stage but, to some extent, could be detected in all of the three layers of a star persona mentioned by Auslander (2004a) as it has already been discussed before. It can be argued that the way Bowie performs androgyny is again similar to what Butler says about transvestites in her essay:

The transvestite, however, can do more than simply express the distinction between sex and gender, but challenges, at least implicitly, the distinction between appearance and reality that structures a good deal of popular thinking about gender identity. If the 'reality' of gender is constituted by the performance itself, then there is no recourse to an essential and unrealized 'sex' or 'gender' which gender performances ostensibly express. Indeed, the transvestite's gender is as fully real as anyone whose performance complies with social expectations. (527)

David Bowie's theatrical take on androgyny is interesting to discuss because even though it was done within the confines of the rock and roll genre which, in similar fashion as theatre, is removed from "a reality" (527), it still challenged popular ideas of the naturalised gender order in rock and roll which was more typically represented and dominated by heteronormative ideas of the white, male rock bands, particularly the Rolling Stones. Within the field of popular (rock) music, Bowie's performed androgyny can be seen as "fully real" because by implementing cross-dressing into all layers of his star persona, he challenged the "distinction between appearance and reality" when it comes to gender identity and performing gender.

Bowie and the Space Alien Theme

In *Five Years*, the cultural critic Camille Paglia describes this shift in the perception of sexuality from the 1960s to the 1970s, with Bowie's character Ziggy Stardust being a symbol for it:

Ziggy Stardust to me is a kind of colossus that marks a tremendous transition between the 1960s and the 1970s. The 1970s were a dark era where sexual promiscuity for its own sake was pursued in a way that never has been so universal since probably the Roman Empire. Sex without consequence, anonymous sex, pickups in dark clubs – so Ziggy Stardust, when he appeared, was a kind of prefiguration, almost like a book of revelations, a hallucination of an apocalypse about to occur.

In order to discuss Paglia's statement, the idea and story behind Bowie's 1972 concept album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* can be summed up shortly:

The album presents, albeit vaguely, the story of a rock and roll character called "Ziggy Stardust". Ziggy is the human manifestation of an alien being who is attempting to present humanity with a message of hope in the last five years of its existence. Ziggy Stardust represents the definitive rock star: sexually promiscuous, wild in drug intake but with a message, ultimately, of peace and love. He is destroyed both by his own consumptions, and by the fans he inspired.
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rise_and_Fall_of_Ziggy_Stardust_and_the_Spiders_from_Mars)

Considering the story revolving around the Ziggy Stardust character, the album's narrative paints an apocalyptic picture about the near future as it tells the story of humanity's last five years of existence, which Paglia describes as a "hallucination of an apocalypse about to occur". In *Five Years*, Bowie mentions the following about himself: "I'm a fairly good social observer, and I think that I encapsulate eras, maybe every year or so, I'm trying to stamp that down somewhere, the quintessence of that year". The character of Ziggy Stardust was famously known for his androgynous alien appearance, sexual promiscuity and drug abuse but still promoting a message of hope. Therefore, Bowie's stage persona became what Paglia calls the "colossus that marks a tremendous transition between the 1960s and the 1970s" by reflecting on this transition in his performance, but also offering a form of escapism in order to deal with the 'real' world. Hebdige (1979) argues that "Bowie's meta-message was escape – from class, from sex, from personality, from obvious commitment – into a fantasy past [...] or a science-fiction future" (61) and that his "entire aesthetic was predicated upon a deliberate avoidance of the 'real' world and the prosaic language in which

that world was habitually described, experienced and reproduced” (61). Hebdige’s remarks are of course another way of pointing out the significance of Ziggy Stardust not only in popular culture, but also as a marker of transition and change in terms of morals and sexuality as it was already mentioned by Paglia in *Five Years*.

The creation of Ziggy Stardust also marks the appearance of androgyny in Auslander’s third level of a popular music artist, namely the character. As already stated previously, David Bowie’s artist persona was heavily attached to a certain brand of imagery, especially at the beginning of his career and the first peaks of success throughout the 1970s. Space and alien metaphors in his music and performance have occurred as early as 1969’s *Space Oddity* and 1971’s *Life on Mars?*, but Bowie’s best known interpretation of this theme up to this certainly comes by the name of Ziggy Stardust, the eponymous hero of the 1972 album and his performance persona for the following two years after the album’s release.

Referring back to Auslander’s tripartite structure of the star persona in the field of popular music and performance, Ziggy Stardust as a performance persona presents an interesting case: it can be argued that he is both performance persona and character in one. During his live shows of 1972 and 1973, Bowie not only went on stage and performed as his performance persona Ziggy Stardust, but Ziggy was also the subject of the performed song’s narrative. In the 2002 documentary *Sound and Vision*, it is stated that the introduction of Ziggy Stardust was a daring move that obviously shocked conservatives, but greatly appealed to Bowie’s teenage audience because of the otherworldliness he represented. The younger audience that witnessed the transition from the prudish sexual morals from the early 1960s to the sexually promiscuous 1970s were fascinated with the Ziggy Stardust persona. As a sexually ambiguous, androgynous looking alien turned rock star from another planet, Ziggy represented a kind of freedom that essentially summed up the sexual revolution of the

beginning of the 1970s. In *Five Years*, Bowie himself reflects on the motive behind creating the performance persona of Ziggy Stardust:

It just seemed the perfectly natural thing for me at the time, to put together all these odds and ends that are in culture that I really adored; it just was sort of creating something entirely artificial but something that worked in the confines of rock'n'roll [...] I found my character, one man against the world, really reverberated in my mind that it was something that I really kinda honed in on; Ziggy was this kind of mythological priest figure, and I only say that in retrospect cause I didn't quite know what he was then; but it occurs to me now that the androgyny of some of the tribal priests throughout history have been transvestite in nature [...]

This reflection once again shows that the creation of such an elaborate performance personae as Ziggy Stardust is of course anything but accidental. In Bowie's case, his well-thought-out performance hit a nerve with the intended audience. Furthermore, it also becomes apparent that even though creating this otherworldly androgynous performance persona seemed like a risky choice, especially when thinking about the morals and conventions of the time Bowie grew up in, it was still done within the “confines of rock'n'roll”. Hebdige (1979) also comments on the cult following that developed around Bowie and his stage personae – especially the “mythological priest figure” Ziggy Stardust, as Bowie calls it himself – and argues that glam rock of the 1970's represented “a synthesis of two dead or dying subcultures”, namely “the Underground and the skinheads” (60). He then goes on and explains the cult following around David Bowie and the stage personae he created as follows:

He attracted a mass youth (rather than teeny-bopper) audience and set up a number of visual precedents in terms of personal appearance (makeup, dyed hair, etc.) which created a new sexually ambiguous image for those youngsters willing and brave enough to challenge the notoriously pedestrian stereotypes conventionally available to working-class men and women. Every Bowie concert performed in drab provincial cinemas and Victorian town halls attracted a host of startling Bowie lookalikes self-consciously cool under gangster hats which concealed (at least until the doors were opened) hair rinsed a luminous vermilion, orange, or scarlet streaked with gold and silver. (60)

Hebdige's description shows that Bowie's fan following in the 1970s can be described as cult-like, where the character created for the stage can be seen as the leader that is adored and imitated in every way possible by his audience; through clothing, make-up, and acting in

a certain way that was inspired by Ziggy Stardust (and also later versions of Bowie's most famous stage persona).

Similar to how the Rolling Stones played off their image of the dominant white male, Bowie's approach to the androgynous theatricality of his performances could only work because he represented one of the exceptions needed in a genre that had its established rules when it comes to gender order. Martin describes this in his 1995 article where he talks about the state of affairs:

The androgyny of Michael Jackson, Prince, David Bowie, Robert Smith of The Cure, and other male performers transgresses the essentialized masculinity of rock and roll, and complicates the simplicity of the cock rock/teenybop dichotomy. [...] For all the transgressions of the rock and roll industry's masculine gender order, though, the order itself is largely intact. (71-72)

While the Rolling Stones operated within the established realm of "essentialized masculinity of rock and roll", as Martin puts it, Bowie's androgynous theatricality represented the other side of the gender spectrum that was needed in order to be able to discuss performing masculinity in popular music in general. Creating a performance persona deeply connected to the imagery of an extra-terrestrial, androgynous rock star can therefore be seen as an essential step of transgressing the established rules of the gender order in rock and roll. As one of the first performers to play with performance personae as much as he did, Bowie inspired a trend for the theatrical and creating stage characters that can be found in the performances of a number of artists in contemporary popular music, such as Marilyn Manson, the rock bands My Chemical Romance and Placebo, to only name a few.

The last important point to mention is the fact that in Bowie's case, his connection to the imagery of an alien and space-man was not limited to the genre of popular music. In 1976, he was cast as the male lead in the science-fiction movie *The Man Who Fell To Earth* based on a novel with the same title, which tells the story of "[...] a humanoid alien who comes to Earth to get water for his dying planet" (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0074851/>).

It can be argued that a great deal of Bowie's work as an actor shows a tendency of relating Bowie to the concept of the other: next to his character in the *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, he also plays a vampire character in 1983's *The Hunger* opposite Catherine Deneuve and Susan Sarandon. Furthermore, Bowie also acted as the Elephant Man on Broadway from 1980 to 1981, as well as the character of the Goblin King in the 1986's Jim Henson movie *Labyrinth* (see Figure 7).

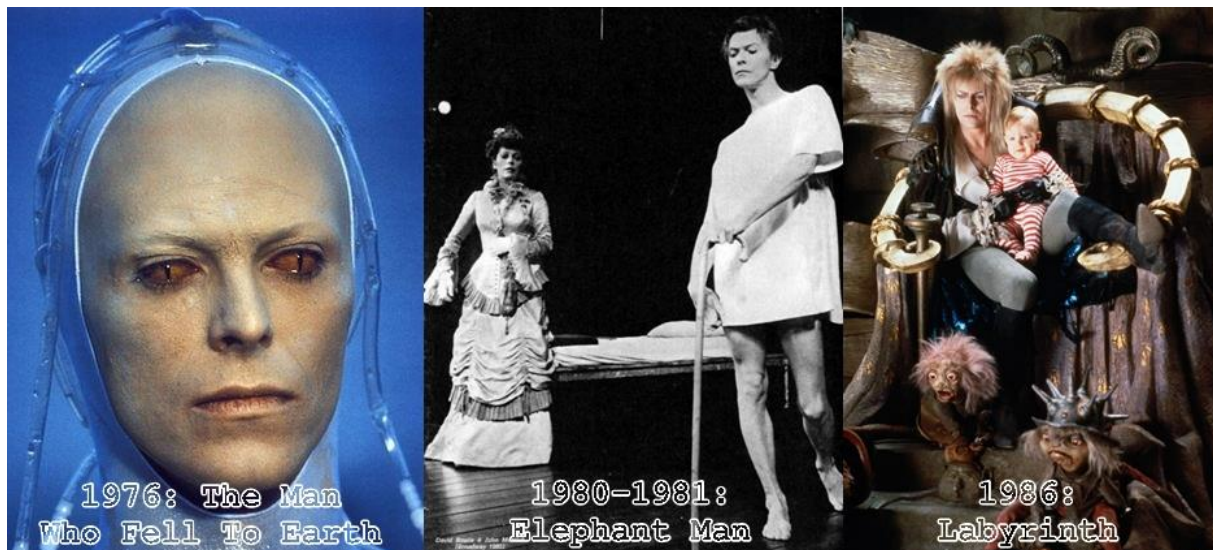


Figure 7

Otherness is a concept often discussed with various focal points in cultural studies, for example gender, race, power or sexuality. Generally, the concept of otherness is based on how societies establish different identity categories. Bauman (1991) for example mentions how identities related to dichotomies:

Woman is the other of man, animal is the other of human, stranger is the other of native, abnormality the other of norm, deviation the other of law-abiding, illness the other of health, insanity the other of reason, lay public the other of the expert, foreigner the other of state object, enemy the other of friend. (8)

Bowie's art has been heavily associated with space and alien imagery in the 1970s, but it also resurfaced in later decades. His involvement in various acting projects all are examples of establishing the image of himself as the other. The stage personae he created for his performances in popular music, such as Ziggy Stardust or Aladdin Sane, as well as his

character in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, are all alien characters and can therefore be classified as strangers or abnormalities. Bowie's character in *The Hunger* is not human either, but a vampire. In *Labyrinth* his character Jareth calls himself the 'Goblin King' and represents a fantastic creature residing in a dream world. Lastly, Bowie's Broadway debut was also marked by him slipping into the role of a character representing otherness, namely the Elephant Man, a physically disabled man who is part of a freak show, which also fits into the category of otherness as far as Bauman's description is concerned. In Western society, 'the other' is described as the opposite to what can be described as the "universal hegemonic human being [...] – white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied cis-men" (<http://othersociologist.com/otherness-resources/>). What is interesting in Bowie's case is that his otherness, or rather, his characters' otherness and how they are represented in popular culture, do not necessarily stand at the losing end of the power spectrum, as would most likely be the case in the 'real' world. The way Bowie's characters represent otherness they actually offer a form of escapism and even an opportunity for identification for his audience as it was already mentioned before by Hebdige (1979). He describes Bowie's cult-like fandom in the 1970s and how his fans started to dress up to look similar to Bowie's Ziggy Stardust character. The lyrics of the last song of the *Ziggy Stardust* album of 1972 called *Rock'n'Roll Suicide* are a good example of how this character created by Bowie offers a form of escapism into a dream world and even encourages relating with Ziggy on a certain level:

Oh no love! You're not alone; You're watching yourself but you're too unfair; You got your head all tangled up but if I could only make you care; Oh no love! You're not alone; No matter what or who you've been; No matter when or where you've seen; All the knives seem to lacerate your brain; I've had my share, I'll help you with the pain; You're not alone; Just turn on with me and you're not alone; [...] Gimme your hands cause you're wonderful; Oh gimme your hands. [sic] (Bowie, *Rock'n'Roll Suicide*, 1972)

Lyrics like these, especially in combination with a theatrical performance on stage, as Bowie celebrated it in the 1970s (even going so far as to dramatically kill off the character of

Ziggy Stardust in a 1973 performance at the Hammersmith Odeon) definitely hit a nerve with the so-called Bowie-ites, as Hebdige (1999) describes them:

The Bowie-ites were certainly not grappling in any direct way with the familiar set of problem encountered on the shop floor and in the classroom: problems which revolve around relations with authority (rebellion versus deference, upward versus downward options etc.). None the less, they were attempting to negotiate a meaningful intermediate space somewhere between the parent culture and the dominant ideology: a space where an alternative identity could be discovered and expressed. To this extent they were engaged in that distinctive quest for a measure of autonomy which characterizes all youth sub (and counter) cultures. (450)

Again, this refers back to Paglia's way of describing the character of Ziggy Stardust as a kind of symbol for the transition from the 1960s to the 1970s, not only in terms of morality, but the way youth subcultures in Britain tended to change and evolve depending on the issues they were facing, no matter if they were of socio-political nature or questions of gender and identity. Hebdige explains that for Bowie-ites, the main focus was "confronting the more obvious chauvinisms (sexual, class, territorial) and seeking, with greater or lesser enthusiasm, to avoid, subvert or overthrow them" (450). He also mentions that they were not only "challenging the traditional working-class puritanism so firmly embedded in their parent culture", but also trying to resist "the way in which this puritanism was being made to signify the working class in the media" (450). As a result, Hebdige states that they were "adapting images, styles and ideologies made available elsewhere on television and in films [...], in magazines and newspapers [...] in order to construct an alternative identity which communicated a perceived difference: an Otherness" (450). Therefore, it is justified to discuss Bowie's Ziggy Stardust persona (amongst others) as an icon of popular culture that through the concept of otherness, inspired a whole subculture to challenge "at a symbolic level the 'inevitability', the 'naturalness' of class and gender stereotypes" (Hebdige 450) that were prevalent at that time.

Bowie as a Symbol of Reinvention

The theme of space and alien imagery, which is heavily discussed in both of the two Bowie documentaries, is also closely linked to the theme of David Bowie as a symbol of reinvention. Often dubbed as the chameleon of popular music, Bowie is the standard example of an artist with no constant performance persona, who rather shifts from one character to the next, therefore always changing and keeping the interest around his artist persona alive. In the introduction to *Sound and Vision* (2002), it is stated that “[h]is key to survival was always constant change”, which is another theme that is touched upon time and time again by various commenters in the documentary.

After Bowie killed off his most famous performance persona, Ziggy Stardust in July 1973, the second half of the 1970s represented a decade of constant reinvention for him. In an interview snippet that is shown in *Five Years*, the young Bowie himself states that “I glit from one thing to another a lot. [...] It’s like flit, but it’s the 70s version” and then agrees when he is described as a “working actor” by the TV journalist conducting the interview. After Ziggy, Bowie moved on to a number of different performance personae that can be roughly put into order with the releases of his 1970s albums, for example Aladdin Sane, Halloween Jack and The Thin White Duke.

As much as Bowie’s career is marked by constant change and innovation, his approach to reinvention can also be described as having a cyclical character. In 1980, with the release of the album *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)*, Bowie revisited the very first character he had created more than a decade ago, Major Tom of 1969’s *Space Oddity*, in his song *Ashes to Ashes*. Instead of describing the same character all over again, however, the lyrics of the song suggest that the character of Major Tom is a more dark and sinister figure now in comparison with how he had been described in the past:

Do you remember a guy that’s been in such an early song; I’ve heard a rumour from Ground Control; Oh no, don’t say it’s true; [...] Ashes to ashes, funk to funky; We

know Major Tom's a junkie, strung out in heaven's high; Hitting an all-time-low [...] My mother said to get things done, you better not mess with Major Tom (Bowie, *Ashes to Ashes*, 1980)

Music journalist John Harris in *Five Years* comments on revisiting the character of Major Tom in the context of a new song, saying that “[i]t is very interesting that at the end of the 70s, he goes back to his first key character. Major Tom returns both in the sense of an updated performance of *Space Oddity*, but then he takes the character, puts it in a new song, and does very interesting things with it. So Major Tom becomes a very different and sinister figure”. Going back to a character that was developed a decade ago but at the same time giving a new twist to how it was visualised. In the accompanying music video to *Ashes to Ashes*, Bowie is shown as a pierrot-clown character on a beach, intercut with scenes that look like outtakes from his updated *Space Oddity* performance from 1980 where Bowie is sitting alone in the corner of a padded room, singing to himself:

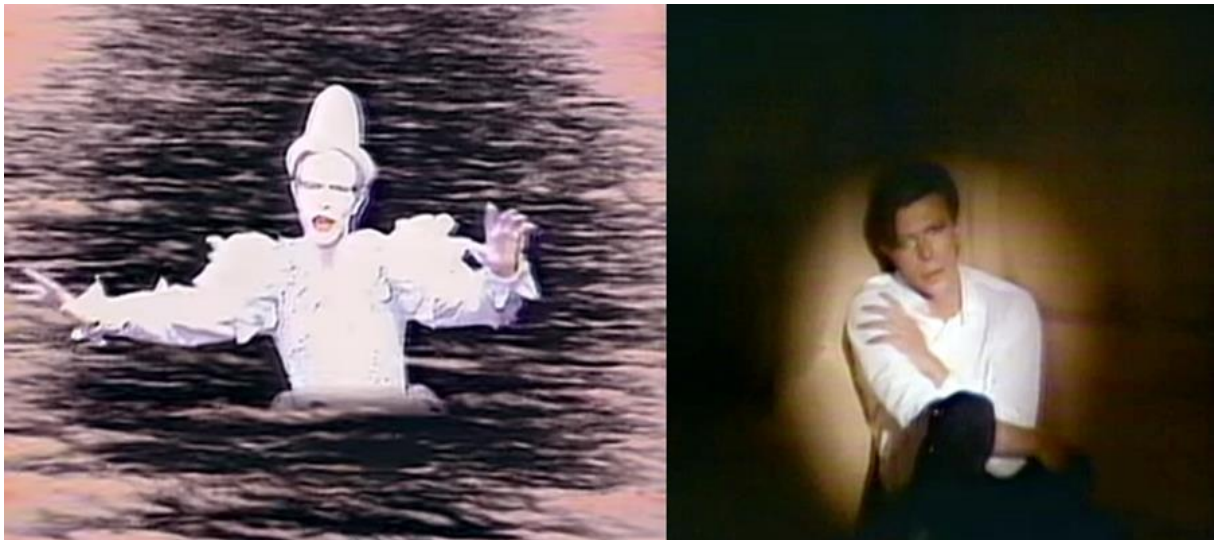


Figure 8

Bruner (2011) mentions the term “turning points” while discussing autobiography and describes them as “those episodes which, as if to underline the power of the agent’s intentional states, the narrator attributes a crucial change or stance in the protagonist’s story to a belief, a conviction, a thought” (31). By revisiting the character of Major Tom which is in a way the starting point of Bowie’s career as a performer, especially in terms of inventing

characters, it can be argued that the lyrics and the video to *Ashes to Ashes* describe the turning point in Bowie's life narrative which is mentioned by Bruner. Furthermore, he also says about turning points:

They represent a way in which people free themselves in their self-consciousness from their history, their banal destiny, their conventionality. In doing so, they mark off the narrator's consciousness from the protagonist's and begin closing the gap between the two at the same time. Turning points are steps toward narratorial consciousness. (32)

Even though the discussion of *Ashes to Ashes* is not the end point of the documentary in terms of narrative, it nevertheless represents an important step towards fusing the protagonist of the story with the narrator. The juxtaposition of depicting Bowie as his clown character at the beach and him sitting on his own in the corner of a padded room singing to himself is so striking because it is a visual representation of a turning point in his life narrative. The clown character represents a character explored by Bowie in the past – Major Tom–, while Bowie as a performer sitting by himself singing the words to a rather dark and sinister song can be interpreted as the “self-consciousness from their history”, the way Bruner describes it in his discussion of turning points.

If we look at Bowie's take on reinvention and revisiting as an aspect of life narrative in both documentaries, Bowie can be seen as reflecting on his first character in *Five Years* by saying: “I think Major Tom is the first time I'd been able to create a character that was very incredible I think for any kind of writer, that was a high point. He preceded all the others and I suppose one has a special place for.” So the act of revisiting a character of the past can be seen as not only sentiment, but also a calculated move on the artist's part. As Bowie has stated himself, the character of Major Tom is not only something he is proud of himself, but also appealed to his audience and therefore was worth revisiting and reinterpreting.

Finally, the end of the documentary *Sound and Vision* provides the viewer with more insight into how other artists saw Bowie as a symbol of constant change and reinvention from an audience perspective. Fellow musician Moby states that “[h]e really did pave the way for

things that are going on today, you know stylistically and musically and also in his capacity to experiment so successfully”, similar to Trent Reznor of the band Nine Inch Nails, who says about Bowie that “[h]e has a way to dictate trends, not follow them.” Lastly, famous fashion designer Alexander McQueen sums up Bowie’s essence as a performance artist by saying “[h]e perseveres to be original all the time, he’s like a chameleon, always wants to change with the times”, once again playing with the image of Bowie being a symbol for constant reinvention.

Then and Now

Similar to the documentaries about the Rolling Stones, both *Sound and Vision* and *Five Years* about David Bowie can be taken as examples for life narratives of the career of a popular music artist. In addition to David Bowie’s own retrospective comments on different stages of his career, both documentaries feature a lot of comments of fellow musicians, old friends and family members as well as music critics and journalists, which paints a very diverse picture of David Bowie’s career as an artist and performer in the realm of popular music.

Very similar to the point that McAdams (2008) makes about reconciling past images of ourselves with more present ones, Bowie himself says that “[y]ou have to accommodate your pasts within your persona, it helps you reflect what you are now” about his changing and evolving performance personae. Added to that, as early as the 1970s, he also describes himself as a “fairly good social observer” who is able to “encapsulate eras” in order to illustrate the “quintessence of that year” (*Five Years*). This is another point that goes hand in hand with what McAdams claims about narrative identity which always needs to be considered in relation to “social contexts of family, community, the workplace, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class, and culture writ” (243).

In general, Bowie as an artist proves to be very aware of how he has presented himself as a performer and artist in the past in both documentaries. Especially when it comes to discussing his mainstream success of the early 1980s with the release of the album *Let's Dance*, Bowie's artist persona underwent a rather drastic change. It went from the dominance of stage personae such as Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane or the Thin White Duke towards the establishment of the rock star David Bowie himself who appeared not to be hiding behind various masks, as he had done in the past decade. About this change, Bowie himself retrospectively states: "I think we're out of characters now, and now we're into suits, and the suits will change from tour to tour, but the bloke in them will kind of stay the same" (*Five Years*).

From a present day audience perspective, David Bowie is an interesting subject of analysis because of the almost cyclical model of his star image in relation to performance personae. From the beginning of his career, the fascination with David Bowie has a lot to do with the mystery around his persona in general. The release of the 2013 album *The Next Day*, after a ten year period of silence and disappearance from the public scene, is marked by an absence of interviews or live performances by David Bowie in order to support the new record. The end of the *Five Years* documentary relates this new era back to the 1970s: "In a sense, he has regained the mystery and distance which was such a powerful part of what made him so exceptional in the 1970s. Suddenly, we don't know who David Bowie is, once again". Discussing Bowie from an even more contemporary viewpoint as compared to where the documentary's narratives end (the narrative of *Sound and Vision* ends with the release of *Heathen* in 2002) is interesting in terms of star image and the way Bowie actively plays with different levels of performance. Contrary to how in the 1970s and 1980s, Bowie's performance was first marked by an abundance of different stage personae he embodied on stage and then by fashioning himself into a star that did not hide behind these characters,

Bowie's comeback in 2013 marks a very different kind of approach to his own stardom.

About star quality and identity, Shingler states:

Ultimately, however, the individual's attainment of stardom rests on being pigeon-holed, labelled, publicly dissected and analysed, scrutinised, exposed, charted, mapped, positioned, identified and evaluated. This is made all the more challenging and interesting by the fact that stars possess several identities and several different kinds of identity, determined by the various aspects of their character and the various characters that they play. (121)

Taking this into consideration, especially when looking back at the 1970s and 1980s, one can say that Bowie's star persona fits Shingler's description. In the glam rock era, he was very much in the spotlight and a widely discussed performer due to the innovative concepts he brought to the stage, especially considering the way he always liked to play with different stage personae. More recently, however, when asked about the promotion of his new album, Bowie stated that there were no plans of ever performing these new songs to a live audience.

5. Ideas of Authentic Masculinity versus Androgynous Theatricality

The Rolling Stones' portrayal of ideas of authentic masculinity, both on stage and off, has already been discussed with regard to documentaries such as *Shine a Light* and *Crossfire Hurricane*. In those documentaries, the viewer gets glimpses of how this performed masculinity is perceived from different angles: the band members themselves, their audience and fans and the general public in the form of journalists, cultural critics and fellow musicians. Based on what was already found above, this section will provide an in-depth analysis of the Rolling Stones as representatives of the more self-evident masculine side of the spectrum within the field of popular music and especially the genre of rock and roll. Therefore, the topic will be discussed from three points of view: the creation and establishment of the Rolling Stones' star image as a basis for their perception as the dominant stereotypically masculine rock band of the last five decades; audience reception and the identification factor the Rolling Stones offer to their audience and finally why their supposed authenticity must be questioned.

David Bowie's theatricality has already been touched upon in the section of this thesis discussing rock retrospectives such as *Sound and Vision* and *Five Years*. Bowie was discussed as a performer in a retrospective manner by the artist himself, fellow musicians, friends and family as well as music journalists and cultural critics. In this chapter, Bowie's more exaggerated theatrical style of performance will be discussed especially with regard to his androgynous and cross-dressing appearance. The following points will be analysed in greater detail and in comparison with the Rolling Stones more heteronormative representation of masculinity in rock and roll: David Bowie's star image with special focus on his idea of reinvention and change compared to the Rolling Stones' more steady star image; Bowie as an example for intentionally using an androgynous imagery and look as a big part of his performance as an artist, contrasted with the Rolling Stones' preferred masculine aesthetic;

and finally audience reception and in how far the concept of identification works for both the Rolling Stones' and Bowie's audience, as well as answering the question if and in how far their fan bases overlap.

Discussion of the Imagery used in the Self-presentation of Stars

The notion of representing a certain image is a crucial part of the (self-) fashioning of any star. While a lot of theory about the self-presentation of stars is based on (Old) Hollywood actors and the acting industry in general, it can be argued that performers in popular music work with very similar methods. In star studies, there is a general consensus that there are certain prerequisites for stardom which are vital for success. Basinger, quoted in Shingler (65) sums up fundamental qualities a person needs to possess in order to become a star as an introduction to the functions and features of stardom:

A star has exceptional looks. Outstanding talent. A distinctive voice that can easily be recognized and imitated. A set of mannerisms. Palpable sexual appeal. Energy that comes down off the screen. Glamour. Androgyny. Glowing health and radiance. Panache. A single tiny flaw that mars their perfection, endearing them to ordinary people. Charm. [...] (qtd. in Shingler 65)

As already mentioned, this set of prerequisites is meant to be applied to Hollywood actors and actresses, but there are still more than enough overlapping qualities that are also required for a performer in popular music in order to gain success, which makes it justifiable to use Basinger's list in order to describe performers in that particular genre. The analyses of the four documentaries discussed in previous chapters have already shown that both the Rolling Stones and David Bowie possess and work with a lot of the attributes mentioned by Basinger. Features such as "a distinctive voice", "a set of mannerisms", "sexual appeal" and "androgyny" can be grouped into qualities connected with the desire to establish oneself as a star and performing gender, or in the case of this thesis, masculinity. Other features mentioned, such as "glamour", "a single tiny flaw" and "charm" might also be grouped

together because they play a more important role since they invite a good audience reception and identification.

There is one interesting point to mention when looking at the star images of the Rolling Stones and David Bowie in comparison: while Bowie's career has been marked by continuous reinvention and change, especially when it comes to stage personae, the Rolling Stones' formula for success has stayed more or less the same over five decades of being performing artists. Dyer claims that "star images are always extensive, multimedia, intertextual" (3), and that different forms of expression are not always equal. The previous analyses of the so-called 'rockumentaries' of course support this claim, as they have already shown that there always are several layers of representation to the performance of artists in the popular music field, and that these layers carry different weight in terms of how a performer is received by their audience.

The concept of glamour that was already mentioned above is one of the basic features that help stars to set themselves off against the crowd. In order to become a star, a person needs a few qualities bordering on the extraordinary to set themselves apart from the average mass. Shingler (68) argues that "[s]tars stand out. They have a certain lustre, a special sheen and a sparkle, that makes them glitter, that makes them glamorous." When looking at stars coming from the realm of acting, glamour is now often connected with the notion of the so-called Old Hollywood glamour, with beautiful actresses and actors enchanting their audience with the alluring image they represented. Even though the idea of glamour obviously stems from a set of qualities needed in the acting industry, it is also crucial to how performers in the popular music industry are perceived by their audiences. Still, there are different forms of glamour represented by different stars and their images, which also holds true for the Rolling Stones and David Bowie – it can be argued that as artists, they have very different approaches to glamour. In the case of David Bowie, glamour had a lot to do with the introduction of

colourful stage personae and the theatrics of his performance; as Goodall (2008) argues, the concept of glamour has been reinvented time and time again:

Glamour was reinvented with a dash of parody in the 1970s with the Rocky Horror Show and the advent of David Bowie in his Ziggy Stardust persona. The impact of the star performer was expanding in scale with mass media dissemination, but live interaction with audiences remained a generative source of star power, as Dame Edna Everage has understood so well. (15)

Being one of the leading figures of 1970s glam rock, Bowie's way of inhabiting different characters on stage showed an extraordinary understanding of what makes a star. Looking at the star David Bowie the way he presented himself in the 1980ies up until his hiatus in the early 2000s, he already possessed a lot of the features that make up a star, for example charisma, expressivity and a mellifluous voice, as Shingler (66) puts it. In that era, however, Bowie's star image was not dominated by the creation of various stage personae such as Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane or The Thin White Duke, which definitely helped to achieve first peaks of success in the 1970s. Still, these prerequisites were supported by further qualities that helped Bowie to achieve success. Bowie's stage presence while inhabiting the characters or personae he had created for himself, combined with his special "fashion sense and style" (Shingler 66), helped to create a certain aesthetic perception of his art. This aesthetic is what helped to further cement his position as a star not only in the music industry, but also in popular culture.

Compared to Bowie, whose brand of glamour was based on his androgynous stage personae and the way he combined fashion and makeup with a theatrical on-stage performance, the Rolling Stones' appeal cannot be explained in the same way. The Rolling Stones' way of incorporating something comparable to Bowie's glamour into their star image was (and is) illustrated mostly through the rock and roll lifestyle they came to represent ever since their earliest peaks of success in the mid-1960s. The band combined the features they also share with Bowie – charisma and a certain sense of style when it comes to performing on stage – with their image of being a band of rebellious young men who allegedly did not care

about pleasing those in charge of the system (post-war Britain) they grew up in themselves.

Allen (2006) describes a photograph taken of the Rolling Stones in 1963 at a performance at Battersea Park:

In the photograph, the Rolling Stones are performing in daylight at what resembles an outdoor festival, although the venue is much more modest than the term might suggest today. [...] They are all wearing black roll necks while Mick Jagger and Brian Jones are also wearing casual jackets. They all have longish hair and only Charlie Watts sports a parting. [...] Behind the band, in a backstage area, a small group of slightly older men, dressed smartly and conventionally with shorter hair, suits and ties, show little interest in what is happening. The contrast is striking. The Stones are as uniform as the watching men, but their appearance signifies a crucial cultural shift in Britain in 1963. Even before I heard their music they offered a visual promise of challenge and, I now suppose, authenticity. (148)

This description of the Rolling Stones in such an early stage of their career already shows how they did not represent the ‘glamour factor’ in a traditional way, but rather utilised a certain way of dressing and presenting themselves in order to establish their star image as rebellious rock stars questioning the status quo. The juxtaposition of the way Allen describes the band’s appearance contrasted to the older men in the background is a striking visual representation of what would become their trademark throughout their career: the image of the white, masculine rock band challenging the system, presenting an alternative lifestyle for the youth subculture that made up a very large chunk of their following. This claim can be supported by offering quotes by the band members themselves as shown in various archive clips of the *Crossfire Hurricane* documentary. They state the following: “We never abided by any rules. The gentlemanly things, we never did it. That was part of why we got ostracised by everyone”, “We were just refusing to conform to what everybody wanted us to be”, or “We have been called just about everything, from beautiful to revolting”.

Several points can be noted to sum up this section on differing ways of self-representation with regard to the Rolling Stones and David Bowie, as well as their approaches of representing different versions of masculinity. Referring back to Auslander’s (2004) idea of analysing a performer in popular music in three layers, we can conclude that the Rolling

Stones have established their star image mostly through their collective performance persona in general, but especially through the charismatic performance of Mick Jagger. Representing a certain 'rock and roll' lifestyle had the effect of making them appear as authentic in their actions and performance as mentioned in the above quote.

Bowie's success on the other hand was heavily built on the introduction of fantastic characters (such as Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane or the Thin White Duke) to his stage performance. When she discusses the performance of stereotypically masculine gender roles as opposed to practices of cross-dressing and androgynous self-presentation, de Lauretis (1987) offers an idea as to how both of these ways of performing masculinity can be explained. The Rolling Stones can be described as operating and performing in what she calls the "discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses" (26), while David Bowie's way of slipping into androgynous characters on stage can be assigned to what de Lauretis calls the "space-off":

But avant-garde cinema has shown the space-off to exist concurrently and alongside the represented space, has made it visible by remarking its absence in the frame or in the succession of frames, and has shown it to include not only the camera (the point of articulation and perspective from which the image is constructed) but also the spectator (the point where the image is received, re-constructed, and re-produced in/as subjectivity). (26)

Bowie is often described as an avant-garde artist by critics. De Lauretis' description of the space-off in terms of gender performativity and representation fits very well with what he came to symbolise through his way of representing androgyny on stage. She further states:

Now, the movement in and out of gender as ideological representation, which I propose characterizes the subject of feminism, is a movement back and forth between the representation of gender (in its male-centered frame of reference) and what that representation leaves out or, more pointedly, makes unrepresentable. (26)

Following this line of argument, it can be concluded that Bowie's way of performing can be seen as being part of the space-off described by de Lauretis, while the Rolling Stones' performance of masculinity can be assigned to the represented space in a heteronormative

discourse. Furthermore, it might also offer an explanation as to why the two ways of performing gender could work alongside each other within the same discourse: “These two kinds of space are neither in opposition to one another nor strung along a chain of signification, but they coexist concurrently and in contradiction” (de Lauretis 26). The idea of both spaces being able to “coexist concurrently and in contradiction” will be further examined when I discuss audience reception as well as concepts of identification and otherness below.

Audience Reception, Identification and Otherness

One question that still remains is how two different models of performing masculinity within the same general genre of music could be equally successful, and even share a part of the same fan base. To answer this question, audience reception must be discussed by examining in what ways it is possible to identify on some level with performers such as the Rolling Stones or David Bowie. About subculture in 1960’s Britain, Hebdige (1979) mentions the “sizable black community” and how it relates to the white youth:

The proximity of the two positions – white working-class youth and Negro – invites identification and even when this identity is repressed or openly resisted, black cultural forms (e.g., music) continue to exercise a major determining influence over the development of each subcultural style. (442)

Both the Rolling Stones’ and David Bowie’s musical style is rooted in the black blues of the 1940s and 50s; a genre of music which Hebdige calls a “black cultural form”. For Britain’s white youth, identification therefore was possible with both artists, the Rolling Stones and David Bowie, because the black or Chicago blues can be determined as a common influence in terms of style. However, it can be argued that while identification is possible with both artists, they suggest different ways of doing so.

With the Rolling Stones, identification is based largely on the star image that has been discussed in the previous section. Their image of rebelling against the status quo and the moral standards of post-war Britain they have grown up in themselves offered a new kind of

countercultural thinking for their dedicated followers. This particular youth subculture makes up a big part of the Rolling Stones' audience. Hebdige (1979) describes them as "ostensibly defined" against other groups such as "parents, teachers, police, 'respectable youth'" and other cultures such as "adult working-class and middle-class cultures" (442).

In his paper about the boom of the British blues in the 1960s – which the Rolling Stones were leading figures of – Allen (2006) tries to find an explanation of why it happened exactly at that time and what attracted the white youth subculture described by Hebdige. About the photograph of the Rolling Stones performing in Battersea Park mentioned in the above section, he finally adds the following: "More personally, it offered me a first (visual) sense of an alternative to a mainstream life as a lower middle-class, provincial grammar-school boy" (148). The idea of the Rolling Stones offering an "alternative to a mainstream life" ties in with the way Hebdige describes their fan following as part of the white youth subculture in Britain. This is contrasted to other groups standing for a certain set of morals and values that is subverted by the Rolling Stones' lyrics and performance. For young people the rebellious or alternative lifestyle represented by the Rolling Stones was also accessible because it offered an alternative to the little choice many of them were offered in the 1960s. On the one hand it was either a "smooth transition from school to adulthood via academic or blue-collar apprenticeships followed by the material aspirations of a premature middle age", or on the other hand "the hedonistic, sex- and fashion-obsessed 'swinging sixties' – certainly entertaining but in truth remotely elitist, elusive, ephemeral and centred upon specific areas of London" (Allen 147).

Lastly, Allen also mentions that it is very likely that "young British men liked the boasting, aggressive sexuality" (153) of blues music, which also definitely is a big part of the Rolling Stones' lyrics and performance style. The sexual imagery of the genre becomes apparent in a number of Rolling Stones songs, such as *Monkey Man*, *Let's Spend The Night*

Together, or *She Was Hot* to only name a few. This imagery is of course strongly connected to the brand of ‘authentic’ masculinity they want to sell and therefore also offer a way of identification for their (male) audience. In this context, it is also interesting to once again refer to de Lauretis’ (1987) concept of the represented space and the space-off in avant-garde cinema and how it can be related to the way artists perform masculinity in popular music as well. By offering their male audience a means of identification through the notion of aggressive male sexuality, it can be argued that the Rolling Stones support the ideological representation of gender in a “male-centered frame of reference” (26) and hence confirm hegemonic discourse.

Moving on from the Rolling Stones to David Bowie, there is another means of identification for the audience: identification with the other. On a base level, the identification process for the audience (as with the Rolling Stones) begins with the black blues and its British imitation that made it accessible for the white youth subculture. Still, it can be argued that the Rolling Stones offered this base level of identification through their lifestyle of questioning the status quo as well as on their performance of accented, sexually boastful masculinity. David Bowie’s approach, by contrast, offered escapism on a larger scale. His take on androgyny and cross-dressing as part of his performance of otherness has already been discussed in previous chapters. Hebdige argues that it inspired his fan following to challenge “at a symbolic level the ‘inevitability’, the ‘naturalness’ of class and gender stereotypes” (450). This again also ties in with de Lauretis’ (1987) idea of the off-space, which can be described as an “elsewhere” to hegemonic discourses and the very male-centered way of representing gender (26). By offering a way of identifying with the other, David Bowie’s performance of Ziggy Stardust, an androgynous-looking alien-turned-rock star, he provided a powerful idea of escapism for his audience.

A brilliant example that not only sums up Bowie's influence as a performer and captures the essence of his star persona, but also illustrates his idea of identifying with the other is a speech by actress Tilda Swinton. She held it in Bowie's absence in March 2013 at the inauguration of the *David Bowie is* exhibition in the Victoria & Albert museum in London. The following is a shortened excerpt of Swinton's speech:

Dear Dave

[...]

We're in the Victoria and Albert Museum preparing to rifle through your drawers

[...]

And, alongside, when I was 12 - and a square sort of kid in a Round Pond sort of childhood, not far from here - I carried a copy of *Aladdin Sane* around with me

[...]

The image of that gingery boney pinky whitey person on the cover with the liquid mercury collar bone was - for one particular young moonage daydreamer - the image of planetary kin, of a close imaginary cousin and companion of choice

[...]

You were, You are, One of us

And you have remained the reliable mortal in amongst all the immortal shapes you have thrown

[...]

Yet, I think the thing I'm loving the most about the last few weeks

is how clear it now is - how undeniable - that the freak becomes the great unifier

The alien is the best company after all

[...]

When I think of what it used to feel like once

To be a freak who liked you

To feel like a freak like you

- a freak who even looked a little like you

[...]

And pulled us together, together

By you, Dave Jones

Our not so absent, not so invisible, friend

Every alien's favourite cousin

Certainly mine

We have a nice life

Yours aye

Tilly (The Victoria & Albert museum, www.vam.ac.uk)

The structure of Swinton's speech is of course reminiscent of the way songs are structured. Especially when looking at her words in a transcribed form, they are like lyrics rather than a traditional speech. By comparing Bowie to "the image of planetary kin, of a close imaginary cousin and companion of choice", Swinton adopts and illustrates the idea of

David Bowie representing the other very early on in her speech. Later on, she even goes as far as to call him an alien as well as a freak. However, she gives these terms, which would generally be seen to be derogatory, a twist by then calling herself “a freak like you”. Here it can be concluded that for Bowie-ites, as Hebdige calls them, it is more identification with Bowie’s specific brand of otherness, as well as being able to identify with him on the grounds of being “a freak” more than anything else they are fascinated with.

Lastly, the way Swinton addresses Bowie with “Dave Jones” – an abbreviation of his birth name – and calls him everyone’s “not so absent, not so invisible, friend” as well as “every alien’s favourite cousin” of course suggests a certain closeness to his audience that one would not expect at first glance. Considering Bowie’s cult-like following, one would rather think that being this kind of leading figure positions him at an elevated or even unapproachable level, creating a certain distance to his audience. Still, even though at first glance, Bowie’s way of representing otherness might not be as approachable as the Stones’ more straightforward system of offering means of identification, it works on this “space-off” level that makes unrepresentable ideas of the hegemonic discourse visible.

Performance, Power and Subversion

The last point that needs to be addressed are the power relations between performers and their audience and how these relations connect to a certain socio-political agenda, as well as how acts of subversion are incorporated into performances and what potential effects they have. In the entertainment industry, similar as in politics, every performer (whether the role has been imposed by a management or not) has an agenda they want to see actualised. No matter what this agenda might be, creating a massive fan following as it was done by the Rolling Stones and David Bowie alike is the key to see it fulfilled. The sections above already explain the preconditions and performance strategies of these artists to garner an almost cult-like following – the question that remains is what makes their performances of masculinity so

powerful. While it has already been established that offering ways of identification for an audience is vital in order to create a certain following in popular music, it is also interesting to discuss the use of power in order to achieve this goal.

Foucault (1987) mentions the following about power and its relations:

Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix – no such duality extending from top down and reacting more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body. One must suppose rather that the manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups, and institutions, are the basis for wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole. (94)

The idea of power coming from below is significant for the way popular music is discussed in this thesis because of the fact that a big part of the Rolling Stones' and David Bowie's performance style as well as their fan following are based on subcultural movements. In terms of genre and musical style, the Chicago blues of the 1940s and 50s – a black cultural form – was a huge influence that was adapted for the British market by artists such as the Rolling Stones and Bowie. In terms of audience, the white youth subculture of 1960's Britain that felt alienated from the traditions, morals and value system of the past made up a large chunk of their following. By offering a certain appeal to this particular part of subculture through their performance, especially by offering different ways of identification, a big fan-following could be built in order to push their own socio-political agenda by targeting a specific audience to make sure their voice was heard. Nevertheless, it must be noted that such power structures between performers and their audience are only controllable to a certain extent, which also holds true when minority subcultures such as the Bowie-ites or the Stones' fan base are involved. An example for that is the development of violent group dynamics as it is shown in the documentaries discussing the Rolling Stones: at various points in the *Crossfire Hurricane* documentary, there are a lot of scenes showing situations getting out of hand and large groups of fans turning into mobs spurred on by performances of the band. More often

than not, the band is not able to gain back control in such situations, which has already resulted in tragic accidents in the past, as well as the Rolling Stones taking a break from playing live shows for longer periods of time.

When she discusses Foucault's idea of power, de Lauretis (1987) says:

Both power and resistance, then, operate concurrently in "the strategic field" which constitutes the social, and both traverse or spread across – rather than inhere in or belong to – institutions, social stratifications, and individual unities. However, it is power, not resistance or negativity, that is the positive condition of knowledge. Far from being an agency of repression, power is a productive force that weaves through the social body as a network of discourses and generates simultaneously forms of knowledge and forms subjectivity, or what we call social subjects. (35)

Taking this into consideration, the idea of "power and resistance" can easily be illustrated by looking at the relationship between the Rolling Stones, the media and the law. In one of the archive clips of the *Crossfire Hurricane* documentary Keith Richards states: "[T]he cops turned me into a criminal". This is one of many cases where it shows that where there is power, there is also resistance and vice versa. Still, de Lauretis also mentions that it is power "that is the positive condition of knowledge". With regard to the power that artists like the Rolling Stones and David Bowie inhabit, this positive condition described by de Lauretis might be offering new and different spaces of identification for their youth subculture audience that differ from the hegemonic discourse.

Still, while keeping these power relations between artists, their audience and the status quo in mind, it is important to again emphasise that behind every performance in the field of entertainment there is an agenda waiting to be fulfilled. Performers in popular music cannot simply be defined as egomaniacs looking for a way to cultivate a certain image. While the 'right' kind of self-presentation is a very important part of gaining popularity for any performer, there is normally another agenda involved apart from excessive self-portrayal that in some cases could be described as bordering on narcissism.

However, it can be argued that both David Bowie's and the Rolling Stones' socio-political agenda is definitely connected to the ways they perform and represent versions of masculinity and even sexuality. Bowie's ambiguous sexuality was one of the preferred topics of discussion in the media of the early 1970s; even though he was a married man with a son, he stated that he was bisexual or even homosexual in interviews, even before the release of the *Ziggy Stardust* album in 1972. While the validity of such statements remains questionable, they certainly secured him mass recognition and a new niche within the genre of rock and roll, which helped to further his career. Bowie's affinity for cross-dressing and creating androgynous stage personae together with his statements about his own sexuality received a lot of aggressive responses from mainstream media and the public alike. Still, it can be argued that Bowie's performance of gender and sexuality also glamourised and gave a more positive connotation to a representation outside of the heteronormative discourse, which also supported emerging lesbian and gay movements of the 1970s. As one of the leading figures of glam rock, part of Bowie's agenda definitely was to challenge the heteronormative framework of gender representation and oppose homophobia.

Similar to David Bowie, the Rolling Stones' agenda also represents a countercultural movement against the prevalent values and morals of the 1940s and 50s. While the Stones' have not written many outright political songs – *Street Fighting Man* being one of the few exceptions – a lot of Jagger's and Richards' lyrics still criticize the status quo and hint towards prevalent problems in society. Paired with their image of virile masculinity and the 'sex, drugs and rock and roll' lifestyle they came to represent, they gave a voice to Britain's white middle-class youth subculture through the way they expressed thoughts about social issues, as well as images of anger and even violence through their lyrics and performance.

Therefore, it is crucial to point out once more that different performances of masculinity, no matter if they are perceived as stereotypically male or different in terms of

cross-dressing and theatricality, must be questioned. About the ‘reality’ of gender as it “is constituted by the performance itself”, Butler (1988) states:

As a consequence, gender cannot be understood as a role which either expresses or disguises an interior ‘self’, whether that ‘self’ is conceived as sexed or not. As performance which is performative, gender is an ‘act,’ broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority. (528)

It can be argued that this also holds true for performances of gender in the popular music scene: the performance of gender, or in the case of this thesis, masculinity, is a construction that serves the purpose of establishing a certain star image that is alluring for the targeted audience. In the staged context of popular music, there is a spectrum of ways of how to perform gender. This spectrum opens the field to subversive representation of heteronormative ideas of gender as it was done by David Bowie and his take on androgyny. Such subversive representations can be seen as “[p]erforming one’s gender wrong”, which then “initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect” (Butler 538). In the case of David Bowie (and his following), a form of punishment would be being denounced as ‘freaks’ and other derogatory terms.

This idea of “[p]erforming one’s gender wrong” and the fear of the punishment that could possibly follow is also illustrated in the *Shine a Light* documentary about the Rolling Stones. At one point in the set, Mick Jagger introduces the next song to his audience by stating: “We’re gonna do this is a real old song [*sic*]. It’s one of the first we’ve ever written, in fact it’s so old that we gave it to someone else because we were slightly, slightly embarrassed about it the first time we wrote it” (*Shine a Light*). The band then starts playing *As Tears Go By*, one of the first original songs composed by Jagger and Richards in the 1960s, which was first interpreted by Marianna Faithfull in 1964 before the Rolling Stones recorded their own version in 1965. The song itself differs greatly from other early Rolling Stones songs because of its introspective lyrics and its slow, ballad-like pace. A song such as *As Tears Go By* that discusses vulnerability, in the repertoire of a band that became famous

for the performance of stereotypical, heterosexual masculinity, can definitely be seen as subversive. Jagger's statement about their embarrassment for the song supports this idea: since *As Tears Go By* does not really fit with the typical imagery the Rolling Stones present in their lyrics and performance, the fear of punishment in the form of rejection by their audience is very plausible.

Taking all these points into consideration, the notion of authenticity in the performance of gender by popular music artists must always be questioned because these performances are deliberate and thought-through in order to appeal to a certain audience and push a certain socio-political agenda. In the popular music field, "[p]erforming one's gender wrong" or "performing it well" (Butler 538) are both sides of the same coin as they are deliberately constructed with a certain agenda in mind, which, broadly speaking, is to gather a following. Once an artist's performance attracts a big following, their own (or the management's) socio-political agenda is easier to realise and broadcast to the masses; in the case of David Bowie and the Rolling Stones, this agenda is connected to countercultural ideas such as questioning the status quo and the heteronormative framework within which society usually operates. However, for performers in popular music, performing gender a certain way is only one – albeit very powerful - aspect that works together with a number of others in order to create the perfect formula of a star image worthy of iconic status, as it is the case with both the Rolling Stones and David Bowie.

6. Conclusion

To answer the question of how the different means of performing masculinity in popular music as represented by the Rolling Stones and David Bowie can exist with similar success and a certain overlap of fan bases within the same general genre of rock music, one has to acknowledge several points that were raised in this thesis.

Starting with genre, it is obvious that both artists were influenced by the black blues of the 1940s and 1950s, especially the Chicago area. Not only have both artists contributed to bringing blues music to 1960s Britain, but they also have helped black blues artists such as Muddy Waters to gain more popularity by introducing them to their own audience as it is also stated by Allen: “The careers of many black American blues singers were revived or boosted significantly as a result of the creation of a new, young, white audience by the 1960s blues boom [...]” (143). Reinforcing a connection with their blues roots is an important part of the Rolling Stones’ narrative as a band, as it can be seen in the *Shine a Light* documentary of 2008, where they even share the stage with Muddy Waters to acknowledge their musical roots.

Their audience of the 1960s and 1970s, which essentially was the white middle-class youth that grew up in post-war Britain, was drawn to both the Rolling Stones and David Bowie for the same overall reasons: their performances featured different acts of subversion, and they were role models that appealed to them. Still, both artists represented very different star images within the genre of rock and roll. Therefore, the process of identification must be described as nuanced depending on the artist’s appeal.

For fans of the Rolling Stones, it was based on the mind-set of rebelling against the status quo, while for Bowie-ites, it had more to do with identifying with the other as a form of escapism. This difference is heavily connected to the way masculinity is performed by the two respective artists: the performance of a stereotypical, virile masculinity as represented by

the Rolling Stones was met with approval by both male and female fans alike – heterosexual male fans were able to identify with the sexually suggestive and boastful lyrics of the band, but it still should also not be forgotten that “young women shaped early rock and roll as its undeniably active and passionate fans” (Martin 54). Therefore, young women definitely belonged to the Stones’ target audience as well. Additionally, the Rolling Stones’ performance as artists in popular music was met with approval by their fan base because of its subversion of the status quo represented by their ‘sex, drugs and rock and roll’ lifestyle. The band’s famous logo of a pair of lips with the tongue sticking out can be described as a symbol for this subversion. The inspiration for this logo came from Mick Jagger’s trademark, the full lips, and how he uses them to his advantage: they do not only support his self-representation as a star because of their erotic connotation, but also symbolise the Rolling Stones’ subversions of the status quo.

Since David Bowie’s performance tended to slip into an array of cross-dressing, androgynous-looking characters on stage (as well as off), it offered a perfect opportunity of escapism for his audience into “a space where an alternative identity could be discovered and expressed” (Hebdige 450). The clever construction of stage personae such as the iconic Ziggy Stardust made it possible to represent these alternative identities by subverting what Martin (1995) calls the “naturalized gender order of rock and roll” which is, and has always been, dominated by heteronormativity. By subverting the heteronormative rules dominating the genre of rock and roll, Bowie’s performance offered new means of identification for minority subcultures and gave a voice to gay and lesbian movements of the early 1970s.

The analysis of the so-called ‘rockumentaries’ discussed in this thesis, which show Bowie’s and the Stones’ narrative as performers from a retrospective point of view, makes it clear that when it comes to performance, the notion of authenticity must always be questioned. Even though many facets of a performance – actions which are not just restricted

to performing gender, of course – in popular music appear to be natural and not staged, the performers themselves as well as other contributors in these documentaries make it clear that they are very aware of the role they are playing both on and off stage.

To conclude, the answer to how artists in the same cultural formation and genre, which in case of this thesis is popular rock music, could be successful despite their very different takes on performing masculinity especially at the beginning of their career ultimately boils down to a variety of factors. First and foremost, the shared basic influence of the black blues; secondly, a similar talent for drawing in their targeted audience by subverting prevalent values and morals as well as gender stereotypes in society through their performance, as well as offering appealing new ways of identification; and lastly, the perfect performance of a cleverly constructed and thought-out star image that appeals to the masses.

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D. Figures

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8. Appendix

a. Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die Analyse der Darbietungen von Künstlern war lange Zeit auf das Theaterfeld beschränkt. Andere Disziplinen, wie auch die Populärmusik, wurden bis vor einigen Jahren nicht beachtet. Diese Masterarbeit beschäftigt sich daher mit der Darstellung von maskuliner Geschlechtsidentität und der Selbstpräsentation von Populärmusikern. Es werden zwei Künstler – David Bowie und die Rolling Stones - in Bezug auf verschiedene Darstellungen von Männlichkeit bei ähnlich kommerziellem Erfolg im Genre der Rockmusik diskutiert. Die Untersuchung von diesen Darstellungen, insbesondere David Bowies Hang zur Kreation von androgynen Bühnenfiguren im Vergleich zu der stereotyp dargestellten Männlichkeit der Rolling Stones, erfolgt über die Diskussion von jeweils zwei retrospektiven TV-Dokumentationen pro Künstler. Die Analyse erklärt die erzähltechnischen Zusammenhänge zwischen klassischen Autobiographien und diesen retrospektiven Dokumentationen, und zeigt verschiedene Probleme mit narrativer Identität auf. Gleichzeitig trägt die Diskussion dieser Dokumentationen zu einem besseren Verständnis für die Selbstpräsentation von Musikern wie David Bowie oder den Rolling Stones insbesondere im Hinblick auf Genderperformativität bei. Die Schlussfolgerung beleuchtet die unterschiedliche Beziehung beider Künstler zu ihrem Publikum, den Medien und sozialpolitischen Werten in der Zeit ihres Durchbruchs und erklärt die wichtigsten Faktoren für ihren ähnlichen Erfolg: Der starke Einfluss des Black Blues bezüglich des Musikgenres; der Aufbau einer Fangemeinde durch Identifikationsmöglichkeiten mit dem jeweiligen Künstler sowie die Subversion von vorherrschenden sozialpolitischen Wertvorstellungen; und schließlich die perfekt gespielte Darstellung eines gut durchdachten Images.

b. English Abstract

For a long time, performance analysis has been restricted to the theatre realm while other fields, such as music, have been disregarded until recent years. There is still a research gap when it comes to analysing performances of gender in the self-representation of artists in popular music. This thesis juxtaposes two popular rock artists, David Bowie and the Rolling Stones, and discusses the way they perform masculinity differently with similar success in the same overall genre. The basis of analysis are four retrospective documentaries (two for each artist), which allow discussions of autobiography and narrative identity, but also self-presentation with special focus on cultivating a certain image and the performance of masculinity. The conclusion explains the relationship between both artists with their audience and the media, as well as their attitude towards socio-political values. Furthermore, it lists the factors they have in common that secured their on-going success: the influence of the black blues; the build-up of a loyal following through offering means of identification; the performance of subversive acts against the status quo; and the perfect presentation of a well-thought-out star image.

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