Songs To Save Your Life:
The Queer Messaging of 1980s Pop Music.

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Declaration

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Abstract

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This study argues that the 1980s witnessed a revolutionary shift in pop music representations, and offered, for the first time a plethora of transgressive alternatives, which challenged the ubiquitous heteronormativity of the pop landscape which had gone before. Queer narratives commonly recall the decade as a dark aeon for LGBT/queer communities. With most political systems remaining universally hostile to the idea LGBT advancement or equality, the emergence of HIV/AIDS would disproportionally affect sexual minority populations and see further ancillary stigma directed towards those already subject to significant marginalisation.

Just as the Weimar arts scene of 1920s Germany critiqued the rise of fascism, and the advent of punk rock was, in part, a reaction to the austerity of 1970s Britain, pop music has been shown to reflect the times in which we live. Using queer theory as a foundational framework, the study appraises various pop music artefacts from the period. In exploring the breath of contributions to the era's musical outputs, through the lens of queer theory, the true extent, of the indelibly queer influence over the decade, becomes readily apparent. Relevant sexuality-related, musical, and transnationalist contexts are explored in Chapters I and II, in addition to introduction to the principles of queer theory underpinning the research. Chapter III introduces the genre of Hi-Nrg. Illustrated as innately queer in form, its subsequent trajectory of assimilation into the mainstream, where it would come to constitute a predominant, defining soundtrack of the period, is presented. Chapter IV continues the thematic thread and explores the phenomenon of the 'gender bender' in 1980s popular culture, illustrating their considerable aesthetic influence on the decade. In Chapter V, the focus turns to the plethora of avenues of expression adopted by artists, both explicit and coded, from which queer intimations can be drawn.

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Like Heteronormativity never happened: An introduction to pop's decade of sexual transgression. 9

Chapter I: Pop Music, Sexuality, Transnationalism; Theoretical Perspectives. 21

I. A. Introduction 21

I.B. Pop Music Perspectives. 23

I.B.1 Pop Music - Origins, Definitions and Characteristics 23

I.B.2. New Technologies 25

I.B.3. *Youthquake*: The Rise of the Teenager and the Birth of Youth Culture 25

I.B.4. The Complex Terminology of Pop 27

I.B.5. Pop Academia and the Study of Pop Music – Considerations and Dynamics. 28

I.B.6. Pop Music - Roles, Impacts and Effects 31

I.B.7. Pop Music in the 1980s 34

I.B.8. *Mirror, Mirror*: Technological Advancements and Changing Mediums 35

I.B.9. MTV and The Rise of the Music Video 35

I.B.11. Access, Absences & Success: Pop music in 1980s Ireland 39

I.C. Sexuality Perspectives. 41

I.C.1. Queer communities in the 1980s 41

I.C.2. *Under Attack*: The Emergence of HIV/AIDS 44

I.C.3. HIV and the Mobility of Queer Consciousness 45

I.C.4. Locating 'Queer' - Controversy and Effect 46

I.C.5. Origins of Queer Theory 49

I.C.6. Criticisms of Queer Theory 51

I.C.7. Queer Theory and Academia 53

I.C.8. Queer in this research 54

I.D. Synthesis. 57

Chapter II: Queering the Groove: Sexuality in Pop Music. 60

II.A. Introduction 60

II.B. Pop Music, Sex & a Diachrony of Queer Sexualities 61

II.B.1. Scrutiny, Censorship & Self-Regulation: The Preoccupation with Sex in Pop 61

II.B.2. The 'Filthy Fifteen': *Parental Guidance Necessary*, but of limited consequence? 63

II.B.3. *Boys Don't Cry* while *Girls Just Want to Have Fun*: Pop's Rigid Roles and Rhetoric 65

II.B.4. Locating the Queer in Pop 68

II.B.5. Advances of a Glam, Disco and Punk Army: The Advent of the Visible Queer 70

II.B.6. Synth Styles and Subversion: The Queer in 1980s Pop Music 72

II.B.7. ***(Can You Tell Me) Why*****? - Investigations on queerness in 1980s Pop** 75

II.C. Pop Music and Queer Sexuality: An Analytical Framework 76

II.C.I. "Just What I Wanted": Pop's Place in Queer Lives 76

II.C.2. Safe Spaces, Identity & Self Determination: Individual and Collective Functions of Pop 77

II.C. 3. Icons, Anthems and Affinities 78

II.C.4. Notes on Representation 81

II.C.5. From Foucault to Frankie Goes to Hollywood: Contextualising Queer Analysis in this study 82

II.C.6. Discourse Analysis 83

II.C. 7. Charting the Charts: Discourse Analysis and Pop Music 85

II.C.8. Semiotics, Multi-Modality and the application of Discourse Analysis in this work 86

II. D. Synthesis 89

Chapter III: HI-Nrg: Affirming A Subversive History of Queer Desire 91

III.A. The Disco Ball Cracks 92

III.A.1. Assimilation and Decline. 92

III.A.2. "(Burn, Baby, Burn) Disco Inferno": The death of disco? 93

III.A. 3. Pioneers or Pariahs? The Village People's Indelible Pop Boot-Print 95

III.B. Birth of a Genre 97

III.B.1. The Origins, Etymology and Quiet Discourse of a Queer Pop Revolution . 97

III. B. 2. Riding High (Energy): The 'New Disco' takes hold 103

III.B.3. Another Time, Another Place: Stock, Aitken and Waterman Convert Hi-Nrg for the Masses. 105

III.C. Measuring against Methodology 108

III.C.1. "Prove Your Love": Considerations in consolidating Hi-Nrg against a Queer Framework 108

III.C.2. Song Lyrics and Titles 109

III.C.3. "Hit That Perfect Beat": Hi-Nrg Music, Meaning, Aesthetics and Ownership 114

III.D. Assimilation, Betrayal or simply just a case of "That's the Way It Is"? 120

III.D.1. Encroaching Criticisms 120

III.D.2. A Heteronormative Ubiquity: The 'Vanilla Cul-De-Sac of Appropriation'? 124

III.D.3. The Dawn of 'dance' Music: House, Techno and Second Summers. 126

III.E. Synthesis. 127

IV. A. Introduction 130
IV.B. Arrival of The Gender Benders 132
IV.B.1. Culture Club, Controversy, and Crossdressing in Pop. 132
IV.B.2. Ascendancy: Sisters, Doing it for Themselves 135
IV.B.3. "Dude looks like a lady": Twisted Sisters and Beyond 137
IV.C. A 'Divine' Discourse ? 139
IV.C.1. Tabloid Tales and Terminology: Interpreting a 1980s Phenomenon 139
IV.C.2. "Walk Like a Man": Butler, Queer Theory, and the "Gender Benders" 142
IV.C.3. Queer Looks: Aesthetics, Songs, and Performativity 146
IV.D. "A Glorious Docker in Rock and Roll Drag": A Queer Appraisal of Pete Burns 149
IV.D.1. Testimony of a Troublemaker 149
IV.D.2. Really "Big in Japan": Lyric, Music, and a Queer Embodiment 154
IV.D.3. Boys Stop Swinging: The Beginning of the End 159
IV.E. Synthesis 160
Chapter V: Vinyl Closets & Pink Glass Ceilings 163
V.A. Introduction 163
V.B. "Fronted by Faggots" - "There's More to Love (Than Boy Meets Girl)" 165
V.C. Enjoying the Silence? Striding and Striving Upon Pop's Tightropes of Identity 169
V.D. Drinking from the Blurry Cup: Whitney and the 'Womyn' Challenging Notions of Lesbian Invisibility in the Decade 182
V.E. Backlash: HIV/AIDS, and the New Heteronormativity. 189
V.F. Synthesis. 194
Conclusion. 197
Bibliography: 208
Appendix 1: Number One Records in Ireland by Country of Origin (1980s) 1

Table of Tables

Appendix 1:

Table 1: Number one records in Ireland by country of origin, throughout the 1980….1

Introduction: Like Heteronormativity never happened: An introduction to pop's decade of sexual transgression.

> You may think I'm exaggerating, or overinterpreting, but these memories - the sight of Debbie Harry promenading on Twenty-Third Street - are my possession, and they are not visions that will disappear, or visions whose meanings I can ignore by pretending that it makes no difference how a star's gait seemed momentous and allegorical to a primed beholder.
>
> -Wayne Koestenbaum, *Debbie Harry at the Supermarket*, 2012.

The 1980s proved to be a notoriously challenging decade for queer communities. In England & the United States, from where most of the music featured within this study emanated, prohibitive laws and legislation mirrored the remaining societal hostility to the advancement of queer causes (Todd, 2016; Flynn, 2018). The emergence of HIV/AIDS, as well as disproportionally and devastatingly affecting queer communities, further exacerbated the stigma associated with homosexuality, and arrived as a hugely significant and unforeseen blow (Garfield, 1994). The ineffectual and recalcitrant response of collective governments would see queer activists divert their attention away from their previous equality-based agendas, to mobilise in response to the threat of AIDS (Altman, 1998; Kramer, 1989).

In Ireland, the picture was depressingly similar, with the criminalisation of homosexuality remaining intact for the duration of the decade, despite prolific attempts to repeal that archaic decree. In addition to the emergence of HIV/AIDS, the period would also be bookmarked by a catalogue of events which were gravelly indicative of Ireland's unrelenting denigration of homosexuality. The 1982 murders of two gay men in Dublin, and a third in Cork, were grotesquely complemented by a series of fires at gay venues in the capital, at the tail-end of the decade. These desecrated the few existing focal points for Dublin's underground gay scene and are suspected to have been malicious in origin (McDonagh, 2021). This confluence of events, while suggestive of an enduring hostility, also ensured that queer lives were subject to ongoing, and prominent discourse throughout the decade, both in Ireland and beyond. This was commonly facilitated through the vessel of a mainstream media, that was at best apathetic, and at times provocatively unreceptive, to the advancement of gay causes (Sanderson, 1995; Lovelock, 2018).

To situate this in the context of my own personal history, as a twelve-year-old, growing up in the grey (and very non-gay) confines of 1980s working class Dublin, the sight of Pete Burns performing on *Top of the Pops* had offered me a queer lifeline of sorts. It was a glimpse of the possibility of a life un-like any I had borne witness to previously. In my part of the city, the location of which, a teacher would later helpfully advise not to include in any potential job applications, there were few people who looked, behaved, or sounded like Pete Burns. I was fascinated by the seeming contradictions; his feminine attire and make-up were intercepted by a wholly masculine, deep baritone voice. His performativity was imbued with an aggressive punk style, while also clearly indebted to the incorporation of an overarching camp sensibility.

Some 38 years later, I am also conscious of the evident socio-sexual progress attained since then, both in Ireland, and in the countries from which most of the material scrutinised within the study, originated (Mohr, 2005). Rather than being obscured by such a passage of time, these investigations significantly benefit from the vantage of almost 40 years of such progress. Alongside the latter-day credibility afforded to the study of pop music, the luxurious position of more sexually literate times, lends to a broadened understanding of pop's queer influence, unimaginable in the decade of the 1980s itself. Nevertheless, the demonstration of the hostile environment experienced by queer populations, and which ensured their continued marginality, serves as an important objective for this study. Given the factors, the predominance of queer cultural influence in the period's pop music is all the more remarkable.

At the time of writing, a renewed focus has emerged on specific aspects of the 1980s' queer contributions within popular culture. Kerr & Juhasz (2018) have termed the glut of cultural productions revisiting the early days of the AIDS epidemic as the "AIDS Crisis revisitation" and register their unease at much of the material's omission of exploration of all but the most acceptable of nominal representations of queerness. Fortunately, some other recent efforts, notably within the medium of television, have made laudable attempts to address the impact of the decade through an intersectional lens, one more aligned to the political frameworks underpinning queer theory. The American television drama series, *Pose*, and *It's a Sin*, from the United Kingdom exemplify the need to restore narratives which explicitly placed trans and non-white queer identities at front and centre of their stories. Both productions also share the distinction of having emphasised pop music's central role providing a soundtrack to the decade. With its title borrowed from The Pet Shop Boys 1980s hit single of the same name, *It's a Sin*, written by Russell T. Davies, and commissioned by the United Kingdom's

Channel 4, wore its pop associations proudly. The six-part show reinvigorated the discourse in relation to the political and social margins in which gay men, and queer communities generally, had found themselves relegated to, political and socially. Davies' carefully curated soundtrack also generated its own commentary, much of which was concerned with affirming pop music's vital role in sound-tracking the decade for its queer constituents. On the songs chosen for the show, one of the show's producers remarked this:

> What is important to say about all the music in the show is that these songs are still being played now. They're still being heard in clubs and pubs. The way that many of them have been embraced by queer people is incredible. These songs weren't written for those reasons, but they now have another life and language to them, which is ours.
> (Hoar, quoted in Kheraj, 2021)

Hoar's observation serves as a further ancillary introduction, conveying the relationship that exists between pop and its queer audiences, and unsurprisingly, many of the tracks selected by Davies feature within these pages. Some of them have already been subject to evaluation, their queer merit already previously explicitly established. Some of these stories have been told, with associations held with the decade often including acknowledgement of the array of sexuality and gender possibilities which coloured pop. However, as Lecklider (2004) has observed, many aspects to this story remain untold, and across these pages is an attempt to capture the overarching extent to which the decade's pop was influenced by facets of queer culture. The following offers a breakdown of the content covered, mapping the many converging and intersecting threads, which are employed to convey this.

In the first part of Chapter I, the origins of pop music are explored, as well as the converging factors which led to its explosion, and constitution, as a major cultural force, from the 1950s onwards. Observing the initially diminished reputation bestowed on the genre, the study then surveys the subsequent varied, and more intricate understandings of pop and its potential multitudinous functions, which have since framed academic discourse on the subject. The work of scholars such as Denora (2000), and Frith (1978; 1987; 1990) is shown to have significantly enhanced the form's credibility as a form of study. Attention is also paid to etymological considerations, regarding the status of pop music in relation to its often fraught, and yet interchangeable, relationship to that of 'rock music', a distinction shown as imbued with significant gendered allusions. The section concludes, with specific examination of the status of pop, both culturally and economically, in the 1980s.

The study explores artifacts of mainly North American and European descent. However, for the final section of the Chapter, the focus switches to Ireland. Beginning with an introduction to the concept of transnationalism, studies related to its application in the field of pop music analysis are presented. These help inform an indication of the issues in relation to the material's reception and place in Ireland, which is illustrated as still subject to specific inequities in relation to access to pop music. Yet, despite such unique complexities, the Chapter ends with a profile which illustrates the commercial dominance of predominantly English and North American pop in the Irish charts of the 1980s. This was replicative of the experience of many countries; indicative of the then still unyielding dominance of British and American pop music on the global stage, these particulars are intended to enhance the framework against which subsequent content related to Ireland is better understood.

The second section preoccupies itself with perspectives of queer sexualities, exploring the rigidly demarcated binaries of sexual minority identity politics of the decade, and the burgeoning rise of queer theory. The mobility of a queer consciousness, generated in the face of increased stigma and hostility generated by the aforementioned arrival of HIV/AIDS, is shown, together with the forging and establishment of queer academic avenues to have also contributed towards a seismic shift in sexuality discourse of the period. From here, how aspects of queer theory will be utilised to justify the inclusion of artifacts explored later in the study, and to qualify their assemblage under the moniker of queer, is then explored.

In Chapter II, the focus is further defined, by exploration of the specific intersections of sexualities and pop music. Here, the inherent, complex, and ultimately enduring relationship between the two is unearthed. In addition to the central role played by sexuality in the representation, packaging and performativity of pop, a seeming preoccupation with these intersections in popular culture discourse related to pop music, is also explored. Themes of censorship, regulation and inhibition, in relation to the portrayals of various sexualities, are also introduced. From here, the next section progresses closer to the nub of this project, investigation into the intersections of pop music and queer sexualities. The form's initial insistence, on rigid gender demarcation is analysed, and serves as an introduction to the first potent challenges to such structures, and also the wider, heteronormative hegemony which had previously dominated. The advent of glam rock, followed by disco and punk, are shown to have profoundly shifted musical representations, and afforded spaces and sub-cultures, which

reflected the explicit existence of sexualities that were previously deemed taboo. The section concludes with a review of the existing scholarship which has already investigated queerness in pop during the 1980s.

The succeeding segment concentrates on the potential function of pop music, in particular to issues of both individual and community identities. Reflective attention is given to the genesis and station of well-established tropes, such as the 'gay icon' and the 'gay anthem' and is followed by a review of the works which confirm pop's role in individual identity formation, and in particular its often-intrinsic role, in the process of 'coming out'. Additional attention is also paid to pop's aptitude for aiding the process of building collective identities, and which affirm its socio-political value. In order to further contextualise, the section then explores the complexity of representation itself, viewed with the particular interest of a queer lens. As Discourse Analysis is utilised as a framework throughout this study, the segment proceeds to introduce its primary characteristics, and its suitability as an effective method for the study of pop music artifacts. Reviewing and presenting existing works analysing pop from this perspective, the Chapter concludes with a presentation of its application in this study.

The first to adopt analysis of a specific thematic thread, Chapter III introduces Hi-Nrg, illustrating the genesis, influence, and omnipresence of the genre. Exploration of how the form is often overlooked in musical histories of the decade, beleaguered by enduring queer associations, and viewed at best, as an inconsequential subgenre of disco, is presented.

The Chapter begins investigating the backlash against disco, experienced in the late 1970s, at a time when its grip on mainstream popular cultures was at its most fervent. At the intersection of queer sexualities, the inception and success of The Village People is then explored. While their fraught relationship with sexual identification has led to a complex legacy, the study illustrates how the band's aesthetics and sounds were rooted in the urban, gay cultures from which they had been recruited. Despite their reluctance, their success crucially evidenced, how such works had the potential to be digested by audiences who remained devoid of any awareness of the culture from which the material was mined. By example, The Village People set forward an important template.

Preceding this, the genre's inception is explored, and attributed to a number of pioneers, most notably, Patrick Cowley and Bobby Orlando. While disparate in character, both had

emerged as influential figures on the United States' dance music scene in the 1970s, part of a seemingly new breed of pioneers who readily interchanged their musical functions, encompassing producer, artist and club deejay roles. Together, both men forged the principles of the sound that would come to define the genre. Characterised by homoerotic infused innuendo and idioms and set to an increasingly frenzied tempo to fulfil audience demand, the innately queer facets of the genre are further explored and presented, as evidence of the pioneering reflection of the lives of its urban, queer audience, which Hi-Nrg provided. Here, analysis of lyrical and aesthetical examples, are used to qualify the artifacts as to their legitimacy under the framework of queer discourse outlined. Etymological considerations are also given room in this section, where the genre is shown to have acquired several linguistic terms over its lifespan. While often used interchangeably, these also aid in illustration of its transnationalist capacities, which, as will be illustrated, would see the genre prove just as popular in the burgeoning queer dance clubs of Dublin, as in the North American cities from which it grew.

From here, Hi-Nrg is shown to have flourished commercially, at the hands of an English production trio, Stock, Aitken & Waterman. The trio's complicated role in its development is then considered. Steadfast in their acknowledgment of the queer roots of the genre, their subsequent acknowledged influence on shaping and defining Hi-Nrg remains undisputable. However, as the decade wore on, the study illustrates how they diluted the form through adaption into an altogether more heteronormative, and less transgressive force. This watered-down, repackaging of the genre was far removed from the queer ideals of its original genesis. Such was the genre's success, parallels to the annexation of disco are drawn, with often the most unlikely of artists seeking to replicate the Hi-Nrg sound.

Together with other factors, this is illustrated as lending to the beginning of the end of the genre, and its characteristic reputation for reflecting queer lives, like no musical style preceding it. Both The Village People, and the subsequent infiltration of Hi-Nrg as a major soundtrack to the pop music to the 1980s, serve as important cultural evidence, of pop music's potential to convey and deliver distinctly queer messaging, whilst leaving conventional audiences seemingly oblivious to the discourse and meanings evoked. The same cannot be said for the focus of the subsequent Chapter, for whom, through their performativity and aesthetics, left few in doubt of their inclinations.

David Bowie had opened the door on the possibilities of gender reconfigurations in pop music a decade earlier, and in doing so, inadvertently provided a huge influence on the successive 'gender bender' phenomenon. However, neither his early proclamations of homosexuality, nor the pioneering gender ambiguity of his Ziggy Stardust incarnation, despite their resonant influence, would stick. In the case of the 'gender benders', their aesthetics and mimesis would negate any sense of any plausible defence, as the very essence of their performativity was based on disregarding the gender norms traditionally imposed in pop music. In Chapter IV, their rich influence on pop music and wider popular culture in the 1980s, is explored. The term's popularisation is illustrated as having been fuelled by its abundant use in typically lurid tabloid newspaper coverage of the time, much of which was framed by outrage, judgements, and condemnation. In estimation of the 'gender benders'' influence, the Chapter examines how the impact of these, often musically disparate acts, would come to have on pop music in its most visual decade yet. Here the work of scholars in the realms of sexuality and gender studies, are once again used to quantify credible justification of their inclusion in the study.

Such theoretical works are also utilised, to revisit and analyse Liverpudlian artist, Pete Burns. Owing both to his emblematic role as a 'gender bender', and in consideration of his ambassadorship of Hi-Nrg, Burns' place in any sexuality or musical historiography of the decade is assured. Through multi modal analysis, Burns' performativity, style and lyrical outputs will be seen epitomic of the very queerness at the heart of much of pop during the decade. He will be shown to symbolise a pop incarnation of the ideas which had begun to emerge at the hands of burgeoning queer theorists, and which would eventually revolutionise sexual politics, identity and thinking. In this respect, Burns is revealed as fulfilling many such denotations; a non-conformist and anti-assimilationist, who remained defiantly dismissive of the previously fixed notions of sexuality and gender, and their implicit rigidity.

Regardless, however, and in common with Hi-Nrg, the zeitgeist initially created by the presence of the 'gender bender' would not outlast the decade. The theme of identity, previously introduced in terms of pop music's potential capacity to assist in collective and individual identity formation in Chapter I, is once again the focus for the final Chapter. Herein, the study undertakes to explore and present on the diverse avenues chosen by artists, in which representations aligned to aspects of queer theory, can be elicited. Together, the breath of such

iterations, further enables a more accurate reading of the sheer presence of queer artistic contribution to the form.

The Chapter commences with affirming the decade's manifestation of an arguably new phenomenon in pop, the 'out', gay, pop star. Across his various 1980s musical incarnations, the work of Jimmy Somerville is proffered as the most exemplary of this new breed. Sommerville's stance, along with that of several of his contemporaries, is explored and acknowledged as a vital facet of evidence in supporting the overall claim of the study, offering, pioneering and unwavering representations of homo-sexualities. From here, the Chapter extends its focus to a category of artists whose work was readily digested as queer in aspects of its execution, but for whom at the time, did not identify as part of any sexual minority grouping. Exploration of varied artifacts, including song lyrics, promotional videos, and sleeve art, are interpreted through queer frameworks, and substantially build on the decade's preponderance of alternatives to heteronormativity. This work was produced by some of the most visible, and commercially successful pop stars of the decade, and therefore adds substantially to the record of recognition claimed by the study.

Evidencing the complexity of reception itself, and the multiple ways in which audiences can interpret works is a theme which also preoccupies the ensuing segment of the Chapter. With its focus on the role and contribution of women in pop music, and in the light of the decade's abject failure in yielding any explicitly queer-identified female artists, the reliance on such readings is of continued importance. Such a forging, of alternative pathways, where sapphic annotations were readily assumed by audiences, is presented as evidence, reflecting a fuller picture of the contribution of female artists to the decade's queer intoned pop.

Given its role in contributing to the resulting dearth of broader queer analysis of the decade, and its subsequent use as assisting the justification for this study, it is somewhat ironic that the final section revisits HIV and AIDS. As illustrated in the proceeding Chapters, by the decade's end, the flamboyant excess of the gender benders had all but disappeared, and the formerly explicitly sexual soundtrack of Hi-Nrg now seemed diluted and dated. The study explores how the convergence of several forces, most specifically the cultural and societal backlash against the 'gay plague', would be felt across pop's environs, resulting in a significant, if temporary, return to established norms of heteronormativity. Despite its illustrious history of prompting shock and outrage in relation to the sexually transgressive, pop

music's initial response to HIV/AIDS did not reflect this previous form. The decade would pass with few explicit references to the pandemic. The silencing effect of AIDS on queer voices, as with other art forms, was all too apparent in pop.

As with the punk movement, borne in part as a reaction to the austerity of 1970s Britain (Wilkinson, 2015), pop music has been shown to reflect the times we live in. In this respect, fulfilling the story of pop's robust queerness during the decade offers a more accurate reflection of a time understandably marked, by the multiple devastations brought about by AIDS. Given that this research topic is broad in scope, and in consideration of the expanse of potential content available for investigation, there is an undeniable subjectivity to the choices proffered for selection. In writing on the nature of archiving Irish queer materials, Madden (2013) comments on the vast breath of choice, noting how the selections, "[…] inevitably suggest my own fandoms, my own obsessions, my own affective attachments…" (p.187-188). Echoing the approach adopted for this study, the sentiment also signposts to the vital need of ensuring the credibility of the examples used, either through the work of previous scholars, or indeed, by virtue of my own analysis. First and foremost, this study is written from the point of view of a fan. In his work, Madden also cites renowned queer scholar, Ann Luja Cvetkovich. Cvetkovich's observation, that, "[…] the archivist of queer culture must proceed like the fan or the collector whose attachment to objects is often fetishistic, idiosyncratic, or obsessional" (2003, p.253), offers both instruction, and affirmation as to the validity of endeavours such as this.

How audiences receive, or, as in the case of many of the items presented in this study, interpret such artifacts, remains a compelling and effective method of pop music analysis for good reason, not least for its significant role in the form's belated accrual of academic credibility. While utilised widely in this study, wherein evidencing the chosen artifacts as fitting of a queer status remains a primary goal, scholars of communications in musicology have also long established the potential for parasocial interactions, between the producers and consumers of pop music (Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Wert, 2021). While these may be instrumental in fostering an understanding of pop's potential depth, and contributing to a greater understanding of its function, the inherent view of pop's worth remains focused on the reception of messaging. Other media scholars have accurately pointed to the prospective limitations of such approaches. Heller (2011), for instance, cautions that the mere formulation of lists, of queer intoned artifacts or sites of representation unattended captures little insight

beyond perfunctory measurement. Hennessey (2017) argues that such representations themselves mark a commodification of queerness. With its primary conviction of the subject matter being so deserved, and overdue, of its equitable status in the wider pantheon of pop culture historiography, observations such as these, have not only helped in guiding the work, but also corroborated the wish to offer more than a 'greatest hits' of queer pop from the era in order to produce a more fitting assessment.

As such, while providing a curated compilation of pop's queerest 1980s moments, the study aims to focus more broadly on what queer culture brought to the music of the decade, and to illustrate just how the influence of queer sexualities was so significant to the period. Bluntly, this study is concerned with what pop gave to queer audiences, but also how the decade's pop was enriched by an emboldened band of queer transgressors in the shape of pop stars.

Queer theory, itself in gestation during the very period under scrutiny, offers a framework on which to offer this expanded view of the decade. With its porous view of sexual classification as a product of social constructionism, the emerging concepts of related theorists can be applied in order to offer a boarder analysis. The application of mixed methodological frameworks, which borrow elements of Discourse Analysis to assist an overarching claim of queer theoretical models applied, helps to ensure that the concerns articulated previously are circumvented. The present study fits into a burgeoning pattern of revisiting the myriad of heretofore hidden, untold, or constricted views of queer contributions to culture. Incubated throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the 1990s explosion of queer thinking, in both academia and wider communities, has delivered numerous important appraisals of popular culture.

Television (Doty, 1993; Becker, 2006); film (Cover, 2000; Hanson, 1999); and popular culture generally (Raymond, 2003), are just some of the forms which have been subject to investigation, and relevant to this exercise. While the work of Benshoff and Griffin (2004) is concerned with cinema, their criteria is used to assist in the validation of artifacts as queer in this study. There also exists a flourishing body of works exploring pop music through theoretical queer perspectives, and these have been of similar value in the execution of this study. Echols (2010); Leibetseder (2012); Renzo (2007); and Taylor (2012), have all contributed excellent works on aspects of pop music and queer sexualities, which intrinsically employ analysis through a queer framework. Many of these works are cited throughout the

assembled Chapters, along with reference to the broader, foundational, concepts and texts of scholars such as Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler. Despite not being thought of as particularly attendant to pop or rock music, Foucault did make direct, and confirmatory observations about its potency, which is hardly surprising given the philosopher's preoccupation with power. In addition, scholars such as Bannister (2010); Hubbs (2010); and Wall (2013), have also adapted Foucault's theories as mechanisms for interpreting queer musical works. Forging nexuses from within Butler's work is perhaps an even more discernible task, with the author having commented on various incarnations and trends in pop music performance, over the years. Her pioneering and era-defining views on gender performativity are well placed to instrument the decade's queer musical quotas. As with Foucault, other scholars have also successfully incorporated Butler's theories as mechanisms for the analysis of sexual and/or gender implications of pop performance (Parahoo, 2020; Renzo, 2007), and these are also referenced later within the texts.

In addition, the work of authors, whose work is less pedagogical in its nature, has also proved useful, as a resource. The pop culture spectrums analysed in the work of Simpson (1995; 1996; 2004; 2015) offered early inspiration to this author, on the validity of scratching on pop's shiny surface to unveil evidence of covert sexualities. Bullock's (2017) excavation of the role of queer musicians across the twentieth century is suitably sweeping and exhaustively researched, and alongside subsequent work on the predominance of gay men in the 1960s pop music industry (2020), has tendered a significant source of motivation. Similarly, authored works by Brewster and Broughton (2006); Shapiro (2005); and Doggett (2015), have further enhanced understanding of various aspects related to pop music and sexualities during the decade. English music journalist and author Kris Kirk (1950-1993), warrants stand-alone attention, for his pioneering role in profiling pop's queerness, and particular relevance to this study. Kirk, who was an openly gay man, was the only journalist writing habitually about queerness in pop music, during the 1980s itself. Kirk's first publication, co-authored with partner Edward Heath (1984), was timely for those whose interest was roused by the emergence of the decade's 'gender benders', offering a history of cross-dressing in the United Kingdom up to that point. But it was in his work as a journalist, for magazines such as *Sounds*, *Melody Maker*, *Smash Hits!* and *The Face*, where he sought to seek and publicise the queer nature of pop music, through essays and interviews, where he had most effect. Kirk was also engaged more broadly with sexuality activism, and this informed his work, with one review (Parker, 1999) noting, "[…] the confluence of his pink socialist politics with the emerging likes of Boy

George, Bronski Beat and the Pet Shop Boys makes for fascinating and historic reading" (p.71). Posthumously collected in in 1999, these writings show testament to the pioneering role he accrued, in offering explicit discourse on queer sexualities, in the heretofore notoriously hegemonic arena of rock journalism. The testimonies captured within constitute a capsule of extraordinary merit, with several of the pieces cited throughout this study, utilised to enhance the substantive argument herein.

In her work on queer representation in popular culture, Raymond (2003), cites and accepts Mohr's proposition, that queer communities are, "[…] no longer something monstrous, repulsive, unthinkably abject" (1997, p.333). Given the context of the evolving status of queers across such forms, her subsequent framing of the question as to how these new images are interpreted or digested (p.103) remains as seemingly relevant now.

Perhaps, as music journalist David Quantick, once infamously predicted, eventually "Pop will eat itself" (Cited in Roberts, 1998, p.326). This, however, is unlikely. This study demonstrates how, along with convergence of factors such as the birth of the 'teenager', and a post-war explosion in western consumerism, pop's initial advance in the 1950s was aided by significant modifications in how music is accessed and digested. In the decade under investigation a second shift would occur, facilitated by the rise of MTV, and the autonomy granted by the introduction of the Sony Walkman. Since the 1980s, alterations of an even more seismic nature have occurred. In an age of digital downloads and instant accessibility, pop has continued to evolve. Correspondingly, pop music has also progressed in relation to gender and sexuality, as affirmed by scholars such as Geffen (2020). It has continued to confound, provoke and cause consternation, and the rejection of constructionism, so central to queer theory, is explicit in lots of pop music of today. Despite a globalised pop market, pop music continues unabated to reflect these new categorisations, of the 'post-queer' age, some scholars (Ruffolo, 2016, p.55) have argued we now find ourselves in.

On the value of preserving lesbian cultural artifacts, Nestle (1990) notes, "Our will to remember, is our will to change the world" (p.93). This thesis takes inspiration from that and asks for the proper accreditation of entirety of queer cultural capital, and its influence over the pop music of the 1980s. The work of memory and of realising the potential for change starts on the dance floor.

Chapter I: Pop Music, Sexuality, Transnationalism; Theoretical Perspectives.

I. A. Introduction

> Deciding what music to listen to is a significant part of deciding and announcing to people not just who you 'want to be' ... but who you *are.* 'Music' is a very small word to encompass something that takes as many forms as there are cultural or subcultural identities. And like all small words, it brings a danger with it.
>
> -Nicholas Cook, *Music: A Short Introduction*, 2000.

An abundance of disciplines, theories and ideologies exist that can be functional to the study of pop music and its associated artifacts. As such analysis is the primary concern of this research, it is incumbent to present and contextualise the various factors underpinning both pop music and queer sexualities. This Chapter is presented in two distinct sections, both designed to provide a robust overview of the various contexts framing the main body of this research. The first section introduces and assesses existing academic work and discourse in relation to the genre of pop music. Included is a history of the genre, an exploration of its roots and evaluation of its enduring relationship and associations with youth culture. The often-confusing etymology existing around the term itself is also observed. In addition, the effects of, and role, pop music plays in everyday life are also dissected, with specific consideration paid to the decade under review for this study - the 1980s.

While the study is primarily concerned with artifacts of North American and Western European descent, the intention is to encompass an analysis of the manifestation of the artist's, trends, and musical genres discussed throughout, from an Irish perspective. The concluding section, therefore, introduces relevant considerations, which aid the interpretation of their impact in Ireland. Beginning with an overview on existing works exploring pop music's well established transnationalist capacities, the section continues by outlining several factors unique to Ireland, and its access and reception to such materials.

The second section switches focus, offering a selection of queer contexts of the time - a decade synonymous with the emergence of HIV/AIDS and its devastating effect on sexual minority communities. It builds a picture of both the socio-political and legally restrictive contexts in which queer lives were lived during the time. This segment will illustrate how the

mobility of such communities, in response to such adversity, led to the foundation of a new queer consciousness. Elaborating on this, the section then locates 'queer' itself in a number of contexts relevant to this study. A history of the genesis of Queer theory is presented, and evidence of an inter-connecting and mutually beneficial relationship with activism, identity and queer communities generally, is highlighted. In this project, the utilisation of Queer theory is of prime importance in the determining of artifacts as having a queer inference, component, or character. As such, the section concludes by elaborating on how the principles and framework of queer theory have been used, and on their proposed application in this work.

Combined, it is envisaged that the various contexts dissected here will offer both a valuable insight and fulfil a constructive necessity in laying the foundations of the succeeding Chapter, which is devoted specifically to the intersections between pop music and sexuality. "The full history of gay male sexuality in 1980's pop has not yet been written" notes Lecklider, (2004, p.112). As such, it is anticipated that the following exploration of pop music's origins and trajectory, along with that of queer communities at the time under scrutiny, will effectively aid the process of beginning to address this former gap.

I.B. Pop Music Perspectives.

I.B.1 Pop Music - Origins, Definitions and Characteristics

As with many art forms, over time there has been considerable debate among scholars of Musicology, Culture and Media studies as to what exactly defines the boundaries of pop music (Clayton *et al,* 2012; Frith, 1978; Manuel *et al*, 2001). Fortunately, greater consensus exists in relation to pop music's varied beginnings. Deriving from numerous sources and genres of music, in recent years a plethora of scholars have illustrated pop's origins to be as varied as its output (Doggett, 2015; Garofalo, 1992).

The pivotal impact which African American culture has had on the medium, from its origins and through its continuing evolution, has also been well chronicled. Described as "[…] the hugely formative influence of Black, American music on pop" (Manuel *et al*, 2001, p.2), a consensus, suggesting that the genre owes more to facets of black culture for its genesis than to any other, has been affirmed by a number of authors (Doggett, 2015; Gill, 1988; Shaw, 1986). Given the timely acknowledgement in recent years of a continued pattern of cultural appropriation of various aspects of black culture (Browne and Kapano, 2014), many scholars have opted to question the portrayal and marketing of black artists and the status of black communities in general, within the pop industry. Exposing issues of marginalisation like those identified across other cultural platforms, works in this area have concentrated on aspects of cultural appropriation in pop music specifically (Ziff & Rao 1997), on racism in pop (Horne, 2019; Bertrand, 2010) and on stereotyping (Helton, 1997). Despite being a hybrid of varied musical styles derived from non-white communities, unfortunately, pop has been shown to be just as complicit in its treatment of issues of inclusion, acknowledgement and representation, as many other art forms.

Pop music's central positioning in the broader category of pop culture has also been investigated, by authors such as Strinati (2000); and Stanley (2013) who acknowledges how "[t]he story of pop music is largely the story of the intertwining pop culture of the United States and the United Kingdom in the post-war era" (p.6). Delaney (2007) notes a key characteristic of pop culture as being its very accessibility, and alongside with a number of studies, attributes its rise as a 'culture of the people', to a combination of urbanisation, industrialisation and the advent of mass media (Brant & Callie; 2019; Danesi, 2020).

While consensus exists as to pop music's place in the wider pop culture pantheon, some have cautioned that this very positioning may detract from pop music's true potency as a medium worthy of stand-alone study or analysis (Frith, 1996). Reminders that pop culture is, "[…] the culture that is left over after we have decided what is high culture" (Storey, 2015, p. 5), further legitimize such concerns. Expanding on this, the same author notes how "[…] popular culture is always defined, implicitly or explicitly, in contrast to other conceptual categories: folk culture, mass culture, high culture, dominant culture (*ibid*. p.1). These definitions begin to offer a hint of pop culture's often poor standing as a form worthy of analysis. Born of a discourse coined as "If its popular, it must be bad" (Frith, 1991, p.103), similar associations have plagued pop music itself, and are explored later in this Chapter.

Finding a single definition of pop music that will satisfy all, is "[…] impossible and pointless" (Burnett, 2002, p.29). Yet, it does feel necessary to present some definition on the subject, not least because of the confusion alluded to by so many scholars. While the Oxford English Dictionary records the first use of the term 'pop song' from as far back as 1926, as we will see in later sections, the popular use of the term was born in Britain of the mid 1950's, *"*[…] as a description for Rock and Roll and the new youth musical styles it influenced*"* (Middleton *et al*, 2012, p.61). The myriad of existing definitions and terminologies applied to the genre offer just a hint of the many attachment's theorists, academics, detractors, and fans of pop music have placed on the medium, in a relatively short lifespan. With its complex boundaries and origins, there is at least a measurement of agreement as to when pop began. Stanley (2013) proposes the United Kingdom's pop era commenced in 1952 with the advent of the first UK singles chart, and in 1955 in the United States, when Billboard produced the first US equivalent. On the difficulty in defining the parameters of pop music, he pragmatically notes:

> What exactly is pop? Well, if you make singles and albums, and if you go on TV or tour to promote them, you're in the pop business. If you sing Acapella folk songs in a suburban pub, you're not. (Stanley, 2013, p.9)

Despite the confusion and debate, from the 1950s onwards, pop music began to embed itself into the wider popular culture, becoming increasingly powerful and impactful both economically and culturally. The technological and cultural shifts which enabled pop music's

birth and subsequent growth into "[…] a vast, thrilling art form" (Bennun, 2016) are detailed in the next section.

I.B.2. New Technologies

In addition to pop's musical lineage, several other factors which converged in the 1950s are worth noting, to contextualise the decade and the continued entrenching of pop music as a major cultural force. The effects of a burgeoning youth market, enabled by a series of socio-economic and technological developments in the United States and the United Kingdom after World War II, has been explored by many authors (Bennett, 2001; Tebbutt, 2016).

This economic expansion was a crucial component in the embedding of pop music as a cultural force in the 1950s and allowed consumers to indulge in a wide array of new technologies, all of which further increased the accessibility of pop music to the masses. This change was pivotal to the development of pop music, and its trajectory of growth. Technologies such as the transistor radio and the gramophone were now financially in reach for many consumers, making music accessible in people's homes and cars (Doggett, 2015; Austin & Willard, 1997). The introduction of new techniques also enabled the mass production of the new vinyl 45rpm records for the first time (Bennett, 2001) and meant a far greater number of records could be produced. It may be argued that this 'opening' - making pop music available to a mass audience, contributed to the role it would come to play in popular culture for the remainder of the century and beyond, and without which perhaps even this research would not be considered worthy.

I.B.3. *Youthquake*: The Rise of the Teenager and the Birth of Youth Culture

> Teenagers are still swooning to modern music, but their old yearning for Frank Sinatra has faded into nostalgia. 'Poor Frankie, He's old now, and has three kids'.
>
> -*Life Magazine,* August 1958.

Of the different cultural, economic and technical factors that converged in the 1950s to enable the pop music to indelibly imbed itself into popular culture, none suited the genre more than two recently popularised concepts – that of 'youth culture' and the 'teenager'.

Milestone (1999) attributes the birth of the 'teenager' to "[…] the collision of increased standards of living, more leisure time, the explosion of post-war consumer culture and wider psychological research into adolescents all contributed to the formation of this new social category defined by age" (p.63). Scaruffi (2003) explores and presents on the impact of the very concept of 'youth culture', illustrating how it was born of the same ideology and elements of the teenager. This is concurred by numerous works by authors including Peterson (1990) and Shunway (1992). Austin & Willard's (1997) opus bring together works exploring aspects of youth culture as diverse as fan clubs (Scheiner, pp.81-95) and cyberculture (Addison and Comstock, pp.367-379). These and other works, further underpin the enduring and varied relationships between young people and pop music.

Butterfield (2015, p.745) explains that while the use of the term 'teenage' can be dated back to the 1920's, the use of the term 'teenager' is younger, with first evidence of its emergence in 1941. Garner (2016) illustrates that the conceptualisation and grouping of young people between the ages of 13 and 19 has occurred since the 17th century, however, "[…] no-one paid much attention to the teenager, until the middle of the twentieth century" (p.613). Other scholars have noted the importance of acknowledging that the attributes associated with the term has a precedence in how society has viewed youth in general over the last 150 years (Savage, 2007). Savage pays particular attention, along with Tebbutt (2016), to how the term has been irrevocably linked with aspects of delinquency. For pop music and its trajectory, it is a fortuitous coincidence that the timing of the term's use coincided with the increase in new technologies, as already outlined.

The teenager was an impeccable fit for a whole suite of new markets born of the boom. New products, such as clothing, magazines, records, and concert tickets had to be sold to someone. Dutifully, the teenager obliged, consolidating further the symbiotic association between young people and pop music (Dearn, 2013; Bennett, 2001). Despite enormous changes to the industry since the 1950s, "[…] the main target market audience of much pop music remains the youth market" (Watkins, 2009, p.5), and the form has been acknowledged as remaining a primary leisure tool for teenagers (Bennett, 2001).

I.B.4. The Complex Terminology of Pop

For even the most casual fan of the genre, pop music exhibits several contentious intersections where no concise agreement exists, especially in relation to its terminology. The fractious relationship between 'pop' and 'rock & roll' is confused somewhat by the fact that both terms are commonly interchanged, and frequently intersected (Clayton *et al*, 2012). This is further exacerbated by the fact that they are sometimes used to delineate their difference and opposition to one another. Scholars have illustrated how, from 1967 onwards, the term 'pop music' gained prominence as a way of identifying its difference to 'rock music' (Golang, 2002), a proposition which is backed up by Firth (1978).

Frith has argued that pop music is a very specific genre often characterised as being singles based and aimed at a youth market, whereas rock music is seen to serve a more mature audience, primarily through the medium of albums. He also suggests that a core element of pop music's aim lies in its desire to appeal to the widest possible audience, setting it apart characteristically further from rock (2001, pp.95-105). However, not all scholars agree.
Stanley (2013), while confirming that the rock versus pop debate, "[…] has riddled modern pop since the Rock and Roll explosion", contends that the situation is getting better "[…] though rock-ism still exists and is rife" (p.41). Ultimately, he believes the distinction between the two to be entirely false. For this research, with its specific focus on pop music as a genre, direct quotes from theorists and academics may reference 'rock', or 'rock and roll', but no distinction is employed.

In considering the issues related to etymology, one concluding aspect remains worthy of note, in light of this project's aim to present on the queer abundance of pop music in the 1980s. Scholars have pointed to further implications, in the associations and implications of the two terms, specifically related to gender and sexuality. Warwick (2013) unearths a history of on-going gendered associations; that of 'rock' with masculinity and 'pop' with femininity. A comprehensive review of US pop music criticism between the years 1971-1999 gives further validation to this argument. Using semantic associations to gather objectives under masculine and feminine traits, the findings found that writings overwhelmingly "[…] valorise serious masculine 'authentic' rock, while dismissing trivial, feminine 'prefabricated' pop music" (McLeod 2001, p.47). It is little surprise therefore, that while challenging these very notions as

a gay rock fan, Block (1981) concedes that "The problem is that rock, for all its daring celebration, stops at the ultimate taboo: Boys don't kiss boys" (p.181). The repercussions of this on audiences has also been dissected, with Schipper noting concern that such notions, no matter how subliminal or discreet, "[…] encourages people to go along with hetero-sexism even if they don't hold such negative beliefs or attitudes towards queer sexuality or queer people" (p.294).

These works offer a glimpse at some of the existing discourse around pop music in relation to gender and sexuality. These are further deconstructed in Chapter II, where these and other heteronormative and gendered notions of pop music (its use and meaning) will be challenged by utilising aspects of queer theory.

I.B.5. Pop Academia and the Study of Pop Music – Considerations and Dynamics.

The study of pop music is a relatively new phenomenon, and one which has borrowed frameworks and theories from an array of academic fields including Musicology, Popular Culture Studies, Media Studies and Sociology. In addition to the complex etymology that exists in relation to defining pop as discussed in the previous section, scholars have noted the existence of several additional factors which warrant consideration in relation to the study of the genre, and which should be considered in advance of reviewing works in relation to pop music itself. Writing on the intricacies of such academic undertakings, Taylor's work introduces some of these complexities noting:

> popular music(s) in particular are intricate systems of social practice and process usually accompanied by lyrics, dance, fashion, video and other media texts, and thus popular music necessarily incorporates all of these and acknowledges that it is not only sonic, but also visual, kinetic and verbal modes of signification that make it such an appealing – and complex – social phenomenon (Taylor, 2012, p.41).

Managing to articulate and acknowledge the multi-faceted means in which an audience may experience music, and the complex systems at play in the processing of such materials, Taylor collects some vital points of consideration for those (including this very study) undertaking analysis of pop music. She enhances the integrity of this view in quoting fellow musicologist, Grossberg, who asserts that "[p]op music cannot be studied in isolation, either from other forms and practices of popular culture or from the structures and practices of everyday life" (2002, p.27, *in* Taylor, 2012, p.42).

Other factors are also pertinent for consideration. As early as the 1950s, pioneers of academic work investigating popular music were warning that "[…] much of the pioneering work in this field has been done by or on behalf of the communications industry to prove to advertisers that it can influence buying habits" (Riesman 1950, *in* Frith 1978, p.16). Indicators of commercial success have also been used by musicology critics, as a form of accreditation for pop music. Scaruffi (2003) is among those to address the commercial attainment of pop songs, as a marker for their merit and cultural success. Although this research's primary focus is on analysis of artifacts such as song lyrics and video performances, the mode of measuring commercial success will be explored to some extent, providing further statistical evidence of the presence and influence of queer identities in pop music in the period under review.

In terms of its heritage, Frith, in writing on academic investigations into pop music, reminds us that its history is "[…] rooted in sociology, not musicology (for which, even now, pop music is at best of marginal interest), and the sociology of pop and rock is, in turn, rooted in two non-musical concerns: the meaning of "mass culture" and the empirical study of youth and delinquency" (1990, p.12). Noting how, "[…] these were individual topics of academic interest in the 1930s but were merged with the rise of rock and roll in the mid-1950s" *(ibid),* Frith's frustration at the abundant history of *non-musical* analysis of pop music, to the detriment of studies of pop music itself, is noteworthy. He also touches on another central theme recurring throughout this review: the historically poor status of popular music as a field deemed worthy of academic investigation. With the negative connotations attached to this school of judgement remaining intact until relatively recently, it is useful to trace the origins of this prejudice.

The earliest judgments of pop music were not good. Adorno outwardly dismissed popular music as leading to "[…] passivity, regressing listeners to a child-like state" (Adorno, *in* Negus, 1997, p.11) and many of his Frankfurt school contemporaries shared similar Marxist views of pop culture as being generally devoid of value or meaning outside of the order of commodities. When comparing it to 'serious' music, he remarks of pop songs that "[…] the hit will lead back to the same familiar experience, and nothing fundamentally novel will be introduced" (1941, p.26), a pattern he sees as inevitable, as pop music itself manipulates "[…] a system of response mechanisms wholly antagonistic to the ideal of individuality in a free, liberal society" (*ibid*).

Although such strong views have since been comprehensively challenged, it is perhaps no surprise that Adorno has been cast as "[…] a brick-head snob of the question of the "popular" in art" (Meisel, 2010, p.44). Meisel, alongside Riesman (1950), can both be partly credited with challenging this perception. Frith (1987) also admonishes this view and offers a rationale for its basis, noting that "[u]nderlying all the other distinctions critics draw between 'serious' and 'popular' music is an assumption about the source of musical value, and 'serious music' matters because it transcends social forces; popular music is aesthetically worthless because it is determined by them" (p.138).

The lack of credibility attached to the study of pop has "[…] has changed in recent years" (Stanley, 2013, p.32), due in no small part to the efforts these scholars, and of course Frith, who reminds us that "[s]ince the late 1960s, popular music has become a key focus in the related disciplines of cultural and media studies and sociology" (*in* Bennett, 1996, p.10). A challenge to the earlier dismissal of pop music's worth is provided by this research, which in offering a queer perspective on the influence and meaning of 1980s pop music, will aid in further expanding the debate on pop's purpose and place in our lives. Despite his underestimation of pop music's ability to create both textual and performative responses, and for audiences to be sophisticated enough to read them, scholars still consider Adorno a valuable part of pop music's academic legacy. Penick, on the subject of Adorno's theories of listener regression, notes the following:

> It amazes me that Theodor Adorno recognized in early radio and the recordings of the 1930s the commercial power of a music industry still in its infancy. And it amazes me that his theories of the consumer industry vibrate with relevance today in spite of technological developments which have transformed both commerce and the arts.
>
> (Penick, 2004, p.8)

At the very least, Adorno did see popular music as a force with implications beyond that of just lyrical or musical assessment, and his prophetic cognisance of its commercial potential cannot be undermined. Although similarly critical of many aspects of his work, the aforementioned Meisel notes, that, "It is Adorno who most readily identifies the resistance to pop, and who serves as its historical centre more clearly than does any other thinker" (2010, p.6), reminding us of the important dialectic he established.

Despite this enduring legacy, theories related to the role of pop music in society, and its impact and relevance to listeners and audience have been developed considerably since these first appraisals of pop music. These are presented in the next section.

I.B.6. Pop Music - Roles, Impacts and Effects

> When people say, 'Oh listen, they're playing our song,' what they're saying is, 'That song reminds us of that tremendous feeling we had when we met'.
>
> -Dennis Potter, *The New Yorker*, 1989.

Much has been written on the function, bearing and effects of pop music. As we have seen, Adorno was one of the first "[…] particularly concerned with the fetishising effects of mass culture upon art" (Bennet, 2001, p.36), introducing the concept of 'good' and 'bad' music, of which popular music firmly belonged to the latter. While in agreement with Adorno's earlier pronunciations that many pop music listeners were passive, Rieseman (1950) was among the first scholars to propose a more sophisticated model of analysing how popular songs are 'received'. Offering instead the hypothesis of a 'majority' and 'minority' within each population of listeners, his exploration of the 'minority' revealed an audience discerning and active in their listenership.

In recent decades, academics and scholars have continued to undermine the original dismissal of pop music as symptomatic of "[…] a long trend of research within Cultural Studies and Sociology that seeks to rescue the listeners (or consumers) from their fates at the hands of mid-20th century theorists of mass culture" (Sicilanio, 2013, p.309). Simon Frith remains one of the most prolific and revered, with much of his academic career "[…] engaged with the problems of taking popular music seriously" (University of Edinburgh website). In addition, Frith is also noted for his numerous popular music press contributions. He first explored academic aspects of music's function and character with *The Sociology of Rock* (1978), examining the ideologies surrounding the consumption of music, and contextualised its role as both a tool of leisure, and as force driven by youth culture.

Frith's career and work have very much challenged earlier critiques on audience passivity and on pop music's very substance. His multi-faceted approach to the promotion of analysis and study of pop music is perhaps unparalleled in pop music criticism and academia. Not that all of his work has been as robustly well received. *Rock and Sexuality* (which he co-authored with McRobbie, 1978) holds the dubious honour of introducing the term 'cock rock' to academic writing (Tagg, 2008). Frith has produced work which has significantly expanded notions of pop music. By the late 1980s, his hypothesis offered a convincing argument as to its role and purpose in our lives, condensing these into specific functions. He suggests that pop music (1) helps us answer our questions about our identity; (2) assists in 'framing' our sense of time and memory; and (3) helps us manage boundaries between the public and the private; (4) all of which is delivered through a medium to which, importantly, the listener feels an element of ownership over. Also insisting it is these factors that contribute to pop music's lasting endurance and popularity (1987). Frith's analysis of pop music was an illustration of a more elaborate, elevated discourse in relation to pop and its various roles.

Only the last attributed influence, that of listener ownership, is an obvious exception which may now justify re-visitation. Frith's reference to ownership was meant in the sense of how a specific lyric or song may resonate with an individual. But, given the hugely significant changes in the format of how people buy or access music in the time since Frith's piece was published, it is worth noting significant changes in listening habits, have been observed by several scholars (Sen, 2010; Tepper & Hargittai, 2009). However, these are not of primary focus for this study, concerned as it is with a decade when formats were entirely physical.

Continuing on a sociological bend, *Music for Everyday Life* (Denora, 2000), has been described as a "contemporary classic" (Siciliano, 2013), and partly responsible for the study of pop music becoming more credible. Central to Denora's argument is the theory that music is used by audiences to articulate self-identity, undergo exploration of simulated possibilities, with the potential to reflect or accentuate the frame of mind of the listener. Denora easily manages to contextualise music as a powerful cultural artifact using a range of sociological theories to illustrate music and its function as a social agent.

The work proffered by the above authors and others has enhanced the credibility of pop and rock as art forms worthy of exploration, and a plethora of works has been generated latterly

by scholars from a wide variety of backgrounds of expertise. By fortunate coincidence, it is also a medium suited to analysis through statistical measurement of success, in the shape of the pop charts, as first logged from 1955 in the USA and 1953 in the United Kingdom. Significant variants exist, due to the statistical criteria on which chart placings are based (namely, sometimes based on sales alone and sometimes on sales and radio play). Despite this, more recently scholars have noted the former lack of exploration of chart placings and subsequently have taken advantage of this rich resource.

For example, Hamlen's (1991) paper expertly uses empirical evidence to refute condescending views in relation to a deficit among pop music fan's ability to discern talent. Strobyl and Tucker's (2000) work explores the dynamics of chart placings and success in the United Kingdom, for a period of 13 years, from 1980-1993. They reveal fascinating correlations between a record's initial popularity and its lasting success, illustrating how market forces such as seasonal demand affects record sales.

The appraisal of pop music's role in the social and political arenas, as increasingly proffered by scholars of pop music, is perhaps a final nail in the coffin for those early denigrators of pop music. Researchers have investigated and established links between music, culture, audiences and the social and political. While agreeing with Adorno that pop music consumption is "[…] imbued with political significance", Street (1991, p.250) plausibly argues that this relationship is even more complex:

> It is not a merely utilitarian, commercial transaction, but a statement of collective identity. As such it establishes an alternative to the prevailing order. Popular culture comes to be as important, politically, as the workplace and the state. It becomes the political expression and resource of the marginalised and dispossessed. (Street, 1991 p.251)

Street's estimation and wider work demonstrates a wider understanding of pop's role as a social agent and parallels can be drawn between his theory and the connections and relationships between queer communities and pop music, which are discussed in the next Chapter. Of course, any such benefits are not for the acquisition and use of identities marginalised based on sexual orientation only, and there exists a rich body of works to indicate this.

Shaw (1986) explores aspects of the political significance of pop music in black and non-white communities of the United States. The 1980s leftist ideologies promoted by a plethora of UK-based artists coming together in the 1980s for collective ventures such as '*Rock against Racism'* and '*Red Wedge'* are presented in substantial detail by Smith (2011) and Goodyear (2003). Leblanc's (2008) contribution explores feminist-based resistance to the sexism encountered in punk. How women, both as artists and audience, often imbue political significance to aspects of pop music has also been explored by a considerable number of scholars. For example, Van Sickel (2005) cleverly utilises empirical evidence to challenge perceptions of US country music as being morally conservative, or anti-feminist and instead offers a convincing counter-reading. The accessibility of and role in dance music culture in politicising male working class youth in the UK is explored by Redhed (1993). Not all awakenings aided by pop are of liberal ideologies either. Brown (2004) investigates 'Nazi Rock' subcultures in the UK, offering ample evidence of a thriving underground subculture. These testimonies and countless others, validate the assertion made by Schudson (1989) that pop artifacts can and are utilised as political strategy.

I.B.7. Pop Music in the 1980s

> By the 1980s, those who had lived out their adolescent fantasies of rebellion through rock 'n' roll, beat, R&B or rock were old enough to inherit the seats of power in the mass media
>
> -Peter Doggett, *Electric Shock - 125 Years of Pop Music*, 2015

The rationale for devoting attention to pop music in the 1980s in this study is two-fold. Most obviously as the decade under scrutiny for this overall research piece, it warrants particular analysis. In addition, this was the decade by which the genre had truly become a major economic force, represented by "[…] a period of enormous expansion in the recording industry" (Jones 1997, p.18).

As "[…] the last great decade for the single, and the last era in which the top 40 was an event, something which actually seemed to matter to the young as a whole" (Blythe, 2002, p.67), the decade warrants the attention of pop scholarship generally. "This was now the culture that pop built" notes the aforementioned Doggett (2015, p.572), affirming just how predominant pop music's influence had become in wider pop culture realms, and beyond. As with the 1950s, when a number of factors transpired to ensure pop music's exponential growth,

a number of influences converged to ensure the 1980s was also a pivotal age for pop music. By coincidence, the specifics of these dynamics echoed those of the earlier decade, as record companies, and the music industry generally, capitalised on further advancement in technology. These are presented below.

I.B.8. *Mirror, Mirror*: Technological Advancements and Changing Mediums

A slew of technological advancements occurred in the 1980s which forever changed how music would be consumed. Making personal musical choice portable for the first time, the Sony Walkman was introduced to mass markets in 1984 and quickly became ubiquitous in its use. The invention of the Walkman was a defining moment in 1980s pop culture as evidenced by Bull (2006) and DuGay (1990). Many theorists have speculated on the effects of what has been referred to as the most "[…] autonomous and mobile" form of listening thus far, enabled through the invention of the personal stereo (Hosokawa, 1984, p.119). The implications of this change, in both listening habits, and the fortunes of the company which patented the product, Sony, is detailed further in work by Morita (1991).

While the unique selling point was its portability, the Walkman also capitalised on the increasing popularity of the cassette tape over vinyl, a trend which had begun in the 1970s. Vinyl was also under threat from another source. Laing, writing on 1980s record sales, recalls the decade as a time marked by a "[…] meteoric rise of Compact discs, and the decline of vinyl" (2008, pp.235-36). The Compact Disc (CD), another first for Japanese company Sony, (Doggett, 2015) enabled further growth to the industry, enhancing its economic 'resurrection' after a slump in the late 1970s (Denisoff, 1986).

Each of the above can be considered in their own way, to have been contributing factors to the enormous profits attained by the music industry in the 1980s. But another development, the advent of 24-hour music television, was to change the face of pop music and how we digest it, forever.

I.B.9. MTV and The Rise of the Music Video

Attributed as having originated almost twenty years earlier with Bob Dylan's *Homesick Blues* (Doggett, 2015 p.521) the success of the music video in the 1980s can be linked in no

small part, to the 1981 launch of MTV, the first 24-hour music television station (Kaplan, 2014). Music videos were designed to act as promotional tools for a single, a ‘calling card’ for the (usually) imminent album, enticing potential listeners with increasingly lavishly budgeted and cinematic projects. Rotation on MTV almost always resulted in a hit record, which in turn meant profit, so record companies obligingly supplied the company with all of their programme content for free. The role of MTV in shaping pop music in the 1980s is well documented (Kaplan, 2014; Jones, 2005; Woolfe, 2008). Scholars of pop music have been quick to acknowledge music video as “[…] one of the most important emergent cultural forms in contemporary pop culture” (Frith, 1993, p.23) and its contribution in the pantheon of 80s pop culture is irrefutable.

Illustrative of this success, Jones (2006, p.18) argues that Michael Jackson’s 1982 *Thriller* album is “[…] emblematic of all of the key changes of the 1980s” in one album. Jones effectively argues it can be typified as such, by four factors: (1) its hugely expensive execution, (2) Its employment of a wide array of producers and songwriters, (3) its use of accompanying videos as promotional tools, and finally, (4) its musical reflection of the rise of ‘urban’ music in the mainstream. The album as a ‘blueprint’ for success is widely acknowledged. Subsequently, “[t]he most successful acts of the 1980s, Madonna and Michael Jackson, were the first video acts, using MTV to sell themselves brilliantly as stars” (Frith, 2012, p.16).

Straw (1993) investigates the role, influence and function of MTV and the music video on the 1980s pop landscape. While acknowledging its definitive place in any musical overview of the decade, noting that: “One of MTV’s most significant innovations was the institutionalisation within North America equivalent to that of national network radio” (*ibid*, p.8); he also warns and provides ample evidence to support his theory that “[…] the dominant tendency in discussion on music videos impact on rock music is to exaggerate that impact” (*ibid*, p.4). In respect to the ramifications of this visual form of media, the frustration was succinctly articulated by artist Joe Jackson, who remarked of an industry where “[…] artists are now being signed for their video potential rather than their musical talent” (*in* Doggett, 2015, p.532). MTV would remain a pop culture fixture, eventually become accessible to viewers in parts of Ireland in the late 1980s. Aspects of Irish reception to MTV, along with other considerations, are explored in the next section, which begins with an introduction to transnationalism.

I.B.10. Transnationalist Perspectives

> The geographical relevance of popular culture is masked by its very ordinariness and pervasiveness within everyday life.
>
> -Veronica Morley & Katrinka Somdahl-Sands, *Music with a Message*, 2011.

As this study endeavours to be inclusive of Irish contexts but conversely, explores material mainly originating from the USA and UK, aspects of Transnationalism, the study of "Extending or going beyond national boundaries" (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*), is relevant to many aspects of pop music. Initially conceived and utilised as a concept to explore the migrant experience, which "[…] embodied and imagined, condenses our concerns with race, space, and the time and politics of belonging" (Westwood & Phizacklea, 2000, p.3), studies into the diaspora are particularly prevalent in an Irish context, given our well-documented history of emigration (Akenson, 2005; Delany, 2006; Ferriter 2009). However, Nolan and Larkan argue that while the model has flourished as a concept in historiography, sociology and social policy discourse, "[…] such perspectives have been relatively uncommon in Irish scholarship" (2015, p.2). The aforementioned Nolan continues to rectify this omission, exploring the effect of the international response to HIV/AIDS on Irish policies, through a transnationalism lens in further works (Nolan & Butler, 2018).

Despite the wealth of scholars who have produced works beyond an Irish context (Georgiu, 2006; Vertovec, 2009), less have explored the area of the transnationalism and popular culture, and far less again have devoted space to exploring the effects or aspects of transnationalism in relation to the scope under review in this dissertation - how we digest (and indeed embrace) a foreign entity's popular culture, and how we interpret coded and non-coded messages of sexuality in such materials. This dearth of exploration of trans-nationalist, or geographical aspects of pop music, is confirmed by scholars such as Kong (1997), and noted as unusual, given that, "[…] the music industry has also at least partially provided the foundation for many of today's transnational, diversified communication conglomerates" (Burnett, 2002, p.3).

However, in recent years, as the presence of popular music has continued to grow in academic settings globally (Dylan-Smith *et al,* 2017), this has begun to be rectified. Kiwan & Meinhof (2011), for instance, offer a compelling and detailed exploration of how North African

immigrant populations in France used their music as an expression of celebrating their new freedoms. Rocio (2013) brings together a number of authors to offer a snapshot of aspects of American transnationalism in the arts and embraces popular music in his itinerary. Jin's (2018) work offers analysis on the recent augmentation of Korean pop culture in western societies. Shifting genre, Stephens introduces the term, 'black transnationalism' to explore the presentation of Bob Marley, to audiences in the United States (1998), while Cepeda (2000), explores the exposition of Hispanic cultures into the Northern hemisphere, during the 'Latin boom' experienced in pop music during the late 1990s. It is intriguing to note the abundance of work relating to one artist, Morrissey. Anguiano (2012; 2014), has devoted much academic endeavour to exploring the complex relationship between Morrissey and his Latino fans, through a lens which manages to encompass inclusion of theories of masculinity, class, gender and sexuality. Devereux & Hidalgo (2015) expand on this, offering further examination of Morrissey's Chicano and Latino fanbase, specifically in relation to identity. The preceding author, Irish scholar Eoin Devereux, has written extensively on Morrissey (2011; 2015); his exploration into the intricacies of the artist's sexuality (2014) adding to the pantheon of works in the arena, which are explored fully in Chapter V. Among his endeavours, along with Dillane & Power, Devereux is editor of a tome dedicated to issues surrounding Morrissey, fandom, and identity (2011), in which Hazard's paper (p. 19-34), further progresses transnationalist analysis of the artist's work.

Fortunately, the former paucity of attention paid to intersections of transnationalism and pop music, is not mirrored in the concept's relationship and appliance, to foundational frameworks relevant to this study. For instance, David (2013), notes how:

> The strength of the transnationalism might be seen as a result of several paradigmatic shifts in the later part of the twentieth century. Chief among them were the rejection of the notion of American exceptionalism in the 1980's and attention to the paradigms of ethnic studies, feminism, and other minority studies. (David, 2013, p.3)

David's localising of transnationalism's attributes offers a hint of its subsequent utilisation as a method of instigating exploration of a queer nature. In recent years, scholars such as Liu and Rofel (2010), and Klapeer & Laskar (2018), have deepened our understanding of lived transnationalist perspectives, in exploring them through these lenses. In addition, the model has been successfully used to dismantle what Su (2019) describes as, the "[…] conceptualization of the global and the local as always being mutually exclusive and always

binary". Writing as a queer Myanmar woman, on a previous difficulty reconciling her post-colonial identity, with that of western-born sexuality epistemologies devoid of geographical subjectivities, the author unlocks the potential of queer theory when intersected with transnationalist principles. In challenging, "[…] the normative understanding of modernity and queerness as located in the West and built on Western standards" (*ibid*, 2019), her evocation of transnationalism's capacity, to lend to queer theory a mechanism to ensure inclusivity and agency is laid bare.

I.B.11. Access, Absences & Success: Pop music in 1980s Ireland

Here in Ireland, there are several aggravating factors in relation to our own transnationalist experience of pop music. Pop and its associated artifacts, such as those proffered as evidence in this very study, may be assumed to have been victim to the supercilious academic reception to the form experienced internationally (Stanley, 2013; Frith 1996) as detailed earlier in this Chapter. In Ireland, however, it seems that pop music was also getting summary treatment in terms of being considered credible, for economic reasons, as much for as any culturally low-brow connotations. Scholars have illustrated the shortcomings in relation to pop music scholarship's history in the state, observing that:

> There has been little discussion of how popular music can be used as a tool for opening up access to the arts, facilitating capacity-building, encouraging social integration or aiding multiculturalism – not to speak of offering a general educational value. (Strachan & Leonard, 2002, p.249)

Further to this consideration, and relevant to the realm of where transnationalism and pop music combine is the rather pragmatic matter of access to media, an issue for many in Ireland during the period under scrutiny. Conway (1958) was the first to explore the profile and ramifications of the geographical inequities affecting media access, a pattern which would continue, including and surpassing the 1980s. A coincidence of broadcasting infrastructure and geographic privilege meant that, while the south and west of the country relied on the twin combination of state broadcaster's channels, RTE 1 and 2, Northern and, inadvertently, Eastern viewers, had access to the wider provisions of the English, BBC and ITV channels, both with studios in Northern Ireland.

In the 1970s, access to shows on English television meant an abundance of pop themed content such as, *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, *Top of The Pops* and latterly, *The Tube*, at a period when rock pop music itself was still relatively difficult to locate on Irish radio (Gubbins & Ó'Briain, 2021). Divided for the most part into urban, multi-channel and rural, single-channel spheres, similarly, swathes of the country had access to pirate radio, which remained the place most likely to hear new pop music (Mulryan 1988; Bohan 2019), until the nation's first (licensed) pop and rock music station, RTE Radio 2, was launched in 1979 (Morash, 2010).

The effect this had on Irish consumers and listeners of pop is unclear, and not of primary concern for the purpose of this research. However, as scholars such as Howell (1980) have prompted suggestion as to how it may have further contributed to existing societal inequalities, it remains an area ripe for further exploration. The subsequent advent of MT USA, hosted by Vincent Hanley, would significantly contribute to challenging this inequity, with its 1984 inception. Recorded each weekend in New York, the weekly three-hour show exclusively featured music videos, introduced by Hanley. While no match for the endless rotation of MTV, on which the show's format was loosely based, nonetheless it has been accredited by a wide range of Irish commentators, for its role in opening the doors to a diversity of music, until its untimely end in 1987, a result of Hanley's death of an AIDS related illness (Ferriter, 2009).

Despite a lauded heritage of a rich and diverse musical culture and history, (Kirwan, 2015; Smyth, 2005) the 1980s Irish pop charts were dominated by acts from the United Kingdom and the United States, bolstered by some additional representation from other countries. This is an anomaly which seems to have escaped the attention of most scholars thus far. Even the most cursory inspection of chart positions and sales from the decade illustrate how prevalent the import of pop music was on Irish shores in the 1980s. See appendix 1 for a diagram confirming this.

The substance of pop music of the period was comprised of artifacts ideally suited for exploration through transnationalist frameworks, to explore, "[…] the ways in which these are reformulated as they move across national boundaries" (Echols, 2010). In light of the aforementioned dominance of UK and US pop, and as an aid to contextualise this overall research piece which will utilise the very same artifacts, the concepts and discourses associated with transnationalist realms will remain to the fore throughout this work. All of the above considerations are worthy of inclusion in any study of pop music and assist in establishing a

cohesive picture of its origins, role and place in our societies. These works help to justify the inclusion of pop as a subject worthy of study generally, and act as a framework for many elements of this research.

However, in order to continue to progress the contextual analysis of constituent elements of this study, the next section of this work presents an overview of aspects of life in the 1980s, as lived by queer communities.

I.C. Sexuality Perspectives.

I.C.1. Queer communities in the 1980s

As already stated, much of the music offered for dissection in this research emanates from the United Kingdom and United States, and to a smaller degree, other pockets of Europe. As such, the queer context of lives in these arenas is worth exploration. A common thread runs through each of these geographic contexts, that of the emergence of HIV/AIDS and an ensuing political, social and legislative backlash against queer people, resulting in a decade stoically defined as a period when "[…] in the history of gay men, just staying alive is a political act" (Kramer, 1989, p.24).

During the 1970s, queer visibility and capacity building had increased at a steady pace in the United States (Mottier, 2008). Following on from the Stonewall riots of the late 1960s "[…] our Bastille Day…the turning point of our lives" (Weeks, 2006 as cited in Seidman *et al*, 2006, p.14), a degree of emancipation occurred for some. In large urban centres such as New York, Chicago and San Francisco, the phenomenon of the gay neighbourhood or '*gay ghetto*', traceable to earlier parts of the century, began to increase in size and visibility (Dorderer, 2002; Bell, 2010). The Stonewall riots had acted as a way of introducing the notion of a "[…] legitimate gay consciousness" (Woods, 1995, p.7) and the modern, Western gay rights movement was born. D'Emilio (1989) notes that within a year of Stonewall, the number of gay and lesbian organisations in the United States had risen more than ten-fold (p.688). The ideology that erupted with the riots also began to spread to Western European countries, "[…] smuggled in, on cheap continental flights" (Woods, 1995, p.6).

In the United Kingdom, ten years after results of the government sponsored Wolfenden Report had first recommended it, the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 decriminalised homosexuality between men aged 21 and over, in England and Wales. (Lewis, 2016; Higgins, 1996). By the 1980s, however, there was still an unequal age of consent. As in the United States, queer communities and populations in the United Kingdom suffered a backlash, related to the emergence of HIV and AIDS. The ruling Conservative party made it clear throughout the decade that they had little time for sexual minorities or difference. Todd (2017) collects many examples of party leader Margaret Thatcher's public sentiments on homosexuality, including "[w]e may not like them, but we have to live with them", and "[c]hildren who need to be taught traditional values are being taught they have an inalienable right to be gay, and are being cheated of a sound start in life" (p.41). The hostile environment was furthered legislatively in 1988, when the UK Conservative Party introduced a bill, infamously known as 'clause 28', which outlawed the 'promotion' of homosexuality in schools (Mars-Jones, 1988).

This repressive state was buoyed by an aggressively homophobic tabloid media in England (Sanderson, 1995; Brictha, 2011; Beharrell, 2003), who "[…] day after day, attacked gay people in a propaganda campaign of astonishing intensity" (Todd, 2016, p.38). *The Sun* newspaper is noted as having been particularly vitriolic in its coverage. Infamous examples include a 1987 article headlined, 'Fly Away Gays – And We Will Pay!' whereby gay men were offered free travel to leave the UK (Watney, 1996, p.57), and another which endorsed the view of a US psychologist that: "All homosexuals should be exterminated to stop the spread of AIDS" (Sanderson, 1995, p.89). The publication's distaste for homosexuality was unrelenting.

The Sun's allegiance to UK Conservative party policy, particularly in relation to matters of sexuality, was unfaltering. Substantiation that its then editor had a preoccupation with sexual orientation, which led the paper to routinely "[…] insinuate and spread rumours about the sexual orientation of famous people, especially pop stars" has been offered by scholars (Chippendale & Horrie, 2002, p. 305-306). Garfield concurs with this assessment but broadens it in relation to the wider English press, citing their response to the emergence of HIV/AIDS as "[…] a chance (for them) to legitimise their homophobia" (2002, p.23).

Unsurprisingly, there is also a dearth of work exploring gay or queer sexualities in Ireland during the decade under scrutiny in this research, and even less exists from the decades

or centuries before. Given the well documented social mores in Ireland at the time under scrutiny in this review (Ferriter 2009; McCafferty 1984), and the continued criminalisation of (male) homosexuality, by the time of its belated 1984 publication, editors of the first Irish book to explore Irish homosexual identity, *Out for Ourselves,* had to justify its very existence. “It felt vital to compile an entirely Irish book, as just one part of the struggle to reclaim our identity as Irish lesbians and gay men” (Dublin Gay & Lesbian Collective, 1984, p.5). Upon its release, many bookstores refused to stock the publication (Lacey, 2015), more indication of the prevailing attitudes towards homosexuality at the time. While managing to remain defiant in overall tone, the tome offers a bleak view of how many of Ireland’s view of those veering from heteronormative ideals:

> The media censors us, the church condemns us, the law outlaws us, and all, right thinking people know that we are perverts, child molesters, genetically damaged, hormonally imbalanced, and generally disgusting, that is the situation for thousands and thousands of gay men and lesbians in Ireland today.
>
> -*Out of Ourselves*. Dublin Lesbian and Gay Collective, 1984.

Alongside the continued criminality of homosexual acts, the authority of the Catholic Church was as pervasive as at any time during the history of the republic and remained unblinkingly and uniformly hostile to any advancement of gay men or lesbians (Inglis, 1998; Ryan, 2011; Ferriter, 2009). Although further evidence is hardly needed to illustrate the sense of marginalisation experienced, the separate murders of three gay men in the early part of the 1980s reinforced for many, just how low the standing of such lives were held in Irish society. The deaths, and subsequent handling of investigations were bereft of any sensitivity on the part of the media, the church, or the police and further re-enforced just how hostile the establishment in Ireland remained in regard to this issue (Casey, 2018; Crone, 1988; Rodgers, 2016). With these factors in mind, it is unsurprising that upon the publication of his 2004 text Lacey reminds us of “[…] the virtual absence of the words ‘Ireland’ and ‘Queer’ from gay history has not changed greatly” (p.6).

As illustrated, the United Kingdom, Ireland and the United States all shared in common legal and political barriers to homosexuality. Enhanced by media hostility, the societal aversion to homosexuality during the 1980s was abundant and it is almost unfeasible that the status of

this group could falter further in society. However, this is exactly what happened, as detailed in the next section.

I.C.2. *Under Attack*: The Emergence of HIV/AIDS

> The consensus that informed the debate on the emergence of HIV was that all homosexuals were perverts.
>
> -Simon Garfield, *The End of the Innocence: Britain in the time of AIDS*, 1994.

Despite ingrained Catholic values in regard to sex and sexuality still holding sway, Ireland could not halt the spread of HIV/AIDS, with the first cases of HIV being reported in late 1982 (Seery, 2009). Common to their UK and US peers, Irish queer communities began formulating responses to HIV/AIDS long before the state began to even consider a response. The volunteer led *Gay Health Action* formed in Dublin in 1985, a full four years before the first Dáil debate on the issue, as evidenced by the work of Joyce (2010) and Duffy (1993) among others.

From early on in the decade, much of western societal discourse on homosexuality was in relation to the emerging HIV/AIDS pandemic, and it would remain as such for the remainder of the decade. HIV/AIDS's association with homosexuality is traceable back to one of its earliest incarnations, when a new mystery illness initially christened 'G.R.I.D' (Gay Related Immune Deficiency) was reported (Garfield, 1994). From this first mention, the association of gay men with the disease would be both lasting and impactful. Statutory health responses to the pandemic have been shown to be adversely delayed and influenced by negative views and associations of homosexuality (Altman, 1998; Fejez and Petrich, 2009). Furthermore, already Conservative-leaning governments could also use HIV/AIDS to further moralise (Gillet, 2011; Higgins, 1994).

As illustrated above, the societal context in which queer lives were lived in the 1980s was marked by marginalisation. However, the newly mobilised response of sexual minority communities in response to such ostracization would have a profound impact on sexuality politics and identity for decades to come. The next section describes how the ideologies of scholars such as Michael Foucault and Judith Butler were applied as foundational frameworks for the burgeoning movement - the birth of a 'queer' consciousness.

I.C.3. HIV and the Mobility of Queer Consciousness

As demonstrated, much of the discourse both related to queer communities in the 1980s was HIV/AIDS related, (Kramer, 1988; Todd, 2014). Pop music's own specific response to the emerging epidemic is explored in substantial detail in Chapter V of this study. Presently, the focus remains on how the HIV/AIDS became the unlikely catalyst for a seismic shift in identity politics regarding sexuality, specifically that of queer politics. A delayed public-health response to the emergence of the virus was a tangent of the epidemic common to affected populations in many countries, including Ireland, the United States and the United Kingdom. While this had a catastrophic effect on gay communities, there were also unforeseen implications, which in hindsight may be observed as having a positive effect on such groups in unexpected ways. As Altman observes:

> Although the AIDS epidemic has occurred in a period when most social conservatives have been politically dominant in most western societies – increasing the stigma against homosexual and homosexuality – it has also translated into much greater recognition of the homosexual community and a homosexual movement, in most western democracies. (Altman,1988, p.301).

This unanticipated recognition has also been observed in Ireland. Writing on the public health response of the Irish government Larkin and Nolan (2015), note:

> A liberal platform had converged around sexuality, reproductive health and rights from the 1970s, but this was a minority agenda prompting government to engage cautiously with the liberal response defining AIDS internationally (Larkin & Nolan, 2015, p.12).

Nolan has explored this further in other work (Butler and Nolan, 2018), and other scholars of Irish Queer histories concur. O'Connor (1996), in attempting to offer some positive repercussion on the toil of HIV/AIDS for already embattled gay and lesbian communities of Ireland, reminds us that "[…] up until the 1980's, Ireland had successfully fought off the tide of social change which had swept through other western countries" (1996, p.186), propositioning the theory that the community mobilisation witnessed had earned at least some type of legitimacy politically for gay communities. Akin to Nolan, he writes:

> The commandeering of the multifarious roles of education, prevention, care, support and activism by gay men and lesbians in the development of aids service orgs has

> brought us into contact with govt agencies in a manner which would have been inconvincible in previous eras (O'Connor, 1996, p.187).

In addition, empirical evidence illustrates a paucity of international research on almost any aspects of gay culture in the 1980s, save for HIV/AIDS-related work. For example, Boehmer's (2002) analysis of the United States National Medical library archives reveals that over a 20-year span (encompassing the decade under review in this work), 61% of articles published in relation to gay men or lesbians were disease-specific.

Within these contexts of a continued association with AIDS, from within this embattled community came a forthright and culturally significant response. And, while it is a stretch to lay claim that the queer movement was born solely of a consequence of HIV/AIDS, the link is indisputable, as "[…] newly (HIV positive) diagnosed gay men took up the pejorative epithet 'queer' and embraced it" (Dean, 2003, p.125). As Russo (1988) forewarned, "After we kick the shit out of this disease, I intend to be alive to kick the shit out of this system so that it will never happen again" (*in* Warner, 1993, p.303). If the timing of this new queer movement came as no coincidence and was in fact directly influenced by the impact of HIV/AIDS as evidenced above, and by others such as Hunt and Yip (2016), its effect and durability were still unknown. The next section offers an overview of its development and effects, before introducing the rise of queer theory, an ideological and academic framework upon which this research is based.

I.C.4. Locating 'Queer' - Controversy and Effect

Along with the parameters of pop music being difficult to define, "[…] 'queer' is a slippery term" (Taylor, 2012, p.18), its usage fraught with controversy and debate. To further complicate matters, any uncertainty is further exacerbated by precarious and controversial positioning from within the very communities it purports to encompass and represent (Ayoub & Paternotte, 2014; Gamson, 2013). Indeed, for a period during its initial use, most debates centred on the semantics of the word, as "[…] those advocating for queer, and those opposing it, shadow-boxed through the dictionaries and social history books" (Woods, 1995, p. 29). While Woods has a point, his view perhaps dismisses the often-complex debates put forward. Elaborating on the difficulty of defining a concept designed as a rejection of assimilated ideologies, McKee (1998) suggests any attempt to do so "[…] would seek to tie down what

cannot be contained, to explain what must forever escape final meaning, to attempt to regulate that which is energized precisely by its transgressive status" (p.238).

In common with pop music, the term queer also has an interesting etymological trajectory. The word has nearly always been imbued with a nefarious or pejorative meaning or interpretation. Historically the term has been shown to pre-date the use of 'gay' or 'lesbian' as a form of self-descriptor, with Chauncey (1995) tracing the origins of its use to early twentieth century New York. Its employment as a pejorative term can also be traced to this period (Graham and Smith, 1984). By the 1950's, the term 'gay' as a descriptor for homosexual men and 'lesbian' for homosexual women began to take hold. During the decade under review in this study, 'gay' was commonly used as umbrella term to describe men and women (Graham and Smith, 1984).

As HIV/AIDS continued to take the lives of so many gay men, the response from within gay communities, already the vanguards of initial responses became more political in their language, tone and their use of direct-action techniques to effect change. Groups such as Act-Up and Queer Nation typified this new radicalisation of the old identity politics vanguard, using direct action methods to make their point, often controversially (Gunsallas, 2006; Taylor, 2010). Act-Up came first, being established by activist, author and former Gay Men's Health Crisis chairperson Larry Kramer. Two days after addressing a March 1987 public meeting on HIV/AIDS in New York, in which he called for volunteers interested in establishing a direct-action response group, several hundred people attended what would be Act-Up's inaugural meeting (Crimp, 1990). During his time at GMHC, Kramer had been appalled at what he perceived as apathy on the part of public health officials, in regard to HIV/AIDS within the gay population.

Queer Nation was established later, in 1990, and involved many of those behind the organisation of Act-Up. While Act-Up's initial focus was on HIV, Queer nation was established with a wider remit – initially as response to a perceived rise in hate crimes perpetrated against gays, but quickly expanding to encompass other issues adversely affecting gay men, such as prejudice and invisibility. Quickly, a sister chapter developed in the United Kingdom, although the moniker 'Outrage' was used instead (Woods, 1995). By utilising a direct-action philosophy, Queer Nation and Outrage achieved both notoriety and mainstream media attention through a serious of high-profile public protests and campaigns, most notably

their 'outing campaign'[1]. The methods, campaigns and language of both these groups stood in stark contrast to the assimilated methods and ethos favoured by other gay interest groups of the 1980s. This positioning also helped ensure continued dissent in relation to reclamation of the term 'queer', discussed later in this Chapter, and a debate which continues to this day (Pearlman, 2019).

The rejection of previously favoured self-identifying labels 'gay' and 'lesbian' for the more aggressive 'queer' moniker was seen by proponents of the term as a show of defiance and strength to a hostile heteronormative world, but the new queer politics faction was also in reaction to a shift towards a growing liberal conservatism in gay communities of the 1980s. Queer was a stance against what was perceived as an assimilationist pre-occupation with attaining goals such as same sex marriage and adoption rights and the challenging of existing laws banning gay in the military. Queer was fundamentally critical and challenging of "[…] a gay movement centred more on obtaining straight privilege than challenging power" (Chu, 2014, p.233). The form's inclusivity was also welcomed by many, particularly those whose sexuality may have represented just one aspect of their intersectional identities, such as people of colour, or those living with HIV. In addition, "[…] the experiences of people prior to the emergence of the current homo/hetero polarity, as well as people who have engaged in sexual practices that rupture heterosexual hegemony, but do not see themselves as lesbian or gay" (Goldie, 2001, p.25) were welcomed to the fold. As well as identity politics preferences and allegiances, others simply preferred the concept of a newly evolved form of identification, favouring how it replaced the "[…] mundanity of gay, with its utopian ideology, with an identity rich in contradiction and obscure in meaning and purpose" (Woods 1995 p.31).

The parameters of the advent of this new queer movement were widespread and had effect in academia, with the flourishing of what would become Queer Studies, a discipline already gathering momentum due in part to the endorsement of social constructionists such as Foucault. The foundational basis of queer studies, queer theory, and its instrumental role in this research, is examined in the next section.

[1] Queer Nation began to publicly reveal the identities of celebrities, politicians and public figures who were gay but either denied it, or who were seen to support causes perceived anti-gay (Rolph, 2014; Quinn, 2007), and this is discussed further in Chapter V.

I.C.5. Origins of Queer Theory

The target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are.

-Michel Foucault, *The Subject & Power*, 1982.

The concepts put forward by Foucault and other scholars led to a rejection of the former assumptions of the implicit importance of liberationalism. Instead, scholars began to entertain the notion of sexuality as something more accurately regarded as a complex social experience manipulated by important social, societal and political contexts. Foucault was of the pioneering view that cultural notions, norms and beliefs were responsible for the wide chasm of what society believes to be normal as opposed to what is un-normal, or even deviant (Seidman, 2008).

Previously, studies such as those by Erikson (1957) had paved the way in terms of identity theory, in liberating a number of scholars to later establish "[…] conceptual models and measurements of sexual identity sub-groups" (Dillon, Moradi & Worthington, 2011, p. 650). From here, a focus emerged on 'identity politics', leading to a variety of social justice movements which "[…] asserted the positivity, diversity, and difference, and the ethical and political value of pluralism" (Jenkins, 2008, p.19). Successful as this strategy has been in terms of advancing the rights of gay men and lesbians, it relies on an essentialist claim, that "homosexuality is a construct that is both ahistorical and a-cultural, a part of human civilization for all time; whereas constructionism suggests homosexuality is defined more by temporal periods and the cultural context (Sullivan, 2008, p.3). Instead, Foucault's viewed identity as a form of subjugation, and he emphasised the relationship between the role of identity categorisation in the production of disciplinary power (O'Farrell, 2005). "In addressing the meaning and implications of sexuality in our society reject foundational values and deny that there is a naturalist or essentialist component to sexual orientation" (Ball, 2001, p.271).

Although deceased by the time of its rise to prominence, Foucault's impact on queer theory is irrefutable. His pioneering work remains acknowledged as "[…] undoubtedly one of the most important precursors to queer theory and the study of gender" according to Matos (2013), with volume 1 of *History of Sexuality* commonly cited as the most influential text in relation to its rise (Hegarty and Massey, 2006). In challenging our assumptions and introducing new avenues to interpret or understand sexuality, "[…] his analysis of the interrelationships of

knowledge, power and sexuality was the most important intellectual catalyst of queer theory" (Spargo, 1999. p.8), cementing his place as a 'founding father' of queer theory.

The analytical paradigm developed by Foucault was furthered by feminist scholars such as Diana Fuss and Adrienne Rich, who used it to deconstruct traditional patriarchal hegemonies (Hunt & Yip, 2016). Philosopher Judith Butler expanded on some of Foucault's earlier proposals in relation to sexuality, by introducing the idea that gender is also subject to the same conditioning and acceptance or rejection, and ultimately another system of social control (Butler, 1990). Butler proposed that only through the repeated 'performance' of gender is gender itself constructed, rendering it a "[…] stylised repetition of acts, so that 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" (1990, p.43). Importantly, this new interpretation of gender as performance and a constructed identity then afforded room to the idea that the tampering or resignification of such roles could be utilised as a subversive strategy (McDonald, 2002). Butler's hypothesis of gendered behaviours as imposed cultural practices and norms, along with her conviction as to the underlying potential power of attempts to subvert them (Clarke et al, 2010), are central to queer theory. As such, this philosophy will be utilised to disentangle and present on the proliferation of the 'gender bender' in 1980's pop culture, in Chapter IV of this research.

While the theme of gender is omnipresent in her works, Butler's ideas on sexual identity also contributed to queer theory and consolidated her role, along with Foucault, as one of its most articulate proponents (Watson, 2005). Such is the role Butler's contribution played in developing this new queer framework, it has ensured her an "entrenched status" (Fisher, 2016) as a foundational academic of queer theory, and has earned her the unusual distinction of being "[…] like very few men and perhaps no other woman, an international celebrity academic" (Gessen, 2020).

Further scholars contributing to these new concepts include Rubin (1984) whose work is also considered foundational to queer theory, with its plea for " […] an autonomous theory and politics specific to sexuality" (p. 34). Kosofsky Sedgwick, another noted queer theorist, concurs - calling for more inspection of "[…] the multiple, unstable ways in which people may be like or different from each other" (1990, p. 23), and giving further argument to the need for a reframing of sexualities. Halperin's work (1990) is another piece considered pivotal.

Although focused on historical subject matter, homosexuality in ancient Greece, it drew heavily from Foucault's social constructionist perspective to interpret chosen texts. Halperin acknowledges "[…] the nineteenth-century interpretation of sexuality as a singular 'instinct' or 'drive' for both its endurance and 'unassailable logic'", endorsing Foucault's ideology as a far more accurate way to the reading of historical artifacts. Representing what "[…] constitutes a major advance in the process by which classical scholars are coming to recognize the cultural assumptions and political biases that so often underlie their supposedly objective search for the truth" (Gutzwiller, 2007, p.104), Halperin further enhanced queer theory as effective modus for academic endeavour.

However, not all scholars were as unanimously in agreement as to the virtues of queer theory, and criticisms have been varied, with cogent questioning of some of the validity of its core fundamental claims.

I.C.6. Criticisms of Queer Theory

Despite a core principle being a resolve to explore and expand beyond that of more traditional gay and lesbian studies, as with the idiom queer itself, Queer theory has also been plagued by accusations of ambiguity, with "[…] much of queer studies in the 1990's revolving around efforts to define or claim this admittedly vague term" (Whittington, 2010, p. 157).

However, more concerning, and substantial criticisms have run beyond that of the theory's linguistic merits. A number of critiques have negatively evaluated the theory and its application, revealing an imbalance among certain constituents, to the detriment of others. In addition to this, shortcomings have been identified in relation to its ability to effectively challenge intersecting hegemonies of power affecting these very groups. For example, a growing number of scholars have accused queer theory of championing an image which is gay, white, male and middle-class. In-turn perpetrating the myth of "[…] the presumed heterosexuality of the black community" (Kiesling, 2017 p.3) the author questions its effectiveness or relevance to black lives. "Doubts have been cast as to queer theory's ability to effectively generate and sustain analysis and action that aggressively counters […] white racist ideology and white privilege" (Darnell, 2009, p. 157), echoing further concerns in relation to queer theory's claim of being all-encompassing in its inclusivity.

Also, despite a prominence of female writers such as Butler and Rubin, others have argued that Queer theory has focused on gay men to the detriment of women, trans and other non-binary identities originally granted inclusion under the queer umbrella. Its disproportionate preoccupation with the needs of gay men is laid bare by academics such as Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1996), with scholars lamenting at how "Queer tried to convince women to join a movement based almost solely on a gay male agenda" (Beresford, 2014, p.761). Others have taken this aspect of criticism further, accusing it of reinforcing patriarchal norms, to the point of "[…] rendering lesbians and lesbian issues invisible again" (Beresford, 2014, p. 765). Furthermore, some have bemoaned that in the rush to embrace queer theory during the 1990s, previous approaches to framing feminist discourse (particularly feminist lesbian themes) have been rendered obsolete (Feldman, 2009). Her additional citing of an exclusionary deficit, in relation to the "[…] erasure of bisexuality" (Feldman, 2009, p.59) only adds to the reputational damage. For a philosophy built with the intention of broadening definitions and resisting heteronormative hegemonies, and indeed lauded for its inclusive manifesto (Woods, 2015; Greene, 2009), it is ironic to note that much of the criticism levelled at queer theory has centred on its very exclusivity.

Other short-comings have been exposed and are varied - an over reliance on textual analysis (Edwards, 1998), a tendency towards geographical bias (Jagose, 1987). A rather elementary, but none-the-less valid dichotomy also illuminates further weakness in the very proposition of queer-associated theory. Arguing that while "Queer exhibits a particular loathing of binary oppositions […] on the other hand it is evident that queer theory is possible only on the basis of the binaries queer/straight or queer/conventional", Oakes (1995, p.383), exposes a further fundamental contradiction inherent in the model.

Echoing the disdain expressed in relation to feminist models of thought being dismissed, Kramer (2008) would express similar concerns in relation to lesbian and gay histories, which he perceived to be under threat in the social sciences, due to the encroaching popularity of Foucault derived deconstructionist arguments, (Kramer, 2008). Kramer's change of role, from that of an early foundational queer activist to overt critic of Queer theory may well be viewed as a turnabout. However, it also offers a fascinating introductory example of how queer activism and politics has intersected with academia. The relationship between the two is explored in the next section.

I.C.7. Queer Theory and Academia

Regardless of the various critiques outlined above, in tandem with the burgeoning queer movement, the 1990s saw a "[…] rapid development and consolidation of gay and lesbian studies in universities" (Jagose, 1996, p.2). Intellectually stimulated by many of the deliberations, "from there on the intellectual production on gender and sexuality as socio-cultural constructs would blossom" writes Correa, (2001, p. 47). The fields of Women's, Gender, Gay & Lesbian, and latterly Queer studies, "[…] all established themselves in academic departments to a degree that few had dreamed possible during the grittier and more explosive early years of second-wave feminism and Gay Liberation" (Love, 2007, p.207).

To exactly what degree the characteristics of queer theory and the explosion of queer related academia, with at its very core "[…] an emphasis on permanent rebellion and submission of dominant social meanings and identities" (Mottier, 2008, p.45) shaped activism or identity politics remains difficult to quantify. And while the area is underexplored, research from the United States and Canada has shown how queer activists seize "[…] established social science methodologies such as statistics to claim legitimacy and render queer worlds visible in the policy process" (Grundy and Smith, 2007). Researchers have also been keen to argue that the very act of undertaking affirmative sexuality research is in itself a political act, reminding us that some of the earliest academic outputs in this arena put the very reputations of those conducting it at risk (Clarke et al, 2010).

Queer theory's impact, however, on the academic pursuit of knowledge regarding sexuality has been unequivocally demonstrated as being both pivotal and far reaching by many:

> Queer theory has reinvigorated the study of sexuality, pushing scholars to think of social categories more critically, and to be mindful of the ways that such categories may obfuscate the very subjects they are intended to name. (Green, 2007 p.31)

As well as being accredited for this reinvigoration, Green also acknowledges that the development came fortuitously at a period "[…] when debates around the ontology of sexuality and gender had reached a tired impasse" (p.27), and as discussed in the previous section, a period marked by the cultural eschewal of traditional gay and lesbian identities. The consensus remains, however, that the value of the relationship is apparent and that "the deconstructive

lens of queer theory has and should continue to serve as a valuable counterpoint to the ways in which sociologists conceive the reigning schema of social categorizations" (Warner, 1989, p. 39). The new frameworks and concepts exposed by proponents of queer theory have been utilised by scholars from a diverse base of disciplines, as illustrated earlier in this section. Its application as a lens to consider pop music and associated artifacts, in this project, is presented in detail in the next Chapter. This section ends however, with an overview as to the direct relevance and application of queer theory in this work.

I.C.8. Queer in this research

> Queer Theory offers an activist politics, a crucial revitalization of debates on sex and gender and offers some of the most provocative readings of literary and cultural history currently available.
>
> -Robert Luckhurst, Queer Theory (and Oscar Wilde), 1995.

While Aboudaif alludes to the qualities which have attracted scholars, the debate continues as to the validity of both the term 'queer' and the ethos behind it, suggesting its continuously fractured relationship with more traditional gay groups and politics is symptomatic of "[…] a deepening rift between those who in some important sense aspire to be normal and those who either aspire otherwise or have no choice-that is, between normal gays and queers" (Warner, 1999, p. 161).

The inclusion of Queer theory remains important to this study for a number of reasons. Its application remains strategically important, befitting the analysis of a body of work in which queer artistry was inherent and in abundance. O'Flynn (2018) reminds us how "The ambiguous coding of 80s pop suspended the figure of the gay male in an in-between space […] and the queer male figure in 80s pop was largely indistinct, visible only through the slats of half-open closet doors". As a result of these circumstances, "Understanding 1980s pop music in relation to sexuality requires a high tolerance for cognitive dissonance" (Lecklider, *in* O'Flynn, 2018). These very idiosyncrasies, inherent in the narrative of 1980s pop music, are perfect foil for a framework built on dismantling clearly demarcated classifications. We are reminded how a fundamental "[…] purpose of queer is to oppose norms through disturbing definitions and legitimisations" (Taylor, 2003, p.43), and as such this approach will be recalled and utilised throughout the main body of this text.

In order to fulfil the research goal, examples will be collected from explicitly gay texts and other artifacts taken from the decade. However, a queer analytical framework will enable the presentation of supplementary specimens, unearthing and directing the reader to previously overlooked materials with indirect or coded symbols. Inherent in this process will be the utilisation of tools proven as methods of performing "[…] analyses of language data informed by the insights of queer theory" (Motschenbacher and Stegu, 2013, p.521), reflecting an overlap with the Discourse theory-based origins of Queer Linguistics. The application of such will act as an additional critical lens, and the complementing similarities between it and the chosen methodology, Discourse Analysis, are explored in more detail in the next Chapter.

This study will specifically refer to the queer framework of analysis as established by Benshoff and Griffin (2004), in their anthology on queer cinema. Their model proposes four main aphorisms for the detection and categorisation of queer content or intent in cultural artifacts: *Auteurs, Forms, Camp* and *Reception*. For this study, the model is marginally adapted; the category of *Camp* will instead be explored within the realms of the *Forms* category, reducing the number to three. This adapted model, *Auteurs*, *Reception* and *Forms* will be activated across Chapters III, IV and V.

The first classification, *Auteurs*, refers to the distinctive creative perseverance of the artist creating the product. It seeks to ascertain evidence to determine a queer inference, despite possible interference resulting from having to adhere to cultural protestations regarding homosexuality. Benshoff and Griffin propose a Queer Auteur theory as a way of detecting such intent, noting that "[…] some sort of gay sensibility or queer trace does indeed shine through the restrictions of studio filmmaking" (*Ibid*, p.18). Williams (2011), acknowledges the linguistic complications arising from the term's origins and definition, but offers a convincing riposte to the view of scholars who insist the term can only be applied to that of the role of a director within the hierarchical process of filmmaking.

Material by auteurs coded with specific signage alluding to a queer inference has been revealed in several studies into various aspects of culture and media - from the fine arts (Smith, 2015) to film (Russo, 1981) and provides an analysis criterion for artifacts investigated across the study. However, it is important to note that coding can be "[…] as much a part of the relationship between the work and the audience as it is part of the relationship between the

creator and audience (or even the creator and their work)" (Ennis, 2020). This notion introduces the second element to the model, which asks of the object's reception - how has the material been received by a queer audience? The allegiance of many queers to pop as a cultural entity, and its role in both individual and collective queer identity formation has been rigorously explored by scholars (Todd 2016; Bullock 2017; Dhoest, Herreman & Wasserbauer, 2015), and is presented in detail at the beginning of the next Chapter. For this study, the reception of queer audiences to the artifacts is key. By extension, the aesthetics and make-up of the materials themselves are also central.

As such, the third principle, that of forms, asks if there is evidence of a queer aesthetic at play in the work, that may be recognised by other queers themselves. Scholars have even suggested the possibility of a gay aesthetic being inherent to pop music itself (Himes, 2015). Here, the specific aesthetic of 'camp' is a familiar example. The venerated work of Susan Sontag, who proposed camp as a form of […] dandyism in the age of mass culture" (1964) did much to reveal the queer nature of the aesthetic to a wider public, noting its favouring of the outlandish and the theatrical. Benshoff and Griffin confirm that "As a mode of textual production, a camp sensibility can be purposely encoded into cultural artifacts by their makers" (*ibid* p.119). Can similar, or other aesthetics be drawn from the material subject to scrutiny?

Benshoff and Griffin's framework has been evaluated and lauded for enabling, exploration of "[…] the extent to which queer sensibilities have pervaded twentieth-century culture" (Morrison, 2006, p.136). Along with its accessibility to scholars of various disciplines (Theodoropoulou, 2016), it's application alongside principles of Discourse Analysis, will underscore the analysis offered throughout this study.

In addition, it is worth noting that queer theory remains a contemporary force, its influence as pertinent as ever. Scholars have noted its continued impact and use in framing discourse. "A generation of "queer" youth don't feel the same need to label themselves or organize politically around "gay" or "lesbian", although Taylor goes on to quantify this point, arguing that, "The most pressing and urgent debates around gender and sexuality are connected not to gay and lesbian rights but to trans rights and the complicated, challenging questions that arise from trans politics" (Taylor, 2019, p.113).

In conversation on the legacy of queer theory, Halberstman notes of Judith Butler's specific contribution that without her, "[…] you wouldn't have the version of genderqueer-ness that we now have" (in Fischer, 2016). Fischer goes on to reminds us that "[…] the understanding of gender that *Gender Trouble* suggests is not only recognizable; it is pop" (*ibid* 2016). This positioning of sexuality and gender-related theory within wider pop culture realms is note-worthy for its relevance to the artifacts under review in this research, which of course, fall under the same category. Likewise, it is but a fortunate coincidence that the decade under review for this project witnessed much of the foundational scholarship, activism and momentum in regard to queer theory.

This research will adopt a queer lens to explore 1980s pop music for non-heteronormative content, to present a stimulating textual analysis of chosen artifacts. The analytical tools of queer theory as put forward by Benshoff and Griffin will be utilised throughout the project, offer a framework in which the materials discussed may be confidently presented as queer, and complementing Discourse Analysis methodologies employed throughout.

I.D. Synthesis.

This Chapter has presented an overview of the various constituent contexts in which this research project is focused. Section one armed the reader with a comprehensive summary of the existing discourses related to pop music. Covering its diachronic development, from the 1950s up to the decade of focus in this project, the section illustrated how the genre's credibility and acceptance as a form worthy of academic investigation has significantly grown since its original dismissal as provoking nothing more than a passive, superficial response among audiences.

Factors associated with aiding pop music's growing impact on popular culture, such as the advent of new technologies and a post-war economic boom were also dissected. Interesting parallels were drawn with these advancements, to the dawn of MTV and advent of the portable music player in the 1980s.

In acknowledgement of the intent to incorporate Irish perspectives into the research, the section concluded with an introduction to transnationalism. A review of works explored its

successful application in enhancing the view of the potential potency of pop music, further augmenting the forms reputation. The prohibiting and enabling factors which shaped Irish access and reception to these materials were also examined.

The second section began by providing a detailed overview of the socio-political and legal status of queer communities during the span of the 1980s. In addition to continued prohibitive, and sometimes even new discriminatory legislation, queer communities also had to contend with the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS, provoking a backlash harnessed by an almost entirely hostile media. However, the response of sexual minority communities in the face of such hostility was shown to have been profound, and to have led to the emergence of a new political consciousness, which would have lasting impact and legacy.

This burgeoning ideology was then explored at further length. Tracing its deconstructionist roots and outlining how instrumental its underpinning philosophies were to the fledgling queer movement, the enduring relationship between Queer theory, activism and academia was also presented. Some valid denunciation, from within both sexual-minority communities and academic spheres, was also presented. Despite this, the wealth of evidence presented serves as an indication that Queer theory remains as effective an analytical tool as ever. The section then concluded, with an exploration as to how Queer theory will be utilised in this work, complementing and enhancing the methodologies employed in the main text, namely Discourse Analysis.

As has been evidenced throughout this Chapter, an increasing number of studies have begun to shine a light on pop music as a field of study, as its credibility as an art form has increased. However, the main thematic intersection of this research remains the interplay between pop music and sexuality. The following Chapter will offer analysis of the various interplays between both, offering evidence as to how more than any other genre, the evolution of queer visibility has been played out to a soundtrack of pop music.

Chapter II: Queering the Groove: Sexuality in Pop Music.

II.A. Introduction

The headlines, scandals and content generated by pop music over the course of its history indicate how, when deemed to be at its most shocking or degenerative, those associations are most often linked to sex, sexuality, and sexual behaviour. From Elvis's gyrating hips (Shumway, 1992; Frith, 1996); via Donna Summer's orgasmic disco anthems (Savage and Pearson, 2012); to the arrest of George Michael for solicitation in a public bathroom and his subsequent refusal to 'bare all' and apologise to the media (Jovanac, R 2007), sexuality has been an omnipresent component of the discourse surrounding pop since its inception.

The function of this Chapter is to offer a robust investigation of the intersections of pop music and sexuality, with a particular focus on queer sexualities and pop music in decade under review. The Chapter also introduces the methodological frameworks to be used in supporting the main premise of the study. The first section surveys existing discourses relating to pop music and sexuality and explores how the relationship between the two has been analysed and presented. On-going controversies and campaigns in relation to pop music's sexual content will be illustrated as having dominated much of the discourse in relation to pop and sexualities. Following on from this, the Chapter continues with a trajectory, tracing the evolution of the representation of sex and sexuality across the decade and encompassing the societal reaction to such representations. There is a plethora of artifacts to explore, and several studies of the highest academic rigor have touched upon the presence and influence of queer contributions in this decade. However, sexuality is seldom a central focus in these works. Hence, for those who do explore aspects of pop through a sexuality lens, there is a further dearth of studies specifically addressing the 1980s.

Sequentially, the first half of this Chapter concludes with an examination of the representation, role and status of queer sexualities in pop music during the decade under scrutiny. Part 2 progresses this and is concerned with setting out an analytical framework in which to evaluate the intersections of sex in pop for specifically queer content. The section begins by outlining the multi-layered relationship between queer communities and pop, illustrating a loyal affinity to the medium, on the part of sexual minority communities.

Thereafter, evidence of pop's role and influence, on both individual and collective levels of identity, are also exhibited and explored.

This is followed by an introduction to the methodological frameworks to be utilised throughout the remainder of this research. For this study, Discourse Analysis is to be employed as the main tool and will be used in conjunction with the queer framework unveiled at the end of the previous Chapter. Similarities underpinning Discourse Analysis approaches to those of Queer theorists are presented, particularly in relation to how pop artifacts may be 'coded' depending on the audience. These are used to evidence the effectiveness of combining both frameworks to structure and frame the overall argument of this study.

Consideration is also given to the space where discourse techniques intersect with other philosophies relevant to the study of pop music and how it has been interpreted. As such, evidence of Discourse Analysis's longstanding association with the study of mass communications and semiotics, is also introduced. The methodology's acceptance of pop as a multi-modal entity also enhances its effectiveness as a method of evaluating elements of pop culture, such as the artifacts chosen for investigation in this study. Ultimately, the queer readings presented in this Chapter serve as a gateway, whereby the research journey begins to focus on the ultimate destination of this study, exploring pop and its fascinating relationship and trajectory with queer sexualities.

II.B. Pop Music, Sex & a Diachrony of Queer Sexualities

II.B.1. Scrutiny, Censorship & Self-Regulation: The Preoccupation with Sex in Pop

Along with its enduring, symbiotic relationship to youth culture, pop music's association with numerous aspects of sexuality has been complex. The topic is considered a fundamental cornerstone of pop's core. As will be illustrated, much of the discourse surrounding pop music, both past and present, is dominated by a focus on the role sexual expression plays in the content and presentation of such artifacts. In addition to growing societal unease about perceived associations with delinquency, the cultural birth of the teenager in the 1950s, as discussed in the previous Chapter, quickly became a primary focus in the United States for "[…] a growing anxiety that cultural life had become sexualized and teenagers addicted to the pleasures of the body" (Altschuler, 2003, p. 67).

Along with film, television and other mediums such as comic books, pop music, so beloved of this new categorisation of youth, quickly became a focus of ire among those concerned with the upholding of values considered undesirable (Street, 2001). In fact, pop would become "[…] the most conspicuous target for the would-be censor", its lyrics labelled from the very beginning as trivial, sexually suggestive, or even obscene" (Budd, 1999, p.4). Admonishments and censorious interventions emanated from across a spectrum of stakeholders including government, pressure groups, religious groups, as well as from within the industry itself (Cloonan, 1996; Winfield & Davidson, 1999). The critical response among such forces, to the suggestive lyrics and dance crazes accompanying pop and the fashions employed by teenagers, have been documented to the point where such denouncements have become colourful cornerstones in the history of pop itself (Doggett, 2015; Schippers, 2010; Stanley 2013; Wierzbicki, 2016). Today, it is easy to reflect on some criticisms, such as the disdain directed at Elvis Presley and his hip-wriggling antics (Shumway, 2014), with a slightly patronising, retrospective lens. However, neither the contempt in which such performances were held, nor the effect these censorious forces had on shaping pop music, should be underestimated. Quoting the New York Times in its review of a Presley performance, branded as "[…] suggestive and vulgar tinged, with the kind of animalism that should be confined to dives and bordellos", Altschuler (2004, p.90) illustrates the level of repugnance at which pop music and the behaviours associated with it, induced.

Such reactions also confirmed an admission that acts such as Elvis's should be read as sexually signalling, even if Presley was in fact, merely continuing a long history of sexual gesticulations within popular music performance. The characterisation of pop as a potentially corruptive, adverse force stuck, and continued to dominate from the 1950s onwards. Today, a significant portion of discourse devoted to pop music remains focused on the effects it may have on impressionable (and, almost always, young) minds. For instance, in 2016, a division of the American Psychological Association produced a somewhat superciliously named *Report of the Division 46 Task Force on the Sexualization of Popular Music – Consequences on gender ideals and identity development, objectification and sexualization, sexual attitudes, sexual behaviours and gendered violence,* which warned in its executive summary:

> Many popular music lyrics and videos have become sexualized, containing high levels of sexual content with an increasing number of songs including demeaning messages of men controlling women, sex as a top priority for men, objectification, sexual violence

> against women, sexual exploitation, degradation of women, women being defined by having a man, and women as not valuing themselves without a man.
> (Task Force on the Sexualisation of Popular Music, 2016, p.1)

The inherent value in the unearthing of evolving thematic trends, matched by other studies which indicate an increase in sexual referencing in pop generally (Dukes et al, 2003; Novotney, 2016; Ward *et al*, 2005;). However, it is interesting to note the researchers' use of the present tense. Suggesting pop artifacts 'have become sexualised' omits consideration that such concerns (albeit motivated less by theories or concerns of a feminist or gender-inequality nature in pop's early days), have always been to the forefront of discourse in relation to pop (Street, 2001). Unsurprisingly, issues of censorship have also continued to colour pop's reputation (Nuzum, 2001). Such is the notoriety of its reputation as a flagrant manipulator of standards of decency, numerous books, articles and studies have detailed the various censorship controversies (Winfield & Davidson, 1999; Cloonen & Garofalo, 2003) existing through pop music's short history. The next section explores one of the most fabled attempts to moderate pop music, which, by coincidence, originated in the decade scrutinised in this study.

II.B.2. The 'Filthy Fifteen': *Parental Guidance Necessary*, but of limited consequence?

With its preoccupation with sex and the anomalous nature of its resulting effects, it would be difficult to conjure a more perfect example of the shortcomings of such regulatory crusades, than the unwittingly iconic status attained by the infamous American Music Industry "Parental Guidance Necessary" campaign (Schonfield, 2015). The system, which categorises explicit or offensive lyrical content, remains active to this day, having been adopted by the US record companies in 1985 and in the UK in 2011 (Deflem, 2019). Its inception and subsequent adoption as a regulatory tool by Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), was prompted by a list of 15 pop songs drawn up by the Parents Music Resource Centre and which were duly christened 'the filthy 15' by critics (Weiss, 2015).

In establishing thematic categories by which offensive material could be labelled, the choices proffered yield insight into the predominant focus of concern. Of the four classifications, 'Violence', 'Occult', 'Drugs and Alcohol', 9 of the 'filthy 15' were grouped under the remaining category, 'sexually explicit lyrics', fuelling further indictment of a particular preoccupation with sex and sexuality. Affixing stickers to pop music products (both

physical and digital) to denote their subsequent categorisation, critics of the campaign have pointed to a number of shortcomings. Some have questioned the voluntary nature of its subscription, but more importantly, a vagueness as to what may be considered offensive, and by whom. For instance, “[…] there’s no specific definition of "explicit." The main criteria seem to be: strong language or depictions of violence, sex, or substance abuse”, notes Cole (2010). Just as with other attempts to categorise, inhibit or censor pop music, further examples of which are discussed in the next section of this Chapter, the campaign yielded anomalies and unwelcome results (Deflem, 2019), for those who had insisted on its inception.

For instance, the logo accompanying the campaign has become an iconic image of pop-culture itself, routinely emblazoned on a host of t-shirts and other paraphernalia. A number of scholars have exposed how, inadvertently, the symbol quickly became ‘badge of cool’ for artists looking to project authenticity and credibility (Cole 2010; Christianson and College, 1992). Ironically, having the label displayed on your record, compact disc or download icon, to the horror of those insisting its implementation, became *de rigueur* for many artists.

Again, this is illustrative of how attempts to control, categorise or censor pop artifacts has often had the opposite effect of making the product more attractive to consumers or listeners. Underlying the rationale for such campaigns is the implicit belief that exposure to negative (especially sexual) content can affect attitudes or behaviours. However, such analysis disregards several other underlying factors, often overlooked, and which merit consideration. For instance, despite a number of the aforementioned studies being grounded in trusted methodological frameworks such as Cultivation Theory, as pioneered by Gerbner (1998), ultimately, ‘[…] it’s still unclear how [such lyrics] affect certain sexual cognitions of emerging adults’, notes Schonfield (2015). Despite widespread acknowledgement of pop’s prolific employment of sexuality in various connotations, Schonfield is just one of a number of theorists that take a contradictory view of sex and its prolific use in pop. Others have evaluated the majority of sexual representation in pop as adhering to existing norms of gender hierarchy and the hegemony of heterosexuality, contravening any notions of transgression. From its inception, “Rock and roll was less than its critics feared. The music rarely endorsed sex outside of established relationships” notes Altschuler (2003, p.67). Despite its reputation as a vehicle for unlicensed sexual expression, pop has also functioned as a mechanism for exerting sexual control (Hartman and Schmid, 2015; Kutulas, 2017).

In addition to exposing the sex orientated focus of would-be censors, the list of songs deemed part of the notorious 'filthy fifteen' reveals other considerations worthy of inspection. Of the nine songs highlighted for their sexual content, seven were by female artists or female led groups. The preoccupation with sex in pop seems to have been particularly concerned with female sexuality. As such, the next section offers an exploration of the roles and representation of men and women in pop, in relation to sex and expressions of sexualities.

II.B.3. *Boys Don't Cry* while *Girls Just Want to Have Fun*: Pop's Rigid Roles and Rhetoric

By the 1960s, pop had continued to ingrain itself as a major cultural force, increasingly providing "[…] the soundtrack to our lives" (Clarke, in Clarke and Brosnan, 1997, p.14). The criticisms garnered by pop culture and pop music in particular, continued. "No-one can really calculate the effect this exposure is having on individual lives and minds" warned the January 1964 issue of Time magazine, just months ahead of the beginning of the infamous 'British invasion' of United Kingdom acts in the US charts (Hatch and Milward, 1987; Buckley, 2003).

However, the previous focus on pop and rock music was somewhat diluted by ascending outrage directed at the burgeoning civil rights and anti-war movements, and the second wave of feminism (Winfield and Davidson, 1999). The irony inherent in pop being toppled as a public enemy should be noted, having been acknowledged to have played a significant contributing role in the rise of 'counterculture' movements of the 1960s (Moist, 2018; Kramer, 2013). Indeed, functioning as "[…] a major role in the counterculture authored space, in relation to articulations of community by providing a shared sense of collective identity" (Bennett, p. 22 in Whiteley & Sklower, 2014), pop music's effect was being felt far and wide. Warner, for instance, explores pop's influence on the genesis of pop-art, most notably in its 'trash' aesthetic' (2014). The decade also witnessed the birth of the 'protest song' (Doggett, 2007) and the rock festival (Mankin, 2012), both of which were strongly associated with the burgeoning alternative viewpoints emanating from a generation beginning to question, and reject, the traditional societal norms thrust upon them.

Despite the well documented role of sexual permissiveness within aspects of 1960s counter cultures, many women found themselves increasingly frustrated at their representation and status in pop culture realms (August, 2009). Numerous studies have presented evidence of

rigid, often stereotypical, limitations in representations of women at the time, with reoccurring lyrical themes implying subjugation, submission and conformity very much the norm (Clawson, 1999; Hartman and Schmid, 2015). Scholars also sought to investigate why this was the case, even suggesting that the very nature of rock itself is bound by "[…] general characteristics which push the musicians into traditional masculine or feminine stereotyping, demonstrating that rock and roll reflects contradictory ideals and consequently still acts in accordance with the same social norms the genre is supposedly rebelling against" (Hartman and Schmid, 2015, p.57).

There is general consensus that it was only towards the end of the decade that women began to be presented as musicians or involved in pop, beyond the remit of lending their vocals to hits (Kutulas, 2017). Artists such as Mama Cass and Janis Joplin (Leibetseder, 2012) began to forge successful careers and challenged previous norms of how women should look, behave and contribute to rock or pop. Scholars have also taken a differing view on the presentation of women during the formative part of the decade and in the 1950s, reappraising the value in which such representations offered young women. Cyrus's (2003) study praises the projection of comradery among the numerous successful 'girl-groups' of the early 1960s, commending their "[…] emphasis on leaderless conformity" (p.27). She also refers to the work of fellow scholar Smith (1999), who attributes the inception of the medium of 'girl culture' to the rise and popularity of girl groups during the decade.

However, progress was not always fast. Citing the early 1970s success of artist Carole King as an example (King had been hugely successful as one half of songwriter Goffen & King during the 1960s), Kutulas' 2017 hypothesis suggests that the counterculture ideals of the 1960s took time to effect change. It wasn't until the 1970s when "[…] Americans incorporated ideas and lifestyle choices represented by sixties movements into their lived experiences" (p. 2), allowing for women to (slowly) gain a more self-determined role in pop music. The author goes on to cite James Taylor, husband of King's pop contemporary Carly Simon, as exemplifying a 1970s "[…] embodiment of a new man, gentle, sensitive and eager to please", (p.34), signifying the changes in the representation and presentation of men, enabled by the same processes of incorporation.

Before the 1970s, representations of men had also stuck rigidly to gender norms, albeit with very differing standards and far less limitations than the cultural sanctions which

traditionally enveloped female artists. Despite having since drawn certain queer or sexually subversive inferences from the sexual swagger and projected vulnerability of Elvis ("Will you love me tonight") (Brittan, 2016; Simpson, 1994) and noted exceptions such as 1920's blues singer Ma Rainey (Wilson, 1984), the traditional role of men in pop had overwhelmingly been to assert their sexual dominance (Hartman and Schmid, 2015). Described as "[…] the liberating promise of rock masculinity", popular music norms ensured that for men, "Middle-class expectations of gentlemanly behaviour were smashed, along with hotel rooms and musical instruments" (Sheehan, 2010, p.297). While the emerging 'glam rock' movement of the early 1970s would garner justified criticisms for its dearth of female artists, it did allow for the men to visually express themselves in a way inconceivable just years before (Auslander, 2006). The alternative fashions ushered in by this pop trend was labelled 'Unisex' (Mort, 1998), breaking with a longstanding tradition whereby even the concept of fashion itself was deemed un-masculine and distasteful (Breward, 1995).

The contributions of David Bowie, an aspiring glam-rock star whose, fashion, performativity and proclamations presented queer infused tones to a degree previously unimaginable in pop, feature numerous times throughout this study. Beyond the representations of sexual ambiguity introduced by Bowie *et al* (Brooks, 2018) and presented in the next section, Gregory (2002) suggests that following the sexual revolution of the 1960s, glam rock also reflected an "[…] uncertainty about the nature of masculinity" (p.108) itself, something which had not been portrayed in pop before. However, no such claims of reticence could be applied to the duo of evolving sub-genres of pop which would come to define the remainder of the 1970s, disco and punk. Although audibly miles apart, both were united in their rejection of previous musical status quos and as will be presented later, both afforded numerous presentations of sexualities, in often assertive or explicit, ways. The space given to queer identities in both genres, and the respective generative roles each played in enabling 1980s pop music to be so queer heavy in content is fundamental to the premise of this study.

In short, both genres allowed for the continued disruption of gender and sexuality norms, as inaugurated by Bowie and glam rock. After a period of almost total invisibility, themes and representations of queer sexualities were gaining ground and visibility and would continue to do so. Finally, a locale for queer identity could be found in pop music.

II.B.4. Locating the Queer in Pop

> LGBTQ+ people have always been at pop's vanguard, as performers and audiences; the history of pop music is queer history.
>
> -Jess Skolnik, *The Rainbow Is a Prism: The Many Facets of LGBTQ+ Pop Music History*, 2018

As demonstrated in the previous section, much of the discourse, commentary, analysis and outrage generated by pop music has revolved around accusations and defence of its overuse of sex and sexuality, or its propensity to further perpetuate existing, often rigid, gender stereotypes and representations. A similar situation exists for queer sexualities, although as will be illustrated, there is considerable evidence to suggest that queer voices have been regulated to a degree where they are commonly bereft of any residual queer suggestion. This is hardly surprising, given the continued legislative prohibitions regarding homosexuality, and the taboo nature in which same sex attraction or desire was viewed by mainstream culture and society (Loughrey, 1998; Woods, 1995) for the duration of pop's late twentieth century trajectory. For, as with hetero sexualities, from its inception in the 1950s onwards, pop's stakeholders have left a history of attempts to silence, censor or deny queer voices. Aware of the limiting potential of any explicit queer referencing, artists often have also succumbed to self-censorship in order to attain success. Despite this, there still remains more than enough evidence to effectively establish that pop has always been imbued with a strongly queer component.

The Little Richard song, "Tutti Frutti", provides an exemplary example of censorship in action, which, dating back to the very birth of pop in the 1950s, offers a fitting place to begin analysis of the course of queers in pop. Long considered archetypal as a pop song (White, 2003), its lyrics were altered significantly by Richard's management before its release (White, 1984, p.119), eroding previous references to the act of anal sex[2]. Despite this, Richard's success, along with that of contemporaries such as Jerry Lee Lewis, at the same time "[…] showed signs that the repeal of reticence was well underway in the 1950s" (Altshuler, 2004, p.98) in relation to sexuality in pop music. While critics were eager to denounce the sexual

[2] "Tutti Frutti's" original lyric contained the couplet, 'Tutti Frutti, good booty, If it don't fit, don't force it, You can grease it, make it easy', later to be replaced by the more innocuous 'Tutti Frutti, aw rooty
Tutti Frutti, aw rooty' (White, 2003).

suggestiveness and explicit nature of their lyrics and performances, such criticisms were based on an implicit assumption of the heterosexual nature of such content.

Like women before them, culturally, queers were to only benefit marginally from the later counterculture movements of the 1960s, in terms of representation. The decade yielded few examples of explicit referencing to, or representations of homosexuality. The Tornado's "Do You Come Here Often?", commonly cited as one of the few notable exceptions (Petridis, 2006; Huxley, 2015), belies just how few citations exist, with it it's vague referencing to be found buried on the B-side of their single[3].

Artists now known to have been lesbian or gay, such as Dusty Springfield (O'Brien, 2000) and Arthur Conley (Ward, 2014), routinely concealed their sexual orientation. A retrospective lens has also since established that while musical artifacts of the time may have contained a disappointing paucity of queer referencing, behind the hit singles and performers lay an industry which was anything but heteronormative. Confirmation of a long-held suspicion, "[…] of the connection between musicality and homosexuality, and a strong supposition that the music profession is made up largely of homosexuals (Brett & Wood, 2003, p.3), has been upheld by a number of latter-day biographers. These have revealed the extent of involvement of gay men as major stakeholders in the industry, as producers, managers and agents of the most successful acts of the decade.

The aforementioned Tornadoe*s* were managed by Joe Meek, a producer, sound engineer and manager known to be gay (Repsch, 2001). Brian Epstein managed The Beatles (Coleman, 1989); The Rolling Stones were managed by Andrew Oldman, and The Who by Kit Lambert (Motion, 2018). At the same time, Robert Stigwood promoted both Cream and The Bee Gees (Dando-Collins, 2017). These businessmen, along with others such as Simon Napier-Bell (Napier-Bell, 1998; 2001), held such sway within the music business they would come to be known as 'the Velvet Mafia' (Bullock, 2020) and considered to be the "gay architects of rock" (Farber, 2017).

[3] The B-side in question, "Do You Come Here Often?", of which the band had zero input, included a short monologue between two characters implied to be gay. (Bullock, 2017)

Despite this wealth of involvement, outward representations of queer sexualities in pop remained expressly scarce, especially when compared to the progress mediums such as film had made during the decade (Smith, 1999). The continued (and actively upheld) criminalisation of homosexuality in England from where the above roll-call of managers all originated, must be considered as having an impact. Eventually, the Sexual Offenses Bill of 1967 decriminalised homosexuality for men aged 21 and over, (Lewis, 2016; Higgins, 1996). However, culturally and societally homosexuality was still held in disdain, considered unpalatable with the aesthetics and virtues of pop.

A shift would soon occur, however, whereby new representations and voices emerged which challenged the heteronormativity of pop's strict hierarchical structures. Recalling Martin's (1995) theory presented in the previous Chapter, in relation to the effects of counterculture taking its time to effect change in the role of women in pop, it is pertinent to speculate if this may also have been the case in terms of representations of queerness. For, from early on in the 1970s, new versions of masculinity would be presented. Their arrival and reception are explored in the next section.

II.B.5. Advances of a Glam, Disco and Punk Army: The Advent of the Visible Queer

Despite the slew of gay men governing the industry, it would take until the early 1970s advent of glam rock for any suggestion of queerness to be outwardly presented. While "American popular music slumbered in the comfort of predictable stars and assured cultural and industrial hegemony" (Thompson, 2008, p.3), in England glam rock became a catalyst in transforming the representation of men in pop, in turn opening the door to queer representations of masculinity.

David Bowie and Marc Bolan, celebrated as "[…] the indisputable mega czars of glam rock" (Napier-Bell, 2001, p. 484), alongside contemporaries such Lou Reed and The New York Dolls, eschewed not only the former rigid gender roles of men in pop, but also actively addressed queer sexualities in a non-coded form, a first for the medium (Bullock 2017; Charlesworth, 2018; Glen, 2016). It has since observed that Bowie was simply pursuing a path of "[…] often Brechtian questioning of gender and sexual identity formations" (Brooks, 2018, p. 186). However, the shift was hugely significant. In a now infamous 1972 interview, given

to the now defunct Melody *Maker* magazine, Bowie declared "I'm gay, and I always have been" (Bullock, 2017; Glen, 2016). Later he would claim bisexuality to be a more accurate reflection of his orientation, and by the 1980s went so far as to recall, "The biggest mistake I ever made was telling that *Melody Maker* writer that I was bisexual. Christ, I was so *young* then. I was *experimenting*…" (Loder, 1983). Nevertheless, Bowie's utterance was seismic in its effect, inspiring a future generation of 'freaks and queers'. While initial hopes that he would become "[…] a gay Elvis" (Simpson, 2008, p. 94) were soon quelled as Bowie quickly moved away from associations of camp or homosexuality, his Ziggy Stardust-era use of make-up and costume reverberated just as profoundly, and his performances evoked equally landmark responses. On the effect of Bowie's televised performances, Oppenheim (2016) writes:

> A bisexual, androgynous, alien Rockstar, Ziggy Stardust's flaming red locks and risqué skin-tight Lycra bodysuit wooed the world. Watched by 14 million people, the historic Top of the Pops performance saw him put his arm round his guitarist Mick Ronson and stare intensely into his eyes. As odd as it might seem now, a man putting his arm around another man on television served as a watershed moment for young people grappling with their sexuality (Oppenheim, 2016).

The author articulates the importance of such performativity to an audience previously bereft of any cultural references to their lives. Others concur on the significance this particular performance held (Bullock, 2017: Kirk, 1999), noting how "[…] kids could watch David Bowie on Top of the pops and imagine themselves transported to a world of sexual ambiguity" (Doggett, p.484). In pop's ever-changing world, by the mid-1970s punk and disco had replaced glam rock in popular tastes. Polar opposites in many regards, both genres allowed for continuation of this new side to presentations of masculinity and femininity. Both would also shape the tastes of the following decade.

Disco has been acknowledged by many studies, not least for offering "[…] spaces in which an array of gender and sexual identities were possible, a space in which the social world of heterosexual, masculine aggression and female sexual passivity could be "re-imagined" (Mankowski, 2010, p.1). Punk's approach, often dismissively stereotyped as confrontational, has been appraised by scholars such as Mueller (2017) as employing numerous subversive strategies. Acknowledged as moving beyond the realms of being cast solely as sub-genres of pop, both are considered stand-alone cultural milestones in themselves (Haider, 2018: Garcia, 2014). While music remains the anchoring focus, both encompass the realms of "[…] dancing, club, fashion, film – in a word, a certain *sensibility*" (Dyer, 1979 p.151). Doggett reminds us,

that by the 1970's, such was disco's influence, it had come to denote "[…] a term that now referred both to a venue, and to the music which shook its walls (1979, p.15, as quoted in Maitra, 2011, p.376).

In placing subversive, diverse sexualities and desires firmly at front and centre of pop, disco and punk were both instrumental in opening the doors for the plethora of representations of alternative and often, queer sexualities, which would command the pop charts of the 1980s. The ferociousness of punk's aesthetic and subversive approach allowed for the emergence of the cultural pop phenomenon of the 'gender bender' in 80s pop (George, 1992). Together with the advent of 'Hi-Nrg', the most overtly queer pop music genre thus far, and a direct descendent of disco (Fritz, 1999; Reynolds, 2006), the two constitute crucial pillars of evidence. Their rise and significance are explored in further detail in Chapters III and IV of this study.

Disco and punk have one final similarity for note here. Both share a trajectory in terms of an early 1970s ascendance, and in the timing of when both reached the peak of their respective cultural zeniths, in the intermediate and latter end of the decade (Jones and Kantonen, 1995; Taylor, 2009). Although the impact of both was profound and enduring, by the 1980s other musical genres, fashions and trends were emerging. The manifestations of queerness inherent in many of the musical artifacts and representations of the time, are presented in the following section.

II.B.6. Synth Styles and Subversion: The Queer in 1980s Pop Music

> To put it bluntly, the pop charts are full of faggots - myself included. It's a real boot in the eye for the normal majority.
>
> -Pete Burns, *in* Kirk, *A Boy called Mary*, 1999.

Burns' quote may be considered offhand or facetious in tone, but in many ways, it captures the essence of this study's overall conviction regarding the period. At the dawn of the decade, as disco and punk were being further appropriated into mainstream pop-culture, newly emerging (although descendant) musical trends and pop tribes such as 'New Wave' and 'The New Romantics' began to supplant the former as the new vanguard of 'cool' (Cateforis, 2011).

It soon became apparent that pop in the 1980s would extend the possibility of alternative representations first offered in the 1970s by glam rock, disco and punk. From early in the decade, evidence of the ascent of such demonstrations was increasingly clear. Visually, if not sonically, the new romantic movement borrowed from Bowie's sexual ambiguity. The cover of The Human League's seminal (Larkin, 2011) 1981 album, *Dare*, with its depiction of an intentionally ambiguously gendered model on its cover, was just a sign of things to come. Within a year, Boy George would sit at number one in the charts on both sides of the Atlantic, un-apologetically bringing his brand of cross-dressing to the masses.

'Synth pop' (Collins, Schedel & Wilson, 2013) would prove equally amenable to permitting new representations - yielding numerous acts with a distinctly and sometimes overtly queer, perspective. Groups such as Soft Cell (Bell, 2020), Depeche Mode (Miller, 2004) and Yazoo (Kirk, 1999), would ensure that from the beginning of the decade "[…] ambiguous gender play of fashion, style and androgyny would become even more associated with the new pop" (Cateforis, 2011, p.52). The genre's popularity would continue as the decade wore on, with the Pet Shop Boys (Gill, 1995), Bronski Beat (Coles, 2015), Eurythmics (Hawkins, 1996) and Erasure progressing the trend for electronic instrumentation and production, while simultaneously exploring and portraying sex, gender and queer orientations in ways rarely seen before. Elsewhere, the success of yet another sub-genre of disco, Hi-Nrg, was drawing audience's attention to Dead or Alive, led by the 'gender bender' Pete Burns. Modelling their sound on that of US drag queen, Divine, who had first enjoyed mainstream chart success in 1984, these and other explicitly queer Hi-Nrg acts added to the burgeoning explosion of alternative representations.

Both acts were produced by Stock, Aitken and Waterman (SAW), an English production trio who would become the most prolific UK producers of the decade (Elliot, 2017). Although all heterosexual, they readily acknowledged their appropriation of the emerging HI-Nrg trends, adopting the sound from English gay clubs where Waterman had deejayed and adapting it to become their trademark sound (Stock, 2004; Waterman, 2000). This study positions Burns, SAW, and a number of the other artists mentioned above, as predominant stakeholders. Their prevalence and success, along with the trajectory of Hi-Nrg are argued to have been responsible for the queering of the decade and feature prominently throughout this study.

Explorations of queer themes were not confined solely to dance-related genres either. In 1984 indie rock proponents The Smiths, led by Steven Morrissey, would offer a vision of male sexuality which transgressed both the traditional male posturing of heteronormative rock, but also contravened the overt approach favoured by many of the emergent cluster of artists challenging these norms. Employing lyrical themes of vulnerability, loneliness and isolation, he frequently combined these with the inclusion of queer cultural reference points, endearing him to both heterosexual and queer audiences, alike (Devereux *et al*. 2011; Dillane, Devereux & Power, 2014; Simpson, 1995).

This sudden proliferation of emerging artists with a queer tone was further buoyed by an environment whereby several acts, already established in the previous decade, further consolidated their careers. Both Elton John and Queen, led by Freddie Mercury, continued to flourish. Although neither were directly associated with the genres responsible for this new queering of the pop landscape, both would go substantially further in allowing their previously hidden queer leanings to come to the fore during the decade, perhaps enabled by the offerings of their new-found contemporaries.

Significant variations exist in the tone, expression and explicitness of the enumerated artist's queer sign-postings. Jimmy Sommerville, uniquely placed as singer of two successful and explicitly gay acts, Bronski Beat and The Communards, can be viewed at one end of the scale. Both of his bands were unabashedly explicit in their proclamation of gay identities, and in their insistence on the inclusion of same sex imagery and lyrical depictions (Coles, 2015). Other acts such as the Pet Shop Boys, who expertly balanced mainstream success and appeal whilst incorporating obliquely coded reference points for a discerning gay audience (Gill, 1995), are exemplary of the opposite end.

This study argues that the varied spectrum in which queer sexualities was presented in 1980s pop, encompassing both explicit referencing and implicit coding, played a significant role in ensuring a proliferation of artifacts which deviated far from previous decade's sexual norms. As such, this study's final Chapter, *Vinyl Closets and Pink Glass Ceilings*, explores in detail the brevity of expressions of queer sexuality throughout the decade. For now, the following section presents an overview of the existing scholastic research into queerness in pop during the decade. Although a number of studies and publications have focused on the

interconnectivity of queerness and pop during the decade, the absence of any thorough narrative on the subject is also made apparent.

II.B.7. *(Can You Tell Me) Why*? - Investigations on queerness in 1980s Pop

Regardless of the audibility of such queer messaging in 1980s pop, it would take until well into the following decade for the beginnings of critical or academic reflection on such abundance or impact to be acknowledged. The 1990s heralded a number of publications collecting the works of music journalists and/or academics exploring queer contributions and identities in pop music (Gill, 1995; Kirk, 1999). Of these, Kirk's work (1999) is perhaps most pertinent to this study, the content consisting of articles collecting interviews which the journalist carried out in various newspapers and music industry magazines during the decade. Queer sexuality is strikingly prominent within the pieces, prompting Richard Smith to observe of Kirk, in the book's introduction, as being, "[…] a queer pioneer, the first to take homosexuality out of the private realm and into public spaces" (Smith, quoted in Kirk, 1999, p.3).

In more recent years, a number of works offered chronological narratives of the history and evolution to date of pop music, and of pop music and sexuality. The works of Stanley (2013) and Doggett (2015), while not focusing on sexuality or homosexuality per se, are worthy of mention, both for their exhaustively encyclopaedic approach and their adept inclusion of sexuality related issues. Aston (2016) also constructs a history of pop music of encyclopaedic proportions but is one of the more recent works specifically devoted to exploring pop music history through a queer lens. Similarly, Bullock (2017) focuses on queer pop contributions of the wider twentieth century and offers plenty of insight into the decade's iconic pop moments.

Amongst this burgeoning landscape, there is no shortage of work exploring the presence of homosexuality in the various sub-genres of pop music. Binder's (2013) work explores queer identities and representation in Hip-Hop communities, while Brownlee (2010) focuses on Bubble-gum pop. Flood's contribution (2017) decodes queer messaging in country music. Jones and Cantonen (1999); Lawrence (2011); Clayton *et al*. (2012); Walter Hughes (1994) and Dyer (1979) are just some examples of work examining the origins of Disco, tracing its roots and development to black, latino and queer urban clubs of the US in the early 1970s.

Having reviewed the discourse surrounding sexualities in pop music and introduced some of the various queer manifestations of the 1980s, the second part of this Chapter progresses the study by locating pop music in an analytical framework. The section begins by exploring the place and effect of pop music in queer lives.

II.C. Pop Music and Queer Sexuality: An Analytical Framework

II.C.I. "Just What I Wanted": Pop's Place in Queer Lives

> Of all the mass media, rock is the most explicitly concerned with sexual expression… rock's relationship to sexuality isn't just an academic exercise, it is a necessary part of understanding how sexual feelings and attitudes are learned.
>
> -Simon Frith & Angela McRobbie, *Rock & Sexuality*, 1978.

Upon application to a queer audience, Frith and McRobbie's reminder of the underlying significance of the intersecting relationship between sexuality and pop helps to begin the work of unravelling the unique affiliation shown to exist between the two. There is no doubting it, queers love pop. In addition to their longstanding industry involvement detailed in the previous section, studies have shown that LGBT consumers are significantly more likely to have purchased pop music or attended a live concert in the previous year, than their straight counterparts. The same study indicates that 92% of LGBT consumers consider themselves pop music fans (GLAD, 2017). So acute is the connection and awareness of the affinity that scholars have gone as far as developing hypothesis which suggest a gay aesthetic inherent in the form itself (Himes, 2015). Such is the fervent queer appeal (Adams, 2017) of the pop music broadcasting institution that is the annual Eurovision Song Contest, that scholars have ascribed it as being akin to 'a gay Olympics' (Baker, 2017).

Demonstrating a significant involvement in its development and management, as well as an often-devout allegiance to the medium, this section explores the often complex and prominent relationship the genre has had with queer sexualities. Audience culture consumption is a key area of interest to Media, Cultural and Musicology studies, and of particular relevance to this study. Many scholars have explored facets of the relationship between pop and queer

communities, presenting a myriad of studies in which aspects of the relationship are inspected. It is here where we begin to build a picture as well as how and why pop music plays such a significant role in many queer lives. The following section presents an overview of such studies.

II.C.2. Safe Spaces, Identity & Self Determination: Individual and Collective Functions of Pop

Building on the concepts of identity pioneered by Erikson (1957), and later utilised by scholars such as Dillon, Moradi & Worthington (2011) to better understand homosexual identity formation, many works have focused on demonstrating how music has been utilised by LGBT communities for the purpose of aiding identity formation, both individually and collectively. Such themes are further explored by Brett *et al* (1994), Simpson (1995) and Whieley & Rycenga (2006) who all offer queer readings on aspects of pop music and its relationship with identity. Dhoest, Herreman and Wasserbauer (2015) illustrate the variety of ways in which pop has "[…] consistently been important in the construction and evolution of Western lesbian and gay cultures" (p.208). Specifically, they reference Irvine (1996) and Valentine (1995) whose exploration of how gay and lesbian audiences use 'decoding' practices to interpret queer readings. These works, alongside that of Gill (1995) are further considered in the final Chapter of this study, whereby examples of the dialectical synthesis at play in such coding practices is further explored.

Scholars such as Walser (2014) have also been quick to reject any simplistic claims that musicians and fans 'express their sexuality' through pop songs but are instead involved in what he calls 'identity work' of which sexual orientation can be a part of. Walser suggests that a great variety of gender constructions and strategies of sexuality can be imbued by the listener, echoing the view that one of pop's most significant functions is to aid us in the process of framing identity, whether in the private or public realm (Frith, 1987). Conclusions have also been drawn from the field of psychology, as to pop music's capacity to affect a collective audience:

> […] to show that one belongs to a specific social group; to make listeners feel related to people who like the same kind of music; to make listeners feel connected to their friends; or to help listeners gather important information about others.
>
> (Schäfer *et al.* 2013, p. 263)

Aspects of this realm have also been explored with a specifically queer lens. Writing on the role of music in contributing to queer cultures and spaces, Gill (1995) notes that "Dancing, dance music and places where people dance have been central to the lives of queers since queers were first invented" (p.134). A notion conversant to queer audiences who have traditionally organised under designated social and or community spaces which are often referred to as 'safe spaces', Coleman (2016) and Cohen (2002) further elaborate on pop music's vital functioning in the sensory development of and cultural awareness of space. Siegel (2001) goes as far as proposing that such is the function served by the music played at queer venues, it may be viewed on a socio-political basis, as a form of free speech.

This view may be challenged as somewhat extreme, but together with the other studies listed, a portrait of a fevered relationship between many queers and pop music begins to emerge. Two additional cultural concepts, that of the 'gay icon' and of the 'gay anthem', which have also become widely associated with queerness (especially gay men) progress this view and are presented in the following section.

II.C. 3. Icons, Anthems and Affinities

> He once told me about picking up a bloke who said you could always tell a 'queer's' place because they've all got albums of Judy Garland.
>
> -Kenneth Williams on Joe Orton, quoted in Dyer, *Judy Garland & Gay Men*, 1988.

Extending the inventory of work exploring collective aspects of identity, Hubbs (2007) explores the connotations and place of the 'gay anthem' in queer community formation. Using the example of the ubiquitous "I Will Survive", the study maps the song's trajectory and explores dimensions of its longevity and popularity as an atypical anthem. Hubbs's work affirms the cultural significance in which pop songs can be received by queer communities. Resonances of Frith's hypothesis (1987), as discussed in the previous Chapter, may also be recalled. His proposition that pop promotes its audience's ability to generate a sense of ownership over a song or artist, further assists in framing why certain artifacts come to hold such associations with queer audiences. As such, songs such as The Village People's

"Y.M.C.A." (Pearlman, 2008), "Born This Way" by Lady Gaga and Diana Ross's "I'm Coming Out", [4] have, alongside countless others, secured anthem status.

The degree to which the term of "gay anthem" has become ingrained in pop culture is affirmed by the glut of newspaper, magazine and internet features of which such anthems are the focus. Articles exhorting the reader to "[…] kick-start your Pride weekend with this playlist of 30 songs" (Kirkland & Carey, 2020); lists of the "[…] best gay anthems ever" (Henderson, 2017); and revelatory confessionals, where queer or queer-friendly commentators choose songs as their own anthems, such as "Oprah's Pride Playlist" (Schubak, 2019), abound. Hand in hand with exploration of the gay anthem, the concept of the "gay icon" has also been investigated in works by Todd (2016); and Guilbert, who wisely acknowledges its overuse (2018, p. 14). Dyer (1986) is perhaps the benchmark for such works, in his exploration of the fabled relationship (Miller, 1996; Currid, 2001) between Judy Garland and gay men. The scholar suggests a complex dynamic at play between the two, resulting in "[…] specific aspects of Garland's image and artifacts making a particular set of sense for gay men" (p.142).

Others such as Forenza (2017), have offered a reading on how young queer audiences can be assisted in the coming out process through identification with those decreed to have 'iconic' status by queer communities. Fascinating works on fandom, exposing often surprising affiliations, such as Ortega's work exploring Johnny Cash's Lesbian fanbase (1998), have also enhanced the parameters of what is considered to be read as 'queer' art by audiences. Perhaps more obvious is the abundance of works exploring the iconic status of artists such as Madonna (Watts, 1996; Seton *et al*, 1992), Lady Gaga (Yebra, 2017) and Kylie Minogue (Salas *et al*, 2010), each of whose resonance amongst queer listeners, has been long and widely established.

Expanding on matters of musical predilections and identity, Dhoest, Herreman & Wasserbauer (2016) explore the differences in musical tastes between lesbians and gay men, with the former found more likely to appreciate alternative genres of pop, while gay men are more generally predisposed to the more commercial end of the pop spectrum. However, while "there are undeniable musical norms that are associated with mainstream lesbian and gay

[4] The Nile Rodgers-produced hit for Diana Ross would be soundtrack to many a queer dancefloor, enduring in its popularity. However, Ross claims not to have understood the gay subtext when recording the track, which was later confirmed by the producer (Lavin, 2020).

cultural identity" (Taylor, 2012, p.121), Taylor concludes that being gay or lesbian does not necessarily pre-dispose one to a particular musical style.

While not exclusively a female domain, there is also acknowledgement of the notable predominance of women exalted as gay icons (Guilbert, 2018), and burgeoning theories of a link between gay men and female pop stars on the basis of both being subject to the forces of hetero-patriarchy (Kirk, 1999), however more investigation is needed before such correlations can be drawn. Theorists agree however, that "[…] friendships between straight women and gay men have been a subject of pop culture fascination" (Russell, 2016). Conversely, some feminist theorists such as Auchmuty *et al* (1991) have pointed to the existence of an undercurrent of misogyny in some aspects of gay male fan culture. These evolutions have further dismantled earlier notions of an unbridled adulation, on the part of gay men in particular, to their icons. "Scratch lightly at the surface and what flakes off is, yes, reciprocity and genuine affection, but also callous misogyny" cautions O'Flynn (2019), writing on the relationship between gay men and the pop princesses they apparently revere.

In reference to the earlier suggestion of a gay aesthetic inherent in pop music, it is also useful to refer to Sontag's noted essay on the meaning of camp (1964). The first academic essay to confirm a particular penchant shared among some for ostentatious, artificial and ultimately melodramatic aesthetics and tastes, it can still be applied to help justify queer analysis. "Camp is esoteric - something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques." (*ibid*, p.4) she notes, enhancing the legitimacy of the model proffered by theorist's Benshoff and Griffin for ascertaining queer content, and applied in this study. While Christopher Isherwood is accredited as having inaugurated the word and concept into literature the decade previously, Sontag's work ensured that camp emerged from the underground, to enjoy a position of cultural prominence, still widely acknowledged as an established "cultural trope" (Sing-Kurtz, 2018) among today's media literate audiences.

The many works listed above demonstrate the multifaceted nature of pop's association and functions for queer audiences, as individuals and communities. However, the very prominence of issues regarding visibility and coding throughout this research also necessitates an exploration of analyses conducted in relation to issues of media representation and queer sexualities. An overview into explorations of this intersection are presented in the following section.

II.C.4. Notes on Representation

For many media scholars, the importance of assessing queer representation has a dual purpose. Exploring the possible effects upon which exposure to queer protagonists may have among a mainstream audience constitutes one pillar of work. Additionally, studies have focused on how the consumption of media is represented among queer audiences themselves (Cook, 2018). Broadly, Matherson (2005) and Kellner (1995) are just some of the many scholars whose works explore the influence that media can exert over its audience. Sanderson (1995), alongside Gibson (2006) have delved further into the implications of queer sexuality representation and media, both arriving at the conclusion that audiences "[…] come to understand homosexuality" (Gibson, p.138) through interplay with its associated mediums. Calzo and Ward (2009) provide more evidence in their study which demonstrates a clear correlation between media exposure to homosexuality and resulting greater acceptance of the same.

Queer scholars have also been astute in their criticisms of media. A number of works have exposed the invisibility of queer characters on television (Fejes & Petrich, 1989; Signorile, 1994), or critiqued their function when they do appear Becker (2006), illustrating a tendency for the portrayal of two-dimensional, poorly executed characters (Raley & Lucas, 2008). Shilt's *The Celluloid Closet* (1981) would expose a similar hetero-centric collusion in cinema. Authors have exposed the perpetual use of stereotypes to depict gay men, finding a predominance of "mincing walks and camp voices" (McQueen, 1998, p.47). Gross (2001) offers further evidence of an over-reliance on stereotypes, and some scholars suggest that the majority of queer media representations, serve not only to "[…] de-personalize gay people as moral outsiders" (Chung, 2007, p.101), but also to re-enforce a belief that being gay is a lifestyle choice (*ibid*). Conversely, there remains little doubt that upon authentic execution, representation can serve as a valuable tool. LGBT respondents to a study by Giuliano & Gomillion (2011) cited positive depictions of queer characters on television as a source of pride and revealed how often such delineations assisted them in their own self identification process. Similarly, findings by Kivel and Kleiber (2000), detailed how young people may utilise media sources as a way of gaining an understanding, and even an access point, to the queer community.

More recently studies have reported a move to a somewhat more affirmative delineation, noting a specific increase in visibility in their various readings on the queer content of media (Becker, 2006; Cook, 2018; O'Leary 2010). However, others have been less equivocal in their espousal of such developments. Somewhat wary of the value of simply "[…] tallying up LGBTQ characters and storylines as if sheer force of their numbers might reveal something of our political forces" (Heller 2011, p.668), such concerns are amplified in regard to a reliance on "[…] social worker simplifications of 'positive images' (Medhurst, in Burtson, 2016). Such studies have long reminded us that representation itself is complex and nuanced (Albertazzi & Cobley, 2009) and continues to feature in evolving media debates today. In response, scholars have frequently promoted the execution of mixed methodologies in studies of media artifacts (Albertazzi & Cobley 2010; Devereux 2003) as employed by this study. The theme of representation is central to the work of this project, and as such will be re-visited throughout.

II.C.5. From Foucault to Frankie Goes to Hollywood: Contextualising Queer Analysis in this study

In advancing towards the analytical framework to be utilised in this project, it is worth noting how many of the studies cited here further serve to dismantle earlier dismissals of pop. Original criticisms in relation to its inducement of little more than submissive passivity among audiences, as proffered by Adorno and the Frankfurt school, have long since been challenged by these investigations. In addition to those approaching the medium through sociological or musicological frameworks to present a more thorough analysis of pop's scope, the work of some of the pioneering theorists in the area of sexuality has also been used to contribute to a more sophisticated acknowledgement of pop's functions. For example, scholars have been quick to point out that Foucault's theories reflect more recent and complex understandings of the relationship between popular media and audience (Green 2009). Parallels reverberate between his philosophies, accredited as "[…] a reminder regarding the power of language for producing particular ways of thinking and seeing: that the symbolic has real repercussions" (Hobbs 2008, p.14), and mechanics of Discourse Analysis, the tool utilised in this study.

By the 1980s, pop and rock were acknowledged as cultural forces to the extent where even Foucault was no longer impervious to the medium's influence. "Not only is rock music an integral part of the life of many people, it is also a cultural initiator; to like rock, to like a

certain kind of rock rather than another, is also a way of life, a manner of reacting; it is a whole set of tastes and attitudes" (Foucault, 1983; *in* Boulez and Foucault, 1985). However, despite such esteemed recognition, it has also been noted that "[r]ock remains in a hard place as long as historians and critics continue to alienate the form from its racially, regional, gendered, and queer roots" (Brooks, 2018, p.184). This study seeks to assist in redressing this imbalance; interpreting artists and artifacts while utilising a number of theorists and their work to build evidence as to the queer potency of pop in the 1980s.

Expanding from its once neglected place in the pantheon of Musicology, pop has increasingly examined intersectional aspects of issues of gender, feminism, race and sexuality (Whitley, 2000; Bayton, 1992; Taylor, 2012). Perhaps pop music criticism has evolved, mirroring the trajectory of pop itself. It is within this pantheon that this research fits, even as it seeks to identify instances were queerness remains largely unrecognised:

> By shifting the focus away from the question of what it means to be lesbian or gay within the culture and on to the various performances of heterosexuality created by the culture, Queer theory seeks to locate Queerness in places that had previously been thought of as strictly for the straights".
>
> (Burston & Richardson, 2005, p.121)

Burston and Richardson offer a timely reminder as to the importance of the burgeoning re-appropriation of cultural artifacts through a queer lens. To further advance this investigation, the introduction to the specific methodological frameworks used by many scholars of pop music to explore these intersections and which will be utilised by this study is also necessary. The next section begins this process.

II.C.6. Discourse Analysis

How can a queer way, or 'being queer on a track' be explained?

-Doris Leibetseder, Queer Tracks: *Subversive Strategies in Rock and Pop Music*.

'Who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect.'

-Harold Laswell, *The Structure and Function of Communication in Society*.

The above quotes can be elucidated as posing both a question integral to this study's core, and, in Laswell's definition of communications, a suitably unadorned riposte. Laswell is best known for his foundational involvement in the development of Content Analysis, one of the earliest and most frequently employed forms of media investigation. Originating as a system of measuring the effectiveness of political propaganda (McNamara, 2005), the model has been long utilised as a methodical way of studying mass media (Harwood and Garry, 2003).

Described as "[…] a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communications" (Berelson, 1952, p.18), pop music charts represent a heuristic framework for gathering statistics and capturing trends. However, despite its longstanding and ubiquitous use as a research tool, various scholars have illustrated shortcomings (Markoff, Shapiro & Weitman (1974)); Billing (1998) in the model. Content Analysis prohibits any exploration of the complex relationship between interpretation and the intricacies of language, and it has been argued that this can lead to inaccurate and slanted results (Franzoni, 1989). Criticisms garnered in the latter years of the twentieth century are also indicative of an overall shift, as media related research moves "from empiricism to discourse" (Devereux, 2000, p.194), resulting in the growth of more sophisticated mixed method models, influenced by semiotics, narrative, and Discourse Analysis.

Due to the broad scope and extent of this research, the nature of the artifacts under scrutiny and its consistent application as a methodology when undertaking research into the media (Brady, 2006; Tietchen, 2000), Discourse Analysis forms a primary research function in this study, complimented by the application of queer theory. The structural combination of the two is particularly apt for elicitation of coded messages (Davis, 1998), which will be shown to have proliferated during the decade.

Discourse Analysis has been described as "[…] the study of social life, understood through analysis of language in its widest sense including face-to-face talk, non-verbal interaction, images, symbols and documents" (Potter and Wetherall, 1987 p.21). Etymologists propose that the word 'discourse' can be traced back as far as the 14th century, deriving from a Latin source, whereby the word translates as a 'conversation' (McArthur, 1996). Many definitions exist, but simply put "[a] discourse is a conglomeration of ideas and practices that define specific properties relating to the way a society sees itself" (Hawkins, 2016, p.35).

Commonly applied to a study a wide variety of communications, Snape & Spencer (2003) are among the scholars who have traced the origins of Discourse Analysis from a sociological foundation to examine the way "[…] knowledge is produced within different discourses and the performances, linguistic styles and rhetorical devices used in particular accounts" (p.200). With many mass media forms offering a bewildering palette of artifacts to choose from, and in light of the complexity of the possible configurations of analysis, scholars have also accommodatingly catergorised three specific levels of analysis, summarised as follows:

1. The vocabulary of the text or artifact, its use of grammar, metaphor, structure and rhetoric, symbolism etc.
2. How the text assimilates or defies particular existing practise or discourses.
3. Exploration of the wider systems and social practise of which the text of artifact can be attributed to.

(Fairclough, 2013)

In acknowledging far more than just the event of patterns or themes in lyrics or images, such evaluations have helped Discourse Analysis earn its reputation as a favoured methodology for pop music scholars.

II.C. 7. Charting the Charts: Discourse Analysis and Pop Music

Scholars of pop music have routinely utilised Discourse Analysis techniques and models and applied them to the study of pop music. It has been suggested that such discourse theories employed can be categorised in three ways, matching numerically the categorisations of Discourse Analysis itself. Compromising of "The study of song lyrics as performed language; the description of discourses on or about music; and the analysis of music as discourse" (Bradby, 2003 P. 67), numerous examples of studies devoted to each exist, with many utilising two or more of the approaches together. As exemplified by this study, it is also common for scholars to adopt a mixed methodology approach to research pertaining to cultural artifacts.

The practice has been employed to construct investigations into a diverse spread of artists, from Lady Gaga (Abrahamson, 2011) and Eminem (Abain, 2016), to Madonna (Brady, 2006) and Public Enemy (Tietchen, 2000). Beyond studies with a singular performer as their focus, Discourse Analysis has been used for investigations broader in their scope. Hibbert

(1996) for example, explores aspects of ‘indie rock’, exploring how performers attempt to convey authenticity, a value closely associated with the genre. Auslander expands on this theme, his work examining the medium of the rock concert, with live performance being another value associated with authenticity (1998). Machin concurs, citing the quest to appear authentic as one of the core existing discourses in pop music (2010). His research not only confirms the aforementioned quest for legitimacy, but also suggests that this is just one of many other dialogues frequently at play in pop music. Such dialogues, as alluded to by Machin, are of evidently of interest to this research project’s mission of enacting Discourse Analysis to explore queer pop artifacts. He leaves the reader in no doubt as to the significant impact of such dialogues in shaping “[...] the way we think about ourselves...these discourses that tell us that a boyband does not produce music from the heart, whereas a blues artist does” (Machin, 2010, p.13). Importantly, Machin’s concept also partly explains the past paucity of acknowledgement regarding the extent of prominent queerness in pop of the 1980s. As such, Machin’s theory is revisited throughout this research.

Alvaro (2017) utilises the methodology for an equally niche although revealing study, exploring the trajectory of usage of the word ‘love’ in pop music. The role pop plays in the cultural construction of female teenagers is dissected by Ward (1998), while Bannister (2006) offers an exploration of rock’s influence in the identity formation of teenage boys, both studies are also underpinned by a Discourse Analysis framework. As evidenced, the adoption of Discourse Analysis techniques is commonly employed in the study of pop music. However, it is also necessary to draw attention to some of the other constructs which are used to understand media communications, and as such are worthy of consideration. In addition to offering a further understanding to the guiding principles of Discourse-related techniques, they are also of relevance to this study and are presented in the next section.

II.C.8. Semiotics, Multi-Modality and the application of Discourse Analysis in this work

It would be negligent to present an overview of Discourse Analysis without referencing the field of semiotics, as it is a vital component to understanding the employment of Discourse Analysis techniques, especially when analysing media artifacts. The study of signs and symbols, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) is often attributed as the pioneer of linguistic semiotics (Albertazzi and Cobley, 2010). His thinking was that each word, sentence or indeed

utterance could be classed either as a 'signifier', or the 'signified', the former representing the format, and the latter representing the concept of the meaning (*in* Holdcroft, 1991).

Reminding us that "[…] all thinking is dialogic in form" (1998, p.23), philosopher and logician Charles Sanders-Peirce introduced an additional facet in his subsequent work, on the taxonomies of signs. His work is grounded in pragmatism and has drawn comparison with that of Saussure's hypothesis in its first two elements; representment and interpretant (Silverman, 1983; Chandler, 1984). However, Sanders-Peirce's introduction of a third component, *the object – i.e.,* to which the sign refers to, extends Saussure's hypothesis into triadic form. For this study, Saussure's positioning of a sign's content and possible effect bears relevance, presenting as it does the possibility of the existence of oblique intentions in signs. Peirce's perspective, concerned as it is with coded signifiers as much as the explicit, is also relevant.

Pop generates a multiplicity of signs and significations, whether heard, written, seen or performed. Although song lyrics will represent a proportion of the artifacts scrutinized in this research, the sum of products proposed for discussion is broader, encompassing music video, record sleeve artwork, and other by-products of pop music. As Machin (2010) notes:

> Artists tell us about themselves, about who they are, their meaning as an act, and as how to read their music, not just through the sounds they make but also through how they look and move, through the photographs in which we see them, and the artwork they use pop record sleeves.
>
> (Machin, 2010, p. 32)

As observed, artists utilise different forms to communicate to their audience. Beyond the primary product of the song, there is also existing academic evidence to suggest that discourse methodologies can also be applied to these different forms. Pop music's proven suitability to a Discourse Analysis is enhanced by its recognition of pop as a multimodal form of communication. We are reminded that "Lyric, sound, and packaging work separately, but together have a combined effect" by Walker (2018, p. 188). Such is the appreciation of Machin's method of analysis for such materials, it has been described as a toolkit: "[…] for systematically describing and analysing the visual language of pop music" (*ibid*, p.32) and is central to exploration of non-lyrical artifacts in this study.

Exploring the various different facets of pop product, including text, sounds and images "[…] all of which contribute to articulating ideological discourses in society (McKerrel & Way, 2017, p.211) is a logical extension to this research. In viewing pop as a multi-modal cultural entity, this investigation will benefit from exploration across numerous platforms in which artists have conveyed a queer message or subtext. Queer ideologies or meaning will be shown to be present across the various artifacts. The aforementioned study notes:

> Approaching music as multimodal discourse is a relatively recent innovation which is informed by various disciplinary perspectives but is also embedded within CDA which views music as a part of communication often embedded within a variety of modes used to articulate ideology.
>
> (McKerrel & Way, 2017, p.212).

As such, Discourse Analysis with a multi-modal approach offers license for the effective exploration of pop music and its associated by-products. The application of a multi-modal Discourse Analysis will be crucially augmented by utilisation of the queer framework described in the previous Chapter. Echoes of the methodology's characteristics can be found in the queer model, with both concerned with the complexity and nuances of interpretation and meaning; and how these may be extended to aspects of sexuality (Giffney, 2009).

Emerging from discourse-based origins, the field of Queer Linguistics shares a focus with that of queer theory, both concerned as they are with "[…] the disruption of gender binarism and heteronormativity (Motschenbacher and Stegu, 2013, p.522). Here, its use will specifically aid the investigation of lyrical texts from the 1980s. "Individual desires encompass gestures, grammars, frictions, and intensities that amass shared meanings over time but are not *limited* to those meanings", notes Davis (2012, p.18), offering articulation of the rationale underpinning the need to imbed queer theory as a vital scaffold upon which to convey the research argument. In emphasising once again, how "[…] subcultural and often gender-related codes play a crucial role in the process of 'decoding' lesbian and gay culture", Taylor (2012, p. 63) offers a final reminder of the value of locating this study between aspects of queer theory and the foundational approach upon which Discourse Analysis is based. Both approaches intersect productively in this project's ambition to assemble a queerly authentic chronicle of 1980s pop. As such, the foundational thread offered by combining Queer theory and Discourse Analysis will be utilised throughout the rest of this research, running concurrently and complementing each other's application.

II. D. Synthesis

The emphasis in this Chapter was to investigate and report on how the worlds of pop music and queer sexuality have intersected. Adopting a structure similar to the previous Chapter, the content offered a chronological thematic review of the existing discourses and studies which have enhanced our understanding of aspects of pop; both its intrinsic and explicit relationship to sexuality in general, and its historically less visible, but none the less continuous liaisons with queer communities. Pop's relationship to sexuality was illustrated as convoluted at best, its trajectory shown to have been steadily accompanied by attempts to inhibit, regulate or control expressions of sex and sexuality. The form was shown to have been prodigiously normative, especially in the decades of its inception, when expressions of gender were starkly delineated, and countenances of queer were entirely invisible.

Advancing on the foundations laid by Bowie and glam rock, the emergence of explicitly non-heteronormative artists was shown to have proliferated in the decade. Genres such as Synth-pop, alongside burgeoning youth tribes like the New Romantics, would shape the sounds and styles of the 1980s. Their ethos was seemingly even more inclusive and embracing of alternative sexualities than the 1970s pop transgressors from whom they took their inspiration.

The Chapter then considered the functions specifically attributed to pop music and its facilitative role in both individual and community queer identity developments. This section offered a robust reflection on the various existing interpretations as to why this particular popular cultural medium so often plays a significant part in many queer lives. The importance of representation, as derived from disciplines of media studies, was also introduced. Media was shown to play a crucial role in facilitating access to queer reference points, although unfortunately, despite the illustrated allegiances to many forms of pop culture, too often representations of queer communities have been flawed at best.

As units of analysis, lyrics offer a primary measurable artifact in many studies of pop music. As such, models employed for such investigations were introduced in the following section. However, the Chapter also importantly illustrated how the methodology chosen for this study, Discourse Analysis, can be applied to other pop related outputs, such as visuals, record artwork and music videos. The methodology was shown to share similarities with the field of Semiotics, specifically in the belief that language is 'signed' and that meaning can exist

beyond the literal, in interpretation. Discourse Analysis's acknowledgement of pop as a broad multi-modal entity was considered, and a number of studies underpinned by the methodology were presented as supporting evidence of its suitability as a tool for enhancing investigations into pop. Finally, evidence as to its suitability as a methodological tool to be underpinned by a queer framework was presented.

The Chapter also introduced the enduring legacy and queer connections inherent in disco and punk, which alongside glam rock, ushered in previously invisible new representations of gender and sexualities. These connections are explored more, in the next Chapter - its focus being on the re-appraisal of a much maligned and often ignored genre, Hi-Nrg. Adhering to Discourse Analysis techniques and applying the queer criteria framework outlined in the previous Chapter, the impact of the genre on the decade's musical landscape will be presented.

As detailed academic investigations into pop and queer theory have been shown to be still lacking (Leibetseder, 2012), illustrating Hi-Nrg's history and its pervasive effect on 1980s pop music will progress both the overall research goal of this study and help to affirm the genre's importance in the queering of the decade.

Chapter III: HI-Nrg: Affirming A Subversive History of Queer Desire

> The worst part of being gay in the late twentieth century is all that damn disco music to which one has to listen.
>
> -Quentin Crisp, *The Penguin Dictionary of Modern Human Quotations*, 2001.

This Chapter aims to establish and convey the magnitude of influence, which a relatively uncharted subgenre of disco, would come to exert over the pop music landscape of the 1980s. From its unflinchingly overt representations of queer sexualities, to the less explicit, yet abundant manifestations of coded, sexualized reference points, the genre is presented as pioneering in reach and content.

Artifacts are subject throughout to analysis under the frameworks of queer theory and Discourse Analysis, to ensure the adherence to the methodological tools introduced in Chapters I and II. Song lyrics and titles are dissected, along with exploration of the aesthetics utilised by a number of Hi-Nrg artists in their performativity. The ubiquitous use of queer idioms and imagery will be shown to have imbued the genre with a pioneeringly explicit queer sensibility. Appraisal of such representations are extensively portrayed, encompassing not just the scope and extent to which this resolutely queer sub-culture would influence the decade's pop music, but also its inherently queer attributes. Perhaps more so than any thematic milieu presented throughout this study, the task of extricating a queer influence is easily facilitated, such is the genre's acknowledged function at its peak, as a heretofore unheard personification of queer desire (Abbot, 2017). The status attained by the genre; acknowledged by both queer communities and external commentators and scholars alike, as being a uniquely 'gay genre', is also presented and explored and further enhances the argument.

Despite its predominance as an influential musical style, Hi-Nrg will also be shown to have been commonly under-acknowledged, left conspicuously absent from many rock and pop histories of the time. As such, affirming the genus's accurate place in the decade under review constitutes an important part of this study. The next section commences with an exploration of the genre's genesis, emerging as a remnant of the disco boom of the 1970s.

III.A. The Disco Ball Cracks

III.A.1. Assimilation and Decline.

> "Travolta – travoltar to travolt, travoltice, travoltage – to describe the condition of disco fever"[5]
>
> -Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture*, 2010.

By the late 1970s, the disco sound continued to saturate the pop landscape, while the music and aesthetics associated with the genre embedded itself further into wider pop culture (Dyer, 1979; Echols, 2010). As the decade entered its twilight period, the form's continued penetration of the mainstream would see an increasing number of artists, who, while not traditionally associated with the form, would adopt disco as a style. Artists as unlikely as Dolly Parton and Rod Stewart, best known respectively for their country & western and rock stylings, would embrace the trend as it continued its sojourn of annexation (Abjorensen, 2017).

The paradigmatic harnessing of disco by The Bee Gees had seen them attain levels of success exceeding previous career highs and was noted by many artists hoping to replicate such commercial triumphs. The group's soundtrack to the film *Saturday Night Fever* would become the world-wide best-selling album of 1978 and would remain the best-selling album world-wide until toppled by Michael Jackson in the 1980s (Withburn, 1993, *in* McLeod, 1996, p.349). Eventually it became eponymous with the genre of disco, earning induction into the United States National Recording Registry in 1987, on the basis of its cultural significance (Richards, 2014). The effect on this mainstreaming of disco in relation to its constituent queer and or non-white audience has been examined. For some, their success was evidence of a significant shift:

> The Bee Gee's success coincided with a shift in perception of the discotheque's function. It was no longer an arena for subverting society's sexual mores, and breaking taboos, but proof that one was inside the mainstream – or in selected circles, within the social elite.
>
> (Doggett, 2015, p.475).

[5] Echols (2010, p.200) offers an example of disco's cultural reach; a neologism emerging from Portuguese-Brazilian slang, named after John Travolta, star of disco-themed motion picture, Saturday Night Fever.

Other scholars have concurred with this viewpoint, citing the movie soundtrack as a landmark, "[…] marking the beginning of the 'popularization' of disco by repressing its black and homosexual origins" (Maitra, 2011, p.275-276). As has been explored in previous Chapters, before its mass cultural adoption, the genre's cultural influence in reconfiguring the pop landscape, while affording space to lesser-heard voices, has been well established. For example, Mankowski (2010), notes how for women the genre had "[…] put forth a range of sexual personas that worked within a feminism increasingly mediated by popular culture and allowed non-movement women to explore sexual freedom while retaining respectability and emotional attachments, if they so chose" (p.4). In the same study, the author testifies as to how disco "[…] threatened and reshaped dominant modes of masculinity while opening avenues for the demonstration and (limited) acceptance of gay pleasure and style" (p.121).

Others would continue to uphold a defence of the genre and its innate transgressive abilities. For these, it remained a genre tightly associated with subverting heteronormativity and/or the expression of non-white intonations. Among the most lauded (Kooijman, 2005; Duffet, 2011) is Dyer's 1979 essay, *In Defence of Disco.* Within, Dyer categorised rock music as being incessantly phallic-centric in its espousal and expression of male, heterosexual desire and the control of sexuality. Conversely, he argues that even in its mainstreamed form, disco had continued to enable more inclusive sexual expressions, and therefore spoke to audiences hungry for an alternative. Additionally, he nominates 'discos'; the very club spaces which grew out of the genre's popularity, as being emblematic of the shift from a preoccupation with purely heterosexual desires. However, despite such impassioned defence, disco's pervasive reign over popular culture would begin to provoke a negative reaction.

III.A.2. "(Burn, Baby, Burn) Disco Inferno": The death of disco?

The most notorious example of the mounting backlash, the infamous "Disco Demolition" night, was held in Chicago in 1979 (Greenberg, 2019; Mankowski, 2010). Analysis of the inception and execution of the event, and of the voluminous subsequent analyses it attracted, reveals its further value as an example, touching as it does on many of the cultural, often sexual, converses at play in pop music.

Promoted extensively on local radio, a buoyed crowd of an estimated 70,000 had been invited to bring disco records to be destroyed after a baseball match. Records were hauled onto the playing field and literally blown up, in what had been chiefly devised as a way to promote ticket sales for the stadium but has since gained almost mythological status as a turning point for disco. The event itself would descend into a riot (*ibid*, 2010). The cultural connotations underpinning the night and the subsequent similar events staged across the United States in the following months, have since been comprehensively scrutinised.

While disco had become omnipresent in mainstream culture, many have argued that the underlying rationale for the level of venom directed at its success was because of its specific role in affording its audience new ways of expressing gender or sexuality. Rock music had been deeply challenged by disco and the backlash against it was as much about reinforcing the rigidly heterosexual and mainly white, representations of rock (Mankowski, 2010). Gillen (2007) offers a particularly compelling investigation into the phenomenon of the backlash, leaving the reader in no doubt as to the manifestly anti-queer sentiment behind it:

The Disco Demolition events offer a lens with which to view the complex ways in which antigay prejudice, fears of shifting gender roles, and concerns over heterosocial spaces came to be articulated nationally through popular culture (Gillen, 2007, p.276). Furthermore, his analysis reveals how "[…] an acute antigay prejudice was used to stigmatise disco and in turn instigated the genre's rapid decline even as disco-phobia reflected and furthered antigay prejudice" (p.279). Damningly, scholars have observed parallels between the demolition event, with that of the infamous Nazi book burnings (Morrison, 2020, p28). Conversely, the episode's initiators have always resolutely distanced themselves from any such intentions in their staging of the event, with their own oral history (Dahl, Hoekstra & Natkin, 2016) claiming their motivation to be based instead on a reaction to their perception that rock was becoming marginalised. However, regardless of the motivation or outcomes, it was clear that disco was beginning to falter, its omnipresence across numerous cultural platforms provoking negative reaction. Simultaneously, the genre also began to suffer a commercial decline. Between 1979 and 1980, a number of disco orientated record labels closed; and the number of disco records charting dropped significantly, almost overnight. Greenberg (2019), for example, utilises the American charts of 1979 to illustrate just how swift the decline was, noting how on July 21st the six best-selling records were all disco-orientated, but by time of publication of the September 21st charts, there remained just one disco song in the entire top ten.

III.A. 3. Pioneers or Pariahs? The Village People's Indelible Pop Boot-Print

Such was the strength of disco's association with subversive sexualities, that queer anomalies could readily find success using the genre as a springboard. Most worthy of mention are The Village People, whose act also represented queer coding at its least subtle. Starting out as an openly gay band in the 1970s (Midgley, 2014), was an anomaly in itself. Under the Svengali-like control of Jacques Morali, who studied music at the renowned *Conservatoire de Paris* for over 10 years, The Village People's songs were disco in their style, and laden with lyrics which referenced the 1970s urban gay experience 1970s (Aston, 2016; Napier-Bell, 2001). Even the group's name, a reference to Greenwich village of 1970s New York - was long established as a focal point for the burgeoning gay community (Loughrey, 1988), conveyed an early intention to conjure an association. The group's repertoire contained numerous paeans eulogising the emerging urban landscapes wherein gay communities where beginning to take form, in songs such as "San Francisco (You've Got Me)" and "Go West". Accompanied by lyrics which name-checked well-known gay bars such as *Fire Island*, and which were imbued with colloquial gay linguistic terms, such as with the song "Cruising", the material was brim-full of homoerotic content and reference points.

Morali had only belatedly auditioned most of the group in response to an increasing number of requests for live shows from the gay night-clubs where his tracks had already become staples, indicating how his original vision of "[…] a gay vocal troupe" (Aston, 2016, p.291) was envisaged primarily to occupy a gay audience. The Village People's image further accentuated their origins and gay association, with each member adopting an image, borrowed undiluted, from popular gay club culture and/or gay pornography of the time (Kirk, 1999). These explicitly queer sartorial reference points; the leather clone; the construction worker; the traffic cop, were recognised immediately by their intended target market. Despite the "[…] open secret" (Buckland, 2012, p.69), for most of their new-found mainstream audience, such imagery, along with lyric's laden with same-sex reference points, were received without any notion of their queer origins (Midgely, 2014).

It is difficult to look back at the lyrics and aesthetics employed by the group and comprehend how such imagery escaped or evaded the attention of the mainstream audience who took the band's heterosexuality for granted. De Saussure's hypothesis (*in* Albertazzi and

Cobley, 2010), that words serve as mere indicators, with little actual relation to what they were designed to symbolise, is crucial to understanding why this appears to have been the case. As has been noted, within weeks of the release of their most notorious success, "Y.M.C.A.":

> Without a clue of what the song was about, the whole of America was copying. Every small-town club, every bar, every church hall, could be heard thumping out a mini version of the decadence that had once been only found at the Sanctuary in New York…(as) gays around the world laughed at America's blindness.
>
> (Napier-Bell, 2001, p.216)

"Y.M.C.A" has since become imbedded in popular culture, and to a lesser degree its follow-up, "Go West". While they provide scintillating examples of coding at its most literal, the group soon began to try to diminish any hint of queer inclination (Chilton, 2020). Echols (2010) suggests the group hold a pivotal place in queer readings of rock and pop histories, as "[…] the first gay-to-straight crossover group" (p.138). Yet, despite disillusioning a queer community still bereft of 'out' role models (Midgley, 2004), the group's success provided a first, clear indication of how aesthetically and sonically, explicitly queer imagery and themes had the ability to exist and thrive outside of the sub-culture they were derived from.

Of course, many pop acts of the 1980s would thrive on a similarly queer-inflected content, albeit delivered in sometimes subtler ways than The Village People had displayed in their early career. However inadvertently, their subsequent and emphatic denial of any queer resonance in their output may also be viewed as an example of sorts. As pop stars of the 1980s increasingly proffered queer-rooted aesthetics and lyrics in their offerings, they would find themselves having to navigate a thin line. As their work was laid open for interpretation as being queer, the prevailing message from the conservative music industry remained one of trepidation, in relation to the explicit disclosure of homo or queer sexualities (Kirk, 1999; Sanderson, 1995). Set against the backdrop of socially conservative media and government, especially in the major pop producing markets of the UK and USA, it is evident to see why many artists, in spite of their work, often chose to adopt at best ambiguous responses in relation to questions of sexual identity. In this sense it may be argued that The Village People provided a valuable blueprint, for what would often be a precarious balancing act. While further exploration of the theme, and its effect on queer 1980s pop is discussed in Chapter V of this study, credit must be reserved for The Village People, for their pioneering role. Despite

attempting to distance themselves from the very cultural origins of which they were descended, their place in the history of any queer analysis of pop music remains assured.

There was no doubt that by the end of the 1970s the form had reached something of a saturation point, increasingly falling out of favour with audiences, critics, and most importantly for the industry, consumers. However, the genre would survive, in many shapes and forms, in many ways its ‘death’ an exaggeration (Greenberg, 2019; Rob, 2016). Artist Gloria Gaynor, forever aligned with the genre (Hubbs, 2007) observes, “[d]isco music is alive and well and living in the hearts of music-lovers around the world. It simply changed its name to protect the innocent: Dance music” (*in* Robinson, 2010, p. 51). Disco’s enduring cultural impact has been well evidenced, and its place as a soundtrack which enabled new representations and voices, many of which are cited in this study, are well documented (Echols, 2010; Maitra, 2011).

In terms of its musical legacy, a number of genres would emerge in its wake and these descendants would be imbued with much of the ethos and execution methodologies pioneered during the second half of the 1970s (Buckland, 2010). The next section focuses on the emergence of a musical style which would epitomise the queer experience more than any other before it - Hi-Nrg. The heretofore instrumental, yet primarily invisible role played by queers in pop would be changed irrevocably as a result of the genre. Its origins and rise to such an exalted positioning among queer communities, is presented as follows.

III.B. Birth of a Genre

III.B.1. The Origins, Etymology and Quiet Discourse of a Queer Pop Revolution

> Although disco was dead as a mass phenomenon, the gays hadn’t stopped dancing yet.
>
> -Richard Smith, Introduction, *A Boy Called Mary*, 1999.

As The Village People were enjoying world-wide success whilst simultaneously attempting to detach themselves from queer culture, the commandeering of disco into the mainstream had continued. In the United States, two DJ/Producers/Promoters, Bobby Orlando and Patrick Cowley, were separately carving out careers in the urban gay clubs on opposite

coasts. Due to its multitudinous nature, scholars have noted a difficulty in attributing dance music to any individual, noting how "[…] it is virtually impossible to pinpoint the original creative source" (Laski, 1993, p.127). However, both Cowley and Orlando would come to share the accreditation as having laid the foundations of the Hi-Nrg sound (Kirk 1999; Waterman, 2000), and while neither would hugely benefit from its eventual domination of UK and US pop charts in the mid to late 1980s, their influence and championing of the genre is indisputable.

Despite criticisms to the contrary, disco had progressed stylistically during its ascent, "[…] from its funk-orientated origins in underground clubs and private parties, into a more upscale, sophisticated sound associated with the smooth consonances of Philadelphia Soul and heavily produced orchestral music" (McLeod, 2006, p.348). As it continued its evolution into a mass cultural medium, Cowley and Orlando would begin to adapt and re-work aspects of the genre's core stylistic trademarks, commonly increasing its tempo, and introducing other characteristics which would come to define the Hi-Nrg genre.

In terms of the genre's etymology, there is a general consensus that as a term, 'Hi-Nrg' was adopted on foot of artist Donna Summer describing her hit song, "I Feel Love", as having "[…] a high energy vibe" (Jones and Kantonen, 1999; Shapiro & lee, 2000). Produced by Giorgio Moroder, himself cited as a "godfather of disco" and a forefather of the Hi-Nrg sound (Nika, 2015; Vivarelli, 2016), it was Cowley's seminal 15-minute mix of the song which "[…] established him as an electronic visionary who could seemingly do anything with a home studio" (Bieschke, 2019, p. 23). With Donna Summer's previous hit, "Love to Love You, Baby", Moroder had introduced the concept of one track extending over the entire side of a twelve-inch vinyl recording (Baumgartel, 2013).

While Cowley identified as gay, Bobby Orlando's role in Hi-Nrg's development was perhaps less obvious, given his seemingly overtly hostile attitude to homosexuality. Introduced by author and poet Dennis Cooper as "[…] a hyper-macho, incredibly cocky, rampantly homophobic ex-boxer who made gay disco" (2020), Cooper's informative essay on Orlando explores the idiosyncrasies of the hugely prolific producer/artist. Chronicling his devout Catholicism, including his authorship of a book on creationism; alongside noting the repeated termination of his business relationships with artists, as a result of offering to help cure their homosexuality, Orlando cuts a complex character. All the while producing songs which, in the

main, were “brazen odes to sex and partying” (*ibid*, 2020), this seemingly contradictory stance does little to detract from his role as a pioneer of the form.

Despite these differences, both producers shared a similar approach in relation to many aspects of the execution of the records they oversaw. Scholars have noted how both men were exemplary specimens of a new breed of multi-functioning musical entrepreneurs:

> The early 1980s were a period in which the lines between studio producers, engineers, songwriters and disk-jockeys became increasingly fuzzy. Many DJ's, in addition to spinning records at clubs, ventured into dance music production, bringing many of the workplace concepts and techniques into the recording studio.
> (Fikentscher, 1991, p. 10).

That the period coincided with the advent of Hi-Nrg is perhaps no coincidence, and the development of the genre itself. Walters has confirmed the degree to which Hi-Nrg was a form of grassroots culture, emerging out of necessity: “While major record companies scrambled to drop the disco acts they had ravenously signed up, plenty of small independent labels run by gay folk sprang up to meet the demands for up-tempo dance records in their own communities” (1996, p.72).

Both Cowley & Orlando commonly featured as vocalists on their own records, which were further typified by syncopated bass, synthesisers and the four-on-the-floor beats. Although the style was clearly derived from disco (Fritz, 1999), in a major departure to what had come before, both producer’s records sped up the traditional disco sound, establishing something altogether more frenzied. The tempo of these records, paced at least 120 BPM (Beats per minute), and most typically at 127 BPM (Buckland, 2010) produced a dramatically urgent sounding style, which when not sung by the producer’s themselves under the guise of a host of aliases, were commonly often delivered by black, female vocalists. (Abbot, 2017).

Hi-Nrg lyrics were frequently sexually suggestive lyrically and commonly involved overt glorifications of the male body. A variety of idioms and constructs relating to the experience of urban, gay America, itself growing rapidly in cities across the country (Bell & Binnie, 2004), were commonly referenced in song titles and lyrics. These, along with the relevance as to additional characteristics of the aural landscapes created by both, are given due consideration in the following section.

Cowley's success came earlier, as by the late 1970s he had helmed recordings which had crossed over to enjoy mainstream chart placings. One of his earliest hits, "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)", was sung by Sylvester, an unapologetically queer, black artist (Gamson, 2005) who would later be included in the 'gender bender' phenomenon. The song has been described as "genre defining" (Shapiro, 2005, p.74). While Orlando accrued some chart success, somewhat perplexedly in the Benelux countries in particular (Shapiro, 2005, p.71), it would take a few years later before he would attain acknowledgment as a founding father of the genre. However, later his Hi-Nrg productions for acts such as Divine, and The Pet Shop Boys, would chart world-wide (Jay, 1995; Smith, 1995) ensuring additional recognition.
Scholars have suggested that Cowley's legacy was impacted by his exploration that of sexual realms within dance music, "[…] in particular, the homosexual ones, probably contributed to his relative obscurity" (Marke, 2019, p.23). However, in recent years there has been a more robust re-appraisal of his legacy, as with that of his genre founding contemporary, Orlando (Lefebvre, 2016).

Both in its audible stylistic modifications to that of disco, and in terms of the lyrical themes and qualities utilised by the genre, Hi-Nrg was, by the end of the 1970s, replacing its predecessor as the perpetual soundtrack of gay nightlife (Kirk, 1999). As the genre progressed into the emerging decade, it began to develop additional characteristics which further distinguished it from its original lineage. European influences, from gay nightclubs of Spain, Germany, Italy and France, began to gather momentum and further broaden the genre's scope (Kureishi, 1995; Kirk, 1999). Even by the aforementioned notoriously multitudinous standards of dance music categorisation, Hi-Nrg's course would see it overlap with several other categorisations and labels. As with pop music itself, Hi-Nrg's exact classifications are fluid.

For example, the term Eurobeat was coined originally to describe Hi-Nrg style records which began to emanate from the English club scene, courtesy of producers such as Ian Levine. Levine's output, producing tracks such as "So Many Men, So Little Time", continued the genre's burgeoning lyrical tradition for innuendo-laden, camp lyrical themes, a premise explored further later in this Chapter. His 1982 produced hit, fronted by Evelyn Thomas, would use the genre's name as its title, "High Energy" (Laski, in Miller, 1993; Rimmer 1984, p. 12.). In Italy, the term Italo Disco was used to describe the flourishing Hi-Nrg scene there, commonly characterised by native Italian artists singing Hi-Nrg songs in English. This format was soon repeated in other countries, with French, Spanish and German artists following suit

(Krettenauer, 2016). Just to compound the complexity, an additional idiom; Euro-Disco, has often been used interchangeably to describe Hi-Nrg, Eurobeat and Italo Disco, and as an umbrella term for all three. However, Euro Disco is also commonly and mistakenly used to describe a trend first identified in the 1980s among music critics, whereby English tourists, having heard a song played in resorts across Europe, would seek out and purchase the record on their return home.

Perhaps more accurate a term, 'Package holiday disco' (Frith, p.168 *in* Ang & Morely, 2005), resulted in some unlikely records charting during this period, which were also often 'one hit wonders', to boot. A slightly patronising attitude among consumers, to the very 'package holiday' records they had purchased, is noted by Frith, describing how "[…] British club audiences took delight in the very gap between the grand gestures of Eurosingers and the vacuity of their songs" (p.170). But for all of the associations, while some of these records, as Frith explains, were similar to Hi-Nrg, with "[…] a bouncy beat, just one chorus hook and elementary lyrics" (p.171), to equate the two as the same is incorrect.

A final linguistic convolution comes with the term boys-town, which was also used to describe Hi-Nrg albeit mainly in the United States and Canada (Brewster & Broughton, 2006). Borrowed from the name of a suburb in Chicago, Illinois, where the queer community had coalesced in the early 1970s to create one of the first 'gay villages' (Baim, 2008), the term would be increasingly replicated and used to describe similar urban development and migration patterns occurring across cities of the United States (Dechauncery, 2002). Such was its association with homosexuality, that the name would subsequently be adapted by San Francisco band, Boystown Gang whose fleet of early 1980's releases were some of the earliest Hi-Nrg songs to chart, faring particularly well across Europe (Roberts, 2006).

Evidence of the interchangeability of these terms can be elucidated by an example from the pages of English Pop magazine, *Record Mirror*. Recognising the surge in songs produced in the Hi-Nrg musical style, the publication launched the first 'gay chart' in 1982. The chart ran in the magazine until 1988, although its original name was changed a number of times, to 'Boys Town Disco' chart; then the 'Hi-Nrg chart'; and by the time of its demise, the 'Eurobeat chart' (Rollo, 2019).

For all the semantic intricacy surrounding the genre and its descriptors, the characteristics of Eurobeat, Italo Disco, Boystown and their associated recordings share more than enough in common for inclusion under the Hi-Nrg genre, an approach mirrored by this study. As the decade continued, the rise of Hi-Nrg was also coincidentally abetted by what scholars have since illustrated to be a seismic revolution in musical styles, occurring in 1983. In their exhaustive study of over 17,000 pop music recordings, Leroi, Levi, Mauch & Macallum, (2015) illustrate this musical shift as being the second of three such transferences which have occurred in pop's short history, the others arriving in 1964 and 1991, respectively. Their much-publicised work (Morelle, 2015), the lofty aim of which the author's describe as being "[…] to investigate the evolution of popular tastes", cites the 1983 shift as having been enabled by the new suite of technologies available, such as synthesisers and drum machines. Producer Phil Harding (2010) retraces the impact of this revolution, noting the significant advances brought about in recording abilities, along with detailing how these enhanced the Hi-Nrg sound.

While the addition of a weekly Hi-Nrg Chart in British publication *Record Mirror*[6] would signify some recognition of the genre, it would fall to an unlikely source to dismantle what seemed a profound silence in relation to Hi-Nrg's advancement, on the part of the music press. The rise, and significant influence, of weekly pop publications has been documented by scholars (Toynbee, 1993), and by 1983 the most successful exponent of format, English publication, *Smash Hits!* proclaimed Hi-Nrg as "the sound of 1984" (Rimmer, 1984, *in* Elliot, 2016, p.14). Tellingly, even in these relatively early days of its genre's genesis, the piece demonstrates a reluctance on the part of industry stakeholders, to confirm the genre's queer associations. Of the various producers, music executives and artists interviewed, one strongly attests that the genre cannot be viewed as 'gay', even when probed on the nature of its homoerotically infused lyrics.

Proffered with the example of the then recent hit, "So Many Men, So Little Time", "[…] a record with a chorus of blokes singing '5, 10, fifteen, twenty'" (*ibid,* 2016), the author notes how during the interviewee's defence, "[…] a coy smile breaks out across his face" (*ibid, 2016*). Evidently, such acknowledgment was deemed still too risky a strategy. Despite this, the

[6] American music publication *Dance Music Report* would follow suit in 1984, with their own chart.

article is explicit that the origins and success enjoyed by the genre thus far were of a resolutely queer nature, and that for many, Hi-Nrg was 'gay music'.

However, aside from these examples the genre's growth drew negligible attention from the 'serious' music press of the time (Burns, 2009). Normally competitively keen to spotlight a new trend, whether the dearth of attention is due to the "[…] shackles of dance snobbery" (Atkinson, 2010), or a more sinister reluctance among rock and indie-centric magazines is uncertain, but it is clear the music style's ascent was neither acknowledged, nor endorsed by the mainstream music press. A beacon came in the form of Kris Kirk, whose contributions are discussed in the previous Chapter. In 1987, Kirk would eventually manage to oversee the production of a gay-themed issue of UK weekly pop and rock paper, *Sounds*, quite a coup considering that the publication's reputation for championing heavy metal and punk bands (Tucker, 2006).

Unfortunately, both academic and encyclopaedic works of the time are also commonly bereft of any mention of Hi-Nrg, seemingly oblivious to the genre. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that by well into the 1990s, pop and rock criticism was still finding ways to omit disco, whose cultural capital has been shown to have extended way beyond its underground origins. Charlton's *Rock Music Styles* (1994), despite its otherwise meticulous categorisation of rock and pop styles, omits any mention of either; similarly, Hatch and Milward's *From Blues to Rock: An Analytical history of Pop Music* (1990) offers scant mention of disco, or its descendant genre. An exception came from one of pop's established academic defenders. Frith's essay (1989) has the musicologist pronounce Euro-Disco as '[…] the noise where teen commerce, conceptual art and the gay scene collide' (Frith, in Ang & Morely, 2005 p.173). The situation would improve in the next decade, as the queer zeitgeist took hold, and scholars such as Smith (1995), and Simpson (1995) began to write about aspects of pop culture and pop music, through this lens.

III. B. 2. Riding High (Energy): The 'New Disco' takes hold

Although disregarded in the main by the music press, Hi-Nrg's trajectory continued, unabated. By the middle of the decade, Hi-Nrg songs were firmly ensconced in chart fixtures across the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States, while also becoming increasingly

popular in Asia (Shapiro, 2005; Waterman, 2009). The 1984 breakthrough success of "Relax", by Liverpool band, Frankie Goes to Hollywood whose rattling of the UK's music establishment owed much to the burgeoning style (Lecklider, 2004). English synth-pop bands such as New Order had already toyed with the genre. In the previous year their hit, "Blue Monday", had borrowed Hi-Nrg stylings on its initial twelve inch only pressing. Other English artists, also known primarily for their synth-pop style, such as the openly queer Bronski Beat, would also adopt the Hi-Nrg sound (Gill, 1995; Hawkins, 1996).

In tandem with this genre cross-over, it is once again worth noting the contribution of synth-pop itself in significantly adding to the prevalence of queer artists during the decade. Many scholars have surveyed and confirmed the space afforded to queer expressions of sexuality in the genre. For instance, Peraino (2014) delves deeper into the connection and uses Foucault's theory on technologies as "[s]ystems of practice or interdisciplinary techniques on the levels of the social and the individual which human beings use to understand themselves" (p.287), to corroborate and frame the relationship between the two. Pubrick (2020) explores the manifestation of explicitly queer lyrical content in the work of artists such as Soft Cell and Depeche Mode, while Jones (2020) chronicles the genre's birth, detailing how a hotch-potch of post-punk resistance and outlandish sartorial style led to the new romantic movement and it's "sly sexual subversion" (Murphy, 2020), out of which synth-pop grew. Cateforis (2011) substantiates this, illustrating the positioning of gender ambiguity at play in many artists' appearance and aesthetics. Its instrumental role, in the genesis of the 'gender bender' is discussed further in the next Chapter.

In addition to overhauling the original Frankie Goes to Hollywood composition demo with a distinctly current style that "[…] tapped into Hi-Nrg's remorseless, metronomic precision and orgiastic vibe" (Reynolds, 2009, p.53), producer Trevor Horn released a slew of differing twelve-inch remixes of "Relax", one of the first examples of what would become an industry norm within a few years. The trajectory of the twelve-inch single, along with its very origins, are strongly linked to disco (Fikentscher 1991; Shannon, 1995; Shapiro, 2005; Osborne, 2016). Early on in its inception, club dee-jays had cultivated the practice of using two copies of a record, mixing both on separate turn-tables, in order to create hybrid extended versions of an existing song (Napier-Bell, 2001, p. 214).

Producer Tom Moulton was particularly pivotal in the format's development, appropriating trends from artists such as The Beatles and Jimi Hendrix, whose previous experimentations with the sequencing of separate songs into a continuous edit he utilised for use in his own production (Osborne, 2016). Alongside the extemporisation of genres such as Jazz and Progressive Rock, Moulton applied these to Gloria Gaynor's 1975 disco album, *Never Can Say Goodbye*, effectively creating the first "[…] non-stop disco marathon" (*ibid*, 2016, p.155). It follows logic to ascribe that Hi-Nrg's acceleration was abetted by this trend. Either way, duly obliging collectors and fans, the genre increasingly began to issue multiple mixes of the same song. By 1983, twelve-inch recordings would account for one third of all English singles sales (Osborne, 2016, p.158). Replicating queer theory's rejection of labels, the idea of the pop song as a monotonous structure was swiftly dissipating.

Everywhere it seemed that "There was a consciousness that Hi-Nrg was about to go overground" (Bell, 1995, in Smith 1995, p.145). Now firmly ensconced as the main soundtrack in most gay nightclubs (Brewster and Broughton, 2006), 1985 can be accredited as the year that the genre truly broke ground in the mainstream pop charts.

III.B.3. Another Time, Another Place: Stock, Aitken and Waterman Convert Hi-Nrg for the Masses.

The production trio of Stock, Aitken and Waterman remain accredited as having been responsible more than any other producers or artists, for introducing Hi-Nrg to a mainstream audience (Elliot, 2017; Smith, 2016). Formed by English music industry executive, Deejay and Manager, Pete Waterman, the trio was completed by music business cohorts and musicians, Mike Stock and Matt Aitken. Their own abbreviation of their names, into the moniker, SAW, would eventually become adopted by the industry and music press alike. The trio's first taste of commercial success together came in 1984, with the artist known as Divine. Glenn Humphries had come to prominence in the late 1960s and early 1970s as an actor in John Waters' seminal indie movies (Heffernan, Milstead & Yeager, 1991). Under the guise of his drag persona, Divine had already released a number of records in the United States, produced by Hi-Nrg forefather, Bobby O (Bernard, 1995).

Waterman had long-standing associations with the record trade, having risen through its ranks the previous decade as another beneficiary of the disco revolution. Immersed in the

promotional end of the industry, with a substantial A&R (artist and repertoire) background to add to his club dee-jay experience, Waterman was well disposed to new trends in pop music (Waterman, 2000: Stock, 2004: Harding, 2010). Having noted the emergent success of Hi-Nrg, Waterman set about recreating the sound with his new-found partners Mike Stock and Matt Aitken, observing "I had a vision of Motown type songs with more modern chords and techno, gay disco rhythms" (Waterman, 2000, p.126). Despite his acute and fortuitous acumen for pop trends, when it came to the actual production duties much of these, including musicianship and even occasionally backing vocals, was left to the execution of the remaining pair of the trio (Stock, 2004: Harding, 2010).

Stock Aitken and Waterman's first production for Divine, "You Think You're a Man", made number 1 on the newly published Hi-Nrg charts, but more importantly, scored the production team with their first top twenty hit (Elliot, 2017). Other success followed quickly, with Hazell Dean's "Whatever I do, Wherever I Go", notching up the trio's first top ten mainstream success across Europe. Despite the genre's abundant focus on male-centric lyrical themes, women, nonetheless, played a significant role in Hi-Nrg, and none perhaps more so, than Hazell Dean. The singer would make her live debut at the London-based gay super club, Heaven, in 1983. Her status, as one of the artists most readily associated with the genre (Laski, 1993; Wade, 2020), has endured, and is an accolade seemingly relished by the singer herself, noting, "I am the queen of Hi-Nrg" (in Arena, 2017, p.42). In his exploration into aspects of queer cultural unity, Norton (2016), while reviewing the discourse of English gay magazine, *Boyz*, offers an example of magazine text, which illustrates the view of Dean's exalted status among queer audiences. "Call yourself gay, and you don't even have a copy of Hazell Dean's "Who's Leaving Who?" in your collection? You're gonna get yourself drummed out of this community, matey" (p.284).

The Hi-Nrg production stamped on Divine and Dean's records caught the attention of Pete Burns, lead singer with Dead or Alive (Burns, 2007; Stock, 2004). Burns, as with Divine, was another artist becoming synonymous with the burgeoning gender bender movement. Burns, who had risen through the punk movement, was looking to capitalize on the burgeoning Hi-Nrg scene (Burns, 2009: Waterman, 2000). The first fruit of the band's association with SAW, "You Spin Me Round", held the somewhat dubious honour of having the longest chart climb of a song to the number one position. Released in December 1984, the record entered the top 100, before repeatedly ascending and descending the charts. Finally, after seventeen

weeks in the charts, the record hit the number 1 spot in the United Kingdom (Greene, 1985). The significance of the success of Hi-Nrg, and its potential crossover appeal, was not lost on the production trio:

> High Energy is certainly reaching a non-gay audience now. Radio 1 DJs play it a lot, the charts embrace it, and despite opposition from more traditional-minded soul boys, an awful lot of non-gay clubs are starting to have Hi-Nrg nights.
>
> (Waterman, in Elliot, 2017, p.78)

The success of the song, and the band's subsequent hit singles in 1985, "[…] allowed the machine to move forward with momentum, vision, and confidence" (Harding, 2010, p.391) and would prompt a number of artists to seek out a SAW collaboration. Bananarama, an English girl group trio who had enjoyed success on both sides of the Atlantic with a slightly shambolic post-punk take on pop, were among those who approached Waterman and his cohorts to replicate the Dead or Alive sound (Dallin & Woodward, 2020). Subsequently, their track, "Venus", would result in a first state-side number one in 1986 for both the band and the increasingly successful, and in-demand, trio (Smith, 1995, p.141).

The delineation of the majority of the triad's output remained firmly entrenched into what, several years into the genre's ascent, now constituted a familiar Hi-Nrg style. While their mastering of Hi-Nrg was reaping substantial commercial rewards, in tandem, the proliferation of non-SAW produced Hi-Nrg music was also increasing in tandem. European artists accelerated the genre's prominence with a continuous stream of Hi-Nrg hits emanating from across Europe (Krettenauer, 2016). During this period, these contributions helped to ensure the retention of the resolutely queer lyrical characteristics of the genre. Tongue-in-cheek odes to queer sex, with a penchant for lyrics and titles reflecting the urban gay experience, and which were set over a pulsating, urgent and artificial soundtrack, continued to permeate charts across the continent. In tracks such as "Boom, Boom, (Let's Go Back to My Room)", "Male Stripper" and "It's Raining Men", the homoerotically charged subject matter, delivery, and overall aesthetic of Hi-Nrg was inherent, continuing with the blueprint first laid out by Cowley, Orlando *et al.* almost a decade previously. Despite a lack of homegrown interpretations of the genre, Hi-Nrg was also amassing a solid reputation in Ireland, where it had become, as in the United Kingdom, a predominant soundtrack to the burgeoning queer night-club scene, most notably in Dublin.

Indicative of this popularity, Beat Records, located in the city's now defunct Abbey Mall, specialized in the import of otherwise impossible to find Hi-Nrg imports, almost all on twelve-inch formats (Tarpey, 2008; Kavanagh, 2020). While still underground in Ireland of the 1980s, the rich culture in which Hi-Nrg flourished has since been subject to review by scholars of Irish queer musicology. Hanlon (2021), for instance, notes how, "[q]ueer music scenes have paid a fundamental role in contributing to social change in Ireland, particularly since the 1970s". Beat Records, along with its neighbour, Abbey Discs, ensured that Deejays and queer audiences, in nightclubs such as *Flikkers* (and later, *Sides*) could enjoy these transnational iterations of queer culture, for the first time. The following section offers a detailed investigation of artifacts associated with Hi-Nrg, extracting, and presenting their connotations and intentions, to illustrate this study's claim as to the genre's reflection of queer lives.

III.C. Measuring against Methodology

III.C.1. "Prove Your Love": Considerations in consolidating Hi-Nrg against a Queer Framework

Overall, this Chapter is designed to position Hi-Nrg as a constituent force which substantially added to the proliferation of queer artifacts in 1980s pop music. As such, this section is specifically concerned with confirming the queer core of Hi-Nrg artifacts, using a framework discussed in the previous Chapters, combining Discourse Analysis and queer theory. In nominating Hi-Nrg's occurrence and impact as being a crucial benchmark, it is necessary to furnish evidence of the artifacts produced, but to also offer substantiation to its seemingly unique positioning as a 'gay genre', more so than any other. How, and why, did the genre muster this accolade, more so than others? The impact of this association with queer communities on the genre, and of how this association may have been perceived and read by a heterosexual audience also warrants investigation.

Fortunately, attempting to establish Hi-Nrg under the methodology chosen for this study, and presenting various artifacts through a Discourse Analysis framework, the genre is pleasingly rich in its abundance of explicit examples. The explicitly queer sentiment of Hi-Nrg, as represented, tooled, and understood by queer audiences, also comfortably fits within each of the categorisations employed by Benshoff and Griffin (2005).

The comparably ascendant genre of synth-pop also held associations for many with non-heterosexual expressions. Like disco, it had afforded space for the representation of alternative sexualities (Mankowski, 2010) and was a mainstay musical style in gay bars and night clubs, but it was not innately queer to begin with. Doggett (2016) observes that, "[t]here was nothing inherently gay about disco music; the music was merely the conduit to exhilaration, a thrilling demolition of barriers and restraints which was only available in the dance club or the Bathhouse" (p.467). In the case of Hi-Nrg, this was just the opposite, as the following examples serve to vindicate.

III.C.2. Song Lyrics and Titles

As has been illustrated, the process by which songs are received by an audience is a complex one and must include consideration to a plethora of circumstances including, "[…] attention/perception, decoding/interpretation, working memory, long-term/schematic memory, and response preparation" (Bodie, Worthington, Imhoff, & Cooper, 2008, p.106). Studies have identified the importance of textual content as being fundamental to a song's reception, independently processed but complimenting other audio content such as the music itself (Besson, 1998; Besson and Schon, 2001).

Lyrics, of course, may also "[…] vary widely with respect to the topics they mention and the images they evoke" (Fell & Sporleder, 2014, p.626). Given their perspicuous nature, additional surveying of the queer lyrical titles and themes inherent in many Hi-Nrg songs is an obvious locality to begin exploration. Throughout this study, retaining a cognisance as to the reception of artifacts is essential; as titles, lyrics and vocals are far more subjective than other forms of music (Thompson, 2013), it becomes even more pertinent to verify the queer intent. In addition, examples proffered illustrating the genre's propensity for coded terms or references covertly intended for a queer audience, must also pass verification.

Fortunately, strong methodological frameworks exist, which unearth the investigations presented. Benshoff and Griffin's (2005) framework, for example, can be used to affirm queer lyrical content, especially when aided through the lens of Queer Linguistics. Kulick (2000) suggests, that while various scholars have concluded that there is little evidence of any notion of a "[…] homogenous homosexual subculture that shared a common language' (p.251), there

is verification of the existence of, "[…] a fringe vocabulary, known mostly by gay men in urban centres" (*ibid*, p.251). The inclusion of numerous linguistic idioms pioneered as colloquial apparatus by emerging urban queer communities (Bell & Binnie, 2004), was commonplace in the genre. Reflective of the hedonism and exuberance of queer night-life in the pre-AIDS, post-disco period (Lovett, 2005) in which Hi-Nrg amassed popularity, song titles and accompanying lyrics were frequently infused with sexual innuendo.

As acknowledged forerunners of the style, it is fitting to begin with examples of evocation of queer references from the respective lyrical canons of Patrick Cowley and Bobby Orlando. They provide a pragmatic and vibrant introduction to the defining role of lyrics in establishing the genre's queer credentials. Cowley's 1981 opus "Menergy", offers an archetypal case-point:

> The boys in the bar-room
> Livin' it up
> Shooting off energy
>
> Menergy, Menergy, Menergy
>
> The boys in the back room
> Laughin' it up
> Shooting off energy
>
> The guys in the street talk
> Checkin' you out
> Talkin' bout Menergy
>
> The boys in the bedroom
> Lovin' it up
> Shooting off energy
> Menergy, Menergy, Menergy

In addition to their idiomatic style, another thread common to the genre is Cowley's choice inclusion of terms imbued with sexual suggestiveness, utilising a number of colloquial terms used among queer communities. Referencing the 'back-room' vividly locates a geographical sphere for the lyric, the argot term having been adopted to describe the sex-on-premises bars of the emerging gay, metropolitan centres of the United States (Martin, 1987). Further settings such as the bar, the street, and the bedroom are also name-checked, each united by the commonality of serving as spaces where the possibility of sex is to be navigated and

negotiated. This is graphically confirmed by Cowley's 'boys/guy's', who 'shoot off' in each verse's unique setting. Inclusion of the phrase to "shoot off", used by gay men as a vernacular description of ejaculation (Green's Dictionary of Slang), lays bare the explicitly queer resonance to Cowley's formative take on the genre. Such was its implicit resonance, a variation on the phrase would feature as title to Bobby Orlando's track, "Shoot Your Shot". A sample of its lyrics:

> Don't ever stop
> Doing what you're doing
> Don't stop
> Shoot your shot
>
> You got what I want
> You got what I need
> Shoot your shot
>
> You know how I feel
> Come on make it real
> Shoot your shot

Although cyclical in nature, the lyrics illustrate a similarly queer bent. Despite his reputation for being less than erudite, Orlando would later helm the production of a number of songs for the Pet Shop Boys, whose own song-writing skills would yield a more nuanced, but none-the-less resolutely established queer, take on subject matter. As for the aforementioned boys of Cowley's "Menergy", while busy 'checkin' you out', were engaged in 'cruising', a concept indelibly stamped as a definitively queer cultural practise (Stacey, 2004; Espinoza, 2019). The act of seeking out on potential sexual partners in public spaces has long been established as a method of engagement initiated by queers. Enabling the bearer access to a world still largely stigmatised by the mainstream, it forms part of an illustrious and subversive tradition involving the use of verbal and non-verbal codes (Cameron and Kulick, 2006). Stacey (2005) succinctly describes its primary role as a conduit to initiate sexual contact, citing it as "[…] the gay male sexual sport arena, where it is all in the gaze. Erotic attraction and connection occur (or fail) in the blink of an eye" (p.17). Previous exploration by the same author had already revealed the ritual to be multifarious in function, offering its participants access to a hypergamous world which crossed racial, class and even language divides, while also challenging heteronormative conventions (2004). This is confirmed by Qian (2014), who documents its further potential emancipatory effects, and Turner (2003), who consolidates cruising's influence, noting its geo-physical role in the development of queer spaces.

Hi-Nrg duly reflected this occurrence, obligingly occupying its lyrics with themes revolving around engaging in the procurement of sex. Titles such as "Searchin' (Looking for Love)"; "So Many Men, So Little Time"; "Unexpected Lovers"; "Faith in Strangers", all alluded to the forays of the practice, reaching a linguistically explicit crescendo with songs such as "Cruising", and "Cruising The Streets". The latter's lyrical palette includes the following verse:

> Hey there all you hunky guys dancing to the beat
> Listen good
> I'll tell you about a new way to meet
> All it takes is a little time for you to feel the heat
> Wait until midnight
> then start to cruise the street
>
> You can find anything you're looking for
> You might find a big ol boy
> Nine inches or more
> It's all true I promise you
> It might make you sore.

Aspects of Giffney's Queer Linguistic framework (2009) can be recalled and applied with ease to each collectively, such is the implicit use of the term and of narratives associated with it. By 1987, any remaining ambiguity in relation to the genre's propensity for the documentation of such liaisons would be utterly dismantled by "Cruising in The Park", by the United Kingdom's Martyn Lacey:

> I got a wife
> I got a family
> Nice home and car
> And lots of friends around me
>
> My other life begins to rear its head,
> When the rest of town are sleeping in bed,
> I've kept this secret since I was wed
>
> Cruising in the Park
> No one round here knows my name
> Cruising in the park
> After dark

While the repeated occurrence of cruising as a thematic thread within the lyrics and titles of the genre assist in evidencing the claim of a core queer component, they constitute just one element of a wider repertoire of sexualised lyricism. Frequently songs contained provocative connotations, indeed such is their prominence that they may even be considered a defining characteristic of the genre. A perusal of selected titles yields iterations of fruitful examples.

In songs such as “Bring on the Men”; ‘I Need a Man”; Megatron Man”; “Thank God for Men”; and “Male Stripper”, the repeated espousal of desire for, and veneration of, the male body is a predominant theme. That some scholars have already attributed this to be part of the lyric’s allure to a gay male audience (Buckland, 2010, p.68), is not surprising. Other titles, such as “Man-Sized Love”, and “Slice Me Nice”, illustrate another of the genre's favoured linguistic traits; the employment of thinly-veiled innuendo (Walters, 1996). On occasion, such characteristically sexual intimations were overtaken by titles and songs imbued with a bawdy sexual assertiveness rarely seen previously in pop music. Examples of where this is made graphic, such as with the song “I am So Horny for You”; or indeed, where the queer disposition is rendered linguistically unavoidable, as with the Modern Rocketry song, “Homosexuality”, are also plentiful.

For these examples and others, the discourse analysis tools proposed to decode and interpret potentially queer readings, such as those suggested by Taylor (2012) are rendered almost unnecessary, such is the blatancy of their collective connotations. Nonetheless, a correlation must be demonstrated, and fortunately the observed texts comply with the defining objective criteria set by Queer Logistical frameworks; that of seeking to dismantle the established hegemonies of heterosexist norms (Motschenbacher and Stegu, 2013). When not infused with overtly sexual themes, the genre would often revert to Motown inspired lyrical themes of the “[…] teenage crush heartache, hot flashes, and heroic histrionics” (Shapiro, 2005, p.70) type. However, there is also evidence to suggest that as the genre began its journey of appropriation, other strategies were developed, which can be read as being designed with the aim of avoiding explicit inference of any potential same-sex inferences. One such lyrical strategy employed was the erosion of any suggestion as to the gender of the object of the song-writer or performer’s affection, heartbreak or disdain. The tactic is illustrative of the lengths in which writers would go to censor their songs. Given pop music’s general reliance on lyrical motifs referencing sex, desire and romantic relationships (Dukes, 2003; Christiansen *et al.* 2016), the absence of gender signifiers can be interpreted as a deliberate choice.

The practise was exemplified by Hi-Nrg producer Ian Levine, "[…] who by studiously avoiding the word girl in his lyrics […] cannily made music that appealed to his core audience of gay men, and still managed to crossover to the pop consumer who remained blissfully unaware of its leather-and-poppers origins" (Brewster & Broughton, 2005, p.212). Others, such as Dead Or Alive would cannily follow suit, with *Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know*, their 1987 album accomplishing the feat of distending the absence across an entire album[7]. Insistence on the avoidance of male or female denotations, as executed through the genderless pop lyric, may also be construed as another method of simultaneously exploiting both queer and heterosexual audiences. And while this is likely, especially given both Levine and Waterman's respectively noted acumen, this study argues its very existence renders a reversal of its original intent. As a form, these examples of 'genderless pop' also warrant inclusion under the umbrella of queer connotation inherent in the genre.

The lyrics, titles and the associated semantic themes of Hi-Nrg have been illustrated as commonly conveying queer messaging befitting the methodological framework outlined by Benshoff and Griffin. For their suggested categorisation of auteurs, lyrics have been shown to explicitly and demonstrably referred to cornerstones of queer culture during the time of the genre's popularity. For Cowley and other Hi-Nrg pioneers, the lyrical intentions may have been abundantly clear, however, while lyrics are an obvious artifact for consideration, they constitute just one element of a song. Fittingly, other aspects of Benshoff and Griffin's model can also be proposed to qualify Hi-Nrg's non-lyrical credentials.

III.C.3. "Hit That Perfect Beat": Hi-Nrg Music, Meaning, Aesthetics and Ownership

Sonically, the genre's wider musical underscoring offers further testimony to the queer nature of its inception and reception. Both the remit and methodologies chosen for this study inhibit the need or feasibility of an intrinsically detailed musicologist perspective on Hi-Nrg. However, the study of the reception of audiences to music retains particular relevance and is imbued with its own complexity. Scholars have articulated this succinctly, noting that:

[7] Despite the de-gendered lyrics, Burns and co, would not resist the temptation to rely on the genre's predilection for innuendo-laden lyrics, most notably on the track "Come Inside" (Burns, Coy, Lever & Percy, 1986).

> Because music is temporally patterned, has syntax, creates expectancies, and has a nested structure, it connotes meaning and significance, even though it typically makes no actual reference to objects or events in the world.
>
> (Russo and Thompson, 2004, p.52).

From its inception at the hands of its forefathers, Cowley and Orlando, Hi-Nrg would prove itself specifically designed "[…] to enhance the excitement of man-on-man cruising, illicit sex, and chemical stimulants through electronic means" (Marke, 2016, p.22). Describing the effects of the sound on the dance floor, Buckland (2012) describes how:

> It was underaided with heavy bass-tones, so that dancer did not only hear the beat, they felt it. The pulse felt like it was coming from deep inside your body. This connected the body to the soundscape environment, so that rather than being acted upon, participants actively engaged and intervened with the soundscape.
>
> (Buckland, 2012, p.70)

Bieschke (2019) describes Cowley's *raison d'être* as being, "[…] the enthusiastic embrace of the sexual possibilities of electronic music, particularly the homosexual ones" (*ibid*), and it seemed that such frontiers were in reach. For, while the ashes of disco still simmered, Cowley and countless others benefitted from an unrelenting demand from queer club-land, for increasingly up-tempo records to dance to (Flicker, 1997). Such demand may have been driven by the simple evolution of musical tastes, but the plethora of historians and scholars who have long established and explored a strong correlating relationship between night-club patronage and levels of drug use (Lea, Reynolds & de Wit, 2013; Acosta, Cleland & Palamar, 2019; Lovelock, 2018) may beg to differ. For some, it was the "[…] escalating use of stimulants in the clubs [which] pushed the tempo even faster" notes Walters (1996, p.72). Regardless of the basis of this trend, the aesthetics associated with the genre also commonly projected transgressive subversions.

Two divergent categorisations of such representations can be elucidated, which share the etymological distinction of having both originated as colloquial terms. The first, the term 'gender bender', is attributed to the mainstream music press as a means of describing the surge in artists who, through their attire, excessive application of make-up and feminine performativity demonstrated a total disregard for gender traditional roles (Brownlee, 1995).

Conversely, the second term, the 'clone', originates from within the community, and was gaining linguistic popularity at the same time as Hi-Nrg's ascent (Levine, 1998).

Discernible correlations can be drawn which link the innately queer performativity of the 'gender bending' artists, to that of the ideas of a number of sexual theorists. Such Hi-Nrg manifestations evoke Butler's theories of gender and its acquired nature (1993). Butler's proposal of drag, as being an exemplary example of the performativity of gender (*ibid*, p.74) is echoed by the overlap of the 'gender-bender' with that of the resolutely queer sub-culture. This, along with a comprehensive account and exploration of the contributions and impact of the gender play executed by the so-called 'gender benders', is offered in the following Chapter.

While the gender-bender brazenly transgressed rigidly held traditional demarcations of male and female gender representations in pop, the aesthetics and attire of the clone instead reflected a sexualised, hyper-masculine homosexual ideal of manhood (Levine, 1998; Cole, 2000). As illustrated earlier, the employment of gay tropes and sexualised imagery had already been successfully exploited by The Village People (Midgley, 2014). Stimulated by a broad palette of sartorial reference points which encompassed everything from gay pornography (Kirk, 1999) to Militaristic uniform (Rubin, 1994); the trend was unvarying in its appreciation of the projection of a rugged masculinity previously un-equated with homosexuality. Wilson (2001) observes how, "[a]lmost overnight, it seemed, the mincing fairies of an earlier epoch were transformed into hyper-macho muscle men, lumber jacks and even gestapo officers" (p.281). Buoyed by an emerging gay leather scene (Rubin, 1994) and the growing cult status of Finish artist Touko Laaksonen, whose work as Tom of Finland exemplified the chiselled, muscular aesthetic (Hooven, 1993; Shapiro and Lee, 2000), this newfound style of representation was generously appropriated by several Hi-Nrg artists. The extent of the queer aesthetics employed is most graphically and eloquently depicted by the example proffered by the no-less explicitly named Hi-Nrg group, Man2Man.

Describing as consisting of a "[…] Tom of Finland Adonis", alongside a musical partner, "[…] perfect, in seedy sadomasochistic leather and mirror shades" (Moore, 2008), the duo's chosen attire authentically reflected the origins of their sound, complemented with lyrics and titles emblazoned with the by-now-traditional heavily sexualized innuendo. A review of their 1987 performance on United Kingdom pop music chart show, *Top of The Pops*, sums up the homocentric nature of their attire:

> Go-go boys in leather and military garb add to the atmosphere while Paul Zone strips off his leather to reveal more leather, then flannel, then a vest, then some bondage accessories to the delight of the squealing […] in the crowd.
>
> (QX Magazine Website, 2016, author unknown)

Each item mentioned holds association with the aspects of the clone's predisposition, for fabrics and attire which accentuate the sexual identification of homosexuality with masculinity. Such was the pervasive nature of the aesthetic accoutrements and imagery, that the uniform would culturally outlast Hi-Nrg, manifesting across the mainstream in a number of other coded guises throughout the 1980s and beyond (Levine, 1998). Jones (2017) and Jonanac (2007) are just two of the commentators to explore how pop singer George Michael incorporated clone imagery to signify to multiple audiences, in turn aiding his successful career trajectory from frothy pop duo, Wham, to fully-fledged solo artist. Such was the blatancy of the aesthetic, that by the time of Michael's own notorious coming out, with "[…] toilet paper stuck to his shoe", the author registers that a "[…] surprising number of straight people were still shocked" (Simpson, 2016).

Further obliging Benshoff and Griffin's methodological criteria, the camp-associated elements of fabled 'trash' aesthetic (Koestenbaum, 2001) as attributed to pop-art forerunner, Andy Warhol, and 'pope of trash' film-maker, John Waters (Waters, 1981, p.22), are evoked. While preceding Hi-Nrg by over a decade, the two forms share the distinction of both centralising the portrayal of unrepentant queer desire as prominent threads throughout their representations. Warner's description of the aesthetic, and in particular, its fondness for "[…] extravagant display" (Warner, 2012, p. 48) can be extended to fit the rigorously camp outputs associated with Hi-Nrg. Significantly, his work also acts as a reminder of the aesthetics' prior role in exerting stimulus over pop music, via groups such as The Velvet Underground (*ibid*), themselves precursors to the glam-rock pantheon discussed in the previous Chapter.

While each facet of Hi-Nrg complimented the other, the relationship between the music and the aesthetic had specific links. Shapiro describes how the genre's tempo created an urgency, reflecting a community "[…] striving for superhuman perfection, by pushing the clone aesthetic to its furthest limits (2005, p.71). In truth, Hi-Nrg was the whole package; a heady mixture of electronic music and pulsating beats, supported by vocal arrangements commonly exuding a sense of camp, and/or overt homosexual suggestibility, all delivered with

a visual aesthetic that frequently reflected both. As the previous divulsion of its attributes has revealed, the cultural penetration of the genre is all the more remarkable, given the candour of the lyrics and aesthetics frequently and characteristically employed in the performativity of the music. For many, however, the motivation and intended audience for the genre, could not have been more abundantly clear: “This is gay ghetto music with no other goal than to pump up the drama, sexual innuendo and BPMs for a male insider audience.” observes Walters (1996, p.72).

Analyses of the reception of queer audiences to the genre offer further testimony of this. Scholars of both socio-musical and queer origins have illustrated an indelible link between the genre and its early audience. While acknowledging the ‘sleazy charm’ of euro-disco, and affirming its relationship with a queer audience, Frith suggests the ‘brazen utility’ (in Ang & Morley, 1989, p. 168) of Hi-Nrg records as a particular feature of their underlying appeal to gay men, in particular.

Previously, scholars have observed that “[...] the very fact that there exist gay disco charts which are differentiated from non-gay disco charts strongly suggests there is a range of music which gay people feel has specific importance to them” (Laski, 1993, p.116). However, studies have also revealed that despite gay men generally demonstrating a predilection for more commercial, ‘disposable’ pop than their lesbian counterparts, there is also strong indication that being queer does not predispose one to a particular musical style. (Taylor, 2012). Complex questions arise from these various studies, perhaps indicative of the only recent inauguration of research focused on enhancing understanding of the many intersections of pop and sexuality.

Considering that, this study is determined to avoid uniformly proposing Hi-Nrg as being inherently significant to all queer-identified audiences during its reign. While there existed “[…] a strong tradition […] of anthems performed by women for a largely gay audience” (Abbot, 2017), the genre was most frequently occupied with representations and transgressions based on ideologies and fantasies, which were almost always male in their viewpoint. However, despite Cowley and Orlando’s common use of their own vocals, and the queer aesthetics of the male artists discussed earlier, the contribution of women to Hi-Nrg remained significant.

Hazell Dean, although having retired from recording as recently as 2021, would sustain a career performing live on the gay nightclub circuit. Flynn’s (2018) description of the singer,

as, "[…] a pint-sized lesbian superhero, and perennial gay pride fixture" (p.29), conveys something of the reputation she accrued. With Dean, there is an additional, ironic, queer resonance at play. The notion of a lesbian performer singing songs imbued with the overt male homoeroticism of the genre, such as on the track "Searching (Looking for love)", with its refrain where the singer intones, "I've gotta find me a man", adds the resonance of a delicious queer irony.

Echols (2010) notes that, "[…] the biggest stars of gay disco were heterosexual, African American women" (p.147), and this tradition was prolonged with Hi-Nrg, as its growth accelerated in the early 1980s. While Dean reigned supreme in the United Kingdom, other female artists, such as Miquel Browne, followed just a few inconceivable years later by her daughter, Sinitta, would also come to be associated with the genre. While there is no evidence to indict a queer identification on the part of many of these artists, there remains an underlying transgression at work.

Despite this, the genre was not above susceptibility to the foils of two-dimensional representations. The interchangeable line-up, and aspects of performativity, of Orlando-helmed band, The Flirts, are critiqued by Rosa (2017). However, the author still finds and attests a residual queer value inherent in the work, as a means by which to demonstrate the mimetic nature of gender performativity.

It was the genre's pivotal role as an unapologetic sexual soundtrack for those lucky enough to be part of emerging urban, queer landscapes of North America and Western Europe, which sets it apart. "The post-stonewall gay man now wanted heroes that he could call his own", note Kureishi and Savage (1995, p.212), and the genre was pioneering in being the first to explicitly address this gap. As evidenced in the previous Chapter, many other well-established correlations between constituents of queer identity and particular genres of music exist. However, what sets Hi-Nrg apart from those associated with such works, is its additional distinction; that of being viewed, both internally by sexual minority communities, and externally amongst mainstream readings of the genre, as an intrinsically queer genre. (Atkinson, 2010; Kirk, 1999). Despite the evidenced orchestration of a sonic landscape which effectively sound-tracked the lives of emerging queer audiences (Marke, 2016; Flick, 1997), some scholars have observed that ultimately, '[…] whether this music is unique to gay disco's,

or whether it is mainstream music which is interpreted in different ways by gay disco goers is not really relevant. (Laski, *in* Miller & Shaw-Miller, 1993, p. 121).

Instead, it is the genre's standing, which "[…] like it or not, is now regarded as ours" (Kirk, 1999) where Hi-Nrg remains unmatched and the correlation irrefutably champions the genre's unique status. Despite having been shown to have attained little endorsement for having done so, this study argues that Hi-Nrg realised a cultural milestone, in its deliverance of a form which offered an undiluted expression of transgressive queer sexualities. Like disco, whose "[…] whole culture of behavioural codes, aesthetics, styles of dance, texts, values and embodied knowledge […] give shape to a shared sensory orientation" (Garcia, 2004, p.131), the genre drew from, referenced and sang back to an audience "[…] now hungry for gay role models" (Kantonen and Jones, 1999, p.45).

Having commenced the Chapter with an exploration of Hi-Nrg origins, this section applied artifacts associated with the genre, against the underpinning methodological frameworks chosen by this study. However, while examples of the queer inclinations commonly inherent in the genre's out-puts have been demonstrated, it remains necessary to illustrate and explore its infiltration into mainstream culture, in order to fully comply with the objective of illustrating the profound impact of queer sexualities over pop music in the decade under scrutiny. The concluding section of this Chapter fulfils this gap, exploring the final years of its growth, from a period wherein, it came to constitute a major cultural force in pop music. The section commences with a continuation of the genre's trajectory into the mainstream pop charts, chiefly under the guise of production trio, Stock, Aitken, and Waterman.

III.D. Assimilation, Betrayal or simply just a case of "That's the Way It Is"?

III.D.1. Encroaching Criticisms

> We set the trend with Motown, Northern Soul, Philly, Disco, Eurobeat , Hi-Nrg and they assimilate and popularise them.
>
> -Richard Smith, *Seduced and Abandoned: Essays on Gay men and Pop Music,* 2016.

> We'd been doing the gay disco, Hi-Nrg, Boystown, call-it-what-you-will thing for a good few years by then. And from that original Bobby O, New York inspiration, we'd taken it somewhere else. We were masters of the art, and the world was our oyster.
>
> -Pete Waterman, *I Wish I Was Me*, 2000.

By 1988, Hi-Nrg had become a ubiquitous chart sound (Kirk, 1999), chiefly as a result of SAW's commercial success, which was indisputable by this point. During the last three years of the decade, they would achieve over 100 Top 40 hits records (O'Hare, 2009) and, by 1988 had amassed singles sales exceeding six million in the United Kingdom (Elliot, 2017). Their commercial zenith would occur in 1989, when the trio's value was reputed to account for an impressive "[…] twenty-seven per cent of the market in the record business" (Stock, 2004, p. 94). Given such statistics, it was little wonder that the production trio were invariably sought out.

Repeating the trajectory of disco, whose popularity among artists hoping to incorporate the genre into their own work has already been mentioned here, increasingly SAW found themselves in demand as producers for already established artists. Acts as diverse as Cliff Richard, Laura Brannigan and Debbie Harry turned to the trio. However, even these may be considered pale examples, next to the troika's most unlikely pairing with that of heavy metal group, Judas Priest (Halford, 2020). However, as is common in pop music, commercial success does not equate to critical praise and increasingly, the trio and their methods were dissected by an increasingly sceptical music press. A critical tide facing the trio's omnipresence in the UK and European charts began to swell (Smith, 1995). The trio's methodologies, ethos and musical output would all gather considerable disdain.

In 1985, in addition to producing already established artists for other record labels the trio had embarked on developing their own stable of protégés, artists whose records were released on their newly founded PWL (Pete Waterman Limited) record label (Harding, 2010). Similarities were noted between PWL's 'assembly line' production methods and 'revolving door' approach to artists, to that of the iconic Motown records. With the advent of their own label and company offices, these were further confirmed by Waterman, who seemed to relish such comparison. To those present at the inauguration of the label's new studios, he shared a vision of how he "[…] intended to create a UK equivalent to Detroit's famous Tamla Motown" (Thompson and Harding, 2019, p.154). While some would concur that there was similarity in

the production outfit's methodologies; and their success as a small independent in an industry of major corporate labels, critics were quick to emphasize that this was where any such 'hit factory' associations with Berry Gordy's legendary company and production methods ended (Napier-Bell, 2001).

Aspects of their corporate approach to the production and dissemination of pop music drew specific criticism, with the team's philosophy becoming problematic for many. Adopting and promoting the moniker of *"The sound of a bright, young Britain"* (O'Hare, 2009), as a brand mantra for their new record label, the trio's ethics were increasingly compared to that of the ruling Conservative party in England (Sandbrook, 2019). Despite its queer origins and associations, through its Stock Aitken and Waterman connections, Hi-Nrg was increasingly becoming equated as a soundtrack to something very different; "[…] an avaricious product of Tory Britain" (Climie, 2012).

These new developments also heralded significant artistic changes. Whereas early hits such as "You Spin Me Round (Like A Record)", had been written by artist Pete Burns and bandmates from Dead or Alive, the development of PWL marked a conversion whereby the trio began to insist on writing, as well as producing, almost all their own records, regardless of the artist's own experience, or pedigree in this field (Larkin, 1997, p.1,141). As their success and confidence grew, SAW also demonstrated a willingness to work with almost anyone if they thought they might have a hit. Their role-call of artists included tabloid fodder such as 'page three girl' Samantha Fox, and Mandy Smith, known primarily for having an underage relationship with Rolling Stone Bill Wyman, whom she would eventually marry at the age of 18 (Courtney, 2011). In addition, they recorded singles with Children's television puppets and, most notoriously, soap opera stars[8].

Australian Kylie Minogue would eventually exceed any expectations of what a soap opera star could achieve in the music business, in terms of commercial sales, and as time would attest, career longevity. Minogue would become the best-selling singles artist in the United Kingdom in both 1988 and 1999 (Elliot, 2017). However, her working relationship with the

[8] In addition to their well-established role as producers to Kylie Minogue, SAW would also engineer hits for Minogue's *Neighbors* co-star, Jason Donovan, signaling a trend for soap actors to reinvent themselves as pop acts.

trio would also offer insight as to the minimal artistic input expected, reflective of a process whereby:

> The artist would arrive at the session with the sole purpose of providing the vocal to a pre-written song, usually to be sung over a fully produced backing track. Post-production editing would take place after the vocalist had left the session, and Stock and Aitken would finish the final mix ready for mastering and release.
>
> (Bennett, 2015)

Despite its success, during promotional activity for the album, Minogue was remarkably forthright in reflecting on her lack of involvement in the recording process. "I feel very removed from this album because I didn't have much say about it and it doesn't sound like me', she rather passively noted in 1988. "They did what they thought they had to do to deliver a hit, which they did. But the album still isn't *me*" (Minogue, *in* Hunt, 1988, p.35), she added, her admission providing the perfect foil to a cynical music press, concerned as ever with projecting artistic integrity. It is easy to envisage how such execution infuriated the music establishment.

While Minogue's subsequent exaltation and endurance as a gay icon is well documented (Salas *et al,* 2005), she, (along with other acts such as Rick Astley) was a world away from those fronting the trio's earlier collaborations. The difference was striking, and easily apparent to those who had worked with the trio previously such as Pete Burns, who noted: "[w]e were never part of that manufactured thing. The sound is pretty close because they crafted it, but we wouldn't want to be associated with a Sinitta record" (*in* Elliot, 2017, p.70). Increasingly, the artists promoted were a world away from the aggressive camp proffered by Burns or Divine, and instead perfectly packaged pop prince and princesses were the order of the day.

The musical style, while still mining a distinct Hi-Nrg sound, was also slowly changing. Waterman understood "[…] that to move this music from the gay club to teen mainstream meant adapting it" (Frith *in* Ang and Morley, 1989, p.170) and this is exactly what he achieved. As Lindsey (2019) notes, "[...] It was hard to believe the architects of records as slick as "Say I'm Your Number One", or as lustily feral as "You Spin Me Round" were now making music with virtually interchangeable synth bass lines and the same synth bass fanfares" (p.16). As the prevalence of their productions continued unabated, their style became familiar to the extent

that a Stock, Aitken and Waterman record was rendered immediately identifiable (Mason, 2004). So ubiquitous was their chart sound, characterised as "[…] desperately unfunky" (Renzo, 2007), the trio would earn the moniker 'Shlock, Aimless and Watered-down' (Llewellyn-Smith, 2011; Lindsay, 2019). Given the negative nature of the discourse, artists hungry for the commercial success almost ensured by the trademark SAW production style began to become cognisant of the emergent hazards of association with the trio. Such was the reputational criticism garnered, some artists preferred to decline credit to the team on their productions altogether (Elliot, 2017, p.121).

In fairness, the trio never shied away from the explicit queer origins of their now ubiquitous sound. "We make gay records, there's no question about it and we're not afraid to say that" emphasised Waterman (*in* Bernard, 1986, p.46). However, this acknowledgement seemed increasingly at odds with the artists chosen to front PWL songs. Instead, tracks increasingly "[…] graced with squeaky clean SAW acts, wholesome and beaming" (Lindsay, 2019, p.14), became the order of the day. There is suggestion that, despite acknowledgment of their debt to Hi-Nrg as a queer-rooted genre, there was reluctance to deal with explicitly queer material. For instance, Pete Burns would recall, "There is a lyric from "Something in My House", where I make a reference to a 'wicked queen'. The producer, Mike Stock, stopped me and said I couldn't use that term because it would mean the record is about gay people" (Arena, 2017, p. 29). In tandem with its dominance as a style of pop, the artist's fronting SAW's productions, and other Hi-Nrg records seemed progressively less transgressive. This de-sexualisation of queer proclivities, formerly innate to the form, would continue as the genre's ubiquity approached saturation point (James, 2017).

III.D.2. A Heteronormative Ubiquity: The 'Vanilla Cul-De-Sac of Appropriation'?

Subsequently, scholars have attributed this appropriation and sedation of the genre's very queerness as being accountable for its eventual expiration. As Abbot (2017) emphatically notes, "The mainstream's co-option of the genre would eventually lead to Hi-Nrg's dilution and demise". Despite 1989 proving to be a commercial pinnacle for PWL (Stock, 2005; Elliot, 2018), it would also mark the beginnings of the end of the Hi-Nrg's reign (Fritz, 1999). As with disco a decade beforehand, its decline was both swift and profound, with the genre barely surviving intact to the decade's end.

It is enticing to attribute Hi-Nrg's passing as an inevitable consequence of reaching what had been aptly described in terms of the genre's arc, as the "Vanilla cul-de-sac" (Moore, *in* Abbot, 2017) of Stock, Aitken & Waterman's successful appropriation and re-packaging of the genre. However, a number of other factors should also be considered. If anything, this study illustrates the unusual status the trio hold in relation to Hi-Nrg. More than just riding on the success of a genre, they were in fact instigators of its early 1980s installation as a soundtrack to gay bar and nightclubs and must be duly accredited for their unsurpassed role in the genre's rise in popularity. While they may stand accused of morphing it into an almost un-recognisably bland and sexless form, they never lost sight of the music's queer origins. It may be too easy to dismiss the trio in view of the criticism levelled at their contributions, methods, and purported role in Hi-Nrg's eventual demise. Despite the rancour they provoked, there are scholars willing to provide a defence (Elliot, 2017), even questioning the motivation of such accusations. For instance, Smith (1995) suggests:

> The real reason that people hate Stock Aitken & Waterman is because they feel they should. I strongly suspect that most of them are to some degree, closet fans, hence the exaggerated and irrational hostility. It was exactly this sort of snobbery that kept the likes of Emerson, Lakes and Palmer in Lear jets during the nineteen seventies.
>
> (Smith, 1995, p.41)

Smith smartly alludes to the repeated quest for validation of authenticity, the supposed absence of which, in pop music, has already been illustrated to have frequently lent to its poor reputation as being worthy of analysis or praise. However, while the influential music press' evidenced neglect of Hi-Nrg can be considered as a manifestation of such discourse, it is apparent that other factors also contributed to its demise.

Despite its successful mainstreaming, such was the potency of its queer origins and make-up, that the association between Hi-Nrg and queer communities was never lost. Flick (1997) recounts attending a music industry conference panel discussion on the future of the genre, where the participants were unanimous in their opinion that its progress was being impaired by its enduring association with homosexuality. Flick's recollection of how, "[t]he general consensus was that even a brilliant Hi-Nrg record would suffer from the albatross of a queer connection" (1997, p.24), is evidence to suggest other dynamisms at play.

Despite increasingly less transgressive representations, the genre's innately queer lineage was firmly established, and regardless of its commandeering influence this was still evidently considered somehow prohibitive to enduring success. How the correlation may have ultimately affected the genre's trajectory is unknown. As with the accusations of overkill and dilution levelled at Stock, Aitken and Waterman (James, 2017), it is problematic to proportion accountability solely to such attitudes, yet the potential of their contribution certainly warrants them worthy of note. One final, significant factor should be additionally considered in the genre's demise, that of the simple, continuous evolution of tastes and trends.

III.D.3. The Dawn of 'Dance' Music: House, Techno and Second Summers.

Fortunately, evidence surrounding the final, less conspiratorial factor in the genre's decline is abundant. For, in the United States, the genre was morphing into a new sound, under the tutelage of assorted Deejays in cities such as Chicago, Detroit and New York (Rietveld, 1998). As with their disco and Hi-Nrg fore-fathers, these sounds emanated from black and queer clubs, where tastes were evolving, in keeping with the ever-evolving nature of pop (Salkind, 2019). Just as Hi-Nrg had once emerged from the ashes of disco, house and techno music were in-turn derivatives of Hi-Nrg (Fritz, 1999; Hawking, 2013), and by the late 1980s, had established themselves as a more than adequate rival to the increasingly bland offerings of the former's now over-familiar and chart-friendly execution.

House Music, pioneered by the likes of Frankie Knuckles and Steve "Silk" Hurley (Bidder, 2001), used roughly the same tempo as Hi-Nrg and disco, employing the same four-to-the-floor beat, but sounded distinct in several ways. Building on the trend for twelve-inch mixes popularised by its lineage, house often incorporated fragments of other recordings into these expansive compositions. The practice would become known as 'sampling' (Said, 2015). Use of the technique was not new, and its employment in various styles of pop as a precursor to its use in the genre, have been established. McCann (2017) illustrates how Caribbean immigrants had incorporated sampling techniques into early hip-hop in the 1970s, and this trend would continue as a foundational thread in 1980s rap, as it continued to grow as a musical force (Krims, 2001).

Techno, emanating from Detroit, had been pioneered by a trio of deejays known as The Belleville Three (Reynolds, 1999). Strongly influenced by the work of German Synthesizer music such as Kraftwerk and disco forefather, Giorgio Moroder (Kodwo, 1998), techno was sonically interlinked with house. Both utilised increasingly contemporary production techniques to orchestrate a more sonically industrial sound. These emerging styles relied less on formulaic production, and the explicitly homoerotic over-tones or camp aesthetics long a mainstay of Hi-Nrg and its artists, were absent.

While these genres may not have been as inherently queer as Hi-Nrg in terms of content or performativity, as with many forms of dance music, the origins of both still reveals a rich queer and black heritage (Needham, 2017). However, their impact on the demise of Hi-Nrg would be profound. By the early 1990s, house, techno and rap had all-but replaced Hi-Nrg (King, 2013). Together, they constituted a new force as their sound proliferated the UK and US charts. Emergent subgenres such as 'acid house', and their associated cultural by-products, such as the advent of 'raves', entered mainstream culminating in what would be christened as the 'second summer of love' (Blake, 2019; Reynolds, 1998). Once again pop music was the subject of tabloid indignation, but this time the ire was to be directed at the associations between dance culture and recreational drug use, offering sexuality related matters a respite from their over-scrutinised positioning in discourse relating to pop's supposed nefarious value.

In light of such a significant musical shift, it is uncharitable to place the onus of responsibility for the genre's demise on the omnipresence of Stock Aitken and Waterman's identikit version of the genre, or indeed on a music industry still uneasy with a form so aesthetically queer in nature. Instead, its cultural demise can be attributed to a combination of all factors outlined.

III.E. Synthesis.

This Chapter has illustrated the considerable impact, which Hi-Nrg had on pop, in the 1980s, when:

> Enough brazenly queer performers had stated their sexuality, indeed insisted on it being known, to suggest that a successful career in pop and retaining one's personal dignity and integrity as a self-identified queer were not mutually exclusive.
>
> (Gill, 1995, p.173)

Hi-Nrg's trajectory, from a niche genre originating in the gay clubs of Western Europe and North America, to its eventual ubiquity as a chart style, was documented.

However, despite illustrating its significant success and contribution to shaping the sounds of 1980s pop music and culture, the Chapter also revealed how the genre remains commonly overlooked in pop music evaluations of the decade. Remedying this common omission, the Chapter continued with an exploration of the genre's appropriation, which would see it attract criticism almost as demonstrative as its amassed mainstream success. Despite its successful appropriation, the genre's association with queer culture was shown to be so profound that no manner of white-washing its transgressive values could erode its underlying queer starting-point.

As a result of the bawdiness and unflinchingly homoerotic nature common to Hi-Nrg song lyrics, aesthetics and associated artifacts, the genre was shown to have met and easily surpassed the methodological frameworks used to ascertain and establish queer content. Inspected artifacts and materials easily complying with the requirements of analytical tools from aspects of both Discourse Analysis and queer theory.

Victim to the encroaching popularity of house music and homogenisation at the hands of Stock, Aitken and Waterman, and in the eyes of the music industry, an indelible negative correlation with queer identity, by late in the decade Hi-Nrg would be flailing. However, in evidencing its engrained influence, the enduring association with homosexuality may be considered an accolade of special note. Based on the evidence presented here within, Jones & Kantonen's observation on the genre as "[…] the embodiment of gay life on the dance floor" (1999, p. 45) offers a definitive assessment as to its unique positioning in sound-tracking aspect of queer lives. While other genres before or since may have been associated with, and indeed been popularised by queer intent; none have at their very essence reflected queer life at a time and point in history, quite like Hi-Nrg.

While the following Chapter changes in thematic tact, supplanting as it does the exploration of a specific musical genre for investigation of a visual stylistic trend, there are overlaps and commonalities between the two. As already noted, a number of the artists who experimented with Hi-Nrg were generally included under the 'gender bender' moniker, and as such, will once again feature. In addition, parallels can be drawn between the poor

accreditation commonly bestowed on the genre, often both dismissive in its nature and scant in its nature, to that of discourse generated by the bearing of the disparate group of individuals categorised under this new label.

As such, and as with the treatment of Hi-Nrg here within, the objective is to award the subject with a more robust appraisal which instates its true impact on the decade. The Village People's previous utilisation of explicitly homosexual tropes, steadfastly lifted from gay culture, was earlier illustrated as being pioneering in the representation and portrayal of queerness in pop. Due in part to an aesthetic so stereotypical as to almost reach the point of caricature, the portrayal was immediately recognisable to a queer audience. However, the mascots they chose to emulate reflected a culture still inherently underground and therefore, alien, to a mainstream audience. As we have seen, this deficit, among a large section of their audience, would serve as a defence for the group later, when attempting to distance themselves from the connotations so obvious to a queer, or queer-literate, audience.

The 'gender benders' could use no such strategy. Such was the nature of the often confrontational and sometimes aggressive transgression of gender purveyed discourse, conclusions, and controversy were perhaps unavoidable. For, despite some precedence in the glam-rock and punk movements, pop had not yet encountered such explicit contravention of its rigid gender demarcations.

Chapter IV: "Wicked Queens and Super-Fruit Extraordinaries": The Rise, Fall & Impact of the "Gender Benders".

IV. A. Introduction

> Although it is the hypermasculine musicians who are considered the epitome of the perfect rock star, the true rock stars are those who defy gender boundaries and participate in 'gender bending.' These gender benders are the ones actually following the neglected ideals of the rock and roll culture: they live outside of the mainstream culture, and rebel against anything that wants to restrict freedom.
>
> -Caroline Hartman & Letizia Schmid, *Girly Boys and Boyish Girls: Gender Roles In Rock And Roll Music*, 2015.

Of the varied aspects of gay culture to permeate into the mainstream during the 1980s, few challenged the hegemony of rock's aesthetic as aggressively, as the 'gender bender'. As with executions and artifacts of Hi-Nrg, the multiple manifestations of expressions of gender, frequently employed by pop artists in the 1980s can be considered as further compelling evidence of the decade's prominent positioning of representations previously unseen. Acts such as David Bowie, The New York Dolls and others associated with the advent of glam rock are fittingly accredited and well chronicled, alongside punk, as having pushed away the rigidly entrenched boundaries of gender and sexuality (Charlesworth, 2018; Gregory, 2002). Taking cue from such inspirations, pop in the 1980s would present both the listener, and, increasingly the viewer, with a plenitude of unorthodox representations. Further dismantling the heretofore unyielding rigidity of gender norms, and the censorship of expressions of queer desire previously inherent in pop and rock, the profound impact on the aesthetics employed by artists would significantly influence the look and style of the decade's pop content. Such was the power of these visual amendments they would even bypass the previously inflexible demarcations of genre, exerting their influence on the most unlikely of sources. In addition, the refusal of many of the 'gender benders', to be defined or categorised by the linear binaries of the period, gives further evidence of their transgressive worth. Antedating the cultural explosion of queer-aligned identities which would occur at the end of the decade, the 'gender benders' can be accredited with offering an anticipatory intimation of this shift, thus further consolidating their queer merit.

This Chapter explores such representations and chronicles the manifestation and trajectory of this specifically queer-infused phenomenon, in three main sections. The first section begins, fittingly, with Boy George's inaugural, era-defining introduction to the public via *Top of the Pops* and concentrates on illustrating the emergence of the phenomenon of the 'gender bender' on the 1980s pop landscape. While pop music's long history of gender transgression is acknowledged, as the trend's arc is charted, a picture emerges of an abundance of unorthodox gender representations which perplexed, challenged and enthralled, to a degree unparalleled in the form's history. Often associated with musical genres which traditionally afforded spaces to queer identities, illustration of how the aesthetic influence of the phenomenon would reach beyond these, into the broader spheres of pop and rock, is also provided.

The second part explores the ascendancy of the term itself, and evidences its specific popularisation in the 1980s, as a result of tabloid press usage. The complex etymology of the idiom is explored, with both elements serving as further contexts in which its development may be understood. For the third section, a scholastically queer interpretation of the 'gender bender' movement is applied. Indeed, the works of Butler and other renowned theorists are used here, to rigorously evaluate the impact of pop's new breed. As with the previous Chapter, selected song lyrics and titles are presented for analysis, but here more attention is paid to queer frameworks which evidence the innate aesthetical and performative qualities, and influence, brought about by the vibrant presence of the 'gender benders'. The fourth movement consists of a specific critique of Dead or Alive singer Pete Burns, an ideal candidate to exemplify the innate queerness of the decade. Alongside examples of his own testimony, evidence of how the artist's artifacts, performativity and identification pre-empted and reflected values of the burgeoning academic and activist-led queer movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s, are presented.

Regardless of Burns' pioneering impact, his commercial success would wane significantly by the end of the decade. In parallel, the final section of this Chapter demonstrates the retreat of the 'gender bender's' omnipresence in popular culture. In common with the decline of Hi-Nrg, the trend would not outlast the decade. Despite this, for the period of their reign throughout most of the 1980s, the contribution of the incongruous group of artists who would come to be known as the 'gender benders' irrevocably altered manifestations of masculinity and femininity in pop, and as such, furthered ensured the queering of the decade

IV.B. Arrival of The Gender Benders

IV.B.1. Culture Club, Controversy, and Crossdressing in Pop.

> Just as had happened with glam rock back in the seventies, the gender benders raised the question of poofs in pop, and thus unwittingly unleashed the answer.
>
> -Richard Smith, *Introduction*, A *Boy Called Mary*, 1999.

On a Thursday evening in 1982, 12 million English TV viewers tuned in to a broadcast of *Top of the Pops*, the BBC's long running and influential chart show (Beer, 2006; Fyer, 1997), to be confronted by the spectacle of Boy George, performing with his band, Culture Club. George, the English-born son of Irish immigrants (Bright & O'Dowd, 1995), would lead the charge to become the most infamous of the 'gender benders', a term cloaked by somewhat imprecise, and unfortunately dubious connotations, thanks to its popularisation via the channels of the notorious English tabloid press. A pop/soul hybrid act emerging from the new romantic movement via the well-documented sartorial splendour of the London based 'blitz kids' (Jones, 2020; Napier-Bell, 2002; Rimmer, 2011), Culture Club would become one of the highest selling acts world-wide, propelling gender non-conformity to the top of the charts. However, it was clearly Boy George's image, as much as the music itself, which drew the immediate attention of the media and thus, the wider public (Bullock, 2017). With long, ribbon adorned hair and liberally applied make-up, accentuated by the loose ragdoll-like stylings of eminent designer Judy Blame (Baron, 2016), George's performance stood out:

> This was the first time most of Britain had been confronted with George in all his androgynous splendour. There was a storm in the press, that took months to slow down. 'Is it a boy or is it a Girl' Fleet street cried, outraged. Wally of the week!' George took up an almost permanent residency in the pages of the daily papers.
>
> (Rimmer, 2011, p. 16)

Discourse on George's appearance, performativity, and ultimately, his sexual orientation would come to dominate the discourse generated by the band, in both the music and mainstream press. Although he would lead the charge, gender bending was far from a neoteric phenomenon in popular music. Despite a usual adherence to hierarchal structures which, for the majority

espoused heteronormative, patriarchal ideals, even the most cursory scratches beneath pop music's history reveals abundant contraventions. A rich heritage of cross-dressing, drag and other alternative or underground manifestations, peripheral to queer communities, have ensured that these antecedent forms of expression, delivered through numerous aesthetical, sartorial artifacts and aspects of performativity, have a well-documented history (Geffen, 2020).

From the queer black women at the fore of the 1920s United States Blues scene (Chen, 2016), via the transgressive gender aesthetics and antics of Little Richard (White, 2003), to Bowie's iconic flirtations with bisexual identity, make-up and platform shoes (Glen, 2003), mutations of the customary are easily located and well renowned. Less hallowed perhaps, but still equally worthy of note for similar transgressive qualities are the contributions of American underground rock musician Jobriath (Wayne, 2012). Also in the United States, Jayne County would come to some prominence during the 1970s, as a singer with punk rock outfit, The Electric Chairs. With an act constructed to shock, whether through County's 'Valley of the Dolls' drag queen aesthetic, or through musical outputs such as, "(If You Don't Want to Fuck Me) Fuck Off", the band were never destined for the mainstream. The extent of Jane County's participation in pivotal cultural and political landmarks from populating Andy Warhol's infamous New York Factory studio to involvement in the Stonewall riots, was finally revealed in her autobiography (1995). In addition, County's pioneering contribution as an explicitly trans-identified performer, has helped solidify her distinguished place in pop's canon (Petridis, 2021). However, despite such colourful antecedents, much of the work of such artists would evade the majority of mainstream pop audiences.

This would shift significantly in the next decade, as the early to mid-1980s would witness a surfeit of overtly transgressive performers whose prominence would populate the tabloid press as frequently as the music charts. Boy George's cohorts, the 'blitz kids', were a cluster of young adults who had converged around the eponymously named London nightclub at the end of the 1970s (Morère, 2019). Expediently situated between two art colleges, the venue helped enable many of the loose gathering to become vanguards of a new subculture, favouring the ostentatious, extravagant and crucially, genderless clothing of designers such aforementioned Judy Blame, among others (Kemp, 2009).

Inspired by a diet of Bowie and punk, various members of the disparate group would come to exert influence over many aspects of 1980s British culture, from fashion to design, (Smith and Sullivan, 2007; Jones, 2020). However, it was the movement's role in the genesis of a new cohort of pop artists, which had the most influence. In addition to Culture Club, the roll-call of individuals such as Siobhan Fahey or Princess Julia, who, along with a number of groups such as Adam Ant, Sade, Ultravox and Spandau Ballet, would come to occupy the pop music charts of the early 1980s. Another member of the clan, Steve Strange, of pop group Visage, would also find himself included under the newfound populist moniker of the 'gender bender', as would Hayzi Fantazee, a duo consisting of partners Jeremy Healy and Kate Garner.

The significant cross-Atlantic commercial success of Culture Club had been duly noted by the record industry. A number of other pop acts emerged and were also quickly included under the increasingly populated term. Having also achieved cult notoriety as a 'blitz kid', Peter Robinson, aka Marilyn, was a friend of Boy George's, and was quickly signed up by a record company, in a somewhat cynical attempt to replicate his peer's success. Critics, however, were more than a little unkind as to Marilyn's vocal abilities and material, and sceptical of his launch as a pop star to begin with (Tennant, 1984 *in* Frith, 1995). In addition, when not focused on his evidently riveting gender bending ways, the discourse surrounding Marilyn often revolved around his friendship with George, the singer resignedly admitting as much in 1984 (*ibid*). Nonetheless, Marilyn's debut single would follow Culture Club's success, securing him a place in the upper echelons of the top ten in the English charts and across Europe.

Divine, aka actor Harris Glenn Milstead, had emerged as an unlikely Hi-Nrg pop star. Outside of the Benelux countries, the success of his Bobby Orlando-produced tracks had been largely confined to the Hi-Nrg soundtracked gay scene of North America and Europe (Jay, 1995). However, in 1984, Stock Aitken and Waterman produced the recording "You Think You're a Man", would become one of trio's first chart hits. Divine, as Boy George and Marilyn before, was catapulted from cult status into the mainstream. In common with both artists, *Top of The Pops* was once again a significant vehicle in alerting the masses to Divine's own mass. Divine was always going to draw attention, and he was soon added to the fold of those included under the 'gender bender' label.

IV.B.2. Ascendancy: Sisters, Doing it for Themselves

Despite a membership predominantly male in domain, a number of female artists were also ascribed 'gender bender' status and found themselves the subject of scrutiny in regard to their gender transgressive imagery and performance. While glam rock had introduced expanded gender possibilities for men, it had taken until the subsequent advent of punk for the rigid aesthetic expectations placed on women to be truly challenged on a level previously unforeseen. Punk's trademark confrontational performance style and aesthetics had shocked on many levels (Wilkinson, 2014), and its subsequent cultural saturation has ensured its legacy as one of the most impactful and enduring genres. The advances made by punk's emergence from the underground had introduced mainstream audiences to women such as Debbie Harry, Siouxsie Sioux and Nina Hagen, whose confrontational punk performance style, along with their outrageous, sado-masochistic infused Vivienne Westwood-influenced sartorial fashions (Paytress, 2003; Kawamura, 2005), would significantly expand the heretofore two-dimensional palette of representation of women in pop.

Scottish singer, Annie Lennox, had emerged on the tide of punk and found success as part of pop/punk band, The Tourists. Here she met Dave Stewart, and their second collaboration, the synth-pop infused band, The Eurythmics, would see the duo attain and maintain significant commercial success (Ellis & Sutherland, 2001). As was now the way of those ordained with 'gender bender' status, initial commentary resulting from the band's first hit, "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)", centred as much on appearance as on the music itself. With cropped hair and a propensity for men's suits, Lennox's image meant that she quickly found herself labelled under the emerging moniker. Rodger's (2006) substantial exploration of the artist's career, demonstrates the true brevity of her gender performativity, attributing her work to a lineage of Homeovestism[9], as much as androgyny, or indeed 'gender-bending' ways. The multifaceted performativity of gender, as employed in the promotional videos of The Eurythmics, has also garnered acclaim. Specifically accredited as antidotes to the frequently

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[9] Attributing the term Homeovestism, to Psychoanalyst Joan Riviere's classification to describe displays of excessively feminine traits, first observed among women holding roles perceived as masculine in the 1940s, Rodger's (2006) explores Lennox's gender experimentations. She notes Gamman and Makinen description of the artist, as a "quintessential feminine type" (1995, p. 70)

sexist visuals then associated with the medium (Oglesbee, 1987), this has further cemented the Lennox's pedigree as a feminist provocateur, in addition to that of a gender non-conformist.

Grace Jones, Lennox's chief female contemporary awarded 'gender bender' classification, would share in her non-conformist approach. With the added intersection of race, she would distort the established norms of pop music even further. Judiciously self-proclaimed as "[…] the sybaritic Grace Jones, bare skinned in Studio 54, lathered in foam and coke, tongued, and flailed by drag queens, total strangers, and horny hedonists, entertaining the creeps, weirdos, strays, and lionized, living the un-American dream" (Jones, 2015, p.176), Jones has revelled in a reputation for dismantling cultural and societal barriers and norms. While Lennox had found initial success with punk, Jones's musical career had materialised on the wings of popularity of that other great transgressive enabler of the 1970s, disco. Her path, alternating back and forth between the roles of fashion model, singer, actress and self-proclaimed muse to artist Jean-Paul Goude (Jones, 2016; Baron, 2016) continued unabated in the new decade as, in common with Lennox, she toned her musical style to accommodate the emerging musical trends.

Embarking provocatively on the new decade, by titling her inaugural 1981 tour a 'one-man show' (Lutz, 2016), Jones would describe the show as being about "[…] rejecting normal, often quite sentimental and conventionally crowd-pleasing ways of projecting myself as a black singer and female entertainer, because those had turned into clichés, which kept me pent up in a cage" (Jones, 2015, p.259). Along the way, the artist would cultivate a reputation as fiercely non-compromising as the brevity of her extensive cultural contributions, across numerous platforms. Her persona, in interviews and live performance, perfectly suited the visuals and the convergence of high-art and pop music. Drawing on explicit utilisation of "[…] racial and sexual stereotypes, associated with the African diaspora" (Kershaw, 1997, p.19), Jones would offer a stoically androgynous and formidable representation of womanhood, and profoundly "[…] contribute to a reconceptualization of Afrocentric culture" (*ibid*) along the way. The androgyny of her image and performativity would see Jones added to the growing list of performers associated with the tag of 'gender bender'.

While discourse attracted in both music and mainstream press was, as illustrated in the following section, frequently toned by incredulous, often condemnatory reporting, the impact of the cultural occurrence on the pop landscape, and wider popular culture, was undeniable.

Geographically, while many of those who found themselves labelled with the term were English by origin, their reach quickly crossed the Atlantic, as artists replicated their English and European success. The feted 'British Invasion' of American airwaves and music charts during the first half of the decade (Jones, 2020; Bullock, 2017) would contain amongst its ranks several artists whose reputation for experimentation with representations of gender was firmly asserted. "Alongside Boy George and Annie Lennox, America's be damned rockers seemed as out of time as Frank Sinatra in the California of 1967", notes Doggett (2015, p.524), giving testimony to the modifications and reforms ushered in by this new wave. Such was the ongoing fascination with this occurrence, that by 1985 it would warrant the lead story in the January edition of *Life*, a piece entitled, "Gender Benders: The Year of Living Androgynously" (Lecklider, 2004, p.111). The advent of MTV, the first 24-hour music television, only further enabled the cluster, heralding as it did, a "[…] demand for striking visuals to accompany the song" (Troy, 2007, p.195).

As the commercial blaze of Culture Club's success began to wane in the United Kingdom by the mid-1980s, Liverpudlian singer Pete Burns, among others, would ensure the construct remained to the fore of popular culture, well into 1985. With his band Dead or Alive, Burns' contribution to the queering of the decade is strengthened by his adherence to a philosophy which rejected sexual or gender classifications, as will be explored further later in this Chapter. Dead or Alive's sound had shifted enormously from their early post punk, prototype goth beginnings, to the glossy, synthesised Hi-Nrg production of their 1985 album, *Youthquake* (Greene, 1985). The sonic transition resulted in a sound considered atypical of the 'gender benders'.

IV.B.3. "Dude looks like a lady": Twisted Sisters and Beyond

Despite this demonstrated association with Hi-Nrg, the emergent popularity of assorted 'gender benders' in the United States would see an evolution, which also serves to illustrate the extent of their broader aesthetical influence. Displays of gender ambiguity had always been a prominent feature of the post-punk, new wave movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s (Bernstein & Majewski, 2014). Increasingly, however, representations of the accoutrements and style of those associated with the unsolicited affiliation would occur in other, often far less recognisably queer genres of the pop pantheon.

While acknowledged as being "[…] a little messier" (CDESMoulins, 2018) a solid, if complex, relationship between hard rock, heavy metal genres, and queer identity and fandom, has been unearthed by scholars in recent years. Such is the genre's established predilection for androgynous imagery, it is difficult, as De-Gallier (2020) notes, "[…] to imagine metal without make-up". Clifford-Napoleone's work (2016) manages a two-fold achievement, disentangling established prevalent preconceptions of the genre, as perpetrator of solely heteronormative ideals, while also revealing the foundations of this reputation. Saliently, she notes that, "[…] only by refocusing the study of heavy metal away from its projection as heterosexual masculinity can we truly begin to unpack the ways in which heavy metal consume and enact their heavy metal desires" (*ibid*, p.2). Others, such as Heesch & Scott have duly assisted in attempting to have this ambition realised, further lifting the lid on aspects of hard rock and queer sexuality (2016), and by the 1980s the gender bender's influence would extend to this formerly perceived bastion of sexual hegemony.

The United States was the main breeding ground and market for heavy metal and hard rock, both of which were flourishing in the 1980s (Beaujour & Bienstock, 2021), and Dee Snider, of rock group Twisted Sister, would soon attract the 'gender bender' tag. Snider would assimilate the outrageous make-up and clothing associated with the gender benders, as well as injecting an acknowledged camp aesthetic into his performativity. Bands such as Van Halen, Motley Crue, Poison and KISS, were already renowned for their generously coiffured hair, theatrical performance styles and androgynous clothing, to such extent that the term 'hair metal' had been humorously applied by critics (Popoff, 2014). The development was not uniformly welcomed within the metal fanbase, provoking a backlash from fans of 'harder' metal genres, as detailed by Walser's (1993) exploration of gender portrayals in the genre.

Even by these visual standards of the genre, Snider's appearance still shocked, mainly due to the overt gender transgression at play. Writing in his autobiography, he discloses a revealing approach to his sartorial choices for performance. "I pulled together whatever 'borderline' feminine outfits I could without going over the line (read: flaming homosexual)", he notes, (2012, p.59). Heterosexuality also assured, in 1987, fellow rockers Aerosmith, led by the similarly gender bender tagged Steve Tyler, would address the wave of gender bending straight on, in song. "Dude looks like a Lady", would become a significant chart hit world-wide and while admonished for it's less than nuanced lyrical content (Alonso, 2017),

nonetheless it represents a zenith of sorts, such was the explicit, if brash, nature of its lyrical theme. Heavy rock was not isolated in incorporating aspects of the gender insurrection which had seemingly taken hold in pop, and other genres would also be subject to interpretations involving gender contraventions, throughout the decade.

Prolifically, Prince Roger Nelson, aka Prince, would ensure that rhythm, blues and funk-based pop music was also conversant to the trend, through his numerous subversions of gender. Whether through lyrics such as, "I'm not a woman, I'm not a man, I am something that you'll never understand" ("I Would Die for You"), through his sartorial adoption of women's lingerie, or through the then anomaly of assembling a predominantly female band, Paisley Park (Thorn, 2016), Prince would further disrupt the hegemony through a dizzying range of performative mechanisms. Bautista (2017) and Reynolds (2016) are among the scholars who have delved into his contributions to dismantle pre-existing norms of gender expression in rock, with Dylan (2021) noting how, "[…] he ruthlessly exploited the whole is he?/isn't he? schtick, the ambiguity of his trojan horse style helping spin a web of mystery" (p.227). Hawkins (2019) expands the accolade further, noting how the artist has "[...] successfully negotiated the movement between queer and straight, demonstrating the sensational possibilities of sexual identity as fluid (p.106).

Such examples give indication as to the pervasive brevity of non-traditional executions of gender across numerous pop and rock platforms during the decade. However, an examination remains warranted, of the genesis and construct of the 'gender bender' term itself. Together with its popularisation, a perusal of the ensuing discourse generated, and its etymological origins, yields an enthralling Chapter in pop's history.

IV.C. A 'Divine' Discourse ?

IV.C.1. Tabloid Tales and Terminology: Interpreting a 1980s Phenomenon

Despite, proving that experimentation beyond the stringent binary of gender medians was no prohibitor to commercial success, critical reaction to the evolution of the gender benders was loud, and for the most part, disparaging. This study has previously documented the obsessional degree to which English tabloid newspapers of the 1980s were transfixed with

the sexual orientation of male stars in particular, and Boy George drew by far, the most tabloid inches of his gender-bending contemporaries (Napier-Bell, 2001). *The Sun* newspaper's first headline *'Mister (or Is it, Miss?) Weirdo'* reported with enthralment to readers, how (he), "[…] looks like a girl, sounds like a fella and behaves like something strangely in-between" (Ware, 1982, p. 17).

In keeping with their well-documented disdain for anything even remotely perceived to tolerate homosexuality (Lovelock, 2018; Sanderson, 1985), mockery and thinly veiled heteropatriarchy were the order of the day. Examples abound - for instance, a review of a performance by Divine assured its readers, that "[…] ugly is a word that assumes new proportions with Divine around. Super-fruit extraordinaire, his gross frame and catty repartee are his only saving graces" (Jay, 1995, p.148). In January 1984, *The Sunday Mirror's* two page 'special report' on the 'gender benders', would warn readers that "[…] these days, far from simply dressing up in the privacy of their own homes, the gender benders are coming out of the wardrobe. They wear their high-camp clothes in the street, to the local pub, and even to the supermarket!" (Mckay, 1984, p.10). Despite such feverish reportage, in of itself responsible for the term's popular usage, the press had not always been so forthcoming in devoting their attention to the trend. Boy George would recall how, early in his career, upon reaching out to a newspaper to suggest an interview, his management had been met with the response, "we don't interview transvestites" (O'Dowd, 1995, p. 217). Such discourse was not regulated to the purview of the tabloids, as the music press were evidently equally as offended by the menace posed by aesthetic displays of the 'gender benders'. United Kingdom-based music weekly, *Sounds* focused the attention of their review of Culture Club's first single on George being "[…] ludicrously unphotogenic" (p.217, *ibid*). Interestingly, studies have also identified a disparity in such reportage based, ironically, on gender. While the tone of articles on male-identified 'gender benders' had typically encouraged reader condemnation, revelling in salacious descriptions of their gender travesties, in the case of Annie Lennox, the opposite occurred. Instead, Rodger (2004), notes how, "[n]ewspaper and magazine articles inevitably raised the issue of Lennox's androgynous appearance, and sought to reassure the reader that, despite this, she was a very feminine and 'normal' woman" (p.24).

On foot of Divine's July 19th, 1984 appearance on the television show *Top of the Pops*, *The Sun* would breathlessly report that […] "the BBC's switchboard was jammed with more than 1,500 complaints about him gyrating around in a tight dress, high heels and a bouffant

blonde wig" (Sky, 1984, p.14), citing his performance as "[…] the latest and most outrageous example for the current pop fashion for drag". It's interesting to note Sky's tabloid classification of Divine's performance as 'drag' as opposed to 'gender bender' here (*ibid*, 1984). Used in the same publication which would popularise and frequently label artists using the latter term, it offers example of the explicit intersections "correctly" assumed to exist, between the worlds of queer culture, drag and the burgeoning cultural occurrence of the 'gender bender'. The indolent nature of such labelling has been observed by scholars, who note its interchangeable use, "[…] by journalists and media outlets to describe, in a summary fashion, a range of identities such as drag, transgender, cross-dressing, and queer identities" (Prosser, 2016, p.1).

Here it is worth pausing to consider the disdain for the term, from within LGBTI & queer communities themselves. Considered inappropriate at best, its use has been described as "[…] derogatory to transgender people, and highly offensive" (Ofcom, 2016 p.10), with its implicit conveyance of a core assumption, that 'sex' and 'gender' are one in the same. Similar rejections have been recorded from both the artists routinely included under its umbrella (Burns, 2006, p.57), and also from scholars, who have pointed to the potential negative implications of association with the label. For instance, Rodger's (2004) articulates concern that application of the term could adversely affect an artist's critical standing. This inadvertently exposes the innately queer, and negative, connotations in which the term was seemingly imbued.

The expression 'gender bender' has been described in the simplest of terms, as "[…] a person who dresses and behaves like a member of the opposite sex" (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 2018) and "[...] a person who wears the clothes and copies the behaviour of the opposite sex" (*Cambridge English Dictionary*, 2019). The term 'gender-fuck' had emerged in the early 1970s, coined initially as descriptor for the San Francisco based performance art and drag troupe, and sometime Divine collaborators, The Cockettes (Walters, 1988 *in* Kureishi & Savage, 1995). Humphrey's seminal gay rights manifesto, *Out of the Closets* (1972), would link the concept to the counterculture 'guerrilla theatre' movement of the previous decade, of which it also shared Californian origins. Soon after, the article 'Gender Fuck and its Delights,' in *Gay Sunshine – A Journal of Gay Liberation* (Lonc, 1974), offered further consolidation of the concept, implicitly identifying the disruption of the heteronormative, as being a core

element of its existence. However, 'gender-fuck' was never going to be considered a palatable choice for those attributed with coining the term 'gender bender' in the 1980s.

Collins Dictionary cites the term's origins as occurring from 1980-1985, correlating with the period in which the artists explored within this Chapter rose to commercial success and media notoriety. However, evidence of a specific inaugural use of the term remains tantalisingly indeterminate. Despite this, there is consensus regarding its popularisation as a form of describing the aesthetic trend first brought to the masses by Boy George and his band and employed in the daily staple of newspaper stories dissecting fixating on his unconventional appearance (Whatling, 1984; 2013). In retrospect, it is easy to conceive why the term was popularised by the "[…] connotation-rich vocabulary" (Schaffer, 1995, p.30) of the tabloids, continuing their semiotic tradition of employing rhyme (*ibid*; Van Dijk, 1991, p.47). In seeking to shock and titillate readers, the paradox of their subsequent role in the label's popularisation is inherent, and surely constitutes a notably ironic footnote of 1980s pop culture. Despite their incongruence and the sordid circumstances of their naissance, the 'gender benders' ensured the stamp of gender insurrection would be unavoidable throughout the decade.

The next section specifically explores the performativity and other creative elements of the gender bender's pop music manifestations, under the microscope of queer theory frameworks and analysis of various discourses, in order to redeem its overlooked status and validate its role in the decade's pop history.

IV.C.2. "Walk Like a Man": Butler, Queer Theory, and the "Gender Benders"

> Rock and Roll didn't invent gender bending, but it dressed it up to the nines.
> -Thor Christensen, *A Rockin' Gender-Bender Round-Up*, 2016.

This section presents the underpinning frameworks necessary to fathom and appreciate the gender bender's pivotal role in the queering of 1980s pop, and indeed, wider culture. Under the microscope of sexuality theorists, the extent of the gender bender's role and its treacherous nature in challenging pop's previously gendered status quo is unearthed. Unlike Bowie, or more recent manifestations of gender non-conformity, such was the innately, undeniably queer bent to the 'gender benders', that there could be no reprieve from the onslaught of inference which their image would betray. While other acts could retreat into a little plausible deniability,

in relation to their sexual or gender identifications, the aggressively and explicitly transgressive nature of much of the visual, performative, and aesthetic styles employed by the 'gender benders' would render any ambiguity in relation to such matters, as void.

Despite an innate queer history running through pop, Hartman & Schmid (2015) remind us that the same habitual ideologies, which are held as paragons of societal masculinity, are also absorbed by performers, "[…] and due to that, rock culture has picked them up, and deemed them the proper characteristics of a rock star" (p.63). Also, despite the plethora of queer representations during the period, the decade would also elicit its share of reactionary responses. One study quotes a fan who, contributing to a magazine debate on the trend for feminine portrayals of masculinity within heavy metal, retorts that, "[...] real men don't wear make-up" (Walser, 1993 p.130). The work also stresses that some representations of androgyny in hard rock may, unfortunately, be best understood, "[…] as yet another tactic for dealing with the anxieties of masculinity" (*ibid,* p.128). Walser's work is extremely relevant to hard rock culture, however, the aesthetics of the atypical 'gender bender' were often explicitly queer, and warrants a more robust, stand-alone, and transgressive accolade. Some just acknowledgements of the more far-reaching influence of artists who were busily redrawing pop's gender roles at the time do exist:

> The aesthetic of the new romantics defied gender conventions, and in a period of discussion and debate about prescribed gender roles emerging in both Thatcherite discourse and press coverage of the 'new man', the movement was arguably part of a broader reimagining of, and challenge to, conventional ideas about gender and identity.
>
> (Kenny, 2011)

The new romantic movement was indeed characterised by its rejection of the aesthetic binaries of male and female. There is little doubt of the correlation between the movement and its role in helping to define an aesthetic, and the subsequent tabloid birth of the 'gender bender'. As noted, in relation to the rich legacy of the new romantic movement, "[T] heir artistic energy, questioning the appropriateness of dress, has infused the music and fashion world for years, and still does" (Morère, 2019).

However, as we have seen, the 'gender benders' were far more incongruent; a tabloid-labelled construction. While some of their number would be associated with the synth pop

calling card of the new romantics (Patterson, 2016), other genres, such as Hi-Nrg, would also feature as sonic templates for their outputs, thus rendering a collective review of their outputs less obvious. As such, previous observations, while building evidence towards the acute influence of transgressive gender representation in pop during the time under scrutiny, still fall short of observing the innate queerness inherent within. This study argues that when viewed through the conjectures espoused by queer theorists such as Butler, the queer-imbued linguistic analysis approach outlined by Motschenbacher and Stegu, (2013), or against the backdrop of the framework proposed by Benshoff and Griffin (2004), a truer picture emerges. It is here that the deeper influence and disruption to the hegemony of pop, as played by the disparate group, becomes clear.

Thus, the work of Butler serves as a discerning starting point, as many of her eminent explorations of gender and sexuality are of relevance to this study. Building upon the ideas of Foucault, the author famously sets forth gender as, "[…] the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigidly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (1990, p.66). Offering instead, an interpretation of gender, as "[…] a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and perform in the mode of belief" (1988, p.520), Butler also laid bare the vehicle at the core of the deliverance of such representations, performativity. Its pivotal role, "[…] that reiterative power of discourse, to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (1993, p.20), as conduit for the communication of gender, is also deconstructed. In challenging what Peri and Bradley (2017) refer to as a "[…] system of criteria" (p.585), which is understood to regulate our cultural values in relation to the classification of gender, Butler reveals the restrictive banality at the core of adherence to much gender performance.

Such ideologies not only challenged second wave feminist discourse of the 1980s (Coles, 2007), but also questioned the rigid binary of assimilationist 'gay and lesbian' identity politics of the period (Kopelson, 2002). Regardless, the key concepts presented by Butler would have a profound impact on sexuality scholarship, sealing her reputation as a *cause célèbre* of queer theory, and as "[…] one of those rare academics whose work is making ripples well beyond the confines of the ivory tower" (Bankowsky & Kotz, 1992 p. 41). Little wonder that Butler's work, with its "[…] in-your-face difference, with an edge of defiant separatism" (Gamson, 1995, p. 395), complimented the anti-assimilationist ethos of the emerging new

queer activist movement, as exemplified by groups such as Act-Up, and Queer Nation. Furthermore, scholars such as Gould (2007) have confirmed that Butler's theories can be readily applied to popular music research [...] on the basis of our intellectual, emotional and corporeal engagements with music (p.208).

While such notable explorations of gender are relevant to this study per se, Butler's work from this period is of further interest to this research due to her exploration of drag, a form already illustrated as having direct influence upon, and association with, the 'gender bender'. Butler credits the practice as revolutionary, for its role in exposing the discursive nature of gender performativity itself. Drag, she notes, "[…] in imitating gender, implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself" (1993, p.187). In doing so, Butler acknowledges the parody offered by such performances, and their role in the deconstruction of previous gender norms. Furthermore, Butler offers a reminder of the elaborate nature of the complexity of performativity at play in its execution, noting the form's utilisation of three contingent forms, "[…] anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance" (*ibid*, p. 175), which when combined illustrate the convoluted, layered disposition of such enactments. Butler proposes this form of gender parody as "subversive repetition" (p.146, 1990), and promotes drag as key to enabling an understanding of the mimicry of gender performance. The 'gender benders' loud demonstration of disregard to such norms, exposed the fallibility of such representations, and subverted the logic traditionally associated with the sex/gender concepts.

Since Butler's late twentieth century work, a range of other scholars have explored drag and its potential and aptitude as a vehicle for sexual subversion (Rhyne, 2004; Hobson, 2013; Buck, 2019). Horowitz (2013) proposes that drag shows can "[…] produce effects just as real (and as really political) as apparently upstaged performances - political rallies, legal interventions, and organised protests (p.305), even going as far as suggesting it is "[…] better suited to the project of negotiating, claiming and articulating an individual or collective queer identity, than, say, campaigning for queer friendly candidates and legislation". Regardless of its exact prowess as an agitator, there is ample support for the concept of 'disidentification', coined by Muñoz (1999), who identified it as core to the process employed by drag artists, and those categorised under the gender bender umbrella. Muñoz suggests that the appropriation of social and aesthetical aspects of culture, ordinarily deemed unattainable to the performer, come together as entertainment. The socio-sexual ramifications of such analysis further enhance the

political capacity of the 'gender benders' to critique existing norms and pervasions, and directly places them closer to the front-line alongside the decade's renowned musical sexual agitators.

Although disparate, a commonality among those ascribed 'gender bender' status, was the eschewal of gay and lesbian binaries. This may be viewed as another example of transgression, albeit as provocative to those who adhered to the rigidly inflexible identity politics of the 1980s (Farber, 2009; Morris 1998), as much as to any broader, societal moral majority. In today's climate, the abstention of traditional sexual and gender identity labels such as gay/lesbian and male/female, in favour of increasingly non-binary markers, particularly among young people, has been identified in numerous studies (Avary, 2021; Kuper, Nussbaum, & Mustanski, 2012; Yeadon-Lee, 2016). In the 1980s, the basis of the rejection was multitudinous, and is explored in greater detail in the following Chapter. But testimony from the period illustrates an aversion on the part of many of the 'gender benders' to be categorised within these binaries (Burns, 2007; O'Dowd & Bright, 1995). As demonstrated in Chapter II, the counter-culture ideals of the 1960s had a delayed impact on pop. In the case of the 'gender benders', it was the reverse; they pre-empted the emergence of the burgeoning queer movement as it revolutionised concepts of identity.

With analysis unearthing a social, even political significance to the transgressive qualities of drag and assorted gender play, it is fortunate to find that, while making no explicit reference to the 'gender benders', the founding social constructionists who informed Butler's own work were cognisant of the cultural significance of pop and rock. Foucault's rejection of the implicit assumption of liberationalism and insistence on viewing sexuality as a social experience open to manipulation would open a pathway of new critical thinking. Foucault acknowledge pop and rock's value as a "[…] cultural initiator" (Foucault & Boulez, 1983, *in* Rahn, 1985, p. 8). As such, the 'gender bender's' refusal to be neatly categorised by sexual identity can be read as a marked extension of the constructionist philosophy.

IV.C.3. Queer Looks: Aesthetics, Songs, and Performativity

The visual presence of Boy George remains a cornerstone image of the 1980s today, reflecting both his level of exposure during the decade, and the aesthetical intrigue his image conveyed. "His make-up is extensive, but it creates not the illusion of looking upon a woman;

rather it somehow allows if not underscores his anatomical reality as a man", notes Pinar, (1983, p.188). Early ambiguous answers in relation to his sexuality, would be later regretted by the beleaguered performer (Kyte, 2003), and scholars have been generous in affording his contributions. "[w]e should not underestimate to which the presence of George and people like him may have helped some men to expand their male gender identity" notes Heath, (*in* Kirk, 1999). Indeed, given the context of press speculation, combined with the sexually conservative nature of the music industry, wider media, and the low socio-political status of sexual minorities during the decade, this early reluctance does not detract from his pioneering role.

On an aesthetic level, George's friend and now fellow pop star, Marilyn, would supersede his contemporary's androgyny, if not commercial success, utilising aesthetics associated with his namesake, the actress Marilyn Monroe, to full effect. Speaking in 2016, he recalled:

> I'd have on an Anthony Price dress, fox fur, diamantes, the hair, the five-inch stilettos, fishnets, all of that. And the whole of fucking Oxford Street … cars would stop, people would crash into each other, guys would lean out of windows going, 'All right, darlin!', builders on building sites would go fucking nuts and drop things, that kind of vibe. People didn't look like me then; they just didn't. *Women* didn't look like that, let alone a man, a boy dressed up like that. People went fucking nuts.
> (Robinson, quoted in Petridis, 2016).

Such blatant contravention ensured that he too would attract intense tabloid interest, almost matching the level of exposure attained by his famous friend. So seemingly rich in gender transgression was the period, scholars have cited it as being exemplary of philosopher Umberto Eco's concept of 'semiotic guerrilla warfare', whereby resistive readings of artifacts are employed to counter and subvert (*in* Morère, 2019).

However, the 'gender benders' aesthetics went far beyond merely their attire. The visual collaborations of Grace Jones with partner Jean-Paul Goude stand testament to an emphasis on transgressive images of the body, as well as make-up and clothing. This can be seen in the iconic covers of records such as *Island Life* and *Nightclubbing*, the latter depicting Jones's torso, "[…] so sculpted that the decolletage-cum-breastbone could be male or female" (Baron, 2016, p. 85). The mid-1980s work of Peruvian photographer, Mario Testino, with Pete Burns of Dead or Alive, would adopt a similarly androgynous tack, producing imagery which defied the template set for the depiction of the hegemony.

In performance, the ‘gender benders’ were equally transgressive. A live appearance by Divine, which involved “[…] spitting out the lyrics like a towering inferno of wounded pride”, with the artist proclaiming to be “[…] the best lover in the world, (while) castigating a succession of men with huge egos and under-developed man-hoods” (Pafford, 2018), offers a salient description of the performance style utilised by the artist. While the visual aesthetics of the ‘gender benders’ was the most transgressive aspect of their trademark, it is also worth discussing the other means through which they engineered transgression, namely the titles they used and lyrics they sang. In the previous Chapter exploring the impact of Hi-Nrg, the crossover between the gender benders and the genre was illustrated. Both Divine and Pete Burns of Dead Or Alive would utilise the sonic template, embracing and enhancing its reputation for homoerotic, innuendo-laden lyrics (Bell & Binnie, 2004). Emerging from the ‘gay ghettos’ of the west, Divine’s output employed the use of queer linguistics (Kureishi, 1995; Kirk, 1999). Queer-centric titles, such as the previously discussed “Shoot Your Shot”, and “Born to be Cheap” were complimented by songs explicitly referencing the gender-play being performed, such as “Show Me Around”, with Divine admonishing the listener: “I ain’t no country boy”. The underground and explicitly queer nature of Divine’s earlier career was never diluted for his later musical recording outputs.

The manifestation of ‘gender benders’, thrust into the public sphere had no doubt benefitted from a combination of musical genres. Glam-rock, punk and disco (Gregory, 2002; Taylor, 2009; Dyer, 1978) had each functioned as enabling factors in the representation of alternatives to the hegemony offered traditionally in rock and pop. Later, genres such as synth pop and new wave (Cateforis, 2011; Pubrick & Pubrick, 2020), along with tribes such as the new romantics would ensure this expansion continued into the 1980s. The predominant role of visual aesthetics in 1980s popular culture was discussed in Chapter II. It was facilitated by the rise of MTV (Kaplan, 2014; Troy, 2007), and a music and style press enjoying consummate circulation (Patterson, 2015). All this contributed to the materialisation of this incongruent group, who no doubt benefitted from such an optically vibrant culture.

IV.D. "A Glorious Docker in Rock and Roll Drag": A Queer Appraisal of Pete Burns

IV.D.1. Testimony of a Troublemaker

> Pop (in the 1980s) was long overdue something that was more "out'', that carried the scent of spunk and the harsh tang of amyl nitrate.
>
> -Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again*, 2005.

> Now that I'm old enough to know what I like, I like big muscle boys on motorbikes.
>
> -Pete Burns, "Black Leather", 1979.

Undoubtedly, Boy George, together with his Culture Club cohorts, were the most commercially successful and high profile of the 'gender benders' (McAlpine, 2012). Without his celebrity, it is debatable whether the concept alluded to by the term would have permeated popular culture to the degree it eventually would, and his contribution to pop's queer cannon is equitably acknowledged (Pinar, 1993). However, this section chooses to present a critical inquiry into the outputs and performativity of another performer, Pete Burns, and presents evidence to designate his *modus operandi* as being reflective of many foundational aspects of queer theory.

Burns would use every opportunity; in performance, lyrics, and press interviews, to challenge and perturb not only the heteronormative hegemony on the music industry, but also the binary nature of the sexual identity politics adopted by many gay and lesbian communities of the time. He would take seemingly obvious delight in interweaving and conjecturing multiple interpretations of gender, often to the bafflement of critics, and of an industry still grappling with the idea of a man in a dress. Together with his constant rejection of the sexual and gender-based medians of pop music and broader societal cultures, this section illustrates Burns' philosophy and execution of such refutations and presents evidence which designate him as the pop-star epitome of the queer activist/queer theory movement he would pre-date. Burns' often colourfully worded testimonies, when combined with an analysis of lyrics and

performativity, unearths a fascinating portrait pioneering of a pioneering figure. Disregarding prescriptive gender functions and norms, Burns becomes a true non-conformist in the pop pantheon.

Burns' initial introduction to the thriving punk rock music scene of 1970s Liverpool (DuNoyer, 2004), came through his employment at renowned independent record store, *Probe Records* (Greene, 1985). Here, he would quickly cultivate a reputation, for outrageous attire, and an abrupt manner, where "[…] he would stare right into the soul" (Vincent, 2010) of any customer attempting to purchase a record, of which he disapproved. On foot of this burgeoning reputation, and despite a self-confessed lack of any musical experience, Burns was soon invited to experiment fronting bands. The Mystery Girls, and Nightmares in Wax, would precede Dead or Alive, and seemingly ever-revolving incarnations would feature various future musical luminaries, such Pete Wylie, Julian Cope and Wayne Hussey, along the way. The cluster, along with *Probe Records* staff and customers, would frequent *Eric's*, a Liverpudlian venue synonymous with the punk rock movement of the 1970s, where Burn's persona and shocking appearance made him an obvious icon of the scene. At the time of his death, the city's rich influence on him, and his associates, was recalled:

> Burns was a product of one of Britain's great cities, Liverpool, and his demise is a grim reminder of how much Britain's cities have shrunk in clout and public influence over time. Liverpool in the late Seventies was home to a scene crackling with mavericks and freaks, such as Jayne Casey, Holly Johnson, Ian McCulloch, Julian Cope and Pete Wylie to name just a few. Like many ambitious young people at the time, Burns used his home city to build a public persona and reputation.
> (Davenport, 2016).

In addition to the significance of the urban environment to which Burns had migrated, his graduation towards the punk scene was equally important, with its ethos built upon a cocktail of the subversion of the politics of sexuality and gender (Taylor, 2009; Wilkinson, 2014), among its many affronts. As with other genres of pop music, the relationship has not always been abundantly apparent, but nonetheless, "[…] right from the beginning Punk and LGBT culture were inseparable from one another. The crossover took a variety of forms, most particularly in regard to fashion and self-presentation" notes Wilkinson (2016). Pioneering underground punk artist, Jayne County, would note in her biography:

> My biggest fans were a group of kids in Liverpool, and every time we played Eric's they'd come and sit in the dressing room and watch me get ready. One of them was

> a little boy named Pete who was always painted up, and he'd sit and stare at me, studying my make-up and everything…when I came back to England a few years later, Pete had become famous as one of the 80s 'gender benders' - Pete Burns of Dead or Alive. (County, 1995, p.95)

Others have concurred, strengthening the reputation of the punk's queer lineage (Nault, 2019; Taylor, 2009), and it was from the ashes of these punk-spirited endeavours that Burns' would form Dead or Alive, in 1980. Eventually signed to EPIC records in 1984, their first hit, a cover version of KC and The Sunshine Band's 70's disco hit, "(That's the Way) I like It", brought Burns' unconventional looks to the broader public for the first time. Candid about the motive of the signing being based on a cynical industry desire to capitalise on the 'gender bender' trend, and to "[…] find a new Boy George" (quoted in Greene, 1985 p. 21), the following year would see the band reach number one in 17 countries, via their genre-hopping switch to Hi-Nrg, as detailed in the previous Chapter (Lindsay 2019; Waterman, 2000).

'Morrissey & Pete Burns: The Very Odd Couple??!!' led the October 9th, 1985, cover headline of UK pop music magazine, *Smash Hits*! The mid-to-late 1980s would be the magazine's most fortuitous period, reigning supreme in terms of sales among the music press, with a circulation topping 1 million in the United Kingdom, and with equally impressive sales across Europe (Patterson, 2016). As such, and despite the recent encroaching emergence of MTV, alongside the television show *Top of the Pops*, *Smash Hits!* was a hugely significant promotional avenue for artists. Scholars have since argued that the magazine fulfilled a heretofore, insurgent functioning; championing as it did a type of pop music shunned by most of the rock-orientated music press of the era and being "[…] best understood in terms of a carnivalesque disruption that challenges all stable ideas about what makes music good, and what popular music should be about" (Railton, 2001, p.321). To feature two of the year's most prominent pop stars on the highly prized front cover was "[…] a scoop the tabloids would die for" (Cranna, 1985, quoted *in* Firth, 2006, p.81.), and something of a coup. In the interview, Steven Morrissey, then lead singer of indie pop group The Smiths, recalled first meeting Burns while recording an episode of *Top of the Pops*, and subsequently, the two had struck up a friendship.

The ensuing interview is overarchingly camp, peppered with citations such as "I sent him 46 naked sailors for his birthday*" (ibid,* 1985), and bolstered by portraits of the two gazing admiringly at one another. Despite no explicit reference to homosexuality within the text, the

discourse is reminiscent of the longstanding tradition of 'camp' instilled British humour. Traceable from the music halls of the 1890s (Baker, 2014), to the 'Bona Polari' influenced comedic style (Baker, 2019) of Kenneth Williams into the 1960s, the tone of the interview is set firmly to tongue-in-cheek. Once the subject of disdain from activists, on account of its reliance on perceived outdated facets of stereotyping, in more recent years the form of representation has been re-appraised more sympathetically: "[…] helping to represent an oppressed gay identity, but in a cheerful, mocking, and implicit way" (Baker, 1991, p.77).

Although both artists would proceed to follow very different career trajectories, they shared a suitably non-conformist outlook, as to suit a somewhat obvious inclusion within the fields associated with queer theory. However, while Morrissey's work has been subject to numerous investigations (Himes, 2015; Bret, 2004; Dillane, Devereux and Power, 2014; Simpson, 2004), there has less acknowledgement of Burns' contribution. Applying queer linguistic to Burn's principles, through analysis of his testimonies from the period, reveals an ideology and outlook demonstrating an abject refusal to adhere to societal, or industry norms, in relation to sexuality and gender. Burns' contemporaries, most notably, Boy George, frequently side-stepped questions on the nature of their sexual orientation.[10] Despite jaded comparisons, based on their respective reputations as proponents of gender non-conformity, and which would follow both artists throughout their careers (Kyte, 2003), this study argues that Burn's is more explicitly queer. While George had proffered the mainstream with their first exposure to gender benders, overall, he "[…] opened the closet door, but only by the tiniest crack; ultimately, he was too cuddly, coyly masking his sexuality", suggests Reynolds (2017, p.121). Burns was more than willing to disregard any such ambiguity, as George himself would concede, when interviewing Burns several years later, for his London-based radio show. "I was a 'user-friendly' poof, there was a fierceness to you, something dirty about you" (Kyte, 2003). This fierceness would manifest, repeatedly, in the frequent testimony of Burns, as captured in the many interviews from the period.

In relation to his sexual identity, the artist was characteristically blunt, explaining in 1984, "[…] I've got a wife, but I've also got a lover, Steve, and we all get along fine" (*in* Kirk,

[10] Boy George's response to such inquisition from Woman magazine, "[…] Sex? I'd rather have a cup of tea", would become fabled (Morgan, 2011) although as this study has indicated, is a somewhat unfairly deficient assessment of his testimonies and contributions. Clarifying the remark as "[…] a complete lie", (O'Dowd & Bright, 1995, p.256), nonetheless the phrase has remained in the pop culture lexicon.

1999, p.119), thus confounding the classifications expected of him. In the same interview, he expressed his dissatisfaction at the label ‘gay’, noting, “[gay] to me conjures up a moustache, a check shirt and doing twirls to Gloria Gaynor records, and, if that’s what being gay is, then, no I’m certainly not gay” (*ibid*, p.121). Burns would prove equally as dismissive to the established norms of gender, noting with his trademark caustic wit, “[...] I’m not trans anything - I’ve arrived” (2007, p.81). On a more sombre note, he would explain, “[...] I’ve never had a reason to separate gender” (*in* Wiseman, 2007), and would continuously articulate a rejection of labels throughout his career. Reflecting on such inquisition in his autobiography, he would observe that “People always want to know – am I gay, bi, trans or what? I say, forget all that. There’s got to be a completely different terminology and I’m not aware if it’s been invented yet” (Burns, p.54). The desire for a reconfiguration of how sexual and gender identities are assembled would be something of a reoccurring theme in these testimonies, with the artist noting, “[…] the place I belong doesn’t exist yet” in (Kirk, 1999, p.108).

Under the spectre of the broader, societal conservative ideals of the time, Burns, while also eschewing the labels foisted as alternative by the sexual identity vanguards of the period, would provide a unique sense of identification. Obviously, Burns was not alone in rejecting labels foisted by the identity politics of the day. As noted in Chapter II, social constructionists such as Foucault viewed sexuality as more accurately regarded as a social experience, manipulated by various societal contexts, casting doubts on the prevailing liberal notion of liberationism. This fits with Burn’s marked reluctance to align himself with any rigid identity label, less driven by a fear of the consequences of adherence to such, but instead as an authentic rejection of their constructed nature.

Burns would represent an opportunity for a re-imagining of difference, a solidifying of those who do not fit with the status quo and pre-empt the queer sexualities revolution of subsequent decades. Not only is it fitting to place Burns’ work in a queer arena, with its emphasis on permanent rebellion and submission of dominant social meanings and identities (Mottier, 2008), but it would also be the only classification, of which he would grant approval. As he would note, “[...] I’ve been called a transvestite a lot lately but, in the days of (David) Bowie, we didn’t know that word. I was a ‘poof’ in the 1970’s, a ‘gender-bender’ in the 1980’s. I like the word ‘queer’ (*in* Kirk, 1999, p,103).

IV.D.2. Really "Big in Japan": Lyric, Music, and a Queer Embodiment

Burns' performativity and lyrical outputs give insight into his abject rejection of traditional gender roles and sexual identities, both of which he saw as fluid concepts. Adopting a performance style described as, "Not so much, 'gender bender' as 'gender mugger'" (Simpson, 2004, p.73), Burns presented a persona at odds with the expectations of his appearance. On recordings, expectations were further confounded. "Far Too Hard" (Burns & Coy, 1984) adopts a reflective, autobiographical style, in which the listener is first made privy to Burns' own preoccupation with his notorious appearance. The lyric commences:

> Hey there, take a look at me, no I couldn't look no better
> Oh, I am a young man fascinated by my profile in my mirror

We are introduced to a male narrator inviting admiration for his looks, a stance markedly in contrast to the type of lyrical presentation offered by male performers. We are also reminded of feminist theorists who conceptualised the idea of the 'male gaze', defined as "[..] the frequent framing of art so that the viewer is situated in a 'masculine' position of appreciation" (Korsmeyer & Brand-Weiser, 2021). Burns takes the idea of the 'beholder' one step further, turning the gaze onto himself as a male, but while still encompassing and embracing his non-traditional, 'un-male' attributes. Instead of adhering to a type of androgyny and performativity which, as detailed by Heesch & Scott (2016), allows for their heterosexual reputations to remain intact, Burns would continue to prove uncompromising.

There was no coincidence in Burns' choice of Stock, Aitken & Waterman as producers for the band's second album, *Youthquake*. Having heard their work with Divine and Hazell Dean, and, despite industry reservations that it was merely, "[…] music for faggots" (Burns, 2007, p.44), only made Burns more determined. Their first single collaboration, "You Spin Me Round", far outsold previous efforts inspired by the Hi-Nrg genre. Peter Waterman would later confess to having stolen most of the musical themes used, from "Ride of The Valkyries" by Wagner, acknowledging, "[...] it was high camp and Pete seemed a perfect vehicle for that kind of flamboyance" (Waterman, 2000, p.97-98).

Despite the intrinsically queer combination of a Hi-Nrg soundtrack, coupled with the confrontationally queer performance style, it is interesting to note the atypical absence of

pronouns of any type, in the band's period of work with the production trio. A trend identified in the previous Chapter, entire albums from Burn's catalogue can be listened to without a single gender signifier. Despite the reiteration of genderqueer themes in his work, before and after this three-year period, 1985's *Youthquake*, together with 1987's, *Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know*, were instead dominated by lyrics, which, almost exclusively referenced the first person. This contravenes studies into language and semiotics in pop music, which have illustrated that while pop songs frequently rely on this linguistic stance, it is mostly intersected with specific gender descriptors:

> Pop song lyrics are frequently written in the mode of direct address, of intimate conversation, in which the speaker and the person spoken to are identified and 'I' and 'You', these are commonly interspersed with gender signifiers in the form of labels such as 'boy', 'girl', 'man' or 'he' and 'she'. (Goddard and Fudger, 1977, P.143).

It may even seem that these absences impede the credibility of the central thesis of this appraisal. However, the lyrical absence of gender-identifiers in this period of his work may also be viewed in an alternative light – and can also be suggested as a sign of Burns' refusal to compromise. Evidence as to the long history of entertainment stars censored and forced to remain closeted, part of a patriarchal, heteronormative system of power, abound (Bullock, 2017). Rather than repeat the trajectory of male stars who chose to or were pressured to 'cover their tracks' lyrically, by gendering lyrics specifically for heterosexual norms, others, more 'out' artists, neutralised theirs. I believe that this absence of such gender markers represents a strategy, which qualifies the material as queer.

Regardless of his pushing of sexual and gender boundaries in appearance, performance, and testimony, by the late 1980s, Burns' commercial success and profile had waned in the United Kingdom and the United States. However, he remained substantially successful within Asian markets, most notably in Japan. The term, 'big in Japan' has developed into a worn pop music cliché, which artists, whose reputation and/or success has decreased in western pop music markets, use as a defence, to an almost Spinal Tap-like degree (Launey, 1995). However, in Burns' case it was justified. Tours of vast arenas sold out immediately. The 1989 single "Turn Around (and Count 2 Ten)" was a relative flop in the United Kingdom, where it barely disturbed the charts reaching number 70. In Japan, the same title would spend 17 weeks at number 1.

Scholars such as Muramatsu (2002) have explored the intricacies of aspects of gender representation in Japan across various media platforms. While acknowledging that the country was often subject to similar hegemonic representations to that of the west, the study notes an improvement in the 1980s, linked to a wider societal shift in gender roles. Németh (2014), offers further confirmation of this, and also explores the specific "crisis in masculinity" (p.8), which had begun to alter traditional perspectives of maleness which had previously dominated. In addition, and despite the former rigidity, he and others such as Ellis-Rees (2016) have illustrated how representations of masculinity have often differed from those held in the west. Specifically, the tradition of Bishōnen, translated as 'the beautiful boy', which harks back to the earliest of Japanese literature, has remained a predominant element within the country's pop culture (Orbaugh, in Buckley, 2002). Burns' carefully curated aesthetic would fit neatly into this tradition, and it was unsurprising his unorthodox appearance was embraced by Japanese pop audiences. Burns, no longer signed to Epic records internationally, would continue to explore gender in these markets, in progressively more explicit ways.

On *Nukleopatra*, Burns concocts an unusual setting, even by pop music standards. The lyrics recount Burns visiting a spiritualist who informs him of a past reincarnation, that of an alter-ego, the said Nukleopatra:

I saw your advertisement
In a magazine
So I came to see you
To find out who I'd been
You said I was Queen

You saw a he-man's body
With an angel's face
I was a different gender
King of the she-male race

Concept aside, Burns' dalliance with gender reiterates throughout the lyrics, amplified by the sonic contradiction of his deep baritone. As his commercial success faded, so did the need to neutralise his lyrics, which became more explicit in their rejection of sexual and gender hegemonies.

By the turn of the millennium, Burns' musical releases had become sporadic, defined by a pattern of short, recording bursts, - a precedent which would last until his death. However, his defiance of gender-traditional roles would prevail. "Isn't It a Pity" features on 2003 album *Evolution*. Heavy use of auto-tune in the production adds a metallic quality to Burn's voice, and the song updates his trademark Hi-Nrg sound, embracing electro-clash genre popular during the period (Phillips, 2009). Burns delivers lyrics which are perceptibly autobiographical:

> I'm a kind of hybrid
> Of a cartoon and a feature
> Some have thought me lovely
> Others saw an ugly creature
>
> Some have thought me right at times
> Others found me tired
> But I cannot count the times
> That my backside has been admired

By the chorus, Burns has switched gender altogether, lamenting:

> Isn't it a pity?
> That I'm not the prettiest girl in the world
> But when I kick up my heels in the sun
> I'm the loveliest one
> I have found my image obscures all that I am
> But who says you can't mix vinegar with jam?

Once again in seeking to deconstruct existing gender roles, Burns' echoes notions of Judith Butlers observation, "Drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality" (Butler, 1993, p. 74.) Burn's performative expression is signified by lyrical references to female-associated accoutrements such as high heels, along with his identification as a 'girl'. Delivered with a backdrop of sparse, electronic dance-music, the track offers a distinctly queer template, profoundly as far removed from the 'boy meets girl' nature of much pop lyricism as it is possible to get.

In fact, both Burns and Butler share similar opinions on many issues, in particular the social construction and innate superficiality of gender and orientation constructs, whether

imposed or chosen by societal norms or standard alternatives. While they may express this through very different mediums, the essence of innate rejection of boundaries imposed by such rigidity has been shown to cross all aspects of Burns' life and career. In choosing an identity which was more fluid, Burns offered a glimpse of pop's potential to forge expressions of identity to which audiences had traditionally remained unexposed. Although he did not achieve Boy George's level of exposure, he exemplified Butler's theory that such transgression unbolts a space for queer resistance.

Although increasingly intermittent, ensuing collaborations, such as with the Pet Shop Boys, in 2004, would ensure Burns retained the opportunity to continue to challenge. The fruits of their endeavours, "Jack and Jill Party", was a slang term, for a sex party in which both gay men and lesbians are invited to participate (National Museum & Archive of Lesbian and Gay History, 1996). Ever the *provocateur*, Burns would delight in explaining how he took Neil Tenant's original lyrics, which were explicitly gay, and incorporated terminology appropriated from New York street transsexuals to further embolden them (Burns, 2007, p.122).

2016 has been a year noted for the loss of a number of pop music icons including Bowie, George Michael and Prince (Bullock, 2017). On the eve of the release of a career-spanning box-set, Burns was added to the list. In his final years, notoriety had been increasingly maintained by press interest in his cosmetically altered appearance, with discourse commonly speculating on the possible underlying reasons for his decision to undergo such significant surgeries. While this study is loath to accede to such supposition, it is advantageous to revisit Butler one last time, and her reminder that: "[...] one is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body" (1988, p.521). In light of this, it can be argued that such modifications to Burns' physical appearance were yet another example of his jettisoning of the norm, adding further evidence of his queer merit.

In later years, Burns had also become a regular contributor on a number of reality television shows. It may be argued that the form, involving "[t]he juxta positioning of personalities likely to react to one another in a volatile way" (Douglas & Guinn, 2005, p.221), and which had gained a reputation as 'car crash tv' (*ibid*), resulted in a diminished appreciation of his achievements. It fell to Julian Cope, sometime band-mate and fellow stalwart of the Liverpool punk scene, to sum up Burns' contribution in relation to his nonconformity with the expression of gender:

> It's important that he's remembered as a truly significant cross-cultural figure
> I think the gender fluidity that exists today is really fucking useful - if Pete had become famous now he would have been fine… he was a pioneer'*(in* Vincent, 2016).

Burns cannot be credited with introducing non-heteronormative imagery to pop music, as pop music history is abundant with artists who have not followed conventional rules prescribed to gender norms in terms of appearance. But, while his contemporary world was still clinging on to its increasingly outdated gender expectations and norms, he was steadfastly rejecting them, alongside that of the identity-based politics of gay communities of the time. In doing so, Burns was unique. He provoked discomfort, unease, and fascination but ultimately, generated debates about the rigidity of labels, identities, and terminologies. Burns contributions to the pop landscape of the 1980s and beyond have been sometimes overshadowed – but his outputs and philosophies were always fearless and authentic, often unexpected and without which the rich tapestry of queer pop music history would be a much less colourful place.

IV.D.3. Boys Stop Swinging: The Beginning of the End

By 1988 the steamrolling influence of the 'gender bender' had begun to slacken, their presence in the mainstream faltering. Former 'blitz kids', Boy George and Marilyn, would both eschew the explicitly transgressive nature of their earlier apparel and appearance, and with it, much of their accompanying notoriety.

Culture Club disbanded in late 1986, with George embarking on an inevitable solo career, which in the 1990s would see him transition to dance music dee-jay. The band would also reform several times over the next two decades. Marilyn's musical career had lasted all of just one album. A 'comeback' gig, organised by his record company and documented, intriguingly by another queer 1980s pop star-in-waiting, Neil Tenant, ended with the singer storming off stage. (Tenant, 1985 *in* Kureishi & Savage, 1995). The success of Pete Burns and his band had faded in European and American markets, and Glenn Milstead, aka Divine, died on March 8th 1988. (Jay, 1995). Milstead had already embarked on a transition of sorts, with breakthrough acting roles where he would no longer assume a drag persona (Milstead, Heffernan & Yeager, 2005). 'Gender bending' performance artist Leigh Bowery would continue to permeate the intersections of art and club culture, collaborating with the likes of

Lucien Freud (Tilley, 1997). Although his contributions have been widely accredited as influential to a continuing generation of queer artists, the world in which he inhabited was far removed from the mainstream vehicle of tabloids and tv chart shows which had birthed the phenomenon.

Almost as quickly as it had emerged from the fringes of various post-punk and queer cultures, the fashion for gender bending in pop seemed over. Simultaneously, binary representations of the masculine and feminine would enjoy a resurgence in popularity and any hints of ambiguity, particularly on the part of male performers, was censored (Keeps, 2002). While the nature of pop culture itself fulfils an evolving demand for new trends and styles, scholars have also suggested that the regression was representative of a wider backlash (Jones, 2021; Simpson, 2015; Keeps, 1992) which is presented in further detail at the end of the next Chapter. Nonetheless, the 'gender benders' had attained significant cultural prominence, in popular media as much as in the music press and ensured an irrevocably queer presence for the greater part of the decade.

IV.E. Synthesis

This Chapter continued the quest to illustrate the abundance and impact of queer-originated or themed aspects of 1980s pop, by focusing on the surge of non-gender conforming artists during the decade, most notably, the advent and impact of the 'gender benders'.

Important enablers to this swell, in the guise of music genres such as synth pop, new wave, and of course, Hi-Nrg, as well as the influence of broader youth tribes such as the 'new romantics', were critically appraised and rightfully acknowledged for their contributions in initiating the rise. However, credit for the popularisation of the term was ascribed, in the main, to its emergence as a tabloid idiom. The Chapter outlined examples of the resulting discourse, exposing the content as typical of the characteristic approach of a then rabidly homophobic tabloid media. The paradox of their role in the label's rise was also acknowledged. Following this, the Chapter continued to explore the gender bender's impact, illustrating an aesthetic influence extending beyond genres of music more typically associated with gender nonconformity.

In seeking to anchor the gender bender in a framework which befits this study, an exploration followed, authenticating the phenomenon, through the assistance of sexuality and queer theorists. The work of Judith Butler was chosen as a discerning starting point, her concepts of gender, its performativity, and on the subversive essence of drag as a form, all referenced in relation to the potency of the gender bender's impact. Emphasis was placed on the semiotic, as it was the visual aesthetic of the gender bender which was perhaps most pervasive in its impact, and the disruption of gender norms encapsulated by the rise of the 'gender benders' was explored. However, the strong visual impact was shown to have been enhanced by lyrics and performativity, and these were presented equally accountable to their queer origins.

From here, the Chapter continued to offer analysis through this queer bent, offering an exploration of the career of Pete Burns, singer with Dead or Alive. Motivated by a desire to salvage Burns' often overlooked queer musical legacy, in a career later dominated by an association with the television genre of 'reality tv', his unique non-conformity was shown to offer a glimpse of an alternative to the increasing rigidity of identity adherence of 1980s sexual politics. Combining analysis of his testimony, lyrics and other artifacts together with Burns evidenced refusal to adhere to gender or sexual orientation classifications offered compelling confirmation of his pedigree as a queer innovator.

A significant and necessary reconceptualising of gender has occurred since Boy Georges' appearance on *Top of the Pops*, at the dawn of what would be the queerest of pop decades. The 'gender benders', despite being incongruently bound by an unsolicited and unsympathetic tabloid moniker, yielded a profound effect on 1980s pop culture, ushers of an era of pervasive gender nonconformity. While pop music was soon to change course, and see a return to more traditional gender depictions, the 'gender benders' served as potent agitators in the queering of the decade. However, despite the loose grouping's significant influence, their manifestation represented just one of many iterations of queerness on display. Despite such documented obstacles, the decade would witness a flood of diverse representations of sexualities, delivered in multiple forms.

The following Chapter explores the various approaches adopted by artists throughout the 1980s. Alongside the overt representations offered by the burgeoning number of explicitly defined queer artists, the subsequent investigation into the artifacts of those less forthcoming

in relation to a queer alignment, but from whose work queer inferences may be drawn, offers a more robust picture of the decade.

Chapter V: Vinyl Closets & Pink Glass Ceilings

V.A. Introduction

> The category of 'homosexuality' is only as old as recorded sound. Both inventions arose in the late nineteenth century and concerned the home. Both are discourses of home's shattering: what bodies do when they disobey, what bodies do when they are private.
>
> -Sasha Geffen, *Glitter up the Dark: How Pop Music Broke the Gender Binary*, 2020.

The 1980s was a decade like no other in pop's history as converging forces collided, resulting in a maelstrom of non-heteronormative sexuality representations which flooded pop's already colourful spectrum. While illustrating the decade as the first to witness a number of openly gay popstars succeed, this final Chapter also argues that they exploited particular contemporary intersections of industry and socio-sexual complexities that opened multiple avenues of identity. Some stood pioneeringly aligned to the then majority discourse emanating from 'gay and lesbian' identity politics, with its unrelenting emphasis on the binaries of heterosexuality vs. homosexuality. However, they also realised other ways of demonstrating their transgressive qualities.

While investigation of every artist or artifact with potential to be imbued with a queer association in the decade under scrutiny is impractical, such categorisation is also counterproductive to the refuge of fluidity offered by queer theory. Instead, this Chapter extends on the atypical classifications of the time, with the aim of revealing the true extent of the decade's residually homo-influenced content. The evident increase in openly gay popstars obviously warrants exploration and forms one discernible element. Their very presence was indicative of a manifestly changing industry, and as such, their arrival is given due exploration in the first section of the Chapter.

Following this, acts who indicated or asserted an assumptive heterosexuality, but who have since identified, or been identified as queer, are then explored. These serve as potent reminders that despite the floodgates of sexual deviance witnessed in the charts, the on-going impact of the decade's prevailing legislative and socio-political conservatism could not be underestimated. For many of these artists, their proclaimed heterosexuality was at odds with

their imagery and music. As such, fans and commentators were presented with popstars as complex texts to decipher.

Whether sexually ambiguous, or unequivocally closeted in the 1980s, the subsequent trajectory of artists such as Elton John, George Michael or the Pet Shop Boys, alongside the numerous others who have since ‘come out’, represents significant change. In reflecting upon the decade, from the relative comfort and positioning of a post-Marriage Equality-proofed Ireland, this study is afforded the luxury of making assessments which could previously only have been assumptions. The testimonies of these artists, along with the numerous readings of their work, yield further insight into the complexities at the heart of pop and identity intersections during the decade.

Such interpretations became especially precious tools in relation to evaluating female artists’ contributions to pop music. The proclivities of female ‘gender bending’ pop stars, alongside the mainstream success of artists who whose careers had been forged on the burgeoning ‘Womyn’s’ circuit, had ensured that increasingly wider representations of women were common in the 1980s. Despite this, the decade would end with no significant female pop artist having identified as lesbian or queer. An exploration of the resulting reliance on eliciting coded indicators, from songs, lyrics and aspects of performativity, is warranted. What signs could the alert listener look out for? Despite a reticence over publicly proclaiming same sex identification, audiences were more than sophisticated enough to elicit queer readings of these artists and their work.

The reluctance to declare sexuality can be viewed as symptomatic of the malignant political and societal attitudes to homosexuality which prevailed at the time. This was further regulated by an industry still convinced that the closet was the best place for a pop star to keep any explicit affirmation of homosexuality. The study illustrates how such concerns inadvertently forged a myriad of openings in which artists would express themselves. Often, these were elected on foot of censorious concerns, on the part of artists’ or management, or the artists themselves. The fact that such pressure (in relation to sexual identity disclosure) emanated from not only from the murky motivations of the tabloids, but also from within the music industry or the gay community itself, serves as further indication of the complexities at play.

Coalescing with the decade-defining cultural aesthetics of the ‘gender bender’ and the intently queer soundtrack provided by Hi-Nrg, the true extent of queer influence on the decade becomes palpable. This adds to the acknowledged role played by youth tribes and musical genres in the ‘queering’ of the decade.

Writing on pop’s innumerable functions, Hawkins (2009) notes its particular capacity to act as, “[…] an ideal stage for depicting gender in quite extraordinary ways, often driving home the arbitrariness of sexual categorization, [where] the 1980s were the most apparent indictment” (p.93). This Chapter confirms this hypothesis of the decade as an exemplary period of queer expression in pop. In utilising queer theory, with its very foundation built on the rejection of the categorisation to which Hawkins alludes, an expanded and more robust portrait of queer musical influence on the period is captured. Despite the documented exertion of influence and unparalleled levels of visibility, the Chapter takes a sombre final turn. The collective picture of queer influence and content permeating throughout pop was not to last. Social and political forces, still hostile to the notion of queer identities, were emboldened by the advent of HIV/AIDS. An ensuing backlash against gay communities would eventually even permeate into pop music.

V.B. “Fronted by Faggots” - “There’s More to Love (Than Boy Meets Girl)”

Of the many junctures of queer sexuality and pop music in the 1980s, the pop incarnations of Jimmy Sommerville command particular attention. Bronski Beat, the band through which the public was first introduced to the Glaswegian singer, represented a true first in pop music. Unashamedly gay, while singing about explicitly gay themes (Bullock, 2017), Sommerville’s staunch politicism was unabashed. Explicit projections and declarations of homosexuality would ensure his emblematic status and somewhat unique positioning as a new breed of pop-star. While Hi-Nrg had forged an impenetrable queer reputation with its sexual suggestiveness, and while synth pop had ushered in a plethora of gender bending aesthetics, Bronski Beat incorporated lyrical themes which went far beyond the remit of innuendo. In addition to the insolence of singing about same-sex love, the band’s lyrical themes often addressed the lives of queer audiences more broadly, writing on issues including homophobia and HIV/AIDS. Their 1984 single and world-wide chart hit, “Small-town Boy”, addressed homosexuality with rare explicitness, recalling only Tom Robinson’s “Sing If You Are Glad To Be Gay” in 1979. Collaborator Richard Coles would note, “We heard it and we immediately

recognised it as our own experience, a vindication of what we stood for, and an endorsement, like the Grierson award, of who we were" (2014, p.63). Others have concurred. Still unused to seeing such explicit reflection of their lives in the form, the cultural significance of the song among LGBTI audiences has been well established (Maconie, 2014 p.272).

In keeping with the decade's increasing emphasis on the visual, the accompanying video for the single was equally unequivocal. It featured Somerville in the role of a young gay man who is rejected and left with little choice but to escape parochial heteronormativity: "[…] this was the first time that the reality of being a young gay man in Thatcher's Britain, had been laid bare to a mainstream audience" (2017, p.237). Kelaita (2021) nominates both the song and its video as prime examples of enactments of Halberstam's theory of 'metronormativity' (2005). Described as "[…] the story of migration from "country" to "town" […] within which the subject moves to a place of tolerance after enduring life in a place of suspicion, persecution, and secrecy" (*ibid*, p.37), scholars have drawn attention to its staple reoccurrence in gay autobiography narratives (Maddison, 2002). "[…] Being gay, coming out, necessitates spatial progression, if only to be understood as running away from bullies or oppression" notes the Kelaita (*ibid*, p.155), specifically endorsing "Small Town Boy" for its capturing of these trajectories. Kelaita also notes that Somerville's "[…] actual destination is incidental, since it is clear he is symbolically headed towards the queer city" (*ibid*, p.8). It is here in the queer geographies of the city that Bronski Beat were confidently mapped, with no need for subtlety, or the coding of same-sex desire.

The track was from the band's debut album, *The Age of Consent*, itself a pointed reference to the continued disparity in the age of sexual consent between heterosexuals and homosexual in the United Kingdom. Akin to the ideological leftist standpoint of the political gay rights movement of the decade, Bronski Beat, and Somerville in particular, would also become publicly aligned with socialist, anti-racist and feminist agendas (Coles, 2014; Smith, 2011). They would have top billing at the 1983 'Pits and Perverts' concert, organised in support of striking English miners, and later immortalised in the 2014 film, *Pride*, (Robinson, 2007). Sommerville also co-founded Red Wedge, a collective of musicians including Paul Weller and Billy Bragg, which sought to promote the English Labour party (Daniel, 2016).

Despite their profile, after little more than a year, Sommerville would leave the band. From its ashes came The Communards, where he partnered with Richard Coles, a session

musician who had played previously with Bronski Beat. This new incarnation proved a further vehicle for Sommerville's mix of socio-political pop, queer love songs and choice of camp classics as cover versions. While not quite as short-lived a tenure as with Bronski Beat, The Communards split in 1988 and led the way to Sommerville's subsequent solo career. He would continue to tackle queer-related themes with his debut solo album, *Read My Lips*, responding to his experience of working with queer HIV activists, a cause he threw himself into, upon disbanding The Communards (Cole, 2004, p. 240).

His political commitment to causes would result in his arrest in 1989, for his staging and attendance at an Act-Up protest (Aston, 2016). Somerville truly epitomised a new type of homosexual pop star; out, proud and unapologetically queer. He sang overtly of same -sex love and desire, and yet still sustained a successful career. His resolute insistence on openly discussing queer sexual themes and aesthetics firmly assure his place in pop's queer history. The lack of ambiguity in relation to his sexual orientation inadvertently resulted in him developing an immunity of sorts, to the feverish tabloid speculation which seemed to endlessly follow artists such as Boy George, Freddy Mercury & Elton John[11]. It is clear he created and commandeered a space heretofore unoccupied in the realms of pop. So stringent was Somerville's political stance, it may be argued he was peerless. However, the decade did witness a number of other artists, who, while not as overtly radical in their lyrics, sentiments or brushes with the law, did not shy away from gay identification.

Andy Bell would also talk openly about his homosexuality to journalists, from the beginning of his run of hits in 1985, as one half of Erasure (Kelly, 2019). The band formed when Bell had answered an advert placed by established synth-pop purveyor Vince Clarke, who was looking for a singer for a new musical venture. After several unsuccessful releases, Erasure secured the first in a long run of hits in 1986 with the single, "Sometimes". Clarke had already been a part of three successful synth-pop acts in the 1980s; Depeche Mode, Yazoo, and The Assembly. Smith's (2016) description of Clarke, as "[a] wandering electro boffin" (p.37) seems more than fitting. The author also shares his hypothesis as to the nature of the heterosexual Clarke's choice of Bell as a duo-mate. "What next for our Vince? If you were forming a band in 1985, you'd probably want a faggot to front it. Damn it, it was practically

[11] While Sommerville may have escaped speculation, it did not offer full protection from the notoriously queer hostility of the English tabloids, especially on foot of his previous arrest for propositioning a plain clothes police officer, in 1985.

compulsory" (*ibid*, p.38). Smith would acknowledge that he was incorrect, when Bell attested that Clarke did not know he was gay when he had auditioned. Nonetheless, it captures a telling picture of the mid 1980s zeitgeist within pop, for all that was queer.

Away from such speculation, Erasure themselves were "[…] a camp sensation that never resorts to irony or cynicism" (Deangelis, 2006, p. 204), and Bell's performances and effeminate dancing style would see him labelled as "[…] a champ of camp" (Gotto, *in* Dalton & Ross, 2001, p.46). Live shows gained a reputation for their demonstrations of camp and extravagance, with Bell appearing in drag. Still one of the few openly gay singers in pop, Kelly (2019) observes, how "[…] as Bell's confidence grew, this sensibility became integral to Erasure's identity" (p.120). Interestingly, and in spite of this, Erasure's audience has drawn particular attention for its reputed diversity (Rapp, 2004; Deangelis, 2006). The band's heterosexual fans could not ignore their homo-specific aesthetics. Crucially, for queer audiences, Erasure served as further affirmation that they no longer needed to rely solely on the subverted coding or sly innuendo of old.

Marc Almond, one time Bronski Beat duettist[12] and successful pop star in his own right, was another artist whose sexuality seemed a foregone conclusion for many. Another artist indebted to punk beginnings (Wilkinson, 2015); Almond's brand of seedy pop was undeniably queer-tinged (Neal, 1987). Almond would later claim on-going interference from his record company, who were keen to downplay any possible homosexual connotations (Doggett). If Almond's theatrically camp performance style and penchant for eyeliner and mascara was not enough, an eventual cover appearance of the May 1987 edition of UK magazine, *Gay Times*, would dismantle any remaining ambiguity in relation to his sexuality (Bullock, 2017; Reed, 1995).

Liverpudlian's Holly Johnson and Paul Rutherford also ensured that the homo-quotient was central to their band, Frankie Goes to Hollywood. The group's marketing campaign embraced facets of underground queer sex cultures, incorporating imagery from leather and fetish sub-scenes. Frankie Goes to Hollywood's introduction had been orchestrated by *New*

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[12] While Culture Club's first appearance on Top of the Pops is rightly recalled as an iconic transgressive moment, there were many others. The coupling of Almond and Somerville, represented another significant first. Here were two gay men, singing clearly about another. Aston comments on how the two artists dialled the camp performativity up 'several notches' for television performances to promote the track (2017, p.361).

Musical Express journalist and burgeoning mogul, Paul Morley. Morley's intuition as to the potential promotional opportunities and commercial gain to be reaped from such representations (Napier-Bell, 2001, p.298), was astute. As discussed in Chapter I, the controversy involving the BBC's contested 'banning' of the band's debut single, "Relax", and its ensuing success, can be held as irrevocable proof of the success of this strategy.

Together these performers seemed to prove that gay men, or at least a certain type of gay man, had become a permissible option in pop's canon. Doggett observes such 1980s representations and their successes as confirmation that gay identified artists, "[…] could flourish, and be accepted by the British public" (2015, p.511). This growing roster, along with increasingly explicit queer aesthetics and performativity of the gender benders, fortifies the presence of identities pertinent to this study.

Yet many other artists chose not to either discuss, disclose or defend their sexual orientation. The positive reinforcement that such representations offered has been long noted by scholars (Becker, 2006; Cook, 2018; Calzo & Ward, 2009) and thus, offer legitimisation to the underpinning hypothesis of this study. In the effort to encompass the true range and influence of queer artistry on the decade's pop music, and underpin it within a queer framing, the next section explores the plethora of queer artists marked only by the commonality of their non-identification as gay. In moving beyond the unequivocal definitions of 'gay' or 'lesbian', a more accentuated picture emerges. These readings become especially important in configuring the contribution of women to the queerness of the decade.

V.C. Enjoying the Silence? Striding and Striving Upon Pop's Tightropes of Identity

While Sommerville represented the forging of new possibilities, a more complex and nuanced relationship existed in relation to public identification for a significant number of artists. This complex realm of statements, retractions and denials in turn generated interpretations and readings. Importantly, the ability of the queer audience to elicit queer renderings, even when subconscious or un-intentional is also emphasised. With many queer popstars of the decade not falling identifying as such, these readings still provide crucial evidence for this study.

Both Elton John and Freddie Mercury continued to build on their careers throughout the 1980s. Queen's 1981's *Greatest Hits* would become the fifth largest album of the decade, eventually accruing the accolade of best-selling album ever in the United Kingdom (Brandle, 2021). Both are estimated to be amongst the 100 top selling acts of the decade (Bullock, 2017). Emblematic of their exalted status as part of rock's establishment, both were prominently billed at the Bob Geldof-initiated *Live AID* concert, simultaneously held in 1985 at Wembley arena in London and JFK stadium in Philadelphia. For Mercury's band, Queen, the event garnered particular praise and is commonly cited by scholars and music commentators as the highlight of the event (Blake, 2010). The acclaim ensured Mercury was firmly ensconced in the public eye.

As illustrated in Chapter I, the advent of HIV/AIDS had given the tabloids further licence to vent homophobia (Kramer, 1989; Garfield, 1994). The eventual tabloid disclosure of Freddy Mercury's HIV status, following a lengthy campaign of insinuation, had been a particularly ugly phase in their vehement crusade. As Smith (2016) notes of Mercury's eventual death in 1991: "He'd spent the last few months of his life being hounded by the press ('What are you trying to hide, Freddie?' one tabloid had screamed just days before), now they came to bury and to praise him" (p.234).

Observing that, "[…] sexuality has been a prominent issue for the majority of his career" (Allcock, 2014, p. 22), Elton John had also endured a long history of conjecture and scrutiny at the hands of the tabloids. Of the numerous and lengthy libel cases he took against various newspapers and their editors, the most publicised was in relation to a series of *The Sun* Newspaper articles. The stories centred on the testimony of a 'rent boy' who had supposedly organised male prostitutes on behalf of the artist. "In retrospect, it was only a matter of time until the Sun came after me. I was gay, I was successful, I was opinionated, which in The Sun's eyes made me fair game for vendetta", noted John himself of the campaign (John, 2019). Resident media watch-dog columnist at English magazine *Gay Times* would note of the affair, "[t] he sheer scale of corruption and depravity at The Sun whilst concocting the 'case against' Elton was breath-taking. The truth, as ever, was nowhere to be seen" (Sanderson, 1989).

Both artists had previously divulged experiences of sexual experimentation with the same sex. John had publicly stated his bisexuality in 1976 (Bullock, p.262; Felton, 2020), as opposed to the conflicting testimony regarding Mercury's sexual identification, which

continues to provoke discourse to this day. The general consensus leaned towards his private identification as bisexual, if not gay. The work of both artists has been interpreted and categorised as being aimed predominantly at heterosexual, male audiences (McLeod, 2011; Cullen, 2017). However, despite Cullen's observation that "[…] their flamboyant personal style essentially hid their sexuality in plain sight" (2017, p. 166), both men were also "[…] capable of looking and sounding like raging working-class heterosexuals when they chose to" (*ibid*, p.166). McLeod (2011) points to a further similarity in the trajectory of both men's careers, in his extensive exploration of the relationship between sports and popular music. John's association with sport, as owner of English football club, *Watford FC* , and the adoption of Queen songs such as "We Will Rock You" and "We Are The Champions" as sports anthems, are illustrated as enhancing each artist's (then) reputation for attracting a male, heterosexual audience. Lynch (2003) observes how for much of the period of his fame, "Mercury was not an icon for gay men; rather his audience consisted largely of white, straight men seemingly unaware of, or unconcerned by, the gay iconography he adopted":

> Popular music, although a patriarchal institution that has perpetuated many masculinist representations, has also encouraged transgression. It has provided a safe place for homoerotic and feminine fantasies to exist and provided the means for deeply submerged desires to surface. Freddie Mercury's 'stage performance' allowed the audience, briefly, to accept the reality of their own performance of sexual identity and gender roles. (Lynch, 2003, p.181)

Here the author effectively broadens Mercury's legacy. Such revision has since been enhanced with Smith (2016) poignantly noting the singer's post-death adoption by the queer community: "He's ours now, maybe more because of how he died than how he lived" (p.236). Either way, both men would come under criticism for their perceived disownment of an openly gay identity, now proudly exemplified by the likes of Sommerville, Bell and Almond. Elton John's wedding to a woman in 1984 (John, 2019) seemingly only compounded the frustration of gay communities still yearning to prominent iterations of themselves (Jones and Kantonen, 1999). Gill (1993) characterises the artist's refusal to wholly align with an 'out' gay identity as being "[…] masked by fake weddings, then the 'actually-I'm-bi' clause" (1995, p.103), and sums up a taste of the disdain felt.

Between the tabloid's heteronormative hostility and the gay press's simultaneous scorn at the time, John's now exalted status as a 'gay icon' (Bullock, 2017), accrued over the

intervening years, is all the more notable. However, like Mercury it is possible to view the artist's contributions beyond the invisible, inimical parameters unwillingly bestowed on his celebrity status. Allcock (2014) for instance, reminds us of John's long-standing challenge to the traditional binary of masculine/feminine attire in pop, an attribute which can be traced back to the artist's emergence in the 1960s. By the 1980s, John was also one of the first celebrities to publicly align and fund-raise for AIDS charities amidst a generally muted response on the part of pop. Although tenuous, alignment to a gay-associated cause can still be read as a tangible identifier, a proposition strengthened by the example of artist George Michael. In common with Elton John, with whom he would record and release the 1991 AIDS benefit single, "Don't Let the Sun Go Down On Me", Michael was visibly and vocally supportive of AIDS charities, as the disease entered its second decade of annihilation.

While George Michael would not officially 'come out' until 1998 (Jonanac, 2007), long before both scholars and fans had already noted signifiers which indicated a queer lineage and messaging at play. Drukman (1995) applies principles of Mulvey's feminist theory of the male gaze (1975), to propose and explore the concept of a 'gay' equivalent. In his paper he applies principles of Mulvey's feminist theory of the male gaze (1975) to propose and explore the concept of a 'gay' equivalent. He suggests Michael as an archetypal example: "Michael is a performer who, from the very beginning, actively seduced the gaze while infusing his act with a gay sensibility" (p.101). Drukman notes of Michael's WHAM! band-mate Andrew Ridgley: "[…] his casting loving glances from the side-lines, [and that] his presence allowed embodied ego-identification for the gay male spectator as he/we gazed at George Michael" (p.102).

Along with Lecklider (2004, p.111), the author also draws attention to the video for Michael's 1988 single, "Faith". Finding that the imagery employed evokes the already well-appropriated aesthetic of the 'clone', Drukman proposes the film as: "[...] the most obvious signifier, in a solo career characterised as abundant with messages of "[…] gay scopophilic pleasure" (p.102). Michael would later affirm these earlier intentions and reflect specifically on his struggles to accept his sexual identity. In a 2009 interview, he would look back at the decade and acknowledge "[…] a depression at the end of Wham!, because I was beginning to realize I was gay, not bisexual" (Hari, 2009). While Michael was spared from having to settle for a posthumous acknowledgement of queer validity, as in the manner acquired by Freddie Mercury, he would only begin to attain such credibility later in his career. The details of Michael's 1998 public 'outing' are explored elsewhere in this study, and are generally well

documented (Jones, 2017; Bullock, 2017). His response, read as forthright and defiant, significantly shifted perceptions of the artist, and enamoured him to a queer audience who were previously used to having to rely on encryption. From here on, Michael would staunchly and publicly affirm his sexuality, unapologetically defending his sexual rights, which remained a staple of tabloid scrutiny[13].

Back in the 1980s, it was the visual clues offered by Michael's liberal appropriation of aesthetics associated with queer cultures, which had caught the eye of commentators. However, other artists would imbue their work with an abundance of reference points, encompassing the lyrical as well as the visual, and thus befitting of the multi-modal approach to analysis, described by Walker (2018). Refusing to explicitly confirm or deny queer identity, many of these artists strode a contentious balancing act, and none more demonstrably so, than the Pet Shop Boys. To many observers and fans, their 1980s work was littered with clues of a viscerally queer nature (Gill, 1995). Even their choice of Hi-Nrg maestro Bobby Orlando as producer served as an early indicator of the band's lineage and influence. Examples abound among the group's artifacts from the period, and can be unearthed in song titles, lyrics, and in the imagery employed to promote their records.

In the title of their 1987 single, "Rent", Tennant archly deployed a term with a well - documented history of being used to describe young, male prostitutes (Dorais, 2005; Coleman, 2014), which indelibly imbues the song with a specific resonance. Its chorus refrain, "I love you, you pay my rent", (Tennant & Lowe, 1986) leaves the listener in no doubt as to an implicit correlation with a type of sex work. Hone's (2005) authoritative history of male prostitution in the United Kingdom further evidences the term's lengthy, and thoroughly queer lineage. Whilst reluctant to claim an indefinite correlation, the author researches its use back as far as the 1895 trial of Oscar Wilde, where Wilde's accompanying friends at the Old Bailey were described as 'renters', in the popular press of the day (p.12). Interestingly for this study, Hone firmly locates the semiotics of the 'rent boy' term as exemplary of an ideology more befitting of queer theory than of any rigid gay/lesbian binaries:

[13] Padva (2014) recounts one of Michael's interactions with a British tabloid reporter, who had followed the artist to well-known cruising ground, Hampstead Heath, in London; "Are you gay? No?" he asked the photographer, "Then fuck off, this is my culture" (p.115).

> The working-class man who participated in queer sex, not out of an innate sexual desire but for compensation, and who was emphatically not queer himself—was unable to find a place in a dichotomous system of sexual belief that contained only heterosexuals and homosexuals. (Hone, 2005, p.24)

Coleman (2014) elaborates, illustrating the term's construction as result of a convergence of "[…] multiple signifiers such as class, nationhood, gender, economic exchange, and the established narrative of heterosexual prostitution - all of which informed the eroticism that surrounded him" (p.5). As if to further qualify their underlying intentions, reputed queer filmmaker Derek Jarman was enlisted by the duo to direct the promo videos for the single's release. London's Kings Cross, an area notorious as a location for the procuring of same-sex liaisons, would provide the location. Despite such literally queer affiliations, Tennant would instead suggest that his inspiration for the song came from the idea of a "[…] kept woman". (Tennant, 2004). Such testimony, coming from an artist who had once intoned, "I see us in the tradition of Joe Orton and Noel Coward (*in* Smith, 2916, p.200), understandably garnered frustration and comment from queer quarters.

There were numerous other signifiers which further elaborated the distinctly queer slant. Subsequent singles, "It's a Sin", and a version of U2's "Where the Streets Have No Name", which, conjoined with a cover of Hi-Nrg band, Boystown Gang's, "Can't Take My Eyes Off You", left many queer audiences in little doubt as to their orientation. As with the single "Rent", many other of the band's videos would project entirely unsubtle homoerotic aesthetics (Hawkins, 2013, p121). Of these, the Eric Watson-directed "Domino Dancing" is most noteworthy. Despite the supposed subtext of two young men at war over the affections of a young woman, US magazine *Rolling Stone* would assess the video as:

> […] probably the most homoerotic pop video ever made. "Domino Dancing" was every bit as dishonest, titillating the straight world with images it could never acknowledge, then doubling the repression by keeping openly gay expression closeted.
>
> (Farber, 1989, p.32).

Gill (1995) adds further disparagement. Recounting an episode where, upon hearing the Pet Shop Boys' inaugural album, *Please*, at an industry-sponsored unveiling, he automatically assumed the band to be of queer descent. Subsequent communication from their manager, he explains, conveyed the band were irate, as Neil was not yet 'out' to his mother

(*ibid* p.2). Gill accuses their approach as being "[...] akin to someone sliding around the back of a school class photo, escaping one position to appear in another" (*ibid*, p.2).

Despite such critical denigration, this study argues that the culminative influence of Tennent and Lowe, along with their abundant use of reference points of a distinctly queer association, merit distinction. For all of their disputed ambiguity, the Pet Shop Boys offered a clear illustration of the broad ideological discourses enabled and evoked (McKerrell & Way, 2017) by the utilisation of a variety of mechanisms and artifacts. Adding to the growing list of pop stars who would do so in the decade, Tennant would eventually 'come out', in an interview with British publication, *Attitude*, in 1994 (Buckle, 2015). Tennant's declaration, along with those of his fellow pop stars can be viewed as an evolution, encapsulating a shift in identification and attitudes. However, resistance to the burgeoning alignment of identification would steadfastly continue to be the *modus operandi* of other artists, notably with Morrissey.

In the interest of non-partisanship, it is worth pointing out that Morrissey was only continuing an approach first adopted during his celebrity ascendancy during the first half of the 1980s. Infamously, Morrissey avowed sexual chastity: "Celibacy enhanced Morrissey's career, by turning him into a conundrum, a puzzle to be solved", notes Simpson (2004, p.115). Despite later protestation that he had only used the term in reference to himself on one occasion, Goddard (2016) contests this, noting its frequent manifestation in interviews, particularly during the early gestation of The Smiths. He notes that, as a result, it "[…] remains a fundamental composition of his mythology" (p.69). While the Pet Shop Boys expertly played with lines of sexuality, Morrissey's stretched notions of queer transgression even further by encompassing gender in addition to sexual identity.

Early television and concert appearances would see Morrissey perform in oversized women's blouses and strings of pearls, and make his stage entrance adorned with flowers, usually gladioli (Rogan, 1992). Within a short time of his emergence on the pop music scene in 1983, the artist's ambiguity regarding labelling his sexual orientation were quickly interpreted as symptoms of undisclosed homosexuality (Greco, 2011). However, while many of the artists who fill the pages of this study are marked by the commonality of critical dismissal, The Smiths were generally far more compatible with the music press's dogged demand for badges of authenticity.

The band eschewed the predominant electronic-based, dance-pop characteristic of the decade. Instead, a more traditional, guitar-lead sound was adopted. The combination of Morrissey's lyrical prowess, combined with the accomplished musicianship of Johnny Marr would quickly see the band touted as the 'darlings' of the burgeoning 'independent' scene (Blythe, 2002, p. 381). As purveyors of this 'indie' movement, The Smiths were considered to be free of the perceived artistic constraints of the mainstream industry, and generally, more experimental (Fonarow, 2006 p.12). As a result, The Smiths instead drew instant critical favour. "There was a truth in what the pair aspired to, an honesty that would shine through in particular the way they planned everything, from song titles to record sleeves (which were a mixture of working-class heroes and gay icons)", notes Jones (2021, p.198). Furthermore, the author is emphatic that this be interpreted as manifest of "[…] simple care and attention" (*ibid*, p.199), rather than a desire for validation.

From the very beginning of The Smiths' career, for those hoping to elicit queer readings, there seemed a plethora of references points from which to choose. The band's first single, "Hand in Glove" was a concoction which seemed for many to be positively brimming with homo-specific content. Morrissey's lyrics spoke of "[…] a love that's different". With his filching of additional lyrics from the screenplay of *A Taste of Honey*, Sheila Delaney's 1960s kitchen sink drama, and one of the first British films to feature a gay character, the references seemed pointed. The single's B-side, "Handsome Devil", with lines suggesting that, "[…] a boy in the bush is worth two in the hand", and enquiring, "[…] when we're in your scholarly room, who will swallow whom?", only consolidated the conjecture that Morrissey was homosexual.

Their second single release "This Charming Man", continued to provide such ammunition. Chronicling a *rendezvous* between the narrator and the alluring gentleman of the song's title, Goddard (2013) defines the lyrical encounter depicted in the song as "[…] evidently one of sexual initiation, sizzling with flirtatious dialogue" (p.52). Once again, and in what would become a trademark characteristic of Morrissey's song writing, the undercurrent of homosexual themes is aided by the employment of references commonly literary in origin. Famously, Morrissey had a particular affinity with Oscar Wilde (Hubbs, 1996), his admiration captured in the 1986 song, "Cemetery Gates", where amongst a lyrical cluster of literary figures, he calls out Wilde for special praise. His welcomed comparisons between the two. While, one hopes, the assessment that, "Poor Oscar, was merely an early failed and somewhat

overweight prototype for Morrissey" (Simpson, 2004, p.13) was imbued with a degree of the sarcasm familiar to those conversant with the author's work, it also conveys something of the extent of the reverence which Morrissey enjoyed. In "This Charming Man" the line describing "A jumped up pantry boy, who never knew his place" had been lifted from the 1973 film, *Sleuth*. Despite being ostensibly centred on two heterosexual characters, the movie has long been regarded as being imbued with homoerotic symbolism (Aston, 2016). The critical and commercial success enjoyed by the band, had been relatively immediate. Along with the propensity for the inclusion of homo-friendly referencing, it would endure until the band's premature 1987 split, before extending into Morrissey's inevitable, nascent solo career.

Ascribing queer credentials and frameworks to Morrisey's artifacts is assisted by the abundance of existing works devoted to queer readings of his associated artifacts. Within these works, the significance of Morrissey's carefully cultivated persona is also commonly acknowledged. Hubbs, for instance, writes:

> Morrissey, Tortured, reclusive, celibate, narcissistic, dour, droll, literate - these are some of the words in the Morrissey mythology. The persona we're encouraged to construct is clear enough: A sort of rock Emily Dickinson, trapped in a James Dean-like body" (Hubbs, 1994, p.267).

Hubbs deftly sums up Morrissey's burgeoning 1980s reputation, recognisable to the extent that he would eventually face accusations of having "[…] swerved into self-parody" (Moran, 2016). However, for the remainder of the 1980s Morrissey would continue to represent a beacon, for the subjugated and disenfranchised. Despite this, and the evident markers of a homosexual nature, Morrissey would empathically stick to this rejection of the labels commonly bestowed upon him. Like his contemporary and one-time comrade, Pete Burns, his view of such sexual categorisation or alignment was both unequivocal and unfaltering:

> I don't recognize such terms as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and I think it's important that there's someone in pop music who's like that. These words do great damage, they confuse people, and they make people feel unhappy, so I want to do away with them. (Woods, 2007, p. 283 *in* Devereaux, Dillane & Power, 2011.)

For all of Morrissey's citations from pre-existing gay cultures, many scholarly works also locate his output in the wider queer context. His rejection of the favoured labels which fence-marked sexual orientation at the time, serves as an introduction to a significantly broader

palette of transgression. Most specifically, it was Morrissey's relationship to gender, the categorisation of which he seemingly viewed as similarly redundant and harmful as sexual orientation categorisation, which stands out. His contravention of normatively attributed gender markers was employed as abundantly as his disregard for categorisation based on sexual orientation.

Given his demonstrated attraction to literature, an appreciation for the classic feminism of works by Simone De Beauvoir and Germaine Greer was hardly surprising (Goddard, 2012 p.127). Yet it can be argued that Morrissey's assertions are more applicable to the views emerging from queer theory, which had challenged second-wave feminism's view of gender. A declaration of being "[…] a prophet of the fourth gender" (Bret, 2004, p.51) may typify the pomposity for which he would come to be known, but also deftly stations Morrissey's positioning beyond the alignments of traditional social constructionism. This is a field already well documented, with scholars positioning the artist as having brought forth the notion of polymorphous identification, by circumventing the constraints of heteronormative representation. Greco (2011), notes that: "[h]is performance […] has remained fluid throughout his career, at times suggesting effeminacy, sensitivity, and gentleness, at others evoking elements of a brutish masculinity and violence" (p.3), summarising the paradoxes of the artist's enactments of gender.

Lyrically, the rebuff of normative gender roles is apparent in numerous compositions. In songs such as "Sheila take a Bow", Morrissey's configuration is made apparent. With its line, "I'm a girl and you're a boy", the interchange of gender markers is explicit. "These songs", notes Hubbs (1996), "transgress masculine conventions through identifications with feminine subjectivity, and with other distinctly un-masterful ways of being" (p.277). Simpson concurs on the artist's seeming fascination with revealing the ambiguity of gender (2006). Morrissey would note in 1986: "It was very important for me to try and write for everybody" (*in* Jones, 2021, p.202). Scholars have also given legitimacy to Morrissey's candidacy for the role of alerting the listener to the incongruities of gender: "As someone who is ambivalent about gender and sexuality, Morrissey is particularly well-positioned to understand how emotions have been gendered in musical form, too" (Dillane, Devereux & Power, 2017, p. 58). Substantively, Morrissey's contribution to the decade's pop spectrum is artistically undeniable. While there were other figures influential in alternative music, such as R.E.M's Michael

Snipe[14], who would later explicitly identify as queer, none had the influence of Morrissey, with an image and association so defined as to, "[…] rubberstamp the idea of what an indie figurehead could be" (Jones, 2021, p. 196).

Controversies have since overshadowed and dampened both Morrissey's critical standing and the reverence he once enjoyed. Concerns about displays of perceived nationalism (Goddard, 2013, p.229), and flirtations with fascist imagery (Weight, 2013, p. 345) followed the artist for a number of years from the early 1990s onwards. While the 2012 outcome of a subsequent protracted court case against English magazine *The New Musical Express* would side with Morrissey, the subsequent accusations of racism levelled at the artist have stuck. Subsequent comments on the attributes of specific nationalities (Topping, 2010) did nothing to abate the reproach which would reach a crescendo of sorts in 2019, with the artist lending support to a far-right political party, For Britain (Jonze, 2019). While Morrissey has always steadfastly denied racism, for an artist whose career was built on the positioning of himself as an outsider, it is unsurprising to find that this has affected his legacy (Snowsell, *in* Devereaux, Dillane & Power, 2011, p.90). Despite this, for the period of his ascent to fame in the 1980s his reputation as an auteur of queer influence, akin to that outlined by Benshoff and Griffin (2004), remains undoubtable. Hawkins (2002), affirms this:

> Morrissey demonstrated how the male could avoid locking into the pressures of a fixed sexual identity. Through the pretentiousness of denying categorization, he showed how one could jump on the bandwagon of queering identity by stretching sexuality as a cultural construction. (Hawkins, 2002 p. 73)

The author also crystalises Morrissey's aptitude in destabilising the gender equilibrium. As previously explored in relation to other artists in this study, this exposes a view on the artifice of gender performativity, as espoused by theorists such as Butler. However, the discourse-led scrutiny of artifacts used in this study, alongside the volumes of existing investigations into Morrissey's queer worth, also act to ensure he meets Benshoff and Griffins additional, complementing criteria. The principle of 'form' is adhered to, if not exemplified, by an oeuvre peppered with literary, innuendo-laden, and abjectly camp song writing. His

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[14] Pattie (2007) has proposed that Freddie Mercury, Morrissey and Michael Snipe, as queer front men of predominantly heterosexual bands, share the commonality, of being able to present identities, "[…] which allows their homosexuality to be partially incorporated into the homo-sociality of the band" (p.126).

surpassing of the gauge of 'reception' is evidenced by the very breath of work bestowing him with queer honour. Simpson reminds us that this is still problematic:

> "A project 'outing' Morrissey's lyrics is finally rather fruitless - and slightly misses the point. All Morrissey's songs and lyrics resolutely refuse a sexuality, it's what makes them heroically handsome" (2004, p.107).

While further validating the artist's appropriate placing within the queer realm, Morrissey's refusal to adhere was just the tip of his transgressions. The breath of appreciation and allegiance to Morrissey, from the economically disenfranchised, alienated youth of 1980s Thatcherite Britain to the Latino street gangs of 1990s Los Angeles, is evidence that the singer's reach can be measured beyond the sexual. However, sex and gender were central to his 1980s existence:

> "Sex and gender ambiguity, a resistance to finite fixing of sexual or gender viewpoint, is not merely an aspect of style with Morrissey. It is, in fact, a primary substantive element of his stated artistic project" (Hubbs, 1996, p.368).

I would go further and claim that this describes the totality of pop in the 1980s. In this respect, and despite his subsequent fall from grace, Morrissey's given role as an arbiter of the intersections of pop and queer identity remains intact.

Morrissey and the Pet Shop Boys, are representative of a queer-intoned suggestiveness, lurking just shy of explicit identification with homosexuality or queerness. But taken together, the otherwise divergent group also share the distinction of being among the most commercially and critically successful of the decade. Given the conjecture and analysis in relation to their sexual orientation, it is also important to note that the proposed conduit to such alignment with 'gay' identity was also often obstructed by other causes.

Morrissey's 1980s critical standing was vastly superior to that of Stock, Aitken & Waterman, whose work and methods were met with critical derision. However, their adoption of Hi-Nrg was not their only queer association. Their protégé trio, Big Fun, mined an aesthetic similar to that of Andy Bell and Jimmy Somerville. The triad of Phil Creswick, Jason John and Mark Gillespie had formed from the ashes of Seventh Heaven, of which Creswick and John had been members. Seventh Heaven had been devised by Hi-Nrg producer Ian Levine, as an openly gay band (Arena, 2017). Upon leaving the group, the two recruited Creswick's then boyfriend, Gillespie, to complete the new act.

The band were quickly signed to Jive records, who had been touting the concept of seeking a 'male Bananarama', a statement of camp intent if ever there was one. Despite the trademark homo-appropriated musical production, and delivery of an aesthetic clearly derived from gay culture, Big Fun's sexuality, while never expressly stated, was read by many as explicitly queer, as acknowledged by Creswick himself (*in* Arena, 2017). He would also claim that it was made clear to the band by their management, that they could not discuss their homosexuality with the press (Masterton, 2012). "I knew our fans knew we were gay, and clearly they didn't care" (*ibid*, p.39), he notes, although in the end, the management's reticence did not matter. Thanks to the ever-helpful English tabloid press, the band were outed by *The Sunday People,* in September 1989. Any inspection of the article is rendered unnecessary by its lead headline, proclaiming the "Gay shame of teen heart-throb Jason" (Hadleigh, 1997, p.208), typical of their approach which repackaged their outrage, clumsily disguising it as empathetic editorialising.

Review of the testimony of several of the artists discussed in this study reveals the scenario depicted by Creswick to be a depressingly familiar one. Marc Almond (Doggett, 2017) and Pete Burns (Burns, 2007) are among the artists who have divulged experiences of record company attempts to inhibit their identities or censor material deemed too dangerous in its queer association. While cognisant that any such list is rendered incomplete by the success of the nature of the pressure applied, for others, it was resolutely their own choice. Christopher Hamill, aka Limahl, had emerged into the spotlight in 1983, as lead singer with English pop group, Kajagoogoo. Hamill has long since 'come out', but at the height of his success there was no mention of homosexuality. On the subject, the singer has noted: "I was always out to my family and friends. But when Kajagoogoo hit the big time that wasn't my agenda. I didn't go into music to change the world's attitude to gays" (*in* Collingbourne, 2012). While Hamill's statement may be interpreted as somewhat apathetic to the wider, socio-sexual struggles of the period, there is evidence of a similar defence among women in pop at the time. Yet this reticence did not detract from scholarly and audience readings of women's contributions to pop's most queer of decades.

V.D. Drinking from the Blurry Cup: Whitney and the 'Womyn' Challenging Notions of Lesbian Invisibility in the Decade

On November 25th 1984, at the bequest of Bob Geldof and Midge Ure, Britain's biggest pop stars would converge to record the single, "Do They Know it's Christmas?", the proceeds of which were to be donated to support victims of the evolving famine in Ethiopia. Charity singles were not a new phenomenon, with a lineage traceable to ex-Beatle, George Harrison's "Bangla Desh" single in 1971 (Binnie, 2014, p.180). Yet such a mass gathering of pop stars on one recording was a new innovation. In collating the troupe, Geldof, singer with The Boomtown Rats, would unknowingly revolutionise the concept of the charity record (Westley, 1991). By the close of the decade, the single had accumulated sales of a towering twelve million copies, (McFarlen, 1989, p.155-156), its success prompting the Live Aid concert held in 1985. It was also the catalyst for a wave of benevolent imitators so pervasive, that the mass charity record would become an idiosyncratic, yet defining, characteristic of the decade's pop music (Howells, 1999, p.66). These iterations, including an Irish-version, The Concerned, which would feature such luminaries as variety star Twink, and broadcast journalist Pat Kenny (Concern, 2018), varied wildly in gradations of quality, and success[15].

A significant juncture of 1980s pop culture in itself, Band Aid is also illustrative of the dearth of visible women in the industry at the time. Out of the 41 vocalists and musicians credited on the track, only four women were present: English trio, Bananarama, and American artist Jody Watley. The absence has been noted by scholars (Kooijman, 2013, p.24), alongside some of the few female participants themselves (Dallin, 2020). Such inequitable representation was just one of the challenges facing women's status in pop during the period.

For all of its demonstrable ability to provoke cultural discourse and to offer broader alternatives, rock and pop still commonly relied on narrow representations of women, aided by the new visual accompaniment of MTV. From the seeming necessity to sexualise their marketing to an over-reliance on objectifying lyrics and imagery, scholars have noted the propensity of representative challenges faced by women during the decade (Oglesbee, 1987;

[15] Morrissey, resplendent in the caustic wit for which he was noted, would observe of Geldof and co.'s efforts; 'One can have great concern for the people of Ethiopia, but it's another thing to inflict daily torture on the people of Great Britain' (*in* Garfield, 1985, p.19).

Shonk & McClure, 2017). In terms of queer female sexualities, a focus on the lack of representation of such identities has been duly noted by critics. On the surface, it is difficult to contest the assessment of critic Jon Savage, who noted that while "[…] popular music acknowledges the sign of 'gayness', there is not yet a whisper of female sexual autonomy, of lesbianism" (*in* Stein, 1995, p.416). The fact that the 1980s would pass, with no major female pop star identifying as lesbian or queer, may be viewed as only reverberating this indicting view of the decade.

As a result of this relative dearth, tactical analysis is required in which to argue for the substantiality of the female queer presence. Fortunately, despite the outlined obstacles, the 1980s also saw other significant advances, in relation to the portrayal and representation of women. The advent of "[…] new femininities, which were bold, assertive, financially independent and sexually confident", is noted by Carter (2014, p.232), in her exploration of women's role across pop cultures of the decade. Carter's work readily conjures up the iterations of expression, epitomised by one of the decade's most successful pop acts, Madonna. Carter's claims are also with concurred by others (Nicholas & Price, 1998, p.152). Crucially, and in common with artists discussed previously, such as the Pet Shop Boys, female artists forged avenues and mechanisms of expression which enabled audiences to decipher queer content.

Artists, such the Antiguan-born Joan Armatrading, who achieved significant chart success during the decade, refused to discuss sexual orientation, part of a career-long approach of declining to discuss her personal life. A public acknowledgment of sorts would come in 2011, with the artist entering into a civil partnership with another woman. Despite her demonstrated reticence, Armatrading has been long noted for her employment of gender ambiguous lyrical tactics ("Me, Myself, I") and pathways (Connell & Gibson, 2003) trodden by other queer artists. In terms of reception, there is also an acknowledgment of the artist's devout lesbian fan-base. For example:

> Lesbians, it seems, have always *gotten* Armatrading's music, the songs about love and redemption, about female friendship and romance, all in a gender-neutral context; her lyrics "read" as lesbian, the same way the music of Melissa Etheridge did, long before either woman was out". (Anderson-Minshall, 2013)

Similarly, despite a history of vocal support for LGBT causes stretching back to the 1970s, it would be 2004 before folk-pop artist, Joan Baez would see fit to discuss her own same sex

experiences publicly (Aston, 2016, p.344). Baez came to prominence in the 1960s, as a female, bohemian contemporary to Bob Dylan and Richard Fariná (Hajdu, 2001). By the 1970s, she was viewed as emblematic of the burgeoning 'Womyn's' music scene. Numerous works have emphasised the pivotal lesbian influence and contribution of this emerging phenomenon, its genesis a direct result of the exclusion of women unwilling to conform to enduring industry expectations on how a female artist should look and sound. (Kendall, 2013; Lont, 1992; Morris, 1999). The yearly Michigan Womyn's Music Festival had begun in 1975 and served as a template for collective live platforms free of the hetero-patriarchy which still entrenched rock and pop music. Indicative of its very necessity, by the 1980s the 'womyn's' circuit would be deemed comparable in size to jazz, existing as a parallel market (Gill, 1995, p.144). The central role, played by the Goldenrod Music Distribution company, also located in Michigan, is explored by Kehrer (2016), who also emphasises its indelible association with lesbian separatism, characteristic of 1970s second wave feminism. She reveals the idiom as having been a compromise, designed to abrogate the perceived risk of using the term 'lesbian music' (p.224). Nonetheless, she also acknowledges "[an] understanding, though, that the majority of artists and listeners are lesbian or queer, and that women's music began as an expression of lesbian culture and politics" (*ibid*, p.224), implicitly locating and affirming its origins. Subsequently, Taylor (2013) charts the late 1980s trend that saw artists, who, having previously forged careers on such circuits, began "[…] dropping anchor along the banks of mainstream popular music" (2013, p. 41).

Most notably, Tracey Chapman would enjoy huge world-wide success with her 1988 self-titled first album and attracted a similarly staunch lesbian following to that of Armatrading and Baez. Chapman would site the familiar preference of a desire to draw distinction between her private and public life as reason for refusing to identify as non-heterosexual. A 2016 interview with Alice Walker saw the distinguished author, in lieu of Chapman's taciturnity, disclose a previous relationship with the singer. Walker would also offer insight into their decision to keep their relationship private. Posed with a question regarding the potential social and cultural impact their relationship could have fostered, the Pulitzer prize winner would note, "I would never do that. My life is not to be somebody else's impact - you know what I mean? And it was delicious and lovely and wonderful and I totally enjoyed it and I was completely in love with her but it was not anybody's business but ours." (Wajid, Guardian, 2006). While Walker's explanation is grounded in a similar, if more personal, take on Hamill's previously

noted justification (Collingbourne, 2012), there was still an abundance of queer readings to be taken from their works:

> Even if they tended to skirt clear identifications, these artists weren't particularly heterosexually informed either, studiously avoiding male pronouns in romantic ballads and carefully constructing their personas to assert a strong, if sexually ambiguous, presence (Zimmerman, 2000, p.520).

Texan-born artist Michelle Shocked would reveal an even more guarded stance, citing expectations to align herself to a particular identity as particularly frustrating (Nordhielm, 1990). Part of the 'neo folk movement' which liberally intersected the womyn's music scene, Shocked, along with artists such as Suzanne Vega, Natalie Merchant (Kearny, 1997) and The Indigo Girls (who, themselves, would 'come out' in 1994), would also attain crossover mainstream success in the second half of the decade. Testament to the impressive contrivances of the alternative scene from which she had emanated, a recording of a live performance titled *The Texas Campfire Tapes* had sold an estimated 30,000 copies among the women's community in the United Kingdom, distributed solely on home-recorded cassette tapes. (Lont, 1992, p.241). However, while Shocked's reticence was generally in keeping with the discourse rationale of the artists mentioned above, it was also seemingly confounded at times, by the artist herself. Upon being nominated, alongside Tracey Chapman, The Indigo Girls, & Phranc, for Best Contemporary Folk Recording at The Grammy Awards, she is attributed as having remarked that the category should instead be named 'Best Lesbian Vocalist'. (Russel, 2002, p. 331). A later insistence on clarifying that she had actually said, "This award could have been called 'They Might Be Lesbians'," (Kusner, 2008, p.34) hardly served to placate the insinuation. and also set in place a fraught relationship between the artist and LGBT/queer communities, which would continue to pursue the artist in the ensuing decades (Hughes, 2013; Michaels, 2013).

While the career of k.d. Lang would only really jettison the singer to the exalted status of "[…] the world's most famous lesbian" (Iley, 2019) with the international success of her 1992 album, *Ingénue*, the Canadian's profile and acclaim had been building steadily in the second half of the previous decade (Mullally, 2019). The artist would 'come out' publicly in the same year as the album's release, in an interview with American magazine, *The Advocate*. Valentine (1995) noted the irony inherent in the fact that Lang had achieved this in the realms of country music, a genre commonly considered to be underpinned by heteropatriarchal norms.

Ever cognisant of embracing the newsworthy, pop queen Madonna would infamously note of Lang: “Elvis is alive, and she’s beautiful” (Bennetts, 1993, p.51) and the disclosure did not, as feared by her record company, seem to affect her commercial viability. Although generally greeted with approval, the move did garner boycotts of her music by numerous country music stations. Protesters dutifully assembled outside the 1992 Grammy awards, demonstrating against her nomination and subsequent win in the Best Female Pop Vocal Performance category. The backlash was potent enough to serve as a reminder of the burden of being so prominently singular, a “[…] sapphic North star” (Hanra, 2019). In the same article, the singer would reflect on the encumbrance, noting that her “[...] sexuality, and everything, was so much out in the open, and has been for many years. I feel exhausted by being exposed” (*ibid*, 2019).

Valentine’s aforementioned exploration of the reception to Lang by lesbian audiences illustrates several processes in which her music, performativity and image are consumed as powerful totems of lesbian identity (1995). She offers validation of the artist’s complaint, noting her requirement to walk “[…] a precarious tightrope of ambiguity, attempting neither to lose her heterosexual album-buying public by being labelled a ‘lesbian’ artist, nor betray her gay following who are quick to accuse gay celebrities of assimilation, or ‘selling out’” (p.477).

Also faced with intersectional pressures, although based on her ethnicity, such sexuality-related weights were less evidently apparent for American pop star, Whitney Houston. Houston had attained significant world-wide commercial success with her first two albums, including a record-breaking run of seven consecutive Billboard number one singles, from 1985 to 1989. However, criticisms would soon emerge, which questioned how Houston’s music was being packaged for white audiences. Leading to accusations of the dilution of black culture (Bego, 2012), the artist would find these allegations particularly difficult, and subsequent musical shifts, towards more urban-associated genres, were perceived as direct attempts to reconcile the disparagement. Latterly, scholars such as Metzer (2012) have lent to a re-evaluation of sorts, whereupon Houston’s trademark power-balladry style, then assumed symptomatic of such white-washing, is instead illustrated as having a strong black lineage. The complexity of the expectations and roles which Houston found herself having to manoeuvre has also been acknowledged. Kooijman (2015) proposes the singer as ‘missing link’, in a trifold history of modern female African-American celebrity, beginning with Diana Ross in the 1970s

and encompassing the "[…] allegedly post-racial era of Beyoncé" (p.308). Drawing parallels between the careers of each, in other work, the same author notes how:

> As commodified superstars in the realm of pop music, their 'authenticity' has been doubly questioned, in relation to the predominantly white rock aesthetic, as well as music genres such as soul, R&B, and hip-hop that are connoted as 'black' (Kooijman, 2019).

Regardless, in being booed by the audience at the 1989 American Soul Train Awards, and denounced by Civil Rights activist Al Sharpton, who coined the nickname 'Whitey Houston', (Halperin, 2015, p.13), the singer was exposed to the commonly fraught nature of the politics of representation. It is little wonder that she chose to remain silent on intersections of a sexual nature. Yet despite a high-profile, turbulent marriage to fellow popstar, Bobby Brown, rumours circulating in relation to her sexual orientation would persist and intensify during the subsequent decades. Houston herself would never confirm a same sex relationship nor publicly align to any non-heterosexual identity, and instead amassed a record for publicly denouncing homosexuality on religious grounds (Brockes, 2019). Following her death in 2012, she was the subject of a number of documentaries which touched upon her orientation. A sexual relationship with her former personal assistant, Robyn Cranford was eventually confirmed and chronicled in the latter's autobiography (2019). Brockes (2019) also references the book's revelations regarding the treatment of Cranford at the hands of fearful Houston, her family, and a record industry apprehensive of the relationship being exposed. She notes "[…] one gets the chilling sense not only of how alien things were in the very recent past, but of a story that shouldn't be repeated in the future", articulating at least a degree of progress, in that Cranford's story can now be told.

As with Freddie Mercury, this study argues it is fitting to bestow a similar status of queer eligibility upon Houston. Given the nature of the complex regulative pressures applied to black women's expressions of sexuality in pop (Patterson, 2019) and the circumstances outlined, evidence of a glut of gender non-specificity amongst the lyrics of many of the artist's biggest hits (Henry, 2018) is somewhat unexpected. Black and queer scholars have asked for a reappraisal. Tinsley (2018) argues for Houston's place among the pantheon of black female artists drawing on the tradition of the transmasculine/feminine 'Ezili', a Haitian-originating folklore often viewed as being complimentary to aspects of queer theory. She specifically

celebrates Houston, for the distinction of resisting what she describes as "[…] the persistent masculinisation of black lesbians." (p.35).

Houston's legacy gives an indication of the specific complex intersections of identity to be navigated by women of colour in relation to sexuality. Here in Ireland, the burgeoning urgency of the work of lesbian and feminist activists is painted by Hanlon (2020) as the backdrop for the inception of Irish pop duo, Zrazy. The author, lamenting the heretofore abysmal representation record of Irish popular culture in relation to the Sapphic observes:

> From the outset of Zrazy, Walsh and Nelson decided that they would be out as lesbians, and out as a couple – a brave and bold political move in this particular period, in which the catholic church continued to exert a significant influence upon Irish society and its laws, politics, education and health systems. (Hanlon, 2020, p.69-70)

As a result, the author confers the group with the distinction of explicitly reflecting "[…] a lesbian feminist sensibility within the spheres of an Irish musical heritage" (p.72). Until joined the following decade, by Dublin singer-songwriter Shaz Oye, they would remain the sole purveyors of lesbian-fronted Irish pop.

Comparatively, and despite the charge of the 'British invasion' which had been to the fore in introducing the gender bender-ed and sexually ambiguous to American shores, British pop seemed to lag behind. Gill, writing in 1995, notes how "Britain has yet to produce a figure to compare to Lang" (p.150). The Bandanas came closest, formed only towards the end of the decade. Further confirming Jimmy Sommerville as pivotal in queering the pop landscape (Roberts, 2006), both Caroline Buckley and Sally Herbert had been backing singers for The Communards. While less overtly political in their promotional materials, given the short-lived nature of their career which saw them release just one album, 1991's *Ripe*, it is perhaps unjust to make such comparison. None the less, with their shaved heads and Doctor Marten boots, the duo projected an undeniably lesbian aesthetic which contrasted deeply with the prevailing imagery of women in pop music at the end of the 1980s.

Sand (2007) reminds us how, "[…] historically, music has served as an artistic reflection of gender, its social restrictions on women's performance can be interpreted as a societal fear of the expression of passion and desire by women" (p.240). Despite this, female

artists, either covertly, consciously, or subconsciously did project leanings to audiences, who in turn digested them keenly as to their queer intent. While the mechanisms of projection and reception themselves betray the innate prohibition that still existed for women in 1980s pop generally, queer women in music still adopted mechanisms in order to align with their under-fed and appreciative queer audiences. Interestingly, the aforementioned Sand, in deconstructing the inequalities of representation, recalls Butler's (1995) proposal that these are manifestations of a reaction to disavowed masculine identifications. Unfortunately, this queer reading may also be applied to an epoch of reform involving the subduing of representations of queer sexualities more broadly, as the decade reached its end.

V.E. Backlash: HIV/AIDS, and the New Heteronormativity.

In 1992, Australian soap opera actor and erstwhile Stock, Aitken & Waterman protégé, Jason Donovan, would successfully sue British publication, *The Face*, for defamation of character (Rolph, 2014). In a feature on the recent tactical and controversial 'outing' campaign of activist group, Queer Nation, Donovan was fleetingly mentioned as an artist who had been subject to persistent rumours in regard to concealing his homosexuality. While clarifying that there was no evidence to corroborate the accusation, the piece was accompanied by a doctored picture of Donovan, wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with the words 'queer as fuck'. The basis for the case rested on the claim that the magazine had insinuated the singer had deceived the public, and did not, as such, assess the merits of "[…] whether it is defamatory to say someone is gay" (Quinn, 2007, p.171). However, for many, the significance was clear. For Donovan's defence team, the suggestion of queerness was still as incendiary as to be labelled a 'poisonous slur' (Graff, 2005). While for Donovan, the win would be characterised as a "[..] hollow one, which alienated key audiences, and ultimately and paradoxically damaged his reputation" (Rolph, 2015, p.105), the case also illustrates that despite the progress made in the 1980s, there was still significant affront taken from associations with homosexuality.

The diversity and abundance of representations and readings of sexual diversification on display support the claim of it being a defining characteristic of the 1980s pop musical sphere. Whether artists explicitly identified as homosexual or not, the perception of pop and its enduring queer connections was apparent in a way like no decade before. However, pop's enduring, if commonly covert role, did not go unnoticed among the prurient observers of its previously upheld standards of heteronormativity. While Donovan's case may have reflected

the lingering cultural unease with queerness at the time, there was still a long history of hostility. Looking back to the 1960s, Kallioniemi (2019) characterises suburban America's view of the first British 'musical invasion', as coming to "[…] represent new permissiveness, which also included gentle and humorous flaunting of gender and sexual stereotypes, often connected to the cultivation of a wide definition of style" (p.47).

With its reactive nature having been exposed, as being stimulated by the challenge posed to white, heteronormative representations, the backlash bestowed upon disco a decade later (Gillen, 2007; Mankowski, 2010), would represent another manifestation of this hostility. Kallioniemi also apprises a new antagonist to the substantive voicing of queerness in 1980s, President Ronald Reagan, whose "[…] sanctioned war on pornography and sexuality heralded a new age of conservative politics within the nation, easily associated with the androgynous and degenerate image of New Pop" (*ibid*, p.53). The considerable efforts of Parents Music Resource Centre to censor offending material were explored in Chapter II of this study. However, Luhr (2009) reveals a further, less observed development in pop, which was aided by the cultural climate of the 1980s. The author illustrates how 'Christian pop' artists began to eschew the traditional pathway of rejecting popular culture mores, in favour of embracing youth cultures, as a strategy to change values from within. As such, the vehicle of pop music would come to be assessed, by the same author, as "[…] vital in Christian conservatives' intervention into public life", (2005, p.106), and add further weight to the expanding response to the decade's perceived permissiveness.

Despite this, and although concurring with the assessment of Reagan's negative influence, it is queer commentator Mark Simpson who bleakly but correctly, identifies an even more damaging turn of events:

> The new Cold War, along with the triumph of the "traditional values" of Reagan and Thatcher, had already chilled the political atmosphere. But it was the eruption of the "gay plague" into the news headlines in the mid-'80s that was to decisively turn the tide on both sides of the Atlantic against the androgynous, gender-bending culture of New Wave. (Simpson, 2015)

AIDS affected queer communities to a devastating and disproportionate degree. Its subsequent deleterious effect on the abundance of queer-associated representations of cultures, as identified by Simpson, was symptomatic of a wider renewal of hostility affecting already

marginalised queer populations (Altman, 1988; Garfield, 1994). Despite the decade being unbridled in terms of sexual expression in pop music, the response to HIV and AIDS was paltry.

In 1985, Dionne Warwick would be joined by artists Elton John, Gladys Knight and Stevie Wonder for the single, "That's What Friends Are For", the proceeds of which were to be donated to charities supporting those who had contracted the virus.[16] While admirable in sentiment, there was no explicit mention of HIV/AIDS in the song. Despite both being notable as first efforts to address the stigma associated with the disease (Larkin, 1997), the omission would be repeated in 1986 with "Digging Your Scene", by English band The Blow Monkeys. Extending Simpson's hypothesis, for other scholars, this marked absence of thematic exploration, came as little surprise. "Pop and AIDS compromise each other, forming a contradictory alliance between an industry that markets sex as fun and a disease that links sex with death" notes Keeps (1992, p.20). Evidently considered inappropriate as a theme, hit songs referring to the disease were few and far between. "Sign Of The Times'" by Prince, would mark another exception. Once again, Jimmy Sommerville would also intervene. The lyrics to 1987 single "For a Friend", which detailed a conversation with a friend where they had revealed their HIV status, have been declared as his "[…] most passionate moment" (Hooper, 2003, p.221).

Not all efforts took the same empathetic approach as Sommerville or The Blow Monkeys. Ohio-born, Jermaine Stewart's 1986 cross-Atlantic hit, "We Don't Have to Take Our Clothes Off, (To Have a Good Time)", was endorsed by the republican government of the United States `and considered emblematic of the abstinence-focused prevention response (Blackwell, 1991 p. 141). With self-explanatory lyrics heard as an endorsement of asceticism, the song was described as "[…] buck(ing) the prevailing moral zeitgeist" (Pollock, 2005, p.396). Yet despite promotional interviews from the period which projected and emphasised the singer's resolute heterosexuality, "The song managed to gain an amusing dimension, despite its scaremongering, because Jermaine came across like such a gloriously unreconstructed nelly" (Smith, 2016, p.87). The fashion for favouring the abstinence approach

[16] The introduction to a subsequent fund-raising effort by Elton John on BBC television's Top of the Pops, would in 1989, be indicative of the lingering stigma. Described by the presenter as being for 'charity' (Smith, 2016), the exact nature of which, was presumably deemed un-palatable for a prime-time television audience, "[..]…almost as if they thought saying the 'A' word would expose them to the virus" (p.88).

would be echoed in other pop songs. Like Stewart, the lyrics to Janet Jackson's "Let's Wait Awhile", with its lyrical refrain of "before we go too far" are easily read in a similar manner. The singer would helpfully, but somewhat unnecessarily confirm that the song was written from the perspective of a woman who, "[…] doesn't want him to mistake the fact that she cares for him, for wanting to jump into bed" (*in* Cadman & Halstead, 2003, p.76). Stewart, meanwhile, was wise to the discourse generated by the novelty factor of his hit. Later, he would release another analogously themed single, "Don't Talk Dirty to Me", but by 1988 the record buying public were unfortunately indifferent to his plea. While he never 'came out', there is a poignant irony in Stewart's 1997 untimely death, caused by an AIDS-related illness (Easely, 2008, p.123).

Despite its seeming inability to reconcile itself to the emergence of the pandemic, pop music was not alone as a popular culture facet, in its reluctance to address the shadow cast by AIDS. Goldstein's (1990) review of various cultural media offers evidence a similar reticence within the realms of film, television, and stand-up comedy, deeming the literary-based response as a singular exception. Goldstein's work is an important reminder as to the reactive prevalence of such sentiment. In terms of pop music specifically, Goldstein also echoes the hypothesis proposed by Keeps (1992) and notes how "AIDS threatens the demonism of rock music in general, heightening resentment for those seen as responsible for the epidemic" (1990, p. 302). As such, it would take until 1990, before AIDS would appear in pop charts explicitly in lyrical form. Neneh Cherry's 1990 cover of the Cole Porter standard, "I've Got You Under My Skin", to which the artist added rap lyrics, finally included a mention of the 'dreaded' disease.

While the nature of pop evolving culture fulfils a demand for new trends, the ensuing shift in the representation of male artists was viewed as being unlikely to have been born of coincidence. The recoil, from "[…] the brilliant artifice of the early decade" (Kureishi & Savage, 1995, p.593) to the subsequent regression, was representative of a wider backlash which had a clear effect on pop. As Simpson (2015) notes, "Good old authentic, straight, reproductive, patriotic, album-based guitar rock was back". Alongside the appropriated dilution of Hi-Nrg and the demise of the cultural totem of the 'gender bender', the additional prohibitions to expressions of queer sexuality provoked by reaction to the advent of AIDS ensured that by the decade's end, pop had effectively doubled back on much of on the evolutionary progress made earlier in the decade.

As previously acknowledged in this study, in Ireland of the 1980s, most of the iterations of transgressive sexualities in pop music accessed were imported. The still relatively youthful status of Irish rock and pop live music industries, combined with the continuing societal stigma in relation to homosexuality, would ensure few artists would emerge who were willing to challenge the binaries. Ireland, it seemed, did not have that many queer artists to turn its back on. Despite this, and while the sounds of imported Hi-Nrg permeated through Dublin's burgeoning queer nightlife scene (O'Neill, 2014), suggestion of a nefarious recoil, comparable to that experienced internationally, may be elicited. The cause of the fire which destroyed Dublin's then queer community centre, The Hirschfield, along with its disco, *Flikkers*, while recorded as unknown, caused suspicion among many (McDonagh, 2021). Within days of the centre being gutted, *Sides* nightclub, another of the few focal points in the city, would also be partially destroyed in another blaze (O'Donnell, 2008). This only increased concerns that the community was under renewed attack, during a period already characterised as being "[…] generally oppressive" (Kerrigan, 2017, p.15).

The turnabout in pop music, would also coincide with a period when the form itself is commonly considered to have hit a creative trough. Characterised as being least abundant in terms of artistry or originality, the view of the decade's end as a nadir of creativity is shared by a number of commentators. An advocate for the general brilliance of English 1980s pop culture (2013; 2020), former *GQ* magazine editor, Dylan Jones (2021), acknowledges the blandness of the late 1980s chart-scape. He observes: "If one of the spurs of the creative spirit is the fight against mediocrity, there was certainly a lot to choose from, as the decade tumbled to a close" (p.276). For others, the period marked the beginning of "[…] a directionless state, for rock and popular music, which in many ways is still prevalent in America today" (Ammons, 2005, p.55). For Clover (2004), the futility can be linked to the perceived ideological successes of western capitalism forged during the decade, accounting for the blandness of much of pop's output at the time. Either way, pop was at a crossroads, and following the rambunctious explosion of difference which had coloured the majority of the decade, homogeneity was once again the order of the day.

There were exceptions, of sorts. Pop iconoclast Madonna would increasingly reference queer symbolism, themes and aesthetics in her work, cultivating and cementing her ironclad reputation as 'gay icon' (Sexton, 1992; Simone, 2016). Although such examples would manifest most explicitly in her subsequent 1990s work, in the darkly de-queered charts of the

late 1980s, her imagery was still read as a beacon of hope. Genres under the broad umbrella of dance music served as another exception, with house music and its associated sub-genres, alongside rap, were flourishing (Bidder, 2001; Napier-Bell, 2001) and offering a bridge to the approaching new decade. These and other dance-related genres would come to dominate the early 1990s, alongside the Western United States-born and formerly underground genre of grunge and would alter the charts irrevocably. Such would be dance music's force, it would come to characterise the very nature of pop in the twenty-first century, dominated as it has been for a number of years now, by EDM, (Electronic Dance Music), a shift which first occurred in the 1980s (Jones, 2021). The intrinsic nature of dance music meant that many of these emerging genres would prove accommodating to a diversity of sexualities, but the sheer display of such sexualities, so apparently abundant in the 1980s, was no longer to the fore.

V.F. Synthesis.

Artists affiliated with numerous iterations and planes of sexual identification in the 1980s, while still managing to tell unmistakably queer stories. Pop's overall tone became unprecedentedly homo-tinged in content, style and presentation. First and foremost, the advent of the explicitly self-identifying 'gay' popstar represented in itself, a substantial milestone. Homo-intoned music and fashion was heavily indebted to the lineage of the previous decade's assault on heteronormativity. Bowie and his glam rock cohorts, and the truculent swagger of punk along with the inclusivity of the disco dancefloor, laid the foundations for a decade like no other. Bowie and others had courageously ushered in the first iterations of queer identification, but it was the non-retractable and empathically queer spirit of this burgeoning band of 1980s pioneers, as epitomised most vocally by Jimmy Sommerville, who ensured their development was culturally significant.

The choice of many other performers, to remain reticent over explicit self-identification as queer is understandable, given social and political attitudes towards divergent sexualities during the decade. Yet this makes them no less qualified for inclusion in the pantheon of artists discussed. Many still offered scattered hints as to their queerness throughout their work. While drawing criticism from activist commentators frustrated at the lack of apparent readiness to explicitly align as homosexual, this approach was illustrated as having been embraced as a necessary yet playful mechanism. The cultural imprints of such works aligned to aspects of queer theoretical frameworks, further supplementing the already richly endowed period. In

light of the decade's failure to offer an overt demonstration of an explicitly self-declared queer female performer, attention to subtleties of language and performance and reception became central to understanding the impact of women in assisting the decade's proliferation of the transgressive.

The benefit of a contemporary vantage point is also clear. The intervening forty years has provided a far more robust understanding of the internal and external pressures faced by LGBTI or queer pop stars at the time. The liberal socio-sexual progress since attained in the Western societies from which many of the artists discussed in this study originate has afforded and revealed new perspectives on performers who fully avoided associations with homosexual identification and were careful to abstain from such indicators in their work. Their retrospective rehabilitation further populates the decade's already copious queer presence.

This Chapter ends on a somewhat sober tone. The overarching presence and prevalence of content and artifacts imbued with discernibly queer characteristics is presented as having significantly waned as the decade reached its conclusion. Pop's cyclical nature has been long established by scholars (Hein & Kuhn, 2021). Consensus agrees it consists of, "[…] a relatively long period of increasing concentration and homogeneity, followed by a brief burst of competition and creativity" (Berger and Peterson, 1975, p,180), before repetition of the sequence. Alongside Hi-Nrg's documented assimilation and subsequent decline, the ebbing appearances of the 'gender bender' were further submerged by a documented return to pop sounds, styles and performativity more readily associated with heteronormativity. Fuelled in turn by a negative discourse of association between homosexuality and HIV/AIDS, the latter of which was illustrated as having been flouted by pop, the backlash of sorts ensured the decade ended with a distinctly less queer aspect than it had begun. That the rejection would coincide with a period in pop's history generally viewed as bereft of innovation or artistry was a just retribution. A society gets the pop it deserves.

In true cyclical fashion, much of the momentum achieved during the decade would eventually re-emerge. Fans of queer-imbued pop and rock need not have worried, for like the form itself, "[…] which might hibernate from time to time, and sink back into the swamp" (Turner, 2014), the aberration of queer sexualities was only temporary. It can be argued that these laid the foundations for a new climate of acceptance of sexual and gender diversity, evidenced by the 'coming out' of artists such as George Michael, Elton John and the many

others who have subsequently come to challenge the normative binaries, once so tightly guarded.

The 1980s musical legacy stands as noteworthy as having forged new configurations of gender and sexualities. “Through a parody of artifice and masquerade that challenges the patriarch”, Hawkins (1997) notes how the decade’s queer musical pioneers, “[…] remind us that music can function as a vehicle in deconstructing fixed notions of gender in everyday life (p.118). The decade would, for the first time, see pop stars adopt unapologetically unretractable queer identifications, and successfully introduce them into the mainstream, much to the confoundment of popular expectation. These intrepid musical manifestations were especially courageous, given the at-best, ambiguous societal relationship with homosexuality or expressions of such. Many artists were constrained by such mores and would not ‘come out’ until well into the next decade, if at all. However, other strategies allowed for their work to be read as queer. Together, these illustrate a decade like no other, as queer artists, along with their songs, albums and videos, would take centre stage.

Conclusion.

> How the pop star looks, how he displays his body in performance, how he dresses, how he defines his own social space, and most importantly how he sings, affect the way in which we experience the artist in relation to ourselves.
>
> -Brian Attig, *The Gay Voice in Popular Music*, 1991

Songs to Save Your Life: The Queer Messaging of 1980s Pop Music has assembled a comprehensive investigation into the varied contributions made by queer artists and musicians over the course of an ebullient decade, and which often took the form of transgression. Events such as the banning of "Relax" by the BBC, or Boy George's inaugural appearance on *Top of the Pops,* have entered the pop culture canon and are commonly included in queer pop culture investigations of the decade. These belong to any investigation of sexuality in 1980s pop's well-rehearsed tropes of the decade. However, these reveal only a fraction of the true influence of queerness on 1980s pop and the discourse surrounding it. There was far more to the decade's queer transgressions than the generation of controversy. Consequently, this study set about building a broader analysis which would capture the full extent of the queer zeitgeist, using the underpinning framework of queer theory.

Chapter I introduced pop and sexuality as two components crucial to contextualising the research question, which aimed to explore the abundance and influence of queer messaging in 1980s pop music. The first section explored the 1950s genesis of pop as a stand-alone art. In addition to its symbiotic and enduring relationship to youth cultures, the form's musical, cultural and etymological origins were then explored. A review of pop music in academia followed which illustrated the struggle to achieve complex scholarly understanding of pop's potential functions. The study moved into consideration of how this was redeemed, with new readings proving pop's far-reaching capabilities. In this context, pop's specific 1980s evolution was considered, including how the rise of MTV enabled pop art forms to shift from the solely sonic to the visual. Cognisant of the commitment to involve an Irish perspective, the section introduced the concept of Transnationalism. Specifically, this offered an exploration of pop music's capacity to traverse diverse cultures. In addition to adding to pop's long list of verified capabilities, this pre-empted a focus on the reception to pop music in Ireland during the 1980s. Illustration of how access to the televised performances such as those scrutinised in this study was still dependent on physical location, was provided. Despite such prohibitions, the section

concluded with evidence of the commercial dominance of foreign pop music on the Irish pop music charts of the 1980s.

The second section of the Chapter turned its attention to the politics of sexuality. Offering a context for understanding queer lives during the 1980s, the hostility of feeling towards non-hegemonic populations was illustrated as having manifested in a plethora of restrictive political and legislative responses. Seeking to limit or prohibit the rights of queer communities was also shown to have been a predominant message from an unsympathetic print media. Tempered by the arrival of AIDS, this hostility only grew. In response to this, and to a perceived absence of interest on the part of respective authorities in supressing the encroaching pandemic, a new form of direct activism was born. What appeared as futile initial responses to AIDS nevertheless acted as a catalyst to the burgeoning movement, but the timing was crucial for other reasons. Building on the work of Foucault, theorists such as Butler, Kosofsky Sedgwick and others would cement the value of queer theory in academia.

As a form of activism, 'queer' was shown to offer a mode of effecting change which was direct, inclusive and effectual. As a vehicle to deconstruct the mechanisms and processes of sexuality or gender identification, queer theory was demonstrated to be equally as apt. As this segment illustrated, 'queer' and its associated theories had truly arrived. With its application assisted by the work of scholars such as Butler (1990), Taylor (2003) and Benshoff and Griffin (2004), the section concluded with a demonstration of how the principles of queer theory would be adhered to in this study.

Chapter II brought pop and sexuality together. Presented in two parts, the first section established a diachrony of queer sexualities, beginning in the 1950s. The discourse surrounding pop music was shown as commonly focused on the sexual, which invited heavy scrutiny. In this context, pop commonly self-regulated itself, rather than being censored from outside. Resultantly, pop's early gender representations were immobile and rigid. While the second wave of feminism had yielded societal impact for women, this did not translate quickly into pop. Despite the form's enduring reputation as an agitator of norms, here it demonstrated a resistance to change. Applying this theory of delay to the representations of homosexuality in pop, it becomes clear why it would take up until the early 1970s for queerness to explicitly manifest.

Finally, things shifted. Ziggy Stardust-era David Bowie explicitly challenged the former paucity of queerness in mainstream pop. Bowie's impact was undeniably revolutionary and enduring. Later, both punk and disco, alongside with their attendant cultural movements, further shifted popular music's focus away from the purely hegemonic. The changes ushered in during the 1970s deeply impacted the future pop stars of the 1980s. The emergence of synth pop and the new romantic aesthetic introduced a flow of transgressive stars into the pop canon.

Having reviewed the intersecting trajectory of pop and queer sexualities up to and including the 1980s, the second part of Chapter II offered an evaluation of such junctures in an analytical framework. Here, the previously affirmed and multitudinous capabilities of pop were further explored, but now with its queer audience as the focus. Demonstration of pop's capacity to impact identity formation, on both individual and collective levels was then provided. When combined with specific evidence as to how queer audiences have utilised pop artifacts, the section conveyed the formative, exploratory and celebratory functions of the form. Adding to this, the study offered an overview of two familiar cultural tropes, that of the 'gay icon' and the 'gay anthem'.

Switching focus to the methodological once again, the next section introduced Discourse Analysis. Illustrated as being commonly used in the study of communications, its intended use in this study as an enhancement aid to queer theory was presented. Similarly, in light of the varied forms under scrutiny and underpinning framework, the fields of multi-modal analysis and Queer Linguistics were also explored.

Chapter III was the first to present a specific thematic strand, constructing an argument which positioned the genre of Hi-Nrg as a hitherto unacknowledged but important example of the decade's queer cultural capital. Illustrating the assimilative path of disco and the ensuing backlash its omnipresence would provoke, the Chapter illustrates how the genre evolved stylistically into what would become Hi-Nrg. The spirit of disco was once more evoked, in demonstrating another important contextualizing factor brought about in the decade preceding the 1980s. The multi-layered nature of the various receptions of The Village People offered important and tangible proof of the ability of queer messaging to be read by some but missed by others.

Exploring its genesis in the second section of the Chapter, Hi-Nrg's rise was attributed to a new breed of musical mavericks like Bobby Orlando and Patrick Cowley. Taking hold in the urban gay clubs of North America, by 1984 the genre was illustrated as having established itself as a ubiquitous soundtrack to commercial gay night life.

The third section set about offering an analysis of Hi-Nrg materials, in order to qualify the genre's merit as a foundational component in the decade. Song titles and lyrics were inspected and found to commonly employ the use of queer specific cultural idioms and language, and emerging themes, such as a preoccupation with eulogies of the male form, were identified. The use of sexual innuendo in lyrics was also demonstrated as a defining characteristic, although examples also illustrated how more sexually perspicuous lyrical themes were utilised. The section also highlighted the enduring association, for good or bad, which existed between the genre and queer audiences.

The final section explored the ramifications of Hi-Nrg's ascent into mainstream culture under the supervision of Stock, Aitken, and Waterman. While they define and establish the genre, their manipulation of its crossover success also involved a substantial de-sexualisation of the form. The widespread and unyielding critical indictments faced by the trio also added further complexity to a convoluted legacy. Hi-Nrg's eventual demise, however, was even more complex. Given its increasingly diluted execution, it was somewhat ironic to report evidence of a prevailing unease among record executives for whom the genre's gay association remained problematic. These factors, along with its general ubiquity, meant that Hi-Nrg would soon be replaced by new forms of dance music.

Chapter IV focused on another thematic area, which was also vital in facilitating queer expressions in pop during the decade. Having been introduced earlier in the study, the distinctly 1980s incarnation of cultural phenomenon of the 'gender bender' was revisited. The Chapter commenced with an examination of the ascendancy of the 'gender bender' in early 1980s pop music. Illustrating their grouping as more reflective of an aesthetical commonality than any distinct musical one, it is this aspect of their flagrant contravention which is shown to have been explicitly transgressive. Due exploration also revealed the substantive role played by women in the 'gender bender's' trajectory of influence. The section then sowed how this styling would further influence the pop music spectrum more widely, with increasingly fluid representations surfacing across numerous sub-genres of the form.

Having attributed the 1980s popularisation of the term to the English tabloid press, the second section explored this convoluted genesis. Samples extracted from articles written on the emergence of these 'weirdos' illustrated an underlying contempt for the artists considered to be fitting of the unchosen accolade. Despite the frequency of their reporting and the titillating tone which often characterised it, the underlying discourse surrounding this incongruous group was shown to have resolutely cast the 'gender bender' as the 'other'.

The next section analysed the 'gender benders' through the lens of queer theory. Arguing that the essence of their transgressions were primarily aesthetical, the primary focus of this section was to convey the visual impact of their presence. This performativity, and abject eschewal of binarised notions of gender, were illustrated as unequivocally fulfilling a queer criterion. Despite the visual focus, exploration of other artifacts, such as songs and lyrics provided additional supplementary evidence.

The following section was devoted to one specific artist, Pete Burns. As both a 'gender bender' luminary and a Hi-Nrg troubadour, Burns had previously been introduced to the reader. This section pedestalled the pop star as the epitome of all that was queer in the decade. Through analysis of a multi-modal selection of Burns' materials, and from his own testimonies, a portrait emerged of an artist whose ideals were illustrated as aligned to the burgeoning models espoused by queer theorists, and who embodied the essence of its manifestation in 1980s pop.

Shifting the focus away from the thematic strands of the two preceding Chapters, Chapter V turned its attention to the broader exploration of the variant expressions of sexual identity chosen by artists in the decade. Proposing the very abundance of alternates as having played a constituent role in the queering of the pop canvas, the Chapter commenced with an exploration of the constituent role played by the advent of unequivocally gay pop stars. With their emphatic, unretractable and overt affirmations, the emerging troupe were pioneers representing a seismic shift in pop music representation. Culturally, the development was so distinct that it would qualify the decade as noteworthy in of itself. However, there were also many other iterations at play.

Having already exposed how aspects of the media had an unyielding fascination with the sexual orientation of pop stars, the second section of the Chapter began exploring two artists

subject to consistent speculation and discourse, Elton John and Freddie Mercury. While pop had only recently demonstrated it was possible to be explicitly gay and retain commercial success, this section was occupied with exploring the ambiguous sites where many artists would choose to remain. Here the work and artifacts of artists including George Michael, Morrissey and the Pet Shop Boys was presented and analysed. While the lack of explicit identification may have provoked the chagrin of gay critics and commentators alike, nonetheless audiences read materials as being potently queer significant. The feted 'coming out' of artists such as George Michael and Neil Tennant in the 1990s offered subsequent vindication of what many audiences had suspected. However, as this section illustrated, both had long been subject to prior investigations which rendered aspects of their work as being infused with queer messaging. For others, specifically Morrissey, the ambivalence would continue.

The absence of a female equivalent to Jimmy Summerville's card-carrying form of identification was subsequently addressed. This lack indicated the additional, intersectional prohibitions facing women in pop. Given the want of any role model, the illustration of how the interpretative tools were used by audiences to extract and affirm queer meaning from artist's oeuvre was once again vital. The genesis in the 1970s of a 'womyn's' music scene was further evidence of the inequities commonly experienced. In tandem with Hi-Nrg's enduring association with gay men, the explicit correlation between the burgeoning circuit and lesbian identity was illustrated. Adding further relevance to this study, the platform was also shown to have played a significant role in fostering the careers of a number of artists who would attain mainstream pop success. In addition to gender-rendered prohibitions, additional intersections of race were shown also to have concerned black female artists. Crucially, and despite such complexities, the clear inference of queer messaging was illustrated as having been read by many among these artist's audiences.

The final section of this Chapter revisited the AIDS pandemic to explore how the emergence of the 'gay plague' would come to affect pop music, and the relative weakness of pop's response to the crisis, despite its perceived ability to provoke and consider uncomfortable truths. AIDS had been deemed a seemingly untouchable topic, but the impact of the disease would still profoundly affect the scope of representations previously afforded space in the decade's pop charts. That this occurred when the genre of Hi-Nrg and the visual transgressions of the 'gender bender' were both in recession only added to the misfortune. Ancillary factors

which may have contributed to the sudden dearth of queer iconography, including the various moral crusades of President Ronald Reagan, were then considered. The moral backlash which had been given license by the arrival of the pandemic permeated pop, ensuring the return to a landscape where queers were once again regulated to the peripheral.

That pop had seemed to have turned its back on its previous decade-defining predilection for the increasingly common presence of queer artists is of no great surprise. Despite the progress achieved, as reiterated in this study, the visibility and representation of women had served as an indication of the enduring nature of struggles for equity. People now know of even darker injustices that existed and were sustained within many realms of pop culture and its associated industries during the 1980s. Most gravely indicative of the depths of dysfunction to which the industry could slide, the latter day uncovering of abuse perpetrated by the likes of the BBC's *Top of the Pops* presenter Jimmy Saville and pop star Gary Glitter serve as particularly ugly examples of such toxicity. Davies (2014) and McShane (2013) have both explored this darkest section of the underbelly of pop music and celebrity culture.

In addition to the overarching and indelibly negative influence of AIDS, other common threads were exposed throughout the study. While each was concerned with the exploration of a specific thematic area, the artists and artifacts which populated Chapters III, IV and V commonly intersected, by design. In exploring and validating the queer prowess of each subject, additional patterns also emerged. Both the sonic affront of Hi-Nrg and the visual assault of the 'gender bender' shared a common expiration date. As a catalyst for the resumption of more traditionally heteronormative expressions in pop, AIDS would constitute a substantive third factor in ending what had been the most overtly queer period in pop's history.

In addition to the capabilities attributed to 1980s pop in this study, there is one further aspect to its character, in which its ultimate depletion of queer identities may be understood. By its nature, pop is a fickle form, and this has been well established. Osbourne (2012) asserts that "[P]op culture is about the now, a fickle state of flux with an accelerated life cycle drive by a commercial calculous that valorises the new" (p.20). Lim (2016) expands on this, noting that: "[G]iven the high permeability of cultural flows and the fickle nature of its consumer base, popular culture trends and fashion may be revived or ebb at different time periods" (p.40). Her

observation offers additional insight relevant to understanding the sudden disappearance of the sexually transgressive from pop's shores. It disappeared because it would be coming back.

The ebb and flow of pop is one of its constants, and while the diminution of a queer presence was swift, it was also transitory. Granted, the emerging 1990 trend of 'brit-pop' has been denigrated for its reliance on hegemonic representations (Cummins, 2020). Scholars have confirmed a dependence on "[a] form of compulsive gendered behaviour that is reinforced by homophobia and anti-femininity" (Hawkins, 2016, p.153), within the genre. Fortunately, the same cannot be said of the other emerging pop genres. At first glance, the new forms of dance music and the burgeoning alternative of the Seattle-born grunge scene contained less overt queer referencing than the commonly perspicuous nature of the previous decade's pop music. However, both would be imbued with a queer sensibility which would eventually surface.

The cover of the September 1993 issue of British style magazine *The Face* featured the latter genre's poster-boy, Kurt Cobain. Resplendent in a blue dress and adorned with nail polish and face make-up, Cobain would also commonly adopt drag aesthetics for performances, albeit toned by the less glamourous visuals more readily associated with his genus. However, grunge had also amassed something of a reputation as yet another male-dominated form (Taylor, 2012). This also acted as a catalyst, however, partially responsible for the ensuing 'riot grrrl' movement which would significantly challenge the neglect of women in 'alternative' pop and rock (Driver, 2008). Affording spaces to formerly marginalised artists, its development would come to play a crucial role in the visibility of queer women. In turn, their central role in its trajectory has been well accredited.

The new forms of dance music were equally accommodating, with house music being described as: "[...] unapologetically gay and unmistakably black" (Johnson, 2003, p. 80). Home to the flourishing form of techno, the 'rave' scene would provide an environment so inclusive that it would attain a reputation as a convergence point for previously distinct heterosexual and homosexual club cultures (Denizet-Lewis, 2000; Rief, 2009). In observing that: "You could say the greatest gay pop star of the 1990s was the nightclub Trade" Flynn (*in* O'Flynn, 2018) captures something of the relatively faceless nature of 1990s dance music, and of the intersecting relationship between club and queer cultures of the period.

As pop music had changed, so had the wider socio-political climate. In lieu of the onslaught of hostility which had faced queer communities in the 1980s, many of the new political regimes of power began to reflect a considerably more liberal approach to matters of homosexuality. Ireland would finally decriminalise homosexuality in 1993 (Ferriter, 2009), and in the United Kingdom the legislative legacy of 1980s tory homophobia, 'clause 28' would be repealed in 2000 (Baker, 2022). As the impact of these changes has been documented as having been a significant positive factor in the progression of LGBT populations generally, there is no reason to assume such benefits did not filter down to pop stars. As noted in the previous Chapter, the 1990s would see several noted pop stars 'come out'. These were undeniable as signifiers of a more enlightened media industry reception to queer sexualities and marked a shift as numerous pop stars chose to declare their status.

Despite this, the case of Boyzone's Stephen Gately, and specifically the circumstances related to his 1999 'coming out', reveal something of the lingering, distasteful methods of aspects of the media when it came to their treatment of sexuality. In addition to being the first major Irish pop star to declare his homosexuality, the 'boyband' categorisation of which Boyzone were exemplary was more normally associated with the blandest incarnations of heteronormativity. As such his announcement was even more significant. For the most part well-received, Kerrigan (2021) documents how the event was somewhat contrived. *The Sun* newspaper had threatened Gately with an ultimatum, to 'come out', or to be 'outed'. Left with little choice, he chose the former, granting the newspaper an 'exclusive' interview.

However, despite these lingering obstacles, pop has continued to progress in relation to alternative expressions of sexuality. In the intervening years, queers have stayed to the fore in pop. Solo artists Ricky Martin and John Grant, along with bands such as The Gossip and Scissor Sisters, would ensure that the turn of the century was marked by a new generation of 'out and proud' pop stars. In the 2010s, the view of rap and rhythm and blues as being imbued with a lingering resistance to change would be challenged by the emergence of artists such as Frank Ocean and Lil' Nas X.

At the time of writing, a debate was provoked by the work of American rapper Kendrick Lamar, which continues to rage. Lamar's 2022 track "Auntie Diaries" details the gender transition of two of the artist's relatives and has been met with divisive responses (Haney, 2022). While some have acknowledged the artist's motivation as being empathy-driven and

have commended his efforts (Aswad, 2022), others have cited examples of mis-gendering and the repetitive use of derogatory language as lessening the song's impact (Marshall-Lewis, 2022). Misguided efforts are nothing new in pop, and while Lamar's execution may be clumsy, the very notion of trans acceptance being addressed by a heterosexual rap artist illustrates how much the world of pop has changed.

The noted demographic shift toward queer, trans and non-binary identifications has also been judiciously replicated in pop. 1998 would see Israeli Artist Dana International win the Eurovision song contest. Despite the competition's underwhelming musical reputation, the event represented a vital cultural milestone in the visibility of trans artists in pop music (de Carlo, 2018). The artist, whose real name is Sharon Cohen, has rightfully been awarded the accolade of being a: "[...] a transnational mould-breaker" by Duan (*in* Lind, 2010, p.148) for her contribution. Now, in an age where pop stars such as Miley Cyrus, Sam Smith, Janelle Monáe and Demi Lovato openly discuss the fluidity of their gender, pop's queer credentials have never been stronger.

For many of these artists, the legacy of queerness innate to 1980s pop has proved inspirational. Lead actor in the previously discussed 2021 AIDS drama "It's a Sin", Olly Alexander had been hitherto best known for his pop career as the openly gay front man of Years & Years. At the 2022 Brit awards Alexander would duet with Elton John to sing the production's eponymous title track. As they performed the Pet Shop Boys seminal tale of catholic guilt, their convergence was symbolic of both the progress made in pop and the lasting role 1980s pop played in queering the charts. Elton John's complex relationship with sexual identity in the 1980s has already been addressed within this study. Despite being born in 1990, Alexander has frequently discussed the extent of inspiration he has drawn from the pioneering artists of the decade (Hereford, 2021).

Not alone, artists such as Jake Shears have accredited the pathway to queer identities in pop as having been significantly enabled by the likes of Pete Burns (Levine, 2016). John Grant has detailed the resilience offered by the transgressive nature of 1980s pop, in the face of his strict Methodist upbringing (Grant, *in* Cochrane, 2018). The cultural impact of Boy George has also been acknowledged. On the impact of her first exposure to George and his ilk, queer artist Beth Ditto has observed that it felt: "[...] almost like home" (Ditto, *in* Abraham, 2021, p.61), and provided the inspiration for her own career, noting: "I took those moments

and ran with them (*ibid*, 2021). What is clear from these testimonies is that the impact on the artist who forged the pathways of 1980s transgression has been profound and enduring.

In her persuasive appraisal of the successful sabotage of the gender hegemony within pop, Geffen (2021) observes that music: "[...] shelters gender rebellion from those who seek to abolish it" (p.2). In this study, the 1980s were shown to have been the most influential period of such insurgence, where the normative representations of gender and sexuality were dethroned from their previous seemingly impenetrable positioning. While acknowledging and encompassing the existing renowned facets of the queer presence during the period, the investigation set about offering supplementary evidence to broaden the view of the decade. As a result, a portrait of the overarching effect to which numerous queer cultures influenced the period was constructed. Under the mantle of queer theory, and utilising the ideological frameworks of associated scholars, the validity of the artifacts chosen for exploration were assured.

With the previously stifled voices of queer artists and pop stars now being heard loud and clear, it is no overestimation to view the decade as a period like no other in pop's colourful history. The 1980s would see the closet door of pop prized open. Once unlocked, there was no going back.

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Appendix 1: Number One Records in Ireland by Country of Origin (1980s)

Pop music's transnationalist capacities have already been documented. In light of this, and given the pervasive cultural and commercial influence retained by English and North American pop music during the 1980s, it is unsurprising to note their presence on the Irish charts of the period. However, the extent of their influence is worth exploring.

Table 1: Number one records in Ireland by country of origin, throughout the 1980s.

Country of Origin	**Ireland**	**United Kingdom**	**United States**	**Other**	**Total Number of Number One hit records per year**
Year					
1980	1	3	2	1 (Swedish)	7 (no chart for 33 weeks due to industrial action.)
1981	4	12	2	4 (Spanish, Swedish, French and Dutch)	22
1982	0	11	5	4 German x2, Spanish, Swedish	20
1983	0	16	3	3 French, Australian, Spanish	22
1984	0	14	5	1 German	20
1985	3	14	9	1 German	26
1986	3	13	6	5, Norwegian, Greek, Austrian, Swedish & Jamaican.	27
1987	6	10	11	0	27
1988	7	14	6	2 Australian	29
1989	6	10[17]	8	7 Australian, 1 Italian.	31

(Compiled from information at http://irishcharts.ie)

The diagram above sets out the sum of number one hits records on the official Irish chart for every year of the decade. The prevalence of hits originating from the United Kingdom is striking, accounting for over 50% of Irish number ones from 1981-1986. This is followed closely by records which originated from the United States. In addition, the table reveals a number of anomalies. The 1989 charts would see a greater number of best-selling records from

[17] The Bangles' track Eternal Flame would reach number one on two separate occasions during the year.

Australian artists than those of Irish descent. The accomplishment of French, Spanish and German artists in reaching the top spot was in stark juxtaposition to the equivalent absence of Irish artists in the corresponding years. These incongruities also reveal something of the poor performance on the part Irish pop, during the decade. The period from 1982-1984 was particularly vacant, with no record by an Irish artist filling the position over a three-year period. While not exhaustive, this does offer indication as to how dominant pop music from the United States and United Kingdom was during this period in Ireland of the 1980s.