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Queer in Queen: Camp aesthetics and queer performativity in Queen's music videos

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The present paper situates its concerns at the crossroads of cultural studies, queer studies and visual culture in an effort to illustrate how queer identity is visually performed and formed through a particular aesthetic discourse that foregrounds kitsch, excess and self-conscious parody. Consecrated by Susan Sontag in 1964 as camp aesthetics, this visual discourse generates artistic acts whose major goal is to reach beyond ideological categories, hierarchies, dichotomies in order to destabilize their authority. This study focuses on some of Queen's music videos in an attempt to argue that they represent clear instances of camp visuality designed by the band's front man, Freddie Mercury, as part of a therapeutic artistic form of coping with his own queerness. In this respect, the present paper explores the connections between these particular visual representations and their potential to destabilize traditional master narratives such as heteronormativity.

Keywords: *visual culture, camp aesthetics, the politics of queerness, gender discourse, difference, stereotype.*

1. Introduction

The recently released, much acclaimed yet highly controversial Queen biopic, the 2018 *Bohemian Rhapsody*, has helped refuel the world's interest in an already historic rock band that needs no further introduction. In those over 45, this motion picture has revived intense feelings of nostalgia and youthful excess, in those younger it has stirred a curiosity primarily rooted in the movie's glamorous and

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almost heroic portrayal of the band's front man, Freddie Mercury. To both categories, the film's appeal comes as the result of a perfectly well devised Hollywoodian product which favors, not surprisingly I would say, epic narrative over historical truth. This explains the major dissonances between the public's exuberant reception of the film and the critics' less enthusiastic coverage of this biopic. Aside from Rami Malek's exceptional portrayal of Mercury which is beyond debate despite their lack of physical resemblance, yet compensating through intensity, and Queen's greatest hits soundtrack which cleverly supports the otherwise transparent narrative, the film professionals have not found much to praise. And this, I believe, is the result of the fact that the film has sugar-glazed Mercury's much troubled life story in the typical Hollywoodian style, turning it from camp to glam.

This is in fact where the idea for the present paper germinated: in the conceptual conflict between glam rock, a label that has often been used by the press to define Queen, one that Mercury, a former art student, reportedly loathed, and camp aesthetics, a bizarre concoction of kitsch and old-fashioned glamour, where irony and parody are essential to the interrogation of the authority of well-established visual landmarks. On a theoretical level, this paper situates itself at the intersection of cultural studies, visual culture and queer theories, in an attempt to demonstrate that Queen's music videos represent complicated and complex visual interrogations of aesthetic conventions in place at that time. On a more profound level, they also problematize issues of identity, by extravagantly (to some shamelessly) and repeatedly foregrounding violations of gender boundaries and gender roles by erasing gender differences in almost visually absurd extravaganzas that are often reminiscent of operatic shows, yet so very different (see for instance the video for *It's a Hard Life).* This was, without a doubt, the result of Freddie Mercury's own quest for self-identification, as well as of his strong artistic background and sensibility. By stubbornly, if ever unnerving, refusing to resolve the questions and rumors about his sexuality, Mercury brilliantly devised a visual identity that would be carried on into Queen's videos and that would forever elude the very idea of category, norm, definition. His visual persona would thus illustrate his witty as ever answer to a reporter's direct question on whether or not he was gay: "I'm as gay as a daffodil, my dear" (Lesley-Ann Jones 2012, 76).

This paper is also trying to assess the effects that Queen's videos have had on the contemporary Western visual culture in terms of representing queer

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identity. The choice of Queen as the subject of this paper has come almost naturally, as they were the very first band to introduce the concept of promotional video and inaugurate a practice that has become standard today. Also, their video performances provide some of the very first examples of camp visuals that inaugurate a long-lasting line of successors with Boy George, Ru Paul, Marilyn Manson, Pink or Lady Gaga as just a few examples. My interest here lies in how camp aesthetics serves to suspending the mythological dimension of norms and rules, as well as the very concept of difference, gender difference in particular.

2. Camp aesthetics

The term ***camp*** was ushered in the language of many fashionable contemporary theories by Susan Sontag's 1964 essay *Notes on Camp,* which brought Sontag immense literary notoriety and marked a turning point in theorizing about the cultural phenomenon of postmodernism in its aesthetic aspect. Originating from the French verb *se camper* – to posture or to flaunt, camp started to define an aesthetic attitude that relied on theatricality, excess and over-the-top performance and which targeted the deconstruction of previously well-established canons and norms. Even though Sontag initially defined camp as a form of sensibility (Sontag 2019, 1) completely lacking any kind of political intention, any intention whatsoever to be more precise, a form of naïve extravagance rooted in taking oneself dead seriously, in the following decades, ***camp*** was gradually refined into a markedly subversive type of aestheticism with strong political comments attached to it. As Katherine Horn remarks in *Women, Camp and Popular Culture,* 'camp -…- is both disruptive and creative', an aesthetic strategy that relies on parody, exaggeration and detachment (Horn 2017, 21). Moreover, it is fuelled by excess, which becomes the propeller of camp's subversive deconstruction.

This paper's interest in camp aesthetics is also rooted in the fact that, as many of its theoreticians have noticed and as Katherine Horn very clearly summarizes in her 2017 study, camp originated and was dependent on gay subculture (Horn 2017, 16), as it first emerged as a secret code of communication within gay communities in the 1960s. Sontag herself established the connection, in stating that camp originated chiefly from "an improvised self-elected class, mainly homosexuals who constituted themselves as aristocrats of taste" (Sontag 2019, 41), turning thus camp aestheticism into a particular performance of identity. This connection between being queer and aesthetically performing it on stage in a

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manner that subversively defies the very idea of gender, genre or category, be it sexual or artistic, is exactly what stands at the core of the present analysis. And the choice of Queen's visual performances to exemplify it comes as a natural consequence of the fact that, aside from being pioneers, these stemmed from Freddie Mercury's inner struggle to come to terms with his own sexuality. By creating concept videos that would aesthetically and defiantly erase as well as mock the high and low culture dichotomy, Mercury flaunted an emerging and all-conquering pop culture. He hijacked camp's effeminated and secretive allusive gestures and turned them into a refined, clever, yet utterly outrageous instrument of demythologizing not only the male/female gender binary and the heterosexual normative grid, but also infatuated cultural landmarks such as opera, ballet or theatre. On a more personal level, Mercury was probably trying thus to resolve inner identitary conflicts that he found impossible to confront on a social level by performing them on stage.

3. Representing Queer

Even though queer theories emerged in the 1990s, as part of the larger field of Gender Studies, and even though they largely build on feminist claims about the constructedness and performativity of the gender category, they are essentially different in their concerns, expanding their focus to accommodate all kinds of sexual identities that would not be part of the normative pattern. In this sense, they are slightly different from gay/lesbian theories which restrict their concerns to the homosexual/heterosexual binary.

This paper dwells upon an understanding of queer in the sense it has acquired during the past few decades in the Western episteme and not in the original pejorative meaning it was first used to conveniently resolve unresolvable gender categories. Whereas originally, the term queer appeared in order to categorize the uncategorizable in a manner that would bring comfort to the heterosexual majority by securing its heteronormativity, with time, the term has gradually been rehabilitated by various theories which have studied the fluid boundaries of gender identity and have demonstrated that, despite the traditional binary division of gender into masculine and feminine, a division that would undoubtedly secure the future of the species, gender identity remains a matter of both chance and choice, with extremely fluid boundaries that go way beyond a

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binary structure. As Jodie Taylor argues in her insightful article on scenes and sexualities,

> Queer now embodies a highly fruitful anti-essentialising ambiguity that produces a complex and ever shifting set of relationships to the perceived norm for not only gender and sexuality but to all normalising regimes. Thus, queer identities, practices and scene collectives problematise placement within a static binary sub/dominant culture, as they emerge. (Taylor 2010, 2)

This is precisely where the major concern of this paper resides: in understanding how queer identity articulates itself visually through the appropriation of a stylized aesthetics that would neither state nor deny, that would simply challenge not only normative patterns of sexuality or gender, but normative patterns altogether, without proposing anything instead. Within this frame of mind, the queer emerges as the unidentifiable, the elusive, the fragmented, that which cannot be conceived within a coherent framework as it represents the disruptive element. Asserting the difference within sameness paradoxically reconciles opposites and renders binaries redundant through a disruptive visual textuality.

The recent discourses of Gender Studies and Queer Studies have appropriated the concept of *representation* as a violent process, following thus in the footsteps of feminist theories. Representation not only cripples the object/subject in order to make it fit its rigid frames, but also confines the object/subject to a frozen image. This image is bound to become a stereotype. Moreover, representation is seen as too limited to exhaust the infinite instances of being. Coextensively, representing the queer is bound to generate type images, but, at the same time, contributes to the visibility of this ambiguous gender category. That is why, the queer will choose not to represent (gender) but to perform it. Gender-as-performance (see Butler's theories on it) becomes a chief device in challenging both the authority of the gender binary and the partial and incomplete status of representation. The visual performance of the queer has a double effect: it shocks visually and it destabilizes ideologically. By itself, the queer body introduces the highest degree of subversion of traditional cultural models: it fits neither of the two categories devised by traditional Western thought and thus suspends them both.

There is an apparent blatant incongruity between rock's direct, strong masculine, virile popular perception and queerness, which is more than often

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perceived as effeminated, flamboyant, elusive. However, the combination of the two might have been the source of Queen's immense success, as well as the reason behind their musical and visual innovations.

The band's biographers unanimously agree on the fact that the queer in Queen was undoubtedly Freddie Mercury, whose essential gift was not mere musical talent, but an extraordinary sense for performance. As a performer, Mercury intuitively and very early on understood the importance of image, of the visual. Many of those who had known him before he became famous reported that he was an outrageous appearance from head to toe. Reportedly, he must have been the living impersonation of Sontag's camp, as he took "relish for the exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms" (Sontag 2019, 44). He was Being-as-Playing-a-Role long before anyone took him seriously. Some made fun of him, none took him too seriously until they heard his voice and witnessed him on stage. He was the one to pursue May and Taylor and form and christen Queen (an outrageous name very indicative of Mercury's identity issues but also of his acute sense of humour and admiration for the British royal family). In an epoch when being openly gay would have been very unthinkably risky on a professional level as well as on a personal one (homosexuality was decriminalized in Britain as late as 1967), young Mercury chose to perform his queerness on stage and later on in the band's videos (it is interesting how Mercury's stage appearance became more normatively masculine as the band engaged into video filming). As the aesthete of the band, Mercury imprinted his camp visuality to most of their video performance almost in a therapeutic effort to cope with the unthinkable (which to him was coming out before his Parsee family in whose religious tradition homosexuality was Evil itself). On another level, since the whole point of camp is to dethrone the serious (Sontag 2019, 41), there is a lot of parody in these visual performances, the sort of parody that acts as a form of resistance towards conventional monolithic culture, but also is there simply to be enjoyed (see for instance the video for I Want to Break Free). As Jodie Taylor argues in her analysis of the queer music scene, „style becomes an inherently meaningful form of resistance where clothes, music, dance, haircuts and language form a response" (Taylor 2010, 4). Queer survival depends on the critique of both mainstream culture and gay subculture, „displacing the singularity of style and the lineage of parent culture, favoring instead eclectic coalitions" (Taylor 2010, 4). By confiscating the codes of high culture, Queen's videos refract the canonical visuals of both gender and genre, as the following analysis will largely demonstrate.

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4. Queen's music videos – A case study

Until 1975, the concept of promotional music video did not exist. Musicians promoted their upcoming albums using radio stations, releasing singles to boost sales. With the release of their fourth album, *A Night at the Opera,* the British band Queen also released a song that would enter the history of music as the best liked, most listened to song of all times: *Bohemian Rhapsody.* Resisting all genre categorizations and labels, featuring a six-minute long mix of rock, opera, ballad and chorus sections, the single was initially refused by radio stations precisely because of its anti-canonical length (at the time, a three-minute length was the standard on the radio).The concern of this paper is not, however, musical, but visual. Queen's performances had not remained unnoticed especially due to Freddie Mercury's flamboyant, outrageous and hard to pin down visual appearances. With a stage name reminiscent of the Greek God of transgression and mediation and a degree in fine arts at Ealing Art College, Mercury transferred the innovative feature of his musical genius to his visual performances. Queer became the best way to describe Queen's live performances as going against all previously known musical and visual landmarks. Mercury himself became a queer icon, with his costume extravaganzas, his flaunting bodily movements, his extraordinary operatic voice range and his completely over-the-top stage persona. An embodiment of camp.

Bohemian Rhapsody

It was Mercury who came up with the idea of filming the *Bohemian Rhapsody* video to promote the *Night at the Opera* album. This was to become the very first music video in the sense we understand them today. Arguably, as Oscar-winning lyricist Tim Rice pointed out, it was also Mercury's coming-out song, although, coming from a strict Zoroastrian Parsee family, this was never admitted publicly. Despite the general confusion about the song's apparently hectic lyrics, to Tim Rice, *Bohemian Rhapsody* was obviously an allegory of Mercury's confessing to his family about his homosexuality, killing the man they thought he was/ought to be and embracing a new, liberated identity (Jones 2012, 154). However, Mercury stubbornly refused to ever explain his lyrics or his videos, leaving sense-making to the audiences who loved him and loathed him for this.

Visually, the video expands from the concept of the Hollywood diva image, showing the four members of the band shot from a close range in the typical black-

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and-white frozen frame so reminiscent of Marlene Dietrich or Greta Garbo poses. Just like Andy Warhol's silk screens of Hollywood icons, the video builds on the concept of image, which is then endlessly multiplied, as a chorus of dubbed voices cries out random names taken from various operatic productions: Scaramouche, Galileo, Figaro. As former record producer argues in Lesley-Ann Jones's 2011 biography of Freddie Mercury, „it was the first hit generated by a visual" (Jones 2012, 157). Photographer Mick Rock had been commissioned before by Mercury himself to create the album sleeve for *Queen II.* As a declared admirer of the Hollywoodian Golden Age, just like Mercury himself, Rock started from the idea of a stark black-and-white close-up of the band's members' faces, preserving both the elegance and the stillness of the original inspiration. On Mercury's suggestion, the same idea became the foundation of the *Bohemian Rhapsody* video. The initial black-and-white close-up relied on a classical photo of Marlene Dietrich in the *Shanghai Express* film. Marlene Dietrich herself had often been rumored as queer, cross dressing as a man in many of her films at a time when Hollywood was not yet under the Hays censorship Code. As Mick Rock remembers, Mercury joked about him wanting to be Marlene. It was a half-joke. Struggling with his sexuality and finding it impossible to admit it even to himself, while still maintaining the appearance of a heterosexual relation with Mary Austin, Mercury transferred the struggle to his music and his visual performances:

> We decided we should put Rhapsody on film, and let people see it. We didn't know how it was going to be looked upon, or how they were going to receive it. To us, it was just another form of theatre. (Mercury in Jones 2012, 157)

Thus, all the features of camp aesthetics were all of a sudden there, in a music video. Theatricality, mimicry of golden Hollywoodian iconic imagery, parody, as well as a powerful subversion of canonical forms of art: opera, classical cinema, theatre. Moreover, the video managed to perfectly accompany the song. Every time the song echoes, the image reverberates and remains in the listener's/viewer's mind, making the two inseparable. As part of the camp aesthetics, gender as a rigid, well-confined and defined category is suspended by Mercury's ambivalent appearance which openly defies the visual normative representation of both genders. The theatre gong blow that concludes both the video and the song strongly underlines the fact that this is just a performance and we, the viewers, should be aware of it, just as we are at the end of Shakespeare's *A*

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Midsummer Night's Dream, when Puck, the androgynous jester, warns us that all was just a farce.

On a more profound level, the *Bohemian Rhapsody* video works around the concept of public image or persona, just about in the same way Andy Warhol did in his 1962 Marilyn Monroe dyptich now exhibited at MOMA. Thought as a tribute to the then recently deceased Hollywood diva, Warhol's artwork reinterprets the concept of icon in the context of the contemporary Western popular culture, while exploring the various facets of one's public image as a collection of frozen stereotypical, often caricature-like hypostases. The Marilyn Monroe dyptich is a wall-size silkscreen where the actress's standard Hollywood photograph is multiplied using various garish color tones which gradually fade away in black and white tones, to show Warhol's obsession with death and effacement. As a former art student, Mercury must have been aware of Warhol's work. This would certainly explain a similar multiplication of the initial type image that the *Bohemian Rhapsody* video foregrounds. The same kaleidoscopic visual effect and the same effacement of the strong black and white image that opens the video. Probably the same intention of discussing the force of the image, of the visual, of the superstar as a contemporary icon. And the same deconstruction of this forceful image as ephemeral, artificial, illusory. The video was a major hit and led to the immense success of the song which, to this day, has remained on top of the public's preferences. The video was absorbed into popular culture in many ways. One of the best-known instances is the 1992 cinematic parody remake of Bohemian Rhapsody in *Wayne's World,* an iconic pop-culture comedy that exploits the parodic streak of the initial video. The video's appeal to popular culture stems from the irreverent way it brings together "a little high" and "a little low": the obvious operatic background, the theatrical references and the outrageous low culture of drag visually represented by Mercury's heavily made up face, varnished nails and flamboyant silver-white outfit.

Crazy Little Thing Called Love. Body Language

Written as a tribute to Elvis Presley, Mercury's *Crazy Little Thing Called Love* musically revisits the golden age of rock'n roll as a form of paying homage to the sources of rock music. On a visual level, however, the video for the song subversively revisits and challenges normative representations of gender by reversing the object/subject positions of the male gaze and implicitly of the desire contained in it. The male gaze theory introduced by film director Laura Mulvey was

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readily embraced by feminist theory as the expression of female objectification by men and of the male domination over women. According to it, the act of looking at contains a form of possession that condenses both sexual desire and the forceful fulfillment of it. This implies a gender role pattern that puts the masculine in a dominant subject position, while the feminine is devoured as an inanimate object. Such a pattern is deemed as both representative and normative for patriarchal Western culture and the way in which the gender roles dynamics has traditionally been managed. Subversively, Queen's video replaces the female object of the gaze with the white male body which becomes the object of desire. However, this does not mean that the gender role pattern is reversed, but simply dissolved. Consistent with Sontag's description of camp as refusing to offer a different set of standards but rather going beyond binaries, standards and norms (Sontag 2019, 67), but also faithful to visually representing the queer, the leather-clothed Mercury appears to be the object of desire for both the male and the female dancers in the video, whose almost aggressive reach claim his body in equal measure. Mercury leather outfit is intentionally almost identical to the one that Elvis Presley himself wore in his 1968 comeback concert, visually inviting comparisons, interrogations and challenges. Presley's masculine, virile rock star image is visually doubled in the spectator's consciousness by Mercury's elusive performance which, despite powerful visual masculine props such as the motorbike, subliminally invites suspensions of the heterosexual axis of desire by introducing a couple of male dancers who claim the protagonist. The intense black and white contrast evokes both the Golden Age of Hollywood as a standard of glamour and raises concerns as to the stereotypical construction of sexual Otherness, which is dissolved by the superposition of both male and female bodies.

An almost identical video banned in the USA due to its explicit and potentially offensive sexual content, *Body Language* plays with heteronormativity in what first seems a visual enactment of straight sexual desire. Desire is first laid bare in the exposure of half-naked sexualized bodies, then subverted as the bodies are gradually reduced to their constitutive parts and eventually exposed as utterly violent and consuming in the form of actual biting and scratching of the desired body.

By now, Mercury's appearance had dramatically changed into what biographers called "the clone look", a stereotypically masculine facade which was in fact a visual code of recognition within gay communities. While in the first half of the video male and female half naked bodies engaged in sexually loaded motions are randomly objectified by close-up half light filming, which leads to their visual dismemberment and eventual loss of identity, in the second half, Mercury appears

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in a shirtless leather jacket mockingly wooing a threesome of heavy-weight, middle aged African American starlets. The visual contrast of the two hypostases in which Mercury plays the part of the actively gazing subject amounts to the deconstruction of the typified object of desire which, in this case, glides from the commonplace female sex-bomb, to male raptured bodies and eventually to totally non-normative corporeality. This would probably satisfyingly account for Sontag's definition of camp as an economy of "androgynous vacancy" (Sontag 2019, 68), since the dismemberment of normal/normative desire portrayed in this video dismantles the gender binary while taking a laugh at it.

It's a Hard Life/ Living on My Own

With the 1984 release of *It's a Hard Life* video, Mercury takes it to the extreme, flaunting the complete theatricalization of experience, camp's "victory of the aesthetics over morality, of irony over tragedy" (Sontag 2019, 55). Reportedly, this was the video that the other members of the band loathed the most, probably because of the utterly flamboyant mannerisms and subtexts it introduces, making it difficult to digest by the larger public. If one is aware that the song opens with a line taken from Leoncavallo's opera Pagliacci, which translates as "Laugh clown, at your broken love!", the video's theatricality is perhaps easier to accept. Directed by Tim Pope upon Mecury's own close supervision, this is perhaps the most straightforward illustration of camp aesthetics, as it gathers most of its features: blatant exaggeration, a dethronement of the serious, visual display of artifice and kitsch, disdain for normality in all its forms. Inspired by opera, the costumes used in the video are outrageously kitsch. Mercury wears a skin-tight, half-body bright red outfit garnished with feathers and huge eyes, which has made it into popular culture as the "giant prawn outfit". The visual composition of the video is overwhelming. The multitude of eyes attached to Mercury's costume look back at the spectator, dissolving and reversing his gaze. It is like looking in the eyes of the Medusa.

There are a lot of characters, most of them Mercury's actual entourage, all dressed in heavy costumes that amalgamate in a concoction of self-aware kitsch. Excess is everywhere, exaggeration rules. Mercury performs self-mockery with a seriousness and a passion worthy to define camp. Although the inspiration for the video was opera, its visuality is powerfully reminiscent of carnival. Cross-dressing, outrageous costumes, heavy make-up on an overcrowded stage overturn opera's high status into carnivalesque debauchery. The viewer contemplates the abolition

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of all norms, a sheer neutralization of moral indignation (Sontag) and is forced to either discard the whole thing as simply too much or enjoy it childishly as a victory of style over content. The same type of visual excess is repeated in the video for *Living on My Own,* where Mercury, by himself this time, chooses to use images from his 39th birthday party in Munich. Conceived as a black-and-white costume party where guests had to come as their favourite character, this party has remained famous amongst the band's entourage as the most outrageous, excessive and crazy event they had ever attended. The video documents it with shots taken by suspended cameras in which every possible violation of visual, cultural and ontological boundaries occurs: transvestites, hermaphrodites, dwarfs, obscene nudity, zoophilia, all are there in plain sight, to be contemplated, consumed and enjoyed. The irony of carnival turns into grotesque debauchery where the only visually comprehensible character remains the birthday boy himself, who is surprisingly (or not) dressed as himself. On a very subtle level, this pointed to Mercury being not only aware, but stating it clearly that he was a character and should not be taken seriously. The spectator is forced to abandon common sense or making sense in front of this visual aberration. *Living on My Own* actually translates Mercury's own life philosophy: the complete abolition of rules and norms, be they cultural or ontological, as a means of asserting his own queer identity and his creative genius.

I Want to Break Free

I chose to conclude my analysis with the strange case of the *I Want to Break Free* video for several reasons: first, the banning of this video by MTV in the USA in 1984 led to Mercury's stubborn refusal to ever tour the States again. Secondly, neither the song nor the idea of the video belonged to Mercury. Thirdly, this is perhaps the best-known Queen video and probably the most innocent, despite its transparent intention or precisely because of it. And fourthly, because it is a departure from camp visuality straight into sheer enjoyment and playfulness.

The video is built as a transparent parody of *Coronation Street,* a popular British TV series back in the 1980s. The four members of the band take on the roles of the female characters of the show, in a more than obvious cross-dressing performance which has nothing in common with the subtle subversion of camp. Here, the intention is laid bare, the viewer can sit back and relax as there is no challenge, no hidden meaning, no strings attached. The visual effect is cartoonish, the pun is on women mostly, as the video remains restricted to the domestic

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interior and to women's little ways around the house. The four characters epitomize female stereotypical representations: the sexy teenage blonde, the appealing sexually active brunette, the middle-aged, bitter housewife and the old decrepit grandma. The fact that Mercury refused to shave his moustache for this video might have been the seed for the fiery controversy it stirred in the States. MTV took it as offensive and refused to play it, despite Queen's success in the States at the time. This led to the band's decline over the big pond, which they would or could never reverse.

Visually, there is no trace of camp in *I Want to Break Free:* nothing subversive, nothing covert, nothing held back. The straightforward availability of the scope, the intensely apparent message, the overt cross-dressing for fun's sake blow up camp's theatricality.

5. Conclusion

The above analysis does not pretend to have exhausted the topic. Nor was this my intention. It claims however to have drawn attention to what must have been an intimate connection between Freddie Mercury's intense realization of his queerness and the public visual representation of it in the form of camp aesthetics. This allowed him to be what he was by playing a role: that of himself.

On a theoretical level, the above analysis has revealed the necessity for an interdisciplinary approach when considering visual products, as these emerge from a specific cultural context that they reflect and then influence. Moreover, visuality is in close connection to identity, both individual and collective, as the visual artist will first express himself, more than often, in a therapeutic manner, but will also express the group identity he best identifies with. Very seldom do we take music videos seriously. On the one hand, because they seem to be there for us to consume and then discard, on the other because the commodity they speculate around is our attention, therefore most of them will tend to remain within a shock factor frame of work that is very hard to overcome. The case of Queen's music videos is worth investigating simply because they pioneered the genre and succeeded in overturning people's attention from music to the visual. As the lyrics of Radio GaGa ironically predicted in 1984, when the band were lamenting over the sad demise of the radio, the world does not seem to ever grow tired of "all those visuals".

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