

Reviews

Global Glam and Popular Music: Style and Spectacle from the 1970s to the 2000s. Edited by Ian Chapman and Henry Johnson. London: Routledge, 2016. 300pp. ISBN 978-1-138-82176-7
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The cultural theorist Jon Stratton is a key inspiration in this account of the original British Glam Rock phenomenon and a sample of its global scions since the 1970s. Subsequent to Stratton's (1986) call for further critical work on this popular music formation, Stuart Hall (1992), in an unconnected piece, speculated on what the future of Cultural Studies, Stratton's disciplinary home, might look like. Hall's concern, analogous in some ways to Pierre Bourdieu's in the context of the contemporaneous French intellectual field, was predicated on a suspicion of what he read, particularly in terms of the North American interpretation of Cultural Studies, as a troubling shift towards theoreticism, the uncoupling of theory from practice in the pursuit of the institutionalisation of (sub)fields of scholarly enquiry, to adopt Bourdieu's spatial metaphor. Hall's plea was to embrace the 'danger' of the paradoxes arising from securing status (publish! career!), thus risking institutionally determined compromise, and maintaining a marginality that afforded greater autonomy – especially in terms of political agency beyond the academy – but necessarily meant forgoing a meaningful resource base, essential for agitating for social change.

Popular Music Studies, in one of its intellectual trajectories a disciplinary subfield of Cultural Studies, is now well established and the authors of the 19 essays that form this collection can be forgiven the temptation to see in writing about Glam a way of securing its place within the legitimated subfield, with its attendant experts and gatekeepers, ripe for future revisiting. It also affords the opportunity to retreat into scholasticism, an unreflexive writing-for-writing's-sake disposition in which one doesn't move beyond reproducing one's own habitus, or second-nature worldview.

The challenge the editors presumably set themselves at the moment of the book's genesis, then, was what usefully might be said about Glam and its subsequent mutations, 45 years after its original British discursive formation. Further, at least I would argue, how might such insights honour Hall's insistence that what makes popular culture, and by extension popular music, worth critiquing is the exposing of complex power relations played out in concrete settings: recognising the distinction between 'understanding the politics of intellectual work and substituting intellectual work for politics' (p. 286), as he put it?

In Chapman and Johnson's introductory remarks, the case is indeed made for Glam's importance: the *vitality* of its historical variants, understood in context, *meant something profound* to those performing *and* consuming it (p. 2; my emphasis). The editors approach this challenge by framing Glam historically and geographically, with the book divided into three parts: 'Britain from the Early 1970s'; 'Europe and North America'; and 'Global Perspectives'.

It's in reflecting on these opening remarks that I think the scholars contributing to the book reveal a collective missed opportunity: there is little ethnographically

derived data, or primary interviews, underpinning the contributions, and thus insufficient account of how the contextualised practice of artists and fans might inform theoretical perspectives. Each essay – spatial limits prohibit a detailed review of all 19 – is instead largely framed via textual reading, informed by publicly available archived interviews and media artefacts. This economical approach is perhaps understandable given the constraints an edited collection places on contributors, and indeed the historical case studies themselves raise legitimate problems of method, not least how to counter the risk of investing in memories mediated via contemporary discourses of value. Still, I longed to hear more from the diverse fans of Glam's various global manifestations that the book attends to and it is in this respect that it offers so many unrealised possibilities for comprehensive engagement.

In Paul 'Nazz' Oldham's essay on the Australian Sharpie subculture and the conflicted performances of masculinities within it, Ian Chapman's engaging examination of mid-1970s New Zealand Glam artists struggling to counter post-colonial snobbery ('cultural cringe', p.272) while simultaneously unreflexively in thrall to the distinctions they located in more 'progressive' strands of rock, even Philip Auslander's repositioning of Lady Gaga as a postmodern Bowie (no need to wait for my next performative deconstruction of self, they're all right here), are but three examples of where one is only partially persuaded that Glam's radical vitality is self-evident. Arguably, it's left to Jay Keister's self-referential account of the Glam-Punk scene in late 1970s West Coast America to furnish the reader with a sense of how the political was *experienced* when he discusses how the homophobic and regressive gender attitudes of certain audiences were confronted during that period.

None of this is to valorise audience studies as the only viable way to lay claim to what is political – or indeed to pitch epistemology against abstract theory – but rather to argue again for the importance of understanding how discourses are taken up, negotiated, embodied and rearticulated. It also draws the reader's attention to the sociohistorical specificities that give rise to particular cultural formations and why these matter: the messiness, paradoxes and ambiguities of the thick sociological description at the moment structures of feeling contagiously take shape.

Subverting normative gender codes, perhaps Glam's most enduring structure of feeling (we're back to focusing on the lipstick rather than the music, to paraphrase the John Lennon definition of Glam cited by two authors), forms the basis of Timothy Laurie's deconstruction of K-Pop artefacts and his conclusion, in the case of performer Amber Liu – that the conventions of popular music production are such that subversion is invariably decontextualised and fleeting (or pseudo-individualised if you'll allow me that *passé* term) – is a useful reminder of how important context is. The directly heard voices of fans are still absent but the scant evidence drawn from social media sites is at least suggestive of counter-discursive strategies in play.

Conversely, there are chapters when the forgoing of audiences doesn't feel like an absence: Samantha Bennett's 'phonomusicological' reading of Gus Dudgeon as an innovative producer, particularly his initial work in the late 1960s and early 1970s, is persuasive: with Bennett's insights embedded, listening afresh to John Kongos' proto-Glam 'He's Gonna Step On You Again' was a revelatory aural experience. So, too, Nancy L. Stockdale's proposition that Freddie Mercury's resistance to being ethnically *Othered* – not least by his record company keen to commodify his 'exoticism' – was one motivation for his theatrical approach to performance and lyrical preoccupations: self-reinvention, or more precisely an anti-essentialist sensibility, again adopted as a formidable political strategy. Lastly, the chapters by Ian

Chapman on Alice Cooper and Lee Chambers and Robert G. Weiner on Kiss are at least premised on theses that claim each artist has been, like Mercury, hitherto undervalued in scholarly accounts of Glam. Indeed, Chambers and Weiner go further when they propose that the psychic and corporeal investments Kiss fans were invited to make in the music, performances and merchandise of their cartoonish superheroes offered the reward of finding oneself through increased self-awareness. Here, liberation is acquired not through self-reflexively problematising the very notion of an authentic self – one of Glam’s recurring motifs – but in embracing the less radical proposition of a ‘true self’ momentarily freed from the enslavements of mundane existence.

Less novel, understandably so given the wealth of published material available by accomplished writers beyond academia, are the entries by Jon Fitzgerald and Philip Hayward on Roxy Music, Shelton Waldrep on Bowie and Christine Feldman-Barrett and Andy Bennett on British first-generation Glam, which the latter read as displaying the postmodern sensibility Hebdige located in the later subculture of Punk, an argument I have developed myself (Branch 2014). In the former accounts of the popularisation of avant-garde ideas and the adoption of an ironic disposition in the work of Roxy Music and Bowie, I struggled to locate insights not expressed already by writers such as Jonathan Rigby (2005), Michael Bracewell (1997, 2007), Jon Savage (1998) and Simon Critchley (2014). Alison Blair’s positioning of Marc Bolan as a dream weaver in the carnivalesque tradition suffers a similar fate. Underwhelming, too is Amanda Mills’ essay on the Glam legacies she locates in the proto-Britpop of Suede and Pulp. There is nothing wrong in detecting in these artists a sensibility they themselves acknowledged was borrowed from the art-school Glam Rockers of the early 1970s, but I longed to hear more from Mills in respect of the important point Giuseppe Zevolli repeats later in this publication in his excellent, nuanced reading of the intersections of race and gender in the work of glam enthusiast, Mykki Blanco: Mark Fisher’s (2014) polemical claim that Britpop was essentially reactionary in its denial of contemporaneous black music cultures.

What conclusion can be drawn from these diverse studies of Glam performers? I am persuaded of the book’s critical relevance primarily because it proffers new case studies that will enhance the knowledge of students and scholars engaged in the study of popular music, although it defines glam so broadly by the end of it I did wonder how many other artists could feasibly be attributed with the same sensibility. However, I did long to hear more from the fans, and indeed critics, of the artists informing these case studies, and to hear more about how fans acted upon invitations to subvert and dismantle, to reframe and re-appropriate, to try on and discard, and to ameliorate the disorientation of displacement, a point central to Marco Ferrarese’s essay on Malaysian rock *kapak*. I longed to hear, in short, how Glam music, or a Glam impulse to adopt Giuseppe Zevolli more flexibly utilised descriptor, remains so very vital to the marginalised and *Othered*. Calling for revolution – that most masculinist of postures, and therefore campily rejected by Glam-era Bowie as illusory – is indeed always a drag, but that shouldn’t stop us comprehensively exploring the socio-culturally contextualised snags *as they are experienced*, a task this publication, judged by its own defined aspiration to throw light on Glam’s vitality, only partly attends to.

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***The Art of Songwriting*. By Richard West. New York: Bloomsbury, 2016. 256 pp. ISBN 978-1-4725-2781-3**

***The Cambridge Companion to the Singer Songwriter*. 367 pp. Edited by Katherine Williams and Justin A. Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. ISBN 978-1-107-68091-3**

***The Singer-Songwriter Handbook*. Edited by Katherine Williams and Justin A. Williams. 277 pp. New York: Bloomsbury, 2017. ISBN 978-1-6289-2030-7
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Making songs, singing songs and thinking about songs is a big part of many people's musical lives. Where once the thoughtful and creative young person might have written poetry, or painted watercolours, now, along with the film script and the soon-to-be Arts Council-funded Instagram account, songs are waiting to be written. And so, in university music courses, the practice and study of songwriting is gradually becoming embedded. It follows that there will be a growth of accompanying literature to help the aspiring songwriter, teacher and thinker to make more sense of the form. Richard West's *The Art of Songwriting* provides a study of songwriting practice, anchored in practical experience along with some academic theory as underpinning; Williams and Williams's *The Cambridge Companion to the Singer Songwriter* is, as the title suggests, more firmly anchored in the academic approach to the subject; Williams and Williams also provide a more teaching-based study in *The Singer-Songwriter Handbook*.

The Art of Songwriting situates itself firmly in the tradition of books like Jimmy Webb's (1998) *Tunesmith* and John Braheny's (2006) *The Craft and Business of Songwriting*. The book is elegantly organised into three sections: 'Songs', 'Songwriters' and 'Songwriting'. The first section provides an overview of the field, introducing West's own songwriting history and practice, wrestling with the definition of what constitutes a song, with the slippery borders between a more traditional, Tin Pan Alley-derived idea of the composed song and the increasingly useful understanding of the song as recording or track. This section goes on to balance the competing viewpoints and perspectives on what it is to look at songs. The section on words is also reassuringly clear-headed, West acknowledging the difficulties 'in evaluating lyric outside of its musical and performative context' (p. 23), but mercifully sidestepping the curious notion in popular music academia that any analysis or attention to song lyrics is misplaced. This seems to be based on a misinterpretation