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“A joke’s a very serious thing”

Subversive Camp Humour in Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s Video Art

By Wendy L. Moir

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Abstract

This thesis examines the video art of Montreal born artist Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay. When the artist found himself struggling to articulate his gay identity, the impact of homophobia on his psyche, and the misery of heartbreak, he turned to song lyrics to express himself. Through an examination of the stories that Nemerofsky Ramsay recounts, the songs he chooses as vehicles, and the existing music models he appropriates as a means of expression, I illustrate the politically charged nature of his artistic practice. I argue that the artist strategically employs subversive Camp humour as a means to attract, engage, and educate his viewers while confronting them with issues of gendered identity, homophobia, restrictive heterosexual institutional quos, and a lack of queer representation in the mainstream. Further, I examine how and why the artist chooses popular music and musical forms as a vehicle of expression.

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Introduction

It is easy to forget that humor is the oldest form of deconstruction; it breaks down barriers, shatters polarities, and conducts subversive, or even liberatory, attacks upon the reigning order.¹

Many strains of humour carry serious purposes, with their intent to subvert various institutional status quos Such humour wields both a carrot and a stick, magnetically drawing interested audiences while simultaneously educating them with hard, raw truths.²

Since 2000, the comical appropriation and parody of music and musical forms has been the centrepiece of Canadian artist Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's video art practice.

This thesis will examine how and why Nemerofsky Ramsay strategically employs humour in his work. Through an analysis of his videos, I will illustrate how the artist employs critical distance as he appropriates and parodies hetero-normative models present in the music industry including the music video medium, the boy bands template, and formulaic hetero-normative lyrics. I argue that the artist's humorous parodies embody queer-specific parody, or Camp, as defined by Moe Meyer. Meyer contends that the political function of Camp is increased social visibility for the queer population.³

Building upon Meyer's definition of Camp and the belief that humour has the power to attract, rather than alienate, I will propose that the artist's parodies serve multiple queer political functions. For example, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's musical performances simultaneously attack the reigning hetero-normative order, provide the artist with the opportunity to insert himself into the institutionalized hetero-normative mainstream, and

¹ Ruby Rich, "Review Essay: Feminism and Sexuality in the 1980s," *Feminist Studies* 12 (Fall 1986): 525-6.

² Iain Ellis, *Rebels Wit Attitude: Subversive Rock Humorists*, (Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press, 2008), 1.

³ Moe Meyer, "Introduction: Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp," in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, Ed. by Moe Meyer, (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 5.

serve to illuminate to non-queer audiences the lack of queer visibility and representation in a non-threatening way.

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay

Born in 1973, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay lived in Montreal until middle school when his family moved to Calgary and then later Winnipeg. As a child, Nemerofsky Ramsay attended art stream schools and was active in choirs. Initially intent on being an artist, he enrolled in visual arts at York University but quickly switched to their interdisciplinary cultural studies programme. The artist's move to Toronto in 1991 for his undergraduate studies coincided with his coming out as gay and at that time, his examination of queer identity superseded his artistic interests. It was not until 2000 that Nemerofsky Ramsay wedded his political interests with his artistic interests.

Since 2000, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay has created 13 videos including *Je Changerais d'Avis* (2000), *Forever Young* (2001), *I am a Boyband* (2002), *Live to Tell* (2002), *Audition Tape* (2003), *Lyric* (2004), *Together at Last* (2004), *One to Sixty-Five* (2005), *Patriotic* (2005), *Uropop* (2006), *Omu* (2007), *Sadame Gawa* (2008), and *The Same Problem* (2008).⁴ In addition to videos, Nemerofsky Ramsay has made several text-based works, some of which complement his video art. *Libretto*, for example, is a 36-page booklet extension to his video *Lyric* published in 2004.⁵

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay is not alone in appropriating music to address issues of identity. Several Canadian artists including Althea Thauberger, Kevin Schmidt, and

⁴ Several of these videos, including *Omu*, *Sadame Gawa*, and *One to Sixty-Five*, were created specifically for an event and are not available for preview on his portfolio disc.

⁵ Author's interview with the artist, January 10, 2009

Steven Shearer have created videos in a similar vein.⁶ While these Vancouver-based artists appropriate musical forms and explore their relation to identity, their parodies are not political or queer specific. Nemerofsky Ramsay is currently the only Canadian video artist who consistently employs music in this way.

Chapter Breakdown

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's body of work emerges out of a rich and established Canadian video art practice. Chapter One lays out the historical framework for my research as I examine the evolution and trends of video art in Canada. I outline both the capabilities and the limits of early video technology as it shaped the style of works created. Further, I emphasize artists who address themes of gender fluidity and homosexuality and, consequently, who I believe have been formative for the artist. By outlining his predecessors, I can then illustrate how Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's video art practice is innovative and contributes to the medium.

Furthermore, I sketch out the progression of music television. Nemerofsky Ramsay's early video art predecessors grew up with the emergence of television and responded accordingly. Similarly, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay saw the emergence of music television. His artistic practice routinely appropriates the models and performance codes present in music television. As a result, a discussion of music television channels is necessary in order to fully contextualize Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's musical performances.

⁶ Althea Thauberger: *Songstress* (2002), Kevin Schmidt: *Long Beach Led Zep* (2002), Steven Shearer: *List* (2004).

Before Chapter Two, I include a short section called “Terms” where I sketch out a brief history of the term Camp and how I use the terms Camp and Parody in this thesis. Both Chapters Two and Three present detailed visual analyses of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s videos and share the common goal of demonstrating how the artist strategically employs humour to engage, rather than alienate, while confronting his viewers with queer and societal issues.

In Chapter Two, I consider the root of Nemerofsky Ramsay’s artistic practice. The artist cites his childhood struggles with identity as being formative to both his personal and artistic development and as a result, I draw heavily from Judith Butler’s gender and performance theory.⁷ Through thorough visual analyses of the videos he created between 2000 and 2003, I illustrate how Nemerofsky Ramsay uses humour to confront his viewers with issues of restrictive gender norms and homophobia.

Chapter Three examines videos created after 2003. Like my analysis of his early works, I identify how humour manifests in each of his videos as well as how it affects the viewer’s engagement with the issues introduced. In addition to my examination of subversive Camp humour, I question the relationship between music, fantasy and desire as set forth by Sheila Whiteley and Barbara Bradby.⁸ I propose that one of the reasons Nemerofsky Ramsay chooses to appropriate music and musical forms to introduce queer

⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1988), and Judith Butler, “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*,” *Yale French Studies*, No. 72, Simone de Beauvoir: Witness to a Century (1986).

⁸ Sheila Whiteley, “Popular Music and the Dynamics of Desire.” In *Queering the Popular Pitch*, edited by Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 249 – 262 and Barbara Bradby, “Do-Talk and Don’t-Talk: The Division of the Subject in Girl-Group Music. *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990.)

issues is because this is where his homosexual desires found a socially acceptable manifestation as a youth.

Methodology

There are inherent problems with researching an emerging artist. Literature written on Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's video art is scarce; there are only a handful of exhibition reviews and short exhibition essays. As a result, I draw heavily from information gathered from my interview with Nemerofsky Ramsay on January 10, 2009 as well as those performed by notable queer Canadian video artist Mike Hoolboom in 2008 and Robert Enright's essay and interview "Heartbreaker: The Video Art of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay" from 2004.⁹

I am grateful to several Canadian art experts who generously offered guidance as I sought out an understanding of contemporary video. Peggy Gale, Stefan St-Laurent and the staff at V-Tape, especially Wanda Vanderstoop, lent advice as I searched for artists with similar contemporary artistic practices. Because of V-Tape's generous preview program, I was able to screen a multitude of videos necessary to gain an understanding of Canada's queer video art tradition. I also took advantage of the vast archival material at the National Gallery of Canada and screened several Colin Campbell and Paul Wong videos there.

⁹ Robert Enright, "Heartbreaker: The Video Art of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay," *Border Crossings* (November 2004): 54-64 and Mike Hoolboom, "Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay: The Singer." In *Practical Dreamers: Conversations with Movie Artists*, edited by Mike Hoolboom, (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2008), 81-90.

While the presence of subversive humour in Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's videos has been acknowledged previously,¹⁰ it was not fully articulated until Heather Anderson, assistant curator in contemporary art at the National Gallery of Canada, identified his application of politicized Camp, in an acquisition proposal in the spring of 2008.¹¹ I was fortunate to act as her research assistant for this project. I use Anderson's proposal as a point of departure, building upon her connection between the artist's use of humour and Moe Meyer's definition of Camp.

Further, Suzanne G. Cusick's practical application of Butler's theory that sex is performative enriches my discussion of Nemerofsky Ramsay's singing style and voice quality.¹² In his essay, "Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet," Philip Brett describes how important music can be for queer youth.¹³ In addition, Whiteley and Bradby's discussions of the relationship between music, fantasy, and desire provide concrete examples of how fantasy can manifest for attentive listeners. Together, these texts provide explanations for the significance of music during the artist's adolescence and consequent appearance and appropriation in his artistic practice.

Theoretical Overview

I was first introduced to Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's work at the beginning of my graduate studies in October of 2007, when I attended an Art Star 3: Video Art

¹⁰ Thomas Hirschman briefly describes the presence of humour in his article, "Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay: Subversive video-maker is his own boy band at soundtracks art fest" http://www.nowtoronto.com/issues/2003-10/16/cover_story. (Accessed January 18, 2008)

¹¹ Acquisition Justification for Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, National Gallery of Canada, Spring 2008

¹² Suzanne G. Cusick, "On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex." In *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*, edited by Elaine Barkin et al. (Los Angeles: Carciofoli, 1999).

¹³ Philip Brett, "Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet" in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, edited by Philip Brett et al. (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Biennial screening at SAW Gallery. In addition to screening nine of his videos, the artist performed a section of his *Lyric* video live. I remember laughing throughout the evening; the combination of pop music parodies with a Camp sensibility greatly appealed to my sense of humour.

The following week I read the curatorial essay accompanying Nemerofsky Ramsay's screening, Stefan St-Laurent's "It Will Burn Inside of Me." In this essay, St-Laurent describes the artist's works as "incredible interpretations [that] are so full of true and deeply buried emotion [and that] they never parody or even directly refer to the original maker's pilfered [appropriated] material." He also argues that, "The media that Nemerofsky Ramsay mimics, contests and transforms is merely a portal for his personal work. He paradoxically clones himself to create bands, uses his own voice for songs and shoots and edits his own work, rendering the appropriated "product" superfluous."¹⁴ This essay prompted me to consider Nemerofsky Ramsay's appropriations of popular music and musical forms and his choice of song lyrics as an autobiographical tool. Upon reflection, I determined that the appropriated material is at the crux of Nemerofsky Ramsay's artistic practice. In contrast to St-Laurent, I do not consider the artist's performances to be full of earnest emotion. Rather, I believe they are wholly contrived and are meant to serve the greater purpose of confronting his viewers with queer and societal issues.

In his essay, "Reclaiming the Politics of Camp" Moe Meyer 'reclaims' Camp by asserting that it is much more than an aesthetic, rather, it is queer-specific and can be

¹⁴ Stefan St-Laurent, "It Will Burn Inside of Me." In *Art Star 3: Video Art Biennial* (Montreal: ABC Art Books Canada, 2007)

political. He reacts harshly against Susan Sontag's influential essay, "Notes on Camp," and explains that what distinguishes Camp from kitsch and irony is the presence of critical distance.¹⁵ Moe Meyer's definition of Camp is central to this thesis as I argue that Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay employs Camp humour as a political strategy. The artist's parodies possess critical distance and work to increase queer visibility. In addition, Mitchell Morris' article, "It's Raining Men: The Weather Girls, Gay Subjectivity, and the Erotics of Insatiability" (1999) was helpful in reaching an understanding of Camp by providing examples of its various manifestations.¹⁶

While several texts address the history of music television, Andrew Goodwin's book, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* (1992) provides the most comprehensive history of music videos. Unlike some texts that approach music videos like mini-movies, and consequently neglect to discuss the music, Goodwin balances his discussion of image and sound.¹⁷ Simon Frith's article, "Youth/Music/Television," is also helpful in reaching an understanding the nature of MTV.

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay describes many of his videos as experimentations with identity as he "performs" himself and seeks out the elusive "acceptable behaviour."¹⁸ Judith Butler's gender and performance theories, especially those discussed in

¹⁵ Moe Meyer, "Introduction: Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp," in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, Ed. by Moe Meyer, (London; New York: Routledge, 1994) and ¹⁵ Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp" in *Art Theory and Criticism: An Anthology of Formalist, Avant-Garde, Contextualist and Post-Modernist Thought*, Ed. by Sally Everett, (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1991).

¹⁶ Mitchell Morris, "It's Raining Men: The Weather Girls, Gay Subjectivity, and the Erotics of Insatiability." Edited by Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley, 213-229. Los Angeles: Carciofoli, 1999.

¹⁷ Like E. Ann Kaplan's "Sexual Difference, Pleasure and the Construction of the Spectator in Music Television," (1986).

¹⁸ Mike Hoolboom, "Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay: The Singer," in *Practical Dreamers: Conversations with Movie Artists*, (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2008), 83.

“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” (1988); “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*” (1986); and her book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), are critical to understanding Nemerofsky Ramsay’s artistic practice. Butler facilitates an understanding of the purpose and intent of the artist’s video work that address performance codes and tropes of masculinity.

In *Rebels Wit Attitude: Subversive Rock Humorists*, Iain Ellis argues that humour has the power to undermine the status quo. Ellis’ assertion, that humour has the capacity to attract, engage, and ultimately educate audiences, is formative to my understanding of Nemerofsky Ramsay’s use of comedy.¹⁹ In her essay, “‘Sex as a Weapon’: Feminist Rock Music Videos,”²⁰ Robin Roberts’ discusses humour as a subversive strategy for female musicians in a music video context. Her text is particularly helpful as it provides examples of how humour can be wielded to attack the patriarchal reigning order in a video context. Her analysis also shaped how I address comedy in Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s work.

In order to gain an understanding of video art in Canada and contextualize Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s artistic practice, I draw heavily from curator and video art expert Peggy Gale as her texts provide an excellent overview of the medium in English-speaking Canada. Her essays “Video Art in Canada: Four Worlds” (1976), “A History in Four Moments” (1995), and “Video Has Captured Our Imagination” (1977), in addition to Dot Tuer’s essay “Mirroring Identities: Two Decades of Video Art in English-Canada”

¹⁹ Iain Ellis, *Rebels Wit Attitude: Subversive Rock Humorists*, (Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press, 2008), 1.

²⁰ Roberts, Robin. “‘Sex as a Weapon’: Feminist Rock Music Videos.” *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter, 1990), 1-15.

(1995),²¹ outline the progression of themes and concerns, namely conceptual, narrative, dramatic and social issues, emerging in the different artistic centres. Furthermore, they identify the key players in Canada's video art history.

Renée Baert's essay "Video in Canada: In Search of Authority" (1987) and Jean-Yves Bégin's essay "The Vidéographe Challenge" (1973) highlight specific moments, like the formation of video art in North America, and the technology used.²² Together, all of these texts enable me to articulate Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's innovations.

In "Popular Music and the Dynamics of Desire" (2006), Sheila Whiteley explains the relationship between music, fantasy and desire that exists for both listeners and performers of music. Whiteley argues that while singing along with music lyrics, we can engage in performance codes otherwise considered taboo. As a result, fantasies that we are forced to repress for fear of social retribution often find a safe place to materialize. Thus, Whiteley's essay provides possible explanations for Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's attraction and subsequent appropriation of music. Music may have provided an avenue to express the homosexual desires he was forced to repress as an adolescent.²³ Further, in her essay "Do-Talk and Don't-Talk: The Division of the Subject in Girl-Group Music" (1990), Barbara Bradby provides concrete examples of how listeners can actively engage

²¹ Peggy Gale, "A History in Four Moments." In *Mirror Machine: Video and Identity*. Edited by Janine Marchessault, (Toronto: YYZ Books, 1995), Peggy Gale, "Video Art in Canada: Four Worlds," *Studio International Journal of Modern Art*, vol. 191, no. 981 (May/June 1976):224-229 and Peggy Gale, "Video Has Captured Our Imagination." In *Video re/View: The (best) Source for Critical Writings on Canadian Artists' Video*, edited by Peggy Gale and Lisa Steele, (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1996).

²² Renée Baert, "Video in Canada: In Search of Authority," *From Sea to Shining Sea*, edited by A.A. Bronson et al. (Toronto: The Power Plant, 1987) and Jean-Yves Bégin, "The Vidéographe Challenge." In *Video re/View: The (best) Source for Critical Writings on Canadian Artists' Video*, edited by Peggy Gale and Lisa Steele (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1996).

²³ Sheila Whiteley, "Popular Music and the Dynamics of Desire." In *Queering the Popular Pitch*, edited by Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga. (New York: Routledge, 2006).

in fantasies when singing along with music lyrics. Bradby's sketches out pronoun arrangements common in popular music like "I – Him" that when sung, facilitate a listener's ability to fantasize.²⁴

Thus, in addition to deepening my appreciation of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's video art, the aforementioned texts shaped how I approached them. In the following chapters, I will draw from these writings to answer several questions including: How does Camp manifest in the artist's videos? How is his work similar or different to his video art predecessors? How is his oeuvre informed by the music industry? And, why did Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay choose music as a vehicle?

²⁴ Barbara Bradby, "Do-Talk and Don't-Talk: The Division of the Subject in Girl-Group Music. *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 343.

Chapter 1

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's artistic practice is indebted to the work of an established lineage of queer Canadian video artists who appropriate popular culture and other existing forms and then rework them within a critical practice informed by conceptual art. This chapter will briefly sketch out a history of video art in Canada. While the principal themes and styles employed generally by Canadian video artists will be acknowledged, greater emphasis will be placed on artists who first confronted viewers with issues of sexuality, homophobia and gender fluidity. This chapter will explore both how Nemerofsky Ramsay's video work is indebted to a groundwork laid out by artists such as Colin Campbell, as well as how he differentiates and distinguishes himself from them.

Video was enthusiastically embraced by many artists when it was first introduced in Canada. According to Dot Tuer, the new medium became popular with artists as a result of its ability to challenge mainstream television programming as well as its inherent intimacy and capacity to capture private moments.²⁵ Additionally, in her article "Video Has Captured Our Imagination," Peggy Gale writes that the first wave of attraction to video art may have stemmed from people's visions of themselves as celebrities as they could create their own television programming.²⁶ Regardless of whether it was the allure of fame that first attracted artists or not, there is little doubt that the video recorder

²⁵ Dot Tuer, "Mirroring Identities: Two Decades of Video Art in English-Canada," 111.

²⁶ Peggy Gale, "Video Has Captured Our Imagination," 115.

creators considered this as they strove to create an affordable and portable video recorder.²⁷

Video art was initiated into Canada in 1967 with the introduction of the 'Portapak,' which was acquired from the United States by National Film Board employee Robert Forget.²⁸ Described by Gale as "low-cost and low-tech," these small Sony black and white video recorders were accessibly priced, portable, and had the capacity to record both picture and sound on one tape.²⁹ The Portapak's half-inch reels, however, were difficult to edit. As a result, the video's grainy twenty minute picture is often viewed in 'real time' with little to no modifications made to the tape.³⁰ Another key feature of the Portapak, which Jean Gagnon claims shaped the artistic outcome of English speaking Canada, is the ability to connect the Portapak to a monitor while recording.³¹ In his 1985 article, "Video – One Little Word for a Many Faceted Thing," Gagnon writes that the ability to watch the recording video in 'real time' resulted in "self-referential and reflexive techniques" which would come to be characteristic of Toronto video artists.³² While francophone artists in Quebec, for example, initially focused on societal and identity issues, early English speaking Canadian video artists explored and exploited

²⁷ Peggy Gale, "Video Has Captured Our Imagination," 115.

²⁸ Jean-Yves Bégin, "The Vidéographe Challenge," in *Video re/View: The (best) Source for Critical Writings on Canadian Artists' Video*, ed. Peggy Gale and Lisa Steele (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1996), 100.

²⁹ Peggy Gale, *Videotexts* (Waterloo, Ont: Published for the Power Plant by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995) back cover, 1., Jean Gagnon, "Video – One Little Word for a Many Faceted Thing," in *Video re/View: The (best) Source for Critical Writings on Canadian Artists' Video*, ed. Peggy Gale and Lisa Steele (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1996), 138.

³⁰ Peggy Gale, *Videotexts*, 147.

³¹ Jean Gagnon, "Video – One Little Word for a Many Faceted Thing," in *Video re/View: The (best) Source for Critical Writings on Canadian Artists' Video*, ed. Peggy Gale and Lisa Steele (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1996), 138.

³² Jean Gagnon, "Video – One Little Word for a Many Faceted Thing," 138.

“inherent properties of the medium itself” by responding to the instant playback visible on their monitor.³³

The distinction between video art and television was significant to artists as television programming had negative connotations associated with it: profitable yet unoriginal with expected topics, plots, and actors.³⁴ In her book, *Videotexts*, Gale explains that after the initial novelty of video art wore-off, two trends emerged; for some, the interest in video art increased, especially the creators of guerrilla television and alternate media, but most abandoned the medium.³⁵

In her essay, “A History in Four Moments,” Peggy Gale distills the history of video art in English speaking Canada into four trends that developed organically from one to another: “conceptual, narrative, dramatic and social.”³⁶

Gale explains that that the Portapak entered Canada at a time when “idea[s] generated and informed [art] work, and remained its most important aspect.”³⁷ Conceptual Art reigned in Canada, especially in Halifax and Toronto. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a shift occurred in the art scene: rather than creating a product for commercial consumption, emphasis is placed on the development of a work of art and its “intellectual engagement.”³⁸ Ephemeral art forms (video tape was only believed to have a ten-year life span) like media and performance work were quickly embraced in North

³³ Jean Gagnon, “Video – One Little Word for a Many Faceted Thing,,” 138. It was also introduced into the United States in the same year.

³⁴ Peggy Gale, “A History in Four Moments,” in *Mirror Machine: Video and Identity*, ed. Janine Marchessault (Toronto: YYZ Books, 1995), 56

³⁵ Peggy Gale, “Video Has Captured Our Imagination,” in *Video re/View: The (best) Source for Critical Writings on Canadian Artists’ Video*, ed. Peggy Gale and Lisa Steele (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1996), 115.

³⁶ Peggy Gale, *Videotexts*, 7.

³⁷ Peggy Gale, “A History in Four Moments,” 55.

³⁸ Peggy Gale, “A History in Four Moments,” 55.

America. In conceptual art videos, the artist's idea is the core of the piece and as a result, the monitor "tended to function as [a] mere channel for conveying the image/experience."³⁹ Initially, the nature of video art was typically private and intimate and did not have a clear audience let alone an intended buyer. Gale posits that video recorders were initially thought of as "secret collectors."⁴⁰ The ability for an artist to create a video unaided in the comfort of his or her own home unsurprisingly led to candid, memoir-like confessions. Video artists explored intimate themes often in an uninhibited and frank fashion thereby pushing boundaries more than any other medium had allowed them to date.⁴¹ Gale reasons that the "interest in (and need for) exposure is ultimately a true reflection of our situation and ourselves. We are all subjects."⁴²

This early type of video art has been criticized by Rosalind Krauss. In her article, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," Krauss describes video art as boring and self-absorbed.⁴³ In her 1977 essay, "Video Has Captured our Imagination," Gale counteracts Krauss' claims and explains that critics may perceive early video art as dull because it rarely abided by the defined model already in place for regular polished television programmes. As previously mentioned, editing was initially difficult, and therefore rarely attempted. While not the only reason, this contributed to the "rambly" and tangential character of some videos. Further, some video art lacked a narrative or even had an explicit purpose.⁴⁴ Using Colin Campbell, specifically his video *Janus* (1973, 20 minutes) as an example, Gale asserts that his work is not narcissistic, which she believes to be

³⁹ Peggy Gale, "A History in Four Moments," 55-56.

⁴⁰ Peggy Gale, "Video Has Captured Our Imagination," 116-117.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* (Like Paul Wong's *Confused: Sexual Views* (1983-84)

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Rosalind Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," *October* Vol. 1 (Spring 1976)

⁴⁴ Peggy Gale, "Video Has Captured Our Imagination," 115.

another form of ‘boredom’ complaint; rather it is a “means of identification and exorcism of personal devils, a coming-to-terms with (undesirable) portions of personal character and history. Confrontation with reality played out in public.”⁴⁵ Watching these personal, unedited videos can be taxing and may make viewers feel uneasy and agitated. Gale claims, however, that facing the video and your personal response to it is not boring. As the medium and technology evolved, few videos remained in “video-time,” with editing and an established storyline becoming common place.⁴⁶

The use of an established script and storyline in video art developed in Canada during the mid 1970s. Gale claims that the “use of narrative grew from Conceptual concerns,” with scripts becoming integral to the construction of videos.⁴⁷ One of the examples Gale cites is the artist collective General Idea’s 1977 video, *Pilot*. In *Pilot*, General Idea appropriates an established television model and cites commonplace television ‘tricks’ and language.⁴⁸ Gale also describes a different kind narrative form that emerged as “open and non-linear, inconclusive storylines – that suffused the whole field...” and presents the work of Lisa Steele and Colin Campbell as examples of it.⁴⁹ Campbell’s narrative approach is described by Bruce W. Ferguson as having “no real respect for the conventions of literature or television.”⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Ibid. 115-116.

⁴⁶ Ibid 116.

⁴⁷ Peggy Gale, “A History in Four Moments,” 58.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 59.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 60.

⁵⁰ Bruce W Ferguson, “Colin Campbell: Otherwise Worldly” in *Colin Campbell: Media Works 1972 – 1990* (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1990) , 16.

Dramatically themed works naturally developed in the mid 1970s from the previous narrative videos.⁵¹ According to Gale, the primary characteristics of these videos include dialogue, plot and overt allusions to “cinematic genres and themes.”⁵² In the mid to late 1980s and continuing on through the 1990s, Canadian video artists began to create socially conscious themed works. Gale describes the tapes generally as being “elaborate fictions based on fact.”⁵³ Artists covered a broad range of topics including the law, ethnicity, sexuality and family. In Toronto, for example, artists Colin Campbell and John Greyson created videos about the AIDS epidemic and the misconceptions the general public have about the disease.⁵⁴

Three artists, who play a prominent role in the aforementioned history, stand out also as key figures in the queer Canadian art scene. Colin Campbell, Paul Wong and John Greyson are groundbreakers in the video art scene as they opened up a dialogue about censorship, representation, the fluidity of gender and issues surrounding homosexuality, bisexuality and sexuality in general. While Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay was not aware of these artists when he first began creating his video art,⁵⁵ Campbell, Wong and Greyson’s video art represent a tradition which Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s body of work can be compared.

The tapes Campbell, Greyson, and Wong create are typical of the artistic centres they participate in. Colin Campbell and John Greyson lived and worked primarily in Toronto while Paul Wong’s artistic practice is based in Vancouver. In her article,

⁵¹ Peggy Gale, “A History in Four Moments,” 60.

⁵² Peggy Gale, “A History in Four Moments,” 61.

⁵³ Peggy Gale, “A History in Four Moments,” 63.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 62.

⁵⁵ Interview I did with the artist, January 10, 2009

“Mirroring Identities: Two Decades of Video Art in English-Canada,” Dot Tuer explains that thematically, video art in both Vancouver and Toronto focused on similar subject matter such as sexual acts, and “counterculture lifestyles.”⁵⁶ However, while groups in Vancouver like Intermedia absorbed video into their larger artistic practice which concerned itself with “blurring the boundaries between art and life, the private and public,”⁵⁷ early video art in Toronto is extremely self-reflexive and private. Groups also formed in Toronto, namely Art Metropole, A-Space and Trinity Square Video, yet Tuer stresses that in contrast to Vancouver’s communal pursuits, Toronto video art is distinctly characterized by its individual vision.⁵⁸ According to Tuer, Colin Campbell is one of the most notable self-reflexive artists to emerge from the Toronto video art scene. She describes Campbell’s video work as “complex webs of transference and mediation: proto-simulations that blend the confessional with the conceptual, self-conscious narcissism with narrative fiction.”⁵⁹

John Greyson, a friend and lover of Colin Campbell, describes the deceased artist as a “Toronto video artist, writer, teacher, [and] gender terrorist.”⁶⁰ Campbell was a pioneer of video art in Canada; as previously mentioned, he is celebrated, along with Lisa Steele, for having invented the Toronto narrative style. He is also famous for fighting, and winning, against the censorship of art videos.⁶¹ Campbell’s video art consistently

⁵⁶ Dot Tuer, “Mirroring Identities: Two Decades of Video Art in English-Canada,” 110.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 108.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 110.

⁵⁹ This quote refers to both Colin Campbell and Lisa Steele. Dot Tuer, “Mirroring Identities: Two Decades of Video Art in English-Canada,” 110.

⁶⁰ John Greyson, “The Singing Dunes: Colin Campbell, 1942 – 2001,” in Davies, Jon. *People like us: the gossip of Colin Campbell* (Oakville, ON: Oakville Galleries; Montréal : Distributed by ABC Art Books Canada, 2008), 47.

⁶¹ Sarah Milroy, Obituaries “Colin Campbell: Passionate Pioneer of Video Art, (Toronto: Globe and Mail, 17 Nov. 2001)

addressed issues of gender and sexuality, often in a complex way. His tapes have been discussed at length by scholars who have tried to capture the essence of his oeuvre. Greyson describes his videos as “very op-ed, of their moment, a catalogue of tabloid obsessions and current debates... he found uniquely personal ways to respond to political crises, be it censorship or AIDS. Though he was appalled by injustice in any form, his interventions were never soap-boxy, refusing the rhetorical in favour of ironic commentary.”⁶² In other words, many of Campbell’s tapes address current affairs and are a combination of gossip and political headlines. While his works tackle heavy weight issues, rarely are they sombre. In explanation of his own works, Colin Campbell has said that “all that material ... is about gender anyway, and stereotypical roles, and trying to address that as being a serious problem. I’ve never felt comfortable in any specific role in terms of sexuality or gender that I’ve been exposed to, which is why my work addresses that all the time.”⁶³

Campbell was born in the rural town of Reston, Manitoba in 1942 and died from cancer at the age of 59 in Toronto.⁶⁴ Most of his early works, like *Janus* and *Sackville, I’m Yours*, do not follow a strict script. As described by the artist himself, it was primarily autobiographical or explored his “interactions with the world.”⁶⁵

There are two faces present in Colin Campbell’s video *Janus*. According to the Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, Janus is a divine being from Roman mythology

⁶² John Greyson, “The Singing Dunes: Colin Campbell, 1942 – 2001,” in Davies, Jon. *People like us: the gossip of Colin Campbell*, 49.

⁶³ Kathleen Maitland-Carter, “Campbell Interviewed,” *CineAction! Summer issue*, 1987, 34

⁶⁴ Sarah Milroy, Obituaries “Colin Campbell: Passionate Pioneer of Video Art, (Toronto: Globe and Mail, 17 Nov. 2001)

⁶⁵ Interview with the artist. Kathleen Maitland-Carter, “Campbell Interviewed,” *CineAction!* (Summer issue, 1987), 33.

whose defining characteristic is his two faces. Known as a protector, especially during times of war and conflict, he is often depicted on or over doorways with one face looking forwards and the other backwards.⁶⁶ In this early black and white video, the artist stands in profile while the other is positioned before the camera, full-length and in the nude. The pair is depicted in an intimate moment; as the camera slowly pans over them, Campbell tenderly touches and kisses his male companion. Eventually, the viewer realizes that only one of the figures is alive and animated while the other is a full size photograph cut out of the artist himself. In reference to *Janus*, Campbell states that while this video was not the first to address queer themes, it contains the “most direct reference to homoerotic kind of imagery.”⁶⁷ He describes the tape as “self-questioning” and that “It was a live image of me making out with a full size photo of myself You look at it and recognize that it’s a doubling kind of image. That it is the same person somehow with themselves.”⁶⁸ Most likely in response to critics like Rosalind Krauss, Colin Campbell defends the intention of the work by stating: “Call it narcissistic! But for sure that wasn’t my reason for doing it.”⁶⁹ Rather, Campbell claims that his reason for creating this work was the excitement of depicting two nude men kissing which was rare at the time.⁷⁰ *Janus* is an intimate, internal depiction of the artist’s life, which is representative of not only his own early work, but tapes of other Toronto artists in the early 1970s.

⁶⁶ "Janus" *A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. Edited by Elizabeth Knowles. Oxford University Press, 2006. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Carleton University. 11 September 2009 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t214.e3669>>

⁶⁷ Rowley Mossop, “Queer Art in the Capital: Colin Campbell’s Work is Driven by a Questioning of Sexual Identity,” *Xpress* (Ottawa, May 1991), 6.

⁶⁸ Rowley Mossop, 6.

⁶⁹ Rowley Mossop, 6.

⁷⁰ Rowley Mossop, 6.

Campbell is best known for his narrative works. In her article, “Video in Canada: In Search of Authority,” Renée Baert cites Colin Campbell and Lisa Steele as artists who are most closely associated with a narrative model. Campbell and Steele worked together on the series the *Scientist Tapes* (1977-1978) and independently on solo projects. Baert describes this Toronto innovation as “evolution of a serialized form of narrative, in which a narrative line is developed through a sequence of related productions which layer and compound the fictions.”⁷¹

The *Bad Girls* and *Woman from Malibu* Series are two of Colin Campbell’s most famous works. The latter is comprised of six videos, which include: *The Woman from Malibu*, *Shango Botanica*, *The Temperature in Lima*, *Last Seen Wearing*, *Hollywood and Vine* and *Culver City Limits*. The creation of this series and the videos that follow represent a shift from Campbell’s earlier work. Like all of his tapes this series addresses themes of sexual and gendered identity, however the *Woman from Malibu* tapes distinguish themselves as they are scripted, they are not autobiographical or intimately “inward facing” and for the first time Campbell dresses in drag and creates female personas. Campbell describes the shift as progressing from “dealing with external fiction as opposed to internal fiction.”⁷² These black and white videos were created during Campbell’s stay in California in 1976 and 1977. The series begins with the *Woman from Malibu* describing the death of her husband and concludes, in *Culver City Limits*, with her describing her own murder. Inspired by newspaper headlines and local gossip, Campbell’s videos possess a gentle pacing and are not always purpose driven.

⁷¹ Renée Baert, “Video in Canada: In Search of Authority,” 177

⁷² Interview with the artist. Kathleen Maitland-Carter, “Campbell Interviewed,” *CineAction!* (Summer issue, 1987), 33.

Colin Campbell is celebrated for his characters; the protagonist in *The Woman from Malibu* is one of his most celebrated. Originally, the artist anticipated hiring a woman to act the part of *The Woman from Malibu* but ultimately decided that he could play the part more convincingly than anyone else.⁷³ Throughout this series, Campbell dresses in drag, references gay icons like Liza Minnelli and humorously recounts stories in a “bawdy and amateurish” way.⁷⁴ Consequently, the series is often discussed in terms of its camp aesthetic. Interestingly however, Colin Campbell and scholars alike resist Susan Sontag’s definition of camp.⁷⁵ Moe Meyer’s ‘capital C’ understanding of Camp, which I outline in Terms, is better suited to Campbell’s work. While not abrasively confrontational, Campbell’s videos are political as they strive to provide queer representation and encourage dialogues about sexuality, gender and queer concerns. When asked in an interview about how self-consciously he employed humour, Campbell replied, “Yeah, it’s a strategy. It’s one way to make your characters sympathetic, especially if they can laugh at themselves. It’s also a good way to get some kinds of information across that might be just too heavy if you did it straight.”⁷⁶ As will be discussed in the following chapters, humour is also a critical part of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay practice. While the artist tackles serious issues including his own experiences with homophobia and the social isolation he experienced due to his sexuality, an often light-handed approach is employed.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ferguson, Bruce W. “Colin Campbell: Otherwise Worldly,” 16.

⁷⁵ Interview with the artist. Kathleen Maitland-Carter, “Campbell Interviewed,” *CineAction!* (Summer issue, 1987), 34 and quote from Peggy Gale in Milroy, Sarah, Obituaries “Colin Campbell: Passionate Pioneer of Video Art, (Toronto: Globe and Mail, 17 Nov. 2001), F9.

⁷⁶ Kathleen Maitland-Carter, “Campbell Interviewed,” *CineAction!* (Summer issue, 1987), 35.

Colin Campbell and Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's video art share many elements including the use of subversive humour, charismatic storytelling, engaging characters, and emphasis on gender issues. Colin Campbell's videos include various "*dramatis persona*." ⁷⁷ His fictional characters are clearly defined: whether he dresses in drag to become *The Woman from Malibu* or Robin from *Modern Love* or even the male Art Star in *Sackville, I'm Yours*, he "announces" himself as a distinct figure separate from Colin Campbell, the artist from Reston, Manitoba. ⁷⁸ While Nemerofsky Ramsay likewise creates elaborate *dramatis persona*, the distinction between the 'act,' or who he wants the audience to think of him as, and the artist himself can be difficult to distinguish. In contrast to Campbell's elaborate costumes and facades, Nemerofsky Ramsay typically performs a version of himself.

A further similarity between Nemerofsky Ramsay and Campbell include their shared frustration with a lack of queer representation as neither of them relates to mainstream hetero-normative models. During an address at the National Gallery of Canada, Campbell told the audience that, "We're not very often given a chance to speak. And the noise of life is truly relentless. At best, I think we can only remain poised to not allow silence to fall around what matters. By breaking silence around issues of gender, sexuality, prejudice, love, politics, we enter the noisy discourse of life. One may be drowned out, but hopefully someone's listening."⁷⁹ Colin Campbell fought for the ability to include 'taboo' images in his videos and was faced with discrimination even by members of the queer community. The video *White Money* was supposed to be included

⁷⁷ Bruce W. Ferguson, "Colin Campbell: Otherwise Worldly" in Campbell, Colin et al. *Colin Campbell: Media Works 1972 – 1990* (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1990), 11.

⁷⁸ Bruce W Ferguson, "Colin Campbell: Otherwise Worldly," 11 - 12.

⁷⁹ Andrew Sorfleet, "Colinization" *C Magazine*, (Toronto #31, 1991), 52.

in an exhibition but was ultimately censored by a (gay) curator in Ottawa who did not agree with how he represented sexual acts between homosexual people. In an instance where Campbell was trying to challenge a lack of queer representation and “give voice to a different kind of imagery,” he was refused.⁸⁰ Colin Campbell’s fight against censorship paved the way for future artists. In speaking to the lack of queer representation in popular culture; Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay has picked up the fight where artists like Colin Campbell left off.

While Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay grows out of a tradition formed by previous Canadian video artists like Colin Campbell, he differs from his predecessors in several ways. For instance, the artist completed a bachelor’s degree at York University in cultural studies where he would have become well versed in the popular gender theory of the 1980s and 1990s. His theoretical background is evident when he reflects upon his own work, as he employs Judith Butler’s language to describe his gender compliance and confusion as a child.⁸¹ In contrast, Colin Campbell came to theory in a roundabout way. According to Greyson, Campbell “assimilate[d] high theory and low humour by osmosis.”⁸² While Campbell may reference different theorists intermittently in his videos, Nemerofsky Ramsay’s work is inherently informed by it. Whether conscious or not, the videos were created after the completion of his degree, and therefore the way Nemerofsky Ramsay thinks about and approaches issues of gender is filtered through his knowledge of gender theory.

⁸⁰ Kathleen Maitland-Carter, “Campbell Interviewed,” *CineAction!* (Summer issue, 1987), 38.

⁸¹ As explained in Chapter Two.

⁸² John Greyson, “The Singing Dunes: Colin Campbell, 1942 – 2001,” 47.

In contrast to Campbell's rejection of literary or televised conventions, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay closely follows a music television model. As will be discussed later, Nemerofsky Ramsay embodies Linda Hutcheson's definition of parody as he simultaneously criticises and embraces MTV conventions and performance codes in his work.

Vancouver artists, video and otherwise, have typically concentrated upon "information, co-operation, open access and general interest."⁸³ Characteristic of his geographic setting, Paul Wong's video work often embodies a community spirit. While his current work focuses upon his racial background, his earlier work explored issues of gender and sexuality. Wong is most famous for his 1983-1984 video *Confused: Sexual Views*. He describes this work as being about "bi-sexuality and all the options that come with it."⁸⁴ While twenty-seven people participated in the video, the four primary figures are the artist himself, Gary Bourgeois, Gina Daniels and Jeanette Reinhardt. Initially, these four characters are divided into two monogamous couples but by the last frame, all four are shown exploring each other and various combinations of sexual pairings. The interactions between the four characters are reminiscent of a soap opera as they show flirting, deceiving and enjoying each other at a nightclub, in their homes, studios and at work. Interspersed throughout the video are several figures that, in an interview-like setting, explain their own sexual experiences, offer their opinions about sexual acts, describe their sexual preferences and admit to their prejudices. The video is very frank and contains several sexually explicit scenes. As a result of the overt sexual content in the

⁸³ Peggy, Gale, "Video Art in Canada: Four Worlds," *Studio International*, vol. 191, no. 981 (May/June 1976), 224.

⁸⁴ National Gallery of Canada, Cyber Muse, "http://cybermuseum.beaux-arts.ca/cybermuseum/docs/wong_clip8_e.pdf." Accessed 15 June, 2009.

work and a failure to appreciate the artistic merit of the video, the then director of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Luke Rombout, cancelled the screening just hours before the video was set to premier.⁸⁵ After the cancelation, Wong battled against Rombout's censorship yet ultimately lost his fight in court. In response to the conflict, the arts community in Vancouver rallied together to campaign for an apology from the VAG.⁸⁶

In the middle of the controversy, the National Gallery of Canada purchased Paul Wong's video. Wong explains, "The National Gallery had first bought a work of mine called *Confused Sexual Views*, work [that] was in fact still in the law courts in British Columbia That was really an important purchase, because it showed me that even though the work was being censored and rejected by the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1984, the National Gallery of Canada felt that it was in fact a work of art worth collecting."⁸⁷ By purchasing *Confused: Sexual Views*, the NGC sent a pointed message to not only the Vancouver Art Gallery, but also the rest of Canada that Paul Wong's video is *art* and is worthwhile, regardless of any perceived vulgarity or offensiveness. This purchase was a validating experience for Wong. Paul Wong's struggle, like that of Colin Campbell, has paved the way for present and future queer video artists like Nemerofsky Ramsay to create candid and provocative works of art. Wong's extensively publicized battle with the VAG introduced the issue of homosexuality and censorship to the general public, thus engaging non-art audiences in the debate.

⁸⁵ John Bentley Mays, "The Young and Restless Talk Sex," *Globe and Mail*, April 1984, http://www.mercerunion.org/show.asp?show_id=444

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ National Gallery of Canada, *Cyber Muse*, "http://cybermuseum.beaux-arts.ca/cybermuseum/docs/wong_clip8_e.pdf." Accessed 15 June, 2009.

In the video Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay made for *The Search for Art Fag 2000*, a competition organized by RM Vaughan and Roy Mitchell as part of the Images Festival in Toronto, the artist tips his hat, so to speak, to famed Toronto video maker and gay rights activist, John Greyson. John Greyson was born in 1960 in London, Ontario. He is a video artist, writer and now filmmaker. Greyson is well known for his activism and has been described by Colin Campbell as “working harder than anybody for the Gay Community.”⁸⁸ His early video work focuses almost exclusively on “gay rights, AIDS activism and censorship.”⁸⁹

Nemerofsky Ramsay created his Art Fag video with the assistance of then boyfriend, photographer Guntar Kravis. The ten contestants were asked to create a film about being an ‘Art Fag’ and Nemerofsky Ramsay chose to represent a day in the life of one. He describes the video as him “flitting about town, eating breakfast modelled after a Wolfgang Tillman still life, communing with my inner Cindy Sherman, flirting with John Greyson, getting fashion tips from Karma Clarke-Davis and gorging myself on free food at a gallery opening in lieu of dinner.”⁹⁰ In an interview with Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, he stated that he was not yet familiar with Colin Campbell or John Greyson’s video art, but was familiar with their names and their significance to the queer artistic community.⁹¹

Finally, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s appropriation of media templates resembles his predecessors, General Idea. General Idea consistently appropriated popular culture in their art and were committed to inserting themselves into the mainstream. For example,

⁸⁸ Kathleen Maitland-Carter, “Campbell Interviewed,” *CineAction!* (Summer issue, 1987), 38

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Mike Hoolboom, “Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay: The Singer,” in *Practical Dreamers: Conversations with Movie Artists*, (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2008), 85.

⁹¹ Author’s interview with the artist, January 10, 2009.

they created several made-for-television videos, including *Test Tube* (1979) and *Shut the Fuck Up* (1985). Furthermore, General Idea created *FILE Magazine*. *FILE* content evolved from being generated by reader response to the contribution of hired artists. According to the artists, they modeled their *FILE* logo after *LIFE Magazine* and this “familiarity . . . enabled us to insert the most esoteric or obscure content and still have it distributed through the most democratic of venues, the newsstand.”⁹² Another well known venture includes their AIDS project, where they appropriated Indiana’s “LOVE” design, and distributed their version on posters, stickers, placards, pamphlets and lottery tickets in addition to more formal works, like sculptures.⁹³ As will be illustrated in chapters two and three, Nemerofsky Ramsay, like General Idea, mines popular culture for a wealth of material.

Nemerofsky Ramsay’s work grows out of a rich Canadian video art tradition. Artists like Colin Campbell, Paul Wong and John Greyson are pioneers in the Queer video art scene and laid the foundation for the kind of video art that Nemerofsky Ramsay creates. They opened up a dialogue and gave a voice to issues of gender fluidity, sexuality, identity exploration, homophobia, and they fought against the lack of queer representation. Because of the successful censorship battles undertaken by Campbell, Wong, and Greyson, Nemerofsky Ramsay has the ability exhibit his works publically.

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay is most notably different from his predecessors because of his singing, dancing and appropriation of the music video model. Before an in-

⁹² *General Idea: Multiples: Catalogue Raisonné: Multiples and Prints, 1967 - 1993*. (Toronto, Ont.: S.L. Simpson Gallery, 1993), 10.

⁹³ *General Idea: Multiples: Catalogue Raisonné: Multiples and Prints, 1967 - 1993*, 14. (Plates 130c, 136, and 156.)

depth analysis of the contents and aesthetics of Nemerofsky Ramsay's videos, however, it is necessary to provide a brief history of music videos and music television. An awareness of the evolution of the music television phenomenon and the nature of music videos will assist with the contextualization and understanding of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's video art.

Music Television

Typical of Colin Campbell and the Toronto artistic tradition, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's early videos are intimate, inward looking, and autobiographical in nature. Also, like General Idea, Nemerofsky Ramsay appropriates and parodies media forms. Infused with Camp humour, the artist borrows familiar contemporary models like American Idol auditions, music videos and CNN information-style channels and parodies them in his videos. Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay is a child of the MuchMusic and MTV era; growing up with the development of music and cable television is formative for the artist and music videos featuring prominently in his body of work. *Audition Tape*, for example, includes clips of a Tatu music video, *I am a Boyband* appropriates a music video format and *Patriotic* bears a resemblance to The Pet Shop Boys' video, "Go West." Works of art that do not directly reference music videos evoke their glossy and hyper-edited character. Drawing upon Andrew Goodwin's book, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* and Simon Frith's article, "Youth/Music/Television," I will unpack the nature of music videos in order to reach a greater understanding of Nemerofsky Ramsay's use of them.

According to Andrew Goodwin, in order to fully grasp the genesis and nature of music videos, it is necessary to understand how they are directly tied to the "economic impulses behind the format."⁹⁴ Music videos distinguish themselves from previous forms of visual performances in many ways. It is not the use of lip-synching, but rather their "pervasiveness and potential for cost-effective circulation."⁹⁵ These videos are the music

⁹⁴ Goodwin, 41

⁹⁵ Goodwin, 29

industry's effort to employ an economical solution to marketing their music worldwide, which is part of a larger trend of expanding merchandising.

Music videos flourished due to the growth of cable, broadcast and satellite television. With this considerable growth came a need for cost-effective programming, especially in America but also in Europe, which music television met.⁹⁶ Another motivation driving music television development was the potential to reach the 16 – 34 year old age group. Television advertisers typically struggled to reach this demographic yet were confident that a station that strictly offered music, (the “right kind of music”) could reach their desired demographic.⁹⁷ An MTV Europe 1988 sales-pitch boasts:

Finally, advertisers can reach people by television in a way that was only available to them through the print media. Now advertisers can hit the 16-34's with MTV's laser sharp targeting – not scattered buckshot. This audience's discretionary income is not in piggy banks or pension funds. MTV reaches its viewers all over Europe with a consistent clarity: it's about the cars they drive, the clothes they wear, [and] the foods they fuel themselves with.⁹⁸

As Simon Frith explains in his article “Youth/Music/Television,” television programming oriented towards this demographic combines both “entertainment and consumer guidance; the mode of address is that of a sales staff.”⁹⁹ As the above sales-pitch explains, the 16-34 age range is a prime advertising target because of disposable income. Eager to tap into this coveted market, MTV Europe was able to secure sponsorship from Levi-Strauss right from its genesis.¹⁰⁰ As Levi's European marketing director John

⁹⁶ Goodwin, 37

⁹⁷ Goodwin, 38

⁹⁸ Simon Frith, “Youth/Music/Television,” 72.

⁹⁹ Simon Frith, “Youth/Music/Television,” 74.

¹⁰⁰ Simon Frith, “Youth/Music/Television,” 71.

Ankeny stated, “MTV Europe represents a youth lifestyle and Levi-Strauss produces the clothing for that lifestyle.”¹⁰¹

In addition, Andrew Goodwin argues that 1980s music television spoke to two occurrences: an older demographic of rock music consumers and the expansion of a ‘youth culture’ in America that did not revolve around music.¹⁰² In 1985, John Qualen recognized that, “for the first time in history, the rock audience is getting old...this decline in the purchasing power of the industry’s key target audience is the joint result of [the] recession...and the demographic decline in the numbers of that age-group.”¹⁰³ The impact of this demographic shift was substantial as it cultivated a new musical genre. Musicians like The Rolling Stones and Tina Turner filled a space between the youth tailored and pre-rock genres. Further, he states that this ‘older’ audience is not as likely to go to a concert as the younger generation yet still craves a performative visual accompaniment. Consequently, this older demographic, like the 16-34 year olds, also became prime advertising targets of music television.¹⁰⁴

A significant post-punk trend in the early 1980s was a new approach by musicians to advertising and the media. Up until that time, in order to possess musical credibility, it was necessary for musicians to pen their own lyrics and perform live.¹⁰⁵ Punk and rock musicians perceived live performances as an “‘authentic’ [way to] communicate their music to an audience.”¹⁰⁶ According to Goodwin however, “the New Pop [acts]

¹⁰¹ John Ankeny, quoted in MTV Europe Press Release, August 1988. Simon Frith, 71.

¹⁰² Goodwin, 39

¹⁰³ As quoted in Goodwin, 41

¹⁰⁴ Goodwin, 40

¹⁰⁵ Goodwin, 34, 35

¹⁰⁶ Goodwin, 34

constituted a timely acknowledgement that this ideology did not make sense.”¹⁰⁷ This new philosophy first took root in the United Kingdom; by 1983 audiences did not place the same value on whether band members actually played on their albums or not. Not long after, several pop bands, including Wham! and Human League, were created. Initially, these acts rarely performed live, if at all, as their music was machine-made and could not be replicated by the musicians and their instruments. While the importance of musical ‘authenticity’ lingered longer in the United States, by the late 1980s, these strong convictions weakened as Madonna emulated the United Kingdom’s New Pop model. In place of live performances, New Pop bands “established themselves as ‘performers’” by creating and disseminating music videos even though the musicians lip-synched and “mimed to music they did not actually play.”¹⁰⁸ Goodwin explains, “The new music making technologies enabled lip-syncing to be read as a legitimate part of pop performance, and the new attitude to marketing matched the up-front, and often self-conscious, strategies used in promotional clips.”¹⁰⁹ As a result, the combination of new music equipment technology (for example, drum machines and synthesizers) and views towards the creation of image profoundly impacted both the music industry and establishment of music television.¹¹⁰

Andrew Goodwin asserts that the advanced music-making technology illustrated “more forcefully than ever before that pop performance is a *visual* experience” going so far as to describe the New Pop music video a “visual medium with a sound track.”¹¹¹ It

¹⁰⁷ Goodwin, 35.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 36.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 36-37.

¹¹¹ Goodwin, 33 (Goodwin’s italicization)

is noteworthy that musicians did not always possess the same degree of creative independence they had previously with other varieties of pop performance. In most cases, music labels sponsor the videos and therefore insist on controlling their direction.¹¹²

Boybands, which will be discussed in Chapter One, are extreme examples of music groups whose every move is contrived and controlled. Jan Jagodzinski goes so far as to describe them as the new castrati because of their complete lack of agency.¹¹³

In addition to shaping lifestyles with advertising and channelling fan income in their favour, the music video system worked to catapult artists into superstardom. In his book, *A World Made Sexy: Freud to Madonna*, Paul Rutherford writes that “By 1992 the MTV services were reaching approximately 56 million homes in the United States, making the channels not only a major success story in the cable industry but a significant force in the music industry as well.”¹¹⁴ Madonna dominated the music video scene throughout the 1980s and 1990s and is the quintessential example of a musician who benefited from the music video phenomenon. The prevalence of her videos in addition to their queer references makes it unsurprising that she is repeatedly referenced in Nemerofsky Ramsay’s videos.

Two recent texts that focus upon music videos and music television also include Kip Pegley’s *Coming to You Wherever You Are: MuchMusic, MTV, and Youth Identities*

¹¹² Ibid, 29.

¹¹³ Jan Jagodzinski, *Music in Youth Culture: A Lacanian Approach*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); 156-157.

¹¹⁴ Paul Rutherford, *A World Made Sexy: Freud to Madonna*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 174.

(2008) and Carol Vernallis' *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (2004).

Kip Pegley notes that “music television ... is a significant, yet undertheorized force in the lives of Canadian youth” and that Canada’s music television station, MuchMusic, is often overlooked in favour of MTV in academic discourse.¹¹⁵

While the impetus driving MuchMusic parallels MTV, the channels are not the same. In *Coming to You Wherever You Are: MuchMusic, MTV, and Youth Identities*, Pegley outlines the differences between MTV and MuchMusic using a 1995 sampling from each station. According to Pegley, Canada is one of the few countries to resist MTV’s franchise and successfully launch and sustain their own music station.¹¹⁶ In addition to having more video airtime and playing a broader range of genres, the author identifies that it is primarily the “extramusical” content, like MuchMusic’s consideration of time-zone changes, multi-cultural VJs, and “presence of a diverse Toronto crowd,” that distinguishes Canada’s MuchMusic from its American counterpart.¹¹⁷

Unfortunately, the cross section Pegley analyzes is limited to one week in 1995, and therefore does not discuss the British pop bands Nemerofsky Ramsay cites as being formative during his youth. Pegley’s text is still useful, however, as she outlines MuchMusic’s programming requirements. According to the author, MuchMusic “had to face much more stringent policies on cultural inclusion when it was launched than did

¹¹⁵ Kip Pegley, *Coming to You Wherever You Are: MuchMusic, MTV, and Youth Identities*, (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2008,) 12, 2.

¹¹⁶ Pegley, 3. According to Pegley, there are CRTC policies that restrict MTV from coming in and replicating a channel that already exists. As a result, MTV Canada was re-launched in 2005 (they first entered Canada in 2001 when they affiliated themselves with a Calgary’s Craig Broadcasting) as a “specialty channel devoted to talk-programming.”

¹¹⁷ Pegley, 4, 105.

MTV, and it continues to do so today. These policies were established by the CRTC, who was responsible ... for enforcing regulations such as the Canadian content quota and multicultural representation.”¹¹⁸ Thus, it may be assumed that in comparison to American youth, Canadians like Nemerofsky Ramsay would have had greater access to a broader range of videos, including the British acts he cites.¹¹⁹

In *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context*, Vernallis singles out the inclusion of props and costumes, editing techniques, the presence or lack of a narrative, the setting, the role of extras, as well as lyrics, space, colour, texture and time in music videos.¹²⁰ While her discussions focus on early videos from the 1980s and 1990s¹²¹, her identification of the multi-faceted and layered elements of music videos are helpful in determining how to approach and what to consider when analyzing Nemerofsky Ramsay’s video art.

For example, in chapter seven, Vernallis examines how lyrics, images, and music are balanced in music videos. Some of the questions she asks, which I use as a guide when viewing Nemerofsky Ramsay’s videos, include “How important are the lyrics of music video in relation to their image and music? How do viewers receive a music video’s lyric, and how does this reception differ from that of lyrics when the song is heard alone? Do music lyrics transform music and image, and vice versa? What structural role do lyrics play?”¹²² Ultimately, Vernallis argues that “music-video lyrics frequently make

¹¹⁸ Pegley, 73

¹¹⁹ For example, MuchMusic “regularly featured a world music show entitled *Cliptrip*.” Pegley, 73.

¹²⁰ Carol Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.)

¹²¹ Half of her book is dedicated to analyzing Madonna’s “Cherish,” Prince’s “Gett Off,” and Peter Gabriel’s “Mercy St.”

¹²² Vernallis, 137.

way for materials with sharper contours – an interesting timbre, a dancer’s gesture, a dramatic edit [Therefore,] when we watch music videos, lyrics rarely maintain the upper hand.”¹²³

It is perhaps for this reason that Nemerofsky Ramsay displays lyric subtitles in the majority of his videos. [See figures 1 -4] As mentioned previously, the artist claims that he does not “choose [the songs] at random. In all of my videos, the text spoke to me and I chose to tell my story through that song.”¹²⁴ Thus, the artist emphasizes their importance by spelling them out for his audience.

Like music videos, Nemerofsky Ramsay’s video art sells ‘him’ and his cause. His tapes embody their promotional character: glossy, choreographed, scripted, perfectly edited, engaging and arguably more familiar and accessible to a broader audience than the standard art video. However, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s videos bare more than a formal visual relationship to music videos. The bands he listened to (and watched) as a youth, including Depeche Mode, the openly gay Erasure, the “glass closeted” Pet Shop Boys, and The Smiths as well as Madonna; they saturate his work.¹²⁵ In his book, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, David P. Marshall claims that watching music videos allows viewers to create deeper emotional attachments to band members.¹²⁶ Gayle Wald, in her article “‘I Want It That Way’: Teenybopper Music and

¹²³ Vernallis, 137, 138.

¹²⁴ “Video Art Fag Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay Does a Song and Dance at Soundtracks,” *Now Magazine*, October 16, 2003. [Http://www.nowtoronto.com/issues/2003-10-16/cover_story](http://www.nowtoronto.com/issues/2003-10-16/cover_story). (accessed January 18, 2008)

¹²⁵ John Gill, *Queer Noises: Male and Female Homosexuality in Twentieth Century Music* (London: Cassell, 1995), 8 and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2008.)

¹²⁶ David P. Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 183.

the *Girling of Boy Bands*,” expounds this sentiment by stating that the act of dancing and singing along with music videos in the privacy of one’s home “complements this fantasy of ownership and makes possible distinct varieties of fan practice and pleasure not encouraged by recorded sounds alone.”¹²⁷ Thus, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s strong connection to the aforementioned queer musical groups may in part have grown out of his early consumption of their music videos. What distinguishes his oeuvre from his predecessors is the mediation of his feelings and experiences through this music. The artist uses lyrics as autobiographical vehicles, stating that: “[the songs] are always about something in my life. I don’t choose them at random. In all of my videos, the text spoke to me and I chose to tell my story through that song.”¹²⁸ As a result, the presence of these musical influences will be documented in the following chapters.

In this chapter, I have uncovered some of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s artistic and music influences. The first part of chapter one distinguishes the differences and similarities between his video art practice and those of his Canadian predecessors, and will enable me to better articulate his innovations. As music videos dominate Nemerofsky Ramsay’s body of work, I devote the second part of chapter one to outlining the purpose and general characteristics of music videos and television. By contextualizing Nemerofsky Ramsay’s videos, I strive to reach a holistic understanding of his art and enrich my visual analyses.

¹²⁷ Wald, 18.

¹²⁸ “Video Art Fag Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay Does a Song and Dance at Soundtracks,” *Now Magazine*, October 16, 2003. [Http://www.nowtoronto.com/issues/2003-10-16/cover_story](http://www.nowtoronto.com/issues/2003-10-16/cover_story). (accessed January 18, 2008)

TERMS

Before delving into an analysis of Nemerofsky Ramsay's video art, I should introduce and define how I will be using the terms parody and Camp.

Parody:

As trends in literature and art evolve, so does the meaning of parody. Most pertinent to this thesis is the definition Linda Hutcheon puts forth in her recently updated book *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (2000). Recognizing the fluidity of the term parody, as well as its often incorrect usage and delineation in present-day texts, she strives to provide an accurate definition applicable to contemporary art in North America. Generally, the author describes parody as “a form of repetition with ironic critical distance, marking difference rather than similarity.”¹²⁹ The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines parody as a “literary or musical work in which the style of an author or work is closely imitated for comic effect or in ridicule.”¹³⁰ In her book, however, Linda Hutcheon revisits the linguistic root of parody, *parodia*, in order to suggest an additional definition. While the prefix *para* is commonly interpreted as ‘counter,’ it may also be understood as meaning ‘beside.’ As a result, ‘parody’ may also be interpreted as “an accord or intimacy instead of a contrast.”¹³¹ Throughout my analysis of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's artwork, Hutcheon's dual understanding of parody will be considered. I will propose that Nemerofsky Ramsay's performances criticize the dominant hetero-normative culture enforced by popular music lyrics and videos.

¹²⁹ Hutcheon, xii

¹³⁰ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/parody>. Accessed 7 June, 2009

¹³¹ Hutcheon, 32

Simultaneously, I will explore how the artist's work celebrates and embraces these music video and musical forms.¹³²

Hutcheon continues by stating that "parody is intensely context and discourse dependent."¹³³ While the author explains that some contemporary parodic art is not accessible and understood by viewers, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's video work arguably is. Hutcheon describes artists as encoders and viewers as decoders. In order for the parody aspect of an artwork to be identified and therefore 'successful,' the encoder must direct the decoder's interpretation with 'signals.'¹³⁴ In other words, parodic art is reliant upon the viewer's identification of these signals imbedded by the artist. My case studies will illustrate how Nemerofsky Ramsay's video work parodies popular music lyrics, performances, and performers and the hetero-normative structure that they reinforce and maintain.

Camp:

According to Susan Sontag, Camp is difficult to pin down and define. In her influential 1964 essay, "Notes on Camp," she describes it as an aesthetic or sensibility. Sontag posits that the essence of Camp is "its love of the unnatural; of [the] artifice and [of the] exaggerated" and offers up *The Enquirer's* headlines and stories, Tiffany lamps and *Swan Lake* as cases in point.¹³⁵

¹³² This association is drawn by National Gallery of Canada assistant curator of contemporary art, Heather Anderson, in her acquisition proposal for Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, April, 2008.

¹³³ Hutcheon, xvii

¹³⁴ Hutcheon, xvi

¹³⁵ Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp" in *Art Theory and Criticism: An Anthology of Formalist, Avant-Garde, Contextualist and Post-Modernist Thought*, Ed. by Sally Everett, (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1991), 96, 98

In his essay, “Reclaiming the Politics of Camp” Moe Meyer’s argues that there is only one Camp (and not multiple diluted versions) it is queer and it can be political.¹³⁶

Meyer appropriates Linda Hutcheon’s contemporary understanding of parody and modifies it in order to generate an updated definition of Camp. Meyer reasons that:

[Hutcheon’s] redefinition provides the opportunity for a reassessment of Camp, when Camp is conceptualized as parody.... When subjected to Hutcheson’s postmodern redefinition[of parody], Camp emerges as specifically queer parody possessing cultural and ideological analytic potential, taking on new meanings with implications for the emergence of a theory that can provide an oppositional critique.¹³⁷

In stark contrast to Sontag, Meyer defines Camp as a form of queer-specific parody and “that produces queer social visibility.”¹³⁸ Meyer’s resists Sontag’s apolitical and un-queer characterization of Camp and argues that Camp is “not simply a ‘style’ or ‘sensitivity’ as is conventionally accepted.”¹³⁹ In her essay, Sontag diminishes the relationship between homosexuality and Camp. According to Meyer’s, this resulted in the misguided understandings and associations with “irony, satire, burlesque, and travesty; and with cultural movements such as Pop.”¹⁴⁰ In order to distinguish between camp as an aesthetic and Camp as a political term reserved for Queer purposes, Meyer’s uses a ‘capital C.’

Meyer suggests that:

Queer identity emerges as self-consciousness of one’s gay and lesbian performativity sets in. In the sense that queer identity is performative, it is by the deployment of specific signifying codes that social visibility is produced. Because

¹³⁶Moe Meyer, “Introduction: Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp,” in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, Ed. by Moe Meyer, (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 5

¹³⁷ Meyer, 10

¹³⁸Meyer, 5

¹³⁹ Meyer, 1

¹⁴⁰ Meyer, 7

the function of Camp ... is the production of queer social visibility, then the relationship between Camp and queer identity can be posited.”¹⁴¹

Meyer further develops his definition of Camp by describing it as the full range of performative acts “used to enact a queer identity, with enactment defined as the production of social visibility.”¹⁴² Finally, Meyer states that, “By employing a performance-oriented methodology that privileged process, we can restore a knowledgeable *queer* social agent to the discourse of Camp parody.”¹⁴³

My visual analyses of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s videos will be greatly informed by Moe Meyer’s politicized notion of Camp. I will consider how queer parody, or Camp, manifests in his artistic practice and the potential for his videos to function as oppositional critiques.

¹⁴¹ Meyer, 4-5

¹⁴² Meyer, 5

¹⁴³ Meyer, 10

Chapter 2

When Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay found himself struggling to articulate his gay identity, the impact of homophobia on his psyche, and the misery of heartbreak, he turned to song lyrics to express himself. This chapter examines the stories that Nemerofsky Ramsay recounts, the songs he chooses as vehicles, and the existing music models he appropriates as a means of expression. Through an analysis of his early videos *Je Changerais d'Avis* (2000), *I am a Boyband* (2002), *Audition Tape* (2003), and *Live to Tell* (2002), I argue that his video art performances function cathartically and politically. Not only is Nemerofsky Ramsay able to work through his personal issues, but his musical performances, strategically infused with subversive Camp humour, serve to open up reflection upon queer sexuality, identity, and homophobia while contributing to queer social visibility.

Nemerofsky Ramsay's struggle with identity dates back to his youth. The artist recounts a childhood incident where his mother, sister and he made an appearance on a fitness television program. In the segment, Nemerofsky Ramsay laughs and shifts his body closer to the camera in an exaggerated and contrived way. Watching the clip now, he remarks:

I am stunned at this image of myself. I can't tell if it is a true window into how uncomfortable I felt in my own body, how the idea of 'natural' behaviour had already been stolen from me at that age, always being pelted with comments on how I was inappropriately effeminate, [and] identifying with all the wrong characters in the media.... I think I was always in a stage of performance as a child, always searching for the

elusive, acceptable way of behaving, and the explicitness of the television stage intensified this feeling of performativity for me.¹⁴⁴

Judith Butler's theories of gendered identity and performativity are critical to understanding Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's struggles. In the essay, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," Judith Butler defines sex as the particular anatomical feature of a person's body, and gender as the "cultural meaning and form that the body acquires."¹⁴⁵ As a result of these distinctions, Butler reasons that gender is to be understood as a facet of identity that is acquired gradually over time. As Simone de Beauvoir states, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."¹⁴⁶ She and Butler note that, as a result of these distinctions, "it is no longer possible to attribute the values or social functions of women to biological necessity, and neither can we refer meaningfully to natural or unnatural gendered behaviour: all gender is, by definition, unnatural."¹⁴⁷ In other words, Butler is stating here that if gender is no longer understood as being inherent, the assumed relationship between being a certain sex and "becoming" the presumed corresponding gender is destabilized. When gender is understood as being informed by cultural forms and therefore constructed, Butler asserts that the notion of "being' female and 'being' a woman" are two separate distinct states of being.¹⁴⁸

Butler expands upon this argument in her 1990 book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler declares that sex is also

¹⁴⁴ Mike Hoolboom, "Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay: The Singer," in *Practical Dreamers: Conversations with Movie Artists*, (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2008), 83.

¹⁴⁵ Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," *Yale French Studies*, No. 72, *Simone de Beauvoir: Witness to a Century* (1986), 35.

¹⁴⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 301.

¹⁴⁷ Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," 35

¹⁴⁸ Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," 35

unnatural and culturally constructed.¹⁴⁹ As Louise A. Hitchcock explains, “Woman, man, femininity and masculinity are symbolic constructions formed arbitrarily and linguistically by a repressive system of meaning that masquerades as the real.”¹⁵⁰ Butler argues that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; ... identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.”¹⁵¹ This notion of performativity is closely examined in Butler’s article “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.”

In “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” Judith Butler suggests that “the body becomes its gender through a series of acts [or expressions] which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time. From a feminist point of view, one might try to reconceive the gendered body as the legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic.”¹⁵² In other words, Butler argues that gender identity is not inherent; no one is born with a predetermined knowledge of how to conduct one’s self in accordance with their sex. While this information is not inherent, it is inherited. Butler describes gender identity as being made-up of a series of stylized and repeated actions. The acts, which she describes as everyday “bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds” are

¹⁴⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 7.

¹⁵⁰ Louise A. Hitchcock, *Theory for Classics: A Student’s Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 159.

¹⁵¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 25.

¹⁵² Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec.1988), 523.

a learned behaviour.¹⁵³ Thus, if gender identity is not the result of an internal essence and is in fact a performance, performances may be challenged and relearned.¹⁵⁴

Judith Butler uses the analogy of the theatre and actors in order to clarify her argument. She writes, “Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives.”¹⁵⁵ Therefore, Butler claims that all of our acts which constitute gender identity are not purely original or individual. Rather, these acts are both ‘rehearsed’ and limited by an established script.

Butler explains that the ‘acts’ which make up our preconceived notion of gender identity are normalized in society because of their consistent repetition. The actors themselves further perpetuate a ‘cultural fiction’ of a polarized binary gender identity as they come to believe in the naturalness of their own acts and therefore continue them.¹⁵⁶ Furthering the theatre analogy, Butler states that “it is quite clear that there are strict punishments for contesting the script by performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisations.”¹⁵⁷ In other words, if a person’s ‘acts’ do not correspond to the gender identity associated with his or her sex, they will be punished. Consequently, people are compelled to conform to an established set of acts for fear of retribution.

¹⁵³ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” 519

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 519

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 526

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 522

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 531.

Reflecting on his first video encounter, Nemerofsky Ramsay notes the distinct unease his childhood self felt as he struggled to act ‘normally.’ Antagonized for acting in a more feminine than masculine manner, and for associating with unbefitting media figures, resulted in the necessity to perform, or as Butler articulates, to act in accordance with his male sex. The artist’s anecdote parallels Butler’s argument that gender identity is a “performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo.”¹⁵⁸

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s recognition of the element of performance in his twenty seconds of airtime formed his artistic practice. He dedicates several of his early videos to exploring performance codes and tropes of masculinity, stating, “I try on appropriate behaviours, I perform myself, I seek out what is natural for me in a public, ‘televised’ way.”¹⁵⁹

Je Changerais d’Avis

Je Changerais d’Avis is the first of many videos where Nemerofsky Ramsay appropriates song lyrics and a media format in an attempt to articulate the breadth of his emotions.¹⁶⁰ After listening to the 1964 Françoise Hardy version of the song “Je Changerais d’Avis” at the suggestion of a friend, the artist was inspired.¹⁶¹ The lyrics of the song, which speak of the desperation and frustration of strained love, appealed to the

¹⁵⁸ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” 520.

¹⁵⁹ Mike Hoolboom, “Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay: The Singer,” in *Practical Dreamers: Conversations with Movie Artists*, (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2008), 83.

¹⁶⁰ While the artist considers *Je Changerais d’Avis* to be his “first video art piece,” he did create two previous videos, *White* and *Art Fag 2000*. Hoolboom, 86.

¹⁶¹ Mike Hoolboom, 86. (Written by Ennio Morricone, originally titled *Se Telefonando*, first recorded in 1963.)

artist as he was in the midst of an unstable relationship.¹⁶² He explains, “I was in a troubled, fragile relationship with a man I was very much in love with, and was having difficulties expressing my unhappiness to him.”¹⁶³ In addition to appropriating song lyrics, the artist appropriates a well-known media template. Nemerofsky Ramsay states that by singing lyrics that mirrored his emotions and employing an extreme television layout, he hoped that now, “Maybe ... this unnameable emotion can somehow be transmitted.”¹⁶⁴

Created in 2000, the artist states that this 4 minute video borrows the Toronto CP24 “hyperinformation” [sic] television channel format as the “everything-at-once aesthetic strategy fascinated” him.¹⁶⁵ Like the CP24 format, the screen consists of variously sized boxes divided by black lines, including a rectangular box that broadcasts a twenty-four hour and four day weather forecast. [Figures 3.] While Nemerofsky Ramsay’s interpretation embodies the overwhelming nature of the news channel, he has streamlined its format. Contained within the boxes are four images of Nemerofsky Ramsay from the shoulders up, and a black and white image of a woman who interprets the lyrics with sign language. Rather than news or entertainment headlines, German and French song lyrics stream across the bottom of the screen. In the largest box, Nemerofsky Ramsay listens to headphones and sings along with a woman’s voice as English subtitles translate. The picture quality of the top left box is clearer than the other three headshots of the artist. The left hand box with a pink filter plays in slow motion, while the small box

¹⁶² Mike Hoolboom, “Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay: The Singer,” in *Practical Dreamers: Conversations with Movie Artists*, (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2008), 86.

¹⁶³ Mike Hoolboom, 86.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

to right plays in fast forward. The images resemble poor web camera footage as they are colourized and grainy.¹⁶⁶

Nemerofsky Ramsay's musical performance in *Je Changerais d'Avis* evokes a hybrid mix of desperate emotion and camp absurdity. At times, his expressions are too theatrical, too over-the-top to be taken seriously. By the end of the video, Nemerofsky Ramsay is frantic. A slight smile, as though he is remembering a tender moment or happier time, vanishes and his eyes well up with tears. He repeatedly rolls his eyes to the side as though he is exasperated; he wipes at his nose, and expels his breath in huffs. As the song finishes, Nemerofsky Ramsay calms down and faces the camera with a despondent expression, conceding defeat. This extreme emotiveness, coupled with the bombardment of images embodies a Camp sensibility.

While not as explicitly political as his later videos, *Je Changerais d'Avis* can also be interpreted as a movement to insert queer content into the mainstream. Before becoming an artist, Nemerofsky Ramsay attended York University where he was encouraged to approach media critically and consider how people are informed by the media about gender and sex. He explains that in his videos, he is "acting [his politics] out...I'm definitely the kind of person who looks for myself in film and in the media I'm surrounded with. I'm looking to identify with things. I'm looking not to feel alone with my emotions."¹⁶⁷ In *Je Changerais d'Avis*, the artist bombards the viewer with images of himself: a gay man suffering from a deteriorating relationship. As the artist does not see himself reflected in film or media, he proactively inserts himself into it.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ *Border Crossings*, 64

I am a Boyband

While *Je Changerais d'Avis* features the artist's first use of lyrics and a media format to mediate his emotions, *I am a Boyband* marks his exploration of gendered identity in the music and video medium. As previously mentioned, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay felt compelled to reject 'expressions' which felt comfortable to him as early as ten years old. Consequently, the artist would often act in a more 'masculine' manner in order to evade harassment. In Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's 2002 video, *I am a Boyband*, the artist performs four different formulaic boyband characters who sing and dance to an Elizabethan era song about heartbreak. Nemerofsky Ramsay appropriates and embraces various tropes of masculinity including an athletic figure, an aggressive 'tough' figure, and a sensitive romantic figure, while simultaneously criticizing them.

Acting out these tropes of masculinity serves several functions: firstly, his performance may be perceived as 'trying on' various male characters. He describes many of his videos as "performing different characters as a way of digging for the truth about [himself]."¹⁶⁸ Like his first televised experience, the artist may be experimenting with personas in search of one that is both comfortable for him and socially acceptable. Secondly, and more importantly, Nemerofsky Ramsay's performance serves to parody normalized notions of masculinity and the artificial and contrived nature of boy bands. In essence, the artist's portrayal of these characters is a critique of masculinity because his

¹⁶⁸ Mike Hoolboom, 84.

exaggerated performances calls attention to the notion that all forms of masculinity are ultimately a “masquerade.”¹⁶⁹

The song “Come Again Sweet Love” was written by John Dowland, a lute player and composer who was born in 1563 and died in 1625. His music, especially the volume, *The First Booke of Songs*, experienced several surges in popularity and has been revisited and reworked several times.¹⁷⁰ Nemerofsky Ramsay was first introduced to Dowland’s music as child when he participated in a youth choir.¹⁷¹

The artist created *I am a Boyband* during an extended trip abroad. While it was filmed in Berlin, the artist completed post-production work at the Banff Centre while participating in a residency as part of their *Up Close and Personal* series.¹⁷² Nemerofsky Ramsay collaborated with Canadian musician, Taylor Savvy, who was also in Germany in 2002. The artist preserved the meter, lyrics, and harmonies, yet hired Savvy to modify the song with drum machines and sequencers, thus creating a synthesized pop “boy-bandish” sound.¹⁷³

In her article, “‘I Want It That Way’: Teenybopper Music and the Girling of Boy Bands,” Gayle Wald describes how boyband videos are carefully constructed with the

¹⁶⁹ Heather Anderson, National Gallery of Canada Acquisition Proposal for three of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s videos, April 2008

¹⁷⁰ Diana Poulton, *John Dowland*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 21 and 89. Most recently, British musician Sting and lute player Edin Karamazov recorded an album of Dowland’s songs entitled, “Songs From the Labyrinth.” Released in 2006, the album was successful; within its first week it landed in the number one slot on Billboard’s Traditional Classical Chart and was the “top-selling classical record of 2006.” While Sting did not sing “Come Again Sweet Love,” he introduced and popularized Dowland’s music for a new generation. Source: “Sting, Songs from the Labyrinth.” PBS.org <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/shows/sting/index.html> (accessed March 19, 2009).

¹⁷¹ Authors interview with the artist, January 10, 2009.

¹⁷² Heather Anderson, National Gallery of Canada Acquisition Proposal for three of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s videos, April 2008.

¹⁷³ Mike Hoolboom, “Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay: The Singer,” in *Practical Dreamers: Conversations with Movie Artists*, (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2008), 87.

intent to engage viewers and intensify their attachment to the singers. For example, hand gestures that reference the song lyrics, (pointing at the camera to signify “you,” a hand placed over the heart to signify “love” or “desire”) in addition to positioning the singers directly in front of the camera, creates a sense of intimacy and closeness. In combination with facial expressions, these actions heighten the viewer’s sense of “immediacy and sincerity...[and serve to] nurture fantasies of authenticity and spontaneity, despite their obvious stylization and visual framing.”¹⁷⁴ Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay humorously acts out these contrived techniques in his boyband parody.

The opening scene of *I am a Boyband* is black with white subtitles that read: “A cloned boyband appropriates an Elizabethan madrigal to express heartbreak over lost love.” Next, the artist appears in the centre of the frame, dressed in jeans and a fitted blue t-shirt set against a black background. As he begins to sing, the song lyrics appear in white subtitles at the bottom of the screen. [Figure 1.1] This character begs his lover to return to him. He sings: “Come again! Sweet love doth now invite, thy graces that refrain to do me due delight. To see, to hear, to touch, to kiss, to die! With thee again, in sweetest sympathy.” As Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay sings, he gazes intently upwards at the camera. His expression is sly as he tries to coax his lover back to him. The figure raises his hands slowly in front of him as he sings of the wonder he feels when with his lover, clenching his fists together after singing, ‘to die!’ He repeats the verse again and this time reaches his hands out, one in front of the other, towards the viewer. As a second singer

¹⁷⁴ Gayle Wald, “‘I Want It That Way’: Teenybopper Music and the Girling of Boy Bands.” P.22 (Accessed February 10, 2010) http://www.genders.org/g35/g35_wald.html

walks into the scene, the first figure takes a step back to the left to allow the newcomer to take centre stage.

The second character, dressed in an Adidas jacket with sporty racing stripes, sings: “Come again! That I may cease to mourn, through thy unkind disdain/ for now, left and forlorn /I sit, I sigh, I weep, I faint, I die /in deadly pain and endless misery.” The two figures sing the last two lines again and dance in unison. The confidence of the first character is gone and the second character looks down repeatedly and meekly tucks his hands into his jean pockets.

Next enters the ‘tough’ third character. He wears trendy oversized blue sunglasses and a sleeveless shirt that reveal his defined arm muscles. As the third figure sings he gesticulates passionately; he punches the air, kicks his foot for emphasis and glares at the camera through his glasses. [Figure1.2]

The fourth character’s bangs sweep across his forehead. He wears a fitted, silky blue shirt and is instantly recognizable as a ‘romantic.’ He appears anxious and desperate as he sings about his grief and crying himself to sleep. The four figures conclude by singing: “Gentle love!/Draw forth thy wounding dart, thou canst not pierce his heart for that I do approve./By sighs and tears, more heart than are thy shafts, did tempt while he, while he for triumph laughs.” As the four characters harmonize and dance in unison, they lock eyes with the camera, as though to compel their lost love to return. [Figure1.3]

Their voices fuse together seamlessly in harmony. The formal and refined character of their voices contrasts sharply with the absurdity of the choreography; while it is not complex, it is over-emotive. In between holding their hearts, the figures look at

each other and nod their heads, affirming the sentiments the singer describes. Perhaps what is most comical, is the realization that the artist is not exaggerating in any way; his parody embodies the arrogant facade and manner in which these boyband singers take themselves too seriously.

This over-the-top musical performance exemplifies both Sontag's and Meyer's definition of Camp. *I am a Boyband* possesses an exaggerated and theatrical Camp aesthetic sketched out by Sontag. Further, the performance embodies Meyer's definition as Nemerofsky Ramsay illustrates a high degree of critical distance. More than an earnest attempt to discover the illusive gendered identity acceptable for both him and society, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's humorous appropriation of the boyband template illustrates to his viewers how ridiculous the existence of socially reinforced rigid masculine norms are and points to the existence of multiple different, stereotyped models.

Audition Tape

Jemima Lewis explains in her article, "Sing the Praises of Tatu, the Teenage Lesbians," that the pressure to conform, to feel accepted and to fit in is most intense during adolescence in a school setting. Preying upon others who express a different sexual orientation is the most common, and the most hurtful. She explains: "sexual oddity is an especially rich mine, since it touches on the most vulnerable parts of the human soul; the parts that bullies love to reach. From an astonishingly young age – long before puberty sets in – children become aware that to be 'gay' ... is as shockingly different as it

gets, which is why these are the favourite taunts of the playground.”¹⁷⁵ Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay spent his formative years in Calgary, in the same riding as Preston Manning, creator of the Reform Party of Canada. An inhospitable setting for a “young faggy boy,” the artist cites this time as intensely challenging and influential for his personal and artistic development.¹⁷⁶ He spotlights his adolescent angst in the 2003 video, *Audition Tape*, through an appropriation of Tatu’s song and video for “All the Things She Said.”

The merit of Tatu and their video for “All the Things She Said,” is controversial and warrants contextualization. Despite speaking pointedly to challenges faced by queer youth, gay and straight communities alike reject Tatu.¹⁷⁷ Prohibited from playing on the British television programme “Top of the Pops” and deemed “paedo-pop,” “sick” and “perverted,” outraged reactions to Tatu’s video for “All the Things She Said” is consistently negative.¹⁷⁸ Russian child psychologist turned manager Ivan Shapovalov is allegedly quoted as saying he “got the idea of Tatu from market research. I saw that most people look up pornography on the internet and of those, most are looking for underage sex. I saw their needs weren’t fulfilled. Later it turned out that I was right.”¹⁷⁹ Shapovalov’s exploitive attitude, in addition to a sexually charged video, compels writers

¹⁷⁵ Jemima Lewis, “Sing the Praises of Tatu, the Teenage Lesbians,” *Independent*, February 10, 2003. [Http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/jemima-lewis-sing-the-praises-of-tatu-the-teenage-lesbians-597181.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/jemima-lewis-sing-the-praises-of-tatu-the-teenage-lesbians-597181.html) (accessed March 14, 2009.)

¹⁷⁶ Author’s interview with the artist, January 10th, 2009.

¹⁷⁷ Sarah Kerton, “Too Much, Tatu Young: Queering Politics in the World of Tatu,” in *Queering the Popular Pitch*, ed. Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga (New York: Routledge, 2006), 155-156.

¹⁷⁸ Jemima Lewis, “Sing the Praises of Tatu, the Teenage Lesbians,” *Independent*, February 10, 2003.

¹⁷⁹ Anna Carey, “Love That Dares to Speak Its Name,” *Sunday Tribune*, February 16, 2003 <http://www.tribune.ie/archive/article/2003/feb/16/love-that-dares-to-speak-its-name> (accessed March 15, 2009)

like Anna Carey to ask, “Are Tatu just fodder for old male perverts?”¹⁸⁰ When I first watched the video in 2002, my line of thinking corresponded with Carey’s question; I assumed the video was a marketing ploy targeting men’s lesbian fantasies.

In contrast to the critics who dismiss Tatu as “fluffers” for lecherous men, Sarah Kerton argues in her article, “Too Much, Tatu Young: Queering Politics in the World of Tatu,” that the “pleasurable viewing, parodic of heterosexual ‘lesbian’ pornographic fantasy” is suspended and cannot actually come to fruition.¹⁸¹ The viewer’s fantasy cannot reach fulfilment as the video is punctuated repeatedly with scenes of the girls crying and being tormented, thus confronting him or her with the harsh realities allegedly accompanying of the girl’s situation.

In her article “Sing the Praises of Tatu, the Teenage Lesbians,” Jemima Lewis discusses the band members, their music and critics’ reactions to them. Lewis states that even though most critics of the band condemn Tatu because Lena and Yulia are portrayed inappropriately as “highly sexualized teenagers,” this is not what they actually disapprove of.¹⁸² Lewis uses Britney Spears and her 1998 song and accompanying video, “Hit Me Baby One More Time,” to support her claim; this video was successful despite (or possibly because of) Spears and her schoolgirl uniform. According to Lewis, critics are responding to the re-appropriation of this trope to depict a taboo lesbian love. In “All the Things She Said,” Lena and Yulia embody the same young, highly sexualized female trope as Britney Spears. Lewis argues that Tatu is not abhorred so vehemently by their critics because they are depicted as sexual. Rather, she feels that the video is contested

¹⁸⁰ Ibid

¹⁸¹ Kerton, 161.

¹⁸² Jemima Lewis, “Sing the Praises of Tatu, the Teenage Lesbians,” *Independent*, February 10, 2003.

and feared because Tatu's steamy video may "lead impressionable schoolgirls astray."¹⁸³ Presumably, after the initial sensationalism subsides, the display of open affection between two people of the same sex may become normalized. Writer Anna Carey agrees, stating, "The tabloid frenzy over Tatu highlights the level of discomfort with which mainstream society views lesbians and lesbian culture."¹⁸⁴

Audition Tape begins with the subtitle: "Gay White Male, 29, 5'11" 165 lbs, good singing voice and co-ordination, desperately wants to join Russian girl band." A shot of a young girl dancing in an empty room replaces the subtitles. The viewer realizes that she is finishing an audition as she wears a numbered bib and thanks an unseen judge as she exits the room.

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay enters the frame, faces the camera, and states that while at first glance he may appear to be too old for a pop group, he is the ideal candidate for a Russian girl band. Wearing casual clothing and a side bag with a large '13' on it, Nemerofsky Ramsay wistfully explains that when he was thirteen, things were "really different." The artist describes how isolating being gay was. He was bullied for being queer and there was no one he felt he could speak with, not even his parents, as they too were homophobic.

The artist's audition is interspersed with shots of the Russian version of Tatu's "All the Things She Said" music video. [Figure 4] English subtitles included at the bottom of the screen reveal line by line how the lyrics of the song directly parallel his struggles with discrimination. When Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay describes the

¹⁸³ Jemima Lewis, "Sing the Praises of Tatu, the Teenage Lesbians," *Independent*, February 10, 2003.

¹⁸⁴ Anna Carey, "Love That Dares to Speak Its Name," *Sunday Tribune*, February 16, 2003.

homophobia he faced in his youth, Lena Katina and Yuliya Volkova sing of how they are told their condition needs to be cured. When he explains that he could not even speak to his parents about his struggles, Tatu sings “Mama, Papa forgive me, I have lost my mind.” At one point, Benny sings along passionately “I have lost my mind/I need her/ I have lost my mind” as the video plays behind him.¹⁸⁵ In her article, “Too Much, Tatu Young: Queering Politics in the World of Tatu,” Sarah Kerton notes that the final verse of “All the Things She Said” references a specific cultural phenomenon. According to Kerton, the phrase “Yes, I’ve lost my mind,” corresponds to the Russian practice of exiling young lesbian women to mental asylums.¹⁸⁶

At one point, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay declares his loves for the album title “200 kilometres in the Wrong Direction,”¹⁸⁷ because to him, it “perfectly describes the apocalyptic confusion that he felt when he was thirteen.” At thirteen, the artist could not even admit to himself that he was gay but was infatuated with the gay pop music of Erasure and Depeche Mode. While declared in a theatrical and comical way, there is depth to Nemerofsky Ramsay’s assertion that The Smith’s “How Soon is Now?” was an anthem for a “generation of queer loneliness” and his personal theme song. The significance of this statement is expounded by queer music theorist Philip Brett who writes, “Music.... is particularly accommodating to those who have difficulty in expressing feelings in day-to-day life, because the emotion is unspecified and unattached.”¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, he reasons that “To gay children, who often experience a

¹⁸⁵ Tatu, “All the Things She Said” From the album, “200 Kilometers in the Wrong Lane” (2002)

¹⁸⁶ Sarah Kerton, “Too Much, Tatu Young: Queering Politics in the World of Tatu,” in *Queering the Popular Pitch*, ed. Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga (New York: Routledge, 2006), 160.

¹⁸⁷ Incorrect title, it is actually “200 Kilometers in the Wrong Lane” (2002).

¹⁸⁸ Philip Brett, “Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet,” 17.

shutdown of all feeling as a result of sensing their parents' disapproval of a basic part of their sentient life, music appears as a veritable lifeline."¹⁸⁹

Nemerofsky Ramsay continues by comically describing his first awkward sexual experience, uttering the man's name, Doug, in a deadpan voice. The Camp humour climaxes when the artist sings and dances in iconic schoolgirl drag: a white blouse, plaid kilt and long braids. Finally, the artist cites his eyebrows and their resemblance to his great-grandmother's as one of his qualifications. Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay concludes the video by singing a very brief excerpt from Madonna's song "American Life" from her 2003 album of the same name. He sings that he will "change his name" if it will "get him far" and that he will do "yoga and pilates" if that means that he will be chosen for Tatu. Ironically, Nemerofsky Ramsay states that he will do whatever it takes, including changing his name, identity and appearance – in essence everything about him - to fit into the Tatu mould.

While the lyrics and the video for "All the Things She Said" point to the isolating and painfully hostile experiences queer youth face, Tatu's sexually charged image overshadows any productive dialogue about homophobia. Regardless of whether the band and subsequent video was orchestrated by Shapovalov "for a male audience and the male gaze"¹⁹⁰ or whether the girls in reality are even lesbians, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's appropriation of their lyrics and video illustrates its ability to poignantly summarize queer adolescent hardships.

¹⁸⁹ Philip Brett, "Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet," 17.

¹⁹⁰ Quote from Marie Mullholand in Anna Carey's article, "Love That Dares to Speak Its Name," *Sunday Tribune*, February 16, 2003 <http://www.tribune.ie/archive/article/2003/feb/16/love-that-dares-to-speak-its-name/> Accessed March 15, 2009

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay describes his experience of seeking out popular music to narrate his life as discouraging, isolating, and frustrating. While he is interested in “find[ing] the deep truths of love, grieving and risk-taking and all the lived emotions that are part of [his] own experience,” there is an absence of applicable lyrics.¹⁹¹ In essence, popular music lyrics are inadequate; they do not apply to him as they usually conform to an institutionalized monogamous heterosexual narrative.¹⁹² It is for this reason that Tatu’s “All the Things She Said,” struck a chord; the lyrics spoke to his adolescent struggle with his queer identity.¹⁹³ As a result, Tatu ultimately transcends its genesis; the outcome was an infiltration of same-sex affection into mainstream society. While it was not necessarily instigated with the positive intention of forging a space for queer people or encouraging dialogue about same-sex experiences, the dubious behaviour of their manager matters less than the consequent creation of a model for youth who felt isolated in their struggles.¹⁹⁴

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay reasserts the narrative of Tatu’s “All the Things She Said” as his audition confronts viewers with the crippling isolation and oppression of homophobia. The issues raised are important to him and he does not risk alienating his audience with a heavy-handed approach. Rather, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay balances the severity of his subject matter with Camp humour. Through comedy, the artist subversively reveals not only a lack of applicable lyrics, but also an absence of

¹⁹¹ *Border Crossings* (November 2004): 64.

¹⁹² *Border Crossings* (November 2004): 64.

¹⁹³ Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, "Postmodern Choirboy: Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay on his elegies for a lost natural self," *The Walrus*, June 2006. (Accessed March 17, 2009)

<http://www.walrusmagazine.com/articles/2006.06-detail-postmodern-choirboy-benny-nemerofsky-ramsay/>

¹⁹⁴ On October 12, 2007, a performance and screening of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s work was hosted at Saw Gallery in Ottawa, Ontario. After the screening of *Audition Tape*, some people were noticeably moved, and one woman openly cried. She was overwhelmed by how *Audition Tape* made her feel. While Tatu’s video “All the Things She Said,” may or may not have meant anything to her before, the artist’s depiction of the angst of formative teenage years articulated in a way that was poignant and relatable.

homosexual models and narratives in the mainstream. Appropriating Tatu's song and video in addition to the American Idol audition format successfully arguably engages, rather than alienates his audience. *Audition Tape* exemplifies Robin Robert's statement that "humor [can make a] message explicit [in a] non-threatening way."¹⁹⁵

Live to Tell

Despite announcing that he hates Madonna, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's 2002 *Live to Tell* marks the second time he appropriates her lyrics in his video art.¹⁹⁶ Though Nemerofsky Ramsay does not explain why he resists Madonna so much, his reaction is common in the queer community. Madonna's status as a queer icon is contentious. While many theorists support her reign, there are as many who demand its fall. In his article "Metatextual Girl: Patriarchy Postmodernism Power Money Madonna," David Tetzlaff contends that Madonna has "won for herself an unlimited ticket for subcultural tourism – she can visit any exotic locale she likes, but she doesn't have to live there."¹⁹⁷ In other words, Tetzlaff argues that Madonna capitalizes on the sexual orientations and ethnic cultures she appropriates yet on a whim can shed the character she has tried on. Thus, Madonna deftly circumvents any of the hardships and challenges people in these minority communities are confronted with.

In contrast, Sonya Andermahr argues that "Madonna is the first major mainstream artist to give gay images and themes explicit mass treatment and exposure.... and

¹⁹⁵ Robin Roberts, "'Sex as a Weapon:' Feminist Rock Music Videos," *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter, 1990), 13.

¹⁹⁶ Thomas Hirschmann, "Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay: Subversive video-maker is his own boy band at soundtracks art fest" http://www.nowtoronto.com/issues/2003-10-16/cover_story. Accessed January 18, 2008

¹⁹⁷ David Tetzlaff, "Metatextual Girl: Patriarchy Postmodernism Power Money Madonna" in *The Madonna Connection*, Ed. by C. Schwichtenberg, (Oxford: Westview, 1993), 259.

explicitly courting her gay fans” and cites the lyrics and music videos of “Vogue,” “Justify My Love” and “Express Yourself” as examples.¹⁹⁸ Thus, what distinguished Madonna from other queer icons like Diana Ross was her purposeful inclusion of queer culture in her lyrics, performances and music videos.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, Sonya Andermahr posits that by showcasing queer images and topics in her body of work, Madonna opened up a space in the mainstream for the queer community.²⁰⁰

Like *Je Changerais d’Avis*, the impetus to create *Live to Tell* stems from a failed relationship. While Nemerofsky Ramsay had listened to Madonna’s 1986 hit song “Live to Tell” before, he claims that it was only during a period of grieving that he really heard the lyrics for the first time.

[Everyone else was] dancing, but I was listening to the lyrics. I felt, ‘Oh my God, here is Madonna telling my tale.’ In some ways, I couldn’t accept that because I went through long periods of hating Madonna, thinking she was evil incarnate. But then at the same time, like a classic fag, I yielded to her. I think the humour of the situation is apparent in the piece, but it’s also very serious. I’m asking the audience to take me very seriously. I’m saying, ‘I’m going to tell you a story – and Madonna wrote it.’²⁰¹

The lyrics, namely, “If I ran away I’d never have the strength to go very far/ how would they hear the beating of my heart?” resonated with the artist as it perfectly articulated his heartache.²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ Sonya Andermahr, “A Queer Love Affair? Madonna and Lesbian and Gay Culture,” 32, 31

¹⁹⁹ Sonya Andermahr, “A Queer Love Affair? Madonna and Lesbian and Gay Culture,” 32, 31

²⁰⁰ Sonya Andermahr, “A Queer Love Affair? Madonna and Lesbian and Gay Culture,” 31.

²⁰¹ Thomas Hirschmann

²⁰² Thomas Hirschmann

At first, the multiple viewpoints of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay milling about a room are unsettling; the black and white bird's eye view is clearly surveillance footage of the seemingly unaware artist. However, the tension minimizes as the music starts; Nemerofsky Ramsay confronts the camera in several of the shots, acknowledging its presence.

Despite the mostly empty setting, the sixteen-camera composition is visually dynamic. The artist is dressed in black clothing; in some shots, he wears a knee length skirt, others a pair of slacks, and in one a pair of shorts, which is striking set against the sparse white room. Viewed from different camera angles, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's movements act like facets in a kaleidoscope, drawing your eye around the screen.

Nemerofsky Ramsay's surveillance camera confrontation resembles the performance works, or "media-jamming stunts," of The New York Surveillance Camera Players. In public areas saturated with surveillance cameras, the performers hold-up tongue-in-cheek signs that read "I'm on my way home to watch TV" and "It's OK, Officer, I'm just getting something to eat."²⁰³ According to the artist, the panopticon-like impression created by the security cameras is meant to highlight the perpetual scrutiny he receives as a gay man. He explains, "it's something about the conflict of not being able to have a private moment with your emotions and yet wanting your emotions to somehow be validated through a witness... the surveillance camera is a hostile presence in *Live to Tell* that I defiantly face."²⁰⁴ Thus, what began as an appropriation of Madonna lyrics to

²⁰³ Stefan St-Laurent, "It Will Burn Inside of Me," in *Art Star 3: Video Art Biennial* (Montreal: ABC Art Books Canada, 2007)

²⁰⁴ *Border Crossings* (November 2004): 60.

express the misery of heartache becomes a confrontation with the scrutiny he routinely receives.

While simultaneously confronting people's judgement of himself, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay punctuates his impromptu recital with humour using quirky, unexpected movements. Throughout Nemerofsky Ramsay's performance, he sporadically makes superman poses, exaggerated kicks, pirouettes, and at one point even runs around in a little circle and jumps.

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay describes himself as a diarist.²⁰⁵ His early videos *Je Changerais d'Avis*, *I am a Boyband*, *Audition Tape* and *Live to Tell* contain autobiographical elements and therefore function as a journal of sorts, a place where he reflects upon his struggles with identity, sexuality, homophobia and multiple rounds of heartbreak. As previously mentioned, Curator Stefan St-Laurent describes the artist's videos as full of pure emotion and states that he "endeavours to open his heart to strangers and to connect with them on a personal level."²⁰⁶ He dismisses the significance of the media models, claiming that they are "merely a portal for his personal work."²⁰⁷ In stark contrast to St-Laurent, I believe the 'portal' is a key component of his message and cannot be disregarded. By employing music video and boyband models as well as pop song lyrics as vehicles, the artist illustrates the problematic nature of institutionalized gender norms, the prevalence of homophobia and the absence of queer representation in the mainstream. Superficially, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's videos are merely about

²⁰⁵ Nemerofsky.ca <http://nemerofsky.ca/current-exhibitions-projects> (Accessed November 23, 2009)

²⁰⁶ Stefan St-Laurent, "It Will Burn Inside of Me," in *Art Star 3: Video Art Biennial* (Montreal: ABC Art Books Canada, 2007)

²⁰⁷ Stefan St-Laurent, "It Will Burn Inside of Me," in *Art Star 3: Video Art Biennial* (Montreal: ABC Art Books Canada, 2007)

heartbreak and relationships. A thorough analysis of his works, however, demonstrates a political consciousness. The incorporation of humour enables the artist to confront his viewers with queer issues without alienating them.

Chapter 3

A discernible shift occurs in Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's artistic practice; videos created post-2003 are more ambitious, overtly political, and outwards-looking in comparison to his earlier works and demonstrate a degree of personal and artistic growth. The artist's humorous appropriation of music and musical forms to address queer specific concerns, however, remain a constant throughout his body of work and as a result, my argument remains the same. *Lyric* (2004), *Patriotic* (2005), and *Uropop* (2006) employ comedy as a strategy; the incorporation of subversive Camp humour enables the artist to confront his viewers with issues without alienating them. In other words, Nemerofsky Ramsay is able to engage his audience and draw their attention to the inequitable reigning hetero-normative order. His works of art serve to create awareness of societal issues and work towards an increased social visibility of the queer population.

The artist's most recent project, *The Same Problem* (2008), however, forgoes Camp and subversive humour. This video illustrates a heightened sense of self-reflexivity as Nemerofsky Ramsay questions why popular music functions as his default. My analysis of these videos opens up a discussion of the artist's attraction to popular music and musical forms; I examine both his use of voice as 'weapon' of choice and his appropriation of music as a vehicle to disseminate information.

Lyric

In the essay "The Voice: Between Body and Language," French theorist Guy Rosolato describes the voice as the body's "most powerful emanation" and that from

infancy, we are aware of its potential power to attract attention and affect others.²⁰⁸ In his 2004 video *Lyric*, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay channels this power and stretches the limits of his voice. The 110-minute looping video *Lyric* reads like a love song anthology or, as Robert Enright describes it, “an experimental pop-cultural love poem.”²⁰⁹ Easily Nemerofsky Ramsay’s most ambitious undertaking to date, *Lyric* is set-up as an interactive five-monitor installation. The monitors, which all play the same video yet have different starting points, portray the artist singing sound bites plucked from a thousand popular music love songs. The monitors are lined-up in a curved line and the viewer is required to approach each one and put on headphones.

Lyric resembles a topical song cycle. Popular in the eighteenth-century, this strain of song cycle is compiled of poems that share a similar theme.²¹⁰ Like topical song cycles, *Lyric* possesses a “variety of keys, meters, and tempos as well as an array of styles.”²¹¹ Rather than tracing the seasons or all the months of the year, however, Nemerofsky Ramsay covers the scope of a romantic relationship, including “the madness and heights of love, the burning desire and heartache, the begging, [and] the wonder”.²¹² Nemerofsky Ramsay accumulated an inventory of love songs and took note of phrases that “kept recurring, particularly banal lines.”²¹³ After identifying a variety of hyperbolic statements, he organized them thematically. The artist isolates common phrases like “I

²⁰⁸ Guy Rosolato, “The Voice: Between Body and Language,” in *Voices. Voces. Voix*. (Rotterdam, Netherlands, Wittede With., 2000), 111, 108.

²⁰⁹ Robert Enright, “Heartbreaker: The Video Art of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay,” *Border Crossings*, 56

²¹⁰ Ruth O. Bingham, “The Early Nineteenth-Century Song Cycle,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*. Edited by James Parsons. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 104-105.

²¹¹ Bingham, 105

²¹² *Border Crossings*, 56.

²¹³ *Border Crossings*, 61

call to you,” which are subtitled at the bottom of the screen, and groups them in a manner that emphasizes the repetitive nature of the love songs.

The video, which was shot in one day, is set in the artist’s grandmother’s home, as it is a “place of love and longing” for him.²¹⁴ The setting is visually dynamic. The light streaming into three of the rooms he sits in reflects off the painted walls casting the artist in a purple, blue, or bright pink light respectively. [Figure 2] Nemerofsky Ramsay sits in front of the camera with his head slightly in profile. He sings:

Look into my eyes/ look in my eyes while you’re near/ take a look into my eyes/
when you look at me/ every time you look at me/ the gentle way you look at me/
look at me/ look at me/ look at me/ I wanna see you looking at me/ look at me/
look at me/ look at these eyes/ so take a good look at my face/ look me in the face/
you looked at my face/ look at me standing here/ looking at you, you looking at
me/ well he looks at me with those innocent eyes/ look at me now/ so take a look
at me know/ why do you look right through me?/ look at me, you never look at
me/ and please don’t look at me like that/ look away baby, look away/ don’t look
at me I don’t want you to see me this way.

As Nemerofsky Ramsay sings, he acts out the emotion of each phrase fully. For a few beats, he raises his arms; fingers spread open, eyes wide and earnest. With the next sound bite comes a brand new feeling, now his brows furrow in despair, eyelids close and fingers clench into fists. The time signature changes and Nemerofsky Ramsay shakes his head slightly, seemingly dazzled by the love he describes. The following moment, he dances light-heartedly in his seat all the while singing in a high falsetto, trilling along with the music blaring from his iPod headphones. His performance epitomizes Camp humour; each expression is exaggerated and theatrical and illuminates the sheer emotive

²¹⁴ Hoolboom, 88

absurdity of these lyrics. The “hetero-normative monogamous” status quo that saturates our airwaves becomes more pronounced with each over-the-top phrase Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay sings.²¹⁵ While hearing one or two songs in isolation does not make it obvious, hearing a montage of 1000 makes its existence undeniable.

Lyric is the culmination of the artist’s response to formulaic popular music played on the radio, the emergence of the iPod and his research of epic oral history singers.²¹⁶ Typical of his previous videos, his inspiration came from the emotional distress of a relationship and his response to pop music. He states, “I was already interested in how boybands were singing about dying and loving you forever and being miserable – all these kinds of hyperbolic statements. I was feeling the conflict of these lines being meaningless and also identifying with the repetition of their over-the-top quality.”²¹⁷

The artist also cites early iPod marketing as an inspiration for *Lyric*. In 2004, Apple introduced the iPod, a type of MP3 music player and boasted that it could store up to a thousand songs ‘in your pocket.’ Intrigued by Apple's unprecedented innovation, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay was inspired to create a video that reflected a sense of mass consumption as he was both intrigued and disappointed that the emphasis was on song quantity, rather than song quality.²¹⁸ Furthermore, the artist was researching oral histories at the time and was fascinated by “epic singers in Russia, Asia and Armenia who would

²¹⁵ Hoolboom, 88

²¹⁶ Hoolboom, 88

²¹⁷ *Border Crossings*, 61

²¹⁸ Hoolboom, 88

sing an entire culture's history at events."²¹⁹ Inspired by his research findings, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay challenged himself to create and sing an epic love story of his own.

Risa Horowitz describes *Lyric* as "both a purging and an embrace, as if Nemerofsky Ramsay embarked upon the project to either disavow fanciful notions about love or to welcome them all the more."²²⁰ In a review of the exhibition, "Neverending Song of Love," Horowitz notes that the artist's work is so successful because it "hovers between Nemerofsky Ramsay's confession of the influence of pop-song love and his determination to critique it."²²¹ The artist's performance illustrates a keen critical distance from the institutionalized hetero-normative nature of mainstream popular music. While Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay admits to relating to the sentiments in the pop song lyrics, his humorous performance of them emphasizes their contrived and formulaic nature. Viewers are repeatedly confronted with the clichéd nature of popular music when watching *Lyric*, especially when the artist sings the same word like 'love,' from various different songs, several times in a row. Thus, not only does *Lyric* comment upon the banality of popular music, it speaks to the hetero-normative, inclusive nature of mainstream lyrics the artist struggles with.

Periodically, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay performs live as a means of challenging himself and leaving the "safety net of video performance" behind.²²² On October 12, 2007, the artist's videos were screened at SAW Gallery as part of the *Gallery's Art Star 3: Video Art Biennial*. During the screening, Nemerofsky Ramsay sang the seven-minute

²¹⁹ Hoolboom, 88

²²⁰ Risa Horowitz, "Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay," *Canadian Art*, (Winter 2004): 94

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² *Border Crossings*, 56

first names theme of *Lyric* with subtitles projected behind on the stage, assisting the viewers to follow along with his impressive fast-paced performance. As the artist sang, "Aaron, oh Aaron/ Alice/ Anastasia/ Angie, Angie/ Anna/ Ariel/ Barbara Ann/ Ben/ B-B-B-Benny/ Billie Jean/ Billy/ B-Bobbie McGee/ Candy, Candy, Candy/ Caroline/ Cecelia/ Chiquitita"²²³ he did so as they are heard in their original form, quickly shifting keys, time signatures and emotions as required. In both the live performance and in the video itself, Nemerofsky Ramsay sings in a very high register.

Nemerofsky Ramsay's consistent use of a high singing voice may be interpreted as another facet of his queer identity. In the essay, "On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex," Suzanne G. Cusick explores the voice and how it relates to identity. Cusick argues that the voice, an internal biological function, is performative, akin to our clothing and gestures.²²⁴ Her essay challenges readers to reconsider the assumption that voice is solely shaped by the confines of the body. Voices are not simply "inevitable consequences of biological sex," they are also culturally constructed.²²⁵

A vocal change during puberty is presented as an example. Cusick writes, "The performance of sex as vocal register is a good example of a behaviour that is compulsive without being compulsory. For there is nothing in the physical chain of events that *requires* a young boy to abandon the register."²²⁶ The larynx, heart and lung development during puberty enable boys to vocalize deeper sounds. According to Cusick, access to tenor and bass registers does not necessitate the relinquishing of the previous register. She

²²³ A to C of "First Name Theme," Hoolboom, 88

²²⁴ Suzanne G. Cusick, "On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex." In *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*. Edited by Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley. (Los Angeles: Carciofoli, 1999), 25.

²²⁵ *Ibid.* 29

²²⁶ *Ibid.* 32

reasons that contemporary men in North America happily embrace their deeper voices as speaking or singing in a lower Tenor or Bass register signifies their male sex, and therefore their “biological difference from girls” and adulthood.²²⁷ In other words, Cusick argues that relinquishing the higher, pre-pubescent voice is simply a matter of choice, yet is rejected in favour of performing their male sex. This is an oversimplification. More than choice, boys need to relearn how to sing with mature vocal chords. As Dr. Paul Théberge explains, boys can no longer sing in a high range using the same technique invoked before puberty. Breathing techniques need to be modified and renegotiated, often at the expense of sound quality.

While there are flaws in Suzanne G. Cusick’s reasoning, her practical application of Butler’s most radical theory, that sex as well as gender is performative, holds merit. There are multiple possibilities for Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s use of a consistently high register. In the video, *I am a Boyband*, he may be singing the madrigal the way it was originally meant to be sung. Conversely, in *Lyric*, the artist may be parodying pop music icons like Justin Timberlake, who is famous for his high singing voice. Finally, it is possible that Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s consistent use of a high register is an additional facet of his exploration of gendered identity and challenge to institutionalized gender norms.

In the videos *I am a Boyband*, *Audition Tape*, *Live to Tell*, and *Lyric*, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay employs popular music and musical forms as a vehicle to address several queer-specific issues including restrictive gender expectations, homophobia, and a

²²⁷ Ibid. 33

lack of queer representation in the mainstream. *Lyric* especially raises the question: why does Nemerofsky Ramsay choose popular music and musical forms as his means of expression? What is the relationship between desire, fantasies, and popular music for the artist? Drawing from Sheila Whiteley, Barbara Bradby, and Stephen Hinerman, I will explore possible explanations for Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's attraction to and appropriation of popular music.

In her book, *Strip Show*, Katherine Liepe-Levinson argues that the general populace feel threatened by sexual desire and consider it dangerous. While governments can exercise control of sexual relations via marriage laws, for example, desire cannot be limited or controlled in the same way.²²⁸ Expanding upon this principal in her essay, "Popular Music and the Dynamics of Desire," Sheila Whiteley states that as a result of a subject's inability to freely express him or herself, a perpetual sense of absence becomes commonplace.²²⁹ Identified as a "primal experience of absence" by Jacques Lacan, a child comes to realize that their world consists of both pleasure and the absence there of.²³⁰ Whiteley explains that a baby's need to suck a mother's breast for sustenance exists in tandem with a yearning to suck because it is pleasurable.²³¹ The baby is inclined to lean toward acts that will both decrease anxiety and augment pleasure, in other words, Freud's "pleasure principle."²³² Whiteley argues that the child's pursuit for both unity and pleasure, or full satisfaction, and "its displacement by desire as a site of prohibition" is

²²⁸ Whiteley, 250, Liepe-Levinson, 183-184

²²⁹ Whiteley, 250

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Stephen Hinerman, "'I'll Be Here with You': Fans, Fantasy and the Figure of Elvis," in *Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 111.

noteworthy.²³³ As previously discussed, when becoming socialized, a subject is required to comply with an established set of expectations and regulations and as a result, it is necessary for some drives to be suppressed. Rather than dissipating however, Whiteley contends that these drives linger and reappear as fantasy.²³⁴

In his essay, “I’ll Be Here with You’: Fans, Fantasy and the Figure of Elvis,” Hinerman asserts that fantasies present the means to negotiate socially unacceptable desires without fear of social retribution. He states that fantasies possess the potential of “full satisfaction and total meaning in a world marked by separation, absence, and traumatic disruption.”²³⁵ Consequently, fantasies can offer an acceptable avenue out of difficult situations.²³⁶ In addition, in her essay, “Pornography and Fantasy: Psychoanalytic Perspectives,” Elizabeth Cowie argues that the body’s physical reaction to sexual desire is tied to fantasizing as our ability to immerse ourselves in fictional fantasies links directly to our understanding of sexuality.²³⁷ According to Whiteley, it is here that popular music and fantasy intersect as “popular music provides a specific insight into the ways in which fantasy – whether through watching a live performance, or in the intimacy of listening to music in the private space of the bedroom – can signal both what is denied and what we would like to experience.”²³⁸ These fantasies may also exist for the

²³³ Whiteley, 250

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Stephen Hinerman, 114.

²³⁶ Whiteley, 250

²³⁷ Elizabeth Cowie, “Pornography and Fantasy: Psychoanalytic Perspectives,” in *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*, ed. Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 135-36 and Whiteley, 251.

²³⁸ Whiteley, 251

musician; depending on the styling and attitude associated with a genre, he or she can perform in ways typically considered taboo.²³⁹

While Whiteley restricts her case studies to 1970s audiences and musicians like Queen lead singer Freddie Mercury, her argument translates easily to Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay and his attraction to and subsequent appropriation of music and musical forms. As noted in Chapter Two, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay was forced to act in accordance with the institutionalized heterosexual notion of male gender as an adolescent, thus repressing what felt comfortable to him. When he deviated from the established and accepted gender norm, he faced retribution. As illustrated in the artist's discussion of bands like The Smiths in *Audition Tape*, the homosexual drives Nemerofsky Ramsay repressed in his youth found an acceptable way to materialize while listening to music. Whiteley and Hinerman's theories provide possible explanations for the significance of music in the artist's life and his subsequent employment throughout his body of work; as a youth singing along with music lyrics, the artist could engage in homosexual fantasies and act out his desires in an accepted way.

In her article, "Do-Talk and Don't Talk: The Division of the Subject in Girl-Group Music," Barbara Bradby provides specific examples of how listeners actively engage with the popular music they are listening to and outlines situations where fantasies come to fruition through the act of listening. Bradby begins by questioning why girl groups of the 1960s were so wildly popular and argues that the songs sold as a result of the meanings created within them for their female audiences. She proposes that the songs

²³⁹ Whiteley, 251

were appropriated by their audiences in order to create identities.²⁴⁰ While fans sing along with the music they listen to, they actively engage in fantasies depending on the grammatical structure of the song lyrics. The author provides a detailed analysis of ‘girl group’ songs whereby she identifies pronoun sequences and how they correspond to reality and to fantasies. For example, In *He* Songs, I – Him (active) is fantasy while, He – Me (Passive) is reality. In *You* Songs, You – Me (Passive,) is fantasy while “I – You” (Active) is reality. Finally, in *He – You* Songs, “You – Him” (you active) is fantasy while “He – You” (You Passive) is reality.²⁴¹

While this text focuses specifically upon 1960s girl groups, the theories are relevant to Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s interactions with popular music. When Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay sings lyrics in an “I – Him” song, he may be engaging in an imagined fantasy scenario. In *Audition Tape*, Nemerofsky Ramsay cites Depeche Mode as one of the bands he relished as an adolescent. Their 1987 song, “Never Let Me Down Again,” is an example of an “I – Him” song as an excerpt of the lyrics reveal: “I’m taking a ride/ With my best friend/ I hope he never let's me down again/ He knows where he's taking me/ Taking me where I want to be.”²⁴² According to Bradby, by singing out loud the artist may engage in fantasizing, and according to Whiteley, the artist’s repressed homosexual desires may have found a socially acceptable release.

Interestingly, Gayle Wald notes in her article, “‘I Want It That Way’: Teenybopper Music and the Girling of Boy Bands,” that song lyrics from many

²⁴⁰ Barbara Bradby, “Do-Talk and Don’t-Talk: The Division of the Subject in Girl-Group Music” in *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word*. (New York : Pantheon Books, 1990), 343.

²⁴¹ Bradby, 350.

²⁴² “Never Let Me Down Again” is from Depeche Mode’s 1987 Album, *Music for the Masses*

contemporary bands, like The Backstreet Boys, often do not contain any gender allusions. The purposeful absence of explicit references further enables gay and lesbian listeners to engage with these songs.²⁴³

From July 9 to August 28, 2004, “Neverending Song of Love,” a survey exhibition of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s video work was held at the Plug In ICA in Winnipeg.²⁴⁴ While Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay describes the retrospective as “exciting and empowering,” the experience left him questioning whether he could contribute anything more with his current creative strategy; he felt as though everything he could do, he had already done. Consequently, the exhibition triggered a change in his work. Since that exhibition, Nemerofsky Ramsay has been experimenting with various new directions. While the themes remain predominantly unchanged in Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s post “Neverending Song of Love” exhibition videos, the artist’s treatment of them changes. After a brief foray into being an ‘art-pop’ singer,²⁴⁵ Nemerofsky Ramsay returned to creating videos. Rather than stemming exclusively from personal experiences, however, his new approach appears to be less introspective and includes a broader concern for cultural and societal issues. Two of these new works include the collaborative political video *Patriotic* and the sexually explicit video *Uropop*.

²⁴³ Gayle Wald, "I Want It That Way": Teenybopper Music and the Girling of Boy Bands." (Accessed February XX, 2010), p12

²⁴⁴ *Border Crossings*, 56

²⁴⁵ *Hoolboom*, 89

Patriotic

In his 2005 video *Patriotic*, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay collaborates with French artist Pascal Lièvre. Nemerofsky Ramsay, who divides his time between Canada and Europe, met Lièvre while abroad in 2003.²⁴⁶ The artist describes *Patriotic* as a “strange, futuristic national anthem, by a rogue political faction...it’s a super cheesy romantic love song used as a vehicle to disseminate propaganda.”²⁴⁷ In the video, the two artists sing lines from the United States Patriot Act created by the United States Congress in response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. As they sing, the artists strike various poses. [Figure 5] In one, their arms are raised in a regal fashion, referencing commanders sitting atop equestrian monuments. In another, they stand at attention with their heads held high, hand on their hearts, and sing with earnest smiles on their faces. While outside, both artists unnecessarily don goggles and ear protection. The ambiguous nature of the video as well as the Campy poses resemble the famous staged portraits of French artists Pierre et Gilles.²⁴⁸ Intermittently, Nemerofsky Ramsay and Lièvre are accessorized by additional fit young men who, dressed in tight gray tank tops and matching wedge hats, stand on guard in formation alongside the two singers. As the opening subtitle explains, “The American Patriot Act and Celine Dion collide in a sarcastic propaganda video.” The lines they sing, which include “To deter and punish terrorist acts in the United States and around the world, to enhance law enforcement investigatory tools, and for other

²⁴⁶ Heather Anderson, National Gallery of Canada justification proposal for three of Nemerofsky Ramsay’s videos.

²⁴⁷ Xtra! “Love is a Battlefield,” Number 572, September 28, 2006. <http://www.darylvoat.com/xtra-benny.htm> Accessed(December 1, 2009.)

²⁴⁸ Paul Ardenne, “One Big Family: An Aesthetic of Reconciliation,” in the exhibition catalogue *Pierre et Gilles: Double Je, 1976-2007* (Koln; London: Taschen, 2007), 408-409. For similar images, see Pierre et Gilles’ *Le marin* (1985) p87, *Vive la marine*, 2 be 3 (1997), p148 and *Le petit communiste – Christophe* (1990), p 364 in the same text.

purposes” are set to an up-tempo and synthesized dance version of Celine Dion’s hit song, “My Heart Will Go On” from the 1997 *Titanic* movie soundtrack.

Patriotic is reminiscent of the Pet Shop Boys’ “Go West” music video.²⁴⁹ Not only does *Patriotic* possess a similar synthesized and upbeat sound, it also shares similar visual components including an abundance of fit young military men wearing tight tank tops and wedge hats standing or marching in front of iconic landmarks. The video has also been described by a spectator as being akin to “synchronised swimming set to Celine Dion music, with boy scout uniforms worn instead of trunks.”²⁵⁰ As the two artists sing, large white diagonal subtitles accompany their lyrics. Rather than resembling a karaoke screen display, the text invokes the appearance of a recruitment poster. The characters, dressed in army green adorned with large hot pink “W’s”, stand alternatively in front of military monuments in Paris, France, a plain pink backdrop or lush green foliage. After the live performance and screening of his work at Saw Gallery in October 2007, an audience member asked Nemerofsky Ramsay if the “W’s” referred to George W. Bush. Nemerofsky Ramsay admitted that the Ws are deliberately vague but that yes, Bush was one of the references he considered.

In many respects, *Patriotic* is typical of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay’s oeuvre as the video includes a musical performance with appropriated lyrics and melody. *Patriotic*, however, is the artist’s first overtly political video, and easily his most campy as well. The presence of these pronounced elements may be attributed to his collaboration with

²⁴⁹ “Go West” is a cover of the Village People’s 1979 song that describes a movement of gay men to America’s West coast.

²⁵⁰ “For the Social Butterfly: Patriotic and SOUNDplay” BlogTO. September 21, 2006 http://www.blogto.com/arts/2006/09/for_the_social_butterfly_patriotic_and_soundplay. Accessed December 1, 2009

Pascal Lièvre. Lièvre, who also integrates performance and music in his works, previously created a “superkitch music video” using George W. Bush’s Axis of Evil speech.²⁵¹

The juxtaposition between the seriousness of the lyrics Nemerofsky Ramsay and Lièvre sing and the tune they are set to is striking and very funny. It is obvious that Nemerofsky Ramsay and Lièvre’s theatrical Camp performance takes a jab George W. Bush and his war on terrorism. Further, the musical performance in *Patriotic* may also comment upon the power of song to influence listeners and disseminate information.

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay has acknowledged how cathartic his artistic practice is for himself. He states that as an adolescent, he was repeatedly told to “just be yourself”. It was such a conundrum. Being myself was a state I feel I lost long ago. In my early 20s I started actively trying to honour all the parts of myself that I felt had been abused and stigmatized, giving them space to re-emerge. Video became a tool in that project.”²⁵² The artist’s 2006 video, *Uropop*, exemplifies this sentiment.

Uropop

The opening scene of *Uropop* is a black screen with a subtitle that reads, “The pause that refreshes.” The subtitles are replaced with a shot of the artist dancing in a club setting. The shallow, stage-like background has uniform white tiles with an array of colours flashing on them, mimicking the atmosphere of a nightclub. Nemerofsky Ramsay,

²⁵¹ Esma Moukhtar, “Patriotic,” Netherlands Media Art Institute. <http://catalogue.nimk.nl/art.php?id=9149>. (Accessed December 1, 2009)

²⁵² Hoolboom, 89-90

who is subtly spotlighted in the centre of the frame, is surrounded by five men. Wearing a pale yellow tank top and dark wash jeans, he dances in front of the camera to generic yet catchy techno music. The nondescript dancing men around him do not acknowledge him and remain primarily in profile. As though it was a commercial, the scene flickers to black and the yellow words “Uro Pop,” flash diagonally across the screen.

After dancing for a few moments, the expression on the artist’s face becomes bored and his dancing slows. As Nemerofsky Ramsay walks off the dance floor, the music changes and he is seen in profile walking through a wide hallway that is poorly lit. A large white arrow points towards a doorway where a young, topless male leans sips on a beer. As the artist approaches and walks through the doorway, he appraises the resting man. In the next scene, Nemerofsky Ramsay is shown face on as he walks through a doorway into a men’s washroom. The artist hesitates in the doorway and reaches up to hold onto the doorframe. His expression reveals his interest as he gazes in towards the bathroom. Three men, who have their backs to Nemerofsky Ramsay, stand in front of a urinal. A few beer bottles are perched on the ledge that rests at arm height. The man in the centre turns to acknowledge him - the shot pans from the men at the urinals to the artist again as the men acknowledge each other. In the next scene, two men stand over him and urinate on him. Nemerofsky Ramsay bends over, kneels, crouches and lies on his back, as his face and body are urinated on. Following this ‘baptism,’ the artist turns back, smiles broadly, and salutes the men as he walks out through the doorway. He rushes to a washroom sink and removes everything except his white briefs.

In the next moment, the artist whips out a travel-sized hairdryer and begins drying his pants. The careful tending to his soiled clothes is unexpected and extremely funny. With his pants dry, he rushes back out on to the dance floor, still buttoning up his pants on the way. His shirt, now bedazzled with yellow sequins, catches the light as he dances with renewed vigour. No longer bored, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay dances enthusiastically with his arms in the air.

In contrast to the artist's earlier videos *I am a Boyband* and *Audition Tape*, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's *Uropop* does not illustrate him 'trying on' other behaviours nor does he plead for acceptance. *Uropop* illustrates the artist "honour[ing] all the parts of himself that he felt had been abused and stigmatized,"²⁵³ and the experience leaves him feeling rejuvenated. Nemerofsky Ramsay's previous lacklustre expression and uninspired dance moves are replaced with a broad smile and energetic dancing. Thus, the video may be interpreted as functioning as a fictional resolution to the artist's quest for a gendered identity. However, while the video may serve this cathartic purpose, it is not clear. Unlike Nemerofsky Ramsay's previous body of work, this video does not include any singing, commentary, or subtitled song lyrics to guide the viewer's understanding. While his objective is ultimately ambiguous, the artist continues to balance confronting his viewers with explicit queer images by making them laugh.

Between *Uropop* and *The Same Problem*, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay created *Jimmy*, (2007), an embroidered flag and performance in Winnipeg in honour of Jimmy Somerville, *I Remember You This Way* (2008), a map project that formed part of

²⁵³ Hoolboom, 89-90

Toronto's Inside out Festival, and *You and Me Together Fighting For Our Love*, (ongoing since 2007), a body of work venerating Jimmy Somerville.

However, the artist did not stray from musical performances for long. In 2008, Pride Toronto commissioned the video, *The Same Problem*, for *Video Art is Queer 2008*, a program curated by Sharon Switzer. Two versions of *The Same Problem* exist; after the Pride Toronto screening, Nemerofsky Ramsay and Aleesa Cohene revisited the video and created a second version with (rerecorded) improved vocals.²⁵⁴

The Same Problem

The origin of *The Same Problem* dates back to Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's 2004 video *Lyric*. The artist had initially wanted to include a wordless theme, where he would string together the wordless 'oohs' and 'ahhs' from pop songs, but ultimately left it out. The desire to make a wordless vocal work lingered with him and came to fruition with the creation of this video.

The Same Problem begins with a male voiceover, and corresponding text, declaring: "Every time he woke up, it was the same problem." A lone figure (Nemerofsky Ramsay) engages in a call-and-response dialogue with the body of water he stands in front of. The artist calls out wordless phrases that are recognizable fragments from pop songs. Following each 'ooh' and 'ahh,' the figure sings, the ocean in turn responds. The ocean's response repeats Nemerofsky Ramsay's voice yet is more refined and beautiful. The wordless phrases, appropriated from songs like Billy Joel's "Uptown Girl" and Elton John's "Yellow Brick Road," are almost unrecognizable when echoed by the ocean. The

²⁵⁴ Author's interview with the artist, November 23, 2009.

ocean digests the artist's voice, processes it then returns it as a layered, choral-like harmony. The call-and-response progressively escalates; as the figure becomes more agitated, so does the ocean. At the climax, the figure is virtually howling at the ocean and the violent waves crash dramatically. The appropriated film footage of the stormy ocean is compiled from multiple film sources and fills the screen entirely, overwhelming the viewer. It is unclear whether it is the figure's calls that conjured the storm or whether the storm is a figment of his imagination. As the video ends, both the figure and viewers are uncertain as to what they have witnessed.

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay describes his collaboration with long-time friend and Toronto artist Aleesa Cohene as being equal as a mutual consensus was reached for each decision. When asked about the meaning and intention of the work however, the artist states that he can only speak for himself. While the video is very much a partnership, Nemerofsky Ramsay claims that he and Cohene have apparently never directly discussed the meaning of the video, and as a result, their interpretations of it may be very different.²⁵⁵

The narrative is mysterious; the video invites its viewers to consider what the problem is, why the figure is calling out and who is answering. When asked directly, "What *is* the problem?" Nemerofsky Ramsay does not have a clear answer. While he intends for the problem to be perceived as existential, he admits that part of his personal problem is that popular music is his default. He states that "Every time I open my mouth Billy Joel comes out." In other words, Nemerofsky Ramsay takes issue with his inability to leave popular music behind. Even after making a concerted effort to move past his

²⁵⁵ Author's interview with the artist, November 24, 2009

reliance on pop lyrics with some of his text based works, pop songs are still the artist's default as he is unable to find his voice.

In an interview with the artist, he described the lack of words as “liberating.”²⁵⁶ Nemerofsky Ramsay describes *The Same Problem* as a bridge between his previous videos and his current work. While he explains that the inspiration and emphasis of his previous body of work was the pop song lyrics, he is keen on creating future wordless vocal art. The artist refers to *The Same Problem* as a living, evolving piece and is currently working on a sequel with Cohene in addition to other wordless vocal works.

While early video artists like Colin Campbell were censored for their portrayal of sexualized content, artists now face new censorship challenges. It is noteworthy that while *The Same Problem* was screened at the Gladstone House as part of the Toronto Pride festivities, that was not its original purpose. The video was supposed to be screened at Pride on a large screen downtown but their work, along with half of the other videos that were commissioned for the main event, were left out. According to Nemerofsky Ramsay, the organizer's fears and unfamiliarity with customary practices of contemporary video art raised copyright concerns. As *The Same Problem* included appropriated images, the organizers were concerned with copyright laws and possible legal repercussions.

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's videos, *Lyric*, *Patriotic*, and *Uropop* bring to light issues of restrictive and clichéd hetero-normative dialogue in popular music (which is reflective of the greater contemporary society,) war, and a lack of queer social

²⁵⁶ Author's interview with the artist, November 24, 2009

representation. As I have illustrated in my visual analyses, however, the artist's strategic infusion of Camp humour facilitate viewer engagement, rather than alienation.

While Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay still employs humour as a tool to facilitate his challenges to institutionalized norms, this chapter reveals the artist's growth. He is not complacent; he now performs live at exhibition openings and video screenings. He travels extensively, collaborates, creates longer and more involved works and perhaps most importantly, displays a heightened sense of self-reflexivity.

Conclusion

While I believe it is the artist's repeated appropriation of music and musical forms that distinguishes him from his predecessors, there has not been an in depth study of this aspect to date. Answering the questions, what compels Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay to confront his viewers using music and music forms? And, why is pop music his 'default'? are key to fully understanding and appreciating Nemerofsky Ramsay's artistic practice. I deepen my analysis of the artist's video art by examining the connection between music, desire and fantasy as put forth in Sheila Whiteley's essay, "Popular Music and the Dynamics of Desire." Using Whiteley's theories, I argue that the artist's ability to safely engage in taboo performance codes by singing along with pop music lyrics in his youth may explain his strong connection to music and musical forms.

I believe Nemerofsky Ramsay appropriates popular music and musical forms for several reasons. Unlike jazz, opera, or Broadway show tunes, popular music is typically more accessible to youth. It is not surprising that the artist connected emotionally to the popular music as a teenager; he grew up listening to and watching music videos of bands like Depeche Mode, The Smiths, Erasure, and the Pet Shop Boys who were either enclosed within a glass closet or embodied a gay aesthetic.

There remains a question of reception; humour functions as a code disrupter in Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's works of art, but who are the decoders? Throughout this thesis, I argue that Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay challenges the "mainstream." Nemerofsky Ramsay's videos, however, are screened in mainstream venues including artist run centres, galleries, and festivals. For example, the video *I am a Boyband* has been aired

extensively on both European and Japanese television stations. It appeared on KunstKanaal in the Netherlands and the cultural television channel Arte, available in Germany and France. According to the artist, *I am a Boyband* aired weekly on Arte for two years.²⁵⁷ Despite being shown on television, Nemerofsky Ramsay's video art is still somewhat limited to art audiences. While this may be perceived as 'preaching to the choir,' so to speak, as he criticizes pop culture from within the white walls of a gallery, I believe that even art audiences may benefit from Nemerofsky Ramsay's commentary upon the restrictive nature of traditional gender roles, lack of queer representation in the mainstream and the destructive effects of homophobia. While positive representations of queer people are becoming increasingly more common in mainstream formats, homosexuality is still far from being universally accepted.

There are many possibilities for future research. Because of the limited scale of a Master's thesis, I focused my art historical contextualization almost exclusively on Canadian video artists. However, the artist spends a great deal of time abroad and therefore it would be worthwhile to compare his body of work to European artists as well. In addition, a closer investigation into the reception of his work, including feedback from his viewers, would greatly enrich a reading of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's video art.

While I argue that the artist employs Camp humour, and therefore possesses a degree of critical distance, multiple and sometimes contradictory readings of Nemerofsky Ramsay's videos as both earnest and contrived are possible. A tension exists within Nemerofsky Ramsay's video art: are his performances displays of pure emotion or of contrived sentimentality? Ultimately, I believe the artist is a master manipulator; he is

²⁵⁷ Email correspondence with the Author, May 21, 2010.

greatly skilled at engaging his viewers and pulling upon their heartstrings. However, I believe that the emotions driving the works of art are sincere; I do not doubt the misery he experienced after a failed relationship nor the fear and isolation he suffered as a queer youth.

Professor Georges Claude Guilbert's assertion that "To practice Camp is ... to turn hilarious bitchiness into an art form" does a disservice to Camp's serious didactic potential.²⁵⁸ The subversive and queer-specific humour that saturates Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay's video art practice embodies Moe Meyer's politically charged "capital C" definition of Camp. Through my visual analyses, I illustrate how the artist's videos function as oppositional critiques as he confronts viewers with issues relating to gendered identity, homophobia, restrictive heterosexual institutional quos, and a lack of queer representation in the mainstream. By weaving Camp humour into his works of art, Nemerofsky Ramsay deftly avoids alienating his viewers with a heavy-handed approach. Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay attracts, relaxes, and engages his audience while simultaneously educating them about societal issues or the harsh realities faced by members of the queer community. In other words, his use of comedy functions as both "a carrot and a stick."²⁵⁹ Whether it is a criticism of George W. Bush's war on terrorism in *Patriotic*, gender's performative nature in *I am a Boyband*, or the perpetual scrutiny faced by members of the queer community in *Live to Tell*, the artist reaches a balance between

²⁵⁸ Georges Claude Guilbert, *Madonna as Postmodern Myth: How One Start's Self-construction Rewrites Sex, Gender, Hollywood, and the American Dream*, (Jefferson, N.C. : McFarland & Co., 2002), 123.

²⁵⁹ Iain Ellis, *Rebels Wit Attitude: Subversive Rock Humorists*, (Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press, 2008), 1.

humour and hostility. Ultimately, Nemerofsky Ramsay reveals that “a joke’s a very serious thing.”²⁶⁰

²⁶⁰ Charles Churchill, “The Ghost,” In *The Poetical Works of Charles Churchill – Volume Two*, edited by W. Tooke. (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1854), BookIV, line 1379.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



FIGURE 1.1
Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, *I am a Boyband* (2002)
Video Still



FIGURE 1.2
Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, *I am a Boyband* (2002)
Video Still



FIGURE 1.3
Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, *I am a Boyband* (2002)
Video Still



FIGURE 2
Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, *Lyric* (2004)
Video Still



FIGURE 3
Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, *Je Changerais d'Avis* (2000)
Video Still



FIGURE 4
Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, *Audition Tape* (2003)
Video Still

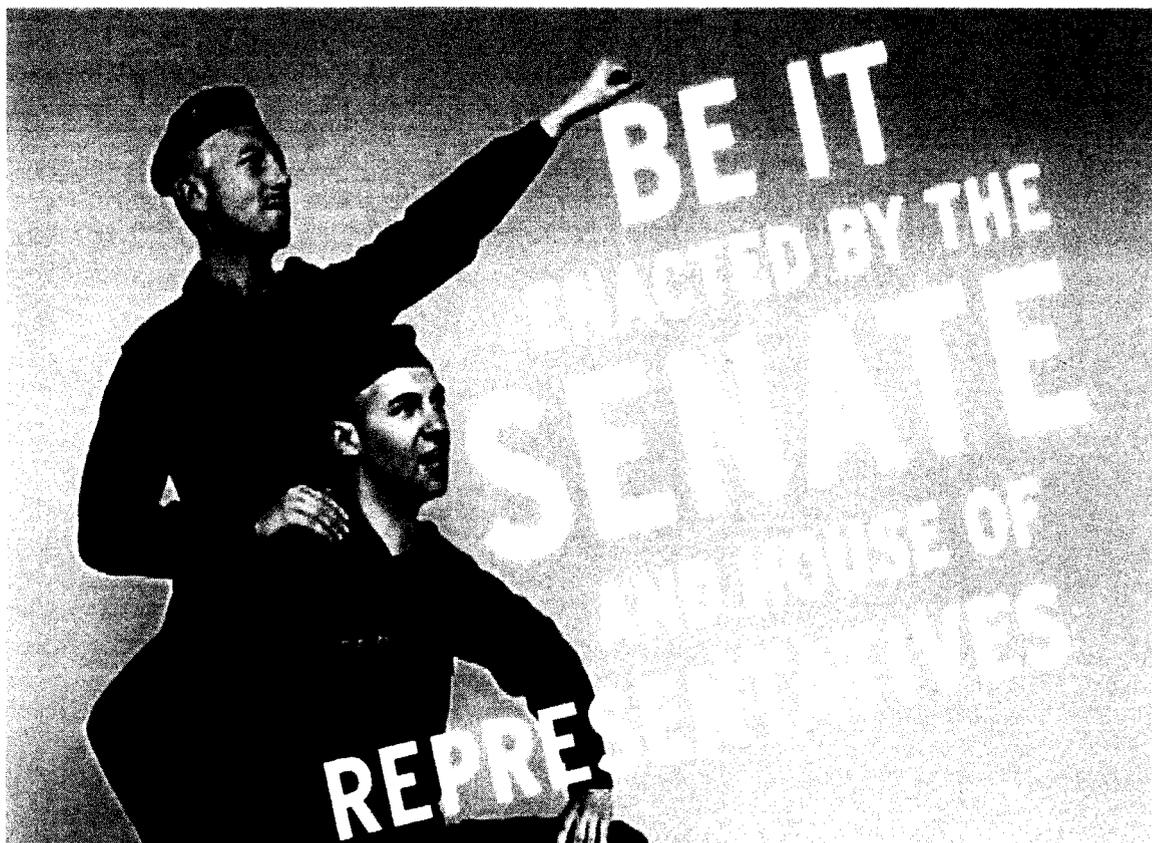


FIGURE 5
Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, *Patriotic* (2005)
Video Still