

The Observed Observer. David Bowie's Dandy Poses

Marie-Isabelle Engels maen0000@uni-saarland.de

Which celebrity? /Project Sketch

David Bowie

- as a dandy figure/ glam or glitter rock artist
- Relevance to Cultural Studies: Rock musicianship as a staple of popular culture linked to historical background and contemporary interpretations of the dandy
- Intersectional theoretical approach: Gender/Class/Authenticity or Identity aspects
- Key concepts: Aestheticism/Individuality/Camp/Ambivalence

These are important contexts / the pictures I analysed

<https://www.elle.fr/Loisirs/Musique/Dossiers/David-Bowie-de-Ziggy-au-Dandy-le-roi-du-style-c-est-lui>

You can see pictures of David Bowie in various garb

<https://stae.com/Artists/Mick-Rock/David-Bowie-and-Mick-Ronson-Guitar-Fellatio-1972>

The so-called "Guitar fellatio" photograph

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VudyGkGWDIc>

[A 1977 interview of David Bowie](#)

This is yet another important quote!
„In 1971 there were few, if any, openly gay rock stars“ (Pat Gilbert p. 73)
„The best leader they can possibly have is the one that looks back at them from the mirror.“ (David Bowie on people needing leaders, 1977 interview)

Here are some more findings and my conclusion!

- David Bowie's role and merits in gender and aesthetics discourse have been assessed controversially: He is seen as empowering and liberating for fans and art „consumers“, as the epitome of counter-culture aesthetics and practices (cf. Redmond p. 257, 303, 316) as well as dependent on capitalist/consumerist mechanisms (cf. Redmond p. 316, Erbe p. 241, 244)
- David Bowie's characterisation as vanguard artist has been questioned: Gender discourse is said to have been emancipatory already when Bowie used it to his own ends (cf. Erbe p. 243); to others he was a true originator of a new genre (cf. Gilbert p.46) with daring public sexuality displays (cf. Gilbert p. 70, 73, 77f.)
- So ambivalence can be traced not only within the alleged position of dandy figures towards society and within ambiguous gender representations in glam/glitter rock. David Bowie's evaluation as an artist and his impact is also ambivalent.

This is another important quote!
“Camp taste is by its nature possible only in affluent societies...” (Sontag p.272)
“I don't see what I do in terms of power. I think I'm a fairly good social observer.” (David Bowie, 1977 interview)

These are my findings...

- George Bryan „Beau“ Brummell (07.06.1778-30.03.1840): Emphasis on visual simplicity
- Dandies are detached from society and aesthetically self-styled. Emphasis on outward appearance is complemented by sharp intellect and brilliant, often sarcastic, wit
- Dandies are exempt from work
- The modern dandy: Mass culture and its commercial machinery do not fully allow for independence; Camp as a solution (cf. Sontag 2013, p.271)
- Camp surfaced as a pre-eminently homosexual expression in the 1960s and 70s. It has been interpreted as apolitical with a focus on artifice, the theatrical and exaggeration. The androgynous element of Camp questioned gender interpretations.
- Glam/ glitter rock as a counter-movement to 1960s youth revolt and its authenticity values. Instead, glam/glitter artists played on the active formation of gender identity as a social construct (cf. Olds p. 26)
- David Bowie obviously helped shaping fans' identity (cf. Redmond p. 248ff) but denied his own power vehemently in the 1977 interview

This is an important quote!

„Bowie praktiziert den Dandyismus bewusst als Zitat.“ (Tietenberg p. 477)

Here is what I analysed

- The dandy in history
- The modern dandy
- Camp and the construction of gender identities
- Fan identity building and how celebrities might see this
- Glam/glitter rock and gender ambiguity
- The artistic individual and their identity in a capitalist world
- Some iconic examples of David Bowie's self-stylizations and stage personae

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