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Elizabeth Bernholz's Gazelle Twin: Disguise, Persona and Jesterism

Introduction

The proliferation of low-cost, high quality digital and audiovisual production and distribution systems over the last two decades has allowed a range of solo performers and ensembles to develop repertoires, release recordings and perform in non-traditional contexts. While often difficult (see Farrugia and Olszanowski; Jóri), the ability to gain traction at the fringes of the (still) highly male-dominated music industry by using these technologies has provided opportunities for female artists such as Grimes (Claire Boucher) and FKA Twigs, whose work has been commercially successful and critically acknowledged. While not yet as well-known as the previous performers, Elizabeth Bernholz (née Walling), who uses the professional alias/persona Gazelle Twin, has carved out a distinct niche for herself over the last decade. Over a series of albums and videos produced since 2010 Bernholz has explored various aspects of identity, persona and disguise and, particularly in recent years, in the run-up to and aftermath of Brexit, concepts of English heritage and identity explored by adopting the role and appearance of a twenty-first-century jester.

Writing about an artist as strongly identified with and invested in her creative persona as Bernholz involves a complex negotiation and switching between the performer's own perception of herself, her perception and representation of her creative personae (which have undergone various transitions) and critical responses to her work, which often blur, combine and/or confound these. In this regard, the complex identity roles and switches are as much a part of the creative entity known as Gazelle Twin (henceforth GT) as they are explanatory factors behind it. As subsequent

sections will elaborate, our specification of these aspects is directly relevant to the identity gaming and deployment of a creative persona central to her oeuvre and career.[1]

In order to analyze the development of GT's personae it is necessary to consider the concept of persona in socio-cultural discourses. Broadly speaking, personae are performed entities. They manifest as aspects of pre-constituted personalities that are selectively presented in social, public and/or media contexts and/or as characters adopted to perform in such contexts. Credibility is an important issue in professional contexts. As Lee has asserted:

> [T]he legitimation of our labour depends a great deal on the persona perceived to perform it. It is not sufficient to simply do work and/or do it well, but its cultural, economic, and political value is shaped by the identity that performs it. (Lee 2)

To give one example, a wooden cabinet produced by a renowned craftsperson is likely to be acknowledged and valued more than an identical artefact produced by an unknown amateur. This is an important emphasis with regard to cultural production, as the cross-association of credibility and critical attention and expectation often influences perceptions of the quality and appeal of cultural material. For instance, in 1969 John Lennon and Yoko Ono recorded a group of experimental tracks that were released as *The Wedding Album*. Review copies were sent out on with the recordings on the A sides and a single continuous test tone on the B. Knowing the couple's serious interest in musical avant-gardism, Richard Williams, a senior journalist at the UK's esteemed British weekly music publication *Melody Maker*, erroneously reviewed the B sides and commented favorably on the tone's sustained minimalist appeal and the creative possibilities it suggested (Williams). Showing typical humor, Lennon responded by telegramming Williams to say that he and Yoko appreciated the review (Calkin).

Critical work on musical performers and their personae has developed significantly over the last decade (see, for instance, Auslander) and has identified performance styles, visual appearance, performance in media interviews and representation in audio-visual media texts as crucial elements. Musical persona is obviously a key element in creative identity and is determined by various aspects of compositional and/or performative competence and often (but not necessarily) originality. The introduction to a themed issue of the journal *Persona Studies* on music and persona (vol. 5, no. 1) reflected this by commenting that the "mutability" of the concept of persona "is no more prominently displayed that in its intersection and

[1] This chapter draws on both previously published interviews with Bernholz (which are individually referenced), an interview conducted with the authors in November 2021 and subsequent email correspondence.

integration into music and musical culture" (Fairchild and Marshall 1). Unsurprisingly, studies of personae in popular music have concentrated on prominent stars, Stefani Germanotta's invention and manipulation of her Lady Gaga persona being perhaps the most obvious example (Deflem). In this manner such research intersects with the parallel field of celebrity studies and, perhaps understandably, in this context, has largely bypassed the persona-building strategies of less prominent artists.[2] With regard to singers, vocal performance and the distinct "grain" of an individual's voice have long been seen as expressions of musicians' characters and accomplishments and, hence their personae (Frith 187–97). In these regards, technical manipulation of vocal style and performance, such as that pioneered by Annette Peacock in the 1970s (Doran), can be seen to have opened up a wide range of options for female performers working in the avant-garde. As discussed in subsequent sections, vocal manipulation is a signature element of GT's work, allowing her multiple expressive voices that are nestled within a richly technologized sound world in which conventional analogue instruments play a minimal role.

Born in Canterbury, in the south-eastern English county of Kent, in 1981, Elizabeth Bernholz studied music at the University of Sussex, in Brighton, graduating in 2006, and currently resides in rural Leicestershire, in the English Midlands, with her partner and two young children. Despite her professional career as a composer/performer working in the avant-garde fringe of electronic popular music, she has revealed that she was not deeply immersed in contemporary music styles during her studies and immediate post-graduate phase. She came to the genre after experiencing difficulties gaining remunerated employment and network connections as a young, female composer and a related sense of being thwarted in developing her creative skills. As a result, she shifted focus, moving both to more improvisatory forms of performance and composition and to incorporating her voice as a key element within these.

Bernholz has emphasized that a key aspect of her entry into the contemporary music scene was her discovery of the power of assuming a costumed performance personae. Identifying the "irksome" pressure of expectation to "look, dress, behave in a certain way" as a young female performer (Hayward), she has detailed how experimenting with costume options allowed her "to layer themes and symbols and meanings that were embedded in the music" (ibid.) and also energized her:

> [I]t felt as if suddenly I was able to come alive a little bit more . . . I felt like I just sucked the power in and it was something really transformative and amazing . . . the

[2] Many lesser-known artists (such as Chris Sievey, Natasha Khan and Dominic Harrison) have also engaged in complex creations of personae that merit detailed study.

> adrenaline pumps, and that eggs you on to push yourself. I remember when I first really got into doing the *Unflesh* show, I started to move in a completely different way and I developed these movements . . . none of them were choreographed. They just came, they just erupted . . . It was like allowing myself to be possessed but by an altered, concentrated version of myself. (Stasis)

These are striking reflections on the enablement and activation of creative energies through a constructed entity that extends and animates the abilities of an individual in ways that did not seem possible prior to their exploration. The GT name is a significant element of this. It initially arose through trying various anagrams of her actual (then) name (i.e. Elizabeth Walling). These suggested a further name, Gazelle Twin, that gained resonance through her fondness for the traditional Jewish/Old Testament canticle known variously as the The Song of Solomon or The Song of Songs, which comprises love lyrics alternated between male and female characters. The canticle includes a passage in which a male compares his beloved's breasts to "two fawns, twins of a gazelle" before entreating her to accompany him to the countryside and spend a night of bucolic bliss with him. Bernholz has described this section as having a particular "resonant meaning" for her, providing a "delicate and cryptic image" that she adopted in an attempt to "always to have a name under which the identity and direction of the project could be free to change and hopefully surpass fashion and trends" (Metamatic). Discussing similar issues of personal and professional naming with regard to Stefani Germanotta, known professionally as Lady Gaga, Deflem has characterized her adoption of the stage name as an early career attempt at "impression management" (43) by creating a highly flexible "parafictional persona" (Warren). While at very different ends of the celebrity spectrum, GT and Lady Gaga illustrate the flexibility that invented personae can deliver, particularly for female performers wishing to go beyond the role of conventionally attractive and fashionably attired (hetero)sexualized front women.

The Entire City

The first creative work credited to GT was the album *The Entire City*, released on the artist's Anti-Ghost Moon Ray label in 2011.[3] The album and its accompanying videos represent GT as an enigmatic and somewhat

[3] An album of remixes of the tracks (entitled *The Entire City Remixed*) followed in June 2012, available as a digital download through the Anti-Moon Ghost Ray website.

esoteric presence. The album cover, for instance, eschews representing the artist and, instead, works in association with the album's title to suggest a simultaneously futuristic and decaying metropolis. The album was named after a group of eponymous Max Ernst paintings from 1934–37 and the album cover featured Susan Moxhay's painting *Athne*, showing a partially submerged city with encroaching vegetation. The album's musical textures encompass a wide array of synthesized percussive sounds, thick synth bass and airy and affected vocal passages that provide a rich close-listening experience. In terms of the overall mix, the vocal parts are somewhat submerged within the arrangements, giving a "horizontal" aural perspective. Establishing her trademark musical sophistication, most tracks are in minor keys and harmonic complexity is evident; notably, the Phrygian mode used for "Men Like Gods," the chromatic chord movement in "Bell Tower" and the use of a Lydian scale in "Nest." Complexity is also evident in the use of a variety of time signatures, such as on the title track "The Entire City" (in 5/4) and "When I Was Otherwise" (in 6/4).

The videos made for tracks on *The Entire City* (all directed by Bernholz) provide filaments that suggest an artistic persona in the process of emergence. The "I Am Shell I Am Bone" video, for instance, provides a visual accompaniment to a song featuring a delay and reverb laden vocal melody over a repeated synth bass pattern underpinned by a mid-tempo (100bpm) bass drum rhythm that develops into a constant 1/16th note rhythmic pattern in the chorus. The video comprises blurred, indistinct, ghostly, humanish shapes and trailing strands of matter, geometrically processed and crossed with images of fish, jellyfish and rays and blurry sequences exploring a seafloor wreck. GT's face emerges in the final third of the track. The overall impression is of a murky, displaced, metaphoric realm in which the vocal protagonist has "no tongue" and "no choice," as specified in the lyrics. The video for "Changelings" reveals one of the first versions of GT's costumed personae one third of the way in, when ambiguous black and white textural images of smoke give way to, first, brief shots of the performer's face, with dark tears streaking down, and then a close-up showing a long fabric fringe covering her eyes and nose and emphasizing her mouth as she intones lyrics about seeing the "end of the world." The image flickers through various distortions of her face and alternates between these and smoky textures for the remainder of the video. The lead vocal has a thin, whispered quality that suggests intimacy; the video's imagery reflects this, and vulnerability is evident in lyrics such as "I'm waiting lonely like a shadow in the night sky" (a dark-on-dark image) with a bleak reference to watching "you"—"all you cheaters and liars."'

The third track to have a video made for it, "Men Like Gods," is distinct by virtue of its lilting feel and its incorporation of a Phrygian harmonic

palette with an elongated chord pattern. The song's lyrics and the video's imagery are also notable for presaging Bernholz's later subversive pastoralism and role-playing with lyrics that characterize her as "a demon running wild" and for evoking pagan/horror fiction imagery in the verse:

> Now I'm collecting your souls tonight
> A million fires before your harvest comes
> To burn out, wear the mask of a heathen
> For the moon's lonely eyes, they see, they see

Bernholz has described the lyrics and musical feel of the song as inspired by the annual Mamothones ritual conducted in the village of Mamoiada in Sardinia.[4] This event involves ordinary villagers transforming themselves into extraordinary masked figures with bells clustered like barnacles on their backs and parading through the streets before burning a large effigy. Intrigued by reports of the event, she travelled to witness it and subsequently described it as "the most bizarre and unsettling thing [she has] ever experienced" (Camarretta). The "Men Like Gods" video includes processed footage of the ritual combined with images of GT in costume, imitating aspects of the pose and movements of the participants together with close-ups of her eyes and lip-synched mouth miming the vocals. The video also debuts a costume used extensively in her later work, with the artist fully masked and wearing a large, jester-like neck ruff in one sequence.

Unflesh

Following the release of a seven track EP in 2013 entitled *Mammal*, in *Unflesh* (2014)[5] Bernholz's GT persona developed in a more confident, unsettling and confrontational manner. Unlike the decaying cityscape featured on the cover of her debut release, *Unflesh* featured an image that evoked the menacing nature of young (usually) men in hoodies, associated with bleak housing estates and gang violence in the UK[6] and took it into the sphere of visceral body horror by showing a literally un-fleshed face

[4] See Iorio and Wall for discussion.

[5] An album of remixes of the tracks (entitled *Fleshed Out*) followed in July 2016, available as a digital download through the Anti-Moon Ghost Ray website.

[6] See Stephenson for discussion of the so-called "hoodie horror" cycle of films initiated with James Watkins's 2008 feature *Eden Lake*.

within a hood, with cartilage visible like a carcass in an abattoir (Fig. 1). The film's horror-movie-esque cover image was complemented by music tracks that recall John Carpenter's stark and spare synthesizer scores for films such as *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976) and the darker, rockier *Ghosts of Mars* (2001).

Fig. 1. Image of the GT persona used in promotion of the *Unflesh* album and its related tour, 2014. Courtesy of Gazelle Twin

The album and its music videos explore aspects of bodily anxiety and trauma but avoid using a personal, intimate voice—as other performers have done when exploring similarly intense material, such as Tori Amos on her *Boys for Pele* album (1996), or Lingua Ignota on *Caligula* (2019). Instead GT's persona is musically developed through various sonic manipulations that led one reviewer to characterize her as a "cyborg singer"

> taking on her inner demons in a claustrophobic digital world of skittering beats and synths, her own voice on top more often than not twisted unrecognisably into that of a demonic robot. From the stomach churning cry that opens the album to its final stammering squeal, it's a genderless creature we hear contorting itself throughout the album's convoluted, maze-like songs—hacking its own DNA in search of a very personal corporeal truth. (Bath)

The punningly titled "Anti Body" exemplifies these aspects, comprising an extended recollection of youthful anxiety and suicidal impulses occasioned by body dysmorphia. Bernholz has described this song as

"particularly autobiographical" and reflects that while she emerged from her adolescent trauma, it still resonates; "I'm still a female in a world that's fucking hard to deal with when you're trying to be honest and natural" (Monroe). The track is assertive, beginning with a distorted metallic percussion hit that gives way to a repetitive kick drum pattern that is then doubled by the monotone chant-like delivery of the verse. The chorus contains an upbeat hi-hat and sparser vocal rhythm that gives a mild funk flavor—elements that are contrasted by ghostly vocal wails and the distorted power chords that feature at the conclusion. The accompanying video (directed by Chris Turner) opens with a swaying overhead lamp, and is dark and claustrophobic, shot in a drab corridor and washroom and centering on various versions of GT's face as she lip-synchs and moves to the track's rhythms. GT's face and upper body, clad in a blue hoodie, is exposed in shifting patterns of shadow and light and undergoes various transitions, from a child's face to the performer's (covered in fabric with only her mouth exposed) to that of an older woman, with occasional inserts such as scattering cockroaches and handfuls of pills. The use of dramatic light and shadow, back-lighting and occasional images, such as her apparently levitating in a changing room, create a strong horror feel for the clip, which further emphasizes the song's lyrical themes and their sparse accompaniment.

"Exorcise" develops a different type of intensity with its 140bpm 4/4 time rhythm driven by a constant 1/16th note cycling arpeggiated synthesizer figure. Percussive elements build while breaths and gasps are used as devices that either punctuate the lyrical phrases or as part of dense and distorted repeating patterns. The song's video (also directed by Chris Turner) recalls scenes and images from David Lynch's 1990 TV series *Twin Peaks* and features three similar, blue-hooded figures working through exercise routines (punning on the track's title) in increasingly animated ways until an elegant but menacing young male arrives. He tries to strangle one (or more) of the "GTs," apparently successfully, until a final image shows a besuited female figure emerging from the conflict. The music video for "Guts" is similarly disconcerting. The track features a multilayered vocal part alternating between high register, childlike/anxious nonsensical utterances and semi-spoken lyrics with prominent low register parts underpinned by a repeating two bar kick drum pattern. The form of the track involves stark changes of texture and juxtaposition of disparate musical elements. The accompanying video (directed by Esther Springett) is similarly tense, set in the cramped, claustrophobic space of a car that's going through an automated car wash, with images of the blue-hooded GT ambiguously trapped or playing in the confined space.

GT's exploration of female feelings and fears on the album prompted a woman posting on the Bandcamp website to make the notable characterization that the album presented a "disturbed and disturbing set of songs about being a woman in the most squamous, gibbering, throbbing way possible" (Levikron). The intensity of the album's personal, psychological/body horror-themed songs and videos was also complemented by "Belly of the Beast," a track addressing the topic of animal exploitation. The song offers a fantasy of revenge, with an ambiguity as to whether the lyrics, featuring lines such as "I'll beat them at their own game," are enunciated by GT as a human or as an animal. It opens with sampled supermarket till bleeps followed by a repeating one bar synthesizer bass and kick drum part that plays a familiar 3+3+2 rhythmic pattern at a fast tempo (165bpm). The synth bass part continues for most of the track with filtering and distortion added to build peaks and troughs in the arrangement. The video represents the theme by contrasting images of a blue-hooded individual roaming supermarket aisles and a cattle barn with a footage of supermarket shelves swaying and spilling goods as the metaphorical foundation of animal farming is shaken to the core.

Enter the Jester: Undermining English Mythology

Having debuted GT as a subtle, allusive agent on *The Entire City* and transformed her into an icon of visceral, alienated femininity on *Unflesh*, Bernholz switched from a personal-political to a national-political focus. Her first foray into this arena occurred in 2017, when she wrote a musical adaptation of J. G. Ballard's 2006 novel *Kingdom Come*—a dystopic vision of a future London dominated by consumerism—for two vocalists and digital accompaniment. The work was released as a seven track EP and was performed at several UK arts festivals.[7] The project addressed the social upheaval, decay and partisan ugliness that typified early twenty-first-century British culture. This focus also informed her next two projects, GT's

[7] The EP explores longer forms with four of the seven tracks lasting almost 6 minutes or more. "See How They Run," "I Consume Only" and "Hallowed" feature dense, metallic and reverberant drone-like synthesizer beds underneath mostly spoken word vocals. Repeating refrains, as used in GT's other works, are common, with lines such as "I took mine, I took mine, I took mine, I feel fine" (from "Metro") and "You can't reach me, you can't hurt me, I can suck you dry" (from "I Consume Only"). Industrial and mechanical rhythmic parts feature in "The Suburbs" and "Death Drive," while more syncopated rhythmic patterns underpin "Metro" and the first part of the relatively bouncy closing track "Cling Film."

following album, *Pastoral*, and her subsequent collaboration with the NYX Choir on the related *Deep England* project. These two albums engaged with myths and visions of quintessential (old) Englishness that had been activated in the 1990s in reaction to a rising tide of Scottish and, to a lesser extent, Welsh nationalism. Increasing separatist impulses produced a counter perception that Englishness had been submerged by Britishness and merited reassertion (see Featherstone). These sensibilities were evident in cultural forms such as neo-traditional folk music, in which Englishness became a resurgent identity (Keegan-Phipps and Winter). These developments were both related to and interactive with a marked increase in anti-European Union sentiment in England that led to the formation of the UKIP party in 1993[8] and the eventual success of the Leave campaign in the 2016 referendum on EU membership. This cultural patriotism was closely entwined with conservatism and xenophobia, most manifest towards immigrants and to the EU administration in Brussels. These impulses were identified by various creative practitioners who critiqued aspects of the jingoism and separatism rife in the period (see, for instance, Ghoshal; Guenot). Bernholz responded by reconfiguring her GT persona as a jester and by exploring jesterism as a critical strategy.

The jester is a well-known figure in English culture that originated in the Tudor period (Southworth). Jesters were (usually male) satirical commentators who acted as buffoons in order to make variously insightful, critical and/or generally provocative comments to the monarch.[9] The figure of the jester (at least as s/he is known today[10]) is commonly represented as having a cap (with single or multiple peaks, often adorned with bells), a bright, often asymmetrical, costume and carrying a scepter (known as a bauble or marotte). One of the most significant modern representations of the jester has been Punch, who appears in the enduring popular tradition of Punch and Judy puppetry. This emerged in the Restoration period as an anglicized version of the French *commedia dell'arte* tradition, with Punch's attire resembling that of the traditional court jester. In Punch and Judy puppetry Punch interacts with his long-suffering wife Judy, their baby and other characters and frequently enacts violence upon them. Until the late Victorian era, when the shows became more consciously targeted at audiences of children and families, the commentary and scenarios provided by puppeteers voicing Punch were often provocative and acerbic and the character's frequently extreme actions

[8] As a rebranding of the earlier Anti-Federalist League founded in 1991.

[9] See Carlyon for a cautionary note on the extent of jesters' ability to be critical/satirical of their royal patrons and members of their court.

[10] There is little information on what Tudor jesters may have worn.

were emphasized through his ironic catchphrase of "That's the way to do it." Punch is also known for having a distinct sonic character, his voice being produced by his puppeteer by using a metal-bound reed, known as a swazzle, that gives his vocal lines a rasping, kazoo-like quality. This voice serves to signal the parodic, inhuman otherness of the character in a manner that distances the spectator from the frequent violence and misogyny of his on-stage behavior.

Individuals dressed in cap-and-bell jester-style hats and/or related colorful clothing became a feature at rave (electronic dance music) events in the United Kingdom in the 1990s and 2000s and, while they did not strictly follow the orthodox jester dress code, figures such as The Prodigy front man Keith Flint were recognized as tapping into the tradition, with his obituary in the *New Statesman* stating:

> Known for his incendiary, grandparent-horrifying turn in the "Firestarter" video in 1996 and subsequently for a festival presence somewhere between a court jester and a mob orator, Keith was rave on legs. A capering monster of the id . . . he incarnated the most absurd and electrifying aspects of the dance music experience which overturned our social order and our ideas of ourselves in the 1980s and 1990s. (Harrison)

Bernholz has described her interpretation of these traditions in terms of creating a "non-gendered being that was like this strange mascot of English history and its strange symbolism and past and present sort of squished together, a freakish thing" (Hayward). Her jester persona first appeared in two tracks and accompanying videos released ahead of her 2018 *Pastoral* album: "Hobby Horse" and "Glory." The first song plays with the triple meanings of the term "hobby horse"—as a personal preoccupation; a costumed, folkloric figure with a horse-like head;[11] and a children's toy comprising a horse's head on a stick that can be held between the thighs while the child pretends to gallop. The song's refrain of "get on your hobby horse" is thereby ambiguous. The track is propelled by a one bar rhythmic pattern at a fast tempo (138bpm) in a 4/4 time signature played by a saturated electronic kick drum that is also the basis for the song's angrily chanted vocal hook. The sonic texture is very dense in the peak sections of the track with synthesized bass, high pitched bleeps, distorted guitar-like sounds and multiple vocal parts doubling the vocal call and drum rhythm.

[11] The song's lyrical reference to the hobby horse evokes comparison to the dual 'obby 'osses that feature in May Day parades in Padstow, in Cornwall, where they lead processioners and dancers through the town in a manner that grows increasingly anarchic as darkness falls. A similar figure is also glimpsed towards the climax of the British horror film *The Wicker Man* (1973, directed by Robin Hardy), referred to below with regard to the *Deep England* album. The song's use of recorder melodies and the video's combination of folkloric and horror imagery further suggests a connection between the song and the film.

A tremolo recorder sample and high-pitched synthesizer pad melody add the main melodic elements of the track. At 2:12, a breakdown section features sampled football crowd chanting. The busy rhythmical noise-based texture is reminiscent of hip hop composition techniques used by Public Enemy to convey a sense of urgency and political commentary. In the video for the track, and in later promotional imagery for the album, Bernholz appears in a distinctly modern twist on the pseudo-medieval jester, dressed in a white, jockey-style cap, red fabric face mask, white frilled collar, red Adidas sports outfit and red and white trainers (Fig. 2). In the first half of the video, she alternates "riding" a (mass-produced) red and white toy hobby horse, playing a recorder and lip-synching the song's lyrics in a forest (intercut with similar images against a white background). Around the halfway mark she enters a field and finds a miniature red and white tent. Going inside, she encounters what she describes as the "clichéd media figure" of the "toxic" angry white male prominent in the Brexit era (Hayward), lashing out at and attempting to tame him.

Fig. 2. GT as a modern jester. Publicity photo, 2018. Courtesy of Gazelle Twin

Expanding the social commentary of "Hobby Horse," the lyrics of the ironically titled "Glory" concern the unattainability of idealized visions of England (exemplified by William Blake's "Jerusalem," discussed further

below) and identify those who promote such visions as "spreading your disease," leading to the repetition of the fundamental question of modern English identity: "Who are you?" The track begins with a short, modified recorder melody over a shifting synthesizer pad and percussive footstep-like sounds. A sparse repeating mid-tempo (120bpm) four bar bass and drum pattern is then introduced that continues throughout the track, underpinning the strident melodic vocal delivery of the lyric:

> You won't see your old home again
> You won't see the old ancient
> You will tell yourself it will be ok
> You will take the liberty
> You will serve the holy sentence
> 'Til it transpires in your vision

The emphatic vocal style, the rising fifth motif in parts of the vocal melody and recorder sounds and the steady rhythmic pulse and swirling accompaniment give a sense of a "call to arms" amidst a chaotic situation.

The music video to "Glory" continues similar themes to "Hobby Horse," albeit in a more complex manner, and involves Bernholz in shifting roles. Opening in black and white in a woodland locale, the video introduces a knight in armor and cape adorned with the red Saint George's cross (in the manner of a crusader). The knight trudges along until he stops under a tree where, unbeknownst to him, GT's jester (clad in dark clothes and a three-pointed hat, with face exposed) waits above with a maliciously gleeful expression. The central section of the video shows the knight's weary collapse accompanied by the jester and by Bernholz dressed as a nun and as a maiden clad in white. This section ends with the knight apparently expiring and with the nun laying flowers by him before the maiden herself expires. After the closure of this cryptic narrative sequence (at around 3:50 into a 5:10 video), the screen switches to color (suggesting a shift from a period setting to a present-day one), showing a knight in closed visor armor in a dark studio space, before he incongruously reappears in a field adjacent to a modern town. He is then shown walking through night-time city streets before the image transitions to a young man walking into a supermarket. This switch to modernity contrasts the mythic medieval and the modern in a way that recalls the opening syntagmatic match-cut sequence of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's film *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), which similarly plays off the historical against the contemporary, albeit at an earlier historical moment when Englishness appeared threatened in other ways. The video's complex, cryptic imagery undercuts the historical potency of the crusader/knight imagery, with female stereotypes—the nun and the maiden—and GT's jester diffusing his power, appearing in short narrative scenarios.

The *Pastoral* album included both of the tracks discussed above and continued their imagery on a cover that parodied Deutsche Grammophon designs for albums of classical western art music[12] by featuring GT in red and white jester garb against a painted English pastoral landscape. The image is explained and expanded by the album track "Tea Room," a gentle yet dissonant and rhythmically stilted composition in which GT, implicitly representing an everyday Englander, expresses puzzlement and alienation from pastoral Englishness. This theme runs through the album and is expressed through two allied but distinct musical and lyrical strands: critical reflections on pastoralist mythology and the ideology underlying it and darker and more abrasive tracks that focus on decay, delusion and oppression.

The album's opening track, "Folly," sets the tone by asking wide questions regarding what species, century, atmosphere and government the GT persona is encountering in the present, with the vocal delivery alternating between a heavily processed robotic vocal sound and a reverberant solo operatic voice. The two vocal sounds could be understood to represent past and present, as does the unsettled accompaniment, which combines a warbling, recorder-like sample with subtle timpani. The next batch of tracks on the album—#2–8—explore dystopic elements of Englishness. Questions concerning time and politics asked in the album's opening track are answered in the following "Better in My Day," an uptempo (142bpm), 3/4 track driven by a repeating one-bar drum pattern. The multiple intonation of the track's title summarizes the view of an embittered individual lamenting the social decline perceived by the Brexit/UKIP movement and the constituency they represented and mobilized. The texture is thickened throughout, with the addition of drum fills, percussive hits, repeating short flute melodies, metallic synthesizer pads and percussive vocal exhortations signaling a relentless single-mindedness that builds into a frenzy, symbolizing embittered "Little Englander" perspectives and their underlying sensibilities.

Subsequent tracks contrast the bitter nostalgia of the vocal protagonist in "Better in My Day" with the actual state of English politics and society. In "Little Lambs," a combative and driving accompaniment underlies GT's vocal line which paints the inhabitants of the vocal protagonist's "little island" as "distracted" lambs in a manipulated "herd" being lured by the "fantastic lies" of Brexit and of conservatism more generally. "Dieu et mon droit"—a track named after the monarchical motto of the United Kingdom (meaning "God and my right") similarly contrasts the official discourse of the country to provincial decay, disillusion and poverty. The majority

[12] See Boruchowitch for an overview of these.

of the music sits in a shrill and metallic high register with a repeating six beat chord sequence providing a metronomic accompaniment. The vocal sound is heavily processed, with multiple layers providing a dense cluster that intensifies the lyrical message. "Throne" provides a further dark take on the monarchy's association with capitalism. Over a simple backing track, a short loop of a gritty harmonic sound fragment, GT assumes the persona of a malevolent entity that sits in a position of power and imposes debt and insolvency that are analogized as "wounds" and "pus" on the populace. "Mongrel" conveys similar sentiments through multiple looping sound fragments overlaid with a bouncy up-tempo (140bpm) electronic kick drum, hi hat and stick pattern.

The previously discussed "Glory," released as a "taster" for GT's new persona, is followed on the album by "Jerusalem," a collage inspired by (and incorporating elements of) Hubert Parry's musical setting of William Blake's four verse poem "And did those feet in ancient time" (1804). The first two verses of Blake's original poem reference aspects of the so-called (and entirely folkloric) "Glastonbury tradition" that postulated that Christ visited England before his crucifixion. The second verse ends by contrasting the bucolic paradise imagined around Glastonbury with the "dark Satanic mills" of the industrial revolution while verses three and four are essentially a call to arms to fight to (re-)establish a Christian paradise in England.

Blake's poem gained fresh currency in England in 1916, when conflict with Germany was intense; the composer Hubert Parry set the text to music so that it could be performed at rallies to raise funds for the patriotic Fight for Right Movement. Since then, it has frequently featured as a patriotic song, even being adopted as the anthem of the English cricket team in 2004, being played before home test matches and chanted by the team's supporters. Commenting on the discrepancy between Blake's particular utopian visions and the highly ideological nature of its co-option by nationalist political groups in the early twenty-first century, Whittaker has contended that the hymn now represents "a fallen Albion at war with itself, engaged in the bitterest of mental fights" (391). In accord with this contention, GT's track begins with a fragment of the hymn and then juxtaposes a thick, delayed synthesizer chord sequence with a recording of a phone conversation of someone reporting an abandoned car in their neighborhood. The incongruous juxtaposition of the two is underlined by intermittent distorted cackling sounds that invite comparison to the swazzle tones used by Punch and Judy puppeteers before the allusion becomes evident as the voice intones Punch's catch phrase "That's the way to do it." In this manner, the squeaky-voiced protagonist appears as a figure that parodies authority figures and their complacent manipulation of truth to secure power (as symbolized by the deployment of "Jerusalem" to signify power and patriotism).

Emphasizing the Blakean association, the following track, "Dance of the Peddlers," incorporates lines from Blake's poem "The Tyger" (1794) to undercut the popularist/jingoistic adoptions of Blake and Parry's "Jerusalem" and more general mythic pastoralism with questions about the unholy and profane nature of modern politics and capitalism. "Sunny Stories" continues the theme with a thin musical texture, with just vocal and multiple looping recorder samples played at different speeds, providing a relatively sonorous minor key accompaniment to the mostly pentatonic vocal melody. The song's lyric provides a simple scenario, declaring that GT could simply deliver comforting "sunny stories" but has chosen not to.[13]

Overall, the *Pastoral* album furthers GT's stylistic development by placing a new version of her persona amidst turbulent ideological issues. The wide range of musical textures, incorporating acoustic instrument samples, field recordings, looped sound fragments and electronic/synthesized sources, harks back to the richer textural elements of *The Entire City*. However, like *Unflesh*, *Pastoral* incorporates more pointed lyrical themes, and the starker minimalist accompaniments of the former are developed on *Pastoral* into a more cohesive intensity. While gender issues are not overtly signaled in the lyrics of *Pastoral*, the live tour promoting the album finished on an emphatic note with a performance of Ivor Cutler's short song "Women of the World Take Over," advocating that option as a means of averting social calamity.

Women in Collaboration: GT & the NYX Choir

The female "take over" referred to above was articulated in creative form in GT's subsequent collaboration with the female NYX Choir for a re-interpretation of the themes (and some compositions) from *Pastoral* in an album and associated performances entitled *Deep England*. NYX are a six-piece choir[14]

[13] The album concludes with a brief sampled sequence of a male singer singing two choruses and a verse from a version of the traditional ballad "Over the Hills and Far Away." The refrain, sung to a jaunty melody, features as what appears to be a gentle coda to the often intense lyrical and musical compositions on the album but the sting in its tale is that the "far away" in question is not an unfolding vista of pastoral Englishness but the battlefields of Europe during the Napoleonic Wars which Englishmen were dispatched to. The song, which exists in multiple versions, was popularized, in version written by English folk singer John Tams, in the TV series *Sharpe* (1993–97), relating the experiences of a British soldier in the Napoleonic Wars, which is the version sampled.

[14] A six-piece choir consisting of director Sian O'Gorman, Anna Clock, Ruth Corey, Cecilia Forssberg, Adelaide Pratoussy and Shireen Qureshi.

that performs and records with electronic music accompaniments that set vocals amidst different sonic textures and digital rhythms. *Deep England*'s title refers to the deep, ideologically conservative and xenophobic attachment to a "lost" supposedly idyllic England that was explored by historian Patrick Wright (1995, 1996) in discussions that presaged the development of the Brexit campaign. The album comprised re-workings of material from *Pastoral* ("Better in My Day," "Folly," "Glory" and "Throne"), the related title track "Deep England";[15] versions of Blake and Parry's "Jerusalem" and the song fragment "Fire Leap" (from the soundtrack to *The Wicker Man*, 1973); together with a new composition, "Golden Dawn" (written by NYX director Sian O'Gorman). In her collaboration with NYX, Bernholz features as a singer within the choir rather than by being backed by them, and the GT persona established in her earlier output similarly features as an element within the choir's ensemble identity.

Musically, the reinterpretations of the *Pastoral* tracks maintain the main vocal parts and some of the prominent instrumental and percussive elements of previous recordings, albeit without the distinctive, harder electronic and obvious looped and sampled qualities of the originals. Vocal effects are achieved both acoustically (e.g., multiple vocal harmonies in "Folly" replicating the vocal harmonizer effects on the *Pastoral* version) and with electronic processing. GT's initial version of the album's title track featured a shifting low pitched synthesizer drone supporting two vocal verses, one spoken word, the second a strident rising melodic phrase enriched by swirling synthesizer textures, whereas NYX's version offers an elongated interpretation of the original, with the choir and additional processing providing a timbral richness not evident on GT's version.[16] The choral version of Blake and Parry's "Jerusalem" on the album[17] also

[15] Originally released as the B-side to the single release of "Hobby Horse."

[16] The threads running through the earlier *Pastoral* album that were picked up by NYX were also made manifest in the eponymous concert film of NYX and GT performing material from *Deep England* (directed by Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard), particularly in the collage of musical elements from "Fire Leap" and lyrics and melody lines from "Better in My Day," which gave the nostalgic sentiments of the latter an almost absurd resonance with the sinister underpinnings of the idyllic space of Summer Isle featured in *The Wicker Man* film.

[17] The version by a female choir is also notable for reinvesting the song with a submerged meaning that sidesteps its current associations with fervent patriotism. While Parry wrote his initial musical arrangement so that the song could be performed at patriotic rallies during World War I, he wrote the now commonly performed orchestral setting at the invitation of women's rights campaigner Dame Millicent Garrett Fawcett in 1918, and subsequently agreed to Fawcett's request that it could become the Women Voters' Hymn and assigned copyright to the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies to support their activities. When the NUWSS disbanded in 1928 copyright was transferred to the Women's Institutes, who retained it until 1968 when the composition became public domain.

complements the critical tone of GT's *Pastoral* by re-arranging the stirring melodic qualities of Parry's hymn. A solo female voice with a very heavy reverb sound sings the first 8 lines with the usual melody, then the choir repeats this section in a chant-like monotone. The "dark satanic mills" lyric then becomes the take-off point for darker and heavily dissonant melodic and timbral elements to be foregrounded, emphasizing the latter rather than the fanciful mythology of the opening lines that has inspired patriotic renditions. Nestled within the NYX Choir, Bernholz and her GT persona achieve a rare moment of harmonious solidarity, a sense of belonging not evident anywhere else in their (coterminous) oeuvre.

Conclusion

Bernholz's work as GT is distinct and distinguished on a number of levels. Aside from her basic achievement in gaining traction in the electronic music scene as a female artist, her development of the GT persona over a number of recordings, videos and performances has provided a compelling example of the manner in which an emergent audio-visual artist can be creatively enabled and enhanced through the adoption of (costumed) personae that—at least in Bernholz's perception of her own work—enhance her confidence and, thereby, imbue her with a sense of power. Her accounts of this process and the analyses of her work provided in this chapter suggest that she has accessed the enveloping focus intrinsic to the creative "flow" identified by Csíkszentmihályi as key to high-quality artistic achievement and innovation. Her development from somewhat abstruse concerns, to personal emotional-visceral expression, to a more wide-ranging critique of national nostalgia and ideologies is also notably ambitious. The choice to pursue the latter in styles and genres other than the bombastic anthems habitually mobilized to address such concepts by mainstream rock artists (such as The Clash's "This is England" [1985], or Bruce Springsteen's "We Take Care of Our Own" [2012]) has produced a corpus of musically and thematically complex work. While her output has been innately female in its vision and sensibility, it crosses gender divides by addressing both specifically British and more universal themes. The jesterism of her most recent recordings and videos exemplify the latter aspects, turning thematic tropes against themselves to illustrate the ideologies essential to their formation. The inspiration she has derived from folkloric elements, such as the Sardinian Mamothones tradition and Punch and Judy puppetry represents a modern *media-loric* development that is

distinct in the electronic music scene and that points to the capacity of this broad genre to engage with tradition as well as modernity and futurism.

Discography

All Gazelle Twin recordings are released digitally on her Anti-Moon Ghost Ray label: http://www.antighostmoonray.com/

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