

In 1998, more than a quarter of century after the brief rise and fall of glam rock, Todd Haynes made a film-homage about glam pop-culture and its icon, entitled: *Velvet Goldmine* (in Poland it was shown under the not very apt title: *Idol*).¹ Haynes' film was not, however, an ordinary "biography" of a given epoch or sub-culture – it was, as I have mentioned, an homage but also an attempt at an analysis of a phenomenon, a discovery of all its constitutive elements and, finally, a colourful synthesis that was not supposed to describe glam rock but to become one of its products.

Glam was attractive and extravagant, and thus appeared to be superficial. Until recently, it was regarded as merely a brief, kitschy and trivial moment in the history of popular music, and efforts to introduce it into a wider social or cultural context were rare. True, glam works of the most important artists of this trend – David Bowie, Lou Reed, Iggy Pop, Brian Eno or Brian Ferry – were examined with appreciation (although also sometimes with a pinch of salt), but deeper reflection on the phenomenon as such did not, for all practical purposes, exist. Only recent years brought publications whose authors decided to treat the phenomenon in question as just as essential for studies on subculture (and thus pop-culture) groups as a sociological analysis of mods, hippies or punks. The extraordinary diversity of the meanings of this trend, its complexity, inter-textual qualities and, predominantly, subversive potential were noticed. The revolutionary character of glam rock revealed itself in an immensely bold (much more so, as it became apparent, than in the case of the hippie ideology) approach to manners and morals, sexuality and identity in general. It proposed experiments with sexual and gender identity by going on the assumption that identity is something that we can create ourselves and that it is a fluid and open category succumbing to manipulation. In this fashion it tried to blur the boundaries and differences between the feminine and the masculine, the hetero- and the homosexual; glam negated social norms up to then extremely closely guarded and inviolable (even by such supposedly revolutionary ideas of freedom as those proclaimed by hippies). Glam started to be treated as a text, an extremely self-aware construct, each of whose elements was part of a well-devised strategy. An exaggerated and over-stylised aesthetic of glam, considered up to then to be an empty form with no ambition to express anything but itself and a product cynically intended for consumer-oriented young people, proved to be a code and content by no means trivial but full of melancholic irony combining enormous, brilliant subversity, unlimited eroticism free of all norms and a longing for the unattainable. Such contents were found in the superficial and the formal, in artificiality, exaggeration, and theatrical qualities so characteristic for glam. Those categories comprised a message liquidating the traditional division into form and content.

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The Androgynous Who Fell to Earth

Glam

Glam rock (in America also known also as glitter rock) emerged in Great Britain during the early 1970s. Naturally, it had its precursors and phenomena that from the point of view of ideology, customs and, in particular, aesthetics strongly inspired it. In the UK they included undoubtedly the mods subculture and in the USA - the milieu of Andy Warhol's Factory. From the mods (whose name is an abbreviation of "modernist") glam borrowed a certain approach towards style and aesthetics envisaged as a supreme value decisive for identity and individuality. From the habitués of the "Factory" and pop-art it took the obliteration of boundaries between art and pop-culture, a demonstrative game played with one's creation and image, and, predominantly, sexual freedom expressed in that which was glam's *raison d'être*, i.e. gender-bending and the negation of the binary nature of boundaries.

The discovery of the concrete moment in which glam emerged as fully mature remains controversial; the same holds true for resolving the question: who was its "original" and "true" initiator? For some critics and fans this was the appearance of the T. Rex band in the once highly trendy and extremely influential British TV music programme: "Top of the Pops" on which Marc Bolan, the band's frontman, appeared in full make-up and with eyelids dripping with glitter. For others, the alpha and omega of glam and its unquestioned king is its most popular star - David Bowie. In this case, the borderline moment could be either Bowie's album: *The Man Who Sold the World* (mainly due to the controversial cover on which the longhaired singer lounges on a highly decorative sofa posing in one of his famous "man dresses"). The most spectacular occurrence, when glam was first noticed as a fully formed (musical) genre and trend (fashion and pop culture) and which ultimately affected its form, was Ziggy Stardust – a mysterious androgynous arrival from the stars, who came to Earth in order to save it from annihilation. With his irascible although cold allure (of a strangely sexual nature) he captures the planet and hypnotises crowds. Ultimately, however, Ziggy succumbs to the worshipping throng and his narcissism takes over: he abandons his noble mission and fantasizes about falling

in love with his ego. In order to rescue the Earth and himself Ziggy must slay his ego and depart.

The Ziggy character proved to be exceptionally emblematic and ultimately prophetic for glam. First, he was the realisation of a postulate of greatest importance for the entire trend – the creation of a persona, a totally artificial identity that, albeit extremely evocative, would not conceal its invented nature. Ziggy was a construct stemming from fantasy, a combination of futuristic imagination and longing for the past and innocence. He originated from fantasy and thus was not part of the human, earthly order. As a construct he was to be directed to a great extent against complete “naturalness” - the ethos of the culture of the ‘60s, cultivated by hippie artists, who in a programme-like manner were expected to be authentic, genuine, and natural. Through such created constructs as Ziggy glam was supposed to say that “naturalness” is full of hypocrisy and, moreover, that as such it simply cannot exist. Identity and image are always but creations – there is no primal substance. The only choice we have is to allow to be fashioned by social norms and demands (regardless whether belonging to conservative societies or the ostensibly progressive, such as hippies) usurping the right to naturalness, correctness, and truth or to take over control over self-creation. By negating the conceit of naturalness glam opened a path towards unfettered creativity, whose substance was to be one’s body, way of life, and identity. The question about primary nature and “truth” no longer had any sense – that what was essential was incessant creationism, the fluidity of categories and their constant metamorphoses instead of petrification in hermetic and untouchable definitions. Ziggy (and thus Bowie) urged his fans to experiment with their image and identity, to create themselves no longer in an opposition to, or upon the basis of any sort of norms but as part of the latter’s total rejection. The slogan: “Be as you are” must be changed into: “Be as you want to be” (a similar formula: *don’t dream it - be it*, can be found in the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* directed by Jim Sharman in 1974. Although Sharman’s film cannot be directly associated with glam it had numerous common features and from the ideological and aesthetic viewpoint it was maintained very much in its spirit). Such an approach to one’s identity (in particular sexual) became the glam programme and part of its strategy and ideology.

Ziggy was an embodiment of these postulates. By observing the principle of resigning from the binariness of gender, sex, and sexuality Bowie created Ziggy as an ideal bisexual androgyne, not so much a combination of both genders as their negation. He was supposed to exist beyond them without depriving himself of combined sexual potential. In this manner Ziggy became a determinant of the glam style, a fashion he devised and which transcended the conventions of the masculine and the feminine and combined an enormous number of stylistic tracks and references. This *sui generis* hybrid was com-

posed of elements originating from assorted cultural contexts, albeit always oscillating around an ambivalent and never ultimately defined ideal of androgyny. Ziggy was envisaged as a mysterious creature from the stars, a combination of a sexless, remote, and ideal body, demonic, dehumanised, and minimalistic futurism, and nostalgia for the opulent cabaret from the turn of the nineteenth century and the 1920s. The extremely slender Ziggy/Bowie was usually dressed in a shiny latex costume concealing all symptoms of sex and colourful high platform boots. His outfit was supplemented by vivid make-up and startlingly orange hair. Although Ziggy is, as a rule, perceived in categories of bisexuality it would be more apt to use the term “pansexuality”. His purpose was not so much to desire as to be desired regardless of gender or sexual orientation. Bisexuality, even if only due to its name, refers to binariness – and Ziggy transcended and thus eliminated binariness itself and its principle. He was primarily an object of desire whose entire essence flirted with his fans. More, from the very onset to the end Ziggy functioned as a fantasy, a conglomerate of the dreams and desires of his fans – at no moment in his existence did he claim the right to be “genuine”: he was supposed to be an idea and a substance, and to live in a world of fiction and not facts. His presence could never be palpable, nor his identity – recognised, diagnosed, and enclosed in a definition.

With the exception of Bowie none of the glam artists created a character of this sort. The others² – Marc Bolan from T. Rex, Brian Eno and Bryan Ferry from Roxy Music, Iggy Pop of The Stooges, Lou Reed from the Velvet Underground or the New York Dolls - operated rather with their image, always remaining within the domain of gender-bending and referring to the camp stylistic. Marc Bolan resembled a fairy-tale elf straight out of a J.R.R. Tolkien story combined with a drag queen in strong make-up. Brian Eno in his cosmic and gloomy costumes could have successfully appeared in a horror story with elements of science fiction. On the other hand, the style represented by Brian Ferry contained the elegance of gangsters from the 1930s, American kitsch of the 1950s, and the nonchalance of the mods – all with an addition of distinct sexual ambivalence. Lou Reed, however, came from the integral milieu of Andy Warhol’s Factory. Reed, a member of the precursory (in all respects) Velvet Underground was to transfer the Factory into new aesthetics, an embodiment of a dangerous and colourful life unfettered by any sort of norms, and of total openness as regards sex and gender. Reed also represented a climate of drug-induced self-inflicted destruction and decadence, so characteristic for the music of the Velvet Underground and the ambiance of the Factory, and ultimately essential also for glam. An extreme example of such self-destructive creation was Iggy Pop, today described more often as a precursor of punk rock than one of the authors of glam. Pop represented

the animal element, sexuality conceived not as created on the surface of the body but as pure albeit transgressed nature. While Lou Reed was to be a male version of a femme fatale in dark make-up and with black nail polish, Pop on stage became the embodiment of unpredictable and hysterically wild sexuality – he harmed and exposed himself while sprinkling glitter. The theatrical nature of his performances consisted of ostentatious “naturalness” closer, however, to untamed instinct rather than to the “authenticity” which the hippies wished to personify in the 1960s. Although none of these artists (with the exception of Bowie, who has to be viewed as separate from Iggy) decided to publicly announce homo- or bisexuality or to openly overcome hereternalnormative coercion, they all transcended it in a more creative way – their transgression consisted rather of creating (sexually) undefined images while always leaving room for uncertainty and assumptions. It is ambivalence and not declaration that was to become one of the key principles of glam. Sexuality was to be deprived of all definitions, to be left to its own potential unlimited by all norms or social conventions. In addition, sexuality was outfitted with a costume and made-up so as to mark just how conventional and artificial was its image and enclosure within binding binariness. Since the deconstruction of sexuality is always accompanied by a costume, the latter can be arbitrarily changed or created anew and experiments can be carried out while violating the conventionalised.

Camp

From the viewpoint of its essence and significance glam was a phenomenon strongly enrooted in camp sensitivity – not only regarding aesthetics but also that, which could be called its “policy”. To an extremely large degree the camp aspect of glam corresponds to an attempt at its description (not definition – since the definition of camp is by the very nature of things an impossible feat; its recognition is a question of intuition) presented in Susan Sontag's famous *Notes on “Camp”* (1964).³ True, the essence of camp would be fondness for the unnatural, a predilection for extravagance based, on the one hand, on excess and, on the other hand, on passion, the ambition of creating something very serious that, however, fails but simultaneously does not lose any of its intensity as well as genuine pleasure and involvement (which often may produce pathos that ceases to annoy and starts to entertain). Camp taste has an inclination for the purely decorative and visual, which accentuates the texture of things and their sensual surface. A camp thing or character wishes to be unusual and that feature is, as a rule, to manifest itself in exaggeration and splendour, in *glamour*. Camp tries to be aristocratic but often this quality turns out to be false and pretended and resembles costume jewellery that although not “genuine” can still make an impression. First and foremost, camp has a predilection for the theatrical and the artificial, aesthetics or rather

over-aesthetisation, in which the distinction between the aesthetically “good” and “bad” is no longer binding. The camp dandy will not shy from vulgarity and is capable of elevating the low to a high rank.

Although this description matches glam perfectly, camp in its glam version often negates the theses proposed by Sontag, who claimed that camp emphasis on style assumes neglect of the content concealed beneath the surface of style. The “ideology” of glam tries to prove that content can be actually the surface itself and that it does not lose any of its value or gravity. It is simply the division into style and content, form and content that is liquidated.

Sontag, however, negated the political nature of camp even though camp as such and its glam “variant” are predominantly subversive and thus political and never remain neutral. Camp provokes, and hence is involved in non-normative culture relegated to the margin and often socially branded (even if this involvement assumes a frivolous and not overly serious form). In this sense, glam matches better those attempts at describing the nature of camp that are proposed by theoreticians trying to expand and modify Sontag's canonical text and to reconcile all writings that criticise it. David Bergman wrote: *First, everyone agrees that camp is a style (whether of objects or of the way objects are perceived is debated) that favours “exaggeration”, “artifice” and “extremity”. Second, camp exists in tension with popular culture, commercial culture, or consumerist culture. Third, the person who can recognize camp, who sees things as campy, or who can camp is a person outside the cultural mainstream. Fourth, camp is affiliated with homosexual culture, or at least with a self-conscious eroticism that throws into question the naturalisation of desire.*⁴ In turn, according to Jack Babuscio camp is defined and established by four key features: irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humour.⁵ Irony is supposed to refer to the contrast between a given individual (or object) and his/its context.⁶ In this way, irony combines opposites: male/female, high/low, fictitious/true. For irony to be effective it is necessary to endow it with some sort of a concrete spectacular shape – *the art of camp therefore relies largely upon arrangement, timing and tone*⁷ - hence the overblown aestheticism and even over-aesthetisation. Hence also the enormous pressure on the superficial, the external texture of things. Babuscio remarked that style is the medium for self-projection, the carrier of meaning, and the expression of emotions; it is never “neutral” but is always constructed and exists rather as a form of awareness.⁸ It is also always subversive and accentuates the non-continual by contrasting things that are ostensibly contradictory; in this way it undermines the very principle of constructing such standards - the binding principle of banality. Although camp is often associated with kitsch (and sometimes is even called conscious kitsch), the two phenomena are separated by an essential difference: camp assumes earnest involvement - the ability to strongly identify oneself

with that, which is regarded as camp. On the other hand, kitsch is artistically shallow and vulgar and focuses on sensation; kitsch is sentimental and superficial.⁹ The essence of camp is not its flamboyant aesthetics but rather the code concealed within it and its evocative character (kitsch is not intentionally subversive). Camp does not stop at depiction as such – it constantly stresses that we are dealing with presentation and convention.

Discussions (more or less theoretical) about glam emphasize its visual, aesthetic aspect while ignoring meanings contained in visuality; those satisfied with the description alone did not see any need to analyse the causes of constructing such aesthetics. The point of departure is the name itself – glam (*glamour*) – assuming that the most prominent component was exaggerated and lavish form (usually featuring the artificial opulence of costume jewellery). The essence of the phenomenon, however, appears to be something else. As Brian Eno, one of the representatives of glam, declared: *I have to say that the "Glam" part was the wrong idea to focus on. For me it wasn't so much about glamour so much as the idea of changing identity or thinking up your own identity. Whether it was glamorous or not was actually accidental.*¹⁰ In other words, form as such, although ostensibly designating only itself, indicated the contents concealed within. In a truly camp paradox the content was not separate from the form but was contained in it.

Now for a moment back to Sontag's text. By constantly stressing camp's predilection for artificiality she assumed that the likeness typical for camp is that of the Androgyne. Sontag maintained: (...) *The most refined form of sexual attractiveness (as well as the most refined form of sexual pleasure) consists in going against the grain of one's sex. What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine (...)*¹¹ and stressed: *Camp is the triumph of the epicene style. (The convertibility of "man" and "woman," "person" and "thing".)*¹² In other words, *all style, that is, artifice, is, ultimately, epicene.*¹³ Glam understood this dependence perfectly. Style and artificiality were based on diametrically comprehended creativity independent of what we call "Nature". In this mode, the identity that each one of us creates for himself should be not only the "reversal" of that "Nature" (to act against one's sex) but fully independent. Consequently, in glam that, which is genderless is more popular than that, which is bisexual and combines the masculine and the feminine.

Longing and desire

Velvet Goldmine was intended as homage to a past epoch, its music and ideology. It was not supposed to be a monographic study of glam. Haynes wanted to avoid any sort of documentariness. He was more interested in the film being glam in itself, so that its construction and stylistic were governed by the same laws as glam creativity and narrations by glam rockers. *Velvet Goldmine* is thus more

of a dream, a recollection brimming with the nostalgia of someone for whom glam became a borderline moment in defining his identity. This is the reason why the whole story is seen through the eyes of a fan – Arthur, who as a journalist is to resolve ten years later the mystery of the feigned murder of a former glam-rock star, Brian Slade. Arthur, now grown up and disillusioned with reality, is compelled not only to find out about the fate of the object of his youthful fascination but also to go on an inner journey and settle accounts with his rejected wishes and longings. Although Haynes applied a construction strategy familiar from *Citizen Kane* by Orson Welles – a single story seen by numerous witnesses - the narration, deprived of all traits of realism, compels us to think that Arthur's experience and recollections are of key importance. We watch a combination of recollections, imagination, and dreams, for which facts are but an inspiration and which can be never verified. This is an extremely well conceived operation – the story we watch is only a construction composed of many others, interlinked and overlapping. None can possess a status more authentic or credible than others. The same strategy is present in each symptom of glam rock creativity and appears in queer theories. That, which we recognise as a fact – someone's history, identity – is a construction, while access to so-called truth is impossible. The essence of things as such does not exist; there is only its depiction. There is no such thing as primal nature – all is the work of culture. This is why in *Velvet Goldmine* nothing claims to be the sole truth and fact. This is not to say, however, that we are dealing with pure fiction – the director tried to treat the two categories as equal, to obliterate the boundary between them, and to render their status identical. Once we name them, facts become fiction and the latter can always become facts for someone who wishes to recognise it as such.

In order to create a complete albeit auteur synthesis of glam rock Haynes followed all the paths that could have led to and from glam, those that could have become his inspiration, and those that he inspired himself. More, the director defined glam rock as the most quotable moment in rock and roll, a great collage of sources.¹⁴ This is also why the film is made of scores of short texts, quotations, and references. First and foremost, while tracing the precursors of glam rock it resorts directly to Oscar Wilde, who in *Velvet Goldmine* appears as a magic child dispatched from the stars, the owner of an emerald-amulet. Glam rock was also inspired by the American "glamour" of the 1920s (hence a portrait of Jean Harlow in the office of Slade's manager), eighteenth-century salons, and the decadent *fin de siècle* cabaret. The intersexual network is woven very finely – the director made use not only of his own trails but also references contained in the works of glam rockers; hence citations from Genet and the inter-war Berlin cabaret. The very core of the narration – the story of Brian Slade and Curt Wild – is

composed of facts taken from the lives of Bowie, Pop, Reed, Eno, Ferry and Bolan. Haynes extracted the most constitutive and essential components and used them to create the history of glam rock embodied in the love story of Slade and Wilde.

All references in *Velvet Goldmine* indicate culture texts dealing with non-normative sexuality as well as the construction of identity by applying the external, the aesthetic, and the visual. Haynes was interested primarily in glam rock's ostentatious artificiality conceived as a medium, style as a means of expression, creation that builds identity, and the overcoming of binariness in the domains of sexuality and gender. In this fashion, the film's prime theme is the glam androgynous envisaged as a subversive person opening up new possibilities, something that remains outside the polarised gender order, and thus an object of desire that fascinates because it comes "not from this world".

This is not, however, the Platonic version of the androgynous belonging to the primeval order of things, a symbol of completeness, purity, pre-sexuality, and universality. The glam androgynous is sexual, or rather outright pansexual. As Stella Bruzzi claimed: *The androgynous (...) has been conceptualised as a pre-sexual Platonic ideal (...). Such flights into intangible, symbolic fantasy capture only half of the power of an image.*¹⁵ The second half was to be composed of irresistible, overwhelming corporeality and sexuality. According to Bruzzi the androgynous figure stands on the borderline between two spheres - the imagined and the real. Eternal unfulfilled longing for the ideal would be, therefore, combined with desire. Longing creates a fantasy whose force is its eroticism.

This is not to say that the aesthetics of the androgynous must be a combination of the features of the feminine and the masculine. It does not necessarily have to be a blend of both sexes and can be their negation or rather that of binary division as such. While not being either a woman or a man, the androgynous can still possess overwhelming erotic force, even if only because by existing outside the boundaries of that, which is known and understood, he personifies mystery, unpredictability and that, which is not subjected to norms and categorisation. In other words, he also carries danger and risk by stirring a wish to cross the reality that we know, with which we can become familiar, and which we can name and experience.

Surprisingly, such an image of the androgynous appears in the visual arts extremely rarely. If authors actually decide to construct a character that is to blur or transcend boundaries between genders they usually restrict themselves to conventionalised phenomena of transvestism, transsexuals or cross-dressing.¹⁶ Meanwhile, none of these categories realises the conception of the androgynous because they all retain the binary division of the sexes even if they link their elements. Stella Bruzzi declared: *Whereas cross-dressing is a collision between genders, which*

*are nevertheless identifiable, androgyny is a fusion that can encompass these shifts and permutations. Despite signalling danger and transgression, the cross-dressed or "dragged-up" body still utilises the differences between the sexes for effect (...).*¹⁷ In this manner, solid banality remains the foundation. *The blurring of differences that characterises the androgynous is, conversely, more dangerous and destabilising because it incorporates eroticism.*¹⁸ This sort of eroticism is based on endless uncertainty and doubts, on a simultaneous recognition, and its lack, of the ambivalence of the androgynous image. The spectator perceives the discontinuity of the identity of such a creature and does not harbour an illusion that he is seeing a woman (or a man dressed as one) or a man (or a woman dressed as one). It is exactly ambivalence that seduces, and by doing so forces us to forget about discontinuity while telling us to fall in love with ambivalence as such. It cannot be classified or categorised since there is no clear-cut definable category beyond femininity and masculinity. The androgynous is neither feminine masculinity nor masculine femininity, nor is he an improvement of one of the genders because he negates the principle of the existence of gender in general. He is something quite distinct – ideal eroticism independent of the division into genders, sexes, and sexuality; more, since androgyny assumes the obliteration of boundaries between the sexes it also presupposes the blurring of the delineated limits of sexuality.¹⁹ This is not to say that it instantly implies bisexuality, because that category, together with the significant prefix: "bi-", is also negated. Homo--, hetero--, or bi-sexuality are replaced by pansexuality, which encompasses all combinations and reaches the very essence of sexuality; it exists outside all categorisation.

Naturally, from the very beginning the most important were longing and desire – the structure of *Velvet Goldmine* and its aesthetics are subjected to these two categories. All tension between the characters and thus also the manner of showing them (always from the perspective of one of them) is tinged with longing and desire. The most important in the construction of the film is the category of memory: narration is based on the mutual permeation of recollections and dreams, while their depiction is deprived of realistic features and over-aestheticized so as to show desire, on the one hand, and to arouse it, on the other hand. By using the same structural principles as those in *Citizen Kane*, Haynes offered several sources of reminiscences – we hear stories successively recounted by persons who had been close to Brian Slade; these stories had been changed into a myth by those who in some way had been betrayed by him. Nonetheless, visualisation is not based merely on their voices - it is the fantasy of Arthur, a fan and a collector of those reminiscences that creates imagery. The stories told by Cecil, Mandy and Curt are filtered through Arthur's suddenly awakened memory, suffused with rejected longing and desire. In this manner, all that we are watching is a trans-

position of reality, fiction founded on the latter. Importantly, this fiction possesses the status of the only truly existing space. Facts are created or rather recreated, and even reconstruction is mere fiction. In *Velvet Goldmine* the supreme principle is construction conceived as negation of the natural, the in-born, the real and that, which exists in it. Here, everything is a product – events, recollections, and even the characters themselves. Among the latter the most sophisticated and best representatives of the ideal of the androgynous are Brian Slade, Curt Wild and Jack Fairy.

First and foremost, all the characters are a conglomerate of concrete features, of “authentic” people - David Bowie, Iggy Pop, Lou Reed, Brian Eno and Bryan Ferry. The parenthesis is particularly important since it indicates the fact that the public identity of those artists, just like their pseudonyms, was a creation, fiction; that they invented artificial persons for the sake of their work and the audience (although only Bowie decided to devise the characters of Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane and Thin White Duke – who were to be clearly distinctly unconnected with him as David Bowie). The successive level of the construction is determined by the performance of the film protagonists - Brian Slade becomes Maxwell Demon (modelled on Bowie-Stardust); Curt – a star brought up by wolves, the embodiment of uncivilised atavism; Jack Fairy, in his gown and jewels, functions as a sophisticated drag queen (rather than as a transvestite) endowed with irresistible but upsetting charm. Each changes into someone else, constructs a persona that, in turn, becomes a manifesto, a programme, a provocation, and, more importantly, a performance. The next level could contain the likenesses of particular characters existing in the memory of other protagonists, very much mythologised and filtered through ever-alive emotions. For Mandy, Brian remains a sweet boy although unyielding and ruthless in his battle for fame, for whom she had sacrificed her youth. For Cecil, he is the embodiment of an ideal and the greatest disappointment (*elegance walking hand in hand with a lie*). Finally, Curt conceived Brian as a quintessence of his fantasy and, at the same time, a supplement of himself. The portrait of Slade in the memory of persons close to him is a construction born of desire, longing, and suffering, since the ideal not only never changed reality but became conquered and trivialised by it. There remains only Arthur and his return to teenage fascinations. Although we hear Mandy, Cecil and Curt telling stories, we see them through the eyes of Arthur who performs the function of the visual narrator. His vision is pure fantasy – based on trivial and already considerably falsified (as a rule, mythologised) knowledge about the idol possessed by each fan. The image of Brian, which he retained, is a mixture of facts obtained from newspapers, posters and photographs, song lyrics, emotions experienced while listening to records, and youthful fantasies that were supposed to supplement the image of the

star. Arthur's Brian and Curt are fantasies, the products of his imagination, fiction closer to the wishes cherished by him than to reality.

The most important for our reflections appears to be the last category of constructing the person and personality, contained in the fan-idol relationship, as well as the protagonists' transference into fiction, into the personas that they had created for themselves. Those two types of the construction of identity (or personality) in *Velvet Goldmine* are very strongly connected with the category of an obliteration of boundaries between the genders, a devaluation of the binarity upon which they had been based up to then. The same holds true for desire – sexuality in Haynes' film ceases to be hetero- or homosexuality just as gender is no longer male or female. Brian-Maxwell, Curt, Jack or Arthur – all realise the ideal of androgyny, although each in his own, personal, and distinct way.

From the very onset, the plot of *Velvet Goldmine* takes place in fairy-tale sets. In 1854 a falling star soaring across the sky above Dublin explodes in lavender sparks. It leaves behind on Earth, in the household of Mr. and Mrs. Wilde, a child – the future Oscar, wrapped in fabric clasped with an emerald pin. The latter proves to be a talisman, an emblem, and a carrier of certain inner force and charisma enjoyed by each successive owner of the jewel. A hundred years later, the seven-year old Jack, beaten and persecuted by his peers, finds in the school playground the emerald wedged between pavement flagstones. He returns home along a path leading across an excessively adorable, over-aestheticized, and ostentatiously artificial and fairy-tale landscape – a symbol of a mythical happy childhood that the boy cannot enjoy. Already as an owner of the gem he stands in front of a mirror and takes a close look at his cut lip, slowly smearing the blood as if it were lipstick; suddenly, he becomes pleased with his reflection. He has created a new version of himself, certain of his value, and aware that his place in the world lies beyond the rigid and brutal norms of the schoolyard, in a land of fantasy full of strange flowers and subtle perfumes, a land of which it is joy of all joys to dream, a land where all things are perfect and poisonous.²⁰ This opening sequence combined with an off-screen text tells us that little Jack is the heir not only of the aesthetics of Oscar Wilde but also of the latter's way of thinking (e.g. in *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*). It also shifts the focal point of the film from the conflict between the accepted norm (approved identities) and that, which is situated beyond, the existence of a world devoid of norms. Haynes wished primarily to enter the world (even if artificial) of characters negating norms. By making use of stylistics and a structure resembling a dream he presented reality devoid of polarised identities, values, and categories, leaving his protagonists and reality unidentified and open, and prohibiting their classification.

The grown-up Jack becomes an androgynous creature "guided" by the inherited jewel.²¹ His androgynousness, however, is realised in categories belonging to the discourse of binarity and understandable for the surrounding (which recognises norms). He is treated according to the common understanding of a transvestite – a man, probably homosexual, who dresses as a woman. He does not provoke laughter or becomes a caricature of any of the genders – although this was the way in which the (popular) cinema usually showed all sorts of trans-gender protagonists. Wherever he appears, Jack is admired and respected. To apply a distinction proposed by the theoreticians of camp – Jack Fairy belongs to high camp, to its aristocracy, and all criteria defining low camp are absent. Haynes stressed upon numerous occasions that Jack is the source, the first "genuine" example of his genre, and that his magnetism benefitted all others.

And yet he does not comprise the centre of fascination for all protagonists. It is Brian Slade-Maxwell Demon who arouses the greatest desire. Interestingly, Slade is shown as a usurper who seduces Jack and steals the jewelled pin, thus seizing its power. Nonetheless, Brian's creation, i.e. Maxwell Demon, is someone totally new, "prepared" and moulded by Slade's numerous experiences and inspirations but never merely their commonplace conglomerate. As Cecil recounts, *Brian's tender introduction to the theatrical underworld would leave a dramatic impression*. He thus became acquainted with the revue theatre demi-monde (outstandingly low camp), full of aging transvestites and homosexuals. Inspired by what he saw on stage and backstage, little Brian gave his parents performances during which he became Little Richard – yet another icon inspiring glam rock artists. Then, in the spirit of numerous boys from the suburbs, he joined the mods, *the first true dandies of pop – and known to just about any indiscretion when a good suit was involved*. Their philosophy was to become the philosophy of glam – the most important is creation, pose, and a radically stylised image. Identity and personality can be constructed on the body without succumbing to social pressure. Just as in the case of each subculture, the mods were recruited from among young people whose basic principle of existence was rebellion. This time, they revolted against the greyness and boredom of the surrounding world, the puritan mentality of the middle class, and the working class ethos. Ostentatious consumerism expressed disdain for everything that is common, and the cult Vespa scooter became a symbol of independence while a well-cut suit was to be an attribute of perfectly designed individuality. Within this context it was obvious that in the working and middle class environment, as a rule rather conservative, mods could function as "effeminate" (in contrast to the rockers in their leather jacket and with heavy motor-bikes). Haynes undoubtedly made use of this stereotype – his Brian-mod exploits his pedantic image of a dandy, i.a. to seduce other boys with a girlish appearance.

Brian endlessly observes and spies upon that, which is decisive for the magnetic force of others. This is the force that he perceives first in Jack and then in Curt, who becomes his one true passion and, at the same time, the embodiment of the ideal lover for Maxwell. His relationships are, as a rule, based on desire – not so much for corporeality as for the image of successive fascinations. Brian wishes to stir the same type of unrest and the same ambivalent and undefined emotions. He wishes to become that, which he desires, and just like Ziggy Stardust he desires his ego. This is not to say that Haynes sees the source of Maxwell's power in pure usurpation, although he distinctly makes it clear that among all the protagonists Brian is the only who betrayed and lost the battle waged against imposed, hostile reality. The charisma of Brian-Maxwell was simply granted to him by those who believed in his image, who waited for him, and for whom he expressed that, which they wanted to see. Although Brian created Maxwell, the latter functioned only in the imagination of his fans as a fantasy devised by them, each time different and matching their most intimate and individual longings. A feedback effect – Brian offers others his image and they fill it with meaning and give it back. Hence – if we accept Arthur's perspective as central in the narration of *Velvet Goldmine* – the strongly mythologised characters and space, the obligatory structure of a dream, the conspicuous over-aesthetisation, and the obliteration of the difference between fiction and fact, dream and reality.

The indubitably overwhelming power of Brian/M Maxwell comes from his androgyny. As has been mentioned, it not so much links both genders or becomes a "third" one as negates the existence of any sort of gender. Maxwell is supposed to be an arrival from the stars and thus does not have to be a human being. His "alien" nature, although dehumanised, is, however, suffused with eroticism affecting everyone regardless of gender and declared sexual orientation. His eroticism does not arise from an increased potential, the supposed attribute of a combination of man and woman, but rather from the fact that it remains a secret. Since no one knows who Maxwell is, no one is capable of describing the character of his sexuality. It is the unknown and not enhancement that is decisive for his power. Interestingly, Maxwell's persona, urging his fans to join in constant fun and experimenting with their identity, proposed the rejection not only of the binary nature of gender and unambiguous hetero- and homosexuality but also of the existence of any sort of defined gender or orientation. The construction of identity was to take place outside these categories and to be totally independent of them. Since, however, we are unable to move beyond them and the culture that founds them, such creation is outright impossible. There remains the process of juggling with the attributes of femininity and masculinity, keeping a distance towards them, and comprehending their conventional character. At the same



time, such experiments can produce extremely creative effects – we can imagine only two genders as stable; even if they were to be represented in countless variants they will be always enclosed in two "camps". Each representation that would exist somewhere between them would be only temporary and could not become stabilised because there does not exist a defined category that would render it immobile. This is the reason why each androgynous character shall possess a unique character – he can never become petrified and turn into a matrix, to be later repeated.

Queer and the performative character of identity

Velvet Goldmine is a queer film and its author is one of the foremost creators of a current described by the critics as the New Queer Cinema.²² The recounted story of glam rock, its "biography", was "rendered queer", passed through the filter of queer theories – even superficial acquaintance with them can prove to be very important for deciphering the film. Naturally, it would be difficult to assume that the authors of glam rock during its peak period were conscious of the subversive character of this trend; the director, however, was undoubtedly aware of it when he introduced the phenomenon of glam rock into a widely understood history of queer culture (formulated, necessarily, backward), since he discovered in it twin-like similarity to the queer view of reality, sexuality, and identity – the fluidity of categories, the rejection of hermetic definitions, the overcoming of the binary. Haynes noted upon numerous occasions that the early 1970s (and glam rock above all) constituted the last truly diverse, productive, and

progressive period open to new ideas and the toppling of taboos, especially within the sphere of sexuality. The sexual revolution was not brought about by the 1960s but by the 1970s. The earlier decade assumed free love, but actually it was still limited by obligatory heterosexuality and the binary nature of cultural gender. In this sense, it paradoxically remained conservative. On the other hand, the 1970s, together with glam rock, were, the director claims, a quintessence of truly liberated sexuality. *What was so interesting about the glam era was that it was about bisexuality and breaking down the boundaries between masculinity and femininity with this androgyny thing. It was about breaking down barriers (...).*²³ Haynes perceived in glam not only a lens that gathered all these elements but also an immensely important link in the chain of queer culture.

In common use the term "queer" functions as a concept-umbrella encompassing all those sexual identities and sexualities that remain outside the norm of the binary division of gender and homosexuality. Contemporary theories concerning the domain of queer increasingly frequently tend to include within their range identities whose nature is determined not only by non-normative sexuality or sexual identity but also by social class or race. In a word, the category of sexuality ceases to be the sole category for queer – just as essential is every identity that for one reason or another is excluded, relegated to the margin, discriminated or branded by those guarding the norms. In this manner, the theories of queer focus more on identity in general than on sexuality; finally, the construction and perception of norms (and thus also that,

which is regarded as normal) depend on the way in which we see the creation or construction of identity.

The theories of queer oppose the same logic that offers dichotomies based on what we recognise as concurrent, or not, with norms. They go on the assumption that the foundation of oppression is binary division.²⁴ This is why "queerness" as such is to be based on the instability (or constant destabilisation) of identities regarded as "hard", invariable, and natural. It is to overcome divisions, blur boundaries, oppose their hermetic qualities and ossification, and thus propose fluidity, the flexibility of all categories thanks to which it will become feasible to topple an order built on dichotomies and thus the foundation of eventual oppression. Naturally, reasoning of this sort is enrooted in a constructivist approach presupposing that all identities functioning in social order (sexual, gender, racial or class) are merely a construction produced by that order. Contrary to the essentialist model, its constructionist counterpart negates all conceptions maintaining that identity is in-born and embedded in the psyche of each person from his birth, and that it is "natural". In this manner, it discloses the same order that makes use of the essentialist approach envisaged as a tool of social control serving the retention of binariness, norms, and order itself. Stability denotes immobilisation, and instability – creativity and development. Queer supports the second option.

This manner of perceiving identity leads us in a straight line towards theories represented by Judith Butler, who in a number of her works described the conception of performativeness, which pertains to identity. In: *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*²⁵ Butler intended to undermine universal reflections on identity as essence, substance, something inherent that precedes all sorts of discourses, relations or conditions. In this manner, she criticised reasoning characteristic for essentialism, and thus also "the metaphysics of substance" that, she stressed, still exists in philosophical and sociological thought. Butler evoked those conceits by following the example of Nietzsche or rather his commentator, Michel Haar, who claimed: (...) *a number of philosophical ontologies have been trapped within certain illusions of "Being" and "Substance" that are fostered by the belief that the grammatical formulation of subject and predicate reflects the prior ontological reality of substance and attribute. These constructs, argues Haar, constitute the artificial philosophical means by which simplicity, order, and identity are effectively instituted.*²⁶ This "metaphysics of substance" permeates also thinking about the categories of gender – the body is conceived as a substance, a domain in which gender is inscribed, closely stemming from that body (and its biology). By the very nature of things, the body carries gender, which in turn affects directly connected cultural gender and desire (in the heteronormative order focused in an obligatory manner on the other gender). For Butler one of the most important undertakings intent on un-

dermining such an approach is the division of the enforced gender/sex/sexuality triad; this would mean that a biological woman does not have to be a cultural woman who due to her nature desires men ("cohesive" both biologically and culturally). Shattering this triad would also signify resignation from gender binariness and thus open a path towards all those identities that do not find fulfilment in such binariness.

Our reflections attach greater importance to the consequences of rejecting the "metaphysics of substance" – if the latter collapses then all categories based on it and resulting from its logic will lose their *raison d'être*. Since substance and essence are mere illusions there is no original model on which cultural gender is to base itself nor does there exist any "original" model of man and woman realised in countless copies; the very concept of naturalness loses its sense. We are dealing here with *sui generis* reification – that, which appears to be natural, inborn, primary, and pre-discursive is only an artificial product, the outcome of neutralisation that while suggesting naturalness and pre-discursiveness retains the stability of the genders, their binary division, and the order based upon it. The essentialist model becomes replaced by a constructivist one – the "original" or the "ideal" are only social constructs. The performative character of identity is supposed to consist of a constant repetition of that "original" or "ideal" and its bodily realisation by means of gestures, behaviour, and the creation of outer appearance, with this process of repetition producing an illusion of naturalness, the stability of the object and its identity. There exists, therefore, only the copy, which, in a manner of speaking, creates the "original" that, furthermore, *exists exclusively in the symbolic sphere and is a fantasy copied by subjects exposed to socialisation/culturalisation.*²⁷ Butler wrote: *Gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself. In other words, the naturalistic effects of heterosexualised genders are produced through imitative strategies; what they imitate is a fantastic ideal of heterosexual identity one that is produced by the imitation as its effect. In this sense, the "reality" of heterosexual identities is performatively constituted through an imitation that sets itself up as the original and the ground of all imitations.*²⁸ She claimed, however, that the "roles" that we assume, those "ideals" constantly imitated and embodied by us, are imposed from above and we have no field for manoeuvre – as a subject, we cannot select our "role". We receive it under coercion and have no impact upon it; nor can we reject it or accept another one since we are incapable of acting outside the "matrix of intelligibility", a set of standards and norms that define the way in which we are to look like and behave and who we are to be so that society could accept us and recognise us as "normal" individuals. Those who transcend this matrix, beings that are not enclosed in definitions or norms of identity "cohesion", are usually delegated to the

margin, branded, excluded or ignored. In this situation, a purposeful realisation of a non-continuum (i. e. to shatter the sex/gender/sexuality triad) by, e.g. applying the drag queen practice, is a strategy of submersion intent on breaking the compulsory identity continuum in order to reveal its artificiality, and thus the artificial character of its stability. *Although we are capable of trusting the femininity of a woman, the anxiety, fear or animosity of many people are caused by the femininity of a man. Such panic is associated quite possibly with the unspoken suspicion that femininity could be accessible also to men. This would denote that it does not originate from some sort of feminine specificity, its biology or essence, regardless of its comprehension, but that the source exists elsewhere – beyond the subject!*²⁹

By referring those conceptions to characters created first by the authors of glam rock (less consciously) and then by Todd Haynes (more consciously) one can notice that the fascination they produce has the same foundation as the above-mentioned fear and anxiety. It is sufficiently reinforced so that the characters not so much undermine the stability and cohesion of the identity triad as totally ignore it. The androgynous creatures of glam do not exceed the matrix of intelligibility but bypass it, just as they ignore all standards pertaining to the neutralised "original" or "ideal". The androgynous of glam is not a drag queen combining the feminine and the masculine in some sort of a phenomenal melange – in that case we would be able to still recognise which of its elements culturally belongs to which gender. The androgynous nonchalantly resigns from the attributes of either gender. Naturally, there remains the strategy of subversion because glam and its androgynous constantly mark their artificiality and demonstratively admit that they are only a copy of a non-existent original. This copy, however, makes no claims to being a substance, an essence that is the beginning of everything. Glam seems to be saying after Butler: there is no gender identity apart from its expression; identity is performatively constituted by "expressions" alone, which are perceived as its effect.

In daily life, Butler stressed, we imperceptibly try to neutralise this theatricalisation (this is the source of its success), but glam and Haynes' protagonists consciously emphasize theatricalisation; in this way they simultaneously celebrate it and shatter and deconstruct it. It starts being noticed, which is not to say that it is condemned or rejected. It simply changes its appearance - Bowie, Bolan, Pop, Reed, Eno or Ferry followed by Jack Fairy, Brian Slade, and Curt Wild no longer theatricalise their cultural gender, which is supposed to follow their biological gender and decide about sexuality, but they theatricalise their androgynous identities, their cultural genders that, paradoxically, do not exist since there is no "recipe" for a true androgynous, no stable matrix. In this manner, such activity emphasizes that the idea or primary substance has no *raison d'être* - the androgynous personas of the mentioned artists are only temporary realisations

of some fleeting fantasy that makes no claims to being the source and basis of any sort of identity. True, these are fantasies, but they do not belong to any norm based on the illusion of "firm" identity, substance or compulsory binary sex/gender/sexuality order. Fantasies are to oppose such a system; more, they are supposed to be constantly aware of the fact that they are no more than mere fantasies. *It was the idea of Curt more than anything, this – image. Which, of course, no one could ever possibly live up to*, Mandy says to Arthur at a certain moment. As long as there exists the awareness of "being fiction" there exist preserved creativeness, liveliness, and ensuing subversiveness. Once that awareness vanishes loss becomes inevitable as does joining the binding, heteronormative system. Perhaps herein lies an explanation of the fall of Ziggy and the transformation of Brian and his betrayal.

The latter can possess yet another essential meaning for understanding *Velvet Goldmine* – once again the study by Judith Butler proves helpful by referring to psychoanalytical theories on identification and desire.³⁰ Butler wrote: *Any intense emotional attachment thus divides into either wanting to have someone or wanting to be that someone, but never both at once. It is important to consider that identification and desire can coexist, and that their formulation in terms of mutually exclusive opposition serves a heterosexual matrix.*³¹ In the case of the protagonists of *Velvet Goldmine* this mutual exclusion is overcome. Arthur desires Brian and Curt because, i.a. he wants to be like them. The same process occurs not only in all fan-star relations but also in relations involving the stars, e.g. Brian-Jack, or Brian-Curt. Certainly, great importance is attached here to the violation of the principles of the obligatory order of the sex/gender/sexuality triad; true, almost all the lead characters in these relations are men (Mandy has been bypassed and other subversive women are simply missing, a feature that is actually characteristic for glam as a whole). More, these men not only reject heterosexuality but also the binding "realisation" of biological gender by cultural gender – none of them "represents" a man or plays his role. On the other hand, all build on their bodies an identity that does not belong to the order of any cultural gender. They "are" not men but they also "are" not women (only Jack Fairy could produce certain doubt) – nor "are" they even a combination that could be understandable within the paradigm of the binary order of genders. Their performance is situated totally outside categories.

In such a configuration identification and desire could merge into one, since there is no binariness that would be capable of dividing them. To be like someone else does not denote copying – emulation could be understood only in the categories of a function. Brian does not want to look like Jack nor does he want to copy his creation – he wants to possess the same force as Jack. Since he understands that this force stems from the un-

defined nature of identity and its instability this is on what he focuses the desire of imitation.

The androgynous cannot exist without an image. After all, he does not possess substance and does not exist as a palpable, real being because he is situated outside that, which is imaginable and can be categorised. To exist in the physical reality of daily life means to apply the rules of that reality and thus the categories and norms suggested by culture. The set of those categories is strictly defined and regulated even if it succumbs to constant transformations. The trans-gender character can transgress or negate such categories and norms; he can rebel against them but will be always dependent on their existence. He is embroiled in the definiteness of the "feminine" and the "masculine" and can only juggle them but will never free himself from them. The androgynous, however, possesses such liberty but can exist only as an idea or an image that cannot be examined to the end. The transference of this idea and image onto a screen is a task just as subtle as it is extremely difficult. Ignoring that, which is known, and entering, even if only by means of a visual presentation, the domain of the unknown and even the unrecognisable appears to be an absurd undertaking and one doomed to failure – how could we show something that is actually non-existent? A mere product of fantasy? The cinema, however, can offer us fantasy, and the means of film expression are capable of not so much presenting it as proposing a feeling (or premonition) of its presence. If the androgynous can exist somewhere film can offer him space as long as the latter resembles a dream and never touches the Earth.

Endnotes

- 1 *Velvet Goldmine* is the title of one of David Bowie's most outrageous songs.
- 2 I omit such secondary characters as Gary Glitter and Suzy Quattro and the bands Slade and Sweet.
- 3 S. Sontag, *Notes on „Camp”*, full text accessible from: <http://www.math.utah.edu/~lars/Sontag:Notes%20on%20camp.pdf> (accessed 19.12.2013)
- 4 D. Bergman, in: *Camp Grounds. Style and Homosexuality*, ed. D. Bergman, Massachusetts 1993, pp. 4–5.
- 5 J. Babuscio, *Camp and the Gay Sensibility*, in: *Camp Grounds...*, op. cit., p. 20.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid., p. 21.
- 8 Ibid., p. 22.
- 9 Ibid., p. 23.
- 10 B. Hoskyns, *Glam! Bowie, Bolan and the Glitter Rock Revolution*, Faber Paperbacks, 1998.
- 11 S. Sontag, op. cit.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 <http://www.theasc.com/magazine/nov98/velvet/index.htm> interview for "American Cinematographer".
- 15 S. Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema. Clothing and Identity in the Movies*, London/New York 1997, p. 176.
- 16 The term: *cross-dressing* means "changing" into a costume culturally ascribed to another gender. This phenome-

nomen should not be identified with transvestism, in which it has a rather erotic sub-text; *cross-dressing* is usually a wider concept and exceeds the sphere of personal experience. As a social act it could become an instrument of subversion. On the other hand, it is worth keeping in mind that there is no single binding definition and that existing ones are subjected to constant transformations and, as is usual in such cases, give rise to numerous polemics.

¹⁷ Bruzzi, op. cit., p. 176.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. XX.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 175.

²⁰ Quotation from the film.

²¹ Jack is very loosely inspired by Brian Eno and Bryan Ferry, members of the Roxy Music band, regarded as one of the artistically superior within glam rock. From them Jack borrows his surname and a disturbing, innate charisma, often attributed to Eno who rather distinctly realised the merge of two genders while strongly accentuating features belonging to the stereotype of femininity.

²² See: K. Kosińska, *Drzwi już otwarte. New Queer Cinema*, [www.celuloid.pl](http://celuloid.pl/artykuly_cale.html?artykul=71efcd0813a93cd&numer=1), no. 1. 1.10.2003. (http://celuloid.pl/artykuly_cale.html?artykul=71efcd0813a93cd&numer=1).

²³ www.avclub.com/articles/todd-haynes-13566.

²⁴ See: J. Gamson, *Must Identity Movements*, in: *Queer Theory/Sociology*, ed. S. Seidman, Cambridge, 1996, p. 396.

²⁵ J. Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York-London 1990.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 28.

²⁷ D. K. Balejko, *Teatr ról płciowych. Teorie o performatywnym charakterze tożsamości płciowej w oparciu o film Jennie Livingston Paris Is Burning oraz teksty teoretyczne Judith Butler*, in: *Gender w humanistyce*, ed. Małgorzata Radkiewicz, Kraków 2001, p. 136.

²⁸ J. Butler, *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*, in: *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, eds. H. Abelove, M. A. Barale, D. M. Halperin, Routledge, New York-London 1993, p. 313.

²⁹ D. K. Balejko, op. cit., p. 137.

³⁰ Further on Butler mentioned the equally interesting problem of the nature of the existence of identity and its constitution. First, she recalled Freud and his theory of incorporation, which she then compared to the concept of mimetic identification expounded by Mikael Borch-Jacobsen and Ruth Leys; to a certain extent she accepted both. These conceits suggest that the psychic subject, identity, is never primeval or stems from itself, neither is it cohesive and self-identical. It is always constituted by the Others. Finally, Butler combined both theories into a single one. Although they may exert a considerable impact on an interpretation of the relations between the protagonists and comprise a base for further reflections within the context of Haynes' film, due to insufficient space I shall concentrate only on identification and desire. Ibidem, pp. 316-318.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 316.