Analysing Popular Music as Performance

Three Performer-Centered Approaches

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Performative Aspekte wie die Inszenierung einer Live-Performance, das Agieren auf der Bühne, die Konstruktion der Performance Persona (Auslander 2009) oder der Star Personality (Frith 1996), die Publikumsbeteiligung, aber auch soziokulturelle Entwicklungen tragen zum Gesamtkonzept einer Performance in der populären Musik bei. Gegenwärtig werden in der Popularmusikforschung neue methodische Perspektiven entwickelt, die historische, strukturalistische und phänomenologische Paradigmen mit Diskursen über Performativität verbinden. Analysieren wir eine Live-Performance oder ein Musikvideo, müssen wir berücksichtigen, dass wir in der Regel nur Facetten der Persona hinter den Musikschaffenden zu sehen bekommen, so dass die Beziehung zwischen der Performance Persona und dem Character (Auslander 2009) meist im Vordergrund steht.

Die Analyse von Performances in der populären Musik unterscheidet sich von den Transkriptionsmethoden der Musikwissenschaft, den Notationsmethoden der Tanzforschung und theaterwissenschaftlichen Analysemethoden. In diesem Beitrag untersuche ich unterschiedliche performancetheoretische und -analytische Ansätze, darunter Philip Auslanders Konzept der »Musical Persona«, Erving Goffmans »Rahmenanalyse« und Jens Eders »Uhr der Figur«, und wende die vorgestellten Theorien auf eine konkrete Fallstudie an, die sich auf Taylor Swifts »Look What You Made Me Do« (2017) konzentriert. Durch die Analyse des Musikvideoclips, der Live-Performance und der Lyrics sollen die sozialen und kulturellen Bedeutungen interpretiert werden, die sich aus diesen Inhalten ergeben. Auf Basis von aktuellen Forschungen auf dem Gebiet von populärer Musik als Performance untersuche ich die drei vorgestellten theoretischen Zugänge auf ihre Produktivität hin für die Analyse populärer Musik.

Performative aspects such as staging a live performance, acting on stage, the construction of the performance persona (Auslander 2009) or star personality (Frith 1996), audience participation, but also socio-cultural developments, contribute to the overall concept of a performance in popular music. New methodological perspectives have been developed in current popular music studies that have linked historical, structuralist or phenomenological paradigms with the discourse of performativity. By analysing a stage performance or a music video, we must consider that we normally only get to see fragments of the persona behind the artist, thus the relationship between the performance persona and the character (Auslander 2009) is usually foregrounded.

Pop performance analysis differs from transcription methods of musicologists, notation methods of dance research, and analysis methods of theatrical performance. In this paper, I examine theories of performance including Philip Auslander's theory of the "musical persona," Erving Goffman's "frame analysis" and Jens Eder's "clock of characters" and apply the introduced theories to a concrete case study concentrating on Taylor Swift's "Look What You Made Me Do" (2017). I turn a critical eye to expressive content across the music video, the live performance and the lyrics with the aim of interpreting the social and cultural meanings that arise from that content. By drawing on scholarly work dealing with popular music as performance, I examine the aforementioned theoretical approaches in terms of their productivity for the analysis of popular music.

SCHLAGWORTE/KEYWORDS: music video; musical persona; performance analysis; pop expression

The staging of the Eras Tour, the sixth concert tour by the American singer-songwriter Taylor Swift, consists of three separate stages: a main stage with a giant, curved widescreen, a rhombic middle stage, as well as a rectangular one that forms a T-shape at the middle of the floor featuring visuals and effects throughout the show. At the beginning of each show Taylor Swift appears out of nowhere on the middle stage, singing the first words of the evening into a glittering microphone and wearing a pink body suit. It is a musical journey through Swift's creative phases, ranging from country to folk, pop, and alternative rock genres. Designed as a tribute to the discography across her seventeen-year career, the musician dedicates a separate stage set to each "era" with forty-five songs on the setlist of a three-and-a-half-hour concert, with pyrotechnics, fireworks, and smoke machines enhancing the show. The eras are represented by distinctive outfits and personae: from the earthy Folklore singer through to the gritty edge of *Reputation* (2017), the cool of *1989* (2014) to the glamorous performance of *Midnights* (2022). Each audience member receives a wristband that flashes in colors matching the respective era. The identical setlist includes two surprise songs. With a concert film having been released in October 2023, most fans know what to expect and might have learned the dance moves and chants from *TikTok*.

Performances in popular music have their own "theatricality." The different aspects of this musical theatricality such as concepts of staging, mediality and performativity form the center of the analyses of performances in popular music and thus the question of the aesthetics as well as the social and cultural meaning of pop music as performance. Regarding these aspects, music is examined not as a reproducible work but as an unrepeatable event. Originating in literary and linguistic studies, the idea behind performativity has developed into a diverse and complex discourse over the course of the twenty-first century, extending from linguistics and anthropology to the ever-growing field of performance studies. The term "performance," which was introduced into German-speaking theater studies in the 1970s, refers to a specific theatrical genre that emerged in the 1960s/70s and initially became known as action art, happenings or performance art.[1] German-speaking researchers mainly rely on theater studies, concentrating on the concept of performativity introduced by Erika Fischer-Lichte, when more or less adapting it for popular music studies. Performance analysis and its interpretation encompasses the production of sounds, movement, gestures, technical skills, style, and the staging of the performing artists. Regarding popular music as performance implies researching what is actually embodied, in which socio-cultural processes performances are embedded, and to what extent they function not only as a medium for content-related stimuli, but also as a carrier of meaning or for the production of knowledge.

Fischer-Lichte emphasizes four aspects of theatricality: performance, staging, corporality and perception.[2] She describes performance as a process of representation through body and voice in front of a physically present audience, staging as a process in which the strategies are developed and tested according to which what, when, how long, where, and how it should appear in front of the audience. Corporality results from the factor of representation or material, while perception refers to the spectator, their observing function and perspective.[3] In the concert situation, the audience follows a particular

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1   Fischer-Lichte/Roselt 2001, 241.

2   Fischer-Lichte 2007, 10.

3   Ibid., 18.

ritual, a sequence of actions that is primarily carried out by the visitors and can be defined as Milton Singer's concept of "cultural performance": "Each one [cultural performance] had a definitely limited time span, or at least a beginning and an end, an organized program of activity, a set of performers, an audience, and a place and occasion of performance."[4] Meanwhile, Philip Auslander, whose research focuses on performance, media, and cultural studies, criticizes the fact that musical performances have so far been excluded from theater and performance studies: "Theater studies leaves music out of its purview because it traditionally regards musical performance as inherently non-dramatic, and performance studies has inherited this prejudice. Even opera and musical theater are neglected areas of study in these fields despite their obvious relationship to other theatrical forms."[5] In his essay "Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto" (2004), Auslander introduces the term "musical persona," observing the fact that the performed music forms only a part of the musician's performance. In his performer-centered stance, he seeks ways of discussing what it means to perform as a musician, how artists create meaning through their performances, while ultimately focusing on the question of what musicians do as performers.

While most of the publications of popular music production in cultural studies investigate the economic, sociological, or political contexts in which the respective music is produced, they mainly ignore the fact that music is made in and through performance. Starting on the one hand from theater and cultural studies and on the other hand from theoretical discourse on the aesthetics and practice of the performative, this article pursues two goals. Firstly, introducing, discussing, and examining theories of (popular musical) performance including Auslander's theory of the "musical persona," Erving Goffman's "frame analysis" and Jens Eder's "clock of characters." Secondly, questions and methods of a popular music performance analysis are applied to a concrete case study concentrating on Taylor Swift's "Look What You Made Me Do" (2017) with regard to addressing our understandings of the possible meanings of the audiovisual text. By turning a critical eye to the significant changes in musicology during the last decades and pinpointing the social and cultural relevance of popular music performance, I draw on scholarly work dealing with popular music as performance and examine the aforementioned theoretical approaches in terms of their productivity for the analysis of popular music.

THE "MUSICAL PERSONA" IN POPULAR MUSIC

Auslander defines performance as constructed primarily through the act of the performer's presentation and only secondarily through the presentation of the music: "What musicians perform first and foremost is not music, but their own identities as musicians, their musical personae."[6] In this way, the identity of the performer comes to the fore in the musical performance. Auslander uses David Graver's concept of "personage," in which the presence of the actor's person is separated from the portrayed role that the

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4   Singer 1972, 72.

5   Auslander 2015, 529.

6   Auslander 2006, 102.

actor plays, to speak of the "musical persona."[7] Graver's concept, using movie actors as examples, shows three different facets: "the real person, the celebrity movie star (Graver's personage), and the actor portraying a character."[8] However, Auslander uses the Latin term "persona" instead of Graver's "personage," explaining: "Although I find Graver's concept of a personage congenial, I prefer the term persona, which I use to describe a performed presence that is neither an overtly fictional character nor simply equivalent to the performer's "real" identity."[9] Auslander builds on Simon Frith's model for understanding the different aspects of the voice in pop music[10] and his observation that we hear pop singers as "personally expressive,"[11] as personalities who sing from their own experience. According to Frith, popular musicians are involved in a process of "double enactment," embodying two performative dimensions at once: their "star personality" and "song personality."[12] Auslander systematizes and expands Frith's description and identifies: "the real person (the performer as human being), the performance persona (the performer as social being), and the song character (the role that performers play in accordance with the lyrics of a particular song)."[13] Auslander's broad conception of performance emphasizes that identities in popular music are constantly performed, closely linked to cultural, social, and historical discourses, constructed to reflect genre conventions and socio-cultural norms,[14] and at its best, respond to them.[15] Furthermore, Auslander argues that the persona serves as identification point between pop musicians and their audiences:

> [T]he real person is the dimension of performance to which the audience has the least access, since the audience generally infers what performers are like as real people from their performance personae and the characters they portray. Public appearances off-stage do not give reliable access to the performer as a real person, since it is quite likely that interviews and even casual public appearances are manifestations of the performer's persona.[16]

However, the term "performer" causes difficulties in the cultural studies debate. Sandra Danielczyk rightly argues that the premise that image alone is what is tangible and analyzable cannot go hand in hand with a concept of "real identity."[17] "Performer" becomes a construct that is determined by social expectations and social roles, whereby the personal and own situational perspective of the researcher plays a considerable role. Stephen Lowry describes the significance of "performer" as a theoretical construct for the analysis as follows: "What is meant by the "real" person often remains unclear. The star with whom viewers and fans interact is always a construct based on the information and signs disseminated in the media. In this respect, questions about the real person can be neglected when analyzing stars or the construct "real person" can be regarded as part of

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7   Ibid., 101.

8   Ibid.

9   Ibid.

10   Frith 1996, 186–187.

11   Ibid., 191–197.

12   Ibid., 212.

13   Auslander 2009, 305.

14   Auslander 2006, 101.

15   Auslander 2009, 306–307.

16   Ibid., 306.

17   Danielczyk 2017, 57.

image formation."[18] Hans-Otto Hügel points out that the joint reception of work and image carries the act of constituting a "star," whereby the image is an integral part of the work, just as, conversely, the work cannot be perceived without the image.[19] The question of what role is attributed to "the real person" in the analysis of persona on stage, in music video clips, in social media, but also in pop critique and in the study of popular music, remains unanswered. Particularly in the context of musical performances, the possibility of labelling a stage persona as "real" appears problematic, as Auslander's tripartite model suggests that the term "real person" allows some aspects associated with the musicians to be perceived as authentic, while others are considered inauthentic. In 2019, Auslander revised his distinction between persona as self-presentation and character as fiction:

> I arrived at detailed description of the musical persona as the performance of a social role. Over time, however, I came to realize two limitations to my formulation. The first is that it did not account for those instances in which musicians do perform fictional characters as their persona. […] The other limitation of my initial formulation of musical persona is closely related to the first. I found that I had placed too much emphasis on the self/other distinction in differentiating what musicians do from what actors do, resulting in a too easy contrast between actors as purveyors of fiction and musicians as representing aspects of themselves in performance.[20]

In contrast to Auslander, Allan Moore discusses the persona as manifested primarily in the recorded voice in its relation to sonic aspects, harmony, melody or lyrics. Moore examines the persona regarding the role musicians undertake when singing[21] – a role that is shaped by certain markers in music and sound. Consequently, the persona and their attributed characteristic are negotiated through the recorded voice depending on genre and style. While Moore is "less interested in musicians than […] in music,"[22] he conflates Auslander's "real person" and "performance persona" into his idea of "performer" to analyze a musician's identity outside of the recording. Moore continues with introducing the protagonist, a "figure inside the song, that has an identity only within the song."[23] By asking, "[w]hat should we expect of the persona?"[24], Moore poses three follow-up questions: Does the persona appear to be realistic or overtly fictional? He states that a realistic persona requests that the listeners interpret them as a "vocalized version of a direct address."[25] Meanwhile, a fictional persona would arise in a situation where the singer is obviously taking on a specific character compared to an actor. Moore's second question concerns the narrative of the track being realistic, something of the everyday life, "likely to be encountered by members of the imagined community addressed by the singer"[26] or fictional. The third question concerns the involvement of the protagonist in the situation

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18   Lowry 1997, 16; author's translation.

19   Hügel 2004, 66.

20   Auslander 2019, 84–85.

21   Moore 2012a, 181.

22   Ibid., 180.

23   Moore 2009, 126.

24   Ibid., 127.

25   Ibid.

26   Ibid.

described, "singing from reputed experience affected by the situation,"[27] or, if the musicians is external to the situation, reporting on it. He concludes by presenting a combination of "realistic (not fictional) persona, everyday (not fantastic) situation, involved (not objectified) stance, present (not past or future) time, and, exploration of the moment as the "bedrock" position of the persona."[28] Ultimately, Moore argues that songs provide certain meanings entailing the possibility to determine a variety of probable responses to a text,[29] meaning that listeners gain flexibility in negotiating the potential meanings of a song or track.[30] By examining Moore's theory, Kai Arne Hansen asserts that Moore's exclusive focus on the importance of sounds leaves him occupied with sound recordings that downplays socio-cultural significance, identity, and gendered meanings in popular music.[31]

Philip Tagg has a similar perspective concerning the location of persona at the sound level, particularly interested in vocal performance, by introducing the "vocal persona."[32] Tagg claims that the vocal persona is to be understood as an aspect of the musician's personality perceived by others through the medium of the singing voice or prosody. Meanwhile Tom Cochrane defines persona as a concept to investigate how complex emotions in music can be analyzed and concludes that the musician's persona becomes a frame that endorses or unifies the emotional feeling.[33] Building on the idea of a frame, Giovanni Formilan and David Stark assume that the persona has an autonomous reality existing independently of the musician's identity person.[34] In the study on DJs and producers, the researchers theorize identity as a multi-sided relationship involving person, persona, and others, concerning mainly the audience. Meanwhile, Hansen argues, with a focus on today's commercial pop, that musicians work within disparate modes of expression creating intersecting spaces. He investigates the constitution of pop personae across various platforms to demonstrate that personal narrativity in pop is bound up with our experiences of sound recordings and music videos. This approach entails "a view of the persona as co-constructed at both the production and reception ends of pop music"[35] and achieves "a holistic understanding of pop personae, reflecting the multifaceted ways in which they are constructed and experienced in a contemporary pop context."[36]

Burns and Lafrance, in turn, demonstrate a reader-centered approach that addresses the indeterminacy of textual meanings by combining critical cultural studies with music and audiovisual analysis.[37] In recognizing the indeterminacy of meanings, Burns adopts a post-structuralist orientation[38] and foregrounds the multimodality of popular music texts,[39]

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27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 128.

29 Moore 2001, 6–7.

30 Moore 2012b, 6.

31 Hansen 2017, 16.

32 Tagg 2012, 344.

33 Cochrane 2011, 211.

34 Formilan/Stark 2021, 39.

35 Hansen 2019.

36 Ibid.

37 Burns/Lafrance 2002.

38 Burns 2002, 32–35.

which also supports my own research on performances in popular music.[40] Furthermore, Burns develops a framework for understanding the relationship between individual parameters and the complexity of narrative functions of music as a transmedia phenomenon, focusing on the elaboration of their specific characteristics and textual meanings, and emphasizes the importance of integrating music analysis into the study of popular music.[41] At this point, I would like to mention that my own analyses of sound recordings rarely make use of traditional notation. This decision is consistent with Walser's position that descriptive language is perhaps best suited to convey our understanding of sound, lyrics and the motion picture.[42] While Burns's primary objects of enquiry are concept albums and songs, I argue for the applicability of a similar theoretical framework to the study of the pop persona concentrating on Auslander's identification of three layers in pop singers' performances.

ANALYSING TAYLOR SWIFT'S PERFORMANCE IN "LOOK WHAT YOU MADE ME DO" BY DRAWING ON THE CONCEPT OF THE "MUSICAL PERSONA" IN POPULAR MUSIC

Slipping into different narratives is portrayed particularly prominently in Taylor Swift's 2017 video "Look What You Made Me Do." The music video, which is four minutes and fifteen seconds long, shows Swift in many different situations and roles. All the scenes can be interpreted as confrontations with people with whom she has shared differences of opinion during her career. The video debuted at the 2017 MTV Video Music Awards, a show that covers a dramatic narrative in the musician's life. "Look What You Made Me Do" depicts Swift confronting her past performance personae, covering her romantic relationships as well as her feud with Kanye West including Kim Kardashian West's exposure of Swift on social media.

In the video's opening scene, the name "Nils Sjöberg" is written on a tombstone, as Swift is digging up a grave. The name is a reference to the pseudonym the musician used as a songwriting credit on the 2016 Calvin Harris/Rhianna single "This Is What You Came For."[43] Swift and Harris dated from March 2015 to June 2016.[44] The grave digging character is masked as a cadaveric version of Swift in the music video "Out of the Woods," wearing her 2014 Met Gala gown,[45] while the main tombstone from which the Swift zombie character emerges announces "Here Lies Taylor Swift's Reputation." The next sequence draws on Swift's lawsuit win, with the musician reclining in a bathtub of jewels, showing also a one-dollar bill, presumably referring to the Taylor Swift sexual assault trial in August 2017. David Mueller, a former DJ, alleged that Swift had him wrongfully terminated following an incident at a meet-and-greet in 2013; Swift countersued him for battery and sexual assault, seeking a symbolic one-dollar in damages, with

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39   Burns 2019, 96.

40   See Fürnkranz 2024a; 2024b.

41   Burns 2019, 96–97.

42   Walser 2003, 22.

43   Whitehead 2017, n. pag.

44   Lee 2015, n. pag.

45   Acuna 2017, n. pag.

the jury ruling in the musician's favor and ordering the DJ to pay her one dollar.[46] Swift released a statement following the trial revealing that her reason for counter-suing was to empower other victims of sexual assault.[47]

The throne scene includes the infamous snake that was used by Swift for promoting the album *Reputation* (2017) and that was also worked into the album's merchandise.[48] The snake covers the feud between Swift and Kayne West that has its roots in 2009. As Taylor Swift was giving her acceptance speech for the Best Female Video "You Belong with Me" at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards, West went on stage, took the microphone from Swift, and said: "Yo, Taylor, I'm really happy for you, I'mma let you finish, but Beyoncé had one of the best videos of all time! One of the best videos of all time!", indicating Beyoncé's video "Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)."[49]After releasing the song "Famous" (2016), in which West raps, "I feel like me and Taylor might still have sex. Why? I made that bitch famous," Swift criticized West and denounced the lyric as misogynistic.[50] West claimed to have obtained her approval over the criticized lines, "I called Taylor and had an hour-long convo with her about the line and she thought it was funny and gave her blessings,"[51] while the musician denied that claim with her spokesperson confirming that Swift had instead warned West not to release a track "with such a strong misogynistic message."[52] West's then-wife Kim Kardashian released an edited video recording in which Taylor Swift appeared to grant her approval to parts of the controversial lyrics, while in March 2020,[53] a longer recording was published that shows no evidence of West mentioning the lyrics to Swift.[54] On the same day as the Kardashian video was released, she tweeted about National Snake Day, "[t]hey have holidays for everybody, I mean everything these days! 🐍," a gesture that was interpreted as being directly addressed to Swift, with the hashtag #TaylorSwiftIsASnake becoming trending.[55] The Swift snake character sits on a golden throne while being served tea by an animated snake. On the armrest and on the columns of palace, carvings of the phrase "Et tu, Brute?" can be seen, referring to William Shakespeare's drama *Julius Caesar*. The snake character wears a gown by Balmain, a brand that has championed the Kardashian family.[56]

The following sequence depicts a character who is involved into a car crash. The character drives a luxury sports car down a dead-end street. When the character opens the car door, she is surrounded by paparazzi. Swift's hairstyle, with angular bangs, as well as her style of dress – a leopard print coat – makes her resemble her longtime rival, Katy Perry. The car crash is reminiscent of the one in Perry's "Unconditionally" video (2013).

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46   BBC 2017, n. pag.

47   Miller 2017, n. pag.

48   Hilterman 2017, n. pag.

49   Kreps 2009, n. pag.

50   Yoo 2016, n. pag.

51   Renner 2016, n. pag.

52   Yoo 2016, n. pag.

53   France 2017, n. pag.

54   Willman 2020, n. pag.

55   France 2017, n. pag.

56   Whitehead 2017, n. pag.

The camera zooms in on a Grammy Award the character is holding up. While Taylor Swift has won ten Grammys, Perry has, as yet, none of her own.

The various Swift's characters are supported by other characters in some sequences in the video, such as when she and her crew break and enter into a bank vault that boasts the name "Stream Co.," clearly referring to Swift's battle with streaming services in 2015.[57] After publishing a short newspaper column in *The Wall Street Journal* emphasizing the importance of albums as a creative medium for musicians in November 2014,[58] Swift removed her catalog from music streaming platforms.[59] In an open letter in June 2015, the musician threatened to withdraw her music from Apple Music due to the fact that the platform refused to offer royalties to musicians during its free three-month trial period.[60] This letter pressured Apple Inc. and the announcement that it would pay artists during the free trial period was released.[61] This narrative is depicted with Swift donning a hoodie that reads "Blind for love" and swinging a baseball bat. Simultaneously, we see that crew members' disguises are cat masks, a reminder that Swift has joked about possibly becoming a "crazy cat lady."[62]

Another sequence with a number of other characters depicts Swift as the leader of a factory of expendable robotic model types, a "Squad U." Hereby, Swift refers to Squad as a term used by the media to describe her circle of friends that includes successful models, actresses, and singers.[63] Afterward, Swift dances in another room with a group of eight men wearing "I <3 TS"-shirts, hot pants, tights, and high heels.

Next, she is standing on the wing of a plane in an airport hangar. The character saws off the wing in half and later spray-paints "reputation" in pink on the plane. At the video's climax, a Swift character stands on a T-shaped mountain while characters, including from her past stage performances, music videos, and red-carpet appearances, fight against each other while trying to reach her. When the Swift character at the peak of the mountain stretches out her arms, the other Swifts fall off the mountain. In another scene, the Swift character picks up a phone saying "I'm sorry, the old Taylor can't come to the phone right now. Why? Oh, 'cause she's dead!" Swift clearly attempts to shed her past performance personae.

The last scene depicts fifteen different Taylor Swift characters in the hangar while Swift stands on the wing of the plane. The bespectacled Swift from "You Belong With Me," the 2008 Swift wearing a "Junior Jewels"-shirt covered in the signatures of her celebrity friends, the guitar playing country music character, the top hat-wearing character from the album *Red*, the silver dress character from the 2009 VMAs to the 2017 all-black *Reputation* character. The "You Belong With Me" character is criticized by the "Into the Woods" zombie character and the other Swift characters for her "surprised face," perhaps referring to the criticism Swift has received for that expression at numerous awards shows. The *Reputation* character then calls the "Into the Woods" character "bitch," who responds with "Don't call me that!" The country lover character is accused of being fake

57 Schonfeld 2015, n. pag.

58 Weissmann 2014, n. pag.

59 Knopper 2014, n. pag.

60 Peters 2015, n. pag.

61 Halperin 2015, n. pag.

62 McRady 2017, n. pag.

63 Taylor Swift Fandom, n. pag.

by the *Red* character, reacting with tears, while the *Reputation* character states that Swift is "playing the victim […] again." Then the 2009 VMA-Swift character says "I would very much like to be excluded from this narrative," which leads the other characters to yell at her to "shut up!" in unison.[64] Ultimately, Swift uses the fifteen different personae she has created during her career and turns them into characters for her music video to voice the critiques that others have made of her. By stepping out of the role, a humorous approach to the musical persona occurs in the music video, which is by no means based on a real entity, but is rather comprised of different narratives.

The analyzed live performance of "Look What You Made Me Do" is taken from the concert film *Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour* (2023). The Eras Tour version of the song features an extended intro and an extended outro to the song. The performance begins on the middle stage, with Swift dressed in a jumpsuit that leaves one leg free. The ornaments on her costume are reminiscent of a snake and correspond to the aforementioned attribution by West and Kardashian towards the musician. Swift begins to sing and moves around the stage, imitating the zombie choreography from her music video. When the guitar kicks in, her movements become more fluid and correspond to the beat. Singing "But I got smarter / I got harder in the nick of time, honey / I rose up from the dead I do it all the time / I got a list of names and yours is in red underlined" she turns around and walks towards the main stage, while "I check it once / then I check it twice" is addressed directly to the audience. Swift turns towards the stage; for the second part of the chorus, she walks towards her backing dancers, who are dressed to match the characters in Swift's video and are standing in glass boxes. After the chorus, dancers dressed in black, reminiscent of agents, enter the stage and circle the glass boxes, visually heralding the next verse. The diversity of the dancers stands out here, with the troop consisting of white people and BiPOCs of different generations and body shapes. Swift as the performance persona is clearly distinguishable from the characters on stage. Swift sings "You asked me for a place to sleep / Locked me out and threw a feast (what?)," then she turns around and walks towards the main stage. With "I check it once / then I check it twice," she turns directly to a dancer in a glass box. Both entities knock against the panes and sing "The world moves on, another day another drama, drama / But not for me, not for me, all I think about is karma" in unison. For a moment, Swift's performance persona and the Swift character embodied by a background singer become one entity.

With the pre-chorus, Swift turns her attention to the other Swift characters in the glass boxes. She interacts with them, dances close to the boxes and sets them in motion with jolts. With "I don't trust nobody and nobody trusts me / I'll be the actress starring in your bad dreams," the performance persona turns her attention back to the audience on the middle stage. The mood in the audience is heightened by the intensity of the music. Mobile phones recording the performance are in motion, while dancing bodies are recognizable in the video. While Swift recites "I'm sorry, the old Taylor can't come to the phone right now / Why? Oh, 'cause she's dead (oh)," she imitates a telephone with her hand. With the next pre-chorus, a platform arises from the stage, lifting Swift out of the action. As the platform moves, Swift dances on her knees, then stands up. Meanwhile, the other Swift characters leave the cages and dance around the performance persona, who is standing on the platform. The song ends with a static Swift repeating "Look what you just made me do" as she is cheered by the dancers and the audience. Swift clearly centers the

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64   Spanos 2017, n. pag.

live performance as performance persona, while the background dancers embody the personae from Swift's earlier career stages – which are presented in the video by the artist herself – as characters on stage.

FRAME ANALYSIS AND THE FRAMING OF THE "MUSICAL PERSONA"

The work of the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman (1922–1982) deals with anthropological, social-psychological and psychiatric problems of social or socially deviant behavior. The focus is on the question of how the individual can maintain their structurally vulnerable autonomy. In interactions, the individual tries to convey a certain image of themselves because they know that they are being observed. Goffman's so-called "frame analysis" is an excellent tool to analyze and make understandable the levels of everyday experience of cultures and their artistic transformations. Goffman understands "frame" to be experience schemas learned through socialization, which people use unconsciously. "Frames" define situations and enable them to be dealt with, they are the "principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them."[65] The individual places each situation in a framework, in a specific experience schema. The use of the individual frames occurs unconsciously, and attention is only drawn to this through irritation, through falling out of the frame, or through a violation of the rules associated with a frame.[66]

Goffman utilizes the term "front" to signify "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance"[67] by identifying three integral components:

1. setting, encompassing "furniture, decor, physical lay-out, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the space of human action played out before, within, or upon it,"[68]
2. appearance, describing "stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the performer's social statuses";[69]
3. and manner, referring to "those stimuli that function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the on-coming situation."[70]

While Knoblauch criticizes the concept of frame analysis as "overemphasizing" the structural characteristics of interactions, but "underestimating" the subjective meanings that people associate with interactions,[71] media theorist Joshua Meyrowitz developed Goffman's model to electronic broadcasting media. Meyrowitz asserts that "it is not the physical setting itself that determines the nature of the interaction, but the patterns of information flow,"[72] arguing that the expansion of electronic broadcasting media had blurred the

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65   Goffman 1986, 10–11.

66   Ibid.

67   Goffman 1956, 13.

68   Ibid.

69   Ibid., 15.

70   Ibid.

71   Knoblauch 2000, 175.

72   Meyrowitz 1985, 36.

boundary between the public and the private with information being exposed in public. The convergence of formerly distinct situations has the effect of merging and opening up previously separate worlds to each other, thereby demystifying and breaking down barriers in the social world.[73] The boundaries between front stage and backstage have developed into a new middle region that can be interpreted as a new front stage, containing "elements of both the former onstage and offstage behaviour, but lacks their extremes."[74] Ultimately, Meyrowitz's development of Goffman's model is indicative of a shift in behavioral trends.

Based on Goffman's considerations on frame analysis, Auslander approaches his concept of the persona in music videos. Goffman's conceptualization of frames as unconsciously utilized experience schemas acquired through socialization, offers a novel perspective on the dynamics of social interaction. Nevertheless, the use of these acquired frames generally occurs unconsciously until irritation occurs. The film *The Truman Show* is often cited as an example, in which the protagonist learns from a falling spotlight that he is in a television show and not in real life. In summary, it can be said that situations are classified into experience schemas and accordingly perceived within a certain framework. In his text "Framing Personae in Music Videos" (2019), Auslander develops this idea further and uses it as the basis for a threefold framing of musical performances as events:

> The innermost frame is considered to be the one that most directly defines the event; it is the frame that allows us to understand that an event is a musical performance, such as a concert, a recital or an open rehearsal. These musical events differ, for example, in different behavioral conventions. This frame sets out basic expectations of the musical event, defines social roles, and a common understanding of all those involved about which conventions prevail between performers and audience.[75]

According to Auslander, the expectations of what might happen during a performance are largely influenced by the second frame, namely that of the musical genre. In popular music in particular, genres can be defined in many different ways. Genres distinguish forms of musical experience from one another and establish boundaries between them with varying degrees of permeability.[76] Grouping songs by genre makes it easier for users to find tunes that match their musical taste. Genre, as a mediator between different elements of music and a universally understood description of music,[77] is subject to frequently changing trends[78] and social influence.[79] Fabian Holt describes genre as "a fundamental structuring force in musical life. It has implications for how, where, and with whom people make and experience music,"[80] adding in the further course of his discussion of genres in US popular music: "Discourse plays a major role in music making."[81] Holt de-

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73 Ibid., 92.

74 Ibid., 78.

75 Auslander 2019, 208.

76 Ibid.

77 Marino 2015, 239–240.

78 Zangerle et al. 2019, 324.

79 Salganik et al. 2006, 854–855.

80 Holt 2007, 2.

81 Ibid.

fines the creation and experience of music as a social construct that is passed on through discourses and thus manifests the relevance of genres. Auslander illustrates that the music video is in some ways an ideal space for the staging of musical personae because it offers performers a greater degree of control over their means of expression:

> Because performers construct their musical personae in relation to musical genres, it is important to consider the connections between the music video and genre in relation to the idea of personae. For one thing, the music video arguably should be seen as a genre unto itself rather than as a subgenre of film, television, or advertisement.[82]

Ultimately, Auslander describes this framing, referred to as the second frame, as fundamental for the analysis of personae in music video clips. Nevertheless, it seems relevant to me to take a closer look at the third frame.

The third framework surrounding the performance of popular music includes the socio-cultural conventions defined by society as a whole outside the context of musical performance and genre. Performance, as a social context that differs in its design from the processes of everyday life, allows actors to engage in behavior that would not be acceptable in other social contexts. In Goffman's view, theater becomes a model for the social world.[83] At this point, Goffman refers to the "theory of symbolic interaction,"[84] which derives from the pragmatism or social behaviorism of the *Chicago School* of the first half of the twentieth century. The basic assumption of the approach is expressed in a theorem formulated by William Isaak Thomas in 1923: "Those situations that are defined as real by the people involved in them are real in their consequences."[85] The social construction of reality is shown in the perspective that defines the starting point of a situation and through its relevance to action.

At the interface between reality and staging, the frames learned by the individual serve the continuity of the socially constructed reality and create the possibility of certainty in action. Auslander cites David Bowie and Suzi Quatro as counterexamples with regard to conventional codes of conduct, musicians who did not conform to the genre conventions of rock music of the late 1960s, and further mentions Pussy Riot for their system-critical, feminist performance in a Russian Orthodox cathedral in 2012 as examples of the transgression of socio-cultural norms.[86]

Auslander indicates "a crucially important point that is central to Goffman: actors and musicians are completely alike in the sense that both groups are engaged in performing a social identity."[87] The music video for Swift's performance of "Look What You Made Me Do" provides an opportunity to examine the performance of a persona in the context of event, genre and socio-cultural frames, in this case the framing of reprocessing past narratives and empowerment in the context of a pop production.

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82   Auslander 2019, 221.

83   Goffman 1973, 19.

84   Rose 1973, 266–272.

85   William Isaak Thomas quoted in Helle 1992, 57.

86   Auslander 2019, 209–210.

87   Ibid., 84–85.

Analysing Taylor Swift's Performance in "Look What You Made Me Do" by Drawing on Frame Analysis

Event

Auslander describes musical events as characterized through "different behavioral conventions."[88] In Harald Huber's and my study "Performing Diversity" that deals with performance rituals in Austrian musical life, the differences and diffusions between the stylistic fields of classical/contemporary music, jazz/improvised music, folk music/world music, dance/hip-hop/electronics, rock/pop music and Schlager/folk music were explored in the form of qualitative case studies. A particular focus was placed on the examination of crossover phenomena within the music landscape of the years 2010–2015. The selected examples represented a variety of the concert form, which were then categorized according to the performances' ritual-dimension: a characteristic feature of the devotional ritual is the immobilization of the body. This is typified by the audience's seated position in a concert hall, the option to applaud upon entering the stage, and the provision of information through a printed program. Conversely, the animation ritual is distinguished by the activation of the body, encouraging the audience to participate physically in a relaxed atmosphere, encompassing activities such as dancing, clapping, singing, conversing, and consuming beverages. Spoken contributions are facilitated through live moderation. In this form of meditation, the degree of mental or physical attention can be customized by the audience depending on the situation, ranging from complete devotion to use as background sound.[89] Swift's staging corresponds to the animation ritual. The audience is addressed multiple times during the live performance and is thus engaged in Swift's performance. Despite the prevalence of mobile phones among the audience, the movement, exclamations, and raised hands of the fans can be discerned.

Genre

"Look What You Made Me Do" was written and produced by Swift together with Jack Antonoff. Recorded at Rough Customer Studio in Brooklyn, Antonoff programmed the track and played its instruments, and Randy Merrill mastered the track at Sterling Sound in New York.[90] The song is three minutes and thirty-one seconds long, written in the key of A minor, and has a tempo of 128 beats per minute (bpm). While music critics described the track as electropop,[91] *National Public Radio*'s Lars Gotrich said that the beats and vocals evoked electroclash,[92] *Rolling Stone*'s Brittany Spanos assumed it was a dance-pop song, attributing this effect partly to the "dark techno" of Britney Spears's 2007 album *Blackout*.[93] In turn, *Swiftpedia* describes the song's genre(s) as synth-punk, dance-pop, electropop, and progressive pop.[94] Swift states in a 2010-interview "I'm inspired by

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88 Ibid., 208.

89 Fürnkranz/Huber 2021, 352.

90 Battan 2017, n. pag.

91 Johnston 2017, n. pag.; Sheffield 2017, n. pag.; Kinbbs 2019, n. pag.; Gotrich/Lorusso/McKenna 2017, n. pag.

92 Gotrich/Lorusso/McKenna 2017, n. pag.

93 Spanos 2017, n. pag.

94 Taylor Swift Fandom, n. pag.

all kinds of different sounds [...] I think genres are sort of unnecessary walls,"[95] affirming Auslander's stance that genres distinguish forms of musical experience from one another and establish boundaries between them with varying degrees of "permeability."[96]

The track is introduced by a slow, orchestral melody that transitions into the first verse after a short break-down. The kick changes fundamentally between the first and second part of the verse. As the pre-chorus begins, the beat and rhythmic elements disappear completely, instead, this part incorporates piano and synth-simulated brass that give pre-chorus and bridge a "melodramatic, emotional"[97] feel. Furthermore, Swift's vocals are accompanied by a dramatic sound, which alludes more and more to a drop. This focusses on the repetitive phrase "Look what you made me do" and bass-heavy drums, described as "vindictive, mocking, dismissive, even a little playful."[98] The verses and chorus consist of electronic tones, hip-hop-inspired beats, and vocal cadences. The track builds on elements of mid-1980s and 1990s industrial and electro,[99] while the opening strings and piano were described as "Hollywood"-inspired by Sarah Carson[100] and evoked a "dark, fantasy-film" atmosphere, as *The New York Times*[101] wrote.

Reprocessing Past Narratives

Given this context, the video for "Look What You Made Me Do" needed to construct Swift's musical persona in a way that would embrace the musician's performance as a reprocessing of past narratives, accusations, feuds and denunciations. The musician uses language and symbolism to establish the themes of blaming and victimhood. Already the title of the song implies that the narrator has been forced to take certain actions because of someone else's behavior. The song opens with "I don't like your little games / don't like your tilted stage / the role you made me play / of the fool, no, I don't like you." Especially, "little games" and "tilted stage" work as metaphors for strategies of power, manipulation, and control, while the "role you made me play" refers to Swift's position due to power imbalances. The tombstone in the video's opening as well as the line "I'm sorry, the old Taylor can't come to the phone right now / why? Oh, 'cause she's dead!" refers openly to the new persona Swift has created during the process of working on the album, or as a promotional tool. The death of the "old Taylor" can be seen as a metaphor for silencing people through powerful institutions, patriarchal practices, and societal norms, appropriating Robin James's stance that there are "many ways to deal with damage and trauma, and people frequently recover, survive, cope and flourish in ways that don't adequately support hegemony."[102] Accordingly, it can be interpreted as Swift's empowerment strategy by creating a new image.

95   Scaggs 2010, 7.

96   Auslander 2019, 208.

97   Coscarelli/Pareles/Caramanica/Morris/Ganz 2017, n. pag.

98   Ibid.

99   Ibid.

100 Carson 2017, n. pag.

101 Coscarelli/Pareles/Caramanica/Morris/Ganz 2017, n. pag.

102 James 2015, 168.

Empowerment[103]

The music video showcases different portrayals of Taylor Swift's personae, each reflecting a respective stage of her career. This implies that her performer's identity is continuously changing. The video's narrative comments on Swift's public persona and how she is perceived by her fans as well as the media. By showing revenge and hatred, the first character in the music video, a zombie Swift, is crawling up through her own grave that reads "Here lies Taylor Swift's reputation." The symbolic and literal return from the death after months of silence can be interpreted as an empowering act regarding Swift's career. Meanwhile, Swift clearly shows dominance and power by sitting on a golden throne decorated with snakes or standing in front of lines of plastic models and singing, "But I got smarter / I got harder in the nick of time, honey / I rose up from the dead I do it all the time / I got a list of names and your is in red underlined / I check it once then I check it twice," leading a group robbing a bank or being the head of a female biker gang and singing "The world moves on another day another drama, drama, but not for me, not for me all I think is karma." She dances in front of eight male dancers all wearing "I <3 TS"-tops and repeats "Ooh, look at what you made me do," in another sequence the dominant character stands in front of the other characters taken from her hit video clips and repeats "I don't trust nobody and nobody trust me, I'll be the actress starring in your bad dream" for four times. Especially in those sequences that define the dominant Swift character as leader, Goffman's definition of "front"[104] becomes crucial.

Another aspect that correlates to ideas of empowerment are actual acts of power in Swift's video. "Ooh, look what you made me do" is allegedly visualized when one of the Swift characters performs male-connoted acts such as the car crash scene that leads to an explosion, hitting stacks of money or lifting two big motorcycles by herself. Especially the combination of the delivered messages and the visual cues enables the video to demonstrate the musician's ideas of empowerment supported by the intensely repetitive parts.

With this song, its video and live performances, Swift celebrates empowerment, female-identifying music creation, and feminist communities. Her critique of heteronormative gender concepts, sexism and abuse of power, as well as patriarchal structures in the music business and everyday life is defined through the lens of the reality of a female pop star, or rather through her musicking as a form of empowerment, which is particularly strengthened by the sense of community. The characters in the music video represent exaggerated and utopian ideas of Swift's personae alluding to Robin James's observation that postfeminism and popular feminism are, at least in principle, aligned with the objectives of liberal (white) feminism, including the promotion of individual empowerment and self-ownership. James concludes that "because liberal feminism is incapable of addressing patriarchy as a system that works at the structural and institutional level, successfully realizing liberal feminism's goals can't and won't fix patriarchy."[105]

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103 According to Norbert Herriger (2002, 14), the term refers to processes of the active appropriation of power, strength and creative capacity by those affected by powerlessness themselves.

104 Goffman 1956, 13.

105 James 2020, 7.

THE CLOCK OF CHARACTERS

The German film scholar Jens Eder deals with the approaches to character analysis from the various directions and schools of film studies – structuralist, psychoanalytical and cognitive theories – as well as the attempts to unite several approaches. In addition, he creates a differentiated, comprehensive model of analysis that incorporates and integrates the aforementioned interdisciplinary preliminary work. Eder's concept of character analysis encompasses fictional characters, i.e., characters in film, television and music videos, their characteristics, their actions, their typification, and the emotional involvement they trigger in viewers. According to Eder, the analysis of a character is incomplete if it only remains at the level of visualized representation – i.e., the performance – without including the reception by asking two key questions: "How can one systematically analyse characters and corroborate statements about them? And how can one explain in what ways viewers experience characters and react to them with perceptions, thoughts, and feelings?"[106]

In his analysis, Eder divides the film character into four levels of observation: from an aesthetic point of view as artefacts, from a diegetic point of view as fictional beings, from a thematic point of view as symbols, and from a pragmatic point of view as symptoms. Eder presents these four levels as the "clock of character":
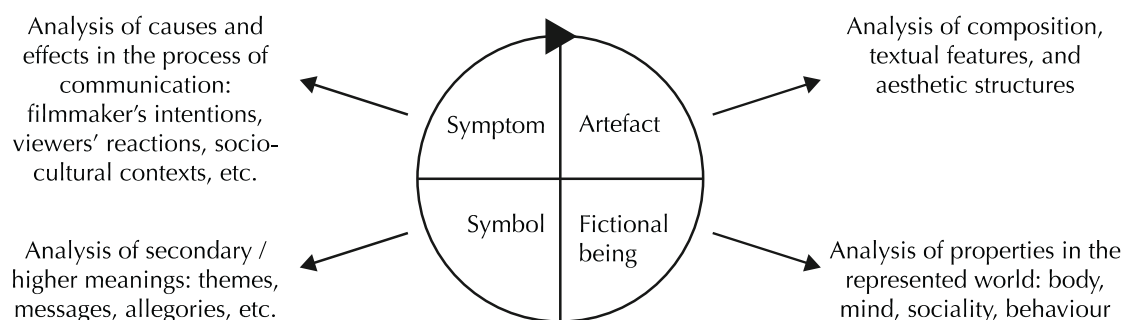

Figure 1: The "clock of character,"[107] as formulated by Jens Eder

Eder's analysis schema distinguishes four aspects: "Characters are, firstly, inhabitants of a fictitious world; secondly, artefacts of a particular mould; thirdly, symbols conveying meanings and themes; and fourthly, symptoms permitting inferences about their production and reception, causes and effects."[108]

Before the viewers identify a character, they already perceive the character on the basis of the audiovisual appearance. At the basal level of perception, the character is initially interpreted with the help of preconscious codes. The "character as artefact" refers to the sensually perceptible form of the character and their components such as body, age, gender, origin, costume, hairstyle, make-up, props, voice, and lighting, in the sense of the filmmaker's intentions. Characters are thus created as artefacts by audiovisual means – they are either portrayed by actors or artificially animated. From these impressions, view-

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106 Eder 2010, 17.

107 Ibid., 21.

108 Ibid., 24.

ers create their own interpretation of the character, to which they attribute characteristic traits.[109]

"Characters as fictional beings" are characterized by physical, mental, and social features. If the characteristics of the fictional being are captured by the plot lines of scenes, viewers can understand them as signs that extend beyond the filmic fiction and create associations with overarching themes. Categories such as gender, age, bodily abilities, or form permit "a rather precise description of external appearance and body language with regard to body shape, face, gaze, mimic, gesture, proxemics, posture, touch, hairstyle, clothes, and other artifacts close to the body."[110]

"Character as symbol" examines the different meanings that can be read into characters, their symbolic content: "When we examine characters as symbols, the question to be answered is what indirect meanings they convey."[111] Additionally, the results of the previous reception allow a reading into a diagnosis of real historical-social conditions and relationships. The analysis of "character as symptom" takes up these connections and deals with the historical and political context in which the character was created and develops its effect: "When we examine them as symptoms, the question concerns the causes in the production process that lead to their specific properties, and the effects of them on the viewers during and after reception."[112] The design of the character can ultimately be reflected on each of the levels described, closing the circle to the "character as artefact."

The "clock of character" allows us to include components such as hierarchies, contrasts, communication or interaction in the analysis. Characters face their context, as main or secondary characters they act according to a certain hierarchy of attention, as a protagonist or antagonist in a field of conflict situations and in certain spaces of action. An existing value system defines the character as a good or evil fictional being. Values, desires, drives and emotions determine the motivations in the narrative. The fate of the fictional being can trigger empathy and sympathy, subsequently an emotional connection to the recipient's own identity is established. Eder's approach that focuses on four aspects characterizing a fictional character appears to be fruitful for analyzing musical performances in many respects. Musical performances also work with artefacts and fictional beings that have various symbolic and symptomatic aspects.

Analyzing Taylor Swift's Performance in "Look What You Made Me Do" by Employing the "Clock of Character"

Firstly, I decided to swiftly summarize the characteristics of Swift's song, since musical details are characterized by intertextual stylistic connections, which in turn serve to provide a framework for the interpretation of both the persona and the track by the listener. "Look What You Made Me Do" has a 4/4-time, a tempo of 128 bpm, and is written in the key of A minor. The track is introduced by a slow, orchestral melody, which, after a short break-down, leads into the first verse. Between the first and second part of the verse, the

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109 Ibid., 26–29.

110 Ibid., 24.

111 Ibid., 32.

112 Ibid.

kick changes radically. Swift's voice is accompanied by a dramatic sound, which increasingly hints at a drop as her singing progresses focusing on the repeated phrase "Look what you made me do" and bass-heavy drums.

Character as Artefact

As artefact, Swift reenacts various personae she embodied through her career and in her songs, as well as ideas of her persona that were ascribed to her through the media, fans, and fellow musicians. The video begins with what were at that time current allegations against Swift, but overall the video looks back at Swift's career by featuring her personae, who were turned into characters in the music video, and ultimately confronting them with accusations.

Character as Fictional Being

As fictional being, Swift highlights her new role as a villain while embodying various stereotypical villainous characters and roles, such as acting as a bank robber, a reckless driver, a vandalizer, sitting on a throne, or standing on top of a human mountain. The dichotomy of the role of villain combines the assumption that the Swift characters are not the creators of their own villainess, but have rather been forced into it. The villain character matches the audience's expectations: Swift's staging is a mixture of being cruel, vindictive, and self-centered, coming from a place of self-defense. Additionally, Swift's clothing and style parodies other musicians such a character on a throne surrounded by snakes wearing a gown by Balmain, a brand that is associated with the Kardashian family – referring to Kim Kardashian West's exposure of Swift on social media – or the car accident character with angular bangs, wearing a leopard print coat, resembling her longtime rival, Katy Perry.

Character as Symbol

For years Swift was associated with being the "Country Lolita,"[113] a pop star with a "very pink, very perfect life."[114] As a symbol, Swift metaphorically kills the past versions of her personae, when she sings "I'm sorry, but the old Taylor can't come to the phone right now, why? Oh, because she's dead." This is illustrated visually at the beginning of the video with the zombie version of Swift climbing out of a grave and by using comparisons to burning witches to illustrate the accusations made against her when she sings "I can feel the flames on my skin, crimson red paint on my lips." Swift addresses being "killed" by the media in the past, but also highlights the fact that she has learnt from past controversies: "But I got smarter / I got harder in the nick of time, honey / I rose up from the dead I do it all the time / I got a list of names and your is in red underlined / I check it once then I check it twice." Besides the media, the character condemns celebrities who have control over the system and have used their influence in aiding them turning the public against her as she sings, "I don't like your kingdom keys / they once belonged to me / you asked me for a place to

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113 Edwards 2012, n. pag.

114 Grigoriadis 2009, n. pag.

sleep / locked me out / and threw a feast" and continues with "I don't trust nobody and nobody trusts me." As a symbol, the character is highly critical of the power structures around female musicians. This criticism emphasizes the awareness of being one of those who benefit, having the "kingdom keys." By speaking against the system's operations, the character underlines the fact that female celebrities often experience backlash from the systems they are in, while taking on a contradictory role. The character as a symbol uses her celebrity position in the song, the music video and the live performance as a platform to bring attention to toxic and misogynist behavior.

Character as Symptom

"Look What You Made Me Do" contains numerous hidden meanings indicating denunciation, accusation, fake facts, and misogyny that influenced Swift's career and subsequently the creation of the song character. In the opening scene, we see two tombstones one reading "Taylor Swift's Reputation" and the other reading "Nils Sjöberg" referencing the pseudonym Swift used for a songwriting credit for her ex-boyfriend Calvin Harris's song "This Is What You Came For." This contribution was supposed to be kept a secret, but after the reveal, Harris started a tweetstorm accusing Swift of looking for "someone new to try and bury."[115] The single dollar bill that we see in the bathtub full of diamonds in which Swift bathes in is speculated to represent the symbolic dollar the musician was awarded for winning a sexual assault trial in 2017[116] as a response to media statements mocking that she "cries in a marble bathtub surrounded by pearls."[117] The golden throne with a carving of "Et tu, Brute?" on the armrest, referring to William Shakespeare's drama Julius Caesar, indicates Swift's infamous title "snake" during her rift with Kanye West and Kim Kardashian.[118] While standing on a mountain of characters wearing several notable outfits previously worn by herself, Swift reiterates that she is leaving behind her old image and embracing her newfound role as an evil "snake"-character.

Concerning Swift's position as a feminist artist, the depiction of the male dance crew wearing "I <3 TS"-shirts, hot pants, tights and high heels becomes particularly crucial. Staged as gender benders, the dancers challenge binary gender norms. According to Judith Butler, the division of people into the categories of male and female is a discursively formed construct that uses an alleged, natural-biological fact as a pretext for exercising domination and power.[119] In the video, male dancers perform alternative gender concepts in drag, thereby revealing the performative nature of gender. Butler asserts that "in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency."[120] Swift's music video provides a valuable opportunity to re-evaluate the masculinized body as a medium of expression and offers a compelling illustration of the cultural reinterpretation process that is currently taking place within feminist music circles. The concept of gender bending cannot be found within the live performance. How-

115 Nevins 2017, n. pag.

116 Whitehead 2017, n. pag.

117 Jones 2017, n. pag.

118 France 2017, n. pag.

119 Butler 1990, 45.

120 Ibid., 187.

ever, the dance crew's depiction of diverse body types and BIPoCs can be interpreted as a staging strategy to showcase Swift's idea of diversity.

As symptom, the character uses denouncing and misogynist statements, packs them into a catchy tune, and deconstructs the idea of a fixed identity in popular music while emphasizing the influence of media and public perception on celebrities' personae. The critique of heteronormative ideas and misogyny in the media is underlined with a video that critically and ironically depicts stations of Swift's career and introduces a new empowered persona.

CONCLUSIONS

In his book *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (1998), Nicholas Cook demonstrated the deep entanglement of music as the "purest" art form with media, semiotic systems as well as other art forms. In *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance*, Cook argues that music and performance should no longer be understood as two separate or merely complementary fields, but rather in terms of "music as performance."[121] The methodology employed by Cook is characterized by a comprehensive integration of three elements: firstly, a broad contextualization of the history of music and ideas is undertaken. Secondly, structural-analytical details are elaborated. Thirdly, empirical-quantitative investigations of sound recordings are conducted. A significant consequence of this concept is that the phenomenon that can be labelled as music in an analytical, listening or reading sense is deprived of the status of a clearly defined and structured (research) object.[122] In *Konzert-Szenen: Bewegung, Performance, Medien. Musik zwischen performativer Expansion und medialer Integration 1950–2000* (2013), Christa Brüstle delineates the distinguishing characteristics between the concert stage and the theater stage, highlighting the conventional allocation of roles to musicians and actors. From a methodological perspective, the book adheres to the recent paradigm shift in musicology which shifts the focus from the work to the performance,[123] emphasizing the analysis of musical practices and processes. It is exactly this paradigm shift that enables us to integrate the analysis of performances on stage and in music videos in a theory of popular music.

Reflecting Fischer-Lichte's definition of theatricality that comprises four aspects: performance, staging, corporality, and perception, I assume that pop musicians address their audiences in complex ways. Consequently, reading and analyzing performances in popular music is more than examining one particular text but an inspection of a conglomerate of texts and contexts that form the production, as well as the reception of musical and performative expressions. In his 2019 text "Framing Personae in Music Videos," Auslander claims that the music video is in some ways an ideal space for the performance of musical personae compared to live performance, because the video offers the performers a greater degree of control over their means of expression as well as an accurate context for artists to negotiate musical personalities.[124] Music videos allow musicians to construct their personae in detail without having to take into account the contingencies of live performance.

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121 Cook 2013, 1.

122 Ibid., 12.

123 Brüstle 2013, 17.

124 Auslander 2019, 221.

Throughout the text I have paid close attention to the understanding of the pop persona as the center of a performance in popular music. As a starting point, I introduced three performer-centered approaches to the analysis of how contemporary pop artists mobilize themselves as intertextual objects, resulting in a broad exploration of how identities in pop are carved out through personal narrativity and visual display. Firstly, I introduced, discussed and examined theories of (popular music) performance including Auslander's theory of the "musical persona," Goffman's "frame analysis" and Eder's "clock of characters." By doing so, I turned a critical eye to the mutual relationships between notions of identity, sound, and look, and how performers negotiate their subjectivities and demonstrate their personae through visual and musical codes.

While I found Auslander's threefold model of the persona in popular music[125] as well as his conception of performance fruitful for my analyses of "Look What You Made Me Do," I agree with Danielczyk's stance that the notion of what is analyzable is incompatible with a concept of "real identity."[126] Auslander's approach offers a useful toolkit for the analysis of the performance persona and the character, furthermore it allows us to expand the scope of popular music analysis by encouraging us to consider personae and frames within the analytical framework. In turn, Auslander builds on Goffman's "frame analysis" introducing a threefold framing of musical performances as events as well as Goffman's usage of the term "front"[127] to signify "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance."[128] Concentrating on the genre and on the socio-cultural frames allowed me to include musical aspects but still focus on Swift's performance in the music video. My third approach emerged from film studies. Eder's concept of understanding characters includes their characteristics, their actions, and the involved audience. Eder's basic schema distinguishes four standpoints for the analyses of characters: from an aesthetic point of view as artefacts, from a diegetic point of view as fictional beings, from a thematic point of view as symbols, and from a pragmatic point of view as symptoms. As a trained film scholar, Eder's approach taught me much when co-writing the book *Aufführungsrituale der Musik. Zur Konstituierung kultureller Vielfalt am Beispiel Österreich* (2021), and I was therefore keen on using his approach in analyzing Swift's performance in said music video. As a film scholar, Eder offers a valuable toolkit for analyzing music videos; the four aspects enabled me to dive deeper into Swift's performance than all the other approaches I used. I learnt about her staging, performance style, as well as about the video's background and the hidden easter eggs.

In recent decades, popular music has evolved into a multifaceted, interdisciplinary field of enquiry. Methods, objects, and added value of music-centered approaches are being critically interrogated. The discourse has shifted towards the notion of contexts examined through new methodologies and connected to sound as integral parts by employing appropriate music- and performance-analytical instruments. As I hope my discussion of Swift's "Look What You Made Me Do" has made clear, reading pop performance is not an attempt to identify one true version of what meanings the song affords. The ideas, signs and symbols that comprise pop performances can present challenging articu-

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125 Auslander 2009, 305.

126 Danielczyk 2017, 57.

127 Goffman 1956, 13.

128 Ibid.

lations of the persona, while the public discussions surrounding musicians are often characterized by contradictory narratives. This may result in ambiguity, making it difficult to pinpoint any single and true idea of a performance concept. The complex and various ways in which pop performances are negotiated attribute meaning to their experiences. The focus of this study is therefore the multiplicity of possible meanings in pop, with the aim of inviting the reader to reflect on their own involvement in activating these meanings. I introduced three approaches, as well as toolkits, that seem useful when concentrating on the performance of the persona in popular music. I advocate for the integration of persona-centered, performance-analytical methods as a genuine component of musicological research. Given the increasingly diverse and interdisciplinary methodological landscape, collaboration with scholars from theater, film and media studies, as well as intersectionality research – a topic I was only able to apply to a limited extent in Swift's oeuvre – is both useful and necessary. Furthermore, we must keep in mind that continuous developments in media practices and technology have led to changes in modes of performance and production that warrant academic scrutiny. However, methodological progress must be complemented by reflections on fruitful ways of interacting with new interdisciplinary approaches.

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