

Miles Luce

The "Gec-Effect:" How 100 Gecs Queers Genre and Gender

Miles Luce is a freshman studying Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Art History. Miles is from Kansas City, Missouri. This research was self-guided, in conversation with peer Ian Partman.

Abstract: My article tracks the queer relations to genre and vocality embodied by contemporary hyperpop duo, 100 geecs. I argue that 100 geecs initiates a nomadic approach to genre through absurdism and parody. Furthermore, I describe how 100 geecs' use of vocal modulation resists gender's construction of the masculine and feminine voice. I conclude with a meditation on "gec" feminism that attempts to follow the ethic of hyperpop for articulating a wacky, yet subversive genre of (un-)academic writing. My investigation of 100 geecs' album, *1000 geecs and The Tree of Clues*, is a cross-disciplinary exercise in queer theory, gender studies, musicology, art history, and philosophy; it primarily contributes to queer theory discourses on genre, gender, art, and the body.



100 geecs, "gec 2 Ü (Danny L Harle Harlecore Remix)," *1000 geecs and The Tree of Clues*.¹

100 geecs, Hyperpop, and Queer Theory

Hyperpop, canonized by its Spotify playlist in August 2019, functions as an umbrella term for a diversity of artists and songs that usually feature auto-tuned voices, lightning-quick tempos, and distorted 808 beats. Birthed out of nightcore, emo, lo-fi, soundcloud rap, bubblegum pop, and countless other genres, Hyperpop describes more of a "hyper-" than apathetic relationship to

¹ 100 geecs; Danny L Harle. 2020. "gec 2 Ü (Danny L Harle Harlecore Remix)." *1000 geecs and The Tree of Clues*. Comps. Dylan Brady and Laura Les. Spotify.

genre.² “Hyper-,” derived from the Greek word *hyper*, meaning “over, beyond,” captures an alternative—or even “queer”—approach to genre rather than a music entirely untouched by it. In fact, hyperpop emerges in its relationship to genre and remains inseparable from the existence of a “pop” to either go “over” or “beyond.” Similarly emergent out of countless strands of its forebearers—critical thought and activism—while existing in an anti-normative relationship to its object of disturbance—fixed categories of gender and sexuality—one could call queer theory and hyperpop close cousins.³ Although Hannah McCann and Whitney Monaghan emphasize the lack of one definition for queer theory, for the unfamiliar, I refer to queer theory as a disruptive appropriation of the word “queer” as a political, ethical, and philosophical challenge to different forms of power, especially of the cis-heteronormative fashion.⁴ Following the developments of the field, I will employ “queer” as both an adjective and verb, simultaneously describing subjects considered lesbian, bisexual, gay, and trans-, while naming that which confuses, subverts, fails to meet expectations, and resides outside of norms, categories, or genres.

Hyperpop’s relationship with queerness has been named as “‘inseparable.’”⁵ The genre offers both a music and cyber-community for trans- and queer youth while epitomizing theorizations of queerness as transgressive or subversive. No academic publication has yet attempted to address or analyze 100 geecs, a prominent hyperpop duo, from a queer theoretical perspective. Many articles document 100 geecs’ queerness, but with a descriptive rather than critical approach to the word “queer.” Michelle Kim of *them* notes 100 geecs’ use of vocal modulation to “explore gender” but refrains from diving into the topic further.⁶ Spencer Kornhaber of *The Atlantic* does not do much beyond deeming “[t]he straight white normie” as the “hyperpop boogieman.”⁷ The most extensive analysis, Max Schaffer’s self-published “Modulation & the Chaos-Trans Voice,” places 100 geecs within a history of musicians subverting boundaries between the masculine and feminine voice. Schaffer locates the duo within “the modern practice [of] ‘queering’—which [they] define as tearing something to pieces and haphazardly smashing [it] back together in new forms.” Unfortunately, Schaffer’s definition only breaks metaphorical rather than theoretical ground and remains untethered from a dialogue with

² Will Pritchard, “Hyperpop or Overhyped? The Rise of 2020’s Most Maximal Sound,” *The Independent* (Independent Digital News and Media, December 17, 2020), <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/hyperpop-genre-2020-charli-xxc-rina-sawayama-b1775025.html>; “The Rise and Rise of Hyperactive Subgenre Glitchcore,” *NME*, December 21, 2020, https://www.nme.com/en_asia/features/glitchcore-hyperpop-charli-xxc-100-geecs-rico-nasty-hip-hop-2842918.

³ Hannah McCann and Whitney Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now: from Foundations to Futures* (London: Macmillan International, Red Globe Press, 2020), 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵ Pritchard, “Hyperpop or Overhyped?”

⁶ Michelle Kim, “Meet 100 Geecs, the Absurdist Pop Duo Inspired By Everything on the Internet,” *them.*, January 16, 2020, <https://www.them.us/story/100-geecs-interview-dylan-brady-laura-les>.

⁷ Spencer Kornhaber, “Noisy, Ugly, and Addictive,” *The Atlantic* (Atlantic Media Company, February 21, 2021), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/03/hyperpop/617795/>.

queer theory. Though Schaffer's work provides insight for an investigation of 100 geecs' queer vocality, I depart from Schaffer's definition of "queer"-as-destructive in my discussion of genre. I will engage Stan Hawkins' *Queerness and Pop Music* in the context of vocality, but as it stands, 100 geecs' relationship to genre remains untheorized. The potential symbiotic relationship between 100 geecs and queer theory is profound: queer theory offers a rich theoretical lens to understand and describe the entrance of hyperpop into the mainstream, while hyperpop offers queer theory new ways of thinking about genre, the voice, gender, the body, and art. My reading of 100 geecs will also problematize the theorization of queerness as mere transgression. In this sense, my use of the word "queer" will be multiplicitous, highly contextual, as well as both endorsed and problematized.

Parody and Absurdity

Composed of musicians Laura Les and Dylan Brady, 100 geecs released their 2020 remix album, *1000 geecs and The Tree of Clues*, amid "queer times": the last months of the Trump presidency, a global pandemic, and an economic recession. The project typifies the period's zeitgeist of confusion and chaos. The hypnotic beat of "gecgecgec (Remix)" entails the incessant repetition of the "gec" onomatopoeia, of which the group's fanbase has stretched to operate in almost any context: as a noun, verb, and adjective that transcends meaning itself.⁸ Les explains that the origin of the name was effectively *gec ex machina*; the duo encountered the strange term from a spray-painted wall outside Les' Chicago dorm.⁹ In August 2020, I pejoratively wrote that "100 geecs' artistic choices appear as perplexing considering each—noisy, deconstructive anthems; undiagnosable within a single genre; an outlandish and meaningless moniker—further deters mainstream recognition."¹⁰ When analyzed as parody, 100 geecs' "perplexing" propensities reveal themselves as subversive, consolidated into a practice that I termed the "gec-effect." Under this interpretation, the absurdity and frivolity of the group transforms from a seemingly counterintuitive eclectic weirdness into one that breaks from the hegemony of genre within pop music. By "gec-effect," I refer to the stitching together of different genres so as to reside within an absurd, indeterminable space in relationship to the boundaries of those genres, thus destabilizing the coherence of "pure" genre, rather than merely destroying the concept of genre altogether. In other words, to "gec" is to epitomize a parodic use of genre while inhabiting an indifferent approach to the rules and norms of those said genres. As Jacques Derrida writes of the law of genre, "as soon as [it] announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line

⁸ 100 geecs; Lil West; Tony Velour. 2020. "gecgecgec (Remix) [feat. Lil West and Tony Velour]." *1000 geecs and The Tree of Clues*. Comps. Dylan Brady, Laura Les, Jhaisiah Everidge and Semaj Grant. Spotify.

⁹ 100 geecs, interview by Pigeons & Planes. 2020. 100 geecs on Soulja Boy, How They Got Their Name and the Future of Virtual Concerts | Trending Topics (June 17). Accessed August 16, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=vI1DFv000OU>.

¹⁰ Miles Luce, "The 'Gec-Effect:' How 100 Geecs Renders Genre and Gender Absurd," Miles Luce (Wordpress, August 17, 2020), <https://milesluce.home.blog/2020/08/17/gec-effect/>.

of demarcations, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity.”¹¹ To expand upon Derrida, I contend that the twist of genre lies in its ability to conceal itself, its status as a public secret: something known, but unspoken. The moment of “annunciation” occurs at that same moment of “transgression.” 100 geecs were never “off limits” at inception, but at *reception*. Only when abandoning the dominant standard of polite recitation does the scholar, artist, and musician face an accusation of offending the institutions of “Writing,” “Art,” and “Music.” From YouTube videos asking “IS THIS MUSIC OR NOISE” to accusations that the group are “deeply ironic people,” the mainstream charge against 100 geecs viscerally rejects their music because it sounds “bad,” “weird,” or “noisy.”¹² These designations stem from a normative adherence to music’s law of genre: that certain arrangements of noise constitute legitimate music, and some do not. The rationale behind the argument relegating 100 geecs—and hyperpop by extension—as mere noise rather than music stems from the duo’s “geec-effect”: their queer relation to genre. The “geec-effect” is queer exactly in its disobedient approach to categorization and boundaries. The law of genre holds that the risk of “impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity”—all historical markers for queernesses—warrants total exclusion. In response to characterizations of 100 geecs as “genre-less,” Derrida’s proposes that “a text cannot belong to no genre.”¹³ In this sense, the law of genre persecutes not those outside its grasp—for its grasp is omnipresent—but punishes the act of crossing the law’s “line of demarcation.” As I will demonstrate, “genre-less” commendations of 100 geecs’ sound only reify that “line” itself, establishing a proper mode of transgression. Given Derrida’s theorization of genre, we must follow 100 geecs for a politics and ethics of *subverting* the hegemony of genre, rather than undertaking the Sisyphean task of abolishing it entirely.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” trans. Avital Ronell, *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): pp. 55-81, <https://doi.org/10.1086/448088>, 57.

¹² Patrick Cc: “IS THIS MUSIC OR NOISE?! *100 GECS REACTION* (Money Machine),” YouTube, June 26, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6wV64KJfI0>; Hannah Mylrea, “100 Geecs: ‘People Think We’ve Staked Our Entire Career on the Fact That We Can Be Ironic,’” *NME*, July 10, 2020, <https://www.nme.com/music-interviews/100-geecs-interview-1000-geecs-and-the-tree-of-clues-charli-xcx-pc-music-minecraft-2705405>.

¹³ Eli Enis, “This Is Hyperpop: A Genre Tag for Genre-Less Music,” *VICE*, October 27, 2020, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/bvx85v/this-is-hyperpop-a-genre-tag-for-genre-less-music>; Jacques Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” 65.



Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917.¹⁴

Such was the effect of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*. Submitted to the Society of Independent Artists under pseudonym "R. Mutt," *Fountain* was rejected under the condition that it could not represent art.¹⁵ The board's position exposed an informal belief in "Art" as governed by a certain limiting definition. Further exploring the parallel between Duchamp and 100 geecs demonstrates how the injection of art considered culturally "useless" into the mainstream frees art from a naturalized utilitarian frame of reference that only values what appears as "objectively" art. Thus, a characterization of 100 geecs as "trash," "garbage," or "waste," may have given the duo's body of work more power than merely ignoring it: such a charge has exposed a governance within the realm of music, thus giving their parody meaning. This definition of "Music"—or "Art" in the case of Duchamp's rejection—was only intended to appear or to please rather than to obscure or disturb. If this definition of art has infiltrated the public imagination, Duchamp and 100 geecs essentially "piss" on "Art" itself. For Duchamp, "Art" is his toilet. For 100 geecs, "Music" is their "piss baby."¹⁶ By this I mean that Duchamp and 100 geecs are not anti-"art" in the sense of anti-expression or anti-creativity; the two are anti-"Art" in the sense of art's governance by genre. 100 geecs intrinsically resists such governance of art without alienating mainstream appeal,

¹⁴ Larry Qualls. 1988. "Fountain." Ronald Feldman Fine Arts. Artstor. New York. https://library-artstor-org.www2.lib.ku.edu/asset/LARRY_QUALLS_10311708756.

¹⁵ Sophie Howarth and Jennifer Mundy. 2015. *Fountain*. August. Accessed August 11, 2020. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573>.

¹⁶ 100 geecs, A. G. Cook. "money machine - A.G. Cook Remix." *1000 geecs and The Tree of Clues*. Comps. Dylan Brady, Laura Les. Spotify.

maintaining artistic anarchy *for* the public. For example, in response to “gatekeeping” of the duo’s music on digital media app Tiktok, Les cemented the egalitarian ethos of “gec” with the casual statement, “everybody should be allowed to have a good time.”¹⁷ In an interview with the Guardian, Les denounced this internet practice that deems anyone outside the purview of “diehard fan” a witless “poser,” summing up her and Brady’s agenda as merely “do[ing] our best not to be jerks.”¹⁸ The perceived aimlessness of 100 geecs reveals that the group’s intention is not really for or against anything. It appears they make music to make music and have a good time: the epitome of “art.” Here, in apparent apathy, 100 geecs exudes absurdism at full force. Les and Brady shrug off meaning as quickly as critics can place it on to them.

In this sense, 100 geecs enacts a parody politics where absurdity remains critical to an effective ethic of resistance to genre. Still, how does one reconcile the occasional normative pop embodiments of the group? Lyrically, 100 geecs preserves the structure of chorus and verse, while employing rhyme and repetition to acquire the “catchy” edge that makes pop songs appealing and infectious. Les’ post-chorus on “money machine” encourages the listener to join in with an ultimate falsetto imitation of her night-core crooning. From “making money on [your] own,” on “745 sticky (Injury Reserve Remix),” to “[your] boy’s ... own ringtone,” on “ringtone (Remix),” and “[being] addicted to Monster, money, and weed, yeah,” on “800db cloud (Ricco Harver Remix),” 100 geecs’ subject-matter does not stray far from contemporary pop’s obsession with love, materialism, and drugs.¹⁹ However, it is exactly 100 geecs’ paralleling of pop conventions with absurdity that mixes the necessary ingredients for parody. For example, “stupid horse (Remix)” engages in a nursery rhyme chorus that derides various animals before the narrator declares they fell out of multiple vehicles with rhyming names:

“Stupid sheep, I just fell out of the Jeep
Stole the money in your bank account, oh no
Stupid goat, I just fell out of the boat
Stole the money in your bank account, oh no

¹⁷ @xxlaura_lesxx. 2020. Laura Les. July 12. Accessed August 16, 2020. https://twitter.com/xxlaura_lesxx/status/1282532925926510592.

¹⁸ Hannah Ewens. 2020. “We’re not doing this to be ironic”: are 100 Geecs the world’s strangest band? June 23. Accessed August 11, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/jun/23/were-not-doing-this-to-be-ironic-are-100-geecs-the-worlds-strangest-band>.

¹⁹ 100 geecs; Injury Reserve. 2020. “745 sticky (Injury Reserve Remix).” *1000 geecs and The Tree of Clues*. Comps. Dylan Brady, Laura Les, Corey Parkey, Jordan Groggs and Nathaniel Ritchie. Spotify; 100 geecs; Charli XCX; Kero Kero Bonito; Rico Nasty. 2020. “ringtone (Remix) [feat. Charli XCX, Rico Nasty, Kero Kero Bonito].” *1000 geecs and The Tree of Clues*. Comps. Dylan Brady, Laura Les and Gus Lobban, Laura Les, Maria Kelly, Sarah Perry Charlotte Aitchison. Spotify; 100 geecs; Ricco Harver. 2020. “800db cloud (Rico Harver Remix).” *1000 geecs and The Tree of Clues*. Comps. Dylan Brady and Laura Les. Spotify.

Stupid bird, I just fell off of the Bird
 Stole the money in your bank account, oh no
 Stupid dog, I just fell off of my hog
 Stole the money in your bank account"²⁰

The parallelism of the childish invocation of "farm animals" against pop music's "money" allows the absurd to eclipse all meaning, exposing the norm itself as absurd. "Stupid horse's" remix asks: what separates "farm animals" from "money" in the context of our infectious melody? The absurdist chorus of "stupid horse" acts as a mirror to elucidate the fragility of distinction between legitimate and illegitimate pop music, just as Duchamp's *Fountain* destabilized the lines between legitimate and illegitimate art. In other words, "stupid horse" exposes the essential lack of difference between singing about money and singing about farm animals. Both are "pop music" in the end. In this sense, choruses like "stupid horse's" produces a parody: the "gec-effect." The parody deconstructs the conventions of pop music by taking their definitions to a logical extreme, thus exposing the arbitrary nature of limits and category in music.

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* endorses a similar approach to hegemonic understandings of sex and gender. Butler writes, "[the critical task] presumes ... that to operate within the matrix of power *is not the same* as to replicate uncritically its domination. It offers the possibility of a repetition of the law *which is not* its consolidation, but its displacement."²¹ Butler allows us to theorize 100 geecs as subversive even though they adhere to certain pop conventions such as song structure and subject-matter. Though the duo venerates the absurd—assigning the project intention would be asinine—analyzing the productive value of their work points to a "gec-effect" that confuses the law of genre's operation within pop music. The urgency of such an analysis lies in exposing pop music's discursive orientation towards queerness: not only in the sense of gay, lesbian, and trans- individuals, but as that which signifies a force of resistance, what lies outside of power, or genre.

So far, I have been invoking the term "power" in the Foucauldian sense. Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* introduces a positive conception of interpreting power in the context of sexuality as active "production" rather than mere "repression." In other words, if power does not just destroy, but create, it does not only create "genre," but generates resistance to genre. To employ a spatial metaphor: resistance is always within, rather than outside of power. As Foucault writes, "[w]here there is power, there is resistance ... consequently, this resistance is

²⁰ 100 geecs; Count Baldor; GFOTY. 2020. "stupid horse (Remix) [feat. GFOTY & Count Baldor]." *1000 geecs and The Tree of Clues*. Comps. Dylan Brady, Laura Les, Polly Salmon and Thomas William Parker. Spotify.

²¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), 42, emphasis my own.

never in a position of *exteriority*.”²² Pairing Foucault’s “power” with Derrida’s conception of violating the law of genre by crossing, or “impurity,” I want to propose that genre produces its resistance in the sense of an interior “betweenness.”²³ *Fountain* was *between* “art” and its outside, *1000 geecs* was *between* “music” and its outside. Therefore, parodying the law of genre does not constitute inhabiting its outside; it rather requires its improper deployment: unauthorized, unexpected, uninvited genre crossings.

Certain interpretations of hyperpop have valorized the genre for its transgression of certain musical norms itself, which decimates the subversive potential of the “gec-effect” by pre-ordaining transgression as the *meaning of hyperpop*. The acolytes of hyperpop-as-transgression falsely attribute its radicalism to its transgression. Rather, hyperpop’s radicalism originates in its exercise of parody, its meaninglessness, its dynamism, its rejection of pre-destination, *precisely* in Les’ having a “good time.” I want to emphasize the irony of embracing transgression as the new law of resistance, exactly in its establishment of a “new law.” For example, a Vice article describes backlash against A. G. Cook for including artists like Iggy Azalea, Madonna, and Vince Staples on the official Spotify hyperpop playlist: artists considered by hyperpop’s amateurs as not quite the “intangible, nebulous, you-know-it-when-you-hear-it sensibilities of hyperpop in 2020.”²⁴ The question of the “official” hyperpop playlist establishing a canon aside, the demand for distortion, noise, and absurdity *as* the theme of hyperpop—all metonyms for transgression—codifies hyperpop into the law of genre, with transgression as the central tenet of its legitimacy. Thus, transgression becomes the new law, with its priests rejecting its contamination by improperly “hyperpop” artists. Here, hyperpop loses its “betweenness” because it subsequently constructs an exterior: it becomes genre. Philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s conceptual inventions of the “nomad” and the “migrant” capture my articulation of these two poles of resistance that I describe:

“The life of the nomad is the intermezzo. Even the elements of his [*sic*] dwelling are conceived in terms of the trajectory that is forever mobilizing them. The nomad is not at all the same as the migrant; for the migrant goes principally from one point to another, even if the second point is uncertain, unforeseen, or not well localized. But the nomad goes from point to point only as a consequence and as a factual necessity; in principle, points for him [*sic*] are relays along a trajectory.”²⁵

²² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1990), 95, emphasis my own.

²³ Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” 57.

²⁴ Enis, “This Is Hyperpop: A Genre Tag for Genre-Less Music.”

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 380.

Hyperpop as an (anti-)space “between” the law maintains its nomadism and articulates a dynamic politics against genre, rather than one that seeks validity on the law’s basis. The aforementioned aimlessness and absurdity of 100 geecs best embodies this nomadic politics: while they do transgress genre in the sense of departing from norms to operate from a space of interior “betweenness,” they do not *intend* to establish transgression as the theme of their music or the space of a new genre. In Deleuzoguattarian terminology, 100 geecs does not “migrate” to transgression but briefly stops by as a “consequence and factual necessity.” I use absurdity here to emphasize the absence of intention. When transgression becomes the ethical impetus motivating the fluctuations of hyperpop’s sound, the law of genre has reterritorialized its hold on hyperpop’s intense, yet brief assault on pop music. To reiterate, reading hyperpop as *parody* rather than mere transgression avoids the pitfalls of re-establishing genre.

Gender and Genre, Art and Technology

If we take genre not as a descriptor and indeed a facet of discursive power, the entire question of inquiry into hyperpop does not just have to do with tracking the flaunting of musical norms, but a fundamental concern with constructions of gender, sexuality, class, and race within pop music.

Sonically, 100 geecs primarily “queers” pop music by experimenting with voice modulation. The duo’s use of the technology often makes the gender of the singer unrecognizable. The voices on 100 geecs’ discography range from masculine, feminine, to robotic, and somewhere in-between. The sheer variability of voices renders categorizing them impossible, reductive, and possibility politically problematic. 100 geecs’ heavy use of voice modulation not only stems from the nightcore genre, but Les’ struggles with gender dysphoria, expressed through her earlier solo track, “how to dress as a human.”²⁶ In Michelle Kim’s interview, Les says “[i]t’s the only way that [she] can record.”²⁷ To claim that 100 geecs’ “queers vocality” theorizes “queer” not *only* as an identity, but also situates the voice as a site of identity-production through hegemonic gender-sex norms, thus revealing its potential for hijacking via vocal modulation.

“Gec 2 Ü (Danny L Harle Harlecore Remix),” arguably *1000 geecs*’ most ambitious delve into vocal modulation, feminizes and masculinizes both Brady and Les’ voices to the point where discerning the singers’ genders—or the singers themselves—becomes an impossible task.²⁸ Les sings the entire outro, where a yearning autotuned teenage-heartthrob’s voice cries out: “Sitting all alone, and you call me on the phone / And you say, ‘I need love, can you get to me now?’” The teenager then pitches up to another, more feminine figure—more recognizably Les per her other performances on *1000 geecs*—presumably on the other side of the 1-800-“gec 2 Ü” hotline,

²⁶ Kim, “Meet 100 geecs, the Absurdist Pop Duo Inspired By Everything on the Internet.”

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ 100 geecs; Danny L Harle, “gec 2 Ü (Danny L Harle Harlecore Remix),” *1000 geecs and The Tree of Clues*.

introduced on the Dorian Electra remix of the song. The last seconds return to the teenager's voice before it fades into the bass line of "hand crushed by a mallet (Remix)."²⁹ Les' performance demonstrates the effectiveness of modern vocal technologies in confusing the gendered assumptions behind what constitutes a "masculine" and "feminine" voice.

Within a genre of "gendered listening," the voice in recording produces the artist itself in terms of gender: the recognizably "masculine" or "feminine" voice produces "male" and "female" artists. Butler writes of gender as "a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being."³⁰ Here, the voice represents the gendered act, and the vocalist as only a façade of "a natural sort of being." The vocal replaces the visual in its absence, appropriating the voice-as-art to construct the artist-as-gendered. The "gec 2 Ü" voice disturbs this mode of gender production in not only its nomadic "betweenness" in relation to categories of masculinity and femininity, but its exposure of the limits of those gender categories themselves.

First, the space of gender "betweenness" dissolves the strict definition between art and artist, voice and vocalist, thus situating the voice as the art in and of itself, allowing for a plethora of ungoverned gender possibilities. Though the vocal modulation of the outro produces the "illusion" of two singers, it is in fact, one. Combined with the modulation of the intro, the listener cannot assume the "artist" of the voice at all. This theorization engages Stan Hawkins' concept of "genderplay" in *Queerness in Pop Music*, published 2014. Genderplay both captures my arguments about absurdity and intention while contextualizing Schaffer's use of "queering" to vocality. As Hawkins details,

"vocal delivery constitutes a prime signifier of identity ... because of its cultural construction. In order to address this, I active the term genderplay to situate vocality in relation to attitude as much as intention. In much pop music genderplay refers to the specifics of the singer's persona and musical idiolect, often through a good-humored engagement with lyrics and subject matter in recorded form. Hence, the staging of the voice is all about corporeal presence and active participation."³¹

Hawkins' engagement of genderplay precedes the emergence of hyperpop and thus needs a certain tweaking. I want to emphasize genderplay as not only a vocal "playing" with gender in the sense of negotiating and transgressing certain cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity, but as a decimation of the subject, or "persona" itself. Revisiting the etymology of

²⁹ 100 gec; Craig Owens; Fall Out Boy; Nicole Dollanganger. 2020. "hand crushed by a mallet (Remix)." *1000 gec* and *The Tree of Clues*. Comps. Dylan Brady and Laura Les. Spotify.

³⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 45.

³¹ Stan Hawkins, *Queerness in Pop Music: Aesthetics, Gender Norms, and Temporality* (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 2.

hyper-, the robotification of the voice under technologies of vocal modulation creates a space for art in recorded music as *beyond* the artist. To write in Hawkins' language, vocal modulation initiates "corporeal *absence*" in music, even with the presence of the voice. In this sense, the modulated voice occupies an interior "betweenness" in terms of presence and absence: the vocalist is both there and not there, thus decimating the vocalist's bounded coherence in recording. The original recording of "gec 2 Ü" released in 2019 epitomizes this theorization. Instead of confusing the gendered construction of the voice as the remix does, "gec 2 Ü" pitches up Les' original outro to the point of indistinguishability with the instrumentation. Here, the artist subsides into their art, positioning the art itself as the subject with authorial agency. In other words, not only does Butler's concept of performativity figuratively murder the subject, but literal instances of vocal technology have murdered the artist-as-subject, or at least rendered the artist's hand—contribution of the voice, in this instance—opaque and unintelligible, as illustrated by both instances of "gec 2 Ü" voice. Recorded music is now untethered from its author: a musicological Frankenstein's creature.

Additionally, the degree to which the "gec 2 Ü" voice *can* transition between notions of a "masculine" and "feminine" voice frames gender as a mutable genre of the voice with space for nomadism or "betweenness." By confusing the boundary between masculine and feminine, the "gec 2 Ü" voice exposes the absurd nature of categories itself by subversively repeating them: the listener cannot reliably distinguish the boundary where the masculine and feminine begin and end. In one's reception to that act itself, the "betweenness" of the "gec 2 Ü" voice reveals a certain genre of gendered listening by the very annunciation of its transgression of normative vocal performance. Like the subversive effect of Duchamp and 100 geCs' failures to embody "Art" and "Music," the "gec 2 Ü" voice unearths an unspoken listening-governance serving the taxonomical function of constructing coherent and hegemonic gender categories. The proximity of gender and genre in this formation points to the interconnectedness between the two. Etymologically, English's "gender" stems from Old French's "genre" and Latin's "genus." Gender and genre serve the taxonomical intention of categorizing unkempt matter; they represent a rationalist attempt to render the world ordered and knowable, and thus governable. "Gec 2 Ü" reveals that taxonomy ("genus": gender and genre) always fails, because the dynamic nature of matter always oozes out of the strict containers in which we try to hold it.

To avoid reinscribing gender and genre, one must theorize in terms of nomadism (subversion), rather than the migrant (transgressive) possibilities of the "gec 2 Ü" voice. The "gec 2 Ü" voice disturbs Derrida's conception of genre not by inhabiting a *space* that is either masculine or feminine, rather, by embracing a temporal confusing of gender. By centering temporality, we attune to the act of crossing, violating, and trivializing the sanctified lines of demarcation that divide the world according to one of the most prevalent genre dualisms of discourse: the gender binary. Thinking of "gec 2 Ü" in mere spatial terms recreates a hegemony of transgression that

quickly devolves into transphobia via the requirement of clocking the singer to deem their performance as sufficiently radical. In other words, to attribute radicalism to the inhabiting of a gender performance that does not align with the singer's assumed sex requires an intelligible production of sex. The radicalism of the "gec 2 Ü" voice has nothing to do with the artist; following Butler's concept of gender as performative and my theorization of technological presence and absence, we must locate "gender" in songs themselves rather than in singers. It is exactly the "gec 2 Ü" voice's act of "betweenness" via the temporal crossings of masculine and feminine that initiates radically ungoverned gender potentials.

Gec Feminist Manifesto

My article has tracked the "gec-effect's" implications for pop music and gender. In August 2020, I asked whether we could "consolidate the 'gec-effect' into a subversive practice, reverberated by legions of fans."³² I then invoked Jack Halberstam's 2013 *Gaga Feminism* that situated the avant-pop sensation that was Lady Gaga as an allegory for the emergence of a new generation's gender politics. When I first read *Gaga Feminism* in 2018, I was surprised at how temporally-contingent studies in pop culture are, especially when the Lady Gaga that Halberstam was talking about was radically different from the *A Star Is Born* Gaga I encountered at the time. I then detailed Tiktok as a potential site for "'gec feminism,' a continuity of gaga in principle, yet unique in situation ... [revealing] how the gender politics of avant-pop has changed with the continued virtualization of everyday life."³³ Now that what *was* "100 gec Tiktok" has long since disbanded, as well as public confidence in Tiktok as a universally liberatory medium for online utopias, I want to contextualize "gec feminism" to the context of writing within the academy. I intend—ironic, right?—to emphasize absurdity, parody, and humor as central to approach a queer politics within the academy that seeks to displace a certain hegemonic genre that governs what constitutes legitimately "academic" inquiries. Following Halberstam, I wish to close with my own "gec manifesto."³⁴

While official modes of scholarship, research, and writing offer a brief respite from the omnipotence and speed of today's media-stream, "gec feminism" refuses to withdraw from capturing the impossibly anarchic virality of the 21st century's cultural objects. Gec feminist writing must engage with these forms of popular culture, pejoratively referred to as "low" by those on the other side of the academic fence. Halberstam happily embraces the flipside of this dualism by designating their 2011 work, *The Queer Art of Failure*, as "low theory."³⁵ They define the practice as not only

³² Luce, "The 'Gec-Effect'" (2020).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2013), 131.

³⁵ Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 16.

“a mode of accessibility, but ... a theoretical model that flies below the radar, that is assembled from eccentric texts and examples and that refuses to confirm the hierarchies of knowing that maintain the *high* in high theory.”³⁶

In this vein, can low theory direct us towards a revolutionary politics simultaneously obvious and concealed, hidden in plain sight? Halberstam’s archive offers up objects as wacky as Pixar animation, among others, as worthy of critical scrutiny; they comb through that which appears counterintuitive to academic writing for traces of revolt, subversive practices, and queer utopia. As Halberstam puts it,

“The texts I prefer here do not make us better people or liberate us from the culture industry, but they might offer strange and anticapitalist logics of being and acting and knowing, and they will harbor covert and overt queer worlds.”³⁷

Halberstam’s calls for low theory contextualize the site of “betweenness” that the gec feminist embodies: one between “low” and “high” as well as a temporality that fluidly moves across those designations while mixing the two. Here, the gec feminist not only diversifies the objects of critique, but decimates a certain hegemonic genre of critique, “high theory.” Halberstam’s humorous romp through displays of counter-hegemony in media takes a (not so) serious risk in its flippancy, levity, and self-proclaimed stupidity when the powers-that-be demand disciplinary conformity in the “high theory” genre of academic critique. My concept of “high theory” is informed by Deleuze and Guattari’s distinction between “royal science” and “nomad science.”

I want to return to the two philosophers to contextualize the nomadic nature of gec feminism that I wish to lay out against the “royal science(s).” In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish “two types [(genres? perhaps)] of science”: one obsessed with reproduction—the royal science—and one intent on *following*—the nomadic science.³⁸ The philosophers hold that “[r]eproducing implies the permanence of a fixed point of view that is external to what is reproduced.”³⁹ The royal genre of academic critique, or “high theory,” not only assumes a dichotomy between the researcher and the researched, but reproduces such distinction by holding the researched as an object of study, only affectable by the researcher-subject. The nomadic genre of critical science that I wish to embrace following the gec feminisms I track in this article initiates an egalitarian relationship between the researcher and the researched; the researcher-subject no longer holds sole epistemological authority over the researched-object, but rather allows the object the freedom of movement, effectively dissolving the power dynamic

³⁶ Ibid., 16, emphasis my own.

³⁷ Ibid., 20-21.

³⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, “A Thousand Plateaus,” 372.

³⁹ Ibid., 372.

between subject and object. Deleuze and Guattari articulate how the nomadic science inherently resists the law of genre:

“what becomes apparent in the rivalry between the two models is that the ambulant or nomad sciences ... subordinate all their operations to the sensible conditions of intuition and construction—*following* the flow of matter, drawing and linking up smooth space ... In contrast, what is proper to royal science, ... is to isolate all operations from the conditions of intuition, making them true intrinsic concepts, or ‘categories.’”⁴⁰

Within the nomadic genre, the purpose of the researcher lies in *following* its object. In this sense, gec feminism’s “low theory” attempts to embody a nomadic science by *following* rather than *capturing* the gender/genre confusions conjured by hyperpop artists. Furthermore, to clarify on the earlier nomad/migrant distinction, I do not wish to “migrate” to gec feminism, but rather articulate a method of researching, thinking, and knowing that moves between the genres of “high” and “low,” “academic” and “popular,” “formal” and “informal,” as well as “researcher” and “researched.” At this moment of recitation, this space is what I have termed “gec feminism.” I am sure that in other contexts, what constitutes “gec feminism” will be radically different or not even referred to with the same words. If anything, this concept is a “remix” of Halberstam’s gaga feminism, and thus subject to future reworkings and reprises.

If you are still confused about what the “gec feminist” does, let me invoke philosopher Rosi Braidotti. In *Nomadic Subjects*, Braidotti reflects on the institutionalization of Women’s Studies and flow of feminist ideas. In line with her nomadic politics of sexual difference, she decries a conception of the feminist-as-intellectual, an epistemologically legislative “philosopher-queen.” She instead advocates for alliances across generations of feminist knowledge:

“In defending this notion of feminist genealogy, I am collapsing the distinction between creative texts and academic or theoretical ones. It seems to me that the strength of many feminist texts lies precisely in their ability to combine and mix the genres, so as to produce unexpected, destabilizing texts.”⁴¹

Identifying and naming those points of gender’s collapse in the “low” sphere conducts the important work of merging lofty academic critiques of gender with an archive of popular culture. To depart from Braidotti’s feminist-as-intellectual, I want to propose that the gec feminist must simultaneously conduct the work of the comedian and the philosopher, residing somewhere in “between.” Braidotti joins in on the joke, “[wishing] [that] feminism would shed its saddening, dogmatic mode to rediscover the merrymaking of a movement that aims to change life.”⁴² Here,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 373, emphasis my own.

⁴¹ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 207.

⁴² Ibid., 167.

the gec feminist bridges the gap between comedy and philosophy through the medium of parody. The act of writing in a gec feminist mode itself is a parody of academic writing. Even in writing this sentence to be explicit, I am risking taking myself too seriously. The gec feminist does not act as an oracle, revealing some truth. Rather, in the moment of laughter, the gec feminist finds fissures in the current regime, holes in the dominant mode through which a path to another world lies: the world of "gec."

Discography and Works Cited

100 geecs. 2020. *1000 geecs and The Tree of Clues*. Comps. Dylan Brady and Laura Les. Spotify.

100 geecs. 2019. *1000 geecs*. Comps. Dylan Brady and Laura Les. Spotify.

Les, Laura. July 12, 2020. Twitter. @xxlaura_lesxx. Accessed August 16, 2020.
https://twitter.com/xxlaura_lesxx/status/1282532925926510592.

Les, Laura. 2017. how to dress as human. Soundcloud. <https://soundcloud.com/osno1/how-to-dress-as-human>.

Qualls, Larry. 1988. "Fountain." Ronald Feldman Fine Arts. Artstor. New York. https://library-artstor-org.www2.lib.ku.edu/asset/LARRY_QUALLS_10311708756.

References

Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1990.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Derrida, Jacques. "The Law of Genre." Translated by Avital Ronell. *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 55–81. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448088>.

Enis, Eli. "This Is Hyperpop: A Genre Tag for Genre-Less Music." VICE, October 27, 2020.
<https://www.vice.com/en/article/bvx85v/this-is-hyperpop-a-genre-tag-for-genre-less-music>.

Ewens, Hannah. "'We're Not Doing This to Be Ironic': Are 100 Geecs the World's Strangest Band?" The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, June 23, 2020.

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/jun/23/were-not-doing-this-to-be-ironic-are-100-gecs-the-worlds-strangest-band>.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1990.

Halberstam, Jack. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

———. *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2013.

Hawkins, Stan. *Queerness in Pop Music: Aesthetics, Gender Norms, and Temporality*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.

Kim, Michelle. “Meet 100 Geecs, the Absurdist Pop Duo Inspired By Everything on the Internet.” *them.*, January 16, 2020. <https://www.them.us/story/100-geecs-interview-dylan-brady-laura-les>.

Kornhaber, Spencer. “Noisy, Ugly, and Addictive.” *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, February 21, 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/03/hyperpop/617795/>.

Luce, Miles. “The ‘Gec-Effect:’ How 100 Geecs Renders Genre and Gender Absurd.” Miles Luce. Wordpress, August 17, 2020. <https://milesluce.home.blog/2020/08/17/gec-effect/>.

McCann, Hannah, and Whitney Monaghan. *Queer Theory Now: from Foundations to Futures*. London: Macmillan International, Red Globe Press, 2020.

Mylrea, Hannah. “100 Geecs: ‘People Think We’ve Staked Our Entire Career on the Fact That We Can Be Ironic.’” *NME*, July 10, 2020. <https://www.nme.com/music-interviews/100-geecs-interview-1000-geecs-and-the-tree-of-clues-charli-xcx-pc-music-minecraft-2705405>.

Pigeons & Planes. “100 geecs on Soulja Boy, How They Got Their Name and the Future of Virtual Concerts | Trending Topics (June 17).” Youtube, 2020. Accessed August 16, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=vI1DFv000OU>.

Pritchard, Will. “Hyperpop or Overhyped? The Rise of 2020’s Most Maximal Sound.” *The Independent*. Independent Digital News and Media, December 17, 2020. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/hyperpop-genre-2020-charli-xcx-rina-sawayama-b1775025.html>.

“The Rise and Rise of Hyperactive Subgenre Glitchcore.” *NME*, December 21, 2020. https://www.nme.com/en_asia/features/glitchcore-hyperpop-charli-xcx-100-geecs-rico-nasty-hip-hop-2842918.

Schaffer, Max. “Modulation & the Chaos-Trans Voice,” December 9, 2019. <https://maxmadethat.com/publishing/transvocalmodulation>.