
Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository

5-25-2016 12:00 AM

On the Internet by Means of Popular Music: The Cases of Grimes and Childish Gambino

Kristopher R. K. Ohlendorf
The University of Western Ontario

Supervisor
Dr. Keir Keightley
The University of Western Ontario

Graduate Program in Media Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

© Kristopher R. K. Ohlendorf 2016

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd>



Part of the [Digital Humanities Commons](#), [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#), and the [Other Music Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ohlendorf, Kristopher R. K., "On the Internet by Means of Popular Music: The Cases of Grimes and Childish Gambino" (2016). *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository*. 3792.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/3792>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact wlsadmin@uwo.ca.

Abstract

What is the internet? It began as a military research experiment, but the internet has since become a sweeping cultural phenomenon. One of the most prevalent areas of the internet's cultural dominance is in popular music, and this thesis addresses how the internet is being understood and discussed by popular music artists. I study the works of Grimes and Childish Gambino, two popular music artists who grew up alongside the internet's rise to cultural dominance and explicitly address this experience as an integral component of their lives and works. I look specifically at discourse surrounding Grimes' "post-internet" music and Childish Gambino's expansive conceptual work *Because the Internet* (2013). This research concludes by addressing how popular music artists like Grimes and Childish Gambino are helping produce the ways in which we understand and discuss the cultural phenomenon of the internet, and how they provide a foundation for future artists and research to build upon.

Keywords

The internet, post-internet, popular music, music genre, technology, media studies, popular music studies, online music culture, online music discourse, classification, concept album, internet art, vaporwave.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my late grandfather, Dr. Ron Hart. I am forever grateful for inheriting a fragment of your intellect and having spent the time with you that I did.

Acknowledgments

I must first thank my brilliant supervisor Dr. Keir Keightley for believing that my ideas were worth exploring and helping me piece together the thoughts in my head. This thesis would not be the same without your rigor, helpful guidance, and always appreciated “Keir beers.” Other staff members in the FIMS and PMC faculties were also essential in my intellectual development throughout this process; particularly John Reed, Norma Coates, Tim Blackmore, and Warren Steele.

I must thank my parents, Kimberly and Charles, for conceiving me, raising me, and loving me as I continually change and grow. Shout out to my siblings Kurt and Emily as well, who always knew me to be weird but maybe now it’s making more sense. Thank you to my lovely grandmother, Kay Hart, for proofreading this thesis and making me feel comfortable at a young age for my artistic interests.

My cohort of fellow grad students made these two years in grad school fly by. It was a pleasure to make such great friends and share so much alcohol (and karaoke) with you guys. I could not have been any better acclimated to your great country.

I must acknowledge the artists who I researched in this thesis for creating the wonderful works that I thoroughly analyze. My hope is that if they ever come across this research, they feel I treated their works and words with respect. Thank you to all artists who push boundaries and encourage me to do the same.

The soundtrack to writing this thesis was heavily provided by Grimes and Childish Gambino’s discographies, as well as Kanye West’s *The Life of Palbo*, Lil Yachty’s *Lil Boat*, and Drake’s *Views*, among others.

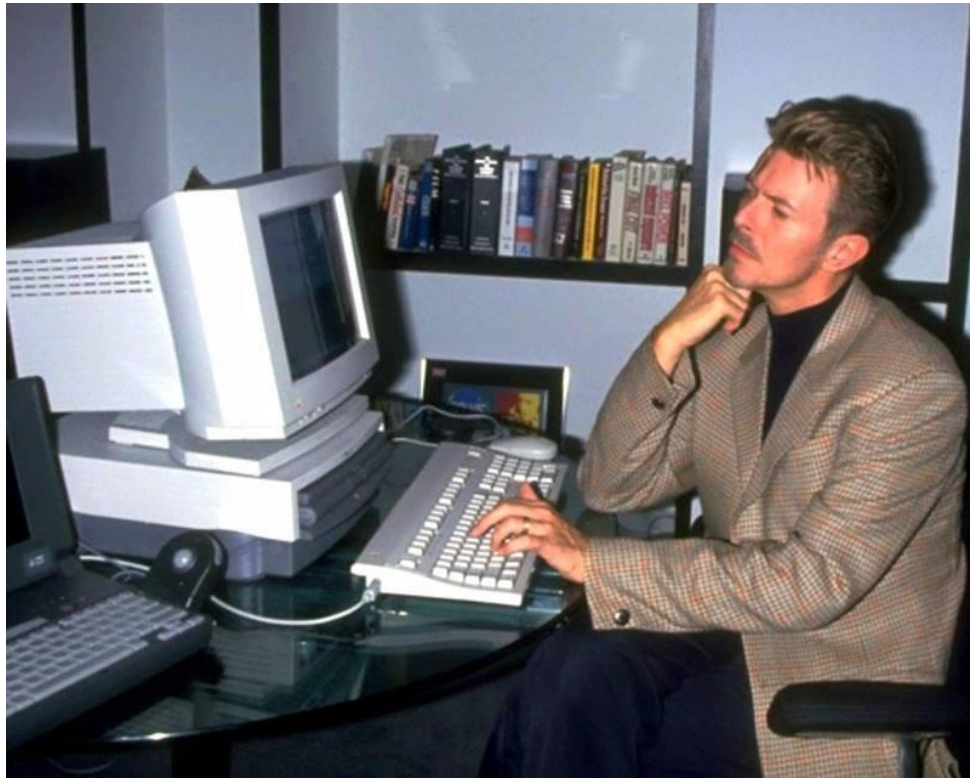
I would like to acknowledge my cosmic ancestors comprised of stardust spread throughout the universe over billions of years. We are all in this grand celestial poem together. This thesis and my life would also not be complete without the inspiration I feel every day from Kanye West. Thank you. “We on an Ultralight Beam.”

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Chapter 1	1
1 Introduction: “It’s an Alien Life Form”	2
1.1 “I’m From the Internet”: A Framework for Studying the Internet in the Context of Popular Music	4
1.2 Central Ideas and Description of Chapters	10
Chapter 2.....	13
2 The Story Thus Far: A Look at Popular Music and Technology	14
2.1 Popular Music and Technology	14
2.2 Popular Music and the Internet	18
2.3 Popular Music about Technology	24
2.4 Popular Music about the Internet.....	26
2.5 Conclusion	28
Chapter 3.....	30
3 Grimes, “Post-Internet,” and How the Internet Infiltrated Genre Discourse	31
3.1 The Problem: Grimes and “the antigeneric moment”	32
3.2 The Solution: Grimes and “Post-Internet”	39
3.3 The Confusion: Unpacking “Post-Internet”	47
3.4 The Aftermath: Poptimism and the Resistance of “Pop”	54
3.5 Conclusion	61
Chapter 4	64

4	Speaking “the Language of Earth”: Childish Gambino and <i>Because the Internet</i>	65
4.1	A Dilettante for the Internet Age	66
4.2	Setting the scene for <i>Because the Internet</i>	73
4.3	The Identity Crisis of <i>Because the Internet</i>	82
4.4	<i>Because the Internet</i> and the Exploitation of Fans	95
4.5	Concluding <i>Because the Internet</i>	108
	Chapter 5	114
5	Conclusion: Bricks of a New Rome.....	115
5.1	The Bricks of Grimes.....	117
5.2	The Bricks of Childish Gambino	120
5.3	Further Research	125
5.4	Conclusion: A Modest Foundation	131
	Bibliography	135
	Curriculum Vitae	151

Chapter 1



David Bowie: I think the potential of what the internet is going to do to society, both good and bad, is unimaginable. I think we're actually on the cusp of something exhilarating and terrifying.

Jeremy Paxman: It's just a tool, though, isn't it?

David Bowie: No, it's not... it's an alien life form.

– Excerpt from a 1999 BBC interview with David Bowie¹

* Image: "David Bowie operating a computer on Jan. 1, 1994, during the dawn of the web as we know it today." Taken from Mashable, "BowieNet is proof David Bowie was an Internet visionary before Napster," (Jan 11 2016), <http://mashable.com/2016/01/11/david-bowie-bowienet/#bQzIuHuS3Eq7>.

¹ BBC Newsnight, YouTube, "David Bowie speaks to Jeremy Paxman on BBC Newsnight (1999)" (Jan 11 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiK7s_0tGsg.

1 Introduction: “It’s an Alien Life Form”

This thesis examines two adventurous popular musicians from the twenty-first century whose recent work explores something we call “the internet.” But I want to begin with some prescient words of wisdom on the topic from one of the most adventurous musicians of the twentieth century, David Bowie. Upon his tragic death in 2016, an old 1999 BBC interview resurfaced online of Bowie prophetically discussing the eventual cultural impact of the internet. His ideas grow out of a conversation with interviewer Jeremy Paxman, who asks: “Did I read somewhere that you said if you were 19 you wouldn’t go into the music business?” Bowie agrees, and states, “I wanted to be a musician because it seemed rebellious, it seemed subversive...It felt like one could effect change, to a form.” He continues, “It was very hard to hear music when I was younger...when I was really young, you had to tune into AFN radio to hear the American records. There was no MTV, and it wasn’t sort of wall-to-wall, blanket music. So therefore, it had a call to arms feeling to it. This is the thing that will change things. [That] this is a dead, dodgy occupation to have. It still produced signs of horror from people when you said, ‘I’m in rock and roll,’ they said, ‘my goodness!’ Now, it’s a career opportunity.” Bowie is illuminating what Keir Keightley discusses in “Reconsidering Rock,”² when he concludes, “Once rock broke the symbolic link between mass culture and mindless conformity, it became possible to build new distinctions within and upon the terrain of the popular, to express oppositional sensibilities via commercial, mass mediated culture.” While rock may have initially meant “rebellion in musical form,” its subversion eventually became the commercial mainstream. Bowie feels that given the state of music in 1999, being a rock musician was no longer rebellious and had become simply “a career opportunity.” However, Bowie views the internet as the successor to rock culture. He states, “the internet...now carries the flag of being subversive, and possibly rebellious.” He is equating the rebellious feeling that compelled him to become a rock musician with the internet. The interviewer becomes visibly confused by Bowie’s statement.

² Keir Keightley, “Reconsidering Rock,” *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 141.

Bowie continues, stating that he feels that there are no longer artists “leading the way” in rock music like Presley in the 1950s and the Beatles and Hendrix in the 1960s. He states that instead, “Now, it’s sub groups and genres. It’s hip-hop, it’s girl power, it’s a communal kind of thing. It’s about the community. It’s becoming more and more about the audience, because the point of having somebody who ‘led the forces’ has disappeared. The vocabulary of rock is too well known. It’s a currency, it’s not devoid of meaning any more, but it’s certainly only a conveyer of information now, it is not a conveyer of rebellion. And the internet has taken on that...so I find that a terribly exciting area.” Bowie feels the vocabulary of rock has become too well-known and normalized for any significant subversion to occur and positions the internet as the new “conveyer of rebellion.” With the internet, however, the vocabulary still needs to be created in order to understand and discuss it. This is apparent in Bowie stating, “it’s an alien life form.” This acknowledges the challenge in adequately articulating what “the internet” means. The interviewer later asks for clarification, “It’s simply a different delivery system...but you’re arguing about something more profound?” To which Bowie responds, “Oh yeah, I’m talking about the actual context and the state of content is going to be so different to anything that we can really envisage at the moment...Where the interplay between the user and the provider will be so ‘in simpatico’ it’s going to crash our ideas of what mediums are all about.” Bowie is implying that “the internet” is more than simply a new delivery system. It is an entirely new place for content to exist and interactions to occur. Bowie then draws a comparison with conceptual art, stating, “The breakthroughs at the early part of the century with people like Duchamp were so prescient...The idea that the piece of work is not finished until the audience come to it and add their own interpretation, and what the piece of art is about is the gray space in the middle. That gray space in the middle is what the 21st century is going to be about.”

This “gray space in the middle” is where the majority of the research that follows occurs. Bowie’s prophetic statements are not included here just to validate his brilliance, but to provide a frame for understanding the research that follows. In this Master’s thesis, I seek to better understand how popular music artists are discussing the fragmented cultural context of the internet that Bowie foresaw. Specifically, I provide in-depth analyses of Grimes and Childish Gambino, the respective artistic monikers of Claire

Boucher and Donald Glover. These artists arguably parallel and build upon the rebellion of Bowie and early rock musicians in their use of the internet to rebel and “effect change, to a form.” Their works explicitly engage with the internet and address the experience of living through the internet’s rise to cultural dominance. Boucher and Glover also use the internet to subvert and resist expectations of a woman and a black male in the music industry. In-turn, their rebellious subversion carves new cultural paths for future artists to follow. Studying these artists may help provide some of the vocabulary and ideas with which to better discuss and understand the cultural phenomenon of the internet.

1.1 “I’m From the Internet”: A Framework for Studying the Internet in the Context of Popular Music

The meanings of “the internet” are multifarious and confusing. “The internet” can simultaneously carry multiple meanings ranging from a “series of tubes”³ to the aforementioned “alien life form.” Due to this confusion, I will provide an initial framework built on sociologist Annette N. Markham’s article “The Internet as Research Context” to provide some clarity. Markham writes, “the concept we label The Internet is, both in practice and theory, a multiplicity of cultural phenomena not limited to either a monolithic entity or a universal set of experiences.”⁴ She further states, “users experience [the internet] alternately or simultaneously as *tool*, *place*, or *way of being*.” I will discuss each of these perspectives on the internet and how they relate to the subjects I am studying in order to clarify how the term “the internet” will be used throughout this thesis.

Markham first elaborates of “the internet” as a *tool*:

The most common frame used to describe the internet is that of tool. As such, the internet is a network of electronic connections, a communication medium, a conduit that allows information to flow from one place to another. Utilized in the framework of a *tool*, the internet can extend one’s reach, expand the senses, and complicate traditional notions of time and space. Whether we’re saving time by

³ Public Knowledge, “Senator Stevens Speaks on Net Neutrality” (Jun 28 2006), <https://www.publicknowledge.org/news-blog/blogs/senator-stevens-speaks-net-neutrality>.

⁴ Annette N. Markham, “The internet as a Research Context,” *Qualitative Research Practice* (2004), 360.

shopping online, spending time surfing the latest film reviews, collapsing physical distance to chat with a group of friends in three different countries, or increasing psychological distance by using e-mail rather than walking across the hall, Internet communication is altering the fundamental processes by which we get things done.

This perspective on the internet views it as a communication technology that facilitates the sharing of information. In the context of popular music, the internet acts as a tool for distributing and consuming music as well as a communication tool between artists and audiences. Both Grimes and Childish Gambino gained initial exposure by using the internet as a tool to upload, share, and promote their music. Peterson & Ryan elaborate on this in their article “The Disembodied Muse: Music in the Internet Age.” They write that “Digital technology has democratized the recording process, allowing many more musicians to get into the business of recording their own music...unlike previous physical media... digital content can be distributed via the internet across the country, or across the globe, in seconds.” Claire Boucher and Donald Glover, the people behind Grimes and Childish Gambino, did not have to create demo tapes or CDs and send them to record labels and local radio stations in hope of exposure. They were able to use the internet as a tool to spread their music and cultivate an audience on their own. This is significantly different than pre-internet artists who more commonly would have to go through record label complications to gain exposure. As a result of this more democratic way of sharing music, it allows artists to widely distribute music very cheaply.

The internet also arguably provides artists like Boucher and Glover with the power and autonomy to subvert and resist expectations of classification. Instances of classification resistance that arise throughout this thesis can be better understood in the context of Pierre Bourdieu’s “classification struggles” from his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Bourdieu begins by stating that “classification struggles” are a “forgotten dimension of the class struggle.”⁵ He continues, “one only has to realize that the classificatory schemes which underlie agents’ practical relationship to their condition and the representation they have of it are themselves the product of that

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, “Conclusion,” *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Harvard University Press, 1984), 466-484.

condition.”⁶ This suggests that subjects of a classification struggle exist within it because they understand the class relations of certain classificatory schemes they are placed in. Claire Boucher struggles with Grimes being classified as a “pop star” because she recognizes the gendered connotations that come with it. Donald Glover similarly struggles with being classified as a “rapper,” because it implies certain racialized stereotypes that he does not conform to. If neither one of these artists recognized the class relations of being classified as either a “pop star” or “rapper,” they would not feel the struggle to resist such classifications. Bourdieu concludes, “Position in the classification struggle depends on position in the class structure; and social subjects...are perhaps never less likely to transcend ‘the limits of their minds’ than in the representation they have and give of their position, which defines those limits.”⁷ Bourdieu is suggesting that subjects within the classification struggle are restricted by the position they already hold. Boucher being “female” and Glover being “black” already positions them in a rigid class structure, which then informs their classification struggles in positioning themselves as artists. Understanding this is important not only because their careers are so closely intertwined with debates about genre labels under which they ought to be classified; it is also relevant because of the role that the internet plays in their resistance to classification. It is not uncommon for avant-garde artists to resist labels, but Grimes and Childish Gambino bring these conversations into the online world.

Returning to Markham, she also notes how the internet may act as a *place*, stating:

...the internet is not only a conduit that facilitates the swift and planet-wide flow of information, it comprises the cultural spaces in which meaningful human interactions occur. There, in a described, imagined, or perceived place, one can spend time wandering, navigating, and otherwise exploring. One can converse, come to know and love, insult [flame], and otherwise interact with others one meets there. Although computer-mediated social spaces have no literal physical substance, they can be perceived as having dimension, comprising meaningful, structured places where things happen that have genuine consequences. In this frame, the internet is not so much a prosthetic for the senses but a separate environment where the self can travel and exist.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Markham is touching on how the internet can act as a cultural environment for people to interact, express themselves and, in some ways, exist. If use of the internet as a *tool* provides the means to communicate and share information, then the internet as a *place* becomes the environment where these interactions occur.

To better understand how this relates to popular music, David Byrne discusses the role of environments in the creation of music in his essay “Creation in Reverse.” He finds fault in “conventional wisdom, which maintains that creation emerges out of some interior emotion, from an upwelling of passion or feeling, and that the creative urge will brook no accommodation, that it simply must find an outlet to be heard, read, or seen.”⁸ This romantic narrative of creativity “suggests that a classical composer gets a strange look in his or her eye and begins furiously scribbling a fully realized composition that couldn’t exist in any other form.”⁹ Byrne argues that instead, creativity is a sort of reflection of the environment in which it is created. For instance, certain harmonic shifts would not resonate well in larger churches due to echoes, so Western medieval composers used harmonies that functioned better in the space where the music was heard. Similarly, early punk musicians wrote music that sonically resonated in grimy bars, which might have reverberated poorly in large churches. Byrne writes of this adaptive creativity occurring in the natural world as well, with birdcalls that evolve to fit within their respective environments: “Birds that live on the forest floor evolved lower-pitched calls, so they don’t bounce or become distorted by the ground as higher-pitched sounds might. Water birds have calls that...cut through the ambient sounds of water, and birds that live in the plains and grasslands...have buzzing calls that can traverse long distances.”¹⁰ According to Byrne, the creation of music is deeply rooted in the environment in which it is created. Combined with Markham’s perspective on the internet as a *place*, the internet can then be understood as a cultural environment that conditions the production of popular music works. This leads artists to view the internet

⁸ David Byrne, “Creation in Reverse,” *How Music Works* (McSweeney’s, 2012), p 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Byrne, 50.

as a cultural place for popular music. For instance, when Detroit-bred rapper Danny Brown states, “I’m not from Detroit, I’m from the internet,”¹¹ he is suggesting that his cultural rise as an artist is attributed to the internet rather than Detroit. Another artist, Lil Yachty, has been described to “[inhabit] a post-regionalist rap universe, a space defined by digital platforms rather than geography.”¹² The environment of the internet is here prioritized over geographical space.

Grimes’ *Visions* (2012) was made on a laptop in Boucher’s apartment in Montreal and Childish Gambino’s *Because the Internet* (2013) was made in a mansion in Los Angeles. However, the more encompassing cultural environment of the internet is what links these two works together. Boucher effectively consumed massive amounts of music online growing up and spit it back out as Grimes, while Childish Gambino’s *Because the Internet* thematically regurgitates Glover’s relationship to the internet back onto the internet. Unlike in a church or bar, the constraints for music made in the environment of the internet are less immediately apparent. This leads to Grimes’ genre-expanding “post-internet” music and Childish Gambino’s textual-amalgam *Because the Internet*.

The final way that Markham frames the internet is as *way of being*. She writes:

Through the design, control, and play of information in online contexts, personalized worlds can be created, organized, and enacted. Though the internet is quite literally a network of computers, the outcome is a fuzzy mapping of imagined geographies, perceived physicalities, and transcendent forms. As a means for reinscribing, reconfiguring, or otherwise shifting identity, body and self’s connection with other, the internet becomes, for some, a way of being.

Markham is suggesting that for people whose lives are deeply embedded on the internet, it becomes a way of life. She continues, “Users who have integrated Internet technologies into their lives to a high degree can be seen to incorporate the internet as a way of being.” Both Claire Boucher and Donald Glover explicitly discuss how growing up alongside the internet’s rise to cultural dominance affected their artistic output, and Glover even claims

¹¹ Red Bull Music Academy’s Youtube Channel, “Danny Brown (RBMA UK Tour Glasgow 2015 Lecture)” (Apr 3 2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNLpUC3BbcE>.

¹² Pitchfork, “Lil Yachty *Lil Boat*” (Mar 17 2016), <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/21736-lil-boat/>.

he spends more of his waking hours online than offline. John Dewey writes in *Art as Experience* that “the developing growth of an individual from embryo to maturity is the result of interaction of organism with surroundings, so culture is the product...of prolonged and cumulative interaction with environment.”¹³ The interactions that Boucher and Glover had with the internet throughout their lives influenced their development as individuals and helped shape the cultural expressions they make as artists. Dewey illustrates this when he says, “Experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication.”¹⁴ By studying the works of Grimes and Childish Gambino as forms of communication, we may better understand how the internet is expressed as a *way of being* through their art. This can also be understood as contributing to what Raymond Williams calls a structure of feeling, which is “concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt.”¹⁵ The experiences communicated by these artists help to understand a structure of feeling surrounding the internet as a *way of being* that both of these artists express.

The internet is then simultaneously a technological *tool* used by these artists, a cultural *place* where their works are created and exist, and embodies a philosophical *way of being* that is expressed through their art. Markham elaborates on the relationship between these perspectives:

The boundaries between these three frames of tool, place, and way of being are permeable, if not artificial. One can conceptualize and experience the internet as both tool and place, use the internet as a tool while integrating it as a gestalt, or land in various categories depending on the time of day, type of technology, person with whom one is interacting, and any other number of factors. Rather than a taxonomy, model, or theory, this framework is simply one way of making sense of experiences of the internet as well as the complex growing field of Internet research.

¹³ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (TarcherPerigee, 2005), 28.

¹⁴ Dewey, 22.

¹⁵ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford; 1977), p 132.

While she states that these frameworks are perhaps more artificial than real, they are still helpful in understanding the complexity of this thing we call the internet. “The internet” is an adaptable and fluid term that suits a variety of contexts, and the confusion that comes with this term is an aspect of researching it. Looking at the works of artists like Grimes and Childish Gambino, however, help add some clarity to the meanings behind “the internet.”

1.2 Central Ideas and Description of Chapters

Key questions addressed by this thesis concern the relationship between these artists and the internet. What role does the internet play in how these artists resist expectations of classification? How do these artists discuss the role of the internet in relation to their lives and works, and why do they find the internet to be such a central component? These questions envelop my analysis of these two artists.

In Chapter 2, I provide a brief historical overview of the relationship between popular music and technology. I then discuss the historical relationship between popular music and the internet, and bring the discussion up to the present moment. I primarily use the works of Eric Katz and Steve Jones in these discussions. Both Katz and Jones are leading scholars on the relationship between popular music, technology and the internet. Katz’ *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* provides an in-depth understanding of how technology has influenced popular music. Jones’ *Rock Formation: Music, Technology, and Mass Communication* looks at this relationship in the context of rock music, and his article “Music and the Internet” provides an early overview of popular music and the internet. I also look at some older works of popular music that address technology, dating back to Tin Pan Alley, as well as more recent works of popular music that address the internet. I distinguish between novelty songs about technology and songs that critically address technology. This helps to place Grimes and Childish Gambino within an established tradition of popular music that critically engages with technological change.

In Chapter 3, I provide an in-depth analysis of the term “post-internet” used to classify Grimes’ music. When Grimes’ music first surfaced online, critics and journalists

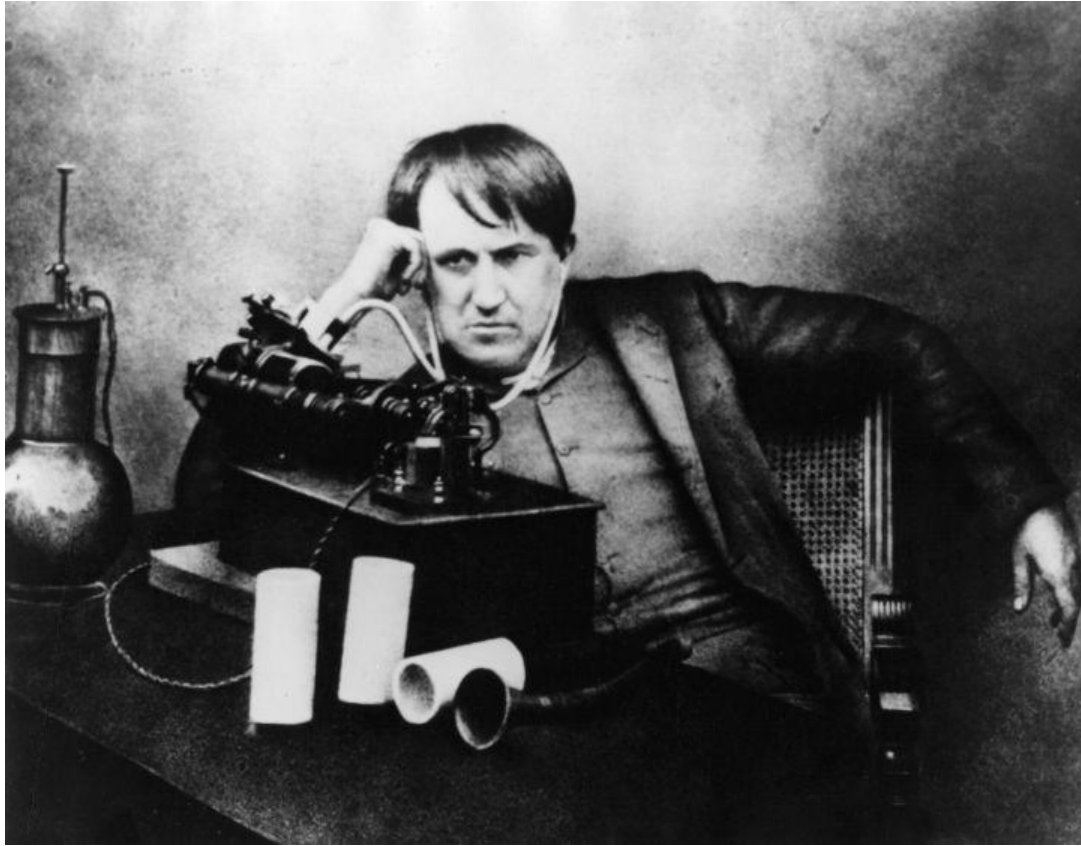
were at a loss of how best to describe it. There was no clear genre label to encompass what Grimes sounded like, only various amalgams and adjectives. Claire Boucher eventually used the term “post-internet” to describe the sound of her music in an interview. This term was immediately adopted by critics to classify Grimes’ music, but Claire Boucher subsequently dismissed the term altogether. I examine reviews and interviews detailing this narrative, and analyze Boucher’s explanations of “post-internet” to understand how the internet influenced the sound of her music. In discussions of genre, I primarily draw upon the work of Simon Frith, Fabian Holt and Joshua Gunn. These scholars help clarify the progression of “post-internet” as a genre label. I use popular works from Nicholas Carr and Susan Greenfield to elucidate some of Boucher’s ideas about the meanings of “post-internet” and the role of the internet in her life and music. I also place discussions of Grimes within so-called popoptimist critical ideology to understand how Boucher’s popoptimist-leaning taste informs her “post-internet” music. I then look at how Grimes is perceived as a “pop star” against Boucher’s refusal of the term, and how this relates to questions of gender and parallels her prior resistance to classification with “post-internet”. I conclude with an understanding of how Boucher uses the internet to subvert expectations of classification as Grimes. This chapter provides discussions on how popular music genre formation and dissemination plays out on the internet, as well as how the internet led to Grimes’ “unclassifiable” sound.

In Chapter 4, I provide an extensive analysis of Childish Gambino’s *Because the Internet* (2013). Part media experiment and part online performance art, Glover takes the idea of a concept album and expands it into a “concept world” that exists on the World Wide Web. I first detail Glover’s unique artistic path and his resistance to traditional hip-hop narratives. I look at his album *Camp* (2011), which foregrounds Glover’s subversion to racialized expectations of hip-hop artists. I then detail the complicated rollout of *Because the Internet* and the multitude of ways that Glover used the internet to craft this work. I place discussions of *Because the Internet* alongside those of Henry Jenkins to understand how it can be understood within frameworks of transmedia and convergence culture. I then use Bolter & Grusin’s concept of remediation to understand the ways that Glover used the internet to make users more aware of its existence, and how he builds upon techniques used by Marshall McLuhan in *The Medium is the Massage*. Next, I look

at how Glover engaged with his online fanbase with the meme “Roscoe’s wetsuit” and conclude with an understanding of how and why the internet features so prominently in Glover’s subversive artistic career and *Because the Internet*. This chapter attends to questions of classification as they relate to Glover’s race, career and music in the context of the internet.

In Chapter 5, I link together the analyses of these artists to understand what studying them reveals about the relationship between popular music and the internet. I discuss how new artists are continuing on the paths created by Grimes and Childish Gambino and provide ideas for future research. I conclude by suggesting the importance of continuing research in this area.

Chapter 2



“Any discussion of the role of technology in popular music should begin with a simple premise: without electronic technology, popular music in the twenty-first century is unthinkable.”

– Paul Théberge¹⁶

* Image: Thomas Edison pensively listening to his wax cylinder phonograph. Taken from LIFE, “On this day in 1877, Thomas Edison announces his invention of the phonograph” (Nov 21), <http://life.tumblr.com/post/13110774194/on-this-day-in-1877-thomas-edison-announces-his>.

¹⁶ Paul Théberge, ‘Plugged in’: technology and popular music,” The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p 3.

2 The Story Thus Far: A Look at Popular Music and Technology

Simon Frith envisions three stages of musical history based on “the ways in which sounds are produced and reproduced”¹⁷ through technology. He explains that “In the first (or “folk”) stage, music is stored in the body (and in musical instruments)...In the second (or “art”) stage, music is stored through notation... [and in] the final (or “pop” stage), music is stored on phonogram, disc, or tape and retrieved mechanically, digitally, electronically.”¹⁸ Each stage shifts with the changing nature of technology. Nearly two decades after Frith’s initial statements, he notes “the digitalization of music is now complete.”¹⁹ This digital stage involves movement onto the internet, an interconnected computer network that has a noticeable effect on the culture of popular music. Although there is already scholarship written on the relationship between the internet and popular music, none of this analysis looks at how this relationship is now being culturally reproduced by popular music artists. In this thesis, I will focus on the works of Grimes and Childish Gambino to understand how their relationship to the internet informs the way they discuss their works. In this chapter, I will first look at the relationship between popular music and technology, and then between popular music and the internet. Finally, I will introduce examples of popular music about technology and the internet and clarify why Grimes and Childish Gambino in particular are worth studying.

2.1 Popular Music and Technology

In Steve Jones’ *Rock Formation: Music, Technology, and Mass Communication*, he considers popular music to be a product of its relationship with technology:

Without electronics, and without the accompanying technical supports and technical experimentation, there could not be the mass production of music, and

¹⁷ Simon Frith, *Performing Rites* (Harvard University Press, 1996), 226.

¹⁸ Frith, 226-227.

¹⁹ Frith, “Performing Rites, Revisited,” IASPM Keynote Presentation, Gijon, Spain, June 24, 2013.

therefore there would not be mass-mediated popular music, or its consumption. But beyond production and consumption, there would also not be the composition of popular music, for popular music is, at every critical juncture of its history, determined by the technology musicians use to realize their ideas. Of equal importance, without technology there could not be the creation of sounds that are today intimately associated with popular music.²⁰

Mark Katz provides a similar sentiment in *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* when he states “the technology of sound recording, writ large, has profoundly transformed modern musical life.”²¹ His analysis of the relationship between popular music and technology is based around the idea of what he calls a phonograph effect, which is “any change in musical behavior — whether listening, performing, or composing — that has arisen in response to sound-recording technology.”²² This effect is not exclusive to the phonograph, and Katz asserts that it is recognized as *any* change in musical behavior. A relatively simple phonograph effect is the 3-4 minute pop single, which was driven by the space allotted on a 7-inch 45 rpm record.²³ Timothy Warner lists many changes like phonograph effects:

In the arts, various technologies have emerged which alter the relationship between artists and audience: in music, for instance, the phonograph, electrical recording, radio, the tape recorded stereo, multitrack recording, sound synthesis, the cassette recorder, digital sampling and television have all precipitated change both in the production of the art work and its reception.²⁴

Katz further claims that “The story of any phonograph effect, however complicated, can...be understood as arising from the interaction of three equally important and mutually influencing agents of change: the technology, the users of the technology, and society.”²⁵ Both he and Jones emphasize the mutual influence of these elements on

²⁰ Steve Jones, *Rock Formation: Music, Technology, and Mass Communication* (SAGE Publications: 1992), 1.

²¹ Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (University of California Press, 2010), 1.

²² Katz, 2.

²³ Katz, 3.

²⁴ Timothy Warner, *Pop Music - Technology and Creativity* (Ashgate Pub Ltd, 2003), 43.

²⁵ Katz, 6.

popular music.

One of Katz' central phonograph effects is how sound recording and playback dissolve the line between performer and listener, which opens up new ways to experience music. He states that "recorded sound is *mediated* sound," and "this mediation has led users to adapt their musical practices and habits in a variety of ways."²⁶ Edward Kealy writes that recorded music is "an impersonally mediated experience. Instead of being with musicians and hearing them sound an instrument in an aesthetically pleasing way, they (the audience) listen to a speaker system."²⁷ With the introduction of recorded sound one could listen to music without a musician present. This leap provided a substantial shift in the way listeners experience music. Instead of music being dictated by the musician, it allowed listeners to "ultimately decide what they were to hear, and when, where, and with whom."²⁸ Or, in the words of Evan Eisenberg, listening to recorded music becomes "a séance where we get to choose our ghosts."²⁹¹² This control over listening allowed a person to experience musical activity entirely alone, which was initially met with puzzlement. In 1923, Orlo Williams wrote that walking in on someone listening to music alone was as heinous as "if you had discovered your friend sniffing cocaine [or] emptying a bottle of whiskey."³⁰ Now, it is commonplace to see "people in public places, earphones practically implanted into their brains, nodding or singing along to their own private music."³¹ As musical habits of listeners adapted to the mediated nature of recorded sound, what initially seemed odd eventually became commonplace.

The portable nature of recorded sound also provided access to sounds previously unheard by listeners. In 1924, Darius Milhaud wrote "Thanks to the phonograph, I will be able to play the discs of black music — recorded and published by blacks — that I

²⁶ Katz, 2.

²⁷ Cited in Jones, 100.

²⁸ Katz p. 12

²⁹ 2 Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa* (London: Pan Books, 1988), 46.

³⁰ Katz, 20.

³¹ Katz, 21.

brought back from the United States. It is truly very precious to be able to study the folklore of all the world thanks to this machine.”³² This idea profoundly changed the cultural evolution of popular music and still carries on today. Peterson and Ryan write, “Some adventurous musicians raised in one musical tradition listened to records of another genre and, after repeated listenings, were able to incorporate the other genre into their own style.”³³ Musicologist Jay Wilkey perceptively writes in 1969, “In the emerging digital age...the divisions of mankind based on differences in style, verbal and musical, are melting away. This electrical retribalization has resulted in the mutual toleration and even mutual influence of many styles – past and present, East and West, pop and classic.”³⁴ Recorded sound seemingly transcends time, geographical space and genre. Through the distribution of mediated recorded music, Kurt Cobain could be influenced by The Beatles who were influenced by Elvis Presley. The main link connecting each of these artists is the mediated recorded sounds that were transferred between them by reason of recording technology. Without this link, The Beatles would have never been able to hear the Memphis blues of Elvis, and Cobain would subsequently have never heard the brit-pop of The Beatles. The links binding these artists would be broken. Technology must then be understood as not only affecting the ways in which people produce and consume music, but also in mediating cultural spaces where popular music culture exists and develops over time. Paul Théberge writes in “‘Plugged In’: Technology and Popular Music,” “Technology is...an environment in which we experience and think about music; it is a set of practices in which we engage in making and listening to musical sounds; and it is an element in the discourses that we use in sharing and evaluating our experiences, defining, in the process, what music is and can be.”³⁵ This perspective understands technology as providing an environment for musical experiences to take place.

³² Katz, 18.

³³ Peterson and Ryan, “The Disembodied Muse: Music in the internet Age,” *Society Online: The internet in Context* (SAGE Publications, 2004), 228.

³⁴ Jay Wilkey, “‘Marshall McLuhan and Meaning in Music.” *Music Educators Journal* 56.1 (1969): 54-58.

³⁵ Théberge, 3.

Jones focuses on the ways in which these developments cause a “change of mind” in users. Concerning the determinations operating upon the production and reception of music, Jones states:

Such determinations regarding sound and music are affected by the use and design of technology, and by the culture within which technology is produced and consumed. To borrow from [Lewis] Mumford, “behind all the great material inventions of the last century and a half [there] was not merely a long internal development of technics: there was also a change of mind.” A change of mind is currently underway in popular music as new technology both enables and restricts the creation and realization of music. The change of mind includes what Mumford identified as a “reorientation of wishes, habits, ideas, (and) goals,” and an understanding of it is critical to a complete awareness of the evolution of popular music.³⁶

He later concludes, “It is the technology of sound recording, the instruments used for fixing sound, that is the driving force behind this evolution and the concurrent change of mind among musicians, composers, producers, and all involved in the creation (and consumption) of popular music.”³⁷ Music technology thus not only affects the music it encompasses, but also the evolution of popular music as it develops along with the “change of mind” in its creators and consumers over time. What Grimes and Childish Gambino are seen to embody later in this thesis is the “change of mind” that was formed by growing up alongside the internet.

2.2 Popular Music and the Internet

In Peterson & Ryan’s analysis of popular music and technology, they follow Frith’s example and divide the historical development of popular music into technological eras; the invention of music notation, the spread of the parlor piano, the birth of radio, and the LP rock revolution.³⁸ They then take it one step further and add the internet, stating, “Like every major technological change, the internet is having a profound effect on virtually all aspects of our society.” Jones similarly states that “network technologies are driving

³⁶ Jones, 9.

³⁷ Jones, 12.

³⁸ Peterson and Ryan, 223.

further evolution of musical practices and processes at great speed, and they are, at least presently, the site of the most visible shifting.”³⁹ And Katz, quoting musicologist Timothy D. Taylor, considers the internet to provide “the most fundamental change in the history of Western music since the invention of music notation in the ninth century.”⁴⁰ While these statements carry an air of hyperbole, the undercurrent is that like many previous technological shifts in the past century, the internet is having a noticeable effect on popular music. Like previous technological eras of the phonograph, radio and television, the internet now acts as a cultural dominant for popular music. Peterson & Ryan discuss the consequences of this change:

Digital technology has democratized the recording process, allowing many more musicians to get into the business of recording their own music...[and] makes it possible to manipulate sound in ways that were undreamed of previously...unlike previous physical media such as human performance, records, and cassettes, digital content can be distributed via the internet across the country, or across the globe, in seconds...the digital production and dissemination of culture greatly enlarges the menu of available choices for listening or acquisition, with an unprecedented array of music choices available to internet-savvy consumers.⁴¹

According to Peterson & Ryan, the internet affects the production, content, distribution, and consumption of popular music. David Hesmondhalgh claims that this democratization “[has] aesthetic consequences too...the making available of new voices, new experiences and perspectives.”⁴² It allows more people to produce their own music, creates new sounds to hear, lets amateurs distribute their music around the globe, and in turn opens up others to consume new experiences. While there is some degree of tension with major record label involvement with online streaming services like Spotify, Tidal, and Apple Music, there are still many ways for artists to upload and share their music without going through major label complications. For instance, BandCamp and SoundCloud allow anyone with an internet connection to upload and share their music

³⁹ Steve Jones, “Music and the internet,” *Popular Music* Vol. 19 (2000), 218.

⁴⁰ Katz, 178.

⁴¹ Peterson and Ryan, 231.

⁴² David Hesmondhalgh, “Post-Punk’s Attempt to Democratize the Music Industry: The Success and Failure of Rough Trade,” *Popular Music* Vol. 16 No. 3 (Oct., 1997), 256.

instantly. Claire Boucher and Donald Glover both began by uploading and sharing their music through similar services as Grimes and Childish Gambino, and have since reached greater exposure on larger sharing platforms. I will address later in this thesis how this has aesthetic consequences like Hesmondhalgh describes.

Peterson & Ryan conclude that on the internet, “it is the music that moves, and people do not need to move to hear whatever music they please whenever they choose to hear it.”⁴³ Jones finds significance in this movement of music online, stating:

The most critical [issues] to which we should turn our attention are those that have consequences for the movement of music within and through different (and sometimes altogether new) spaces, such as changes in sales mechanisms, Internet broadcasting, the use of computers for production, consuming and distributing music, and the personalization of musical tastes and behaviors. And all these issues have important implications for the ways we conceive audiences and individuals.⁴⁴

While the phonograph brought upon the mass mediation of recorded popular music, the internet has provided a space in which these mediated elements can freely move. This increased mobility of popular music on the internet allows it to develop in new ways, just as previous technological advancements brought their own changes.

One of the main results of recorded sound’s movement to the internet is an increased accessibility to music, which began with peer-to-peer file-sharing networks like Napster and Kazaa. In 2000, Jones writes, “The connection of the personal computer to the internet brings potential for connection to a wide variety of music, broadening the scope of listening possibilities.”⁴⁵ A decade later in 2010, Katz clarifies that “The clearest change that digital and networking technologies have introduced is the possibility of music’s unprecedented and unparalleled accessibility.”⁴⁶ In a pre-internet world, people might overhear a group discussing The Shaggs’ outsider music album *Philosophy of the*

⁴³ Peterson and Ryan, 224.

⁴⁴ Jones, 225.

⁴⁵ Jones, 218.

⁴⁶ Katz, 186.

World (1969) and spend the rest of their lives looking for a copy to listen to. Now, one can hear their masterpiece “My Pal Foot Foot” within seconds of finding out about the band. As is the case with The Shaggs, “The internet not only makes it possible to find particular pieces easily, it also allows users to explore unfamiliar territory.”⁴⁷ Users of the internet have described this phenomenon as a “world radio”⁴⁸ and equate it to “going to a buffet [where] you can get whatever you want whenever you want.”⁴⁹ These reactions echo early responses to the phonograph,⁵⁰ which introduced the idea of musical choice. However, such decisions were still constrained by the records that were accessible. One was confined to the selection of a local record store or friends’ collections. The internet has almost completely dissolved such restrictions, allowing motivated users to access an unprecedented amount of recorded popular music from around the world.

This mobility also facilitated the development of online communities based around shared musical interests. Katz writes that file-sharing “users may enjoy greater access to music, discover new repertoire, exercise increased flexibility in the way they listen to music, rethink their ideas of musical authenticity, and form virtual communities around shared musical interests.”⁵¹ He further observes, “The sharing of music has fostered the development of distinct online communities...formed around common musical tastes and interests.”⁵² These communities were prevalent on file-sharing networks like Napster, which had 80 million registered users at its peak.⁵³ Katz writes of these users, “Whether convened because of a creative drive, a common religion, or an interest in genre, the members of these communities find meaning in their associations and activities far beyond an interest in free music. They are sharing files, beliefs, ideals,

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Katz, 187.

⁴⁹ Katz, 189.

⁵⁰ Katz, 18.

⁵¹ Katz, 185.

⁵² Katz, 193.

⁵³ PC World, “Requiem for Napster” (2002), http://www.pcworld.idg.com.au/article/22380/requiem_napster/.

and lifestyles.”⁵⁴ Jones adds that “The practice of fandom is mediated by network technologies along with music.”⁵⁵ In a pre-Internet era, “music nerds” might have convened at concerts, record shops, or listening parties, but on the internet, fans of serialism and One Direction alike can find spaces to share and discuss common musical interests. In Chapter 4, I look at Donald Glover’s intimate relationship with his online fanbase and how it informs his work *Because the Internet*.

As with previous technological shifts, the internet and popular music now have a symbiotic relationship. With increased accessibility, the internet provides a space for popular music to be widely disseminated and offers a new way for users to consume popular music, possibly leading to a more diverse musical landscape. In Peterson & Ryan’s study on the correlation between internet usage and taste diversity, they concluded that “there is a significant relationship between greater internet use and greater [musical] omnivorousness.”⁵⁶ Those who spend more time on the internet tend to seek out more music, expanding their tastes in the process. They also concluded in their study that “Gender proves to be significantly related to omnivorous musical taste, with women on average being significantly more omnivorous than men.”⁵⁷ They state, “Most genres of music are seen as a male domain. Women, particularly young women, are more likely to identify with particular artists and be agreeable with others about music choices.”⁵⁸ In Chapter 3, I address how this may play out in Grimes’ “post-internet” music.

Much of the early scholarly discussions of popular music and the internet focused on file-sharing, and the influence of this phenomenon is still evident today. Katz writes, “It was the novel idea that computer users could obtain content from one another rather than through a corporate entity, and the socialization and community-building that followed from these peer-to-peer interactions, that paved the way for the social-

⁵⁴ Katz, 194.

⁵⁵ Jones, 218.

⁵⁶ Peterson and Ryan, 234.

⁵⁷ Peterson and Ryan, 233.

⁵⁸ Peterson and Ryan, 234.

networking phenomenon that has changed the way people use the internet.”⁵⁹ The evolution of the internet is then influenced in part by its relationship to popular music. One of the first major social networks, MySpace, was initially developed with musicians in mind and even had the short-lived label MySpace Records.⁶⁰ Of the top 50 most followed accounts on Twitter, over half of them are related to popular music.⁶¹ Out of the top 30 most viewed YouTube videos, 28 of them are popular music videos (the remaining two are educational children’s songs).⁶² Spending a significant amount of time online is now crucial for keeping up with popular music culture. Conversations that were once had in record shops now happen on Twitter and discussion boards, and there is always new music to discover online. The act of streaming music through services like Spotify (which has 30 million paid subscribers⁶³) requires one to have an internet connection. Katz concludes his book *Capturing Sound* by saying “Just as the technology shapes the activities of its users, their activities shape the technology.”⁶⁴ The MP3 format was not created with music in mind, nor was the phonograph meant initially for music.⁶⁵ The development of magnetic tape was pushed by Hitler’s desire to record his speeches, not musical recording.⁶⁶ Théberge writes, “Pop artists and consumers have often used technology in ways unintended by those who manufacture it. In this way, pop practices constantly redefine music technologies through unexpected or alternative uses.”⁶⁷ This applies directly to the internet, which came about as a military experiment but ended up enabling the sharing and discussion of music. As Lawrence Lessig notes, “The appeal of

⁵⁹ Katz, 195.

⁶⁰ Fortune, “MySpace cowboys” (August 29 2006), http://archive.fortune.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/2006/09/04/8384727/index.htm.

⁶¹ Twitter Counter, “Twitter Top 100 Most Followers,” <http://twittercounter.com/pages/100>.

⁶² Wikipedia, “List of most viewed YouTube videos (April 19 2016),” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most_viewed_YouTube_videos.

⁶³ Statista.com, “Number of paying Spotify subscribers worldwide from July 2010 to March 2016 (in millions),” <http://www.statista.com/statistics/244995/number-of-paying-spotify-subscribers/>.

⁶⁴ Katz, 220.

⁶⁵ Katz, 179.

⁶⁶ Katz, 8.

⁶⁷ Théberge, 3.

file-sharing music was the crack cocaine of the internet's growth. It drove demand for access to the internet more powerfully than any other single application."⁶⁸ This, in turn, influenced the ways people engaged with popular music.

2.3 Popular Music about Technology

Considering the far-reaching influence of technology and the internet on popular music, it can be difficult to pinpoint what exactly should be studied to clearly understand this relationship. Katz emphasizes studying "not the technology, but the *relationship* between the technology and its users."⁶⁹ Jones notes the importance of studying these relationships.

[It] is at the level of consumption and realization that one should begin to analyze the relationship of technology and popular music, for it is at that level that popular music is formed. As the printing press enabled production of mass-circulation newspapers, which consequently affected newspaper content...music technology affects the content of music during its creation as well as its consumption.⁷⁰

Jones is emphasizing that technology not only affects the creation and consumption of music, but also the content of music. One subset of popular music where this is clearly evident is in music that explicitly addresses technology as a lyrical or thematic subject. For instance, when looking at songs about the telephone, a historical link can be drawn across the 20th century. "Hello! Ma Baby" (Howard and Emerson, 1899) acts as an early Tin Pan Alley example about a man who only knows his lover through the telephone, and "Hello Central, Give Me Heaven" (Harris, 1901) "launched a string of telephone songs over the next few years."⁷¹ This is far from a definitive list, but "Chantilly Lace" (The Big Bopper, 1958), "All Alone" (Frank Sinatra, 1962), "Last Train to Clarksville" (The Monkees, 1966), "Sylvia's Mother" (T. Rex, 1972), "Hot Line" (The Sylvers, 1976), "867-5309/Jenny" (Tommy Tutone, 1981), "I Just Called to Say I Love You" (Stevie Wonder, 1984), "Kiss Me thru the Phone" (Soulja Boi, 2008), "Telephone" (Lady Gaga

⁶⁸ Katz, 196.

⁶⁹ Katz, 3.

⁷⁰ Jones, 44.

⁷¹ Diane Holloway, *American History in Song: Lyrics from 1900 to 1945* (iUniverse, 2001), 9.

ft. Beyoncé, 2010), “Call Me Maybe” (Carly Rae Jepsen, 2011), and “Hotline Bling” (Drake, 2015) all, in one way or another, explicitly address the sound medium of the telephone. Such songs about technology may serve as cultural manifestations of how differently users interpreted such technologies during their respective times. The telephone used by the subject of “Hello Ma! Baby” is a much different technological tool than the one used by Drake over a century later, but the songs still carry a similar sentiment.

Television and radio were similarly treated, with “Video Killed the Radio Star” (The Buggles, 1979) acting as a prominent example. The song acts as an example of technological change chronicled by popular music, with its lyrics explicitly addressing changes in music technology. In Warner’s analysis of the track, he notes:

The victim of technological change is, particularly in the popular arts, a recurrent image of the twentieth century — the silent film stars who did not manage the transition to talkies, for example. However, also implicit here is the complex transition from a purely aural performance on radio to a pre-recorded (and highly manipulated) visual illusion of performance on video: perhaps one of the most radical developments in recent music history.⁷²

The illusion of performance on video suggests a mediation of visuals as well as sound, and The Buggles are expressing anxiety about this transitional state. In fact, “The Buggles never performed live, and existed for their fans purely through recorded media: vinyl, magnetic tape and video.”⁷³ Their entire existence was mediated through technology, with their major hit dealing with this very subject. Their music video was even used to launch MTV and ease popular music into a new visual format. Warner concludes that “Considering the subtle complexities and rich paradoxes that an analysis of ‘Video Killed the Radio Star’ reveals, dismissing it as a ‘novelty song’ ... would seem inappropriate.”⁷⁴ This suggests a distinction between popular music that simply treats technology as a novelty and popular music that critiques the very nature of such

⁷² Warner, 45.

⁷³ Warner, 41.

⁷⁴ Warner, 48.

technologies. When Dire Straights sings “I want my MTV” in “Money for Nothing,” it tells us that the character in the song is addicted to the culture of music television but does not address the implications of this relationship. When The Buggles sing “Video killed the radio star / In my mind and in my car, we can’t rewind we’ve gone too far,” they are making a more explicit critique of the role of technological change in the context of popular music. This places Grimes and Childish Gambino within an established tradition of popular music that critically engages with technological change. The difference is that Boucher and Glover are now interested in changes brought about by the internet.

2.4 Popular Music about the Internet

As with previous communication technologies, there are a plethora of songs that treat the internet as a novelty. Britney Spears asks her lover to “E-Mail my heart and say our love will never die”⁷⁵ just as Emerson & Howard’s subject exclaims “Send me a kiss by wire, baby my heart’s on fire!”⁷⁶ The heartbroken subject of Prozzak’s biggest hit “www.nevergetoveryou” (2000) weeps at the computer screen just as Sinatra wept by the telephone in “All Alone” (1962). Technologies have changed, but sentiments remain. One thing that can be learned from looking at novelty songs about the internet is that the majority of them came out after 2005, even though the internet had already been in commercial use for over a decade. This growth is attributed to the shift to Web 2.0, a term coined by Tim O’Reilly in 2004, “to refer to new kinds of media companies which deploy social networks, user-generated content, or user-moderated content.”⁷⁷ In Bridgette Wessels cultural history of the internet, she states, “The defining feature of most Web 2.0 services is a cluster of dynamic social networks that form a ‘participant web’ through the active engagement of its users. Web 2.0 encompasses a wide range of applications, such as blogs, wikis, social networking sites, podcasts, social bookmarking

⁷⁵ Britney Spears, “E-Mail My Heart” (1999), ...*Baby One More Time*, JIVE.

⁷⁶ Howard and Emerson, “Hello Ma Baby” (1899).

⁷⁷ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York University, 2006), 334.

sites, auction sites, online games, and peer-to-peer services.”⁷⁸ Soulja Boy was arguably one of the first artists to truly capitalize on Web 2.0, with “Crank That (Soulja Boy)” (2007) producing a dance craze out of a YouTube video. Soulja Boy consequently named his album *souljaboytellem.com* (2007) in order to drive traffic to his website. Many timely Web 2.0 services are clearly referenced in examples of popular music; for instance, “Myspace Freak” (C-Side, 2006), “Twitter Song” (Chris Brown, 2009) and “Instagram that Hoe” (Fat Joe, 2012). Looking at these works shows a growth in music about the internet after the rise of Web 2.0. With Grimes and Childish Gambino, I am interested in how this cultural expansion has been a determining factor in their creative output.

There are also examples of popular music that critically address ideas related to the internet, for instance St. Vincent’s song “Digital Witness” (2014), EMA’s *The Future’s Void* (2014), Autre Ne Veut’s *Age of Transparency* (2015), and Holly Herndon’s *Platform* (2015), among others. British rock band Radiohead discussed ideas related to the internet in their prescient album *Kid A* (2001) and also used the internet to release their album *In Rainbows* (2007) as a pay-what-you-want download. While studying every artist who critically addresses the internet would be ideal, it is beyond the scope of this Master’s thesis to do so. Grimes and Childish Gambino in particular are worth studying because their relationships with the internet are remarkably clear. First, both artists’ artistic monikers are closely tied to the affordances of the internet. Both artists’ names are in fact products of internet-based classification systems. Claire Boucher got the name “Grimes” when building her MySpace music profile. She tweets about the origin of the name, “on myspace ur genre could be grime and u could have 4 genres so i was plural grime.” Donald Glover got the name “Childish Gambino” by putting his real name into an online Wu-Tang Clan name generator. This shows that their relationship with the internet appeared at the conception of how they identify themselves as artists, with their artistic monikers coming from online labeling systems. Second, they use the internet to resist and subvert expected forms of classification in relation to their careers.

⁷⁸ Bridgette Wessels, *Understanding the Internet: A Socio-Cultural Perspective* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 26.

Boucher is commonly classified as a pop star rather than a successful producer, and Glover is labeled as a rapper even though he does not identify himself as one. These artists assert their autonomy by seeking to subvert external classification with their works. Claire Boucher seeks to resist genre classification altogether with Grimes' post-internet music, yet she still is a victim to the "pop star" label due to being a female musician. Donald Glover similarly resists being labeled as a rapper, but he is frequently classified as such due to his race. Third, all of these characteristics are manifested in their works, which characteristically tend to resist labels and classification. Grimes "post-internet" music was initially unclassifiable as a result of its supposedly indescribable new sound, and Childish Gambino's *Because the Internet* is a textual amalgam meant to be an "experience" rather than an album. Looking at these moments of classification opens up discussion of how these artists use the internet to subvert expectations. Considering the explicitness with which Boucher and Glover engage with and discuss the internet, they serve as productive case studies in better understanding the role of the internet in the experience of popular music. And although both of these artists humbly began by producing music in their bedrooms and uploading it online, they have since become important and successful figures in popular culture. Grimes tours the world as a highly critically acclaimed artist signed under Jay-Z's Roc Nation entertainment company and has graced the covers of fashion magazines like *Teen Vogue*, *Flare*, *Elle*, and *Nylon*. Childish Gambino's *Because the Internet* was certified gold by the RIAA, selling over 500,000 copies, and Donald Glover is covered in mass celebrity news publications like *TIME*, *People*, and *Entertainment Weekly* for his work as both an actor and musician. While these artists were once obscure, they have since become minor celebrities and have considerable reach online. This exposure makes them productive case studies of the internet's influence on contemporary culture.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter began with my review of the long-standing historical relationship between popular music and technology through the works of Jones, Katz and others. These scholars discuss how strongly tied popular music is to technology, ranging from the creation and production of works to the development of cultural spaces in which popular

music culture spreads and develops. I then looked at the relationship between popular music and the internet in order to understand how the internet now acts as a cultural dominant for popular music. The internet provides a new space that allows “music to move” as well as a place for fans to congregate; it creates a new technological environment for popular music culture to exist. It is from this technological environment that Grimes and Childish Gambino emerged. I looked at the tradition of popular music works related to technology dating back to Tin Pan Alley and continuing today and used Warner’s discussion of The Buggles’ “Video Killed the Radio Star” to provide a distinction between novelty songs about technology and works that more critically address technology. This places Grimes and Childish Gambino within a tradition of popular music that critically engages with technological change. Finally, I looked at a handful of examples of music about the internet, and clarified why Grimes and Childish Gambino were chosen for this study.

Chapter 3



“The universe, like the internet, is too much for any of us to wrap our brains around and Claire Boucher, the woman behind Grimes, likes this idea.”

- DUMMY Magazine⁷⁹

* Image: Claire Boucher performing live as Grimes at Seattle’s alternative radio station KEXP. Taken from KEXP’s YouTube Channel, “Grimes – Full Performance (Live on KEXP)” (Mar 27 2012), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJ5XUw4qHZo>.

⁷⁹ DUMMY Magazine, “Halfaxa” (April 4 2011), <http://www.dummymag.com/reviews/grimes-halfaxa-review>.

3 Grimes, “Post-Internet,” and How the Internet Infiltrated Genre Discourse

In a series of tweets in December 2014, Claire Boucher explained the true story behind the origin of her artistic moniker, “Grimes.” She tweets, “on myspace ur genre could be grime and u could have 3 genres so i was plural grime.”⁸⁰ It was through the affordances of creating this online profile that digitally birthed Grimes into existence. She further states, “I was originally too embarased of this story so i told journalists i was named after frank grimes, who is also very cool.” This is actually incorrect because she previously told *Stereogum* the name was in reference to the artist Ken Grimes. She soon realized her mistake, and tweets, “or wait, no i said i was named after someone else made grimes, arg – see this is why you shouldnt lie to journalists.” Each of these tweets displays a strong characteristic of Grimes’ career that unfolds throughout this chapter. First, from the very moment of classifying herself as an artist, Grimes holds a complex relationship to music genre labels and the internet. Second, there is an inconsistency between the way Boucher perceives Grimes and the way the media perceives Grimes. Third, Boucher recognizes the power that journalists have in spinning her words. These characteristics frequently appear in the analysis that follows.

In this chapter, I detail a narrative of Boucher’s relationship with classification that is played out in music critics’ discussions of how to classify Grimes’ music. First, a problem arose because Grimes’ style was deemed unclassifiable and critics used a variety of adjectives and metaphors to describe her music. I employ Joshua Gunn’s idea of “the antigeneric moment” along with ideas from Roland Barthes, Fabian Holt and Simon Frith to understand these early discussions. Then, a solution came when Boucher used the enticing term “post-internet” to describe her music as Grimes. Critics then jumped on “post-internet” as a way to label Grimes’ music, much to the dismay of Boucher, who later renounced the term. I discuss why critics so quickly adopted the term and why Boucher resisted its use. I look deeper into the significance of the term “post-internet,”

⁸⁰ Stereogum, “Grimes Explains How She Really Got Her Name” (Dec 20 2014), <http://www.stereogum.com/1725989/grimes-explains-how-she-really-got-her-name/news/>.

understanding its relationship to the so-called post-internet visual art movement and looking at the equivocal use of “post-” in this instance. I then unpack Boucher’s supposedly scientific explanations of the term as it relates to others who have discussed the internet’s effects on the brain like Susan Greenfield and Nicholas Carr. I then look at how “post-internet” fits into discussions of popmism, and how Boucher also resists the “pop star” classification. Using scholarship on popular music genre and the internet, this chapter examines Grimes as a means to discuss a cultural moment in which the internet infiltrated music genre discourse in a remarkable fashion.

3.1 The Problem: Grimes and “the antigeric moment”

Born in Vancouver then based in Montreal while studying neuroscience at McGill University, Boucher decided to make music after a moment of realization while listening to Panda Bear’s *Person Pitch*,⁸¹ that she suddenly knew how music was constructed.⁸² With no musical experience whatsoever, a friend showed her how to use the entry-level music production software GarageBand.⁸³ Fascinated by electronic loops, and sometimes layering her voice over fifty times on the same track, Boucher developed avant-garde techniques to production and began creating her own unique sound. This sound perplexed and intrigued critics as she began playing shows in the Montreal scene and posting her music online.

In Joshua Gunn’s “Gothic Music and the Inevitability of Genre,” he affirms that it is impossible for a piece of music to be entirely antigeric but notes, “It could be argued, however, that when new and unanticipated musical forms are initially experienced, initially heard, there is at least an antigeric moment.”⁸⁴ Early discussions of Grimes’ music exemplify an antigeric moment as it happens. Roland Barthes writes in his essay

⁸¹ Boucher has also claimed that this epiphany came while listening to Mariah Carey.

⁸² The Guardian, “One to watch: Grimes” (Jan 29 2012), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unfinished_creative_work.

⁸³ Tidal, “Grimes: 5 Albums that Changed My Life” (Feb 3 2016), <http://read.tidal.com/article/grimes-5-albums-that-changed-my-life?sf20255708=1>.

⁸⁴ Gunn, 44.

“The Grain of the Voice,” “If one looks at the normal practice of music criticism (or, which is often the same thing, of conversations “on” music), it can readily be seen that a work (or its performance) is only ever translated into the poorest of linguistic categories: the adjective... The adjective is inevitable: this music is *this*, this execution is *that*.”⁸⁵ In discussions surrounding Grimes’ first two albums *Geidi Primes* (2010) and *Halfaxa* (2010), critics used any adjectival tools at their disposal to try and articulate the sound of these albums. In one of the earliest articles about Grimes, the Montreal-based website *LOOKOUT* writes of the music (I have **bolded** adjectives and descriptors to emphasize their use):

Geidi Primes, her latest album, is **colourful** with an **out-of-this-world** quality that incorporates **space-age** piano riffs, **slurred** lyrics and **delayed** melodies that have you yearning, but unable to sing along. It’s an **intriguing** album with a fusion of **medieval** vibes and **sleepy** sounds, an intermingling that is **truly beyond words**. The vocals are at times **embracing**, **enchanted** and **angelic**, and at other times, **dark**, **spooky** and **otherworldly**.⁸⁶

The “beyond words” nature of Grimes’ music makes it difficult for this reviewer to articulate, and yet the reviewer uses a slew of adjectives ranging from “medieval” to “space-age” in attempt to describe it. The use of adjectives like “angelic,” “enchanted,” and “otherworldly” also arguably carry gendered connotations used to distance Boucher as a female musician. Similar adjectives have been used to describe Icelandic female musician Björk, a precursory artist to Grimes. The interviewer goes on to state, “I’ve really never heard anything comparable to your sound” and notes that “A couple of album reviews say things like, ‘I can’t describe her music, so I won’t. Just listen’.”⁸⁷ They proceed to ask Boucher, “When making your music, do you intentionally make it beyond words and distinct from what’s currently out there? Or is that just part of your spirit of making music?” to which she responds “I feel like people compare musicians to other musicians because it’s easier to say that people have similar sound so that readers might be more inclined to listen. It’s the best reference point in order to compare different

⁸⁵ Roland Barthes, *Image – Music – Text*, “The Grain of the Voice” (Fontana Press, 1977), 179.

⁸⁶ LOOKOUT, “Q&A: Montreal’s Grimes” (Feb 2 2010), <http://lookoutpresents.com/featured/qa-grimes/>.

⁸⁷ LOOKOUT, “Q&A: Montreal’s Grimes” (Feb 2 2010), <http://lookoutpresents.com/featured/qa-grimes/>.

artists.” This parallels Simon Frith’s point in *Performing Rites* when he states, “rock critics rarely describe music in formal language, but almost always through comparison: new sound X is described by reference to already known sound Y...genre labeling is, from this critical perspective, an implied comparison (or set of comparisons) — generic labels are, in fact among the critic’s most essential tools.”⁸⁸ Frith is touching on the nature of genre labels as a means for critics to compare artists, and Gunn makes a broader statement about genre categorization in stating “discourse about popular music is fundamentally and inescapably a generic enterprise.”⁸⁹ Critics and audiences use genre as a linguistic tool to fix artists and their music in place. This is evident in early reviews of Grimes’ music. Critics used various genre labels to try to fix Grimes within them (I have **bolded** genre labels to emphasize their use):

Boucher uses **drum and bass, hip-hop, electronica, classical, folk, dream pop**, and everything in between to lift, edify, and entrance.⁹⁰

Boucher draws from the palette of **choral music** and **R&B** to create a landscape where fairies flit around pools of water and the distance is a foggy landscape of tree covered mountains.⁹¹

[Grimes is] abstract, enchanted **outsider pop**.⁹²

You can hear trace elements of **pop, techno, industrial**, and especially **R&B** across *Halfaxa*....⁹³

...her eccentric, dreamy sound, which draws upon everything from **dubstep** to **disco, Eastern music** to **1990s R&B**.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Simon Frith, *Performing Rites* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 88.

⁸⁹ Joshua Gunn, “Gothic Music and the Inevitability of Genre.” *Popular Music and Society* 23.1 (Spring 1999): 32.

⁹⁰ Consequence of Sound, “Grimes - Geidi Primes” (Aug 15 2011), <http://consequenceofsound.net/2011/08/album-review-grimes-geidi-primes/>.

⁹¹ МИШКА, “Review: Grimes - Halfaxa” (November 15 2010), <https://mishkanyc.com/blogin/2010/11/15/review-grimes-halfaxa>.

⁹² Exclaim!, “Grimes talks medieval times of Halfaxa” (Sept 22 2010), http://exclaim.ca/music/article/grimes_talks_medieval_times_of_halfaxa.

⁹³ Cokemachineglow.com, “Grimes - Halfaxa review” (November 1 2010), cokemachineglow.com/records/grimes-halfaxa-2010/.

⁹⁴ Pitchfork, “Review: Grimes - Geidi Primes” (Sept 7 2011), <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/15751-geidi-primes/>.

The Montreal-based artist's chameleonic approach sees her switch between **oriental pop**, **chillwave**, and **post-rock** with attentive ease.⁹⁵

Detroit techno radio rips, **opera**, the swirling loops of **eastern devotional music**, **rave** hooks and an **R&B** sheen are all part of her sound.⁹⁶

While there is some agreement among these critics fixing Grimes into a pop or R&B genre, the multitude of labels presented above suggests some confusion among critics. This occurrence brings light to the "antigenic moment" surrounding Grimes. This is most evident when critics make statements like "There is something so unusual about this record, an artefact that sounds as if it is being transmitted from space, as if it were coming from a more creative place than could be found on earth."⁹⁷ Because there were seemingly no clearly-applicable genre labels to sufficiently classify Grimes' music when it emerged, critics were left in a position where they felt it must be coming from a fantastical world outside traditional genre discourse. They then used their essential tool of genre labels to list as many related subgenres they could think of. This inevitably does place Grimes inside generic discourse, but critics were still divided on how exactly to label her. This "not-a-genre-yet-every-genre" conundrum became a characteristic emphasized in reviews of Grimes' music. Boucher was described as "genre-bending,"⁹⁸ "genre-defying,"⁹⁹ to "[blend] genres like paints on a palette,"¹⁰⁰ and "causing genre barriers to melt like...polar ice."¹⁰¹ *The Guardian* writes, "By sounding a little like

⁹⁵ NME, "Review: Geidi Primes" (Sept 2 2011), <http://www.nme.com/reviews/grimes/12288>.

⁹⁶ DUMMY Magazine, "Review: Halfaxa" (April 4 2011), <http://www.dummymag.com/reviews/grimes-halfaxa-review>.

⁹⁷ Consequence of Sound, "Grimes - Geidi Primes" (Aug 15 2011), <http://consequenceofsound.net/2011/08/album-review-grimes-geidi-primes/>.

⁹⁸ Faded Glamour (August 9 2011), <http://www.fadedglamour.co.uk/2011/08/album-review-grimes-geidi-primes.html>.

⁹⁹ NY Times (August 11 2011), <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/08/18/out-of-this-world/#more-174353>.

¹⁰⁰ NME, (September 2 2011), <http://www.nme.com/reviews/grimes/12288>.

¹⁰¹ Washington Post, "No Room for Grimes in a genre box" (Sept 6 2012), https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/no-room-for-grimes-in-a-genre-box/2012/09/06/3335160a-f1ed-11e1-adc6-87dfa8eff430_story.html.

everything you've ever heard, the whole sounds like nothing you've ever heard."¹⁰² The difficulty of describing Grimes' music via traditional genre labels became a way of defining it. In *The Quietus*' review of *Halfaxa* (2010), they conclude, "It'll also give the arbiters of genre naming with way too much time on their hands a few sleepless nights as they aimlessly argue as to whether this fits into the witch/chill/whatever pigeonhole."¹⁰³

Drowned in Sound attempts to pin down Grimes as being 'hypnagogic pop,'¹⁰⁴ a genre term created by critic David Keenan in the August 2009 issue of *The Wire*.¹⁰⁵ The word "hypnagogic" refers to the transitional state from wakefulness to sleep,¹⁰⁶ and last.fm hazily describes "hypnagogic pop" as follows:

...hypnagogic pop is a broad term covering a constellation of artists that, while having many different "styles", have a similar music making approach: (sometimes extremely) low fidelity production (that is intentional in a different way than that of Lo-Fi Indie) filtering, more often than not, reminiscences of pop culture in various degrees (ranging from transparent, blatant pastiches to nearly abstract filtering, reverbing, often also including Plunderphonics technique) and in different forms (from free-form, even cassette-side-long jams to almost complete copies of pop format, like in the case of Ariel Pink's Haunted Graffiti).¹⁰⁷

In this way, "hypnagogic pop" is linked to a genre term like "indie," which "refers...to a means of production."¹⁰⁸ To refer to Grimes as "hypnagogic pop" thus elucidates how Boucher's lo-fi production methods influence the sound of her music. *Drowned in Sound*'s review is the only known occurrence of Grimes being tied to this genre label, but it provides an example diverging from other critics in describing how Grimes fits into

¹⁰² The Guardian, "One to watch: Grimes" (Jan 29 2012), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unfinished_creative_work.

¹⁰³ The Quietus, (March 22 2011), <http://thequietus.com/articles/05916-grimes-halfaxa-review>.

¹⁰⁴ Drowned in Sound, "Grimes - Halfaxa" (Mar 8 2011), <http://drownedinsound.com/releases/16030/reviews/4142190>.

¹⁰⁵ David Keenan, "How James Ferraro, Spencer Clark, Pocahaunted, Emeralds, et al are floating beyond Noise to a dreampop hallucination of the 1980s." *The Wire*, August 2009.

¹⁰⁶ Merriam-Webster, "Hypnagogic," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hypnagogic>.

¹⁰⁷ Last.fm, "Hypnagogic Pop," <http://www.last.fm/tag/hypnagogic+pop>.

¹⁰⁸ Frith, 86.

“the contemporaneous musical zeitgeist.”¹⁰⁹ The reviewer proceeds to explain this zeitgeist:

For, making up in knowledge what they lack in any formal musical training, these twentysomething GarageBand whizz kids are by-products of the internet age, magpies who appropriate vast stores of music to use and abuse for their own personal laptop endeavours. And 22-year-old Canadian Grimes- aka Claire Boucher - is the latest glo-fi crusader to colour the vista with her eerie, otherworldly hues.¹¹⁰

This presents an interesting take because the reviewer is concerned with Boucher’s production process, deeming her a “glo-fi crusader” alongside lo-fi pop artists like Ariel Pink. Her lack of formal musical training, combined with being a “product of the internet age,” is given credence as a crucial component of Grimes’ sound. Another reviewer notes that “One of the confusing things about reading interviews with [Boucher] is how quick she is to tell us about her lack of musical training.”¹¹¹ In one interview, she explains that “Not knowing how to play music is my greatest asset...I try to imitate things, and then I fail horribly, and then it’s just...something different.”¹¹² In another interview, she humbly notes that “On the first album I recorded everything on the white piano keys, but [now I’ve] figured out how to write on the black and white keys together, so it’s more diverse.”¹¹³ Lack of formal musical training is nothing new in popular music. Paul McCartney and John Lennon famously could not read music.³⁵ Outsider artists like Daniel Johnson, and to a lesser extent established artists like Kurt Cobain, used their lack of formal musical training as a large contributor to their sound. Where Boucher diverges is in how she makes up for formal musical training with the internet’s “vast stores of

¹⁰⁹ Drowned in Sound, “Grimes - Halfaxa” (Mar 8 2011), <http://drownedinsound.com/releases/16030/reviews/4142190>.

¹¹⁰ Drowned in Sound, “Grimes - Halfaxa” (Mar 8 2011), <http://drownedinsound.com/releases/16030/reviews/4142190>.

¹¹¹ DUMMY Magazine, “Halfaxa” (April 4 2011), <http://www.dummymag.com/reviews/grimes-halfaxa-review>.

¹¹² DUMMY Mag, “Grimes interview: ‘So many worlds.’” (August 21 2010), <http://www.dummymag.com/new-music/grimes-interview-so-many-worlds>.

¹¹³ Exclaim!, “Grimes talks medieval times of Halfaxa” (Sept 22 2010), http://exclaim.ca/music/article/grimes_talks_medieval_times_of_halfaxa.

music to use and abuse,”¹¹⁴ as noted by the reviewer above. To say that the internet makes up for what Boucher lacks in musical training insinuates that it has a definitive influence on the production of her music. This is described in a review which states “Grimes, whose Claire Boucher openly admits to having no musical training whatsoever and so has ‘no understanding of theory or notation,’ is above all else an avid *listener* of music, someone whose ability to make a great album seems to stem primarily from Boucher having absorbed so many of them.”¹¹⁵ Boucher did not learn how to write music from any sort of musical training or playing live in the tradition of a rock band, but rather from consuming a breadth of music that was near-unattainable before the internet. *DUMMY Magazine* also brings up the internet in discussion of Grimes’ music:

The internet is as important to interesting music today as hallucinogens were in the sixties. The internet is the most fun you can have without actually enjoying yourself, and listening to Grimes’s second record ‘Halfaxa’...is as dissociative, as unfocussed and as awesome as the internet itself.¹¹⁶

Bringing the internet into discussions of Grimes marks a shift from reviewers merely trying to describe the music to now explaining *why* it sounds the way it does. “The internet” is itself a highly fluid term that encompasses a variety of technological and cultural phenomena. To equate Grimes with the internet suggests an intriguing and complex answer to the problem of classifying Boucher’s music. It also provides a temporal explanation, placing Grimes in a zeitgeist with other musicians who also engage with the internet in a similar manner. However, this does not solve the critic’s problem of generic classification.

¹¹⁴ Drowned in Sound, “Grimes - Halfaxa” (Mar 8 2011), <http://drownedinsound.com/releases/16030/reviews/4142190>.

¹¹⁵ Cokemachineglow.com, “Grimes - Halfaxa review” (November 1 2010), cokemachineglow.com/records/grimes-halfaxa-2010/.

¹¹⁶ DUMMY Magazine, “Halfaxa” (April 4 2011), <http://www.dummymag.com/reviews/grimes-halfaxa-review>.

3.2 The Solution: Grimes and “Post-Internet”

What seemed like one solution to the issue of labeling Grimes’ music came in an interview with *Interview Magazine* in May 2011, shortly before recording her breakthrough album *Visions* (2012). Boucher was asked to explain the “non-specific” nature of her sound:

DURGA CHEW-BOSE: Largely, the music writing that’s out there about you is focused on how non-specific your sound is and how your influences are wide-ranging; the word “ethereal” is used a lot. Was that your intention?

CLAIRE BOUCHER: Yeah, I mean, I think people just ask those questions because they’re easy and obvious.

CHEW-BOSE: In your words, how would you describe your music then?

BOUCHER: I mean, I think my sound is post-internet. People my age had the internet when they were kids. So I think I just had a really diverse musical background, but from a really young age. People who are 30 and older don’t have that—they were raised with genres of music. But people my age had everything all at once...genres are sort of disappearing, people just use bands as reference points. And if I were to describe my sound, I’d just say it’s “modern?”¹¹⁷

Boucher is clearly stating that the internet had a large effect on her music and is causing genres to “disappear.” For her to use “modern” here also arguably places Grimes’ “post-internet” into a cultural zeitgeist. She would soon be promoting her album *Visions* in the coming months, and in subsequent interviews, many publications pressed her to elaborate on this “post-internet” phenomenon she described here (For instance, online articles from *The New York Times*,¹¹⁸ *Dallas Observer*,¹¹⁹ *The Creators Project*¹²⁰ and *The*

¹¹⁷ Interview Magazine, “Grimes of the Heart” (May 24 2011), http://www.interviewmagazine.com/music/grimes-claire-boucher#_.

¹¹⁸ NY Times, “FIND TITLE” (August 11 2011), <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/08/18/out-of-this-world/#more-174353>.

¹¹⁹ Dallas Observer, “Grimes is Very Comfortable Being a Cyborg” (Feb 29 2012), <http://www.dallasobserver.com/music/grimes-is-very-comfortable-being-a-cyborg-thanks-7072899>.

¹²⁰ The Creators Project, “Siren Seduction: Q&A With Electronic Musician Grimes” (March 26 2012), http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/en_uk/blog/siren-seduction-qa-with-electronic-musician-grimes.

Guardian.¹²¹). By the time *Visions* was released, the term “post-internet” was used in relation to Grimes’ music in reviews by a variety of online publications. I have located uses in online reviews of the album from January to March 2012 by *Pitchfork*,¹²² *SPIN*,¹²³ *Consequence of Sound*,¹²⁴ *Sputnik Music*,¹²⁵ *KEXP*,¹²⁶ *DIY Magazine*,¹²⁷ *The Quietus*,¹²⁸ *Tastemakers Magazine*,¹²⁹ *Filter*,¹³⁰ *Dusted*,¹³¹ *No Rip Cord*,¹³² *The Yale Herald*,¹³³ *Reviler*,¹³⁴ *Temporary Rough Venom*,¹³⁵ *Black Tar Music*,¹³⁶ *Luddite Stereo*,¹³⁷ and *LA*

¹²¹ The Guardian, “One to watch: Grimes” (Jan 28 2012), <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/jan/29/grimes-boucher-one-to-watch>.

¹²² Pitchfork, “Grimes - Visions Review” (Feb 17 2012), pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/16211-grimes-visions/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+PitchforkAlbumReviews+%28Pitchfork%3A+Album+Reviews%29.

¹²³ SPIN, “Grimes, ‘Visions’ (4AD)” (Feb 23 2012), <http://www.spin.com/2012/02/grimes-visions-4ad-0/>.

¹²⁴ Consequence of Sound, “Grimes - Visions” (Feb 17 2012), <http://consequenceofsound.net/2012/02/album-review-grimes-visions/>.

¹²⁵ Sputnik Music, “Grimes - Visions” (January 27 2012), <http://www.sputnikmusic.com/review/47706/Grimes-Visions/>.

¹²⁶ KEXP, “Album Review: Grimes - Visions” (Feb 24 2012), <http://blog.kexp.org/2012/02/24/album-review-grimes-visions/>.

¹²⁷ DIY Magazine, “Grimes - Visions” (March 12 2012), <http://diymag.com/archive/grimes-visions/>.

¹²⁸ The Quietus, “Grimes - Visions” (Feb 24th 2012), <http://thequietus.com/articles/08059-grimes-visions-review>.

¹²⁹ Tastemakers Magazine, “Grimes - Visions” (March 14 2012), <http://tastemakersmag.com/reviews/album-reviews/2012/grimes-visions/>.

¹³⁰ Filter, “Grimes, Visions - 4AD” (Feb 21 2012), <http://filtermagazine.com/index.php/reviews/entry/grimes>.

¹³¹ Dusted, “Grimes - Visions” (Feb 20 2012), <http://www.dustedmagazine.com/reviews/6961>.

¹³² No Rip Cord, “Grimes - Visions” (March 26 2012), <http://www.noripcord.com/reviews/music/grimes/visions>.

¹³³ The Yale Herald, “Grimes’ post-Internet dream world” (Feb 24 2012), <http://yaleherald.com/reviews/grimes-post-internet-dream-world/>.

¹³⁴ Reviler, “Grimes: Visions Review (Three Takes)” (Feb 23 2012), <http://www.reviler.org/2012/02/23/grimes-visions-review-three-takes/>.

¹³⁵ Temporary Rough Venom, “Album Review: Grimes - Visions” (March 12 2012), <http://temporaryroughvenom.blogspot.ca/2012/03/album-review-grimes-visions.html>.

¹³⁶ Black Tar Music, “Grimes - Visions // Review” (March 20 2012), <https://blacktarmusic.wordpress.com/2012/03/20/grimes-visionsreview/>.

¹³⁷ Luddite Stereo, “Visions - Grimes - album review” (Feb 02 2012), <http://ludditestereo.com/2012/02/11/visions-grimes-album-review/>.

*Music Blog*¹³⁸. Later reviews for reissues of *Geidi Primes*¹³⁹ and *Halfaxa*¹⁴⁰ also used the term, as well as various thinkpieces¹⁴¹ and end-of-the-year lists¹⁴² that mention Grimes.¹⁴³ This does not include print publications, and there are likely more uses out there. This shows a significant adoption of the term “post-internet” in describing Grimes’ music after the interview with *Interview Magazine* took place.

It does not seem that Boucher’s intention was to be classified as “post-internet” as much as she deployed the term to resist genre classification altogether. She even speaks of the idea of genre as a dated concept. However, whether or not she intended her music to be labeled “post-internet,” it inevitably was. Gunn writes, “despite the predictably resistant rhetoric of popular music artists, music is unavoidably destined for generic containers.”¹⁴⁴ Suddenly, all the confusion and incoherence in labeling Grimes’ music could be contained within a single term. Fabian Holt writes in *Genre in Popular Music* that “Discourse plays a major role in genre making. A genre category can only be established if the music has a name. Naming a music is a way of recognizing its existence and distinguishing it from other musics.”¹⁴⁵ By stating, “my sound is post-internet,” Boucher inadvertently gave her music a label that made it easily distinguishable from other music. Frith notes, “Whatever decision is made generically... will have a determining influence on everything that happens to the performer or record

¹³⁸ LA Music Blog, “Album Review: Grimes - Visions” (Feb 22 2012), <http://lamusicblog.com/2012/02/review/album-review-grimes-visions/>.

¹³⁹ Pitchfork, “Grimes - Geidi Primes” (Sept 7 2011), <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/15751-geidi-primes/>.

¹⁴⁰ Sputnikmusic, “Grimes - Halfaxa” (Nov 5 2015), <http://www.sputnikmusic.com/review/69042/Grimes-Halfaxa/>.

¹⁴¹ DUMMY Mag, “Grimes is leading a generation of online musicians to the material world” (May 22 2012), <http://www.dummymag.com/features/be-a-body-grimes-meaning>.

¹⁴² The Guardian, “Best Albums of 2012, No 2: Grimes - Visions” (Dec 13 2012), <http://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2012/dec/13/best-albums-2012-grimes-visions>.

¹⁴³ Pitchfork, “The Top 100 Albums of 2010-2014” (2015), <http://pitchfork.com/features/staff-lists/9465-the-top-100-albums-of-2010-2014/5/>.

¹⁴⁴ Gunn, 32.

¹⁴⁵ Fabian Holt, *Genre in Popular Music* (The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 3.

thereafter.”¹⁴⁶ By deeming her music “post-internet” in this interview, she gave critics exactly what they were looking for — a new, attractive term that would solve their issue of classifying Grimes’ music.

Frith asserts, “Genre is not determined by the form or style of a text itself but by the audience’s perception of its style and meaning.”¹⁴⁷ Whether or not Boucher wanted Grimes to be considered “post-internet,” critics and fans quickly picked up the term to classify her music. As previously discussed, there was something in Grimes’ music that perplexed critics in their attempts to classify it. By calling the music “post-internet,” Boucher played right into their hands. Her music no longer existed outside of genre discourse, because there was suddenly a label to describe it. Holt writes that “Mass mediation plays an enormous role in genre formation, and corporate companies form a major part of the institutional network.”¹⁴⁸ He further notes, “Online discourse can be viewed as an extension of offline discourse, and it is often complementary to the professional mass media.”¹⁴⁹ These interviews, articles and reviews about Grimes were the pervasive forces in adopting the term as a genre classifier for Boucher’s music. Listeners who just discovered Grimes would look to such reviews and find a new genre to obsess over, while old fans could defiantly claim they listened to her “before she was post-internet.” It was not Boucher who held the power of determining whether her music was “post-internet,” but the voices of critics and fans.

Considering that Boucher’s initial use of the term was meant to dispel genre terms rather than create one, she was not pleased with how tied her music became to the label “post-internet”. Shortly after the reviews for *Visions* flooded in, Boucher took to Twitter to dismiss the term altogether. Although this particular tweet is now irretrievable,¹⁵⁰ a cover story by *Self-Titled Mag* explains the situation:

¹⁴⁶ Frith, 76.

¹⁴⁷ Frith, 94.

¹⁴⁸ Holt, 21.

¹⁴⁹ Holt, 29.

¹⁵⁰ Boucher (@Grimezs) deleted all of her tweets from before Dec 10 2013.

...the term “post-internet,” which Claire once used in an interview to explain, as she says, “the very clear situation that obviously the internet has changed the way people consume music,” how it provides access to music across all genres, encouraging a pastiche of influence. (Claire herself culls influence from across the spectrum, citing Mariah Carey, Aphex Twin, Marilyn Manson and Timbaland as key figures.) “Post-internet,” in an accidental and not entirely inappropriate instance of coining culture, has become a self-perpetuating meme, attributed to her music in a way she didn’t expect. “People are starting to refer to it as if it were a genre, which is not the way it was intended,” she says. “It’s not that I’m a post-internet artist; it’s that the internet exists now, and at one point it didn’t.” Fittingly, she turned to Twitter to renounce the term entirely, posting, “omg ‘post internet’ whatever i was running my mouth i don’t support the use of that term—not affiliated with it yoooooooo.”...The term “post-internet” may have evolved beyond what she intended but perhaps necessarily so. Still, she prefers to keep her distance: “I’m just worried that it gives me an air of faux intellectualism.”¹⁵¹

Gunn writes that “Even when fans and artists deny generic labels, often such denial signals a reading of the adjectival code that, when coupled with the denial itself, paradoxically affirms generic inclusion.”¹⁵² By now distancing Grimes from the “post-internet” label, Boucher inadvertently gives the term more power in relation to her music. It then became a topic among publications to discuss her dismissal of the term; just as they had previously discussed her adoption of it.¹⁵³ This is evident in an interview with *W Magazine*:

Claire Boucher, the 24-year-old singer known as Grimes, rolls her eyes. The cause of her exasperation is the phrase “post-internet” — throwaway words she once used to describe her strange, soulful electro-dance sound — which has been lobbed back at her ad nauseam. “It seems so pretentious,” she says. Public relations aside, though, she still stands behind its meaning. Her self-produced album *Visions*, released this spring, has the media hailing the arrival of a “new breed of pop star.” The work is unquestionably the result of growing up in a digital world. Like Boucher, who’s a thin wire of nervous energy, the songs are frenetic, with odd musical references ranging from Enya to Björk to Mariah Carey

¹⁵¹ Self-Titled Mag, “Grimes: Cover Story” (March 20 2012), <http://www.self-titledmag.com/2015/10/22/throwback-thursdayread-our-grimes-cover-story/>.

¹⁵² Gunn, 41.

¹⁵³ Exclaim!, “Grimes - The Accidental Pop Star” (Feb 27 2012), http://exclaim.ca/music/article/grimes-accidental_pop_star.

(for Boucher's high falsetto). "It's ADD music," she explains. "I go through phases a lot."¹⁵⁴

This example shows Boucher resisting the term to classify her music, yet still standing behind its existence as a cultural phenomenon. In an interview with *Austin Chronicle*, Boucher states that she never even said her music was "post-internet," contradicting previous interviews she gave in her career.¹⁵⁵ In another interview, she states:

It's just a stupid term that I unfortunately made up...But the concept isn't stupid, it's a phenomenon that just totally exists. Because the internet¹⁵⁶ exists. It's all around us on a daily basis, and it's totally informed the way people live their lives, the way they consume music, and the way that they interpret it, both as listeners and artists.¹⁵⁷

Boucher states in an interview early in her career, "I want to make a tome – access every genre of music, and also create new genres with them."¹⁵⁸ When given the opportunity to found her very own genre, however, Boucher chose to resist it. This presents a paradoxical situation. Boucher is not dismissing the existence of "post-internet," nor entirely denying that she is a part of it, but is completely against the term being used as a genre label to affix her music. Gunn states that "resistance to genre is not so much a resistance to musical codes as a revolt against the human process of categorizing by which music is mediated by the linguistic sign."¹⁵⁹ More than anything, this seems to be the issue most pressing for Boucher. It is not the idea of "post-internet" that causes Boucher to resist the label, but the very idea of classification itself. In a video interview, Boucher states, "There is nothing that I really define my music as, because I think that's

¹⁵⁴ W Magazine, "On the Verge: Grimes" (June 2012), <http://www.wmagazine.com/people/celebrities/2012/06/grimes-claire-boucher-musician-visions>.

¹⁵⁵ Austin Chronicle, "Surrealist Yuppie, Grimes" (Oct 4 2012), <http://www.austinchronicle.com/daily/music/2012-10-04/surrealist-yuppie-grimes/>.

¹⁵⁶ Keep this turn of phrase in mind in the next chapter when we deal with Childish Gambino's project titled *Because the Internet*.

¹⁵⁷ Three Magazine, "Grimes On How To Make Yourself a Brand" (April 12 2012), <http://themusic.com.au/interviews/all/2012/04/12/grimes-interview-with-three-mag/>.

¹⁵⁸ DUMMY Mag, "Grimes Interview - So Many Worlds" (Aug 21 2010), <http://www.dummymag.com/new-music/grimes-interview-so-many-worlds>.

¹⁵⁹ Gunn, 36.

inherently going to limit it.”¹⁶⁰ This statement encapsulates her resistance to classification, and why Boucher was so resistant to the idea of being attached to the “post-internet” label. Even if she feels that she may be a part of what “post-internet” means, for her music to be classified as “post-internet” would limit one’s understanding of her music. Frith writes that “to hear music generically...means organizing the sounds according to formal rules.”¹⁶¹ This is what Boucher is against, and no matter how hard she tried to resist it, genre classification still binds her. Gunn concludes his work on the inevitability of genre by affirming that “attempts of artists and fans to engage in discussions outside of generic discourse, to avoid categorizing, are ultimately futile.”¹⁶² The story of Grimes presents a vivid example of this, and in the end, Boucher’s attempts to exist outside of genre only brought her further within it.

In reviews for *Art Angels* (2015), released over three years after Boucher dismissed the term “post-internet,” critics still felt compelled to use it in their analysis (such as *SPIN*,¹⁶³ *Vulture*,¹⁶⁴ and *The Local Joke*¹⁶⁵). *The Guardian* states that “Boucher has always claimed to be ‘post-internet’” but then calls Grimes “a more traditional pop project.”¹⁶⁶ Boucher adds:

Pop is just another genre. Some of my songs are influenced by pop music. Some of them are not. The whole purpose of Grimes is that it’s genreless. Trying to constantly put a genre label on it makes no sense and then you are always eating your words two months later. So, why bother? People keep trying to be like,

¹⁶⁰ Konbini, “The Auto-Interview: Grimes” (Jul 17 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SVcbft9XOA>.

¹⁶¹ Frith, 91.

¹⁶² Gunn, 44.

¹⁶³ *SPIN*, “Review: Grimes Preaches Wonderful and Horrifying Hyperspace Gospel on ‘Art Angels’ (Nov 6 2015), <http://www.spin.com/2015/11/review-grimes-art-angels/>.

¹⁶⁴ *Vulture*, “Grimes’s Art Angels Is Superhero Music for Introverts” (Nov 6 2015), <http://www.vulture.com/2015/11/album-review-grimes-art-angels.html>.

¹⁶⁵ *The Local Joke*, “ALBUM REVIEW: Art Angels - Grimes” (Jan 14 2016), <https://thelocaljoke.wordpress.com/2016/01/14/album-review-art-angels-grimes/>.

¹⁶⁶ *The Guardian*, “Grimes: ‘In my life, I’m a lot more weird than this’” (Oct 31 2015), <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/oct/31/claire-boucher-grimes-art-angels>.

“We’re trying to pin down the Grimes style.” If you haven’t realised by now, you’re never going to be able to.¹⁶⁷

This narrative shows an instance of a characteristically “genreless” artist being inexorably pulled back into generic discourse. No matter how much Boucher and her music may resist genre classification, labels inevitably take over. While Grimes may no longer be as strictly bound to the “post-internet” label as she once was, it continues to appear in music discourse years later. It has become a genre tag on last.fm¹⁶⁸ and bandcamp,¹⁶⁹ each listing over 100 artists,¹⁷⁰ with Grimes listed as the “top artist” on last.fm’s page. The rising UK collective PC Music has been classified as “post-internet,”¹⁷¹ and articles have been written about the elusive term, such as *Vice*’s “So What is Post-internet Music, Anyway?” in late 2015,¹⁷² *humanhuman*’s “Exploring Post-internet Music”¹⁷³ in early 2016,¹⁷⁴ and *MTV*’s “The Post-internet Worlds of Atlanta Rappers Lil Yachty and Playboi Carti”¹⁷⁵ in early 2016. The term “post-internet” has also been picked up outside of music discourse. *The New York Times* refers to Jerry Seinfeld’s career fitting into a “post-internet world”¹⁷⁶ in one article, and discusses Instagram celebrity Meriam Bennani to be “playing on the idioms of post-internet culture”¹⁷⁷ in

¹⁶⁷ The Guardian, “Grimes: ‘In my life, I’m a lot more weird than this’” (Oct 31 2015), <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/oct/31/claire-boucher-grimes-art-angels>.

¹⁶⁸ Last.fm, <http://www.last.fm/tag/post-internet>.

¹⁶⁹ Bandcamp, http://bandcamp.com/tag/post-internet?page=7&sort_field=pop

¹⁷⁰ Other artists classified as “post-internet” by last.fm and bandcamp tend to be low-profile artists influenced by internet subgenres like Seapunk and Vaporwave, and have an aesthetic built on early online imagery.

¹⁷¹ Vice, “PC Music is Post-Internet Art” (Jan 8 2015), https://thump.vice.com/en_ca/article/pc-music-is-post-internet-art.

¹⁷² Vice, “So What Is Post-Internet Music, Anyway?”

¹⁷³ Humanhuman, “Exploring Post-Internet Music” (Jan 2016), <http://humanhuman.com/articles/exploring-post-internet-music>.

¹⁷⁴ Artists classified as “post-internet” by *humanhuman* are Holly Herndon, Arca, Amnesia Scanner, Lotic, and Rabbit. These artists all make electronic-based music that somehow engages with the internet.

¹⁷⁵ MTV, “The Post-Internet Worlds of Atlanta Rappers Lil Yachty and Playboi Carti” (Feb 1 2016).

¹⁷⁶ The New York Times, “Jerry Seinfeld, Online Force” (May 27 2015), <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/31/arts/television/jerry-seinfeld-online-force.html>.

¹⁷⁷ The New York Times, “The Absurdist Hijabs and Instagram Wizardry of One Millennial Artist” (Oct 28 2015), <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/28/t-magazine/art-meriem-bennani-hijab-video.html>.

another. Online fashion publication *DIS Magazine* claims to be a “post-internet lifestyle magazine.”¹⁷⁸ Nearly five years after Boucher’s seminal interview, “post-internet” lives on. Below are some album covers for albums tagged “post-internet” on bandcamp, which feature re-appropriated imagery of early internet and computer culture.



Images of bandcamp albums tagged as “post-internet”: *FREE MUSIC NOW!!!*, *Heal Zone Demos*, and *Mindows 89*.

3.3 The Confusion: Unpacking “Post-Internet”

“Post-internet” bears little resemblance to traditional genre labels. The term had little commercial use in its adoption, which has normally been a key motivation of genre labels in the past.¹⁷⁹ Classifying Grimes’ music as “post-internet” did not initially make it any easier for record shops, online distributors or record labels to organize it for sale (though the term has since been used by places like last.fm and Bandcamp to organize music, as noted above). Nor did the genre emerge from a geographical space or local scene like previous genres.¹⁸⁰ It arises out of that intangible “place” of the internet. There is not even

¹⁷⁸ The New York Times, “Seriously Unserious About Fashion” (Nov 16 2012), <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/18/fashion/at-dis-magazine-not-the-usual-rules.html>.

¹⁷⁹ Frith, 75-76.

¹⁸⁰ Holt, 19.

a specific sound of “post-internet,” insofar as it supposedly sounds like everything. Considering “post-internet” bears little resemblance to popular music genre labels that came before it, why was it adopted so widely in relation to Grimes’ music? In order to answer this, we must first address a larger question looming over this analysis – what is meant by “post-internet”?

The term first appeared in discussions of visual art, with “post-internet” describing a movement that succeeded “Internet Art”.¹⁸¹ It is not unheard of for a popular music genre terms to first exist in other contexts of art. For instance, “Gothic” was initially used to describe literature and architecture before it was brought into popular music.¹⁸² Whether Boucher was familiar with post-internet visual art is not known, but based on her relationship with Montreal’s underground art scene it would not be surprising. Among the first known usages of the term “post-internet” is in an interview in 2008 with Marisa Olson, a well-known figure of post-internet art, when she used it to describe “art *after* the internet”.¹⁸³ Many art critics have debated the nature of post-internet art. In *Art in America*’s recent “The Perils of Post-internet Art,” the author states “‘Post-internet’ avoids anything resembling a formal description of the work it refers to, alluding only to a hazy contemporary condition and the idea of art being made in the context of digital technology.”¹⁸⁴ In *Art F City*’s “Finally, a Semi-Definition of Post-internet Art,” a contributor states “I find the term mostly annoying and don’t believe it will have traction in the long run.”¹⁸⁵ *Artspace* attempts to define the term in “What is Post-internet Art? Understanding the Revolutionary New Art Movement” and states, “post-internet artists have moved beyond making work dependent on the novelty of the

¹⁸¹ Rhizome, “What’s Postinternet Got to do with Net Art?” (Nov 1 2013), <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/nov/1/postinternet/>.

¹⁸² Gunn, 37.

¹⁸³ Marisa Olson, “POSTINTERNET: art after the internet.” *Foam magazine*, Winter 2011/2012, 60.

¹⁸⁴ *Art in America*, “THE PERILS OF POST-INTERNET ART” (Nov 30 2014), <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/the-perils-of-post-internet-art/>.

¹⁸⁵ *Art F City*, “Finally, a Semi-Definitive Definition of Post-Internet Art” (Oct 14 2014), <http://artfcity.com/2014/10/14/finally-a-semi-definitive-definition-of-post-internet-art/>.

Web to using its tools to tackle other subjects.”¹⁸⁶ This idea of moving beyond “the novelty of the Web” connects back to the discussion in Chapter 2 of music about the internet. Post-internet visual art does not treat the internet as a novelty and instead critiques the cultural role of the internet, much like the popular music artists I am discussing.

One of the most central points of confusion with the term is its usage of “post.” One critic even confusingly describes Grimes as being “oh so relentlessly *post*” and ends their critique by stating “Forget it. I’m out of adjectives... Like I said, this thing is oh so post.”¹⁸⁷ In discussing the nature of “post” in “post-internet,” arguments often parallel those about postmodernism. Some postmodern theorists have claimed that “post” carries historical and temporal connotations, sometimes meaning “after” or “past,”¹⁸⁸ while at times meaning “an extension of.”¹⁸⁹ Olson’s definition of “post-internet” relies on “post” meaning “after,” but this creates confusion because the internet is not “over,” just as modernism may not have been “over” when postmodernism emerged. Olson draws this parallel herself when she clarifies “I said that both my online and offline work was *after the internet* in the sense that ‘after’ can mean both ‘in the style of’ and ‘following.’ For illustration, I referred to the concept of postmodernity coming not at the *end* of modernity, but *after* (and with a critical awareness of) modernity.”¹⁹⁰ Other postmodernists argue that “post” implies a reaction to modernism,¹⁹¹ similar to how some critics find post-internet art to not be *after* the internet but *about* the internet, or a critique

¹⁸⁶ Artspace, “What is Post-Internet Art? Understanding the Revolutionary New Art Movement” (Mar 18 2014), http://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/trend_report/post_internet_art-52138.

¹⁸⁷ Fake Plastic Trees, “Grimes - Geidi Primes REVIEW” (Sept 18 2011), <http://www.fakeplastictones.com/2011/09/grimes-geidi-primes-review.html>.

¹⁸⁸ John Lukacs, *At the End of an Age*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002).

¹⁸⁹ Dick Hebdige, “Staking out the Posts.” *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things*. (London: Routledge, 1988): 181-207.

¹⁹⁰ Olson, 60.

¹⁹¹ Bryan S. Turner, “Periodization and Politics in the Postmodern.” *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1990): 1-12.

of “an internet state of mind.”¹⁹² The usage of “post” in “post-internet” is elaborated on in “Exploring Post-internet Music”:

Reading the term post-internet superficially, it would seem to imply that it comes after the internet; an evolution past the internet to a new field. It is quite the contrary in fact. Just as with post-modernism, post-rock or post-everything the use of ‘post’ entails a critical framework around the concept that is being, well... post-ed. ‘Post’ not only means that it comes after, but implies an awareness of its medium, sources, audience and its limits. The movement then takes this self-awareness as its new subject. The result is a metastate of looking and is sometimes criticised for being disconnected, too difficult for the general public to understand, and maybe even be too devoid of actual meaning due to its excessive self-contemplation... In the post-internet era, being online has become so much of our daily life, that it is impossible to think of how we would interact, gather information, work or play without it. Post-internet art is not about the internet as a medium anymore, but more of an examination of this virtual world and its impact and relation to the real world. To put it simply: not merely made on the net, but *about* the net.¹⁹³

So “post-internet” may be temporal in taking place after a certain period of the internet’s life cycle, but also reflective in being critical about the world that the internet introduced. Dick Hebdige says of postmodernism, “a single writer can talk at different times about different ‘posts’.”¹⁹⁴ This statement rings true with “post-internet” as well, with “post” carrying different, adaptable connotations.

Claire Boucher’s own definitions of “post-internet” offer some of the clearest explanations of this phenomenon. On the one hand she focuses on the biological and evolutionary impact that the internet is having on her brain. On the other, she is critically addressing the vast expanse of art and information that the internet allows her to access. For her, it is the combination of these two sides that encapsulate “post-internet”. She typically leads with a scientific explanation and then elaborates on its consequences for her music. Below are some of her scientific explanations of “post-internet” (I have **bolded** scientific terminology for emphasis):

¹⁹² UCCA, “Art Post-Internet” (Mar 1 2014), <http://ucca.org.cn/en/exhibition/art-post-internet/>.

¹⁹³ Humanhuman, “Exploring Post-Internet Music” (Jan 2016), <http://humanhuman.com/articles/exploring-post-internet-music>.

¹⁹⁴ Hebdige, 183.

The phenomenon I'm referring to is the **neurobiological** difference between people who were born after the internet became a common, household thing and people who had their adolescence without exposure to the internet.¹⁹⁵

I was trying to refer to, specifically, what I think is a **biological** difference between people who were born in the late '80s - people who experienced adolescence with the internet - and those who did not.¹⁹⁶

Grimes could be described as 'post-internet' because my brain is **biologically** different from the brains of people who were not exposed to the internet as adolescents. I (and 99% of my peers) have therefore carved neural pathways that structure the use of the internet as a priority skill and also allow us fluency and adaptability (that is inherent to our basic understanding of the internet).¹⁹⁷

Definitions like this of "post-internet" reveal Boucher's neuroscientific background. She never graduated from McGill because her music career took off, but Boucher was enrolled in the "electro-acoustics program, which is like psycho-physics...it's the physics of neurobiology, specifically related to music."¹⁹⁸ She states, "[I] studied a lot of how the brain interacts with music. So by the time I actually started making music, I kind of had an understanding of frequencies and kind of how the brain responds to things, which I think really helped me as a producer."¹⁹⁹ Considering this background, it is not surprising that she uses terms like "neurobiological" to explain "post-internet," and it provides a pseudo-scientific explanation of this phenomenon. Acclaimed neuroscientist Dr. Susan Greenfield would agree with Boucher that the internet is having neurobiological effects on our brains. In her book *Mind Change: How Digital Technologies are Leaving Their Mark on Our Brains*, Dr. Greenfield argues, "The human brain will adapt to whatever environment in which it is placed. The cyberworld of the twenty-first century is offering a new type of environment. Therefore, the brain could be changing in parallel, in

¹⁹⁵ The Guardian, "One to watch: Grimes" (Jan 28 2012), <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/jan/29/grimes-boucher-one-to-watch>.

¹⁹⁶ CLASH Music, "Visions-Grimes" (Dec 03 2012), <http://www.clashmusic.com/feature/visions-grimes>.

¹⁹⁷ The Creators Project, "Siren Seduction: Q&A With Electronic Musician Grimes" (March 26 2012), http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/en_uk/blog/siren-seduction-qa-with-electronic-musician-grimes.

¹⁹⁸ Interview Magazine, "Grimes of the Heart" (May 24 2011), http://www.interviewmagazine.com/music/grimes-claire-boucher#_.

¹⁹⁹ NPR, "Feeling This: A Conversation With Grimes" (Apr 27 2016), <http://www.npr.org/2016/04/27/455769676/feeling-this-a-conversation-with-grimes?sf25295019=1>.

correspondingly new ways.”²⁰⁰ Dr. Michael Merzenich, a pioneer in brain plasticity research, also claims that heavy use of the internet has neurological effects.²⁰¹ UCLA psychiatry professor Gary Small writes in *iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind*, “The current explosion of digital technology not only is changing the way we live and communicate but is rapidly and profoundly altering our brains.”²⁰² Although these scientific minds agree with Boucher’s statements, they have nothing to say about popular music. Boucher’s discussion of the science behind “post-internet” effectively introduces these ideas into popular music discourse. In further explaining “post-internet,” Boucher then touches on the cultural consequences of this neurobiological phenomenon:

[“Post-internet”] is leading to what I would consider the beginnings of a musical Renaissance. So for me, post-internet refers to the group of people who are psycho-hybrids with their internet selves (my Twitter, my whatever). [We] turn through the cyber universe, absorb as much as possible. For music, this means that the potential is endless. Sometimes I feel at such a loss simply because I feel so overwhelmed with the beauty and culture of the past that is rising up through the internet, and meeting things from other eras or communities that have never merged before. It’s like... the world’s fair of all art ever (I’m sure a sad and vast proportion will never reemerge for various reasons, but you know what I mean). This can only be great for us—because it is the responsibility of the contemporary musician to continue the legacy of humankind to the best of his or her abilities, especially as we may not have much time yet.²⁰³

I went through my adolescence having this revelatory experience – I can have any music I want and I can get it immediately. For me and for a lot of people I know, there’s this musical eclecticism that happened.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Dr. Susan Greenfield, *Mind Change: How Digital Technologies are Leaving their Mark on Our Brains*, (New York: Random House, 2015), 14.

²⁰¹ Michael Merzenich, “Going Googly” (Aug 11 2008), <http://www.onthebrain.com/2008/08/going-googly/>.

²⁰² Gary Small and Gigi Vorgan, *iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind* (New York: Collins, 2008), 1.

²⁰³ The Creators Project, “Siren Seduction: Q&A With Electronic Musician Grimes” (March 26 2012), http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/en_uk/blog/siren-seduction-qa-with-electronic-musician-grimes.

²⁰⁴ The Guardian, “One to watch: Grimes” (Jan 28 2012), <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/jan/29/grimes-boucher-one-to-watch>.

The music of my childhood was really diverse because I had access to everything, so the music I make is sort of schizophrenic.²⁰⁵

This bridges the gap in connecting “post-internet” from being a biological phenomenon to a cultural one for Boucher. Her idea of being a “psycho-hybrid” with online identity is alluded to by Greenfield when she states, “a lifetime of early exposure to the influences of Facebook and Twitter is producing a cultural mindset that is different from that of previous generations.”²⁰⁶ This different cultural mindset is precisely what Grimes (and later, Childish Gambino) embodies. Pitchfork even once referred to Grimes as “a human Tumblr,”²⁰⁷ and Boucher has said “I basically consider myself a cyborg.”²⁰⁸ For her, the internet is not a separate aspect of her life but an integral component of her existence as a person and artist.

In Nicholas Carr’s book *The Shallows: What the internet is Doing to Our Brains*, he takes a McLuhan-esque approach and claims “the Net is best understood as the latest in a long series of tools that have helped mold the human mind.”²⁰⁹ He then further asserts, “With the exception of alphabets and number systems, the Net may well be the single most powerful mind-altering technology that has ever come into general use.”²¹⁰ One of his main conclusions is that “the Web makes it harder for us to lock information into our biological memory, we’re forced to rely more and more on the Net’s capacious and easily searchable artificial memory, even if it makes us shallow thinkers.”²¹¹ This is at the heart of what Boucher is describing when she says her music is eclectic,

²⁰⁵ New York Times, “Out of This World” (Aug 11 2011), <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/08/18/out-of-this-world/#more-174353>.

²⁰⁶ Greenfield, 119.

²⁰⁷ Pitchfork, “Grimes: Arg Angels” (Nov 10 2015), <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/21264-art-angels/>.

²⁰⁸ Dallas Observer, “Grimes is Very Comfortable Being a Cyborg” (Feb 29 2012), <http://www.dallasobserver.com/music/grimes-is-very-comfortable-being-a-cyborg-thanks-7072899>.

²⁰⁹ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the internet is Doing to Our Brains*, (New York: Norton, 2011), 115.

²¹⁰ Carr, 116.

²¹¹ Carr, 194.

schizophrenic, and “ADD music.”²¹² This is what is meant by the “‘post-internet’ feel”²¹³ of the music and why a publication would say “Grimes’ music similar to the audio equivalent of the internet.”²¹⁴ Growing up with the internet and a seemingly endless amount of music at her fingertips, Boucher encountered an eclecticism of music that was impossible in a pre-Internet era. Once Boucher started to make her own music, this experience invariably influenced her musical output. As is evident in early reviews, the diverse breadth of genres and styles in her music was apparent, but her depth of formal music theory and practice was shallow. This is why her music was so difficult for critics to grasp, even if it was recorded solely with “the white piano keys.”²¹⁵ Critics early on even said that the internet makes up for what she lacks in formal training.²¹⁶ This is inevitably why Boucher used “post-internet” to explain the sound of her music. She not only recognizes that she is coming from a period of technological change and media transition, but understands how this experience deeply influences the sound of her music. She is able to grasp the biological effects of growing up with the internet and how it influences her art. This is why she never dismisses the “post-internet” phenomenon entirely because she recognizes it “totally exists.”²¹⁷

3.4 The Aftermath: Poptimism and the Resistance of “Pop”

It is worth mentioning how Boucher’s discussions of “post-internet” coincide with the rise of poptimism. Poptimism has been called “the prevailing ideology for today’s most

²¹² W Magazine, “On the Verge: Grimes” (June 2012), <http://www.wmagazine.com/people/celebrities/2012/06/grimes-claire-boucher-musician-visions>.

²¹³ Dallas Observer, “Grimes is Very Comfortable Being a Cyborg” (Feb 29 2012), <http://www.dallasobserver.com/music/grimes-is-very-comfortable-being-a-cyborg-thanks-7072899>.

²¹⁴ Oyster Mag, “Oyster Notes: Grimes’ Imaginary Online Dating Profile” (Oct 10 2012), <http://www.oystermag.com/oyster-notes-grimes-imaginary-online-dating-profile>.

²¹⁵ Exclaim!, “Grimes Talks Medieval Times of Halfaxa” (Sept 22 2010), http://exclaim.ca/music/article/grimes_talks_medieval_times_of_halfaxa.

²¹⁶ Drowned in Sound, “Grimes - Halfaxa” (Mar 8 2011), <http://drownedinsound.com/releases/16030/reviews/4142190>.

²¹⁷ Three Magazine, “Grimes On How To Make Yourself a Brand” (Apr 12 2012), <http://themusic.com.au/interviews/all/2012/04/12/grimes-interview-with-three-mag/>.

influential music critics.”²¹⁸ It involves an argument that pop music deserves the same critical respect as rock. *The New York Times*’ Saul Austerlitz writes “It is no accident that popmusic is an Internet-era permutation.” Boucher’s diverse “post-internet” taste looks like a popmusic playlist, spanning from pop country to progressive metal. Some artists that Boucher has listed as influences on Grimes are Dolly Parton, Marilyn Manson, Mariah Carey, Tool, Beyoncé, Aphex Twin, Enya, Kanye West, Madonna, Timbaland, Panda Bear, Outkast, and Nine Inch Nails. This list not only shows Boucher’s diverse taste spanning various eras and genres, but also displays her appreciation for mainstream pop music. In regards to Tool, Boucher states, “They’re so artsy, but so populist. I try to live by the sonic principles of Tool.”²¹⁹ This art-yet-pop mindset is also shown in a blog post of her favorite songs, where she lists tracks from Prince²²⁰, Taylor Swift, Skrillex, Elliot Smith, Rihanna and Paramore, among others.²²¹ In Amoeba’s YouTube segment “What’s In My Bag?”²²² when artists go through Amoeba Record’s store and pick out a few items, among the things Boucher selects are a Blink 182 music video DVD, experimental ambient producer Balam Acab’s album *Wander Wonder*, Justin Bieber’s *Never Say Never* concert film, and industrial group Skinny Puppy’s *Singles Collection*. A non-poptimist (i.e. rockist) mindset would have trouble understanding why Skinny Puppy is placed alongside Justin Bieber, since one is a gritty, authentic, and innovative band and the other is a mass produced product of popular culture. For Claire Boucher, placing these two alongside each other is nothing out of the ordinary.

²¹⁸ The Washington Post, “Do you want popmusic? Or do you want the truth?” (Apr 17 2015), https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/at-the-top-of-the-pop-music-heap-theres-no-criticizing-the-view/2015/04/16/d98d53a8-e1f2-11e4-b510-962fcfab310_story.html.

²¹⁹ Rolling Stone, “Grimes on ‘Art Angels’ Follow-Up, Why She Loves Tool” (Apr 12 2016), <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/grimes-on-art-angels-follow-up-why-she-loves-tool-20160412>.

²²⁰ RIP. Prince passed away towards the end of writing this Master’s thesis.

²²¹ Pretty Much Amazing, “Grimes Shares List of the Best Songs of All Time” (Dec 2 2015), <http://prettymuchamazing.com/news/grimes-best-songs-of-all-time>.

²²² Amoeba Music’s YouTube Channel, “Grimes – What’s In My Bag?” (Jun 11 2012), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahnUH7wnW30>.

In regards to the Justin Bieber concert film, Boucher states, “I think Justin Bieber is really under-appreciated...he’s pretty talented. The fact that he wrote all his own singles...he had a hard life (laughs). [The film] makes you appreciate Justin Bieber, ‘cause he’s not just a product of the machine, he’s a real musician.” This statement is to be taken with a grain of salt since Boucher laughed and the fact that Bieber did not actually write all of his own singles, but it displays a model of a popoptimist mindset because Boucher is placing the more rockist idea of musical authenticity within the framework of mass produced pop music. She affirms that there is more to Bieber than him being a “product of the machine” because he is also a “real musician.” This popoptimist ideology makes sense when applied to many of the artists mentioned by Boucher as influences. She recognizes that while many of them may be mass produced products of popular music, she does not see that as detrimental to their artistic credibility. This then adds another layer to Boucher’s idea of “post-internet” because while it is built around the idea of the vast access to music offered by the internet, it is her popoptimist-leaning mindset that caused her to consume so many different styles. A die-hard heavy metal fan with an internet connection has access to the same music that Boucher does, but they may not choose to listen to such a diverse array of artists. Because Boucher views many seemingly opposing styles on the same playing field, she uses the internet as a means to cultivate her eclectic, popoptimist taste.

The Guardian writes of musicians who embrace popoptimism like Robyn and The Knife: “Nurtured by the growing critical mass of indie culture, [these artists] used the structure of pop to create music with a point of view that was not in any way mainstream. It was pop music that wasn’t necessarily popular.” This is again exemplified by Grimes, who emerged out of indie culture and has been deemed “pop for misfits” by *The New Yorker*.²²³ Fittingly, Boucher also rejects the label of a pop star/artist. This came up prominently around the release of her highly anticipated album *Art Angels* (2015). Since Boucher had dismissed “post-internet” during the cycle promoting her previous album *Visions* (2012), perhaps critics had to think of something new to classify her because they

²²³ The New Yorker, “Pop For Misfits” (Sept 28 2015), <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/09/28/pop-for-misfits>.

took this opportunity to view *Art Angels* (2015) as Boucher's attempt to break into the pop mainstream. In an interview with *The Globe and Mail* titled "Producer, musician...but don't call Grimes the p-word," Boucher states:

I think there's an aspect of pretty much every interview I've gone into over the last year; they're like, "So are you going to be a pop star?" And I'm like, "No, I'm making this record by myself. I'm on an independent label, this is independent music; most of this record is, like, industrial and, like, screamo. It's not pop music. ... And the headline the next day is, like, 'Grimes wants to be a pop star.' And it's just ... like you guys wrote these stories before you ever talked to me. It's like there's a media narrative that is really intense and really, really inaccurate, that no matter how many times I say the opposite ... just gets more and more powerful. And I'm just really fed up with it. It just really sucks to have the media constantly painting you as something that is so incredibly far away from, like, what you are.

This quote encompasses many of the themes that have run through my analysis so far. Boucher resists the classification of "pop star" and notes that no matter what she says media publications still label her as such. This is not entirely different from the course run by "post-internet," especially considering that many publications still used the term after she dismissed it. This complicated relationship with how the media perceives Grimes is the subject of the opening song on *Art Angels* (after the intro), entitled "California." She claims the song is a "hate track for *Pitchfork*... [and] for like the music industry."²²⁴

Boucher's resistance to the "pop star" label is an issue of both gender and classification. She has experienced a lot of sexism in the music industry, and her tumblr post in 2013 entitled, "i don't want to be infantilized because I refused to be sexualized"²²⁵ (which she has since deleted), addresses instances of sexism she has experienced in the music industry. This blog post caused major media attention and is still mentioned much to her chagrin. She even writes in the post, "i dont want my words to be taken out of context." Three years after writing the post she tweeted, "most

²²⁴ Pigeons and Planes, "Grimes Calls Her Song 'California' a 'Hate Track for Pitchfork'" (Nov 12 2015), <http://pigeonsandplanes.com/2015/11/grimes-california-a-hate-track-for-pitchfork/>.

²²⁵ Huffington Post, "Sexism In Music Targeted By Female Singer Grimes In New Blog Post" (Apr 24 2013), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/24/sexism-in-music-singer-grimes_n_3146111.html.

annoying thing about my job: being asked about ‘music industry sexism’” and that “media propagates sexism by portraying me as a victim rather than the successful producer that I am.”²²⁶ She once said, “When I first started playing shows, it was awful. People would always be like, ‘You’re not a real musician.’ I’m playing with samplers and MPCs – everyone is also playing with samplers and MPCs. It’s just because I’m a girl that you’re going to shit on me about it.”²²⁷ This perception of Boucher as “not a real musician” causes her to be a largely one-woman project and handle all aspects of production herself. It also relates to previous discussions of her lack of musical training, as detailed in section 3.1 of this chapter. It is not abnormal for an independent musician to have no formal music training, but in discussions of Grimes, critics felt it was necessary to emphasize. This could again be another way of “othering” Boucher, pointing out that she has no formal training when plenty of male independent musicians do not either. Boucher feels that the moment a male producer or engineer gets involved with her music, “then people [would] start being, like, ‘Oh! That guy just did it all.’”²²⁸ When she wanted to add guitar and violin to the album, *Art Angels*, rather than getting someone else, Boucher taught herself how to play the instruments. She states, “One of the first things I did was Google what chords were in Dolly Parton’s ‘Jolene,’ and I used those on ‘Belly of the Beat.’”²²⁹ Her autonomy and DIY nature contribute not only to her music, but also to the multitude of music videos she has directed for Grimes and to the stage direction of her live shows. She makes it a point to be the sole creative force behind Grimes because she feels the moment a male gets involved the credit would shift to them.

Boucher prefers to be understood as a producer along the lines of Kanye West and Phil Spector because she positions her work as such, even stating early on, “It’s kind of

²²⁶ Twitter, Grimes (@Grimezsz,) Apr 12 2016, <https://twitter.com/Grimezsz>.

²²⁷ SPIN, “Grimes Comes Clean: Synth-Pop Provocateur on Her Big Year” (Dec 6 2012), <http://www.spin.com/2012/12/grimes-interview-2012-big-year/?page=0>.

²²⁸ Mic, “Grimes Says Men Still Get All the Credit for Women’s Creative Work in a New Interview” (Sept 22 2015), <http://mic.com/articles/125699/grimes-says-men-still-get-all-the-credit-for-women-s-creative-work-in-a-new-interview#.tNDBisvdh>.

²²⁹ Rolling Stone, “Grimes on ‘Art Angels’ Follow-Up, Why She Loves Tool” (Apr 12 2016), <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/grimes-on-art-angels-follow-up-why-she-loves-tool-20160412>.

like I'm Phil Spector and I'm forcing a young girl (Grimes) to make pop music and perform exhaustively...Except, instead of it being someone else, that girl is also me."²³⁰ Boucher finds the media's view of her as a "pop star" rather than a producer to be sexist, and tweeted "endless speculation abt whether grimes will be a popstar seems 2 disregard the fact that I'm a paranoid recluse & i can't even walk in heels."²³¹ Boucher does not feel that she fits into the classification of a "pop star," yet media publications still classify her as such. Male independent music producers like Baths, How to Dress Well, and James Blake have arguably added pop sensibilities to their music over the years, but they are not classified as trying to be "pop stars" like Boucher. There is admittedly much more research to be done on how gender factors into these discussions of Grimes, but it is outside the scope of this chapter. What is important to note here is that this displays another example of her struggle against the power of classification.

In an interview with *The Quietus* titled "Eschewing Pop Ideology: An Interview With Grimes,"²³² Boucher states, "It really bothers me that people are so intent on trying to see if they can compare *Art Angels* to, you know, Taylor Swift or whatever. It's just not the world I'm operating in"²³³ and claims, "What bothered me initially is just the idea that you mention Beyoncé once in the press three years ago and suddenly you can't seem to get away from it. I'm on an indie label. I couldn't even get on Top 40 if I wanted to."²³⁴ Boucher is commenting on the fact that because she may show a popmusic taste by liking the work of Beyoncé, critics now expect her to make music for Top 40. However, Boucher claims that she is not even in a position to reach the mainstream pop world if she tried. The interviewer then notes:

²³⁰ The Guardian, "One to Watch: Grimes" (Jan 29 2012), <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/jan/29/grimes-boucher-one-to-watch>.

²³¹ Twitter, Grimes (@Grimezsz), Sept 26 2016, <https://twitter.com/Grimezsz>.

²³² The Quietus, "Eschewing Pop Ideology: An Interview With Grimes" (Mar 10 2016), <http://thequietus.com/articles/19860-grimes-art-angels-realiti-interview-pop>.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

As the conversation continues, it's becoming clearer and clearer to me that any apparent eschewing of the pop genre isn't necessarily a question of distaste for what that term signifies after all, but rather a frustration with an overarching and pervasive arbitrary classification of music into genres – categories designed to eff the ineffable, to make things easy (and easily marketable). “I think it's just very hard to speak about music. There's no kind of inherent qualities to any music, there's not even a great vocabulary for talking about music,” she continues, “Like, what? Loud, quiet, dark, bright, soft – they're not actually words to describe music: they're metaphors. It's like talking about things that are intangible. It's hard to describe, and I think it probably bothers any artist.”²³⁵

This brings us right back to the beginning. Boucher dismisses the label of “pop” just as she did “post-internet,” even using very similar rhetoric. As soon as publications decide some new way to classify Grimes, Boucher dismisses it and it is back to square one. In an earlier interview with *Pitchfork* around the release of *Visions*, Boucher did, in fact, say, “I want to be a behind-the-scenes producer. I really hate being in front of people. But I'm also obsessed with being a pop star.”²³⁶ This statement seems to have been taken more literally than Boucher intended, much like when she first used the term “post-internet” to describe Grimes' music. These examples show Boucher colloquially using terms in interviews that later get picked up by publications as classifications for Grimes. It is at this point that Boucher feels she must outwardly resist the use of such classifications. Just as she does not dismiss the phenomenon of “post-internet,” Boucher may not entirely resist what a pop star represents. However, she has no interest in being classified as such. It is when the classifier is taken from Boucher's statements and affixed onto Grimes when conflict arises. This again shows Boucher's strong resistance toward the power that classifications hold.

In the song “California,” she sings “I don't understand what they say / ‘Cause I get carried away / Commodifying all the pain.” Boucher consistently feels that her words get taken out of context. This relates not only to discussions of classifying her music as laid out in this chapter, but also the ways in which she discusses her issues with sexism and being seen as a “pop star.” The song ends with the last line of the chorus, “California,

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Pitchfork, “Grimes: Interview” (Feb 15 2012), <http://pitchfork.com/features/interview/8774-grimes/>.

I didn't think you'd end up treating me so bad." Boucher's complicated relationship with the media, and music industry as a whole, is a consistent stressor on her as an artist because Grimes is consistently classified and perceived in ways that she sees as inappropriate or constraining.

3.5 Conclusion

Marshall McLuhan writes in *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*, "The student of media will not only value slang as a guide to changing perception, but he will also study media as bringing about new perceptual habits."²³⁷ The phrase "post-internet" reveals something more complex than simply an attractive neologism. When applied to the genre-defying nature of Grimes' music, it may point to something more profound about the internet's influence on the creation of her music. The explanations of "post-internet" that she gives offer perspectives on how she believes the internet is biologically affecting her brain and consequently altering her creative output. Even though she may resist "post-internet" as a genre label, she never dismisses the existence of "post-internet" as a cultural phenomenon. To her, "post-internet" is not meant to classify her music, but instead to explain the fundamental reasons as to why it exists in the form it does. To say Grimes is "post-internet" is not entirely different than if Madonna had said her music was "post-MTV" or if The Beatles had said their music was "post-Phonograph." The difference is that unlike Madonna or The Beatles, Grimes created a disruption in traditional genre discourse and "post-internet" appeared to explain why. First, Grimes was considered indescribable and seemingly from another world. Critics used every tool at their disposal to try to pin down her sound, and they continually tripped over themselves. They could sense that there was something about Grimes' music that was characteristically new, but it was beyond words. Then Boucher deemed her music "post-internet", and it solved this issue. Grimes could now be fixed to a single term that emphasizes the internet's influence on her music. While this helped critics and audiences, it caused problems for Boucher because "post-internet" was never intended to be a genre label. If anything, her use of "post-internet" was meant to dispel genre altogether.

²³⁷ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man* (McGraw-Hill, 1965), vi.

By placing Boucher's idea of "post-internet" alongside popmism, it elucidated how Grimes' post-internet music is informed by an arguably popmism outlook. This is shown in Boucher's diverse taste and the way in which she values pop music. However, when classified under "pop" herself, she resisted it just as she did "post-internet." This sheds more light on Boucher's consistent resistance to classification and to the complicated relationship between her and media publications. If Boucher was not concerned with classification, her relationship with media publications would arguably be more amicable. Instead, she creates the song "California," which shows a classification-resistant artist whose issues with the media's perception of her become a topic of her music. If Grimes' post-internet music acts as an expression of Boucher's relationship with the internet, "California" then acts as an expression of the complicated predicament that the term "post-internet," among other things, placed her in.

One reviewer writes, "Forget 'post-internet,' the better description for Grimes is 'post-genre'."²³⁸ Boucher herself believes genres to be disappearing²³⁹ and archaic,²⁴⁰ with "post-internet" pushing towards a genreless future. In order for that to happen, however, critics and audiences would first have to give up much of what they know about discussing music. As seen here with the case of "post-internet," it does not seem that will happen any time soon. And considering critics started calling Grimes a "pop star" by the time of the next album cycle, it extends this point. Gunn writes, "Within a musical context...genres are not merely a tool of scholarly criticism but one of the basic constructs listeners and artists use to make sense of what they are hearing."²⁴¹ It is through the linguistic filter of genre that audiences are able to make sense of the fluidity

²³⁸ Alternative Music, "Grimes Visions - Album Review",
<http://www.populararticles.xyz/Article/entertainment/AlternativeMusic/201510/8807.html>.

²³⁹ Interview Magazine, "Grimes of the Heart" (May 24 2011),
http://www.interviewmagazine.com/music/grimes-claire-boucher#_.

²⁴⁰ Washington Post, "No room for Grimes in a genre box" (Sept 6 2012),
https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/no-room-for-grimes-in-a-genre-box/2012/09/06/3335160a-f1ed-11e1-adc6-87dfa8eff430_story.html.

²⁴¹ Gunn, 35.

of music.²⁴² Even if the music exists outside genre discourse as in the case of Grimes, genre labels are inevitably used in order to make sense of it. Where Grimes distinguishes herself from genre-resistant artists of the past is in how the internet fundamentally shaped the genreless nature of her music. Whether or not this will lead to a post-internet “musical Renaissance” is unknown, but if Grimes is any indication of how musical genre is evolving, the internet could continue as a prominent factor influencing and expanding the sonic palette of popular music. However, no matter how new or different one’s music may be, genre labels will inevitably emerge in order to classify and discuss it.

Frith cautions that “The crunch comes when the academic account [of a genre] is written over the mythical one — by *the collector* — and the history of the genre is rewritten in terms of a new purism.”²⁴³ The rewritten purism of a genre would then become the way in which it is perceived and understood, whether or not it adheres to the genre’s initial principles. Holt similarly states, “problems arise if scholarly definitions [of a genre] become the rule and not the tool, because that creates barriers for understanding how categories work in culture.”²⁴⁴ This scholarly account of “post-internet” is not meant to entirely encompass what is at stake with this term. “Post-internet” is so expansive that to try and pin it down is little different than trying to pin down Grimes’ music, or the internet itself. What this analysis does provide is a glimpse at the underpinnings of a phenomenon in popular music in which the internet infiltrated music genre discourse in a most explicit fashion.

²⁴² Gunn, 34.

²⁴³ Frith, 89.

²⁴⁴ Holt, 15.

Chapter 4



“Because the internet I’m here, because of the internet we’re all here. It’s the language of earth...Everyone keeps saying by this or that year, Mandarin or Spanish will be the most dominant language, but the internet is already a language we are all connected to... But the thing is, there are no rules, which is also the awesome thing.”

– Donald Glover (Childish Gambino)²⁴⁵

* Image: Donald Glover as Childish Gambino checking his phone in the music video for “Sweatpants” from the album *Because the Internet*. Taken from Childish Gambino’s YouTube Channel, “Childish Gambino – Sweatpants ft. Problem” (Apr 14 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExVtrghW5Y4>.

²⁴⁵ Exclaim!, “Childish Gambino Discusses ‘Because the Internet’ and the Complexity of Web-era Issues” (Nov 11 2013), http://exclaim.ca/music/article/childish_gambino_discusses_because_internet_complexity_of_web-era_issues.

4 Speaking “the Language of Earth”: Childish Gambino and *Because the Internet*

One night in 2008, Donald Glover was hanging out with his friends “chilling and drinking”²⁴⁶ while a sophomore at NYU. They came across a Wu-Tang Clan name generator²⁴⁷ online and naturally decided to put their names in. While at first it was “all funny and stuff,”²⁴⁸ as soon as ‘Donald Glover’ came back from the name generator as ‘Childish Gambino,’ Glover felt immediately attached. He said to his friends “you guys, it’s not funny anymore. This is something big.”²⁴⁹ As with Grimes in the last chapter, Donald Glover’s artistic identity as “Childish Gambino” is a classification taken from the internet. This chapter concerns Childish Gambino’s *Because the Internet* (2013), an expansive work that identifies itself with the internet, exists on the internet, and critiques the influence of the internet. The work exists perfectly in Bowie’s “gray space in the middle” that he discussed in Chapter 1 in reference to Duchamp’s conceptual art. *Because the Internet* exists in “the gray space in the middle” between the art and the audience’s experience of it, which is mediated entirely through the internet. While the previous chapter concerned music critic discourse addressing the role of the internet in Grimes’ music, this chapter will focus on a work explicitly marked, in some way, as “about” the internet.

This chapter addresses how both Donald Glover and *Because the Internet* subvert expectations of classification. Glover states that he is not a rapper and that *Because the Internet* is not an album, but both are often classified thusly. To better understand this, I first provide some background on Donald Glover’s career and how it diverges from

²⁴⁶ Uproxx, “The Strange Mystery Behind Donald Glover’s Rap Name, Childish Gambino” (Dec 23 2014), <http://uproxx.com/tv/the-mindblowing-mystery-behind-donald-glovers-rap-name-childish-gambino/>.

²⁴⁷ The Wu-Tang Name Generator used by Glover at the website <http://www.mess.be/inickgenwuname.php> is an online algorithm where the user can “Join Ghostface Killah, Inspectah Deck, Method Man, RZA...” of the Wu-Tang Clan and “Become a real Wu Warrior” by entering their name and clicking the button “Enter the Wu-Tang” to receive a Wu-Tang sounding moniker (e.g., “George Costanza” becomes “Mad Conqueror”).

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

traditional hip-hop narratives, which leads to the creation of *Because the Internet*. I then provide an overview of many key elements of *Because the Internet* in order to understand how this text conceptually engages with the internet, and look at the identity crises of *Because the Internet* and how it relates to Glover's own malleable artistic identity. Next, I place *Because the Internet* within Henry Jenkins' frameworks of transmedia and convergence culture, along with Bolter & Grusin's hypermediacy, to better understand this text. I finally explore how Glover used the internet to engage with his online fanbase in experimental and thematic ways with a meme from *Because the Internet* called "Roscoe's wetsuit". My goal in this chapter is to better understand how the internet is such an integral component of both Glover's life and his work, *Because the Internet*.

4.1 A Dilettante for the Internet Age

Donald Glover is a multifaceted artist who has reached success primarily as a writer, actor, comedian and musician. He first gained attention starring in YouTube videos with the internet sketch comedy group Derrick Comedy while studying dramatic writing at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts (the videos have since reached over 100 million views)²⁵⁰. His work caught the eye of producer Tina Fey, who offered him a writing gig on her new series *30 Rock* soon after he graduated in 2006.²⁵¹ Glover found success as a writer for the series and earned a Writers Guild of America Award for his work.²⁵² He left the show after three seasons and moved to LA in 2009. Show-runner Dan Harmon was impressed by Glover after seeing the feature-length Derrick Comedy film *Mystery Team* (2009) and cast him to play Troy Barnes in NBC's new sitcom *Community*.²⁵³ Shortly after *Community* began, Glover also had a successful stand-up special on *Comedy Central Presents* in 2010 and was awarded the Rising Comedy Award

²⁵⁰ YouTube, "Derrick Comedy: About Page," <https://www.youtube.com/user/derrickcomedy/about>

²⁵¹ The Village Voice, "Donald Glover is More Talented Than You" (Apr 13 2011), <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/donald-glover-is-more-talented-than-you-6430538>.

²⁵² Writers Guild of America, "2009 Writers Guild Awards Television, Radio, News, Promotional Writing, and Graphic Animation Nominees Announced" (Dec 8 2008), <http://wga.org/content/default.aspx?id=3410>.

²⁵³ The New York Times, "His Day Job Subsidizes All That Other Stuff" (Mar 10 2010), <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/14/arts/television/14glover.html>.

at Just For Laughs Festival the same year.²⁵⁴

Meanwhile, ever since his days at NYU, Glover had been creating music. Glover's earliest known work is the album *The Younger I Get* that he produced between 2004-05 and handed out as CD-Rs to residents in the NYU dorm where he was an RA.²⁵⁵ He successively produced ten remix albums under the self-reflexive name mc DJ, and he produced three mixtapes, an EP, and two independent albums as Childish Gambino before his first official release in 2011.²⁵⁶ All of these works were released for free online. While working on *Community*, Glover started collaborating with the show's music composer, Ludwig Göransson, and began maturing his sound. The two have since worked together on subsequent Childish Gambino releases. Glover released his first official Childish Gambino album *Camp* (2011) with Glassnote Records. *Camp* is a concept album that tells the story of a boy at summer camp and the various trials and tribulations he faces. Glover toured the album extensively and effectively launched his music career as Childish Gambino. Nearing the fifth season of *Community*, Glover made the conscious decision to quit the show in early 2013 in order to spend more time on his own projects.²⁵⁷

This rise to fame sharply diverges from more traditional narratives of hip-hop careers. Murray Forman writes in *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop*:

Within hip-hop culture, artists and cultural workers have emerged as sophisticated chroniclers of the disparate skirmishes in contemporary American cities, observing and narrating the spatially oriented conditions of existence that influence and shape this decidedly urban music...as hip-hop's varied artists and aficionados themselves frequently suggest, their narrative descriptions of urban

²⁵⁴ Access Hollywood, "Aziz Ansari & Donald Glover To Be Honored In Montreal" (Jun 23 2010), <http://www.accesshollywood.com/articles/aziz-ansari-donald-glover-to-be-honored-in-montreal-87055/>.

²⁵⁵ Popular Opinions with Chaz Kangas, "Childish Gambino - 'The Younger I Get'" (Nov 11 2011), <https://popularopinions.wordpress.com/2011/11/11/gambino2/>.

²⁵⁶ ForeverChildish.com, "childish gambino discography and downloads," <http://foreverchildish.com/music>.

²⁵⁷ TV Line, "Donald Glover Reveals the Real Reason He Quit Community: 'I Wanted To Be On My Own'" (Oct 15 2013), <http://tvline.com/2013/10/15/donald-glover-leaving-community-why/>.

conditions involve active attempts to express how individuals or communities in these locales live.²⁵⁸

Forman is concerned with the ways in which rappers discuss a physical and socio-economic social space, “the hood,” in hip-hop. Glover’s class background and entry point into the music business as a TV star, writer and comedian disqualifies him from such a narrative. His debut album *Camp* wrestles thematically with his own racial identity and his feelings as an outsider to hip-hop culture. In the opening track, “Outside,” the lyrics state, “I just wanna fit in but nobody was helping me out / They talking hood shit and I ain’t know what that was about.” Glover mentions his cousin in the song as a sort of antithesis, saying his cousin was “taken over” by the streets and raps to him, “The world sayin’ what you are because you’re young and black / Don’t believe ‘em.” According to one online exegesis, Glover is stating here, “The ‘world’ (current culture) is telling his cousin that because he’s ‘young and black’ he has to be in the streets doing hoodrat stuff.”²⁵⁹ Glover actively works against the stereotyped construction of racial identity that he feels influences his cousin.

W. E. B. Du Bois writes in *The Souls of Black Folk* of “double consciousness” as the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.” Double consciousness is meant to embody one’s feeling of “two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”²⁶⁰ Glover consistently displays signs of a double consciousness in his lyrics and states in an interview, “White people are a blank slate...we are not...As a black person I constantly have to know what people are assuming about me.”²⁶¹ He deals with this specifically in lyrics that address being perceived as an “Oreo,” a racial slur connoting being black on the outside but white

²⁵⁸ Murray Forman, *The ‘Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Wesleyan: 2002), 8.

²⁵⁹ User macksaveli’s Rap Genius annotation, “Childish Gambino – ‘Outside’ Lyrics” (2012), <http://genius.com/Childish-gambino-outside-lyrics>.

²⁶⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, Avenel, NJ: Gramercy Books, 1994), 2.

²⁶¹ Medium, “The Racial Politics of Childish Gambino” (Dec 4 2014), <https://medium.com/cuepoint/the-racial-politics-of-childish-gambino-baf1f79c1961#.ptb7hd2xw>.

on the inside. He raps, “No live shows because I can’t find sponsors/ For the only black guy at a Sufjan concert.”²⁶² This is in reference to indie artist, Sufjan Stevens, whose album, *Illinois*, Glover had previously remixed as mc DJ into *Illin-Noise*. Because of Sufjan Steven’s largely white indie rock fan base, Glover feels like an outsider at his concerts. In another line he says, “I won’t stop until they say ‘James Franco is the white Donald Glover’.”²⁶³ This is in reference to Glover’s multifaceted artistic identity being recognized as a “black” version of James Franco, another TV actor who has spread into other artistic worlds. Franco has been recognized to “[enact] hysterical identification or a (con)fusion of the self with a diverse set of multimedia artistic progenitors and contemporaries.”²⁶⁴ For instance, Franco played an artist-turned-murderer named “Franco” on an entire season of *General Hospital*, and his role was conceived as a work of performance art. Glover is working in a similar conceptual performance art world with *Because the Internet*, and recognizes that he is perceived as the “black” James Franco rather than Franco being the “white” Donald Glover.

Glover jokingly refers to himself on the song “Backpackers” as “The only white rapper who’s allowed to say the N-word.”²⁶⁵ He is playing up the idea that he is seen as a “white rapper” due to his career path and the lyrical content of his work. In a *Rolling Stone* interview video titled “Battle: Donald Glover vs. Childish Gambino”²⁶⁶ where he cleverly interviews himself, Glover asks Childish Gambino to quote his favorite verse from another rapper. Gambino responds with a lyric from Eminem, the most successful white rapper in hip-hop history. In some ways, Glover may feel that Childish Gambino follows more in the tradition of a white rapper like Eminem rather than black rappers like Jay Z or Tupac. This further differentiates Glover from the racial connotations of hip-hop’s traditional “the hood,” though at the same time Glover still feels like an outsider to

²⁶² Childish Gambino, “Fire Fly,” *Camp* (2011), Glassnote Records.

²⁶³ Childish Gambino, “Hold You Down,” *Camp* (2011), Glassnote Records.

²⁶⁴ Dinah Elizabeth Holtzman, “Hysteria and the Multimedia Art of Lady Gaga and James Franco,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 48: p 18.

²⁶⁵ Childish Gambino, “Backpackers,” *Camp* (2011), Glassnote Records.

²⁶⁶ Rolling Stone’s YouTube Channel, “Battle: Donald Glover vs. Childish Gambino” (Nov 7 2011), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5MWyVAUBi0>.

white culture. He raps how as a child, his mom was “Workin’ two jobs so I can get into that white school, and I hate it there / They all make fun of my clothes and wanna touch my hair.”²⁶⁷ This creates a conundrum wherein Glover is an outsider to white culture due to the color of his skin, but also an outsider to black culture as a result his taste and education. He finds both sides constricting, rapping “And every black ‘you’re not black enough’ / Is a white ‘you’re all the same’” This lyric chides ignorance on both sides, suggesting a refusal of being pigeonholed either too white to be black or too black to be white. In one of his most clever and obscure lines, Glover raps, “So it’s 400 blows to these Truffaut niggas / Yeah, now that’s the line of the century / Niggas missed it, too busy, they lyin’ ‘bout penitentiary.”²⁶⁸ Here, he is effectively using his knowledge of French New Wave cinema, a characteristically white European film movement, as a means to diss rappers he deems “true-faux niggas” that follow more stereotypical hip-hop narratives. Glover himself said, “no one is going to get that line,”²⁶⁹ and one could assume that the rappers he is dissing may not be aware of Francois Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows* since they did not go to film school. It is a clever example of Glover appropriating white culture to further distance himself from black culture and ending up somewhere in-between these two worlds.

Kelly Isley says of The Isley Brothers’ struggle to reach FM rock formats in the 1970s, “I don’t think we would have any problem crossing over if the color of the skin was different. It’s not the color of the music.”²⁷⁰ The “color” of Childish Gambino’s music may similarly appear to contradict the color of his skin. Many of Glover’s early works show a strong affinity for indie pop/rock rather than hip-hop, with Glover remixing albums from Sufjan Stevens and Fiona Apple as mc DJ. Early works of Childish Gambino feature him rapping over songs from established indie rock acts like Animal

²⁶⁷ Childish Gambino, “Outside,” *Camp* (2011), Glassnote Records.

²⁶⁸ Childish Gambino, “That Power,” *Camp* (2011), Glassnote Records.

²⁶⁹ YouTube user xxbffcutestaxx, “YAYA LOVE!” (Sep 10 2011), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1X3z_iYa1k.

²⁷⁰ Eric Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy* (The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 62.

Collective, Sleigh Bells, and Grizzly Bear.²⁷¹ It is then unsurprising that Glassnote Records, a label known for indie rock acts like Mumford & Sons and Phoenix, signed Childish Gambino. Glover claims that he chose to sign with Glassnote to have an “indie push” for the release of *Camp* and stated that the album was “black rock” due to its use of real instruments.²⁷² The term “black rock” relates to the Black Rock Coalition, a New York-based artist’s collective founded in 1985 whose goal is “to assert that a new generation of black musicians could play more than just R&B and hip-hop.”²⁷³ This is precisely what Glover is trying to do, and in the track “Hold You Down,” a song about the music industry holding rappers down, it ends with the line, “They ask me what I’m doin’, I say I’m stealin’ rock back.”²⁷⁴ This places Glover in a position where he is appropriating white music that itself was built on appropriations of black music.

This creates an even further divide between Glover and hip-hop, though that does not stop his music from being classified as such. *Pitchfork* opens their scathing 1.6/10 review of *Camp* with “If you buy only *one* hip-hop album this year, I’m guessing it’ll be *Camp*”²⁷⁵. This sarcastic statement emphasizes the fact that Childish Gambino’s fans are typically not hip-hop connoisseurs, so if an indie rocker buys one hip-hop album it would be *Camp*. Furthermore, the statement is discrediting Gambino’s hip-hop bona fides. Fittingly, Glover had already rapped “*Pitchfork* only likes rappers who crazy or hood, man” on the album before this review was written. Childish Gambino’s music may seem hip-hop on the surface but arguably bears stronger ties to the indie pop/rock scene. Pierre Bourdieu writes of classification in relation to taste:

Taste is a practical mastery of distributions which makes it possible to sense or

²⁷¹ Childish Gambino, *I Am Just A Rapper* (2010), Self-released.

²⁷² Sunset in the Rearview: Music Blog for Hipsters and Squares, “Childish Gambino Signs to Glassnote Records” (23 Aug 2011), <http://sunsetintherearview.com/childish-gambino-signs-to-glassnote-records/>.

²⁷³ SPIN, “Black Rock: An Oral History” (Oct 23 2008), <http://www.spin.com/2008/10/black-rock-oral-history/>.

²⁷⁴ Childish Gambino, “Hold You Down,” *Camp* (2011), Glassnote Records.

²⁷⁵ Pitchfork, “Childish Gambino - Camp” (Dec 2 2011), <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/16074-camp/>.

intuit what is likely (or unlikely) to befall — and therefore to befit — an individual occupying a given position in social space. It functions as a sort of social orientation, a ‘sense of one’s place’, guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position. It implies a practical anticipation of what the social meaning and value of the chosen practice or thing will probably be, given their distribution in social space and the practical knowledge the other agents have of the correspondence between goods and groups.²⁷⁶

Bourdieu is discussing the expectation that comes with anticipating certain values associated with particular tastes, which here can be applied to perceptions of hip-hop and indie rock. When Childish Gambino is viewed through a hip-hop lens, the music is seen as a joke to hip-hop purists because it does not fulfill their expectations. However, when viewed through an indie rock lens, confusion sets in simply because Glover is both black and raps. His background, influences, and record label relationship all point towards the indie rock scene, but Glover still consistently struggles with being classified as hip-hop. On a more fundamental level, these genre labels are built on divisions between black and white music. Sarah Sahim writes in her *Pitchfork* article “The Unbearable Whiteness of Indie”:

In indie rock, white is the norm. While indie rock and the DIY underground, historically, have been proud to disassociate themselves from popular culture, there is no divorcing a predominantly white scene from systemic ideals ingrained in white Western culture. That status quo creates a barrier in terms of both the sanctioned participation of artists of color and the amount of respect afforded them, all of which sets people of color up to forever be seen as interlopers and outsiders.

This touches on views of Glover that classify him as an outsider to indie music as a consequence of not being white. Considering Glover is an outsider to hip-hop as well, this only furthers the classification purgatory in which his music exists. A response to Sahim’s article on *New Republic* states, “There are few artists of color in the indie scene because artists of color who make what could be called ‘indie music’ get classified as

²⁷⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, “Conclusion,” *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Harvard University Press, 1984), 466-484.

something else.”²⁷⁷ Despite Glover’s attempts at classifying his music as indie rather than hip-hop, he and his music still fall under classifications that he does not agree with or desire. Glover finds technology as a large contributing factor to his success, and in his song “All the Shine,” he explicitly raps, “I got fame, my A&R’s a computer”²⁷⁸. Artists and repertoire (A&R) is the division of a record label that manages, promotes, and generally oversees an artist’s every move, and Glover states here that he simply uses a computer for these purposes. He curates his own online social media profiles, uploads music and videos at whim, and handles various other aspects of his career online.

Glover’s online presence grew along with his television and comedic success, and his highly active social media presence and consistently updated website became strong aspects of his artistic identity. Fans could easily communicate with him on Twitter and Tumblr, and Glover used these platforms in a way that showed they were a part of his life. These online platforms arguably give Glover greater autonomy in curating his artistic image than he would have had in a pre-Internet era. If his A&R were controlled by the music industry, Glover would have fallen more fully into the streamlined and racialized rapper identities that he critiques. However, because [of] the internet, he is able to take control of his identity and create a complex image of an artist who bridges the gap between white and black cultures without being exclusively on one side or the other. As we will see with *Because the Internet*, Glover takes his feelings about the power of classification further in creating a text that seeks to resist textual classification altogether.

4.2 Setting the scene for *Because the Internet*

Childish Gambino’s *Because the Internet* (2013) begs the question, “How far can a concept album go?” The Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) was packaged with a cutout sheet of moustaches and badges for the owner to “become” a character on the album cover. Pink Floyd’s *Dark Side of the Moon* (1969) came with stickers for listeners to place on their speakers, musical instruments or wherever else,

²⁷⁷ New Republic, “Why ‘Indie’ Music Is So Unbearably White” (Apr 2 2015)

²⁷⁸ Childish Gambino, “All The Shine,” Camp (2011), Glassnote Records.

effectively extending their experience of the album. Pink Floyd later made *The Wall* (1979), supported by an elaborate tour and eventual film that expanded its concept further. A few decades later, progressive rock band Coheed and Cambria, based their entire career on an overarching concept across seven albums, multiple comic books and published novels. This is by no means a definitive history of concept albums, but it elucidates the fact that concept albums often use various elements beyond the audio recording to further the conceptual experience. Donald Glover, with his work *Because the Internet* (2013), embeds and extends his ideas fully within the World Wide Web. Rather than stickers and cutout posters, Glover uses social media posts, YouTube videos, a screenplay, and various other media to develop the conceptual experience of *Because the Internet*.

In *Setting the Record Straight*, Colin Symes adapts Gérard Genette's idea of the "paratext" to the album format and addresses how features like the cover art and liner notes are indeed essential components of the album as a text. Symes is interested in how aspects that are "off the record" frame the album experience and concludes by pondering how the CD format extends these barriers. He writes:

CDs, then, adopt new forms of paratext and new ways of interfacing with music. They constitute electronic versions of cover architecture that are screen- rather than page-based and that increase the options available to the "reader" and listener. But the real significance of these textual innovations derives from the fact that they make the disc increasingly autonomous, less dependent on an envelope of textual inferences that to date have "enclosed" discs. They potentially have the capacity to make the compact disc an entirely self-sufficient and independent textual system – a device that offers, via the web, many more channels and vehicles of musical exposition and explanation...this paratext is seemingly without boundaries, temporal or spatial, and it provides portals to a superabundance of sound and music, to an almost infinitely extended *record* of records. Moreover, this superabundance can be accessed almost without effort, instantaneously, and for an infinitesimal cost.

Symes is focusing on how the digital nature of the CD extends the paratext beyond a physical entity. He notes here that the web offers "more channels and vehicles of musical exposition and explanation," which, as we will see, Glover fully exploits with *Because the Internet*. Existing primarily on the World Wide Web rather than in a sole physical form, *Because the Internet* has been described as a "'concept world' rather than a mere

concept album.”²⁷⁹ This world is mediated through the internet and is comprised of conceptually interlinking pieces of media content that Donald Glover released during the rollout of *Because the Internet*. During this time, any move that Glover made could be interpreted as adding to this “concept world” that was constructed largely during the latter half of 2013 on the internet and still continues today. One critic notes that it plays out like a work of online performance art.²⁸⁰

Although it is hard to pinpoint when exactly *Because the Internet* begins, the first major event that frames this narrative occurs when Glover disappeared from the internet in July 2013, causing *TIME* to write the article, “Where is Donald Glover?”²⁸¹ They write:

Glover’s web presence and constant Twitter banter...played a crucial role [in his meteoric rise to stardom]. His iamdonald.com website was thorough and robust, complete with regularly updated sections... [and] Glover was a Twitter junkie, constantly checking the social networking platform (where he has nearly a million followers) and using it to interact with fans at all hours of the day and night...Donald Glover, Internet darling, had effectively disappeared from the medium that had won him his rabid following.

The internet was an integral component of Glover’s stardom, and so his digital “disappearance” was noticed and notable. Glover effectively committed “virtual identity suicide”²⁸² by wiping all the old posts from his website and deleting, all of his tweets and photos on Twitter and Instagram with no explanation.²⁸³

The day after *TIME* published this article, Glover released a cryptic teaser video. The teaser was named “clapping for the wrong reasons [internet version]” and provided a 49 second condensed version of what would become “Clapping for the Wrong Reasons,”

²⁷⁹ TIME, “New Childish Gambino Album’s Fatal Flaw: It’s Just Not Cool” (Dec 10 2013), <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/12/10/new-childish-gambino-albums-fatal-flaw-its-just-not-cool/>.

²⁸⁰ The Daily Beast, “‘Because the Internet’ Review: Childish Gambino is Hip-Hop’s Perennial Outsider” (Dec 20 2013), <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/12/10/because-the-internet-review-childish-gambino-is-hip-hop-s-perennial-outsider.html>.

²⁸¹ Time.com, “Where is Donald Glover?” (Jul 29 2013), <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/07/29/where-is-donald-glover/>.

²⁸² Susan Greenfield, *Mind Change* (2015)

²⁸³ Time.com, “Where is Donald Glover?” (Jul 29 2013), <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/07/29/where-is-donald-glover/>.

an integral component of the *Because the Internet* experience.²⁸⁴ The teaser begins with Glover bouncing a basketball up a staircase and quickly cuts to a collage of scenes ranging from Glover with a bloody nose to someone in a scuba suit, with the sounds of the bouncing basketball and a phone ringing running throughout. A scene appears of the basketball bouncing back down the staircase without Glover and then switches to him answering the phone that was ringing throughout the clip. It then cuts to the title “CLAPPING FOR THE WRONG REASONS” and rolls a complete list of credits. Fans were confused and intrigued, with comments like, “So is this thing going to be released, or what?”²⁸⁵ and “Don’t know what it is, but I’m excited for it!”²⁸⁶. *Paste Magazine* speculated that “The project appears to be for a Childish Gambino project, whether its [sic] tied to a music video or a short film is yet to be known,” and “while nobody is really too sure of what Clapping For The Wrong Reasons will turn out to be, it’s sure to be eccentric to say the least.”²⁸⁷ A little over two weeks later, Glover released the full-length “Clapping for the Wrong Reasons [director’s cut]” which raised even more questions. The 25-minute short film takes place in a mansion and stars Childish Gambino, ex-porn star Abella Anderson, hip-hop artist Chance the Rapper, experimental producer Flying Lotus, and a handful of other seemingly unrelated people like Danielle Fishel, who played Topanga on the 90s TV series *Boy Meets World*.

There is no coherent narrative to the film. IMDb describes it as following “a seemingly mundane day in the life of a young affluent rapper as he wanders through his

²⁸⁴ Donald Glover, “clapping for the wrong reasons [internet version” (Jul 30 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdJD-OvpRvY>.

²⁸⁵ Comment from gatorace15, https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/1jdsww/clapping_for_the_wrong_reasons_trailer_new_short/

²⁸⁶ Comment from ThatIndianGuy7116, https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/1jdsww/clapping_for_the_wrong_reasons_trailer_new_short/.

²⁸⁷ Paste Magazine, “Watch Donald Glover’s Clapping For The Wrong Reasons Short Film” (Aug 16 2013), <http://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2013/08/donald-glover-releases-cryptic-teaser-for-clapping.html>.

cavernous mansion.”²⁸⁸ The film stylistically pulls from ambiguous European Art Cinema films like Alain Resnais’ *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) and Marco Ferreri’s *Dillinger is Dead* (1969), again displaying Glover’s taste that he showed earlier in the aforementioned “So it’s *400 Blows* to these Truffaut niggas” line. *Complex* describes the short film as “a bunch of staggered, seemingly irrelevant (to each other) scenes, which are connected only in that they take place in the same house.”²⁸⁹ *Entertainment Weekly* calls the film “intriguing and disturbing...But in a good way”²⁹⁰ and *Vulture* writes “we don’t know why it exists [or] what the context is...yet it’s stunningly watchable...anyone who feels like watching a muted, mysterious 25-minute movie will likely be mesmerized [and] possibly confused.”²⁹¹ One fan writes “I have no clue what I just watched”²⁹² and another asks for clarification:

Could someone please explain this to me? I’ve watched this twice and I just see this as “A Day in the Life of Donald” and the title is what everyone will do when they watch it to the end, clap for the wrong reasons (as in they’ll like and respect this short film, even though they don’t understand it). I’m not hating on it, I actually enjoyed seeing something different like this. I just want to know the deeper meaning behind it/see if there is a deeper meaning.²⁹³

Complex parallels this comment in their thematic questioning of the short film:

What does it all mean? I certainly don’t know, but it’s the type of movie that gives you the probably false sense that there is something grand behind it, tying the whole thing together, and you and I are just not observant enough to catch it. But of course, I won’t ask anyone what it means because I would have to admit that I didn’t already know. Hence, one might find himself, at the end of the

²⁸⁸ IMDb, “Clapping for the Wrong Reasons (2013),”
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3093732/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

²⁸⁹ *Complex*, “Watch Donald Glover’s Short Film ‘Clapping For The Wrong Reasons’” (Aug 15 2013),
<http://www.complex.com/music/2013/08/donald-glover-short-film>.

²⁹⁰ *Entertainment Weekly*, “Donald Glover short film is weird and thought-provoking” (Aug 16 2013),
<http://www.ew.com/article/2013/08/16/donald-glover-clapping-wrong-reasons>.

²⁹¹ *Vulture*, “Donald Glover Made a Haunting, Hypnotic Short Film” (Aug 16 2013),
<http://www.vulture.com/2013/08/donald-glover-short-film.html>.

²⁹² Comment from gatorace15,
https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/1kg5gr/clapping_for_the_wrong_reasons/?sort=top

²⁹³ Comment by hightiness,
https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/1kg5gr/clapping_for_the_wrong_reasons/?sort=top

movie, applauding the film's supposed metaphorical content, or perhaps its ability to convey some deep meaning by playing with the quotidian. But then he'd be clapping for the wrong reasons.

These discussions tap into themes that would eventually inform *Because the Internet* as a whole. In "Clapping For the Wrong Reasons," much is shown but little is given away. There is little understanding of the characters, their relationships, and what connects them together in this luxurious mansion. Susan Greenfield writes, "a character in a YouTube clip usually has no complex backstory and no personal relationships, and his or her actions have no long-term consequences; they are frozen in a tiny window of time. What you are watching doesn't really *mean* anything."²⁹⁴ The short film plays right into this, with viewers having little understanding of what is happening, who these people are, and why they are in a mansion.

A bit more context was provided by Chance the Rapper who mentioned he was working on Childish Gambino's new album in an interview with the magazine *Dazed and Confused*. The article describes Chance to be working at a place deemed "The Temple" which is "the rented hilltop mansion [owned by NBA player Chris Bosh]...where Gambino is recording his new album." This explains the setting of "Clapping for the Wrong Reasons" and the fact that it was filmed alongside recording the album. *Dazed and Confused* notes, "Engraved on a wooden placard by a vast bronze Buddha at the entranceway, the rules of The Temple are clear: 'No shoes. No Tweeting or Instagramming. Work starts at 10am.'"²⁹⁵ This explains Glover's absence online. He forbid social media use while recording the album and claims, "I just wanted to set up a space where people...really had to deal with themselves"²⁹⁶ without going online. When Henry David Thoreau removed himself to the woods to write *Walden* in the mid-1800s, he explained, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the

²⁹⁴ Greenfield, 211.

²⁹⁵ *Dazed and Confused*, "chance the rapper's acid reign" (Aug 2013), <http://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/16753/1/chance-the-rappers-acid-reign>.

²⁹⁶ Q on CBC, "Childish Gambino brings 'Because the Internet' to Studio Q" (Apr 8 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhBntF0q6jY>.

essential facts of life.”²⁹⁷

While Glover’s forbidding of social media is not quite as extreme as Thoreau, and he was in a luxurious mansion rather than a cabin, he is still playing into a Romantic narrative that says the bustling outside world is somehow distracting to his artistic process. Here the outside world is represented online by endless Twitter feeds and Instagram posts rather than industrial factories. Glover wanted everyone working on the album to be actively present rather than constantly distracted by the internet. He felt that by removing himself from the internet and being completely IRL²⁹⁸, he could focus more clearly on his work, just as Thoreau did when he removed himself to the woods. This is rather ironic for an album called *Because the Internet*, and Nicholas Carr took a similar, more Thoreau-esque approach when writing *The Shallows: What the internet is Doing to Our Brains*. He removed himself to a cabin with little Internet access in order to write it.²⁹⁹ Glover explains in an interview that his disconnection from the internet “felt really bad”³⁰⁰ at first, just as Carr found it “far from painless.”³⁰¹ When work was finished, they both fell back into their old patterns once back online, effectively rejoining civilization like Thoreau did after two years of living in the woods.

One scene in the short film shows Gambino clearly working with Ludwig Göransson producing a beat (which would later become “The Party”), though there is little other evidence in the film that points towards any connection to a new album. Around this time, fans were anxiously piecing together whatever they could to try and make sense of what Glover was doing. At one point, fans dug into the code of *childishgambino.com* and found a way to access seemingly “hidden” pages that Glover had placed there for them.³⁰² These mostly ended up being extraneous videos, .gif images

²⁹⁷ Henry David Thoreau, *Selections from Walden* (Crown Publishers, 1973), 63.

²⁹⁸ Online abbreviation for “in real life.”

²⁹⁹ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the internet is Doing to Our Brains*, (New York: Norton, 2011), 199.

³⁰⁰ Q on CBC, “Childish Gambino brings ‘Because the Internet’ to Studio Q” (Apr 8 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhBntF0q6jY>.

³⁰¹ Carr, 199.

³⁰² Westernfall.com, “Childish Gambino,” <http://www.westernfall.com>.

and poetry, but the idea goes along with Glover's desire for people to learn to code. He once tweeted "learn to code, God codes"³⁰³ and frequently professed the importance of coding to his fans.³⁰⁴

It was also around this time in September that Glover first tweeted two words, "Roscoe's wetsuit," a highly ambiguous phrase that "spread like wildfire"³⁰⁵ on social media. Fans theorized that it could be, among other things, the name of Childish Gambino's next project. I will delve further into "Roscoe's wetsuit" as a meme later in this chapter. The most explicit message about the new album, though still vague, came from a video uploaded October 8th titled "yaphet kotto."³⁰⁶ The one-minute-twenty-six-second video features Glover submerged in a pool of water staring at the camera with a freestyle rap playing in the background. At the end of the video, it cuts to a black screen with the text "Because the Internet" and then "winter break."

It was shortly after this video that Glover broke his silence online through a series of confessional messages on Instagram. The series of posts are images of notes handwritten by Glover on Residence Inn Marriott Hotel stationary. The first note begins, "I'm afraid of the future" and continues with messages such as, "I feel like I'm letting everyone down," "I'm afraid I hate who I really am," "I feel this will all be pretentious," "I hate caring what people think," "I'm afraid this is all an accident," and "This is the first time I've felt helpless."³⁰⁷ One message reads, "I'm afraid people think I hate my race." This message echoes back to Glover's complicated racial relationship discussed

³⁰³ Ibid.

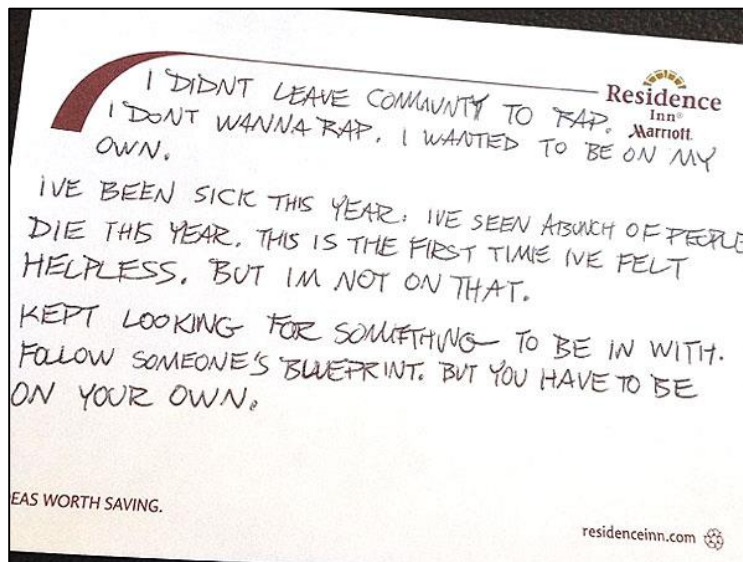
³⁰⁴ YouTube, "Childish Gambino Tells His Fans to Learn How to Code" (Nov 9 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOLk3b3lPm0>.

³⁰⁵ Inifnite Hip Hop, "What in the world is Roscoe's Wetsuit?" (Oct 3 2013), <http://infinitehiphop.com/2013/10/03/what-in-the-world-is-roscoes-wetsuit/>.

³⁰⁶ Why he chose this title is unknown. Yaphet Kotto, the black actor, plays an Italian-American character on *Homicide: Life on the Street* with the surname "Giardello," which is similar to Glover's artistic surname "Gambino." Glover's character on *Community* was also intended to be white, like Kotto's character on *Homicide*. These may or may not be some of the reasons why the video is named "yaphet kotto," as it could simply be homage.

³⁰⁷ People, "Donald Glover Posts Troubling Notes on Instagram, Opens Up About Leaving Community" (Oct 16 2013), <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20746092,00.html>.

earlier in this chapter and the double consciousness he experiences concerning how people perceive him. Glover confessed these feelings across eight posts with around 50 similar statements covering his anxieties.



An example of one of the images of handwritten notes posted to Instagram.

In relation to these posts, *XXL Mag* comments, “The range of reactions from fans and onlookers ran the gamut: letters of support, posts appreciating his candidness, people clowning him for being a bitch, others conjecturing that he may be suicidal.”³⁰⁸ *TIME* writes, “the notes mark a return to part of what made Glover so popular and unique in the first place: unparalleled thoughtfulness, openness and honesty with his fans.”³⁰⁹ When *People* confronted Glover about the “troubling”³¹⁰ messages, he responded, “That night, we had a show, and then afterwards, I had this moment of feeling like, ‘What’s the point? Why am I even here?’ I just wanted to write down my feelings. I definitely was just

³⁰⁸ *XXL Mag*, “Childish Gambino Is Afraid of the Future” (Nov 1 2013), <http://www.xxlmag.com/news/2013/11/childish-gambino-afraid-future/>.

³⁰⁹ *TIME*, “Donald Glover Explains His Absence” (Oct 15, 2013), <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/10/15/donald-glover-explains-his-absence/>.

³¹⁰ *People*, “Donald Glover Posts Troubling Notes on Instagram, Opens Up About Leaving Community” (Oct 16 2013), <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20746092,00.html>.

expressing myself.”³¹¹ One fan blog wrote an extensive take on the notes as being nihilistic.³¹² They analyze 17 of his statements and how each one relates to nihilism, from his fear of an uncertain future to never reaching happiness. Glover continues in interviews that he was simply being honest in these posts, something *XXL Mag* says is, “rarely seen these days from mainstream artists in any lane, much less in hip-hop.”³¹³ Susan Greenfield writes in *Mind Change: How Digital Technologies are Leaving their Mark on our Brains*, “the internet provides individuals with a unique opportunity for self-expression that encourages people to reveal their true self, including the aspects that are not comfortably expressed face-to-face.”³¹⁴ According to Glover, he was merely expressing his true feelings. Whereas one might typically call a close friend or family member to discuss such anxieties, Glover turned to the internet. Greenfield further explains, “those who most keenly desire to express their ‘true’ identity are precisely those who rely most heavily on relationships in cyberspace.”³¹⁵ This again applies to Glover, whose artistic identity is heavily built on his relationship with fans online. This suggests why he chose the internet (specifically Instagram) to post these messages; he felt it was the most comfortable space for him to do so.

4.3 The Identity Crisis of *Because the Internet*

The notes also address Glover leaving *Community*. He confesses, “I didn’t leave *Community* to rap. I don’t wanna rap. I wanted to be on my own.”³¹⁶ Glover extends this idea in interviews when asked about these statements saying, “I just don’t like the term

³¹¹ People, “Donald Glover: I Didn’t Want To Lie About My Feelings Anymore” (Oct 17 2013), <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20746483,00.html>.

³¹² Christy and Paul, “A Nihilist Response to Donald Glover’s Worry Journal” (Oct 15 2013), <https://christypaul2013.wordpress.com/2013/10/15/a-nihilist-response-to-donald-glovers-worry-journal/>.

³¹³ XXL Mag, “Childish Gambino Is Afraid of the Future” (Nov 1 2013), <http://www.xxlmag.com/news/2013/11/childish-gambino-afraid-future/>.

³¹⁴ Susan Greenfield, *Mind Change: How Digital Technologies are Leaving their Mark on Our Brains*, (New York: Random House, 2015), 114.

³¹⁵ Greenfield, 115.

³¹⁶ People, “Donald Glover Posts Troubling Notes on Instagram, Opens Up About Leaving Community” (Oct 16 2013), <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20746092,00.html>.

‘rapper’. It exists but I’m definitely not a rapper.”³¹⁷ Glover sounds a lot like Claire Boucher from the last chapter here, and this is coming from the same person who released a two-part mixtape titled *I am Just A Rapper* in 2010. As previously discussed, his relationship to the “rapper” classification is clearly complicated as is his relationship to racial classification. Glover further explains his dismissal of the classification “rapper” in an interview with NME:

Glover says he wants to be able to work on different projects at the same time, instead of being pigeonholed as a comedian, actor or rapper. “I don’t get why I can’t be all these things,” he says. “They’re not ‘a thing’ – I’m alive, I’m just doing something. People expect certain things from you and they don’t even know you. It’s like, how can you know me when I don’t even know me?”³¹⁸

These expectations go back to Bourdieu’s point and the expectations placed on Glover depending on which art world he is working within. If Glover is on TV, he is an actor, but the moment he steps on stage he becomes a rapper. Glover questions why he has to be labeled as any of these things and why he cannot simply live free of classifications. He uses Kanye West as a relevant example, who in recent interviews for *Yeezus* (2013) had spoken of a glass ceiling that held him back from getting into the fashion industry due to his “rapper” label.³¹⁹ Again, racial politics limit black artists’ attempts to break into white-dominated worlds. Glover clearly states, “I just don’t want to be labeled,”³²⁰ echoing Claire Boucher’s complaints in the last chapter. Both artists find something inherently restricting about the expectations behind classifications and actively speak out against them in relation to themselves and their works. Glover even began saying that the term ‘album’ was constricting in the context of what he was doing with *Because the Internet*. In an interview, he first states, “This album is not a rap album,”³²¹ then continues, “I don’t see my album as an album. Like I really don’t. It comes with a bunch of stuff. I want to

³¹⁷ NME, “Childish Gambino explains his worrying Instagram letter, insisting ‘I’m not having a crisis’” (Oct 17 2013), <http://www.nme.com/news/childish-gambino/73276>.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ The Breakfast Club, “Childish Gambino Addresses Lupe Fiasco Beef, Suicide Rumors, Not Wanting To Be Boxed In & More” (Oct 24 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LEvOcDxI734>.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

make experiences.”³²² He further explains: “I don’t want to make albums... You gotta build a bigger world. I’m not gonna make an album. I’m going to make an album, I’m going to make the rollout dope, I’m gonna make the movie with it dope, I’m gonna make everything dope, I’m gonna make a world.”³²³ Glover is emphasizing the paratextual elements surrounding *Because the Internet* as just as important as the audio recording, if not more important. He uses the example of Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* (1982) to better explain this:

You think about *Thriller*. The thing that really made that pop off... was the ideas behind it... that video is a short film, he was the first one... the record is amazing, it is, but if it was just the record – and I’m not saying it wouldn’t still be a classic – but if it was just the record it wouldn’t be an experience.

In relation to *Because the Internet*, Glover is stating here that if he were to simply to release an album it would be “just the record.” However, what he is building with *Because the Internet* is a conceptual experience.

In early November he continued building on this by releasing the album artwork, which consists of an animated .gif of his sullen face blowing into pixels and re-forming every few seconds.³²⁴ The album art acts as a looped visual representation of Glover’s star brand, his face, being destroyed and restored digitally over and over again.



³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Complex, “Childish Gambino’s ‘Because the Internet’ Artwork Jumps Out at You, Literally” (Nov 7 2013), <http://www.complex.com/music/2013/11/childish-gambino-because-the-internet-artwork>.

Still frames of the animated .gif album cover for *Because the Internet*.

On November 13th Glover then uploaded “one of year’s cleverest lyric videos”³²⁵ for “3005,” the first single from *Because the Internet*.³²⁶ The video is a faux-internet browser window of Childish Gambino watching Abella Anderson (who was previously in “Clapping for the Wrong Reasons”) strip on a webcam as he sends the song’s lyrics to her through instant messages. The aesthetic of this music video was also adapted to a website, Abella.xxx, to promote *The Deep Web Tour* for the album. “The site positions the visitor as ‘The Boy’ character engaged in a private show with Abella (actually a looped video), when the visitor types anything, Abella responds with the tour dates for the show.”³²⁷ This conceptual component factors into themes of love and sex in the screenplay of *Because the Internet*, wherein The Boy has trouble connecting with the women he interacts with (a theme also present on *Camp*). Webcam strippers and forms of “virtual sex,” as conceptually emulated here, offer the pleasure of sex but are void of “real life” human connection. This idea links to broader themes of loneliness and isolation in *Because the Internet* and expands the overall conceptual experience.

In the Instagram posts, Glover also addresses a conflict in releasing the album with his label:

The label doesn’t want me to release in December because it’s not a holiday record and I’m not a big artist. I started the record last Christmas. Christmas always made me feel lonely, but it helped me restart the new year. I want people to [experience] this album when everything’s closed. When everything slows down and quiet. So you can start over.

Fans took to twitter in support of Glover’s desire for the album’s release and used the

³²⁵ Complex, “In Case ‘Because the Internet’ Didn’t Make Sense, Childish Gambino Wrote A 75-Page Screenplay To Go With It” (Dec 6 2013), <http://ca.complex.com/music/2013/12/childish-gambino-because-the-internet-screenplay>.

³²⁶ Hot New Hip Hop, “Childish Gambino ‘3005’ (Lyric Video Starring ABella Anderson)” (Nov 13th 2013), <http://www.hotnewhiphop.com/childish-gambino-3005-video.21810.html>.

³²⁷ <http://www.westernfall.com/>

hashtag “#Donald4December” to spread awareness.³²⁸ Led by the fansite foreverchildish.com, thousands of tweets with the hashtag were posted, and according to Glover this event convinced the label to let him release the album in December as he wanted.³²⁹ *Because the Internet* leaked on December 3rd, and some fans speculate that Glover was behind it. He tweeted the message “enjoy” earlier that day before the leak surfaced, and in an online Q&A with *Rap Genius* that night he said, “happy leak day.”³³⁰ He later also tweeted (as part of a scripted conversation) “ARIZONA KID: Maybe he made two versions and leaked one version and gave his record company the other. SKATEBOARD KID: who. cares.”³³¹ Fittingly, there was one specific difference in the two versions. The leaked version cuts off the final track “III. Life the Biggest Troll” right before Gambino says, “Eventually my followers realize they don’t need a leader.” There is no explicit evidence that Glover was behind this, and perhaps he just heard of the leak happening and capitalized on it to conceptually add to the “world” he had been building for months. However, Glover adamantly believes that music should be free. He uses the confounding metaphor that “Trying to make somebody pay for music is like a bakery trying to get people to pay for smelling the bakery as they walk by.”³³² He claims “music is free. As soon as an album has leaked, anyone can get it. And that’s fine.”³³³ Whether or not Glover leaked the album in protest to his record label like Death Grips did with *No Love Deep Web* (2012)³³⁴ is hard to say. However, he did use the leak happening as yet

³²⁸ ForeverChildish.com, “#Donald4December” (Oct 2013), <http://foreverchildish.com/post/64133180295/donald4december-childish-gambinos-sophomore>.

³²⁹ The Breakfast Club, “Childish Gambino Addresses Lupe Fiasco Beef, Suicide Rumors, No Wanting To Be Boxed In & More” (Oct 24 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LEvOcDxl734>.

³³⁰ Pigeons and Planes, “Roscoe’s Wetsuit: Finding Meaning In Childish Gambino’s ‘Because the Internet’ on the internet” (Dec 10 2013), <http://pigeonsandplanes.com/2013/12/roscoes-wetsuit/s/maybe-leaked-internet/>.

³³¹ Pigeons and Planes, “Roscoe’s Wetsuit: Finding Meaning In Childish Gambino’s ‘Because the Internet’ on the internet” (Dec 10 2013), <http://pigeonsandplanes.com/2013/12/roscoes-wetsuit/s/maybe-leaked-internet/>.

³³² Complex, “Cover Story Uncut: Childish Gambino Talks About The internet” (Jan 14 2014), <http://www.complex.com/music/2014/01/childish-gambino-uncut-interview>.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ SPIN, “Download Death Grips’ Frenzied ‘NO LOVE DEEP WEB’ LP” (Oct 1 2012), <http://www.spin.com/2012/10/death-grips-no-love-deep-web-album-download/>.

another conceptual element to the *Because the Internet* experience.

A stream was put on iTunes for fans to listen shortly after the leak, but it was not until December 6th when Glover uploaded the album to because.theinter.net along with a 72-page screenplay that the various pieces of this world started to connect. The screenplay begins with a cryptic code, and then:

NOTE TO READER: THE PRELUDE TO THIS SCREENPLAY (“CLAPPING FOR THE WRONG REASONS”) IS AVAILABLE ON THE WEBSITE YOUTUBE FOR FREE CONSUMPTION. IT MAY OR MAY NOT GIVE CONTEXT TO THIS WORK YOU’RE READING.³³⁵

This explicitly draws a conceptual link between “Clapping for the Wrong Reasons” and *Because the Internet*. The main character in the screenplay also lives in a mansion described exactly like “The Temple” where the short film was set. The succeeding line is “*You can’t live your life on a bus...*,”³³⁶ now explicitly linking *Because the Internet* to his previous album *Camp* (2011), which ends with the lyrics, “I wish I could say this was a story about how I got on the bus a boy and got off a man more cynical, hardened, and mature and shit. But that’s not true. The truth is I got on the bus a boy. And I never got off the bus. I still haven’t...”³³⁷ The first page of the script effectively works in contextualizing *Because the Internet* as not only a conceptual continuation of *Camp*, but also that “Clapping for the Wrong Reasons” fits somewhere between these two projects. The screenplay tells the tragedy of The Boy, a sullen twitter celebrity, who becomes increasingly disillusioned with himself and the world around him. He is constantly around people, yet feels entirely alienated and uses the internet as his only way of feeling any connection. He eventually gets involved with drug dealing and dies in a swimming pool, a scene echoing back to the first promotional video for the album, “yaphet kotto.” Visual clips are embedded throughout the script at specific moments and every song from *Because the Internet* is placed strategically in the script to follow the story as the user experiences it. The story features The Boy interacting heavily with online spaces like

³³⁵ Donald Glover, because.theinter.net (Self-published: Dec 2013), p. 1.

³³⁶ Glover, 1.

³³⁷ Childish Gambino, “That Power,” *Camp* (2011), Glassnote Records.

Twitter, and the characters and conversations which appear in the script can also be found online. The timing of the posts on Twitter take place just weeks before *Because the Internet* was released. All of this conceptually develops the online world that encompasses *Because the Internet*. Glover then brought this world to life by teaming up with Tumblr IRL³³⁸, a subset of the social media website Tumblr, which provides “a window to the musician’s creative mind” by partnering musicians with visual artists to “create an audio-visual immersion and present their work in a physical setting.”³³⁹ Glover used this partnership to create a real-life version of The Boy’s room at Rough Trade NYC. *The Creators Project* writes, “On the surface, the exhibit reveals the influences that shape Childish Gambino’s multifaceted creative vision. But on an even deeper level, *Because the Internet* [sic], the third installment of the inspiring Tumblr IRL series, shows what happens when music culture, technology and record stores come together.”³⁴⁰ This effectively brings the *Because the Internet* experience out of the digital world and into a real-life (IRL) setting. *Because the Internet* could now conceivably be “walked into,” adding more immersion to the project. Glover also did a brief tour of shows which he played exclusively in mansions,³⁴¹ much like “The Temple” where “Clapping for the Wrong Reasons” takes place and where the character of The Boy lives.³⁴²

Whether or not Glover intended *Because the Internet* to be viewed as an esoteric media experience rather than an album, negative reception of the work tended to classify

³³⁸ IRL stands for “in real life.”

³³⁹ Tumblr IRL, “About page,” <http://irlirl.tumblr.com/about>.

³⁴⁰ The Creators Project, “Childish Gambino’s Exhibition At Rough Trade NYC Brings” (Dec 05 2013), <http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/blog/childish-gambinos-exhibition-at-rough-trade-nyc-brings-the-internet-to-life>.

³⁴¹ Glassnote Music, “Here are the cities the mansion performances will be taking place in” (2014), <http://glassnotemusic.com/post/67691641010/iamdonald-here-are-the-cities-the-mansion>.

³⁴² I was fortunate enough to go to a secret house show at SXSW in 2014 where Glover performed a stripped-down set of songs. I found out about it through Rap Genius on Twitter, who said to tweet them your favorite Childish Gambino lyrics for the chance to go to a show. I tweeted them (it was the 400 Blows/Truffault line) and received a direct message with an address and time. I showed up to a random house in an upscale residential neighborhood and entered through the garage, where I was asked to remove my phone since no pictures were allowed. I proceeded to go to the show of around 30-50 people. I remember there being pop-tarts set up around the house, the same ones that The Boy eats in the screenplay.

it solely as an album of popular music. Pitchfork writes in their 5.8/10 review of *Because the Internet*, “It’s all very ambitious, but experiencing *Because the Internet* as the artist intended requires an hour of fully plugged in attentive reading, embedded YouTube clip viewing, and listening.”³⁴³ The Needle Drop’s 5/10 review of *Because the Internet* expresses a similar sentiment when stating “this record is so so so dependent on this screenplay to be completely understood, or I think even enjoyed just on its own.”³⁴⁴ One fan validates this claim when admitting, “Before I read the screenplay it was a 6/10 album definitely but then I watched the short film and read the sceenplay [sic] and instantly it was a 9 or 10.”³⁴⁵ These critiques are addressing the nature of *Because the Internet* and Glover’s desire for listeners to go through the effort of fully experiencing it as a conceptual world. Lucy Green argues in *Music on Deaf Ear*, “Both experience of the music and the music’s meanings themselves changes complexity in relation to the style-competence of the [listener], and to the social situations in which they occur...music can never be played or heard outside a situation, and every situation will affect the music’s meaning.”³⁴⁶ Differing consumer practices clearly influence one’s experience of *Because the Internet*. For an active audience member who is embedded within Glover’s online world, they experience *Because the Internet* entirely differently than one who more passively listens to the album outside of this context.

SPIN ends their 2/10 review of the album with simply “it’s a bad rap record.”³⁴⁷ In doing so, the reviewer is revealing that they expected the album to be a rap record and thus is disappointed when it did not fulfill this expectation. This again goes back to Bourdieu and reveals two layers of expectation. The reviewer not only classifies *Because*

³⁴³ Pitchfork, “Childish Gambino - Because the Internet” (Dec 12 2013), <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/18817-childish-gambino-because-the-internet/>.

³⁴⁴ The Needle Drop, “Childish Gambino - Because the Internet ALBUM REVIEW” (Dec 10 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2uzq3A9YbU>.

³⁴⁵ Comment from user “D__” on The Verge, “‘Because the Internet’: online fame gives Donald Glover the feels” (Dec 10 2013), <http://www.theverge.com/2013/12/10/5195582/because-the-internet-online-fame-gives-donald-glover-the-feels>.

³⁴⁶ Lucy Green, *Music on Deaf Ears* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 141, 143.

³⁴⁷ *SPIN*, “Childish Gambino’s Sloppy, Erratic ‘Because the Internet’ Offers Only Unintentional LOL’s” (Dec 10 2013), <http://www.spin.com/2013/12/childish-gambino-because-the-internet-worst-new-music/>.

the Internet as “rap” music, but also deems it an “album.” Both of these classifications create expectations that are unfulfilled when experiencing the text, leading to the reviewer’s dissatisfaction with it. Fans voiced their frustration with the critic’s reading of *Because the Internet*, with the top-rated comment on the article saying:

Your final line is “it’s a bad rap record,”...Where is the rap on Flight of the Navigator? Or Urn? And you do realize that a minority of the songs on this album purely involve rapping, right? ...You walked into this review with the mindset “This is a rap record,” and that is why this review has absolutely no merit. You displayed zero objectivity in reviewing the actual music being presented because you wanted to fit the album into a specific mold.³⁴⁸

This fan sees the text as not fitting into a “specific mold,” much like Glover professes. Another fan makes similar comments, pressing the point, “it’s an experience, not a rap album,” and “it isn’t just a rap album.”³⁴⁹ This shows a very clear division among those who simply listened to the album as an album, and rabid fans who spent hours of time and effort to try and piece together the entire experience. One fan concludes in their glowing 26-page analysis of *Because the Internet*:

What do I think of this album? I wouldn’t call this an album. I would call this art...If you were to listen to the album alone, you would not realize what the songs are really trying to convey. You would be limiting yourself to a linear way of looking at music...When I listen to this album, I am not going to listen to it just to bump tunes. When I listen to this album, I am going to slip into the little world that Donald Glover created for this project...[This] will be considered one of the first stepping-stones to something much larger for music as a whole. Donald is a visionary.³⁵⁰

This fan parallels Glover himself in highlighting that he or she views *Because the Internet* as a work of art rather than an album. *Because the Internet* is not simply music to passively put on in the background, but a work of art that requires active engagement by

³⁴⁸ Comment from user “Craven” on SPIN, “Childish Gambino’s Sloppy, Erratic ‘Because the Internet’ Offers Only Unintentional LOL’s” (Dec 10 2013), <http://www.spin.com/2013/12/childish-gambino-because-the-internet-worst-new-music/>.

³⁴⁹ Comment from user “Guest” on SPIN, “Childish Gambino’s Sloppy, Erratic ‘Because the Internet’ Offers Only Unintentional LOL’s” (Dec 10 2013), <http://www.spin.com/2013/12/childish-gambino-because-the-internet-worst-new-music/>.

³⁵⁰ Jordan Beffert, “Because the Internet Review” (Dec 10 2013), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwNEsoeb3W9sQnRSajNfWndlWGc/view>.

the audience, not only in intently listening to the music, but in subsuming themselves into Glover's online world. Fans like this praise *Because the Internet* for the very reasons why critics dismiss it. After all, this project was made more for Glover's fans than critics. Even though *Because the Internet* reached RIAA Gold-certification, garnered two Grammy nominations, and did receive some positive praise, there is a strong division in readings between those who passively listened to the audio recording and those who more actively experienced this work. On one side it is characterized as a messy and confusing album; on the other it is approached as a profound, visionary work of art.³⁵¹

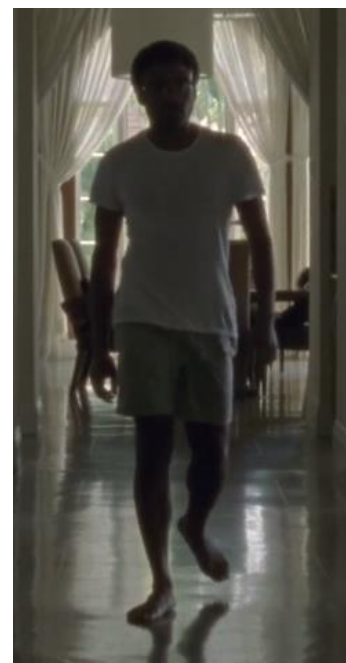
The perplexity caused by *Because the Internet* as a media text parallels Glover's apparent identity crisis as an artist. The identity of The Boy in *Because the Internet* is similar to that of Glover, and whether or not the character is actually Childish Gambino, Donald Glover, or an entirely fictional character is at the crux of discussions on *Because the Internet*; no answers are ever given. One reviewer writes, "It's easy to conflate them and easier still to lose track of edges where The Boy, Gambino, and Glover meet, and maybe that's the point...So who do we believe? The boy, the rapper, or the actor? None and all three."³⁵² For instance, "Clapping for the Wrong Reasons" is credited to Childish Gambino yet is produced by Donald Glover. The Boy is described as wearing the same clothes that Gambino wears in "Clapping for the Wrong Reasons" and is what Glover wore in most interviews and performances after coming back from his online absence.³⁵³ Below is a description of The Boy's closet in the screenplay, and images of Donald Glover wearing the same clothes while performing live, being interviewed, and acting in "Clapping for the Wrong Reasons."

³⁵¹ The Daily Beast, "'Because the Internet' Review: Childish Gambino is Hip-Hop's Perennial Outsider" (Dec 20 2013), <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/12/10/because-the-internet-review-childish-gambino-is-hip-hop-s-perennial-outsider.html>.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Me Plus TV, "Childish Gambino's *Because the Internet* is a Stroke of Genius" (Dec 11 2013), <https://meplustv.wordpress.com/2013/12/11/why-childish-gambinos-because-the-internet-is-a-stroke-of-genius/>.

Little hills of dirty clothes grow up the walls from the floor. Same pile of shoes is there. Wall with same dirty spot. The closet is filled with white shirts and flower shorts. There's one very old and tattered Shearling coat that hangs to the right.



Images of a description of The Boy's closet in the *Because the Internet* screenplay (top) and Donald Glover being interviewed by Arsenio Hall (middle), performing live (bottom left), and acting in "Clapping for the Wrong Reasons" (bottom right).

The Boy also drinks San Pellegrino in the screenplay, which appears in a trashcan in the Tumblr IRL concept room, and Gambino opens an entire fridge-full in “Clapping for the Wrong Reasons.” Glover asks the question “where’s the line between Donnie G and Gambino?” in “Life: The Biggest Troll,” showing that even he is unsure. In response to a lukewarm review from *TIME* about the album, one fan writes, “You are stuck on seeing Donald Glover the writer/actor and not Childish Gambino the musical artist.”³⁵⁴ Another fan writes in a separate discussion, “Donnie G and Childish Gambino have become one.”³⁵⁵ These arguments from fans relate to the debates above about approaching *Because the Internet* as an experience or work of art rather than as simply an album. Again, this emphasizes the expectations that come with classification.

To classify Donald Glover as simply an “actor” or “rapper” is arguably no different than approaching *Because the Internet* as an “album.” Is Donald Glover an actor, comedian, rapper, songwriter, producer, or writer? Is *Because the Internet* an album, film, alternate-reality-game, social media experiment, or something else entirely? Glover states that it is not an album and instead draws attention to the paratextual experience surrounding the album. However, the experience itself is difficult to classify because it includes the entire narrative played out thus far. It is thus a circular, confusing, and rather daunting process to fully map out *Because the Internet*. There are additional aspects I have not yet mentioned, including the exclusive app made for *The Deep Web* tour for the album,³⁵⁶ multiple conceptual music videos,³⁵⁷ the listening parties he held for *Because the Internet* in city parks that Glover promoted on social media,³⁵⁸ the “hackz”

³⁵⁴ TIME, “New Childish Gambino Album’s Fatal Flaw: It’s Just Not Cool” (Dec 10 2013), <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/12/10/new-childish-gambino-albums-fatal-flaw-its-just-not-cool/>.

³⁵⁵ Comment from Jaxghanistan, “Where does Donnie G end and Childish Gambino begin?” (2015), https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/2hxpvu/where_does_donnie_g_end_and_childish_gambino_begin/

³⁵⁶ Grantland, “We Went There: Childish Gambino’s Deep Web Tour” (Mar 31 2014), <http://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/childish-gambinos-deep-web-tour-review/>.

³⁵⁷ Noisy, “All About That Race: Understanding The Secrete in Childish Gambino’s Videos” (Mar 12 2015), http://noisy.vice.com/en_ca/blog/childish-gambino-music-videos-conspiracy-theories-because-the-internet-2015.

³⁵⁸ MTV, “Childish Gambino Has ‘Stepped Up,’ Fans Praise At Spontaneous Listening Party” (Oct 22 2013), <http://www.mtv.com/news/1716025/childish-gambino-album-twitter-party-nyc/>.

USB drive that appears in the screenplay and was handed out to 100 fans with exclusive content,³⁵⁹ secret songs placed online for fans to discover,³⁶⁰ his mysterious relationship with singer Jhené Aiko,³⁶¹ and more. There are also dozens of connections between these disparaging elements linking various elements of *Because the Internet* together, but they create an endless loop that is too much to cover completely in this chapter. What is important to note is that these dispersed forms of content deepen and complicate the status of *Because the Internet* as text. The confusing nature of this text parallels the psychological state of Glover in his own confusion over whether he is a rapper, actor, comedian, writer, producer, or whatever else. Similar to how he feels he just exists and should not be categorized; this text embodies an analogous enigma. In order to express this perplexing feeling, Glover turns directly to the internet. Like Claire Boucher in the last chapter, Glover wishes that both he and his art could exist free of labels. Also like Boucher, Glover explicitly engages with the internet to express this feeling. *Because the Internet*'s ambiguous, dispersed nature is not unlike the internet itself. As noted in Chapter 1, Sociologist Annette Markham explains, "the concept we label The Internet is, both in practice and theory, a multiplicity of cultural phenomena not limited to either a monolithic entity or a universal set of experiences." Trying to fully define "the internet" is arguably just as circular, perplexing and long-winded an exercise as defining *Because the Internet*. The Verge writes, "Glover's signature 'I'm a mess' self-awareness extends to this commentary to make clear how overwhelming and all-consuming the internet is."³⁶² *Because the Internet* can be read as an expression of Glover's own fragmented

³⁵⁹ Pigeons and Planes, "Roscoe's Wetsuit: Finding Meaning In Childish Gambino's 'Because the Internet' on the internet" (Dec 20 2013), <http://pigeonsandplanes.com/2013/12/roscoes-wetsuit/s/boys-bedroom-hackz-flash-drive-exist-irl/>.

³⁶⁰ Pigeons and Planes, "Roscoe's Wetsuit: Finding Meaning In Childish Gambino's 'Because the Internet' on the internet" (Dec 20 2013), <http://pigeonsandplanes.com/2013/12/roscoes-wetsuit/s/secret-song-exists-kind-love/>.

³⁶¹ Donald Glover and Jhené Aiko were rumored to be dating during the rollout of *Because the Internet*, and the two feature heavily in each other's music videos. Aiko appears in the music video for "Telegraph Ave" from *Because the Internet*, and Glover appears in Aiko's music videos for "The Pressure," "Pink Toes," and "Bed Peace." Aiko also resembles a love interest in the *Because the Internet* screenplay, leading fans to further speculate about their mysterious companionship.

³⁶² The Verge, "'Because the Internet': online fame gives Donald Glover the feels" (Dec 10 2013), <http://www.theverge.com/2013/12/10/5195582/because-the-internet-online-fame-gives-donald-glover-the-feels>.

identity that uses the internet to exemplify this state.

4.4 *Because the Internet* and the Exploitation of Fans

Throughout the roll-out and since the release of *Because the Internet*, fans have had countless discussions online about the nature of this text. *Pigeons and Planes* writes:

For the past four months, Donald has taken his creative ingenuity and built an alternate reality to house the rollout for his sophomore album *Because the Internet*, out now, and with each day we learn something new about this world. Appropriately, we're learning most of it through the internet. Using two elaborate websites and social media, Donald has created an immersive environment that's inspiring kids internationally to do things their own teachers struggle to get them to do every day: read, think critically, engage with art, and even learn how to code. But most valuable of all, he's started an online conversation with entire websites, forums, and threads on Reddit devoted to coming together as a community to decipher all things BTI... This alternate reality is so vast and multi-layered that it can be difficult to understand without spending a LOT of time on the internet.³⁶³

This quote touches on the feverish amount of work fans have put in to experience and discuss *Because the Internet*. Glover's understanding of the internet and web culture led him to strategically make a rollout that he knew would have this effect. His desire to release it over "winter break" was claimed to be partly a strategic move because he knew high school and university students would have the downtime to sit online and experience it.³⁶⁴ I can personally attest that I did not immediately dive into *Because the Internet* when it was released but waited until I was home for winter break from university, unwittingly playing right into Glover's hands. He constructed this project to tap directly into the fanbase of so-called digital natives that he knew would follow it. This audience is built on people who have spent enough of their lives online to have a sense of what Glover is talking about in his emoticon-filled screenplay and lyrics stacked with references to Vine, WorldStarHipHop.com, e-vites, and a multitude of Internet slang terms.

³⁶³ Pigeons and Planes, "Roscoe's Wetsuit: Finding Meaning in Childish Gambino's 'Because the Internet' on the internet" (Dec 10 2013), <http://pigeonsandplanes.com/2013/12/roscoes-wetsuit/>.

³⁶⁴ The Breakfast Club, "Childish Gambino Addresses Lupe Fiasco Beef, Suicide Rumors, No Wanting To Be Boxed In & More" (Oct 24 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LEvOcDxI734>.

Countless thinkpieces³⁶⁵ and theory-posts³⁶⁶ surrounding *Because the Internet* exist online, and a handful of fans even wrote high school or university essays on the project.³⁶⁷ Many of these discussions proclaim Glover's genius and offer a variety of takes on *Because the Internet*. Some fans have argued that *Because the Internet* is a work of transmedia, which helps in explaining it as a text. In an analysis at westernfall.com, the authors write:

In his article entitled 'Transmedia Storytelling 101', Henry Jenkins defines transmedia as "a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story (Jenkins, 2007)." The 'Because the Internet' project definitely incorporates a process of delivering important elements of a narrative fiction through multiple, unique delivery channels as discussed above.

This places *Because the Internet* within Jenkins' framework of transmedia, which helps in discussing it as a media text. *Because the Internet* exists across multiple mediums and moves between them with ease, including an audio recording, screenplay, short film, twitter profiles, interviews and various other miscellanea discussed in this chapter. All of these elements are then tied together by the overarching conceptual idea of *Because the Internet*. These online scholars then note that:

Jenkins goes on to write, 'The encyclopedic ambitions of transmedia texts often results in what might be seen as gaps or excesses in the unfolding of the story: that is, they introduce potential plots which can not be fully told or extra details which hint at more than can be revealed. Readers, thus, have a strong incentive to continue to elaborate on these story elements, working them over through their speculations, until they take on a life of their own.' As mentioned previously, alongside the ambiguous nature of the storytelling in the short film, Glover had users look through code to find secrets in his website, including a secret track that

³⁶⁵ Huffpost Entertainment, "Childish Gambino and the Metamodern Ennui: Why Because the Internet Is the Most Significant Album in Recent Memory" (Jun 13 2014), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jesse-damiani/because-the-internet-chil_b_5485075.html.

³⁶⁶ Reddit, "A Close Reading of Childish Gambino's 'Because the Internet'" (2014), https://www.reddit.com/r/hiphopheads/comments/1s2wac/a_close_reading_of_childish_gambinos_because_the/.

³⁶⁷ T. Ryan, "AP English: Analysis of Childish Gambino's Because the Internet" (Apr 9 2014), <https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B79kbInYGbbnZy1MS1JVcGIYzg&usp=sharing>.

has yet to be found, five months after the release of his album. As a result, the incentive continues for fans to stay invested in the project.³⁶⁸

This analysis links Glover's and Jenkins' ideas. Transmedia is a component of what Jenkins deems "convergence culture," which encompasses "the flow of content across multiple media platforms...and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want."³⁶⁹ For Internet-reared Childish Gambino fans, *Because the Internet* acts as a validation of how they consume content. Jenkins gives an example: "A teenager doing homework may juggle four or five windows, scan the Web, listen to and download MP3 files, chat with friends, word-process a paper, and respond to e-mail, shifting rapidly among tasks."³⁷⁰ Likewise, *Because the Internet* invites the user to be listening to the album while they simultaneously have a screenplay open in their browser along with various other tabs related to the project. After the album is finished, they still might feel compelled to search online for hours, scouring theories and discussions about the project. Jenkins writes that "Convergence involves both a change in the way media is produced and a change in the way media is consumed."³⁷¹ On the production side, Glover utilized his talents in writing, acting, songwriting, producing, and coding to create the entire experience. His fans consumed it all on the internet. This is different from a pre-Internet world when the musician would make the album and a fan bought its physical release or saw a live show. With the internet, Glover was able to exploit various avenues to craft this project online.

Jenkins writes, "The promises of this new media environment raise expectations of a freer flow of ideas and content."³⁷² Perhaps this is precisely what Glover desires in his need to be free from classification. Nicholas Carr adds to this by stating, "the future of

³⁶⁸ Wetserfall.com, "Childish Gambino," <http://www.wetserfall.com>.

³⁶⁹ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 2.

³⁷⁰ Jenkins, 16.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Jenkins, 18.

knowledge and culture no longer lies in books or newspapers or TV shows or radio programs or records or CDs. It lies in digital files shot through our universal medium at the speed of light.”³⁷³ On the internet, both Donald Glover and *Because the Internet* are communicated as digital information. Glover feels that this information should be free without fitting into any predetermined molds. In a pre-Internet world it was arguably more necessary for an artist or work to be classified because fans had few, if any, direct links to the artist. With the internet, one can now look at Glover’s social media profiles to see who he projects himself to be. Seemingly, all of the information is there. Concerning the idea of living life online, Glover states, “Life is now a film...life is an expression...my life is online...and so is yours, like everybody’s...it’s like an expression...You can’t live alone anymore.”³⁷⁴ With *Because the Internet*, Glover strives to express this existential feeling through a work of art. Following McLuhan, Jenkins writes “we are in an age of media transition, one marked by tactical decisions and unintended consequences, mixed signals and competing interests, and most of all, unclear directions and unpredictable outcomes.”³⁷⁵ Both Glover’s artistic identity and *Because the Internet* are characteristically unpredictable regarding how fans are constantly on edge for what comes “next” in the saga of Glover’s career and the rollout of *Because the Internet*. One day Glover may release a cryptic short film with no explanation of what it is, and the next he may delete his twitter account. Fans can never anticipate what he will do, and this affected the rollout of *Because the Internet*. Within the context of convergence culture, *Because the Internet* can then be understood to reproduce the contingent media environment in which it was created.

It is also important to consider *Because the Internet* as a hypermediated text. In Bolter and Grusin’s *Remediation* they discuss remediation, “the ‘anthropotropic’ process by which new media technologies improve upon or remedy prior technologies.”³⁷⁶ In their

³⁷³ Carr, 89.

³⁷⁴ Q on CBC, “Childish Gambino brings “Because the Internet” to Studio Q” (Apr 8 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhBntF0q6jY>.

³⁷⁵ Jenkins, 11.

³⁷⁶ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation* (The MIT Press, 1999), 273.

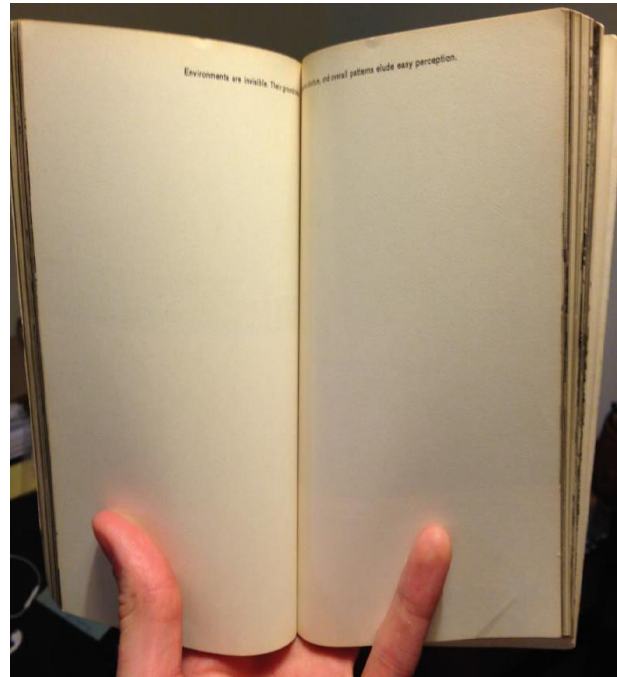
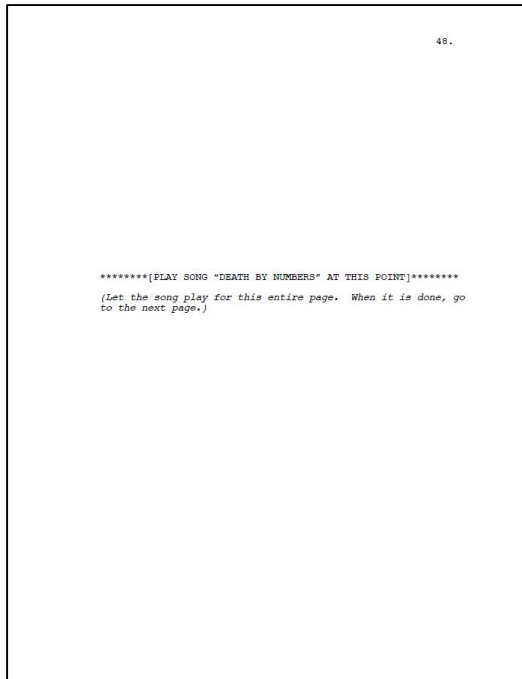
analysis, they break remediation into two stages. The first stage, hypermediacy, is “A style of visual representation whose goal is to remind the viewer of the medium.”³⁷⁷ The second stage, immediacy, is “A style of visual representation whose goal is to make the viewer forget the presence of the medium.”³⁷⁸ *Because the Internet* leans toward hypermediacy because it consistently reminds the user of the medium of the content they are consuming. Marshall McLuhan provides a clear example of hypermediacy in *The Medium is the Message* when midway through the book he presents two largely blank pages side-by-side with the message, “Environments are invisible. Their groundrules, pervasive structure, and overall patterns elude easy perception.”³⁷⁹ Glover makes a similar move a little over halfway through the *Because the Internet* screenplay when the script stops on a page with the instruction to play the 45-second song, “Death By Numbers,” and to “*Let the song play for this entire page. When it is done, go to the next page.*”³⁸⁰ Both of these examples make the user aware of the medium they are consuming. McLuhan entices the reader to notice the book in his or her hands that may have previously felt invisible. Glover provokes the user to stop reading for 45-seconds and reflect on the experience he or she is having. Like McLuhan, Glover urges the user to recognize the environment that was previously invisible. Rather than a book, *Because the Internet* is meant to be experienced in front of a digital screen. Whether that is a desktop computer, laptop, smart phone, or tablet is irrelevant. It is the environment of the internet that is meant to rise to the surface, and this is the invisible medium that Glover urges the user to notice. I have provided images below of these two instances.

³⁷⁷ Bolter and Grusin, 272.

³⁷⁸ Bolter and Grusin, 272-73.

³⁷⁹ Marshall McLuhan with Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Message* (Bantam Books, 1967).

³⁸⁰ Glover, 48.



Images of hypermediated instances in the *Because the Internet* screenplay (left) and Marshall McLuhan's *The Medium is the Massage* (right).

Another example of this is the meme “Roscoe’s wetsuit” that Glover spread online throughout the album’s release. It initially started as a cryptic tweet from his account, and he began retweeting any fans that also tweeted the phrase. This caused it to “spread like wildfire”³⁸¹ early on, and the term kept coming up throughout the project’s rollout and release. It still appears, even coming up in lyrics to the mixtape/EP hybrid *STN MTN/Kauai* (2014) that Glover released after *Because the Internet*. There initially was a website for roscoeswetsuit.org that just showed text of the term and nothing else. Glover even rented out a billboard in LA to display the text. This billboard example is particularly interesting because it takes a piece of new media, a tweet/online meme, and regurgitates it through the old media of a billboard. This is an example of backwards remediation in which old media is used to develop on new media, rather than the other way around. Fans searched for any evidence they could piece together in order to

³⁸¹ Inifnite Hip Hop, “What in the world is Roscoe’s Wetsuit?” (Oct 3 2013), <http://infinitehiphop.com/2013/10/03/what-in-the-world-is-roscoes-wetsuit/>.

understand what “roscoe’s wetsuit” could mean. Glover gave them plenty, and “Roscoe’s wetsuit” appeared throughout the screenplay, in the Tumblr IRL room, his music videos, and various other places.³⁸² “Roscoe’s wetsuit” even can be seen on the physical CD release by peeling off the front cover,³⁸³ not unlike The Beatles hidden “butcher block cover” on early pressings of *Yesterday and Today* (1966). However, none of this evidence led anywhere. The more the term appeared, the more ambiguous it became. I have provided images below displaying some of the various places where “roscoe’s wetsuit” exists.

There’s a billboard. It says: **ROSCOE’S WETSUIT**

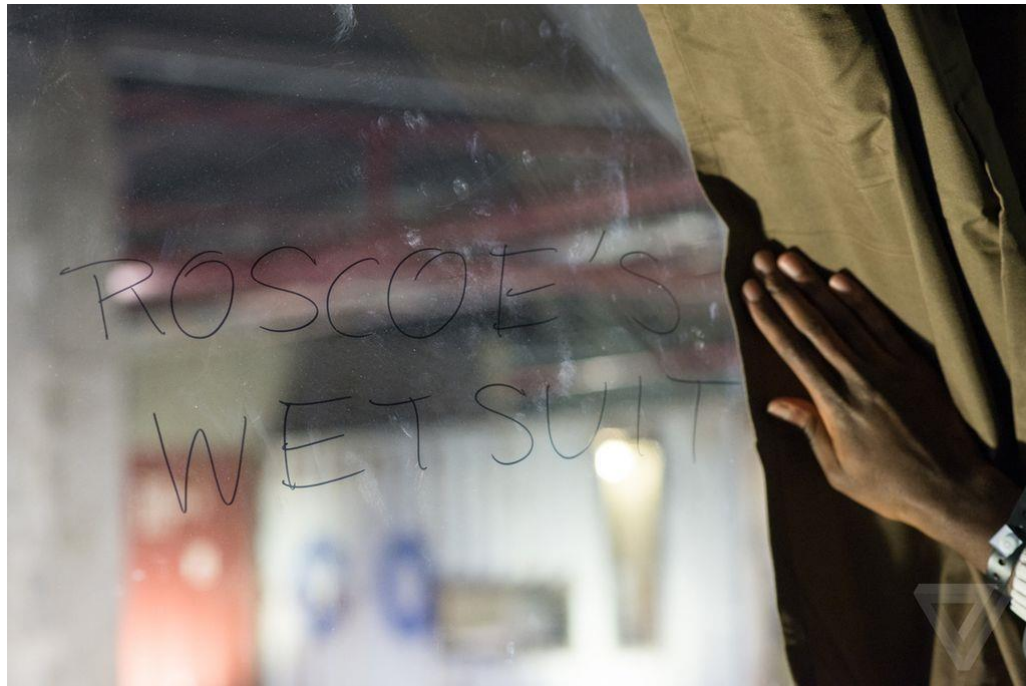
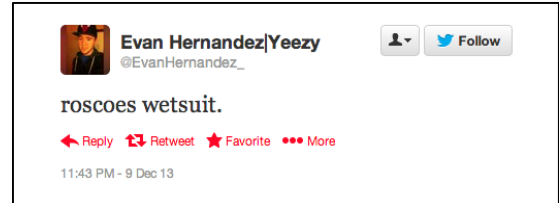
The Boy stares at it. Just a white billboard with “roscoe’s wetsuit” on it.



Images of “Roscoe’s wetsuit” appearing in the *Because the Internet* screenplay (top), and IRL billboard (bottom).

³⁸² Reddit, “[REQUEST] Roscoe’s Wetsuit Video” (2016), https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/3xk952/request_roscoes_wetsuit_video/

³⁸³ A fan discovered this after the cover was warped from leaving the CD out in the sun. (Reddit - https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/2226c5/so_my_cd_cover_was_warped_today_in_the_sun_behind/)



Images of “Roscoe’s wetsuit” appearing in fan tweets (top), the Tumblr IRL room (middle), and hidden behind the physical CD album cover (bottom).

Fans spent lots of time trying to understand what “Roscoe’s wetsuit” meant and continue to do so long after the album’s release. Some initially believed it was the name of Glover’s forthcoming project that eventually became *Because the Internet*, and others still believe it could be an album in the works.³⁸⁴ Other “theories” run the gamut from it being a condom for Glover’s penis,³⁸⁵ an alien living inside of Glover’s body,³⁸⁶ a reference to Bret Easton Ellis’ *Less Than Zero*,³⁸⁷ a critique of contemporary hip-hop artists,³⁸⁸ or a metaphor for life itself.³⁸⁹ One of the most intricate explanations comes from a fan who thought it could signal a collaborative mixtape between Childish Gambino and Chance the Rapper. The comment explains, “If you put ‘roscoe’s wetsuit’ into the Wu-Tang name generator, you get ‘Sixty Second The Baptist’. If you put ‘Donald Bennett’, (Childish Gambino’s first name and Chance the Rapper’s last name) you also get Sixty Second The Baptist. What are the odds?”³⁹⁰ At this point, “Roscoe’s wetsuit” had come full circle. The meme that Glover created was effectively processed through the same online algorithm that brought “Childish Gambino” into existence, creating a seemingly unintended conceptual loop found by fans.

Countless other fan theories abound online, but the most provocative and widespread is that “Roscoe’s wetsuit” is actually meaningless. In a YouTube video of Glover at a park in Toronto during a public listening party for *Because the Internet*, fans

³⁸⁴ Reddit, “[Discussion] Thoughts on Roscoe’s Wetsuit being the name of Bino’s next album?” (2015), https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/2nu03s/discussion_thoughts_on_roscoes_wetsuit_being_the/?ref=search_posts.

³⁸⁵ Reddit, “[Discussion] Roscoe’s Wetsuit” (2015), https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/2rw503/roscoes_wetsuit/.

³⁸⁶ Reddit, “Who is Roscoe’s Wetsuit?” (May 2015), https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/34jvik/who_is_roscoes_wetsuit/.

³⁸⁷ Reddit, “This is what Roscoe’s Wetsuit really means.” (Dec 2015), https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/3qkeit/this_is_what_roscoes_wetsuit_really_means/.

³⁸⁸ Reddit, “roscoe’s wetsuit” (Nov 2015), https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/3m148r/roscoes_wetsuit/.

³⁸⁹ Reddit, “Is ‘Clapping for The Wrong Reasons’ the Boy’s dream while in the hospital?” (Sept 2015), (https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/3kxkii/is_clapping_for_the_wrong_reasons_the_boys_dream/).

³⁹⁰ Infinite Hip Hop, “What in the world is Roscoe’s Wetsuit?” (Oct 3 2013), <http://infinitehiphop.com/2013/10/03/what-in-the-world-is-roscoes-wetsuit/>.

press him for what “Roscoe’s wetsuit” means. He responds, “You guys will see...it’s all part of bigger things too...just remember asking why you want to know, that’s a part of it...do you know why you want to know? ...you just want to know? Okay, cool.

Remember that.”³⁹¹ From the mouth of its creator, “Roscoe’s wetsuit” seems to signify the very act of questioning itself. It creates a conceptual mise-en-abyme wherein the further one looks into “Roscoe’s wetsuit,” the more it reveals itself over and over again. This is exemplified in the screenplay when The Boy first sees “Roscoe’s wetsuit” on Twitter (text styles are taken from the screenplay):

He was looking for something to retweet on his time-line. People say dumb shit all the time...

...someone tweeted “roscoe’s wetsuit”.

“...what’s that?”

The Boy drops “roscoes wetsuit” into Google. A Yahoo answer comes up for it. The answer to “what is roscoe’s wetsuit?” is...“roscoe’s wetsuit”. Hilarious.³⁹²

The Boy dropping the term into Google parallels what any curious fan would do in this scenario. As expected at this point, there is also a Yahoo Answers page that mirrors the one The Boy finds in the screenplay.³⁹³ Greenfield writes of Google searching:

The advent of the internet, with sophisticated algorithmic search engines, has made accessing information as easy as lifting a finger. No longer do we have to make costly efforts to find the things we want. We can “Google” the old classmate, find articles online, or look up the actor who was on the tip of our tongue...success in a Google search depends not on detailed scrutiny or in-depth reflection but instead on fast evaluations at face value.³⁹⁴

It is this reflex of instantly accessing information that “Roscoe’s wetsuit” plays on. Glover created a term largely void of meaning with the assumption that his fans would

³⁹¹ YouTube, “Childish Gambino answers question about Roscoe’s Wetsuit in Toronto” (Dec 5 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reNsZhCwcPc>.

³⁹² Glover, 8.

³⁹³ Yahoo Answers, “Does anyone know what Roscoe’s Wetsuit means?” (2013), <https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20130904160651AAIzRsh>.

³⁹⁴ Greenfield, 204-05.

search for meaning online, and in the process imbue it with meaning. In *The Shallows: What the internet is Doing to Our Brains*, Nicholas Carr builds on Plato's idea that writing causes one to be "filled, not with wisdom, but with the conceit of wisdom"³⁹⁵ and deems the internet "a technology of forgetfulness"³⁹⁶ as a result of our reliance on instant information from the Web to find whatever we need. With "Roscoe's wetsuit," the fact that there was not a definitive answer online is what led fans to continue searching for meaning. It acts as an anomaly in an online world where so much else can be found with a single click. One fan succinctly explains, "It means nothing. Roscoe's wetsuit is just proof that anything, no matter how pointless and senseless, can go viral. The people of the internet will repeat it and wonder about it for no reason. Maybe to connect with each other. Maybe to search for meaning where there is none."³⁹⁷ *Pigeons and Planes* speculates:

"Roscoe's wetsuit" is a phrase created to symbolize how anything online can go viral...Because the Internet. While everyone searches for meaning, RTs it, instagrams it, and spreads the word, nobody knows what "the word" really means. If we look at it this way, Roscoe's wetsuit shows how eager this Internet dependent generation is to latch on to an idea, whether or not we really understand it, and whether or not it really has any meaning at all.³⁹⁸

This resembles the short film "Clapping for the Wrong Reasons" because the viewer feels compelled to clap even though they do not know why. Mark Federman at the University of Toronto performed a study addressing "the challenge of multiple media literacies in a tumultuous time."³⁹⁹ He concludes that in the internet's "world of ubiquitous connectivity and pervasive proximity...the greatest skill [involves] discovering emergent meaning

³⁹⁵ Carr, 54.

³⁹⁶ Carr, 193.

³⁹⁷ Reddit, "Have we received any explanation of the meaning of Roscoe's Wetsuit" (2014), https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/1w8qj1/have_we_received_any_explanation_of_the_meaning/.

³⁹⁸ Pigeons and Planes, "Roscoe's Wetsuit: Finding Meaning in Childish Gambino's 'Because the Internet' on the internet" (Dec 10 2013), <http://pigeonsandplanes.com/2013/12/roscoes-wetsuit/>.

³⁹⁹ Mark Federman, "Why Johnny and Janey Can't Read, And Why Mr And Ms. Smith Can't Teach: The challenge of multiple media literacies in a tumultuous time" (undated), University of Toronto, <http://individual.utoronto.ca/markfederman/WhyJohnnyandJaneyCantRead.pdf>.

among contexts that are continually in flux.⁴⁰⁰ Glover continually shifts “Roscoe’s wetsuit” to suit a variety of contexts, both online and off. No matter where “Roscoe’s wetsuit” appears, the search for its meaning inevitably brings fans to the internet and may thereby reveal its hypermediacy. In this way, “Roscoe’s wetsuit” acts as the conceptual glue that holds *Because the Internet* together and as a microcosm for the project as a whole. From “Clapping for the Wrong Reasons” to Glover’s Instagram notes to the screenplay, Glover created an excess of attractive and enigmatic information and content. The relationship among all of the elements is what comprises the work *Because the Internet*. The further one looks into this content, the more links and connections can be found, but the less apparent any singular meaning becomes. Glover assumed with “Roscoe’s wetsuit” that fans would latch onto it in the way they did, and the same goes for *Because the Internet*. In David Jennings’ *Net, Blogs, and Rock ‘n’ Roll* he equates online viral campaigns to spreading a seed, and states, “the challenge in a fragmented media landscape is to get your seed blown far and wide, so that as people wander that landscape, their chances of coming across it are as high as possible.”⁴⁰¹ While “Roscoe’s wetsuit” had strong conceptual ties to *Because the Internet*, the term’s online circulation also inevitably brought exposure to the project. “Roscoe’s wetsuit” then also fulfills a strong promotional incentive for Glover. In many ways, he exploited his online community of fans to pursue the thematic purpose of this work while increasing its buzz. If he did not already have this fanbase, “Roscoe’s wetsuit” would not have caught on so strongly nor would *Because the Internet* have gained the audience it did. Glover had to first reach online fame before he could look down and reflect on it, and to do so he exploited the very community that got him the fame in the first place. *The Verge* writes:

[*Because the Internet*] has all the trappings of a work crafted by an artist grappling with success, excess, and the exhaustion that comes with it. But what’s interesting here is how he plays with that trope from a net native’s perspective. His fame is a distinctly online-driven kind of fame, after all. As such, the language of the work is colored by internet life as he’s lived it. What results is a thoughtful if somewhat ungainly commentary on how people relate on- and

⁴⁰⁰ Quoted in Carr, 111.

⁴⁰¹ David Jennings, *Net, Blogs, and Rock ‘n’ Roll* (Nicholas Bradley Publishing, 2007), 142-43.

offline.⁴⁰²

Since the internet is such a large part of his success, Glover was able to use his online presence to spread “roscoe’s wetsuit,” and thus bring exposure to *Because the Internet* as a whole. If I had tried to do *Because the Internet* with my measly 200 twitter followers (compared to Glover’s 1.8 million), “roscoe’s wetsuit” would have had much less circulation and its effect would have been lost. However, since Glover has cultivated such a strong online presence throughout his career, there were already nearly 2 million fans ready to latch onto and discuss “roscoe’s wetsuit” the moment it appeared.

Some argue that *Because the Internet* is a rather elaborate piece of online trolling, which “generally describes someone who adopts an offensive or controversial stance in order to annoy other(s) or to provoke an emotional response.”⁴⁰³ *TIME* was unhappy with this behavior and writes in their lukewarm review of the album:

When, as has been suggested, Glover is using interviews, social media, and every other public communication to actually create the multimedia concept art, there has to be a reason for it. But, how can we believe anything about someone who considers the world a concept art piece and makes the fans just part of the story, like extras in a movie?...The big reveal at the album’s conclusion is that he was (likely) trolling all the trolls, but what about the fans? What about those of us who don’t need our time wasted merely to make the point that someone was wasting our time? Because the Internet should read as Because I Can, as if the anonymity of the web gives us no culpability for our actions or our art.⁴⁰⁴

Like previous critics mentioned in this chapter, the reviewer here is unimpressed with *Because the Internet* and wishes for it to conform to his expectations of what purpose an “album” should serve. This reviewer is conflicted over the fact that there is “no reason” for Glover to have done what he did. However, there is more to this project than just wasting people’s time. This entire experience of *Because the Internet*, including

⁴⁰² The Verge, “‘Because the Internet’: online fame gives Donald Glover the feels” (Dec 10 2013), <http://www.theverge.com/2013/12/10/5195582/because-the-internet-online-fame-gives-donald-glover-the-feels>.

⁴⁰³ Greenfield, 147.

⁴⁰⁴ *TIME*, “New Childish Gambino Album’s Fatal Flaw: It’s Just Not Cool” (Dec 10 2013), <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/12/10/new-childish-gambino-albums-fatal-flaw-its-just-not-cool/>.

“Roscoe’s wetsuit” and everything else, asks its audience to recognize the internet as a part of their lives. It provides no answers but provokes questions about searching for a sense of meaning in the internet-age. These questions, while ultimately circular and perhaps unanswerable, are meant for listeners to not only recognize the internet as a part of their lives but to question what that means.

4.5 Concluding *Because the Internet*

As a hypermediated text, *Because the Internet* seeks to reflect the internet to its users. It is nearly impossible to discuss any element of this text without explicitly addressing the internet in some way. Glover uses the internet as a *tool* to create *Because the Internet*, as a cultural *space* for *Because the Internet* to disseminate and exist, and he expresses the internet’s *way of being* through *Because the Internet*. The relationship between Glover and his fans lies at the center of *Because the Internet*. If his online fans had not followed the experience as it happened and questioned every move, *Because the Internet* would have been a very different, much less dynamic text. In the last song on the album of *Because the Internet*, “III. Life: The Biggest Troll,” Glover raps, “High on my own, it took time to realize / Because the Internet, mistakes are forever / But if we fuck up on this journey, at least we’re together.” Themes of loneliness and alienation permeate *Because the Internet*, but Glover finds solace in the fact that however alone he might feel, the internet and his fans are still there. In her book *Alone Together*, Sherry Turkle writes:

Our new devices provide space for the emergence of a new state of the self, itself, split between the screen and the physical real, wired into existence through technology... These young people are among the first to grow up with an expectation of continuous connection: always on, and always on them... All of this makes them fluent with technology but brings a set of new insecurities. They nurture friendships on social-networking sites and then wonder if they are among friends. They are connected all day but are not sure if they have communicated. They become confused about companionship. Can they find it in their lives on the screen?... Their digitized friendships—played out with emoticon emotions, so often predicated on rapid response rather than reflection—may prepare them, at times through nothing more than their superficiality, for relationships that could bring superficiality to a higher power, that is, for relationships with the

inanimate.⁴⁰⁵

Turkle is discussing the how one who has grown up with the internet and digital technology experiences relationships. *Because the Internet* touches on some of the themes Turkle mentions. In “3005” Glover asks, “Got a house full of homies, why I feel so the opposite?” which is also a major theme in the short film “Clapping for the Wrong Reasons” and recurs in the screenplay. Glover is surrounded by friends, but feels entirely alone. It is nothing new for a celebrity to feel isolated and confused by fame. However, Glover turns directly to the internet as a way to explain this feeling. The further he looks in himself to understand why he feels alone, the more the answer is — for lack of a better term — because the internet.

Glover claims that the title “Because the Internet” actually comes from a conversation between him and alternative-rock icon Beck. He states in an interview with *TIME Magazine*:

I was working with Beck, and he asked me a question about whether rappers talk to each other and I started off the answer by saying, ‘I don’t like starting answers with this, but Because the Internet⁴⁰⁶...’ and he said, ‘You should name your album that.’ It started as a joke and the more we talked about it the more it was like, it actually makes sense. It’s weird to me that there’s not a similar title [out there already], Because the Internet is everything. These words will end up on the internet, somewhere, somehow. Everything we do is put into information online so I thought it was appropriate for the times.⁴⁰⁷

The ellipses following the phrase “Because the Internet...” are essential in understanding how this title begs for completion but never reaches an end, like the work *Because the Internet* itself. Because the internet...*what*, exactly? The work *Because the Internet* can be understood to continue this never ending statement. Rather than any answers or finite endings, *Because the Internet* only provides more questions and infinitude to ponder.

⁴⁰⁵ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together* (Basic Books, 2011), 16-17.

⁴⁰⁶ Claire Boucher also used the term “because the internet” when describing “post-internet.” See footnote 156 for source.

⁴⁰⁷ Time, “A Conversation with Childish Gambino: Nostalgia, Bitcoins and Advice from Tina Fey” (Dec 05 2013), <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/12/05/a-conversation-with-childish-gambino-nostalgia-bitcoins-and-advice-from-tina-fey/>.

When then asked how much time he spends online, Glover answered, “It’s probably easier to answer how much time I don’t spend on the internet, which would probably be the time when I’m sleeping, so I guess about four hours.” He elaborates:

[I spend that time] Emailing, checking up on information, getting sent Vines, reading a tweet, any sort of information. The album’s sort of about how I only connect through that really. I mean, how often do you sit down and talk to someone for like two hours? It’s not like a bad thing. I don’t want anybody to think this is an indictment. But I thought it was an interesting thing. People used to talk a lot longer and now it’s, like, if I sit down and talk to someone for two hours and not look at my phone, not only is it like a great feat, like it’s hard to do, but I’d be probably in trouble. People would be like, ‘Where were you? Were you sick? Did you get in trouble?’ Something would be wrong.⁴⁰⁸

Glover is saying that the internet is a main source of human connection for him, and that he literally spends more of his waking day online than off. Greenfield states, “cyberculture does not encourage the development of the attention span necessary for deep thought, and thus is if we rely exclusively on that digital culture, we fail to construct the adequate conceptual framework that gives the world around us meaning.”⁴⁰⁹ It would be erroneous to say that Glover is incapable of deep thought, but what Greenfield touches on here is the very confusion Glover feels in his unfulfilled desire to find meaning on the internet. The more time he spends online the more disconnected he feels, so he turns right back to the internet to alleviate this. However, it just creates a continual loop like “Roscoe’s wetsuit” with no conceivable ending.

In Joseph Weizenbaum’s *Computer Power and Human Reason*, he writes, “An intellectual technology becomes an indispensable component of any structure once it is so thoroughly integrated with the structure, so enmeshed in various vital substructures, that it can no longer be factored out without fatally impairing the whole structure.”⁴¹⁰ Without the internet, *Because the Internet* would not exist. Likewise, Donald Glover as we know him would not exist, either. As a black artist, the internet provides avenues for Glover

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Greenfield, 244.

⁴¹⁰ Joseph Weizenbaum, *Computer Power and Human Reason* (New York: Freeman, 1976), 8.

that previously were not available in the music industry. This is why the animated .gif album cover is not of a computer blowing up and being reassembled, but Glover's own face. Because the internet he initially gained an audience via comedic YouTube videos; because the internet he was able to share music and gain an audience as Childish Gambino; and because the internet he was able to develop a strong fanbase that would continually support him and his work, including the elaborate demands of *Because the Internet* and its need for active engagement. *Because the Internet* is coming from someone whose life has been so deeply influenced and embedded online that to dismiss it would be impossible. Glover clearly states, "I love the internet...I think my whole vision of life has been changed by this tool that humans have made."⁴¹¹

This chapter began by looking at Donald Glover's career narrative and how he is classified as a perennial outsider to both black (hip-hop) and white (indie) music worlds. This classification struggle, at the core of his identity as an artist, can be seen growing into a superabundance of paratextual media to create *Because the Internet*. In working to understand this text, I looked at discussions about it from critics, fans, and Glover himself. These discussions offered multiple speculations on a highly ambiguous text. By placing *Because the Internet* within frameworks of transmedia, convergence culture, and hypermediacy, I sought to understand some of the logic behind Glover's creation and dissemination of this text. His use of his online fans in particular is an essential aspect of *Because the Internet* and analyzing the meme "Roscoe's wetsuit" helped to better understand Glover's relationship with this fanbase as well as the thematic ideas of this work.

In the previous chapter, Claire Boucher saw the internet as having a neurobiological influence on her brain that consequently affected the sound of her music as Grimes. For Glover, the internet philosophically affects the way that he finds meaning in life. Both artists can be understood as having lived through the internet's cultural

⁴¹¹ Q on CBC, "Childish Gambino brings "Because the Internet" to Studio Q" (Apr 8 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhBntF0q6jY>.

growth. Glover explicitly states that he is in a “unique position”⁴¹² to reflect upon the phenomenon of the internet due to being “part of a generation that’s pretty special because we remember life before the internet.”⁴¹³ For the “post-internet messiah”⁴¹⁴ Donald Glover, “The internet is a living, breathing thing and we are making it as we go.”⁴¹⁵ *Because the Internet* is his way of speaking what he calls “the language of Earth,” and in doing so contributes to the development of the “living, breathing thing” that he views the internet to be.

Glover’s internet presence yet again lived in the shadows for most of 2016, and he broke the silence on June 17th when he tweeted a link to an app titled *Pharos*. The app initially was a distant view of the Earth with the perspective slowly getting closer as a number counted down to impact. Fans inevitably went straight to the internet to discuss what this could be, with one fan even deriving a quadratic graph to find what time the app would make impact. Upon impact, the app revealed that Childish Gambino will be performing his new album entirely in full at a special event in Joshua Tree, California on September 2nd 2016. Users who bought tickets to this event were treated with a “guidebook” that features a series of philosophical messages.⁴¹⁶

The modern world has the answers readily available for us at a moment’s notice. In a matter of decades, it’s become exponentially harder to reconcile our worldly knowledge with our acceptance of the unknown. Distracted by our day-to-day, questions we’ve all considered are still unanswerable: WHO ARE WE? WHERE ARE WE FROM? WHY ARE WE HERE?

⁴¹² ANDPOP, “A Deep Interview with Childish Gambino...Because the Internet” (Dec 5, 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzZ6CB6NPvo>.

⁴¹³ Time, “A Conversation with Childish Gambino: Nostalgia, Bitcoins and Advice from Tina Fey” (Dec 05 2013), <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/12/05/a-conversation-with-childish-gambino-nostalgia-bitcoins-and-advice-from-tina-fey/>.

⁴¹⁴ The Daily Beast, “‘Because the Internet’ Review: Childish Gambino Is Hip-Hop’s Perennial Outside” (Dec 20 2013), <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/12/10/because-the-internet-review-childish-gambino-is-hip-hop-s-perennial-outsider.html>.

⁴¹⁵ Time, “A Conversation with Childish Gambino: Nostalgia, Bitcoins and Advice from Tina Fey” (Dec 05 2013), <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/12/05/a-conversation-with-childish-gambino-nostalgia-bitcoins-and-advice-from-tina-fey/>.

⁴¹⁶ Pigeons and Planes, “Everything We Know About Childish Gambino’s Mysterious *Pharos* Album Event” (June 24 2016), <http://pigeonsandplanes.com/2016/06/childish-gambino-pharos-event-guidebook-info/>.

The messages continue, and Glover contextualizes these existential concerns within our internet-saturated world.

A unified human intention is now possible due to accelerants such as the internet. A recognition of “we cannot know everything” by every individual can be made. This large scale agreement cannot only allow for the beauty of our mystery to be celebrated, but for a universal belief system to be born. A rational, progressive, and spiritually fulfilling global pantheism can be reached without disregard for our process of change: evolution.

More messages explain to the user their conceptual role in the live performance with a specific “vibration code” and designated color frequency and wavelength of what colour clothing to wear to the show. There is also a set of rules for the user to follow on how to interact with other fans of similar vibrations and wavelengths. A high-rated comment on Reddit exclaims, “BINO IS CREATING A PHYSICAL REPLICA OF THE INTERNET.”⁴¹⁷ This again raises questions about the distinction between IRL and online life. The performance has yet to happen at the time of this writing, but considering how *Because the Internet* (2013) developed on the themes of *Camp* (2011) before it, one could speculate that this new album will build upon many of the ideas presented in this chapter. As Donald Glover’s understanding of the internet evolves and expands to cosmic heights, we will continue to learn more about the inevitable role that it plays in our culture.

⁴¹⁷ Reddit comment from outcold16,
https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/4pnnue/for_those_interested_in_what_the_app_takes_you/.

Chapter 5



“Rome wasn’t built in a day, and the internet is our new Rome.”

– Kanye West⁴¹⁸

* Image: Macintosh Plus’ album *Floral Shoppe* (2011), a founding text of the Vaporwave music genre.

⁴¹⁸ STASHED’s Youtube Channel, “theSTASHED.com Exclusive: Kanye West, Steve Stoute & Ben Horowitz Talk Tech at Cannes Lions” (Jun 23 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdSfnuEGHH4>.

5 Conclusion: Bricks of a New Rome

This epigraph was delivered by Kanye West as part of a panel on technological change at Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity in 2014. Fittingly, Donald Glover and Claire Boucher both explicitly reference Kanye West as a major influence on their artistic lives and works. It is worth questioning what West is insinuating here. To equate the internet with Rome suggests that it is a living, growing world with the potential to have irreversible political, technological and cultural effects on the history of human civilization. Like the term “the internet,” “Rome” is also multifarious and encompassing. “Rome” once represented a physical space, but it also became something beyond the Mediterranean as a global empire and now represents a historical era and ideal. Similarly, the term “the internet” no longer just represents a “series of tubes” but now describes something more complex. Both of these terms represent something real, a physical space and a technology, but grew beyond “real life” to signify something conceptually intangible. West’s quote may feel hyperbolic, but “Rome wasn’t built in a day” suggests we are in an early stage of the internet’s development and it is in our hands to “build” it. As the internet continues to prominently feature in many aspects our lives, it is important to consider how we discuss the world it encompasses. In concluding this thesis, I want to place my research in relation to broader questions about how we understand the cultural phenomenon of the internet.

Simon Frith writes, “in examining the aesthetics of popular music we need to reverse the usual academic argument: the question is not how a piece of music, a text, ‘reflects’ popular values, but how – in performance – it produces them.”⁴¹⁹ From this perspective, my research is not so much an attempt to describe the internet as it is a consideration of the digital circulation of popular music meanings that create and elucidate our understanding of the internet. Bridgette Wessels writes in *Understanding the Internet*, “To understand the ways in which the internet interacts with society involves considering the ways in which its characteristics are materializing into social and cultural

⁴¹⁹ Simon Frith, *Performing Rites* (Harvard University Press, 1996), 270.

forms.”⁴²⁰ The works of Grimes and Childish Gambino act as cultural texts that exemplify how they interpret the role of the internet in their lives. To build on this, Marshall McLuhan writes, “The artist is the person who invents the means to bridge biological inheritance and the environments created by technological innovation.”⁴²¹ By placing Grimes and Childish Gambino in McLuhan’s perspective, they can be understood as helping bridge the gap between how we understand our natural biological selves in relation to the technological environment of the internet. McLuhan also states, “The power of the arts to anticipate future social and technological developments, by a generation or more, has long been recognized. In this century Ezra Pound called the artist ‘the antennae of the race.’”⁴²² This can be related to Frith’s statement above because he finds that musical works create values for the future by building on the past and present. This could make it seem as if artists are “the antennae of the race” because they tend to produce the values that later become established and popular. In the context of McLuhan, these values are directly related to our understanding of technological development. If we think of Grimes and Childish Gambino’s interpretations of the internet’s growth in this way, it is then important to discuss what potential values and ideas about the internet this research may reveal.

One central question that is worth addressing is why these artists care so much about the internet. Other artists have had many positive benefits in their career from the internet but they are not as compelled to discuss it as a central aspect of their work. For instance, Drake got his big break as a rapper from his mixtape *Thank Me Later* (2009) blowing up online, but in 2015 proudly raps “Fuck goin’ online, that ain’t part of my day.”⁴²³ Boucher and Glover’s relationship with the internet is more nuanced and less binary than simply being online or off. They see it as a large, pervasive force in their artistic lives, and these discussions come through in their resistance to classification. In Eric Weisbard’s analysis of artists who resist mainstream radio formats, he concludes,

⁴²⁰ Wessels, 2.

⁴²¹ Marshall McLuhan, *Laws of Media: The New Science* (University of Toronto, 1988), 98.

⁴²² Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media Critical Edition* (Ginkgo Press, 2003), 16.

⁴²³ Drake, “Energy,” *If You’re Reading This, It’s Too Late* (2015), Cash Money Records.

“Every attempt to oppose a format mainstream, by renouncing capitalism or compromise, registers entitlement and privilege: middle-class, male, white, heterosexual, northern, hipster, genre, or some other form.”⁴²⁴ Weisbard suggests that white males typically held the privilege to resist radio formats, and while a case could be made that Boucher and Glover fit under some of these classifications, they are disqualified because of their gender and race respectively. It is worth questioning how Boucher and Glover were able to occupy “privileged” positions of resistance they formerly would not have held due to their gender and race. A potential reason for this could be that the internet provided these artists with the power and ability to resist the constraining power of classification and build their own unique careers. The internet acts as a liberating force, allowing Claire Boucher and Donald Glover to bypass stereotypical expectations of a woman and a black male in the music industry. The internet offers them the opportunity to openly resist classifications, which was a position previously afforded to white males. In a pre-internet world, it would have been significantly more difficult for either of these artists to reach the cultural positions they now hold. While Boucher and Glover are clearly still heavily subjected to gendered and racial classifications, they are able to actively resist falling into the roles that others enforce upon them. It is worth looking at how the kinds of internet-influenced cultural spaces that Boucher and Glover created for themselves are potentially providing avenues for future artists.

5.1 The Bricks of Grimes

As previously touched on, Boucher has experienced a lot of sexism in the music industry. She begins her blog post entitled “I don’t want to be infantilized because I refuse to be Sexualized”⁴²⁵ with “I don’t want to have to compromise my morals in order to make a living.” She later states, “I’m tired of men who aren’t professional or even accomplished musicians continually offering to ‘help me out’ (without being asked), as if i did this by accident and i’m gonna flounder without them. or as if the fact that I’m a

⁴²⁴ Eric Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy* (The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 20.

⁴²⁵ Huffington Post, “Sexism In Music Targeted By Female Singer Grimes In New Blog Post” (Apr 24 2013), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/24/sexism-in-music-singer-grimes_n_3146111.html.

woman makes me incapable of using technology. I have never seen this kind of thing happen to my male peers.” Boucher was able to bypass this abhorrent environment when she first began producing music with her MacBook laptop with a connection to the internet. She could potentially still have become a successful producer without these technologies, but the number of hurdles Boucher would have had to jump through in a pre-internet music industry may have surpassed the ones she is forced to already confront today. She once said in an interview with *SPIN* in regards to sexism, “The more I’ve had to work in this industry, the more I’ve been shocked at the way people behave.”⁴²⁶ She later divulges in the interview, “With the first incarnations of Grimes I would make stuff and there would be a guy who would be doing the instrumental stuff and after awhile I realized, I’m actually falling into this niche that feels like what I’m *supposed* to do as a female: ‘Just be a singer and have someone do the tech-y stuff.’ The fact that that’s my *default reaction* is absurd.” This illustrates that Boucher initially followed the dominant industry expectations of a female pop musician, but eventually realized the gendered subordination that comes with doing so and chose to actively resist it.

With the ability to produce and distribute music as Grimes in her own DIY studio (as she still does), Boucher bypassed many of the gatekeepers and their presumptive blatant misogyny to gain initial exposure. Boucher states in an interview with *Rolling Stone*, “I’ve been in numerous situations where male producers would literally be like, ‘We won’t finish the song unless you come back to my hotel room.’ If I was younger or in a more financially desperate situation, maybe I would have done that. I don’t think there are few female producers because women aren’t interested. It’s difficult for women to get in. It’s a pretty hostile environment.”⁴²⁷ Producing at home may then be more than just an aesthetic or economic choice. It provides a space where Boucher can work on her music without consistently being subjugated as she might be in recording studios. She

⁴²⁶ SPIN, “Grimes Comes Clean: Synth-Pop Provocateur on Her Big Year” (Dec 6 2012), <http://www.spin.com/2012/12/grimes-interview-2012-big-year/?page=0>.

⁴²⁷ Rolling Stone, “Grimes on ‘Art Angels’ Follow-Up, Why She Loves Tool” (Apr 12 2016), <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/grimes-on-art-angels-follow-up-why-she-loves-tool-20160412#ixzz46miHX9WB>.

mentions it is the hostility of such environments that contributes to the fact that there are fewer female producers, not because of a lack of interest by female artists. In another interview, she states, “Going into studios, there’s all these engineers there, and they don’t let you touch the equipment...I was like, ‘Well, can I just edit my vocals?’ And they’d be like ‘No, just tell us what to do, and we’ll do it.’ And then a male producer would come in, and he’d be allowed to do it. It was so sexist. I was, like, aghast. It made me really disillusioned with the music industry. It made me realize what I was doing is important.” She still clearly experiences sexism in the music industry, but the importance lies in how Boucher can now speak out against it as a result of the cultural position that she has built for herself. Reaching this position was arguably facilitated by Boucher’s liberating use of the internet to bypass pre-internet music industry ideological barriers. Boucher is able to use her cultural position to resist and reveal the sexism that permeates in the music industry rather than having to compromise her morals in order for her music to be heard. This may cause her to serve as an example for future female artists to follow.

One such example could be Lorde, the project of New Zealand singer-songwriter Ella O’Connor, who cites Grimes as her musical idol.⁴²⁸ Lorde’s music has been similarly praised for infusing various genres. Her single, “Royals” (2013), sold over 10 million copies worldwide and charted on nine different *Billboard* charts, including Rock, Dance, R&B/Hip-Hop and Top 40.⁴²⁹ She has earned two Grammy Awards,⁴³⁰ was named as one of *TIME*’s most influential teenagers in the world in 2013⁴³¹ and was included in *Forbes*’ “30 Under 30” list⁴³² the following year⁴³³. Lorde also resists a sexualized image and

⁴²⁸ StyleCaster, “Who is Lorde? 5 Things to Know About the Singer Behind the Hit, ‘Royals’” (2013), <http://stylecaster.com/lorde-singer-royals/>.

⁴²⁹ Billboard, “Lorde – Chart History” (Apr 2016), <http://www.billboard.com/artist/1553855/Lorde/chart?f=379>.

⁴³⁰ Grammy.com, “And The GRAMMY Went To...Lorde” (Jan 29 2014), <http://www.grammy.com/news/and-the-grammy-went-to-lorde>.

⁴³¹ TIME, “The 16 Most Influential Teens of 2013” (Nov 12 2013), <http://time100.time.com/2013/11/12/the-16-most-influential-teens-of-2013/>.

⁴³² Forbes, “30 Under 30: Bruno Mars And Music’s Brightest Young Stars” (Jan 6 2014), <http://www.forbes.com/sites/zackomalleygreenburg/2014/01/06/30-under-30-bruno-mars-and-musics-brightest-young-stars/#6787bce91504>.

works against mainstream pop star expectations; she turned down an opportunity to tour with mega pop star Katy Perry because it “didn’t feel right.”⁴³⁴ *Clash Music*’s review of her album *Pure Heroine* (2013) states, “[the album] has come at a time when we’re staring at Miley Cyrus and Rihanna, up at the cultural Frankenstein of our world stage and then at each other and thinking, ‘Is this a consequence of the culture and industry we’ve created around us? Is this what it takes to sell?’”⁴³⁵ Boucher arguably acts as a vanguard for forthcoming subversive female pop musicians like Lorde to follow. Born in 1996 (eight years after Boucher), Lorde has been recognized as a voice for an internet-bred generation. In the song “A World Alone” (2013), she croons “Maybe the internet raised us.”⁴³⁶ Whereas Boucher recognizes what a world before the internet was like, artists like Lorde are coming from a world where the internet has always existed. It is also a world that is better understood because artists like Boucher have produced ways in which to understand it. As Grimes, Boucher arguably used the internet as a means to help break into a male-dominated sexist industry and provide a path for others like Lorde to follow.

5.2 The Bricks of Childish Gambino

For Donald Glover, the internet acts as a similar liberating force in regards to being a black male in the music industry. As I extensively discussed in Chapter 4.1, Childish Gambino’s album, *Camp* (2011), explicitly deals with Glover’s complicated relationship to racial classification and its ensuing expectations. He resists compromising his integrity in order to fit into stereotypical hip-hop roles. Instead, Glover raps about his

⁴³³ Forbes, “30 Under 30: Bruno Mars And Music’s Brightest Young Stars” (Jan 6 2014), <http://www.forbes.com/sites/zackomalleygreenburg/2014/01/06/30-under-30-bruno-mars-and-musics-brightest-young-stars/#6787bce91504>.

⁴³⁴ TIME, “The 16 Most Influential Teens of 2013” (Nov 12 2013), <http://time100.time.com/2013/11/12/the-16-most-influential-teens-of-2013/>.

⁴³⁵ Clash Music, “Lorde – Pure Heroine” (Nov 10 2013), <http://www.clashmusic.com/reviews/lorde-pure-heroine>.

⁴³⁶ Lorde, “A World Alone,” *Pure Heroine* (2013), Universal Music Group.

unique path as an artist and feels he is either seen as too black to be white or too white to be black. His ability to rise to cultural prominence without conforming to stereotypical hip-hop narratives was facilitated by the internet. Starting with his humble beginnings in Derrick Comedy's YouTube videos, over time Glover built a dedicated online fanbase of individuals who connected with his ideas. So much, in fact, that they spent large amounts of time discussing and experiencing *Because the Internet* (2013), a text that requires active engagement. Glover's fans are not just passive consumers of his works, but avid devotees who passionately connect with what Glover stands for as an artist and play a crucial role in the execution of his conceptual ideas.

One of these fans is Kevin Abstract, a rising independent hip-hop artist from The Woodlands, Texas. Born the same year as Lorde, Abstract follows the cultural path laid out by Donald Glover as an unconventional black male artist. He once tweeted, "s/o donald glover for making things easier for kids like me."⁴³⁷ *Pigeons and Planes* asked Abstract to elaborate on this tweet, which led to an article he wrote for the website unpacking this statement. Abstract first discusses his experience of attending one of Glover's impromptu public listening sessions for *Because the Internet* in Atlanta. His prose recreates the experience of waiting for Glover to appear in person, while acknowledging the complex mixing and meeting of real and virtual spaces this involves: "This is Atlanta. No, this is the internet. No, this is behind the internet...The Deep Web is here. Waiting. These are the kids that had no voice – not before, not on this scale. Waiting. Waiting for it to speak."⁴³⁸ The "it" here is referring to Glover's cultural voice. Abstract frames it in such a way that kids who previously felt voiceless now have someone to speak for them. Abstract later elaborates on the experience of listening to Childish Gambino:

⁴³⁷ Kevin the Abstract (@kevinabstract), Twitter, (Sep 14 2014)., <https://twitter.com/kevinabstract/status/511217650362351616>.

⁴³⁸ Kevin Abstract, *Pigeons and Planes*, "How Childish Gambino Made Things Easier For Kids Like Me" (Nov 11 2014), <http://pigeonsandplanes.com/2014/11/how-childish-gambino-made-things-easier-for-kids-like-me/>.

When that black kid is walking around his all-black high school, listening to the album, it's not just an album, it's something he can connect to. Another soul he can relate to. Someone who talks about the same shit he sees, feels, and hears every day in the streets and hallways. Living on the outskirts of Atlanta. Too black for the whites and too white for the blacks.

Abstract then lists examples of other outsider personalities like, “the boy from Nowhere, Texas who doesn’t have any friends but spends all day on Twitter to pass the lonely time... [who] can’t help but notice this guy (Donald Glover) who acts like him and thinks like him, and talks about the shit he sees on the internet and makes it real.” This statement suggests that Glover makes the experience of the internet “real” for his fans. He is arguably providing a voice that produces the ways in which his fans are able to interpret, understand, and speak of their relationship to the internet. Abstract goes on to discuss the influence Glover had on his self-released free album *MTV1987* (2015).

At 17 years old I wrote an album. I wrote an album about depression, love, memories, and a lot of other dreamy teenage bullshit. I didn’t write an album about the internet. I created something that was a product of it. The thing that was special about the album, however, wasn’t [sic] the album. It was the way we released the music that made the album something fresh...with a lot of help from my friends...we used the internet as a medium. Our artwork, our videos were all based on the concept of the audience seeing what I see when I’m most vulnerable, when I turn on my macbook. People can read the textedit diary entries I posted on Instagram and look directly into my life, into my screen, same thing.

Abstract clearly states here that *MTV1987* is not “about” the internet but a “product of” the internet. A reviewer similarly writes, “*MTV1987* is less *about* technology as it is the *result* of technology.”⁴³⁹ This arguably positions Abstract’s album as succeeding Glover’s *Because the Internet* (2013). Abstract also sees no difference between his “life” and a “screen.” He treats his social media profiles and online ephemera as a window into his life and builds the concept of *MTV1987* by using the internet in a variety of ways. For instance, posting screenshots of confessional messages on Twitter⁴⁴⁰ strikingly similar to Glover’s techniques as laid out in Chapter 4. Abstract also positions the “album” as piece

⁴³⁹ Sunset in the Rearview, “Stream and Download Kevin Abstract’s Extraordinary Album ‘MTV1987’” (Jul 15 2014), <http://sunsetintherearview.com/download-mixtape-kevin-abstract-mtv1987/>.

⁴⁴⁰ Kevin the Abstract (@kevinabstract), Twitter, (Jul 14 2014). <https://twitter.com/kevinabstract/status/500825773520203778?lang=en>.

of a larger conceptual idea that takes place online, just like *Because the Internet*. *MTV1987* was critically well received⁴⁴¹ and featured on *SPIN*'s list of best hip-hop albums of 2014.⁴⁴² Abstract claims that *MTV1987* is “for all of the self-conscious kids who would rather be in their bedroom pretending to be someone else online than going to a high school party and attempting to socialize.”⁴⁴³ He then confesses, “The internet is dark but i feel safe here.” A reviewer notes, “*MTV1987* is an impossibly honest portrait of someone still unsure about whether the internet is bringing him closer to, or further from, ultimate sadness.”⁴⁴⁴ Another writes, “Kevin Abstract as we know him is an Internet Child, a conflicted, complicated offspring of two worlds—one physical, the other online—competing for importance.”⁴⁴⁵ Deeming Abstract an “Internet Child” is similar to the aforementioned Lorde lyric, “Maybe the internet raised us.” This then positions Kevin Abstract and Lorde as being bred in a world where the internet is already culturally dominant and they know nothing else. They thus succeed Boucher and Glover, who lived through the internet’s growth as it took place.

Kevin Abstract concludes his article by touching on how Glover helped pave the way for artists like him.

I wouldn’t have been able to release [*MTV1989*] if the black dude who kinda looked like me didn’t share his stories and ideas and take on the world with the world. With the rap world. He’s brave. He’s brave enough to say, “Hey I Like this. I look like this. I talk like this. I made this. Do you like it?” Kanye gave people careers off of a sound he made with an album. He kicked down doors and made it possible for guys like Cudi and Gambino to work. Gambino is doing the same for kids like me—kids who are in their bedroom, spending hours trying to create something that’s bigger than the music. Bigger than uploading a song on

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² SPIN, “40 Best Hip-Hop Albums 2014” (Dec 4 2014), http://www.spin.com/2014/12/40-best-hip-hop-albums-2014/kevin-abstract-mtv1987_1/.

⁴⁴³ Billboard, “Kevin Abstract, ‘MTV1987’: Exclusive Album Stream” (Jul 15 2014), <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/the-juice/6157633/kevin-abstract-mtv1987-exclusive-album-stream>.

⁴⁴⁴ Verse, “Album Review Kevin Abstract *MTV1987*” (Aug 6 2014), <http://verse.nofillers.com/album-review-kevin-abstract-mtv1987/>.

⁴⁴⁵ Potholes In My Blog, “Kevin Abstract – *MTV1987*” (Jul 21 2014), <http://potholesinmyblog.com/kevin-abstract-mtv1987/>.

SoundCloud. It's bigger than themselves. Gambino has created a world and all of his fans have gotten lost in it. They want to know what comes next. Where does the story go? That inspires the fuck out of me. That's what I'm doing with my art, and that's how Childish Gambino made things easier for kids like me. He made it clear.

Abstract is explicitly claiming that *MTV1989* was created out of the cultural space that Glover built for artists like him. Abstract recognizes that without Childish Gambino, Kevin Abstract and *MTV1989* would arguably not exist. When Glover made *Because the Internet*, he produced perspectives about the internet that helped others better understand it. This could be the "clarity" that Abstract mentions here. When Abstract is asked by an interviewer, "How much of an understanding do your parents have about what you do?"⁴⁴⁶ He responds, "My dad gets the internet a bit more than my mom. They both know what's up for the most part though." Abstract is asked if his parents understand what he "does," addressing the basis of his work as an artist. In response, Abstract does not mention anything about being a rapper, songwriter, or hip-hop artist. Instead, he responds by addressing how his parents understand the internet. This response suggests that Kevin Abstract positions his relationship to the internet as arguably the most integral component of his life as an artist, perhaps more important than his generic affiliation to hip-hop or even popular music. Abstract once tweeted the message, "i miss you a lot this album changed my life omg" along with an image of the album cover for *Because the Internet*. Abstract seems to be continuing on the path that Glover created. He provided a means for Abstract to better understand his relationship to the internet, which is a crucial part of his work. Glover also provided the means for a black, internet-bred artist to find his own voice by listening to him. Kevin Abstract exists in a cultural space as a black male artist that Donald Glover helped create. Considering that Abstract's relationship with the internet is even further embedded in his life than Glover's, he may also be producing new ways in which we can better understand this relationship.

⁴⁴⁶ Wonderland Magazine, "New Noise: Kevin Abstract" (Jul 16 2014), <http://www.wonderlandmagazine.com/2014/07/new-noise-kevin-abstract/>.

5.3 Further Research

Another new artist that is inciting interesting discussions about the internet is “bubblegum trap” rapper Lil Yachty, who is one year younger than Lorde and Kevin Abstract. Lil Yachty claims that he felt inspired to make music after the success of OG Maco’s “U Gessed It,” a song that reached success as a meme on Vine. He also cites Soulja Boy as a major influence. In *Pitchfork*’s “The Influencer: A Decade of Soulja Boy,” the article chronicles how Soulja Boy’s early usage of the internet in 2005 influenced future artists. Pitchfork writes, “Soulja’s meteoric rise, from a bored teen in Batesville, Mississippi to the most relevant rapper alive, represented not just the first wholly Internet-bred megastar, but the first time the transition from nobody to hip-hop star was publicly documented every step of the way.”⁴⁴⁷ When prodded about Soulja Boy’s influence on him, Lil Yachty states, “The way he came up, it was a whole new wave...the whole way he took over the internet. I follow kind of in his footsteps.”⁴⁴⁸ When Lil Yachty blew up online after his song “1Night” was featured in a YouTube comedy sketch, publications quickly discussed his work as coming from the same internet-bred place as Lorde and Kevin Abstract. *Pitchfork* opens their review of his mixtape *Lil Boat* (2016) with, “Atlanta’s Lil Yachty is a pure creation of the internet.”⁴⁴⁹ Another article from *Noisey* describes him to be “sailing the rap internet’s uncharted waters,” and that he “is making music that feels native to the internet.” *Noisey* also describes Lil Yachty as “post-regional,” and *Pitchfork* succinctly states, “[Lil Yachty] inhabits a post-regionalist rap universe, a space defined by digital platforms rather than geography.” This relates back to rapper Danny Brown’s quote in Chapter 1 when he states, “I’m not from Detroit, I’m from the internet.” This also relates to Kevin Abstract’s quote above, “This is Atlanta. No, this is the internet.” These statements show the complexity of intertwined real and virtual spaces where the line between IRL and the

⁴⁴⁷ Pitchfork, “The Influencer: A Decade of Soulja Boy” (Jul 9 2015), <http://pitchfork.com/features/article/9682-the-influencer-a-decade-of-soulja-boy/>.

⁴⁴⁸ HOT 97 YouTube channel, “Lil Yachty Talks Why He Doesn’t Consider Himself a Rapper & Worst Social Comments He Gets” (Jun 9 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyqcrHW-CuU>.

⁴⁴⁹ Pitchfork, “Lil Yachty *Lil Boat*” (Mar 17 2016), <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/21736-lil-boat/>.

internet is unclear. The implications of this mindset are now being further embodied by artists like Lil Yachty. An article from *MTV* discusses what it calls “the post-internet world” of Lil Yachty. This instance shows “post-internet,” a term I covered extensively in Chapter 3, being adopted and normalized to describe and classify Lil Yachty’s cultural place. His music sounds little like Grimes, but it carries a similar approach in that Lil Yachty’s music is inseparable from the internet. Boucher arguably provided the language, “post-internet,” in order to describe a cultural phenomenon that artists like Lil Yachty now fulfill. If Lorde, Kevin Abstract, and Lil Yachty are any indication of the direction new popular music artists are going, the internet will increasingly continue to feature as an integral component.

There are significantly more cultural texts and media ephemera worth studying in order to better understand what popular music can tell us about the phenomenon of internet. In particular, the work of academic and music producer Holly Herndon is worth exploring.⁴⁵⁰ She describes her music to be an attempt at capturing the sounds of the present moment. For instance, in the song “Chorus” (2015), she samples the sounds of Skype conversations and internet browsing to create the song. Her most recent album, *Platform* (2015), is an experimental electronic album in which “she attempts to use electronic music to ask deeper questions about politics, community, and communication.”⁴⁵¹ Herndon questions the internet from a political angle, and her “[live] performance techniques go beyond a deconstruction of the boundaries between audience and performer, acting as a sometimes uncomfortable lens, laying bare to the audience how personal our engagement with technology has become.” For example, at one show she installed surveillance cameras and when audience members would go on their phones, the camera would zoom in on them and project the image on stage. She also teaches a course on electronic music at Stanford and is currently building a crowd-sourced database with musician Jennifer Walshe that catalogs “sound work that explicitly

⁴⁵⁰ I initially proposed to write a chapter on Holly Herndon, but I had to scrap it due to it being outside the scope of this master’s thesis.

⁴⁵¹ Pitchfork, “Fix the Future: Holly Herndon’s Collective Vision” (Mar 31 2015), <http://pitchfork.com/features/update/9619-fix-the-future-holly-herndons-collective-vision/>.

engages with the internet.”⁴⁵² This database is titled “Post-Internet Sound” and has the objective to create an “archive of sound and music works dealing with the internet since its inception.”⁴⁵³ This instance again shows “post-internet” being utilized in cultural discourse.

Chapter 3 provided an example of the internet infiltrating music genre discourse with Grimes and “post-internet,” but there is much more to be studied about the relationship between music genre and the internet. Specifically, the online music genre Vaporwave is ripe for further research in this area.⁴⁵⁴ Vaporwave emerged on internet communities in the early 2010s and “distinctively has no set location as to where it originated, as it started online, making it the first genre of music to be completely globalized.”⁴⁵⁵ Similar to how artists like Lil Yachty are coming from a post-regional space, Vaporwave can be understood as a post-regional genre that emerged from no physical geographical space. Vaporwave works carry a distinct visual and musical aesthetic that nostalgically re-appropriates cultural artifacts from the late 80s and early 90s in the new context of the internet (it sounds like elevator music meant to accompany the act of browsing the internet). The movement also fittingly appropriates Greco-Roman imagery, as seen in the intro image to this chapter of Macintosh Plus’ album *Floral Shoppe* (2011). Below are some examples of user-made Vaporwave art taken from the Facebook group “Vaporwave dreams in your brain.”

⁴⁵² Holly Herndon’s Twitter Profile (@hollyherndon), Twitter post (Nov 30 2015), <https://twitter.com/hollyherndon/status/671287951163265024>.

⁴⁵³ Holly Herndon and Jennifer Walshe, “Post-Internet Sound: Introduction” (2016), https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1uU-wLYoIjNwAjvO9XcBjsBPgpx2CcNfhGzzviUUf3_k/viewform?fbzx=4384042421455968562.

⁴⁵⁴ The YouTube video “Vapourwave: A Brief History” (next footnote) acts as a perfectly place to start.

⁴⁵⁵ wos X’s YouTube Channel, “Vapourwave: A Brief History” (Jun 10 2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdpP0mXOIWM>.



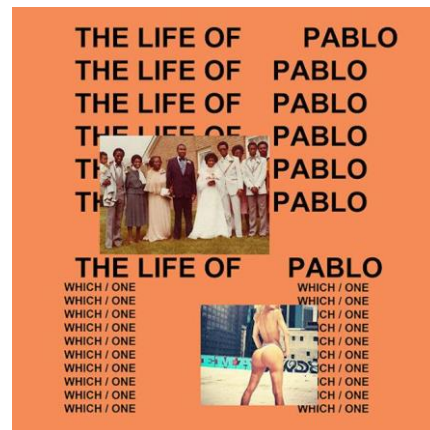
One of the most popular Vaporwave songs, Macintosh Plus' “リサフランク420 / 現代のコンピュー,” is a slowed down chopped-and-screwed Diana Ross sample repackaged under foreign lettering. Vaporwave may be understood as “a joke on music itself... [literally] a glorification of stealing other people's art, and marketing it under something else with foreign languages.”⁴⁵⁶ Vaporwave is also frequently produced on cassette tape, and there are a number of Vaporwave-specific cassette labels that distribute and exist entirely online. The movement critiques and satirizes aspects of consumer culture and capitalism, with the origin of its name tied to a passage from Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*. Marx states, “all that is solid melts into air,” referring to the constant change society is subjected to under bourgeois capitalism.⁴⁵⁷ “Vaporwave” critiques this idea while simultaneously enacting it. Vaporwave has even been described as “post-music,” a term which is even more confounding than “post-internet.” Mainstream artist Drake has appropriated elements of Vaporwave in the music video for “Hotline Bling” (2015) and in the production of the song “Feel No Ways” from his album *Views* (2016). There is much more to be said about Vaporwave and what it can tell us about music genre, the internet, and cultural movements online.

In Chapter 4, I detailed the extensive rollout of the “conceptual world” that Donald Glover created for Childish Gambino's *Because the Internet* (2013). This is one instance of the internet being used in an innovative way to release an album, but there are many more worth investigating. Three days after the official release of *Because the Internet*, Beyoncé released her self-titled album *Beyoncé* (2013) online with no prior promotion or announcement. This “surprise drop” strategy has since been emulated by other major acts like Drake, Rihanna, and Kendrick Lamar and is becoming a more common occurrence. Kanye West has also utilized the internet in interesting ways in the release of his albums, specifically *The Life of Pablo* (2016). In the weeks preceding West's *Yeezy Season 3* fashion show at Madison Square Garden, he tweeted that he

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid

⁴⁵⁷ DUMMY Magazine, “Comment: Vaporwave and the pop-art of the virtual plaza” (Dec 7 2012), <http://www.dummymag.com/features/adam-harper-vaporwave>.

would be playing his new album at the event and would stream the performance in movie theaters around the world. He catalogued the process of finishing the album through Twitter, posting images of shifting track lists and changing the album's title multiple times. On the day of the event, West appeared at Madison Square Garden and plugged his MacBook laptop into an aux cord to play the album for millions of onlookers, visually reminding us of the laptop's status in both the production and consumption of music today. He streamed the album online a few days later, and in the months afterwards continually tweaked and changed songs on the album. Critical reviews of *The Life of Pablo* that were written immediately after its release addressed a different version of the album than was later available. West chose not to make a physical release of *The Life of Pablo* and instead only stream it online. West tweeted “uuuuuum, so there it is... No more CDs from me.” In reference to his previous album *Yeezus* (2013), he tweets, “the Yeezus album packaging was an open casket to CDs r.i.p.”⁴⁵⁸ This is fitting, considering the album art for *Yeezus* is that it has none (save for a red sticker) and simply exposes the physical CD format.



Images of Kanye West's *Yeezus* (2013) and *The Life of Pablo* (2016).

The Life of Pablo became the first *Billboard* #1 album to be available exclusively through streaming with no physical release, which could become a more common trend for major

⁴⁵⁸ Kanye West (@kanyewest), Twitter (Mar 7 2016), <https://twitter.com/kanyewest/status/706895554471657472>.

artists. Even *Because the Internet* had a physical (both CD and vinyl) release. There is much more to discuss with *The Life of Pablo* and what it tells us about the shifting nature of the album format and how artists are experimentally releasing their albums on the internet. In the promotion of Radiohead's *Moon Shaped Pool* (2016), they mysteriously deleted all of the content on their social media profiles and pages are left completely blank⁴⁵⁹ (even profile images are just white). This strategy parallels Donald Glover's own "virtual identity suicide" that commenced the release of *Because the Internet*. This is yet another instance of popular music artists using the internet in experimental ways to release their works.

These are but a handful of examples that are worth further examination in order to better understand the relationship between popular music and the internet and how artists are contributing some of the ways in which we discuss and understand the internet. There are many other elements worth looking into as well, for instance record contractual law in the context of the internet as discussed by Grant Hawkins⁴⁶⁰. There are inevitably many more examples, and the future will continue to provide more.

5.4 Conclusion: A Modest Foundation

This thesis began by questioning the relationship between popular music and the internet, and what this relationship can potentially tell us about how we understand and discuss the phenomenon of the internet. In Chapter 1, I looked at the multifarious term, "the internet," and built upon Sociologist Anette Markham's framework of studying the internet as a *tool*, *place*, and *way of being* in the context of popular music. In Chapter 2, I looked at the historically inseparable relationship between popular music and technology and how the internet is simply the newest technology to continue this relationship. I looked at popular music about technology and the internet and placed my subjects Grimes and Childish Gambino within a tradition of popular music that critically engages

⁴⁵⁹ Pitchfork, "Radiohead Erase Internet Presence" (May 1 2016), <http://pitchfork.com/news/65175-radiohead-erase-internet-presence/>.

⁴⁶⁰ Grant M. Hawkins, "'Whatever I Want (Fuck Who's Watching):' Death Grips, Disobedience and the Music Industries" (2016). Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository. Paper 3549. <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/3549>

with technological change. In Chapter 3, I performed an extensive analysis of the term “post-internet” and how the internet infiltrated music genre discourse in discussions of Grimes. I studied how critics label and classify Grimes, and talked about Claire Boucher’s consistent resistance to classification. I also studied the term “post-internet” more intently in an attempt to get at the root of what the term means. In Chapter 4, I looked at Childish Gambino’s *Because the Internet* (2013) and Donald Glover’s strong relationship to the internet that informed this work. I discussed how his use of the internet led to a unique career path that resists traditional hip-hop narratives and how this perspective plays into the themes, creation, and execution of *Because the Internet*. I then concluded in Chapter 5 by addressing the implications of how Grimes and Childish Gambino are helping produce ways in which future artists may be able to understand and navigate their own careers in the context of the internet.

What this research provides is an understanding of some of the ways studying popular music can help us recognize how the phenomenon of the internet is being culturally understood, discussed, and expressed. Because popular music is so intrinsically tied to technology, and consequently the internet, studying popular music acts as an effective way to understand the cultural role of the internet. What studying Grimes and Childish Gambino provides is a glimpse at a particular cultural moment detailing the shift from pre-internet to post-internet popular music culture. Because Boucher and Glover can remember a life before the internet’s cultural dominance, they are able to recognize how this growth influenced their lives as artists. They were able to use the internet in liberating ways, and in turn produce new cultural spaces for others to follow. Such artists include Lorde, Kevin Abstract, and Lil Yachty, who simply know no world before the internet. Boucher and Glover discuss the act of “growing up” alongside the internet, whereas these new artists were “bred” and “raised” by it. As more internet-bred artists like these begin making music, they will have less of an understanding of what it meant to live before the internet. The line between real and virtual may also become further blurred. This has more than just cultural implications in music. For instance, in a recent case of people using Craigslist to solicit sex, a lawyer concluded, “It’s only an offence if

the communication takes place in a public place... Whatever else – the Internet, Facebook or Craigslist – they’re not places.”⁴⁶¹ If the distinction between “real life” and the internet continues to dissolve, new rules and interpretations will continually need to be created in order to keep up.

While the internet can be understood as a technological development alongside radio, telephone, and television, perhaps it is worth understanding from alternate perspectives. One perspective is that the internet can be better metaphorically understood in the same vein of electricity. While the internet is a new delivery system of content like previous media technologies, it also creates an entirely new framework for ideas and innovations to develop and build. As we have seen here, it provides a global cultural environment for people to take part in. Like electricity, the presence of the internet may also soon be “invisible” in the context of modern life due to its integrality. Pew Research Center speculates this will happen by the year 2025.⁴⁶² Another perspective is to metaphorically understand the internet as being similar to the development of agriculture. The development of agriculture completely shaped civilization and the modern world, providing the societal means for innovations like electricity and the internet to be created. One could speculate that in the first couple decades of primitive farms, dwellers may have recognized agriculture’s importance but could never fathom the world we live in today. With the internet, we are presently like these early farm dwellers. Given what has been discussed throughout this thesis, the internet is clearly having considerable cultural consequences, and this only seems to be the beginning. The internet’s effects on the way we live have already been insurmountable in its short lifespan, and this thesis engages with how popular music artists understand and interpret the internet in relation to themselves and their works. It may be easy to dismissively say, “They are just musicians, what does it matter?” but considering the intrinsic link between popular music and the

⁴⁶¹ Yahoo! News, “Craigslist ads offer free rent for sex in Canadian cities and they appear to be legal” (Apr 29 2016), <https://ca.news.yahoo.com/blogs/dailybrew/craigslist-ads-offer-free-rent-for-sex-in-canadian-192704487.html>.

⁴⁶² Pew Research Center, “Digital Life in 2025” (Mar 11 2014), <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/03/11/digital-life-in-2025/>.

internet, these artists act as leading examples of how to discuss and understand the world in which we currently live.

Boucher and Glover's viewpoints are important because they offer crucial looks at what it means to live with the internet while still remembering what it felt like to live without it. As the culture of popular music becomes further embedded online, the perspectives offered by Boucher and Glover provide important viewpoints to help recognize how this cultural shift was interpreted and discussed as it took place. This feeling may soon be lost by future generations, and Boucher and Glover have produced ways to help future generations better understand the role of the internet in their own lives. As the "new Rome" of the internet continues to be built, the perspectives offered by studying the works of Grimes and Childish Gambino act as part of a modest foundation for this new world as it begins to take shape. In order to better understand this world as it unfolds, more research on the cultural role of the internet is necessary. As argued here, studying popular music acts as a preeminent way in which to undertake this.

Bibliography

Books, Journal Articles and Music Works

- Barthes, Roland. "The Grain of the Voice," *Image – Music – Text*. Fontana Press, 1977.
- Bolter and Grusin. *Remediation*. The MIT Press, 1999.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Bridgette Wessels, *Understanding the Internet: A Socio-Cultural Perspective*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Britney Spears, "E-Mail My Heart" (1999), ...*Baby One More Time*, JIVE.
- Byrne, David. *How Music Works*. McSweeney's, 2012.
- Carr, Nicholas. *The Shallows: What the internet is Doing to Our Brains*. New York: Norton, 2011.
- Childish Gambino, *I Am Just A Rapper* (2010), Self-released.
- Childish Gambino. *Camp* (2011). Glassnote Records.
- Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. TarcherPerigee, 2005.
- Diane Holloway, *American History in Song: Lyrics from 1900 to 1945* (iUniverse, 2001), 9.
- Dinah Elizabeth Holtzman, "Hysteria and the Multimedia Art of Lady Gaga and James Franco," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 48: p 18.
- Drake, "Energy," *If You're Reading This, It's Too Late* (2015), Cash Money Records.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York, Avenel, NJ: Gramercy Books, 1994.
- Eisenberg, Evan. *The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa*. London: Pan Books, 1988.
- Forman, Murray. *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop*. Wesleyan: 2002.
- Frith, Simon. "Performing Rites, Revisited," *IASPM Keynote Presentation*, Gijon, Spain, June 24, 2013.
- Frith, Simon. *Performing Rites*. Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Green, Lucy. *Music on Deaf Ears*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988.
- Greenfield, Susan. *Mind Change: How Digital Technologies are Leaving their Mark on Our Brains*. New York: Random House, 2015.
- Gunn, Joshua. "Gothic Music and the Inevitability of Genre." *Popular Music and Society* 23.1 (Spring 1999).

- Hawkins, Grant M. "'Whatever I Want (Fuck Who's Watching):' Death Grips, Disobedience and the Music Industries" (2016). Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository. Paper 3549. <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/3549>
- Hebdige, Dick. "Staking out the Posts." *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things*. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Hesmondhalgh, David. "Post-Punk's Attempt to Democratize the Music Industry: The Success and Failure of Rough Trade," *Popular Music Vol. 16 No. 3* (Oct., 1997).
- Holt, Fabian. *Genre in Popular Music*. The University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Howard and Emerson, "Hello Ma Baby" (1899).
- Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University, 2006.
- Jennings, David. *Net, Blogs, and Rock 'n' Roll*. Nicholas Bradley Publishing, 2007.
- Jones, Steve. "Music and the internet," *Popular Music Vol. 19* (2000).
- Jones, Steve. *Rock Formation: Music, Technology, and Mass Communication*. SAGE Publications: 1992.
- Katz, Mark. *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*. University of California Press, 2010.
- Keightley, Keir. "Reconsidering Rock," *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Lorde, "A World Alone," *Pure Heroine* (2013), Universal Music Group.
- Lukacs, John. *At the End of an Age*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2002.
- Markham, Annette N. "The Internet as a Research Context," *Qualitative Research Practice* (2004).
- McLuhan with Fiore. *The Medium is the Message*. Bantam Books, 1967.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Laws of Media: The New Science*. University of Toronto, 1988.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media Critical Edition*. Gingko Press, 2003.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*. McGraw-Hill, 1965.
- Olson, Marisa. "POSTINTERNET: art after the internet." *Foam magazine*, Winter 2011/2012, 60.
- Peterson and Ryan, "The Disembodied Muse: Music in the internet Age," *Society Online: The internet in Context*. SAGE Publications, 2004.
- Small and Vorgan. *iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind*. New York: Collins, 2008).
- Théberge, Paul. 'Plugged in': technology and popular music," *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Thoreau, Henry David. *Selections from Walden*. Crown Publishers, 1973.

- Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together*. Basic Books, 2011.
- Turner, Bryan S. "Periodization and Politics in the Postmodern." *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity*. London: Sage Publications, 1990.
- Warner, Timothy. *Pop Music - Technology and Creativity*. Ashgate Pub Ltd, 2003.
- Weisbard, Eric. *Top 40 Democracy*. The University of Chicago Press, 2014.
- Weizenbaum, Joseph. *Computer Power and Human Reason*. New York: Freeman, 1976.
- Wilkey, Jay. "'Marshall McLuhan and Meaning in Music.'" *Music Educators Journal* 56.1, 1969: p. 54-58.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford; 1977.

Online Sources

- "Hypnagogic," *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, 2001. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hypnagogic>.
- Access Hollywood, "Aziz Ansari & Donald Glover To Be Honored In Montreal" (Jun 23 2010), <http://www.accesshollywood.com/articles/aziz-ansari-donald-glover-to-be-honored-in-montreal-87055/>.
- Alterntative Music, "Grimes Visions - Album Review", <http://www.populararticles.xyz/Article/entertainment/AlternativeMusic/201510/8807.html>.
- Amoeba Music's YouTube Channel, "Grimes – What's In My Bag?" (Jun 11 2012), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahnUH7wnW30>.
- ANDPOP, "A Deep Interview with Childish Gambino...Because the Internet" (Dec 5, 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzZ6CB6NPvo>.
- Art F City, "Finally, a Semi-Definitive Definition of Post-Internet Art" (Oct 14 2014), <http://artfcity.com/2014/10/14/finally-a-semi-definitive-definition-of-post-internet-art/>.
- Art in America, "THE PERILS OF POST-INTERNET ART" (Nov 30 2014), <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/the-perils-of-post-internet-art/>.
- Artspace, "What is Post-Internet Art? Understanding the Revolutionary New Art Movement" (Mar 18 2014), http://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/trend_report/post_internet_art-52138.
- Austin Chronicle, "Surrealist Yuppie, Grimes" (Oct 4 2012), <http://www.austinchronicle.com/daily/music/2012-10-04/surrealist-yuppie-grimes/>.
- Bandcamp, http://bandcamp.com/tag/post-internet?page=7&sort_field=pop
- BBC Newsnight, YouTube, "David Bowie speaks to Jeremy Paxman on BBC Newsnight (1999)" (Jan 11 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiK7s_0tGsg.

Billboard, “Kevin Abstract, ‘MTV1987’: Exclusive Album Stream” (Jul 15 2014), <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/the-juice/6157633/kevin-abstract-mtv1987-exclusive-album-stream>.

Billboard, “Lorde – Chart History” (Apr 2016), <http://www.billboard.com/artist/1553855/Lorde/chart?f=379>.

Black Tar Music, “Grimes - Visions // Review” (March 20 2012), <https://blacktarmusic.wordpress.com/2012/03/20/grimes-visionsreview/>.

Christy and Paul, “A Nihilist Response to Donald Glover’s Worry Journal” (Oct 15 2013), <https://christypaul2013.wordpress.com/2013/10/15/a-nihilist-response-to-donald-glovers-worry-journal/>.

Clash Music, “Lorde – Pure Heroine” (Nov 10 2013), <http://www.clashmusic.com/reviews/lorde-pure-heroine>.

CLASH Music, “Visions-Grimes” (Dec 03 2012), <http://www.clashmusic.com/feature/visions-grimes>.

Cokemachineglow.com, “Grimes - Halfaxa review” (November 1 2010), cokemachineglow.com/records/grimes-halfaxa-2010/.

Complex, “Childish Gambino’s ‘Because the Internet’ Artwork Jumps Out at You, Literally” (Nov 7 2013), <http://www.complex.com/music/2013/11/childish-gambino-because-the-internet-artwork>.

Complex, “Cover Story Uncut: Childish Gambino Talks About The internet” (Jan 14 2014), <http://www.complex.com/music/2014/01/childish-gambino-uncut-interview>.

Complex, “In Case ‘Because the Internet’ Didn’t Make Sense, Childish Gambino Wrote A 75-Page Screenplay To Go With It” (Dec 6 2013), <http://ca.complex.com/music/2013/12/childish-gambino-because-the-internet-screenplay>.

Complex, “Watch Donald Glover’s Short Film ‘Clapping For The Wrong Reasons’” (Aug 15 2013), <http://www.complex.com/music/2013/08/donald-glover-short-film>.

Consequence of Sound, “Grimes - Geidi Primes” (Aug 15 2011), <http://consequenceofsound.net/2011/08/album-review-grimes-geidi-primes/>.

Consequence of Sound, “Grimes - Visions” (Feb 17 2012), <http://consequenceofsound.net/2012/02/album-review-grimes-visions/>.

Dallas Observer, “Grimes is Very Comfortable Being a Cyborg” (Feb 29 2012), <http://www.dallasobserver.com/music/grimes-is-very-comfortable-being-a-cyborg-thanks-7072899>.

Dallas Observer, “Grimes is Very Comfortable Being a Cyborg” (Feb 29 2012), <http://www.dallasobserver.com/music/grimes-is-very-comfortable-being-a-cyborg-thanks-7072899>.

Dallas Observer, “Grimes is Very Comfortable Being a Cyborg” (Feb 29 2012), <http://www.dallasobserver.com/music/grimes-is-very-comfortable-being-a-cyborg-thanks-7072899>.

- Dazed and Confused, “chance the rapper’s acid reign” (Aug 2013),
<http://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/16753/1/chance-the-rappers-acid-reign>.
- DIY Magazine, “Grimes - Visions” (March 12 2012), <http://diymag.com/archive/grimes-visions/>.
- Donald Glover, “clapping for the wrong reasons [internet version” (Jul 30 2013),
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdJD-OvpRvY>.
- Drowned in Sound, “Grimes - Halfaxa” (Mar 8 2011),
<http://drownedinsound.com/releases/16030/reviews/4142190>.
- DUMMY Mag, “Grimes Interview - So Many Worlds” (Aug 21 2010),
<http://www.dummymag.com/new-music/grimes-interview-so-many-worlds>.
- DUMMY Mag, “Grimes is leading a generation of online musicians to the material world” (May 22 2012), <http://www.dummymag.com/features/be-a-body-grimes-meaning>.
- DUMMY Magazine, “Comment: Vaporwave and the pop-art of the virtual plaza” (Dec 7 2012), <http://www.dummymag.com/features/adam-harper-vaporwave>.
- DUMMY Magazine, “Halfaxa” (April 4 2011),
<http://www.dummymag.com/reviews/grimes-halfaxa-review>.
- DUMMY Magazine, “Review: Halfaxa” (April 4 2011),
<http://www.dummymag.com/reviews/grimes-halfaxa-review>.
- Dusted, “Grimes - Visions” (Feb 20 2012),
<http://www.dustedmagazine.com/reviews/6961>.
- Entertainment Weekly, “Donald Glover short film is weird and thought-provoking” (Aug 16 2013), <http://www.ew.com/article/2013/08/16/donald-glover-clapping-wrong-reasons>.
- Exclaim!, “Childish Gambino Discusses ‘Because the Internet’ and the Complexity of Web-era Issues” (Nov 11 2013),
http://exclaim.ca/music/article/childish_gambino_discusses_because_internet_complexity_of_web-era_issues.
- Exclaim!, “Grimes - The Accidental Pop Star” (Feb 27 2012),
http://exclaim.ca/music/article/grimes-accidental_pop_star.
- Exclaim!, “Grimes Talks Medieval Times of Halfaxa” (Sept 22 2010),
http://exclaim.ca/music/article/grimes_talks_medieval_times_of_halfaxa.
- Faded Glamour (August 9 2011), <http://www.fadedglamour.co.uk/2011/08/album-review-grimes-geidi-primes.html>.
- Fake Plastic Trees, “Grimes - Geidi Primes REVIEW” (Sept 18 2011),
<http://www.fakeplastictones.com/2011/09/grimes-geidi-primes-review.html>.
- Filter, “Grimes, Visions - 4AD” (Feb 21 2012),
<http://filtermagazine.com/index.php/reviews/entry/grimes>.

Forbes, “30 Under 30: Bruno Mars And Music’s Brightest Young Stars” (Jan 6 2014), <http://www.forbes.com/sites/zackomalleygreenburg/2014/01/06/30-under-30-bruno-mars-and-musics-brightest-young-stars/#6787bce91504>.

ForeverChildish.com, “#Donald4December” (Oct 2013), <http://foreverchildish.com/post/64133180295/donald4december-childish-gambinos-sophomore>.

ForeverChildish.com, “childish gambino discography and downloads,” <http://foreverchildish.com/music>.

Fortune, “MySpace cowboys” (August 29 2006), http://archive.fortune.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/2006/09/04/8384727/index.htm.

Glassnote Music, “Here are the cities the mansion performances will be taking place in” (2014), <http://glassnotemusic.com/post/67691641010/iamdonald-here-are-the-cities-the-mansion>.

Glover, Donald. *becausetheinter.net screenplay*. Self-published: Dec 2013.

Grammy.com, “And The GRAMMY Went To...Lorde” (Jan 29 2014), <http://www.grammy.com/news/and-the-grammy-went-to-lorde>.

Grantland, “We Went There: Childish Gambino’s Deep Web Tour” (Mar 31 2014), <http://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/childish-gambinos-deep-web-tour-review/>.

Holly Herndon and Jennifer Walshe, “Post-Internet Sound: Introduction” (2016), https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1uU-wLYoIjNwAjvO9XcBjsBPgpx2CcNfhGzzviUUf3_k/viewform?fbzx=4384042421455968562.

Holly Herndon’s Twitter Profile (@hollyherndon), Twitter post (Nov 30 2015), <https://twitter.com/hollyherndon/status/671287951163265024>.

Hot New Hip Hop, “Childish Gambino ‘3005’ (Lyric Video Starring ABella Anderson)” (Nov 13th 2013), <http://www.hotnewhiphop.com/childish-gambino-3005-video.21810.html>.

Huffington Post, “Sexism In Music Targeted By Female Singer Grimes In New Blog Post” (Apr 24 2013), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/24/sexism-in-music-singer-grimes_n_3146111.html.

Huffpost Entertainment, “Childish Gambino and the Metamodern Ennui: Why Because the Internet Is the Most Significant Album in Recent Memory” (Jun 13 2014), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jesse-damiani/because-the-internet-chil_b_5485075.html.

Humanhuman, “Exploring Post-Internet Music” (Jan 2016), <http://humanhuman.com/articles/exploring-post-internet-music>.

IMDb, “Clapping for the Wrong Reasons (2013),” http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3093732/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

- Inifnite Hip Hop, "What in the world is Roscoe's wetsuit?" (Oct 3 2013),
<http://infinitehiphop.com/2013/10/03/what-in-the-world-is-roscoes-wetsuit/>.
- Interview Magazine, "Grimes of the Heart" (May 24 2011),
http://www.interviewmagazine.com/music/grimes-claire-boucher#_.
- Jordan Beffert, "Because the Internet Review" (Dec 10 2013),
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwNEsoeb3W9sQnRSajNfWndIWGc/view>.
- Kevin Abstract, Pigeons and Planes, "How Childish Gambino Made Things Easier For Kids Like Me" (Nov 11 2014), <http://pigeonsandplanes.com/2014/11/how-childish-gambino-made-things-easier-for-kids-like-me/>.
- Kevin the Abstract (@kevinabstract), Twitter, (Jul 14 2014).
<https://twitter.com/kevinabstract/status/500825773520203778?lang=en>.
- KEXP, "Album Review: Grimes - Visions" (Feb 24 2012),
<http://blog.kexp.org/2012/02/24/album-review-grimes-visions/>.
- Konbini, "The Auto-Interview: Grimes" (Jul 17 2013),
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SVcbft9XOA>.
- LA Music Blog, "Album Review: Grimes - Visions" (Feb 22 2012),
<http://lamusicblog.com/2012/02/review/album-review-grimes-visions/>.
- Last.fm, "Hypnagogic Pop," <http://www.last.fm/tag/hypnagogic+pop>.
- Last.fm, "Post-Internet," <http://www.last.fm/tag/post-internet>.
- LIFE, "On this day in 1877, Thomas Edison announces his invention of the phonograph" (Nov 21), <http://life.tumblr.com/post/13110774194/on-this-day-in-1877-thomas-edison-announces-his>.
- LOOKOUT, "Q&A: Montreal's Grimes" (Feb 2 2010),
<http://lookoutpresents.com/featured/qa-grimes/>.
- Luddite Stereo, "Visions - Grimes - album review" (Feb 02 2012),
<http://ludditestereo.com/2012/02/11/visions-grimes-album-review/>.
- Mark Federman, "Why Johnny and Janey Can't Read, And Why Mr And Ms. Smith Can't Teach: The challenge of multiple media literacies in a tumultuous time" (undated), University of Toronto,
<http://individual.utoronto.ca/markfederman/WhyJohnnyandJaneyCantRead.pdf>.
- Mashable, "BowieNet is proof David Bowie was an Internet visionary before Napster," (Jan 11 2016), <http://mashable.com/2016/01/11/david-bowie-bowienet/#bQzIuHuS3Eq7>.
- Me Plus TV, "Childish Gambino's Because the Internet is a Stroke of Genius" (Dec 11 2013), <https://meplustv.wordpress.com/2013/12/11/why-childish-gambinos-because-the-internet-is-a-stroke-of-genius/>.
- Medium, "The Racial Politics of Childish Gambino" (Dec 4 2014),
<https://medium.com/cuepoint/the-racial-politics-of-childish-gambino-baf1f79c1961#ptb7hd2xw>.

Mic, “Grimes Says Men Still Get All the Credit for Women’s Creative Work in a New Interview” (Sept 22 2015), <http://mic.com/articles/125699/grimes-says-men-still-get-all-the-credit-for-women-s-creative-work-in-a-new-interview#.tNDBisvdh>.

Michael Merzenich, “Going Googly” (Aug 11 2008), <http://www.onthebrain.com/2008/08/going-googly/>.

MTV, “Childish Gambino Has ‘Stepped Up,’ Fans Praise At Spontaneous Listening Party” (Oct 22 2013), <http://www.mtv.com/news/1716025/childish-gambino-album-twitter-party-nyc/>.

MTV, “The Post-Internet Worlds of Atlanta Rappers Lil Yachty and Playboi Carti” (Feb 1 2016).

New Republic, “Why ‘Indie’ Music Is So Unbearably White” (Apr 2 2015)

New York Times, “Out of This World” (Aug 11 2011), <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/08/18/out-of-this-world/#more-174353>.

NME, (September 2 2011), <http://www.nme.com/reviews/grimes/12288>.

NME, “Childish Gambino explains his worrying Instagram lettter, insisitng ‘I’m not having a crisis’” (Oct 17 2013), <http://www.nme.com/news/childish-gambino/73276>.

NME, “Review: Geidi Primes” (Sept 2 2011), <http://www.nme.com/reviews/grimes/12288>.

No Rip Cord, “Grimes - Visions” (March 26 2012), <http://www.noripcord.com/reviews/music/grimes/visions>.

Noisey, “All About That Race: Understanding The Secrete in Childish Gambino’s Videos” (Mar 12 2015), http://noisey.vice.com/en_ca/blog/childish-gambino-music-videos-conspiracy-theories-because-the-internet-2015.

NY Times (August 11 2011), <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/08/18/out-of-this-world/#more-174353>.

NY Times, “Out of This World” (August 11 2011), <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/08/18/out-of-this-world/#more-174353>.

Oyster Mag, “Oyster Notes: Grimes’ Imaginary Online Dating Profile” (Oct 10 2012), <http://www.oystermag.com/oyster-notes-grimes-imaginary-online-dating-profile>.

Paste Magazine, “Watch Donald Glover’s Clapping For The Wrong Reasons Short Film” (Aug 16 2013), <http://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2013/08/donald-glover-releases-cryptic-teaser-for-clapping.html>.

PC World, “Requiem for Napster” (2002), http://www.pcworld.idg.com.au/article/22380/requiem_napster/.

People, “Donald Glover Posts Troubling Notes on Instagram, Opens Up About Leaving Community” (Oct 16 2013), <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20746092,00.html>.

People, “Donald Glover: I Didn’t Want To Lie About My Feelings Anymore” (Oct 17 2013), <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20746483,00.html>.

Pigeons and Planes, “Grimes Calls Her Song ‘California’ a ‘Hate Track for Pitchfork’” (Nov 12 2015), <http://pigeonsandplanes.com/2015/11/grimes-california-a-hate-track-for-pitchfork/>.

Pigeons and Planes, “Roscoe’s wetsuit: Finding Meaning in Childish Gambino’s ‘Because the Internet’ on the internet” (Dec 10 2013), <http://pigeonsandplanes.com/2013/12/roscoes-wetsuit/>.

Pitchfork, “Childish Gambino - Because the Internet” (Dec 12 2013), <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/18817-childish-gambino-because-the-internet/>.

Pitchfork, “Childish Gambino - Camp” (Dec 2 2011), <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/16074-camp/>.

Pitchfork, “Fix the Future: Holly Herndon’s Collective Vision” (Mar 31 2015), <http://pitchfork.com/features/update/9619-fix-the-future-holly-herndons-collective-vision/>.

Pitchfork, “Grimes - Geidi Primes” (Sept 7 2011), <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/15751-geidi-primes/>.

Pitchfork, “Grimes - Visions Review” (Feb 17 2012), pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/16211-grimes-visions/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+PitchforkAlbumReviews+%28Pitchfork%3A+Album+Reviews%29.

Pitchfork, “Grimes: Arg Angels” (Nov 10 2015), <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/21264-art-angels/>.

Pitchfork, “Grimes: Interview” (Feb 15 2012), <http://pitchfork.com/features/interview/8774-grimes/>.

Pitchfork, “Lil Yachty *Lil Boat*” (Mar 17 2016), <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/21736-lil-boat/>.

Pitchfork, “Radiohead Erase Internet Presence” (May 1 2016), <http://pitchfork.com/news/65175-radiohead-erase-internet-presence/>.

Pitchfork, “Review: Grimes - Geidi Primes” (Sept 7 2011), <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/15751-geidi-primes/>.

Pitchfork, “The Influencer: A Decade of Soulja Boy” (Jul 9 2015), <http://pitchfork.com/features/article/9682-the-influencer-a-decade-of-soulja-boy/>.

Pitchfork, “The Top 100 Albums of 2010-2014” (2015), <http://pitchfork.com/features/staff-lists/9465-the-top-100-albums-of-2010-2014/5/>.

Popular Opinions with Chaz Kangas, “Childish Gambino - ‘The Younger I Get’” (Nov 11 2011), <https://popularopinions.wordpress.com/2011/11/11/gambino2/>.

Potholes In My Blog, “Kevin Abstract – *MTV1987*” (Jul 21 2014), <http://potholesinmyblog.com/kevin-abstract-mtv1987/>.

Pretty Much Amazing, “Grimes Shares List of the Best Songs of All Time” (Dec 2 2015), <http://prettymuchamazing.com/news/grimes-best-songs-of-all-time>.

- Public Knowledge, “Senator Stevens Speaks on Net Neutrality” (Jun 28 2006), <https://www.publicknowledge.org/news-blog/blogs/senator-stevens-speaks-net-neutrality>.
- Q on CBC, “Childish Gambino brings “Because the Internet” to Studio Q” (Apr 8 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhBntF0q6jY>.
- Rap Genius, User macksaveli’s Rap Genius annotation, “Childish Gambino – ‘Outside’ Lyrics” (2012), <http://genius.com/Childish-gambino-outside-lyrics>.
- Red Bull Music Academy’s Youtube Channel, “Danny Brown (RBMA UK Tour Glasgow 2015 Lecture)” (Apr 3 2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNLpUC3BbcE>.
- Reddit, “[Discussion] Roscoe’s wetsuit” (2015), https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/2rw503/roscoes_wetsuit/.
- Reddit, “[Discussion] Thoughts on Roscoe’s wetsuit being the name of Bino’s next album?” (2015), https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/2nu03s/discussion_thoughts_on_roscoes_wetsuit_being_the/?ref=search_posts.
- Reddit, “[REQUEST] Roscoe’s wetsuit Video” (2016), https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/3xk952/request_roscoes_wetsuit_video/.
- Reddit, “A Close Reading of Childish Gabmino’s ‘Because the Internet’” (2014), https://www.reddit.com/r/hiphopheads/comments/1s2wac/a_close_reading_of_childish_gambinos_because_the/.
- Reddit, “Have we received any explanation of the meaning of Roscoe’s wetsuit” (2014), https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/1w8qj1/have_we_received_any_explanation_of_the_meaning/.
- Reddit, “Is ‘Clapping for The Wrong Reasons’ the Boy’s dream while in the hospital?” (Sept 2015), [\(https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/3kxkii/is_clapping_for_the_wrong_reasons_the_boys_dream/](https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/3kxkii/is_clapping_for_the_wrong_reasons_the_boys_dream/).
- Reddit, “roscoe’s wetsuit” (Nov 2015), https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/3m148r/roscoes_wetsuit/.
- Reddit, “This is what Roscoe’s wetsuit really means.” (Dec 2015), https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/3qkeit/this_is_what_roscoes_wetsuit_really_means/.
- Reddit, “Who is Roscoe’s wetsuit?” (May 2015), https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/34jvik/who_is_roscoes_wetsuit/.
- Reddit, Comment by hightimess, https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/1kg5gr/clapping_for_the_wrong_reasons/?sort=top

- Reddit, Comment from gatorace15,
https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/1jdswn/clapping_for_the_wrong_reasons_trailer_new_short/
- Reddit, Comment from gatorace15,
https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/1kg5gr/clapping_for_the_wrong_reasons/?sort=top
- Reddit, Comment from Jaxghanistan, “Where does Donnie G end and Childish Gambino begin?” (2015),
https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/2hxpvu/where_does_donnie_g_end_and_childish_gambino_begin/
- Reddit, Comment from ThatIndianGuy7116,
https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/1jdswn/clapping_for_the_wrong_reasons_trailer_new_short/.
- Reviler, “Grimes: Visions Review (Three Takes)” (Feb 23 2012),
<http://www.reviler.org/2012/02/23/grimes-visions-review-three-takes/>.
- Rhizome, “What’s Postinternet Got to do with Net Art?” (Nov 1 2013),
<http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/nov/1/postinternet/>.
- Rolling Stone, “Grimes on ‘Art Angels’ Follow-Up, Why She Loves Tool” (Apr 12 2016), <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/grimes-on-art-angels-follow-up-why-she-loves-tool-20160412>.
- Rolling Stone’s YouTube Channel, “Battle: Donald Glover vs. Childish Gambino” (Nov 7 2011), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5MWyVAUbI0>.
- Self-Titled Mag, “Grimes: Cover Story” (March 20 2012), <http://www.self-titledmag.com/2015/10/22/throwback-thursdayread-our-grimes-cover-story/>.
- SPIN, “40 Best Hip-Hop Albums 2014” (Dec 4 2014), http://www.spin.com/2014/12/40-best-hip-hop-albums-2014/kevin-abstract-mtv1987_1/.
- SPIN, “Black Rock: An Oral History” (Oct 23 2008),
<http://www.spin.com/2008/10/black-rock-oral-history/>.
- SPIN, “Childish Gambino’s Sloppy, Erratic ‘Because the Internet’ Offers Only Unintentional LOL’s” (Dec 10 2013), <http://www.spin.com/2013/12/childish-gambino-because-the-internet-worst-new-music/>.
- SPIN, “Download Death Grips’ Frenzied ‘NO LOVE DEEP WEB’ LP” (Oct 1 2012),
<http://www.spin.com/2012/10/death-grips-no-love-deep-web-album-download/>.
- SPIN, “Grimes Comes Clean: Synth-Pop Provocateur on Her Big Year” (Dec 6 2012),
<http://www.spin.com/2012/12/grimes-interview-2012-big-year/?page=0>.
- SPIN, “Grimes, ‘Visions’ (4AD)” (Feb 23 2012), <http://www.spin.com/2012/02/grimes-visions-4ad-0/>.
- SPIN, “Review: Grimes Preaches Wonderful and Horrifying Hyperspace Gospel on ‘Art Angels’ (Nov 6 2015), <http://www.spin.com/2015/11/review-grimes-art-angels/>.

SPIN, Comment from user “Craven”, “Childish Gambino’s Sloppy, Erratic ‘Because the Internet’ Offers Only Unintentional LOL’s” (Dec 10 2013),
<http://www.spin.com/2013/12/childish-gambino-because-the-internet-worst-new-music/>.

SPIN, Comment from user “Guest”, “Childish Gambino’s Sloppy, Erratic ‘Because the Internet’ Offers Only Unintentional LOL’s” (Dec 10 2013),
<http://www.spin.com/2013/12/childish-gambino-because-the-internet-worst-new-music/>.

Sputnik Music, “Grimes - Visions” (January 27 2012),
<http://www.sputnikmusic.com/review/47706/Grimes-Visions/>.

Sputnikmusic, “Grimes - Halfaxa” (Nov 5 2015),
<http://www.sputnikmusic.com/review/69042/Grimes-Halfaxa/>.

STASHED’s Youtube Channel, “theSTASHED.com Exclusive: Kanye West, Steve Stoute & Ben Horowitz Talk Tech at Cannes Lions” (Jun 23 2014),
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdSfnuEGHH4>.

Statista.com, “Number of paying Spotify subscribers worldwide from July 2010 to March 2016 (in millions),” <http://www.statista.com/statistics/244995/number-of-paying-spotify-subscribers/>.

Stereogum, “Grimes Explains How She Really Got Her Name” (Dec 20 2014),
<http://www.stereogum.com/1725989/grimes-explains-how-she-really-got-her-name/news/>.

StyleCaster, “Who is Lorde? 5 Things to Know About the Singer Behind the Hit, ‘Royals’” (2013), <http://stylecaster.com/lorde-singer-royals/>.

Sunset in the Rearview, “Stream and Download Kevin Abstract’s Extraordinary Album ‘MTV1987’” (Jul 15 2014), <http://sunsetintherearview.com/download-mixtape-kevin-abstract-mtv1987/>.

Sunset in the Rearview: Music Blog for Hipsters and Squares, “Childish Gambino Signs to Glassnote Records” (23 Aug 2011), <http://sunsetintherearview.com/childish-gambino-signs-to-glassnote-records/>.

T. Ryan, “AP English: Analysis of Childish Gambino’s Because the Internet” (Apr 9 2014),
<https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B79kbInYGbbnZy1MS1JVcGliYzg&usp=sharing>.

Tastemakers Magazine, “Grimes - Visions” (March 14 2012),
<http://tastemakersmag.com/reviews/album-reviews/2012/grimes-visions/>.

Temporary Rough Venom, “Album Review: Grimes - Visions” (March 12 2012),
<http://temporaryroughvenom.blogspot.ca/2012/03/album-review-grimes-visions.html>.

The Breakfast Club, “Childish Gambino Addresses Lupe Fiasco Beef, Suicide Rumors, No Wanting To Be Boxed In & More” (Oct 24 2013),
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LEvOcdX1734>.

- The Creators Project, “Childish Gambino’s Exhibition At Rough Trade NYC Brings” (Dec 05 2013), <http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/blog/childish-gambinos-exhibition-at-rough-trade-nyc-brings-the-internet-to-life>.
- The Creators Project, “Siren Seduction: Q&A With Electronic Musician Grimes” (March 26 2012), http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/en_uk/blog/siren-seduction-qa-with-electronic-musician-grimes.
- The Daily Beast, “‘Because the Internet’ Review: Childish Gambino Is Hip-Hop’s Perennial Outside” (Dec 20 2013), <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/12/10/because-the-internet-review-childish-gambino-is-hip-hop-s-perennial-outsider.html>.
- The Guardian, “Best Albums of 2012, No 2: Grimes - Visions” (Dec 13 2012), <http://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2012/dec/13/best-albums-2012-grimes-visions>.
- The Guardian, “Grimes: ‘In my life, I’m a lot more weird than this’” (Oct 31 2015), <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/oct/31/claire-boucher-grimes-art-angels>.
- The Guardian, “One to watch: Grimes” (Jan 28 2012), <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/jan/29/grimes-boucher-one-to-watch>.
- The Local Joke, “ALBUM REVIEW: Art Angels - Grimes” (Jan 14 2016), <https://thelocaljoke.wordpress.com/2016/01/14/album-review-art-angels-grimes/>.
- The Needle Drop, “Childish Gambino - Because the Internet ALBUM REVIEW” (Dec 10 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2uzq3A9YbU>.
- The New York Times, “His Day Job Subsidizes All That Other Stuff” (Mar 10 2010), <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/14/arts/television/14glover.html>.
- The New York Times, “Jerry Seinfeld, Online Force” (May 27 2015), <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/31/arts/television/jerry-seinfeld-online-force.html>.
- The New York Times, “Seriously Unserious About Fashion” (Nov 16 2012), <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/18/fashion/at-dis-magazine-not-the-usual-rules.html>.
- The New York Times, “The Absurdist Hijabs and Instagram Wizardry of One Millennial Artist” (Oct 28 2015), <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/28/t-magazine/art-meriem-bennani-hijab-video.html>.
- The New Yorker, “Pop For Misfits” (Sept 28 2015), <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/09/28/pop-for-misfits>.
- The Quietus, “Eschewing Pop Ideology: An Interview With Grimes” (Mar 10 2016), <http://thequietus.com/articles/19860-grimes-art-angels-realiti-interview-pop>.
- The Quietus, “Grimes - Visions” (Feb 24th 2012), <http://thequietus.com/articles/08059-grimes-visions-review>.
- The Quietus, “Grimes Halfaxa Review” (March 22 2011), <http://thequietus.com/articles/05916-grimes-halfaxa-review>.

The Verge, “‘Because the Internet’: online fame gives Donald Glover the feels” (Dec 10 2013), <http://www.theverge.com/2013/12/10/5195582/because-the-internet-online-fame-gives-donald-glover-the-feels>.

The Verge, Comment from user “D__”, “‘Because the Internet’: online fame gives Donald Glover the feels” (Dec 10 2013), <http://www.theverge.com/2013/12/10/5195582/because-the-internet-online-fame-gives-donald-glover-the-feels>.

The Village Voice, “Donald Glover is More Talented Than You” (Apr 13 2011), <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/donald-glover-is-more-talented-than-you-6430538>.

The Washington Post, “Do you want popitism? Or do you want the truth?” (Apr 17 2015), https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/at-the-top-of-the-pop-music-heap-theres-no-criticizing-the-view/2015/04/16/d98d53a8-e1f2-11e4-b510-962fcfab310_story.html.

The Wire. “How James Ferraro, Spencer Clark, Pocahaunted, Emeralds, et al are floating beyond Noise to a dreampop hallucination of the 1980s,” August 2009.

The Yale Herald, “Grimes’ post-Internet dream world” (Feb 24 2012), <http://yaleherald.com/reviews/grimes-post-internet-dream-world/>.

Three Magazine, “Grimes On How To Make Yourself a Brand” (Apr 12 2012), <http://themusic.com.au/interviews/all/2012/04/12/grimes-interview-with-three-mag/>.

Tidal, “Grimes: 5 Albums that Changed My Life” (Feb 3 2016), <http://read.tidal.com/article/grimes-5-albums-that-changed-my-life?sf20255708=1>.

Time, “A Conversation with Childish Gambino: Nostalgia, Bitcoins and Advice from Tina Fey” (Dec 05 2013), <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/12/05/a-conversation-with-childish-gambino-nostalgia-bitcoins-and-advice-from-tina-fey/>.

TIME, “Donald Glover Explains His Absence” (Oct 15, 2013), <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/10/15/donald-glover-explains-his-absence/>.

TIME, “New Childish Gambino Album’s Fatal Flaw: It’s Just Not Cool” (Dec 10 2013), <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/12/10/new-childish-gambino-albums-fatal-flaw-its-just-not-cool/>.

TIME, “The 16 Most Influential Teens of 2013” (Nov 12 2013), <http://time100.time.com/2013/11/12/the-16-most-influential-teens-of-2013/>.

Time.com, “Where is Donald Glover?” (Jul 29 2013), <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/07/29/where-is-donald-glover/>.

Tumblr IRL, “About page,” <http://irlirl.tumblr.com/about>.

TV Line, “Donald Glover Reveals the Real Reason He Quit Community: ‘I Wanted To Be On My Own’” (Oct 15 2013), <http://tvline.com/2013/10/15/donald-glover-leaving-community-why/>.

Twitter Counter, “Twitter Top 100 Most Followers,” <http://twittercounter.com/pages/100>.

Twitter, Grimes (@Grimezs), Apr 12 2016, <https://twitter.com/Grimezs>.

- Twitter, Grimes (@Grimezsz), Sept 26 2016, <https://twitter.com/Grimezsz>.
- Twitter. Kanye West (@kanyewest), (Mar 7 2016),
<https://twitter.com/kanyewest/status/706895554471657472>.
- Twitter. Kevin Abstract (@kevinabstract), (Sep 14 2014).,
<https://twitter.com/kevinabstract/status/511217650362351616>.
- UCCA, “Art Post-Internet” (Mar 1 2014), <http://ucca.org.cn/en/exhibition/art-post-internet/>.
- Uproxx, “The Strange Mystery Behind Donald Glover’s Rap Name, Childish Gambino” (Dec 23 2014), <http://uproxx.com/tv/the-mindblowing-mystery-behind-donald-glovers-rap-name-childish-gambino/>.
- Verse, “Album Review Kevin Abstract *MTV1987*” (Aug 6 2014),
<http://verse.nofillers.com/album-review-kevin-abstract-mtv1987/>.
- Vice, “PC Music is Post-Internet Art” (Jan 8 2015),
https://thump.vice.com/en_ca/article/pc-music-is-post-internet-art.
- Vice, “So What Is Post-Internet Music, Anyway?” (Nov 11 2015),
https://thump.vice.com/en_ca/article/so-what-is-post-internet-music-anyway.
- Vulture, “Donald Glover Made a Haunting, Hypnotic Short Film” (Aug 16 2013),
<http://www.vulture.com/2013/08/donald-glover-short-film.html>.
- Vulture, “Grimes’s Art Angels Is Superhero Music for Introverts” (Nov 6 2015),
<http://www.vulture.com/2015/11/album-review-grimes-art-angels.html>.
- W Magazine, “On the Verge: Grimes” (June 2012),
<http://www.wmagazine.com/people/celebrities/2012/06/grimes-claire-boucher-musician-visions>.
- Washington Post, “No Room for Grimes in a genre box” (Sept 6 2012),
https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/no-room-for-grimes-in-a-genre-box/2012/09/06/3335160a-f1ed-11e1-adc6-87dfa8eff430_story.html.
- Westernfall.com, “Childish Gambino,” <http://www.westernfall.com>.
- Wikipedia, “List of most viewed YouTube videos (April 19 2016),”
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most_viewed_YouTube_videos.
- Wonderland Magazine, “New Noise: Kevin Abstract” (Jul 16 2014),
<http://www.wonderlandmagazine.com/2014/07/new-noise-kevin-abstract/>.
- Writers Guild of America, “2009 Writers Guild Awards Television, Radio, News, Promotional Writing, and Graphic Animation Nominees Announced” (Dec 8 2008),
<http://wga.org/content/default.aspx?id=3410>.
- XXL Mag, “Childish Gambino Is Afraid of the Future” (Nov 1 2013),
<http://www.xxlmag.com/news/2013/11/childish-gambino-afraid-future/>.
- Yahoo! News, “Craigslist ads offer free rent for sex in Canadian cities and they appear to be legal” (Apr 29 2016), <https://ca.news.yahoo.com/blogs/dailybrew/craigslist-ads-offer-free-rent-for-sex-in-canadian-192704487.html>.

Yahoo Answers, “Does anyone know what Roscoe’s wetsuit means?” (2013),
<https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20130904160651AAIzRsh>.

YouTube user xxbffcutestarxx, “YAYA LOVE!” (Sep 10 2011),
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1X3z_iYa1k.

YouTube, “Childish Gambino answers question about Roscoe’s wetsuit in Toronto” (Dec 5 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reNsZhCwcPc>.

YouTube, “Childish Gambino Tells His Fans to Learn How to Code” (Nov 9 2013),
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOLk3b3lPm0>.

YouTube, “Derrick Comedy: About Page,”
<https://www.youtube.com/user/derrickcomedy/about>

YouTube. Childish Gambino’s YouTube Channel, “Childish Gambino – Sweatpants ft. Problem” (Apr 14 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExVtrghW5Y4>.

YouTube. KEXP’s YouTube Channel, “Grimes – Full Performance (Live on KEXP)” (Mar 27 2012), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJ5XUw4qHZo>.

YouTube. wos X’s YouTube Channel, “Vapourwave: A Brief History” (Jun 10 2015),
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdpP0mXOIWM>.

МИШКА, “Review: Grimes - Halfaxa” (November 15 2010),
<https://mishkanyc.com/bloglin/2010/11/15/review-grimes-halfaxa>.

Curriculum Vitae

Name:	Kristopher R. K. Ohlendorf
Post-secondary Education and Degrees:	<p>The University of Texas at Austin 2010-2014 B.S. in Radio-Television-Film and B.S. in Communication Studies</p> <p>Western University 2014-2016 M.A. in Media Studies</p>
Honours and Awards:	<p>James Lawrence Fly Endowed Presidential Scholarship in Communications 2012-2014</p> <p>Graduate Student Teaching Assistant Award 2016</p>
Related Work Experience	<p>Teaching Assistant Western University 2014-2016</p>