

**Fuck all this dick swinging.  
Let the kids have the  
art:**

*considering  
relationships between  
popular music  
and contemporary  
video art.*



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## INTRODUCTION

In the weeks leading up to the release of his 2016 album *Blond(e)*, the American musician Frank Ocean began what was initially thought to be a live stream, hosted by *Apple Music*, on his website [boysdontcry.co](http://boysdontcry.co).<sup>1</sup> The 'stream' depicted in black and white, as reported by *Pitchfork*, featured 'a couple of workbenches in a large empty hall, with occasional muffled chatter in the background.'<sup>2</sup> [fig1] On closer inspection, it appeared that the 'stream' was not a live stream at all but an endlessly looped video. Over the course of the following week, the 'stream' was updated sporadically as Ocean began working in the space; sawing lengths of wood and building a large spiral staircase [fig2] in the centre of the room<sup>3</sup> to the sound of previously unheard music played on speakers; not overdubbed. 17 days later, Ocean released the visual album, *Endless*.

*Endless* exists as a 45 minute black and white film of Ocean and another man undertaking the aforementioned task of constructing the staircase but this time with previously unseen camera angles revealed and re-cut into the original footage. The entirety of the film is sound-tracked by new music by Ocean himself and the German contemporary artist, Wolfgang Tillmans. The project could be looked at as an ingenious piece of marketing; intending to build anticipation in the lead up to the release of *Blond(e)*, which occurred just two days later. It was also later revealed that the release of *Endless* fulfilled Ocean's contractual obligation to *Def Jam* and *Universal Records*, leaving him free to release *Blond(e)* under his own record label, *Boys Don't Cry*. However, the video's existence does also appear to engage with questions surrounding the relationship between the mediums of popular music and contemporary video art. If we assume that *Endless*, when viewed in silence, becomes an overly obtuse viewing marathon, then the incorporation of popular music carries with it the ability to make the visual components of the film immediately more engaging and ultimately create a work which is more intellectually accessible. Popular music has the ability to adopt the characteristics of contemporary video art, offering it's audience a more complex package than is perhaps conventionally expected, but retain accessibility through the continuation of it's own familiar relatable aesthetic. *Endless*, if viewed as an 'art film'<sup>4</sup>, also retains its context as a product of popular music. This perhaps also opens the potential for works of contemporary video art to utilize the associations of the music video or visual album to connect with an audience in a similar way to those mediums. Furthermore, the employment of methods of distribution seen within contemporary popular music by contemporary art may offer the possibility of an alternate, more democratic viewing

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<sup>1</sup> Now renamed to <http://blonded.co/>

<sup>2</sup> Monroe, Jazz. "Frank Ocean Launches Mysterious Live Stream." January 2016. Accessed 13/12/2016, <http://pitchfork.com/news/67226-frank-ocean-launches-mysterious-live-stream/>.

<sup>3</sup> Revealed to be a collaboration with the artist Tom Sachs.

<sup>4</sup> Photography director Francisco Soriano directly references the work as a 'video art project' in a since deleted tweet <http://www.thefader.com/2016/08/01/frank-ocean-francisco-soriano-video>.

experience outside of the gallery context. Through collaboration, as seen in *Endless*, and through the sharing of each other's aesthetics, the relationships between popular music and contemporary art could offer methodologies for the dismantling of cultural hierarchies through the cooperation of artists from across boundaries of categorization.

The following chapters will attempt to discuss these themes. Chapter 1 will discuss Jordan Wolfson's use of popular music in his video work *Raspberry Poser*, attempting to unravel his appropriation of pop-cultural material and how this impacts contemporary audiences' personal relationships to the work. The analysis of *Raspberry Poser* will serve as a starting point to engage in the discussion around the utilization of popular music in the context a work of contemporary video art. Chapter 2 will engage in the methods of distribution surrounding the format of the visual album and how these can be used to democratise artworks. The chapter will take as its examples, two 2016 visual albums: *Lemonade* by the American musician, Beyoncé and *That's Desire / Here We Are* by Wolfgang Tillmans. Chapter 3 will investigate the collaborations between contemporary artists and pop-musicians. As its focal point, the chapter will discuss the collaboration between Wolfgang Tillmans and Frank Ocean on the latter's visual album *Endless* and publication *Boy's Don't Cry*. The chapter will attempt to engage in how cultural hierarchies may be mediated between the two 'worlds' of popular music and contemporary art. Through these chapters, this text will investigate the relationship between the two aforementioned genres and attempt to theorise what each might be able to gain through such an interaction.



## Beautiful Nightmare: The Audience's Relationship with Popular Music in Jordan Wolfson's *Raspberry Poser*

Jordan Wolfson's 2012 work, *Raspberry Poser* is a key example of a work that uses the basic format of the music video and re-contextualises it within the discourse of contemporary art. The 13 minute 54 second long video takes the form of what could perhaps be categorized, in popular music terms, as a visual EP; as it comprises of three songs played over an extended 'music video'. The video utilizes a bizarre combination of imagery including: a masochistic animated child who repeatedly disembowels [fig3] himself before the viewer, CGI bouncing HIV viruses [fig4], a seemingly aimless wandering punk [fig5] (played by Wolfson himself), and billowing CGI condoms spilling three dimensional love hearts across the screen [fig6]. The animated elements of the film are placed over found imagery from the Internet, including: children's playrooms, high-end home improvement shops, paintings by Caravaggio and Breugels and the streets of New York. These components are jarringly pieced together and sound tracked by three songs, Mazzy Star's *Fade into You*, Beyoncé's *Sweet Dreams* and Roy Orbison's *Only the Lonely*.

In her essay, 'Only The Lonely', for Wolfson's monograph *Ecce Homo/ le Poseur*, Linda Norton writes, "As in a music video, the shots here are rhythmically or associatively – rather than narratively – cut and synched."<sup>1</sup> Wolfson insists that disparate segments of imagery are brought together not to form any kind of narrative or consciously considered associations between themselves, but to instead provide the viewer with a chaotic mass to which they attach their own meaning. In a 2012 interview conducted by Paul Soto for *Art in America*, Wolfson declared of the work "I am not trying to make these elements come together here by any means or any narrative. There is no story. There is no clarity of content, only isolated areas of content."<sup>2</sup> It is interesting then how the music he appropriates works in combination with the imagery and how it may lead the viewer to draw connections between the "isolated areas of content."<sup>3</sup> With it's continued use throughout the duration of the work; does the music help to create an implied, if not actual, sense of meaning in the minds of the audience?

In his essay 'Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music', Simon Frith writes many rock music fans felt that they "'owned' their favourite music in ways that were intense and important to them."<sup>4</sup> This notion of 'ownership' could describe a person's relationship to music they love, but equally music they hate, or that they feel connects heavily to a particular portion of their life. Again, in the words of Frith, "In

<sup>1</sup> Norden, Linda. "Only The Lonely", in *Jordan Wolfson: Ecce Homo / Le Poseur*. (Los Angeles: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2013), p. 47

<sup>2</sup> Jordan Wolfson quoted in Soto, Paul. "Flattening Exercises: Q+A with Jordan Wolfson." Accessed 13/12/2016, <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/interviews/jordan-wolfson-redcat/>.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Frith, Simon. "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music", in *Taking Popular Music Seriously: Selected Essays*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 247.

'possessing' music, we make it part of our own identity and build it into our sense of ourselves."<sup>5</sup> In this context, Wolfson's choices of music can be seen to operate as a kind of pre-packaged emotion: a tool that resonates with the audience because of their particular personal connections to each song. Whether an audience member attaches love or hate or indifference to each of the songs in *Raspberry Poser* really becomes irrelevant with Wolfson's previously stated intentions for the work. Wolfson states of his use of music, in interview for *Artspace* magazine, "it's interesting to take something out of culture that in a lot of ways was made by culture—to take this by-product of culture, which is what I consider a lot of this pop music to be, and then to recycle it by fertilizing my work with it."<sup>6</sup> As a 'by-product of culture', each song retains within itself the possibility to invoke a personal reaction from the listener, both through the objective qualities of the song and the through each song's specific connection to the life of its listener.

In his interview with Wolfson, Paul Soto states, "The act of looking here has so much to do with swiping, that flattening exercise that makes the screen into something like a democratic or egalitarian window."<sup>7</sup> Here, Soto acknowledges similarities in the work to the act of scrolling through an Internet image search. However, where he describes the act of Internet searching (or 'swiping') as "a democratic or egalitarian window", the content of imagery in *Raspberry Poser* operates quite differently. While Wolfson's choice of imagery may appear as random, unconnected and 'egalitarian' as an unspecific image search in an Internet search engine (or the songs perhaps from an automated streaming service playlist), the very fact that he has chosen the images and therefore content of the work places the appropriated audio and visuals in a different realm. In this, the mode of the viewing of images is not 'egalitarian' but instead, inherently hierarchical. Wolfson uses his status as the artist to position himself as controller of content, layering the appropriated sound and imagery and manipulating his audience to draw conclusions within their own minds. As Robert S. Nelson writes in his essay 'Appropriation', "what once was complete and meaningful is taken over by the second system and made to stand for a new notion".<sup>8</sup> The use of appropriated found image and sound employed by Wolfson could perhaps be equated to Marcel Duchamp's 1913 work, *Bicycle Wheel* [fig7] where he affixed a bicycle wheel to the seat of a stool, rendering both objects useless. In the case of both *Raspberry Poser* and *Bicycle Wheel*, although the original pieces of content are recognisable, they are also now inextricably tied to each other by their new context thus losing their original intended function. However, where Duchamp's

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, p. 247.

<sup>6</sup> Jordan Wolfson quoted in Goldstein, Andrew M. "Jordan Wolfson on Transforming the 'pollution' of Pop Culture into Art." Accessed 13/12/2017, [http://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews\\_features/qa/jordan\\_wolfson\\_interview-52204](http://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/qa/jordan_wolfson_interview-52204).

<sup>7</sup> Soto, Paul. "Flattening Exercises: Q+A with Jordan Wolfson." Accessed 13/12/2017, <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/interviews/jordan-wolfson-redcat/>.

<sup>8</sup> Nelson, Robert S. "Appropriation" in *Critical Terms For Art History*. 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.) pp 162, 163.

choice of object “was based on a reaction of visual indifference”<sup>9</sup>, Wolfson’s choices of content appear much more emotionally and societally connotative and therefore retain within them, especially in their combined state, the potential to be altogether more devastating.

Alongside directly appropriated found image and sound, Wolfson appears to also make use of appropriated characters. The punk that he plays in the work appears to take enough of the classic tropes of late 1970s punk fashion to be immediately recognised as punk. For example, he wears items such as a customised leather jacket with ‘CLASH CITY ROCKER’ and ‘DISCO SUCKS!’ written on it, ripped clothes and studded Dr Marten’s boots. However, the clothing seems such a direct representation of punk that the character feels as though he has dressed himself in a costume shop; he is a ‘hollow’ punk, a stand in for the real thing, a symbol. The punk feels as much a cartoon character as the violent animated cartoon child who also features. When the punk wanders aimlessly through a Paris park, sound-tracked by Roy Orbison’s *Only The Lonely*, the connections drawn between the song and the character again appear to be slippery and ‘hollow’. When the punk, later in the film, offers up his bare (‘lonely’) arse in the park, the immediate connections of ‘loneliness’ associate back to *Only The Lonely*, despite the visual at this point being set to a slowed down version of Beyoncé’s *Sweet Dreams*. Here, Nelson’s idea of the overriding of singular, meaningful reference points through their placement into a new context “to stand for a new notion”<sup>10</sup> can be seen. It can also be seen that the meaning drawn from the coming together of these separate appropriated areas of content has the possibility to appear only at surface-level in an audience member’s reading of the scene. For example, the lyric “There goes my baby, there goes my heart, They’re gone forever” in *Only The Lonely* appears to quickly attach itself to visual of the bouncing HIV virus and stay attached (or ‘stuck together’), perhaps acting illustratively and alluding to the death of a lover from the virus. However, due to the fleeting nature of the lyrics and the immediacy of the perceived connections, the combined ‘stuck together’ pieces of content do not properly allow for in depth analysis, instead disappearing off screen with merely a surface level reading.

In interview with *Artspace*, Wolfson recalls, “being taught to have a nearly hysterical fear of AIDS”<sup>11</sup>. With Beyoncé’s ‘Sweet Dreams’, the bouncing HIV viruses appear to be dancing along to its dance-pop aesthetic<sup>12</sup>. Wolfson is perhaps using this avatar of the HIV virus as a kind of ‘boogiemani’ that dances jauntily along to the beat of the song much in the same way as, for example, the zombie figures in

<sup>9</sup> Duchamp, Marcel. ‘The Creative Act’ and ‘Apropos of ‘Readymades’ in eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Patterson, *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 141.

<sup>10</sup> Nelson, Robert S. “Appropriation” in *Critical Terms For Art History*. 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.) p. 163.

<sup>11</sup> Goldstein, Andrew M. “Jordan Wolfson on Transforming the ‘pollution’ of Pop Culture into Art.” Accessed 13/12/2016, [http://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews\\_features/qa/jordan\\_wolfson\\_interview-52204](http://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/qa/jordan_wolfson_interview-52204).

<sup>12</sup> The HIV avatar may again operate here as a symbolic appropriation more than a direct visual one as the animation was commissioned by Wolfson himself.

the music video for Michael Jackson's *Thriller*<sup>13</sup>. The effect of this is perhaps more exaggerated as the majority of *Sweet Dreams* is played slightly slowed down causing Beyoncé's voice to be pitched unnaturally and unnervingly low, emphasising, as Linda Norden writes, "her "beautiful nightmare," rather than the "sweet dream.""<sup>14</sup> Of course, allowing the combination of sound and image to operate in this way may appear a somewhat reckless thing to do when dealing with a matter as devastatingly real and as embedded in cultural (particularly queer) history as the HIV crisis. This association is one that will prove deeply troubling to many people touched by or engaged with this matter. As Nelson describes one piece of content being 'taken over' by another, with *Thriller* the song will forever associate with the dance and the dance with the song. If a person were to draw a similar connection to Beyoncé's *Sweet Dreams* and the dancing HIV virus as facilitated by Wolfson in *Raspberry Poser*, perhaps that person would be forever unable to separate out the two stuck together 'areas of content' (Wolfson's imagery is, due to its controversial nature, far more memorable than the song's more conventional original video<sup>15</sup>). If this person were someone who found Wolfson's use of the HIV virus in this way troubling, this would perhaps override the song's original visual, indelibly tainting it with that association.

In the case of Mazzy Star's *Fade Into You* (the first song featured in the work), when paired with the imagery of the bouncing HIV viruses and the billowing CGI condoms, the sentimental indie-pop aesthetic of the song leads the entire sequence to take on the feeling of something of a memorial video. The song's lyricism and melancholy tone lend a particular sadness to the visuals with the titular lyric, 'Fade Into You' perhaps suggesting death and the destructive nature of the HIV virus. As Frith writes on the listener's ability to relate to sung popular music, "The tone of voice is more important in this context than the actual articulation of particular lyrics"<sup>16</sup>. It is perhaps merely a question of the superficial tone, built from 'stickiness' of overlaid imagery and sound, rather than a full analysis, which determines the ultimate positive or negative response of a particular audience member. It could also be possible that the 'stickiness' of the imagery placed alongside the song may influence the way in which the song is listened to as a stand-alone work in the future. For example, the potentially problematic nature of Wolfson's use of visual content in *Raspberry Poser* could potentially forever 'stick to' and taint Beyoncé's *Sweet Dreams* or Mazzy Star's *Fade Into You* for a listener who responds negatively to the perceived recklessness in his juxtaposition of references. Again, with reference to Frith's notion of personal 'ownership', each individual audience member will express a very personal response to the combination of music and imagery and as such, this particular conclusion is again purely my own surface level reading. However, if

<sup>13</sup> michaeljacksonVEVO, "Michael Jackson - Thriller (Official Video)". *Youtube*. Accessed 20/03/2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOnqjkJTMAA>.

<sup>14</sup> Norden, Linda. "Only The Lonely", in *Jordan Wolfson: Ecce Homo / Le Poseur*. (Los Angeles: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 2013), p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> beyonceVEVO. "Beyoncé - Sweet Dreams." *YouTube*. Accessed 20/03/2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JlxByc0-V40>.

<sup>16</sup> Frith, Simon. "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music", in *Taking Popular Music Seriously: Selected Essays*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 269.

imagery alluding to a commentary on the HIV crisis is combined with the emotive immediacy of a recognisable pop-song and consequently leads the audience to largely draw their own surface level conclusion without offering any potential for deeper reading, this is perhaps an irresponsible act. It could be that Wolfson is forcing the audience to take responsibility for their own reading of the work and placing the fault in their hands if when they draw the content together, the meaning of the work as a whole becomes problematic. However, surely the artist, Wolfson, takes on some level of responsibility for the interpretation of the audience no matter how 'isolated' he deems the areas of content he puts together.

In interview with Aram Moshayedi for inclusion in *Ecce Homo/ le Poseur*, Wolfson states of his work, "I want to believe that the viewer is actually inventing that bridge to the work."<sup>17</sup> However, the bridge that Wolfson talks of his audience building is perhaps one that he has himself almost fully completed. He is giving them a participatory medal, merely allowing them to place in the last brick of he bridge to give the illusion that his audience were themselves creating the connections. The work seems in this way a manipulation. Wolfson appears to attempt an absolution of responsibility by declaring that it is the audience who are adding any meaning to the work. In reality, the layering, sequencing and editing of the content that he chooses has only a limited number of readings. *Raspberry Poser* is itself something of a "beautiful nightmare"; the appeal of its immediate visual and aural facade belies the concern created by the connections drawn between them.

Wolfson's use of popular music does add emotional gravitas to the videos initial experience and arguably allows for an increased accessibility due to the audiences ability to connect with the pre-established pop-cultural medium of the music video. That these factors ultimately lead to the potential manipulation of the work's audience is problematic. Consequently, it is perhaps interesting to think of how the formatting and incorporation of popular music and the music video could be used in the context of contemporary art in a way that abandons the hierarchies of Wolfson's control of content seen in *Raspberry Poser* and allows the relationship between artist and audience to function more democratically.

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<sup>17</sup> Jordan Wolfson quoted in Moshayedi, Aram. "Tell a Poser" in in *Jordan Wolfson: Ecce Homo / Le Poseur*. (Los Angeles: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 2013), p. 94.

## Give the Music to the Kids: The Visual Album and Democratisation Through Distribution

In *Only the Lonely*, Linda Norden writes of Wolfson's *Raspberry Poser*, "unlike a music video, *Raspberry Poser* plays as a loop, slows itself down, and periodically goes black and silent."<sup>1</sup> I would argue, instead, that with the emergence of the new music video formats such as the 'visual album', a contemporary audience is perhaps more familiar than Norden may realise with the interruption and confusion of the once easily categorised format of the music video. American musician Beyoncé's 2016 starkly political visual album *Lemonade* [fig8, fig9] discussed topics such as infidelity and black femininity through a series of songs interspersed and interrupted by a number of extended spoken word passages all wrapped together in a unified visual package. This breaking up of musical sections with spoken passages is a key example of how the visual album is pushing the boundaries of what is expected when a music video is experienced. The introduction of non-musical elements and a longer, specifically sequenced structure could perhaps be partly due to a reaction against the playlist culture of contemporary music streaming platforms such as Spotify, Tidal and Apple Music, where listeners pick and choose singular songs to listen to rather than engaging with an LP where each song is listened to in consecutive order. However, in the coming together of multiple popular visual and audial components, the artist also appears to test the audience's ability to engage with a more complex extended package.

On 9<sup>th</sup> December 2016, the artist Wolfgang Tillmans, largely known for his photography work, released his first visual album, *That's Desire/ Here We Are*<sup>2</sup>, a project with his band *Fragile*, via his profile on the video sharing website YouTube. The project was the 5<sup>th</sup> music video uploaded to his profile and his third to be released as a physical object in vinyl format, following on from his earlier 2016 releases, *2016 / 1986* and *Device Control*.

Two days prior to its release, Tillmans wrote of the film in an Instagram post: "participants danced and improvised in Los Angeles and New York to the music without previously knowing it"<sup>3</sup>, stating that the performances took place "in a white blank space to the sound of a boombox. A set of coloured gels in front of the window being the only production props."<sup>4</sup> The video follows Tillmans' description; what is presented appears to be a series of dances featuring a number of performers (including Tillmans himself), which have been improvised to each of the album's six songs. The performances all appear to take place within the walls of the same white cube style

<sup>1</sup> Norden, Linda. "Only The Lonely" in *Jordan Wolfson: Ecce Homo / le Poseur*. (Los Angeles: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 2013.) p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Wolfgang Tillmans. "Fragile - Visual Album - 'that's desire / here we are EP.'" *YouTube*. Accessed 20/03/2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--14l6ajk5c&t=322s>.

<sup>3</sup> Tillmans, Wolfgang. "Instagram Photo by Wolfgang Tillmans • Dec 7, 2016 at 12: 12pm UTC." Accessed 06/02/2017. [https://www.instagram.com/p/BNtyknCDHFJ/?taken-by=wolfgang\\_tillmans&hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/p/BNtyknCDHFJ/?taken-by=wolfgang_tillmans&hl=en).

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*.

gallery space and are aligned with the mood of the songs. For example the fast paced ‘electro-punk’<sup>5</sup> song, *Fast Lane*, features a male performer frantically banging his fists on the floor in time to the beat of the song [fig10] whilst the more meditative *Naïve Me*, written in the wake of the United Kingdom’s Brexit vote, features Tillmans stretching his body to touch opposite sides of the ‘gallery space’ [fig11].

In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin wrote that, “technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations that would be out of reach for the original itself”<sup>6</sup>. With ‘That’s Desire/ Here We Are’, although Tillmans does not see the work as a ‘copy’, the act of uploading the work onto Youtube suggests an attempt at democratising the viewing of his artworks. The work streamed inside the video frame on Youtube is an original, not a reproduction, but the wide availability of online content provides a platform to view original artwork created and published by a leading contemporary artist. This then utilises the notion of distribution of mechanically reproduced objects to widely distribute an original work. As Benjamin writes, “the authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from it’s beginning,”<sup>7</sup> going on to explain that in reproduction what is lost from an artwork is “its testimony to the history which it has experienced.”<sup>8</sup> This historical testimony and the “authority of the object”<sup>9</sup> that its history helps to create is something that Benjamin terms the object’s ‘aura’<sup>10</sup>. Whilst this may be true of the physical art object, the notion of ‘aura’ appears to become more complicated when tied to a work that is first viewed through an online video streaming platform. By utilising such a familiar popular culture format as a music video on such a conventional music video viewing platform as Youtube, one could argue that the question of ‘aura’ is no longer relevant. If an audience views *That’s Desire/ Here We Are* as they would view any other music video then perhaps it is not even recognised as an art film but rather as another recognisable item of pop culture. If Wolfgang Tillman’s were to create a chair that looked quite unusual but still had all the basic components of a chair and were to place it on display in Ikea, perhaps you would sit on it. The ‘aura’ of *That’s Desire/ Here We Are* exists whether it is viewed on a laptop or smartphone, at the home of its viewer or on a bus as it’s original intended viewing experience is non-specific. It does not exist in one place but in all places and the semi-religious experience and pilgrimage of gallery viewing is something that is not only not required but that also is irrelevant.

In another passage from *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* Benjamin writes of the relationship between reader and writer that in a time where any person with the ability to write has “in principle,... an opportunity to

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<sup>5</sup> Wolfgang Tillmans. “Fragile - Visual Album - ‘that’s desire / here we are EP.’” *YouTube*. Accessed 20/03/2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--14l6ajk5c&t=322s>.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. (United States: Prism Key Press, 2010.) p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p.4.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p.4.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, p.4.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, p.4.

publish, [...] At any moment, the reader is ready to turn into a writer.”<sup>11</sup> Writing therefore becomes “common property.”<sup>12</sup> With Youtube, the same can be said of video making. In Tillmans’ self-uploading of his work to Youtube, he places it into a space that can be accessed and published to by all those who have access to a computer or smartphone. For an artist who has, in the past, won the Turner Prize and who, only three months after uploading this video will have a solo exhibition at Tate Modern, this appears to be a very democratising act. Tillmans here appears to have circumnavigated the art world in order to deliver a work to the same space in which the audience can and do exhibit, therefore potentially dismantling the hierarchies placed between artist and audience. Even in what could be analogised as the ‘gallery shop’, the online record stores through which it is possible to buy the accompanying 12” vinyl record of *That’s Desire/ Here We Are*, the product offered is an original artwork. The price of £8.50<sup>13</sup>, for which the work can be bought, is perhaps in a similar bracket to that of a poster of an artwork in an established contemporary gallery. However, by purchasing a vinyl record, the buyer receives a fully constructed original artwork from the artist, complete with the meditative experience achieved in the ritualistic act of playing a vinyl record on a record player. Here the work functions in perhaps the same way as an artist’s limited edition might: a fully functioning artwork with its ‘aura’ intact. The vinyl is (although the limited numbers of its various editions of production often dictate its value) an object theoretically unlimited in copy to its potential buyer. This duality of stream-able video and buy-able pop music art object offers an increased accessibility for the work in both intellectual and physical terms.

Similarly to Beyonce’s *Lemonade*, Tillman’s *That’s Desire/ Here We Are* is embedded with his politics. With four of the six songs written in a period Tillman describes on his Youtube account as “Post-Brexit/ Pre-Trump”<sup>14</sup>, the work charts Tillmans’, and his collaborators’, relationship to the changing world around them whilst also, “reflecting the desire to carry on and live” their “lives in a quest for personal happiness, whatever the circumstances are.”<sup>15</sup> The song *Fast Lane*, was recorded in 1986 when Tillmans was 17 years old<sup>16</sup> influenced by, “cold war angst and nausea at political indifference”<sup>17</sup>. The inclusion of this song appears to serve as reminder of the previously mentioned ‘political indifference’ with key lyric “taking the fast lane into the dark”<sup>18</sup> serving as an appropriated metaphor for both Brexit, the

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>13</sup> Juno Records. “Search Results on Juno for: Fragile.” December 19, 2016. Accessed 06/02/2017, [http://www.juno.co.uk/search/?q%5Bartist%5D%5B%5D=%22fragile%22&hide\\_forthcoming=0](http://www.juno.co.uk/search/?q%5Bartist%5D%5B%5D=%22fragile%22&hide_forthcoming=0).

<sup>14</sup> Wolfgang Tillmans. “Fragile - Visual Album - ‘that’s desire / here we are EP.’” *YouTube*. Accessed 20/03/2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-14l6ajk5c&t=322s>.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*



rise of Donald Trump in the United States and the swell of far-right politics across the western world at the time of its 2016 release.

The question around the space in which particular works are shown seems to be a preoccupation of Tillmans'. In his on-going project *Playback Room* [fig12], originally created in Tillmans' Berlin gallery space Between Bridges and soon to be included in his solo exhibition at Tate Modern, Tillmans creates a space specifically intended for listening to recorded music. Furthermore, currently *Playback Room* has only been used for listening to recorded pop-music. In a press release for *Playback Room*'s 2016 installation in The Lenbachhaus, Munich, the following was written of the work:

Concert halls allow us to experience live music, and operas are staged in buildings erected for the purpose. Studio music as a distinctive art form stands out for lacking venues dedicated to its reception, even though many musicians regard the final recording of a song or album as the true essence of their art.<sup>19</sup>

Here we can see that the venue in which a work is displayed is particularly important to the way in which it is received. Where *Playback Room* seems appropriate as a space free from outside distraction in which the recording can be appreciated in its most singular form; by placing *That's Desire/ Here We Are* into the wider discourse of the music video he allows the work to be appreciated in perhaps its most freeing setting. The placement of 'That's Desire/ Here We Are' appears to reject the framework of the white cube gallery space. As Brian O'Doherty writes of the white cube gallery space in his book *Inside the White Cube*, "the ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is "art.""<sup>20</sup> For *That's Desire/ Here We Are*, although the video, by showing an improvised dance performance in a white walled space, perhaps takes some of the aesthetics of an 'art film', it seems necessary for the work engage with a setting that does not immediately place itself as 'art'. Where Tillmans allows, with *Playback Room*, recorded music to be treated with the same meditative experience as contemporary art thus elevating pop-music into the sphere of 'art', with *That's Desire/ Here We Are*, he brings art film and contemporary dance out of the often intimidatingly elevated intellectual art world and into a place where the work can be appreciated as music video and political statement first and as artwork second.

As O'Doherty writes of the white cube gallery space, "The white wall's apparent neutrality is an illusion. It stands for a community with common ideas and assumptions."<sup>21</sup> By placing the film on Youtube, Tillmans eliminates the interference of such a community. If placed into a similar white walled space, the white room in

<sup>19</sup> Lenbachhaus. "PLAYBACK ROOM." 2014. Accessed 20/03/2017, <http://www.lenbachhaus.de/exhibitions/2016/playback-room/?L=1>.

<sup>20</sup> O'Doherty, Brian. "Notes on the Gallery Space" in *Inside The White Cube*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.) p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> O'Doherty, Brian. "Context as Content" in *Inside The White Cube*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.) p. 74

which the performance occurs would be perhaps automatically assumed as ‘gallery’. Instead, the performance occupies a space perhaps more reminiscent of pop-music than of contemporary art, similar to the ‘singing in a white room’<sup>22</sup> background often used as a low budget set in pop-music videos. In interview with TateShots, regarding *Playback Room*, Tillmans declares of recorded music (and I believe this can be applied to music videos as well), “there is not the question of an alternative.”<sup>23</sup> Where recorded music is appreciated as a totally separate experience to performed music, so Tillmans’ video album should be treated separately to a contemporary improvised dance performance in a white cube gallery. Again, with the music video, “there is not the question of an alternative.”<sup>24</sup>

With *That’s Desire/ Here We Are* so interwoven with political meaning, it seems appropriate that Tillmans’ visual album be uploaded to Youtube, an egalitarian viewing window where his political message can be universally available. In the case of Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*, the question of availability of political content becomes more complex. With *Lemonade* as a visual album only initially only available to stream in full as exclusive content on the paid subscription service Tidal, Beyoncé’s vitally current political work initially appeared bizarrely out of reach for the majority of the general public. With multiple streaming services currently competing for public attention, each company is looking for popular musicians exclusive to their service in order to entice potential customers. Customers then have to make the decision between, for example, Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* on Tidal or Frank Ocean’s *Endless* on Apple Music or face paying for multiple streaming services each month. It is worth noting here that Tidal is a service established by Beyoncé’s husband Jay-Z and is a company in which Beyoncé herself is a shareholder and consequently this may then give an indication of where Beyoncé’s streaming loyalties lie. In her 2017 Grammy’s acceptance speech on winning the ‘Urban Contemporary Album’ category for *Lemonade*, a speech that largely addressed the topic of visibility for people and artists of colour, Beyoncé declared:

My intention for the film and album was to create a body of work that would give a voice to our pain, our struggles, our darkness and our history. To confront issues that make us uncomfortable.<sup>25</sup>

Given that this speech was delivered shortly after losing out on the Grammy for ‘Album of the Year’ to white soul singer Adele, surely a work that aims to offer a voice should be more widely available to those peoples to whom the voice is being given. The visual album and accompanying music did become available for download

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<sup>22</sup> Popularised in the late 1980s eg. Cocteau Twins – “Cico Buff”, Sparks – “The Number One Song In Heaven”. For more see: <http://singinginawhiteroom.tumblr.com/>

<sup>23</sup> Tate. “Wolfgang Tillmans – ‘what art does in me is beyond words’ | TateShots.” *YouTube*. Accessed 20/03/2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYIXGdoTwWA>.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>25</sup> Recording Academy / GRAMMYs, “Beyoncé Wins Best Urban Contemporary Album | Acceptance Speech | 59Th Grammys”. *Youtube*. Accessed 20/03/2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sl3bpkcrM6k>.

or physical purchase only a few days after the Tidal release for the standard price of a CD<sup>26</sup>. However, with *Pitchfork* reporting that Tidal earned 1.2 million<sup>27</sup> new users on the release of *Lemonade*, it may seem inappropriate to restrict access to such a vitally current political album in the pre-Trump portion of 2016 as a marketing strategy for the company, even for such a limited period of time. The closing line of *Formation*, the final song on *Lemonade*, Beyoncé states: “your best revenge is your paper”<sup>28</sup>, ‘paper’ being a colloquialism for money. It could therefore be that in financial gain through *Lemonade*’s exclusivity on Tidal, Beyoncé serves to offer ‘revenge’ against white supremacist American society, embodied by Trump, for artists of colour such as herself. The potential problems arising from streaming service competition were perhaps most clearly and succinctly articulated in two tweets from American musician and Tidal investor Kanye West who, seemingly in a moment of anti-competition clarity, wrote: “This Tidal Apple beef is fucking up the music game”<sup>29</sup>, “Fuck all this dick swinging contest. We all gon be dead in 100 years. Let the kids have the music.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Amazon. "LEMONADE By Beyoncé: amazon.co.uk: Music". *amazon.co.uk*. Accessed 20/03/2017, <https://www.amazon.co.uk/LEMONADE-Beyonc%C3%A9/dp/B01EPOY1AQ>.

<sup>27</sup> Hogan, Marc. "Beyoncé's Lemonade Earned Tidal 1.2 Million New Subscribers in a Week." May 13, 2016. Accessed 06/02/2017, <http://pitchfork.com/news/65458-beyonces-lemonade-earned-tidal-12-million-new-subscribers-in-a-week/>.

<sup>28</sup> beyonceVEVO. "Beyoncé - Formation". *Youtube*. Accessed 21/03/2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDZJPJV\\_\\_bQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDZJPJV__bQ).

<sup>29</sup> WEST, KANYE, "This Tidal Apple Beef Is Fucking up the Music Game," *Twitter*, Accessed 06/02/2017, [:/twitter.com/kanyewest/status/759436006810460160](https://twitter.com/kanyewest/status/759436006810460160).

<sup>30</sup> WEST, KANYE. "Fuck All This Dick Swinging Contest. We All Gon Be Dead in 100 Years. Let the Kids Have the Music." *Twitter*. Accessed 06/02/2017, <https://twitter.com/kanyewest/status/759437257099010048>.

## Collaboration Between Worlds: The Mediation of Cultural Hierarchies Through Collaboration

Regarding the 2016 collaboration between Frank Ocean and Wolfgang Tillmans, as mentioned in the introduction, I would like to analogise the concepts of collaborative work established by Charles Green in his book, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism*. Green discusses member of 'Art & Language' collective, Ian Burn's, 1992-93, *'Value Added' Landscapes* [fig13]. As Green writes, the collection of works "combine ready-made amateur landscapes" with Burn's own "short essays describing the appropriated paintings."<sup>1</sup> Although the works seem more appropriative than collaborative, Burn insisted that the works were 'collaborations' where, in the words of Green, "his contribution was the discursive framing of another artist's work."<sup>2</sup> Of course this exchange is not always mutually beneficial; with Burn's work, as his text is placed directly over the top of the original paintings, the 'amateur' artists' work becomes too obscured by his text for them to be properly appreciated in their own right. It seems unlikely that, in the absence of Burn's text, the art establishment would appreciate the original paintings if they were to view them again. Therefore, in Burn's *'Value Added' Landscapes*, the benefits received from his perceived addition of critical value to the works are only truly directed towards himself. It seems that, a worthwhile collaboration should offer a mutual exchange and merging of ideas that is either unknowable or unobtainable in the absence of the collaboration from which ultimately, both parties must benefit. Although the work can be viewed as exploitative in the destruction of Burn's "unwilling collaborators"<sup>3</sup> original intentions, there is perhaps something in the work's ability to, as Green writes, "mediate between different kingdoms"<sup>4</sup> that could similarly be applied to those collaborations between artists and musicians. In this mediation, the work becomes, again in the words of Green, "an opportunity to reflect on cultural hierarchies"<sup>5</sup> between the perceived 'high' culture of contemporary art and 'low' culture of popular music. This relationship between two differently tiered genres in the hierarchy of culture carries with it the opportunity for each to feed off of the other in mutually beneficial exchange.

This notion of "kingdoms" is something I would like to re-term 'worlds'. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner establish in their book *Sex in Public*, with reference to "queer world-making", "'world," like "public," differs from community or group because it necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more

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<sup>1</sup> Green, Charles. "The Artist as a Value Added Landscape" in *The Third Hand: Collaboration In Art From Conceptualism To Postmodernism*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.) p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, 191.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, 191.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, 192.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, 192.

spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points”<sup>6</sup>. Ocean and Tillmans share a commonality in that their open homosexuality situates them each within this shared queer ‘world’. Although the contemporary art and popular music ‘worlds’ similarly contain more people and spaces than can be identified in their underground scenes, the level of fame that both artists share places them each under the scrutiny of the mainstream; each “a community with common ideas and assumptions”<sup>7</sup>

The question of mutual benefits in the case of the collaboration between Ocean and Tillmans on the former’s visual album ‘Endless’ [fig1] and publication *Boys Don’t Cry* [fig14] is perhaps more complicated than it initially appears. Tillmans’ photography features heavily in both *Boys Don’t Cry* and as the cover of Ocean’s second 2016 album, *Blond(e)*. Tillmans’ song, *Device Control* bookending *Endless*, initially as a 15 second introduction to the visual album and secondly in full part way through the album’s closing track. As Tillmans explains in an Instagram post, Ocean’s decision to use *Device Control* in its entirety on *Endless* was an unexpected inclusion, declaring his “surprise”<sup>8</sup> that Ocean had chosen to do so. Tillmans does, in the same post; state that he was “enormously proud and happy”<sup>9</sup> for his song to be used by Ocean. However, the fact that the song was, on the date of the release of *Endless*, unshared by Tillmans and shared in full by Ocean non-consensually seems more an act of appropriation than of collaboration. Furthermore, had Tillmans not been “enormously proud” of the song’s inclusion on *Endless*, this could have proved immensely problematic. To quote Robert S. Nelson in this context, “what once was complete and meaningful is taken over by the second system and made to stand for a new notion”<sup>10</sup>. *Device Control*, before it’s appearance on *Endless* was “complete and meaningful” but only to those with whom Tillmans had shared it privately. However, the first public contextualisation this song is one that it’s creator, Tillmans, did not intend. Instead it is “taken over”<sup>11</sup> by the context of *Endless*. The public furore surrounding the release of *Endless*, as discussed in the introduction, perhaps increases the intensity of this hijacking of context. Given the fame of Ocean in the ‘world’ of popular music, the context of *Endless* is seemingly unavoidable for Tillmans, with his music being thrust suddenly into the mainstream. Had Ocean used *Device Control* after it’s release by Tillmans, the question of its use would merely be one of legality and copyright. However, by providing the initial public frame of reference for *Device Control* in its entirety, without the consultation or consent of its creator, Ocean is perhaps robbing Tillmans of his autonomy in controlling the context

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<sup>6</sup> Berlant, Lauren and Warner, Michael. “Queer Counterpublics” in “*Sex in Public.*” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (January 1998): 547. doi:10.1086/448884. p. 558

<sup>7</sup> O’Doherty, Brian. “Context as Content” in *Inside The White Cube*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.) p. 74

<sup>8</sup> Tillmans, Wolfgang. “Instagram Photo By Wolfgang Tillmans. Aug 19, 2016 At 3:22Pm UTC”. *Instagram*, Accessed 20/03/2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BJS4-aIDWLJ/>.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Nelson, Robert S. “Appropriation” in *Critical Terms For Art History*. 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.) pp 162, 163.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, 162.

of his own work. Tillmans is, in this portion of his collaboration with Ocean, initially an “unwilling collaborator”<sup>12</sup>.

Having written of Ocean’s use of Tillman’s work thus far in a negative manner, I would now like to discuss the potential benefits of this re-contextualisation of Tillmans’ work. With the notion of mediation between ‘worlds’, in the context of the collaboration between Tillmans and Ocean, the boundary of where each of the two artists sits within the ‘worlds’ of contemporary art and popular music seems very much blurred. Indeed, both figures seem to occupy each other’s ‘worlds’ as much as their own most commonly occupied ‘world’. Ocean is credited as director<sup>13</sup> of the “art project”<sup>14</sup> *Endless* and Tillmans is credited as maker of the popular music song *Device Control*, which introduces and concludes the film. Equally, Ocean still operates as a musician and Tillmans a photographer and contemporary artist. As Green writes of Ian Burn’s *‘Value Added’ Landscapes*, by placing himself as a critic ‘collaborating’ with the ‘amateur’ artist, he is “staging the figure of an artist composed of two non-artists”<sup>15</sup>. Whilst I would argue that to describe ‘amateur’ artists as “non-artists” places an unnecessary hierarchy in the description of these occupational terminologies, I believe the basic point can be applied to Ocean and Tillmans. Ocean and Tillman’s, by entering the ‘world’ of their collaborator create, within each of their separate bodies, a composite creator who can move freely between ‘worlds’. This is possibly because each has simultaneously the attention of the audience of both popular music and contemporary art turned toward them. In this way, it is perhaps possible to see the external collaboration between Ocean and Tillmans as a facilitator for collaboration between the internally separate practices that exist within each of them, simultaneously as contemporary artist and musician. Ocean and Tillmans here perhaps occupy this kind of liminal state where categorization of each artist’s practice is unclear. This internally blurred dichotomous composite author perhaps occupies a space where each practice pressures, as Green writes, “to cancel the other and whose “real” status was uncertain.”<sup>16</sup>

The question of audience is integral to the discussion around the potential benefits of collaboration between ‘worlds’. The audience familiar to Tillmans’ and Ocean’s work will carry with them separate “ideas and assumptions”<sup>17</sup> common to

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<sup>12</sup> Green, Charles. “The Artist as a Value Added Landscape” in *The Third Hand: Collaboration In Art From Conceptualism To Postmodernism*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.) p. 191.

<sup>13</sup> Noisy Staff, “Here Are The Full Credits From Frank Ocean's 'Endless' - Noisy”. *Noisy*. August 22, 2016. Accessed 16/12/2017, [https://noisy.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/here-are-the-full-credits-from-frank-oceans-endless](https://noisy.vice.com/en_uk/article/here-are-the-full-credits-from-frank-oceans-endless).

<sup>14</sup> Renshaw, David. “Meet the Director Claiming He’s Behind Frank Ocean’s Video Art Project.” May 20, 2015. Accessed 14/12/2016, <http://www.thefader.com/2016/08/01/frank-ocean-francisco-soriano-video>.

<sup>15</sup> Green, Charles. “The Artist as a Value Added Landscape” in *The Third Hand: Collaboration In Art From Conceptualism To Postmodernism*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.) p. 195.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, 195.

<sup>17</sup> O’Doherty, Brian. “Context as Content” in *Inside The White Cube*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.) p. 74

their respective 'worlds'. The publication, *Boys Don't Cry* (which features not only contributions from Ocean and Tillmans but also artists such as musician Kanye West and the now late queer Chinese photographer Ren Hang) was initially distributed independently as a free but limited edition item available for one day only from four shops in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and London. Also contained within the magazine, was a CD containing the packaging for Ocean's as of yet unheard album *Blond(e)*. The limited edition nature of *Boys Don't Cry* carries with it something of Walter Benjamin's notion of 'aura'<sup>18</sup>. The notion of 'aura' in this instance perhaps operates with similar religiosity and fetishisation of the object seen in contemporary art. As Brian O'Doherty discusses an object as innocuous as an ashtray, when placed in a white cube gallery, becoming "almost a sacred object"<sup>19</sup>, in the hands of Frank Ocean the magazine becomes equally sacred. Here, the sacredness of the object is focused by the popular culture media and the cult of celebrity. Tillmans' photography is thrust into the hands of a devoted set of Ocean's fans who have likely queued for hours in order to possess a copy of the magazine and CD and whose attention will almost definitely be directed towards Ocean rather than Tillmans. What Tillmans receives from the collaboration is not only a re-contextualisation of his work but also a platform that is not tied to the connotations carried with his perspective through the lens. Instead, the focus is on Ocean as he is the star of his fans' 'world'. Tillmans' contributions to 'Endless' are forever tied to Ocean. What is perhaps afforded to Tillmans by being placed in this context is the freedom to escape his own celebrity in the world of contemporary art and to move more freely in the 'world' of the publication and popular music under the "discursive framing"<sup>20</sup> of Ocean whilst simultaneously having his work placed under the scrutiny of an alternate audience perspective.

The collaboration between the performance artist Marina Abramović and American musician Jay-Z for the latter's 2013 *Picasso Baby: A Performance Art Film*<sup>21</sup> was, inspired by the former's work *The Artist is Present*. Abramović's *The Artist is Present* is a 3 month long durational performance first shown at her 2010 MoMA retrospective where artist and audience members could, one at a time, in Abramović's own words, "sit and engage with mutual gaze"<sup>22</sup> [fig15]. *Picasso Baby: A Performance Art Film* documents a six hour performance where Jay-Z performs, at points with Abramović, the eponymous song at Pace Gallery, New York (a white walled gallery space) to an audience with a majority of invited celebrities from

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<sup>18</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. (United States: Prism Key Press, 2010.) p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> O'Doherty, Brian. "Notes on the Gallery Space" in *Inside The White Cube*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.) p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> Green, Charles. "The Artist as a Value Added Landscape" in *The Third Hand: Collaboration In Art From Conceptualism To Postmodernism*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.) p. 191.

<sup>21</sup> "JAY Z - Picasso Baby: A Performance Art Film". *Vimeo*. Accessed 20/03/2017, <https://vimeo.com/80930630>.

<sup>22</sup> Marina Abramovic Institute, "Marina Abramovic On The Artist Is Present (2010)". *Vimeo*. Accessed 20/03/2017, <https://vimeo.com/72711715>.

popular culture and the art establishment. Some members of the audience, including Abramović herself, dance or sing with Jay-Z during the performance. The work was widely condemned with owner of the New York gallery Postmasters, Magda Dawson, tweeting, "Performance art has died today."<sup>23</sup>

What seems perhaps unpalatable about *Picasso Baby: A Performance Art Film* is its corporate sanitization of performance art with the endorsement of the genre's most prominent figure. In interview with Abramović for *Spike Art Magazine*, Kolja Reichart states to her, "When you rubbed your forehead with Jay-Z's, it seemed like an economical transaction: I grant you the right to use my piece, but in reverse you have to provide a space for my brand within your campaign."<sup>24</sup> [fig16] Abramović agreed, stating openly that her motivation to collaborate was in exchange for a monetary donation for the construction of her Marina Abramović Foundation. Furthermore, when Abramović briefly mistakenly believed that she had not received the money Jay-Z owed, she denounced the collaboration as "only a one-way transaction"<sup>25</sup> perhaps suggesting that she felt whatever had been exchanged was not of mutual artistic benefit (as surely any artistic benefits received would be retained thus negating the possibility of a such a one sided transaction) but simply a business transaction. For Jay-Z, the film and performance perhaps seem an attempt to gain some of the cultural cache of the art establishment as a marketing tool for the promotion of his album *Magna Carter Holy Grail* on which *Picasso Baby* features. The aforementioned album was released as a 72-hour free download by for customers of mobile phone company Samsung as part of a \$20m business deal with Jay-Z's record label Roc Nation.<sup>26</sup> The collaboration therefore seems to be not a mutual exchange and merging of ideas but instead one in which each party is solely interested in monetary gain. On the surface *Picasso Baby: A Performance Art Film*, appears to insert the performance of popular music into the contemporary gallery and thus the discourse of performance art. In reality, the collaboration in its failures, perhaps only dictates the notion that popular music is attempting to obtain some level of artistic legitimacy through cross category collaboration and therefore perpetuate the hierarchy between the two genres.

For Ocean, the associations with Tillmans and therefore with the 'world' of contemporary art could again cynically be read as an attempt to acquire art establishment legitimacy for his film and his publication. However, where corporate and financial interference suggests an impersonal relationship between Abramović and Jay-Z, the nature of the relationship between Ocean and Tillmans reads more as friendship. The two artists were brought together by independent fashion magazine

<sup>23</sup> Dawson, Magda. "The Dream Finale Would Be For James And Tilda To Join The Rapping. Performance Art Has Died Today. Bye". *Twitter*. Accessed 13/03/2017, [https://twitter.com/magdasawon/status/355053755168866305?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/magdasawon/status/355053755168866305?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw).

<sup>24</sup> Marina Abramović quoted in Reichart, Kolja. "'I Will Never Do It Again'". *Spike Art Daily*. Accessed 13/03/2017, <http://www.spikeartmagazine.com/en/articles/i-will-never-do-it-again>.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>26</sup> Forde, Eamonn. "Jay-Z's Samsung Deal Signals A Musical Future Where The Rich Get Richer". *The Guardian*. Accessed 13/03/2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2013/jul/04/jay-z-samsung-music-future>.



*Fantastic Man* with Tillmans commissioned to photograph Ocean for a feature on the musician<sup>27</sup>. Tillmans recalls in interview for *i-D* magazine, “he was well researched on my work in a way that few sitters ever are” and he felt that Ocean “was knowing exactly who he came to”<sup>28</sup>. Although the photographs were barred from being used for *Fantastic Man* by Ocean (later appearing in ‘Boy’s Don’t Cry’), the two artists stayed in contact. Ocean recalls “Stopping in Berlin to witness Berghain”<sup>29</sup>, the city’s famous gay club, with Tillmans in the introduction to *Boys Don’t Cry* [fig17]. In a 1981 interview *Friendship as a Way of Life* for the magazine *Gai Pied*, queer French philosopher Michel Foucault talks of the establishment of a queer “way of life” that “can be shared among individuals of different age, status and social activity.”<sup>30</sup> The way of life that he describes has at its core friendship, as Foucault describes, “the interest in friendship has become very important; one doesn’t enter a relationship simply in order to be able to consummate it sexually”<sup>31</sup>. As Foucault states in regards to the need to establish a queer “way of life”, “it is a myth of saying: there will no longer be any difference between homo- and heterosexuality”<sup>32</sup>. Created through a need to build a ‘world’ alternate to the pervading hetero-normative society, it is perhaps this kind of cross societal and cross generational queer friendship that allows collaborations such as Ocean’s and Tillman’s to flourish in a way that would be unlikely in hetero-normativity. Tillmans’ topless portrait of Ocean that adorns the cover of *Blond(e)* [fig18] and which can also be seen in his 2017 Tate Modern exhibition seems intimate and tender, taken with the care of a friend rather than a passing collaborator.

Perhaps the queer space which colours both Ocean’s and Tillmans’ experience and which fosters a relationship of care is key to the cultivation of collaboration across categorical ‘worlds’ of popular music and contemporary art; where friendship and a mutual respect for each other’s practice are regarded with utmost importance. The queer ‘world’, as it rejects the confines of hetero-normativity, perhaps equally is able to offer a solution to the rejection of cultural hierarchies and the creation of a more fluid and less visibly corporate state of cross category collaboration.

<sup>27</sup> Hogan, Marc. "Wolfgang Tillmans Explains How His Techno Track Bookended Frank Ocean's Endless | Pitchfork". *Pitchfork*. Accessed 13/03/2017, <http://pitchfork.com/news/67666-wolfgang-tillmans-explains-how-his-techno-track-bookended-frank-oceans-endless/>.

<sup>28</sup> Wolfgang Tillmans quoted in Salter, Steve. "Wolfgang Tillmans On Working With Frank Ocean And Returning To Music | Read | I-D". *I-D*. Accessed 13/03/2017, [https://i-d.vice.com/en\\_gb/article/wolfgang-tillmans-on-working-with-frank-ocean-and-returning-to-music](https://i-d.vice.com/en_gb/article/wolfgang-tillmans-on-working-with-frank-ocean-and-returning-to-music).

<sup>29</sup> Ocean, Frank. "Frank Ocean: Photo". *frankocean.tumblr.com*. Accessed 20/03/2017, <http://frankocean.tumblr.com/image/149245577141>.

<sup>30</sup> Foucault, Michel. *Friendship as a Way of Life*. n.p., 2008. [http://commoningtimes.org/texts/mf\\_friendship\\_as\\_a\\_way\\_of\\_life.pdf](http://commoningtimes.org/texts/mf_friendship_as_a_way_of_life.pdf). p. 138.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*, 138.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, 139.

## Conclusion

As discussed in this text, the relationship between popular music and contemporary video art can be both beneficial and detrimental. Jordan Wolfson's appropriation of popular music in *Raspberry Poser* leads to a potentially socially dangerous manipulation of its audience; where the HIV virus is perhaps flagrantly postured as 'villain'. Here, *Raspberry Poser* provides an example of how the formats seen in popular music and the music video, through their relatable immediacy, can be used in artworks to increase the work's accessibility to a contemporary audience. However, the work also serves as a warning sign. In the combination of politically and socially volatile content of imagery such as the HIV virus, this same immediacy carried by familiar pop-music also retains the possibility to lead the audience to draw potentially problematic conclusions.

In the utilization of the distribution methods of popular music videos provide an opportunity for artists to free themselves of the associations embedded within the white walls of the contemporary gallery space. The placement of Wolfgang Tillmans' *That's Desire/ Here We Are* on *Youtube* offers a widely accessible experience free from the necessity for viewers to pay to view the work. Conversely, streaming services such as *Tidal* and *Apple Music*, in competing for exclusive content from artists, have the potential to restrict access to works and therefore work counter to the potential for democratization offered by *Youtube*. The accessibility of works such as *Endless* and *Lemonade* on paid streaming services is limited as it is to an extent dictated by audience members' ability to pay for subscription charges and is therefore affected by their audience's personal financial situations. Historically, objects of music distribution such as CD and vinyl require payment. However, the existence of the Internet allows for content to be distributed freely and thus more democratically and so artists must choose the method of distribution they deem most appropriate. Video sharing platforms such as *Youtube* allow artworks to be more widely accessible and for artist and audience to both occupy and exhibit in the same space. Therefore, I argue that the political nature of Beyoncé's *Lemonade* and to an extent Frank Ocean's *Endless*<sup>1</sup> may be best suited to the widest distribution possible and perhaps seem inappropriately placed on paid streaming services.

Through collaboration, Charles Green states, "a mediation of cultural hierarchies"<sup>2</sup> between two 'worlds' of popular music and contemporary art can be offered. Jay-Z and Marina Abramović's collaboration on *Picasso Baby: A Performance Art Film* in its corporate sponsorship potentially opens such collaborations up to easy scepticism. Conversely, through engagement with Michel Foucault's discussion of queer intergenerational friendship in relation to the

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<sup>1</sup> The line "Sucked a dick long had a swan neck" on the song 'Sideways' was, at this point in time, Ocean's most vividly and openly queer.

<sup>2</sup> Green, Charles. "The Artist as a Value Added Landscape" in *The Third Hand: Collaboration In Art From Conceptualism To Postmodernism*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.) p. 192.

collaboration between Wolfgang Tillmans and Frank Ocean on *Endless, Boy's Don't Cry* and *Blond(e)*, it appears a less visibly corporate mode of collaboration between 'worlds' can be established. It is perhaps this notion of collaboration through queer cross-generational and cross-physical-boundary friendships that has also spawned the collaborations seen again in Tillmans' *That's Desire/ Here We Are*, which features a number of queer collaborators. American rapper Ash B. raps "I'm a lesbian, I only fuck with girls"<sup>3</sup> on opening song *That's Desire* and transgender model, Hari Nef prominently features dancing throughout the film. Through collaboration, artists and musicians have the opportunity to generously provide platforms for each other's works to be experienced in new contexts and by new audiences.

This notion of the sharing of platforms, seen in the distribution of *That's Desire/ Here We Are*, seems important to Tillmans. His work *Playback Room*, has only ever played music by other musicians who Tillmans admires. His Instagram account<sup>4</sup> similarly reinforces this idea. Tillmans posts regularly to his account, giving, in great detail, insights into his daily life, politics and working processes, sharing his world with his audience not just through his artwork but through this apparently honest presentation of himself. Tillmans is not cryptic in his presentation and does not appear to shroud himself in any kind of mystery. Similarly, Frank Ocean's Tumblr page<sup>5</sup>, though cryptic in its more sparse and sporadic set of updates features alongside posts of album details, personal paragraphs of queer solidarity and, on the day of the release of *Blonde*, "FUCK, SORRY.. I TOOK A NAP BUT IT'S PLAYING ON APPLE RADIO RN."<sup>6</sup>

It is perhaps through this notion of sharing and openness that a potential future for the building and maintaining of productive relationships between popular music and contemporary art can be theorised. Through the sharing of platforms, both online and physical, and openness in sharing through collaboration it is perhaps possible to maintain a relationship between the two categories that avoids scepticism and allows for a more equal mediation of cultural hierarchies.

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<sup>3</sup> Tillmans, Wolfgang. "Fragile - Visual Album - 'that's desire / here we are EP.'" *YouTube*. Accessed 20/03/2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--14l6ajk5c&t=322s>.

<sup>4</sup> Tillmans, Wolfgang. "Wolfgang Tillmans (@Wolfgang\_Tillmans) • Instagram Photos And Videos". *Instagram.Com*. Accessed 20/03/2017, [https://www.instagram.com/wolfgang\\_tillmans/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/wolfgang_tillmans/?hl=en).

<sup>5</sup> Ocean, Frank. "Frank Ocean". *Tumblr*. Accessed 20/03/2017, <http://frankocean.tumblr.com/>.

<sup>6</sup> Ocean, Frank. 2017. "Frank Ocean". *Tumblr*. Accessed 20/03/2017, <http://frankocean.tumblr.com/post/149244630771/fuck-sorry-i-took-a-nap-but-its-playing-on>.

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Fig1: Still from *Endless* (2016), Frank Ocean, visual album, 45m



Fig2: Still from *Endless* (2016), Frank Ocean, visual album, 45m



Fig3: Still from *Raspberry Poser* (2012), Jordan Wolfson, video, 13m54s

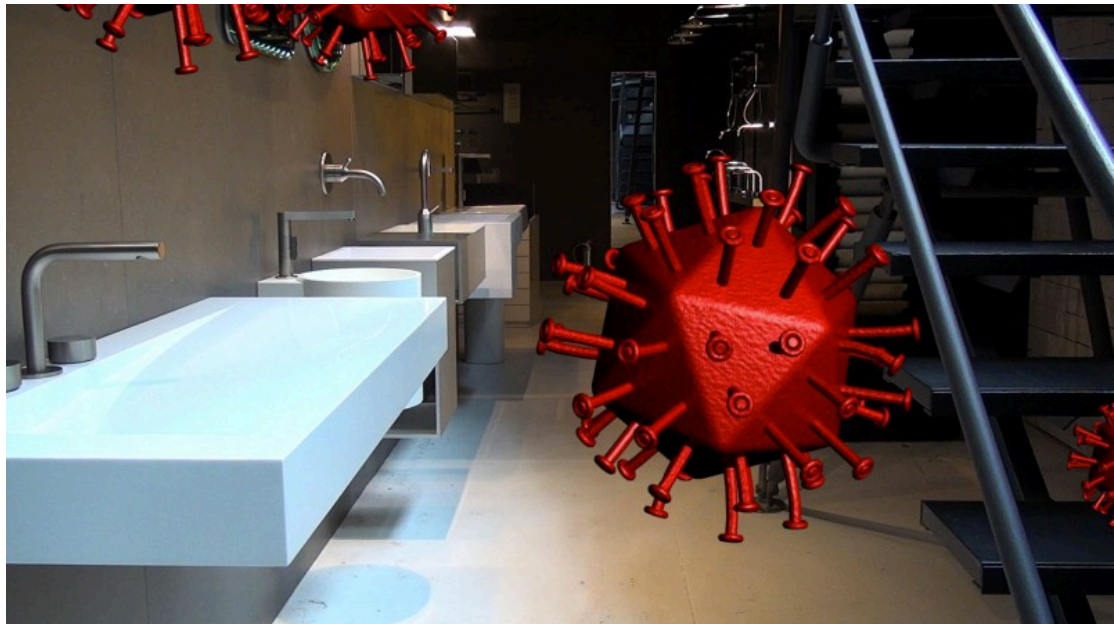


Fig4: Still from *Raspberry Poser* (2012), Jordan Wolfson, video, 13m54s





Fig5: Still from *Raspberry Poser* (2012), Jordan Wolfson, video, 13m54s



Fig6: Still from *Raspberry Poser* (2012), Jordan Wolfson, video, 13m54s



Fig7: *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), Marcel Duchamp, 1.3 m x 64 cm x 42 cm



Fig8: *Lemonade* (2016), Beyonce, album cover, 1h5m



Fig9: Still from *Lemonade* (2016), Beyonce, visual album, 1h5m



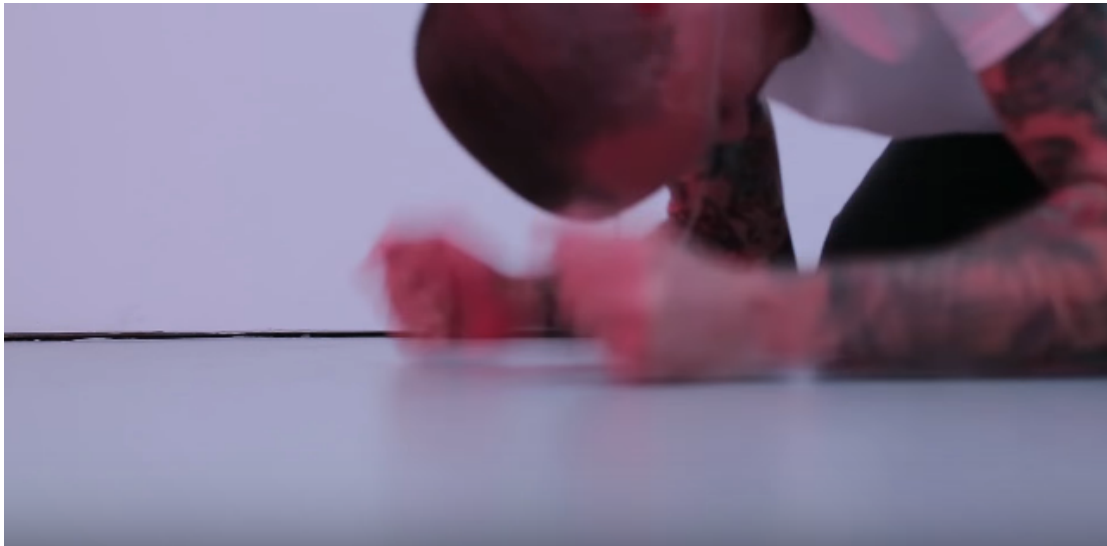


Fig10: Still from *That's Desire/ Here We Are* (2016), Wolfgang Tillmans, video, 27m35s



Fig11: Still from *That's Desire/ Here We Are* (2016), Wolfgang Tillmans, video, 27m35s



Fig12: Installation photo of *Playback Room* at The Lenbachhaus (2016), Wolfgang Tillmans

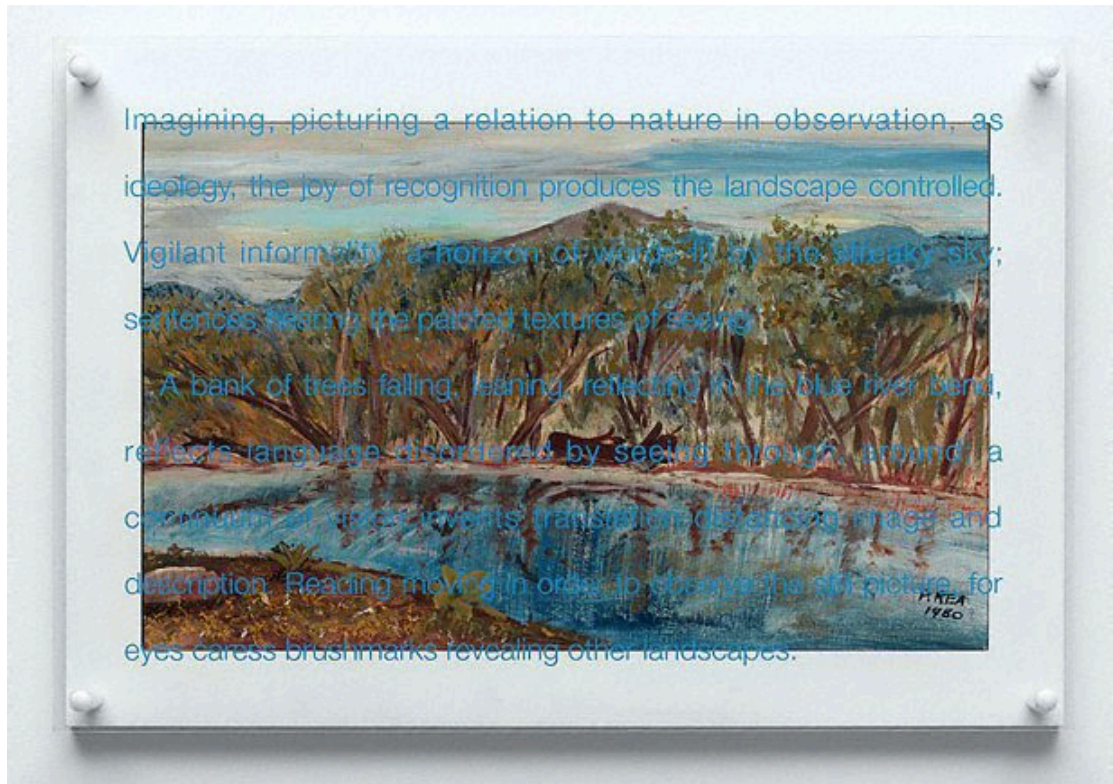


Fig13: 'Value Added' landscape no. 11 (1993), Ian Burn, oil and ink on board, transparent synthetic polymer resin, 59 x 87 x 10.5 cm



Fig14: *Boys Don't Cry* (2016), Frank Ocean, publication, photography by Wolfgang Tillmans





Fig 15: Documentation of *The Artist Is Present* at MoMA (2010), Marina Abramovic, performance



Fig 16: Still from *Picasso Baby: A Performance Art Film* (2013), Jay-Z, video, 8m55s

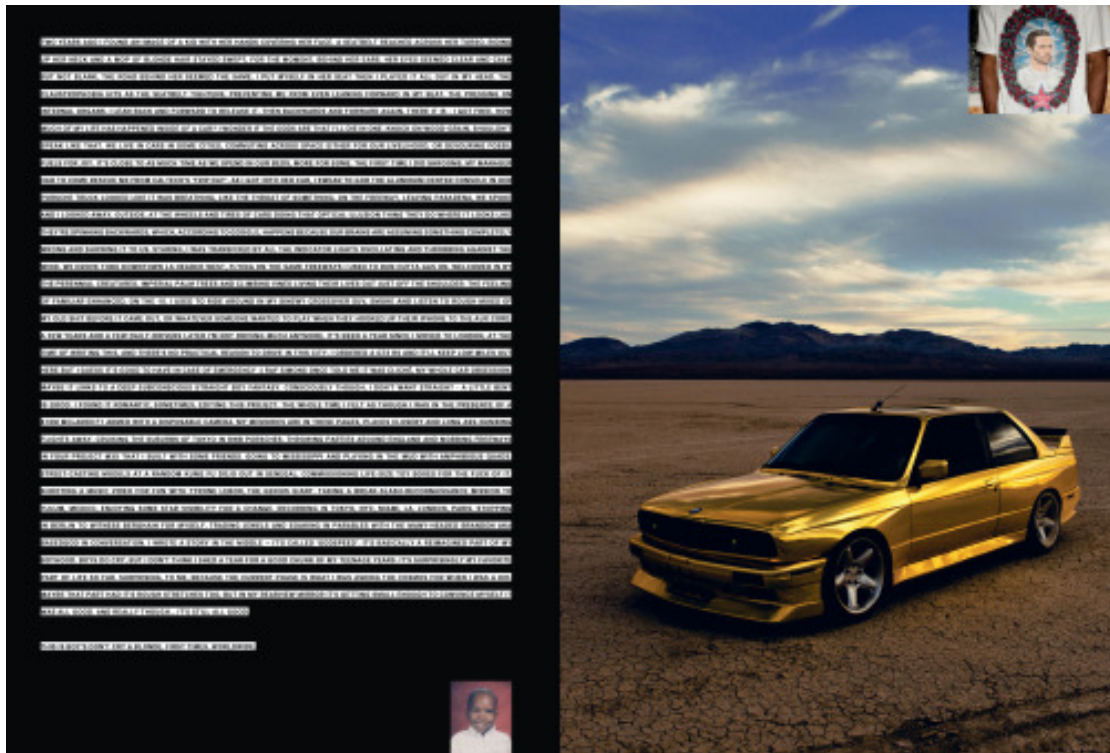


Fig17: Pages from *Boys Don't Cry* (2016), Frank Ocean, publication

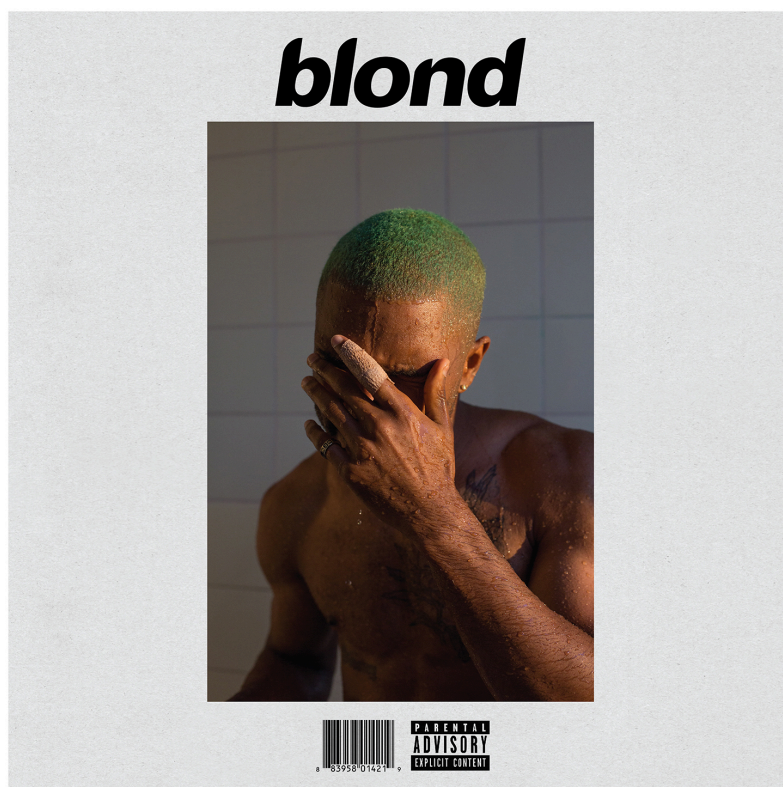


Fig18: *Blond(e)* (2016), Frank Ocean, album cover, photography by Wolfgang Tillmans

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