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Leonie Biney's Formation of Black Feminine Totality via Dream-Like, Otherworldly Futures

Leonie Biney is a British artist of Ghanaian, Nigerian, Sierra Leonean, and Jordanian ancestry. As a singer-songwriter who works largely independently, her music blends bedroom pop, dream pop, indie, and alt-pop; her music videos also incorporate whimsical and fantastical aesthetics (Wild Paths). For my video essay, I choose to focus specifically on Leonie Biney's 2025 single, "Groupie," later also released in the *When You Turn Around* EP in 2026.

The song is told from Biney's first-person perspective and addresses the viewer/listener in the second person. In it, she touches on the infatuation and jealousy she feels over the subject, using a variety of metaphors and small, quotidian experiences to highlight the emotion and conflict she feels over this perceived unrequited love. With the song's outro consisting of scat syllables, the final lyrical contents in its bridge ask the listener whether she can be "someone to call" and "someone at all" ("Groupie"). The music video visually portrays this introspection, including clips of her playing the backing guitar, running through dreamlike natural scenes, and occasionally facing impossible or metaphorical situations, all blanketed by hazy editing and scrapbook-esque lyrics. Overall, Biney manages to tell a captivating and widely-relatable experience of a deep crush without referencing specific features or characteristics like the appearance, gender, or situational context of any people other than herself mentioned in the lyrics. Yet, these experiences obviously draw from her own, as she implicitly states in other videos and social media appearances ("This song is out now"). As a dark-skinned Black woman of the African diaspora, she narrativises her inner world and claims a universality of persona

unaffected by the relations of oppression that characterise real-life society. Thus, I argue that *Leonie Biney's storytelling through a thin personage and broad lyrical relatability appear in intentional contradistinction with her salient, down-to-earth physical embodiment in her art as a dark-skinned Black woman, manifesting dually feminist and Afropessimist reclamations of her agency and radical existence via the Afrofuturist imagining of unbounded romantic realities.*

To clarify, I will define the philosophical terms used in my thesis as follows.

Dominance feminism "describes sex and gender equality as arising from the sexualized subordination of women by men" (Abrams), and particularly positions gender as a "primary axis of difference" preceding constructions like race and class within society (Nash).

Afropessimism contends that "Blacks are not Human subjects, but are instead structurally inert props, implements for the execution of White and non-Black fantasies and sadomasochistic pleasures" (Wilderson); in other words, rather than conceiving of Blackness as a specific cultural identity, it may instead be analysed as the position of exclusion, fungibility, and inhuman otherness fundamental to the contrastive construction of humanity in modern civil society.

Finally, Afrofuturism "expresses notions of Black identity, agency and freedom through art, creative works and activism that envision liberated futures for Black life" (Smithsonian). While known for science fiction aesthetics with an exploration of technological advancement in relation to the Black social condition, the term also encompasses works like Biney's, whose envisioned future is still magical and surreal and thus a departure from currently lived reality.

As stated, like many of Biney's other songs, "Groupie" is told from an intimate first-person perspective and directly addresses an unspecified subject in the second person. In general, her lyrics' poeticism abstract and distill the dreamy emotions and general reverie as experienced by people in love, allowing for direct relatability with her very thin personage by the

listener. Sonically, bedroom pop is also characterised by its low fidelity and intentional "at-home" recording quality (hence "bedroom") rather than that of traditional studios. This also contributes to an ethos of down-to-earth relatability and thematic universality. Yet her physical embodiment in music videos and social media posts as a dark-skinned Black woman, a solo act doubly or triply underrepresented in general media and especially within her genre, signify a special reclamation of individuality. In a nation and world where anti-Blackness, and the construction of Blackness as a position of fungibility, arguably form a substratum of civil society, the salience of Biney's body and personal voice in her art becomes an intentional demonstration of agency. Here there can thus be identified intersections between dominance feminism and Afropessimism in Biney's specific construction of Black femininity within a fantasy world that seemingly knows no society other than her internal imagination and perceptions: "the breadth of being alive, the principle that the lived experience of one who is black and female is comprehensive enough to manifest totality" (Quashie). Afropessimism argues firstly that society's external construction of race is embedded in White Western logics of definition via exclusion, with Blackness being "coterminous with slavery," according to Frank Wilderson, a writer and professor of African American Studies at the University of California, Irvine. It asserts that Blackness is thus ontologically a position of social death, whereby Black people are treated as "dead" and dehumanised individuals unworthy of social participation, accumulating as property even as they are still physically alive. Strains of Afropessimism such as Wilderson's, however, also position Black struggle and oppression as non-synonymous with and actually actively appropriated by the struggles of various marginalised groups, including the non-Black working class, non-Black LGBTQ+ people, and non-Black women. Thus it has historically seemed to reject certain strains of Black feminist scholarship which seem to, by contrast, position

gender as an aforementioned primary axis of difference, arguing that the sociocultural refusal to see Black people as people thus un-genders Black flesh, as Black women are by proxy no longer "women" (Nash). In other words, the struggle of Blackness supersedes that of womanhood. However, both dominance feminism and Afropessimism can be identified as similar insofar as they position categorical oppression as something arising from relational definition and construction of one group as superior to/in opposition to another. Additionally, Afropessimism features a forward-facing prescription that social death is "constructed by violence and imagination[...] thus like class and gender, which are also constructs, social death can be destroyed" (Wilderson). This highlights its potential synthesis, rather than casting aside, of its approaches to Blackness with approaches to womanhood as a category. Although dominance feminism has since given way to evolving conceptions of gender beyond a fundamental binary (Nash), the point remains that radical existence in the dual assertion of one's Blackness as well as one's womanhood can themselves destroy those current societal constructions of such which are recognised by both dominance feminism and Afropessimism as inherently exclusionary and oppressive. Black aliveness, the action spurred by Afropessimism's Black death, actively "recognizes gender as a site of human beingness but also as a violation" (Quashie). Thus, although Afropessimism may still not accept the same fundamental philosophical premise as the "White" dominance feminism, the shaping of modern Black feminist theory as centering Black women's experiences can also still acknowledge the ontological and rhetorical bases that Afropessimism shares with traditions like dominance feminism (Nash). Following this, Biney defines her own existence as a Black woman independently, rather than in relation to either Whiteness or masculinity, and creates a personality whose individuality transcends simple demographics. By intentionally tailoring her style and musical visuals as to leverage her

extremely specific personal experience towards general individual relatability to the listener, Biney actually forms an artistic attempt at casting aside contemporary conventional logics of racialised and gendered experiences within White patriarchy and reconstructing them entirely independently.



Fig. 1: Abstract and dreamy visuals are ubiquitous throughout the music video, although they also consistently centre Biney as the focus of attention ("Groupie").

The music video in particular can be analysed as a holistic product, with emphasis on its overarching themes and evocative aesthetics. The video's cinematic choices and edited visual effects create a storyline that enhances one's interpretation and understanding of the lyrical narrative. The hazy, unclear, and dream-like mood of Biney's music video is a well-constructed exploration of a romantic future as situated within a wider reality (or un-reality). While not exactly science fiction, the video's portrayal of a quotidian fantasy still captures what is almost magical realism in aesthetic, or at least a speculative piece blurring boundaries between fiction

and nonfiction. Thus, Afrofuturism appears as a resource for this manifestation of Black speculative realities (Ringer), characterising Biney's vision of a post-suffering future where she is free to narrate, express, and relate emotions with the audience as someone saliently Black, female, and fully human. Additionally, being a dark-skinned Black woman whose artistic peers in other genres may deconstruct femininity by realising personages of hypermasculinity or hypersexualisation, Biney perhaps represents a more conventional reconstruction of said femininity through clothing and style choices, and finds a powerful voice in such. She does not specifically name any Black or feminine experience in the lyrics of the song ("Groupie"), thereby echoing her application of Afropessimism as a radical reconstruction of her existing lived humanity, even if "traditional," completely outside the relational boundaries of present-day social identity. As Kevin Quashie, an assistant professor of Afro-American studies at Smith College, asks in his book *Black Aliveness, or A Poetics of Being*: "What would it mean to consider black aliveness, especially given how readily — and literally — blackness is indexed to death? To behold such aliveness, we have to imagine a black world... we have to imagine a black world so as to surpass the everywhere and everyway of black death, of blackness that is understood only through such a vocabulary. This equation of blackness and death is indisputable and enduring, surely, but if we want to try to conceptualize aliveness, we have to begin somewhere else. This is a story of us, a story of black aliveness as the being of us." I contend that Biney is doing exactly this: without explicitly referencing her own Blackness or even non-traditional femininity, she discards Black death and feminine oppression and constructs a world of Black female aliveness. The Black female experience loses definition, not because it is diluted, but rather that there is *no need* to define it in contrast to any other experience. Quashie again writes that "this black world is not one where the racial logics and harming predilections of antiblackness are inverted but one

where blackness is totality, where every human question and possibility is of people who are black." Her Afrofuturism in this way is thus not entirely conventional in that it does not necessarily incorporate specific elements of African culture or diaspora experience (e.g. slavery or segregation, which it is worth mentioning are also in themselves Black American-centered histories). Rather, the continuities of struggle within Blackness as posited by Afropessimism are still implicitly recognised by the extreme intimacy of her art to her lived experience. In other words, Afropessimism arguably becomes a political mythology more than just an analytical framework, where Afrofuturism can again be drawn upon to nuance, characterise, and extend the collapsed Afropessimistic conceptions of the Black experience across spatiotemporal lines (Ringer). Her pasts of exhibiting traditional femininity and her intimately personal experience of romance as a member of the Black diaspora are thus the "Afro" building blocks upon which Biney constructs Afro-futures. By managing to distill a near-universal experience into her own highly personal and embodied narrative, with specific scenes that signify struggles with stagnancy and self-alienation, Biney reclaims a complex sense of self and instills it inherently into her work. For example, she literally portrays the idea of a reality-defying self-awareness and reflection through the appearance of a full-body mirror in the middle of a forest clearing; she then bounds through a series of related but imagined aesthetic scenes ("Groupie"). Other examples abound of this: the lyrics themselves actually narrate her struggle with a love who does not recognise her, and selectively use pronouns (exclusively "I" and "you," even referring to the object of jealousy as "the new piece" rather than "him/her/them") to bound the world while still keeping it open to interpretation and relation to the viewer's own experiences ("Groupie"). The presence of physics and conventional logic-defying moments and artifacts within the visuals, and the continuously interspersed scenes of herself running without a destination, finding objects in

unexpected places, and even on stagnant repeat in her home draw on themes of spatiotemporality and its clever use to create surreal Afro-futures via her embodied experiences ("Groupie"). Especially as she can be observed playing her own backing track and even speaking directly to the camera at one point ("Groupie"), the meta-nature of this fantasy is made obviously intentional, furthering Biney's real-life and in-universe agency as a liberated storyteller. The fantastical is treated as quotidian, and vice versa. The universality and relatability of her experiences are not a watering-down of the oppression of Blackness and femininity, but instead represent the inseparable injection of Biney's individuality into the fantasies she shares with her audience, the world.



Fig. 2: Visuals are included of Biney running stationarily inside her own home, enhancing the effect of spatiotemporal fictions within the Afrofuturist style ("Groupie").

To conclude, the music of Leonie Biney embodies in its every artistic styling, choice, and very nature the Black feminism of simple aliveness. In universalising her extremely personal experience and making salient her presence in her art, she utilises ontological bases of dominance feminism and Afropessimism to construct an Afrofuturist world of her very and singular own, inviting and enticing listeners to a collectivity of Black being free from the predilections of an anti-Black and anti-female world. She creates an inherent "totality: we *are* and are of the universe; we *are* and are of a black world" (Quashie). As Biney herself asks in the final lyrics of her song, "can I be someone at all?" She answers herself with music.



Fig 3. Leonie Biney poses wistfully, guitar in hand, gazing into an unknown and unbounded distance as her video fades to black ("Groupie").

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