A School for Singing: The Poetics, Politics, and Aesthetics of the CBGB Scene

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ABSTRACT

On August 16, 1974, exactly one week after Richard Nixon's resignation, the Ramones made their debut at CBGB. Over the next ten years, the club would become synonymous with the punk aesthetic that the Ramones embodied. By shifting, however temporarily and by no means completely, the focus of punk studies (and by extension, cultural studies, American studies, urban studies, and queer studies) back to an often disavowed origin point, CBGB and New York City, "A School for Singing" rediscovers a utopian imaginary inherent in that scene often taken to be one of the most shambolic and nihilistic in the history of postmodern arts and letters. Punk was not just a musical movement, it was an artistic event that had wider ramifications, felt across the art world, from the dingiest clubs to the most rarefied art galleries, publishing houses, and runways. Just this past year, the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art opened its fifth most popular exhibit of all time, "Punk: Chaos to Couture," which features, among other mementos of the punk era, a faithful recreation of the CBGB bathroom, where "all the action happened," as Patti Smith once quipped.

"A School for Singing" returns us to the space of CBGB, not just the bathroom, but the awning, the bar, the stage, and the street outside in order to understand the aesthetics, politics, and poetics of this space. Spaces tell a story, and "A School for Singing" attempts to speak the language of the stones. It takes its title from W.B. Yeats: "Nor is there singing school but studying / Monuments of its own magnificence," and speculates that the CBGB scene intervened on Yeats's classical modernism and the avant-garde at a moment of cultural and political crisis. It linked the modernist struggle for autonomy, poetically, to contemporary political struggles over working class rights,

queer identity, and deindustrialization in an aesthetic language that was literary, musical, and visual, and was also equally indebted to the vernacular of popular culture. In the process, the CBGB scene sowed the seeds for all punk scenes and all punk aesthetics to come.

At its core, the CBGB scene was a product of the cultural crisis that gripped the U.S. at the beginning of the 1970s. Besides Nixon's resignation, the Ramones's first appearance coincided almost exactly with the one-year anniversary of the Case-Church Amendment, ending the Vietnam War, in theory if not in fact. In their songs, the Ramones sang about Vietnam, as well as Patty Hearst, Charles Manson, and the recent film *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Patti Smith dedicated her first single to the memory of Jimi Hendrix and the spirit of Patty Hearst. In other words, the CBGB scene was imbued with what Frank Kermode once called, in partial reference to William S. Burroughs, a fixture at the club, "a sense of an ending." Burroughs was a particular hero to Richard Hell, who gave the club and its scene an anthem, "Blank Generation," the blank in which, literally represented by silence on the song's studio recording, was meant to signify not a lack of origins but a desire for them, for what Michel Foucault might describe as a "heterotopic" space, in which his generation could thrive.

"A School for Singing" interrogates this heteropian desire for any-space-whatsoever in a series of case studies starting, in the introduction, with the Ramones's first appearance at CBGB in 1974. It then turns, in the first chapter, to the germinal musician in the CBGB scene and Velvet Underground co-founder Lou Reed, and the extraordinarily important influence two figures within the queer culture of the 1960s, William S. Burroughs and Andy Warhol, as well as his poetic mentor Delmore Schwartz,

had on his music, lyrics, and performance career. Reed's work is analyzed within the specific frame of the "queer child," offered by literary critic Kathryn Bond Stockton, which the chapter contends was central to the CBGB scene's political and aesthetic imaginary. This interest in the queer child carries over into the dissertation's second chapter, on punk appropriations of girl group pop music, which tracks this figure of the queer child through the contemporary subcultural theory of Judith Halberstam, Tavia Nyong'o and José Muñoz, all of whom have written on punk.

The third and fourth chapters of "A School for Singing" focus on the Ramones, often thought of as the most demotic of the CBGB artists. To the contrary, the Ramones were far more conceptually sophisticated than other critics have realized. For instance, an early admirer of the Ramones was the conceptual artist Dan Graham, alongside whose work the Ramones's performances are read dialectically in the dissertation's fourth chapter, especially the Ramones's 1980 album *End of the Century* (which to this point has received very little critical attention), and Graham's two video artworks *Performer/Audience/ Mirror* and *Rock My Religion*. The Ramones and Graham, who also wrote critical essays about punk, were participating in a larger cultural dialogue concerning working class identity, sexuality, and deindustrialization in the U.S. at the end of the 1960s, which links their work back to figures such as Reed, Burroughs, and Warhol, as well as the historical avant-garde so beloved by other CBGB artists, such as Patti Smith and Richard Hell.

The central portion of "A School for Singing" ends with two chapters on the literary afterlives of the CBGB scene in the fictional works of William S. Burroughs, who participated in the scene, and William Gibson, who followed it. In particular, these

chapters develop my notion of the CBGB scene as a heterotopia. These chapters describe how the concerns with space, expressed in these two literary works, responded to the CBGB scene's original interest in queer visibility and the crisis of urban redevelopment.

The coda to "A School for Singing" explores the cultural memory of the CBGB scene in the present. Despite the way in which the original poetics, aesthetics, and politics of the CBGB scene are reappropriated, commodified, and assimilated in cultural productions as various as Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from a Goon Squad*, the recent "Chaos to Couture" exhibit, the Pussy Riot protest, and Occupy Wall Street, this coda insists, as does the rest of the dissertation, on uncovering, in the tradition of cultural critics—Marxist, queer, feminist, and otherwise—the utopian spirit of punk that imbues the scene's memory, which refuses to concede to its reification. The cognitive mapping of the CBGB scene offered here is ultimately intended as a blueprint for how this resistance might continue in the twenty-first century, and is intended to be read alongside other periodizing works within American studies, such as Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front*, Scott Saul's *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, and Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound*, to name just a few.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project officially began at a meeting of a cultural studies reading group at the University of Virginia, organized by Ben Fagan, during which we discussed Dick Hebdige's *Subculture*. After that initial discussion, I met with Sylvia Chong, who encouraged me to pursue my interest in music and youth culture more seriously as a research project. Later, Eric Lott came onboard as my dissertation director and advised me to indulge my love for CBGB punk and explore the meaning of that club as a space. The rest, as they say, is history, and Sylvia and Eric deserve thanks, more than anyone else, for any insight contained herein. All of the shortcomings are my own. Richard Will, as well, has been an encouraging interlocutor on all things musical since I first took a graduate seminar with him on folk revivals in the year before I began the project, and Michael Levenson graciously agreed to offer his own insights into the project at the eleventh hour, which will surely benefit the dissertation as it transforms into a book. Other faculty members at the University of Virginia have been equally engaged and encouraging. Among these, Jennifer Wicke has been perhaps the greatest champion of my career and thinking, and David Golumbia provided an invaluable space for intellectual inquiry by organizing the department's Theory Reading Group.

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you to spend your life with, because you'll never get bored, and I meant it. Kristina, you changed my life and this dissertation, and it couldn't have been completed without you. I thank you for everything.

INTRODUCTION: The Punk Event

On August 16, 1974, exactly one week after Richard Nixon resigned from office and a year after the Case-Church Amendment was passed, ending U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War in theory if not in fact, in the midst of the oil crisis and the 1970s recession, from which we may still be recovering, a brand new rock band called the Ramones made their debut on the stage of a dingy biker bar at 315 Bowery in downtown Manhattan called CBGB-OMFUG or CBGB for short. CBGB-OMFUG stood for Country Bluegrass Blues and Other Music for Upstanding Gourmandizers, but the original idea of its owner Hilly Kristal, to feature the same sort of roots music mentioned in its name, never took off.[1] Instead, between its opening in December 1973 (nobody seems to know the exact date), until its closing on October 15, 2006, CBGB became synonymous with another genre of rock music called punk.

As several commentators have noted, Tavia Nyong'o and Stacy Thompson in particular, "punk" is a complicated term, the full range of meanings of which would be difficult to describe.[2] In his recent article "Brown Punk," Nyong'o offers the following,

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[1] Most histories of CBGB regard the original purpose of the bar, as a kind of honky-tonk, meant to spearhead a country music revival downtown, as a weird coincidence. However, it is interesting to wonder if Kristal's original purpose for the bar might have had something to do with what historian Bruce Schulman has called the "southernization" of U.S. politics and culture during this period. As part of this southernization, for instance, in 1973, as Schulman notes, New York mayor John Lindsay created Country Music Day in the city to honor the Country Music Association's choice to hold their annual conference there (xiv). The 1970s in general were also the period when southern rock and country music began the incredible commercial revival that they still enjoy today. See Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Politics, and Society* (NY: Da Capo Press, 2002).

[2] Tavia Nyong'o, "Brown Punk: Kalup Linzy's Musical Anticipations," *TDR: The Drama Review* 54:3 (Fall 2010), 71-86; "Do You Want Queer Theory (or Do You Want the Truth)? Intersections of Punk and Queer in the 1970s," *Radical History Review* 100

punk "gathers to it the outside or underbelly of society, less through a specific semiotics than through what is frequently, if amorphously, termed an attitude. Punk attitude presents a hole or aperture in the symbolic order, through which history gleams."[3] Within the context of musicological discourse, Bernard Gendron's traces the etymology of the term punk in a chapter on the genre in his book *From Monmartre to the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde*.[4] As a noun, the Oxford English Dictionary offers at least three divergent meanings—a prostitute, a tool for punching holes, and a piece of "soft decayed or rotten wood."[5] Associated with the latter meaning, a "punk" is also a spark used to start a fire. Of course, as Nyong'o has pointed out, the term also had a life of its own in prison discourse, and is still deployed widely as black vernacular slang, describing the bottom in an act of gay sex.[6] As I mention below, Nyong'o traces the interesting intersections between punk's recent usage both within African-American, queer, and musicological discourse. According to Gendron, the term was first used in explicit reference to music in the writing of rock critic Greg Shaw and later took on a life of its own when Lenny Kaye used it the liner notes to his celebrated 1972 compilation *Nuggets*.[7] For now it should be noted that punk refers, in this context, not only to a

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(Winter 2008), 103-119; and "Punk'd Theory," *Social Text* 23:3-4 (Fall-Winter 2005), 19-34; and Stacy Thompson, *Punk Productions: Unfinished Business* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004).

[3] Nyong'o, "Brown Punk," 75.

[4] Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[5] "punk, n.3". OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.libproxy.csun.edu/view/Entry/154687?rskey=E9JAHE&result=3&isAdvanced=false (accessed October 31, 2013).

[6] Nyong'o, "Punk'd Theory."

[7] Shaw, qtd. in Gendron, 232; Lenny Kaye, ed. *Nuggets: Original Artyfacts from the First Psychedelic Era* (Los Angeles: Elektra Records, 1972).

musical genre, but also to what I call, following Michael Denning and Raymond Williams, a larger "cultural formation," which includes the contributions of artists, writers, celebrities, and other media personalities.[8] In this dissertation, I am specifically concerned with this formation as it gathered around CBGB.

The Ramones were not necessarily the first punk band, nor was their CBGB show on August 16 their first performance, nor were they even necessarily the first punk band to appear on the CBGB stage. Nevertheless, for many, this event was the word made flesh of the spirit of punk that had circulated downtown for several years. Ever since Andy Warhol's band, The Velvet Underground, had crashed the annual banquet of the New York Society for Clinical Psychiatry at Delmonico's on January 12, 1966, there had been a sense in New York City that some sinister force, some new artistic idea was struggling to represent itself, either through music or literature, underground cinema or performance art.[9] There had been several stabbing tries at diagnosing a sickness at the heart of what Theodore Roszak had famously called "the counterculture," for instance, the sophomorish humor of the Fugs, Patti Smith's early poetry, or the glam rock of the New York Dolls, but the Ramones seemed to trump all these artists, both in their perspicacity and their commitment, not because they seemed especially aware of their malaise, but totally engrossed in it.[10] As many critics and historians have already noted,

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[8] Raymond Williams, qtd. in Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1996), xx.
[9] Grace Glueck, "Syndromes Pop at Delmonico's," *The New York Times* (January 13, 1966), reprinted in Albin Zak, ed. *The Velvet Underground Companion: Four Decades of Commentary* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 3-5. This event is discussed at greater length in chapter one.
[10] Theodore Roszak, *The Makings of a Counter Culture: Reflections of the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

the 1970s were a confusing decade in the U.S. Coming hot on the heels of Watergate, the recession, and the end of the Vietnam War, the Ramones both responded to that confusion, and like a broken mirror, reflected and refracted it, within their music, their look, and the way they carried themselves. This refractive quality was, in turn, borrowed by the Ramones's punk followers, as well as the conceptual artist Dan Graham, discussed in my fourth chapter below.

If you were not there, it is impossible to know exactly what an early Ramones's gig might have felt like, but we can get an idea from a concert video of three songs from their thirteenth gig, the earliest existing footage of the band, filmed at CBGB less than a month after their debut, on September 15, 1974.[11] The band appears onstage in a rough approximation of their trademark look, although there are still some trappings of their members' former lives at glam rock wannabes. Joey Ramone had actually sung for a glam rock band called Sniper for a period of time. On September 15, the guitarist Johnny is decked out in his glam rock finery, sporting tight pants, maybe spandex, and a bolo jacket with leopard print lapels. The band can barely keep it together. During the second song, "I Don't Wanna Go Down to the Basement," Joey seems to fall down in a weird impersonation of James Brown dropping to his knees during a song's most melodramatic moment. Otherwise, his performance is mincing, verging on the campy, what the cultural critic and musical provocateur Drew Daniel might call "queer minstrelsy."[12] Indeed, some spectators might have found this aspect of Ramones' performance offensive, but as

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[11] The performance is included as part of Ramones, *It's Alive* (Burbank, CA: Rhino Home Entertainment, 2007). DVD.

[12] Drew Daniel, "Why Be Something that You're Not?" Punk Performance and the Epistemology of Queer Minstrelsy," *Social Text* 31:3 (Fall 2013), 13-34.

Daniel argues, queer minstrelsy in punk has sometimes challenged traditional notions of queer epistemology, as in the case of the Meatmen singer Tecso Vee, and the Ramones' performance would seem to have a similar effect. As Joey Ramone's own brother, Mickey Leigh has written of the earlier glam rock era,

> It was like a love-in run amok. Though the sixties credo was that everybody should do their own thing, homosexuality had still been concealed—even in rock & roll. Bowie, Reed, and Andy Warhol did just about everything to change all that. The difference now was that the boundaries of gender didn't separate male from female but included them both. You were what you were, at whatever time you chose to be. . . . Jeff was neither athletically inclined nor macho. Finally it didn't matter.[13]

Claiming the Ramones as queer anti-heroes is somewhat risky business. After all, the cultural politics of their guitarist Joey were quite reactionary, although he never spoke out on this particular issue, but in this performance, the band is playing with audience expectations not only regarding how a rock band should sound, but also how they should act, and taking the campy persona of prior rock stars, like Mick Jagger or Little Richard, to their absurd extreme. At points, the entire spectacle seems to break down, for instance, between songs, when the band argues about what to play next. It is unclear whether this is a cleverly staged bit of performance art or whether the band members are really bickering, but it serves as an emblem for the entirely uncanny nature of their performance. As early admirer Roberta Bayley, who took the photograph for their first album cover, and was part of the pre-Sex Pistols scene surrounding Malcolm McLaren's shop Let It Rock, would put it, "It was very strange, seeing them for the first time, because you didn't have any precedent for the look or the sound or the really short songs,

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[13] Mickey Leigh and Legs McNeil, *I Spent the Night with Joey Ramone: A Family Memoir* (NY: Touchstone, 2009), 90.

even. They played a really short set. It was almost like conceptual art, thinking about it. It was weird but great."[14] We will return to the Ramones's connections to conceptual art in chapters four and five, which were actually more solid than Bayley might have realized, but for now, we will merely pause to recognize that it is the uncanny undecidability regarding what was actually going on at these Ramones performances that made them so provocative. As literary critic John Lyons has mentioned, the experience of the uncanny, for Sigmund Freud, was not an intellectual but an emotional experience.[15] It represents a return of the repressed, the repressed feeling of pre-cognitive plenitude that the baby experienced before it was severed from the mother's breast by language, what Jacques Laçan called "the name of the father," its moment of interpellation into language's symbolic order.[16] It was this experience that the Ramones revived at CBGB, the reversal of the law of the father, symbolized by his name, although it was not regressive. Rather, it was animistic, recapturing a lost energy for rock and roll, and recapturing a downtown space in Manhattan that was slipping from its former denizens' grasp.

As another early CBGB performer Richard Hell put it, it was important that the Ramones and their cohort chose this bar on the Bowery as their headquarters since "the

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[14] Roberta Bayley, quoted in Everett True, *Hey Ho Let's Go: The Story of the Ramones* (NY: Omnibus Press, 2002), 20.

[15] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny (1919)," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, edited by James Strachey (NY: Norton, 1976), 217-256; and personal conversation with John Lyons, June 27, 2013, University of Virginia, Andrew W. Mellon Dissertation Seminar.

[16] Jacques Laçan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, translated by Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 230.

Bowery has signified drunkenness, dereliction, and failure for as long as anyone can remember."[17] He continues, "Such is the mental space of its physical space."[18] Its name is derived from an antiquated Dutch word for "farm." It started out as a road for cattle, but by the early 1800s had become the city's first entertainment district. During the 1840s, it served as the incubator for blackface minstrelsy, the U.S.'s first form of popular culture, featuring an impressive number of saloons, brothels, and cheap hotels. By the time the Ramones arrived, the area had been in steep decline. It was the site of stabbings and shootings, and many homeless men and women called it home, in part because of the many cheap flophouses that lined the street until very recently. Nowadays, the area has been profoundly changed by gentrification, and CBGB was one of the casualties. Looking south from the pavement in front of the former club, the first thing one sees is a branch of the Chase-Manhattan bank. Inside the club, there is now an upscale clothing and overpriced record store owned by fashion designer Jon Varvatos. Instead of flophouses, across the street there is now the boutique Bowery Hotel, and in either direction are the shiny new exteriors of the New Museum and Cooper Union, the latter of which many critics view as a testament to the ascendance of the 1%. In the wake of the renovation, Cooper Union announced that for the first time ever that it would attempt to charge its students tuition, a decision that is still being disputed during this writing.

Spaces tell a story, and this dissertation, "A School for Singing," attempts to relate that story regarding CBGB. Perhaps more richly than any song, novel, film script, or painting, the material traces we leave on built space function as a social text from

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[17] Richard Hell, "CBGB as a Physical Space," in Dominic Molon, ed. *Sympathy for the Devil: Art and Rock and Roll since 1967* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2007), 27.
[18] Ibid.

which can be read the myths and legends of a disembodied age. Just as history has deposited in us "an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory," as Antonio Gramsci once put it, so too do we leave our marks across the flesh of history, embedded in persons, places, and things.[19] The technocratic need for abstraction and symbolization, in computer codes, genetic sequences, and financial derivatives, often comes off like an attempt to erase these sloppy marks of our earthly legacy, but they persist, ineluctably, testifying, bearing witness for or against us. As Theodore Dreiser wondered along with his protagonist Carrie Meeber, gazing at the talking collars and shoes at Partridge's, "Who shall translate for us the language of the stones?"[20] "A School for Singing" is such an attempt.

It takes its name from a couple lines in W.B. Yeats's poem "Sailing to Byzantium," "Nor is there singing school but studying / Monuments of its own magnificence," and argues that the CBGB scene intervened on Yeats's classical modernism and the avant-garde at a moment of cultural and political crisis by attempting to erect a vernacular alternative at a bombed out site in downtown Manhattan.[21] As CBGB was making its claim to fame, the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center were being erected just a couple miles away. Throughout this dissertation, I read the CBGB scene as a direct cultural response to the process of what Randy Martin has called

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[19] Antonio Gramsci, "The Study of Philosophy," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 324.
[20] Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1900; New York: Pocket Books, 2008), 102.
[21] William Butler Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium," in *Selected Poems and Four Plays*, 4th edition, M.L. Rosenthal, ed. (NY: Scribner, 1996), 102-103.

"financialization" that the Twin Towers represented.[22] As we will see at the conclusion of "A School for Singing," the memory of CBGB has played an important role in our cultural memory after the loss of these towers as well. According to this argument, the CBGB scene linked the classical modernist struggle for autonomy, poetically, to contemporary political struggles over working class rights, queer identity, and deindustrialization in an aesthetic language that was literary, musical, and visual, and was also equally indebted to the vernacular of popular culture. In the process, the CBGB scene sowed the seeds for all punk scenes and all punk aesthetics to come.

As it has been discussed in this introduction, the Ramones first performance was the punk event around which this scene or cultural formation grew. In his book *Being and Event*, Alain Badiou defines an event as an absent presence that enacts a void in a previous situation, whether it be scientific, artistic, political, or amorous.[23] In the Lacanian terms mentioned above, and in the terms employed across Nyong'o's work on punk, the event may be thought of as a break or interruption in the symbolic order of daily life. The Ramones grew out of a void in the counterculture, from which each of their members had been rejected. Joey, their leader, born Jefrey Hyman, was a gawky Jewish kid from Forest Hills, Queens. He was actually born physically deformed because the fetus of his undeveloped twin brother had fused to his spine, causing him awkwardness and discomfort throughout his life.[24] He was also mentally ill, suffering from crippling obsessive-compulsive disorder until his death in 2001. On guitar was

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[22] Randy Martin, *The Financialization of Daily Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).
[23] Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, translated by Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005), 178-183.
[24] Leigh and McNeil, 2.

Johnny, the most controversial member of the band, born John Cummings. John was an all-American boy gone bad, the reactionary yin to Joey's progressive, sensitive yang. Cummings claimed he formed the band because he was laid off from his job as a construction worker because of affirmative action.[25] The underlying racism of this statement betrays a larger tension that runs throughout the Ramones's work and the punk cultural formation more generally. In the song "Today Your Love, Tomorrow the World" from their first album, Joey proclaims himself a "shock trooper in a stupor…a Nazi *schatzi* gonna fight for the Fatherland."[26] The fact that a Jew delivered these lines and that the son of Holocaust survivors was sitting behind the drum kit does little to dispel the threat of these lyrics. The Ramones at their best, like punk more generally, were grotesque and disturbing, and this was at least part of their charm. After all, wasn't the U.S. at this juncture grotesque and disturbing too? In another song from the same album, "Glad to See You Go," they proclaimed that "in a moment of passion," they would "get glory, like Charles Manson." Why Manson and not Marlon Brando or James Dean? Because the Ramones's performances attested to their existence within what Mark Seltzer has called the U.S.'s "wound culture," so saturated by violence and trauma as to be virtually unlivable.[27] This is the reason the Ramones sing about Manson, Patty Hearst, and the Nazis (not Hitler, but "little German boys"): through them, they were trying to garner some insight into the U.S.'s real monsters, Lieutenant William Calley, Richard Nixon, or Anita Bryant, for instance. The drummer Tommy (born Erdélyi) was the son of

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[25] Ibid., 105.
[26] Ramones, *Ramones* (New York: Sire, 1976).
[27] Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

Hungarian Holocaust survivors and the only member who actually had any real experience in the music industry prior to joining the band. He had played in the semi-notable Queens band the Tangerine Puppets (at least they were an inspiration to the other Ramones), and worked at the Record Plant in New York, engineering such famous records as Jimi Hendrix's *Band of Gypsys*.[28] He had also put in time at the Museum of Modern Art in their film library and would later claim that one of the primary influences on his ideas for the band was the surrealist filmmaker Luis Buñuel.[29] Dee Dee, the bassist and heart and soul of the band, born Douglas Colvin, was brought up as a military brat in Germany where he would collect Nazi artifacts in the fields around his house. He was a punk before punk existed, having worked as a hustler to earn money for clothes when he was laid off from the same job as Johnny. He would later commemorate this period in his life in the song "53rd & 3rd," from the band's debut album, and one of their most effective—"Then I took my razorblade / Then I did what God forbade / Now the cop's are after me / But I proved that I'm no sissy."

As mentioned above, the critical theorist Tavia Nyong'o has recently argued that the term "punk" has acted as what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have called a "floating signifier" for the intersections between racial and queer identity since the genre first emerged in the early 1970s.[30] Although I quibble with some of his readings in what follows, this work and the work of Nyong'o's colleagues, some of which has been collected in a recent issue of *Social Text*, has informed the overall shape of this project

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[28] Jimi Hendrix, *Band of Gypsys* (Los Angeles: Capitol, 1970).
[29] True, 19.
[30] See Nyong'o, "Punk'd Theory;" and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 2001).

and been generative for its argument.[31] What Nyong'o's work, along with that of José Muñoz, Jack Halberstam, Mimi Nguyen, and others has informed us is that punk has always been non-white, and female, despite the fact that so many of its straight, white, and male spokespeople have gotten most of the credit.[32] To some extent, I walk a shaky line in this dissertation by returning to CBGB, which for some symbolizes the very worst tendencies towards whitewashing, sexism, ableism, and homophobia within the punk pantheon, but as I hope what follows shows, returning to this original site of the punk cultural formation reveals to us unnoticed ways in which the scene was diverse, especially when it came to matters of gender and sexual experimentation. In fact, it is a central argument of what follows that the CBGB scene was a sometimes grotesque, but always invigorating response, especially, to two major events in downtown Manhattan—the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969 and the beginning of the financial crisis in 1973, which lead to the city declaring bankruptcy in 1975. In the face of these developments, punk, as embodied by the Ramones' first performance, was an artistic event intended to reclaim space in downtown New York and establish what Michel Foucault once called a "heterotopia" in downtown New York.[33] As Foucault defines it, a heterotopia is a space in which traditional cultural values are overturning, if only temporarily. He gives the example of an airport, a graveyard, or a Chinatown. Although for Foucault, heterotopias

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[31] "Punk and Its Afterlives," special issue of *Social Text* 31:3 (Fall 2013), edited by Jayna Brown, Patrick Deer, and Tavia Nyong'o.

[32] See Muñoz and Halberstam's contributions the special issue listed above; also Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (NY: NYU Press, 2005) and Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay, *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race* (NY: Verso, 2011), which includes essays by Nguyen along with many others.

[33] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," translated by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16:1 (Spring 1986), 22-27.

exist, to some extent, by virtue of their institutional function. In what follows I explore the heteropian as an institutional as well as an aesthetic concept in terms similar to another follower of Foucault's, Jacques Rancière. For Rancière, the beautiful aesthetics of heterotopia are opposed, politically, to a sublime aesthetics of what he calls "heteronomy."[34] Each of these concepts are explored in greater depth in chapters three, five, and sex below.

Another important theoretical interlocutor in the first two chapters of this work is the queer theorist Kathryn Bond Stockton. In her book, *The Queer Child*, Stockton argues that her titular figure has been a ghostly figure haunting what Ellen Key called "the century of the child" before it even began, in the year 1900.[35] Stockton convincingly argues that all children are queer because they are not felt capable or responsible enough of exhibiting adult sexuality. Of course, there may be good reasons for this denial, concerning children's ability to consent not only to sexual activity but any other number of adult decisions, but as Stockton reveals, especially in her chapter on the twentieth century classic of childhood sexuality *Lolita*, which Frederic Jameson has described in another context as emblematic of the whole of aesthetic modernism, discerning a child's motives and intentions is perhaps no easier or harder than those of an adult, and society's unwillingness to acknowledge this fact in a straightforward and responsible manner perhaps accounts for our larger inability to care for children, especially children of color,

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[34] Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension: Aesthetics, Politics, Knowledge," *Critical Inquiry* 36 (Autumn 2006), 1-19.
[35] Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2009).

girls, and the non-gender-conforming.[36] As each chapter of a "School for Singing" reveals, the punk scene, as an extension of earlier rock scenes, was a kind of coming out party for the queer child, which I think has allowed this figure its higher level of public visibility in recent years, among Lady Gaga's "little monsters," on the show *Glee*, or as part of the nationwide anti-bullying campaigns. Every bullied kid is also a queer, whether they know it or not, and the excavation of punk's queer roots in this dissertation might help them discover that.

Finally, the dissertation's title, in its invocation of schooling and the lyrical voice, besides its reference to Yeats, is also meant to gesture towards the CBGB scene's position within a larger Cold War cultural formation that encompassed punk but has also rejected it. Besides the containment culture described by historians such as Elaine Tyler May and Alan Nadel, "A School for Singing" also argues that the CBGB scene was the kind of high-school-dropout-stepbrother to the so-called "program era" that Marc McGurl has described as being promoted and erected by their college-age siblings.[37] In his book *The Program Era*, McGurl makes a convincing argument on behalf of the creative writing program's role in shaping the cultural networks that govern literary expression and the wider cultural imagination today. Unlike many other academic critics, McGurl does not see the writing program as a bureaucratized alternative to a thriving avant-garde, but rather an extension of that avant-garde's political and aesthetic concerns into the

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[36] Stockton, 119-154; and Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (NY: Verso, 2002), 197-210.

[37] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1988), (New York: Basic Books, revised and updated 1999); Marc McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009); and Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* (Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 1995).

mainstream. For him, institutionalization is not necessarily a bad thing as long as it produces literature that is communitarian and progressive; however, questions linger at the end of his book, partially as a function of its focus on narrative fiction. However, whither poetry, and whither especially lyric poetry, and specifically the most popular form of lyric poetry of the twentieth century, the popular song, the production of which is institutionalized, for sure, but which occurs for the most part outside of the colleges? Within the larger field of post-WWII and contemporary cultural poetics, this is one of the central concerns of "A School for Singing." An implicit argument that runs throughout this dissertation is that something like the CBGB scene is where post-WWII poetic lyricism *tout court* resides after the collapse of the historical avant-gardes and political literary modernism occurred somewhere over Hiroshima or perhaps on the CBS *Nightly News* with Walter Cronkite. Whichever story you tell about it, I read the CBGB scene as a politically-committed salve to postmodernity in its torturous Marxist variant so eloquently explored by Jameson, not as a symptom of it.[38]

In what follows, I make these arguments over the course of six chapters, three interludes or excurses, and a coda. In the first chapter, "Punk, Between Beat and Pop; or, Lou Reed as Queer Child" I explore the CBGB scene's connections to two artistic avant-gardes that immediately preceded it, the beat formation in literature and the pop art scene centered around Andy Warhol's Factory in midtown Manhattan. I trace the influence of these two scenes, especially, on the career of the proto-punk *par excellence* Lou Reed, who I attempt to claim as a queer child of the sixties counterculture and the Cold War

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[38] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991).

containment culture. By tracing Reed's influences through beat and pop, and taking seriously his connection to the earlier modernist poet Delmore Schwartz, I argue for the ways in which the CBGB scene offered an alternative to these previous cultural formations in terms of sexuality, style, and gender relations. In particular, I discuss the way in which Reed's masochism, expressed in his music, lyrics, and performance practices exemplified a kind of subjectivity different from the one endorsed by Herbert Marcuse in his epoch-making *Eros and Civilization* and much closer to Michel Foucault's ideas regarding "the care of the self," which he expressed in the third volume of his similarly influential *History of Sexuality*.[39] In the second chapter, "How Do You Spell Love? Girl Group Pop and the Politics of Punk Appropriation," I explore a similarly constitutive aesthetic dimension of the CBGB punk scene that also attests to the importance of the queer child within that scene's aesthetic and poetic imagination. The conclusion of the chapter traces these influences into punk's future after CBGB by discussing them in relation to two important west coast punk bands, the Germs and Go-Go's, and the contemporary girl group revival by Kathleen Hanna, the Breeders, Sonic Youth, Courtney Love, and others.

In my third chapter, "Punk Rock In-Formation; or, the Concept of the Ramones," I return to the subject of this introduction, the Ramones, whom some critics consider the most demotic of the CBGB punk bands, but whom I actually claim was one of the most conceptually rich. I explore the band's connection to the queer artist Arturo Vega, who designed their clothes, stage setup, and insignia, and trace his influences further into the

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[39] Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 3: The Care of the Self* (New York: Vintage, 1984); and Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry* (New York: Beacon Press, 1955).

New York queer underground than has previously been attempted. In the fifth chapter, "Dan Graham's Conceptual Reflections: On the Ramones and CBGB," I discuss the reinterpretation of the band's work by the conceptual artist Dan Graham, who was one of the first critics of any stripe to write about punk seriously as more than just a pop music fad. Through close analysis of one of Graham's signature works, *Performance/Audience/ Mirror*, and some discussion of his video art piece *Rock My Religion*, I argue that Graham and the Ramones should not be seen as members of completely different artistic worlds but as part of what the philosopher Jacques Ranciére might call the same "distribution of the sensible."[40] In the case of the Ramones, I relate this distribution of the sensible to the queer kinship system implied by their public appearance as brothers, and the queer punk undercommons discussed by José Muñoz.[41]

In my final two chapters, "There Is No Way Out of the Valley: The Heterotopian Aesthetics of Television and William S. Burroughs," and "Cyberspace as Any-Space-Whatsoever: The Punk Soundscapes of William Gibson," I discuss some of the literary sub-formations of this queer punk undercommons that two cyberpunk writers, William S. Burroughs and William Gibson, have explored in the fiction they wrote after the CBGB scene, which was inspired by it. In these chapters, I engage most directly with the spatial dimensions of heterotopia as an aesthetic concept, in order to explore the ideas about urban space that these writers intuited from listening to and hanging out with CBGB

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[40] Jacques Ranciére, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, translated by Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2006).
[41] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), and "'Gimme Gimme This . . .Gimme Gimme That:' Annihilation and Innovation in the Punk Rock Commons," *Social Text* 31:3 (Fall 2013), 95-110.

artists. From 1973 to 1981, Burroughs lived less than a mile away from the club at 222 Bowery in a refurbished YMCA gymnasium that he called the Bunker. Patti Smith, Richard Hell, and the members of Blondie were frequent guests there, where they would discuss literature, take drugs, and philosophize. I argue that Burroughs, in a trilogy of novels he wrote in the eighties, *Cities of the Red Night*, *The Place of Dead Roads*, and *The Western Lands*, was reflecting on his participation in the CBGB scene and its legacy. In particular, I compare his work to that of the band Television during their CBGB heyday in order to explain how they were thinking the same way about heterotopia, financialization, and modernity. In my chapter on Gibson, I explain how Burroughs's primary artistic inheritor, along with J.G. Ballard and Kathy Acker, repurposed this legacy in his sensational postmodern novels *Neuromancer*, *Pattern Recognition*, and *Spook Country*.

The latter part of this chapter, especially, feeds into my coda, "Occupy the Bowery, Occupy the Blank" which meditates specifically on the importance of the CBGB scene's ideas regarding urban space and sexuality in a post-9/11 world. I begin by discussing Jennifer Egan's popular 2010 novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, which I argue is literally haunted by the memory of the CBGB scene. I also trace the reiterations of the CBGB spirit in three other important cultural productions of the last few years—the Occupy Wall Street protests near Ground Zero in New York, Pussy Riot's occupation of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in 2012, and the recent exhibit *Punk: Chaos to Couture*, which ran at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York during the Summer of 2013.

As I am writing this, too, a new fiction film on the history of CBGB is being released, and the second annual CBGB film and music festival is being held in New York City. I wish I could be there, but I live in L.A. now, a situation that I worry about as the author of this dissertation, but don't regret. I gave New York a try once, and even visited CBGB on a random drunken night when I went to college there, but by that time, the club was feeding off its own legacy, not really booking challenging bands anymore. The atmosphere was still there, but not the reason for being, and I feel, to some extent, that New York City rejected me too. As a suburban kid from Philadelphia, travelling to New York and living there was, in many ways, the epitome of making it big, but I wonder anymore if I really belonged there. Growing up, I was always more attracted to the glitz and glamour of L.A.—as a lover of Disney cartoons and Hollywood movies—as well as L.A.'s sleazy side, the stuff of *noir* fantasy. Like David Byrne, a member of the CBGB scene expressed in a recent editorial, I wonder whether either of these things—sleaziness or glamour—can be found in New York anymore on an artist, student, or professor's budget.[42] Do these people even exist anymore in the way they did in 1973? This is what Occupy Wall Street has lamented and the CBGB scene celebrated. Passing back through this moment in time, intellectually, like Walter Benjamin through the arcades of Paris, is intended, in part, to imagine a way back to that time sans the homophobia, racism,

[42] David Byrne, "Will Work for Inspiration," *Creative Time Reports*, www.creativetimereports.com, October 7, 2013. Accessed October 10, 2013.

sexism, or ableism.[43] Hopefully, it is a worthy attempt. For now, the music, and art, and literature, and film…Roll tape.

[43] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* edited by Rolf Tiedemann, translated by Howard Elland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

EXCURSUS: "Land"

The penultimate song on Patti Smith's first album Horses *is called "Land."*[44] *It is a song suite made up of three sections: "Horses," "Land of a Thousand Dances," and "La Mer (de)." The song begins with Smith's unaccompanied voice reciting a seemingly spontaneous bit of beat poetry: "The boy was in the hallway drinking a glass of tea / From the other end of the hallway a rhythm was generating / Another boy was sliding up the hallway / He merged perfectly with the hallway / He merged perfectly, the mirror in the hallway." In the 2008 biographical documentary of Smith,* Dream of Life*, she claims in voiceover, while discussing the influence of her mentor William S. Burroughs, that the hero of "Land," later named as "Johnny," "was truly a descendant of Johnny and the wild boys," the main character (if one can call him that) in Burroughs's experimental novel* The Wild Boys *originally published in 1971.*[45] *Later, as Smith is joined by the churning guitar of Lenny Kaye, and pounding drums and bass of Jay Dee Daugherty and Ivan Kral, she describes Johnny being "pushed against a locker," apparently raped, while being surrounding by "horses," an incantation that Smith repeats throughout the conclusion of this first section of "Land." Then suddenly, a little over one minute into the song, the chaos stops. The band clicks in, and they begin playing the classic 1962 pop hit by Chris Kenner, "Land of a Thousand Dances," later popularized by Headhunter and*

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[44] Patti Smith, *Horses* (New York: Arista Records, 1975).
[45] Patti Smith, *Dream of Life*, directed by Steven Sebring (New York: Celluloid Dreams, 2008); and William S. Burroughs, *The Wild Boys: A Book of the Dead* (New York: Grove Press, 1971).

the Cannibals and Wilson Pickett, whose version was the most commercially successful.[46] *The shift is jarring, but it gets your head nodding. It does not seem to fit, exactly, the lyrical universe that Smith sketched earlier in the composition, which is otherwise quite erudite and esoteric, including the Burroughs references and several strange puns, such as the title of the third section, mer de/merde = sea of/shit, or the riff between "sea of possibilities" and "one who seizes possibilities." It is in this interval between beat and pop where punk begins, between the beat of the drum and the pop of lyrical signification, and also between two genres of avant-garde literary and artistic production—beat literature and pop art. This space also functions as what Jacques Derrida has called, following Plato, Socrates, and Martin Heidegger, a* khora*—what is translated in Heidegger as a "clearing" in space that is also a place illuminating the gap or distance between being and non-being, which for Derrida are parasitic concepts*.[47] *As Smith sings later on the track, in the transition to "Land"'s final section, "the sea of shit," "There's a little place / A place called space / It's a pretty little place / It's across the tracks / Across the tracks / And the name of the place is a I like it like that."*[48] *This interval or* khora *may also be describes in Tavia Nyong'o's terms as a "black hole," ripped open in the sonic fabric not just of this song, but also of late modernity; between*

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[46] Headhunter and the Cannibals, "Land of a Thousand Dances" (New York: Rampart, 1965); Chris Kenner; "Land of a Thousand Dances" (New York: Instant, 1962); Wilson Pickett, "Land of a Thousand Dances" (New York: Atlantic, 1966).

[47] On the clearing, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper-Collins, 2008), 169-172. See also Jacques Derrida on the *khora*, "As If It Were Possible, 'Within Such Limits…'" translated by Benjamin Elmwood with Ellen Rottenberg, in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 343-370.

[48] "I like it like that" is a reference to another Chris Kenner song of the same title (New York: Instant, 1961).

the highbrow and the lowbrow, and the avant-garde and the vernacular.[49] *Smith, Lou Reed, the Velvet Underground, the queer girl groups before her, and their punk appropriators after her occupies this space in the same richly poetic way suggested by recent political movements. Let's step into this hole, this* khora, *this hallway, adorned with mirrors, which also has erotic connotations, and look around.*

[49] Nyong'o, "Brown Punk," 75.

CHAPTER ONE: Punk, Between Beat and Pop; or, Lou Reed as Queer Child

Before punk there was the beat, not just the beat of the drum, but beat literature of the kind popularized on college campuses and coffee houses throughout the 1960s—Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* and Nova Trilogy, as well as issues of the *Chicago*, *Evergreen*, and *Partisan Reviews.*[50] Beat literature was the literary basis upon which punk was founded, and through which it gathered its aspirations to high art.[51]

At the forefront of this orientation towards the beat is Lou Reed, a middle class Jewish boy raised on Long Island and born in Brooklyn, who in 1964 founded the Velvet Underground with John Cale and Angus MacLise. The Velvet Underground were the proto-punk band bar none. They perfected their style during their time with Andy Warhol, playing in his multimedia show, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, and they also borrowed from the black and white R & B and soul musicians that Reed so instinctively admired, but it was beat literature and the partially commodified attitude of the beatnik or urban hipster that it spawned lie at the core of the Velvet Underground's political and aesthetic concerns (to the extent that they might be said to have had the former). As the musicologist Elizabeth Lindau has argued, the Velvet Underground were essentially concerned with minimalism and repetition as avant-garde aesthetic ideals, meant to bring about transcendental spiritual states and mock repetition elsewhere in U.S. popular culture, which connected them not only to Andy Warhol's Factory, where they hung out

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[50] William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (New York: Grove Press, 1959); Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1956); and Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Viking, 1957).

[51] For a sweeping survey of the historical connections between beat and punk, see Victor Bockris, *Beat Punks* (NY: Da Capo, 2000), on which I draw throughout this chapter.

and practiced, but also to the academic world of modern classical composers, such as Tony Conrad, La Monte Young, Terry Riley, and Steve Reich (to name just a few).[52] However, as Victor Bockris describes in his autobiography of Reed, *Transformer*, reading the beats and the existentialist philosophers, such as Søren Kirkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, whom the beats, such as Burroughs and Kerouac, so deeply admired, served, at least in Lou Reed's case, as an entry point into the world of underground art, literature, and media, a black hole from which he has never escaped (not that he would want to).[53] Taking (or perhaps faking) the beatnik pose, which Jack Kerouac originally intended to be "beatific," allowed Reed to position himself inside and astride prevailing Cold War discourses of politics and sexuality, especially as they governed queer sexual identity, through his experimentation with the masochistic social and erotic contract.

Lou Reed's relationship to both beat and pop, as well as his modernist mentor Delmore Schwartz, was lateral, transgressive, and sideways—in a word, queer. He was born three months after Pearl Harbor, in the midst of what Elaine Tyler May and Alan Nadel have called "Cold War containment culture."[54] He received electroconvulsive therapy (electroshock treatment or ECT) in 1956, at the Rockland County Psychiatric Center, northwest of Manhattan, as a treatment for what Bockris suggests his parents considered "homosexual behavior and alarming mood swings."[55] As Bockris describes it,

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[52] See Elizabeth Lindau, "Art Is Dead. Long Live Rock! Avant-Gardism and Rock Music, 1967-99" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Virginia, 2012).
[53] Victor Bockris, *Transformer: The Lou Reed Story* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 30. I have relied on this work by Bockris for historical background throughout this chapter.
[54] See May, *Homeward Bound*, and Nadel, *Containment Culture*.
[55] Stockton uses this term in *The Queer Child*, 6.

Reed had developed "an effeminate way of walking."[56] This treatment occurred one year after the publication of *Lolita*, the novel that Kathryn Bond Stockton points out did more to define the sexual child in the twentieth century than any other cultural text.[57] Ginsberg's "Howl" was performed for the first time in the same year, and mentioned Rockland, the same place where Ginsberg met that poem's dedicatee Carl Solomon, both of whom were seeking treatment for their own gay desires.[58] Reed participated in Andy Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable "happenings" between 1965 and 1967, a coming out party of sorts for Warhol's queer children that presaged the Stonewall Rebellion in 1968. He released his most acclaimed album *Berlin* in 1973, the same year that homosexuality was removed as a disease from the Diagnostic Statistical Manual, only to be replaced by Gender Disorder in Children in 1981, the same year that Reed released one of his most confessional albums, *Growing Up in Public*, which seemed to allude, however cagily, to his dalliances with gay sex, transgenderism, and masochism during the 1970s.[59] On the song "Make Up," from his 1972 album, *Transformer*, he sang, "We're coming out / Out of our closets / Out on the streets," a slogan that his sometimes lover and Warhol confidante Billy Name claims Reed took directly from a popular flyer around New York City at the time, posted by the post-Stonewall group the Gay Liberation Front.[60]

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[56] Ibid.
[57] Stockton, 119-154.
[58]Ginsberg, *Howl*; and Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (Paris: Olympia, 1955).
[59] Lou Reed, *Berlin* (New York: RCA, 1973), and *Growing Up in Public* (New York: Arista, 1981).
[60] Reed, *Transformer* (New York: RCA, 1972); and Billy Name, qtd. in Bockris, *Transformer*, 169.

In other words, in Lou Reed's work with the Velvet Underground during the 1960s and 70s, and his own solo work, at least until the 1982 album *The Blue Mask*, Reed synthesizes a queer identity and aesthetic that is slippery and motile, that grows sideways in the fashion that Stockton suggests all queer children grow during the twentieth century since they cannot really "grow up" in the terms enforced upon them by the parent culture.[61] Reed's corpus grows plump with meanings as it moves laterally through the course of late twentieth century history, queer history, and punk history, and endows to the CBGB scene a queer aesthetic, a sideways aesthetic, that defines that scene's orientation towards history and the cultural politics of the late twentieth century.

Lou Reed, Delmore Schwartz, and the Queer Cultural Politics of Late Modernity

In 1960, after a brief stint at NYU's Bronx campus, Reed left his childhood home to attend Syracuse University in upstate New York, where he met the poet and short story writer Delmore Schwartz, who served as something of a queer father to Reed, despite his palpable discomfort with Reed's bisexuality.[62] Schwartz belonged to Reed's parents' generation and had similar roots, the son of Jewish parents who were born in Romania and brought him up in Brooklyn. Schwartz was briefly a *cause célèbre* among modernist writers, including T.S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams, and Ezra Pound, as well as the New Critic Allen Tate, who praised his first book *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*,

[61] Stockton, 1-57.
[62] Bockris, *Transformer*, 62.

published by New Directions in 1938.[63] He won the Bollingen Prize for poetry in 1959, for his book *Summer Knowledge*, although by that time he had become disenchanted with the literary world after the negative critical response to his epic poem *Genesis*, published a decade earlier. By the time Reed arrived at Syracuse, Schwartz was already in the advanced stages of alcoholic dissipation, and also addicted to speed. However, from all accounts, Schwartz and Reed developed a close emotional relationship, and Schwartz considered Reed an inheritor of his artistic legacy, even though he had not read a word, to that point, that Reed had written. According to Bockris, it was apparently some spark of youthful enthusiasm that attracted Schwartz to Reed, or perhaps just his young disciple's reverence.[64] Despite his disdain for the youth culture that Reed represented and his bisexuality, Schwartz was attracted to his proto-punk, beatnik pose, which lead Reed to connect his musical experiments, which were already occurring in high school, with various R & B bands, to his literary ones.

Reed has recently published a tribute to Schwartz in *Poetry* magazine, in which he describes his teacher as "the greatest man [he] ever knew."[65] He also dedicated a song to Schwartz, "European Son," on the Velvet Underground's debut album *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, and mentions Schwartz in the song "Our House," the leadoff track from *The Blue Mask*. In other words, Schwartz's poetical figure bookends Reed's career as a queer artist. He was there at its inception in the heady days of collegiate discovery at

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[63] Delmore Schwartz, *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1938). I have relied on James Atlas, *Delmore Schwartz: The Life of an American Poet* (NY: Avon Books, 1978) for biographical information.
[64] Bockris, *Transformer*, 68.
[65] Lou Reed, "O Delmore how I miss you: Dreams from his teacher," *Poetry* 200 (June 2012), 264.

Syracuse, and Reed invokes him in "Our House," where he describes Schwartz appearing before him and his new wife Sylvia (nee Morales) as a ghost, summoned by using a Ouija board. On the album that preceded *The Blue Mask*, 1980's *Growing Up in Public*, Reed described Sylvia as an "angel," and proclaimed that his "love [for her was there] to stay." Despite the fact that they later divorced, Reed's relationship with Sylvia marked the end of his flirtation with a queer public persona. Since then, he has hinted at this persona, for instance, on the song "Halloween Parade" from *New York* in 1989 or in his collaborations with the transgender artist Antony Hegarty, but he has not been as open about his bisexuality as he was in the 1960s and 70s, when he publicly dated both men and women, including the transwoman Rachel, to whom he dedicated his 1976 album *Coney Island Baby*.[66] As Reed narrates on *Growing Up in Public* and *The Blue Mask*, this evolution in his sexual personality was accompanied by his newfound sobriety, and in a way, these albums might be understood as Reed bidding adieu to his queer youth.

As Kathryn Bond Stockton argues, the queer child haunts the gay adult, as well as the straight world, to whom it is merely a ghostly or even a monstrous presence, literally unimaginable within our current sexual epistemology.[67] On "Our House," it is the ghost of Lou Reed's queer father Delmore Schwartz who haunts him and his wife, for the love of whom Reed seems to overcompensate throughout both *Growing Up in Public* and *The Blue Mask*. For instance, on the latter, he includes the song "Women," an ode to the fairer sex that, coming from a formerly out bisexual man, borders on the parodic. Insipidly,

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[66] Antony and the Johnsons, *I Am a Bird Now* (Bloomington, IN: Secretly Canadian, 2005); and Reed, *Coney Island Baby* (New York: RCA, 1976), and *New York* (New York: Sire, 1989).
[67] Stockton, 17-22.

Reed repeats the mantra, "I love women," over and over during the song's chorus, as though he is attempting to convince himself of it. On one hand, this mantra is also misogynistic, but the listener cannot help but sympathize with Reed, who was literally tortured by his parents and the state during his most formative years in order to exorcize his love of men.

Schwartz's relationship with Reed as queer mentor or father figure would be relatively unimportant if it were not for the larger literary influence that Schwartz might have had on Reed and hence the whole of the CBGB scene and punk more generally, as well as the way in which Reed's relationship with Schwartz helps us place the former's poetics within the larger field of post-WWII cultural production from the point of view of sexual dissidence. Schwartz is probably one of the most admired literary artists of the mid-twentieth century to receive so little critical acclaim today. Besides his early critics mentioned above, he also had a poem dedicated to him by Robert Lowell in his breakthrough volume *Life Studies* in 1959; he is the dedicatee of John Berryman's *Dream Songs*, as published 1969; and he served as the inspiration for the character of Von Humboldt Fleisher in Saul Bellow's novel *Humboldt's Gift*, published in 1975.[68] In that novel, a *roman à clef*, Von Humboldt Fleisher's relationship with the aspiring novelist Charlie Citrine was intended, by Bellow, as a thinly veiled depiction of his own relationship with Schwartz. Saul Bellow and Lou Reed—it is difficult to imagine two more awkward literary bedfellows, Bellow an opponent of counterculture who partially

[68] Saul Bellow, *Humboldt's Gift* (New York: Viking, 1975); John Berryman, *The Dream Songs* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1969); and Robert Lowell, "To Delmore Schwartz" (1959), in *Life Studies and For the Union Dead* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2007), 59-60.

inspired Allan Bloom's 1987 jeremiad *The Closing of the American Mind*, and Reed the *enfant terrible* of rock and roll who took the anti-authoritarian gestures of Bloom's hated Rolling Stones to their most decadent extremes.[69] That both artists should trace their literary heritage back to Schwartz is more than a coincidence and in fact marks the paces through which the avant-garde was put by the U.S. bureaucracy during the Cold War era that virtually killed it.

As Robert von Hallberg has written, the Cold War was a difficult time for the U.S. avant-garde in part because of the pressure that bureaucratization put on that formation, in the form of CIA surveillance as well as the social pressures faced from organizations like the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).[70] During the Cold War, there was a disavowal and downright paranoia regarding bureaucratization, institutionalization, and absorption on the part of the avant-garde, at the same time that they either suffered or enjoyed their greatest prominence within the U.S. academy. In the case of literary writers, this story of bureaucratization is told in optimistic if not Pollyannaish terms by Mark McGurl in his recent book *The Program Era*.[71] In that book, McGurl offers a systems-theoretical approach to the kind of literary writing done in post-WWII creative writing departments that argues in favor of those departments' particular aptitude for creating high quality prose that is responsive in a comforting and entertaining

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[69] Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Penguin, 1987).
[70] Robert von Hallberg, *The Cambridge History of American Literature, vol. 8: Poetry and Criticism, 1940-1995*, edited by Sacvan Bercovitch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13-22; see also, Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2001).
[71] Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009).

way to the challenges of a pluralistic, democratic society. McGurl's approach runs contrary to most academic and critical writing on the period in that it does not see the rise of the creative writing program as a fall from grace for contemporary U.S. literary fiction but instead the very means through which its initial avant-garde promise came to fruition in the form of popular literary writers like Joyce Carol Oates, Raymond Carver, and Maxine Hong Kingston, all products of creative writing programs as well as teachers, who write fiction that is easily intelligible to the literary masses as well as challenging, tackling difficult political issues of community, racism, and social belonging that have been particularly compelling in the U.S. context over the past 75 years.

Both Reed and Bellow, and also Schwartz, have been touched by this cultural formation—there is really no way for a contemporary U.S. writer not to be—but they have subsequently rejected it, each in his own way. Reed studied creative writing at college, but has done everything in his power to distance himself from the literary elite as is possible in his career as a rock star. In a 1965 essay that he wrote for the multimedia magazine *Aspen*, a special issue of which was edited by Andy Warhol, Reed wrote, "The colleges are meant to kill," and he mocks academic poets like Robert Lowell and Richard Wilbur by name, nevermind the fact that Lowell was actually a close friend to Schwartz before his literary fall from grace.[72] Saul Bellow, in a different way, as Simon During has argued in the compelling final chapter of his 2012 book *Against Democracy*, positioned himself alongside contemporary liberal academia, which he has criticized for its

[72] Lou Reed, "The View from the Bandstand." *Aspen* 3 (December 1966), 1-4. As part of the magazine's multimedia aspect, the essay was printed as a mimeograph on pink paper and stapled at the corner. This essay and the rest of the magazine, which included a Velvet Underground record, was packaged in a box.

complicity with an identitarian logic of conflict abatement and narcissistic self-fulfillment.[73] Despite his frequent slippage into politically incorrect and downright offensive stereotyping, especially of African-Americans, During reads Bellow as one of the sole inheritors to a conservative literary tradition that is also anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist. As During puts it in his introduction, perhaps problematically, the problem of the twenty-first century is too much, not too little democracy, and whereas one might quibble with this formulation in the case of a China, Egypt, Syria, or Iran, the reader can see his point in a case like the U.S. or Western Europe where a technocratic elite have lead what they see as the unwashed masses down a path of austerity that is unfulfilling for most of its inhabitants even as it is simultaneously unjust and untenable.[74] Under this system, democratic elections function more as a pressure valve than an expression of popular will. In fact, it is difficult to say whether "the people," however you construe them, really know what they want. Bellow, according to During, offers his readers a way of imagining a pluralistic political community that is also detached from the vicissitudes of a spiritually deadening technocracy and a narcissistic culture of complaint.

At the root of both of these anti-authoritarian visions, Reed's and Bellow's, there is the peculiar figure of Delmore Schwartz. What he represented for both these men, Robert Lowell, and John Berryman as well might be espied in his breakthrough story "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities," published in the *Partisan Review* in 1937.[75] Since the story is concerned with the optical fantasy of the primal scene, it is perhaps unsurprising

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[73] Simon During, *Against Democracy: Literary Experience in the Era of Emancipations* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 123-148.
[74] Ibid., 1-13.
[75] Delmore Schwartz, *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1938), 11-22.

that both Reed and Bellow, who seem so ideologically opposed, should find the origin of their aesthetics there. In the story, the unnamed narrator, who we assume is Schwartz, has a dream about watching a movie in which his father asks his mother to marry him. The scene fills Schwartz with dread. He has the foresight to know that this love story, if we can call it that, will not end well, primarily because it will turn him and his sibling (of unknown gender) into "children whose characters are monstrous."[76] The title contains an ironic pun or paradox. Schwartz is having a dream, presumably about the lust of his parents, but whose responsibility is beginning? On one hand, his parents are being prosecuted, because they did not take responsibility for their lust. His father chose marriage because he thought it would be comfortable. Schwartz writes, "He wants to settle down. After all, he is twenty-nine, he has lived by himself since he was thirteen, he is making more and more money, and he is envious of his married friends when he visits them in the cozy security of their homes, surrounded, it seems, by the calm domestic pleasures, and by delightful children."[77] The final sentence of this quotation continues for another quarter page, the longest in the story. On the other hand, Schwartz himself is the guilty party. At the end of the story, he is removed from the theater because he screams at the screen, warning his parents about their mistake. The story, in this way, reads as a challenge that the author is issuing to himself, to take personal responsibility and not surrender to the empty promises of bourgeois life and domesticity. The other people in the theater scold Schwartz for his transgression against the spectacle. To them, his outburst is a symptom of his immaturity. At the end of the story, it is difficult to tell

[76] Ibid., 17.
[77] Ibid.

whether the narrator has made a break with his parents' lifestyle, mistakes, and fate, or if he is doomed to repeat them.

In 1974, Lou Reed released the song called "Kill Your Sons" on his album *Sally Can't Dance*, which discusses the consequences of his electroshock therapy treatments at age fifteen.[78] It covers similar thematic territory to Schwartz's story. In the first verse, Reed describes the consequences of the therapy. He sings,

> All your two-bit psychiatrists
> Are giving you electroshock
> They said they'd let you live at home with mom and dad
> Instead of mental hospitals
> But every time you tried to read a book
> You couldn't get to page 17
> 'Cause you forgot where you were
> So you couldn't even read

He laments the fact that the treatments left him so forgetful that he could not get past the seventeenth page of a book without turning back. Reed describes this experience from the second-person point of view, even though he is relating he own experience, "You couldn't even read." He ends the first verse with this line, clearly signifying his utter disgust with his parents for condemning him to this fate, merely because of his difference from their Long Island, middle-class ideals. The second verse echoes Schwartz's fears regarding the "monstrous character" that his parents have created. Reed describes how his father "took an axe" and broke a table. It is unclear whether this line really happened or is meant to be symbolic. He also discusses how his sister has married a man "without a brain," but he suggests that his parents are more comfortable with this choice rather than Reed's own life as a hustler and bard merely because of the reputed security it provides.

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[78] Reed, *Sally Can't Dance* (New York: RCA, 1972).

However, Reed sees through this myth, as evidenced by his father breaking the table. As in Schwartz's story, there is more than meets the eye in the case of bourgeois domesticity—fathers filled with homicidal rage because their spouses and children represent not pleasure and satisfaction but failure and disgust.

Schwartz's story is written in an iceberg style, adapted from Ernest Hemingway and Sherwood Anderson, but tempered by his interest in psychoanalysis and the unconscious.[79] Schwartz does not create a typically heteronormative, patriarchal exterior, like Hemingway and Anderson, around the subconscious anxieties expressed in "Dreams," which are clearly somewhat sexual in nature. Instead, he indulges these anxieties. Whereas the iceberg writing of Hemingway and Anderson was meant to narrativize political and sexual traumas (WWI in particular), to put them in their place, so to speak, in the lifeworld of the analysand, Schwartz's evocative and vague language, his short sentences punctuated by long outbursts is meant to prize the veil of domesticity apart. Domesticity is what represses trauma. Writing, in Schwartz and Reed's case, initiates self-analysis and forces readers to take responsibility for their choices. In asking Schwartz's mother to marry him, Schwartz's father was avoiding what an existentialist like Jean-Paul Sartre or Martin Heidegger would call the more "authentic" option, to remain alone and single, despite one's fears, because in doing so, the father would have remained true to himself and hopefully had a more successful passage into adulthood.[80]

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[79] Paul Smith, "Hemingway's Early Manuscripts: The Theory and Practice of Omission," *Journal of Modern Literature* 10:2 (June 1983), 268-288.

[80] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (1927), translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), and Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (1943), translated by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1993).

Within the modernist firmament, Schwartz occupies a similarly anti-patriarchal position. Although Eliot and Pound praised him, he resented their respectability and conservatism. Schwartz clung fast to the avant-garde idea of artistic transgression, the utopian dreams of his surrealistic forefathers. His poetry and writing was an attempt to create an avant-garde in the U.S. that could be accepted by the young people of his generation, the children of immigrants in the Jewish diaspora, like Lou Reed's parents; instead, he ended up appealing to their sons. Schwartz dismissed the aristocratic pretensions of Eliot, the populism of William Carlos Williams, or the reactionary outbursts of Wyndham Lewis and the futurists. His poetics were slyly critical of his own putatively middle-class values.

Another work by a canonical mid-century poet testifies to Schwartz's significance. Robert Lowell's poem, "To Delmore Schwartz," included in his breakthrough volume *Life Studies* in 1959, occurs during that book's third part, a series of odes to writers that he admired or who inspired him—Ford Madox Ford, George Santayana, Hart Crane, and Schwartz.[81] "To Delmore Schwartz" recounts a memory of the poet in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1946. The poem is a bitter recollection of a cold and fearful afternoon spent getting drunk with Schwartz after a botched meeting with T.S. Eliot's brother, Henry Ware, who Lowell had hoped would be able to secure him an academic position at Harvard. As the literary critic, Philip Beard points out, "To Delmore Schwartz" was one of the first poems Lowell composed for *Life Studies*, his breakthrough book in which he abandoned the staunch formalism of his earlier verse for the freer, more unrepressed voice that he would be associated with for the remainder of his career, the

[81] Lowell, 55-64.

confessional voice that he leant to post-WWII America as a means of transition between the high modernism of Eliot and the postmodern verse of poets such as those associated with the New York or L.A.N.G.U.A.G.E. schools.[82] The poem tells of how Lowell and Schwartz spent the day getting drunk, playing with a "stuffed duck" that Schwartz had brought to Lowell's house.[83] The stuffed duck image is whimsical, especially when Schwartz and Lowell crown their afternoon's drunkenness by sticking its foot "in a quart of gin we'd killed," but in light of Schwartz's later degeneration, which had already begun in 1946 and was certainly well underway by 1959, the blended atmosphere of death and drunkenness is just as foreboding as it is Dionysian.[84] As Beard suggests, "To Delmore Schwartz" marks a break for Lowell with his modernist past as an admirer of Eliot and W.H. Auden, but it also invokes the creepy atmosphere of Cold War repression when it weirdly invokes Stalin in a non-sequitur that ends a series of lines rewriting Wordsworth,

> *"We poets in our youth begin in sadness;*
> *thereof in the end come despondency and madness;*
> Stalin has had two cerebral hemorrhages!"[85]

These lines are spoken by Delmore in the poem, and he is quoted earlier saying, "…Let Joyce and Freud, / the Masters of Joy, / be our guests here."[86] Beard points out the puns in the latter line. (*Freude* is German for "joy.") But even as Delmore cracks jokes, he invokes a spirit of genocidal doom, Stalin, whose authoritarian personality would haunt not only confessional poets like Lowell during the Cold War, but also confessional rock

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[82] Philip Beard, "Lowell's 'To Delmore Schwartz," *The Explicator* 62.1 (2003), 47-50.
[83] Ibid., 59.
[84] Ibid., 60.
[85] Ibid. Italics in original.
[86] Ibid., 59.

stars like Reed, in the form of Soviet-style bureaucracy and its paranoiac reaction formation in the U.S.

The same atmosphere of paranoia imbues Reed's own ode to Schwartz, "European Son," which appears as the last song on the Velvet Underground's debut album *The Velvet Underground and Nico*.[87] The song, even more than Lowell's poem, contains an explicit break with the past when it includes the dissonant sound of a bottle shattering two minutes into the song. Even at the end of the Velvet Underground's thoroughly shocking debut, this sound comes as a surprise every time you hear it. After the bottle breaks, the track is overwhelmed by a squelch of feedback that ends the first section of the nearly eight minute recording, and begins its last six minutes, a wordless mash of propulsive rhythm and blues accompanied by swirling layers of feedback guitar and amplified viola.

Like the music on the track, the words of "European Son" also depict a break with the past as they narrate the life of a mysterious protagonist. Addressing the protagonist directly, Reed sings, " You killed your European son / You spit on those under twenty-one." It is unclear who any of these people are—the son, the spitter, or the juveniles under 21. Reed claimed that he dedicated the song to Schwartz just because it had the fewest lyrics and Schwartz hated rock music. He apparently thought Schwartz might be more comfortable having his name associated with "European Son" because it ends up less like a rock song than an electronic experiment. In other words, besides the rockish backing with which the song starts, a Bo Diddley drumbeat, for the most part, the song

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[87] The Velvet Underground, *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, audio recording (New York: Verve, 1967).

lacks the grounding structures common to rock in its second half—lyrics, a melody line, or vocal harmonies, for instance. The beat persists throughout the song but the guitarists and John Cale's viola solo freely during the song's longer, final section. Choosing this song to honor Schwartz makes sense because it expresses Reed's vexed relationship with his mentor, who also served as a tragic father. Reed clearly admired Delmore, but he probably did not seek to emulate him, and this distance is captured dramatically in the apparently disgusted lyrics of Reed's song. The lyrics in the song come quick and venomous, and end almost before the song begins. They are made up mostly of short images that depict a hateful world that is nevertheless colorful. Reed mentions that the protagonist's "blue cars are gone," and that he "painted" his "wallpapers green." Not much happens in these lyrics, which makes it plausible that the band's dedication of the song to Delmore was merely incidental, but sonically it does summon an atmosphere similar to that of Lowell's poem. For both Reed and Lowell, it becomes apparent that Delmore Schwartz's short and brilliant life, cut short by his own excesses, was both an inspiration and a cautionary tale, and a testament to the social and historical pressures being placed on the poet during that strange moment in the 1960s before the psychedelic revolution and the almost total ascendance of the youth culture.

As a poet, Scwhartz bridged the gap between the print-based literary avant-garde from which punk emerged, and the semiotic literacy that its arrival heralded—the queer plumpness of punk's sideways aesthetic. Punk's semiotic literacy was based not only on the ability to "read" print texts—it was perhaps based on that ability least of all—but on the subject's ability to "decode" cultural artifacts that may include text but also included visual images, sounds, and later, manipulable objects of the kind familiar to computer

programmers and, on a lesser scale, everyday users of the world wide web. Like surrealists, punks create assemblages. Although punk's social mission was rarely articulated in such terms, singers like Tom Verlaine, Richard Hell, and Patti Smith, and writers like William S. Burroughs foretold the hallucinatory world of everyday psychedelia captured in William Gibson's notion of the matrix or "cyberspace." Punk, in a relatively straightforward way, was media about media. Through song (lyric poetry), it lodged a critique of the song-producing industry, but as usual, media about other media are never about the media they manifestly claim to address. Instead, on an unconscious level, the lyrics of the punk songs were not about the song-producing industry, but about another technological development just then emerging from the cultural-industrial system of the post-WWII consensus—the new digital realm of simulacra, images, and MP3s. Punk's embrace of the "spirit of rock and roll" was, from the first, a nostalgic one, but not a reactionary one necessarily. Later punks' overidentification with this nostalgia transformed punk into a reactionary event, but in its early stages, identification with a rock and roll past was first of all a tactical method for dealing with a media world that was beyond the grasp of the artist's control. Comparing Lou Reed's tribute to Delmore Schwartz with those of Lowell, Berryman, and Bellow, brings into high contrast the epistemological shift that had taken place in the literary underground. This shift was not merely a popularization, commodification, or fetishization of the literary, but the place where the literary went in the postmodern era with the institutionalization of the literary project.

Modernist Shock and the Queer Gesture: Reed and Warhol

Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground first became associated with Andy Warhol during their stint as part of his multimedia show, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, between 1965 and 1967. This show had its debut under the title Uptight! at the annual banquet of the New York Association for Clinical Psychiatry at Delmonico's steakhouse in New York on January 12, 1966. During the performance, the Velvet Underground played music onstage while Factory superstars Edie Sedgwick and Gerard Malanga performed suggestive sado-masochistic dances in front of them, and Warhol projected films and colored gels on top of the whole spectacle. Filmmakers Barbara Rubin and Jonas Mekas circulated throughout the crowd, confronting the assembled guests with crude questions, such as, "What does her vagina feel like? Is his penis big enough? Do you eat her out? Why are you getting embarrassed?"[88] The psychiatrists had asked Warhol and his entourage to visit them in order to gain exposure to the burgeoning youth culture, but they got more than they bargained for. It might be a stretch, but it was almost as though Warhol and his cohorts, many of whom were struggling with their sexual identities, were confronting the assembled party with their particular brand of art terrorism in order to take revenge on a biomedical institution that had labeled them as sick or perverted.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the response was not good, but the conception of the event neatly exemplifies the Velvet Underground and Andy Warhol's terroristic stance towards heteronormativity in the band's early, pre-Stonewall days. Even Andy Warhol's sexuality, at this point, was a strange and barely understood thing to the art-buying and

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[88] Andy Warhol describes the event in *POPism: The Warhol Sixties*, with Pat Hackett (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 147.

image-consuming public at large, and his profile suffered, to some extent, from rumors of his homosexuality. Nowadays, of course, such a closeted existence is almost unimaginable for the twentieth century's most fabulous gay artist, but at the time, figures like Reed and Warhol were still struggling *within themselves* to come to grips with their queerness in a public culture that was downright hostile to the anti-heteronormative.

In a chapter of his book *Cruising Utopia*, on the queer drag performer Kevin Aviance, José Muñoz puts forward an aesthetic theory of what he calls the queer "gesture."[89] As he puts it, "Gesture…signals a refusal of a certain kind of finitude," especially when it is performed on behalf of a queer minority whose lives are structured by repression, shame, and risk.[90] In a painful but touching moment in Muñoz's text, he recounts the experience of being taunted by his macho brother, cousins, father, and uncle for the "way he walks."[91] As Muñoz suggests, moments like these inform queer subjects' lived relationships towards their own bodies and the world around them. A similar process was at work when Lou Reed was subjected to electroshock because of "homosexual behaviors," not gay sex.[92] The fact that these gestures were apparently a real manifestation of queer desire is immaterial to understanding the significance that tactics like those that Warhol and Reed employed at Uptight! might have had for them

[89] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 65-67.
[90] Ibid., 65.
[91] Ibid., 68.
[92] Bockris, *Transformer*, 13.

and their colleagues, acting as literal counter-shocks to the system of publicity in which they were interpellated.[93]

Such an interest in shocking gestures and poses carries over into the Velvet Underground's entire career as both performers and recording artists, and into Reed's longer solo career. What early admirers of the Velvet Underground like Lester Bangs, Ellen Willis, and the editors of *Punk* magazine, who put Reed on their first cover, so admired about him and his band was their incorporation of aesthetic confrontation or rupture into popular music, what Walter Benjamin actually called "shock," or Bertolt Brecht and Viktor Shklovsky "alienation" or "distancing" (in different contexts).[94] The Velvet Underground's first album is marked by breaks or ruptures in the sonic fabric of the traditional pop song, like the one in "Land" that introduced this chapter, or the bottle breaking in "European Son" mentioned above. These confrontational gestures "refuse finitude," as Muñoz might put it. Elsewhere, on the song "I Heard Her Call My Name," from the 1968 Velvet Underground album *White Light/White Heat*, Reed provides perhaps the most jarring of these interruptions when he transitions from chorus to guitar solo with the lines, "I heard her call my name / And then my mind split open."[95] Just at

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[93] Warhol was also bullied for his feminine affect, his relationship with his mother, and his contraction of St. Vitus dance, which caused him to have spasmodic outbursts as a child. Ric Burns, *Andy Warhol: A Documentary Film* (New York: PBS, 2006).
[94] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 217-252; Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, translated and edited by John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 91-99; and Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Device," in *The Theory of Prose*, translated by Benjamin Sher (Bloomington, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991), 1-14.
[95] The Velvet Underground, *White Light/White Heat*, audio recording (New York: Verve, 1968).

this moment, Reed triggers an overdrive pedal attached to his guitar and lets out at a screech of feedback, the sound of which, for the listener, verges on the uncomfortable. To that point on the album, Reed has made multiple jokes, in its lyrics, about emasculation and castration. On the song "The Gift," an audio experiment with stereo separation, the band plays their instrumental composition "Booker T." on one side of the stereo band, and bassist and viola player John Cale reads a story written by Reed at Syracuse on the other. The story is about a young college student in Pennsylvania, Waldo Jeffers, who arranges to have himself shipped in a large box to his girlfriend Marsha in Wisconsin. Unbeknownst to Jeffers, Marsha is tired of their relationship and unenthused when his package arrives at her doorstep. In the process of carelessly opening it with a pair of scissors, Marsha stabs Waldo in the head and kills him, spoiling, in the most grotesque terms, his already absurd plan. It is not difficult for the listener to perceive Jeffers's murder as simultaneously a kind of castration performed by what psychoanalysts might call a "phallic woman" or *femme fatale* getting her revenge on an impotent and ineffective man. The Velvet Underground, of course, had a song called "Femme Fatale" on their first album as well. Elsewhere on *White Light/White Heat*, Reed makes a series of crude jokes about oral sex in the song "Sister Ray," where he utters the barely audible phrase "sucking on a ding-dong," or the otherwise elegiac "Here She Comes Now," where he describes the woman in the title as "looking so good" and being "made out of wood." It is not hard for the listener to imagine that the woman mentioned in the title might actually be a man or perhaps even a man's penis belonging to one of the many transgender "superstars" that Lou Reed encountered at Warhol's Factory. In other words, whether he does so intentionally or not, Reed develops throughout the lyrics of

White Light/White Heat and *The Velvet Underground and Nico* a symbolic matrix for interpreting moments like the guitar solo on "I Heard Her Call My Name," the smashed glass on "European Son," or the chair scraping across the floor on "Heroin." These are queer gestures meant to signify the band's difference both from the heteronormative world of rock music performance and the queer underground of pop art and performance in New York City. The Velvet Underground exists somewhere between these two cultural formations, which was what made their queer imaginary so appealing to the CBGB artists they inspired. In developing this imaginary, they also left behind some musical masterpieces and signposts in the larger literary history of the twentieth century for their queer brothers and sisters at CBGB to follow.

Lyric Poetry and the Musical Voice

Printed poetry is silent music. It used to be audible, when all poetry was sung. Now only some of it is. Some poets, however, have combated this silence. At mid-century, there was a vogue for performance poetry among the Beats and confessionals, and among musicians with literary pretensions—folk singers, rockers, and later punks, especially the punks in the New York scene, centered at the rock club CBGB's.[96] An important conduit between all these scenes—the Beat, the punk, the confessional, and the folk—was the lead singer, guitarist, and primary songwriter for the New York proto-punk band the Velvet Underground, Lou Reed.

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[96] On the link between confessional poetry and performance, see Christopher Grobe, "The Breath of the Poem: Confessional Print/Performance circa 1959." *PMLA* 172, no. 2 (March 2013): 215-230. Grobe claims that "no other form of poetry has had so clear an effect on performance practices as confessional poetry has," excluding (as usual) sung poetry and later, hip-hop lyrics.

Lou Reed is a multimedia artist and a writer, as well as a musician, although his music, performances, and lyrics have not often been discussed in this way. The materials of his art are not just the sound of his songs or their lyrics, but also the method of their presentation in terms of their recording and performance. Like Charles Olson thought of the poem, Reed conceived of the song as an "open field," meant to "project," as Olson put it, the author's energy into the future through what Olson called "percussive" effects.[97] Olson uses a musical metaphor. For Olson, the field of the poem was the page, as the field of the painting was the canvas. Percussive effects were created on the page by emulating the poet's breath, either through line length, punctuation, diction, or meter. For Olson, the smallest unit of poetic meaning was the syllable, for Reed, the chord. For Reed, the field of the song was its recording (in his case, magnetic tape) or performance situation (as part of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, or upstairs at Max's Kansas City). Reed approached these recording and performance situations at one ironic remove, imbuing his productions with an abstract quality, as though they were presented "in quotes," as other high pop artists dealing in camp, like Warhol or the New York Dolls, might present their work.[98] In her essay on the Velvet Underground, Ellen Willis distinguishes between "art rock" and "rock art." She claims that art rock is based on "the idea of making rock-and-roll more musically and lyrically complex, of combining elements of jazz, folk, classical, and avant-garde music with a rock beat, of creating 'rock

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[97] Charles Olson, "Projective Verse" (1950). *Poetry Foundation*, accessed July 11, 2013. http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/essay/237880?page=1.

[98] Van M. Cagle describes the New York Dolls's performances occurring "in quotes" in the essay "Trudging Through the Glitter Trenches: The Case of the New York Dolls," in *The Seventies: The Age of Glitter in Popular Culture*, edited by Sheldon Waldrep (New York: Routledge, 2000), 125-154.

opera' and 'rock poetry.'"[99] "Rock art," on the other hand, for Willis, "has much more in common with 'high art'—in particular avant-garde art—than the ballyhooed art-rock syntheses: it involved more or less consciously using the basic formal canons of rock-and-roll as material (much as the pop artists used mass art in general) and refining, elaborating, playing off that material to produce what might be called rock-and-roll art."[100] For her, the Velvet Underground fall into the latter category. For another artist working across or at the intersection of media, the open field might consist of the filmstrip, the laptop, or the dance studio. Like other ambitious songwriters, such as Bob Dylan or Patti Smith; underground filmmakers, like Stan Brakhage or Jonas Mekas; or his mentor Andy Warhol, Reed was returning the term "poem" to its original Greek meaning of creation or "making" (*poiesis*) in its most general sense, through the material aesthetic process of multimedia art.

The way in which Lou Reed's return to poetry as a material art in the form of the song, either in performance or record, set the stage for the punk event at CBGB's in 1974. His performance practices signified a certain queer identity embraced by the performers there. In *The Queer Child*, Kathryn Bond Stockton discusses the way in which the gay children exist as ghosts to their parents, their community, and themselves, because the gay child, from the point of view of history, does not yet exist.[101] Stockton connects this structure of delay to Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of masochism in his book *Coldness*

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[99] Ellen Willis, "Velvet Underground," in Albin Zak, ed. *The Velvet Underground Companion: Four Decades of Commentary* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 71.
[100] Ibid., 71-72.
[101] Stockton, 17-22.

and Cruelty.[102] For Deleuze, the temporal delay associated with masochism, namely the forestalling of pleasure in lieu of pain, is specifically anti-patriarchal and opposed to the kind of rationality, which he sees as sadistic, upon which modernity is based. In this way, for Deleuze, mascochism is specifically aesthetic and anti-authoritarian. Reed's interest in poetry as multimedia art was influenced by his experiences both with Delmore Schwartz at Syracuse and Andy Warhol in New York City, and this multimedia practice occurred within the larger context of Cold War poetics, in particular William S. Burroughs's concept of "the Reality Studio," similar to Louis Althusser's concept of the Institutional State Apparatus (or ISA).[103] Discovering this concept had a similar effect on Reed as it did on the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, both of whom admired Burroughs, and who were writing their most important works at the same time as Reed. Ultimately, Lou Reed's artistic practice paralleled these men's philosophical practice in terms of how it thought about human freedom. This practice in turn informed the queer aesthetic of punk in terms of its larger political and philosophical commitments, especially as they were expressed in masochistic fantasies of dominance and submission.

The members of the Velvet Underground understood themselves as acting in direct opposition to the hippies, who dominated rock culture at the time they were performing and recording. For instance, in the PBS documentary on Lou Reed's life,

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[102] Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty* (1967), in Deleuze and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism*, edited and translated by Jean McNeil (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 9-142.

[103] Burroughs first mentions the reality studio in *The Soft Machine* (New York: Grove, 1961); Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation) (1970)" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 85-126.

Rock and Roll Heart, Moe Tucker discusses the band's tours to California as assaults on the hippie establishment.[104] The hippies stood for peace, love, and a utopian use of drugs to benefit human society. The Velvet Underground weren't necessarily opposed to these ideals, but they appreciated how they were severely limited by the politics of the time, in terms of their understanding of gender and sexuality. Unlike the hippies, the Velvet Underground were political realists, a position that oftentimes threatened to come off as cynicism, although this was not really warranted. On the other hand, the Velvet Underground associated themselves directly with the beat subculture that had preceded them, even if that culture was in some ways ideologically opposed to the pop art subculture of "superstars" in which they found themselves at Andy Warhol's Factory. Like the beat writers, the members of VU were dedicated to the almost nihilistic pursuit of "kicks," not only in terms of drug-taking and casual, kinky sex, but also in terms of the appreciation of rock music itself, which was considered a lower art form, a quick fix.[105] All three of these subcultures—the proto-punk, the hippie, and the beat—were responding directly to what other critics and historians of the Cold War have called "containment culture."[106] One of the basic precepts of containment culture was mental hygiene through practices such as psychiatric therapy, psychoanalysis, and social work. The use of electroshock therapy during this period was part of this larger complex of

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[104] Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, *Lou Reed: Rock and Roll Heart* (NY: WNET, 1998).
[105] In an interview with Ian Svenonius, Mike Watt, the bassist for punk band the Minutemen, mentions that Richard Hell once related to him his view that "kicks" were what connected the beat and punk subcultures. Ian Svenonius and Mike Watt, *Soft Focus*, vice.com, September 4, 2011, http://www.vice.com/soft-focus/mike-watt.
[106] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, and Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*.

discourses described by Eli Zaretsky in his history of psychoanalysis as psy-complexes.[107] Lou Reed received electroshock at one of the same state hospitals discussed by Allen Ginsberg in his poem "Howl." Ginsberg's mother and the addressee of that poem, Ginsberg's friend Carl Solomon, also received electroshock for their mental illness, as do the protagonists in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the latter at only one remove from the hippie milieu from which the Velvet Underground distanced themselves, and the former part of the same jazz milieu or underground jazz subculture that so impressed Lou Reed. and which inspired some of his music with the Velvet Underground.[108] In other words, electroshock was part of a larger structure of control that touched many lives, including Reed's, during this period.

In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz discusses queerness as an unfinished project, both at the level of the self and society.[109] He draws on the theories of Ernst Bloch and Giorgio Agamben, regarding utopia and potentiality, and argues that queer artworks offer their audiences hopeful glimpses of the future not so much through their content but at the same time or more so through their performance of an idealized queer identity that does not yet exist.[110] Amongst many other examples, Muñoz points to an Andy Warhol drawing and a Frank O'Hara poem to illustrate the kind of "gee whiz" utopianism and

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[107] Eli Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York, Vintage, 2005).
[108] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, 1952), and Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (New York: Viking, 1962).
[109] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1-18.
[110] Ibid., 2-5, 9.

queer potentiality inherent in what might be considered minor or ornamental acts of artmaking.[111]

Much of the Velvet Underground's reputation as dark, brooding nihilists was constructed by straight, male rock critics who accomplished a great deal in terms of explaining the Velvet Underground's accomplishment within the rock canon, but simultaneously sought to decouple that accomplishment from the queer subcultural milieu from which it originally emerged. For instance, it is clear in Lester Bangs's famous interview with Reed, "Let Us Now Praise Famous Death Dwarves," that Bangs was disturbed by Reed's relationship, at the time of that interview, with a transgender woman named Rachel, whom Bangs depicts in the interview as frightening and freakish.[112] There has been a tendency throughout Reed's career, on the part of rock critics, to see his struggles with his sexuality as coincidental to his larger musical output, but in fact, many of his stranger musical moves only make sense when placed in the larger context of queer cultural production. Throughout his career, Reed himself has not been exactly confident in his sexual identity, as either a queer, gay, or bisexual man, although he has not been ashamed of his desires either. Nevertheless, while he might not have embraced a queer identity in himself, he did celebrate it in the other members of Warhol's Factory who surrounded him, for instance, the famous drag queens Candy

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[111] Ibid., 5-9.
[112] Lester Bangs, "Let Us Now Praise Famous Death Dwarves, or, How I Slugged It Out with Lou Reed and Stayed Awake," in *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, edited by Greil Marcus (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 169-183.

Darling, Jackie Curtis, and Holly Woodlawn about whom Reed sings in his biggest hit "Walk on the Wild Side."[113]

Candy, in particular, acted as something of a muse for Reed throughout his career, for instance, on the track "Candy Says" from the Velvet Underground's third self-titled album.[114] Much of the band's reputation as a precursor to punk rests on the abrasive sonic experimentalism in which they engaged throughout their career, but this album, most of which is filled with gentle ballads, serves as evidence that the Velvet Underground were a sonically diverse band capable of touching moments of sensitivity to go with their bombastic significations of alienation and confusion. "Candy Says" is part of a larger cycle of songs with the word "says" in the title—"Caroline Says," "Lisa Says," and "Stephanie Says"—in which Reed explores feminine subjectivity, in this case, from the point of view of a transgender woman. The song begins with the lines,

> Candy says
> That I've come to hate my body
> And all that it requires
> In this world
> Candy says
> I want to know completely
> What other souls discreetly
> Talk about
>
> I wanna watch
> The bluebirds fly
> Over my shoulder
> I wanna watch
> Them pass me by
> Maybe when I'm older

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[113] Lou Reed, *Transformer*.
[114] Somewhat confusingly, the Velvet Underground's first album was titled *The Velvet Underground and Nico* and their third simply *The Velvet Underground* (New York: MGM, 1969).

What do you think I'd see
If I could walk away from me?

It is curious to imagine what conversation with Candy might have provoked Reed to imagine this monologue for her. It is difficult to say whether the body dysmorphia depicted in the song's first lines – "I hate my body" – was really experienced or expressed by Candy, or whether it was imagined by Reed. In any case, the sound and delivery of the song seems to indicate a deep and intimate identification with Candy on Reed's part, even though Doug Yule, the bassist who replaced John Cale on the Velvet Underground's last two albums, sings the song. Yule delivers the lyric in a high register, approaching falsetto, almost as though he were imitating a woman, which might have been the band's intent. However, although the tune may seem whimsical at points, it is never absurd or mocking. The singer and lyricist sincerely respect Candy's point of view and want to take it seriously. In both verses, Candy is depicted as a carefree, loving character whose sense of biological displacement in the world translates into a blasé detachment from it. As a whole, "Candy Says" might be Lou Reed's most succinct expression of a queer subjectivity, but it is a subjectivity that he only obliquely glances and wispily points his listeners towards, like the artists in Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*, a queer subjectivity that would be revived by Reed's followers at CBGB some years later.

In the December 1966 issue of the multimedia art magazine *Aspen*, edited by Andy Warhol, Lou Reed wrote an editorial titled "The View from the Bandstand."[115] In the editorial, Reed asserts, "Everything is dead," and that the only thing keeping his generation from going "crazy" is rock music.[116] He praises rock and pop songwriting teams, such as Brian and Eddie Holland and Lamont Dozier; Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich; Burt Bacharach and Hal David; and Carol King and Gerry Goffin, as the greatest artists of his age, and contrasts them directly with highbrow poets, such as Robert Lowell and Richard Wilbur.[117] For Reed, Lowell and Wilbur are the nadir of poetic art. They are part of the same world as the colleges and the military, and as Reed explains, "The colleges are meant to kill, and if they don't succeed, "the draft will." He explicitly associates Lowell, Wilbur, and "the Yale Poetry Series" with the colleges.[118]

Reed's editorial may be dismissed as the petulant scribblings of an amphetamine-fueled dilettante, but between the lines of his rant, he offers some sincere insights into the poetic project on which he thought he was embarking with his new band the Velvet Underground, which just that past year had been "discovered" by Andy Warhol. Midway through the editorial, Reed praises rock music for one aesthetic quality above all others—repetition. Reed compares the repetition in rock songs to the repetition of Warhol's films or the repetition that he thinks he hears in what he calls "Eastern music." Presumably, "Eastern music" refers, in this context, to the music of India that had recently been

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[115] Lou Reed, "The View from the Bandstand."
[116] Ibid., 1-2.
[117] Ibid., 2.
[118] Ibid., 1.

introduced to the rock audience by performers such as the Beatles and Rolling Stones, or perhaps Indonesian gamelan, with which Reed might have been familiar via his bandmate John Cale who had studied that genre with his mentor La Monte Young. In his essay, Reed claims that repetition is "fantastic" because it is "anti-glop." "Glop" to him is the mainstream of U.S. consumer society, a society of differentiation, which presumably demands endless variety so that it can sell more *stuff*. (Stuff=glop.) Repetition is undifferentiated and calming. As Clement Greenberg might put it, it is anti-kitsch.[119] It cuts through mass-cultural noise and gives Reed something upon which to focus. As he puts it, "Listening to a dial tone in Bb, until American Tel & Tel messed and turned it into a mediocre whistle, was fine…Andy Warhol's movies are so repetitious sometimes, so so beautiful. Probably the only interesting films made in the U. S. Rock-and-roll films. Over and over and over. Reducing things to their final joke. Which is so pretty." For Reed, modern life is filled with complications and distractions—differentiation. Intriguingly, rock n' roll, which for others might be part of the mass-cultural noise, helps Reed find focus, to realize his potential as an aesthete, invested in the frightening, the beautiful, the sublime.

Reed's position contrasts with that of cultural theorist Jacques Attali. In his book *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Attali argues that music is a "simulacrum of ritual murder."[120] It was a primary means through which primitive societies differentiated themselves from nature and the animals, and a primary means by which we still

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[119] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kistch" (1939), in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 3-21.
[120] Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1977), translated by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 26-27.

differentiate ourselves from nature, the animal, and the industrial din. In a manner that parallels that of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their criticism of the culture industry and modern popular music especially, Attali complains that "repetition," in the form of musical recordings, massively reproduced, commodified, and distributed, is a simulacrum for the fallen, dystopian world of consumer capitalism characterized by unjust disparities in wealth and power, and the exploitation of the working classes. Lou Reed, in his essay, celebrates this exploitation. For Reed, the exploitative character of consumer society—its glop—is taken for granted. Rock music, in its repetition, like Warhol's film, Eastern music, or the dial tone, provides relief from glop. For Reed, this is all the postmodern subject can ask, for a lateral position or subjectivity *alongside* consumer society, speaking back to it and rearranging its coordinates in a queer way.

In his book *Coldness and Cruelty*, the philosopher Gilles Deleuze argues that masochism should not be considered a perversion.[121] For him, masochism represents a logical response to the conditions of modernity to which the masochism of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, who described its symptoms in his 1870 book *Venus in Furs* was particularly attuned.[122] In direct opposition to Freud's famous interpretation of the masochistic symptoms, Deleuze argues that the masochist does not choose self-punishment because the super-ego has eclipsed the ego (as is the case with the sadist). Instead, the masochist strikes a contract for self-punishment with the master in order to reassert the ego function over the super-ego. Masochism is a fantasy in which the slave represents not just the masochistic subject, but in symbolic terms, the subject of

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[121] Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*.
[122] Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*, in *Masochism*, 143-272.

modernity writ large. The master, on the other hand, whether male or female, takes on the role of what Deleuze describes as the "oral" mother, a figure Masoch celebrates, but which the phallogocentric symbolic order tends to efface.[123] According to the masochist, the oral mother occupies an imaginary space between what Deleuze calls "the primitive, uterine, hetaeric mother," and the "Oedipal mother," the mother to whom the masculine adult is attracted.[124] Forsaking these two mothers for the oral mother, Deleuze claims, is not an act of regression, but of psychological and political liberation in a phallogocentric modernity that is cold, cruel, rationalized, and sadistic.[125] As Reed would put it, dead. For the subject in the masochistic fantasy to embrace the oral mother and relinquish the law of the father, which is the masochist's birthright, the masochist replaces one social order with another.

The theme of masochism is evident throughout Lou Reed's work with the Velvet Underground and beyond, even on his earliest recordings. Reed met John Cale while working at Pickwick Records, a label that issued quick knockoffs of novelty records, dance crazes, and genre pieces. In 1964, they recorded their first collaboration and only one for the label, "The Ostrich," as part of a prefabricated pop band called the Primitives.[126] The reputed inspiration for "The Ostrich" was the vogue that season for both ostrich feathers and other dance songs, which it parodies. "The Ostrich" is a somewhat inconsequential footnote to the Velvet Underground's recorded legacy, since only half the band appeared on the track and it was obviously produced under

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[123] Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*, 131.
[124] Ibid., 55.
[125] Ibid.
[126] The Primitives, "The Ostrich" (NY: Pickwick, 1964).

circumstances that were not necessarily conducive to artistic autonomy or creativity. However, it does touch on the theme of masochism explored on their other records, and despite its inauspicious musical beginnings, contains some formal innovations that anticipate the band's later efforts to duplicate the masochistic ritual in sound.

The lyrics to the song encourage self-harm, and its sound is confrontational, to say the least. The band's sound fits their name—primitive, simplistic, unrehearsed. The drums are plodding and only roughly coordinate with the tempo of the other instruments. In the lyrics to "The Ostrich," Reed commands his listeners to "get down on [their] face and step on [their] heads," a joke that may have been intended as a double entendre, with the word "head" referring both to the dancer's penis and cranium (or that of the dancer's partner).[127] When John Cale arrived to play bass on the song, he was impressed with the way that Reed tuned each string on his guitar within the same pitch class. The purpose behind this technique, for Reed, was simply to record more quickly, without having to waste time transposing chords or figuring out more complex forms of accompaniment. It also sounded rowdier, as though the band couldn't be bothered to tune their instruments or learn the proper chord shapes. Such techniques would be taken to their logical extreme by later CBGB punk bands like the Ramones whose guitarist Johnny Ramone would use only barre chords when playing his instrument. Such a use of barre chords, at high

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[127] As mentioned above, the "head/phallus" pun or malapropism appears in a few songs from the Velvet Underground's second album *White Light/White Heat*, including the songs "Lady Godiva's Operation," "The Gift," and "I Heard Her Call My Name," in which characters from each song have their "minds" or "heads" "split open." In the case of Lady Godiva, the offending act takes place on an operating table, in "The Gift," at the hands of an impatient girlfriend who doesn't realize her boyfriend has arrived in her apartment inside a package. The last song on *White Light*, "Sister Ray," infamously describes oral sex as "sucking on a ding dong."

volumes, leads to the production of overtones, which the Ramones and later, more experimental punk bands like Sonic Youth, have used to produced a synaesthetic, hallucinatory, and disorienting effect. When John Cale first encountered this technique at the Pickwick studios, he appreciated its synaesthetic inventiveness. For him, its production of drones was not unlike the process music he was pursuing at the same time with the avant-garde musician La Monte Young at the Dream House. For Young and Cale, the production of drones was intended to bring about the same dreamlike, supersensual state described by the protagonist of *Venus in Furs* during the masochistic ritual. Although Cale's interest in the supersensual, dreams, and drones might have come from a different ideological point of view than Reed's, they both ended up in a similar place, invested in misusing rock instruments for ritualistic purposes. Such an offhanded repurposing of the tools of mainstream music-making on the part of Reed and Cale also previews their collaborations with Andy Warhol, who would similarly seek to redeem the everyday shortcuts of commercial art-makers, for instance, silkscreen printing and the use of the assembly line, as serious art that comments on the production process even as it participates in it. "The Ostrich" does not match the band's later music in terms of the volume or intensity of its sonic assault, but it is quite violent for a song that was supposed to be recorded for primarily commercial purposes. At the very least, the song compares favorably to other similarly heavy, violent, distorted songs recorded by garage bands during what Lenny Kaye, the curator of the 1972 garage rock compilation *Nuggets*, called the "first psychedelic era."[128]

[128] Lenny Kaye, *Nuggets*.

Perhaps the band's most straightforward evocation of the masochistic theme was the song "Venus in Furs," named after the Masoch novel, which was one of the first songs the band recorded as a demo in 1965, and which eventually appeared on their debut album *The Velvet Underground & Nico* in 1966.[129] On the formal level of sound, the song also evidences the band's increasing commitment to rock music performance as masochistic ritual. On the 1965 demo, John Cale sings; on the commercial version, Reed. The verses of the song contain a rather straightforward, simplified retelling of Masoch's tale. Its point of view is unclear. At times, the narrator sings in the third person, watching the masochistic exchange between Wanda, the dominatrix, and Severin, her slave, but the narrator's viewpoint also shifts or slips at times to that of Wanda herself, commanding Severin, for instance, to "bleed" for her. The chorus of the song is obscure. In it, Reed sings, "I am tired / I am weary / I could sleep / For a thousand years / A thousand dreams / That would awake me / Different colors / Made of tears." These lines do not occur in Masoch's novel, although they do resemble the terms of the masochistic contract signed between Severin and Wanda in its English translation. Besides the document in which Severin pledges his life to Wanda as her slave, he also signs a document that reads only, "Having been for many years weary of existence and the disappointments it brings, I have willfully ended my useless life."[130] Wanda has Severin transcribe this document in his own handwriting. In the case that she should want to put him to death, which is within the bounds of their agreement, she would then have an alibi. The point of this contract, in the context of Masoch's fiction, is not really to justify Severin's possible murder, but

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[129] The demo version appears on the first disk of the Velvet Underground box set, *Peel Slowly and See* (Santa Monica, CA: Polydor, 1995).
[130] Masoch, 221.

rather to raise the relationship between Severin and Wanda into the realm of what Masoch describes as the "supersensual."[131] The supersensual is an enhanced erotic state meant to combat what Deleuze called the "coldness and cruelty" of contemporary existence.

Musically, "Venus in Furs" is designed to bring about this supersensual state in a way that was formally innovative at the time of its recording. Along with other songs on the Velvet Underground's debut album, "All Tomorrow's Parties," "Heroin," "The Black Angel's Death Song," and "European Son," it prominently features John Cale's drone-like viola playing, and self-consciously defies the three or four chord patterns that had dominated blues- and Tin-Pan-Alley-based rock songwriting to that point. Throughout the verse, the band lingers on a D-minor chord. The effect is not unlike that of a tragic or lachrymose folk ballad in the English tradition, but the verse's wearied, pained effect is heightened by the presence of Cale's viola, which lingers on a single note. Cale repeatedly bows a high D in such a way as to emulate the crying or wailing of the masochistic subject. In its repetitiveness, the song is not *unlike* some other psychedelic music of the time, but the effect is nowhere near as uplifting or transformative as most early psychedelic performances, for instance by the Grateful Dead or Jefferson Airplane, were intended to be. Rather, the mood of "Venus in Furs" is frightening and oppressive. Elsewhere on *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, the band increases the intensity of their sonic assault, but there is an unsettling yet pleasing unity of form and content on this song meant to bring about what Masoch might have described as a supersensual reverie.

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[131] Masoch, 151.

Taunting the listener with the song's outré subject matter and unsettling sonic construction, the Velvet Underground seeks a kind of agreement with their listeners on a track like "Venus in Furs." There seem to be three main influences on the songwriting on their first album—psychedelic music, the protest tradition of folk songwriting, and R & B. "Venus in Furs" is most indebted to the first two. Yet instead of functioning like most psychedelic folk music, to accompany or enhance the drug experience, "Venus in Furs" seems designed to bring about its own state of altered consciousness, similar to the state that Masoch described as supersensual. The supersensual is immanent and lateral, an aesthetic of intensity, neither sublime nor necessarily transcendental. In the terms proposed by Jacques Rancière and explored in more depth in chapter five, it might be considered heterotopian.[132] "Venus in Furs" and other songs on *The Velvet Underground & Nico* seem designed to bring about the same state. For instance, in the song "Heroin," Reed tries to imagine, in music and words, the exhilaration of the drugtaking experience. The tempo of the song shifts with what Reed describes as the "rush" of his high. A similar sort of imagination occurs in "Venus" vis-à-vis the "supersensual" experience of the masochistic contract. The Velvet Underground's music frequently causes pain, in at least abstract contradistinction to most popular music in the U.S., which most listeners rely upon as an entertainment medium for the delivery of aesthetic pleasure.

Other listeners have noted the Velvet Underground's fascination or interest in sadomasochism as a perversion on par with drug addiction or other forms of kinky sex. For these listeners, sadomasochism was at best a kind of fetishism for Lou Reed, the band, and Warhol. At worst, it was just a sick joke. In fact, the band named themselves

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[132] Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension."

after a sensationalistic "tell-all" book called *The Velvet Underground*, published by a man named Michael Leigh, in 1963.[133] The book purported to expose the sadomasochistic underworld in New York City, but its main purpose was to titillate rather than edify, as most of its details were invented, and it was marketed as soft-core porn rather than scientific study. Michael Leigh's credentials as a physician were in fact fabricated to get the book past censors. The band did not name themselves after this book because they took its content seriously, but rather because they liked the sound of the name and wanted to shock their listeners. Originally, they were named the Warlocks, as well as the Falling Spikes.

In embracing sadomasochism, Lou Reed was embracing repetition as well as perversion as a means to combat the social structures that had produced those repetitions and perversion. Like the writer William S. Burroughs, who influenced him, Reed was waging war on the Reality Studio. Within the U.S. context, it is usually thought that the psychedelic bands, to whom the Velvet Underground are often contrasted, intended to circumvent the Reality Studio by establishing what the historian Michael Kramer has described as "the republic of rock."[134] However, as critics from within the rock subculture, such as Burroughs, Reed, and others recognized, the republic of rock suffered from many of the same limitations and prejudices as the bourgeois public sphere it was intended to counter. Specifically, it was just as patriarchal and often more homophobic and racist than the official bourgeois public sphere in the U.S. itself. To confront this alternative public sphere with more publicity (what Michael Warner might call counter-

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[133] Michael Leigh, *The Velvet Underground* (New York: Macfadden Books, 1963).
[134] Michael Kramer, *Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

counter-publicity),[135] for instance, punk songs mocking the "summer of love" or hippies, might be effective in its way, but instead the Velvet Underground, learning perhaps from Warhol, sought to undermine the identitarian assumptions underlying all forms of publicity. The establishment of a masochistic contract with the audience was one of their primary ways of doing so. When the band performed "Venus in Furs," they would be accompanied onstage by the dancers Gerard Malanga and Mary Woronow, who would pantomime a masochistic ritual of mastery and obedience, with Woronow pretending to whip Malanga, dressed all in black, under harsh strobe lights.

While the hippies in San Francisco were celebrating the "Summer of Love" at the "human be-in," the Velvet Underground were lamenting "the Long Hot Summer" of race riots throughout the U.S.'s industrial, urban dystopias. In September 1967, the band entered Scepter Studios in New York City to record *White Light/White Heat*, with producer Tom Wilson. No matter how you looked at it, the summer just past had been momentous, but depending on your point of view, it was either joyous or horrific. On June 1 of that year, the Beatles had released their own album, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, which kicked off what many in the hippie counterculture and the media called, "The Summer of Love."[136] "The Summer of Love" had been preceded by the first "Human Be-In" in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park on January 14 of that year, and it would continue through the Monterey Pop Festival, held between June 16 and 18, as thousands of young people traveled to San Francisco to soak in the vibes, and experiment with psychedelic drugs and casual sex. In Victor Bockris's biography of Lou

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[135] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (NY: Zone Books, 2002).
[136] The Beatles, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (Los Angeles: Capitol, 1967).

Reed, he claims that Jackson Browne told him that Lou Reed attended a New York City equivalent of the be-in.[137] West of the Mississippi, the hippies were exploring new horizons of human experience, but back East a very different climate reigned.

On *White Light/White Heat*, the Velvet Underground extended the avant-garde experimentalism of their first record into more extreme, far out, mind-expanding directions, but they tempered this experimentalism with a rough destructiveness that had rarely been heard on a rock record before. Besides the overdriven title track, which resolves in 40 seconds of near-white-noise, there was the even more infamous, "Sister Ray," which chronicled the exploits of speed freaks and drag queens over a seventeen and a half minute drone of pulverizing electric organ and distorted guitars. In between, there were weird sonic experiments such as "Lady Godiva's Operation," which at one point disintegrates into a cacophonous rumble of disjointed lyrics and sound effects, and arguably the album's most intense track, "I Heard Her Call My Name," which featured guitar-playing by Lou Reed that instantly expanded the palette of the electric guitar in terms of volume and brutality.

The trope of "minds splitting open," which Reed mentions in the song "I Heard Her Call My Name," is echoed across the songs on *White Light/White Heat*. The title track, which starts the album, begins, "White light going messing up my mind," and continues riffing on this theme throughout its two minutes of lyrics. Presumably, the "white light" sung about in this line, and the "white heat" in the next are a reference, first of all, to the adrenaline rush of speed, which was the Velvet Underground's drug of choice during this period, but the trope is articulated differently elsewhere. For instance,

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[137] Bockris, 150.

"Lady Godiva's Operation" recounts an horrific brain surgery gone bad, and perhaps the album's strangest song, "The Gift," at least from the point of view of sonic construction, features a spoken recital of a Lou Reed short story by John Cale that ends with its hero's "head split open" by his girlfriend when she stabs him with scissors after he tries to mail himself to her at college.

White Light/White Heat, no doubt, devolves around dirty jokes and double entendres, but caught between two cultural dominants—liberating fantasy and repressive backlash—these jokes signify more than tawdriness. Like all jokes, according to Freud, the humor has a target, aimed squarely at resolving the tensions that informed *White Light/White Heat*'s cultural moment and the artistic concerns of its creators at that moment and beyond.[138] The album is fueled by the adrenaline rush of psychedelic experience and sexual expressiveness indebted to the countercultural scenes in New York and across the continent in San Francisco, but it is also a carefully constructed chiaroscuro study in light and darkness that echoes, in an oblique way, the social conflicts that accompanied its construction. The album never explicitly addresses racial conflict, but the opposition between black and white is used to frame the album's experimental soundscapes. Its cover is an all-black composition created by Warhol Factory denizen, Billy Name, like the *Black Paintings* of Robert Rauschenberg a decade or so earlier. The cover contains a photograph of an upper arm with a skull tattoo, but the tattoo is barely perceptible and can only be seen in a certain light. In point of fact, it is hardly seen at all since the original LP is so rare and reissues do not necessarily reproduce the authentic

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[138] Sigmund Freud, *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, translated by James Strachey (NY: Norton, 1960).

cover image. Name toned the photo so darkly that the arm and the tattoo are only two slightly different shades of black. Above this image, the cover contains the title of the album, the band's name, and their record company's logo. The cover is a study in minimalism, and the band's second cover to feature retrofitted, pop art anamorphosis. Their first album featured Warhol's famous "banana" cover that encouraged the listener to "Peel Slowly and See" what was behind the banana, which was a sticker. Underneath, perhaps anticlimactically, there was a hot pink, skinless banana. As usual, the Velvet Underground, here accompanied by Warhol, were playing around with phallic imagery. Name's cover for *White Light/White Heat* extends the lyrics' punning into the visual realm.

Throughout their career, the Velvet Underground were perceived as loud, brash, and confrontational. In standard punk history books like *Please Kill Me* and *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*, the Velvet Underground are described as a "proto-punk" band, meaning their fashion sense, sound, and attitude, seemed to contribute something in terms of confrontation or alienation first to the early CBGB scene and later to the international punk scene more generally.[139] Oftentimes, this contribution to the larger punk narrative, or to punk poetics, on the part of the Velvet Underground is dismissed as a kind of transgression for transgression's sake. It is imagined that the only purpose of the music, on the part of the musicians who make it and the fans who consume it, is to act out some sort of symbolic fantasy of youthful rebellion through self-harm, drugtaking, or music played at extreme volumes and speeds. Certainly, this is the purpose of a good deal of

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[139] Clinton Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids: The Birth of American Punk Rock* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1993), and Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Grove, 1996).

punk, especially in its less arty, more populist variants, but there is also a more forward-thinking, one might even say utopian, orientation to a music like the Velvet Underground's. Even when they engage in the production of pure noise, it is intended as a metaphor or symbol of a deeper alienation, for instance, during their stage show or on album tracks such as "Run Run Run," "The Black Angel's Death Song," "European Son," "White Light/White Heat," "I Heard Her Call My Name," and "Sister Ray," or later on lead singer Lou Reed's infamous *Metal Machine Music* album. This deeper structure of feeling or symbolic representation of alienation on the part of the Velvet Underground is extra-linguistic, but it is enhanced by the band's use of language and imagery, the former of which was created by Reed, who from the very early days of the band considered himself just as much, if not more so, a poet than a songwriter or musician. Although some of this romantic consideration on Reed's part may be dismissed as dilletantism, there is something to Reed's pose when it is considered within the wider field of Cold War poetics and the cultural politics of the late 60s and 70s. Ultimately, it seems unfair to saddle Reed with the status of poseur at a moment when poetry itself was undergoing revolutionary shifts in production, distribution, and institutional status to which Reed's work as a solo artist and with the Velvet Underground might be seen as a response. Reed's adoption of a poetic persona was actually a symbolic act meant to counter the political and emotional alienation he felt within an increasingly reactionary Cold War poetic and political establishment.

Between their founding, in 1965, and the departure of Reed, in 1970, confronting audiences with their own alienation was the Velvet Underground's business. As the members of the Velvet Underground have repeated in multiple interviews, they

understood their music to be a specific response to the "good vibrations" emanating from the west coast of the U.S. and London during the Summer of Love.[140] Reed's masochism is a protest against the hippie ideology, against the Cold War security state, the psy-complexes, and the academy within the larger history of the Cold War culture industry. The masochistic contract that Reed established with his critics, his audience, and his patrons was meant to counter the patriarchal power and norms of the Cold War security state, or what Deleuze described elsewhere, drawing on the theories of Burroughs, "the society of control."[141] The origin of the punk aesthetic can be found in this oppositional stance.

[140] Bockris, *Transformer*, 133.
[141] Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (1992): 3-7.

CHAPTER TWO: How Do You Spell Love?
Girl Group Pop and the Politics of Punk Appropriation

Punk occurs between beat and pop. For us, Lou Reed represents the beat side of this equation, but what about pop? Before there was punk, there was pop, specifically girl group pop, made by bands like the Shirelles, Crystals, Shangri-Las, Ronettes, and Angels in the 1960s. Listening to this music while absorbing the "popism" of Andy Warhol, punk rockers, both male and female, discovered an ecstatic poetic grammar of pleasure and identification. Punk rock references to and borrowings from the girl group tradition are myriad, starting with the musical (and sometimes sartorial) transvestitism of the New York Dolls and Ramones; continuing through the high girl group camp of Blondie; the chart success of former punks like the Go-Go's and Bangles; and the feminist girl group recovery projects of artists like Kim Gordon of Sonic Youth, Kim Deal of the Breeders and Pixies, and Kathleen Hanna, as a member of Bikini Kill and Le Tigre, and working alone under the pseudonym Julie Ruin.[142]

Perhaps because of subcultural studies' overwhelmingly masculine, heteronormative emphasis on young, white, male subcultures, scholars have paid relatively less attention to the influence of girl group pop on various punk scenes than, say, avant-garde art, Beat literature, glam rock, or reggae.[143] Yet punk rockers have embraced the girl group

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[142] Throughout this chapter, I retain the original spelling of the Go-Go's name, assuming this won't cause confusion when being used as a possessive.

[143] I have in mind, in particular, the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies' approach to subcultural studies, especially the work of Dick Hebdige, *Subculture*, and the contributors to the field-defining anthology, *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, edited by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (New York: Routledge, 2006). Drawing on the work of the feminist, dissident Birmingham cultural scholar Angela McRobbie, Judith Halberstam offers a trenchant critique of these prejudices in the final chapter of her book *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender*

tradition throughout their genre's history in order to theorize that music's relationship towards rock music's past and the politics of that past in terms of racial genealogy, sexual liberation, and erotic expression. In this way, punk appropriations of girl group pop may be understood to occur at a site of intersection between the cultural and political legacies of the feminist movement, post-Stonewall gay liberation, and the ethnic revival movement that gained momentum during the 1970s. These influences endow punk appropriations of girl group style with a transgressively erotic quality—so much so, in fact, that one may say that the influence of girl group pop on punk is constitutive of the genre. Ultimately, I want to suggest that punk's engagements with girl group pop can be read, from a queer, feminist point of view, as redemptive and indeed utopian acts of historical recovery. Punk appropriations of girl group pop are anterior of punk, occupying a social and sonic space beyond CBGB, the Sex Pistols, and even riot grrrl that has endowed punk performances with a queer, empowering vitality.

L-U-V Spells Love: Girl Talk and The "Good Bad" Grammar of Punk Appropriation

Punk rock appropriations of girl group sounds begin with a misspelling—a queer place to start, in more ways than one. On their 1973 self-titled debut album, the New York Dolls, arguably the first New York punk band, start the song "Looking for a Kiss" with a line cribbed from the Shangri-Las' song "Give Him a Great Big Kiss." "When I say I'm in love, you best believe I'm in love, L-U-V!"[144] The line serves as a transition out of the

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Bodies, Subcultural Lives, "What's That Smell? Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives" (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 152-188.

[144] New York Dolls, *New York Dolls* (New York: Mercury, 1973) and Shangri-La's, "Give Him a Great Big Kiss" (New York: Red Bird, 1964).

"personality crisis" that gives the album's first track its name. It transports the listener from the confusing mental space of the first song's narrator to the streets of New York that provided both the Shangri-Las and the Dolls with their foremost inspiration. "Looking for a Kiss" is a saucy riposte to the Shangri-Las' song narrated from the point of view of that song's male love object. Whereas the singer in "Give Him a Great Big Kiss" describes her new boyfriend to her girlfriends as "good bad, but not evil," "Looking for a Kiss" finds that boyfriend alone on a Sunday morning in New York acting real bad, looking for love in all the wrong places. The somewhat foreboding romanticism of the Shangri-Las' song is reflected in the tender vulnerability of the Dolls' lyrics, initiating a set of reflections on the rock n' roll genre's past that hinges on the specific appropriation of a certain facet of that past—the girl group tradition of 1960s pop.

By cribbing one of the Shangri-Las' most distinctive lines, which derives its humor from the rhetorical use of intentional misspelling, the Dolls, in an almost charming way, insert themselves into a conversation conducted using what girl group expert Jacqueline Warwick has called "girl talk"—grammatical mistakes, onomatopoeia, and nonsense words that evoke emotions and experiences that "good girls" aren't supposed to share.[145] Warwick considers this sort of girl talk to be a form of what the French theorist Hélène Cixous famously called "*écriture feminine*," "writing through the body [that] can resist the language of patriarchal discourse."[146] When the Dolls enter into this conversation, they don't reappropriate it for the patriarch, but instill it with a queer sense of intimacy, of chatter between bad boys and girls, including bad boys in girls' clothing.

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[145] Warwick, Jacqueline, *Girl Groups, Girl Culture: Popular Music and Identity in the 1960s* (NY : Routledge, 2007), 33-50.
[146] Ibid., 40.

The Shangri-Las were founded in the Cambria Heights section of Queens, New York in 1963. From 1964 to 1966, they had a series of pop hits including "Give Him a Great Big Kiss," "Out in the Streets," "(Remember) Walking in the Sand," and most famously, "Leader of the Pack."[147] All of these hits and most of their other songs were produced by the pop eccentric George "Shadow" Morton, whom the New York Dolls would later enlist to produce their second album, *Too Much, Too Soon*, in 1974.[148] The Shangri-Las were part of a second-wave of white girl groups that emerged in the mid-60s in the wake of earlier breakthroughs by black groups like the Shirelles, Crystals, and Ronettes.[149] Like the Ronettes, the Shangri-Las were the archetypal "bad" girl group; onstage and on record they projected an air of rebelliousness, and they were more forthright, although still subtle, about their sexuality and attraction to rebellious male characters. In tones that were still for the most part saccharine, they invited their listeners to take a walk on the wild side, and apparently many punks were listening.

Besides the New York Dolls, another artist who has publicized her debt to the Shangri-Las is the bassist for the second-wave New York punk band Sonic Youth, Kim Gordon, who is still engaged in a successful rock career today. In 1995, Sonic Youth, in collaboration with Kim Deal, bassist of the Pixies and guitar player and lead singer for the Breeders, released a track called "Little Trouble Girl" on their album *Washing*

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[147] All of these songs appear on the compilation Shangri-La's, *Myrmidons of Melodrama: The Definitive Collection* (London: RPM, 2002).
[148] New York Dolls, *Too Much Too Soon* (New York: Mercury, 1974).
[149] Throughout this essay, I have relied on Charlotte Grieg's account of girl group culture, *Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow? Girl Groups from the 50s On…* (London: Virago, 1989) for historical background and insight.

Machine.[150] Originally produced for the soundtrack to the film *Grace of My Heart*, the song is a cunning pastiche of the girl group pop of the 1960s that that film sought to explore, especially the work of the Shangri-Las.[151]

"Little Trouble Girl" contains the basic musical ingredients of a Shangri-Las song—a spoken interlude, airy harmonies, echo, and a backbeat—but it renders these elements uncanny through subtle manipulation. The spoken interlude of "Little Trouble Girl," for instance, is stretched well past its normal length in a Shangri-La's song, of one verse, to take up nearly two minutes in the song's center. Through this dilation, which has a creepy, uncanny effect, the band transforms the interlude into something more like a speech or a testimonial, engaging again in the kind of "girl talk" described by Warwick, occurring outside the strictures of musical melody, harmony, or rhythm. The vocalist, Kim Gordon, is addressing her mother. At the beginning of the speech, she acknowledges that she and her mother were once "close, very very close," but now she's "close, very very close" to her man. The sexually suggestive epizeuxis, or rhetorical repetition of words, in the phrase "close, very very close" is borrowed directly from the Shangri-La's song, "Give Him a Great Big Kiss," when the lead singer responds to a question by her backup singers about how her new boyfriend dances, "close, very very close." In "Little Trouble Girl," this close contact with a male suitor doesn't just set the singer apart from her girlfriends in the band, it has transformed her into a sex-positive proto-feminist, someone the song suggests is very different from her mommy's little girl.

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[150] Sonic Youth, *Washing Machine* (Santa Monica, CA: Geffen, 1995).
[151] Alison Anders, *Grace of My Heart* (Santa Monica, CA: Gramercy Pictures, 1996).

Such a transformation could be interpreted as the traditional one from daughter to wife, but it seems far more likely in the context of this song that the singer is breaking tradition, pursuing this relationship solely for her own pleasure, and creating "trouble" in a system of courtship that would discourage such pairings. The latter interpretation is reinforced, especially, in the video that was made to promote the song, in which the "little trouble girl" of the title is depicted as a space alien navigating a sci-fi landscape that looks oddly outdated, like a 1950s vision of the future that never came to pass. Both the song and the video dramatize a political movement away from the 1950s housewife towards feminine liberation. It confronts the feminine mystique head on, and it does so using the aesthetic tools of musical production that existed prior to second-wave feminism. However, it uses these tools in critical, oppositional ways. "Little Trouble Girl" gestures towards girl group pop's proto-feminism in whimsical and nostalgic if perhaps oblique ways. In this context, the alien child in the "Trouble Girl" music video begins to resemble the ghostly gay child recently described by theorist Kathryn Bond Stockton in her book *The Queer Child*. According to Stockton, all children are essentially queer because of their sideways or lateral relationship to the parent culture and its Victorian ideals of sexual development. For this reason, the ghostly gay child, who actually acts on the sexual desires that Sigmund Freud described it as having, invisibly haunts the cultural history of the twentieth century, which Ellen Key famously described as "the century of the child" before it even began.[152] "Little Trouble Girl" and its accompanying video seem to embody Stockton's concepts of "cubist" or "sideways" growth for the queer child during the twentieth century, plumping the productive

[152] Stockton, 8.

interface between girl group pop and punk with additional erotic meanings, especially when it comes to sexual rebellion and self-expression by teenage girls.[153]

The New York Dolls, also, stood in this sideways relationship to the girl group tradition. They appeared onstage in drag. Instead of sanitizing a rock n' roll medium that, as George Lipsitz (1990, 99-132) has suggested, proved a fertile ground for dialogue between white, black, and brown working class musicians, the Dolls were attempting to reclaim that ground and queer it through their ostentatious sartorial choices and what their lead singer David Johansen called "trisexuality" ("I'll *try* anything!"), which were influenced by their exposure to the drag scene at Andy Warhol's Factory, the nightclub Max's Kansas City, and Mercer Arts Center performance venue.[154] The Dolls held a kind of dominion over the Mercer before it literally collapsed in 1973.

This intense, expansive body of meanings speaks to us, grotesquely, lustfully, in songs like "Looking for a Kiss" and "Little Trouble Girl" when standard grammars, the structures of spoken and musical language, break down. The appeal to girl group history on the part of the New York Dolls and Sonic Youth is an appeal to inauthenticity, at least according to the standard rules of rock n' roll performance, which places them in a queer relationship with rock n' roll's masculine, patriarchal history. By 1973, when the New York Dolls first appeared on the New York scene, the standard rules of rock performance required or at least encouraged performers to write their own material and play their own instruments, to dress and comport themselves in a certain masculine if sometimes campy

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[153] Ibid., 11-17.
[154] George Lipsitz, "Against the Wind: Dialogic Aspects of Rock and Roll," in *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 99-132.

way; yet girl group pop resisted these norms. The female performers of girl group pop were all image, making no claims to musical proficiency, even if they could sing, and they were controlled by pop svengalis like Shadow Morton, Phil Spector, or Richard Gottehrer, each of whom experienced a career revival working with New York punk bands—the Dolls, Ramones, and Blondie, respectively. Gottehrer also produced the first Richard Hell and the Voidoids album and the Go-Go's album, *Beauty and the Beat*, discussed below. Instead of disavowing the girl groups' contagious streak of inauthenticity within the rock n' roll tradition, the punk rockers embraced it, pulling at one of the threads that stabilized rock's racialized, gendered, and sexualized meanings.

The punks remind rock listeners that the girl group sound always had a hold over their genre's most respected innovators. Artists such as the Beatles and the Beach Boys covered girl group material in earnest, and the Shangri-Las toured with the Rolling Stones. To a large extent, also, the Beatles, especially, emulated the girl groups onstage with their manners and attitudes. Although the members of these groups might have been loath to admit it, this emulation of girl group style leant their music a uniquely feminine subjectivity that was virtually unknown in popular culture before that time. As Jacqueline Warwick has written, "the tremendous popularity of girl groups . . . marked the first instance in U.S. history of a music centered around adolescent girls and their experiences coming of age, in a society where teenagers were emerging as a newly significant group."[155] Although the lyrics of girl group pop were not always progressive when it came to gender roles (and the male rock bands who covered girl group songs would often edit them to restore the patriarchal gender dominant), the mode of feminine being

[155] Warwick, 3.

displayed in girl group songs was a big step forward from the June Cleaver-esque stereotypes of the 1950s. Working within the culture industry of the 1960s that intellectual critics such as Dwight Macdonald and Theodor Adorno had dubbed "totalitarian," girl group performers, along with their corporate handlers and brilliant songwriters, who were often also female, such as Carole King, Cynthia Weil, and Laura Nyro, authored scripts in which teenage girls could be erotic. Some of rock music's most charismatic male performers also identified with and subsequently repurposed these scripts. Thus, when David Johansen acknowledges his appreciation of girl group pop at the beginning of "Looking for a Kiss," or Kim Gordon and Kelly Deal revive it, they are not exactly breaking away from rock's old guard; they are talking back to them.

The Dolls and the Ramones, another band who participated in punk rock's first wave in New York City, accelerated this dialogue in dizzying, manic ways that often threatened to overwhelm the masculine norms of rock performance. When the Ramones, especially, tackle girl group material like "Baby, I Love You," originally by the Ronettes, or girl group-derived material, like the outtake from *Rocket to Russia*, "SLUG," they exude a desperate vulnerability.[156] No less an authority than the queer feminist rocker Carrie Brownstein, guitarist in the all-female rock band Sleater-Kinney, who wrote the song "I Wanna Be Your Joey Ramone," described that band's lead singer, Joey, as "a performer who embodied diffidence and grandiosity. Here was a man who was simultaneously awkward, eyes hidden by hair, and also larger than life."[157] Although it was never completely clear to his fans whether this affect of "diffidence and grandiosity" was

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[156] Ramones, *End of the Century* (NY: Sire, 1980) and *All the Stuff (and More!)*, vol. 2 (NY: Sire, 1990).
[157] Qtd. in True, 277-278.

natural or part of the act, what is certain is that it was brought out of the closet, so to speak, at least in part, by Ramone's encounter with non-normative sexuality during the glam rock period. As his brother, Mickey Leigh, writes in his biography of Joey, *I Slept with Joey Ramone*, during the glam rock era, "You were what you were, at whatever time you chose to be . . . [Joey] was neither athletically inclined nor macho. Finally it didn't matter."[158] The New York Dolls, of course, were the leaders of the New York glam rock scene, and Joey Ramone participated in that scene by performing under the name Jeff Starship in the band Sniper before joining the Ramones.

Like the New York Dolls, when they worked with Shadow Morton on *Too Much, Too Soon*, the Ramones announced their allegiance to girl group pop when they worked with Phil Spector on their 1980 album, *End of the Century*. This album contained the band's cover of the Ronettes' girl group song "Baby, I Love You," the Ramones' only real hit during their careers, and girl group-indebted songs like "Rock n' Roll High School," "Danny Says," and "Do You Remember Rock n' Roll Radio?" Although seen by many Ramones's fans as their first misstep after a blistering series of great records in the 1970s, the album, in Joey's case at least, seemed to come from the heart and speak to his reasons for becoming a punk rocker in the first place, not to become the antichrist, like Johnny Rotten, but to become a tough girl, like Ronnie Spector or perhaps David Johansen. This is a punk position at least as defiant as Johnny Rotten's and perhaps more ethical, or at least in different ways. As Tavia Nyong'o has shown, punk and queer emerged alongside each other in the 1970s to challenge similar structures of

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[158] Leigh and McNeil, 90.

heteronormativity.[159] With the Ramones's and the New York Dolls's appropriations of girl group pop, such a challenge emerges from a perhaps surprising place, establishing a grammar for erotic engagement that female punk performers like Deborah Harry, the lead of singer of the band Blondie, and close confidante to Ramone, advanced.

The "X" in Sex: Blondie and the Law of Genre

Deborah Harry, the lead singer of Blondie, translates the contradictions inherent in girl group appropriations into sonic pleasures that are surprisingly subversive, especially for listeners familiar with narratives of Blondie's career that disavow them as inauthentic sellouts. Many others on the punk scene, for instance Richard Hell, didn't like them. Judging by the constant cleverness, craft, and promiscuity of their songs, however, this disavowal is revealed for the misogynistic slander that it was. What doesn't come as a surprise, in this context, is Joey Ramone's love for Blondie's music, which he surely appreciated for just this subversive potential, especially when it came to gender transgression and sexual pleasure.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Deborah Harry's success as the lead singer of Blondie was that her career didn't break until she had already cracked the age of 30. The sexual persona that Harry projected on her Blondie records and in performance wasn't that of a naïve youngster, as many people took it; instead, it was that of a mature woman growing sideways (as Kathryn Bond Stockton might put it), fluidly exploring aspects of her sexuality beyond the laws of gender that frequently render women passive receptacles for masculine attitudes about what they lack. In this way, Harry's persona, as

[159] Nyong'o, "Do You Want Queer Theory (or Do You Want the Truth)?"

social text, stood in the same relation of submission and dominance towards other members of her genre that Jacques Derrida once called "hymenal" in his essay "The Law of Genre," a form of belonging to a genre that I explore in more detail below.[160] In her music with Blondie, Harry pursues a sex positive persona that talks back to punk appropriators of girl group pop, like the New York Dolls and the Ramones, not just in terms of gender and sexuality, but also in terms of racialization, playing a tricky game with racial signification that I want to claim can be understood and cautiously appreciated within the context of the 1970s ethnic revival.

From the very first track on their first record, which was also their first single, Blondie started to delineate a sonic space of sexual possibility in contrast with the boys' club that existed at CBGB's, New York punk's home turf, and they did so by appropriating girl group material. The first track on Blondie's self-titled debut, "X-Offender," is one of the most slyly subversive songs to emerge from the first wave of New York punk.[161] In apparent deference to the girl group tradition, it starts with a spoken introduction and covers similar thematic material, telling a story of lost and tragic love, although this version is considerably more perverse than a typical girl group song. "X-Offender" was written by Blondie bassist Gary Valentine in collaboration with the band's lead singer Deborah Harry and was produced by Richard Gottehrer. As mentioned above, Gottehrer had made his name in the music business by working with girl groups in the 60s. He wrote the hits "I Want Candy" and "My Boyfriend's Back," the latter of which went to number one on the Billboard pop chart when he recorded it with the

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[160] Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," translated by Avital Ronell, *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980), 55-81.
[161] Blondie, *Blondie* (New York: Private Stock, 1976).

Angels in 1963. The original title of Blondie's song was "Sex Offender," which referred to a character in the song, and it was supposed to tell the story of a teenage boy accused of statutory rape for sleeping with his girlfriend. Apparently, this material was judged inappropriate for commercial release, so the band changed the plot of the song to focus on a young prostitute. In the course of the song's three minutes and fifteen seconds, this prostitute falls in love with a cop who picks her up for turning tricks on the street. She pines for him in prison and at the end of the song takes heart in her belief that he will want her "to be sex offensive" for him again when she gets out.

The song's lyrics and scenario are a cunning jab at state authority, which is embodied in the figure of the cop. In the great tradition of proto-punk writers like Jean Genet and William Burroughs, Blondie's song exposes the sexual fetishism upon which this state authority relies. In *The Thief's Journal*, Genet reports his attraction towards the cop's badge: "The metal object had for me the power of a cigarette lighter in the fingers of a workman, or the buckle of an army belt, of a switchblade, of a caliper, objects in which the quality of males is violently concentrated."[162] As Michael Taussig argues, such objects do not become fetishes for Genet; he does not disavow them.[163] Gazing upon the cop's badge, Genet desires to break the law: to "slip [his] hand under the lapel where cops usually wear the badge . . . I would have then trembled just as if I had been opening his fly."[164] Genet shares this compulsion both with Burroughs and the narrator of Blondie's song, and the three mimetically bequeath this compulsion to their audience

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[162] Jean Genet, qtd. in Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 136.
[163] Ibid., 140.
[164] Qtd. in Taussig, 136.

when they perform, either on the page or on record. Like Genet, the character in "X-Offender" recognizes the fetish power of the cop's badge but desires to disarm it (or "defetishize" it, in Taussig's term), in other words, to be "sex offensive."[165] At her trial, the narrator of "X-Offender" fixates on her cop's "badge and rubber boots," not the reality of her inevitable incarceration. Genet and the "X-Offender," according to Taussig (141), "reenchant" the world by breaking the law, although the "X-Offender" does so in a much more literal way, since her action takes the form of an actual enchantment—a song. Serving as Blondie's debut single and the first track on their self-titled debut album, "X-Offender" has what one might call a "vestibular effect," engaging the listener's body in an aural *pas de deux* of symbolism, sound, flesh, and desire as they begin their engagement with this band, their movement into its sonic space.

Alongside provocations like "X-Offender," on their first album, Blondie offers a response to the racial ventriloquism that sat awkwardly alongside the New York Dolls' girl group appropriations. This ventriloquism also haunted Blondie's music, which was marketed as racially white, but often drew from black musical traditions. Later in Blondie's career, they would have megahits by crossing over into musical genres that are often thought of as stereotypically black, first disco with "Heart of Glass," then hip-hop with "Rapture," and finally reggae with a cover of the ska song "Tide Is High."

As the girl group historian Charlotte Greig explains in her useful history of the genre, even as the complexion of girl groups shifted, in the mid-1960s, from black groups like the Shirelles and Crystals to white groups like the Shangri-Las and Angels, the genre

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[165] Ibid., 140.

was still ethnically marked.[166] Most of the girl groups' songs were written by Jewish-American songwriters, and many of the bands were populated by the descendents of working-class Italian, Jewish, Irish, and German immigrants. Identification with this ethnic past is also evident in Blondie's music, even if it turns up in odd places in tracks like "Kung Fu Girls" and "A Shark in Jets Clothing" on their first album. Recently, historians of punk like Jon Stratton and Steven Lee Beeber have argued that the first wave of punk, including Blondie, whose main songwriter, Chris Stein, was Jewish, was a specifically Jewish-American cultural formation, and they are right to point out that a surprising number of early New York punks were of Jewish descent, and that this heritage had some influence on the music's themes, for example, genocide, and its sense of humor, which shared something with the dark worldview of comics like Lenny Bruce and Woody Allen.[167] However, the genre may also be understood as participating in the broader ethnic revival movement that overtook the U.S. throughout the 1970s and included white ethnics of many different backgrounds. As the cultural historian Matthew Frye Jacobson has pointed out, the ethnic revival served a variety of purposes, both progressive and conservative, but as a whole can be understood as a specific response to the threats to U.S. racial whiteness in the face of first the Civil Rights movement, then the Black Power movement and other non-white ethnic identity movements.[168] In this context, punk can definitely be seen, in some ways, as contributing to this reconsolidation

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[166] Grieg, 69-100.
[167] Steven Lee Beeber, *The Heebie-Jeebies at CBGB's: A Secret History of Jewish Punk* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2006) and Jon Stratton, "Jews, Punk, and the Holocaust: From the Velvet Underground to the Ramones—The Jewish-American Story," *Popular Music* 24 (2005), 79-105.
[168] Jacobson, Matthew Frye, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006), 8-9.

of white identity, but when not directly racist, as it was in some cases, punk engagements with ethnic identity, like its appropriations of girl group pop, seemed more like an exploration of the musicians' own otherness or *encounter* with otherness than a hateful response to it.

Such a sentiment seems to be operative in the song "A Shark in Jets Clothing," which harkens back to an earlier moment of ethnic expression to consolidate Blondie's identification with the working-class, ethnically marked outsider. The title to "A Shark in Jets Clothing" is, of course, a reference to one of the Cold War's great racial melodramas, Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim's rewrite of *Romeo and Juliet*, *West Side Story*, which restages the conflict between the Capulets and the Montagues as a racial conflict between white and Puerto-Rican gangs in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of New York City. Although there are no other specific lyrical allusions in "A Shark in Jets Clothing" to the songs of *West Side Story*, it covers similar thematic ground. In the song, a narrator who identifies herself as white during the verse warns her presumably Puerto-Rican boyfriend not to "cross the line" between white and Puerto-Rican neighborhoods in order to see her. Instead, they'll meet in a subway car, which she describes as a "neutral zone," in order to carry out their tryst.

Blondie weaves their girl group appropriations back into a narrative of U.S. racialization that includes ethnic as well as racial others. Later girl group appropriations by punk musicians will be used to position themselves as race neutral, that is, racially white, absent the racial signifier. Yet as Blondie shifts between musical genres on their first album, moving from girl group pop to straightforward punk to surf music, and later dabbles in disco, rap, and reggae on later albums, they also cross lines of gender and race,

hinting at the ways in which the latter are bound up with generic, gendered considerations. Although the "neutral zone" of cross-racial coupling described in "A Shark in Jets Clothing" isn't fully elaborated in that song, it harkens back to what I called the vestibular, anterior space beyond the law of gender and now genre and race that we heard on "X-Offender." As I'm suggesting, the whole of Blondie's excellent first album establishes a general ambience of transgression, which is behind and marked by an "X", which, following Derrida, we might call "hymenal."[169] This ambience emerges according to a different logic than the patent shock tactics of the New York Dolls, but it is still indebted to them, especially when it comes to establishing the grammar of girl group appropriations. In the case of the New York Dolls, the Ramones, and Sonic Youth, punk appropriations of the girl group tradition not only influenced their style, they also, in a sense, punctured the skin of their musical language, resulting in rhetorical figures like intentional misspelling and epizeuxis that they wore as masochistic stigmata of subcultural affiliation. In the case of Blondie, the extent of their girl group appropriation goes farther to transform the skin of their song not just into a surface that is punctured or wounded with stigmata, but into wholly new generic substance, a hymenal surface over which racialized, gendered, and erotic signifiers move and slip in promiscuous and subversive ways. This formal promiscuity is doubled, for instance, in the lyrics to their song "In the Flesh." That such a music should have emerged at the end of the 1970s, after Stonewall and at the height of the women's movement and the white ethnic revival should not come as a great surprise since all three of those movements were advocating a micropolitics of the body and the sign in the post-emancipation aftermath of the 1960s,

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[169] Derrida, 74.

the emblem of which is Michael Foucault's publication of *Discipline and Punish* in Paris in 1975.[170] Blondie's music seemed to dwell in a hymenal genre space that Deborah Harry herself called "power pop"—girl group pop inflected with the raw power of punk.[171] Within the skin covering this space, a punk-influenced band called the Go-Go's would emerge in Blondie's wake to grant punk appropriations of girl group style its most public airing.

The Beat and the Beastly: The Go-Go's and The Birth of Punk Rock Tragedy

Turning to the Go-Go's, we move from New York in the 1970s to Los Angeles at the dawn of the 1980s to look at a band whose link to punk rock is tenuous, but whose subsequent influence has been distinctive and powerful. The Go-Go's album, *Beauty and the Beat*, released on July 24, 1981, still holds the distinction of being the only LP written and performed by an all-female band ever to reach number one on the Billboard album chart.[172] Just a few years earlier, when the band formed in 1978, such an outcome would have seemed very unlikely. The Go-Go's emerged out of an L.A. punk scene that was defiantly anti-commercial and anti-authoritarian. They shared practice space with another L.A. band, X, whose signature song, "Johnny Hit and Run Paulene," told the story of a sex slave raped once every hour for 24 hours; they played their debut gigs at the iconic L.A. punk club the Masque; and lead singer Belinda Carlisle had briefly played drums in perhaps the most anarchic L.A. punk band, the Germs, whose performances often ended

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[170] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977).
[171] Harry, qtd. in Lester Bangs, *Blondie* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), 8.
[172] The Go-Go's, *Beauty and the Beat* (Santa Monica, CA: IRS, 1981).

with their lead singer Darby Crash covering himself in peanut butter or cutting open his chest. Crash committed suicide at age 22 by drug overdose on December 7, 1980, just months before *Beauty and the Beat* debuted.

In the immediate aftermath of Crash's death, *Beauty and the Beat* could be understood, on one hand, as a violation of his spirit, which had arguably provided the L.A. punk scene with what Friedrich Nietzsche might have called its "Dionysian" spark.[173] Indeed, Crash was a great admirer and attentive reader of Nietzsche. In this context, then, the Go-Go's sweet harmonies, sparkly keyboards, and pop hooks might have been reverting back to a corporatized, deodorized Apollonian past, which in Nietzchean terms, was uniquely Californian. On the other hand, the Go-Go's success might also be understood as the punk power play par excellence, in Harry's terms, taking the means of production out of the hands of the boys in order to produce a pop image that was both sexy and serious. Their version of the L.A. Apollonian was not uncomplicated, relying on a sometimes-critical form of pastiche that many women found empowering. From the cover art to the arrangements to the lyrics of the songs and Belinda Carlisle's vocal style, the Go-Go's played a cunning game with the rules of pop, demonstrating mastery over both sides of what historian and urban theorist Mike Davis has called the "sunshine-noir dialectic," the symbolic play of light and dark that provides L.A. with its unique frontier imagery[174]. The Go-Go's offered more than a safe alternative to Crash's dangerous suicidal tendencies. They indirectly criticized them in a necessary way, and

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[173] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1844), translated by Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday, 1956).
[174] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1990).

this criticism depended upon the band's embrace of the lighter side of the pop equation, which in their case meant a critical reflection on a girl group tradition in rock n' roll that has always been susceptible to charges of fakeness, inauthenticity, and weakness.

Among the bands that I have discussed in this chapter, the Go-Go's were perhaps identified most strongly with the girl group tradition, whether they liked it or not, because of the actual gendered makeup of their band, whereas the other groups I've discussed only invoked that tradition. The band was directly marketed, nostalgically, as a girl group throwback, a circumstance that they could have resented since they were much more accomplished as musicians than most members of the early girl groups. Instead, they seemed to acknowledge their status as commodity, but distance themselves from it in tactical ways. The voice on the Go-Go's records is not necessarily more authentic or complex than what we hear from other female performers, but it does speak in a different way because it was so uniquely positioned within the field of rock n' roll spectacle. The Go-Go's acknowledge their weakness as female performers within a male-dominated performance culture, but assure their audience that to perceive them in this way is a mistake. In fact, they manipulate these audience misapprehensions in order to gain their strength. Their play at this weakness begins, like all the punk bands I have been discussing in this essay, at the level of grammar and the sign, in this case taking the form of a perhaps trite but nonetheless amusing pun on "beast" in the title of their debut album. This play, however unintentionally, but nevertheless strikingly, puts the Go-Go's into dialogue with Belinda Carlisle's former mentor, Darby Crash, who described himself variously, in the titles of his songs, as a "manimal" and "lexicon devil," and in one of his most striking, Nietzsche-inspired lyrics as "a puzzled panther, waiting to be caged." If

Crash's short, intense career was a dramatic exercise in "becoming animal," as Gilles Deleuze might have it, the title of the Go-Go's album simultaneously invokes that transformation, disavows it, and construes its micropolitical power alongside another sort of immanent power, that of the beat, which is also addressed in the lyrics of their most famous song.

There is an undeniable power to the lyrics of the Go-Go's first single "We Got the Beat," released in 1981, however sloganistic they might be. The song is, ultimately, a rewrite of the Ramones's signature punk anthem "Blitzkrieg Bop" (and by extension many other dance pop hits), a similarity that becomes more apparent when listening to the original version released on the UK independent label Stiff Records in 1980, which relies on crunchier, louder guitars, much like the Ramones. Also like the Ramones song, "We Got the Beat" explains how "the kids" "are forming in a straight line," a line from "Blitzkreig Bop:" each of the Go-Go's verses end with "people," "the kids," and presumably the band itself "falling in line." Throughout the song, the meaning of this latter phrase is subtly transformed; in the first verse, with reference to "the people," it clearly is being used in its colloquial sense of obedience to authority, but later in the song, when it refers to what is presumably a line dance, it takes on another, possibly more liberating meaning, as the band's audience falls into line in order to lose themselves, lose their ego, in the dance.

In this song and throughout their first album, *Beauty and the Beat*, the Go-Go's are imagining a form of punk *eros* to counter the death drive or *thanatos* of Darby Crash, which was admittedly very powerful. Instead of simply confirming myths about femininity in U.S. culture, the Go-Go's music subtly challenges these myths as the band

fabricates a sound skin marked by silences and elisions that morph the weaknesses of the feminine mystique into strengths. On the cover of their album they are pictured wearing cosmetic mud masks, simultaneously plying and withholding their beauty from the male gaze. They lay out this program on another of their hits from the album, "Our Lips Are Sealed," which is an archetypal "girl talk" song of the kind Warwick described, imbued with deep ironies and double meanings. In this song, the Go-Go's perform femininity in quotes. The singer, Belinda Carlisle, addresses an unnamed interlocutor, possibly a lover but just as likely a friend, a girlfriend, like the girls in her band. In the face of "rumors" and "lies," she encourages this interlocutor to use "a weapon . . . in [their] defense / Silence." Of course, within the context of a song being sung, this line has a playful effect. It provides what Carlisle calls a "shield" for the singer and her confidant. She mentions elsewhere in this song that other "people" don't possess this shield. Silence, in this song, is an open secret, and its content is never revealed. Coincidentally, the Germs play with a similar open secret in their song "What We Do Is Secret," but whereas the lyrics to that song are a nearly inscrutable, anti-authoritarian rant, especially when delivered by Crash, the lyrics to the Go-Go's song are crystal clear but all the more mystifying because of it. Although it may seem like a stretch, their secret is erotic, with the sealed lips of the song's title referring not only to the lips of the singer's mouth but also her vagina. The secret that these lips withhold is not only spoken, it is covered by the hymen. In "Our Lips Are Sealed," the Go-Go's return their listeners to an ecstatic point of identification between girls and their guys or maybe only among themselves, the same point, I have been arguing, that the New York Dolls started us at when they quoted the Shangri-Las, a point between genres, genders, and ethnicities. From that point onward,

punk appropriations of girl group pop were an open secret, with all the suggestiveness and contradictions that that term might imply, although the majority of punk historians have been hesitant to fully explore this zone of pleasure and identification. Instead, they have focused on figures like Darby Crash, who were assuredly brilliant, but offer a rather weak model for speaking truth to power, survival, moving on.

Conclusion: *Another Hot Topic*

The death of Darby Crash served as a model for another rock n' roll suicide in 1994, that of Kurt Cobain, the first punk rocker to take that genre to the top of the charts. Perhaps not surprisingly, in this context, a girl group revival emerged in his wake that seemed to reflect critically and draw spiritual sustenance from the history that I've been describing here. Emblematic of this revival was a performance as part of MTV's *Unplugged* series by Cobain's widow, Courtney Love, in 1995, of perhaps the most troubling girl group song from the 1960s, "He Hit Me (It Felt Like a Kiss)," which was written by Gerry Goffin and Carole King, produced by Phil Spector, and performed by the Crystals in 1962. As Jacqueline Warwick explains in an essay on "violence, masochism, and anger in girl group music," this performance seemed to draw on a set of spiritual resources for coping with violence towards women inherent in the girl group form, the first popular genre of U.S. music to express the feelings and needs of young girls directly in the public sphere.[175] The lyrics of the song tell of a woman battered by her boyfriend who is nevertheless attracted to him because the violence lets her "know" that he "loves" her.

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[175] Warwick, "He Hit Me, and I Was Glad: Violence, Masochism, and Anger in Girl Group Music," in *She's So Fine: Reflections on Whiteness, Femininity, Adolescence, and Class in 1960s Music*, edited by Laurie Stras (Farham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 89-112.

Love's performance of the song figures Cobain's suicide as an act of unforgivable violence towards her that nevertheless endears her to his spiritual memory. The performance places Cobain's death in a unique perspective from the point of view of the mourning wife, as well as the long history of girl group music's filial relationship with the punk tradition. Although the performance sheds light on Cobain's unwitting cooperation with the norms of mainstream, patriarchal musical culture, it might also remind us that he was inspired by punk feminism. For instance, the title of his most famous song was adapted from a bit of graffiti that riot grrrl leader Kathleen Hanna wrote on the wall of Cobain's apartment, "Kurt smells like Teen Spirit." Teen Spirit was a brand of deodorant marketed to teenagers at the time.

Love's performance is but one example of an ongoing girl group revival that began in the mid-1990s and continues today. Although music continued to be released by female vocal groups between the late 1960s and mid-1990s, it often seemed as though these performers and their handlers wanted to project a more "mature" image for their stars as women, not girls. This attitude began to change, of course, with two musical developments in the 1990s of very different kinds. Beginning in the early part of that decade, punk women in the Pacific Northwest, Washington, DC, and the UK began to gather under the banner of riot grrrl, an insurgent movement within punk that sought to take the genre back from the boys and insert a feminist voice into the degraded, patriarchal rock n' roll spectacle. Only a few years later, a prefab singing group from London called the Spice Girls brought their own brand of what they called "girl power" to the international masses.

These developments have had significant bearing on the shape of the ongoing girl group revival. Subsequent years have seen the massive popularity of international pop stars like Britney Spears, Beyoncé, Amy Winehouse, and Christina Aguilera, to name just a few, all of whom seem to owe something to the Spice Girl's girl power, either in terms of ideology or marketing tactics. In 2005, Rhino Records released the magisterial box set *One Kiss Can Lead to Another: Girl Group Sounds, Lost and Found*, which served up four CDs worth of girl group rarities in a package designed to look like a hat box.[176] Perhaps more intriguingly, female punk rockers, including some of those involved in the original riot grrrl movement, have turned back to girl group pop as well. In just the last few years, a number of female garage bands, like the Dum Dum Girls, Best Coast, and Vivian Girls, have emerged, seamlessly blending girl group influences and punk sounds. Even before them, electroclash acts (a blend of dance and punk) as well as riot grrrls rediscovered these roots.

Perhaps the most visible spokesperson of riot grrrl, Kathleen Hanna, fanzine editor and frontwoman for Bikini Kill, has been emblematic in this shift in punk sensibilities. In 1997 she released a solo record under the name Julie Ruin and a year later she formed a new band Le Tigre. Both of these projects paid oblique homage to girl group pop by relying on samplers and synthesized beats. Putting down their guitars to embrace studio technology, in a nevertheless lo-fi way, Le Tigre looked and sounded much more like a girl group of the 1960s than Bikini Kill, even if they were still a far way off. Still, unlike Bikini Kill, and much like the girl groups, they were much more

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[176] *One Kiss Can Lead to Another: Girl Group Sounds, Lost and Found* (Los Angeles: Rhino, 2005).

focused on creating danceable, fun music that traded riot grrrl's politics of rage for an arguably more subtle politics of corporeal pleasure and withholding centered around what the Go-Go's have already identified for us as a primary modality of punk power and struggle—the beat.

With Le Tigre, Hanna began to adopt a vocal style similar to Belinda Carlisle's, although no doubt for ironic, comic, critical effect. Like Carlisle on the tracks discussed above, Hanna hiccups her way through tracks as Julie Ruin and on Le Tigre albums in a nasal tone that seems specially designed to sound something like the valley girl or mallrat of masculine, anti-girl fantasy, the stereotypes typically presented of girls in the media when marketers aren't trying to seduce them. As I've tried to suggest above, Carlisle might have fit this stereotype, but she did so knowingly, in quotes, instilling a sense of playfulness and danger in her otherwise ethereal music. Nonetheless, as Hanna has hinted, however obliquely, in a recent interview with CNN online, this is one of the only "real" voices women have had in rock music since the genre began, and speaking or singing in it, when done correctly, can be empowering.[177] Speaking or singing in quotes reminds the listener that all speech acts have a performative character, vocalizing, among other things, the gender of the speaker. As a matter of style, such performatives can reconfigure gender constructions, permitting new voices into the discourse. When invited to comment on the need for female singers to look good as well as sing well by CNN, Kathleen Hanna laments the fact that singers have to offer "the whole package," that they have to fit into what she calls an "*American Idol* reality." She counterpoises the Go-Go's

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[177] Abbey Goodman, "The Original Riot Grrrl on Katy Perry, 90s Revival." *CNN*, June 7, 2011. Accessed July 15, 2011. http://www.cnn.com/2011/SHOWBIZ/Music/06/07/kathleen.hanna.documentary/index.html.

to this reality, commenting, "The Go-Go's were one of the biggest all-girl bands ever. What other all-girl band has ever been really famous? There's never women playing instruments."[178] To some extent, Hanna overstates her case, but it suggests the logic that might have informed her move from Bikini Kill to Le Tigre. Instead of appropriating what the boys had, why not rediscover the musical power that women in rock and punk had had all along?

When they answer this question, Le Tigre squares the hermeneutic circle of punk appropriations of girl group pop. Girl groups weren't just a peripheral influence on the punks, along with Beat poetry or avant-garde art, they were, in an important sense, a wellspring of the punk genre that runs through it like a red thread. In the song "Hot Topic" from Le Tigre's 1999 first self-titled album, which Judith Halberstam has also praised, Le Tigre engages in a series of shoutouts to queer and feminist icons, musical and otherwise—Yoko Ono, Eileen Myles, and Angela Davis, to name just a few.[179] They do so in the context of a girl group song. Most of the ingredients are there—a charismatic lead singer, spoken interlude, call and response, vocal harmonies, and a good dance beat. All that's missing are the strings. Reflecting on Jacqueline Warwick's bold observation that girl group pop was one of the first public airings of young girls' thoughts and feelings, we may also notice that the emergence of girl group pop marked the first instance of the same in the lives of punk rockers growing sideways within and beyond adolescence.[180] Understanding this anterior space for punk's development is key for

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[178] Ibid., n.p.
[179] Halberstam, 170.
[180] Warwick, *Girl Groups, Girl Culture*, 3.

understanding the genre within a queer, feminist history within which it rightfully belongs.

EXCURSUS: Swastika

Before he joined the Ramones as their art director and costume designer, queer artist Arturo Vega, who had moved to New York from Mexico, produced a painting of four swastikas, set in circles, against a solid background, akin to the Nazi flag. The square canvas is divided into four quadrants, each with a different color scheme. The top left quadrant is painted in barely perceptible variations of white, the bottom right in black. The two opposing swastikas are painted in dayglo fluorescents and earth tones. As Vega mentioned in a recent interview, he chose fluorescent colors because they are actually harmful to the human eye. As he describes it, Nazism is a "manmade evil" and these are manmade colors, which do not really occur in nature.[181] *For Vega, the swastikas, which actually hung in an apartment that he shared with the Ramones bassist and vocalist Dee Dee and Joey Ramone, were a "closet Nazi detector."*[182] *In other words, Vega claimed, the only people that would really be offended by them were spectators who harbored fascistic feelings themselves, opposed to the use of certain symbols in art in any context, which Vega clearly understood as a limit on his artistic freedom. Produced by a gay immigrant from Mexico and hanging on the wall of an apartment shared by two ambisexual rock stars, one who had grown up in post-Nazi Germany, and the other Jewish, the swastika paintings, in this context, may be read as expressing self-loathing on the part of their creator and admirers, but also evidence a forceful effort on the part of the artists to poke a hole in the symbolic order of late modernity that had rendered such representations not only taboo, but also unspeakable. They may verge on the tasteless,*

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[181] Ethan Minsker, "Antagovision – Arturo Vega," *YouTube*, http://youtu.be/yVmJh35E_c0 (accessed October 27, 2013).
[182] Ibid.

but like the space between punk and pop heard in "Land," between the land of a 1000 dances and the sea of shit, these swastikas, which are literally blinding, produced a khora *or clearing in the punk imagining of Vega and the Ramones.*[183]

In his essay on Jews, punks, and the Holocaust, Jon Stratton argues that early punk, of the kind performed at CBGB, was an attempt of the part of its performers, many of whom were second or third generation Jewish immigrants, to overcome and cope with the stigmatizing memory of the Holocaust in Jewish-American life.[184] *Vega's dayglo swastikas, in this context, become a potent symbolic bridge across subcultural affiliation groups in the postmodern, pop art, CBGB milieu. In this context, the swastika, like the semi-fascistic leather regalia that the Ramones wore as their on-stage costume, becomes a fetish around which to organize a new system of queer, cross-ethnic affiliation. The Ramones proclaimed on a 1977 track from the album* Rocket to Russia *that they were a "happy family," even though the family on that track sounded far from it.*[185] *As the Ramones put it, their "daddy…liked men," and they were "in all the magazines…gulping down thorazines." Of course, the Ramones all took the same last name. The joke here was that the Ramones were a kind of queer family or gang, a joke that operates across their recorded output. In this way, the Ramones were a kind of primordial queer family or "band of brothers," as Freud might put it, overthrowing the fascistic authority of their rock and roll elders, just as Vega was trying to disperse the authority of his artistic forebears in the Warholian pop world. Their gestures were anti-authoritarian, as well as*

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[183] There is an interesting metaphoric resonance with Heidegger's word for the *khora* here – der Lichtung – or "lighting" in the sense of illumination. See translator's notes to Heidegger, 169-172.
[184] Stratton, "Jews, Punk, and the Holocaust."
[185] Ramones, *Rocket to Russia* (New York: Sire, 1977).

utopian, engaging in a masochistic ritual play that was also opposed to sadistic, patriarchal fantasies of dominance and mastery. This utopian spirit lies at the core of all the Ramones cultural productions, the CBGB scene's, and punk more generally, although it has of course often been portrayed as utopia's opposite. The Ramones, perhaps more than any other band, were faithful to this legacy, this spirit, this truth, and in fact instantiated it. Not only was their triumph artistic, it was also conceptual. This is some of their story.

CHAPTER THREE: Punk Rock In-Formation: The Concept of the Ramones

According to the Ramones, the twentieth century ended on February 4, 1980. At least that's what they claimed when they released their fifth studio album *End of the Century* on that date. On the album's first track, "Do You Remember Rock N' Roll Radio?" Joey Ramone sings, "It's the end, the end of the 70s / It's the end, the end of the century," and who are we, as listeners, to question his bad math? After all, it occurs on a track as catchy and infectious as anything the Ramones had produced to that point, and as the philosopher Alain Badiou has recently reminded us, it is no easy thing to count a century, even if you are a Ramone.[186] Especially in our postmodern, secular, global society, in which what Badiou elsewhere calls "the Christ event" no longer holds sway over our historical or existential imaginary in the same way it once did, where do we begin and end our count?[187] 1968? 1989? The French Revolution? Or do we adopt some other calendar altogether—the Muslim? the Chinese? Badiou quotes the seventeenth century French theologian Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet who wrote, "What are a hundred years, a thousand years, when a single instant effaces them?"[188] This single instant is what Badiou calls the "event."

The Ramones set out to identify the event, a truth around which to structure their political and aesthetic consciousness, when they name their album *End of the Century*. Both the Ramones and Badiou begin their accounts of this century, their accounts of history, not with an actuarial table of times and dates, but with an emphasis on the event's

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[186] Alain Badiou, *The Century*, translated by Alberto Toscano (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007), 1.
[187] See Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, translated by Ray Brassier (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford UP, 2003).
[188] Badiou, *The Century*, 1.

capability to shape history and our status as subjects to it. They set out to discover what Badiou calls a "truth" upon which to found an ethics.[189] The Ramones' song in which they declare the end of the 70s the end of the century is structured around an obvious gap. When they ask their listeners to "remember rock n' roll radio," they do not invoke their halcyon days starting out at the New York rock club CBGB, appearing alongside other punk bands such as Television, Patti Smith, Suicide, Talking Heads, and the rest. Instead, they plunge the listener into a 50s and 60s radio world that is wracked with nostalgia and payola, the very things that early New York punk was often understood to be rebelling against—*Hullabaloo*, *Upbeat*, *Shindig*, Ed Sullivan, Alan Freed, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Murray the K. Even once we get to hear about some rough contemporaries of the Ramones, they are distinctively pre-punk—John Lennon, T. Rex and "Ol' Moulty" (one-armed drummer for the Boston-based garage rock band The Barbarians)—icons of the British Invasion and psychedelia, glam rock, and garage rock respectively. Punk rock does not fill the gap between rock n' roll radio and the end of the century. Instead, it exists as a ghostly absence around which the Ramones' wish for a return to rock n' roll innocence may be structured.[190]

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[189] Badiou's use of the term "truth" should be read with the inflection of something like "noble truth" in the Buddhist sense or virtue in the Nietzschean, a slogan or maxim around which to build an ethical system. Good examples, for Badiou, of a truth that was worth fighting for include St. Paul's dictum "In Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew," later changed to "East nor West," or Mao's "One divides into two." See Badiou, *Saint Paul*, and "One Divides Into Two," translated by Alberto Toscano, *Culture Machine* 4 (2002), http://www.culturemachine.net/ index.php/cm/article/viewArticle/270/255.

[190] As Badiou argues, the event first appears as an absence in the previous political, aesthetic, romantic, or scientific situation, which the subject then endows with a name. Such naming is the constitutive political, aesthetic, romantic, or scientific act, and is analogous to a religious type of benediction, not unlike the process of naming discussed

Thus, the Ramones' desire to remember rock n' roll radio is neither nostalgic nor reactionary; it is utopian. The Ramones end the century on February 4, 1980 because they wish to instigate a new American century of their own design on that date. They mean to serve as subjects to history that would forego the forces of Reaganite reaction then overtaking the American populace. The Ramones' new century is meant to repair the traumatic gap that was opened up in the national imaginary during the painful transition that took place in national life from 1972 to 1974.[191] New York punk did not fill this gap; it signaled its emergence. The Ramones' new century was intended as a counter-century to the one instantiated by the Reagan Revolution, the first victories of which more or less accompanied the 1980 album's release.[192] By identifying the gap around which the fantasy of their new century may be structured, they identify the *annus horribilis* of the short, sharp decade just past as 1973, the year just before the Ramones formed, and the year from which all of their 70s music sought to recover, the same year that the Reagan Revolution sought to erase. 1973 was the year that the Vietnam War ended, the Watergate scandal began to dominate U.S. cultural consciousness, and a frustrating economic recession seized the U.S. as a result of failed monetary policy and the oil embargo. Although 1968 is often named as the year that Reaganism and later neo-conservatism sought to erase, it was actually 1973, the year that first revealed the

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in Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*. See Badiou, *Being and Event*, 173-200; and Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991).

[191] Frederic Jameson identifies this two year period as "the definitive end of what is called the 60s." Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s," *Social Text* 9/10 (Spring-Summer, 1984): 178-209.

[192] Joey Ramone, in particular, was a defiant Reagan hater, and the band released one of the most poignant Reagan-era protest songs, "Bonzo Goes to Bitburg," in 1985, a rare foray into directly topical, political songwriting for the otherwise highly conceptual band.

limitations of the Reaganite right's revolutionary program, which they really had to erase from public memory, and of course they more or less did. Its ghosts have only started to reemerge publicly, on a mass level, since 2008, when the most recent financial crisis has encouraged many Americans to openly reconsider socialism as a viable alternative to neo-liberalism's painful, tragic cycles of boom and bust, and occupy everything.

The 70s are a decade that historians still struggle to comprehend, and the Ramones' music helps us do it.[193] It offers contemporary listeners special insight into that decade's unconscious desires and social fantasies. Since they first appeared on-stage on March 2, 1974, the Ramones have been universally heralded as a key member of the rock n' roll canon, and sometimes as the original punk rock band or purest example of the punk rock style, but these accolades have been both a blessing and a curse. Too often, praise of the Ramones recognizes the importance of their sound, but obscures the ways in which this sound can be read as a critique of the urban landscape from which it emerged. The Ramones are not just a good time rock band. For the cost of having fun while listening to their music is the price of putting up with an awful lot of noise in order to get there. The Ramones music does not offer any easy answers. Specifically, inherent within their music is a certain fantasy of queer and working class belonging at which most of their critics have only hinted. It is the task of this chapter to recover it.

The Ramones' noise remade social space. As the theorist of sound Jacques Attali has famously noted, noise has the power of prophecy. It is a "simulacrum of ritual

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[193] As So-Cal punk rocker and Minutemen founder Mike Watt puts it on his 1994 track, "The kids of today should defend themselves against the 70s." Mike Watt, "Against the 70s," *Ball-Hog or Tugboat?* (Los Angeles: Columbia Records, 1994).

murder" that has the potential to transform social space through the composition of new social collectives and new forms of consciousness.[194] Attali did not predict that the prophetic music of the future would sound anything like the Ramones—he saw much more potential in the revolutionary sounds of the free jazz movement—but he does identify rock music like that of the Rolling Stones, rock n' roll predecessors to the Ramones, as an important signal of the necessity for some radical, dialectical change in the contemporary mode of musical production.[195] He describes this change as the move from repetition to composition, from the monotonous stockpiling of creative labor in the form of plastic media to the unbridled release of creative energy in free improvisation. He writes that the Rolling Stones' song "Satisfaction," just as much as a piece of music theory by John Cage, "announces a rupture in the process of musical creation, the end of music as an autonomous activity, due to an intensification of lack in the spectacle. They are not the new mode of musical production, but the liquidation of the old."[196] Susan McClary, in her afterword to the English translation of *Noise*, notes that some of what Attali endorses in the final chapter of his book, "Composing," as a mode of musical production designed to bring about a revolutionary change in social consciousness, was realized in the British punk movement led by the Sex Pistols, what she describes as the "New Wave."[197] But in fact the Sex Pistols and the British punks' methods of composition were anticipated and some may say perfected by bands like the Ramones at least two years earlier.

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[194] Attali, Ibid., 28.
[195] Ibid., 138-140.
[196] Ibid., 137.
[197] Susan McClary, "Afterword" to Attali, 157-158.

One of the Ramones' biographies is subtitled *An American Band*, which is supposedly an appellation that the band preferred, but the emergence of the Ramones' sound from the streets of New York in 1974 is not a reason for nationalistic pride.[198] Instead, it should be read as an index of the moral and psychological depths to which the U.S. sunk in the post-Watergate period. Nevertheless, it was not a symptom of stagflation (as it has often been read), but a tactical response to it. The formation of the Ramones signaled an important change in the way the rock music public understood itself that was equal to the times of stress and strain that that public was going through psychologically, politically, and socially after the Vietnam War and Watergate, during the worst financial crisis it had faced since the Great Depression.[199] Their music initiated a shift from a narcissistic self-understanding on the part of male rock stars and their public to one based more on mutual recognition and the formation of guerilla counterpublics, especially around concerns of working class identity and queer belonging. These creative moves on the part of the Ramones were so efficient and economical that they seem almost invisible to us today.

In a series of recent books and articles, Jacques Ranciére has argued that our aesthetic judgments are governed by what he calls the "distribution of the sensible," partitions of the human sensorium that dictate what we can sense and thus what we can think and feel.[200] The Ramones, along with the other New York punk bands and

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[198] Jim Bessman, *Ramones: An American Band* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1993).
[199] On rock counterculture as a public sphere, see Michael Kramer, *Republic of Rock.*
[200] See, in particular, Jacques Ranciére, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, translated by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2006); "The Aesthetic Dimension: Aesthetics, Politics, Knowledge," *Critical Inquiry* 36 (Autumn 2006); *The*

conceptual artists in New York that constituted their aesthetic milieu, dissolved these partitions of the sensible in a quest for what the surrealist George Bataille described as "the formless," surreal juxtapositions of urban iconography that stand corporate strategies of domination on their head and reveal the tragic ironies inherent in urban dwelling during the postmodern period. Mutual recognition of and by the Ramones' audience of their role in this strategic game of representation is the first step towards the development of a new consciousness of self among that audience, the rock counterpublic.

The Broken Mirror: Ramones as Reflection and Refraction

The appearance of the Ramones in downtown New York in the early 1970s did not simply signal the appearance of a great new rock band. It also marked the emergence of a new class consciousness among rock music spectators that differed sharply from the one envisioned by classic Marxist cultural critics like Georg Lukács, as well as Marxist class commentators that were more contemporary with the Ramones, such as Christopher Lasch, Richard Sennett, or Jonathan Cobb.[201] Class consciousness for the Ramones is not structured around some nostalgic notion of class solidarity but instead upon a knowing recognition of class's existence as a structuring category—a category that is intersected by other identity categories such as race, gender, and sexuality, and a category that exists to be prodded and parodied. Class consciousness for the Ramones might even be

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Emancipated Spectator, translated by Gregory Elliott (New York: Verso, 2009); and *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (London: Polity Press, 2009).

[201] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, translated by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971); Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1979); and Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Norton, 1972).

described more accurately as "trash consciousness," a consciousness of one's own abject position within a totalizing class discourse. It is also "camp" consciousness, in the fullest sense of that term offered by Susan Sontag.[202] Rock critic Tom Morgan touches upon this possibility of the existence of trash consciousness in the Ramones' music in his essay on their third album *Rocket to Russia*.[203] He writes, "One of the chief delights of rock music is that it's trash music for a trash culture…[The Ramones'] reveling in the trashy vitality of such an overwrought atmosphere was a life-affirming manifesto."[204] The Ramones were not the only group to revel in this trash consciousness during the period—the New York Dolls and the Dictators come immediately to mind—but they were perhaps the most effective. Recently, musician and cultural theorist Drew Daniel has written about the potential for acts of queer minstrelsy in a punk rock context to disrupt homo- and heteronormative standards of authenticity, especially when it comes to political identity.[205] The Ramones, more than any other punk band, may have been ahead of the curve here—as Daniel partially suggests—as they blended queer minstrelsy with real queer life.[206] The sexual identity of Joey Ramone was always in question, an aspect of his persona that he camped up, especially in his early performances, but the polymorphous bisexuality of the band's bassist Dee Dee Ramone was never in doubt, and in fact promoted by the band in one of their most fetching early songs "53rd & 3rd," in

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[202] Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," *Partisan Review* 31:4 (Fall 1964), 515-530.
[203] Tom Morgan, "*Rocket to Russia*," in Greil Marcus, ed. *Stranded: Rock and Roll for a Desert Island* (1978; New York: Da Capo, 2007), 111-113.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Drew Daniel, "Why Be Something You're Not?" 13-34.
[206] Daniel mentions the Ramones album title *Leave Home* as a kind of slogan for the type of anti-anti-authentic identity play he endorses. See Daniel, 32.

which Dee Dee narrates his time on that street corner, working as a hustler. The real 53rd & 3rd in New York City is now the site of the Citibank building.

As Morgan goes on to suggest, the Ramones' message was all the more poignant because it emerged from a specific time and place, the urban milieu of New York in the 70s. As he puts it, "Very little of 70s rock is genuinely urban; in fact, most of it has no sense of place at all…The triumph of the Ramones is that they *were* urban."[207] The emergence of trash consciousness in the Ramones' music can be read politically as a protest against corporate strategies of domination and control over the production of space, and the rhythm of everyday life in New York during the early 70s. At the time when the Ramones first appeared on-stage, a unique set of social forces were coalescing on New York's downtown scene to which their performances responded—financialization, the end of the Vietnam War, urban "development," the collapse of the counterculture, and new identity movements—but two countercultural developments in particular seem to have informed their performing identities, deindustrialization and the Stonewall Rebellion of 1969. The Ramones artistic director Arturo Vega was a gay man directly influenced by this spirit of simultaneous gay liberation, in the form of Stonewall and Warholian pop art, and disappointed or depressed by the passing of a certain spirit of working class life in the city. He sought to capture the effervescence of both energies in the Ramones's visual style, which was equally indebted to the working class tough guy images of James Dean and Marlon Brando, as well as the clone and leather daddy looks then gaining popularity in New York's underground gay scene, of which he was a part. During the early days, Dee Dee lived with Vega and they were rumored to have been

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[207] Ibid., 112.

lovers. It was this cross-cultural energy, the bisexual construction worker from queens, and the gay, Mexican aesthete who had escaped to Manhattan that informed the Ramones's early sound, style, and performances.

The Ramones' sound was born out of social chaos. As Attali suggests, new technologies of musical production produce new knowledge. In the case of composition, this new knowledge is "cartography, local knowledge, the insertion of culture into production and a general availability of new tools and instruments."[208] The Ramones' sound helped their audience cope with the social chaos that surrounded them by establishing a space, a place, a scene, a *khora*, in which they could dwell. As David Harvey has written, downtown New York has been a proving ground for technologies of capitalist domination during the neo-liberal period.[209] The Ramones' compositional technologies were a response to these corporate technologies, but in the necessary queer riposte to Harvey, which Judith Halberstam describes in her book *In a Queer Time and Place*, they were intended not to resuscitate a dusty, straight, homophobic, and masculinist working class sensibility, but a new working class, queer sensibility equally indebted to the city's past and its queer future, just then in bloom.[210]

The Ramones, in cahoots with other conceptual artists and their collaborators on New York's downtown scene, either dissolved or rearranged the partitions of the sensible that had ruled that scene during the 60s. The Ramones' "conceptualism" set them apart from the average rock band in the early part of the 70s. Most rock bands, by that point,

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[208] Attali, 147.
[209] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995).
[210] See Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 1-21.

had settled into either a blues-based format of riff-centered rock or followed the *Sgt. Pepper*-era Beatles down the neo-classical road of high concept, "progressive," or prog rock. Blues rock, epitomized by bands like Grand Funk Railroad and Led Zeppelin, has been characterized by metal and punk scholar Steve Waksman as promising its spectator a polymorphic, utopian merging with "the Crowd" in the grand spectacle of the arena show.[211] Prog rock, on the other hand, epitomized by bands like Pink Floyd and Yes, encouraged aesthetic distance between rock performer and rock spectator, severing a bond that during the 50s and 60s was at least putatively populist. Pink Floyd signified the severing of this bond during their stage show in support of their 1982 album *The Wall*. Inspired in part by punk's indulgence in feelings of alienation, Pink Floyd would end their concerts by literally erecting a wall between themselves and their audience. The wall was supposed to signify the band's disgust with the rigors of record company pressure and touring, but it could also be interpreted as a gigantic middle-finger turned towards their audience. The Ramones' specific articulation of a populist conceptualism within New York City's early 70s downtown milieu stands out as a highly politicized, dialectical response to this waning of rock n' roll spectacle at the close of the 60s counterculture moment.

When asked about the creative evolution of his band, Joey Ramone explained, "The first album was kind of, uh, I guess, a conceptual album more or less, 'cause it was

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[211] Steve Waksman, *This Ain't the Summer of Love: Conflict and Crossover in Heavy Metal and Punk* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 19-69. This goal of arena rock is also reflected upon negatively in the lyrics to Watt's "Against the 70s:" "Stadium minds with stadium lies gotta make you laugh."

something nobody's ever done or heard before."[212] According to Joey, the Ramones self-titled debut was intended to be something more than just another fun rock n' roll record, although it was most certainly that too. The band's original drummer, and the producer of many of their best albums, Tommy Ramone, echoes Joey's comments in a 1979 interview with Rolling Stone's Timothy White:

> We used block chording as a melodic device…and the harmonies resulting from the distortion of the amplifiers created countermelodies. We used the wall of sound as a melodic rather than a riff form: it was like a song within a song—created by a block of chords droning…I'll tell you what else was distinctive…the hypnotic effect of strict repetition, the effect of lyrics that repeat, and vocals that dart at you, and the percussive effect of driving the music like a sonic machine. It's very sensual. You can put headphones on and just swim with it. It's not background music.[213]

Prior to joining the Ramones, Erdelyi had worked as a record engineer for such rock n' roll luminaries as Jimi Hendrix, and was involved tangentially in New York City's underground film scene. He is a reputed fan of Luis Buñuel, and the creator of some avant-garde films himself before joining the Ramones.[214] Joey Ramone's mother owned an art gallery in Queens where Joey worked (and briefly lived) before joining the band. His brother, Mickey Leigh, even reports in his recent memoir and biography of his brother (co-authored with *Punk* magazine co-founder Legs McNeil) that Joey tried his own hand at painting for a time, attempting to one-up Warhol by not painting a

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[212] *Ramones: It's Alive, 1974-1996*. The DVD includes no videographic information about the date of the interview, location, or identity of the interviewer. The interviewer asks Joey about the band's 1977 recording of "Sheena Is a Punk Rocker," so one can safely assume that the video was made after that date. It was probably made no later than "the early '80s," since band manager Danny Fields alludes to the late 70s/early 80s music scene as though it is contemporary in another section of the same set of videotaped interviews.

[213] Reprinted in True, 55.

[214] See Robert Christgau, "Ramone," *Robert Christgau: Dean of American Rock Critics*, http://www.robertchristgau.com/ xg/rock/ramone.php (accessed April 3, 2010).

Campbell's soup can but actually painting with Campbell's soup.[215] The problem with the paintings was that they would degrade rapidly and thus could not be displayed for any length of time. These experiences in New York City's wider artistic community, along with the influence of the Ramones' designer, Arturo Vega, who created their on-stage "costume," had just as much of an influence on the Ramones as comic books, fast food, the Beatles, and bubblegum records.[216]

In the interview with White, Tommy lays out the conceptual building blocks of the Ramones' sound—what he calls "block chording," repetition, vocals up front and high in the mix, and harmonic distortion. Presumably, "block chording" would refer to the "blocking out" of harmonic progressions on the guitar using barre chords, the root notes of which are doubled by the bass guitar, creating a tone cluster, which when played live at high volumes, creates a cloud of sound that is felt bodily, what Tommy refers to as an underwater or swimming effect. Extensive use of block chords constituted the standard arrangement for a Ramones' song until about their fourth album, *Road to Ruin*, in 1978. Played at high volumes and with maximum distortion this technique would produce a new set of overtones to accompany the major triads "blocked out" by barre chords on the bottom three strings of Johnny Ramone's guitar. These overtones produce a refractive effect: while the guitarist is fulfilling the role typically occupied by the rhythm guitarist in a four-piece rock band (e.g. John Lennon in the Beatles or Brian Jones in the Rolling Stones), his guitar also takes on certain harmonic and melodic responsibilities

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[215] Leigh and McNeil, 86-87.

[216] Robert Christgau insists on this term, "costumes," which had nothing to do with the Ramones preferred sartorial choices outside of the band and everything to do with projecting a group identity. The same goes for their shared, adopted last names. Christgau, "Ramone," n.p.

typically fulfilled by the lead guitarist. Johnny's playing can be said to produce riffs, licks, and solos where they do not really exist, through a phase effect created by harmonic distortion and stereo separation. As Tommy puts it, the Ramones' conceptual techniques produce "a song within a song." They produce a sonic effect that pushes on the limits of rock song form and allows their listeners to appreciate their music on a second, more conceptual level. The Ramones' early records owe a debt both to the full-on synaesthetic experience of the psychedelic movement as well as to the purely intellectual, conceptual understanding of art production posited by gallery artists who were part of the New York City and wider international art worlds during the late 60s and early 70s—artists like John Cage, Dan Graham, Sol LeWitt, and Andy Warhol.

"Conceptual" and "concept art" were buzzwords around New York City's downtown arts scene in the late 60s and 70s, a scene of which the Ramones and their famous home venue, CBGB's, were very much a part. Rock writers, such as Clinton Heylin, Nick Rombes, Everett True, Mickey Leigh, Legs McNeil, and Gillian McCain, all acknowledge this possible conceptual heritage for the Ramones' music, but for the most part it remains under-explored.[217] Yet the Ramones' conceptualism was apparent to anyone in the 70s with the willingness to see it. Despite the Ramones' self-fashioning as rock music savants, quotes like those from Joey and Tommy betray their sophistication and their high level of artistic self-consciousness. The sentiment is also echoed throughout fan recollections of the band and critical accounts of their music. In a

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[217] See True; Leigh and McNeil; Nick Rombes, *Ramones* (New York: Continuum, 2005); Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids: A Pre-Punk History for a Post-Punk World* (New York: Penguin, 1993); and McNeil and McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk*.

biography of the band, Everett True interviews Roberta Bayley, the photographer who took the picture that served as the Ramones' first album cover on their self-titled debut in 1976. She recalls her first experience seeing the Ramones live: "It was very strange, seeing them for the first time, because you didn't have any precedent for the look or the sound or the really short songs, even. They played a really short set. It was almost like conceptual art, thinking about it. It was weird but great."[218] Similarly, punk rock music critic Nicholas Rombes begins his excellent book-length essay on the Ramones' self-titled first album by writing, "*Ramones* is either the last great modern record, or the first great postmodern one. Fully aware of its status as pop culture, it nonetheless has unironic aspirations toward art."[219] Finally, in his important oral history of punk, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*, Clinton Heylin identifies "a central conundrum in attempting to ascertain the Ramones 'significance'—how (self-)conscious their original concept was."[220] In sum, it was never uncommon to ascribe deeper conceptual motives to the Ramones' apparent simplification of rock music's core artistic ingredients. Playing fast, hard, and loud did not just stagger or impress. It tapped into a cultural zeitgeist, and amidst its formless chaos, it signified something very poignant about the similarly chaotic social world from which it emerged—New York City's nascent downtown scene in the first half of the 70s. As the Ramones' manager, Danny Fields, put it, "When the Ramones appeared on the stage, they were like something I'd unconsciously been waiting

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[218] Bayley, quoted in True, 20.
[219] Rombes, 3.
[220] Heylin, 167.

for…They were perfect. I didn't want to change anything about them."[221] In other words, it was an emotional experience, similar to the uncanny, a return of the repressed, a hole in the symbolic, a formless artistic event.

Hearing the Ramones for the first time, avant-garde guitarist and composer, Rhys Chatham, who for part of the 70s was the artistic director of downtown New York's most prominent performance space, the Kitchen, experienced what scene chronicler Tim Lawrence has described as an "epiphany."[222] According to Chatham, "While hearing [the Ramones], I realized that, as a minimalist, I had more in common with this music than I thought…I was attracted by the sheer energy and raw power of the sound as well as chord progressions which were not dissimilar to some of the process music I has been hearing at the time."[223] The Ramones added to this minimalistic conception of contemporary rock music a distinctively satirical and nostalgic, but nevertheless critical, obsession with the detritus of American popular culture that gave their music a popular, politicized edge not found in most minimalist compositions (of, say, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, or Terry Riley, often considered the three most important practitioners of the style). For listeners like Chatham, however, the Ramones' simplicity did not occupy a lower rung on downtown New York's cultural hierarchy than the more sophisticated productions of a Philip Glass or Arthur Russell (the main subject of Lawrence's book). Their music

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[221] Fields quoted in Steven Lee Beeber, *The Heebie-Jeebies at CBGB's: A Secret History of Jewish Punk* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press), 35.
[222] Tim Lawrence, *Hold On to Your Dreams: Arthur Russell and the Downtown Music Scene, 1973-1992* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009), 116.
[223] Quoted in Lawrence, 116. Robert Christgau reports a similar conversion narrative for his friend Tom Johnston, who he describes as a "laconic explicator of Reich and Glass and the 'one-note music' of Rhys Chatham…who had little interest in pop but lots in minimalism."

occupied a nodal point in what Lawrence, borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari, describes as the "rhizomatic" structure of that downtown scene, nourishing it and being nourished by it in a way that subsequent stratifications and hierarchizations of downtown Manhattan have made increasingly precarious and difficult.[224] 1974, the year in which the Ramones began playing in downtown Manhattan was a unique moment at which an unsigned rock band from Queens could afford to live downtown in close proximity to progressive art venues such as Warhol's Factory, the Kitchen, and the St. Mark's Poetry Project. Art market speculation had not yet sullied the dream of a Warholian republic of losers.[225]

The Ramones' aesthetic was a subtle and progressive reworking of the styles and tropes preferred by glam rock bands like the New York Dolls and the Stooges in the U.S., and David Bowie and Marc Bolan overseas. It emerged out of campy riffs on those styles. The Ramones' image was crafted as a rough parody of urban machismo in collaboration with Arturo Vega. As mentioned in my introduction, Mickey Leigh ascribes his brother Joey Ramone's attraction to glam rock in the early part of the 70s as having just as much to do with sound and fashion as it did with sexuality. Although the Ramones' visual image is clearly meant to connote an air of "toughness" or "hardness"

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[224] Lawrence, 87.

[225] In his essay "After Laughter," on graphic artist Raymond Pettibon, who started his career as a designer for the punk rock record label SST and is brothers with the guitarist of the hardcore punk band Black Flag (Greg Ginn), Benjamin Buchloh describes how the meaning of the Warholian dictum, "In the future everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes," was reversed during the 70s. Originally intended as a rewriting of the beatitude, "The meek shall inherit the earth," by the 80s this dictum was used to justify cultural mediocrity. A surplus of fame was used to justify the existence of an unproductive class of fame consumers. Benjamin H.D Buchloh, "Raymond Pettibon: After Laughter," *October* 129 (Summer 2009): 13-50.

this image must also be read, in part, as a sort of parody within the larger context of the Ramones' sound, lyrics, and on-stage personas.[226] The Ramones are looking tough for other men, and almost playing the part of children, brothers, assembled into a strange, queer family, which is also invoked in the lyrics to "We're a Happy Family."

Besides the shortness of their songs and the loud volume of the Ramones' early music, which the band members compared explicitly to the sound of a chainsaw, their early performances included out of tune instruments, forgotten chords, drunken stumbling, and on-stage fistfights. Lyrically, the Ramones' early songs recounted cartoon versions of Vietnam combat training, Cold War espionage, Manson family-style slayings, and Nazi posturing. In a very self-conscious manner, the band seemed to be lampooning all the social and cultural forces that had made them what they were—youth, in its strictest empirical sense, passive consumers of cultural goods such as rock music, leather jackets, comic books, hamburgers, and cheap drugs. The artist and critic Dan Graham, who was also a great early Ramones fan, specifies the identity of the typical rock music consumer during the countercultural period:

> In the 1950s a new class emerged, a generation whose task was not to produce but to consume; this was the "teenager." Freed from the work ethic so as not to add to postwar unemployment and liberated from the Puritan work ethic, their philosophy was fun. Their religion was *rock n' roll*. Rock turned the values of traditional American religion on their head. To rock n' roll meant to have sex…NOW.[227]

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[226] Tom Morgan makes a similar point: "Their leather jackets and strung-out streetwise pose weren't so much an imitation of Brando in *The Wild One* as a very self-conscious parody" (108).

[227] Dan Graham, "Rock My Religion" in *Rock My Religion: Writings and Art Projects, 1965-1990*, ed. Brian Wallis (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993), 85.

The appearance of the Ramones represents the most highly self-critical reflection on this new social role for youth as a consuming class in rock music to that point. Starting out as members of the glam rock scene—Johnny Ramone wore a leopard print shirt and tight black leather pants during most of the band's early performances—the Ramones sublimated the 60s countercultural desire for sexual experimentation and release into their desire to play "hard." On one hand, this new desire may be understood as a form of repression, but it is also productive of a new subject position for rock fans and rock musicians with its own set of aesthetic norms and potentials. As has been well established in the cultural history of the period, the 60s counterculture in many ways excluded certain racialized, gendered, and sexualized others. For all its reputed revolutionary force, the 60s counterculture remained more or less negro- and homophobic as well as misogynist. The Ramones did not necessarily overcome all of these discriminatory practices, either in word or in deed, but they did open up new spaces of identification between themselves, their female and queer fans and a transnational audience that has embraced them throughout the global south (particularly in places like Argentina and Mexico). On one of the standout tracks of queer, feminist punk band Sleater-Kinney's 1996 album *Call the Doctor*, " I Wanna Be Your Joey Ramone," they celebrate their identification with Ramone in an openly universal way.[228] As guitarist Carrie Brownstein put it in an interview with Everett True, Joey Ramone "embodied both diffidence and grandiosity. Here was a man who was simultaneously awkward…and also larger than life…The song has us stepping into a male rock performer's shoes and by doing this we get a glimpse of

[228] Sleater-Kinney, *Call the Doctor* (Portland, OR: Chainsaw, 1991).

the absurdity, the privilege, and the decadence we didn't feel was inherently afforded to us."[229]

Listening again to the Ramones' early music, it may seem repetitive in a way that more closely resembles mass produced pop music than that of British punk bands like the Sex Pistols or the Slits, but because of their simultaneous blending of pop songcraft with transgressive sonic experimentation, the Ramones' music is never boring or obtuse in a way that the Sex Pistols and the Slits quickly became. The Ramones' music maintains its identity as part of the great pop ritual, the Satanic inversion of all that the parent culture considered holy, and refuses the temptation of sanctimonious preaching, a fatal flaw of much subsequent punk production. Experimenting with repetition, among minimalist composers and other downtown New York artists, was a preferred mode of transgressive aesthetic production in the early 1970s that responded tactically to repetition elsewhere in the cultural and social field—on television advertisements, in late modern architecture (like Minoru Yamazaki's design for the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center), and in pop music itself. The Ramones tap into this spirit of repetition that is only mindless in the sense of being ritualistic, meant to bring about a heightened state of consciousness in which the subject's social and political priorities are reordered.[230] In this way, their music

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[229] Carrie Brownstein, qtd. in True, 277-278.

[230] The Ramones' emphasis on repetition in some aspects of their music's formal construction may seem to contradict Jacques Attali's theoretical ideas about the need for a transition from repetition to composition as the dominant mode of musical production during the contemporary period. In his book, Attali does not consider nascent modes of minimalist production like those of either the Ramones or the downtown minimalist composers (Glass, Chatham, Riley, Reich, etc.). In the Ramones' music repetition is transformed from a mindless stockpiling of creative energy to a means through which to cathect creative energy. In this way, it avoids the accusations against repetition that Attali enumerates.

is supersensual like the Velvet Underground's, or the masochistic rituals originally described in *Venus in Furs*.

The Ramones' performances were a broken mirror, chaotically reflecting back to the downtown scene the scattered history of pop art and performance that had taken place in the preceding decade. On the Ramones' first album, *Ramones* (1976), each song consists of two, three, or at most four chords arranged in simple A/B, verse/chorus patterns. There are no guitar solos. Melody lines or "licks," the definitive formal feature of most blues-based early-'70s guitar rock music, are never picked out or clearly articulated. Using only one finger or a pick, the bassist, Dee Dee Ramone, always doubles the bass of the current chord being strummed by Johnny in a strict pattern of 8-notes to the bar on the bottom two strings of his bass. Johnny's strums are often muted with the guitarist's palm so as to focus their rhythmic energy as opposed to highlighting any harmonic complexity or development. The drumming, similarly, follows a militaristic eighth-note pattern. On most songs, the movement into the chorus is signaled by the drummer when he uncrosses his arms to move from the high-hat to the ride cymbal. Only in this very slight moment of timbral variation does the rhythm section betray any semblance of artistic expression or self-identity. Otherwise, all their psychic energy seems focused on the artistic goal of playing "hard," that is, fulfilling their prescribed role as the members of that most banal suburban creation, the garage band, as similar to every other garage rock band as they are singular in their sonic informality. Only the voice of Joey Ramone, strangely melodic, strangely charming, floats above this din and endows it with any sense of human character or embodied presence. Otherwise, the rest of the ensemble seems to perform constantly under erasure, their courage

screwed, fits clenched, their stomachs balled up in knots. If all rock music performance can be viewed as a sort of ritualized masturbation, the Ramones' performances can also be understood as a form of ritualized self-torture. Such a brutal realization of the prophetic power of rock n' roll noise was exactly what the New York scene needed to exit the 60s, a dead ideological project anyway, and begin to explore the 70s, the traumatic gap between the end of rock n' roll and the end of history.

Behind the Broken Mirror

The Ramones deconstructed the identity categories underwriting countercultural authenticity. They captured the brutalizing affective experience of trash consciousness not only in their lyrics but also in the sound of their music. Yet all of this sound and fury might have signified nothing if they had not also intuited in rock music what an art critic might describe as the "support" underlying the creation of popular music and rock records in particular. This additionally deconstructive aspect of their aesthetic presentation is important to my point about the Ramones' music expressing a mentality that was qualitatively different from that of other rock bands. The Ramones accurately identified the vampiric record industry as the art system that sonically supported their music, and undermined it by orchestrating their songs as brutalist deconstructions of previous song forms, by imbuing them with what I will describe later in this section as "punk rock in-formality."

Everything about the Ramones' first performances at the rock club CBGB provided their audiences with an off-putting but ennobling aesthetic experience of the real—in the Lacanian sense of unknowable sublimity, but also musical realism—imbued

with the ironic sensibility of the surreal. Even the architecture of the club added to this experience of surreality and the intensification of experience embodied in the music. For instance, the club's bathroom was located behind the main stage, so that in order to access it you would have to negotiate the assembled crowd and cross the band's sightlines. In order to take a piss, in order to deposit your waste, you would literally have to penetrate the spectacle, to step behind the looking glass through which that night's talent was projecting their fantasy of the rock n' roll lifestyle. A contributor to the website *urinal.net* comments, "Most likely every rock star has used this urinal at one point in their life…and so have I."[231] Penetrating the lower depths of this club provided its audiences with a literal sense of abjection meant to channel their alienation and transform it into something ritualistically liberating, almost sacred.

One of CBGB's earliest and most famous performers, Richard Hell, focuses on this liberating aspect of the club's décor in a brief essay that he wrote about the space of the club for the book that accompanied a 2008 museum exhibition, *Sympathy for the Devil: Art and Rock and Roll since 1967*. Hell notes that "CBGB's is located on the Bowery, a street the very name of which has signified drunkenness, dereliction, and failure for as long as anyone can remember. Such is the mental space of its physical space."[232] The street also signifies transience and transgression, having served as the gathering place for many of New York City's immigrant communities throughout its long history, and as a burlesque entertainment center during the antebellum period. For Hell,

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[231] Topher Cox, "The Urinals of CBGB's," *urinal.net*, http://www.urinal.net/cbgb/.
[232] Richard Hell, "CBGB as a Physical Space," in Dominic Molon, ed. *Sympathy for the Devil: Art and Rock and Roll since 1967* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2007), 27.

this iconography is best embodied in the graffiti that covered the walls of the club's infamous bathroom (along with the rest of the backstage area).

> The effect of the surfaces of CBGB's dark, crazed insides is eerie, haunting. It's like a dead-quiet, chillingly colorful cemetery. Or autopsy: all of complicated history sliced open to view. It's not so much that the graffiti evokes the endless procession of individual kids who've attended the club, but that it evokes their absence, their faceless selves buried under the next pretty layer of pointless assertion. The walls are an onslaught of death and futility as much as they are of life and vitality.[233]

For Hell, gazing at these graffiti covered walls is a lot like staring back into the toilet. What you see there reminds you of mortality even as it affirms your existence, your ongoing biological life. Stepping beyond the looking glass of the CBGB stage does not lead onto some higher reality, does not provide you with insight into the kernel of the rock n' roll fantasy; instead, one fantasy gives way to another. In the CBGB bathroom, each spectator was offered special purchase, a privileged view, not on the truth of history, but its catastrophic workings. As Hell expresses it, the CBGB graffiti was an "autopsy," a cross-section laid bare to the social historian in all of us. Like shitting, a necessary wallowing in bodily abjection, there is a certain violence embedded in this space. Imagine the cardiac pulse of the CBGB bathroom, underneath the stage, the whole thing acting like one big subwoofer with you in it. To describe the scene as womblike, at this point, would border on the insipid if it weren't for the truth of natality that resides here, the rebirth of dreaming.

Architectural historian Eric Darton has written, echoing the comments of Gaston Bachelard, that "the design of tall buildings demands, as the price of its extreme

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[233] Ibid., 28.

verticality, the sacrifice of a 'dream cellar,'" what Bachelard calls "oneiric space."[234] What the CBGB bathroom and the Ramones self-presentation seeks to re-instantiate is exactly this oneiric space, the space demolished when skyscrapers and other vertical monstrosities are built on top of neighborhoods where people live, work, and congregate. Skyscrapers are "oneirically incomplete;" they contain no "dream cellar," and hence no mystery.[235] The emergence of the rock scene at CBGB's was roughly simultaneous with the erection of the World Trade Center towers in downtown Manhattan, twin symbols of the city's increasing domination by finance capital. CBGB's could only evolve into a space of aesthetic free-play as an unintentional, positive result of Robert Moses's otherwise disastrous plans for the redevelopment of downtown Manhattan and the other four boroughs.

The Ramones' effort to re-instantiate this oneiric space is reflected both in their song lyrics and in their off-stage behavior as junkies and louts compulsively directed towards the lower depths of experience, what the poet and punk rock progenitor Arthur Rimbaud described as the "long, gigantic and rational derangement of all the senses."[236] Punk rock was originally referred to as "street music," and it seems as though the bands and their backers appreciated this term. The Ramones' self-titled debut album contains at least two "street" or walking songs—"53rd and 3rd" and "I Don't Wanna Walk Around

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[234] Eric Darton, "The Janus Face of Architectural Terrorism: Minoru Yamasaki, Mohammed Atta, and Our World Trade Center" in *After the World Trade Center: Rethinking New York City*, edited by Michael Sorkin and Sharon Zukin (NY: Routledge, 2002), 89.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Arthur Rimbaud, "Letter to Paul Demeny, May 15, 1871" in *Rimbaud: Complete Works, Selected Letters*, translated by Wallace Fowlie (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 307.

with You." "53rd and 3rd" is a chronicle of Dee Dee Ramone's days as a queer hustler in midtown Manhattan. The title of the song quite explicitly does the rhetorical work of re-imagining urban space that the French theorist Michel de Certeau embraced in every act of urban walking in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*.[237] It takes a blind alley, an address, an instance of strategic mapping on the part of the corporate elite—53rd and 3rd is now the address of the Citibank building—and makes it into a remembered place, a sacred place, no matter how bleak Dee Dee's experience of it might have been. The song even commemorates this spatial imaginary in a sort of blood ritual during the song's disturbing bridge. The bridge is the only section of the song that Dee Dee sings. In his famous falsetto voice, he laments, "Then I took my razor blade / Then I did what God forbade / Now the cops are after me / But I proved that I'm no sissy."

"I Don't Wanna Walk Around with You," part of a cycle of "I Don't Wanna" songs on the Ramones' first two albums, represents the constructive disavowal of Dee Dee's traumatic experience of the city in lieu of a commitment to a new kind of walking. According to Ramones' biographer Everett True, the first Ramones sets were comprised almost totally of "I Don't Wanna" songs, most of which ended up on future albums: "I Don't Wanna Go Down to the Basement," "I Don't Wanna Walk Around With You," "I Don't Wanna Be Learned, I Don't Wanna Be Tamed," and "I Don't Wanna Get Involved With You."[238] When the band was asked to issue a more affirmative song—"I Wanna" instead of "I Don't Wanna"—they responded with the even more affectively negative, "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue." Through a simple system of affirmation and negation,

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[237] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* translated by Steven Randall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
[238] True, 27.

these songs set out a certain set of rules for punk, which could be strict or repressive if they were not so ridiculous: good—sniffing glue; bad—walking around with you and going down to the basement. As the Ramones' music developed, they addressed a wider yet nevertheless tragic set of affirmative concerns: "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend," "Now I Wanna Be a Good Boy," and "I Wanna Be Well." As de Certeau has explained, walking around the city, evolving a map of space out of the darkness of urbanity, replaces the dungeon and the castle keep for the modern hero—the ordinary man; hence, the play of light and dark, of space remembered and space created in Ramones lyrics.[239]

The Ramones sing "I Don't Wanna Go Down to the Basement," but only because they know the abject horror of self-recognition that resides there, the natal truth of dreams that panoptic phantasmagoria like Mayazaki's World Trade Center or Pruitt-Igoe homes, or Robert Moses's Cross-Bronx Expressway blot out. The Ramones' are holding up to the audience a mirror, but it is a broken mirror, a cracked mirror, shattered by the sound material that channels their audience's frustrated self-identity back to them in jagged shards and imaginary glimpses. There is a violence to this operation redolent of the ritualized mirror that Jacques Attali theorizes as characteristic of every act of music-making:

> A noise is a resonance that interferes with the audition of a message in the process of emission. A resonance is a set of simultaneous, pure sounds of determined frequency and differing intensity. Noise, then, does not exist in itself, but only in relation to the system within which it is inscribed: emitter, transmitter, receiver. . . . In its biological reality, noise is a source of pain . . . a weapon of death. . . . The game of music thus resembles the game of power: monopolize the right to violence; provoke anxiety and then provide a feeling of security . . . Music, then, rebounds in the field of sound like an echo of the sacrificial channelization of

[239] de Certeau, 106-107.

> violence. . . . Music has been, from its origin, a simulacrum of the monopolization of the power to kill, a simulacrum of ritual murder.[240]

For Attali, this simulacral aspect of music was nowhere more pronounced than the 70s, around the time that he was writing, in 1977, the same year as the first record industry crash. In the early part of the decade, the music industry, and the rock recording industry in particular, reached a saturation point, after which is sales began to plummet, only to stabilize in the 80s with the introduction of compact disc technology. Such a point of saturation doubles as a point of domination—cultural and political—of music listeners by music marketers, by the forces of capital accumulation in what Attali refers to as the stockpiling of surplus creativity.[241] The music industry's monopoly over sound squelches dissent; hence the movement from rock counterculture to rock hegemony, the motive force of cultural reaction to which punk was supposed to have responded.

The Ramones' sound did not just respond to the social chaos happening around it content-wise, it also established a sort of meta-discourse through which to have a larger conversation within the rock community about what rock music meant or could mean. To return to the aesthetic theory of Jacques Rancière, what the Ramones did is roughly equivalent to the aesthetic writing of a joiner for a working-class newspaper in revolutionary France in the 18th-century, *The Workers Tocsin*.[242] Like the joiner, the Ramones re-imagined a set of prescribed social behaviors, a social role, as a self-consciously theatrical performance. In this way, the Ramones' performances at CBGB summoned the aesthetic attitude of what Rancière describes as the "as-if" in the minds of

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[240] Attali, 26-28.
[241] Ibid., 145.
[242] Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension," 7-8.

their listeners, the same attitude that the joiner summoned in the minds of his *Workers Tocsin* readers: "They disassociate the gaze from the hand and transform the worker into an aesthete."[243] Somewhat paradoxically, the social role that the Ramones occupied was that of the rock n' roll performer, a wholly manufactured social role on the part of the youth culture industry—the masturbatory figure of narcissistic, consumerist youth completely dedicated to self-mastery through self-fashioning. The Ramones occupied this social role as the only possible mode of authentic social being in a postmodern society devoid of existential meaning, but their distracted gaze askance at the assumed self-seriousness of rock performance encouraged the eyes of their spectators to look elsewhere in another way.[244] They do not prove a point or demonstrate a principle, like most pedagogical, political art. Instead, they imagine the spectator's apprehension of something about him or herself and communicate that apprehension affectively through the formal construction of their work.

The Ramones' music is notable for what Dan Graham might have described as its "in-formality." Graham identifies the aesthetic principle of in-formality at work in a performance by his friend, the performance artist Bruce Nauman. In his essay, "Subject Matter," Graham suggests that "the body in-formation [in Nauman's piece] is the medium; the body in-formation is the message for the present of…*Nauman himself*."[245] The hyphen in this neo-logism keys the reader on its double or triple meaning. The art is

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[243] Ibid., 8.
[244] As Attali puts it, quoting the Rolling Stones, "What can a poor boy do, except play for a rock n' roll band" (147)? The cryogenic freezing of creativity in the mode of musical production that Attali describes as repetition ironically demands that the subject-citizen becomes the thing that she most despises—herself.
[245] Graham, "Subject Matter," in *Rock My Religion*, 42.

"informal" in the sense of not conforming to the aesthetic norms of official art world culture. It is vernacular. But it is always also "in formation." That is, always in a state of becoming and thus resistant to any static prescription of artistic meaning. And finally, the work is "information" in the sense of conveying a message. No less so than a television news broadcast or magazine ad (both the material bases for other artworks by Graham), the artworks of Nauman participate in a larger media system or public sphere in which diverse artistic voices compete for airtime, visual space, or sonic presence. These artworks gesture towards an ambient world in which subjects are formed and positions are taken independent of one's positivistic acceptance of the terms of identitarian discourse. The Ramones' music re-signifies this gesture through the material of pure sound, a sense modality that is the privileged medium through which trash consciousness may emerge.

If we are to focus our attention more concertedly on matters of form and "in-formality" in conceptual artworks, like the Ramones' early recordings, we can link the conceptual tradition back to a wider modernist tradition that can be broadly categorized under the subheading "surrealism," however, surrealism in its most anti-authoritarian, transgressive mode, that of George Bataille and his circle. In Bataille's *Encyclopedia Acephalica*, he defines the term "the formless" as follows:

> A dictionary should begin from the point when it is no longer concerned with the meaning but only with the use of words. Thus, *formless* is not only an adjective with a certain meaning, but a term serving to deprecate, implying the general demand that everything should have a form. That which it designates has no rights to any sense, and is everywhere crushed under foot like a spider or a worm. For the satisfaction of academics, the universe must take shape. The entirety of philosophy has no other end in view: it puts a frock-coat on that which is, a frock-coat of mathematics. To affirm on the other hand that the universe does not

> resemble anything and is nothing but *formless* amounts to the claim that the universe is something like a spider or a gob of spittle.[246]

The struggle for formlessness takes place in the face of the scientific and mathematical will to form that is also a will to power through knowledge. Through the chaotic juxtaposition of dream images in the everyday world it seeks to bring about a new sur-reality that competes toe-to-toe with the drab, mind-numbing, and soul-crushing reality of late modernism and postmodernization. The world is made more like a spider or a glob of spittle because there needs to and must be some regions of contemporary being not wholly given over to the symbolic logic of language, math, and science. As a preferred philosophical spokesperson of the conceptualists, Ludwig Wittgenstein, put it in a very different context (though perhaps not in a very different spirit), "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."[247] Logic can diagrammatically display *most* of the world, but there remain regions of being beyond the grasp of its symbolization that can only be comprehended through direct experience and the intermediation of aesthetic judgments. The Ramones' music pointed in the most surreptitious and thus the most poignant ways towards these undiscovered regions of being, an act that was downright revolutionary at the moment of its cultural conception, a social moment that was marked by its retrogression and narcissism.

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[246] George Bataille, "George Bataille (1892-1962) from 'Critical Dictionary,'" in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds. *Art in Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 475.
[247] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1999), 108.

Coda: Coping with the End of History, Counting on the End of the Century

Post-punk band Sonic Youth's documentary of their 1991 European tour, *1991: The Year Punk Broke*, climaxes with a speech by the band's lead singer Thurston Moore. Over coffee, Moore rattles off the following,

> '91 is the year punk finally breaks…through…to the mass-consciousness of global society. Modern punk, as featured in *Elle* magazine, Motley Crue singing "Anarchy in the U.K." in a European arena in front of 100,000 screaming people—one of the most sickeningly candy-assed versions you'll ever hear of it, but it is the song itself. And you read an interview with John Lydon—to him, it's a lark.[248]

Afterwards, we see a rousing performance of the signature tune, "Smells Like Teen Spirit," of another rock band, Nirvana, who opened for Sonic Youth during their European tour. During the tour, Nirvana's second album *Nevermind* and the "Smells Like Teen Spirit" single became global hits, unseating Michael Jackson's *Dangerous* album at the top of the pop charts. As the two bands toured Europe, the opener, Nirvana, gradually eclipsed Sonic Youth in terms of popularity and significance. Moore's comments, and the subtitle of the documentary itself, "the year punk broke," take on an ironic, double-edged significance in this light. 1991 was not just the year that punk "broke through"—Moore cleverly hesitates before the word "through" as he completes his sentence—it was also the year that punk broke down, the year that it lost steam as a mode of politically resistant, immanent critique.

At least that's Moore's opinion. More likely, I think, is that in 1991, at the end of the Cold War, the Ramones' punk sound was finally absorbed into the fabric of American music in an almost imperceptible way. It is the year that the Ramones' critique of the

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[248] Thurston Moore, *1991: The Year Punk Broke*, directed by Dave Markey (Los Angeles: Geffen, 1992).

American century was realized historically, when their sound took over the airwaves like some muddled, yet troubling, return of the repressed. Right after Nirvana's performance, *The Year Punk Broke* presents us with a performance by none other than the Ramones themselves. Moore relates that his band had played with Iggy Pop, and now they were playing with the Ramones. The punk rock circle remains unbroken.

In his recent book of pop music criticism, *1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This to Sing About*, Joshua Clover suggestively writes that the "political belle époque" initiated by the "*annus mutationis*" of his title "seemed to reverse the [United States'] decline as global hegemon—a descent that starts around 1973 with the end of the postwar economic boom and the great image-defeat of the Vietnam War."[249] Elsewhere in his book, Clover mourns that "the grand narrative of 1973 will have to be told elsewhere; only bits and pieces are rifted through [his book]."[250] I have attempted to tell part of that story here. The story of the Ramones is an important first chapter in the sonic history of this dark period. Leaving progressive political affiliations aside, if we can follow Francis Fukuyama in dubbing 1989 the end of history, we may describe 1973 as the "beginning of the end of history." Thus, if we listen to the Ramones' 70s music in concert with the "sound" of conceptual art—its "voice"—it may help us to map out what it felt like to be a subject to the end of that history, not as a passive consumer but as an existentially and politically resistant gestalt, possessing a certain mentality or trash consciousness that would allow one not only to survive this ending, spiritually, but to begin again, materially, as a new type of person. Behind this investigation there lies the suspicion that

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[249] Joshua Clover, *1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This to Sing About* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 5-6.
[250] Ibid., 9.

the sonic energy that propelled much of the music that Clover celebrates, especially that of the rock band Nirvana, can be traced back to the Ramones initial intervention in New York in the 70s.

During the scenes in their documentary in which Sonic Youth prepares for their performance with the Ramones, they almost seem cynical about it, but there can be no doubt about the debt that these musicians owed to the Ramones sonically and conceptually. The Ramones set the template—because there is nothing else to do at the end of history but play for a rock n' roll band, put four bodies in motion and enjoy the chance effects their swaying creates, in front of microphones or as their nervous hands rush back and forth across steel, over pickups. The four original Ramones found an opening in sound when they dangled themselves like pendulums over the abyss of informality and let it rip. They discovered something about themselves, the music that they loved, and its audience. Their sound subsequently winnowed its way into our consciousness so completely that it seemed almost imperceptible. Yet it is still heard all around us in the sound of revolutionary rock bands taking up the mantle of punk. Nowadays the counterculture tends to disavow this legacy. It would prefer 60s nostalgism or the embrace of some technophilic notion of utopia. Yet the argument of this chapter has been that the Ramones' sound, re-interpolated throughout the 70s and 80s by bands like the Sex Pistols, Sonic Youth, and Nirvana, and even later by punk bands as diverse as My Bloody Valentine and Sleater-Kinney, possesses a progressive, utopian potential that is both radically democratic and populist, easy to intuit yet conceptually complex. It blares at us every time we hear sounds so aggressively smart we can feel them. It is a promise of equivalence between audience and performer that can only be denied once it

is broached. The Ramones' sound embodies trash consciousness. It is the sound of barriers falling, and it is positively conceptual.

CHAPTER FOUR: Dan Graham's Conceptual Reflections

In June 1977, post-Minimalist artist-critic Dan Graham premiered a new performance piece titled "Performer/Audience/Mirror" at the contemporary arts center De Appel in Amsterdam.[251] "Performer/Audience/Mirror" marked a turning point in Graham's artistic career. It was the culmination of a series of performances that he had begun in 1969 with "Like" and "Lax/Relax." In these and other performances that Graham staged throughout the 70s, and in the video works that accompanied them—such as "Roll," "Body Press," "Two Consciousness Projections"—the artist thematically explored his mutual cooperation with his audience in the making of artistic meaning, and sought to explore alternative modes of art-making designed to heighten consciousness in a way that was very much in keeping with the 60s' psychedelic spirit.

As Graham describes "Performer/Artist/Mirror" (in a 1993 script for the piece that he published in a collection of his writings, *Rock My Religion*), it consists of four "stages."[252] During the first stage, the performer enters a room in which an audience is

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[251] The second performance was at the P.S. 1 Institute for Contemporary Art in Long Island City, New York in December 1977. Another notable performance occurred at Riverside Studios in London on February 24, 1979. At this performance, Branca was accompanied by the noise rock band, The Static, featuring Glenn Branca, a prominent member of New York City's post-punk "No Wave" scene. Graham and Branca later collaborated on a musical performance that included rudiments of the "Performer/Audience/Mirror" idea, "Musical Performance and Stage-Set Utilizing Two-Way Mirror and Time Delay" (1983). This performance, which also took place in a room with a mirrored wall, involved the performance of music by Branca and two other musicians, which was played back on time-delayed video on a monitor in the back of the room. The monitor was visible to the audience and musicians via the mirror. A video recording of a performance of "Performer/Audience/Mirror" at Video Free America in 1977 can be viewed on-line at <http://www.ubu.com/film/graham_performer.html>. I will refer to this videotaped performance later in this chapter.

[252] Different versions of the script had appeared in *New Art* 3/4 (Fall 1980), 30-31, and *Theatre* 1981 (Graham, *Works*, 177). The latter volume also contained a transcription of

seated facing a wall covered by a mirror. Facing the audience, he describes out loud "the external movements and the attitudes that he believes are signified by this behavior for about five minutes" (114). Almost imperceptibly, then, for the audience, he moves into the second stage of the performance, during which he "continues facing the audience. Looking directly at them, he continuously describes their external behavior for about five minutes" (114). During the third and final stages of the performance, Graham repeats the two previous stages, although this time facing the mirror. The script stipulates that "he is free to move about, to change his relative distance to the mirror, in order to better see aspects of his body's movements" (114). According to Graham, during the fourth stage, "His changes of position produce a changing visual perspective that is correspondingly reflected in the description," although in keeping with the overall ambiguity of the piece, it is difficult to say whose "perspective" is changing according to Graham's prose. Certainly, both the audience's and Graham's perspectives can both be said to be changing at any given moment. Thus, Graham's script establishes a feedback loop of sorts in which a gestalt mind/body system made up of many individuals in a given situation is transformed into an artwork that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The script for "Performer/Audience/Mirror" describes a site at which the artist investigates his relationship with the audience on both a social and phenemonological level, resulting in an act of aesthetic creation. The script and the resulting performance are deceptively simple, but they in fact represent a systematic condensation not only of all of Graham's performance practices throughout the 70s, but also his critical ideas about

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the performance at P.S. 1, which is reprinted in *Dan Graham: Beyond*. I have reproduced the script for "Performer/Audience/Mirror" as an Appendix to this chapter.

the role of artworks in a larger mass culture that is both alienating and forgetful. After he premiered "Performer/Audience/Mirror," Graham more or less abandoned the performance practices that had characterized most of his career to that point. He began publishing more critical essays; at first focusing his attention on a musical form, punk rock, the influence of which already seems present in "Performer/Audience/Mirror." In at least one performance of the piece, Graham compares his poses to those of a rock n' roller, and the piece does reflect the same basic structural relationship between performer and audience as a rock performance.[253] It is no wonder, then, that later video artworks by Graham, most notably *Rock My Religion* (1982-1984) and *Minor Threat* (1983), contain large amounts of footage that Graham shot himself of sweaty young men slamdancing at hardcore punk shows by bands like Minor Threat and Black Flag, or of the lead singers of these bands, throwing themselves into their performances with the utmost physical commitment, bordering on violence. These video pieces seem to explore the same self-reflexive thinking about performer and audience as the earlier video art. Graham's later studio art, too, architectural pavilions that incorporate elements of sculpture and design, reflect the critical turn in his work that "Performer/Audience/Mirror" represented. Almost all of these works utilize mirrors and other types of glass intended to create optical illusions. In Graham's later essays about theater, sculpture, architecture, and design, he focuses on the ability of these mirrored surfaces to inspire critical reflection on the part of

[253] The rock star comment occurs in the videotaped version of the performance. This moment is described in more detail below.

their users, and help them recover their memories of public space during a postmodern-era in which most public space is designed to cover over or distort those memories.[254]

"Performer/Audience/Mirror" was preceded by another, similarly titled performance in 1975, "Performer/Audience Sequence" (Graham, *Works*, 168). All that was added in the later performance was the mirror, both in the title of the piece and in its performance space, described in Graham's script as an "installation." The only other components in this installation are, more or less, the performer and the audience. Other detritus found in the space of the installation may be disregarded; hence, the piece's simplistic, reductive title. The room in which the performance occurs, whether it be an art gallery, a studio, or any other sort of box equipped to fit people, serves as the support or frame for a work that will ultimately explore the most basic situation of any artwork through a kind of staged phenomenological reduction—an encounter between artist and audience that is mediated via a mirror, the most attenuated of what Michael Fried might call "supports" for an artwork.[255]

As Graham stipulates in his "Thoughts" on the performance, which accompanied the publication of its script, the mirror's inclusion is crucial to the piece's meaning and function. As Graham writes, only "through the use of a mirror" is "the audience able to instantaneously perceive itself as a public mass (as a unity), offsetting its definition by

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[254] Graham is straightforward in these essays about the influence of the German philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin on this mode of critical thinking.

[255] Explorations of medium specificity and the capacity for media forms to create their own meaning were key motifs in 60s art critical discourse, especially in the writing of Michael Fried. See his "Art and Objecthood" (1967), collected in Wood and Harrison. Rhea Anastas points out that Dan Graham very specifically saw his early curatorial work, criticism, and art-making as opposing Fried's aesthetic doctrine (in *Beyond*, 110-129).

the performer('s discourse)" (115). The mirror in this performance is a metaphor for all forms of technological mediation. In a series of essays and artworks that he had produced in the 60s and 70s, Graham had identified this same capacity to "offset" or destabilize the art audience's relationship towards themselves and towards the artist or performer in other, more technologically sophisticated media or media systems—magazines and the periodical publishing industry (the series of artworks and essays collected in the volume, *For Publication* (1975)); painting ("Eisenhower and the Hippies" (1968)), television ("Dean Martin/Entertainment as Theater" (1969)), and rock music ("Dean Martin" and other essays).[256] For Graham, certain artistic techniques common to these media might be capable of achieving what Brecht described as the *Enfremdung* or distancing effect, which Brecht claimed was the ultimate, politicized tactic of his epic theater (*Rock My Religion*, 60). Without fully spelling out the distancing effect's place in a Brechtian theatrical poetics, Graham explains in his essay on Dean Martin that when Martin appeared on-stage during his TV variety show as a charming drunk character, he was "playing himself" (my terms). In Graham's terms, he "displayed the self-mechanism of [television's] structure," and made the audience "aware of the literal machinery of the ropes, flues, and light apparatuses" that bolstered television's screen spectacle (60). Graham compares this exposure of "the device," this "making strange," which was at the root of Dean Martin's appeal (according to Graham), not only with the films of Andy Warhol, but with those of Godard, as well as rock guitarist Pete

[256] A facsimile of *For Publication* is included in Dan Graham, *Works and Collected Writings* (29-60). All other works mentioned are included in *Rock My Religion*.

Townsend's thoughts on rock performance,[257] and Graham's own experience of an art world "happening"/sex party in a Lower Manhattan "sort of nightclub" called "Cerebrum" (60-64).[258]

The mirror in Graham's piece serves a structural role as the most basic form of illusionistic "medium" through which to channel his creative energies as well as the imagination of his audience. Through the mirror in Graham's performance, the audience has what might be called "a brush with the real." As Graham puts it in an oddly repetitive turn of phrase included in his "Thoughts" on the performance, seeing itself reflected in the mirror "effects cause-and-effect interpretation for the audience" (115). Put this way, the verb "to effect" could have an ambiguous double meaning, either to "make happen," or "make appear to happen." It throws off the symbolic coordinates of the audience's subjective experience of the artwork and thus of their subjectivity as a given psychic gestalt. Like the mirror stage in our childhood development, Graham's performance has the potential to reorder the subjective coordinates through which the audience perceives the world, admittedly a tall order for any artwork, but the drama of which is reflected in the script's reference to each segment of the work as a "stage."

In this attempt to reorder his audience's subjective coordinates, Graham is both replicating and parodying the goals of rock music performance as they existed during the

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[257] Pete Townsend is the guitarist for the rock band, the Who.

[258] "Exposing the device" was a key aesthetic tactic, which Graham claims influenced Brecht's *Enfremdung*, in the revolutionary poetics of the Russian formalists, and especially Viktor Schklovsky. Graham mentions Schlovsky and his specific influence of Brecht, as well as "making strange,"in his 1983 essay "Theater, Cinema, Power"(in *Rock My Religion*, 178). In his later essays, Graham veers away from a Brechtian explanation of this poetics towards a more Benjaminian conception based on the creation of "dialectical images."

psychedelic era. He occupies the same relationship with the gallery audience as rock performers do with theirs. In the videotaped performance of "Performer/Audience/Mirror," Graham's last sentence during stage 3 of the performance, when he stops describing himself and begins describing the audience, is: "I seem to be losing balance, but I'm shaking very hard as I'm doing this as if it's some kind of [aborted?] rock n' roll-type gesture."[259] Although Graham as actor aspires to what Derrida describes as a phallogocentric mastery over language in his piece, his authority is undermined by what the artist in another context describes as his "pathetic physicality."[260] Graham's body-image functions as nothing more than a statue for the audience to fix their gaze upon at this stage in the performance, as the perspectival punctum of the piece that commands the audience's vision; in Lacanian terms, it is the imago or imaginary of the piece, holding in place the audience's visual field and papering over their unattainable mastery of the piece's unfolding through space and time.

With this transitional comment about his rock star pose, Graham begins to indicate the influence that his experience of rock music performance might have had on his

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[259] The word or phrase that I have written in brackets is barely audible in the video. It could also be "bored" or "bawdy."

[260] This term appears in Graham's essay "Rock My Religion," he writes,

> By 'exposing himself' on stage (showing his penis to the audience during a concert in Miami in April 1969) and thereby exposing the basis of the rock spectacle, Morrison wanted to expose the audience's corrupt desires. In this ritual, intended to question the mystique of rock as spectacle, Morrison chose to reenact the castration complex. Through his own emasculation, Morrison expressed his desire to see rock bring about the destruction of the Oedipal order. And, in fact, when his penis was revealed to the public, Jim's potency as a rock figure was immediately destroyed. His gesture of showing 'it' destroyed his former aura of phallic mastery; the phallus had become—Morrison had become—pathetically physical (93).

conception of this piece. Graham was a long time rock fan who avowed his love for the form in his critical writing, and was one of the first members of the official art world elite in the U.S. to take rock music seriously as an art form.[261] In his piece, his voice, like the voice of a rock star, directs the audience's gaze, and demands their attention in an almost authoritarian manner that relies upon his possession of the phallus, a locus of symbolic power, via his social coding as masculine subject. Graham's self-positioning in the piece is not unlike the self-positioning that Graham would elsewhere identity as the rock star's relationship with his audience. In his video and essay *Rock My Religion*,[262] for instance, Graham describes rock music performance as the interaction between a narcissistic performer and a sexually infantile spectatorial public. He writes,

> The rock star appeals to both sexes equally, encouraging their identification with his narcissistic sanctioning of self-sexuality.
>
> Even though the male rock star has absorbed the "female" seductive techniques of narcissism and coquettishness, his powers rest ultimately on his phallic presence (*Rock My Religion* 92).

In his performance, Graham is the only speaking subject, and this arrangement is forcefully maintained by his positioning in the front of the room, behind the fourth wall. The piece has no content per se. Rather, its formal structure is only provided by Graham's written description of the piece (published later) and his phonic enumeration of sense impressions and mental states during the course of the piece's temporal unfolding. If the piece can be said to have any formal content whatsoever, it is mutually constituted

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[261] In a recently published interview, Graham identifies Leslie Fiedler as an important inspiration for his attempts to talk about high art and rock music in the same breath (*Beyond*, 94).

[262] The multiple uses of this title in Graham's corpus can be confusing. It is the name of both a video work and an essay, the latter of which is more or less the script for the video, although there are several important deviations. *Rock My Religion* is also the title of a collection of Graham's writing, published in 1993.

by both the performer and the audience at any given time. He recites his reactions to their reactions, and attempts to interpret their reactions in a fashion that verges on the obnoxious as it invades their private space of bodily integrity and individual consciousness. To some extent, this obnoxiousness is written into the piece. In stage 1 of his performance, Graham writes that "the audience hears the performer and sees a mirror view (reverse) of what the performer sees," and in stage 3, "the audience cannot see the performer's eyes." Graham not only scripts his own movements, he also scripts and stipulates the audience's reactions to his movements. Nevertheless, this scripting of the audience's behavior is rendered ironic within the context of the piece. It abuts Graham's utopian "Thoughts" on the piece, and leaves the audience room for critical distance after the performance has ended. Indeed, his disidentificatory reference to his own eyes imbues the entire drama with practically Oedipal overtones. He preemptively defends the site on his body that would be the site of Oedipus's castration.

However, if the piece is somehow undemocratic in this way, if it banks on the powerlessness of the audience in relation to the mastery of the performer, it is at least *honest* about this power dynamic. It exposes the device that fuels its own meaning production so that that meaning may be counteracted or negated by the audience. Key to this negation is the ephemerality of the performance, how it almost doesn't exist, except as a script or conceptual idea. Exposing this device in this context, while not inherently radical, is an emotional experience, not just a medium for delivering a political or social message. The work creates a *khora* or clearing in the space of the gallery similar to the one the Ramones created on the CBGB stage. In this clearing, Graham establishes a new "in-formal" sincerity with his audience. As discussed in the previous chapter, around the

time of this performance, 1977, the apotheosis of this formal in-formality was the Ramones, a band which Dan Graham greatly admired. Graham published essays on punk as early as 1979. In his earliest essay on punk, "Punk as Propaganda," Graham writes that "the Ramones from New York City and Devo from Akron, Ohio model their aesthetic/political strategies after those Pop artists of the 1960s: they prefer to package themselves rather than be packaged by the media or the record industry" (Graham, *Rock My Religion*, 96). Although Graham is not often associated with the CBGB scene, his reflections on it are a testament to the reach and profundity of that scene's intervention.

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In a London performance of "Performance/Audience/Mirror" in 1979, the punk rock band Static "opened" for Dan Graham. Static was led by avant-garde noise guitarist Glenn Branca, and both men would go on to collaborate with post-punk band Sonic Youth. A flyer distributed to promote the performance has the same look as the handmade, xeroxed flyers produced by punk bands. But the visual style of this flyer is not just an expression of subcultural solidarity with punk musicians and their audience on the part of Dan Graham, it also captures this sort of performance's reliance on an angry ideological posture and self-reflexiveness about the mass-mediated public relations system on which such performances might be said to "hang" like a picture in a frame. In his magazine work, Graham stipulated that the whole periodical publishing system was his medium. In "Performance/Audience/Mirror" and the artwork of the Ramones, the medium was that singular relationship between rock musicians and their public, a sublimated byproduct of technological reproducibility, and a relationship that until that

point had been united in a state of glorious in-formality, always becoming something new to challenge the terms of its own destiny.

By the time punk bands like the Ramones had begun appearing at downtown New York clubs, Dan Graham was already a well-established artist-critic in his own right. A disciple of Sol LeWitt, Graham's art, like the music of the Ramones, followed closely LeWitt's aesthetic program set out in his essay "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (originally published in *Artforum* in 1967, rpt. in Harrison and Wood, 834-837). According to LeWitt, conceptual art "is not illustrative of theories…[It] is not necessarily logical…The philosophy of the work is implicit in the work and is not an illustration of any system of philosophy;" however, "it is the objective of the artist who is concerned with conceptual art to make his work mentally interesting to the spectator" (LeWitt in Harrison and Wood, 834-5). The artist accomplishes this latter task, according to LeWitt, by forming "concepts" and then "implementing" them through "ideas," which are like plans. The phenomenological details of a conceptual artwork—how it looks, sounds, feels, smells, etc.; how it presents itself to an individual consciousness, a "one"—isn't so important as what it makes the spectator think, although an artwork that does not immediately capture the spectator's attention on some aesthetic level must also be ultimately deemed unsuccessful. Such an artwork is mathematics—a purely philosophical, not aesthetic, matter.

Graham's late-60s essays on conceptual art, such as "Subject Matter," "Schema," and "Information," had a tremendous impact on extending and popularizing the ideas of LeWitt and other conceptualist artist-critics like John Cage. These essays also functioned as collage-like artworks in their own right, an attribute they share with Graham's later

essays, which increasingly come to focus not only on the world of "high" gallery art but on popular cultural topics, rock music and punk in particular. The essays occupy several different discursive registers, and don't really make straightforward art-critical arguments of any kind. Instead, they leave the reader with the general impression that something is afoot in the art world, that something is changing, and that they are a part of it. The essays are still widely read, cited, and commented upon, and Graham's artworks still frequently appear in gallery exhibitions or as stand-alone installations.

Even in his early essays, Graham avowed an aesthetic interest in or kinship with the artistic production of rock n' rollers. For instance, in the footnotes to "Subject Matter," the most critically incisive of his early essays, Graham mentions John Lennon and Yoko Ono's *Bed Piece*, one of the earliest and most explicit crossovers between rock music and conceptual art, and he notes that Lennon's status as a well-known public figure endowed the "piece" with a certain irony appropriate to its status as conceptual art. That is, Lennon's involvement with the piece, as rock n' roll celebrity, was an important element in the piece's artistic conception. Another footnote to "Subject Matter" reads,

> Don Judd, at a panel discussion at the Cooper Union in New York, 1969, 'Soul is the bottom of the barrel.' Tina Turner: 'Soul is grease.' A recent videotape by Nauman shows him covering his body with grease (*Rock My Religion*, 51).

This footnote, which could easily be read as an inconsequential aside in Graham's essay, actually provides the reader with a good deal of insight into this critical essay's ideological project. Donald Judd, a minimalist artist famous for his fiberglass sculptures of hard-edged geometric forms, comes under attack as the arbiter of the "official" art world and all its snobbish, authoritarian trappings. Tina Turner, a rock singer, and Bruce Nauman, one of the most prominent of the new conceptual artists that Graham was

proclaiming in his essay, are aligned with one another as representatives of a cultural insurgency both in the staid confines of high art and in the realm of popular culture. Nauman and Turner wage a rebellion against the official art culture of Cold War America.

For Graham, the constitutive relationship between rock music and conceptual or post-minimal art is a two-way street. Conceptual art does its part to alert its audience of the ironies and aporias inherent in different modes of artistic appreciation, which have been shaped not only by art world practices but leisure industries like rock music, but many of conceptual art's ideas about the world are actually anticipated by rock music itself. For Graham, there is no sense in which his artworks "say" anything about the media systems they participate in any more than those systems already exist as criticisms of themselves, and this is very much in keeping with the theories of art and media of his two masters, Marshall McLuhan and Sol LeWitt. Like McLuhan, Graham not only analyzes media but lives alongside them as though they are living, breathing things, very much in keeping with systems theory's way of understanding the human organism's social and biological place in the word. As Eric de Bruyn explains, like LeWitt, Graham takes seriously the notion that "the illustration of mathematics or philosophy was not the goal of conceptual art" (de Bruyn, 49).[263] Conceptual art must have some value added in the sense that besides simply demonstrating a principle, it must also stimulate the imagination.

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[263] Or, as LeWitt put it, " Conceptual art doesn't really have much to do with mathematics, philosophy, or any mental discipline…. [I]t is not an illustration of any system of philosophy." LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," qtd. in de Bruyn, 62.

Graham's conceptual art was meant to reflect the facts of the world (as Wittgenstein would have them) back to his audience in a way that was slightly askew from the way in which the media world around them was already presenting those facts—re-representation. Thus, Graham's early critical writings on conceptual art are accompanied by publications on the painting of Dwight D. Eisenhower and Dean Martin, public figures that Graham believed allowed their audiences to view the social world askance, not by design but through the shear force of their own idiosyncratic personalities. This parallax view of the world available via their artworks took place alongside similar, perhaps more self-conscious, acts of misapprehension by rock stars. In the Dean Martin essay, Graham writes,

> Pete Townsend, of the rock group Who [sic], would split the screen into horizontal and vertical motions in an analysis of the audience/performer relation: "The audience is schizoid…They're sensitive in that they're open to media…open to media distorters like grass, like booze, like all these things." So when the play catches them, they are in this flux and in order to hit them "you've got to move with them on the same plane…This isn't to say you're going down to anything…up and down—it's a question of a vertical things, and when you're making a performance, it's not vertical" (*Rock My Religion*, 60).

In this quote from Townsend, Graham finds the kernel of an idea that he also detects in the work of Dean Martin, of Andy Warhol, of Jean-Luc Godard, and most of all of Bertolt Brecht—a principle of radical equality between performer, audience, and medium. By unveiling the means of production that leads to the creation of the spectacle, these artists expose the illusoriness of the media in which they work, the selfsame illusoriness that separates audience from performer. There is nothing *inherently* radical about demolishing this barrier, but it is a necessary first step towards a felt sense of equivalence amongst audience and performer as *subjects*, and the establishment of

something approaching a democracy worthy of the name in what Guy de Bord pessimistically described in a similar context as "the society of the spectacle." Such a conceptual practice is at least one way to bring about the reordering of phenomenological experience desired by Bataille in his definition of "the formless."

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Dan Graham ends his essay "Subject Matter," a manifesto of sorts for his generation of concept artists (Bruce Nauman, Meredith Monk, Yvonne Ranier, Simone Forti, Steve Reich), by focusing on sound. First, he discusses Steve Reich's composition, "Pendulum Music."[264] Reich's handwritten score for "Pendulum Music" reads,[265]

PENDULUM MUSIC
For Microphones, Amplifiers, Speakers, and Performers

> 2, 3, 4 or more microphones are suspended from the ceiling by their cables so that they all hang the same distance from the floor and are all free to swing with a pendular motion. Each microphone's cable is plugged into an amplifier which is connected to a speaker. Each microphone hangs a few inches directly above or next to its speaker.
>
> The performance begins with performer taking each mike, pulling it back like a swing, and then in unison releasing all of them together. Performers then carefully turn up each amplifier just to the point where feedback occurs when a mike swings directly over or next to it's speaker. Thus, a series of feedback pulses are heard which will either be all in unison or not depending on the gradually changing phase relations of the different mike pendulums.
>
> Performers then sit down to watch and listen to the process along with the audience.
>
> The piece is ended sometime after all mikes have come to rest and are feeding back a continuous tone by performers pulling out the power cords of the amplifiers.

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[264] I hesitate to call it a "musical composition." Musicality isn't really at stake in this piece.

[265] Steve Reich, *Writings on Music, 1965-2000*, edited by Paul Hiller (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 32.

According to Graham, this piece alerts its audience to the difference between "art time" and "non art time," and the specific phenomenological qualities of "art time." He writes, "*Art time* (nonentropic) or out-of-the-ordinary existence (machine identity of the machine environment) is activated by the performance only to run down and back from work expressed as entropy to reach its prior *non art time* coexistent with the machine as object's actual place—use—in the world (Graham's italics, Rock My Religion, 47). "Art time," typically, is thought of as "nonentropic." Recalling Bataille's definition of "the formless," even the most beautiful artworks "put a frock-coat on that which is, a frock-coat of mathematics." Reich's handwritten procedure removes this frockcoat and lays bare the device. When performed, it exposes a specific phenomenological quality of sound—its temporal boundedness and the way in which this temporal unfolding can work against the composition of the piece. Graham continues,

> Generally, music as perceived might be distinguished from a visual event in that it is directly (literally) present in the *same* time continuum as the perceiver; both sender and receiver share the same space of—for—its generation. And second, although light is a combination of particles and wave-forms, we don't respond to it in this mode of 'structure,' but as a reflection of some other material; sound 'hits' the ear as a continuous stream of particles and oscillations inseparably at one time (47).

"Pendulum Music"'s specific phenomenological quality as an artwork conceived in *sound* contributes to its status as an event, its impact, how it "hits" the ear in a way that is otherwise distorted by visual media.

Graham's ultimate point in "Subject Matter," which he gets at only in the most roundabout of ways, is that if contemporary artworks expect to be heard, to have a voice,

to have an impact, to be a "hit" (in the same way as a pop song), they must sound now; they must be sonic. This point may seem obvious, if not circular. But however much we may desire artworks to "speak to us," they only very rarely do. The history of Western art, even its musical history, until the late 19th-century, is a history of silence. It consists of nothing more than an archive of scores, traces of sonic presence dressed up in a "frockcoat of mathematics." The invention of recorded music ends this silence and popular music, of the kind produced by the Ramones, represents one way in which this transition is voiced.

The Ramones were the first rock group to conceive of themselves as participating in this new history. Early Ramones performances were like Steve Reich's "Pendulum Music" arranged for rock band. Put four bodies in motion and enjoy the chance effects their swaying creates, in front of microphones or as their nervous hands rush back and forth across steel, over pickups. In the music of the contemporary Irish band My Bloody Valentine, this principle is taken to a teleological end of sorts. In an interview with Ian Svenonius, another inheritor of the Ramones' tradition, Shields describes the Ramones as "his favorite band:"

> SVENONIOUS: Um…I wanted to…because your music doesn't feel like it is really, y' know, directly part of the tradition of rock n' roll, but it's obviously, obviously you're a huge fan of rock n'roll, is there something kind of anti-hierarchical about the way My Bloody Valentine sounds? It's like, uh, the way that you produce the music, kind of everything's, kind of brought up to one, y' know, it's kind of, uh, it's dynamic, but there's, sort of everything's present, almost on equal terms. People thought cubism sort of demolished hierarchy because it brought the background forward, and of course punk rock and rave made the same claim to destroy hierarchy. I mean, is that something that you're concerned with, and…?
>
> SHIELDS: I didn't really think about it like that, y' know, but just from the point of view of, y' know, I didn't, I never really liked rock n' roll bands in that way, y'

> know what I mean? That's why I liked…my favorite band being the Ramones, y' know, when they first came, when I first heard 'em. What I liked about it was just the, just the *ffft*, the full-on-ness of it, do y' know what I mean? There was no kind of, well, "This is the heavy bit, and this is the quiet bit," or, y' know, and all that kind of stuff. It was just like, *aaaaiuray*. Stop. *URRRRRRR*. Stop. Like that. And I saw them live and it was just like that, but, y' know, insanely loud. And it was just like, that's, that's good, y' know, and so there's this kind of, y' know, all the, the widdley-widdley, kind of standing in poses rock n' roll guy. Like, "I'm the lead guitarist, and I do what I do," and y' know what I mean? Everyone's kind of…
>
> SVENONIOUS: Uh huh, it's more egalitarian, like…the look, the way they play. Everything's functional.
>
> SHIELDS: Yeah, but on the other hand, y' know, when you see, like, a band like the Who, doing their kind of, y' know, each one of 'em, y' know, or, like, the Keith Moon, John Entwistle, and Pete Townshend, all kind of doing their own version of going completely crazy, that's, to me, that's the same as well. Do y' know what I mean? So it's kind of like, if you take the Who and the Ramones mentality, y' know?[266]

Shields can only do justice to the Ramones's sound and the impact it had on him by resorting to onomatopoeic speech and gesture, because what the Ramones did to him exceeds linguistic description and can only be caught in the phenomenological space between feeling and consciousness, can only be captured in the body.

While making his first Ramones noise, *ffft*, Shields gestures with his hands, raising them, palms up, quickly off the table towards his face; abruptly; blinking; neck agog. During his second emulation of the Ramones's sound, "*aaaaiuray*. Stop. *URRRRRRR*. Stop," Shields reverses his earlier hand gesture. He moves his hands, palms down, from near his face in a motion that closely resembles a laying of hands or the casting of a magic spell. His hands hesitate as though he's pressing down on something, channeling the charisma of the Ramones's performance. Continuing his description of the

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[266] Ian Svenonious, "Kevin Shields." *Soft Focus*. http://www.vice.com/soft-focus/kevin-shields (accessed October 27, 2013).

experience of seeing the Ramones live, he reverts to the original gesture, as though capturing once again, with the motion, his embodied experience of spectatorship. This feeling is different from the one that he got from "widdley-widdley" rock stars. During this section of his interview, Shields emulates the standard pose of a right-handed rock n' roll guitar player, and wiggles his whole body. He pretends as if he's about to fall of the chair, kind of like the moment in Dan Graham's performance when he loses his balance in the pose of a "bored rock star," or the way Jim Morrison would stalk around the stages of Hollywood with one knee bent and the other slightly kicked out in a shamanic dance. Svenonius picks up on what Shields is signifying through his bodily attitudes. During his response to Shields, he repeats the laying of hands motion, and quickly recapitulates the rock star pose when praising the Ramones, but without the wiggle. His body goes rigid for a moment. He adopts an "emptyheaded" sort of zombie or robot look.

This gestural play continues as Shields and Svenonius discuss the Who. Before enumerating the members of the Who that played instruments, Shields taps on the table as though he's laying out a map or setting the table, then he strikes the pose each Who member would have taken on stage as he mentions their names. At stake in all this gestural play is a certain emplacement of affect or feeling that Shields and Svenonius experienced in the presence of the Ramones and the Who. What the laying of hands gesture signifies is the religious, communitarian "vibe" of this experience.

My Bloody Valentine's concerts would end with a religious ceremony as well, the song "You Made Me Realise," which contained an extended noise rave-up that they

described as the "Holocaust" section of the performance.[267] An endurance test of sorts, during this section of the performance, My Bloody Valentine would sustain one-note feedback drones on their guitars for 40 minutes or more. These performances could reach decibel levels of 120 or above, well beyond what is considered a healthy level for the functioning of human ears. As he discusses in his interview with Svenonius (and as I've experienced myself at a My Bloody Valentine concert), at this level, the listener begins to hear things sounds that don't seem real—songs within songs. The sound is dry but it encompasses your whole body. In his interview, Shields claims that the only sonic effect besides amplification that My Bloody Valentine used in the production of their music, the technique which produced the music's famous phasing effects, was what he describes as "reverse reverb."[268] When Tommy Ramone suggested that you could "swim" in the Ramones music, he probably only meant this in a metaphorical sense, but at a My Bloody Valentine performance you can physically feel the sound in such a way that you do feel underwater. Your knees buckle, your stomach contorts, and the waves of feedback literally seem to create visual hallucinations not unlike the effect of heat waves rising from a hot blacktop.

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[267] "Rave-up" was a term originally used to describe improvisational instrumental passages included in the middle of songs by the Yardbirds. During this section, the Yardbirds would typically play double-time and include any number of psychedelic electronic effects in the production of their music. The rave-ups were noisy and eclectic, and complemented the psychedelic experience well. My Bloody Valentine's choice of the term "Holocaust" to describe their rave-up sections is interesting both from the point of view of the terms originally ritualistic meaning, "burnt offering," as well as the now common view of the Jewish roots of punk expressed by Steven Lee Beeber and Jon Stratton.

[268] Presumably he is referring to a form of digital or analog delay that reverses the looped signal.

The sound of My Bloody Valentine represents one extension to the community of sound in-formation that the Ramones originally conceived. They made their breakthrough in 1991 with the release of their album *Loveless*.[269] In his book, *1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This to Sing About*, Joshua Clover suggests that even the crassest commercial music of 1989 was expressive of an effusive, almost utopian structure of feeling that accompanied and allowed for the end of Soviet communism and the destruction of the Berlin Wall.[270] As I mentioned before, he looks backward to contend that this 1989 moment was a culmination in cultural feeling of an economic process of postmodernization that had begun much earlier in 1973, but he also cannot help but glance forward a bit, too, and reel some music from two years later, in 1991, into the purview of his structure of feeling. Raymond Williams described "structures of feeling" as "social experiences in solution," and thus it seems fair to suggest that these experiences may link together disparately over time even if they can be held together conceptually in the name of a year, an event, a number—1989. But there is an affective lag between the utopian experience of 1989 and the pessimistic, dystopian spirit expressed in the music of 1991, even the 1991 music that Clover fixates on, especially that of Nirvana, who debuted in 1989 with their album *Bleach*, but became a household name with the 1991 release of their album *Nevermind*.[271] It seems that in the face of the jubilant "end of history" that Clover claims so many 1989 bands were celebrating, there was an immediate and violent backlash on the part of the 1991 bands in what Sonic

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[269] My Bloody Valentine, *Loveless* (London: Creation, 1991).
[270] Clover, *1989*.
[271] Nirvana, *Bleach* (Seattle: Sub Pop, 1989), and *Nevermind* (Santa Monica, CA: DGC, 1991).

Youth dubbed "the year punk broke." The interval between capitalist crisis in 1973 and the Ramones's aesthetic response in 1975 is recapitulated in the interval between historical break in 1989 and aesthetic response in 1991.

The form of both responses is conceptual. Although *Nevermind* is the most memorable and critically well regarded of the rock albums from that year, it was notably beaten out in the *Spin* magazine critics poll for best album of the year by *Bandwagonesque* by the band Teenage Fanclub.[272] At the time, *Spin* magazine was more or less at the forefront of the second punk explosion taking place in American underground music that would soon break through into the mainstream. In certain ways, *Bandwagonesque* hews even closer to the conceptual aesthetic of the Ramones than even Nirvana. Nirvana may have appeared alongside the Ramones in Sonic Youth's concert film *1991: The Year Punk Broke*, and thus established themselves as the primary inheritors of the Ramones's and Sonic Youth's legacies, but the sonic conception of Teenage Fanclub's album seems to assimilate the Ramones's sound in-formation more completely. The album begins, fittingly, with a track titled "The Concept," which nevertheless seems, at first listen, to lack very much aesthetic complexity. The song begins with a noisy feedback intro banged out on an electric guitar played at a very high volume. The guitarist strums a G chord and lets it ring as the singer begins to recite a basic love lyric:

> She wears denim
> Wherever she goes
> Says she's gonna get some records by the Status Quo
> Oh yeah

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[272] Teenage Fanclub, *Bandwagonesque* (Santa Monica, CA: Geffen, 1991).

Oh yeah[273]

Each line is accompanied by a downstroke on the guitar, doubled by the bass, and complemented harmonically by a barely perceptible synth line. (The keyboard almost resembles more feedback.) The chord progression is circular. It cascades downwards from G to F# over D to G minor, then doubles back as the band rises from C to D underneath their Beach Boys-like harmonies as they sing, "Oh yeah." The ringing chords and stuttering development of the song accentuate an emotional sense of frustration and longing, which is echoed in the song's chorus:

I didn't want to hurt you
Oh yeah
I didn't want to hurt you
Oh yeah

The chord sequence during this chorus reverses the turnaround pattern in the verse. Instead of starting with the cascading figure, it begins with the movement from C to D. The band then begins the downward cadence underneath the chorus refrain of "Oh yeah." This pattern of reversal in the chorus establishes a chiastic harmonic structure that is unmatched lyrically. After repeating the chorus lines twice, the band modulates to an A-major chord in order to resolve the chorus and re-enter the verse, and the listener expects during this blue-sy shuffle some sort of accompanying lyric resolution, but this is denied. The listener is given no sense of why the singer hurt his lover in the first place, what he's going to do about it, or how everything ends up.

In fact, the song *never* provides the listener with this sort of lyric resolution. Instead, after cycling through another verse/chorus permutation and a long guitar solo,

[273] Status Quo is the name of a popular British rock group.

the song temporarily slows to a halt while repeating the A-major blues shuffle pattern. The band then settles on an open-D chord and lets their instruments ring until the drummer claps out a leading fill on his snare and tom-toms. The rest of the band re-enters the fray but at half-time, and for the rest of the song's approximately three minutes they cycle through an even more repetitive cascading instrumental, recapitulating the G-F#-Em sequence and then moving up a fifth to C-B-Am. This latter section is extraordinarily pleasant in an almost clichéd manner. It is accompanied by an orchestral string arrangement reminiscent of the sunniest AM radio pop. What the song leaves unresolved lyrically—the singer's love affair—it resolves musically through an indulgence in almost excessively emotive music.

The listener isn't primed to accept this emotional indulgence by the album's cover, however, which features a rough line drawing of a bright yellow bag of money (labeled with a dollar sign) against a garish pink background. The contrast between the pink and yellow is striking, but in an unpleasant way. The colors seem disharmonious, and the image almost cynical, but this visual disharmony and cynicism is answered by the most harmonically beautiful and enticing music. Or is it? The album's leadoff track, "The Concept," is followed by a one minute and 22 second burst of pure guitar feedback noise titled "Satan."[274] The album quickly returns to its bittersweet pop feel over the next eight tracks, but it then veers into uncharted territory again with the final track, a keyboard and

[274] For me, "Satan" is more or less the "proof of concept" track on *Bandwagonesque*. After the swirling uplift of "The Concept," it brings us harshly down to earth and exposes the device in-forming the rest of the album. My Bloody Valentine's *Loveless* contains a similar second track, "Loomer," which echoes the original "Glider" track in sound and construction. After the floating psychedelic onslaught of the first *Loveless* track, "Only Shallow," "Loomer"'s pure noise brings the listener back down to earth.

drum machine fantasia titled "Is This Music?" that departs from the organic sonic signature of the rest of the album. Where the rest of the songs on *Bandwagonesque* (except "Satan") are characterized by sweet melodies, breathy vocals, ringing guitars, and loping drums, "Is This Music?" an instrumental, is comparably militaristic rhythmically, and cold and robotic overall. The album ends with a question, "Is This Music?" but the listener wonders what "this" is—the unrequited saccharine melodies on the rest of the album, the uncharacteristic techno pop at the end, or both? What *is* the concept here? What in-formation is being conveyed? Similarly, the title of the second track, "Satan," seems intended to parody rock music's demonic aspirations, a stark contrast to the beatific sentiments prevalent elsewhere on the album.

Sonically, *Bandwagonesque* is more immediately indebted to another '70s rock group besides the Ramones, Big Star, who the band namechecks in the album's liner notes, but its conceptual ideas are more closely akin to the Ramones and other punk bands.[275] The open-endedness of their compositions, both sonically and lyrically, as well as their inclusion of self-reflexive tracks like "The Concept," "Satan," and "Is This Music?" indicate that the band is thinking about composition in a more conceptual way. The point of their music is not just to make the audience happy. That is part of the point of the music. But within a wholly commercialized cultural system, like rock, emblematized by the moneybag on the record's cover and its witheringly cynical title,

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[275] Admittedly, the namecheck is oblique. Teenage Fanclub reprints a line from a Big Star song, "Thank you friends, wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you." Yet they also lift entire chord progressions from the Big Star catalogue, and there are songs on the album called "Star Sign" and "Guiding Star." Big Star was named after supermarket chain in Memphis, the band's hometown, and a neon sign advertising that chain graces their debut album cover. Other songs on *Bandwagonesque*, "December," "What You Do To Me," "I Don't Know, and " Sidewinder," are all reminiscent of Big Star song titles or lyrics.

rock bands are forced to question the stakes of this happiness. At what Fukuyama described as the end of history, a lot of formerly "independent" rock bands recording for artisanal, craft labels like Creation or Sub Pop began signing to "major" labels, funded by corporate capital, like Geffen, run by music business impresario and Dreamworks founder, David Geffen. Both Teenage Fanclub and Nirvana recorded their second, breakthrough albums, *Bandwagonesque* and *Nevermind*, on the Geffen label. The commercial cooptation of punk rock by major labels like Geffen was a byproduct of the cutthroat market dynamics and capitalist utopianism of the 1989 moment, but as early as 1991 it was being reflected on critically by bands like Teenage Fanclub not so much through their lyrics alone, but through the production of conceptual artworks like Bandwagonesque that through the dialectical assemblage of sonic, visual, and lyrical elements spoke to their audience in a thoroughly premeditated, egalitarian tone that accentuated the equality between subjects—performer and audience—reflected in an optical medium—the CD.[276]

Punk wouldn't be punk without its rebel image. The music wouldn't still be heard if it didn't seem to epitomize rebellion and transgression in sound and conception, and admittedly this isn't all a matter of conceptualist construction. Even in modern day punk songs that still sound like punk songs, played by bands that look like punk bands, the thrilling confrontation between sound in-formation, a type of sur-reality, and the corrosive effects of *social* reality, which is also constructed, is what makes it all sound

[276] Unlike the record or the live musical performance, CD technology does not rely on actual physical changes in air pressure or speed to produce its sonic effects. They are stored digitally as a visual record on the surface of a CD to be "read" by a laser and translated back into sound information.

vital and relevant, what allows it to say something more than what the singer merely *says*. This is true just as much for a straightforwardly political punk song as it is for one that only seems tangentially so.

EXCURSUS: "I Wanna Be Your Joey Ramone"

When the queer, feminist punk band Sleater-Kinney wants to dramatize their internal conflict as female performers in a male dominated, chauvinistic, and misogynistic industry, they sing "I wanna be your Joey Ramone," because as lead guitarist Carrie Brownstein explains in an interview (quoted above), Joey Ramone possessed a style and vulnerability that could appeal to a feminist, lesbian rock star like herself in an openly universal way.[277]

The band's performance of the song maintains the same openness to contradiction as that which Joey embodied. Although it follows the "rules" of three chord punk, clocking in at less than three minutes and maintaining the Ramones strict 8 notes to the bar rhythmic pattern, the song is sonically unique. The instruments slink around the song's rule-bound construction. The bass and guitar skip notes where they're not supposed to, and the drummer adds mini-fills on the tom-toms that sneak from one stereo channel to the other under the bubbling sonic froth stirred up in the verses. During the chorus, the band breaks through this seemingly constrained sonic construction with their patented orgasmic, operatic yelps, delivered several octaves higher than most punk rock vocals. In contrast, Joey sang in a comparatively low voice for a rock singer, which accentuated his cuteness, not his monstrosity. The song's lyrics compare the immediacy of watching a performance by the Ramones with the alienating distance of a rock star who is only a poster on the singer's wall. The first verse begins,

> *It's fine,*
> *when it's all mine.*
> *It's on my wall,*

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[277] Sleater-Kinney, *Call the Doctor*.

it's in my head,
memorize it till I'm dead.
It's yours.
Now I'm so bored.

This boredom is crushed by the appearance of Joey Ramone in the song's chorus. After proclaiming that she wants to be your Joey Ramone, the singer then explains why: because she knows what it feels like to be caught in between the embodied experience of dancing at a Ramones's concert and being trapped in the performer's gaze. After the chorus, she continues,

I just don't care.
Are you that scared?
I swear they're looking right at me.
Push to the front so I can see.
It's what I thought.
It's rock 'n 'roll.

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We go downtown.
Put on your best frown.
Give me a chance.
I know I can dance.

The song concludes with a very slight variation on the first two lines, "It's fine/'cause it's all mine." The shift in preposition from "when" to "because" signals the singer's entrance into self-knowledge, from an historically conditioned alienation to a logically deduced self-confidence, brought about by the egalitarian mutuality of a Ramones's performance. She knows she can dance, she thought this is what standing in the front row would feel like, she doesn't need Joey to tell her. She meets his gaze while making the scene downtown in a pedagogical drama of mutual self-recognition.

CHAPTER FIVE: "There Is No Way Out of the Valley:" The Heterotopian Aesthetics of Television and William S. Burroughs

In February 1974, the writer William S. Burroughs returned to New York City after a thirty-year long global sojourn that had taken him from Mexico City to Paris, Tangiers, London, and many other points in between.[278] Born in St. Louis in 1914, Burroughs had not lived in the city since the 1940s, when he first became acquainted with Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and other members of the Beat generation. Yet upon returning to the city in the 1970s, Burroughs was hailed as a conquering hero, and became a mentor to another group of young writers, musicians, filmmakers, and painters that were establishing a new underground art scene at the downtown New York rock club CBGB.[279] In 1975, Burroughs moved into a converted YMCA locker room at 222 Bowery, just two blocks from the club, which he called "the Bunker," and in the six intervening years, before Burroughs left New York permanently, in 1981, the Bunker would become a literary and artistic salon of sorts for members of the CBGB scene and other artists associated with the downtown art world. In 1978, Burroughs was celebrated at the three-day Nova Convention, which brought together punks, academics, writers, and critics to discuss his work. At the Nova Convention, Burroughs read a short piece called "Bugger the Queen,"

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[278] Throughout this chapter, I rely on Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs* (New York: Bodley Head, 1991), and Barry Miles, *El Hombre Invisible* (New York: Virgin Books, 2002) for biographical and historical information on Burroughs's career during the 1970s.

[279] Burroughs's relationship with the punks is discussed in detail in two books by Victor Bockris, *Beat Punks* (New York: Da Capo, 1998) and *With William Burroughs: A Report from the Bunker* (New York: Seaver Books, 1981).

which praised the UK punk band, The Sex Pistols, for their recent single "God Save the Queen," and announced his allegiance with the punk movement.[280]

Although Burroughs is often acknowledged as an influence on the CBGB scene and the punk movement more generally, few critics have explained what specific impact he might have had on the sound, lyrics, or visual imagery of punk, and no critics have considered what reciprocal impact Burroughs's association with punk might have had on his own writing. Upon returning to New York City in 1974, Burroughs experienced a burst of creativity that resulted in a trilogy of novels that he published from 1981 to 1987—*Cities of the Red Night*, *The Place of Dead Roads*, and *The Western Lands*.[281] As I explain in this chapter, these novels share common thematic and formal concerns with punk music. In particular, Burroughs's late writing and the lyrics and music of the early CBGB punk band Television both focus specifically on the changing qualities of urban space in New York City after its redevelopment by the city planner Robert Moses in the 1960s, and its debt crisis in 1975. They also comment upon the emergence of new queer subcultures in the city during the same period. Burroughs, of course, was one of the first writers to use the term "queer" in a positive way, having written a novel of that name between 1951 and 1953, which was not actually published until 1985, only four years after he had left New York City for good.[282]

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[280] William S. Burroughs, "Bugger the Queen," in *The Adding Machine: Selected Essays* (New York: Seaver Books, 1985).
[281] Burroughs, *Cities of the Red Night* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981); *The Place of Dead Roads* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1983); *The Western Lands* (New York: Viking, 1987).
[282] Burroughs, *Queer* (New York: Viking, 1985).

Burroughs, in his late novels, and Television, in their music, articulate their understanding of late modern space in formal terms, through their rejection of what the critical theorist Jacques Rancière has called "the heteronomy of the sublime" in their avant-garde cultural productions.[283] Like the supersensual, masochistic works of Lou Reed or the Ramones (discussed earlier in this dissertation), neither Burroughs nor Television demands obeisance to a transcendental aesthetic ideal. Instead, these artworks are inspired by what Rancière calls "the heterotopy of the beautiful," an embodied aesthetic of experimentation and play that engages its consumer in a dialectical exchange of judgments. Burroughs and Television's orientation towards the heterotopy of the beautiful, towards avant-garde art and popular culture, reconceptualizes the role of all three within the space of the city. They blend avant-garde art with popular culture as a political response to urban decay, and this blending serves as a remedy, for these artists, to the political cynicism and defeatism of other late modern cultural production.

Heterotopy, Heteronomy, and the Avant-Garde

In his recent essay, "The Aesthetic Dimension: Aesthetics, Politics, and Knowledge," Jacques Rancière draws a distinction between "the heterotopy of the beautiful" and "the "heteronomy of the sublime."[285] As explained in that essay and elsewhere in Rancière's recent writings on avant-garde aesthetics, much of the avant-garde during the twentieth century preferred the heteronomy of the sublime over the heterotopy of the beautiful. For Rancière, artworks are heteronomous in the sense that they attempt to establish their own

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[283] Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension: Aesthetics, Politics, Knowledge," *Critical Inquiry* 36:1 (2009), 1-19.
[285] Ibid., 5-15.

aesthetic rule and demand fealty to that rule on the part of the spectator. For Rancière, however, such fealty is, predictably, anti-democratic. To prefer the heteronomy of the sublime over the heterotopy of the beautiful is to assert art's radical place outside political affairs, which ends up cancelling out the political role of aesthetics in creating democratic communities. According to his definitions, there really is no such thing as apolitical art, just art with a different relationship to what he describes as "the distribution of the sensible." By asserting art's radical alterity, critical theorists like Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Derrida, whom Rancière discusses in his essay, intend to articulate a role for art that would help its audiences see past humdrum political concerns and encourage a radical political commitment. However, for Rancière, aesthetic experience is constitutive of our political participation in a democracy, and hence must be understood as part of that democracy, not originating from some transcendental space beyond it.

Specifically, for Rancière, aesthetic production has the potential to create heterotopian spaces. He does not cite Michel Foucault on the topic of heterotopias or "other spaces," but it is not hard to see how Rancière might have had Foucault in mind.[286] As in Foucault's heterotopias, wherein alternative political realities are imaginable because cultural values are reversed, the heterotopian, in beautiful artworks, for Rancière, gestures towards an alternative political space apart from the humdrum concerns of everyday life in a capitalist republic. He gives the example of a writer for the nineteenth-century French working-class newspaper, *The Worker's Tocsin*.[287] In an article for that newspaper, the writer, who also works as a joiner, spends his day with a fellow joiner

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[286] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," translated by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16:1 (Spring 1986), 22-27.
[287] Rancière, 7-9.

laying floors, observing and admiring his work.[288] By seeing the joiner as an artist and his work as a disinterested aesthetic production, the writer assumes an equality with the joiner, and thus associates with him as if they were allies, united in the same aesthetic project, which also has an ethical dimension, and implies a political attachment. These "as-if" moments are constitutive of any democracy worthy of the name, according to Rancière, which aligns him not just with the Kantian aesthetic tradition, as he invokes it in his essay, but also the pragmatist aesthetics proposed by John Dewey in his book *Art as Experience* (1934).[289] Heterotopian political art can specifically serve a transformative role in making the spectator more aware of his or her own place within what Rancière calls "the distribution of the sensible," the distribution of aesthetic beauty throughout society that is alternately shared with or held back from individual citizens based on their social rank, a distribution which is homologous to society's political arrangements.[290]

Previous to William S. Burroughs's association with the punk movement in New York City during the 1970s, he strongly identified with the heteronomy of the sublime as the primary goal for political art. This orientation is especially evident in his "cut-up" experiments of the 1960s. In these experiments, Burroughs would randomly choose snippets of film, audio, or text that he had either written himself or borrowed from other authors. He would cut these snippets up into smaller fragments and randomly reassemble them into collage-like works that he would then edit or revise to accentuate certain

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[288] Rancière discusses this piece by the joined Louis Gabriel Gauny in more detail in *The Nights of Labour: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, translated by John Drury (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).
[289] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigree, 2005).
[290] See Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, translated by Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2000).

narrative threads, images, forms of repetition, or other rhetorical figures. Burroughs endowed these cut-up experiments with an almost mystical power to interfere with the systems of social control in U.S. society associated with the mass media and government propaganda. The trilogy of novels that Burroughs created after his association with the punk movement exhibit an exhaustion or frustration with this method, and in fact seek to reflect back on it critically in a way that looks forward to a more heterotopian avant-garde aesthetic of the future. In this heterotopian space, a new aesthetic economy flourishes as a place to re-imagine the current social space in which one dwells.

The Poetics of an Empty Gesture: Pointing towards Heterotopia

When Burroughs returned to New York City in 1974, it was a city on the brink. After WWII, the city planner Robert Moses had ascended to an extraordinary level of political power within New York City's municipal government without ever having won elected office.[291] During the post-WWII period, Moses embarked on a number of ambitious public works projects, which included the construction of highways and housing projects, such as the Cross-Bronx Expressway and the Triboro Bridge, which eviscerated many of the city's neighborhoods and exacerbated slum-like conditions in the parts of the city that were majority African-American and Latino, including Harlem, the Bronx, and the Lower East Side. In 1975, the inherent failures of Moses's redevelopment policies would come to a head when the city's government was forced to default on their municipal debt, a

[291] For the classic account of Moses's career and influence, see Robert Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975). See also Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).

financial catastrophe that led to the famous headline in the New York Daily News on Thursday, October 30, 1975, "Ford to City Drop Dead," when then President Gerald R. Ford refused the city a bailout. During the summer of 1977, the Bronx burnt live on national television during baseball's World Series, David Berkowitz engaged in his reign of terror as the "Son of Sam," and on July 13, 1977, the entire city suffered a blackout.[292]

In 1978, Gerard Malanga, an associate of Andy Warhol, took a photo of the writer William S. Burroughs pointing a shotgun at the World Trade Center.[293] Burroughs stands in the bottom left hand corner of the photo, taking aim at Manhattan's skyline. The Twin Towers rise up in the photo's background, in the far-right hand corner of the frame, directly opposite the barrel of Burroughs's gun. Burroughs's gesture is may seem offensive after the events of September 11, 2001, but it nevertheless reminds the viewer of the original status of these buildings, not as symbols of national pride, but rather the dehumanizing power of finance capital, which had reshaped the urban landscape of New York City in the years following WWII.

In his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the French sociologist Michel de Certeau describes "seeing Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center," which as he puts it, "transforms the bewitching world by which one was possessed into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down

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[292] See Jonathan Mahler, *Ladies and Gentleman, The Bronx Is Burning: Baseball, Politics, and the Battle for the Soul of a City* (New York: Picador, 2005).
[293] The photo is displayed online at Aeroplastics Contemporary, http://previous.aeroplastics.net/ 2007_in_my_solitude/Malanga/Malanga_Burroughs.jpg (accessed October 30, 2011).

like a god."[294] To see Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center is to play god, an awfully presumptuous position, according to de Certeau. Malanga's photo reverses this godlike perspective and reinscribes the space of the towers as playthings on a human scale. Especially from our contemporary vantage point, the photo exudes the threat of terroristic destruction, but it also invokes the promise of aesthetic creation, to reverse political hierarchies in an act of heterotopian worldmaking, which establishes an "as-if" in the mind of the viewer.

When the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center were first opened in 1971, the Port Authority, which managed them, found it difficult to fill their space. Yet, all around them, in the city over which they towered, space seemed to be running out. Burroughs registers these crisis conditions in New York City in the first novel in his late trilogy, *The Cities of the Red Night*, published in 1981. In a preface to that novel, titled "Fore!" Burroughs writes,

> …there is simply no room left for 'freedom from the tyranny of government' since city dwellers depend on it for food, power, water, transportation, and welfare. Your right to live where you want, with companions of your choosing, under laws to which you agree, died in the eighteenth century. . . Only a miracle or a disaster could restore it.[295]

Burroughs is reflecting, in this preface, on the political status of pirate communes during the eighteenth century, the ostensible focus of his novel, which nevertheless manages to cover a vast amount of spatial and temporal ground in its over 300 pages worth of relatively plot-less text, including a murder mystery and contemporary government conspiracies. Burroughs invokes pirate communes, in the preface, as an alternative mode

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[294] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 91-92.
[295] Burroughs, *Cities of the Red Night*, xv.

of political organization to what he believes is the falsely democratic utopianism of finance capital. Earlier in the preface, he writes,

> The liberal principles embodied in the French and American revolutions and later in the liberal revolutions of 1848 had already been codified and put into practice by pirate communes a hundred years earlier . . . but [these pirate communes] were not able to maintain themselves since they were not sufficiently populous to withstand attack. Had they been able to do so, the history of the world could have been altered. . . . Imagine such a movement on a world-wide scale. Faced by the actual practice of freedom, the French and American revolutions would be forced to stand by their words.[296]

When Burroughs writes that only "a miracle or disaster" could restore the rights of "city dwellers" to "live where [they] want, with companions of [their] own choosing, under laws to which [they] agree," he may seem to exhibit bad faith in such a magical, political change taking place. But his comments are rendered slightly ironic when one considers that, in the next section of *Cities*, titled "Invocation," he dedicates the book "to all the scribes and artists and practitioners of magic through which these spirits have been manifested."[297]

Elsewhere, in a 1975 interview with the British musician, Jimmy Page, lead guitarist for the distinctively non-punk band Led Zeppelin, Burroughs specifically addressed what he understood to be the political potential of magic. For Burroughs, the belief in magic simply corresponds to "the deep conviction that nothing happens unless someone wills it to happen."[298] For Burroughs, the realm of magic is roughly equivalent to the psychoanalytic realm of fantasy. It is unreal, but not experienced as such by the

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[296] Ibid., xi-xiv.
[297] Ibid., xviii.
[298] William Burroughs, "Rock Magic: Jimmy Page, Led Zeppelin, and a Search for the Elusive Stairway to Heaven," *Crawdaddy!* July 1975, 36.

subject. The realm of fantasy is aesthetic, but it is also political, since aesthetic perceptions comingle with our understandings of political affairs.

The political reality of the pirate commune, in the context of Burroughs's preface and *The Cities of the Red Night* trilogy more generally, functions as a heterotopian figure of political organization, a beautiful mutation in the political and aesthetic organization of society.[299] The spirit of the commune invokes a new *sensus communis*—a new common, aesthetic sense for political organization. Similar figures occur throughout Burroughs's late trilogy, in the form also of Western cowboy gangs and nomadic tribes of magicians and shamans. Burroughs had first delineated figures of this type in his 1969 novel *The Wild Boys,* a direct reflection on Burroughs's involvement in countercultural movements during the 1960s, but they occur with increasing frequency and intensity in his late trilogy.[300] This change occurs because of his association with the New York punk scene, a rebel band of urban avant-gardists that shared Burroughs's political concern with the corporate takeover of the city, the media, and national space.

Burroughs never discusses the punk movement directly in his fiction, and he only addresses it in the most oblique ways in his critical writing, essays, and interviews (for instance, "Bugger the Queen," mentioned above), but heterotopian figures of punk fantasy nonetheless turn up in his late fiction, in particular in a scene from the final novel

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[299] In medical discourse, "heterotopy" refers to "the occurrence of a tumor in a part where the elements of which it is composed do not normally exist. "heterotopy, n.". *OED Online*. September 2011. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.libproxy.csun.edu/view/Entry/86526?redirectedFrom=heterotopy (accessed October 30, 2011).

[300] Burroughs, *The Wild Boys* (New York: Grove, 1971).

of his trilogy *The Western Lands* called "The Valley."[301] In "The Valley" section of *The Western Lands*, Burroughs describes a tribal culture, somewhere south of the U.S. border, cut off from civilization. This tribe lives in a valley, from which "there is no way in or out."[302] Within the valley, most of the inhabitants are starving, but they are only "kept alive," according to the native informant in whose voice this section is written, "by music," which is produced by a specific sub-sect of the valley dwellers, a group called "the Corners or Corn-Eaters" because of their willingness to eat "a strain of radioactive blue corn" native to the valley.[303] Most of the valley dwellers stay away from the blue corn, because "it rots the gums…and attacks the palate…finally the tongue and gums and lips are eaten away to the bone so that the Corn-Eaters resemble grinning skulls, their contaminated flesh glowing in the dark."[304] The Corners resemble, in however an oblique way, the punk musicians that Burroughs was encountering on the Bowery during the 1970s. Besides the fact that the Corners are musicians, a skill that they share with the punks, they also indulge in the consumption of blue corn, a destructive and addictive substance not unlike the heroin preferred by Burroughs and the punks as their drug of choice. Although the rural setting for the Corners episode is obviously distinct from the urban landscape that Burroughs and the punks inhabited, there is a clear sense that both groups played the same role in their respective societies, giving the other inhabitants hope, at least suggesting a way out of the valley, even if that journey involved a mental

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[301] Burroughs, *The Western Lands*, 228-234.
[302] Ibid., 228.
[303] Ibid., 230-231.
[304] Ibid., 230.

excursion deeper into one's own psyche, at the level of aesthetic form, rather than a physical movement out of that space.

Instead of questing single-mindedly after a heteronomic aesthetic of transcendence, as Burroughs did in his cut-up works, the strain of CBGB punk represented by Burroughs and Television balances delicate aesthetic forms with heavily expressive content. The need for a political miracle is translated, in this work, into a series of aesthetic productions or magical incantations, which may at times seem far removed from their political origins, but beckon to their reader or listener to join a psychic struggle against the forces of corporate domination. The urban crisis of distribution and accumulation in New York City in the 1970s occurs to these artists as a violent incursion of the network society into the unconscious. The only way out is through the development of a distinct artistic vision, "a distant vision," the etymological root of the term "*tele*-vision," which removes one from the current social and political situation and transports her into a different imaginary place and time, a different distribution of the sensible.

The Sound of a Little Voice and the Touch of a Little Hand

The social and political emptiness of the distribution of the sensible in New York City at the time when Burroughs was writing is described most straightforwardly in the middle number of his late trilogy, *The Place of Dead Roads*, which was published in 1983. Much of this novel takes place in and around Burroughs's Bowery apartment and involves characters that could serve as doubles for members of the CBGB scene, most especially, the novel's hero Kim Carsons, an Old West cowboy, but also a hustler and drug addict,

like Burroughs's punk friends. In a short passage from the novel, Burroughs relates his fleeting impressions of the late-modern city from the point of view of Carsons, who is also partially autobiographical, and his sidekick Boy Jones. The passage occurs as the two characters, gay cowboys of uncertain spatial and temporal origin, travel through time copulating repetitively, unable to escape the strictures of Burroughs's aesthetic vision:

> The Bunker is dusty, dust on the old office safe, on the pipe threaders and sledgehammers, dust on his father's picture. The West has only its short past and no future, no light.
>
> Kim feels that New York City has congealed into frozen stills in his absence, awaiting the sound of a little voice and the touch of a little hand. . . . Boy walks into an Italian social club on Bleecker Street. A moment of dead ominous silence, dominoes frozen in the air.[305]

For Burroughs, New York had become a cold, silent place, but this silence does not signify peace or tranquility. Rather, silence in this passage signifies stasis, "frozen stills," not experienced (in the German sense of *Ehfarung* or passing through, counter to alienation), but merely witnessed and described.[306] Redemption lies in "the sound of a little voice and the touch of a little hand," perhaps singing a song or writing a novel. Here Burroughs evokes a dialectic between the hand and the voice, on one side, and the film camera and media technology, what he mythopoetically describes as "the Reality Studio," on the other; that is, a dialectic between two media systems, one which ensnares

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[305] Burroughs, *The Place of Dead Roads*, 301.

[306] On the difference in German between the two types of "experience" signified by the words "*Erlebnis*" and "*Ehfarung*," see Miriam Hansen, "Foreword," to Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Towards an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, translated by Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xvi-xx. As Hansen notes, this distinction played an important role in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, especially the work of Ernst Block, Theodor Adorno, and Walter Benjamin.

and the other which liberates.[307] The Reality Studio, which is controlled by the forces of reaction, is what strips everyday life and experience of its meaning. The hand and the voice are what redeem it. They are the political miracle for which Burroughs longed in the preface to *Cities of the Red Night*. An economically based critique of contemporary urban politics is translated into the terms of an aesthetic transaction—transgression against the frozen, staid film stills of the Reality Studio.

A similar form of transgression and transference occurs in the music and lyrics of the band Television who first performed at CBGB on March 31, 1974, and as legend would have it, built the original stage in the club. Throughout the 1970s, they would be one of the bands most strongly associated with the CBGB scene. The band was formed by two high school dropouts, Richard Hell and Tom Verlaine, in 1973. Hell and Verlaine were born Richard Meyers and Tom Miller, respectively, in 1949. Meyers changed his name to Hell after the eighteenth-century French poet Arthur Rimbaud's famous poem *A Season in Hell*, and Miller took the name of Rimbaud's lover, the older poet Paul Verlaine. This choice of names seems to invoke a homoerotic relationship between Hell and Verlaine, which they always dangled teasingly before their audience but never actually acknowledged. Hell moved to New York City in 1969, and Verlaine followed in 1971. Initially, both men moved to the city with the intention of becoming poets. Hell started the small literary journal *Genesis:Grasp* in 1969, and Verlaine was a contributor. In 1971, they also self-published a book of poetry collaboratively under the pseudonym

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[307] Burroughs first mentions the Reality Studio in *The Soft Machine*. See also Larry McCaffery, ed. *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Science Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1992).

Theresa Stern called *Wanna Go Out?*[308] They created the artist's photo for Theresa by dressing in drag, photographing themselves, and superimposing the two photos over each other.[309] Their first band, the Neon Boys, broke up before recording an official album, although some demos have since shown up on bootlegs. In 1974, their new band Television was one of the first punk bands to play CBGB once it started featuring live music. It was one of the few clubs in New York City to feature original music at the time. In a journal entry dated May 25-28, 1970, Hell wrote, "After having read *The Job* [a book-length interview between Burroughs and Daniel Odier, published in 1969] I'm certain Burroughs' thought will have an impact on the next century comparable to Marx's and Nietzche's on this. Absolutely brilliant great man."[310] At the time he was writing, Hell was a nobody who had recently moved to New York City from Lexington, Kentucky, by way of a reform school in Pennsylvania, but during the next decade, Hell would come to lead the New York punk scene and embody its anarchic spirit. Years later, after Burroughs's death, in a 1997 essay called "My Burroughs," Hell wrote, "I consider Burroughs the real Rimbaud." That is, Burroughs is a hero to Hell's avant-garde in the same way Rimbaud was to the European avant-garde of the earlier twentieth century.

Hell would leave Television before they recorded their first album, in 1977, but what he realized after reading Burroughs would influence the aesthetic program of the band he helped found. For Burroughs, Hell, and Verlaine, transgression of late modern systems of media technology, including the rarefied precincts of the art world, was

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[308] Theresa Stern, *Wanna Go Out?* (New York: Dot, 1973).
[309] Hell documents their exploits on his website, www.richardhell.com (accessed October 30, 2011).
[310] Richard Hell, "Journal," 2 October 1969-2 October 1970, The Richard Hell Papers, MSS 144, I, 1, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries, 46.

tantamount to transgression of the technocratic structures of the network society itself. There is no way out of this system, but there is a way to work through it. As a band, Television foregrounds the concern with media technology and the problems it poses in a technocratic society. One needs to look no further than the band's name. But this concern with mediation in fact runs much deeper, influencing every level of the band's visual and musical presentation. Their first album, *Marquee Moon*—nature (the moon) made theatrical, reminiscent of Burroughs—featured a cover photo by a young Robert Mapplethorpe, reproduced not from the original negative, but from a Xerox photocopy. The band appears to the listener through a doubled lens, which does not bring them into tighter focus, enhancing their visual appeal, but obscures it and renders them ghostly, almost saint-like. This obsession with the obscure, mediated quality of contemporary experience extends to the album's lyrics. Besides the title track "Marquee Moon"—"There I stand 'neath the Marquee Moon/Just waiting/Hesitating . . ."—there's the even more apt "Venus:"

> Tight toy night, streets were so bright,
> The world looked so thin between my bones and skin
> there stood another person who was a little surprised
> to be face to face with a world so alive.
> I fell.
> DIDJA FEEL LOW? NO, Not at all. HUH???
> I fell right into the Arms of Venus de Milo.
> I stood up, walked out of the Arms of Venus de Milo.
> You know it's all like some new kind of drug.
> My senses are sharp and my hands are like gloves.
> Broadway looked so medieval—
> it seemed to flap like little pages:
> I fell sideways laughing with a friend from many stages.
> How I felt.[311]

[311] These lyrics, by Tom Verlaine, are copied directly from the liner notes to the 2003 Elektra reissue of *Marquee Moon*.

The electrical power of the streetlights permeates Tom Verlaine's (the lyricist and singer's) body, and this illumination in turn transmogrifies Verlaine's experience of the city. It doesn't enhance it. "Broadway looks so medieval," like a book, an illuminated manuscript in neon, a film still rather than three-dimensional space. The experience of a city is more like a hallucination, "some new kind of drug," than an extension of the speaker's subjective experience, and this confusion about the singer's experience of the city is registered in the world's "thinness" between his bones and skin.

For Television, as for Burroughs (at least in his later work), this synaesthetic, hallucinatory experience of the city has less to do with "tuning in, and dropping out" or "better living through chemistry" than it does with the changing quality of urban space itself, its privatization and commodification. In the late novels of Burroughs and in punk lyrics we have come a long way from the first Beat generation's romanticization of urban experience, as in Ginsberg's *Howl* or Kerouac's *Subterraneans*; also, the flat, haunted New York of Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*, inspired by the affectless, conspicuous consumption of loft living, is not very far in the future.[312] Even Burroughs's image of the city as an "interzone," a space between the regulatory regimes of national governments, which he invokes in his second novel *Naked Lunch*, seems too optimistic in this context. When punk rock first started to be played at CBGB, and Burroughs returned to town, the battle over urban space being fought in a text like *Howl* was over, and Moloch had won. Burroughs and early punk bands like Television dwelled in the spaces

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[312] Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (New York: Vintage, 1991); Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1956); Jack Kerouac, *The Subterraneans* (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

ruined by this social reorganization, but they find a way out not through a heteronomous surrender to the sublime, but through the sophisticated, self-reflexive production of aesthetic heterotopy.

The solution to the problems associated with the urban crisis in Burroughs's late fiction and Television's music and lyrics is the heterotopian creation of as-ifs in the mind of the spectator. The same Burroughsian hands and voice, repulsed by contemporary urban experience, but simultaneously recognizing its potential, are at play in Television's "Venus." The song ends with a memory of Tom Verlaine's youthful exploits with his childhood friend Richard Hell. Verlaine sings,

> Then Richie, Richie said:
> "Hey man, let's dress up like cops
> Think of what we could do!"
> Something, something said "you better not."

Hell was the individual singularly most responsible for moving Verlaine away from the Greenwich Village folk scene, with its emphasis on confessional songwriting and the artist-as-genius model, towards the more self-reflexive style of rock performance often associated with punk rock. As expressed in the lyrics to "Venus," living the punk rock lifestyle, falling into "the arms of Venus de Milo," is not a matter of getting high or getting laid, it has to do with masquerade—dressing like cops in order to see what you can do, how far you can go, naming yourself after a French poet, or combining your image with your best friend's in order to create a new person, a new poetic voice. Such masquerade may involve dressing like cops, but it does not entail the establishment of a new regulatory ideal; instead, the aesthetic invoked in "Venus" is loosening, free, like falling through the air.

Before Television, Hell and Verlaine were poets, but writing could only go so far as a means of bringing about "miracles or disasters" in a society dominated by the spectacle and engendering ever more rapid forms of media proliferation and convergence—the record player, audio tape, film and still cameras, Xerox machines, typewriters, computers. Television's revolutionary project had to be articulated not only at the level of lyrics, but also sound, the strumming of guitars and the beating of drums, a blissful performance of the collision between embodiment and externality. Contrary to most critics' stereotypes of the CBGB scene as angry and abrasive, Television's music is almost fragile, characterized by long, interweaving guitar solos, and the abandonment of the blues scale, which was the dominant harmonic mode in most 1970s rock music. Television instead favored extended modal jamming inspired by their listening to free jazz. The space of a Television song is a heterotopian space of beautiful formal experimentation and sonic irregularity that is almost trancelike in its magical power to transport the listener out of her everyday experience. Such formal experimentation by a band like Television was part and parcel of CBGB punk's early focus on form and technique, which was largely abandoned by later, more aggressive punk bands in the late 1970s and 1980s in London, L.A., and other punk hotspots. Perhaps this is why New York punk has so often been overlooked in academic accounts of the punk movement that have sought to relate it to other twentieth-century avant-garde movements.[313]

The lyrics of "Venus" indulge in the extended conceit of falling into the arms of a statue famous for having no arms, while the music propels the listener forward into a

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[313] See Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge, 1979), and Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth-Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990).

mental space of blissful ambiguity and uplift. "Venus," a short, four-minute pop song is remarkable for its twin guitars playing complicated melody lines in harmony with each other, which often run counter to the poetic line of the vocal. The verses are delivered in what comes off sounding an awful lot like a march rhythm, with heavy accents being applied by the drummer on each alternating beat. The lyrics say that the singer has fallen, but as the song ends, the guitarists reach higher and higher up the neck of the guitar for a perfect note to resolve their long solos and melody lines that extend much longer than rock music's typical four or five note hooks. There are hooks here, but they are shaped like arabesques and they transport the listener to a place within the coordinates of bodily experience, the arms of Venus de Milo, which are nevertheless products, in this context, of the singer's imagination.

So Elegant, So Intelligent

In his late trilogy, Burroughs reflects on his association with punk bands like Television and the other artists that congregated at CBGB in order to systematize the insights he discovered in New York City in the 1970s. His goal is to create a distant vision of a countercultural future that seemed lost at the time of his writing, a cool avant-garde vision to compete with what Marshall McLuhan called the hot medium of television.[314] Such systematization does not just involve the description of revolutionary characters. Burroughs's distant vision also involves a rethinking of literary form that may at times seem far removed from matters of political expediency, and actually look like a self-reflexive, formal step backwards, but which can also be understood within the larger

[314] See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

context of Burroughs's aesthetic production as a necessary, diagonal move away from the heteronomy of his cut-up works. Although the final novel in the trilogy, *The Western Lands*, contains cut-up material, most of it leftover from the sixties, it is not a cut-up novel. Rather, the novel's various plots and subplots are obviously scrambled, but overall syntactic unity and a basic plot structure, the partially autobiographical memoir of a dying writer, is maintained. Whenever cut-up material is involved, it is clearly labeled as such. For instance, near the end of the novel, Burroughs writes,

> Then Ba, the Heart. "Feeling's dull decay." Nothing remains to him but his feeling for cats. Human feelings are withering away to lifeless fragments abandoned in a distant drawer. "Held a little boy photo in his withered hand . . . dim jerky far away someone has shut a bureau drawer."—(cut up, circa 1962-63).[315]

Ellipses as film cuts and syntactically notated asides are self-consciously employed by Burroughs as meta-textual gestures designed to encourage reflection within the reader on the novel's formal construction. They demystify Burroughs's use of cut-up material and complement the novel's loose narrative structure. Burroughs originally endowed the cut-ups with mystical transformative powers; here he admits their limitations and strives to reestablish communication with his audience at an emotional level.

The title of Burroughs's final novel *The Western Lands* is a partial allusion to T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Eliot's *Waste Land* had figured prominently in Burroughs's cut-up experiments of the 1970s. So it comes as no surprise when Burroughs decides to end what he understood as the whole of his literary enterprise with an offhanded, jibing line only half-cribbed from it, "Hurry up, please. It's time," the British barman's equivalent to the U.S.'s "last call." With this allusion, Burroughs may mark the futility of the literary

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[315] Burroughs, *The Western Lands*, 255-266.

enterprise, but in a most tantalizing way, as an indulgence in the futile artificiality of the literary enterprise holding the stolid importance of the natural world at bay in a brief creation of a heterotopian as-if.[316] Here, Burroughs encounters Eliot, a fellow St. Louisian, whose literary trajectory through Harvard and Europe was a model for his own, as a master whose *Waste Land* helped establish the modernist avant-garde paradigm. Burroughs and the punks were ostracized from the avant-garde across space and time; at the end of *The Western Lands*, Burroughs reestablishes a flimsy yet poignant link. The work of punk's poetic enterprise is completed, at least for Burroughs, by integrating a melancholy trace, from Eliot, to be picked up and extended.

By the time readers get to this point in *The Western Lands*, they may feel as though they are awfully far away from New York City and the punk rock milieu that I am claiming informed Burroughs's composition of the novel—in London, St. Louis, or perhaps even the Egyptian Land of the Dead that Burroughs also evokes in the novel's title. But this distance is exactly what I claim Burroughs and at least some punk bands at CBGB wanted to establish between their art and social reality. Unlike the homologies that other writers on punk have argued the genre establishes between the form of the music and the listener's class position, this punk poetics, the punk poetics of Burroughs, Verlaine, and Hell, creates a heterotopian space in the imagination, in which resistance against the forced strictures of urban development are once again possible, if only momentarily, through an escape into aesthetic form. But in an urban space in which opportunities to escape are ever more fleeting, these glimpses of heterotopia appear like

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[316] T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), line 141.

open windows onto another world at which to sit and marvel—at a more democratic vista to come.

CHAPTER SIX: Cyberspace as Any-Space-Whatsoever: The Post-Punk Soundscapes of William Gibson

In 1991, Duke University Press published a re-edited version of a 1988 issue of *The Mississippi Review* titled *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Science Fiction*.[317] The title of the collection comes from a line in William S. Burroughs's cut-up novel *The Soft Machine* (1961) (later repurposed in *Nova Express* (1964)), "Storm the Reality Studio and retake the universe."[318] For Burroughs, the Reality Studio described all of the institutions and technologies that contribute to our day-to-day, common sense understanding of the world. They are what dissuade us from the wisdom of the proverb that Burroughs claimed to have inherited from the medieval Islamic mystic Hassan i Sabbah, perhaps via Friedrich Nietzsche, who was also known to quote it, "Nothing is true. Everything is permitted."[319] Because of the Reality Studio, which may include Hollywood films, drug laws, or the police, we "permit" the authorities to impose their version of reality upon us. According to Burroughs, via his cut-up technique, this process may be reversed.

Since *Storming the Reality Studio* was published, another William, and a disciple of Burroughs, William Gibson has, along with his sometimes co-author Bruce Sterling, become the author most synonymous with the so-called "cyberpunk" genre that volume was meant to represent. Far from a punk, Gibson himself is a sort of unreformed hippie who fled to Vancouver during the Vietnam War in order to dodge the draft. Although influenced by punk ideologies and iconographies, his novels are actually nostalgic for a

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[317] McCaffery, ed. *Storming the Reality Studio.* See also, *Mississippi Review* 16:2-3 (1988).
[318] Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*, 151, and *Nova Express* (NY: Grove, 1992), 59.
[319] Burroughs, *Cities of the Red Night*, 158, and Nietzsche, 287.

period before punk happened, which the new genre was actually thought to disrupt, the 1960s counterculture in its classical form, as it was described, for instance, by Theodore Roszak in his influential 1969 book *The Making of a Counter Culture*.[320] This is not to say, however, that Gibson is not "punk" in the sense that all the texts in "A School for Singing" are punk. Rather, analyzing three novels by Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984), *Pattern Recognition* (2003), and *Spook Country* (2007) within the frame for understanding punk configurations and performances explored in "School" suggests just how expansive that frame can be, shifting our focus, as cultural historians and critics, away from commodification or reification and towards utopia in the postmodern era.[321] As with all of the texts described in this dissertation, these novels may be read as heterotopian mappings of "any-space-whatsoever," a space which functions as what Jacques Derrida, following Plato, called a *khora* or Martin Heidegger *Lichtung*, that is, a clearing in space and time that illuminates the interval between being and non-being, or what Heidegger calls "being-in as such."[322] Such a space is what artists crave when space has run out or been rendered meaningless by financialization. Gibson and Burroughs attempt to occupy this space, in the spirit of the punks that came before them.

Gibson's nostalgia for a space beyond punk, before punk, but within punk are strewn throughout his corpus, nowhere more so than in the novel that many would say founded and popularized the cyberpunk genre, *Neuromancer*. *Neuromancer* tells the story

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[320] Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).
[321] William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984); *Pattern Recognition* (New York: Berkley, 2003); and *Spook Country* (New York: Berkley, 2007).
[322] On "being-in as such," see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 169-172. See also Jacques Derrida, "As If It Were Possible, 'Within Such Limits…'" 343-370.

of a hacker named Henry Dorsett Case, whose last name may have been inspired by the spiritualist Edgar Cayce, despite the difference in pronunciation ("case" vs. "kay-cee"). The later protagonist of *Pattern Recognition*, who is clearly connected to Case within Gibson's fictional universe, is Cayce Pollard, soldering the link to the spiritualist. Pollard is a style hunter with an almost supernatural ability to predict the success of a brand or logo. She is searching for her father, Win, who the reader finds out died during the World Trade Center attacks in 2001, as well as the creators of a film, being distributed online, called "The Footage." Reminiscing about her father, Pollard recalls that "her friends had mistaken him for the younger William S. Burroughs," in the one photo she could produce of him for the purposes of location after 9/11.[323] Cayce Pollard and hence Henry Dorsett Case are spiritual incarnations of Edgar Cayce with William S. Burroughs as their father. Through this genealogy, which is aesthetic and biological, Gibson is trying to figure himself, as author, within punk history, a son to the godfather of punk who also has an almost supernatural ability to see through what *Neuromancer* describes as the "consensual hallucination" that is "cyberspace," a term Gibson coined, as well as the highly complicated material world of brands and logos that cyberspace complements.[324] Gibson's ability to perform this penetrating gaze is contingent upon a skill set that Case Dorsett, at least, as Gibson describes it in *Neuromancer*, was stripped of in "a bed in a Memphis hotel," referencing the deaths of both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Elvis Presley, and by extension, the counterculture.[325] In that hotel room in Memphis, a link to the past was broken and Case was set adrift from his community in what Gibson

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[323] Gibson, *Pattern Recognition*, 186.
[324] Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 5.
[325] Ibid., 6.

calls "the Sprawl," a euphemistic term for most of the Eastern seaboard of the United States (at least from Boston to Atlanta) that is rundown and completely overdeveloped. Like the counterculture dissidents described by Theodore Roszak, as well as Burroughs, Dorsett, and the two Cayces, Gibson is alienated from this technocratic world even as he is bemused and fascinated by it.

His nostalgia is for a world before this bemusement, this alienation, this derangement, and it is expressed in all three novels as a nostalgia for a world before punk rock, and alongside it, but also within it. In his writing on popular music, Gibson has focused on decidedly non-punk artists, for instance, Steely Dan and U2, the latter of which, at least, had an early connection to the punk cultural formation, but has drifted away from that form's do-it-yourself ethos over the last couple decades.[326] In fact, Gibson views Steely Dan as being closer in spirit to his literary father William S. Burroughs than the punks. Steely Dan, of course, were named after a dildo mentioned in *Naked Lunch*, but Gibson also notes that they employ many of Burroughs's compositional methods in arranging their songs, especially when it came to their lyrics, which were often Burroughs-style cut-ups (lyrics produced by combining two different, unrelated lyrics in an aleatoric way).[327] Gibson, in fact, understands the whole collaboration between Steely Dan's principles, Walter Becker and Donald Fagen, in these terms, as two halves of the same cut-up producing what Burroughs's called "the third

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[326] William Gibson, "Any 'Mount of World," in *Distrust that Particular Flavor* (NY: Berkley, 2012), 27-34; and "U2's City of Blinding Lights," *Wired*, August 2005, http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/13.08/ u2_pr.html (accessed online October 24, 2013).

[327] William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text*, edited by James Grauerholz and Barry Miles (NY: Grove, 2001), 77.

mind," also the name of a book by Burroughs and his closest collaborator Brion Gysin.[328] What Gibson finds so subversive about Steely Dan, which obviously cannot be said of most punk bands that were inspired by Burroughs, is that their music can be played in a supermarket, so that you might be hearing a song about Watergate, adultery, or cocaine without really knowing it, and it was just this kind of subliminal messaging that Burroughs and by extension Gibson thought were necessary for unlocking the ideological traps or fetters to human freedom that Deleuze, drawing from Burroughs, described as the "societies of control," embodied in the Reality Studio.[329] According to Deleuze, the "society of control" embodies the cultural impetus towards coding, surveillance, and abstraction as the *sine qua non* of the postmodern security state. These are typically the forms of social control that the punks figured themselves as rebelling against; hence, it is curious to read Gibson, the so-called cyberpunk writer, bar none, discovering a more successful form of social protest being staged against them in the music of Steely Dan, often thought of as middle-of-the-road rock artists.

Gibson's enchantment with reggae dub makes a little more sense for a cyberpunk author.[330] After all, Dick Hebdige notes in his book *Subculture* that dub was one of the few types of non-punk music that British punks, at least, enjoyed.[331] Their own music was, after all, a kind of anti-music, which was intended to match the righteous "dread"

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[328] Gibson, "Any 'Mount of World," 29; William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind* (New York: Grove, 1982).
[329] Gibson, "Any 'Mount of World," 29; Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (Winter 1992), 3-7; and Burroughs, "The Limits of Control," in *The Adding Machine*, 117-121.
[330] Gibson, "God's Little Toys: Confessions of a Cut and Paste Artist," *Wired*, July 2005, http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/13.07/gibson.html (accessed October 24, 2013).
[331] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, 64-70.

pose of dub reggae in spirit if not in form. If reggae dub was the lower frequencies of Zion's sufferers bubbling up from the fleshpots of Babylon, punk was the ravings of its anarchic minstrels, the children of the parent culture, not its castaways, attempting to rip holes in the sonic fabric of daily life. This figuration of punk and dub is reflected in *Neuromancer*, although not in very glowing terms vis-à-vis the former.

Gibson's Soundscapes

Gibson's focus on sound begins as early as the first sentence in *Neuromancer*, even if it is sound filtered through a visual image: "The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel" (3). In other words, the sky looks like television static, and the reader is made to imagine the familiar sound that usually accompanies such an image—white noise. White noise is a scrambled signal, and to see the world through its haze is to take a dim view of that world; it confuses and annoys. In this sentence, the novel's protagonist, Case, views the sky as white noise, and thus signifies for the reader already the way in which modes of electronically mediated perception have intervened on the most sacred regions of human experience in the dystopian setting of this novel. Even gazing at the sky, daydreaming, has been corrupted. Romanticism, to which the title alludes, is mocked. Neuromancer = "new romancer" (also the name of a commercially-oriented punk subgenre in the 1980s).

Distortions of sound or its absence are disturbing to the protagonist, Case, and they set the mood for the existentially fraught exploration of his own consciousness that will provide the novel with most of its thematic material (however much that material may be cloaked in a traditional heist or action plot). Like many detective or mystery

novels, *Neuromancer*'s first set piece takes place in a bar. Case sits on a barstool chatting with the bartender Ratz. Gibson writes,

> As Case was picking up his beer, one of those strange instants of silence descended, as though a hundred unrelated conversations had simultaneously arrived at the same pause. Then the whore's giggle rang out, tinged with hysteria.
> Ratz grunted, "An angel passed." (4)

A momentary silence provides a temporary relief from the oppressive noise that sets the tone for everyday life elsewhere in Gibson's post-apocalyptic world. That this relief is disrupted by a "whore's giggle" betrays the fact that Case's current problems are at least partially romantic. The angel passing through the room seems likely to be Case's former lover, Linda Lee, who died as a result of Case's former career as a cyber-"cowboy" or hacker.

The name Linda Lee is likely an allusion to a lyric in a distinctively "countercultural" 1960s song, "Cool It Down," by the Velvet Underground, which contains the lyrics,

> I'm just around the corner
> You know I'm looking for Miss Linda Lee
> 'Cause she's got the power to love me by the hour
> Gives me double-u L-O-V-E[332]

The authenticity of this allusion is supported by the fact that Gibson has acknowledged his love for the Velvet Underground elsewhere in his work. He would later name an entire novel after one of their songs, "All Tomorrow's Parties," and in a 1986 interview with Larry McCaffery, he claimed that he originally wanted to use another line from a Velvet Underground song, "Sunday Morning," as the epigraph to *Neuromancer*: "Watch

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[332] The Velvet Underground, *Loaded* (New York: Cotillion, 1970).

out, the world's behind you."[333] Although the Velvet Underground are often named as a proto-punk band and undoubtedly had a profound influence on the sound and thematic content of later punk music, they had just as much in common with the 60s rock counterculture as they did with the 70s punk subculture (despite their aforementioned disidentification from the former). For instance, a contemporary listener could be forgiven for mistaking a 1969 concert recording of the Velvet Underground made at the San Francisco rock club The Matrix, and released as part of the Velvet Underground *Bootleg Series* in 2001, for a Grateful Dead bootleg of the same era.[334] In concert, VU, like the Dead, would stretch their recorded songs out into long instrumental jams. Both bands experimented with noise and psychedelic lighting effects to bring about altered states of consciousness in their audience, the Grateful Dead especially during their song-suite "Dark Star." The *Bootleg Series* recording was made by a young VU fan, Robert Quine, who would later go on to play guitar in the punk band the Voidoids. It would have been nearly impossible for Gibson to have known of this recording when he wrote *Neuromancer*—it only surfaced in the early part of the 2000s—but the fact that "the matrix" turns up as a key term in *Neuromancer* used interchangeably with Gibson's neologism "cyberspace," and the fact that one of Case's mentors was named Bobby Quine are coincidences too enticing to ignore.[335] Robert Quine the guitarist had been collaborating with Lou Reed at the time that Gibson was writing *Neuromancer*, a

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[333] The Velvet Underground, *The Velvet Underground and Nico* (New York: Verve, 1967); Larry McCaffery, "An Interview with William Gibson," in *Storming the Reality Studio*, 265.

[334] The Velvet Underground, *Bootleg Series, vol. 1: The Quine Tapes* (New York: Polydor, 2001).

[335] The last name Quine could also be a reference to the philosopher Willard Van Orman Quine, who was actually the guitarist Robert Quine's uncle.

relationship described by Reed's biographer Victor Bockris in terms very close to the "third mind" ensembles of Becker and Fagen, Burroughs and Gysin.[336]

When Gibson chose the term "matrix" as a synonym for "cyberspace," the alternate space of consciousness into which the hacker is plunged when interacting with virtual technologies, he meant to invoke an alternative topology of space different than the one that we are normally used to in the humdrum world of the five senses. This is the same reason why the Matrix's owners chose this term as the name of their club. Topology was a hot topic in the swinging 60s. Geographical re-mappings of the mind and space, it was hoped, would open up new vistas of consciousness and democratic belonging, for instance, in the burgeoning field of cybernetics, Situationist psychogeography, or the experiments in cognitive mapping described by Kevin Lynch in his book *The Image of the City* and later taken up by Frederic Jameson as the postmodern ideal of politically-committed art.[337] Popular ideas emerging from fields such as cybernetic and gestalt psychology in the 1960s held that society was nothing but a field of information that could be manipulated through social engineering and the use of psychedelic drugs. This was the view, for instance, of Dan Graham, who also saw its logic at work in the Happenings of Alan Kaprow and the conceptual art of his colleagues Bruce Nauman, Sol Lewitt, Steve Reich, and choreographer Yvonne Rainier.[338] In *Neuromancer*, the matrix is "a field of data" (16), but it is also a "consensual hallucination" (5), one to which Case has lost access at the beginning of the novel. He desperately wants to return to the matrix

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[336] Bockris, *Transformer,* 327-342.
[337] Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960); and Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism,* 51-54.
[338] Dan Graham, "Subject Matter," in *Rock My Religion*, 38-51.

where he was a "cowboy," a hero, filled with the masculine self-confidence usually associated with that most traditional of American cultural archetypes (6). At the beginning of the novel, Case can be said to feel *nostalgia* for the matrix, for the consensual hallucination, for his status as cowboy. If we construe this nostalgia within the ontological boundaries of our actually existing world, it seems an awful lot like a nostalgia for the psychedelic experience, an experience that was created every night at 60s rock clubs like the Matrix, the Family Dog, and the Filmore East and West. Gibson's depiction of the matrix, of cyberspace, as a receding lifeworld for which his protagonist is nostalgic is symptomatic of Gibson's own nostalgia for the purportedly cross-racial, masculinist solidarity of the 60s rock counterculture. Gibson's later novels will contain carefully considered female protagonists such as *Pattern Recognition's* Cayce Pollard. At this point, Gibson's central heroine is Molly Millions, equipped with retractable claws, a grotesque caricature of the cat-like woman who tears men to shreds, a maneater.

The lifeworld that *Neuromancer* depicts, which Gibson intended as a perverse analog of our own, makes Gibson's protagonist Case and Gibson himself extraordinarily uncomfortable. In his interview with McCaffery, Gibson claims that *Neuromancer* was first inspired by his passing by a video arcade in Vancouver, BC, and feeling alienated from the teenagers inside, from their *culture*, which was different from his own, somehow linked to the 60s rock counterculture.[339] By the time of his 2007 novel *Spook Country*, he describes the whole "world as video game."[340] This new youth culture was somehow linked to the 60s rock counterculture that sang about pinball wizards and other

[339] McCaffery, "An Interview with William Gibson," 272.
[340] Gibson, *Spook Country*, 445.

facets of teenage life, but it was also distinct from it in a way that *Neuromancer* and later *Spook Country* figures as disturbing. The 60s dream of a retooled consciousness has been achieved, but at what cost? Gibson's primal scene at the Vancouver video arcade reoccurs in *Neuromancer*. In fact, Case meets Linda Lee at a video arcade. She is a redemptive force emerging from the cacophony of contemporary experience. Early in the novel, after Linda Lee has been taken away from him, Case compulsively returns to the scene of their first meeting and engages in self-destructive behavior intended as a sort of contrition for his sins against Linda. Getting in this sort of trouble reminds Case of being back in the matrix, with the Tokyo cityscape looking like a field of data that he can understand. When he is sober, the city perplexes him; when high, it is easily understood, and its confusing, synaesthetic experience is captured in terms of sound. Gibson describes Case re-entering the arcade where he met Linda, "Then he was through the entrance, the sound crashing over him like surf, subsonics throbbing in the pit of his stomach. Someone scored a ten-megaton hit on Tank War Europa, a simulated airburst drowning the arcade in white sound as a lurid hologram fireball mushroomed overhead" (17). Case's sound and vision of the arcade is obviously meant to accentuate its grotesquery, the extraordinarily weird way in which it is divorced from the social reality outside its doors. The fact that *Neuromancer* takes place in a future world in which Europe has apparently been destroyed by nuclear war only makes this spectacular display of youth culture creepier than it already is in our own lifeworld where war simulation video games like *Medal of Honor* and *Call of Duty* prepare young people ideologically to sacrifice themselves on global battlefields

Case's circumspection about the new youth culture, and his nostalgia for a lifeworld resembling the psychedelic 60s is further exemplified by his attitudes towards what the book actually describes as "subcultures." "Subculture" is a term with a long history reaching back to the Chicago School of sociology in the 1930s, when it was used to describe immigrant groups whose lifeways departed from the American mainstream. The term was later taken up by the sociologists and cultural historians associated with the Birmingham School of cultural studies in England during the 1970s. Cultural studies practitioners, such as Dick Hebdige, Stuart Hall, and Angela McRobbie, used the term "subculture" to describe the "spectacular" youth cultures that emerged in Britain after WWII, for instance, the mods, rockers, skinheads, teddy boys, Rastafarians, rude boys, and punks.[341] In his book, Gibson uses the term in this latter sense, to describe a spectacular youth subculture, although it is unwittingly conflated with its roots in race-based sociology at certain key moments. When the term "subculture" first appears in *Neuromancer*, it is used to describe the "Panther Moderns," a terrorist group that assists Case and Molly in retrieving an important computer file from the media corporation Sense/Net. When Case learns that the Moderns will be helping him and Molly out, the novel intones through free and indirect discourse that "it wasn't a name he knew. Something new, something that had come in since he'd been in Chiba. Fads swept the youth of the Sprawl at the speed of light; entire subcultures could rise overnight, thrive for a dozen weeks, and then vanish utterly" (58). Although Case will find the Moderns helpful in his mission, he is dismissive of their subcultural credentials. Learning from a

[341] See Hebdige, *Subculture*, and Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds. *Resistance through Rituals*.

computer program that contains information about the Moderns, Case is indulged in the comments of "Dr. Virginia Rambali, Sociology, NYU" (58). In the program, Rambali appears in a lecture-like setting. She is challenged by a disembodied voice, "Given [the Moderns'] penchant for these random acts of surreal violence…it may be difficult for our viewers to understand why you continue to insist that this phenomenon isn't a form of terrorism." Dr. Rambali replies, "There is always a point at which the terrorist ceases to manipulate the media gestalt…The Panther Moderns differ from other terrorists precisely in their degree of self-consciousness, in their awareness of the extent to which media divorce the act of terrorism from the original sociopolitical intent" (58). Immediately after hearing this information, Case commands the computer to "skip" the rest. Rambali's employment as a sociology professor and her comments about the Moderns' seem intended as a parody of the sort of academic discourse surrounding the appearance of youth subcultures, especially Dick Hebdige's famous comments about the punk subculture, which he singled out for very similar reasons to Rambali, in particular its participants' self-consciousness about the transgressive potential of subcultural style.

Case wants nothing to do with the Panther Moderns and neither does Gibson's novel. Yet this is not say that the novel has nothing to do with alternative modes of cultural belonging designed to oppose the hegemony of the official culture of consumer capitalism (e.g. Hollywood, advertising, fashion, high technology). For in order for Case to assume full self-realization at the end of Neuromancer and re-experience some of the existential plenitude that he lost in the matrix, he must seek assistance from the Zionites, the Rastafarian inhabitants of the Zion space station orbiting earth. Case uses the Zionites' space "tug," the *Marcus Garvey*, to travel to a neighboring space station, the

Freeside, where he will have his final showdown with the evil forces of the Tessier-Ashpool corporation.

The Zionites provide Case with technological and material support, but they also serve as a sort of spiritual inspiration. When Case enters the Zionist compound, he hears the strains of dub music. Gibson has written about dub elsewhere in an article for *Wired* magazine on remix culture.[342] After explaining his artistic debt to William S. Burroughs's cut-up method of literary composition, Gibson notes that "meanwhile, in the early '70s in Jamaica, King Tubby and Lee 'Scratch' Perry, great visionaries, were deconstructing recorded music. Using astonishingly primitive predigital hardware, they created what they called versions. The recombinant nature of their means of production quickly spread to DJs in New York and London."[343] Versions were remixes of popular Jamaican reggae songs that rearranged the instrumental and vocal tracks, and sometimes introduced new sonic elements in order to create recordings that could be consumed as stand-alone songs. The need for dub versions was commercially as well as artistically driven. It responded to the dearth of quality recording materials in Jamaica as well as the sensual experience of marijuana-smoking and dancing. Gibson describes Case's entrance into the Zionite compound, "As they worked, Case gradually became aware of the music that pulsed constantly through the cluster. It was called dub, a sensuous music cooked from vast libraries of digitalized pop; it was worship, Molly said, and a sense of community" (104). As it did for Gibson writing in *Wired* 20 years later, dub represents, for Molly, an

[342] Gibson, "God's Little Toys."
[343] Ibid., n.p.

alternative to *Neuromancer*'s soulless, alienating, dystopian soundscape, an allegorical stand-in for contemporary soundscape in which the novel appeared.

If it seems unclear whether Case is as convinced as Molly at this point in the novel of dub's inspirational, communitarian qualities, it nevertheless serves as his salvation from a computer program designed by corporate overlords that poses the deepest threat to his surviving the novel. The program lures Case into what is described as "a land of the dead," a memory-scape in which Case is tempted by a virtual projection of Linda Lee (243). Plunged into this scene of temptation after "jacking in" to a computer console deep within Tessier-Ashpool's corporate compound, Case is subject to a massively dense hallucination in which he comes to live with Linda Lee again on a secluded beach (255). Case seems to have discovered something like "the experience machine" described by the philosopher Robert Nozick in his famous thought experiment in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.[344] Case experiences a synthetic reality in which he can once again enjoy romantic bliss with his former lover Linda Lee. He is returned to an uncomplicated scene of plenitude, a metaphorical stand-in for the high psychedelic tide of 1960s utopianism. Case is lured out of this hallucination, out of this dream, by the sound of music, the sound of dub. The hallucination ends when Case walks away from Linda Lee and the character in the novel called Neuromancer, "following the music…Maelcum's Zion dub" (244).

Case is able to make a bond with the Rastafarian subject that he cannot make with the video game players in the Sprawl. Gibson figures these conflicts in terms of the sounds Case hears. Dub, the salvific sound in *Neuromancer*, was a direct influence on

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[344] Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 42–45.

punk rock musicians, especially in the U.K., and Gibson seems to be offering an argument here that it is more closely related to his own aesthetic production and somehow more advanced than the sound of the punks, figured in the novel as the Panther Moderns. But why is it better than the return to psychedelic plenitude in the scene of Gibson's hallucinatory temptation? The answer lies in dub's appeal, for Gibson, to an aesthetic principle shared with some punk groups, but not all, and practiced most famously by Gibson's hero William S. Burroughs—its dedication to the cut-up and the remix, to the transgression of cultural propriety, in the service of achieving a higher consciousness. The problem with the ideology of psychedelia, with the ideology of the 60s counterculture, is that you can only transcend real world concerns for so long before being forced violently back down to earth. And as became clear at the end of the psychedelic era, the concerns of the hippies could be read more in terms of intergenerational strife between white fathers and sons than worldwide revolution for all. In *Neuromancer*, counterculture ends and subculture begins when Case is violently expelled from the matrix. This scene occurs before the novel begins in a hotel room in Memphis where Case is pumped full of neurotoxins. The episode's Memphis setting seems more or less random, but it perhaps unconsciously alludes to two signal events in the history of the 60s counterculture—on one hand, the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968, a date which can be understood as the symbolic if not the chronological end of the 60s, and on the other, the death of Elvis Presley, certainly not a 60s icon, but a sort of cowboy in his own right, who in spite of his pitiful end, will always symbolize the first rebellious sparkle of the rock n' roll generation and its final burning out. For Gibson, a certain way of re-imagining human consciousness died with these men. In Case's

discovery of the communitarian potential of dub he finds something to replace it, a certain something that Gibson can only imagine through recourse to sound. In his later novels, Gibson will more completely realize this sound's kinship to punk's sonic transgressions against neo-liberalism's symbolic systems.

Punk Rock, Nostalgia, and the Desire for Any-Space-Whatsoever

There are at least two important references to punk in Gibson's more recent novels *Pattern Recognition* and *Spook Country*. In *Pattern Recognition*, the exercise in postmodern archaelogy undertaken by Case's colleague Damien is described as "punk" (293). As Damien puts it, he has travelled to "the currently unfrozen swamps past Stalingrad" to excavate the site of the WWII battle, which involves the removal not only of "weapons of all kinds, watches [and] an unopened bottle of vodka," but also "strata of Germans, Russians, Germans," that is, the remains of the men who fought in the battle (72-73). That this scene should be called "punk" is telling. Gibson is suggesting, perhaps in spite of himself, that the excavation is punk in the same way that a dream might be, penetrating reconstituted layers of the cultural unconscious, particularly as it is concerned with WWII and the massive amounts of bloodshed that occurred there. Such a position is not unlike the one taken by Jon Stratton in his essay on Jews, punks, and the holocaust, although Gibson is considerably less sympathetic with this excavation.[345] As Lauren Berlant has suggested, the memory of trauma, in *Pattern Recognition*, will eventually be

[345] Jon Stratton, "Jews, Punk, and the Holocaust," 79-105.

resolved sentimentally, via the family drama of Cayce and her father.[346] At the scene of "punk archaelogy," another, perhaps more morbid resolution is sought between Damien and his fellow Russian diggers, with whom he must get drunk in order to stay working (73). While Cayce achieves closure at the end of *Pattern Recognition* by coming to grips with the fact that her father's death was merely a coincidence of history, Damien refuses to concede closure, digging unceasingly into the past, however ironically or sentimentally detached he might be from that excavation.

The female protagonist of *Spook Country* Hollis Henry was a member of a popular band in the 80s called The Curfew. As Gibson describes them, they might have sounded a bit like the Cure, not punk exactly, but with roots in that scene. Throughout the novel, Henry becomes tied up in the political-economic machinations of the Belgian advertising mogul Hollis Bigend whose mother was a member of the Situationist International who travelled to Switzerland to research what Bigend describes as "a minor Dadaist" (100, 267). Another character in *Spook Country*, Milgrim, is observed reading the book *The Pursuit of the Millennium* by Norman Cohn.[347] Situationism, Dada, and Cohn's book have all played an important role in the history of punk at least since the publication of Greil Marcus's 1989 book *Lipstick Traces*, in which Marcus claims that these political and artistic movements—Situationism, punk, millenarianism, and Dada—

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[346] Lauren Berlant, "Intuitionists: History and the Affective Event," *American Literary History* 20:4 (2008), 845-860.

[347] The book is actually described as "a chunky 1961 paperback history of revolutionary messianism in medieval Europe" (64), but Gibson has clarified the book's identity on Twitter. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Oxford UP, 1957); and "What Book Is Milgrim Reading in William Gibson's *Spook Country*?" *Science Fiction and Fantasy Stack Exchange*, http://scifi.stackexchange.com/questions/28120/what-book-is-milgrim-reading-in-william-gibsons-spook-country (accessed October 27, 2013).

all constitute what he calls a "secret history of the twentieth century."[348] By invoking these four movements, Gibson attempts to place his book within that history, either as a comment upon it or an instance of it. He is also leading the reader, clearly, to make a connection between the novel's climax and a Situationist prank, Dada collage, or punk rock song. The novel concludes when a container full of laundered money, which was supposed to go towards reconstruction efforts after the Iraq War, is diverted by Hollis, in cahoots with a character only described as "the old man." This political act is also like an artwork in that it is achieved using the same satellite technology that allowed the character Alberto Corrales to produce his locative art at the beginning of the novel. Corrales, assisted by a computer hacker named Bobby Chombo, produces holographic reproductions of famous celebrity deaths, such as River Phoenix and Helmet Newton. Bigend's mother is another one of Gibson's punk parents too, but like Win Pollard, is a missing person. Her son has absorbed her Situationist knack for art terrorism, but he lacks the political commitment of that movement. This commitment is what Henry must restore by participating in Bigend's larger plot to prevent the shipment of the embezzled funds, an act of civil disobedience that is also described in the novel as an act of art terrorism in which the digital is used to manipulate solid objects in a non-commercial way.

Punk again, in these novels, as in *Neuromancer*, is a mark of authenticity, but not exactly the right sort of authenticity. As Lauren Berlant has noted in her criticism of *Pattern Recognition*, along with the Colson Whitehead novel *The Intuitionist*, these are both ultimately sentimental novels, in the case of *Pattern Recognition* meant to paper

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[348] Greil Marcus. *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

over the trauma of the World Trade Center attacks. Intriguingly, *Pattern Recognition* is widely considered to be the first major novel to deal with the events of 9/11, although it does so in a way that almost seems to fly in the face of its larger political rhetoric. Gibson, at least, was somewhat aware of this rupture, as he describes the writing of the novel as having been interrupted by 9/11. He did not originally intend to include the 9/11 subplot in the book, but felt compelled to after the event. In a certain sense, he is saying "goodbye" to all that, that being the consumerism for which Cayce Pollard so obviously stands, even though she is made allergic by it. What 9/11 killed, Gibson seems to be saying, was William S. Burroughs, who is then resurrected in the form of Cayce Pollard and later Hollis Henry in *Spook Country*, daughters to Burroughs's punk legacy.

In this way, Gibson's later novels represent his coming to grips, so to speak, not only with 9/11, but with the whole period of U.S. history that it might be seen to bookend, the neo-conservative interregnum that stretched from the end of Vietnam and Watergate in 1973 to 9/11 in 2001. What he seems to be saying is that in the face of the 9/11 attacks and the Bush ascendancy, what is needed is a return to politics in the form of punk. This return occurs by, in *Spook Country*, getting the band back together in a Situationist-styled act of art terrorism or prank. After the Cuban exile super-spy Tito places the radiation pellets on the container at sea outside of Vancouver, which will make the money inappropriable, he seeks cover by joining a suburban rock band to whom he identifies himself as "Ramone," clearly a reference to the band, and a play on the pseudo-Hispanic resonances of their name (441). As Greil Marcus so eloquently documented in *Lipstick Traces* (and Jon Savage in *England's Dreaming*), it was the British punks who really solidified the link between punk, Situationism, and dada, but Gibson properly

returns this heritage to New York City, where Burroughs relocated after his collaborations with Brion Gysin, an actual member of the original surrealist circle.[349] Burroughs also corresponded with the Situationist Alexander Trocchi.[350] There is just as solid a throughline from dada to Surrealism to Situationism to New York punk as there is to the Sex Pistols, whether or not Marcus and Savage noticed them, but they are perhaps more subliminal. This is exactly what Gibson likes in his art, however. The spirit of Burroughs is subliminally buried underneath the wreckage of the World Trade Center. Cayce has to come to grips at the end of the novel with the fact that her father has died. There is a photograph of Burroughs from 1973 pointing a shotgun at the newly constructed World Trade Center towers. It was taken by Warhol Factory member Gerard Malanga, who appeared onstage with the Velvet Underground early in their careers. Burroughs's photo was intended as a declaration of war against all that the WTC represented, globalization and finance capital, especially. The memory of that rebellion, like the memory of true freedom embodied in pirate colonies described at the beginning of *Cities of the Red Night*, died with the collapse of the WTC. It was no longer possible to rebel against social authority in the same way. U.S. patriotism and the national security state were embodied in the uncanny space of the WTC towers in an impenetrable way. Filmmakers had them digitally removed from future representations of New York City, a weird tribute to their sudden lack.

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[349] Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2001).

[350] Timothy S. Murphy, "Exposing the Reality Film: William S. Burroughs Among the Situationists," in *Retaking the Universe: William S. Burroughs in the Age of Globalization*, edited by Davis Schneiderman and Philip Walsh (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2004), 29-57.

The CBGB scene emerged at the same time the WTC was being built. They were only two miles away. The night before 9/11 I attended a concert by the progressive post-punk band Pullman at a downtown rock club called Tonic. I stood next to the lead singer of the Magnetic Fields, Claudia Gonson, who sings a song called "Punk Rock Love" on that band's album *69 Love Songs*.[351] Where are these spaces now? They died too on 9/11. Both CBGB and Tonic are closed. The reality of this closure in history is what Gibson commemorates in the shift from one act of terrorism in *Pattern Recognition* to another in *Spook Country*. He is suggesting that one of the only things that kept us going in the 1970s, during the Reagan years, and the neoliberal ascendancy was the spirit of punk. It is what keeps us mindful that the shiny surfaces of our iPhones and other personal computing devices are, as George Bataille would remind us, mere husks of the more ideal forms of communication that art and aesthetics might promise us, and this is how iPods are repurposed in *Pattern Recognition*, not as devices for playing music but as massive storage devices that hackers use to download illicit code in Apple Stores. The destruction of the World Trade Center, in the end, was a boon to New York's re-redevelopment as a paradise for the rich in the twenty-first century. Spaces like CBGB were exactly the sorts of casualties that this re-redevelopment took. The Bowery is now a completely gentrified space, under which is plowed the queer memory of a working class heterotopia that was really just a desire for any-space-whatsoever. Even in the novels of William Gibson, the cyberpunk author who actively disavows punk, the memory of this space is reconfigured, again, and again, and again, and again.

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[351] The Magnetic Fields, *69 Love Songs* (Durham, NC: Merge, 1999).

CODA: Occupy the Bowery, Occupy the Blank

There is another postmodern novel that ends near the site of the former World Trade Center, Jennifer Egan's Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Visit from the Good Squad*.[352] In the novel's final scene, a rock star, who started off in punk bands, returns to the site of the World Trade Center to deliver a concert for millions. He has discovered a new style of performance that Egan describes as something akin to a punk rock Bob Dylan.[353] As in *Pattern Recognition*, the site of the World Trade Center frames a sentimental ending, although in Egan's case this is not so jarring, since she has been dealing in sentimental subtext all along. The novel's sentimental ending forecloses on a kind of openness represented by the novel's earlier formal experiments, an invented language delivered in text messages and a chapter delivered in Power Point slides, but it is also a weird prognostication of the Occupy Movement that would begin two years after it was published.[354] Unintentionally, Egan makes the connection for her readers between the more serious, political side of Occupy and punk rock and its sentimental underbelly. Throughout its existence, the Occupy movement has struggled to depict itself as "serious" despite its refusal to issue any demands or form a platform or party. As Walter Benn Michaels has suggested in an article for *PMLA*, this may be because the hearts of the protestors are in the right place, they are drawing their own cognitive map of late capitalist space, but it is difficult for them to really do anything about it since they are so thoroughly implicated in that map, that matrix themselves, enjoying certain privileges

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[352] Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (New York: Anchor, 2010).
[353] Ibid., 310-340.
[354] Ibid., 234 - 309

over the "truly disadvantaged" that most Occupiers, at Wall Street, at least, would have a hard time giving up.[355]

Sacrificing this privilege was at least some of what the CBGB artists intended, however much they might have failed, and however much they might have still enjoyed certain privileges on the basis of their race, gender, sexuality, or physical ability. The most thrilling moment in Richard Hell's signature early tune, "Blank Generation," occurs during the chorus when he repeats the song's titular line, "I belong to the blank generation," but drops the word "blank," and along with the rest of his band, pauses, passing over in silence a name that does not yet exist.[356] It is a clever, novel moment, unifying form and content, and although it results in a momentary silence or ellipsis, it does not interrupt the song's forward motion or energy; it adds to it. It exists as a moment of openness, not blockage; as a way into the song's swirling juxtaposition of ragged guitar chords, manic soloing, and swift, surreal images, not a passage out of them.

"Blank Generation" was Hell's anthem for the generation of rock stars, artists, and poets who created a new multimedia arts scene at CBGB on the Bowery starting in 1974, and it is often understood as the ultimate expression of punk nihilism, as a song that petulantly insists on existential emptiness and autonomous self-destruction, but this interpretation of the song only tells one side of the story. There is nihilism in Hell's lyric, for instance, in the final verse, which ends with the narrator shooting heroin, and satisfying himself with the world "beneath his eyelids," but there is also a sense of hard-

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[355] Walter Benn Michaels, "Dude, Where's My Job?" *PMLA* 127:4 (October 2012), 1006-1009; and William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, The Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
[356] Richard Hell and the Voidoids, *Blank Generation* (New York: Sire, 1977).

bitten optimism in the song's chorus. Hell takes his blankness seriously. The song is a semi-satirical reinvention of an earlier song, "The Beat Generation," by the middlebrow poet Rod McKuen and songwriter Bob McFadden, which itself parodies the Beat lifestyle and lingo.[357] In Hell's song, he erases the generational nametag with conviction, and replaces it first with the word "blank" and later with an outright elision. Nevertheless, the song's energy and delivery suggest that this elision gives way to a newfound freedom. The chorus of "Blank Generation" asserts Hell's generation's inalienable right to name itself.

The term "generation" in this song does not just refer to a generational name, but also to the process of aesthetic *re*-generation through performance. The title of Hell's first literary magazine, which he founded upon his arrival in New York in the late 1960s, was *Genesis:Grasp*, a title that evokes both the Biblical creation story and a new beginning. In the blankness of Hell's generation, there is emptiness, but there is also potential. Perhaps because the CBGB scene ended so tragically for so many of its participants, in either drug abuse, obscurity, or mainstream complacency—even Hell doesn't want to talk about it anymore—the themes of regeneration and self-determination on display in Hell's lyric are often overlooked, but the sentiment is palpable. In the song, he declares himself a member of the blank generation not because he is numb or uncommitted, but because he and the other members of his generation have been rendered inscrutable—blank!—by their upbringing in a society obsessed with media images and social status, exhausting itself through foreign adventurism in Vietnam, and suddenly unable to grasp its own sense of historical destiny at home. The world-historical events of the late 1960s—

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[357] Rod McKuen, *Beatsville* (New York: Stanyon, 1998).

decolonization, the domination of television, psychedelic rock, conceptual art, landing on the moon—had resulted in a sensory overload and a gripping numbness that the narrator of Hell's song and the members of his "blank generation" felt compelled to reject.

But how to interpret this rejection of the social world that had so recently come into being at the end of the 1960s? On one hand, it is tempting to interpret it as apolitical, an empty aesthetic gesture, and indeed many historians and theorists of punk rock have done just that. Hell's song, however, points towards a set of political commitments enacted in New York punk music that were not always spoken outright, but which often seemed to lend the music its pulse. Like British punk, New York punk articulated its own theory of everyday life, how to navigate it and how to survive it, and I have tried to elucidate this theory in the preceding pages. When considered as a larger set of aesthetic practices—not just the production of live and recorded music, but literature, visual art, film, video, and performance—New York punk's implicit theory of urban space, identity, and social change comes into high relief, and has disruptive consequences for our understanding of the aesthetic, economic, and political transition from a modern to a postmodern cultural dominant in the period of "the long 1970s," from the election of Richard Nixon in 1968 to Reagan's re-election in 1984. At CBGB, musicians, writers, and other artists sought to instantiate what the philosopher Gaston Bachelard described as an "oneiric" or dreamlike space in downtown New York, a space that defied the dehumanizing social conditions developing outside its doors, or what Jacques Rancière

and Foucault would call a heterotopia.[358] Richard Hell, a participant in the CBGB's scene as a writer and performer, was one of the primary theorists of this dreamscape. Certain members of CBGB were truly disadvantaged. By imagining any-space-whatsoever, the occupiers of CBGB and the Bowery extended Burroughs's dream of the pirate community beyond the page and into the larger space of the rock club, the loudspeaker, the art gallery, and the fashion house.

Like communism, punk is a specter. It has no essence. It lingers. It functions like the term "queer" in José Munoz's figuration—"not yet here," "an ideality."[359] But it is part of an aesthetic undercommons that encompasses several terms—queer, punk, proletarian—and even its most highly reified examples attest to this shifting ground. "A School for Singing" has not been intended to suggest that the CBGB scene was somehow more authentic in this way than any other punk scene, or that it should somehow take primacy over them as the "origin" of the punk aesthetic. As each of my chapters shows, and as critics like Greil Marcus have suggested, the punk spirit can be read backwards in time in any direction.[360] But it has been necessary, at least in some attenuated and contingent way to pass back through the space of CBGB. As the women in Pussy Riot so forcefully reminded us, when they occupied a cathedral, not a street or a stage, performances like theirs are, in the words of Tavia Nyong'o, borrowed from Paolo Virno, *kairotic*, that is, they belong to an ecstatic time and place that anticipates a better world to

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[358] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, translated by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1969); Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension;" and Foucault, "Of Other Spaces."
[359] Muñoz, 1.
[360] Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, 82-83.

come.[361] The fact that we are only now awakening to this kind of radical hope is not a failure of the CBGB scene but of our own neoliberal imagination.

[361] Tavia Nyong'o, "The Scene of Occupation," *TDR: The Drama Review*. 56(4): 136-149.

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