

# What is Post-Punk?

A Genre Study of Avant-Garde Pop, 1977-1982

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**Abstract**

This dissertation is a genre study of the non-mainstream, Anglo-American genre of popular music known as post-punk. I analyse the music of artists such as Public Image Ltd., Joy Division, Wire, Gang of Four, and the Raincoats, focussing specifically on their incorporation of musical idioms from the genres dub-reggae and disco. I also unravel the role of women musicians within this genre, and attend to post-punk's aesthetic connection to industrial music, industrial images, and avant-garde aesthetics. I am particularly concerned with the role played by the rock media in shaping the genre's discourse and aesthetic criteria. I employ a multidisciplinary methodology, drawing from musicology, communication studies, theories of genre, post-colonial studies, and gender studies. The larger purpose of the dissertation is to use post-punk to explore the complex ways in which genres of music come into being and the way genres of music map onto or shape categories of social identity.

## Résumé

Cette thèse présente une étude du genre post-punk, un type de musique populaire anglo-américain de niche qui a émergé à la fin des années soixante-dix. J'analyse la musique d'artistes tels que Public Image Ltd., Joy Division, Wire, Gang of Four et les Raincoats. Je me concentre en particulier sur la façon dont ces musiciens ont intégré les idiomes de la musique dub-reggae et disco. J'examine aussi le rôle que les musiciennes ont joué dans ce genre de musique, et de même que les esthétiques du genre post-punk en ce qui concerne les sons et les images industriels. Je porte également une attention particulière au rôle que les journalistes ont joué dans la formation des esthétiques et paramètres du genre post-punk. J'utilise une méthodologie interdisciplinaire qui emprunte à la musicologie, les théories de genre, les études en communications et les études postcoloniales. Le but général de ce projet est d'utiliser le genre du post-punk pour explorer les processus compliqués par lesquels un genre de musique se développe et la façon dont les catégories de musique sont cousues aux catégories sociales.

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## INTRODUCTION

In episode five, series one of the British sitcom *The Young Ones*, which first aired on December 7, 1982, the four attendees at Scumbag College decide to throw a party. In preparation for the big night, Neil the hippy has made a henna dip, Vyvyan's duties have included vacuuming the floors and making the punch, Rick the anarchist manqué has apparently spent hours cleaning the house, and Mike “the cool person” has appropriately done nothing. Running throughout the episode's idiosyncratic array of slapstick violence, puppetry, and self-consciously low-quality gags are an abundance of musical references, each sutured to the distinctive identities of the four main characters and their party invitees, creating a microcosm of post-1960s British popular music culture. The sleazy sociology professor, who arrives as Rick's guest and makes himself comfortable amongst the party's female contingent, shares the same name as the “king of orgasmic rock,” Jim Morrison. Neil gets high and his trip to outer space prompts a reference to David Bowie's “Space Oddity.” Mike wears a braided military tunic in the style of the lead singer from Adam and the Ants. Vyvyan sports studs, bovver boots, and what appears to be a t-shirt of the South Yorkshire heavy metal band, Saxon, and his metal friends drink heavily and speak with Birmingham and Scottish accents, subtly aligning the metal genre with an implicitly working class, hard-living male demographic. Rick, who likes to think of himself as the most on-trend of all the characters, introduces two instances of diegetic music that are both contemporary with the series itself and have more recently been folded into the genre known as post-punk. First, he plays a brief snippet of a record by the Human League, which is promptly smashed to pieces by the “pigs.” Secondly, the housemates are treated to a live performance by the band Rip Rig + Panic.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Elton, Rik Mayall, and Lise Mayer, “Interesting,” *The Young Ones*, BBC2, December 7, 1982.

This particular episode of *The Young Ones* captures two of the main intersecting challenges with which my dissertation is concerned. First, it presents the way in which genres of popular music are related to categories of people, as illustrated by the series writers' decision to use musical references to enhance the individual characters' profiles. Connections between genres of music and categories of social identification hinge in part upon the identities and social positions of the musicians themselves, that is, the way in which individual musicians participate in larger social formations such as those of race and gender. Categories of musical genre also refract and produce the identities of the differentiated audiences that cohere or constellate around certain genres of music as well as individual artefacts, such as songs or albums.<sup>2</sup> As David Brackett has noted, popular music's genre labels "denote social identity" more so than those in classical music. He adds, "genres indicate a tacit and contingent collective agreement about the 'proper' place for different types of music and the social groups associated with them."<sup>3</sup>

The second issue that is presented in this episode is the stylistic variety that characterises the post-punk genre, a type of largely non-mainstream, Anglo-American popular music that emerged in the late 1970s and declined at the beginning of the 1980s. The two examples of diegetic music in the episode—the Human League's "The Things that Dreams are Made of" and the Rip Rig + Panic's "You're My Kind of Climate"—are considered to be from the post-punk canon. At one end of the post-punk spectrum is the Human League song, an electro-pop dance number, characterised by multiple synthesizer lines, cyborg-style vocals, and a synthesized drumbeat. At the other end is Rip Rig + Panic's performance, which represents musical and social eclecticism, and the kind of borrowing from black-associated genres such as funk and

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<sup>2</sup> Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 161.

<sup>3</sup> David Brackett, "Questions of Genre in Black Popular Music," *Black Music Research Journal* 25/1 (2005): 89.

disco that is *also* seen to typify the post-punk genre.<sup>4</sup> What is more, the members of Rip Rig + Panic do not project a homogenous social identity; an all-male band with both black and white members accompany singer Andrea Oliver, a British woman of Antillean origin. In the scene from *The Young Ones*, the trouser-less tenor saxophone player is wearing an African mask, which may be read as an allusion to the broadly “tribal” aesthetic associated with other post-punk groups such as the Pop Group. Rip Rig + Panic’s musical eclecticism is framed, nevertheless, within the unpolished playfulness of punk, and is therefore distinct from earlier articulations of musical eclecticism, such as those associated with rock and progressive rock of the late 1960s.

In this dissertation, then, I present post-punk as a stylistically diverse genre, but also highlight the way in which this stylistic diversity makes defining post-punk according to its sonic characteristics alone almost impossible. I suggest that post-punk cannot be defined according to a clear set of historical parameters either; rather paradoxically, post-punk’s emergence was inextricably linked to the almost simultaneous emergence of punk itself. I propose, therefore, that the genre known as post-punk is held together by a particular social *milieu* that comprises musicians, audiences, critics, and scholars, which can be characterised by its participation in the larger social formation of predominantly male white bohemia. Furthermore, this social *milieu* projects an identifiable aesthetic sensibility. In order to both support and expand this central thesis I consider post-punk as a genre held together by certain discursive themes. These themes include the following: the incorporation of musical and social Others, namely black-associated musics and women musicians; the incorporation of, or aspirations towards, fine art practices; and the post-modern refraction of Late Capitalist imagery, especially that of industry and technology.

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<sup>4</sup> The name “Rip Rig + Panic” is also a reference to the 1965 album of the same name by African American jazz saxophonist Rolland Kirk. The band’s decision to take Kirk’s album as their name reinforces my suggestion that one characteristic of post-punk is its eclecticism that crosses both generic and racial boundaries.

But rather than present these discursive themes as post-punk's objective criteria, I suggest that these are the themes that music critics have drawn upon in order to frame the post-punk genre and, as such, they can be interpreted as reflecting and sustaining the values of the white bohemian *milieu*. Post-punk musicians' identification with rock's Others (via, for example, reggae, disco, and women musicians), as well as their incorporation of fine art and political rhetoric, and the critical framing thereof, may be interpreted as marking post-punk as a leftist intellectual genre which, at the same time, perpetuated one of rock music's paradigms, that of rejuvenation through lateral borrowing.

In what follows I outline some of the main theoretical ideas that I employ throughout the dissertation. I concentrate first upon existing theories of both historiography and genre from different disciplines, including musicology, social theory, film studies, and literary theory, in order to elaborate upon the kinds of practical, historical, and conceptual challenges that a genre study entails. I then discuss my conceptualisation of genre in more detail. I suggest that genres of popular music might be understood from three interconnected perspectives: genre as musical style, genre as a set of social relations, and genre as a technology of power that ensures the correct correspondences between types of people and types of musical sound. I then conclude with an outline of the dissertation's main chapters, which each address aspects of the discursive themes I outlined above: post-punk as a historiographical conundrum; post-punk as a genre that identified with and borrowed from Others; and post-punk as a postmodern genre full of Late Capitalist imagery.

### ***Historiography and Genre***

In his 1969 historiographical treatise, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault contemplates the distinction between writing "total history" and writing "general history." Total

history, he suggests, involves writing a history that organises disparate documents and information around a single principle. General history, on the other hand, allows for more of what Foucault calls “dispersion,” in which a single principle can be contradicted or usurped by more peripheral concerns.<sup>5</sup> In many ways, writing the history of a musical genre is akin to Foucault’s idea of total history. One organises source material around a single principle, a category of music such as punk, disco or, as in this case, post-punk. The problem with such an approach, however, is the way in which one’s object of study, one’s single principle, appears to evaporate on closer inspection of the historical sources, and the way in which “dispersion” becomes an obstacle. The historical study of a musical genre, therefore, could be said to have a mirage-like quality. On the one hand, post-punk is a communicable and identifiable entity. It is possible to say, for example, that one enjoys post-punk but doesn’t care for punk and have that statement mean something. But, on the other hand, the closer one gets to the historical context in which post-punk was situated, the more a clear definition of the genre becomes elusive. The communicable aspect of genre therefore seems to rely on the momentary suspension of the complexities or “dispersions” of non-diachronic history, a smoothing over of certain historical contradictions in order for a clear narrative to emerge. Part of this suspension is also born out of practical necessity. As Foucault observes, abundant sources and information can make writing modern history a difficult task, which is certainly the case with popular music histories, where the primary sources (myriad weekly-published journals and magazines, endless-seeming recordings and discographies) seem to call for more detailed and narrower explorations of musical-historical periods.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge; and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Is it possible, therefore, to write a history of a musical genre such as post-punk that allows for the inevitable dispersions, inconsistencies, tensions, and unpredictability that historical sources present? As Foucault himself has argued, a history of any kind must after all have some kind of structure.<sup>7</sup> One of my main strategies throughout the dissertation has been to take a single principle, the post-punk genre, and try to navigate its integrity as an identifiable thing while also allowing for its inconsistencies to emerge. One of the central questions that I ask at the beginning of the project is, for example, that even though fans and critics may talk about post-punk today, did such a category exist in its own time?

When writing a history of something, Foucault also argued that it is necessary to suspend “existing forms of continuity” and to show that these continuities

do not come about of themselves, but are always the result of a construction the rules of which must be known, and the justifications of which must be scrutinized: we must define in what conditions and in view of which analyses certain of them are legitimate; and we must indicate which of them can never be accepted in any circumstance.<sup>8</sup>

What Foucault regards as “continuities” in this extract could also be understood as the criteria or sets of rules that hold together entities such as categories of musical genre.

Responding to Foucault’s recommendation, then, the kinds of “continuities” that I suspend and scrutinize in this dissertation are the recurrent discursive themes that unite an otherwise stylistically diverse group of artists and musical artefacts. These themes, it should be stated, are drawn primarily from journalist Simon Reynolds’ 2005 book, *Rip it up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984*,

which constitutes the most comprehensive and most detailed book on the topic to date, and is one of the main texts with which I am in dialogue throughout this project.<sup>9</sup>

Using Reynolds’ conception of the genre as a starting point, I question the idea that post-punk

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 25-6.

<sup>9</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Rip it up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984* (New York; London: Penguin, 2005).

can be defined temporally, as a genre with clear start and end dates, and I interrogate the extent to which post-punk formed at a moment when rock-based music embraced its “Others,” namely, black-identified genres such as disco and reggae, as well as female musicians.<sup>10</sup> I also assess the extent to which post-punk can be seen as a postmodern genre that refracted Late Capitalist interests and blurred high-low, art-pop distinctions. Furthermore, I examine the extent to which these themes were and were not identifiable during the time of the music’s emergence with a view to restoring some of the tensions and complexities that characterised the period. Based upon my reading of Foucault, I therefore envision genre, particularly as the concept pertains to post-punk music of the mid- to late 1970s, not as an unencumbered, stable entity that exists “out there.” Rather, I propose treating genres as a dynamic field of discourse in which individual musical texts and their producers are shuffled, like the tumbling glass beads of a kaleidoscope, to form clusters that accord with the biases, interests, and social positions of intermediaries including music critics, scholars, fans, and the musicians themselves.

I also propose that a study of genre necessarily involves attending to all of music’s parameters, not just its purely sonic elements. In line with Simon Frith’s decomposition of the “musical, marketing, and ideological forces” of a musical genre in his essay “Genre Rules,” I suggest that genre is the complex imbrication of musical and extra-musical style; the social identities of musicians, audiences, and critics; processes of valorisation and legitimisation; aspects

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<sup>10</sup> I am using the term rock-based here to indicate that post-punk is, broadly speaking, part of the same generic family as rock ‘n’ roll, rock, punk, and heavy metal. I also employ the term “rock field” or “field of rock” to mean the same thing. Even though punk may be defined in opposition to certain kinds of (progressive) rock of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the two genres are nevertheless both musically and sociologically related; both are guitar-based genres, are associated with a white male demographic, and can be understood in relation to more distant genres, as I discuss throughout this dissertation. Jennifer C. Lena uses a similar concept to refer to “rock ‘n’ roll, rockabilly, glitter rock, punk, heavy metal, and emo,” which she calls the “rock stream.” See Jennifer C. Lena, *Banding Together: How Communities Create Genres in Popular Music* (Oxford; Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2012), 8.

of historical temporality; and the ideological unities that genres both respond to and create.<sup>11</sup> In this regard my methodology is also in dialogue with Franco Fabbri's schema of the five parameters of genre that he set out in his 1982 essay, "A Theory of Musical Genres." Fabbri's five types of generic rule include: 1) formal and technical rules, which refer to the music's sonic characteristics; 2) semiotic rules, which pertain to the music's meaning and affective possibilities; 3) behavioural rules, which involve the behaviour of audiences or musicians within a given genre and within certain settings; 4) social and ideological rules; and 5) the economic and juridical rules of genre. While this schema may appear fixed and therefore not dissimilar to a quasi-classical conception of genre as an entity with distinct, positively defined characteristics that act as static criteria that qualify an object's inclusion in a genre, Fabbri's model is in fact fluid, as he indicates when he refers to the changing nature of individual genres over diachronic time.<sup>12</sup>

Rather than awarding each rule its own platform in a systematic way like Fabbri, however, my approach to genre uses close and detailed analyses of both music and discourse in order to illuminate how each parameter or rule is enmeshed with the others. Through musical analysis I highlight the social as well as the stylistic rules of genre, and through discourse analysis I highlight sociological and ideological components. I also accord more significance to the role played by music critics whose writing and decisions on genre can be seen to serve as an

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<sup>11</sup> Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 84.

<sup>12</sup> Franco Fabbri, "Theory of Musical Genres: Two Applications," accessed December 14, 2014, <http://www.tagg.org/others/ffabbri81a.html>. See also Fabbri's recent commentary on his own work in which he defends the fluidity of this model. Fabbri, "Genre Theories and their Applications in the Historical and Analytical Study of Popular Music: A Commentary on my own Publications" (PhD Diss., University of Huddersfield, 2012). Julie E. Cumming offers a very clear definition of a classical conception of genre in her book, *The Motet in the Age of Du Fay*. Cumming suggests, "the classical category is like a box: it has a clear boundary, so objects belong either inside or outside, and there is no opportunity for gradation within the box." She argues that this classical or Aristotelian model is inadequate for the analysis of musical genres because they often have complex subgenres and deviations that do not follow all of the rules. See Cumming, *The Motet in the Age of Du Fay* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9.

historical record of how categories of genre were both produced and represented. One of the crucial contributions of this dissertation, then, is the notion that a genre of popular music is produced in part by an identifiable, nameable group of critical voices that entered the rock journalism field after rock had already been legitimised as a serious genre in the mid 1960s. Their tastes and critical reflections, therefore, represent an interest in post-punk *qua* rock as a genre defined by artistic, symbolic capital, rather than a genre that garners prestige based upon economic gain. The journalists Jon Savage, Paul Morley, Kris Needs, Paul Rambali, Vivien Goldman, and Chris Brazier are as integral to an understanding of post-punk as groups such as Public Image Ltd. (PiL), Joy Division, Gang of Four, and the Raincoats.

In addition to suspending accepted historical continuities or themes as per Foucault's recommendation and thinking through genre somewhat systematically, as Frith and Fabbri have done, this dissertation is also guided by the idea of genre as a process of differentiation. As Frith has noted, genres such as women's music and indie (independent) music are conceived of in opposition to other categories and other categories' attendant political values, such as the kinds of normative values associated with the so-called mainstream.<sup>13</sup> Two theoretical propositions on genre as a system of differentiation recur throughout the dissertation. The first is Derrida's oft-quoted passage from his 1980 essay, "The Law of Genre,"

a text cannot belong to no genre, it cannot be without or less a genre, there is no genreless text; there is always genre and genres. Every text participates in one or several genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging.<sup>14</sup>

Responding to Derrida, I propose that there are several "texts" (songs, albums, bands, etc.) in the post-punk canon that *participate* in genres other than post-punk, but do not *belong* to them. The opposite is also true. "Texts" from genres such as new wave and punk may *participate*

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<sup>13</sup> Frith, *Performing Rites*, 87.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," in *On Narrative*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 65.

in post-punk but do not *belong* to post-punk. What, then, is the crux of Derrida's distinction between participation and belonging? The answer seems to be located in a question of exclusivity. To belong to a genre implies belonging to it exclusively. But for a text to participate in a genre, it does not have to participate in just one. Participation is, however, something of a relative system; texts do not participate in all genres equally. This is where issues of identity and ideology complicate factors such as musical (i.e. "purely textual") generic hybridity. One is more likely to say, for example, that post-punk participates in rock rather than disco, even though post-punk participates in both since its musical style draws from both genres. However, post-punk is genealogically connected to rock, and its social identity profile, broadly speaking, fits the white male paradigm of rock.

Using the idea of "neighbouring genres," as elaborated by Thomas O. Beebe after Walter Benjamin's essay, "The Origin of German Tragic Drama," can help bring out the nuances between participation and belonging further.<sup>15</sup> In his book *The Ideology of Genre*, Beebe proposes that the recognisability of a genre relies on an "anaphoric" or "deictic" process. That is to say, genres implicitly refer to the other genres that surround them and that is how they achieve their comprehensibility; a genre is a "foregrounding against the background of its neighbouring genres." Or, to put it differently, using a model drawn from the semiotic analyses of Ferdinand de Saussure, genres can be defined negatively according to what they are not.<sup>16</sup> Much of this dissertation is therefore focused on understanding post-punk's position in relation to the other genres that surround it, including its closest neighbours punk, new wave and industrial, and its more distant neighbours, disco and dub-reggae, which might be more accurately construed as post-punk's "Others" rather than its neighbours owing to the significant racial and queer

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<sup>15</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> Thomas O. Beebe, *The Ideology of Genre: A Comparative Study of Generic Instability* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 28, 250-7, 263, 279.

identities associated with reggae and disco in particular. These strategies for reading a genre with reference to the other genres that surround it cut across all facets of the musical “text” in question—its musical, social, and ideological facets.

### ***Genre as Musical Style***

In musicological conversations, especially those concerning Western art music, the concept of genre often refers to a kind of musical piece that has certain formal parameters and that is performed in a particular context or environment, such as a symphony or a concerto, rather than referring to a larger category of music such as “classical” or “jazz.”<sup>17</sup> If one were to apply this kind of model to most popular music, then, the genre of most performances would be song (and perhaps formats such as the LP would also come into the equation). A similar kind of understanding of genre is also prevalent in certain realms of literary theory. Genre in works of theatre, for example, often describes whether the play in question is a tragedy, a comedy, or some hybrid thereof. It is often the manner of the text’s unfolding, therefore, that determines its genre. Within genre categories such as fiction there are also micro-distinctions in terms of form and expectations. In popular fiction, for example, the genre of the novel may be divided into smaller categories of thrillers, romance novels, and historical fiction, to name but a few.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in film, as Stephen Neale has argued, genres such as thrillers or melodramas have particular kinds of narrative structures, and thus rules regarding their form and content.<sup>19</sup> Popular music can work in a similar way. A disco song would be expected to fulfil certain formal and

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Eric Drott, “The Ends of Genre,” *Journal of Music Theory* 57/1 (2013): 1-45; and Jeffrey Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History, and Musical Genre* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Beebee, 20-5.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Neale, *Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1980), 20-5.

stylistic requirements, such as an open-closed hi-hat drum pattern, a syncopated bass line, synthesized string parts, and perhaps euphoric or hedonistic, repeated lyrics.

Music sociologist Jennifer C. Lena distinguishes between musical style as idiom (she provides polka or techno as examples) and genre as a phenomenon that requires a “deeply sociological approach.”<sup>20</sup> But, one of my recurrent arguments in this dissertation is that the intra-musical, the idiomatic, or the stylistic are closely intertwined, through connotative meaning, with a sociological notion of genre. As Mikhail Bakhtin noted, the notions of style and genre are inseparably intertwined. He writes,

Where there is style there is genre. The transfer of style from one genre to another not only alters the way a style sounds, under conditions of a genre unnatural to it, but also violates or renews the given genre.<sup>21</sup>

A useful way to think of (or to even visualise) the idea of style in this instance is perhaps to think of it as clothing. Style is “the manner in which” something is expressed, the clothes in which an artefact is dressed. In the case of the music of J.S. Bach, for example, this would indicate a fugue (genre) written in the high style.<sup>22</sup> In popular music, this might indicate a scene from a Broadway musical dressed in a disco style. Another example, from the non-musical world, would be the idea of a mathematics textbook (genre) written as an interior monologue (style).

The question is, then, does post-punk have an identifiable musical style that can be transferred to other genres? The sonic characteristics and musical style of post-punk music are

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<sup>20</sup> Lena, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Cary Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 66. I apply Bakhtin’s model concerning issues of musical style and genre more thoroughly in my essay, “Paul Anka Sings ‘Smells Like Teen Spirit,’” in *This is the Sound of Irony*, ed. Katherine L. Turner (Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Dreyfus proposes this particular conception of style in his analyses of J.S. Bach’s music. While Dreyfus’ work is informed by a close reading of the kind of theoretical ideas in circulation during Bach’s time, this understanding of style is, I feel, applicable to other kinds of music. See Dreyfus, 190-1.

important components of its identity. There are enough recognisable sonic characteristics that one *could* say that there is indeed an identifiable post-punk style. If I wanted to write a parody of a post-punk song I would need a dour vocal performance with erudite or self-conscious lyrics accompanied by metallic-sounding, distorted electric guitars playing texturally not melodically; and an accelerated disco beat or dance groove, a melodic bass line, and echoing sound effects borrowed from dub-reggae.<sup>23</sup> Groups such as Gang of Four, Joy Division, PiL, and A Certain Ratio exemplify this style.

However, even though post-punk music has an identifiable style, many of the groups included in the post-punk category skirt the periphery of these characteristics, incorporating only some of them. These groups include, for example, the Raincoats, the Slits, Cabaret Voltaire, and the Durutti Column. Similarly, there are also groups from the same late-1970s era who display some post-punk characteristics but do not qualify for the post-punk genre (see Diagram 1.1).

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<sup>23</sup> For a primary source that discusses the post-punk guitar style in terms of its metallic timbre and textural role see J.C. Costa, “Post-Punk Guitarists,” *Musician, Player, and Listener*, October 1, 1981, 122-4.

**Diagram 1.1** A Venn diagram showing the status of elements of musical style with regards to post-punk music and non post-punk music.



Groups such as the Police and the Clash, for example, borrowed from dub-reggae just as several post-punk musicians did. However, both the Police and the Clash did so by incorporating reggae's rhythmic style and juxtaposing it with classic rock/pop or punk. The song "Can't Stand Losing You" by the Police from 1978 is a good example of this. The timbales-style snare roll, the syncopated bass line and the offbeat "skank" on the rhythm guitar set up a reggae-style groove for the beginning of the song, and Sting's faux-patois vocal inflection suggests a strong reggae influence.<sup>24</sup> Within four measures, however, when Sting's voice enters with the words "Called you so many times today," the rhythmic profile of the song becomes decidedly squarer, especially in the rhythm guitar, which switches from playing on the offbeat to playing four quarter notes per measure. The song's shift away from its reggae beginning is even more pronounced during the pre-chorus and chorus when the song unveils its "true" identity as a classic rock/pop song. The reggae groove returns again before the second verse and fragments thereof also recur during the instrumental break at the song's halfway point (see Table 1.1).

<sup>24</sup> The "skank" technique involves playing down-stroked chords (usually barre chords) on the second and fourth beats of the bar. The guitar's resonance should also be limited in such a way that the instrument produces a percussive sound.

**Table 1.1** The alternation between reggae and classic rock/pop in “Can’t Stand Losing You” by the Police

Section	Style	Approximate Timings
Intro	Reggae	0:00 – 0:09
Verse 1	“Square” Reggae	0:09 – 0:22
Pre-Chorus	Classic Rock/Pop	0:22 – 0:30
Chorus	Classic Rock/Pop	0:30 – 0:40
Pre-Verse	Reggae	0:40 – 0:53
Verse 2	“Square” Reggae	0:53 – 1:07
Pre-Chorus	Classic Rock/Pop	1:07 – 1:15
Chorus	Classic Rock/Pop	1:15 – 1:35
Instrumental	Quasi-Dub	1:35 – 1:48
Verse 3	Classic Rock/Pop	1:48 – 2:01
Pre-Chorus	Classic Rock/Pop	2:01 – 2:09
Chorus	Classic Rock/Pop	2:09 – 2:56
Outro	Classic Rock/Pop	2:56 – 3:00

According to Bakhtin’s formula, in this song the reggae style has been transferred to the classic rock/pop genre. But how do we know that that is the correct way around? Could it not also be argued that the classic rock/pop style has been transferred to the reggae genre? One way we can say that the reggae style has been co-opted into “conditions unnatural” to it is because the *majority* of the song is in the classic/pop rock idiom. Thinking about this in terms of proportions, the reggae sections only account for slightly more than a third of the song, including the intro,

the hybrid “square” reggae moments, the outro, and the quasi-dub section in the middle. The domination of the classic rock/pop style in this song can largely be attributed to the length of the final chorus, which is almost a minute long, and the fact that the Police have chosen the classic rock/pop idiom for the song’s main hook, arguably the most memorable section.

But the identity of the musicians is also a condition necessary to deciding on the song’s genre. Sting, Andy Summers and Stewart Copeland (in other words, the Police) are not reggae musicians and they are an all-white group. I am not proposing an essentialist view of genre in the sense that white musicians cannot play reggae or that they are not “natural” to the reggae genre (in this regard, Bakhtin’s use of the term “natural” could be misleading when his formula is applied to popular music). Rather, certain musical styles or gestures in popular music almost always connote particular social constituencies. These connotations accrue and are reinforced over time. Thus our first thought on imagining reggae is that it is music from Jamaica played primarily by musicians of the black diaspora. Sting’s emulation of a Jamaican accent in the song also reinforces the idea that the Police are a classic rock/pop group performing a reggae masquerade.

According to the unspoken rules of the post-punk genre, furthermore, “Can’t Stand Losing You” displays the “wrong” way of bringing the reggae style into the punk/rock idiom. But why? The Clash’s homage to black music of the same year, “(White Man) in Hammersmith Palais,” has a similar structure to “Can’t Stand Losing You,” only the song’s order of events is reversed; “(White Man) in Hammersmith” opens with a punk/classic rock intro but switches to a reggae groove when the vocals for the verse enter, and then back to rock for the chorus. Notably, this particular song was recently an object of some derision on the PiL fansite, Fodderstompf,

when journalist Greg Whitfield described John Lydon's reggae playlist for the Capital Radio programme in 1977 (which I discuss in more detail in chapter two) as follows:

this list is a rare insight into John Lydon's (and PiL's) much discussed love of reggae; and deserves to be documented. It's hard to imagine any of the punk / reggae fakers coming up with anything like this... This ain't no white man in Hammersmith.<sup>25</sup>

Does Whitfield mean to suggest the Clash, who appear as spectres with his reference to their song “(White Man) in Hammersmith,” are “punk/reggae fakers”? If so, it seems as though inserting a reggae “skank” in what is otherwise a rock-style song is not the “correct” post-punk way to incorporate this particular genre. This goes part of the way to explaining why the Police and the Clash are exempt from the post-punk canon, even though they share its temporal frame (the end of the 1970s) and its interest in stylistic hybridity or eclecticism.

So what was post-punk musicians' way of incorporating reggae and why is the particular manner of the incorporation so important? I address these questions in more detail in chapters two and three, but for now I shall indicate some of the main ideas. First, the final sonic result of post-punk's appropriation of dub-reggae's ambience yields a different kind of overall style in the end from the two Police and Clash songs cited above. Secondly, as Whitfield's dismissal of “(White Man) in Hammersmith” implies, explicitly juxtaposing reggae with rock, as opposed to sublimating its gestures to create a different (new) style, is perhaps too explicit or inauthentic an incorporation to be considered appropriate to post-punk's aura of sophistication and its positive racial politics. These are the ideological values that underpin seemingly “objective” aspects of musical style. But who decides on the right way to incorporate reggae and how that influences

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<sup>25</sup> Greg Whitfield, “‘It Ain’t the Names that Matter, You Got to be Able to Hear them First,” August 2007, accessed September 9, 2014, <http://www.fodderstompf.com/ARCHIVES/ARTS/reggae.html>.

distinctions between genres? This is largely the work of critics and the musicians themselves, but Reynolds' 2005 book has also been a strong force in defining the post-punk genre *ex post facto*.

Elsewhere in recent work on post-punk, several writers have drawn attention to post-punk's variety of influences, illustrated in part by the Rip Rig + Panic performance on *The Young Ones* discussed at the beginning. In his work on Joy Division and the use of holocaust imagery in post-punk music more generally, Matthew Boswell has argued that post-punk musicians turned away from the self-consciously simplistic song-writing style that has come to characterise punk, and more towards the “musicianship” of rock from earlier in the decade.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, perhaps one of the most noticeable stylistic differences between punk and post-punk, which may signify this “musicianship,” is post-punk musicians’ singing style. Male post-punk musicians’ vocal style tended to be smoother and sound more like “singing” (though still untrained) than punk. Take, for example, the singing styles of Paul Haig (Josef K), Ian Curtis (Joy Division), Edwyn Collins (Orange Juice), David Byrne (Talking Heads), Jaz Coleman (Killing Joke), Robert Smith (the Cure), and Ian McCulloch (Echo and the Bunnymen).

This shift from the punk shouting-singing style to something more lyrical may coincide with or be related to what both Michael Goddard and Benjamin Halligan (citing Philip Auslander’s work on glam rock) have characterised as post-punk’s turn towards “theatricality;” a throwing off of the “authenticity” of punk and cultivating instead a “dehumanized inauthenticity.”<sup>27</sup> It also speaks to Goddard and Halligan’s suggestion that being post-punk involved a “hanging up of the leather jackets and a binning of the safety pins: music as lifestyle

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<sup>26</sup> Matthew Boswell, *Holocaust Impiety in Literature, Popular Music and Film* (Basingstoke, UK; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 114.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Goddard and Benjamin Halligan, *Mark E. Smith and the Fall: Art, Music and Politics* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 6. See also Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

option replaced by music as a critical, philosophical engagement with the world around.”<sup>28</sup> Such views of post-punk certainly resonate with my assertion that post-punk musicians’ incorporation of other musical styles, such as reggae, is perhaps tacitly considered more sophisticated and politically right-on than the attempts made by other artists in closely associated genres. But Goddard and Halligan’s definition is also contingent on a narrow view of punk, as a genre that was restricted to surface features: a depoliticised fashion movement as opposed to a genre that engaged with contemporary politics. As Simon Frith and Howard Horne have noted, punk, in the way it was thought of by the Sex Pistols’ manager Malcolm McLaren was the solution to several conundrums posed by critical theory, “a solution to the continuing dilemma of Romantic art—how to be subversive in a culture of commodities.” The mainstream perception of punk, as a “dole queue”-associated genre, forms only part of its story.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, while the singers I listed above all have a similar style, not all post-punk bands shared this characteristic. Notably, all of the vocalists that I listed were male, whereas female post-punk vocalists tended to favour the shouting-singing style associated with punk. Siouxsie Sioux (Siouxsie and the Banshees), Ari Up (the Slits), Delta 5, and Liliput (formerly Kleenex) all had a more “yelpy,” punk style of singing. Bands such as the Slits are arguably included in the post-punk (as opposed to punk) category because the very inclusion of women in a male-dominated genre speaks to the kind of forward-thinking politics that writers such as Reynolds have ascribed to or gleaned from the post-punk genre, even though the Slits (and Siouxsie and the Banshees) were punk contemporaries. It also seems as though the more amateur, punk-inflected style of groups such as the Slits is perhaps overlooked in the interests of a positive politics of gender inclusion.

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<sup>28</sup> Goddard and Halligan, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art in to Pop* (London: Methuen, 1987), 133.

On the one hand, then, it is possible to positively identify some of the most salient aspects of the post-punk style. On the other hand, not all post-punk music fits this model, as illustrated by the different approaches to singing favoured by female vocalists, and the unclear “rules” that govern the way musicians can incorporate reggae into their songs. As Brackett has noted, “no listing of semantic or stylistic content can account for all texts that might be branded by a particular label.”<sup>30</sup> This is not to say that categories of genre are completely illusory. Rather, extra-musical factors are necessarily implicated in the definition of the genre and, as I have demonstrated, these extra-musical factors are also latent in the musical sounds. Post-punk’s musical gestures, its rhythm, melody, harmony, and instrumentation are sutured to the categories that organise social life. It is through their historically accrued connections with genre that musical sounds are able to both signify and complicate social categories, including those of race, gender and sexuality.

### ***Genre as Social***

As my discussion of musical style illustrates, it is difficult to analyse the musical parameters of genre in isolation from its social aspects; musical style and categories of social identity seem sutured to one another. To recall Brackett’s argument, categories of genre in popular music often “indicate a tacit and contingent collective agreement about the ‘proper’ place for different types of music and the social groups most associated with them.”<sup>31</sup> Categories of musical genre are therefore not only decided upon according to musical parameters or sonic characteristics but also the identities of music’s producers and consumers. The interconnectedness between genre and identity is such that certain musical genres can come to represent certain social groups and communities. The inverse is also true, musical categories

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<sup>30</sup> Brackett, “Questions of Genre,” 77.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 89.

produce or shape communities that otherwise would not have necessarily existed. Brackett and Karl Hagstrom Miller have both explored these notions extensively in relation to the topic of race and popular music genres across the twentieth century.<sup>32</sup>

Regarding the identity of post-punk's producers (its musicians, its public faces), most post-punk groups were white (aside from a few exceptions such as drummer Donald Johnson in A Certain Ratio, who is black) and most are male and from the United Kingdom.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, when compared to genres of rock that preceded it, post-punk has a comparatively more inclusive identity politics. The accepted academic narrative, as I discuss in more detail in chapters one and four, is that punk's DIY ethos encouraged women musicians, who had previously been excluded from the male genre of rock, to either join or start their own rock groups. The Slits, the Raincoats, Delta 5, Siouxsie Sioux and Liliput are all staples of the *post-punk* canon even though groups such as the Slits pre-date the post-punk 1978 watershed proffered by Reynolds, and might just as easily be placed in the *punk* canon. I suggest that the inclusion of women musicians in post-punk, as well as the genre's incorporation of certain black-associated musical influences such as reggae and disco, may be related to the meaning of the word "post" in post-punk. Given the fact that many punk, post-punk, and new wave acts were coterminous (such as the female groups listed above), and the difference between these three genres was not especially clear at the time of the music's emergence, it seems to me that the "post" in post-punk means more than simply "after." It seems to stand for "beyond" or "surpassing" the punk genre, by both including women and opening a dialogue with other, previously maligned genres, such as disco. In other

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<sup>32</sup> See David Brackett, "What a Difference a Name Makes: Two Instances of African American Music," in *Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton (New York: Routledge, 2003), 238-50; "Black or White? Michael Jackson and the Idea of Crossover," *Popular Music and Society* (May 2012): 169-85; and Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Popular Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> The inclusion of musicians from the US in the post-punk genre is discussed in more detail in chapter five with reference to Pere Ubu and Devo specifically. I also address the US rock media perspective on new wave/post-punk in chapter one.

words, the “post” stands more for the privileging of marginal Others who had previously been excluded by rock’s differentiation from dominant pop culture, rather than simply for indicating the period after punk.

There are, however, two problems with this idea, both of which I address in more detail in various stages throughout the dissertation. But, to briefly summarise, the first problem concerns the way in which this definition of post-punk as a more “progressive” or inclusive genre than punk depends on a narrow view of both punk (as in the Sex Pistols, the Clash, the Ramones) and its neighbour new wave (as in the Stranglers, the Police, Elvis Costello), and supposes clear differentiation between post-punk, punk, and new wave. The second problem, which I address in the most detail in chapter three, concerns the construction of a particular kind of post-punk masculinity. In certain areas of the rock media, especially in reviews of white male groups, and in some scholarship on this period, the kind of white masculinity articulated in post-punk is implicitly defined according to its essential difference from other categories of identity, such as femininity and blackness.

Furthermore, if the critics of the post-punk era are as integral to a definition of the genre as its musicians, as I have suggested, then the identities of these critics also problematizes this image of post-punk as more socially inclusive than previous genres of rock. Almost all of the critics associated with the post-punk moment, writing for weekly publications such as *New Musical Express*, *Sounds*, and *Melody Maker*, and the monthly publication *ZigZag* were male and mostly white. There were some exceptions such as Vivien Goldman, Carola Dibbell, and Mary Harron, but the critical voices associated with the genre were predominantly male.<sup>34</sup> In making this observation I am keen not to erase the female voices but nevertheless find it

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<sup>34</sup> See also Helen Redddington’s discussion of the male “cultural gatekeepers” of the punk and post-punk era in *The Lost Women of Rock Music: Female Musicians of the Punk Era* (London: Equinox, 2012), esp. 48-76.

significant that post-punk discourse was still very much a product of male criticism, not unlike most other genres of music. Furthermore, it could be argued that post-punk's relative esotericism (compared to a more mainstream classic rock genre) means that post-punk is and continues to be a critics' genre; the kinds of music papers/magazines that I listed above often excluded or derided mainstream genres of popular music. Rock connoisseurship is in many ways characterised by the knowledge and reiteration of certain musical genealogies or canons, and a bohemian-esque refusal of the most hegemonic commercial genres.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to the complex identity politics that characterise post-punk's performers and critics—its predominantly white male profile that prides itself on an Enlightened-seeming investment and interest in rock's Others—it might also be defined by its audience. Regarding post-punk's consumers, it is useful to consider Rick Altman's observations about audiences in his work on genre in film. Altman remarks that when commentators describe the viewing or, for our purposes, the listening process, they often use words such as "audience," "one," or "we." But Altman asks,

who constitutes the "we" thus evoked? Far from representing society at large, or American society as a whole, or even all filmgoers, this "we" stands for a different group in the case of each separate genre. Everyone knows that audiences for women's prison films are radically different from those for folk musicals, yet standard generalizing terminology tends to hide this difference.<sup>36</sup>

Altman suggests therefore that an audience is a specific social group that is brought together by its love of a particular genre. Will Straw has also pointed to the non-homogeneity of

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<sup>35</sup> Will Straw, "Sizing Up Record Collections: Gender and Connoisseurship in Rock Music Culture," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 10. A good example of the rock genealogy at work can be gleaned from music critic Paul Morley's comments about the visual aesthetic of Joy Division's 1979 record, *Unknown Pleasures*. According to Morley, *Unknown Pleasure* just seemed to "belong in your record collection" alongside Roxy Music, the Velvet Underground, and David Bowie's *Diamond Dogs* even though the sleeve for Joy Division's record did not use the same visual language as the sleeve for albums by these artists. See Morley in "Joy Division—The Documentary," YouTube video, 1:35:44, posted by Mathieu Guillien, July 17, 2012, accessed February 10, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1qQsHGHi8w>.

<sup>36</sup> Altman, 157.

cinema's audiences but has argued that the “correlation between tastes and consumption patterns with categories of social identity” is an even “more explicit and resonant component of the sense music fans make of their own involvement in the culture of popular music.”<sup>37</sup> I would argue, furthermore, that an audience is also held together by the positions that individuals occupy in the social world. I am not suggesting that the post-punk audience is a homogenous entity, nor am I suggesting that the identity of an audience remains constant over time—categorisation of music changes with the introduction of new genres and the aging of others, and in the absence of concrete ethnographic data it is of course impossible to say anything definitive about the demographics of the post-punk audience. Nonetheless, based upon what we know about the genre regarding factors such as the time of its emergence, the visual evidence of images from the period, the kinds of venues in which post-punk concerts took place, the ways in which it has been presented (that is, as an inclusive, “radical” genre affiliated with movements such as Rock Against Racism) it is likely that post-punk groups played for their art college peers and/or for audiences who shared similar ideological views.

Delineating post-punk's demographic today, however, is more difficult owing to the way in which digital technologies have extended post-punk music's reach in such a way that its audiences are no doubt spread across the globe, even more so than they would have been in the late 1970s (even though, as I discuss in chapter two, the sound and racial politics of post-punk were inextricable from the circulation of the sounds and people of the African diaspora). Furthermore, post-punk musicians and their peers have aged, and new generations of audiences are no doubt post-punk enthusiasts, spurred by texts such as Reynolds' book and re-releases of post-punk staples such as the 2005 re-recordings by Gang of Four entitled, *Return the Gift*. The

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<sup>37</sup> Will Straw, “Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music,” *Cultural Studies* 5/3 (1991): 374-8.

changing audiences for a genre such as post-punk may be understood through Straw's idea of an artefact's "lifecycle." Straw notes how cultural commodities, such as records, "circulate within their appropriate markets and cultural terrains"; this circulation, Straw continues "is organised as a lifecycle, in the course of which both the degree and basis of their appeal is likely to change."<sup>38</sup> During its lifecycle, then, a genre may pass through a variety of different audiences and demographics.

A model for understanding the way in which demographically and geographically diffuse members of an audience might be held together is through Altman's idea of the "constellated community." Altman notes how film viewers who are fans of a particular genre rarely come into actual contact with each other. He writes,

Isolated from each other, reduced to imaging the larger group on the basis of a few faint sightings, generic communities constitute what I call *constellated communities*, for like a group of stars their members cohere only through repeated acts of imagination.<sup>39</sup>

The "repeated acts of imagination" that hold constellated communities together include, in the case of post-punk, reading the music papers cited above that have contents shaped by a distinct group of voices, or by attending concerts, or by communing on internet forums. Arguably the music papers but especially internet forums facilitate contact between members of generic communities that is constant-seeming, rather than "intermittent." As I discuss in chapter one, internet users form virtual communities who mediate, police, and articulate ideas about popular music genres. An analysis of such communities demonstrates the tension between flux and stability, the relationship between albums and/or texts that are at the core of a genre and those that orbit the genre's periphery.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Altman, 161.

Such “repeated acts of imagination” may not only refer to the idea of imagining oneself as part of a genre- or constellated community, but it could also refer to the kinds of alliances that hold these sometimes diverse social groups together. Frith has noted, for example, how categories of genre not only describe listeners and audiences but they are also a shorthand for what music can “mean” to audiences and listeners. “The musical label,” Frith writes, “acts as a condensed sociological and ideological argument.” It is a sign that signifies “what people like and why they like it.”<sup>40</sup> Straw has made a similar argument with his discussion of the idea of musical scenes and communities. In his article, “Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Scenes and Communities in Popular Music,” Straw defines the differences between alternative rock audiences and those who enjoy dance music; for rock, its followers cohere owing to their valorisation of canons and stability (for example, the Velvet Underground serve as a recurrent touchstone for those often male “white bohemians” who have extensive record collections); for dance music audiences (notably black teenagers, urban club-goers and young girls), ideas such as novelty and internationalization override an affection for canons.<sup>41</sup>

A model that I use in order to comprehend and articulate the complex forms of identity that post-punk speaks to is Georgina Born’s model of the four ways in which music can represent or articulate identity, which she outlines in the introduction to her and David Hesmondhalgh’s book *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*. Born recognises that music is not restricted to simply reflecting its social environs or communities but is capable of both reflecting *and* producing identities, as well as forging modes of identification that take place in between these two opposing poles. None of these modes of

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<sup>40</sup> Frith, *Performing Rites*, 85.

<sup>41</sup> Straw, “Systems of Articulation,” 384-5.

musical identification are, furthermore, mutually exclusive and they can intersect with each other. Identification may also vary between the individual level and the group level.

The first kind of identity formation that Born outlines is the purely imaginary mode, which she describes as “an imaginary figuration of sociocultural identities, with no intent to actualise those identities: a kind of psychic tourism.” This is the identification that one would most likely associate with musical exoticism: a group or individual may incorporate or appropriate the music of a community or individual whose Otherness is not subsumed by a shared interest or point of identification. The second kind of identity formation that Born presents is the prefiguring of emergent social identities that I refer to as an “emergent” identification at several points in this project. This kind of identification occurs when music contributes to the “re-forming” of existing identities. This “emergent” mode is particularly useful when exploring issues of borrowing, influence, and appropriation between two musical scenes that retain a sense of difference from one another but are nonetheless subsumed by a larger social formation. The third mode of identity in music is the homology model, when the linkages between music and identity serve to reinforce or reflect existing kinds of identity. An example of this third mode would be the kind of one-to-one correspondence cultivated by the music industry throughout much of the twentieth century, where categories such as “black music” are thought to appeal exclusively to black listeners. The fourth and final of Born’s modes of identification is the “macrohistorical,” which describes “how musics become subject to inevitable historical reinterpretation and then reinsertion into the changing sociocultural formation—a kind of discursive and practical reflexivity around music.” This mode refers to the retroactive interpretation of the identities with which a particular musical culture is associated.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 35-7.

Another useful model for understanding the relationship between cultural artefacts and social identity is the work of French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, especially his book *Field of Cultural Production*. I employ some key Bourdieusian principles in this dissertation. It is at times productive, for example, to think of genre in terms of Bourdieu's notion of "field"—that is, the cultural arena, delimited by a temporal frame, in which artists and musicians situate themselves and their products. Bourdieu applies his notion of a "field" to French literature in the second half of the nineteenth century. Writers whose work is market-oriented and who are wealthy as a result are situated on the right-hand side of the field, and writers whose work might be considered "autonomous" and who are poor sit on the left-hand side. The specific placement of the writers is given additional nuance via the inclusion of the different kinds of audience with whom particular writers' works are associated, from "no audience" and "intellectual audience" at the left-hand side of the field, to the "bourgeois audience" and "mass audience" situated on the right-hand side. It may be useful, therefore, to think of the late-1970s musical scene as a field in which genres such as disco maybe situated at what Bourdieu calls the "heteronomous" end, the market driven, mass-audience end, since disco was a genre that accrued tremendous financial capital and mainstream appeal. On the other hand, we are more likely to find post-punk at the far left of Bourdieu's field, as a genre that made little financial capital, had a small audience, but attained meaning and prestige through symbolic capital, that is, the endorsement of cultural gatekeepers. Bourdieu's notions of "positions" and "position-takings" are also valuable models for discussing the relationships between different participants in the late-1970s musical field. A position, in the Bourdieusian sense, denotes the space that a musician or a genre may occupy, one that has been carved by precedents in relation to the other positions in the field. A position-taking is the product that the artist makes.<sup>43</sup> As I shall discuss, PiL's 1979 song "Death Disco"

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<sup>43</sup> For a detailed discussion of the ideas of "field" and "positions" see Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of

may be seen as a position-taking that brings the commercial sound of disco into the post-punk domain, which is marked more by symbolic capital than economic capital (i.e. post-punk's value is conferred by other artists and critics rather than by its financial success).

These models regarding the relationship between categories of popular music and categories of social identity will therefore inform much of the theoretical framework of this dissertation. I employ them to explore the relationships between aspects of nation, race, and gender, and as a means of extrapolating the precise processes through which music can come to have a social meaning. As I suggested earlier, these social issues will almost always be presented as sutured to particular musical sounds and the sonic characteristics of post-punk. In short, then, this dissertation seeks to understand the concept of genre in popular music as a social and as a musical phenomenon, as something that both produces identities and is informed by the identities of the musicians themselves, critics, and audience members.

### ***Genre as Power***

As Frith has noted, genre not only acts as a shorthand way of signalling the social groups to whom a particular kind of music communicates; genre also indicates the kinds of significances that are important to or shared by such social groups. Furthermore, Frith has also proposed that genre labelling is “at the heart of pop *value judgements*” (emphasis mine).<sup>44</sup> That is to say, decisions as to whether a song or group is placed in the post-punk category or the new wave category or any category, for that matter, are therefore informed not only by musical-stylistic criteria and/or the identities associated with a particular sound or group, but also by the values or politics of the critics and fans, and the values or politics that are assumed to be embodied by a

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Cultural Production, or: the Economic World Reversed,” in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 29-73, esp. 49 for a diagram of the French literary field.

<sup>44</sup> Frith, *Performing Rites*, 75.

given genre. Canons are a good representation of the interconnection between genre as musical sound, genre as social, and genre as a set of values or a short hand for valorisation. Canons are also closely involved in the process of genre formation over longer stretches of time. As collections or bodies of artists and works (in this case, songs, albums, and groups) canons act as a spinal cord of exemplars.

Musicologists have for some time questioned the validity of the construction of musical canons and musical periods. Historians have more recently favoured a critical historiographical approach, that is, the writing of histories that provides a space for the simultaneity of contrasting musical events. As Gary Tomlinson notes, critical history entails “an awareness of the circumscribed conceptual structures and political interests that helped sponsor such canons in the first place.”<sup>45</sup> Scholars in popular music have employed this kind of critical approach to reveal the extent to which canons of popular music have been constructed according to prevailing systems of power. For example, rock canons of the 1960s and 1970s have been criticised for their Anglo-American male-centrism.<sup>46</sup> The critique of musical canons also gives rise to examinations of how different kinds of canon interact or interrelate, such as the mainstream-alternative dichotomy, or the boundary between heavy metal and punk as in work by Steve Waksman, and also how processes of legitimization that take place in the music press, for example, depend upon certain sets of values and interests, as demonstrated by Bernard Gendron and Keir Keightley.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Gary Tomlinson, “Musicology, Anthropology, History,” in *The Cultural Study of Music*, ed. Martin Clayton, et al., 42.

<sup>46</sup> See Matthew Bannister, “‘Loaded’: Indie Guitar Rock, Canonism, White Masculinities,” *Popular Music* 25/1 (2006): 77-95; and Ralf von Appen and André Doehring, “Never Mind the Beatles, Here’s Exile 61 and Nico: ‘The Top 100 Records of All Time’ – A Canon of Pop and Rock Albums from a Sociological and an Aesthetic Perspective,” *Popular Music* 25/1 (2006): 21-9.

<sup>47</sup> See Steve Waksman, “Introduction: The Metal/Punk Continuum,” and “Metal, Punk, and Motörhead: the Genesis of Crossover,” in *This Ain’t the Summer of Love: Conflict and Crossover in Heavy Metal and Punk* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), esp. 1-18 and 146-71; Bernard Gendron, “Gaining Respect,” and

The idea that histories and objects such as canons are the products of dominant bodies of power is an idea that also pervades the work of Foucault. Foucault stressed the closeness of the relationship between knowledge and power, demonstrating how the presence or absence of particular histories depends upon the prevailing interests of the dominant and those who police and define the boundaries of knowledge. His discussion of Friedrich Nietzsche's work on the ideas of "emergence", "descent" and "origin" prioritizes historical contractions, accidents and the margins of knowledge, stressing that the formation of all knowledge (including classifying systems, read: genre categories) gives rise to oppression in some form.<sup>48</sup> By exposing these systems of power that have contributed to the construction of historical narratives, musical canons, and categories of musical genre one can expose the holes in what, at first glance, appear to be tight, hermetic formations; such as the formation comprised by the genre post-punk. Furthermore, by understanding genre as an epistemology formed through discourse as opposed to an ontology, it becomes possible to challenge the idea that musical genres are definite entities that exist "out there," a quasi-classical idea that recent work in the fields of music information retrieval and computerised analyses of musical genre risk affirming.

The notion of genre as an apparatus of power also takes us back to the issue of the social constituencies who have historically participated in and contributed to the formation of musical genres. Those who have policed genres' boundaries are also marked by their own social positions. Part of this dissertation, then, is invested in the idea of uncovering some of the implicit prejudices or values or politics that hold post-punk together. I contend in chapter five, for

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"Accolades," in *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde*, 161-88 and 189-226 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); and Keir Keightley, "Reconsidering Rock," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, ed. Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street, 109-42 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>48</sup> Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, 76-101 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974).

example, that calling post-punk a “modernist” genre is a means that commentators use to elevate this particular corner of popular music according to the tenets of highbrow culture.

This dissertation takes post-punk as a case study to explore the problems inherent in defining and articulating issues of genre in popular music. I draw on a variety of approaches that include analyses of musical style and of print media discourse, scrutiny of dates and issues of periodization, and attention to the social significations of musical gestures and how they express what Born calls large-scale “social formations,” specifically those of race and gender. I conclude the project not with a definitive picture of post-punk as though it were a stable, identifiable thing, but with a definition of post-punk that takes into account the properties of genre that may be considered like an autostereogram: a dizzying mess of minute historical details that, when looked at from the correct angle, transforms into a tangible and communicable, if only loosely-structured entity.

### ***Chapter Outline***

Chapter one deals specifically with the genealogy of the category post-punk. I look closely at the development of the genre’s name(s), focussing in particular on its earliest usages. I also analyse how recent scholarship and commentary has broken down the late 1970s new wave field into smaller genres by comparing these more recent perceptions of the post-punk/new wave scene with the organisation of the critics’ polls in *ZigZag* and *Village Voice* at the end of the seventies, in both the UK and the US respectively. In the final section of this chapter, I compare a Google-generated post-punk canon with historical discourse about the records included in it, focusing specifically on the 1978 album by the London group Wire, *Chairs Missing*. I return to Derrida’s participation-belonging model to elucidate how historical descriptions of post-punk

music permitted the fluidity of participation, but present day definitions have tended towards exclusivity.

Chapter two is the first of three chapters to look at post-punk as defined according to one of its Others: dub-reggae. I explore the kinds of musico-stylistic ramifications that resulted from post-punk's musical borrowings from dub-reggae, and how this has in many ways become a stylistic marker of the difference between punk and post-punk. But I also examine how this connection between post-punk's white musicians and Britain's Jamaican migrants (the dub-reggae musicians) signified at a wider social and racial level. I draw specifically on the post-colonial work of Paul Gilroy and Homi K. Bhabha, and employ Born and Hesmondhalgh's identification typology to illuminate the kinds of interactions that took place between the punk/post-punk genre and the dub-reggae genre. My overall argument is that post-punk may be defined according to its particular way of incorporating some of the sonic characteristics of dub-reggae as well as an inclusive attitude towards racial difference. Nevertheless, I also highlight the ambivalence of this white-black, British-Jamaican identification by drawing attention to the imbalance of power between these two communities.

Chapter three offers another perspective on post-punk in relation to one of its social Others, turning this time to disco. Taking PiL's song title "Death Disco" as my point of departure, I employ both musical analysis and discourse analysis to argue that post-punk has come to signify a particular kind of white masculinity. I borrow theories of white identity from Richard Dyer to suggest that post-punk whiteness gains its meaning through an implicit comparison with historically-accrued assumptions about both blackness, queerness, and the mainstream.

Chapter four examines the role of female musicians in the post-punk genre. My point of departure is the general academic consensus that the punk movement opened the hitherto male-dominated rock field to women musicians owing to its emphasis on and celebration of amateur aesthetics and non-virtuosity. In order to both critique and enhance this existing narrative in relation to post-punk, I analyse a number of performances by three of post-punk's female groups, the Slits, the Raincoats, and Lora Logic. I also compare the Slits and the Raincoats' articulations of "femininity" against the music of their female contemporaries. I conclude by suggesting that punk and post-punk did not open the field of rock to women musicians because of their essential, gendered musical incompetence, but that the discourse of amateurism provided an important discursive space in which certain women musicians could resist the historical disciplining of the female body.

Chapter five untangles the connection between post-punk's so-called avant-garde aspects and its status as proto-industrial music. Here I juxtapose more contemporary generic divisions that separate the bands Pere Ubu, Devo, and Cabaret Voltaire into new wave, post-punk, and industrial, correspondingly, with the historical discourse, which tied all three bands according to their art-school kudos and their origins in former industrial cities. As with my other chapters, this close analysis elucidates the assumptions and values that lurk behind processes of categorisation, I therefore question recent scholarship's tendency to frame post-punk and new wave as "modernist," arguing that such an interpretation may be a means to legitimise certain popular musics according to the strictures of highbrow culture and the academy.

Rather than close with a definition of post-punk, in the epilogue I suggest that the aim of this dissertation has been to illuminate some of the criteria according to which post-punk has been delineated. As I suggested at the beginning of this introduction, this dissertation aims to

suspend the “forms of continuity” that hold post-punk together as a means of restoring “the statement to the specificity of its occurrence.”<sup>49</sup> I attempt to question the “constancy” (or continuity) of post-punk as an object/genre and expose the “interplay of rules” that have made the appearance of post-punk possible.<sup>50</sup> Time weathers, and those in power carve, genres out of otherwise unclear, unstable or inchoate masses of artefacts of all kinds—songs, albums, articles, musicians, critics, listeners. In my final analysis, I suggest that the “post” in post-punk is not necessarily determined by post-punk’s temporal relation to punk but stands, rather, as an indicator of stylistic hybridity that may be read as emblematising a particular kind of symbolic capital that other genres of popular music, including punk, are seen to lack.

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<sup>49</sup> Foucault, *Archaeology*, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 30-2.

## CHAPTER ONE

### What is Post-Punk?: The Genealogy, Emergence, and Signification of a Name

In this chapter I begin by mapping the standard narrative concerning the emergence of post-punk as a genre. I highlight how post-punk is often considered one of three “splinter” genres that appeared after the archetypical punk band the Sex Pistols disbanded in January 1978. In addition to post-punk, these “splinters” included new wave and real punk. In the interests of restoring the historical contradictions and tensions that surrounded the emergence of post-punk as a category, however, I then move on to analyse the media discourse in the years immediately following punk’s purported collapse, from late 1977 to mid-1978. I focus particularly on the now-forgotten categories “New Musick” and “power pop,” the still-in-circulation categories punk and new wave, as well as on the emergence of the term “post-punk” as a generic name. I not only illuminate the unsteadiness and uncertainty regarding categorisation, and the fluctuating generic terms used during this era, but I also highlight the different values and interests that individual critics communicated and how their predilections influenced their categorising decisions.

I then pan-out from looking at the micro-distinctions between these three closely intertwined generic neighbours (punk, post-punk, and new wave) and analyse post-punk’s position within the larger field of late-1970s popular music. I concentrate specifically on the critics’ end of year poll in the US magazine *Village Voice* and the readers’ end of year poll in the UK music paper *ZigZag*, evaluating how most new wave music of the time was grouped and appraised together in opposition to certain groups or individuals who stood metonymically for the most loathed of other genres, such as middle-of-the-road (MOR) rock and disco.<sup>1</sup> I call

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I employ the term “new wave” as a catchall term to refer to the musical activity in the UK and the US in the mid- to late 1970s that existed outside of the genres disco, funk, Kosmische Musik, progressive

attention, therefore, to the way in which attempts at clear, fine-grained distinctions amongst punk, new wave, and post-punk were rare, and when they were made, critics tended to wear their uncertainty conspicuously. In this section I also begin to carve out post-punk's social parameters, as a genre nested within the larger new wave framework, which was in turn marked by white male bohemianism.

In the final part of the chapter, I contrast this historical perspective with an easily accessible present-day articulation and policing of what constitutes post-punk: a Google-generated canon. I analyse the historical discourse connected with one of the first LPs that appear on the Google list, Wire's *Chairs Missing* (1978), which may be seen as sitting just on the cusp of post-punk. With reference to Derrida's discussion of participation and belonging, I discuss some of the ways in which the "canonical" album *Chairs Missing* historically participated in other genres but has come to belong exclusively to post-punk. The larger purpose of the chapter is to argue that the definition of the post-punk genre was not decided upon immediately after the death of punk, but, rather, is something that has solidified over a long period of time, and has been shaped by the predilections of critics and fans.

### ***Punk Splinters***

Within just a year of its christening in 1976, punk in the UK was already rumoured to be flagging, only to be declared dead by London newspaper the *Standard* in early February 1978.<sup>2</sup>

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rock, hard rock, and mainstream pop. My use of the term is therefore a reflection of the way in which it was used during the period in question and accords with Bernard Gendron's use of the term in his book *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), esp. 270-1.

<sup>2</sup> Simon Reynolds suggests that punk took until mid-1978 to "die" and that it had already become parody of itself by summer 1977. See Simon Reynolds, *Rip it up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984* (New York; London, Penguin, 2005), 1. For more on punk in its earliest stages, see Caroline Coon's article in *Melody Maker* of August 1976, which captures the energy of the punk movement at the moment of its emergence. Her article not only provides a detailed overview of the movement's main aesthetic principles, and also provides an introduction to punk's main UK and US purveyors, including Sex Pistols, the Ramones, Buzzcocks, Television, and the Clash. See Coon, "Punk Rock: Rebels Against the System," *Melody Maker*, August 7, 1976, 24-5.

According to Dave Laing in his 1985 book *One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock*, however, punk's "spirit" lived on in a new genre known as post-punk. Groups such as PiL, Joy Division, Gang of Four, and Siouxsie and the Banshees revived punk's aggressive energy, its air of experimentation and its anti-industry ethos.<sup>3</sup> Simon Reynolds presents a similar narrative in his brimming 2005 post-punk chronicle *Rip it up and Start Again*. In contrast to the more working-class-associated genre known as Oi!, post-punk (or what he calls the "postpunk vanguard") comprised those musicians who, according to Reynolds, saw the punk period "not as a return to raw rock 'n' roll" as other punks did, "but as a chance to break with tradition." He suggests that the "prime years" for this tradition-breaking music were between 1978 and 1982.<sup>4</sup>

Even though Reynolds' "postpunk vanguard" included bands as diverse as the gloomy, dub- and disco-inflected strains of PiL and Joy Division, the peppy cosmopolitan pop of Talking Heads, and the utterly merciless musical violence of Throbbing Gristle, he has suggested that these bands can be grouped together into a single genre because they all,

dedicated themselves to fulfilling punk's uncompleted musical revolution, exploring new possibilities by embracing electronics, noise, jazz and the classical avant-garde, and the production techniques of dub reggae and disco.<sup>5</sup>

Reynolds' book could be viewed as a survey of the time period 1978-84 that encompasses many subgenres, as opposed to a definitive delineation of post-punk as a single genre. Like Laing, Reynolds therefore sees post-punk as a continuation of punk's unfinished business, a resuscitation of punk's energy and revolutionary spirit. Post-punk was a "counterculture" of musicians, Reynolds suggests, who "shared a common belief that music

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<sup>3</sup> Dave Laing, *One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock* (Milton Keynes, UK; Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1985), 106-8.

<sup>4</sup> Reynolds, x.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

could change the world.”<sup>6</sup> This is the same endorsement of post-punk (and punk’s) capacity for ideology critique that was articulated almost verbatim some decades earlier by Greil Marcus.<sup>7</sup> Both Reynolds and Marcus betray what could be described as a modernist sensibility in their discussions of punk and post-punk; they display an allegiance to progressive, leftist politics without necessarily interrogating their own subject positions as part of a lineage of white, male bohemian cultural gatekeepers. In addition to its “revolutionary” potential, Reynolds also suggests that post-punk musicians revitalised punk by borrowing “new” musical “possibilities” from other, non-punk and non-rock genres.<sup>8</sup> Some of the genres from which post-punk musicians drew these revitalising or “new” elements, such as dub-reggae and disco, were marked by social as well as musical difference. These genres also stood outside of the anti-commercial ethos associated with the rock genre more broadly. In this regard, dub-reggae and disco might be considered resources or even colonies from which punk and post-punk musicians borrowed in order to sustain or reinvigorate the punk movement.<sup>9</sup>

Echoing Reynolds’ narrative regarding punk’s offshoots Oi! and post-punk, as well as Laing’s teleological trajectory from punk to post-punk, Theo Cateforis has also proposed that punk broke off into distinct factions after the movement purportedly ended. He writes,

The three main splinters that had appeared in the wake of punk’s collapse at the dawn of 1978—new wave, new musick (or post-punk, as it would soon be called),

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>7</sup> Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Will Straw has also argued that punk mined “lateral” genres such as reggae in order to sustain itself. See Straw, “Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music,” *Cultural Studies* 5/3 (1991): 374-8. Similarly, David Brackett has argued that mainstream popular music has tended to treat African American music as a colony from which it may “draw periodically, to replenish itself in times of scarcity.” See Brackett, “(In Search of) Musical Meaning: Genre, Categories, and Crossover,” in *Popular Music Studies*, ed. David Hesmondhalgh and Keith Negus (London: Arnold, 2002), 69. I discuss the issues of appropriation and borrowing, and the postcolonial aspects of such practices in more detail in chapters two and three.

and real punk—would all continue to grow and prosper well into the 1980s. But of these three only new wave would take hold as a viable commercial entity.”<sup>10</sup>

In his book *Are We Not New Wave? Modern Pop at the Turn of the 1980s*, Cateforis argues that the term “new wave” referred to those musicians who were commercially successful (“a viable commercial entity”), who purveyed a “futurist pop” aesthetic, and whose careers began in the mid-1970s and continued into the early 1980s. For Cateforis, new wave was characterised by the prevalence of kitsch, camp, synthesizers, and the detritus of contemporary culture, elements that he regards as being particularly “modern.” With the exception of Gary Numan, most of Cateforis’ musical examples of what constituted new wave are drawn from the United States, and include bands such as Devo, Talking Heads, and the B52s.<sup>11</sup>

Cateforis’s definition of new wave is, however, more in line with what Bernard Gendron has referred to as the “second wave” of new wave, which emerged in 1978 and ran through to approximately 1980.<sup>12</sup> According to Gendron the term “new wave” was first used in London only a few months after the word punk was taken up and, around mid-decade, new wave started to be used interchangeably with punk, especially on the scene associated with the New York club CBGBs. By the end of 1977, Gendron suggests, the term new wave “had definitely triumphed in the United Kingdom as the proper label for the then-contemporary underground music” and was used to categorise the groups Ultravox, the Adverts, and Generation X specifically. Importantly, however, Gendron also notes that the term new wave served to “capture in punk bands what the designator ‘punk’ left out—the arty, avant-gardish, studied and ironic dimension that

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<sup>10</sup> Theo Cateforis, *Are We Not New Wave? Modern Pop at the Turn of the 1980s* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 27.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-4.

<sup>12</sup> Gendron, 249.

accompanied the streetwise, working-class, and raucously ‘vulgar’ dimension,” which recalls Reynolds and Cateforis’s allusions to “modernist” strains in this era’s music.<sup>13</sup>

Thus Laing, Reynolds, and Cateforis all propose that three categories emerged after punk’s disintegration: real punk (or Oi!), new wave, and post-punk. And, implicitly or explicitly, all of these commentators, including Gendron, have indicated a necessity for a genre label that could accommodate the more obviously arty aspects of punk (exemplified by groups such as Talking Heads or PiL), a label that did not just denote the now clichéd “three-chord” rumblings of the Ramones. While in some ways the splinter model is tenable, only Gendron (and to some extent Reynolds) seems to account for the confusion and uncertainty regarding what actually happened to these three musical categories at the end of 1977 and at the beginning of 1978.

Several issues are worth attending to, then, if one wants to restore some of the tensions and confusions regarding terminology and genre separation in this particular area of the mid- to late-1970s popular music field. First, in spite of what the London tabloid media claimed at the time, and despite the number of industry-styled punk imitators that emerged after the disbandment of the Sex Pistols at the beginning of 1978, to suggest that punk had died altogether is somewhat misleading. Or, at least, it reflects an investment in punk and a particular vision thereof that was not shared with mainstream audiences, but rather the perspective of critics. In addition to the newer “new wave” groups who emerged on the popular music scene after the end of 1977 (such as Blondie, Elvis Costello, and the Jam), some holdovers from the punk period

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 270-1. In a slightly later article than the one published August 1976, Coon defined the difference between punk and new wave as follows: “New Wave: An inclusive term used to describe a variety of bands like Eddie and the Hot Rods, the Stranglers, Chris Spedding And the Vibrators, the Suburban Studs, Slaughter and the Dogs who are not definitively hard-cord punk but, because they play with speed and energy or because they try hard, are part of the scene”; and “Punk: Not a popular label but now accepted to describe bands like the Clash, the Damned, Eater, Chelsea, Siouxsie, the Sex Pistols—bands who usually play frantically fast, minimal aggressive rock with the emphasis on brevity, an all-in sound rather than individual solos.” See Coon, “Punk Alphabet,” *Melody Maker*, November 27, 1976, 33.

(including the Adverts, the Clash, Buzzcocks, Vibrators, Television, Jonathan Richman and the Modern Lovers, the Patti Smith Group, and X-Ray Spex) all had Top 40 singles in the UK in 1978. One might argue that punk's mainstream success signified its death, but this is also problematic since "God Save the Queen," the quintessential punk song, reached No.2 in the UK singles chart during the Queen's Jubilee month in 1977, indicating that punk in the UK was a mainstream movement as much as it was a critics' genre, even from its very beginnings.

Secondly, as Reynolds has also noted, multiple bands that are considered to be part of the post-punk genre actually pre-date the 1978 watershed, such as Throbbing Gristle and Devo, amongst others. The name "post"-punk is therefore deceptive, since it implies a straight line of descent from one genre to the next and therefore obscures the lack of clarity that surrounded rock music categorisation in the wake of, and even during, the punk/new wave era. In actual fact, the rock media circulated different names for the kinds of music that emerged from late 1977 onwards that was connected with punk and new wave—including New Musick, the avant-garde, the new music, power pop—before the now accepted trajectory of punk to post-punk solidified, and the splinter model became accepted.

### ***New Musick vs. Power Pop***

"When's the last time you saw a new waver wearing a sweater?"

Chris Brazier, *Melody Maker*, December 1977

Both Reynolds and Cateforis have cited the "New Musick" edition in *Sounds* magazine of November 26, 1977 as the starting point for the emergence of the post-punk genre. The supplement's contents were penned by Jon Savage, one of the main music journalists of the punk and post-punk era, and included an article on Siouxsie and the Banshees, as well as the German group Kraftwerk. According to Cateforis, Throbbing Gristle, Wire, and the Slits were also brought under the New Musick banner. He notes in particular how the journalists writing for this

issue of *Sounds* implied that “coldness” and “harshness” were some of the central characteristics of New Musick.<sup>14</sup> Brian Eno was another musician of the era whose music temporarally fell into the New Musick category. One month after the *Sounds* special issue, in December 1977, journalist Vivien Goldman, also at *Sounds*, described Eno as a musician who had “won his battle to make thought-provoking, surprise New Musick a Western rock reality.”<sup>15</sup>

Goldman’s use of the word “Western” in the phrase “Western rock reality” in her description of Eno’s music perhaps gives us some insight into the origin of, or associations held by, the term New Musick. With the word “Western” Goldman may have been alluding to one of the main politico-geographic preoccupations of the late 1970s, the Cold War. In particular, she and the other critics who used the term New Musick may have been referring to the division of Germany into East and West.<sup>16</sup> Famously, Eno was instrumental in the production of two-thirds of David Bowie’s so-called “Berlin Trilogy” (“Heroes,” *Low*, and *Lodger*), two of which (alongside Iggy Pop’s *The Idiot* and *Lust for Life*) were either produced or recorded in Berlin’s Hansa Studio. According to Reynolds, these Berlin-associated albums,

signaled a shift away from America and rock ‘n’ roll toward Europe and a cool, controlled sound modelled on the Teutonic “motorik” rhythms of Kraftwerk and Neu!—a sound in which synthesizers played as much of a role as guitars.<sup>17</sup>

This penchant for all things German in opposition to “American and rock ‘n’ roll” that Reynolds identifies here may have also been the inspiration for the quasi-Germanic spelling of “Musick,” which is close to *Musik*, as well as the quasi-Germanic capitalisation of the words. Furthermore, this music’s purportedly “ice cold” character, and Reynolds’ references to

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<sup>14</sup> Cateforis, 27.

<sup>15</sup> Vivien Goldman, “Brian Eno: Before and After Science,” *Sounds*, December 10, 1977, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/brian-eno-before-and-after-science>.

<sup>16</sup> Some rock press reflections on being in Cold War Germany can be read in Paul Rambali’s interview with Wire following their tour with Roxy Music in summer 1979. See Paul Rambali, “Reluctant Rock Stars: A Nation in Crisis,” *New Musical Express*, July 7, 1979, accessed July 21, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/reluctant-rock-stars-a-nation-in-crisis>.

<sup>17</sup> Reynolds, 4-5.

technology (synthesizers and “motorik” rhythm) evoke the imagined bleakness that lay beyond the Iron Curtain, and reinforces stereotypes about people from Germany and their alleged rigid, robotic disposition. This would also explain the inclusion of the German group Kraftwerk in Savage’s New Musick editorial, alongside Throbbing Gristle and Siouxsie and the Banshees, who were both from the UK. The Nazi iconography used by Siouxsie and the Banshees in particular may too have justified Savage’s decision to include them in the New Musick section. New Musick in 1977, then, seems to have signified a messy, slightly xenophobic amalgam of the Third Reich, Eastern Bloc chic and Kosmische Musik, united under an image of clichéd Germanic severity, austerity, and technophilia. Importantly, some of the kinds of associations conjured by the term New Musick have endured and become part of post-punk’s often unspoken criteria, especially those of coldness, harshness, and darkness, as I shall discuss later in this chapter.<sup>18</sup>

*Sounds*’ creation of the New Musick category did not go without rebuff, however. Kris Needs at *ZigZag* magazine quipped some months later in early 1978 that the New Musick label only “kept its momentum for about a week before power pop wimmed in.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the term New Musick was invoked mockingly throughout most of 1978 to refer to a passing fad invented by the music journalists at *Sounds*. As Needs suggested, the label “power pop” circulated a few months after the appearance of New Musick in *Sounds* and several writers drew comparisons

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<sup>18</sup> In the same edition of *Sounds*, in a separate article from the one devoted to New Musick, Savage used the term “New Musick” with reference to Devo. The signification of his use of the term New Musick is not, however, especially clear. He appears to have been self-consciously reflecting on the whole idea that there could be a genre of “new” music. With reference to Devo’s song “Social Fools,” Savage wrote, “You want ‘new musick?’ social fools? Beyond ...” and goes on to quote Devo’s interest in German groups such as Kraftwerk who, according to Devo, resisted the rock paradigm associated with the previous generation of 1960s rock. For Devo, in other words, German musicians pioneered the new music or New Musick, which derived meaning in opposition to hippie rock of the 1960s. See Jon Savage, “Devo Look Into The Future!” *Sounds*, November 26, 1977, accessed January 22, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/devo-look-into-the-future>.

<sup>19</sup> Kris Needs, “Wire,” *ZigZag*, March 1978, accessed July 21, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/wire>.

between the two categories. It was in *Sounds* again that a two-part special on power pop appeared on February 18, 1978. Chas (Charles) de Whalley wrote the first instalment and Savage wrote the second, but both writers had a decidedly different take on what constituted power pop.<sup>20</sup>

For Savage, power pop was 60s-redolent, “nice” in a way that punk was not, and denoted bands such as the aptly named the Pleasers and the Boyfriends. According to Savage, who often employed as a rhetorical strategy the familiar binary between rock as entertainment with commercial aspirations and rock as anti-commercial or authentic, these bands were only in it for the money.<sup>21</sup> The Pleasers were, effectively, a Beatles-imitation group complete with mop-top haircuts and a lively early 1960s-style sound exemplified by songs such as “Billy,” which appeared on the 1978 new wave compilation *Hope and Anchor Front Row Festival*.<sup>22</sup> The Boyfriends were perhaps a little edgier, with a sound more similar to Elvis Costello (especially on songs such as “Last Bus Home” and “Saturday Night”) and adopted a Costello-esque 1950s and 1960s retro sensibility. According to Savage, groups such as the Pleasers were hyped (unconvincingly for him) as the next “post-punk thing.”<sup>23</sup>

Reflecting his view that music has the capacity to enact social change (thus foreshadowing both Marcus and Reynolds’ “music-to-change-the-world” credo), Savage’s article on power pop criticised the very idea of dividing music into genres altogether. He suggested that

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<sup>20</sup> Cateforis considers power pop to be subgenre of new wave, a genre that can be defined by the revival of mid-1960s musical culture. For his chapter on power pop see Cateforis, “I Wish it could be 1965 Again”: Power Pop and the Mining of Rock’s Modern Past,” 123-50.

<sup>21</sup> Jon Savage, “Power Pop Part 2: The C&A Generation In The Land Of The Bland,” *Sounds*, February 18, 1978, accessed March 19, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/power-pop-part-2-the-ca-generation-in-the-land-of-the-bland>.

<sup>22</sup> This song appeared alongside songs by recognised punk/post-punk staples such as XTC and the Stranglers, as well as Dire Straights.

<sup>23</sup> Savage, “Power Pop Part 2.” Around the same time, there was a Manchester band called the Smirks who journalist Andrew Harries described as neatly combining “elements of new wave and nostalgia. They feature quirky Shadows-style dance routines.” See Harries, “Manchester: Riding the Second Wave,” *Melody Maker*, June 3, 1978, 38.

categorisation only serves to make music and musicians more malleable and amenable to the interests of the music industry. Categorisation, he suggested, also limits audiences' access to what he perceived as "interesting" music. Nevertheless, in place of power pop (represented by the Pleasers and the Boyfriends) Savage proposed that the groups Devo, Pere Ubu, and Magazine might generate the next wave of musical excitement after punk. The music that these groups made was, according to Savage, more than just "esoterica," but actually had the potential for popular appeal. In Savage's mind, these groups could deliver the "substance" that was "needed" after the "shock" of punk had dismantled the rock 'n' roll paradigm, which for Savage was characterised by a subtle blend of misogyny and hedonism: "I mean [rock 'n' roll is] all about fun 'n' barfing, eh, schoolgirls (corrrr!) and a piss up, innit?"<sup>24</sup>

Quoting Manchester punk-poet John Cooper Clarke, whose words appeared in *New Musical Express (NME)* earlier that year, Savage endorsed the imagination, artistic aspirations and contemporaneity of what Cooper Clarke called "new wave" groups, which comprised Devo, Pere Ubu, and Magazine:

(The new wave) is the nearest thing there's ever been to the working classes going into areas like surrealism and Dada ... I think people in the new wave have done the smart thing and walked into those areas ... I don't think I've ever seen a punk group that didn't have something imaginative about it ...<sup>25</sup>

Two main points can be extrapolated from Savage's discussion of power pop, then. First, the terms new wave and punk were fluid. Savage's use of Cooper Clarke's quote illustrates this well, since Cooper Clarke uses the two categories interchangeably. Secondly, Savage implied that the newer music to emerge from the new wave scene (Pere Ubu, Devo, and Magazine) had a degree of artistic credibility that set it apart from both earlier examples of punk *and* the kind of

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<sup>24</sup> Savage, "Power Pop Part 2."

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. I discuss these musicians' references to art-historical movements such as surrealism and Dada in more detail in chapter five.

power pop purveyed by bands like the Pleasers and the Boyfriends. His use of descriptors like “estoberica” and “substance” in relation to the groups Devo, Pere Ubu, and Magazine, and his quotation from Cooper Clarke highlight the avant-garde kudos of the *new new wave*.

Savage’s low opinion of power pop and appreciation of the artiness of Devo et al., chimed with the ideas put forward a week earlier by de Whalley in his article, “Power Pop Part 1: Suddenly, Everything is Power Pop!” In a more amusing, less earnest tone De Whalley also categorised the bands on the 1978 new wave scene according to the extent to which they did or did not project an artistic, intellectual sensibility. Significantly, de Whalley did not single out the Boyfriends or the Pleasers as the main purveyors of power pop but instead pointed to certain bands from the New York punk scene such as Jonathan Richman, Blondie, the Ramones, the Dead Boys, and UK musician Elvis Costello. For de Whalley, power pop did not necessarily refer to Beatles-imitators (as it did with Savage) but was, rather, “all about hooks and excitement.” De Whalley suggested that the New York bands had:

Power Pop potential because all make the sort of music that could/can so easily turn up a three-minute classic Pop song light years closer to the realities of the late Seventies than any ChinniChap ballroom blitz.<sup>26</sup>

For De Whalley, then, a group could qualify as power pop if it boasted “pop” elements such as short songs and a sing-able chorus. He also saw power pop as a continuation of the movement started by the punks who, for him, simultaneously expanded the music-listening horizons of the mainstream while maintaining accessibility and what could be considered a kind of “crossover” appeal:<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Chas de Whalley, “Power Pop Part 1: Suddenly, Everything is Power Pop!” *Sounds*, February 11, 1978, accessed March 19, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/power-pop-part-1-suddenly-everything-is-power-pop>. “The Ballroom Blitz” was a 1973 song by the British glam rock band, the Sweet. ChinniChap refers to the song-writing duo Mike Chapman and Nicky Chinn, who wrote the song “The Ballroom Blitz.”

<sup>27</sup> David Brackett has written extensively on the concept of crossover. The term refers primarily to a song that crosses over from one chart into the mainstream. Historically most crossover paths have lead from the black music chart (called variously race, R&B, soul, and urban at different epochs) or the country music chart onto the

The Pistols, the Stranglers, the Clash and the Damned all had chart hits with their first singles and the ears of the suburban studs and the doe-eyed shop girls were opened for the first time in years to sounds that came from way outside the ruling coalition of 10cc/Queen/The Stylistics/Stevie Wonder/Boz Scaggs and the other Adult Orientated rock medicine shows.<sup>28</sup>

Significantly, de Whalley also positioned power pop in relation to New Musick, and it is in this regard that he foreshadowed Savage's references to "substance" and "esoterica," which were published a week later. De Whalley conceded that "New Musickites" such as Devo, Pere Ubu, the Pop Group, and Siouxsie and the Banshees could indeed join in the revelry of power pop, providing that they "leave their library books by the door and laugh and joke with us lesser mortals." But, if these New Musick groups could not produce the kind of music that the "kids" demanded, de Whalley argued, they would do nothing more than "[foster] the same kind-of [sic] musical elitism that deprived the people of their own medium of expression back in 1967."<sup>29</sup>

For Savage in *Sounds* magazine in early 1978, then, power pop comprised cynical '60s throwbacks, spawned to exploit the audiences left hungry following the cresting and crashing of punk. In his characteristically idealistic way, and foreshadowing more recent discourse on punk, Savage perceived the first wave of punk as having had the potential for some kind of social revolution: it cleaned up rock's misogyny and hedonism and, with its alleged connection to surrealism and/or Dada, had the potential to become art. From Savage's perspective it was now up to bands like Devo, Pere Ubu, and Buzzcocks-offshoot Magazine to bring "substance" to the new wave scene. De Whalley's pronouncement was different. Only musicians who wrote unpretentious three-minute songs could be considered the new incarnation of the punk spirit.

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mainstream Top 100 (in the US). In this instance, I am suggesting that punk in the UK straddled the divide between critical endorsement from the rock media and Top 40 success. See also Brackett, *Categorizing Sound: Genre and Identity in Popular Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

<sup>28</sup> de Whalley, "Power Pop Part 1."

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Devo and Siouxsie, with their “library books” in tow, were perceived to be taking themselves too seriously, and therefore did not qualify as the logical continuation of the movement associated with the likes of the Sex Pistols and the Clash. Nevertheless, the split between artiness and accessibility pervaded both accounts of what did and did not constitute “power pop.”

This spat between Savage and de Whalley demonstrates, then, that in 1978 even punk itself was not uncontested territory. The punk genre was already fractured along the lines of its critics’ own interests. De Whalley did not detect punk’s artistic sensibility, for example, but Savage did. Similarly, clinging dearly to a view of punk as nothing more than guttersnipe stupidity, pulp novelist and writer of the “insider” punk history, *Cranked Up Really High*, Stewart Home has decried Manchester band the Fall as “art shit,” the majority of the New York scene as “art bores” (with the exception of the Ramones, the Dead Boys, Dictators, and the Electric Chairs), Wire as “art rock not PUNK,” and he has also disqualified the Stranglers from the punk genre because they had “keyboards all over their records.”<sup>30</sup> Even though all of the groups that Home has rejected were contemporaries with those he views as punk (such as Manchester’s Slaughter and the Dogs), their positions have been recalibrated and now accord more with the criteria for post-punk than for punk. The division between unpretentious and pretentious-seeming/arty music can therefore be seen as one of the factors that has contributed to the formation of music that is today widely regarded to be part of the post-punk genre.<sup>31</sup> As Simon Frith and Howard Horne have suggested, post-punk might be considered the “back field” of the pop scene or pop music’s “avant-garde ghetto.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Stewart Home, *Cranked Up Really High: Genre Theory and Punk Rock* (Hove, UK: Codex, 1995), 12-13, 22-3, 51.

<sup>31</sup> Reynolds, for example, notes how post-punk musicians may have been guilty of reinstating “art rock elitism.” See Reynolds, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop* (London: Methuen, 1987), 134-5.

The process of neatly dividing up the new wave scene into distinct categories (punk vs. “art shit,” for example) has been largely retroactive, from Laing to Home to Reynolds. Nevertheless, as de Whalley and Savage’s articles indicate, nascent divisions were emerging. Certain press articles from the period also indicate that punk or new wave was undergoing something of a sea change towards the end of 1977, but this change did not yet have a name that was widely agreed upon. Writing for the UK magazine *Melody Maker* on December 31, 1977 (one month after *Sounds*’ New Musick special) Chris Brazier interviewed the Fall. The tagline underneath an image of the band mid-performance read, “THE FALL: taking the repetition and monotonous vocals which have flooded the country in the past year and developing them into something positive and exciting.”<sup>33</sup> The tagline was extracted from Brazier’s interview with the band. To his ears, not only did the Fall’s music sound more “exciting” than the “repetition and monotonous vocals” of punk, but Brazier also highlighted that the Fall’s music was “clever.” The band shared a similar kind of “intelligence and readiness” to those purveying “art-rock,” and the band’s members were seen as more intellectual than “sub-Ramones” imitators. Even in the Fall’s fashion sense Brazier detected something that made the band conspicuous in the punk *milieu*. He described their clothes as more “nondescript” than those worn by punks, “When’s the last time you saw a new waver wearing a sweater?” he asked the reader.<sup>34</sup> The sweater, in its humble normalcy, was discordant with the torn t-shirts and bondage gear that is now a cliché of punk regalia and Vivien Westwood and Malcolm McLaren’s famous King’s Road clothing shop, Seditionaries/Sex. Furthermore, the sweater also suggested the library-going intellectualism and artiness that critics like de Whalley detected in the Fall’s contemporaries.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Chris Brazier, “United They Fall,” *Melody Maker*, December 31, 1977, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Similarly, two months before Brazier’s article on the Fall, another piece devoted to the Manchester scene divided the city’s main bands into two camps: the first camp included the Worst, the Negatives, the Drones, and

### ***That Which We Call Post-Punk***

In a similar approach to the one that I am employing here with regards to post-punk, punk and new wave, in his work on the emergence of genre categories in film, Altman has scrutinised primary sources to uncover “the terms actually used by contemporaries to describe the films that today are widely recognised as a genre’s early masterpieces.”<sup>36</sup> While exploring the “generic origins” of the (film) musical in particular Altman observes how at the time of the appearance of the earliest films with sound the word “musical” was “always used as an adjective, modifying such diverse nouns as comedy, romance, melodrama, entertainment.”<sup>37</sup>

Taking the (“prime”) years 1978 to 1982 as a sample, a similar tendency can be observed with the term post-punk. Rather than modifying another genre (as was the case with “musical”), however, the term post-punk was frequently used to modify or locate a feeling of emptiness or confusion—a sense of disappointment after the end of 1977. Phrases such as “post-punk letdown,”<sup>38</sup> “post-punk disillusion,”<sup>39</sup> “post-punk jungle,”<sup>40</sup> “post-punk vacuum,”<sup>41</sup> and “post-punk quicksand”<sup>42</sup> represent some uses from the era. Words such as “jungle” imply a sense of chaos that ensued after the break up of the Sex Pistols and the “death” of punk. This chaos perhaps refers to the unsettled significations of terms such as “power pop” and “New Musick”

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Slaughter and the Dogs, and was referred to as the “living reminders” of British punk at its most riveting. Emerging bands such as Magazine, the Fall, and the Buzzcocks, however, were seen as “leading” the new wave in Manchester and pointing towards a cultural regeneration. See “United We Stand,” *Melody Maker*, October 22, 1977, 44-6.

<sup>36</sup> Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 30.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>38</sup> Jon Savage, “Power Pop Part 2.”

<sup>39</sup> Jon Savage, “Red Crayola: Soldier Talk (Radar),” *Melody Maker*, April 28, 1979, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/red-crayola-is-soldier-talki-radar>.

<sup>40</sup> John Pidgeon, “Basil Brush Didn’t Write ‘Boom Boom’: The R&B Revival in London,” *Melody Maker*, December 8, 1979, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/basil-brush-didnt-write-boom-boom-the-rb-revival-in-london>.

<sup>41</sup> Simon Frith, “The Jam is Packed Off to America,” *Creem*, April 1980, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-jam-is-packed-off-to-america>.

<sup>42</sup> Mike Stand, “Classix Nouveau: Art Nouveau,” *Smash Hits*, April 2, 1981, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/classix-nouveaux-art-nouveaux>.

analysed above, and the short-lived appearances of groups such as the Boyfriends, who perhaps hoped to cash-in on the punk fallout but have since disappeared with only the slightest trace.

Other music journalists used post-punk as a social and/or generational category to refer to those who came of age after the celebrated punk high point of 1976 and 1977. These were the post-punk “teenyboppers” who attended concerts given by groups such as the Undertones,<sup>43</sup> the “high brow post-punk kids” at the Parisian nightclub Les Bains Douches (which opened at the end of the 1970s and has been immortalised in the posthumous Joy Division release, *Les Bains Douches 18 December 1979*),<sup>44</sup> or simply the “post-punk blank generation.”<sup>45</sup> The prevailing images of negativity associated with the period after 1976-77 (letdown, vacuum, disillusion, blankness) go hand-in-hand with the images of bleakness or darkness that are regularly used to describe the genre and were, in earlier instances, associated with the music’s quasi-Germanic disposition and its connection to the Kosmische Musik of bands such as Kraftwerk. The idea that punk represented a revolutionary moment after which all other genres and movements were a disappointment, also resonates with Marcus and Reynolds’ interpretation of punk (and post-punk) as a genre capable of ideology critique.

What this early usage of the term post-punk suggests, then, is that the term did not denote a particular cluster of musicians or a set of sonic characteristics. Rather, the term post-punk seems to have been used, at least in its earliest instances, with the emphasis on the *post*. The punk years of 1976 and 1977 served as a historical watershed or point of reference. At roughly the same time as the appearance of the power pop articles in *Sounds*, in February 1978, Charles

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<sup>43</sup> Gavin Martin, “Crash Course in Corruption with the Undertones,” *New Musical Express*, November 4, 1978, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/crash-course-in-corruption-with-the-undertones>.

<sup>44</sup> Max Bell, “Talking Heads: Les Talking Heads à la Carte,” *New Musical Express*, July 28, 1979, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/talking-heads-les-talking-heads-a-la-carte>.

<sup>45</sup> Cynthia Rose, “Invasion of the Walkman People,” *City Limits*, October 16, 1981, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/invasion-of-the-walkmen-people>.

Shaar Murray at the UK music paper *NME* used the term post-punk to refer to the group Magazine, specifically their performance of their single “Shot By Both Sides” on the British television chart show, *Top of the Pops*. He suggested that Magazine were “the most convincing post-punk band so far” (emphasis mine). Murray’s use of the term “most convincing so far” insinuates that there had already been numerous *unconvincing* post-punk bands before the arrival of Magazine, and also that punk’s replacement was being sought only a matter of weeks after the Sex Pistols’ disbandment in January 1978. His description of Magazine’s performance on *Top of the Pops*, furthermore, contains many of the elements that recur in descriptions of the post-punk genre, especially descriptions that exist in present-day non-academic circles. He wrote,

the darkly powerful “Shot By Both Sides”—thunderous, melodramatic, richly textured, naggingly memorable, paranoiac, self-important, an adolescent fantasy captured and expressed with adult power—bam, a first hit and a curiously unimpressive and unexpressive *Top Of The Pops* where Devoto appeared too static and sluggish behind rather silly eye make-up ...<sup>46</sup>

Murray thus framed Magazine’s single, “Shot By Both Sides,” as dark and melodramatic, both of which are terms that one encounters in present-day fan discourse and descriptions of the post-punk genre.<sup>47</sup> He also indicated that this song represented the way in which punk had moved from being an adolescent genre to an adult one. His reference to self-importance also recalls Goddard and Halligan’s description of post-punk as a “hanging up of the leather jackets” and a turn towards “critical, philosophical engagement with the world around,”<sup>48</sup> as well as de Whalley and Savage’s dispute over the bookishness of Devo and Siouxsie and the Banshees.

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<sup>46</sup> Charles Shaar Murray, “Magazine: Howard Devoto’s Enigma Variations,” *New Musical Express*, February 25, 1978, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/magazine-howard-devotos-enigma-variations>.

<sup>47</sup> Note here, for example, fan/blogger Aaron Ortega’s reference to post-punk as “dark territory” or as “our favorite institution for indulging in melancholy grooves.” See Ortega, “The 10 Post-Punk Albums Every Music Fan Should Own,” accessed July 22, 2014,

[http://blogs.dallasobserver.com/dc9/2014/02/post\\_punk\\_albums\\_best.php?page=all](http://blogs.dallasobserver.com/dc9/2014/02/post_punk_albums_best.php?page=all).

<sup>48</sup> Michael Goddard and Benjamin Halligan, *Mark E. Smith and the Fall: Art, Music and Politics* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 6.

Murray's acknowledgement of Devoto's "silly eye make-up" and "static" pose could be interpreted in several ways. It could suggest that Devoto's new look gestured towards the kind of gender play and cross-dressing theatrics that defined groups such as the New York Dolls, who, as Will Straw has noted, were one of several punk progenitors. In this light, Devoto's performance was still within the punk and proto-punk remit.<sup>49</sup> When watching Devoto's performance and observing his appearance, however, one thinks immediately of Eno, which would reinforce Reynolds' argument that post-punk musicians reached back to a time before punk in search of inspiration, and emulated groups such as Roxy Music in terms of both musical and visual style.<sup>50</sup> I hazard, however, that Murray's comments on Devoto's appearance were also intended as a criticism of what he perceived as pretentiousness or artiness, which connects to the art dispute between Savage and de Whalley. The make-up and the unmoving, awkward pose also situate Devoto's performance within the wider notions of post-punk masculinity that I explore in more detail in chapter three.<sup>51</sup>

Murray's description of Magazine as the "most convincing post-punk band so far" thus represents one of the earliest uses of the term "post-punk." It is significant, furthermore, that his description of Magazine highlights its melodramatic, dark, and adult components, as well as Magazine's lead-singer's pretentiousness and performance of bodily awkwardness, since these are the kinds of images and aesthetic ideas that characterise the post-punk genre. But Murray was not the only music critic to begin to use post-punk as a quasi-generic term. Beginning at least as far back as the summer of 1979, Garry Bushell was one writer who not only used post-punk as a

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<sup>49</sup> Will Straw, "Sizing Up Record Collections: Gender and Connoisseurship in Rock Music Culture," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 14.

<sup>50</sup> Reynolds, 4.

<sup>51</sup> "Punk Britannia At The BBC [09]. Magazine - Shot By Both Sides (TOTP 1978)," YouTube video, 2:05, posted by DeKlootHommel, June 27, 2012, accessed January 25, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxahgaOQch0>.

category, but also went so far as to describe what the category actually meant. Describing the Leeds-based band Gang of Four, Bushell wrote,

within the vague boundaries of what is loosely termed after or post punk—music being made in the void left after punk has generally been deemed to have run up the curtain and joined the Choir Invisible—the Gang number amongst the most impressive rock bands currently doing the rounds.<sup>52</sup>

To Bushell post-punk was the “music being made in the void left” by the death of punk, and Gang of Four represented one of those groups. Of course, all kinds of music were produced and consumed after February 1978—therefore Bushell’s description should perhaps be interpreted with the tacit understanding that post-punk music had to have some kind of connection to punk, whether that was a musical connection or, more accurately, a connection to punk as part of the same socio-culturally defined scene.

In a separate article in the publication *Trouser Press* Bushell also highlighted the musical variety that characterised what he called “the new post-punk wave.” Bushell suggested that the genre included “groups as important and diverse as the Gang of Four and the Human League.” Gang of Four were a guitar-based four-piece whose lyrics drew heavily from the kinds of Marxist critical theory to which they were exposed while two of their members were studying in the fine arts department at the University of Leeds. Human League were, as I indicated in the introduction to this dissertation, more of an electro-pop band. Bushell’s 1979 observation that this genre was musically “diverse” therefore corroborates my suggestion that post-punk is a genre that cannot be defined according to a strict set of sonic characteristics.<sup>53</sup>

Having said that, other critics chose to give post-punk a specific sound. When describing the music of British singer-songwriter Joe Jackson in February 1978, for example, Murray noted

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<sup>52</sup> Garry Bushell, “Gang of Four: the Gang’s All Here,” *Sounds*, June 2, 1979, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/gang-of-four-the-gangs-all-here>.

<sup>53</sup> Garry Bushell, “Stiff Little Fingers: (F)Ireland Rockers,” *Trouser Press*, July 1979, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/stiff-little-fingers-fireland-rockers>.

that the musician had managed to combine mid-1960s pop with white reggae and “the *angular, metallic sound* of the post-punk late ‘70s” (emphasis mine). Significantly, Murray’s reference to “angular, metallic sound” recalls the stylistic characteristics that I outlined in the introduction.<sup>54</sup> In addition to the “angular, metallic sound,” critics also characterised post-punk as “defiant”<sup>55</sup> or as having “attack,” which connects the genre back to punk.<sup>56</sup> And, even more specifically, LA punk rock fanzine, *Flipside*, referred to post-punk with the phrase “British guitar disco.”<sup>57</sup> Recalling the debate between Savage and de Whalley regarding New Musick and power pop, the term post-punk was also used on occasion in connection with terms like “art rock” or avant-garde. The Flying Lizards were, for example, described as “the ‘commercially acceptable’ face of experimental post-punk avant-garde.”<sup>58</sup>

The notion that post-punk was a fusion of art and pop was also an idea expressed by Mary Harron in her 1979 interview with Gang of Four, “Dialectics Meets Disco.” During her introduction to her interview with the band, Harron described punk as “an attack on privilege,” which was manifested in the rejection of “the avant-garde as elitist, and disco as a symbol of record company power.” However, the kind of music that Gang of Four was making (in other words, post-punk) differed significantly. She made the following suggestion:

Today punk is dead, the avant-garde has emerged as a powerful force and disco is considered the music of the people. Socialism has replaced anarchy, and theory is

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<sup>54</sup> Charles Shaar Murray, “Joe Jackson: Look Sharp!” *New Musical Express*, February 3, 1978, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/joe-jackson-look-sharp->. For more on the idea of post-punk being characterized by a “metallic” sound see J.C. Costa, “Post-Punk Guitarists,” *Musician, Player, and Listener*, October 1, 1981, 122-4.

<sup>55</sup> Robot A. Hull, “The Raincoats: Odyshape,” *Creem*, October 17, 1981, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-raincoats-odyshapei>.

<sup>56</sup> Andy Gill, “Cabaret Voltaire: Mix Up,” *New Musical Express*, October 20, 1979, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/cabaret-voltaire-imix-upi-rough-trade>.

<sup>57</sup> Danny (Shredder) Weizmann, “The Gun Club,” *Flipside*, 1981, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-gun-club-2>. I discuss post-punk’s relationship to disco in more detail in chapter three.

<sup>58</sup> Penny Valentine, “Flying Lizards: TV,” *Creem*, May 1980, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/flying-lizards-tv>.

no longer despised: “structure” and “ideology” have replaced “frustration” and “energy” as the most over-used words in the rock press.<sup>59</sup>

Harron’s observation of the fusion of the avant-garde (allusions to fine art, artiness) and disco in the music of Gang of Four, as well as her note about the change in language that framed this punk splinter, thus captures some of the central characteristics that other critics also outlined.

From the turbulence of 1978, then, when the rock media seemed to be grappling for generic terms and new movements, into mid-1979 when the term “post-punk” started to settle, a few common recurrent themes or characteristics started to coalesce around a cluster of bands, which included Gang of Four, the Human League, Magazine, Devo, Pere Ubu, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and the Fall. Some of these bands were described as having an “angular, metallic” guitar sound, punk-inspired aggression, darkness, melodrama, bookish intellectualism or political leanings, and a disco groove combined with some loosely artistic or avant-garde practices. I shall discuss these musical characteristics towards the end of the chapter in my analysis of Wire’s 1978 album *Chairs Missing*. For now, however, I would like to pull away from the micro distinctions between these categories that emerged in the years 1978 and 1979 to look at how post-punk can be situated just as meaningfully within the new wave as a whole, which resided within the white bohemian corner of the late 1970s popular music field.

### ***Situating Post-Punk in the Broader Pop Field***

On November 12, 1977, in the same month as *Sounds*’ New Musick special, *Melody Maker* ran a three-page feature on the success of British new wave in the United States. Within this category *Melody Maker* included the Jam, the Sex Pistols, the Clash, the Damned, Elvis Costello, the Rezillos, Generation X, and the Stranglers, groups who have more recently been broken up into at least two separate categories: punk and new wave. The UK’s economic

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<sup>59</sup> Mary Harron, “Dialectics Meets Disco,” *Melody Maker*, May 26, 1979, 17-18.

hardship and some of the musicians' propensity towards ideology critique were also considered specific to the British new wave and distinct from the United States' branch. The writer noted how Paul Weller's (lead-singer of the Jam) decision to stay in a New York hotel overlooking Central Park for forty pounds a night was, for example, "not at all in line with the new wave code of conduct." After spending two weeks in the US, the article's writer also seemed particularly unimpressed with the fact that no new wave was ever played on FM radio. S/he wrote, "The heavies, from Peter Frampton to Fleetwood Mac to Led Zeppelin, still carry all the weight, and American kids seem content with that." Even bands like Boston and Kansas, made in the image of Led Zeppelin, were more attractive to American young people than the new wave. According to *Melody Maker*, bands like Television and Talking Heads were considered in the US to be part of a "sophisticated clique" whereas the Ramones and Blondie were just "hip pop" bands. This opposition between new wave and MOR rock echoes de Whalley's criticism that punk/new wave was the only genre so far to challenge the "ruling coalition" of disco and MOR rock.<sup>60</sup>

One exception, however, was Elvis Costello, who managed to straddle the mainstream and the new wave. He apparently received the most FM radio play "of any import record in history" at that time with his 1977 album, *My Aim is True*.<sup>61</sup> Costello's success amongst critics in the US was indeed confirmed roughly a year later. His gap-toothed, bespectacled visage starred on the front cover of the *Village Voice* when they announced the results of their 1978 Annual Pazz and Jop Critics' Poll on January 22, 1979, with a headline that announced the "Triumph of the New Wave." With an analysis and debrief written by the *Village Voice*'s resident music critic Robert Christgau, the poll comprised the votes of ninety-seven music critics from publications

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<sup>60</sup> de Whalley, "Power Pop—Part 1."

<sup>61</sup> "Will America Swallow the New Wave?" *Melody Maker*, November 12, 1977, 37-8, 69.

such as *Stereo Review*, *High Fidelity*, *Circus*, and *Crawdaddy*. According to Christgau, the 1978 poll was “overwhelmed by a post-punk sweep” with sixteen of the thirty “finishers” belonging to the new wave genre, which, it should be added, he *distinguished* from punk in his opening sentence, but *elided* with post-punk.<sup>62</sup> The sixteen that Christgau were referring to included Elvis Costello, Nick Lowe, the Clash, Talking Heads, Ramones, Ian Dury, Patti Smith Group, Television, Devo, Blondie, Pere Ubu, Wire, and Generation X. All of these groups are musically diverse and all of them have more recently been divided into the sub-groups new wave, punk, and post-punk. There were allusions to such smaller divisions within Christgau’s analysis but these were allusions at best and not thoroughly systematised. He noted, for example, how the more “conservative critics” were enamoured with Costello and Nick Lowe, but that the “new wavers” had moved onto Pere Ubu and the Contortions, which suggests that new wave for Christgau signified the edgier artier faction, whereas popular musicians such as Costello occupied a different sphere; new wave for Christgau seems to have signified post-punk but the more popular faction, what we now consider new wave, did not have a name.<sup>63</sup>

On the whole, however, Christgau pitted new wave’s success against more strongly differentiated, surrounding, or what Beebee calls neighbouring, genres.<sup>64</sup> Much to his own chagrin about becoming what he calls a “cultist” (by which I think he meant “elitist”) and recalling *Melody Maker*’s disappointment with US radio fare, Christgau’s analysis highlights the widening gap between music that is popular in the mainstream and music that was popular amongst his ninety-seven critics. Christgau singles out the film *Grease* (and presumably its soundtrack), as well as hard rock, as mainstream successes of which he did not approve:

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<sup>62</sup> Robert Christgau, “The Triumph of the New Wave: Results of the Fifth (or Sixth) Annual Pazz and Jop Critics’ Poll,” *Village Voice*, January 22, 1979, 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas O. Beebee, *The Ideology of Genre: A Comparative Study of Generic Instability* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 28, 250-7, 263, 279.

The rock that has become America's popular music is rotten from Olivia Newton-John [star of *Grease*] all the way to Kansas. Good art and/or worthy entertainment will continue to be created within its various genres, but as forms they're moribund.<sup>65</sup>

Christgau did not condemn all mainstream music, however, noting in its defence that “some disco records do more than just succeed on their own terms, as dance music—some of them are wonderful rock and roll.” What this mainstream-critical split indicates is the way in which new wave/punk/post-punk may be said to have held more symbolic capital than mainstream pop or MOR rock. If we were to situate new wave/post-punk/punk in a Bourdieu-style “field of cultural production,” it would occupy the lower left section of the field, the space designated for artists whose work is popular with small, young, bohemian audiences, and who acquire prestige via the endorsement of fellow artists and critics. Disco and MOR rock, on the other hand, would be closer to the lower right-hand side of the field, as they were more “dominant” musical genres with a mass audience and mass-market-oriented music.<sup>66</sup>

Christgau was also keen to condemn the homophobia and racism behind the “Disco Sucks” movement. It is in this regard that Christgau also lamented the fact that one main genre/identity was missing from the 1978 poll, that of black music. Only Parliament’s *One Nation Under One Groove* and Al Green’s *Truth ‘n’ Time* made it into the critics’ top 30. Partly owing to its “forced” and “frantic” nature, which indicates a mapping of social stereotypes onto racially-marked musical genres, Christgau suggests that new wave “isn’t just (blues-based) white music—it’s White Music, or maybe even WHITE MUSIC.” Christgau reflected, “Racial balance proved even more difficult to come by. Our informants were useless, and consultation with black journalists around here yielded few new names. Finally, around New Year’s, I resorted to record

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<sup>65</sup> Christgau, 41.

<sup>66</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), esp. 49. I discuss the complex position of disco, as a mainstream genre that was also associated with marginal black and gay identities, in more detail in chapter three.

company publicists specializing in black music, but most of the 30 or so invitations that resulted went out so late that I got only 11 back in time.”<sup>67</sup> Not only is new wave locatable at the left end of the late-1970s popular music field, but Christgau’s comments also indicate that popular music’s legitimization has historically been bound to exclusions at the level of race.

Rather than concentrate on the detailed distinctions within the new wave field, then, it seemed more meaningful to Christgau (and presumably his readers) to draw attention to how new wave was defined according to the racial identities of those who produced and consumed it, and how this could be “heard” in the music’s gestures, which is something that I return to in chapter three in particular. Another large social formation that Christgau does not tackle in his Critics’ Poll debrief, however, is the issue of gender. Of the top thirty records chosen in the 1978 poll, only two of them featured female performers: Blondie’s *Parallel Lines* and the Patti Smith Group’s *Easter*. Furthermore, of the ninety-seven critics who participated in the poll approximately twelve were female. While I am hesitant to impose a presentist identity politics onto a publication from 1979, it is important nonetheless to recognise the social faces of genre: new wave and post-punk were not unencumbered musical styles floating in the mid- to late-70s ether but were, rather, shaped according to unspoken rules of inclusion and exclusion along the lines of race and gender.

Turning now to the UK, the *ZigZag* Readers’ Poll for the following year, 1979, presents a similar image of the late-70s musical field as the *Village Voice* critics’ poll, especially regarding the divisions amongst musicians that both critics and fans deemed meaningful. As Frith has noted, the readers’ poll in the music press is a “key ideological moment” in the sense that it “serves as a public display of the magazine’s success in forging a community out of its disparate

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<sup>67</sup> Christgau, 41.

consumers.”<sup>68</sup> Like the *Village Voice*, *ZigZag* did not distinguish between punk, new wave, and post-punk. Instead the categories were: Best Album, Best Single, Best Group, Unknown/Unsigned Band, Live Group, Fave Person, Hated Person, Sexiest Person, Male Singer, Female Singer, Best Dressed, Songwriter(s), Hot Tip for the Top, Reggae Act, Record Label, TV Programme, and a category called simply “Excess!” that listed “Booze! Sex! Drugs!”<sup>69</sup> Like the *Village Voice*’s poll, almost all of the selections were a blend of various acts such as the Clash, Siouxsie and the Banshees, PiL, and the Jam, with the Slits, the Raincoats, and Gang of Four all tipped to be 1980’s big thing and, as with the *Village Voice* poll, all of these musicians (with the exception of the reggae poll) were white.

With poll results like this, it is tempting to agree with Genesis P-Orridge’s (the creative force behind the 1970s proto-industrial group, Throbbing Gristle) verdict on the new wave genre. In an interview with Sandy Robertson in 1977, P-Orridge voiced their dissent against the new wave and its “regressive” character because its musicians, “Pretend that nothing ever happened for the last twenty years … that they’ve just invented rock n roll.”<sup>70</sup> P-Orridge’s caustic remark was in many ways true: new wave (and post-punk) was a continuation of the predominantly white male rock tradition. Black music was represented in *ZigZag* by the list of the ten favoured reggae acts of the year, which included dub-poet Kwesi Johnson but also the 2-tone (mixed race) group the Specials. This inclusion of reggae as the only representation of black music in the *ZigZag* poll also speaks to the relationship between (post-) punk and reggae that I discuss in more detail in chapter two.

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<sup>68</sup> Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 84.

<sup>69</sup> “The 1979 ZigZag Reader’s Poll!” *ZigZag*, July 1979, 22-3.

<sup>70</sup> Genesis P-Orridge quoted in Sandy Robertson, “Throbbing Gristle: It’s Never Too Late to Fall in Love,” *Sounds*, November 26, 1977, accessed August 15, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/throbbing-gristle-its-never-too-late-to-fall-in-love>. My use of a gender-neutral pronoun to discuss P-Orridge’s comments is deliberate, since they identify as pandrogynous.

The *ZigZag* Readers' Poll included more female musicians than the Critics' Poll in *Village Voice*. Although there is no way of knowing the predominant gender of *ZigZag*'s poll contributors with certainty, it nevertheless seems telling that of the ten candidates for "Sexiest Person," seven were women in addition to one transgender person (Wayne/Jayne County), bassist Paul Simonon of the Clash, and Kris Needs, one of *ZigZag*'s main writers.<sup>71</sup> Based on the fact that most of the candidates on the "Sexiest Person" list were female it is possible to suggest that *ZigZag* had a predominantly heterosexual male readership. How "disparate," one wonders, was the *ZigZag* "community"?

In their article on "The 100 Greatest Albums of All Time," Ralf Von Appen and André Doehring combine sociological and aesthetic analysis to demonstrate how most of those involved in the creation and consumption of such lists are white males aged between twenty and forty who positioned their musical tastes in opposition to the mainstream.<sup>72</sup> A similar pattern is in evidence in the *ZigZag* readers' poll. An important nuance is, however, the inclusion of more women amongst the musicians themselves. This explicit inclusion of women in the *ZigZag* 1979 poll not only points to an increase in the number of rock bands with female musicians, no doubt spurred by second wave feminism, but also to the political (or "ideological") interests of those in the post-punk/new wave community. Recalling Savage's ideas that punk challenged classic rock misogyny, or Marcus and Reynolds' more recent insistence on punk and post-punk's capacity to "change the world," it would appear as though a more inclusive gender politics was important to the post-punk/new wave community. This is nevertheless made ambiguous by the discourse of

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<sup>71</sup> "1979 ZigZag Poll," 22-3.

<sup>72</sup> Ralf von Appen and André Doehring, "Never Mind the Beatles, Here's Exile 61 and Nico: 'The Top 100 Records of All Time' – A Canon of Pop and Rock Albums from a Sociological and an Aesthetic Perspective," *Popular Music* 25/1 (2006): 21-9.

objectification inherent in having an almost exclusively all-female “Sexiest Person” category (see Fig. 1.1).

In yet another example of resonance between the *Village Voice* critics’ poll and the *ZigZag* readers’ poll, one of the *ZigZag* readers’ most hated people is not Olivia Newton-John but her co-star in *Grease* and the star of *Saturday Night Fever*, John Travolta. Coming in at number four (of ten), Travolta is positioned below two right-wing politicians (“Maggie” Thatcher and Martin Webster) and Top 40 Radio DJ, Tony Blackburn. Other hated musicians were Billy Idol (a punk known for displaying his love of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones too conspicuously), as well as Bob Geldof and Rod Stewart (see Fig 1.1).<sup>73</sup> These lists of names are neither arbitrary nor insignificant because, through their affiliations, they point to the important exclusions that help define this particular musical genre and/or category. John Travolta represented disco at its most whitewashed and commercially successful in *Saturday Night Fever* and also the commodification of 1950s nostalgia exemplified by *Grease*—both films and their soundtracks were tremendously popular in 1978. Similarly, Rod Stewart purveyed his own unique and unsavoury brand of bare-chested disco with his 1978 smash, “Da Ya Think I’m Sexy?” Idol, as I already suggested, was too in thrall to the Beatles and the Stones to be considered a real punk, and Blackburn doled-out the mainstream chart every week on his BBC Radio 1 show.

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<sup>73</sup> In an article on Lene Lovich, Simon Frith actually singled out Stewart as the most “unpleasant sexual performer in rock.” See Frith, “Patti and Lene: Sisters Under the Skin?” *Melody Maker*, March 17, 1979, 14.

**Fig. 1.1** The 1979 *ZigZag* Readers' Poll list of most hated people and the sexiest people.  
 Source: Print edition of *ZigZag*, July 19, 1979

**FAVE PERSON**

- (1) 1. JOHN PEEL
- (2) 2. JOE STRUMMER
- (3) 3. SIOUXSIE
- (4) 4. MICK JONES
- (5) 5. ME
- (6) 6. JOHN LYDON
- (7) 7. JIMMY PURSEY
- (8) 8. PAULINE MURRAY
- (9) 9. IAN DURY
- (10) 10. PALMOLIVE

**HATED PERSON**

- (1) 1. MAGGIE THATCHER
- (2) 2. TONY BLACKBURN
- (3) 3. MARTIN WEBSTER
- (4) 4. JOHN TRAVOLTA X
- (5) 5. JOHN TYNDALL
- (6) 6. IAN PENMAN
- (7) 7. PETER POWELL
- (8) 8. BILLY IDOL
- (9) 9. BOB GELDOF
- (10) 10. ROD STEWART

**EXCESS!**

1. BOOZE!
2. SEXI
3. DRUGS!

**SEXIEST PERSON**

- (2) 1. SIOUXSIE SIOUX
- (1) 2. DEBBIE HARRY
- (3) 3. PAULINE MURRAY
- (4) 4. VIV
- (5) 5. KATE BUSH
- (6) 6. RACHEL SWEET
- (7) 7. WAYNE COUNTY
- (8) 8. PAUL SIMONON
- (9) 9. KRIS NEEDS (WHAT?!)
- (10) 10. PALMOLIVE

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By analysing the critics' and readers' polls from both the US and the UK, in the *Village Voice* and *ZigZag* respectively, the smaller distinctions between categories appear to evaporate (although traces are left, as in Christgau's allusions to the differences between what he regarded

as punk and new wave, in the form of “conservatives” and “new wavers”). What does emerge, however, is that the taste community that governed the new wave field had an identifiable identity: white, predominantly male, with a positive gender and racial politics that can be read as simultaneously or paradoxically “revolutionary” (which would be Reynolds’ perspective) and entrenched, owing to the objectification of its female participants and the narrow scope of its black music inclusions. Other meaningful distinctions according to which this field might be defined were the differences between the new wave field and its closest enemies: commercial disco, a certain kind of 1950s and 1960s nostalgia (perhaps with the exclusion of mod culture), the weekly Top 40, and the long-haired rock of Boston and Kansas.

### ***Present Day Belonging vs. Historical Participation***

The rock discourse of the mid- and late-1970s print media presents only a nascent version of the kind of definition of post-punk that exists today. Certain critics identified aspects of the genre’s aesthetic criteria that are now taken as given, such as its “artiness,” “darkness,” and certain musicians’ incorporation of critical theoretical ideas. Others identified its influences, such as Kosmische Musik and disco, and other commentators, such as Murray in particular, used the term post-punk to describe a set of sonic characteristics. Generally speaking, however, what we now consider to be post-punk was mixed in with the broader new wave and/or punk category. New wave/punk was in turn nested within the wider popular music field of the mid- to late-1970s, and was positioned in relation to more commercial genres such as MOR-rock and disco. This broader new wave/punk category derived some of its meaning as a genre from the social identities of its producers, critics, and consumers. Furthermore, the term “post-punk” was often used in its most literal sense to refer to musical events and artefacts that emerged post-1977.

In more recent years, however, definitions of the term post-punk have reified, as exemplified most clearly in Reynolds' 2005 book. Reynolds excises new wave groups, such as the Police and the Jam, and thus draws up clearer barriers between what he perceives as the "vanguard" of post-punk and those groups whom he sees as more peripheral and commercial. At the same time, he unites groups as musically different from each other as Throbbing Gristle and the Raincoats. As I have suggested, Reynolds ties his idea of post-punk together using notions such as "radicalism," which may be interpreted to mean a particular kind of leftist "progressive" political ideal. He also suggests that post-punk bands differed from punk bands because their influences were more eclectic and more obviously intellectual. But Reynolds' book is only one of several nodes that contribute to the present day definition of post-punk as a genre. Arguably the internet has become *the* dominant arena in which contemporary ideas of genre are shaped, at least from a lay and/or fan perspective. Wikipedia, Allmusic and YouTube, are just a sample of the most general (i.e. not genre-specific) sites that present different definitions of a given musical genre. The articulations of genre that exist in these forums are, furthermore, not always presented in a descriptive way, but usually exist in the form of lists generated by fans or via online aggregation systems, which function as shorthand articulations of more in-depth aesthetic values, ideas and allegiances.<sup>74</sup>

The value of these websites for discussions about popular music genre lies in what they can tell us about contemporary processes of knowledge formation and acquisition. They also demonstrate the extent to which formations of musical genre are on-going processes. Our

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<sup>74</sup> One of the most effective examples of the expressive possibility of fan lists in popular music and popular culture can be found in British writer Nick Hornby's novel *High Fidelity* and the subsequent film adaptation by Stephen Frears. The male music connoisseurs in *High Fidelity* compile various top-five lists for different genres and sub-categories. To a connoisseur, these lists function as a shorthand code for conveying certain aesthetic values, ideas, and allegiances, which, to an outsider, may not be easily detectable. See Hornby, *High Fidelity* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996).

present-day understandings of what constitutes a category of popular music are substantially mediated by the internet and, therefore, informed by neither an actual nor an entirely imagined community, but by a virtual community of scholars, journalists, casual researchers, fans, and trolls.<sup>75</sup> In other words, in the realm of popular music classification and discourse, online information aggregations have added another generating and circulating discourse for musical genres; they act as another node in the discursive field. Online lists or catalogues of recordings labelled “post-punk” simultaneously contribute to the reification of the genre, while keeping a certain degree of flexibility that is informed principally by individual tastes or opinions, and are in turn policed, often aggressively, by fellow fans. This may be understood as an example of what Jason Toynbee describes as the shared yet simultaneously diverse experiences of genre.<sup>76</sup>

Perhaps the most readily accessible summary of what constitutes post-punk today emerges when one types, “top ten post-punk albums” into the Google search engine. What this act yields is a canon, a list of the most frequently mentioned albums on the web with reference to the term post-punk (see Fig. 1.2). What is striking about Google’s canon is the appearance of several records that do not form part of Reynolds’ “postpunk vanguard.” The high ranking of the two records by the Chameleons, *Script of the Bridge* (1983) and *What Does Anything Mean? Basically* (1985), as well as the two records by Echo and the Bunnymen *Heaven Up Here* (1981) and *Ocean Rain* (1984), is particularly striking. Chronologically, these records are certainly more post (as in after) punk than any of the groups I have already discussed. Their sonic characteristics, furthermore, demonstrate the influence of bands from the more gothic end of the

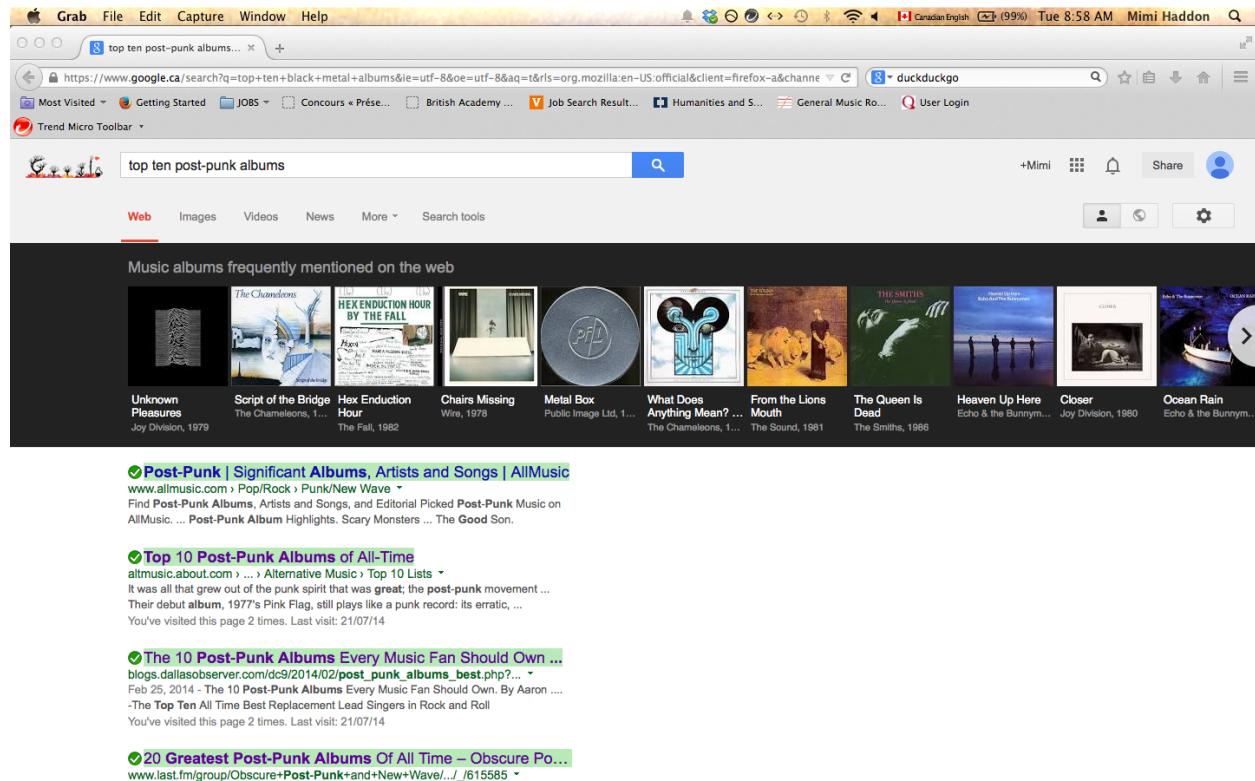
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<sup>75</sup> The idea of an “imagined” community comes from the work of Benedict Anderson see, *Imagined Communities: Reflections On the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1983). As I outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, however, Altman also refers to his “constellated communities” as consisting of people who seldom come into contact and therefore are brought together by repeated acts of imagining. See Altman, 161.

<sup>76</sup> Jason Toynbee, *Making Popular Music: Musicians, Creativity, and Institutions* (London: Arnold; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

post-punk spectrum, such as Joy Division, Bauhaus, and the Cure, and share ground with gothic bands such as the Sisters of Mercy and the Cocteau Twins.<sup>77</sup>

**Fig. 1.2** A screen shot of the “Music albums most frequently mentioned on the web” after searching “top ten post-punk albums,” accessed September 25, 2014



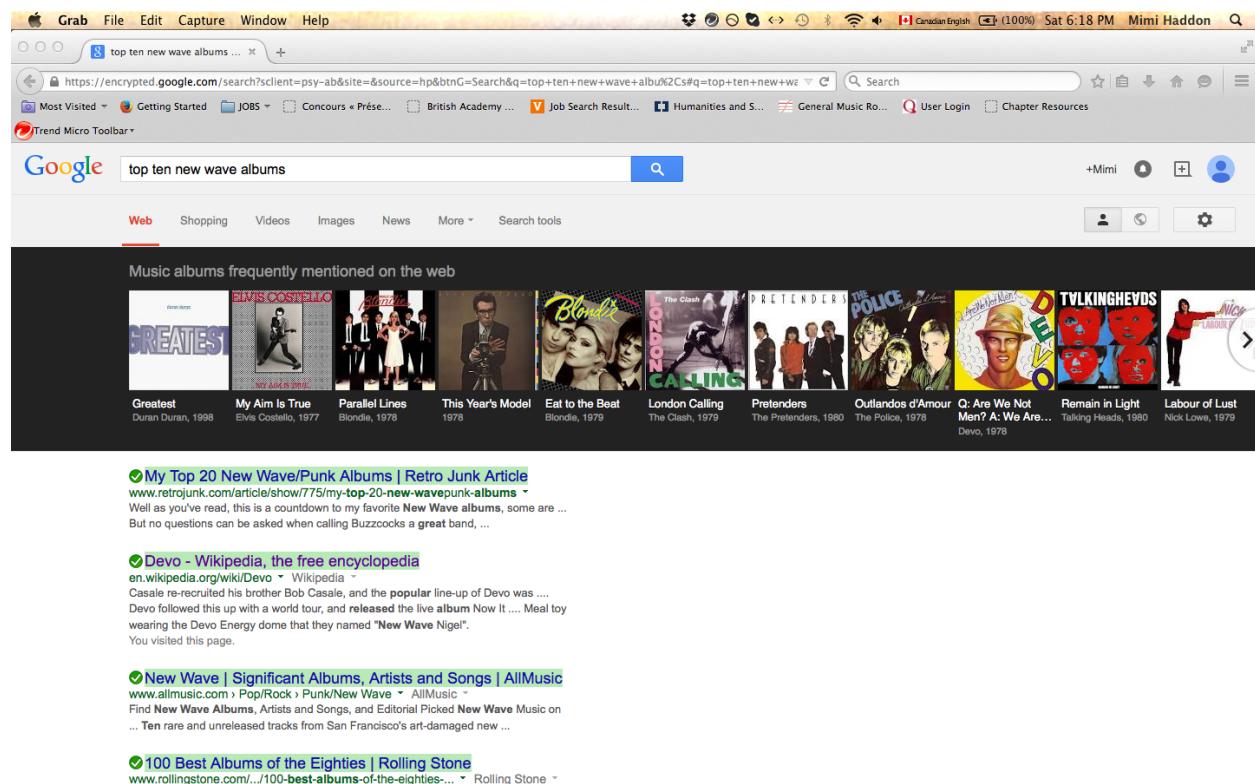
Four of the first five albums on Google’s list of twenty, the Fall’s *Hex Enduction Hour*, Joy Division’s *Unknown Pleasures*, PiL’s *Metal Box* and Wire’s *Chairs Missing*, all spanning the years 1978 to 1982, are indeed the albums that recur frequently on certain “best post-punk album” lists created by fans that appear on websites such as Last FM.<sup>78</sup> Whereas, the Chameleons and Echo and the Bunnymen occur less frequently. In this context, the list format

<sup>77</sup> Reynolds, 361-2. I discuss the gothic aspects of post-punk in more detail in chapter three. An early review of the band’s music in the rock media suggested that the Chameleons sounded like a cross between the Jam and U2, both of whom are arguably too commercial to fit within the contemporary definition of post-punk. See Penny Kiley, “Caught in the Act: the Chameleons,” *Melody Maker*, April 10, 1982. The Chameleons’ later records were compared to the Cure, the Psychedelic Furs, and REM, and situated by reviewer Ian Gittins “squarely” within the rock genre. See Gittins, “The Chameleons: Strange Times,” *Melody Maker*, September 20, 1986.

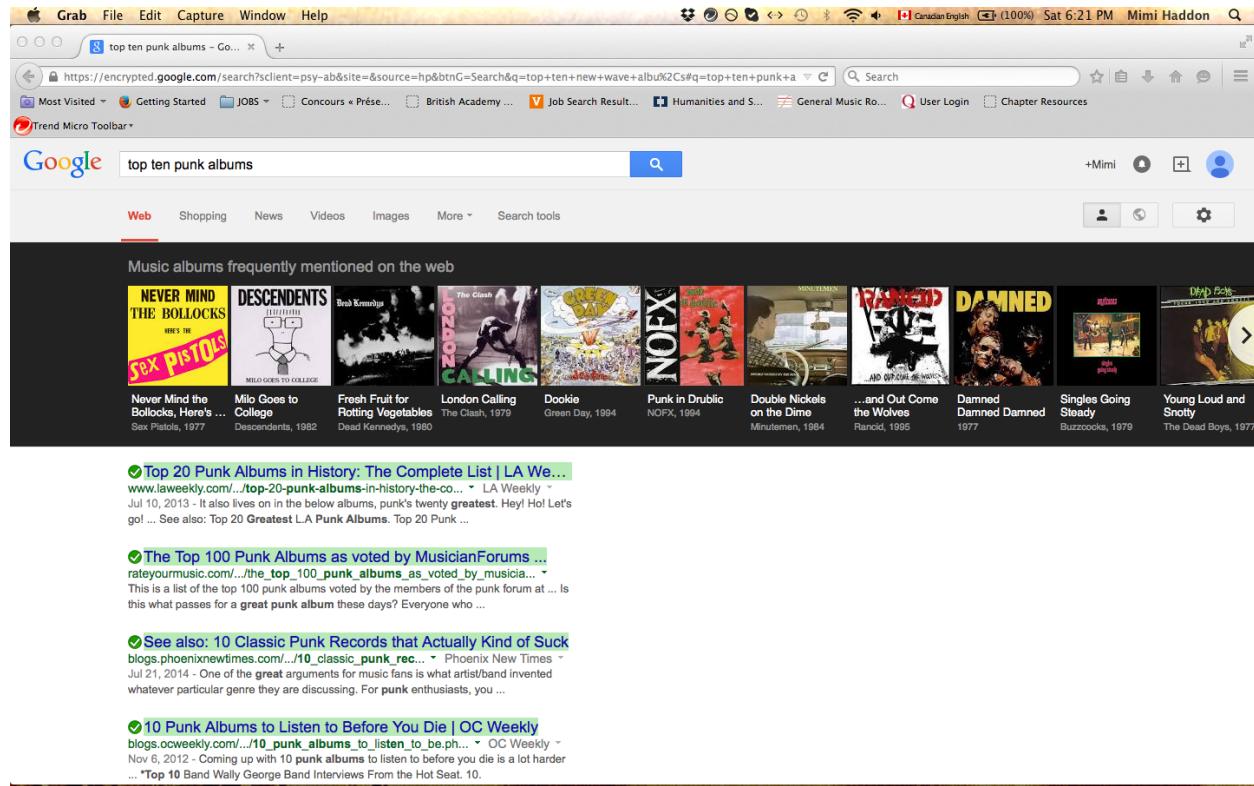
<sup>78</sup> See, for example, “20 Greatest Post-Punk Albums of All Time,” a discussion thread started by the user “SartorialMe” on Last.fm, accessed 11 July, 2014, [http://www.last.fm/group/Obscure+PostPunk+and+New+Wave/forum/11683/\\_/615585](http://www.last.fm/group/Obscure+PostPunk+and+New+Wave/forum/11683/_/615585).

can be read as a shorthand expression of genre that simultaneously contributes to the reification of genre, as a form of canonisation, but maintains a modicum or semblance of fluidity as people can voice their disagreement through likes and dislikes, comments sections or the making of alternative lists. While fans and internet users consider these four albums as belonging to post-punk, at the time of their emergence these albums participated in several other genres, particularly those I have already discussed, such as punk and new wave. The genres punk and new wave, however, now have their own Google lists on which these records do not appear, which illustrates the tendency towards increasing genre segregation over historical time (see Figures 1.3 and 1.4).

**Fig. 1.3** A screen shot of the “Music albums most frequently mentioned on the web” after searching “top ten new wave albums,” accessed March 21, 2015



**Fig. 1.4** A screen shot of the “Music albums most frequently mentioned on the web” after searching “top ten punk albums,” accessed March 21, 2015



What this discrepancy suggests is that the fluidity of generic terms has hardened over time. Where the four records *Chairs Missing*, *Metal Box*, *Unknown Pleasures*, and *Hex Enduction Hour* used to participate in multiple genres, they now—at least from a popular perspective—belong to only one. At the time of their emergence, the London-based group Wire, for example, were regarded in 1978 as being part of the punk scene. Critics such as Andy Gill noted how the band had “emerged at the time of the punk scene” and shared punk’s “ethos of non-virtuosity.”<sup>79</sup> In addition to being connected with the punk scene, Wire were also described by the press as a “Roxy band,” presumably in light of their appearance on a live album made at the Roxy club in London’s Covent Garden, *The Roxy London WC2*, which also included punk

<sup>79</sup> Andy Gill, “Wire: But Obviously It Isn’t,” *New Musical Express*, September 16, 1978, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/wire-but-obviously-it-isnt>.

staples such as the Buzzcocks, Sham 69, Slaughter and the Dogs, and X-Ray Spex. The same critic who called them a “Roxy band,” Paul Rambali, also referred to Wire as “the first *punk* band to actually try to stick to the letter of the credo as propagated by Rotten and Perry” (emphasis mine).<sup>80</sup> For others in the rock media, Wire were also “rock’s new music vanguard,”<sup>81</sup> one of the “first *new wave* studio band[s],”<sup>82</sup> and the “most progressive of all the bands coming out of the *new wave*”<sup>83</sup> (emphasis mine). For critics situating Wire according to the available terms of the era, then, it appears as though punk and new wave were the most fitting and most readily available. Even if Wire were considered to be doing something different within those genres (which is repeatedly articulated by critics’ insistence that they were different from other kinds of “rock ‘n’ roll,” e.g. “rock’s new music vanguard”) they were not seen to be part of an altogether new genre.

In this confusing world of musical categorisation, where present day commentators have divided up the new wave scene into micro categories, and historical commentators were not in agreement about who went where, what is the status of sonic characteristics? Like many other groups from the era, Wire did not have a homogenous musical style. To enhance their descriptions, critics of the 1970s frequently pointed to the “minimalism” and/or “starkness” that they heard in Wire’s music, which recalls the criteria for New Musick (“coldness” and “harshness”), as well as recent fans’ recurrent references to darkness, and Gendron’s description

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<sup>80</sup> Paul Rambali, “Reluctant Rock Stars.”

<sup>81</sup> Nick Kent, “Wire: 154,” *New Musical Express*, September 22, 1979, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/wire-i154i-harvest>.

<sup>82</sup> Harry Doherty, “Barbed Wire,” *Melody Maker*, December 9, 1978, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/wire-barbed-wire>.

<sup>83</sup> Chris Bohn, “Wire: Wider Vision,” *Melody Maker*, October 13, 1979, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/wire-wider-vision>.

of punk as “minimalist.”<sup>84</sup> If we accept the present-day distinction that exists between punk and new wave, which necessarily relies on the narrowing of both of those terms, then in many respects Wire’s *Chairs Missing* (1978) participated in both the punk and new wave genres. Punk in this instance designates short songs, power chord-based patterns, fast tempi and aggression, and new wave designates a clearer sense of melody, the use of vocal harmonies, more adventurous chord progressions, and varied musical textures.

The punk characteristics on *Chairs Missing* include the instrumentation (drums, bass, two guitars, male vocals) and the brevity of the songs, many of which do not exceed the two-minute mark. More specifically, Wire’s participation in the punk genre is discernible in a couple of songs on the album, especially “Sand in My Joints,” which is a power-chord thrash. The singer, Colin Newman, sings in an untrained-sounding way, with a thick southern British accent reminiscent of the Johnny Rotten-esque punk style. A brief, raucous guitar solo is the only moment in the song in which there is any kind of variety in texture.<sup>85</sup>

For the most part, however, *Chairs Missing* shows a greater variety of texture, tempi, and groove than an album like the Sex Pistols’ *Never Mind the Bollocks*. In other words, the sonic characteristics of “Sand in My Joints” are not representative of the whole album. In many of their songs, Wire pursue the kind of “simplicity” that punk musicians favoured, but often steer this simplicity in unexpected, non-punk directions. Like many other musicians in popular music, the members of Wire were all self-taught, but the opening song on *Chairs Missing* seems to explicitly draw attention to their learning process or their status as autodidacts. The song is aptly

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<sup>84</sup> Gill, “Wire: But Obviously,” and Doherty, “Wire: Barbed Wire.” See also Gendron, esp. 234, 238, and 258.

<sup>85</sup> Indeed the punk genre’s musical homogeneity is perhaps more likely to be found in its textures and its choices of tempi and groove, or lack thereof, than in its harmonic “simplicity.” As Paul Friedlander has suggested, the “simplicity” of punk’s harmonic language has often been over-stated, and he gives the example of the Sex Pistols’ “God Save the Queen” as a song that departs from the expected I-IV-V harmonic framework. Friedlander, *Rock and Roll: A Social History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 254.

titled “Practice Makes Perfect” and may be interpreted as a self-conscious comment upon the education of a punk guitarist, which often consists of spending long hours spent jamming on the low E string of the guitar.<sup>86</sup> The song’s tempo is slower than most punk songs at approximately 104 beats per minute, and its rhythms are aggressive and straight to an exaggerated degree—a caricature of the regimented discipline associated with the practicing or learning of musical instruments. But rather than jamming on power chords as in “Sand in My joints,” the song’s two-chord harmonic framework revolves unusually around the chords Cm and F# major. The opening guitar intro also has an unusual flavour. Its eerie semi-tone oscillation is not easy to place generically, although it could be heard as representing a kind of musical darkness. In fact, the tritone (F#-C in this particular case) is *almost* a universal musical symbol for “darkness.” After perusing the fingerboard, however, it becomes clear that it was created by moving one’s fingers very minimally between E and A strings in the second fret. By playing this part oneself, in other words, it is easier to grasp the minimalism and simplicity of the punk style, even if the line doesn’t sound like a stereotypical punk riff (see Ex. 1.1).

**Ex. 1.1** The opening bass guitar riff for Wire’s song, “Practice Makes Perfect”

x 5 (before rhythm guitar enters)



The texture for “Practice Makes Perfect” thickens from this opening guitar riff. The drums and rhythm guitar enter with their aggressively on-beat militancy followed by a second, heavily overdriven, guitar playing an arpeggiated Cm chord. The song’s lyrics begin with the doctrine “Practice makes perfect,” but quickly drift into a more surreal and gothic evocation of an escort service that somehow features nineteenth-century actress Sarah Bernhardt’s hand,

<sup>86</sup> See Bernard Sumner in “Joy Division—The Documentary,” YouTube video, 1:35:44, posted by Mathieu Guillien, July 17, 2012, accessed February 10, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1qQsHGHi8w>.

eventually dissolving into echoing laughter. Recalling Gill's suggestion that Wire drew on the "ethos" of punk, "Practice Makes Perfect" does indeed wear its do-it-yourself characteristics on its sleeve, especially in terms of its titular lyrics and its easy-to-play opening riff. The band have, however, employed a harmonic vocabulary, tempo, groove, lyrics, and texture that cannot easily be categorised as punk, at least not according to its most narrow definition, encapsulated by the rough-hewn musical language of the Sex Pistols and the Ramones. The references to Sarah Bernhardt alone seem to call for a designator that encompasses the song's "artiness" in a way that punk does not, as Gendron suggested with regards to the different significations of the terms punk and new wave.<sup>87</sup>

Some of the other songs on *Chairs Missing* have different stylistic affiliations. The song "Another the Letter" features accelerated disco drumming and a synthesizer part characteristic of some Kosmische Musik. At other times, *Chairs Missing* can be heard as participating in new wave as well, to the extent that it includes songs with more pop-oriented melodies than a song such as "Practice Makes Perfect." The power chord dirge in "French Film Blurred," for example, suddenly breaks into a melodious chorus that we hear only once, and the single from *Chairs Missing*, "Outdoor Miner," might be fruitfully compared to a song such as Costello's "(Angels Wanna Wear My) Red Shoes" of the previous year. The song's pop-like structure, sing-able hook and wistful piano solo certainly point to more commercial terrain, and the song indeed made it as far as No.51 in the UK singles charts.

Even though Wire's *Chairs Missing* has become a staple of contemporary articulations of post-punk, particularly in the form of internet fan lists, both the historical critical discourse concerning the album and its sonic characteristics suggest that the album participated in other genres too. Its sonic characteristics can be interpreted as having participated in punk and new

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<sup>87</sup> Gendron, 249.

wave, and critics described the album as punk, rock, and new wave. The point is that the now-clear seeming distinction between these generic neighbours does not reflect the historical situation, and Wire's historical position as participating in several genres at once is dissonant with the present moment in which stricter distinctions between categories have been created.

Having said that, there is historical evidence that Wire's music stepped outside of the conventions that audiences expected to hear at a punk/new wave concert. When Wire performed at the Roxy, the audience most likely expected a punk or a reggae band since the generic orientation of the Roxy club was as a punk venue whose Rasta DJ Don Letts played reggae records interspersed with punk ones. What the audience heard, however, was something that did not accord with their expectations, something that did not restrict itself to punk or reggae conventions. Indeed, journalist Kris Needs noted how Wire were often greeted with "stunned silence" from the audience because "Wire did not turn out to be the anticipated standard punk band."<sup>88</sup>

In his theorisation of genre in popular film Stephen Neale has suggested that genres are not "forms of textual codifications," but are, rather, "systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text, and subject."<sup>89</sup> The Roxy audience were therefore oriented towards a particular set of punk conventions that were disappointed on hearing Wire's performance. Neale has also suggested that,

Generic specificity is a question not of particular and exclusive elements, however defined, but of exclusive *particular combinations* and articulations of elements, of the exclusive and *particular weight* given in any one genre to elements which in fact it shares with other genres (emphasis mine).<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Needs, "Wire."

<sup>89</sup> Stephen Neale, *Genre* (London: The British Film Institute, 1980), 19.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-3.

Wire's performance did not comprise any "exclusive elements," elements that were particular to one genre. With guitars, bass, drums, and vocals, they shared instrumental elements with punk, but also the broader umbrella genre, rock. Their identity as an all-white male four-piece also placed them within the conventions of rock and punk. Having said that, Wire articulated these conventions differently from a more traditional punk band or, to use Neale's formulation, Wire used a "particular combination" of the punk and new wave elements. Therefore, Wire "weighted" the elements differently than a punk band would have; they made a "different articulation" of certain staple elements and thus signalled a "shift in the regime" of punk and rock convention.<sup>91</sup> In this regard it is therefore tempting to call *Chairs Missing* a post-punk record, a simultaneous participation in and re-articulation of punk.

### **Conclusion**

Through a close reading of the rock print media from November 1977 to the middle of 1979, then, what I have tried to stress throughout this chapter is the way in which the now accepted trajectory from punk to post-punk followed a more complex pathway than this genre-to-genre genealogical relay would imply. At the time of post-punk's emergence much slippage existed between the terms punk, new wave, and post-punk. Definitions of these terms or their criteria had not ossified as much as they have today. The categories new wave and rock were, for example, broad enough to accommodate the kind of musical language employed by a group such as Wire. At the same time, however, it is possible to identify nascent ideas that were associated with groups such as Wire, Pere Ubu, the Fall, and Siouxsie and the Banshees, which included artiness, darkness, coldness, and harshness. As I have also demonstrated in the case of Wire, this particular band's sonic characteristics strove outside of punk's most limited musical parameters,

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<sup>91</sup> The ideas of "different articulation" and "shift in regime" are from Neale, 23.

and critics identified this by referring to them as a “vanguard” or rock’s “new” thing. It is easy to see, therefore, how these nascent discursive ideas have reified in more recent years into solid criteria, with the result that these groups have been extracted from the broader new wave scene, excised from generic neighbours such as the Jam and Elvis Costello, and put into a category of their own known as post-punk.

In his discussion of Jon Savage’s compilation of music from the year 1970 entitled *Meridian*, Straw has argued that in creating the compilation Savage has imposed a kind of coherence upon an era characterised by musical incoherence.<sup>92</sup> In the case of post-punk, even though writers such as Reynolds have repeatedly stressed the incoherence of post-punk as a genre in terms of its sonic diversity, the genre is held together according to values such as forward-looking leftist politics. Even its musical eclecticism is somewhat paradoxically used as a cohering feature. From our present-day perspective where the new wave field has been divided into neater categories, the snapshots of late-1970s musical field offered by the *Village Voice* and *ZigZag* polls may appear incoherent. In other words, the period’s incoherence has been ordered into more clearly identifiable genres. But fan- and critic-communities of the period did not locate coherence in the stable distinctions between sibling categories, although nascent distinctions were certainly emerging. Rather, coherence in the late-1970s could be found in punk/new wave’s opposition to more distant genres (such as MOR rock and disco) and, subsequently, more large-scale identity formations, particularly those of race and gender. In short, at the dawn of 1978, it seemed as though, despite the quarrels between rock critics about the hair’s breadth differences and uncertainty amongst New Musick, power pop, new wave, post-punk and punk, as long as

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<sup>92</sup> Will Straw, “The Consecration of Musical Incoherence,” *Kinephanos* 2/1, (March 2011), accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.kinephanos.ca/2011/la-legitimation-culturelle-cultural-legitimization/>.

you didn't think that the 1977 song, "Hotel California" by the white American MOR rock group the Eagles was a reggae single, then you were probably doing OK.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Journalist Kris Needs expresses this idea in his article, "Roots Rock Reggae," *ZigZag*, August 1977, 29.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Dub is the New Black: Post-Punk, the Melodica, and the Politics of Appropriation

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the artists mentioned in the 1979 readers' poll in the UK music paper *ZigZag* were predominantly white and participated in the new wave category (which encompassed both punk and post-punk). However, the editors of *ZigZag* also chose to include a list of top ten "Reggae Acts" in the poll. Reggae could be said to represent an exception within the new wave scene as the only black-associated music with which the new wavers identified. The artists listed in the "Reggae Act" section included the Jamaican-born poet Linton Kwesi Johnson, the mixed race group the Specials, and Jamaican reggae acts such as Culture, Steel Pulse, Bob Marley and the Wailers, Misty, and Burning Spear.<sup>1</sup> The fact that this reggae list was included in a poll that was otherwise dominated by white new wave acts speaks to the particular connection that British new wave had with reggae.

Drawing from journalist Simon Reynolds' suggestion that post-punk may be characterised by its musicians' incorporation of "new possibilities" such as reggae,<sup>2</sup> this chapter analyses the relationship between the late-1970s UK new wave/post-punk genre and reggae-based music. I focus specifically on post-punk musicians' incorporation of musical gestures from reggae-based music such as dub, and how this incorporation compares to similar practices of white borrowing from black-associated genres in rock music of the previous decade. I also unravel what post-punk's relationship to dub-reggae signifies at a broader socio-cultural level, particularly in light of the UK's colonial history, the post-war labour migration, and the country's racial tensions.

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<sup>1</sup> "The 1979 ZigZag Reader's Poll!" *ZigZag*, July 1979, 22-3.

<sup>2</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Rip it up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-84* (London and New York: Penguin, 2005), x.

***“I’d hate to be involved with the blues”<sup>3</sup>***

In the latter half of the 1970s, for certain white rock musicians, borrowing from blues-derived genres was simply no longer cool. Running contrary to rock’s history of imitating and idolising musicians such as Robert Johnson, Chuck Berry and Jimi Hendrix, several musicians, particularly in Britain, sought to avoid using musical gestures that evoked the sound world or connotations of rock ‘n’ roll. In his history of post-punk, Reynolds has argued that this eschewal of 1950s rock ‘n’ roll, was symptomatic of post-punk’s commitment to creating what he calls “modern music.” In order to make music that sounded “new”—and unlike punk, hard rock, and rock ‘n’ roll—post-punk guitarists rejected “rama-lama riffing” and “bluesy chords” in favour of what Reynolds calls a “cleaner” sound.<sup>4</sup>

Keith Levene, guitarist with the post-punk group Public Image Ltd. (PiL) expressed his views on the rejection of blues-based music in a 1980 interview in the weekly music magazine *New Musical Express (NME)*. The *NME*’s interviewer, Chris Bohn, was careful to point out, however, that Levene’s “distrust of rock and roll” was not “directed at the originals,” the rock ‘n’ roll musicians of the 1950s. Rather, Levene’s distaste was directed at musicians such as the

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<sup>3</sup> Keith Levene quoted in Chris Bohn, “Public Image Ltd: Corporation Executive Report to Shareholders,” *New Musical Express*, July 5, 1980, accessed November 21, 2013, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/public-image-ltd-corporation-executive-report-to-shareholders>.

<sup>4</sup> Evidence of punk musicians’ enthusiasm for 1950s rock ‘n’ roll can be found in the 1970s rock music press. Singer from the Clash, Joe Strummer, admired African-American blues musician Clarence “Gatemouth” Brown, for example, and his first group, the 101ers, began its career singing Chuck Berry songs. See the article and interview by Peter Silverton, “The Clash: Greatness from Garageland,” *Trouser Press*, February 1978, accessed December 10, 2012, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-clash-greatness-from-garageland>. For the quotations from Simon Reynolds, see *Rip it up*, 2-3. For further evidence of PiL’s dislike of 1950s rock ‘n’ roll see Robin Banks, “We Only Wanted to be Loved,” *ZigZag*, December 1978, 8, in which John Lydon says, “I’m not interested in digression or mod period music or rock ‘n’ roll. It’s boring. I got pissed off listening to Steve [Jones] run through Chuck Berry riffs and then gradually changing to Peter Frampton riffs. It got depressing.” For a more in-depth discussion of the idea of “modern music” see chapter five of this dissertation, and for a closer examination of the use of racialised language in relation to post-punk discourse see chapter three. David Brackett has also observed a similar process of erasing black musical gestures in his article, “Elvis Costello, the Empire of the E Chord, and a Magic Moment or Two,” *Popular Music* 24/3 (2005): 357-67.

Rolling Stones, and even his former band mates in the Clash, who continued to emulate rhythm and blues well into the 1970s. In Levene's own words,

Funny thing was that I never realised [at] first that rock—The Rolling Stones—all came from black music, the blues. And I really came to hate all those 50s Chuck Berry riffs. I love it for what it was, but all the rock and rollers ... [make] me ill. They are all so into that and think that it's so important—if only they'd fucking get away from it, into something that is important ...<sup>5</sup>

Corroborating Reynolds' assertion that post-punk guitarists cultivated a non-blues-style of playing, Levene also remarked,

My personal thing has never come from black music, and I'd hate to be involved with the blues or anything. I never get the blues. I might get down, but the blues haven't got anything to do with me, right? When I left The Clash, I joined a band called The Quick Spurts and I told them that if I could amputate their little fingers I would stay with them, because I hate all that twelve-bar shit, you know?<sup>6</sup>

Levene's comments in the *NME* not only illustrate his rejection of blues-associated genres and his condemnation of those still "involved with the blues," but Levene also alluded to his reasons as to why this music was passé. While not saying so explicitly, Levene implied that blues-derived music did not speak to his racial and national identity as a white British musician: "the blues," he says, did not have anything "to do with" him. Levene's venom towards those who continued to emulate and appropriate such remote-seeming music may be interpreted in several interconnected ways. First, Levene's "distrust" of rock is characteristic of the punk era's rejection of what was perceived to be the over-inflated egoism of rock.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, PiL had recently returned from an unsuccessful tour of the United States, which may have also

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<sup>5</sup> Levene quoted in Bohn, "Public Image Ltd." PiL were not the only group to voice their dislike of rock music and self-importance associated with the previous/1960s generation. In a *ZigZag* interview from September 1977, a member of the group Subway Sect remarked, "I like 50's rock 'n' roll—just don't like 'ROCK' music." At other points in the interview they also criticised musicians who were on a "Keith Richard (sic) trip," which is to say, the members of Subway Sect did not appreciate the hero-type status that 1960s rock musicians enjoyed. See Steve Walsh, "Subway Sect," *ZigZag*, September 1977, 12-14.

<sup>6</sup> Levene quoted in Bohn, "Public Image Ltd."

<sup>7</sup> Caroline Coon, "Punk Rock: Rebels Against the System," *Melody Maker*, August 7, 1976, 24-5.

compounded Levene's feeling of estrangement from American-associated music.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Levene also seems to have been affected by the incongruity that characterised 1960s blues-rock: the fact that young white British musicians were singing about places to which they had never been, experiences they had never had and racial identities they had never lived ("the blues haven't got anything to do with me, right?").

Levene's suggestion that there was more "important" music than the blues thus invited readers to contemplate and possibly cultivate alternative, non-blues-based areas of interest and influence. Reading further along in the interview it appears as though Levene's main alternatives to blues-based music were the music of Brian Eno and muzak. But for those readers of *NME* who were familiar with the music and media coverage concerning Levene and PiL there must have been something incongruous about Levene's rejection of "black music." Indeed, throughout the entire interview neither Levene nor Bohn mentioned one of the most obvious influences audible on PiL's 1979 album *Metal Box*: dub, a sub-genre of reggae pioneered by Jamaican musicians in the 1970s.<sup>9</sup>

All three of the regular members of PiL (Keith Levene, John Lydon, and Jah Wobble—formerly John Wardle) not only shared an affinity for dub, but Levene himself was directly involved with dub as a session musician in the early 1980s for Adrian Sherwood's project, On-U Sound.<sup>10</sup> Thus despite Levene's insistence that his "personal thing" never came "from black

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<sup>8</sup> In a genre such as rock where the idea of authenticity is held in high esteem, the inauthenticity inherent in white British performances of African-American music is conspicuous. For more on authenticity in rock see David Brackett, "Rock," *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World* Volume 10: Genres, International (London: Continuum, forthcoming). For more on the complexities of black-white identification on the 1960s British blues revival scene see Sean Lorre, "Urban Blues in Chicago and London" (paper presented at the McGill Music Graduate Students Society Symposium, Montréal, Québec, March 21, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> PiL's album *Metal Box* also demonstrated the influence of disco, which is mentioned briefly in Levene's interview with Bohn. I map the musical characteristics and racial signification of the intersection between post-punk and disco in chapter three of this dissertation.

<sup>10</sup> On-U Sound is a record label started by producer Adrian Sherwood in the early 1980s. On-U Sound's website boasts the label's history of bringing together independent rock, post-punk and dub, in "post-punk, post-

music,” one of PiL’s central sources of inspiration *was* black music. The words “black music” in the interview with Bohn, however, seem to have denoted African-American music rather than Jamaican genres such as dub, reggae, and ska.<sup>11</sup> This confusion regarding the use of the term “black” in relation to categories of music, furthermore, illustrates the problems inherent in conceptualising identity in terms of race alone that exclude additional identity markers such as nationality and gender. Indeed, such discussions of “blackness” fall into essentialist territory.<sup>12</sup>

The kinds of thoughts and ideas expressed by Levene in his interview with Bohn were not peculiar to him but circulated amongst other artists and commentators during the post-punk period. In 1977 a writer for *Sounds* magazine, Vivien Goldman, observed how rhythm and blues

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colonial Britain.” See On-U Sound, accessed November 22, 2013, <http://www.on-usound.com/>. In fact, PiL’s bassist was so enamoured with dub that he changed his name from John Wardle to “Jah” Wobble—“Jah” meaning God in Rastafarian vernacular. See also Christopher Partridge, *Dub in Babylon: Understanding the Evolution and Significance of Dub Reggae in Jamaica and Britain from King Tubby to Post-Punk* (London; Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2010), 230-1. For an interview with Wobble in which he discusses his interest in dub see Simon Reynolds, *Totally Wired: Post-Punk Interviews and Overviews* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 16-26.

<sup>11</sup> For more discussion on the way in which blues-derived musics are embedded within Jamaican genres see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 2. The term “black music” is of course problematic insofar as it presupposes an ethnic essence of blackness, it homogenises the different musics and identities of the black Atlantic diaspora, and is often used synonymously with African-American music at the exclusion of other kinds of black music, as Levene’s interview illustrates. Philip Tagg’s 1989 open letter is one of the most notable examples of a challenge to such assumptions. See Tagg, “Open Letter: ‘Black Music,’ ‘Afro-American Music’ and ‘European Music,’” *Popular Music* 8/3 (1989): esp. 285-92. In this chapter, however, I am drawing more from the work of Gilroy who has argued in favour of a theoretical approach to black Atlantic musics that recognises the notion of black identity as neither an ethnic essence nor a totally contingent construction, but rather for its affirmative political power, and as a lived, meaningful experience that is produced through “practical activity” such as language and gesture. Music, Gilroy argues, may be seen as a model for way in which black identity is therefore meaningfully produced (*Black Atlantic*), 100-2. It is also worth noting that during the 1970s, there was a publication in Britain called *Black Music* that included articles on different black genres such as soul and reggae, which suggests that the term “black music” was in use during this particular period to denote different genres. George Lipsitz has also discussed how immigration to the UK from places such as Jamaica contributed to the partial dissolution of the differences between people from different island nations and the emergence of new categories such as “Black Britons” and “West Indians.” See Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Poetics of Place* (London: New York: Verso, 1994). I am not proposing that African-American and Jamaican musics are essentially, culturally or sonically the same but, rather, in spite of individual musicians’ intentions, their positions as subordinate resources for genres of (white) rock may be illustrative of a kind of systemic colonialism.

<sup>12</sup> In *The Black Atlantic* Gilroy uses the concept of double consciousness to discuss the negotiation of the simultaneity of living both a racial and national identity. This idea derives from the 1903 work of W.E.B. DuBois and concerns the dual identity of African Americans as both African descendants and victims of European slavery. See DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. Brent Hayes Edwards. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

was no longer in favour, but Jamaican music was.<sup>13</sup> In a 1978 interview Brian Eno also expressed a dislike of blues-based genres and suggested that he was developing an interest in reggae. When criticising music that had a “bluesy feel” Eno even singled out the same culprits as Levene; he criticised the Rolling Stones for their blues-derived style. He also planned to collaborate with reggae musicians Aswad and praised his own music for its forward-looking aesthetic—forward-looking, perhaps, because it did not derive from African-American genres. A subtle allusion to the essential eroticism of blackness also comes to surface in Eno’s interview, especially since he derided the “it’s-all-felt” aesthetic of blues-based music.<sup>14</sup>

As I discussed in chapter one, at the time of this music’s emergence the boundary between punk and post-punk was not at all clear: many punk musicians became post-punk musicians; punk and post-punk can also be defined according to their social profile, both genres comprise predominantly white male musicians;<sup>15</sup> and music from these seemingly distinct genres was not only coeval but some musicians who are often categorised as post-punk began making music before punk was even a genre. In terms of musical differences between punk and post-punk, however, this reorientation away from blues-derived music towards genres such as dub-

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<sup>13</sup> Vivien Goldman, “Jah Punk: New Wave Digs Reggae,” *Sounds*, September 3, 1977, accessed November 22, 2013, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/jah-punk-new-wave-digs-reggae>. The title of Goldman’s article reinforces my argument in the first chapter of this dissertation, which emphasized a flexible conception of the criteria for the post-punk genre, one that allows for the interchangeability between the terms punk, post-punk, and new wave.

<sup>14</sup> Around the same time, the journalists Kris Needs and Danny Baker suggested to Eno that publications such as *Sounds* had presented him as someone who created “new Ice Cold Music of the Future.” Eno responded to this idea with the following: “I didn’t think it was ice cold (laughs). You see, it doesn’t derive from that bluesy feel, and people are so used to that, you know, the whole tradition of the Stones, that kind of it’s-all-felt kind of movement, and I don’t drive (sic) from that very much but nonetheless I don’t think that what results is therefore cold, it doesn’t have that particular kind of warmth.” In this same interview Eno also discussed how he was planning to embark on a project with UK reggae group Aswad. For the full interview see Kris Needs and Danny Baker, “An Interview with Brian Eno,” *ZigZag*, January 1978, accessed November 22, 2013, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/an-interview-with-brian-eno>.

<sup>15</sup> The idea of a “social formation” is drawn from Georgina Born’s work on music and the social. What Born refers to as a “wider social formation” denotes categories such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and age. See Born, “Music and the Social,” in *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton, 261-74 (London: Routledge, 2003). For more on punk and racial politics see Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay, *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race* (London; New York: Verso, 2011).

reggae was certainly a stylistic shift that emerged more in the latter half of the 1970s, after punk's purported demise. Indeed, from a musical perspective, one of the most defining characteristics of post-punk is how its musicians took punk gestures and transformed them by incorporating certain musical components from other genres.

As Levene's interview and the other examples demonstrate, this reorientation away from one genre of black music towards another may be interpreted as a kind of "splitting." While borrowing from "black music" *qua* African-American music was passé, inauthentic, and demonstrated the dubious appropriation of the experiences of a national and racial Other, borrowing from "black music" *qua* Jamaican music was somehow more acceptable, even desirable.<sup>16</sup> From the mid-1970s onwards, certain music journalists wrote of a shared feeling of suffering between punks and Rastafarians (Jamaican musicians), two groups that are marked as much by their musical interests and practices as by their social identities.<sup>17</sup> This emphasis on the kindred similarities between these two socio-musical scenes was, to a certain extent, an attempt to explain the reorientation away from remote-seeming genres such as blues-based music towards dub-reggae. Theology scholar Christopher Partridge has referred to a shared sense of marginalisation between punks and Rastafarians as a "rapprochement" between two of Britain's youth subcultures, brought together by their shared experience of economic hardship and their

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<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that there are some songs in the post-punk discography that do in fact borrow blues gestures and chord progressions, such as those on the Fall's 1980 album *Grotesque (After the Gramme)*. The Fall's use of blues gestures was arguably satirical, however, and is therefore not in the same aesthetic vein as groups such as the Rolling Stones.

<sup>17</sup> Rastafarianism is a religion/ideology adapted from Christianity and is followed primarily by people of Jamaican origin. Its doctrines pervade dub-reggae music especially in its lyrics, but also in its production style. A more detailed explanation of Rastafarianism and its musical representation can be found towards the end of this chapter.

shared status as outlaws. Similarly Dick Hebdige suggested that punk's alliance with Britain's "other within" (reggae) was another weapon in punk's anarchic arsenal.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, from as early as the 1940s, the West Indian population in the UK expanded significantly, following an initiative on the part of the British government to invite migrant workers to the UK to solve its post-war labour shortage. One of the results of this mass migration from the Caribbean to the UK was a new proximity between Britain's white youth and Jamaican migrants, which may have engendered a "rapprochement" of the kind Partridge describes. But Britain's racial politics in the 1970s also furnished a particular kind of identification between musicians specifically, who used their public image to promote a politics of interracial accord. Since genres of popular music are often characterised by the social communities with which they are associated, bringing together different genres on the concert stage could be interpreted as a socio-political gesture.<sup>19</sup>

Britain's unique racial politics of the era also account for the seemingly contradictory rejection of one black genre and the embrace of another. Drawing from Georgina Born's model of the four kinds of musically articulated modes of identification, I suggest that by allying themselves with and borrowing from dub-reggae, post-punk musicians articulated what Born has described as an "emergent" mode of identification—that is, identification between different social categories at a musical level that "prefigures" actual engagement at a social level.<sup>20</sup> Post-punk's identification with dub-reggae enacted a partial subsumption of racial difference under a shared British national identity. Indeed, these two socio-musical scenes shared spaces on the

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<sup>18</sup> Partridge, *Dub in Babylon*, 171. See also Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), esp. 43-4, 56.

<sup>19</sup> David Brackett, "Questions of Genre in Black Popular Music," *Black Music Research Journal* 25/1 (2005): 89.

<sup>20</sup> Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 35-7.

pages of music magazines, on club dance floors, in record shops, and in certain places like West London and Bristol. The important point is that in many ways this emergent identification contrasted with the purely imaginary or appropriative mode that post-punk musicians perceived to be characteristic of late-1960s blues-rock.

Even though the identification between the post-punk scene and the dub-reggae scene can be framed as “emergent,” this does not necessarily presuppose bi-directional borrowing between the two scenes. On the one hand, certain dub-reggae musicians (primarily those in Britain) did voice an affinity with punk and post-punk, and participated in the making of post-punk records. West Indian-born musician Dennis Bovell, for example, produced albums by the Slits and the Pop Group, and British Rasta DJ Don Letts famously introduced Bob Marley to punk.<sup>21</sup> More often than not, however, post-punk musicians enhanced the musical gestures and vocabulary of punk by borrowing from dub-reggae but there are fewer instances of the borrowing process moving in the opposite direction, with dub-reggae rarely borrowing from punk or post-punk.<sup>22</sup> Issues of national identity also problematize the emergent model. The kind of musical ideas that post-punk musicians borrowed and incorporated, while still racially marked as Other, had undergone a process of “indigenization”: dub-reggae was an important part of Britain’s musical history.<sup>23</sup> The peculiarity of this historical moment, then, with its unidirectional musical borrowing, its bi-directional co-operation in political and recreational spheres (as I shall discuss)

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<sup>21</sup> In an interview for *The Guardian* newspaper in 2015, Letts stated, “Bob Marley would always try to pull my girlfriends. The last time we spoke I had bondage trousers on, and he told me: ‘You look like a bladelaat mountaineer.’ Three months later he wrote ‘Punky Reggae Party,’ so I figured I got the last laugh.” See “Don Letts: ‘Punk is Not Mohawks and Safety Pins. It’s an Attitude and a Spirit,’” *The Guardian*, February 7, 2015, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/feb/07/don-letts-this-much-i-know>.

<sup>22</sup> The punk-reggae hybrid band Basement 5, who were also active in the late-1970s, represents a contradiction of this general rule.

<sup>23</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, “Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies,” *Modernism/Modernity* 13/3 (September 2006): 430.

and literal proximity between two racially different social categories, complicates the familiar paradigms developed for describing the process of borrowing music from a remote Other.

### ***Dub in the UK***

Jamaica's long history of subjection under British colonial power provoked the shifts in migration that would eventually contribute to the identification between white British musicians and black Jamaican musicians in the 1970s, and the subsequent musical borrowings characteristic of the post-punk genre. Jamaica was a slave colony under British rule until 1838 and a British colony until as late as 1962. The history of Jamaica's oppression under British rule is a central characteristic in many dub and reggae songs, and features in the music's lyrics particularly, as I shall discuss later on in this chapter.<sup>24</sup> The beginning of the Jamaican migration to the UK dates back to the Second World War, and indeed many West Indians served in the British army during that conflict. According to the *Times* of London, on June 22, 1948, the SS *Empire Windrush* ferried approximately 492 Jamaican migrant workers—including “singers, students, boxers, pianists, and a complete dance band” as well as those willing to work in the coal mines—to Tilbury docks on the Thames estuary.<sup>25</sup> West Indian migrants continued to be brought to the UK throughout the 1950s and 1960s in an attempt to solve the labour shortage that Britain had been suffering since the end of the Second World War.

One of the central features of musical life in Jamaica itself was the sound system sessions that began in the 1950s. Sometimes known as dance halls or “blues” parties, sound system sessions were Jamaica's main site of popular music activity. In the 1950s, a sound system session was an outdoor party with a DJ playing primarily American rhythm and blues records.

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<sup>24</sup> Partridge, *Dub in Babylon*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> “News in Brief,” *The Times*, June 23, 1948, 2, accessed November 25, 2013, <http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/newspaper>.

The size and power of the playback equipment were the sound system's main attractions. Earth-shattering bass emissions were particularly sought after and sound system DJs would often make or modify their own equipment in order to achieve such an affect. The movement of people and recorded music from Jamaica to the UK during the time of the sound system session's emergence also meant that the UK developed its own vibrant sound system culture, especially amongst the UK's new Jamaican communities.

The DJ Duke Vin has been cited as one of the first, if not the first, UK "sound system man." Duke Vin introduced the sound system session to Britain from as early as 1955. DJ Metro was also an important figure in the development of the UK sound system scene. Metro had been apprentice to DJ Duke Reid back in Kingston, Jamaica and arrived in England in 1958, having apparently spun records during the ship's crossing in order to keep the passengers entertained.<sup>26</sup> Using his skills as an electrician, DJ Metro built his own sound system in the 1960s, named the "Metro Downbeat" (after "Sir Coxone's Downbeat" in Jamaica), and he also played DJ sets at the Flamingo Club in central London's Soho and the Metro Club in Ladbroke Grove<sup>27</sup>—a venue where DJ and producer Bovell also had a residency in the 1970s, and which was located in a predominantly West Indian district of London. The growing importance of the UK sound systems amongst their followers has been expressed by Metro in his recollection of the "fierceness" of the competition between rival systems in the UK. Metro stated that "nobody talked about Jamaica" in the UK, because "it was happening here now."<sup>28</sup>

The process of relocating a musical practice from one place to another illustrates what Susan Stanford Friedman has called "indigenization," the process of "making *native* or

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<sup>26</sup> James Maycock, "Metro and the Birth of the British Sound System," *The Independent*, August 1998, accessed April 5, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/metro--the-birth-of-the-british-sound-system>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

*indigenous*” a cultural practice from elsewhere. This is a process that, furthermore, relies on particularly favourable conditions such as a positive relationship between the place of origin and the new location in order to facilitate transplantation.<sup>29</sup> The long history of Britain’s colonisation of Jamaica, then, may have inadvertently fostered the “transplantation” of sound systems from Jamaica to Britain. The crucial point is that Britain had its own sound system scene that was almost as old, alive and thriving as the one in Jamaica. In many ways this makes certain forms of Jamaican musical practice very much a part of Britain’s cultural history and, therefore, may have contributed to post-punk musicians’ feeling of kinship with dub-reggae in reaction against the previous generation’s relationship to African-American music.

The genre known as dub emerged from the practice of the sound systems and became particularly prominent in the mid- to late-1970s, initially in Jamaica. The figurative crown awarded to the inventor of the genre has been somewhat contested but King Tubby (born Osborne Ruddock) is frequently cited as an important innovator. Tubby owned his own sound system in Jamaica known as the Home Town Hi Fi, which he built himself drawing on his training as an electrical engineer.<sup>30</sup> In 1976 Goldman (regular reggae columnist for *Sounds* magazine) lauded Tubby’s creation of a “new form” known as “dub.”<sup>31</sup> The basis of dub lies in the practice of creating what is known as a “version.” This involves retaining the bass line and drum beat of a pre-existing song (known in combination as the “riddim”) and adding sound effects such as reverb and echo. Certain aspects of the version would be manipulated in real time, often with a performer “toasting” over the top.<sup>32</sup> The word “dub” itself developed out of the

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<sup>29</sup> Friedman, 430.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Partridge, “King Tubby Meets the Upsetter at the Grass Roots of Dub,” *Popular Music History* 2/3 (2007): 315.

<sup>31</sup> Vivien Goldman, “Reggae: Black Punks on ‘Erb,”” *Sounds*, October 16, 1976, accessed December 6, 2013, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/reggae-black-punks-on-erb>.

<sup>32</sup> “Toasting” involves vocalizing an often-improvised text in a rhythmic (sometimes rhymed) way over the top of a beat. It is also referred to as “chatting,” and is akin to the practice of MC-ing found in hip-hop.

industrial process of making records and refers specifically to the dub plate and the attendant practice of dubbing.<sup>33</sup>

One of dub's central musical characteristics goes hand-in-hand with its practical parameters. Dub musicians (sometimes also known as "scientists" or "architects") such as Tubby were renowned for their inventive and resourceful attitude towards using certain kinds of electronic music equipment. It was through this inventiveness and experimentation that special effects, such as echo, reverb, and found sound, could be added to a version. This often involved "abusing" equipment. One anecdote relayed by dub historian Michael Veal reveals how Tubby would pick up his spring reverb machine and then drop it on the floor in order to produce "a violent and clangorous sound."<sup>34</sup> Tubby would also often re-wire old equipment in order to create new effects that could be used on versions. Of particular importance were Tubby's homemade echo/delay units. In fact Tubby may have been one of the first dub architects to introduce effects such as echo and reverb into the dub version, and since then these effects have been widely regarded as a hallmark of the dub genre.<sup>35</sup> Significantly, it was this use of echo that certain post-punk musicians incorporated into their songs, and echo's particular significance in dub culture transformed as it moved from Jamaican dub into post-punk, as I shall discuss later in this chapter.

Dub records such as *African Dub* and Keith Hudson's *Pick a Dub* were lauded in UK weekly music magazines from the mid-1970s onwards, with writers such as Goldman and Penny Reel contributing regular reggae columns to *Sounds* and *NME* respectively.<sup>36</sup> In August 1977,

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<sup>33</sup> Partridge, "King Tubby," 310.

<sup>34</sup> Michael E. Veal, *Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 75.

<sup>35</sup> Partridge, "King Tubby," 316-17.

<sup>36</sup> See for example Penny Reel, "Keith Hudson: A Better Brand of Dub," *New Musical Express*, January 14, 1978, accessed December 13, 2013, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/keith-hudson-ia-better-brand-of-dubi>.

*ZigZag* in particular went so far as to dispense with its “No Black Music policy” in order to publish more reggae articles.<sup>37</sup> The extent to which Jamaican music—the sound system parties, and the circulation of dub and reggae records—thrived in the UK is evidence of the strength of Paul Gilroy’s concept of the “black Atlantic.” Gilroy argues that diasporic cultural productivity is the result of a dialogue and exchange that takes place in cross-cultural networks, and he has thus argued for a sense of fluidity when discussing boundaries between nation states.<sup>38</sup> In this sense, dub’s identity might not necessarily be restricted to nor isolated in Jamaica. Sound systems started life with American rhythm and blues records. With the mass migration to the UK, sound system parties took root there. Jamaican-made records were exported to émigré communities in the UK where they piqued the interest of the alternative music press, such as *NME*, *Sounds*, and *ZigZag*. In this regard dub-reggae might be interpreted as the product of the exchange and circulation of sound between multiple nations: Jamaica, the UK, and the United States.<sup>39</sup> In light of this re-distribution of the dub genre using Gilroy’s frame of the “black Atlantic”—from being rooted in the seemingly tropical climes of the Caribbean to a more dispersed and multi-national project—Levene and other post-punk musicians’ re-orientation begins to come into view. Levene and some of his contemporaries sought music that was more “important”, that is, contemporary, relevant, or even literally closer to home, than remote-seeming African American music.

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<sup>37</sup> Kris Needs, “Roots Rock Reggae,” *ZigZag*, August 1977, 29.

<sup>38</sup> Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 15.

<sup>39</sup> Record label boss Chris Blackwell, also played a significant role in stimulating the circulation of records between Jamaica and the UK from the early 1960s onwards. See Lloyd Bradley, *This is Reggae Music: The Story of Jamaica’s Music* (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 130. Similarly, Maycock’s detail about how Metro regularly ordered rare records from California and the Bronx, as well as from Jamaica, challenges conceptions of dub culture as an exclusively Jamaican-rooted form of expression. See Maycock, “Metro.”

### **(Post-) Punk Meets Reggae**

Beyond the figurative walls of the UK's Jamaican communities, the avenues through which Britain's white subcultural followers came into contact with sound systems, dub, reggae, and its musicians are myriad. In fact, even the UK's mainstream audiences had a taste of some of dub's most celebrated names. The song "Uptown Top Ranking" by the teenage Jamaican duo Althea and Donna reached No.1 in the UK popular music chart in February 1978. The song was co-produced by Gibbs and Thompson in Jamaica. But there were many other nodes of contact and spaces across the UK that brought the punk scene directly in contact with the dub-reggae scene. These included: the circulation of dub records in music stores and clubs frequented by punks; punk-identified individuals attending sound system sessions in the UK; the alternating coverage of punk/post-punk and dub/reggae in music magazines such as *Sounds* and *ZigZag*; the sharing of concert bills between dub musicians and punk musicians at political-activist events; and the particular exchange-facilitating roles played by individual artists in both genres.

To give just a handful of examples of the nodal points between post-punk and dub-reggae, DJ Don Letts, producer Bovell, and certain venues and events are of particular interest. Letts, born in London to Jamaican parents in 1957, is cited by Partridge as an individual who introduced reggae and dub onto the UK punk scene. Letts was DJ at a club called the Roxy, which was formerly a gay disco located in central London's Covent Garden. According to Partridge, those who frequented Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood's shop, Sex, were also likely to attend Letts' DJ sets at the Roxy.<sup>40</sup> Even though the club was only open for a short amount of time (from January to April in 1977) it was, in Partridge's words, "a powerhouse of

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<sup>40</sup> A reconstruction of McLaren and Westwood's shop was on display recently at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art as part of the museum's exhibition "Punk: from Chaos to Couture," May 9 to August 14, 2013. Several punk garments designed by Westwood were also exhibited. McLaren was manager of the seminal punk band the Sex Pistols and Vivien Westwood is one of the most well known names in punk fashion.

punk creativity.” Letts also played dub-reggae records at Acme Attractions, a shop that rivalled Sex and also attracted members of the punk scene.<sup>41</sup>

Outside of London, there were further examples of identification between post-punk scene and dub-reggae. In 1978 journalist Charles Shaar Murray in *NME* described the live music venue the “F” Club in Leeds as “a reggae/punk crossover no-man’s-land” that “[played] music compounded of equal parts of reggae, New Wave and David Bowie.”<sup>42</sup> Likewise in Manchester, the record label known as Factory (famous now for its post-punk roster) released a reggae song by local band X-O-Dus on one of its compilations. X-O-Dus’s song, “English Black Boys,” was also produced by Bovell. The group’s music has been described by Factory as “progressive” reggae in that it was intended for both black and white listeners.<sup>43</sup> This self-conscious articulation of the racial identity of the audience for a group like X-O-Dus (black and white listeners) points to an awareness of the way in which musical genres are often divided according to race. By including X-O-Dus on the compilation, then, Factory attempted to foster an alliance not only between reggae and punk, but also between black and white music fans.

As these examples illustrate, Jamaican music took root in the UK so strongly that Britain’s white subcultural youth started to take an interest in it. But the race relations in Britain after the mass migration of Jamaican workers are perhaps not best remembered for their utopian tranquillity. Poor housing and competition for its availability between West Indian immigrants

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<sup>41</sup> In addition to reggae records, Letts also played music from the New York scene, such as Television, the New York Dolls, MC5 and the Stooges during his DJ sets. Other locations and events that musicians visited in order to hear reggae included record stores such as Revolver in Bristol frequented by the Pop Group, the Silver Sand night club in Newport enjoyed by members of the Clash, and the “blues parties” in certain parts of London such as Brixton, Tavistock Road, and Westbourne Grove. See Partridge, *Dub in Babylon*, 168-9.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Shaar Murray, “Magazine, Howard Devoto’s Enigma Variations,” *New Musical Express*, February 25, 1978, accessed December 10, 2013, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/magazine-howard-devotos-enigma-variations>. As I discussed in chapter one, new wave was often used synonymously with punk and post-punk in mid- to late-1970s press discourse.

<sup>43</sup> “X is for X-O-Dus,” A Factory Alphabet, accessed February 27, 2013, <http://afactoryalphabet.blogspot.ca/2009/05/x-is-for-x-o-dus.html>.

and the UK's white population was one of several factors that gave rise to tension between these two communities. Such tensions eventually exploded in rioting, and one of the most notable outbursts of race-related civil violence took place in late summer 1958 in London's Notting Hill district. By the mid to late-1970s, the racial violence between Caribbean migrants and the poor whites living in London had escalated in scale and another outbreak took place in Notting Hill, this time during the annual carnival celebrations on August 30, 1976.

Live concerts in aid of easing Britain's racial tension were thus further grounds upon which these two generic fields (punk/post-punk and reggae/dub) came into contact, especially during the latter half of the 1970s. At the annual meeting of the West Midlands Conservative Political Centre in Birmingham, UK, on April 20, 1968, defence spokesperson for the Conservative party, Enoch Powell, delivered a speech that cost him his place in the cabinet when he was immediately dismissed by Prime Minister Edward Heath.<sup>44</sup> Described by the *Times* of London as "evil" and "disgraceful," Powell suggested,

We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependants, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre. So insane are we that we actually permit unmarried persons to immigrate for the purpose of founding a family with spouses and fiancés whom they have never seen.<sup>45</sup>

Despite its problematic content and the call to stop the flow of immigration to the UK, Powell's speech garnered considerable popular support. In 1972 Powell was voted "man of the year" in a poll organized by BBC radio, and in 1975 the *Times* newspaper published a full-page feature, complete with caricature, outlining the trajectory of Powell's career and focussed above

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<sup>44</sup> William Wootten, "Rhetoric and Violence in Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns* and the Speeches of Enoch Powell," *The Cambridge Quarterly* 29/1 (2000): 4.

<sup>45</sup> "An Evil Speech," *The Times*, April 22, 1968, 11. For the full speech as presented by *The Telegraph* newspaper see "Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood Speech,'" *The Telegraph*, November 6, 2007, accessed November 28, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html>.

all on his stance on immigration.<sup>46</sup> But Powell and his dubious sentiments also made their way onto the rock stage. In Birmingham in 1976 guitarist Eric Clapton (former member of the Yardbirds and Cream, and a major proponent of the blues-rock genre) declared that Britain should “vote for Enoch” and “send them all back” so as to avoid becoming a “black colony.” During the same performance, Clapton also requested that the Jamaicans, Arabs, Saudis, “wogs” and “coons” in the audience should promptly leave the concert hall.<sup>47</sup>

In the immediate wake of Clapton’s infamous verbal effluvium, and from within a country where support for right-wing politics appeared to be mounting, several musicians banded together to form the movement known as Rock Against Racism (RAR). Using the slogan “Love Music, Hate Racism,” RAR intended to promote racial awareness and foster friendship between racial groups by organizing concerts that featured both black and white musicians.<sup>48</sup> The most famous of these events was perhaps the Carnival Against the Nazis in April 1978, which featured punk groups such as the Clash, X-Ray Spex and the Tom Robinson Band.<sup>49</sup> The movement also had its own magazine called *Temporary Hoarding* that contained practical advice on how to organize concerts, as well as promotional badges, posters, stickers and leaflets. But it was primarily through bringing together reggae and (post-) punk that RAR sought to convey its message of racial unity.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Caroline Moorehead, “Enoch Powell,” *The Times*, May 12, 1975, 7, accessed December 10, 2013, <http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/newspaper>.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in John Street, *Rock Rebel: the Politics of Popular Music* (Oxford; New York: Blackwell, 1986), 74-5.

<sup>48</sup> Gilroy also suggests that David Bowie’s endorsement of Hitler was another catalyst for the formation of Rock Against Racism. See Gilroy, “Two Sides to Rock Against Racism,” in *White Riot*, ed. Duncombe and Tremblay, 181.

<sup>49</sup> “Rock Against Racism,” Tom Robinson Band, accessed November 28, 2013, <http://www.tomrobinson.com/trb/rar.htm>.

<sup>50</sup> Ian Goodyer, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism* (Manchester, UK; New York: Manchester University Press, 2009), 11-12.

The fact that RAR began as a response to Clapton's racist outburst helps to contextualise Levene's dismissal of black-associated genres and their white imitators as expressed in the excerpts from the interview that opened the present chapter. By demurring from associating with blues-based genres but developing a connection with Jamaican music, the musicians in the punk and post-punk scene in the latter half of the 1970s were able to distance themselves from what may have been perceived as the colonialist enterprise of appropriating remote-seeming black music. This was a colonialist enterprise that was, furthermore, compounded by Clapton's display of racial supremacy, despite having always been a purveyor of black-associated music, which included both reggae and blues-based styles. In stark contrast to the music of black America, Jamaican migrants and musicians lived and performed in very close proximity to the musicians in the punk scene. Indeed, what better way to send an anti-racist message (to someone who had spent their career playing black-associated music) than to embrace the closest black music possible? According to Born's typology, punk and post-punk musicians' endorsement of dub-reggae may have been an attempt to bring about, or "potentialise" through music a "real [form] of sociocultural ... alliance" between black and white in the UK<sup>51</sup>—one that surpassed the seemingly contradictory views of Clapton, who had both criticised Britain's immigration policy and covered Bob Marley's song "I Shot the Sherriff" in 1974.

Perhaps in order to dissuade audiences, readers, and musicians from concluding that punk's fascination with reggae in any way imitated the appropriative practices of the previous generation of rock musicians, and perhaps in order to explain why the punk scene specifically might be interested in relaying a message of racial harmony, certain journalists, such as Savage and Goldman, wrote of a shared sense of marginality between punks and Rastafarians. Following an RAR concert in September 1977 (one year before the Carnival Against the Nazis), Goldman

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<sup>51</sup> Born and Hesmondhalgh, 35.

described the kinship between punks and Rastafarians as the “new wave sympathy for their black peer group.” Goldman argued that it was their shared status as victims of an oppressive culture that brought punks and Rastafarians together. She wrote,

when you get right down to it, punks and dreadlocks are on the same side of the fence. Bluntly, who gets picked up in the street by the police? Answer: those natty dreads [Rastafarians] and crazy bald heads [punks].<sup>52</sup>

Goldman was keen not to depict this identification between punks and Rastafarians in too idealistic a light, however. In the same article she cited instances where young white people had been struck by beer bottles hurled by young black people. Nonetheless, Goldman also quoted Letts in order to support her argument in favour of a shared cause for the two communities. Regarding punk, Letts is quoted as having said that punk was the “first white movement that he could relate to as a black man” without being made to feel as though he was participating in a minstrel show.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Letts’ comments were integral to Goldman’s argument, so as to avoid charges of unidirectional borrowing and appropriation.

Beyond RAR, other political-activist events also demonstrated a connection between the punk scene and the reggae scene. In October 1978, for example, post-punk groups the Pop Group and Cabaret Voltaire, and former Velvet Underground member Nico, appeared alongside the Jamaican dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson at an Amnesty International Benefit Concert. The reviewer for the concert Richard Williams remarked in the magazine *Melody Maker* that most of the audience members “swaying” to Johnson’s prose were white.<sup>54</sup> The benefit concert given for the Commission of Inquiry into Police Brutality and Malpractice Against the Black Community

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<sup>52</sup> Vivien Goldman, “Jah Punk: New Wave Digs Reggae,” *Sounds*, September 3, 1977, accessed December 10, 2013, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/jah-punk-new-wave-digs-reggae>. At the end of this particular article there is a preview for the next issue, which was scheduled as a reggae special: “And only in *Sounds* next week—a complete (well, just about) guide to all the reggae bands gigging around the country, complete with pix and interviews. Shine up your dancing shoes in preparation, and we’ll see ya there.”

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Richard Williams, “The Pop Group/LKJ/Nico/Cab Voltaire,” *Melody Maker*, October 21, 1978, accessed December 10, 2013, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-pop-grouplkjnicocab-voltaire>.

also featured both black and white musicians.<sup>55</sup> These events, therefore, also speak to the anti-racist motivation behind punk's "rapprochement" with reggae.

### ***John Lydon: Reggae Connoisseur***

While discussing the instances of proximity between the UK's punk scene and its reggae scene—the shared soundscape of clubs, the movement of individuals across the boundaries of the two genres, the shared interests in anti-racism and political activism—I have not as yet detailed punk and post-punk musicians' actual *musical* interest in dub-reggae, nor how post-punks borrowed from this genre. Amongst the many different contexts in which dub-reggae and post-punk came into contact, musician John Lydon's personal enthusiasm for dub-reggae is perhaps the most well documented instance of the interconnection between these two socio-musical scenes. Along with Levene and Jah Wobble, Lydon was a member of PiL, the group whose second album *Metal Box* released in 1979 displayed a debt to both dub and disco. Previously, however, Lydon was lead singer of archetypal and infamous punk band the Sex Pistols. Using "Johnny Rotten" as his *nom de guerre* while with the Sex Pistols, Lydon was perhaps most famous for having used expletives on British day-time television, and for having desecrated the Queen and several other similarly hallowed English institutions. As I have demonstrated, Lydon's interest in dub was not exceptional but Lydon's prominence at the time as an iconoclast and leader of alternative trends meant that his post-Pistols activity attracted a considerable amount of intrigue and media attention. Consequently, so did his zeal for dub-reggae.

Writers such as Reynolds have cited four particular events that demonstrated Lydon's love of reggae and that also serve to depict post-punk as a genre that sought to diversify the

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<sup>55</sup> Paul Rambali, "The Last Poets/Merger: Acklam, Nothing Hill, London," *New Musical Express*, January 14, 1978, accessed December 10, 2013, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-last-poetsmerger-acklam-hall-notting-hill-london>.

musical language of punk. These events include: 1) Lydon's appearance on Capital Radio, where he was interviewed by Tommy Vance on a programme entitled "The Punk and his Music;" 2) another radio interview, this time in Birmingham; 3) Lydon's letter to a fan, which exhibited his in-depth knowledge of reggae; and 4) Lydon's trip to Jamaica with Virgin Records boss Richard Branson, DJ Letts, and journalist Goldman.

The two radio interviews are cited primarily to demonstrate the depth and breadth of Lydon's tastes beyond punk and to illustrate his particularly strong affinity for dub-reggae, in addition to other genres such as progressive rock.<sup>56</sup> During the Capital programme, Lydon played dub and reggae musicians such as Augustus Pablo, Fred Locks, Culture, Dr. Alimentado, and Peter Tosh. During the interview, Lydon said that he had always enjoyed reggae and was attracted to dub-reggae musicians' "love of sound" as a phenomenon distinct from music.<sup>57</sup> Vance also noted that he has "never, ever, seen anybody with a big pile of reggae records, who's in, ostensibly a white band." Lydon's explained his tastes by invoking his upbringing in Islington and his early socialising with skinheads (a British subculture that modelled its look and attitude on Jamaican rude boys) as something that stimulated his affinity for reggae. Lydon also frequented clubs such as the Four Aces,<sup>58</sup> a nightclub in Dalston London opened by Jamaican émigré Newton Dunbar.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Reynolds, *Rip it up*, 17.

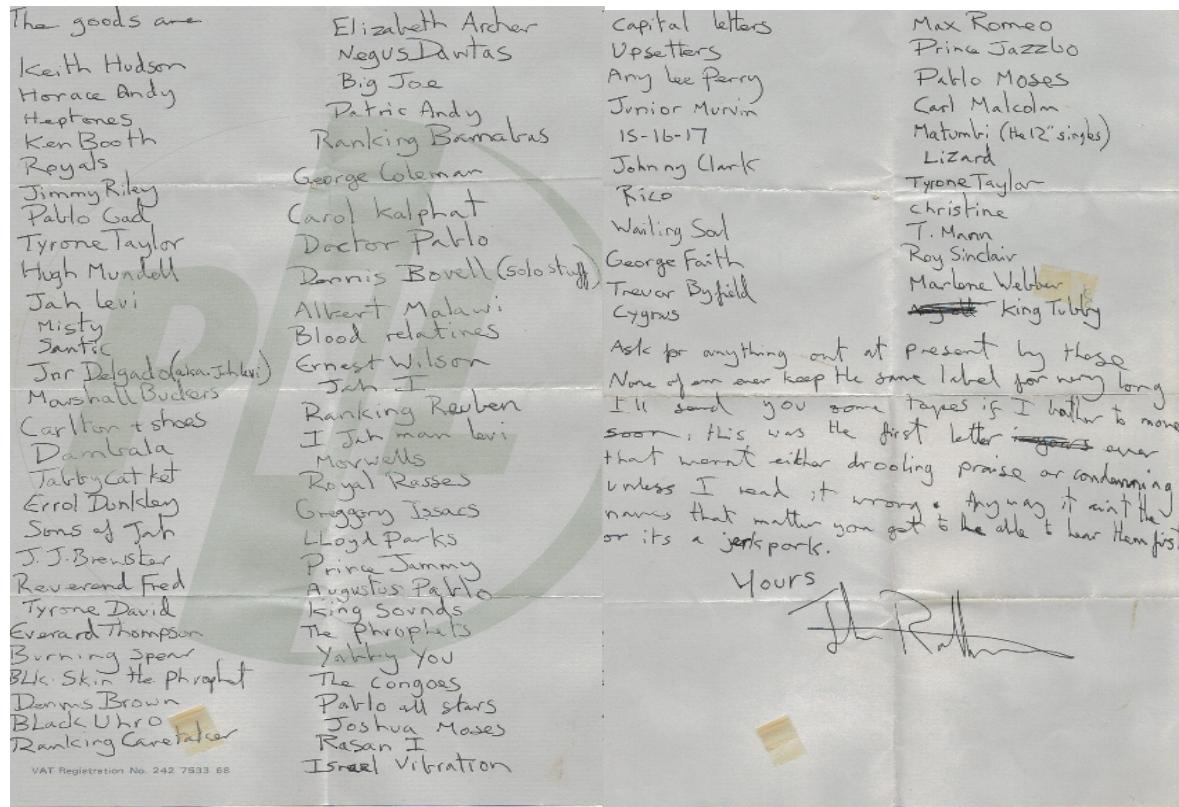
<sup>57</sup> Greg Whitfield, "'It Ain't the Names that Matter, You Got to be Able to Hear them First,'" August 2007, accessed September 9, 2014, <http://www.fodderstompf.com/ARCHIVES/ARTS/reggae.html>. A complete list of the songs played on the programme is available at the website Fodderstomp. Seven of the twenty-five songs from Lydon's playlist are reggae or dub-reggae songs, including: Augustus Pablo, "King Tubby Meets The Rockers Uptown;" Fred Locks, "Walls;" Vivian Jackson and the Prophets, "Fire In a Kingston;" Culture, "I'm Not Ashamed;" Dr. Alimentado & The Rebels "Born for a Purpose;" Makka Bees, "Nation Fiddler/Fire!"; and Peter Tosh "Legalise It."

<sup>58</sup> Vivien Goldman, "John Lydon: Man A Warrior The Interview—Part 1," *Sounds*, March 4, 1978, accessed December 10, 2013, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/john-lydon-man-a-warrior--the-interview-part-1>.

<sup>59</sup> Derry Nairn, "Legacy in the Dust: The Story of the Four Aces," *History Today*, November 24, 2010, accessed December 10, 2013, <http://www.historytoday.com/blog/2010/11/legacy-dust-story-four-aces>.

The depth of Lydon's reggae knowledge is even accessible in his own scribbled hand. Fodderstompf, a fansite for PiL, suggests that sometime between 1978 and 1980 Lydon replied with an extensive list to a fan who asked him for some recommendations on reggae records (see Fig. 2.1). The contributors to Fodderstompf have also remarked upon the connoisseur-like quality of the list and the inclusion of obscurities. The list bears the mark of someone who "ain't no white man in Hammersmith," a description that refers to the song by the Clash called "(White Man) in Hammersmith Palais,"—a song that, in comparison with Rotten/Lydon, demonstrates only a superficial familiarity with dub-reggae via its use of reggae rhythms.

**Fig. 2.1** A list of reggae recommendations sent to a fan from John Lydon of PiL, written sometime between 1978 and 1980. *Source:* Fodderstompf.<sup>60</sup>



Music journalist Greg Whitfield has suggested that nowadays the records that Lydon recommended are fairly easy to purchase because there is a reggae-reissue industry, and they're also widely available on the internet. In 1977, however, Lydon's selections demonstrated "very esoteric knowledge and tastes." According to Whitfield, the kinds of records that Lydon is recommending would have come from Jamaica in small loads and would have been bought quickly by sound system DJs or collectors. They would have been expensive and the kind of places where one could have bought these records would have been, in Whitfield's words, record shop basements with "[pound] notes at the ready, bidding against others in the know, keen to get

<sup>60</sup> Published by Fodderstompf in August 2007, courtesy of the website ViciousRiff, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.fodderstompf.com/ARCHIVES/ARTS/reggae.html>.

hold of the hardest bass lines and the most transcendent, spiritual vocal sides.”<sup>61</sup> This suggests, therefore, that Lydon had an intimate knowledge of and connection to the UK’s dub-reggae scene.

As I noted in chapter one, the Sex Pistols disbanded early in 1978 following an unsuccessful tour of the US. In that same year Lydon gave his first television interview since 1976 with journalist Janet Street-Porter for London Weekend Television in 1978. The tenor of the conversation between Lydon and Street-Porter conveys the intrigue and anticipation that surrounded Lydon’s post-Pistols career. Lydon’s status as a media curiosity is visually signalled by the way in which he dressed semi-incognito for the interview, wearing a Mad Hatter’s top hat and no punk accoutrements. Lydon and Street-Porter were also followed through London’s Covent Garden by a gang of curious youths. In the interview, Street-Porter asked Lydon what he had been doing with his time since he left the Sex Pistols, had he been rehearsing, was he already with a new band? Significantly, Street-Porter then probed Lydon about which musical genre he intended to pursue with his new band, asking “a lot of people think that maybe your first record is going to be a reggae record.” Towards the end of the interview Street-Porter remarked that Lydon is not the only musician to show an enthusiasm for reggae, that it is indeed an “interest that has been shared by many new wave [musicians].”<sup>62</sup>

That same year, on Christmas Day and Boxing Day (December 26) 1978 at the Rainbow Theatre in London, Lydon’s new project PiL had its debut. Echoing the hybrid billing of the Amnesty concert only two months earlier, not only did post-punk musicians PiL appear alongside poet Kwesi Johnson, but punk-reggae fusion band Basement 5 also had their debut at this concert, and Roxy DJ and genre go-between Letts also appeared on the bill. Penny Reel at

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<sup>61</sup> Whitfield, “It Ain’t the Names.”

<sup>62</sup> “John Lydon Interview Circa 1978,” YouTube video, 6:41, posted by SexPistolsChannel, September 12, 2009, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfWMnQcJ9Yc>.

*NME* was one of the journalists covering PiL's debut and his review of the concert stressed how significant a figure Lydon was to the UK's subcultural scene at that moment. Reel described Lydon as "the *face of the decade*" and as someone who had almost single-handedly been the "catalyst for all that [had] happened in rock music since the Pistols arrived on the scene" (emphasis original).<sup>63</sup> Needless to say, the audience at the Rainbow Theatre was feverishly keen to hear Lydon's brand new project.

In Reel's account of the concert it was reggae, not punk, that "ruled the day." PiL took to the stage last and emerged to a reggae soundtrack. In Reel's faux-Jamaican patois, this was PiL's "first ever public appearance inna inglan, inna dis yah time, yaah!" The band started with their song entitled "Theme," the opening song to their first album, *Public Image: First Issue*. The song comprises a repeated bass line, a drumbeat, sound effects, and improvised-sounding vocals. The basic groove of the "Theme" suggests slow-tempo hard rock, and Wobble's bass line is conspicuous for its use of a (presumably forbidden) bluesy flat 7<sup>th</sup> and its adherence to a blues-esque alternation between areas I and IV, though lacking the move to V that would complete a blues progression. However, by virtue of its prominent bass-and-drums texture, as well as its languorous bass groove, the band's overall emphasis on timbre, Lydon's meandering vocal performance, and the band's evasion of verse-chorus form, "Theme" suggests the influence of dub, and certainly departs from the kind of music made by those "rock and rollers" of the previous generation.

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<sup>63</sup> Penny Reel, "Public Image Limited; Linton Kwesi Johnson: Rainbow Theatre, London," *New Musical Express*, January 6, 1979, accessed December 10, 2013, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/public-image-limited-linton-kwesi-johnson-rainbow-theatre-london>.

### ***Echo and the Melodica: Post-Punk Incorporates Dub***

PiL were not the only post-punk musicians to adopt some of dub-reggae's sonic characteristics. Gang of Four, Joy Division, and the Durutti Column, had their own approach to incorporating aspects of Jamaican music, which was arguably subtler than some of their contemporaries; rather than adopt the offbeat reggae "skank" in the way that the Clash did with "(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais" or the Police did with "Can't Stand Losing You" or the vocal inflections at the beginning of "Roxanne," both Joy Division and Gang of Four adopted the melodica in homage to Jamaican musician Augustus Pablo. In addition to this, Joy Division and the Durutti Column may be interpreted as having adopted some of dub's atmospheric style of production.

In an interview given with Bert van de Kamp first published in the Dutch magazine *Muziekkrant Oor* in September 1981, Joy Division's producer Martin Hannett professed his fondness for dub. Van de Kamp remarked, too, that Hannett's unique production style was identifiable because of the "[dub] techniques, delayed reverb, elastic drums and other special effects" that he used on his records. Van de Kamp gives *The Correct Use of Soap* by Magazine and *Closer* by Joy Division as examples of the Hannett's dub-influenced production style.<sup>64</sup> Hannett also mentioned in the same interview that he had listened to a lot of music produced by reggae producer Joe Gibbs, even if it was not always possible for Hannett to identify how exactly Gibbs had achieved a particular sound effect.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, in a different interview with Max Bell for *NME* a year earlier, Hannett expressed that he was especially fond of echo and syn-drums, such as those heard on reggae recordings:

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<sup>64</sup> Martin Hannett quoted in an interview with Bert van der Kamp, first published in *Musikkrant Oor*, September 1981, republished on Martin Hannet.co.uk, trans., Hans Huisman, accessed January 25, 2015. <http://www.martinhannett.co.uk/interv.htm>.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

I was indoctrinated into that stuff by [DJ] Roger Eagle. I'd go around to his gaff around midnight and stay 'til dawn listening to his million reggae albums and they were all great dance records. Plus he tended to have blow.<sup>66</sup>

In a filmed interview with Tony Wilson (manager of Factory records, the label to which Joy Division were signed) Hannett discussed and demonstrated his methods at the mixing desk in such a way that arguably alludes to his dub influences.<sup>67</sup> Redolent of Veal's description of the "spatial" dimension that echo can lend to a dub recording,<sup>68</sup> Wilson asked Hannett whether he used "exotic electronics" in his recordings "to create an imaginary room" (emphasis mine).<sup>69</sup> Wilson's use of the word "exotic" seems particularly pertinent to a discussion of the role that dub-reggae influences played in post-punk music. Could it be argued that certain kinds of production gestures were, at that time, sutured to the language of dub and reggae, and that Wilson was alluding to dub and reggae with the word "exotic"? Despite dub-reggae's anchoring in the UK, the genre may have seemed exotic owing to its racial Otherness, its distant-seeming origins and, as I shall discuss in the final parts of this chapter, the symbolic significations of some of its sonic characteristics.

Hannett also worked with the Durutti Column, a band on the Factory label whose only constant member was guitarist and pianist Vini Reilly. According to Durutti Column biographer Mark Prendergast, *The Return of the Durutti Column*, released in 1980, was a record of "nine

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<sup>66</sup> Hannett was not only fond of the cascading echoes of dub, but also the kinds of echo effects he heard on CBS recordings from the mid-60s and recordings produced by pop/country producer Lee Hazlewood. See Max Bell, "Phantom of the Factory: It's Martin Hannett! A Hero in his Own Town!! Didsbury!!!" *New Musical Express*, July 19, 1980, 6-7; and Jon Savage, "An Interview with Martin Hannett 29<sup>th</sup> May 1989," *Touch-Vagabond*, 1992, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/an-interview-with-martin-hannett-29th-may-1989/>.

<sup>67</sup> "Martin Hannett and Tony Wilson at Strawberry Studios in July 1980," YouTube video, 6:30, posted by Dimitri Krissof, August 27, 2008, accessed December 5, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XI-w7LjSNi4>.

<sup>68</sup> Veal, 71.

<sup>69</sup> "Hannett and Wilson at Strawberry."

classically-structured guitar pieces put through echoplex.<sup>70</sup> Like Levene, Lydon, Eno, and other post-punk musicians discussed earlier, Reilly wanted to make music that was not influenced by rock ‘n’ roll, he wanted to make music that was “new” and was, according to Prendergast, inspired by Fats Waller, Art Tatum, and Benjamin Britten.<sup>71</sup> In 1981 Reilly told an interviewer that Hannett understood how he did not want a “horrible distorted, usual electric guitar sound.”<sup>72</sup> Such a remark in many ways echoes Levene’s desire to depart from the conventions of rock, which I outlined in the introduction to this chapter. In order to achieve something unlike the “usual electric guitar sound,” then, producer Hannett introduced a machine known as the Echoplex, a tape delay machine designed by Don Dixon and Mike Battle in 1959. The Echoplex works by recording sound onto magnetic tape. The sound is then played back, and the speed of the tape or the distance between the playback heads determines the amount of delay.<sup>73</sup>

The Durutti Column’s song “Sketch for Summer” was released in the UK on the Factory records label in January 1980 on *The Return of the Durutti Column*. Originally released in a sandpaper sleeve, the packaging had to be re-thought since it began to have a—perhaps predictably—damaging effect on the vinyl of the record itself.<sup>74</sup> The song is purely instrumental with no vocal track, and foregrounds Reilly’s guitar playing. A percussion loop produced by a drum machine and samples of bird song comprise the other accompanying sounds. The melodic content of “Sketch for Summer” is built upon mellifluous arpeggios developing from a repeated Dm7 sonority, using the flattened sixth degree for colour with a counter melody often playing at

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<sup>70</sup> Mark Prendergast, “The Durutti Column Biography 1978-1991,” The Durutti Column, accessed August 22, 2012, [http://thedorutticolumn.com/the\\_durutti\\_column\\_biography\\_1978-1991.html](http://thedorutticolumn.com/the_durutti_column_biography_1978-1991.html).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Vini Reilly, interview with two unidentified interviewers, August 13, 1981, accessed December 5, 2013, <http://users.rcn.com/rpsweb/durutti-column/texts/iv-muntplein.html>.

<sup>73</sup> Michael Dregni, “Echoplex EP-2,” *Vintage Guitar*, July 2012, 54-6.

<sup>74</sup> “Factory Communications UK (Part 1: Fac 1 to 50),” accessed December 5, 2013, <http://www.trans.com.au/factory/index2.html>. According to Deborah Curtis, Ian Curtis and the other members of Joy Division were drafted in to glue together most of the album covers for this record. See Deborah Curtis, *Touching From a Distance: Ian Curtis and Joy Division* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 84.

the fifth and sixth above. Although without lyrics, “Sketch for Summer” is constructed using the alternation between two main sections, mirroring the verse-chorus-verse-chorus formula of most popular songs. In contrast with the “verse” section in Dm7, the chorus breaks into a “groove” with a more strongly articulated, syncopated and chromatically descending bass line outlining the harmonic sequence Bb – Am – Gm – Dm7. This alternation between two contrasting sections and subsequent emulation of a standard pop/rock song structure is especially interesting given the song’s description as “classical” and Reilly’s rejection of “usual” rock conventions.

Nonetheless, “Sketch for Summer” is not a punk song. Even though “rock heroes” such as Elvis, Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd had used the Echoplex and similar machines, “Sketch for Summer” also does not sound like the rock music from the 1960s or early 1970s. First of all, the harmonic outline suggests other genres, such as funk or even jazz. Secondly, the Echoplex adds temporal complexity to the already improvised-sounding, flexible rhythmic contour of Reilly’s guitar line. What are perhaps even more interesting, however, are the sampled use of bird song and the particular playing technique that Reilly adopts. The effect that Reilly achieves (enhanced by the delay from the Echoplex) suggests the sound of a Hawaiian steel guitar, and the bird song projects a related image of an idealised tropical oasis. The name of the song, furthermore, also seems marked, especially since the North West of England is not known for its idyllic summer weather.

To suggest that Reilly and Hannett were trying to evoke Jamaica by using the Echoplex machine, as well as exotic signifiers such as bird song and the Hawaiian-style guitar, is perhaps too simplistic. A more nuanced suggestion would be that Hannett, having been a fan of dub-reggae, introduced the Echoplex and the sound effects based upon what he knew of that genre in response to Reilly’s request for an unusual sound. But, as John Corbett has posited in his work

on experimental music of the twentieth century, reverb is “the signifier of the ‘other,’” and is something that has the capacity to evoke “imaginary fantasy universes.”<sup>75</sup> In “Sketch for Summer,” delay/echo (rather than reverb, although the two are similar), coupled with the bird song, evokes the “imaginary fantasy universe” of exotic climes and idyllic summer afternoons, and perhaps obliquely the music of an “Other.” What is significant, furthermore, is how echo and reverb are used in dub-reggae itself to represent Otherness or elsewhere-ness, as I shall discuss later in the chapter.

The Durutti Column were not the only band on the Factory label to incorporate aspects that may have derived from dub-reggae via the use of the Echoplex and other black-associated musics with their funk-style groove. Joy Division were another group signed to Factory and produced by Hannett whose music was in dialogue with the dub-reggae style. Like PiL, with their 1979 album *Metal Box*, Joy Division entertained the idea of releasing their single “Love Will Tear Us Apart” (backed with “The Sound of Music” and “These Days”) as a twelve-inch record, a format popular with dub and disco DJs, favoured for its accommodation of longer mixes and better sound quality.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, Joy Division’s interest in the twelve-inch format may not have come directly from dub or disco, but from *Metal Box* itself. After sharing a bill with PiL at the Futurama music festival in Leeds in September 1979, Joy Division singer Ian Curtis commented upon how he couldn’t understand why PiL had garnered such poor reception. On the contrary, Curtis thought *Metal Box* was “superb,” save only for the fact that he had to “put

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<sup>75</sup> In relation to the 1981 album by Jon Hassell, *Dream Theory in Malaya*, and Brian Eno and David Byrne’s *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, Corbett also suggests, “All these projects use an exotic-sounding, echoey mix, a long-standing trope of sonic Orientalism, usually linked to the ‘mysteries of the East’ mentality.” See John Corbett, “Experimental Oriental: New Music and Other Others,” in *Western Music and its Others*, ed. Born and Hesmondhalgh, 176.

<sup>76</sup> Alan Hempsall, “A Day Out with Joy Division,” *Extro* 2/5, January 8, 1980, accessed December 5, 2013, <http://home.wxs.nl/~frankbri/jdvextro.html> Also.

various amounts of weights on [his] stylus to stop the thing jumping.”<sup>77</sup> One possible reason as to why Curtis’ stylus would be jumping while listening to *Metal Box* can be attributed to the bass frequencies on the record; determined to approximate the kind of powerful “bass culture” heard in dub, PiL created a particularly meaty bass sound, and thus had mixed their record in such a way that Jah Wobble’s bass sound possibly overwhelmed Curtis’ home hi-fi equipment.<sup>78</sup>

According to his widow Deborah Curtis, Joy Division singer Ian Curtis developed a strong interest in reggae and regularly frequented a record store in the Moss Side district of Manchester in search of the latest music in that genre. In Deborah Curtis’ words, “Ian became obsessed with a lifestyle different from his own. He began to infiltrate the places where white people didn’t usually go.”<sup>79</sup> Joy Division drummer Stephen Morris has also commented that the band listened to “a lot of dub.” In response to Reynolds’ suggestion that Joy Division’s creation of the sound of “cavernous space” gives the listener the impression that dub originated in “the Lake District or the steppes of Siberia,” Morris commented:

There was a whole series of records by [dub musician] Scientist—*Scientist Meets the Space Invaders*, and all that. That was kind of the feel but obviously we’re not from Jamaica! So it got a little bit warped.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, like several of the post-punk contemporaries, Joy Division listened to and incorporated some of dub-reggae’s production techniques, particularly the use of echo. But Joy Division also featured a melodica in two of their songs, an instrument which was not only associated with Augustus Pablo, but had also been used in earlier ska records such as those by Delroy Wilson and also the Soulettes. According to fan discourse, the melodica that Joy Division

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> If certain parts of a track need to be loud, or if the bass parts are mixed in stereo as opposed to mono, problems with phase correlation can occur, causing the needle to jump. This could be one possible explanation for Curtis’ trouble, but further research is needed to understand how *Metal Box* was mixed.

<sup>79</sup> Curtis, 31.

<sup>80</sup> Stephen Morris quoted in Reynolds, *Totally Wired*, 239.

used belonged to Curtis, and it was he who introduced it to the band and used it in the songs “Decades” and “In A Lonely Place.”<sup>81</sup> What sets Joy Division apart from their near-contemporaries who incorporated the more rhythmic aspects of dub-reggae (such as the Police and the Clash mentioned in the introduction) is the understated sound of their dub incorporation. Even though in the late-1970s the melodica was strongly associated with Pablo, its actual sound is arguably not as obvious a Jamaican signifier as a “skank” rhythm or a timbales-style rim-shot roll. The melodica is more easily absorbed into the kinds of synthesiser sounds that post-punk musicians were experimenting with, almostmistakable for the ARP Omni-2 synthesizer that is so characteristic of Joy Division’s recordings. In the song “In a Lonely Place,” for example, the melodica responds to the melodic phrase started by the synthesizer on the song’s instrumental hook (shown here in Ex. 2.1) in such a way that the melodica sounds like an echo of the synthesizer. Returning to the chapter’s central discussion of cross-cultural identification in post-punk music, could it be argued that the semantic slipperiness of melodica, as a synthesizer masquerade, makes for a more subtle form of appropriation? Given the stereotypical, culturally inscribed association between black identity and rhythm,<sup>82</sup> in choosing to blend a dub *timbre* into their songs rather than dub *rhythm*, Joy Division have arguably circumvented the crudest kind of appropriation and projected more of a “connoisseur’s” appreciation of dub.

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<sup>81</sup> Mark Price, “Joy Division: Equipment,” *Joy Division Central*, accessed April 7, 2014, <http://www.joydiv.org/eqpt.htm>. The instrument’s importance to Joy Division’s sound has also been recorded in bassist Peter Hook’s autobiography of the band, which features a photograph of a melodica on page 259. However, Hook does not actually discuss the instrument in his biography. See Hook, *Unknown Pleasures: Inside Joy Division* (New York: It Books, 2013), 259.

<sup>82</sup> Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 234.

**Ex. 2.1** The melodic hook in Joy Division/New Order's "In a Lonely Place" that demonstrates the blurring of the synthesizer and melodica timbres. It can be heard at 1:12 - 1:31 on the *Substance 1987* recording.



The melodica also featured throughout Gang of Four's 1979 record, *Entertainment!* In many ways, in Gang of Four's recordings, the melodica captured the child-like, no-frills, amateur aesthetic of punk. The simplicity of the melodica can be read as a rejection of the overblown virtuosity of 1970s supergroups, much in the manner of the one-finger-style synthesizer playing of electro-pop musician Gary Numan, as suggested by Theo Cateforis.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, the particular way in which Gang of Four incorporated the melodica into their music might be heard as an articulation of punk and post-punks' anti-virtuosic ethos. On the album's opening song, "Ether," the band introduces the melodica approximately two-thirds of the way into the song during the instrumental break. The melodica takes part in an antiphonal dialogue with the electric guitar, providing extremely minimal single-note and then single-chord responses. Towards the end of the instrumental break, the guitar and melodica alternate playing dissonant chords on the downbeat, eventually collapsing together and no longer playing antiphonally, as their rhythmic diminutions propel the song forward towards its main riff. In effect, the melodica-guitar duo in this song is an anti-solo since both instruments play minimal, non-melodic parts. However, following a concert on March 25, 1979 at the Lyceum Theatre in London journalist Charles Chaar Murray noted Gang of Four's debt to Pablo specifically, describing the band's incorporation of the instrument as "an earnest approximation" of the Jamaican melodica player

<sup>83</sup> Theo Cateforis, *Are We Not New Wave? Modern Pop at the Turn of the 1980s* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 176.

and dub musician.<sup>84</sup> In an interview from 2009, Reynolds also asked Gang of Four's guitarist Andy Gill whether the band "got the idea of using melodica on some of the songs from *Augustus Pablo*?" to which Gill responded, "We'd put our hands up and admit that one!"<sup>85</sup> Thus, even though Gang of Four's melodica playing may be said to participate in punk minimalism, the instrument also signified an interest in dub.

In Reynolds' account of dub in post-punk, he focuses more on the Slits and the Pop Group (more than Joy Division, Gang of Four, and the Durutti Column as I have done here) as two groups who incorporated dub ideas. The group Reynolds calls the "blue-eyed funkateers," the Pop Group, came from the city of Bristol, one of the UK's most important slave ports during the eighteenth century. It was in this city that the band frequented "blues parties" especially in the St. Paul's district. According to Reynolds, the Pop Group's "passion for black music" was not limited to reggae but the members of the group were also avid jazz and funk enthusiasts.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, a strong funk influence is audible in the lead guitar riff and the reggae "skank" in their song "We Are Time," and the song "She is Beyond Good and Evil" is noted by Reynolds for its "deranged dub effects." The Pop Group's interaction with black music did not stop at sonic emulation, however. Their debut album *Y* was produced by Bovell, who, as I discussed earlier, is often cited as a nodal connection between the punk and reggae socio-musical spheres. Under the name Blackbeard, Bovell also released the record *Strictly Dub Wise* in 1978 and collaborated with Kwesi Johnson, the poet who shared the stage with PiL on their Christmas performances of

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<sup>84</sup> Charles Shaar Murray, "The Mekons/The Fall/Human League/Gang Of Four/Stiff Little Fingers: The Lyceum, London," *New Musical Express*, March 31, 1979, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-mekonsthe-fallhuman-leaguegang-of-fourstiff-little-fingers-the-lyceum-london->.

<sup>85</sup> Reynolds, *Totally Wired*, 110.

<sup>86</sup> Reynolds, *Rip it up*, 41-2. Mark Stewart, lead singer of the Pop Group, has discussed his interest in funk and reggae with Reynolds (*Totally Wired*), 94-103.

1978.<sup>87</sup> In a more recent interview, Bovell in fact declared the Pop Groups' drummer Bruce Smith and their bass player Simon Underwood to be the punk equivalents to Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare, the drums and bass session duo who recorded with the most renowned names in dub-reggae.<sup>88</sup>

It seems, however, that Simon Underwood was not the only contender for punk equivalent to drummer Dunbar. Journalist Needs noted Palmolive of the Slits for her "stomping reggae" playing style, and also likened her to Sly.<sup>89</sup> Incidentally, the Slits' 1979 record, *Cut*, was also produced by Bovell. According to Reynolds, "Bovell was an obvious choice. The Slits, especially [their singer] Ari Up, were reggae fiends." Like the Pop Group, Ari Up would often go to "blues parties" and, despite being one of very few white people there, she was able to fit in because of her dreadlocks and adeptness at "stepping,"<sup>90</sup> a style of dancing popular at reggae dance halls that is a variation on the "heel-toe," a two-step movement alternating between the right foot and the left. In addition to Bovell's production input, the playing styles of the members of the Slits also contributed to the dub-inflected sound. In January 1978 The Slits played a concert at Ari Up's former secondary school in London's Holland Park.<sup>91</sup> In his review of this concert Needs pointed out that the Slits were "surrounded by a sea of ecstatic black faces." Was Needs assuming that, "naturally," black schoolgirls will be excited by reggae? Or, is his point subtler? At that time, was there something politically significant about an all-white punk group playing reggae style music for an almost exclusively black audience?<sup>92</sup> Thus here again, in

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<sup>87</sup> Reynolds, *Rip it up*, 43-4.

<sup>88</sup> Dennis Bovell quoted in Reynolds, *Totally Wired*, 103.

<sup>89</sup> Kris Needs, "The Slits: Holland Park School, London," *ZigZag*, January 1978, accessed December 14, 2013, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-slits-holland-park-school-london>. Despite Needs' praise of Palmolive, she was eventually replaced by Budgie (Peter Edward Clarke). The role of gender in post-punk and Palmolive's replacement will be discussed in more detail in chapter four.

<sup>90</sup> Reynolds, *Rip it up*, 46-51.

<sup>91</sup> Needs, "The Slits: Holland Park School, London."

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

Needs' article, there appears to have been a trend amongst music journalists to draw attention to the "emergent" identification between different racial communities based upon musical genre.<sup>93</sup>

### ***Between the Local and the Exotic***

In the same section of Reynolds' book where he discusses what he hears as the most obviously dub-inflected parts of the post-punk discography (the albums *Y* and *Cut*), he forges a link between the kind of exotica dub-reggae offered to the post-punk musicians who were in search of inspiration and "newness," and the artwork in which these groups clothed their albums. Reynolds not only points out the similarity between the cover for *Cut* and the image of the Mud People of Papua New Guinea on the cover of *Y*, but he also reports that both groups, especially the Pop Group's singer Mark Stewart, longed "for a lost wholeness that they imagined existed before civilization's debilitating effects."<sup>94</sup> On the one hand, what could be described as the Pop Group's "orientalism"—their simultaneous idealisation, representation and containment of non-Western cultures deployed to criticise life in the UK, which extended beyond using dub-reggae sounds into a more generalised image of "Other" cultures—participates in the familiar asymmetrical dialogue that has taken place between much Western music and its Others. It may also connect back to the generalised sense of "Otherness" captured in "Sketch for Summer" by the Durutti Column. At the same time, however, what is so striking about the Pop Group's utopian vision of "pre-civilized society" is that it echoes the kind of exotic signifiers employed that are in many ways characteristic of dub-reggae. I do not intend to suggest that the kind of exoticism employed by post-punks such as the Pop Group, the Slits, and even the Durutti Column was identical to dub-reggae's own approach, the distribution of power is very different,

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<sup>93</sup> Born and Hesmondhalgh, 35-6.

<sup>94</sup> According to Reynolds, the Pop Group's fascination with a "tribal" or "primitive" aesthetic, and their romanticisation of "pre-civilized society," also spurred the use of African drumming during group's tour, dubiously named "Animal Instincts." The audience at these concerts was also encouraged to bring "drums and whistles," in order "to transform," in Reynolds' words, the concerts into "tribal ceremonies." See Reynolds, *Rip it up*, 48.

but there is nonetheless a significant point of semblance. For Britain's alternative youth, the disillusionment with Babylon (a catchall word used by Rastafarian followers coined from the Bible to represent, broadly speaking, present society in its white-dominated state) articulated in dub-reggae and the Rasta movement in general resonated with their own experience of living in Britain amidst the poverty, high youth unemployment and racial tension in the mid- to late-1970s.<sup>95</sup> Post-punk's turn away from conventional rock genres towards dub-reggae was thus a complex attempt to foster a more "real" identification with musicians who were simultaneously local and other (British and black). At the same time, however, it may also be seen to have been escapist, especially in their more generalised evocations of the exotic or an elsewhere.

As sociologist Sarah Daynes has argued, however, for Rastafarians and dub-reggae musicians, retaining an image and/or some kind of memory of "Africa," whether actual or sculpted by "collective" consciousness, is a way of articulating and challenging the horror of forced migration.<sup>96</sup> With a view towards further problematizing post-punk musicians' borrowing from dub-reggae, then, I suggest that post-punk musicians such as the Pop Group *and* dub artists and the Rastafarian community *all* participated—to varying degrees and in different ways—in the kind of orientalism where Africa—be it Ethiopia, Abyssinia, Zion or simply the non-West—meant utopia, and furthermore, this had its own musical manifestations. As Gilroy has suggested concerning numerous black music genres, dub-reggae might be understood as a "counterculture of modernity." That is to say, dub-reggae positions "the world as it is against the world as the racially subordinated other would like it to be" and thus "demands that bourgeois civil society live up to the promises of its own rhetoric." The utopian inclination of dub-reggae—its

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>96</sup> Sarah Daynes, *Time and Memory in Reggae Music: The Politics of Hope* (Manchester, UK; New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 103-4.

countercultural vision, what Gilroy calls a “politics of transfiguration”—stems primarily from the genre’s connection to Rastafarianism.<sup>97</sup>

Rastafarianism, Jamaican culture’s most well known subversion and reclamation of the traces of its colonial past, is an adaptation of Christian millenarianism. It was significantly influenced by the black intellectuals Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912) and Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), and espouses the idea that Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia, crowned in 1930, was God incarnate. Since British colonial power in Jamaica excluded slaves from a more detailed understanding of Christianity, Rastafarianism is also marked by its compensatory or improvisatory borrowings from African mysticism. Some of its main doctrines and practices include meditation, the notion of the divine within the self, and the philosophy of “immanentism,” as well as dread, the growing of dreadlocks, and smoking marijuana. The concept of Black Nationalism (or Pan Africanism) is also integral to Rastafarian thought. For Rastafarian followers, Africa is idealized as Zion, a lost utopia, a place that its descendants and diaspora hoped to regain after the fall of Babylon. Repatriation in the case of Rastafarianism was, however, almost always symbolic; very few Rastafarians actually returned to Africa.<sup>98</sup>

The idea of a “politics of transfiguration” seems to have been one of the central aspects of dub-reggae that found resonance with Britain’s white youth, exemplified by the union between the two socio-musical scenes on the stages at activist events like Rock Against Racism. But in many ways, in spite of the shared disenchantment with the socio-political status quo in Britain at the time—encapsulated by Eric Clapton, Enoch Powell, the race riots, unemployment, and unaffordable housing—and the literal proximity between post-punk and dub-reggae musicians, dub-reggae’s way of expressing dissatisfaction with contemporary society’s oppressive

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<sup>97</sup> Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 36-8.

<sup>98</sup> Partridge, *Dub in Babylon*, 9, 18-23, 31-40.

structures was still “Other” to punk. The sheer difference in musical styles between the two genres made dub-reggae a rich genre to borrow from, and so did dub-reggae’s attachment to the evocation of foreign lands in the form of Zion, Africa, Ethiopia, and elsewhere. Reynolds has summarized the stylistic difference between punk and dub-reggae in such a way that alludes to this aura of exoticness:

[compared] to the miragelike unreality of reggae production—all glimmering reverb haze, disorienting effects, and flickering ectoplasmic wisps—most punk records sounded retarded, stuck in the monochromatic and mono midsixties.<sup>99</sup>

Reynolds’ language here employs the familiar modernist trope of looking to the “Other” in search of newness, in search of something to revivify a dying movement, which was, in this case, punk. Dub-reggae’s distant origins and different techniques of musical production gave it the dazzle of the orient, the “miragelike unreality,” as well as an attractive freshness from the drudgery of punk, as well as the paunchiness and dubious politics of blues-rock in the second Babylon—England. At the same time, dub-reggae’s proximity to the punk scene, both in terms of its politics and in terms of physical space (cross-over venues and local immigrant populations) gave it enough of a “local” character to mitigate possible charges of appropriation on the part of punks and post-punks that might otherwise mirror white rock musicians’ appropriation of blues-based genres.

The extent to which Britain’s post-punk subculture—comprising its musicians, fans and critics—perceived dub-reggae as residing somewhere between the local and the exotic, as I am suggesting, is something that surfaces in Goldman’s reports published in *Sounds* on the trip that Lydon made to Jamaica in 1978 with Virgin Records boss Richard Branson, DJ Letts, and Goldman herself. Lydon was flown to Jamaica to work as an “artists and repertoire scout” for

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<sup>99</sup> Reynolds, *Rip it up*, 18. The fact that many of Reynolds’ narratives are structured around the ideas of negation and newness is discussed in more detail in chapter five of this dissertation.

Virgin, having proven his “impeccable” qualifications for the role with his playlist for Capital Radio’s programme mentioned earlier.<sup>100</sup> Lydon confessed at the time that his motivation for joining Branson et al in Jamaica, and agreeing to act as a talent scout was as much to save himself money (he no longer had to “pay a fortune for imported records”) as it was to raise the profile of Jamaican music in the UK.<sup>101</sup>

Opening her report on the Jamaican trip, Goldman set both soundtrack and scene. She listened to Jamaican singer Mikey Dread when she arrived and her article begins with references to famous Kingston landmarks such as the Sheraton Hotel, which was featured in Perry Henzell’s *The Harder They Come* (1972), which initiated many Britons’ exposure to reggae and Jamaican culture, and Randy’s Record store and studio, where renowned dub and reggae musicians such as Perry and Bob Marley made records. While staying at the Sheraton, Goldman remarked upon how the roster of live musicians playing at the hotel makes it feel as though “you were wading through your singles collection every time you went to get a glass of water.” She noted musicians such as Peter Tosh, Tapper Zukie, Culture, Robbie Shakespeare, Sly Dunbar, and Lee Perry, many of whom had appeared on one, if not both, of Lydon’s radio playlists.<sup>102</sup>

When describing the socioeconomic situation in Jamaica, Goldman employed a similar narrative strategy to the one used by Hebdige in his 1979 book on punk, *Subculture*. Goldman extrapolated parallels between the poverty she witnessed in Jamaica and the kind that Lydon may have experienced growing up amongst Irish immigrants in England. She also suggested that music offered a way for the oppressed in both cultures to escape poverty and that what Gilroy

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<sup>100</sup> Goldman, “Man A Warrior—Part 1.” See also the earlier mention of the kinds of records played by Lydon during the Capital interview with Vance.

<sup>101</sup> Andrew Courtney, “The Trouble with Johnny,” *Record Mirror*, May 6, 1978, reproduced at Fodderstompf, accessed December 10, 2013, <http://www.fodderstompf.com/ARCHIVES/INTERVIEWS/rm578.html>.

<sup>102</sup> Goldman, “Man A Warrior—Part 1.”

called the “politics of transfiguration,” encapsulated here in the phrase “soon come,” was integral to both cultures:

So many people with nothing to do... why, even the British Customs official trouncing my “Jamaica, Land I Love” plastic tote bag for possible ganja (no, nein, nyet, non—I ain’t that dumb), was talking about how music’s the only way out of the Kingston ghettos (other than ganja/guns...). It’s worked for Bob Marley, it’s worked for John [Lydon].

Unemployment’s not all. According to John, they say (and practice the philosophy of) “soon come,” *the quintessential Jamaican phrase in Ireland as well*. No sense of urgency in either land, apparently, and what Ireland lacks in ganja it makes up for in Guinness.<sup>103</sup>

Unemployment, existential emptiness, music, marijuana, millenarianism, and beer, were thus the things that, for Lydon and Goldman, fostered a kindred connection between Jamaicans and the Irish living in England. Not only that, but Goldman also seems to be speaking to the British readers of *Sounds* with words whose familiarity and pertinence perhaps rang aloud in their ears (“nothing to do,” “unemployment,” “no sense of urgency”). Lydon and Goldman’s trip to Jamaica, and Goldman’s reportage, then, can be understood as an attempted actualization of the cross-cultural and cross-racial identification already felt amongst certain members of Britain’s punk scene and other white reggae fans. In making the pilgrimage, as it were, from London to Kingston, the trip and the talent scouting were perhaps a way of modulating the punk’s scene’s identification with dub-reggae from the “purely imaginary” through the “emergent” into something more “real.”<sup>104</sup>

Nonetheless, there are some significant aspects of the post-punk press discourse, particularly surrounding the trip to Jamaica, that challenge this idea of “emergent” and/or “real” identification. While Lydon was in Jamaica he was still very much in the talons of McLaren’s company, Glitterbest. The appearance of a loitering Glitterbest employee, photographing Lydon

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Born and Hesmondhalgh, 35.

against his consent, gave Lydon the opportunity to vent his frustration about the McLaren and Westwood empire. What is particularly interesting, however, is to note how assumptions about essential blackness worked their way into what Westwood and McLaren were purported to have written on their shop window as a reaction to Lydon's trip. They wrote that Lydon had "gone away to the sun in Jamaica to grow his cock."<sup>105</sup> Westwood's purported reference to the size of Lydon's proverbial toolbox and its hoped-for improvement upon travelling to Jamaica is not insignificant. As writers such as Frantz Fanon, Homi K. Bhabha, and Sander Gilman have demonstrated, white-dominated culture's fixation with black genitalia has been one way of sustaining the colonial project, by objectifying and homogenizing black bodies as simultaneously abject and alluring.<sup>106</sup> Thus the fact that Westwood chose to depict Lydon's interest in dub-reggae and his trip to Jamaica using such a stereotype contributed to reinforcing the idea that black musicians, even those in Britain, still represented the "Other."

Westwood's language and ideas (paraphrased by Lydon in the interview with Goldman) thus bore the sinister traces of power asymmetries. For all their striving to surpass the realm of "purely imaginary" identification, however, similar kinds of colonial structures surfaced in other reportages by Goldman. Just one week after the second instalment recounting Lydon's Jamaican experience, Goldman published another article in *Sounds* on Jamaican music, specifically the band Culture. This article was suffused with exotic imagery. In particular, Goldman focused on facets of Jamaican life that are especially "natural," "animal," "erotic," or "spiritual." An image of Culture's singer Joseph Hill washing his hair with cactus was the image with which she chose

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<sup>105</sup> Vivien Goldman, "John Lydon: Man A Warrior, Part 2," March 11, 1978, accessed December 10, 2013, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/john-lydon-man-a-warrior-part-2>.

<sup>106</sup> For a discussion of the other as "an object of desire and derision" see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 19. In musical discourse Steve Waksman has discussed such stereotyping of black masculinity in his work on Jimi Hendrix. See Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire: the Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press, 1999), esp. 167-207.

to open the article. She then observed the different kinds of exotic fruit growing in abundance—the wild cherry and the ugliest—as well as the goats, the children playing makeshift instruments and the marijuana. “The entire country encounter” she wrote “seemed like a dream.”

In her descriptions of Hill, Goldman invoked a stereotype common to descriptions of black men of the spiritual leader or the shaman-type:

Joseph . . . is striding beside me, firmly clasping a knotty stick. Was I under the influence? Perhaps: Joseph resembled a prophet of old, an endlessly praiseworthy patriarch of yore, accepting the shouts of “Hail Culture!” that spring from all directions with a graciously sage nod. As befits the one and only leader of Culture.

What is more, Goldman detailed how Hill lived with his mother in a two-room house, with a “lushly flourishing garden,” like a “Tropical Greenhouse at Kew with the lid off” in a “land that’s so blatantly fertile.” Goldman also justifies Rastafarianism’s negative attitudes towards women by suggesting that such beliefs “tie in with fears of a culture that’s rooted in the seasons. The cycles of the moon exert a full acknowledged power in the absence of street lights.”<sup>107</sup>

Under Goldman’s pen, then, Jamaica is an exotic, erotic, primitive paradise and her reporting on Jamaica falls into the long-standing historical trend of simultaneously idealizing yet containing the “Other” through particular kinds of representation. Here the “Other” is revered for its mysticism, virility, and earthiness. Even though the kind of identification that Goldman and Lydon were cultivating—with press articles, interviews, trips, and the musical borrowing from dub-reggae and Jamaican musicians—was one that highlighted similarity along the axis of

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<sup>107</sup> Kew Gardens is a botanical park in London. See Vivien Goldman, “Culture: From the Roots,” *Sounds*, March 18, 1978, accessed December 10, 2013, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/culture-from-the-roots>. Bhabha describes the stereotype as a “major discursive strategy” and a “form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place,’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated...” Bhabha gives the example of the “bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved.” For more on issues pertaining to racial stereotyping see Bhabha, 18.

socioeconomic disenfranchisement, a sense of difference is nonetheless articulated through Goldman's exoticisation, which reads like a colonial era travelogue.

Furthermore, the kind of poverty experienced by West Indian migrants living in the UK was also arguably more severe or more "real" than the kind encountered by dub-reggae's white counterparts in the punk scene. This distinction also contributes to complicating the idea of a "subcultural rapprochement" or "emergent" identification. In an interview with UK reggae group Aswad, for example, Goldman quoted their bass player George who pointed out the difference between the posturing of punk and the real hardship of Jamaican immigrants:

See my trousers now? They're done up with a safety-pin and man call me a punk. But it's the same with the holes in my t-shirt—I wear it like that because I haven't got another. The punks do that to be outrageous...

Goldman's response was to point out that not all punks are necessarily dilettantes, but concedes, "those mohair jumpers with prefab holes do cost £26.00."<sup>108</sup>

Despite the fact that many parts of Britain had existing West Indian communities (such as those in Ladbroke Grove in London or St. Paul's in Bristol), and that dub-reggae was somewhat "indigenous" to the UK (in Friedman's sense of the term), Goldman's publications in *Sounds*, especially her trip to Kingston with Lydon, would have provided British readers with exposure to Jamaican cultural life in such a way that was probably new and exotic-seeming. People who perhaps had no prior knowledge of the island were now presented with detailed representations of it, albeit ones penned by British tourists. It is arguable, in any case, that such articles contributed to or enhanced the perception that dub-reggae musicians were "Other."

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" challenged the way in which Western thought has pivoted upon the idea that the "West is Subject." She notes how the West's position as subject has, however, been "concealed."

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<sup>108</sup> Goldman, "Jah Punk."

Historically, Western discourse has feigned a kind of disembodied and dislocated sovereign position, by universalising certain experiences and not allowing the subaltern to “speak.” By stripping non-Western Others of their subject-hood, furthermore, Western thought has enacted a particular kind of “epistemic violence.”<sup>109</sup> Indeed, Homi K. Bhabha has also argued that the very “construction of the colonial subject … demands an articulation of forms of difference.”<sup>110</sup> With the exception of Letts, Bovell, and George from Aswad, almost all of my examples pertaining to the identification between white post-punk musicians and dub-reggae musicians have centred upon white British voices such as those of musicians such as Levene, Lydon, Hannett, and Morris, as well as journalists such as Reynolds and Goldman. But understanding the role played by Jamaican musicians with regards to self-representation is integral to a discussion about the politics of appropriation, especially because it may shed light upon how post-punk’s “exotic” elements themselves are indebted to dub-reggae.

As I have suggested, a particularly utopian vision of Africa pervades much Rastafarian thought, which is manifest in reggae music and its sub-genres. The idea of returning to the time and place before, what sociologist Daynes has called, “the forced exile provoked by the slave trade,” is also a central facet of dub-reggae. Daynes has noted that an “idealized,” “imagined,” and “thought” Africa is “omnipresent in reggae lyrics” and appears “under diversified vocabulary: Africa, Ethiopia, Abyssinia, mother, mama...” Daynes has also remarked upon how dub-reggae musicians favour a generalized image of the continent, a “single and homogenous” Africa, rather than references to specific tribes or countries, and that this way of representing Africa was “progressively built into a shared history that starts with the slave trade and the

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<sup>109</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-2.

<sup>110</sup> Bhabha, 19.

Middle Passage.”<sup>111</sup> Diasporas, she argues, are often characterised by “their ability to invent or reinvent [a] center *a posteriori*, and their insistence on referring to this imagined center.”

Regarding the concept of “centers,” Daynes identifies two interlocking kinds of “center” in reggae and Rastafarian culture: the first is Africa, which is a “spatial” centre, and slavery, which is a “temporal” one. Slavery, she has argued, “implies two essential notions, deracination and domination, which call forth two kinds of ‘elsewhere,’ the actual land, and the better place that existed/exists pre-/post-colonization.” Drawing on the etymology of the word “utopia,” meaning “no place,” Daynes has suggested that Africa, as it is represented and conceptualized in reggae’s “collective memory,” is “[in] no place, or in no time: Africa is a distant past as well as an ideal future that is not yet reached; it is also a place from which people have been taken away and of which they preserve memories,” it is both “not-here” and “not-yet.”<sup>112</sup>

Both musically and lyrically dub-reggae communicates this dream of repatriation to an “elsewhere,” which is in turn also tightly bound to the philosophy of millenarianism, borrowed in part from Christianity and incorporated into the Rastafarian movement. The image of a hoped-for Africa, as well as references to the African roots and heritage of contemporary Jamaicans, are fundamental characteristics of the reggae genre and its sub-genres. As Daynes has demonstrated, certain reggae lyrics refer explicitly to Africa or forced migration.<sup>113</sup> Musicians also chose to title their records with references to the Africa in such a way that the sound of the actual record (such as the *African Dub* tetralogy by Gibbs, for example) comes to represent the sound of Africa as it is imagined in the dub-reggae/Rastafarian collective memory.

One particular dub-reggae musician whose influence on the post-punk scene was discussed with reference to the melodica, Augustus Pablo, coined what he referred to as the “Far

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<sup>111</sup> Daynes, 103-4.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 90-105.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 100-1.

East sound.” Music journalist for the *New York Times* Jon Pareles has described the particular sound that Pablo created, the “Far East sound,” as “minor-key tunes with sparse lines for melodica floating above deep bass lines and echoing keyboards.”<sup>114</sup> According to Veal, Pablo modelled his “Far East sound” on 1960s recordings made by the likes of Don Drummond, Dizzy Moore, Jackie Mittoo and Tommy McCook, all of whom made music designed to represent Africa or Asia.<sup>115</sup> For Pareles, the “Far East Sound” is exemplified on both Pablo’s 1972 song “Java” and his 1977 album *East of the River Nile*.<sup>116</sup> For Veal, Pablo’s personal articulation of the “political and spiritual dimensions of his Rastafarian faith” was through his creation of a “devotional genre of reggae exotica.” I suggest, therefore, that Pablo’s “reggae exotica” communicated reggae’s collective vision of Africa-as-utopian-elsewhere using musical gestures in addition to textual ones.<sup>117</sup>

Pablo’s song “Java” was a collaborative effort between Pablo, producer Clive Chin, and engineer Errol Thompson, and recorded at Randy’s studio in Jamaica.<sup>118</sup> The song comprises a characteristically reggae-style “skank” rhythm guitar part, plus lead-guitar melodies, bass, the distinctive “rim shot” snare sound on the drums at the beginning, and a delay effect on the minimal vocals (which call out the word “Java”). The song’s main melody, however, is dominated by Pablo’s melodica.<sup>119</sup> Although Pablo is perhaps the most renowned melodica player in the dub-reggae genre, the instrument was quite common to the genre from as early as the 1960s. Musicians like Danny McFarland and Delroy Wilson, Soul Brothers and The Soulettes, in songs such as “King Street,” also featured the melodica. Indeed, the sound of the

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<sup>114</sup> Jon Pareles, “Augustus Pablo, 46, Musician; Helped Shape Reggae’s Sound,” *The New York Times*, May 20, 1999, accessed March 26, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/05/20/arts/augusto-pablo-46-musician-helped-shape-reggae-s-sound.html>.

<sup>115</sup> Veal, 166.

<sup>116</sup> Jon Pareles, “Augustus Pablo.”

<sup>117</sup> Veal, 166.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 165.

instrument's distinctively eerie buzz and decay can perhaps be understood as a signifier of the reggae genre, since, by the time of "Java" in 1972, the instrument had already established a unique role in the genre's history. Importantly and to recall my earlier discussion, it was also the instrument used by Joy Division "In A Lonely Place" and Gang of Four's "Ether."

With regards to Veal's suggestion that Pablo developed a "devotional genre of reggae exotica," and recalling earlier discussions of Otherness and exoticness in this chapter, one of the most striking aspects of the song is the fact that it opens with what is perhaps *the* archetypal musical referent for the exotic or the "East:" the melody from "The Streets of Cairo," or "The Poor Little Country Maid." Originally an American vaudeville song, "The Streets of Cairo," by American composer James Thornton from 1895, was written to ridicule the authenticity of the "Egyptian dancing girls" who performed at World's Fair in Chicago two years earlier, and who were probably actually from France (see Ex. 2.2)<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Charles A. Kennedy, "When Cairo Met Main Street: Little Egypt, Salome Dances, And the World's Fairs of 1893 and 1904," in *Music and Culture in America, 1861-1918*, ed. Michael Saffle, 271-77 (New York: Garland, 1998).

**Ex. 2.2** The opening melody to “Java” by Augustus Pablo, derived from “The Streets of Cairo” by James Thornton



In “Java” the unmistakable melody is picked out on an electric guitar, over which Pablo intones the largely indiscernible words “From the West... From the East... Hail... Java.” Pablo’s lyrics, minimal and largely indiscernible though they are, summon the Rastafarian imagery of, and reverence for, “soon come” elsewhere. What is striking, however is that Pablo has replaced Africa with the generalized, non-specific “elsewhere” in the way that Daynes has described. In this case, he has chosen the island of Java. The song unfolds as a series of improvisations on melodica accompanied by a simple two-chord alternation, between Am and Dm. Even though the melody from “The Streets of Cairo” appears only at the very beginning of the song, I suggest that it functions as part of Pablo’s creation of the “Far East sound” since it acts as a framing device for the entire song. Furthermore, it is not uncommon in other genres of black popular music for the opening reference (whether a sample or quotation) to be one of the most signification-heavy features of the song. In the specific case of dub-reggae, songs sometimes begin with a toast that announces the affect of the ensuing song. Pablo’s reference to “The Streets of Cairo” might even be interpreted as an instrumental toast.

The quotation of “The Streets of Cairo” at the beginning of “Java” might be understood as an “Orientalist” semiotic. That is to say, in “Java,” Pablo communicates the idea of Rastafarian repatriation—the return to what Daynes has called “elsewhere”—by borrowing a generalized image of what Edward Said referred to as “the Orient,” a “unified racial,

geographical, political cultural zone of the world.”<sup>121</sup> Pablo’s image of Java is not only exotic, but also utopian since he conflates Java with devotional imagery at the beginning of the song using the word “Hail.” What is significant, however, is that Pablo appears to have taken this image of Java/elsewhere from colonial power: a *fin-de-siècle* American voice satirizing the sound of the Middle East. This image or symbol for the “East” as represented by this eight-measure melody had thus acquired such circulation and semiotic power that Pablo, who stands as “Othered” by white-dominated society, borrowed it for its capacity to represent the utopianism germane to Rastafarian thought. To put it simply, Pablo-as-dominated has re-appropriated dominating culture as part of his “devotional exoticist” project. To quote Said, “There are lenses through which the Orient is experience, and they shape the language, perception, and form of the encounter between East and West.”<sup>122</sup> Here, a stereotypical image of the Orient has shaped Pablo’s representation of a utopian elsewhere in “Java.”

Another distinctive aspect of “Java” that contributes to its “devotional exoticist” character is the use of echo. As I suggested in the earlier discussion of Joy Division and the Durutti Column, echo/delay is a dub-reggae staple, the “sonic signature of the genre” no less, and often applied to the drums and the vocals.<sup>123</sup> Although, as we saw in the post-punk examples, the Durutti Column applied echo to the lead-guitar and Joy Division “orchestrated” an echo effect between the synthesizer and the melodica. The actual concept of echo was also important and prevalent in dub poetry and literature.<sup>124</sup> The use of echo therefore could be interpreted as participating in dub-reggae’s evocation of the utopian elsewhere germane to Rastafarianism. But

<sup>121</sup> Bhabha, 23. For the original quotation see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 72.

<sup>122</sup> Bhabha, 25. Originally in Said, *Orientalism*, 58-9.

<sup>123</sup> Julian Henriques, “Sonic Diaspora, Vibrations, and Rhythm: Thinking Through The Sounding of the Jamaican Dancehall Session,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 1/2 (2008): 219.

<sup>124</sup> The collection of poems entitled *Echo* by Oku Onuora from 1977 is cited by Partridge as a “key work in the history of dub poetry.” See Partridge, *Dub in Babylon*, 202. For the collection of poetry itself see Oku Onuora, *Echo* (Amsterdam: Cultural Media Collective, 1981).

also, as Corbett has suggested, it also contributes to an understanding of Jamaican music as “Other.” First of all, the disembodied sound of one’s own voice emanating from a not-easily-identifiable source has a magical quality. This magical quality—the supernatural, the uncanny—arguably plays into stereotypical images of the “Other.” One thinks of the “mystic East” or, as I suggested with reference to Goldman’s description of Joseph Hill, the power of the shaman, or even Hannett’s suggestion that dub has “magical properties.” Secondly, since echo is produced when sound bounces off of a surface, hearing echo in dub-reggae implies a communion or mirroring with a distant location. To put it another way, sound is sent from Jamaica to a symbolic Africa and returns intact thereby invoking sense of kinship, connection, and resonance, but also the assuring implication that the “soon come” elsewhere is, in fact, out there. The amalgam of exotic signifiers in “Java”—the quotation from “The Streets of Cairo,” the melodica with its shawm-like sound, and the echo effects—combine with Rastafarian allusions in the lyrics to articulate an image of Africa as the “no place” or paradise free from colonial rule that pervades Rastafarian art.

In some ways my argument about dub-reggae’s use of “exotic” imagery is in dialogue with Frantz Fanon’s suggestion that “what is often called the black soul is white man’s artifact.” While Fanon’s aphorism suggests that historically white-dominated culture has projected (and continues to project) an essential purity or *je ne sais quoi* onto black Others, which it then fetishizes (one needs only think of 1960s blues-rock musicians such as Clapton or perhaps Goldman’s idealised descriptions of Jamaica), I argue that dub-reggae musicians such as Pablo turned the colonial fantasy of Otherness and system of oppression into a generative and creative tool. In this regard, my argument perhaps echoes Gilroy’s argument in favour of what he calls “anti-anti-essentialism,” the idea that although blackness does not suggest an essential

difference, it is lived and historical experience and re-appropriating the tools of colonialism can be important aspects of resistance.<sup>125</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

In his work on Jamaican sound system sessions, media and communications scholar Julian Henriques has challenged Gilroy's proposition of a theory of "circulation mechanisms" for understanding diasporic movement. Specifically, Henriques' contention is that circulation mechanisms do not account for "*what* is circulated, or *why* it might have the effect it does, or the relationship between the sender and the receiver of the goods." Henriques singles out music especially as a medium that is not well suited to Gilroy's theory of circulation owing to the way in which music, through both its physical properties and the way it is disseminated by technology, is capable of travelling beyond the regions of those who made it. As an alternative framework, Henriques proffers the idea of thinking "through *vibrations*" rather than through circulation mechanisms, focusing specifically on how the "propagation range" of sound "reaches well beyond earshot." Using Henriques' framework, then, while the sound system sessions in Kingston may have evoked a "mythical homeland of 'Africa' away from Babylon," the sound system sessions in Britain and the dissemination of dub-reggae reached ears and bodies who bore no obvious relationship to a "mythical homeland of 'Africa.'"<sup>126</sup>

Taking Henriques' suggestion that the dissemination of sound reaches well beyond the movement of its people and producers, and that such sounds can still retain an affective meaning even at such distances, even conjuring images of particular places, how do we understand British musicians' experiences and hearing of dub-reggae? For those listening to Augustus Pablo in places such as Manchester, did the echo of the "mythical homeland" ring true, or did it represent

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<sup>125</sup> Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 99-103.

<sup>126</sup> Henriques, 219-29. Original emphases.

something entirely different? What kinds of transmutations in meaning and socio-racial identity took place when the sonic signifiers used to represent, in dub-reggae's case, "elsewhere," became absorbed into the musical language that developed out of the punk scene?

As I have suggested in the case of the Durutti Column, the Echoplex may be interpreted as evoking a fantastical "elsewhere," something that was designed to sound remote from "rock 'n' roll." Similarly, in Joy Division's music, the faint echo of Pablo's melodica lent songs such as "In a Lonely Place" a "cavernous" sense of space, but did not necessarily signal the exotic. Joy Division and Gang of Four also incorporate Pablo's melodica: in Joy Division's music the instrument was a timbral cousin to their synthesisers and for Gang of Four it was a minimal, anti-virtuosic punk-style instrument. For John Lydon and PiL, it was the structure and texture of dub that was most alluring; it allowed the band to eschew the conventional rhythmic patterns and instrumental arrangements that punk had inherited from the maligned music of a previous generation of rockers. The Pop Group and the Slits borrowed dub-reggae's spatial effects, dub-reggae's approach to rhythm, and the "skank" guitar, and these groups also felt the vibrations of dub-reggae as a local phenomenon, since musicians such as Ari Up attended local dancehalls, clubs, and record outlets. Perhaps, as Will Straw has suggested, dub-reggae offered these musicians a way to sustain the flagging energy of punk<sup>127</sup>—an idea reinforced by accounts such as Reynolds', who has framed reggae as a "new possibility." Unlike the blues-based rock associated with the previous generation, Jamaican music was literally closer to home.

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<sup>127</sup> Will Straw, "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music," *Cultural Studies* 5/3 (1991): 375. For a discussion of American musicians David Byrne and Brian Eno, and their incorporation of non-Western musics, see Steven Feld, "My Life in the Bush of Ghosts: 'World Music' and the Commodification of Religious Experience," in *Music and Globalization: Critical Encounters*, ed. Bob White, 40-52 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

The identification between Jamaican and white British musicians was, however, not without its power asymmetries. First of all, one gets a sense from the press literature that reggae and, by association, its musicians in spite of the thriving UK scene, was treated as an exotic, at worst, as a “primitive” phenomenon. Secondly, for some (but not all) punks and post-punks an anarchic anti-Babylon creed was a lifestyle choice, and therefore very different from the socioeconomic limitations and prejudices imposed upon Jamaicans both at home and abroad. And yet, the ability to tease out the precise distinctions between identification, influence, emulation, and appropriation, is problematized even further owing to the character of the music-poetic language of the dub-reggae genre itself. As a diasporic art form with strong connections to Rastafarianism, millenarianism and Black Nationalism, dub-reggae’s exoticised and romanticized “Africa” and its sonic analogues, confuse straightforward ideas of exoticism or orientalism. Indeed, dub-reggae in many ways exemplifies what Gilroy calls looking in two directions simultaneously. It is interesting to observe, then, how dub-reggae’s connotations are translated in post-punk musicians’ borrowing of dub’s musical language. While Jamaican musicians perhaps imagined the distant echoes of “Africa,” British post-punk musicians buried the sounds of Jamaica echoing “Africa” within their mixes. From PiL’s version-like textures, to the Durutti Column’s aura of holiday paradise, to Joy Division’s blurring of the timbral line between synthesizer and melodica, and Gang of Four’s punk-styled use of the melodica, all of these musical examples contain a complex tale of power, movement, representation, identity, and genre.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Post-Punk or “Death Disco”? : Rhythm, Groove, and Representations of White Masculinity**

In the previous chapter, I argued that post-punk musicians’ incorporation of musical ideas from Jamaican dub-reggae may be understood as part of a larger socio-cultural dialogue between Britain’s white youth and the Jamaican migrants who came to the UK during post-war labour migration. The white British individuals participating in the punk, new wave, and post-punk scenes were literally closer to certain Jamaican musicians and Caribbean cultural intermediaries (such as Don Letts and Dennis Bovell) than white musicians had been to previous genres of black-associated music such as R&B of the 1950s from the United States. By contrast, another kind of black-associated music from which post-punk musicians borrowed was disco, which was more remote than reggae. This remoteness owed in part to disco’s origins in the United States, but also the kinds of mainstream connotations that disco had acquired during its lifespan, connotations which ran somewhat contrary to its origins in marginal social spheres.

The distance between the British post-punk (as well as new wave and punk) scene and disco can be discerned in Simon Reynolds’ description of the Public Image Ltd. (PiL) song “Death Disco,” released on June 29, 1979. Reynolds has suggested that this song was “arguably the most radical single ever to penetrate the UK Top 20.” According to Reynolds, the song was “radical” for the way in which it bridged two generic worlds: the nihilistic, outlaw, predominantly white world of punk (setting aside, for now, the way in which this is complicated by the Jamaican connection), and the hedonistic mainstream *and* black associations of disco. The very pairing of the words “death” and “disco,” Reynolds has argued, was also “just as radical” as

the generic bridging.<sup>1</sup> Seemingly inspired by PiL's song title, Reynolds has used "death-disco" as a synonym for post-punk throughout his book and in other articles.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter I unpack the rich significance of the so-called "radical" pairing of the words "death" and "disco" in relation to both PiL's song and the post-punk genre as a whole. I demonstrate how, on the one hand, the words "death-disco" evoke post-punk's generic plurality and potential dissolution of fixed categories of musical style, since the words imply that post-punk has both borrowed from and adapted disco's musical ideas. On the other hand, I show how by using the word "death" and other related images (such as those that refer to non-normative physicality, madness, and even illness) in conjunction with disco, PiL, Reynolds, and other commentators maintained (and continue to maintain) a generic cleavage between post-punk and disco, between white-associated music and black-associated; in other words, "death," images of madness, and non-normative physicality function in this context as racial code.

I begin by surveying the extra-musical connotations that disco held in the rock and punk press from the mid- to late-1970s in order to give a sense of how rock and punk critics, both implicitly and explicitly, held disco in low esteem owing to its mainstream, commercial and,

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Rip it up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984* (New York; London: Penguin, 2005), 213.

<sup>2</sup> The term appears in his article on the band the Slits in *Uncut* magazine from December 1997, here Reynolds describes the period from 1979 to 1981 as "one of the great neglected eras of modern music," a period of "post-punk experimentalism—death-disco, agit-funk, 'John Peel bands.'" See Reynolds, "The Slits: *Cut*," *Uncut*, December 1997, accessed October 14, 2012, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=1038&SearchText=death%2Ddisco>. The last synonym ("John Peel Bands") refers to the BBC Radio 1 programme hosted by broadcaster John Peel, which has become iconic for its roster of indie performers, and indeed many post-punk bands were invited to record a session for his show. Post-punk bands that appeared on Peel's show included: 23 Skidoo, A Certain Ratio, Associates, Au Pairs, Aztec Camera, B-Movie, Bauhaus, Cabaret Voltaire, Crispy Ambulance, the Cure, the Damned, the Delta 5, Echo & the Bunnymen, the Fall, Flying Lizards, Gang of Four, the Go-Betweens, John Cooper Clarke, Josef K, Joy Division, Killing Joke, Magazine, Monochrome Set, Orange Juice, Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark, Pere Ubu, the Pop Group, the Psychedelic Furs, the Raincoats, Scritti Politti, Section 25, the Shop Assistants, Siouxsie and the Banshees, the Slits, Swell Maps, Ultravox, the Undertones, Wire, XTC, and Young Marble Giants. For more on John Peel's radio show see BBC Radio 1, "John Peel," last updated September 2007, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/johnpeel/>.

somewhat contradictorily, racial and queer associations. Secondly, I provide musical examples that demonstrate how post-punk musicians incorporated disco gestures into their songs and adapted them according to the punk style. I concentrate specifically on comparing post-punk rhythms, drum patterns, and bass lines to those found in disco. The third section of the chapter shows how the connotations of disco described in section one were brought to bear on post-punk's incorporation of the genre. Even though disco gestures became a generic hallmark of much post-punk music and, in turn, signalled post-punk's departure from many of rock's conventions, rock/punk commentators and post-punk musicians alike continued to cordon off disco, dancing, and a particular conception of the body as the domain of the racial Other by subtly, perhaps unknowingly, presenting post-punk music in ways that drew upon the historical tendency to define blackness according to rhythm and the virile, loosely dancing body on the one hand; and whiteness according to physical inadequacy, and mental fragility or "madness" on the other.

I conclude by turning to arguments made by Sander Gilman, Frantz Fanon, and Richard Dyer to propose that the critics' way of framing post-punk's disco-inflected rhythm and particular style of dancing, taken within the context of the pervasive associations between disco, blackness, rhythm, and the body, prolongs the culturally constructed racial bifurcation that marks the black body as rhythmically and physically adept, and the white body as not. Furthermore, the emphasis on specifically psychological disturbances that I extrapolate from critics' reviews of post-punk music not only complements the "pernicious metaphysical dualism" that accords the monopoly on mental activity to the white subject,<sup>3</sup> but it also contributes to ideologies of

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 97.

authenticity and to the construction of mental illness as a symbol of artistic creativity or greatness in Western culture.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Disco Critics and Celebrants***

Down on the disco floor  
They make their profits  
From the things they sell  
To help you cop off

—Gang of Four, “Tourist,” 1979

In order to grasp how and why post-punk has been framed, both by PiL and Reynolds, as disco’s deathly cousin, it is important to understand what disco signified to rock and punk enthusiasts. In this next section, I outline how at the end of the 1970s, certain rock and punk critics held disco in low regard for at least two, slightly contradictory, reasons: first, disco was perceived as a capitalist genre with a mainstream following, garnering economic capital rather than symbolic capital.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, disco was associated with a particular kind of sexualised Otherness. Even though it was eventually transformed and co-opted by predominantly white musicians with a suburban fan-base, and even though it came to dominate the music charts during the post-punk period, disco’s origins in New York’s black, gay, and Latino subculture marked it as morally suspect and racially Other. For the rock and punk circle, then, these facets of disco merged to give rise to a perception of the genre as something consumerist and normative, but also suspiciously hedonistic and alien.

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<sup>4</sup> Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 217. See also Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965).

<sup>5</sup> The ideas of “symbolic capital” and “economic capital” derived from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Artists attain symbolic capital via praise and endorsement from critics and fellow artists, whereas economic capital refers to genres or artists who are commercially successful. See Bourdieu, “The Field of Cultural Production, or: the Economic World Reversed,” in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 29-73.

A number of scholars have indeed commented upon disco's varied meanings and slightly contradictory character. Disco not only denotes particular sonic characteristics, but also connotes a place of dancing and recreation, as well as a certain sense of fashion and style. Brackett identifies disco's origins in the gay, black, and Latino club culture of New York City in the early 1970s, and notes that the music played in these clubs was "a blend of Motown soul, Latin-inflected funk, and a new, sophisticated type of uptown soul associated with Philadelphia-based producers."<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Craig Werner locates disco's roots in the gay rights movement that gathered momentum after Stonewall, and suggests that places such as the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street "brought together a crowd of blacks, whites, and Puerto Ricans who put up with [the bar's] abysmal sanitary conditions largely because it was the only gay bar in New York which permitted dancing."<sup>7</sup>

Brackett notes, however, that even though disco began as an underground culture in certain gay, black, and Latino communities in New York, some disco music crossed over into the mainstream and, by the end of the 1970s, the genre dominated the mainstream.<sup>8</sup> Writing in 1979, journalist Andrew Kopkind suggested that disco, a \$4 billion industry at the time, had not only saturated the popular music charts, but also infiltrated other mass media, such as film and theatre, and had inaugurated a "new attitude towards party going."<sup>9</sup> The mainstream sound of disco at the end of the 1970s is best exemplified by the Bee Gees, the Village People, and the music featured in John Badham's 1977 film, *Saturday Night Fever*.<sup>10</sup> Studio 54, a Manhattan club peopled by

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<sup>6</sup> David Brackett, *The Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader: Histories and Debates*, Second Edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 350.

<sup>7</sup> Craig Werner, *A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race, and the Soul of America* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 205.

<sup>8</sup> Brackett, *Pop, Rock, Soul*, 351.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Kopkind, "The Dialectic of Disco: Gay Music Goes Straight," in *Pop, Rock, and Soul*, ed. Brackett, 352-53. Originally published in *Village Voice*, August 12, 1979.

<sup>10</sup> Note that the 1979 *ZigZag* readers' poll discussed in chapter one singled out John Travolta, star of *Saturday Night Fever*, as one of its most hated people. Travolta connoted disco at its most mainstream (and was also

fashionistas and the celebrity elite, and that operated a very exclusive entrance policy, also played a significant role in the realignment of disco from subculture to mass culture.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, during the genre's lifespan, not only did disco's audience, participants, and ideological significance change, but so too did some of its musical characteristics. According to Werner, the "standardized production style," the metronomic beat, and the decreased use of polyrhythmic patterns and live drummers in the second half of the 1970s was another shift that contributed to giving disco "its bad name."<sup>12</sup>

The tremendous commercial success of disco and its connotations of superficiality, were things that attracted criticism from cultural arbiters, particularly amongst "beleaguered partisans of rock, punk, or jazz," who, according to Kopkind, framed disco as "a metaphor for the end of humanism and the decline of the West."<sup>13</sup> Reynolds has suggested that the punk and rock fans who were unaware of disco's origins (its black, Latino and gay roots) heard it "as the mass-produced, mechanistic sound of escapism and complacency, uptown Muzak with a beat for the moneyed and glamour struck."<sup>14</sup> Many rock purveyors also disapproved of disco's so-called centralization (the fact that disco musicians moved to big cities in order to take advantage of particular recording studios) because it was perceived as anathema to rock's decentralized ideal; that is, the image of four musicians thriving on local, small-budget music scenes without the aid of high-profile studios, producers, and promoters. Kopkind writes how, just as rock in the 1960s signified a threat to the status quo, disco in the 1970s was a "revolt against rock," challenging the latter's aspirations towards authenticity with authenticity's antitheses: artifice, fashion, frivolity,

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associated with another pop hit of 1978, the film *Grease*). See "The 1979 ZigZag Reader's Poll!" *ZigZag*, July 1979, 22-3.

<sup>11</sup> Werner, 203.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>13</sup> Kopkind, 352-3.

<sup>14</sup> Reynolds, *Rip it up*, 154.

urbanity, and commercialism.<sup>15</sup> One of the most well-known patriarchs of rock criticism, Lester Bangs, suggested two years earlier, in 1977, that all his friends disliked disco for these very reasons: it was commercial and vacuous, it was “bright wallpaper” and banal.<sup>16</sup> Even in an article that sought to defend disco against such criticisms, Richard Dyer in a 1979 issue of the magazine *Gay Left* stated, “[it’s] not just that people whose politics I broadly share don’t *like* disco, they manage to imply that it is politically beyond the pale to like it,” suggesting that it was the genre’s capitalist connotations that upset Dyer’s fellow left-wingers.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to attacking disco’s commercial appeal and perceived lack of authenticity, several writers expressed covert and overt homophobia and racism towards the genre. The event known as “Disco Demolition Night,” organised by DJ Steve Dahl during a Chicago White Sox *vs.* Detroit Tigers game in Comiskey Park on July 12, 1979 (notably only two weeks after the release of PiL’s “Death Disco”) is often cited as the moment when the anti-disco sentiments resembling those circulating in the rock press reached their apex. According to cultural critic and historian Tavia Nyong’o, hatred towards disco was not only born of the genre’s capitalist connotations. Capturing the contradictory status of disco (as simultaneously a white suburban hit and an alien subculture), Nyong’o argues that disco was unwelcome because of “the music industry’s determination to force an unwilling contact between the underground and the mainstream in the name of ‘crossover,’” which he suggests, “only succeeded in crossing out the flavors most valued by those in the know, while failing to rid itself entirely of that odor most

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<sup>15</sup> Kopkind, 353-4.

<sup>16</sup> Lester Bangs, “The Sylvers: Something Special,” *Circus*, January 31, 1977, accessed December 14, 2012, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=8541&SearchText=sylvers>.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Dyer, “In Defense of Disco,” in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 410. Originally published in *Gay Left* 8 (Summer 1979): 20-23.

noxious to outsiders: the pungency of gender, racial, and sexual difference.”<sup>18</sup> One “outsider” who exemplified punk’s hatred of disco at its most toxic was New York City writer Legs McNeil who, according to Reynolds, “believed that disco was the putrid sonic progeny of an unholy union of blacks and gays.”<sup>19</sup>

Nyong’o also argues that Dahl’s “Disco Demolition Night” was not only a reaction against the connotations of artificiality, and of gender, racial, and queer difference associated with disco culture, but Nyong’o also suggests that it was an attack on the kind of white male heterosexuality portrayed by mainstream disco icons such as the Bee Gees and Tony Manero (John Travolta) in *Saturday Night Fever*. Nyong’o writes that Travolta’s white suit and flamboyant dancing, and the Bee Gees’ high vocal registers, “[usurped] the disco diva and the gay man,” and presented an alternative version of white male sexuality which, positioned the white male as object, and thus provoked “an aggressive shyness” and a “demand to return to the position of the gazer” on the part of white heterosexual males.<sup>20</sup> Disco, therefore, not only posed a threat to white rock because of its connotations of difference (as an “unholy union of blacks and gays”), but it also seemed to tap into anxieties surrounding how performances and representations of racial and queer difference might affect the formation of identities in white normative society.

The following extracts from interviews and articles from the rock and punk music press of the mid- to late-1970s exemplify some of the “aggressive shyness” to which Nyong’o has referred. They articulate the two criticisms aimed at disco that I have extrapolated so far: disco’s commercialism and its association with the domain of the sexualised and the Othered. Crucially,

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<sup>18</sup> Tavia Amolo Ochieng’ Nyong’o, “I Feel Love: Disco and its Discontents,” *Criticism* 50/1 (2008): 101-2. For more on the heterosexualization of disco see Ani Maitra, “Hearing Queerly: Musings on the Ethics of Disco/Sexuality,” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 25/3 (June 2011): 375-96.

<sup>19</sup> Reynolds, *Rip it up*, 154.

<sup>20</sup> Nyong’o, 102.

the following writers aimed to distance themselves from disco and other black-associated genres by referring to themselves and their own physicality in self-deprecating terms.

In a review of the Ramones' self-titled debut record in 1976 both the band and the reviewer Nick Kent (on behalf of *New Musical Express* [NME]) voiced disdain for disco. Kent praised the Ramones by remarking that "punk rock hasn't sounded this good since *disco-death-rot* music set in and started *calling the shots on your gams*" (emphasis mine). He also wrote how groups such as the Rolling Stones have been busy trying to achieve "blacknuss" (sic) and looking to genres such as reggae for inspiration, and therefore audiences needed the Ramones so that "loser white-kids," including Kent himself, could reconnect with their "roots."<sup>21</sup> Kent's article is particularly striking since it combines many of the threads and themes pertaining to rock/punk perceptions of disco that I outlined above. Kent explicitly connected disco with the idea or image of death, meaning, in this instance, death as a cold, non-breathing, un-emoting and, therefore (via a leap of quasi-Adornian imagination) an "inauthentic" aesthetic. Kent implied that disco lacked the kind of human quality—the live musicians, the *auteur*-ship, the rough "grain"—assumed to characterise rock, but favours synthetic forms of music making and artificiality. Similarly, the word "rot" suggests disease, decay, and moral decline into decadence, recalling Kopkind's observation that disco embodied the "end of humanism and decline of the West" for the "beleaguered partisans of rock."<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Kent not only refers to disco as "dead" and "rot," alluding to mass culture's connotations of inhumanity *qua* the industrial machine, but he

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<sup>21</sup> Nick Kent, "The Ramones: *Ramones* (Sire-Import)," *New Musical Express*, May 15, 1976, accessed December 14, 2012, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=18501&SearchText=ramones>. Kent's comment about the Rolling Stones suggests that white musicians' incorporation of reggae pre-dates the punk and post-punk era. The immediate point of reference was perhaps the Stones' album *Black and Blue* (1976), which included two reggae-style songs. Another example of earlier incorporations of reggae into rock would be Led Zeppelin's "D'Yer Mak'er" from 1973. As I argued in chapter three, however, the close connections between the punk and reggae scene towards the end of the 1970s differentiates post-punk musicians' approach from examples earlier in the decade.

<sup>22</sup> Kopkind, 353.

also calls attention to disco's coercive effect on the body. For Kent, disco forces the reluctant body to dance against its will; this music is “calling the shots” on people’s legs.<sup>23</sup>

Further on in his article, Kent suggested that different musical genres are, and should remain, ghettoised according to race. He expressed his low regard for white musicians who try to perform genres such as reggae, for example, calling for an “instant ungodly death to white reggae,” and one of the most salient distinguishing differences between black and white music for Kent is rhythm; he observes, for example, how the average white drummer cannot play “on beat.”<sup>24</sup> The central messages in Kent’s article, then, are: disco is commercial music that forces the body to dance; and white musicians cannot play certain kinds of rhythmic patterns in the way that black musicians can and, furthermore, they should not even try. Suspicious of the kind of physical expression and dancing associated with disco, and embarrassed by white attempts to play reggae, Kent projects some of the “aggressive shyness” that Nyong’o suggested was part of the backlash against disco, as well as a kind of inferiority complex on behalf of white rock purveyors. Kent’s decision to align ideas of dance, blackness, and rhythm in his review of the Ramones’ record also reinforces what Gilroy refers to as the “pernicious metaphysical dualism” whereby the black body is assumed to have the monopoly on certain kinds of physicality in accordance with colonial racial stereotypes and fantasies of primitivism, whereas the white man’s domain is the mind.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> In fact, Kent’s argument has uncanny echoes of Adorno’s references to the “rhythmically obedient type” of listener who is coerced into having “institutionalised wants” by “standardized,” beat-driven music. See Theodor W. Adorno, “On Popular Music,” in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie, esp. 460-1 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002). For a discussion on the relationship between labour and mechanized, synthesizer music see both chapter five of this dissertation and Theo Cateforis’ chapter on synthesizers in new wave in *Are We Not New Wave? Modern Pop at the Turn of the 1980s* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 151-81.

<sup>24</sup> It is not exactly clear what Kent meant by “on beat” here. I suggest because both reggae and disco are known for their syncopated treatment of rhythm and polyrhythmic nature, it is possible that Kent actually meant “off beat.”

<sup>25</sup> Gilroy, 97.

Following the release of his single, “I Wanna Be Black,” former member of the Velvet Underground and proto-punk, Lou Reed, commented on the dominance of black music in the 1970s charts. Like Kent, Reed referred specifically to disco and highlighted its rhythmic character. Without having to be prompted, Reed asked interviewer John Morthland at *Creem*, “have you ever noticed that when there’s nothing happening, nigger music—pardon me—soul brothers and their turbulent rhythm kinda takes over . . . It gets called disco.”<sup>26</sup> Reed’s use of the slur “nigger music” is not the only racist element in his statement, so too was his sarcastic self-correction (“pardon me—soul brothers”) and his idea that the rhythmic character of black music is not simply popular, but that its “turbulent” style “takes over,” but only when “there’s nothing happening.” It is as though Reed visualised disco as an opportunist criminal, taking advantage of a music industry that has let its white dominance/policing slacken. It is not clear whether Reed’s disinterested casual racism in this article was ironic or not. Indeed, in the lyrics to “I Wanna Be Black,” stereotypes of black musicians’ rhythmic adeptness and sexual prowess abound; as Morthland observed, the song contains lines such as “I wanna be black and have natural rhythm, and shoot off 20 feet of jism.” Some critics in the rock or punk press thought the song was indeed ironic. In 1978, Jon Savage called the song an example of “inverse racism,” particularly the lines, “I wanna be black, I don’t wanna be a fucked up middle-class college student any more,”<sup>27</sup> and Peter Silverton called both the song and Reed’s accompanying minstrel-style dancing “utterly offensive, tasteless and wonderful,” commenting on how, during a 1979 performance at London’s Hammersmith Odeon, Reed played “his I Wanna Be Black role up to

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<sup>26</sup> John Morthland, “Lou Reed, Say it Again, Lou,” *Creem*, 1976, accessed December 14, 2012, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=19968&SearchText=say+it+again%2C+lou>.

<sup>27</sup> See Jon Savage, “Lou Reed: Street Hassle,” *Sounds*, March 11, 1978, accessed April 7, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/lou-reed-istreet-hassle>.

the hilt—flapping his arms, trying to imagine he was really testifying but, as usual, looking like a total geek trying to do the funky chicken—sublime.”<sup>28</sup>

Whether Reed’s comments in the *Creem* interview or his lyrics and minstrelsy in “I Wanna Be Black” were ironic or not, what this short detour into the world of Lou Reed demonstrates is that during the punk and post-punk era, not only were certain kinds of racist stereotypes circulating in the (predominantly white) rock and punk scene, but musicians’ and journalists’ anxieties about their own complicity with such racism were circulating too. Both Savage and Silverton rescued Reed by suggesting that his song was actually a critique of what it’s like to be a white man, echoing, a few years later, the same kind of embarrassment and self-deprecating humour that pervaded Kent’s celebration of the Ramones. Perhaps unsure or nervous of the kinds of boundaries that Reed was over-stepping in his “I Wanna Be Black” performance, these critics decided to frame themselves as white men, middle-class, sexually inadequate, and terrible at dancing as a consequence.

As illustrated by the work of Sander Gilman and Ronald Radano, the associations between racial Otherness, rhythm, sexuality, and disease discernible in the above articles from the mid- to late-1970s have been drawn in numerous cultural and political contexts across the twentieth century. Cultural historian Gilman writes, “[during] the rise of modernism, from the *fin de siècle* to the collapse of the Nazi state (and beyond), the black, whether male or female, came to represent the genitalia through a series of analogies.”<sup>29</sup> Gilman also notes how, at the turn of the century black sexuality was “classed as a disease” in such a way that “articulated many of the publicly repressed sexual fantasies at the turn of the century.” As Gilman illustrates, therefore,

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Silverton, “Lou Reed in Cloning Sensation!” *Sounds*, May 6, 1978, accessed April 7, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/lou-reed-in-cloning-sensation>; and Peter Silverton, “Lou Reed at Hammersmith Odeon,” *Sounds*, April 21, 1979, accessed April 7, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/lou-reed-at-hammersmith-odeon>.

<sup>29</sup> Gilman, 109-10.

the black subject has a long history of representing both the sexualised and diseased Other.<sup>30</sup> The stereotypes that pervaded the rock/punk press with regards to disco music were not far from the historical and cultural trend that Gilman describes. Reed's obscene lyrics about virility and penis sizes in "I Wanna Be Black," and Kent's anxieties about disco music dictating dancing, and both commentators' references to the way that disco music dominated ("takes over") the charts like a virus, participate in historical assumptions and essentialisms about black masculinity and black music making, specifically in opposition to white music making.

The particular way in which rock/punk critics expressed fantasies and anxieties in conjunction with rhythm also has its historical precedents. Musicologist Radano has suggested that "[references] to the bodily affecting power of black rhythm" was a point of fascination for critics at the beginning of the twentieth century too.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the dissemination of "bodily affecting" rhythm became a metaphor for libidinous excess and the spread of disease. As Radano writes, "rhythm as infection not only concretized fears of an immigrant menace but identified a metaphor for its transmission as well, as if sound's recognition would bring into the white body the 'hot blood' of foreign populations and African-Americans."<sup>32</sup> While the kinds of racialised language employed by rock/punk critics in the 1970s does not quite express the same kind of terror about coming into contact with immigrant "hot blood," one notices how similar kinds of themes pervaded this discourse: disco rhythms made by black musicians were "taking over" and were coercing unwilling bodies into succumbing to its infectious power. Not only do the above examples continue to prolong certain assumptions about race, music, and the body but also, in almost all cases, they do so in a self-deprecating manner where the white musician, the white

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ronald Radano, *Lying Up A Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 234.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 236.

critic and/or the white fan are framed as hopelessly repressed, middle-class, and rhythmically inept.

In an already-mentioned article with a more scholarly orientation than the rock print media, “In Defense of Disco,” Dyer lauded disco’s physicality (its “full body eroticism,” as he writes) and proffered this as one of the genre’s redeeming features against those who denounced its capitalist associations. Dyer also highlighted the historical tendency that I have described regarding the constellation of blackness, rhythm, and sexuality. Writing in England, Dyer was seemingly not aware of some of disco’s subcultural origins, however. Far from New York City’s gay club scene, and writing in the wake of *Saturday Night Fever* and the Bee Gees, Dyer referred to disco as the “dominant culture” and, ironically, suggested that the genre’s radical potential was in the way it has been subversively re-appropriated in gay clubs, exemplifying, “contrary use of what the dominant culture provides.”<sup>33</sup> Going against observations made by critics and journalists in the US, Dyer seemed to understand disco as an aspect of hetero-normative culture and one intended as such by its producers, not one that carried the “odors” of blackness and sexuality that Nyong’o described earlier.<sup>34</sup>

During his discussion of disco’s eroticism, Dyer consciously articulated the problematic elision between black identity and sexuality, and how disco’s rhythm is embroiled in this string of signifiers. According to Dyer, disco was somewhat unique since it possessed what he referred to as “whole body” eroticism, owing to its structure, its lyrical “raunchiness” and, above all, its rhythmic insistence, since it is rhythm that compels the body to move.<sup>35</sup> Dyer then discusses

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<sup>33</sup> Dyer, “In Defense of Disco,” 413.

<sup>34</sup> Nyong’o, 101-2.

<sup>35</sup> Dyer, “In Defense of Disco,” 413-15.

disco's rhythmic origins in black-associated music and relays the subsequent erotic connotations conjured in the colonial imaginary. He writes:

Typically, black music was thought of by white culture as being both *more primitive and more "authentically" erotic*. Infusions of black music were always seen as (and often condemned as) *sexual and physical*. The use of *insistent black rhythms in disco music*, recognizable by the closeness of the style to soul and reinforced by such characteristic features of black music as the repeated chant phrase and the use of various African percussion instruments, means that it *inescapably signifies (in this white context) physicality*.<sup>36</sup> (emphasis mine)

Even though Dyer appears to have been elucidating the problems inherent in associating rhythms that derive from predominantly black musical cultures with physicality here, he in fact concluded by reinforcing such assumptions by comparing the eroticism of disco with the (lack of) eroticism in rock. What is more, Dyer also framed the white subject's body as one that is somehow physically inadequate. In opposition to the "whole body" eroticism of disco, which "leads to . . . expressive, sinuous movement," rock, he suggested, is a "mixture of awkwardness and thrust."<sup>37</sup> Thus on the one hand, Dyer's work drew attention to the problematic historical tendency towards fantastical projection and the fetishisation of blackness, a tendency that, as I have shown, circulated in rock and punk discourse in the mid-to-late 1970s. At the same time, even Dyer seemed incapable of escaping the inclination to ascribe an unhappy union between the white male body and rhythmic expression, since he describes rock dancing (read, white dancing) as awkward and thrusting devoid of certain kinds of nuance and sensitivity.<sup>38</sup>

From the above appraisals taken from the mid- to late-1970s, the time at which disco was at its height, and from some more recent commentaries upon the social impact of disco, it is

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Here we might see a connection between post-punk musicians' decision not to incorporate the rhythmic aspects of reggae but to opt instead for its timbral and echoing effects. Adopting the very obviously black-associated "skank" is something that has come to mark new wave, not post-punk. See chapter two of this dissertation for more on this.

possible to discern that disco was criticised by rock and punk adherents for its commercial success and its dominance of popular music charts, and that it was also associated with racial difference and bodily/sexual expression. This last issue manifested itself in explicit racism and homophobia (such as Dahl's riot), in more obscure sexual panic, and even in intellectual commentaries like Dyer's, which drew attention to social and racial asymmetries. Furthermore, the racial difference and subsequent sexual character of disco were perceived as being musically represented by disco's rhythm, and the human body's response to rhythm through dance. Even in critics' work that strove towards righting power imbalances or that articulated deference towards black culture, the fundamental assumption that the black body had a different relationship to physicality and rhythm persisted. Not only that, certain critics' endorsement of an essential difference between black music making and white music making, and the distinction between black and white physical and rhythmic fluency was self-deprecating and self-effacing.

### ***“Death Disco” and Post-Punk Rhythm***

If, as I suggested in chapter one, post-punk is part of the punk genealogy and therefore connected to the discourse that disavowed disco's commercialism and panicked about its physicality, the fact that post-punk musicians adopted disco-like rhythms and bass line patterns does in some ways seem “radical,” or, at least, it may be interpreted as an attempt to flout the rules imposed by the genre and identity police. As I demonstrated in chapter two with regards to dub-reggae, post-punk's incorporation of disco gestures may be seen as part of what Will Straw has referred to as post-punk's “lateral borrowing,” the temporary and one-sided interaction between post-punk and its neighbouring genres, which Straw argues may have been an attempt

to “rejuvenate” or “sustain” the “cultural space of punk.”<sup>39</sup> Turning to some musical examples now, I suggest that post-punk musicians adopted disco rhythmic structures, but did so by adapting them according to a punk aesthetic. In this regard, post-punk musicians such as PiL remained true to the logic of a rock-based genre by eschewing the perceived superficial, inauthentic, and “good time” aspects of disco, particularly by setting disco rhythm inside an otherwise sinister, gloomy, punk-styled musical context.

Let us not forget that the band PiL was the brainchild of John Lydon, a former Sex Pistol and, therefore, presumably something of a luminary for the punk “loser white kids” to whom Kent referred in his *NME* article. The actual sound and musical characteristics of PiL’s “Death Disco,” therefore, perhaps came as a surprise to some rock and punk commentators. Journalist Danny Baker’s review of “Death Disco” indicated that critics expected PiL to release a song that criticised disco culture. Baker wrote,

The new Public Image single will be “Death Disco,” and not, as somewhat hopefully reported in another paper, “Death to Disco.” In fact Wobble [PiL’s bassist] believes disco music to be the closest sound to what PiL are doing. Certainly, and believe me, I’d have no bones about stating otherwise were it the case, “Death Disco” has one of the most powerful backlines to be heard this side of Chic.<sup>40</sup>

Baker therefore suggested that the sound of PiL’s new single, “Death Disco,” was contrary to what audiences might have expected. Rather than trashing disco, these former punk musicians paid homage. Baker’s reference to “another paper” also suggests that the song may even have been erroneously listed as “Death to Disco” in another publication, a publication

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<sup>39</sup> Will Straw, “Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music,” *Cultural Studies* 5/3 (1991): 375-85.

<sup>40</sup> Danny Baker, “The Private Life of Public Image,” *New Musical Express*, June 16, 1979, accessed December 14, 2012, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=10063&SearchText=private+life+of+public+image>.

perhaps with a stricter, more typically rockist, anti-disco policy.<sup>41</sup> The potentially incorrect listing therefore demonstrates the strength of assumed alliances and conflicts between the genres (post-) punk and disco.

Baker also highlighted that PiL's bass player, Jah Wobble, actually strove to play a disco-style line in this song, and Baker goes so far as to compare the "backline" (presumably meaning bass line) to the "powerful" kind heard in disco numbers by the group Chic, famous for songs such as "Le Freak" and "Everybody Dance."<sup>42</sup> In addition to expressing an affinity for disco, PiL also endorsed the pursuit that had hitherto been so maligned by rockists: dancing. In the same interview with Baker, Lydon stated that he quite liked "a lot of disco music," primarily because "you can *dance* to [it]," and stressed that you could also dance to PiL's.<sup>43</sup> As I have already implied Lydon's love of disco signalled a departure from what Reynolds calls the "standard punk stance...that disco sucked,"<sup>44</sup> and PiL's own perception of their song contradicted the expectations that audiences and critics might have about a band that stemmed from a punk and/or rock background. Baker was not the only critic to draw attention to the significance of the disco elements in PiL's songs. In a way comparable to Reynolds' adoption of the metonym "death-disco" to denote post-punk as a whole, Jon Savage described PiL's music as "downer disco." He

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<sup>41</sup> An example of subtle anti-disco "rockism" (the notion that some genres of popular music are more authentic than others) and a journalist using rock as a barometer of value featured in Robert Christgau's commentary on his 1978 critics' poll when he suggested that some disco records are "wonderful rock 'n' roll." See chapter one of this dissertation, esp. 60.

<sup>42</sup> As Reynolds suggests, "Death Disco" is not the only PiL song to use disco-signifiers. Reynolds has suggested that the whole of *Metal Box* (the 1979 album by PiL that features the song "Death Disco"), particularly its 45 rpm format, demonstrated a debt to both dub and disco, and songs such as "Memories" possessed a dance-music style, and PiL's earlier release, "Fodderstompf," could be heard as a parody of Donna Summer's "Love to Love You Baby," foreshadowing the songs on *Metal Box* with its "hypnotic dub-funk bassline." Reynolds, *Rip it up*, 24.

<sup>43</sup> Baker, "Private Life."

<sup>44</sup> Reynolds, *Rip it up*, 25.

compares their music to that made by 1970s German-rock musicians such as Neu! and Can, but also notes how PiL add a particularly “heavy disco propulsion” to their songs.<sup>45</sup>

Even though “Death Disco” was intended for the dance floor and critics praised the funkiness of its bass line, the song is obviously still a far cry from the songs by Chic. The song does indeed have a disco-inspired drum pattern and a repeated two-measure bass riff that recalls certain disco ideas. But it also includes other genre signifiers and extra-musical connotations, such as reggae-esque scratches on rhythm guitar, a lead guitar line based upon a somewhat tongue-in-cheek rendition of Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake*, a half-screamed vocal line that sometimes concurs with the lead guitar line, and lyrics that were, according to Reynolds, partly inspired by the deaths of both Lydon’s mother and former Sex Pistol, Sid Vicious, in 1979.<sup>46</sup>

The bass line (or “backline”) of “Death Disco” is in some ways similar to the kinds of iconic disco bass line heard in songs such as “Good Times” by the R&B disco group Chic. In “Good Times” the bass line is a four-measure phrase that comprises two rhythmically similar halves (although they do vary slightly throughout the song): measure one comprises quarter notes (or quarter note values) on the first three beats of the first measure, followed by a sixteenth-note anacrusis at the end of beat four that anticipates the downbeat of measure two. Measure two is characterised by busier eighth- and sixteenth-note movement, before returning to the 16<sup>th</sup>-note anacrusis that leads back into the measure with quarter-note rhythms (see Ex. 3.1.). The harmonic outline in “Good Times” is based upon the repetition of Em7—A13—A7sus back to Em7. The affective character of the bass line to Chic’s “Good Times” is one of tension and

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<sup>45</sup> Jon Savage, “Public Image Ltd.: The Factory, Manchester,” *Melody Maker*, June 18, 1979, accessed December 16, 2012, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=18367&SearchText=downer+disco>.

<sup>46</sup> Reynolds, *Rip it up*, 213-14.

release, wherein the measures with quarter-note values set up pregnant pauses whose tension is released in the subsequent measures.

**Ex. 3.1** The bass line in “Good Times” by Chic



The bass line to “Death Disco” has a similar kind of structure. Crucially, however, the alternation between tension and release achieved by Chic is altogether absent. Rather, PiL’s bass line sounds more like a one-measure repeated loop and an abbreviated version of Chic’s disco classic. After a brief ascending chromatic scale, the bass line in “Death Disco” outlines an E minor triad, with the addition of an F-sharp (touching on the contour and harmonic palette of Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake* heard in the lead guitar part). As in measure one of “Good Times,” a sixteenth-note anacrusis appears at the end of each measure in the PiL song, leading in to the next measure, but the quarter-note set-up has been omitted (see Ex. 3.2). Furthermore, the tempo in “Death Disco” is quicker than it is in “Good Times,” at 116 bpm rather than 112 bpm. The drum part in “Death Disco” also uses a disco pattern; the eighth-note closed-open hi-hat pattern with the open hi-hat coming on the offbeat, “four on the floor” in the bass drum, and snare accents on beats two and four. The cumulative effect of the abbreviated bass riff, the shorter distance between activity and repose, and the faster tempo recalls the skipping of a vinyl record.<sup>47</sup>

**Ex. 3.2** The bass line in “Death Disco” by PiL




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<sup>47</sup> The bass line to Queen’s disco-homage “Another One Bites the Dust” also illustrates the use of this tension and release structure with quarter notes followed by smaller rhythmic subdivisions in the next measure.

These more aggressive aspects of “Death Disco”—the faster tempo, the frantically repetitive insistency—are complemented by the sinister lyrics, Lydon’s often pitch-less wail, and the quotation from Tchaikovsky, which lends “Death Disco” not only a very different harmonic palette compared to the extended harmonies of “Good Times,” but also an air of nineteenth-century gothic kitsch.

My comparison between “Death Disco” and “Good Times” demonstrates not only how PiL have borrowed certain gestures from disco, but have also transformed them by omitting the breathing room provided by Chic’s bass line and condensing it into a more aggressive loop. PiL have also juxtaposed disco gestures with musical and lyrical materials that are anathema to the perception of disco as a commercial culture with sexual rhythmic vibrancy; Lydon screeches his vocals, the guitars are abrasive, the lyrics are mysterious but discernibly gloomy, and there is also the element of kitschy horror. “Death Disco” therefore sounds like more of a commentary on the purported compulsory positivity and carefree connotations associated with mainstream disco. Indeed, the titles “Death Disco” and “Good Times” could hardly be more opposed. At the same time, however, even though PiL’s reconfiguration of disco-genre signifiers lends them a punk flavour, the rhythmic character of the song remains recognisably disco and, perhaps more importantly, you can dance to the song, albeit awkwardly.

“Death Disco” is not the only example of a post-punk song that borrow its rhythmic character from disco. As I indicated in the introduction to this dissertation, many post-punk bands used a combination of a disco rhythm section with noise guitars, and other punk and/or reggae musical signifiers, such as distortion and echo, as well as political and/or sombre lyrics. This confluence of styles is exemplified in songs by PiL, as well as Joy Division, Gang of Four, A Certain Ratio, and Josef K. It is perhaps for this reason Reynolds has taken the song title

“Death Disco” as a metonym for the much larger body of music made during the period from the late-1970s and early-1980s.

Another example of the way in which “deathliness” was used as a way to disavow disco’s physical and mainstream connotations appears in producer Martin Hannett’s comments about Joy Division. Hannett remarked that the Joy Division made “dancing music with *Gothic* overtones” (emphasis mine).<sup>48</sup> Joy Division’s particular kind of borrowing from disco-associated genres went so far as recording a version of soul singer Nolan Porter’s song “Keep On Keepin’ On” during their 1978 demo session with RCA, which Joy Division chronicler Jake Kennedy suggests was a fusion of the “disparate worlds of new wave and soul” that was designed to “[double] audience figures.”<sup>49</sup> Several Joy Division songs demonstrated the hybridity between disco-associated musics and punk. Indeed, the emphasis on “groove”—a term not regularly used to discuss punk—is audible in a song such as “Dead Souls” from their second album, *Closer*, released in 1980. Here the band uses more than two minutes at the beginning of the song to focus on the purely instrumental parts without vocals. The absence of lyrics and emphasis on the rhythmic counterpoint in this example alludes to the extended instrumental loops of the Eurodisco exemplified by Georgio Moroder and Donna Summer.

An analysis of the Joy Division song “She’s Lost Control” demonstrates another way in which post-punk musicians created a more disco- or funk-associated sound through their rhythm section. This time, however, the group did not necessarily incorporate obvious disco gestures into their song-writing style (unlike PiL), but rather, modified certain punk gestures in such a way that they begin to sound more akin to disco or funk. In the bass line to the archetypical punk

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<sup>48</sup> Reynolds, *Rip it up*, 420.

<sup>49</sup> The song was, however, never released. See Jake Kennedy, *Joy Division and the Making of Unknown Pleasures* (London: Unanimous, 2006), 24.

song “God Save the Queen” by the Sex Pistols, for example, one notices that the only moment of syncopation comes in the form of the tied eighth notes before the three-note anacrusis (measure seven after the repeats). This is the only point at which the bass line diverges from otherwise continuous eighth note movement (apart from the quarter note at the end of the introduction in measure four that signals the end of the phrase) (see Ex. 3.3).

**Ex. 3.3** The bass line in “God Save the Queen” by the Sex Pistols, mm.1-7



In “She’s Lost Control,” however, this anacrusis figure, which Joy Division’s bassist Peter Hook may have incorporated into his technique from his experience of playing punk songs, becomes more of a melodic feature of the bass riff, occurring very early on as a lead-in to the second half of the phrase (measure 5 in Ex. 3.4). Both the syncopation in the bass part, and the way in which the bass enters with a quarter note (measure 4) as opposed to eighth notes, furthermore, highlight the syn-drum pad punches on beats two and four of the drum part, especially since, in measures five and seven, the bass accent falls an eighth note after beat two, creating a kind of polyrhythmic counterpoint more characteristic of disco. The unusual extremity of pitch and the step-wise movement in “She’s Lost Control” also make the bass line serve as more of a melody line, in contrast to the predominantly monotonous riff for “God Save the Queen.”

**Ex. 3.4** The opening drum part and bass line in “She’s Lost Control” by Joy Division, mm.1-7

The musical notation shows two staves. The top staff is for the Bass, and the bottom staff is for the Drum Set. Both staves are in 4/4 time. The bass line is rhythmic, with eighth-note patterns. The drum part is also rhythmic, with eighth-note patterns and various dynamics (crosses for forte, dots for piano, and rests). The notation is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

In summary, not only did post-punk musicians communicate their debt to disco and other kinds of dance music in interviews but such interests are also audible in their music. In the case of “Death Disco,” PiL appear to have borrowed a disco bass line but reduced it in such a way that the balanced phrases exemplified by Chic’s “Good Times” become an insistent repeated loop. Joy Division’s “She’s Lost Control,” on the other hand, diverges from the stereotypical punk bass line by making the bass line more melodic, and extrapolating the small moments of syncopation present in punk bass lines and playing them in dialogue with a rhythmically independent drum part, thus creating the kinds of polyrhythmic sound more characteristic of disco or funk than punk.

***White Men Can’t Dance***

On the one hand, post-punk’s incorporation of disco-like characteristics signalled a departure from the previously dominant punk/rock logic that insisted that both dancing and certain kinds of rhythmic gestures were exclusive to commercial and black-associated genres, best exemplified by Kent’s reference to the kind of disco music that “[calls] the shots on your

gams,”<sup>50</sup> or Reed’s descriptions of “soul’s brother’s” disco and its “turbulent rhythm.”<sup>51</sup> In this regard, post-punk’s challenge to the rules of genre also presented a possible challenge to what Gilroy refers to as the “pernicious metaphysical dualism that identifies blacks with the body and whites with the mind” by reintroducing the body into white-identified music.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, however, it is important to note how the specific language used by critics in the late-1970s to describe post-punk’s physicality and rhythm, in light of the genre’s incorporation of disco, is almost always coloured by images of mental illness and physical awkwardness, death or the gothic, and/or resistance to some kind of system of power (which is more often than not, the machinations of advanced capitalism).<sup>53</sup>

Even though such references to mental illness and physical frailty were arguably critics’ “objective” or creative critical responses to the aggressive sound of the music, its abrasive timbres, and its sombre lyrics, as well as the visual impression of post-punk performers’ particular dancing style, these evocations of non-normative bodily states continued to sustain the on-going racial encoding of musical genre by framing white physicality as different from black physicality. In short, critics’ references to madness-induced non-normative physicality contribute to the construction of white male identity as physically inadequate compared to the fantasy of black virility described above.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, writers such as Savage continued to frame post-punk as one of the last incarnations of artistic authenticity, despite its disco and funk (and

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<sup>50</sup> Kent, “The Ramones.”

<sup>51</sup> Morthland, “Say it Again, Lou.”

<sup>52</sup> Gilroy, 97.

<sup>53</sup> For more on the idea of black music as “healthy” see Julian Stringer’s article on the Smiths in which he suggests that the Smiths’ uncomfortable approach to issues of sexual expression was part of their ideological whiteness. See Stringer, “The Smiths: Repressed (But Remarkably Dressed,” *Popular Music* 11/1 (1992): 22. Cf. Simon Reynolds, “How Soon is Now?” *Melody Maker*, September 27, 1987, 28.

<sup>54</sup> An issue that warrants further exploration is the way in which this aestheticisation or romanticisation of madness and anti-/non-normative bodily comportment in post-punk and other related genres springs from an able-ist perspective. The kinds of effects that these discursive formations have on disability identity are certainly worth exploring.

therefore mainstream) adaptations. Savage's decision to maintain the rhetoric of authenticity with regards to post-punk, even unknowingly, thus accords whites the monopoly over a particular kind of commercially-resistant "modern art."<sup>55</sup> In his review of the 1979 Joy Division record *Unknown Pleasures*, for example, Savage expressed his ideas using a logic common to much rock discourse, namely, the suggestion that certain kinds of popular music can criticise mass culture from within mass culture itself. Savage first of all rails against the trajectory of "(Western, advanced, techno-) capitalism," arguing that popular music "is the only site of possible expressivity within the confines of commerce and consumption." Savage then suggested that *Unknown Pleasures* is one possible antidote to the grave state of things and an example of this kind of "expressivity," it is "a brave bulletin, a *danceable* dream" (emphasis mine).<sup>56</sup>

Around the same time of Savage's review, numerous critics who attended live performances of Joy Division's music at the end of the 1970s strove to represent through language the unique dancing style of Joy Division's lead singer Ian Curtis, and many critics used madness or illness of some kind as their frame. At a performance of this so-called "doomy fourpiece" (Ian Curtis on vocals, Bernard Sumner on guitar, Peter Hook on bass, and Stephen Morris on drums) Mick Middles writing for *Sounds* described Curtis' dancing style as someone "waving his right hand in epileptic fashion."<sup>57</sup> The fact that Curtis did in fact suffer from epilepsy had not yet become public knowledge and, until his eventual suicide at the age of twenty-three on May 18, 1980, it is unlikely that many knew the extent of Curtis' suffering. Using similar language to Middles, at another live performance Paul Rambali at *NME* remarked

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<sup>55</sup> I discuss the relationship between modernity and whiteness, and modernity as a designator of value in more detail in chapter five.

<sup>56</sup> Jon Savage, "Joy Division: *Unknown Pleasures*," *Melody Maker*, July 21, 1979, accessed December 16, 2012, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?Article.ID=1444&SearchText=danceable+dream>.

<sup>57</sup> Mick Middles, "Joy Division." *Sounds*, November 18, 1978, accessed December 16, 2012, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=10649&SearchText=epileptic+fashion>.

that Curtis' “*body shakes, rocks and palpitates*, a *mad dervish* of motion and movement all caught in that one *mad* spotlight” (emphasis mine).<sup>58</sup> Ramabli also gives a vivid account of the audience’s physical response to what he describes as the “irresistible motion” of Joy Division’s music:

Heads that start to *bob furiously* at the first pulse of streamlined rhythm, attached to *bodies that lurch back and forth*, attached to *legs that jerk up and down* at the knee and arms that *swing in a loose crawl or elbows that flap madly*. It’s the *modern dance* that everybody will be doing in the coming months (emphasis mine).<sup>59</sup>

Rambali also added that there was a certain amount of poignancy to Joy Division performances: they are “sorrowful, painful and sometimes deeply sad” with “harrowing glimpses of confusion and alienation.”<sup>60</sup> Both Middles’ and Rambali’s description of Curtis and the Joy Division fans, therefore, drew on images of mental illness and the kind of physicality associated with hysteria or delirium. It is as though the “pulse of streamlined rhythm” possesses Curtis and his audience. In many ways this kind of language recalls the discourse I identified earlier, which frames black music and its rhythms as contagious, as something that has an overwhelming power over the body. The physicality in Rambali’s review has something unhealthy about it, with its lurches, jerks, crawls, and mad flapping, especially when set in context with the “harrowing glimpses of confusion and alienation.”

Seemingly inspired by the 1979 Francis Ford Coppola film, *Apocalypse Now*, Chris Bohn writing for *Melody Maker* also suggested that Joy Division inspired a “new dance” led by “the *demented Brando figure*” (emphasis mine), and that their music is composed out of “frustration” and “tight, uneasy rhythms.” Echoing Rambali, Bohn also draws attention to a sombre shadow

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<sup>58</sup> Paul Rambali, “Joy Division: Take No Prisoners, Leave No Clues,” *New Musical Express*, August 11, 1979, accessed December 16, 2012,

<http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=17350&SearchText=elbows+that+flap+madly>.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

hanging over the performance when he describes Joy Division as “masters of . . . gothic gloom.”<sup>61</sup> Attending the same performance as Bohn, Paul Morley described Curtis’s dancing style as that of a “comical trapped butterfly *flapping*” and a visual representation of the “*struggle* inherent in Division’s music” which expresses “the *violence of breakdown, inhibition, failure*” (emphasis mine).<sup>62</sup>

It is significant that these critics’ appraisals not only framed Joy Division’s music and physical expression in terms of mental illness and its attendant bodily manifestations, to some extent including even death or deathliness (with the recurrent references to gothic-ness and gloom—something that I shall develop towards the end of the chapter), but critics chose both explicitly and implicitly psychological ailments: critics referred to madness, fury, confusion, alienation, frustration, uneasiness, sorrow, pain, sadness, and dementia, amongst other things. Another clear example of this interest in psychological torment in relation to Joy Division is Bell’s description of listening to Joy Division, as something “uncomfortably claustrophobic,” “memorably psychotic,” with “dialogues of schizophrenia.” Bell also went so far as to evoke the image of a mental institution, describing the band’s music as something that “[brought] to mind endless corridors where doors clank open and shut on an infinite emotional obstacle course.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Chris Bohn, “Joy Division: University of London Union,” *Melody Maker*, February 16, 1980, accessed December 16, 2012, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=6471&SearchText=demented+brando+figure>.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Morley, “Joy Division: University of London, London,” *New Musical Express*, February 16, 1980, accessed December 16, 2012, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=9116&SearchText=comical+trapped+butterfly>. Despite these references to physical failure that resonate strongly with other critics’ perceptions of similar (even exactly the same) performances, Morley also suggests that Joy Division’s music inspires the feelings of “love, penetration and stimulation,” that their music is “physical,” “degenerate,” and expressive of “deepest desires.” These latter descriptions give an unusual sexual overtone to the otherwise pervasive emphasis on madness and physical fragility as the primary way of describing post-punk physicality.

<sup>63</sup> Max Bell, “Joy Division: *Unknown Pleasures* (Factory),” *New Musical Express*, July 14, 1979, accessed April 7, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/joy-division-iunknow-pleasuresi-factory>.

For more discussions of Curtis’ epilepsy in the field of music and disability see David Church, “Welcome to the ‘Atrocity Exhibition’: Ian Curtis, Rock Death, and Disability,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 26/4 (Fall 2006),

On the one hand, returning to Gilroy's assertion about the "pernicious" binary between the black body and white mind, and both Gilman and Frantz Fanon's discussions of the black body as the locus of sexual fear and desire, critics' observations of the dysfunction of the white body in these performances could be interpreted as a result of the "spreading" of black rhythm.<sup>64</sup> Since post-punk musicians, like Joy Division, incorporated disco and funk into their music, it appears as though they have caught the disease and their white bodies, not built for this kind of syncopation or eroticism, are responding accordingly. I suggest, however, that this kind of extended metaphor about essential racial differences was not necessarily in critics' minds.

Rather, from the articles, it seems as though post-punk's jerking performances are not brought about by spreading rhythm from body to body, but from some kind of psychological ailment. Indeed, western culture has a history of bestowing a special status on certain kinds of mental illness. As Gilman has demonstrated, cultural commentators have often assumed that there is a connection between mental illness (or "craziness"), and race and/or creative genius. Gilman draws attention to the work of psychiatrists R.D. Laing and Joe Berke who argued that "madness" was a "creative response to an untenable world . . . those who society labels as insane are only responding to the craziness that surrounds them by creatively reworking it."<sup>65</sup> Such ideas have recurred throughout western thought but became noticeably prevalent during and after the nineteenth century, and indeed certain avant-garde artists used madness as a form of capital to present themselves as the "antithesis of the established order."<sup>66</sup>

In light of the historical trends noted by Gilman, I suggest that post-punk critics' valorisation or romanticisation of "madness" in Joy Division's performances can be situated

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accessed February 17, 2015, <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/804/979>; and George McKay, *Shakin' All Over: Popular Music and Disability* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013), esp. 134.

<sup>64</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove Atlantic, 2008), esp. 89-94.

<sup>65</sup> Gilman, 217.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 225-8.

according to the tendency to aspire towards authenticity and legitimacy by looking to anti-rationality. Furthermore, by writing about these post-punk performances in this way, critics participated in and contributed to the formation of longstanding ideas about white physicality and creativity in opposition to black physicality and creativity; in short, through metaphors, and coded and subtly racialised language the white artist remains/becomes reified and legitimized as the tortured genius with the frail body, while the black artist is the all-body disseminator of captivating rhythms.

The kinds of performances of Joy Division's music that critics may have seen were also filmed. Some footage that exemplifies the sickly "modern dance" includes Joy Division's "She's Lost Control" on September 15, 1979 on the UK television programme *Watch Something Else* and their performance of "Transmission" on *The Wedge*, another UK television programme. Curtis, in particular, has been memorialised for his unique dancing style, partly because of his known struggle with epilepsy. Indeed, music fans on YouTube have created something of a tribute video to the singer's stage presence, rather tastelessly entitled "Epilepsy Dance."<sup>67</sup> Joy Division's performance of "She's Lost Control" on *Watch Something Else* was filmed from the waist-up, making it difficult to see what Curtis is doing with his lower body, but this in itself seems significant; in line with the arguments about the cultural construction of whiteness, Curtis has been symbolically alienated from his sexual self, his lower half. During the instrumental breaks, Curtis stares into the distance, as though possessed, and flails his arms before returning to clutching the microphone and singing with softened, blinking eyelids. Curtis' dancing style is even more pronounced in the group's performance of "Transmission." During the section where the lyrics state "dance, dance, dance, dance, dance to the radio" Curtis jerks compulsively as

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<sup>67</sup> "Ian Curtis – Epilepsy Dance," YouTube video, 11:39, posted by Canal de mt250481, April 18, 2011, accessed November 22, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7QOvO7BycQ>.

though prompted to dance by his own incantation.<sup>68</sup> The cameras tend to pan away from Curtis and towards the other musicians during the instrumental breaks. While this is a somewhat conventional way of editing popular music footage, it might also have been because Curtis' dancing when he was not singing was too wild, too bizarre, or too disturbing for those tuned in at home. "Transmission" is also interesting for the constant sixteenth-note hi-hat subdivision of the drummer, which also seems to be a disco reference, albeit at a faster tempo than you would likely find in a disco number.<sup>69</sup>

At the end of the performance of "She's Lost Control" there is a brief shot of the almost exclusively white audience; nobody appears to be moving. There is thus an incongruence between Curtis' and the audience's participation in the music. This juxtaposition can be interpreted using two of the theoretical ideas that I have already mapped out in this chapter. First of all, the juxtaposition re-inscribes the assumption proposed by Dyer that rock fans (white bodies) either dance awkwardly or do not dance at all. Secondly, Curtis' wild abandon and its incongruousness with the audience's response convey the image of the romantic tortured, isolated, mad artist. Notably, this representation of Curtis as a shy tortured genius was alluded to in Ramabli's comments about his speaking voice during an interview. Curtis' voice was apparently "high and faltering" as opposed to "swarthy and assertive."<sup>70</sup> Note as well the way in which Rambali draw a connection between "swarthiness" (dark-skinned-ness) and assertiveness,

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<sup>68</sup> This moment is something of a realisation of a Marxist critique of advanced capitalism: the machine of the commercial music industry (the radio) is compelling audiences to move against their will, as though taken over by an all-consuming force which, furthermore, makes them ill. In addition, the implication that this disease—the dancing disease and its bodily contortions—is caught from synthetic music recalls, albeit more implicitly, Kent's notion of the disco, which was significantly allied to symbolic blackness, that "[calls] the shots on your gams."

<sup>69</sup> Joy Division, "She's Lost Control," YouTube video, 3:39, posted by robbanzanas kanal, June 1, 2007, accessed December 12, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVc29bYIvCM>;

Joy Division, "Transmission," YouTube video, 2:54, posted by Le Locomotion, August 21, 2006, accessed December 12, 2012, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rdf9gxp\\_-4A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rdf9gxp_-4A).

<sup>70</sup> Rambali, "Joy Division."

again, inscribing a connection between racial otherness and, for want of a better word, the cock-sureness that Curtis lacked in interviews.

Despite the kind of cult-like attention Curtis' dancing, music, and biography have attracted, his performance style was not altogether unique. Other post-punk musicians also performed in such a way that might attract similar descriptions of madness, awkwardness, and/or sexually repressed anxiousness. For example, in two performances by Gang of Four, "To Hell With Poverty" on *The Old Grey Whistle Test* and "At Home He Feels Like A Tourist" on German TV show *Rockpalast* in 1983, singer Jon King can be seen uncontrollably jerking.<sup>71</sup> In the music video for "Sorry for Laughing," Scottish group Josef K's movements bear no relation to the funkiness of the music. Singer Paul Haig's suited attire gives him an air of stiffness or repressed-ness and his spectacles make him appear like a sinister nineteenth-century physician or pervert. Haig's only physical movement throughout the whole performance is his awkward straddling of a life-size cushion toy that resembles one of the band members (which also looks like a suited man). Like Curtis' seeming waistless-ness, Haig is therefore alienated from an obvious symbolisation of sexuality or virility in the video. During the rest of the performance Haig demonstrates immobility by tapping one foot with one hand plunged shyly into his pocket. Haig also occasionally hugs himself defensively, or voluntarily straight-jackets himself, as though psychologically unfit or too embarrassed to be out in public.<sup>72</sup>

At the same time that post-punk musicians such as PiL, Joy Division, Gang of Four, and Josef K brought disco into the foreign generic space of punk, they also (re)introduced a certain

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<sup>71</sup> Gang of Four, "To Hell With Poverty (TV Live)," YouTube video, 3:21, posted by Byrd75, August 9, 2006, accessed December 12, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPJHQmJAiKA>;

Gang of Four, "At Home He Feels Like A Tourist," YouTube video, 4:16, posted by TravisBickle1963, November 7, 2010, accessed December 12, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LZ3iJ7-EEI>.

<sup>72</sup> Josef K, "Sorry for Laughing (Official Video) (Domino Records)," YouTube video, 3:05, posted by Domino Recording Co., May 16, 2012, accessed December 12, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VzcWv8qKQw>.

kind of physicality that may be interpreted as an articulation of white masculinity. The disco and funk rhythms and styles audible in songs such as “She’s Lost Control,” “At Home He Feels like a Tourist,” and “Sorry for Laughing” invite, to borrow Dyer’s words, more “whole body eroticism” than “awkward thrusting.” Discussions of the performances themselves and the press’s reviews of these performances, however, maintained the commercial *and* racial bifurcation that previously ruled the impasse between rock/punk and disco. Critics focussed on how post-punk musicians’ adaptation of disco was aggressive and their dancing to it was appropriately wild, but chose to frame these components using images of madness, sexual repression, or morbidity. Such images, furthermore, served to illustrate that post-punk was white but also stood outside of dominant culture. As such, discourse around post-punk’s incorporation of disco contributed to sustaining two assumptions that pervade many cultural conversations, not just those germane to popular music: first, that madness is a form of subcultural capital in opposition to the economic capital of commercial musics like disco (as demonstrated most clearly and sinisterly in the later marketing of Curtis’ depression and illness by the Factory label);<sup>73</sup> and secondly, white creativity is different from black creativity, and it is located in the mind rather than the body.

### ***Narratives of Race, Madness, and Death in Other Discourses***

The particular image of the white body as suffering and malfunctioning under the strain of disco rhythm, giving rise to the “modern dance,”<sup>74</sup> has been employed elsewhere, particularly in the musicological work of Theo Cateforis in his discussion of David Byrne’s performance and dancing in Talking Heads’ 1984 video *Stop Making Sense*. In many ways Cateforis’ critique

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<sup>73</sup> Mitzi Waltz and Martin James, “The (Re)Marketing of Disability in Pop,” *Popular Music* 28/3 (2009): 367-80.

<sup>74</sup> Rambali, “Joy Division.”

resembles the reviews of Joy Division discussed earlier because he also emphasises images of physical awkwardness and psychological ailments as important aesthetic components in new wave music. In line with my own arguments, Cateforis proposes that nervous disorders in general are ailments that have been historically coded white. Because most new wave musicians were both white and middle-class, “[new wave] itself connoted whiteness.” Nervousness, Cateforis argues, therefore became synonymous with “white new wave masculinity” because it offered one way of articulating what it felt like to be alienated from inside a middle-class habitus.<sup>75</sup>

For Cateforis, Byrne’s performance is “nothing less than a musical and visual commentary on what it means to be white.”<sup>76</sup> He bases his argument upon critic Carter Ratcliff’s appraisal of *Stop Making Sense* in a review that highlighted the difference in on-stage physicality and movement between guitarist Alex Weir, who is African American, and Byrne, who is white. Ratcliff observed that Weir appeared to be comfortable, but Byrne did not. Cateforis argues that this contrast between Byrne and, not only Weir, but the other black performers on stage, makes it “clear” that “nervousness is inseparable from whiteness,” and he uses Byrne’s performance of the song “Once in Lifetime,” in which Byrne convulses wildly, to illustrate this point.<sup>77</sup> Cateforis supports his decision to interpret Byrne as nervous by drawing on other press responses to Byrne from the time, such as Bangs’ review, which proposed that Byrne’s “hypersensitivity” was an artistic gift and sign of refinement.<sup>78</sup> This latter point in particular resonates especially strongly with my earlier proposition regarding Curtis and other post-punk lead singers, where I suggested that signs of mental illness function as symbolic and/or subcultural capital for these

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<sup>75</sup> Cateforis, 74.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 75.

musicians who positioned themselves against the mainstream connotations of disco and dominant culture.

By framing Byrne's performance within the history of neurasthenia in North America—as an illness brought about by modernised living conditions and technology, and one that affects white people almost exclusively—Cateforis contextualises his interpretation of Byrne's performance in *Stop Making Sense* as one of quintessential whiteness. While I agree that the performance of nervousness or awkwardness in Byrne's performance can be considered as part of the cultural construction of whiteness and, I suggest, part of the process of the racial encoding of musical genres, I think it is important to consider some additional things: first, nervousness (and by extension, illness, failure, awkwardness) is connected to whiteness by virtue of its assumed opposition to blackness and physical vitality, especially in the context of Ratcliff's review which positions Byrne against Weir. While Cateforis does analyse Byrne's performed nervousness, he does not interrogate the assumptions that allow this black-white binary to occur. For example, what are the implications behind Ratcliff's assertion that Weir looked comfortable on stage? Secondly, as I have already implied, nervousness is primarily a symptom of psychic disturbance. Therefore, as indicated by Bangs' comments cited by Cateforis, critics, perhaps unwittingly, bestow a kind of prestige upon the mental conditions of these white new wave musicians in such a way that sustains the body-mind bifurcation between black and white genres/identities and also reinforces the elision between mental fragility, artistic worth, and symbolic/subcultural capital. Finally, to elaborate further on Cateforis' suggestion that new wave's performance of whiteness provided a way of expressing criticism towards its middle class origins, and in light of Gilroy's call for “anti- anti-essentialism,” in which he argues that black identity is a lived experience and “remains the outcome of practical activity: language,

gesture, bodily significations, desires,”<sup>79</sup> it seems important to consider the reasons why and how aspects of madness, physical awkwardness and, as I shall demonstrate, death, have been meaningful articulations of the white experience for both artists and critics alike.

As I suggested earlier in the chapter, the performance of physical inadequacy by white performers in conjunction with black-associated rhythmic patterns and musical gestures, and the fact that critics received the performances in these terms, may have enabled self-conscious musicians to negotiate an asymmetrical power dynamic: the history of white appropriation of black music. For the final section in this discussion of post-punk’s vocabulary of madness, physical awkwardness and death, then, I return to the place at which I started—the “radical” pairing of the words disco and death. Surveying the role of gothic-ness in post-punk and using Dyer’s discussions of cinema at the end of the 1970s as my critical starting points, I suggest that the sickly white body paradigm that I have extrapolated so far can be extended to images of death as the final culmination or logical conclusion of the aestheticisation of whiteness as a state of failure or inadequacy.

A 1977 review of a live performance by multiple bands on Manchester’s Factory label provides a strong example of the conjunction between post-punk and the images of death and decay, and complements earlier references to post-punk’s gloomy sound. First of all, Savage describes the location for the concert as a site of post-industrial demise with the venue seemingly located on the precipice of an abyss. He uses words such as “grim” and “forlorn” to describe the surroundings, and draws attention to details such as the “disused Victorian industrial buildings,” and a “post H-bomb” atmosphere.<sup>80</sup> In addition to the frequent recurrence of these sombre

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<sup>79</sup> Gilroy, 102.

<sup>80</sup> Jon Savage, “Buzzcocks/Magazine/John Cooper Clarke/The Worst/The Fall/The Prefects/The Negatives/Warsaw: Electric Circus, Manchester,” *Sounds*, October 15, 1977, accessed December 16, 2012, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=20433&SearchText=disused+victorian>. These kinds of

signifiers in press commentaries, a lot of post-punk musicians also chose lyrics, and song and album titles that had explicitly gothic or gloomy subject matter. For example, A Certain Ratio's first album in 1979 was entitled *The Graveyard and the Ballroom*, which conjures images comparable to "Death Disco," in the sense that it unites an obvious reference to death with dancing as well as recreation and leisure time. Furthermore, song titles on *The Graveyard and the Ballroom* include "Crippled Child" and "The Thin Boys," both of which participate in the aestheticisation of non-normative body types or physical frailty that I have discussed with regard to critics' commentaries. Similarly, Siouxsie and the Banshees' record from the same year (1979) has song titles such as "Carcass," and there are many death-associated lyrics and titles in Joy Division's output, such as "Dead Souls" and "I Remember Nothing."

In addition to the song title "Death Disco," *Metal Box* also included titles such as "Chant" and "Graveyard." While the latter is explicitly deathly, the former evokes images of ritual, and the somewhat mystical and religious connotations of the gothic. The music in the song "Graveyard" is purely instrumental and, like "Death Disco," uses a disco-based drumbeat with a very abrasive guitar line and dub-influenced echoic samples. In Reynolds' description of the song, he evokes the gothic aesthetic by describing "Graveyard" as "disco music for a skeleton's ball," but also implicitly, and crucially frames disco as black when he writes that "[it] really sounds like dem bones doing the shake, rattle, 'n' roll," once again alluding to distinctions between disco and post-punk along racial lines.<sup>81</sup>

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urban images are discussed in more detail in chapter five of this dissertation. The compilation album *Short Circuit: Live at the Electric Circus* exemplifies the kinds of performances Savage would have seen. The record is also noteworthy for the fact that it includes exclusively (post-) punk and reggae acts.

<sup>81</sup> Reynolds is presumably referring to the spiritual "Dem Dry Bones," but the language also evokes that of minstrelsy. See Reynolds, *Rip it up*, 215.

The kinds of gothic overtones that critics heard in certain post-punk songs can be understood in relation to the gothic music genre itself, which is described by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as follows:

A style of rock music, and the youth culture associated with this, *deriving originally from punk*, and characterized by the *dramatically stark appearance of its performers and followers*, reminiscent of the protagonists of (esp. cinematic) *gothic fantasy*, and by *mystical or apocalyptic lyrics*” (emphasis mine).<sup>82</sup>

In his discussion of the definition of the gothic genre (under which category the author notably places groups such as Joy Division, the Sisters of Mercy, Bauhaus, the Damned, and Siouxsie and the Banshees) Joshua Gunn suggests that by 1980 the distinctions made between this music and punk “gave way to gothic.”<sup>83</sup> What is significant about Gunn’s discussion of gothic music is his description of how certain genre names come into being. He argues that, even though music has its own technical vocabulary, the *adjective* is still “the primary representative unit the listener uses to describe music to herself and others,” and he gives examples such as “heavy” for metal and “raw” for punk.<sup>84</sup> He then identifies some musical-lyrical characteristics that are common to the musicians listed above that may have attracted the descriptor “gothic,” such as themes of “death, destruction, and darkness,” “electronic sounds and dance-beats,” “minor chords, sparse, minimalist rhythms,” and a “recognisably ‘eerie’ or ‘gloomy’ texture.” He also notes how producers and consumers of gothic music adopted a particular fashion as a marker of belonging to the genre, one that corroborates the *OED* image of gothic music fans with “pale white faces,” and adorned in black and, often, Victorian-style clothing.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, 9<sup>th</sup> edition, s.v. “gothic,” accessed September 10, 2012 <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/80221#eid2593916>.

<sup>83</sup> Joshua Gunn, “Gothic Music and the Inevitability of Genre,” *Popular Music and Society* 23/1 (1999): 31-50.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

As much as these characteristics may elicit references to, or signify, gothic-ness, they do not account for other contingencies that come in to play when choosing an adjective that best describes the music. As Brackett has argued, genre labels in popular music discourse are rarely chosen “innocently.”<sup>86</sup> I suggest, therefore, that the words used to describe certain musical cultures have unspoken significances. With reference to Dyer’s work on the discursive sculpting of white identity, I propose that descriptions of post-punk and gothic music as dark or gloomy, and even intelligent and introspective, function as codes for whiteness, just as much as they describe the sonic and lyrical content of individual songs.<sup>87</sup>

Thus the particular image of death, I suggest, gave post-punk critics, and perhaps also post-punk musicians, one way of articulating the experience of being a white, specifically masculine, subject at this moment in history. Dyer’s final chapter in his book devoted to representations of whiteness, *White*, focuses on this relationship between whiteness and images of death. The author attempts to “identify a feeling surfacing in moments of white contemporary popular culture, a sense of the dead end of whiteness.”<sup>88</sup> The “sense of the dead end” of whiteness seems particularly pertinent to the present discussion in the sense that, at the end of the 1970s, white rock music had reached something of a terminus, since punk had apparently failed and 1960s rock groups had reached an apex of pretentiousness. What is more, popular music more generally continues to be over-shadowed by the history of the appropriation of black music by both rock purveyors and the mainstream, which contributes to a perception of white creativity as inherently stilted and subsequently fraudulent.

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<sup>86</sup> David Brackett, “AMS/RRHOFM Lecture April 25, 2012,” YouTube video, 1:30:53, posted by amsformusicology, May 16, 2012, accessed December 12, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6J38fq0fHV4>.

<sup>87</sup> Gunn, 39.

<sup>88</sup> Richard Dyer, *White* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), xv.

In addition to reading whiteness as a “dead end” in twentieth-century artefacts, Dyer also provides examples from older Western art wherein white identity has been sutured to images of death: these include the veneration bestowed on the dying body of the white Christ, the Victorian penchant for painting dead female children, the “sublime pallor” of tuberculosis in the nineteenth century, and the “romantic longing” for death in nineteenth-century German and British poetry.<sup>89</sup> These images and artistic trends are not only deathly but, as they appear in Dyer’s text, echo almost verbatim the gloomier aspects of post-punk and the discussion of gothic-ness as a musical genre above. Furthermore, in his conclusion, Dyer summarizes the images of whiteness that have pervaded his book; these include the words “taut, tight, rigid, upright, straight (not curved), on the beat (not syncopated), controlled and controlling.”<sup>90</sup> Once again, this language is almost identical to the descriptions of post-punk music and musicians that I have extrapolated in this chapter, especially Dyer’s references to rhythmic stuttering and sexual repression.

Whiteness and death are also united for Dyer because whiteness often signifies the “bringing of death,” especially in non-white cultures, and he gives the examples of the white sheets of the Ku Klux Klan, whites as bringers of genocide and slavery in the Americas and Australia, and also the Holocaust, during which the murder of non-whites was justified as a cleansing process.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the at-times-ironic identification with Nazi iconography by punk and post-punk musicians provided another way of assuming and performing the white subject’s historically-inscribed role as persecutor, especially in the post-civil rights era, when dividing subjectivity according to race became especially significant.

With these historical and artistic precedents in mind, Dyer maps the idea of the white subject as deathly or life-less through the figure of the android in the *Alien* films and *Blade*

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 209-10.

*Runner*. Significantly Dyer analyses representations of whiteness in films, from the same historical time frame as the post-punk activity. The first part of *Alien* was released in May 1979 (in the USA) and *Blade Runner* dates from slightly later, June 1982 (in the USA). Such texts can therefore be read as a parallel representation of a particular historical moment from within another artistic discipline and of a culture's relationship to certain kinds of ideas, particularly ones such as race. For Dyer, the picture of white identity projected in these films is one that is "desolate and terminal." In *Blade Runner*, the white characters are presented against a "yellow human background" according to the racist logic of the "yellow peril," since Asian civilians dominate, or appear to have "taken over," the Los Angeles of the future.<sup>92</sup> Dyer also observes how *Blade Runner* represents "white creativity" through the characters of Dr. Tyrell and J.F. Sebastien, who are both "pale creatures . . . devoid of human interaction, dead and dying," and Harrison Ford's character (Deckard) is "an exemplary white for our times" because of his ordinariness. Indeed, *Blade Runner's* enduring cult success, Dyer argues, results from the fact that it "touches on the suspicion that white man, in his retreat from the coloured hordes, has nothing in his self to fall back on."<sup>93</sup> It is unclear what Dyer is implying with the phrase "nothing to fall back on;" however, it is possible to glean the insinuation that white man's creativity entails a form of colonisation, such is the case with certain genres of popular music, especially rock. Secondly, in the particular context of the fantasy and fear of being "overrun" by Others—in a manner reminiscent of Eric Clapton's fear of being overrun by immigrants that I discussed in chapter two—the white male subject is racially isolated, surrounded only by non-whites.

Indeed, in line with the arguments made earlier about the assumed sexual appetite of specifically racial Others (but also gays and women) in relation to disco, in the *Alien* films and

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 212-14.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 215.

*Blade Runner* Dyer remarks upon how “[reproduction] is polarised between the non-reproducing, white and often android-led human world and the terrifying and indeed alien realm of the alien's uncontrollable reproductive energy.” Dyer then aligns this with the “specifically white, agast perception of the unstoppable breeding of non-whites, that deep-seated suspicion that non-whites are better at sex and reproduction than whites.”<sup>94</sup> Thus in *Alien*, images such as “the android/white man's severed head covered with cum,” is a “grotesque vision of a fruitless display of sexuality at the point of death.”<sup>95</sup> In addition to the long-standing history of the attribution of sexual vivacity to non-whites and Others more generally, Dyer suggests that this anxiety was heightened by the AIDS pandemic at the end of the 1970s, “the most common aetiology” of which “in the popular imagination combines the uncontrolled African heterosexual appetite with the *ne plus ultra* of white sexual decadence, namely queers.”<sup>96</sup>

I do not wish to suggest that critics of post-punk music or the musicians themselves consciously adopted the images of death and bodily awkwardness in an attempt to absolve themselves of associations with purported black virility or queer decadence, but rather, what I would like to demonstrate is how performances of death, madness, physical frailty, and even ordinariness, and critics' commentary upon such images and ideas were perhaps the last available spaces for a particular kind of white creativity in the wake of colonialism, fascism, and the history of white supremacist projects. Furthermore, racial bifurcation and assumptions about essential difference pervade the seemingly innocent field of popular music categorisation, signification, and discourse, especially via the pervasive insistence that black rhythm is both inherently erotic and infectious. Even if the images of death, madness, and ordinariness, performed by the musicians and inferred by the critics, result from self-conscious feelings of

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

white shame, these assumptions persist when striving to make sense of subject-hood in a culture of confusing and barbaric labelling. In this context, whites are precluded from the body, and non-whites are kept from the poetic capital and presumed profundity sutured to certain images of physical fragility, mental illness, and even death.

### ***Conclusion***

By the end of the 1970s, musicians such as those in PiL, Joy Division, Gang of Four, A Certain Ratio, and others, inclined away from earlier styles of rock and punk perhaps because, to paraphrase Elvis Costello, these styles offered only two “bankrupt” kinds of masculinity: aggressive machismo or fey sensitivity.<sup>97</sup> As I have demonstrated, one of the most noticeable ways in which post-punk musicians departed from the established rock and punk styles was via the incorporation of black-associated musics, be they reggae or disco. Importantly, post-punk musicians’ incorporation of disco differed from their white contemporaries: it was not the kind of sexualised white funk purveyed by (number-ten most-hated Rod Stewart), nor the ironic style of Ian Dury, nor did it have the normative appeal of the Bee Gees and *Saturday Night Fever*. Rather, post-punk borrowed disco’s rhythmic patterns and funky basslines, but articulated disco’s “eroticism” using punk-derived gestures. Thus unlike disco, the post-punk groove was too aggressive (or sometimes too slow) for comfortable dancing, the harmonic palette too sombre for the kinds of euphoria articulated in mainstream songs such as “I Feel Love” or “Good Times,” the lyrics too sinister, the guitar sounds too noisy, and the repeated loop pattern was more anxiety-inducing than groovy or dance-provoking.

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<sup>97</sup> Bill Flanagan, “The Last Elvis Costello Interview,” *Musician* (March 1986), accessed December 14, 2012, <http://www.elviscostello.info/articles/m/mu8603a.html>. The actual quotation from Costello is: “Two types of rock ‘n’ roll had become bankrupt to me. One was ‘Look at me, I’ve got a big hairy chest and a big willy!’ and the other was the ‘Fuck me, I’m so sensitive’ Jackson Browne school of seduction. They’re both offensive and mawkish and neither has any real pride or confidence.”

Genres from outside of the rock paradigm, like disco, were, furthermore, associated with commercialism and, later in disco's lifespan, the kinds of normative values depicted in *Saturday Night Fever*. Disco was also racially encoded (and continues to be so), and these encodings in turn were accompanied by wider assumptions about essential racial qualities. In this particular context such assumptions included the pervasive connection made between blackness and sexuality, a sexuality propagated by infectious rhythm to which frail white bodies helplessly succumb. In the media discourse on post-punk that I have analysed in this chapter, critics used language pertaining to corporeal frailty and/or psychological disturbance to frame post-punk musicians' incorporation of disco. Such themes of the ailing body and mind, furthermore, are themes that Dyer, Gilman, and others, have identified as coded white in conjunction with the long history of associating blackness with opposite adjectives; blackness has been associated with dancing, sexual virility, and the body as opposed to the mind.

This chapter has been primarily concerned with what Dyer calls "white makings of whiteness within Western culture," and therefore can be thought of as the negative to chapter two of this dissertation, which investigated some of the black makings of post-punk.<sup>98</sup> Even though the images of deathliness, non-normative body types, or madness are not unique to white subjectivity and culture and, as I have indicated, different kinds of disease (as well as their degree of contagiousness and aetiology) have been projected onto different races, I propose that images of madness, physical frailty, and death gave critics, and perhaps even the musicians themselves, a way of self-consciously justifying borrowing musical ideas from a genre that was both commercial and black-associated. Indeed, Dyer has argued that in cultural discourse the responsibility for racially motivated social injustices and atrocities almost always falls at the feet of the white subject. I suggest, therefore, that post-punk musicians and critics negotiated their

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<sup>98</sup> Dyer, *White*, xiii.

position as white, decentred, anti-commercial, predominantly male artists who made disco-inspired music, by performing their identity as one marked by illness, inadequacy, failure, and death, the most self-effacing state of all.<sup>99</sup>

In some ways, then, Joy Division's Ian Curtis, his struggle with epilepsy and eventual suicide on May 18, 1980 serves as a metonym for the perception of post-punk that I have outlined in this chapter. In the post-suicide criticism on Joy Division, much of which appears in singer Curtis' obituaries, critics warned against the temptation to mythologise, romanticise, and even commodify suicide in the way that the band's record label, Factory, had done with the photograph of the Genoa cemetery on the sleeve of the band's posthumous single, "Love Will Tear Us Apart."<sup>100</sup> Even self-conscious critics such as Savage and Morley, however, were drawn towards to detecting "fragility" in Joy Division's recordings, seemingly unable to escape the power of retrospective interpretation after Curtis' death, but also perhaps unknowingly seduced by narratives of the creative, awkward romantic genius that have, in certain discourses, become sutured to the white male subject.<sup>101</sup> In short, the specific social connotations that certain musical gestures held at the end of the 1970s, particularly regarding issues of mass-market culture and race, meant that the bringing together of disco and punk in post-punk not only caused a rupture in popular music discourse, but one that was inevitably repaired and rationalised by rhetoric born of the legacies of both anti-commercial modernism and colonialism. The words "death-disco" therefore not only communicate how post-punk incorporated disco, but also how the discourse that surrounds the genre has subtly disowned disco's commercial status and its connotations of Otherness as well.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>100</sup> Reynolds, *Rip it up*, 118.

<sup>101</sup> Jon Savage, "Joy Division: From Safety to Where?" *Melody Maker*, June 14, 1980, accessed December 16, 2012, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=6850&SearchText=from+safety+to+where>.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### “Is Your Finger Aching? I Can Feel You Hesitating”: Post-Punk Women and the Discourse of Punk Amateurism<sup>1</sup>

At the Hammersmith Odeon, towards the end of October 1976, New York punk-poet Patti Smith gave her second London performance. In her review of the concert for the UK-based weekly music magazine *Melody Maker*, journalist Maureen Paton observed how Smith’s performance was especially captivating for the female members of the audience:

A lot of women present clearly got off on the idea of having someone up there to identify with (an attitude with which I have a great deal of sympathy), and there were more yells of encouragement from women than I’ve ever heard at any other concerts.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that there were “more yells of encouragement from women” in the audience demonstrates how exceptional Smith’s performance must have seemed. Here was a woman who derived her stage persona from channelling male icons such as Doors-singer Jim Morrison and poet Arthur Rimbaud, and who was not only participating in the hitherto male-dominated field of rock but was actually leading a rock group. Smith was, in other words, a rock musician with whom the women attending the Hammersmith concert could finally identify.

In the rest of her review, however, Paton wrote scathingly about the way in which Smith seemed to be relying too much on her exceptional status as a woman in rock, in lieu of displaying any kind of musical skill:

But it’s precisely this kind of *freak originality* that Smith exploits so mercilessly by playing the rock and roll hero. The guitar that she *hadn’t even bothered to learn to play properly* was toted around the stage as a symbol, nothing more. And that just *isn’t good enough* (emphasis mine).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lyrics from “Come Again” by the mixed-gender post-punk group the Au Pairs from the album *Playing with a Different Sex* (1981).

<sup>2</sup> Maureen Paton, “Patti Smith,” *Melody Maker*, October 30, 1976, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

By criticising Smith's "freak originality" Paton was implying that Smith was using her gender, her exceptional status in the rock field, as her primary means of winning approval, rather than showcasing her musicianship or achieving recognition based on musical skill; she "hadn't even bothered to learn" the guitar she was holding. Paton also appears to have been judging Smith according to classic rock criteria, in which notions of virtuosity and skill were prized, and does not appear to have been *au fait* with the emerging punk trend, which valued a self-consciously amateurish, DIY approach.<sup>4</sup> It is not uncommon to encounter opinions such as those expressed by Paton in the mid- to late-1970s rock discourse. As I shall discuss, journalists often implied that it wasn't "good enough" for a female musician just to be on stage, making music, and participating in the new wave/punk moment, but she had to be able to "play properly" or "play hard" as well.

Significantly, the rock media's anxiety about whether or not female musicians had managed to surpass their predetermined position as sex objects and become instrumentalists who could "play properly," appears to contradict the argument concerning women's contribution to punk and post-punk that numerous commentators have made more recently. Scholars such as Mavis Bayton, Helen Reddington, and Caroline O'Meara have suggested that it was precisely punk's ethos of anti-virtuosity and its irreverence for conventional playing styles that opened the field of rock to women artists in the first place.<sup>5</sup> Musicians such as Smith, as well as the Slits, the

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<sup>4</sup> Paton's review, from October 1976, appeared only months after Coon's *Melody Maker* article, "Rebels Against the System," which christened punk and championed its "anyone can do it" approach in August that year. See Coon, "Punk Rock: Rebels Against the System," *Melody Maker*, August 7, 1976, 24-5. Allan Jones' article, "But Does Nihilism Constitute Revolt?" which appeared underneath Coon's two-page punk special, referred explicitly to the Patti Smith Band as a punk group, and argued that "Smith and the like" may be seen as part of a lineage of groups from the 1960s who prioritized "physical energy and passion" over "technique or musical competence." See Jones, "But Does Nihilism Constitute Revolt?" *Melody Maker*, August 7, 1976, 24-5.

<sup>5</sup> See Mavis Bayton, *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Helen Reddington, *The Lost Women of Rock: Female Musicians of the Punk Era* (Sheffield, UK; Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2012); and Caroline O'Meara, "The Raincoats: Breaking Down Punk Rock's Masculinities," *Popular Music*, 22/3 (October 2003): 299-313.

Raincoats, Nina Hagen, and Siouxsie Sioux are some of the most well known women of the punk and post-punk era, but they by no means represent the extent of women's involvement in these genres, which was significantly greater than previous eras.<sup>6</sup> According to Bayton punk challenged, "a whole range of existing rock conventions," and subsequently "opened up a space in which women could play."<sup>7</sup> Punk challenged rock's conventions in part by presenting alternative masculinities (as discussed in the previous chapter) and by not partaking in rock's most ostentatious forms of misogyny. Bayton also argues that punk's celebration of musical ugliness also encouraged women who may have previously lacked confidence and/or had no prior experience of playing a musical instrument that they too could be in a band.<sup>8</sup>

This chapter offers a critique of the idea of "amateurism" in the discourse on women's participation in punk and post-punk. I explore the different ways in which the intertwinement of women musicians with notions of amateurism relates to the broader discussion concerning the definition of post-punk as a genre. I begin by revisiting some of the relevant literature on the role of women in punk, focussing specifically on the different positions and modes of musical expression available to women prior to and during the punk and post-punk eras. Then, with reference to rock's pre-punk musical conventions and assumptions about women's ability to play and compose, I analyse music by three post-punk female groups/artists, the Slits, the Raincoats, and Lora Logic, as well as the music of some non-punk female musicians. Rather than suggest that the Slits, the Raincoats, and Lora Logic epitomise an integral representation of female identity because of the way in which they "resisted" rock's conventional idioms, I argue in

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<sup>6</sup> Significantly, rather than focus on the idea of musical amateurism, Simon Frith and Howard Horne have suggested that punk's close associations with the fashion departments in the UK's art colleges was also a factor that contributed to the increased participation in women, since women "traditionally had a stronger presence" in those departments than men. See Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop* (London; New York: Methuen, 1987), 129.

<sup>7</sup> Bayton, *Frock Rock*, 63.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 65. See also O'Meara, 300.

favour of a genre-based reading of these complex issues wherein the generic spaces of punk and post-punk provided a new position for the expression of alternative (female) identities.

### ***New Positions and Second-Wave Feminism***

Either in spite of or perhaps because of what Paton referred to as her “freak originality,” artists such as Patti Smith inspired some of post-punk’s most well known female participants. For Ana da Silva, vocalist in the London-based group the Raincoats, Smith’s first London performance at the Roundhouse in May 1976 was particularly captivating. According to Zoë Street Howe (biographer of the Raincoats’ contemporaries, the Slits), Smith’s performance at the Roundhouse was on a par with the Sex Pistols’ concert at Manchester’s Lesser Free Trade Hall in June 1976, in the sense that “Everyone who was anyone on the early London punk scene was there.” According to Howe, da Silva was particularly impressed with “Smith’s defiance,” the fact that she spat out a flower onto the floor and appeared not to be “taking shit from anyone.”<sup>9</sup> In a 1978 interview with Alan Anger at *ZigZag* magazine, da Silva also remarked:

I saw [Smith] when she first came over [to the UK] and played the Roundhouse and until that day, I hadn’t seen anyone who could move me the way she did. I really loved the way she was communicating with her audience throughout the gig.<sup>10</sup>

Smith was not the only inspirational figure for post-punk’s female musicians. As Reddington has demonstrated, seeing the haphazard performance style and irreverence for conventional musicianship exhibited by the Sex Pistols also marked a crucial turning point, especially for guitarist Viv Albertine of the Slits:

I think I’d seen the Pistols once, and having seen the Pistols, *I knew*; I immediately got it. It wasn’t about how well you play; it was about how you’ve got something to say that no-one else is saying. And I utterly got that: otherwise I’d never have thought in a million years of buying a guitar because I couldn’t

<sup>9</sup> Zoë Street Howe, *Typical Girls? The Story of the Slits* (London; New York: Omnibus, 2009), 14.

<sup>10</sup> Alan Anger, “The Raincoats,” *ZigZag*, August 1978, 36.

play, and I'd never played, and I didn't consider myself a musician. But it was just so liberating seeing the Pistols because I thought "Oh, you don't have to be a musician, you just have something you desperately want to say and the bollocks to get up and say it."<sup>11</sup>

But why would "amateurism" and DIY aesthetics, the fact that the Sex Pistols couldn't "play," necessarily have encouraged female artists specifically to buy guitars and start their own bands? The association between female musicians and amateur aesthetics is especially problematic in genres such as punk and post-punk because all of the musicians in these genres, both male and female, were what we might call "amateurs." This is to say that, as with most musicians in popular music, punk and post-punk musicians received no formal musical training and deliberately drew attention to their simplistic musical style.<sup>12</sup> Skills in popular music are acquired through what Lucy Green has called "informal music learning practices," which have few similarities with formal music education, and may include teaching oneself and/or "picking things up" as you go along.<sup>13</sup> By linking female rock musicians to amateurism in this way, then, is there a danger of re-inscribing the idea that female musical skill is hindered by some kind of biological deficiency, which—palpable misogyny aside—is easily debunked by turning to other genres at which women excel, such as classical music and jazz?

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<sup>11</sup> Viv Albertine quoted in Reddington, 46.

<sup>12</sup> An example of the kind of excitement generated by this new amateur aesthetic can be read in James Wolcott's introduction to the New York punk scene in the *Village Voice* in the mid-1970s. Wolcott wrote: "what you get [from this music] is not high-gloss professionalism but talent still working at the basics; the excitement (which borders on comedy) is watching a band with a unique approach try to articulate its vision and still remember the chords. Television was once such a band; the first time I saw them everything was wrong—the vocals were too raw, the guitar work relentlessly bad, the drummer wouldn't leave his cymbals alone. They were lousy all right but their lousiness had a forceful dissonance reminiscent of the Stones' *Exile on Main Street*, and clearly [singer] Tom Verlaine was a presence to be reckoned with." See Wolcott, "A Conservative Impulse in the New Rock Underground," in *The Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader: Histories and Debates*, Third Edition, ed. David Brackett, 341-345 (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). For the original article see Wolcott, "A Conservative Impulse in the New Rock Underground," *Village Voice*, August 18, 1975.

<sup>13</sup> Lucy Green, *How Popular Musicians Learn: A Way Ahead for Music Education* (Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 5.

Helen Reddington, in her history of women rock musicians of the punk and post-punk era, has argued that the widespread youth unemployment in the UK during the 1970s provided young women with an opportunity to resist the gendered roles prescribed by previous models of adulthood. Unemployment, Reddington argues, “levelled” the gender field by allowing both young women and young men to prolong their childhood and child-like creativity. Reddington also argues that the “gender-levelling” effect of unemployment was not the only condition that prompted women to join the punk movement as instrumentalists and singers; it is important to recognise, she argues, that punk was more than just a fashion statement or even a musical genre. Punk was a “social revolution,” she suggests, that challenged mainstream culture’s normativity and fostered an “atmosphere of enablement.” This atmosphere of enablement was paralleled, furthermore, by a significant political intervention, the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act in the UK in 1975.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout her book Reddington notes how the concept of “amateurism” in punk music was both an advantage and disadvantage for punk’s women musicians. On the one hand, punk amateurism was advantageous because it meant that women who had previously lacked confidence or had been systematically excluded from the world of rock—its equipment, its social spaces, its machismo posturing—could now participate in the genre. Reddington’s conceptualisation of punk’s valorisation of amateurishness derives its meaning in opposition to the “polished and smug sounds” of progressive rock. In this regard Reddington’s argument echoes Caroline Coon’s 1976 *Melody Maker* article on British punk in its earliest stages. Punk emerged, Coon suggested, in opposition to “bands like Genesis, Jethro Tull, E.L.P., Yes, Rick

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<sup>14</sup> Reddington, 17-23. Running parallel with the incorporation of women into rock via punk, it is also worth noting that the women’s movement of the 1970s and 1980s in the United States revived and adopted the music of all-women swing groups from the 1940s. As Sherrie Tucker has noted, the International Sweethearts of Rhythm in particular were perceived to represent “women’s creativity, women’s community, and global sisterhood.” See Tucker, *Swing Shift: “All-Girl” Bands of the 1940s* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 165.

Wakeman, Roxy Music and Queen,” who were “gentlemen rockers” and whose music “can only be played by people with similar academic temperaments.” Punk therefore “stripped [rock] down to its bare bones again,” with minimal equipment, fast songs, no solos and “no indulgent improvisations.” It was a genre in which audiences revelled “in the idea that any one of them could get up on stage and do just as well, if not better, than the bands already up there.”<sup>15</sup> Young women as well as young men were amongst those who imagined they could “get up on stage and do just as well.”<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, the notion of amateurism worked to disadvantage women musicians because punk’s embrace of minimal musical skill left women musicians vulnerable to the predominantly male, but also female, “gatekeepers” in the rock media. As I illustrated with Paton’s review of Smith’s concert, certain music critics often commented on female musicians’ inability to grasp the rock idiom.<sup>17</sup> As I have suggested, suturing female participation in the punk and post-punk genres to a discourse of musical amateurism has the potential to re-inscribe the notion that women have a biologically determined inability to grasp the techniques or idioms associated with rock-based music. This is especially true if the sociological preconditions for women’s exclusion from rock are not fully explored or if a song’s potentially gendered musical meaning is not carefully unravelled; as I shall discuss in more detail, feminist musicologists have

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<sup>15</sup> Coon, “Rebels Against the System.” According to Frith and Horne, punk’s “debunking of ‘male’ technique” was not the main condition that contributed to women’s participation in rock. They suggest, rather, that spaces for women already existed “because of women’s involvement in the first place. Punk *bricolage*, for example, was most effective in the work of Vivienne Westwood and Poly Styrene, in the play of the female art school musicians on images of femininity. Iconography which is consistent in patriarchal ideology—woman as innocent/slut/mother/fool—was rendered ludicrous by *all being worn at once*.” See Frith and Horne, 155.

<sup>16</sup> In another article from November 1976, Coon noted how punk was a genre that valued women’s participation. She wrote, “For the first time ever, a culture is developing which is not, like mods and rockers, dominated by males. Post-hippie equality and trans-sexuality are a nearly fully-realised fact of life.” She listed as notable punk women: Judy Nylon, Chrissie Hynde, Vivienne Westwood, Viv Albertine and Siouxsie Sioux. See Caroline Coon, “Punk Alphabet,” *Melody Maker*, November 27, 1976, 33.

<sup>17</sup> See also Reddington, 21-2.

often confused what Lucy Green calls “inherent” and “delineated” musical meanings, and thus have inadvertently perpetuated essentialist assumptions.<sup>18</sup>

Counteracting arguments based upon biological determinism, Bayton has outlined some of the primary sociological reasons as to why women have not historically been associated with the rock idiom (of which punk and post-punk may be considered subgenres). This history of women’s exclusion from rock would also explain why some women might have been inspired by the aesthetics and performance of non-virtuosity, such as those exhibited by the Sex Pistols or Smith, who hadn’t “even bothered to learn” her guitar. Bayton suggests that (teenage) women have not only been deterred from such masculine-coded pursuits as playing the electric guitar via hegemonic cultural representations of “femininity,” but they have also tended to lack the money, time, space, transport, and access to equipment that are, more often than not, the material preconditions for learning a rock instrument. Bayton also argues that women have usually not been party to the informal settings in which young men learn the electric guitar and young women are often excluded from being given technical “tips.”<sup>19</sup> The arenas in which young men may acquire technical tips, furthermore, form part of what Green called the “informal music learning practices” that characterise and are at the centre of the acquisition of instrumental skill in popular music.<sup>20</sup>

The idea that women have historically been excluded from the role or position of electric guitarist in particular is something that others have also remarked upon. Apart from a few notable exceptions from earlier eras (such as Maureen Tucker of the Velvet Underground, 1960s garage-rock bands such as the Shaggs and the Luv’d Ones, and the widely heard but often

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<sup>18</sup> Lucy Green, *Gender, Music, Education* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 127-32.

<sup>19</sup> Mavis Bayton, “Women and the Electric Guitar,” in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (London: Routledge, 1997), 37-40.

<sup>20</sup> Green, *How Popular Musicians Learn*, 5.

unsung bass player Carol Kaye), the late 1970s and early 1980s saw a comparative boom in the number of women musicians occupying positions (the spaces and roles carved out by social conditions and precedents) in popular music that had hitherto been dominated by men: namely, that of electric guitarist, bassist, and drummer.<sup>21</sup> These roles as rock instrumentalists differed significantly from the positions previously occupied by women. As Bayton has suggested, women have tended to play the supporting roles of mother, wife or girlfriend, fan, consumer, and singer. Roles in executive positions, in journalism, in management, and as part of the road or technical crew have often been mostly restricted to men.<sup>22</sup>

Both Simon Reynolds and Joy Press have also identified a similar trend with regards to the positions that women have played not only in rock but also in the counter-cultures more generally. Reynolds and Press argue that the positions of the groupie and the “desexualised den-mother” can be traced from the era of the Beat poets of the 1950s into the rock generation of the 1970s and beyond.<sup>23</sup> In dialogue with these positions or roles offered by popular music history, Reynolds and Press have suggested that certain women musicians simultaneously rejected the idea of fixed female roles while, at the same time, celebrating “female imagery and iconography.” Musicians of the 1970s and 1980s, such as Kate Bush, Siouxsie Sioux, Nico, Annie Lennox and Madonna, treated female stereotypes as “a wardrobe of masks and poses to be assumed,” and therefore highlighted the performative aspect of gender; these women “[shifted]

<sup>21</sup> I am using the word “positions” with reference to the work of Pierre Bourdieu. In his book *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu suggests that cultural fields (such as French literature of the late nineteenth century or, in this case, rock and pop music of the late 1970s) may be understood in terms of the interaction between the available “positions,” which can be understood as the genres (e.g. novel, song, etc.) or roles (e.g. painter, electric guitarist, etc.) available to artists, and the “position-takings,” which are the products or “manifestations” that agents create that either conform to or challenge/disrupt the previously available positions. See Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 16-17, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Bayton, *Frock Rock*, 10-11, 26. As I have already indicated, one notable exception is the abundance of all-women swing groups from the 1940s, who have been erased from most jazz histories. See Tucker, *Swing Shift*.

<sup>23</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock 'n' Roll* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 230-2.

between a series of female archetypes,” such as the mother, the whore, the ice queen, and the androgyne.<sup>24</sup> The problem with the idea that female musicians navigate preordained pantomime identities, however, is that it implies female musicians are, even in creative fields, demanded to assume an identifiable, nameable position in order to be recognised, whereas the same is not demanded of male subjects. Judith Butler would argue, however, that male identity is similarly a product of “iterability,” that is, a “regularised and constrained repetition of norms” through which the subject is enabled and realised.<sup>25</sup> The kinds of preordained positions for women in popular music, nevertheless, arguably form part of the technology that has excluded women from rock and hence the reason musicians such as Ana da Silva and Viv Albertine may have felt inspired by Patti Smith’s on-stage defiance or the Sex Pistols’ musical scruffiness.

Reynolds and Press refer to the female musicians of the post-punk era specifically as the “post-punk demystification” set. This group comprised, but was not limited to, the Slits, the Raincoats, Au Pairs, and Delta 5.<sup>26</sup> Reynolds and Press argue that this particular group of musicians (almost all of whom belonged to mixed-gender groups, even if their earliest incarnations were as exclusively female bands) sung about or “demystified” hitherto taboo subjects such as sex, menstruation, female masturbation, being followed home, rape, eating disorders, domestic banalities, and anxieties about physical appearances. This open exploration of such topics, as well as the assumption of new positions as guitarists, bassists, and drummers, was arguably stirred by or was an articulation of the tenets of second-wave feminism. The idea that women’s personal lives were political, owing to the way in which many aspects of women’s

<sup>24</sup> Reynolds and Press, 233, 291-306. See also Frith and Horne’s more nuanced argument about these pantomime images in which they suggest that, by wearing these personae all at once, women punk artists drew attention to their absurdity. Frith and Horne, 155.

<sup>25</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 91.

<sup>26</sup> For a complete list of the women musicians and bands included in Reddington’s study see Reddington, 8. Indeed, the artists that Reynolds and Press have chosen to include may reflect their anti-pop biases, as identified by Reddington, 115.

lives bore the traces of internalised, systemic misogyny, was of course an integral principle to this movement. Indeed, Bayton has suggested that punk's DIY aesthetic was not the only factor that contributed to the increased number of female musicians, but that second-wave feminism exerted a significant influence because it encouraged women to move into hitherto male-dominated terrain and to assume hitherto male-associated positions.<sup>27</sup>

However, interviews with members of both the Raincoats and the Slits from the 1970s and early 1980s suggest that these two particular groups chose to distance themselves from the feminist movement. When asked about the prospect of the Raincoats playing a then-forthcoming "Women in Rock" concert in which every band was either an all-female band or had at least one female member, da Silva expressed that she had "mixed feelings" about the prospect, stating that she did not "like the idea of putting male and female groups into separate categories." On the one hand, da Silva valued the idea of "[showing] people that there are a lot of girls in rock bands," but, on the other hand, stressed that she "[hated] all this feminist idea."<sup>28</sup> Having recently returned from giving a series of concerts in Poland, da Silva also remarked that audiences in the UK seemed to be comparatively more fixated on the idea of gender than those abroad:

... straight after we had done a gig in Reading [UK] the other night, a girl came up to us and said, "You were quite good for a girls' band." I mean either you're good or you're bad, it shouldn't matter what sex you are. I really loved the way that Poly Styrene of X-Ray Spex shaved off all her hair as a kind of anti-glamour stand. Glamour has always been an over-exaggerated cliché, anyway.<sup>29</sup>

Da Silva's reflection on the Raincoats concert in Reading, as well as the disregard for what she calls "all this feminist idea," raises at least two important issues. First of all, in a similar vein to Paton's comments about the 1976 Smith concert, the female audience member's surprise that the Raincoats' were "quite good for girls" is an illustration of the internalisation of (male-

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<sup>27</sup> Bayton, *Frock Rock*, 68-73.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

produced) rock discourse's mistrust of women's playing abilities, which is inadvertently reinforced by the persistent, more recent tendency to frame female rock musicians in terms of punk's DIY aesthetic. Secondly, the fact that da Silva admired musician Poly Styrene's "anti-glamour" head-shaving reinforces the argument that post-punk's women were invested in the idea of "demystification," which can also be construed as an implicitly feminist stance, even if the Raincoats choose to reject the label "feminist."

The reasons why the Raincoats chose to distance themselves from what da Silva called the "feminist idea" may have been a result of certain public stereotypes about feminism or the women's movement that circulated at the time. According to Debra Baker Beck, the women's movement "was basically ignored by the mainstream press with the exception of a few high-profile incidents such as the protest of the 1968 Miss America pageant." The image of the feminist as a "bra-burner" emerged from these protests, during which, according to Beck, "a few protest participants did throw some bras into a trash can. However, no lingerie was singed."<sup>30</sup> Back in the UK, the public may have derived their perceptions about feminism from the demonstrations that accompanied the 1969 Miss World competition. Publications such as *Spare Rib*, the UK's longest-running feminist magazine, founded in 1972, also provided a point of reference for contemporary understandings of feminism. According to Joanne Hollows, *Spare Rib* adopted a stricter socialist-feminist identity after 1975 and defined itself in opposition to lifestyles that its contributors considered not feminist, such as domestic consumerism.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, as Reddington has illustrated, many female musicians on the punk scene saw the

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<sup>30</sup> Debra Baker Beck, "The 'F' Word: How the Media Frame Feminism," *NWSA Journal* 10/1 (1998): 142. See also Susan Faludi who has also noted that the bra-burning incident is a myth in *Backlash: the Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Crown, 1991), 75-7.

<sup>31</sup> Joanne Hollows, "Spare Rib, Second-Wave Feminism and the Politics of Consumption," *Feminist Media Studies* 13/2 (May 2013): esp. 269-72, 281. Tucker has also noted how the women's movement in the US came under attack during the 1970s and 1980s from "women of color, working-class women, lesbians, and other women excluded from the narrow confines of white middle-class US women's experience." See Tucker, 168.

punk men as close allies, as boyfriends, as friends, and as musical mentors.<sup>32</sup> This presents another reason why performers such as da Silva may have been suspicious of what she perceived as “feminism’s” attempt to promote or entrench gender segregation.

The Slits (the Raincoats’ London contemporaries) were also keen to assert their disregard for the feminist movement, or at least the label “feminism.” In a 1977 interview with the band, music journalist Kris Needs introduced the topic of gender with the following words: “There’ve been girl members in male groups but never before has a group of girls like this come along and threatened the male domination of rock.” Yet, Needs continued, “the Slits are determined not to get involved with the feminist women’s lib stance,” noting how the band had recently turned down an interview with *Spare Rib*.<sup>33</sup> The band’s lead guitarist, Albertine, declared outright, “We don’t want to do all that feminist stuff.” Echoing da Silva, she argued that the kind of feminism purveyed by *Spare Rib* was “discrimination” since the magazine “shouldn’t have just girl groups in there” and compared *Spare Rib* to “those yank magazines” that have the “girlie issue.”<sup>34</sup> From the Slits’ perspective, then, the problem with explicitly feminist-labelled events and publications was less to do with being pro-equality, but more to do with the idea of what the band perceived as entrenching the already-in-place segregation between male musicians and female musicians. The US publications with the special “Women in Rock”-style issues and magazines such as *Spare Rib* arguably served to further embed the exceptional status that women rock musicians were accorded at the time by both fans and critics.

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<sup>32</sup> Reddington, 32-3.

<sup>33</sup> Kris Needs, “The Slits,” *ZigZag*, August/July 1977, 20. Reddington has also cited a 1976 letter from a female reader to *Sounds* magazine in which the letter-writer expresses an interest in playing the electric guitar. Significantly the writer seems to have found it necessary to disassociate herself from the women’s liberation movement, stating, “I’m no women’s libber.” The Raincoats’ and the Slits’ attitude therefore appears to have been part of a more widespread distrust of the feminist movement amongst young women who were interested in rock and punk. See Reddington, 24.

<sup>34</sup> Needs, “The Slits,” 20.

Like the Raincoats, however, the Slits professed an attitude, communicated in their songs as well as in interviews, which did nevertheless accord with feminist principles. They criticised the “conditioning” effect that teen magazines had on young women, for example, and they took a dim view of the kind of “typical guy who wants to have the woman under his thumb like his housewife and all that.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, even though both the Slits and the Raincoats resisted the labels “feminist” and “women’s lib,” and were sceptical of all-female rock events and publications such as *Spare Rib*, the kinds of principles or ideas that their songs communicated suggested a broadly feminist sensibility. These bands were most likely reacting to a public stereotype about what feminism was, not the movement’s aims or theoretical concerns.

### ***The Slits***

The music journalist discussed above, Kris Needs, was in fact one of the Slits’ biggest media proponents. His features on the Slits, which appeared in monthly UK music magazine *ZigZag*, followed the band from their earliest incarnations until at least the release of their first record, *Cut*, in the summer of 1979. Needs’ writing projected an awareness of the extent to which, in his words, the Slits, as an all-women group, may have seemed like a “novelty.” He chose, however, to see the Slits’ presence on the new wave/punk scene as something that had the potential to “threaten the male domination of rock.”<sup>36</sup> The opening commentaries to his interviews with the band were always enthusiastic and yet, at the same time, he sometimes seemed to be overcompensating for the fact that the Slits were (in their earliest days) an all-

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

female group.<sup>37</sup> For example, in a description not unrelated to Paton's disappointment that Smith relied on her "freak originality" rather than her musicianship, Needs wrote:

The Slits are out there on their own, proving almost singlehandedly that girls can form a group and *play hard, vital music without relying on their attributes* to get away with *musical murder* [my emphases].<sup>38</sup>

Anticipating dismissal on the grounds of the group's gender, Needs asserted that the Slits "can play" and do not "get away with musical murder." Furthermore, Needs' insistence that the Slits play "hard music" could be interpreted as participating in what Norma Coates has called the "technology" that "reinforces and reinscribes" the idea that rock is a masculine genre.<sup>39</sup> That is to say, Needs used the word "hard" in a way that is comparable to using the word "rock" as a verb (as in, "these girls rock") and therefore implied, just in case anyone was worried, that the Slits can play as "hard" as men.<sup>40</sup> The word "hard" also implies a degree of physical strength and stamina that may be assumed to be lacking in female musicians (especially female drummers) not to mention the images of masculine virility that the word "hard" also invokes.

In addition to highlighting the Slits' tacit accordance with the male-gendered expectations of rock (playing "hard, vital music") and thereby abating a (male) reader's instinct to dismiss them, Needs also drew attention to the Slits' gender by noting that they compose, "strong, personal songs." As Bonnie Gordon has argued in her work on 1990s singer-songwriter Tori Amos, the idea that women are more inclined to write personal songs has meant that the

<sup>37</sup> The Slits were in fact only an all-female group until 1979 when their drummer Palmolive (Paloma McLardy) left and was replaced by male drummer Budgie (Peter Edward Clarke). This will be discussed in more detail shortly.

<sup>38</sup> Needs, "The Slits," 18. Needs also stresses the Slits' ability to play "hard" in a later article from January 1978. See Needs, "The Slits: School Hall 5pm-5p," *ZigZag*, January 1978, 31.

<sup>39</sup> Coates is using the word "technology" in the Foucauldian sense; the word denotes the systems and processes through which power replicates itself. In this case it refers to the hegemony of the masculine encoding of the rock genre. See Norma Coates, "(R)Evolution Now? Rock and the Political Potential of Gender," in *Sexing the Groove*, ed. Whiteley, 52-4.

<sup>40</sup> The image of folk music specifically as one of the few genres available to women was in fact echoed by Slits' guitarist Albertine, who remarked in 1979 that Chrissie Hynde was the first woman to show women "they could play guitar without being a 'wimpy folkie.'" Quoted in Vivien Goldman, "What's So Good About Natural Primitivism?" *Melody Maker*, September 8, 1979, 36.

media has often given female song writers the (negative) label “confessional,” a label that not only alludes to the emotional and introspective content of a song by a female composer, but also subtly criticises an approach to song writing that provides “too much information” about the kinds of issues I discussed earlier (such as menstruation, masturbation, sex, and rape). The vocalisation of such topics can, furthermore, be considered as participating in a broadly feminist political agenda.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Needs’ description of the Slits’ music as “personal” may have also been a reference to the “personal is political” slogan associated with second-wave feminism.

The way in which Needs discussed the Slits’ musicianship also exemplifies the kind of double bind that punk’s non-virtuoso, amateurish aesthetic presented for female musicians of the era. Even though Needs was positive about the Slits’ presence on the new wave or punk scene, his comments about the band’s grasp of rock parlance also appear to have been gendered. He remarked, for example, “you know they can improve, which they are in leaps and bounds when their equipment works and the sound is right,” and concluded his interview with the band with, “What the Slits need is their own sound mixer, who knows the songs and can get the balance which’ll bring out the best in the songs.”<sup>42</sup> The Slits were most likely not the only (post-) punk band of the late 1970s whose live concerts were besmirched on account of their poor sound. Needs’ comments, however, although well intended, take on the tone of condescension, especially given the way in which women have traditionally felt alienated from the technical side of music production, and given that the “sound mixer” was likely to have been a “sound man.” As Bayton has suggested with regard specifically to the comparative dearth of female electric guitarists, women instrumentalists have often been affected by “the ‘black-box-with-chrome-

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<sup>41</sup> Bonnie Gordon, “Tori Amos’ Inner Voices,” in *Women’s Voices Across Musical Worlds*, ed. Jane A Bernstein (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 192-4. Bayton has also discussed the kinds of topics that appear in punk and post-punk women’s songs. See Bayton, *Frock Rock*, 66.

<sup>42</sup> Needs, “The Slits,” 21.

knobs' syndrome," that owes not to an intellectual deficiency but to female musician's lack of familiarity with and access to certain kinds of sound equipment, as well as the jargon that often unnecessarily mystifies such "boxes."<sup>43</sup> It is probable that the Slits knew that the sound at their live performances was bad but perhaps did not have the necessary jargon needed in order to request for it to be changed.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, Needs reports that the Slits' performances would sometimes "screech to a halt" because their lead singer, Ari Up, "can't hear the guitar," which is about as technical as one needs to be when asking for the balance to be adjusted during a live performance.<sup>45</sup>

By suggesting that the Slits "can improve" in "leaps and bounds" Needs was also highlighting the Slits' (lack of) skill as musicians. The drummer, Palmolive, was reported to have been playing "high-speed metronomic jungle drums" but significantly had not "been playing for more than a year." The group's bassist, Tessa Pollitt, had only "learnt the bass two weeks before."<sup>46</sup> By noting the short amount of time that Palmolive and Pollitt had been playing their instruments Needs could be interpreted as doing two things. First, he was foregrounding an essential characteristic of punk, its conspicuous amateurism.<sup>47</sup> But secondly, Needs often sounds as though he was apologising for the Slits' shaky musicianship. As I discussed in chapter one, other post-punk bands did not have formal musical training, such as Wire, who came to music from studying visual arts (like many rock musicians), and whose song "Practice Makes Perfect" foregrounded their novice musical skills. Similarly, just as the Raincoats had an audience

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<sup>43</sup> Bayton, "Women and the Electric Guitar," 42.

<sup>44</sup> An interesting anecdote from bassist Gaye Black confirms this speculation, at least with regards to her own experience of not having the right (male) jargon. She tells Reddington that she was always frustrated by her bass sound, how it never sounded the way she wanted it to, because she did not know "technically" how to ask for it to be adjusted. See Reddington, 62.

<sup>45</sup> Needs, "The Slits," 19.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>47</sup> Coon, "Rebels Against the System," and Jones, "But Does Nihilism."

participation-style song called “Instrumental in E,”<sup>48</sup> Bernard Sumner and Peter Hook of Joy Division practiced their instruments by spending hours just playing E. Both of these “performances” (“Instrumental in E” and playing E) may refer to the process of teaching oneself guitar by starting with the first (lowest) string.<sup>49</sup> The point is that musical amateurism in punk and post-punk was not confined to the all- or predominantly female groups but was a salient characteristic of the genre as a whole. But, as Reddington has noted, amateurism in the women’s bands was either more conspicuous or interpreted negatively.<sup>50</sup>

The Slits’ drummer, Palmolive (Paloma McLardy), whose “high-speed metronomic jungle drums” were a significant characteristic of the Slits’ early sound, left the group before the band had signed to Island Records and recorded their debut LP, *Cut*, in the summer of 1979. A male drummer known as Budgie (Peter Edward Clarke) replaced Palmolive. Although Palmolive purportedly left for political reasons—feeling more at home with the small label ethos of the neighbouring Raincoats, whom she joined after she left the Slits—according to Needs, Palmolive’s drumming “wasn’t up to the increasingly stringent demands imposed on it by the Slits’ wildly rhythmic new songs.” After asserting that Budgie was “Obviously … technically better than Palmolive,” he asked the remaining members, “but do you reckon he’s made a lot of difference to the band?” Both Up and Albertine affirmed that Budgie had made a “musical” difference to the band in the sense that they were able to “experiment more” because “he [could] keep the beat.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Anger, 36.

<sup>49</sup> See Bernard Sumner in “Joy Division—The Documentary,” YouTube video, 1:35:44, posted by Mathieu Guillien, July 17, 2012, accessed February 10, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1qQsHGHi8w>.

<sup>50</sup> Reddington, 21-2.

<sup>51</sup> Needs, “The Slits—Now,” *ZigZag*, April 1979, 7. For more on the role played by John Peel and his colleague John Walters, particularly concerning their promotion of the Slits and Siouxsie and the Banshees, see Reddington, 57.

But Needs' framing of Palmolive's involvement with and then departure from the Slits presents something of a paradox. On the one hand, the Slits were part of a movement (punk) that was characterised by the way in which notions of conventional musicianship were thrown into question, as evidenced by Albertine's reaction to the fact that the Sex Pistols were not a virtuoso group. On the other hand, both Needs and the remaining members of the Slits considered Palmolive's limited musical capabilities as a restriction and she was replaced. Furthermore, in this particular case, the dynamics of musical skill are gendered in such a way that re-inscribe essentialist ideas about the difference between male and female musicianship in the rock idiom; Palmolive was replaced by a (more competent) male drummer.<sup>52</sup> This change of personnel from Palmolive to Budgie, from female drummer to male drummer, also coincided with a change of genre for the Slits, from punk to post-punk.

The difference between the two drummers' playing styles can be illustrated by analysing two different performances of what is ostensibly the same song: "Newtown," recorded with Palmolive for a 1977 session on John Peel's BBC Radio 1 show (a radio show on which many punk and post-punk bands performed), and which was also recorded with Budgie for *Cut*, their 1979 LP.<sup>53</sup> Up's vocal melody is effectively the same in both performances, as is the basic idea for the backing vocals. But most other aspects of the song have changed. On the LP version, produced by dub producer Dennis Bovell, the texture is enriched with the addition of occasional organ and piano parts. The LP version also includes sampled-sounds, including (what sounds like) the shaking of a box of matches, the striking of a match and dropping a spoon, all of which

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<sup>52</sup> The fact that the drums are particularly male-gendered undoubtedly introduces ideas of the body and physicality into the discussion. For a critique of the gendering of physical or bodily skill see Iris Marion Young, *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>53</sup> For the 1977 version of "Newtown," see "The Slits—Peel Session 1977," YouTube video, 9:41, posted by Vibracobra XXIII, December 1, 2013, accessed February 21, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3E-9gceMQgA>.

are sounds that accord with the song's overall message, which equates innocuous-seeming pleasures such as reading the newspaper and following a football team with getting a heroin fix. Albertine's guitar part is also quite different, having switched from playing mostly power chords in the 1977 Peel session to playing single, high-register punches on the second half of beat four in every other measure on the LP version.

One of the most striking aspects of the song that has changed, however, is the rhythmic groove. The bass line is the same in both the 1977 and 1979 versions; but in the 1979 version, Pollitt (the bass player) turns her bass part into a line that develops additively. On the 1977 version, however, the bass line is a continuously looping A-minor pentatonic, two-measure phrase that doesn't quite "feel right" because it begins and ends with the repetition of the same two pitches, C-A (see Ex. 4.1). On the LP version, however, the bass line has been broken up so that a quarter note is added every two measures. Beginning with C in measure one then adding C-A in measure three, and so on and so forth (see Ex. 4.2). The bass line is therefore not heard in its entirety until Up's vocal line comes in at approximately 0:22.

**Ex. 4.1** The drums, percussion, electric guitar, and bass part to the 1977 John Peel version of the Slits' song "Newtown" with Palmolive on drums, mm. 1-9. Arrows indicate instances of the drummer and bassist speeding up.

The musical score consists of three staves of music. The top staff is for Electric Guitar, the middle for Bass Guitar, and the bottom for Drum Set. The score is divided into three sections, each with a different arrangement of instruments. Arrows point to specific measures where the drummer and bassist are speeding up.

The drumming in the two performances is also very different. As Example 4.1 illustrates, Palmolive favours alternating between the floor-tom plus kick drum, and the snare drum (a quarter-note each and then two eighth-notes each), although her drum part is complicated by the sound of continuous sixteenth notes (emanating from an unclear, drum-like source, which is indicated on the third staff) that produce an additional percussive line (see Ex. 4.1). Budgie's drumming on the LP version is, however, more syncopated and intricate. His part includes off beats on the hi-hat, and a snare part (with the snare disengaged) that involves more elaborate subdivisions and arguably more dexterity owing to the use of "ghost" notes (see Ex. 4.2). The

1979 version with Budgie also has a stronger reggae character than the 1977 Palmolive version. Needs had in fact noted how Budgie's drumming gave the band "a new rhythmic treatment" that brought the group "galloping much closer to the girls' beloved reggae."<sup>54</sup> Not only is Budgie's drumming in this song more redolent of the reggae style, but it is also more in time, since Palmolive and Pollitt tend to speed up on the eighth-note passages in the 1977 version (as indicated by the arrows over the eighth notes in Ex. 4.1).

**Ex. 4.2** The drum and bass parts to be the beginning of the album version of the Slits' song "Newtown" with Budgie on drums. The tempo is approximately 92 beats per minute.<sup>55</sup>

The question is, then, how does the Slits' change of drummers from Palmolive to Budgie bear on discussions of female musicianship in rock-based genres and how does this issue intersect with questions of genre? As I indicated earlier, Palmolive possibly left the Slits for reasons other than the fact that the other three members may have been dissatisfied with her playing. Nevertheless, I would argue that Palmolive and many of the Slits' earlier more amateur-sounding recordings rose to the DIY challenge of punk, by exhibiting or performing a strong degree of amateurism. As exemplified by the 1977 Peel version of "Newtown," the instrumental parts were simple and delivered haphazardly. Their later recordings, however, as illustrated by

<sup>54</sup> Needs, "The Slits—Now," 6.

<sup>55</sup> The drum notation is as before (F kick drum, A floor tom, and C snare), but in this performance the snare is disengaged. The crosses on the G line indicate the closed hi-hat and the diamond-shaped note heads on the G line indicate the open hi-hat.

the 1979 version of “Newtown” from *Cut*, were more polished and showed more intricate attention to detail. It could be argued therefore that the Slits’ transition from Palmolive to Budgie marks a turn in genre: from punk to post-punk, from a rough amateurish DIY style to a reggae-inflected, more polished performance with a solid groove.

What is significant, however, is that this transition from one genre to another was accompanied by the replacement of Palmolive by Budgie, a female drummer by a male drummer. Of course, Palmolive does not represent the epitome of female musicianship, but while her amateurish drumming may have been acceptable in the punk genre, it is not “acceptable” or legible in the post-punk genre. Furthermore, when reviewing the Slits post-Palmolive material, journalists such as John Orme at *Melody Maker* suggested that it was producer Bovell’s “wisdom” that had brought the Slits’ music to full fruition. “The tireless patience of producer/control-king Dennis Bovell,” wrote Orme, “has freed depths of musical resource that only the Slits’ most ardent admirers would have recognised.” Orme concludes that *Cut* was a record that the Slits and Bovell had “made together,” but he nevertheless implied that a significant amount of creative control was in Bovell’s hands.<sup>56</sup> Thus the Slits’ turn from punk to post-punk, from a more amateurish playing style to more polished performances, was accompanied by the incorporation of male members and contributors, whom critics such as Orme saw as integral to realising the Slits’ creative vision and moving them beyond punk. Despite replacing Palmolive with Budgie, and despite the fact that journalists such as Orme put Bovell in the role of the clear-headed genius come to sort out the women’s “rabble,” the Slits remained an all-female-identified group, keenly emphasising that drummer Budgie was “not a full-time”

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<sup>56</sup> For more on Bovell’s role on *Cut* see John Orme, “‘Cut’ (album review),” *Melody Maker*, September 1, 1979, 23. This article is also noteworthy for the gendered dynamics between Bovell (male producer) and the Slits (female musicians) that it implicitly communicates.

Slit.<sup>57</sup> At the heart of this complex gender-genre relation is one of the main issues concerning the implicit definition of post-punk as a genre: post-punk should be *different* from punk, but this difference can be at the level of sonic characteristics or social identity. The fact that the Slits “progressed” to more complicated, non-punk music and were still female-identified means that they have “qualified” for post-punk, whereby their gender functions as a kind of cultural capital.

### ***Lora Logic***

The way in which the Slits’ groove became male-associated as they moved from punk to post-punk, from a female drummer to a male drummer, was also something that occurred with other post-punk bands. What is more, the male-gendering of rhythm and groove in post-punk influenced the way in which critics understood post-punk women’s creativity. In her work on female musicians in the Montréal independent music scene, Vanessa Blais-Tremblay has observed that in certain indie rock scenes there exists a pervasive assumption or prejudice that women cannot “groove.”<sup>58</sup> Indeed, it is not uncommon to encounter descriptions of female musicians who have been described as having no sense of rhythm. John Cale of the Velvet Underground famously said that giving Nico a tambourine to play was a terrible decision because of her “unique” (read: poor) sense of rhythm.<sup>59</sup> Such a gendering of rhythm and groove can also be traced in descriptions of music by post-punk vocalist and tenor saxophone-player, Lora Logic. Richard Cook’s review of Logic’s 1982 solo album, *Pedigree Charm*, credits the male rhythm section with taming Logic’s excessive femininity:

Perhaps the credit can be claimed by [band] This Heat’s Charles Hayward on drums and the guitars of Phil Legg; their no-nonsense refusal to be led down the

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<sup>57</sup> Needs, “The Slits—Now,” 8.

<sup>58</sup> Vanessa Blais-Tremblay, “‘Montre moi c’que t’as dans les culottes!’ A Review of the Scholarly Literature on Gender and Groove” (unpublished paper; McGill University 2011). See also Ingrid T. Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>59</sup> Richard Witts, *Nico: the Life and Lies of an Icon* (London: Virgin, 1993), 140.

blind tunnels in Logic’s palindromic set of songs keeps things in shape while staying chipper enough to negotiate all the sharp bends and angularities.<sup>60</sup>

As in Orme’s review of *Cut*, in which he argued that Bovell had been the one to bring out the Slits’ hidden talents, Cook seems to suggest that, left to her own devices, Logic’s music would be structurally and rhythmically wayward, perhaps even “nonsense.” Throughout his review, Cook also draws on the tropes of woman-as-nature and woman-as-chaos, presenting Logic as a siren or witch-like creature who is in danger of leading the male rhythm section down “blind tunnels.” Logic’s amateurism appears therefore to be a kind of excess; an unwanted spilling over that the male rhythm section must contain, even though, as indicated above, amateurism was purportedly valued in punk.

Indeed, listening closely to one of the songs that Cook praises on *Pedigree Charm*, “Brute Fury,” one might hear a simplistic gender binary in the song’s texture. The song opens with a minimalist-sounding chorus of three tenor saxophones, which begin by playing homorhythmically but break out into a quasi-canon. These parts are presumably played and over-dubbed by Logic herself. Following the opening saxophone chorus, Hayward and Legg’s tight disco groove fades in. Then, juxtaposed against this bouncy disco-funk backing, two tenor saxophones (presumably over-dubbed by Logic) accompany Logic’s double-tracked vocal. The two saxophones play different, at times dissonant, ostinato-like melodies, which provide counterpoint to Logic’s vocal (see Ex. 4.3). Logic’s sax-voice polyphony therefore contrasts Hayward and Legg’s tight rhythm playing. Based on Cook’s review, we might argue that Logic’s polyphonic, chaotic-seeming amateurish excess is tamed by strict, on-beat male musicianship.

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<sup>60</sup> Richard Cook, “Where’s the Logic in That Then?” *New Musical Express*, March 6, 1982, 33.

**Ex. 4.3** The vocal part for the chorus section of “Brute Fury” by Lora Logic, accompanied by two tenor saxophones. This section can be heard at 0:49 – 1:24 on the album *Pedigree Charm*.

vib.

Fu - ry, \_\_\_\_\_

brute fu - ry -

They could-n't find the

vib.

ans-wers

They could-n't find the

ans-wers

Fu - ry, \_\_\_\_\_

brute

vib.

fu - ry -

They could-n't find the

ans-wers

They could-n't find the

vib.

ans-wers

That they want-ed to

That they want-ed to

But, as I suggested, this interpretation of “Brute Fury” wherein Logic represents the wayward polyphonic free spirit and Hayward-Legg represent the rhythmic grounding of the song relies on essentialism and re-inscribes a simple gender binary, drawn from discursive tropes that have emphasised women’s “lack of” rhythm. It is therefore more productive to see the song in terms of genre and look at the way in which the post-punk genre provided a space for women to self-consciously and self-assuredly “perform” (in the Butlerian sense) amateurism as an articulation of empowerment or resistance against the historical disciplining of women’s bodies and voices. As I discussed with reference to PiL’s “Death Disco” in the previous chapter, it was a characteristic of post-punk music to fuse a disco groove with more improvisatory, chaotic seeming, punk melodic elements. In “Death Disco,” John Lydon screeched over a frantic disco beat. Notably, the lyrics to “Death Disco” also ran contrary to disco’s mainstream, hedonistic connotations, with their evocations of Lydon’s mother’s death. Similarly, Logic’s lyrics in the song’s B-section of “Brute Fury” (see Ex. 4.4) may be interpreted as describing a domestic scenario and as articulating a feminist politics since Logic appears to be singing, sarcastically and with faux empathy, about her (male) partner’s inability to control his temper. Both Lydon and Logic, therefore, brought “alien” subject matter (death and male oppression) into the “hegemonic” language of disco.<sup>61</sup>

**Ex. 4.4** Lyrics for the verse or B-section in “Brute Fury” by Lora Logic.

And my empire cries x2  
 That he has a temper, a temper, a temper  
 And now he has a headache  
 If only he’d been stronger, and wiser, and stronger  
 That he has a headache  
 If only they’d been calmer, and kinder, and calmer  
 Now he has a headache

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<sup>61</sup> I problematize the notion of disco as a hegemonic, mainstream genre in chapter three by illustrating how it occupied a paradoxical position.

Another problem with gendering the groove in these post-punk examples is the way in which such an interpretation overlooks women from other genres whose drumming or sense of rhythm was more conventional or more sophisticated. Although active in more pop-associated music, Karen Carpenter is another example of a contemporaneous female drummer who was not only more adept than the post-punk women (owing, in part, to the fact that she belonged to a different, non-punk genre), but whose performances also exhibited the tensions associated with female drummers and the assumption of hitherto masculine-associated instruments.<sup>62</sup>

The mid-1970s saw Carpenter perform a number of televised novelty-style drum “workshops.” The workshops were intended to showcase Carpenter’s drumming and narrate the story of how she came to learn and acquire the instrument. The drums were Carpenter’s preferred instrument: thus the fact that she was presented or made to perform as a singer exemplifies the way in which her voice and body—her mode of musical expression—were disciplined to accord with strict gender norms. Carpenter’s anorexia and early death further illustrate conservative culture’s, in this case, fatal demands. As such, the television “workshops” function as a testament to the perceived deviant nature of Carpenter’s affinity for and deftness with such a male-associated instrument. Carpenter’s skills are framed as a novelty and comments in the narration, delivered by her brother Richard Carpenter, highlighted the extent to which women have been systematically excluded from such male-gendered activities. Richard’s commentaries included sound bites such as “girls don’t play drums” and, in the footage Karen seems to be palpably frustrated at being made to perform in such an obvious novelty fashion.<sup>63</sup> The fact that Karen

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<sup>62</sup> Significantly, Carpenter was cited by one of Reddington’s punk interviewees as an inspiration and as somebody who made playing the drums look “fun.” See Reddington, 30.

<sup>63</sup> See for example, “The Karen Carpenter Drum Workshop,” YouTube video, 6:22, posted by MagikMakyll, June 29, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9IagAg7u5M>, accessed January 4, 2015; and “Karen Carpenter Drum Solo—1976 First Television Special,” YouTube video, 5:42, posted by CrescentNoon, March 17, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdHyzGXAJPg>, accessed January 4, 2015.

purveyed pop and soft rock, also meant that her role as a drummer was even more outside the norm, owing to the way in which gender norms are more rigorously maintained and policed in those genres than they were in punk or post-punk.

### ***The Raincoats***

The gendering of the rhythm section that may be gleaned from my discussions of the Slits, Lora Logic, and Karen Carpenter, was also evident in discussions of the Raincoats' music. One important difference, however, is the way in which some critics saw the post-punk women's unconventional musical skills (or lack thereof) as one of their most appealing features. In August 1978, journalist Neil Spencer, for example, described how his expectations of the Slits did not match his experience of hearing and seeing them perform live. He expected a standard punk group, but heard something rather different: "It was my first and (admittedly late) Slits gig, and I was expecting some trashy 3-chord dole queue ramalama dressed in shocking pink female guise." But Spencer in fact heard a group who had "evolved a long way from the primal punk mud of '76" and whose "musical naivety perhaps encourages a refreshing willingness to explore new forms."<sup>64</sup> The idea that the Slits' lack of familiarity or command of generic conventions opened new musical vistas is an idea that has also surfaced in discussions about the Raincoats, the group that Palmolive joined after she left the Slits. A *ZigZag* interview with the Raincoats in 1980 described their live performances as follows:

To see the Raincoats on stage for the first time is to see beauty emerge out of *apparent chaos*. I mean, they all seem to *start at different times* and they all seem to be playing something different, and the *rhythm never seems to stay constant* for half a minute at a time, and it's not your average everyday platic (sic) mac sort of rhythm to start off with.

But then, if you listen, everything suddenly clicks into place, and you realise how remarkable it really is. Careful thought that develops inspiration rather than being

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<sup>64</sup> Neil Spencer, "Some Girls Do It Pretty Good," *New Musical Express*, August 12, 1978, 43.

a heavy-handed substitute for it. An *abandonment of the traditional rock structures* that, unlike with a good many other bands, does not lead to tedium and superficial would-be freakiness (my emphasis).<sup>65</sup>

This *ZigZag* commentary on the Raincoats' live performances indicates two significant things: the band's music displayed a lack of or an irreverence for rock conventions, and this in turn inaugurated new approaches to playing rock and punk. In the section that follows I outline how the Raincoats' music may have at times sounded like "apparent chaos." I also identify some of the ways in which they "abandoned rock structures," and whether or not this presented a challenge to certain "masculine" musical codes.

The Raincoats' song "Adventures Close to Home" from their 1979 self-titled LP is one of their least conventional-sounding songs, and it exhibits a number of the characteristics that were described in the 1980 *ZigZag* review cited above. Rather than trying to hear the song as having continuous groove, the structure of the song might be better understood as being divided into blocks or units that each have their own rhythmic profile. The effect of these juxtaposed rhythmic units is one in which, recalling the above review, "the rhythm never seems to stay constant." The first groove is established with the bass guitar and rhythm guitar. The bass plays straight eighth notes that are punctuated by the rhythm guitarists' quasi-reggae "skank," alternating measure-by-measure between areas D major and B minor. After a two full measures of this bass and rhythm groove, Palmolive enters with her idiosyncratic tom playing: a very on-beat pattern beginning with a group of sixteenth notes (see Ex. 4.5).

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<sup>65</sup> "In A Warm Kitchenette with the Raincoats," *ZigZag*, May 1980, 19.

**Ex. 4.5** “Adventures Close to Home” by the Raincoats, mm. 4-6

The musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is for the Electric Guitar, which starts with a single eighth note. The second staff is also for the Electric Guitar, showing a continuous eighth-note chord pattern. The third staff is for the Bass Guitar, featuring eighth-note patterns. The bottom staff is for the Drum Set, showing a steady eighth-note bass line. The time signature is 4/4, and the key signature is one sharp.

This opening groove breaks off at measure seven as the vocal part enters and the first verse begins with the lyrics, “Passion that shouts, I’m red with anger.” The syncopated groove that was established at the beginning changes here: the rhythm guitar becomes more difficult to hear, but nevertheless mirrors the kind of rhythmic pattern played by all of the instruments, including the bass, which has changed from playing continuous eighth notes (see Example 4.5) to playing a line that is rhythmically similar to both the vocal line and, to some extent, the lead guitar line. In other words, all of the parts (vocal, electric guitars, bass, and drums) are characterised by the same rhythm pattern: a lilting rhythm that emphasises the second half of beat three (see Ex. 4.6).

**Ex. 4.6** “Adventures Close to Home” showing the drums, electric guitar, bass and vocalists playing a similar lilting rhythmic pattern, mm. 7-9<sup>66</sup>

Music score for Ex. 4.6 showing four staves: Voice, Electric Guitar, Bass Guitar, and Drum Set. The score is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp. The vocal line includes lyrics: "Pa - ssi-on-ate shouts I'm red with ang - er I lost my self". The electric guitar, bass guitar, and drum set provide harmonic and rhythmic support with a consistent lilting pattern.

After three measures of this pattern, the rhythmic focus shifts from lilting syncopation to a measure that almost feels as though we’re hearing two measures of 2/4, where the bass player plays exactly the same rhythm as the drummer (see Ex. 4.7).

**Ex. 4.7** “Adventures Close to Home,” m. 10

Music score for Ex. 4.7 showing four staves: Voice, Electric Guitar, Bass Guitar, and Drum Set. The score is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp. The vocal line includes lyrics: "Through all - eys of mys - ter - y". The electric guitar, bass guitar, and drum set provide harmonic and rhythmic support.

The next phrase or unit is nine beats long. In my illustration, however, I have divided this phrase into two measures, one in 4/4 and the other in 5/4, since the bass part seems to be articulating a downbeat into the measure in 5/4 (1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 5). But it could also be heard as a

<sup>66</sup> The triangulated note heads indicate a wood-block-like percussion instrument.

phrase in 9/4, especially because the drums confuse the meter by dividing the nine-beat phrase differently, into a group of 3 + 4 + 2 (Ex. 4.8).

**Ex. 4.8** “Adventures Close to Home” showing the drums, electric guitar, bass, and vocals, mm. 11-12

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is labeled 'Voice' and shows a vocal line with a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes. The middle staff is labeled 'Bass Guitar' and shows a bass line with quarter notes. The bottom staff is labeled 'Drum Set' and shows a complex rhythmic pattern with various notes and rests. The time signature changes from 9/4 to 5/4 in the middle of the measure. The lyrics 'I went up and do - wn -' and 'Like a de-ment-ed train' are written below the vocal line.

The song returns to a less ambiguous sense of 4/4 meter at measure 13 (the beginning of the chorus) with a wispy-sounding sixteenth-note cymbal roll and a chromatically ascending bass part (see Ex. 4.9) that catalyses a kind of vocal canon before the song eventually returns to the offbeat rhythmic groove heard at the beginning (see Example 4.5).

**Ex. 4.9** The chromatic bass line and return to 4/4 in “Adventures Close to Home”

The musical score shows a single bass line in 4/4 time. The bass line consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes that ascend chromatically, starting from a low note and moving up through various sharps and flats. The bass line is played on a single staff with a bass clef.

Even though, ostensibly, the Raincoats use a conventional rock structure in “Adventures Close to Home”—that is, they use verse-chorus alternation—the song’s structure is not immediately obvious nor does it sound conventional. Indeed, the song sounds more like “apparent chaos,” to recall the *ZigZag* review of the band’s live performances. This sense of “apparent chaos” owes in large part to the additive character of the song’s composition: the song seems to be assembled using brief “units” of unequal length that are each characterised by their own distinctive sense of rhythm or groove despite the fact that, interestingly enough, units one, two, and six have exactly the same drumming pattern (although it is played on different parts of the kit each time). The addition of a measure in 5/4 (or 9/4, depending on how one parses the

measures) also contributes to the song's rhythmic eccentricity. The *ZigZag* reviewer's comment that "the rhythm never seems to stay constant for half a minute at a time," when applied to this particular song, seems like a bit of an understatement: in fact, the rhythm does not remain constant for more than a few measures at a time. The particular relationship between gender and genre, and the Raincoats' unconventional approach to rhythm, are both issues that shall return to shortly.

But first, another significant aspect of "Adventures Close to Home" is the role played by the individual instruments. Unusually, in both the verse and the chorus sections, the bass, the guitar(s), and the vocal parts sound less as though they are individual voices serving a particular function or even holding down a particular role (i.e. the bass "should" support the harmony and rhythmically lock-in with the drums, and not necessarily play the same rhythm as the drummer, as we have seen in some of these examples), and more like a fractal of a single idea. As I have already indicated, for example, all of the "voices" in the verse have a similar rhythmic profile: all "aim" for the second half of the third beat (see Ex. 4.6), creating a kind of rhythmic homogeneity with only minor variations in each part. Furthermore, the pitch content of the bass line and the voice part especially are very similar in the verse, and in the chorus, the bass plays along with the vocalist(s). The bass not only functions as more of a melody instrument, therefore, but also mirrors the role of the singer(s).

This approach to "part writing" interfaces with issues of both gender and genre several ways. First of all, there is something amateur-seeming about this approach to the individual instrumental lines, a sense of "if we all play the same notes then it will sound OK." This amateurishness, furthermore, seems more extreme than other autodidact punk and post-punk musicians. Secondly, the division of instrumental roles could be heard from a feminist-political

perspective: the Raincoats' eschew the conventional sense of hierarchy associated with rock music (the lead leads, the bass supports, the vocalist sings the melody, etc.) by choosing to distribute the same basic idea amongst the band members somewhat equally. Thirdly, by abandoning punk or rock conventions, the Raincoats' music falls more easily within the eclectic ethos that has come to be associated with post-punk.

In her article, "The Raincoats: Breaking Down Punk Rock Masculinities," Caroline O'Meara acknowledges the fact that the Raincoats resisted the labels "female" and "feminist," but argues nevertheless that the Raincoats' music exhibited a broadly feminist sensibility and, therefore, seeks to unravel "how the Raincoats' interest in feminism resulted in music that questions masculine assumptions and formulations in rock music."<sup>67</sup> O'Meara argues that the Raincoats' departure from generic conventions and expectations are "crucial to an understanding of how their music can represent gender difference." She argues that the Raincoats' music "generally eschews common badges of musical masculinity" such as guitar solos or the "pounding thrusts" of a rock beat.<sup>68</sup> Drawing from Diana Fuss' notion of "reading from multiple subject positions" as a means of "dislocating our belief in stable subjects and essential meanings," O'Meara suggests that da Silva's vocal melody in their song "Fairytale in the Supermarket" produces an effect of "dizzy uncertainty." This effect, she argues, "threatens the listener's position as a subject and corresponds in direction to the deep alienation of the lyrics,"

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<sup>67</sup> "O'Meara, "Raincoats," 299. Similarly emphasising the male-female binary, Reynolds and Press argue that the Raincoats turned to "non-phallocentric" genres such as reggae in order to challenge the masculinity of rock-based musics. See Reynolds and Press, 309-10. I discuss the implicit (e)masculation of non-rock genres such as disco in more detail in chapter three of this dissertation. The gender politics and gendered meanings of reggae have yet to be extrapolated. What seems interesting, however, is the way in which Reynolds and Press implicitly disregard Jamaican culture's history of homophobia, which arguably disturbs the assumption that reggae is a "non-phallocentric" genre.

<sup>68</sup> Reynolds and Press, 306-9.

<sup>68</sup> O'Meara, 302-3.

which sarcastically frame the act of escaping into daydream in the feminine-coded space of the supermarket as a concession to prescribed gender roles and spaces.<sup>69</sup>

However, despite the fact that O'Meara is critical of essentialism, her argument seems to depend upon the idea that unpredictable melodies are an expression of some kind of feminine mystique. Therefore, rather than interpret da Silva's unpredictable singing style as an articulation of fragmented subjectivity or as a challenge to the singularity of the listener's subjecthood, then, I am more inclined to agree with O'Meara's other observation, that da Silva's unpredictable singing style bears the *generic* markers of punk. Da Silva's singing is, in fact, not only similar to John Lydon's style but also, I suggest, Mark E. Smith's quasi-slam poetry style of vocal performance heard in recordings by post-punk contemporaries the Fall. In this regard, it could be argued that O'Meara has *heard* da Silva's vocal delivery as a representation of an evasive, sprite-like femininity because da Silva is female. However, her approach can also be situated squarely within the singing style cultivated by other (male) punk and post-punk musicians.

In many ways, O'Meara's feminist analysis of the Raincoats' music echoes an argument that Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie critiqued in their 1979 essay, "Rock and Sexuality." Frith and McRobbie noted that, "[some] feminists have argued that rock is now essentially a male form of expression, that for women to make non-sexist music it is necessary to use sounds, structures, and styles that cannot be heard as rock."<sup>70</sup> In her analyses of the Raincoats, O'Meara looks at the "specific modes the band uses to represent femininity in music," modes that did not derive from the masculine-coded gestures associated with rock.<sup>71</sup> In other words, O'Meara interprets the Raincoats' rejection of the rock idiom as a feminist gesture by drawing attention to

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 308. See also Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York; Routledge, 1989).

<sup>70</sup> Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, "Music and Sexuality," in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 372.

<sup>71</sup> O'Meara, 307.

the “masculine” character of the musical codes. Similarly, the kinds of unconventional approaches to song writing heard in “Adventures Close to Home” could be heard as feminist in the sense that they are disassociated from the male language of rock. However, this interpretation depends on a limited and homogenised understanding of female identity and female musicianship. I would therefore like to look laterally at the Raincoats’ and the Slits’ generic neighbours, to their female contemporaries in other but nonetheless closely associated genres. The Raincoats’ and the Slits’ contemporaries did play masculine-coded music, so how does this problematize a reading of rock’s sounds, structures, and styles as both masculine and sexist?

### ***Lateral Comparisons: Post-Punk’s Generic Neighbours***

In his work on glam rock, Philip Auslander takes a queer-informed view of the argument that rock’s gestures have come to represent a stereotypically Western view of masculinity and an attendant misogynist politics. Auslander highlights the fact that several female musicians of the mid-1970s, such as Suzi Quatro, participated in what he (after queer scholar Jack [Judith] Halberstam) calls “female masculinity.” Auslander describes “female masculinity” as not simply the emulation of masculine-coded musical gestures but more of “a refusal on the part of masculine women to repress that aspect of themselves in favour of the masquerade of normative femininity.”<sup>72</sup> In other words, the Slits and the Raincoats’ contemporaries participated in the male-gendered rock formula in such a way that raises two issues: first) the question of whether women who played in a conventional rock style were compliant with its macho bravura and suppression of women; and secondly) how the relationship between amateurism and female musicians is peculiar to punk and not other neighbouring, rock-based genres.

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<sup>72</sup> Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 212. See also Jack (Judith) Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

The mid-1970s LA group the Runaways is one example of an all-female group who participated in the hard rock genre. The rhythmic profile of the Runaway's 1977 song "Queens of Noise," for example, features the "pounding" eighth notes that O'Meara (with reference to Robert Walser) interpreted as being male-coded.<sup>73</sup> The lyrics are simpler than the often detail-laden anecdotal and metaphorical style cultivated by the Slits, Lora Logic, or the Raincoats. "Queens of Noise" also contains an oblique reference to the lyrics of Marc Bolan's "20th Century Boy" ("20<sup>th</sup> century toy, I wanna be your boy") in its chorus, "We're the queens of noise, come and get it boys. Queens of noise, not just one of your toys." Arguably this chorus articulates defiance in the face of objectification, even if the band had a reputation as being nothing more than "jailbait," as I shall discuss shortly. "Queens of Noise" also has a limited harmonic palette that is more characteristic of the hard rock style than any songs by either the Slits or the Raincoats; it is based entirely upon power chords moving by intervals of seconds, fourths, and fifths. The band's onstage performance style also included the kind of pelvic thrusting and flying kicks that are associated with hard rock, and their clothes for some of their live performances borrowed from glam and hard rock, sporting long hair, silver jump suits, and knee-high platform boots.

It is true that these genres (hard rock and glam rock) have traditionally been associated with masculinity. This is not to say that these genres have essential masculine qualities but, rather, that they have been gendered male as a result of the predominance of male musicians that participate in these genres as well as the historically-embedded coding of certain kinds of performance theatics and musical gestures associated with these genres. The Runaways, who

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<sup>73</sup> O'Meara, 303. See also Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 1993), 109.

were influenced by Quattro,<sup>74</sup> could therefore also be said to be performing “female masculinity,” not by simply imitating their male counterparts but by refusing to repress the aspect of their identity that resonates with masculine-coded gestures.

Not insignificantly, the Slits rejected comparisons with the Runaways. When asked by Needs what they thought of their female contemporaries, Up stated that the Runaways especially were “full of shit.”<sup>75</sup> I can only speculate as to why the Slits may have found the Runaways “full of shit.” Up may have dismissed the Runaways because she did not like the music they played, which was not only in a different genre from the reggae-styled post-punk the Slits favoured, but could also be construed as an anti-feminist capitulation to and collusion with male-associated modes of musical expression. But Up may also have been aware of the Runaways’ reputation as objects of male desire, something that the so-called post-punk “demystification set” explicitly fought against in interviews and songs. In his review of a Runaways’ concert at Sheffield University in 1977, Chris Brazier wrote:

It says a lot about current attitudes to women that the only all-girl band to make it on any significant scale has been the Runaways, chosen by former mentor Kim Fowley as much for their jailbait rating as for their musical prowess.<sup>76</sup>

Brazier’s review not only highlighted the way in which the Runaways’ were objectified, but it also reminds us of the pervasive anxiety about whether or not female musicians can exhibit “musical prowess,” as I discussed with reference to Paton’s dismissal of Patti Smith’s inability to “play properly” and the recurrent references to both the Slits and the Raincoats minimal musical skill.

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<sup>74</sup> Auslander, 223-6.

<sup>75</sup> Needs, “The Slits,” 20.

<sup>76</sup> Chris Brazier, “The Runaways,” *Melody Maker*, November 19, 1977, 68. Auslander discusses the objectification of teenage girls in 1960s rock culture, which may help contextualize Brazier’s “jailbait” comment. See Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock*, 211-12.

The extent to which Brazier's comments about the members of the Runaways being chosen for their "jailbait rating" were accurate can be discerned in an interview with the band members themselves in another *Melody Maker* feature also from November 1977. In the interview with Harvey Kubernik, guitar players Lita Ford and Joan Jett discussed the recent departures of bassist Jackie Fox and singer Cherie Currie from the group, with Jett having now taken over the lead vocal responsibilities. Ford mentioned how she was "upset" because audiences and the media often failed to take the band seriously and treated them as a mere "novelty." At the same time, however, Ford also commented that Fowley (the band's male mentor) told their new bassist, Vicky Blue, to "lose weight if you wanna be in this band. No one wants to see a female version of Randy Bachman."<sup>77</sup> Fowley's insidious advice to Blue was, furthermore, contradicted by Jett who remarked in the same interview that the "band wasn't put together for sexual purposes, we play music, we give good shows and work real hard." Jett was not only palpably frustrated with the assumption that women could not play rock music but, significantly, seemed to want to position the band in relation to the emerging new wave (punk) genre, commenting that she felt "an affinity with the new wave bands" because they also "wanted to be heard" (read: rather than seen).<sup>78</sup> In other words, following their change of personnel and the departure of Currie (who journalist Brazier referred to as "more of a freak side show with her stripper's corset"), the band wanted to move towards the new wave (further corroborated by the fact that Jett is pictured in the article wearing a Sex Pistols t-shirt), which in many respects positioned itself against the rock tradition, including its conventional gender roles. What this suggests, then, is that punk, new wave, and post-punk provided a potential space for women in which they could shed their confining status as sex objects or as a novelty act.

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<sup>77</sup> Harvey Kubernik, "Catching the Runaways," *Melody Maker*, November 5, 1977, 35.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

The examples of Quatro and the Runaways demonstrate that the pathway of amateur aesthetics was not the only route into rock for female musicians of the mid-1970s. As Auslander illustrates, there was a space within hard rock and glam rock for women who wanted to perform “female masculinity.” At the same time, however, “female masculinity” did not discourage audiences and critics from seeing the band as objects or even poor musicians. Is there a better way, therefore, to understand the imbrication of female musicians with the discourse of amateurism other than stating that punk’s amateur aesthetics opened the rock field to women, or by stating that musicians who eschewed conventional notions of groove or rock structure challenged “gender-specific notions of rock”?

O’Meara’s suggestion that the Raincoats “took advantage of punk’s unskilled performances in order to shatter traditional (read: masculine) subjectivity in rock music”<sup>79</sup> inadvertently has a way of implying that the Raincoats’ music is an embodiment of (essential) female expression. This is partly because the argument overlooks some of the social conditions that contributed to the sound of the Raincoats’ music, as well as comparisons with contemporaries who did play in the “male” idiom, such as the Runaways. I therefore suggest that there are (at least) two slightly different ways of interpreting the Raincoats’ music. These two readings, furthermore, do not exclude each other and therefore may be taken together.

The first reading would be, then, that the Raincoats’ sound/music is neither simply an expression of female identity nor an expression of an explicitly feminist agenda but, rather, the sonic analogue to the technology of social relations that has historically excluded women from participating in masculine-coded music making. As Bayton has suggested regarding female electric guitarists, a lack of money, space, transport, mentors, role models, confidence, and language are just some of the factors that contribute to female musicians’ exclusion from the

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<sup>79</sup> O’Meara, 299.

rock genre.<sup>80</sup> In other words, is there a practical aspect to the sound of women's rock music that has been overlooked? That is, does the Raincoats' music sound like music made by individuals who have been systemically excluded from acquiring a familiarity with the conventions of a particular idiom?

The second reading would be to suggest that the Raincoats were familiar with rock or punk's language but chose not to employ such conventions. They chose, rather, to *perform amateurism*, in the Butlerian sense of term. In this regard, the low expectations that certain cultural gatekeepers had of women's musicianship was the necessary "constraint" that informed and contributed to the creation of amateurish performances as an aesthetic choice. If women were, in some ways, discursively "prohibited" from realising their rock aspirations, as we saw with Karen Carpenter, then amateurism and the performance thereof became a space in which to realise creative possibilities.<sup>81</sup> Much in the way that Quattro and the Runaways performed female masculinity, post-punk women may be said to have performed amateurism as a way to resist the disciplining of the female body and voice. Punk, in other words, was an important outlet for women, and was one that provided a space for women to perform either the haphazardness that had hitherto only been in the male purview or a kind of haphazard femininity that was off-limits in other genres.

### ***Conclusion***

In the song "Come Again" by mixed-gender post-punk group the Au Pairs, female lead singer Lesley Woods and fellow band member Paul Foad play the part of a "couple who are attempting to make sex more reciprocal and mutually satisfactory, only to find themselves

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<sup>80</sup> Bayton, "Women and the Electric Guitar," 40.

<sup>81</sup> Butler, 91.

entrapped in another set of expectations.”<sup>82</sup> On two occasions during the album version of the song (from *Playing With a Different Sex*, 1981) Foad shakily seeks assurance, asking: “Am I doing it right?” and “Do you like this, like it like this?” Cutting Foad short of his questioning, Woods, in strident voice, poses the potentially devastating question: “Is your finger aching? I can feel you hesitating,” hollering and repeating, “Is your finger aching?” at the song’s three-quarter-mark climax as the band careens towards the instrumental break.

Woods’ lyric is significant for the way in which it reclaims power and agency over the female body, putting female sexual pleasure back into the literal hands (fingers) of women, and blowing open the hitherto unspoken truth that some may not be able to “master” female genitalia. Woods’ lyric, accompanied by a deft grasp of the post-punk idiom in her guitar playing, serves as an effective analogy for the reclamation of power that punk and post-punk’s female musicians enacted by assuming the positions of drummer and guitarist specifically, and by creatively performing to or within the expectations of amateurism. As Reddington has illustrated, male rock critics mocked post-punk bassists Tina Weymouth, for “worriedly” checking her fingers, and Gaye Black for watching where she put hers.<sup>83</sup> Thus, stealthily inserted into the hitherto masculine world of rock that has both covertly and overtly insisted that female musicians will always be amateurs in certain fields or genres, Woods’ lyric playfully suggests that there are other skills that require comparable degrees of manual dexterity, precision, patience, stamina, access to and familiarity with the right equipment that some may never acquire. The sarcastic, symbolic castration enacted by Woods’ lyric is a powerful metaphor for understanding the kind of humiliation experienced by musicians such as Weymouth, Gaye, and also Patti Smith, the Slits, Lora Logic, and the Raincoats who the cultural gatekeepers (male and female) implied

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<sup>82</sup> Reynolds and Press, 312.

<sup>83</sup> Reddington, 49. See also Chris Salewicz, “Review of the Adverts,” *New Musical Express*, June 11, 1977, 44.

were either incompetent, or whose implicitly natural musical whimsy—such as an inability to keep time—became the key to new artistic terrain, as reviews of the Slits and the Raincoats' live performances suggested.

It could also be argued that these accusations of incompetence pointed in different generic directions. Paton expected Smith to be able to play her guitar “properly” in accordance with the class rock aesthetic, but writers such as Needs and some of the other writers at *ZigZag* expected these female musicians to play punk, or to play music that was punk-associated and therefore anti-virtuosic. In yet another interpretation of musical genre and value, in their more recent account of the period, Reynolds and Press have suggested, for example, that the post-punk women’s groups’ “anti-musical” sounding songs were their “most subversive.”<sup>84</sup> This interpretation, then, that links the inclusion of women musicians with subversion, speaks to one of my earlier points: post-punk, as it has been formulated by Reynolds, is a discursive trope that values, even fetishizes, social as well as musical elements that are perceived to stray from the otherwise male-dominated conventions of rock. As I have suggested in earlier chapters, groups such as the Slits and the Raincoats were very much a product and part of the *punk* scene, but Reynolds has chosen to categorise them as post-punk rather than punk. I suggest that this is because the “post” in post-punk means more than simply “after,” but something more along the lines of “beyond.” In this regard, the “post” may refer to the identities and musical styles that punk left out, namely women and the kinds of sonic artefacts written in an amateurish style that do not conform to standard rock or punk vocabulary. More cynically, the “post” might also be taken as a term of value, which is something that is implicit in Reynolds’ work. In this instance, women in post-punk might be interpreted as a form of cultural capital, a marker of leftist distinction. Indeed, as Frith and Horne have suggested, “feminist performers like Vi Subversa

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<sup>84</sup> Reynolds and Press, 306-9.

and the Au Pairs had to operate in this post-punk ‘experimental’ space,” rather than the punk space.<sup>85</sup>

Post-punk is not a particularly historically accurate category but, nevertheless, it serves as a useful and operative term to express both an aesthetic sensibility and a certain kind of socially progressive politics. Just as bands like Joy Division and Gang of Four were different from punk in the sense that both groups incorporated more funk- or disco-based grooves, or in the way that PiL took a different approach to dub than the Clash, groups such as the Slits, the Raincoats, and Lora Logic might be thought of as post-punk rather than punk (i.e. beyond punk) because their music did not use what have come to be thought of as the masculine coded punk conventions: the recognisable verse-chorus form, the power chord harmonic foundation, the standardised instrumentation, the monotonous bass line, and the largely unchanging tempo and texture. The fact that these women did not use conventional rock or punk approaches should not necessarily be heard as an expression of their essential femininity, female incompetence, or even as a resistance to “masculine” rock convention but, rather, as a realisation of the kinds of possibilities afforded by conspicuous amateurism. The crucial nuance here is that punk amateurism did not call to women musicians because of a biological inability to play nor perhaps solely because of the history of systemic exclusion, but because the aesthetic and performative language of amateurism offered an important space of play for women whose musical voices and bodies had hitherto been so stringently policed.

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<sup>85</sup> Frith and Horne, 134.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Between Flesh and Machines: The Signification of Industry and Modernity<sup>1</sup>

Under the subheading “Heart of Darkness,” journalist “Robot” A. Hull introduced his interview with the band Pere Ubu in *Creem* magazine in November 1979 with the following description:

In CB lingo, Cleveland is the Dirty City, where sulfur dioxide permeates human pores. But for years, as a challenge to the city’s concrete slab, Cleveland’s underground music scene has been riding the street waves in tempo with the rhythms of industry. From this real world of toil and sweat, Pere Ubu has emerged, embodying the sounds and textures of Cleveland just as the Beach Boys did California and the Velvet Underground, New York City.<sup>2</sup>

Hull’s profile on Pere Ubu thus began with a multi-sensory description of the band’s hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. By referring to “CB” lingo, the slang used in Citizens’ Band radio, a medium favoured by long-distance truck drivers, Hull immediately set the scene of a working-class environment, and his reference to the CB community’s affectionate dubbing of Cleveland as “the Dirty City” conveyed an accordingly lowbrow image. The references to sulphur dioxide in the air and Cleveland’s “concrete slab” also suggest the dystopian connotations of an industrial city in decline, an image similar to those proffered by Marxist theorist Marshall Berman in his work on the self-destructive nature of modernisation.<sup>3</sup> According

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<sup>1</sup> The title for this chapter derives from a comment given by lead singer David Thomas from the band Pere Ubu. Describing his hometown of Cleveland, Thomas said, “There’s a relationship between flesh and machines in Cleveland that is very strange. It’s a strong juxtaposition. Cleveland is a giant, blown-out factory town. There’s the Flats with all this incredible industry, steel mills going flat out all day and all night, and its just a half mile away from where all the people live. This gives them the feeling that there’s no future for somebody here, and all the musicians seem to be in love with that fact.” See Thomas quoted in Paul Rambali, “Pere Ubu: Weird City Robomen,” *New Musical Express*, January 7, 1978, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/pere-ubu-weird-city-robomen>.

<sup>2</sup> Robot A. Hull, “The World According to Pere Ubu,” *Creem*, November 1979, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-world-according-to-pere-ubu>. It is possible that Pere Ubu’s song title, “Heart of Darkness,” and Hull’s use thereof was also a reference to Joseph Conrad’s novella of the same name, especially given the fact that *Apocalypse Now* (the film adaptation of Conrad’s novella) was released earlier that year, in the summer of 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Schuster and Schuster, 1982), 15. For more on the slang used in CB radio see Richard David Ramsey, “The People Versus

to Hull's introduction, we have indeed entered the heart of post-industrial, post-apocalyptic darkness.

Hull's emphasis on Cleveland's industrial squalor and the city's working-class heritage in his introduction to Pere Ubu is in many ways redolent of Jon Savage's description of "post-H-bomb" Manchester in his 1977 Joy Division review, as discussed in chapter three.<sup>4</sup> Unlike Savage, however, Hull used the image of an industrial city in decline to describe or evoke the actual sound of Pere Ubu's music. In this chapter, then, I concentrate on the way in which 1970s rock critics used images associated with industry, industrial decay, and modernisation to describe the sound of music of three late-1970s bands: by Pere Ubu, fellow Ohio group Devo, and Sheffield, UK's Cabaret Voltaire. These references to industrial-associated imagery also served to link these three bands together into a quasi-genre, which is significant because all three of these groups have more recently been placed in separate genres: Pere Ubu belong to post-punk, Devo belong to new wave, and Cabaret Voltaire are considered a proto-industrial group. I also emphasise how journalists' use of the term "industrial," and its associated images, can be considered an important part of the industrial genre's prehistory, even if the term did not denote a generic category in the same way that it does today. In the second part of the chapter I highlight the fact that late-1970s critics conflated their "industrial" appraisals of these three bands with ideas of the "modern," and how these musicians' use of the synthesizer and references to avant-

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Smokey Bear: Metaphor, Argot, and CB Radio," *Journal of Popular Culture* 3/2 (Fall 1979): 338-345. There is a scene in German director Werner Herzog's 1977 film, *Stroszek*, in which a group of long-distance truck drivers take advantage of the protagonists' girlfriend, a former prostitute, and broadcast it over Citizens' Band radio. The scene is pertinent not only because of the time period (mid- to late-1970s), and its effective illustration of the lower-class connotations of long-distance truck drivers and their use of CB radio, but because the film is also a critique or parody of life in the American Mid-West, in the fictitious town of "Railroad Flats," Wisconsin. Watching *Stroszek* was also one of the last things that Joy Division singer Ian Curtis apparently did before committing suicide. See chapter three of this dissertation for more on Curtis, and themes of death and illness in post-punk.

<sup>4</sup> Jon Savage, "Buzzcocks/Magazine/John Cooper Clarke/The Worst/The Fall/The Prefects/The Negatives/Warsaw: Electric Circus, Manchester," *Sounds*, October 15, 1977, accessed December 16, 2012, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=20433&SearchText=disused+victorian>.

garde art practices attracted such references to “modern music.” For the final part of the chapter I suggest possible ways in which the issues regarding present-day perceptions of generic divisions amongst post-punk, new wave, and industrial relate to broader issues of musical categorisation and canonization. I therefore continue to demonstrate the plurality and convoluted character of the post-punk genre by reading it against the grain of present-day scholars and commentators who have divided the music of this era into distinct categories.

### ***From Cleveland, Ohio to Sheffield, Yorkshire: Regionalism and the Meaning of “Industrial”***

Returning to Hull’s description of Pere Ubu, Cleveland’s history and reputation as an industrial city that traded principally in iron and steel did not merely serve as a backdrop to the city’s music scene. Like sulphur dioxide into human pores, Cleveland’s industrial by-products—its noise, its sweat, and its cynicism—were perceived to have seeped into the very sound of the city’s music. Hull’s vague but nonetheless important extended metaphor about how “Cleveland’s underground music scene has been riding the street waves in tempo with the rhythms of industry,” implies a homology between the city’s manufacturing activity and the city’s musical sound, as does his suggestion that Pere Ubu have been “embodying the sounds and textures” of Cleveland. Thus, in the same way that the Velvet Underground purportedly captured New York City’s edge and sleaze, or in the way the Beach Boys channelled sunny Californian vibes, Hull draws a direct correlation between Cleveland’s industrial identity and the sound of its local music.

Hull’s article was not unique in this respect. From at least as early as January 1978 many other critics in the rock music press drew a direct connection between Pere Ubu’s music and Cleveland’s industrial landscape and/or soundscape. Two months before the publication of Hull’s article, Max Bell at *New Musical Express (NME)* went so far as to introduce Pere Ubu as

an “industrial band,” arguing that one could hear in their music, “snatches and refrains from the nightmare blue collar world where you found yourself locked in the steel works without a box of matches.”<sup>5</sup> In 1978, a music journalist for *New York Rocker*, Richard Grabel, wrote how Pere Ubu’s music drew on the “sounds and ambience of their industrial homeland.”<sup>6</sup> Also in 1978, Savage at *Sounds* appears to have displayed a reflexive self-awareness of this discursive trend. With reference to Pere Ubu again, Savage remarked upon critics’ tendency to use Cleveland’s industrial character as a framing device, writing how other critics have presented the city as “very bleak, and industrial” with “blank spaces and empty places, scarred planes stretching as far as the eye can see.” He concluded equivocally, “you *could* say that … rock traditions/bleakness are at Ubu’s core” (emphasis original).<sup>7</sup>

In addition to describing Pere Ubu’s music as an embodiment of or sonic analogue to Cleveland’s industrial character, rock critics at the end of the 1970s also provided lengthy descriptions of the band’s performing activity and life within the city itself. Such descriptions of the band’s life in Cleveland further reinforced the idea that Pere Ubu dwelled in former industrial quarters situated in a cultural wasteland. A building known as the Plaza was an apartment complex where almost all of the members of Pere Ubu lived, apart from their lead-singer David Thomas. According to post-punk chronicler Simon Reynolds, the building was co-owned and unofficially maintained by Pere Ubu’s synthesizer- and saxophone-player Allen Ravenstine.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Max Bell, “Pick Up a Picnic,” *New Musical Express*, September 15, 1979, 37. This description is also somewhat reminiscent of Bell’s depiction of the clangy doors and labyrinthine hallways of a mental institution that he used when describing Joy Division, a description that I discuss in chapter three. See Max Bell, “Joy Division: *Unknown Pleasures* (Factory),” *New Musical Express*, July 14, 1979, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/joy-division-iunknown-pleasuresi-factory>.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Grabel, “Pere Ubu: CBGB’s, New York, NY,” *New York Rocker*, April 1978, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/pere-ubu-cbgbs-new-york-ny>.

<sup>7</sup> Jon Savage, “Pere Ubu, the Modern Dance,” *Sounds*, February 11, 1978, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/pere-ubu-the-modern-dance>.

<sup>8</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Rip it up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984* (London; New York: Penguin, 2005), 72. Also see Ubu Projex, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.ubuprojex.net>.

The building was located at 3206 Prospect Avenue, an apparently neglected street on which the streetlights had been out for a whole year.<sup>9</sup> *NME* correspondent Paul Rambali described the Plaza as an emblem of the kind of American grandeur that began to recede in Cleveland from the 1940s onwards. What was once, according to Rambali, a “fine example of American gothic architecture,” the place where the city’s business overlords housed their mistresses at the end of the nineteenth century, was now situated on what had become the city’s red light district.<sup>10</sup> The fact that the side of this building appeared on the front cover of Pere Ubu’s second album, *Dub Housing*, demonstrates how the band members themselves also made their industrial-city roots an important part of their self-presentation and aesthetic. Not only did the members of Ubu dwell in the lots left vacant by Cleveland’s industrial decline, but, according to Reynolds, the band’s rehearsal space was located in the former John D. Rockefeller Building, a seventeen-story turn-of-the-century building, formerly the office hub of coal, iron, and lake-shipping.<sup>11</sup>

This discursive tendency to use images of industrial decay to introduce Pere Ubu also extended to describing the kinds of venues at which the band gave their live performances. These venues were also holdovers from the city’s industrial past, and were equally as dire as their living quarters were purported to be. Ubu played regularly at a venue known as Pirate’s Cove, which was located on the Flats, the floodplain of the Cuyahoga River and site of the city’s main industrial activity in the nineteenth century, later turned into a place for nightclubs and music venues. A sense of cultural scarcity and desperation characterised Pere Ubu-singer Thomas’ account of performing in these venues. He described them as “sleazo-dive warzones” where, if

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<sup>9</sup> Hull, “World According.”

<sup>10</sup> Paul Rambali, “Pere Ubu: Unique Ideas Lead to Prison,” *New Musical Express*, November 18, 1978, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/pere-ubu-unique-ideas-lead-to-prison>.

<sup>11</sup> Reynolds, 72. *The Encyclopaedia of Cleveland History* is an excellent reference for the history of certain buildings and districts in Cleveland. See *The Encyclopaedia of Cleveland History*, Case Western Reserve University and the Western Reserve Historical Society, accessed September 4, 2013 <http://ech.cwru.edu/>.

you were lucky, you could “play for four or five drunks off the street.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, being in a band and doing the rounds at these unappealing venues appears to have been one of very few opportunities that allowed young people to avoid working in one of Cleveland’s factories.<sup>13</sup>

This media commentary on Pere Ubu therefore highlights how their music was heard as blending in with the sound of Cleveland’s industrial activity. It is also a typical rhetorical or journalistic strategy. Indeed, journalists in general often reflect a tendency to amplify or exaggeratedly crystallise public and/or idealised perceptions of particular places. What is striking, however, is the frequency with which these references to Cleveland’s industrial character and its cultural dearth occurred. To many of these predominantly British writers, Cleveland, Ohio seemed like a romantic, fantastical locale. But the press’s emphasis on urban factory lands and post-apocalyptic decay was not peculiar to Pere Ubu. In reports on fellow Ohio band Devo, who hailed from nearby Akron or Canton, the press also used urban environs as a framing device. Reynolds in fact quasi-justifies including these two American bands (Pere Ubu and Devo) in his book on predominantly British music because of their industrial affiliations. Music from Ohio did indeed attract a flurry of interest in the UK at the end of the 1970s, but Reynolds has also suggested that the cities Akron and Cleveland were “harsh, *appropriately* postpunk” places (emphasis mine).<sup>14</sup> In what ways, then, does post-punk signify or connote industrial-ness or “harshness”?

British critics’ decision to emphasise the industrial homelands of musicians from the United States was arguably an act of translation. Because the music of Pere Ubu was most likely UK readers’ first introduction to Cleveland, it is possible that critics aimed to make their profiles

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas quoted in Ian Birch. “The Pere Tree,” *Melody Maker*, May 13, 1978, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. In the interview with Hull, Pere Ubu’s bass player Tony Maimone stated how he would often “tell people he worked with cement rather than have to explain that he was employed by something called Pere Ubu.” See Hull, “World According.”

<sup>14</sup> Reynolds, 70.

of these musicians more relatable to British readers. Britain's cities were undergoing processes of de-industrialisation under Thatcher's government similar to those in Cleveland, whose steel and metal processing industry began to decline in the late-1970s. In fact, in July 1978 the independent label Stiff Records and *Sounds* magazine—both British-based—launched a competition to win a holiday to Akron, Ohio, and Stiff Records released the Akron compilation album, which included music by "garage bands" and "odd balls" from the Akron area as well as a rubber-scented, Akron-themed sleeve.<sup>15</sup>

The music press's decision to draw comparisons between industrial cities in the US and in the UK is also illustrative of the regionalism that characterised the punk and post-punk era. As David Hesmondhalgh and Helen Reddington have both suggested, the punk movement fostered an interest in scenes outside of London, as illustrated by a series of articles on regional scenes in *Melody Maker* from the late 1970s onwards.<sup>16</sup> For example, in Peter Silverton's profile of Akron and the surrounding area in *Sounds* in June 1978 he used Sheffield, UK as a point of comparison. He suggested that Akron, "famed 'Rubber Capital of the World,'" was to a British person "suburban in a way that English cities like Sheffield could never be."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, even though Silverton suggested that Akron and Sheffield were in some ways different, he nevertheless compared these cities' industrial characters.

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<sup>15</sup> Jon Savage, "Various Artists: *The Akron Compilation* (Stiff); Short Circuit—Live at the Electric Circus (Virgin)," *Sounds*, June 24, 1978, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/various-artists-ithe-akron-compilationi-stiff-ishort-circuit--live-at-the-electric-circusi-virgin>. Akron is known for its rubber production, hence the decision to use rubber as the signature scent. In their interview with Hull, the members of Pere Ubu also pointed out how they were more popular in Europe than they were in the United States. The fact that European outlets like Stiff and *Sounds* were releasing Ohio-associated material demonstrates the way in which this music had garnered a niche, non-US audience. See Hull, "World According."

<sup>16</sup> See David Hesmondhalgh, "Post-Punk's Attempt to Democratize the Music Industry," *Popular Music* 16/3 (Oct. 1997): 255-74. Helen Reddington also mentions the importance of regional scenes. See Reddington, *The Lost Women of Rock Music: Female Musicians of the Punk Era* (London: Equinox, 2012), 6.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Silverton, "Rock in Akron: The Music of Greater Akron," *Sounds*, June 17, 1978, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/rock-in-akron-the-music-of-greater-akron>.

As I suggested, one of the ways in which both critics and the members of Cleveland's Pere Ubu described their hometown was as a hopeless, artless wasteland with only the "sleazo-dive warzones" to play in. This sense of regional inferiority was something that appeared in discourse about Sheffield as well. Pere Ubu's singer, for example, described Cleveland as a "vacuum" with "no escape" where "failure is built into everything."<sup>18</sup> Such a statement may be illustrative of a provincial inferiority complex; the world outside is not only bigger and more intimidating than life within Cleveland's proverbial walls, but it's also better. The kind of "second city" syndrome that suffused accounts of cultural life in Cleveland was, furthermore, similar to late-1970s critics' introductions to Cabaret Voltaire and Sheffield. In his 1978 article entitled, "Sheffield: This Week's Leeds," for example, Andy Gill presented a strikingly similar picture of a culturally bereft second city to the one's presented by Pere Ubu's singer:

Until last year, Sheffield was undoubtedly the most musically inactive city in Britain. For a city with over half a million people, the paucity of small venues was little short of criminal, and the prospects for bands working outside the Working Men's Club circuit absolutely non-existent. "Drift south, young man, and drown" was the order of the day.<sup>19</sup>

Just as Thomas noted that Cleveland musicians were forced to play the "sleazo-dive warzones" and how, for Cleveland's citizens, failure was a self-fulfilling prophecy, Gill suggested that Sheffield musicians were faced with similarly unhappy prospects. They could either perform in the Working Men's Clubs or suffer the inevitable-seeming humiliation of trying to make it "down south" in London.

It is not necessarily surprising that two small cities in the industrialised Western world at the end of the 1970s had similar cultural scenes, especially after the punk era when, as

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas quoted in Birch, "Pere Tree."

<sup>19</sup> Andy Gill, "Sheffield: This Week's Leeds," *New Musical Express*, September 9, 1978, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/cabaret-voltaire-sheffield--this-weeks-leeds>.

Hesmondhalgh has suggested, places such as London were no longer necessarily the central hubs of musical activity and the music press was keen to promote “new sounds from outside the capital.”<sup>20</sup> Importantly, however, this late-1970s press commentary dates from a moment before Pere Ubu, Devo, and Cabaret Voltaire were separated into clearly distinct genres. In other words, the musicians’ regional identity and a series of sound-place homologies were sufficient to hold these groups together, producing a somewhat coherent genre. Like Savage earlier, Gill was also self-conscious of the way critics had fastened the dreary urban landscapes of places like Sheffield onto certain musicians:

It would be all too easy to view Cabaret Voltaire as some kind of a response to the pressures of industrial society, and lard an account of them with grey images of urban decay and razor-wrist despair.

I mean, here’s this city, Sheffield, famed only for cutlery and viewed by motorway flashers-by as the most probable place for God to fling a few fallen angels. And here’s this “band,” currently the most talked-about musical phenomenon emanating from the city, producing music which sparks to mind adjectives like “flat,” “grey,” “repetitive,” “soulless,” “monotonous,” etc. It all fits! No it doesn’t.<sup>21</sup>

Contrary to critics’ prevailing tendency to tie Cabaret Voltaire’s sound to industrial images in light of their second city origins, then, Gill’s article suggested that Cabaret Voltaire “could have been spawned in any city” and, not only that, but the kind of music that Cabaret Voltaire made was not necessarily the product of an urban environment. The “route” taken by Cabaret Voltaire towards the kind of music they were making, Gill stressed, was via Roxy Music, “the arts in general,” “Kulchur,” and a desire to “create for themselves.”<sup>22</sup> By setting up

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<sup>20</sup> For more on this and the importance of “decentralization” in the punk and post-punk eras, such as the boom in specialist record shops and small labels, see Hesmondhalgh, 259.

<sup>21</sup> Gill, “This Week’s Leeds.”

<sup>22</sup> S. Alexander Reed, *Assimilate: a Critical History of Industrial Music* (New York: Oxford University Press), 62. Originally in Gill, “This Week’s Leeds.” A very similar argument is offered by Stephen Mallinder, a member of Cabaret Voltaire, in the band’s interview with Chris Westwood, “Cabaret Voltaire,” *ZizZag*, September 1978, 18-19. Mallinder states, “I don’t think [the environment] is a direct influence on us … I think it’s industrial, yeah, but it would’ve come out if we’d live in a rural area.”

Cabaret Voltaire using two different sets of images (Sheffield's unappealing greyness, cutlery, and cultural lack *versus* the band Roxy Music, art, culture, and notions of unique creativity), Gill's account begins to challenge the relatively superficial biographical information of hometown origins with more detailed account of Cabaret Voltaire's cultural activity and influences. Industrial music scholar S. Alexander Reed has similarly emphasised the way in which Cabaret Voltaire created music not out of "indifference" for Sheffield, "but *in spite of* Sheffield," referring presumably to the city's cultural scarcity.<sup>23</sup> Reed also gives a thorough account of Cabaret Voltaire's affiliation with Sheffield University and local council youth projects; such as the arts and theatre venture Meat Whistle.<sup>24</sup> Thus Gill, and to a certain extent Reed chronicling the history from a present-day perspective, resist the one-to-one equation of cityscape-to-musical-sound that so many other journalists employed by introducing a different set of ideas into Cabaret Voltaire's space of possibilities.

Cabaret Voltaire feature in Reed's history as early participants in the industrial genre, alongside fellow Yorkshire bands Clock DVA and Throbbing Gristle.<sup>25</sup> All three bands (Cabaret Voltaire, Clock DVA, Throbbing Gristle) are, however, also subsumed within Reynolds' post-punk history.<sup>26</sup> On assessing the interaction between Reed and Reynolds' respective accounts, then, it could be argued that "industrial" is a style or sub-category locatable within the larger post-punk umbrella, which includes Cabaret Voltaire alongside Devo and Pere Ubu.<sup>27</sup> In this regard, as I argued in chapter one, Reynolds' book could be viewed as a survey of the time period 1978-84 that encompasses many subgenres, as opposed to a definitive delineation of post-

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<sup>23</sup> Reed, 62. In the interview with Westwood, Cabaret Voltaire's studio was "an ex-derelict office just off the city centre" that was shared with 2.3 (a Sheffield punk band) and some Pakistani immigrants who would "hammer on the ceiling" whenever the amplifiers were turned up. See Westwood, "Cabaret Voltaire."

<sup>24</sup> Reed, 61-72.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>26</sup> Reynolds, esp., 85-103, 124-39.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 71.

punk as a single genre in the way that it is understood in certain fan circles.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the fact that Reynolds also argues that Ohio bands like Pere Ubu and Devo were just as responsible for the “industrial” vogue as bands like Throbbing Gristle, is somewhat corroborated in Reed’s study, which quotes a 1986 issue of *Spin* magazine that argued, “Industrial music got its name in Cleveland when the 1978 wave of new rockers began experimenting with factory hisses and mechanical beats.”<sup>29</sup> As it turns out, however, Reed uses this statement from *Spin* as a foil to comment upon how the meaning of the term industrial has changed since the publication of the 1986 article, as I shall discuss shortly.

But rather than split hairs trying to decide who belongs where, or whether industrial is or is not a subgenre of post-punk, I suggest that elucidating the continuities and the fractures in these discourses is more productive. Such continuities and fractures demonstrate the criteria according to which cultural gatekeepers (scholars and journalists, in this instance) participate in the production of categories of musical genre. I hazard, therefore, that even though both Pere Ubu and Devo are excluded from the industrial music canon, part of the pre-history of industrial music is indebted to critics’ rhetorical interest in post-punk musicians’ industrial-city origins and the de-industrialising of locales such as Cleveland, Akron, Canton, and Sheffield. The quotation from *Spin* that Reed cites, for example, in fact accords with Bell’s 1979 description of Pere Ubu as an “industrial band,” which I cited earlier.<sup>30</sup> Thus what was and still is a classic journalist strategy—setting the scene with references to a band’s biography and home surroundings—has not only had an impact on present-day conceptions of post-punk as a bleak, scarred, gritty genre

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<sup>28</sup> See page 38 of this dissertation.

<sup>29</sup> Reed, 127-28.

<sup>30</sup> Bell, “Pick Up a Picnic.”

(as exemplified by Reynolds' reference to "harshness"), but has also contributed to the prehistory of the industrial genre, a genre that has drifted away from post-punk.

If I may pull these threads together, then: the fact that the rock press used the same kinds of industrial analogies to describe the music of Pere Ubu, Devo, and Cabaret Voltaire, on the one hand, illustrates a typical journalistic strategy of drawing on biographical details and information about a musician's locale for rhetorical effect. The way that this industrial discourse has contributed to conceptions of popular music genres, however, should not be overlooked. First, while industrial music is now considered a genre unto itself with a more complex profile than the kinds of city-music mappings I have extrapolated here, this discursive use of the term "industrial" and its associated imagery, especially in relation to bands like Cabaret Voltaire forms part of the pre-history to that genre. Secondly, the fact that these musicians were written about concurrently with no clear hints towards more detailed categorisation or generic segregation points to the way in which the post-punk era was a stylistically heterogeneous field prior to more recent subdivisions. Thirdly, by trying to draw a semblance between these two hives of activity (Sheffield and cities in Ohio), critics perhaps made them more relatable to British readers by refracting the larger socio-political conditions that characterised the 1970s in both the UK and the US: the process of de-industrialisation and the onset of post-Fordism.

### ***Hooks vs. Noise: The Semiotic and Generic Signification of the Synthesizer***

In the modern times, the modern way.

—Roxy Music, "Editions of You," 1973.

Two somewhat contradictory images relating to the idea of the "industrial" emerged in these press commentaries from the post-punk era. But both may be regarded as a refraction of the larger socio-political conditions that characterised the late 1970s in both the UK and US. First, one encounters images of large-scale manufacture characteristic of the industrial revolution, such

as factories and heavy machinery.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, one encounters references to the kind of information technology characteristic of post-Fordism or late-Capitalism. What is more, critics used these kinds of images in relation to music by Pere Ubu, Devo, and Cabaret Voltaire, and, more specifically, used these images to describe the sound or role of the synthesizer.

Examples of both of these kinds of industrial or post-industrial images abound in reviews of Pere Ubu's music from the years 1978 to 1979, particularly with reference to the synthesizer. Using metaphors that evoke the images of the ruins left by failed large-scale manufacture, Savage wrote how "the synthesizer blows like icy wind over the [Cleveland] flats (sic)." Pere Ubu's songs were, according to Savage, full of "white noise/hiss howls," and their song "Street Waves" on their first studio album, *The Modern Dance*, "[floats] free through distant explosions" and the "sounds of moving metal," thus evoking the mechanical noises associated with industrial production. In this same article, Savage likened Pere Ubu's use of *noise* to the music of Throbbing Gristle,<sup>32</sup> who are now widely considered to be integral participants in the industrial music genre. Likewise, in 1978 Hull remarked upon the way in which Pere Ubu "sonically [reproduce] the machine hum of Ohio's A-1 Junk City" and how they were able to "weave the noises of the city into their music."<sup>33</sup> Even those critics who were sceptical of the homology between industrial cities and the sound of Pere Ubu's music, such as Rambali, admitted to hearing a "mutant jack hammer," as well as "surreal landscapes of noise and slabs of blistering white noise" on *The Modern Dance*.<sup>34</sup> Whereas, summoning the sounds of post-Fordism more than those of heavy manufacture, Grabel suggested that Pere Ubu's music evoked the

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<sup>31</sup> See for example the interview with Thomas cited at the very beginning in which he mentioned the "mills going flat out all night." Rambali, "Weird City."

<sup>32</sup> Savage, "Modern Dance."

<sup>33</sup> Hull, "World According."

<sup>34</sup> Paul Rambali, "Pere Ubu: The Modern Dance," *New Musical Express*, March 11, 1978, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/pere-ubu-the-modern-dance-.>

“atmosphere of urban America” and the “modern world” via the use of synthesizer, “which blends unobtrusively with the other instrumental parts,” especially in songs such as “Real World” where it is used to create “telephone bleeps, sirens.”<sup>35</sup>

Taking Pere Ubu’s geographic origins and biography as a point of departure, then, critics employed these two facets of “modern civilisation”—industrialisation and technologized de-industrialisation—to describe the sound of the band’s music often referring specifically to the synthesizer. Significantly, the ways in which the synthesizer could signify these two facets of “modern civilization” also intersects with recent scholarship, particularly the ways in which some of this post-punk music has been more recently divided into the categories new wave and industrial. In fact, from a present-day perspective, the particular use of the synthesizer in post-punk may now be understood as pointing in two different *generic* directions, rather than just in two related *semiotic* directions. According to scholar of new wave music Theo Cateforis, the synthesizer came to represent the “modern” world through the eyes of new wave.<sup>36</sup> But the synthesizer may also be heard as an integral component of the abrasive sonic universe of the industrial genre. Furthermore, the different ways in which the instrument was used also bears upon the distinction between these two genres. Berman’s image of modernity as the destruction wrought by failed industry and the sounds of technological “progress,” could in fact be used to connect these two ideas, new wave modern and industrial abrasion.

Cateforis’ conception of “modernism” or the “modern” in relation to new wave is tied to particular historical moments that were marked by significant shifts in technology. For this reason, Cateforis writes, “no instrument symbolized [new wave’s] modern identity more fully than the synthesizer.” Even though synthesizers had been prominent in rock music since the

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<sup>35</sup> Grabel, “Pere Ubu: CBGB’s.”

<sup>36</sup> Theo Cateforis, *Are We Not New Wave? Modern Pop at the Turn of the 1980s* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press), 151.

early 1970s, as I shall discuss, Cateforis has argued, “Not until new wave did a legion of synthesizer players truly usurp the *lead role* traditionally accorded the guitar and push the synthesizer’s *modern* associations fully to the foreground” (emphasis mine).<sup>37</sup> Cateforis has therefore highlighted the importance of a particular *kind* of synthesizer playing in relation to the new wave genre and its “modern” connotations. Commercially successful British musicians of the early-1980s such as Gary Numan, Human League, Depeche Mode, and Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark are Cateforis’ examples of this new way of using the instrument, which may be characterised as a hook-based melodic style and hence usurp the lead guitar roles. This music represented what Cateforis calls a “seismic paradigm shift,” which was afforded by the cheapness and easy playability of synthesizers at the turn of the 1980s.<sup>38</sup> For Cateforis, the synthesizer’s “modern associations,” were also predicated on the negation of progressive rock aesthetics *and* on the articulation of the sounds of late-capitalism, the kinds of “telephone bleeps” and “sirens” that I mentioned with reference to Grabel’s review of Pere Ubu.<sup>39</sup>

In a 2010 profile on Devo in *Sound on Sound* magazine, journalist Sam Inglis wrote, “[in] rock and pop [in the early-1970s], synthesizers were most prominent in the hands of the prog-rock acts emerging from Britain.” But Devo’s singer, Mark Mothersbaugh, was apparently more interested in,

sounds that I thought were relevant to our place in time … V2 rockets and mortar blasts, stuff that reflected what I was watching on the evening news. I also wanted to find the sounds that were in the most subversive music that was out at the time, which wasn’t anything to do with pop music.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 152

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 160-62. See also Grabel, “Pere Ubu: CBGB’s.”

<sup>40</sup> Mothersbaugh quoted in Sam Inglis, “Four Decades of De-Evolution,” *Sound on Sound*, August 2010, accessed October 3, 2013, <http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/aug10/articles/devo.htm>.

Mothersbaugh was also not enamoured by what he has referred to as “bloopy organ sounds” emitted by groups like ELP and Yes. Rather, he preferred what he called the “shocking” and “inspiring” sound of the song “Editions of You” by Roxy Music from their 1973 album *For Your Pleasure*.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, although seemingly loath to admit it, Mothersbaugh borrowed much of his synthesizer inspiration from disco, which to him, “was like a beautiful girl with a great body but no brain.” He continued,

I hated [disco], but at the same time I was like “What kind of synths are they using to get that sound?” I begrudgingly would say: Yeah, the song “I Was Born To Be Alive” is idiotic, but there are some really cool synth sounds in it. They made some of the best mixes, and the beats were irresistible, even though I was resisting it because I thought it was moronic.<sup>42</sup>

In the original version of “Jocko Homo,” one of Devo’s earliest singles released on their own label, Booji Boy, in the US in 1977, the band can be heard at their most “cartoonish.”<sup>43</sup> The original video depicts Mothersbaugh dressed in a white coat and swimming goggles delivering a lecture to a group of students wearing plastic sunglasses, facemasks, and head coverings from surgical scrubs. The narrative climax of the video is the depiction of the band writhing like maggots on the lecture desks, clothed in white body bags having, presumably, devolved.<sup>44</sup> In the original version, the song opens with the sound of a factory alarm-cum-riff. Then, the unmistakable, chromatically descending riff, played on synthesizer and guitar at the very beginning of the song, as well as the ascending synthesizer arpeggios, and the bleating chorus

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. “Born to be Alive” was a late-disco song by French singer Patrick Hernandez. The specifically “brainless” connotations of disco are discussed in chapter three of this dissertation, particularly in relation to issues of race, gender, and sexuality. Eno’s synthesizer break on “Editions of You” comes after the saxophone solo at roughly 1:30.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> As I shall discuss in more detail in the next section, Reed describes both Devo and Pere Ubu as “cartoonish.” Reed, 128.

<sup>44</sup> The importance of the theme of madness and the aestheticisation of psychiatric disturbance is addressed in chapter three of this dissertation. The video can be found here: “Jocko Homo (original version),” YouTube video, 3:57, posted by Shaw Israel Izikson, accessed April 10, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRguZr0xCOc>.

“We are Devo” epitomise the kind of self-consciously moronic absurdity that characterised Devo’s oeuvre. True to their cynical and ironic manifesto (a quasi-scientific “belief” in the de-evolution of humanity), Devo’s riffs and the refrain in this song, in their pedantic simplicity, suggest a parody of factory-made popular music. Significantly, the synthesizer’s role in “Jocko Homo”—playing the ascending arpeggios and chromatic riff with the guitar—is not as pure noise. But nor does it play a catchy pop hook or a soloistic lead role. Rather, the synthesizer part seems to straddle the two fields; it is melodic, but also sounds like manically malfunctioning communications interface from a low-budget science fiction film and therefore connotes the information technology age. In this regard, the semiotic significance of the synthesizer, coupled with the opening alarm sounds in this particular performance, overlaps with the kinds of (post)-industrial sounds that critics heard in Pere Ubu and Cabaret Voltaire.

Despite the prominent use of the synthesizer in music by Pere Ubu and Cabaret Voltaire, however, both are excluded from Cateforis’s definition of new wave. I suggest that this is because the incorporation of the synthesizer in Pere Ubu and Cabaret Voltaire’s music was more noise-based. That is to say, the instrument was not used as a melody instrument in the way that it was in Cateforis’ early 1980s new wave examples, nor does it have the same kind of post-Fordist significance that we hear in Devo. With Pere Ubu and Cabaret Voltaire, the instrument provided more of a textural and timbral layer. Thus, not only did the late-1970s rock critics identify the synthesizer as an instrument that emulated industrial sound, but critics also found the concept of abstract noise a useful way to describe what musicians like Pere Ubu were doing with the instrument.

In some ways this textural, more abstract or noise-based use of the synthesizer has more in common with Reed’s main criterion for industrial music. The “sonic use of noise,” Reed

writes, is “perhaps the only compositional element reliably shared from Cabaret Voltaire to Combichrist and from Die Krupps to Doubting Thomas,” and might therefore be interpreted as a sonic unifier of the industrial genre.<sup>45</sup> The fact that critics made reference to the use of noise in relation to industrial imagery may also point to another important discursive aspect of the pre-history industrial music genre. Indeed, Reed’s decision to include Cabaret Voltaire in the industrial canon according to this criterion (“the sonic use of noise”) is to a certain extent bolstered by the early press commentary. For example, Savage described Cabaret Voltaire’s use of synthesizers in such a way that evokes these ideas. He wrote that Cabaret Voltaire used the synthesizers “as instruments with *tonal qualities of their own* rather than to reproduce the sound of another” (emphasis mine).<sup>46</sup> Similarly, when describing Cabaret Voltaire’s music in October 1979, Gill argued, “[instead] of concentrating on the *easy hook and the instant rhythm*, the Cabs here concentrate on emotional *soundscaping*, offering several *alternatives to the pure noise/pure pop* furrows endlessly ploughed by latterday synthesizer bands” (emphasis mine).<sup>47</sup> Gill was therefore keen to point out how Cabaret Voltaire avoided using certain pop-like gestures, which may be contrasted with the “hooks” played by Numan in new wave songs such as “Cars,” which was released in August of the same year.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, Cabaret Voltaire’s grainy all-synthesizer texture blends highly repetitive and rhythmically insistent lines with siren-like pulsations and declamatory, roboticised vocals. From a present-day perspective, then, post-punk musicians’ different ways of using the synthesizer have contributed to perceptions of their generic affiliations: for a new waver, the synthesizer is a melody instrument, used to generate “cool”

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<sup>45</sup> Reed, 47.

<sup>46</sup> Jon Savage, “Cabaret Voltaire: Something Strange is Going on in Sheffield Tonight,” *Sounds*, April 1978, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/cabaret-voltaire-something-strange-is-going-on-in-sheffield-tonight->.

<sup>47</sup> Andy Gill, “Cabaret Voltaire: Mix Up,” *New Musical Express*, October 20, 1979, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/cabaret-voltaire-imix-upi-rough-trade>.

<sup>48</sup> Cateforis, 178.

hooks; for industrial music, the synthesizer is a noise-generating machine. But, from a historical perspective, post-punk synthesizer playing connoted the post-industrial locales with which these regional bands were associated.

The press literature of the late-1970s reveals that Pere Ubu was on the noise-generating end of the synthesizer spectrum. In fact, in a 1979 article Gill suggested that Cabaret Voltaire's debut album, *Mix Up*, might be successfully compared to Pere Ubu's music in the sense that both bands composed "modern 'mood music,'" and neither group reached for "any old tune."<sup>49</sup> Thus not only did Gill compare Cabaret Voltaire's music to that of Pere Ubu, but he also used the idea of "modern," most likely indicating that Pere Ubu's music fulfilled critics' expectations that this music should be new and/or contemporary. As Simon Frith and Howard Horne have suggested, post-punk groups "found themselves playing to self-consciously experimental audiences, to critics who *expected* something novel every time."<sup>50</sup> Pere Ubu and Cabaret Voltaire, therefore, both catered to audiences and critics who valued new or "modern" music, and the pervasive use of the word "modern" in late-1970s rock press literature may have contributed to Cateforis' argument that new wave was a "modern" genre.

### ***Generic No-Man's Land***

As I indicated earlier, Reed explicitly excludes both Pere Ubu and Devo from his discussions of early incarnations of the industrial genre, despite Pere Ubu's inclusion of synthesizer-generated sonic noise, which 1970s critics compared to sounds heard in songs by Cabaret Voltaire and Throbbing Gristle.<sup>51</sup> He suggests that the "political and sonic extremism" articulated by Devo and Pere Ubu "came packaged in too cartoonish a whimsy" and is "too song-

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<sup>49</sup> Gill, "Mix Up."

<sup>50</sup> Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop* (London: Methuen, 1987), 134.

<sup>51</sup> For the comparison to Cabaret Voltaire see Gill, "Mix Up," and for the comparison to Throbbing Gristle see Savage, "Modern Dance."

*oriented* to fit into the pantheon of early industrial music in all its abstract, oppressive direness” (emphasis mine).<sup>52</sup> In addition to being “cartoonish” and too song-oriented, I also suggest that Pere Ubu’s particular kind of “sonic noise” had precedents in the psychedelic/space rock style of Hawkwind and the classic rock style of Led Zeppelin, and therefore bears too close a resemblance to conventional rock to have the kinds of critical edge that industrial is now associated with. As I shall discuss in more detail towards the end of this chapter the fact that rock gestures could detract from Pere Ubu’s place in both new wave and industrial, is illustrative of the way in which these genres have been retrospectively constructed according to an exclusory agenda that devalues rock elements. These more recent segregations, however, run against the kind of plurality that defined the post-punk field at the moment of its emergence.

Thus, just as critics such as Gill drew a connection between Cabaret Voltaire’s “modern ‘mood music’” and that of Pere Ubu, other commentators listed the song-like nature and rock aesthetic of Pere Ubu’s music as a complementary component to the “slabs of blistering white noise.”<sup>53</sup> Ian Birch, writing for *Melody Maker* in May 1978, for example, commented upon the fact that Pere Ubu’s music was a meeting point between “full-blooded *rock*” and “chunks of white noise” (emphasis mine).<sup>54</sup> Rambali also wrote about the way in which Pere Ubu “use conventional rock forms but seem to give them a new language by re-devising the way sound is used in these forms (emphasis mine).”<sup>55</sup> And, in conversation with Rough Trade founder Geoff Travis, Vivian Goldman remarked upon the juxtaposition between “rousing *rock & roll* climax (emphasis mine)” and “these weird antiphonal wind instrument wailings,” to which Travis responded,

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<sup>52</sup> Reed, 128.

<sup>53</sup> Rambali, “Modern Dance.”

<sup>54</sup> Birch, “Pere Tree.”

<sup>55</sup> Rambali, “Weird City.”

We mustn't forget though that, with [the songs] "Non-Alignment Pack," "Street Waves" and their encore "Final Solution," they have constructed *all time power riffs* that rank with any. Plus in "Street Waves" they have an *electronic synthesizer break that is a bit like the break that Led Zeppelin played with in "Whole Lotta Love"* before Jimmy Page comes back in with one of the best and most simplistic guitar solos in rock ...

The big difference is that watching Pere Ubu the synthesizer section enhances the song; with Zeppelin you find yourself dying for it to finish so you can hear the solo (emphasis mine).<sup>56</sup>

It seems, then, that Pere Ubu's combination of rock riffs and synthesizer noise positions them in a generic no man's land. Even though some critics regarded them as being just as "modern" as Cabaret Voltaire and even though they were discussed as part of this regional trio in the late-1970s, they have more recently been excluded from definitions of both industrial and new wave. In short, Pere Ubu's synthesizer lines are/were not hook-based enough and heavy sounding to belong to new wave, but too song- and rock-oriented for industrial.

"Street Waves" certainly uses conventional-sounding rock riffs, especially the opening pentatonic electric guitar part and the hard-rock style guitar solo. The strumming pattern on the repeated E chord in the rhythm guitar part is also reminiscent of the Velvet Underground, which also suggests a punk or proto-punk aesthetic. As Travis remarked in the conversation with Goldman cited above, Pere Ubu do include a synthesizer break in "Street Waves" that is almost a minute long and, unlike the kind of synthesizer lines composed by new wave musicians such as Numan, serves a primarily textural function rather than a "lead" or "melodic" one, producing sheets of noise to accompany an otherwise conventional rock sound. As Travis indicated, the synthesizer break in "Street Waves" may be compared to the theremin solo and tape experiment

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<sup>56</sup> Geoff Travis in conversation with Vivian Goldman. See Goldman, "Datapanik in the Year 1978: Pere Ubu," *Sounds*, May 13, 1978, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/datapanik-in-the-year-1978-pere-ubu>.

section in what Steve Waksman has called Led Zeppelin's "quintessential cock rock song" of 1969, "Whole Lotta Love," especially in terms of its length and non-solo style.<sup>57</sup>

But significant differences between "Street Waves" and "Whole Lotta Love" should be noted. First, the synthesizer is present as background noise throughout "Street Waves," whereas the theremin in "Whole Lotta Love" appears as more of a novelty feature. Secondly, Pere Ubu's synthesizer break, which comes after a psychedelic-sounding guitar solo, is accompanied by guitar feedback; a hypnotic bass groove; a minimal drum part comprising a syncopated bass drum and closed hi-hat on two and four; and some distant, modal-sounding guitar melodies that are, once again, reminiscent of the Velvet Underground. The synthesizer solo in "Street Waves" does not lead into a guitar solo, furthermore, but back to the chorus. In "Whole Lotta Love," however, the groove accompanying the theremin anti-solo is very different. It is a more insistent four quarter-note on-beat rhythm with occasional fills and conga interjections. Meanwhile, Robert Plant vocalizes "sensually" over the top. Therefore, even though both of these songs, contain hard rock characteristics as well as noise-based anti-solos mid-way through, each conveys different generic or aesthetic sensibilities. "Whole Lotta Love" epitomises hard rock, whereas "Street Waves" has a more psychedelic and/or proto-punk character. Nevertheless, the rock-like character of "Street Waves" is enough to exclude it from recent formulations of both industrial and new wave.

In addition to Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love," another possible historical precedent to Pere Ubu's particular way of employing the synthesizer as texture, colour, and noise throughout the song, accompanied by a more psychedelic style, is Hawkwind. Hawkwind were an English space rock band whose personnel was constantly changing, but generally comprised a

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<sup>57</sup> Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire: the Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 248-50.

five-piece of guitar, drums, saxophone, and synthesizer, featuring Ian “Lemmy” Kilmister (later of Motörhead) on bass. Music journalists recognised Hawkwind as an important stylistic precedent for the use of the synthesizer in both Pere Ubu and Cabaret Voltaire. While reminiscing about listening to the B-side to Pere Ubu’s first single from 1975, “30 Seconds Over Tokyo” backed with “Heart of Darkness,” the track to which I referred at the beginning of this chapter, Rambali wrote how he sometimes wondered whether he was listening to nothing other than a more fashionable version of Hawkwind.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, there is a more psychedelic rock sound to these earlier releases like “30 Seconds Over Tokyo,” even though Pere Ubu themselves rejected such comparisons.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Chris Westwood, writing for *ZigZag* magazine, heard three strains in Cabaret Voltaire’s music: the American avant-garde art collective/musicians, the Residents; the Velvet Underground; and, Hawkwind circa 1973.<sup>60</sup>

Notably, the sound of the synthesizer in the early 1970s did not evoke the same kind of industrial or post-industrial images that it did for these post-punk musicians, either as a sonic analogue to a regional city’s industrial past or as a signifier of late-Capitalist “progress.” This could be because punk and its characteristically regional affiliations had not yet emerged or because the larger socio-economic processes of deindustrialisation were not yet in full sway. By and large, in the early 1970s, the sound of the synthesizer signified outer space and science fiction. In a 1973 issue of *Phonograph Record*, for example, journalist Greg Shaw wrote an article on the history of “space rock.” He listed as some of the genre’s precedents: 1950s rock ‘n’ roll; the Byrds’ song “C.T.A 102,” which featured theremin and synthesizer noises; Pink Floyd’s 1967 album *Piper at the Gates of Dawn* with its “weird organ noises and *de rigueur* synthesizer

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<sup>58</sup> Rambali, “Unique Ideas.”

<sup>59</sup> Hull, “World According.”

<sup>60</sup> Westwood, “Cabaret Voltaire.” It is worth noting that Westwood does say that the comparisons are “questionable.”

whooshes"; the German rock group Amon Düül (although Shaw suggests that they were not "technically" space rock); and Hawkwind's song "Master of the Universe," released on their second album, *In Search of Space* (1971). Significantly, Hawkwind's "Master of the Universe" was re-released on *Space Ritual*, the 1973 record that Westwood compared to some of Cabaret Voltaire's music.<sup>61</sup> Shaw described "Master of the Universe" as,

evocative of the precise technology involved in space travel, while the synthesized sound suggests the sense of adventure and excitement we associate with science fiction movies, *Star Trek* and so-on.<sup>62</sup>

Thus in 1973 writers such as Shaw associated the synthesizer with the "adventure and excitement" of science fiction and not the kinds of industrial or post-industrial signifiers chosen by critics later in the decade to discuss the instrument in Pere Ubu and Cabaret Voltaire. Indeed, the synthesizer on "Masters of the Universe" does not serve a melodic function, and instead provides more psychedelic and sci-fi-style swooshing, with prominent glissandi and panning effects and as a timbral contrast that punctuates the end of phrases. There is, nevertheless, a point of semblance between sci-fi and post-industrial "progress," that is, both suggest an interest in the role and representations of technology. But, more to the point, critics observed a stylistic similarity between the mid-late 1970s music of Pere Ubu and Cabaret Voltaire, and the late-1960s/early-1970s music by purveyors of hard rock and space rock.

What effect, then, do these generic overlaps have on conceptions of the tangled trio of genres post-punk, new wave, and industrial? First of all, it presents a challenge to those cases that assert that post-punk was a continuation of the punk genre, since the influences that critics heard in these bands, such as the Velvet Underground, Led Zeppelin, and Hawkwind, all pre-date

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Greg Shaw, "The Future Will Happen This Year: Space Rock," *Phonograph Record*, March 1973, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-future-will-happen-this-year-space-rock>. It is perhaps worth noting that some of the sounds highlighted by Shaw were most likely not produced by synthesizers, since most late 1960s musicians only had access to the theremin, musique concrete, and the mellotron.

punk, even though the Velvet Underground in particular have been folded into narratives of punk as “proto” representatives. Furthermore, the fact that these three influences and/or precedents (Velvet Underground, Led Zeppelin, and Hawkwind) are mentioned concurrently without drawing generic distinctions between Pere Ubu and Cabaret Voltaire, not only speaks to the plurality of the new wave/post-punk field at the time, and how this differs from present-day conceptions of these generic categories, but also problematizes a clear sense of lineage or genealogy between genres. These historical precedents to post-punk’s use of the synthesizer (the kind heard in Pere Ubu and Cabaret Voltaire) also challenge Cateforis’ suggestion that, up until new wave, previous models of synthesizer-playing were somewhat limited to the progressive rock style purveyed by musicians like Rick Wakeman and ELP, who used the synthesizer as a lead instrument.<sup>63</sup>

I’d like to conclude this section by briefly discussing the synthesizer’s materiality and its potential impact on the kind of sounds produced by the various musicians, especially Pere Ubu. In his book, Cateforis identifies the synthesizer as a “hybrid invention” since it “combines the familiar keyboard and tonal melodic possibilities of the acoustic piano with the electronic circuitry of sound synthesis.” Cateforis remarks upon how Numan’s “signature synthesizer” was the Polymoog, particularly the preset “Vox Humana,” a synthesized string sound that “would come to signify the ‘cold, alien artifice’ of [Numan’s] particular sound.”<sup>64</sup> The fact that groups such as ELP, and their “modernist” new wave adversaries used keyboard synthesizers has significant ramifications for the style and sound these musicians produced; unlike the space or psychedelic rockers, Pere Ubu, and Cabaret Voltaire, the musicians that Cateforis discusses produced principally melodic lines of differing degrees of virtuosity. By contrast, Allen

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<sup>63</sup> Cateforis, 155.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 172.

Ravenstine, Pere Ubu's saxophone and synthesizer player played an EML model, which, according to Rambali, "were most used for sound effects and teaching."<sup>65</sup> According to Reynolds, Ravenstine's EML 200 was operated using "tone dials" as opposed to a keyboard and Reynolds has argued that this mechanism allowed Ravenstine to avoid sounding like a progressive rock musician; the interaction with the instrument would indeed be very different by virtue of the absence of a keyboard interface.<sup>66</sup>

### ***Post-Punk "Art" vs. "Art Rock"***

Don't expect art.<sup>67</sup>

—Pere Ubu, 1979.

By bringing together the press discourse on Pere Ubu, Cabaret Voltaire, and Devo, one of my principal aims has been to show how the criteria that present-day commentators have used to sort these bands into separate generic categories is closely intertwined with particular kinds of aesthetic ideals that may not be compatible with historical commentators' concerns. These aesthetic ideals, furthermore, may be interpreted as having ideological underpinnings. New wave, to which Devo now belong, has come to represent a genre that blends pop-style sonic characteristics with an ironic, distanced, kitschy sensibility, and for Cateforis, this genre is also "modern." Industrial music, the genre to which Cabaret Voltaire now belong, is known more for its violent, abrasive, shock-laden aesthetic.<sup>68</sup> Both new wave and industrial may be interpreted as

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<sup>65</sup> Rambali, "Unique Ideas."

<sup>66</sup> Reynolds, 72. Similarly, journalist Birch likened Ravestine's synthesizer to a "modern press-button phone." See Birch, "Pere Tree."

<sup>67</sup> Hull, "World According."

<sup>68</sup> It is worth noting that "shock" was an important component in early avant-garde art insofar as avant-garde art refused conventional notions of meaning. Shock in early-twentieth-century avant-garde art was intended to prompt the receiver (listener, audience, observer) into changing their life praxis. See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 80. As such, it is possible to draw a line of descent from avant-garde art to movements such as punk and industrial, and Situationism provides a convenient point of contact. But in this chapter, I am also concerned with questioning the meaning of such quasi-genealogies. Labeling a popular movement "modernist" or "avant-garde" legitimizes them at the exclusion of other popular genres.

participating in the kind of ideology critique that journalists such as Reynolds and Greil Marcus have associated with punk and post-punk more broadly.<sup>69</sup> That is to say, genres such as industrial, new wave, punk, and post-punk achieve meaning through their opposition to mainstream culture and its normative trappings; they are counter-cultural genres that proffer alternative modes of existence and critiques of the culture industry from within the mass cultural framework. It is perhaps for this reason that Pere Ubu has been excluded from contemporary accounts of both new wave and industrial. Even though they were by no means part of dominant culture, their musical similarities to hard or classic rock—too song-based with too many pentatonic guitar riffs—means that they have been excluded from the contemporary accounts of both new wave and industrial. Their participation in an aesthetic derived from 1960s rock, recast as misogynist and ego-driven in contrast to punk, “justifies” their exclusion.

In the section that follows, I suggest that the idea of punk-based genres as a new counter-culture in the 1970s has become attached—in part through a conglomeration of discursive comparisons, metaphors, and analogies—to what Peter Osborne, after Theodor Adorno, has described as the “qualitative” definition of modernity.<sup>70</sup> My point is, the idea that this music—new wave, post-punk, industrial—is “new” or “modern” is not unencumbered. Rock journalists’ of the late 1970s use of these terms (“new” and “modern”) may be interpreted as neutral, denoting “of the present.”<sup>71</sup> As my Roxy Music epigraph in the previous section implied, describing the “times” as “modern” was not specific to the late 1970s. However, as Osborne has

<sup>69</sup> See pp. 38-9 of this dissertation. It is also worth noting that Simon Reynolds applies similar terms of valorisation to electronic dance music, which he has described as a genre that “inherited rock’s seriousness: its belief that music could change the world.” See Simon Reynolds, “Historia Electronica Preface,” in *The Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader: Histories and Debates*, Third Edition, ed. David Brackett (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 504. For the original source see Simon Reynolds, “Preface,” in *Loops: Una Historia de la Musica Electronica*, ed. Javier Blánquez and Omar Morera (Barcelona: Reservoir Books, 2002).

<sup>70</sup> Peter Osborne, “Modernity is a Qualitative, Not a Chronological, Category,” in *Postmodernism and the Re-Reading of Modernity*, ed. Francis Baker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen, 65-84 (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1992).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

illustrated, from the late eighteenth century onwards, the notions of newness and modernity have lost their neutrality and come to denote “better than,” and modernity in particular, as a term that bestows value, is inextricably linked to the historical perspective of the male coloniser.<sup>72</sup> To paraphrase Mothersbaugh of Devo, it is better that the synthesizer signifies the sound of the Western civilisation’s industrial demise or its technological “progress,” than the sound of disco’s “brainless” women. One wonders whether the abundant use of synthesizers on Stevie Wonder’s music of the 1970s would also qualify as “modernist.” I suggest, therefore, that more recent commentator’s use of the words “new” and “modern” to describe this music are actually terms of value, modified versions of the more neutral usage that circulated in the late 1970s press.

It is also probable that more recent valorisation of post-punk-affiliated genres as “modern” genres is a product of the way in which critics highlighted the “avant-garde” leanings and fine-art-associated practices of the musicians themselves. For those with knowledge of the European *fin-de-siècle* art world, the very words Pere Ubu and Cabaret Voltaire are conspicuous. Pere Ubu borrowed their name from Alfred Jarry’s play *Ubu Roi*, a surrealistic piece of satire from 1896 that lampoons the gluttony of the bourgeoisie. Similarly, Cabaret Voltaire lifted their name from the Zurich nightclub established by Hugo Ball in 1916, described by Bernard Gendron as “the founding venue of the dada-movement.”<sup>73</sup> The members of Pere Ubu in particular also made self-conscious references to the world of art music. For example, in Hull’s 1979 interview with Pere Ubu, bassist Tony Maimone remarked that he drew inspiration from John Cage and George Gershwin, and his fellow band mates chimed in with their quasi-Cagean

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 69-75. For more on the idea of modernity as it relates specifically to colonialism see Robert Young, *White Histories: Writing History and the West* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>73</sup> Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 30.

irreverence, declaring that the “drip, drip, drip” of the kitchen sink has also been an important influence.<sup>74</sup>

The early industrial groups Cabaret Voltaire and Throbbing Gristle not only included references to the early twentieth-century European avant-garde, but their art and performances also received institutional and university support, even if both bands flouted this institutional endorsement.<sup>75</sup> As the band’s biographer Simon Ford has also illustrated, using mass media as a forum for artistic experimentation was something that Throbbing Gristle did as early as the late-1960s, and therefore before punk solidified as a genre.<sup>76</sup> Devo similarly also had institutional connections, specifically with Kent State University in Ohio. Two of Devo’s members, Gerald V. Casale and Mark Mothersbaugh were students at Kent State, and both of them had already experienced the power of Dada-inspired art’s irreverence for societal norms and conventions at Kent.<sup>77</sup>

These art-associated references and practices illustrate the way in which these kinds of art-historical practices and ideas circulated and extended beyond the confines of the institutionalised or legitimised art world. As Benjamin Piekut has suggested regarding the London avant-garde scene between 1965 and 1975, multiple musicians from different genres haphazardly employed the language of the avant-garde at this time; these ideas were not restricted to the highbrow-associated art music world.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, as Frith and Horne have also argued, “[avant-garde] discourse as such didn’t prevent [the post-punk bands] from becoming

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<sup>74</sup> Hull, “World According.”

<sup>75</sup> Reed, esp. 66-7, 75.

<sup>76</sup> Simon Ford, *Wreckers of Civilisation: the Story of COUM Transmissions and Throbbing Gristle* (London: Black Dog, 1999).

<sup>77</sup> Reynolds, 76-7.

<sup>78</sup> Benjamin Piekut, “Indeterminacy, Free Improvisation, and the Mixed Avant-Garde: Experimental Music in London, 1965-1975,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 67/3 (Fall 2014): 771.

part of ‘rock tradition’ but assigned them a particular place within it as an ‘art’ group.”<sup>79</sup> In fact, the UK punk scene was closely tied to the country’s art colleges and connections, and Malcolm McLaren’s own particular interpretation of punk displayed the influence of two main art-theoretical spheres: Andy Warhol’s Factory and the notion of “subversive Pop art” drawn from Situationism as it was interpreted by the 1968 French student movement and the radical group, King Mob. According to Frith and Horne, punk’s performance conventions exhibited the art college influence most vividly: in these performances “ideas of pop spectacle met up with anything-goes silly-and-serious experimentation of the art event.”<sup>80</sup> Punk performances were “thus informed by avant-garde arguments about shock value, multi-media, montage, and deconstruction.”<sup>81</sup> But to suggest that these inter-textual references illustrate a “modernist” sensibility risks legitimising a cultural movement and social group—white male bohemianism—that has already been legitimised according to the tenets of highbrow culture. In other words, taking punk and post-punk’s fine-art connections as a sign of “modernism” is also a way of bestowing value onto these genres.

As I suggested, present-day formulations of the post-punk era as a counter culture characterised by a “modern” ethos, which one encounters in both trade texts such Reynolds’ book and scholarly work such as that by Cateforis, may in part be attributable to the many references that the 1970s rock press made to post-punk musicians’ interest in or borrowing from the world of fine art. Not only did journalists refer to post-punks’ fine art connections, but they also described post-punk performances as “modern” or “avant-garde.” In addition to using “modern” to denote “of the present” or “contemporary,” journalists’ use of these words may have also been to suggest that these post-punk groups made contemporary music that also

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<sup>79</sup> Frith and Horne, 135.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 128-31.

negated previous genres of “art rock.”<sup>82</sup> Hull, for example, suggested that Pere Ubu’s concerts were part performance art, part rock show. According to Hull, Pere Ubu shared Alfred Jarry’s “maxim that the absurd exercises the mind,” specifically with reference to the moments when singer Thomas, while onstage, would unload “a case full of hammers and began striking hammer-on-metal.”<sup>83</sup> In fact, Thomas’ on-stage hammer routine seems to have been something of a staple at Pere Ubu’s concerts and several rock critics interpreted it as an “arty” gesture. Goldman, in her conversation with Travis, referred to it as such,<sup>84</sup> and so did Don Snowdon writing for the *Los Angeles Times* in August 1979. Snowdon described Pere Ubu as being part of the “new *avant-gardist* movement” (emphasis mine) and the title for his article, “Pere Ubu Plays for Body, Brain,” also indicated that this kind of popular music intellectually surpassed the kind of music available on Top 40 radio.<sup>85</sup> Snowdon’s title also indicates that Pere Ubu had successfully overcome the schism between rock music and dance music. As I discussed in chapter three, this is an “achievement” valued by a particular kind of white, critical intelligentsia. Max Bell was also keen to highlight Pere Ubu’s arty pretensions, not only by noting the bands’ interest in what he referred to as “art forms that have nothing to do with rock and roll,” but also by highlighting Pere Ubu’s incorporation of poetry by American poet Vachel Lindsay into one of their songs. Significantly, Bell interpreted the combination of such highbrow references in combination with Ravenstine’s synthesizer playing as something that would make Pere Ubu “the

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<sup>82</sup> Bürger argues that there is a difference between modernism and the avant-garde. Where modernism might be interpreted as an attack on tradition, the avant-garde was more of an attack on the institution of “art.” The journalists of the late-1970s rock media were perhaps not concerned with this academic distinction but employed both terms to signify negation (of previous genres of rock) and resistance. Both terms may therefore be read as coded valorisations. See Bürger, *Avant-Garde*, xv.

<sup>83</sup> Hull, “World According.”

<sup>84</sup> Goldman, “Datapanik.”

<sup>85</sup> Don Snowdon, “Pere Ubu Plays for Body, Brain, Pere Ubu: The Whiskey, Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 4, 1979, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/pere-ubu-plays-for-body-brain>.

band most likely to formulate a lasting *avant-garde* legacy for others to dilute" (emphasis mine).<sup>86</sup>

Devo's relationship to notions of the avant-garde arguably played more of an obvious role in their performances than it did in Pere Ubu's. Devo's live performances were often multi-media events. Some of their concerts began with a short film made by Chuck Statler, a friend from Kent State, entitled *The Beginning Was the End: The Truth About Devo*.<sup>87</sup> Devo's performance art-derived antics, absurdist mock-science philosophy, goggles, boiler suits, and clown-masks were, however, not too well received amongst certain writers. Hull, for example, wrote that Pere Ubu made "an artsy band like Devo look like buffoons from Fernwood."<sup>88</sup> One of the most aggressive anti-Devo voices was Gill at *NME* who was scathing about Devo's outfits, which were more "clownish" than "futuristic," and their live choreography, which was "a ridiculous nursery choo-choo train of stomps and jumps." After admitting that Devo were better live than he anticipated, Gill concluded their music is "still formalist rock 'n 'roll, given a gloss of 'newness' by its presentations." The way in which Gill chose to put "formalist rock 'n' roll" in opposition to "newness" illustrates the way in which the late-1970s rock media devalued pre-punk counter culture music (i.e. 1960s and early 1970s rock). This was also something that I discussed with particular reference to blues-based and African American music in chapter two of this dissertation, but here, it appears as though Devo's expansion of their product into quasi-fine art-derived practices was another way in which this music could be perceived as "new" or as "modern." Again, we might interpret these discursive themes as precursors to present-day formulations that emphasise notions of the "modern," and they could also be interpreted as

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<sup>86</sup> Bell, "Pick Up a Picnic."

<sup>87</sup> Reynolds, 79.

<sup>88</sup> Hull, "World According." It is possible that Hull is referring to the US comedy show "Fernwood 2 Night" from 1977. The programme was a talk show set in the fictitious town of Fernwood, Ohio, designed to parody small town life. If so, then Hull's belittling of Devo's "artisness" is even more scathing.

contributing to the larger rock-associated project of striving for legitimacy according to tenets of highbrow culture.

Similarly, Ian Birch suggested that Devo positioned themselves against the obsolete 1960s counter-culture by employing “Dadaist” ideas. According to Birch, this “*radically different band from Akron, Ohio*” challenged “*flabby, redundant* ideas, particularly those that are *left over from the Sixties*” (emphases mine). It is clear from Birch’s interview with Devo that they were determined to become anything other than the “Sixties rock star,” complete with “glitter, open shirt, sweating chest and grinding pelvises,” or a “Seventies wank-off.” In order to avoid this kind of passé late-1960s and early-1970s model, Devo’s artistic approach was, therefore, to fragment and collage together pre-existing artefacts and ideas, which, according to the band, was something that the “Dadaists” may have done.<sup>89</sup> The kinds of multi-media performances that Pere Ubu and Devo produced, which the musicians themselves interpreted as being “avant-garde” or even “Dadaist,” were also a characteristic of Cabaret Voltaire’s work. Similarly, journalists were keen to stress the “Dadaist” connection and position Dadaist-esque “art” in opposition to the “art rock” of the 1960s and 1970s. As Westwood noted, for example, Cabaret Voltaire’s “Dadaism” was that implicitly superior kind of “art” known as “anti-art,” not that “boring virtuoso-crap they call ‘art rock.’”<sup>90</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

By comparing the sonic characteristics and media discourse concerning the three post-punk bands, Pere Ubu, Devo, and Cabaret Voltaire, I have contrasted the fluidity that characterised categories of musical genre at the time of the music’s emergence with present-day

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<sup>89</sup> Ian Birch, “We Are Devo: We Are the Next Thing,” *Melody Maker*, 25 February 1978, 10.

<sup>90</sup> Westwood, “Cabaret Voltaire.” As Bürger noted, the European avant-garde art movement of the 1920s was the first artistic movement to challenge the institution of “art.” It is perhaps with reference to this idea—Dada as negation of previous institutions of art—that journalists such as Westwood were able to suggest that the music made by post-punk musicians was a negation of earlier genres of art rock. See Bürger, *Avant-Garde*, 22.

discourse, which has tended towards stricter rules of generic belonging and exclusion.<sup>91</sup>

According to current debates surrounding this period, Devo are new wave, owing to their relative commercial success and “modernist” aesthetic; Cabaret Voltaire are part of the industrial music genre as drawn up by Reed; and Pere Ubu are excluded from both genres. Pere Ubu are not commercially successful enough to belong to new wave, nor sufficiently “dire” to belong to industrial, even if at this time Cleveland was, according to certain commentators, “garnering a reputation for producing music for the industrialised Eighties.”<sup>92</sup>

I have also demonstrated how the rock press in the late-1970s drew comparisons amongst these three groups and how these comparisons were made according to three principal ideas. The first point of comparison was the musicians’ origins in second-cities, former industrial centres of either the US or the UK. The second point of comparison concerned the way in which the synthesizer was heard as a sonic corollary to these (post-) industrial locales. The third point of comparison was the way in which all three bands bore some relation to what critics called the “avant-garde” or other kinds of artistic movements. By proffering some possible historical precedents in terms of musical style for these bands, I have also illuminated aspects of post-punk’s genealogy that conflict with present-day expectations and/or criteria for certain genres. In particular, I suggested that Pere Ubu’s use of certain hard rock characteristics might speak to their present exclusion from new wave and industrial. I have also highlighted how there were other approaches to playing the synthesizer, which broaden and complicate the binary narrative that pits progressive rock’s decadent, “bloopy organ sounds” against post-punk/new wave

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<sup>91</sup> Jacques Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” in *On Narrative*, edited by W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 65. See also pp. 9-10 of this dissertation.

<sup>92</sup> Birch, “Pere Tree.”

android “cleanliness.” In doing so, I have therefore restored some of popular music history’s chaos and non-linearity.

As I suggested in the introduction to this dissertation, writing the history of a genre may be illustrative of the tension between what Michel Foucault calls “general” and “total” history. That is to say, how does one retain the unity of a “total” history but allow for the “dispersions” that characterise “general” history? Similarly, Will Straw has noted in his essay on Jon Savage’s music compilation, *Meridian 1970*, that the success of such a project, the production of a historicised document, lies in the way one is “able to absorb and recapitulate” the “uncertainties and incomplete transitions” of the historical moment of which it is a snapshot.<sup>93</sup> By restoring these historical tensions and overlaps between Pere Ubu, Devo, and Cabaret Voltaire, I have created a thick, historically specific impression of the post-punk scene at the end of the 1970s that contrasts with cleaner, present-day discussions.

At the same time, however, I have also shown how certain themes and discursive trends that pervaded the late-1970s rock press continue to inform our present-day conceptions of what constitutes post-punk, new wave, and industrial. Concerning music’s non-representational character, Georgina Born has suggested that it is through “connotation” that music acquires its meaning, its capacity to evoke “visual, sensual, emotional, and intellectual” extra-musical phenomena, which serve as “metaphors” to describe music’s meaning. Born also suggests that metaphors may be seen as “a set of singular mappings of analogy,” whereas “discourse suggests that metaphors may *cluster into constellations of perceived likeness*, systematic fields of experience, knowledge or theory” (emphases mine).<sup>94</sup> What is striking and significant about this

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<sup>93</sup> Will Straw, “The Consecration of Musical Incoherence,” *Cultural Legitimation*, 2/1 (March 2011), accessed March 4, 2015, [www.kinephanos.ca](http://www.kinephanos.ca).

<sup>94</sup> Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalisation of the Avant-Garde* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 19.

late-1970s rock discourse is the way in which the connotative mapping of the sound of the post-punk synthesizer onto the sounds of industrial decline and the onset of post-Fordism, drawn from the environs with which these musicians were associated, have solidified into terms of genre and terms of value. The sound of the synthesizer was interpreted as a refraction of late Capitalist de-industrialisation and was associated with three very distinct-sounding bands. The genre known as “industrial” may have emerged from these industrial/post-industrial discursive and connotative analogies, but it is the recurrent discursive insistence on art-as-ideology-critique, that decides who belongs to industrial, new wave, and post-punk.

## EPILOGUE

### The “Post” in Post-Punk

Punk enabled people to say, “fuck you.” But somehow it couldn’t go any further, it was just a single venomous … two syllable phrase of anger, which was necessary to reignite rock ‘n’ roll. But, sooner or later, someone was gonna wanna say more than “fuck you,” someone was gonna wanna say, “I’m fucked.” And it was Joy Division who were the first band to do that, to use the energy and simplicity of punk to express more complex emotions.

—Tony Wilson, Factory Records<sup>1</sup>

The generic label “post-punk” denotes the more avant-garde strand of predominantly British, non-mainstream music that both succeeded and was coterminous with mid- to late-1970s punk. As I have demonstrated, several bands that have more recently been described as *post-punk* started their careers either before or during the punk years, 1976-77. Complicating matters even more, participants in both the punk and post-punk genres were also situated within the coterminous category known as new wave.<sup>2</sup> While many music critics of the period noted the emergence of more explicitly avant-garde or musically hybridised styles during and after 1977, this music did not have a fixed label or a uniform set of musical characteristics. In other words, at the time of its emergence, this avant-garde sub-genre of punk was inchoate, and the media did not rigorously differentiate amongst punk, new wave, and post-punk.

In this regard, the division of the mid- to late-1970s punk or new wave scene into three (or even more) distinct genres may be understood as a largely retroactive process, as illustrated by online lists and canons, influential journalistic texts, and scholarly work on these individual sub-genres. The larger argument that I have tried to make in this dissertation, then, is that post-punk as a genre does not denote a strict set of sonic characteristics nor a concrete musical period nor even a necessarily fixed group of musical artists. It is better understood as a sub-genre of

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<sup>1</sup> “Joy Division—The Documentary,” YouTube video, 1:35:44, posted by Mathieu Guillien, July 17, 2012, accessed February 10, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1qQsHGHi8w>.

<sup>2</sup> See also Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), esp. 269-71.

punk music for which the mainstream connotations of “punk,” as the white, male-associated music of the Sex Pistols, the Ramones, and the Clash, do not account.<sup>3</sup> Post-punk accounts for the kinds of musical, sociological, and aesthetic features excluded by the term “punk” in its narrowest, most mainstream sense. More specifically, post-punk might also be understood according to a number of discursive themes, and in turn, these discursive themes have broader socio-political significations that allude to the way in which genres can also be subtle indicators of value or cultural hierarchy. In this dissertation, I have taken as my point of departure themes that emerge from the discourse of journalists and scholars producing retroactive histories. These are: the idea that post-punk musicians incorporated dub-reggae and disco, that post-punk was a space for women and gender positive relations, and that post-punk was a genre with both regional and avant-garde associations.<sup>4</sup>

I have not only analysed and illuminated the specific conditions for the emergence of these characteristics or themes, but I have also demonstrated what these characteristics or discursive themes signify at a broader level. I propose that post-punk musicians incorporated aspects of dub-reggae owing to the proximity, literal and ideological, between the British punk and reggae scenes, fostered by Britain’s colonial past and the post-war labour migration. Furthermore, certain post-punk musicians’ particular manner of incorporating dub-reggae was less obvious than more mainstream or new wave-associated examples of punk-reggae hybridity, more concerned with timbres and textures, than rhythms or textual references. This difference in approach to incorporation may be interpreted as a less “crude” form of appropriation. However, this reading is one that subtly bestows value on post-punk and endorses its implicitly more “progressive” racial politics. It is worth bearing in mind, therefore, that certain rock journalists of

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<sup>3</sup> In this regard, the generic term post-punk functions in a similar way to Gendron’s reading of the term “new wave.” See Gendron, 170.

<sup>4</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Rip it up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984* (London: Penguin, 2005).

the time continued to assert the Otherness of Jamaican music, which in turn is complicated by dub-reggae's own project of utopian uplift via symbolic repatriation. What emerges, then, is an ambiguous relationship between post-punk and dub-reggae; was post-punk's incorporation of dub-reggae a replication of rock's appropriation of the blues in the 1960s, and hence another example of white rock's tendency to borrow laterally in order to sustain itself?

I have also demonstrated how post-punk musicians borrowed some of their own syncopated rhythms from disco. And yet the press and post-punk musicians' performance style cultivated and contributed to a particular version of white male identity that gains its meaning in opposition to disco's black *and* mainstream connotations of "healthy" hedonism, upfront sexuality, virility, and fluid physicality. While post-punk musicians such as PiL and Joy Division may have borrowed from disco, their way of performing disco rhythms, their lyrics, and their on-stage persona continued to articulate an impasse between popular music's Others and white masculinity, wherein the latter represents the cerebral, the non-dancing, and the sexually repressed.

The complex way in which punk amateurism played out for post-punk women musicians was the subject of chapter four. Punk's adherence to a DIY aesthetic did not necessarily level the gender playing field entirely, since certain cultural commentators judged punk and post-punk women according to the tenets of the comparatively more virtuosic genre of classic rock. Nevertheless, I suggest that punk's celebration of amateurism and, perhaps, audience and critics' expectations of women's essential musical incompetence, created a space in which women could "perform" haphazard femininity. The musical results of these amateur performances were different from standardised punk: women musicians introduced irregular time signatures, unusual and non-punk instrumental combinations.

The final chapter addressed how the discursive mappings of certain analogies have played a part in the formation of both the genre of industrial music and the kinds of criteria that characterise post-punk music. This “industrial” aspect of post-punk emerged from the music’s regional associations and was associated specifically with the sound of the synthesizer, as a refraction of the contemporary political climate, a sonic corollary to images of deindustrialised in Britain and North America. These kinds of images were associated primarily with Pere Ubu, Cabaret Voltaire, and Devo, who were also tied together by critics because of their fine-art-associated practices and references. I suggested that this combination of “industrial” imagery and “avant-garde” aesthetics was interpreted at the time as a way of negating previous genres of rock music. This language of negation, furthermore, combined with journalists’ use of the terms “modern” and “new” in the late-1970s rock media, may have contributed to scholars and journalists’ more recent tendency to describe this era’s music as “modern” or “new” in such a way that bestows value, according to the tenets of highbrow culture, as opposed to simply describing this music’s contemporaneity.

If these discursive themes describe a kind of music that both came after and was concurrent with punk, then what does the “post” in post-punk mean, and how does this prefix relate to these discursive themes? In their interrogation of the meaning of postmodern feminism, Carolyn Dipalma and Kathy Ferguson begin by questioning the signification of “post.” The first signification that they address is the word’s function as a prefix, meaning after, behind, or later, and as a prefix that suggests a linear sequence. In other words, “postmodern” follows or comes after “modern.”<sup>5</sup> As I have demonstrated, understanding post-punk as part of a linear sequence—

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<sup>5</sup> Carolyn Dipalma and Kathy Ferguson, “Clearing Ground and Making Connections: Modernism, Postmodernism, Feminism,” in *Handbook of Gender and Women’s Studies*, ed. Kathy Davis, Mary Evans, and Judith Lorber (London: Sage, 2006), 130.

post-punk follows punk—does not hold up to rigorous historical investigation; certain post-punk musicians predated the punk movement whereas others were coterminous with it.

The second reading of “post” that Dipalma and Ferguson offer is informed by their use of what they call the “alternative grammar of postmodern feminism.” They suggest that “post” in this instance could also be read as a noun: “post” as a place from which one takes measure. “The postmodern,” they suggest, “could be a site from which one can get a fuller view of the modern, an outpost or incursion into the modern, a place where one can get one’s bearings, gather for resources, pause before reentering.”<sup>6</sup> And their final reading of “post” is as a verb: “post” as in the act of posting a sign. “To postmodern,” they write, “is to denounce some aspects of the modern and to point out that other parts are lost or missing. Postmodernism could be that which keeps us well posted on the workings of the modern.”<sup>7</sup>

This last interpretation of the “post” in postmodern may be applied to the “post” of post-punk with great effect. The “post” in post-punk does not necessarily refer to the music that came after punk. Rather, while the word “punk” allows post-punk’s constellated community to belong to the punk/new wave *milieu* and share its historical space, the “post” allows this community of musicians, audiences, journalists, and present-day commentators, to step back, signalling an awareness of and/or a denunciation of punk/new wave’s perceived shortcomings. To “post-punk” is to post or announce punk’s shortcomings, and turn towards music that offers a corrective to such shortcomings. I am not suggesting that post-punk musicians consciously decided to denounce punk and self-identify as post-punk; it is not such a simple question of intention. Rather, post-punk is a discursive trope that serves to differentiate music with more self-consciously complex lyrics, more eclectic influences, or more social diversity, from the punk

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 131

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

caricature of simplicity, aggression, whiteness, and masculinity. As Tony Wilson's comments about Joy Division indicate, punk is often characterised by simplicity and aggression, but post-punk can be characterised by a more complex, introverted aesthetic. In other words, post-punk holds more cultural capital than punk; to identify as a post-punk fan is akin to saying you are more intellectual, more complex, and more socially progressive than punk.

What can this study of post-punk tell us about genre at a broader level? Through a close analysis of the relationship between the rock media and musical characteristics I have demonstrated how musical genres are not ontological facts; they are phenomena that emerge out of knotted, often chaotic-seeming discourse, which is shaped into a more coherent, identifiable form over time. I suggested in the introduction that a genre might therefore be compared to an autostereogram or a "magic eye" image, insofar as dizzying masses of detail can assume a clearer shape when viewed from a particular angle. Furthermore, the "angle" that one takes may not necessarily concern musical characteristics alone; as I have demonstrated, a genre can describe an aesthetic and political sensibility, a particular social demographic, an historical period, a particular group of actors, and can also serve to bestow value on a specific collection of artefacts.

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