

PUNK AESTHETICS IN CINEMA:
THE INTERSECTIONS OF PUNK MOVEMENTS, QUEER HISTORIES AND
SUBCULTURAL FILMMAKING

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Declaration

This is to declare that this submission is entirely my own work, in my own words, and that all external references and sources used in researching it are fully acknowledged and all quotations properly identified within the contents. It has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or another person, for another degree, either at National University of Ireland Galway or elsewhere. I understand the ethical implications of my research, and the regulations of National University of Ireland Galway.

Signed:



Date:

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Abstract

This research combines historical and political investigations into the relationship between punk subcultures and film, tracing the development of punk aesthetics on screen through certain independent, avant-garde and experimental European and North American films from the early 1970s to 2000s. It examines these films' low-budget, collaborative and DIY backgrounds and how their aesthetics are shaped by the materiality of subcultural contexts. The corpus starts with the "punk cinema" canon that focuses on famous bands and locations, exploring the aesthetic elements of the early half-documentaries, such as transparency and fact-fiction hybridity, in order to uncover the role of cinema in the larger canonizing historicities of punk. Moving beyond the limits of "punk cinema," the study unravels the intersections between punk, queer and feminist subcultures in the later chapters, covering considerable ground in terms of how subcultural cinema has been in close contact with the cultivation of queer politics in the pre-digital phase of cinema. As such, the corpus revolves around three main categories thematically distinguished according to their aesthetic and economic positioning as well as production and reception conditions: early punk documenting in cinema; low-budget films of certain European auteurs created out of subcultural environments, such as Pedro Almodóvar (in relation to *la movida madrileña*), Derek Jarman (in relation to London's punk and gay underground in the late 1970s), and Virginie Despentes (in relation to pro-porn feminism and French New Extremity); and American "trash cinema" and John Waters, structuralist film and the New York's No Wave movement. The chapters situate punk aesthetics, queer histories and counter-cinema within a larger discussion around identity politics and aesthetic reclamation of anti-social negativity through avant-garde cinema.

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Introduction: Punk Aesthetics as a Field of Struggles

The greater the lack on the inside, the greater the need for an outside to contain and to defuse it, for without that outside, the lack on the inside would become all too visible. [...] Those inhabiting the inside [...] can only comprehend the outside through the incorporation of a negative image. [...]

The issue is the old stand-off between confrontation and assimilation: does one compromise oneself by working on the inside, or does one short-change oneself by holding tenaciously to the outside? (Diana Fuss, *Inside/Out* 5)

The anarchical spectacle of certain low-budget films, sometimes enjoying unexpected success, can lead to a mixed reception that, on one side, suspects their aesthetic value, and on the other side, attributes them a paracinematic value through cult status and subcultural fame, as happened to most of the films considered in this thesis. By anarchical spectacle, I do not only refer to a cluttered onscreen aesthetic that deliberately or involuntarily rejects a set of mainstream practices, but also a negative aesthetic that projects what is lacking and excluded within that set of practices. Analyzing the role of such spectacles in our culture inevitably requires negotiating the cultural legitimacy of de-facto dichotomies, such as mainstream and underground, public and private, inside and outside, or, as in the symbolic context of the opening quotation by Diana Fuss, heterosexual and homosexual (*Inside/Out* 5). The term “punk aesthetics in cinema,” as put to work in this study, fundamentally describes the cinematic works that dealt with these inside/outside tensions at each point of their emergence, from the low-budget collective production conditions that situate them outside of the film industry, to the debates and discourses that follow their precarious dissemination (and banning in some cases) as well as their aesthetic form itself.

The initial punk subculture emerged in the mid-1970s in several Anglo-Saxon urban locations under the influence of earlier post-war counter-cultural movements in Europe, such as the Situationist International (SI) and Surrealism and Dadaism before it (Sussman, Marcus, Francis). Punk shared with these movements the “subversive appropriation of dominant, mass-media

representations” (Sussman 4). This method of subversive appropriation, which is known as *détournement* in the SI terminology, was itself an appropriation of the poet Comte de Lautréamont’s aphorism that the founder of the SI, Guy Debord, directly copied in his influential book, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967): “Plagiarism is necessary, progress implies it” (Francis 19). The embrace of the often negatively considered “plagiarism” here as a method of creativity parallels the 1970s punk attitude associated with the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethos. Throughout this thesis, such “punk” methods – methods that come out of restricted environments and reflect the very same restrictions – will be explored in relation to cinema. While punk, and its proto-punk predecessors, provide an intersectional framework as regards to production environment, onscreen aesthetics and etymology in terms of counter-aesthetics, punk’s turbulent relationship with the mainstream culture echoes the inside/outside negotiation that informs the direct focus of many theorists (including Diana Fuss, Judith Butler, José Esteban Muñoz and Jack Halberstam) on identity, identification and disidentification. These theories, mostly grouped under the umbrella term “queer theory,” shed light on the connections between identity struggles, marginal subjectivities and how certain (dis)identificatory forms of cultural production, can offer political resistance and survival strategies for excluded subjects through methods that are similar to proto-punk counter-cultural art practices. Examining the connections between subcultural environments from which such strategies emerge as cinematic products, what follows reveals that the historicization of “punk cinema” failed to address these rich intersections between diverse punk-related movements, and queer theories and histories.

As punk aesthetics in cinema will be investigated through their diverse set of locations that informed their own unique relations between public and counter-public spheres, Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural production is very relevant: art is not autonomous. According to this influential theory, the concealed hierarchization at work within the field of cultural production forces us to view the final artwork as a result of a certain “position-taking” (Bourdieu 30-34). This perspective has been particularly useful for scholars who investigate cultural productions that are associated with the “outside,” such as independent cinema (Tzioumakis; King), trash cinema and the concept of paracinema in relation to the discourse of taste (Sconce;

Mathijs and Mendik). As the editors of the collection, *Alternative Europe: Eurotrash and Exploitation Cinema Since 1945*, citing Bourdieu's perspective, state: "We believe the relation between research into how a film works culturally, and analyses of its aesthetic nature and status cannot be separated. [...] film's place in culture is linked to its aesthetics, and vice-versa, without implying that 'quality' equals cultural value" (Mathijs and Mendik 2). This belief has informed approaches to the politics of avant-garde art in cultural studies for decades in relation to how cultural value can be synonymous with bourgeois values under capitalism: the avant-garde is apparent when an art form reveals its own consciousness through position-taking, and vocalizes/visualizes its own position with the aim to rupture "the illusion" of art being autonomous and functioning independently from the capitalist system (Duncan 719). The contention is that the avant-garde in any field of art tries to negate the workings of its industry of cultural production by way of leaning towards an outsider position, either employing or causing shock effect including, in some cases, through pornography as we will see in the exploration of the intersections between gay underground cinema, queercore and French New Extremity in later chapters.¹ This outsider position becomes even more observable when this art form is inseparable from the environment within which it occurs: subcultural productions.

Dick Hebdige paved the way for studies regarding how subcultures function within society, by way of primarily analyzing their style and set of codes. Punk was one of the most influential subcultures that created its own iconography and it still continues to be reproduced today in a variety of contexts. Because of the shape-shifting nature of punk, it never stays the same, and constantly adds new subjectivities to its history, transforming its initial meaning. Once the dominant culture absorbed the style after its initial inception, the counter-ideology that punk style claimed to embody – "everybody can do it" – lost its significance. However, the ever-changing nature of popular culture enabled punk as a counter-culture to be reembodyed by the collective and individual histories that are able to collect, repeat, remember and recreate the ideas

¹ A study on pornographic film as avant-garde art considers Andy Warhol's film *Blow Job* (1964), for example, as a cultural document that had an important impact on the debate regarding the high culture/low culture dichotomy in the 1960s post-war American avant-garde, positioning sexually explicit gay content as part of the "momentous changes in the decade that culminated in Stonewall" (Osterweil, "Blow Job" 432).

ingrained in punk after its “death”: “Long after the ‘death’ of classical punk, post-punk and/or punk subcultures coalesce around praxis. For contemporary punks, subcultural membership, authenticity, and prestige are transacted through action internal to the subculture” (Clark 231). This thesis, first and foremost, aims to explore how this oscillating journey of punk, from proto-punk ideals to the post-punk incarnations, has been reflected in the field of cinema. Punk has been interpreted in relation to cultural theories around collective and counter-hegemonic methods of art-making which will be laid out in Chapter One. However, as evident in the larger field of avant-garde cinema, similar ideas of collaboration and instances of position-taking outside of the dominant film sector have been at work within the field of film production since cinema’s inception as an art form. When punk and avant-garde cinema are explored together in terms of their ability to create more possibilities for radical aesthetics and communities, we no longer talk about films with punk rock soundtracks, but a specific aesthetic that is connected to larger political movements and negotiations of belonging that surround cultural production. Therefore, I choose the term “punk aesthetics in cinema” to highlight a reconceptualization of punk, that both expands on, and unravels the limitations behind the “punk cinema” discourse. While the term “punk aesthetics” evokes multiplicity, “punk cinema” implies a categorical delimitation.

Punk Literature, Queer Theory and The Field of Cultural Production

Punk literature is vast and still growing; the variety of connections between musical and subcultural influences is still being tracked while sociological examinations of punk as a youth culture specific to a particular time have been reworked and expanded to a global scale. Subjective histories and lived experiences continue to be shared and offer subjects for building a larger context for the term “punk.” Equally, its intersections with other counter-cultural movements from the past or the present still attract theorists as a potential area for investigating new approaches to critiquing dominant ideology. Echoes of this vastness can be found in the various definitions of punk cinema in two distinct ways. Whilst for scholars such as Stacy Thompson punk cinema is strictly concerned with the production conditions which confine the term to the early punk music documentaries and half-fiction films made by punk artists of the

late 1970s and early 1980s. For Nicholas Rombes the notion of punk cinema involves larger cinematic tendencies that seek to subvert the norms around filmmaking and narrative structures, from the Dogme 95 movement to *Fight Club* (1999). Even though these two approaches to the concept of punk cinema are closely related to the shock-effect of punk and the “no future” ideology, they do not necessarily explore the relationship between punk and cinema in a reciprocal manner. In other words, “punk cinema” has been coined as a term that either describes specific films that are associated with the punk rock music genre, or films that exhibit an attitude similar to what is ostensibly perceived as punk. Therefore, it is fair to say that in this “punk cinema” discourse, punk is a given fixed framework, rather than serving as an alterable concept that can be transfigured by what cinema as a medium can offer.

However, the larger intersectional discourse around punk accounts for punk’s recuperations, its predecessors, deaths and aftermaths, cultural atmospheres and economics that rework its political strategies and creative approaches. Demonstrating a deconstructive treatment of punk as a political concept open to transfiguration, recent queer studies have been interested in exploring the parallels between punk and queer subcultures with regard to the etymology of the terms “punk” and “queer,” and the identity politics attached to them: a politics which endorses the creation of inclusive spaces. These theories highlight the importance of subjective experience within collectives organized out of exclusion; the major point being how their politics emphasizes the temporal associations that disrupt the societal norms that organize society around heterosexual reproduction. It is not a surprise that some of these studies build their arguments through delving into a lot of art works, music genres, performances and films, as the field of cultural production offers what Pierre Bourdieu calls *the space of possibles*. For Bourdieu, the field of cultural production is where power relations concerning cultural capital render every art form a result of a certain position-taking: “The literary or artistic field is a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggles* tending to transform or converse this field of forces. [...] Every position-taking is defined in relation to the *space of possibles*” (30) (emphasis in original). This idea of *the space of possibles* is very useful to make sense of the parallels between punk and queer as counter-cultures that strive to create theoretical and productive spaces for excluded subjects, identity

struggles and imaginative forms of being. If cinema is part of the field of cultural production and if there are cinematic productions that take counter-positions against the dominant powers within the field, then these position-takings within cinema are in relation to *the space of possibles* as well. It is the aim of this thesis to reveal the linkages between punk, queer and counter-cinema and argue that the struggle to create alternative *possibles* in punk culture has been in a close relationship with cinema. Queer theory, with its insistence on deconstructing social spaces and critiquing the fixation of identities, provides the theoretical underpinning for this thesis. Hence, the initial question “how does punk translate into film” turns into “how does punk relate to film or vice versa,” thus requiring us to explore the direct and indirect connections between certain filmic expressions, resistant strategies and larger avant-garde movements that have been in close engagement with punk and queer theory’s territory.

Resistant Strategies and the Case of *Tarnation* (2003)

Eve Ng’s examination of two studio films that came out in 2015, *Carol* and *Freeheld*, demonstrate that Bourdieu’s field theory could be taken as a basis to map out an updated theorization that explains how the relatively “insignificant symbolic capital” of social media can disrupt the mainstream commercial agents in the field of queer film production (10). Ng touches upon other studies that delve into the cooperation between queer media and mainstream Hollywood, uncovering that the cultural value of queer mainstream production still relies on downplaying queer elements and “seeking to establish the quality of films through focusing on the caliber of its actors and directors” (10). Bourdieu’s theory, from Ng’s perspective, is useful to explore the evolution of the heteronormative valorization within the studio system that continues to attach low symbolic value to queer authenticity via its promotional strategies. Ng’s study shows that social media users can increase the cultural capital of queer mainstream films by way of producing an online sphere around them. This online sphere counterbalances the market strategies that have “the tendency to disavow the political significance of representing a minority perspective” (11-12) and “counter the queerness” of the works themselves. This is one example that exposes the inner struggles of queer media within the mainstream sector and the role of the “outside” sphere – e.g. the viewer-produced media online – in their success within the system

itself. We can extend this discussion to the low economic capital of independent productions that also negotiate survival within the cultural sphere, perhaps to a more severe degree than the queer mainstream, such as home movies and subcultural productions that reach out to larger audiences than their own locale, challenging the dominant correlation in the field of film industry that equates “high economic capital” with “high cultural value.” For example, Jonathan Caouette’s 2003 documentary *Tarnation* which was made with a mere \$218.32 (Czach 216), is a significant work that demonstrates the imbalance between such a correlation. Combining home-movie aesthetics – edited entirely on free editing software iMovie (Czach 16) – and autobiographical elements that chart Caouette’s own documentation of his traumatic childhood and relationship with his mother, *Tarnation* renders subjective experience as the key resource for creating cultural value.

Following Ng’s theory, it could be argued that *Tarnation*’s cultural value has been increased as the well-known American filmmakers John Cameron Mitchell and Gus Van Sant decided to help the film by taking producer roles, simultaneously increasing its economic value through supporting the film’s entry to the festival circuit. This distinctiveness of *Tarnation* led to the film being considered part of “the changing face of documentary” that is associated with the rise of independent documentary productions in the early 2000s. Paul Arthur points to a shift in how the cultural value of the documentary genre is measured, taking *Tarnation* as a point of reference; the autobiographical and the subjective became as valuable as what the older documentary tradition viewed as the objective and the neutral (21). The queer content of *Tarnation* plays a substantial role in revealing such a shift, since the film’s auto-journalistic aesthetic suggests a “therapeutic tour de force” in Arthur’s words (21), or functions as a stabilizer for the filmmaker’s identity as well as his healing from trauma, in Adrienne Harris’ psychoanalysis-oriented reading (12). For *Tarnation*, the individual survival strategy at work on the level of the film’s content is openly about the filmmaker’s personal experiences. While *Tarnation* highlights the potential cultural value in personal filmmaking, the films involved in the later chapters of this thesis are explored in terms of how collective solutions to restricted conditions, both in terms of marginal identities and low-budget productions, attest to similar

coping mechanisms by adopting “badly connoted” methods, such as mock-terror, camp, pornography and distorted adaptations of canonical texts. The variety of survival strategies within the field of cultural production can be traced from *Tarnation* back to the earlier subcultural cinema associated with “low cultural value,” such as trash, exploitation and pornography. This transhistorical exploration offers a portal into how queer politics looked on screen before the digitalization of cinema at the dawn of gay rights movements, second-wave feminism and the early punk movement. The survival aesthetic of auto-journalism in *Tarnation* also signaled the future of the digital ubiquity of capturing tools (such as smartphones that can play a role in documenting injustice and brutality in our time), with Caouette’s camera creating what is now called the “selfie” aesthetic in 2003. This thesis contends that, before the rise of self-documentation in independent media, we find subcultures as the creative sites through which the experience of exclusion could be reflected on by various methods of reclaiming space and language.

Queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz defines his concept of disidentification as “a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously” (*Disidentifications* 5). As he continues, “subjects who are outside the purview of dominant public spheres encounter obstacles in enacting identifications” (*Disidentifications* 8). Diana Fuss defines “identification” as the process that “names the entry of history and culture into the subject, a subject that must bear traces of each and every encounter with the external world” (*Identification* 3). Disidentification, then, marks the process whereby “the entry of history and culture into the subject” does not involve an acknowledgement of the subject’s subjecthood, and therefore the subject rejects the process of identification (Fuss, *Identification* 7). In this manner, there emerges a surface-level appropriation where the subject externalizes the effects of this process (Fuss suggests that internalization can also happen to a degree [4-8]), highlighting the meaning and failures of identification for the marginalized subject within dominant culture. Muñoz’s detailed studies on cultural productions, also drawing from Fuss, uncover the crucial role of subcultural spheres for minority subjects, especially queer people of color. Muñoz also reveals that subcultural artistic strategies do not only communicate various identity struggles, but also echo within this

communication the struggle of the art itself to exist as a production within the cultural sphere.

Such obstacles, in the pre-digital phase of cinema, sometimes led to strategies that are not as visibly focused on a specific trauma or stigma, as evident in *Tarnation*'s therapeutic exploration of the self, but could be more accurately described as collectively searching for "the lost subject of identification" through antagonistic methods of parody and irony. In this regard, this thesis is a retrospective effort to understand the undervalued subcultural negational aesthetics from the past and their influence on the development of the field of queer politics. What follows investigates the emergences of film cycles associated with marginal subjectivities, atypical narratives and low-budget hybrid formats that gave way to categories such as New Queer Cinema, New Punk Cinema and New French Extremity. It provides a transhistorical intervention into the standardized histories of punk, uncovering the subcultural and DIY aspects of queer cinema that forged joint radical practices with punk subcultures.

Mapping Out Punk Aesthetics on Screen

The corpus starts with the "punk cinema" canon that focuses on famous bands and locations, exploring the aesthetic elements of the early half-documentaries, such as transparency and fact-fiction hybridity, in order to uncover the role of cinema in the larger canonizing historicities of punk. Several resources describe the category of "punk cinema" as a canon. I adopt this terminology from the earlier studies that focus on different aspects of punk on film, such as Bill Osgerby's survey on the history of punk cinema, David Laderman's study on punk in films in relation to the musical genre and Mark Benedetti's strong criticism of canonization within the discourse of New York's No Wave movement which holds strong parallels with the discourse around punk. Moving beyond the limits of this "punk cinema" canon, the later chapters situate the intersections of punk aesthetics, queer histories and counter-cinema within a larger discussion around identity politics and aesthetic reclamation of anti-social negativity through avant-garde cinema.

Chapter One lays out the current state of punk research and explores its connection to avant-garde art in further detail, from earlier subculture studies to the discourse around modern nihilism in general. Roland Barthes' concept of the "writerly text" opens this exploration since punk has been associated with this concept as an open aesthetic that incorporates audience perception into the textual meanings of a text. What it means politically for an art work to have such an open aesthetic continues to remain relevant throughout the other chapters as the role of avant-garde, shock-effect and subjectivity are key themes for subcultural productions. Based on the thematic concepts laid out in Chapter One, Chapter Two explores the "punk cinema" terminology and moves on to critique the popularization and canonization methods of "punk cinema," examining the low-budget documentaries and mockumentaries that are counted as the key examples of "punk cinema" and their treatment in the literature. In doing so, Chapter Two discusses the issues of "immediacy" and "self-reflexivity" in the films' ostensibly "transparent" aesthetics. The subcultural aspects of these films are visible onscreen, especially in the early examples such as *The Punk Rock Movie* (Don Letts, 1978) and *The Blank Generation* (Amos Poe and Ivan Král, 1976), as a result of the fact that they are made within the physical environments of specific punk events of the time while utilizing a populist perception of punk as a sensation in the mainstream media. I examine ignored aspects of early punk cinema that rely on the cinematic referential codes of the heteronormative gaze echoing the media sensationalism of the time. For example, *The Punk Rock Movie's* overlooked cinematic engagement with the media representations of punk and *The Blank Generation's* approximation to cinema verité are both analyzed in relation to how they textually engage with the "immediacy" of the environment. In this analysis, the abundance of concert and archive footage comes across as an overriding effect in the reception of the two films, revealing the role of this constructed "transparency" in the standardization of punk history that ignored many aspects with regards to the involvement of women and queer subcultures.

While Chapter Two uncovers the gaps within the discourse around punk cinema, Chapter Three investigates the political commonalities between punk and queer in terms of methods of identification and disidentification. This chapter starts with the trash cinema of John Waters

from the early 1970s that amalgamate gay underground cinema with the exploitation genre, creating a specific “low” camp aesthetic that has been a source of influence for many theorists and filmmakers associated with the category New Queer Cinema that emerged in the 1990s. Waters’ collective filmmaking methods, with the help of his friends (known as the “Dreamlanders”), have parallels with the early punk cinema analyzed in Chapter Two. Furthermore, Waters’ early cinema renders confrontational strategies of queerness as the ultimate proto-punk aesthetics, such as mock-terror, drag performance and an immersion in abjection. These “negative” aesthetics that embrace disgust are echoed in the later sections of Chapter Three that analyze Derek Jarman’s first feature film *Jubilee* (1978) including London’s gay-punk intersections, and Pedro Almodóvar’s first feature film *Pepi, Luci, Bom* (1980) that emerged from Madrid’s own unique post-Franco subculture, *la movida madrileña*. In these investigations, we see that early work in these filmmakers’ careers indicate the importance of collective filmmaking conditions in the cultivation of their individual aesthetic, creating works that stand out in their oeuvre as examples that have been considered “not yet there” due to their cacophonous hybrid-formats that carry a sense of spontaneity. The commonality these films share in terms of their reception signifies the queerness of their aesthetic as a negotiation between subjectivity and collectivity, while each of them uniquely exemplifies a specific role in relation to the cultivation of “punk cinema.” Whilst Waters’ early films are considered “proto-punk,” Jarman’s film is considered within the “punk cinema” canon (hence, dismissed from his larger oeuvre) and Almodóvar’s film is only mentioned within the discourse as part of “a brief introduction to the roots of punk cinema” (Barber 168).

After demonstrating in Chapter Three that punk aesthetics in cinema do not necessarily mean films about punk, Chapter Four examines the use of pornography as a political apparatus within low-budget subcultural films that are not directly considered punk, specifically, through analyzing New York’s No Wave movement in relation to feminist film theory, the queercore movement and *No Skin off My Ass* (1991), and the French film *Baise Moi* (2000). It will be argued that these films reproduce punk as a residual commodity which refers to the cinematic aesthetics that are left out from mainstream appropriation of punk. These films perform cultural role

reversals that reclaim pornographic expression to confront the assumed correlation between low cultural value and marginalized subjects. The contention is that punk aesthetics can be re-conceptualized and discussed in terms of identity critique through a utilization of pornography, self-reflexivity, aesthetic promiscuity, parody and irony.

Chapter One: Situating Punk and The Avant-garde

In short, what is at stake is a practice of subjectivity that is still unaware of its own constituted nature, hence the difficulty to exceed the simplistic pair of subjectivity and objectivity; a practice of subjectivity that is unaware of its continuous role in the production of meaning, as if things can make sense by themselves, so that the interpreter's function consists of only choosing among the many existing readings, unaware of representation as representation, that is to say, the cultural, sexual, political interreality of the filmmaker as subject, the reality of the subject film and the reality of the cinematic apparatus. And finally, unaware of the inappropriate other within every I. (Trinh T. Minh-ha 419)

This chapter presents an overview of punk discourse in order to provide a background on which a reconceptualization of punk can be built, in light of the intersectional theories around punk subcultures, aesthetics and cultural production. I trace below the aesthetic and political influences of punk in different disciplines, mainly sociology, cultural studies and film theory, and identify the fundamental concepts that inform my approach to examining specific films in subsequent chapters.

There are many different, and at times conflicting, aspects to how the term “punk” has been employed in academia which makes an interdisciplinary methodology necessary to capture these perspectives; here this methodological design is proposed to reflect the intricacies of punk discourse. In order to lay out the patterns, similar tendencies and gaps within the discourse around punk, I present a network of nodes connected to or overlapping each other rather than a categorization, as with the latter, there is a danger of regarding the thematical concepts as distinct from each other which might result in ignoring their shared aspects. For instance, we see that sometimes the terms avant-garde and shock effect have been used synonymously in relation to punk.

I start with the description of punk as “writerly” in order to explore the theories that discuss how

punk aesthetics in cinema comprises an open aesthetic, meaning that the experience offered to the audience is very much part of the construction of the product's aesthetic value. The concept of the "writerly" text as defined by Roland Barthes – a text that offers a sense of openness that invites spectatorial imagination into its aesthetic, rather than a completeness – is at the basis of this description. The second node explores "the shock" of punk and how this shock effect provides the means through which punk productions' direct/indirect relationship with other art and subcultural movements can be traced and framed. This is followed by an investigation of the "punk is (not) dead" debate through the idea of modern nihilism. The chapter then focuses on how the reading of punk along the lines of the avant-garde has been a popular method to expand more on the historical and aesthetic links and correspondences between different cinematic forms. The "earlier subculture studies" section is based on the readings and writings that came from and were influenced by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham which greatly influenced the current shape of sociological studies and the role of semiotics in the study of subcultures. This section explores how the academic orientation of these earlier theories towards subcultures has been criticized as "too distant," arguing that these studies can lack the knowledge of how subcultural participation and performance can cultivate different subjectivities and lived experiences that do not fit in the earlier semiotic readings of icons and style. The last two sections feature a discussion of the intersections of punk and queer in relation to the position of subjectivity in punk discourse and queer studies, and the concept of "no future."

This network of punk discourse can be extended or reduced depending on how the topic is approached. The argument here is that there are gaps and value judgements that standardize certain punk histories and hide the role of subjectivity within historicization. This limited perspective of punk will be revealed through constructing this network, and this can hopefully show how considering punk on an interdisciplinary level can be useful to conceptualize certain socio-cultural influences in film productions and cinematic aesthetics.

What Does It Mean for Punk to Be “Writerly”?

In his article “Punk Cinema,” Stacy Thompson explores the formal style of early documentaries such as *The Blank Generation* (1976) and *The Punk Rock Movie* (1978), each of which are composed mostly of live concert footage of the prominent bands of the 1970s punk scene. While the former was filmed in New York’s famous club CBGB, the latter documented London’s punk environment. As its director, Don Letts, says about his own approach to filmmaking, “[the punk era’s] DIY ethic inspired me to pick up a Super 8mm camera and record what was going on at that time” (Thompson, “Punk Cinema” 51). Drawing from Thompson’s observation that this film’s “organizing principle is the punk song” (50) and it “appears to be simply a conglomerate of crudely filmed pieces of random concert footage” (51), the filmmaking practice behind *The Punk Rock Movie* can be seen as a reflection of the musicmaking practices of the punk bands that it documents. Thompson claims that this type of punk production provides for the spectator the openness to participate in the construction of the meaning of the product. In Thompson’s words, the film “opens itself out, encouraging and prodding the spectator to shift from the position of a passive (to a greater or lesser degree) recipient to that of an active producer of the film’s possible significations” (51). Because of this openness, Thompson thinks that Barthes’ concept of “writerly text” can be applied to this aesthetic in order to conceptualize the spectatorial experience of what he calls “punk cinema” which offers itself as a democratizing process. This idea can be further extended to another activity of the film that centralizes the spectator’s position: the spectator, now being an “active producer,” is not only positioned as the filmmaker, but also, as the musician, or the concert participant, owing especially to the hand-held camera movements as the camera inconsistently changes its positioning from the stage to the audience. The camera’s shift from showing the perspective of the musician to that of the audience does not offer a fixed subject position. The question whether such multiplication of perspectives offered to the spectator can be analyzed through the concept of identification has not been explored within the discourse of punk cinema, even though identification processes have been key to punk-related studies in other disciplines.

Thompson’s introduction of Barthes’ “writerly text” theory into punk discourse (which will be

explained in detail in the next section) has been utilized by David Laderman, who has written extensive explorations of different musical genre conventions and their modifications in cinema. Laderman's book *Punk Slash! Musicals: Tracking Slip-Sync on Film*, traces the asynchronous-ness of the music in early 1980s musicals that take punk as their subject matter, or which show their punk influences via direct references. Laderman's book not only investigates how the punk movement penetrates the traditions of musical genre, but also touches upon the less distinguishable areas of cinema where punk influences can be traced, such as the New York's No Wave scene of the 1980s and its relation to pop-art and the avant-garde. This comprehensive study very briefly touches upon Thompson's reading of early punk documentaries as "writerly" and uses this description to summarize the aesthetics of the "slip-sync sequences" in certain early 1980s musicals, such as *Ladies and Gentlemen, The Fabulous Stains* (1982), by Lou Adler.

Both Thompson and Laderman trace punk influences in cinema, though looking at various areas (i.e. no-budget documentaries vs. mainstream musicals) and adopting completely different approaches – Thompson focuses on an economics of "everybody can do it," while Laderman reflects on genre tropes. The idea that certain productions of music and cinema can share and interchange DIY ethics and punk influences is evident in both Thompson's and Laderman's works, but the shared argument that Barthes' concept of the "writerly" text can be applied to punk productions is not evident in larger theoretical discussions in punk research. Scholarly works that focus on films mostly perform textual analysis (thus, taking film as a text), hence they have a tendency to draw more on literary theory than their sociological counterparts. This engagement with the theoretical underpinnings of the participatory experience that punk aesthetics offers also provides an avenue to discuss the shortcomings of earlier subculture theories that regard punk as a youth subculture lacking the potential for radical change. This thesis contends that the concept of the "writerly" text can be helpful to realize the ways certain punk aesthetics can have substantial impact on identity and/or praxis formations.

First of all, what does it mean for a punk production to be "writerly"? Before attempting to answer this question, it seems important to note a possible misunderstanding that can happen

with Barthes' concept. In Barthes' theory, what is "writerly" does not refer to a final product, it refers to the status of availability for the process of writing/producing, the status of that which can be written/produced. It is a value according to which we can evaluate a work's ability to encourage the reader to not read but rewrite what is written. As Barthes observes:

The writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world is function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. The writerly is the novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem, the essay without the dissertation, writing without style, production without product, structuration without structure. But the readerly texts? They are products (and not productions), they make up the enormous mass of our literature.

(5)

It is important to keep in mind that this value, the "writerly" quality of anything, is also very much subject to change with respect to the reader's (re)writing-(re)producing. In other words, Barthes does not necessarily explain how a work of art can be open to being re-written. Rather he explains, how we, being readers who are willing to *not read but (re)write*, can be open to finding pluralities. Barthes' dichotomous concept of "writerly" / "readerly" text is very much about the relationship between the text and its reader. An author can only hope to produce a work that creates situations for writerly texts to come about during the reader's encounter with the work. The writerly, as an abstract state, defines an art work's commitment to be open to being reconstructed by its audience.

This, the writerly, can describe a punk scene where the band playing on stage embodies an ideal ("everybody can do it") by way of showing how to adopt this ideal and partaking in a production of that specific momentary space rather than merely taking the stage to play music. Such punk performances communicate with the audience in such a bodily way that their shared space becomes a collective environment, before the infinite play of the moment comes to an end. We

can add to Barthes' list of what the writerly is: it is what punk is without the music. The punk scene becomes a site of "a perpetual present" with the prerequisites for the writerly to emerge. The artists' momentary access to the experience with whatever emotion or thought to be released during the event is self-reflexive: the punk artist reflects back on their own activity of music-making and the fact that there can be punk moments to be written by the other participants.

Generally speaking, the musical elements of punk music are diverse and, especially from a genre-based perspective, cannot be pinned down such that the perspective chosen to analyze them becomes more important, i.e. in terms of lyrics, compositions, specific locations or sub-genres etc. However, if we talk about the initial punk moments of the 1976 Western context specifically, a slightly overarching aesthetic comes to prominence: expressive, disorderly and technically imperfect combinations of electric guitar, bass, drums and vocals (mostly in the form of shouting and screaming). Rather than what type of music this is, the writerly element lies in the potentiality of the music to affect its audience in a way that the aesthetic of disorder and imperfection reflects the making of the aesthetic itself. This self-reflexivity in the punk scene can be identified in personal autobiographies of punk artists, saying things along the lines that the art they saw at the time seemed like they could do it too, such as Don Letts' aforementioned description of his early steps into making punk films. Viv Albertine of The Slits remembers her memory of seeing the Sex Pistols for the first time and feeling like she saw a bridge to self-expression. In her memoir *Clothes Clothes, Clothes, Music, Music, Music, Boys, Boys, Boys*, she writes:

I've always thought my particular set of circumstances – poor, North London, comprehensive school, council flat, *girl* – haven't equipped me for success. As I watch the Sex Pistols I realise that this is the first time I've seen a band and felt there are no barriers between me and them. Ideas that have been in the back of my mind for years rush to the front of my brain... [...] This is it. At last I see not only that other universe I've always wanted to be part of, but the bridge to it. (86)

Albertine's memoir reveals that the commonly circulated history of British punk relies on the omission of certain bands, such as The Slits and The Raincoats, typically all-female bands that do

not fit the myth of punk that is generally represented in the shape of male musicians. Furthermore, her memoir also reveals that the subjective experience of a subculture is a definitive aspect of specific subcultural aesthetics, exposing the populist methods of media that either neglect or overly emphasize certain parts of the subculture to sell a mythical sensationalism. For the punk participant who lives through the moment of engaging with the disorderly aesthetic – be it the musician or the audience – the subjective experience becomes prominent, hence an identity issue considering the gap between the participant’s experiential knowledge and the reception of this identity by the public discourse. This is the point that earlier subculture theories overlooked: punk’s political potential for articulating the perspective of excluded subjects, which will be touched upon in a later section.

The Shock Effect & Punk

“The shock effect,” as analyzed by Walter Benjamin, is inherent to the film form (427). The movement of the film strip manipulates audience attention by the changing of images and sounds, disguising the production process of the art itself. This manipulation and the veiling of the mechanics behind producing art meant for Benjamin, and later for Theodor W. Adorno, an obscuring activity that normalizes the economic system that is co-dependent on a hierarchical ideology, ultimately providing a basis for controlling the masses. As noted by Benjamin:

The spectator’s process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change. This constitutes the shock effect of the film, which, like all shocks, should be cushioned by heightened presence of mind. By means of its technical structure, the film has taken the physical shock effect out of the wrappers in which Dadaism had, as it were, kept it inside the moral shock effect. (427)

In this respect, film transforms the radical potential of the shock-effect of Dadaism into another site for commodification. This strand of critical thought is very much what the Frankfurt School represents in cultural studies: modern art – like all modern culture – and the rise of colonialism and capitalism are indisputably interconnected. We can consider the radical position “the shock effect” holds mostly in relation to the post-World War I Dadaist movement that influenced

Benjamin in exploring different art forms in terms of how they function under modernization. Even though this radical position of most avant-garde art has been somewhat respected as a political effort to “heighten the presence of mind” in consuming art, it has also been taken as a potential domain for commodification that can be transformed into a “high culture” product that not only shocks the masses but attracts elements of the bourgeoisie with its sophistication.

“The shock effect” of the initial British punk movement mostly stems from its ambivalent political outburst through fascist and homophobic imagery and the behavior of certain bands in causing a chaotic discussion around the music industry. This ambiguity in the political alignment of the punk bands made it harder for political parties and organizations to persuade them into collaboration, as observed by Matthew Worley in his article “Shot by Both Sides: Punk, Politics and the End of ‘Consensus’.” A lot has been written on punk rock and British politics in the late 1970s; through this literature we can track the mythologizing effect of media representation which, in our current time, has been transforming into another form of populism. The recent popularity of “looking back” at punk in the 1970s through the lens of the current political atmosphere seems to be useful to make connections between the historical and the personal for academics and critics who can say “I was there.”²

Dave Laing is one of the writers who has been interested in “the shock effect” and how punk rock as a musical genre could create this effect. He is openly positive about the possibility that punk can bring the necessary depth to the field of popular music that a political struggle within the capitalist system would require. In the conclusion of his article “Interpreting Punk,” he writes:

Unlike earlier musics [sic], punk rock has not been integrated into a restructured music industry, so much as fractured along the lines of its own internal contradictions. Its most avant-garde elements, which challenged the structure of an

² Some examples include Pete Dale’s article “Year Zero for British Punk Was 1976 – But There Had Long Been Anarchy in the USA” on *The Conversation* (Dale), *The New York Times* piece that “asked punk rockers and those who know their music what it means to them” (Shea), the news concerning “the punk funeral” when Joe Corr e burnt expensive punk memorabilia (“Punk Funeral”), and any John Lydon commentator piece online which can be generally found on *The Guardian*.

orderly music for consumption under the sign of the leisure-effect, remain excluded. Meanwhile, those who have concentrated on a shift in subject matter within the conventional formal structures are inside the music industry without necessarily becoming integrated. (128)

This relatively positive approach describes “most avant-garde elements” of punk as the territory of punk that kept its “outsider” status, while other non-avant-garde aspects – which are not explained in Laing’s article – have been incorporated. The differentiation between avant-garde elements and non-avant-garde elements in punk is not clear in Laing’s “leisure-effect” theory, however we can still sense it through his identifying “the different levels of shock-effect, in terms of their ability to dominate or be dominated by the leisure-effect” (“Interpreting” 127). Nonetheless, the theories around the avant-garde, the political ambivalence of punk and its fragmented position in popular music require further analysis in relation to where punk fits in the field of cultural production.

In another article, “Listening to Punk,” Dave Laing examines the genre primarily from a musical point-of-view and analyzes a variety of styles within punk in relation to the theories of cultural production by Barthes, Adorno, Bertolt Brecht and Benjamin. His focus is primarily on the relationship between the meaning of song lyrics and the singing style. He asserts that while mainstream music tries to appeal to the listener by pleasurable “amplified voices” and lyrics shorn of any political content, punk rock, with an “ugly” singing style, highly political slogan-like lyrics and a generally repetitive, angry or ironic sound, carries a specific shock effect that pushes the listener to confront the negativity of human life and the “dark side” of the unconscious. He mentions subjectivity in punk rock in terms of the role of the artist and through a musicological approach he touches upon intertextuality, which he sees emerging within punk productions. What is particularly relevant to “punk cinema” in Laing’s text is when he describes the difference between the shock-effect of Dadaism and the shock-effect of film form within the broad framework of punk. He states that the randomness of Dada (which is considered by Laing as an aesthetic element approximate to punk as an art form) and its deliberate aim to shock and disturb the audience is what gives Dada a Brechtian approach with “a desire to make a negative

impact, perhaps to cause a ‘shock defense’ or trauma” (Laing, “Listening” 415).

During the same time period, the late 1910s, when the Dadaist movement began, film as an artistic medium was rapidly growing in popularity, the projected moving image becoming a completely new, and at times shocking, audio-visual experience for the masses. Film’s ability to offer a subjective experience of time and movement to the audience, gave way to it becoming an art form that leaves a positive impact on the audience with its aim to “transform the outlook of the viewer” (Laing, “Listening” 415). Laing differentiates between the intentions of Dada and film, and questions where punk would be situated in the discussion of shock affect and art: “If Benjamin’s ideas are applied to the 1970s, where does punk rock stand in the contrast between Dada and film, and in that between the two responses to the shock-effect?” (415).

Another important intervention is Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay’s collection, *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*, which gathers important texts from the initial punk era that engage with the issue of race. In their introduction, they question the boundaries of punk in terms of de-facto whiteness and ask an important question that reflects a self-awareness of the exclusive practices that identity categories can bring about: “But to *whom* does that scene belong, and what kinds of identities are allowed inside its safe spaces?” (13). The argument here is that questions around the exclusionary practices of punk as a distinct subculture – especially its well-documented formations in the British and American context – should also be explored in relation to the idea of inclusivity and the creation of collective aesthetics through shock. The critical approaches to the wide range of political positions that most shock effect in (punk) art stems from, offer a space to discuss the artistic methods of engaging with political imagery that can create shock. The inevitable relationship between socio-economics and aesthetics is often reflected in the onscreen depictions of marginal identities. Therefore, the political positions behind the creation of certain effects of avant-garde art, such as shock and disgust, can be evident in the various representations of marginality and stigmatized subjectivities. This space will be explored further in the thesis in relation to trash cinema of John Waters, the queercore movement and the role of pornography in French New Extremity – cinematic movements that

reclaim the “low status” attached to these genres that work with the shock effect. Above all, in Waters’ early proto-punk cinema, we will find an aesthetic strategy on screen (mock-terror) that utilizes and confronts the negative value attributed to certain racial and sexual minorities in the 1960s American society.

The Metaphor of “The Death of Punk” and Modern Nihilism

What seems like the most fruitful aspect of the “punk is dead” debate in the media and in the academic sphere is the rhetoric it uses, treating punk as an organism which could die. This treatment is not at all unique to punk; from Nietzsche’s widely quoted “God is dead” to “cinema is dead” announcements in every decade (from Peter Greenaway’s “zapper” comment to the latest announcement made by Scorsese),³ the figures most capable of dying typically represent a canon. Nietzsche uses the method of attributing the quality of dying to God, which works as a metaphor for the failure of the fundamental ideals of civilization around “moral equality, collective prosperity, peace, toleration, or scientific progress” which were developed through the age of Enlightenment (Pippin 498-499). Considering the certain nihilist tendencies and “no-future” aspect of the initial punk moment (and how both phrases became t-shirt slogans), the rhetoric punk shares with Nietzsche asks what happens when a specific set of values, religious or subcultural, is perceived as an organic entity that could die. What is the implication behind saying “punk is dead” instead of “punk ended”?

The metaphor of punk being a living entity seems to bring to mind the features of an organism and what it needs to stay alive, such as reproduction, development, maintenance and habitus. The use of this metaphor seems to kill punk by announcing its death, and we see in certain accounts that this metaphor also gives way to its rebirth. For example, Dylan Clark does not only announce the death of punk, he also claims to perform an autopsy on punk’s dead body:

³ In 2016, at a retrospective event organized as a celebration of his career, Peter Greenaway stated: “I believe that cinema died on the 31 September 1983 when the zapper or the remote control was introduced into the living rooms of the world” (Brown). In 2019, Martin Scorsese wrote a piece about blockbuster Marvel movies and the future of cinema, implying that the studio-system is not alive anymore (“I Said Marvel Movies Aren’t Cinema”).

“Perhaps the result of our autopsy will show that subculture (of the young, dissident, costumed kind) has become a useful part of the status quo, and less useful for harboring discontent. For these reasons we can melodramatically pronounce that subculture is dead” (223). While Clark further accounts for the rebirth of punk in his article and explores its regenerations, Ana Raposo offers a more conclusive post-mortem:

The date of the ‘death of punk’ is a disputed issue, ranging from early 1978 to 1979 (symbolically marked by the death of Sid Vicious). The reason for punk’s official demise is not in dispute: its incorporation into the mainstream. It had been ‘made safe’ and a generation that had adopted the revolutionary proto-political concept of punk felt betrayed. By announcing the death of punk, Crass [an influential anarcho-punk band] declared themselves as the authentic punks following the original proto-politics proclaimed by punk’s early pioneers. Anarcho-punk aimed to free punk – and punks – from corporate industries and organised politics. Placing a strong emphasis on individuality and DIY (do-it-yourself) politics, it produced a current that diverged from what punk was becoming. Because if punk died in the late 1970s, it was reborn, as a more self-conscious movement where political stances were more overtly exposed. (79)

Whether later movements, such as anarcho-punk, that were born out of the initial punk anti-establishment DIY ethics could free punk from corporate industries is subject to debate about the possibility, or impossibility, of such emancipation.

In short, the death of punk has been explored mainly in relation to punk’s recuperation by the mainstream, making use of the metaphor of the death of punk to underline punk’s importance in the formation and the loss of identity and authenticity for its participants and practitioners. Moreover, the reason behind the popularity of this metaphor and how it came to dominate the discussion around the mainstreaming of punk can also be contextualized in relation to the larger socio-psychological contradictions associated with the experience of modernity within which Nietzsche’s philosophy has also found its place. Punk’s rhetorical and metaphorical “death” ties it to the modern nihilism that Marshall Berman explored in *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The*

Experience of Modernity (1982). Berman shows us how modernist methods of producing art and knowledge failed to challenge the capitalist economic system that supposedly made them possible in the first place. In the chapter “The Metamorphosis of Values,” Berman writes:

The problem of nihilism emerges again in Marx’s next line: ‘The bourgeoisie has resolved all personal honor and dignity into exchange-value; and in place of all the freedoms that men have fought for, it has put one unprincipled freedom—free trade.’ The first point here is the immense power of the market in modern men’s inner lives: they look to the price list for answers to questions not merely economic but metaphysical—questions of what is worthwhile, what is honorable, even what is real. When Marx says that other values are ‘resolved into’ exchange value, his point is that bourgeois society does not efface old structures of value but subsumes them. Old modes of honor and dignity do not die; instead they get incorporated into the market, take on price tags, gain a new life as commodities. Thus, any imaginable mode of human conduct becomes morally permissible the moment it becomes economically possible, becomes ‘valuable;’ anything goes if it pays. This is what modern nihilism is all about. (111)

By pointing out how, in Marxist thought, what is honorable and real cannot be measured independent from the economic system of valorization, and that a transcendent and ethical value judgement system does not exist outside of capitalism, Berman opens up the discussion of how to create value that is intrinsic and authentic to ourselves. He reads *The Communist Manifesto* as a modernist text, challenging the more common sociological approach of analyzing the traits of modern life through the prism of Marxism: he reads Marxism through the prism of modernism. This theoretical reversal enables him to address possible contradictions in the main Marxist idea that productive and innovative methods of bourgeois society provides the means through which a communal life can be built upon the ashes of overthrown capitalism. He problematizes the assumption in Marxist thought that, with the abolition of capitalism and elimination of the class difference between bourgeoisie and proletariat, people will be able to gain their agency and true sense of self devoid of the pressure of economic status and prestige. Berman asks: “But if bourgeois society is as volatile as Marx thinks it is, how can its people ever settle on any real

selves?” (110). Overall, he encourages the reader to ponder the question of the authentic self and identity, forcing us to reflect upon our sociopolitical existence.

This line of thought inevitably leads us to postmodernism and the loss of self. This is where the investigation of subcultures also finds its place, since subcultures promote communality and individualism (i.e. DIY practices) at the same time, while not necessarily making any direct claims of building a completely new future. Subcultural lives lay bare the potential meaninglessness that emerges from the idea of self as an independent concept that is disassociated from capital. This activity of laying bare embodies the nihilist ideology that “coalesce[s] around praxis” (Clark 230) (“Punk is dead. Long live punk” as the famous graffiti from 1970s goes [Clark 223]). Punk subcultures can be seen as a response to modern nihilism; the contradictions within this response provide the tools for confrontational strategies that can help coping with the contradictions on the level of the self. Berman renders the idea of a free self as unattainable and places the unattainability of this freedom at the core of his interpretation of modern nihilism that emerges at the thought of destroying capitalism and founding a new modernity: “The nature of the newly naked modern man may turn out to be just as elusive and mysterious as that of the old, clothed one, maybe even more elusive, because there will no longer be any illusion of a real self underneath the mask” (110).

There is a fundamental lack here. As Angela McRobbie detects in her early review of Berman’s book, “there is no analysis of gender in this meta-critique” (“All That is” 130). What happens to people who do not identify as “man” in this paradoxical existence? This question could have been useful to explore ideas around the attainability of a free self – something to be created out of the experiential knowledge of oppression and exclusion, rather than found by “the newly naked modern man.” However, Berman is not inattentive to subcultures as he views cities and urbanization as sites for potential changes, perhaps, *the space of possibles*.

This unattainability of a free self is closely linked to the metaphor of the death of punk: punk, as a

subculture, can only reproduce, develop and maintain itself as long as it has the underground habitat that is produced by the very socioeconomic system that it aims to attack. This contradiction seems to be the reason why the “punk is (not) dead” debate has always occupied the discussions around the authenticity and longevity of punk. For example, this situation is summarized by Jude Davies as “the punk is dead debate carried out among interested parties almost since punk’s inception” (4), clarifying that the death of punk debate itself has been a part of punk’s construction, paralleling the contradiction about the free self that modern nihilism exposes. Drawing from this trajectory, this thesis discusses whether the field of subcultures is where the discussion of individualism could go beyond passive consumerism, and instead, point to the possibilities of collective production through striving to embody the ideal “everybody can do it” and the DIY punk aesthetic. Berman asserts that modern art and literature may have failed at exposing its own participation in the brutality of modernization and the attendant normalization of class difference and subordination, resulting in the continuation of the hierarchical dichotomy of high and low cultures. Angela McRobbie, while considering the influence of punk on the new generation of women in the 1980s in the USA in her reading of Berman, sees the potential for creating *the space of possibles* through the recognition of “new forms of misery” that she detects in Berman’s text. She is less romantic about the urban aesthetics and more attentive to the underground forms of resistance, the inevitable cooperation between punk and feminism, and the power of subcultures:

All that is Solid urges us to consider not only the new forms of misery which capitalism in its decline creates but also the new forms of culture and politics which direct experience of these conditions brings into being. And for the Women’s Movement this might mean new and different, even unrecognizable, forms of feminism appearing across a range of social locations. (133)

Following the role of political movements in the cultivation of subcultures, can we claim that subcultures might offer what modernist art could not do, that is, the exposition of its own position in the industry? Can the “everybody can do it” aesthetic subvert the promotion of individualism by way of casting everyone, especially minority groups, as artists who are primarily active creators rather than passive consumers? This is not to say that subcultural productions do

not promote individualism; on the contrary, they offer everyone a space to participate, rendering individual participation as important as the act/product itself.

Considering how punk largely reflects the complexities of the relationship between the authentic self and the capitalist society that leads to the concept of modern nihilism, it is fair to say that comprehending the temporality of punk depends on where we are directed towards by this nihilism. If there is a hopeful sense of potential for imaginative values to be born out of the death of ethical systems in Nietzsche's nihilism, the "punk is reborn" rhetoric that has been adopted after the death of punk debate holds forth a similar potential for creativity and collectivity.

The Avant-garde & Punk

Greil Marcus' well-known book *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century* contributes to the death of punk debate and the complex history of punk: "Punk was not a musical genre; it was a moment in time that took shape as a language anticipating its own destruction, and thus sometimes seeking it, seeking the statement of what could be said with neither words nor chords. It was not history" (82). According to Marcus, exploring the history of punk means tracing the direct and indirect influences and cultural connections between earlier counter cultures and avant-garde art that manifested similar anti-establishment ethics and shock effects that questioned the status quo. In this historical investigation, punk itself is not a history *per se* but rather it temporarily embodies a form of expression fuelled by the disturbance experienced in modern lived life within capitalist societies. In that sense, it is something that only lives in the moment, it is transient, or self-destructive.

As Simon Reynolds observes, Marcus' free-flowing style of exploration is more "a 'conversation' between figures, separated by decades, who have mostly never heard of each other," than a discovery of a genealogy ("Lipstick Traces Reviewed"). This makes the arguments in the book somewhat speculative as the writing contrasts with the traditionally accepted objective tone of the researcher. Therefore, the work carries a critical tone that resembles the perspective of the

Situationists that Marcus connects with punk. Take, for example, Guy Debord's seminal text *The Society of The Spectacle* where he describes the style of dialectical theory as a "a scandal and abomination to the prevailing standards of language and to the sensibilities moulded by those standards, because while it makes concrete use of existing concepts it simultaneously recognizes their *fluidity* and their inevitable destruction" (53). According to the Situationist perspective, art and language interchangeably engage with contradictions within society which necessitates a dialectical approach towards modern art, asserting that the illusion of universality in modernism can be problematized through embracing negation. The Situationist view saw artistic negation necessary in order to challenge standard methods of producing art and knowledge, and the status quo that regulates what is intelligible. This is where the effective critique of modernism lies. As Debord writes, "Critical theory must *communicate itself* in its own language – the language of contradiction, which must be dialectical in both form and content. It must be an all-inclusive critique, and it must be grounded in history. [...] It is not a negation of style, but the style of negation" (53). The critical tone of Marcus in *Lipstick Traces* can be interpreted as an attempt to embody this dialectical perspective because of its adoption of a "conversational" style rather than following a literary or scholarly orthodoxy.

This kind of project of tracing back and forth the direct or indirect historical connections can run the risk of "over-reading signs," but that risk itself signals an artistic tendency in writers that exhibits a punk sensibility towards these specific histories' potential to remain alive, influential and self-reflexive. While for Marcus, history can be a concept that is not exactly flexible, the idea that history is not over is something Sara Ahmed writes of in her blog *Feminist Killjoys*. In a completely different context examining the dynamics between students and teachers within higher education, she critiques the behavior of dismissal (belonging to the academics in positions of power) that criticizes some students for being "too" sensitive about an issue and interrogates the reasons behind this repressive, mostly anti-feminist, behavior. She summarizes what over-sensitivity can mean to people who are over-sensitive: "Over-sensitive can be translated as: sensitive to that which is not over" ("Against Students"). By referring to things that are not over, she describes the things that are swept away within society by the dominant rule of thought,

producing residues. The reason Ahmed's quote is relevant to how punk scholars treat the historicity behind avant-garde artworks, residual artefacts and momentary events lies in the importance of subjective experience in the activity of "over-reading signs." For those who are involved in a subcultural environment where involvement means participating in a ritualistic pattern of creativity and social activity like earlier avant-garde art movements demonstrated, over-reading connections in history can mean reading that which is not over. Exploring the subaltern consciousness in filmmaking, and the inevitable unconsciousness that complements it, requires an interpretive investigation. Hence, the chosen corpus of this thesis is determined from this perspective.

A further study that examines what constitutes avant-garde in relation to other art forms and identifies patterns is A. L. Rees' *A History of Experimental Film and Video*. In terms of political positioning, Rees' embrace of subjectivity involved in his project of tracing of connections within the realm of avant-garde cinema is more self-reflexive compared to Marcus' authorial position. Rees states that his overview includes prejudices and exclusions, advising the reader to remedy the gaps themselves, reminding us about the contradictory nature of writing about a history of the avant-garde. He warns the reader about what this book is not, thereby adopting a negation from the get-go: "It would of course be possible to write quite a different book on this topic, using the same or many other artists and films and looking at other issues. This is not that book" (viii). This negation in the preface is not surprising; Rees dwells on the involvement of the author in writing history by way of highlighting the possibilities of other histories. He also establishes the political context within which cinema and other avant-garde art forms intersect: "Art, which is always a form of social surplus, is a mixed economy even in the most corporate of regimes. The blurring of borders between avant-garde and mainstream is no new phenomenon; it characterizes the century" (4). He continues: "For much of history the avant-garde has questioned this assumption of cinema as cultural myth and industrial product, and offered a number of alternative ways of seeing. At the same time, the act of seeing – and hence of illusion and spectacle – is itself put into question" (5). Considering the self-awareness of subjectivity in his investigation of the history of avant-garde cinema and his embrace of a dialectical perspective

that does not view the avant-garde as disconnected from the mainstream, Rees' book offers an insightful discussion around the "mistrust of apparent continuity" in the avant-garde that sheds light on the ambivalences in the politics behind the shock effect of punk (5). Rees' quote below also shows that the avant-garde is a concept through which we can find the intersections of cinema and punk:

Although "avant-garde" is not an altogether happy term, and many film-makers reject it, its survival in film criticism suggests that it may not yet be drained of all content, including the survival of shock as a cultural agent and catalyst. Often dismissed as a merely juvenile impulse to throw paint at the public (but sanctified by Marinetti, Mayakovsky, surrealism and punk), shock was cast by the sophisticated critiques of Walter Benjamin and Antonin Artaud as the founding moment of cinema itself. Recast in the 1970s by structural film to attack film norms of vision and duration, and then in the 1980s by body-centered Baudelairian taboo-busters, the maligned idea of shock as cultural stimulant, interruption or break is far from exhausted. (4)

Seeing shock as a cultural catalyst and simultaneously an interruption exhibits a dialectical attitude towards researching cultural stimulants and markers, taking a deliberate detour from clear distinctions about how art functions. Rees' attitude can be interpreted along the same lines as Debord's idea that "dialectical theory's mode of exposition reveals the negative spirit within it" (112), and informs this thesis in terms of rendering self-reflexivity and negation as central pillars.⁴ Furthermore, Rees' observation of how certain shock effects have been seen as "juvenile" in the mainstream parallels the criticisms about seeing punk as a "youth culture," a point explored in the next section.

⁴ Echoing Rees' conceptualization of negation in the avant-garde that includes punk and the 1970s structuralist film movement, a few structural films will be explored in Chapter Four in relation to New York's No Wave movement. It will be argued that the partial appropriation of the structural film aesthetic by one of the most narrative-driven No Wave films from the 1980s, *Variety* (Bette Gordon 1983), serves a punk aesthetic due to its rejection of the strict rules of the structuralist film movement.

Earlier Subculture Theories

When Dick Hebdige, in his influential book *Subcultures: The Meaning of Style*, examined the brief moment of punk as a defiant subculture formed out of the effects of recession and the repressive political atmosphere in the UK and the USA at the time, he built a perspective based on semiotics through which the style of punk, as a specific set of cultural signs, is analyzed as a political agent that challenges the dominant ideology “at the profoundly superficial level of appearances: that is, at the level of signs” (17). Briefly, what created the punk aesthetic was the dislocation of technique and knowledge that “high art” necessitates, which is ultimately a marker of class difference. Hebdige begins the discussion by delving into how dominant ideology works on the collective unconscious within culture through common sense and quotes the cultural theorist Stuart Hall: “[Y]ou cannot learn, through common sense, *how things are*: you can only discover *where they fit* into the existing scheme of things” (Hall 325). For Hebdige, the dominant ideology is disrupted when punks extracted items, images and symbols out of *where they fit*, rendered technique unnecessary for musical composition, and lastly took over the aesthetics and behaviors of “the degenerate” and “low culture” that the mainstream media sensationalized as destructive, such as anarchism, vandalism, taboos around sexuality, obscenity, fetish and BDSM.

Hebdige’s book carefully articulates what style meant to subcultures to express certain political and social responses to the socio-economic restrictions imposed by the ideological hegemony of capitalist culture. Punk was a symptom for Hebdige, a historical era which exemplified the complex relationship between subcultures and their role in cultural production. As he observes:

[...] [T]he punks were not only directly responding to increasing joblessness, changing moral standards, the rediscovery of poverty, the Depression, etc., they were *dramatizing* what had come to be called “Britain’s decline” by constructing a language which was, in contrast to the prevailing rhetoric of the Rock Establishment, unmistakably relevant and down to earth. The punks appropriated the rhetoric of crisis which had filled the airwaves and the editorials throughout the period and translated it into tangible (and visible) terms. (87)

There are key questions here that concern cinema and the discussion that Hebdige started about punk as a subculture and as a collective style. Can we apply “punk” in more general (“tangible [and visible]” in Hebdige’s words) terms that are not necessarily about the specific crisis in 1970s Britain, but more about a larger social crisis in the age of postmodernism? How does “the rhetoric of crisis” that could be integrated with young and poor sections of society transfer into an audio-visual medium? Does the postmodern era of cultural production offer a larger arena for this to happen?

Dick Hebdige’s work can be seen as an extension of earlier subculture theories that investigated the concept of subculture primarily as a “youth culture” in the UK. One of the most influential works of this kind is *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* edited by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson from the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), in 1975. These essays mostly casted subcultures as a smaller subset of the bigger class system and social history, naming the dominant culture as the parent culture of subcultural rebellious movements. As Hall and Jefferson note:

In modern societies, the most fundamental groups are the social classes, and the major cultural configurations will be, in a fundamental though often mediated way, “class cultures.” [...] When we examine this relationship between a subculture and the “culture” of which it is a part, we call the latter the “parent” culture. This must not be confused with the particular relationship between “youth” and their “parents,” [...]. What we mean is that a subculture, though differing in important ways – in its “focal concerns,” its peculiar shapes and activities – from the culture from which it derives, will also share some things in common with that “parent” culture. The bohemian subculture of the *avant-garde* which has arisen from time to time in the modern city, is both distinct from its “parent” culture (the urban culture of the middle class intelligentsia) and yet also a part of it (sharing with it a modernising outlook, standards of education, a privileged position vis-a-vis productive labour, and so on). (4)

Playing a critical role in the development of cultural studies as a field drawing largely from

Marxist philosophers such as Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser, Stuart Hall – the director of the Birmingham CCCS at the time when the subcultural studies started to blossom – paved the way for the Marxist readings of subcultures first and foremost as an expression of the subordinated class. Hall’s work has captured many aspects of the process of marginalization under dominant ideology, mainly Thatcherism, and the politics of identity, race, difference and otherness (Alexander).⁵ While Hall’s Marxist perspective continues to influence many scholars to analyze cultural productions and societal patterns from a class-based approach, some of the theories around subcultures based on Hall’s work have been criticized for their fixed ideological framework.

Jack Halberstam observes that this approach “is trapped in the oedipal framework that pits the subculture against parent culture” (“What’s That” 319) and he posits queer subcultures against this perspective: “[Q]ueer subcultures are not simply spin-offs from some distant youth culture like punk; as we will see in relation to riot dyke, queer music subcultures may be as likely to draw upon women’s music from the 1970s and early 1980s as upon British punk circa 1977” (320). Halberstam’s presentation of dyke subcultures shows the diversity within queer communities in terms of their style and music. From riot grrrl punk bands and drag king performers who imitate boy bands, to the queercore movement and slam poetry, which carries influences from rap subculture and attracts queer musicians and spoken word artists of color, Halberstam covers considerable ground in terms of different subcultures (alternative to the initial British mid-70s punk) and necessitates a perspective that can escape the connotations of youth/parent terminology. How queer subcultures blur the border between the cultural theorist and the subculture participant is another important aspect of Halberstam’s research in terms of the longevity of certain subcultural behaviors and the challenges they presented to heteronormative culture.

⁵ For a detailed account of how Hall’s work expanded the intersections of race studies and cultural studies as well as an exploration of the entrances of his own identity as a point of reference for the theoretical discussions around race and diaspora – he has been cited at times as “a theorist of black Britain” – please see Claire Alexander’s dissection of “the issue of both Hall’s raced identity and his impact on the study of race” in her article “Stuart Hall and Race”(465).

We can say that the earlier ideas around punk aesthetics and politics of identity in subcultures have been very much influenced by Western schools of thought based on Marxism, including The Frankfurt School and the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies. They maintained the tone of the objective researcher who locates themselves at a distance from their subjects, thereby potentially losing touch with experiential knowledge that comes with being a member of a subculture (though this is not to assert that the academics at CCCS were not personally involved in subcultures, but to highlight their positionality in their theoretical engagement with the subject of subculture). There are scholarly works that address the early subculture studies' positionality issue, written by academics who choose to use their subcultural experiences within their theorization on a visible level. These more contemporary works mostly begin with the personal story of its author's or editors' own affinities with punk, presenting detailed accounts of punk that could only exist through its writers' experiences. They present overall a critical agenda that reveals that the "objective researcher" approach can be problematic when it comes to researching subcultures that share an aesthetic and a set of values that are individually adopted by members in such different ways that trying to pin down a subcultural experience comes across as an authoritarian and one-dimensional project.

Some of the earlier sociological works showed us how this dimension simplified aspects of subcultures, such as gender, race and sexuality, that were essential to their later regenerations and iterations in different time-places, as also carefully documented in Duncombe and Tremblay's *White Riot*. As observed above, this book collects personal essays by a variety of writers, from James Baldwin to Patti Smith, creating a collage that guides us through the changing perceptions of race and white privilege surrounding the history of punk. This is a resource that can fill certain gaps in theoretical studies that lacked the visibility and immediacy of experience, as much as it can be used to trace how the politics of (in)visibility of race is blended in the ways we think of the punk figure: processes of erasure in culture were not the main reference points in the earlier subculture theories even though these processes underpinned the development of these theories. Here, it is also important to mention Angela McRobbie's widely cited and translated article "Settling Accounts with Subculture," a feminist critique of subculture theories, including

Hebdige's *Subcultures*, bringing sexual politics and gender into this field. McRobbie dissects how Hebdige's *Subcultures* actually differs from the earlier theories in *Resistance Through Rituals*, detecting that "neither book takes us very far in understanding youth and gender" ("Settling" 24). As a fellow CCCS academic at the time, McRobbie's intervention into the "absences" in the subculture theories shed light on their male-centric positionalities.

On another note, Halberstam, years later, also acknowledges how masculine aspects of the punk subculture could attract all genders and how influential punk has been for certain queer subcultures, despite some of the earlier punk bands' association with certain fascist and homophobic aesthetics. How does the political ambivalence of earlier punk communicate with the predominantly representation-oriented politics of queer culture? This question will be explored in later chapters on the intersections of punk and queer subcultures, especially with regards to the anti-social aesthetics of the queercore movement and Bruce LaBruce's early punk films that directly made references to the homophobic sections of the punk subculture.

Halberstam also touches upon certain traits that dyke and queer performers share in their art, such as irony, parody, self-reflexivity and "politics of refusal – the refusal to grow up and enter the heteronormative adulthoods implied by the concepts of progress and maturity" ("What's That" 330). Even though the documented history of Anglo-Saxon punks in the 1970s consists of mainly young people and the "death" of this initial "youth culture" has been commonly accepted, the less documented queer subcultures from then and now continue to call for alternative readings of subcultures and aesthetics. Drawing from Halberstam, when the influence of punk becomes disentangled from the cis-male/young cultural participation, we might reach a more positive conclusion about its legacy than Dick Hebdige's conclusion which suggests "complete otherness or complete spectacle" (Halberstam, "What's That" 319). Halberstam's perspective provides a critique of the populist perception of punk as a concept that is doomed to be assimilated by the mass culture.

Punk & Queer: The Role of Subjectivity

The positioning of subcultures in a theoretical framework within which modern life and public sphere are connected around the free market, white privilege and heteronormative reproduction has been shown to be insufficient to explore the political potentials subcultures offer. The works by Cathy J. Cohen, Jack Halberstam, Tavia Nyong'o and Jayna Brown, who analyzed the phenomenological parallels between punk and queer, suggest that punk discourse would benefit from the philosophical and methodological explorations developed by queer theory. It is important here to point out that punk and queer's coevolution has become a prominent subject of interest within queer studies. One of the earliest texts that bring them together is Cathy J. Cohen's article, entitled "Punks, Bulldaggers, And Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" (1997). Cohen, whose most recent work is on black youth cultures, suggests that one of the functions of queer politics should be infiltrating the left, stating that "many [...] [left] theorists have been homophobic and heterosexist in their approach to the topics of sexuality and heteronormativity" (443). Cohen's text does not engage in the earlier subculture theories or any punk subculture per se ("punks" are taken as yet another marginalized group in her perspective along with women and queer people of color); however, her detailed critique of the mainstream left politics as well as the assimilation within queer activism has been especially influential in queer studies for quite some time, as evident in the journal *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*' special forum to celebrate the twentieth-anniversary publication of her aforementioned article (Ramos). The later documentations and works on punk already share affiliations with research and discussion methods in queer studies, such as Cohen's, that take the combination of intersectionality and the subjective experience as focal points. Accordingly, this thesis centralizes the role of subjectivity in conceptualizing punk, drawing from the scholarly works that highlight the subjective aspects of research in the context of queer methodologies. Before delving into the parallels between punk productions and queer methodologies, I would like to underline how the later punk writings demonstrated a self-reflexive rhetoric drawing from the subjective experiences of the authors involved. Here, there is a focus on "lived experience" and this contrasts in some respects with earlier subculture theories.

For example, Frank Cartledge questions the ways in which the established punk iconography has been determined by the textual/visual histories based on the London SEX shop managed by Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood, “cutting a swath through the urban landscape,” creating a myth around punk fashion (143). Cartledge’s account of punk fashion involves the more ordinary, the more social and the more day-to-day interactions between the local and the public, presenting a more authenticity-oriented approach that gives more importance to the “temporally and spatially diverse” visual historicity than the one based on “an iconographic look, frozen c. 1979” (147). What is left out from this frozen iconography also informed the absence of the day-to-day punk experience from the sociological studies that focused on punk imagery like Hebdige’s *Subcultures*, as the observable subject of punk was, to the academics, only a version of the accumulation of cultural images that were propagated through the exclusionary mediated practices of public representation.

Furthermore, Lucy O’Brien’s personal communications with women involved in creating punk music address an immediate issue that is intrinsically connected to the frozen image of punk imposed by the public media: first-hand accounts, oral histories and subjective experiences are crucial to investigate what type of social and aesthetic dynamics are ignored to foreground a fixed identity of a subculture. These essays examine the ways in which punk was positioned as a subsection of dominant culture based on what was visible from the “outside.” From the variety of topics that derive from personal experience and close engagements with the “minor” subjects of punk and the impulses of nostalgia, this collection pays attention to areas that were not taken as central before in order to build a consensus about what the cultural analysis of punk should look like. It is not a coincidence that most of these essays involve critical engagement with the idea of authenticity in a way that is psychological, giving room to self-expression of the writer while demonstrating how to combine subjective experience with theoretical work. This resonates with the focus on subjectivity in queer methodologies as well as the “personal is political” rhetoric of the second-wave feminism.

The feminist rhetoric of “personal is political” influenced the identity politics of LGBT+ activism

of the last 60 years. Feminist and LGBTI+ activism have been integral to the formation of queer studies. Hence, the traditional role of the objective researcher started to become problematized by academics who believed in the importance of subjective experience when researching certain subjects and the ways in which these subjects themselves are formed. One of the most practical effects of queer theory is producing the possibility of new methods that take into account personal experience as equally important as collected data, which contrasts with certain sections of social sciences and humanities that insist on empirical and quantitative methods. It is the aim here to draw connections between how queer methods emerged and were received within different disciplines, and my own research topic, punk aesthetics in cinema. Researching queer methods and methodologies is a challenging one, since the idea of thinking about research methods in terms of the critique of identity within queer theory is relatively new and the definitions are very much in flux. What follows brings together two distinctively destabilizing methodological discussions on producing (queer) theory and (punk) art, the first of which explores how queer studies has an impact on cultural theory in terms of research techniques.

One of the key resources that exemplify such studies is the collection, *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Sciences Research*, published in 2011 and edited by Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash. As they express in their introduction, they reject putting forward a definition of queer, defining their main purpose as to encourage their contributors to attribute their own meaning to “queer.” This way, they give importance to the opaqueness of the term, in order to “explore the internal ‘boundary policing’” and “to keep current sets of meanings associated with queer in circulation while also allowing room [...] for others that are yet unknown, unasked or unacknowledged” (Browne and Nash 8-9). As a result, the most visible commonality in the collection is that all authors integrate “queer” into their own research, presenting ideas not just through illustrating, but also through questioning the usefulness of queer theorizing itself. The authors' subjective experiences with this unorthodox approach towards academic study become crucial to the collection, bringing subjectivity to the fore and, thus, challenging the traditional ideas around “objective research.”

Current debates around whether the term “queer” can describe a research methodology, or, whether queer theory could create methods that are “queer,” are mainly held among researchers within the field of sociology. While the former approach to the description of “queer methodologies” considers how a presupposed methodology can be reformed and reframed as “queer,” the latter approach takes as its focus how a new methodology can be constructed through a “queer” perspective. The difference between these two approaches to how to define a “queer methodology” underlines one of the functions of queer theory, that is, the destabilization of the grounds on which academic research stands: Are we going to take traditional research methodologies’ constructedness for granted? Is not the constructedness of current methodologies a criterion that confirms the validity and quality of a particular research in the first place? By claiming to challenge the tradition and to construct new methods, are we risking the legitimacy of our research? How queer theory emerged, coming from activist social movements and being informed by post-structuralist perspectives drawing from Michel Foucault's deconstruction of sexuality, shows that this destabilizing effect “has relied on a humanities-centered displacement of the disciplinary innovations that were unfolding in the social sciences as ‘LGBT/queer studies’” (Brim and Ghaziani 15).

In their collection, Browne and Nash similarly observed the hesitation towards owning the queer critique of the modernist idea of “unified and rational subject” within social sciences and how humanities have been more directly adaptive in comparison:

Queer approaches of various sorts not only become visible in the HIV/AIDS activism in North America in the 1970s and early 1980s, it also surfaced across a number of disciplines receptive to the problematic of postmodern thinking [...]. Most scholars would concede that queer theorising initially gained greater visibility more quickly in the humanities than the social sciences. (4)

Even though Browne and Nash observe that certain disciplines in Humanities have played a serious role in the development of queer theory,⁶ both of these collections on queer methods feature sociological studies and practices, rather than cultural theory-based textual studies with postmodernist perspectives: sociology seems to be the discipline that opened up the discussion of what it means to adopt queer methods and what kind of research that would be. This seemingly paradoxical situation makes it hard to imagine a study on aesthetics that openly announces an adoption of a queer methodology, as the discussions around queer methodologies mostly center around social studies that require certain amounts of collected data of social lives and experiences, rather than work on cultural productions. Therefore, it is fair to assert that there is a lack in academic discussions around what a queer methodology would look like in cultural studies that are based on the analyses, textual or otherwise, of certain cultural productions, arts and aesthetics. Perhaps this lack does not have to be considered as an academic gap, but rather can be interpreted as a natural result of the interconnectedness of the emergence of queer theory and the postmodern inclinations in cultural studies.

By way of having the critique of the unified subject and the dominant methods of production of knowledge at the heart of this convergence, and therefore not relying on rigid research methods to validate its own importance in critical analysis, cultural studies has already been destabilizing its own methods via compelling works by queer theorists, such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Jack Halberstam, Lauren Berlant, Lee Edelman and José Esteban Muñoz among others. It is very common among queer theorists to make use of cultural productions, popular or not, aesthetics and arts in their research to demonstrate the layered manifestations of fragmented identities and the effects of exclusionary practices within heteronormative society, and not necessarily via detailed textual analyses that would be typically employed within that specific text's own discipline, such as literary criticism or film studies. This point will be exemplified later through Halberstam's works, but the main observation here, is that the academic endeavour to identify queer methodologies come from social sciences, rather than queer theory's closer partner

⁶ These disciplines comprise especially the ones within wider cultural studies that are more inclined to postmodern criticism – such as philosophy, literary theory and criticism, film/drama/performance studies etc. (Browne and Nash 4).

cultural studies, as the articles in the aforementioned collections demonstrate. As Browne and Nash note: “The philosophy of science literature in particular turned its critique to the notion of the supposedly unassailable ‘objective researcher’ inexorably uncovering a knowable reality through reliance on a relational theory of truth – a critique becoming increasingly visible across disciplinary boundaries” (4). Following Browne and Nash, can we say that the critique of the unwavering position of “the objective researcher” is not as inherent in the social sciences in terms of its analytical functions, as it has been in philosophy and cultural studies? Could that be the reason why it is the social sciences, rather than cultural theory, that requires and produces the discussion of the queer methods and methodologies, showing a strong concern about the identification of a queer methodology and how it could emerge and be practiced? These questions bring us to the role of subjectivity in this discussion, as it is one of the few common traits of the studies involved in these collections that engage with the question of what makes a research “queer” and the practice of “queering.”

When discussing the politics behind using the term “queer” instead of “gay” or “lesbian” as a mode of address, Eve Sedgwick points out the performative activity that the term invokes:

A word so fraught as “queer” is – fraught with so many social and personal histories of exclusion, violence, defiance, excitement – never can only denote [sic]; nor even can it only connote; a part of its experimental force as a speech act is the way in which it dramatizes locutionary position itself. Anyone’s use of “queer” about themselves means differently from their use of it about someone else. This is true (as it might also be true of “lesbian” and “gay”) because of the violently different connotative evaluations that seem to cluster around the category. But “gay” and “lesbian” still present themselves (however delusively) as objective, empirical categories governed by empirical rules of evidence (however contested). “Queer” seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person's undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation. A hypothesis worth making explicit: that there are important senses in which “queer” can signify only *when attached to the first person*. One possible corollary: that what it

takes – all it takes – to make the description “queer” a true one is the impulsion *to* use it in the first person. (9)

Sedgwick's clarifying explanation of the term “queer” emphasizes an activity, rather than a category (hence the term “queering”). An activity gains meaning through the person who performs it, whereas a category gains meaning through the commonalities shared by the subjects it unifies. The political side of “queer” stems from its connection to inclusiveness with regard to everything that assumed identity categories exclude in society: “queer” is more about the activity of defying exclusionary discourses around identity and less about identification. In light of this understanding of queering activity as a method to destabilize established categorizations and techniques of describing others, it may be possible to combine subjectivity and collectivism while exploring the issues of identity, representation and societal participation. Here we are specifically referring to aesthetics and methods that promote participation rather than consumption, highlighting the importance of lived experience rather than authorized knowledge. As I sought to underline earlier in this section, punk research has been another strand of academia where the methods of incorporating lived experience into the study of a societal and/or aesthetic subject continue to be explored, questioning the methodological abilities of the traditional research schools to realize the inner psycho-social and collectively artistic dynamics of subcultures. This aspect of punk research aligns with the discussion of queer methodologies summarized in this section. This is not to assert that subjective experience only interests punk studies and queer studies in terms of research methods, but to point out a possible methodological alignment between the two that supports the argument of this thesis: considering punk and queer movements' shared act of confronting exclusionary discourses and mainstream modes of practice, it is possible to reveal the connections between “writerly” aesthetics that come out of certain low-budget collective cinematic productions and the queering elements of punk discourse.

Drawing from the queering activity as a method for promoting subjective *and* collective participation in art-making, I would like to turn to punk discourse in academia and its queering aspects. Tavia Nyong'o, for example, expands on, and slightly differs from Cohen's call for

intersectionality and pushes for a theorization of “the intersection of punk and queer as an encounter between concepts both lacking in fixed identitarian referent, but which are nonetheless periodically caught up and frozen, as it were, within endemic modern crises of racialization” (“Punk’d Theory” 20). Nyong’o suggests a framework where the participatory and negational expressions of punk can be used to deconstruct settled identity categories, rather than to build a “grand unifying theory of social oppression” (20). This thesis takes up this framework, hence the connections between punk and queer will be explored more in relation to the “no future” ideology in the next section.

The “No Future” Debate

Helen Reddington is a scholar and a musician who openly declares her subjective position in the opening section of her article “The Political Pioneers of Punk (Just Don’t Mention the F Word).” Reddington also worked extensively on the position of gender in punk, producing a body of work that constitutes the backbone for studies that explore the experiences of women musicians in punk. Her approach is based on an acknowledgment of her own subjective position as an informing element for conducting research, similar to the other studies mentioned above. From her perspective, authentic anger refers to a collective experience of women: “We too felt anger” (“The Political” 96). She foregrounds the immediacy of the situation where a space for self-expression is taken up by “the women who experienced the loss of identity” (96) and focuses on how “*being punks* through *doing the music*, and visibility were factors that consolidated a realist feminism at the time, far from theoretical discourses that sought to ignore the lived experiences of women by setting their sights on grander and more abstract horizons” (96). Her choice to place her own subjective experience at the forefront of her critical position can be seen as an indirect methodological critique of veiled theoretical agendas that acted as authoritative objective accounts. Not surprisingly, Reddington repeats the paradox of the relationship between punk and academia making reference to the *No Future?: Punk 2001* conference organized by David Muggleton in order to justify the precarious position of punk in academia. Even though Reddington’s studies more directly adopt identity politics than the disidentification-oriented queer theories I will explore, her insistence of talking about visibility, the act of *doing punk* in

spite of exclusion and the immediate need of taking up space within the punk scene as well academia, still resonates with discussions around queer temporalities, futurity and anti-futurity debates in queer theory.

In 2007 a roundtable discussion on queer temporalities between some of the most influential names in queer theory was published in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. This roundtable featured a debate around how queer theorists view the perception of time and history and their roles in theorizing queer temporalities (Dinshaw et al). Among the contributors was Lee Edelman who presents queerness as an anti-futurity mode of being that gains its critical power through negation of reproduction. Edelman's theories draw from Lacanian psychoanalysis, problematizing the importance given to the historicization of queerness and the search for an ideal past that can guarantee a future for queer life. Some of the other academics, on the other hand, discusses the potential of re-building the social and community, which provides for the reader a tool to trace the differences between the theoretical positions regarding futurity in this debate.

In a different conference discussion, Edelman criticizes Jack Halberstam for embracing punk by asserting that the early punk songs, such as "God Save the Queen," despite their nihilist attitude, still imply a futurity, a "potential renewal" in the rebellion of the disenfranchised youth, and that this hidden futurity in punk escaped Halberstam's reading (Caserio et al 822). Edelman's influential book *No Future: Queer Theory and The Death Drive* suggests that queerness embodies the psychoanalytic concept of the death drive, because it de-idealizes the metaphors of meaning that aspires to explain sexuality through "heteroreproduction" and "exposes sexuality's inevitable coloration by the [death] drive" (27). Edelman's account of queerness ultimately rejects "spiritualization through marriage and reproductive futurism" (27) which is the basis of what he terms as queer negativity. He refuses any connection between his book's title and the punk slogan "no future" – a connection Halberstam makes in order to point out the potential parallels between queer negativity and punk aesthetics which leads to Edelman's criticism. In this debate, Edelman takes the Sex Pistols song as the ultimate promise of punk reducing punk's

multiplicities to a mainstreamed example, seeing punk's negativity only as a style which is "little more than Oedipal kitsch," thus echoing earlier subculture theories that read punk as a "child" culture (Caserio et al 822).

This debate around punk being (ir)relevant to the antisocial thesis of queer theory is also traceable in the roundtable and a detailed analysis of this debate is beyond the scope of this section. The argument here is that this debate concerns punk, as much as the punk debate concerns queerness: both debates stem from a desire to decipher the political implications and psycho-social possibilities of identifying with negative drives in our culture and taking negating positions in that search for authenticity. Matthew Worley's informative book that shares the main part of the title of Edelman's, *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture, 1976–1984* (though published 13 years later) does not necessarily engage with this theoretically productive debate among cultural theorists, despite the fact that these naming strategies share a slogan that reproduces similar connotations around authenticity and identity. I argue that these theoretical and cultural analysis-oriented tensions are not to be easily resolved within the project of re-conceptualizing punk for "writerly" aesthetics, but can be traced through cinematic engagements with similar questions.

The theoretical analyses mentioned above that concern experimental and avant-garde aesthetics in cinema provide the tools with which a coherent analysis of punk subculture's intersection with cinema can be undertaken. The investigation of punk discourse in this chapter reveals that there are specific philosophical focalizations of what punk can bring into film analysis influenced by discussions of avant-garde art, modernism and postmodernism. One of the most weighted recurrent nodes is "self-reflexivity" which marks the place of disorder and imperfection in punk aesthetics giving way to Barthesian readings that introduce the concept of "writerly" as an open aesthetic that invites audience participation in meaning-making. Self-reflexivity in art makes one think what it means for an artwork to have, or host, a self to reflect upon; this point can be seen as closely connected to the socio-economics of film practices if we are to view a film's self as the sum of what constitutes the existence of a film, i.e. every cultural and material input that gave

shape to its form. Therefore, the perspective adopted here that is informed by the investigation undertaken in this chapter views film as a fragmented subject that aspires to present itself as a unity, but ends up occurring as a socio-economic mess with identity problems: a cultural production that is commonly expected to be identifiable on a variety of levels (narrative, structure, characterizations, etc). Big-budget Hollywood productions mostly create a polished, climax-oriented and confined cinematic worlds which is in line with Mark Fisher's use of the term "Disneyfication" to describe the cultivation of a reality-effect in art through hypnotic techniques and special effects (13) (which I will extend to the notion of "genre-ification" in the next chapter). The low-budget avant-garde productions I analyze in this thesis either deliberately fail at achieving such a constructed realistic aesthetic or reject it all together, potentially earning a cult position within underground or subcultural spheres, such as the early works by John Waters, Derek Jarman, Virginie Despentes, Bruce La Bruce, Bette Gordon, Lydia Lunch and George Kuchar. How a film realizes a negating aesthetic position and becomes self-reflexive is dependent upon its production conditions and this is where avant-garde cinema has a critical correspondence with how punk functions in music.

Of course, there are several further intersections of punk and cinema, such as the early films produced in late 1970s London and New York documenting the punk scenes and its peripheries. The next chapter will focus on this direct connection within the larger territory of avant-garde cinema and punk, investigating how subcultural rituals and music-makings affected filmmaking practices in the Anglo-Saxon context. Theorizing early punk cinema in the next chapter will be helpful to trace aesthetic and material influences in larger cinematic contexts, offering insight into how certain avant-garde films can and could engage with punk subculture and its contentious nihilism. The different forms of this engagement will show us that punk is a fruitful concept for exploring the methods of low-budget filmmaking practices and what type of questions they propose through film form that led them to be called "experimental," "transgressive," "extreme" or, simply, "trash."

Chapter Two: The Discourse of Punk Cinema

Not that I have anything invested in authenticity. I don't believe that "culture" is or should be understood as static or unchanging, but call me cynical, I'm suspicious of Western avant-garde (including punk) claims to transgress bourgeois banality channeled through acts of cultural confiscation. [...] This isn't a judgement call as much as it's a demand to critically examine the dynamics of any so-called exchange. [...] Actively creating a public culture of dissent – punk or not – will have to involve some self-reflexive unpacking of privileges/poverties and their historical and political contexts. (Mimi Nguyen 265-268)

A dominant concern of the "punk cinema" discourse in scholarly and journalistic spheres is the experiential and political implications of the concept of "self-reflexivity" discussed in the previous chapter within the context of the avant-garde. This concept is mostly interpreted by most of the works in the literature that this chapter explores as a major aesthetic that marks the punk-ness of a film. Moving on from punk's position in the larger discussion examining the relationship between the avant-garde and counter-cultures, to a more focused investigation of "punk cinema" and its reception, the following chapter outlines more fully the key ideas around "self-reflexivity" in relation to punk on screen, such as the spectrum of authenticity, issues of "true" depictions and how subcultural entrances into filmic worlds can be analyzed through a correlation between subcultures and genres.

While making a case for a reconceptualization of punk through cinema, I aim to reassess the well-known and repeated historicities of punk, and to foreground the ideological tools through which a reductive version of punk subcultures was produced following media representations of specific predominating British and American figures and bands. These representations have produced a gap between the experience of the participant and the perception of the non-participant. This gap can be observed through the different interpretations of punk subcultures as if there were a "truth" to punk which could be identified by linear history-writing, rather than comprehending its multiplicity and inevitable diversity in the accumulation of the subjective experiential knowledge its participants have produced. Even though Dick Hebdige's *Subcultures*

explored the impact of black cultures on the cultivation of punk, there is a racial dichotomy in that exploration that can also be traced in the early punk cinema that situated black riots as the ultimate point of envy for the white punks, attributing specific roles (such as the victimized criminal and the inexperienced rebel) to black and white figures in the portrayal of punk subculture. While Chapter One posits the concept of punk within the theoretical discourse concerned with the avant-garde, to be able to extend beyond this earlier approach this chapter aims to lay bare such reductive aspects of the concept of “punk cinema” and films that directly take certain punk scenes and figures as subject matter.

Many resources have helped build the infrastructure for a close analysis of the term “punk cinema” which present patterns in the reception of early punk films and their textuality. Therefore, I organized this chapter on two different levels. The first level serves as a comparative and supplementary literature review to Chapter One, dealing with the paradox of authenticity discussed via the genre-ification of “punk cinema.” By genre-ification, I refer to the categorizations of the films that are directly about punk rock figures and bands from the late 1970s and 1980s. This discussion leads to the second level that considers the categorized films and how their audio-visual and narrative composition oscillates between documentary and fiction forms, and hence do not hold clear boundaries. I argue that there is a similarity between genres and subcultures in terms of how mainstream filmic methods create forms of recognizabilities so that subcultural resistance strategies against dominant culture can be simplified and, sometimes, erased. While the first part of this chapter tackles this issue of authenticity through readings of works that take a close look at “punk cinema,” the second part of the chapter then delves into the films themselves that these works partially involve. Some of the literature came to prominence because of its categorizing function that eventually helped to create the term “punk cinema” which does not necessarily attend to the diverse interactions between punk aesthetics and cinema. This inattentiveness is the starting point from which to explore the extended possibilities for “punk aesthetics” in cinema beyond “punk cinema”: the genre-ification of punk on screen seems to evoke a sense of dissatisfaction in its reception, a specific spectatorial feeling that stems from the incongruity between the screen representation of

punk and the spectator's experiential knowledge of punk. This impossibility of depiction on screen is not specific to a "punk audience;" it can be seen as the cinematic symptom of the paradox of the postmodern condition that questions identity as a unified, representable entity. The works considered below look into the issues of authentic representation of punk; hence they offer a site for us to explore the aesthetic patterns and limitations of early punk cinema in relation to the documentary genre.

The first of these works was mentioned in Chapter One in relation to Barthes' literary concept of "writerly," Stacy Thompson's "Punk Cinema" article. The second resource is a collection called *New Punk Cinema* (which also involves Thompson's article), edited by Nicholas Rombes, which takes a broader approach to defining "punk cinema" than Thompson's. It brings together a wide range of definitions of punk throughout the book, which are at times contradictory. In his highly critical review of the book, Ethan de Seife, for example, questions the book's lack of engagement with the trope of art cinema, stating: "Putting aside the fact that many of the films valorized by this book are actually very traditional films that hide behind a veneer of 'edginess,' the putative new punk cinema fits nicely inside and is in fact entirely subsumed by the art cinema" (70). De Seife's criticism of *New Punk Cinema* goes as far as arguing that the book does not "establish the critical value of staking out an entirely new category" (70), problematizing the concept of "punk cinema" altogether to point out the necessity of identifying the various types of connections that are at stake between punk and other cinematic categories, such as art cinema.

Bill Osgerby's article "Silver Screen Seditious: Auteurship and Exploitation in The History of Punk Cinema" in the recent collection on punk *Fight Back: Punk, Politics and Resistance*, is one of the most coherent resources on "punk cinema," reviewing, in a categorical manner, the different ways in which film has engaged with punk. While the fourth book *Destroy All Movies!!!: The Complete Guide to Punks on Film* is an archival, semi-journalistic and descriptive work full of interviews that give valuable insight into punk artists' subjectivities and short humorous film reviews, the fifth book *No Focus: Punk on Film* by Chris Barber and Jack Sargeant similarly provides an extensive overview of the relationship between punk subculture and cinema in the

American and British context, and their intersections. The last two resources focus more on collecting oral-histories, informative details about productions, behind-the-scenes stories and categorizations rather than making the claim to describe what this relationship represents in terms of cultural production. However, the shape and structure of these resources at the same time offer a frame of reference into the methods born out of an archivist and subcultural ambition to document punk on screen. This ambition in itself manifests the participatory effects of punk, which indicates, through creative choices in the texts' titles and prose in these texts, a nihilistic productiveness which I will associate with postmodern authenticity as well as with the films later in this chapter. Thinking through each of these resources, we can observe different levels of engagement between punk subculture and film form. From "guerilla gig" videos to live footage documentaries, such as *The Blank Generation* (1976), *The Punk Rock Movie* (1978) and *The Decline of Western Civilization* (1981), from Julien Temple music films that position the Sex Pistols in between populist media and the working class experience, to experimental Derek Jarman films that use collage and cut-up techniques – *Jubilee* (1980) in particular –, early punk cinema and the discourse around it in these works provide a revealing path to understand the impact of punk subcultures in cinema.

“Punk Cinema” & “New Punk Cinema”: A Terminological Exploration

While the “punk is (not) dead” debate branches out into a genre question around what type of music would count as “punk rock” as well as what it means to be “a punk,” the coinage of the term “punk cinema” emerges as a perpetuation of this categorical issue and ties this debate to the question of genre in film. Socio-economics and aesthetics are the two main criteria in the two works this section explores in defining “punk cinema.” The terminological discussion that separates the two criteria reflects the parallels between how subcultural expressions are explored and the function of genre as an enhancing instrument for recognizability of counter-aesthetics that resist mainstream categorizations.

The main criteria behind what “punk cinema” can be for Thompson is its self-reflexive low-

budget aesthetics that negate the commodifying functions of the larger film industry. Thompson makes comparisons between different low-budget and big-budget films in his study to argue that the definition of punk cinema relies on its ability to be made independently and out of a collectivity, whereas big-budget films that include punk-ish characters or somewhat punk-influenced and polished aesthetic features, by their nature, cannot embody a DIY punk ethos. His article (which also constitutes the chapter “Screening Punk” in his later book *Punk Productions*) implies a dichotomy between the aesthetics of independently produced low-budget films and that of the mainstream film industry, positioning punk aesthetics on the side of the former. The importance of this argument lies in its reliance on the experiential knowledge of punk subcultures and the lack of financial and technical resources that originates the aesthetics. The experience of participation in the subculture informs the filmmakers’ ability to overcome economic restrictions via a specific amateurishness that results in an aesthetic authenticity which is, for Thompson, required to define their work as punk. However, it also implies a value judgement which operates according to a measurement that calculates the trueness of subcultural representation. This chapter acknowledges the importance of Thompson’s insistence on a strict definition (as similar arguments about what should count as punk can be observed in other contexts⁷) while aiming to display the potentialities of recontextualizing punk in terms of aesthetics and economics. Thompson poses definitional questions after briefly summarizing the independent productions and aesthetics of New York-based *The Blank Generation* and London-based documentary *The Punk Rock Movie*, and listing them as exemplary in describing his use of the term “punk cinema”:

Thus far, I have drawn examples of punk cinema solely from documentary-style films that take punk rock or punks as their subject. However, for the purposes of the definition I am proposing here, punk cinema need not concern itself with punk per se. A question immediately arises: if punk cinema does not take punk as its subject, then should for example, California Newsreel or Andy Warhol films be considered punk cinema? What about French New Wave? Are *Dutchman*

⁷ Thompson takes influence from the advertising policy of the most internationally well-known punk zine, *MaximumRocknroll*, when explaining the necessity of restriction in defining a punk production: “We will not accept major label or related ads, or ads for comps or EPs that include major label bands” (“Punk Cinema” 48).

(Anthony Harvey, 1966), *Sleep* (Warhol, 1963), *Paris Belongs to Us* (Jacques Rivette, 1960), and other avant-garde films examples of punk cinema? (“Punk Cinema” 51-52)

Even though Thompson shows interest in extending his view of punk cinema via this questioning, his examples for punk cinema consist of films that directly take punk as their subject matter throughout his article. As a result, his context still remains within the borders of documentary genre. As we explored in Chapter One, the concept of punk is imbued with connotations and paradoxes that extend beyond its designated time-locations, and to be able to bring this approach to and enliven the punk aesthetics in cinema, it seems necessary to look beyond the documentaries about punk. Thompson acknowledges this in the above quote, but his examples still demonstrate a digression from the critical project of presenting a larger picture of punk aesthetics. Thompson’s corpus still essentializes the uncontested place of Anglo-Saxon bands, such as the Clash in *Rude Boy’s* (1980) case, the Sex Pistols in *The Great Rock ‘n Roll Swindle* (1980) and *The Filth and the Fury* (2000), in the creation of punk aesthetics that have the critical potential to democratize film production. This is what is referred to as genre-ification here: the repetition of icons and figures to an extent that they become the essential features of “punk cinema.” This process ascribes a peripherality to possible subject matters other than the famous bands and personalities. While a genre approach can be productive in analyzing the cinematic depictions of punk subcultures via examining the iconography, it also reveals the limitations of populist understandings of punk subcultures by way of re-enacting common-sense perceptions of punk, as we will explore later through *The Punk Rock Movie*.

While Thompson’s dichotomous approach resonates with a certain punk attitude that vocalizes and claims to perform an outright rejection of commercialization (i.e. anarcho-punk), at the same time it does not concur with a more deconstructive approach which can regard punk as a site of radical possibilities, rather than an authoritative cultural phenomenon. This approach suggests rearranging the historical contexts around punk and is distinctive from the common narrative of punk as emerging in the late 1970s London and New York. Fiona I.B. Ngô and Elizabeth A. Stinson, for example, ask this question in their issue of *Women & Performance: a*

journal of feminist theory, titled “Punk Anteriors: Genealogy, Theory, Performance”: “What can be resituated in front of the generic narratives of punk’s beginnings and mainstays as a form of resistance?” (166). This question does not only open a space for investigating the intersections of race, gender and sexuality within narratives of punk; it also points out the critical necessity to think about punk as a temporal and alterable concept that can involve contradictions in its own sphere. This approach helps us to comprehend perhaps the most discussed contradiction ingrained in punk discourse which is its engagement with commercialization, be it in the form of rejection or cooperation.

Nicholas Rombes, in the collection *New Punk Cinema* he edited, puts forward the idea that the enhanced accessibility of new digital technologies has a formative impact on the contemporary audience’s film-watching habits. He asserts that certain filmmaking practices that do not focus on linear narrative structure but combine digital textualities with complex narratives can be taken as the symptoms of the adoption of self-reflexivity by the mainstream media. The argument in this approach is that spectators are more used to a fragmented viewing experiences compared to audiences during the Classical Hollywood era. He calls the popularization of self-reflexive filmmaking methods “new punk” and does not discount the possibility of that big-budget major studio films could be considered within this category – an argument contested by Stacy Thompson. For example, Christopher Nolan’s film *Memento* (2000), which was distributed and produced under the Hollywood studio system (though the relatively smaller sub-company Newmarket Films) and nominated for two Academy Awards, is one of the examples Rombes uses as having a punk sensibility due its non-linear narrative structure (*New* 122). In contrast to Thompson’s insistence on low-budget production as the essential condition that supposedly engenders the self-reflexive aesthetic of punk cinema in the first place, Rombes views commercialization as the distinguishable feature of new punk cinema because of its ability to make self-consciousness and irony a popular aesthetic. “Popular” means “more accessible” from Rombes’ standpoint, and punk becomes synonymous with pop. Rombes concludes his investigation as follows: “The relaxing of critique in the face of the overriding entertainment apparatus of the cultural industry, has, today, become the signatory gesture of new punk cinema”

(New 85). The assertion here is that there is a certain self-reflexivity and self-consciousness in new punk cinema that does not necessarily direct its critical eye towards the mainstream and the dominant culture industry but incorporates this self-consciousness into popular and mainstream cinema. His examples for this practice mostly include films with non-linear narratives and “unconventional” cinematography including Lars Von Trier’s *The Idiots* (1998) and *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), as well as Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman collaborations such as *Being John Malkovich* (1999) and *Adaptation* (2002). Rombes gives importance to the changes in the understanding of popular culture in the individualistic digital age and distinguishes a newness in the formation of deconstructive aesthetics in cinema which is influenced by both punk and the avant-garde in terms of foregrounding how art is made. His view of this punk cinema which is described as “new,” corresponding to the postmodern embodiment of both irony and sincerity, largely describes filmmaking styles that have ostensibly deviated from Hollywood conventions but are still accepted by major studios – a cinema that is influenced by the “self-reflexivity” of the avant-garde and experimental films but distinct from them in its ability to incorporate this trait into the mainstream (Rombes, *New* 80). The development of this aesthetic is viewed by Rombes as a result of how the home-based technologies of media consumption and the internet have affected audience habits. Even though avant-garde filmmaking is referred to as an influence in the formation of this cinema in Rombes’ analysis, the creative and aesthetic features of the process of adopting avant-garde filmmaking are not necessarily explored. As a result, the suggested neologism “new punk cinema” comes across as an over-arching definition that relies on the incorporative and assimilative properties of mainstream productions.

Stacy Thompson centralizes not only a sense of negativity born out of punk subcultures (evident in his example of punk cinema, Jack Hazan’s *Rude Boy*), but also “what it negates and critiques – the capitalization of film through commodification” (52). While what Thompson deems necessary for punk cinema consists of connections to punk subcultures on the production level, slow-paced action-lacking narrative and the lack of Hollywood formulas, Rombes does not render subcultural ties, DIY economics and critical negation against capitalist methods of art-making as formative for his concept of new punk cinema. On the contrary, Rombes embraces the

aesthetic opportunities that can be gained through the assimilation into Hollywood. These two sets of ideas around punk cinema are fruitful in terms of exploring the idea of authenticity in relation to punk on screen despite their differences. Adopting Stacy Thompson's idea of the interconnectedness of aesthetics and economics, this chapter aims to advance his exploration of punk cinema as well as to problematize his singular understanding of punk as a specific movement that belongs to a time and place. Similarly, Rombes' ideas around postmodern audience's familiarity with the abundance of irony and self-reflexivity as aesthetic tools in popular visual media are still quite relevant.

In light of this discussion of punk cinema, this thesis aims to take an equidistant approach to both perspectives in order to understand the relationship between the mainstream and the avant-garde while exploring subcultural formations in film production. Punk cinema, as a writerly construction of an avant-garde attitude on the level of film form, invites the audience experience to be another productive element for creating meaning, as punk has been thought to do for decades in independent music production. In short, "punk cinema" does not refer to a genre here, but to an aesthetic that should not only be understood by what it signifies, but also by what it complicates and what it can invoke in the audience, perhaps, more similar to how we view the term "modern art," or "postmodern art" for that matter – terms that do not seek to avoid paradoxes. As such, the scope of this thesis does not exclude the examples Thompson gives for punk cinema; on the contrary, it proposes to foreground the connections between punk and the avant-garde (and its history of entanglement with the dominant culture) in conceptualizing punk aesthetics in cinema.

Another work that examines punk cinema is Bill Osberg's article "Silver Screen Sedition: Auteurship and Exploitation in The History of Punk Cinema" published in the recent scholarly collection by The Subcultures Network on punk *Fight Back: Punk, Politics and Resistance*. This exhaustive text assesses the different ways in which film has engaged with punk in a critical manner and drawing ties between the categories of punk cinema and a range of Film Studies-related topics including auteur theory and audience reception. This article makes use of

Thompson and Rombes' aforementioned works to survey the connection between punk and cinema in order to provide a foundation on which a general review of "punk cinema" as an eclectic site for cinematic creativity can be mapped onto "the history of punk." Osgerby presents clusters of ideas about different sections of "punk cinema" that were also circulated within the aforementioned resources; these sections are explored in relation to genres such as documentary, exploitation and musical. The study of subcultures crosses paths with the study of genre in Osgerby's article, since both of these fields' defining nature, as phenomena, is devised by the way their participants/followers engage with their aesthetics. Furthermore, there is ambiguity around how a subcultural participant is identified: some people can be labeled "punk" by an outsider perspective rather than deliberately self-described. The same applies with regard to the aesthetics; as Zack Carlson, one of the cowriters of *Destroy All Movies!!!: The Complete Guide to Punks on Film*, says in the introduction of his book when alluding to the intangibility of punk, "those that flaunt the standard fashions are by no means intrinsically linked to the movement" (XII).

"Destroy All Movies" & "No Focus": The Impossibility of Depicting Punk(s) on Film

Destroy All Movies!!!: The Complete Guide to Punks on Film is one of the most comprehensive review collections about punk on screen, including many interviews with filmmakers, artists and musicians who were involved in some of the iconic films in the collection. While this book follows an encyclopedic method (listing more than 1000 films alphabetically), how these films are connected to the punk subculture is not clear from its structure. In that sense, it is more of an archival work than a critical investigation as its film collection exhibits various different potential ways of connecting punk and film. While the collection includes the usual suspects of "punk cinema,"⁸ it also catalogs every film the authors could get their hands on with a character that could pass as a punk. The discussion of who could pass as a punk or what makes these characters punk is not necessarily the concern of the book; if a character may pass as punk in one way or another, that satisfies the criterion for inclusion. The collection's criteria are not limited to

⁸ I will touch upon most of these films later, including Julien Temple films about Sex Pistols and Malcolm McLaren, such as *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* (1980) and the film made 20 years after *The Filth and the Fury* (2000), the notorious unfinished *Who Killed Bambi?* and early punk films coming straight out of the subcultural spheres, such as *The Punk Rock Movie* and *The Blank Generation*.

characters; soundtrack is also another important element. *Cruising* (1980), for example, is regarded as an “irrefutable low-art masterpiece” and “the first big-budget major studio film to feature man-on-man fisting” (Carlson and Connolly 80). There are two reasons why *Cruising* is in this list, the second of which weighs more: the soundtrack features a song by the band The Germs, and, more importantly, there is an implicit parallelism the authors observe between the underground American punk scene and the underground gay scene which this film uses as a backdrop for its crime narrative. We will explore this parallelism more in the next chapter; however, for now, it is important to mention that the connection between gay culture and punk is mentioned only in passing in the literature I cover in this chapter. All in all, *Destroy All Movies!!!* is still very useful for tracing subcultural rare films and for investigating different ways in which researchers associate punk with a variety of cinematic elements, particularly those that make the connection audio-visually visible on screen.

Destroy does not offer a thematic shortcut to the reader in tracing what type of aesthetics punk could bring into cinema. We need to read between the lines of the writers’ opinion pieces about each film and the interviews conducted with filmmakers, artists and musicians in order to recognize all the aesthetic and/or subcultural connections. In summary, a film deserves to be in their encyclopedic collection based on the film’s characters, soundtrack, how punk bands and artists from the different pasts of punk subcultures are documented and, lastly, how some of the famous punk figures are cast as actors. From the collectors’ wide criteria for inclusion, it can be said that the collection was bound to be perpetually unfinished as “punks on film,” either as a genre-related concept or a visual definition, cannot offer an absolute categorization given the ambiguous nature of what constitutes the aesthetic elements of “punk.”

The exploration of how punk subcultures translate onto film in the discourse of punk is imbued with a sense of discontent, which can be identified in a number of reviews of early punk films and interviews with punk artists who either took part in making these films or were participants in specific scenes and groups that these films depict, as can be seen in *Destroy All Movies*. This discontent is mostly connected to punk’s assimilation by the mainstream, making use of the

metaphor “the death of punk” to underline punk’s importance in the formation and the loss of identity and authenticity for its members/participants. Signaling the “punk is (not) dead” debate and its connection to the idea of modern nihilism that underpins the postmodern condition, the works listed in this chapter are suffused with a feeling of incompleteness when facing the loss of authenticity in cinematic depictions of subcultural and/or personal experience of exclusion. This feeling is also echoed by the title of the book *Destroy All Films!!!*; its writers Zack Carlson and Bryan Connolly named their encyclopedia of punk on film in relation to the destruction of all movies, suggesting their impossible task of covering all films that had a small or big part in depicting punk on screen. The title resonates with the problematization of the understanding of punk as pertaining to a singular history, adopting a negativity towards the existence of an authentically punk film even though the book itself functions as a categorical resource. This impossibility of depicting punk on screen can be seen as a cinematic symptom of the idea of punk as already being dead from the moment it was born, or, in other words, punk as always available to be reborn/recreated, hence temporal. Ultimately this impossibility corresponds to the paradox of the self being an unattainable entity, and punk in this trajectory comes across as a tool through which a self could be constructed. In order to uncover the audio-visual realizations of this paradox and the ways in which different self-presentations and identity figurations are portrayed, received and criticized, the next section traces the sense of discontent found in the historicizing of “punk cinema,” utilizing another collection called *No Focus: Punk on Film* by Chris Barber and Jack Sergeant.

No Focus, published in 2006, adopts a hybrid form, and its inclusivity towards what it tries to compile in terms of punk and film functions differently than that of *Destroy All Movies!!!*. While *Destroy*, in its subheading, claims to be “The Complete Guide To Punks On Film,” in *No Focus*, Sergeant asserts, “punk cinema emerges across genres, forms and styles” (8). The authors’ choice of subheading (“Punk on Film”) uses “punk” as more of a singular phenomenon than a pluralizable subject. This small variance in the subheadings of the two books actually reveals the main methodological difference between them: *No Focus* preserves a conceptual integrity in terms of examining the relationship between a punk subculture and cinema by identifying

influential works, while *Destroy* attempts to function as a survey of whatever “punks” could be in cinema. *No Focus* conceptualizes, *Destroy* itemizes. Despite the fact that this difference in form signals each text’s levels of seriousness in its approach, an important similarity between them also exists: both of their main titles convey a negativity (“destroy” / “no”), towards what it means to put punk into focus in movies. In fact, both books include several interviews with people through which readers can discern singular dissatisfactions around cinematic representations of punk.

I would like to use this comparison between these two comprehensive books as a way in which to discuss two main points in this section. The first point concerns the aspects of punk aesthetics in cinema revealed via the methodology of compilation. We will see that contextualizing films (*No Focus*) helps us to realize how filmmaking can be a tool to make what punk subcultures represent culturally tangible. We will also see that itemizing films without prejudice of the contexts from which they emerged (*Destroy All Movies!!!*) helps us to see how the punk influence in cinema drastically exceeds the borders of the British and American contexts of its emergence; alphabetical order becomes a democratizing tool through which films are included in this “guide to punks on film.” On the other hand, my second point uses the similarity between the books – the negativity conveyed in their main titles – as a point through which to discuss the origin of this negativity: we will see that it has to do with how punk subcultures emerge as a way of dealing with the limits of representational formulas that the dominant culture imposes. First, let’s delve into the first point to see what types of grouping is at work in *No Focus* which will give way to the exploration of the second point regarding punk subcultures as a coping mechanism and how genre becomes a tool through which cinema, from DIY productions to mainstream, have translated this mechanism onto the screen.

No Focus is comprised of sections that are written by the editors Chris Barber and Jack Sergeant, while some other sections are written by specific commentators from the era under discussion. Interviews conducted with specific artists discussing their filmmaking with regard to punk make up large sections of the book. Barber and Sergeant’s methodology gives prominence to the UK context; the book opens with a comprehensive article by David McGillivray on Julien Temple

and his hybrid-documentary about the Sex Pistols, *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* (1980). The book's framing follows an arc that mostly concerns the British context, including chapters on Derek Jarman, an interview with Don Letts, a section on the anarcho-punk band Crass, a section on "kitchen sink" (focusing on films about working class youth in the UK), the Talking Heads concert film *Stop Making Sense* (1984) and a brief overview of "related films" (referring to those that were ostensibly influenced by punk in a section titled "punksploitation"). Furthermore, by inserting relatively less-detailed sections about the American counterparts of "punk cinema" including Penelope Spheeris, John Waters and the New York-based No Wave movement, *No Focus* covers and pinpoints most of what "punk cinema" is associated with in the larger Western media.

We discover that some documentaries, especially two prominent ones from the late 1970s, *The Punk Rock Movie* by Don Letts and *The Blank Generation* by Amos Pose and Ivan Karl, were not as cinematically organized (i.e. quickly reproduced) as some of the other more famous observational and/or historically informational documentaries, such as *The Decline of Western Civilization* series made by Penelope Spheeris and the later Don Letts film called *Punk: Attitude* (2005). Some of the other films mentioned in the book that came out slightly later than the peak moment of British punk, are considered more structured than the aforementioned earlier documentaries, while still conveying a degree of close proximity to the subculture they present. One of these is *D.O.A.: A Rite of Passage* (1981), which follows the Sex Pistols' USA tour and other bands that the filmmaker Lech Kowalski followed in London. The documentary chronicles key moments that became famous later, such as Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen's last interview together in 1979. Another example is *Rude Boy* (1980) which can be called a half-documentary because it combines a sub-plot about a fictional character, a nihilistic roadie character for the Clash, intercut with the band's concert footage. While Julien Temple's *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* has been labeled as a mockumentary due to its ironic tone in telling a detective story about the corruption of the Sex Pistols band members by their manipulative manager (Malcolm McLaren), which strangely parallels the actual events, hence blurring the border between reality and the artificiality of the story behind the rise and fall of the band. Another important area of

“punk cinema” is the “punk musicals” that David Laderman’s book *Punk Slash! Musicals: Tracking Slip-Sync on Film* closely investigates.

Throughout these works, there is a spectrum of how accurately a film can get to depict the punk scene it tries to capture, from the documentaries that seem to emerge from the scene itself to the films that are heavily incorporated into the genre machinery, which I called genre-ification above. Because all these films are discussed in relation to their ability to approximate reality, we can say that this aesthetic spectrum also coincides with the spectrum of authenticity by which they are measured. This is why it makes sense to analyze the reception of punk films and the aesthetics of the films together: both areas reveal an anxiety over authenticity. We can observe the inseparability of reception and aesthetics also in one of the most influential historians of British punk’s response to a question about punk authenticity in an interview with Matthew Worley. Jon Savage says:

On the surface, I thought punk was highly inauthentic – but that was just a mask in a way. You know, punk records I still play I do so because they still resonate emotionally [...], there’s some kind of truth in them. That’s really what you want from pop music – a kind of existential authenticity; that you feel the musicians in that moment are actively engaged with what they are saying and are really committed to what they are trying to say. (Worley, “The Cultural Impact” 308)

Spectrums of Punk Authenticity and *The Decline of Western Civilization* (1981)

Ryan Moore regards punk as a subcultural response to “the condition of postmodernism” and identifies two distinct contexts from which this response emerges: authenticity and destruction. On the one hand, he uses the term “the culture of destruction” to chiefly describe the punk aesthetics and fashion created by Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood through their shop (which changed multiple names and is most famously known as “SEX”); this culture became visible through the media construction of the Sex Pistols that did not shy away from populism. On the other hand, Moore associates “the culture of authenticity” with the American hardcore

scene, mostly California, and the importance given to acquiring specific identity traits and rituals that defy the commodifying effects of postmodern society (Moore 307). This dual approach concerning the relationship between punk and postmodernism in Moore's differentiation is challenged by Ivan Gololobov in his article "Immigrant Punk: The Struggle with Postmodern Identity;" Gololobov writes "the tension between postmodernist deconstruction and a search for the Real in punk may not necessarily be divided by time or space" (81). Gololobov underlines the partiality and temporality in being authentic and how punk authenticity does not have to contradict the postmodern condition, arguing that a postmodern authenticity can be possible within the figure of the immigrant self. Gololobov's construction of the "immigrant punk" figure – a figure that signifies a border-crossing – resonates with certain punk aesthetics in films outside of the "punk cinema" canon evident in their usage of real-life footage, collage and different levels of narrativization. The following discussion will consider how these films, to different degrees, are sites of authenticity where the subcultural underground is rendered symptomatic of an unconscious struggle to deal with societal oppression. While this struggle sometimes can be recognized through a randomness in camera movement and editing, at other times it is concealed by a rather self-conscious writerly effort to construct authenticity by way of inserting sub-plots into concert footage, such as in *Rude Boy* (1980) and *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* (1980), which will be examined later in this chapter.

This body of work benefits from a postmodern context through which we can consider the possibility of a postmodern authenticity in filmmaking, which eventually can be helpful in analyzing how mainstream approaches utilize this type of authenticity to create recognizable, hence profitable, films that fit into the general perceptions of punk. Ben Agger's definition of postmodernism is helpful to understand the problem of an authentic self which is symptomatic of the postmodern condition: "Like poststructuralism and critical theory, postmodernism rejects the possibility of presuppositionless representation, instead arguing that every knowledge is contextualized by its historical and cultural nature" (117). This definition imagines the possibility of a postmodern authenticity that offers room for unrepresented existences to express the condition of not being a subject of representation, because it forces us to problematize

representational methods of the idea of objective knowledge. In a postmodern society, if knowledge does not exist without a context, the knowledge of self would then rely on the form of this contextualization. Hence, the context is what makes reflecting on having a “self” possible. This is why documentaries, as sites of reflection and with a claim for objectivity, offer a place for examining how representation functions in terms of producing knowledge about the self and authenticity.

Penelope Spheeris made three documentaries about LA-based subcultural environments: *The Decline of Western Civilization* (1981), *The Decline of Western Civilization II: The Metal Years* (1988) and *The Decline of Western Civilization III* (1998). The first was shot when the hardcore scene was at its peak in California including performances by the bands Alice Bag Band, Black Flag, Circle Jerks, Catholic Discipline, Fear, the Germs and X. These performances were accompanied by interviews conducted by Spheeris herself with people in the scene with the aspiration to show these people discussing their lives within their daily environment. Spheeris “had a hard time getting it into theaters because they just did not play feature-length documentaries in theaters in those days” and “booked some dinky theatre on Hollywood Blvd.” one night, causing the police to close the street because of the huge number of people who came to see the film (Carlson and Connolly 93). The documentary encountered considerable obstacles in getting screenings and acquired cult status, especially within the “punk cinema” canon. While Spheeris herself accepts the impossibility of depicting the subculture as a whole, asserting that “you never completely capture anything” (Carlson and Connolly 93), Lance Sinclair describes the documentary as follows in his chapter in *No Focus*:

Waves of disgust and self-hate recur throughout the film, which is a factual document of events in the Californian hardcore community from December 1979 through to May 1980, told through the voices of a wide spectrum of players, from senselessly hateful street punks to dubious club owners and ranting propagandists. [...] it paints a vision of a country at war with itself [...] In this it becomes the most important piece of punk cinema from the eighties, presenting its subject matter in a global, distanced perspective and offering apologies to neither spectator nor participant. (112-113)

Another account of this film by Exene Cervenka, a punk artist and the singer of the punk band X also featured in the documentary, expresses the inevitable incompleteness of any depiction of the subculture in her interview with Zack Carlson:

I think there were films that depicted aspects of what was going on at the time, but nobody could get the whole thing. It'd be so difficult to do that with a documentary. The complicated factions of a person just usually aren't shown that much. They end up being about one aspect of the scene, and how shocking it is. There was a lot going on between people, a lot of art, and someone like Claude Bessey who was so smart and so astute just didn't manage to come off that way in the film. It's hard ... people uncover great things in documentaries all the time. But when the viewer's intimately aware of the subject of a film like that, it's more difficult for the documentary to have an effect. (Carlson and Connolly 97)

Cervenka's account of *Decline* exemplifies an experience that is specific to a punk participant whose knowledge of the LA hardcore punk subculture exceeds the documentary's depiction. Hence this experience is different to that of an audience without this experiential knowledge and will learn about the subculture through this depiction. This difference between specific experiences of viewing the documentary marks the problem with transparency and representation.

Observing differences in the experience of watching *Decline*, we can say that there are certain ways in which the film produces knowledge that is affected by the spectatorial and artistic presuppositions at work in the making and viewing processes. While the film has been described as a straightforward documentary, or in Sinclair's words "a factual document of events," it had a positive effect for the bands. Keith Morris, from the band Circle Jerks and a former member of Black Flag (featured in Spheeris' series) remarks that his band felt indifferent towards the documentary during the filming phase: "[Y]ou have to understand that we didn't take any of this seriously. [...] [W]e were gonna play whether she was filming or not" (Carlson and Connolly 96). However, he also acknowledges the documentary's help in disseminating their music: "Penelope did us a huge Grand Canyon-sized favor by filming us. It got to people in other places that would

not have heard about these bands. [...] *Decline* afforded us the opportunity to get in a van and go to other places” (96).

While disseminating knowledge about the bands and the subculture was one of the pragmatic consequences of *Decline*, it also gave way to critical observations about the conservative changes in education, critical thinking and the ways in which the urban youth were engaged in radical creativities in the Reagan era. Jessica Schwartz recognizes *Decline* as one of the source materials through which to identify the limiting effects of the American public education system upon youth culture, asserting that “the creative arts and the humanities, once culturally valued as expressive of western cultural strengths, were increasingly cut” during this time (146). She explores the pedagogical offerings of punk music writing in terms of deconstructing and challenging the limiting standardization methods that western education imposes, to stress the expressiveness and the importance of “circular, re-cycling and non-hierarchical values” (152) in toppling these delimitations in the music-makings of the pre-hardcore LA punk scene. She references Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* in carrying out her analysis of the exclusionary practices of American education in devaluing the importance of diversity in the creative arts, highlighting Spengler’s main argument that “this freezing of culture is part of the civilization” (Schwartz 146). Citing the Germs’ song “Forming” as an example of connecting musical and lyrical elements in a circular fashion, Schwartz’ analysis explains how a punk deconstruction of linear progression in classical song structure can be instructive and educational in regards to finding personal expression through musical grammar. She convincingly investigates what punk music can methodologically offer in terms of musical literacy and modes of engagement in the creative arts in general. In Schwartz’s framework of punk pedagogy, Spheeris’ documentary is a useful cultural production for marking a moment in American society and youth culture. Tying the larger socio-economic changes to subcultural formations, Schwartz observes that Spheeris “uses cinematic form to capture the sounds of a shifting subcultural movement from the diverse and artsy noisiness that echoed punk’s intellectual antecedents in the avant-garde to hardcore, [which is] the more straightforward distillation of rock music that resounded the emergent neoliberal economic expediency” (145).

Despite the factual and positive aspects of how the subcultural information could be circulated through *Decline*, the directness of the film did not always deliver an untainted communication of authentic expression. In the interview sections of the film, deliberate questions are directed at the punk participants in a blue-tinted black and white color shot, slightly reminiscent of a film-noir-esque interrogation scene. In this mise-en-scène, we do not see the filmmaker but only hear the questions she asks from behind the camera, acting as the performatively-sympathetic interviewer which creates a slight tone of tabloid journalism. This composition attributes some of the racist and misogynistic remarks we hear from the interviewees a causality in terms of the societal function of this subcultural environment. The look of the interviewee, Eugene, in the opening shot of the film is described by Lewis as “a skinhead who opens *The Decline of the Western Civilization* with a treatise on how punk has ‘no stars – no bullshit’” (90). However, Spheeris declared that she avoided interviewing skinheads and violent figures in general, even though the film includes Eugene’s racist commentaries (one of Eugene’s answers about being chased in the city involves the pejorative “n word”) and another interviewee’s boastful account of violent misogyny.⁹ The filmmaker’s contradictory remark indicates a similar situation to how *The Punk Rock Movie* has been received as merely a live-footage – empirically authentic – documentary despite its occasional populism. The abundance of concert footage that is deemed rare and valuable for subcultural participants in *Decline* also creates an overshadowing-effect that hides diverse, and at times contradictory, expressions and socializations in order to compile a fixed worrisome image of the subculture. Furthermore, the presentation of the role of racist rhetoric and gender-discrimination in the subculture through talking-head style interviews position the filmmaker as an observer rather than an insider. Even though Spheeris’ choice of capturing the live bands without interruption had positive outcomes for the bands at the time, this depiction of the punk environment still echoes presuppositions pertaining to a generalized viewpoint of punk as a sign of decay in youth, perhaps even more so than it reflects the diverse dynamics of the environment.

⁹ “I didn’t interview any of the skinheads because I didn’t want to take the chance that some vulnerable young mind is going to see the film and imitate them. Just like I don’t do violent films when I work in Hollywood, I didn’t want to portray skinheads in *Decline*” (Hejnar 121).

The mise-en-scène, dramatic close-ups and stable camerawork in these interview scenes, along with the intrusive questions, manufacture a particular framing of the participants' expressions, ascribing a sense of "confusedness" to the participants' identification with punk. Spheeris' interrogation centers around violence, family and the interviewees' clothing style and body modification choices, composed mostly of "why" questions that set out the preconceived notion of "punks" as "lost youth" through the "I don't know" answers, giving priority to this notion rather than the difference and diversity in the interviewees' experiences. As Helen Reddington accurately observes: "Throughout the film she [Spheeris] embeds her director's persona deep inside the subculture" ("The Decline"). The interview montage scene cuts between different answers such that the participants' answers to the filmmaker's questions (including "what do you feel when you fight?" or "where does the aggression come from?") come across as prefigured by the mise-en-scène that conveys a sense of bleakness (e.g. the naked lightbulb hanging from the ceiling in the interview room is as low as the level of the interviewee's head). Therefore, some of the answers, such as "I feel violent" or "it comes from living in the city, seeing all the ugly old people" are depicted as integral to the subculture's ritualistic behavior (e.g. pogo and mosh pits). Without much nuance, this ritual becomes connected to an exclusionary rhetoric based on race, age and gender, and the context within which this rhetoric emerges is not considered by the filmmaker. Instead, the abundance of live footage and the concert scenes through which the environment of the bands is depicted frame the talking-head interviews as peripheral. Spheeris' own disavowal of the involvement of skinheads parallels the film's manipulative tone which is hidden behind the subcultural value the film conveys through concert and backstage footage.

Decline's contribution to history-writing and tracing radical responses, behavioral formations and creative models in LA punk during the rise of American conservatism is unquestionable. On the other hand, the film signifies how fluctuating the production of knowledge can be in terms of transferring experience, reaction and creativity. Schwartz's reading is useful here in assessing how presuppositions are constructed through "a freezing of culture" and how standardizations of creative expression actually restrict and regulate the methods of creative exchange, brushing over fragmentations in understanding authenticity. Considering the impossibility of the untampered

capturing of subcultural authenticity and the representational failures of supposedly “unmediated,” “raw” or “direct” documentations, *Decline* reveals how preconceived notions play a considerable role in producing knowledge and forming modes of seemingly authentic representation. In doing so, it renders authenticity as a spectrum, rather than a “raw” process of transference of information regarding punk’s contribution to the formation of a youth identity in the American subculture.

The next section will explore two particular punk spheres’ direct reflections on the medium of cinema in light of the aforementioned problems with authenticity and transparency in documenting punk. While the *Decline* series follow a comparatively conventional documentary style, including interviews that involve filmmakers’ questions and the choices made for directing the camera, the next sections will delve into the films that do not involve such a conventional framework and interview-oriented depiction. How these films are perceived and how their varied reception depicts a common dissatisfaction about representation will continue to be important for this chapter, as this dissatisfaction indicates the impossibility of a “true” depiction of the punk experience. This is not only because punk experience is subjective, but also this experiential knowledge of punk is, first and foremost, unconsciously constructed. Following the exploration of what the *Decline* series offered us in terms of authenticity, the films considered in the next section also give us an opportunity to investigate how subcultural experience represents a negating response to dominant culture in an aesthetic form. How does the postmodern condition that complicates the idea of an authentic-self initiate aesthetic consequences, such as collage, cut-up, junk, ready-made, asynchronistic audio-visuals, noise, and distortion that give way to a specific experientiality that is closely associated with punk? This question helps us theorize early “punk cinema” which refers to films that directly take as their focus punk scenes and communities, displaying the functionality and potentiality of the postmodern authenticity that punk can embody by way of making the negating and paradoxical responses to assimilation visible.

The Problem with Transparency: *The Punk Rock Movie* (1978) and *The Blank Generation* (1976)¹⁰

Osgerby mentions Penelope Spheeris' *Decline* series in a section regarding the "punk cinema's popular peak," positioning the films among Spheeris' other punk-influenced bigger budget fiction productions. The reason behind this seems to be the fact that the reception and popularity of the first documentary in the series enabled Spheeris to work within more financially advantageous conditions through writing fiction films, such as *Suburbia* (1984) and *Dudes* (1987), based on her involvement in and experience of the LA punk scene. These films helped Spheeris' career make inroads into the mainstream, leading up to her fame with the box-office comedy success *Wayne's World* (1992). However, there is a more cinematically relevant reason for evaluating *Decline* within the mainstream territories of cinema: the filmmaking style of *Decline* does not leave room for doubt in terms of its genre status as a documentary as opposed to the earlier more "slippery texts" of "punk cinema."¹¹ These texts exhibit home-movie aesthetics in delineating the social spaces of the subculture whilst composing different textual musicalities, or in Mark Benedetti's words, "emphasizing the importance of the club space as not simply the site of specific cultural/artistic practices, but also as the site of powerful, complex affective investments" ("The *Blank*" 44-45). Before pondering Benedetti's terms of discourse in relation to the specific connections between Downtown New York culture's mixing of punk and the avant-garde later in this chapter, I will lay out the general reception of earlier "punk cinema." In this section, two less structurally definable documentaries set in two distinctive Anglo-Saxon social scenes of punk are explored to demonstrate another contention regarding the issue of authenticity: how the filmmaking framework contributes to forming a standardization of both punk, as a "subversive" subject matter, and the documentary itself, as a supposedly transparent form. The argument is that the sense of transparency is shaped by a combination of pre-existing presuppositions about punk constructed through the larger media and the filmic formations and

¹⁰ This section features a further development of research published under the title "Revisiting Early Punk Cinema" in the *Punk and Post-Punk* journal, vol. 10, no. 1 (2021).

¹¹ Mark Benedetti uses the term "slippery text" to describe the genre-escaping status of *The Blank Generation*: "The *Blank Generation* is a rather slippery text. It is not quite a documentary concert film, not quite a home movie, not quite a music video or historical narrative of a scene, not quite an avant-garde film – or, perhaps, it is all of these at once" ("The *Blank*" 48).

engagements with wider cultural influences in cinema.

Kevin Donnelly, in his article “British Punk Films: Rebellion into Money, Revolt into Innovation,” considers a cluster of British punk films as “a historical unit, rather than a specific form” and detects two distinct parts in this unit, “transparent documentary” and “aesthetic world.” Don Letts’ *The Punk Rock Movie* is one of the former in Donnelly’s reading because of its heavy reliance on concert footage and hand-held camera movements that replicate the bodily movement of the audience. Gina Marchetti similarly sees a unity in this cluster of punk films, though considers the American context as well while acknowledging differences: “They all attempt to capture the gritty feel of the city streets, of punk as an *urban* subculture and of the bands as a product of the street environment. [...] [A]lthough extremely different, punk films are, in many crucial respects, all of a piece” (270). Marchetti’s reading mostly concerns itself with different forms of documenting the punk scenes, hence different filmmaking perspectives reflected in these documentary formats, claiming that they were made to “rationalize, criticize, or somehow explain the punk subculture to the uninitiated,” but were nonetheless “shown primarily to punk audiences at clubs or small art cinemas” (282). Both writers conclude their explorations of punk on film by pointing out how the aesthetics of the nihilistic attitude of punk permeated other cultural avenues and turned into different artistic formations, ceasing to exist as a cultural phenomenon on their own. These studies are helpful in pointing out the importance of urban landscape and the aesthetic differentiations between documentaries, fictional insertions into real-life punk histories and musicals. However, the unity they see in these films relies on the understanding of punk as a finite social environment with a specific authenticity. There are certain aesthetic choices in some of these films that complicate these perspectives which read an effective authenticity into the films. The filmic structures based on archival footage in some of the films considered in these studies (which I will also analyze later) do not necessarily eschew narrative and textuality altogether as discussed by these writers. The films have hybrid forms that highly resemble certain mainstream media, such as fictionalization of certain real-life subjects to delineate the filmic aesthetic of iconizing imagery. By way of analyzing scenes from two documentaries, I would like to problematize this idea of unity in the punk documentation and

fictionalization, agreeing with Laderman's observation: "In my view, one of the most compelling contradictions around punk is how its paradoxically self-destructive emergence launched a perpetual recycling effect, that is, indeed, essentially punk" (6).

Don Letts says during an interview about his filming of *The Punk Rock Movie*: "[The punk era's] DIY ethic inspired me to pick up a Super 8mm camera and record what was going on at that time" (Thompson, "Punk Cinema" 51). Thompson observes that this film's "organizing principle is the punk song" (50) and it "appears to be simply a conglomerate of crudely filmed pieces of random concert footage" (51). According to him, this filmmaking practice behind *The Punk Rock Movie* can be seen as a reflection of the musicmaking practices of the punk bands that it aims to document. Letts says in another interview in *No Focus*, "when you shot at 24fps the Super-8 cartridges lasted about three minutes, and it was really fortunate that all the punk groups, everything they had to say, fitted into that time. You know what I mean, the perfect format for punk rock" (93). The combination of Thompson's reading and how Letts talks about his film parallels Donnelly's description of this film as a "transparent documentary." However, if we examine the structure of the film, we discover an underlying frame narrative (the film both opens and closes with Sex Pistols concerts echoing the traditional historization of punk as if it originates from the Sex Pistols), a cross-cutting technique used to juxtapose concert footage and police busting a punk fashion shop called BOY with a constructed sensationalism that does not necessarily divert from the common perception of punk subculture as a troublesome environment. Despite these montage choices that would traditionally organize a narrative, the film still conveys a sense of randomness established via a number of elements: the film's usage of diegetic and non-diegetic texts, the abundance of camera zooms in and out and the fact that a large chunk of the film consists of concert footage. Examining the ways in which the film oscillates between a sense of randomness and editorial organization that highlights the provocativeness of the outlook of specific figures and actions, I argue that Laderman's term "in/authenticity" would better describe this film than earlier readings by Donnelly and Marchetti. Even though Laderman coins this term to describe the more mainstream feature films that fictionalize certain elements and figures in punk subculture – in his definition, "the punk musical

cycle” – this section aims to explain how this earlier documentary does not diverge from the problem of authenticity that is associated with more popular genres, especially, the musical.

The film opens with footage of the Sex Pistols, playing their most famous song “God Save the Queen.” The camera is located among the audience members, and we see subtitles appearing at the bottom-right of the screen moving towards the left “the Sex Pistols.....God save the queen” – explaining to us what we see on screen. After the song finishes, we start hearing police sirens and a non-diegetic text appears “notting hill studios presents.” Then we hear the Clash’ song “White Riot” playing over the image of a woman dancing in the Roxy club and the lead musician from the Irish band The Pogues, Shane MacGowan, dancing in a jacket with a Union Jack pattern; the title of the movie then appears. What happens after is as follows: the dancing woman shows her breasts, MacGowan wrestles with another person, the Clash song finishes, the subtitle “photographed entirely on location in super 8 mm” appears, we see and hear MacGowan playing drums when the stage is empty and he shouts at the microphone as another subtitles appears: “The Roxy club opened in early 1977 for just 100 days, in this period the club devoted itself entirely to punk rock. In London there was nowhere else for the groups to play.” The fact that this establishing shot announces the details about what type of film is used and where this film is shot highlights the materiality of the film, the specificity of the place and a supposedly typical scene in this space. Furthermore, the people who are shown on screen are aware that there is a camera recording them. From the beginning, the audience is made aware of this documentary’s whole premise: what we are about to see is as self-conscious as a punk performer. This self-consciousness of the film parallels the punk performer’s engagement with the scene, echoing Marchetti’s reading that the earlier documentaries were made for the punk audience. Furthermore, there are specific cinematic elements that foreground the provocativeness of punk behavior, rendering the film a work that seeks attention from larger media via provocative images, and also as an authentic reflection of a closeted scene where the reasons behind provocative behaviors and the congregation around disorderly music are understood only via participation.

This play between self-aware performance and working towards provocation is evident in most cross-cutting scenes in the film. In one prominent scene where we see a policeman trying to understand what is going on around the shop BOY, and subtitles emerge again to explain us what happened: “Chelsea police arrived at Kings Road punk shop after complaints over shocking window displays.” We hear a reggae song as the scene continues with these subtitles: “The display included a severed finger... a burnt foot... and an ear... all made out of plastic.” This scene is positioned in a cross-cutting montage together with an interview with the famous punk figure Soo Catwoman¹² and concert footage of the band Jayne County and the Electric Circus (the subtitles show the band’s earlier name which they were known as at the time, Wayne County and the Electric Circus).¹³ Before the film switches to further concert footage of the band Eaters, again we see the police taking down all the items from the display of the fashion shop. Furthermore, right after a Jayne County and the Electric Circus song finishes, there is a cut to a swastika symbol; at the same time, we hear the reggae tune that we heard in the earlier police-busting scene at BOY. The camera zooms out from the symbol revealing that it is on someone’s arm. Don Letts complicates the meaning of what is shown on screen by choosing the reggae tune as the soundtrack of the scene depicting the fakeness of the punk shop where the policemen are taking down the fake body parts from the display while people adorned with swastikas are hanging around. Because the soundtrack is the main element tying together the BOY shop scene and the concert footage through crosscutting between shots, it functions as a voiceover that aids continuity. Dick Hebdige, in his early close analysis of the topic of subculture, established a clear-cut distance between punk and reggae subcultures based on his view of ethnicity as an unrenowable historical concept through which he cast a “frozen dialectic” in-between black and

¹² Soo Catwoman was famous for her specific hairstyle and outfit which resembled the look of a cat. More information can be found on her official website: <https://www.soocatwoman.com/>

¹³ Jayne County refers to her stage persona as her “alter ego, Wayne/Jayne County” in a piece where she discusses her banning from Facebook in 2014 for using the “t-word” (County) – a word that has been commonly accepted as transphobic in the last ten years with regards to its use as a slur in the media (Serano). For a detailed account of the history of the “t-word,” see the transfeminist writer and activist Julia Serano’s blog piece in which she warns her readers that her piece involves the word, however does not “advocate for the continual usage of the word” (Serano). County defends reclaiming the t-word and heavily criticizes “language policing.” Hence, County’s “controversial” perspective contributes to “the debates that have taken place within trans female/feminine spectrum communities” around reclaiming “badly connoted” identity labels (Serano). In her defense, County cites her involvement in Stonewall riots and past collaborations with trans artists and activists (as well as Andy Warhol). Her collaboration with Derek Jarman in the film *Jubilee* will be examined through musical camp performativity in Chapter Three.

white cultures (69). Jamaican-British Don Letts was a reggae DJ at the Roxy club around the same time as punk became popular and made *The Punk Rock Movie* providing a means to identify the ties between subcultures by way of constructing this important scene. The use of reggae music as a voiceover (spilling its connotations over the police-busting scene that also featured some Nazi imagery used as fashion) highlights “the melting pot” nature, albeit heterogeneous, of the environment. Certain shocking mannerisms reflected a deliberate fakeness, described rightly by Marchetti as “absurd extremes,” cultivating a contradictory aesthetic by combining out-of-context political images.

This putting-things-out-of-context nature of the shocking humor of the late 1970s London punk scene was purposefully reflected in *The Punk Rock Movie*, as summarized by Jon Savage in his seminal book *England's Dreaming*: “The film graphically shows the full effect on Punk of the ‘shock-horror’ publicity as the media’s script was replayed for real” (328). As a result, we see a gendered sensationalism with the abundance of short interpolating close-up shots that resemble a voyeuristic gaze of a peeping-tom, such as a shot that zooms in on a woman’s crotch (she only wears underwear) and another on a woman’s lips pierced with a safety pin. There are other scenes in the film that do not show a band’s concert but portray specific figures and events at the Roxy, making the film distinctive in its featuring of rare conversations that seem to come straight out of the subcultural environment versus those constructed interview-style. Again, to borrow from Savage’s listing of the film’s “shock-horror” moments: “Keith Levene [formerly the Clash and Public Image Ltd member] is shooting speed in the Roxy toilet. An unknown fan sensuously slashes his stomach with long passes of a razor-blade. Dee Generate [from the band Eater], on April Fool’s Day, gets up from behind his drum kit to slash at a pig’s head with a cleaver, while the rest of the group performs Velvet Underground playback” (328). These moments’ inclusion in the film produces the fiction of the “shock-effect” of punk; their role in the film as “shocking” relies on the spectator’s familiarity and judgement of this subcultural environment, considering the fact that the film’s punk participants are not given space in the film’s temporality to contextualize these moments in relation to whether they are “shocking” or not to the immediate audience in the scene.

While the film's engagement with the social reportage style of exhibiting the "shock-horror" of punk spaces is acknowledged here by Savage, its making use of sensationalism based on sex and appearance seems to be generally overlooked. In particular, through the portrayal of Siouxsie Sioux, Soo Catwoman and the band The Slits combined with an opening shot of a scene that exhibits a newspaper article specifically featuring "punk girls," *The Punk Rock Movie* is imbued with a semi-ironic exceptionalism towards women in the Roxy scene. For example, we see a specific framing of Siouxsie Sioux engaged in activities that could be deemed stereotypical when compared to a sensationalist representation of punks as intoxicated troublemakers, e.g., she takes pills, she drinks, she smokes, she applies her heavy gothic make-up. While this depiction foregrounds the impact of Siouxsie Sioux's charisma on others in the scene (we see people trying to get her attention while she minds her own business), as well as her "troublesome" look, *The Punk Rock Movie* becomes an aesthetic document of how the London Roxy punk scene involved a self-conscious voyeurism directed at itself. It is also clear that certain scenes in the film aim to depict how punk provocations were perceived by the media and the police. However, we hardly come across anywhere in the works I considered above a mention of the film's adoption of the popular media's voyeuristic gaze, and this in fact reflects the dominating effect of concert footage: the abundance of punk rock music represented by the live shows bury this self-aware and sensationalist aspect of the film behind the "crude 'home-movie' 8mm views of punk musicians in concert and off-stage" (277), as Marchetti observes.

This film style is, despite its provocative surface, democratizing in terms of portraying art practice, showing that creating a punk artefact, (or punk creativity), can mean participating in any way in the punk scene. In fact, what *The Punk Rock Movie* does perfectly is to reflect the earliest idealization of punk performance as DIY and not-specific-to-music: a young woman flashing her breasts or a young man flashing his penis, the activity of kicking empty cans in a Union Jack jacket, an androgynous person wearing a full leather head mask, are symbolic spectacles as much as the bands on stage. However, similar to the bands, they also only gain meaning through their engagement with the environment within which they exist. Even though

Hebdige's analysis of subcultures might have overlooked some of the important internal intricacies and diversities in terms of how punk participants developed racial, sexual and aesthetic self-awareness and a heterogeneous socialization that differed from scene to scene, his Stuart Hall-influenced interpretation of how the shock-effect of punk communicates the way common sense functions on a societal level still holds power.

Hebdige discusses in what ways punks appropriated hyper-ordinary images and items which result in a temporary disruption in the symbolic associations and common-sense acceptances around the order of things in relation to a number of elements, such as "(un)fashion," music and language (100-112). In *The Punk Rock Movie* we see the functioning of this type of communication of at work on the cinematic level in relation to the diegetic textual organization of the film. Before the footage of each concert, Letts inserts an indicator on screen that tells the spectator who the band is. While some of the indicators are non-diegetic texts appearing at the bottom of the screen, some others pertain to the diegetic world of the film, meaning that the texts appearing on screen are from either a punk participant's jacket or a poster on the wall, rather than an addition during the editing. Even though there is no apparent storytelling in the film, it still has a vague diegesis in terms of presenting an underground scene. The fact that not all of the textual introduction to concert footage could be created through utilizing the environmental cues within the scene in the moment of camera shooting, and that some non-diegetic insertions were also used to introduce bands, constructs this vague diegesis that articulates a semi-authentic insider-view. This half-embeddedness in the subcultural environs of *The Punk Rock Movie* feeds the sense of transparency as much as it deviates from it: while the fans' jackets embroidered with the band names (like "Eater" or "Slaughter and The Dogs") enter the filmic construction of the concert scenes, the filmic textuality (non-diegetic subtitles) interferes with the concert scenes to provide a textual communication between the spectator and the film. Despite all the "transparency" that the concert footage delivers throughout the film, this swapping between diegetic and non-diegetic textual insertions in the beginning signals an artistic aspiration to be accessible to the mainstream.

David Laderman takes as his focus a sub-genre called the “punk musical cycle” whose historical precursors are respectively the classical musical (*Singing in The Rain*), the pop-rock musical (*A Hard Day’s Night*), cult films (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*) and lastly documentaries that are “really inside the downtown-cinema punk-underground film movement” (33), referring to *The Blank Generation* and *The Punk Rock Movie*. Even though Laderman’s study of fictional punk films through a genre perspective will be explored later, his comparison between Amos Poe and Ivan Král’s *The Blank Generation* and *The Punk Rock Movie* is a good starting point for discussing the aesthetic and conceptual differences between two important documentaries that have been perceived as similar to each other but also as the closest works to the authentic depiction of punk subcultures in late 1970s London and New York as both films are mostly made up of raw concert footage. As Laderman’s main point of reference in film analysis has to do with the asynchronicity between the image of a punk artist making music and the unmatched sound used in the film (which he describes as “slip-sync”), his comparison between the two films considers this aspect using Thompson’s adoption of “writerly;” he views *The Blank Generation* as a better example in terms of encouraging the audience to produce their own meaning because of its deliberate choice of slip-sync. Laderman’s perspective offers a persuasive reading of a technical feature, describing the image-sound relation as a “radical disjuncture” that marks the complexity of articulating authenticity (34). However, this still does not clarify what exactly those meanings could be that the deliberately asynchronous sound-image saturates the film with (to a point that there is a constant slippage which could mean “no slip” for Laderman).

This section expands on Laderman’s reading of *The Blank Generation* and argues that the more open aesthetic comes from a certain disengagement from mainstream perception and the lack of a type of sensationalist depiction that we find in *The Punk Rock Movie*. Combined with the disruption in “conventional sound-image authenticity” that Laderman observes (34), there are other aesthetic constructions in the film, such as the multiplicity of camera angles and types of modifications in the temporal relationships between shots, specifically double exposure, fast/slow motion and music video aesthetics. These together construct the independent vision of *The Blank Generation* and make it closer to another film approach: cinema vérité.

First, it is important to point out the similarities between *The Punk Rock Movie* and *The Blank Generation* to realize their commonalities in terms of expressing a paradoxical position of authenticity. For example, both films' use of diegetic textualities is quite similar: *The Blank Generation* features an image of a backstage door on which the word "Blondie" is written, to indicate that we are about to watch Blondie concert footage; it juxtaposes the show with shots of backstage where the band, and most prominently Debbie Harry, pose for the camera using props to create a music video mise-en-scène. These scenes resemble the composition of the Siouxsie and the Banshees' scene in *The Punk Rock Movie*. While the voyeuristic tone does not necessarily persist all through the film, there is a prominent change of style when shooting Debbie Harry that approximates Jean Luc Godard's way of shooting Anna Karina's mirror scenes to depict the charming effect of Karina's character (Véronica Dreyer) in the eyes of her lover in *Le Petit Soldat* (1963). The cinema vérité style and French new wave influences are evident in *The Blank Generation* (the film is also in black and white); there is a rejection of professionalism through the asynchronous soundtrack-image combination. In fact, the connection between Godard's filmmaking and Downtown New York culture from which *The Blank Generation* emerged is an important aspect for Benedetti in his exploration of the other avant-garde characteristics of the film. While he observes that "Godard's extensive experimentation with the complex relationships between sound and image clearly play a role in the way that Poe and Kral cut these tracks together" ("*The Blank*" 47), he also makes connections between the "direct cinema" style and the hand-held shaky camera movements. Furthermore, the asynchronicity in sound-image composition, "constant motion" and the hand-held camera style also manifests an aesthetic immediacy which I explain below.

Amos Poe openly expresses, in his interview with Jack Sargeant in *No Focus*, the sense of immediacy while making the film when asked about how the film would differ if he had been concerned with technological quality: "While I was filming there would be people who would come in and say '[...] we can get you an Arriflex [a 35 mm camera] and sound recordist [...] you should be more professional,' and you know the thing was there was no such thing as waiting for

tomorrow. It was all about today, it was very much about the present” (85). Poe and Ivan Král’s articulation of embeddedness in the scene, and the aspiration to capture authentically the specific temporality of the scene they were involved in, is very similar to how *The Punk Rock Movie* combines backstage and the stage footage as well as audience participation. While *The Punk Rock Movie* was structured around interviews and small events that exhibit the provocativeness and the motivations of the punk participants through a direct manner by centralizing figures in the punk scene, *The Blank Generation* does not disrupt the influence of music as the organizational force underlying the observational aesthetics. In that sense, Laderman’s argument that *The Blank Generation* is more realistic in “eschewing all but the thinnest veneer of organization” (33) makes sense because of its lack of disruption in the soundtrack. However, in terms of aesthetic organization, *The Blank Generation* does include aesthetic features that make a collage-esque composition possible, which is actually what makes it more similar in style to cinema vérité than documentary.

The music video, home-movie, experimental and avant-garde cinema are the pivotal points around which Mark Benedetti analyzes and situates *The Blank Generation* in relation to the history of the punk venue CBGB and the Downtown New York art circle. The variety of connections he makes between the film and the strands of avant-garde cinema extends beyond Godard, stressing that the lack of plan and “process-oriented approach to filmmaking” (“The Blank” 50) behind *The Blank Generation* “makes it difficult to learn much of anything about punk or Downtown history simply by watching” (“The Blank” 49). Benedetti’s view of the film as a “slippery text” due to the film’s categorical and historical complexities is informed by both the early receptions of the film as an insufficient documentation of the Downtown scene and the later canonization of the film as “one of the first Downtown films” (50). In this analysis, an opaqueness is detected in terms of the influence this film had as a punk production at the time, providing an “open-history” (52) that is relatively less committed to iconizing the bands than the other examples of “punk cinema.” It can be said that *The Blank Generation* is more connected to a cinematic experimentalism than to a documentation of the punk subculture it taps into, risking audience rejection by audio-visual elements that block a clear view into the specific moments of

punk bands and a sense of “transparency.”

Marchetti (1983) asserts that “*The Blank Generation*’s lack of image-sound synchronization, fuzzy, muted sound quality, and out-of-focus zoom shots may alienate rather than involve the audience” (278). Her reading is not in accordance with the idea that this lack could actually offer aesthetic openings for the spectator. We have seen so far, for example, Stacy Thompson (in his book *Punk Productions*) express that both *The Blank Generation* and *The Punk Rock Movie* eschew narrative, structure and closure by way of combining concert footage that seems disorderly and random. Thompson’s main focus is to compare them to mainstream Hollywood cinema in order to underline the connection between authenticity and low-budget-ness and how the production conditions of these documentaries fit in with his definition of punk production as artworks that are produced under a specific restrictive underground environment. Whether *The Blank Generation* is more accessible to its spectator than *The Punk Rock Movie* is an open-ended discussion; on the other hand, as outlined in this chapter, these films’ respective audio-visual organizations are actually quite different. The argument here is not to say that their differences lead to a complete discrepancy in what their dealings with the issue of capturing authenticity manifests; rather they both embody a paradoxicality in authenticity, but in recognizably different ways because of their engagement with public perception and provocation.

The aesthetic immediacy Poe speaks of in his interview is evident, for example, in the film’s opening scene where concert footage of Patti Smith is shown in fast motion while we listen to a live and rapidly-interrupted recording of her music. The asynchronicity in the audio-visuals does not only come from the fact that the musical sounds and her vocals do not match the lyrics we hear or the instruments present on stage; it also comes from the technique of fast motion that creates an urgency in her bodily performance on stage while she reads from a book or sings and moves in her idiosyncratic androgynous manner. The music is kept intact throughout the scene even when there are different scene insertions, such as her backstage activities, her talking to people in the car or smoking. When the integrity of Patti Smith’s music overlaps the fast-motion framing of her stage show and backstage/car activities, the music functions as a unifying vehicle

for the fragmented images of the punk performer. From this cinematic perspective, *The Blank Generation* aspires to create almost an individualistic episode for each musician or band it presents to us, rather than juxtaposing them like *The Punk Rock Movie* to foreground a punk unity, contrary to the earlier readings by Marchetti and Donnelly.

There is a general multiplication of camera angles throughout the concert footage in *The Blank Generation*; however, one of them especially foregrounds the variety of perspectives that could be established within a punk scene. During the Talking Heads concert, the hand-held 8mm camera is not only located among the audience members turned towards the stage; sometimes it is located on stage among the band members turned towards the audience. There are shots even from the point-of-view of someone who might be standing backstage. Stacy Thompson explains this type of camera direction as follows: “The barrier between producer and consumer becomes permeable, so that the viewers become not punk musicians but performers nevertheless, and the camera and its operator become part of the audience to the point of dancing with the fans” (“Punk Cinema” 50). While Thompson focuses more on *The Punk Rock Movie*’s camera movements, *The Blank Generation* offers more of this aesthetic multiplication of point-of-view (POV) shots through intensifying the position of the film-spectator by not disrupting the soundtrack at all: we are constantly reminded of the fact that there is a multiplicity in the scene unified by sound. This participatory style of documentation seems to be the cinematic equivalent of the punk attitude in music which embodies the lack of technicality and praises the deliberate distortion of the ideas of harmony and mastery. *The Blank Generation* relies on the authenticity of the punk performance on stage and the punk participants in the venue while also placing itself as a film in an exalted position to document this experience, hence disrupting its own articulation of transparency.

Fact-Fiction Hybridity in Punk Cinema: *Rude Boy* (1980) and *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* (1980)

Due to the low-budget conditions and the level of aesthetic immediacy in filmmaking practices

involved, the previous examples of documenting punk showed that there is a spectrum of authenticity in how punk translates onto the screen. By “immediacy,” throughout this section, I refer to an aesthetic construction which is infused by subcultural real-life elements through the live footage of the bands performing and audience members, interspersed with multiple POVs and the self-reflexive audio-visual construction on the filmic level. *The Punk Rock Movie*’s overlooked cinematic engagement with the media representation of punk at the time and *The Blank Generation*’s approximation to cinema verité with a slight gesture towards the political aesthetics of Godard’s cinema, reveal that the intentionality behind depicting the underground punk spaces in their real-life spatiality stems from an aspiration to create identifiability for these spaces. While the identifiability in *The Punk Rock Movie* is a cinematic application of a media reportage style, Amos Poe and Ivan Král’s adoption of cinema-verité provides a more avant-garde artistic identifiability for *The Blank Generation*. While these identifiable features contribute to a sense of transparency in their cinematic representation, they also offer us insights into how live footage and “home-movie” aesthetics both manufacture an authenticity and, at the same time, necessitate the iconic representations of key figures and images in the construction of this “punk authenticity.” In this layered representation, there is a democratizing effect in terms of creativity by bringing together a variety of bands, figures and images, and the issue of immediacy in representation is the key factor in constructing authenticity for ignored sections of society and the underground cultural scenes.

Moving on from the most “immediate” films of “punk cinema,” this section will explore two other examples that have been considered leading movies in locating two prominent British punk bands in punk history on screen: *Rude Boy* (1980) and *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* (1980). While the former inserts a semi-fictional character plot into the live footage of some of the most famous concerts of the Clash, the latter fictionalizes the story of the Sex Pistols as Malcolm McLaren’s invention in order to subvert the financial and representational practices of the music industry, at the band’s expense.

Considering the fact that these bands loom large in the popular knowledge of British punk in

general, it is not surprising that the films about them also make up the more well-known section of “punk cinema;” I mainly refer here to the later documentaries *The Filth and the Fury* (2000) by Julien Temple who also directed *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*, and *the Clash: Westway to the World* (2000) by Don Letts who made *The Punk Rock Movie*. This popular section of “punk cinema,” especially the aforementioned later documentaries that rely on archive footage of the bands which attracts a cult audience, brings us back to one of the main arguments of this chapter: how these examples of “punk cinema” do more to narrow down than to multiply how punk translates into film, since they “have all contributed to the canonization of particular bands, performers and artists within the popular conception of punk history” (Grimes 189). In order to investigate the relationship between punk and cinema beyond the canonization mechanisms of “punk cinema,” I will explore punk’s intersections with other subcultural formations in the later chapters. However, to undertake an analysis of how “punk cinema” came to be incorporated into the mainstream film industry through this canonization, it is still necessary to note the earlier films’ ability to, consciously or unconsciously, reflect on two imperative concerns with regard to punk authenticity: the racial politics of punk and its assimilation by the mainstream (a.k.a. its death).

Compared to the later bigger budget productions, both *Rude Boy* and *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* (coming out slightly after the initial “death” of British punk in 1980), demonstrate an aesthetic immediacy that emerges through close engagement with band members, prominent figures around them at that time (with the exception of John Lydon in *Swindle*’s since he refused to participate in the film) and around their various environs – fictional, spontaneous or otherwise. It has been claimed that both filmmakers continued to employ some of the earlier stylistic punk approaches “in their later punk music productions” (Grimes 197). Their construction of authenticity relies on an abundance of old footage from the 1970s, and so uses the passing of time as an aesthetic element (these documentaries were produced 20 years after the earlier ones). Therefore, it runs the risk of producing an aesthetically inauthentic nostalgia. In fact, the typical “rockumentary” has been analyzed as an exploitation of “the audience’s wish to return, to repeat, and to regain an original event” (Sarchett 31). Sarchett’s analysis is helpful in

assessing the earlier punk films, in terms of their dependency on the live and archive footage, and their distance from “rockumentary” which is considered by Sarchett as follows: “[T]he rockumentary, like most documentary, is an inherently nostalgic genre which posits a retrieval of the pretextual. J. P. Telotte remarks that this will lead unavoidably to a ‘sense of loss’ since the representation must always mark the absence of the event” (31). This is where the genre-ification map is useful – the theoretical territory around the documentary genre points to this idea that re-historizing functions by filling the gap created by a sense of loss.

While Ailsa Grant Ferguson’s detailed account of *The Filth and The Fury* describes the film as “counterhistorical” and a “transgression of conventional documentary,” her reading still mentions the film’s “looking back” activity, albeit transgressively through archive footage, as producing “a bricolage of visual and audio clips from the 1970s period” (“Every” 142). Here we see the replacement of the term “live footage” with “archive footage” in the consideration of what these documentaries consist of in comparison to the earlier examples, shifting the focus from the representation of present-time to the past-time. We discover that the earlier films both aesthetically, and in their reception, created conflict within their depiction of authenticity, providing a retrospective insight into the relationship between punk and cinema due to the immediacy of their aesthetics that the films that were made 20 years later could not realize.

Both *Rude Boy* and *Swindle* can, similarly to the *The Blank Generation* or *The Punk Rock Movie*, be considered as “slippery texts” in terms of their genre(s) and narrative methods as they combine live footage, collage and fictional sub-plots. In fact, *Rude Boy* is generally referred to as a “rockumentary” – a term that does not only mark the centrality of music in a documentary but also the hybridity between art forms. Similarly, *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* is known as a “mockumentary” – another hybrid word that both reconstructs and dissolves the meaning of the documentary genre. Jane Chapman’s explanation of the fact-fiction hybridity in documentaries also denotes the mockumentary style as “writerly” in terms of creating authenticity: “Mockumentary, the satirization of documentary, and reality TV have both impacted the truthfulness debate. Very often the space occupied by such formats is partly fictional and partly

factual, with the onus to detect authenticity likely to fall increasingly on the shoulders of the viewer, as digitalization challenges Direct Cinema's claims that the camera cannot lie" (Chapman 12).

From cinema verité to Direct Cinema, the practice of claiming truth through the camera has influenced theories in relation to realistic aesthetics on screen, and mockumentary comes across as one of the styles that employs factuality in some measure as a device to dismantle realistic representations. In this trajectory, the questionable authenticity of the Clash or the Sex Pistols as punk artists provides for the earlier punk cinema a contested background that comes with its own inner contradicting histories already charged with a fact-fiction hybridity in relation to the bands' relationships with the mainstream.

Furthermore, these films' construction of fiction based on real-life events solidified the problem of authenticity in the center of the discussion on whether punk is dead through the stories about the rise of these bands. We see that the fact-fiction hybridity in their formal structure points to the specific issues that these bands represent in the perception of punk in popular culture. In the case of the Clash, the main issue of representation is the conflict in sustaining genuine politics in relation to race and class by a famous punk band made up of white and middle-class art-school students during the rise of Thatcherism in Britain. Regarding the Sex Pistols, the crisis of representation originates from their manager Malcolm McLaren's projects using the band to manipulate public perspectives and media coverage, namely showcasing how to make "cash from chaos."

Rude Boy has been mentioned earlier as a half-documentary among the other earlier punk films and their positions in the genre-ification map, placing it closer to the "slippery texts" than those that are more overtly "documentary." The fact that the film features the band the Clash and a variety of live footage provides a rationale for categorizing the film as a "rockumentary" while its aesthetic impact of fact-fiction hybridity brings the film more towards the territories of the aesthetic paradoxes of "punk authenticity." Osgerby also locates *Rude Boy* closer to the avant-

garde genres: “*Rude Boy*’s grim *cinema verité* style, meanwhile, echoes the Free Cinema documentary movement of the 1950s and the work of directors such as Lindsay Anderson” (213). Before Osgerby, Chris Barber made several cinematic connections between *Rude Boy* and other influential films, in particular *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), because of its “stark realism and docu-drama form” (42), as well as Jean Luc Godard’s *Le Petit Soldat* (1962) due to the giving of a central role to a nihilist character (43). Thompson’s comparison between *Rude Boy* and *The Battle of Algiers*, despite their stark difference in tone and subject, discloses an important point in terms of adopting a documentary style in filmmaking that runs on a fact-fiction continuum. Exploring the issues around codification, identifiable narratives and factuality in relation to documentary and mockumentary films, Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight’s book *Faking It: Mock-Documentary and the Subversion of Factuality* illustrates how mockumentary as a method destabilizes the hierarchical assumption underlying the “scientific” position of documentary filmmaking that supposedly unlocks a “truth” in society. Their reading of *The Battle of Algiers* with regards to its reliance on documentary codes can also be applied to *Rude Boy*:

The position constructed for the audience is one of in which viewers are encouraged to take the political message as a “reality” or “truth,” with the use of documentary codes and conventions encouraging a belief in the account presented. The film does not present a challenge to documentary, nor to the discourses of factuality. Instead it uses them to validate and give credibility to this historical account. (Roscoe and Hight 56)

What is interesting in this trajectory is that the more the films are ambivalent in their genre-affiliations and their usage of documentary codes, the more the level of controversy in their reception increases since an oscillating fact-fiction hybridity blurs what is encouraged to be taken as “truth” or “reality.” While certain fictional narratives become representative of factual events, other factual elements can seem overly constructed, hence fake. Employing such ambiguity, *Rude Boy* does not directly demythologize the Clash by implying they are fake as it does not hesitate to give lengthy space to concert footage. However, it does put their “realness” on stage in contrast to their non-stage presences by way of partly fictionalizing the band. Other more clearly fictional parts of the film will also be analyzed in light of the turbulent reception of the film in order to

capture the connection between the film's reliance on factuality of concert footage to present a "real" portrayal of the antagonistic youth and the oppressive political polarizations surrounding the punk subculture at the time.

Rude Boy has been famously disowned by the Clash, most prominently by Joe Strummer, because of the film's fictional sub-plot concerning two young black men's systematic activity of pickpocketing and process of getting caught. The dissemination, reception and celebration of the film in the last 40 years seem to be permeated by the dispute between the involved parties: the Clash, the directors Jack Hazan and David Mingay, and finally Ray Gange. Gange played the semi-fictional nihilistic roadie character who has dialogue scenes with each member of the band where a subtle leitmotif of his character marks the occurring problems within the Clash's backstage environment as he, seemingly unintentionally, puts the political and behavioral candor of the band in question in the film. An interview with Gange after the film's 30th anniversary demonstrates that the ambiguity in the film's genre made the film less of a representation of the band, and hence its quality as a rockumentary with the power to "retrieve the pretextual" was perhaps impaired. And yet the film still has a cult following; in fact when the interviewer tells Gange that he was glad that "the film did not get cut down to a concert film..." and asks what Gange thinks of the Clash disowning the film, Gange replies: "My suspicion is that they thought it was going to be like *Help...* or *Hard Day's Night* maybe...and it didn't really turn out like that did it. They thought it was going to grow legs and become this madcap adventure. ... You know, it got a little too gritty and real" ("The Clash's *Rude Boy*").

The factual parts of *Rude Boy* consist of the events and locations surrounding the roadie character as much as the Clash concerts, backstage and hotel shots, since the scenes that are not band-related were also mostly shot in real-life locations. For example, the sex shop where the main character works was Ray Gange's actual workplace during the filming (Childs). From the film's title to the deviation in both the factual and fictional focus from the Clash to the roadie who is more of a liability to the band than a helper, *Rude Boy* provides a bleak personification of a nihilistic attitude located in the midst of the political outspokenness of the band and their

music. The decentralization of the band is executed through utilizing and challenging the cultural status of the Clash as a simultaneously popular and political punk band. This does not necessarily seem like a direct contribution to the mythologizing of the Clash. The band's influence is actually a factuality on which the filmmakers based their grittiness by capturing real-life concerts in a "rockumentary" style, producing live footage that is regarded exciting and valuable, as Chris Barber says, "*Rude Boy* is a must for the Clash fans" (42).

Regarding the "too gritty and real" aspect of *Rude Boy*, Stacy Thompson's analysis concerns how punk history is communicated in the type of film form that he describes as "writerly": "*Rude Boy* endeavors to construct a piece of 'punk history' and to underscore the effects of punk on official, bourgeois History [sic] and vice versa by imagining punks as capable of producing both types of history" ("Punk Cinema" 53-54).¹⁴ In the roadie character's intrusion into the Clash's touring story that is filled with concerts and political demonstrations in working-class UK towns, Thompson detects a history-writing that promotes the idea that official history can be interrupted and rewritten by the inclusion of subcultural stories. This history-writing does not only refer to the film's strategic placement of certain moments of "official History" borrowed from other media (e.g. the footage of Margaret Thatcher's first election), but also it offers openings for the spectator "to become involved in history" through the roadie character's slow-paced narrative. On the other hand, the admixture of direct references to the turbulent socio-political atmosphere of the time, message-driven sub-plots and real concert-footage is evaluated by Jon Savage as more contextually and temporally dependent on the film's specific background. Savage writes:

If, in 1979, *Rude Boy* was embarrassing, today, it is a visual record of a lost era.

Opening with mute shots of the clichéd high rise, the film quickly takes you on a tour through a society in terminal crisis: SWP [Socialist Workers Party] and NF [National Front] graffiti, huge embattled marches, Mrs Thatcher making inflammatory calls for

¹⁴ The capitalized usage of "history" here belongs to Stacy Thompson. This capitalization seems to be the writer's way of differentiating a specific type of history – one that is in favor of bourgeoisie values – that does not necessarily promote cultural formation outside of the status quo.

law and order. (519)

While Thompson finds an authentic openness in *Rude Boy*'s filmic construction, Jon Savage takes the film as a direct reflection of the subcultural limbo that represents both struggle and nihilism within the socio-political context of Britain in 1978. All in all, in both readings, the Clash, as a real band that represents a fact of punk history, is also a representational agent giving room for fictional exploration of its era. This provides a paradoxical authenticity from which the film's open aesthetics emerge.

In terms of politics, Savage correlates the Clash's depiction in the film with the assimilative effect of the rise of the free market politics of conservatism against the backdrop of the clashes between the National Front and the anti-fascist movement led by leftist organizations such as the Anti-Nazi League set up by the Socialist Workers Party, and Rock Against Racism. He writes: "*Rude Boy*'s achievement is to present the Punk subculture at the point of its disintegration. As the film carries on through the year, the Clash solve their dilemmas by becoming progressively less open, more 'professional'. And, the film says, such is the greatness of the Clash, that their struggle was a microcosm of England at the time" (520). Savage makes a strong point in observing the Clash's progression towards professionalism in the film, but what is important about this representation is that the progression is implied in the film through the band's interaction with the roadie character rather than through a depiction of a musical journey leading to mainstream success. Even though band members are friendly and welcoming to the roadie's disorderly behavior and political apathy in the beginning, they exclude him to the point of eventually throwing him out. From the hotel scenes where the band members make fun of him to the backstage scenes where his inability to fulfil a roadie role is highlighted by his drunken idleness, the film is full of moments that juxtapose the roadie's dysfunctionality as a racist social outcast with the political stance of the Clash. This is shown through his dialogues with the band members or other people around the band about not believing in politics, wanting to be a capitalist and denigrating the Clash and the section of youth they represent ("left-wing wankers" or "university types"). These dialogues and shots that show him being left behind by the band or him cashing out his concert ticket for money, mark his exclusion from the touring sphere of the Clash (and their stays at

comfortable hotels). These are the narrative marks in the film that signify the Clash's gradual professionalism combined with the roadie's lumpenism, thereby complicating a section of "punk History" by injecting a parasitical sub-plot into the musical spaces of the Clash. In the representation of these spaces, the physical labor required for preparing the musical stage performance and production also becomes visible.

There are recurrent scenes in the film where we see various people preparing the Clash shows and rehearsals, such as one which the band manager runs around looking for equipment and others in which Gange's character sets up a drumkit or checks the sound. In the scene featuring a Rock Against Racism concert in London's Victoria Park the camera is located at the back of the stage, showing the big crowd facing the band from the road crew's perspective as the crew attempts to fix the ongoing problems with the sound. The emphasis on the working crew, among which Gange's drunken character fails to do his job properly, shifts the attention from the band to the road crew in the background, thereby foregrounding the difference between the visibility of the Clash's political outlook and the invisibility of the labor behind making the band's performances possible. While this construction relies on the live concert taking place outside of the film's intentions, it also involves a semi-planned improvisation by the roadie that provides the narrative entrance into the factuality of the concert and taps into the appeal of a "rockumentary" uncovering the "lost moments" of seeing the Clash live. While utilizing the reality effect, *Rude Boy* problematizes the artistic authenticity of the Clash's musical moments, especially Strummer's adoption of a political agenda as a popular figure. It elevates the narrative juxtaposition of the band and the roadie into the war between "left" and "right" happening at the socio-political surface.

As mentioned before, Savage announces that the film was "embarrassing" at the time, possibly pointing to this confused atmosphere around the film's depiction of underprivileged sections of British society who are subjected to the racial and socio-economic oppression in the "rockumentary" by the apparatus of the band. In 1980 Joe Strummer vocalizes this type of embarrassment, or more of an aversion, when asked in *Melody Maker*, "Do you think you were

fairly portrayed by ‘Rude Boy?’: “... I mean I am a middle class twat, but so are they [the filmmakers Dave Mingay and Jack Hazan] and we didn’t like what they were doing with the black people, because they were showing them dipping into pockets and [...] that was their only role in the film. [...] That is what the right-wing use, all blacks are muggers which is a load of rubbish” (Hewitt).

The director Jack Hazan¹⁵ states that, together with David Mingay, they “wanted to capture what was going on” and filmed the happenings and demonstrations in the streets “where you had the National Front being protected by the police” while not necessarily concentrating on how to portray the Clash as a legendary band (Mack). While the interview with Jack Hazan in 2016 does not involve any reference to the scenes that upset Strummer, it does mention that the filmmaker is aware of the film’s nostalgic appeal, stating that “people who grew up in the punk movement and were influenced by it enormously and still are—they revisit this film quite a lot.”¹⁶ Similar to *The Punk Rock Movie* and *The Blank Generation*’s status as the first examples of “punk cinema” based on the value of rare archive footage and “crude” aesthetics that promise the “retrieval of the pretext” marking a specific subcultural experience from the past, *Rude Boy*’s importance in the “punk cinema” canon also comes from its immediate connection to what was happening at the time, embellished with ambiguous fictionality. Moreover, the fictional aspects of *Rude Boy* are exactly the features outside of the “rockumentary” genre and create the filmic atmosphere that obscures the film’s problematic relationship with constructing narrative out of factuality.

There are two main sequences of the film that concern the representation of people of color and the influence of the Black British movement and reggae music on the Clash. The first one consists of the scenes of the pickpocketing sub-plot that are occasionally cut across the band and

¹⁵ Hazan also made *A Bigger Splash* (1973) – another fact-fiction hybrid film about the artist David Hockney, following him through a post-break-up creative struggle. This film contains clear similarities to *Rude Boy* in terms of aspiring to capture the paradox of artistic authenticity and representation. Hazan recollects this filmmaking tendency as a “dead end” and states: “We shouldn’t really have carried on in this way, and we did, and *Rude Boy* was the consequence” (Mack).

¹⁶ In 2015, British distributor Fabulous Films released a new Blu-ray version of the film.

the roadie scenes which led Joe Strummer to disown the film (Hewitt). The young character in this sub-plot does not take part in other scenes in the film and does not appear to be connected to the band at all. In that sense, this sub-plot is the only part that is completely fictional, embedded into the concert footage and other semi-fictional material involving the roadie character's improvisational behaviors and interactions. The way the pickpocketing action is viewed through the eyes of the policemen from afar who firstly observe these activities before taking action to arrest the person highlights the role of the police in this sub-plot. Towards the end of the film there is an interrogation scene where the person who gets caught is asked why he signed a false confession listing names, followed by his answer: "[I]f you were beaten up and kicked around, wouldn't you sign it?" This scene cuts to the TV footage of Thatcher's election victory, concluding the fictional sub-plot (and the film itself) with the reality that the "new racism" marked by the Conservative Party's oppressive regulations around underrepresented sections of British society and strict immigration policies are on the horizon.

The film's usage of concert footage and a fact-based approach pushes the fictional sub-plot concerning the arrest of the pickpocket into a functionally realistic representation. This scene clearly takes its inspiration from the Clash's famous cover of the reggae song "Police and Thieves" by Junior Murvin – a song reference that correlates a white band's cover of a black musician's song with the questionable authenticity of fact-fiction hybridity. While there is a societal factuality to the "Police and Thieves"-themed narrative of the sub-plot, its stripped off nature from contextual background, its disconnected-ness with other fictional aspects of the film and its pragmatic referentiality, render the experience of oppression as a functional tool for realistic effect first and foremost. This pragmatic approach towards presenting the experience of oppression becomes hidden under the different layers of fact-fiction oscillation, suspending its relevance between the left-right war and the aspiration to reveal the paradoxical authenticity of the Clash.

The second scene in which there is a specific absence of attention on the individuals' experience of race-based oppression, is when Joe Strummer plays a solo song on the piano, singing the lyrics,

“the black man got the rhythm, the white man got the law.” A wide-angle shot captures both Strummer playing and Gange’s character walking around in the rehearsal space with a beer can in his hand. After Strummer’s song, Gange’s character vocalizes his opinion on how the Clash should stop mixing politics with music, insinuating that the influence of reggae on Strummer’s music and his lyrical focus on racial oppression is hypocritical, using the derogatory “n-word” (Strummer jokingly also replies using the same word). This dialogue carries an irony implied by the shot-reverse-shot composition that cuts abruptly between them initiating a disjuncture in the way their opinions are vocalized, making the camera movement very recognizable. Perhaps this is one of the moments that Jon Savage describes as embarrassing: the framing of a clichéd representation of a working-class character on the dole as a lumpen drunk with racist and misogynist beliefs within the political environment of the Clash and the resort to a self-reflexive camera for gritty aesthetics and crudeness effect. *Rude Boy* exemplifies a privileged creative attitude towards using the experience of oppression as a functional device to construct its own authenticity through fact-fiction, advancing the documentary style’s “privileged position within society [...] maintained by the claim that it can represent the most accurate and truthful portrayal of the socio-historical world” (Roscoe and Hight 6). By tapping into black culture’s impact on punk subculture through functionalizing a specific experience of oppression and systemic racism into an unrelated sub-plot, it prioritizes adding a reductive racial dimension to the subcultural story over developing the representation of this experience itself. Paul Gilroy detects this creativity as an envious punk sensibility:

The cultural backdrop to black combativity was important to punks [...]. The street carnival, with its bass-heavy sound systems pumping out the new militant “rockers” beat of reggae as the half-bricks and bottles flew overhead, demonstrated to the punks the fundamental continuity of cultural expression with political action. The two were inextricably interwoven into a dense and uncompromising statement of black dissent which was a source of envy and of inspiration to a fledgling punk sensibility. This envy and its creative consequences were spelled out by the Clash in their song “White Riot,” described by one writer as the after-effect ‘of being caught in the racial no-man’s land between charging police and angry black youth at the Notting Hill carnival riots of 1976. [...] The intimate political and ideological

connections embodied in this musical relationship were given substance by RAR's [Rock Against Racism] efforts to put on gigs up and down the country in which black and white bands and their audiences combine. In these, the emphasis was on the creation of an experience in which the emptiness of "race" could be experienced at first hand and its transcendence celebrated. (186-7)

Paul Gilroy's analysis of the alliance between RAR and a large section of the punk movement, within which the Clash had a central role, does not only shed light on the hierarchical fact-fiction mechanism at work at the background of *Rude Boy*; it also recasts the authenticity problem of the Clash as a precursor to the later depoliticization of the post-punk culture. In this light, the societal complexities (left-right war) that reduces the profundity of racial oppression to factual narrativizations becomes visible in the film through the fact-fiction hybridity. Lastly, *Rude Boy*'s employment of this hybridity as well as its specific documentary-style features, or in Donnelly's words "its engagement with the codes of realism in much the same way as did *Cathy Come Home* (1966), Ken Loach's social realist television document-drama" (104-5), evokes the privileged position of documentary in spectatorial perception. Here this position is evident in how the film positions racial oppression on the fictional side of the spectrum merely to enrich the more factual side of the film which is the punk movement around an iconic band.

The underlying hierarchical positioning and the privileging effect of "the seeming transparency" which "allowed for the possibility of an explicit political agenda" (Donnelly 104) is overshadowed by some of the readings of the film along the lines of "the traditions of British realism," cinema verité and kitchen sink (Osgerby 212-213). The film's approximation to "rockumentary," on the other hand, reveals the manipulative current amidst these layers and provides the evidence – the backstage space – through which the "strange mediation between authenticity and public image" can be observed (Trainer 143). Adam Trainer, in his article exploring *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* in relation to the idea that cinema is a "legitimate forum for the iconization and canonization of specific individuals and movements" (142), explains the "rockumentary" as follows:

The rockumentary [...] generally endeavours to dismantle the myths supporting the

dominant images and public perceptions surrounding a particular performer. [...] Jonathan Romney points out, however, that what occurs in the *backstage* space of the rockumentary is not truthful but a construction of star personae and filmmaking rhetoric manipulated as any scripted drama (1995: 82-92). It is this limbo state – this discomfoting manipulation of the backstage space and those who occupy it – that provides the genre with its immediacy. (Trainer 143)

Trainer's theorization of the backstage, specifying its metaphorical aspect evident in this word's italicizing, explains the function of the footage of backstage as a type of fictional demystification of the famous figures that creates a false sense of immediacy. The way fact-fiction hybridity in the construction of the backstage space of *Rude Boy* runs on correlated privileges between artistic maneuvers both embodied in the Clash and the film's aesthetic, stemming from the codes and traditions of British realism, is functionally similar to but stylistically different from what goes on in *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*. While the literature on *Rude Boy* focuses on realism to describe the bleakness that hides power structures at work in the filmmaking, *Swindle* is associated with the more boisterous styles, such as bricolage (Huxley) and *the carnivalesque* (Osgerby). In addition to the functional similarities between the two films in terms of their inclusion of concert footage and the band members' non-concert activities that create the *backstage* atmosphere, both films were dismissed by their front men: John Lydon refused to partake in *Swindle* as well as the other Sex Pistols-based pre-*Swindle* sexploitation film project *Who Killed Bambi?* which was initially planned to be directed by the influential sexploitation filmmaker Russ Meyer. Osgerby writes, "at the beginning of 1978 the Pistols' first American tour collapsed acrimoniously and Johnny Rotten [Lydon] quit the band, subsequently refusing to have any dealings with McLaren or the movie" (215). The production story of *Swindle* is a fundamental part of the story of the Sex Pistols that serves as a deconstruction; it muddies the facts surrounding the band's ending, ultimately attributing a tone of farce to the band's history. Its narrative focuses on Malcolm McLaren and how he manufactured the band as a project to teach us, the public, lessons to subvert the norms of the music industry alongside public perception, combining scenes of McLaren with archive footage of the Sex Pistols, including some of the famous shows of the band as well as Sid Vicious' notorious cover performance of the song "My Way" by Frank Sinatra. The following section explores how the film has been perceived as a

work that deliberately deconstructs the iconic elements of the band in order to centralize Malcolm McLaren as the main force behind this iconography, as this film was actually his project.

Adam Trainer states that the film “served as a bookend to the career of” the band (Trainer 148), centralizing McLaren’s meddlesome actions and perspectives on punk within this career. Unlike the directors of *Rude Boy*, who were not necessarily a part of the Clash’s story but observers with the intention of constructing a scene of “truth” about that time, Malcolm McLaren as the producer of *Swindle* and its main figure was very much involved in shaping and publicizing the band’s career. The role of McLaren in the story of the Sex Pistols has been subjected to much debate which is explored in detail by Jon Savage in his book, *England’s Dreaming*, and it is the most enlightening resource to date, sketching out the visible conflicts and uncertainties surrounding this history through oral and written accounts including the production of the film. Furthermore, David McGillivray notes that *Swindle* “was so successful that many people probably believe that it is a historical document” in his humorous journalistic piece on the film, which is combined with his recollection of the experience of interviewing a very unwilling Julien Temple (*Swindle*’s director) 25 years after the film’s release (20).

Indeed, there have been readings that viewed *Swindle* as a historical document to some degree,¹⁷ either ignoring the prevalent ironic tone or perceiving the film as a direct reflection of the band’s story due to the already-ingrained irony in every section of the narrative and aesthetic construction of the Sex Pistols as a media phenomenon. This perception of the film as a document shows that the aim of the makers of the film was successful in deceiving some viewers, as Julien Temple reports that the film “was meant to be a joke on many levels” (McGillivray 20). In the book *Sex Pistols: The Inside Story*, Fred and Judy Vermorel interview Temple (alongside

¹⁷ An example is Peter G. Ross’ article on the organizational practices within the music industry that gave way to mainstreaming British punk which includes such a misreading: “Anyone familiar with the history of punk rock, at least the history perpetuated and communicated to generations of young music audiences through the mythological discourse of popular culture, will know that the simple explanation of how punk rock emerged can be found in Julien Temple’s 1980 film *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*” (155).

the band members) about the process of making the film which and show that McLaren could dictate and control every aspect of the film. According to Savage, McLaren himself often stated that he was behind the construction of punk in general and viewed the film as what contained the Sex Pistols legacy, saying that: “[T]he film was us preventing the whole thing from turning into a dreadful tragedy and turning it into a fantastic enigma. [...] That is what we tried to do, to lie incredibly. We did it quite successfully” (500). Years later, in his review in *Uncut Magazine*, Neil Spencer writes: “The truth – and there are many variations of it where the Pistols are concerned – is a more chequered affair, one obscured as much as revealed by *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*” (60).

The amount of material accounting and reviewing the process of making *Swindle* and its ostensibly chaotic aesthetics, as well as the planned and semi-actualized film projects prior to *Swindle* including the notoriously unfinished film *Who Killed Bambi?* and Temple’s short films capturing some of the Sex Pistols live shows, effectively elevated the popular status of the band towards an iconic and notorious position. This was not only possible through the film’s own cinematic achievement, but more so through the way the chaos around the making of “a Sex Pistols film” snowballed and infiltrated the popular media, and finally with the help of the record company Virgin’s gradual release of the songs from the soundtrack album before the film was released. Reynolds summarizes this chaotic ending:

While McLaren struggled to break into the porn world, the Sex Pistols posthumously enjoyed a seeming interminable run of chart success. [...] Virgin had turned McLaren’s punk critique of commodification into a *commodity*. As a good Situationist, McLaren should have known all along that “the spectacle” (mass media, the leisure/entertainment, industry) could absorb any disruption, no matter how noxious, and convert it into profit. (*Rip It* 305)

If *Rude Boy* pretends to demythologize the Clash while providing the allure of an unrestricted backstage experience, hence solidifying the band’s position in “punk history,” *Swindle* demolishes the alluring representation of the Sex Pistols to the point that the members seem to be performing in a ruined version of the backstage, complicating the myth surrounding their

breakup. This was also observed by Trainer: “Although it provided the Sex Pistols with a platform of notoriety from which to perform in the public eye, this reputation for exploitation and sleaze quickly became old and was outdated by the time *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* emerged” (147). However, this did not stop *Swindle* from being received as a masterpiece (McGillivray 26) or “the Citizen Kane of rock ‘n’ roll pictures” (“The Great Rock”).

As demonstrated above, there are exhaustive resources available reporting, retelling and reviewing British punk music, politics, popular culture and artefacts. These resources touch upon *Swindle* both in-depth and in passing, positioning it within the larger historicizing, drawn from and in reference to mostly Jon Savage’s, Vermorel’s and Reynolds’ accounts, as well as the film reviews and analyses published in different collections and journals. The most recent example of these would be the *Punk and Post-Punk* journal. David Huxley, for example, in his extensive study on *Swindle*, charts the film sequence by sequence laying out the whereabouts of each animation, archive footage and semi-fictional scene featuring the members of the band and McLaren in specific times and locations. He exposes the instrumental elements in the building of the outlook of “a historical document” and the role of archive footage in this:

During the first 20 sequences archive footage is used seven times, and this is backed up by recreations of actual events (in both live action and animation), held together by McLaren’s narration. This undoubtedly gives the impression that the film may largely be a documentary despite being shot through with the punk ethos of “cut-ups;” its meaning created through this hectic montage. Even the more extreme of McLaren’s statements such as “... the most successful of all was an invention of mine called the punk rock [sic]” *can* be seen as “factual.” (Huxley 88-92)

In addition, Philip Kiszely’s exploration of *Swindle* together with *Rude Boy*, uses other written materials and historizations around these films when writing: “In its ambition to write itself large within and upon history, the punk cinema of *Rude Boy* and *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* both fails to register fully on its own terms and mimics, for the most part, the undemocratic modes of behavior, practice and production it sets out to dismantle” (195). Tying Kiszely’s account to Osgerby’s reading of the film along the lines of exploitation genre, the rest of this chapter

explores the evidently exploitative sections of the film to elaborate on the reverse role of factuality in constructing authenticity and writing history.

Due to the film's "hectic montage," the discussion of how factuality functions in *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* shifts more towards mockery and parody while still occasionally providing an authentic tone ultimately aimed at deception. Its position as a "slippery-text" comes from its communication with factuality that is almost at the moment of dissolution: McLaren's self-narrated ten lessons throughout the film overwrites the story of the Sex Pistols. The opening shots of the film feature someone – supposedly McLaren – with a full-face leather mask "teaching" us the first lesson, "how to manufacture a band," followed by title credits constructed by colorful big letter props carried around by McLaren's protégé character Helen of Troy played by Helen Wellington-Lloyd whose dwarfism has been considered as what made her "the archetypal punk 'staree'" (McKay 231).¹⁸ The sequence is followed by a re-enacted Gordon Riots scene where the Sex Pistols members are burnt in effigy followed by a fake audition scene in which different young men perform to be selected as the new vocalist for the band due to the departure of Johnny Rotten. Later on, this already raucous opening is followed by the first concert-archive scene of the film in which the band plays "Anarchy in the UK." This is a brown tinted black and white shot composition that is clearly not filmed during the making of *Swindle*. This archive footage is intercut with a shot in which a punk audience dances – pogoing – within a different venue than that which is featured in the archive footage. Even though the fact that these two shots are not part of the same footage is immediately apparent, a closer look reveals that the dancing audience shots do not belong to the archive footage. While it is also not clear whether this audience shot is staged for the film or taken from an actual concert, the way the crowd dances and engages with the camera visually matches the live soundtrack belonging to the Sex Pistols seen on stage and derives its authenticity from its framing within this archive footage. Over one of the dancing audience shots we hear McLaren's narration: "Theorize, threaten and

¹⁸ Helen Wellington-Lloyd also starred in Derek Jarman films of the same era that were in direct relation with punk subculture, *Jubilee* (1978) and *The Tempest* (1979), was an artistic collaborator involved in the punk fashion shop SEX and became one of the most famous punk figures of the era together with McLaren whom she met at Goldsmith's Art School (Robb 86).

insult your own useless generation.” Huxley reads this voiceover as the artificial context given by the film, locating “the meaning of all these shots in a context of deliberately planned rebellion they might not otherwise have had” (94). This reliance on archive footage in *Swindle*, as well as in the previous films I examined, indicates that it is the key method to deliver a sense of authenticity in these hybrid-films about famous British punk bands. What *Swindle* does differently than the earlier examples here is to utilize the traditional method of suspense: unreliable narration.

Osgerby notes that the film’s “formal qualities were partly born out of necessity” as a result of the band’s breakup, applying “strategies to construct a narrative around a band that no longer existed” (215). As we have seen in other scholars’ positioning of *Rude Boy*, there is a tendency to analyze the low-budget immediate aesthetics in relation to established cinematic techniques and codes when it comes to “early punk cinema.” Echoing this tendency, Osgerby also detects the influence of “filmmaking traditions such as *Nouvelle Vague* and Sergei Eisenstein’s theories of montage, in which meaning is created through the collision and juxtaposition of images” (215-216). As for what *Swindle* specifically does within the discourse of tracing influences, he identifies an amalgamation of “these avant-garde influences” and “the formal techniques rooted in the practices of exploitation filmmaking” (216). He continues: “Russ Meyer was long gone, but the style of exploitation movies remained prominent, with the film pushing gleefully towards the shocking and the outrageous. One sequence, for example, sees a nude pubescent girl morph into a spectacularly coiffured punk” (216). While raising a prescient issue with this particular scene and *Swindle*’s employment of a shock-style borrowed from the exploitation genre, Osgerby seems to miss the two important aspects of this scene that actually constitute the film’s exploitation on different levels.

Firstly, McLaren’s second lesson (“establish the name sex pistols”) is being written in lipstick by Helen of Troy on the naked upper body of the young actress Judy Croll. In the next shot, we see her whole body naked and digitally added underpants become noticeable; she wears her jacket only in the same room where McLaren takes a bath with the help of Helen of Troy. This composition presents the young woman’s image as a spectacle that is created by McLaren.

Secondly, her transition to a “coiffured punk” is actually supposed to imitate another famous punk figure from the London punk scene, Soo Catwoman. On the seemingly official Soo Catwoman website, her representative writes, “Judy was passed off as Soo Catwoman in the film ‘The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle’ in 1980, somehow over the years and until this day there are people believing it is Soo Catwoman [sic]” (“The Real”). Indeed, David Huxley confuses the actress as Soo Catwoman (also writing her name wrong) in the sequence chart through which he examines the film, describing the sequence as “Lesson 2: Establish the Name (Written by Helen on a torso of a naked girl). McLaren (in bath) talks about creating a group to play in small venues, away from the press. The girl, Sue Catwoman, is turned into a punk” (89). According to the piece on Soo Catwoman’s website this confusion is “a tragic mistake to make.” The dismissal of this unjust appropriation raised here parallels the sense of discontent this chapter explored earlier in terms of the impossibility of original depiction, though extending its relevance to the rather clear-cut territory of authorization: McLaren and Temple’s scene-construction here involves an unauthorized presentation of a punk figure being psychically embodied by someone else.

The exploitative nature of the scene does not only come from the possible coercion at work that runs the risk of undermining an adolescent person’s bodily autonomy. Furthermore, the film consciously taps into this possibility as a suspense effect by way of constructing this scene as a representation of a punk creation by McLaren; here McLaren acts as if he creates a young punk, similarly to how he claims to be the creator of the Sex Pistols. This highlights McLaren’s God-like status as the manufacturer of subversive figures and artefacts. In addition, the young person’s image credit belongs to another person who created the Catwoman persona independent of the film and McLaren. In this layered exploitation, the bodily representation of a person becomes the site wherein the factual formation becomes embodied by a fictional portrayal that both undermines its own subject and its actor. In that sense, it manages to remove authenticity altogether as a necessity for iconizing punk but replaces this issue with a variety of other reconstructions in the film beyond this scene.

These reconstructions include the Rio de Janeiro scenes where Ronnie Biggs – the famous exile who was responsible for The Great Train Robbery in 1963 – replaces Rotten’s role in the band, or the film-noir parody where Sam Cook plays a detective and watches the film in a cinema at the end. This “film-in-a-film” section of the production towards the end is the moment at which the film completely breaks away from factuality. The last sequences in the film specifically are filled with criminal connotations and implications through manipulations of factuality and parodying scenarios in a mockumentary style that asserts itself fully (e.g. Sid Vicious’ mass-shooting an aristocratic Paris audience after his performance of “My Way”). Huxley explains this as follows: “For all its apparent confusion, *The Great Rock ’n’ Roll Swindle* is in fact constructed in quite a traditional way at the level of the shot. Its unconventionality lies at the level of its sequences and the way in which it mixes animation, documentary, recreation and fictional scenes almost seamlessly” (94).

In this regard, within the early “punk cinema” that shares a sense of immediacy, *Swindle* is most closely related to the mainstream reductions of punk histories, documentations and fictions in the later “punk cinema” canon because of its employment of traditional narration despite its mock-heroic tone. *Swindle* can be seen as the threshold of “punk cinema” beyond which the degree of appropriating clear genre-features increases to a point that we no longer talk about “slippery texts.” On another note, its exploitative features, especially when put into comparison with other examples of early “punk cinema,” are not obscured by the abundance of concert footage as the film relies more on McLaren’s manipulative narration connecting all the fictional parody sequences. This closeness to mainstream methods of narrativization, which utilize the band’s “success” stories, are evident here on the filmic level beyond its reception by the popular media.

Both *Rude Boy* and *Swindle* carry a debunking effect in their hybridity towards the iconization of the bands they feature while at the same time reiterating their popular status. They repeat certain narratives that reveal how the identifiable traits of punk subculture are socially constructed. Media presentation and public perception seem to function as genre tropes: the more the early

“punk cinema” refers and adapts to popular media, the more the films become recognizable through their methods of employing narration techniques.¹⁹ In this manner early “punk cinema” demonstrates that the spectrum of recognizability coincides with the spectrum of perceived authenticity on screen and the different degrees of hybridity made up of factual and fictional events are direct results of attempting to find recognizability through cinematic productions. These films’ aesthetics and reception tell us about the problems surrounding punk in terms of representation and authenticity as socially created mechanisms that worked/died together with the aforementioned iconic bands’ public image. In conclusion, the “punk cinema” canon created its methods to narrativize famous figures in distilled stories of subcultures and within this trajectory, we see that the fictionalization and genre-ification processes excluded less recognizable and less adaptable sections of subcultural experience.

While this chapter focused on the films described by “immediacy” and “transparency” in terms of capturing authentically the most well-known figures from the 1970s London and New York punk scenes, there are other more mainstream films in the canon, such as *Ladies and Gentlemen*, *The Fabulous Stains* (1982), *Sid and Nancy* (1986), and the more recent *Control* (2007) and *The Runaways* (2010), devoid of any “real” archive or backstage footage. *Sid and Nancy*, for example, leaves no room for misinterpretation in terms of its format: a fiction film “based on a true story.” This level of mainstream fictionalization can be understood in terms of the assimilation methods at work.²⁰ However, the concern of this chapter has been rather the more “immediate” films’ claim for authenticity through their employment of the documentary form as that is where we find the resistant strategies against assimilation. Even though the films considered in this chapter, which are referred to as early punk cinema, are known for their underground reception conditions, low-budget grittiness and tone of mockery, their aesthetics still seek to provide points of identification for audiences through the representational methods employed. This paradoxical position of the early punk cinema requires non-hierarchical concepts, such as Laderman’s

¹⁹ For further on narration techniques in film see David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985), pp. 48-62.

²⁰ Barber discusses the director Alex Cox’ involvement in this mainstream adaptation of the story of the relationship between Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen, and considers *Sid and Nancy* essentially a film about drug addiction (Barber and Sargeant 36).

“in/authenticity,” to clarify the negotiations between the underground and the mainstream. In the next chapter, we will examine the intersections of punk and queer subcultures that offer room for such paradoxicalities and work towards multiplying punk subjectivities. Muñoz highlights that “simply ‘queer[ing]’ an object, phenomenon or a historical moment,” is not enough to uncover indirect connections. Following Muñoz, Curran Nault states that his study of the queercore movement “seeks less to prove punk’s ‘true queerness’ than to invoke some generative [...] historical instances of queer punk ‘connectivity’” (*Queercore* 49). In this vein, the next chapter traces such instances in order to find the cinematic territories wherein fact-fiction hybridity offers room for alternative temporalities rather than reduction of experiential knowledge of subcultures, as we see has happened in the mainstreaming of punk with the help of “punk cinema” canon.

Chapter Three: The Intersections of Punk and Queer

There are of course many queer genealogies, and they lead to sites and movements that are not always self-declared as queer or even LGBT. To think along these grooves we should resist the impulse to simply 'queer' an object, phenomenon, or historical moment and instead attend to it with an understanding of lines of queer genealogical connectivity as something other than tautological. (José Esteban Muñoz, "Gimme" 96)

The critical theory journal *Social Text* published an issue dedicated to punk in 2013, titled "Punk and its Afterlives." The editors list the various reasons behind their choice of theme in their introduction, making it clear that their main motivation is to contribute to a deconstructive undercurrent that questions the dominant discourse around punk, seeking to "disrupt linear histories of punk" within the new field of "punk studies" that they are skeptical of (Brown, Deer, Nyong'o 2). In this journal issue, punk as a sociological subject, offers a cultural milieu through which the theorists, who are in one way or another involved in and/or fans of different sections of punk subcultures, uncover the "alternative affective territories" that capture the "creative articulations of punk by women, people of color, and queers" (5). The essays revolve around how to think about the different temporal and spatial subaltern formations and "modalities of punk" which require alternative lenses that "don't care about reforming a dominant history" (Brown, Deer, Nyong'o 5). Their focus on the "off-the-grid" moments, spaces and cultural productions that intersect punk and queer politics reveals the insufficiency of trying to write "a linear master narrative" of punk – a master narrative whose impossibility is discussed in relation to the "punk cinema" discourse in Chapter Two.

Deborah Vargas's essay, for example, considers Texas-Mexican punk bands Piñata Protest and Girl in a Coma to explore the afterlife of punk within the context of "cantina time" (where cantina refers to a South Tejas working-class bar²¹). Vargas' piece reflects on "the spatiotemporal

²¹ Vargas uses the term "Tejas" instead of "Texas" "in order to denote the geopolitical, cultural imaginary of peoples of Mexican descent" (116).

configuration” that brings together “the slower tempo Tex-Mex music – and by extension, Tejas vernacular – and the rapid tempo of punk” (59), particularly analyzing how the heteromale space of the cantina is reimagined through the music videos of Piñata Protest and Girl in a Coma. Similarly, Matthew Carrillo-Vincent explores the concept of “emo,” firstly as a subculture, and then as a cultural response to the normalization of a specific masculinity within the American hardcore punk scene. In doing so, Carrillo-Vincent contextualizes “normality” as a space, and the emotional figure of the “emo” as its periphery which he takes as an opportunity to occupy “the very contours of normativity itself” (36). For these theorists, the term punk “resonates in both historical as well as affective registers; it oscillates between specifically located worldly practices and free-floating transhistorical associations” (Brown, Deer, Nyong’o 2). In the same vein, this chapter focuses on the cinematic resonances and temporalities where the subjects of punk and queer movements intersect while being in touch with, but also moving beyond, the “punk cinema” canon.

As José Esteban Muñoz notes in his contribution²² to the *Social Text* issue, a queer genealogy does not have to be “openly gay.” This means that we can find connectivity between cultural territories that are not necessarily socially-perceived as queer spaces or ostensibly queer subjectivities. Muñoz’s innovative approach is “a thought experiment,” echoing the queer methodologies in sociology that prioritize subjective accounts discussed in Chapter One. It is important to reiterate that, within queer studies, the methodology of using subjective experience does not necessarily negate objective analytical thought; rather it reveals both the role and exclusion of subjectivity within the established understandings of objective research. Paralleling this perspective, Muñoz’s exploration of the early Los Angeles punk scene, specifically the images, songs and performances of Darby Crash (the vocalist and songwriter of the punk band Germs) centralizes the aesthetics of an inexplicit queerness, a “secret and extremely queer sociality of wanting more” (107). His article underlines that some aesthetic performances in this specific punk scene articulate a connection between the absence of a self-declared identification

²² His article’s title, “Gimme Gimme This... Gimme Gimme That’: Annihilation and Innovation in the Punk Rock Commons” references the punk song “Lexicon Devil” by the LA punk band Germs.

and the desire for overcoming “that particular burn of ‘not having things’” (107). Muñoz’s thought experiment demonstrates a dialectic of connectivity that both realizes the absence and presence of the sign of queerness. This chapter presents specific cinematic works and their connections to subcultural environments as well as the subjectivity of their maker, testifying to the type of connectivity Muñoz’s experiment aims to manifest. When Muñoz looked at the territories that are not always self-declared as queer, he ended up in punk. The same happened to the following filmmakers and their works analyzed in the following sections. To apply Muñoz’s experimentation to the investigation of cinematic articulations of punk is to take the main punk genealogy in cinema, which is the “punk cinema” canon examined in the previous chapter, as the starting point for exploring different temporalities of punk (such as the proto-punk qualities of John Waters’ trash cinema that predated American punk which is the focus of the next section). In short, a reworking of Muñoz’s quote explains the rationale here: the main punk genealogy leads us to sites and movements that are not always self-declared as punk.

The interchangeability of punk and queer in this strand of thought is helpful in discovering the more visible, but overlooked, connections between punk and queer subcultures, aesthetics and theorizations. The special issue of *Social Text* seems to testify to this affinity. In an earlier issue of the same journal in 2005, Tavia Nyong’o provides the grounds on which this discussion could be built, revealing the etymological ties between the evolutions of the two terms. These studies show that queer subcultures and relevant research can be considered as the closest kin of punk subcultures and research upon them. Nyong’o’s etymological focus uncovers the historical intersections between the terms’ – punk and queer’s – perception and circulation in the Anglo-Saxon context. Nyong’o explores this connected historicity of the words via “the contemporary American Africanization of the meanings of punk” where “punk” is conflated with “gay,” and the term “being punked” refers to a “derogatory” position that “the male homosexual” inhabits (“Punk’d” 21-23). This etymological investigation reveals the connections within the study of street cultures – Nyong’o refers to this as “street theorizing” – which requires acknowledging the racial dynamics of the street and prison in different settings and considering the dialogues between punk and different subcultures, such as hip hop. Referencing the *Dictionary of*

Contemporary Slang (Thorne 1990), Nyong'o also notes: "No source I consulted could definitely trace the origin of the *punk* but a representative etymology reports that 'the word originated in British slang around the end of the 17th century when it was used to denote a whore and later a precursor to the modern *rent boy*'" ("Punk'd" 23). This point makes it clear that historical intersections between punk and queer subcultures have always been there when terminology is considered which marks an important and overlooked aspect in the dominant narratives of punk history. This etymological connection provides a significant ground on which the explorations of the aesthetic intersections can be built.

As argued in the previous chapters, when punk is researched, there tends to be an element of subjectivity which highlights the lived experience and the participatory aspects of punk productions. In addition to this commonality between the research methods, there are other subcultural formations that overtly stem from the intersectionality of queer and punk. Notable examples are the riot grrrl movement which started in Olympia, Washington in the 1990s and expanded in a range of further movements including lesbian separatist fractions (Kearney); the queercore movement originated in Canada made up of visual artists as much as musicians and started as a fake counter-movement that criticized the mainstream gay culture which was also influenced by riot grrrl; and *la movida madrileña*, Spain's sexually diverse punk response to commercialism in the post-Franco era, specifically in Madrid. Punk as a subculture had influences on and connections to film through other movements that have also been subjected to a large number of analyses within queer studies. This includes Andy Warhol's Factory productions, Derek Jarman's films that emerged from his communal environment in the 1970s and 1980s, the No Wave film movement and Cinema of Transgression in New York, and early John Waters films along the lines of "trash cinema" which reflected links to punk scenes in the American context.²³ We can trace the influence of these cult-ish events and films on the formation of the Anglo-Saxon punk subculture among certain biographies, autobiographies and

²³ The collection *Midnight Movies* (1983) edited by American film critics J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum is an essential resource that provides a combination of film reviews, oral history, evidential stories, and artistic connections between the underground New York cinema, the rise of pornography, experimental cinema, punk and the No Wave movement between the early 1960s to 1980s.

historical studies.²⁴ Of course, different artistic influences and connections go beyond the Anglo-Saxon-oriented historicities of punk and it is important to acknowledge the diverse societal formations on a global scale that resonate with avant-garde aesthetics.²⁵ These aesthetics emerged from subcultural creative environs that struggled against the assimilatory practices of mainstream culture. As outlined in the previous chapter, the “punk cinema” canon that captures mostly the low-budget documentaries from a specific era (the late 1970s and early 1980s) contributed to the process of canonization and the centralization of certain Anglo-Saxon figures and iconographies. This chapter discusses how the intersections between punk and queer subcultures offer the critical area where the canonization methods – epitomized by the reliance on famous punk figures’ archive, backstage and concert footage – of the representation of punk in cinema are displaced by the lesser-known female, drag and gay figures, fragmented narratives, abundance of queer parody, and the combination of camp and trash aesthetics, and fake musical performances. Generally, in these intersections, the politics of realistic representation are dispensed with via a deliberate coupling of low-budget artificiality and spontaneity.

As the etymological roots of “punk” and “queer” demonstrate, we find an embrace of negative labelling in these subcultural formations. Trash cinema, predating “punk cinema,” is where we find the roots of such reclamation in cinema. The 1960s-1970s exploitation film cycle and the New York underground midnight film culture, revolving around figures such as Jonas Mekas, John Smith and the Kuchar brothers, gave way to the celebration of “trash” in cinema that once was subjected to condemnation by audiences, filmmakers and critics alike (Barefoot 49). In general, trash cinema manifests the queer and camp roots of punk itself in terms of rejecting high aesthetic value, which is associated with the term “proto-punk” (Barber 179), “low camp” and

²⁴ Some of the single-authored punk books that also helped shape this claim are also mentioned in the previous chapter on the “punk cinema” canon as well as the earlier movements that influenced punk subculture: Jon Savage’s *England’s Dreaming: the Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* (1991), Clinton Heylin’s *From the Velvets to the Voidoids: The Birth of American Punk Rock* (1993), Simon Reynolds’ *Rip It Up and Start Again: Post-Punk 1978-1984* (2005) and former The Slits guitarist Viv Albertine’s autobiography *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes. Music, Music, Music. Boys, Boys, Boys* (2014).

²⁵ The two volumes in the *Global Punk Series*, which are edited by Mike Dines, Alastair Gordon, Paula Guerra and Russ Bestley, attest to the global extent of recent punk studies. The second volume *Trans-Global Punk Scenes* has been recently published in March 2021.

“the counterculture avant-garde” (Kleinhans, “Pornography” 98-99). As Guy Barefoot also notes, trash cinema “carries negative connotations even if only to turn them upside down,” and it is “a term like ‘punk’, an insult that came to denote a particular form of music but which retains at least some of the aggression inherent in its adoption” (21).

John Waters, viewed as a key figure in trash cinema (Barefoot 60), adopted the tropes of exploitation cinema through a specific collective low-budget expressionism that reclaims disgust, terror and the abject status of the queer subject. His trash cinema also utilized the campness of Hollywood productions that stemmed from the limits of the production code (the Hays Code) which forbid sexuality and gay expression on screen until 1968 (Mennel 26). Waters’ cinema rendered this type of camp – in Kleinhans’ terms, “low camp” – and queer expressionism as an essential part of trash aesthetics on screen. His first mondo-film-inspired feature *Mondo Trasho* (1967)²⁶ has no dialogue, but only a soundtrack of popular songs of the time, preceding the method of using asynchronous soundtrack that we find in the early punk documentaries of the late 1970s (this is also what David Laderman called the “slip-sync” sound). Moreover, Waters’ first “talkie” film *Multiple Maniacs* (1969) is described by Chris Holmlund as a product of its time, “full of counterculture, hippie/yippie/proto-punk energy and rage” (97). These early guerrilla films exploited the camp subtexts of mainstream Hollywood by taking melodramatic acting to the extreme, specifically through the drag performances of the late disco star Divine (Harris Glenn Milstead). Milstead was a long-time collaborator and a friend of John Waters who featured in most of his films as a member of the “Dreamlanders” – a label that describes Waters’ collaborator-friends from Baltimore (Maryland, USA) who formed together with Waters the low-budget production company Dreamland Pictures. Milstead’s drag persona Divine gradually became well-known in American underground cinema through the early John Waters films, eventually rising to international fame as a disco star via staging notorious live shows (mostly in

²⁶ Nunes explores Waters’ adoption of mondo films and the exploitation genre both in relation to production and distribution conditions as follows: “The mondo film genre was inspired by documentaries from the first half of the twentieth century, exploiting the [...] practices and habits of [...] societies all over the world. Later, it became an inspiration for many ‘mockumentary’ films of the 1960s. [...] Waters’ *Mondo Trasho*, whose title is a direct tribute to *Mondo Topless*, exploits the mondo film genre’s capacity to depict humanity’s potential real life trashiness and gross out his audience” (12).

Europe) and releasing disco records throughout the 1980s (Jay).²⁷ Divine's pre-disco underground acting performance will be analyzed through the concept of "queer terrorism" in the first case study of this chapter on John Waters' early cinema and its proto-punk status.

Incorporating "trash" into the context of punk aesthetics in cinema is not directly a de-canonization of "punk cinema," as this chapter connects the deconstruction of the societal dichotomies of high and low culture through the trash cinema of John Waters, to one of the examples of "punk cinema" canon in the UK, Derek Jarman's *Jubilee* (1978). *Jubilee*'s inclusion in this chapter provides a transitional point from the formation of proto-punk ideals through trash cinema's queer terrorism on screen to the unrecognized spatiotemporal intersections of punk and queer subcultures in London's punk era. As it can be identified in the literature around British punk, *Jubilee* is considered an important work that characterizes a specific moment in England's history in its combining of punk, camp and royal history (Savage 377, Marker and Sargeant 52-58). Despite its status within the "punk cinema" canon as an important text (which did not escape the issue raised in the previous chapter regarding "the impossibility of depiction" which I will explore in more detail later), it is somewhat a neglected piece in the larger field of study on Jarman's art. Colin MacCabe detects in Jarman's approach to cinema a form of rearranging time and space which will be explored further through the idea of queer temporality in the next section: "The experimental nature of his home movie making had always made Jarman aware of various ways of manipulating the image through time" (vii). *Jubilee*'s aesthetic position, as both within and outside of "punk cinema" due to its dedication to camp reenactments of both historical and punk figures instead of relying on any degree of factuality, manifests the dialectic approach of the editors of the special issue of *Social Text* that prioritizes transcending normative time: the film's specific location, London, allows for the representation of an imaginary queerness, giving room to "free-floating transhistorical associations."

²⁷ Milstead's personal manager Bernard Jay's book *Not Simply Divine*, published after Milstead's sudden death in 1988, provides a controversial account of Divine's disco career as it focuses on Milstead's financial and health problems as well as his "bad habits." The tone of the book throughout echoes the *backstage* sensationalism of "punk cinema," with its premise to "scrape off the make-up" and "unveil the real Divine" (as claimed by the blurb).

Following the examination of Jarman's *Jubilee*, the theme of queer temporalities in cinematic punk aesthetics will be extended beyond the UK-USA axis in this chapter's exploration of Spain's own unique punk movement and Pedro Almodóvar's first feature film, *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (1980) (*Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls Like Mum*). I argue that the embeddedness of *Pepi, Luci, Bom* in Madrid's subcultural movement, *la movida madrileña*, demonstrates perfectly how subcultural experience gives way to an aesthetic strategy of survival that transforms low-budget restrictions into self-reflexivity. The contention is that Pedro Almodóvar's first feature film *Pepi, Luci, Bom* embodies similar punk aesthetics and queer temporalities to other texts analyzed in this chapter, but through the temporary disruptions in narrative progression that stem from the specifics of its locale. The subcultural environment that Almodóvar was part of prompted disruptive entrances into the narration through which the film's satire emerged. This point, along with other disparate narrative vantage points that rupture linearity in the film, is taken as a critical aesthetic example of queer temporalities on screen that radiate through the auteur's (and their immediate environment's) experiential knowledge of subculture and oppression in the context of post-Franco Spain.

Drawing these three cinematic fields together, this chapter presents a more intersectional view of how punk translates into film in comparison to and accompaniment with the main genealogy of punk aesthetics on screen, revealing the role of subjective experience of the filmmakers with their specific subcultural background.

Tracing Proto-Punk Ideals in the Early Cinema of John Waters: *Multiple Maniacs* (1970)

This section situates an early film by John Waters in relation to specific proto-punk subcultural formations, such as the underground experimental film movement and exploitation cinema in 1960s New York and Waters' own Baltimore-based friend group, "Dreamlanders," with whom he never stopped working throughout his career. In the "punk cinema" literature, certain films by Waters have been more favored as punk than others due to the specific details around direct

connections to punk. These specific details that are provided as proof of Waters' punk connections in most punk film resources are as follows: the casting of Stiv Bators from the Cleveland-born American punk rock band Dead Boys and the usage of early Blondie songs for the soundtrack of the film *Polyester* (1981) (Osgerby 2020; Hoberman and Rosenbaum 276; Barber 179); the image of Divine from the film *Female Trouble* (1974) being used on one of Vivienne Westwood's t-shirt designs that were sold at her notorious punk shop SEX in London, King's Road (Nault, *Queercore* 66; Hoberman and Rosenbaum 276); the re-naming of *Desperate Living* (1977) as *Punk Story* for its release in Europe (Nault, *Queercore* 67; Hoberman and Rosenbaum 276); and the brief punk career of Edith Massey who played some of the key roles in Waters' films, such as the Egg Lady in *Pink Flamingos* (1972).²⁸ In addition to these direct references to punk, the main commonality between punk and Waters' trash aesthetics for all these writers is the "shock tactics" evident in his films. In fact, by writing a book called *Shock Value* in which the production histories of his films as well as his friendships and influences are recounted in detail, John Waters confirmed the general perception that "shock" constituted a major motivation for his art. This section looks beyond the detection of this commonality of "shock" between punk and the Waters' oeuvre, analyzing some of his early filmic compositions and production choices. The aim here is to uncover the connections between the shock effect and the politics of reclaiming disgust through exploring the abject status of the queer subject. This connection constitutes the backbone of proto-punk trash aesthetics in Waters' cinema, which provided for the later subculture queercore (and further film movements, such as New Queer Cinema and French New Extremity) the tools with which the oppression of queerness can be addressed in the form of camp referentiality, irony and parody. The specific campness of Waters' early pre-studio films, particularly evident in *Multiple Maniacs* (1970), was dismissed by Chuck Kleinhans as "low camp," since he thought they lacked the ability to "sustain audience attention for the length of the film" ("Taking Out" 191). I argue that the unkempt cinematography that

²⁸ Based on the outrageous characters she played in Waters' films, Massey staged live shows following Waters' suggestion to take advantage of the newly blossomed notoriety of punk subculture, take up a punk look and set up gimmicky live events which led her to team with "rock promoter and entertainment lawyer Rod Crossland" and hire a local punk band, called the *Enfant Terribles* (Connolly 216). Massey's live punk acts took place in famous venues, such as CBGB. Her short-lived punk career is considered as further evidence of the influence of "Waters' iconography within the underground culture of the 1970s broadly and the burgeoning punk scene specifically" (Connolly 217).

realized this subcultural version of camp is precisely where the proto-punk ideals which push against the limits of realistic representation can be found – this is a screen politics that “cuts across experimental avant-garde film, pop art and trash cinema” (Mennel 28).

In *No Focus*, Chris Barber positions Waters’ films within a section titled “No Laughing Matter: Proto-Punk Comedy Shockers” where he reads his shock tactics as “a strategy that instead of seeking compromise to avoid conflict, exaggerates or sensationalises a potential threat (as perceived by others) forcing each counter position to its own provocative apotheosis” (179). Denah Johnston similarly situates Waters in relation to a concept called “punxploitation.” While this term is not explained in Johnston’s book *No Future*, Waters’ films are perceived highly relevant “in the larger realization and ideology of a nomadology of underground/punk film” (Johnston 147). In these contextualizations, the writers mostly reference how Waters was influenced by underground filmmakers of the 1960s, such as George Kuchar, Kenneth Anger and John Smith. In particular, J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum’s comprehensive book *Midnight Movies* focuses on uncovering the New York downtown culture and gay underground influences. Significantly, as a marker of the “postmodern moment in the history of gay representation in film” (63), Glyn Davis positions the films of Gregg Araki within the New Queer Cinema discourse as the perpetrators of the earlier campness of New York’s gay underground which includes John Waters films and the Andy Warhol produced Paul Morrissey films (54). Barbara Mennel, in her overview of queer cinema, also touches upon the impact of John Waters’ subcultural past on his later integration into the mainstream. She briefly links Waters’ unstable career to the tension between Warhol’s global fame that “integrated mass-produced popular culture and advertisement into fine arts” and the limited dissemination of the underground films of Kenneth Anger and John Smith (28). These works are very helpful in identifying the mainstream integrations and connections between avant-garde film movements, the American gay underground going back to the 1960s and the punk and post-punk era. They attest to how the queer methods of camp aesthetics and underground cinema are inseparable from the transitions and subcultural formations from hippie culture to punk in the American context and its ties to European post-war art movements. Their main goal is to provide an overview of these

connections rather than analyzing the specifics of either John Waters' filmography or other artists in terms of queer politics. This chapter expands on such mappings and provides further analysis, drawing from relevant queer theory around temporality, anti-sociality and drag performance which directly connect Waters' early cinema to the punk discourse.

The development phase John Waters and Dreamlanders went through in the 1960s, from his earliest works, *Roman Candles* (1966) and *Eat Your Makeup* (1968) (not accessible for viewing anymore except private screenings and retrospective exhibitions on Waters), to the production and success of *Mondo Trasho* (1969), followed by *Multiple Maniacs* is outlined by John Waters in the section "The Hilbilly Ripoffs" in his 1981 book *Shock Value*. His production company Dreamland Pictures was just his bedroom in his parents' house and a borrowed 8mm camera with stolen films provided by Mink Stole, his long-time Baltimorean collaborator along with Mary Vivien Pearce, David Lochery and Divine (Glenn Harris Milstead) among others (Waters 41-49).

According to *Shock Value*, ever since Dreamland Pictures was formed in the 1960s, the publicity that the Dreamlanders received for causing trouble provided much motivation for their artistic practice, and John Waters cites them all with affection. Even the book's most famous quote points to Waters' welcoming of negative responses, stating: "If someone vomits watching one of my films, it's like getting a standing ovation" (2). Waters' low-budget aesthetics of violence and excess throughout his career follow a growing arc peaking with *Pink Flamingos* in terms of critical acclaim and audience popularity, and his name is now associated with the embrace of negativity, "bad taste" and trash aesthetics. After the success of *Pink Flamingos* through the midnight screenings in New York theaters, New Line Cinema became Waters' first commercial distributor which seriously impacted Waters' "directorial brand," as examined by Matt Connolly in his PhD Dissertation on the topic (144). Waters' collaboration with New Line Cinema in his later bigger budget productions gave way to a "transgressor-turned-compromiser narrative" in the academic discourse which has been challenged by Connolly's study of the role of "extra-cinematic" elements and Waters' ongoing connections to the underground and cult cinema fans

who are also referred to as “paracinematic audiences” (8). The diverse perspectives on Waters’ much debated “assimilation” includes Kleinhans’ praise of his later studio films in the 1980s, such as *Polyester* (1981) and *Hairspray* (1988), for their high production value compared to the “dullness” of his early films (“Taking Out” 191).

Following these perspectives that focus on Waters’ cinematic development and his invention of manipulative strategies to engage with dominant media outlets, I will retrospectively reflect on the impact of Waters’ early subcultural filmmaking on the development of a specific form of racially informed queer politics on screen that resists assimilation. Tracing the cinematic embrace of trash, alongside an immersion in abjection, the following section examines how Waters’ pre-studio, proto-punk films create a therapeutic form of queer expressionism that consumes and exhausts the methods of legitimizing identification with what 1960s American society deemed socially and morally unacceptable; that which we might otherwise refer to as “queer.” These methods evident in his film productions, from his first feature film *Mondo Trasho* and his first “talkie” film *Multiple Maniacs* – also his favorite in his career (Waters 62) – to the last film in his “Trash Trilogy” *Desperate Living* (1977), involve depicting the figure of “white trash” as a manifold identity, generating graphic representations that embrace the abject status of the human body, specifically through Divine’s drag which can be associated with the concept of “queer terrorism.”

Disidentification and Queer Terrorism

Apart from providing considerable production and reception details about how John Waters and his friends started making films, *Shock Value* also contains informative parts where the director cites his direct and indirect influences: violent events and accidents such as car crashes (as a child his favorite places were junkyards); criminal trials (he spent his early adulthood going to courts to watch trials including those related to the Manson-family murders); his fellow Baltimore residents – mostly violent girls at school and housewives with enthusiastic hairdos which led to his iconic musical *Hairspray* (1988) (he used to just drive around in his hometown to find

inspiration for his next project); and “the two masters” of cinema that influenced him, Herschell Gordon Lewis who is well-known for pioneering low-budget gore in cinema and specifically the splatter subgenre of horror – most famously *Blood Feast* (1963) – and Russ Meyer, perhaps the most famous director of exploitation films including *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (1965) and *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* (1970).²⁹ According to his autobiographical book, Waters’ fascination with violence and excess was not limited to cinema. He states:

It’s not that I want to harm anyone – I’ve never initiated physical violence in my life – but thinking about violence seems to relax me and give me comfort. Even when violence is directed at me personally, I’ve managed to keep a cheery attitude. [...] I’ve always identified with that Diane Arbus photo of a child holding a toy grenade and grimacing in mock terror. (24)

John Waters’ identification with mock-terror is evident in the way his films convey a level of unbelievability. This unbelievability is not only due to the graphic extents to which his characters engage with “unbelievable” bodily actions that are designed to incite disgust in the audience. But also, via the low-budget, partially-voluntarily, partially-involuntarily, cheap-looking set, costume and make-up designs (by Van Smith, Waters’ “good friend and ‘ugly expert’” who was responsible for Divine’s famous eyebrows and hair styles [Waters 72]), his early cinema combines comedic value with shock value. If this combination is considered together with Waters’ multiple assertions of not having a political agenda when being asked whether he intends to offer social critique, there emerges an artistic positioning which Anna Breckon describes as “anti-redemptive” (514). The reflectivity of cinema for Waters provided the means through which terror could be mimicked, and “the perverted, the obscene, the criminally insane, the monstrous and the pathologically unhygienic” could be embraced (Breckon 515). Breckon observes a “rage against redemptive politics” and a lack of interest in terms of “bringing such subjects or acts into cultural intelligibility or sanction” in this cinematic embrace of bodily abjection and criminal action in her analysis of *Pink Flamingos*. Breckon contextualizes Waters’ cinema through the theoretical framework of Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection and anti-social queer theory in order to frame Waters’ cinema as a contradistinction, a counter-humanistic

²⁹ *Multiple Maniacs* took its title from Lewis’ *Two Thousand Maniacs!* (1964) (Barefoot 60).

assertion and a refusal of traditional left-wing politics that is pivoted around the emotion of empathy. Waters' cinematic linkage of deviant behaviors that involve consuming bodily fluids as well as sexual taboos and the criminal acts of robbery, torture and murder already feature the thematic connection between the abject, the queer and the criminal outcast. Considering this conjunction, Breckon's theoretical trajectory is quite well-fitting. Nonetheless, Waters' celebration of deviancy also accommodates an ambiguity around what it signifies politically that also offers room for a more flexible reading in terms of the process of identification, and consequently, disidentification.

I will now expand on Breckon's association of Waters' artistry with the anti-social strand of queer theory to argue that Waters' early films, in this case *Multiple Maniacs*, are less engaged with a critique of "socially redemptive humanism" than creating space for and identifying with what American society considers "white trash," as well as sculpting a queer subjectivity out of this figuration. In an article about the role of criminal trials and racial complexities in John Waters films (published in a law studies journal), Taunya Lovell Banks argues that "what makes many of these early films so subversive is Waters' use of the 'white trash' body – people marginalized by and excluded from conventional white America – as counter-cultural heroes" (154). The identification with the abject and the marginalized in Waters' cinema is offered to the spectator within a theatrical mimicry of terror and drag performance. Hence this cinema functions as an unrealistic sphere within which the effects of regulatory and racially-informed practices of the judicial system can be explored without the angst of societal judgement and the consequences of actual criminality. This is exactly the kind of sphere that subcultures, such as punk communities and drag balls, seek to provide. Indeed, the fact that John Waters created this aesthetics with the contributions from fellow Dreamlanders points to the role of subcultural collectivity in survival strategies that go beyond the dialectic of public and counter-public discourse that predominated in the early queer theory (Eng, Halberstam, Muñoz 12).

In their editorial to another *Social Text* issue dedicated to the development of queer theory, David L. Eng, Jack Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz collectively problematize the counter-

public discourse, which stems from Jürgen Habermas' homogeneous concept of civil society and citizenship, as follows: "The dialectic of public and counterpublic loses any critical edge to account for 'perverse' modernities, those queer bodies and knowledges that exist outside the boundaries of sanctioned time and space, legal status, citizen-subjecthood, and liberal humanism" (13). In this regard, a clear-cut understanding of the public sphere does not speak to the hybrid-space Waters' early cinema created, in which criminality and queer subjects are combined through embedding "shameful" and "private" acts into specific public places, such as the carnival, the church and the street in *Multiple Maniacs*. The Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's influential literary concept of *the carnivalesque*, as a marker of hybridity and ambivalence in terms of politics of artistic transgression, resonates with Waters' composition of mock-terror in his early cinema. Both Waters' private-public conflation and Bakhtin's "carnival semiotics" specify an expressionism that allows for "the inner realm [of the body] to enter eccentrically into the outside world and vice-versa" and "the border traffic between inside and out, between I and we, between identity and alterity" (Lachmann 151). The subjects of this "border-traffic" constitute the subjects of the marginalized, the abject and the queer in camp aesthetics. Hence, the politics of the carnival parallel Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz's criticism of the counter-public discourse where the subjects of the public and counter-public are rendered dualistic, rather than in the state of "border-crossing."

Furthermore, Waters' films confront the accepted normalcy of public space by signifying their counter-political potentials, filling them with bodily transgression, crossdressing and mock-terror, offering a type of titillation that Chuck Kleinhans associated with the carnival-inspired roots of the exploitation genre. In his contribution to the collection *Sleaze Artists* that explores the theme of "sleaze" in cinema, Kleinhans explains the roots of *mondo film* that Waters' early cinema was influenced by directly referenced in the title of *Mondo Trasho*:

Cheaply made rip-offs, they belong economically and industrially to the exploitation film market. The exploitation film has roots in the fairground show, the circus sideshow, and the traveling carnival. The carnival pitchman's basic plan is this: (1) gather a crowd; (2) promise them something sensational; (3) get their money; and (4)

fool them and get away. At its worst-intentioned, in the classic con job, the “mark” is left at the end so confused, embarrassed, humiliated, or compromised that he does not go to the police or authorities to complain (and this is relatively easy when the content is sexual). [...] Building on this exploitation tradition, the Mondo films of the 1960s simply adapted this con to new technologies, audiences, and rationales. (“Pornography” 99-100)

Even though Kleinhans did not find the campness of Waters’ early cinema interesting in an earlier article (“Taking Out” 191), his historical exploration of the roots of the exploitation genre in the carnival here can actually be helpful to reveal the historical referentiality of some of the scenes in *Multiple Maniacs* which were initially dismissed by Kleinhans. The pseudo-criminal public space of the provocative and manipulative carnival, which inspired the mondo-cum-exploitation film cycle, is further referenced and accentuated in Waters’ *Multiple Maniacs* via its establishing scene.

This film opens with a carnival host’s invitation announcement to the “The Cavalcade of Perversions” where respected parts of society could buy tickets to entertain themselves with the disgusting sights of “real queers kissing each other like real lovers” and “puke eaters.” The organizer of this carnival, Lady Divine (Divine) and her co-host and lover Mr David (David Lochary) along with the other queers on exhibit, “embark on a proto-punk mission to shock and outrage decent people” (Barber 181), robbing and torturing them out of boredom at the end of the show. After receiving a call from the local bar owner Edith (Edith Massey) about the news that Mr David has been with another woman (Mary Vivien Pearce), Lady Divine hits the road to seek revenge – a journey during which she is attacked and raped by a homeless glue-sniffer woman and a man. She arrives at a church while contemplating her life – we hear her thoughts at this point as voiceover – where she meets a quirky woman called Mink (Mink Stole) who comes out of the confessional only to give Lady Divine a “rosary job;” a simulated loud anal sex scene follows. Mink uses rosaries to offer pleasure to Lady Divine – an activity resulting in their falling in love (this scene is intercut with shots depicting a Jesus-Christ-worshipping ceremony which I will come back to later). Mink supports Lady Divine in her revenge project; thus they go to Lady

Divine and Mr David's shared house – this location was John Waters' own apartment at the time (Waters 64) – where Lady Divine murders everybody, carves open their bodies and eats their guts, followed by the entrance of a giant Lobster (nicknamed Lobstra) into the scene (a fifteen-foot prop designed and built by another friend of Waters, Vincent Paranio described by Waters as “an art-school dropout” [64]). After a depiction of Lobstra attacking Lady Divine – an overly theatrical *mise-en-scène* that ends with Divine's performance of showing signs of joy – she hits the streets once again to terrorize the public and ends up getting shot by the National Guard. The abundance of rape and murder in the narrative seems quite terrorizing when read; yet there are a lot of elements in the implementation of this narrative that render the terror as what Waters might call “mock-terror.” This does not mean the film basically mocks the experience of terror; rather it theatricalizes the verisimilitude of terror through low-budget set locations and “unbelievable” exaggerated performances. In this way, the dramatization of the characters does not offer an identification to the spectator, but rather their bodily realities become separated from the narrative's drama. This is the type of performative layering that we can associate with queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz's concept of “disidentification.”

According to Muñoz, “disidentification” refers to a performative strategy that aims to embody the ambiguity of identification where what is identified with is simultaneously a source of exclusion and oppression. Muñoz explains “disidentificatory” practice through the performance of “terrorist drag” in the punk rock drag artist Vaginal Crème Davis:³⁰

[...] *terrorist* insofar as she is performing the [American] nation's internal terrors around race, gender and sexuality. [...] Davis uses ground-level guerrilla representational strategies to portray some of the nation's most salient popular fantasies. The fantasies she acts out involve cultural anxieties around miscegenation, communities of color, and the queer body. (“The White” 91)

It is essential to note that Muñoz's concept of terrorist drag is grounded in Davis' punk roots as

³⁰ The next chapter, which involves a section on queercore subculture and Bruce La Bruce films, will also mention Vaginal Crème Davis with regards to the various multi-media intersections between queer and punk subcultures, including zines and performative talks.

well as her performative critique of the whitewashing habits of the punk community in San Francisco in the 1990s. Muñoz argues that Davis' performance elucidates "a temporal space where the person of color's consciousness turns to her or his community after an immersion in white culture and education" ("The White" 84). Vaginal Crème Davis' art of disidentification through her engagement with different communities, such as Black Power³¹ and the LA punk rock scene, vibrates on a similar frequency to the drag performance of Divine as an outcast "white trash" identity in the early cinema of Waters. Davis' performance art self-reflexively confronts and comments on the social perception of the gender-ambiguous black body as the source of terror, and Davis intensifies this by combining punk and Black Panther iconography. The ambiguity around the border between Divine's performance and the identity of Harris Glenn Milstead who embodied this persona, provides a similar type of problematization of the ideals of white femininity as essentially hygienic and full of value. Ragan Rhyne describes this as camp: "[T]his camp project of reassigning value to the valueless is achieved primarily through the performance of whiteness, or of 'white trash' more specifically" (190).

The matrix of race, class and gender constitutes the backbone of a number of interventions into Divine's performance as an iconic personification. In relation to Divine's performance in the early cinema of Waters, Eve Sedgwick and Michael Moon note that Waters' cinema foregrounded "the acts of otherwise taken-for-granted economic processes of consumption, absorption and waste" (32). In a conversational journal article, titled "Divinity: A Dossier A Performance Piece a Little-Understood Emotion," Sedgwick and Moon delve into the cultural intersections of fatness, whiteness and queerness, noting how the drag performance of Divine "offers a powerful condensation of some emotional and identity linkages – historically dense ones – between fat women and gay men" (12). They consider this conjuncture as a subversion of naturalizing narratives around the healthy reproductive white female body. Furthermore, for Sedgwick, Divine's performance can be considered as an ambiguous shift in bodily meaning that

³¹ Regarding Davis' appropriation of the visual elements of the Black Power movement, Muñoz states: "Vintage Black Power discourse contained many homophobic and masculinist elements that were toxic to queer and feminist subjects. Davis used parody and pastiche to remake Black Power, opening it up via disidentification to a self that is simultaneously black and queer" ("The White" 84).

signals in our culture “a pattern of discreditation and impossibility for the female body of any class and race and any size” (31). Harris Glenn Milstead was never addressed in the credits by his real name, but only as Divine in Waters’ films in which the persona Divine plays a different character than the persona itself, creating a double personification within each film’s world. This double personification provides a performative complexity which Sedgwick refers to as “a palimpsest of fragmentary meanings” (31) where different figures associated with campness, such as the drag queen, the fag hag, the transvestite and the feminine gay are embodied all at once. These figurations convey “materialized displacements,” such as “food as clothing, clothing as bodies, bodies as food, bodies as waste or waste as food” (33). Displacing the roles of basic conceptions around human need, such as clothing, food and trash, Waters used Divine’s bodily complexity to cultivate an exaggerated form of fat femininity “as a sort of repository for the excess of whiteness itself” (Rhyne 190) that frustrates the idealistic cultural codes that surround both femininity and whiteness. In relation to this racial trajectory of excess, I will now turn to the idea of queer terrorism since Divine’s exorbitant theatricality and mock-terror is where we find the roots of the reclamation methods that both punk and queer discourses share.

Divine’s mimicked terror is different from the terror in Vaginal Crème Davis’ terrorist drag as Divine’s whiteness offers a white racial background on which a different disidentification can be practiced: what Divine performs is the type of assumed terror, stemming from the “war on terror” rhetoric of the American media which goes back to the 1970s, cultivating a political doctrine of “preemptive response” (Chomsky 120). Here Davis cites the racially-informed implication of the terrorist in this rhetoric; Divine embodies both the preemptive terror and the “white trash” terror. The concept of queer terrorism is the umbrella term that can embrace these differences and temporal specificities. Jasbir Puar’s influential book *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* utilizes Muñoz’s concept of “terrorist drag” to excavate the queerness in the media rhetoric around terrorism in the USA and points out the theoretical and practical conjunctions of the annexation of queer and terror:

Muñoz’ description of this terrorist drag appropriately points to the historical convergences between queers and terror: homosexuals have been traitors to the

nation, figures of espionage and double agents, associated with communists during the McCarthy era, and, as with suicide bombers, have brought on and desired death through the AIDS pandemic (both suicide bomber and gay man always figure as already dying, a decaying or corroding masculinity). [...] Clearly, one can already ask: What is terrorist about the queer? But the more salient and urgent question is: What is queer about the terrorist? And what is queer about terrorist corporealities? The depictions of masculinity most rapidly disseminated and globalized at this historical juncture are terrorist masculinities: failed and perverse, these emasculated bodies always have femininity as their point of malfunction, and are metonymically tied to all sorts of pathologies of the mind and body – homosexuality, incest, paedophilia, madness and disease. (Puar xxiii)

Through the mock-terror implementation of the terrorizing narrative in *Multiple Maniacs*, the combination of comedic and shock value is embodied in the figure of Lady Divine whose violent acts (such as torturing the carnival audience, stealing their identification papers and threatening them as well as her mass murder at the end) are interspersed with her own terror with the experience of rape as well as the pleasurable sexual experience she has with Mink at the church. Rather than adopting a clear cause-and-effect logic found in the rape-revenge subgenre that became popular in the 1970s – the most well-known example of which is *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978) – along with splatter movies of H. G. Lewis, *Multiple Maniacs* parades the fakeness of Lady Divine's incited and experienced terror in a way that foregrounds its connection with pleasure. Divine's perpetually-costumed body becomes a site for excessive theatricality and the connection to reality seems to be lost, to a point where the spectator is unsure where the border between theatricality and reality lies. As stated by Giulia Palladini, this type of theatricality "unlimits the language" and mobilizes its function towards experimentation and the exploitation of meaning. Exploring Waters' later film *Desperate Living* and the imaginary garbage-town Mortville, she states:

Mortville, then, is the realm of a struggle for the power of, and the right to, pleasure [...]. This struggle, in fact, is not only enacted – or not primarily – enacted in the movie through the narrative [...] but more importantly through an operation of

theatricalization which [...] serves to unlimit the language and make it function beyond representation. It is an operation which re-opens language to the possibility of experimenting with what pleasure, or repulsion, may be after all; an operation of struggle within the language of reality against what can be understood as the sovereignty of meaning. (119)

This elusive end-point horizon of theatricality in *Multiple Maniacs* renders the societal outcasts' environments and queer bodies imaginable if not identifiable. As a result, exclusion becomes something that can be dealt with by its cultivation through the disgusting and criminal acts. Terror, in this figuration of queer terrorism, becomes a site of imaginativeness.

Subcultural Codes in Waters' Trash Cinema: Paracinema, Excess and Camp

The restrictions behind the low-budget production of *Multiple Maniacs* – only \$5000, an amount Waters borrowed from his dad and paid back (Waters 61) – forced Waters to rely on real-life locations and his friends, producing a sense of reality in relation to the filmmaking conditions that attracts the audience's attention to the non-diegetic space of the film. In addition to this, Waters' early films employed the theatrical body as another materialistic and referential element, mainly through the overly dramatic performances of Dreamlanders, including Divine's. In *Multiple Maniacs*, the more the narrative is unbelievable due to exaggeration and raggedness, the more the corporeality of the stage and the performers become identifiable. A giant lobster creature entering Lady Divine's house to have sex with her is not plausible in the story world; however, this jerry-built prop's movement is very visibly controlled by a crew member outside of the frame, like a puppeteer, highlights a degree of realism that exceeds beyond the Lobstra's desperate unbelievability, denoting the existence of the set and the film crew. What is on screen acquires a documentary-like quality in terms of depicting "how to make a low-budget movie." This is the type of aesthetics that has been associated with DIY punk ethics, that promote thinning the professional construction of artistic production by involving the audience in the process of meaning-making. In the same vein, Jeffrey Sconce's concept of "paracinema" is designed to explain the role of excess in the spectatorial involvement in terms of the production

of meaning beyond the denoted meanings through the diegesis:

By concentrating on a film's formal bizarreness and stylistic eccentricity, the paracinematic audience, much like the viewer attuned to the innovations of Godard [...], foregrounds structures of cinematic discourse and artifice so that the material identity of the film ceases to be a structure made invisible in service of the diegesis, but becomes instead the primary focus of textual attention. It is in this respect that the paracinematic aesthetic is closely linked to the concept of "excess." ("Trashing" 386)

Drawing on Kristin Thompson's description of excess as a textual effect that rubs off and/or alters the dramatic surface of the narrative,³² Sconce observes that "paracinematic attention to excess seeks to push the viewer beyond the formal boundaries of the text" ("Trashing" 387). Sconce's "paracinema" framework focuses on "trash cinema" fandom based on the underground film magazines dedicated to this cinema as well as the new generation of graduate film students who bring "low culture" to film studies with an ambition to challenge the "aesthete taste" of academic film culture. It can be argued that the rise of trash cinema literature as well as the queer and punk subcultural film movements over the last 25 years shows that the cultural legitimacy of low-budget film cultures is not as questionable in Film Studies since Sconce's "paracinema" diagnosis in 1995.³³ Nonetheless, the concept of paracinematic aesthetics still resonates with John Waters' aesthetics. The contention here is that Waters' early cinema does not only create such paracinematic aesthetics, it actually borrows this excess from earlier exploitation and splatter genres that are considered body-genres, and exhibits a meta-paracinema form of excess by the mimicry of exploitative filmmaking itself (Nunes 9).

The essence of the concept of cinematic excess Kristin Thompson writes about, and Sconce

³² Kristin Thompson writes: "[T]he minute the viewer begins to notice style for its own sake or watch works which do not provide such thorough motivation, excess comes forward and must affect narrative meaning" (132).

³³ Sconce's own collection *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics*, Guy Barefoot's overview of trash cinema in *Trash Cinema: The Lure of the Low* and Elena Gorfinkel's book *Lewd Looks: American Sexploitation Cinema in the 1960s* as well as Gorfinkel's other publications around the themes of taste, sexploitation, and erotic and adult media, attest to this point, among other resources.

expands on in relation to paracinematic audiences, lies in the materialistic aspect of film that becomes “the primary focus of textual attention” (Sconce, “Trashing” 386). The paracinematic audience, such as cult film followers, trash film fans as well as the abundance of publications (mostly in the form zines and web forums) that these audiences produce, form a type of cinematic subculture which values trash aesthetics for their low-budget imaginativeness, and resistance against the assimilatory practices of mainstream media. Such audience attention to the material conditions may also have an impact on cinematic productions in return, as in the case of Waters who repeatedly cites the exploitation and underground films as his major influences. For example, in the documentary *It Came from Kuchar* (2009) about the American underground filmmakers and twin brothers George Kuchar and Mike Kuchar and their extraordinary low-budget methods that mixed Hollywood genre tropes with a punk sensibility – producing DIY films with an extreme productivity (as one interviewee comments, “nobody actually knows the number of films George made”) – John Waters comments “they should be awarded, they should be knighted really.” In his filmmaking practice, Waters used subcultural knowledge on two levels; one that comes from the paracinematic experience and the other, from his local and communal production context in Baltimore. In so doing, he transformed the course of trash cinema by combining camp and paracinema – two concepts that are taken as usually discrete subcultural codes by Sconce on the basis of their “aspiration to the status of ‘counter-cinema’” or its lack thereof (“Trashing” 374). As a gay code that appropriated Classical Hollywood as an aesthetic coping mechanism, camp provided exaggerated theatricality as another textual element creating a communicative safe space for the audience which is also a non-diegetic paracinematic zone. Waters’ early cinema filled the cinematic gap Sconce detected between camp aesthetics that relied on Hollywood, and counter-cinema that rejected it.

Reclaiming Disgust, Waste and Theatricality

The church scene where the shots of sex acts are intercut with the re-enactment of a white impersonation of Jesus Christ providing food to his followers, and at the end of scene being crucified by the same people, establishes ties between religious oppression and the parodic embodiment of a psycho-sexual complexity that is attached to murderous activities. Out of the

entire film, this Jesus Christ segment is the only part that does not belong to the heroine's narrative timeline. Even though Lady Divine's contemplation on religion does not directly provide a rationalization for her deviant tendencies, it does frame on screen her lesbian experience at the church combined with a religious implication. In this scene that intercuts between the lesbian sex and the Jesus Christ-segment, the Catholic church and its rhetoric serve as a point of commencement for the queerness of Lady Divine. Regarding the film, John Waters states in *Shock Value*:

Multiple Maniacs really helped me to flush Catholicism out of my system, but I don't think you ever can really lose it completely. I even tried going to communion with the cast, stoned out of my mind, in a real church on Easter Sunday. [...] As our motley group filed up to the communion rail in our Easter worst, the entire congregation could see one actor's ass, since he had a large hole ripped in the back of his pants. The priest's face turned scarlet, but he had no choice but to pop the communion wafer in our mouths as our turns came. Being Catholic always makes you more theatrical. (65)

Waters' anecdote above not only parallels the constructive place of churches as both set locations and screening venues in his trash cinema,³⁴ but also resonates with the political ambiguity in the way non-normative identities and sexualities are portrayed in his films which influenced the later sexually ambiguous punk iconography. When *Multiple Maniacs* incorporates the type of performative disgust practiced by anti-LGBTI+ religious rhetoric, it attaches the feeling of disgust as well as criminality to queer sexualities thereby making the connection between the queer and the abject as well as the illegal. In making these connections, *Multiple Maniacs* makes use of the political problematics of the exploitation genre only to substitute its exploitative aspects of human bodies with an unrelieved queer terrorism. In slight contrast to how Breckon

³⁴ In *Shock Value*, Waters writes about how the local churches constituted the major screening venues for his early films. Waters talked a local church into "allowing the Provincetown premiere of *Eat Your Makeup*" (54); *Mondo Trasho* was also premiered at the same church ("Our favourite showcase, The Emmanuelle Church, once again came through" [59]). As for the premiere of *Multiple Maniacs*, John Waters writes: "Emmanuel Church decided they had risked their necks for 'art' and recommended I try the First Unitarian Church as an alternate premiere site. Since this church was also centrally located downtown, I called the reverend, who immediately agreed. Anything to get young people into a church, I guess" (65).

saw an anti-redemptive politics in Waters' cinema, we can read a redemptive tone into Waters' dedication to the thematic equation of abject-queer-crime. By conjoining the shock effect that stems from abjection, i.e. usage of bodily waste, such as puke and excrement, with criminal queer figures, Waters' early films challenged the acceptable camp that the 1970s American mainstream normalized through Andy Warhol's pop-art. This can be understood as a cinematic disidentification "that refuses to follow the identificatory protocols of dominant culture" (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 72).

Gaining the public titles, such as "the pope of trash" and "the prince of puke" (Connolly 6), by his cinematic embrace of disgust, Waters reversed the rules of designating the disgusting, hence the queer, by way of using the figure of the white trash "as a surrogate for talk about race and sexuality in the 1960s" and "to attack mid-twentieth century sexual parochialism and repression" (Banks 163). Waters' aesthetic demonstrated in the pre-punk and pre-queer-politics era that low-budget conditions can provide the aesthetic possibilities for reclaiming expression for what is accepted as inexpressible. This aesthetic entered into the avant-garde circles, and later mainstream media, by its spectacle and Divine's famous persona, predating the tactic of reclamation of AIDS activism in the 1980s and 1990s. This spectacle also indicated that reclaiming "disgust" can function as a survival strategy of resistance "within the flux of discourse" (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 19). This is the same strategy that lies behind the method of reversing shaming terminology associated with the punk subculture, as well as queer politics, which can be traced back to the roots of the terms, "punk" and "queer."

The same year punk came to fame (1977), Waters made *Desperate Living* (distributed as "Punk Story" as indicated before), the last film in his "trash trilogy" which follows *Pink Flamingos* and *Female Trouble*. As with his earlier proto-punk films, Waters once again complicated the recognized versions of camp that targeted gay men, this time attributing a central role to lesbianism (revolving around the relationship between a neurotic ex-housewife Peggy [Mink Stole] and her ex-maid Grizelda [Jean Hill]) and gender-dysphoria in the cultivation of mock-

terror and camp. One of the sources of mock-terror in *Desperate Living* involves a sex-change operation being reversed as Susan Lowe's character Mole McHenry's phalloplasty is not appreciated by her/his lover Muffy St. Jacques (played by the cult film star Liz Renay). These characters are forced to live under the dictatorship of the dominatrix Queen Carlotta of Mortville (Edith Massey) – a garbage town made up of carton prison-houses and trash props. In Queen Carlotta's diktat, there is a special day, called "Backwards Day" where all the prisoners of Mortville are forced to wear their clothes backwards and walk backwards in public spaces. Gilluiana Palladini associates the "Backwards Day" with "a stratified waste of historical time in American culture," and explores the other visual references in *Desperate Living* to specific 1930s phenomena, such as the canonical films *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *Freaks* (1932), as well as the shanty towns, called "Hoovervilles" built by the poor and underprivileged outcasts during the Great Depression (123-124). The trash aesthetics in Waters' early cinema, partially stemming from Catholicism, situates a group of parodic and neurotic lesbian portrayals within class struggle here in *Desperate Living*, amalgamating a historically-referential representation of a queer American wasteland with a sadistic monarchic rule. Perhaps Edith Massey's brief punk career at the time had an impact on the retitling of *Desperate Living* as *Punk Story* in Europe; regardless, it is evidence of the influential position of Waters' proto-punk methods of embracing what is discursively used to exclude within the intersections of punk and queer genealogies. This position, as evidenced by such transgressive acts as Queen Carlotta's rule in *Desperate Living*, as well as Divine's later fame in the UK and the rest of Europe as a subversive drag disco star, disarranges the clear aesthetic distinctions between subcultural codes in popular culture of the time, such as the one found in Hoberman's following statement in 1979: "The secret star of camp is the drag queen; the sacred monster of punk is the dominatrix" (276). Following Waters' toppled monarchy in the lesbian wasteland of Mortville in *Desperate Living*, the next section explores the transhistorical queer appropriation evident in Derek Jarman's first feature film *Jubilee* (1978), a work considered part of the "punk cinema" canon (Barber and Sargeant 50). *Jubilee's* utilization of Britain's monarchic icons, most notably the time-travelling Queen Elizabeth I, as well as its Catholic connotations, such as the scene "in which Jesus Christ is groped at a disco orgy, which compares unfavorably to even the most inept blasphemies of John Waters' *Multiple Maniacs*" (Hoberman 282), binds Jarman's appropriative paradoxical modernism to

Waters' relentless disidentificatory aesthetics. This bond can be positioned on the British punk and American proto-punk trajectory which will be extended to a different punk movement in Spain in the last section on Pedro Almodóvar's first feature film *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, which also centralizes a sexually diverse band of women within the context of *la movida madrileña*.

Within and Outside of “Punk Cinema”: Bad/Queer Modernism in *Jubilee* (1978)

This section focuses on a number of elements regarding the positioning of Derek Jarman's film *Jubilee* (1978) within the intersections of queer and punk cinema as well as its scholarly reception as a key text in 1970s British cinema.³⁵ Its depiction of a dystopian punk Britain visited by Queen Elizabeth I from the past (only to see the decline of civilization) has been debated and famously dismissed by Vivienne Westwood on one of her t-shirt designs, entitled “Open T-shirt to Derek Jarman from Vivienne Weekwood [sic],” where she declares that *Jubilee* is “more boring than Uncle Tom Don Letts' even lower budget film” (Osgerby 212),³⁶ referencing *The Punk Rock Movie*. This long letter printed on both sides of a t-shirt involves a criticism of Jarman for glamorizing “old Elizabeth's England” and its “grand stuff and diamonds” when presenting violent punks as disciples to media consumerism; all because Jarman is a “gay boy directing his nose in the right direction” for his masochistic fantasies (Westwood). Again, we see here perhaps the most unifying feature of “punk cinema”: the discontent that the film evokes among the audience in terms of its true-ness to punk, epitomized by a famous punk figure's dismissal that dominates the discourse around the film. Jon Savage's opinion of *Jubilee* as the best punk film that “captured the mood of Punk England better than anyone could have predicted” (377) is shared and disputed at the same time among scholars. For example, Claire Monk writes in her article about *Jubilee*'s status within the 1970s British cinema and specifically punk films: “*Jubilee*

³⁵ According to Robert Shail, 1970s is designated as the “unknown” period in British cinema due to the fall of cinema attendance as well as the decline of formerly popular movie series. The political and economic turbulence of the 1970s affected the film production industry to a level that British cinema's fate was completely unpredictable (xiv). The British Film Institute's financial support shifted between “commercial productions” and “art-house sector” due to the government changes (Shail xv, Dupin).

³⁶ Jarman, as seen in Isaac Julien's film *Derek* (2008), cites Westwood's dismissal and t-shirt design jokingly as an honour; the only other t-shirt she made dedicated to a person featured the famous portrait of Queen Elizabeth II wearing a safety pin which became the emblem of British punk subculture. “An Open Letter to Derek Jarman” t-shirt can be seen at the V&A Museum of Art and Design's website.

also remains the most imaginative in grasping the sensibility and creative practice of punk (in the brief phase before it became neutralised into a mass-produced commodity) and in attempting a translation of these to film” (“Now” 83). On the other hand, Westwood’s discontent with the film which took the shape of a punk commodity itself – a SEX shop t-shirt to be sold – supports David Laderman’s account that the stark difference in its reception actually shows *Jubilee*’s ability to capture “the paradoxical, schizophrenic heart of punk” (42).

David Laderman’s analytical approach in his book *Punk Slash! Musicals: Tracking Slip-Sync on Film* is based on the rupturing effect of asynchronicity between audio and visual portrayals of musical performances, an effect we find in *Jubilee* which, for Laderman, constitutes the main feature that renders a film punk first and foremost in terms of the spectatorial experience it offers. However, as Curran Nault detects in his review of Laderman’s book, Laderman does not necessarily attend to the film’s rendering of punk subculture at the time as a queer environment while discussing the film’s cinematic methods (*Punk* 78). In fact, this gap can also be observed in the comprehensive studies around the concept of queer cinema that mostly involves Derek Jarman’s other films,³⁷ paralleling how *Jubilee*’s queer aesthetics is rarely examined in the “punk cinema” literature. The film’s deployment of the London punk scene through a mostly female and sexually diverse group of people, is not recognized as a divergence from the main features of punk cinema: these missing features in *Jubilee* centralize famous bands and rely on archive footage to construct a low-budget punk authenticity that offers a sneak-peak into the backstage, and thereby speaks to the fandom curiosity evident in the famous Sex Pistols film *The Great Rock n Roll Swindle* and the Clash film *Rude Boy*.³⁸ This choice of cast, in conjunction with the film’s transhistorical setting where the Elizabethan past encounters a decadent, violent and queer version of the present times, or as described by Denah Johnston the “rendering of two very

³⁷ As an example of this, Niall Richardson’s book *The Queer Cinema of Derek Jarman: Critical and Cultural Readings* can be given as *Jubilee* is only mentioned as a punk inspired work that expressed Jarman’s strong hate towards Thatcherism (5-6).

³⁸ This specific construction of a sense of transparency and authenticity in punk cinema that attracts fan attention due to the heavy involvement of rare footage that features punk bands is critically explored in relation to the fact-fiction hybridity in documentary genre as well as cinema vérité in Chapter Two. In summary, the abundance of concert and archive footage in these early punk films comes across as an overriding effect in their reception, ultimately contributing to the larger standardization of “punk history.”

disparate times – that of Queen Elizabeth I and modern, nearly dystopian, Britain” (154), complicates *Jubilee*'s alignment with punk subculture that also led to criticisms including Westwood's. Despite its intricate depictions of queer relations articulated as inherent in the punk antagonism and negativity around social norms, *Jubilee* has not been necessarily considered as a key film in the literature around queer cinema either. Its combination of punk and queer aesthetics, therefore, is the focus here to examine this unexplored territory and highlight its position as an exemplary text that aesthetically pushes more for the intersectionality of punk and queer as transhistorical concepts than merely portraying them as discrete subcultures whose ways and chronology occasionally cross.

Jarman's articulations of time and historicity in a fragmented manner building transhistorical connections will be taken as a focal point. Jarman displays a cinematic pattern throughout his productions: the assemblage of low-budget audio-visual representations grafted upon a fictitious temporal structure, building an expressionistic and mostly homosocial counter-society that is, or might be, dying. From his characterizations based on St Sebastian, Caravaggio, King Edward II and Ludwig Wittgenstein, to compact set designs depicting the relevant era with careful attention to the use of darkness with occasional anachronistic installations in his films, Jarman's appropriation of historical subjects manifests an interest in medieval violence mixed with a contemporary perspective of gay sociality. This pattern works as both an admixture of and a divide between queer aesthetics and queer politics, which often led his work to be “(mis)read as an internalization of oppression” (Richardson 13). Before delving into *Jubilee*'s scholarly reception including the neglect towards its queer methods, it is important to point out that the way *Jubilee* is seen as “a stand-alone work in his oeuvre” (Johnston 148) or a film that “stands rather apart from the body of his films” (Wymer 56), reflects an understanding that punk does not necessarily belong to his larger thematic vocabulary. Jarman's body of work has been greatly analyzed as an attempt to bring together art and personal politics throughout his life and his death.³⁹ Jarman's interest in the punk scene can be correlated with his personal aesthetics

³⁹ With regards to his films, four dedicated books stand out as comprehensive resources in terms of providing a chronological insight into the personal, political and production-related background of Jarman's films: an admittedly biographical, *Derek Jarman: Dreams of England* (1996) written by Jarman's friend Michael O'Pray, the

designed to give space to the abjection of subjects of a specific time-place and situated as an engagement with his larger artistic pattern of building imaginary counter-publics and queer temporalities.

As an outspoken artist whose creative methods and craft went beyond the screen, Jarman's work has been examined and re-visited by scholars and curators in relation to his contribution to avant-garde and modernist discourses over the past 30 years. From his early experiments with super 8mm film, the sketchbooks he produced throughout his life, his famous garden in Dungeness that became a set for his surrealistic film *The Garden* (1990), his involvement in gay activism and the way he channeled the experience of being HIV+ into an art form, to how every step of Jarman's life and death was reflected within his work has been documented in different mediums. His long-time collaborator and friend Tilda Swinton comments in the documentary *Derek Jarman: Life as Art* (2004) on his making use of his own death as a means to creativity: "His death was a real piece of work; he took it on and made it into something, created a thing out of it." Announcing the fact that he was living with AIDS in the public media when the stigma and prejudice around AIDS peaked in the late 1980s, his effort of transporting this experience into an artistic and political act did not just result in the making of his last and most directly personal and internationally well-known film, *Blue* (1993), but also in the form of a public resistance against the rise of homophobic rhetoric aimed at him during the Thatcherite era.

A recent special issue of *Shakespeare Bulletin* (dedicated to Jarman's frequent adoptions of Renaissance aesthetic tropes) involves Catherine Silverstone's analysis of "the phenomenon of the multi-faceted responses to his death" (452). Silverstone asks questions, such as "what do memories of a life (and death) bring into the public domain? What do these acts of remembering enable and occlude?" (452), exploring the connections between Jarman's own contribution to the construction of his legacy and death and the impossibility of "fully" recognizing an artist's cultural impact. Her exploration reveals the media obsession with obituaries which work to

collection *By Angels Driven: The Films of Derek Jarman* (1996) edited by Chris Lippard, Rowland Wymer's *Derek Jarman* (2005), and Jim Ellis' *Derek Jarman's Angelic Conversations* (2009).

reiterate “aspects of what cultures consider worth remembering and grieving” (Silverstone 454). Furthermore, she points at a congruence between the public, artistic and scholarly responses to Jarman’s death, as a site of “making connections with the past in order to critique the present,” and how Jarman’s commitment to interact with the past and historical figures in his films echo the “affective relations across time” (461). In doing so, Silverstone connects Jarman’s semi-pessimistic world-building into connection with how commemorating his death and body of work marks specific shifts in the perception of queer art and artists in the British media and culture as well as a worry about the future of experimental filmmaking (453). Indeed, Jim Ellis attributes the failure among many commentators to recognize Jarman as “the most important Anglo-American gay director in the post-Stonewall era” as the result of Jarman’s experimental methods of filmmaking as much as his interlaced radical politics that did not hesitate to adopt monarchist aesthetics (*Angelic* xvi).⁴⁰ Another example that centralizes Jarman in British modernist art is Isaac Julien’s documentary *Derek* (2003); it is a documentation of Jarman’s artistic motivations as much as it is a critique of the capitalist society that seems to confuse culture with commodity, expressed in Tilda Swinton’s monologues. From these accounts, we can see that there are close correlations between the route the literature around Jarman’s life and works took, featuring commonly agreed pivotal ideas about the posthumous public positioning of Jarman, and the cultural changes regarding what is considered “timely” within British media and art publications.

Silverstone’s investigation clarifies that Jarman’s political and aesthetic efforts to communicate with the past and his own (future) death became more recognizable in time partially due to the growing power of queer politics in British culture, and partially to revive the public attention towards the art-house. In light of this trajectory, Jarman’s interest in the punk subculture for his

⁴⁰ Rowland Wymer also investigates Jarman’s love of William Blake and discontent towards Blake being incorporated into a mainstream British politics, as well as how Jarman’s relationship to Blake affected the writing of *Jubilee* in the section on the film in his book *Derek Jarman* which asserts that we find a sympathy towards monarchist imaginations in an earlier manuscript of *Jubilee*. While Wymer acknowledges the complexity and aesthetic opaqueness of this sympathetic expression, he still thinks that Jarman revealed a momentary romanticism that stems from a sense of loss with regards to the “old modern era” (60-63). It is perhaps the insolvability of Jarman’s positioning in relation to monarchy and old modernism that reveals the paradoxicality of modernist narratives that has aligned queer aesthetics with “the bad side;” an idea I will come back to later.

second independent feature film⁴¹ comes across as another site for exploring his aesthetic antagonism that is built through an affective relationality between British society's oppressive past and a subcultural response that embodies the "no-future" attitude. This was a response that came at a time where the stigma around minority groups within British society worsened and an essentialist form of identity was promoted symbolically by the election of Margaret Thatcher.

Claire Monk analyzed *Jubilee* in two articles, one of which makes an important point about "punk cinema" in general, stating that the pre-digital film technologies did not facilitate the instant creative practice that the punk ethos entailed at the time ("Now" 87). Therefore, an artist such as Jarman (whose famous London loft in Butler's Wharf has been compared to Andy Warhol's Factory⁴²) could observe the punk scene from a slightly outsider perspective and imagine an appropriative aesthetic through the film form beyond the consideration of punk as an aurally immediate practice. As Jarman was partially connected to the punk scene through several friends including Jordan (Pamela Rooke) – the famous performer and the fashion figure who introduced The Slits and Adam Ant to Jarman (*Dancing* 160) – his position allowed him to avoid the bands popularized by widespread media attention and focus on the less visible parts of the subculture.

As Robert Shail's collection *Seventies British Cinema* documents, the British film industry at the time was heavily controlled by the government that enforced rigid understandings of nationality, "high culture" and art-house, and contributed to the rise of low-budget practices resulting in the production of exploitation and horror films that responded to underground audience interests. Given this background, Jarman's radical filmmaking, that rejected industrial demands at the time, already shared a kinship with how bands-focused early punk documentaries, such as *The Punk Rock Movie* and *Rude Boy*, were made: "[H]is (self-described) 'home-movie' approach to

⁴¹ Jarman cites his film *Jubilee* as one of the two truly independent films he made in Britain, the other one being his first feature *Sebastiane* (1976) in his interview with Colin MacCabe in Julien's *Derek*.

⁴² Denah Johnston went as far as to say Jarman was "arguably the British Warhol of the 1970s, complete with his own 'factory' of sorts, his works remain on the fringe of recognition never having achieved pop culture success" (154).

film-making and life-long insistence on his own amateurism” exemplified a shared dissenting practice among punk and queer subcultures (Monk, “Now” 88).

Jarman described the making of *Jubilee* as a hybrid of documentary and fiction, again echoing features of the “punk cinema” canon explored in the previous chapter. This approach was combined with how his personal circumstances became part of the film’s setting:

The source of the film was often autobiographical, the locations were the streets and warehouses in which I had lived during the previous ten years. The film was cast from among and made by friends. [It] is a fantasy documentary fabricated so that documentary and fictional forms are confused and coalesce. (*Dancing* 168-169)

The documentary qualities of *Jubilee*, as also described above by Jarman, come from its production conditions that produce a cut-up narrative with the sub-stories and characters chaotically short-lived. In that sense, they recapitulate the sudden birth and death of the specific punk subculture belonging to the famous two years of punk, 1976-1977 in London.

Jubilee has been discussed in terms of its musical scenes (Laderman 42-57), its position in the punk literature as “a controversial masterpiece of punk cinema” due its connections to the “initial” punk movement in London (Barber and Sargeant 56), and its articulation of Britishness and the concept of nation in comparison to Isaac Julien’s *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) (Ellis, “Erotics” 148). Starting from *Jubilee*’s narrative organization that frames a dystopian violent and post-consumerist society representing the present time within a time-travel plot involving a portrayal of Queen Elizabeth I, the next section will explore *Jubilee*’s position in the literature as an exemplary cinematic work that foregrounds transhistorical connections between early modernism, punk antagonism and queer negativity. With an updated blended approach that draws from the concepts of queer negativity and bad modernism, the aim of this section is to reveal the temporal layers in the film that gives way to a duality that describes the film’s inside-ness and outside-ness within the “punk cinema” canon as well as its paradoxical position in terms of queer politics.

The Theme of Death and Self-Conscious Violence

Jubilee has a frame narrative: it starts with a scene where we see Queen Elizabeth I (Jenny Runacre); the queen's alchemist and mathematician Dr John Dee (Richard O'Brien who wrote *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*); a "lady in waiting" (as listed in the cast) character played by the famous punk figure Helen Wellington-Lloyd who collaborated with Malcolm McLaren and also had a role in *The Great Rock n Roll Swindle* as his protégé; and the character Ariel (David Brandon) from Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* who serves as the magical time-travel angel and transports the queen and the other two to present-day Britain after John Dee casts a spell causing Ariel to arrive. The next scene presents an apocalyptic atmosphere where we see black smoke, smashed cars, a bunch of young people beating up another person with gunshots in the background and ending with a long shot slowly moving backwards where a burning baby carriage enters the frame. This iconic shot is one of the most emblematic images of late 1970s British cinema in terms of visualizing the "no-future" punk slogan through an image of death at the earliest stage in life.

The choice of the image of a burning baby carriage as a representation of the future indicates the aggressive tonality of the film, giving a hint towards the scale of symbolism we are about to experience.⁴³ Furthermore, this symbol of a family-related item that evokes reproduction under fire, especially in the late 1970s, 43 years before same-sex marriage became legal in the UK, renders the second establishing shot as already a very direct reference to the film's overall antagonism towards the idea of building a future. This, in fact, closely resonates with the anti-social queer theory that considers negativity as a form of resistance against the modern society's obsession with acquiring a libidinal, and thus existential, certainty through the guarantee of a reproductive future, as explored in Lee Edelman's book *No Future: Queer Theory and The Death Drive*. Robert L. Cesario observes in Edelman's argument that religion was substituted with family and nation for the guarantee of immortality, and writes, "the substitutes [family and

⁴³ When listing the "victims of the punk gang" in the film, Wymer connects this image to "what was then regarded as the most shocking scene of violence in modern British theater, the stoning to death of a baby in a pram by bored youths in Edward Bond's *Saved* (1965)" (64).

nation] share an infantile belief in the life to come. In contrast, homos, Edelman makes one think, are grown-up enough to face mortality” (820). Even though Edelman’s psychoanalytic pessimism is also critiqued productively by other queer theorists including Roserio⁴⁴ for ignoring how the realm of aesthetics provides the avenue for new forms of human relations and futurity beyond reproduction, Jarman’s establishing scene both symbolizes this negativity and verifies the criticisms at the same time as an aesthetic construction that still remains relevant in our time.

It takes a while before we see the time-travelled Elizabeth I’s visit to the present punk world; first the spectator is introduced to the main characters – a “pointedly post-sexual female posse” (Monk, “Now” 88) – of the film and where they collectively live, plan and present their ideals in the form of sexual acts, performative speeches and just killing time. There is a shot in between the baby carriage scene and the introduction to the squat: we see a group of boys smoking near a crushed car, and graffiti on the wall says “post-modern” while one of them steals sunglasses and earrings from the apparently now-dead driver of the car. From the beginning, this environment is depicted as terrorizing and violence is rendered spontaneous. This is evident through the constant gunfire sounds in the background, one of the most violent character Mad’s (Toyah Willcox) threatening of people with a rifle, and the introduction of Amyl Nitrate (played by Jordan) – the first leader of the gang – whose opening speech about history being intangible involves “the Situationist slogan *Faites vos desires réalité*: make your desires reality” (Monk, “Shadow” 369).⁴⁵ Even though this motto has a dark connotation (as Monk decodes it, it could be “a recipe for fascism or sadistic murder as easily as liberation” [“Shadow” 369]), it is also staged within a performative speech about the constructed-ness of history where “bad guys” can easily be interpreted as “good guys.” As evident in the graffiti that appears in this scene, Jarman adds another connotation to the already layered environment by constructing and tagging the

⁴⁴ The two key collective debates around the anti-social theory and queer negativity were “The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory” (Caserio, Edelman, Halberstam, Muñoz and Dean) and “Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion” (Dinshaw, Edelman, Ferguson, Freccero, Freeman, Halberstam, Jagose, Nealon, Nguyen). Muñoz’s theory of queer utopias has also been notably taken as an alternative path to think about what it means to imagine a world within the restrictions of the heteronormative society that casts queer subjects as abject.

⁴⁵ Chapter one of Jim Ellis’ book *Angelic Conversations* titled “Artistic and Sexual Revolutions” traces the connections between the Situationist movement, Jarman’s earlier avant-garde 8-mm film practices and the rise of Gay Liberation Front.

following introductory scene with the keyword, “post-modern.” The next shot is Mad introducing Amyl as “England’s glory” to a group of young women mostly in punk attire and as the audience, we are located within the group being addressed by Amyl who occasionally looks directly at the camera while giving her speech. This self-reflexive technique of the actress looking directly at the camera and breaking the fourth wall, however, is not in full-effect due to the involvement of her audience in the diegetic scene itself. Therefore, the reliability of Amyl’s authenticity as a performer is problematized by the combination of a documentary style believability and a fictional depiction of a self-conscious punk performer. According to Jim Ellis, this, brought together with the time-travelling Queen Elizabeth I plot, is “an early example of the postmodernist interest in combining and juxtaposing period styles” (*Angelic* 50). Furthermore, this long establishing scene of Amyl Nitrate’s history lesson “Teach Yourself History” provides the DIY context through which to view the various killings in the film as a reclaiming activity: the exaggerated violent actions of the female gang as the “bad guys” and the prevalent theme of death function as a commentary on how British media depicted punk subculture as a source of violence, rather than a direct depiction of this perspective.

While there is a direct reference (through graffiti) to the concept of postmodernism in the 1970s as street art, *Jubilee*’s perspective towards the early modern Britain and British tradition is situated in between modernist avant-garde and a postmodern style in which “the line between pastiche or irony and the mere recycling of comfortingly familiar forms has proven perilously thin” (Mao & Walkowitz 6). Jarman’s punk aesthetics are more of an adaptation, rather than a pastiche that confuses itself with its “original,” and functions on two different levels that interact in opposite directions. On the one hand, the film inserts the punk environment (depicted in the form of a deviant and sexually ambiguous female gang) into the unreliable narrative of the past which addresses, then, the critical capability of punk. On the other hand, it shows the same environment’s voluntary assimilation by capitalism. This treatment of punk is not necessarily a direct critique or a representation of the punk scene; rather, it resituates punk in relation to a specific early modern history in a non-linear manner in order to realize an aesthetic of resistance that is against assimilation and coercion under the capitalist society that is the successor of this

earlier period. This is a reclaiming of violent negativity towards the very social structures that laid the foundations of modernity and violently pushed “unrepresentable” subjects to abject status and the underground.

There is a sequence in the film that exemplifies the construction of this reclaiming-negativity aesthetic with a direct reference to punk’s connection to modern nihilism. The whole gang, the sexually outspoken and expressive Crabs (Nell Campbell who also played the role of Columbia in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and the play it is based on in 1975), both leaders Amyl Nitrate and Bod, orange-haired tomboy Mad, and the most submissive member of the group with no dialogues, Chaos⁴⁶ are watching television in their squat. Lounge Lizard (played by Jayne County from the band Jayne County and the Electric Wizard whose live performances were featured in the early punk documentaries such as *The Blank Generation* and *The Punk Rock Movie*) appears on television and we do not hear the song she performs. Bod asks, “Who is that?” and Amyl answers “Lounge Lizard,” followed by Crabs’ comment about how Lizard looks like death. Amyl blows a kiss to the screen and Mad says “kiss of death.” Bod keeps watching the television, first laughs and then states “the world won’t miss his missing chromosome,” vocalizing a hatred towards Lizard’s trans-ness, misgendering the character and overall implying that she is planning to kill her. This one line can be considered as a summary of how transphobic language functions on the same level as a murderous motivation stemming from a gender-critical approach that a punk environment can give voice to: the violence of the female gang is not separated from the language of the oppressors.

Everybody is excited by this suggestion of killing Lizard and in the next shot we see the group on their motorbikes on the way to the Lizard’s house, in a sequence connected to the next shot by the sound of the beginning of Lounge Lizard’s (recorded by Jayne County’s band) song “Paranoia Paradise.” This sound bridge to the next shot, where we see Lizard realizing she is on television

⁴⁶ We see Chaos in one of the scenes when she is cleaning the gang’s motorcycles in full bondage costume – an obvious reference to Kenneth Anger’s experimental film *Scorpio Rising* (1963) in which the objectification of a gay biker gang is juxtaposed with the 1960s rock ‘n’ roll music, rendering the iconography of the Hollywood rebel as homosexual while placing the gang at the end in a Christ-worshipping temple.

again and starting to sing along to her own song, renders the song we hear as the connector to the biker gang's commitment to kill her; the song itself becomes the agent of Lizard's death. The lyrics "paranoia paradise/is sure going to be the death of me" and "ask Adam and Eve/Eve didn't think that the devil was bad/she heard he was an angel that just turned red/part of God's heaven is what the devil had/God kicked the devil out when he turned mad" also signal the upcoming death of Lizard from her own vocals, citing the dangerous reversibility of the good and the bad in the context of sexual desire through religious reference, while also representing a self-awareness of the upcoming torture that breaks the narrative credibility. After the completion of her song, the gang arrives in the room and Bod violently kills Lizard after threateningly joking as if she is interviewing her, suggesting that Lizard's fame through her punk band was what led Bod to assault her. After a minute long strangling scene that causes Lizard's performative death, Mad activates a mechanical metronome which creates rhythmic sound. This serves as a sound bridge to a very quick shot where we see the black-eyed angel Ariel using a rectangular sun-reflector located on his crotch to transport Queen Elizabeth I (played by the actress Jenny Runacre who also portrays the character Bod who had just killed Lizard) to the crime scene. In the next shot, the queen examines Lizard's dead body remarking "a dark parable it is to my understanding" which prompts John Dee to explain the matter to her: "Light and dark, cold and hot, living or dead, mankind is attracted by the polarities." This emphasis on dualities becomes completed when the queen asks where God is and whether God is dead. Here, the reference to the "God is dead" rhetoric of Nietzsche's nihilistic critique of Western civilizational values is vocalized by the representative of an older tradition. This vocalization creates a complex relationality between the following elements in the scene: the trans punk icon Lounge Lizard's death whose performance about desire as a blurring of "good" and "bad" signaled her murder; the metaphor of the death of punk; and the larger trajectory regarding the paradoxical experience of modernity and its systems of valorization.

Lizard's performative death functions as a haunting emphasis on modern cultural valorizations based on dichotomies in relation to the abjection of queer and transgender bodies. The fact that Lizard's killer Bod and her post-mortem visitor Queen are portrayed by the same actress Jenny

Runacre, binds the two characters on a non-diegetic level, configuring the filmic world as a site to combine opposites in one body and to engender a self-reflexive questioning of the death of morality over a transgender figure's murder. The popularization of punk culture on television and media through which Lounge Lizard became famous is rendered both accommodating and destructive towards transgender performers.⁴⁷ While Jayne County performs the final moments of Lizard in a theatrical mocking tone as if this death was part of her punk performance on stage, it is comparable to a scene from a Shakespearean tragedy.

Embracing paradoxes, then, Jarman found parallels between trans embodiment, the crisis of modernity and punk subculture, allowing for the probing of the recurrent habit of announcing the death of a culture, a subculture or a virtue and the fact that these announcements have never been accepted without protest. In effect, Jarman employs a queer disco scene where we see an abundance of naked or semi-naked people dancing (some in medieval costumes and bondage) including the punk characters, gay couples, crossdressers, and a polysexual orgy scene shortly after Lizard's death sequence as a possible answer to the Queen's contemplation on where God could be. What is also worth pointing out here is that this party is organized by Borgia Ginz (played by Jack Birkett also known as The Incredible Orlando⁴⁸), the fictional media magnate whose "radical commercialism is [...] ecumenical: he buys up Buckingham Palace and turns it into a recording studio," symbolizing the encompassing possessive power of commercialism that constantly attempts to digest subculture into assets of substitutable products (Ellis, *Angelic* 60).

From Bod's earlier transphobic statement about Lizard, to Lizard's self-conscious performance

⁴⁷ Lounge Lizard's performance in this scene blurs the border between the actress Jayne County's own punk persona and the fictional character of Lizard; a blurring that is conducted by the unfitting clothes of Lizard that are completely different than County's punk style and the out-of-sync singing to her own song recorded by Jayne County's band at the time, Jayne County and the Electric Wizard.

⁴⁸ Jack Birkett also had memorable roles in Derek Jarman's other films, such as Caliban in Jarman's Shakespeare adaptation *The Tempest* (1979) and the Pope in *Caravaggio* (1986). Birkett was a long-time friend and collaborator of Lindsay Kemp – the famous dancer and choreographer – who also has a cameo in *Jubilee*; together they staged the adaptations of Jean Genet's *Our Lady of Flowers* in 1974 and Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* in 1977 (Haughton, Carter). During the 1970s, the artistic connections between Jarman, Kemp and Birkett marks a shift from early modern grotesque influences to more post-modern drag performances, signalling a change in the experience of gay identity "in the initial post-legalization period in Britain" (Hargreaves 112).

about her own sexual desire bringing “the death of her,” on the level of the sub-narrative of Lizard’s murder a transgender punk icon is performatively killed due to her success on television: her symbolic death as an assimilated subject led to her real death. In creating this cycle of death, the full song “Paranoia Paradise” is still given a significant screen time filling the period in between the gang activity, Lizard’s murder and the Queen’s questioning of whether in this apocalyptic society what God represents has become lost. This in-between space given to the song and Lizard’s drag performance, which also has religious connotations, proposes sexual desire and trans embodiment as the terrain for uprooting the good and bad dichotomy with regards to violence as well as gender binary. Lizard’s death is also as performative as her own performance with the song, relating one performance to the other. As Jim Ellis observes: “The violent inscription of the body, punk’s extension of masquerade to the level of the body itself, challenged the status of the body and gender as neutral and ahistorical, going one step further than glam rock’s blurring of gender boundaries” (*Angelic* 57). In this scene, this violent inscription of the body considered together with Lizard’s lyrics and self-conscious performance also corresponds to the tension between queer theory and queer politics detected by Niall Richardson: “[S]ome of the ‘queerest’ images in Jarman’s work are those not explicitly connected to allegorical political activism” (11).

Queer Modernism as Bad Modernism

It is this paradoxical application of queer negativity in Jarman’s aesthetic constructions that build a connection between the history of abjection and a rejection of clean-cut representational identity politics, and could be associated with the concept of queer modernism. Robert L. Caserio in his article “Queer Modernism,” claims that “queer eros cannot be harnessed to political use” (215). Denying the political use is to “surrender to the undoing,” letting unconscious desires give way to spontaneous aesthetic correlations that can lead to political paradoxes (215). Queer politics versus queer eros: this dichotomy seems to be at the heart of considering the field of aesthetics as an avenue for probing the connections between the experience of assimilation and identity under capitalism, and the experience of exclusion and abjection under heteronormativity. Jarman, with his insistence on reclaiming tradition as an aesthetic terrain for

“reasserting the dissent, controversy and resistance” (Monk, “Shadow” 365), envisaged punk subculture’s “queerest” images that confused both punks and modernists, actually creating bonds between their avant-gardist tendencies that blurred the possible political rigidities that reside within each tradition.

There is a key scene in *Jubilee* where Jordan performs with vulgar gestures a lip-sync (in full medieval gear) to a pop version of “Rule Britannia” at an audition for the Eurovision Song Contest before the media emperor Ginz, combining tradition with vulgarity. These transpositions between what is expected to represent early modern culture and punk vulgarity are also echoed in another scene where “Jordan performs classical ballet in an urban wasteland of burning books, observed by the ghosts of high culture and classical civilization,” based on material from Jarman’s earlier 8mm short film *Jordan’s Dance* (1977) (Monk, “Shadow” 369). While Monk sees a contrast between these scenes and argues that these contrasts were articulated by Jarman as part of the tradition itself, this trajectory more closely resonates with the concept of “bad modernism.” This concept refers to a negational stance, an aesthetic and scholarly rearticulation of the excluded and repressed sections of modernism, haunting the established canons of modernist thought; in short, the waste and the residues of modernist discourse. This concept sheds light on the relationship between the queer underground and modernism, as observed by Heather K. Love:

Both Foucault and Butler suggest that turning a negative category into a positive one cannot be done cleanly: modern homosexuality is bound up with modern regimes of categorization, discipline and stigma. In the context of *bad modernism*, we might ask whether reclaiming of *bad* is a reversal “that retains and reiterates the abjected history of the term.” As in the case of *queer*, the modernist affirmation of this term is haunted by its history as an instrument of shame. (24)

In other words, the term queer modernism identifies the aesthetics that emerge from the moment when the historical residues of oppression haunt the present modernism to a point where modernism’s existence cannot be imagined independently from its violent past. Jarman’s summoning of Queen Elizabeth I in *Jubilee* along with Amyl Nitrate’s provocative historical

writings, lip-syncing to a British patriotic song and the ballet dancing, translates the haunting effect of the “bad” and “queer” territories of modernism into cinematic practice. Punk in this configuration is imagined as both a subject of modernist assimilation into commodity and the last instance of a collective nihilistic response that modernism, and in this case the British modernist tradition, created.

There are other referential indications of how punk subculture provided the tools for enunciating an aesthetic form of queer negativity for Jarman. One such scene features the murder of the two incestuous gay brothers Angel and Sphinx, who are occasional members of the female gang, by the police at a small bingo hall. From the scene where Amyl and Mad’s subsequent revenge killing of a cop takes place, to the offscreen killing of a woman – supposedly Queen Elizabeth II⁴⁹ – and Lounge Lizard (both murdered by the most violent character in the film *Bod*), *Jubilee* is charged with killings that can be analyzed through the lens of queer negativity. While the gay brothers’ killing by the police is an overt reference to police brutality and institutional homophobia, the context in which this happens frames their murder within the environment of the older generation: before their murder, we see a Bingo game played where the prizes are either a dildo, a can of Heinz Beans or a pack of Queen Elizabeth II’s Silver Jubilee-themed underpants which is won by one of the two elderly women who are the only people there at the bingo hall. These murders are captured in a space where the props of vulgar humor are perceived as ordinary by the elderly women, associated not only with traditional values but also with the transgression of these values simultaneously by positioning the mundane space of the bingo hall as both accepting of “sexual deviance” and a site of virulent homophobia. This duality in representation, combined with the dramatic revenge of their murder conducted by Bod and Mad in the subsequent scene, point to a direct political expression that pairs the role of tradition with institutional violence while gesturing towards a possibility of reclaiming this tradition through rendering the bingo hall as an initially-gay-friendly space. However, this is the only scene where

⁴⁹ The earliest scene where we see Bod’s first on-screen murder involves Elizabeth II in her “country look.” After her murder, Bod steals the crown while the famous diamond Koh-i-noor falls over from the crown. Later the diamond is found by a child and respectively gets stolen from the child by Helen Wellington-Lloyd’s character “lady in waiting.” This scene hands the symbols of monarchic power over to the act of punk criminality, again, randomizing the power of British monarchy, followed by a scene that makes the Elizabeth I witness such reversal.

we can talk about such directness in terms of political expression. In addition to Lounge Lizard's murder, there are two other violent killings and a torture scene in *Jubilee* that are, again, inflicted on women by women, along with a scene where the band The Slits (portrayed as destructive figures) enthusiastically destroy a car. All the main characters in the film display transgressive behavior either in the form of sexual or violent acts (sometimes both at the same time) which led to criticisms from feminists at the time, which Jarman recalls in his interview with Colin MacCabe in the documentary *Derek*. In fact, *Jubilee* complicates political correctness and aligns with the paradoxical politics of punk. The film is more in contact with the tensions between rightful political action for human rights and an adoption of queer negativity that seeks to reclaim violence and death as an aesthetic device through which an inversion of gender norms could be practiced and imagined via punk iconography's "no-future" dictum.

With regard to Caserio's attention to "the confluence between anti-imperialism and queer eros" (201), we can consider Jarman's placement of queer eros at the center of *Jubilee* as an avant-garde exercise of rejecting an all-encompassing commercialism by way of complicating its aesthetic use. While pointing to the paradoxical nature of the avant-garde as a possible victim of the assimilatory practices of popular media, *Jubilee* falls back on a queer eros that does not contest violence. In the film, queer eros makes violence recognizable as a fundamental activator of regulatory practices of modern dichotomies around love and virtue. The employment of punk figures and aesthetics as bearers of a politically ambiguous negativity enables the centralizing of the idea of queer eros in a cinematic imagining of a sociality located between the oppressed and the oppressors. Jarman directly cites his own anger towards the restricted experience of "a bottled-up sexuality" and the systematically charged stigma around homosexuality (that took the form of an AIDS stigma in the following decade), as partially the motivation behind making *Jubilee*. While discussing *Jubilee* in his interview with MacCabe, he states: "There was not very much love around then [...] sexuality at that stage seemed to be very violent and have the element of violation in it. I quite liked that; do you know what I mean? But the problem is that the objects of one's affections of course were also one's collaborators and I had not understood that. [sic]" While Jarman openly discusses in this interview the instabilities and changes in his

understanding of sexuality occurring in parallel with his filmmaking practices, this specific statement about love sheds light on the depiction of sexuality in *Jubilee* in particular. From the scene where Mad writes “love” on the killer Bod’s bareback with a knife while Amyl gives another speech about how humans have been tricked to believe they have “human rights,” to the tied-up sex scene between Crabs and one of her lovers who is killed at the end of the scene, love corresponds to a conception of negation that is not independent from the oppressive forms of modernity in the world of *Jubilee*. Considering the film’s collage technique that combines television excerpts from Top of the Pops, shot compositions where speeches and music performances are rendered self-reflexive through the performers’ direct look at the camera and the references to other underground texts such as Valerie Solanas’ *Scum Manifesto* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Jubilee*’s punk aesthetics intersecting with the aesthetics of queer negativity constructs a fragmented collage-esque vision. In *Derek Jarman’s Sketchbooks*, musician and actress Toyah Willcox (who portrays the character Mad in *Jubilee*) describes how Jarman used “sketchbooks as externalized memory” (76). From his own artistic environment that intersected with punk and gay underground circles, Jarman treated subcultural environs as aesthetic influences to create a transhistorical temporality that reflected the fragmented nature of memory and the experience of societal dismissal.

Punk Aesthetics Beyond “Punk Cinema”: Queer Temporalities in *Pepi, Luci, Bom* (1980)⁵⁰

The move from Jarman’s queer modernism and transhistorical approach to reclaiming canonical texts and figures articulated through a punk mise-en-scène, to Pedro Almodóvar’s early cinema that is immersed in a specific subcultural environment, marks a point of departure in this thesis: we are no longer looking at the categorical examples of “punk cinema.” Jarman’s *Jubilee* was a key text that marked the overlaps between the established territories of this canon in the literature and the ignored intersections between punk and queer subcultures. As Mark Allinson

⁵⁰ This section features a further development of research first published under the title “Punk Aesthetics of Pedro Almodóvar’s *Pepi, Luci, Bom*: Self-Reflexivity, Subcultural Formations and Queer Temporalities” in the *Journal of European Popular Culture*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2020).

also points out, there are remarkable connections between Derek Jarman's *Jubilee* and Almodóvar's first film *Pepi, Luci, Bom* which was made two years after *Jubilee*: "Two aspects stand out: the debt both owe to gay culture, and the production contexts of the films which leave their mark on stylistic elements" (228). Despite this subcultural embeddedness, *Pepi, Luci, Bom* has not been as strongly associated with punk as Jarman's *Jubilee* did, even though *Pepi, Luci, Bom* is basically a DIY product of Almodóvar's involvement in underground spaces in Madrid that combined punk and transgressive sexualities.

In his book about Pedro Almodóvar's cinema, *Desire Unlimited*, Paul Julian Smith distinguishes "the minimalist tabula rasa of *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, [...] its eccentric framing and contempt for continuity" (3) and compares his method of filmmaking to the role Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood played in forming the style of punk in 1970s London. *Pepi, Luci, Bom* centers around three women and their process of developing entangled relationships with each other, mainly the sadomasochism between Luci and Bom facilitated by Pepi. This film can be described as a satirical comedy (with a large dose of diegetic punk and dance music), considering its characters' idiosyncratic style of surviving financial and social hardship through searching for passion and fun during the times of *la movida madrileña*.⁵¹ But perhaps we cannot call it a satire in its entirety given the fact that it is highly self-reflexive and too centerless to be considered a direct representation of a specific political position that attacks either the oppressive ideology of the Spanish state apparatus or a privileged social status. The most direct reference to anything related to the state is the policeman in the film, who rapes, beats and gets away with violent and malignant acts. This characterization in the narrative has a comical function used to create a depiction of a world on which the three women's unshakable agency and integrity could be built. It would be more appropriate to describe the emancipatory politics as a guerilla-esque festival of disobedience against the dominant methods of representation in popular culture. But this does not mean that it does not utilize popular media tools. On the contrary, it creates its own

⁵¹ This term refers to the counter-cultural movement started in post-Franco Spain, specifically Madrid, also known as Spain's punk response to its own post-war political and regional transition: "Madrid's happening." Hamilton M. Stapell explains this "happening": "[T]he capital's seemingly miraculous transformation was related to a broader effort to define a new set of democratic identities in Spain after the experience of the dictatorship" (346). For an exhaustive analysis of this movement, see Gema Pérez-Sánchez' book *Queer Transitions in Contemporary Spanish Culture: From Franco to La Movida*.

cinematic cut-up world by combining the style of 1980s TV ads, music documentaries and comic book aesthetics. The opening credits of the film are entirely made up of colorful comic book drawings and texts while Nell Campbell's song "Do the Swim" is heard,⁵² establishing from the start that this film takes its prime influence from cultish mediations and rituals in popular culture that use parody and cut-up.

It is important to state that the ambivalent politics of the film's satire requires further analysis in terms of its relation to larger historicizations of counter-cultures that responded to Spain's turbulent relationship with modernization. The interactions of DIY and negational aesthetics and the post-Franco sociocultural environment in Spain invite a wider critical interrogation of punk as a response to the abrupt end of four decades of dictatorial control and agrarian social policy. For example, exploring *Pepi, Luci, Bom*'s unstable city landscapes and how the police force was represented in this specific era in Madrid, Vanessa Ceia observes that the film's busy representation of urban life communicates the assimilatory practices of the dominant politics at the time that led Almodóvar to be skeptical even of his own subculture (254-259). Borrowing Ceia's concept of "cluttered aesthetics," I argue that this film is one of the key texts that offer a cinematic instance of how a politically ambivalent aesthetic could lead to a "cluttered" and fragmented experience of subculture that emerged from the complex history of social movements, counter-cultures, sexual politics and how they reacted to religious and institutional oppression in Spain.⁵³

Furthermore, *Pepi, Luci, Bom* follows the methods of dissemination of the media industry that dominated the popular culture of the time. In fact, according to Smith, Almodóvar "was in a position to exploit a subculture" (18) with this film just as McLaren and Westwood fuelled the punk revolt for the sake of a new aesthetic, because he did not exactly reject the sectoral practices of corporate productions. We will be returning to Smith's contention that *Pepi, Luci, Bom* can be

⁵² Campbell's camp songs became well known after her performance as the character Columbia in both the stage musical *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1973) in London, and the adapted cult film of the same name.

⁵³ Perhaps this ambivalence can be seen as a symptom of a larger cultural struggle, as the editors of *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction* explain in their preface: "We have subtitled this book *The Struggle for Modernity* both to emphasize the role that culture has played in constructing – and resisting – modernity, and to stress the notion that culture is – as the civil war would show so dramatically – a form of struggle" (Graham and Labanyi: vii).

seen as exploitative of *la movida*; however, what is more relevant to the discussion of the similarities between Almodóvar, and McLaren and Westwood, is that his method of departing from continuity (the element of mainstream film narration that guarantees a linear time movement) is a key component of it.

Pepi, Luci, Bom has been principally described as an early work which introduced a specific aesthetic world about to take shape – but which has not yet taken form – from a future auteur, a stepping stone in Almodóvar’s oeuvre, “in which one can already see some of the main themes of his work” (Mira 14). This type of reading of Almodóvar’s first feature film comes from a “looking-back” activity from the position cognizant of his already-established auteurism, with the goal of situating this film in the chronological context of either his later works and the development of his production company El Deseo (Hartson 141), or the later more mature “Almodovarian” aesthetics (Mira 14) that feature a “camp and kitsch recycling of popular culture and eclectically mix images and elements that recall both European and Hollywood films” (Tzvetkova 105). Of course, from an auteur studies perspective, positioning an earlier film by a filmmaker in relation to their more internationally well-known films is an established film studies method to historicize an artist’s cultural impact. This positioning of *Pepi, Luci, Bom* signals that the subcultural environment Almodóvar was part of inevitably contributed to the film’s aesthetics to a considerable degree due to the low-budget conditions; hence the film’s aesthetics have been deemed relatively less “Almodovarian” than his later films (Mira 14). Therefore *Pepi, Luci, Bom* has been located at the crossroads of Almodóvar’s auteurship and the larger corpus of subcultural formations that distinguish the DIY ethics beyond *la movida*. The disruption of continuity that undermines the narrative at times is one of the key examples of the subcultural impact on *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, and it is not necessarily a prominent feature of Almodóvar’s later work, which may explain the limited critical engagement with this production.

Narrative Disruptions

The film features a loosely-plotted narrative that revolves around two main subplots. One of them features Pepi’s uplifting struggle as an aspiring writer working as a copywriter, and her goal

of teaching a lesson to the policeman who constantly assaults her. The other subplot is about the relationship between Bom, a 16-year-old lesbian and a lead-singer for the punk band Bomitomi, and Luci, the wife of the policeman who Pepi introduced to the underground party scene and Bom. Formally, these plots are constantly interrupted by scenic asides and temporal stoppages that generate short stories of their own and create sub-scenes, which disrupt a sense of singular narrative progression.

An early example is when Pepi waits outside of the policeman's house. We understand from the scene that she has a revenge project in mind of luring Luci, the policeman's wife, into their underground circle – her project later on loses its revenge aspect and turns into a project of saving Luci from her violent husband, which also fails as Luci finds happiness in being subjected to this violence. The camera is positioned behind Pepi in this early scene, showing the building where the policeman and Luci live. A woman and a man arguing in the street enter the frame of the camera. The woman angrily shouts at the man for forcing her to do sex work instead of helping with her career in music and modelling, which apparently seems unproblematic to the man as he defends himself saying, "I am only trying to get you a job." This defense prompts the woman to announce that she does not need a pimp and she could easily do sex work on her own by standing on the street corner, gesturing at Pepi. While these people (who never appear in the film again) end up in a taxi together having this continued argument, we do not see any reaction from Pepi to this disruption. On the contrary, the scene continues as if nothing happened as the policeman exits the building. The inclusion of the scene does not affect the progression of the plot, nor anyone or anything in the scene, but works as an outside framing of Pepi as someone who looks like a sex worker on the street. The theme of the scene shifts from the linear progression of a revenge plot to a frozen temporality via an abrupt dramatization of a sex-trafficking narrative in an exaggerated acting style that highlights the artificiality of this narrative construction around the experience of sex work. This additional framing functions as an outside attachment to the shaping of Pepi's character, as well as shaping what is happening in the scene itself as environmentally constructed. Here, sex work is part of the neighbourhood; it is an occupation that can be an independent choice; its common narrativization featuring a "fallen

woman” who immigrates to the big city is mocked;⁵⁴ it is inherent to the working class and it is related to Pepi’s character. This scene manifests a form of internalized sexual agency through the mannerisms of both women, Pepi and the woman in the car, as well as a performed indifference to taboos around the sociocultural relationship between trauma and sexuality. It is an intensification of a paradoxical campness that realizes and destabilizes the narrative of the experience of a trafficked sex worker via hastily and mockingly embedding the patriarchal oppression within a comical sub-story that emerges from the subcultural environment.

The linearity of the plot around Pepi’s rape-revenge project is not only interrupted; it is temporally attached to this sub-story. Though this sub-story may call for a more sociologically oriented analysis to delve into what it represents, I here focus on its effect in terms of the spectatorial experience. What is offered here can be explained through the concept of queer temporality which foregrounds the subjective and “cluttered” experience of time as being as fundamental as the process of linear historicization, for understanding how normative time is constructed. Carolyn Dinshaw, who has worked extensively on the interactions of medieval studies and queer history, defined temporality in a roundtable discussion in the following terms:

To think outside narrative history requires reworking linear temporality. It requires “the rewiring of the senses” (Jacqui Alexander’s words) in order to apprehend an expanded range of temporal experiences – experiences not regulated by “clock” time or by a conceptualization of the present as singular and fleeting; experiences not narrowed by the idea that time moves steadily forward, that it is scarce, that we live on only one temporal place. (185)

Dinshaw’s perspective here exemplifies the larger critical trajectory that opened up the field of discourse around reproductive futurity within queer studies over the past three decades, and the critical ideas around queer negativity versus queer futurity. It raises the fundamental question of how critical positioning – what is referred to as “queering” – can become more productive in

⁵⁴ In their collection *Prostitution and Sex Work in Global Cinema: New Takes on Fallen Women*, Hipkins and Taylor-Jones, for example, detect a leitmotif in films that involve sex work, “a preoccupation with the story of the ‘fall’ as a narrative that makes a statement about how poverty penalises women in particular or reinforces women’s status as victims” (5). They find an intersection between sex work narratives and the cinematic representations of “the rapidly changing nature of the urban space” (5) through the figure of the prostitute in European and Asian cinema.

terms of theory and practice in general (a topic that is beyond the scope of this chapter). What is argued here is that a filmic aesthetic emerging from a subcultural formation, specifically in the case of *Pepi, Luci, Bom*'s montage sections which interrupt its own narrative progression, could embody an artistic version of this questioning of linearity in creating narratives and history-telling. *Pepi, Luci, Bom* presents such an aesthetic by both utilizing and decomposing the identifying traits of popular media of its time – the style of TV ads, comic strips, music videos in this case – in a timeframe that subjects mainstream media to the temporality of a subcultural movement. Even though, Mark Allinson described Almodóvar's *movida* as more utopian and future-oriented than, for example, Jarman's depiction of punk subculture in *Jubilee* (228), I would contend that the non-narrative disruptions in the film interrupt the tone of optimistic futurity that Allinson found. The satirical atmosphere of narrative disarray, stemming from the spontaneity of the low-budget conditions as well as the cluttered spaces that using real-life locations facilitated, disrupt the believability of the utopian ideas the characters express in terms of having a future.

María DiFrancesco's analysis takes a detailed plot-based approach to the film, looking at it "within the context of Spanish history and FST [family systems therapy]" and reading it as a cultural signifier of "the sociocultural pendulum from conservatism to liberalism in post-Franco Spain" (51). She focuses on the specific elements of the narrative that involves lesbian bonding and builds a family picture of similar futurity to that of the heterosexual union, foregrounding the scenes where Pepi writes a script with the same name as the film.

Pepi tells Bom that, in her movie, Luci and Bom will get married, and that Pepi will give the two women the baby she dreams she conceived when she was raped as a wedding present. With its "happy" ending, the film-within-a-film overtly emphasizes the positive ramifications of the female-centered family while subversively foregrounding that social problems affecting the family continue to exist. Namely, though Pepi draws a picture of the lesbian family, complete with child, as a supportive social system that affirms the validity and individuality of its members, at least one member – the imagined child – is literally spawned of sexual violence. (52-53)

DiFrancesco's reading focuses on the imagination of the family on a narrative level, but is told via a self-reflexive method: making the main character actually write a script about that which it depicts. While DiFrancesco acknowledges that the lesbian family Pepi imagines creating is not necessarily free from the societal oppression that it represents in terms of familial roles and reproduction, she still reads the film's ending as a hopeful anticipation of Pepi and Bom's possible coupling, signalling a future together. Considering the repetitive cut-up formal structure that disorganizes the central narrative progression that mostly centers around Pepi's failed projects and impositions on people, the closing shot of the highway after Pepi and Bom's conversation about moving in together and building a new future comes across as yet another parody of dreaming of a better life.

This self-referential reversal of hope into what can be called queer negativity is also evident in an earlier scene in the film when Pepi is trying to write her script. Her writing is disrupted by a phone call from her father telling her that she needs to get a job. She sees a job advertisement for a copywriter at a newspaper, and the film cuts to a TV ad. This is another undercutting of narrative linearity through the interference of a TV ad for underpants: Luci starts working at an advertisement company as a copywriter and the ad she writes abruptly appears between two scenes that are not linearly connected to each other. Because the ad is not part of the narrative timeline, its interference works as a reminder of the construction of the narrative itself. Her later writing for the job, which she refers to as capitalistic, intersects with her creative writing which is about dreaming of a possible future and a family together with Luci and Bom. Pepi's imagination, reflected in her creative work, is interrupted by a mediated representation of her quick embrace of a "capitalistic" role. While this interruption in her artistic writing of a hopeful future relies on the continuation of her "capitalistic" role, it also indicates an aesthetic entrance of the idea that "post-modern deconstruction of identity [...] means recognition of the fact that 'Spanishness' is a shifting concept, encompassing plurality and contradiction" (Labanyi 397).⁵⁵ In the scene, Pepi's creativity (which can be thought of as an essential part of any possible identity she might have) is represented as both subjected to capitalist assimilation and an independent

⁵⁵ It would be interesting to think about Pepi's scene in the film in relation to how Jo Labanyi explains this postmodern shift in Spain: "Post-Franco Spain (almost twenty years after Franco's death, it is hard to avoid the expression) is marked by a sense of catching up with the future but also of being an irremediable postscript" (396).

artistic practice bereft of necessary resources. This dual representation, however, foregrounds plurality over futurity. We do not see her process of writing the ad but the ad itself as the final product. In another respect, we do not see her script played out in the film as a final product at all, but we see her process of writing it.

These interruptions and aesthetic articulations of a fragmented creative process mark the film's "making progress," as the "final product" functions as an interruption, while the "film in a film" is only a process of interruption. Signposting the film's "making of" is marking it as impossible to repeat, thereby marking its temporality. We can explain this temporality as a place, in relation to Jack Halberstam's "queer time and place," in which low-budget aesthetics convey an economic and libidinal resistance against the credibility of professionalism that art necessitates elsewhere. In order to do this, it would be necessary to look at the political background and the critical perception of the film to clarify how it exemplifies the political resistance that punk aesthetics can manifest through constructing queer times and places.

The reason why Paul Julian Smith claims that Almodóvar somewhat exploited the *movida* subculture ("like Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood in Britain in the previous decade" exploited "punk which was its greatest influence" [Smith 18]) is that Almodóvar's later success benefited partly from *Pepi, Luci, Bom*'s screenings on network television in the 1990s. Smith states that the film's later screening on television was part of the public mythologization of a subcultural past and a nostalgia for the *movida* – in Smith's words, a "mourning for a time and place now definitively lost" (19). Even though Smith describes the financial profit gained from the screening of *Pepi, Luci, Bom* on a highly commercialized medium (in contrast with the DIY production conditions of the film itself) as exploitation, he does not criticize Almodóvar for it. On the contrary, Smith sees this as making it possible for the director to expand his "model of political and cultural intervention (as in the case of punk)," which "has no means of negotiating the alliances it seeks between multiple, minimally competent subjects or groups" (19). Smith appreciates Almodóvar's fidelity to finding solidarity between excluded subjects, what he calls "Almodóvar's fabulous eccentrics," for they resemble the Spaniards of the post-Franco transition phase where an oppressive father figure (Franco for Smith) is lost. The fact that these characters

in *Pepi, Luci, Bom* do not have background stories and visible families, and that they merely focus on spending their time as pleasurable as possible, is interpreted by Smith as a sign of Almodóvar's integrity in terms of his devotion to eccentricism and his "celebration of fluidity and performance" (3) that can be found in punk (19). For Smith, it is important to take into account the political period when *Pepi, Luci, Bom* was shot, between two historical events: the first general election after the death of Franco which resulted in a somewhat "centrist" government in 1977, and the failed coup d'état in 1981 (15). Almodóvar wrote the script in 1977, and the film could only be shot in sporadically over eighteen months due to a lack of financial support; it was finally released in 1980 (15). As Smith observes:

It would clearly be foolish to look for direct connections between discrete events in that period and a work as chaotic and corrosive as *Pepi, Luci, Bom*. But it is surely legitimate to ask what ideological investments are to be found in the comic cacophony of a film made at a time characterized by such dramatic historical changes. (15)

Considering the parody-like depictions of sexualities and the active persuasiveness the characters demonstrate in pushing people into homosexuality, sadomasochism, drug use and sex work, the film would have been heavily censored and possibly banned if it had been released only two years earlier. Therefore, the film's ideological investment in bringing out the agency in choosing to be subjected to sexually domineering activities, such as Luci's excessive masochism, can be understood in relation to the cathartic experience of gaining a sudden collective liberation from intense oppression on the socio-national level. The insistence on exhibiting such excesses in the film in a spontaneous, neutralizing and derisive manner realizes unexpected constructions of agency from oppression, which also manifests a mimicked normalcy in the film. For example, when Bom urinates on Luci, the satire is constructed not because of the act itself but because of Luci's status as a repressed wife-figure who is essentially a masochist. The societal roles that are supposed to be oppressive are made comical through their depictions as always-available subjects for sexualization, and the experience of oppression is mediated through sexual acts. Pepi, Luci and Bom, but also the subculture they are part of, are constantly subjected to voyeurism. Private homes of seemingly heterosexual husbands and wives are spaces where this voyeurism takes

place, building correlations between the “perversity” in all of the characters via juxtaposition between these homes and the underground venues. These queer subjectivities linger in spaces where music and kinky activities are essential. Another important example is a long party scene where Pepi is the presenter of a competition looking for the most beautiful penis, called “General Erections,” referring to Spain’s first General Election in 1977 after the death of Franco.⁵⁶ This section is actually edited in a cross-cut sequence with another set of shots where we see a woman wearing a white gown and with a moustache and a beard drawn on her face. In the scene she is drinking and complaining about her husband being a homophobe, referencing his ill-spirited behaviors towards queer people. The implication that he is a (homophobic) gay person and that his wife is not aware of his homosexuality is suggested by the way in which the woman’s conversation with her sleeping husband is depicted: her unawareness of the fact that her husband is actually sleeping in the scene shows that, while she thinks she is having a dialogue, she is actually having a monologue, which summarizes their relationship. Again, these characters never appear again after the party scene, which ends with the couple having sex while the gay husband watches the “General Erections” party through the window (and, of course, without her noticing his watching).

These scenes, when combined, compose a portrayal of excess that does not seek to represent a specific identity, but rather to destabilize modes of representation by way of underlining its constructedness and performativity. It creates a self-reflexive spectacle that offers an imaginative space outside of “the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance” (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time* 6). In other words, it offers a “queer time.” This is not to say that it offers the spectator the experience of “how to feel like a person

⁵⁶ “General Erections” is also the name of the game-show parody photo-novel, originally titled “Errecciones Generales,” that the film is based on (Ceia 248). This photo-novel was a product of *El Víbora*, “the subversive magazine of the *movida*” (Ceia 248). Gema Perez-Sanchez traces *El Víbora*’s negotiation with the mainstream as well as its etymological roots based on gay slang: “The word ‘víbora’ means ‘viper’ and in Spanish it is gendered feminine. In the Western heterosexual world, it is often figuratively used to refer pejoratively to a woman, by echoing the Genesis association of the serpent with Eve [...]. However, the magazine uses the masculine pronoun ‘el’ before ‘víbora,’ alluding, thereby, to the gay slang use of the term [...]. *El víbora* elicits the image of a gossipy, mean, but funny individual who can criticize everything and everybody around him and get away with it because of his sarcastic sense of humor. [...] this magazine further queers the biblical traditions [...]: the image of a *víbora* gay man is tainted with negative, homophobic connotations. In other words, from the very title of the magazine, one can already begin to see how the product was ambiguously both hegemonic and counterhegemonic” (177).

identified as queer” because of the presence of homosexual relations in the story. Rather, the film constructs times and spaces that foreground a discontinuity in the process of identification, homosexual or otherwise, by way of foregrounding its own form, the constructedness of the storyline and the temporality of the social movement from which the film emerges, via the asynchronous soundtrack, handheld camera, disoriented editing and theatrical acting. The fact that the comic-strip sections of the film came from the subcultural magazine *El Víbora* (as well as the general influence of the magazine on the film’s satire) attests to the film’s boisterous articulation of marginal identities in general, as this magazine was known for its kitsch quality, and its willingness to parody its own marginal audience that enabled it to also become popular within mainstream audiences (Pérez-Sánchez 177-178).

Multiple POVS

Pepi, Luci, Bom emerged out of the intersection of the LGBTI+ and punk culture of 1980s Madrid that Almodóvar himself was a part of. However, it would be wrong to view the film as a solely realistic documentation of that movement. Almodóvar simply did not have the money to build a film set and used real locations instead (Smith 11). However, at the same time, he did not just pick up an 8-mm camera and shoot what was going on at the time, as Don Letts did in his earlier music film *The Punk Rock Movie* (1978) in London. Thus, there is a two-fold aspect to this production: the authenticity gained from the reliance on involving characters from the real-life subculture, and the artificiality of making a film which is evident through the movement back and forth between dialogue and abrupt musicality. It is important to note here that Alaska – the leading member of the well-known Spanish punk rock band *Alaska y Los Pegamoides* and an important part of *la movida* – plays the character Bom, and her band’s music constitutes most of the film’s soundtrack and the band Bomitomi’s live performance scenes. The film does not seek to represent Alaska and her band in their reality, or to present them in a polished musical performance scene, and instead constructs a parody in which the references to real-life in the film work as a constitutive element towards assembling a disobedient environment that is deliberately not interested in representing an actual real-life punk figure.

This parodic aestheticism is the key to understanding what is meant here by a self-reflexivity which cancels out a representative realism: the film makes reference to its own artificiality as a film by way of exposing its filmic elements that are designed to connect with its audience through subcultural references. This is also an aspect that can partially be found in the earlier examples of “punk cinema” in which the music was mostly the subject matter, such as *The Blank Generation* (1976) and *The Punk Rock Movie*. There is a particular scene in *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, in which Pepi watches her friends beating up the policeman who raped her earlier in the film (we later realize this person getting beaten is actually the policeman’s twin brother who leaves the city to run away from being mistaken as his brother). She is watching the event with sexual satisfaction; however, the camera angle while we are watching this event switches many times between the first-person angle of Pepi, of her different friends, and of the man getting kicked on the ground looking at the people who are beating him up. Seeing the point-of-view (POV) of each person in the scene puts us in all the possible positions in the scenario of this scene: the POV angle of Pepi (accompanied by her lustful moaning while rubbing her crotch), the moving angles of different friends as they are looking down on the man they are kicking, and the unstable POV angle of the man getting kicked on the ground looking at the people who are beating him. What the spectator sees on screen is never the fixed POV of any of the characters; rather, random switches between these shots, including different POVs, create a multiplicity of perspectives that foreground the activity of changing POV, rather than having a stable POV. Therefore, what is foregrounded by the multiplicity of angles is the perspective of the camera and its ability to change between POVs: its self-reflexivity.

A similar approach to camera direction can be seen in Amos Poe and Ivan Král’s *The Blank Generation*. Despite its closeness to cinema vérité aesthetics, the composition of its live concert scenes have considerable similarities with how the aforementioned 8-mm film *The Punk Rock Movie* is shot in terms of style and direction. Furthermore, *The Blank Generation* is completely asynchronous, meaning that the live soundtrack does not match with the live footage. Again, the handheld 8-mm camera is not only located among the audience turned towards the stage; sometimes it is located on stage among the band turned towards the audience. There are shots even from the POV of someone who might be standing backstage. These mobile handheld

camera angles are actually very similar to the movements of the camera in the beating scene in *Pepi, Luci, Bom*. How can we interpret this similarity? While *The Blank Generation* relies on the authenticity of the punk performance on stage and the punk participants in the venue, *Pepi, Luci, Bom* relies on the exaggerated performance of the sadistic revenge plot accompanied by an opera soundtrack. While in *The Blank Generation* the uniqueness of those particular live performances was captured through multiple participants in the scenes, in *Pepi, Luci, Bom* the uniqueness of shooting that particular scene in that particular time was foregrounded by way of the exaggeration of acting performances and the lack of presentation of any kind of identification with the characters. The plot that belongs to the filmic world loses its significance when disrupted by the range of camera angles that do not belong to specific individuals but only moments from performed roles in a violent scenario that lacks a stable ethical positioning; thus, we are left with what Smith calls “the truth in travesty” (x). This is another queer moment in which the “nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time” (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time* 6) are at work. The cinematographic composition here rejects the static position of an identifiable perspective of a specific character, which usually would be provided through POV shots to intensify the plausibility of the character’s part in the story. Instead, it involves angle shifts and constant movement that underline the artificial performativity of the actors. Smith observes as follows: “In his celebration of fluidity and performance, in his hostility to fixed positions of all kinds, Almodóvar anticipates that critique of identity and essence that was later to become so familiar in academic feminist, minority, and queer theory” (3). Even though Smith refers to Almodóvar’s overall cinematic attitude here in this quote (mostly his preference to use close-up and saturated coloring), it is hard to consider the destabilization of the identification process that the aforementioned scene causes without the specific technical looseness of *Pepi, Luci, Bom* that later Almodóvar films do not necessarily contain.

The multiplicity of POVs in *Pepi, Luci, Bom* can also be observed in other sexually explicit scenes in which the soundtrack is out of sync, or the lighting is too dark to see the specifics of the scene. Even though these scenes are thematically explicit, such as the scene where the winner of the “General Erections” earns fellatio from Luci or when Bom urinates on Luci, it is still graphically

auto-censored as no character is ever depicted naked. Instead, we constantly see disruptive subplots about sex work, voyeurism, a dissatisfied wife in semi-drag costume complaining to her asleep husband who is gay; all people and events “inspired by the stories Almodóvar heard from acquaintances” (Mira 14). Núria Triana-Toribio observes that “this self-appropriation or parody takes the form of an absence of ‘permanently sacred signifiers’” (“A Punk” 281), referencing Dick Hebdige’s famous reading of how punk subculture created its own style out of “unwanted” residues of society: “[T]he forbidden is permitted, but by the same token, nothing, not even these forbidden signifiers (bondage, safety pins, chains, hair-dye, etc.) is sacred and fixed” (115). To summarize: the reason why Almodóvar’s first film, rather than his later films, depicts the punk’s DIY usage of “unwanted commodities” lies in its production conditions, which comprised of a very limited budget and Almodóvar’s own subcultural environment.

“An Art of Projection”

The influence of *la movida* in Almodóvar’s film can be traced through the aesthetic and narrative disruptions in the film’s structure and how the real-life locations and figures provided subcultural references that populated the film’s “cluttered aesthetic.” This chapter associated these subcultural entrances and disruptions in Almodóvar’s first film with the concept of queer temporality. The film uses social taboos to interrupt the narratives of normalcy around sexual emancipation as well as its own plot-driven progression. Almodóvar’s filmmaking in *Pepi, Luci, Bom* produces an aesthetic self-referentiality as a result of its embeddedness in the intersection of punk and gay subcultures in Madrid. This socio-aesthetic quality lays bare the construction of generic narratives around sexual norms via a process of filmic self-parody, problematizing cultural normalcy, and drawing out the multiplicities of punk.

This chapter explored the ideas of queer terrorism and queer eros as an aesthetic territory that channels the experience of oppression into a confrontational mechanism that does not seek to escape political paradoxes. The focus was on how this aesthetic comes from a subcultural space and embodies a punk attitude through reclaiming the negative connotations and the outcast status of the gay underground of the time. Such aesthetic methods of reclaiming negative

connotations in these films use real-life references in order to convey a confrontational effect that marks the reality of cultural stigma; these references mostly involve key figures from the film's related subculture as well as real-life locations, such as Waters' usage of the First Unitarian Church in Baltimore in *Multiple Maniacs* (Waters 64). Derek Jarman's casting of the Slits, Jayne County, Jordan and Toyah Wilcox as violently revengeful figures, and similarly Almodóvar's casting of Alaska – one of the founder figures of *la movida madrileña* – as the nihilistic dominatrix also attest to this point.⁵⁷ While these antagonistic characters are embodied by punk musicians, the punk songs involved in the soundtracks further function as enablers of parody via their juxtaposition with the images of mock-terror. This involvement of the figures from the subcultures surrounding the films and the music-related references in the development of the parodic-antagonistic aesthetics remain as a commonality within the films analyzed in Chapter Four.

Through the multiplicity of perspectives attached to the subcultural conditions of the films analyzed in this chapter, we identified a considerable overlap between gay underground cultures and different coping mechanisms in response to racial, sexual and class-related stigma in three different locations that formed their own subcultures. Exploring the role of gay shame and the problems with Almodóvar's later film *Hable Con Ella* (2002) (*Talk to Her*) from a feminist perspective, Halberstam also touches upon Muñoz' concept of disidentification in order to explore the possibility of a "feminist gay shame" that does not have to project its negativity onto the female body ("Queer Studies" 65). As with Almodóvar's oeuvre, Halberstam also considers Andy Warhol's art as "an art of projection," which utilizes the popular status of the admired diva figure, specifically via the Marilyn Monroe prints and the *Screen Tests* of famous Hollywood actresses. For Halberstam, this projection addresses gay shame through emptying out the aesthetic of the ideal femininity so as to waive the cultural conflation between gay subjecthood and its association with the ineffectualness attached to femininity. Even though this chapter does

⁵⁷ Mark Allinson analyzes the role of Alaska in Almodóvar's film within the context of star studies, calling for an alternative subcultural framework similar to the one taken by this thesis: "[...] stars from marginalized cultures can be approached in terms of their *difference* from the Hollywood star persona (hence star study has only a limited value for European or otherwise marginal figures); and where star study *per se* cannot adequately account for such marginal cultural products, then comparative subcultural analysis can provide a useful theoretical approach" (235)

not position *Pepi, Luci, Bom* within Halberstam's problematization of such gay iconography, this line of thought nonetheless provides an opportunity to explore the feminist criticisms within the intersections of punk and gay subcultures, and the cinematic indications of such cooccurrences (and we will see in the next chapter that these interactions involve the influence of the 1970s feminist film theory). The influence of Warhol's productions and the other underground formations associated with his creative sphere The Factory, will be returned to in the next chapter, as part of the investigation of the connections between the radical developments within feminist theory, structuralist film and New York's No Wave movement. As the various connections between subcultural spaces and paracinematic movements will continue to illustrate, punk aesthetics in cinema – relying on referentiality, irony and parody – is more about bringing out the diversities and unnoticed radicalities within political movements, such as gay rights and feminism, than about a direct adaptation of political language that might run the risk of compromise.

Chapter Four: Reclaiming Negativity Through Avant-Garde Formalism, Pornography and Punk

As a placeholder for the “nothing,” [...] and a figure for the negativity that disfigures every mode of signification, it [queerness] inhabits cinema in two distinct ways: as a fetishization of the image and as the dissolution of that fetish in the recognition of the minimal difference – the flicker – that the image embodies and denies. Dissolving the substance of reality as it normatively appears, destroying the consensus by which social reality and meaning are assumed, queerness is never far from the criminals to whom Hitchcock keeps returning. [...] Against the recuperative deployment of aesthetic idealizations, Hitchcock confronts queer negativity as the observe of the fetish, a negativity whose enjoyment threatens the face of cinema itself. (Lee Edelman, “Light” 5)

The films considered in this chapter bear extra-cinematic characteristics in terms of leaving a transformative impact on to the political movements and subcultures that surround their production, and also the cultural debates around sexual expression on screen and the regulatory aspects of cinema, such as reception conditions and censorship legislation. For example, Bette Gordon’s *Variety* (1983), which emerged from New York’s No Wave movement (the first subcultural context to be explored in this chapter) “intersected with key debates within both feminist film theory and within the feminist movement” while remaining “a peculiarly Downtown text” (Hawkins 127). The film inserts a voyeuristic female protagonist whose relentless pornographic monologues create a fragmented narrative, all the while remaining within a familiar narrative structure, an approach that was not necessarily favored in feminist film theory of the time. As such, *Variety* exemplifies a feminist antisociality similar to the queercore movement and the French film *Baise Moi* (2000) analyzed later in this chapter. While *Variety* and queercore films incorporate musical elements and provide ironic referentiality to aspects of the narrative,⁵⁸ *Baise Moi*’s “extremity” led to constructive debates around female

⁵⁸ *Variety*’s ambient jazz compositions, at times abruptly cutting across scenes, are composed by John Lurie who acted in and composed music for a number of other No Wave films, including Jim Jarmusch’s *Stranger Than Paradise* (1980). Bruce La Bruce’s *No Skin off My Ass* (1991) features all female queercore band Fifth Column as collaborators in its cut-up aesthetic, influenced by the short films made by one of Fifth Column’s founders and the zine-maker G. B. Jones.

criminality and pornographic representation on screen. These films overall exhibit what Edelman calls “queer negativity” (citing Hitchcock’s criminals) – a negativity that signifies an ironic appropriation of the normality it seeks to disrupt. These films do that through their engagement with formalist approaches found in their artistic environment, exhibiting ambiguous politics through adopting from, and parodying, canonical texts, pornographic language and imagery.

Further to the initial consideration of the influence (with regard to reclaiming negativity) of No Wave on American Independent Cinema, this chapter’s second section after No Wave extends the scope of the intersections of punk and queer in cinema to the queercore movement and its cinematic outputs. Looking specifically at Toronto-based Canadian artist and filmmaker Bruce LaBruce, one of the co-founders of the punk zine *J.D.*⁵⁹ (which had a key role in the evolution of this underground movement) I will examine the themes of pastiche, camp and pornography in his films from the early 1990s, in particular his first feature film *No Skin Off My Ass* (1991).

Curran Nault’s recent book *Queercore: Queer Punk Media Subculture* demonstrates that the combination of punk and queer goes beyond the etymological roots and extends outside of the USA-UK axis. This study explores how the feminist rhetoric of “personal is political” influenced the identity politics of LGBTI+ activism in the last five decades through an amalgamation with punk aesthetics in the subcultural spheres. While feminist and LGBTI+ activism have been integral to the formation of queer studies in general, in the queercore movement, we see a transformation of the punk scene into an unapologetic political satire where the personal experience is what matters the most as opposed to the general understanding of punk that is apolitical, or paradoxically unaware of its political implications. Embodying the androgyny of punk aesthetics through adopting the iconography of misogynistic and homophobic hardcore scenes combined with pornographic elements, it directly deploys a “trashiness” that combines No Wave’s negativity and gay pornographic interest with trash cinema elements. Interestingly, both

⁵⁹ The title of the zine, as commonly known, stands for “Juvenile Delinquents.” In the documentary *Queercore: How to Punk a Revolution* (2017), it is mentioned that there are other speculations around what it refers to, including “James Dean,” “J.D. Salinger” and “Jeffrey Dahmer.”

Variety and LaBruce's contribution to the television show *Durch Die Nacht Mit...* (translated as "Into the Night with...") as a director were supported by the German television company Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF). This point does not only tie them together, but is also testament to the transnational impact of Germany's "commercial and critical twilight of the post-war period" (Elsaesser 212). German television throughout the 1970s and 1980s, specifically ZDF's editorial programme *Das Kleine Fernsehspiel* which prioritized the commissioning and screening of unconventional narrative forms, became an important agent for responding to the growing "demand for films on a whole variety of social issues" (Elsaesser 215). According to Thomas Elsaesser, this demand extended beyond Germany and the cultivation of New German Cinema, which includes filmmakers such as Werner Herzog, Wim Wenders and Rainer Fassbinder. This period provided a transnational background for radical cinemas in the rest of Europe and the American underground, as *Variety* among other ZDF-produced No Wave films and LaBruce's later films, including *The Raspberry Reich* (2004) (set in Berlin, produced by German producer Jürgen Brüning) exemplify. The post-war radical creativity in the urban areas in Europe, as in the case of Madrid's *la movida madrileña*, influenced a transformative change in the American underground through cinema that previously was dominated by the disillusioned hippie culture of Reagan-era America.

Identifying the role of pornography within the vocabulary of the punk aesthetics in postmodern Europe and the counter-cinema discourse, this chapter concludes with an analysis of the French film *Baise Moi* and its connection to the French New Extremity phenomenon. While this phenomenon is not connected to a subculture – unlike the other film movements discussed here – its general low-budget usage of pornography nonetheless provides a punk moment within French cinema as will be explained in the consideration of censorship debates in the later sections. However, *Baise Moi*'s collective background and DIY approach to cinematography mark the film as a punk production and share parallels with other subcultural films considered in this thesis, which can be considered antithetical to the auteur-oriented-ness of French New Extremity. As is immediately evident in the French title *Baise Moi* – translated as "rape me" – Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi's film is the ultimate embodiment of feminist

negativity, resonating at the same frequency as the writer Kathy Acker's literary experiments with pornographic language (Acker co-wrote *Variety*) as well as John Waters' queer terrorism. Nadia Louar, for example, applies Ellen E. Berry's reading of Acker's writing to Despentès' manifesto-like book *King Kong Theory* and sees the term "negative esthetics" as quite suitable to describe Despentès' oeuvre in general: "Despentès, like American punk writer and feminist Kathy Acker who is an important influence, 'self-consciously identif[ies] with and [writes] from the position of those most thoroughly marginalized by normative culture (Berry 41)" (128). I will extend their literary similitude to the cinematic works they created collaboratively with other feminist artists, exploring the mobilization of pornographic language. *Variety* uses narrative to go against the "moral hard line" of both the structuralist film and the formalism imposed by an inflexible understanding of spectatorship rooted in popular strands of feminist film theory of the time. *Baise Moi* uses non-simulated sex and cut-up referentiality in order to build an imaginary homosociality by reversing the border between private/public space. LaBruce's *No Skin*, which provides the bridge for this chapter between No Wave and *Baise Moi*, with its camp exaggeration and hardcore melodrama, connects the early trash, punk and pop-art cinema connotations with the avant-garde potentials of pornography.

The Structuralist Film and the No Wave Movement

The Austrian avant-garde filmmaker Kurt Kren's experimental film series, produced throughout his life and distributed as a collection of films titled *Structuralist Films*, includes a four and a half minute-long film, *38/79 Sentimental Punk* (1979).⁶⁰ A recent retrospective exhibition of his films in 2018 at The Lab in San Francisco, *A Sentimental Punk: An Incomplete Kurt Kren Film Retrospective, 1956-1996*, took its title from this film ("A Sentimental").⁶¹ Shot at a punk festival in San Francisco, the film is made up of 36 photographs. Kren removes the lens of the slide projector and mounts his camera into the projector to shoot the slide-show of the photographs

⁶⁰ I managed to find this collection at the François-Mitterrand Library in Paris, formerly known as the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF). Kren's films are also available to purchase as a DVD boxset from the Austrian distributor INDEX which has a special focus on avant-garde film.

⁶¹ The Lab is a non-profit organization who featured other punk artists in its space, such as Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon, Bikini Kill's Kathleen Hanna, Dead Kennedy's Jello Biafra as well as the No Wave artists Lydia Lunch and Nan Goldin and underground filmmakers Jack Smith and Bruce Conner (Hockley-Smith).

directly using the projector light (Kren). This projector-based film made up of still shots captures the temporal simultaneity between the structuralist film practice and the punk movement, offering a cinematic evidence of this concurrence. Structuralist film, positioned as a post-pop art practice in the American avant-garde, is considered as one of the strictest embodiments of film formalism as “it turned away from visual sensation and towards the kind of self-reflexiveness posited in the 1930s by Walter Benjamin (but in the context of Soviet montage)” (Rees 72). Peter Gidal’s collection, *Structural Film Anthology*, first published in 1976, provides an insight into this formalist movement, capturing its peak moment. One of the most striking aspects of this movement is that the artists, such as Michael Snow and Hollis Frampton, were also involved in analyzing other formalist art works, creating a critical sphere in which subjective perceptions are shared through film writings as well film productions, as Gidal’s collection demonstrates. This creative-critical sphere of interaction bears notable similarities to the connection between the developments in French cinema (cinema verité style in particular) and the film journal *Cahiers Du Cinema*, a publication that was critical to the emergence of the French New Wave movement. Writing on Kren for the *Structuralist Film Anthology*, the experimental filmmaker Malcolm LeGrice views the sense of order ingrained in Kren’s filmmaking methods as the main element through which “a dialectic between perceiver and perceived” can be formed (60). From this perspective, the formal structure and editing order have been designed to render the content secondary, highlighting the conditions under which a communicative spectatorial experience is made possible through the form.⁶²

Along with Stan Brakhage and Andy Warhol, Kren is regarded as one of the most influential figures in the development of experimental cinema in terms of bringing a post-war European perspective to the American avant-garde (LeGrice 57-58). Kren’s chronology-oriented approach is reflected in his title choices; every film he ever made is titled with numbers indicating the order

⁶² For a detailed revisiting of the structuralist film era, specifically the works of Paul Sharits, Hollis Frampton, and Malcolm Le Grice, see Juan Karlos Kase’s article “Reassessing the Personal Registers and Anti-Illusionist Imperatives of the New Formal Film of the 1960s and ‘70s.” In this article, Kase diverges from the established understanding of structuralist film, demonstrated by the writings of LeGrice, Vidal and Rees, as a formalist practice devoid of expressionistic and subjectivist characteristics. Instead, he provides a counterpoint by looking at the autobiographic and affective possibilities in the specific films from the movement.

and the year of the film, for instance, *38/79 Sentimental Punk* is the 38th film Kern ever made and was made in 1979. *38/79 Sentimental Punk* encapsulates the structuralist approach via its completely blurred visuals; it is almost impossible to tell that what we see was shot at a punk festival as the extreme exposure of light makes the silhouettes and the space unrecognizable. The fact that the film is made up of still images rather than moving images also creates a stop-motion effect that is entirely a product of the way the film stills are put together through their projection. This repetitive still-image filmmaking technique resembles the screen-printing aesthetic that Andy Warhol's mass-produced prints are famous for. Even though A. L. Rees describes structuralism in experimental cinema as post-Warholian – owing to some of the filmmakers' resistance to museum culture – the desire to be free of narrative and symbolism in structuralist film, at least partially, resonates with Andy Warhol's earlier film and print works, such as the black and white *Screen Tests* series (now part of MoMA's film collection) that he completely abandoned after the late 1960s.⁶³ This juncture of film formalism, as a two-fold response to pop art in the form of both echoing its formalist aspect and rejecting its privatization, can also be traced through another subcultural emergence in New York, which embellished this avant-garde tension with a punk attitude: the art movement that became known as No Wave. Centred around the area known as the Lower East Side in New York,⁶⁴ the No Wave movement's cinematic outcomes, mostly in the form of 8mm and 16mm non-narrative films, have been described under the umbrella term Downtown Cinema, as well as a precursor to the notorious Cinema of Transgression, and in relation to the later development of mainstream American Independent Cinema epitomized by the films of Jim Jarmusch (Smith 173). Both the welfare-supported cheap film productions of the New York's No Wave scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as well as the "sex-wars" within second wave feminism precipitated by the emergence of pornography contributed to this cinematic era of derelict New York, which questioned visual pleasure in

⁶³ Ara Osterweil describes the reception of the experimental films Warhol made between 1963 and 1968 as "mythical," especially the *Screen Tests* that featured celebrities: "[T]heir existence as both cultural artifacts and aesthetic objects has been more mythical than meaningful. Not only were most of Warhol's films rarely screened in his lifetime and almost never commercially, but in 1970 the artist hoisted them out of circulation and pitched them into deeper obscurity, where they remained, unseen and dust-laden, until the artist's death in 1987" ("Screen" 100).

⁶⁴ The exhaustive archival collection of essays, interviews and autobiographical pieces on the history of "the Lower East Side," *Captured: A Film/Video History of the Lower East Side*, is a major resource that tackles the challenging task of documenting the irregular artistic interrelations within this ever-changing environment.

relation to the commodity, the art world and film theory (Hawkins 127). The main commonality between these art movements is their questioning of the formal orthodoxies of cultural media. As part of these connected mobilizations of formalist art, No Wave's centrifugal movement around filmmaking reproduced aspects of the music-oriented punk subculture of New York through a cinematic lens of underground artists whose work bridged the critical tone of structuralist film with the ironic celebration of superficiality and cliché in pop art. Starting from No Wave, this section moves on to trace the similar counter-cultural tensions and formalisms through queercore and French New Extremity.

No Wave combined the discussions around the formal subversion of film in the avant-garde underground and the musical anti-professionalism in punk subculture, or, in Mark Benedetti's words, attempted "to make good on the nihilistic challenge that punk rock promised but failed to deliver" ("Canonization" 265). It also captured a response to the cultural debates of the time around pornography especially through its later incarnation as the Cinema of Transgression which involved artists such as Richard Kern, Nick Zedd and Lydia Lunch. Before moving into the close readings of specific films starting with Bette Gordon's *Variety* (1983), I will briefly explicate here how these tensions in the avant-garde are intermingled with the discussions around the possibility of a feminist cinema free of the male gaze much discussed in feminist film theory. The works analyzed in this chapter demonstrate how the various movements in film art and theory surrounding these films engaged with the entrance of pornography into avant-garde film culture and its potential as a source of political vocabulary for queer, feminist, and punk aesthetics on screen.

Structuralist film has a degree of rigidity in terms of its tendency to follow certain characteristics; as the avant-garde film historian P. Adams Sitney has summarized, these were "fixed camera position, flicker effect, loop printing and re-photography from the screen" (Rees 74). While this formalism is considered to be an effort to "create a new form of aesthetic pleasure" (Rees 74), feminist film theory was concerned with the critique of patriarchal constructions of visual pleasure and allied itself with certain elitisms of counter cinema theory and its characteristic

“moral hard line” (Gaines, “Feminist” 399-400), similar to that of structuralism. This “moral hard line” codeveloped by feminist strands of avant-garde film theory or “countercinema’s politically correct aesthetics,” mostly informed by Laura Mulvey’s early writings, requested from cinema “the formal equivalent of egalitarian sexual relations” (Gaines, “Feminist” 399). From the post-Warholian anti-market perspective that insisted on form and shape over content, to the heated discussion around counter cinema as a potential means of disrupting visual pleasure in the late 1970s, this strand of avant-garde cinema discourse fundamentally represents the tension between form and content, either in the male-dominated milieu of structuralist film or the women’s cinema debates in feminist film theory. The film movements explored in this chapter, along with the respective case studies, are taken here as cinematic responses to this fundamental tension with regard to their subcultural environments and the usage of pornography and pastiche, dissolving the separateness of the feminist-cinema and counter-cinema debates.

Film scholar Teresa de Lauretis’ text, “Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women’s Cinema,” was instrumental in differentiating the role of the spectatorial address from the gendered boundaries of representation. With this influential text, de Lauretis carried the women’s cinema debate more towards constructing subject positions that conceive the “audience as a heterogenous community” rather than of one gender (302). In discussing the limits of a strict feminist formalism, de Lauretis described how certain films, specifically Lizzie Borden’s *Born in Flames* (1983) and Chantal Akerman’s *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Brussels* (1975), helped enrich the spectrum of subject-construction within feminist filmmaking beyond the formalist agenda of feminist film theory:

From the inscription of subjective space and duration inside the frame (a space of repetitions, silences, and discontinuities in *Jeanne Dielman*) to the construction of other discursive social spaces (the discontinuous but intersecting spaces of the women’s “networks” in *Born in Flames*), women’s cinema has undertaken a redefinition of both private and public space that may well answer the call for “a new language of desire” and may actually have met the demand for the ‘destruction of visual pleasure,’ if by that one alludes to the traditional, classical and modernist,

canons of aesthetic representation. (306)

By detecting the abundance of formal differences between the two films, de Lauretis stresses the differences among cinematic constructions both in terms of subjectivity and aesthetics, deliberately puncturing the 1970s project of delineating a formally unified women's cinema. She insists on highlighting the plurality of feminist approaches to creating transformative cinematic visions. For instance, *Born in Flames*, as a half-utopian, half-dystopian fake-documentary, directly addresses how much white feminism in the New Left had to learn from the diverse experiences of Black women in terms of maintaining a constructive collectivity that is grounded in difference rather than compromise. While *Born in Flames* methodologizes non-linearity as a formal element that embodies the necessity of intersectionality within feminist movements, Chantal Akerman's iconic *Jeanne Dielman* is regarded as *the* feminist example of counter cinema due to its aesthetic transcription of domestic oppression onto the film form (Gaines, "Feminist" 401). Jane Gaines reminds us that "these films were canonized over others" within feminist film theory due to their clear political commitment to centralizing the private/public spaces constructed and occupied by women. She further stresses that this canonization reflects the feminist climate of the time in which the demand for the politically correct representation of women was grounded in a sense of sexual correctness that marked certain pleasures incorrect ("Feminist" 387).⁶⁵ This does not necessarily mean that *Born in Flames* or *Jeanne Dielman* completely suit the agenda of politically correct feminism that Gaines explores through different feminist events and influential figures of the time. Yet their canonization reflects a feminist avant-garde elitism that favored formalist subversions of conventional narrative in cinema, echoing the structuralist perspective. Both films are relevant in terms of this formal subversion, and would also connect with the focus of this study as their filmmaking backgrounds are quite

⁶⁵ Gaines cites the famous Barnard Conference on Sexuality in 1982 which was held at Barnard College, under the full title "The Scholar and the Feminist IX: Towards a Politics of Sexuality" – a key event that was host to major debates around sex work, pornography, feminist and lesbian politics. Gaines takes the term "incorrect pleasures" from a panel discussion at this event to describe the heated atmosphere that involved sharp moral agendas and disagreements among feminist theorists and activists alike. For a detailed retrospective investigation of the effect of the Barnard Conference, see the 2016 special issue of *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, titled "Pleasure and Danger: Sexual Freedom and Feminism in the Twenty-First Century." The editor Suzanna Danuta Walters describes this atmosphere as follows: "If one lived—as I did—in New York City at the time and was an active feminist, the sense of sharply divided party lines was palpable and manifest in ways both physical (which side of the room you sat on during a lecture or debate) and intellectual (what you read, whom you cited)" (1).

DIY; *Born in Flames* in particular build on the hybrid-fake-factual punk aesthetic, particularly with its imaginary depiction of a feminist biker subculture whose members hunt men that harass women on the streets of New York. However, as Gaines observed, these films' often exalted position in the discourse of feminist cinema signals the cultivation of a feminist orthodoxy that excluded more politically ambiguous subcultural aesthetics, such as the punk films produced within the No Wave movement that used pornography to articulate a specific form of anti-sociality.

In the following section, I analyze one of the most narrative-based feature films from the No Wave era, *Variety*. I consider both the experimental punk writer Kathy Acker's writing of the film script as well as the director Bette Gordon's transfer of Acker's unorthodox script to the screen, and Gordon's own combination of influences from structuralist film and the French New Wave (she had a film education in Paris, "spending a lot of time in the cinema" and interviewed Godard [Hawkins and Gordon 134]). Drawing from Gaines' positioning of *Variety* as a "politically incorrect" feminist heresy, I argue that Gordon's filmmaking past (prior to *Variety*) connected to structuralism, and Acker's punk literary experimentalism, cultivated a feminist incorrectness on screen. Their disharmonic collaboration, echoing the inconsistencies within feminist cinema debates, also reflects the disorganized No Wave environment from which it emerged. From this disharmony, there emerges a punk aesthetic that uncovers the ignored role of female agency in pornography, taking the "queer negativity" torch from the trash cinema as well as the Warhol-produced trash trilogy directed by Paul Morrissey, *Flesh* (1968), *Trash* (1970), and *Heat* (1972). I situate *Variety* within the paradoxical aesthetics of the films considered in Chapter Three that favored embodying coping mechanisms on screen rather than the formal elitisms that can be found both in structuralism and the women's cinema debates. To clarify, this formalism was embodied, for example, both theoretically and practically, in film theorists Laura Mulvey's and Peter Wollen's film collaborations and their larger film group London Filmmaker's Co-op (LFMC).⁶⁶ Despite its narrative classicism, which ended up being subversive due to the

⁶⁶ This elitism is also touched upon by Colin Perry in his book *Radical Mainstream*, pointing out the problem of accessibility in terms of avant-garde "which sits at the core of the practice of counter cinema" (89). Perry cites Peter Wollen's defense of "cadre" audience in relation to his film *Penthesilea: Queen of the Amazons* (1974) made

unpopularity of narration within its artistic background, *Variety* still carries formal residues of this structuralist avant-garde perspective, typified in LFMC films such as *Penthesilea: Queen of the Amazons* (1974) and *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977). In fact, Bette Gordon cites Mulvey's influential essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" as a point of departure for her film *Variety*: "Everybody was reading this essay and responding to it and I too am thinking about it. Mulvey posits a kind of male spectator. I'm thinking yes, but, what can I do as a filmmaker [sic]" (Hawkins and Gordon 141). Perhaps as a result of this questioning, we find a hesitant narrative structure in *Variety*, which does not necessarily represent the traditions Mulvey criticized, as it is full of ruptures, which reflects the discrepancies between the collaborators. Nonetheless, Gordon and Acker still cinematically convey an interest in telling a linear story – with an ending – about a woman's increasing voyeurism and obsession with pornographic language and productions. Within this context, Acker and Gordon's choice of structured narrative, albeit featuring non-narrative ruptures, signifies a punk attitude due to the prevalence of anti-narrative stances in the artistic-critical environment from which *Variety* emerged – an intertwined environment of No Wave and structuralist film, as well as feminist film theory and pro-pornography activism.

At the Crossroads of No Wave and Women's Cinema: *Variety* (1983)

The 2010 documentary *Blank City* starts with the final scene of Amos Poe's 1976 film *Unmade Beds*, which can be described as a loose punk adaptation of Jean-Luc Godard's *À Bout de Souffle* (1960) (*Breathless*), featuring the painter Duncan Hannah, the filmmaker Eric Mitchell and Debbie Harry (Blondie), along with other No Wave underground figures from the era. The final scene of *Unmade Beds* comprises a static long medium shot in which a woman and a man are talking on a tiny balcony on the top floor of a tall New York building; the camera shoots from another balcony located at the eye level of the sitting woman. She asks, "If you could be anybody, who would you be?" and the man starts shouting names whilst directly looking and holding a

collaboratively with Laura Mulvey. Perry mentions how LFMC filmmakers, including Wollen and Mulvey, were from upper-class backgrounds and continues to explain what is found behind avant-garde elitisms: "Hidden within the conception of an 'ideal reader' and a 'cadre' audience, then, appears to be an oedipal position that regards itself, rather than establishment culture, as a principal social agent. As Bourdieu suggests, a radical social commitment may not in itself cancel out asymmetric class relations" (90).

gun targeted at the camera: “An outlaw, a film director, a rebel, a rock star, Paris, Casablanca, Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, Amos Poe, Eric Mitchell.” In referencing his own name in this long list, the director Poe grants the male protagonist the representative role of the outcast artist alongside his iconic predecessors, excluding women in the process altogether from this figuration. Exploring the connection between authorship and authority in relation to Vivienne Dick’s films from the No Wave movement, Denah Johnston states: “As Susan Sontag reminds us in *On Photography* (1977), the origin of the phraseology for *shooting* film relates to firearms, i.e. *shooting a gun*, thus marking the act of taking a still photograph as inherently violent” (132). Summing up this discursive connection between the camera and the gun – very fittingly the protagonist of *Unmade Beds* is a photographer – Poe’s scene manifests its own authority over how the rebellious artist is imagined in the world of No Wave. The fact that the filmmaker Celine Danhier chose this particular scene to open *Blank City* reflects the documentary’s signatory status as a distilling historiography since “the canon’s inherent sacralization has the tendency of marginalizing many involved, [...] which can produce distorted perspectives” (Benedetti, “Canonization” 276). *Blank City* establishes itself, from the start, as part of the canonization of No Wave, which in turn positions Poe’s male-centric self-reflexivity as a founding moment, exemplifying the methods of distillation that Mark Benedetti describes as “(non-)canon” since most of the historical designations of this movement also lack a clear evaluative criterion.⁶⁷

In “Downtown Godard,” Jonathan Everett Haynes traces the influence of Godard’s avant-garde filmmaking on the culture of Downtown New York. Here he focuses on the aesthetics of Amos Poe’s second feature film *Unmade Beds* (1976), connecting its French New Wave influence with Andy Warhol’s aesthetics, as well as with a punk sensibility. He states:

Poe capitalized on the extreme self-consciousness and vitality of the punk scene that he famously documented in his first feature [*The Blank Generation*]. He redirected

⁶⁷ With regards to the questions of canonization and historiography of subculture, Juan Karlos Kase, whose study on structuralist film is mentioned in this chapter’s introduction above, also analyzes *Blank City* in terms of the problematics of No Wave’s historicization, echoing the problem of depiction in “punk cinema.” For Kase, No Wave and Cinema of Transgression conveyed a mix of individualist and collective modes of overdetermined cinematic violations, hence, “*Blank City* communicates none of [the] libidinal fury or artistic intransigence” that rendered No Wave subject to the earlier punk subcultural theories led by Dick Hebdige (“The Centre” 327-329).

punk's DIY energy towards the cinema, with an eye toward inspiring *other people* to make films. (Haynes 64)

Poe's first feature *The Blank Generation* – analyzed in terms of its position within the canonization of punk cinema in Chapter Two – and his second feature, the more No Wave-situated *Unmade Beds*, both reveal clear aesthetic connections between punk subculture, 1960s underground cinema and the French New Wave. Godard, in this framework, is taken as “a psychology” by Haynes, a psychology that “rested in the idea that there was no essential difference between watching films and making them” (64). The late 1970s No Wave scene amalgamated French New Wave influence with the experimental films of the 1960s underground film culture led by Jonas Mekas and the Kuchar Brothers, including the films depicting queer subcultural spaces in the work of Kenneth Anger and John Smith.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, the energy of the punk subculture stemming from the underground venues fuelled the degree of transgressive-ness of this cinema towards a specific aesthetic that is now called “Cinema of Transgression.” Similar to the canonization of “punk cinema,” No Wave and its descendant Cinema of Transgression have been directly subjected to critical examinations with regard to the subcultural canonization processes (Benedetti, “Canonization;” Kase, “The Centre”). The creative outcomes of No Wave greatly vary both in content and medium, but its cinematic productions mostly consist of short, mid-length and sometimes feature films whose dissemination was similar to the organization of the live shows of the punk bands explored in Chapter Two. Music venues, such as CBGB, Max's Kansas City (Beth B and Hawkins 97), and the Kitchen (Gordon and Hawkins 135), were used as screening spaces for No Wave films. In an interview, Amos Poe mentions that the first screening of *The Black Generation* took place at CBGB (Sargeant 85).

⁶⁸ Beth B makes direct references to Kenneth Anger and John Smith in her interview with Joan Hawkins as major influences in her filmmaking (92). This influence could also be traced in the music video she directed for the one hit wonder new-wave/disco song “The Dominatrix Sleeps Tonight” by the band Dominatrix in 1984. This music video was displayed as part of *Looking at Music: Side 2* exhibition at Museum of Modern Art in 2009 which included the co-writer of *Variety*, Kathy Acker and the photographer Nan Goldin, as well as many other artists and filmmakers associated with No Wave. Beth B's music video conveys strong references to Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* as both videos combine sadomasochism as an aesthetic background with engine-fetish in popular culture (i.e. Anger's motorbike subculture versus Beth B's shiny sports cars), “in favour of an in-your-face approach and a more explicit engagement with popular culture and trash aesthetics” than say, the subtle diarism of another No Wave filmmaker Vivienne Dick (Edmond).

Released after *The Blank Generation*, *Unmade Beds* reveals how the iconography of *À Bout de Souffle* – and especially the fetishized doomed male figure – can be translated into the relentless underground of New York. This translation is also present in the early films of Jim Jarmusch, especially his first feature *Permanent Vacation* (1980) and the second *Stranger Than Paradise* (1983), with their adrift male protagonists, as well as Eric Mitchell’s films, such as *Red Italy* (1979) (which “uses locations like the Lower East Side, Coney Island and the Chelsea Hotel to recreate a punkishly reimagined postwar Europe” [Smith 174]) and *The Way It Is* (1985) which features Steve Buscemi and Vincent Gallo.⁶⁹ While *Unmade Beds* pays a parodic homage to Godard and demonstrates a male-centric imagination of the punk artistry of the time, *Blank City* has been criticized for its “retrospective tendencies,” in spite of the fact that it “delivers a more complete picture of No Wave” compared to the other retrospective documentaries, such as *Kill Your Idols* (2004) and *Lik Your Idols* (2007) (Goddard 128). Poe’s male-centrism can be observed in the scenes where the photographer protagonist converses with Debbie Harry’s character to arrange a photoshoot: this scene is shot by adopting the aesthetic of a photoshoot as Harry poses for the camera, very similar to the scene also featuring Harry in *The Blank Generation* analyzed in Chapter Two in relation to Godard’s *Le Petit Soldat*. In *Blank City*, Poe directly references French New Wave as one of his influences, accompanied by other interviewees, such as Eric Mitchell and Jim Jarmusch, both of whom then comment on the major role Poe played in the cultivation of this film movement.

This hand-in-hand canonization of Poe, Mitchell and No Wave, with respect to *Blank City*, as well as other documentaries, has been criticized by avant-garde and underground film scholars, as the diversity within the movement in terms of aesthetic, stylistic and subjective positionings do

⁶⁹ Harry Smith positions Eric Mitchell as a “leader of No Wave” due to his role as a co-founder of New Cinema, “along with James Nares and Becky Johnston” – “a video screening room on St Mark’s Place dedicated entirely to showing underground films. Although the venture didn’t last more than a year, it provided many underground filmmakers of the time the opportunity to actually get their work seen, and many others with an opportunity to actually see it” (174-175). Smith touches upon how these films paved the way for the “indie” style of independent American cinema that gained mainstream attention through the later successes of the names like Jarmusch, Buscemi and Gallo.

not answer to such attempts at distillation (Kase, “The Centre;” Goddard; Hawkins; Benedetti, “Canonization”). Mirroring the punk documentaries analyzed in Chapter Two, the discourse around No Wave is similarly preoccupied with what counts as the essential No Wave aesthetic and the problems with inclusion. Such issues of inclusion are also echoed in the discourse of feminist film theory in terms of what counts as a feminist text.⁷⁰ Hence, what is at stake here is a convergence between these discourses, the inclusion of particular texts within the canon of No Wave, punk cinema and the debate around Women’s Cinema. At the crossroads, we find Bette Gordon’s *Variety*, which has been attributed to all these discourses while conforming to none of their canonizing factors.

Situating Bette Gordon’s Cinema

No Wave, as a diverse movement, resists a male-centric historicization due to the abundance of women involved in the production of films, which vary considerably from the objectifying aesthetics of French New Wave towards a more formalistic approach to experimental filmmaking, which is, in J. Hoberman’s words, “located at the ‘perceptual’ edge of Poststructural Punk” (“Ericka Beckman”). Even though Hoberman describes the artist Ericka Beckman’s video works here, his description of a specific No Wave perspective (i.e. Poststructural Punk), which is at odds with the male-anti-hero-oriented French New Wave influences (e.g. Poe and Jarmusch), can be extended to many female filmmakers’ works from the era, such as Vivienne Dick, Beth B and Bette Gordon’s early structuralist short films and even to *Variety* despite its conventional format. *Variety* oscillates between this poststructural experimentation, a paradoxical identification with the French New Wave and pornographic subject-construction and a feminist incorrectness that defies the anti-narrative stance of formalism in feminist film theory. As Gaines observes,

Where does *Variety* fit into this picture? *Variety* is a watershed example of the abandonment of countercinema and correctness in feminist film theory in favour of

⁷⁰ B. Ruby Rich examined the debates in feminist film theory since the 1970s, starting from the naming issues around how to describe “the intersection of cinema and the women’s movement,” touching upon the differences between “feminist” labeling and other categorizations, such as “structuralist film” and “melodrama” (“The Crisis of Naming”).

formally “incorrect” (aesthetically excessive) classicism. [...] At the time it appeared, feminist film austerity was so synonymous with mainstream feminist moralism that it made sense for filmmaker Gordon to protest by shooting in the more classical style, diverging from the essentially Brechtian style of her earlier *Empty Suitcases*. (Gaines, “Feminist” 401)

No Wave manifested a punk indifference towards a collective pursuit of a unified aesthetic – such as one finds in the later Danish film movement Dogme 95 which favored minimalistic set design and real-life locations. The descendant of No Wave, Cinema of Transgression actually has a manifesto written by Nick Zedd who extensively worked with Lydia Lunch (part of the no wave/noise band of the time Teenage Jesus and Circle Jerks) and relied on her provocative performativity. Despite the emergence of such a manifesto within its sphere, the early genesis of No Wave entailed scattered practices (as the “no wave” term indicates) rather than a designated filmmaking method, owing to the diverse backgrounds of the artists involved. Emerging from structuralist and No Wave influences, therefore, *Variety* articulated a feminist incorrectness within a storyline that is full of unresolved conflicts. Mark Benedetti notes that, alongside Kathryn Bigelow and Jim Jarmusch, Bette Gordon also has been omitted from No Wave history partially due to her later more narrative-oriented films that are less experimental compared to that of key figures of No Wave such as Vivienne Dick, James Nares and Beth B and Scott B (“Canonization” 275). I hereby resituate *Variety* in relation to its ignored connections to the more experimental sections of No Wave and specifically Kathy Acker’s unique contribution to the use of language that connects *Variety* more closely to the punk aesthetics of reclaiming negativity that is found in trash cinema’s use of narrative. A comparable aesthetic of reclamation can also be found in Kathy Acker’s collaboration with the avant-garde punk band The Mekons.⁷¹

Variety exemplifies the tension between avant-garde and punk, as well as feminist elitism and

⁷¹ Acker and The Mekons made an album together, titled “Pussy, King of Pirates” using Acker’s book with the same title referencing the classic novel *Treasure Island*. The influences of Eastern drone music which pervaded the Downtown culture at the time can be heard in this album which can also be observed in Acker’s writing. In *Blood and Guts in High School*, the protagonist travels to Iran at some point because she has an Iranian slave owner, which is “alluding to 1979 Iranian hostage crisis: an event that played out, in reverse terms, America’s treatment of less-powerful countries” (Henderson 118).

feminist incorrectness (which partially belonged to a gay underground rather than the women's movement). As Hawkins notes, the Downtown movement had within its sphere artists who worked in the sex industry and were not completely aligned with anti-porn second-wave feminism and its privileged position within the academy: "Later, the AIDS crisis galvanized the entire Downtown movement, and the women I'm writing about here joined forces with ACT-UP in a manner that put sexuality and race (rather than just gender) front and center in their identity formation" (124). In fact, this specific era, from late 1975 up until the 2000s, is covered in Joan Hawkins' collection *Downtown Film and TV Culture: 1975-2001*, which consists of essays and interviews with filmmakers, including *Variety's* director and scholar Bette Gordon and Beth B, who collaboratively made short and mid-length films with her then-partner Scott B. We find an intense focus on the subjective perspectives of the artists of the time in this collection, positioning different scholarly approaches to No Wave around the personal interviews that closely and carefully explore the diverse perspectives. In that sense, it is a resource that can be considered akin to the other "punk cinema" books that used similar methods, dealing with the issues of capturing authenticity, the "reality" and "spirit" of a specific counter-cultural wave. Unlike the other large essay and interview collection, *Captured: A Film/Video History of the Lower East Side*, which also pays special attention to the perspectives of those who were directly involved, *Downtown Film and TV* engages closely with the women involved in the scene. As Maura Edmond also notes, women were "absolutely central" and "no other film movement could claim the same" ("Deracination").

Some figures from this movement, such as Lydia Lunch who features in the films of Richard Kern, Vivienne Dick, Beth B and Bette Gordon, indicated that they did not identify themselves with the punk subculture (Lunch 28). However, some others, such as Beth B did not hesitate to connect their art with the influence of punk:

Punk/No Wave Cinema is a convenient catch phrase for many different attitudes, genres and approaches that people were using at that time. The punk music scene in London was hugely influential and we were listening to the Clash and Sex Pistols. (Hawkins and Beth B 92)

While these personal associations can fluctuate, the aforementioned collections make it clear that the subcultural sphere of punk in New York, especially the Lower East Side, directly affected the creative atmosphere and viability of art-making. Hence, the main concern here is to illustrate that the aesthetic alignments are not only on the level of the moving image, but also on the level of the politics of production. *Variety*, with its stylistic connections to punk together with its collaborative production background, problematizes the canonized versions of No Wave.

Referentiality and Disharmony: The Collaboration Between Bette Gordon and Kathy Acker

Bette Gordon engaged with feminist film theory at the time of making *Variety* and contributed to one of the key relevant collections *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*. In her contribution, she expresses her distance from the idea of “creating a separate or alternative feminist erotica” outside of the existing cultural domain, explaining her interest in challenging the limitations of the domain from within and how she sees pornography as “a place to investigate how sexuality is constructed” (420). Gordon’s perspective partially explains why *Variety* follows a narrative arc, despite the ruptures in it, as its narration works towards subverting the expectations that it sets out stylistically. *Variety*’s overall aesthetic is nonetheless quite fragmented as a result of the differences between Bette Gordon and her co-writer Kathy Acker. These differences are outlined in detail by Kevin L. Ferguson in his exploration of Acker’s original script notes for the film (“held in the special collections at Duke University’s Rubenstein Library” [52]), which include written comments that reveal the, at times heated, communications between the co-writers. As the scholarship on Acker’s writing demonstrates, there are established connections between her heavily-referential literary works (which have been considered inseparable from her personal life [Viegner and Wark]) and the trajectory of avant-garde and postmodern literature, late capitalism, punk and feminist movements (Henderson, Sciolino, Colby). Speaking in Alan Benson’s 1984 TV documentary, *Kathy Acker*, she cites the emergence of punk subculture as an artistic “acting out” that closely resonated with her life-long feeling of alienation as well as her critical view of art:

I always felt like a freak and suddenly there were other people who felt the same way.

It was the ability to combine art with circumstances of life before art was on a white

pedestal and in an ivory tower. And though I loved art, I couldn't bear it. [...] For me it was the first time I could ever talk to people, because I could say honestly what I was feeling in what I was doing. Before, I didn't quite understand what I was doing with my work.

This close association with punk exemplified by her collaborations and the influence of William S. Burroughs in her writing style of pastiche and cut-up – which has been described as downright “plagiarism” as a writing method (Mintcheva 268) – and her experimental style of mixing prose and critical writing (described as “punk feminist tropology” by Henderson) were all fused within her ever-present themes of sexual ambiguity, masochism, societal oppression and identity. Bringing these elements together rendered Acker a peerless companion to Gordon's interest in exploring the theme of pornography in *Variety*. Gordon's involvement in the Downtown underground, the structuralist film movement and feminist scholarship also provided fertile background for their perspectives to mingle. Naturally, however, their connections to these subcultural emergences and the way they engaged with pornography and narrative differed. For instance, the sexually graphic scenes written by Acker and her suggestions of improvisation around specific key dialogues were not incorporated into the film. As Ferguson writes, “Gordon's challenge was to work within a narrative structure that would have precluded the kind of extreme linguistic experimentation Acker suggested. [...] To film images as explicit as these would have ruined any possibility that *Variety* be seen more widely” (Kevin L. Ferguson 70). It is not a surprise that Acker suggested such graphicness, as her writing also incorporates pornography to explore the limits and constructions of such language in terms of what it regulates.

Acker's breakthrough experimental novel with strong oedipal themes, *Blood and Guts in High School*, for example, blends the concept of *Bildungsroman* and cut-up, featuring a female character whose relationship to an ambiguous father figure is intermingled with the development of her sexuality within a sex trafficking narrative. It presents an abstract literary landscape alongside abstract drawings delving into the role of patriarchal oppression in the production of ambivalent sexualities. In doing so, pain and violence are rendered as constructive elements in the development of sexual agency, through the theme of slavery combined with masochism. This

book directly copies excerpts from both literary and critical texts, such as Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, in relation to the concept of desire that "is capable of putting to question the established order of a society [sic]" (Acker 125). Acker's unrestrained copy-paste referentiality, blending critical thought with experimental literariness, subjects the referenced texts written by men to female appropriation. As such, Acker's experimental writings do not represent a form of female identity that is completely emancipated from patriarchal society. Rather, Acker's experimentalism deals with regulatory biopolitics in Foucauldian terms, and how sexual violence can produce a form of identity struggle that makes resistance imaginable through negative projection. Acker deliberately uses pornographic language that was ostensibly not designed for women to utilize – "the language of the oppressor," as Andrea Dworkin would describe it – to confront what it is about this language that is oppressive and its potential as a tool for women and queers to engineer an instrument for coping with identity-related and cultural conflicts. As the most recent scholarship on Acker shows (Wark; Bey), Acker's writing opens up an aesthetic site for transformation (that diverges from emancipation) of the body, and transgender experience in particular, which I argue is also present in *Variety* through the sex monologues Acker wrote.⁷²

Bette Gordon similarly explores the limits of this type of subject-construction within the language of her short film *Anybody's Woman* – a project that she used in order to receive funding from the German television company ZDF (\$80,000, a markedly large sum compared to that usually available to No Wave film productions) to make *Variety* (Gordon and Hawkins 141).⁷³ Similar to how Acker directly copied the names for her books from canonical novels that are perceived to be milestones in the development of modernist literature, such as *Don Quixote* and *Great Expectations*, Gordon named *Anybody's Woman* after "the only woman director to survive in the U.S. motion picture industry during the studio system's Golden Era" (Gaines, "Dorothy"), Dorothy Azner, who directed the Paramount Pictures film *Anybody's Woman* in 1930. Gordon

⁷² Kevin L. Ferguson's article reveals the sections written by Acker both through the script notes from the "Kathy Acker Papers" at the Duke University Library and by citing excerpts from a number of interviews with Gordon in which she also mentions Acker's parts in the script (56, 73).

⁷³ Beth B also received funding from ZDF later in her career and cites ZDF as "the salvation of the 90s, which financed filmmakers like Jim Jarmusch, Mark Rapaport, Hal Hartley, and other" (Beth B and Hawkins 97).

states that she wrote down the idea behind *Anybody's Woman* and sent it to Acker as a starting point for the script of *Variety*, which then in return became an "Acker script" (Kevin L. Ferguson 56). Both artists have been described as "poststructuralist" in different contexts: Acker due to her "scepticism regarding the constative efficacy of language" (Sciolino 437), Gordon (as already noted) in relation to her referentiality and departure from structuralist film.

***Variety's* Antisocial Feminism**

On the grounds of the emerging disharmony in Gordon and Acker's collaboration, the question of authentic representation becomes problematized in *Variety*, which typifies the paradox of "punk cinema" that relied on a distillation of punk history for its public recognition: *Variety* also followed the production code, leaving pornography out of its visual language while suggesting the potential shock effect of pornography through the spoken word. This tension on the level of cinematic language – pornography caught between moving image and the written speech – materializes the impossibility of depiction that "punk cinema" also suffered from in terms of capturing experiential knowledge of the subculture. Acker's cut-up writing creates an ironically doomed authenticity for its masochist female figure in her search for sexual agency within the oppressive limitations of New York's sex industry.

In the twenty-four minute long *Anybody's Woman*, we also find an inverse exploration of pornographic language employed to express the experience of being subjected to pornographic material. Gordon asked two of her Downtown friends to converse about their experiences of watching porn. A sharing of experiences between two people happens in the infamous *Variety* Theater, where we see a man (Spalding Grey) and a woman (Nancy Reilly) in their seats in a shot composition that is more designed to depict the facial mannerisms of cinemagoers than a conversation, as both actors are facing towards the screen. They are positioned as if they are talking to the spectator rather than to each other, which reflects the pornographic visual materials' direct address to the spectator by way of point-of-view angles. *Variety*, on the other hand, does not involve such self-awareness in terms of the camera's address. It functions within

the parameters of the fourth wall and maintains a degree of reality-effect grounded in the conventional narrative methods, such as the establishing montage sequence that depicts the protagonist's bodybuilding training. In fact, the main protagonist of *Variety* is a bodybuilder, just like Kathy Acker herself, who, in 1984 Benson's portrait of her, cites bodybuilding as an opportunity to "change your body the way you want" and "a physical form of what I do in my writing."

Variety begins with a scene where the protagonist, Christine (Sandy McLoad), is at the gym bodybuilding. She starts working as a clerk at a porn theatre and becomes obsessed with an older mafia mogul and follows him around in seemingly dangerous areas only populated by men. She develops a habit of recounting unsolicited pornographic stories to her boyfriend who does not appear to welcome them as he gradually seems disturbed by her remarks. She takes the liberty of leaving her work booth to watch the films she is supposed to sell tickets for, and walks into sex shops under the suspicious gaze of the otherwise all-male clientele. In this narrative, the echoes of Acker's writing resonate strongly, even though, as Kevin L. Ferguson states, "a quick glance at the script notes [...] confirms how unfamiliar Acker was with screenwriting conventions" (56). It is precisely Acker's unorthodox writing that contributed an alienating "politically incorrect" punk sensibility to the film which jars slightly with its narrative.

Christine finds agency in the habits and activities that seem to put her in danger, exploring the risky possibilities of engaging with the consumption practices of the newly blossomed underground sex industry in New York, which excluded women from its social spaces unless they were performers. We see that Christine regularly meets in the pub with her girlfriends (the famous No Wave-era photographer Nan Goldin plays Christine's friend Nan in the film)⁷⁴ – an activity that she later stops doing, raising concerns among her friends as the unanswered phone calls to her apartment suggest. Even though the film's plot revolves around Christine, in the two scenes where the women socialize and have conversations around sex work and relationships,

⁷⁴ Nan Goldin also worked as a set photographer and published a photobook documenting the shooting of the film, titled *Variety: Photographs by Nan Goldin* (Ferguson 55).

there is no centralization of Christine; we barely see her speak. The focus is on whoever speaks and this creates a rupture in the storyline as we delve in and out of the suspense that surrounds Christine's life, de-essentializing the protagonist temporarily. This multiplies the perspective offered through the protagonist and links her subjectivity with the other women who also work in similar jobs.

A similar rupture can be found in the scenes where she performs her pornographic storytelling for her boyfriend who becomes distressed by this action. One of these moments take place in Christine's boyfriend's car where the static shot from the backseat of the car – which alludes to a “hidden camera” effect – shows Christine and her boyfriend sitting on the front seats while Christine shares a sex story, interrupting her boyfriend who is trying to tell her about his job. Throughout the whole film, her relationship to her boyfriend is limited to these interactions where he expects to have a conversation about himself which is interrupted by Christine's sex stories. Her unsolicited pornographic monologues imposed on her boyfriend, which mostly involves descriptions of women's bodily movements seducing men and awaiting penetration, positions the boyfriend character as merely an addressee for Christine's practice of verbalizing a pornographic male gaze. This practice confronts the male character while producing a perspective shift in terms of the pornographic address usually evident in the male gaze of hardcore heterosexual porn which conventionally objectifies the female body.

The inclusion of these confrontational moments instigated by Christine's pornographic remarks in the film augments the alienating effect of the pornographic language itself as they are not narratively connected to the scenes that come before or after. Because the scenes themselves are not visually explicit, the film eschews the bodily representation of pornography, rendering pornography first and foremost a discursively constructed aesthetic. While pornographic speech turns into a weapon for Christine to assert her agency, *Variety* becomes more about exploring the possibilities of transporting the body beyond the encumbering gendered relations of the male-centered environments than about emancipation.

The fact that Gordon left out the bodily explicitness of Acker's initial writing and Acker came up with these out-of-context sex monologues (Kevin L. Ferguson 56), results in a filmic emphasis on the ways in which the sex industry imagines the female body as an object. Once the bodily signifiers are reduced to speech that is not supposed to be voiced by Christine, there emerges a residue, an alienating effect, from her occupying the role of "her own undoing" which can be explained by the concept of antisocial feminism, "a form of feminism preoccupied with negativity and negation" (Halberstam, *The Queer Art* 129-133). Halberstam derives this concept from the antisocial thesis in queer theory, which describes the reclamation of excluded statuses of queer subjects and the association of queerness with the death drive. It is informed by the concept of "unbecoming woman" by way of "dedicating itself completely and ferociously to the destruction of self and other" (Halberstam 138). In order to capture the self-destructive aspects of desire awaiting women, Gordon and Acker's disjunctive narrative emphasizes a variety of out-of-context placements of the female protagonist, the most prominent example being these sex monologues which create "an anarchic refusal of coherence and prospective forms of agency" (Halberstam 136).

Quite fittingly, Halberstam associates this act of unbecoming with collage and cut-up techniques which "bind[s] the threat of castration to the menace of female violence and to the promise of transformation" (136). In fact, this five-minute-long car scene in *Variety* conveys a cut-up aesthetic, not only because of its out-of-context-ness in the narrative, but also because it indirectly references Gordon's earlier work. It is shot almost exactly like Gordon's earlier, clearly structuralist film made collaboratively with her then-partner James Benning, titled *The United States of America* (1975) which consists entirely of one static camera shot from a still camera positioned on the back seat of a couple's car.

The United States of America, which is twenty-seven minutes long, is described as "pure road movie, absent of character goals or desire" (Taubin) and is devoid of any dialogue, only including

a soundtrack (seemingly diegetic) coming from the car's radio. Gordon is in the film, mostly sitting in the passenger seat while Benning drives the car. *The United* was considered at the time "a very smart riff on" Michael Snow's highly regarded structuralist film *Wavelength* (1967) (Taubin). *Variety*'s car scene is imbued with a stillness that can also be found in the motionlessness of the camera (and its fixed lens) in *The United*. In comparison to the "purity" of *The United* in terms of mise-en-scène, however, it is even more static: the car does not move, there is no destination for the couple and Christine's speech written by Acker dominates the space of the scene, unlike the silence between the couple in *The United*. Gordon here creates a cut-up aesthetic by inserting Acker's pornographic text into the restaged stillness of her earlier structuralist film, adding an extra layer of stillness by stopping the car, replacing the silence between the couple and car radio (which is the core of the "pure road movie" element) with an antisocial feminist speech. Acker's disruptive role reversals "imply the residue of a certain understanding of trans" according to Marquis Bey, and this implication embellishes this scene with a cut-up aesthetic that goes beyond a role reversal between men and women on the level of pornography.

As Halberstam noted, this type of antisocial feminism articulates "a deeply antisocial politics that casts patriarchy as not just a form of male domination but as the formal production of sense, mastery, and meaning" (108). Halberstam connects this antisocial politics with Valerie Solanas and her influential *SCUM Manifesto* (short for "society for cutting up men").⁷⁵ However, his description of patriarchy's "formal production of sense" here also translates Christine's act of making sense of her otherness (or out-of-context-ness in the male-centric world) through a self-destructive identification with the pornographic. This production of sense through a self-destructive identification with the male subject-position is furthered with Christine's

⁷⁵ The writer Andrea Long Chu's book *Females*, influenced by Valerie Solanas' infamous play *Up Your Ass*, summarizes how Solanas came to be known in the public sphere: "Solanas is mainly remembered for two things: self-publishing the *SCUM Manifesto* in 1967, a darkly funny polemic against the government, the money system, all men, and most women; and shooting artist Andy Warhol at his studio, the Factory, then located on Union Square West in Manhattan, in 1968. The play usually appears as a possible motive for the shooting: Since sending him a copy of the script in 1965, Valerie had been nagging Andy to produce *Up Your Ass*, and her paranoia that he was playing her increased in tandem with his indifference" (16). Solanas' story and this incident with Andy Warhol gave way to the 1990s low-budget film *I Shot Andy Warhol*, featuring Lily Taylor.

bodybuilding and body transforming exercises, echoing Acker's obsession with bodybuilding as an opportunity to "change your body the way you want." From this point-of-view, Christine's transformation can easily give way to a trans reading.

After the car scene, there is a meditation scene in which Christine lies down by the window and we hear a male voice dictating which part of the body should be focused on during the meditation. There is a cut to a collage of close-up shots depicting men shaking hands while we still hear the meditation narrator's voice, implying that Christine is imagining a bunch of men shaking hands. After this meditation scene, we see her bodybuilding, swimming and finally going into an adult shop to watch a pornographic film in a booth followed by another scene where, again, she begins a sex-themed monologue while her boyfriend plays a pinball machine. Just before she starts her monologue, there is an almost minute-long close-up shot of the boyfriend's bottom across the pinball machine. The level of the camera does not directly indicate Christine's point-of-view as she stands on the other side of the machine, but rather implies a voyeuristic gaze that is more associated with pornographic close-ups.

These rupturing audio-visuals, which function more along the lines of experimentalism than a narrative progression, indicate *Variety's* aesthetic lack of commitment to either approach as well as the collaborative dysfunctions between Gordon and Acker. Acker's "politically incorrect" writing, which reclaims a sexual positioning that is not supposed to be hers, has been associated with punk due to her use of anti-social behaviors and negative labels around sexual taboos in her writing. This can be compared to Waters' trash aesthetics and cinematic embrace of the abject, which is described as "in part a response to censorship, turning an accusation into something to be celebrated" (Barefoot 61). To give the most famous moment of trash cinema as an example, Divine actually eating dog faeces in Waters' *Pink Flamingos* is not far away from Christine's invasive monologues that both underline the objectification of the female body as well as the negative value attached to pornography. Both *Variety* and Waters' trash aesthetics articulate an identification with negative value where one partially associates themselves with what society uses to objectify, marginalize, or exclude them in the first place. Christine imbricates herself into

a sex industry that does not give room to her subjectivity, nor the possibility of positive identification. Hence, *Variety*'s connection to queer negativity, that we also find in Derek Jarman's paradoxical modernist approach to queer eros as well as Waters' cinema, stems from this activity of reclaiming a supposedly degraded status as a source of agency.

There is an ending to the plot in *Variety*, albeit an open one. Christine finally manages to arrange a meeting over the phone with her obsession, the highly masculine older mafia character she keeps following throughout the movie. At the end, we see the place where they arranged to meet, but we do not see the characters meeting, so whether they met up or not is left to the spectator's imagination. Kevin L. Ferguson provides an explanation of this sequence (but also perhaps complicates this ending in his detailed research into *Variety*) revealing an important anecdote about the final scene that deserves quotation at length given its relevance to my analysis of *Variety* as an antisocial feminist text:

But the most telling creative difference between Acker and Gordon is found in the last line of dialogue Acker wrote, meant to be spoken by Christine over the final shot of the empty street corner: "Now it's time for me to go travelling," referencing an earlier reflective dialogue Christine spoke into the mirror: "I should dye my hair white and go travelling." In a deviation from Acker's notes, the film's last line of dialogue is Christine saying "You meet me here" on the phone to Louie, and there is no voice-over during the last shot of the empty street. By omitting the last voice-over line about traveling, the film is better able to achieve a balance between narrative and avant-garde, but it also undermines the framework Acker established of viewers identifying with Christine in her journey to experience the larger physical world around her. Gordon tells me the ending is "stolen from Antonioni, from *L'Eclisse* (1962)," and feels that although it contradicts Acker's specific notes for *Variety*, it actually more closely captures the spirit of ambiguity that Acker had asked for: as with Antonioni, the problem with *Variety* was not that women could have sexuality but that the film refused a simple conclusion to the question of female desire. (74)

I have explained this ambiguity that Ferguson refers to as an articulation of antisocial feminist

subject-construction that disrupts both the male gaze as well as the formalism expected of women's cinema. In doing so, the film's treatment of the gaze influenced by the formalism of the structuralist film, combined with Acker's writing, creates an alienating effect that could be associated with trans experience since the identification process is disrupted. On the other hand, its departure from the underground in terms of reception conditions, its format in particular as a feature film to be screened in cinemas, rather than the format of the experimental short or mid-length films to be screened at the music venues (like most of the other No Wave and Cinema of Transgression films), positions *Variety* more on the edge of the mainstream.

The film both represents an anti-social feminist stance, as part of a rare film movement in which women gave shape to its central formalist tendencies, as well as a punk attitude in terms of rupturing a specific formalism that feminist film theory expected from feminist filmmaking at the time. This in-between-ness of *Variety* not only reflects the avant-garde tension around formalism in filmmaking, but also how this tension is echoed in feminist film politics. By way of Acker's writing of Christine as an ambiguously characterized protagonist who occupies spaces and positions designed to exclude her, *Variety* opens up possibilities for audience interpretation which attests to the film's "writerly" qualities. The disharmonic collaboration between the creators produces filmic ambiguities that disrupt the identificatory functions of narrative cinema. *Variety* has never been associated with "punk cinema," yet its engagement with No Wave, feminism and structuralist film creates an aesthetic with meanings are hard to identify, pointing to a negotiation of form, style and identity. This struggle of *Variety* is what signals its punk aesthetic. It does not shy away from pornographic language or narrative cinema, in order to be able to articulate agency over oppressive positions that initially excludes the subject who reclaims agency, reflecting punk's vicious cycle between assimilation by and reclamation from the mainstream. A similar negativity articulated through appropriating the oppressive images can be found in the queercore movement on a more direct subcultural level as it engages with hardcore punk aesthetics, which is the focus of next section.

The Queercore Movement and Bruce LaBruce's Cinema: *No Skin Off My Ass* (1991)

As the punk subculture merged with the influence of European film movements, especially the

French New Wave, in the form of No Wave in New York in the early 1980s, the queercore movement which emerged in the late 1980s in Canada and San Francisco epitomized a similar reciprocity between cinema and musical subcultures. Before delving into queercore, it is noteworthy that both Derek Jarman and Pedro Almodóvar worked with musical media later in their careers, albeit on a much more mainstream level than their earlier punk productions: Jarman made music videos for Marianne Faithful and The Smiths throughout the 1980s, and Pet Shop Boys in 1990s, and Almodóvar made a gay musical, which was described as a “mainstream crisis comedy,” *Los Amantes Pasajeros (I’m So Excited)* (2013) with an estimated budget of €5,000,000 (Triana-Toribio, “Spanish Cinema” 2019). A further significant development was that the post-Stonewall rise of gay politics throughout the 1980s, as a response to vast governmental negligence and public stigma towards the AIDS crisis, led to various audio-visual productions both on the independent and mainstream level. José Arroyo directly connects AIDS with the emergence of New Queer Cinema noting how “AIDS has affected what amounts to an epistemic shift in gay culture” (92). Moving on from Arroyo’s anchoring of this moment, Monica B. Pearl also notes that “AIDS needed representation, partly because it was considered unrepresentable” (27). From this context, there emerged a type of mainstream representation for gay subjectivity associated with the AIDS stigma, and one of the peak moments in cinema that reflects a point of entrance for the commercialization of gay representation is when the AIDS-themed drama *Philadelphia* featuring Tom Hanks enjoyed significant box-office success in 1993. In fact, Pearl describes *Philadelphia* as the opposite of New Queer Cinema (33).

This mainstreaming of gay representation then conflicted with a certain anarchic strand of queer politics which developed during the same era and is demonstrated by the emergence of queercore dating back to 1985 – a movement that is known for its negational and radical artistic practices that satirize the exclusionary dynamics of heteronormative *and* homonormative aspects of society. The queercore movement arose from this conflict between the mainstream gay culture that viewed gay-marriage as the epitome of equality and the understanding of queer activism as an anti-establishment reaction. This latter activism broke “from earlier, more conciliatory gay and lesbian dispositions, and associated with such militant organizations as the AIDS Coalition

to Unleash Power (ACT-UP), the Lesbian Avengers and [...] the Queer Nation” (Nault, *Queercore* 6). Due to the chronologically aligned occurrence of AIDS activism and queercore, Curran Nault observes a methodological association between the two while acknowledging that “some in the queercore community disagreed with the politics of organizations like ACT-UP” (*Queercore* 79) because of their gender politics that prioritized gay men’s representation (*Queercore* 102). Utilizing punk negativity as a way to express the frustration with the assimilationist strategies, queercore articulated, mostly through satire and irony in their zines and songs, how legal emancipation and political correctness in the mainstream functioned hand in hand with the commercialization methods of capitalism.

Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman analyze the creative practices of the influential organization Queer Nation,⁷⁶ and their “strongest tactical moments” within the context of guerrilla LGBT activism in 1990s America, including the organization’s billboard parodies of corporate ads and commodity designs that critically mocked famous brands and TV figures that exploited gay connotations without proper representation and engagement (e.g. *The Simpsons* and GAP). Their tactics were “to cross borders, to occupy spaces, and to mime the privileges of normality – in short, to stimulate ‘the national’ with a camp inflection” (Berlant and Freeman 196). Freeman and Berlant explain these tactics through the concept of “queer nationality” – a political position that imagines a utopian nationalistic identity that, through direct action, breaks out of the systemic homophobia ingrained in the national cultures. They emphasize how disidentification with nationalism, especially in the context of American nationality in the 1990s, was not an option for Queer Nation due to the immediate need for state support, especially in terms of health and safety (197). In addition to the analyses of these tactics, Berlant and Freeman also delve into the fanzine aesthetics that came out of “the negativity of national life for non-

⁷⁶ Queer Nation started in New York in the early 1990s as a gay rights activist group known for their direct actions and were mostly perceived as “militant” compared to the similar LGBT activism at the time (Gray). See Mary L. Gray’s detailed account of the rhetoric Queer Nation used that diverged from more mainstream human rights activists. Gray charts the organization’s turbulent communications with the mainstream media which led to their short-lived but impactful status. In fact, Gray’s article borrows its title from the discourse around short-lived punk subcultures, paralleling the crisis of assimilation that also surrounds punk subcultures: “Queer Nation is Dead/Long Live Queer Nation.” This is also a reference to an article published in 1991 about the organization in the LGBT newspaper, San Francisco Bay Times (Gray).

white and/or nonmale queers” (200). In doing so, they provide a larger context for a queer counter-politics that was more interested in disidentification from nationalism than entrance into the nationalistic social structure of representation.⁷⁷

Berlant and Freeman describe a practice of “counterproductivity” pertaining to how queer fanzines repudiated the promise and privilege of a safe community by way of questioning the rules of sexual intelligibility through making “obscenity” a political speech. The “obscene” politics of the queercore movement’s zine aesthetics is directly connected to the Toronto-based fanzine BIMBOX that Berlant and Freeman explore in their article, and especially the fanzine’s manifesto “Bitch Nation.” Even though Berlant and Freeman’s article seems to be unaware of the queercore movement that emerged at the same time as the zine BIMBOX, it detects, in the zine’s XEROX-produced non-profit practice, a refusal of a property relation based on ownership (220). Playing with the stereotypical language and imagery around the female body and lesbianism, they overturned the meaning of sexual consent “by reversing the direction of embarrassment from the spectacle toward the spectator” (Berlant and Freeman 222). While Queer Nation’s strategies around both reclaiming and seeking to disrupt the space of mainstream representation through parody paralleled Derek Jarman’s queer modernism, LaBruce’s films in the early 1990s emerged directly out of the negational punk methods of art production evident within the radical sexual assertions of queer fanzine culture.

The early films of LaBruce, as productions that came out of the queercore movement, are clearly symptomatic of the intersections of punk and queer subcultures on screen that the “punk cinema” literature almost completely excludes. This exclusion is connected to the assimilation of certain aspects of both “punk” and “queer” subcultures into the mainstream media and activism, epitomized by the popular television streaming and cable services’ interest in these topics. The

⁷⁷ José Esteban Muñoz’s influential theory of disidentification describes “a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology” (“The White” 83). Muñoz’s own scholarly tactic of analyzing minoritarian subjects has been an influence in cultural studies in terms of adopting queer methodologies that insist on centralizing underground, punk and radical artists’ works as well as the researcher’s personal connection/fandom for these arts.

most recent examples of such assimilatory collaborations are the recent 4-part talking-head style documentary series produced by Iggy Pop, *Punk* (2019), for the cable channel Epix, and the popular Netflix series *Queer Eye* (2018) based on the older American reality television program *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003) that is designed to present the straight audience “gay men teaching [...] the ‘virtues’ of shopping” with “its non-threatening images of success, beauty, wealth and above all, consumer capitalism” (Nault, *Queercore* 9). By centralizing queercore as one of the main generators of punk aesthetics in cinema, this section aims to explore how both “punk” and “queer” subcultural ideals and aesthetics are reclaimed in LaBruce’s films in parallel with queercore’s separatist approach “against such co-optations of ‘queer’ by the forces of capitalism and homonormativity” (Nault, *Queercore* 9). As LaBruce also repeatedly emphasizes in his works, the key similarity between punk and queer is their dual process of becoming and rejecting mainstream enterprises. From reclamation to commercialization to reclamation again, the resonances of the words “punk” and “queer” themselves point to a narrative of assimilation, or in nihilistic words, a path to their metaphorical death. Queercore can be seen as their momentary conjoined reincarnation until LaBruce performatively announced queercore’s death too, in 1995, in his article “Notes from a Reluctant Pornographer” (197).

In the world of queercore, through the collective productions of music videos and films influenced by zine-making, pornography is one of the main enablers of political critique on screen at this crossroads of punk failure and queer negativity. Within the territory of postmodern pastiche, LaBruce’s early films reinstated the ideals that punk has been said to hold and have lost, from DIY ethics to a nihilist aggression against social norms. LaBruce’s oeuvre involves visual and musical references to punk subculture, and consists of low-budget productions that can be considered self-reflexive enough to meet Stacy Thompson’s criteria for “punk cinema.” However, his early films in particular, such as *No Skin off My Ass* (1991), and later productions *Super 8 ½* (1994), *Hustler White* (1996) and *Skin Gang* (1999) directly center around a specific gay fetishization of the figure of the skinhead. Along with the fetishization of punk’s most politically-questionable canonized images and figures such as the skinhead borrowed from the Nazisploitation subgenre, these films render punk iconography as a sexual object for queer desire

by combining camp with pastiche. This combination fuels a construction of queer eros that is, compared to Jarman's, more long-lived (LaBruce's gays and feminists always survive), less regulated by the effects of shame and stigma, more melodramatic in its appreciation of violent criminality, and more hardcore in its postmodern appropriation of styles.

The idea of queer eros, a primal form of "life force" (Huffer, *Are the Lips* 11) that harbours fetishes and what society deems as unhealthy, such as certain bodily acts (for instance, licking leather boots or toilets), pervades LaBruce's filmography. At the same time, LaBruce's films bear a melodrama-influenced tone – a genre that carries strong associations with Women's cinema though also with a gay following as camp texts, as in the case of Douglas Sirk films (Mercer and Schingler 106). Hence, compared to Jarman's oeuvre, the concept of queer eros in LaBruce's films is more instilled in an overtly self-conscious, quasi-ironic and pornographic mixture of styles, rather than in the form of appropriation and reclamation of modernist iconography to directly confront its violence. LaBruce's style can be understood as an articulation of an ethics of eros that values the transformation of the experience of being a subject to, or being subjectivized by, power structures within society that govern the accepted norms, and one's own understanding of sexuality. As Lynne Huffer explains this ethics by drawing on Michel Foucault's writings on the ethics of eros: "[I]n its etymology eros refers not only to a notion of passionate love but also to a life force, what Audre Lorde calls, like Nietzsche, 'the yes within ourselves'" (*Mad for* 256). She then asks: "Might an ethics of eros be articulated as a possibility of life to transform the violence of biopower?" (*Mad for* 256). Huffer's question proposes the ethics of eros as a way to reconcile with the formational effect of biopower (a form of power that regulates human populations through medical and social planning and enforcements of "normal" behaviors [Foucault, *History* 137]) that restricts the expressions of the body within the systems of medicalization. Huffer's Foucauldian perspective suggests that the ethics of eros tries to understand the role of violence in bodily expressions as a form of survival that wishes to realize its repressed desires. For Foucault, the possibility of rupture in the modern controlling rationalizations of sexuality lies in the expressions of madness. Hence "the work of poets, artists and mad philosophers" have been the place for Foucauldian interventions, such as Huffer's (*Mad for* 258), to explore the ethics of queer

eros that articulate responses to violence and subordination. In this sense, “hardcore,” both in musical and filmic genre terms, offers such a point of exploration of ethics, as it refers to a violent form of expression that is in opposition to the regulatory body politics of biopower. While the structures of biopower try to recognize the direct depictions of physical desire in medical terms that render certain bodily acts as articulations of “madness,” in hardcore ethics, the violence of the body is to be experienced and depicted repetitively and ritualistically as a response to this trapped-ness of desire. Like Almodóvar’s cheerfully nihilistic lesbians in *Pepi, Luci, Bom* who were willingly trapped in the short-lived subculture of Madrid, in the hardcore-influenced queercore we are again talking about a confrontational mechanism developed against the normalizations of subcultural figurations.⁷⁸

Bruce LaBruce’s cinema emerged also as a “production of a counter-public sphere” as Michael du Plessis and Kathleen Chapman state in their article “Queercore: The Distinct Identities of Subculture” – one of the very few scholarly studies on queercore. They write: “Through its cultural production the queer counter-public consolidated distinct identities, thus simultaneously reproducing and historicizing itself. [...] ‘Queerness’ is not a magic word that can be called on to cover a limitless range of identities, but instead exists only in ‘the thick of things,’ in contingent situations and precise contexts” (46-47). According to them, what makes the queercore movement a counter-public sphere also coincides with what makes it historically postmodern: queercore started as a fake subculture. The founders Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones, through their zine *J.D.s*, pretended in their writings and drawings that there was a radical subculture in Toronto called “queercore” in 1985, “with the explicit goal of putting ‘the gay in punk and the punk back in gay’ (Jones and LaBruce, 1989: 30)” (Nault, *Queercore* 17). They

⁷⁸ While “hardcore” is taken here as a conceptual background on which queercore’s relation to punk and pornography can be explained, the subculture around hardcore punk music and its ritualistic expressions, such as brutal vocals, the variety of constructions of wall of noise, and mosh pits, are not within the scope of this chapter. Two books on hardcore and straight-edge subcultures, however, have shown how these ritualistic patterns exhibit a desire for transformation on the level of the personal and the social: Ross Haenfler’ *Straight Edge: Clean-living Youth, Hardcore Punk, and Social Change* and the collection *Hardcore, Punk, and Other Junk: Aggressive Sounds in Contemporary Music* edited by Eric James Abbey and Colin Helb. In terms of hard-core pornography, Linda Williams’ seminal book *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible”* will be helpful later on in the chapter in relation to pornography as a cinematic method of deconstructing social norms.

published comics and short-strips that insinuated the existence of a larger subculture that did not exist. The documentary *Queercore: How to Punk a Revolution* (2017) explores the movement's origins and how it came to be from this fictional background, tracing its subsequent influence. This documentary situates queercore as a translocal happening between Toronto, San Francisco, LA and Portland connected through underground zines, mail-lists, gay and punk bars and bookshops operating completely under the mainstream radar.

The queercore movement's development involves punk bands consisting of female and queer identified people with a variety of musical styles including post-punk arrangements, thrash metal-sounding punk to synth-based electronic music. These styles can be found in the music of Toronto-based Fifth Column, San Francisco-based Tribe 8 and Portland-based Team Dresch. The influential artist Vaginal Crème Davis – as described in her website “the internationally revered intersexed doyenne of intermedia arts and sciences” (“Vaginal Davis Dot Com”) – also featured in two of the later LaBruce films *Super 8 ½* and *Hustler White*. Her productions, such as zines, musical, drag and theatrical performances that encompass a wide range of locations are also essential queercore artefacts.⁷⁹ The fakeness of the initial queercore and its later actualization and dissemination signal its politics: “Fake it until you make it” foregrounded the ultimate queercore method of creating complex narratives of queer desire and embodiment out of pastiche and cut-up.

Curran Nault's aforementioned book *Queercore: Queer Media Punk Subculture* is a core resource that traces the print outputs of the initial movement originating from LaBruce and G. B. Jones'

⁷⁹ Vaginal Crème Davis' artistry and performance have influenced queercore artists as well as queer theorists. Her practice has been analyzed in Muñoz's article, “‘The White to Be Angry’: Vaginal Davis's Terrorist Drag,” as “a reformatting of self within the social.” Davis' performative approach towards the self formed the basis for Muñoz's theory of disidentification (mentioned earlier in relation to the fanzine culture) and this article was also included in his famous book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and Performance of Politics* published in 1999. Muñoz also interviewed Davis at an NYU talk in which Davis' performative counter-politics can be clearly observed; her detached story-telling style both mocks racially-informed political correctness and constructs a confrontation with the prominently white audience. As Muñoz explains Davis' persona: “Unable to pass as heterosexual black militant through simple counter-identification, Vaginal Davis instead disidentified with Black Power by selecting Angela and not the Panthers as a site of self-fashioning and political formation.” (“The White” 84)

zine *J.D.s* as well as the San Francisco-based zine called *Homocore*.⁸⁰ It includes an exploration of queercore's more recent musical re-formations as well as the turbulent cultural dialogues within the triangle of the movement itself, LGBTI+ activism and the academic territory of queer theory. While taking an anthropological approach to the queercore movement's cultural productions and their larger contexts within the history of LGBTI+ activism and scholarly influences, Nault's key contribution is his positioning of the complicated body politics of queercore within an archival investigation that delves into the historical creative outputs. Nault builds parallels between LaBruce's filmmaking practice and the centrality of underground zines within the movement, suggesting that LaBruce's choice of super 8mm camera, and black and white grittiness can be seen "as an extension of the gritty style of *J.D.s*" (*Queercore* 86). This parallel also shows that there is a congruence between underground zine production as a counter-public practice that managed to cross country borders, and the cut-up aesthetics and the cult status of LaBruce's films that adopted pornography as "the last bastion of gay radicalism," as LaBruce states in a personal interview with Nault (*Queercore* 87).⁸¹ LaBruce's films have not attracted much scholarly attention within film studies in spite of the thematic connections between his work and the category of New Queer Cinema – now a popular subject within the field, particularly since the publication of "New Queer Cinema" in 1992 written by B. Ruby Rich who coined the term, a year after *No Skin's* release. Eugene Brinkema has also observed this lack of scholarly attention:

This slip is not an accident, but a hysterical symptom that results directly from the nature of his [LaBruce's] formal expression. Genre scholarship displaces its desire for his work and assumes it will be treated in a different place – shunted from field to

⁸⁰ An extensive archival project titled *Queer Queries Connecting and Complicating Queer Theory, Stories, And Understandings*, which was "imagined, designed, organized and executed by a group of Mills College students" as an output of their ethnographic study for their "Special Topics in Anthropology: Queer Ethnography" module, is a useful resource in tracing the connections between different queer movements and zines during the late 1980s and early 1990s in Canada and the USA.

⁸¹ I also held a personal interview with LaBruce on February 2nd, 2021, on an online platform, where we discussed the arguments made in this chapter as well as his current projects and ideas about the queercore movement. Even though he associates his involvement in the queercore subculture with the past, he acknowledges the fellow queercore zine-makers and artists, especially G.B. Jones, as his primary influence when he started making films. Moreover, he states that he used to call himself a "retired academic," as his earlier education in film studies inspired him to articulate poststructuralist and feminist theories around gender and sexuality through underground practice. This section cites his semi-academic pieces on pornography and camp.

field, written out because he is imagined to be written on by some other, LaBruce is imagined by film theorists to be perpetually elsewhere. (104)

The scholarly interest in LaBruce's films grew since Brinkema made this observation in 2006, however not necessarily to a degree that would redeem LaBruce's films from this "perpetual elsewhere." Along the lines of Brinkema's observation, Nault also considers this "slip," speculating that this excluded position of LaBruce might have been partially a result of the filmmaker's artistic intentions as a pornographer (Nault, *Queercore* 87). Whether it is intentional or not, the quality of being "perpetually elsewhere" appropriately describes the convergence point of the queer subject and the pornographic in terms of confronting the definition of both through an inclusion/exclusion dichotomy. In fact, from his film education years at York University to his more recent pornographic works, LaBruce has engaged with critical theory in his films and writings in film journals, more than queer film theory has engaged with his works, "even though his work first emerged alongside the well-recorded New Queer Cinema (NQC) explosion of the 1990s" (Nault, *Queercore* 87). Nevertheless, his films sometimes have been associated with this category in film festivals and in queer media coverage which LaBruce humorously rejects, stating: "I have also been lumped in with something called 'The New Queer Cinema,' which to me is equally meaningless" (LaBruce, "Notes from" 206).

While LaBruce's revisiting of Susan Sontag's famous text "Notes on Camp" is one of his most well-known written pieces, his announcement of the death of queercore indicates a self-alignment with the "perpetual elsewhere" rather than queercore, as he declares in his article "Notes from a Reluctant Pornographer" (197). His aesthetics embrace "the criminality of homosexuality" (as he describes it in the documentary *Queercore*) through utilizing the pornographic as a political statement besides the imagery of hardcore punk, and a cinephilic love of 1970s independent American cinema. His filmmaking features frequent references to independent and experimental art-works and sexual subcultures that construct a pastiche (in contrast to Derek Jarman's fondness for popular historical icons and monarchic artefacts), casting pornographic and inexperienced actors, applying punk aesthetics and music, and repeatedly staging non-simulated sex scenes. As part of the narrative of (and the later death of)

queercore, LaBruce's filmmaking amalgamates hardcore punk and porn, a homosexuality that mocks the tropes of the gay mainstream, and female violence which is both influenced by, and also critical of, the heteronormative masculinity of hardcore punk subculture and its iconography.

The Combination of Camp and Quasi-Irony

No Skin Off My Ass opens with a high angle shot in which the camera slowly tracking a couple of young men in punk attire going in and out of a shop, and specifically focusing in on a skinhead who smokes and waits on the sidewalk. This shot is intercut with title sequences and short snippets from the opening scene of Robert Altman's *That Cold Day in the Park* (1969). It is also accompanied by a fragmented soundtrack which features a lo-fi single-guitar piece by the punk band Beefeater with the lyrics "skinhead guys just turn me on" (titled "Fred's Song") and the eerie opening music (flute and guitar) of Altman's film composed by Johnny Mandel. The shots that follow the skinhead walking in the streets are reminiscent of street shots in early punk cinema, such as *The Punk Rock Movie's* scenes taking place around the punk shops BOY and SEX, and *The Blank Generation* co-director Amos Poe's earlier black and white low-budget film *The Foreigner* (1978). The latter follows the arrival of the vaguely-European secret agent Max Menace in New York City, travelling around and having various random encounters in the streets and underground venues – a similar open-plot to the characters-floating-adrift theme repeatedly found in new American Independent Cinema era of the 1970s.⁸² The black and white shots and the opening soundtrack, which involves both the Beefeater song and Mandel's music played over each other at certain moments, creates a melodramatic tone in between shot changes. The shots from the opening scene of *That Cold Day in the Park* are seen on a flickering television screen

⁸² In the documentaries, *Queercore* and *The Advocate for Fagdom*, we hear LaBruce talk about how he grew up with, and learned filmmaking from, constantly watching American cinema from the late 60s and 70s (he also mentions the effect of his cinephile farmer parents). He mentions being especially influenced by the films, filmmakers and actors associated with the "New American Cinema," such as Robert Altman, John Cassavetes, Dennis Hopper and Barbara Loden. In one interview, with regards to a retrospective dedicated to his films at Museum of Modern Art in 2015, he is addressed as a filmmaker who is "known for drawing out the gay subtext in movies from Robert Altman and Billy Wilder," to which he replies: "Talent borrows, genius steals" (Murphy). The details on this retrospective can be found on MoMa's website, and it is noteworthy that this event series at MoMa is one of the major examples of how a later-appreciation emerged from the art industry, rather than the film industry.

which a minute later is revealed to be watched by another man who is played by LaBruce himself. The frame, in which LaBruce's face intensely watches the film and reflects the television light, does not directly display the screen, thereby suggesting that LaBruce's character might actually be watching the skinhead from the window because of his sitting position in the *mise-en-scène*. While the non-diegetic title sequence that starts with "Gaytown Films present" is made up of ink and paper, shot on slightly shaky super 8mm film (as are the rest of the shots belonging to the narrative world of the film), the last text we see in the opening sequence is the diegetic title "directed by Robert Altman" on the flickering television screen. LaBruce displaces his own status as the film's director by choosing to close the opening sequence by foregrounding Altman's authorial marking rather than his own author-status, deliberately undermining his own signature of originality by positioning himself as a spectator first and foremost from the beginning.

This back-and-forth between *That Cold Day's* opening scene, featuring the Hollywood actress Sandy Dennis walking in a park on her own, and LaBruce's character watching this scene on television juxtaposed with the shots following the loitering skinhead, establishes that the film's style hinges upon pastiche. The term "pastiche" refers to a dialogical mode of practice, a self-conscious artistic borrowing from past works; this borrowing becomes central in the making of the work (Hoesterey 496). By presenting itself as a referential text from the beginning, *No Skin* employs a similar technique to the other title sequences mentioned in the previous sections. These previous examples include *Pepi, Luci, Bom's* comic-book style textuality, *The Punk Rock Movie's* opening titles highlighting the specific location where the film takes place, and *The Blank Generation's* backstage shots of diegetic props on which the band names are embroidered, used to open each concert scene. On one hand, this referentiality has been described as a re-working of the zine aesthetic found in the radical queer imagery made up of cut-and-paste images, parodic poetry, writing and collages in *J.D.s* and *Homocore* (McIntosh 145; Nault, "No Skin" 173). Its overt embrace of copying, on the other hand, manifests a type of irony that is not completely contemptuous of the conventional narrative structure that is centered around heterosexual desire, as found in *That Cold Day in the Park*.

In *No Skin*, LaBruce basically appropriates a heterosexual story on the surface level through which both the targets of homonormative and heteronormative critique can be merged in an overall self-consciously pornographic work. This mixed-style can be called quasi-ironic. By injecting the opening excerpts from *That Cold Day* into the establishing sequence and repeating some of the dialogue (word for word) from *That Cold Day* in later scenes, LaBruce renders the “original” work as one of the formational elements of the main character’s queer desire in the film. He positions his cinephilia on the same wavelength with his skinhead fetish by merging the objects of these desires in the opening sequence. Nault also detects that mediated desire for the skinhead punk is the primary theme of *No Skin* (“No Skin” 173). Aside from the opening sequence where we see shots from *That Cold Day* on screen through the television, *No Skin* repeats the narrative of *That Cold Day*: in both films the main character, who is introduced to the accompaniment of a melancholic soundtrack in the opening scene, notices a young man sitting unattended in a park, and decides to invite him to his home. The young man’s inappropriate clothing for cold weather, his appearance of being lost-in-the-park and the fact that he does not have anything to carry with him suggests that he might be homeless or a hustler in both films. While *That Cold Day*’s hustler is slightly hippie-ish, white, short and has long blonde hair, *No Skin*’s hustler is a text-book skinhead. The suspiciously attentive “saviour” protagonist of *That Cold Day* is an upper-class woman (Sandy Dennis) whose choice of living alone (apart from her servants) is perceived as problematic by her friends and relatives. Meanwhile, *No Skin*’s protagonist is a camp hairdresser melodramatically acted by LaBruce himself. Both hosts’ monologues make up a large amount of the dialogues in the film as both captives play mute in the protagonist’s house; this is information the spectator gains later on when the captive meets his sister.

LaBruce’s camp characterization expands on Dennis’ melodramatic method acting in her bourgeoisie personification, exhibiting a type of camp that is reminiscent of the description found in Susan Sontag’s influential text “Notes on Camp” in 1969. Sontag outlines what happens to the common-sense understandings of seriousness, aristocracy, taste and sincerity in the encounter of camp: the “culture” that aristocracy once owned is refigured and discombobulated in an anti-

serious liveliness, artificiality and seizing of “bad taste” in characterization. LaBruce’s personification is not only camp in his reimagining of Dennis’ melodramatic and aristocratic character who takes an existential interest in the hustler, it is also partially ironic due to its eradication of naivety – some degree of which is necessary for the full experience of camp according to Sontag. Rather than directly presenting us the campness in its naïve form, LaBruce prefers to involve us in the construction of camp, by displaying how his personification is actualized: we watch LaBruce watching Dennis in *That Cold Day*. His identification with Dennis’ character is extended to our identification with his process of developing a queer desire towards *being camp*. This sense of irony becomes even more pronounced through the contrast between LaBruce’s performance and the skinhead’s, as the latter completely lacks any character, let alone any campness. The skinhead is merely an object of desire.

In this intersection of camp and quasi-irony, LaBruce’s approach to filmmaking proves to be fundamentally desire-related, especially considering the large screen time given to the later non-simulated sex scenes where the performance of camp becomes secondary while the sexual desire is acted upon. Therefore, LaBruce’s partial irony stems from the centralization of the sex acts through lengthy non-simulated scenes that intersect with excerpts from *That Cold Day* so as to produce a skinhead gay porn sequence. *No Skin* positions Altman’s cinema as integral to the existence of LaBruce’s desire for the skinhead. *No Skin* does not criticize *That Cold Day* for its heteronormativity by creating a certain ironic seriousness through the pastiche. Rather, its insistence on displaying the construction of itself through the influence and integration of *That Cold Day* is what problematizes the restrictions of the production conditions within which heterosexuality was constructed in *That Cold Day*. After all, *That Cold Day in the Park* is an adaptation itself that almost completely removes the direct homosexual connotations that can be found in the “original” text. Richard Miles’ book of the same title (1965), featuring two young male hustlers in Paris “renting themselves to lonely older men,” presents a “laconic and elliptical” depiction of homosociality and a “frank representation of the sexual culture of Paris of the period” (Zielinski 204). The suggestion of homosexuality in the book’s depiction of this relationship between the two young teenagers – one of whom ends up being captured by the

aristocratic woman – is replaced in Altman’s film by the hippie-ish young man and his sister, and the hustler duo’s homosexuality (with a fleeting suggestion of incestuous relation between the siblings) hardly approaches “the polymorphous perversity of the original” (Zielinski 206). Ger Zielinski traces the reasons for this replacement back to the American Production Code at the time that banned homosexual depictions on screen.

Considering the background of these adaptations and especially the unrealized sexual desire of the female protagonist in Altman’s film, LaBruce’s version provides the opposite through pornography. It excavates the forbidden sexuality out of the history of *That Cold Day in The Park* and produces an unrelenting explicit homosexual representation. However, this excavation is not done unresentfully; it shines a light on the process and sadomasochistic implications of this sexual repression, rather than veiling it. LaBruce renders the fetish as a punk aesthetic which results in an ironic tone in the dramatic development that does not fit with the genres. Therefore, quasi-irony here refers to LaBruce’s deliberate disengagement from the systems of genre and artistic value that posit his film in a “perpetual elsewhere.”

Sam Richardson discusses how to evaluate the future of music in the postmodern era and describes quasi-irony as one of the currents that represents nihilistic tendencies in the art world:

[There is] a serious and public admission, not only on the part of some musicians, but across the board, that their work neither has nor is designed to have depth, the sense of engagement that was historically presumed to be a precondition of an artistic gesture. And, indeed, disengagement and quasi irony has become part of the weaponry of certain influential currents of artistic, intellectual, and musical life. (85)

Quasi-irony in this definition refers to a distrust in the system of value within which the art work is presumed to function as an art work. It is not a full irony that asserts an oppositional stance, because quasi-irony productions do not fully commit to protest, or clarify what it critiques. Rather, it borrows the aspects that fit in the aesthetic expression that would enable the artist to give up on the usual expected originality and to sign up for a risky expression of -philia. Whether

this expression is going to be considered as art becomes the subject of the irony in the work itself. LaBruce's quasi-irony stems from this type of anti-artistry, made up of half-critique and half-cinephilia. LaBruce is an avid social media user, constantly sharing clips, posters, and photographs of filmmakers and actors,⁸³ and states in most of his interviews, including in the documentary dedicated to him, *The Advocate for Fagdom: A Portrait of Bruce LaBruce* (2011), that he is a cinephile and he learnt how to make films from growing up with movies in the countryside outside of Toronto. LaBruce's cinephilia is not only visible through his own films. He also took part in a cable television programme titled *Glennnda & Friends: Mondo Toronto* (1995), impersonating Judy Garland and Liza Minelli – a show that satirizes Hollywood and mainstream gay culture. While *No Skin* can be seen as a quasi-ironic adaptation of *That Cold Day*, his second film *Super 8 ½* is “a loose remake of *Play It as It Lays* [Perry 1972]” (LaBruce, “Notes from” 200) – another loose adaptation of, this time, a Joan Didion novel – while also referencing Federico Fellini's influential *8 ½* in its title.

In *No Skin*, G.B. Jones, LaBruce's fellow co-founder of the initially fictitious queercore, plays a feminist filmmaker and sister of the skinhead. There is a long scene in LaBruce's bathroom after he brings the skinhead home where we watch LaBruce and the skinhead perform fetishistic sexual acts, involving toilet seats and leather boots. The skinhead manages to leave the house without being noticed and goes to his sister's house where G.B. Jones' character hangs out with her fellow feminists and listens to one of Angela Davis' speeches on the role of violence in practical resistance against the systemic violation of human rights. Jones' character pushes her brother to pose for the camera and asks whether he wants to be a neo-Nazi or a star. In order to persuade him to pose together with her fellow feminists in the room (played by members of the Toronto-based queercore band Fifth Column), she says “if you want to be in my life, you have to be in my film.” In this scene, what we see on screen switches between the point-of-view of the camera Jones holds and the camera that shoots the scene itself (both views shot in 8mm), realizing a coming together of the imposing-feminist guerrilla filmmaker role and the maker of *No Skin*, LaBruce himself. Furthermore, this scene directly copies the aesthetics of the screen tests

⁸³ LaBruce's cinephilic online expressions can be mostly found on his Twitter and Instagram profiles.

produced by Andy Warhol, combining the shots of the skinhead with the shots of Jones' making-of of the screen test-like shots. LaBruce combines Warhol-esque pastiche with his own vision as well as that of G. B. Jones', and by proxy Fifth Column's, positioning the object of his desire – the skinhead – as the object of a feminist project of political undoing. During this long sequence set in the living room of the Jones' character, we also witness acts, through extreme close-ups, of self-piercing with needles and safety pins, including the skinhead using a needle on his nipple, accompanied by the punk band Nip Drivers on the soundtrack. The way the extreme close-ups are scattered in the scene along with the interrupted soundtrack creates a music-video aesthetic while Jones' camera browses around the room, capturing the skinhead as the other women mockingly pose and play. The women's mockery of the music video aesthetic is combined with the objectification of the skinhead as a possible neo-Nazi, creating an aesthetic that could be associated with the Nazisploitation subgenre.

Nault examines this confluence as follows: “[T]he politically incorrect sexual dalliances of Bruce LaBruce and the complicated anti-fascist erotics of G.B. Jones are foundational to queercore” (*Queercore* 100). The subcultural collaboration manifests its aims through the figure of the skinhead: while LaBruce's character engages with this figure sexually and finally through lengthy scenes of oral sex towards the end of the film, G. B. Jones performs a coercive domination over the skinhead by forcefully subjecting him to feminist politics and her camera. At the end of the film, we see LaBruce transforming the skinhead into a less Nazi-looking punk by shaving his hair into a mohawk. This transformation of the skinhead – the object of LaBruce's queer desire and Jones' political project – is articulated through the positioning of the sex scenes in the film in between the propagandistic interactions of G.B. Jones' character's in her guerrilla headquarters.

Pornography as a Political Apparatus

Ger Zielinski's article on *No Skin* and the adaptation history of *That Cold Day in the Park* focuses on the representation of the featured cities – Paris in Miles' novel, Vancouver in Altman's film and Toronto in LaBruce's film. He offers an insight into how the representations of these cities

reflect the ways in which their public and counter-public spaces are constituted. Zielinski's account of *No Skin* considers LaBruce's subcultural environment, chiefly consisting of G.B. Jones and her band Fifth Column, as a key element in how the film reimagines Toronto's gay village as a public space that combines activism with subcultural production. There is indeed a degree of selective representation of Toronto that replicates the melancholic portrayal of Vancouver in *That Cold Day* and its aristocratic domestic spaces that gradually lose their private status through the hustler's cyclical escape-invasion narrative. Zielinski's argument that *No Skin* queers Toronto by setting the story amidst the queercore subculture relies on the role of zines as representative of such queering, even though the film does not involve any zine-making (211-212). One of the filmmakers associated with New Queer Cinema by B. Ruby Rich, Gus Van Sant, discusses in the documentary *Queercore* how he encountered the queercore zine *J.D.s* and reminisces about asking his friend LaBruce to show him the underground when he was visiting, learning in return that the underground depicted in the zine actually did not exist. Even though there are a few scenes where we see G.B. Jones writing graffiti and walking through the underground metro, the film's settings mostly consist of private indoor spaces that belong to the main characters. LaBruce's and Jones' tiny bedrooms and bathrooms constitute the places where the skinhead's body is objectified and the sexual interactions between the skinhead and LaBruce's character take place. LaBruce organizes the political ideas on social transformation vocalized in Jones' scenes within the private space where he stages his skinhead fetish through pornographic depictions of their sexual interaction.

An early scene in the film that is directly adapted from *That Cold Day* depicts the protagonist giving a bath to his picked-up guest. While in *That Cold Day* Dennis' character only helps the hustler to undress, collects his dirty clothes (including his underwear, which makes the hustler smile) and waits impatiently outside the bathroom, in *No Skin* the hairdresser actually bathes the skinhead, washes his body and sits and watches on the toilet seat while the skinhead plays with his penis in the bathtub. This considerably longer bathroom scene in *No Skin* has an interlude that cuts across the hairdresser's monologue about how the skinheads are his hobby, "like an obsession, almost." What follows is a collage of close-up images of skinhead young males – some

are photos from gigs – shown through a shaky camera that is tilted and moves in a way that creates a tabloid-like Playboy-style voyeuristic aesthetic. Once this interlude is over, the bathroom scene continues with the hairdresser’s monologue that includes an explanation of how the only hairstyle that makes sense to him now is the skinhead, how he studied the style, and how he does not necessarily agree with the popular beliefs within the skinhead subculture, yet has aesthetic curiosities. Throughout this monologue, which also sounds asynchronous with LaBruce’s acting, the skinhead does not talk and only continues playing with himself in the bathtub. The deliberately botched image-sound synchronicity is not only reminiscent of early low-budget pornographic art films with an additional soundtrack, it also represents the asynchronicity between the over-dramatic and hyper-attentive protagonist and the object of his desire, and the skinhead’s absolute lack of interest in what is happening. LaBruce’s pastiche fills in the blanks that were left out in *That Cold Day* with a gay fetishization of a politically questionable style of masculinity, correlating the heterosexual desire in *That Cold Day* that is doomed to be unrealized due to the societal repression of the unmarried aristocratic female figure, and the emptied-out masculinity in the figure of the skinhead.

Nault states that the film’s “focus on carnality and controversy via sexually explicit content [...] conjure[s] ‘bad’ erotic objects” (*Queercore* 86). This conjuring actually happens on a variety of levels of objectification and results in a social transformation of what the character-less skinhead figure represents. This politically charged figure is not represented through a realistic characterization, but only articulated as the embodied object (without character) of queer desire as well as a figure through which the oppressive masculinity of right-wing factions of the subculture can be criticized.

As the movie ends with a love-making scene where the hairdresser eats peanut butter from the skinhead’s bottom, the matching of sexual binaries – active/masculine and passive/feminine – gets increasingly muddled. While throughout the film the masculine skinhead is extremely passive and devoid of rigor, the fetishist camp hairdresser actively acts upon desire-induced interactions and manages to keep the skinhead within his enclave. In this composition, gay

pornography functions as the apparatus through which the sexual gaps in the heterosexual veneer of *That Cold Day*'s story is filled with realized queer desire and explicit sexual acts that also cut across the norms of hard-core pornography, i.e. the hairdresser licking the skinhead's Doc Marten boots, the skinhead licking the toilet seat, the peanut butter detail etc. LaBruce renders the heterosexual desire in *That Cold Day* replaceable rather than the direct subject of critique. The repression of this particular heterosexual desire in *That Cold Day* works simultaneously as an implicit generator of queer desire as well as leaving unresolved sexual queries for a pornographer to fix through sexual and subcultural entries through a gay lens. Nault reads a presence of revenge into LaBruce's composition based on an interview with the filmmaker: "Although fictional, *No Skin*'s 'barely touching love story' has some basis in reality, following as it does on the heels of LaBruce's own troubled romantic fling with a skin. [...] In *No Skin*, LaBruce gets creative revenge on his past skinhead lover-cum-tormenter, substituting the violent reality for a happy ending and a heavy dose of eroticism" ("No Skin" 173). This creative revenge that revolves around the figure of the skinhead expands through the film's reconstruction of the narrative of *That Cold Day*, eventually rendering the combination of Robert Altman's version and LaBruce's feminist punk circles' aesthetics as integral to this creative revenge.

Robert Altman's cinema has been described as the epitome of the "American Independent Cinema," and linked to the sections of New American Cinema critical of mainstream practice, where conventions of Classical Hollywood were displaced by ambiguous depictions of human relationships as well as a stylistic opaqueness (Self 30; Levy 252). Perceived as "the rebel" (Parshall 2-3) of New American Cinema, Altman represents a canon of independent cinema that was cognizant of the dysfunctions of conventional Hollywood while foregrounding "unspoken and unspeakable complexities" in their work (Self 30). LaBruce's adaptation carves out a queer desire to be realized out of the heterosexual veneer of these "unspeakable complexities" found in the American Independent Cinema canon through the construction of melodrama-influenced camp through the 8mm aesthetics. In this pornographic pastiche, LaBruce superimposes his subcultural feminist environment that centers around the band Fifth Column, re-designing the

figure of the skinhead through objectification. While the masculine figure of the hardcore punk is half-transformed through homosexual and feminist interventions, the repressed sexualities that suffuse the New Hollywood canon, as well as punk subculture, are being outed and exploited through the narratives of gay pornography in LaBruce's cinema.

Considering the fact that it is generally the same institution that regulates the consumption of pornographic materials and the rating system that controls the distribution of supposedly "non-pornographic" films screened at the mainstream theaters and at festivals, we can perhaps say that the difference between a porn movie and a non-porn movie are closely regulated by the law. Another fact that agitates the rigid categorization of pornographic films is that certain sex scenes from "non-pornographic" (I use this term in inverted commas to refer to films that are primarily not made to produce sexual arousal in the spectator) films can be found on porn websites, cut out from the whole film in which they feature.⁸⁴ These departures from the controlled and regulated methods of consumption echo Linda Williams' concept of on/scenity which refers to the shifting borders and representations that are formerly associated with the obscene:

If obscenity is the term given to those sexually explicit acts that once seemed unspeakable, and were thus permanently kept off-scene, *on/scenity* is the more conflicted term with which we can mark the tension between the speakable and the unspeakable which animates so many of our contemporary discourses of sexuality. In Judith Butler's terms, it is both the regulation that inevitably states what it does not want stated (1997, *Excitable Speech* p. 130) and the opposition to regulation that nevertheless censors what it wants to say. (Williams, *Porn Studies* 4)

Queer media theorist Ellis Hanson identifies a parallelism between how obscenity has been used as a term to describe both homosexual behavior and sexually graphic imagery in cinema, explicit or otherwise. In his book *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*, Hanson uses the term "outtake" to describe the parts of film that never make it into the actual final cut which "ends up

⁸⁴ At the time of writing this thesis, excerpts from, or uncut versions of films, such as *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), *Caligula* (1979), *Basic Instinct* (1992), *Irreversible* (2002) and *Blue is the Warmest Color* (2013) could be found on specific porn websites, such as xhamster, with the tag "uncut movies."

on the floor or the trash bin,” offering a metaphor for the queer subject as the material that was used to represent homosexuality. Hanson criticizes the dominant discourse in LGBTI+ politics that seeks a “true” representation of the gay or lesbian subject in cinema, while exploring how methods of representation have never been independent from lawful regulations. He presents this idea of the queer subject as always involved in the identification process that cinema has offered since its beginning, even though cinema has largely excluded depictions of homosexuality for much of its history. For Hanson, the queer subject has always already been *there*, perhaps indirectly, in cinema. Especially in certain classical Hollywood productions, actors and actresses have been enacting the camp aesthetics that empower queer spectators. Hanson declares that “Hollywood, despite its history of censorship and its pretense to hetero-centrism, is one of the queerest institutions ever invented” (7). The absence of the queer permeated the narratives and aesthetics, paralleling the absence of the sexual activity in the mainstream cinema. Hanson's symbolic usage of the “outtake” for the queer subject, thus echoes William's usage of the on/scenity.

An outtake has, like the queer subject, a certain reality, a certain place and defining power in the larger narrative of cultural representation, but only as that which should not be looked at. This should-not-be-looked-at-ness is the very antithesis of Laura Mulvey's formulation about the spectacle of woman in cinema, but this is not to say that queerness is unspectacular. In its figuration of abjection and popular disidentification in one of the most popular of media, queerness as outtake places in dialectical tension the excluded and the central, the untheorized and the transparent, the unwatchable and the transfixing. (Hanson 18)

One way to interpret this analogy of homosexuality as the outtake is to consider homosexual identification as not disconnected from the rules of what can be shown on screen, and thus from the pornographic. It has been directly affected by the regulatory legal rules around “obscene” images and sexual representation. Therefore, it makes itself visible, or rather, present through its absence. Hence, a sexual identity that is only perceived in terms of being inside or outside of the public discourse – a.k.a. the closet – can never fully be in, or, out of the system of representation that is constructed by the same social hierarchy. Homosexual identification has been located at

the crossroads of the pornographic and the criminal, hence its perpetual absence from visual media points to its criminalization. This phenomenological position of homosexuality is what John Waters, Derek Jarman, and LaBruce visualize through parody and negative appropriation. LaBruce in particular engages with pornography on more direct terms by including non-simulated sex scenes, revitalizing the correlation between homosexuality as pornography. Film theorist Richard Dyer contributed to this strand of thinking about the relationship between homosexual representation and pornography (“Gay Male,” “Idol Thoughts”). Furthermore, John Champagne interestingly criticizes the academic insistence on textual analysis in film studies and points out the importance of reception when it comes to the experience of pornography, as close analysis “obscures some of the social *functions* of gay pornography” (77) (emphasis by the author).

Dyer's theorization of the production of a type of knowledge – experiential knowledge – through pornography is useful to understanding how pornography could function as a political apparatus in *No Skin*. While Dyer focuses on hard-core gay pornography in which male sexuality is understood narratively – as there is a goal, an aim that drives the whole sexual activity and its visualization, i.e., ejaculation – *No Skin* goes even further in narrativizing hard-core porn: it signals a climax of social transformation of an oppressively masculine figure evident in the hard-core punk subculture. Dyer demonstrates how the border between pornographic as non-narrative, and non-pornographic as narrative, can be problematized in analyzing self-reflexivity in gay porn franchises (“Idol Thoughts”). LaBruce reconstructs this border by adapting from Altman's cinema as well as from his own subcultural milieu. In LaBruce's most recent pornographic films, such as *Refugees Welcome* (2017) (produced as part of the XConfessions series by the feminist producer Erika Lust) subcultural connections continue to aesthetically shape his style of narrativizing hard-core porn from a cinephilic point-of-view, complicating genre borders and on-screen dichotomies in terms of representation. The fact that Lust's productions prioritize female spectatorship and their demands (XConfessions is a crowdfunded project based on fan-generated erotic stories [Wissot]) suggests that LaBruce's pornographic aesthetics do not only respond to gay male spectatorship, complicating further perceptions

regarding the reception of gay pornography.

The problematization of the porn-versus-narrative dichotomy can be also identified in the works of avant-garde filmmakers who can be considered proto-punk, such as John Waters, Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey, as well as in the works of certain filmmakers that are associated with French New Extremity, such as Catherine Breillat, Gaspar No   and Virginie Despentes. LaBruce’s connections to these filmmakers within this designated category of “extreme cinema” can be identified in the French-German documentary series, *Durch Die Nacht Mit...* (translated as “Into the Night with...”) which began in 2010, in which two artists are captured by a filmmaker as they meet up at night in a city. LaBruce shot two episodes as part of this series, one of which involves the meeting of Gaspar No   and Harmony Korine, the other following Virginie Despentes and her actress friend and collaborator Beatrice Dalle as they visit specific underground venues to attend punk-style theatrical performances. LaBruce’s recent range of productions are mostly financially backed by European producers, such as ARTE. These productions present an aesthetic evolution (for instance, digital cameras replace their analogue predecessors) of his self-reflexive compositions that focus on taboo subjects such as misandry (*The Misandrists* [2017]) and gerontophilia⁸⁵ (*Gerontophilia* [2013]). Other recent LaBruce productions include hands-on pornographic productions that are directly produced and distributed as porn movies. Some of his later films continued to feature skinheads, but in the shape of zombies (*Otto; or, Up with Dead People* [2008] and *L.A. Zombie* [2010]). While LaBruce disassociates himself from the queercore movement in “Notes from a Reluctant Pornographer” by remarking that his fellow queercore members disowned him due to his relative success, he also states that punk does not necessarily attract his interest anymore due to its assimilation by the mainstream. He states that his disconnection from punk stems from the dogmatic political correctness, making him “long for days when my girlfriends would have to protect me from getting beat up at the hard-core show” (“Notes from” 205).

LaBruce’s oeuvre can be analyzed from the perspective of Dyer’s explorations of pornography, or

⁸⁵ Gerontophilia refers to the sexual preference for elderly partners.

through its references to genre cinema, subcultures and queer theory. In order to demonstrate the significant extent to which the intersections of punk and queer aesthetics are figured on screen, the next section focuses on *Baise Moi* (2000), written and directed by Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi. *Baise Moi* is another punk-influenced low-budget film with non-simulated sex scenes featuring a punk soundtrack; a film that can be considered a rebirth of queercore aesthetics that LaBruce deemed dead.

Punk, Parody and Pornography: Residual Aesthetics of *Baise Moi* (2000)

Queercore's strategy of using pornography beyond its shock value for a quasi-ironic critique of mainstream assimilation exposes queercore's debt to punk subculture, Warholian pop art, as well as Hollywood melodrama on the level of its cut-up aesthetics. What differentiates queercore's intertextuality from Nicholas Rombes' encompassing notion of "new punk cinema" is its commitment to making excluded sexualities the nucleus of radicalism and negation against the mainstream. Rombes' contextualization of punk revolves around how certain avant-garde and filmic experimentations proved to be incorporable into the mainstream cinema in the works of Spike Jonze, Lars Von Trier and Paul Thomas Anderson. In contrast to this approach, queercore inherited methods of mimicry and camp exaggeration from trash and underground cinema, representing the discarded elements left behind once the assimilable features of avant-garde and punk are taken up by Hollywood's reserved accommodation for a number of unorthodox filmmakers. Chapter Three identified the connections between such residual aesthetics and counter-spaces, from queercore to the works of the French writer and filmmaker Virginie Despentes who has been considered an exemplary figure for a number of movements, including post-feminist pornography and French New Extremity as well as punk. Echoing a similar negating position to queercore, Despentes is also known for her collaborative films that rework genres. For instance, the juxtaposition of road-movie, porn and rape-revenge narrative in her first feature film *Baise Moi* based on her own book of the same title has been subjected to feminist analyses in terms of its depiction of femininity and queerness (Fayard; Ozel 19).

Desportes' connection to punk aesthetics does not only occur on the level of her filmmaking and soundtrack choices, but also in her relationship to the literary world which has perceived her as a feminist *enfant terrible*. Although this latter relationship has not been static but has oscillated between the edge and the mainstream, recently resulting in an increased recognition (i.e. her selection as a jury member for the prestigious literary awards in France, including Prix Femina and Prix Goncourt [Schaal 16]). The French phrase "enfant terrible" ("terrible child"), referring to "one who acts unconventionally" according to the Oxford English Dictionary, has been repeatedly used to describe Desportes (Louar 125; Elkin, "Trash;" Cappelle, "Virginie;" Cox 97), yet this treatment is not necessarily unique to Desportes as some of the other filmmakers considered within the category of French New Extremity, such as Gaspar No   and Catherine Breillat, have been similarly labelled in some sources on French extremism (for No  : Gr  nstad 201; for Breillat: Brevik-Zender 210). Nonetheless, the distinctiveness of Desportes' reception stems from her transition from outcast to acclaimed artist, grounded in her artistic amalgamation of pro-porn feminism and punk sensibility. There has been an increasing attention given to her films and books in popular and academic outlets, as evident in the literary academic journal *Rocky Mountain Review's* special issue dedicated to Desportes' writing and the television adaptation of her most recent novel series *Vernon Subutex* in France, as well as the abundance of interviews with her on popular media.⁸⁶ The editor of the special issue lays out the fluctuating ways in which Desportes' reception took shape over time, explaining her once-marginalized position as follows: "[D]ue to Desportes' use of slang and intertextuality with popular culture and genres (crime-fiction, pornography and punk-rock), she has been equally condemned for being antiliterary, anti-intellectual and 'trashy'" (Schaal 9). According to Schaal, her relationship with the mainstream positions Desportes "on the verge of canonization." This is one of the major parallels between punk aesthetics' paradoxical position as both assimilable and unwanted and Desportes' authorial fame as a feminist writer who has been perceived as an outcast throughout most of her career. The fluctuation in her reception resembles the

⁸⁶ The following resources only partially constitute the relatively recent appreciation of Desportes by the French and English-speaking media (an appreciation that has been considered as a long overdue and whose absence can be explained by the strong dismissal of her earlier works): Nadia Louar's close look at the authorial and philosophical shifts in Desportes' writing in the special issue of *Rocky Mountain Review*, the article "Trash, Rock, Destroy: Is Virginie Desportes the French writer America needs?" in *Harper's Magazine* (Elkin) and *New York Times's* coverage of Desportes' recent mainstream success in the summer of 2020 (Cappelle, "Virginie").

paradoxical discussion of punk's assimilation into popular culture discussed earlier in this dissertation.

Lisa Downing has considered the film adaptation of *Baise Moi* in several publications. She first discussed the film within the context of French Cinema's relationship to "postmodern porn" that is "placed in dialogue with recent deconstructive gender theory" ("French" 265), problematizing the "moral logic" of rape-revenge narratives within which she includes *Baise Moi*. A later article develops this earlier reading by interrogating *Baise Moi*'s graphic representation of sexuality ("*deliberately* real sex [sic]") juxtaposed with "pretend violence" and how this composition deconstructs the spectatorial gaze (Downing, *Film* 83). These earlier analyses are mostly grounded in the conception of sexual difference, not necessarily engaging with the queer theories that destabilize the essentiality of this binary sex. In a recent intervention in this regard, Lynne Huffer, reads the film through the prism of queer feminism that seeks to de-essentialize sexual difference through a parody of violence, attempting to empty out the imposed sexual value that the female body represents on screen. Huffer bases this idea of emptied-out sexual value on French philosopher Luce Irigaray's metaphoric description of the female vagina as "nothing to see," taking female sexuality as an absence lacking a signifier outside of the patriarchal symbolic order (*Are Lips* 167). In addition to these studies that deal with the way *Baise Moi* approaches screening sexuality in terms of ethics, feminist representation and textuality, Leila Wimmer and Scott McKenzie investigate the scandalous reception of the film and the rating and censorship issues surrounding its inclusion of pornographic images. McKenzie's focus on the British Board of Film Classification's report on *Baise Moi* and their request for significant cuts unearths the obfuscated moral agendas around what is considered de-facto pornographic by the rating systems (321-323). Similarly, Wimmer highlights how the film challenged the "discourses of taste that circulate and regulate women's engagement with explicitly sexual images" (140), examining the mostly ignored role of "ethnicity and class that informed its aesthetic dismissal" (131).

Drawing from Wimmer's article that emphasized the process of how "inclusion into the canon" operates within a patriarchal value system that pervades the French media as well as the

international regulations around production and distribution (140), we can read *Baise Moi*'s ambiguously parodic treatment of pornography as a deliberate response to these canonization methods by performatively including porn into its combined vocabulary of avant-garde and trash cinema. We see that the embrace of low-budget punk aesthetics and mock-criminality in *Baise Moi* resonates with how trash cinema led by John Waters celebrates queer terrorism and "low" culture as a coping mechanism, as trash cinema is characterized by its involvement of mostly a mixture of excluded minorities, tastelessness, sex work, squalidness and tabooed sexualities. Despite its resonance with the embrace of negativity and camp performativity in trash cinema, *Baise Moi* is considered more within the drama-oriented French New Extremity category, through comparative readings that touch upon other French films that are known for their graphic depictions of sex and violence such as Catherine Briellat's *À Ma Soeur!* (2001) (Nettleback 65, Downing 277) and *Romance* (1999) (Quandt 20, Downing 277) and Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* (2002) (Mühleisen, Downing 277, Hickin). Overall, since its release in 2000 and the censorship controversy that followed, combined with its portrayal of outcast female figures embarking on a journey of sex and murder, *Baise Moi* has contributed greatly to the critical consideration of gender representation in genre cinema in the past twenty years. However, its adoption of trash aesthetics and irony have been mostly overlooked in the literature which conflated the film with the dramatic shock-value attached to the category of new extremism.

The comprehensive collection *The New Extremism: From France to Europe*, which also features Wimmer's article referred to above, focuses on the production (and reception) of a range of "extreme" films, including *Baise Moi*. This collection interprets the depiction of violence, and both simulated and non-simulated sexual performances, as filmic events that bring "the notion of response to the fore, interrogating, challenging and often destroying the notion of a passive or disinterested spectator in ways that are productive for film theorising today" (Horeck and Kendall 2). According to Horeck and Kendall, the major enterprise of new extremism is the filmic ability to invite spectators to question viewing habits through self-reflexive aesthetics and shock tactics. Based on that account, there emerges a significant commonality between the discourse around new extremism and the discourse around punk: a shared tendency to centralize

the sensational aspects as the essence of the artworks considered. These discussions revolve around how shock-effect is created in cinema as well as the intention behind the deployment of extreme imagery, and punk, which mostly determines their degree of avant-gardism: the less the shock-effect is the end-goal, the more an artwork can question the cultural determinants of what is shocking and what is not. In this formulation, punk has been dismissed as shallow, since the end-goal of punk aesthetics is perceived to be empty provocation. For instance, Gaspar Noé's filmmaking style has been associated with such shallowness in a review of his first film *Seul Contre Tous* (1998) (*I Stand Alone*): "Sadly, though, there is a typically punk hollowness at the core of Noé's rhetoric" (Rayns).

There are a number of connections between *Baise Moi* and Noé. *Seul Contre Tous* can be briefly seen on television in one of the scenes in *Baise Moi* (which I will return to later); Noé's name comes up in the acknowledgements section of the credits for the film; the co-director Coralie Trinh Thi performed in Noé's film *Sodomites* (1998) (a hard-core short that was made for television to promote safe-sex) two years before shooting *Baise Moi*; and Noé "claims that the changes it [*Baise Moi*] brought about in French censorship laws enabled him to make *Irréversible* with complete freedom" (Macnab). In terms of using shock-effect as an end-goal, which is referred to as "punk hollowness" in relation to Noé, *Baise Moi* both aligns with, and deconstructs, Noé's shock-effect (based on sexual violence) by positioning it in the service of a female gaze that mocks the male object of desire. In doing so, *Baise Moi* demonstrates how shock-effect emerges as a by-product when gendered codes of genres (which Noé's cinema also takes advantage of) and bodily representations are reversed, muddying the borders between the corporeality of the performers and the parody of the performance itself. It is a code reversal that implants female agency at the core of the excluded status of porn, sexual taboo and terror while self-reflexively pointing back to how the patriarchal gaze simultaneously sees and constructs them. Considering the punk-oriented soundtrack choices, DIY background and low-quality digital video aesthetics of the film – in Heller-Nicholas' words its *punk vérité* (166) – we can say that it correlates the negative connotations of punk as shallow with the trash connotations of the film's characters, connecting these connotations back to the spectatorial gaze, creating an overall

ambiguous sense of irony in the film.

Ozel explains this blurring, or the double mockery in the film, in the following terms: “Despentes and Trinh Thi know what they are doing but pretend they do not” (110). The self-reflexivity behind this mockery has been overlooked in some critical assessments. For example, the film’s pornographic and violent depictions as well as its “bad ending” have been interpreted as the result of a reaffirmation of the patriarchal power practices (Erensoy 65-66) and far from being a feminist take on the road-movie genre (Gibson ix). I have previously contended that such readings remain within the limited territory of seeking an ideal representation based on the gender/sex binary which Judith Butler’s earlier theories concerning gender, in particular, her influential book *Gender Trouble*, has critiqued.⁸⁷ Drawing from the recent intersections of punk and queer discourse, and to provide a final analysis to bring these methodological correlations discussed throughout this thesis together, I extend the diverse representational discussions that reflect on *Baise Moi*’s deconstructive practice to situate the film as a later incarnation of queer feminist politics that reclaims the negativity imposed on subjects – a feature also found in the trashiness of John Waters’ cinema, queer violence of the early works of Pedro Almodóvar and Derek Jarman, and No Wave cinema’s experimentation with cultural role reversals.

Through its gritty aesthetics, narrative disruptions that involve pornographic scenes, and self-reflexive dialogues and frequent diegetic insertions of music, *Baise Moi* exhibits a type of “deterritorialization” that pre-emptively responds to the limits of cultural categorizations that await the film before it. The concept of deterritorialization is explored here in relation to “lesbian minor cinema,” specifically Chantal Akerman’s and Sadie Benning’s works, “in the sense of exile – and practice – the reduction of cinema to a set of formal elements that alter and frame apparently realist representation” (White 412). With the exception of her latest film *Bye Bye*

⁸⁷ When sexuality is taken as a modern concept which has evolved within the structures of power and bio-politics (based on Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*), its representation on screen becomes a subject of how these structures infiltrate the production of screen media and have an effect on what can be visible and representable. Drawing from this theoretical line between the Foucauldian understanding of sexuality as social construct and Judith Butler’s critique of taking gender as a universality, my MA thesis titled “Baise Moi, Genre, Sexuality: A Critical Analysis of the Blurred Margins of Subjectivity and Cinematic Representation” explored the questions of sexual representation and gender in relation to the film.

Blondie (2012),⁸⁸ Desportes' works challenge the perceptions of what is acceptable in terms of sexual representation through direct use of pornographic imagery on screen. In doing so, Desportes' films echo Patricia White's conceptualization of minor cinema that blurs the border between video art and cinema in terms of low-budget production aesthetics and circulates in marginalized, or in other words "minor," reception contexts outside of the public space of the cinema (i.e. video art festivals, galleries, or in *Baise Moi*'s case, pornographic websites). Drawing from Nancy Fraser's critique of the public/private dichotomy through the lens of the women's movement (unshackling domestic work from the chains of "private life") Colin Perry problematizes such dichotomies when it comes to reception conditions: "Assumptions that certain spaces such as the cinema are *de facto* public, and that others such as the domestic space of television are inherently private, [...] have a troubling tendency to undercut the very politics [of subjectivity] it would seek to advance" (98). Here, I resituate *Baise Moi* within this trajectory of minor cinema, punk residuality and parody and move beyond the extremity discourse, since the focus is on the DIY practice of the self-reflexive scenes that involve pornography and a punk sensibility.

Following Patricia White's exploration of lesbian minor cinema, we find an aesthetic kinship between *Baise Moi* and the other low-budget first features of Chantal Akerman and Leos Carax which both involve a sense of irony. The black and white and slow-paced audio-visual composition of Akerman's first finished feature film *Je Tu Il Elle* (1974), for example, offers an exploration of nudity that is self-reflexive as it is Akerman herself performing alongside another female performer (Claire Wauthion) in its final scene. Akerman's slowly moving camera focusing on the details of the body, the furniture and the physical restrictions of the room (a style of filmmaking that has been associated with feminist counter-cinema [de Lauretis 306]) renders the

⁸⁸ Even though *Bye Bye Blondie* revolves around two older punk women (Beatrice Dalle's character especially represents a commitment to a specific lesbian punk identity), filled with flashbacks to their youth when they were lovers while being involved in Paris' opposing punk and skinhead subcultures, the film's cinematography and narrative are clearly more similar to the mainstream bigger budget sections of "punk cinema" that fictionalized famous punk figures, such as *Sid and Nancy* (1986), *Control* (2007) and *The Runaways* (2010). In that sense, Desportes' filmography parallels both the progression of "punk cinema" canon as well as that of the other filmmakers analyzed in the previous chapters who later on in their career moved on from subcultural filmmaking towards industrial film production, such as Spheeris, Almodóvar and Waters.

spatiality of the scene as a participating element in the slow aesthetic construction of a specific lesbian sexuality. The connection between spatial self-reflexivity and the focus on the corporeality of the body in this composition also resonates with one of the scenes in Leos Carax' earliest film *Boy Meets Girl* (1984). The film is about a boy's (Denis Lavant) unreciprocated desire to be together with a girl (Mireille Perrier) whose melancholic persona leads her to live in existentialist isolation. This black-and-white unrequited love-story is frequently disrupted by scenes in which dance-like performances of the characters responding to diegetic music takes place (similar to a musical number). In one of these scenes, the girl abruptly quits the conversation she is having with the desperate boy (who is outside her building) through her apartment's intercom, as the radical American punk band Dead Kennedys' song "Holiday in Cambodia" starts playing on the radio. The diegetic music that replaces the conversation becomes the pivotal event in the scene that is depicted in a static frame, while the girl's body movements and calm facial expression combine aggression with indifference throughout the whole length of the song. Akerman's redirection of the gaze and Carax' focus on the punk embodiment (aesthetics that have not been associated with new extremism) are aesthetically similar to Desportes' style of cinematography that frames sexual performances not only as connection points for the two characters' (Manu and Nadine) friendship but also as a "desiring system in which the male is an auxiliary" (Ozel 139), while using diegetic music, as much as the camera, to create cues for constructing self-reflexivity around the characters' gaze. Both films' frequent focus on diegetic sound or the presence of long silences in certain scenes in which the bodily movements or positions of the characters are in the foreground, pushing the storyline to the background, and creating a space for exploring the limits of visibility and expressability of sexuality, bodily knowledge and the death drive.

From Homosocial Counter-Spaces to Parodic Referentiality

The low-budget production context of *Baise Moi* not only provides the material conditions that Stacy Thompson deems necessary to align an artistic work with punk's do-it-yourself ethics, but also marks a certain collective effort in the creation of an aesthetic that utilizes aspects of hard-core porn imagery, opening up a complex discussion on authenticity and realism. *Baise Moi's*

filmmakers Virginie Despentes and Carolin Trinh chose not to simulate the sex scenes and cast pornographic film actresses Raffaëla Anderson, playing Manu, and Karen Bach, playing Nadine, as the main protagonists. This is also why the film was banned in France initially and then given an X-rated certificate by the Ministry of Culture following a public condemnation in the mainstream newspapers after its acceptance by the Cannes Film Festival. Thanks to the campaign started by the French director Catherine Breillat, signed by a large number of influential artists including Jean-Luc Godard and Claire Denis, the certificate again changed to 18+ which enabled the film to be released and distributed without significant cuts (Wimmer 130). This controversy, the ban and the rating issues that *Baise Moi* faced seem to reflect the initial status of a punk production as an unwanted residual output of the commodification structures. But that is not the only aspect of the film that reflects the “unwantedness” of the film; both the filmmakers and actresses had been working in the porn industry prior to making *Baise Moi*, an industry that produces films the consumption of which has always been highly restricted and regulated, with some films and screening channels banned altogether, depending on the relevant laws around “obscenity.”⁸⁹ Furthermore, the discussion that positions pornographic films as “low art” productions has been prominent within the discourse around screening sex, including how pornography both regulates and proliferates different sexualities and sexes through representation. Richard Dyer construes this as follows:

The fact that porn, like weepies, thrillers and low comedy, is realized in/through the body has given it low status in our culture. Popularity these genres have, but arbiters of cultural status still tend to value “spiritual” over “bodily” qualities, and hence relegate porn and the rest to an inferior cultural position. [...] Moreover, the effect of the cultural status of intellectual/spiritual accounts of the body is to relegate experiential knowledge of the body to a residual category. (“Male Gay”)

⁸⁹ The collections *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power* and *More Dirty Looks: Gender, Pornography and Power* lay out the Anglophone world’s lawful and cultural constructions around the evolution and consumption of pornography, covering large diverse agendas from anti-pornography feminism to digital media’s effects on the sex industry. The editor of both collections, Pamela Church Gibson, mentions *Baise Moi*, again along with Catherine Breillat’s *À Ma Soeur!*, as examples of how pornography filters into, first, the art-house and then the mainstream, in her introduction to why a prequel to the first collection was necessary, holding post-feminism responsible for normalizing pornography (ix-xi).

Dyer's concept of "experiential knowledge" accounts for the "low" status of pornographic productions, as they challenge the cultural connection between sexuality and spirituality; a challenge that is also at the heart of what can be called residual aesthetics and the construction of defiant politics in *Baise Moi*. There is an internalized notion in the film that bodily knowledge and spectacle can be embraced through reclaiming this "low status" of pornography, deliberately unearthing the experiential knowledge that sex workers and porn actresses gain through working within the sex and porn industry – sectors that are not only perceived as lacking any intellectual and spiritual value, but also mostly creating a culturally constructed moral burden on the workers involved. Gayle Rubin discusses this specific experiential knowledge that has been located at the bottom of the hierarchical system of sexual value in modernity in her influential study "Thinking Sex: Notes for Radical Theory" (101),⁹⁰ which echoes Dyer's positioning of pornography as the high culture's residues that is pushed to the underground out of the visibility structures of mainstream representation. It is not only the pornographic space through which *Baise Moi* visualizes, and thus intellectualizes, the ignored plurality of the characters' sexuality and their bodily knowledge. The depiction of the hotel rooms in which they have sex with and kill random men as well as the bathrooms where multiple self-reflexive cinematic moments take place⁹¹ also pays attention to the residual spaces that complicate the spatial binary this hierarchy of sexual value relies on: public/private space.

There is a sequence approximately in the middle of the film that contains two short bathroom

⁹⁰ For a detailed account of Gayle Rubin's contribution to the "sex wars" between the second-wave and third-wave feminists throughout the late 1970s until 1990s, the anti-porn feminists' protests against her analyses that favored decriminalization of sex work, and Rubin's own reflections on the reception of "Thinking Sex" can be found in her later article "Blood Under the Bridge: Reflections on Thinking Sex." Here Rubin explains how the nuanced approach that situates pornography "within the context of a number of other discourses which construct sexual difference and the female subject in similar ways, most notably advertisement and dominant cinema" became "the anathema to the leadership of the anti-porn movement" which takes pornography as the "single most pernicious institution of male supremacy" ("Blood" 22).

⁹¹ One particular bathroom scene without dialogue in the film involves Nadine spending time on her own listening to music while targeting subjects out of the window with her gun (she does not shoot). This scene ends with her pointing the gun and looking directly at the camera through the bathroom mirror, creating a direct line between the gun and the camera's point-of-view. This mirroring between the gun and the camera is analyzed as an equation between Nadine's position and that of the camera operator (Ozel 98). Ozel's analysis leaves out the function of the diegetic music through the disc player which is a major element that connects Nadine's perspective with that of the spectator as much as the camera operator.

shots in between scenes where Manu and Nadine kill men in public spaces. Following the outdoor scene where they randomly rob a car and run over the owner while mocking him, there is a cut to a bathroom shot where Manu reveals to Nadine that she cut herself (it is ambiguous what she means exactly) wearing only her underwear. Their mannerisms imply a degree of comfort while being naked, and spending time in the bathroom in each other's company. This is followed by another robbery scene where Nadine shoots the owner of a gun shop (this time, both wearing wigs as they realize their pictures have appeared in public media) which leads to a conversation between the women where they contemplate how they lack cool punch lines during criminal moments and, thus, acknowledge the existence of the script (this conversation is set against a jazz-punk song which can be heard in the background). Next, there is a cut to a close up where we see Manu's groin again positioned over a sink in which we see a thin stream of blood. Again, Nadine is also in the bathroom, pouring a drink while Manu tells her how she used to spill her drinks on purpose to upset her mother and how she is ready to have sex. These bathroom scenes convey an alternative homosocial normalcy around bodily expressions and nudity that is specifically established between two women, extending beyond the privacy of the bathroom, rendering this place a homosocial space where one of the character's menstruation is implied with visible depiction. By bringing menstruation into the mix, this scene lays bare the limits of, but also mocks, the very performativity behind the conventional hardcore porn's depiction of female sexuality and the distilled realism that it promises through the bodily exposures. While there has been a frequent attention, in the aforementioned critical responses, to the non-simulated sex scenes in the film, this sequence (which juxtaposes public criminality with an alternative rendering of the bathroom as a homosocial space) has not been mentioned in any of the studies summarized above. While there is a close-up of genitals in this scene, it is outside the context of heterosexual intercourse, and thereby excluded from the discussions concerning the film's construction of sexuality. However, at the center of the film, there exists a humorous disruption of the public/private dichotomy through the depiction of a parodying act of criminality in disguise as a formative element of female sexual bonding.

The concept of "residual spaces" or "residual aesthetics" emerges primarily from urban studies

and public sphere theories, referring to the spatial expressions of counter-public sociality and post-industrial abandonment.⁹² In a recent Master's thesis titled "What is Leftover: The Residual Space," written by interdisciplinary artist and designer Carley Rickles, we find again the concept of residual spaces in the form of abandoned and unattended urban spaces that the design principles and practices of neoliberal urbanization processes leave out: "[W]hile the designed landscape is maintained by codes and those who follow its compliance, the residual space lacks long term citizenship resulting in an absence of binding implications for a desired aesthetic" (19). *Baise Moi*'s characters' "low status" within the societal hierarchies due to their sex work as well as the subsequent criminality they embrace throughout the film, combined with their background stories as second generation immigrants – Raffaëla Anderson is half-Moroccan and Karen Bach is half-Algerian (Wimmer 139) – renders them precarious subjects in terms of lawful citizenship, aligning their bodies with certain residual spaces on the outskirts of Paris. The film's spatial compositions constantly involve self-reflexive references to the female and the immigrant body as a regulated space via the focus on the characters' bodily agency and positioning. This creates a parallel between the characters and the residuality of the post-industrial environments within which their criminal actions take place. The characters' societal exclusion starts to produce residual elements when they enter social environments (shops, brothels) as outlaws and terrorize certain random agents and tokens of high societal value: they steal money from rich-looking women and men, attacking them either at ATMs or in their designer cars or houses, and then leaving their dead bodies behind.

From an earlier rape scene at a warehouse which leads Manu to express indifference about her rape in a later statement (in contrast to her traumatized friend whom we never see after this

⁹² Writing about the role of musical subcultures and their resisting cultural emergences against the prevailing ideology that frames the city of Detroit (USA) as "a global future emptied of all revolutionary content," Louis Moreno traces the "residual aesthetics of industrial decline" found in Detroit's underground (106). This article is exemplary in revealing the connections between the unruly capitalist urbanization methods and subcultural formations: "Detroit's underground culture and politics resists such sentiment [the sentiment that locks the idea of future to late capitalism], leaving us with a different kind of anxiety—'an anxiety about losing the future.' This way of seeing and hearing Detroit helps us to recover a different type of future shock: the recovery of a utopian impulse that still finds in technology and 'the urban' the socio-spatial resources of liberation" (Moreno 106). In *Baise Moi*, the "bad ending" also depicts this anxiety of no future which marks the anxiety of the death of a culture and the death of punk under late capitalism, vibrating at the same frequency of Moreno's analysis of Detroit's underground.

scene), “I don’t leave anything valuable in my cunt,” to the hotels in which Manu and Nadine have sex with and kill men, either together or alone, and in which they build intimate homosocial normalcy, *Baise Moi* (through grainy depiction of in-between private spaces and the mimicry of porn tropes) constructs this concept of residual aesthetics on the level of its cinematic space. This is the space where the criminal status of the characters, the punk subcultural influence through the low-budget filmmaking and soundtrack, and the reclamation of the negativity that surrounds the discourse around pornography and sex work coincide. Desportes’ attentiveness to the combination of sexual marginality and criminal aggression as residual productions of hierarchical society also holds a degree of parody which is shaped through reversing the gendered-associations and typical cityscapes found in the conventions of the road-movie genre.

Patricia White highlights the importance of subjectivity in “lesbian minor cinema” and states that, in Chantal Akerman and Sadie Benning’s cinema, “it is through [...] the autobiographical and formal elements that the work achieves collective implications” (415). The common theme between Akerman, Benning and Desportes is how the subjective histories and personal spaces of the filmmakers are fundamental in the framing of the spatial restrictions through low-budget conditions, despite their cinematographic differences. Furthermore, *Baise Moi*’s collective production context is apparent through the aforementioned dialogues between the protagonists as they involve a self-reflexive punk attitude that also nods to the collaboration between the two co-directors, Desportes and Trinh Thi. As Ozel points out, “even though Desportes was supposed to direct actors and Trinh Thi was the camera operator, they both stepped in and out of their respective role whenever they felt the need to do so” (95). At another point in the film, the protagonists have a conversation (through which they exhibit an awareness of what is the norm for the rape-revenge narrative) about how their story will end, referencing the ending of one of the most famous road-movies *Thelma and Louise* (1983). This self-reflexivity throughout the film also renders its non-simulated sex scenes as pornographic performances first and foremost. It underlines that this is an acting performance precisely because of its mimicry of porn, eschewing the sense of realism ingrained in the graphicness of the bodily exposition. Some of the criticisms of *Baise Moi* state that its insistence on “real” non-simulated sex runs the risk of undermining its

potential transgression in terms of representing female sexuality (Downing 268, Mühleisen 122). This perspective overlooks the film's collectively constructed homosocial counter-space that aligns its aesthetics both with trash and minor cinema as well as the referentiality that fuels the film's parodic tone. The homosocial and referential elements in the film also call for a camp reading through which the anxiety over the failure of representation can be replaced by a sense of possibility. As Chuck Kleinhans states, "camp, as parody, has an ability to expose what the powers-that-be would like to keep neatly hidden and out of sight" ("Taking Out" 199). One of the most critical aspects of *Baise Moi* stems from its camp possibility, exposing what has been overly repeated and reductive in genre and narrative practices.

The insertion of short fragments of two scenes from Gaspar Noé's film *Soul Contre Tous* in one of the earliest sex scenes in *Baise Moi* constitutes one of the major ways in which the film achieves a critical capacity for parody. This aspect can be defined as a result of a technique that "involves the articulation of a critique by expressing a meaning different to the stated or ostensible meaning through a repetition or doubling" (Kleinhans, "Taking Out" 196). This technique is explored in the previous section of this thesis in relation to LaBruce's ironic adaptation methods that create queer punk aesthetics out of 1970s American Independent Cinema and melodrama. The same parody technique can be found in *Baise Moi*, though on a less ostensible level than *No Skin Off My Ass*. We do not see a direct display of the *Soul Contre Tous*' title credits for one thing, and "only viewers who are familiar with Noé's work can identify the film" (Ozel 125). Unlike *No Skin*'s overtly highlighted pastiche and "fakeness," *Baise Moi* keeps its parody ambiguous. The insider-reference to Noé's film, therefore, divides what is offered to the spectators on the basis of their knowledge of Noé's film – a film that has also been a major point of discussion with regard to censorship regulations, specifically in the UK (Hickin). However, this division is more with regard to the reception of Noé's film than spectator expectations.

The knowledge of Noé's film carries with it an awareness of the controversy it caused due to one intercutting scene where shots of a hard-core porn film (which last less than a minute in total

[Hickin 120]) are shown from the perspective of the protagonist (Philippe Nahon) – named only as “the butcher” – whose misogynistic inner-thoughts are heard as voiceover throughout. The shots *Baise Moi* uses are from one domestic violence scene where the butcher hatefully attacks his pregnant wife which can be seen on television when Nadine is having sex with her customer – an early, and the only, prostitution scene in *Baise Moi* through which we are introduced to how Nadine conducts her sex work. Clemence Ozel reads the inclusion of the scene from *Soul Contre Tous* as “not a simple citation but a constructed, manipulated inclusion that both questions the depiction of violence in film as well as [...] restores the female characters’ agency” (126). Looking closely at the aural construction and reading this juxtaposition as a *mise-en-abyme* that problematizes the porn genre, Ozel’s analysis is an important contribution to the discourse on the film with respect to *Baise Moi*’s overlooked referentiality.

In addition to Ozel’s analysis in her PhD thesis on queer temporalities in French cinema (which aims to centralize the works of Céline Sciamma, Virginie Despentes, and Émile Jouvét within the French queer cinema discourse), there is another aspect of referentiality that is important to add here which points to an emptying-out effect in relation to Noé’s film. While Noé borrows hardcore porn shots from actual porn movies to establish a contextual connection between misogyny and the consumption of porn, *Baise Moi* reflects back on this contextualization by way of positioning *Soul Contre Tous* at the same level as a porn film. While Nadine watches on television the domestic violence as well as a sausage cutting scene that implies the castration fear of the butcher from *Soul Contre Tous*, she is performing as a porn actress as part of her job. In other words, *Baise Moi* displays the same moral logic *Soul Contre Tous* attaches to porn movies back to *Soul Contre Tous* itself. This doubling of meaning is what creates the parodic effect, which Ozel reads as “a success in making fun of porn” (129), and we can also claim that this is also a success in parodying *Soul Contre Tous*’s reliance on actual porn shots for shock effect.

Baise Moi goes one step further in building parody through referentiality; it shows how parody, as well as pornography, depends on an audience’s perspective more than the work itself and how “audience members can use parody defensively to defuse, diffuse and break down the assault on

them” (Kleinhans, “Taking Out” 197). Nadine’s self-aware performance that combines her pornographic acting, her sex work and her performance of finding the shots from Noé’s film amusing, diffuses *Soul Contre Tous*’s shock-effect, emptying out the moral logic ingrained in it. There are other narrative borrowings from *Soul Contre Tous*, such as Manu’s asking for 300 francs from her brother who works at the bar. The butcher in *Soul Contre Tous* also requests to borrow 300 francs from a random bartender in one scene which, unlike Manu’s success in acquiring this much money, results in him being kicked out of the bar. In fact, while the butcher completely fails in most of his attempts at criminal activity (except his violence against his wife), such as robbery and murder, Nadine and Manu are “proper” outcasts who *can* rob, steal and revel in their “successful” criminality. *Baise Moi* mocks the butcher’s failure in criminality too.

For the spectators who have not seen *Soul Contre Tous* prior to watching *Baise Moi*, this emptying-out effect functions in a less parodic way (but is still there), because it becomes possible to assume that the customer in the sex scene might have chosen these audio-visuals of domestic violence as porn to be watched while having sex. For the spectator who does not know *Soul Contre Tous*, the film completely loses its status as an avant-garde film and becomes a film whose only value, which is a pornographic value, rests in the context of *Baise Moi* and the characters in the scene: Nadine and the customer. *Baise Moi*’s perspective on pornography centralizes the performers’ experiential knowledge, rather than the consumers, and this is a completely contrasting position to how *Soul Contre Tous* frames pornography purely for shock value.

Either way, getting or not-getting the inside joke, the negativity surrounding the “punk hollowness” of Noé’s notoriously “extreme” cinema is embraced by *Baise Moi* to mock the male sexual partner’s behaviors in the scene, parodying the porn genre’s fictional depictions around female pleasure by way of equating the shock-effect of Noé’s film to the “low status” of pornography, the very status Noé depicts in *Soul Contre Tous*. It is this layered parody-aspect grounded in its cheap home-video aesthetic that incorporates genre conventions that aligns *Baise Moi* with John Waters’ embrace of “trash,” or the pastiche, referentiality and the “fakeness” of queercore aesthetics in Bruce LaBruce’ work. Desportes reflects on the reception of their film in

her book *King Kong Theory*,⁹³ resorting to irony, once again, to criticize the moral logic behind why their film was banned:

And then came the film. Banned. But of course real censorship doesn't come from the courts. It comes more from the advice you are given. And they make sure you hear it. So three porn actresses and an ex-hooker must be forbidden from shooting a film about rape. Even a low-budget, genre film, even a parody. It's important. As if we were threatening state security. (113-114)⁹⁴

“We wanted to make a punk movie”: Pornographic Performance Versus Punk Performance

When asked a question by a gender-biased interviewer about whether she wanted to make the film as a response to sexism in the media, Virginie Despentes gave the following answer: “We wanted to make a punk movie. [...] We loved the movies from the 80's [sic] Scorsese, Ferrara, De Palma's *Scarface* [De Palma 1983], Tobe Hooper, Wes Craven and so with a tiny, tiny budget, we wanted to shoot the same kind of story: strong friendship, outcasts, graphic violence, sex and a bad ending” (Kelly). She lays out the DIY aspects of the film as essential to their filmmaking in this short answer, explaining that their film is intended to be a punk movie, and that they had “a tiny, tiny budget.” The connection between these qualities can also be identified when she talks about the production process in another interview:

It was difficult from the start to the end. People thought we would argue, so nobody wanted us to direct. Then they said Karen and Raffaëla wouldn't be able to act, that it was a bad idea to use porn actresses, that it was a bad idea to show real sex, that it was a mistake to shoot it on DV because it wasn't high quality, that it was wrong to use available light because nobody would be able to see anything, and so on and so on.
(Sharkey)

The film's production comes across in this description as an activity of going against the norms

⁹³ Despentes' book is dedicated to her collaborators in *Baise Moi* – Karen Bach, Raffaëla Anderson and Coralie Trinh Thi.

⁹⁴ I made a slight change in translation in this quote taken from the version published by The Feminist Press (translated by Stéphanie Benson). In the original translation the fourth sentence reads as: “It's more like the advice you are given” (114).

of production and filmmaking itself. It resonates with the “mistakism” that Nicholas Rombes mentions in his work, *Cinema in the Digital Age*, in relation to the Dogme 95 film movement and filmmaker Harmony Korine’s “mistakist manifesto” influenced by that movement (27-28). Despite this correlation, the embrace of trash in *Baise Moi* was not necessarily appreciated as a deliberate “mistakist” avant-gardism, but was blocked from funding, distribution and screening to different degrees. Hence its adoption of DIY aesthetics in the face of such opposition echoes Thompson’s reading of punk commodity in relation to how desire is embodied in its process.

Because commodities are the bearers of desire, they can be read as expressions of the forces that shaped and became embodied in them. Punk in general can be grasped as a material exploration of how a specific set of illicit desires repressed within a dominant social order return to haunt it and, in the best cases, blast cracks in its surface. (*Punk Productions* 6)

Choosing to transform her book and to shoot it with her ex-pornographic performer-collaborator Coralie Trinh Thi, preferring digital video camera (DVCAM) which makes the aesthetic quality of the film impossible to adapt later, using natural lighting and insisting on casting pornographic film actresses, Desportes' filmmaking practice creates a connection between avant-garde experimentation, digital video and punk aesthetics in cinema. The fact that *Baise Moi*, as a result of being shot on digital video cassettes (MiniDV), is not suitable for remastering and digital restoration processes signals its similarity to “shot-on-video” aesthetics of home-movies. DV aesthetics, which both contributed to the decline of VHS (video home system) in the 1990s while continuing to have a legacy today (Noble 735), marks an in-between phase of film production that combines both the physicality of film material (in the shape of the video cassette or videotape) and the process of digitalization of cinema. Rombes refers to this aesthetic as “DV humanism” due to its openness to mistakes through the camcorder while representing the co-existence of the human signature and the “smooth, invisible digital data” (*Digital Age* 28). This in-between position of DV aesthetics embodies the duality of commodification and residuality that also distinguishes the status of pornography and punk.

This collective filmmaking practice and the residuality of *Baise Moi* on the level of the film

material as well as its form, production and technical conditions, positions its punk aesthetics in opposition to the assimilation methods of the mainstream. This positioning opposes Rombes' concept of new punk cinema whose "signatory gesture" is "the relaxing of critique in the face of the overriding entertainment apparatus of the cultural industry" (*New* 85). Rombes asserts that there is a certain self-reflexivity and self-consciousness in new punk cinema that does not necessarily direct its critical eyes towards the mainstream and the dominant culture industry, but incorporates this self-consciousness into popular and mainstream cinema and in that manner points back to itself. This "easy incorporation" of certain avant-garde techniques, once considered as a critique of ideology, is what defines "new punk cinema" for Rombes (*New* 80). While this "easy incorporation" holds great importance in terms of discussing the counter-cultural possibilities against the assimilatory power of mainstream industries, aesthetic hierarchies and power practices ingrained in genres still regulate what can be disseminated, as we have already considered with regard to the production and reception histories discussed above. *Baise Moi's* production process is of a collective and an experimental nature due to its low-budget, similar to the No Wave background of *Variety*, LaBruce's early films, Jarman's *Jubilee*, early trash films by John Waters and *Pepi, Luci, Bom* by Pedro Almodóvar. In their quasi-ironic punk appropriation of the "low status" of the pornographic film as well as the abject status of excluded sexualities, we find the autobiographical reflections in the shape of self-reflexive filmmaking methods. In the face of such levels of engagement with the history of obscenity, pornography and self-reflexivity to the degree of trashiness, there emerges a necessity to shift the vocabulary of "new punk cinema" to be able to situate the collective backgrounds, critically queer manifestos, and autobiographical resistances behind the production of these films.

Even though *Baise Moi* received some of its (low) budget from a French mainstream production company Canal+, its unbound production conditions, distribution and screening went through a gruelling journey before it was able to reach its audience, encountering a number of legal obstacles that fuelled the rhetoric around its extremity and pornography. *Baise Moi's* self-reflexive style is a defying strategy of elevating vision over narrative; the usage of the grainy, dark, distorted, skewed angles, imagery and coloring in the film reflects visual elements of the punk

movement outside the film, designed to bring attention to particular elements, rather than the whole.⁹⁵ Moreover, its production and reception reveal the controlling authoritarian mechanisms and obscenity rules. This is the type of punk aesthetics that fall outside of the Rombes' definition of "new punk cinema" that involves films whose production conditions allowed an incorporation of a degree of irony and a certain self-reflexivity on the narrative level (Rombes' examples include award-winning American films like *Fight Club* and *Memento*), though still functioning within the heteronormativity of the studio system.

Dick Hebdige's investigation of punk as a subaltern style in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* questions whether a punk sensibility can be embodied without an intensified understanding and embeddedness of the significance of subcultural experience and participation. How that experiential sensibility emerges, or as Hebdige quotes Jean-Paul Sartre, how the subordinate class "makes something of what is made of (them)" – to embellish, decorate, parody and wherever possible to recognize and rise above a subordinate position which was never of their choosing" (139) distinguishes the queer methods of reclamation that have constituted the main concern of this thesis with regards to punk aesthetics. There are parallels between queer methods of reclaiming negativity and residuality and a punk sensibility that resists the assimilation through what Ozel calls "the qualities of indeterminacy" (93).

It is proposed by Thompson that the experiential knowledge of punk, or in his words what "punk achieves" (*Punk Productions* 7), lies in its capability to create mediatory strategies through the importance of temporality and live performance within the subculture:

One of punk's mediatory strategies is the privileging of nonreproducible

⁹⁵ Şirin Fulya Erensoy argues that the film follows the tradition of French New Extremity which is characterized by the subversion of genre tropes, bodily violence and "a pessimistic worldview" articulated through "conservative endings that reaffirm the status quo" (65-66). While Erensoy interprets the bad ending of the film as a final, and conservative, conclusion to whether subversion of gender roles can be possible in the world of *Baise Moi*, here I demonstrate that the narrative level is undermined by the parody-aspects and the critical potential of the visual organization of the film in terms of subverting the politics of visibility.

commodities and unalienated labor – the punk rock show is the most important example of this category – over mechanically reproducible commodities produced by alienated labor. [...] Punk’s favoring of the show, free or not, over other forms of punk commodities obeys a mediating logic: the show takes precedence over all other forms of punk, because it combines music and community and is an experiential and embodied phenomenon that can never be replicated or fully captured in live recordings, photos, videos zine accounts, and/or personal narratives. It must be experienced directly, and unlike other commodities cannot be hoarded or accumulated. At best, all nonperformance punk commodities only carry traces of the affect and community that shows attempt to evoke. (*Punk Productions* 123)

The status of uniqueness inherent in the nature of live performance being irreversible directly relates to the community and the audience. The participation of the audience in the punk production does not only come from the nature of being an audience member of a music show, but also is exemplified in the construction of bodily deviant spaces such as mosh pits, crowd surfs, the cut-up textuality of fanzines and joining the punk band on stage. It is notable that in most of the underground punk shows, a stage does not exist. Moreover, in some of the instances we are not even talking about a designated venue but only a basement in a house, as charted by Daniel Makagon’s ethnographic study, *Underground: The Subterranean Culture of DIY Punk Shows* on the community-based DIY punk organizations in the USA. One could detect parallels between the “police pressure” the underground punk shows face (Makagon 154) and the ban that *Baise Moi* received; what can be experienced through the boldness of *Baise Moi* is not far from that experienced at underground punk shows.

The pornographic performances of the actresses in the film also highlight the bodily experience, and thus can be connected to the participatory practices of punk performance: the ability of pornographic imagery to raise bodily reactions marks the film’s participatory aspect. *Baise Moi* deconstructs the “symbolic aesthetic conventions of the mainstream film tradition” that created sexually fetishized objects (Mühleisen 121) and conveys an ambiguity between realism and parody through the pornographic performances. This is one of the ways through which *Baise*

Moi visually constructs a sense of inclusiveness; by creating a parodic fake realism which is considered as “queer” by Wencke Mühlesien: “[T]he realism of queering is a perverse intervention that is not oriented toward utopian political solutions, but rather creates disorder by embracing marginality and perversity. [...] [*Baise Moi*] grasps the embodied self, in sexuality and imagination, as a key to the construction of political subjectivity” (123). Even though Mühleisen subsequently aligns *Baise Moi*’s realism with the conventions of pornography, her notion of queer realism actually points to an activity that can be found in the participatory sensation and parody found in punk; punk points back to the body and the experiential knowledge gained through the body. *Baise Moi* as a punk movie, at a visual level, conveys aesthetics that disrupt the gaze, forcing our focus onto detail and back to the level of the body in its brute physicality and its representational instability.

Mutations Between Punk, Porn and Feminism

Baise Moi and Despentès’ documentary *Mutantes: Punk Porn Feminism* (2008) in which she follows and interviews specific pro-pornography feminist activists, punk artists and queer collectives in the United States, France and Spain, carry a quality of questioning. Despentès’ punk ethics and collaborative connections are also evident in this documentary. It is produced by the gay television channel Pink TV in France which also produces and broadcasts pornographic productions – one of the frequent artists involved in the pornographic channel of Pink TV – Pink X – is the French pornographic performer and actor François Sagat who also played a homeless gay zombie in Bruce LaBruce’s *L.A. Zombie* and collaborated with LaBruce on other projects.⁹⁶ *Mutantes* involves interviews with transfeminist and queer writers and academics whose work informed this dissertation’s theoretical background, providing a context for the intersections between different underground emergences, unattended art practices and pornographic works. Stylistically, the documentary reflects the indirectness of certain connections and indicating moments – “affective registers” (Brown, Deer, Nyong’o 2) – between

⁹⁶ These collaborations involve LaBruce’s gay porn film *It is Not the Pornographer That is Perverse...* (2018), LaBruce’s *The Death Book* featuring some of the portraits of Sagat shot by LaBruce as well as a music video starring Sagat (“I Want to Be You”) and the “romantic punk” musician France de Griessen (Jackson) whose songs are used in the soundtracks for both LaBruce’s *L.A. Zombie* and Virginie Despentès’ later film *Bye Bye Blondie*.

written resources, art works and research, as well as activist demonstrations that affected these movements to different degrees. Among the academics featured in the film are the Spanish writer and philosopher Paul B. Precadio, whose influential book *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* has changed the course of trans writing, American queer theorists Judith Butler and Jack Halberstam whose works have been considered foundational to queer theory, as well as American film scholars Linda Williams and B. Ruby Rich whose works on pornography and queer cinema lay the foundations for porn studies and the category of New Queer Cinema. Despentès traces the feminist discussions around pornography by giving a platform to sex workers' rights activists and the pro-porn performers who engaged with the possibilities of feminist pornography, such as the influential figures Annie Sprinkle and Candida Royale whose subjective histories provide a crucial insight into the birth of the porn genre on screen in the 1970s as an audio-visual medium. Using found footage (mostly archival live recordings of performance artists and activist demonstrations) and superimpositions between these art works, academic writing and interviews, *Mutantes* creates a cut-up transmedia aesthetic that reflects the diverse methods of queer practice and the quality of indeterminacy that we also found in *Baise Moi* via its parodic referentiality. Despentès' focus on the live performance that involves non-simulated sexually graphic practices in *Mutantes*⁹⁷ as well as the interviews with musical practitioners bring to light the counter-cultural practices of radicalism that have interconnected and interacted under the mainstream radar for quite some time. Her interviewees include the No Wave artist Lydia Lunch, the punk musician Lynn Breedlove from the queercore band Tribe 8 and other fellow filmmakers whose works explore the "perversities" of heteronormativity, such as Catherine Breillat and Maria Beatty. These underground connections constitute some of the punk aesthetics that are critical to the "relaxing of critique" approach in postmodern thought that finds its form in the New Punk Cinema or New Extremity discourse. From the birth of radical queer thought and artistic practice, we witness the possibility of anti-assimilatory practices within the intersections of punk, porn, feminism and the queer

⁹⁷ One example for the usage of archival footage in *Mutantes* is the recording of Annie Sprinkle's performance "Post-Porn Modernist," a one-woman stage show from 1991. Sprinkle parodies pornographic performance via referencing different stereotypical porn iconography, all the while being half-naked and offering a spectacle of her vagina to mock the patriarchal obsession over the (un)visibility of female pleasure, or what Linda Williams terms as "the frenzy of the visible."

underground that also display affinities with the earlier trash cinema's methods of pastiche, borrowing from genre tropes, exploitation and pop-art films.

Baise Moi and *Mutantes* treat the possibly-shocking capacity of pornographic feminist audio-visuals and performances as a consequence of reclaiming pornographic expression, rather than the sole aim. By this reclamation, *Baise Moi* highlights the patriarchal ideology that repeatedly circumscribes the binary discourses of sexuality on screen, rendering the genre systems at work complicit in these discourses. The punk sensibility that comes from the collective and low-budget background of the homosocial appropriation of pornography renders its consequential shock-effect unassimilable due to the organic entanglement of the production environment, non-simulated sex scenes and the combined self-awareness of performers and filmmakers. The association between New Punk Cinema and French New Extremity stems from the shock-effect. Here the contention is that these categorizations, by way of foregrounding the end-effect, run the risk of overriding the radical reclamation methods that can be found in low-budget collective production practices that give way to a cinematographic focus on the form and the detail, such as in *Baise Moi*. In contrast to Nicholas Rombes' account of "new punk cinema" which refers to the filmic ability to transpose the "deconstructive rhetoric" of avant-garde and transgression into mainstream cinema (*New 78*), I argue that the punk aesthetics of *Baise Moi*'s "extremity" lies in its capacity to shed light on the cinematic-ness of the residues left behind by the very process of mainstream adaptation.

Conclusion: “Everything is up for grabs”

In their revisiting of the concept of “new extremism” in cinema, Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall⁹⁸ draw attention to “the mainstreaming of sex and violence,” arguing that the recent popularity of extreme cinema blurs the border between “art house extremism” and “multiplex or horror film festival circuit extremisms” (“Extremisms” 9). According to them, this blurring can cause the “lapsing into elitist arguments and perpetuating [of] hierarchies between high and low, art house and mainstream cinema” (Horeck and Kendall, “Extremisms” 9). We therefore need to take into account the diverse manifestations of this idea of cinematic extremity in order to fully grasp its aesthetic and political implications. Their call for a carefully measured approach to the art-house/mainstream tension with regard to the extremity trend in cinema (that was markedly on the rise in the early 2000s and included *Baise Moi*) resonates with the core tension that also underpinned the central argument in this dissertation. In parallel with Horeck and Kendall’s call for a non-hierarchical perspective to think about extremisms in cinema, this thesis focused on a number of cinematic productions that also require such non-hierarchical thinking in relation to punk aesthetics on screen.

Thematically connected to the concept of extremity,⁹⁹ the aesthetics of punk have also been subject to discussions with regard to self-reflexivity and assimilation, as evident in the different approaches towards punk’s translation into cinema (i.e. Thompson’s focus on the low-budget “writerly” qualities of punk documentaries versus Rombes’ concept of “new punk cinema” as an assimilable category). At this intersection of genre-related concepts, Chapter Four explored *Baise Moi*’s relationship to French New Extremity which mirrors the crisis of belonging that could also be found in the discourse of punk cinema: the film’s parodic referentiality and pornographic status reveal the film’s inside/outside negotiation both as art-house extremism and punk cinema.

⁹⁸ Horeck and Kendall also edited a collection on the same topic, titled *The New Extremism in Cinema*, which was cited in the previous chapter in relation to *Baise Moi*.

⁹⁹ There are two main connection points between the concepts of punk and extremism, both of which have been subject to a number of studies: the political extremist groups within punk subcultures (Mareš; Shaffer), the emergence of hardcore punk as a subgenre as well as its connections to the straight-edge culture (Kuhn; Haenfler).

Based on the case studies considered including *Baise Moi*, Bruce LaBruce's first queercore film *No Skin off My Ass* and Bette Gordon's *Variety*, Chapter Four traced a sexual-aesthetic pattern in low-budget cinema that carries the weight of the outcast and the marginalized, a weight that is shared with the spectator through subcultural references and reworking various established formalisms and genres, such as No Wave, second-wave feminism, melodrama, hardcore punk and porn. By way of centralizing the societal exclusions at work in relation to sex work and queer subjects, these films (which manifest different reincarnations and formats of punk, from the early 1980s, to the 1990s and early 2000s) exhibit resistant strategies against mainstream assimilation through pornography, parody and irony. While the No Wave movement in the 1980s originated from New York's punk subculture, the queercore movement in the 1990s subsequently manifested itself as the ultimate mixture of queer and punk negativity as a response to mainstream gay politics and the rise of misogyny and homophobia in the American and Canadian hardcore punk environs. The contention in this thesis is that these aesthetic strategies throughout the post-punk era emerge from subcultural environments and cross-media interactions (such as music, video, performance art, zines and literature) which provide aesthetic and functional solutions to the restrictive filmmaking conditions, primarily resulting in a cut-up aesthetic that signifies the Do-It-Yourself approach of punk.

Such pre-digital cross-media interactions explored in Chapter Four closely resonate with the intertextuality that can be found in the earlier subcultural filmmaking dating back to the late 1960s and the influence of Andy Warhol, evident in the first feature films of Pedro Almodóvar, Derek Jarman and John Waters analyzed in Chapter Three. Before these filmmakers moved on to work with bigger budgets later in their careers, their early works relied on subcultural environments as enablers of queer subjectivities and *survival strategies of disidentification*, to borrow the words of Muñoz. Almodóvar's simultaneous skepticism and embrace of his own subculture, *la movida madrileña*, apparent in the film *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, reflects the cinematic pattern pertaining to the crisis of identification that this thesis identified through the concept of punk aesthetics. *Pepi, Luci, Bom*'s comic-book-influenced "cluttered" aesthetics and parodic lesbian futurity shun realistic representation in order to articulate the complexities and

oppression of queer sexualities – an oppression that is associated with the past in Madrid’s post-Franco society. Almodóvar’s adoption of punk figures and reliance on real-life locations can also be identified in the chaotic aesthetics of Derek Jarman’s *Jubilee* which uses violence to create an antagonistic atmosphere around London’s gay and punk subcultures. I argue that the concept of queer temporality accounts for how these films deal with their respective traumatic past and the politically chaotic atmosphere of the present while critically engaging with the possibility of capitalist assimilation (which characterized the post-punk era) that “converted energies of the counterculture into its own project of re-individualisation” (Butt, Eshun and Fisher 16).

The concept of queer modernism becomes embodied in Jarman’s bricolage of punk and Britain’s early modern period, making use of Shakespeare references and monarchic iconography. *Jubilee* has been considered as a key text in “punk cinema;” however, its queer appropriation of collective violence has not been explored as an integral element that distinguishes its subcultural status. Similarly, its direct engagement with modernist iconography renders its counter-cultural status questionable, as it is omitted from Ailsa Grant Ferguson’s study on “counter-cultural appropriation” of Shakespeare (*Shakespeare* xvi)¹⁰⁰ as well as the collection *Queer Movie Medievalisms* that features queer interventions into the representations of the medieval past on screen. These exclusions also mark *Jubilee* as a resistant text with paradoxical politics that disturb its own identifiability as counter-cinema, reflecting a disidentificatory position-taking against categorizable representations. Therefore, *Jubilee*’s paradoxical relationship to modernism, realized through punk appropriation (which I describe as “queer modernism”) provides a central point in this thesis which argues that queerness, often ignored in the discourse around “punk cinema,” is a fundamental element in the formation of punk aesthetics. By queerness, I do not only refer to the portrayal of LGBTI+ subjects, but also to the strategy of reclaiming negative connotations and aesthetics employed by hegemonic culture to exclude marginalized groups, as epitomized by the political reclamation of the terms “queer” and “punk” by various political

¹⁰⁰ Ferguson delves into the different ways in which Shakespeare’s cultural capital is “inverted into counter-cultural capital” (*Shakespeare* xvii), analyzing bigger budget films than *Jubilee*, some of which are considered key texts, either within the discourse around “punk cinema” (*The Filth and The Fury*), or within New Queer Cinema (*My Own Private Idaho* [1991]).

groups and subcultures. Within this trajectory, John Waters' early trash cinema is analyzed as a proto-punk embodiment of such reclaiming aesthetics through its foregrounding of disgust, mock-terror and theatricality. The fundamental concern, therefore, throughout this thesis has been the aesthetic and political negotiations between reclaiming negativity by means of underground film environments and reclaiming space within the mainstream culture.

By aesthetic negotiations, I refer to the textual incorporations and appropriations analyzed throughout this work that bring a sense of paradoxicality to relevant films in terms of how they are positioned and where they might belong. I discussed these aesthetics as reflection of the process of seeking coping mechanisms that provide a way to deal with cultural stigma through engaging with other texts and iconographies that lend these films a means of identifiability as well as conferring them a radical distinctiveness. Examples included Kathy Acker's employment of self-narrative incorporated into Bette Gordon's No Wave-influenced structuralist tonality in *Variety* and LaBruce's pastiche of lines, images and icons directly copied from other films from American Independent Cinema, melodramatic tropes, Warholian filmmaking and punk zines and imagery.

By political negotiations, I refer to these films' decision to diverge from the political movements that simultaneously make and surround them, such as *Jubilee's* nihilist avoidance of a revolutionary rhetoric even though its subcultural figures engage with revolutionary texts, or Almodóvar's skepticism towards the possibility of a queer future despite the hopefulness of his characters. These negotiations are also manifested in the careers of filmmakers considered who started working with major studios, a development that ensured their early works are more easily accessible. For example, in 2017, Criterion Collection released a high-definition 4K restoration of John Waters' *Multiple Maniacs*, using the original 16mm film materials (Galloway). Among all the filmmakers discussed here, perhaps the most retrospective attention has been paid to John Waters, as his later film career incorporated big stars and a more polished aesthetic, but still featured autobiographically-informed narratives concerning the failure to fit in. Waters' later films include *Pecker* (1999), about a young photographer from Baltimore who gets ostracized by

his own community, and *Cecil B. Demented* (2000) featuring an underground cinema terrorist group who kidnaps a famous Hollywood actress, played by Melanie Griffith, to make a film about destroying the studio system. As the later career of Waters (as well as the gradual success to differing degrees of other filmmakers discussed) demonstrates, punk aesthetics, their transformative disruptions and affirmation by cult followers and underground fans, can lead to workings with, and incorporations into, the mainstream which opens up the discussion around the limits and consequences of such interactions.

Chapter Two explored the process of adopting certain codes of mainstream representation, but in relation to how what we know as punk iconography (determined by the mainstreaming of famous bands from the 1970s) is constructed through a standardization and canonization process in which “punk cinema” plays an essential part. We noted that, even though the low-budget filmmaking methods provide a sense of transparency, these films still benefit from the sensationalist portrayal of the punk scenes in mainstream media, as well as adopting aesthetic practices from more established avant-garde forms, such as cinema vérité. The themes that are identified through an exploration of the hybrid-forms and mockumentary elements in “punk cinema” films, revolve around questions of “true” depiction and authenticity. Most of the films featured in this exploration aspire to depict the subculture’s “essential” elements, though ultimately fail to capture (to different degrees) the diversity and experiential aspect of punk subcultures, as well as to satisfy highly represented punk figures, as evident in Johnny Rotten’s rejection of the film *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle*, and Joe Strummer’s disowning of *Rude Boy*. These films include concert and backstage footage, and also have been analyzed in relation to the genre conventions they tap into. While they both exhibit an aesthetic mixture of mockumentary and rockumentary elements, we also find a combination of mockery and cinema vérité in further “punk cinema” productions: Penelope Spheeris’ oeuvre. It is important to note that the reception and popularity of the first documentary in her *The Decline of Western Civilization* series enabled Spheeris to work within more financially advantageous conditions through writing fiction films based on her involvement in, and experience of, the LA punk scene, such as *Suburbia* (1984) and *Dudes* (1987), both of which gained cult statuses, leading to her subsequent success with the box-

office hit and comedy classic *Wayne's World* (1992).

As exemplified by Spheeris' films, these issues around authentic representation and the later big-budget appropriations of punk locate "punk cinema" in a contradictory position in terms of its initially-claimed negating position against the mainstream movie industry. This contradiction is an important component of my reconceptualization of punk aesthetics as a disidentificatory method, as it is precisely the methods of disidentification in cultural productions that tackle this contradictory idea of authentic representation. To be able to address the aesthetic issues (such as "transparency") around capturing authenticity and offering identifiable representation to the audience in "punk cinema," this dissertation considered the reception of the key films as a source of reflection, a way to think of authenticity itself as a spectrum. Incorporating interviews with artists and filmmakers, autobiographical anecdotes from documentaries and oral history books, the methodology of using subjective accounts (which parallels queer methodologies) of punk participants as well as practitioners revealed the limits of "punk cinema" and its aspiration to depict the subculture. We saw that aspects of experiential knowledge of the subculture get lost when the focus is on famous figures, their stage performances as well as their backstage footage. This methodology of combining reception with textual analysis rendered the issue of authenticity a product of the canonizing practice of relying on well-known figures and distilled images in films, rather than an issue that can be resolved in evaluating a filmmaker's loyalty to punk. This process is a key aspect of the mainstream assimilation of punk, or the "death" of punk, which has haunted punk since its inception as discussed in Chapter One. Therefore, the crisis of authenticity in "punk cinema" is linked to this haunting cycle of assimilation and reclamation, and has a lot to learn from the haunting aesthetics of queer negativity that articulate, and survive, the struggles of identification within dominant culture. We saw in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, that once we leave behind the search for authentic representation, the *space of possibles* opens up more towards cacophony and *the carnivalesque*, the theatrical and the confrontational solutions to the exclusionary categories of the "realistic representation" that pervades mainstream cinema. This is where this thesis distinguished "punk aesthetics" as a multifaceted concept that can both expand on and point to the problems of "punk cinema." The role of the

“punk cinema” canon in providing a distillation of punk histories escalated the crisis over “authenticity,” and can learn from queer and feminist methods of disidentification and negativity which informed punk’s transgressive androgynous look in the first place.

Overall, we see that such complex relations between punk subcultures, the systems of exclusion at work in their screen adoptions, and the larger employment of punk in cinema, indicate how mainstream media relies on underground styles, minority cultures, low-budget experimentation and artistic productions for its own control mechanisms, and financial and cultural continuity. Hence, there is a cyclical movement in this synthesis, tracing resistant strategies against, and negotiations with, such assimilatory practices in mainstream cultural productions, back to the crisis of the “death” of punk. By embracing the death drive, queerness allows breathing room for punks’ struggle with assimilation, as punk and queer’s intersecting subcultural environments have already been providing space for the irrepresentable through camp, parody and pastiche.

This thesis traced these complex relations through a number of cross-media interactions. We saw through each case study that print publications, such as zines, literature, manifestos and comic-books (mirroring the Situationist concept of *détournement*) play an important role in creating punk aesthetics. So does music. We saw that the more the film involves cross-media referentiality, the more the film becomes less identifiable in terms of formalist categories and genres. I argued throughout this dissertation that such punk aesthetics that come out of subcultural environments and various collaborations that go outside of, or negotiate with, the film sector, resist mainstream assimilation by way of reflecting the crisis of identification of the marginalized subject. The cacophonous, cluttered, anti-social, “disgusting” survival strategies of the marginalized subject do not necessarily result in representing an essential part of their subculture, but rather show the possibility of survival through that subculture and its artistic practices. In so doing, the punk aesthetics of the marginalized can use everything that “is up for grabs, to be torn apart and redone” (Nyong’o and Brown), from the most traumatic memories, as in the case of Jarman’s cinema, or *Tarnation*’s “selfie” aesthetic that offers a method of self-healing, to the most politically questionable aesthetics, such as the Nazisploitation references in

LaBruce's cinema and Kathy Acker's literary engagement with hard-core pornography. The filmmaking itself becomes part of the "healing" process in *Tarnation*, hence the personal space of "self-healing" is opened up to a public space, rendering "self-healing" a performative act. Giving room to share and circulate the performative aspects of "self-healing," or collectively confronting the death drive, subcultures offer the space for creating cultural value out of the valueless. Primarily taking the shape of the underground, these collectivized spaces considered in this dissertation all had connections to the mainstream, creating a haunting effect on its mechanisms of valorization.

Filmography

“Béatrice Dalle und Virginie Despentes.” *Durch Die Nacht Mit...*, created by Hans-Günther Brüske, directed by Bruce La Bruce, ARTE / Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), 01 Feb. 2011.

“Harmony Korine und Gaspar Noé.” *Durch Die Nacht Mit...*, created by Hans-Günther Brüske, directed by Bruce La Bruce, ARTE / Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), 07 Feb. 2010.

“Mondo Toronto.” *Glennnda & Friends*, created by Glenn Belverio, 1994. *Video Data Bank*, <https://www.vdb.org/titles/mondo-toronto>. Accessed 08 Oct. 2020.

38/79 Sentimental Punk. Directed by Kurt Kren, 1979.

A Bigger Splash. Directed by Jack Hazan, Buzzy Enterprises, 1973.

À Bout De Souffle. Directed by Jean-Luc Godard, Les Films Impéria / Les Productions Georges de Beauregard / Société Nouvelle de Cinématographie (SNC), 1960.

A Hard Day's Night. Directed by Richard Lester, Walter Shenson Films, 1964.

À Ma Soeur! Directed by Catherine Breillat, Flach Film / Arte France Cinéma / CB Films / Canal+, 2001.

Adaptation. Directed by Spike Jonze, Beverly Detroit / Clinica Estetico / Good Machine, 2002.

Anybody's Woman. Directed by Bette Gordon, 1981.

Anybody's Woman. Directed by Dorothy Arzner, Paramount Pictures, 1930.

Baise Moi. Directed by Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi, Canal+ / Pan Européenne, 2000.

Basic Instinct. Directed by Paul Verhoeven, Carolco / Canal+ / TriStar Pictures, 1992.

Being John Malkovich. Directed by Spike Jonze, Astralwerks / Gramercy Pictures / Propaganda Films, 1999.

Beyond the Valley of the Dolls. Directed by Russ Meyer, Twentieth Century Fox, 1970.

Blank City. Directed by Celine Danhier, Insurgent Media / Pure Fragment Films, 2010.

Blood Feast. Directed by Herschell Gordon Lewis, Friedman-Lewis Productions, 1963.

Blow Job. Directed by Andy Warhol, 1963.

Blue is the Warmest Color. Directed by Abdellatif Kechiche, Quat'sous Films / Wild Bunch, 2013.

Blue. Directed by Derek Jarman, Channel 4 / Arts Council of Great Britain, 1993.

Born in Flames. Directed by Lizzie Borden, The Jerome Foundation / C.A.P.S. / Young Filmmakers Ltd., 1983.

Boy Meets Girl. Directed by Leos Carax, Abilene, 1984.

Bye Bye Blondie. Directed by Virginie Despentes, Red Star Cinema / Frakas Productions / Vega Film / Wild Bunch, 2012.

Caligula. Directed by Tinto Brass, Penthouse Films International / Felix Cinematografica, 1979.

Caravaggio. Directed by Derek Jarman, British Film Institute (BFI) / Channel 4, 1986.

Carol. Directed by Todd Haynes, Film4 / Killer Films / Number 9 Films, 2015.

Cathy Come Home. Directed by Ken Loach, BBC, 1966.

Cecil B. Demented. Directed by John Waters, Polar Entertainment, 2000.

Control. Directed by Anton Corbijn, Becker Films / CINV / Claraflora, 2007.

Cruising. Directed by William Friedkin, Lorimar Film Entertainment, 1980.

D.O.A.: A Rite of Passage. Directed by Lech Kowalski, 1981.

Dancer in the Dark. Directed by Lars Von Trier, Zentropa, 2000.

Derek Jarman: Life as Art. Directed by Andy Kimpton-Nye, 400 Blows Prod and VET Ltd., 2004.

Derek. Directed by Isaac Julien, Normal Films, 2008.

Desperate Living. Directed by John Waters, Charm City Productions, 1977.

Dudes. Directed by Penelope Spheeris, Spheeris Films, 1987.

Dutchman. Directed by Anthony Harvey, Dutchman Film Company, 1966.

Eat Your Makeup. Directed by John Waters, Dreamland, 1968.

Empty Suitcases. Directed by Bette Gordon, 1980.

Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill! Directed by Russ Meyer, Eve Productions, 1965.

Female Trouble. Directed by John Waters, Dreamland, 1974.

Fight Club. Directed by David Fincher, Fox 2000 Pictures / Regency, 1999.

Flesh. Directed by Paul Morrissey, Factory Films, 1968.

Freaks. Directed by Tod Browning, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), 1932.

Freeheld. Directed by Peter Sollett, Double Features Films / Endgame Entertainment, 2015.

Gerontophilia. Directed by Bruce La Bruce, 1976 Productions / New Real Films / Téléfilm Canada, 2013.

Hable Con Ella. Directed by Pedro Almodóvar, El Deseo / Antena 3 Televisión / Good Machine / Vía Digital, 2002.

Hairspray. Directed by John Waters, New Line Cinema, 1988.

Heat. Directed by Paul Morrissey, Factory Films, 1972.

Help! Directed by Richard Lester, Walter Shenson Films, 1965.

Hustler White. Directed by Bruce La Bruce, Dangerous to Know Swell Co. / Hustler White Productions / Strand, 1996.

I Shot Andy Warhol. Directed by Mary Harron, Playhouse International Pictures / Killer Films 1990.

I Spit on Your Grave. Directed by Meir Zarchi, Barquel Creations, 1978.

Irreversible. Directed by Gaspar Noé, Eskwad / 120 Films / Canal+ / Wild Bunch, 2002.

It Came from Kuchar. Directed by Jennifer M. Kroot, Tigerlily Pictures LLC, 2009.

It is Not the Pornographer That is Perverse... Directed by Bruce La Bruce, Cockyboys / Amard Bird Films, 2018.

Je Tu Il Elle. Directed by Chantal Akerman, Paradise Films / French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1974.

Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai Du Commerce, 1080 Bruxells. Directed by Chantal Akerman, Paradise Films / Unité Trois, 1975.

Jordan's Dance. Directed by Derek Jarman, 1977.

Jubilee. Directed by Derek Jarman, Megalovision, 1978.

Kathy Acker. Directed by Alan Benson, London Weekend Television (LWT), 1984.

Kill Your Idols. Directed by Scott Crary, Hunger Artist Productions, 2004.

L.A. Zombie. Directed by Bruce La Bruce, PPV Networks / Dark Alley Media / Wurstfilm, 2010.

L'Eclisse. Directed by Michelangelo Antonioni, Cineriz / Interopa Film / Paris Film, 1962.

Ladies and Gentlemen, The Fabulous Stains. Directed by Lou Adler, Paramount Pictures, 1982.

Last Tango in Paris. Directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, Produzioni Europee Associate (PEA), 1972.

Le Petit Soldat. Directed by Jean-Luc Godard, Les Productions Georges de Beauregard / Société Nouvelle de Cinématographie (SNC), 1963.

Llik Your Idols. Directed by Angélique Bosio, Kidam, 2007.

Los Amantes Pasajeros. Directed by Pedro Almodóvar, El Deseo, 2013.

Memento. Directed by Christopher Nolan, Newmarket Group, 2000.

Mondo Topless. Directed by Russ Meyer, Eve Productions, 1966.

Mondo Trasho. Directed by John Waters, Dreamland, 1969.

Multiple Maniacs. Directed by John Waters, Dreamland, 1969.

Mutantes: Punk Porn Feminism. Directed by Virginie Despentes, Morgane Production / Pink TV, 2008.

My Own Private Idaho. Directed by Gus Van Sant, New Line Cinema, 1991.

No Skin Off My Ass. Directed by Bruce LaBruce, Gaytown Pictures, 1991.

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