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**PUNK, PORN, & POLITICS: THE
AESTHETICS OF RADICAL
SEXUALITIES**

J F ANDERSON

PhD

2021

**PUNK, PORN, & POLITICS: THE
AESTHETICS OF RADICAL
SEXUALITIES**

JAMES FORSYTH ANDERSON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the University of Northumbria
at Newcastle for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Research undertaken in the Faculty of Arts,
Design & Social Sciences

August 2021

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the University Ethics Committee on April 1 2021.

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ABSTRACT

Punk, Porn, & Politics: The Aesthetics of Radical Sexualities

by

James F. Anderson

This thesis marks an attempt to think through the interrelationship between punk, the youth cultural form that emerged in the mid-1970s, and pornography, understood as the aesthetic field pertaining to the explicit representation of sexuality and sexual acts. This thesis presents a detailed discussion of the politics of representation that inform the production and circulation of specific case studies: all of which, in varying ways, demonstrate instances of pornographic imagery operating within punk-related cultural productions. Taking the form of a diachronic analysis, I examine how the relationship between punk-related cultural productions, pornographic iconography, and sexual aesthetics develops over time, stemming from the emergence of punk proper. In doing so, I discuss various examples of this cross-cultural exchange, witnessed in the work of self-identifying punk practitioners and designers responsible for the popularisation of punk style, as well as other artists who historically align with the emergence and development of the punk movement in Anglo-American contexts. I demonstrate that, contrary to prevailing assumptions about punk and its sexual themes, several prominent punk-related auteurs mobilised pornographic imagery to challenge the status quo and overturn gender norms, in more complex ways than have hitherto been acknowledged in scholarship.

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Introduction

In late 2018, the Museum of Sex in New York opened *Punk Lust: Raw Provocation 1971-1985*: an expansive retrospective dedicated to exploring Anglo-American punk's sexual themes. In his introductory text to the exhibition, the art historian and cultural critic Carlo McCormick addressed the potential tensions emanating from the suturing of punk to the thematic of sex in *Punk Lust*, referencing Johnny Rotten's (né John Lydon) infamous quip—'Love is two minutes and 50 seconds of squelching noises'—as indicative of the prevailing assumption that punk was apathetic towards sex.¹ McCormick proposed that if the parallel cultural movement of disco was a corporeal means of transgressing racial and sexual boundaries, incubating and empowering a nascent 'queer' movement, then punk's relation to sex was more ostensibly rooted in such moments of inchoate lust; a 'squelching' distraction from the bleak realities of 'no future'. To be sure, along with its associated nihilism and the androgynous styling of its edgy wardrobe, first wave punk—and its key figures such as Rotten—would express ambiguous attitudes towards sex, overturning traditions that valued sex for either pleasure or for transcendence. Yet, as *Punk Lust* demonstrates, in spite of Rotten's apathy, many of his punk contemporaries engaged with sexuality in overt ways as part of their creative practice.²

Despite the existence of a range of literature concerning punk's visuality, there are few studies dedicated to punk's sexual themes. This dissertation marks an intervention into this impasse, and as such, aims to 'return' the sex to punk, so to speak. That punk's sexual themes

¹ McCormick, C. *et al.* (2019) *Punk Lust: Raw Provocation*. New York: Museum of Sex.

² For a detailed description of this exhibition, see Anderson (2019).

should have been largely overlooked within much scholarship remains surprising, especially when taking into account the etymology of the term, whose meaning is underpinned by sexual connotations. As detailed by feminist music journalist and ‘punk professor’ Vivien Goldman, in the sixteenth century punk was used to refer to forms of social deviancy and impoverishment as a synonym for ‘lowlife’ (2016, p. 178). Tracing the general history and circulation of the term, Goldman notes how, at this time, it served to denote ‘coward’ and ‘loser’ (2016, p. 178). However, in its ‘prison usage’, which continues into the present, punk is used as a slang term for ‘sex slave’ (p. 178).

Punk collector and cultural commentator Toby Mott affirms this linkage further. Introducing his survey of prurient punk ephemera, *Showboat: Punk/Sex/Bodies* (2016), Mott positions sex at heart of the punk subculture *proper*: ‘From punk’s inception, sex was an integral part of the movement, and this can be traced back to Shakespeare’s use of the term “taffety punk,” to mean “a well-dressed whore”’ (Mott, 2016, n.p.). From this very brief etymological sketch, it is clear that punk, as a classificatory term, has undergone various semantic shifts in meaning, but its connotative resonance with sexuality has remained persistent. Given the focus of this study, the emergence of punk as a signifier for ‘marginal’ sexuality dating from the Elizabethan era affirms a genealogy in which the roots and routes of punk can be understood apropos of cultural understandings of sex.

By surveying punk-related activity across interconnected worlds of performance art, graphic design, fashion, and underground film, this dissertation reframes critical understanding of the ‘punk aesthetic’ (Hebdige, 1979, p. 17) in light of overlooked sexual themes in Anglo-

American punk. I argue that sexual imagery, and pornography specifically, is a crucial element that informs what punk scholars Russ Bestley and Alex Ogg have termed the ‘visual codes’ of punk (2012, p. 9). I show that pornography has, at various points, been deployed by auteurs as a means of cultivating ‘provocative’ iconography as an expression of punk’s challenge to the status quo. In particular, I demonstrate this deployment of pornography by female punk-related progenitors as a means of contesting social norms and mores.

I have selected various examples from across the cultural history of punk to explore this cross-cultural exchange between ‘punk’ and ‘porn’, which I view through the conjuncture of ‘punk porn’. I trace trajectories of ‘punk porn’ through a diachronic analysis, examining how the relationship between punk-related cultural productions and sexual aesthetics has developed since the emergence of punk *proper*.³ In this light, I view punk-inspired, contemporary pornography (chapter 5) as part of a continuum with punk aesthetics following the recognisable emergence of punk in the mid-to-late 1970s (chapter 1-2). This continuum evidences changes in the deployment of a recognisable assemblage of punk aesthetic strands—comprising ideological notions, affective stances, and visual codes—that are marked as ‘punk’ phenomena.

³ My use of the term *proper* is meant to indicate the origins of punk beginning with its widespread Anglo-American emergence as a popular subculture in 1976. However, as I have already briefly outlined, and develop further in chapter 1, recognisably punk activity can be traced earlier to events such as the Sex Pistols’ first gig at Central Saint Martin’s College of Art in London in 1975. However, it was not until the following year that punk emerged in the wider popular consciousness, when the transatlantic music press recognised the burgeoning subculture as such. In this sense, the cultural history of UK punk in 1975 speaks to a series of more fragmented cultural activities enacted by relatively small numbers of initiates, whereas, by 1976, punk activity and subcultural membership began to find form outside of London, reaching a high-point by 1977. However, I would add that, while this account is broadly accurate for the US context too, the founding of *Punk Magazine* in New York City in 1975 does suggest that the term was popularised earlier in the US context—I address this cultural history in more detail in chapter 1.

While I consider both historical, as well as more contemporary instantiations of this conjuncture of ‘punk porn’, then, I do not seek to propound a historical account in the strict sense of historiography. Rather, I proffer a theoretical exegesis of aesthetic strategies and performative approaches that are coded as elements in a recognisable ‘punk aesthetic’, and the ways in which these aesthetic assemblages speak to a shared set of concerns centred around concepts such as the aforementioned ‘provocation’, as well as ‘transgression’, ‘consciousness raising’ and ‘demystification’.

My focus on aesthetics seeks to address myriad components of the ‘punk aesthetic’ and its relations to ‘punk style’. To be sure, in accordance with the understanding of punk as an attitude as explicated, punk style cannot be reduced to a strictly defined set of components on the level of fashion. Because, as a subcultural style, punk proclaimed the authenticity of the amateur, privileging personal customisation over earlier subcultures’ strict delineations of items considered constitutive of their style, for example in Mod stylings.⁴ In other words, punk’s participants interpreted the punk style according to their own taste, and in this light, a seemingly infinite list of items could be considered as punk, due to their appropriation as ‘style’ under the guise of punk self-creation.

⁴ I follow Hebdige’s (1979) reading of punk as a subculture as a defined group of participants who share ideas, beliefs and values—as well as adopting a distinctive ‘look’—that deviate from the ‘mainstream’ of culture. By contrast, I see counterculture as a broader movement i.e. the 1960s counterculture, which encompasses various groups and sub-sects, and attempts to mark a more distinct break with the prevailing cultural ideals of a given time period through the adoption of radically different socio-political, philosophical and spiritual ideas. While these terms are not wholly discrete—and indeed, are often used interchangeably in common usage—I view punk as a subculture in dialogue with the media, per Savage (2001)—I elaborate on this in the section ‘k-punk’: Contemporary Theoretical Approaches.

While I do not wish to categorise a set of clothing items as inherently punk, then, I do however think it important to explore clothing items that have become associated with the punk ‘imaginary’ in the ‘cultural memory’ of punk; that is, the collective understanding of what constitutes punk attitude and argot, as understood widely in the public context. Dealing with memory is a tricky business of course, and to a large extent, necessitates assumptions as to what an ‘average’ person would consider to be part of the punk aesthetic. In this light, I work with case studies that themselves have sought to author elements of the punk aesthetic, such as Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, who largely embraced the term, and saw themselves as architects of a recognisable ‘look’ which was uniquely punk—as elaborated in chapter 2.⁵ Alternatively, I also consider case studies which can be understood to have been galvanised by the ‘punk moment’ of 1976-1977 (even if they have personally disavowed punk as a self-definitional marker), such as Cosey Fanni Tutti and Linder Sterling, as discussed in chapter 3.⁶

In this sense, my analysis includes the work of both self-identifying punk practitioners responsible for the popularisation of punk style, as well as other artists who historically align with the emergence and development of Anglo-American punk in the wake of the emergence of punk *proper* in 1976-1977. This ‘punk moment’ is significant in my discussion here, given that it

⁵ Westwood and McLaren were the proprietors of a string of clothing boutiques at 430 King’s Road in the London Borough of Chelsea. Westwood’s career has seen her become one of the most celebrated British fashion designers of the modern era, while McLaren’s career encompassed various musical and artistic projects that spanned (mis)managing groups such as the New York Dolls, Sex Pistols and Bow Wow Wow, to releasing musically groundbreaking albums such as *Duck Rock* (1983) and *Waltz Darling* (1989). I primarily address their careers in relation to the SEX and Seditious era of their creative practice in chapter 2, but for an exhaustive biography of the couple vis-à-vis their centrality to the emergence of British punk, see Gorman’s *The Life and Times of Malcolm McLaren* (2020).

⁶ Cosey Fanni Tutti and Linder Sterling are pioneering female artists who rose to prominence in the 1970s. Both hail from Northern England (Hull and Manchester, respectively), and their artistic careers are interwoven with musical endeavours, with Tutti as a member of industrial group Throbbing Gristle, as well as Chris & Cosey, and Sterling as an associate of Buzzcocks. I address their careers in detail in chapter 3, but for autobiographical accounts, see *Art Sex Music* (2017) and *Linder: Works 1976-2006* (2006).

constituted a shift in popular art and culture whereby accessibility came to be a driving factor of the burgeoning punk ethos. While the cultural industry moved quickly to ‘recuperate’ punk’s assault within its consumerist imperatives, the emergence of punk cohered with, and directly constituted, the opening up of further spaces for cultural activity, meaning that more experimental bands and artists—as well as hitherto occluded subjectivities including women and ethnic minorities—were able to further their career and bolster a larger audience by operating under the auspices of punk.

My rationale for the selection of case studies emphasises the significance of women as auteurs. While I do accord significant space to male figures, such as Malcolm McLaren in chapter 2, or Nick Zedd and Richard Kern in chapter 4, I am explicitly interested in the ways in which these creatives realised their practice through collaborative engagements with female counterparts (Vivienne Westwood, and Lydia Lunch, respectively). In bringing the critical entanglement of ‘punk porn’ to bear on punk-related women and their associated aesthetics, then, I also widen my focus beyond music-making to a variety of artistic contexts: from the fashion styles adopted by punk women in chapter 2, for instance, to the work of female artists who themselves incorporated pornographic modelling and performance into their artistic practice, as explored in chapters 3-4. My investigation into the tradition of ‘punk’ women engaging in different forms of sex work (chapters 1-2) from the late-1970s onwards reflects a singular contribution to the fields of both Subcultural Studies and Porn Studies. I discuss this phenomenon in light of the intersections it evidences between (im)material labour, precarity, and feminist politics, honing in on second wave feminist understandings of the ‘personal is political’ in relation to the sexual politics of punk.

In sum, to generate insight into how ‘punk porn’ has developed apropos of the ‘politics of representation’ it stages, I investigate four examples in Anglo-American contexts, with a particular focus on London and New York City in the late-1970s. In each of these case studies, punk-related artists and musicians ostensibly engage with pornography as a ‘challenge to hegemony’ and a means of opposing established aesthetic norms. Two main questions guide my exploration here: how has Anglo-American punk culture engaged with the thematic of sexuality? And, in what ways have punk’s deployment of sexual imagery functioned within its creative practice? By tracing a trajectory from Johnny Rotten to Bonnie Rotten, then, I show how punk aesthetics have consistently drawn from pornographic imageries for various ends: provocation being one such aim. Tracing this continuum reveals a genealogy of obscenity trials and charges, as consequences of challenging the status quo.

In chapter 1, I adumbrate cultural understandings of punk as a form of memory-work. I frame this discuss through the lens of Cultural Analysis, which I employ as my methodology, as a means towards accounting for the contingency of punk and porn as multivalent signifiers. In chapter 2, I examine the roots of the pornographic imagery utilised by Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren at their SEX boutique, exploring the circulation and reception of their designs in relation to the Sex Pistols. In chapter 3, I investigate the practice of female artists Cosey Fanni Tutti and Linder Sterling, and the ways in which their work engaged with pornography as a form of social critique. In chapter 4, I survey the Cinema of Transgression, the New York underground film movement of the late-1970s and early-to-mid 1980s, and how female auteurs such as Lydia Lunch staged pornographic experimental cinema in a process of

overturning norms of female sexuality and desire. Finally, in chapter 5, I chart the trajectory of ‘punk porn’ to contemporary pornography in the web 2.0 era, analysing how porn performer Bonnie Rotten draws on a ‘punk imaginary’ as a form of self-branding.

What are the Politics of ‘Punk Porn’?

In turning to the sexual at work in punk, this study considers issues central to the ‘politics of representation’ that underscore punk’s deployment of pornography. In doing so, I eschew a totalising view of the case studies considered here. Instead, I seek to shed light on the ways in which both punk and pornography—and the cross-cultural examples presented here—are produced within cultural discourses. My understanding of ‘sex’ draws from philosopher Michel Foucault’s analysis of the experience of sexuality in modern Western culture in his landmark series, *The History of Sexuality*. In the first volume, Foucault asks why we apprehend sexuality as repressed, in spite of the evidence that Western culture actually ‘speaks’ a great deal about sex. Foucault diagnoses the West’s historical tendency to construct sex ‘as a problem of truth’ (1978, p. 56) which he terms the *scientia sexualis*. By this term, Foucault defines an understanding of sexuality within scientific discourses premised on ideals of ‘reason’, as opposed to the tradition he identifies in the representation of sexual knowledge throughout the history of Eastern art, which he terms the *ars erotica* (p. 57).⁷

As Foucault argues, the *scientia sexualis* is grounded in a Christian tradition, in which it is established as a ‘ritual we rely on for the production of truth’ (1978, p. 58), and was

⁷ The Karma Sutra presents a well-known example here.

formalised when ‘medicine, psychiatry, and pedagogy began to solidify it’ (p. 63). Foucault sees the *scientia sexualis* as constituted by two main discursive forms: the examination and the confession (p. 59). Thus, despite the liberatory promise entailed within the *scientia sexualis*—that by speaking about sex, we can come closer to the ‘truth’ of sex—the apparatus of rationalisation serves to problematise and pathologise sexuality, rendering it a scientific matter. In this way, the logics of confession function to enable power structures to regulate sexuality (p. 73), as opposed to liberating it. This discursive operation of power-knowledge, which replicates the structures of bourgeois authoritarianism, has historically entailed a patriarchal bias. That is to say, as Foucault points out, female sexuality has historically been pathologised as ‘hysterical’ (pp. 104-105) in the West, and has been subjugated to a model of heteronormative male sexuality.

Essentially, Foucault sees these techniques as inducing sex to ‘speak’, which he views as part of the ‘dispositif’ through which sexuality has historically been produced in Western discourses through power relations. In other words, Foucault debunks the myth of a ‘natural’ sexuality which has been repressed. In this, he targets psychoanalysis as instilling the false urge to confess one’s sexuality. Rather than a liberating therapy, Foucault sees psychoanalysis as the instrumentalisation of ‘biopolitics’: techniques of disciplinary power which serve a regulatory function over the bodies of the populous. Foucault thus rebukes what he terms the ‘repressive hypothesis’ (p. 10) as developed by figures such as Wilhelm Reich, the Austrian psychoanalyst and follower of Freud, as well as French theorist Herbert Marcuse.⁸

⁸ My analysis centres primarily on Reich here as he was acknowledged as an explicit reference by McLaren and Westwood—this critical linkage is discussed further in chapter 1. However, Marcuse’s theorisation in texts such as *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) develops the idea of the ‘repressive hypothesis’ in compelling ways, and is known to have exerted a profound influence on the 1960s counterculture.

Reich extended Freud's work in texts such as *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930), positing that the founding of civilisation entails the establishment of rules and prohibitions which, in turn, require the repression of sexuality and other immutable drives, upon fear of punishment. Reich's concept of the 'sexual revolution' came to prominence as a guiding idea of the 1960s counterculture, inspiring the belief that 'sexual liberation' would lead to a form of revolutionary emancipation from power through the overthrowing of hegemonic repressive structures. As I discuss, later in this thesis, this idea was reprised by McLaren and Westwood in justification of the controversial prurience exhibited by their punk-era fashion designs.

In a well-known passage from Foucault's text, he reproaches advocates of sexual liberation: 'We must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power' (1978, p. 157). Here, Foucault introduces the figure of the 'spiral', as a means of illustrating how 'pleasure' and 'power' are interlinked. Thus, for Foucault, the nature of power, and its sexual prohibitions, cannot be separated from the structures of domination that circumscribe it, they are locked in '*perpetual spirals of power and pleasure*' (p. 145, emphasis in original). Central to this, Foucault accords a positive ontological status to transgression, insisting that pleasure is always interwoven and interlinked with power relations. To put it another way, for Foucault, power is not merely a repressive force but is conceptualised as a productive operation (p. 119). Yet, Foucault sees the normalising function of the deployment of sexuality as evidence that 'sexuality is originally, historically bourgeois, and that, in its successive shifts and transpositions, it induces specific class effects' (p. 127). This is particularly significant to my consideration of sexuality here, in relation to the ways in which punk auteurs mobilised sexuality on their own terms in 'public',

thereby challenging the sanctity of the bourgeois model of sexuality, in which sex was relegated to the ‘private’ domestic domain—I will return to this class-based argument later in the thesis.

Given my particular focus on gender in relation to sexuality, I seek to interrogate Foucault’s work per film scholar Linda Williams’ reproach of his gendered presuppositions. As Williams contends, ‘even though Foucault can argue that “sex” as an entity is radically discontinuous from one culture to the next, the fact remains that the pleasure of women is alien and other to both systems’ (1989, p. 4).⁹ Recognising Williams’ argument, I explore my case studies through the ‘politics of representation’. In doing so, I draw on Foucault’s understanding of biopolitics, as developed by feminist scholars such as Williams and Lynda Nead, and the ways disciplinary technologies are deployed productively upon subjects, in processes which serve to regulate and contain bodies. Central to my consideration of the ‘representational politics’ within punk’s aesthetic strategies is the figure of the female ‘punk body’ as a site of ‘radical’ subjectivity. As I elaborate in my analysis, this figure can be viewed as an attempt to reconfigure the conventions of ‘aesthetic judgements’ which constitute the art historical figure of the female nude.

A point of clarification: although transgression forms a central conceptual component in my analysis, I seek to avoid reading the ‘punk body’ as inherently transgressive as such. My interest in the nexus of aesthetics and transgression extends beyond judging ‘successes’ or ‘failures’ of those performance or aesthetic strategies. In other words, I suspend judgement about whether these cultural objects are *bona fide* transgressive. Instead, I unpack how these examples

⁹ I provide a more detailed account of Williams’ work in the Porn Studies section below.

invoke various concepts of transgression, and in doing so, I point to the ways in which transgression has been deployed as a conceptual tool. By honing in on transgression, I identify correlations between transgression and ‘transformativity’, indicating ways in which punk artists, more broadly, have ‘transgressed’ societal norms in ways which prefigure contemporaneous challenges to gender and sexual norms.

However, while the concept of transgression is central to my analysis here, I utilise different terminology in various spaces according to their historical relevance and contemporaneous usage. For instance, in chapter 2 I discuss the term ‘provocation’ reflecting its usage in the particular era considered there. While I utilise other terms which might be synonymous with transgression, different terms are being used in individual chapters and sections spaces in order to retain their nuance and explanatory power. In chapter 5, I consider the concept of the ‘abject’ in detail through Bonnie Rotten’s porn performances, and explore this term according to Julia Kristeva’s (1980) psychoanalytic conceptualisations. In so doing the discussion is linked to the concept of transgression but is not subsumed by it—I elaborate further on the philosophical dimensions of transgression as a concept vis-à-vis Foucault’s work in chapter 1.

Alongside Foucault’s work, I employ theoretical insights from the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. His work is particularly apposite to my study, given its focus on identity formations of race, gender, sexuality, and class and the ways in which ‘identity’ comes to bear on the production of aesthetics, and the resulting political implications of those intersections. Utilising a Bourdieusian theoretical frame enables a nuanced view of my case studies; that is,

rather than focus on the ‘high politics’ of much early scholarship on punk (which subjected punk to Marxist-influenced critiques of socio-economic impoverishment), Bourdieu, alongside critical feminist perspectives, enables understanding of ‘representation’ as a political issue, highlighting punk-related cultural productions’ recurring deployment of identity as a strategic visual code. Relatedly, I seek to understand how the subjectivities of women producers of punk porn have functioned to influence the operation and reception of their outputs.

Thus, I see Bourdieu’s theorisation of ‘social class’, ‘aesthetic judgement’ and ‘taste’ as particularly pertinent to the critical analysis of ‘punk porn’ as a conjuncture synonymous with ‘low culture’. Many of the auteurs examined here had ‘working-class’ origins—how far then are their ready embrace of punk, porn, or a combination of both, to be understood as stemming from their exclusion from more high-brow cultural activities? The correlation between ‘punk’ and ‘pornography’, as historically coded categories of ‘low culture’, and the social class of the progenitors who populate these fields of activity, is crucial here. This correlation between ‘taste’ and ‘class’ bears, I argue, a formative relation to the staging of transgression—by operating within independent artistic circuits defined against ‘high-art’ or the popular ‘mainstream’, these auteurs were mounting challenges (albeit, if, at times, diffusely) to hegemonic aesthetic conventions.¹⁰

¹⁰ I provide a more detailed discussion of the ‘mainstream’, and its meanings in the Porn Studies section below. I also note that punk can be seen as an instance of how modernity offers and/or invents new cultural categories of ‘taste’ and signification vis-à-vis subcultural activity.

I see punk's accessibility as central to its 'radical' potentialities as a (sub)cultural form, which finds expression in forms of amateurism (Court, p. 2017).¹¹ In its emphasis on DIY and 'anyone can do it', punk defined itself as a space of cultural production for 'amateurs' to become artists and cultural producers, marking it as perhaps the most inclusive youth cultural movement to emerge in the post-war years. This argument finds purchase in the diverse identity formations associated with punk dating from its initial stages of development. Writing in *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*, music writer Greil Marcus points to the ways in which punk's inversion of 'taste' judgements constituted a radical openness to 'non-normative' identities:

The punks were not just pretty people, like the Slits or bassist Gaye of the Adverts, who made themselves ugly. They were fat, anorexic, pockmarked, acned, stuttering, crippled, scarred, and damaged (1996, p. 74).

Although Marcus writes impressionistically on punk (and his characterisation here can be criticised for its insensitivities), his account is productive insofar as it draws attention to the ways in which punk constituted a relatively 'inclusive' movement because it eschewed normative ideals of beauty.¹²

¹¹ Malcolm McLaren would advance this notion in interviews in his later years, defining punk as the 'cult of the amateur' (McLaren, 2017).

¹² I do acknowledge that, on the face of it, the inclusive ethos of punk does not align to the social dynamics and spaces of porn production, given the standards of beauty that prevail there. That being said, while the conventions of mainstream pornography operate according to standards of beauty and taste, I contend that, in light of technological developments, the self-production of pornography has largely been democratised; that is to say, smart phones enable users to document sexual acts and upload these to the web. In such ways, these DIY porn practices serve as a potential vector of production through which diverse subjectivities can be articulated and represented. Gender scholar Laura Kipnis reaffirms this argument, pointing out that 'pornography can provide a home for those narratives exiled from sanctioned speech and mainstream political discourse, making pornography, in essence, an oppositional political form' (1996, p. 124).

In the sense in which I conceive of it here, then, the ‘low cultural’ status of punk and porn points to a capacity to challenge distinctions of ‘taste’. The exclusions of ‘low culture’ from the ‘social field’ of ‘high-art’ points to the ways in which punk, in particular, inverted hierarchical understandings of art and ‘taste’. As Bourdieu explains, the ‘distinction of taste’ expressed by ‘social subjects’ functions to align subjectivity with socially inscribed classifications of ‘social class’:

Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed ([1984] 2010, p. 1669).

Following Bourdieu’s logic, the marginal status associated with punk—and indeed porn, as a cultural production synonymous with the margins of mainstream activity—can be seen as a statement against the exclusionary dynamics through which institutional fields of art and culture are governed and sustained as ‘bourgeois’ in nature. Thus, I survey ways in which the fields of punk and porn, and their sites of convergence, have been classified as marginal sites of activity which are structured by, but, in turn, serve to structure distinctions of ‘taste’.

I trace this line of thought through instantiations of punk-related cultural production that overturn a host of culturally accepted ideals and ideological presuppositions—ranging from beauty ideals, to notions of artistic competency—so as to scrutinise the dimensions of this non-normative (or, maybe more accurately, anti-normative) emphasis. I draw attention to the ways in which women, in particular, were empowered by this radical reconfiguration of ‘normativity’. From a contemporary perspective, this points to the legacy of punk as fostering space for identity formations that were not the exclusive preserve of a particular ‘social class’. I show that while in

the 1970s ‘punk porn’ offered provocation as an affront to ‘moralising’, in its more contemporary guises, and in the hands of punk-identifying independent digital porn producers, this conjuncture moves into the arena of sexual ethics.

My selection of case studies has been specifically targeted as a way of mapping an artistic trajectory of ‘punk porn’ as a form of genealogical analysis. I am not suggesting that *all* punk-related activity entails a critical engagement with pornographic materials in its visual strategies. Rather, in my attempts to re-examine the extent of punk’s and punks’ engagement with sexual imageries and pornographic productions, and the exchange between these two sites of the ‘alternative’—I show that porn was (and to a certain extent, still is) more central to many influential punk, and punk-related, progenitors’ shaping of the ‘imaginary’ of punk than scholarship has previously acknowledged. Working with a limited corpus of case studies allows for greater focus on the significance of each object without seeking to unify them as evidence of a ‘total’ history and/or theory of ‘punk porn’. In any case, I utilise this conjunctural categorisation provisionally, as I explain in the section on methodology in chapter 1. In the following section, I contextualise my study through the concept of memory-work, accounting for the theoretical implications of my conjunctural analysis. A literature review of the interrelated fields of subcultural studies and porn argues that much scholarship dedicated to the ‘cultural memory’ of punk has hitherto contributed to ‘forgetting’ the centrality of visual codes premised on sexual themes within punk’s aesthetic strategies.

Studying Punk

Punk has been the subject of interdisciplinary scholarly enquiry since its emergence *proper*. Punk's myriad dimensions—spanning music, fashion, film and visual art—were, early on, subjected to rigorous analysis within Cultural Studies and Sociology, in particular. In the British context, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), founded by cultural theorist Richard Hoggart and established by Stuart Hall, sought to unpack the politics of subcultural identification and participation, thereby anticipating punk's relationship and affiliation with political institutions and causes (such as Rock Against Racism, for instance). Cultural Studies accounts have been particularly influential to understanding punk forms of 'performative' politics, foremost among them being Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979). Starting with Hebdige's perspective, punk's associated dispositions and affects have been read as constitutive of punk's 'rebellion' against the 'dominant' culture, as expressed by the adoption of provocative sartorial embodiments in punk fashion, for example.

Feminist cultural studies scholars such as Angela McRobbie were influential in directing emphasis to issues of gender and sex in the context of punk subculture, highlighting the ways punk's legacy testifies to its opening up of spaces for women as creative participants. More recently, punk has been subjected to analysis through the lens of queer theory, with scholars such as Tavia Nyong'o having emphasised the queer roots underpinning early punk, as well as the problematic tendencies exhibited in punk's persistent reliance on, and 'exploitation' of, queer-originating iconographies, as elaborated in chapter 2. Though divergent in the particular aspects of punk surveyed, these strands of scholarship reaffirm cultural historian Matthew Worley's assertion that punk 'may best be understood as a cultural process of critical engagement rather than a specific musical or sartorial style [...] a space to revolt, reject and reinvent' (Worley,

2017, p. 11).¹³ Following Worley, this study strategically bypasses dominant understandings of punk as a musical genre, so as to focus on its visual themes.

While side-lining punk music may appear antithetical to the common understanding of punk as *prima facie* a musical genre, I do so, because punk's aesthetic dimensions and related traditions of visual creativity are, I believe, similarly innovative and significant. While previous critical understandings of punk have addressed the importance of its musical dimensions (Laing, 1985), I expressly emphasise the visual dimensions of punk and pornography in an approach that underscores the singularity of their intersection. I of course acknowledge that both popular and scholarly understandings of punk cannot completely ignore punk *qua* musical genre—where relevant, I consider examples of punk music where they evoke pornographic elements—but my study seeks to address the lacunae of punk's linkages with porn as sharing an aesthetic field centred on sex, sexuality and sexual imagery.

This study explores how punk's emphasis on transgression, inciting offence and—particularly for some women—oppositional body politics, find expression in sexually explicit imagery. Investigating punk's sexual aesthetics offers opportunities to reorientate discussion of punk away from a focus on bands, lyrics, personalities, rebellion and styling towards other considerations of bodies, gender, meanings of liberation and sexualisation whose impacts remain pertinent in the current moment. Put simply, my study aims for innovation in reading punk through a focus on punk women's interests in sexual expression, moments of sexual rebellion and performance that mixed sacred and profane aesthetics. Punk *music* may have contextual

¹³ From this perspective, punk can be seen within a continuum of post-war subcultures, beginning with Rock 'n' Roll in the 1950s, elaborated in Jeff Nuttall's study of post-war subcultures, *Bomb Culture* (1968).

importance for this story but the political stakes of the ‘punk porn’ conjuncture take me in different directions.

Moreover, this study highlights that a striking tableau of graphic design and imagery evolved coterminous with a recognisable ‘punk music’ (referred to hereafter as ‘punk rock’). Such aesthetic dimensions are evident on record sleeves and posters of punk bands, as well as the sartorial stylings of punk musicians and fans alike. Given this correlation between punk music and punk style, I view these sub-categories of punk as existing in a symbiotic creative relationship, whereby punk rock finds its expressive sonic dimensions reflected in a vibrant aesthetic counterpart and identifiable field of imagery. The visuality of punk is crucial to its endurance into the present, and indeed, its continued afterlife and resurgences as a subcultural form with a distinct, albeit multivariate, visual style. Although my concern here lies primarily with the ‘punk aesthetic’, I do occasionally incorporate analysis of key musical events in punk cultural history, which I see as embodying the ‘ritualistic’ aspects of communal punk practice, and, more generally, as central events around which punk subcultural activity is staged.

‘k-punk’: Contemporary Theoretical Approaches

The writings of cultural theorist Mark Fisher evidence the critical theorisation of punk as a ‘concept’; that is, beyond its immediate designation as a genre label.¹⁴ Fisher’s critical theory

¹⁴ To deal with punk is, to a large extent, to attempt to reconcile the phenomenon itself apropos of the boundaries of genre that have historically worked to demarcate it. In light of such issues, dealing with genre necessarily entails a certain symbolic violence, which stems from the ways in which classifications inherently curtail elements of the cultural object(s) deemed aberrant to the overarching narrative of ‘punk’; under the umbrella of which, recognisably punk ephemera are categorised according to a protean set of predominant characteristics. Punk, is particularly significant in this regard, having itself sought to resist the normalising discourses that constitute genre; several significant punk progenitors propagated an anti-punk stance in its first wave, which saw bands such as the Sex Pistols and the Slits ardently resist journalistic attempts to shoehorn them into the then-latest youth culture. While

blog, named after his ‘k-punk’ pseudonym, marked a site of renewed critical writing about music in the early 2000s, harbouring dialogues between a network of critical thinkers working on music and culture, such as philosopher Nina Power and music writer Simon Reynolds. Fisher’s pseudonym speaks to the ways his work extends the study of punk’s legacy towards contemporary contexts, comprising a bringing together of ‘k’ as a substitution for ‘cyber’ (an allusion to its Greek origins as ‘kuber’), and punk.¹⁵

Fisher argues that punk ‘doesn’t designate a particular musical genre, but a confluence outside legitimate(d) space’ (2018, p. 68). In this, he foregrounds the participatory nature of punk, and the potentialities that emerged from its emphasis on DIY cultural production. Chief amongst his examples here are fanzines, which he contends ‘were more significant than [punk] music in that they allowed and produced a whole other mode of contagious activity which destroyed the need for centralised control’ (p. 68). Fisher’s interest in punk (beyond its expressive output) underscores the ‘radical’ significance of the DIY propensities that Anglo-American punk enacted, and through which it took shape, as an assemblage of grassroots cultural activity that existed in a co-independent relationship with the ‘mainstream’. His stress on the importance of developments such as circuits of independent publishing, ranging from music weeklies to self-made fanzines, highlights the production of punk discourses through a networked means of disseminating critical ideas in accessible and wide-ranging formats—I discuss such cultural activity and its links to Dada in chapter 3.¹⁶

this study necessarily works with punk as a genre label, then, I do so in a provisional sense, seeking to interrogate the objects marked as such in a reflexive relationship to this marker. That is, as opposed to attempting to impose this tag onto artists who have themselves disavowed the term such as Cosey Fanni Tutti, for instance.

¹⁵ For clarification, the similarity between Fisher’s pseudonym and the ‘k-pop’ genre tag is one of coincidence.

¹⁶ For a historical account of the context of the British music press during first wave punk, see Patrick Glen’s *Youth and Permissive Social Change in British Music Papers, 1967-1983* (2019).

For the purposes of my analysis of punk aesthetics, what is most significant about Fisher's theorisation of punk are the limitations he identifies in the 'punk aesthetic'. Fisher argues that although punk's visual codes served to mount an ideological 'challenge to hegemony', such codes would ultimately serve to undermine punk's sustained charge and its claim to the cultural 'centre'. Specifically, Fisher takes aim at the predominance of social realist thematics within punk visuality and lyricism, which he sees as marking a 'reductive literalism and perfunctory politics'; by way of an example, he points to the associated stereotypes of 'anarchy' as a sign of revolt, as expressed by 'circles with A in the middle' (2018, p. 753).¹⁷ Fisher argues that this predominant tendency within punk visuality (which he labels 'Lumpen-punk') 'colluded with social realism in censoring/censoring the visionary and the ambitious' (p. 753). He extends this critique to the legacy of DIY, seeing the collective liberatory promise it initially entailed as devolving, post-1977, into a wilful marginalisation, in which DIY cultures—in contrast to the challenge to the hegemonic cultural centre they initially appeared to stage—became fragmented and resigned to the margins of culture (Fisher, 2018).

Fisher's argument is persuasive in drawing attention to the ways punk historically constituted a claim to the symbolic cultural 'centre', despite operating at the 'margins' of popular culture. Fisher makes this point by showing that punk's challenge was to present culture as something more than mere entertainment geared towards consumerism. For instance, that affective combination is found in the debut album title of Gang of Four's, *Entertainment!* (1979),

¹⁷ I note that the connotations of the anarchy logo speak to a historical lineage which associates 'A' with deviance, stemming from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) in which the female protagonist is forced to wear a scarlet 'A' upon her chest as punishment for having given birth to a child out of wedlock.

which ironically mocks art as mere ‘entertainment’.¹⁸ The methods through which punk mounted this assault as a ‘challenge to hegemony’ (Hebdige, 1979, p. 17) are crucial to this study, in terms of understanding how pornography found a place amongst the visual codes of punk. Punk, as an attitude and sensibility—while barbed and provocative—exhibits traits of (black) humour, irony, satire, and parody interwoven in its provocations.

In what follows, rather than arguing that selected punk-related examples definitively accomplished this ‘challenge to hegemony’, I am expressly interested in how these examples appear to produce their own images of rebellion in the face of symbolic orthodoxies, such as the ‘mainstream’. As such, I draw attention to the ways in which punk progenitors presented themselves as figures upholding this symbolic challenge, and the ways in which this confrontational stance functioned to sustain the mythology of punk as an anti-establishment movement. A brief example: Sheila Rock’s 1976 photos of SEX shop assistant Jordan indicate precisely this antagonism, portraying Jordan as an empowered punk woman, whose fetishwear ensemble presents an apparent offense to the passing conservative-looking gentleman. Here, concepts such as the ‘male gaze’ are central to the image’s framing and its depiction of punk’s challenge to the status quo; Jordan overturns the ‘male gaze’ and its containment of femininity in the service of male desire by presenting herself as alien to feminine archetypes (Figure 2.3). This argument is elaborated further in chapters 1 and 2.

¹⁸ Gang of Four are more closely associated with the post-punk period, but Fisher’s work views punk and post-punk in a continuum, in which the aesthetic processes and presuppositions associated with punk cleared ground for the formal experimentations of post-punk (from the late-1970s onwards, reaching a peak in the early-1980s). In the opening line of ‘Natural’s not in it’ from *Entertainment!*, lead singer Jon King recites the refrain ‘The problem of pleasure, what to do for leisure’ (1979), referring to the problematic that Fisher delineates with regard to the machinations of the cultural industry in seeing pleasure as enmeshed with power.

A further consideration to note here is that punk and porn occupy a similar relationship to commerciality. While both domains are associated with transgression and embody ‘alternative’ cultural production, the cultural histories of Anglo-American punk and porn nonetheless attest to the ways that their progenitors have been at the forefront of technological and commercial developments later taken up by ‘mainstream’ media. Porn is particularly significant here, as it is understood to have driven technological developments enabling the most quotidian media consumption practices, for example the home video war between Betamax and VCR formats was supposedly won because pornography was available on VCR (Barss, 2010), and later, streaming video and private e-commerce payment systems were developed to monetise pornographic content online (Attwood, 2010).

Not dissimilarly, early punk activity explicitly engaged in media spectacle and exploited the possibilities of available media platforms (cf appearances on prime time shows to perform outrageously)—punk was as much an intervention in the ‘mainstream’ and commercial media as it was an oppositional site to consumerist circuits. Jon Savage notes that punk was always in dialogue with the media itself (Savage, 2001). The Sex Pistols’ history epitomises this, particularly during McLaren’s management of the band in its early days. McLaren explicitly wanted the band to compete with mainstream acts such as the Bay City Rollers (Gorman, 2020, p. 263), challenging established pop groups and laying claim to the cultural ‘centre’.¹⁹

Thus, as I elaborate in chapter 2, Westwood and McLaren’s innovative approach to cultivating the ‘punk aesthetic’ speaks to the ways sex and sexuality, in their work, are refracted

¹⁹ I elaborate on this vis-à-vis Fisher’s theorisation in the section k-Punk: Contemporary Theoretical Approaches.

through a media lens, involving the commodification of transgressive images from the pornographic margins to the King's Road boutique. In the process of that remediation of sexual iconography, the sexual connotations of early punk were arguably diffused and distorted over time, so that when punk went 'overground' in 1977, the subversive elements of the SEX designs were subsumed beneath the general moral panic over punk. This is of particular interest because early punk emerged coterminous with the increasing visibility of pornography, as I elaborate in chapter 3, suggesting that punk's transgressive sexual connotations dematerialised as the focus on punk as subculture and genre took root and porn became more available on the high street. Punk's relationship to pornography is also bound up in the shift towards increasing commercialisation of sex within Anglo-American popular culture, thus, Cosey Fanni Tutti's *Magazine Actions* can be seen to explore a similar thematic, evidencing both a critique of the 'spectacle', while also interrogating what the commodification of sex, in the form of pornographic imagery, means in the context of the spectacle itself.

Porn Studies

Porn Studies has emerged in recent years as a response to the occlusion of pornography from scholarship within media and cultural studies. Porn Studies' constitution as a recognisable field was signposted by the founding of the critical journal *Porn Studies* in 2014; the journal draws on a range of critical frameworks across media and cultural studies, as well as feminist scholarship and queer theory. Prior to this, several accounts marked the critical thresholds of pornography in scholarship, including historian Steven Marcus's landmark 1966 study *The Other Victorians* which Foucault cites as an influence in the introduction to *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault follows Marcus's account of the significance of societal sites that permitted 'deviant' sexuality in

the Victorian age, such as the ‘brothel and the mental hospital’, around which the ‘other Victorians’—that is, figures such as ‘the prostitute, the client, and the pimp, together with the psychiatrist’ (1978, p. 4)—could be seen to transfer the ‘pleasures that are unspoken into the order of things that are counted’ (p. 4). These sites of deviant sexuality—or heterotopias, to use the Foucauldian term²⁰—are significant in serving to illustrate how the ‘repressive hypothesis’ finds its limits within Victorian society, yet is produced in spite of the proliferation of sexuality.

In the wake of Foucault’s own pioneering work, studies pivotal to establishing pornography as an object of analysis emerged—such as Walter Kendrick’s 1987 study *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Contemporary Culture*, as well as Linda Williams’s 1989 publication, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible”*. In particular, Williams’s analysis of pornography according to the specificity of its genre expressions and diverse characteristics served as a reproach to the myth of pornography as a monolithic aesthetic. Williams’s approach in particular has been influential in my work, which draws on a theoretical framework composed of Marxist-psychoanalytic epistemes, as well as a Foucauldian understanding of ‘biopolitics’.

In my handling of pornography, I investigate ways in which the ‘alternative’ pornographies presented have sought to articulate their difference from conventional understandings of ‘mainstream’ pornography, despite their many overlaps with the ‘corporate mainstream’. Porn Studies is particularly perceptive to the ways in which the categories of

²⁰ In his introductory account to Foucault, Chris Horrocks defines this term as ‘other spaces’ (2009, p. 84).

‘mainstream’ and ‘alternative’ seek to classify pornographic productions.²¹ While such labels can be utilised to enable a more nuanced approach to the analysis of pornography, these terms, and the dichotomy they sustain, are not unproblematic. As Porn Studies scholar Giovanna Maina has pointed out, the ‘mainstream’ against which ‘alternative’ pornographies are defined is itself an essentialist conceptual categorisation (2018, p. 151). That is to say, ‘mainstream’ as a genre label fails to account for the diversity of forms and representations that can be discerned in the output of major pornography producers, and the ‘corporate’ discourses and ‘commercial’ circuits that they inhabit. Even so, while I do employ these labels occasionally throughout my analysis, I wish to underscore the provisional nature of these terms; that where they do occur, I aim to highlight their ‘différance’, to borrow Jacques Derrida’s term, pointing to ways in which they can only ever partially address the complexity of representational forms within pornographic productions.

This study is not intended as an exhaustive history of the development of pornography, but building upon studies such as Kendrick and Williams, and augmented by more recent Porn Studies scholarship, it will challenge limited understandings of ‘alternative’ pornography. As such, I stress the concept-work that informs boundaries and categorisations of pornography within the broader sphere and cultural history of punk. Through critically surveying the circulation and production of pornography in the (sub)cultural spaces of punk-related activity and phenomena, this thesis contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship (spanning the domains of Porn Studies and Subcultural Studies) and debates about the politics and ethics of subcultural praxis in relation to ‘independent’ and/or ‘alternative’ porn productions. Thus, this study aligns with attempts by Porn Studies scholars to consider how alternative pornographic objects intersect

²¹ I note a parallel here between my reading of punk music as a more explicit, raw variation of rock music, and pornography as a form of stripped-down, ‘in-your-face’ form of ‘romance’.

with subcultures for example the seminal reader *Porn After Porn* (2014) investigates alt porn through a critical lens (Maina, 2014; Attwood, 2014; Smith, 2014; Paasonen, 2014; Osgerby, 2014). That collection charts feminist trajectories in alternative pornography, mapping aesthetic strategies utilised across cultural histories of transatlantic punk and post-punk scenes and these methods and discussions inform my own approach.

However, while the aforementioned accounts are expressly interested in ‘alternative’ pornographies as they circulate within the digital paradigm of the web 2.0 era, I seek to expand this focus. I analyse contemporary porn films in chapter 5, but I also pay attention to objects that resist conventional understandings of pornographic forms and formats such as my consideration of ‘porn as/in fashion’ in chapter 2. Such alternative pornographic forms have been understudied in Porn Studies scholarship which has predominantly focused on the production, consumption, and circulation of film, video and photographic images. Although I take an expansive view with regards to forms of pornography, then, my understanding of the constitutive content of pornography is relatively limited to the denotation of sexual imagery and the depiction of sexual acts. In other words, I expand the consideration of pornography to forms that are not traditionally associated with pornography, but in doing so, retain a limited understanding of pornography (and pornographic content) as a primarily visual medium. As with my tentative employment of the ‘mainstream/alternative’ dichotomy, I seek to acknowledge the ways in which ‘pornography’ as a signifier is defined against associated cognates such as art or erotica. As I elaborate later in this chapter, more recent scholarship has sought to expand the conceptual dimensions of the ‘pornographic’ to include explicit depictions of violence (Hester, 2011).

Punk and porn often resist classification. These labels are conceptually constructed, across historical, geographical, and temporal boundaries. So, to examine the implications of ‘punk porn’ as a conjunctural signifier, the connotations of each definitional label need to be scrutinised. As I show in chapter 1, this entails a reflexivity that attempts to move beyond imposing fixed meaning on these terms (and to render them in ‘bondage’). I contextualise my attempts to analyse this conjuncture through genealogical analysis, acknowledging that my selection of examples is underpinned by subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, I draw on the insights of Cultural Analysis as methodology and formal practice to explore the properties of my selected cultural objects that might be ‘resistant’ to scholarly enquiry.

I begin chapter 1 by exploring the conceptual dimensions entailed in studying parallel subcultural histories of punk and porn in a conjunctural reading. Given the protean qualities of these terms, I interrogate these denominations as cultural ‘labels’, reviewing the semantics that circulate in the connotative fields of both, to highlight the contexts in which these categorical labels achieve their ‘meaning’. I then turn to sketching out the primary contestations and debates that inform both punk and porn as objects of scholarship in an assessment of the ways ‘punk’ and ‘porn’ function as ‘performative’ acts of nomenclature—how do objects named ‘punk’ or ‘porn’ often exceed those conceptual boundaries? This is particularly pertinent, given the ‘resistance’ associated with both punk and porn as fields of production and consumption defined by their transgression of aesthetic norms. Specifically, I consider the conceptual ‘resistance’ posed by the study of a punk as an ‘object’ in relation to the theme of anti-intellectualism associated with the progenitors of British punk (Reddington, 2016). In terms of porn, I point to ways in which the thematic of anti-intellectualism is conceived, not as a by-product of porn practitioners *per se*, but

rather, as a tendency within the academe itself whereby scholarship marginalises pornography and continues to regard its study as antithetical to critical examination.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1: ‘History is for Pissing on’: ‘Punk Porn’ Memory-Work

Chapter 1 presents a methodological overview of the intersections between punk and pornography. As opposed to presenting an exhaustive history of either field, here I instead frame these ‘alternative’ cultural domains through the lens of memory studies, reflecting on the ways in which punk is ‘remembered’ in terms of its ‘rebellion’ and ‘representational politics’. In doing so, I reflect on the nature of performative practices in both punk and porn contexts, foregrounding the strategies employed by selected artists and performers who mobilise the female ‘punk body’ in provocative ways. Here, I unpack the conceptual strands of transgression that inform punk and porn imageries, debating the implications of such practice apropos of the ‘politics of representation’ that guides my study. I then investigate ways in which the female ‘punk body’ is represented within the context of a spread in CP/spanking magazine *Janus*, which features an early instance of a punk model within BDSM pornography, analysing the theoretical and political implications of the female ‘punk body’ as a transgressive figure.

Chapter 2: ‘Clothes for Heroes’: Pornographic Provocation in First Wave British Punk

Chapter 2 considers ways that first wave punk rallied against the mores of Middle-England through the lens of style. Focusing on the period between 1975 and 1978 I plot the entrance of porn imagery, as well as BDSM styles drawn from underground kink subcultures, into the visual codes of the London punk scene specifically. Examining ‘architects’ of punk style, Malcolm

McLaren and Vivienne Westwood, I show that Westwood-McLaren punk couture—as modelled by the Sex Pistols—helped to popularise a recognisable punk style that embraced the obscene challenge of sexual imagery. Firstly, I discuss ways in which punk style was embraced by punk women as part of a reconfiguration of normative gender proscriptions imposed upon women in the period. Here, I consider the role of female punk archetypes such as Jordan, SEX shop-assistant and ‘face’ of first wave punk, in arguing that punk engendered progressive articulations of femininity within British society. Through a close visual analysis, I then unpack the design methods used by McLaren specifically, in which pornography was conceived of as a deliberate aesthetic strategy to index the obscene—a means of imbuing early punk style with a provocative, by turns offensive, aesthetic. Drawing out tensions between punk’s symbolic challenges to the status quo and the ethical implications that underscore the representational methods of staging this antagonism, this chapter contends that the ‘politics of representation’ bound up in the Westwood-McLaren ‘porn t-shirts’ remain problematic in their appropriation of imageries of sexual minorities.

Chapter 3: ‘Anatomy is Not Destiny’: Punk-Related Feminist Aesthetic Interventions

In the third chapter, I discuss female artists working pornographic imagery into their practice coterminous with the emergence of first wave punk. Beginning with a critical analysis of the female nude, I then explore Cosey Fanni Tutti’s ventures into sex work as a deliberate artistic policy. Detailing the furore surrounding the display of her pornographic features in the infamous ‘Prostitution’ show of 1976, I argue that Tutti’s *Magazine Actions*, in their journey from the annals of subterranean sex shops to the gallery walls, served to interrogate the status and value of art within institutional contexts. Comparatively, I discuss Manchester artist Linder Sterling,

whose work utilised pornography as a found-object, and illicit source material, in enacting a critique of patriarchal portrayals of women in the period. Examining intersections of sex work, precarity, and feminist critique within the context of punk subcultural activity, this chapter illustrates the complex ways in which transgression runs up against second-wave feminist ideas and ideals, in ways which prefigure a contemporary feminist politics of pornographic production.

Chapter 4: ‘Manhattan Love Suicides’: No Wave and the Cinema of Transgression

Chapter 4 shifts focus and location to New York, tracing intersections between punk and porn across the transition from punk into post-punk during the late 1970s and early-1980s. I begin by sketching the socio-economic contexts of punk’s mid-to-late 1970s emergence in New York, before examining expressions of pornography within the context of punk-related underground film in the No Wave scene, and its later artistic offspring, the Cinema of Transgression. Set against the context of the feminist ‘sex wars’ of the 1980s, the experimental short movies of Nick Zedd and Richard Kern blended violent black humour with highly charged erotic vignettes, commonly featuring nudity, and occasionally, scenes of sexual intercourse. Given the attempts of these auteurs to repudiate the classification of their films as pornographic, this corpus serves to highlight some of the contradictions of the anti-sex position of pivotal second-wave feminists Andrea Dworkin and Catharine A. MacKinnon. By staging grotesque adaptations of porn scripts that invert the power dynamics of ‘conventional’ hard-core pornography, while working within conventions of ‘pornoscripts’ in a deconstructive approach, I argue that these films demonstrate the contestations of pornographic classification. In doing so, they register the tensions of staging female desire upon the female ‘punk body’: an agentic figure shown to transgress patriarchal power relations in erotic scenarios. This embrace of desire, framed through a punk imaginary,

prefigures the ‘mainstreaming’ of ‘alternative’ imaginaries coterminous with the web 2.0 era, as considered in relation to alt porn imageries in my final chapter.

Chapter 5: ‘Girls and Corpses’: The ‘Tattoo-Titted Freakdom’ of Bonnie Rotten

Chapter 5 considers the cultural afterlife of punk as a recognisable aesthetic operative in contemporary pornography, highlighting the ways in which punk circulates as a signifier within both ‘mainstream’ and ‘alternative’ pornographic contexts. I begin by exploring punk’s association with independent porn production and the alternative niche of alt porn. In alt porn the punk imaginary functions as a marker of ‘differentiation’, as well as emphasising subcultural understandings of community underpinned by various feminist ethics. I then consider the case study of adult performer Bonnie Rotten, whose porn career evidences the ‘recuperation’ of punk aesthetics in the corporate mainstream of online pornography. I illustrate ways in which punk operates within Rotten’s self-branding, arguing that punk serves as an aesthetic veneer of rebellion that amplifies her transgressive status, despite her working within ‘mainstream’ porn. I read Rotten’s significance here against individualised creative labour practices concurrent with the rise of social media and self-branding, arguing that whereas earlier porn performers acted as corporate ambassadors of porn brands such as *Playboy*, contemporary porn places greater demands of individualised creative labour on performers. I conclude with a visual analysis of Rotten’s films in consideration of the deployment of the punk imaginary within pornography, and the ways in which an affective repertoire of ‘punk-ness’ intensifies the potential of the female ‘punk body’ in performatively overturning prevailing gender proscriptions.

Coda: ‘Love Comes in spurts’: Bodies, Pleasure, and Transgression

In the concluding section, I consider the ways this study has reflected on the conjuncture of ‘punk porn’, and developments across the aesthetic continuum spanning ‘Johnny Rotten to Bonnie Rotten’. I meditate on the critical afterlife of punk as the deliberate deployment of a performative aesthetic strategy, which has entailed creative agency for both past and contemporary punk-related practitioners. Analysis of these case studies suggests that the punk aesthetic continues to express a radical, albeit oftentimes politically ambivalent charge, pointing to the persistence of punk’s engagements with taboo imageries as evidence of its ‘resistance’ to discourses of normalisation. I contend that ‘punk’ continues to constitute an umbrella term for a wide array of phenomena, staging a multiplicity of political contradictions and ethical tensions across a multimedia corpus of cultural production. Reflecting on the strengths and limitations of my theoretical framework, I address the implications of drawing upon a Foucaultian schema, augmented with Bourdieu’s theory of ‘taste’. I conclude with a discussion of Foucault’s later work, to show how punk exhibits elements of Foucault’s ‘techniques of the self’ which remain of interest to contemporary feminist politics.

Chapter 1: 'History is for Pissing On': 'Punk Porn' Memory-Work²²

The iconoclasm associated with punk's aesthetic strategies possesses profound implications for my consideration of the 'punk aesthetic' here. As indicated by the title of the chapter, taken from the name of Malcolm McLaren's one-man show prior to his death, punk attitude is manifested through the refusal of nostalgia. This manoeuvre, which aligns punk with a trajectory of the historical avant-garde who proclaimed a 'year zero' approach to art—the destruction and desecration of the art worlds they came to inhabit, as a political statement—possess several significant implications for researching punk-related cultural history. Given that a deluge of historical accounts of punk exist, I seek to develop an understanding of punk within the context of memory-work. That is to say, I explore punk's resistance to the past, including its own historicising and commodification, as an act of memory-work involving the 'remembering' of certain punk narratives and their attendant objects, which, in turn, is premised on a 'forgetting' of certain elements of punk's past.

This chapter examines punk as it continues to be shaped by practitioners in the present in two main ways. Firstly, by offering reflection on the ways punk is remembered in the present by punk's 'original' female practitioners, I show how they actively remember certain elements of punk history (from the bottom-up), while omitting elements of the broader cultural history of punk to modify punk memory for their own agendas. Secondly, I offer an examination of how recent retrospectives of punk (from the top-down) reshape punk's cultural history in accordance with political considerations of the contemporary moment. Predicated on a two-fold operation of

²² From Malcolm McLaren's one-man show in the final years of his life, see Gorman (2020, p. 771).

‘active remembering’ and ‘passive forgetting’, punk’s themes are continually reworked, both by those who can claim to have exerted an influence on first wave punk, such as Vivienne Westwood, as well as those like Joe Corr , who grew up in the orbit of such practitioners.

Much punk cultural history and cultural understandings of punk more generally tend to view punk as primarily a social movement and cultural phenomenon centred on men. By adopting a memory-centred approach, I seek to reflexively counter that male-centred and authored ‘his-tory’ of punk, the punk archive more generally and its ‘gatekeepers’.²³ To explore punk vis-à-vis gender, I dialogue with the testimonies of punk’s female progenitors as much as possible, from the limited resources on the topic, and those available to me at the time of writing.²⁴ In light of this, my approach to the topic involved, and was orientated in relation to, the published testimonies of significant players as well as those I was able to make contact with, such as Jordan Mooney and Linder Sterling. Other studies have addressed punk’s historical archive in great detail, for example Matthew Worley’s, *No Future* (2017), offers an exhaustive survey of punk—my own approach takes a more narrow focus on a specific theme of sexuality in punk, providing analysis of the conjuncture of ‘punk porn’ as I locate it in selected works of punk practitioners.

The methodological focus on memory enables exploration of how popular discourses of punk have forgotten or misremembered punk and porn entanglements and offers a corrective to

²³ My own positionality, as a man working with and through a broadly feminist methodological approach to examine representations and expressions of female sexuality, requires that I cannot make claims to ‘know’ female or women’s sexuality, nor can I claim to speak for it (if such an abstract invocation of sexuality can be commanded to speak in this way).

²⁴ As a point of clarification, the completion of some scheduled data gathering for this research project e.g. interviews, was stymied by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

this act of ‘forgetting’. The focus on memory also shines a light on pornography whose historical archive is notoriously difficult to access (Dean, *et al.* 2015; Mercer, 2014; Kendrick, 1996). The in-built mechanism of obsolescence that perhaps characterises pornography - from its physical disappearance (too often discarded once it has been ‘used’ or reassessed as shameful) to the resistance of erstwhile participants to speak on record of their past pornographic engagements – has meant that my evidencing of the ‘punk porn’ continuum has been pursued through close reading of available case studies. Thus my account is hampered by, while also highlighting, the paucity of personal and institutional archives of punk’s more explicit explorations of sex.²⁵

This remainder of this chapter plots a course through several key conjunctural issues that emerge upon the occasion of punk and porn in conjunctural study. In the first part of this chapter, I address the methodological considerations of studying punk and porn in a conjunctural analysis through the methodology of Cultural Analysis. I then turn to the etymological trajectories of both ‘punk’ and ‘porn’, investigating the ways in which discursive formations have come to bear upon understandings of these terms as objects of study. In the second part of this chapter, I survey the introduction of ‘punk’ as a genre term into the lexicon of popular music discourses. This is not an exhaustive historical account, but does serve to foreground the ways in which punk’s meaning stems from its roots as a denominator of sexual activity and classification. In other words, punk as a synonym for sexual deviancy speaks to the power dynamics that this label inhabits. I argue that punk belongs to a trajectory of cultural production that, like sexuality itself (as a site of anti-normativity), challenges the hegemony of ‘aesthetic judgements’. In this way, punk’s challenge

²⁵ Although archives of pornography do exist, porn’s low-cultural status and the seeming squeamishness of archivists/librarians has meant contemporary porn has largely been treated as a disposable commodity. For example, the library of record in the UK, the British Library, has never pursued publishers of pornographic publications to fulfill their legal obligations to submit a copy of every issue for deposit in the repository (Smith, 2007).

to ‘taste’ correlates with the historical role of pornographic imagery within the West, which has been both produced and consumed as a visual site of the taboo, in opposition to culturally accepted artistic imagery and normative visual codes.

This point is particularly pertinent in light of the final part of this chapter, in which I analyse an example of ‘punk porn’ in the form of a CP/spanking²⁶ spread featured in *Janus* 28. By exploring the ways in which the ‘punk aesthetic’ is portrayed within the context of British pornography of the 1980s, I show how the female punk in this spread demonstrates the ways in which punk style is constructed as a site of erotic fantasy and scopic desire, stemming from the semantic connotations of punk as a source of deviancy. Here, I invoke Foucault’s theorisation of BDSM, as developed by feminist scholar Anne McClintock, to highlight the conceptual implications of the interstices between fantasy, subculture, and feminism depicted in this case study.

Cultural Analysis and Cultural Memory

Cultural Studies scholarship has advanced the ‘reading’ of cultural phenomena as ‘texts’. Stuart Hall’s collaborative studies such as *Resistance through Rituals*, sought to understand youth and (sub)culture as both expressions of, and responses to, socio-economic and political issues.²⁷ Key to Hall’s analysis is the concept of conjuncture, which I employ to explore the fields of punk and pornography as ‘punk porn’. For Hall, conjuncture encapsulates the ‘idea that everything exists simultaneously amid specific historical forces in process and amid specific determinant

²⁶ CP stands for Corporal Punishment. This form of fetish activity is discussed within the broader context of BDSM, but, given the overlap between these labels, I often use them interchangeably in what follows.

²⁷ First published in 1975, this collection of articles was co-edited with Tony Jefferson.

structures' (*Norton*, 2010, p. 1781). Following the post-structuralist turn, the field of Cultural Studies has broadened to encompass queer theory, feminist scholarship, and gender studies which read the subject through the 'polysemy' of textual interpretation (*Hebdige*, 1979, p. 117). This emphasis on the 'polysemic' nature of objects guides my analysis, framing my genealogical investigation into punk and porn and their cross-cultural objects, whose meanings are in flux. As a polysemic conceptual marker, punk names a wide array of popular forms and formations, ranging from subcultural identities, to a certain visual style of graphic design. In this sense, scholarly study of such objects can be seen as part of a classificatory process, which marks phenomena as punk as such.

Building upon the critical project of Cultural Studies, Dutch theorist Mieke Bal has advanced Cultural Analysis as a reflexive methodology that aims to 'speak with' cultural objects. For Bal, the practice of Cultural Analysis operates at a critical nexus between Cultural Studies, understood according to Hall's project of engaging 'analytically and politically with popular culture' (*Norton*, 2010, p. 2477), and cultural history, which questions 'the methods and goals of history in general [by] turning to literary techniques and approaches to develop new material and methods of analysis' (p. 1543). Central to Bal's approach is an understanding of the study of culture through the theoretical frames of 'objects' and 'concepts'. Here, objects are understood as the cultural phenomena under investigation, while concepts refer to the analytical lenses utilised by the critic in order to produce a reading of, and ascribe a meaning to, the object of the 'reading'. Throughout this thesis, I retain Bal's terminology in articulating differences in kind

between the dichotomous formulation of ‘objects’ and ‘concepts’ within a constellation of punk-related cultural practices.²⁸

Bal’s work provides an insight into the ways in which the ‘concepts’ used to understand cultural phenomena (what she refers to as ‘objects’) are produced in a process of ‘travelling’ across academic disciplinary boundaries, intellectual trajectories, and socio-historical contexts. Bal’s insistence that Cultural Analysis should be grounded in a reflexive approach is central to my study as a methodology which seeks to resist the limitations of disciplinary totalisations and the dogma calcified in particular research traditions on punk and porn. In other words, rather than merely reproduce the conceptual terminology associated with Cultural Studies, for instance, I attempt to reconcile Bal’s wariness to overdetermined understandings of cultural critique in focussing on the polysemy of the material research object, as part of a reflexive process in which I acknowledge the ‘resistance’ posed by objects themselves to methods of critique.

Bal’s methodology foregrounds the importance of temporal awareness: interpretation of past cultures must be underscored by a ‘keen awareness of the critic’s situatedness in the present’ (1999, p. 1); that is to say, ‘the social and cultural present from which we look, and look back, at objects that are already of the past’ (p. 1). Cultural Analysis strives towards scrutinising the singular nature of objects in a reflexive process that accounts for their bearing on the present, and the ways in which they might serve to ‘define our present culture’ as a form of ‘cultural memory in the present’ (p. 1). While this might suggest a move away from ‘history’, Bal argues

²⁸ I refrain from attempting a cohesive history of ‘punk porn’, given that any attempt to define this assemblage remains partial and subject, as it is, to my own interpretation of objects that appear to align with both punk and porn practices.

otherwise, proposing that we view ‘the past as *part of* the present, as what we have around us’ (p. 1). The reflexive nature of Bal’s methodology does not seek to eschew the disciplinary boundaries of scholarly enquiry, but marks an ‘interdisciplinarity’ which she holds is ‘primarily analytical’ (p. 12).

Bal’s emphasis on the importance of ‘cultural memory’ in the practice of Cultural Analysis establishes a link to the interdisciplinary field of Cultural Memory Studies. Framing punk in relation to Cultural Memory Studies, enables reflection on the ways punk is often understood through a process of ‘remembering’ its emergence within history, and in turn, the cultural history it inhabits, through an assemblage of punk objects. Viewing punk scholarship as interrelated with forms of memory-work, more broadly, chimes with Worley’s advancement of the field according to the ‘components of punk’s diachronic and disparate development’ as opposed to ‘personalised histories, apocryphal stories and the nostalgic hue that surrounds 1976-77’ (2017, p. 20). In other words, by actively acknowledging my study as complicit in the ‘remembering’ of punk, I seek to avoid the nostalgia of punk’s ‘memorialisation’. Thus, in the first place, this study seeks to read punk and its cultural productions on their own terms, as a means of understanding its own images of rebellion and the anti-nostalgia discourses these objects produce.

German historian Aleida Assmann sheds light on how memory-work ‘constructs’ a ‘historical’ narrative in relation to a collective ‘remembering’ of *the past*. Working at the intersection of historical research and memory-work within (trans-)national contexts, Assmann provides a theoretical frame for understanding the cultural dominance of ‘memory’, as reified

and sustained through institutional and cultural practices. As Assmann writes in *Canon and Archive*, ‘When thinking about memory, we must start with forgetting’ (2011, p. 334). Assmann distinguishes between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ forms of ‘forgetting’ operative within cultural memory (p. 334). For this study, I frame punk’s links to pornography through Assmann’s concept of ‘forgetting’. Employing the categories of ‘active’ and ‘passive’, Assmann considers the extent to which specific practices engage with memory in relation to their own temporality. For Assmann, the archive represents a ‘passive’ form of engaging memory within the institution, emphasising the preservation of ‘memory objects’ which leads to an inertia of ‘active remembering’ within public cultural memory.

Crucially, Assmann sees forms of ‘Active forgetting’ as finding expression in ‘intentional acts such as trashing and destroying’ (2011, p. 334). This corresponds to punk’s common embodiment of avant-garde tendencies, such as the neo-Dadaist symbolic denunciation of earlier art forms as an attempt to proclaim a ‘year zero’, through to its iconoclastic, nihilistic demonstrations of teenage boredom and alienation, which erupt in ritualistic spaces of punk activity; in the mosh pits and pogoing at punk gigs, for example. However, Assmann also stresses that ‘Acts of forgetting are a necessary and constructive part of internal social transformations; they are, however, violently destructive when directed at an alien culture or a persecuted minority’ (p. 334). The problematic highlighted here speaks directly to the study of punk’s aesthetic strategies. Assmann uncannily echoes Malcolm McLaren’s infamous defence of the Sex Pistols (Nietzschean) ‘cult of destruction’; as McLaren told a reporter for the BBC’s *Nationwide* program in 1976: ‘You have to destroy in order to create’ (BBC *Nationwide*).²⁹

²⁹ Several factions of the historical avant-garde have deployed this motif of destruction and ‘year zero’, but it is most commonly associated with the Dadaists. Dada is discussed in more detail in chapter 3, but for now I note how closely

This framework is also relevant to my consideration of pornography. The concepts of ‘active’ and ‘passive’, as forms of ‘remembering’ and ‘forgetting’, are pertinent in coming to terms with the legacy of pornography as an aesthetic field and cultural practice that been repeatedly subject to censorship throughout its Anglo-American cultural history. As Assmann explains, ‘Censorship has been a forceful if not always successful instrument for destroying material and mental cultural products’ (2011, p. 334). If ‘censorship’ constitutes an ‘active’ instrumentalisation of regulatory structures geared towards the ‘forgetting’ of certain objects, then ‘passive’ forms of ‘cultural forgetting’ are ‘related to non-intentional acts such as losing, hiding, dispersing, neglecting, abandoning, or leaving something behind it’ (p. 334). Assmann elaborates:

In these cases the objects are not materially destroyed; they fall out of the frames of attention, valuation, and use. What is lost but materially destroyed may be discovered by accident at a later time in attics and other obscure depots, or eventually be dug up again by more systematic archaeological search (p. 334).

Assmann’s argument speaks to the censorship shaping the history of pornography through intentional ‘forgetting’ as interlinked with the ‘aesthetic judgement’ of pornography as a site of ‘low-culture’. To summarise, I see a link between the ways that punk and porn are ‘remembered’ and the ‘judgements of taste’ which have functioned to determine the value of punk and porn archives, and the preservation of their material products. In other words, the low status of pornography has led to consumer engagement with it as a disposable good, which had led to the premature destruction of much of its historical material.

this resembles Albert Camus’s description of the Marquis de Sade in *The Rebel*: ‘The long process of reasoning by which Sade’s heroes demonstrate that nature has need of crime, that it must destroy in order to create’ (1951, p. 16).

While Porn Studies has sought to address histories and trajectories of the cultural production of pornography, much pornography, particularly of the 1970s, is marked by its relative occlusion within scholarship. Indeed, as many scholars have noted, until the late 1980s, examinations of pornography tended to focus on two elements—histories of censorship and whether or not pornography should exist. (Hunt, 1993; Nead, 2002; Williams, 1999) This is compounded by the ‘aesthetic judgement’ of pornography as inherently low-culture (Attwood, 2002; Paasonen *et al.* 2007; Smith, 2005), resulting in its omission from archival preservation (see the essays in Dean *et al.* 2014; Florencio and Vyle 2022; Mercer, 2014), and, beyond the efforts of niche collectors to maintain ‘original’ artefacts (Strub, 2017), pornography has largely been ‘forgotten’, and treated as disposable by consumers.

‘Punk is Dead...Long Live Punk’

The memorialisation of punk has burgeoned in recent years, with the staging of a plethora of retrospectives that explore punk as a unique achievement of late-twentieth century Anglo-American popular culture.³⁰ While boutique punk museums exist globally (often dedicated to particular artists, such as the Ramones Museum in Berlin) punk has increasingly found its way into more mainstream cultural institutions. In 2019, for instance, New York played host to several exhibits dedicated to punk, with a particular emphasis on its visual language and graphic design. The aforementioned *Punk Lust: Raw Provocation 1971-1985* at the Museum of Sex showcased the sexual themes at work in the ‘visual codes of punk’ (Bestley & Ogg, 2012, p. 9).³¹

³⁰ The Museum of London’s coterminous exhibition was dedicated to the Clash’s *London Calling* album (November 2019 through Spring 2020), see: Museum of London (2019).

³¹ See Museum of Sex (2019).

The *Punk Lust* show was augmented by a series of film screenings at the Anthology Film Archives in Manhattan's East Village, which were joined by notable punk-related artists and auteurs such as filmmaker Beth B, as discussed in chapter 4, and transgender rock pioneer Jayne County.³² The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) simultaneously hosted an expansive exhibit dedicated to punk graphic design. *Too Fast to Live, Too Young to Die: Punk Graphics, 1976-1986*,³³ presented the work of Anglo-American artists such as Barney Bubbles, Winston Smith, and Jamie Reid.³⁴ To accompany the exhibition, the museum also staged several events, including a Q&A with rock photographers such as Bob Gruen, Marcia Resnick and David Godlis, and hosted by Gillian McCain, co-author (alongside Legs McNeil) of the popular oral history of American punk, *Please Kill Me* (1996).³⁵

In the UK, the Museum of London hosted an exhibit dedicated to the 40th anniversary of the Clash's 1979 album, *London Calling*. The exhibit emphasised the band's political consciousness and affiliations, as reflected in the curation of live Q&A events dedicated to the politics of identity in punk, as part of International Clash Day 2019.³⁶ For instance, 'Punk and race, past and present' discussed issues of race and politics in punk in relation to feminist punk figures such as Poly Styrene; the event was hosted by Styrene's daughter Celeste Bell Elliot

³² County's punk filmography is significant—starring in notable titles including Amos Poe's *The Punk Rock Movie*, and Derek Jarman's *Jubilee*.

³³ Museum of Arts and Design (2019).

³⁴ Barney Bubbles is known for his 'pop art' work as the in-house designer for independent record label UK Stiff Records, having designed artwork for artists such as The Adverts and Elvis Costello. Winston Smith is known for his artwork for the Dead Kennedys, depicting political themes in a satirical, yet ominous, photomontage style. Jamie Reid is known for his iconic artwork for the Sex Pistols, as discussed in further detail in chapter 2.

³⁵ Bob Gruen's work is well-known—including the iconic shots of John Lennon in 1980 just days before his death. Gruen also toured with, and photographed, the Sex Pistols and the Clash during their early US tours. David Godlis is a renowned New York photographer, whose early work captured the CBGBs punk scene and its notable figures, including Patti Smith and Richard Hell. Marcia Resnick is another New York photographer, capturing a diverse cast of musicians ranging from Mick Jagger to Johnny Thunders; she was also briefly married to former MC5 guitarist, Wayne Kramer.

³⁶ See Janicke (2021).

music writer Zoë Howe, and featured Stephanie Philips of London-based black feminist punk band Big Joanie.³⁷ More recently, this focus on women punk pioneers was foregrounded in a recent exhibition of Linder Sterling's work, *Linderism*, staged between Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, and Newcastle Upon Tyne's Hatton Gallery in 2020.³⁸ *Linderism*, showcased the artist's striking contribution to punk's visual language, epitomised in her contribution to Buzzcocks' *Orgasm Addict 7*" cover (1977). An attendant conference in March 2020, 'Radical Materialities: Linder and Companion Histories', offered stimulating debates on feminist politics, art production and critique, and the emergence of punk as a catalyst for sexual politics.

This diverse array of institutional explorations of punk's legacy point to the ways in which punk, as a creative practice and personal politics, is being re-read through contemporary debates on sexuality, gender, race and class identities. These exhibitions and events show punk is still perceived to be relevant, signalling punk's critical afterlife independent of the commodified and frozen stereotypical cliché of 'Mohican-and-bondage trousers'. This is reaffirmed in the surge of memoirs from several prominent punk-related female musicians. Viv Albertine's successful first book *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes. Music, Music, Music. Boys, Boys, Boys* (2014) drew critical attention to the role of women in punk;³⁹ followed by her second publication in 2018. Related biographical accounts followed by Jordan, Chrissie Hynde, Debbie Harry, Cosey Fanni Tutti, and Brix Smith Start.⁴⁰ More recently, Poly Styrene garnered much attention as the subject of the publication *Day-Glo*—curated by her daughter and Slits biographer Zoë Howe, and featuring contributions from punk scholar (and punk musician) Helen Reddington.

³⁷ See Collinson (2020).

³⁸ See Kettle's Yard (2020).

³⁹ A second publication in 2018, *To Throw Away Unopened* explored a more intimate account of her upbringing.

⁴⁰ For a detailed analysis of this corpus, see Rai *et al.* (2021).

Reddington's academic study *The Lost Women of Rock Music* (2007) is the definitive account of women's roles in punk, featuring interviews with prominent female punk musicians and writers such as Jon Savage. Several of these publications are in production for television at the time of writing, including biopics of both Viv Albertine and Cosey Fanni Tutti, alongside a biopic of the Sex Pistols, *Pistol* by British director Danny Boyle.

This constellation of events and phenomena evidence a corpus of punk memory-work in which the past is reproduced as history in the present, and as such, the concerns of the present come to bear in the 'remembering' of the past. This autobiographical turn is notable in terms of consolidating the ways in which punk is 'remembered' in the testimony of punk's female auteurs specifically, and how this contributes to the refashioning of a contemporary lens through which punk is understood anew in the present. However, while this corpus is significant in its contribution to a broadly feminist corpus of punk cultural history—serving to address the impasse of punk history apropos of its female pioneers—these accounts, by their very nature, function to authenticate and emphasise certain strands of punk activity and events over others, recasting punk in light of issues that have come to the fore in recent discourses. I thus see it as necessary to bear in mind the underlying imperatives guiding female authorship in relation to the punk 'canon', and to scrutinise the themes that these accounts foreground, as a way of thinking through the critical afterlife of punk 'memory'.

These issues surrounding practices of punk memory-work peaked during the 40th anniversary of punk in 2017. The Museum of London hosted *Punk.London*, a year-long series of

events celebrating punk's legacy and 'remembering' punk.⁴¹ However, the city-wide celebration was not without its critics. Among the most vocal commentators was Joe Corr —only son of Vivienne Westwood and Malcom McLaren—best known as a fashion designer and founder of lingerie chain, Agent Provocateur.⁴² In protest at the perceived hypocrisy of a government-supported 'institutionalisation' of punk, Corr  staged a counter-demonstration.⁴³ In an apparent homage to his father's courting of media controversy with the Sex Pistols—namely, the 1977 boat-concert to mark Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee—Corr  torched a large collection of 'original' SEX and Seditonaries items. That destruction appeared to take seriously the injunction to 'destroy' emblazoned on his parent's popular T-shirt designs dating from the SEX era of their London boutique (Westwood, 2016).⁴⁴ Corr  staged his 'punk funeral' on a barge on the river Thames near Chelsea; mannequins depicting then-Tory cabinet ministers, Prime Minister David Cameron, George Osbourne and Theresa May, were sent up in flames, against a backdrop that read 'Extinction! Your future'. The environmental themes underpinning the protest were hammered-home by Westwood herself, who gave a speech from a double-decker bus stationed on the riverbank, imploring the assembled crowd to take up green energy. Before extinguishing his punk collection, reputedly worth £5m, Corr  told the assembled crowd: 'Punk was never, never meant to be nostalgic—and you can't learn how to be one at a Museum of London workshop'.⁴⁵

⁴¹ From 1 October 2016 – 15 January 2017. For more information, see: Museum of London (2016).

⁴² Westwood has another son, Ben Westwood, Corr 's half-brother.

⁴³ See: Press Association (2016).

⁴⁴ In an interview with Ben Westwood, Jordan disputed the veracity of Corr 's destruction of his collection. See: Westwood (2016).

⁴⁵ See: Press Association (2016).

Not unlike the criticism his parents received during the 1970s, Corr e’s detractors denounced the stunt as media attention-seeking: a selfish obliteration of valuable examples of early punk design. Interestingly, Corr e’s stunt presents itself as a form of punk memory-work, in which punk is ‘remembered’ in its most critical form, as a fundamentally anti-establishment movement, determinedly anti-nostalgia. This ‘remembering’ privileges a particular version of punk history. For instance, Corr e’s ‘remembering’ of punk ‘forgets’ the commercial ambitions of many first wave progenitors of punk.⁴⁶ Moreover, this ‘remembering’, paradoxically, was premised on the intentional ‘forgetting’ of these objects, through their destruction. Corr e’s resistance to the public re-staging of punk as a celebration of its artistic achievements emphasises the affective sensibility with which punk has come to be associated. I refer of course to ‘provocation’ and ‘rebellion’, as expressed in the stereotypical punk rebarbative: ‘fuck off!’. Punk’s association with such expletives speaks to the ways in which its rhetoric blended ribald humour and profane language, while evidencing contempt for accepted norms, social mores, and standards of civil and political correctness, thereby evoking carnivalesque themes—I address these further in chapter 5.⁴⁷

What strikes me about Corr e’s pointed criticism of ‘punk nostalgia’—as a veiled critique of inertia in the face of climate change—is its striking ‘utopian’ aspects. As literary theorist Svetlana Boym argues in her essay ‘Nostalgia and its Discontents’, nostalgia ‘is not always retrospective; it can be prospective as well. The fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of

⁴⁶ For instance, the Clash signed to CBS records in January 1977; Buzzcocks to United Artists in August of the same year. The Sex Pistols signed with EMI in October 1976; they would go on to sign with A&R records as well as Virgin Records.

⁴⁷ The concept of ‘political correctness’ refers to a whole history of linguistic standards, particularly in relation to issues of race and gender – a survey of political correctness is beyond the scope of this thesis, however I do briefly address this subject in the section below, Demystification and Consciousness Raising.

the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future' (2011, p. 452). Boym's perspective suggests Corr e's protest can be seen to engage with individual and collective memories which intersect with identities of place. For Boym, 'nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory' (p. 452). Criticism of Corr e's display serves to illustrate Boym's argument here. While Corr e asserted the anti-nostalgia stance of punk as true to its origins, he did so on the basis of his 'biographic' association to his parents as 'architects' of first wave punk; perhaps unsurprisingly, this failed to impress self-identifying punks, who saw his actions as a cynical attempt to 'grab a bit of fame off the back of his parents' (Smith, 2016, n.p.).⁴⁸ Both Corr e's stunt and its reception by self-identifying punks are instantiations of the performative repertoire associated with punk: that is, the 'punk attitude'. This affective stance has significance for my framing of punk in relation to memory-work, speaking to the surplus of meaning implied in acts of 'remembering' punk subculture more broadly.

In his contribution to the anthology *Punk Rock: So What? The Cultural Legacy of Punk*, Andy Medhurst homes in on the different forms of memory-work involved in the 'remembering' of punk within critical accounts. Reflecting on his formative years as a young punk fan, Medhurst suggests that, for its participants, punk's meaning was not limited to its musical output. As Medhurst puts it:

Punk was never just 'music'—if it was then I could only satiate my nostalgia by ploughing through those old singles. Music was the focus, the entry point, but punk went broader and deeper, offering a set of rules and a structure of feeling applicable way

⁴⁸ The thematic of the prevailing afterlife of punk as an attitude as a sur-affective embodied stance, thereby immune to consumerist recuperation, continues to be propagated by 'punks' themselves. In this Time Out article, punk interviewees largely criticise Corr e, while nonetheless reasserting the belief in a punk attitude. See: Smith (2016).

beyond the confines of sound (2020, p. 225)

Medhurst's invocation of Raymond William's conception of a 'structure of feeling' (1977) echoes Fisher's aforementioned 'remembering' of the radical propensities that punk—and popular subcultures more broadly—served to engender.

Moreover, comparison of Corr e's 'remembering' of punk to the institutional memory-work evidenced in *Punk Lust*, enables illustration of the ways in which punk continues to be 'remembered' beyond its musical corpus. In particular, *Punk Lust* foregrounded the importance of punk aesthetics as a means of reproducing a narrative of the *past* which resonates in the *present*. By re-constructing segments of historical record under the aegis of 'sexuality', the show's curatorial framing addressed the contention that cultural memories of punk have predominantly focussed attention on its white, male progenitors, excluding those female auteurs and sexual and racial minorities who were active within Anglo-American punk from its early days. The feminist imperatives that underscored the exhibit were highlighted in relation to the historical importance of several female punk bands. The Slits, for instance, were prominently showcased, with a particular emphasis on the band's debut album sleeve for *Cut* (1979) which depicts the three female band members topless, and caked in mud, in a staging redolent of Amazonian warriors.

However, as this brief description indicates, this process is predicated upon a selective approach to historical engagement, such that a narrative constructed around certain key events in punk are 'remembered', while others are occluded and thus 'forgotten'. Thus punk's retrospectives seemingly profit from the ambiguity of the historical *past* within memory

discourses, which justifies the re-presentation of an assemblage of historical paraphernalia to articulate a recognisable punk history. Such curatorial practices point to the pivotal role of institutional retrospectives in the production of forms of punk memory-work.

Connecting this back to the previous section's theoretical considerations, this operation points to the ways in which 'punk' and 'pornography' continue to circulate as 'travelling concepts' (Bal, 2002). To consider this further, I now undertake a brief genealogical analysis of both punk and porn in light of Bal's theorisation, tracing their etymological trajectories.

The 'Punk' Label: A Brief History

Tracing the etymology of punk shows the term has undergone various semantic shifts since its emergence in the sixteenth century, 'travelling' across various contexts and disciplinary boundaries in its circulation within both 'low' and 'high' cultural contexts. Vivien Goldman observes that, stemming from its reintroduction into popular cultural discourses in the twentieth century, punk would largely shake off its overtly sexual connotations, becoming shorthand for a sub-genre variant of rock music characterised by a raw sonic affect that eschewed overt virtuosity.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Given that my study is expressly concerned with punk aesthetics as opposed to music, I refrain from an exhaustive cultural history of the musical influences that inspired punk artists in their contribution to the musical genre of punk rock. However, I note that British groups such as The Kinks and The Who constitute archetypal proto-punk outfits, given the raw sonic affect and overdriven sounds excess that characterised their early sonic output, and, in the case of the latter, the 'auto-destructive' rituals of their live performances involving the smashing of their instruments. In the US context, both the Stooges and the MC5 similarly cultivated a raw musical affect, which channelled existential and political themes while emphasising an assaulting live performance style. The Velvet Underground's early work also marks a critical touchstone for the punk sound, particularly their second album, *White Light/White Heat* (1968). For a thorough history of punk's musical forebears, see: (Worley, 2017; Marcus, 1989; Laing, 1985).

It is widely accepted that the proto-punk duo Suicide were the first to use the term as a musical genre descriptor, describing themselves as ‘nasty punk cool’ in an ad in *The Village Voice*, dating from December 10, 1970 (quoted in Buszek, 2019, p. 89) (Figure 1.1).⁵⁰ Fashion scholar Maria Elena Buszek has mapped earlier usages of punk in mid-twentieth century countercultural contexts. As Buszek shows, the term was used in the work of writer William Burroughs, ‘whose chronicles of queer life often referenced this underground term for young, gay hoodlums’ (p. 89). Following the Suicide advert, the term became conjoined with the suffix ‘rock’ in Dave Marsh’s 1971 article on ? and the Mysterians, but, as Buszek notes, was most notably used in the liner notes for the 1972 garage-rock compilation album *Nuggets: Original Artyfacts from the First Psychedelic Era* by music writer Lenny Kaye to describe that collection; Rolling Stone writer Greg Shaw retained the term in his review of the compilation (2020, p. 89).⁵¹ The term became solidified in common parlance in the New York scene to refer to the emergence of punk *proper*, following the founding of *Punk Magazine* in 1975, co-created by illustrator John Holstrom, publisher Ged Dunn, and ‘resident punk’, music writer Legs McNeil.

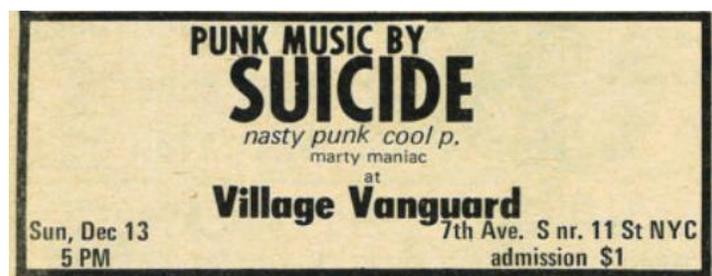


Figure 1.1: Ad. From *The Village Voice*, December 10, 1970.

⁵⁰ See: *The Voice Archives* (2018).

⁵¹ This album became a crucial touchstone for many punk bands, conceived of and compiled by Kaye, then-clerk at the Village Oldies record shop in New York City; Kaye would later become most well-known as the lead guitarist in the Patti Smith Group.

In the UK context, the term came to be associated with a coterie of first wave punk bands following the publication of several influential articles in 1976. The first reference to the Sex Pistols as ‘punk rock’ was in Neil Spencer’s February 1976 live review in *NME*, titled ‘Don’t look over your shoulder, but the Sex Pistols are coming’, which reviewed the band at the Marquee Club in London. This was followed by John Ingham’s article for *Soundz* published in April 1976 referencing British punk, and four months later, feminist writer and artist Caroline Coon wrote a piece on the Sex Pistols for *Melody Maker*, ‘Punk Rock: Rebels Against the System’, in which she explored the burgeoning punk movement according to its socio-economic dimensions. Later, in November of that year, Coon notably referred to Sex Pistols front-man John Lydon as ‘Rotten...punk king!’ on the front of *Melody Maker* (Coon, 27 November, 1976).

For Coon, then one of the only women working for the British music weeklies, punk possessed political potential, and her article explored the dimensions of the burgeoning subculture according to its socio-economic dimensions.⁵² While Coon’s article is perhaps best remembered for casting Lydon in the role of symbolic figurehead of the ‘punk movement’, Lydon himself, as well as his band, would initially disavow the label, seeing it as a heavy-handed, ‘one-size-fits-all’ misrepresentation of their music. Many other bands would similarly repudiate the moniker, viewing it as a concerted effort by journalists to shoehorn a series of disparate bands into a cohesive movement.⁵³

⁵² Coon is a significant figure in first wave British punk. Like McLaren, Coon came from a middle-class background, studying at art school during the 1960s. Active in London’s counterculture scene, she fostered an interest in radical and feminist politics. She famously appeared as a witness at the ‘Oz trial’ (1971), and co-founded the first British drugs information agency, Release.

⁵³ In a 2006 interview with Sex Pistols guitarist Steve Jones on his radio show *Jonesy’s Jukebox*, Lydon identifies a certain level of irony of Coon’s crowning him ‘King Punk’, given his well-known iconoclastic, anti-monarchy stance, see: Lydon (2016).

In spite of such initial resistance to the label, by the 1977 apotheosis of punk, and the popularity of the Sex Pistols, the term became synonymous with other bands such as the Clash and the Damned, along with American counterparts such as Richard Hell, the Ramones and the Dead Boys. More than just a label for individual bands however, ‘punk’ denoted the musical affect that united these groups, as characterised by an up-tempo take on rock which pared down an emphasis on technical virtuosity in favour of a visceral, oftentimes aggressive, series of sonic and performative affects.⁵⁴ For many commentators, including Coon, this ‘back to basics’ approach was read as a deliberate refusal of the virtuoso conventions of more ‘developed’ rock forms, with the progressive-rock of the late-1960s and early-to-mid 1970s ranking foremost amongst these. ‘Prog’ became the ‘straw man’ against which punk took its aim, with many punk musicians seeing the pretences to artistry of ‘prog’, and the demands of musicianship these entailed, as overblown and elitist.⁵⁵ However, since punk emerged as a genre term in the wider-public conscious in the late-1970s, it has since has sparked countless sub-genres and micro-musical scions—thus, this brief breakdown of punk’s characteristics is not to be taken as a generalisable criteria for all forms of punk.

Addressing punk’s contemporary meanings, Goldman writes that while ‘punk lurched into being as a movement with different meanings around the world’, there prevails a ‘general shared sense’ that the word stands for ‘subcultural outrage and defiance’ (Goldman, 2016, p. 78). Goldman’s feminist punk history, *Revenge of the She-Punks* (2019), attests to the widespread

⁵⁴ This brief description does not hold for all punk groups; indeed, compared to other first wave groups such as the Damned and the Clash, the Sex Pistols retained a relatively restrained musical aesthetic, eschewing excessive speed, in favour of a slower tempo accompaniment Lydon’s wry, ironical, and often tongue-in-cheek lyrical tone, as heard throughout *Never Mind the Bollocks* (1977).

⁵⁵ Most notably those commercially and artistically successful British groups such as King Crimson in the 1960s, and Pink Floyd, YES, Genesis, and Emerson, Lake and Palmer in the early 1970s. However, Disco too, was seen as anathema to many early punks.

connotations and manifestations of punk within global subcultural circuits, outlining its critical afterlife as both a concept, a musical style, and form of subcultural activity that is subject to continual appropriation and reconfiguration by successive generations in ever more diverse contexts. This raises an important point with regards to the study of punk within a broader practice of cultural history: past-facing, nostalgia-inflected studies of the subculture exhibit reductionist tendencies, betraying a latent ‘conservatism’ in seeking to re-read a history of punk as monolithic and unchanging. Thus, while this study follows an established trajectory that revisits the origins of punk, I seek to retain a critical distance from the standardisation of punk according to a definitive narrative history of the subculture.

Punk scholar Temmuz Süreyya Gürbüz expands upon these concerns, reflecting on the risks stemming from the line of enquiry advanced in critical accounts dedicated to exploring the historicity of punk. As Gürbüz notes, studies of punk that trace ‘direct or indirect historical connections’ may run the risk of ‘over-reading signs’ (2020, n.p.). Yet, in considering Greil Marcus’s examination of the punk subculture’s position in the history of radicalism and avant-garde movements in *Lipstick Traces*, Gürbüz suggests Marcus’s account is indicative of ‘an artistic tendency in writers that exhibit a punk sensibility towards these specific histories’ potential to remain alive, influential, and conscious’ (2020, n.p.).

Gürbüz’s meditations on punk scholarship serve to sketch the limitations that punk uniquely poses as a research focus. Helen Reddington (2016) advances a similar critical concern:

Writing about punk has always been a risky business, especially when one is approaching it from an academic perspective. Punk is anti-academic, and supposedly anti-formal; it prioritises the lived experience over both scholarly theory and mediated opinion (p. 91).

Introducing their seminal history of punk graphic design, *The Art of Punk*, scholars Russ Bestley and Alex Ogg reiterate this theme as innate to punk: ‘the nature of punk as an ephemeral, diverse, and popular form [...] flies in the face of authority and rejects intellectualization’ (2012, p. 6). While these arguments rightly note punk’s oftentimes antipathy to critical scrutiny, such assessments seem to operate in accordance with a homogenous understanding of punk to some extent; one that privileges a recognition of punk as a subversive cultural practice that deflects any pretension to intellectualism. This viewpoint, while cognisant of punk’s resistance as an object of study, might be questioned further; not least, given that the aforementioned scholars read the work of punk progenitors in relation to an ‘intellectual’ lineage of avant-garde art.

To elaborate, despite acknowledging punk’s anti-intellectualism, the scholars above nonetheless re-inscribe first wave punk (albeit it in differing ways) with an intellectual aspect, through their surveying of punk’s aesthetic strategies as critical praxis. For instance, Reddington’s study considers punk’s critical propensities in terms of the cultural space it opened up, as a site through which to contest norms of gender and sexuality in re-constitutive practices. Correspondingly, Bestley and Ogg’s study positions punk as a key twentieth century artistic movement, as expressed through sophisticated visual strategies, thereby locating it in an avant-garde continuum of ‘intellectual’ approaches to art-making.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ I do of course acknowledge that the present study follows these scholars in conducting an analysis of punk attuned to the theoretical and philosophical elements of its aesthetic components and the artistic trajectories these inspired.

Although an ‘anti-intellectual’ stance was advanced by many of punk’s early progenitors, then, denouncing intellectual understandings of punk might be viewed as an attempt to maintain punk as a subversive critical practice; that is, especially when faced with intellectual accounts with the potential to reduce the signifying charge of subcultural activity. For instance, Hebdige’s *Subculture* has been accused of this reductive tendency. Hebdige himself notes ways in which his analysis, which extends to subcultural scholarship more broadly, runs the risk of producing an overdetermined reading of subcultural contexts, leading to a disjunction between scholarly analysis and participant self-recognition. As Hebdige acknowledges in *Subculture*:

It is highly unlikely that the members of any of the subcultures described in this book would recognise themselves reflected here [...] They are still less likely to welcome any efforts on our part to understand them (1979, p. 139).

However, we should consider the extent to which repudiations of punk’s intellectualism may also be a form of cultural gatekeeping by certain punk commentators and participants. In this light, anti-intellectualism appears as a defensive posture; a response to the perception of punk’s subjection to critical enquiry; a potential threat against punk participants’ own self-imposed authority on the ‘meanings’ of the movement.

Thus it is perhaps unsurprising that scholarship often encounters difficulties: on the one hand, studies wish to acknowledge the viewpoints and requests of punk’s progenitors, while on the other, scholarly enquiry aims to think through theoretical underpinnings and key developments at a critical distance. As Bestley and Ogg concede, punk’s multivalence, has often meant ‘writers and historians have had a difficult time documenting developments beyond a simple chronology of its major themes and events’ (2012, p. 6). Echoing Bestley and Ogg, this

thesis recognises the risks of homogenisation in subcultural analysis, while aiming to shed light on the visual themes that inform understandings of punk:

This, then, is not an attempt to capture and contain the vitality and essence of an amorphous and radical subculture—it is instead an attempt to trace influences, connections, and patterns while charting a course through some of the visual and graphic elements that have come to constitute “punk” (p. 6).

Origins of Pornography

Tracing a similar trajectory regarding ‘pornography’ requires a more limited understanding of the term. In Linda Williams’s literature review of the ‘elusive genre of pornography’ (1989, p. 9), she notes the primacy of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) definition as a key reference point. The OED traces the etymology of the term to the Greek words ‘graphos’, meaning ‘writing or description’ and ‘pornei (prostitutes)’, which signifies the ‘description of the life, manners, etc. of prostitutes or their patrons’ (p. 9), but as the term came to prominence in the nineteenth century, it is the deployment of Greek or Latin words for Victorian sensibilities/moralities. Even so, the etymology of pornography clearly conveys foundational semantic linkages with practices and acts of sex work involving remunerated consensual sex acts.

As a phenomenon in and of itself, however, many scholars argue that sexuality is essentially pornographic in nature. This view finds particular expression in psychoanalytic scholarship, following the influence of French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan. For Lacan, the ‘Other of language’—that is, the gap introduced by language via the Symbolic order—renders a symmetrical sexual relationship ‘impossible’; Lacan encapsulates this in his formula *‘il n’y a pas*

de rapport sexuel ('there is no sexual relationship') (1991, p. 134). Lacan's formula also highlights the necessity of the 'fantasmatic supplement' (Fisher, 2018, p. 127) to sexuality; that is, the necessity of the 'fantasy' to staging desire (Lacan, 1991, p. 134). In this sense, sexuality can be viewed as innately pornographic, given its apparent reliance on the staging of fantasy (as exhibited in pornography), around central objects of fixation, such as the 'fetish'. For my purposes, the central implication of Lacan's argument is that, contrary to the Freudian view of 'perversion' as the result of a failure to realise a healthy (hetero)sexuality, Lacan rebukes the notion of a 'natural' sexuality as such. Lacan's contention illustrates the necessity of the staging of sexuality within the co-ordinates of 'fantasy'.⁵⁷ Writing on contemporary film and pornography, Fisher traces this Lacanian view in the work of writers such as J.G. Ballard and William Burroughs, in which human sexuality is conceived as 'irreducible to biological excitation'; as Fisher concludes, 'strip away the hallucinatory and the fantasmatic, and sexuality disappears with it' (2018, p. 126).

Pornography as a distinct aesthetic field has historically been understood in opposition to art (Hunt, 1993; Nead, 2002; Dennis, 2009; Needham, 2018). This reading marks a contested site of critical struggle, not least, given that the boundaries and parameters which categorise something as 'pornography' or 'art' are in a constant state of flux, and are produced through a series of national and cultural discourses and 'aesthetic judgements' (Dennis, 2009). Gary Needham draws out the implications of understanding porn through the binary logic of this distinction:

⁵⁷ I note ways in which this reproach to the idea of a 'natural' sexuality resonates with Foucault's argument: both thinkers appear to view sexuality as produced, yet where Foucault sees this as a product of biopolitical power relations acting upon the body according to an era-specific episteme, Lacan sees sexuality as produced according to the psychoanalytic conceptualisation of desire.

Definitions of art and pornography and art/porn find themselves caught in the ever-shifting climates of tolerance and politics so that it is possible to infer that pornography is what conservative states call art when they want to remove funding, censor or destroy work (2018, p. 163).

Several notable historical trials have highlighted the ambiguities of pornography's meaning, for example in the oft-quoted gnomic response by Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart in 1964, 'I know it when I see it' (quoted in Williams, 1989, p. 5). Gender theorist Laura Kipnis captures this ambiguity well in her gentle mocking of the boundary that polices the porn and erotica antimony: 'one person's pornography is another person's erotica' (Kipnis, 1996, p. 64). Thus, objects deemed art may well be taken as porn, dependant on the particular gaze of the viewer, and/or the cultural context within which they are consumed (Dennis, 2009).

Walter Kendrick's *The Secret Museum* traces the emergence of pornography *proper* to the nineteenth century. Following the excavation of Ancient Greek frescoes depicting sexual scenes, upper-class gentlemen were invited to view these representations in private, hence 'the secret museum'. This 'containment' of pornography by the patriarchal bourgeoisie entailed a 'aesthetic judgement' of this pornography as 'high-culture' at this time. However, as Kendrick (1987) details, with the entrance of image-based pornography into popular cultural discourses, the 'aesthetic judgment' of pornography shifted from being considered 'erotica' when viewed by upper-class men of the Victorian gentry in the aforementioned fugitive practices.

As Kendrick notes, by the late-nineteenth century, pornography moved into commercial popular contexts, increasingly available to 'lower' classes; henceforth, pornography's association

with the lower-classes led to its categorisation as ‘low culture’. However, Kendrick (1996) refuses a monolithic definition, instead insisting on an understanding of pornography according to its conceptual contingency: that it is ‘not a thing but a concept, a thought structure’ (quoted in McKee *et al.*, p. 1086). Williams notes that Kendrick’s understanding amounts to a view of pornography that does not have ‘*any common qualities*’ (Williams, 1989, p. 11 [italics in original]).

McKee *et al.* highlight Kendrick’s non-reductionist understanding of pornography and the persistent difficulties of defining pornography in contemporary contexts. Their technical report explores a sample of ‘38 leading pornography researchers from a range of disciplines’ (McKee *et al.*, 2020, p. 1085) and finds the meanings of pornography are contingent on researchers’ disciplinary backgrounds. McKee *et al.* also find that the most common definitional tendency focuses on the affective dimensions of porn; that is, its potential to arouse the viewer. In this sense, it follows that any material which stimulates erotic arousal for the viewer, as material for masturbation, can be considered as porn. Thus McKee *et al.* observe:

The complexity of the different definitions that can be created through different applications of explicitness and/or arousal (with the latter term having two possible meanings—intent to arouse or use for arousal) leads to a complex matrix of definitions, each of which produces a different object of study (p. 1088).

McKee *et al.* conclude that ‘researchers across disciplines did not agree on a single definition of pornography’ (p. 1088), with researchers’ proffering several definitions of the term, in accordance with a variety of characteristics and variables.

Nevertheless, and following Kendrick, McKee *et al.* suggest that:

Pornography is not a thing but a concept, a category of texts managed by institutions led by powerful groups in society in order to control the circulation of knowledge and culture, changing according to geographical location and period (p. 1089).

I find this definitional apprehension of pornography useful for the purposes of my study, although McKee *et al.* rightly observe that ‘sexually explicit material intended to arouse’ may not match up with the ways in which consumers are deciding what pornography is in their own consumption practice’ (2020, p. 1089). McKee *et al.*’s study evidences the ways in which social science work is organised around research impacts, viewing porn as a tool operating on individuals with measurable ‘effects’. However, Andrews (2012) has noted the limits of the ‘dominant social concepts’ utilised to categorise pornography in this way, arguing that these constructs ‘cannot possibly cover pornography, the actual aesthetic forms’ (p. 459). That being said, McKee *et al.* point out that for humanities researchers, a totalising definition may not be strictly necessary. Andrews’ argument seemingly has more relevance for social sciences research, which seeks to formalise an agreed-upon definition in their attempts to carry out ‘empirical research’ (p. 1098).

Relatedly, as a concept, pornography draws meaning from its semantic cognates, gaining conceptual power from the para-concept of the ‘pornographic’. The ‘pornographic’ circulates in the reportage of a variety of contemporary cultural phenomena, in turn, inflecting understandings of pornography itself (Barker, 2018). Though multiple definitions are possible, the pornographic is itself a culturally-situated concept, which gains its protean meaning from, and in relation to, the specific cultural context in which it originates; as such, it is subject to shifting views of

obscurity within social, moral, and legal frameworks (Attwood and Smith, 2014; Wilkinson, 2017). Cultural anthropologist Gail Rubin points out that in popular discourses, the ‘polysemic’ nature of the ‘pornographic’ sees it invoked ‘to express many kinds of revulsion’, in spite of the common absence of sexual imagery in relation to its contextual usage. Noting the contradictions that underpin understandings of pornography and the pornographic, Rubin highlights that while ‘war may be “obscene” and Reagan’s policies “pornographic” [...] neither is customarily found in adult bookstores’ (Rubin, 1993, p. 37). Rubin’s analysis reminds us that, in the moralising of mainstream cultural discourses, the ‘obscene’ connotations of pornography commonly serve as a site against that normative moral standards and cultural values are constituted.

Rubin’s work is particularly pertinent with regard to my focus on sexualities viewed as aberrant and marked as ‘abnormal’ to normative models of ‘straight’ sex. In her seminal essay ‘Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality’, Rubin proposes the ‘charmed circle’ to illustrate the hierarchy of sexuality and sexual acts that are constituted by hegemonic sexual morality. Drawing on a Foucauldian schema, Rubin argues that the ‘notion of a single ideal sexuality characterizes most systems of thought about sex’ (1984, p. 154). This ‘ideal’ is produced through what Foucault termed a ‘dispositif’: the scientific apparatuses produced by Western discourses of religion, medicine, psychology and education (Miller-Young, 2014). Rubin’s figure of the ‘charmed circle’ considers ‘good’ sexuality according to the model of heterosexual reproductivity, ascribing ‘normal’ status to the orientation ‘straight’, and privileging matrimony as institution over sexuality. ‘Bad’ sexuality lies at the ‘outer limits’—non-normative sexuality embodied by ‘deviant’ practices such as gay sex, BDSM, and the use of

pornography. Those participating in sexual practices at the ‘outer limits’ of the ‘charmed circle’ are subjected to ‘extreme and punitive stigma’ (p. 151).

Echoing Foucault, Rubin argues that whereas ‘individuals whose behavior stands high in this hierarchy are rewarded with certified mental health, respectability, legality, social and physical mobility, institutional support, and material benefits,’ those at the ‘lower’ end of the ranking are ‘subjected to the presumption of mental illness, disreputability, criminality, restricted social and physical mobility, loss of institutional support, and economic sanctions’ (1984, p. 151; quoted in Miller-Young, 2014). Foucault theorises the link between deviance and its status as a symptom of mental illness through the concept of the ‘perverse implantation’, which he argues emerges in the nineteenth century in relation to four figures: the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult (Foucault, 1978, p. 104-105).

Following Rubin, contemporary studies have sought to expand readings of the pornographic, as a ‘travelling concept’ (Bal, 2002), charting its movement from discourses pertaining to sexual imagery to its mobilisation as a synonym for explicit violence (Hester, 2011; Wilkinson, 2017).⁵⁸ Given the conjunctural focus of this study, it would be possible to investigate the pornographic in relation to instances of explicit violence which perforate the cultural history of punk, for example in those punk performers such as the Stooges’ frontman, Iggy Pop, known for his frenetic onstage performances which, in the late-1960s, incorporated self-laceration. Equally, during the 1980s, the infamous GG Allin also incorporated self-laceration into his onstage act, alongside assaulting audience members, leading to his arrest on

⁵⁸ Hester’s study discusses this ‘conceptual travelling’ in more detail, addressing the contemporary invocation of porn in social media contexts vis-à-vis consumption practices and lifestyles e.g. ‘food porn’.

several occasions. Allin's actions have long occupied a place in punk folklore as examples of transgressive onstage performance, which can, in varying ways, be considered pornographic. Performing in New York City on the eve of his death under the influence of a cocktail of illicit substances (as well as laxatives), Allin smeared himself in his own excrement, to the horror of the audience, the majority of whom fled the venue.⁵⁹

Such examples serve to highlight interconnections between obscenity, transgression, and the pornographic that punk—and its many provocative performers—have staged. However, while such performances seemingly encompass transgressive elements, it is worth elaborating further on the critical underpinnings of these concepts of transgression and the ways in which punk has historically been associated with transgression. In this light, I now survey the main issues that inform philosophical inquiry into the concept of transgression, emphasising the links between sexuality and transgression in particular, and the ways in which sexuality has been theorised as a potentially transgressive practice.

Concepts of Transgression

Contemporary scholars such as Tim Dean have scrutinised the concept of transgression in the work of Foucault, and his intellectual predecessor, French philosopher Georges Bataille. In his 2010 book chapter 'The Erotics of Transgression', Dean draws attention to the centrality of sexuality in the philosophical studies of transgression by these thinkers. As Dean points out, while transgression has made its way into common parlance as a synonym for socially

⁵⁹ Allin died later that evening of a drug overdose aged 36. See: McNeil (2013).

subversive acts—what Dean calls the ‘intuitive *idea* of transgression’ (2010, p. 66)—this understanding is not commensurate with the specificity of transgression as a philosophical concept. In this philosophical understanding, Dean argues that ‘transgression concerns not the law but *the limit*’ (p. 71). Dean shows that there ‘can be no possibility of transgression without law, prohibition, limit or taboo’ (p. 67), but points out that for both Foucault and Bataille, transgression does not concern the judicial (p. 70). Transgression, then, is not marked by the breaking of rules as such, but by the violation of the prohibition(s) that constitute the taboo; taboos, as Dean reminds us, can ‘radiate a genuinely aversive power’ (p. 70).

To elaborate further, while Bataille sees sexuality as a potentially capacious means of enacting transgressions, his main charge against sex, as Dean shows, is that it ‘does *not* violate prohibitions’ (2010, p. 69). While Bataille discusses the ‘erotics of transgression’ in terms of its ‘violation of rules’, Dean points out that this potentially ‘obscures how transgression involves violating not so much rules or social conventions but, more precisely, *taboos*’ (p. 70). Here, Dean refers to the ‘sacred’ that underpins the taboo, pointing out that the sacred status of an object, as evidenced in religious ritual, for instance, must retain its own prohibition in order to retain its signifying power. Dean shows how Bataille’s notion of the ‘double significance’ of taboo draws out connections between transgression and the sacred—as Bataille saliently puts it: ‘what is *sacred* is precisely what is *prohibited*’ (quoted in Dean, 2010, p. 71). Thus, Dean argues that ‘Transgression may entail contact with not only the low and impure but also the sacred and holy. In other words, it may entail touching what is to remain untouchable’ (p. 71). The main implication of the argument here, is that in designating something as ‘untouchable’—that is, to make it taboo—‘tacitly acknowledges that somewhere there lurks the desire to touch it’ (p. 71).

Dean shows that the singularity of the taboo lies in its apparent ability to survive the death of God (2010, p. 70). As Dean summarises, ‘Believed unquestioningly, taboos wield a power that remains immune to logical argument or enlightened reasoning’ (p. 70). In *Totem and Taboo*, Sigmund Freud explores the incest taboo as a founding myth of civilisation, arguing that the taboo serves as a fundamental prohibition upon which kinship relations are structured. In the second chapter, ‘Taboo and the Ambivalence of Emotions’, Freud details the origins of the taboo as a Polynesian word, which contains two distinct connotative strands: ‘On the one hand it means to us sacred, consecrated: but on the other hand it means, uncanny, dangerous, forbidden, and unclean’ ([1913] 2018, p. 16). As Freud demonstrates, ‘taboo expresses itself essentially in prohibitions and restrictions [...] Our combination of “holy dread” would often express the meaning of taboo’ (p. 16). Differentiating ‘taboo restrictions from religious prohibitions’, Freud compares the ‘force of taboos’ with that of Immanuel Kant’s ‘categorical imperative’. As Dean notes, Freud insists that ‘taboo is older than gods and dates back to a period before any kind of religion existed’ (quoted in Dean 2010, p. 70).

If one transgresses a taboo then, as Freud put it, ‘no external threat of punishment is required, for there is an internal certainty, a moral conviction, that any violation will lead to an intolerable disaster’ (quoted in Dean, 2010, p. 70). As Dean observes:

With taboos the threat of punishment comes from inside rather than outside the self. Transgressing laws that one regards as unjust, arbitrary or externally imposed (for example, anti-gay legislation) is easy enough; here we observe the difference between transgression and civil disobedience. What is much harder to sustain is any transgression of one’s own internal limits (p. 70).

Dean argues that, for both Bataille and Foucault, the ‘limit’ constituted by the prohibition of the taboo finds expression much more in literature, as opposed to pornography. Despite the stigma against pornography as a potentially taboo site of aesthetics, pornography does not necessarily imply transgression as such. In this way, both Foucault and Bataille emphasise ‘eroticism’ in relation to its capacity to facilitate transgression. As Dean helps to clarify, given that ‘defying cultural prohibitions is always easier in fantasy than in reality’ (p. 69), the fantasmatic nature of literature enables a representation of the taboo in its excess, which often runs counter to the representational field of pornography. Bataille’s work stands out in this regard, with his focus on transgression in the writings of the Marquis de Sade and Sacher-Masoch. Dean explores Bataille’s concept of the ‘limit experience’ in the work of gay authors such as the science fiction writer Samuel Delaney, in which the sexual orientation of Delaney’s protagonists remains supplementary in their engaging with the ‘self-shattering’ potential of the violation of taboos occurring when the self is brought into contact with what Bataille defines as the ‘impossible’—when the boundaries between the self and its outside (what Lacan called the ‘real’) are breached.

However, while both Bataille and Foucault see sexuality as a source of potential transgression, Dean observes that neither thinker has any particular concern with sexual identity, and in fact, they appear to rebuke the claims of non-normative sexual orientations to a uniquely transgressive status (2010, p. 69). As Dean elaborates, ‘transgression involves an experience of sexuality in which the gender of the partner remains secondary, if not altogether irrelevant’ (p. 69). However, this is not to say that queer practices are exclusive to sexual transgression. As a lineage of queer literature demonstrates, with exemplars ranging from Jean Genet to Guy Hocquenghem, transgression and the queer life are interlinked, given their historical

independence from the normativity entailed in what Judith Butler, following Adrienne Rich, has called ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (quoted in Rubin and Butler, 1994, p. 66). Taking into account the contemporary contexts pertaining to LGBT+ rights and inclusive agendas, then, Dean points out that while non-normative sexualities may appear to embody radical, transgressive positionalities—opposing the hegemonic normativity of ‘cis’ and the heterosexist patriarchy—this imputation is flawed. As Dean contends, ‘lesbian and gay sexualities have no essential or privileged relation to transgression. There is nothing necessarily revolutionary or, indeed, politically progressive about same-sex desires, practices, identities and representations today’ (2010, p. 68).

However, while this may be the case according to the philosophical understanding of transgression I have sketched here, Dean also reminds us that the history of obscenity trials, particularly in the US context, demonstrates how obscenity legislation has increasingly sought to censor and censure the non-normative. As Dean points out, that history of US obscenity legislation, ‘bears witness to a shift from concerns about sexual explicitness to anxiety over representations of non-normative sexualities’ (2010, p. 68). This also translates to the British context, as seen in the differing treatments of individual Westwood-McLaren porn T-shirts—where, despite its explicit depiction of female breasts, the ‘Tits’ T-shirt drew comparatively little criticism, while the ‘Cowboys’ and ‘Naked Footballer’ designs caused outrage and prosecution (I discuss these cases in more depth in chapter 2).

Counterculture and Obscenity

The Westwood and McLaren obscenity trials have contributed to the mythos of punk as a radical movement and challenge to the British establishment and its social mores. Yet, where this mythologising posits punk as a radical youth subculture that constituted itself in opposition to the countercultural imagery and ‘hippie ideals’ of the 1960s, a wider view of the history of underground artistic production testifies contrariwise. In the UK context, ten years prior to the obscenity trials of Westwood and McLaren, the editors of *Oz Magazine* were imprisoned for publishing a comparatively banal illustration of Rupert the Bear engaging in sexual intercourse.⁶⁰ The comic strip, which featured in *Oz*’s ‘School Kids’ issue, was détourned from a Rupert the Bear cartoon. The image of the cartoon bear—augmented with genitals taken from Robert Crumb’s illustrations—was deemed obscene under the Obscene Publications Act, 1959.⁶¹ In the *Spare Rib Reader*, feminist writer Marsha Rowe points to the significance of this trial in the history of British obscenity trials: ‘The charge brought, not against the school kids, but the three *Oz* editors [Richard Neville, Richard Walsh and Martin Sharp], was the first time the Obscene Publications Act, 1959, was combined with a moral conspiracy charge. The three were convicted and given jail sentences’ (1984, p. 15). As reported by Rowe, Neville’s testimony during the trials betrays a Reichian undercurrent, foreshadowing McLaren and Westwood’s later justification of their work as attempt to ‘liberate’ sexual repression, according to the concept of the ‘repressive hypothesis’ as previously discussed. As Rowe describes it:

During the trial, the prosecuting barrister accused the community of which the magazine was a part of being without love. Richard Neville responded that, on the contrary, *OZ* was against the guilt and obsession of repressed sexuality and that ‘*OZ* was trying to redefine

⁶⁰ *Oz* was originally created by Richard Neville, Richard Walsh and Martin Sharp in Sydney in 1963. Neville moved *Oz* to London in 1967 following obscenity charges in Sydney.

⁶¹ Neville and Sharp were acquitted on the charges of conspiracy, but were sentenced to reduced terms on other counts; Dennis was given a reduced sentence. On imprisonment, their hair was cut, to much criticism.

love, to broaden it, extend it and revitalize it, so it could be a force of release and not one of entrapment' (1984, p. 15).

Rowe also notes that other publications were subject to the same attempts to censor non-normative, deviant sexualities. The offices of the *IT* (*International Times*) were raided by police during the same late-1960s period, and in 1973, were prosecuted for 'publishing small ads for homosexuals' writes Rowe, 'despite the legalization of homosexuality between "consenting adults in private"' (1984, p. 14). The use of obscenity law to regulate the boundaries of 'sexual citizenship' remains an important object of study (Bell, 1995; Dymock, 2020).

Demystification and Consciousness Raising

In coming to a critical understanding of the case studies discussed here, it is significant that transgression aligns with the notion of 'demystification' as a form of 'consciousness raising'⁶² and Westwood and McLaren serve to demonstrate this linkage. This discussion is specifically relevant to my discussion in chapter 2 of Vivienne Westwood's self-stated *modus operandi*, justifying her fashion designs as a 'demystification of the icons of tyranny' (Mooney, 2019, p. 169). Taking Westwood's work as a form of 'consciousness raising' seriously, I do see the strands of the libertarianism associated with the 1960s counterculture in her work. The imperative to 'demystify' can be seen as a response to conditioned cultural codes, and aesthetics

⁶² There is an interesting parallel between 'political correctness' and 'consciousness raising'—both entail a particular set of moral and ethical presuppositions and imperatives, while differing in orientation and deployment. Although an exhaustive account of the differences between these ethical entailments is beyond my scope here, I see both of these stances as seeking to overturn the repressive structures of power which condition the subject within modern society. Whereas consciousness raising was frequently invoked within countercultural discourses during the 1960s—as a means to 'turn on' people to the ways in which social responses are culturally conditioned—political correctness appears to play this manoeuvre in reverse, presupposing a moral norm which must be sustained by condemning those who appear to breach the rules governing the policing of identity categories. In this sense, I locate a bourgeois subjectivity within both of these operations, which reproduces power so as to sustain an enlightened minority, who seek to educate, and impose their 'morality' onto, an 'unenlightened' mass.

in particular. By working with taboo imageries in her work, Westwood's designs offered a challenge to conceptions of society as 'sexually repressed'—at least challenging the notion that Britons experienced such repression uniformly or absolutely as per the 'repressive hypothesis'—instead, her work mobilised aspects of the complex topologies and cultures of sex and sexual attitudes in 1970s Britain (Smith, 2010).

Taking Foucault's concerns into account, these stances are indicative of operations of 'power/knowledge' (Foucault, 1978, p. 11). Westwood's re-articulation of 'consciousness raising' (which can be traced from the 1960s counterculture) was not so neutral however, given that it presupposed the ignorance of an 'unenlightened' mass. Westwood's position, couched within discourses of liberation and emancipation constituted an act of self-elected authority, whereby a certain set of ideological presuppositions were privileged, and served to mutually reinforce and vindicate Westwood's stance. To put it more directly, while this position presented itself as an attempt to free a 'lumpen' populace from the repressive machinations of bourgeois hegemonic culture, contradictorily, it actually mirrors those very dynamics of bourgeois authority and its moral certainty. Hence, Florian Cramer has argued that Westwood and McLaren's so-called subversive practice merely constituted the 'bourgeois culture of sentiment inverted' (2007, p. 173).



Figure 1.2: Germaine Greer in *Suck*. No.7.

The case study of *Suck* magazine serves as a means of further scrutinising sexuality as a means of overturning repressive structure of patriarchal power. *Suck* was founded in 1969 in Amsterdam by American expat Bill Levy, and was marketed as ‘That First European Sex Paper.’ The seventh issue is perhaps the most well-known for featuring feminist writer Germaine Greer’s attempt to overturn the conventions of the ‘male gaze’ in a series of nude images. As Thompson (2016) observed, Greer’s staging marked a feminist attempt to refute expectations of female sexual performativity. By eschewing the conventions of eroticism and the set of tropes and codes through which the female body was depicted in men’s pornographic magazines of the period, Greer sought to present her body on her own terms. As Greer conceived it, displaying her exposed genitals front and centre would reveal the brute reality of the site of male sexual desire and thereby destroy the oppressive structures that depict the female body as a docile ‘sex object’.

Her defiant gaze deliberately resisted the sultry posturing associated with sexualised imagery which, to use John Berger's terms, 'offer[s] up her femininity as surveyed' (1972, p. 55).

I find this staging interesting in a number of ways. Firstly, Greer's jovial countenance, which refrains from an overtly seductive posture, appears somewhat incongruous, juxtaposed against the centrality of her genitalia and anus in the picture frame. However, Greer's appearance occupies an ambivalent position vis-a-vis her intention to undermine patriarchal expectations. Her smiling face risks normalising her self-display, thus conforming to the representational regime of the 'male gaze'. Additionally, viewed in light of the psychoanalytic framework outlined as previously outlined, her ob-scene challenge to the bourgeois relegation of sex to the private realm, while certainly confrontational cannot have the same de(con)structive effects on desire, given that desire, as Fisher (2018) has elaborated, is not politically correct. In other words, Greer's justification of her positioning in such a manner presupposes a particular model of desire, as predicated on assumptions regarding the 'male gaze's' fixation on the vagina, while neglecting to account for the anus as an equivalent site of erotic attraction.

However, in Steven Maddison's (2012a) psychoanalytic elaboration of the prominence of the anus and the practice of anal penetration in heteronormative porn, he points to ways in which this pornoscript suggests the implantation of homoeroticism within the pornographic mainstream. Viewed in relation to Greer, then, her positioning aligns with a masculine order in presenting the anus, despite attempting to articulate a defiant feminist corporeality.

More broadly, the cultural objects considered in this thesis are examples of different attempts at the ‘demystification’ of sexuality, often intersecting in complex ways with issues of class and gender. As I discuss in chapter 3, COUM’s attempts to demystify the bourgeois structures of the art institution by staging pornography around a ‘working-class’ thematic were met with outrage. What emerges in the examples I explore, is the centrality of sex to punk’s ‘demystifying turn’; predicated, as it is, on a principle unveiling of nudity as a means of revealing a hidden ‘truth’. In this sense, the distinction between naked and nude that shapes the figure of the female nude in art history is one that is marked by the equation of nudity with the obscene. Yet, while nudity is marked by its relation to obscenity—that is to say, by bringing the ‘ob-scene’ ‘on-scene’, to use Williams’ formulation (2004, p. 3)—the apparatuses that regulate and contain nudity are more forcefully operative upon ‘abnormal’ bodies, as opposed to those befitting their locations within the ‘charmed circle’.

In feminist literature, the concept of ‘demystification’ has been used to both defend and critique porn. Dean foregrounds this in his article ‘The Biopolitics of Pleasure’, in relation to Laura Mulvey’s influential psychoanalytic understanding of the ‘male gaze’. In his reading of Mulvey’s landmark ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, Dean argues that the feminist film theorist betrays a conviction that has ‘animated various feminist critiques’; that is, the ‘conviction that pleasure tends to be taken at the expense of society’s less powerful members’ (2012, p. 5). Indeed, as Mulvey herself rather brazenly declares in her text (in terms redolent of punk iconoclasm): ‘It is said that analyzing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article’ (1989, p. 16; quoted in Dean, 2012, p. 482). Dean contends that while both Mulvey, and subsequent feminist perspectives have broadly moved beyond this position, ‘the

impulse to demystify pleasure has not significantly abated' (2012, p. 6).⁶³

Florian Cramer's polemical work on alt porn provides a contrasting perspective with relevance for this consideration of demystification. Cramer's work unpacks the tensions between what he terms 'pornographic logic', and its operation in relation to the obscene as an aesthetic category (2007, p. 171). Cramer contends that 'the obscene is porn's aesthetic register, its aura and its selling point' (p. 171). However, in discussing what he terms 'the pornographic logic of the taboo on obscenity', Cramer sees this logic cancelling 'itself nowhere more thoroughly than in pornography itself' (p. 171). Cramer asserts that pornography, as an aesthetic field that gives representation to the 'obscene', paradoxically empties out its obscene connotations: hence Cramer's argument that the 'contradiction of all pornography is that it destroys the obscene' (p. 171).

Cramer's evidencing of the paradox underpinning 'pornographic logic' suggests that pornography transforms the ontological status of the obscene itself; in doing so, it achieves the paradox of voiding the obscene in the very act of representing it (2007, p. 171). Cramer extends this argument to several figures associated with sexual transgression. For example, in his consideration of the legacy of the Marquis de Sade, Cramer views the gratuitous sexual violence that defined Sade's literature as an attempt to 'save the taboo by carrying his excesses to the extreme of ritual murder' (p. 172). This 'figure of thought', according to Cramer, which is 'Romantic and sentimentalist at its core' can be seen in the work of what he terms 'urban legends' of 'performance art suicide' such as Genesis P-Orridge, as I discuss in chapter 3. And in

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my discussion in chapter 2, these ideas have resonance with the Westwood and McLaren designs such that, paradoxically, in re-representing iconographies drawn from publications categorised as obscene by legal standards—that is to say, by putting porn images on t-shirts—the pair destroyed the obscene in the act of representing it.

While Cramer’s argument is compelling from a formalist perspective, it tends towards the polemical and frames his case studies in accordance with rigid conceptions of concepts such as the taboo and the obscene. Moreover, he refrains from acknowledging—as Dean’s work does—that despite the incongruencies between commonly held ideas of transgression, and by extension the obscene, the reception of these iconographies has served to impose meaning upon them, thereby inscribing them as signifiers of the obscene, and thereby transgressive, in the eyes of prosecutors. I return to Cramer’s line of thought throughout this thesis, so as to investigate the engagements with the obscene as an aesthetic register, as evidenced within my examples.

Visual Analysis: *Janus*

In his article, ‘Whip In My Valise: British Punk and the Marquis de Sade, c. 1975-85’, Matthew Worley surveys the roots and routes of sexual themes in first wave punk. Worley traces the influence of Sade in relation to myriad expressions of British punk cultural productions.

Worley’s assessment marks a significant addition to the field, exploring a range of phenomena alongside astute examination of parallel subcultural contexts such as Goth and Industrial. His Sade-orientated reading also poses some interesting questions for my study. On the face of it, Worley’s study aligns with a lineage of scholarly readings locating the ‘the divine Marquis’ at the source of contemporary understandings of pornography, as evidenced in studies ranging from

Susan Sontag's essay 'The Pornographic Imagination' (1969), to Camille Paglia's *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nerfertiti to Emily Dickinson* (1990).

Reading punk's displays of sex as bearing Sadean themes is quite compelling, not least as Sade has often been seen as guiding practices in underground sexual cultures, but the turn to Sade can risk collapsing the internal complexities and contradictions of the various objects Worley considers.⁶⁴ In tracing the Sadean thread, Worley emphasises a quantitative survey of objects over consideration of the differences underpinning punk's sexual explorations and particularly those explorations/objects/practices which sought to work against Sadean power relations. Treating Sade as a metonym for punk sexual expressions can limit understanding, particularly of those examples with underlying feminist imperatives (such as Cozey Fanni Tutti's work), which evidence attempts to overturn the master/slave dynamics that organise Sade's pornographic literature.⁶⁵ To evidence this, I have undertaken a formal visual analysis of an example of 'punk porn' cited by Worley: a spread from British BDSM magazine *Janus*.

1970s UK porn production saw considerable growth in the number of pornographic magazines catering to heterosexual male readers. With US publications such as Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* and Larry Flynt's *Hustler* as inspiration, UK publishers sought to create their own mass market full-frontal magazines. Just as in the US, UK publications pitched themselves at different sectors of the class market—Laura Kipnis very ably demonstrated *Hustler's* appeal to the tastes of a 'lower-class' demographic (1996) and Smith has shown how similar distinctions across top

⁶⁴ Here, Worley's tracing of Sade as spectre guiding subversive practice in underground sexual culture chimes with Nuttall's argument in *Bomb Culture* (1968).

⁶⁵ See *The One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom*.

shelf magazine publishing worked in the UK (Smith, 2005) particularly as ‘permissiveness [...] trickled down’ in the 1970s’ (Hunt, 1998, p. 20). At this time, soft-core titles were available from high street newsagents but more niche magazines featuring fetish content were predominantly available from specialist sex shops and by mail-order (Smith, 2005).

Once punk hit mainstream visibility, some niche magazines took the opportunity to stage ‘punk’ inspired features, even leading to one-off publications such as ‘Punk Sex’ as depicted in Toby Mott’s *Showboat: Punk/Sex/Bodies*. Mott’s collection presents this title in a wider corpus of punk and porn crossovers, documenting rare instances of subcultural progenitors participating in the porn industry; for women in particular, modelling provided a means of supplementing income in precarious times. Beyond this, scholarship in this area has largely avoided considerations of ‘punk porn’ for a variety of reasons: first among these being the rarity of surviving physical copies of the publications (and where they do exist they are usually only in private collections such as Mott’s). Secondly, the avoidance reflects the fact that many punks who participated in porn in their teens or early twenties have, in later life, disclaimed their participation, and have been hostile to discussing their involvement in porn—such is the power of stigma attached to posing for pornography that youthful participation cannot be recuperated even under the rubric of punk rebellion.

Nevertheless, images featuring punk musicians in pornographic photoshoots have regularly surfaced in recent years, including Gaye Advert’s porn features (néé Gaye Black)—bass player with the Adverts in the British softcore publication *Fiesta* in 1975 (Figure 1.3)⁶⁶;

⁶⁶ The Adverts are best known for their single, ‘Gary Gilmore’s Eyes’.

other notable examples include the porn modelling of both Honey Bane, contemporary of anarcho-punk band Crass, and Chelsea frontman Gene October.⁶⁷ These can be considered examples of ‘actual’ punk porn; that is, as pornography which features punk models/musicians and/or iconography directly referencing punk.⁶⁸ Moreover, they demonstrate the direct associations between punk and BDSM—bondage in particular—in clothing styles. These examples also connect to Subcultural Studies’ interests in the intersections of labour and precarity in the 1970s and 1980s, and, to the under-examined phenomenon of punk women engaging in practices of sex work and pornographic modelling. Furthermore, these examples have relevance for that Porn Studies scholarship which has examined subcultural identities and pornographic production, indicating that conjunctural instances of pornography and punk can be dated far earlier than the emergence of alt porn in the 1990s (Paasonen, 2007; Smith, 2014; Zecca & Maina, 2014).

⁶⁷ While beyond the scope of my analysis here, there are notable examples of punk-related figures in US contexts having engaged in sex work. Foremost amongst these is Wendy O. Williams who fronted the US punk band The Plasmatics and was known for wild onstage performances in which she would frequently appear in various states of undress, as well as chainsawing guitars as part of her stage routine. Williams worked as a stripper as well as engaging in sex work prior to beginning her music career, performing in strip clubs in New York City; she also starred in the adult comedy film, *Candy Goes to Hollywood* (1979). Other related examples include Poison Ivy, guitarist for The Cramps, who is said to have briefly worked in BDSM/fetish clubs. For other examples, see Worley (2022), and the edited collection, *Showboat* (2016).

⁶⁸ An important point to note here is that these musicians took part in porn modelling prior to beginning their musical careers in the context of first wave punk. That being said, my reading here is sustained on the basis that their public personas are directly related to their status as punk musicians. In other words, I am not seeking to claim that these figures expressly acknowledge their porn modelling as an instance of punk activity per se, but, for the purposes of my argument here, I do note the significance of these examples so as to highlight historical intersections between the contexts of both punk and porn production vis-à-vis notable participants who engaged in both contexts of cultural production.



Figure 1.3: Gaye Black, *Fiesta Magazine*, 1975. Still from *Showboat: Punk/Sex/Bodies*.

According to McLaren biographer Paul Gorman, punk regularly featured in various top-shelf magazines, for example, the London-centric scene was documented in the pages of *Forum* and *Gallery International*. McLaren and Westwood popped up as key spokespersons to explain their growing interest in fetishwear and the styles of sexual minority cultures, proffering a ‘Reichian’ understanding of fetishism and sexual violence as extreme reflections of ‘the environment you live in’ (Gorman, ‘The Story’, n.p.). Seven months later, their King’s Road shop appeared in *Forum* magazine, in a report on its recent re-branding as SEX. Discussing the shoot, Gorman suggests *Forum* differed from more standardised titillation, given its portrayal of ‘sexual relations [...] in a serious, non-prurient manner’ (Gorman, ‘Memories’, n.p.). Reflecting this magazine’s more sophisticated tone (Gorman, ‘Memories’, n.p.), Westwood echoed McLaren’s Reichian-inspired claims in *Gallery International*, framing the shop’s mission as a kind of ‘consciousness raising’, and foregrounding a certain libertarian impulse:

We're here to [...] convert liberate and educate [...] We want to inspire people to have the confidence to live out their fantasies and change. What we're really making is a political statement with our shop by attempting to attack the system (Gorman, 'Memories', n.p.).

Implied within Westwood's declaration here is the sense that the pornographic held some radical charge that enabled and facilitated the punk challenge to authority, as a form of reconfiguring the normativity of social strictures on sex and sexuality. Although present during the shoot, McLaren did not appear in the resulting shots; but Westwood, shop-assistants Jordan, Chrissy Hynde,⁶⁹ and Alan Jones, as well as Sex Pistols guitarist Steve Jones, all did feature in the photographs. Danielle Lewis—reportedly associated with rubberwear pioneer John Sutcliffe, creator of the specialist rubber periodical, *Atomage*—also featured (Gorman, 'Memories', n.p.). The photographs in *Forum* have become famous for their capture of the ironic prurience of the SEX milieu and their 'punk attitude'. Their 'sexiness' constructed through contrasts – between, for example, the 'availability' of tight leather and PVC clothing and the 'antagonistic' display of buttocks and raised middle finger (Figure 1.4). Even as they flash their bodies or display their contours in fetishwear, the invitation is so assertively confident as to be discouraging. In a recent interview, Jordan reaffirmed Westwood's claim that fetishwear had radical meanings beyond its immediate concupiscent connotations (Gorman, 'Memories', n.p.).

⁶⁹ Hynde moved to London from the US in 1973 and was an active figure in both London and New York first wave punk scenes, working for a time as a shop assistant at SEX. She later enjoyed mainstream pop success in the 1980s as frontwoman of the Pretenders.



Figure 1.4: The SEX crowd in *Forum* magazine, June 1976.

In her article, ‘Maid to Order: Commercial S/M and Gender Power’, McClintock argues that the ‘libertarian view all too easily conflates sexual repression with political oppression in a Reichian celebration of unlimit’ (1993, p. 226). McClintock’s compelling consideration of S/M practice demonstrates the ways in which the ‘economy of conversion’ evidenced within BDSM rituals ‘brings to its conceptual limit the libertarian promise that individual agency alone can suffice to resolve social dilemmas’ (p. 228). As McClintock reminds us:

In order to understand more fully the myriad meanings of S/M, it is necessary to distinguish between the social cultures from which it takes its multiple shapes, and against which it sets itself in stubborn refusal (p. 228).

In unpacking the dynamics of S/M, McClintock acknowledges that—in commonality with the punk subculture—the ‘sub-culture of collective fetishism’, constitutes ‘an arena of contestation and negotiation’ (p. 228).

McClintock’s work traces Foucault’s theorisation of the shift from ‘sovereign power’ to ‘disciplinary power’ during the Enlightenment, at which time S/M emerged as a ‘historic sub-culture’ (1993, p. 210) alongside a ‘new technology of the power-to-punish’ (p. 223) that mobilised disciplinary technologies in representational forms. McClintock focuses on the power dynamics in practices of commercial S/M, detailing aspects of ritualistic performance in female-domination scenarios; in which female figures occupy traditionally ‘dominant’ masculine roles, and the male is the subservient ‘slave’ highlighting the reconfiguring of power relations in the performative staging of S/M rituals. Such that, as she contends, the ‘exaggerated emphasis on costume and scene’ reveals ‘social power as *scripted*’ (p. 208). Locating the props central to the ‘formal ritual’ and ‘ceremonial’ nature of S/M, McClintock observes that it borrows its ‘décor, props, and costumery (bonds, chains, ropes, blindfolds)’ as well as its ‘scenes (bedrooms, kitchens, dungeons, convents, prisons, empire)’ from ‘everyday cultures of power’ (p. 208).

Thus McClintock argues that power is ‘permanently subject to change’ (1993, p. 208) and, following Foucault, that S/M scenarios constitute ‘a theatre of conversion’ enabling the re-coding of signs of power—‘the economy of S/M is the economy of conversion’ (p. 208). In this dramatic proscenium, ‘S/M reverses and transmutes the social meanings it borrows [...] without finally stepping outside the enchantment of its magic circle’ (p. 208). Importantly, the conversion

rituals entailed within such practices remain open-ended, for, in S/M, ‘paradox is paraded, not resolved’ (p. 208).

In his lectures on the ‘abnormal’ at the Collège de France 1974-1975, Foucault examined the nineteenth century emergence of the ‘abnormal individual’ (2003, p. xvii). As Arnold I. Davison outlines in the introduction to the published collection of Foucault’s lectures, the ‘examination is that form of knowledge and power that gives rise to the “human sciences” and thus that contributes to the constitution of the domain of the abnormal’ (p. xxiii). This discursive operation is constituted around three key figures of the ‘delinquent’: ‘the human monster, the individual to be corrected, and the onanist’ (p. xvii).

The relations of power underpinning the examination produces the individual in their ‘dangerousness’ as a societal threat, not inherently based on what ‘individuals did, but of what they might do, what they are capable of doing’ (2003, p. xxiii). In Foucault’s view, the ‘delinquent’ is to be distinguished from the ‘law-breaker’, given that the delinquent is processed, ‘not as someone who had actually violated a law, but as someone whose potential behaviour had to be subject to control and correction’ (p. xxiii). As Davison observes:

The old examination was essentially the inventory of permitted and forbidden relationships. The new examination is a meticulous passage through the body, a sort of anatomy of the pleasures of the flesh (*la volupté*) (p. xxiv).

Processes of description produce particular kinds of (deviant) identity that are then subjected to forms of assessment, control or punishment—I consider this further in relation to the S/M ritual represented in *Janus*.

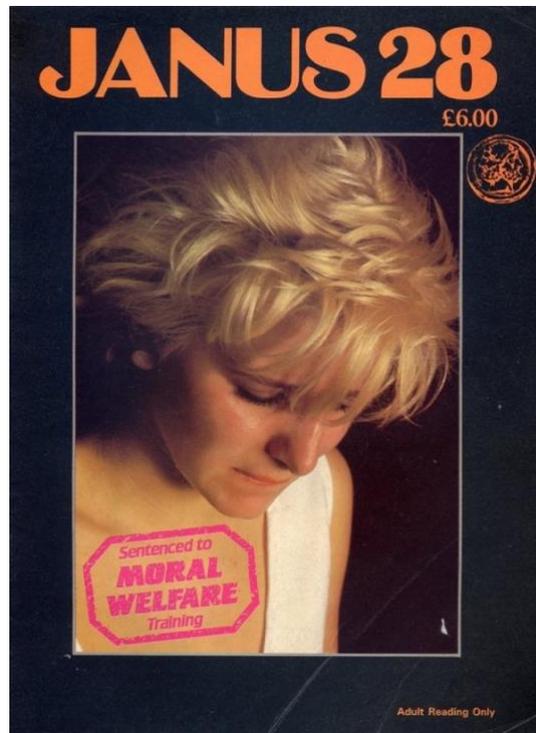


Figure 1.5: Front cover of *Janus 28* (1984).

Dating from 1984, British CP/spanking magazine, *Janus 28*, features a punk model in a spread themed around ‘moral welfare training’.⁷⁰ The photo spread is comprised of stills from a video series of ‘Moral Welfare Training’—a sample shoot to encourage readers to send off for the physical video. This scene, located in the spanking sub-genre of BDSM, plays out as a heterosexual fantasy in which older males, in disciplinary roles, enact symbolic punishment over a young female subject.

In the print article accompanying the spread, the writer notes that the video production component was a new venture for *Janus* (demonstrating the link between pornography and

⁷⁰ *Janus* began as *Mentor* in 1971, changing name after four issues. During the 1970s and 1980s, the *Janus* bookshop, in London’s Soho, enabled opportunistic pornographers to proposition local punks to feature in their spreads as amateur models. The shop closed in 2011. See: Rayworth (no date).

technological innovation, as Barss (2010) has argued). From a twenty-first century perspective, the photo spread appears rather tame, especially if we compare it to the language and explicitness of much contemporary CP/spanking porn found on the web—as discussed in chapter 5. The publishers of *Janus* will have been mindful of the provisions of the Obscene Publications Act, 1959, and in distributors' interpretations of the act, so that 'explicitness' was to be avoided while still conveying the erotic potentials of corporeal punishment. How those pleasures of CP per se might be represented in the photoset is of less interest to me than in the ways this photoset offers its conjunctural formulation of 'punk porn' and in its aesthetic configuration.

The photoset features a model named Lorraine Simmonds', described in the accompanying column as 'an arrogant punk' with a 'tall and curvaceous figure and a gorgeously tempting bottom' (1984, p. 34). It is interesting to note that the photoset fits Foucault's description of the examination procedure as a technology for producing the 'abnormal', represented here in the figure of the female 'punk body' in its 'potentiality' (what Foucault refers to as '*ses virtualites*') (xxiii). Simmonds's 'deviance' is lodged at the level of her punk appearance—the accompanying text appearing to fetishise her dress as a marker of her punk 'authenticity' to be read as 'looking for trouble' and therefore in need of the 'punishment' of the fantasy scenario. She has physical and erotic appeal in her curvaceous figure but her affiliation to the punk subculture—'a real punkette in full regalia'—adds the additional frisson that she is a *bone fide* subcultural participant; this description also genders punk and makes it a diminutive. Simmonds's punishment is administered by the Moral Welfare Officer 'upon her failure to comply' with his orders to 'get your hair cut and burn those ridiculous clothes!' (p. 34). Simmonds's 'punkness' (read: deviance) thus functions as the grounds on which she is deserving

of punishment in the narrative staging of the humiliation and re-education of the spanking scenario. In these stills, Lorraine is subjected to the disciplinary gaze and instrumentalisation of the 'examination' as a disciplinary technique, first during her assessment by the doctor figure, then by the 'Moral Welfare Officer'.

The scene plays on the deviant connotations of punk, recalling the shock to moral standards that punk generated by its emergence in Britain. On one level, the *Janus* spread functions as a satire of punk's rebellion, which mocks the status of punk as 'moral panic', to use the term popularised earlier by sociologist Stanley Cohen.⁷¹ Underpinning this fairly conventional staging of this spanking subgenre of S/M is a fantasy 'playing out' of the punishment of deviance. The threat of the punk to moral order is neutralised through physical punishment, in a ritual of deconditioning against Lorraine's chosen subcultural identity. The accompanying narrative foregrounds the power play operative within the scene as a source of erotic interest, symbolically undermining the 'threat' of Simmonds's 'punkness' at the hands of the disciplinarian doctor. His examination is a process through which her punkness is subjected to the regulatory norms embodied by the authority figures: 'He completely negates the punk's claim to self-expression and proceeds to give her the devil's own examination, during which he has immense difficulty in removing her insanely tight jeans from her bottom' (*Janus*, 1984, p. 34). As is evidenced here, the accompanying narrative acknowledges the resistance posed by Simmonds's punk identity, referring to the difficulties of removing her clothes owing to the restrictive bondage of her outfit.

⁷¹ See his detailed study of British post-war youth culture, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (1972).

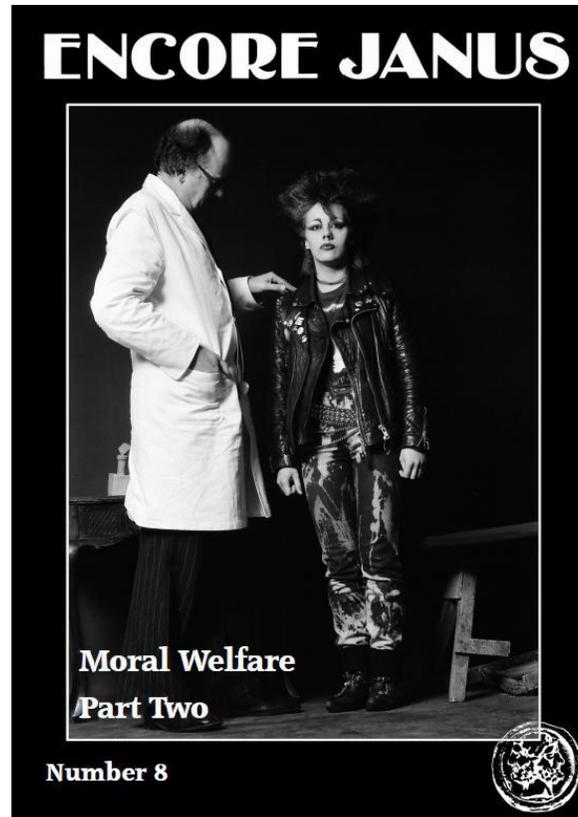


Figure 1.6: *Encore Janus. No. 8*: Cover: 'Moral Welfare: Video—Part Two'.

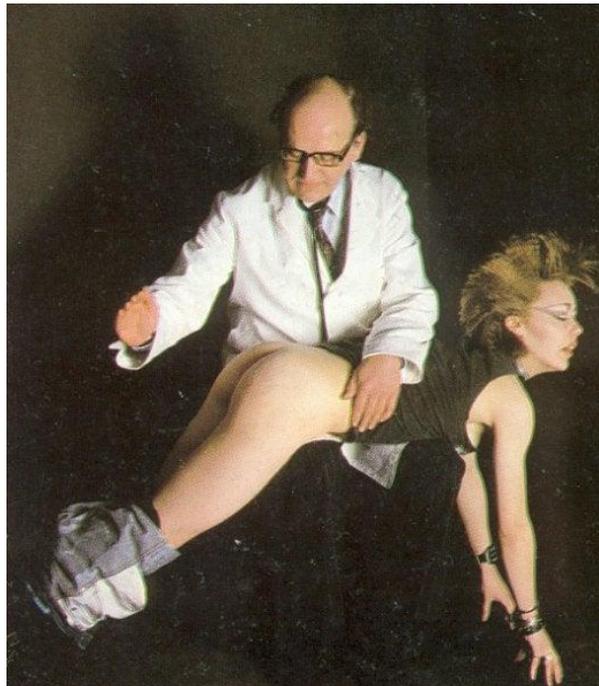


Figure 1.7: *Janus 28*: Still from 'Moral Welfare: Video—Part Two'.

Simmonds is presented as spirited and rebellious, characteristics which merit her necessary ‘punishment’, in accordance with her ultimately ‘submissive’ role in the erotic scenario. Here, the narrative further takes pleasure in submitting Simmonds’s ‘punkness’ to the disciplinary technologies of the medico-scientific regime, referring to her attempted protests when being punished. This shores up a certain image of Simmonds’s rebelliousness, which becomes a source of desire for the erotic other, when she is forced to endure the ‘techniques of normalization’ (Foucault, 2003, p. 21) administered through a series of canings. Simmonds’s subjection to this ‘punishment’ signifies the figuration, exemplified by the mutilation of the ‘flesh’, of the ‘limited corporal punishment’ of the disciplinary regime; by way of which, she is processed by the apparatus which governs the regulation of bodies through the deployment of technologies of biopower in the form of her ‘retraining’ (McClintock, 1993, p. 223) as a ‘model’ citizen.

The staging of this S/M scene thus presents the female punk body as a site of immorality and deviancy, deserving of ritual punishment. The scene plays out a fantasy humiliation of Simmonds’s embodiment of ‘punk attitude’ and the ‘punk aesthetic’ in which the ‘challenge to hegemony’ of punk is undermined, so as to become the ‘fantasmatic supplement’ (Fisher, 2018, p. 127) onto which desire is projected. On the face of it, this scene suggests ways in which the existence of recognisable ‘punks’ as models in pornographic photography occupy a space equal to the protean qualities of these discursive, contingent constructs—an insight into the associations of punk as a recognisable style within niche pornography. I should acknowledge, of

course, that this specific genre of pornography adheres to its own internal codes,⁷² through which erotic interest is facilitated and onto which fantasy is projected. The scene further recalls Foucault, in his formulation of the ‘spirals of pleasure and power’ (1978, p.145), as the text announces the disciplinarians’ desire for the deviance posed by Simmonds. This is reaffirmed in the print description of the scenes: ‘It is only afterwards that we discover that this punky beauty is just the kind of girl Dr Mathew Handley likes to get his hands on!’ (*Janus* 1984, p. 34).

Having briefly considered this scene as an exemplar of McClintock’s argument, and its Foucauldian framework, it is also worthwhile considering how this object might be seen to ‘speak back’ in resistance to this reading. As I observed earlier, McClintock’s work explores S/M scenarios characterised by female domination, in which the staging serves to illustrate how BDSM can be a ritualistic practice of reconstituting power relations. However, in this S/M scene, the heteronormative distribution of roles remains intact; that is, the young woman submits to punishment by two males, thus the ‘economy of conversion’ is more complicated. And it is Simmonds’s ‘punkness’ that is particularly significant to the power dynamic in the *Janus* spread; the conceptual charge of ‘punk’ offers contrasts to McClintock’s model of S/M.

As McClintock notes, ‘it is often not so much the *actuality* of power or submission that holds the S/Mer in its thrall but the *signs* of power: images, words, costumes, uniforms, scripts’ (1993, p. 225). In the *Janus* set and its accompanying text, Lorraine is coded and classified as a punk—she embodies ‘punkness’. This seems to chime with McClintock’s argument that ‘[m]any clients are helplessly fascinated by fetish images of authority—handcuffs, badges, uniforms—

⁷² See discussion in Smith (2009).

and most dominas have rackfuls of costumes' (p. 225). Clearly, the domina figure is absent from this staging, given the heteronormative allocation of roles here. However, the fetishisation of punk style also suggests a certain semiotics of 'power', in which Simmonds's military boots, and their connotative appropriation of military authority, points to her repudiation of a femininity coded as passive. The staging of the scene is geared towards the pleasure of the male disciplinarians who, as the feature's text attests, take pleasure from this type of 'punk beauty, so that the fetishisation of Simmonds's speaks to her own agential capacity. That is to say, in this reading, the technologies of power deployed by the Doctor figure and his accomplice perhaps suggest their own 'symbolic impotence', appearing as over-compensatory mechanisms which aim at revealing the 'search for truth' through the 'confession of the flesh' (1978, p. 19).

This argument resonates with Linda Williams' reading of the dynamics that structure the porn scene in conventional representations of hard-core, in which she draws upon both psychoanalysis and Foucauldian theory to elaborate how intersubjective dynamics of agency are structured around a regime of gazing. While the scene examined here does not belong to the genres of hard-core, the staging of the power dynamic—distributed between the structuring dynamics of master/slave—displays a similar regime of the gaze and its attendant 'search for truth'. As Williams describes in *Hard Core*,

the visual evidence of the mechanical "truth" of bodily pleasure caught in involuntary spasm [is] the ultimate and uncontrollable-ultimate because uncontrollable-confession of sexual pleasure in the climax of orgasm (1989, p. 101).

I suggest that the dénouement of this scenario, in which the doctor is shown taking a close-up picture of Simmonds's bottom is analogous to an attempt at registering the 'truth' of the scene,

the sign of which is indexed in the punishment administered to Simmonds's 'flesh'. Here, the Doctor's dramatic performance is redolent of an approximation of William's 'search for hidden jewels', which discernibly literalises the fetishised pleasure of voyeurism through the deployment of the 'technique of normalization' that registers Simmonds as a 'case'. In a Foucauldian understanding, this confirms that the 'abnormal individual' has been subjected to the 'medico-scientific' regime of power, and hence, becomes processed as knowledge. However, drawing on Williams, I would also suggest that the process of classification in this ritualised form, as symbolised by the camera as a coding/codification device, could also be read as the 'impossibility' of desire and its recourse to scopophilia centred on the fetish-object. The pseudo-scientific thematic of the scene presents documentation as a means of objective clarification and 'truth', thereby restoring 'order' to the scene.

McClintock contends that 'S/M thus brings to its conceptual limit the libertarian promise that individual agency alone can suffice to resolve social dilemmas' (1993, p. 228). Here, we might also see the 'punk aesthetic' as reaching the limits of its 'radical' promise to some extent—the parodic discipline of the 'punk body' here confirms punk's thorough 'recuperation' as an offensive cultural style. Although this scene establishes desire at the level of Simmonds's dress in recognition of her punk style, it does so only to disavow and thus possess her ensemble as the fetish, subjecting it to ritual punishment as an expression of the fetish itself. In other words, power is not simply overturned by the Reichian 'celebration of unlimit' (p. 226). Here, the self-justification of McLaren and Westwood seems to run up against the conflation of 'sexual repression with political oppression', to use McClintock's formulation (p. 226). As such, I propose that this scene serves as a visual form of Foucault's 'perpetual spirals of power and

pleasure’, in which power is viewed, not simply as a repressive and thereby oppressive force, but as a technology that is contingent upon the docile body to be subject to disciplinary measures, so as to constitute itself as such.

A later BDSM magazine, *Tight Ropes* (1996) features a ‘punk’ model as dominatrix in a girl-on-girl scene. The para-texts that frame this scene posit an equivalence between the ‘abnormal’ sexual orientation of the dominatrix figure, and her punk appearance complete with Mohawk, as reflective of her ‘authentic’ dominance as an ‘active’ sexual agent. This contrasts with the *Janus* spread, in which Simmonds’s ‘passive’ deviancy, indicated by her embodiment of the ‘punk aesthetic’, serves as a ‘fantasmatic supplement’ (Fisher, 2018, p. 127) of ‘rebellion’, and thus, as the necessary grounds for her punishment. In other words, her adherence to punk fashion—complete with leather jacket emblazoned with button badges, skin tight, acid-washed jeans, cowboy boots, and suitably extraordinary spiked hair and thick black eye-makeup—is read as a source of deviancy. However, in this latter example, the deviancy of the punk image resounds as a source of erotic fetishisation, empowered sexuality, and signifier of sexual domination. This is seen in Figure 1.8 below, in which the punk model takes the emboldened, classically male role of the ‘master’, while her female ‘slave’ is presented as according to the conventions of passive femininity.

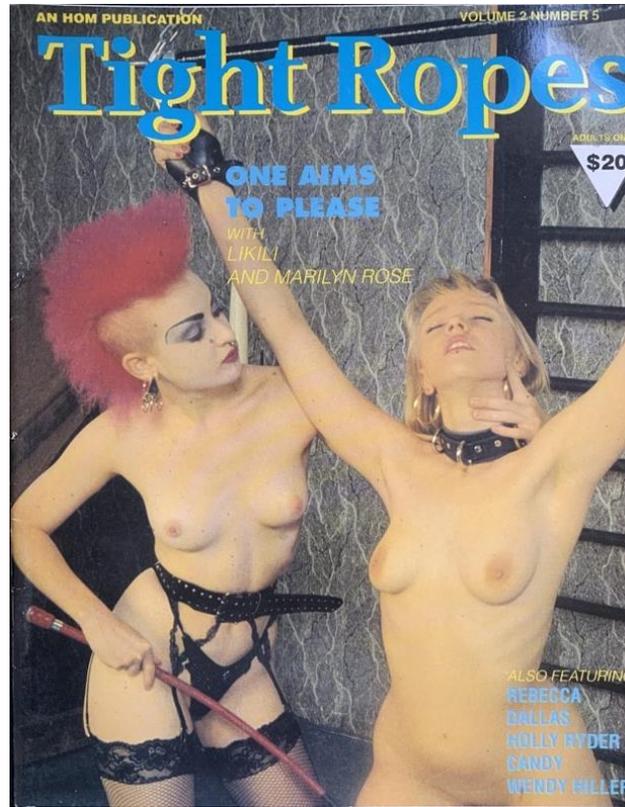


Figure 1.8: *Tight Ropes* (1996).

Drawing on the insights of Porn Studies scholarship here, I see an interesting comparison between these representations of the female punk body and contemporary examples of alt porn such as *Suicide Girls* (Smith, 2014; Osgerby, 2014). Following the tendency to read punk in relation to its stylistic ‘refusal’ of hegemonic normativity, as evidenced within Hebdige’s study, Osgerby locates in this modern alt porn a punk-influenced aesthetic that accomplishes an approximate ‘refusal’ as a ‘challenge to hegemony’, lodged at the level of style as an assemblage of sartorial and bodily adornment. As Osgerby puts it, ‘By championing the aesthetics of subcultural, “Otherness,” alt porn deliberately positions itself as a challenge to “mainstream” representational codes and power relationships’ (2014, p. 51). While *Janus* begs the question of its categorisation as alt porn *proper*, Osgerby’s analysis betrays the risk of reading such instances

of the ‘mainstream challenge’ suggested by the ‘punk aesthetic’ as a given. That is to say, the *Janus* spread serves to demonstrate how the presentation of punk ‘otherness’ more accurately served as a fetishised imagery, which might actually be seen to reduce the agency of the wearer to a ‘partial object’—to use the psychoanalytic term—within the framing of historical S/M.

Furthermore, *Janus* might also be seen to problematise its reading as alt porn, given that the inclusion of a punk model appears as a rather anomalous character within the context of the *Janus* feature. In contrast to alt porn, then, while *Janus* may be considered as an alternative and independent production, in as much as it was produced by an independent model of British porn production, it differs from alt porn in its apparent lack of ethical and political commitments, which serve as a defining feature of this contemporary sphere of alternative pornography. In this light, I would argue that the *Janus* spread instead seems to signal the breakdown of punk’s power as a sartorial signifier, in a mock parody scenario in the spanking fetish sub-genre, in which heterosexual power relations, while fluxed, nonetheless reproduce a representation of the female punk as an ‘abnormal’ figure subject to disciplinarity. This reading contrasts with alt porn, which has historically sought to represent its ‘punk’ models as emancipated, if reactionary, agents, whose engagement with (and production of pornography) testifies to a direct attempt to reassert third-wave feminist ideals. As such, while this example may be read as ‘punk porn’ *prima facie*, it operates within discourses that contrast with alt porn. Rather, in recognition of the narrative here, punk as an embodied, empowered stance is problematised by the metonymic expression of punk agency. This is reflected in the employment of a punk stereotype as a gimmick within the pornographic diegesis of the scene and compounded by the fetishisation of the female punk body

as an exotic ‘other’ (distinguished from the more benign archetypes found in CP/spanking porn, such as the schoolgirl, for example).

While these characterisations seem to function in this context to undermine the female punk body, I wish to return to McClintock’s assertion that ‘S/M refuses to read power as fate of destiny’ (1993, p. 210). This assertion pre-figures the work of gender and queer theorists such as Judith Butler (2010), and the ‘performative agency’ that can be seen to contest and reconfigure hegemonic discourses. Moreover, McClintock’s argument opens up possibilities for the female punk body, which, as I will expand upon in the subsequent chapters, has sought to assert itself against Freud’s well-known edict, ‘anatomy is destiny’. As McClintock argues,

Since S/M is the theatrical exercise of social contradiction it is self-consciously *against* nature, not in the sense that it violates natural law, but in the sense that it denies the existence of natural law in the first place. S/M *performs* social power as both contingent and constitutive, as sanctioned neither by fate nor by God, but by social convention and invention, and thus open to historical change (p. 210).

While McClintock follows Foucault in critiquing the notion of an authentic sexuality as a ‘natural law’, thereby reproaching the ‘repressive hypothesis’, her assessment serves to frame my analysis in the following chapter, which focuses on the ‘performativity’ of punk fashion, and its deployment of pornography as central to its antagonisms.

Conclusion

This chapter has sketched the contours of the conjuncture of ‘punk porn’ in relation to theoretical frameworks which I have examined in relation to selected research ‘objects’ grouped under the

‘conceptual’ classifiers of ‘punk porn’. In doing so, I have sought to elucidate the provisional nature of ‘punk porn’, which I employ here as a reflexive marker, while also recognising the politics implied in the act of naming such a conjuncture. I have delineated the ways in which sexuality is regulated in a Foucauldian sense, through the ‘dispositif’ of hegemonic discourses, in conjunction with Rubin’s analysis, so as to explicate the centrality of notions of ‘deviancy’ and the ‘abnormal’ that saturate the objects which I consider to cohere with the connotative entailments of ‘punk porn’ in terms of their formal qualities. My analysis of the *Janus* spread has shown ways in which ‘punk porn’ can be understood, *prima facie*, as the representation of the ‘punk aesthetic’ within pornography. However, as illustrated through this analysis, this object can also be seen to ‘resist’ the totalising operation implied by the concept of ‘punk porn’, revealing the internal complexities and contradictions of this object as ‘text’, when considered through this conceptual lens.

In the following chapter, I investigate the case study of punk couture as developed by Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, and as popularised by members of archetypical punk band, the Sex Pistols, during the mid-to-late 1970s. This case study presents a different understanding of ‘punk porn’, as the deployment of pornographic imagery within punk fashion, as a means of attempting to overturn predominant norms that governed fashion production in this period. By drawing on more extensive historical context, I explore the ‘politics of representation’ that inform the reception and circulation of the Westwood-McLaren ‘porn T-shirts’ series, discussing the role of women in particular, as significant to an understanding of the issues that mark this conjuncture. I show that punk style occupied a privileged position within the

‘performative agency’ of the London punk scene, arguing that pornography was central to the ‘challenge to hegemony’ that several first wave punk progenitors sought to stage.

Chapter 2: ‘Clothes for Heroes’: Pornographic Provocation in First Wave British Punk

In late 2019, the Horse Hospital exhibited *Vive Le Punk: Redressed*, a retrospective of Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren’s iconic punk couture clothes.⁷³ The show first ran to coincide with the opening of the Horse Hospital as a gallery and art exhibition space in 1993; a cultural hub in London’s Bloomsbury that doubles as the residence for the vintage clothing archive of owner and fashion historian, Roger K. Burton.⁷⁴ *Vive Le Punk* featured assorted garments produced by Westwood and McLaren, dating from 1971, when the pair began their creative tenure as the proprietors and in-house designers at 430 King’s Road in London’s Chelsea, through its *SEX* (1974-1976), and the later *Seditionaries* (1976-1980) incarnations. Items such as bondage suits and ‘straitjacket’ long-sleeve T-shirts were displayed across the subterranean gallery space on inchoate bodily forms rendered from lurid pink PVC (in homage to *SEX*’s infamous frontispiece).⁷⁵ Westwood and McLaren’s construction of a visual language built around the thematic of sex remained striking, flaunting pornographic imagery alongside loaded political iconography and pop cultural icons.

Vive Le Punk was closely followed by a mini-retrospective of British graphic designer Jamie Reid: *TAKING LIBERTIES!* collected political works from Reid’s personal archive spanning 1970-2020. Reid’s graphic design developed a visual language for the Sex Pistols’

⁷³ The show opened November 30th 2019 and was extended to January 31st 2020.

⁷⁴ Burton notably supplied the wardrobe for *Quadrophenia* (1979), with original Mod mohair suits from his collection having been worn by actors such as Phil Daniels, and *Absolute Beginners* (1986).

⁷⁵ Despite the show’s popularity, the success it achieved was bittersweet. The show was a late attempt to garner publicity in the hopes of securing financial support for the gallery; threatened by the imminent closure of the space due to recent excessive rent increases. For more information on the history of the Horse Hospital and the campaign against its closure see: The Horse Hospital (no date).

‘anarchy’ thematic. Reid’s trashed images of Britannia, which deformed Queen Elizabeth II with swastikas and safety pins, remain a key image of punk iconoclasm, and were extensively utilised in Westwood-McLaren couture.⁷⁶ In contemporary contexts, Reid’s insurrectionary aesthetic has been taken up within contemporary public protest, with Pussy Riot, the Occupy Movement, and most recently, Extinction Rebellion, using his politically incisive graphics. The mini-retrospective testified to Reid’s influence on the ‘visual codes of punk’ (Bestley & Ogg, 2012, p. 9), as well as the ‘punk aesthetic’ (Hebdige, 1979, p. 17) central to Westwood and McLaren’s design of an archetypical punk ‘look’.



Figure 2.1: Film still, from interview with Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood, courtesy of Roger K. Burton. Author’s photo (11/12/19).

⁷⁶ The show ran from March 6th-28th. For more information, as well as brief account of Reid’s career, see: *The Horse Hospital* (2020).

The provocations of Westwood and McLaren’s designs joined their stock of leatherwear and bondage gear at SEX—a unique combination in a period when fetish gear was largely only available from mail-order or specialist manufacturers.⁷⁷ Despite the enduring iconicity of the couple’s BDSM-inspired raiment, fashion historian Maria Elena Buszek observes that, ‘Then, as now, Westwood’s bestsellers weren’t the rubber and mesh, lingerie-inspired outfits Jordan wears in today’s most-reproduced imagery of London punk’s heyday, but the stores’ unisex, silkscreen T-shirts’ (2020, 94). The ‘porn T-shirts’ series gained popularity during the SEX-era ultimately becoming recognised as the most controversial of their designs—not least because the pair were arrested and charged under indecency law, as I go on to discuss below.⁷⁸

However, despite its ‘anti-establishment’ origins, punk style—and indeed, punk more broadly—is now celebrated in contemporary British popular culture as a unique achievement of the mid-to-late 1970s. Indeed, as feminist historian Amy Tobin has reflected, punk has become ‘a style so pervasive that it has come to stand for style itself’ (Tobin, 2020, p. 39). Subsequently, Westwood is now venerated as a ‘national treasure’, whose influence can be traced through prevailing trends in fashion and art. Westwood’s legacy has been the subject of institutional ‘memory-work’, such as the 2004 retrospective at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Cartner-Morley, 2004, n.p.). Although Westwood and McLaren’s punk credentials have repeatedly been called into question, and have often been derided by commentators, it is nonetheless the case, that their early creative partnership was formative to the construction of the ‘anti-fashion’ clothing look that remains closely associated with the punk ‘imaginary’. As the ‘in-house’ band

⁷⁷ McLaren sourced stock from the latter, including Vince Man’s leather emporium and the London Leatherman. For a brief history of the brand, still operating today, see: The London Leatherman (2021).

⁷⁸ See: Gorman (‘They Had the T-Shirt’, n.p.).

for SEX and *de facto* models for Westwood and McLaren's designs, the Sex Pistols also contributed to that look and the adoption of their wares by many in the London punk scene and further afield.



Figure 2.2: Assorted SEX & Seditonaries designs (detail from original show), *Vive Le Punk: Redressed*. Author's photo (11/12/19).

By foregrounding the cultural impact of punk style, exhibits such as *Vive Le Punk* evidence the ways in which cultural institutions enact forms of memory-work that shape Anglo-American punk's afterlife in the 'collective memory' (Erll, 2011, p. 9)—as discussed in the previous chapter. Punk's 'remembering' is subject to the political concerns of the present. The staging of Westwood-McLaren in *Vive Le Punk* can be compared to the exhibition—and omission—of their designs in the *Punk Lust* show. As detailed, in its attempt to stage relations between punk's visual design and the thematic of sex, *Punk Lust* sought to foreground the significance of previously sidelined feminist and queer figures such as Jayne County.

With *Punk Lust*, attempts to celebrate the forerunners of a politically conscious queer culture ran up against the provocations of Westwood-McLaren couture: exhibition curator Lissa Rivera deemed certain designs too controversial, such as the ‘Smoking Boy’ T-shirt. According to Gorman, McLaren purportedly obtained the picture of a nude 12-year-old boy with cigarette in hand from *Boys Express*, a magazine in circulation during the 1970s (Gorman, ‘Judy Nylon’, n.p.). The ‘Smoking Boy’ image is striking because it encapsulates a range of worries rising to the fore in the 1970s: children smoking, the potentials of childhood sexuality, and pederasty. The revelations of child abuse by high profile figures that have surfaced in recent years meant the design was withheld from the exhibition so as not to offend.

Benjamin Court’s discussion in ‘The politics of musical amateurism’ suggests that Westwood and McLaren’s designs of this period drew from a range of sexual minority cultures to ‘index a general social taboo’ (Court, 2017, p. 86). The ‘Smoking Boy’ has moved up the ‘taboo scale’ in Western society (as the philosopher Slavoj Žižek has noted, child sexuality is considered the biggest evil today (Žižek, 2014)), thus this chapter unpacks the tensions of the ‘politics of representation’ with regard to Westwood and McLaren’s utilisation of pornographic imagery. Firstly I explore ways the ‘punk aesthetic’ (Hebdige, 1979, p. 17) has been conceptualised, revisiting Hebdige’s classic study of punk in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, and its compelling semiotic analysis, to show how his theorisation of the ‘punk aesthetic’ falls short of addressing punk’s sexual themes. By addressing critical responses to *Subculture*, surveying a selection of critiques that focus on the role of women in shaping understandings of the ‘punk aesthetic’, as well as interrogating the overdeterminations of class evidenced in CCCS

scholarship, I show how studies of punk have often ignored its sexual themes. Bourdieu's work then enables a correlation of a 'politics of representation' to notions of 'taste', sensibility, and inclusivity.

Later, this chapter addresses punk's diverse identity formations, as reflected in its visual codes and iconography. Following Dylan Clark, I explore the London punk scene's facilitation of a 'recreation of selves' (2003, p. 223) considering punk women significant as creative agents in the embodiment of the 'punk aesthetic' as a 'performative' gesture of 'refusal' (Hebdige, 1979, p. 132). Following Mark Fisher's argument that 'Glam [IS] Punk: historically and conceptually [*sic*]' (2018, p. 601), I chart a trajectory of aesthetic representation stemming from Pop Art to show how the re-deployment of 'glam' codes in punk, particularly by women, were premised on an inversion of 'taste' judgements as a deliberate aesthetic strategy. In this reading, I suggest punk embraced the 'abject' as a gesture of revolt in line with themes of 'asexuality' and 'androgyny' that were seen to characterise the London-based punk milieu of 1975-77.

Finally, I focus on the SEX-era designs of Westwood and McLaren, reading the impact of their work in relation to the controversies surrounding the Sex Pistols. SEX was a prime cultural hub of punk so I examine the historical context of McLaren and Westwood's design partnership there and, in particular, McLaren's debts to Situationist theory. I then conduct a detailed visual analysis of selected T-shirt designs, unpacking their deployment of iconography drawn from sexual minority cultures. I address the charges of homophobia made against McLaren by critics such as Tavia Nyong'o, as well as thinking through Benjamin Court's critique of McLaren and Westwood as manipulators exploiting sexual minorities. Thus I re-examine the narrative that

SEX's challenge to the conservative social order and 'Middle-England' values was a stylistic 'hand-grenade' that exploded the stultifying sartorial status quo of seventies fashion (Reddington, 2007, p. 2).

Part 1: Subculture...What is the Meaning of Style?

Cultural anthropologist Dylan Clark sees punk as the last of the 'classical' subcultures, those tribal formations 'understood to be groups of youths who practised a wide array of social dissent through shared behavioural, musical, and costume orientations' and proclaims that 'With the death of punk, classical subcultures died' (2003, p. 223). Clark suggests that punk can be seen as the apogee of post-war subculture, in which the distinctions between subcultural formations were collapsed into a postmodern bricolage practice. Punk style drew from a range of postwar subcultures spanning various eras; for instance, in the widespread adoption of the 'Bronx/perfecto' leather motorcycle jackets of the Rockers—popularised by bands such as the Ramones—to the reappropriation of 'brothel creepers' (formerly a staple of the Teddy Boy wardrobe) by UK punks. Like these earlier British subcultural antecedents, punk's rise and brief popularity would ironically serve to signal its demise as a mass youth culture. Indeed, writer Jon Savage notes that the punk boom of 1977 marked 'the death rattle of first-wave punk' (Savage, 2001, p. 298).

Most academic discussions of punk and its 'rebellion' have focused on 'hard' history and conditions, such as unemployment, through a Marxian-sociological lens, emphasising themes of political and social 'rebellion' articulated in punk (Hall & Jefferson, 1975). Hebdige's study is perhaps the most well-known analysis of the 'style' enacted by subcultures, as a symbolic

territory of rebellion staged as aesthetic ‘difference’. Emerging from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) associated with his mentor Stuart Hall, Hebdige seeks to understand how subcultures can be read as a ‘challenge to hegemony’—the concept first articulated by Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci—‘expressed obliquely in style’ (1979, p. 17). According to Hebdige, ‘The objections are lodged, the contradictions displayed [...] at a profoundly superficial level of appearance: that is the level of signs’ (1979, p. 17).

Hebdige reads the stylistic challenge that subcultures pose to the accepted order of cultural codes and conventions as embodying a ‘refusal’, and the beginning of ‘a movement away from the consensus’ (1979, p. 132). This ‘refusal’ is articulated through the construction of ‘difference’ displayed at the level of ‘style’. A key theoretical touchstone here is Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* which analyses the function of signs in the production of ‘popular myths’. As cultural studies scholar Sonja Smit explains, Barthes argues that ‘Signs and codes are created through myths which in turn serve to sustain those myths’ (2015, p. 2). Barthes traces the historical development of the ‘index’ and the ‘sign’, showing the ‘historical transformation of the sign in relation to the conversion from a feudal society to a bourgeois society’, associating ‘the latter with the sign and the former with the index’ ([1996, p. 74] quoted in Smit, 2015, p. 2). As such, Smit explains that, ‘Whereas the index has a reference and origin, the sign does not; the sign is unlimited in its references and can be bought and sold’ (1996, p. 74). As Barthes sees it, ‘signs become naturalised to represent popular myths’ (1972, p. 142), which leads to a kind of societal amnesia in which ‘society forgets the part played in the construction of myth’ (p. 142).

Hebdige's analysis reads objects such as the safety pin as evidence of a complex process of re-coding the 'sign', as a strategy towards signifying 'difference'. The centrality of the safety pin as a key component of punk's bricoleur practice is achieved through the reworking of the safety pin's domestic 'code' to be 're-coded' on 'punk terms' within the sartorial assemblage of the 'punk aesthetic'. The safety pin comes to be re-presented, following Hebdige's argument, as a 'sign' which signifies punk's 'refusal' of, and thus rebellion against, the status quo. Hebdige argues that 'punk style fitted together homologically precisely through its lack of fit [...] its refusal to cohere around a readily identifiable set of central values' (1979, p. 120). For Hebdige, certain punk 'signs' are 'homological with focal concerns, activities, group structure and collective self-image of the subculture' (p. 114), which he expresses through a string of punk-associated images: 'hole', 'tee-shirt', 'spitting', 'applause', 'bin-liner', 'garment', 'anarchy', before recapitulating to 'order' (p. 120). Despite the rather random collection of punk 'signs' listed here, Hebdige proposes that we read them as internally coherent with the 'elliptical' nature of punk 'style', which, he argues, defines itself 'through a chain of conspicuous absences' (p. 120).

However, Hebdige here betrays a hypostasizing tendency in his argument by affording 'style' the 'status of an objective category' (Clarke, 1981, p. 84) a problematic homogenisation whose production of an internal 'coherence' jars with the different levels of 'symbolic capital' attributed to individual objects (Thornton, 1995, p. 203). Hebdige's list is conspicuously selective, including items such as the vague 'tee-shirt', while neglecting other elements such as their pornographic and/or sexual iconography (1979, p. 60). In a moment of reflexivity, Hebdige references theorists such as Julia Kristeva and the 'polysemy' of the 'sign' (1979, p. 117) in a

critique of the attribution of fixed and stable meanings. While Hebdige does acknowledge the limits of semiotics, his study is nonetheless a structuralist reading.

Hebdige's neglecting to accord any significance to the sexual themes that inform punk's 'refusal' conforms to the myth of punk's asexuality, which—to borrow from Barthes – is a forgetting of 'the part played in the construction of myth' (1972, p. 142). In short, Hebdige's account of punk 'style' is reductive, failing to account for punk's use of found-objects such as pornography. Yet, in some sense, the occlusion of pornography in Hebdige's analysis—a trend that is observable, more broadly, across scholarly research on punk—also points to the significance of pornography as a 'destabilizing factor' (Laing, 1985, p. 413) in standardised accounts of first wave Anglo-American punk. Here, pornography expresses its resistance as a concept to Hebdige's structuralist reading of punk; given its omission, it cannot be understood as 'homologous' with other punk signs.

More recent scholarship has noted further limitations in Hebdige's interpretation of punk signs as stable signifiers. Musicologist Pete Dale's post-structuralist analysis of Hebdige raises issues regarding Hebdige's conceptualisation of punk 'style'. For Dale, the 'problem [...] is that the meanings [Hebdige] reads into the [punk] movement are not necessarily the only meanings which can be inferred' (Dale, 2020, p. 73). Drawing on philosopher Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction, Dale suggests that 'no transcendental signified can close the gap between the same and the other, between signifier and signified, such that meaning is transparent and readily available to two participants in "communication"' (p. 79). As Dale contends, 'For this reason,

there can never be a “taken-for-grantedness” of “meaning” (p. 79). Dale recommends that contemporary readers of *Subculture* approach it from a poststructuralist position.

Furthermore, Dale challenges Hebdige’s ‘top down’ reading of class, which is seen to reproduce class stereotypes. Indeed, in positioning punk against the perceived middle-class status of the 1960s ‘hippie’ movement, Hebdige emphasises punk as fundamentally a working-class phenomenon and proletarian youth cultural formation. Dale cites the class background of first wave punk progenitors such as Joe Strummer, Malcolm McLaren and Siouxsie Sioux, as evidence that punk was not an exclusively working-class phenomenon.⁷⁹ However, it is important to acknowledge that in making this counter-argument, Dale only refers to those progenitors of first wave punk associated with the London-centric punk milieu, thus the logic underpinning his own argument is somewhat reductionist in nature. Nevertheless, Dale acknowledges the accuracy of Hebdige’s claim that through punk, ‘certain sections of predominantly working-class youth were able to restate their opposition to dominant values and institutions’ (1979, p. 112).

Dale’s study chimes with Cultural Studies scholar Gary Clarke’s critique of subcultural analysis associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. For instance, Clarke argues that Hebdige treats subcultures as ‘static and rigid anthropological entities’ (Clarke, 1981, p. 82). As Clarke points out, ‘such reified and pure subcultures exist only at the Centre’s level of

⁷⁹ All of Dale’s examples have been associated with ‘middle-classness’ due to their upbringing and backgrounds. Strummer, the son of an English diplomat, attended boarding school from a young age. McLaren grew up in Stoke Newington; his father was an army officer and his mother was a socialite, and he came from a family who owned various clothing businesses. Sioux was raised in the relatively affluent suburbs of Bromley (hence her later association with the ‘contingent’ of the same name).

abstraction which seeks to explain subcultures in terms of their genesis' (1981, p. 82). Clarke's work addresses the reductionist tendencies in subcultural analysis which reproduce the 'dichotomy between subcultures and an undifferentiated "general public" [that] lies at the heart of subcultural theory' (p. 84). The conception of a coherent mainstream, or status quo, to which punk offers its 'challenge to hegemony' (1979, p. 17) requires the existence of a standardised, homogenous populous that comprises the 'mainstream'. Yet, as Dale points out, 'Strictly speaking there is no "average man and woman in the street"' (2020, p. 9).

The notion of the 'mainstream' central to punk—that is, as the centre ground of popular culture—can be better grasped through the concept of the 'big Other', as originally formulated by Jacques Lacan and developed by Žižek and Fisher. As Fisher defines it, 'The big Other is the collective fiction, the symbolic structure, presupposed by any social field. The big Other can never be encountered in itself; instead, we only ever confront its stand-ins' (2009, p. 44). Here, then, the 'big Other' can be thought of as the symbolic target against which punk's assault was projected and its resistance lodged at the level of style; the conservative socio-cultural order of 1970s Britain can be thought of as the 'big Other' of punk.⁸⁰ This 'big Other' serves as the operational concept guiding Sheila Rock's portrait of Jordan (see Figure 2.3 and chapter 1); where the affronted gentleman functions as the 'stand-in' for the conservative social order against which punk rallied, even if, strictly speaking, this social order was itself a 'symbolic structure' (p. 44).

⁸⁰ By invoking these more abstract concepts, I seek to avoid a hypostatising approach to this topic which would treat punk's symbolic 'challenge to hegemony' as self-evident. Instead, I seek to interrogate the implications of this challenge in terms of aesthetics, unpacking the ways in which it is staged and the strategies utilised by auteurs in doing so.



Figure 2.3: Jordan outside of SEX. Photo: Sheila Rock (1976).

However, this concept also serves to describe the other ‘straw men’ within the mythologising of punk’s emergence as a radical break with all that had come before it. If punk and its progenitors have repeatedly taken aim at ‘mainstream’ culture, the conception of a coherent ‘mainstream’ is itself a reductionist, if not misplaced, notion. This is especially so, given that, as discussed in the previous chapter, many of the major players of punk sought commercial success, and indeed achieved it by entering the Top 40 chart—the exemplar of ‘mainstream’ activity and aspiration. It is not that punk’s ‘challenge to hegemony’ is a fiction *per se*, but, as elaborated in chapter 1, I am interested in the portrayal of this challenge, how punk produced its own images of rebellion, staged as a confrontation with the ‘big Other’. Limiting the ‘big Other’ to the mainstream, the conservative social order, or indeed, progressive rock—serves a hypostasizing function, particularly with regard to the radical reconfigurations of

outdated and anachronistic gender roles and sexual mores that I consider here. The symbolic structure of patriarchy and gender normativity that punk women claimed as their opposition might be understood as a ‘collective fiction’ but, by treating these symbolic structures as ‘real’, punk nonetheless served to achieve feminist advances, opening up spaces for women in particular, and contributing to greater equality between the sexes, even if a residual patriarchal chauvinism persisted within Anglo-American punk, more broadly.

On Record: Punk, Class, and Gender in Subcultural Theorising

Popular music scholar Dave Laing observes the underlying complexity of punk ‘signs’ and practices, noting the specificity of their function within the visual lexicon of punk. His examination of the music of first-wave punk shows how earlier forms incorporated the politics of ‘real life’, centred around themes of societal unrest—poverty, employment and racism in the tradition of protest music (Laing, 1985). For Laing, themes such as unemployment and living standards, common to working-class youth, provided an inherent ‘destabilizing factor’ (Laing, 1985, p. 413) that provided punk bands such as The Clash and Sham 69 with a subversive, yet relatable appeal. ‘Even more destabilizing’ argues Laing, ‘was that area of punk language which drew on discourses which had been excluded from the mainstream media discourse of society as a whole: the area of “pornography” and “obscenity”’ (Laing, 1985, p. 413). However, as Laing observes, ‘it is quite feasible for the same individual to both feel the effects of shock and to observe and enjoy the disturbance thus caused’ (p. 419). Following Laing, it is important to point out the subjective nature of the classifications of the obscene; what may appear obscene differs according to the viewer and, more significantly, obscenity does not always provoke a reaction of disgust. Rather, the obscene entails a more complex affective dynamic of attachment, in which

conflicting desires may be experienced by practitioners and critics alike. In addition, drawing on Bourdieu's understanding of 'taste', such judgements are subject to 'aesthetic judgements' that govern the 'social field' in which they are conceived, and the discourses which inform the particular judgements of commentators (2010, p. 1662).

This tension between the utilisation of pornography as part of the 'punk aesthetic' and its reception as 'obscene' is evidenced in Angela McRobbie's critical response to *Subculture*. McRobbie sees the utilisation of the 'illicit iconography of pornography' in punk as evidence of subcultural discourse as 'the male-defined discourse *par excellence*' (1980, p. 74). Although acknowledging women are not wholly excluded from Hebdige's account, McRobbie observes that 'the style of a subculture is primarily that of its men' (p. 73). For McRobbie, 'The pity is that [Hebdige] thereby misses the opportunity to come to grips with subculture's best-kept secret, its claiming of style as a male but never unambiguously masculine prerogative' (p. 73).

Nevertheless, McRobbie is not entirely critical of subcultures *per se*; she sees subcultural space as a unique platform for female participants to construct identity and performative claims to agency. Given 'how highly differentiated according to gender style (mainstream or subcultural) it is', studies such as Hebdige's fall short of accounting for the ways subcultural style is constituted apropos of women punks—as McRobbie reminds us 'it's punk girls who wear the suspenders, after all' (1980, p. 74). Her argument convincingly affirms the necessity of re-considering the role of women in punk, and in particular, what McRobbie terms the 'rituals of stylish public self-display and of its (at least temporary) sexual self-sufficiency' (p. 73). McRobbie does however accord Hebdige a more nuanced account of class, which she sees as

helping to ‘disrupt (in a positive sense) some of our own common sense wisdoms about class and class culture’ (p. 73).

More recently, Buszek (2019) has addressed the impasse which McRobbie raises as problematic, highlighting the centrality of women as punk’s key designers—such as Alex Michon who designed the Clash’s early wardrobe—and the prominence of female figures such as Westwood and Jordan. Their influence on the conception and reception of the ‘punk aesthetic’ symbolised a uniquely feminist stylistic defiance. Following Buszek, the androgynous quality of punk marks its singularity compared with other subcultures; in this sense, McRobbie’s reinscription of the dominant gender binary can be seen as too heavy-handed. Any reassertion of a rigid boundary between male and female styles occludes punk’s androgyny, and the unisex style of its designs in deconstructing gender norms. Indeed punk style has been championed by key queer theorists such as Jack Halberstam precisely for its subversive potential and overturning of gender presuppositions. As Halberstam contends, ‘Punk has always been the stylized and ritualized language of the rejected’ (2005, p. 153). Even so, in most of the scholarship discussed thus far, which spans the late-1970s into the 1980s, recognition of queer issues are all but absent.

Beyond the CCCS—Bourdieu and ‘Taste’

In her analysis of ‘subcultural capital’, Sarah Thornton takes a critical view of the conception of ‘difference’ in CCCS scholarship. For Thornton, Hebdige and his CCCS contemporaries advance an overdetermined reading of class and resistance through ‘the assertion of cultural difference as an essentially progressive gesture’ (1995, p. 208). Thornton is right to question the assumptions of CCCS scholarship here, noting that the ambiguities of ‘political tendencies’ are often

obscured. In Thornton's view, Hebdige's preoccupation with 'hegemony' frames his argument as an account of 'difference' as 'a good thing in itself', and as 'a step in the right direction away from conformity and submission' (p. 208). As Thornton shows, Hebdige's perceived commitment to 'difference' casts it 'positively as *deviance* and *dissidence*' (p. 208). We might also note Hebdige's failure to critically reflect on different types of stylistic 'difference', and the variations in kind, in relation to the diversity of subjectivities of first wave punk. Thornton's critique builds on McRobbie's assertion that women inhabit subcultural space as an enactment of 'difference', though often with difficulty, in contrast to the subcultural membership and practice of male participants. I will return to Thornton's work on 'subcultural capital' in my discussion of Bonnie Rotten in chapter 5.

For now, Thornton's Bourdieusian reading of subcultures departs from the Birmingham School, while acknowledging that any intellectual attempt to account for the diversity of underground cultures remains a partial analysis. Thornton points to the strengths of Bourdieu's work in grasping the complexities of subcultures, enabling a move away from 'rigidly vertical models of the social structure', as espoused by Marxian frameworks. By contrast, as Thornton puts it, Bourdieu 'locates social groups in a highly complex multi-dimensional space rather than on a linear scale or ladder' (1995, p. 202). Bourdieu's theory presents a lens through which to understand how punk and pornography have been perceived as aesthetic fields of 'low' cultural production. Bourdieu's work is convincing in its demonstration that aesthetic judgements, far from assessing the value and meaning of an artwork in neutral ways, are produced by the 'social field' within which the artwork is realised and implicated. Bourdieu's analysis shifts critical attention to the broadest contexts of production and consumption.

In Thornton's work, Bourdieu's theory emerges as a matrix through which to scrutinise the relationship between various notions of politics and identity relating to class, gender, and sexuality, and the questions of 'taste' raised by punk, in its unique fascination for, and embrace of, cultural detritus, the vulgar, and the abject. Much scholarship dedicated to exploring punk's visual strategies evidences the kinds of 'aesthetic judgement' constructed within a particular 'social field'. In *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Bourdieu shows how 'bringing the concept of a "social field" to bear on the question of artistic production changes our understanding of art' (2010, p. 1662).

Bourdieu's analysis of the 'social field' of art reveals the 'aesthetic' as a historically produced category (2010, p. 1660). In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* ([1979] 1984), Bourdieu makes an extended critique of the 'founding text of modern aestheticism'—Immanuel Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (1790)—demonstrating that aesthetics is itself a historically produced category reflecting the bourgeois idealism of the Enlightenment. 'Aesthetic judgement,' for Bourdieu, functions as form of cultural capital, saturated by power relations that reaffirm the legitimacy of the dominant 'social class' (2010, p. 1660). For Bourdieu, this amounts to 'a sorting process through which modern societies both produce and legitimate economic and status inequalities' manifested in relation to distinctions of art, and an ability to distinguish between 'good and bad art' expressed in appreciation of 'the truly fine as opposed to the vulgar' (2010, p. 1660). Bourdieu shows how these distinctions function as the preserve of a cultural elite composing commentators and critics whose privileged

position within the social 'habitus' allows them to demonstrate their knowledge of such distinctions so as to exert their own 'cultural capital'.

Bourdieu's framing reveals the Kantian 'pure aesthetic' (2010, p. 1668) presupposes a 'pure gaze' with characteristics of 'disinterestedness', 'taste', and 'autonomy' (p. 1660). As Bourdieu shows, these characteristics, when performed, signal the performer's appreciation of art, and thus come to reflect their judgement of 'taste'. However, these dispositions are far from neutral, and in fact, are constituted precisely through a structural process in which the perception of art is divorced from 'worldly concerns' (p. 1660). In this light, the 'pure gaze' is not available to everyone. Rather, it can be thought of as the inheritance of those from a particular social class who are most distanced from 'worldly concerns'; that is, the bourgeoisie. Unsurprisingly, it is from this dominant 'social class' position that the cultural commentators who compose the 'social field' of the art world originate, including 'artists, critics, patrons, gallery owners, and audiences' (p. 1662). This milieu reflects, and, in turn, serves to engineer, this specific set of 'aesthetic dispositions' which, as Bourdieu reminds us, are inseparable from a 'specific cultural competence [...] demanded by the products of a highly autonomous field of production' (p. 1667). In other words, these dispositions can be seen to exist in a 'feedback loop' structured by class relations, which function to obscure the inherited nature of this knowledge. As such, 'taste', far from being a 'natural' endowment, is socially produced and internalised by the social agent, hence the notion of 'acquired tastes' as something one inherits. The 'aesthetic judgement', argues Bourdieu, 'presents the aesthetic disposition as a universally valid principle and takes the bourgeois denial of the social world to its limit' (p. 1668).

To put it simply, the ‘astute’ judgements of artistic commentators are the product of their background and their learned dispositions, as opposed to a judgement of ‘truth’ apropos of the merit of an artwork. This argument enables insight into the designations and classifications of high art, contrasted with the low-cultural forms of punk and porn that form my interest here. A Bourdieusian framing makes apparent that punk and porn praxis would be categorised by Kant as ‘base’ pleasures; that is to say, those pleasures that animate the body. Both punk and porn aesthetics are manifestations of what Bourdieu terms the ‘popular aesthetic’, refusing the codes embodied in the Kantian aesthetic (p. 1668). This encompasses a ‘refusal’ of the ‘refusal’ which hallmarks bourgeois ‘taste’. That is to say, Bourdieu shows that ‘disinterestedness’ entails a ‘refusal’ of the conventions that structure the privileging of ‘content’ over ‘form’ in the ‘popular aesthetic’, hence, this double ‘refusal’ signifies the eschewing of bourgeois ‘taste’ and the ‘pure gaze’ it operationalises.

Thus I suggest that the body of scholarship discussed above operates through ‘taste’ judgements about both punk and porn. That is to say, the exclusion of pornography from these studies is indicative of porn’s designation as ‘low culture’, which contributes to the occlusion of the discussion of pornography as part of the punk subculture and its associated aesthetic field. When pornography does feature, as in Laing’s and McRobbie’s accounts, it is treated as monolithic, and invariably dismissed as mere patriarchal chauvinism. This dismissal, by McRobbie in particular, is underpinned by the radical feminist opprobrium of pornography during the ‘sex wars’ of the 1980s per scholars such as Andrea Dworkin. I address this period in greater detail, and Dworkin’s critique of pornography, in chapters 3 and 4. Stigma against pornography persists in the ‘collective memory’ (Erll, 2011, p. 9) of Western popular culture,

and is reified in the ‘social field’ of high-art—an exclusionary dynamic sustained by the cultural commentators who consecrate certain art objects over others.

So far, I have traced a literature review of several formative critical accounts of punk subculture in relation to concepts of style. Within this discussion, I have critiqued Hebdige’s study for its occlusion of pornography, as well as the tendency found in subsequent accounts such as McRobbie’s, to treat the pornography in punk as a monolithic cultural object. However, following McRobbie’s feminist criticism, I have highlighted the importance of feminist cultural studies in foregrounding the role of women within subculture—and their influence on the concept of style—which is lacking in Hebdige’s account. Invoking a Bourdiesian lens, I have argued that both the occlusion of porn and its treatment as monolithic cultural object can be seen to stem from judgement of ‘taste’, and ‘cultural capital’ and the distinctions between high-art and low-culture that produce the ‘social field’ of art.

In what follows, I survey those critical ideas which were formative to the identification of a recognisable ‘punk aesthetic’, as produced by Westwood and McLaren, as well as the visual strategies through which this bricolage was conceived. Here, I address punk in relation to the historical avant-garde, and the debates about punk’s indebtedness to the Situationists, and relatedly, the influence of the events of May ‘68. In doing so, I evidence the importance of techniques such as *détournement* to punk practice, particularly for its working-class participants, who, by virtue of their ‘habitus’—to use Bourdieu’s term—relied on such techniques as creative strategies of accessibility towards self-recreation (Clark, 2003, p. 223) within punk subcultural space. In turn, drawing on Fisher’s (2018) work, I consider the ‘glam pop continuum’, which

posits the importance of ‘glam’ to punk’s aesthetic strategies. By linking the privileging of ‘artifice’ evidenced in glam to Bourdieu’s notion of class and ‘taste’, I argue that porn is central to this discussion because its designations as ‘obscene’ and ‘low’ meant porn aligned with punk’s embrace of the ‘abject’. This provides the critical framework through which I analyse selected Westwood-McLaren designs using pornographic imagery and their attempts to ‘shock’.

Part 2: ‘What Are The Politics of Boredom?’

Much has been made of punk’s debts to the ideas of historical avant-garde movements of the twentieth century. Foremost in these accounts is *Lipstick Traces*, music writer Greil Marcus’ account of punk, which discusses Malcolm McLaren’s deployment of Situationist techniques through his musical protégés. Although McLaren remains a contested figure, particularly in light of his propensity to ‘self-mythologise’, Gorman’s biography clarifies the extent of McLaren’s engagements with the Situationist International, and his application of Situationist praxis. As Gorman details in *The Life and Times of Malcolm McLaren*, the events of May ‘68 were particularly inspiring for McLaren.⁸¹ Joining Croydon Art School in late 1967, McLaren played a prominent role in the student occupation in May 1968, alongside friend and fellow student Jamie Reid (Gorman, 2020, p. 89). McLaren had initially intended to join his friend Fred Vermorel in Paris for the insurrectionary riots of May ‘68 (Gorman, 2020, p. 89), but his attempts were thwarted as ‘rail and air strikes had paralyzed France’ (2020, p. 89). However, McLaren did arrive in Paris the following month, touring the ruins of the student occupations alongside

⁸¹ Following student protests and occupations of university buildings in Paris, trade unions encouraged workers to conduct sympathy strikes. The trade unions failed to predict the scale of the resulting protests, in which 11 million workers, 22% of the country’s population, took to the streets, temporally grounding the economy of France under fears of an imminent civil war (Mooney and Unsworth, 2019, p. 169).

Vermorel (p. 91). Gorman's account notes McLaren's fascination with the radical graffiti slogans plastered around the city (p. 91).⁸² As Gorman suggests, the experience can be traced in McLaren and Westwood's later deployment of slogans on items of clothing such as 'Be Reasonable, Demand the Impossible'. Gorman also details that on his return to London, McLaren cultivated his interest in Situationist strategies, obtaining *The Society of the Spectacle*, and briefly associating with King Mob, the radical London splinter group of the Situationist International (p. 96).⁸³

In *The Society of the Spectacle* Guy Debord (chief theorist of the Situationist International) detailed the oppressive conditions of mass consumerist society and critiques the alienating effects of capitalism. In thesis 4 of the text, Debord argues 'The spectacle is not a collection of images, rather, it is a social relation among people, mediated by images' (1967, p. 2). To subvert the logics of spectacular society to overthrow its alienating effects, Debord advanced techniques such as *détournement*: the appropriation and subversion of images from consumerist circuits for critical ends. Debord's counter-strategies were expressed and actualised *en masse* in the sloganeering of the student radicals of May '68.

'*Détournement*', as Buszek elaborates, is 'the strategy of appropriating and then manipulating pre-existing imagery, texts, narratives, and technology from the so-called

⁸² Vermorel wrote one of the first authoritative accounts of the Pistols in his anti-biography, with partner Judy, *Sex Pistols: The Inside Story*. Vermorel first met McLaren in 1963 at Harrow Art School, where McLaren also encountered a lecturer who provided him with his signature aphorism: 'It is better to be a flamboyant failure than a benign success'.

⁸³ McLaren and Vermorel were introduced to members of King Mob through mutual acquaintance Henry Adler in 1966 (Gorman, 2020, p. 95). King Mob was led by Christopher Gray, who edited the first British publication on Situationism, *Leaving the Twentieth Century: The Incomplete Works of the Situationist International* (1974).

“spectacle” of popular culture in order to undermine the status quo it propped up’ (2019, p. 90). Marcus defines *détournement* more bluntly: ‘the theft of aesthetic artefacts from their contexts and their diversion into contexts of one’s own devise’ (Marcus, 1996, p. 349). Marcus contends that Situationist strategies within punk contexts can be seen in McLaren’s use of *détournement*.

The linkage of the Situationists and punk is supported by Fisher’s essay ‘The outside of everything now’ which elaborates on the distinctions between the emergence of punk and the events of May ‘68. Fisher asserts that ‘punk was what Britain had instead of 68’ (2018, p. 669). Fisher reads the student occupations of France as an Althusserian critique of capitalism and American imperialism in post-war France under the presidency of Charles de Gaulle.⁸⁴ The critical position of the student radicals of May ‘68, writes Fisher, ‘was as much a rejection of certain theoretical positions as it was of the institutions of modern liberal society’ (p. 669). While a detailed consideration of the subsequent mass strikes and their intersection with the student radicals is beyond Fisher’s account, and my own, his diagnosis of an Althusserian impulse at the heart of the protests provides an interesting frame through which to assess the cultural significance of May ‘68 in the context of first wave punk.

For Fisher, May ‘68 marked a symbolic ‘conflagration’ of what he terms the ‘Sixties Desirevolution’; that is, the failure to realise countercultural ideals of political and sexual liberation (2018, p. 671). Whereas May ‘68 was predicated on a certain utopian vision, shot through with romantic notions that the protests were ‘real expressions of authentic subjectivity’, punk’s challenge was inherently more cynical and diffuse (p. 671). By contrast, the punk

⁸⁴ Louis Althusser’s radical Marxism examines the structures through which social control is exercised over the subject, and in turn, the subject is ‘interpellated’ into compliance with power (Althusser, 2010).

attitude, as embodied by progenitors such as John Lydon, was informed by a deep-rooted scepticism towards such utopian notions, in its statements of inertia and embrace of the ‘inauthentic’. Fisher sees this tendency as akin to ‘a kind of popularised Althusserianism in which interiority was exposed as an ideological bluff’ (p. 671). This tendency finds expression on many levels of punk activity; in punk style, for instance the wearing of bin-liners and toilet chains was embraced, and, in turn, re-coded as ‘authentic’ statements of the ‘inauthentic’. Similarly, musical examples from first wave punk evidence a disavowal of ‘authentic’ ‘interiority’, as reflected in Buzzcocks’ ‘What Do I Get?’ (1978) and ‘Orgasm Addict’ (1977) presentation of desire as simply masturbatory fantasy, and in the disillusionment with romantic love in the Slits’ ‘Love und Romance’ (1979).

These examples speak to the ‘demystification’ impulse outlined in chapter 1, and gestures of ‘refusal’ (Hebdige, 1979, p. 132) that define punk’s inversion of bourgeois standards of taste. Punk articulated this ‘refusal’ most profoundly in its embrace of the socially abject, its veneration of vulgar and crass themes—what *Punk* magazine co-founder Legs McNeil termed ‘embracing the shit’ (*End of the Century*, 2003). For Marcus, the Sex Pistols reflected punk’s existential challenge, that is, its performative enactment of the ‘Politics of Boredom’,⁸⁵ reading punk’s dissatisfaction with the status quo through the Marxist concept of ‘alienation’—a malaise and an expression of cultural cynicism, and an affront to moral values. As Marcus illustrates, in the context of mid-1970s British pop culture, punk’s ‘young, loud, and snotty’⁸⁶ insouciance appeared radically opposed to the perceived conformity of ‘family-friendly’ pop exemplified by

⁸⁵ In his communist red patent leather re-conception of the New York Dolls, during his brief tenure as their manager in late 1974, Malcolm McLaren stated on the press release for the band ‘What are the Politics of Boredom?’

⁸⁶ I borrow this description from the titled of the Dead Boys first album, ‘Young, Loud, and Snotty’ (1977).

Brotherhood of Man, the British winners of the 1976 Eurovision song competition with their romantic ditty 'Save Your Kisses for Me'. In Marcus' account, punk's turn to the vulgar and its fascination with cultural detritus spoke to its anti-establishment stance expressed prominently in the punk tactic of provocation, borne out of a desire to shock.

Fisher takes up Marcus' argument in his conceit that 'Punk's greatest disgust [was] with the trivial and the mediocre, with the existential death of boredom' (2018, p. 225). He teases out the Nietzschean inflections that underpin the enduring significance of punk figures such as Lydon, who, for Fisher, evidences the aristocratic sensibility championed by Nietzsche in texts such as *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886). As Fisher contends, Lydon's status in punk history resides as the 'demonic purge of trivia and mediocrity' (p. 225). I locate in Fisher's argument the operation of a Nietzschean 'transvaluation' that finds expression in punk's turn to the abject corresponding in interesting ways with Bourdieu's reading of language in 'Did You Say "Popular"?' (1991). In that essay Bourdieu identifies an 'aristocratic' sensibility in working-class slang—as a way of asserting membership for an initiated 'elite'. Fisher's account centres on a materialist understanding of culture that shares Bourdieu's understanding of the concept of 'aristocratic distinction'. The difference here, between Fisher/Nietzsche and Bourdieu is that, while the former speak of aristocratic distinction on the level of cultural value, the latter see aristocratic distinction at work in language, as a reaction to the dominant order—I return to this discussion in more detail in chapter 4, where I discuss the importance of a Nietzschean 'transvaluation' to the work of post-punk auteurs.

Following Fisher, punk's turn towards 'artifice' over the 'authentic' enacts a Nietzschean 'transvaluation' of culture through the adoption of an 'aristocratic' sensibility. Fisher posits the importance of glam in the early 1970s, arguing that 'it was glam that made the break which allowed punk to happen' (2018, p. 601). For Fisher, 'Glam IS punk [*sic*]; historically and conceptually' (p. 601) and 'essentially, glam returned pop to the working-class audience disgusted and turned by the hippies' lazy sleaze' (p. 601). This particular argument relies on a linear history of quite distinct phases, premised upon a certain caricature of the countercultural legacy of the 1960s. But, Fisher's attention to the dimensions of class that inform glam, and thus punk, are central to understanding of punk's aesthetic strategies, pointing to the ways punk was accessible to working-class youths, and the importance of the relationships between taste and class to my case studies.

Fisher's theorisation traces glam's privileging of artifice over authenticity to a 'Warholian' artistic sensibility. Addressing punk's Warholian influences, Fisher proposes the concept of 'glam knowledge' traced from 1960s Pop Art. 'Glam knowledge' fuses the shared ironic performativity of the New York art scene and the early London-based punk scene; in which 'the social scene is a stage set' (2018, p. 672) exemplified by Andy Warhol's Factory, whose coterie doubled as the actors, assistants, and inspiration for many of Warhol's 1960s artworks.⁸⁷ In *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock 'N' Roll*, Simon Reynolds and Joy Press expand upon this comparison linking SEX and the Factory, with 'someone like Jordan' functioning as a 'a face, a scenester', in ways comparable to Factory 'superstar' Edie Sedgwick (1995, p. 305). It was through figures such as Sedgwick and Candy Darling that Warhol

⁸⁷ Warhol's first Factory was located on New York's East 47th street, in midtown Manhattan and became famous for its drug-taking and sexual experimentation.

conceived of the ‘superstar’—through reinventing the self as an icon via the embrace of ‘artifice’ as an aesthetic strategy.⁸⁸

Fisher traces other examples of artifice at work in the ‘sartorial correctness’ of early British post-war subcultures such as Mod, noting the alignment of artifice with the ‘fundamentally aspirational’ nature of ‘working-class culture’ (2018, p. 604). In his association of ‘aspiration’ with a working-class sensibility, Fisher identifies that sensibility as inherently ‘foreign to the levelling impulse of bourgeois culture’ (p. 604).⁸⁹ Just as in first wave punk, the role of consumerism in Mod is paradoxical. In his work on Mod, music writer Ian Penman proposes that ‘what began as a principled refusal of the nine-to-five wage-slave grind found its most vivid street-level expression in avid consumerism’ (quoted in Fisher, 2016a, p. 101). Similar critique has been levelled at punk, particularly Westwood and McLaren who, despite their radical rhetoric, were accused of charging extortionate prices for their couture.

The links between artifice, class, taste, and consumerism can be elaborated through consideration of Jordan, as a ‘face’ of SEX, and her importance as female archetype of first wave punk style. Labelled ‘the original Sex Pistol’ by Jon Savage, Jordan joined SEX as a shop assistant in 1974 (Savage, 2001, p. 93). Jordan’s autobiography outlines how the radical punk ‘look’ she adopted would provoke in public contexts. Her beehive hairdo and favoured PVC ensembles caused such offence on her daily commute from Seahaven to London that British Rail

⁸⁸ Warhol’s fascination with the ‘superstar’ can be seen in his *Marilyn Diptych* from 1962. Warhol’s techniques of mechanised screen-printing, reproducing endless repetitions serve as a meditation on the icon. His later *Screen Tests* series furthered this fragmentation of the ‘sign’, highlighting the constructed iconicity of his ‘superstars’ by extended exposure of the ‘artifice’ of their persona to the mechanical eye of the video camera.

⁸⁹ However, Fisher also points out that this ‘aspirational’ tendency ‘can be politically ambivalent, since if aspiration is about the pursuit of status and authority, it will confirm and vindicate the bourgeois world’ (2018, p. 604).

resorted to installing her in a separate carriage from the other passengers. Jordan became the *de facto* model for many of SEX's wares (Reynolds & Press, 1995, pp. 304/5), epitomised in Sheila Rock's aforementioned 1976 portrait of her astride the doorway to SEX (see Figure 2.3).

Rock photographed Jordan as emboldened, her appearance clearly challenging both generational and gendered dynamics. The image is particularly striking as it frames Jordan as an extension of SEX, suggesting the 'performative agency' (Butler, 2010) of punk clothing.⁹⁰ As captured by Rock, Jordan's Westwood-McLaren clothing appears a radical departure from the norms of feminine beauty of the period. Jordan's 'refusal' (Hebdige, 1979) of the normative is a rejection of the 'male gaze', embodied in the conservative male figure. His affronted stance (hand on hip, no less) possesses an air of intimidation, but Jordan is unfazed by the outrage her appearance inspires.

As a trailblazer for punk's visual androgyny Jordan was an early adopter of Westwood's rubberwear ensembles, enjoying their tactile quality as well as 'the power she got from wearing confrontational clothes': 'Punk wasn't necessarily a sexual thing [...] People were scared out of their wits of me' (Reynolds and Press, 1995, p. 305). Jordan did not perceive this clothing as overtly sexual *per se*. Instead, she claimed the clothing as empowering, refusing any notion that wearing fetishwear and rubber in quotidian contexts positioned her as a sex object: 'it was utilitarian in nature, I wasn't sexually objectified.'⁹¹ Feminist scholar (and former Catholic Girls member) Lucy O'Brien agrees and observes that in spite of the 'prevalence of fetish gear and

⁹⁰ As Paul Gorman has outlined, by a perverse twist of fate, the Conservative club *was* actually located directly next door at 429 King's Road. See: *The Life and Times of Paul Gorman* (2020).

⁹¹ Jordan, interview by the author, Rough Trade, Bristol, May 1, 2019.

provocative clothes' embraced in early punk, it 'remained curiously asexual' in nature (2002, p. 194).

O'Brien emphasises the importance of style for many first wave punk women, who sought to reject gender conventions and 'the pastel shades of post-60s femininity' (2002, p 188). According to O'Brien, by 1976 the flowing chiffon fabrics favoured by the 1960s counterculture had 'been mass marketed and diluted to the point where it became the new conformity' (p. 188). Against a 'backdrop of tiered flowery skirts, flicks and flares', punk style embodied a radical reconfiguration of gender conventions; a bold, 'liberating' statement in the face of the 'crushing conformity of what it meant to be a female in a Britain still tinged by post-war austerity' (p. 186). Punk thus 'provided the perfect opportunity' to 'make an overt statement on a newly emerging, more aggressive understanding of female sexuality' (p. 188).

Reynolds and Press also read punk as 'a liberating time for women, a moment in which the limits of permissible representations of femininity were expanded and exploded' (1995, p. 33). However they also point out that in spite of the promise of this 'liberation', 'the misogyny was even more virulent than in the '60s, because punk's general nihilism and "we hate everybody" attitude encouraged a no-holds-barred assault on liberal values (including feminism) and common decency' (1995, p. 33). Rather than enacting a total break with the legacy of the 1960s counterculture, O'Brien acknowledges that the 'unpicking' of archaic conformity realised in the 'celebratory abandon' of the 1960s would resurface with punk: 'It was during punk that the "sex wars" went over ground, that the battle for territory on stage, on the street and in the workplace began to pierce the mainstream' (p. 187). Cognisant of first wave punk's gender

prejudices, O'Brien's argument that punk was 'particularly liberating for young women' (p. 194) has also been subject to critique.

Helen Reddington elaborates on the emancipatory potential of punk's stylistic practices. Re-examining the importance of female participants in the first wave, Reddington suggests that punk presented opportunities to reconfigure gender roles and gendered relations of power because 'Punk rock, which for many men had been just another development of the rock genre, had for women given unprecedented access to a voice and a platform' (2007, p. 118). For Reddington, punk reflected 1970s drives towards sexual equality, in the wake of the Sex Discrimination Act (1975), which protected both women and men from discrimination on the grounds of marital status or sex. Punks may not have been involved in campaigning for the SDA, but the movement produced its own models of organised feminism, such as Rock Against Sexism (formed in November 1978 in the wake of Rock Against Racism) aimed at combatting sexism, taking aim at the rock underpinnings of punk music, and the scene broadly, as well as challenging 'gender stereotypes' and promoting a 'positive image of women in rock' (Worley, 2017, p. 186).

As Worley notes, feminists such as Caroline Coon found punk to be 'the first youth culture not to be dominated by males' (Worley, 2017, p. 177). For Coon, fetishwear signalled a potential suspension of the imposition of traditional standards of female beauty (Coon, 1982, p. 106) and as embodied by figures such as Siouxsie Sioux, 'the hard-edged, fetish-style gear many punk women chose' was, as Buszek affirms, empowering for many punk women (2019, p. 94). While the bondage clothing, leather and PVC ensembles of punk style constructed an

emboldened new vision of femininity, Reddington reminds us that ‘sometimes the co-option of sexual clothing that was claimed to be empowering [...] was not always seen as an ironic statement, particularly in the less sophisticated provinces’ (Reddington, 2007, p. 115).

Notwithstanding the ‘classist’ undertones of Reddington’s argument, her study highlights the frequent incidents where predatory men mistook the fetishwear of female punks as a sexual ‘come-on’—punk women were not exempt from the chauvinistic violence prevalent in Britain in the mid-to-late 1970s. Thus, as Worley astutely notes, punk ‘opened up a space where feminist ideas were culturally played out’ but harboured ‘gender prejudices and preconceptions that continued to bite even as lip-service was paid to notions of equality and emancipation’ (Worley, 2017, p. 193).

In Zoë Howe’s biography of the Slits, Viv Albertine explains the cultural implications of such clothing, claiming the iconography of sexual deviancy in porn as a site of feminist defiance. As Albertine notes, SEX’s wares were often too expensive to afford more than one or two select items so that many women, including the Slits dressed in thrift shop-chic. Notably, the band re-appropriated the aesthetic codes of pornography to redeploy them in a punk statement, as Albertine described:

I might be in rubber stockings and high heels, a little tutu and a ripped T-shirt, hair all back-combed and blonde and black all round [*sic*] my eyes [...] I looked like I’d stepped off some sick porn movie set, and [men] were utterly freaked out and threatened (quoted in Howe, 2009, p. 67).

By subverting the patriarchal visual lexicon of porn magazines, the Slits made a defiant sartorial gesture, which Albertine describes as ‘taking something close to the heart to maybe a lower echelon of male and turning it inside out’ (Howe, 2009, p. 67).

Albertine notes men’s confusion: ‘They understood when it was there or in *Playboy* magazine’ but, as reconfigured by the Slits, ‘they didn’t understand when it was actually in front of them with crazy hair and strong eyes [...] We ruined it for them. It was fun’ (2009, p. 67). Even so, Albertine also recalls the abuse the band received at the time: ‘I got spat at and attacked many times [...] Ari [Up, Slits vocalist] got stabbed, it was just part of everyday life’.⁹² 100 Club DJ, and radio presenter Don Letts, also confirms: ‘They were physically attacked on the streets [...] they freaked people out on a deeply psychological level’.⁹³ Indeed, Worley affirms, ‘sexual violence and sexism remained part of punk’s arsenal of provocation from the outset through the 1980s’ (2017, p. 178).

A price list for Westwood and McLaren’s Seditious-era clothes lists the cost for a ‘regular T shirt’ as £5, and a long sleeve style as £6.50; the value of that latter, by contemporary standards, would equate to approximately £45.⁹⁴ The price list also advertises ‘bondage trousers’ for £30 and ‘leather jeans’ for £45, equivalent to £230 and £343, respectively. As these approximate conversions evidence, Westwood and McLaren’s designs were sold as bespoke items, beyond the financial means of many in the early punk scene. This was at time when credit cards weren’t available to enable ‘designer’ purchases as now, and, the average weekly wages in

⁹² Albertine adds, ‘There were guys just cruising the streets [...] thinking that maybe how you looked, you were a prostitute [*sic*]’ (Albertine, 2014).

⁹³ *The Culture Show* (2014).

⁹⁴ National Archives (no date).

1976 were £70 a week for men, and £45.30 for women (*BBC*, 2001)—clearly there existed an incongruity between McLaren’s championing of punk’s accessibility and the cost of his garments. Though McLaren reminisced that ‘all you needed was put on a bin bag, and you could be a punk’ (quoted in Lissmann, 2018)—the consumerist imperatives which underpinned his various fashion experiments were widely criticised from within the punk scene epitomised in Sham 69’s anti-consumerist diatribe, ‘Rip Off’ (1978). Vocalist Jimmy Pursey’s impassioned refrain goes as follows:

The king’s road shopper make us poor
Time is running out for us
CHORUS: It’s just a fake make no mistake
A rip off for you but a rolls for them

For Jordan’s part, when selling clothing in *SEX* she confesses to giving away *SEX* surplus to ‘kids’ who couldn’t afford it, rather than pander to the upper-class clientele who saw themselves as privileged patrons (Mooney, 2019).⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Indeed, in this light, one might also question the extent as to whether Jordan herself might have been able to wear such styles, had she not been an employee of the boutique.

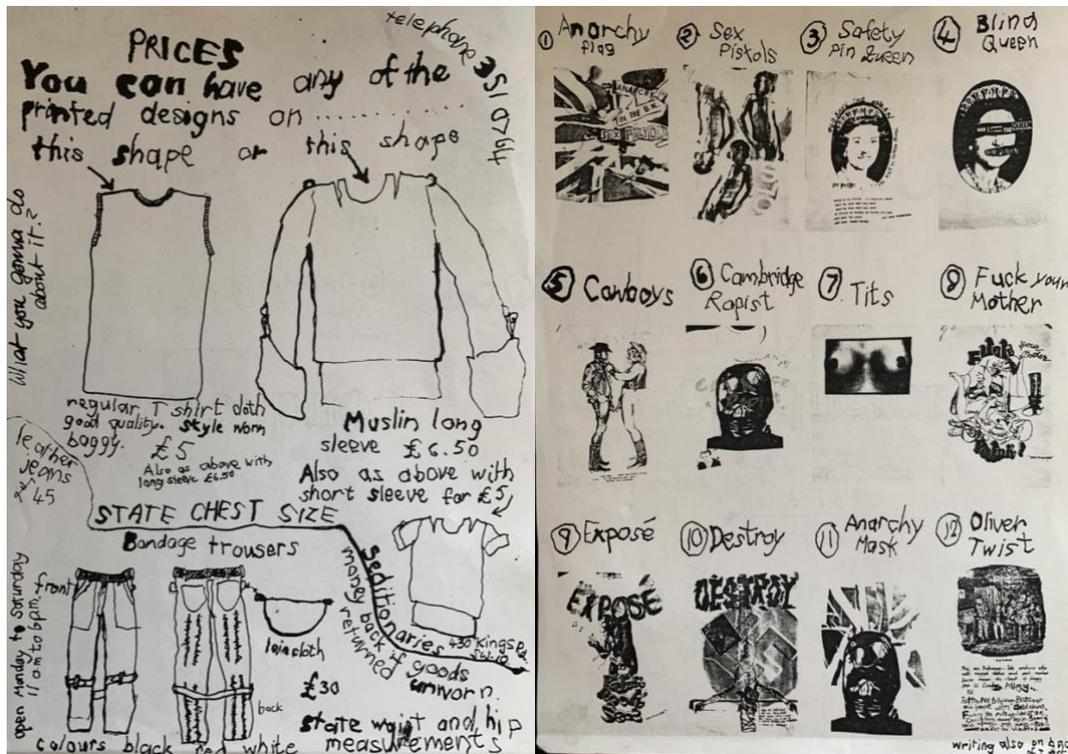


Figure 2.4: Left: Seditonaries-era pricelist. Right: Assorted Seditonaries-era designs.

Jordan’s autobiography, *Defying Gravity* reflects on the importance of SEX as a place of cultural cross-exchange. As Jordan observes, ‘What is so interesting, looking back, is how the worlds of fetish and popular culture came together so seamlessly in SEX’ (Mooney, 2019, p. 93). That cross-cultural clientele is explored in the short documentary *Dressing for Pleasure* (1977) directed by John Samson, which juxtaposes a group of middle-class fetishists from the ‘Rubber Duck Club’—obsessed by the Mackintosh jacket—with the obstreperous McLaren, ordering Jordan to ‘get the rubberwear on’ during the heatwave of 1976. Jordan observes that ‘thanks to the influence of the shop, the vinyl, rubber and leather got mixed up [...] Different eras as well as fetishes collided at 430 King’s Road, possibly for the first time ever’ (2019, p. 81). Buszek also recognises the symbolic importance of SEX as a cross-cultural hub of nascent queer culture, describing it as a ‘magnet for the mostly teenaged “misfits” who had been congregating at clubs

like Louise's, and vice-versa' (2019, p. 91). Buszek notes the interrelated importance of London's gay and lesbian scenes, particularly Louise's and 'Shaggarama's', the queer nightclub renamed the Roxy in 1977. As Siouxsie Sioux has reminisced: 'Before it got a label it was a club for misfits. Waifs, male gays, female gays, bisexuals, non-sexuals, everything. No one was criticized for their sexual preferences [...] we attracted that ambiguous sexuality' (quoted in Buszek, 2019, p. 90).

In the following section, I identify the aesthetic strategy of self-reinvention—and punk as a space where 'selves are recreated' (Clark, 2003, p. 223)—and consider the ways in which SEX's fashion was adopted by various subjectivities in the early London-based punk scene to subvert societal standards of gender.

Part 3: SEX, Seditious and the Sex Pistols

Malcolm McLaren spent the late-1960s hopping around several art schools in London, eventually landing at Goldsmiths college in 1968, but failed to graduate. After abandoning a film project dedicated to the history of London's Oxford Street in the early 1970s, *The Story of Oxford Street*, McLaren sought a new project. McLaren turned to fashion—influenced by Warhol and excited by the possibility of creating a 'Warholian' social scene—as he would later come to reflect:

Warhol had created a more glamorous lifestyle than what we had expected from the lectures and artists we came into daily contact with. This gave purpose to my thinking that dressing up and engaging in fashion suddenly seemed as artistic as anything else you might you do (quoted in Gorman, 2020, p. 118).

With the help of art-school friend Patrick Casey, McLaren opened ‘Let It Rock’ in October 1971—a Teddy Boy themed boutique at 430 King’s Road (Gorman, 2020, p. 135). He soon enlisted the help of his then-girlfriend and aspiring seamstress, Vivienne Westwood, persuading her to leave her job as a schoolteacher thereafter (p. 144). With Westwood on-board, the pair began selling custom lamé suits, alongside those staples of the Teds’ wardrobe—brothel creepers and ‘drainpipes’ and other American clothing styles such as bowling shirts and slacks. The shop was decorated with 1950s rock n’ roll ephemera and insignia, including early records by Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly.

During this period, McLaren’s growing interest in ‘cult clothes’ led him to areas of pop culture which signified a discernible aesthetic ‘edge’, such as leather biker jackets and zoot suits. Following the importation of 1960s ‘biker’ styles, the shop was rebranded in 1973 as Too Fast To Live, Too Young To Die at the same time as Westwood’s own designs became more prominent in their stock. Too Fast To Live, Too Young To Die celebrated the pair’s interest in leatherwear and the chains and straps associated with the rocker wardrobe, and were influenced by Marlon Brando as existential outlaw ‘Johnny’ in *The Wild One* (1953).⁹⁶ Designs by leatherware specialist Vince Man, as well as the London Leatherman—previously the preserve of a gay clientele - appealed to the middle-class Chelsea clientele who could afford them (Court, 2017, p. 95).

⁹⁶ In a filmed interview by Roger K. Burton from 1993, the pair discuss their various collaborative design efforts, citing Brando’s character as key reference. I would also point out that *Punk Magazine* began its first issue, in January 1976, with a tribute to ‘Marlon Brando: The Original Punk’ by Joe Koch (Koch, 1976).

This incarnation of the boutique was short-lived. McLaren decided to rebrand the shop as SEX in October 1974.⁹⁷ As McLaren recalled, the makeover reflected an attempt ‘to extend the concept of Too Fast to Live to the sensual, the erotic, making sex the point of fashion [...] to stretch the limits so thought about combining sex and politics [*sic*]’ (Gorman, 2020, p. 207). SEX was renowned for its fetishwear and BDSM accoutrements, as well as Westwood’s most distinctive designs. Worley characterises the bricolage style of ‘the clothes and ephemera that emerged from the shop’ as a combination of ‘overt sexuality and fetishism (bondage, rubber) with extreme politics (swastikas, anarchism), irreligion and rock n’ roll’ (Worley, 2017, p. 3). This stylistic assemblage is evident in Westwood’s ‘anarchy shirts’, produced during the boutique’s incarnation as Seditonaries, which mixed images of Karl Marx alongside the anarchy logo (Figure 2.5).

⁹⁷ The shop was once again rebranded in December 1976 as Seditonaries.



Figure 2.5: Anarchy T-shirt (Hiroshi Fujiwara Collection).⁹⁸

The aesthetic of SEX would influence, and rapidly solidify, into a recognisable punk style.⁹⁹ In particular, fetishwear proved an important component in the ‘anti-fashion’ clothing look that Westwood and McLaren developed. Westwood appropriated the defining characteristics of specialist bondage items, adding straps and zips to clothing staples such as trousers and jackets to create the ‘bondage’ trouser, where a strap bound the legs at knee height, reducing the mobility of the wearer as per the restraining straps of fetishwear utilised in BDSM practices (Burton, 2017). As McLaren was later to note in an interview, the design represented

⁹⁸ See (Gorman, ‘Blessed’, n.p.).

⁹⁹ Rival King’s Road boutique Acme Attractions, founded in 1974 by John Krivine and Stephane Raynor, was inspired by SEX. Staffed by musician and DJ Don Letts, the shop stocked a more varied assortment of subcultural styles, and Letts’ passion for reggae brought together punk and ethnic cultures, harking back to the original skinhead movement. As Gorman (2020) notes, Acme acquired the silk screen prints of the SEX T-shirt designs, with Westwood reputedly having sold them while McLaren was away.

the punk-associated affect of inertia and the feeling of ‘having nowhere to go’, that found expression in Sex Pistols’ tracks such as ‘Pretty Vacant’ and ‘God Save the Queen’ (Lissmann, 2018).

The pair’s bricolage ensembles marked a further attempt to reconsider established sartorial conventions; for example, clothes were turned inside out to reveal their seams and construction. Contrasting textures and materials, such as leather with plastic and PVC, were also sutured together through the use of safety pins in a process of bricolage.¹⁰⁰ The bondage clothing, leather and PVC ensembles sold at SEX became especially popular with female punks, sported by Jordan Soo Catwoman¹⁰¹ and Siouxsie Sioux.¹⁰² As Worley avers, the ‘stylistic creations of Siouxsie Sioux and Soo Catwoman helped define a recognisably punk image’ (2017, p. 177).

These female figures would take a central role in the coterie that Westwood cultivated at the shop while McLaren was engaged as ‘manager’ of the brash proto-punk outfit, the New York Dolls.¹⁰³ However, his management of the band was short-lived—the Dolls’ disbanded during a disastrous tour of the Southern states—but McLaren’s time with the Dolls would prove to be fortuitous. Returning to New York, McLaren met Richard Hell whose ‘look’ of torn clothing and accompanying affective insouciance became the inspiration for the Sex Pistols’ image. McLaren

¹⁰⁰ Bulldog clips and safety-pins became common accoutrements for many punks, often stuck through ears and noses, as well as being used to hold damaged clothing items together.

¹⁰¹ For a more detailed account of the influential styles worn and modelled by these punk women, see: Worley (2017, p. 4).

¹⁰² Siouxsie Sioux (Susan Ballion) would be a defining face of punk, and the later new-wave music scenes, as frontwoman of Siouxsie and the Banshees. Sioux would gain notoriety for her ‘ice-queen persona’ (Worley, 2017, p. 79).

¹⁰³ He envisaged an image makeover of the Dolls, crafting them in a Communist-inspired ‘red patent leather’ wardrobe.

propositioned Hell to become the frontman of the Sex Pistols but he rejected the offer (Gorman, 2020, p. 249).¹⁰⁴

McLaren returned to London with a collection of pornographic magazines in-hand, purchased from sex shops in Greenwich Village's Christopher Street. McLaren and Westwood détourned a plethora of the most risqué images, and then he and Westwood set about silk-screening them with zeal on SEX customised T-shirts.¹⁰⁵ Hell's 'look' would influence the style of the group that McLaren had conceived of as 'young, sexy, assassins', to rival the Bay City Rollers (Gorman, 2020, p. 263). The Sex Pistols would give Westwood and McLaren's clothing a uniquely British voice to convey youth revolt, with their working-class roots, sulking recalcitrance, and puerile attitude.¹⁰⁶ As Buszek notes, given their proximity to McLaren and the SEX milieu (Lydon was auditioned by McLaren in front of the shop's jukebox, for instance) the Sex Pistols essentially became 'mannequins to shill the store's wares' (2019, p. 91). Indeed, throughout 1975 to 1977, the Sex Pistols were garbed almost head-to-toe in SEX and Seditonaries apparel, particularly the 'porn T-shirts' series, sporting iconic designs such as the 'Tits', 'Cowboys' and 'Naked Footballer' onstage and in interviews. However, as cultural historian Tavia Nyong'o points out, 'wearing the iconography or style of the homosexual [is]

¹⁰⁴ Television were an integral part of the emergence of the punk scene around Hilly Kristal's CBGBs, which opened on the Bowery in New York in 1973.

¹⁰⁵ Inspired by McLaren-Westwood and Reid's graphic design for the Sex Pistols, Adam Ant (né Stuart Goddard) cultivated a similarly provocative use of sexual imagery détourned from BDSM cartoons as well as medical journals. These can be seen on flyers and artworks from 1977 onwards, which incorporated images from John Willie's illustrated series, *The Adventures of Sweet Gwendoline*; a BDSM erotic cartoon, in which the voluptuous Gwendoline was repeatedly captured by nefarious antagonists, bound and often gagged, until saved by an overly-sexualised female accomplice. While an exhaustive consideration of Ant is beyond the scope of his study, his career is interwoven with the SEX coterie, having reputedly hired McLaren early on to help with his image and musical influences, as well as being engaged in a relationship with Jordan (who would briefly manage his band). Ant also starred in Derek Jarmans' *Jubilee* (1978).

¹⁰⁶ While Glen Matlock's background and art-school education at Central Saint Martin's suggest his background was more middle-class, Steve Jones and Paul Cook grew up in Shepherd's Bush, a working-class area in West London.

‘not the same thing as subjecting oneself to the stigma of being perceived as homosexual’
(Nyong’o, 2008, p. 111).

In 1975, McLaren contracted Peter ‘Sleazy’ Christopherson, member of COUM and later Throbbing Gristle, as photographer for an early photoshoot of the band. Christopherson was working at design agency Hipgnosis, which shared a door to the Sex Pistols Denmark Street studio. This photoshoot has been described ‘as one archival switch point between the queer and punk seventies’ (Nyong’o, 2008, p. 111). According to Nyong’o, Christopherson styled the Sex Pistols as ‘rent boys’, inspired by Larry Clark’s work featuring ‘white trash kids’ (p. 111). As Nyong’o describes, ‘When Christopherson posed the Pistols to resemble rent boys in a YMCA toilet, McLaren was apparently shocked and threatened by the homoerotic images [...] he turned down the pictures’ (p. 111) and opted for Ray Stevenson’s images of the band in a London phone box.

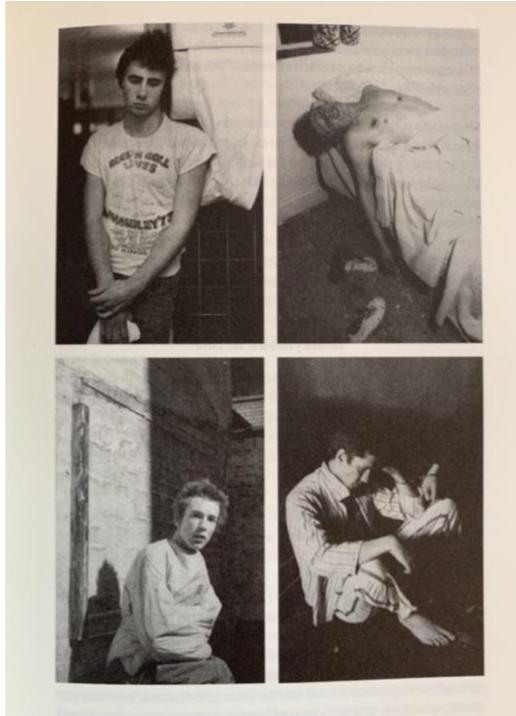


Figure 2.6: The Sex Pistols as 'rent boys', as featured in *Defying Gravity* (2019).



Figure 2.7: The Sex Pistols phone box shot by Ray Stevenson.

Nyong'o's assertion about McLaren's homophobia deserves unpacking. Figure 2.6 above shows images from the original shoot. As is evident from this spread, Christopherson technically only portrayed the Pistols first bassist Glen Matlock in a toilet setting, while the other band members are variously posed. Nyong'o's argument, then, appears to overstate the 'queer' connotations of Christopherson's staging. Perhaps McLaren preferred Ray Stevenson's portrayal of the band in a London phonebox and its more humourous tone, capturing a sense of the 'roguish' sensibility of the band at this point. Further, Nyong'o's description of McLaren as 'threatened' jars with McLaren's explicit deployment of gay sexual iconographies in his designs with Westwood. If McLaren was 'shocked and threatened' by the portrayal of the Pistols as 'rent boys', then it is odd that he would have chosen the 'Smoking Boy' image as their logo, let alone chosen to name the band after the phallus (McLaren, 2009). Nyong'o's critique problematically omits Westwood (given the pair's collaborative efforts during this period), but the further argument that McLaren was merely courting provocation with his 'forbidden' images suggests he lacked an understanding of the 'politics of representation'.

On July 26th 1975, SEX shop assistant Alan Jones was arrested in Piccadilly Circus and charged under the 1824 Vagrancy Act for 'showing an obscene print in a public place' (Gorman, 'The Had the T-Shirt', n.p.). Jones' arrest for wearing the 'Cowboys' T-shirt resulted in similar charges against Westwood and McLaren 'for displaying these shirts in the shop, thereby holding an 'indecent' exhibition' (Gorman, 'The Had the T-Shirt', n.p.). Police seized the remaining stock from SEX and Jones was made to pay a penalty of £30 following Westwood and McLaren's failure to attend their court date (Gorman, 2001, p. 139).



Figure 2.8: ‘Cowboys’ T-Shirt (detail), *Vive Le Punk: Redressed*. Author’s photo (11/12/19).

Gorman has described the ‘Cowboys’ T-shirt as ‘the most provocative of all punk designs [...] it made waves immediately: the same day the shirt went on sale, the first customer to wear it in public was arrested. Within 24 hours, the store itself was raided for indecency’ (Gorman, ‘The Had the T-Shirt’, n.p.). The design features an image McLaren détourned from a 1969 illustration by American artist Jim French featured in pornographic art periodical, *Manpower!* Two cowpokes, naked from the waist down—except for their character-defining cowboy boots—appear before the graphic signage ‘DANCE’, under which ‘SATURDAY NIGHT’ is printed. Below the couple whose naked penises are almost touching, additional dialogue offers a dismissive comment on the cultural scene:

'ello Joe been anywhere lately
Nah, its all played aht Bill
Gettin to straight [*sic*].

Read against the date of the 'dance', Gorman suggests that McLaren's reference to 'straight' positions the couple as subversive figures; the invocation of 'straight' works as an allusion to the staid social order where dancing only happens on Saturdays and is supposed to be confined to heterosexual couples. McLaren's détournement of the 'Cowboys' from the 'then-subterranean world of gay art' marks an innovative stylistic statement, positing 'queer' culture as a means of challenging 'the social and sexual mores of the times' (Gorman, 'The Cowboys Came from Colt Studio', n.p.). Yet, Jones' arrest attests to the homophobia of his prosecution, and the precarity of his self-expression as a gay man in the 1970s (homosexuality was only decriminalised in the UK in 1967). Rising tides of conservatism in Britain saw calls for further regulation of sexual life and, as pornography itself was illegal, wearing a pornographic image in public, carried significant risks.



Figure 2.9: (Left) Malcolm McLaren wearing the ‘Cambridge Rapist’ T-Shirt. (Right) Vivienne Westwood sporting the ‘Smoking Boy’ design.

Police attention was once again directed at the shop in the Spring of 1975. SEX shop assistant Michael Collins alerted the police that the man being sought in connection with a series of sex crimes might have purchased the leather hood worn during the attacks from SEX. According to Gorman, McLaren returned from his New York jaunt ‘to much consternation over the sale of the hoods’ (Gorman, ‘The Story’, n.p.) McLaren courted controversy once again, responding to the events by creating ‘a brutal and shocking design for a T-shirt using a David Parkinson photograph as its core image’ (Gorman, ‘The Story’, n.p.). The ‘Cambridge Rapist’ design references the crimes of Peter Samuel Cook, who committed violent rapes¹⁰⁷ while wearing a leather gimp mask daubed with the word ‘Rapist’ (Gorman, ‘The Story’, n.p.). The T-

¹⁰⁷ Cook was active between October 1975 and April 1975.

shirt design was produced as the manhunt for Cook was ongoing, and while media fascination with his image was at its height (Gorman, 'The Story', n.p.).

Interviewed by David May for *Gallery International* in November 1975, McLaren described fetishism and sexual violence as extreme reflections of 'the environment you live in' and that repressed desire in British society produced societal problems stemming from 'the inability to understand your own sexual reasoning' (May, 1976, pp. 60-4). Questioned about his intentions behind the SEX designs and particularly the 'Cambridge Rapist', McLaren asked 'Look, why treat (Cook) as an individual?' and continued:

Why not treat him as a symbol of what is happening to everybody...I'm saying that if everyone did wear these clothes (from Sex) then this particular island, and all the violence that has been pushed down, would fucking explode! (Gorman, 'The Story', n.p.).

Summarising the interview, Gorman writes that McLaren attempted a 'provocative statement about the sexual repression he believed was stultifying British culture' (Gorman, 'The Story', n.p.). Yet, Jordan frames this as yet another of McLaren's cynical attempts at publicity, claiming McLaren was consulted about her and Collins' suspicions and that the T-shirt was produced before contacting the authorities (Gorman, 'The Story', n.p.). McLaren explained in 2008 that he 'drew the logo and rock 'n' roll lettering with some musical notes, added the words 'It's been a hard day's night' and a post-mortem fake news story about Brian Epstein dying from S&M practices.'¹⁰⁸ Perhaps McLaren thought these juxtapositions ironic.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ McLaren said in 2008 in reference to the conjecture surrounding Epstein's demise related to him by the art dealer Robert 'Groovy Bob' Fraser, see: (Gorman, 'The Story', n.p.).

¹⁰⁹ Epstein died from an accidental drug overdose in 1967.

Jane Caputi's feminist re-reading of Jack the Ripper in *The Age of Sex Crime*, serves as a critical touchstone in this discussion. Caputi understands 'the Ripper' mythology to function as a founding narrative in male fantasies of sex and violence, citing the copycat killings since the Ripper's killing spree at the turn of the century. Caputi notes how the figure of the sexual murderer has assumed a privileged mythos (in Anglo-American contexts), a symbol of both patriarchal domination against women, as well as an agent of libidinal pleasure. As Caputi writes:

Whether as monster, master, celebrity, hero, or all of these, the sexual murderer performs both practical and symbolic functions for the culture that has produced him. He not only massively generates the sexual terror which preserves male power, but he also functions to promote male pleasure (1988, p. 53).

The figure of the 'sexual killer' is venerated in a 'patriarchal culture' as 'its subliminal hero' and 'the inevitable enactment of phallocracy's most fundamental conceptions of manhood and godhood [...] no matter how hypocritically reviled' (1988, p. 62).

As Caputi contends, 'the underlying premise of all the narratives of sex crime, the punch line behind all the familiar jokes, and the allure of the first person identification', is that 'the ordinary patriarchal man [is] found behind the masks of both the prepotent monster and the master criminal/hero' (p. 62). Thus, the 'Cambridge Rapist' design, its bricolage of disparate elements, is ambiguous at best or, at worst, an ironic veneration of Cook's crimes. Rather than unpacking the semiotics of media reporting Cook's crimes, McLaren's additional para-texts add

weight to the salacious narrative, exploiting and expanding the obscene connotations of rape by allying them to the equally taboo subjects of homosexuality and sexual misadventure.

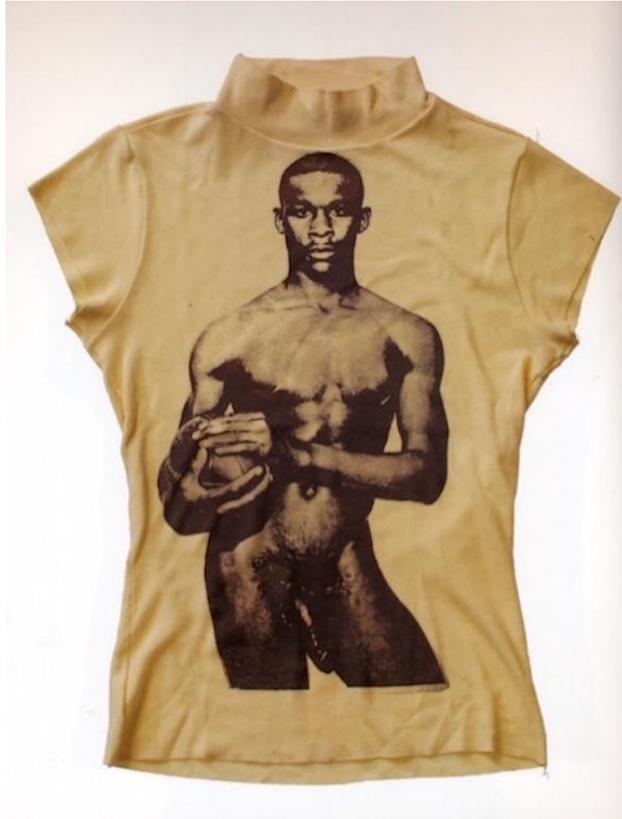


Figure 2.10: Naked Footballer polo top, Sex, 1976. (Hiroshi Fujiware Archive).¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Gorman ('Forbidden Connotations', n.p.).

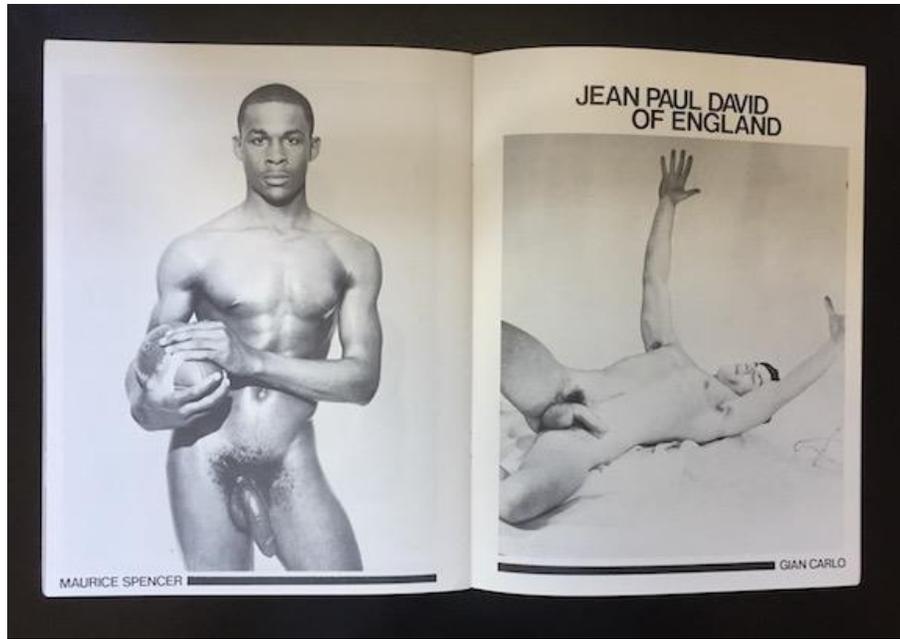


Figure 2.11: The image of Maurice Spencer by Dave Martin (left) in *Bob Anthony's Beefcake No 5*, 1969. (Paul Gorman Archive).¹¹¹

Music scholar Benjamin Court questions the stakes of Westwood and McLaren's designs and their engagements with sexual minority cultures:

Even if McLaren and Westwood intended to use these images to build a specialized style that catered to an emerging youth subculture [...] they did so by appealing to a heteronormative value in the dominant culture—the desire to be shocked by deviance (2017, p. 104).

As Court argues, McLaren and Westwood's raiding of gay cultural iconography remains problematic, because the pair appropriated such images 'to index a general social taboo' to cultivate a deliberately provocative aesthetic (Court, 2017, p. 98). Capitalising on societal prejudice against homosexuality for 'shock-effects' seems particularly cynical from a

¹¹¹ Gorman ('Forbidden Connotations', n.p.)

contemporary viewpoint, particularly given the struggles for gay rights during this period. I find Court's argument convincing overall, but note several issues. Firstly, Court's critique centres around the use of 'gay' imagery specifically and offers a very selective analysis of certain designs—giving the impression that all Westwood-McLaren designs were exploitative—while neglecting other designs that might problematise his reading. Moreover, in challenging Westwood and McLaren's actions, Court ignores that designs such as the 'Cowboys' image were favoured by gay members of the SEX milieu, including Alan Jones.¹¹²

The 'Naked Footballer' design, featuring a nude portrait of American football player Maurice Spencer, offers an interesting example for judging whether the designs were only exploitative. This design was a particular favourite with members of the Sex Pistols—Sid Vicious was photographed wearing the shirt on several occasions.¹¹³ Spencer was photographed by Dave Martin, a photographer based in San Francisco, and the image was published in gay pornography magazine *Bob Anthony's Beefcake*.¹¹⁴ Martin always insisted that his work depicted male physique photography, but this portrait sexualises Spencer's black body. Depicted fully nude, Spencer's muscled torso appears lustrous, the image frame culminating at thigh level, emphasising his penis—the erotic charge is clear and the full-frontal positioning invites a desiring gaze. Notably, Spencer's profession is explicitly referenced—shown clutching an American football as a prop - but this portrayal renders Spencer somewhat passive. The football

¹¹² Gorman suggests Jones was likely the first person to buy one of the T-shirts 'fresh off the rack' (Gorman, 'The Had the T-Shirt', n.p.).

¹¹³ The Naked Footballer design was discontinued following the transition of 430 to Seditonaries in 1977. As pictured in Figure 2.4, a Seditonaries flyer featuring twelve designs and the pricelist shows that the 'Smoking Boy'/'Sex Pistols' design, as well as the 'Cowboys', were still available for purchase.

¹¹⁴ For information of Martin's work and his history, see Online Archive of California (no date).

appears only as another sign to which erotic desire is attached: the fantasy of the athletic, black male body.

Court suggests that:

Whatever the artists, audiences, and publishers personally enjoyed about the original photographs—whether they found them erotic or artistic, or their meanings social or political—there is a sense they interpreted them according to the diverse codes of the specific social groups to which they belonged (2017, p. 103).

Dave Martin, the original photographer of the ‘Naked Footballer’ explains he took the photograph for his own pleasure: ‘It certainly wasn’t for the money. The pictures didn’t sell — no one wanted them. I wouldn’t even list them in catalogues. I took them to please myself, for the sheer beauty of the male body’ (Gorman, ‘Forbidden Connotations’, n.p.). Martin also rejects any idea that his work belongs to a ‘gay’ history of portraiture: ‘My work consists of photography of heterosexual (straight) men active in athletics and to show the beauty of the male physique [*sic*]. It is **not** a Gay Archive [emphasis his]’ (Crimmins, 2017, n.p.).

The eroticisation of the black male body is a recurrent trope in porn, where the black subject is portrayed in white heteronormative fantasies as a sexualised ‘other’ performing in the service of white desire. Thus, the Sex Pistols’ wearing of the design may well mobilise its ‘forbidden connotations’, to use Hebdige’s formulation, in the service of a form of racist transgression, but so too Martin’s photography may have been motivated by similar impulses.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ As a side note, Martin himself was briefly imprisoned under obscenity charges in the mid-1950s.

In Figure 2.12 (as seen below), John Lydon can be seen wearing the design during the Sex Pistols' performance at Andrew Oldham's Valentine's Ball. Oldham's high-art crowd included prominent members of London's queer community, including Derek Jarman (as pictured).¹¹⁶ Jarman's presence at the Pistols' performance is perhaps significant, in light of Court's critique. In this image, we see the 'Naked Footballer' on display to a largely gay audience which complicates Court's formulation of these designs as merely 'shock' material accomplished through 'desire to be shocked by deviance' (2017, p. 104). Rather than 'shocking' the attendees, the Sex Pistols flaunting of gay pornography might be more accurately described through Nyong'o's concept, as a queer 'switch point' between punk and gay culture (Nyong'o, 2008, p. 111). In this light, the image gains its traction as 'shock' effect only in a certain context, for a certain audience. Refraining from discussion of the intersections of sexual subcultures ends up repeating Hebidge's hypostasizing tendencies by invoking a morally offended 'mainstream' as the primary targets of the SEX designs.

In the image of Lydon, Westwood and McLaren's 'Tits' design is superimposed over Spencer's portrait. The overlaying of these designs—one over the other—attempts, albeit perhaps indirectly, a deconstruction of the erotic nude. In this 'new' image neither body is privileged as erotic—their juxtaposition reveals the constructions of pornography and, by voiding the taboo reveals, in John Berger's terms, the banality of 'naked' bodies. Court's criticism that the processes of producing these images as T-shirt designs 'fixes' their meaning privileges the 'creator' of the image and the image itself, as central to any interpretation.

¹¹⁶ Several members of the London- punk scene, including Jordan, appeared in Jarman's film *Jubilee* (1978).

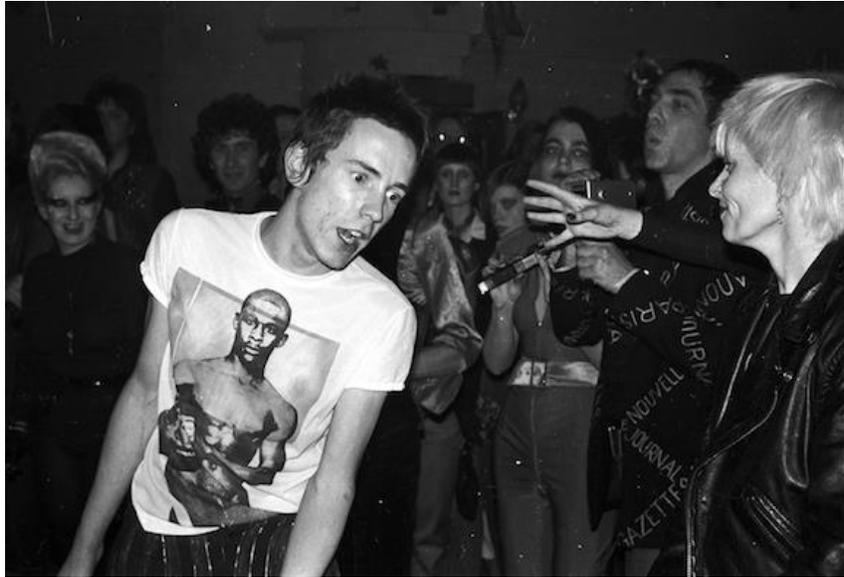


Figure 2.12: John Lydon sporting the ‘Naked Footballer/Tits’ Design, at the Sex Pistols’ performance at Andrew Oldham’s Valentine’s Ball. Photo: Joe Stevens.¹¹⁷



Figure 2.13: Vicious in the ‘Naked Footballer’ T-shirt, with the rest of the Sex Pistols all in

¹¹⁷ L-R: Audience includes Jordan, Luciana Martinez, Derek Jarman, and Vivienne Westwood (Gorman, ‘Forbidden Connotations’, n.p.).

Westwood-McLaren designs, London, March 1977. Photo: Peter Gravelle.¹¹⁸

Court's reading is premised upon the critical reception of these images in direct relation to the identity of the cultural producers involved. However, Court's focus on—what is referred to as 'identity politics' in contemporary discourses—brings issues of sexual orientation to the fore in determining how these images are conceived in his reading. There is a parallel here between the Westwood-McLaren 'Naked Footballer' design, and Robert Mapplethorpe's work: both depict athletic black subjects in erotic framings; both represent the black male subject through their own 'whiteness'. However, Mapplethorpe's own sexual orientation marks a site of differentiation in this comparison to Westwood and McLaren. As a gay-identifying man himself, his work represents the gay black subject according to more sensitive aesthetic codes. Indeed, media scholar Gary Needham reads Mapplethorpe's images in relation to the author's own sexuality, seeing Mapplethorpe's work—and his male subjects—as 'irrefutable in their gay specificity, in their SM specificity, in treating the men and their practices as one would a regal portrait or a still life' (2018, p. 168).

Even so, the dynamics of race and agency in Mapplethorpe's—and Westwood and McLaren's work, via Dave Martin— remain problematic. Art historian Kobena Mercer considers the politics of race that inform Mapplethorpe's work, and the themes of desire which saturate his emphasis on the sexual organs of his subjects. In the essay 'True Confessions: A Discourse on Images of Black Male Sexuality', co-written with visual artist Isaac Julien, the propensities of Mapplethorpe's work to antagonise the distinctions between pornography and art are drawn out.

¹¹⁸ (Gorman, 'Forbidden Connotations', n.p.).

Mercer and Julien see ‘Mapplethorpe’s glossy images in *Black Males* [as] doubly interesting’, given that ‘the stereotypical conventions of racial representation in pornography are appropriated and abstracted into the discourse of “art photography”’ (1994, p. 134). Their visual analysis of his representations of race notes how Mapplethorpe constructs the black body through a racialised gaze particularly in *Man in Polyester Suit* (1980), which depicts Mapplethorpe’s then-lover, Milton Morris’s penis protruding out of his trousers. Mercer and Julien argue that ‘the dialectics of white fear and fascination are reinscribed by the exaggerated centrality of the black man’s “monstrous” phallus’ (p. 134). As they see it, ‘The black subject is objectified into Otherness as the size of the penis signifies a threat to the secure identity of the white male ego and the position of power which whiteness entails in colonial discourse’ (p. 134). In this sense, the authors’ contend that here, the ‘threatening phobic object is “contained”—after all this is only a photograph on a two-dimensional plane’ (p. 134) and that ‘the white male viewer is returned to his safe place of identification and mastery, but at the same time has been able to indulge in that commonplace white fixation with black male sexuality as something threatening and dangerous, something Other’ (p. 134).

Mapplethorpe’s work poses questions about the racialised nexus of power and desire. As Mercer and Julien put it: ‘by reiterating the terms of colonial fantasy, the pictures service the expectations of white desire: but what do they say to our needs and wants?’ (p. 134). Thus Mapplethorpe’s work highlights the distinctions of classification and categorisation that function to demarcate the boundary between art and porn. As Needham outlines, Mapplethorpe described his own work as a ‘play with the edge’ (quoted in Needham, 2018, p. 167). Needham defines the ‘edge’ here as ‘that oblique between art/porn, its danger lying in the lack of separation between

sexually explicit gay content (i.e. fisting) and the subversion of art-historical conventions (i.e. portraiture reconfigured through SM relations)' (p. 167). The art/porn boundary echoes my discussion in chapter 1 of the contextually contingent boundary influenced by the context from which a particular image emerges. Indeed, as demonstrated here, the context that informs the reception of these images is crucial; while Needham sees Mapplethorpe's work as empowering for contemporary gay—and by extension, queer communities—Mercer and Julien view Mapplethorpe's work as evoking a problematic process of representation.

Court's critique of Westwood and McLaren centres their perceived 'straightness', which he extends to the general reception of their designs, without acknowledging that gay members of the SEX coterie consumed/enjoyed/wore these designs. More importantly perhaps, the images originate from equally problematic contexts; as seen, for example, in Martin's portrayal of black sexuality in the service of white desire.

The final image to be considered is the 'Tits' T-shirt, worn by guitarist Steve Jones at the Sex Pistols first televised appearance on the *Today Show*. The incident is mostly remembered as a debacle sparking media outrage. The band appeared with a fracture group of the Bromley Contingent—Siouxsie Sioux, Simone Thomas, Steve Severin, and Simon Barker.¹¹⁹ A heated exchange occurred, instigated by Grundy's sexist innuendo towards Sioux causing Jones to reprimand him with cockney invective—'what a fucking rotter'. Swearing pre-watershed caused outrage in the tabloid press. Indeed, the subsequent tabloid reportage portrayed the band as

¹¹⁹ The Bromley Contingent have been acknowledged as early devotees of SEX, known for their ostentatious style and gender androgyny. As an aside, it is worth considering the vision of punk presented to their audience here; the relative diversity of this group, presents an early social model of punk that made claims towards gender and sexual inclusivity, united in their repudiation of the conservative establishment figure of Grundy.

insurrectionary ‘folk devils’ who spearheaded the ‘moral panic’ of punk. The *Daily Mirror* front-page headline the following day read ‘TV FURY AT ROCK CULT FILTH’ (Gorman, 2020, p. 241). As the *NME* put it at the time, the band were ‘condemned by national newspapers as “obnoxious and arrogant”’.¹²⁰ The *NME* also reported McLaren’s defence of his protégés:

The Pistol’s manager Malcolm McClaren [*sic*] denied the band had staged an outrageous confrontation. He said Grundy provoked the group. Johnny Rotten and the boys, he said, reacted spontaneously, using language “in everyday use” (*NME*, 11 December, 1976).¹²¹

Inflamed by media reportage, the Pistols were deemed a threat to moral order and were banned (almost) nationwide in 1976. Curiously, their argot—including the ‘Tits’ T-Shirt—was relatively overlooked in the coverage that followed.¹²²



Figure 2.14: Still from the Sex Pistols appearance on the Today show of December 1

¹²⁰ ‘Chaos on the U.K. tour ‘76’, in *New Musical Express*, December 11th 1976, p. 2.

¹²¹ I note McLaren’s invocation of the ‘everyday’ here. For McLaren, the ‘everyday’ that the band reflected was intimately tied to their working-class upbringing; this ‘working-class authenticity’ also seemed to bind the Pistols as a punk archetype to a certain Puritanism within punk.

¹²² 16 nationwide dates were cancelled and the Anarchy tour failed. By this point the Sex Pistols’ celebrity had never been bigger but beyond a smattering of gigs in 1977 performing under the pseudonym the SPOTS (Sex Pistols On Tour Secretly), this marked their last UK dates before their jaunt Stateside.

1976, hosted by Bill Grundy.¹²³

Siouxsie Sioux also made the headlines the following week, pictured on the cover of the *Daily Mirror* pouting and pulling on her braces—(‘it’s punk girls who wear the suspenders, after all’) (McRobbie, 1980, p. 74). Shortly thereafter, Sioux made her own debut at the 100 Club punk festival, where she performed a 20-minute rendition of the Lord’s Prayer, accompanied by John Simon Ritchie, newly rechristened as Sid Vicious, on drums. An early adoptee of ‘Tits’, Sioux wore the T-shirt when she was photographed by Sheila Rock performing at the 100 Club in 1977. Sioux’s adoption of the design testifies to its popularity with other female punks, such as Viv Albertine. Buszek suggests that the ‘Tits’ T-shirt stands as ‘a hilariously simple example of the kind of gender play at work in the store’s early punk fashions’ (2019, p. 94). As Buszek notes, ‘the effect, was different, but equally baffling no matter the gender of the shirt’s wearer’ (p. 94). In her observations on Jones’ appearance on the *Today* show, Buszek argues that the juxtaposition of the *trompe-l’oeil* breasts ‘came across as an obscene joke’ (p. 94), given his ‘burly frame and working-class, macho demeanour’ (p. 94). However, ‘on willowy, blonde’ Viv Albertine, the ‘T-shirt’s image invited, then mocked, the illusion of bare women’s breasts that it suggests’ (p. 94). As such, Buszek reminds us that the ‘double takes’ that the ‘shirt encouraged were of a different, if no less provocative, sort’ (p. 95). As this brief account demonstrates, the wearing of the Tits T-shirt by female punks enacted a shift in meaning—potentially liberating in its mocking of men’s obsessions with women’s breasts.

¹²³ In this image, Sex Pistols guitarist Steve Jones *sports* the Westwood-McLaren ‘Tits’ T-shirt, while Simon Barker wears a Westwood proto-anarchy shirt, complete with swastika armband. For an overview on the history of the Tits T-Shirt, see Gorman (‘The Origins of the Tits Tee’, n.p.).

Returning to Court's criticism, he contends that by 'appropriating these images to sell on t-shirts, McLaren and Westwood ignored these codes and social contexts [...] By reframing these images on T-shirts, McLaren and Westwood effectively limited what they could signify [*sic*]' (2017, p. 103). Court operates from the semiotic impasse of Hebdige's text, seeking to ascribe a definite meaning to these images. Court claims that Westwood and McLaren undermined the 'social locations' of these images, but Court overlooks the Alan Jones incident—from Jones' own penchant for the 'Cowboys' T-shirt, to his arrest and prosecution. It is hard to dispute the argument that McLaren sought to provoke, but Court's claim that Westwood and McLaren 'attempted to erase codes used by minorities' (p. 105) collapses the distinctions between these subjects, while overlooking the exploitative contexts from which the images emerged.

Artist Scott Treleaven writes, 'After all, "punk" meant "gay" before punk meant punk' (2016, p. 310). Reading a genealogy of queer struggle intimately tied to punk, Treleaven suggests that punk's linkage with 'queer porn' was a significant moment of queer visibility in popular culture.¹²⁴ Treleaven views first wave punk's fascination with pornography as signalling what Nyong'o has conceptualised as an 'archival switch point between the queer and punk seventies' (Nyong'o, 2008, p. 111). As Treleaven argues,

The queered sexiness that would become intrinsic to punk had the dual purpose of titillating the initiated while simultaneously ridiculing the uptight behind-the-plastic-curtains realm to which sex (or any arousing image outside of sanctioned smut and/or artwork) had been relegated by older generations (2016, p. 310).

¹²⁴ Treleaven published the zine *The Salvation Army*, a key text of the 1990s underground Queercore resurgence, fusing a post-AIDS queer grassroots political activism with a punk aesthetic and insurrectionary rhetoric.

The pornographic images used by McLaren and Westwood are not unproblematic, but Treleaven suggests their DIY designs offered visual subversions of gendered norms of sexuality, taken up in the queercore movement of the 1990s.¹²⁵ Treleaven also notes the influence of gay culture on the early punk scene:

Along with the draggish maquillage, the bondage gear and the outright porn, what punk found thrilling in the burgeoning gay scene was its frank embrace of fringe and coded styles, its penchant for hidden venues, its gender non-conformity, and the inherent power in outside camaraderie (p. 310).

Treleaven contends that ‘Punks were all about giving each other permission to flaunt, demystify, explore, and own their sexuality’ (p. 310). Jordan has also stated: ‘It was a time of sexual equality I believe, men and women were quite liberated by it.’¹²⁶ Indeed, as evidenced in the Queercore movement, the Pistols’ Rotten and Vicious were viewed as important ‘queer’ figures, despite their own apparent heterosexuality.¹²⁷

Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, the dichotomy between art and porn reveals the demarcation between these classifications as contingent and in flux. In these examples, sexuality, race and class intersects in provocative ways, which, when viewed from a contemporary perspective,

¹²⁵ Treleaven sees this archetype of ‘aesthetic resistance’ located in a broader trajectory of ‘queer punk’ that was taken up in the early-to-mid 1980s by the queercore movement initiated by filmmakers and artists such as Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones. Bruce LaBruce gained attention with the publication of the underground queer punk zine *J.D.s*, which was edited by G.B. Jones. LaBruce would go on to become an acclaimed filmmaker, known for his working with subcultural and pornographic themes, as seen in his early work *No Skin Off My Ass* (1993), and *Super 8½* (1994).

¹²⁶ *The Culture Show* (2014).

¹²⁷ Rotten and Vicious were presented in *J.D.s* as proto-queer figures of homoerotic desire, as were proto-punk figures such as Iggy Pop.

remain ambiguous, even problematic. However, as I have argued here, the reception of the Westwood-McLaren designs has largely derived interpretation from the artist biographies of the pair, with McLaren's reputation as a shrewd provocateur fixing his intentions as simply to shock (while Westwood's contributions are seen as innovative and influential).

In particular, this chapter has attempted to shed light on the dynamics that inform the analysis of pornography within the context of fashion design, thus beyond its frequent association with 'masturbation material'. In the context of first wave punk, bodies are important—the wearing of 'taboo' bodies, by normative subjects, became coded as subversive. Punk's embodiment of the 'pornographic body' is an instance of 'performative agency' (Butler, 2010). Although, as my discussion of the Jones trial makes clear, when marginal bodies attempt to display the iconography of the 'other', the wearer is subject to the forces of discipline determined to keep pornography out of popular culture.

Chapter 3: ‘Anatomy is Not Destiny’: Punk-Related Feminist Aesthetic Interventions

Rude Boy (1980), the part-fiction biopic of British punk band the Clash, opens on 20-year-old punk Ray Gange gazing through the broken window of a derelict block of flats—a monument to the failure of Le Corbusier’s 1960s utopian vision of public housing. From his vantage point, Gange’s face registers grim dissatisfaction as he watches a political procession, complete with a squadron of black cars, and cheering, flag-waving crowds. Gange remains mute, positioned against the broken window, and clad in black leather jacket and blue jeans, he is an alienated voyeur of 1970s politics. Disgusted at the scene, Gange spits through the broken panes, before turning swiftly to descend the graffiti covered staircase, a visual palimpsest of the political tensions of late-1970s Britain: one slogan reads ‘SWP=Soft White People. Vote the NF’. In the next scene, following Gange to the Unemployment Benefit Office, we witness further political strife in footage of a protest between the far-right British group the National Front (NF) in a face-off with an opposing leftist protest group, which then cuts to a Walthamstow Anti-Fascist protest. The NF spokesmen condemn the opposition as ‘scum [...] not fit to be on our streets’ while the opposition—separated by lines of London Metropolitan police officers—note their thanks to the police for ‘coming out on this cold morning’ and keeping the peace.

These opening five minutes of *Rude Boy* offer a stark vision of the simmering political tensions in late-1970s Britain that saw the failure of Labour governments to tackle mass-unemployment, causing societal unrest.¹²⁸ Labour rule culminated in the ‘Winter of Discontent’

¹²⁸ Wilson’s Labour government was in power from 1974 until 1976, and was succeeded by James Callaghan who held office from 1976 to 1979.

(1978-1979), and widespread strikes by public sector trade unions in response to Labour pay caps. These failures preceded the rise of a Conservative polity under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher, who came into power in 1979.¹²⁹ As media studies scholar George McKay (2016) summarises it:

There were sustained manifestations of violence from the Northern Ireland troubles, to the Yorkshire Ripper to the Falklands War; there was mass protest from Greenham Common to the Miners' Strike; there were periodic riots sweeping across much of the country, a socially divisive government, mass unemployment and racism [...] All of this was happening under the grand penetrating paranoia of the MAD ('mutually assured destruction') discourse of the nuclear sublime of the late Cold War (2016, p. 3).

Against this backdrop, punk emerged on a national level in 1976, reaching widespread popularity in 1977.

Rude Boy remains a significant document of first wave British punk. The bildungsroman social realist narrative documents Gange's friendship with the Clash, leaving his job at a Soho sex shop to tour with the band, before eventually being fired for drunken ineptitude; the film's sub-plot depicts black youths falling victim to a police 'sting' operation and their prosecution.¹³⁰ For this study, Gange's under-the-counter evening job in a Soho sex shop offers a relevant visual

¹²⁹ Of note here is the prevalence of explicit political implications in the U.K. punk scene. I postulate that the more explicit politics of the second wave of U.K. punk, which emerged coterminously with anarcho-punk and its pioneers such as Crass, aligns with the rise of Thatcher's Conservative government. Similarly, the rise of neoliberalism in the U.S., broadly stemming from Ronald Reagan's defeat of Jimmy Carter in the presidential elections of 1980, provoked a more explicit reactionary embodiment of politics in the second wave, hardcore-punk bands of the 1980s such as Black Flag and Minor Threat. For more on Thatcher's influence on punk, see: Worley (2017, p. 8).

¹³⁰ Filming on *Rude Boy* was delayed by two years, finally released in 1980. Disagreeing with their portrayal by producers Jack Hazan and Dave Mingay, the Clash distanced themselves from the film. Yet it remains an important snapshot of the intersections between subcultural practice, political protest and racial strife. Gange is the conduit for a series of filmed concerts of the band's UK 'Sort it Out' and 'On Patrol' tours. Key moments from punk's political history are represented, such as Gange being filmed onstage at the Clash's infamous appearance at the 1978 Rock Against Racism gig in Victoria Park in London, which was attended by 50,000 punk fans—that event was sparked by Eric Clapton's open support for Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech.

frame through which to consider the contexts of the pornography industry in late-1970s Britain. In a scene introducing Gange at work, the marginal status of pornographic consumption is brought to life, illustrating the ‘underground’ contexts of 1970s pornography. An exterior shot of the premises cuts to Gange seated behind a cash register, sullenly sipping from a can of lager; two well-dressed gentlemen peruse the plastic covered magazines that deck the wall. Dissatisfied with the selection of female domination and leather magazines, one customer asks Gange ‘Have you got anything harder?’; pausing momentarily, he stutters ‘black women...something with black women in it’. Racism, politics, and sexual desire meet here in interesting ways; the seething violence in the previous scenes of protest contrast with the secrecy of sexual commerce.

This chapter examines subversion and re-framing of pornographic images in the context of first wave UK punk, starting with questions of legality pertaining to the production and distribution of pornography in the UK. The UK was the only European liberal democracy not to legalise pornography in the 1960s and 1970s. Prohibiting ‘depiction of actual sexual activity and any other images deemed obscene’ (Smith, 2005, p. 149), the Obscene Publications Act 1959 remains a key piece of legislation¹³¹ ‘producing’ the category of ‘pornography’ and ‘the boundaries that restrain producers’ activities and their products’ (p. 149). Moreover, the definitions underpinning these regulations are ‘notoriously slippery’ (p. 149), usually operationalised when confronted with the ‘challenge to hegemony’ represented by the ‘obscene’, as that which constitutes the outer limits of the ‘charmed circle’. Clarissa Smith details that ‘what

¹³¹ Smith also notes that both the 1876 Customs Consolidation Act and the 1953 Post Office Act also served to regulate pornographic production and distribution. The former prohibits ‘the importation of “indecent” materials’, while the latter ‘forbids the distribution of indecent or obscene materials via the post’ (2005, p. 149).

constitutes the obscene and indecent are largely left to the discretion of the officials who oversee the enforcement of the statutes' provisions' (p. 149).

A detailed history of obscenity trials would show that during the late 1960s and early 1970s the majority of prosecutions were of artists and writers associated with countercultural publishing and avant-garde traditions rather than commercial pornographers. As Smith details, 'many of the cause célèbres of the 1960s and 1970s', involving *Oz* and *Suck* magazines, as discussed in chapter 1, 'featured works of literary merit, or at least that was the defense offered in court' (p. 150). Smith contends that 'these were high art or revolutionary publications prosecuted precisely because their emphasis was not on sexual arousal but on 'unsettling' themes' (p. 150) in which 'artistic intention' might be considered important:

these cases introduced the idea that artistic intention removed indecency and/or obscenity, further inscribing the cultural high/low split with a legal definition of merit and confirming for some that there was one law for the arty liberati and another for Joe Bloggs, who just liked looking at girls (2005, p. 151)

Of significance here, particularly in light of the following discussion, are the ways cases were underpinned by discussions of 'aesthetic judgement' and 'taste' shaping public perceptions of the differences between art and pornography, as well as the attendant 'dispositif' which regulates this threshold and the threat of 'obscenity' it poses, or rather, is understood to pose by the establishment elite.

Smith's article 'A Perfectly British Business' presents an account of porn production in this period, observing the reductionist tendencies of theories of pornography, and how these have

curtailed research into the contexts of UK soft-porn production in this era. Traditionally, discussions of pornography have failed to engage directly with either the producers of pornography, except as the vilified and shadowy figure of the ‘pornographer’, or readers of such material except where those readers ‘confess’ to the ways in which pornography has contributed to their corruption (Smith, 2005, p. 146).

These discourses reproduce stereotypes presented through the binary formulation of ‘male perpetrator’ who exploits and objectifies the ‘female victim’. Porn in this era is often conceived as an underground scene orchestrated by male producers and photographers, manufacturing content aimed at male clientele, yet there were many women writing for softcore magazines, as well as working as ‘glamour’ photographers and likely involved in filmmaking too (Smith, 2005). Significantly, pornography of the 1970s can be seen as the bastard child of the strands of ‘libertarianism’ and ‘permissiveness’ associated with the 1960s counterculture: a low-cultural form of ‘permissive populism’, and expression of ‘vulgar hedonism’, where pornographers colluded with capitalism, producing sexual imagery as ‘low’ entertainment (Hunt quoted in Smith, 2005, p. 150).

Smith notes that while there are ‘significant problems [...] in delineating particular periods as culturally, politically, and economically self-contained’ (p. 150), what remains clear is that as ‘soft-core publications expanded during the late 1960s and early 1970s’, so too, did the explicit nature of the content (2005, p.149). This ‘expansion was encouraged by the success of the American magazines *Playboy* and *Penthouse*’, as well as ‘increasingly liberal attitudes to sexual representation, and an economic climate that favored free market entrepreneurs’ (p. 149).

The ‘homegrown titles’ of the UK were not hard-core at this time, but as the 1970s wore on, ‘there was a race to expose more and more flesh, then pubic hair, and finally gynaecological detail’ (2005, p. 152). Bar the soft-core available at the newsagents, for more explicit or niche material, customers had to visit the licensed sex shops of locales such as London’s Soho (as seen in *Rude Boy*), or they could attempt to procure harder materials by mail-order.¹³² Magazines such as *Club International* and *Whitehouse* followed American pornographic conventions, with a model on the cover and full-frontal, photosets featured inside, following a ‘star-system’ format with regular popular models such as Mary Millington.¹³³ However, as Cosey Fanni Tutti describes in her 2017 autobiography *Art Sex Music*, it was not uncommon for photographers to attempt to coerce female models into sex, promising increased celebrity and financial gain.

Tutti’s fascinating account of the industry she entered in 1973, describes modelling for various pornographic magazines such as *Whitehouse* and *Club International*, alongside working as a stripper, model, and dancer. Tutti’s modelling was conceived as a ‘deliberate policy’ to place herself within pornographic images: both to subvert the notion of the ‘male gaze’, as well as for financial ends, helping to fund various projects with experimental art collective, COUM Transmissions. Her ‘modelling-as-art’ project culminated in the 1976 ‘Prostitution’ show at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London where display of Tutti’s *Magazine Actions* sparked controversy. The opening night of ‘Prostitution’ is a significant event in the context of first wave

¹³² Smith’s (2005) study given a detailed account of the circuits of production and distribution of soft-core in the UK context of the 1970s, detailing the trend to import hard-core material from Scandinavia.

¹³³ Mary Millington is perhaps the most well-known English glamour model and pornographic actress of this period. Millington is best known for starring in *Come Play With Me* (1977), produced by publisher David Sullivan, which ran for 4 years in cinemas—a record-breaking feat at the time. As a side note, Cosey Fanni Tutti also plays a small role in the film. Millington later featured in *The Great Rock ‘n’ Swindle* (1980). Millington represented something of an advocate and champion of male desire in particular, taking a sympathetic approach to the use of pornography by men; relatedly, she also opened her own sex shop. However, facing legal problems and police harassment, Millington committed suicide in 1979.

punk, attended by, and featuring early performances from, the burgeoning London-centric punk scene.

Tutti was not alone in working in porn contexts. In Manchester, Linder Sterling became known for her distinctive photomontage artworks, featured in zines such as *The Secret Public* which she co-produced with Jon Savage from 1978. *The Secret Public* was dominated by images of towering flatblocks and post-industrial wastelands, offset against Sterling's grotesque renderings of transmogrified women's bodies. Domestic objects replaced women's sexual organs and supplanted their faces. Sterling's most notable work from this period is her *Untitled* from 1977, which presents an image of a female athletic model, her head replaced by a clothing iron used on the sleeve of Buzzcocks' *Orgasm Addict 7"* (1977).

Both Tutti and Sterling are interesting for the complex interplay of feminist politics and punk practice underpinning their strategies for representing the female body, subverting and reconfiguring prurient thematic imageries to suit their own critical ends. Tutti's and Sterling's work complicate the too-common accusation that sexual imagery in punk-related contexts merely indicates a contrived attempt to produce 'shock-effects'. Instead, I argue that these sexual imageries signal attempts by female artists at social critique apropos of ideas of 'performative agency' (Butler, 2010) which centre around the conceptual figure of the female 'punk body', as a vector of transgressive activity.

Exploring questions of female agency and sexual objectification, I discuss selected artworks and events by Tutti and Sterling, framing my discussion in relation to the rising currents

of feminism in 1970s Britain and presaging the ‘sex-wars’ that divided feminist thought and practice from the early 1980s onwards. Given the centrality of sexual representations of women, I begin with an overview of the female nude as considered in art criticism and theory. I present a selective overview of key texts on the female nude such as John Berger’s classic 1972 text, *Ways of Seeing*, read in dialogue with Lynda Nead’s *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, published in 1992. Here, I discuss the significance of the female nude through the metaphor of ‘containment’, drawing on Foucault’s notion of biopolitics. Through Nead’s work, I trace a critical framework that I apply to Tutti’s *Magazine Actions* and several of Sterling’s works, attuned to their attempts at critique and subversion of the female nude.

Part 1: ‘Ways of Seeing...The Female Nude’: Aesthetic Considerations

John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* is a touchstone for considering the historical pictorial representation of the female body in Western art traditions. As Berger shows, from the Renaissance onwards the female nude emerged as the archetypical image of sexuality; depictions of the sexualised female body overwhelmingly outweigh those of sexualised masculine subjects. European oil painting rests on the patriarchal structures of art production, in which men were privileged as artists and women were allocated the role of model or muse. Berger argues that male artists rendered femininity at the service of men’s pleasure.

For Berger, the female nude in the Western canon constructs the female sexual subject as the passive focus of the ‘male gaze’; a figure constituted through patriarchal power relations. Western art’s strategies of representing the female figure are produced by patriarchal power relations, through which female sexuality is subjugated to male desire, and thus subject to

hegemonic discourses of ‘power/knowledge’ (Foucault, 1978, p. 11). Berger’s discussion of the ‘naked/nude antimony’ (Berger, 1972, p. 58) is significant:

To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude. (The sight of it as an object stimulates the use of it as an object). Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display (p. 54).

Nudity is a construction of the ‘dominant male/subjected female’ dichotomy, thus nakedness is transformed into nudity through the scopic regime of the ‘male gaze’. The ‘male gaze’ constructs woman as nude sexual ‘object’: ‘nude’, not ‘naked’. This constructed vision of the female nude gazes ‘out of the picture towards the one who considers himself her true lover—the spectator-owner’ (1972, p. 56). The ‘true lover’, as conceived by Berger, is the male viewer of the image, to whom the female nude ‘offer[s] up her femininity as surveyed’ (p. 55).

Representations of the female body as desirable to the ‘spectator-owner’ continue into the present in contemporary mass media discourses such as advertising. As Berger avers, ‘the essential way of seeing women, the essential use to which their images are put, has not changed’ (1972, p. 64). As he puts it:

Women are depicted in a quite different way from men—not because the feminine is different from the masculine—but because the ‘ideal’ spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him (p. 64).

Indeed, representations of women within advertising commonly reproduce the female nude as ‘sex object’, in which the female body is subjected to the ‘male gaze’ of the ‘photographer/consumer’. This can be seen, not just in explicitly male-oriented examples, but

also female-oriented media. For example, publications such as *Vogue* or *Cosmopolitan* present highly constructed images of femininity to women (standardised through digital enhancements) as ‘ideal’ womanly beauty, alongside which commodities dedicated to appearance such as makeup are framed as coveted objects for women seeking to obtain the ‘look’ promised in the advert.

In her discussion of women’s ‘performative agency’ (Butler, 2010) and reification within late-capitalism, feminist philosopher Willow Verkerk views such female-focused media as inculcating an ‘aesthetic of desirability’ in women, ‘supported by an increasingly medicalized cosmetic industry that generates vast amounts of capital’ (2016, p. 155). Echoing Berger’s argument, Verkerk contends that the ‘aesthetic of desirability’ (p. 155) is predicated upon the ‘assumption that female value is connected to being sexually attractive to men’ (p. 155). Berger does acknowledge that consumer society has also led to a greater diversity of representations of women but in light of contemporary feminist and queer theory, Berger also offers a rather inflexible conception of social relations in Western art. Following Nead, I argue that Berger reproduces essentialist understandings of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’, seeing these as inherent characteristics of sex attributable to women and men, respectively.

In her study of the female nude, Nead argues that what ‘matters [for Berger] is the repertoire of conventions that all female nudes are believed to deploy, irrespective of historical or cultural specificity’ (1992, p. 15). Berger fails to accord the same critical understanding of the ‘nude’ to the correlate of his antinomy: the concept of ‘naked’. Following Berger’s argument that ‘To be naked is to be oneself’, Nead extrapolates that ‘To be naked is thus to be without disguise,

to be free of the patriarchal conventions of western society' (p. 15). Indeed, Berger's discussion of 'nakedness' is overshadowed by his focus on the nude. When it is addressed, he frames nakedness inside the domain of 'private' relationships.¹³⁴ However, Nead points out that Berger's somewhat quixotic formulation presupposes that 'power [is] constituted in public' (1992, p. 15). Thus she brings to attention a fallacy implicit within Berger's argument, which privileges the 'private' nature of the relationship between an artist and 'his' object as 'outside the domain of power' (p. 15).

In other words, Berger sees the exteriority to 'power' entailed within the private (as a turn towards interiority) as fundamental to the process of romantic sublimation through which the nude is present in its 'nakedness'; that is, in contrast to the 'male spectator' who turns the 'female figure into a voyeuristic spectacle' (p. 15). This, for Nead, implies that 'the naked is somehow freer from mediation, that it is semiotically more open and represents the body liberated from cultural intervention' (p. 15). In response, Nead challenges Berger's account that 'nakedness' occupies something of an autonomous category outside of representation, highlighting the 'social, psychic and cultural' formations through which the body is represented. Instead, Nead points to the central contention of Berger's argument; that is, 'even at the most basic levels the body is always produced through representation' which render it 'dense with meaning and significance' (p. 16). In this light, Nead argues that there 'can be no naked 'other'

¹³⁴ For Berger, the male artist breaks the pictorial conventions of representation—the representation of the female subject as nude—only through a genuine 'love' for the subject; a privileged relationship, with potential for 'loving' intimacy and knowledge of the female body enabling the artist to depict the female nude in a way that transcends its immediate sexualising connotations. Berger acknowledges the difficulty 'nakedness' presents, proposing that 'In lived sexual experience nakedness is a process rather than a state' (1972, p. 60). Berger equates 'nakedness' with the banal, arguing that banality arises when a 'moment of that process is isolated' (p. 60). In doing so, he seems to suggest that given the inseparability of 'desire' from the 'gaze', all bodily representations may be desired by the eyes of a potential beholder, and as such, desire may render the naked subject as nude. It is only in 'isolated' moments that desire becomes suspended, giving way to banality as 'nakedness'.

to the nude, for the body is always already in representation' thereby debunking Berger's notion of a 'semiotically innocent and unmediated body' (p. 16).

In her own account, Nead presents a theoretical understanding of Western art's female nude, drawing upon both Foucauldian and psychoanalytic concepts. Tracing the emergence of the female nude, Nead reads her in accordance with the central precepts of Kantian aesthetic theory. Echoing my previous discussion of Bourdieu's reproach to Kantian 'aesthetic judgement', Nead identifies the ways in which, 'within the forms and frames of high art', the 'representation of the female body' has served as 'a metaphor for the value and significance of art generally' (1991, p. 2). Her doubled reading of the female nude, as a symbolically capacious figure which has the potential to encourage both 'quiet, contemplative pleasure and a form of excited arousal' (p. 27) is compelling.

Nead traces the 'regulation' of the female nude in continental philosophy through Kantian metaphysics. Nead unpacks Kant's distinction between the 'beautiful' and the 'sublime'. According to Nead, Kant views the female nude as accomplishing the transformation of 'the base matter of nature into the elevated forms of culture and the spirit' (1992, p. 2). Kant's theory stands as a metaphor for 'containment':

the beautiful is characterized by the finitude of its formal contours, as a unity contained, limited, by its borders. The sublime, on the contrary, is presented in terms of excess, of the infinite; it cannot be framed and is therefore almost beyond presentation (in a quite literal sense, then, *ob scene*) (1992, p. 26).

This definition points to the implicit threat of transgression present within the representation of the female nude; that is, this figure has the capacity to potentially exceed the frame through its ‘excess’, thereby necessitating its ‘containment’. The sexualisation of the female nude threatens a Kantian understanding of beauty as ‘a quiet, contemplative pleasure’, through its appeal to ‘a form of excited arousal’ (p. 27). In this sense, the female nude can be understood as a figure who perpetually threatens to exceed the beautiful, threatening to transgress its ‘containment’. As Nead observes, ‘whereas the form of the beautiful is seen to lie in limitation (for example, in the contemplation of a framed picture), the sublime challenges this act of judgement by suggesting the possibility of form beyond limit’ (p. 26).

Nead draws on Foucault’s concept of biopolitics to delineate how the female nude has been subject to ‘containment’ and ‘regulation’ in Western art history. Following Foucault’s understanding of the body (1992, p. 10), Nead suggests this transformative pictorial process ‘can thus be understood as a means of containing femininity and female sexuality’ (p. 2). For example, Nead proposes that the pictorial ‘transformation of the female body into the female nude’ constitutes ‘an act of regulation’ (p. 6). In turn, that power is ‘constituted both through the production of knowledge concerning the body and through self-regulation, through the individual exercising control over the self’ (p. 10).¹³⁵ The regulatory discourses circumscribing the female nude extend to her ‘containment’ within the bounds of the pictorial frame; this framing also exerts a ‘regulatory’ force over the ‘wandering eye’ of ‘the potentially wayward viewer’ (p. 6). Nead’s analysis illuminates how regulations of the female body come to be reinscribed upon the corporeal site of the female nude.

¹³⁵ Here, Nead touches upon Foucault’s shift from ‘technologies of discipline’, as elaborated in the Introduction to the *History of Sexuality*, to the ‘technologies of the self’ as exemplified in *The Care of the Self* (1984).

Nead also applies this Foucauldian lens to Robert Mapplethorpe's photographic series of Lisa Lyon. Lyon won the first Women's World Pro Bodybuilding Championship in 1979¹³⁶ and is portrayed by Mapplethorpe in a series of striking poses, rendered in the Manichaeian monochrome characteristic of his portraiture. Nead notes the ways Mapplethorpe presents 'the female body, trimmed to its essential outline, promis[ing] new freedom and a healthy sexuality' (Nead, 1992, p. 10). Instead of a potentially emancipatory ideal of the female nude, Nead views Lyon's cultivated physique as a re-inscription of biopolitics upon the female body. The 'rigours of the workout signal both the need to conform to social ideals and the force of self-regulation, the exercise of power over oneself' (p. 10) thus Nead points to the ways in which the figure of Lyon, while presenting an emboldened female archetype, is also a portrayal of the 'containment of femininity. As Nead contends, 'The operations of power are thus not simply coercive, exercised from elsewhere over the individual, but are also self-regulatory and organized from within the subject' (p. 10).

Drawing on critical psychoanalytic framings, Nead considers the masculine drive to contain the female body as emerging from an 'unconscious' male 'lack'. Noting a striking likeness between the 'idealized forms of the male and female body' (1992, p. 18), Nead argues that the female nude is 'regulated' 'in order to make it conform to an ideal of the male body' (p. 18). In psychoanalytic terms, this drive towards 'regulation' emanates from masculine 'dread that the male body might itself revert to what it is feared may secretly be its own "female" formlessness' (p. 18). From this perspective, Mapplethorpe's depictions of Lyon express a

¹³⁶ International Federation of Bodybuilders Women's World Pro Championship, Los Angeles, June 16 1979. Mapplethorpe created over 150 images of Lyon, published in 1983 in the print collection *Lady: Lisa Lyon*.

masculine pathology expressing anxiety about the ‘lapsing female body’. The celebratory visual tone, while emphasising the corporeal prowess of Lyon, also functions as a ‘fetishistic’ restoration of the idealised male body as symbolic phallus. The female nude thus possesses greater critical relevance over the male nude, given its symbolic significance as a metaphor to consider issues of containment and boundaries (p. 18). I find Nead’s reading persuasive, but both the female nude and the female bodybuilder occupy positions at extremes of the representational spectrum of women; that is, the former as women as ‘sex object’, and the latter as ‘masculinised’ femininity. Both these figurative constructs are dependent on the ‘male gaze’—the scopic regime through which they are realised.

Gender scholar Emma Rees proposes the concept of the ‘new explicit’ to describe women artists who refuse the art/obscenity distinction in their work. Discussing the etymology of the ‘explicit’, Rees shows that the term has moved somewhat further away from its initial signification in Latin as ‘explicare’ meaning ‘to unfold’, to define its object in terms of extremity and severity (2018, p. 97). As Rees details, ‘It is a word often used to shock and sensationalise, having moved away from its etymology to become synonymous with “hard-core” or “full on”’ (p. 97). Rees examines how female artists who use their own bodies in performance art contexts are discussed.

American performance artist Carolee Schneemann caused controversy following her performance of ‘Interior Scroll’ in 1975. Drawing a paper scroll from her (menstruating) vagina, Schneemann read the scroll aloud to the assembled gallery audience. For Rees, the critical condemnation of Schneemann following this performance highlights a paradox—Schneemann’s

work is an instance of the ‘new explicit’ wherein a woman appears nude but the bodily performance is not governed by the erotic approval of the audience. As Rees sees it, ‘Schneemann is both subject and object within a framework of complex signs, controlled by her and existing without accountability to the needs or desires of anyone else’ (2018, p. 102).

Rees also suggests that advertising imagery presents the ‘nude’ female body as an enticement to consumption, but the ‘naked’ female exceeds and threatens. Female artists such as Schneemann possess agential capacity for self-representation on their own terms, subverting the regulatory structures of the female nude and thus the expectations of the attendant structuring ‘male gaze’—these ‘are revolting women, where “to revolt” entails a turning away from, and rejection of, the dominant images, discourses, and power dynamics that inhere in “hegemonic” pornography’ (Rees, 2018, p. 98). As Rees contends, their ‘bodily texts urge intellectual, not sexual, activity on the viewer’s behalf [...] encourag[ing] high-level conceptual engagement that transcends the dynamics of porn’ (Rees, 2018, p. 100). Reception of the new explicit may be met by a response of arousal in potential viewers: ‘but such arousal is not its primary aim’ (p. 100).

Rees’ argument is compelling but in her outline of ‘high-level conceptual engagement’, Rees reasserts the ideal viewer of Kantian aesthetic theory. The ‘cultural capital’ of the female body of the ‘new explicit’ is defined against the ‘sexually objectified’ pornographic body. Rees suggests that artistic intention removes indecency and/or obscenity. Instead I believe Schneemann’s work complicates standardised representations of the female nude, not so much through disavowing audience satisfaction, but rather, through the performative enactment of the abject. Feminist psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva defines the abject as the ‘viscous’ bodily fluids

such as '[u]rine, blood, sperm, excrement' (1980, p. 54). Kristeva's Lacanian psychoanalytic reading sees these markers of 'excess' (Nead, 1992, p. 26) 'show up in order to reassure a subject that is lacking its "own and clean self"' (1980, p. 54). Kristeva views the 'defilement' entailed within the abject as part of a symbolic process of reconstituting the self; the self thus marks itself against the abject through instinctual 'repulsion' and pathological disavowal (p. 65). In the example of Schneemann, the process of bringing the 'ob-scene on-scene', reveals the 'abjected' bodily fluid of menstrual blood. Schneemann's work thus dismantles a Kantian aesthetic appreciation of the 'contained' beauty of the female nude, subverting the 'regulatory' mechanisms of containment. Schneemann's work is thus doubly transgressive; though it opposes the 'quiet, contemplative pleasure' of the passive female nude, it also seemingly defers the 'form of excited arousal' elicited by the sexualised female body (Nead, 1992, p. 27).

These broader themes of representation, sexuality and the body will be discussed in relation to work by Cosey Fanni Tutti and Linder Sterling. To begin, I consider Tutti's work in the 1976 COUM Transmissions' 'Prostitution' show at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London (ICA), which music critic John Doran recently described as the 'most controversial post-war British art show'.¹³⁷ I explore Tutti's conceptual art practice and her sex work as an enactment of 'performative agency' (Butler, 2010) in her *Magazine Actions*: a series of pornographic centrefold features whose exhibition inspired a conservative backlash. Tutti's *Magazine Actions* present an interesting conundrum - on the one hand, Tutti was interested in and entered into pornography with avowedly critical aims; but on the other, her pornographic modelling conforms to the beauty conventions traditionally found in soft-core publications.

¹³⁷ See Doran's interview with Tutti for his British Master's series for Noisey (Doran, 2017).

I then turn to examples of Linder Sterling's photomontages from the late-1970s, which draw on pornographic imagery in an overtly feminist art practice, thus contrasting with Tutti's disavowal of feminism. Sterling's early-1980s work also takes a performative approach to the female nude, drawing on Lisa Lyon's bodybuilding as a source of inspiration. The chapter sketches the complex interstices between criticality and arousal within the pornographic female body.

Part 2: 'Prostitution'

Cosey Fanni Tutti is a singular figure within both punk and porn contexts. As a founding member of the art collective, COUM Transmissions, as well as pioneering industrial group Throbbing Gristle, her work has explored the limits of moral correctness, the barriers of cultural codes surrounding sex, and transgression as a form of socio-cultural critique. Founded by Genesis P-Orridge in Hull in 1969, COUM was an artistic vehicle through which to foster links with other artists.¹³⁸ During the early 1970s, Tutti disseminated her artworks through postal services as 'mail art'. These art pieces utilised various forms of collage and images from an array of available media, including pornographic magazines. Not content with merely deploying other women's nude bodies in her work, Tutti sought to expand COUM's ethos of free expression. As feminist scholar Eleanor Roberts explains:

Rather than using other people's bodies from existing magazines, Tutti sought to make the work more 'complete' by going out into the sex industry and making the images herself, before recuperating and returning them to her collage and mail art (2020, p. 257).

¹³⁸ Tutti's tumultuous relationship with P-Orridge was detailed in her 2017 autobiography, *Art Sex Music*.

These became Tutti's *Magazine Actions* and proved contentious.

In 1976, COUM Transmissions were invited by London's ICA to host 'Prostitution', a retrospective featuring pictures and props amassed from the group's assorted 'actions'. For the exhibit, Tutti installed 41 features ranging from centrefold to harder material—published in British pornographic magazines from 1973-76 (*Talkhouse Podcast*, 2017). These were displayed alongside her used tampons encased in glass boxes and variously arranged, as part of P-Orridge's *Tampax Romana* series of sculptures (Worley, 2017, p. 184). A double-ended dildo covered in 5-inch-long nails used in her 1975 'action' *Filth* with Genesis P-Orridge was also exhibited.

The opening party of 'Prostitution' proved riotous. Attended by members of the London punk scene such as Siouxsie Sioux, as well as the ICA's high art crowd, Throbbing Gristle appeared alongside short-lived first wave punk band LSD.¹³⁹ A performance by a stripper named 'Shelley' was also in the line-up, presided over by transvestite doorman 'Java' (Roberts, 2020, p. 249) and sex workers were invited to discuss their profession in a Q & A format. The event is striking for its cross-over between the London punk milieu, the avant-garde of COUM, and high-art crowd (Genesis P-Orridge recalls Vivienne Westwood sold clothes in the foyer of the gallery); it was also documented as part of the emergence of punk with a film crew present at the opening proceedings (P-Orridge, 2001).

¹³⁹ LSD, later renamed Chelsea, were fronted by Gene October. They were formed in 1977, reportedly put together so that John Krivine could have a band for his own clothing boutique, BOY, to rival McLaren's Sex Pistols. The early line-up featured Billy Idol (né William Broad) on bass guitar, before he went on to form Generation X.

October 19th-26th 1976



SEXUAL TRANSGRESSIONS NO. 5

PROSTITUTION

COUM Transmissions:- Founded 1969. Members (active) Oct 76 - P. Christopherson, Cosy Fanni Tutti, Genesis P-Orridge. Studio in London. Had a kind of manifesto in July/August Studio International 1976. Performed their works in Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels; Musee d'Art Moderne, Paris; Galleria Borgogna, Milan; A.I.R. Gallery, London; and took part in Arte Inglese Oggi, Milan survey of British Art in 1976. November/December 1976 they perform in Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art; Deason Gallery, Chicago; N.A.M.E. Gallery, Chicago and in Canada. This exhibition was prompted as a comment on survival in Britain, and themselves.

2 years have passed since the above photo of Cosy in a magazine inspired this exhibition. Cosy has appeared in 40 magazines now as a deliberate policy. All of these framed form the core of this exhibition. Different ways of seeing and using Cosy with her consent, produced by people unaware of her reasons, as a woman and an artist, for participating. In that sense, pure views. In line with this all the photo documentation shown was taken, unbidden by COUM by people who decided on their own to photograph our actions. Now other people saw and recorded us as information. Then there are zeroes of our press cuttings, media write ups, COUM as raw material. All of them, who are they about and for? The only things here made by COUM are our objects. Things used in actions, intimate (previously private) assemblages made just for us. Everything in the show is for sale at a price, even the people. For us the party on the opening night is the key to our stance, the most important performance. We shall also do a few actions as counterpoint later in the week.

PERFORMANCES: Wed 20th 1pm - Fri 22nd 7pm
Sat 23rd 1pm - Sun 24th 7pm

INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS LIMITED
NASH HOUSE THE MALL LONDON S.W.1. BOX OFFICE Telephone 01-930-6393

Figure 3.1: Exhibition Flyer: 'Prostitution' (1976).

The performance element of 'Prostitution' is significant—the exhibition flyer sketches COUM's conception of the show as a critique of the art establishment: 'Everything in the show is for sale at a price, even the people. For us the party on the opening night is the key to our stance, the most important performance' (Figure 3.1). Titling the exhibition 'prostitution' invoked the exploited sex worker as a critical lens through which to consider the exhibits. P-Orridge claimed, 'We decided that all art is ultimately prostitution. Basically all work is prostitution [...] you sell skills for money, so we called the show 'Prostitution' as a satirical comment on the art world' (P-Orridge, 2001). Tutti's recollection of the exhibition expands upon

this reading in relation to her *Magazine Actions*, positing their importance within the show as a guiding conceptual methodology. As Tutti explains,

The title of the exhibition was ‘Prostitution’, not only as a direct reference to my first appearance in a sex magazine, as well as my subsequent sex magazine works, but it also represented our thoughts about the art world—talent being touted and sold for a price, the relationship between high art and money (2017, p. 155).

The willingness of the group to position themselves as ‘prostituted’ subjects signals a knowing interrogation of the complex dynamics between art production and spectatorship, even if this self-titling jars with politically correct terminology.

The flyer indicates how COUM, and Tutti specifically, sought to overturn existing power dynamics - the exhibition staged ‘Different ways of seeing and using Cosey with her consent, produced by people unaware of her reasons, as a woman and an artist, for participating’ (Figure 3.1). This description draws particular attention to the critical dynamics of Tutti’s artistic practice—her porn modelling as a ‘deliberate policy’, a foray into the porn industry for her own personal reasons. By emphasising Tutti’s agency and her consent to be photographed nude for the purposes of pornography, COUM address the charges levelled by second-wave feminism at the exploitative nature of the porn industry, particularly their characterisation of the vulnerable female body exploited by malicious pornographers. This was a bold statement to make, made bolder by its assertion of Tutti’s pleasure as within her control, on a level equal to her male counterparts. Regarding her ‘deliberate policy’, Tutti details the processes of presenting her porn modelling as her ‘action’: ‘I extracted all the images of myself and the associated text from each

one—those pages were my “action”, to be framed as my work, thereby subverting the “male gaze” (2017, p. 199).

The show sparked widespread controversy; conservatives were quick to voice their disgust with the show and its contents.¹⁴⁰ Nicholas Fairbairn, Conservative MP for Kinross and Western Perthshire, was outraged at what he termed the ‘porn-show’ (Peacock, 1976, p. 3; quoted in Roberts, 2020), specifically targeting Tutti’s *Magazine Actions*.¹⁴¹ Fairbairn famously branded the group ‘the wreckers of civilisation’ in a parliamentary speech. The show was shut down after four days ‘following charges of obscenity by Crown Commissioners’ (Fusco, 2012, p. 7).¹⁴²

Eleanor Roberts’ recent study sees ‘Prostitution’ as an infamous event that ‘continues to contribute greatly to conceptions (or mythologies) of the ICA as a place of radical experimentation in the 1970s and beyond’ (Roberts, 2020, p. 244). In Roberts’ detailed analysis of Tutti’s *Magazine Actions*, she describes the ‘porn-as-art-project’ as a part of a lineage of pioneering feminist art practice in the mid-to-late 1970s. Noting the interconnected nature of ‘Tutti’s harnessing of sex and sex work’, and its emergence ‘alongside the punk-related aesthetics developed by COUM’ (2020, p. 248), Roberts points to the ways in which Tutti’s ‘*Magazine Actions* enables entirely different representations of gendered agency which complicates existing narratives of ‘1970s’ feminism’ (p. 248).

¹⁴⁰ Recollecting the event, P-Orridge details inviting the mainstream Fleet Street press for their first vision of ‘punk and industrial’ (P-Orridge, 2001).

¹⁴¹ Fairbairn’s opprobrium towards COUM and the exhibition is particularly ironic given the allegations of sexual abuse levelled at him following his death in 1995 (McKay, 2017, n.p.).

¹⁴² In this filmed interview, P-Orridge recalls that Ted Little, then-director of the ICA, encouraged COUM to squat the gallery, which they promptly did. P-Orridge claims that the show ran for the duration of its allotted 6-8 weeks (P-Orridge, 2001).

Tutti herself has always maintained a distance from organised feminism, explaining in *Art Sex Music* that her involvement with the sex industry was antagonistic to second-wave feminism. As Tutti recalls:

As a willing participant I'd placed myself in a position to be used this way, and right in the line of fire of 1970s feminism [...] I didn't identify with 1970s feminism: it didn't speak for me or the diverse and complex nature of women (2017, p. 172).

Tutti's critique of second-wave feminism bristles against the arguments of feminists such as Catharine A. MacKinnon and Elisabeth Anderson, who viewed sex workers as complicit with patriarchal subjection and their own sexual objectification. As MacKinnon argues, 'Objectification makes sexuality a material reality of women's lives, not just a psychological, attitudinal, or ideological one' (1982, p. 539) and as Verkerk summarises, it makes 'female desirability [...] the highest good for women' (2016, p. 155).

Drawing on post-structuralist theory, Verkerk considers how women navigate their reification as 'sexual objects' in late-capitalism and its conditions of precarity. Recognising sexual objectification often shapes women's 'values and aspirations towards becoming desirable under a male gaze' she asserts that 'not all forms of objectification are harmful or wrong' (Verkerk, 2016, p. 157) and that desirability 'is perceived as a way in which to access greater freedom: it is a bartering tool, a commodity accessible through products that women buy' (p. 155). From a 'sex worker perspective', Verkerk argues that

recognizing the predominance of sexual objectification and learning how to perform that objectification with irony, self-empowerment, or a sex-positive approach that destigmatizes female sexuality can be a path towards greater agency for some women (2016, p. 157).

Context matters as Verkerk emphasises sex work can function as a ‘chosen form of income, or a location for political change’ (p. 157). These insights bear striking resemblance to Tutti’s own testimony of entering into and engaging in sex work:

Yes, by doing sex work I was contributing to, but not necessarily endorsing, the thing [feminists] were fighting against. But I was no ‘victim’ of exploitation. I was exploiting the sex industry for my own purposes, to subvert and use it to create my own art (p. 172).

Tutti’s deliberate staging in ‘Prostitution’ can be understood, then, as an exploration of ‘reification’, enacting forms of ‘performative agency’ (Butler, 2010) that problematise the ‘social-ontological naturalization of particular ways of being in this world, as a woman or a worker’ (Butler quoted in Verkerk, 2016, p. 158). Thus even if subject to patriarchal market structures of capitalism (the sex industry, in Tutti’s case) women can still act in shaping structuring conditions. Verkerk argues ‘the market is open to being shaped by many different factors including social institutions and structures of meaning, *individual* speech acts, and technological networks’ (Butler, 2010, pp. 148–150; quoted in Verkerk, 2018, p. 158).

Verkerk reads Butler’s theory through Haraway’s concept of the cyborg to move beyond the classificatory essentialism inherent in feminism that seeks to treat ‘women’ as a homogenous social body ‘subsum[ing] the diverse experiences of women under one banner [...] and assimilating the ‘polyvocal’ into one feminist voice without admitting to it’ (2018, p. 160). My discussion of Tutti deploys this critical understanding of the post-human, as a performative

category blurring identity boundaries, and enacting agency through the fragmentation of gender norms. I draw on Roberts' reading, but differ on her privileging of Tutti's *Magazine Actions* as the locus of criticality in 'Prostitution'.

Cosey Complex

In 2010, a one-day event at the ICA, *Cosey Complex*¹⁴³ celebrated Tutti's unique work, with fourteen critical responses to the theme of 'Cosey', as a concept and methodological practice. In conversation with Maria Fusco, the artist and academic behind the event, Tutti explained the importance of her persona: 'Cosey is a concept [...] It is what I am and what I do. It's not just a name' (Fusco, 2012, p. 11). Tracing the origins of her *nom de plume* from a mail-art exchange with American artist Robin Klassnick, Tutti explained he 'nicknamed me, Cosey Fanni Tutti [...] Later on, when I found out what it means, 'as all women should be', to me it was great [*sic*]' (p. 11).¹⁴⁴ Simon Ford, has suggested 'This adoption of a pseudonym was an early instance of Tutti's interest in masquerade and the construction of multiple feminine identities' (1998, p. 3).

The 'universal' element in Klassnick's addition to Cosey—which itself was an abbreviation of Cosmosis, P-Orridge's original nickname for Tutti – provided her with a 'new identity [...] it was almost like a new life for me' (Fusco, 2012, p. 13). Tutti's *Magazine Actions* embodied multiple personas wherein Tutti inhabited the pseudonyms assigned to her in centrefold shoots, the erotic characters of 'Tessa from Sunderland' or 'Gayle the sizzling swinger' (Worley, 2017, p. 185). As Tutti herself states, 'Relinquishing control of my image and

¹⁴³ The event took place in 27 March 2010.

¹⁴⁴ Ford provides further contextual detail here: 'In 1972, Tutti adopted her new name, a corrupted version of Mozart's 1790 opera *Così fan tutte*' (1998, p. 3).

identity was an important part of the project, and that intrigued me as much as the experience of the process of co-creating those images' (2016, p. 171). These performative strategies of embodiment confirm for Roberts that 'Prostitution' marked the culmination of Tutti's *Magazine Actions*, revealing 'a long-term project by which the pornographers, consumers and art patrons all became labourers of the artist's vision' (2020, p. 260). Worley suggests that

Though she recognised the exploitative nature of pornography, Cosey also claimed to uncover more complex power relations between the performers, audience and producer. In particular, she noted differences between live performance and the reproduction of codified media images (p. 185).

Further, Roberts suggests we might think of the series as 'site specific works' (2020, p. 260), which offer a 'rich visual time capsule of the blatant 1970s sexism that [Tutti] lived through' (Tutti, 2017, p. 340; quoted in Roberts, 2020, p. 260).



Figure 3.2: Tutti as ‘Gayle the Sizzling Swinger’.

However, Roberts also rescues these works through Tutti’s ‘artist’s vision’ which she says wrested her image from the structures of sexual objectification inherent in porn through the critical framing of the ‘Prostitution’ show. Thus Roberts considers the *Magazine Actions* ‘art’, according them meaning within their positioning as an art exhibit. The public furore following the opening caused the gallery to place the magazines in a locked cabinet, watched over by a security guard, and only available to be viewed by members upon request. The irony of this was not lost on Tutti, who took some perverse pleasure in her features being ‘returned’ to their ‘original position’ (Ford, 1999, p. 6.26 quoted. in Roberts, 2020, p. 252).

Roberts observes that any offence caused by the punk rock rabble at the show's opening was insignificant to the ways Tutti's body pushed the limits of the institutional art-space. The purposeful relegation of Tutti's features demonstrates the British art institution's 'containment' and 'regulation' of the female nude as 'obscene'. Recalling Nead's argument that the female nude is a metaphor of 'containment': 'a means of containing femininity and female sexuality' (1992, p. 15) the 'containment' of Tutti's actions returned the 'obscene' to 'off-scene' (Williams, 2004, p. 3). Tutti's embodiment of the 'pornographic body' highlights how proscriptions are placed upon the body, calling into question issues of consent, commodity, and censorship by disrupting the transformative process through which 'the base matter of nature [is] elevated [in] forms of culture and the spirit' (Nead, 1992, p. 15). It is precisely the status of Tutti's centrefolds as 'porn' that marks their criticality.

For Roberts, Tutti's embodiment of various personas is a performance, characterised as 'propelling oneself into a situation as a "persona" [...] with ulterior motives unknown to those who would otherwise populate the infiltrated area' (2020, p. 257). Tutti certainly wanted to expose the ways porn represented her (women) *and* to work with porn *as* her medium to explore her own relationship to the 'male gaze'. As Tutti states,

I wanted to get to know the sex industry from within, to speak from first-hand experience [...] to push against existing expectations and my own inhibitions, and to understand all the complex nuances and trials it imposed on everyone in that business, including the target market (p. 172).

Thus Tutti accepted her work *as* porn, and that her various 'personas' all shared a common denominator: 'Whether I was "Tessa from Sunderland", "Slippery Milly from Picadilly",

“Geraldine”, “Susie” or “Cosey”, I was just like the other girls, sexual fantasy material for masturbation’ (2017, p. 171). This underscores the play with identity in the discussion of ‘Cosey’ as concept above, and her nomenclature: ‘as all women should be’. It is then, important to recognise her work as pornography, and her inhabiting the role ‘just like the other girls’ (p. 171) as a means of perhaps accessing ‘greater freedom’ (Verkerk p. 155).



Figure 3.3: Tutti as ‘Tessa from Sunderland’.

But as Worley frames it, any potential for Tutti’s ‘performatives’ to challenge or re-structure societal and artistic expectations ultimately fall short given the nature of the medium. As Worley puts it, ‘Where performing allowed Cosey to retain agency in her actions and ability to fulfil or dispel the viewer’s fantasy/illusion, transferral to film or print saw her identity

appropriated and objectified' (2017, p. 185). Worley's assessment of the meaning fixing properties of film or print invokes the art/obscenity distinction where performance art has the edge over pornography. Certainly Tutti's pornographic modelling is at odds with the free-expression and creative agency of COUM's performance art—for the photographers of Tutti's centrefolds, her détournement probably mattered very little and certainly didn't get in the way of their images selling magazines and titillating readers.

These issues also surface in *Sexual Transgression No. 5*, the portrait of Tutti featured on the exhibition flyer. Roberts suggests this image is 'clearly informed by machinations of commercial pornography in a specific, historical location of late-twentieth-century capitalism' (2020, p. 256) particularly in Tutti's 'immediately recognizable visual lexicon of "the whore"' (p. 254). The image is a re-staging of Eduoard Manet's 'Olympia' (first exhibited at the 1865 Paris Salon). Manet's 'Olympia' sparked controversy in its day—the portrait clearly indicated his subject's profession as a prostitute—and Tutti's choice of Manet is significant, in its clear allusions to the title and overall theme of the exhibition, and in its critical intent. Berger describes Manet's image as 'a turning point' in representations of the female nude to question the very 'category of the nude' and thus its 'unequal relationship' of power—Olympia is a woman, 'cast in the traditional role, beginning to question that role, somewhat defiantly' (Berger, 1972, p. 63).

Tutti's *Sexual Transgressions No. 5* augments the defiance of Manet's portrait bringing a certain ambiguity and skewing any reading of the image as simply a product of objectification and its patriarchal dynamics. Her costume of dark sunglasses and fetish waistcoat construct

defiance, as her glasses suggest a ‘returning gaze’ (Roberts, 2020, p. 254), while simultaneously shielding Tutti from the demands of the ‘male gaze’. Her bare crotch is exposed, but does not appear exposed to the camera to satisfy male desire; the overall mis-en-scene suggests the presentation of Tutti on her own terms, a challenge to the idea of the ‘new explicit’ outlined above. That is, Tutti’s pose is a ‘performative iteration’ in accordance with the gestural codes of centrefold pornography, but plays with those codes, suggesting their fragmentation through imperfect imitation. As Verkerk notes, ‘performatives as reiterations inevitably involve failure since they are not exact copies’ (2016, p. 160).

Tutti subverts the ‘art historical conventions of the smoothed, rounded and ethereal nudes of the long-stretching canon’ and thus prompts ‘renewed debate around the extent to which different representations of ‘prostitution’ resist stable classification (e.g. along lines of class, sexual agency and gendered hierarchies of labour’ (Roberts, 2020, p. 254). Roberts’ reading is particularly penetrating here, foregrounding the intertwined industrial, technological and commercial pornography at work in the poster image ‘which directly inform or signify the sexiness of the image’ (p. 257). Tutti’s body becomes the site of disruption, repudiating ‘the unitary, “innocent” and organic nude, as well as notions of reproductive sex in favour of a sexual body produced, in part, by (technological) replication’ (p. 257).

Thus Tutti’s *Magazine Actions* bear some relation to the post-human feminist politics articulated by Donna Haraway in her ‘Cyborg Manifesto’ (1985). Roberts suggests there are cyborgian qualities in Tutti’s gender-blurring which challenges ‘notions of a feminism based on universalizing assumptions of natural and “unified” identities’ (Roberts, 2020, p. 257). The post-

human assemblage is offered in a ‘body in a state of permanently unclosed construction’ (2020, p. 257). As Roberts contends:

In her image of the “prostitute”, qualities of partiality, dualism, contradiction and ironic corruption are amplified by the ontological questions prompted by the work (which are impossible to entirely resolve) about how to classify such representations. (pp. 256-7).

Roberts identifies Tutti as ‘an early precursor’ of the ‘anti-essentialist body’ drawing on Haraway’s cyborg as a conception of a ‘a new “self”’, which constitutes ‘a model for activism of a social-feminist politics that looks to biotechnologies and communication technologies to redesign bodies and social relationships through the shaping of information’ (p. 159).

Verkerk also stresses the importance of critical techniques such as irony and satire to ‘cyborg performativity’ and as Verkerk outlines, ‘Haraway’s cyborg feminist rejects the notion of salvation and views herself as embedded in the world’ (Verkerk, 2016, p. 158). This certainly resonates with Tutti’s rejection of the feminist label, her creative practice asserted as a matter of individual agency that ‘employ[ed] the languages and methods of the hegemonic order, but with a satirical performance that upsets its foundations’ (p. 158). This strategic harnessing of the objectifying impulses and their disruptive collection in the *Magazine Actions* ‘ma[de] visible a process of corporeal composition (whether hybrid, cyborg or another pluralistic mode of understanding identity)’ through desire to bring her own image into the “cut and paste” collage and mail artworks she was already creating with images of other women from commercial pornography’ (p. 257).

This argument is compelling, and could be applied to the other technologies of sex deployed by COUM for example in the ‘gender blurring’ exhibited in *Filth* (1974) intended to expose gender interdependency and deconstruction. ‘Prostitution’ showcased a ‘double-ended dildo’ used by Tutti and P-Orridge in their *Filth* performance, an ‘action’ which corresponds with Paul B. Preciado’s conception of ‘dildo-tectonics’ as a ‘prosthesis’ augmenting the human body as a process towards gendered deconstruction. Breaking both rules of ‘compulsory heteronormativity’ (Rubin and Butler 1994, p. 66) and the ‘heterosexual matrix’ (Preciado, 2018) the dildo was used to anally penetrate P-Orridge—questioning dynamics of agency and highlighting mutuality of pleasure. Furthermore, the object itself points to the limits of transgression: the central beam of the dildo is covered in spikes signalling the ‘limit experience’—to use Bataille’s term—of the boundaries between ‘pleasure and pain’ as ‘jouissance’. The deconstruction of subject/object boundaries, the decentering of heteronormative sexual intercourse and the prosthetic as sexual technology all invoke ideas of the abject.

In Tutti’s shoot for ‘The Office Cleaner’ (Figure 3.4), ambiguous bodily language occupies the visual mise-en-scene. Taking some of the ‘predictable, tacky (bordering on absurd) sexual personas’ (Roberts, 2020, p. 258) ‘The Office Cleaner’ is a subtle subversion of pornographic codes overturning the sexual ‘availability’ of the model. In Roberts’ view, this feature is notable for Tutti’s attempt to enact a more emboldened vision of female sexuality that cannot be dismissed as narcissistic (p. 259). Tutti’s ‘ambiguous body language’ questions ‘her supposed availability, as she is concealing while also exhibiting herself [...] This gives an appearance of strength, but it also looks as though she hugs herself’ (p. 259). As Tutti reminds

us, ‘I was transgressing rules—feminist ones included. I live my life as a “person”, seeing all options as being equally open to me and everyone else. I refuse to be defined or confined by my gender’ (Tutti, 2017, p. 172).



Figure 3.4: Tutti as ‘The Office Cleaner’.

Roberts’ attempts to recuperate Tutti’s work as feminist reads the codes of Tutti’s magazine features, for example, the placing of her arm on her leg, as a gesture of her empowerment. But by privileging masculine gestures as empowerment, Roberts effectively undermines Tutti’s understanding of her own femininity as empowerment in/of itself. This attempt to read feminist ‘defiance’ into the signs of Tutti’s modelling poses is somewhat limiting—the exhibition of the *Magazine Actions* is more significant than the individual images

themselves—Tutti’s modelling does not overtly overturn standardised pornographic codes. Yet whatever subtleties of pose she strikes, it makes (according to Žižek (2014)) no difference to the erotic desire of the unconscious. So that, striking a more confident or feminist pose may also be viewed as desirable. Thus, even if Tutti’s images articulated a more emboldened vision of the female centrefold, her actions do not overturn their location within the representational field which structures the processes of desire. Tutti does not overturn the ‘male gaze’ as such, but rather, plays the ‘male gaze’ back to itself, making visible the operations of power which regulate pornography within the service of male desire. When her actions were removed from display, and returned to their symbolic place ‘under the counter’, their ‘containment’ illustrates the signifying power of the obscene, and its threat to normativity.

As this section has demonstrated, Tutti’s innovative contributions to considerations of objectification and the category of the nude remain prescient to the nexus of power and pleasure through which feminism understands portrayals of the female body. In particular, Tutti’s *Magazine Actions* serve to bring to bear questions pertaining to the boundaries regulating the female nude, in terms of objectification and exploitation. Tutti’s work in this period recalls Carole Vance’s theorisation of the female desire. As Vance contends: ‘The hallmark of sexuality is its complexity: its multiple meanings, sensations, and connections. It is all too easy to cast sexual experience as either wholly pleasurable or dangerous; our culture encourages us to do so’ (Vance, 1984, p. 5). Rather than presenting a unified conception of the female nude body in pornographic contexts—that is, as either objectified or emancipated—Tutti’s work resounds for its ability to hold the tension of contradictions, thereby speaking to a ‘punk sensibility’ underpinning her work in this period.

I now turn to another artist of the period, to explore how Linder Sterling's photomontage critiqued sexism, taking specific aim at essentialist, patriarchal understandings of the female body.¹⁴⁵ Through both commercial practice and performance Sterling is remembered for her 'disturbing' gender play as a critique of female sexual objectification (Worley, 2017, p. 183).

Part 3: Linderism

Linder Sterling's association with punk has defined assessments of her career – she was present at the Sex Pistols' second gig in Manchester in 1976, where she met Howard Devoto and Pete Shelley (Tobin, 2020, p. 39), a fortuitous meeting, leading to Sterling's contribution to the *Orgasm Addict 7*", and Worley stresses punk opened up spaces for creative collaboration and, particularly for Linder, 'to present her work and her politics' (Worley, 2017, p. 183).

Sterling was one of many female artists to emerge during first wave punk and keen to embrace punk's re-organisation of established gender norms and comportment. Sterling recalls punk as important to her formative work. 'Just like the hero in the fairy story who finally triumphs by wearing his cloak of invisibility,' she writes, 'so punk was for me a form of transformative raiment' (Sterling, 2016, p. 18). Yet, unlike many of her female punk contemporaries, Sterling embraced feminism as central to her critical practice. For Sterling, significant feminist texts, including Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) and her 'monthly bible', feminist magazine *Spare Rib* (Sterling, 2016, p. 33), awakened her to an international movement of women artists. Through those texts she was 'made aware of women

¹⁴⁵ Ludus' abrasive track 'Anatomy is Not Destiny' (2002) critiques Freud's assertion that 'Anatomy is Destiny'.

working to find their own vocabulary—artistic, personal and political’ (p. 33). Punk served as a catalyst that enabled Sterling to pursue her creative endeavours, rejecting an identikit model of womanhood or women as ‘sexual objects’.

Amy Tobin notes this identification with feminism set Sterling apart from punk contemporaries such as ‘The Slits, and Vivienne Westwood, who saw women’s liberation as middle-class, sincere and censorious’ (Tobin, 2020, p. 43). Sterling’s embrace of the feminist tag did not mean participating in organised feminism, such as the Women’s Liberation Movement (2020, p. 43); Sterling’s feminism seems more aligned to the second-wave maxim ‘the personal is political’. Tobin suggests social class was a defining element of Sterling’s upbringing, filtering her feminist politics through a ‘Northern, post-punk and white working-class context’ (p. 44). These factors shaped Sterling’s uptake of the possibilities she saw in punk ‘for remaking the trappings of femininity for a different kind of glamorous embodiment’ (p. 44). Sterling certainly foregrounds the ‘transformative’ impulse that emerged with punk, staged in its stylised conflicts between youth culture and the status quo. Worley (2017) notes that

those women who came to punk with a more avowedly feminist perspective endeavoured to claim their own cultural spaces by, first, challenging sexist attitudes in punk and popular music generally and, second, forging new styles, languages and approaches to express female-centric concerns and experiences (p. 185).

Sterling’s photomontage epitomises her attempt to realise, in her own words, ‘a new vocabulary’ (O’Brien, 2002, p. 186), ‘to challenge received ideas [and] evade the strictures of classification and easy assimilation’ (Jones, 2002, n.p.). Peter Jones suggests Sterling’s ‘work

can be seen as a critique of the narrow gender stereotypes found in the mass media and the reified, commodity-saturated world of consumer society' (2002, n.p.).

The collage forms of Sterling's earliest works reference John Heartfield and Hannah Höch (during her work and association with Dada artists)¹⁴⁶. Sterling's *nom de plume* was inspired by German Dadaists such as Heartfield, who anglicised his name during WW1; in turn, Sterling took on a Germanic spelling of her name, Linder (Sterling, 2006, p. 17). Dada, the anti-war art ensemble gathered around the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich circa 1916, sought to provoke audiences through deconstructing established conventions of producing and consuming art. French art historian Marc Dachy explains, 'Dada embodied a new generation of artists and a radically new type of art, whose revolutionary nature [...] inevitably had to be seen not just as an aesthetic stance, but as a political one as well' (2006, p. 13). Dada poet Hugo Ball reduced language to phonetics through the absurdist forms of his sound 'poems', in which random sounds were performed by the poet.

As Dachy details, 'Far from aspiring to become the most advanced form of modern art, Dada aimed to accelerate a crisis [...] at the very heart of abstraction, which itself was highly critical of other forms of art' (p. 13). Dachy names Dadaist Raoul Hausman a pioneer of photomontage who saw its 'great propaganda potential' (2006, p. 36). Dawn Ades distinguishes photomontage from collage by its 'reaction against oil painting, which is essentially unrepeatable, private and exclusive' (1976, p. 13). Photomontage seeks to subvert this tradition,

¹⁴⁶ Other notable female Dada artists included Emmy Hennings.

through its use of the ‘primary structuring materials of the picture’ which engender a ‘provocative dismembering of reality’ (p. 13).

In his recent account, punk scholar Ian Trowell has reflected on scholarly comparisons between Sterling’s *Untitled* and Hannah Höch’s *Das Schöne Mädchen* (1920) (Roberts, 2018, pp. 170-1) (Yedgar, 2007, p. 174) as sharing ‘an isolated female position’ (Trowell, 2020, p. 12) in a ‘cultural scene dominated by heterosexual male voices’ (Yedgar, 2007, p. 174). Trowell links Gee Vaucher’s use of montage epitomised in the album sleeve for Crass’s *The Feeding of the 5000* (1978) and Sterling’s photomontage, as constitutive of 1970s feminist art practice. It is worth distinguishing here between the different approaches utilised by these artists. Given that much of Vaucher’s work was hand-painted, her work appears to blur the lines of accepted understandings of montage. To clarify, montage is created by juxtaposing a series of elements in a single composition to create an artistic image, as is evident in the aforementioned Crass cover image. Collage, by contrast, is a composition of materials that are brought together on a single surface, appearing as an assemblage of images. Additionally, photomontage is the result of combining and/or overlapping of two or more images to create a composite image using photographic source materials. While Vaucher’s work appears to blend several of these elements—and indeed, these definitions themselves often overlap and blur discrete categorical understandings—I follow Trowell’s (2020) reading of Vaucher’s hand-painted work as montage (as opposed to photomontage), and its alignment with that artistic tradition.

Sterling’s work extends the form of photomontage in an effort to play out a ‘theme of transformation’ as a challenge hegemonic cultural conventions and social mores. Tobin

foregrounds Sterling's performative approach, tracing Sterling's influences to the avant-gardes of Russian Constructivism and Dada, both of which saw the 'engineer' as an idealised figure, whose cultural production operated in opposition to bourgeois values, and high-art traditions. Tobin notes the influence of Dada's idea of the artist as 'monteur' (2020, p. 42) which 'connected the artist to the mechanic or engineer and brought the issue of class back into view' (p. 42). As Tobin outlines, 'the relationship between art and life, as well as art and labour struggle in dada' were central to Sterling's practice (p. 39). Sterling's affinity with the 'engineer' served to 'refract the figure of the artist', enabling Sterling to embody and explore various gendered constructions of female roles in her creative practice (p. 39) and to 'convert the banal into the radical, the patriarchal into the feminist [and] the normal into the esoteric' (p. 39). Yet, as Tobin reminds us, 'Unlike the dadaists' celebration of modernity and the machine though, Linder's work—made in Manchester during the 1970s, when the city was entering into post-industrial decline—offered a view of the other side of modernity' (p. 42).

The Secret Public

Sterling's creative output flourished immediately after graduating from Manchester School of Art. Her friendship with Howard Devoto led to artistic collaborations, including her design of bespoke lingerie masks modelled by Devoto as part of a mock-advertisement titled *Limiting Accessories Ltd.* Sterling also designed the expressive 'grotesque' heads featured on the cover of *Magazines' Real Life* in 1978. And a collaboration with Jon Savage, for the one-off zine, *The Secret Public*, is a striking example of her early work:

It fully explored its dichotomies: coolly designed outer images covering angry, savage montages, black and white printing of lurid colour originals, women placed in bondage

but by their own design (or is that in itself a product of internalised oppression?), metropolises that offered opportunity and excitement at the same time as they ate you alive (Savage, 2006, p. 14)

The Secret Public could be read in line with Situationist strategies of détournement—Sterling’s found images and repurposing extracted the body from its origin in adult magazines and proposed a different perspective on the pornographic body; détournement a ‘trash’ aesthetic to repurpose it in a more avant-garde context.



Figure 3.5: Front cover of *The Secret Public* (1978).

The *Orgasm Addict 7"* cover accomplishes a similar manoeuvre. In November 1977, Manchester punk band Buzzcocks released ‘Orgasm Addict’, their first single for United Artists. Penned by guitarist Pete Shelley (né Peter McNeish), the track marked his new role as lead

singer after the departure of Howard Devoto (né Howard Trafford).¹⁴⁷ Shelley's comical narration of teenage masturbatory compulsion was promptly banned by the BBC, though this censoring would subsequently cement its infamy as a punk anthem (Reynolds & Press, 1995, p. 306). Simon Reynolds and Joy Press see Shelley's 'masturbation anthem' as an expression of the 'Brutal demystification [that] was always at the heart of punk' (1995, p. 306) and the song's shunning of romantic desire was mirrored in its iconic sleeve.



Figure 3.6: Linder Sterling *Untitled* (1977).

¹⁴⁷ Devoto went on to become the founding member and vocalist of Magazine.

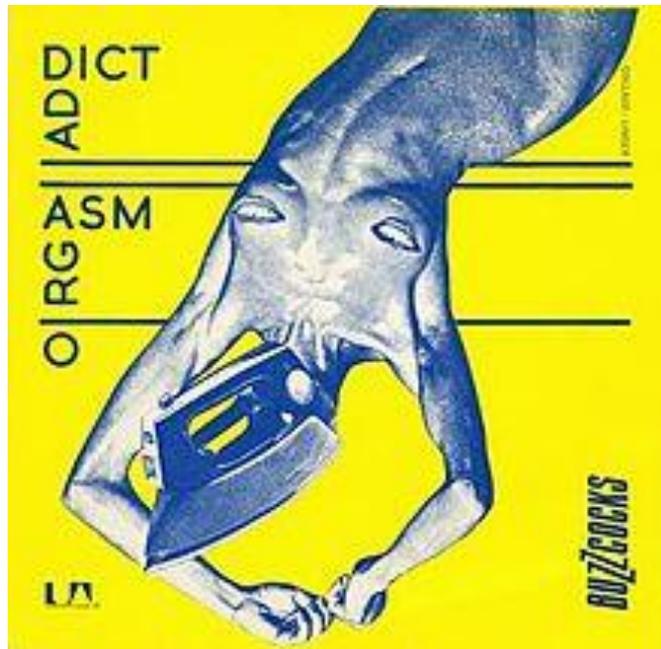


Figure 3.7: Front cover: Buzzcocks *Orgasm Addict 7*” (1977).

Sterling’s 1977 *Untitled* features a woman’s body, taken from the pages of a fitness magazine, naked from the waist upwards, arms stretching above her head in an alluring, albeit clearly contrived, fashion. The fantasy of the pornographic body, the willing sexual partner is obstructed by Sterling’s covering up of the central sites of sexual attraction—her head and breasts. Using collage to build an alternative image, in place of a face, the female body has an iron atop her neck - the addition of this banal domestic item makes the body surreal. Two smiling mouths, frozen in uncanny perma-grins cover the nipples of the female body. Two visual themes emerge: domesticity and sex. The first, comments on the home as the desired site of production for women; the second, the artificial construction of the female subject, to be consumed by a ‘male gaze’; a gaze to which the female viewer is ‘interpellated’. The smiling mouths, inverted and removed from their original, likely alluring, context, take on a sinister character, suggesting a chastisement of the consumer of such constructions of the female body. The iron, in turn,

equates the woman to a tool suggesting that women are merely viewed—and expected to view themselves—as domestic objects in the reproductive unit.

The satirical comment on the representations of women¹⁴⁸ was augmented by sleeve co-designer, Malcolm Garrett, who inverted Sterling's 'woman-machine' hybrid assemblage, rendering it in two-tone blue, offset against a vibrant yellow background (Figure 3.7). The re-design, Trowell argues 'adds a different charge to Linder's montage by offering a reading of the naked female as a hanging torso of meat, whereby the signification of the arms changes from an idealisation of physique and fitness to a limp lifelessness' (2020, p. 13). Trowell also observes that Sterling used a picture of the iron of approximate size to the phantom female head such that the figure should be read as both assemblage and satirical. The image has become synonymous with the 'visual codes of punk' (Bestley & Ogg, 2012, p. 9), and the utilisation of photomontage as biting social commentary.

Peter Jones has argued

Linder's 'fem-punk' photomontages can be seen as part of an agitational project informed by 1970s punk and radical feminism. Using the montage method to create grotesque scenes, they conflate and denaturalize the demeaning gender stereotypes prevalent in the mass media at the time (2002, n.p.).

Sterling's photomontage belongs to a series of 1970s reactions, as Angela McRobbie details, in second-wave feminist art practice—an 'angry repudiation' in which it was: 'necessary to condemn the false and objectified images of women in the mass media' (quoted in Jones, 2002,

¹⁴⁸ Sterling's close friendship with Devoto, who had taken up the role of band manager after resigning as vocalist, Sterling piece became the front cover image of EP.

n.p.). Not only were these images designed to make women attractive for male consumption, they also did this by pulling women into consumer culture since to achieve this ideal it was necessary to buy an endless stream of gadgets, devices and artificial aids (pp. 47-8).

Thus Jones argues that ‘Linder’s varied art practices should not be seen in isolation as separate schemes, but as intertextual, complementary strategies’; in his view, these strategies ‘challenge received ideas, evade the strictures of classification and easy assimilation’ (2002, n.p.). Her work can be seen to draw on an analytical theory of the ‘ideology stage’, informed by Althusser in which ideology is ‘a social practice that naturalizes society’s dominant values and meanings’ (Jones, 2002, n.p.). Jones frames Sterling’s work as a critique of Althusserian ‘interpellation’, advanced in mass culture through commodity advertising targeted to women. Sterling’s work can be considered amidst feminist practice that enacted a ‘paradigm shift’, in which artists focused further on ‘the systems that constructed the female rather than direct imaging’ (Lloyd, 2000, p. 40).

Anatomy is Not Destiny

In her *Works* collection, Sterling writes, ‘By 1978, I felt as if I had worked out everything that I could on paper. Through drawing, print, photomontage and photography, it seemed as though I had explored the dimensions of female sexuality to the limits of my interest in those media’ (p. 27). Turning to performance, as a member of the band Ludus Sterling wore a dress composed of raw cuts of meat at their 1982 gig at the Hacienda—a commentary on the objectified female body, viewed as a piece of meat for consumption by a carnal ‘male gaze’. The Hacienda launched many of the bands and DJ’s of the 1980s and its audiences often thought of themselves

as progressive (Sterling, 2006, p. 40). Recalling ‘Prostitution’, tampons were used to decorate the venue and the audience was handed raw meat as a critique of the venue’s habit of projecting soft-core pornography on its walls (p. 183). The performance finale went further when Sterling lifted her skirt to reveal a ‘12-inch’ black dildo, to the horror of the crowd.¹⁴⁹ Worley (2017) notes the thread of critical issues spanning Sterling’s early photomontage, through to her performances in the post-punk period:

Just as her collages revealed and détourned the gendered semiotics of advertising and the media, so Ludus challenged rock’s masculine conventions and obsessions. The music tended towards the abstract, almost free-form, avoiding linearity. Menstruation and female sexuality featured prominently; the band’s lyrics centred on questions of sexual politics and social anxieties, journeying through the blood, flesh, hair and sweat of a female body some way from the sanitised or disconnected media representations Linder had previously sliced and spliced (p. 183).

Early punk artists had targeted certain ‘pop’ acts as symbols of ‘the establishment’ they sought to challenge. So too did Sterling, who took a stab at 1981 Eurovision winners, Bucks Fizz. In their winning routine for ‘Making Your Mind Up’, the two male members of the four-piece ripped away the skirts of the female members, Sterling’s skirt reveal parodied this routine, but rather than reveal female lingerie as a object of desire, she projected the phallus back to the audience, as a way of overturning the power relations inscribed in the regime of the gaze. However, I would point out that a paradox underpins Sterling’s ‘Anatomy is not destiny’ stance. This stems from Sterling’s critique of female lack as premised on an identification with the masculine order through its impersonation. In this sense, while Sterling undermined heteronormative expectations, in psychoanalytic terms, her performance can be read, paradoxically, as upholding the Freudian contention of women as lack, which here, is mediated

¹⁴⁹ For Sterling’s comments on the legacy of the ‘meat dress’, see O’Hagan (2014).

by performing masculinity—centred around the symbolic phallus of the dildo—as a supplement to the masquerade of femininity. In such ways, Sterling’s performance does not fully escape the contradictions of the binary logics informing gender, but rather, actually comes to identify with masculinity through the disavowal of her femininity. In this way, Sterling never fully overturns the gendered binaries at which she takes aim. That being said, she does however succeed in disrupting audience expectations and normative notions of femininity.

One might re-read Sterling’s performance at this event in light of Worley’s insights on the differing strategies employed by women in punk. As Worley notes, the objective of many women ‘was to reverse/dramatize the power dynamics of sexual/gender relations or retain focus on exposing the underlying viscosity of the human body’ (2017, p. 185). Though Worley posits these strategies as mutually exclusive, I would argue that in their ‘reversal’ of ‘the power dynamics of sexual/gender relations’ that many female punks precisely exposed ‘the underlying viscosity of the human body’ (185).

Issues of regulation and containment can be seen in Sterling’s collaborative project with Swiss photographer Birrer in the early 1980s. A series of photographs taken of Sterling and published as *Pickpocket: SheShe Booklet*, extend her collage into portraiture incorporating materials such as cling film and bandages. Sterling’s interest in ‘found material’ sought to assert a performative break with the prescriptions of femininity, especially in her collected works ‘Myself as a Found Object’.

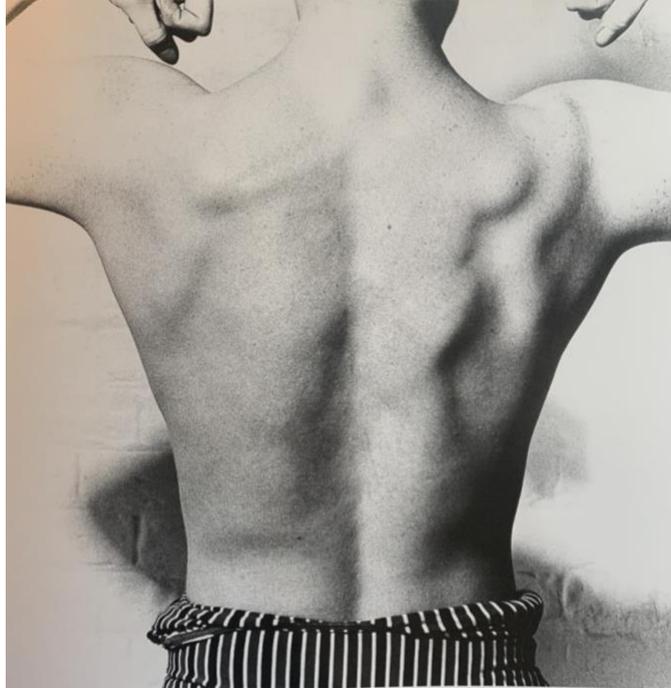


Figure 3.8: Sterling in 'strongman' pose. Photograph: Birrer (1983).

Recalling the earlier discussion of Mapplethorpe's Lisa Lyon series in which Nead suggests the 'formal constraints of the medium' and Mapplethorpe's 'disposition of light and shade, the surface and edges of the images' are an act of 'regulation'. Nead argues that Lyon's body becomes 'a kind of carapace, a metaphorical suit of armour' refixing the boundaries of femininity and 'controlling the potential waywardness of the unformalized female body' (1992, p. 15).

This conception of surface is crucial, reading image signifiers as 'signs' of 'regulation'. But a post-structuralist reading, as informed by Baudrillard's theorisation of 'simulation', sees the sign as standing in for or replacing the 'real'. The 'sign' has come to replace the lost 'original' in late-capitalism, fragmenting the stable value of the 'index' in 'simulated' society.

Signs can ‘fulfil the expectation of a consolatory image, appearances can be more valuable than the truth’ (Smit, 2015, p. 6). In this context, ‘surface’ becomes noteworthy, for example the glistening, tanned corporeal ‘gloss’ synonymous with the bodybuilder can offer ‘surface value’ (Smit 2015, p. 6) rather than fixity. Tobin describes an image in the *SheShe* series

Linder stands back to camera in a strongman pose to show the strong triangle of shoulders, her narrow waist and muscular arms. Although coincident with the 1980s shift to ‘body beautiful’, Linder does not pose her physique after the feminine aerobic slim, but instead emphasises her strength (2020, p. 45).

In Birrer’s photographs (Figure 3.8) Sterling’s body is not ‘greased and glossed’, and Tobin points out that ‘this is less from fear of bodily eruption than a challenge to this spectacle of containment’ (p. 45) seemingly assessing ‘shine’ as ‘containment’. Yet Tobin also observes that

bodybuilders rely on shine more than their female counterparts [...] the result of the fear of the feminine disorder, so that the male bodybuilder can exaggerate the limit point of his bodily containment – the skin – while the woman must hold back her ripped muscles in case they should actually spill out and be rendered irrevocably abject (p. 45).

We might recall Nead here, ‘But what may start out to be a parody of ideals of masculinity and a claim to a progressive image of femininity is easily reappropriated’ (1992, p. 15).

Pretty Girl Series

Considering Sterling’s *Pretty Girl* series from the late-1970s highlights these concerns. The images of black and white female models, whose heads are replaced by commodities from magazine advertising, purposefully obscures the expected sultry, grinning postures of centrefold models. The interventions literalise the patriarchal regime underpinning the domestic environment, and its veneration of domestic commodities. Jones sees these photomontages as

‘disjunctive assemblages of ill-fitting disparate parts, which present figures, on the whole ‘female’, as grotesque hybrids of truncated nudes and consumer goods set in domestic interiors’—a concerted critique of the vision of ‘nice house, nice family’ that bourgeois culture projects as an ‘ideal’ (Fisher, 2018, p. 125).

Sterling presents these commodities sans the para-texts of magazine advertising so that her images signal a refusal of the structures of commodity-culture which portray women as just another commodity for ready consumption. Juxtaposing the nude bodies of porn models with banal objects synonymous with the domesticated housewife, the result is both simple and complex, subverting the established discourses and patriarchal dynamics inherent in their ‘original’ porn contexts - as passive sexual objects. Sterling’s emphasis on disassociated and dissembled bodily object such as mouths and lips, uncton as ‘the metonymical signs for “woman” and male desire’ (Jones, 2002, n.p.) The photomontages from this period offer striking visual critique of the ‘male gaze’, and the sexual objectification of women within mass culture, as well as exploration of her own (female) sexuality.



Figure 3.9: Image from *Pretty Girl* series (1977).



Figure 3.10: Image from *Pretty Girl* series (1977).



Figure 3.11: Image from *Pretty Girl* series (1977).

Yet, in contrast to Tutti's exploration of the 'cyborgian assemblage', Sterling's conception of the body as 'automaton' is not a positive vision. She portrays humanity as the product of commodification, in which sexual reproductivity is rendered as productivity—exemplified in the symbolic transmogrification of the phallus into a Hoover (Figure 3.11). Moreover, her work can also be seen to portray humanity *becoming* commodified and essentialised as product through, and within, media representation(s), suggesting that humanity itself has become part of the machinic assemblage of late-capitalist circuits. In this way, Sterling's work uncannily foreshadows the increasing alienation of a posthuman humanity which

is increasingly reified and implicated within the machinations of consumerist technology. But in doing so, her artistic method of hand-made photomontage reflects the utilisation of an ‘outmoded’ creative practice as a means of ‘resistance’ to the computer-based developments her work anticipates.

Conclusion

In my discussion here, I have resisted the temptation to claim punk as Feminist which some contemporary feminist scholars, such as Roberts, have attempted to do. Tutti’s own repudiation of feminism within her work suggests I might be right to do so, but I have tried to ‘speak with’ the object; that is, rather than impose a reading of Tutti’s work as feminist art - despite drawing attention to comparative creative practices, through examples such as Schneemann—I remain cautious of the redemptive impulse, and the classification of Tutti’s actions as obviously Art.

The ‘Prostitution’ show staged a counter-discourse to institutionalised and organised knowledge which fixes avant-garde artistic practice within the canon via ‘aesthetic judgement’. Thus the exhibit and its opening night destabilised that hegemonic order and pornography was central to Tutti’s, and COUM’s, test of the limits, introducing the obscene as an aesthetic register that challenged artistic classifications. Tutti’s modelling shoots framed by their ‘working-class’ idioms were re-deployed and staged as art—placing ‘Prostitution’ in a lineage of avant-garde practice from Duchamp’s urinal onwards—to expose the hypocrisies of establishment artistic forms. The outrage that greeted the gallery opening was a deliberate means of critiquing the bourgeois, elitist sensibility that Tutti located within 1970s feminism.

The deliberate working-class thematic of the show, partly derived out of the nascent punk scene, challenged structures of social class and bourgeois production. Bourdieu's framework augmented my discussion of Foucauldian biopolitics to bring to light how themes of 'containment' have regulated the female nude. Both Tutti and Sterling mobilised the female 'punk body' to question the very distinctions upon which notions of taste discipline the figure of the female nude. Both artists re-deployed the female nude to challenge the discursive construction of the art/pornography boundary, producing performative counter-knowledge. Such ironies have been overlooked in the critical assessment of Tutti's work, for example in Roberts' suggestion that Tutti's distancing of herself from feminism was the result of her failure to 'understand it'.

Tutti's work still occupies an ambiguous space, located between the binary categorisations of 'art' and 'porn', 'low-brow' and 'high-brow', 'found object' and 'authored work'. But the significance of Tutti's *Magazine Actions* stems from their 'resistance' to categorisation that highlights the arbitrariness of 'distinctions of taste' and 'aesthetic judgement'.

Similarly I have shown that Sterling's attempts to transmogrify sexual representations, born out of the feminist interpretation that porn is patriarchal domination (Dworkin), highlights the obscene signifying power of pornography. Sterling's work retains the obscene charge of porn in the same ways that stickers used on front covers of adult magazines both censor intimate 'erotogenic' zones, and draw attention to their explicitness. Sterling's own disavowal of her work as pornography nonetheless echoes Roberts' feminist readings which assert the production of 'art' as more than just shock.

In the following chapter I detail ways in which underground post-punk film staged pornographic scenes as deliberate transgressive practice. The Cinema of Transgression also refused the label of pornography yet nonetheless staged pornographic scenes for their own ends, as a reclamation of female desire.

Chapter 4: ‘Manhattan Love Suicides’: No Wave and The Cinema of Transgression

In his contribution to *Punk Rock: So What? The Cultural Legacy of Punk*, writer David Kerekes traces a brief history of punk film. Kerekes points out that, despite the widespread cultural influence of punk, its filmic representation onscreen is noticeably undernourished when compared with the cinematic corpus inspired by previous post-war youth cultures. The 1950s stands as a resounding example in this regard; the emergence and popularisation of rock n’ roll being coterminous with the success of films such as *Rock Around the Clock*, released in 1956, in which Bill Haley and his Comets showcased the latest youth trend through its music, fashion style and dance routines. However, Kerekes contends that when punk broke, ‘filmmakers weren’t moving in to exploit the fans as they had done in the 50s, 60s and early 70s’ (2002, p. 69). Ruminating on the taboo themes associated with the ‘punk aesthetic’, Kerekes hypothesizes that ‘Perhaps filmmakers were unwilling to affiliate themselves with something so crass, something which so vilified patriotism, and indeed, something which appeared to delight in Nazi [imagery]’ (p. 69). Despite insisting that there exist few ‘genuine examples of Punk cinema’, Kerekes does proffer a brief list of examples weighted towards Anglo-American contexts, in which he includes *The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Swindle* (1979), Don Letts’ *The Punk Rock Movie* (1978), Derek Jarman’s *Jubilee* (1978), Jack Hazan and Dave Mingay’s *Rude Boy* (1980), and *D.O.A* by Lech Kowalksi (1981).¹⁵⁰

For Kerekes, while these films represent aesthetic elements synonymous with punk, he

¹⁵⁰ While Kerekes adheres to the standardised Anglo-American cultural history of punk, European punk film boasts several examples from this period, such as *Cha Cha* (1979), starring Dutch rocker Herman Brood and German chanteuse Nina Hagen.

resists classifying and categorising this brief corpus as ‘punk film’. That is to say, despite the fact that films such as *The Punk Rock Movie* showcase gigs by the Sex Pistols, as well as documenting taboo themes of drug-use and violence, he argues that the form of the film itself remains relatively standardised. As such, although these works can be seen to feature punk as ‘content’, the ‘form’ of the films largely bypass the adoption of the ‘punk aesthetic’ itself, as a style of what Stacy Thompson (2004) has elsewhere called ‘punk cinema’. Kerekes provocatively insists that ‘the only true punk celluloid’ emerged in the late 1970s ‘New York Underground’ (2002, p. 69) around a ‘distinctive core of independent films’ which attempted ‘to challenge notions of taste, decency, and the social order while promoting aggressive musical soundtracks’ (p. 69): the Cinema of Transgression (CoT).¹⁵¹ Kerekes’ argument is somewhat mired in subjective taste distinctions, but his honing in on the Cinema of Transgression is interesting to my focus on punk and pornography across a trajectory of punk-related, multimedia contexts.

In his manifesto of 1985, filmmaker Nick Zedd announced the Cinema of Transgression as ‘a new generation of filmmakers daring to rip out of the stifling strait jackets of film theory in a direct attack on every value system known to man’ ([1985] 2012, p. 17). Zedd’s manifesto marked a conscious attempt to self-actualise a film movement around a diffuse group of filmmakers, visual artists, and musicians, living and working around the environs of the Lower East Side in Manhattan in the early-1980s. This scene included figures such as fellow filmmaker

¹⁵¹ I do think Kerekes overlooks the transgressive elements of *The Punk Rock Movie*—in which a pig’s head is mutilated onstage at the Roxy by Eater—as signalling how extreme content has the potential to upend standardised film formats. London-based Eater, fronted by then-15-year-old Andy Blade, were known as the youngest of the first wave punk bands, which contributes to the confrontational nature of this scene. Moreover, he also neglects to acknowledge Don Letts’ making of the film on Super 8 with no prior technical training in filmmaking. This untrained, DIY approach to film production suggests a uniquely punk approach.

Richard Kern, as well as visual artist and writer, David Wojnarowicz,¹⁵² filmmaker Tessa Hughes-Freeland, and, cultural theorist, Manuel DeLanda.¹⁵³ While the interests of this group were fittingly diverse, they contributed to the production of a corpus of short Super-8 films which extended the aesthetic concerns of the short-lived No Wave scene—its immediate cultural precursor on the New York underground.

The CoT films featured scenes of extreme violence and gore, alongside BDSM sexual fantasies and black humour, and were often accompanied by post-punk soundtracks drawn from their contemporaries on the NY underground such as Swans. More significantly, these films portray pornography through a punk-inspired lens, utilising the shock-tactics of punk to subvert the conventions of normative agential dynamics in heteronormative hard-core porn. This can be seen in relation to several prominent punk-related female artists, such as musician/poet/actress Lydia Lunch, and sex therapist/performer/artist Annie Sprinkle, who both starred in CoT films by Kern and Zedd, respectively.

For some commentators, the aesthetics of the CoT gave expression to Cold War anxieties and a critique of the ‘family values’ politics of the Reagan era (Sargeant, 1995).¹⁵⁴ However,

¹⁵² Wojnarowicz has gained increased attention in recent years for his activism and criticism of the Reaganite regime which marginalised people with AIDS. He recalls having escaped the stifling conditions of his conservative upbringing through reading Patti Smith’s work, through whom, he was introduced to a lineage of queer writers from Jean Genet to Arthur Rimbaud. Rimbaud featured in Wojnarowicz’s series from the late 1980s in which he dons the façade of Rimbaud, and poses at various locations throughout New York; a comment on visibility at the time of AIDS. Wojnarowicz died of AIDS in 1992. In recent years, his work has continued to attract international artistic acclaim.

¹⁵³ Tessa Hughes-Freeland is a British-born filmmaker who briefly associated with the CoT during the 1980s. Manuel DeLanda is a Mexican-American academic, who was affiliated with the CoT during the 1980s due to his work with experimental film in that period.

¹⁵⁴ Reagan’s Republican politics championed an idealised version of 1950s moral values and a new age of prosperity. Reagan’s presidency heralded socio-economic reforms, including financial deregulation and reduced government spending, leading to the implementation of the neoliberal economic model, and with it, a generational embrace of the yuppie mentality. Writing on the Republican rhetoric endemic of the Reaganite era, cultural critic

while offering certain diffuse instantiations of socio-political critique, Kern's and Zedd's work is not without its own critics. Indeed, erstwhile CoT filmmaker Cassandra Stark Mele has critiqued the 'mean and irresponsible' traits of filmmakers such as Kern, and the ways in which 'imagery pertaining to violence and sexuality was used in damning ways' (quoted in Sargeant, 1995, p. 210). She acknowledges that 'some of these films were poignant critiques of society's surrounding violence and explorations of power and domination' (1995, p. 210), but she also points to the tendency of these filmmakers to reinforce sexist stereotypes and to take gratuitous pleasure in violence against women. Stark's comments touch at the core of the issues concerning the limits and implications of transgression as a renegotiation of existing social codes.

In this chapter, I focus on the function of sexual aesthetics within selected works by Nick Zedd and Richard Kern, and their utilisation of the transgressive elements of pornography as a part of a punk sexual lexicon premised on shock tactics. In doing so, I draw out the links between transgression and sexuality, analysing the significance of figures such as Wojnarowicz and Lunch, in overturning hegemonic notions of the pornographic. Here, I demonstrate ways in which films such as Kern's *Fingered* (1986) can be seen to engage with pornographic conventions as an attempt to stage female sexuality in the service of female desire. However, in doing so, I show that the intersections between their collaborative representations of female sexual desire, and their attempts at transgression through the inclusion of both simulated sexual acts and non-simulated sexual intercourse, overlap in messy and complicated ways.

Carlo McCormick reflects: 'a collective amnesia swept America, when family values, just-say-no platitudes and protect-the-kids censorships rationalized a stunning institutionalising of indifference and intolerance towards difference' (2012, p. 41).

I begin by presenting an overview of the debates about pornography and sex work that marked this period, and which have since become infamous as the ‘feminist sex wars’. These debates opened up the tensions inherent in attempting to represent women’s desire, female agency and sexuality and their incorporation in patriarchal depictions of women’s bodies. In the second part, I briefly trace the emergence of punk in NYC, and the short-lived No Wave scene of music and film that evolved from, and immediately followed it: both of which were formative influences on the emergence of the CoT. I then move towards outlining the roots of the CoT in relation to the ‘pornographic imaginary’ of New York and its 42nd street intersection; and the ways in which Kern and Zedd can be seen to ‘remember’ the ‘deuce’ as a source of taboo imagery, which is reimagined within the aesthetics of the CoT. In the final part, I show that films such as *Fingered* extend the aesthetic concerns of earlier attempts at transgression-through-sexuality by women auteurs such as Cosey Fanni Tutti, and in doing so, presage the emergence of alt porn, which is discussed in the following chapter. To conclude, I reflect on the criticism of Zedd and Kern’s work, reading it against their transgressive aims.

Part 1: The Feminist Sex Wars

The visual domain of sexual representation remains a contested topic within feminist circles. Throughout the 1970s, many feminist writers, academics and activists would reflect critically on the legacy of the 1960s counterculture, and the hypocrisy that underpinned the so-called ‘sexual revolution’. Despite its promises to liberate female desire, the sexual revolution proved unequal to the destruction of the misogyny and exploitation of women ingrained in Western capitalism. Writing in 1975, feminist journalist Susan Brownmiller critiqued the ‘sexual revolution’, pointing to the ways in which pornography, while professing to represent female desire,

reproduced dehumanising effects on women. As Brownmiller argued, ‘Pornography, like rape, is a male invention, designed to dehumanize women, to reduce the female to an object of sexual access, not to free sensuality from moralistic or parental inhibition’ (quoted in Hester, 2011, p. 38).

The ‘sex wars’ of the 1980s saw fierce debate on the issue of pornography as a site of violence against women - anti-porn feminists critiqued the objectification and exploitation of women in pornographic imageries. Their position was contested by anti-censorship feminists, who saw the stance taken by feminist writers such as Andrea Dworkin and Catharine A. MacKinnon as censorious, claiming authority to speak on behalf of all women while undermining the agency of female porn performers, for instance. A brief tour of the central arguments of both anti-porn and anti-censorship positions is worthwhile in order to sketch out the central points of contention that marked the representation of female sexuality in the period in which the CoT filmmakers were operative.

The staunch anti-pornography position of feminist writers such as Dworkin and MacKinnon saw pornography as fundamentally exploitative of women: the representation of women within pornography enacting forms of hegemonic violence on/to/over the female body. For MacKinnon all pornographic representations of women were inherently oppressive, indicative of the subjugation of women to a sexist, patriarchal order. Dworkin writes that ‘The pornographers, modern and ancient, visual and literary, vulgar and aristocratic, put forth one consistent proposition: erotic pleasure for men is derived from and predicated on the savage destruction of women’ (1988, p. 21). Dworkin similarly aligned pornography with violence

against women in viewing pornography as the rape of women's bodies. In her essay *Women Lawyers and Pornography*, she advanced the notion that the 'basic action of pornography is rape: rape of the vagina, rape of the rectum, and [...] rape of the throat' (1988, p. 238). Given what she saw as the 'the popularity of throat rape in current pornography',¹⁵⁵ Dworkin proposed an equivalence of porn to sexual deaths from suffocation; her arguments were rooted in feminist analysis but they also appealed to broader anxieties concerning hard-core pornography and brought wider support for the feminist anti-pornography cause from Christians and other moral campaigners.

In *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, Dworkin defined pornography in explicit terms of 'dominance and violence', believing pornography to be not only a catalyst for male sexual violence, but as a form of violence in and of itself. She declared that a rape was committed both in the filming of women, as well as the viewing of porn itself (1981, p. 137). MacKinnon employed a similar rhetorical manoeuvre, insisting that anti-pornography activism constitutes a 'resistance to a sexual fascism of everyday life' (1982, p. 23). In her conflation of pornography with fascism, she implied that those deriving sexual pleasure from pornography, as a stimulus for masturbation, were desecrating 'human rights' (1981, p. 18).

What is striking however, is the lack of nuance evident in the 'MacDworkinite' position. In the first instance, the critique levelled at pornography in general displays the ways in which this position reified the notion of pornography as a monolithic and fixed aesthetic field. Moreover, this position claimed to speak on behalf of all women, while simultaneously denying

¹⁵⁵ This is a direct reference to *Deep Throat* (1972) featuring Linda Lovelace.

the agency of female performers. In contrast, ‘sex-positive’ feminists saw porn engagement and consumption as part of women’s freedom to seek and know their own pleasure(s). Anti-censorship feminists saw women’s engagement with pornography—either as performers or consumers, or indeed both—as constitutive of the agency of female subjects to decide how they might choose to employ their own bodies. In the US context, the libertarian elements of this argument saw censorship as impinging upon First Amendment rights, denying the ability of women to make a consciously informed decision apropos of engaging with pornography, in all its forms, subject to their own desires without social or moral castigation or persecution (Tong, 1989, p. 113).

In his overview of the feminist debates that marked this period, cultural studies scholar Christian Klesse reflects that the sex wars ‘demonstrate the existence of a multiplicity of positions on sexuality within feminism’ (2018, p. 24). Cognisant of the arguments advanced by radical feminists such as Dworkin, Klesse counters that ‘[r]adical feminism risks reinforcing dualistic gender epistemologies by repeating the master/slave analysis over and over again’ (p. 39). For Klesse, this ‘has the effect of making it impossible to talk about women’s erotic agency’ (p. 39). As such, the position of ‘radical feminism’ views porn as monolithic, homogenous sites of representation. That is to say, that position does not account for the differences in kind between various pornographic representations of women.

These issues were examined by feminist philosopher Rosemarie Tong in *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*, a contemporaneous account of the ‘sex wars’. In her discussion of the feminist anti-pornography position, Tong explained the contentions around the

topic of ‘sexually explicit depictions or descriptions’ as a matter concerning the kinds of representation evident in porn. Here, she asserted a dichotomy between erotica and thanatica. Through the deployment of this binary schema, Tong sought to enforce a distinction between ‘good’ erotica and ‘bad’ thanatica—these two distinct positions to be divided on the grounds of consent, and Tong explained the ‘crucial differences between them’ as follows:

(1) whereas erotic representations show sexual relationships between fully consenting, equal partners who identify emotionally with each other, thanatic representations show sexual relationships in which full consent, real equality, and emotional identification are absent; and (2) whereas erotica encourages both men and women to treat each other as full human persons, thanatica encourages men in particular to treat women as mere objects (p. 113).

While the terms Tong used to claim a distinction between kinds of pornographic texts appear somewhat outdated from a contemporary standpoint, the proximity of her study to the trials of the 1980s provides a critical viewpoint from which to assess the implications of both pro-porn and anti-porn positions.

Here, the assertion of this dialectic of ‘erotica’ and ‘thanatica’ is inherently flawed—in the context of commercial pornography, consent is a legal requirement and prerequisite for shooting, regardless of the perceived severity or violence of the scene taking place. As such, I see Tong’s imputation that consent cannot be given by women who appear in more apparently violent forms of pornography as problematic, though she would no doubt argue per Dworkin that women’s consent is never free under patriarchy. Nevertheless, I would also point out that, the arbitrary distinction between erotica and pornography notwithstanding, the ‘softer’ connotations that erotica suggests bear no relation to issues of consent—just because it *looks* more equal does

not make it so. It follows, then, that no causal link can be inferred between issues of consent and the presumed violence inherent to a particular form of pornographic representation and its attendant practice. Moreover, Tong's definition treats pornography as a singular form constituted by the homogenous reproduction of a strict code of conventions rather than as diverse aesthetic field with different conventions across different genres and appealing to different audiences.¹⁵⁶

However, despite the antagonistic relationship between pro-sex and anti-pornography positions, feminist scholar Helen Hester has reflected on the underlying similarities between both sides. Hester cites literary theorist Leo Bersani, and his suggestion that Dworkin and MacKinnon's 'most radical claim is [...] that so-called normal sexuality is already pornographic,' (quoted in Hester, 2011, p. 35). Following Bersani, the 'ultimate logic' of their critique 'would be *the criminalization of sex itself until it has been reinvented*' (quoted in Hester, 2011, p. 35). As Hester shows, Bersani 'is therefore able to position the anti-pornography strand of the feminist movement' within what he terms the 'more general enterprise, one which I will call the *redemptive reinvention of sex*' (quoted in Hester, 2011, p. 35), which, as Hester points out, is also displayed in certain strands of pro-sex feminism (2011, p. 35).

Other commentators have seen this 'redemptive' tendency as betraying evidence of an implicit prejudice against pornography itself. This argument is put forward by critics such as

¹⁵⁶ Tong's distinction, which she provides in her summation of antipornography feminism, can be further scrutinised in relation to Freud's work on the drives of 'Eros' and 'Thanatos' as described in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). In terms of Freudian drives, these two terms can be seen as instinctual response in which libidinal energy is channelled towards, and in relation to, the object of desire. However, Freud noted a paradox within 'Thanatos', which he referred to as the 'death instinct'; that is to say, this instinct can actually serve to prolong life, when confronting 'external obstacles' (Appignanesi & Zarate, 2013, p. 151). Yet, Freud concludes that this instinct potentiates towards self-destruction when directed towards the self. ('The aim of all life is death') (p. 152).

Florian Cramer, who has argued that both ‘feminist tendencies, anti-porn and pro-porn, disagree on the therapy but not on the diagnosis that mainstream pornography is sexist and disgusting’ (2007, p. 174). This particular claim is reductionist, however I do find other aspects of Cramer’s discussion of the ‘MacDworkinite’ position persuasive. While both thinkers worked to get legal frameworks against pornographers in place, Cramer points out ‘that Dworkin and MacKinnon by no means demanded that pornography be prohibited or censored’ (p. 174). For Cramer, this suggests that ‘their campaign acknowledges the power of sex and of the obscene imagination; the power that virtually all varieties of alternative pornography play down as a game without consequences, rationalise and repress’ (p. 174).

Cramer’s honing in on the power of the ‘obscene imagination’ resonates with the cinematic movement considered here, in which sexuality was explored in various stagings. In the selected CoT corpus I discuss below, the female ‘punk body’ stands as both a site of power and domination, as well as a potentially liberating ‘imagined’ space of fantasy, through which to stage female desire. Moreover, his suggestion that the ‘obscene imagination’ links both anti-porn and pro-censorship positions corresponds with my argument here; that is, although the CoT filmmakers and the radical feminist stance appear to embody divergent positions, CoT directors such as Kern paradoxically align in under-acknowledged ways with the ‘MacDworkinite’ position, in seeing sex as ‘destructive’, as well as a necessary target to ‘destroy’. While in one sense this argument upholds the contention of Lacanian psychoanalysis—the unconscious, and thus sexuality, is essentially pornographic in nature—in another sense, it also correlates with feminist emphasis on ‘lived experience’. I think through these notions here, as well as the Foucauldian implications according to the body and pleasure, in the following analysis.

Part 2: The Birth and Death of New York Punk

Punk emerged in the mid-1970s in New York in the midst of a nationwide economic depression. New York was hit particularly hard, suffering from a fiscal crisis that exacerbated the problems of homelessness and crime in the most poverty-stricken parts of the city like the Lower East Side. In 1975 President Gerald Ford refused to bail out the city; Ford's message was captured by the infamous headline of *The Daily News*: 'Ford to City: Drop Dead'. Swathes of New Yorkers had left the city in the early 1970s—the so-called 'white flight' to the suburbs—leaving the tenements and lofts of the Lower East Side available for comparatively small rents, or to be squatted. Carlo McCormick describes the Lower East Side at this time as a 'perilous zone that had been physically gutted in the worst way by the great white flight from the city that began in the post-war years as first and second generation immigrants moved to the suburbs' (2010, p. 39). Many artists took up residence in these properties and formed themselves into a creative sector, welcoming different artistic and subcultural residents including those who became foundational to punk. As Mark Fisher points out in his meditation on post-punk in *Ghosts of My Life*:

It's no accident that the efflorescence of cultural invention in London and New York in the late 1970s and early 80s (in the punk and postpunk scenes) coincided with the availability of squatted and cheap property in those cities (2014, p. 20).

While large swathes of the Lower East Side of the city were effectively abandoned, certain culturally rich areas such as SoHo and the West Village were undergoing increasing gentrification.

The prevailing narrative on the emergence of punk in New York pinpoints the significance of bars such as Max's Kansas City¹⁵⁷ and CBGBs on the Bowery. CBGBs was opened in 1973 by Hilly Kristal—initially to cater to the ‘Country, Bluegrass, and Blues’ signified by its acronym—Kristal yielded to the pleas of the nascent punk scene, booking Television for a residency in 1974.¹⁵⁸ The group included Tom Verlaine, and his friend and bandmate, Richard Hell, who, as discussed in chapter 2, was instrumental to Malcolm McLaren's vision of punk style as a bricolage aesthetic. The Ramones were at the forefront of this burgeoning scene, inspiring an archetypical punk visual lexicon and sonic aesthetic premised on fast-paced rock; this was stylistically augmented by the band members' uniform composing leather jackets, ripped jeans, and baseball boots. While the band's influence on home turf was initially relatively diffuse, their UK tour in 1976 had considerable influence on the nascent UK punk movement. The band's performance at the Roundhouse in London on July 4 1976 was attended by notable progenitors of the British punk movement including the Sex Pistols and the Damned.

Yet, while many of these bands initially denounced the saturated and overblown theatrics of progressive rock and the commercialism of pop contemporaries, by 1977, many of the main players—on both sides of the Atlantic—had been approached by the record industry, and were engaged in the business of producing successful records and international touring,¹⁵⁹ as opposed

¹⁵⁷ The notorious haunt frequented by a range of underground artists and musicians including Andy Warhol and his ‘superstar’ milieu, as well as the Velvet Underground.

¹⁵⁸ Television were once of the most influential groups to emerge from the scene, even if they remained relatively unsuccessful commercially. Fronted by Tom Verlaine (one of Patti Smith's lovers at this time) and Richard Hell, they began as the Neon Boys from 1972-73, rehearsing at the loft apartment space of their manager, Terry Ork. Though reports vary, Ork is reported to have convinced Kristal to give the newly rechristened Television a residency at his club in 1974.

¹⁵⁹ The Sex Pistols were to find chart success with their anti-monarchy anthem ‘God Save the Queen’ in 1977, released to coincide with Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. The track reached the no. 1 position in the *NME*

to engaging a political class of youth.¹⁶⁰ In this light, while first wave punk flaunted its desecration of earlier musical forms, in practice, their radical stance became something of a cliché—a cultural affectation, popularised by bands like the Sex Pistols, or their American counterparts, the Dead Boys—and a sign of youthful bravado.¹⁶¹

‘No Wave’ was the label applied to a nascent collection of musicians and artists working in the direct aftermath of the punk moment, from 1978 until roughly 1980—the name was a deliberate rejection of the commercial stylings of ‘New Wave’. Given that No Wave was a relatively contained and short-lived scene, it appeared to exert a much more coherent ‘militancy’ in its deliberate rejection of the commercial stylings of ‘New Wave’ as a commercialised form of punk. In 1978, Brian Eno produced the compilation LP, *No New York*, the first musical record to feature No Wave bands such as The Contortions, Mars, D.N.A. and Lydia Lunch’s band, Teenage Jesus and the Jerks. Lunch shunned the prevailing musical conventions of punk, overturning expectations and dynamics between both audience and musicians by employing non-musicians as her backing band. The resulting inchoate dissonance of the band’s music would

singles chart, but was denied the top spot by the BBC (though they later admitted to having ‘fixed’ the charts, fearing public backlash due to the iconoclastic anti-monarchy themes of the song). Both the BBC and the Independent Broadcast Authority refused to play the track.

¹⁶⁰ Following their signing to CBS, the success of the Clash’s third record *London Calling* (1979) saw the band achieve commercial success in the US. For many, their performances as opening act for The Who at Shea Stadium in NYC in 1982 (where the Beatles had previously set records for attendance in 1965) marked their highpoint of ‘selling out’.

¹⁶¹ Although an exhaustive account is beyond the scope of this study, I note that the emergence of ‘hardcore’ punk in the early 1980s—as part of second wave punk—was directly influenced by first wave punk, but was vehemently critical of the apparent ‘selling out’ of first wave punk acts. This transatlantic punk sub-genre is associated with bands such as Black Flag and Minor Threat in the US, as well as UK bands such as The Exploited—all of whom sought to push the boundaries of first wave punk music in terms of tempo and aggression. But, hardcore also gave rise to reactionary movements such as ‘straight edge’, associated with Minor Threat, which adopted a militant anti-drugs stance—see Haenfler (2006). For the purposes of this study, Raymond Pettibon’s artwork for Black Flag is significant, featuring cartoon illustrations that incorporate pornographic, violence and black humour. For a more detailed analysis, see Bestley (2013b) and Bestley and Ogg (2012).

serve as a disturbing accompaniment to Lunch's lyrical diatribes that would often take the form of excoriations aimed at her father who sexually abused her as a child. Lunch's NYC-based post-punk contemporaries were equally reactionary; bands such as DNA and the Bush Tetras evidenced an acute distaste for the hackneyed conventions of rock, and the more derivative strands of punk rock. Moreover, saxophonist James Chance, and his band the Contortions, employed jazz-influenced musical conventions—such as free-form improvisation—in their sonic aesthetic. Chance's early performances were characterised by his manic onstage persona. In an attempt to destabilise the dynamics between audience and performer, Chance would frequently drag audience members from their seated positions, challenging the pretensions of the SoHo art crowd who would frequent Contortions concerts.

The experimentalism of No Wave music found similar expression in the related oeuvre of No Wave film. No Wave film also served to reflect many of the thematic concerns of New York underground film of the 1960s.¹⁶² Resultantly, a gritty aesthetic emerged that incorporated elements of Andy Warhol's cinema, while expressing film techniques and the stylisation of the French Nouvelle Vague. Amos Poe's work is invariably credited as the beginning of No Wave film, beginning with his first feature, *The Foreigner* (1978).¹⁶³ The film's cinematography alluded to the work of those earlier filmmakers, conveying similar themes of existentialism and paranoia set in an ominous city-scape. Preceding this, Poe had produced the experimental punk documentary *Blank Generation* (1976) in conjunction with Ivan Kral, shot at CBGBs and Max's

¹⁶² Warhol's films, as well as those of Jack Smith and later, John Waters, represent a lineage of pioneering experimental approaches to avant-garde and independent filmmaking; a corpus commonly featuring taboo themes such as drug taking and sexual practices, frequently framed through a tone of black humour which inverted established conventions of aesthetic judgement and taste. It remains beyond the scope of my analysis to provide an exhaustive account of the film counterculture of the 1960s here, but Sargeant provides a detailed overview of this subject in *Deathripping* (1995).

¹⁶³ Prior to this, Poe made the shorts *Night Lunch* (1975) and *Unmade Beds* (1976).

Kansas City on handheld Super-8 in black and white. The film is characterised by cut-up transitions that showcase early performances of artists such as Patti Smith and Wayne (Jayne) County, whose onstage personas appeared to challenge established norms of sexuality and gender.¹⁶⁴ The resulting quality of the film produces a jarring affect, in which the footage is out-of-sync with the musical score, signalling a significant disjuncture between sound and image. As an archetypical piece of punk cinema, the choppy, rapid editing and disjuncture between image and sound captures a dynamic, if not chaotic, snapshot of punk in this moment. While Poe's fidelity to the environs of Downton Manhattan would inspire other auteurs such as Eric Mitchell, Scott and Beth B, and Jim Jarmusch¹⁶⁵ to make their own films in the locales of the Lower East side, it is important to note that this DIY approach was born out of necessity, given the lack of funding and resources available to Poe at this time.

¹⁶⁴ The 'first' transgender rock singer, Jayne County represents a singular figure within punk, and the cross-cultural paths forged by queer figures on New York's underground. After breaking the collar bone of Handsome Dick Manitoba with a mic stand in 1976, County became something of a symbolic figurehead, dividing the anti-queer elements of New York's punk scene. Manitoba, lead vocalist of the Dictators, had hurled homophobic slurs at County during the latter's performance—feeling threatened, County struck back resulting in the hospitalisation of the Dictators frontman.

¹⁶⁵ Eric Mitchell is a French-born filmmaker who was active in the New York Downtown scene in the 1970s. Jim Jarmusch is an American filmmaker who has enjoyed success in both independent and commercial contexts.

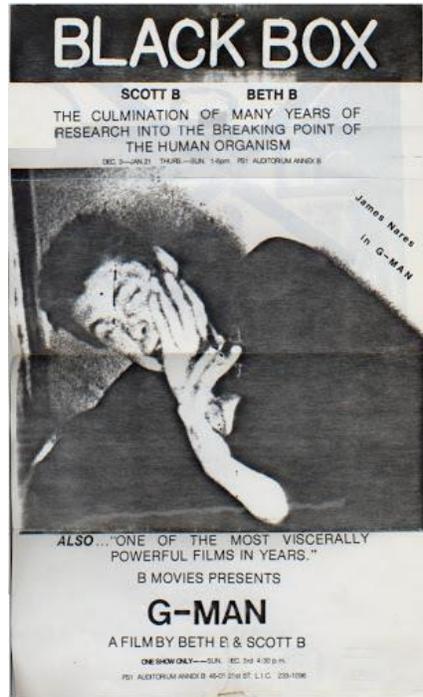


Figure 4.1: B. and Scott B., flyer for *Black Box* (1978) and *G-Man* (1978).

No Wave filmmakers shared a similar concern with exploring the darker aspects of human subjectivity and existentialist themes, while displaying a gritty aesthetic which drew on the ‘imaginary’ of New York. Their films also testify to the cultural cross-exchange between artists and musicians in the Lower East Side. No Wave filmmaker Beth B. and her partner Scott B. were particularly important in the lineage of underground film that immediately presaged the emergence of the Cinema of Transgression. In *G-MAN* from 1978, we see a hardboiled depiction of a dystopian New York. The theme of nuclear war looms as a spectre over the film, with its shots of abandoned buildings and burnt-out zones appearing like remnants of a post-nuclear wasteland. The film’s narrative focuses on a government operative—the head of the bomb

disposal unit, played by Bill Rice—documenting his hidden life in the sexual underground of BDSM and his relationship with a dominatrix, played by Anya Philips.¹⁶⁶

For Beth B, the use of experimental post-punk music by her contemporaries entailed a cross-cultural exchange: ‘it was a way of bringing the aesthetic of music to filmmaking and using [musicians’] talents in creating the soundtracks’ (*Blank City*, 2009). With *Black Box* (1978), Scott and Beth B. created an intense psychological thriller based on the torture mechanisms being used by the US military. In *Deathtripping: The Cinema of Transgression*, Jack Sargeant (1995) argues that the themes of torture and humiliation that marked the work of Beth and Scott B. belong to a more explicitly political wave of filmmaking than those concerned with artistic pretences, such as the previously discussed Poe. Sargeant contends that Beth and Scott B. are more closely aligned to the punk movement through their political commentary, while earlier directors such as Poe displayed a much more ambiguous relationship to the political. Following from the influence of Scott and Beth B., the Cinema of Transgression channelled challenging political themes into their visceral aesthetic, but, by contrast, the films of Zedd and Kern appeared steeped in an irony and humour that was similarly expressed within punk rhetoric and its calls for ‘anarchy’ (Vivaldi, 2008, p. 160).

Several of the CoT auteurs themselves have highlighted the various affiliations that the CoT shared with the ‘punk’ label and its central concepts. In *Deathtripping*, Tessa Hughes-

¹⁶⁶ CBGBs regular and known ‘face’ on the punk scene, Anya Philips marks a crossover figure in the New York artistic underground, playing a pivotal role in the later No Wave movement, as well as the emergence of punk. Philips arrived in Manhattan in 1974, an immigrant from Taiwan, with aspirations to become a fashion designer. She had initially managed Lydia Lunch’s Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, but later moved her attention to saxophonist James Chance; Philips would manage Chance’s own bands the Contortions. Philips starred in several films for No Wave associated filmmakers. Appearances in Amos Poe’s *The Foreigner* (1978), and Scott & Beth B’s *G-MAN* see her portray emboldened sexual roles.

Freeland refers to the loose-knit milieu as ‘Neo-punk filmmakers’ (1995, p. 163). For his part, Richard Kern traces the ‘punk’ nature of his work to the notion of ‘anarchy’, which he reads as metonymic to the concept of punk itself, as evidenced in an interview with Sargeant: ‘I was totally into anarchy, that alone is the one thing that came out of the punk movement—the whole concept of anarchy and creating chaos to fuck everything up and make everything change faster’ (1995, p. 111). Elsewhere, he has also qualified his affiliation with punk as premised on the motivating ethos of destruction as a form of creation, echoing Malcolm McLaren’s statement on destruction as a creative act, as discussed in chapter 1. As Kern puts it, ‘you have to destroy everything to start over again. That was the whole anarchist approach, which was pretty much the punk attitude. It was “fuck everything”’ (Storm, 2012, n.p.).

Filmmaker Tommy Turner, who collaborated with David Wojnarowicz on *Where Evil Dwells* (1985), connects threads between Hughes-Freeland and Kern’s testimony, in seeing the CoT group as an extension of the original punk movement:

I think the Cinema of Transgression [...] was a creative outpouring against the frustration of the times—continuing the punk rock scene and other angry or “give a fuck” art movements that went before. All these people that were somewhat inspired, but never would have made a film otherwise, got a chance to do it (1995, p. 135).

Beyond the resonance that the imagery of the CoT filmmakers had with the ‘punk aesthetic’—such as taboo codes of Nazism and sexual violence—similarities can also be discerned in their working with found-footage, as well as their DIY approach to independent film production and distribution.

Out of all of the CoT filmmakers, it would be Nick Zedd who most exemplified the linkage between the earlier punk scene, through to No Wave, and culminating with the CoT. For instance, Zedd screened his early work at key locations of the New York punk scene. In his autobiography *Totem of the Depraved*, Zedd confirms that he screened his directorial debut film *They Eat Scum* (1979) at Max's Kansas City and Club 57 the year of its release (Zedd. 1996). *They Eat Scum* served up the concerns of the punk aesthetic. But, in iconoclastic fashion, it directed the assault of punk's visual themes back onto punk itself. The film depicts punk youths who succeed in exploding a nuclear power plant in an act of eco-terrorism. As Zedd explains in the No Wave documentary *Blank City* (2009):

I got the idea for *They Eat Scum* observing how the media demonised punk rock, I think what if I wrote this scenario in which there was this even more nihilistic youth movement and what if they decided to go to this new point nuclear power plant as an act of terrorism thus irradiating this entire region [*sic*].

The film was shot on Super-8, a cheap and easily available format at the time, and which lends it an unrefined aesthetic. Like the concerns of No Wave musicians such as Lunch, the film speaks as much to the influence of punk and its central tenets of DIY, as to the failed promises of punk and its co-option into mainstream apparatus of the culture industry. As Sargeant writes, Zedd viewed punk as 'just as much of a target as anything else and offense existed simply for its own purpose' (1995, p. 8).

Upon its release, the film was negatively reviewed by critics, for example, film writer Amy Taubin referred to its aesthetic of transgression as evidence of the film's absence of artistic merit. As Taubin concluded, 'the aesthetic operative here is transgression, both in the terms of

the narrative, and in formal filmmaking terms' (quoted in Sargeant, 1995, p. 8). In their reportage of the screening, *The Wall Street Journal* ran the headline 'Public Access TV In New York Tends Toward Sex, Sadism' (Cleeland, 2013, n.p.) on the front page of its December 20th issue. A particularly perturbed viewer was reported to have commented that the film was 'the vilest and most revolting performance of sadism I have ever seen' (quoted in Landro, 1982, p. 1). As Zedd admits in the documentary *Blank City*, 'I was quite elated to get this kind of attention and this kind of outrage.' Indeed, Zedd brazenly flaunted this 'transgressive' tagline, foregrounding the film's incommensurability with the established institutions in New York. As is evident from the film poster below (Figure 4.2), the tagline 'Banned from the Collective' serves to underscore the film's transgressive status, referring to its banning by the film collective based at St. Mark's Place (Sargeant, 1995).



Figure 4.2: Zedd, Nick. Flyer, *They East Scum* (1979).

This brief contextual summary is intended to illustrate the nexus of artistic and cinematic underground activity stemming from the emergence of New York punk, and particularly the figures and films from the subsequent No Wave scene. I now turn to a more detailed discussion of the CoT, beginning with a revisitation of Zedd's manifesto. As will be shown, Zedd channelled a punk impulse of 'year zero', in positioning the CoT in opposition to the No Wave scene that had preceded it. Zedd saw No Wave as betraying its alternative aims in a bid for commercial crossover appeal. Zedd remains characteristically critical of the No Wave scene, retorting 'once the media started paying attention to it, it started falling apart at that point' (*Blank City*, 2009). This sentiment is echoed by Lydia Lunch, 'the cinema of transgression was harder,

was more sexually oriented, drug involved and was just the obvious progression' (*Blank City*, 2009); Beth B. seconds this judgement, claims that CoT filmmakers 'were willing to go to places our films didn't' (*Blank City*, 2009).

I have already elaborated upon the concepts of transgression to be found in Foucault's and Bataille's works so here I trace the influence of other thinkers, with whom Zedd's manifesto can be seen to align. Foremost amongst these is German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who was a key influence on both of the aforementioned thinkers. Nietzsche's aristocratic sensibility, which I briefly touched on in chapter 1, is revisited here in relation to the 'transvaluation' of the manifesto, as a means of inverting established norms, and overturning judgements of 'taste', correlating with the embrace of the abject evidenced in first wave punk.

I then turn to a visual analysis of several of Kern's films with a focus on themes of gender and sexuality in relation to the figure of the female 'punk body' as a potential site of transgression. I discuss the collaborative series between Zedd and Kern, *Mahattan Love Suicides* (1985), as well as Kern's directorial stand-outs, *The Evil Cameraman* (1990) and, perhaps his most notorious film, *Fingered*, starring Lydia Lunch.

Part 3: The Transgressive Turn

In 1985, the Cinema of Transgression Manifesto was published in Zedd's DIY publication *The Underground Film Bulletin*.¹⁶⁷ The Manifesto nominated Nick Zedd as the self-elected architect of this burgeoning underground film movement. As the 'founding document' of the 'movement',

¹⁶⁷ Zedd published *The Underground Film Bulletin* from 1983 to 1990.

Zedd's manifesto is interesting particularly for its self-authorising of a film movement, and its mythologisation of the possibilities of a cohesive cinematic vanguard. While there is evidence that these filmmakers enjoyed collaborative relationships, many of its central progenitors have sought to debunk the idea that the CoT was in fact a collective movement. For instance, Lydia Lunch contests the notion that the CoT filmmakers shared similar aesthetic preoccupations and artistic concerns; Lunch sees the label as an attempt to shoehorn the work of disparate artists into an identifiable, albeit misleading, cinematic collective. Nonetheless, curator Susanne Pfeffer contends that 'for all their artistic differences or fierce personal disputes, all these filmmakers were dependant on mutual assistance' (2012, p. 8). In Pfeffer's view, Zedd's manifesto can be seen to 'form the core of a movement driven by an unconditional wish to make films and thereby to transgress all aesthetic and moral boundaries' (p. 8). The manifesto has been variously interpreted, but, in many ways, has been received generally positively, as Zedd reflects, 'I think [the other filmmakers] were grateful for the attention they were getting as being considered part of something bigger' (Davis, 2014, n.p.).

Zedd begins the manifesto with the contention: 'We who have violated the laws, commands and duties of the avant-garde; i.e., to bore, tranquilize and obfuscate through a fluke process dictated by practical convenience stand guilty as charged' ([1985] 2012, p. 17). Zedd then berates the 'dreary media arts centers and geriatric cinema critics [who] have totally ignored the exhilarating accomplishments of those in our rank', going on to list himself amongst contemporaries: 'Zedd, Kern, Turner, KlemanN, DeLanda, Eros & Mare, and DirectArt Ltd.'

(2012, p. 17). For Sargeant, this list might be ‘best read as a calculated move by Zedd to define and position the movement’ (1995, p. 33).¹⁶⁸

The declamatory remarks and hyperbolic rhetoric that characterise Zedd’s document is notable in several ways. Zedd’s invocation of ‘transgression’ as a central concept requires further explication. Zedd voices *ressentiment* towards the ‘ivory-tower’ intellectualism of the academy, and its celebration of Structuralist filmmaking, which Zedd announced to be pretentious, and at the expense of his own vanguard:

We openly renounce and reject the entrenched academic snobbery which erected a monument to laziness known as structuralism and proceeded to lock out those filmmakers who possessed the vision to see through this charade ([1985] 2012, p. 17).

Counter to this position, Zedd advocates the transgressive potential of humour; for him, an ‘essential element discarded by the doddering academics and further’ ([1985] 2012, p. 17). However, he then hammers the point home with ‘any film which doesn’t shock, isn’t worth looking at’ (p. 17).

I find it significant that Zedd’s opposition to the established knowledge of the critical institutions of Structuralist filmmaking also places emphasis on overturning established structures and discourses of morality and taste—as evidenced in this passage:

Intellectual growth demands that risks be taken and changes occur in political, sexual and aesthetic alignments no matter who disapproves. We propose to go beyond all limits set or prescribed by taste, morality or any other traditional value system shackling the minds

¹⁶⁸ While I agree with Sargeant, I also note that the list remains rather limited and selective (and is padded out with reference to his processing plant, ‘DirectArt Ltd’).

of men. We pass beyond and go over boundaries of millimeters, screens and projectors to a state of expanded cinema ([1985] 2012, p. 17).¹⁶⁹

This passage serves to illustrate how Zedd conceived of sexuality and taboos as a means of contesting established norms of taste so as to ‘liberate’ his coterie from societal conditioning. I see Zedd’s conjunction of the ‘political, sexual and aesthetic’ as highlighting the nexus at which the case studies surveyed here operate.

Zedd advocated the overturning of hegemonic values: ‘we violate the command and law that we bore audiences to death in rituals of circumlocution and propose to break all the taboos of our age by sinning as much as possible’ ([1985] 2012, p. 17). Zedd’s advocacy of ‘sinning’ as a *modus operandi* through which to reach the site of taboo places desire within the process of transgression. That is, ‘sinning’ here becomes acts of pleasure-seeking both for itself and in deliberate contravention of the ‘moralising’ and prohibitions of religious and political discourse. As sociologist Chris Jenks reminds us however, ‘the relation between rule and transgression can appear random, capricious, individualistic, pathological, accidental or even silly. What philosophy reveals is purpose’ (2003, p. 80). This relates to punk, in terms of the often-overlooked aspect of humour within punk practice and its willing embrace of the abject and taboo, as I discussed in chapter 2.

Positioning his cohort as opposed to the sacred, Zedd advances the profane as both integral to their critical aims, and their underground lifestyle: ‘All values must be challenged.

¹⁶⁹ This harks back to Warhol’s *Exploding Plastic Inevitable*, his collaboration with the Velvet Underground, which was conceived as ‘expanded cinema’. Zedd would re-enact this guerrilla cinema throughout his career, screening films on the side of buildings for the public to view. Alongside Kern and Lunch, he also presented performance art pieces featuring staged violence throughout the 1980s.

Nothing is sacred. Everything must be questioned and reassessed in order to free our minds from the faith of tradition' ([1985] 2012, p. 17). Zedd's declamatory rhetoric is a particularly interesting satire of 'crazy TV evangelists dominating the airwaves' at the time (Forson, 2011). Its tone parallels the provocative lexicon articulated earlier with during first wave punk, resonating with the 'manifesto' of the 'You're gonna wake up one morning' SEX-era T-shirt design.¹⁷⁰ Similarly, Zedd's manifesto attempts to re-draw the lines of accepted artistry, bolstering the idea of a transgressive artistic lineage within which he situated himself and his counterparts. Yet, as with McLaren, Zedd's document can be read as an attempt at attracting and generating publicity through the route of provocation, first travelled by early punk.

Zedd echoed Nietzsche's theory in his placing importance on a nihilistic 'transvaluation' through the explorations necessitated in enacting their transgressive practices. In his broad overview of key historical theorisations of transgression as a concept, Jenks writes that 'Transgression, in whatever form it might take, is as old as the nature and reinforcement of rules—which it breaks' (2003, p. 80). Jenks defines transgression as 'that conduct which breaks rules or exceeds boundaries' (p. 3). The ontological reality of humanity, according to Jenks (2003), necessitates the essential nature of transgression, which can be seen to be operative at the heart of any form of social or cultural change. In socio-cultural contexts, to transgress 'is to go beyond the bounds or limits set by a commandment or law or convention, it is to violate or infringe' (p. 2). Going beyond established structures in societal terms however, prompts consequence and reaction, which can be seen in the media scandals and the threat of legal

¹⁷⁰ Co-designed with Bernie Rhodes, this T-shirt served as a manifesto which listed the 'loves' and 'hates' of the SEX coterie, and McLaren specifically. The T-shirt was initially sported by Jordan and the Sex Pistols, but was not reproduced after its initial run.

ramifications, as I discussed in both chapter 2 in relation to McLaren and Westwood's legal trials, as well as the obscenity trials of COUM Transmissions and Robert Mapplethorpe, as I discussed in chapter 3.

Jenks reasserts the importance of the taboo to transgression, whose boundaries must be exceeded in order to contravene its socially and psychologically constructed limits. Jenks contends that transgression affirms the very limit itself: 'to transgress is [...] to announce and even laudate the commandment, the law or the convention' (2003, p. 2). In doing so, the transgressor opens up an engagement with 'a deeply reflexive act of denial and affirmation' (p. 2), thereby reconstituting the self, according to the 'self-shattering' defence which acts as a prohibition against the taboo. It is important to point out that transgression requires a prior cognisance of the social codes that constitute certain cultural objects as taboo, so as to transgress the taboo itself and thereby perform a transgressive act.

To recognise the site of taboo and to violate it through its enactment is to transcend both moral and artistic boundaries; simultaneously opposing, yet going beyond, given limits. For Jenks,

Transgression and its capacity to challenge, fracture, overthrow, spoil or question the unquestionable can no longer be contained as naughtiness or occasional abhorration [it is] part of the purpose of being and is the unstable principle by which any stasis either sustains or transforms (2003, p. 81).

Seen in this way, as opposed to residing on a spectrum between 'good' and 'bad', transgression is purposive. Jenks counters, 'In the same way, all rules are neither 'good' nor 'bad' and their sanctity no longer resides in the judgement of God!' (p. 81).

These are the core grounds on which Nietzsche sees human propensity towards the transgressive as suggested by actions that fall into the realm of sin. Following the death of God, ‘satisfaction is looked for and found in failure, decay, pain, misfortune, ugliness, voluntary deprivation, destruction of selfhood, self-flagellation and self-sacrifice’ (Nietzsche, 1887, p. 810). Writing on Zedd’s manifesto, Sargeant argues that ‘in its demand that rules be broken and its call for raw affirmation of transgression it posits a Nietzschean transvaluation of all values’ (1995, p. 31).¹⁷¹ Jenks reminds us that transgression entails a double-bind stemming from the occluded nature of the taboo within societal structures, intrinsic to the concept of ‘transvaluation’ as articulated by Nietzsche.

However, read against his own testimony, it is interesting to note Zedd’s disavowal of pornography, thereby delimiting the potential of the pornographic aesthetic towards his purportedly transgressive aims. Reflecting on the aesthetic of the CoT, Zedd contends, ‘It was never pornography. It was eroticism. Sometimes it was experimental, deconstructing pornographic elements and turning them into something else’ (Forson, 2011, n.p.). However, Zedd’s sublimation of the erotic to the level of art, as opposed to the pornographic, seems to belie the dependence of the Cinema of Transgression on pornographic aesthetics, and the issues surrounding exploitation and agency that have dogged their work. Zedd sees his fascination with the sexual as part of his transgressive project, which aimed to target the ‘sexual repression’ of society. This psychoanalytic-Marxist inspired lens of critique recalls earlier first wave punk antecedents namely, McLaren and Westwood’s ‘Reichian’ diagnosis of ‘sexual repression’ in the

¹⁷¹ Zedd published the manifesto in the fourth edition of his publication: *The Underground Film Bulletin* under the pseudonym Orion Jeriko.

late-1970s. In an interview from 2011, Zedd appears to almost parody McLaren's earlier claims: 'Sexual repression is one of the means by which authoritarian power maintains control. We destroyed that with the Cinema of Transgression' (Forson, 2011, n.p.). The 'destruction of sexuality' motif would find particular expression within Richard Kern's oeuvre, to which I now turn.

Goodbye 42nd Street (1986)

Richard Kern moved to New York from North Carolina in 1978, having been enamoured with the 'exotic' nature of the artistic scene of Warhol's Factory in his younger years. The pulp subject matter of Warhol-endorsed films such as *Blood for Dracula* (1974), directed by Warhol's assistant Paul Morrissey, resonated with Kern's aesthetic sensibility and his penchant for pulp and B-Movie horror. Although Kern had harboured ambitions to make films, his creative dalliances with the cinematic medium were limited. Inspired by Zedd's early work, Kern was loaned some filmmaking equipment by Beth B.: a skeleton setup limited to a basic lighting rig, a reel of tape, and a Super-8 camera. Beth B. would also introduce Kern to Zedd in 1984.

Kern's first solo project, *Goodbye 42nd Street* served to eulogise the influence of the 'grindhouse imaginary' of the aesthetic of the Cinema of Transgression. If the environs of the Lower East Side were crucial to No Wave film, then 42nd street can be considered formative to the Cinema of Transgression. The 42nd street intersection, known colloquially as the 'deuce', runs through Times Square—which, in the 1970s, was home to the city's Red Light district. A detailed consideration of the history of this site is beyond my scope here and has, in any case, been covered extensively elsewhere, but I do need to foreground the ways in which this location

is ‘remembered’ as a defining feature of New York in this period—as reflected in films such as *Taxi Driver* (1976) and in the HBO series *The Deuce* (2017-2019). In *Deathtripping* (1995), Sargeant describes the 42nd street junction in overtly romanticised terms:

The crowded environs that formed Manhattan’s shabby centre—a heady mix of adult shops, strip clubs and grindhouse cinemas—were populated with people searching for thrills and people selling them (2012, p. 27).

Sargeant’s mythologising here speaks to what film scholar David Church (2011) has called the ‘golden age’ of American grindhouse nostalgia.

Film scholar Glenn Ward’s article ‘Grinding Out the Grindhouse: Exploitation, Myth, and Memory’ (2016) brings to bear the dimensions of memory-work at work in scholarly ‘remembering’ of this period as an object of research. Writing on the legacy of Times Square in cinematic terms, Ward details: ‘In filmic terms, its accumulation of neon signs and garish billboards serves as an instant signifier of the city as a theater of distractions offering commodified sex, metropolitan decadence, and glamorous alienation’ (2016, p. 20). Not unlike the cross-cultural exchange witnessed during the emergence of punk—marked by a coalescence of creatives in the Lower East Side—Ward points to the ‘interconnectedness of exploitation, porn, and art worlds’ centred around the ‘deuce’ (p. 25). As Ward puts it, ‘coexistence in the same urban environs’ was a significant factor in multimedia production and aesthetic inspiration, entailing ‘some sharing of personnel, management, and audience’ (p. 25). Perhaps more significant, was the fact that this cross-exchange sometimes made the worlds of exploitation cinema, pornography and art, ‘joint targets of both right-wing and feminist censorship campaigns’ (p. 25). Indeed, Ward claims that anti-porn ‘marches in Times Square in the late

1970s, along with Andrea Dworkin's conflation of pornography and snuff, were galvanized by the cheek-by-jowl availability of hard-core and sexploitation films, "snuff" loops, sadomasochistic live acts, and prostitution in the same zone' (p. 25).

However, as Ward points out, 'Whether the agent of destruction was hardcore, new technology, or moral campaigning, it is widely agreed that grindhouse cinema was extinct by the end of the 1980s' (2016, p. 22). In this sense, Ward sees Richard Kern's *Goodbye 42nd Street* as a 'elegiac' response to the dissolution of the 'grindhouse'. Indeed, Kern himself affirms the eulogistic tone that perforates the film in a recent episode of Lydia Lunch's podcast 'The Lydian Spin'; Kern admits that he was inspired to make the film after reading a newspaper article on the impending plans to 'clean up' the area, thereby prompting him to document it before it became gentrified (Lunch, 2020). Tellingly however, Kern admits to having never entered any of the sex shops, but instead, sought to imagine domestic scenes of their interior.

Kern's 'imagined' fantasy of violence and sex at the 'deuce' finds expression in the loose narrative of *Goodbye 42nd Street*, which displays a fascination with Church's (2011) notion of 'grindhouse nostalgia'. Here, the influence of the 'grindhouse imaginary' on Kern seeps into the filmic frame; Kern portrays the 'deuce' in part-documentary fashion, opening the film with panning shots that record the facades of sex cinemas and strip clubs advertising '25c for a dance', which is then intercut with surrealistic scenes featuring domestic gore. In one scene, driven to extreme violence at dinner-time, a frustrated wife stabs her husband's eye from his skull. The film concludes with the suicide of a young man with a revolver, similarly seated at a table; the domestic environs hide a seething plane of ruthless desire and frenzied hysteria,

enactments of the 'death drive'. Read against the title of the film and its cinematic locations, the symbolic violence of this low budget gore is rather tongue-in-cheek in tone, bidding farewell to the environs of Manhattan's seething underbelly through murder or suicide.



Figure 4.3: Kern, Richard. Film still, *Goodbye 42nd Street* (1986).



Figure 4.4: Kern, Richard. Film still, *Goodbye 42nd Street*.

Given the film's ironic titular allusion to the musical *42nd Street*—an all-singing-all-dancing ode to the 1930s—Kern's film suggests the utopian distractions of the musical age are over: the musical's fantastical numbers and expressive choreography irrelevant to the warts-and-all social fabric that Kern's kino-eye reveals to the viewer. Although Kern confirms that he filmed the exterior shots while walking, the general pace and diegetic continuity of the documentary sequences bear a striking resemblance to Martin Scorsese's celebrated depiction of the Manhattan streets in *Taxi Driver*, in which ex-Vietnam veteran Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) rides the streets obsessed with the corruption of the city, and the 'scum' that populate it (*Taxi Driver*). Indeed, the spectre of Bickle seems to loom over the narrative of *Goodbye 42nd Street*, as street shots from Times Square are intercut with scenes of graphic violence. In conjunction, the gritty mise-en-scene of these films draws from the visceral aesthetic of exploitation cinema. For Sargeant, the violence in Kern's film suggests 'fantasies of what was transpiring in the porno theatres and cinemas' (1995, p. 32). Yet, as is common with Kern's

cinematic corpus, the juxtaposition of shots of gore betray a cartoonish, black humour. The themes of sexuality and violence centred on sexual performance and its transgressive potentials, took on a more parodic, satirical tone in Kern's next work, *Manhattan Love Suicides*.

As Kern has explained, the four-part short series the *Manhattan Love Suicides* was conceived as 'a set of films that people [*sic*] go so crazy for the people they're in love with that they kill themselves' (*Blank City*, 2009). The first instalment of the film, *Stray Dogs*, is perhaps most well-known for featuring queer artist David Wojnarowicz who delivers a comedic performance that borrows from avant-garde traditions. His frenetic performance style is redolent of cinematic traditions such as German Expressionism, in which the frame rate lent the actors a highly stylised—albeit jerky—quality, compounded by the high-pitched melodrama of the acting performances. Here, the dangerous unpredictability of Wojnarowicz's protagonist is conveyed through his twitchy performance.

The film follows Wojnarowicz as he encounters the celebrity artist (played by Bill Price) he admires. Wojnarowicz stalks the artist along the streets of Manhattan back to his apartment, the actor's exaggerated performance bleeding into absurdist territory. Inside the artist's apartment, Wojnarowicz is ignored by his idol and, in a dejected frenzy, he begins to masturbate frenetically, while his love object, with back turned, resumes work on a painting. Following a failed attempt to engage the artist in a sexual embrace, the fan proceeds to get increasingly enraged; reaching boiling point, his veins pop in apoplectic fury. Suddenly, Wojnarowicz's arm tears from its shoulder blade, clattering to the floor; the visual enactment of the idiom 'tearing

myself apart'.¹⁷² A bloody mess amongst his own severed limbs, the artist mockingly attempts to make a painted impression of the scene while bellowing with laughter. The short takes viewers through a series of parodic scenes of self-flagellation and humiliation, culminating in the literal destruction of the self, but it retains its black humour throughout, in part, due to the melodramatic performance of Wojnarowicz, and the sheer absurdity of the grotesque bodily dismemberment onscreen. The sexually destructive dynamics between the characters is amplified by J.G. Thirlwell's erratic soundtrack, a frenzied assemblage of drill noises and metallic clangs, which adds a level of tension to the visuals.



Figure 4.5: Kern, Richard. Film still, David Wojnarowicz in *Stray Dogs* (1985).

¹⁷² This chimes with James Dean's iconic performance as Jim Stark in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), who berates his parents for 'tearing him apart'.

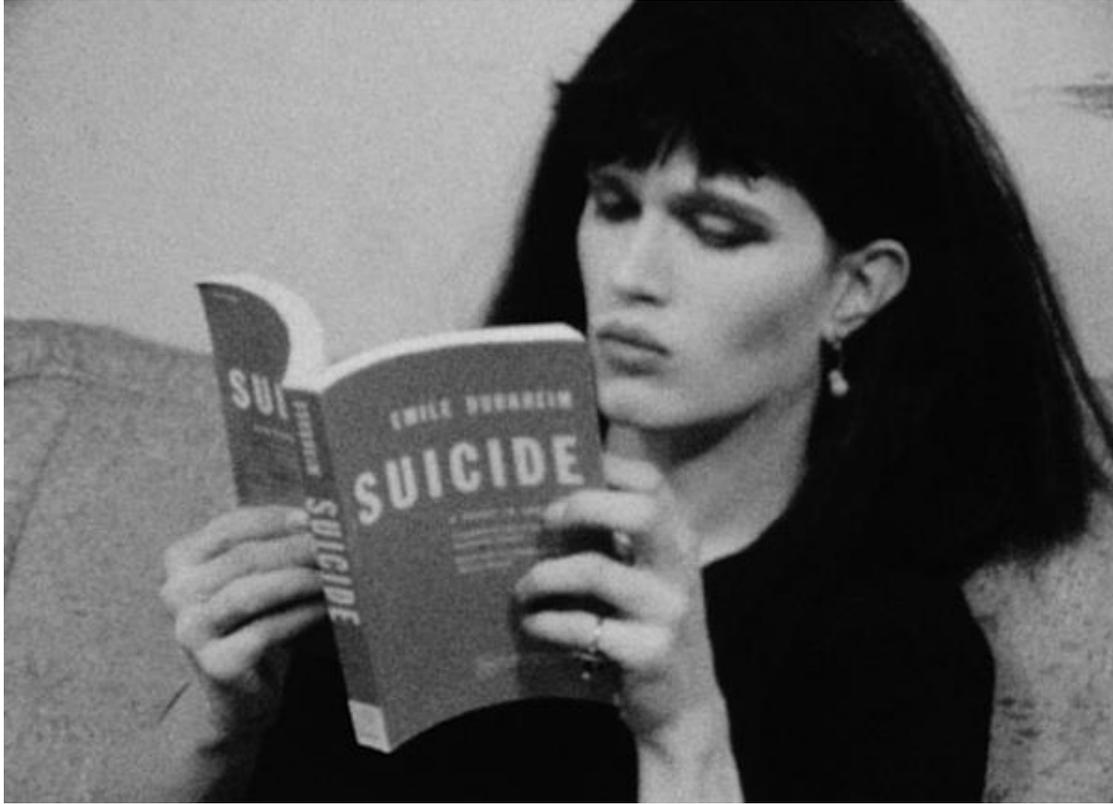


Figure 4.6: Zedd, Nick. Film still, *Thrust in Me* (1985).

The second instalment in the series, *Thrust in Me*, is a collaboration with Nick Zedd. Zedd plays two characters in the film; the troubled female character, and her boyfriend, whose affectation conveys an insouciant petulance. The film opens with Zedd pacing the streets of Manhattan to a soundtrack of The Dream Syndicate's 'John Coltrane Stereo Blues' (1984), a driving post-punk guitar track, with the repeated refrain 'it's gonna be alright'. The film then cuts to Zedd's female character, in drag wearing a dress and sporting a long-haired wig and makeup, reading Emile Durkheim's *Suicide* (1897). Depressed, she runs a bath; haltingly slitting her wrists before a picture of Jesus Christ. Zedd's male character returns home, appears to ignore the corpse of his deceased girlfriend, before promptly proceeding to use the toilet. In the absence

of toilet roll, Zedd's iconoclasm peaks as he wipes his behind with the likeness of Christ. He then animates his dead partner, inserting his penis into her mouth for the film's climatic scene of necrophiliac auto-fellatio. Zedd's excessive posturing and surly countenance add an element of camp to the scene, which is heightened by his drag performance. The film is interesting as it stages a fantasy engaged through differing aesthetic practices in pornography; that is, the sexual objectification of the self, and the practice of self-desire and auto-eroticism, as a stimulus for sexual relief.

As argued by writer Emily Colucci, 'In *Thrust in Me*, Zedd almost heroically manages to cross the line of acceptability relating to gender, suicide, blasphemy, necrophilia and self-love in just one short film' (Colucci, 2013, n.p.). Here, a certain Nietzschean sensibility is echoed in Colucci's review, which to be sure, finds expression in the film's muscular iconoclasm, and its portrayal of a string of taboos being broken in quick succession. However, sexuality appears to be the key site through which Zedd and Kern attempt to realise their transgressive aims. For instance, the oral sex simulation in *Thrust in Me*, echoes B-movie aesthetics and black comedy, but the ejaculation sequence tips the short into the realm of actual humour. Clearly the film makes light of suicide, death and necrophilia but its shock effect is perhaps a direct attempt to mock the artistic sensibilities of Structuralist film which Zedd particularly targeted for opprobrium in his CoT manifesto.

This particular sequence seems to rupture elements of the transgressive staging of the narrative and works within the critical tradition of the carnivalesque. Pasi Falk has suggested that the body is central to transgressive practice. As Falk writes in *The Consuming Body*:

Even the transgressive manifestations of corporeality which momentarily collapse the Order—such as the *carnivalistic* inversion of social hierarchies or the laughter breaking the order of meaning and language—are still conditioned by and related to those culturally constituted boundaries which are trespassed (1997, p. 2).

In the climactic image of this fellatio sequence, Zedd's penis not only ejaculates on to the face of his deceased girlfriend but the shock of the scene is exacerbated by the excessive amounts of semen he produces. Zedd's actions in this scene confirm Jenks observation that, 'while transgression exceeds the limits of taboos, it does not destroy the entire structure of a taboo, limit or prohibition' (2003, p. 65). The shock of the film works through his disregard for death—he pays no heed to her body until he then commits the ultimate violation of it—and the desecration of her corpse. 'For a short period of time' Colucci writes, 'transgression works to subvert the taboo, revealing these boundaries as socially constructed and fluid rather than static and natural' (2013, n.p.). The site that the taboo occupies within the hegemonic social codes of its cultural positioning is characterised, according to Bataille, by an 'intangible stability' (quoted in Colucci, 2013, n.p.), as the normative cultural codes are constantly in a process of flux and perceptions on issues of stigma and taboo are contingent on cultural trends and societal change. In this sense, Zedd's performed necrophilia onscreen is so confrontational that audiences are forced into a relationship of negotiation with it. In its recreation and simulation of the desecration of a taboo—respect for the dead—it iterates that taboo in action, despite symbolically performing it. But as Zedd plays both parts and performs the blowjob through technical superimposition on himself, the taboo gives way to absurdity and humour.

The final scene completes a 360-degree panning shot of the Manhattan skyline, as shot from the top of the Lower East Side walk-up where the action has been taking place. We see Zedd, perched atop the building, legs astride resembling the figure in Caspar David Freidrich's 'Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog' (1818), with a body bag lying close to his feet. The soundtrack, 'John Coltrane Stereo Blues', functions as an ironic stab at both the film's content ('it's gonna' be alright'), and the inertia captured in Zedd's performance. Despite this surprisingly ambiguous ending, the film is unsympathetic to its female protagonist and, by extension, appears to revel in the pleasures of abusing the female body. Zedd may have played the female character himself (and continued to do so in his late 1980s work) but the exploitation of the female character appears gratuitously pleasurable nonetheless.

The Evil Cameraman (1990)

Kern's *The Evil Cameraman* is interesting in its attempts to embrace the 'male gaze' as a tool of power. The diegetic structure of the *The Evil Cameraman* is split into two parts, with the first half of the film suggesting the conventional setup of the joke. Kern appears in front of the camera, slightly bedraggled in a leather jacket and with greasy hair, in the guise of the 'evil cameraman'. In the first two scenes Kern variously handles women, putting them into bondage positions and restraining them brusquely. In this sequence, he pays intense attention to detail (in the setting-up of the various staged bondage scenarios), while largely ignoring his female co-stars and is seemingly oblivious to the unease his brooding silence seems to inspire in his models. His curiously detached behaviour progresses to more sexually aggressive moves, before he presents his semi-erect penis to the face of his co-star. A swastika is pinned on his stomach and his co-star reacts to his exhibitionism with disgust.



Figure 4.7: Kern and co-star in *The Evil Cameraman* (1990).

Punk's shock tactics are mirrored in the selfish, rough and stylised aggression with which the cameraman seeks to enact his sexual fantasies and the humour of the scene exposes the exploitative relations of gendered sexual power. The cameraman's self-absorption in the task of restraining his models demonstrates the objectification of the female body in representation—even so, Kern's attempts at enacting his persona/the 'male gaze' fails spectacularly. His female actors reject his advances, laughing at his attempts to seduce them with his semi-erect penis. Kern's self-satirisation is signalled in the inclusion of the transgressive 'sign' of the swastika and the almost parodic horror of his female co-star as she recoils from him (see Figure 4.7).

Sargeant's view of the first section of the film is that it 'luxuriates in a downward spiral of potential terror which apparently offers no art-context excuses for its extremity' (1995, p. 88). Yet I think his dismissal of the film as lacking any artistic merit or inspiration is short-sighted. There are a number of connections between *The Evil Cameraman* and Yoko Ono's infamous participatory performance artwork *Cut Piece* (first performed in Kyoto in 1964). In that performance—which Ono has performed several times since and has inspired countless re-interpretations by artists such as Marina Abramović—Ono sat motionless on a stage in front of an audience, inviting them to cut a piece of her clothing. Early audience/participants behaved with relative restraint in their cutting, later audiences became increasingly invasive, snipping at the more intimate items of Ono's clothing such as her bra. In *The Evil Cameraman*, Kern reprises this mode of performance, albeit in fragmentary fashion.

In the second part of the film, in which Kern's appearance is conspicuously clean-shaven and clean-cut, he restrains 'Little Linda', this time with ribbons (as opposed to the leather straps and wire utilised in the first section). Kneeling down and snipping away the crotch of 'Little Linda's' tights to reveal her pubic area, Kern lowers his head towards her vagina so as to instigate oral sex. While commonplace according to conventions of most hard-core porn, Kern's advances are spectacularly rejected when his co-star, tearing off the flimsy ribbons of restraint, immediately grabs his head and pushes it backwards, causing Kern to fall backwards out of shot. The climax overturns both the expected narrative progression towards sexual congress and the established power dynamics initially set up by the film. In doing, the female characters move from being the passive objects of male desires to being emboldened subjects in possession of sufficient agency to reject male advances.



Figure 4.8: Richard Kern as the dejected ‘evil cameraman’, in *The Evil Cameraman*.

Sargeant sees the ‘parodic stance’ of the film as typical of Kern’s work more broadly. Russ Bestley’s study of humour offers ways of understanding this parodic stance, paying attention to the ways in which punk’s visual themes utilised humour as a ‘critical strategy’ with ‘subversive potential’ (2013, p. 120). His work hones in on the ways in which the ‘cultural assault’ of British punk was perceived as an ‘assault on late twentieth century national and cultural values’ (p. 120), although, he extends this argument to Anglo-American punk-related activities, more broadly. Drawing on Andy Medhurst’s *A National Joke* (2007), a study into English humour and ‘modes of comedy’ (p. 120), Bestley pinpoints the ways in which humour has addressed ‘power struggles’ particularly antagonisms of classism, racism, and sexism. Punk’s expressions of humour can be understood through Bestley’s three categories:

superiority (where the protagonist exercises or asserts a superior position to the target of the humour), incongruity (the disruption of expectations, often involving wordplay and similar linguistic strategies) and relief (the venting of nervous energy through the breaking of taboos and moral or ethical codes) (p. 121).

Following Bestley, I would suggest that ‘incongruity’ best fits the humour in Kern’s films.

Indeed, Sargeant notes the ways in which the women in the film ‘literally reject their cinematic status as objects-of-the-gaze at key moments’ (1995, p. 89), thereby disrupting audience expectations (p. 121). Sargeant observes that ‘the jaded audience may want to see sex, but the sex always fails to materialise’ (p. 89).

The dynamics of plot and narrative techniques in *The Evil Cameraman* operate through their direct reference to the structures of classical narrative cinema as outlined in feminist critic Laura Mulvey’s well-known conceptualisation of the ‘male gaze’. More than just pastiche enactments of the ‘punk aesthetic’ and their ‘aestheticised violence’, Kern’s work confounds the power dynamics which inform the ‘male gaze’, the regime of looking at the female body that underpins Hollywood cinema in order to allow the viewer to identify with the ‘active’ viewpoint of the male protagonist. Kern utilises the motif of voyeurism as a means of deconstructing the ‘pornographic tropes’ he deliberately stages in his works, thus Kern attempts to portray women as agentic subjects rather than ‘passive’ victims of masculine violence. I will pursue this argument further in relation to *Fingered* below.



Figure 4.9: Film poster: *Fingered* (1986).

***Fingered* (1986)**

Kern's *Fingered* is arguably his best known work. The film pushes the thematic of sex as a site of transgression to its limits, staging a 'punk aesthetic' that contests the dichotomous oppositions regulating art and porn. The film also prompts renewed consideration of the contemporaneous feminist debates about pornography during this period. In its staging of female desire through its star, Lydia Lunch, the film problematises some of the claims of radical feminism. The film was the second writing collaboration undertaken by Kern and Lunch—their first was the more artistic, experimental, short *The Right Side of My Brain* (1985), which explored Lunch's sexual psyche accompanied by a monologue musing on themes of power and violence. Lunch also

performed briefly in *Submit to Me* (1985), which showcased an assortment of BDSM stagings; Lunch opens the film, caressing her body in an overtly sexualised strip tease sequence bordering on parody of the conventions of erotic performance (Figure 4.10).



Figure 4.10: Lydia Lunch in *Submit to Me* (1985).

Fingered contrasts notably with these earlier works, offering a much more visceral cinematic experience. Where these previous shorts were based on a series of vignettes—and were steeped in black humour, bordering on the absurd—*Fingered* employs a much more structured narrative, and an aesthetic that is redolent of cinema vérité. The gritty monochrome veneer of the cinematic frame marks a departure from the overtly stylised cinematic montage of *Submit to Me* and *The Evil Cameraman*, perhaps an indication that Lunch conceived the film as a semi-autobiographical narrative, loosely based on her younger life spent hitchhiking with former boyfriend, biker Marty Nation, who plays her onscreen sexual partner/kidnapper.

Kern described *Fingered* as a ‘drive-in exploitation’ movie (Lunch, 2020), rendered as a full-length movie trailer. Its status as simultaneously a movie and film trailer is just one of the film’s many contradictions—its narrative themes and staging also call into question binary logics and underscore the film’s ‘punk sensibility’. The film’s attempts at brevity and minimalism mark a conscious moving away from the developed plot and length of narrative film.

The film begins with a content warning—as reprinted in Sargeant’s study, the warning is presented as follows:

‘This film is an EXERCISE in the CAPITALIZATION of an EXPLOITATION that some may find unnecessarily VIOLENT, SEXIST, and DISGUSTING. We therefore suggest the viewer EXECUTE caution and discretion. Although it is not our sole intention to SHOCK, INSULT, or IRRITATE, you have been warned that we are CATERING only to our own preference as members of the SEXUAL MINORITY’ (1995, pp. 85/86).

Strikingly, this statement recalls the manifesto, describing in impassioned fashion the extent of their transgressions, while the darkly humorous tone suggests a tongue-in-cheek attempt to mock such classifications. The opening line, with its self-proclamation of sexism and exploitation, parodies the outrage of Dworkin’s rhetoric with its accumulations of description for men’s exploitation of women. It also probably references Lunch’s profession as a phone sex worker, alongside the identification of the film’s producers and consumers as ‘members of the SEXUAL MINORITY’, in terms that foreshadow contemporary identity politics. This claim to a ‘minority’ status points to the demands of heteronormativity but recasts the sexual subculture and the

themes of perversion, BDSM and fantasy that saturate the film's diegesis, as constituting an alternative authority.



Figure 4.11: Lydia Lunch as the phone-sex operator in *Fingered* (1986), film still.

The film opens on a conversation between phone sex worker (Lunch) and a leery lone male masturbator, who addresses Lunch as ‘mommy’ in an incest scenario. Suitably unimpressed, Lunch bluntly reminds the caller that his bank card number is required to speak with ‘mommy’. The dialogue turns aggressive, as the caller recounts his mother’s past boyfriends in derogatory and racist language. The next call Lunch receives is from Nation, who engages Lunch in a pornographic dialogue, replete with chauvinistic tropes and misogynistic motifs—referring to Lunch as ‘one fine piece of fuck meat’ who was ‘born to worship [his] cock’. Nation masturbates while on the phone and his advances appeal to Lunch. She tells him

‘I’m the hottest fucking slut in town, you know that’. Highlighting the creative and emotional labour of the phone sex worker, Lunch goes on to transgress the boundaries that regulate this tech-facilitated exchange by inviting Nation over to her apartment. Once he arrives, Lunch sits on a desk in front of Nation, teasing her fishnet-clad legs in flirtatious foreplay. He impatiently encourages her advances—‘you wanna’ fuck baby?’—before forcefully removing her lingerie and performing oral sex on her. His moves are met with a discernibly approving response, before the two move to rough sex; the first non-simulated sexual scene in the film between Lunch and Nation.



Figure 4.12: Promotional image: Lydia Lunch and Marty Nation in *Fingered*.

Thereafter, Nation kidnaps Lunch, taking her on a road trip in which the film’s themes of violence and black humour frequently bleed into one another. Particularly when, after the couple leave Lunch’s apartment, a lecherous male confronts Lunch on the sidewalk to ask ‘how much?’ Lunch replies ‘you can’t afford it anyway’, before Nation promptly muscles in, stabbing the man

in the leg, and fleeing the scene with Lunch in tow. The most memorable scene of the film comes shortly thereafter, after the couple engage in heated argument during which Lunch protests at Nation's 'kidnapping'. Nation stops the car, drags Lunch from it, before slamming her onto the bonnet. He then draws a pistol and appears to penetrate Lunch with it. Lunch initially resists but this transitions into another sex sequence, in which the couple engage in 'doggystyle' over the bonnet of the car. During the sequence, Lunch takes Nation's pistol and empties a round of ammunition into the air as she climaxes; a metaphor for male orgasm. During the final sequence of the film, Lunch and Nation pick up a distressed young woman on the side of the road (Lung Leg), who claims to have been the victim of an attempted rape. Leg's visibly hysterical persona quickly becomes the target of Lunch and Nation's derision. Leg briefly escapes from the car, and Lunch and Nation violently restrain her, throwing her around aggressively in the process, before the cops show up and order the group to 'Freeze!' as the dénouement of the film.

Reflecting on the legacy of the film in an episode of her podcast, Lunch reveals to Kern that 'I had to document [...] my mental state, my psychosexuality, from a viewpoint that I had not seen described adequately anywhere else, and you helped me to do that' (Lunch, 2020). Lunch continues, 'with *Fingered* I was trying to show the victim becomes the victimizer, and this [is] based on a lot of incidents that Marty and I had already had' (Lunch, 2020). Here, Lunch advances a testimony that does not deny the pornographic nature of the film, but does frame its narrative as a dramatisation of the multiple and complex meanings of female sexual desire that are under-represented in mainstream discourses. In this, she problematises the essentialist reasoning underpinning the critique of pornography as premised on a theory of rape. On the one hand, Lunch's testimony explicitly reproaches the 'MacDworkin' line, which presupposes a

natural female sexuality that has been corrupted by its subjection to patriarchal structures of domination. Yet, on the other hand, Lunch also appear to concur with the Dworkinite conception of female sexuality as always at risk of rape/victimising but, contrastingly, Lunch doesn't see this as necessitating withdrawal from the sexual realm.

With these issues in mind, I would argue that the opening 'shock warning'—with its emphasis on the 'preference' of the cast as members of a 'sexual minority'—serves to underscore Lunch's comments, attesting to her conceptualisation of the film as an expression of her own desires as a heterosexual woman.

Yet, despite her justifications, at the first screening of the film in New York, *Fingered* was promptly condemned by feminist critics for its patriarchal violence. As Lunch recounts on her podcast with Kern, feminist performance artist and NYU professor Karen Finley reacted with outrage and disgust to the film, reputedly vomiting upon viewing it, and accusing Lunch of 'carrying on the cycle of abuse' (Lunch, 2020). Significantly Lunch did not seek to deny the charge; rather, she agreed with the assertion, even if this point seems to have been lost on Finley, stating 'yes that's what I was trying to show here' (Lunch, 2020). The film premiere in Berlin was also subjected to protest, as Cramer recounts: 'the apex of the feminist "PorNo" campaign, exploded in violence at the Berlin theatre Eiszeit, when an autonomous commando' raided Kern's screening of the film (Cramer, 2007, p. 173). Kern's response was, to be sure, distinctly punk, purportedly shouting 'fuck you' to the German audience.

From a contemporary perspective, the film's graphic depiction of misogynistic violence is troubling, particularly when considering the physical harassment of its female protagonists. In the final scene in which Lung Leg's character escapes Nation's car, Lunch chases after her, physically restraining Leg on the ground, before Nation approaches and masturbates over her body as Lunch removes Leg's underwear and attempts to stimulate her in a non-simulated sequence. Visibly shaken, Leg escapes only to be restrained by Nation, who bangs her repeatedly against a wall, then against the ground, slapping her while shouting 'you brought this upon yourself you fucking bitch.' This sequence contrasts markedly with the violence enacted upon the film's male characters, which is more overtly humorous in its presentation and mostly simulated. Nation's various altercations with his male co-stars involve the 'shlock' of fake blood and randomness that evoke black humour, but his harassment of Lunch and Lung Leg is much more difficult to watch. Even more so to contemporary viewers, given the biographical information that has emerged since, which reveals Leg's regrets about partaking in the film, and that she would not have agreed to do the film had she known that she would be physically assaulted by Nation as part of the shoot (Sargeant, 1995, p. 200).

These revelations threaten to overshadow the critical implications of the film, particularly in this #MeToo moment. Even so, I suggest that rather than 'carrying on the cycle of abuse', the film serves to stage that abuse in alignment with the radical feminist anti-pornography position. In his article, 'Lydia Lunch: Punishment of the Rose', Duane Davis unpacks the contradictions of the film. For Davis, Lunch's performance 'problematizes her body and its actions' (1995, p. 177). Davis suggests that the 'various contradictions and paradoxes' of the film are less the results of 'sloppy filmmaking', as he puts it, instead 'they result from the tension placed on the

female body by the woman herself' (1995, p. 177). Davis notes how Lunch's performance subverts the expectations of the (male) viewer, noting that at 'the level of acting as a job, she doesn't do this for money' and, moreover, it 'is not merely a 'role' given to her', as affirmed by her co-writing of the film alongside Kern. Davis, confused, asks 'What then is she doing?', before resignedly claiming that 'we, men, at least, don't know' (p. 177).

Unpacking Davis' argument, he posits the significance of the disruption of audience expectations, and, moreover, the stereotypical performance of roles arguing that in 'pornography, a woman's body must mark the site of Desire; and only resistance or enthusiasm is permitted as the proper erotics' (1995, p. 177). What is unique about Lunch's performance for Davis, is her appearing to act out 'the revenge of the Body' as a challenge to 'the constant process of idealization (subjugation)' through which the female body is marked as the desired object. Indeed, as Davis put it, a 'woman's body is hardly her own: marked, zoned, graphed and mapped—it approaches the status of pure decoration and ornament' (p. 176). In this way, Lunch's reclamation of her own desire in the film serves to overturn the 'subjugation' of her body to the power dynamics of the 'male gaze', which structures the female body as a 'sex object'.

Davis argues that, if a woman 'owns her own Desire she becomes a threat and therefore she must always simulate Desire [*sic*]' (p. 176). Here, then, the 'threat' posed by Lunch's body can be seen in her resistance to the expectations of a purely passive female sexuality—as is supposedly discernible in the pornographic 'mainstream'—while simultaneously embracing her own desire even if those desires are centred on sexual scenarios with men who embody the

violence of patriarchal chauvinism. Davis affirms this point, noting how in pornography, ‘Men too of course must act out certain roles and Lydia essentializes them in her movies as well. In pornography men are portrayed as Pure Lust—Lydia portrays them this way as well’ (p. 177).

Reflecting upon the thematic pertaining to the ‘destruction’ of sex, Davis invokes a broadly psychoanalytic lens, reading *Fingered* as Lunch’s attempt to ‘destroy pornography with the obscene—the brute thing itself’ (1995, p. 177). In doing so, Davis proposes that Lunch disperses the ‘fantasmatic supplement’ (Fisher, 2018, p. 127) that serves as the fantasy site of projection—as discussed in chapter 1—thereby erasing ‘the mediation of fantasy’ (Davis, 1995, p. 177). That is to say, the sexual fantasy around which *Fingered* centres noticeably refrains from the structural ‘supplement’ common to porn of the corporate mainstream, in an attempt to portray the brute mechanism of sex as a form of violence.

Thus I suggest that the premise of ‘brutal demystification’ that structures the filmic logic of *Fingered* reproduces a ‘MacDworkinite’ vision of pornography. Viewed in this light, *Fingered*’s unscripted violence—as in the scenes with Lung Leg—illustrates female subjugation to patriarchal domination. It is doubtful that Dworkin and MacKinnon would view the onscreen physical harassment of female actors as an appropriate strategy to deconstruct the pleasures of commercial pornography, or indeed, as reclaiming female desire for violent sex with chauvinistic men. Nonetheless, I believe an interesting paradox remains. Despite the rejection of the film by some radical feminists, *Fingered* arguably serves to represent the equation of sexuality with violence that underpins the anti-pornography position of Dworkin and MacKinnon, even as Lunch seems to enjoy this sexual violence. This alignment corresponds with Kern’s own

admission: ‘the title sounds like a porno film, but the whole point was to make people feel bad about sex, so it was supposed to be anti-pornography’ (*Blank City*, 2009). Although the ironies of his mobilisation of anti-pornography rhetoric appears to be lost on Kern himself, it is worth noting further ways in which he has sought to distinguish the film from pornography. Meditating further on the pornographic aspects of the film, Kern suggests that

even though there’s pornographic scenes in [*Fingered*], it’s not pornography for a few reasons because there was a goal to pornography like making money (which I guess we made a little, but however...) and getting people off, and this was kind of the opposite of getting people off (Lunch, 2020).

Reflecting on Kern’s disavowal of the label of pornography, it is clear that his justification is premised on the ‘artistic intention’ he invokes, contrasting this with the ‘commercial’ imperatives that he associates with pornography; echoing the arguments of previous chapters, Kern exercises those ‘taste’ judgments which venerate the artistic status of an object as ‘art’, accomplished through a disavowal of the pornographic.

However, as discussed in chapter 3, Kern’s claim that the film operated against the ‘pornographic logic’ of ‘getting people off’ fails to hold ground. As I explained through Emma Rees’ work, invoking artistic ‘merit’ operationalises Kantian precepts—manifesting the affect of disinterestedness and the ‘pure gaze’—while ignoring the fact that desire is not politically correct (Fisher, 2018). In short, some viewers of the film may find its representation of sexual acts certainly do stimulate their own desires, regardless of, or even because of, the violence through which they are realised. Indeed, Lunch herself affirmed that point, in her insistence that the film dramatised her own sexual desires. Further, Kern asserts this claim with a specific idea of

pornography in mind—namely, a monolithic, hegemonic construction—overlooking the other pornographic elements of the diegesis. For me, the film’s dialogue is the most visceral aspect of viewing the film, its expletive ridden pornographic sequences between Lunch and Nation offering a complex interweaving of desire and disgust through the codes of patriarchal violence. Drawing on Baudrillard’s theory, Davis further avers that Lunch ‘takes us out of the imaginary and forces us into a collapsing real, a HyperReality of Lust’ (1995, p. 177). This argument also chimes with Florian Cramer’s contention, as discussed in chapter 1, that the paradox of pornography is that it destroys the obscene in the act of representing it.

Yet, I would also problematise the notion, as reflected in Davis’ argument, that Kern and Lunch destroy sexuality by portraying its ‘brute mechanism’, devoid of any ‘fantasmatic supplement’ (Fisher, 2018, p. 127). Indeed, approaching *Fingered* through an explicitly Lacanian reading reveals that, as Žižek (2014) has claimed, porn is contingent on the structural fantasy for desire. From this psychoanalytic perspective, the urge to overturn standardised sexual intercourse and its associated ‘libidinal economy’ of desire, presupposes a ‘natural’ sexuality untainted by its exposure to the pornographic power relations involved in penetrative sex. In this sense, this argument, which finds an interesting correspondence between Kern and Zedd with the ‘MacDworkinite’ position, overlooks the necessity of fantasy to sexual desire, and that, sexuality cannot be encountered in itself, but only through the staging of a ‘fantasmatic supplement’ (Fisher, 2018, p. 127) which sexual partners are dependent on so as to project their fantasy of desire onto the ‘other’. In this way, rather than destroy sexuality, paradoxically, Kern and Dworkin overtly reinstate pornography in their respective domains of representation, further confirming the signifying power of the obscene in pornography (Cramer, 2007).

Critical Reflections

The critical aims of the movement and its ethics occupy a contested site in both journalistic and scholarly accounts. While commentators such as Giuliano Vivaldi (2008) have read the CoT as an artistic movement that channelled transgression through grotesque imagery, others have been much more critical. Film scholar Duncan Reekie has argued that some of the films of the CoT amounted to little more than ‘incompetent adolescent pretension’ (Reekie, 2003, p. 265). In his review of Jack Sargeant’s *Deathtripping*, critic Simon Taylor views the CoT’s engagement with the ‘punk imaginary’ in pejorative terms. Taylor argues that some of the ‘worst aspects of the punk aesthetic’ were emphasised in the CoT, which he sees manifested in ‘the aestheticized violence and puerile humor, the racism and sexism, the fascination with Nazi regalia and the radical chic of serial killers’ (Taylor, 1996, quoted in Vivaldi, 2008, p. 158). While Taylor’s reading appears to sit within politically correct definitions, I think his reproach to the movement fails to understand the nuance of this cinematic corpus. Moreover, Taylor overlooks the contributions of filmmakers such as Tessa Hughes-Freeland and Cassandra Stark Mele, neither of whom deployed these tropes in their work.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the concerns of the CoT appear much more developed than Taylor’s critique would acknowledge. Certainly the films dealt in difficult themes and their deployment of the ‘punk aesthetic’ suggests both a gratuitous fascination with taboo imagery for shock-effect, as well as a critical strategy through which to challenge normative discourses of sexuality. Reflecting on Taylor’s opprobrium, I note the resonance between his critique and music scholar Benjamin Court’s criticism of McLaren and Westwood’s porn T-shirts as failing

to deal adequately with the ‘politics of representation’, discussed in chapter 2. As I explain there, Court’s critique focused on the design duo’s depictions of sexual and racial minorities centred their transgressive aesthetic at the expense of the ‘other’. I agree that the CoT’s treatments of ‘racism and sexism’ deserve further critical scrutiny but I have also drawn attention to the humour that saturate their films, and how it might function to undermine any celebration of fascist aesthetics and sexist imagery, as in the spectacular failure of Kern’s attempts at sexual exploitation in *The Evil Cameraman*.

I have also detailed the specific discourses that permeate the diegetic framing of these films as ‘transgressive’; and, while this concept has informed the reception of these films, their experimentation might suggest a more avant-garde orientation. That being said, the iconographic elements of punk style staged here can be seen to extend this aesthetic—and its associated ‘attitude’—as a strategy of subverting ‘Order’ through the realm of subjective formations of subcultural identity. Considering the CoT corpus against sexual politics and the debates of the ‘sex wars’, then, I have pointed to the dynamics of pleasure and desire at work in the staging of transgressive sexuality.

Taylor’s aforementioned critique falls short of a considered analysis of the specific use of such aesthetics within this body of work, and the strategies within which these ‘transgressive’ elements come to be deployed. More significantly, the role of parody in these films seems to be broadly overlooked within such critiques. These representational tropes have been detailed in my visual analysis of the selection of films discussed here, in which I have explored how filmmakers such as Kern appear to have worked within understandings of the politics of representation, with

several of his films exhibiting a concern with gender politics in particular. Notwithstanding the misogynist overtones of his films, I have pointed to ways in which his work can be seen to generally critique conventional representations of women found in both ‘mainstream’ film, as well as pornography. In doing so, I have argued that Kern’s work, while visceral and, at times disturbing, can be seen to enact a critique of patriarchal dynamics. Moreover, I have also pointed to the sophistication of concepts of the ‘transgressive’ that underpins the CoT, in discussion of the Zedd’s collaborations with Kern. Zedd’s role as an actor in films such as *Thrust in Me* display a deconstruction of gendered stereotypes and prescribed masculine and feminine roles portrayed and reified within both mainstream film and pornography.

Conclusion

The underground film movement that included the CoT participated in the central debates animating feminism during the post-punk era—particularly the problems of pleasure and danger for women posed by sex (Vance, 1984). Challenging some feminist assertions to speak on behalf of women as a class, pornography was utilised in artistic, subcultural contexts. Admittedly I have focused on a very small number of examples but these punk-related film productions attest to the subversion of pornographic tropes within alternative contexts, as a means of self-expression. As in previous chapters, this discussion has traced the intersections of desire and pleasure, and their connections to themes of transgression and the taboo, at work within the ‘punk aesthetic’. Moreover, that analysis has also highlighted resistance to classification, as an attempt by auteurs to subvert pornographic scripts and logics.

The examples examined here problematise those accounts that align any utilisation of pornographic tropes with pro-pornography intent (Hester, 2011). Zedd and Kern were firmly anti-censorship and therefore opposed to regulation of obscenity, but they nonetheless articulated criticism of pornography in line with the positions of anti-pornography feminism regarding commercial exploitation and taste. Their repudiation of pornography as a label to describe their own work underscores their normative perception of the commerciality of porn films, and its conventionality. That repudiation itself contributed to the production of totalising categories—namely, art vs. porn, and mainstream vs. alternative—thereby highlighting the mutual dependency of these labels as forms of ‘aesthetic judgement’. Their refusal of the designation pornography may also suggest that, from the perspective of these auteurs, to identify a work of art as porn is to constrain its potential as commentary, political or personal. However, the paradox remains that it is only through working with pornographic images that these films gain their provocative charge. That being said, in their focus on the destruction of desire, and the staging of bodies which refute normative pleasures, this corpus appears to parallel Foucault’s concept of a biopolitics and the transgressions of the body.

In sum, the tensions between pornography and transgression sketched here have served to problematise understandings of the discourses that have shaped normative understandings of these fields. That is to say, films such as *Fingered* demonstrate the explicit transgressions of Kern’s staging of the female ‘punk body’, which performs within pornographic codes e.g. sexual intercourse and ‘porn dialogue’, yet eschews the ‘passive’ role of the female body who performs in the service of male desire. Rather, as I have argued, the film paradoxically combines instantiations of both anti-sex and anti-censorship positions. In this respect, Kern’s work further

aligns with the ‘MacDworkin’ position, especially in light of Cramer’s contention, as aforementioned, that ‘Dworkin and MacKinnon by no means demanded that pornography be prohibited or censored. Instead, their campaign acknowledges the power of sex and of the obscene imagination’ (Cramer, 2007, p. 174).

As Cramer argues, it is the ‘power’ of the ‘obscene imagination that alternative pornography’, more commonly known as alt porn, attempts to ‘rationalise and repress’, which is played ‘down as a game without consequences’ (2007, p. 174). So as to consolidate these claims further, in the final chapter, I extend this focus on ‘alternative pornography’ to contemporary pornographic contexts, reversing the focus on the site of cultural production, in examining the deployment of the ‘punk aesthetic’ within ostensibly ‘mainstream’ porn contexts.

Chapter 5: ‘Girls and Corpses’: The ‘Tattoo-Titted Freakdom’ of Bonnie Rotten

In 2014, Bonnie Rotten (née Alaina Hicks) became the first ‘alt porn’ porn star to be crowned Female Performer of the year at the porn industry’s most prestigious awards ceremony, the Adult Video Network Annual Awards. At 21 years old, earning the award marked a highpoint of Rotten’s early career. Rotten entered the adult industry at 18, after winning the ‘Ms. Dead Indiana Beauty Pageant’, a beauty pageant celebrating ‘alternative’ models at the Indiana Days of the Dead convention.¹⁷³ Rotten’s success in the adult industry has its roots in her unique ‘alternative’ appearance—her body is heavily-tattooed—and her persona is characterised by her exaggerated onscreen performance style; this includes a repertoire boasting displays of projectile ‘squirting’ coupled with frequent ‘spit play’. Taking her stage name from a zombie pin-up design tattooed on her left leg (nicknamed Bonnie Rotten), her professional persona draws equally on punk-inspired and horror iconographies. This conjunctural aesthetic is epitomised in the ornate spider-web patterning tattoos that adorn her breasts. Other designs homage cult horror films, as seen in—the zombie design from *Night of the Living Dead* on her stomach, as well as iconographic references to classic slasher flicks such as *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Friday the 13th*.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Rotten’s prize included a feature photoshoot for *Girls and Corpses* magazine in Los Angeles, a niche horror porn publication featuring centrefold images of alternative models, surrounded by stock horror imagery which includes semi-decomposed zombies, spider-webs and skeletons.

¹⁷⁴ Rotten describes her tattoos as follows: ‘At the age of 13, I tattooed some stuff on myself, which led to me covering it professionally with my first at the age of 15. The first was the large zombie on my stomach, that’s from the comic series, *Night of the Living Dead: The Beginning* issue #1! I’m a huge horror fan and most of my tattoos are old slasher films. I have the *Leatherface III* box cover on my left arm, "the saw is family," "camp blud" in reference to *Friday the 13th* on my lower knuckles, and "1428" the address of the house in *Nightmare on Elm Street*’ (xcritic.com).

Rotten has worked for some of the major mainstream porn production companies, beginning her career with shoots for New Sensations. Following her retirement from the industry in 2015, she briefly returned to porn in 2018 with a series of films in partnership with *Brazzers*. Her success in these ‘straight’ productions has meant Rotten has been credited as paving the way for tattooed girls to appear in mainstream porn.¹⁷⁵

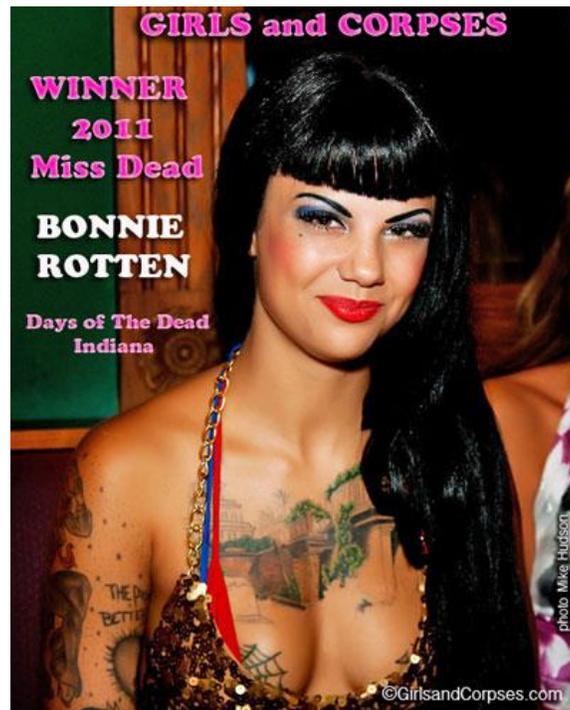


Figure 5.1: ‘Miss Dead 2011’: Bonnie Rotten.

Rotten is branded as a ‘punk model’ and this chapter will examine some of the questions that branding raises about the circulation of punk as a signifier synonymous with ‘rebellion’, exploring how punk rebellion is articulated and reframed within contemporary pornographic

¹⁷⁵ Owned by Manwin, Brazzers, for whom Rotten has performed numerous times, specialise in porn parodies based on spoofing popular film franchises such as *Star Wars* and *The Avengers*.

productions. Punk, or rather Rotten's 'punkness', functions as a marker of both her alterity and as signifier of her 'authenticity'—perhaps exemplifying what Cramer termed 'a rhetoric of the authentic' (Cramer, 2007, p. 174). The function of punk within Rotten's branding parallels the ways 'punkness' has been used within alt porn, giving a distinct 'edge' to a performer's persona (Maina, 2014), consolidating (self-)branding strategies (Biaisin and Zecca, 2014), and ascribing a 'rebellious' image to kinds of production and their output (Attwood, 2014; Maina, 2014; Paasonen, 2014; Smith, 2014). Nevertheless, there are ambiguous elements to Rotten's affiliations with the subcultural, and/or her self-identification with the punk moniker that enable a conscious 'play' with the signifiers of punk, without maintaining a credulity to the puritanism to the ethics of the punk subculture more broadly.

Rotten's signature 'look' certainly shares the subcultural imaginary of her alt porn contemporaries: an aesthetic that discernibly contrasts with what Feona Attwood has labelled the 'cookie-cutter' porn star mainstream stereotype.¹⁷⁶ Even so, Rotten's career evidences a radical departure from the independent production model adopted by most alt porn performers and producers. Rather than constituting her marginality to the mainstream, Rotten's alterity points to the success of her self-branding¹⁷⁷ in ways that recall Susanna Paasonen's dissection of the label 'alt' and its functions in contemporary pornographic production. As Paasonen argues, the 'alt' designation is a mode of niche market placement (Paasonen, 2014), which demarcates self-

¹⁷⁶ The transgressive potentials of her heavily tattooed-body (despite the popularity of tattoos, breasts remain conspicuously absent of tattoos in most pornography, including alt-porn) and the associated extremity, or excessive nature of her of onscreen performances, might be seen to possess greater 'subcultural capital' than other alt performers; in short, more 'alt' than the 'alt'.

¹⁷⁷ Although beyond the scope of this chapter, Rotten has, since her second (and presumably final) retirement from porn, openly championed gun culture, posting regular content on social media in which she handles and shoots an assortment of weaponry in the context of competitive shooting. She also openly embraces her right-wing political beliefs and orientation, defining herself as a conservative.

professed ‘alt’ porn from ‘mainstream’ porn; or, more specifically, the *idea* of the ‘mainstream’. As I have touched on in previous chapters, the term ‘mainstream’ is often used symbolically to organise heterogenous objects under a single label against which some other object can be designated ‘alternative’, ‘political’, ‘radical’ or ‘rebellious’. Rotten’s ‘alt’ self-branding is successfully expressed in her merchandising operation, *Bonnierotten.com*, which specialises in lingerie featuring the spiderweb motif inspired by her tattoos. She also has several ‘branded’ sex-dolls to her name, and a collection of figurines, about which Rotten has remarked, ‘I always dreamed I would have one, and now I have four’ (*Xbiz*, 2016). As Paasonen observed, ‘Alternative pornographies of all kinds are now feeding back ‘into the imageries of commercial pornography that they seem to subvert’ (Paasonen, 2007, p. 163). Thus, Bonnie Rotten is an interesting case study precisely because she enables scrutiny of the processes of ‘recuperation’ and ‘normalisation’ that have accompanied punk’s incorporation in popular culture.

Rotten’s celebrity has been examined across those mainstream media outlets associated with ‘alternative culture’; for example, *Vice* interviewed Rotten in 2014 for an article about music tastes, as part of their web-based and short-lived ‘Pornstar Playlists’ feature series. In his introduction to the piece, journalist Dan Ozzi emphasised the public interest in Rotten’s profession, reminding readers that: ‘Pornstars are fascinating people [...] But after we close our laptops and get a towel to clean ourselves off, we sometimes forget that they go on to live in the world as real people’ (Ozzi, 2014, n.p.). Ozzi’s tone is typical of *Vice*’s knowing style—the winking acknowledgement of the frisson/stigma surrounding porn work—framing the interview around Rotten’s authenticity, gesturing to the ‘real person’ underneath her pornstar persona but oscillating between that recognition of her personhood and othering her as ‘one of our favourite

pornstars, the immensely intimidating tattoo-titted freakwoman, Bonnie Rotten' (Ozzi, 2014, n.p.).

The attempt to 'know' the 'real' woman behind the 'porn star' persona also underpins another online pop culture venue's interview with Rotten. The 'Ask Me Anything' on Reddit—an interactive question and answer format that allows community users to pose questions—explored Rotten's influences and enables some insight into how Reddit commentators engage with her and attempt to configure her as 'punk'. Responding to user 'itskelvinn', Rotten reveals the origins of her performer name 'She was a zombie girl that I made and got tattooed on my leg and I named her Bonnie Rotten! She needed a name for her tombstone' (Rotten, 2014, n.p.). What is interesting is the immediate response from Reddit users, who, seemingly unsatisfied with Rotten's explanation, attempt to trace the origins of her name to first wave punk. For instance, user 'scumfuck94' interposes: 'I'm not positive, nor am I Bonnie, but I'm pretty sure she got it from lead singer of the Sex Pistols, who went by "Johnny Rotten"', which Rotten then confirms as 'Inspiration for sure!' When questioned about her distinctive tattoos and her success in the porn industry, Rotten comments, 'I think suicide girls helped sexualize tattoos and making it sexy, but I wasn't influenced by that' (Rotten, 2014, n.p.).

Rotten also traces her subcultural forebears in relation to her participation in the punk community in her hometown Hamilton, Ohio. In such interviews, Rotten implies a link between the transgressive connotations of her involvement in local subculture and her entrance into porn, stating 'it definitely wasn't a surprise to anyone back home' (Rotten, 2014, n.p.). Indeed, she

frames a discussion of her earliest sexual experiences proximate to subcultural bounds, speaking about her first experience of group sex at 15, with a group of guys from the local punk scene.

Rotten is a figure of interest to me because she enables extension of the critical investigation of the nexus of punk and pornography, and how those intersections function in contemporary contexts. This chapter frames Rotten as a conduit figure, which contextualises a broader discussion of alt porn, as evidence of the ‘critical afterlife’ of punk at work in contemporary pornographic marketing. The chapter traces a trajectory of alt porn from its emergence in the 1990s and the prominence of a ‘punk aesthetic’ in alt porn productions. I link these to the concepts of ‘DIY’, ‘community’, ‘feminist ethics’ and ‘inclusivity’ which are currently associated with forms of independent and alt porn production. This is intended to unpack alt porn’s purported ‘challenge to hegemony’ examining alt porn’s continuing presence and the extent of its critical propensities. In doing so, I draw significantly on *Porn After Porn* (edited by Biasin et al., 2014) the first scholarly collection to focus on alt porn as an identifiable genre.¹⁷⁸

Following this, I discuss how Rotten draws upon a subcultural imaginary that encapsulates both punk and horror iconographies (Jones, 2018), as a form of ‘subcultural capital’ (Thornton, 1995, p. 203) in the strategy of self-branding. Specifically, I think through the ways in which Rotten’s brand is constituted in relation to punk, and how this informs Rotten’s visual

¹⁷⁸ *Porn After Porn* was published in the same year as Rotten’s award, so we might tentatively view this mid-2010s period as the ‘high watermark’ of alt-porn both within critical discourses and as a genre. Further, Rotten’s success also provides evidence of the ‘recuperation’ of ‘alt’ aesthetics within the pornographic mainstream. In this, her career success would play out, tellingly, in punk terms, as if to complete Hebdige’s analysis, when in 2015 (her alterity having been ‘normalised’ and turned into parody), she only managed the fan award for Kinkiest Performer of the Year.

repertoire.¹⁷⁹ Here, I extend a consideration of Rotten's persona in relation to her onscreen performance style, reading several of Rotten's films from 2014 for *Magmafilm* through Mary Russo's understanding of the 'female grotesque'. Clarissa Smith's article 'Reel Intercourse: Doing Sex on Camera' also proves useful to my discussion, given the critical attention it pays to the particularities of a performer's onscreen visual repertoire, as opposed to viewing sex on screen as simply 'an inert property of the filmic process' (Smith, 2012, p. 511). Lastly, I consider Rotten in a broader discussion on current paradigms of neoliberal precarity vis-à-vis the ways in which contemporary pornography reflects hyperreality and interpassivity in late-capitalist cyberspace.

Strategising Subcultural Capital as Branding

Rotten's self-branding draws on aesthetics from various 'alternative' domains; she mobilises 'subcultural capital' to indicate and differentiate her star persona and the meanings of her performances. Cultural studies scholar Sarah Thornton formulated the concept of 'subcultural capital' as an addition to Bourdieu's designations of 'cultural capital', recognising the specific dimensions of contemporary subcultures' display of status, often through discourses of 'authenticity'. Thornton's concept of 'subcultural capital' differs from Bourdieu's 'cultural capital' in that 'the media are a primary factor governing the circulation of the former' (1995, p. 203). That is to say, for Thornton, 'subcultural capital' is achieved through the participation of subjects in media networks. As Thornton qualifies, 'within the economy of subcultural capital

¹⁷⁹ That being said, I do however recognise that the interconnected nature of her persona and her performance style, and the complexities of this nexus, which may render such attempts as a matter of personal interpretation. To put it bluntly, this consideration raises larger questions about subjectivity and identity, themselves loaded historical categories, which extend beyond the immediate focus of this particular study.

the media is not simply another symbolic good or marker of distinction [...] but a network crucial to the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge' (p. 203). As Thornton sees it, then, 'subcultural capital' thus 'correlates in complex ways with degrees of media coverage, creation and exposure' (p. 203) and drives my consideration of Rotten's media presence as interlinked with her personal branding via punk-related aesthetics.

Alt porn: An Overview

The emergence of alt porn *proper* can be traced to the early-1990s, critic Thomas M. Conroy notes the influence of artistic forebears on the alt porn aesthetic, including Throbbing Gristle and 'the erotic photography of Richard Kern', whose work I discussed in previous chapters. Conroy resignedly admits that 'Alt culture has been selling transgression for some time, and what may once have been taboo no longer is' (2015, p. 98). Given what he terms 'the increased overlapping of porn and pop culture' synonymous with the cultural present, Conroy sees 'alt culture' as an 'established [...] marketplace, with various established aesthetics' (Conroy, 2015, p. 98). In this sense, Conroy's argument chimes with Clark's assessment of the 'death' of punk, who notes that 'deviation from the norm ain't what it used to be' (2003, p. 224). Indeed, Clark points out that 'Marketers long ago awakened to the fact that subcultures are expedient vehicles for selling music, cars, clothing, cosmetics, and everything else under the sun' (p. 224). Clark contends that '[p]eople gradually became acclimatized to such subcultural transgressions to the point that, in many places, they have become an *expected* part of the social landscape' (p. 223). Thus in the following discussion of alt porn, I explore how scholarship has viewed alt porn's emergence as coterminous with the technological advances afforded by the internet, and which are key to understanding the demarcation of 'alternative' space(s) within the contemporary

mainstream media landscape.

In considering Rotten's significance, it is important to note that her output has several significant artistic precursors. The porn series, *New Wave Hookers*, directed by the Dark Brothers, is foremost amongst these, and has been credited with paving the way for the alt porn genre. The original film, released in 1985, plays upon the connotations of 'new wave' music and its 'deviance'; the film features various models expressive of a general punk aesthetic, but, in contrast to Rotten's work, their on-screen performances largely conform to a set of standardised pornographic tropes associated with a docile femininity. For instance, models in this series are not heavily tattooed, nor does their performance style speak to the transgression of heteronormative porn scripts. In contrast, I show that Rotten's performance is singular: her performative style overturns notions of feminine passivity, a more explicit embodiment of the 'female punk body', as articulated throughout this study.

As Bill Osgerby describes, *Blue Blood* was one of the first independent porn productions dedicated to subcultural imaginaries to emerge on the web: 'a glossy print magazine' featuring 'gothic models' (2014, p. 39). The website established *Blue Blood's* erotic themes, featuring female performers styled in the aesthetic imaginary of punk and gothic subcultures, featuring, for instance, stylised corsets and black maquillage, and a mise-en-scene drawing on horror tropes including tombstone backdrops. Throughout the 1990s, similarly themed sites appeared online, featuring models from gothic, punk, and rave subcultures complete with elements such as tattoos and piercings. *Gothic Sluts* (1999) shared an aesthetic orientation with the earlier *Blue Blood* in its predominantly photo-based content, while other productions extended to more hard-core

contexts, catering to a broader spectrum of potential consumers. The emergence of *Suicide Girls* in 2001 marked a more popular and tasteful alt porn, featuring ‘alternative ‘pin up’ models sporting body ink, piercings and body modifications. Joanna Angel founded the website *BurningAngel.com* with her partner Mitch Fontaine in 2002, catering to the demand for subcultural hard-core; Angel has emphasised her feminism as important to her porn practice.¹⁸⁰

Angel’s punk-inspired series *P.O.V. Punx* (2008), produced by Angel’s *Burning Angel* productions, features models who—like Rotten—similarly confirm to a ‘punk aesthetic’ with tattoos and piercings. Examination of Rotten’s oeuvre draws on previous scholarship on Joanna Angel (*Porn After Porn*, 2014) which traces Angel’s links to a broader cultural history of punk. However, I argue that Rotten’s work goes further than Angel’s in that the POV structure of the *Punx* series belongs to the relatively standardised conventions of the gonzo porn genre, centring the male perspective such that its female stars operate within a limited performative repertoire. Rotten’s films, her on-screen presence and her performative style marks a challenge to ‘mainstream’ and gonzo conventions, as I elaborate in the visual analysis of Rotten’s work throughout this chapter.

In her work on alt porn, Feona Attwood argued that the ‘association of pin-ups with a sex-positive approach has assumed increasing importance in a context where sexual self-creation, self-expression and plurality are foregrounded in a range of forms’ (2012, p. 143). Attwood views the ‘practices of alternative femininity’ evident within alt porn as specific to subcultural style in which ‘women mix conventionally attractive signs of femininity with other

¹⁸⁰ Rob Rotten has also pioneered a ‘punk rock porn’, albeit underpinned by more discernibly commercial intentions. For an astute analysis of Rob Rotten’s work, see Jones (2011).

more subversive elements' (2012, p. 140). In Attwood's account, she affirms that the alt porn aesthetic foregrounds 'youth, outsider status and subcultural membership', noting that its alterity stems from the coalescing of these visual tropes in dynamic displays that mix 'sexual signifiers with the codes and conventions of retro and contemporary subcultural imagery' (p. 140). As opposed to viewing alt porn in purely aesthetic terms however, Attwood's overview sees the 'subcultural' at work in both the aesthetics and the ethics of this subgenre, stating that 'altporn sites share a set of characteristics; they feature 'models who are real people' and frequently 'men and women of subculture', and they are 'considered woman-friendly and sex-positive'" (Ray, 2007, p. 160; quoted in Attwood, 2012, p. 127). Recognising that there are differences between alt porn sites, Attwood nonetheless sees a shared current between self-professed alt porn producers, observing that 'they all "attempt to define" themselves through a variety of oppositions to mainstream culture—and especially mainstream porn' (Attwood, 2007, p. 449).

In his consideration of *SuicideGirls*, Osgerby notes the success of the alternative pin-up platform in the early 2000s as 'impressive in itself, but was also indicative of a wider boom' in alt porn. Osgerby analyses the constituent aesthetic elements of *SuicideGirls*, characterising their pin-up style as 'sexual representations that draw on the codes and styles of "alternative" subcultures' (2014, p. 39). For Osgerby, this testifies to a positive embrace of 'models glorying in the fashions, tattoos and body-piercings associated with goths, punks and ravers' (p. 39). As Osgerby argues, 'By championing the aesthetics of subcultural, "Otherness," alt porn deliberately positions itself as a challenge to "mainstream" representational codes and power relationships' (p. 51). However, Conroy takes a somewhat cynical view of sites such as *SuicideGirls*, which he caricatures as part of a trend of 'hipster, pro-feminist, high-gloss porn'

(2015, p. 98).

The implications of Conroy's critique here raise the need to address more fundamental debates concerning the self-branding of alt porn as an 'alternative' to the 'mainstream'. Maina highlights that alt porn is complicit in the reproduction of these dichotomous categories, given its reliance on the 'alt' label as part of its self-branding. As Maina persuasively argues, the concept of 'mainstream' thus

functions as the eternal oppositional counterpart, the focus of all negative projections, and the deforming mirror in front of which all the resistant aesthetic strategies, identity processes and political practices are elaborated (2014, p. 84).

As such, what Maina terms 'the unbridgeable gap—and the (supposed) reciprocal impermeability—between mainstream and alternative productions' might be better understood here as 'an operational concept' that also functions as a 'programmatic watchword' (2014, p. 84).

Paasonen views 'alt' as an aesthetic denominator pertaining to a wide array of material and signifies a resistance to 'standardized commodity forms' (Paasonen, 2014, p. 22). In this sense, Paasonen notes that 'subcultural identifications, body styles and aesthetics [...] become marked as such against the bulk of mainstream pornography' (2014, p. 21). As Paasonen sees it, then, alt porn resonates with subcultural practice more broadly, given that alt porn also involves 'specific class politics that operate through taste distinctions' (p. 31). In her view, 'amateur porn is analogous to authentic folk culture whereas alt porn approximates the radical avant-garde' (p. 31). Paasonen reminds us that the alternative stylings of alt porn also function as a branding

method of niche market placement, and thereby a strategy of targeting a specific consumer demographic (Paasonen, 2014). Indeed, the self-branding of alt porn under the rubric ‘alternative’ suggests a specialist product designed to appeal to discerning consumers appreciative of the erotic appeal of subcultural aesthetics; that is, as opposed to a niche offshoot from mainstream adult pornographic productions. Yet, in Conroy’s criticism of *SuicideGirls*, ‘alt’ functions as part of a shrewd marketing strategy that seeks to capitalise on the popularity of subcultures such as punk, proffering a subcultural imaginary so as to appeal to a pre-existing subcultural fanbase.

The editors of *Porn After Porn* frame this discussion in relation to the ‘differentiation’ of alt porn, which is perceived as an authenticating device used to shore up the market value of this material. Yet, Biasin, Zecca and Maina (2014) also remind us that forms of ‘differentiation’ have defined the landscape of the pornographic genre throughout its development and history. As such, pornography has historically always occupied a marginal positionality, which, in some sense, can be seen *qua* porn as ‘resistant’ to dominant ‘heterosexual and heteronormative’ mainstream media. In this discussion, the denomination ‘alt’ can also serve to define sexual representations in ‘ethical’ approaches to porn production. This can be seen in relation to the ‘alternative’ work of ‘female-friendly’ and ‘ethically conscious’ pornographers such as Erika Lust and Anna Span (Arrowsmith, 2010, n.p.). In Lust’s work for instance, performers often direct their own scenes in an attempt to overturn ‘top-down’ forms of directorial power. Entrusting performers to represent their own image speaks to the ways in which such productions acknowledge the agency of performers, as a strategy that seeks to work against the ‘potentially oppressive working practices of the porn industry’ (Paasonen, 2014, p. 22).

Such methods can also be discerned in some contemporary LGBT+ porn. The ethical imperatives that define the production of companies such as *Pink and White*, attempt an ‘opening-up’ of narrowly defined constructions of gender and sexuality, providing a space and medium for queer and LGBT+ representation and voices to appear within both mainstream and alternative pornographic discourses (Mondin, 2014). As such, queer alt porn productions notably feature non-normative body types, as well as non-white performers. Yet, in comparison to mainstream productions, the representation of these identities diverges from the typecast stereotypes that the mainstream can be seen to reproduce.¹⁸¹ For Paasonen, such representational processes can be read as challenging the ‘norms and conventions of mainstream porn catered primarily to male heterosexual audiences’ (Paasonen, 2014, p. 22).

Indeed, given the popularity of queer adult performers such as Jiz Lee on social media platforms, their collaborating with pornographers such as Houston serves to bring attention to the queer community; an affirmation that despite struggles for visibility in contemporary contexts, the representation of ‘queerness’ and the opening up of safe spaces for LGBT+ people is possible—even within the contested space of adult entertainment. The visibility of performers such as Lee has had noticeable effects on the consumption of queer pornography in contrast to other pornographic markets. As discussed by Biasin *et al.* (2014), the consumer market for productions such as *Pink & White* is markedly different to that of mainstream porn productions. The inclusivity of the site, in its attempt to cater for a diverse queer audience, suggests the emergence of greater diversity in the subjectivities that consume porn, and in turn, the

¹⁸¹ Though of course, many productions do still remain largely heteronormative and white in terms of their ethnic and sexual representation.

cognisance of this ‘informed audience, capable of personal and active readings of different pornographic representations, even of those ascribable to mainstream porn’ (Biasin *et al.*, 2014, p. 18).

In their introduction to *Porn After Porn*, Biasin *et al.* provide a salient account of the ways in which the ‘alternative’ is adopted by new ‘porn professionals’ (Attwood, 2010). As the authors see it, the alternative functions to

lay explicit claim to political antagonism (as in post porn or queer/feminist porn), develop a different market-positioning strategy, and create a counter-aesthetics (as is the case with amateur and alt/indie porn) (Biasin *et al.*, 2014, p. 16).

Biasin *et al.* note that consumers have identified with the personalised feel of alt porn productions, to the extent that they feel more engaged in their own practices of consumption and engagement with this particular sub-genre in contrast to the pornographic mainstream; that is, as understood according to the ‘common sense idea of porn understood as a fixed, unpretentious and ahistorical “monolith”’ (p. 16). To this end, the authors highlight that in the case of alt porn, ‘sexual representation and erotic imagery are constantly “underpinned” by political, artistic or simply personal statements’ (p. 19). As Biasin *et al.* see it, this has led to a ‘sur-pornographic’ (2014, p. 18) transformation of porn audiences, and the emergence of new porn consumers and subjectivities, that operate ‘beyond’ the rather typical practice of a disengagement on the part of the ‘stereotypical’ demographic of porn consumption.

For example, Biasin *et al.* also note the significance of emergent online communication forums, particularly evident in relation to queer and feminist instantiations of alt porn, in which it

is common for performers to present ‘intimate diaries, manifestos, articles, essays and so on’.¹⁸²

The development of ‘digital technologies and networked distribution channels’ centred around the internet, now offers a platform for an ‘array of different subjectivities’. As Biasin *et al.* summarise:

women, LGBT, queer, non normative bodies and taste (sub)cultures—have found full discursive, political, and sometimes commercial visibility within the broad arena of pornography and adult entertainment (2014, p. 15).

They suggest that the ‘beyond porn’ status of alt porn is tied to the notable sense community-building it has been seen to engender and contribute to. Drawing on cultural studies scholar Katrien Jacobs’ work, Attwood understands alt porn ‘as part of a broader participatory culture which is focused on social networking, self-imaging and user-generated content’ (2014, p. 129). Standard (and particularly anti-) accounts of pornography might view such productions as merely new ways of exploiting different markets but other academics have acknowledged how pornography may mirror the broadening of sexual orientations, practices and identities in contemporary contexts: the proliferation of sexual subjectivities that exist online in relationship(s) contoured by and in turn impacting ‘market interests and cultural trends’ (Smith, 2014, p. 77).

‘Authenticity’ has become a particularly important marker in the construction and portrayal of alt-porn. As Vannini and Williams have suggested in relation to subcultures more generally, ‘authenticity is not so much a state of being as it is the objectification of a process of representation, that is, it refers to a set of qualities that people in a particular time and place have

¹⁸² Featured on sites such as *SuicideGirls.com*.

come to agree represent an ideal or exemplar' (2009, p. 3). Individual producers or performers offer, or define, themselves as authentic—in the context of different kinds of alt porn, as authentically 'alternative', 'ethical', 'feminist', 'queer' etc.—and they are both measured and further defined by their viewers/community against criteria from within their appropriate context. Describing any pornographic content as 'authentic' has no fundamental meaning; instead it derives its explanatory power through its reference to particular kinds of sexual performance (e.g. hard-core); performer (e.g. amateur), or location (e.g. in public), or orientation (e.g. lesbian). Alt porn producers, performers and consumers have created a particular understanding of authenticity, and judge other productions, performances and viewing positions against that understanding in ways that significantly affect the status of consumers, performers, professional rivals, etc. In this way, Sarah Thornton's 'subcultural capital' is useful for thinking about pornography. Authenticity is demonstrated through subcultural capital—knowledge of the scene, the requisite physical objects, style and appearance and a commitment to the scene, its politics, ideals, ethics etc. Hence in terms of alt porn, authenticity is a process altered by particular contexts and ideals—*Pink and White* for instance are perhaps more invested in queer politics and sexual ethics than they are in the appearance or stylings of 'rebellion'; whereas *SuicideGirls* took styling very seriously.

Smith outlines specific difficulties in understanding alternative pornographic productions when considered in relation to their reception by audiences. For instance, as Smith convincingly argues, the 'alt' label is enmeshed within discourses of fandom, and this occupies an oftentimes contested relationship with 'authenticity'. In this sense, Smith suggests that the notion of the 'authentic' often functions as an impossible marker to achieve. For Smith, 'alt' commentators—

one might note Conroy's critique of *SuicideGirls* here—can sometimes demand a seemingly impossible ideal of 'alt authenticity' precisely because even the most 'authentically' alt forms can be shown to have some representational roots in 'traditional' or 'mainstream' porn (Wysocki, 2010; quoted in Smith, 2014). In illustration of this point, Smith opines,

it is not enough to espouse difference, one needs to demonstrate an *absolute* distance from "pornoscripts" (the supposedly stereotypical, heteronormative, sexist and mundane structures of the "mainstream") (2014, p. 62).

With Smith's insights in mind, this chapter does not intend to judge whether or not Rotten is 'authentic' as a porn performer or as a punk, nor does it seek to champion her 'alternative' branding in its opposition of to mainstream pornographic imaginaries.

In framing my analysis of Rotten against this brief account of the characteristics of alt porn, it is important to note that there are further and significant contrasts between my discussion of Cosey Fanni Tutti's practice in the 1970s and the more contemporary stylings of the porn star here. While pornography remains stigmatised and a 'shadow' economy/entertainment (Voss, 2010) it is also much more visible than four decades ago. Moreover, the possibilities for recognising the deployment of sexual performance by women (whether as artist or model/star) as a means of personal empowerment and /or political critique have also expanded. Tutti's magazine spreads—produced within the restrictive confines of British soft-core traditions are incredibly tame compared with the displays on offer across today's mainstream media spectrum let alone what appears in contemporary pornographic productions. Yet many of the same tensions remain bubbling beneath the surface, and the same debates resurface about the meanings of authenticity versus artifice; empowerment vs exploitation; transgression vs tired old posturing.

Persona, Self-branding and the Female Grotesque

In April 2015, the celebrity entertainment news outlet TMZ filmed Bonnie Rotten as she walked topless around midtown Manhattan in New York. The stunt was filmed as part of a shoot for the ‘sex issue’ of *Inked* Magazine; a periodical dedicated to tattoo culture, which featured Rotten as their cover girl, alongside fellow alt porn stalwart, Joanna Angel. In TMZ’s reporting of the event, viewers were told that the city of New York legally allows women to appear topless in public (Warren, 2015).¹⁸³ In a brief interview with TMZ’s ‘on-the-ground cameraman’ in Washington Square Park, Rotten smiles and attests to having enjoyed the stunt, although she voices concerns about the public nature of the event, and the possibility that children might be negatively affected by her performance. There is an interesting contrast here with the image of Jordan (see Figure 2.3) discussed in chapter 2. Where Jordan’s punk and overtly sexual—but clothed—appearance strikes disgust into the heart of the city gent, Rotten’s toplessness, notwithstanding its ‘punk-ish’ tattoos, elicits more amusement than horror. Indeed, despite the continuing separation of public and private—where nudity/toplessness is still understood to be a primarily private practice—there is little of the ‘transgressive’ presence of punk femininity in this clip.

In the full-length *Inked* clip, Rotten is further filmed completing various touristic *rites de passage* including riding the subway, and hugging a Minnie Mouse costumed character in Times Square (Warren, 2015). Framed by her camera entourage, her presence frequently garners the attention of several overly-enthusiastic men. Despite the smiles, the clip makes apparent the

¹⁸³ Penal Law 245.01 was amended by the Supreme Court in 1992, on the grounds of gender equality, ruling it legal for women to appear topless in public.

ways in which Rotten's nudity is taken as a 'come on' for several men, who are shown entering her personal space to ask for a picture; in one instance, a man abruptly enters the scene with camera phone activated, excitedly snapping close-ups of Rotten's breasts with no regard for her personal space or consent. The spectre of intimidation and chauvinistic aggression that occurs here has parallels with a viral cat-calling clip that circulated the previous year in 2014— Shoshana Roberts's '10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman' (Rosin, 2014, n.p.) comprises footage of various men approaching and verbally harassing the 24-year old actress over a 10-hour period in New York City.¹⁸⁴



Figure 5.2: Image from Rotten's 'topless tour' of New York for *Inked* magazine, as documented

¹⁸⁴ The clip was edited to showcase these abusive incidents. The original clip starring Roberts went viral because of the extensive incidences of sexism it revealed; filmed walking the streets of Manhattan, Roberts is subjects to over 100 insistences of catcalling from a variety of men, mostly young in appearance, and of various ethnicities. Roberts's video had a serious message but that did not prevent it being parodied – indeed there are many parody clips available on YouTube - in one such, filmed in NYC and titled '10 hours of walking but this time she talks back (BEST CATCALL parody)' (jaygee, 2014), the female protagonist is filmed wittily retorting to incidences of streets harassment and silences her harassers. The climax of the film features the plot twist of another woman coming to the walker's aid, reprimanding a group of catcalling males, only to then make her own advances towards the walking woman.

by *TMZ*.

Rotten's *Inked* promo-clip could be seen as a similar document of patriarchal intimidation and misogyny but perhaps the dynamics of Rotten's performance are more complex. Indeed, the majority of New Yorkers appear relatively unperturbed by Rotten's presence, and some people, including an elderly gentleman on the subway, are actively unwilling to participate in her antics. It is Rotten who interrupts the quotidian activities of the public, seeking to elicit conversation with several men—noticeably middle-aged in appearance (perhaps they present less of a threat?)—the majority of whom register humour at the juxtaposition of Rotten's jovial countenance and the apparent absurdity of her exposed breasts.

Rotten's topless display might appear to establish her in a dominant position, and orchestrating the various verbal exchanges on her own terms. And in this light, resonates with Attwood's argument that women may choose to “make a spectacle of themselves” (2012, p. 140), as an embodiment of a spectacular strategy so as to “[provide] them with a protective layer which allows them to ‘hold the gaze’ of potentially hostile observers (Holland, 2004, p. 150; quoted in Attwood, 2012, p. 140). Yet, the dynamics of agency are fragmented and blurred by the semi-constructed nature of this promotional stunt/magazine photoshoot, and compounded by the extra-diegetic dimension of Rotten's accompanying camera crew.

Rotten is playing an ‘off-screen’ version of herself, the ‘bad punk girl’ persona for which she is known. In this, Rotten seems to inhabit her porn star image as ‘self-brand’ on the level of surface, yet her actions here are clearly devoid of the sexual passion associated with her onscreen persona, which fluctuates between her professional requirements as a model partaking in the

photoshoot, and the performative enactment of the ‘bad girl’ onscreen persona. Moreover, because the hyper-sexuality of Rotten is absent, the viewer appears to receive a more ‘authentic’ ‘behind-the-scenes’ representation of Rotten, compounded by the documentary style employed.

Further, there is a sense of postmodern irony that permeates this scene; Rotten is hired to perform a version of her ‘authentic’ self, off-screen and in ‘real life’, so as to advertise her ‘onscreen’ self-branded identity. However, this purportedly ‘real’ event is of course mediated by relays of technology and performative structures, as represented by the production technologies of the camera crew that records Rotten in public. In some sense, we might also read this as an illustration of Lawrence Grossberg’s notion of ‘authentic inauthenticity’ (quoted in Reynolds & Press, 1995, p. 290). In Grossberg’s discussion of strategies of self-creation in pop music, he defines the concept as follows: ‘Although [authentic inauthenticity] seems to celebrate the absence of any center or identity, it actually locates that absence as a new centre. That is, it celebrates the fragmentary, the contradictory, the temporary’ (quoted in Reynolds & Press, 1995, p. 291).

Drawing on Erving Goffman’s notion of our ‘presentation of self’, social anthropologist Ted Polhemus writes, ‘our chosen appearance style functions as an advertisement for ourselves—the first crucial step in our interactions with others’ (1996, p. 8). Following Polhemus, Rotten’s presentation of self here functions as an ‘advertisement’ for her own self-brand, and by extension, that of *Inked* magazine. Yet, the framing of Rotten’s topless tour positions her as a figure of ‘otherness’ in the public sphere, whose brand is seemingly reduced to a ‘surface’ level. In his account of subcultural style, Polhemus argues that:

our ‘presentation of self’ [...] exploits a complex communication code which, arguably, says more about us than words ever can—or, at least, unlike words, offers the means to broadcast ‘where we’re coming from’ to people we’ve not even yet met (1996, p. 8).

With this in mind, I contend that the projected location of Rotten’s persona is sutured to the punk sign of ‘rebellion’ in projecting ‘authenticity’; that of the concupiscent ‘rebel girl’ who seeks an outright embrace of the outré.

Carnavalesque: Mask and Masquerade

In an attempt to grasp the implications of Rotten’s subcultural aesthetic and its claims to the transgressive, cultural studies scholar Lauren Langman’s work on the ‘carnavalesque’ has critical purchase here. The range of references tattooed on Rotten’s frame—a bricolage of subcultural reference points—constitutes a ‘body modification’ (2008, p. 658). For Langman, modifications such as Rotten’s ‘have become fashion statements indicating a moment of resistance, a rebellion against capitalist modernity, the regulation by rational rules and mass-produced selfhood’ (2008, p. 664). For Langman, these modifications serve to bolster a rejection of norms in the context of late-capitalism. As Langman puts it:

We might call this a ‘decivilising process’ in which large number of people who decorate their bodies with a variety of accoutrements reject the cultural standards and norms of propriety of modernity with its cold rationality, its achievement-based status and its repressive morality (2008, p. 664; Vale and Juno, 1989).

While signalling a break with normativity on the face of it, Langman conversely argues that ‘body modifications stand as distinctive markers of inclusion into alternative identity-granting

communities of meaning' (p. 664). However, he primarily views them as representative of ritualised forms of individualised expression within wider cultural trends pertaining to the normalisation of transgression. Langman sees the legacy of subcultural style as a central influence on accepted cultural transgression within late-capitalism. In his view, Langman states that many 'adherents of such body modification regard their embrace of the grotesque as a rejection of the alienation, sterility, emptiness and inauthenticity of modernity' (p. 664). Indeed, one might note the 'grotesque' constitutes a central thematic in the visual lexicon of Rotten's body art; her intertextual corporeality includes horror references and imagery (Jones, 2018) juxtaposed with the 'freak show' attraction of the 'bearded lady'.

Langman's argument can be read through literature scholar Mary Russo's study of the 'female grotesque'. Russo's study identifies the 'grotesque body' with 'non-official "low" culture or the carnivalesque, and with social transformation' (1995, p. 8). Viewing the female body as inherently transgressive, Russo argues: 'in the everyday indicative world, women and their bodies, certain bodies, in certain public framings, in certain public spaces, are always already transgressive—dangerous, and in danger' (p. 60). I note the 'dangerous, and in danger' fluxed status of 'women and their bodies' at work in the aforementioned parody clip, which plays out this trope by framing the female protagonist as a victim of harassment, in the first instance, before subverting the established power dynamic when confronting her antagonists and leaving them mute (Jaygee, 2014). Thus, in this example, I would argue that the female protagonist's body is doubly in 'danger', targeted and 'interpellated' through cat-calls, yet represents a 'dangerous' site, in her capacity to challenge her oppressors, and to subvert

proscribed gender norms and thus disrupt the dynamics of ‘compulsory heteronormativity’ (Rubin & Butler, 1994, p. 66).

I would connect this insight into the performative nature of femininity, as a symbolic threat of ‘danger’, to Teresa de Lauretis’ conceptualisation of the ‘weapons of survival’ attainable to femininity. De Lauretis’ work signals an attempt to theorise the female body as agentic, in contrast to the ‘docile’ body at the heart of Foucauldian biopolitics. De Lauretis conceives of such strategies in a dichotomous formation encompassing ‘mask and masquerade’ (de Lauretis, 1986, p. 17). According to de Lauretis’ view, the ‘mask’ can be understood as the subjectivity imposed upon the body; that is, the identity that forms one’s subjecthood, based on received prescriptions, such as gender. For de Lauretis, the mask represents ‘a burden [...] constraining the expression of one’s real identity’ (1986, p. 17). By contrast, then, ‘masquerade’ is an optional performative, that de Lauretis argues can be ‘flaunted’ not unlike ‘a new dress’ that ‘even when required, does give some pleasure to the wearer’ (p. 17). For de Lauretis, ‘the critical and hopeful power of masquerade’ can be located in the ‘flaunting of the feminine [as] a take-it-and-leave-it *possibility*’ (p. 70). As she puts it, to ‘put on femininity with a vengeance suggests the power of taking it off’ (p. 70).

Here, de Lauretis foregrounds the inherent performativity entailed within the concept of ‘masquerade’, or as Judith Butler would define it, the ‘performativity’ of ‘femininity’. In her discussion of Mary Anne Doane’s work, Russo similarly engages with psychoanalyst Joan Riviere’s ‘Womanliness as Masquerade’, seeking to problematise notions of female spectatorship (Russo, 1995, p. 69). In her reading of this critical dialogue, Russo proposes that

masquerade can ‘manufacture a distance from the image, to generate a problematic within which the image is manipulatable, producible, and readable by women’ (p. 69). In this sense, I read this manufacturing of ‘distance from the image’ as reflected in de Lauretis’ consideration of the political subjectivity of the ‘masquerade’. For de Lauretis, mask and masquerade are not solely to be taken as ‘inscribing different desires’ (1986, p. 17). Rather she sees them as ‘signs of the same need for, and a very similar drive toward, the representation of a subjectivity that, however diverse its sociohistorical configurations and modes of expression, has come into its own as political consciousness’ (1986, p. 17). Feminist scholar Marjorie Garber goes further in her discussion of Riviere’s essay, arguing that ‘Womanliness *is* mimicry, *is masquerade*’ (quoted in Reynolds and Press, 1995, p. 290).

I see a resonance between this discussion of ‘masquerade’ as an aesthetic strategy, in relation to postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard’s conception of the importance of ‘surface’ in contemporary late-capitalist culture. Although Baudrillard’s account is not strictly concerned with gender and sex, his theorisation proves compelling, in terms of seeing Rotten’s expression of an alt porn ‘masquerade’ as constitutive to the popularity of her self-brand within late-capitalist circuits of pornography. In *Seduction* (1990), Baudrillard theorises ‘seduction’ as the ultimate game of power in late-capitalist ‘hyperreal’ society; unlike Foucault, Baudrillard sees ‘seduction’ as overturning hegemonic structures of power.

Baudrillard’s theory conceptualises the primacy of ‘surface’ in ‘hyperreal’ society, which is marked by the saturation of the ‘sign’. Given the dissolution of the ‘sign’ as a stable cultural referent, Baudrillard argues that ‘postmodern’ contemporary circuits of consumerism and mass

culture have produced a ‘simulation’, premised upon the ‘liquidation of all referentials’ (1983, p. 4). As Baudrillard explains, ‘When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality—a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity’ (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 12). In this context, Baudrillard’s concept of the ‘hyperreal’ can be seen, as a ‘strategy of simulation’ (Smit, 2015, p. 2), by ‘substituting the signs of the real for the real’ (1983, p. 4).

According to Smit, Baudrillard’s analysis considers ‘hyperreal’ spaces such as DisneyWorld as a ‘compensat[ion] for a lack of reality’ (2015, p. 2). With this in mind, I see Baudrillard’s observations at work in Rotten’s Reddit AMA, in which the ‘signs’ of her ‘subcultural capital’—her tattoos, for instance—are debated as to their sources of aesthetic origin and influence. Given the ‘plethora of myths’ of popular culture, Rotten’s debt to Johnny Rotten is invoked by other commentators, Rotten herself only considers him a diffuse influence. In this light, one might note Smit’s observance that ‘the perceived loss of reality is met with desperate attempts to cling to an “authentic” world which can be meaningfully and objectively determined’ (p. 2). Smit, following Baudrillard, emphasises that ‘signs act to compensate (in fact to over-compensate) for this perceived lack of the “real thing”’ (p. 2). However, noting the ‘totally oppressive’ and prescriptive nature of the ‘hyperreal’, here, simulation—as ‘seduction’—becomes a strategy, which is ‘not only the loss of reality’ according to Baudrillard, ‘but also its very possibility’ (Butler, 1999, p. 23; quoted in Smith, 2015, p. 2). Indeed, as he put it, the task is to ‘make that world even more unintelligible, even more enigmatic’ (2000, p. 83), and in doing so, ‘embrace the idea that there is no objective reality’ (Smit, 2015, p. 2).

Smit utilises a Baudrillardian understanding of Die Antwoord, the South African rap duo, in her study of their aesthetic strategies. A shared comparison emerges here, given that both Die Antwoord and Rotten found popularity in the early 2010's; both can similarly be seen to enact personas premised on 'alterity' which operate both on the 'surface' level of 'performative' gestures, as well as upon the corporeal surface level, through 'reinscription' upon the body by sporting heavily-tattooed appearances. Like Die Antwoord, Rotten too can be seen to 'appropriate from multiple reference points, treating culture as a found object with which to create [her] particular brand' (Smit, 2014, p. 2). In the same way that Die Antwoord have been seen to borrow from the 'subcultural signifiers available to them' (Woodward, 2011, p. 18; quoted in Smit, 2014, p. 2), the duo's adopted 'white trash' aesthetic highlights 'the non-reality of the signs they borrow' (Smit, 2014, p. 2) through 'a comic exaggeration and celebration of what many may deem as a vulgar taste'. For her part, Rotten's aesthetic does seem somewhat less contrived, in comparison to the comic exaggeration employed by Die Antwoord. Though to be sure, humour permeates her work and persona, with her name being one example.

To return to de Lauretis, then, in what ways might we consider Rotten's punk-porn rebel girl 'masquerade' as inhabiting the emergence of a new political subjectivity? Following Smit, I see Rotten as presenting 'us not with a representation of politics, but with a politics of perception' (2015, p. 8). That is, Rotten's visual aesthetic appears largely 'disinvested in an objective or rational world' through its construction of a corporeal tableau of fictional horror narratives, thus working 'within a simulated world [...] attached to the world of appearances' (p. 8). In the following section, I consider the symbolic understanding of Rotten's 'simulated appearance' here in relation to her performance style, though the lens of Linda Williams'

psychoanalytic reading of the hard-core genre. In this discussion, I unpack the correlation between the 'surface' level of Rotten's performativity and the process that film scholar Linda Williams describes as 'the fantasy of capturing the "truth" of female sexual pleasure' (Williams, 1989, p. 267).

In the following section, I suggest that the excess 'signs' of sexual pleasure that characterise Rotten's performative repertoire e.g. squirting, function as a compensatory 'performative' which allegorises Rotten's 'indiscreet jewels' as a response to the oversaturation of sexual 'signs' in the contemporary 'pornosphere'. Fundamental to this reading is Rotten's embrace of the abject, which I read through Mary Russo's concept of the 'female grotesque' in relation to Julia Kristeva's work.

Female Grotesques

Tracing the trajectory of the 'grotesque' from its origins in the fifteenth century, Mary Russo identifies two main thematic categorisations: the first is the 'comic grotesque', associated with Mikhail Bakhtin's seminal study of medieval carnival in *Rabelais and His World*. The second conceptualisation pertains to the 'grotesque as strange and uncanny' (1995, p. 7), which can be seen in a strand of scholarship encompassing Wolfgang Kayser's *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, and Freud's notable essay 'On the Uncanny' (1995, p. 7). More recently, Mark Fisher's *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016b) extends this scholarly tract in his study of the grotesque as an unsettling affect within contemporary film and literature. Fisher hones in the constitutive elements that define the grotesque: 'the grotesque evokes something which is out of place. The response to the apparition of a grotesque object will involve laughter as much as

revulsion' (2016b, pp. 32-33). As Philip Thompson avers, 'the grotesque was often characterised by the co-presence of the laughable and that which is not compatible with the laughable' (quoted in Fisher, 2016b, p. 33). This definition of the grotesque recalls my discussion of Kern and Zedd's *Thrust in Me* in chapter 4, in which Zedd's absurd performance of necrophiliac auto-fellatio encompasses both laughter and non-laughter, as delineated by Thompson here.

Common to all of these thinkers is the assessment of 'carnival' as a radical event with transgressive potentiality. Preceding Lent, the medieval celebration of carnival marked a rare confluence of social class, in which existing social ideals and values were temporarily inverted. During the festivities, societal conventions and hierarchical structures of power, order, and values would be temporarily suspended and peasants and townfolk would mix with those in the higher social orders. In an article on carnivalization and the contemporary subcultural body, Langman describes the carnival as "'a time of laughter", a festival of pageants and feasts, of transgressive actions and appearances, and ribald, if not profane, language' (2008, p. 659) which 'celebrated the birth, decay and death of the body, as well as its organic functions such as eating, drinking, farting, defecating and copulating' (p. 660).¹⁸⁵ Russo's study posits a radical potentiality in the 'grotesque realism' of the body whereby the carnival is a process of 'symbolic inversion', and 'in its multivalent oppositional play, carnival refuses to surrender the critical and cultural tools of the dominant class, and in this sense, carnival can be seen, above all, as a site of insurgency' (1995, p. 62).

¹⁸⁵ The carnivalesque themes resonate with the performative gestures and self-reinvention that shaped the stylised revolt of first wave punk, as expressed in the *nom-de-plumes* of the Sex Pistols' Johnny Rotten and Sid Vicious. Indeed, already discussed in previous chapters, punk's embrace of the abject, the vulgar and crass, punk declaimed an act of refusal and an enactment of 'revolting revolt'.

For Langman, the pleasures of the carnival emerge because of these ‘*transgressions of moral norms and various social practices*’ (2008, p. 660) in grotesque excess. Whereby, as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White note, ‘Grotesque realism uses the material body—flesh conceptualized as corpulent excess—to represent cosmic, social, topographical and linguistic elements of the world’ ([1986] 1991, p. 295). It is the collective embrace of the vulgar – the ways the human body is temporarily celebrated for its ‘openings and orifices’ rather than ‘its closure and finish’—that gives carnival its power:

It is an image of impure corporeal bulk with its orifices (mouth, flared nostrils, anus) yawning wide and its lower regions (belly, legs, feet, buttocks and genitals) given priority over its upper regions (head, ‘spirit,’ reason). (p. 295)

In Langman’s view, the transgressions of the grotesque symbolically ‘*represent a critique of the values and morals of the elites that “set the apart” [original emphasis]*’ (2008, p. 662) and cultural studies scholar Ken Gelder notes the comparisons between carnival and subcultural forms such as punk, stating: ‘Like spectacular subcultures, carnival involves the flamboyant elaboration of the body, transforming the world through inversion (where high culture becomes low cultures, where the serious becomes the comic, etc.)’ (1995, p. 267). For Langman, sexual transgression lies at the heart of carnivalesque transgressions. As he puts it, ‘Sexual norms and standards of modesty were often discarded as the body, primarily the lower body, became a central focus’ (2008, p. 660).

Importantly, in his analysis of the ‘carnavalesque’ at work in contemporary subcultural formations, Langman also considers pornography as a form of cultural production associated with the ‘transgressive’. Here, I connect Feona Attwood’s observation that ‘the transgressions of

porn [...] are a claim to authenticity' (2012, p. 131). Further, Attwood asserts that 'the authenticity of porn depends on its down-to-earth lack of pretension and the challenge it offers to social norms of class, sex and gender' (p. 131). Drawing on Laura Kipnis, Attwood observes that in this sense, pornographic transgression can be seen 'like other forms of carnivalesque low culture', which overturns civilised values, celebrating, in Kipnis' words, the body as 'insistently material, defiantly vulgar, corporeal' (Kipnis, 1996, p. 132). Attwood's insights shed light on the convergence of 'carnavalesque' practices within the 'pornosphere' as indicative of porn as 'low culture' that constitutes 'an upending of bourgeois conventions' (2012, p. 131).

Yet, from Langman's more overtly Marxist perspective, pornography represents an integral part of popular culture. Langman sees pornography as having moved into occupying a prominent role in the societal mainstream in late-capitalism, having migrated 'from the liminal space at the margins of society (such as seedy stores and dingy theatres) to influence the mainstems of society and become a central motif in its lifestyle and couture' (2008, p. 659). Langman's account thus stresses that in the contemporary climate, porn serves a 'hegemonic function' (2008, p. 662). That is to say, while certain instantiations of cultural transgression might be seen to constitute a 'challenge to hegemony', porn also serves as a domain in which 'to contain discontent and malaise, to channel it away from the political and into the cultural where it could be neutralized' (p. 663).

Stallybrass and White remind us that 'transgressions' are constituted in relation to the 'other'. Thus, as with subcultural practices that seek to signify 'difference' through the 'other', carnival may resemble 'uncritical populism', which 'often violently abuses and demonizes

weaker, not-stronger, social groups – women, ethnic and religious minorities, those who ‘don’t belong’—in a process of *displaced objection*)’ (1991, p. 299). I note that although the ‘pornosphere’ may resemble a site of ‘carnavalesque’, and in its representations conveyed aspects of ‘grotesque realism’, it cannot be seen as a site transgression as such; after all, much hard-core porn frequently portrays the male performer in ‘carnavalesque laughter’ and ‘celebration’ at the expense of the female performer. Nevertheless, Stallybrass and White are helpful here, in their positioning of Bakhtin’s concept of the ‘carnavalesque’ in ‘a framework which makes it analytically powerful in the study of ideological repertoires and cultural practices’ (p. 301). In this sense, their study ‘treats the carnivalesque as an instance of a wider phenomenon of transgression’ in an effort to avoid ‘the reduction of carnival to a single effect’ (p. 267); they associate this ‘reductionist tendency’ in subcultural analysis with the Birmingham school (p. 267), which I addressed in chapter 1. Thus, through this brief theoretical framework I consider Rotten’s pornographic performativity as ‘carnavalesque’ while also acknowledging that Rotten’s ‘transgressivity’ is complex and contradictory.

Firstly, Rotten’s appearance is an invocation of the ‘grotesque’—her body art borrows from horror iconography rendered in a ‘punk style’—the opposite of traditional femininity. Thematically, Rotten’s horror iconography aligns with the grotesque, as exemplified in the semi-decomposed zombie tattoo on her stomach. Moreover, that tattoo image, associated with the macabre and uncanny, works through its juxtaposition with Rotten’s conformity to feminine beauty ideals (slim physique with large, enhanced breasts, bronze skin and classically attractive features) to present a ‘grotesque’ image that signals an excess; perhaps recalling the Kantian dichotomy of the ‘beautiful’ and the ‘sublime’ (Nead, 1992, p. 26). Thus Rotten’s appearance

suggests a ‘symbolic inversion’ of feminine beauty codes, correlative to ‘carnavalesque’ tradition, presenting an image of the ‘porn star’ as marked by the ‘alterity’ of ‘subcultural capital’.

Thus far, my reading has privileged Rotten’s identity in order to elucidate the various subcultural elements that constitute the aesthetics underpinning her self-brand. Rotten’s ‘surface’ bespeaks elements of the ‘grotesque’ and ‘carnavalesque’ thematic traditions, however, as Feona Attwood reminds us, ‘Porn is a refusal of artifice’ (2012, p. 2012). This assertion is striking—it confirms my argument so far about the radical propensities of ‘grotesque embodiment to ‘symbolically invert’ ‘bourgeois conventions’ but it also challenges the ‘surface’ level definition of authenticity I have outlined with regard to Rotten’s persona. Attwood points to the necessity of considering Rotten’s pornographic performances against the ‘artifice’ of the ‘cookie-cutter’ porn archetype. The dynamics of her performance, her performative gestures, offer her audience a uniquely grotesque embodiment of sex.

Russo’s study foregrounds the ‘abject’ as critical to understanding the female grotesque. In this, she draws from feminist psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva’s compelling study of the abject in *Powers of Horror* (1980). As a central concept through which human subjectivity is constituted, the abject surfaces in the ‘viscous fluids’ produced by the body: ‘blood, tears, vomit, excrement’ (Kristeva, 1980, p. 2). This ‘bodily detritus’ is ‘separated out’ from the body in both material and symbolic terms, thereby constituting ‘a *classification system* or a *structure*’ (p. 65) because the abject’s potential for ‘defilement’ is threatening to the individual ego—in its blurring of the borders of the body, it symbolically embodies an affective flux of ‘terror and revulsion’. Thus, as

Kristeva sees it, 'Defilement is what is jettisoned from the "*symbolic system*"' (p. 2); that is, transferred from the symbolic system of the phallic imago (Maddison, 2012a, p. 87) and placed '(predominantly, though not exclusively) on the side of the feminine' (Kristeva, 1980, p. 2).

Bodily abjections thus constitute a limit, Kristeva writes that

We are no longer within the sphere of the unconscious but at the limit of primal repression that, nevertheless, has discovered an intrinsically corporeal and already signifying brand, symptom, and sign: repugnance, disgust, abjection (1980, p. 11).

This reading is instructive, combining both a psychoanalytic understanding of the perversion inherent in sexuality, with a structuralist understanding of how the 'unconscious' is structured like a language. Thus the abject is highly symbolic; a site of projection likely to invoke and elicit strong bodily reactions, corresponding to Williams' conception of the 'involuntary' actions sought from the female body within the hard-core genre. For Williams, this constitutes a search for 'truth', as a compensatory mechanism emerging from the 'lack' of the visual expression of the female orgasm.

Interestingly, Langman analyses the 'female grotesque' in contemporary pornographic productions, noting the correspondence with 'transgressions'. Langman's reading is somewhat critical towards hard-core porn, seeing performative enactments of the grotesque as a form of 'grotesque degradation', which one might associate with the aggressive, violent performance style of a figure like Max Hardcore. In her discussion of Langman, Giovanna Maina characterises 'grotesque degradation' as 'the representation of a grotesque feminine body, covered in bodily fluids and with gaping orifices penetrated by huge phalluses' (Maina, 2014, p. 101). Maina sees 'grotesque degradation' as contributing to the creation of 'fantasy realms of

hyper-masculinity in which women are not simply the object of male lust, but are systematically degraded in retaliation for their assertiveness' (Langman, 2004; quoted in Maina, 2014, p. 101). Following Langman, Maina contends that 'grotesque degradation' can be seen as 'a compensatory fantasy for a male viewer socially threatened by the transformations of the labour market in contemporary deterritorialized capitalism, and whose masculinity has been undermined by the rise of feminism' (2014, p. 101).

In the following visual analysis, I discuss the concept of 'grotesque degradation' in relation to selected scenes from Rotten's 'world tour'¹⁸⁶ of 2014-2015, in which she starred in films for German porn production company, *Magma*, as well as US company, *Bang Bros*.¹⁸⁷ Focusing on these works demonstrates how 'presentations of actual sexual interactions in pornography may signal an alternative logic of filmic production centred on the spectacular body' (Smith, 2012, p. 511). Rotten's performances are striking for their shared preoccupation with the enactment of 'grotesque realism' and through her embodiment of the grotesque her challenge to the 'compulsory heteronormativity' (Rubin and Butler 1994, p. 66) that saturates hardcore.

Rollergirl vs. Bad Boys

Filmed in Switzerland during her promotional tour of 2014,¹⁸⁸ *Rollergirl 1* (2014) opens with Rotten, wearing dark 'wayfarer' sunglasses, sparkly pink bikini top and glittery blue hot pants,

¹⁸⁶ A phrase she uses in reference to her promotional tour she embarked on in 2014/15.

¹⁸⁷ Magma and Magmafilm are both used interchangeably by the production company.

¹⁸⁸ In which she also travelled to Germany, Switzerland, Spain and South Africa. For more information, see: <https://xxxbios.com/female-pornstar/bonnie-rotten-biography/>

haltingly entering a tattoo studio on roller skates. Rotten peruses the in-store clothing display, before taking up position upon the tattoo bed, promptly removing her glasses. She is filmed receiving a tattoo on the inside of her left forearm, facial muscles responding involuntarily to the pain caused by the piece (Figure 5.3). She expresses great delight when revealing her tattoo of the Swiss flag as her latest piece of corporeal artwork; a reference to the Zurich location of the shoot. I note that the subtle evocation of pain here evidences a visual clue reminiscent of Williams's notion of the 'involuntary truth' that guides hard-core porn, suggesting the play with 'mask and masquerade' in the consequent narrative, as the film stages various visual enactments of the 'frenzied search' for Rotten's 'involuntary' bodily response (Williams, 1989, p. 48).



Figure 5.3: Rotten receives a tattoo of the Swiss flag.

Indeed, as Reynolds and Press have observed, 'The face is both something that betrays its owner (as in the involuntary grimace or blush) and something you can hide behind, a shield or veil' (1996, p. 290). Moreover, the tattoo ritual elicits the search for Williams' conception of

‘involuntary truth’, which foregrounds a certain ‘authenticity’ implied by the ritualistic nature of tattoo as a rite of passage. Contrastingly, I see this scene as fetishising Rotten’s ‘masquerade’, which in this instance, threatens to become the burden of the ‘mask’. Rotten’s mask—that of ‘tattoo-titted freakdom’—necessitates the endurance of the physical duress entailed in the tattoo procedure, as a visual metaphor foreshadowing the ritualistic ‘pain and pleasure’ of her consequent sex scene.



Figure 5.4: Rotten outside of the erotic cinema.

Having been ‘inked’, Rotten then takes to the streets, much to the bemusement of passers-by. Arriving at her rendezvous, she strikes a pose outside of an erotic cinema; as Rotten is pictured drinking a beer, a muted electro soundtrack plays out in the non-diegetic space of the scene (Figure 5.4). Turning, Rotten pushes through the doors, proceeding to skate along a corridor of erotic video cabins, before entering a screening room. One of her own blowjob scenes plays on the film screen, as she tentatively enters the theatre, establishing eye contact with her

co-partner Mike Angelo; Angelo, with penis already engorged, notices Rotten as she approaches and sits in the row in front of him (Figure 5.5). The scene plays out along the following lines: Angelo stimulates his protruding penis; reaching over and grabbing Rotten, she responds vigorously by forcing his fingers into her throat. The pair spit into each other's mouths. Rotten engages in a series of acrobatic postures, in which she is bent over rows of seats and reverse 'pile-driven'. The camera emphasises Rotten's anus as central to these sexual positions. Occasionally, alongside her distinctive 'squirting' display and passionate verbal exclamations, there is a brief glance of Rotten onscreen, fragmenting or perhaps multiplying the dynamics of the gaze through visual excess.



Figure 5.5: Rotten enjoys the show, with co-star Mike Angelo in tow.

Throughout, the movie theatre's all-male audience provide a spectrum of different reactions to Rotten's performance(s): the young man closest to the action appears flushed and embarrassed: another divides his attention between the screen and stealing glances at Rotten and

Angelo; while a man in the background appears generally indifferent to the action. For the finale of their scene, Rotten and Angelo occupy the space in front of the cinema screen as if the collective gaze is now fixed on their activity rather than the screen. After a spell in the ‘doggystyle’ position for a display of anal penetration, Angelo pulls Rotten’s distended rectum open with his fingers (Figure 5.6). Despite the rigour of the shoot, Rotten remains seductive; smiling, she coyly asks ‘you just want to see my flower?’ as she expands her anus to reveal a gaping red orifice, much to Angelo’s apparent pleasure. In the climax of the clip, Angelo forces Rotten’s head down onto his penis, so that she vomits over it, while also stretching her mouth and aggressively ordering her to do the blowjob. Nevertheless, there are humorous moments in the scene and Rotten gives no indication that she is not a willing participant in the performance. Rotten confirms her own agential capacity during the shoot, for example when Angelo implores Rotten to squirt once more, she pauses the action and laughs ‘no more’.

Certainly the sequence is an example of the hard-core tropes of ‘extreme anal’ observed by Enrico Biasin and Federico Zecca (2009): the hyperbolic expression of the ‘frenzy of the visible’ (Williams, 1989, p. 36). In his discussion of ‘extreme anal’ star Rocco Siffredi, cultural studies scholar Steven Maddison sees this ‘new’ mode as ‘characterised by fetishistic practices that were once synonymous with gonzo genres, but which can now be found across most porn styles’ (2012a, p. 88). Noting the influence of Siffredi, ‘Buttman’ John Stagliano and Max Hardcore, Maddison also identifies ‘double-penetration, ass-to-mouth, cum swapping, anal gaping and violent ass fucking’ (p. 88) as elements of extreme anal presented through the infliction of pain, coded as bodily transmogrification, and the phallogocentric ‘destruction’ of the anus (Waldby quoted in Maddison, 2012a, p. 87).



Figure 5.6: The 'search' for Rotten's 'jewels'.

Viewing a range of her scenes, Rotten's anus does appear as a site of ritual mutilation, re-inscribed upon the female form in practices of heteronormative anal sex, which requires the expansion of the anus to facilitate penetration. Following Williams, Rotten's revelation of her inner sphincter signals a promissory fantasy for Angelo, propelled by an unconscious desire to reveal the authentic site of female desire. In the emergence of Rotten's inner-corporeality, its materiality disclosing itself as penetrated orifice, perpetuating the 'frenzied gaze upon the female body' (Williams, 1989, p. 267). In Maddison's (2012a) reading, this 'frenzied gaze' is constitutive of hard-core performance styles in which the rapid succession of hard-core sex sequences serves as a 'narcissistic evasion of the feminine 'other' deflected back to the masculine self' (Williams, 1989, p. 267). Kristeva (1980) conceived the anus as the site of desire,

as perversion, and the threshold of the abject: the ‘gaping’ rectum remains frozen as a ‘corporeal’ truth of ‘fundamental incompleteness’.

Interestingly, Rotten’s excessive squirting functions as a substitute for her orgasm. As detailed above, Angelo’s attention is often focused on attempting to stimulate Rotten’s squirting and unlike the normative hard-core script where the woman’s orgasm is verbal, Angelo asks Rotten ‘are you going to cum for me?’, imploring her to ‘do it again’. Considered through Kristeva’s framework, Angelo’s demand entails both a disavowal of the abject nature of the act through refraining to name ‘it’, yet in doing so, also attests to a perverse fascination with summoning the abject evidence of her pleasure.

Kristeva suggests that it is the threat of castration that incites the perverse interest in the abject—the abject appears symbolic as the ‘other’ against which the subject constitutes the imago. Thus in Rotten’s scene, I read Angelo’s compulsive incitement to yet more squirting as excess, a desire for a more visceral encounter with this corporeal ‘other’. Kristeva’s explication of the drives that guide ‘devotees of the abject’ seems to describe the gaping sequence between Rotten and Angelo:

she as well as he, do not cease looking, within what flows from the other’s “innermost being,” for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body (Kristeva, 1980, p. 54).

Angelo’s quest for the abject, or Rotten’s ‘innermost being’ (p. 54), replicates a simulated ritual of repeated aggressive penetration (and his manual stimulation of her body)—evidence of his ceaseless looking (p. 54). Rotten manages to squirt four times in the scene, but not satisfied with

the trace of Rotten's 'viscous fluids' already produced, Angelo takes to stretching her anus, imploring to her 'push it out baby'. The dynamics of control and agency are distributed and weighted towards Angelo as the male performer, and as Kristeva reminds us, 'at the same time that immersion gives him the full power of possessing, if not being, the bad object that inhabits the maternal body' (p. 54). Rotten laughs off Angelo's requests for her to cum even more, and he laughs in turn – the spontaneous eruption of laughter brings a level of Brechtian self-consciousness to the scene, temporarily suspending the frenzied action to highlight its absurdity. Yet laughter onscreen jars somewhat with the duress visibly encoded upon Rotten's body.

As an example of 'grotesque degradation', the scene might offer a 'compensatory fantasy for a male viewer' (Maina, 2014, p. 101). Various males look at Rotten in this scene such that the threat of Rotten's performative excess is redrawn and compensated for. As I outlined above, we see multiple gazes at work, suggesting the excess of Rotten's 'spectacularity'. Some of the intradiegetic audience look at Rotten distractedly, their gaze flitting between the sexual activity happening in front of them, and the hard-core scene playing on the cinema screen. As Angelo obsessively pursues Rotten's squirting response, those attempts at revealing Rotten's 'indiscreet jewels' become a process of control over her body—for the male audience, the threat of the abject is displaced onto the 'contained' cinema screen—the demands upon the performer produce a hyperbolic performance while constantly demanding more.

Maddison argues that 'Rather than inciting our desire to go out and find some 'real' sex, porn generates desire for porn itself: an endlessly updating parade of posthuman bodies, freakishly endowed and reassuringly standardised' (2012b, p. 315). This argument is quite

compelling in relation to the audience in this scene: as their focus moves backwards and forwards between the ‘real-life’ and onscreen actions, “‘Real” sex reced[es] as porn becomes the dominant mode through which sex is experienced’ (p. 315).



Figure 5.7: The concluding shot of Rotten as the ‘rollergirl’.

While in Germany on her world tour, Rotten filmed several outdoor scenes for *BangBros*. Filmed in the Kreuzberg area of Berlin, *Bonnie Rotten Squirts in Public* (2014) features a POV Blowjob scene followed by a hard-core sequence. Approaching the apartment complex, Rotten is seen in short skirt, leather jacket and boots, while her co-star is dressed more casually, in loose jeans and a hoodie. Rotten plays to her ‘bad girl’ persona, greets him with ‘I wanna’ fuck’, to which the cameraman responds with ‘shut the fuck up’. Rotten and her co-star Alberto Blanco have sex in the apartment stairwell, and the camera pans to show a group of three males watching from the staircase below. Once again the cameraman reprimands Rotten telling her to quieten down as she is penetrated. She spits back at her co-star from a ‘doggy style’ position,

and, appearing to orgasm, douses her male partner in ejaculate. The scene culminates with Rotten in a POV position on a balcony in one of the apartments; she stands up and squirts in the direction of her co-star. The idealised porn consumer—the young male subject—is literally represented onscreen, as a fulcrum through which the Rotten’s ‘hyperreality’ can be received as ‘real’.



Figure 5.8: Rotten and co-star Alberto Blanco in performance on the balcony.

Rotten’s squirting performance operates uniquely here—as she ejaculates, she stands up and projects her discharge into the face of the male performer. This practice can be commonplace in pornographic subgenres such as femdom (female domination), it is much rarer to see female performers squirting at their male partner in heteronormative hard-core. Rotten’s squirting performance in this scene is more than a reversal of power dynamics and their visual manifestation through ejaculation. The sheer volume of her ejaculate neutralises the established erotic sequence of penetration (Figure 5.9). As Rotten gleefully expresses her approval and

arousal, the co-star and cameraman promptly erupt in hysterics—recalling Kristeva’s assertion that ‘laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection’ (1980, p. 8). However, more than this, the excess that characterises Rotten’s performance suggests a ‘hyperreal’ strategy of ‘sign’ oversaturation, and the ‘truth’ is performed to hyperbolic excess; yet this encounter with the ‘truth’ of Rotten’s sexual pleasure becomes a ‘sign’ of disavowal.



Figure 5.9: Laughter erupts during Rotten’s squirting display.

There are skills underpinning Rotten’s squirting performance—forms of corporeal knowledge and physical labour—which parody the masculine logics of the “money-shot”, hard-core’s ritualistic ejaculation regime. Rotten’s excessive display outdoes the ‘spectacular’ masculine ‘cumshot’ (‘rubbing his face in it’, so to speak)—and doing it four times! However, returning to Williams’ psychoanalytic reading of hard-core, this ‘excess’ can be read as demanded by a masculine need for compensation against ‘castration’. Neoliberal porn paradigms privilege excess and extremity as central markers of novelty and visibility, and Rotten’s

‘regulated’ body performs its very abjection through excess; yet in doing so, it speaks to the inherent nature of artifice in the neoliberal order, as her abjection becomes ‘surface’ ‘alterity’. Rotten’s ‘squirting’ is no more a statement of her ‘truth’, that is her ‘involuntary jewels’, than any other representation of women’s pleasure articulated within the hard-core genre.



Figure 5.10: Rotten subjects Blanco r to her a ‘dousing’.

Rotten’s performance seems to subvert the usual coding of bodily abjection according to the conventions of hard-core. Rather than present her genital area as the passive receptacle of male domination and passive penetration, she ejects forcefully in a hyperbolic display of female excess (Figure 5.10). Perhaps then the clip’s ambiguous balance on the threshold of porn and parody suggests a divergent sub-trend within hard-core gonzo, appealing to the demographic of the young urban male who co-stars with Rotten; the neoliberal ‘flexi-worker’ who seeks pornography characterised by outbursts of laughter as opposed to the simulated torture of

‘extreme anal’ productions. Taking Williams’ analogy of the speaking ‘eroto-genital’ complex to its logical ends, Rotten’s display can be seen as a bodily rejection of the phallic-power paradigm.

The recurring presence of a gang of male onlookers that populate the clips surveyed here recalls the dynamics of the ‘freak show’; a thematic that permeates the structural ‘paratexts’ of Rotten’s porn persona. Rotten’s own corporeal bricolage is presented as an embodied source of ‘grotesque realism’, which demands a crowd of perversely fascinated young males within the diegetic frame; amounting to visual excess of masculinity, in combination with the compulsory male co-star. The relative anonymity of the males on-screen opens up a complex dynamic, suggesting the literal embodiment on-scene of the ‘male gaze’.

More broadly, we might consider the fragmented ‘male gaze’ as a visual representation of Robert Pfaller’s (2017) theorisation on ‘interpassivity’, as developed by Mark Fisher. Under the conditions of ‘capitalist realism’, the contemporary period of late-capitalism marked by the ‘societies of control’ (Deleuze, 1992), Fisher protests the oversaturation of choices for consumption offered by the ‘entertainment matrix’ (2009, p. 24). As Fisher sees it, the relentless and replenishing content characteristic of consumer engagement in the web 2.0 paradigm entails affective side effect for users, such as ‘twitchy, agitated’ behaviours and ‘an inability to concentrate or focus’ (quoted in Maddison, 2009, p. 24). Following Fisher, Steven Maddison has elaborated that ‘The very saturation of porn, not only in terms of its abundance and accessibility, but its integration into so much of our cultural life, seems to exemplify the idea that we consume porn interpassively, while it performs our sexuality for us’ (2012a, p. 315). For Fisher, through the stimulations of late-capitalist technological machinations—the communicative capitalism of

the smart phone--the modern subject is coaxed into a state of 'depressive hedonia' rendered unable 'to do anything except pursue pleasure' (Maddison, 2009, p. 22).

Conclusion

These films take pleasure in fetishising Rotten's deviant persona: the alterity of her 'alt' status becomes manifest within her performances expressed by her spitting, vomiting, and squirting. The abject is continued through the staging of Rotten in a diegetic mise-en-scene placing her within settings that analogise this 'alt' imaginary: having sex in car parks, stairwells and other liminal 'non-spaces' (Augé, 2009) of the post-industrial landscape. The prevalence of her placement within these spheres mobilises Rotten as a means to explore and make sense of the urban landscape. But more than this, these stagings can be seen as an allegory of the precarity of labour for the contemporary porn starlet; she is portrayed as an individualised subject, reduced to her brand, who has to navigate the physical urban environment seeking 'casual' sex in precarious conditions. Rather than foreground her as a star, these films undermine her star presence and the connotations of celebrity persona, to index a certain level of authenticity. Yet, Rotten is far from a passive agent here; resistance comes from her bodily excess, which parodies the power-plays of extreme hard-core. She instigates the pornographic action, thinks nothing of dousing her male co-star, and thereby subjects him to the 'money shot' and the 'ritual humiliations' (Maddison, 2012a) of gonzo pornography, in subversion of the gendered power dynamics typical of hard-core.

Rotten's visual performance coheres with Fisher's (2009) analysis of 'capitalist realism', and the impossible demands placed on the subject for creative labour it entails. The performance

can be read as a means of disciplining the deviant ‘grotesque body’, which both provokes a gaze as ‘spectacle’, but is also the subject of disavowal in respect of its ‘abjection’. Drawing on Nead, perhaps Rotten’s performance is structured by masculine anxiety: her stagings a symbolic ‘spectacle’ which plays out this ‘containment anxiety’. Thus, her performances are not to be understood as transgressive, but as a ‘sign’ of the successful regulation of the female body. Yet, in another light, Rotten’s ‘spectacular’ bodily excess occurs on her own terms, a catalyst for the temporary suspension of power dynamics, subjecting the male performer to a ritualistic ‘dousing’. From this perspective, the inversion of some representational tropes might signal a shift away from the ‘simulated’ ‘biopower’ inscribed upon the body in earlier hard-core trends.

Coda: ‘Love Comes in spurts’: Bodies, Pleasure, and Transgression

This thesis has explored the thematic of sexuality, and its significance within aesthetic trajectories of punk-related cultural activity. According to Foucault’s conceptualisation of genealogy, I have illustrated the multivalent meanings of my case studies, and the ways in which they relate to both cultural histories, traditions, and practices of ‘punk’ and ‘pornography’. This genealogical focus has emphasised the shifting ways these labels have been understood in relation to notions of ‘punk porn’; a provisional label which, as demonstrated here, has been applied to a diverse array of cultural productions. In turn, the conceptual entailments of the label ‘punk porn’ have been surveyed across shifting legal, political, and socio-cultural climates, illustrating how ‘obscenity’ mutates across historical junctures.

Treating objects as constituent to the ‘counter-discourses’ of the domain of ‘alternative’ culture has shown the doubled status of my case studies. That is to say, these objects were positioned against hegemonic cultural discourses, which thus contributed to their charge as normatively ‘resistant’. Ideas of the ‘mainstream’ and the ‘alternative’ have been central to the reception of my examples as ‘resistance’ and/or ‘rebellion’. Thus, while law makers sought to censor and censure many of the figures considered here, these practitioners and their productions also bolstered the idea of a coherent mainstream. As such, the obscenity trials that embroiled McLaren and Westwood appear to parody Foucault’s biopolitical understanding of society, as that which ‘must be defended’.

In sketching out the co-ordinates of these objects, and the ‘politics of representation’ they can be seen to stage, I have argued that ideas of ‘resistance’ can be discerned in the expression of the ‘punk aesthetic’ through the figure of the female ‘punk body’. An embrace of sexuality and its attendant field of imagery unites these practitioners, and contributed to the perception that their work contravened the social ‘order of things’. However, a critical frame attuned to issues of ‘memory’ indicated these objects occupy paradoxical positions, both intervening within, yet existing exclusive of, the idea of a hegemonic cultural industry constitutive of the ‘mainstream’. Further, the legal threats and moral backlash faced by these auteurs have served to imbue them with a transgressive edge in the ‘collective memory’ (Erll, 2011, p. 9).

I have discussed ways in which elements of the punk aesthetic has become ‘recuperated’ within the mainstream, to the extent that ‘punk’ now circulates as a signifier for rebellion divorced from the subcultural roots, and musical forms, of punk rock. This argument broadly follows Hebdige’s assessment of the processes of ‘normalisation’ to which punk was subject in 1977. But, in my study, I have explored how certain aspects of the punk aesthetic—epitomised by Westwood and McLaren’s still-shocking porn T-shirt designs—resist total recuperation into mainstream discourses.

While the diachronic analysis here serves to sketch the central ideas that came to bear within the realm of punk-related activity, this reading has also brought to bear the ways punk’s ‘remembering’ in the present operates in accordance with contemporary standards. That is to say, in ‘looking back’ at punk, ‘contemporary eyes’ impose a significance to themes that might have

been perceived as ‘marginal’ to many original punk-identifying participants. I acknowledge the risk of ‘over reading signs’ but I follow Žižek’s appraisal of Hegel’s argument, that it only after the moment has passed that a phenomenon can be grasped as such (Žižek, 2014).

Punk memory-work appeared to reach a particular high-point with the 40th anniversary of punk and the various exhibitions I have discussed. These stagings emphasised the ‘inclusive’ elements of punk subculture as a space where ‘selves are recreated’ (Clark, 2003, p. 223), foregrounding the role of women, sexual and racial minorities to the development of punk. Indeed, punk’s female auteurs now appear to occupy as significant a space within the cultural history of punk as their male counterparts—for example in the celebration of figures of Poly Styrene and the Slits—often rearticulated through contemporary feminist discourses, and with reference to a subsequent generation of female punk musicians, for example ‘black feminist punk band’ Big Joanie. This can be viewed as part of a re-politicisation of punk according to the ‘politics of representation’ that inform contemporary understandings of identity politics.

From a feminist perspective, such developments are to be welcomed, and indeed, are long-overdue. However, ‘remembering’ always implies an act of ‘forgetting’, which, as I have shown, occludes the politically ambivalent dimensions of punk (particularly those incommensurate with feminist re-readings of the cultural history of punk). For instance, while Westwood continues to be celebrated as a fashion pioneer, the problematic aspects of her

collaborative early work appear to have been largely sidelined, or else, pinned on the already dubious reputation of McLaren (Gorman, 2020, p. 736).¹⁸⁹

While this study points to the critical afterlife of the punk aesthetic as a deliberate strategy, it is evident that certain aspects of this stylistic assemblage and affective repertoire remain politically ambivalent at best. The punk aesthetic retains a connection to radical protest and left-wing oriented movements—as evidenced by the punk dimensions of *Extinction Rebellion*, for instance—but is not exclusive to progressive causes. Certainly the punk imaginary mobilised by Bonnie Rotten primarily serves self-interest as a body modification at the core of her self-brand; against the backdrop of which, Rotten now flaunts her embrace of Conservatism and gun culture.

Yet, while some commentators may view this ambivalence as evidence of the total expropriation of punk’s signifying charge, I observe that punk retains its relevance precisely because of its singular ability to persist in the public ‘imaginary’ while maintaining such contradictions. The contradictions of punk remain of scholarly interest and examination. As Michael Bracewell registers in the foreword to *Punk Rock: An Oral History*:

punk caused its participants to become highly sensitized towards their own influences and environments; how had they found themselves involved in this outlandish feat of tribal exhibitionism? And what had they looked to punk to deliver? Class war or a recreation of Zurich Dada? Situationism or a beer fight? Gender wars or casual sex? High fashion or anti fashion, or the point where anti fashion became high fashion? More often than not, what punk delivered was a fusion of opposing ideas—holding the tension of contradictions (2012, p. xii).

¹⁸⁹ As Gorman details, these tensions came to a head during Westwood’s retrospective at the V&A in 2004—Westwood was credited as the sole author of the pair’s joint-constructed SEX and Seditious garments. Upon legal threats, this was amended (Gorman, 2020, p. 736).

Thus, I acknowledge the difficulties that punk presents to analysis. As discussed, there is no unified story that encapsulates punk as such, instead, the label defines a range of practices as a ‘travelling concept’ that stand in for a particular set of ideological presuppositions across different eras.

Sexuality resounds as a central contradiction within punk, contributing to the transgressive connotations of the punk aesthetic. Underlying Tutti *et al*’s strategic deployments of sexuality as transgressive practice is the construction of sexuality as, in Foucault’s words, a ‘problem of truth’—a repressed ‘natural’ force in need of liberation. Thus punk can be positioned in a lineage of avant-garde practice following the counterculture of the 1960s. While I have invariably critiqued this argument—instead, pointing to how their practice exemplifies Western culture’s imperative to make sex ‘speak’—I have also acknowledged that in their attempts at ‘demystification’, those female auteurs mounted sustained challenges to normative understandings of gender expression, and, in particular, to the stifling proscriptions of ‘femininity’ as ‘passive’ under patriarchy.

Punk has frequently served as space through which female artists have attempted to actualise feminist critiques of the ‘male gaze’, thus, as I have shown, reaffirming the relevance of punk to feminist histories. Punk marked a site of culture that engendered feminist advancements. Following on from that, I have explored how the female punk body has served as a vector through which to consider feminist concerns about objectification and empowerment running up against the ‘perpetual spirals of pleasure and power’ per Foucault’s work.

I have argued that such practices align in interesting ways with Foucault's work on sexuality, in that, sexuality is deployed according to its power/knowledge (Foucault, 1978, p. 11)—the signifying charge of punk porn lies in its ability to incite and arouse but it is at the same time understood as a target to destroy - given the that the biopolitics of sex mark a site of ideological struggle of modern subjecthood. My delineation of feminine (and feminist) aesthetic strategies here—ranging from the 'masquerade' as a performative iteration, to 'seduction' as a form of entrapment—suggests the radical potentialities of women engaging with, and in turn rearticulating, sexuality for their own ends in ways that recall the second-wave feminist maxim of the 'personal is political'.

Desire resounds as a central point of contention, as in early punk's usage of pornography to highlight the hypocrisies of the 'male gaze' and its reduction of the female nude to a sex-object to be consumed and possessed by the male 'spectator/owner'. Because of the hegemony of such representations, reclamation of the female body as sexually agentic proves contentious to both pro-porn as well as anti-censorship feminist positions, while provoking masculine establishment authority. This was evidenced across all my case studies, from the outrage caused by Jordan discussed in chapter 2, through to Cosey Fanni Tutti's pioneering work (chapter 3), and as developed in post-punk contexts by Lydia Lunch (chapter 4), reaching the realisation of the female 'punk body' in the context of contemporary pornography. In all these instances, the female 'punk body' is presented according to Freud's characterisation of the fetish, as a site of erotic desire and attachment that simultaneously provokes 'disavowal' as well as 'reverence'.

By challenging the ‘regulation’ and ‘containment’ of the sexualised body and its threat to the social and psychological order of patriarchy, these auteurs call attention to the fragility of patriarchal power. That power seemingly cannot bear the weight of contradictions implied by the display of women’s sexuality on their own terms, for their own pleasures—whether artistic, erotic, or both—and, most significantly, in public. Thus, I hold that these auteurs aggressively reassert and reclaim sexuality through a performative agency that belies Camille Paglia’s contention that ‘sex is domination’. Drawing on psychoanalytic feminisms and incorporating insight from de Lauretis, Kristeva, and Williams, I have moved away from Foucault’s idea of the docile body to instead see the female body as an agent for radical change. This parallel’s Foucault’s own shift from the techniques of the body in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, to the techniques of the ‘self’ in his later works. As Lois McNay observes, Foucault’s reworking of autonomy ‘challenges feminists to shift tack from an insistence on a distinct and cohesive “feminine” identity to a consideration of what women might become if they intervene in the processes that shape their lives’ (1992, p. 115).

I have been concerned with the notion of punk-related aesthetic strategies in this thesis and I suggest that the real significance of my study lies with the auteurs themselves, whose own methods of punk-related self-creation are, I would argue, the most significant of their creations. Each of these auteurs have defined their public personas through deliberate acts of self-recreation, thereby speaking to Dylan Clark argument that subcultures are a space in which ‘selves are recreated’ (2003, p. 223). Thus, by surveying prominent female figures’ performative contributions to the ‘punk aesthetic’—their flagrant embrace of sexually loaded style, as well as their challenge to the gender strictures regulating fashion—I have illustrated how those women

performatively (and parodically) overturned social ‘bondage’ by embracing ‘bondage’ as an emboldening stylisation and recreation of the self—as Paglia reminds us after all: ‘Sex is power’ (1990, p. 2).

Ethics as an Aesthetic of Experience

The spectacular display of bodies witnessed in both the domains of punk and porn recalls Foucault’s description of the pre-Victorian age of the seventeenth century as a time unhampered by bourgeois ideology: a time when bodies ‘made a display of themselves’ (Foucault, 1978, p. 1). Foucault goes on to characterise this period in terms reminiscent to the carnivalesque evidenced within punk: ‘It was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions, when anatomies were shown and intermingled at will, and knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults’ (p. 3). It is striking that this description resonates with the punk moment, which, as I have examined here, contested normative ideological presuppositions of a conservative social order in the 1970s; the ‘order of things’, to use Foucault’s formulation. My utilisation of Bourdieu’s analytical framework of social class has also served to underscore the resonance between punk’s ‘refusal’, as articulated by Hebdige, and a Bourdieusian ‘refusal’ of bourgeois norms, staged in the deliberate inversion of aesthetic judgement through subversive punk practice.

The public ‘displays’ of sexuality examined here stand in opposition to the bourgeois stratification and privatisation of sexuality which, according to Foucault, ‘was carefully confined’ by the Victorian bourgeoisie, having ‘moved into the home [where the] conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction’ (1978, p. 3).

Foucault holds that, with the implementation of such structures, ‘silence’ thus ‘became the rule’ on ‘the subject of sex’ (p. 3). I propose that much of punk’s radical claims stem precisely from ‘refusal’ of the ‘levelling impulse’ of bourgeois culture. Punk embraced spectacle for its own ends and, following Fisher, as a part of the existential challenge represented by boredom.

While Foucault has served to help detail the macro-level ‘dispositif’ within which the objects here are produced—that is, the ways in which ‘punk porn’ is classified through institutional discourses, which have served to regulate and contain its transgressive claims—Bourdieu’s work has contributed to a micro-level analysis of the ways in which, in classifying and categorising the ‘punk aesthetic’ speaks to the ‘taste’ judgements exercised within the social field as discourse, composed by a field of commentators. I have argued that these case studies contest normative ‘aesthetic judgements’ as a performative, in which identity formations of sex, gender, class, and race, amount to a ‘politics of representation’.

Punk accords with Foucault’s observation that the goal of life is to make oneself an artwork. In the auteurs I have considered, we find evidence that the recreation of selves is intimately tied to self-fashioning of the body as an aesthetic canvas. An interview by Lester Bangs with Richard Hell connected the threads of ‘self-recreation’ and the thematic of ‘demystifying sexuality’. In 1978, Bangs questioned Hell about his punk anthem of ‘brutal demystification’, ‘Love Comes in Spurts’, from *Blank Generation* (1977). As Hell declares, ‘One thing I wanted to bring back to rock ‘n’ roll was the knowledge that you invent yourself. That’s why I changed my name, why I did all the clothing style things, haircut, everything. So naturally, if you invent yourself, you love yourself’ (Bangs, 1987, p. 265). Hell’s comments may read as a

naively narcissistic, but this notion of self-reinvention chimes with Foucauldian ethics as an aesthetics of existence, while his meditation on what drove his generation is telling:

That is the ultimate message of the New Wave: if you just amass the courage that is necessary, you can completely invent yourself. You can be your own hero, and once everybody is their own hero, then everybody is gonna be able to communicate with each other on a real basis rather than a hand-me-down set of societal standards (Bangs, 1987, p. 265).

Punk served to reconfigure the established ‘order of things’, opening-up spaces for the self-recreation that recalibrated the dynamics of inclusion for cultural production. Punk auteurs effected a modulation of subjective relations, along the lines of gender and sexuality—a process analogous to Foucault’s emphasis on the self as the plane on and through which an aesthetics of existence can be conceived as an ethical injunction.

In a Nietzschean sense, Hell’s testimony speaks to a ‘will to knowledge’, which views conformist credulity with derision. In its place, Hell suggests the power of individuality to overturn the structures that produce identity. However, this form of self-recreation, premised on adornment, speaks to a certain aspirationalism which, as Fisher has outlined, can be politically ambivalent given that it risks ‘vindicat[ing] the bourgeois world’ (2018, p. 604). Indeed, self-recreation bears a relationship to the dandyism of nineteenth century avant-gardes such as the French Symbolists, exemplified in Charles Baudelaire’s ‘The Painter of Modern Life’. If Baudelaire was a model for Foucault’s conception of modern man as he ‘who tries to invent himself’ (quoted in McNay, 1992, p. 89), the privilege of this subject is underpinned by the structures of power that exclude other less bourgeois subjectivities.

Thus it is important to recognise the underlying currents of individualism, amounting to a certain narcissism, which is at odds with the collective, organised politics, and the struggles of ‘isms’, such as socialism and feminism, which punk historically gave voice to through alignment with activism, such as Rock Against Racism and Rock Against Sexism. Moreover, Hell’s idealism can be critiqued for its ignorance of the stakes of self-recreation for other subjectivities, for example the threats of violence that the spectacular female ‘punk body’ has faced such as the Slits confrontations with a hostile ‘male gaze’ during first wave punk, to the threats of intrusion and symbolic violence that Bonnie Rotten’s bodily display was met with, as I discussed in chapter 5.

The performative embodiments of the punk body illustrate Foucault’s observation that the ‘rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures’ (1978, p. 157). But my attempt to explore the biopolitics of the female ‘punk body’ might face the same critique as levelled at Foucault by Best and Kellner ‘it is not clear how the “bodies and pleasures” Foucault valorizes are not, like “sexuality”, also power effects or implicated in normalizing strategies’ (1991, p. 58). Whatever, the mobilisation of the body—whether in Cosey Fanni Tutti’s porn features or Lydia Lunch’s reclamation of female desire while simultaneously destroying sexual desire—these figures demonstrate that the body’s performance of sexuality framed through the lens of the ‘punk aesthetic’ has significant transgressive possibility.

In attempting to writing a genealogy of ‘punk porn’ here, I have explored various para-concepts in punk’s deployment of sexuality. I have highlighted punk usages of pornography as

an enactment of demystification of conditioned societal responses to sexuality, as part of creative practice centred around ‘taboo-busting’. From the vantage point of a Foucauldian analytics, it is clear that this critical impulse presupposes a ‘natural’ sexuality that several punk auteurs have sought to liberate through portrayal of the brute mechanisms of sexuality.

As I have argued here, attempts by punk auteurs such as Westwood and McLaren to ‘liberate’ sexuality fall victim to the idealism of a Reichian ‘utopia’. I have also argued that their couture illustrates the incitement of sex to speak within contemporary discourses, as Foucault argued:

If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom (1978, p. 6).

Here, Foucault’s emphasis on the legal repercussions of operationalising a lexicon of sexuality anticipates the repeated judicial injunctions served on Westwood and McLaren, and the resulting obscenity trials in which they were engaged, for ‘hold[ing] forth in such language’ (p. 6).

However, per Foucault, the implications of this argument may appear to empty out the charge of these designs: if sex is everywhere spoken of, then Westwood and McLaren’s designs merely constitute another instantiation of the hegemonic ‘order of things’ that govern sexuality? To this point, I would suggest that the ‘transgressive’ nature of these designs stems, more accurately, from the deliberate mobilisation of a sexual lexicon outside of the ‘power/knowledge’ (Foucault, 1978, p. 11) nexus of regulation and surveillance of sex.

I hesitate to suggest Westwood and McLaren occupy the radical positionality Foucault describes, but their trials for obscenity speaks to how far they upset ‘established law’ and, according to their own Reichian rhetoric, anticipated ‘the coming freedom’. I explored this latter point in terms of permissiveness, demonstrating a genealogy of ‘punk porn’ wherein Jordan’s sexually charged punk aesthetic appears as an early precursor of contemporary performances of the female ‘punk body’ exemplified in my case study of Bonnie Rotten.

I hold that punk is correlative to Foucault’s shift to bodies and pleasures. I see punk’s de-territorialisation of sexuality from the purely bodily realm of reproductivity (in biopolitical terms) or as a masturbatory device (in accordance with feminist and psychoanalytic theories of sexual desire), and its reterritorialization as a site of an embodied aesthetics--as in porn as/in fashion—illustrates Foucault’s emphasis on bodily pleasure as space of subjective reconstruction. Punk deployed sexuality according to the techniques of the self; that is, as a form of self-reinvention.

In tracing this line (from Johnny Rotten to Bonnie Rotten), I am not passing judgement on any person’s punk credentials as bona fide punk. I think that Bonnie Rotten’s mobilisation of the signifiers of punk speaks to the ways punk persists as a spectacular style and affective practice, which is recurrently deployed as an outre antagonism to established social mores. This recurrence of punk is wed to the notion of public space, as the site of a politics of visibility in which an alliance of, and between, bodies lays claim to subjectivity as such, as staged in the ‘politics of the street’.

Rather than uncovering the truth of sex, my case studies thus evidence the incitement to speak that Foucault delineates. In this way, I recall the significance of the figure of the spiral, through which Foucault illustrates that any operation of power is interwoven with pleasure; in other words, although the confessional mode constitutes the epitome of power-knowledge, this incitement to speak contains its own pleasures—a reading which suggests that feminist art practice’s attempts to overturn patriarchal power dynamics are not straightforward.

For her conservative critics, Tutti’s affront was to reveal the hidden nature of the female body. Her re-constitution of the self played back to the powers-that-be their own melody, to borrow Kittler’s formulation. Tutti’s anti-feminism feminism resonates with Camille Paglia’s argument in *Sexual Personae*, in which Paglia describes the association of womanhood with the sacred, and the ways in which the female body has been historically ‘hidden’ within patriarchal cultures (1990, p. 22). Moreover, the backlash against Tutti’s bodily displays points to Paglia’s argument that ‘Aesthetics stop where sex begins’ (p. 17). Of course, this distinction runs up against Paglia’s counter-claim that ‘Pornography cannot be separated from art; the two interpenetrate each other’ (p. 24).

It is interesting, then, that Bonnie Rotten enacted the female ‘punk body’ through a public ‘display’, which highlighted how self-recreation for women is often a performance of femininity that is both ‘in danger and dangerous’ (Russo, 1995). While Rotten’s performances are the most explicitly pornographic and possibly the most outré examples of transgression of my case studies—she is also the least recognisably punk of the auteurs here, an example of the meta-modern

utilisation of punk signifiers outside of the bounds of the tribalism of subculture. But my intentions here have been to explore how the punk imaginary is mobilised in its critical afterlife which spans the present. As I have illustrated, this ‘imaginary’ finds a singular place within contemporary pornography in particular, which, as I have argued, is equated to a frenetic performance style redolent of the frenzy and aggression commonly expressed in punk performance.

I have sought to unpack certain critical tendencies which illustrate Foucauldian ‘counter-discourses’ such as the drive to ‘destroy’, intimately tied to the ‘punk aesthetic’ and the attendant affective stance of the ‘punk attitude’. I have foregrounded the significance of the concept of ‘demystification’, which, from a Foucaultian perspective, points to the reliance on Marxian-psychoanalytic arguments, as discussed apropos of Reichian theory. Through the lens of Foucauldian biopolitics, I have sought to circumnavigate the tendency to read the notions of ‘liberation’ and ‘emancipation’ into the work of the women considered here.

Additionally, the concept of transgression has served as the guiding modus operandi in the production of the work discussed, which, although conceived differently according to their respective auteurs, finds purchase in the attempts to overturn normalising discourses, and as such, can be understood as counter-discourses. I have argued transformations of power, and the transmutation of biopolitics they have operationalised, have taken place through the figure of the female ‘punk body’, within the interrelated contexts of fashion, performance art, underground cinema, and contemporary pornographic film. A Foucaultian analysis confirms that despite the

transgressions of moral codes and normative iconographic themes, this artistic activity is produced within relations of 'power/knowledge' (Foucault, 1978, p. 11).

By drawing upon these concepts of 'destruction', 'demystification', and 'transgression', I have highlighted several, seemingly paradoxical, critical alignments. The actions of the female figures can be understood as colluding with patriarchy, but a Foucaultian feminist position recognises their potentiality for resistance.

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