

Slamdance in the No Time Zone: Punk as Repertoire for Liminality

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I try to speak, but words collapse.

— Siouxsie Sioux, “Halloween”

[Stage diving is] like diving into a human carpet ... something like the old kids' trust game. Just my way of getting into it. Gospel people got their thing, I got mine.

— Alexa (qtd in Blauner, 1986)

For Randy “Biscuit” Turner

In 1996, Kim Hewitt published the penetrating study *Mutilating the Body: Identity in Blood and Ink*, in which she likens punk rockers to performance artists. She notes how punk audiences morphed from passively witnessing pioneering performers like Iggy Pop to performative agents in the era of the Sex Pistols. This period embodied new phenomena, such as audience members offering up body fluids like “blood, spit, and vomit ... [which were an] antithesis to the integrity and hygiene of the Western humanist body” (110); hence, such performativity blurred boundaries between artists and fans forever. In that ongoing revolt of signs and seepage, punks carved out a “subterranean society ... to rebuff and drive away normal people” and “reserve ... allurements for those who override normality” (110).

I am a punk folklorist entering my forties; as such, I continually attempt to balance cool-headed academics with my own punk performativity as a singer and drummer; my brother, who shaped my sensibilities ever since he ventured to the Art Institute of Chicago in 1980, has been a punk, performance artist, restaurant entrepreneur, and special needs teacher. Despite ten years between our ages, the continuity of punk practices feels ever vital to us. We share our enthralling enthusiasm for X Ray Spex like most men trade barbs and banter over sports. From my emic, participant-

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observer status, in which I am familiar with punk intimacies, such as producing homemade fanzines, altering apparel, and creating videos and films, I will first argue—then attempt to document by offering a selection of photos—how punk audiences are not ancillary but primary figures in the algorithm of the genre’s allure; hence, they dramatize liminality.

Previously, in my book *Visual Vitriol*, I noted how such punk sites, events, and practices allow “hegemonic rules (segregation, suppression)” to become “temporarily suspended while transgression [is] promulgated,” allowing for a “negotiated, temporary, unbound cultural space” that sometimes reveal the “latent homosexual/homosexual orientation of hardcore texts, rituals, and fan participation” (146). I do not suggest that liminality is endemic or even organically manifested at every punk gig, since hyper-local factors (from club patron personas to venue constrictions) often mediate such performances; instead, I suggest that punk gigs retain ongoing possibilities of liminality often witnessed throughout the movement since 1976.

Punk performers’ efforts to destabilize social, cultural, sexual, economic, visual and musical norms inextricably appealed to a variety of communities, including innumerable female, African American, Hispanic, and Deaf participants (all of whom I have discussed in earlier work), as well as Asians, aboriginals, and others. As Jose Esteban Muñoz asserts in a summary of Miranda Joseph’s *Against the Romance of Community*, “Performance is the kernel of a potentiality that is transmitted to audiences ... the real force of performance is its ability to generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups that facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belonging” (98). Muñoz links both the political sentiments and aesthetic outliers of punk to populism and amateurism, which itself “signal[s] a refusal of mastery and an insistence on process and becoming” (11-12). I too believe punk’s authenticity channels amateurism, which often correlates to a sense of unbound agency and imperfection, not refined technique and acute mastery. As Paul Fryer argues, “This dilettante attitude involv[es] a rejection of commitment and any check on free expression” (1). Yet, being faithful to such amateurism *is* a commitment to rein in certain performance possibilities; therefore, free expressionism might be hampered by punk creeds and ideologies in which *raw performance*, rather than those cooked and choreographed, is idolized.

Punk’s allure links liminal temporalities to punk geographic sites and gig performances seemingly unhampered by space and time. Inside these punk spaces, ranging from squats and art co-ops to all ages clubs, rental units and house parties, participants immerse in *becoming* – the process of morphing and transfiguration. To make it plain: when fueled by noise, commotions, musculature, body heat, chemicals, and the rhythm of thronging participants, normative routines melt away in disorderly, sometime grotesque punk pleasure in which the power relations between performer and fan, or modes of power between them, ripple with both frisson and friction – dynamism, not deference. Peter Jones, in his cogent examination of punk as Bakhtinian Carnival, now widely available on-line, thoroughly recognized this shift in fan-performer discourse, interaction, and positionality, including shifting subjectivities:

With its alcohol and amphetamine-fueled cathartic frenzy, almost “oceanic” crush, stage invasions, irreverence for performers and audience alike, “pogoing” and “gobbing,” the punk concert is an example of collective *jouissance*. A display of excess and disorder where rational control is relinquished and differences between subjects and the distinctions between audience and performers, stage and street, are blurred.

This sense of disorder has been the subject of endless study.

Dave Laing offered shrewd observations in *One Chord Wonders*, his screed from 1985. Filtered through lecturer Michelle Phillipov, she cogently summarizes punk’s primary potency as, “Shock effects such as ‘unpleasing’ vocal tones, obscene language, and unconventional mixing techniques formed part of punk’s strategies of provocation and anti-commercialism in which listeners were offered a ‘heightened presence of mind’ rather than an immersion in the easy pleasures of mainstream popular music ...” (27). Furthermore Phillipov revisits writer Jude Davies too by arguing punk’s “construction of communality is based on communication—the first step in a truly democratic engagement with progressive politics ... since the singer ha[s] no special status, no mandate to be spokesperson, songs c[an] only succeed by an act of agreement, rather than identification” (28). Each insight, however, can be interrogated more fully.

The supposed lack of status mentioned is a trope, perhaps linked to punk’s much-finessed working class mythology, the initial media strategies employed by central protagonists-cum-managers like Bernie Rhodes (The Clash) and Malcolm McLaren (Sex Pistols, Bow Wow Wow), and the rhetorical positioning of punk songs and speech. For the first initial months of punk (the punk “zero hour”), as the movement stridently shredded notions of traditional rock’n’roll throughout 1976 on both sides of the Atlantic, this lack of status might have been evidenced and genuine, as in the case of the Buzzcocks. Yet, many punks had already staked their ground in pre-punk movements such as pub rock, including members of The Clash (Joe Strummer, known earlier as John “Woody” Mellor, as in Woody Guthrie—a nod to folk singer as spokesperson), U.K. Subs, 999, and more. As such, many felt the need to reinvent themselves—to shed and toss aside their retrograde, tainted origins and project cutting-edge, future-now, and fluctuating personas.

The “lack of special status” claim might, however, elucidate the temperaments and trajectories of early hardcore punk, especially 1981-1983, when the teenage-oriented, back-to-basics, and abrasive musical invasion tried to stamp out the last cinders of disco, new wave, and arena rock. These youth, however, quickly forged their own Do-It-Yourself media and tour routes; thus, the icon-worship of ‘spokespeople’ like Ian MacKaye of Minor Threat to Shawn Stern of Youth Brigade built up quickly. In cases of both punk and hardcore generations, media (from underground and popular press to radio) coverage cemented local tribal scene making, quickly vaulting singers to special status even before a band’s 45 vinyl was allowed to cool in factories. These singers were de facto spokespeople for punk’s sense of ethos, temperament, and style, even

when and if they rejected the privilege. Hence, punk zines and spaces became theaters of shared, situated knowledge and practices.

The “progressive” orientation is also problematic. Many bands exhorted questionable sympathies, or at least ambivalent, bigoted points of view, thus deflating the notion of punk adhering to democratic and populist leanings, which I have explored. Also, to focus on the singer’s performance alone promulgates think-Oral traditions—the tropes of punk voices—that I again question in my research, since much of punk performativity is tied to other customs. These customs include fostering liminal social spaces; translocal community-building; rituals such as distressing dances and rough-hewn dress; and (as mentioned) inventing personas, which even Deaf punk participants can fully experience and appreciate. Singing is, by and large, a byproduct of punk, not the sole terminus of its meaning.

Punk lore, traditions, and practices can be transferred by proximal, kinetic, oral, and written means and need not relate to “speaking” to audiences, whose position is unstable, unfixed, and nuanced. Moreover, in concert settings, under the barrage of music, a participant’s entire body is a vessel potentially transmogrified by the shimmering electric field of the band’s sound (the wattage and voltage of amplifiers), which can trigger a chemical and physiological response in listeners, including intensely felt sensations during dance, mosh, pogo, crowd surge, skank, and slamming. As Greta Fine from the Chicago-based neo-punk band Bang! Bang! told me in 2009, “Punk brought me out of my head and into my body. Nothing was emotional anymore: it was physical. The music was rough and immediate. It was raw and ugly.” The body, not the mind, becomes the sizzling transmitter.

Punk seems to offer a two-way liminal door, allowing practitioners and listeners to slip away from normative habits and roles into their own surging physicality. As neuroscientist Daniel J. Levitin declares, dancing triggers a person’s action system, including “motor sequences and ... sympathetic nervous system ... In a sort of neurochemical dance, music increases ... alertness through modulation of norepinephrine and epinephrine and taps into ... motor response system[s] through cortisol production” while also modulating other chemicals such as serotonin, melatonin, dopamine, and more (101). Hence, while outsiders may consider punk dancing as a kind of anarchic bombardment—total flux and disjunction—it may actually stimulate and shape a cauldron of shared neurochemical states of being, even re-synchronize and re-socialize youth long suffering under anti-dance patriarchies, especially in the Western world (101).

If the Levitin is correct, then punk dance is not mere discord. Music, as he argues, is part of a common evolutionary and biological past; as such, it allows for social bonds that diffuse tense social situations while conveying intense emotional states (86). Instead of experiencing real combat, death, and distress, punks marshal their energies and inner-chemicals (sometimes amplified by drugs and alcohol), often in combat boots and in staged, mock-battle situations on the dance floor, which feel metaphorically akin to combat rock as collective ritual. That synchrony with the band and each other, in sing-along rapture, stimulates “cognitive operations of memory in

the hippocampus and prediction in the frontal lobes” while also creating a “motor action plan—a specific set of instructions sent to the motor cortex.” If the band and audience pursue call and response patterns, another common ritual in punks (and throughout global music cultural heritages), may symbolize “democratic participation in music” and precede and inspire “utilitarian cooperative activities” (58-59).

In addition, researchers such as Robin Sylvan have avidly correlated music subculture practices to those groups affiliated and intertwined with religious affiliation, including aspects of an “all-encompassing ... orientation to the world” replete with body language, lingo, mannerisms, and a core set of musical tastes and ritual expressions. These “highly valued” shared practices seem to culminate at the “live concert or dance hall, where they experience a sense of ecstatic communion” (4). These tendencies and traits, Sylvan makes explicit, provide spaces for gig goers to experience a “numinous” encounter and community bonding while also translating all the subculture mores “into a code for living one’s day-to-day life” (4). Gigs do not simply embody a music marketing means to an end—a convenient conduit for disempowered fans to passively view a musical commodity; instead, the gig spaces act like a blend of porous secular and spiritual territories and positions. The sites and practices therein help forge, navigate, maintain, and agitate identities and social structures, all while providing epiphanies that seem to mimic religious rites. As a result, punk gig going culture might amount to a postmodern religion, as Sylvan explains. Lastly, such conjecture likely relates to the concept of “cultural religion,” a term coined by Catherine L. Albanese to explore religious development in America from Freemasonry and Mormonism to UFO cults and New Age belief systems.

Additionally, I suggest punk audience performance often hinges not on “mindfulness”—seemingly steeped in Western modes of thought—but rather antipodal concerns: a release from Cartesian dualism. Ensconced in frenetic musical dissonance and dissidence, audiences actually yearn for no-mind, or for sudden collapse of the body and mind’s discreet boundaries. Once listeners feel immersed in the grain, timbre, and pulsating tumult of the songs, the temporality of the music is voided, even though each song is inevitably headed towards its own peak, resolution, and demise. As songs finish, the patterns of obsolescence and decay begin as soon as the chords end and feedback is quelled. “When I am at a concert, there is an increase in enthalpy [the internal energy of a system]. At one show, people were throwing bottles and objects in the air, and a bottle hit me in the forehead,” admits student Eric Hernandez, an avid music concertgoer. “I was knocked out, but I got up and shrugged it off because I wanted to get back into the music. My brain was releasing dopamine and serotonin, and I was feeling the *transcendence* of the sound.” By no means does Hernandez alone express these sentiments.

No wonder crowds scream at bands to quickly proceed to the next tune, for their bodies desire no stasis after such riveting and ricocheting flux. No-mind, or body-mind reunification, is far preferred to mindfulness. The ritual of dancing forms the fluid architecture of the participants’ atavistic purging—perhaps even signals a reenactment of bodily trauma entered willingly and controlled by local customs, inherited

norms, and media-mimicked styles and rules. In his cautionary tale of slamdancing, Bradford Scott Simon surmises: “The slam-pit contain[s] several diadic oppositions, including order/chaos, absorption of self in mass/centrality of individual asserting self, and violence/physicality (149). However, what he neglects is temporalities—how the dance operates within the no time zone of the liminal punk space.

Similar episodes evoking the ritual purification of the mind resonate in literary history too. In the “Story of an Hour” by feminist author Kate Chopin, a wife, upon hearing of her husband’s supposed death in a train accident, retires to an upstairs bedroom to weep on a chair in front of a window, open to the world. After a bout of terrible, cathartic weeping, her mind goes blank—Chopin terms it “a suspension of intelligent thought.” Logos does not beset her. Suddenly, the world outside her domicile space—the “delicious breath of rain,” the leaves aquiver with the rejuvenating spirits of spring, and the call of peddlers yammering about their wares—proceeds to flush through her. At that junction, she begins at first to stammer “Free,” until in a crescendo of self-recuperation and spontaneous resolve, she howls “Free” loudly and freely, knowing she alone owns the days ahead. Almost overcome with this sense of inner music, “Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed ... every inch of her body.” That is, until her husband actually appears, unharmed, and she dies of a heart attack—“the joy that kills.” The irony is heavy as steel beams.

In this context, that blank mind provides the landing site for the discovery of freedom, the exaltation; the mind becomes a vessel through which the world bustles and buzzes. Likewise, punk dance—crowd swelling, scramble, pogo, crowd surf, and sudden surge of acrobatic stage diving—embody a kind of sacrificial rites of self-transformation. As Laban stresses in *The Language of Movement*, the dancing bodies are integrative, stimulating and shaping the meeting ground of mind and body, and become of supreme value, while Mary Lewis Shaw construes dance (based on a reading of the philosophy of Mallarme) as a meditative force that can engage contraries, such as “light and darkness ... the one and the many ... the natural and the supernatural ... the animal and the human ... and male and female ...” (67). Both cast light on the intrinsic power of dance and movement as a way to navigate away from the privileged position of the Word in art, which I equate with mindfulness.

In punk, often the metaphoric body, instead, holds sway. As a crowd throbs, heaves, squirms, and skirmishes, akin to mimicking overlapping insects hordes, a hive-mind (a collectivist subject position) might take effect as certain chemical communication occurs between members embracing the dance-language, a product that may be attributed to a force equated with “intense mobilization of affect” rippling with turbulence, rhythmical rotation, and “collective individuation” (to render the crowd as a body in its own right)” (Goodman 11). In effect, some gigs can seem like a throbbing, frenetic ecology and repertoire of liminality that dissipates, at least partially, as doors are flung open, PAs are shut off, bands escape to back spaces, and the collective energy funnels to bustling parking lots, side streets, alleyways, cars and busses, and neighboring locales.

Punk concerts, for those embedded in the threshold spaces and movements (not mechanical and rote but fluid and often crudely ad-hoc), allow participants to abandon their old roles and systems for brief episodes of time (in which time itself seems void, as if collapsed, as if there were no time at all) and undergo a moment of interrelatedness and inter-penetration with the musical practitioners. This co-intentional space fosters *communitas*, oneness, and “anti-structure,” which anthropologist Victor Turner identifies with liminal spaces. Those inside the ritual, which he refers to as threshold people and liminars experiencing a temporal interface for they “are neither here nor there,” are between the positions assigned and arrayed by “law, custom, convention, and ceremony.” As he attests, *communitas* is spontaneous, pell mell (I would argue in the case of punk), and unpredictable. Those stepping into the space from a “high” position in the social, cultural, or economic hierarchy experience what is “low.”

As this *communitas* coheres, punk participants forge spatial, geographic, economic, and cultural re-positioning in a mediated arena of ‘otherness’—neighborhoods that were and are often risky and rundown. Liminality is not artificially constructed or tied to architecture of fake meaning, even in this era rife with irony and post-modern deconstructed values. Like the wife in the Chopin temporarily freed of her husband’s ties—his private imposed will—the punk concertgoer, especially newcomers, find an unexpected limbo. They are placed beyond their reach of normative coordinated systems of responsibility, values, administration, codes of living, required policies, and become transient margin walkers in a space that is *terra incognita*—unknown to others outside the door.

These temporalities are maintained by a combination of owners and operators, bookers and producers, musicians and performers, and friends and fans. They all contribute to maintaining the semblance of cultivated free zones. As Munoz’s *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* illuminates, participants can “imagine a time and place where their desires are not toxic ...” and a temporality “on the threshold between identifications, lifeworld, and potentialities” (105). Punk spaces are semi-autonomous zones, now often coordinated via social networking platforms, and they still provide a safe space to fulfill punk’s urgent meta-narrative about individual rights and empowerment. These values remain tangibly in-process and open-ended, not fossilized and sealed. Punk personas and punk sites remain adaptable, ongoing, and fluid.

While the rapport between punk fan and performers has long been considered theatrical, with inherent call and responses patterns, shtick, chides, wisecracks, sarcasm, and mock-threats, little attention has been paid to the ongoing disposition of audiences to negate and rupture discreet audience boundaries. In footage from locations across the globe, punk fans can be seen hurling themselves from stages, grabbing mics from performers mid-sentence, commanding the stage in temporary abandonment of their position as mere listeners, singing along in mimicry and mime, throwing their bodies into tumultuous piles, heaving to and fro like bird flocks chasing zigzagging insects, and sometimes starting fights with each other over often invisible infractions.

However, a crowd's volatile presence on stage wasn't always welcome with open arms by the bands. In the column "Memos From the Mouse Trap," found in a May 1986 issue of *Maximum Rockroll*, members of Angry Samoans, Youth Brigade, and Dr. Know decry fans seeping onto stages and unplugging guitar chords, stepping on guitar pedals, and densely packing stage spaces to the point of frustration. Meanwhile, Youth Brigade also penned songs questioning crowd mentalities and rituals, including senseless violence ("The Circle," *Sound and Fury*, 1982). In turn, 7 Seconds took aim at sexist patterns ("Not Just Boys Fun," *The Crew*, 1984) and even "fascist tendencies ... we're against the whole idea of a pit. It's dance floor. It's a place to have fun, not a fucking war." Kevin Seconds can be heard uttering these condemnations before beginning the song "Bottomless Pit" on the bootleg live recording *1984: Live at the VFW #18*, which documents their performance in Kansas City. In Houston, during the mid-1980s, Diana Ray, bass player for the female-led Mydollz had two teeth knocked out on the dance floor of The Island by what she describes as suburban hardcore males, so violence, even when deployed unintentionally and inherently in the routines, did lurk. In this case, the club later held a benefit to aid her medical expenses. Most victims were not so lucky.

For many fans contributing to a performance, rational-mind becomes far less tangible than gut feelings, second-by-second intuition, and atavistic action. A 1986 article in *New York* magazine pictured the tumultuous milieu of hardcore punk venues this way:

... the dance floor begins to look like a giant pinball machine...

Dozens of boys and girls seem to be caught in a sudden whirlwind, flinging themselves hard into one another and the careening away, only to be jolted back by more oncoming bodies ... (Blauner 40)

As Stacy Thompson notes in *Punk Productions: Unfinished Business*, a club like iconic CBGB allowed such interchangeable roles—"any audience member could also be a performer and vice versa. This desire finds its expression in the literal proximity between band member and audience member" (11). But it's not merely the spatial dynamics that matter.

Given the club's heritage, identity, and performance rituals, the audience *is* the performance, in part. No liminality exists if a band plays to an empty house surrounded by decades of graffiti, hasty paint jobs, dingy tables, and dog-eared posters. That relationship, not of antipodes but of inter-penetrating actors, fan and musicians, each dependent on each other for music-making myth and mystery, is a fluid friction. Or, as Paul Marko succinctly notes in *The Roxy London WC2: A Punk History*: "Punk was as much about the audience as about the bands, the club goers were also required to play their part" (214). This is bolstered by a March 1980 article in *Trouser Press*, which describes a gig by The Slits at Hurrah's in New York City. Near the end of the performance, lead singer Ari Up "extended an open invite for anyone who wanted to do anything on any instrument to come up and join in" (Sommer 13).

For bands like the Slits and hybrid musical misfits the Big Boys, a late 1970s to early 1980s American punk band from Austin, TX (who melded lean art rock, bombastic funk, melodic hardcore, and early rap scratching and go-go music grooves into ever-morphing, unstable formats), such cross-hatched practices, in which the vigor of the audience and musicians seem to reach uninhibited, Dionysian vortex levels, were essential to the core performance rituals. Whereas singer Randy “Biscuit” Turner might exhort an audience to avoid cables, chords, and equipment as fans joined them on-stage, he nonetheless relished the tumult and urged them “go start your own band!” (“The Big Boys”). Of course, a semblance of pandemonium was normative: “It was insane—like a riot,” guitarist Tim Kerr told the *Daily Texas* (which dubbed the event a “big disturbance” in the headline) about one gig, describing “piles” of dancers jumping on tables, breaking glass and getting into scuffles as beer pooled throughout the venue; yet, this was not distinct or abnormal: “everybody has a good time ... our shows are always wild” (qtd. in Selby). To outsiders, the anti-hierarchical and anti-structure melee might be worrisome. The unchecked maelstrom that disrupts and frays inherited monocultural norms preserved by ingrained performance traditions and audience-performer dynamics may shock, anger, or dismay them.

In fact, the above incident prompted the club to instigate background checks for future line-ups scheduled to play the site. Also, the antics of the Big Boys were not welcomed or heralded by all Austin music fans. One, Hank Vick, writing a letter to the *Austin American-Statesmen*, decried their musical “outpouring” as “self-indulgent, childish nonsense ‘music’” that appealed to “bored third semester [University of Texas] freshman with range hair” and often overshadowed more “discernable music” in the city. Hence, the music of the Big Boys represents deviant noise “mobilizing bodies” in the contested space of the city environs, or splinters in a “conflict soundscape”—terms evoked by sound ecology/auralities researcher Steve Goodman, who attempts to deconstruct “a whole cartography of sonic force” (9). But the Big Boys perceived such actions as counter-hegemonic, a way to upend the norms of inherited rock’n’roll culture, in which the rigid spatial relationships are maintained by a series of rules, protocols, bouncers, and barricades. In an interview with *Zone V*, Kerr further explained, “Because we don’t perceive much of a line between where we stop and everybody else starts. We’ve always invited people up on the stage, whether they’re dancing singing, or thrashing.”

Exoteric views of such rites might pigeonhole such practices as anarchistic and atavistic pigpiles, artless entanglement, and a choreography of chaos, just as they deem the lyrics of punk to be no more than deformed pop music armed with crude, aberrant declarations of angst (“Kill the Poor,” “I Hate the Rich,” “Fuck You,” and “Dicks Hate the Police”) rather than a modern folk music grappling with familiar, nuanced histories of disillusionment with aberrant systems of power and so-called truths. Non-punks might deem both the temporary borrowed space and firebrand music of bands like the Big Boys as disturbances and disruptors. For punk gig goers (the esoteric insiders), such gigs, even in the post-millennial era, remain quite routine

and indelibly normalized in their transgression, even though the genre of hardcore has splintered and subdivided.

Punk gig performances often exhibit and evidence, even in off-hand, unconscious forms, both consistency and change (or conservative and dynamic portions) in regards to practices. For instance, although the genres of punk continue to mutate, evolve, and transform, much of the allure is still directly tied to corporeal experientialism or self-luminosity. In my research regarding Punk and Deaf community links, student Christine Jensen explained to me the allure of Screamo—a derivation of hardcore in which vocalists tend towards more sand-papered, gruff, noisy, truculent, and choleric style—even to someone hard of hearing: “Music is more about the movement of the music. Screamo’s movement is amazing. It slows and wavers and then shakes and then explodes. It pounds. It moves all up and down your body” (2010). Though disconnected from the zero hour of punk (1976) by decades, her valid experience reinforces punk’s potential to disable Cartesian bodily gridlock: the body is not a vector of automatism, it is a wild thing.

Thus, punk edges close to Artaud’s sense of shocking, incendiary, passionate, and convulsive art forms outlined in *Theatre of Cruelty*—a brutal, invigorating, and terrible beauty. As Lee Jamiseon asserts, “Artaud sought to remove aesthetic distance, bringing the audience into direct contact with the dangers of life. By turning theatre into a place where the spectator is exposed rather than protected...” (23). To that end, punk has also employed, fostered, or hosted a similar series of sensibilities, illustrated in comments provided to me by Chris Thomson (Soulside, Circus Lupus) in 2004: “I remember going to these shows that were very life or death. You traveled to these shitty, sketchy neighborhoods, you saw bands like Black Flag on the *My War* tour, and it was just a big fistfight, and there would be people on acid and drunk and the weirdo art people were there too. ... that’s what I really got off on was this whole feeling you never knew what was going to happen next. You got punched, the singer threw the mic stand in the audience, and then it seemed overnight things got so damn neighborly.” Thomson seemed to yearn for the risk factor, not the creature comforts of punk becoming more mass marketed, expanding into proper, manicured, and homogenized venues and communities, where it seemed to lose viscosity.

Newer generations don’t simply regurgitate and resuscitate practices disseminated and culled from punk lore, media ecology, and received forms. Instead, they sound their own “barbaric yawps”—to steal a quote from Walt Whitman—and imagine their own bodies made electric. In fact, their bodies become syncretic while acting as recombinatory selves sifting through forty years of gestures, texts, habits, rumors, memes, practices, and values, all while infusing and merging with their own aspirations and vitality. They see themselves in old wounds, made anew, urgent and restless. In some places, venues and gig goers gestate new practices, hyper-local folk practices unknown to outsiders. At The Factory in Lufkin, Texas, which hosts a gig the last Friday night of every month, eager all-ages (from five years old to sixty-five years old) fans gather round the local band Social Bliss to pound, lift, and shake plastic and metal folding chairs, fostering both an inclusive, performative, and democratic spectacle

and a jolting, synchronized, and percussive accompaniment to the band's sing-along choruses and refrains.

Punk's philosophy, in part, was always grounded in the ethos of "anything goes." That's at least how many practitioners and critics dreamed of the genre and movement in its nascent, "authentic," and ideal form before four decades of replication and residual style copying, corporate incorporation, appropriation, and de-fanging of punk's content and style. For others, punk's original intent is no more than a glut of foul words still festooned in *Sniffin' Glue* bathroom conversations culled from scruffy punks in London's East End in 1976. Still, the photos I offer seem to demarcate a space of stalled liminal time, dances and body tumult caught in the form of frozen postures becoming much greater than a sum of gestures and movements; the spaces suddenly erupt more allegorically *and* literally; the fever never quite abates; the temporality of timelessness tramps on.

The squalid clubs, the peripheral boredom, the narratives of bartenders and bouncers, the perceived gestures of radically reinvented musicians, all that contextual noise is kept peripherally sidelined. Instead, these carefully chosen photos capture the continuity of punk fan performance, the centrality of aesthetic bodies in immersive mid-flight, replete with the psychic re-imagining of roles as body decorum dissolves. As Jim Ellis sums up punk's promise and premise, the body is much more than a masquerade; it's a "site of history, signification, and revolt" within performance rituals (57). Those tropes can be worn on the sleeve, found in over-ripe guitar chords and tumbledown percussion, in myopic stares, and in seemingly out-of-joint body disarticulations.

The photos document the dance in no time, un-time, time out of time, and witness bodies married to terse, truncated punk beats as performers and fans act in intertwined accord to a fluctuating chronology of fluid chaos. The high-context intensity of bodies intertwined and intermingling, vulgar and volcanic, blazoned with blemishes, battered and contorted, malodorous and maladroit, combine into a sweltering frisson. The crowds do not heed or reconcile with boundaries; their proximities with performers blend, overlap, and often even co-inhabit, just as Bakhtin, in his study of Rabelais, understood the allure of carnival as it swept through city streets in a sudden ratty and ragged jouissance that upset and inverted civic norms and spatial psychology.

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