**The Punk Effect: Art School Bands, Artist Collectives, and the
Makings of an Alternative Culture in Downtown Toronto 1976-1978**

By

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Abstract

This thesis aims to examine the intersections of music, art and politics in late 1970s Toronto, particularly among the artists and musicians of the nascent Queen Street West scene. My research has two intertwined goals. First, to investigate the effect that the nearby Ontario College of Art had on this scene and how local art students' formal training may have impacted their music. Secondly, the symbiotic connection between established artists and the local punk scene will be explored, through a discussion of how artist collectives General Idea and the Centre for Experimental Arts and Communication appropriated punk aesthetics and enlisted punk groups in order to further their own artistic ends. To address these questions, pertinent theoretical models are applied, including; Birmingham School subcultural theory, theories of the avant-garde, and sociological high culture/mass culture debates.

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Introduction

The primary aim of this thesis is to investigate a particular moment of time in Toronto's history when art and punk music collided, when artists and musicians shared with one another, and thus cross-pollinated each other's practices to the point where the sensibilities of one camp became difficult to untangle from the other. In the words of one participant, Anya Varda, "in Toronto the music, the art scene, anything that was cool, hip, and fabulous, was all part and parcel of exactly the same crowd" (Worth 2011, 63). Varda's perspective is conditioned by her own particular experience; but it is true the ties between the punk music and art scenes from 1976 to 1978 ran deep. Imagine for a moment you were there. One night you might go to a Diodes show opening for Talking Heads at A Space – a gallery run by the artist collective General Idea. Another you might attend General Idea's Fashion Burn party, an event featuring a performance by G.I. house band The Dishes. And where else was Fashion Burn located but at the punk club Crash 'n' Burn, a short-lived venue that occupied the basement of the Centre for Experimental Art and Communication throughout the summer of 1977.

In order to contextualize the dynamics particular to my own case study of punk/art exchanges in Toronto in the mid-1970s, I will explore how larger debates and theoretical models from musicology, art theory, and cultural studies can be used as an explanatory framework for what this nascent alternative culture might have represented at the time. My methodology for this project then, is a synthesis of information from more journalistic and (oral) historical primary sources with secondary sources from musicology, art history and cultural studies. In chapter one I focus more on history, and in chapter two I go on to flesh out a theoretical framework for my study. The majority of sources I consulted for this project were accessed via the MacOdrum Library at Carleton University, including the OCA retrospective *100 Years*, which was specially

retrieved from the Archives and Research Collections. In chapter three and four, I use both my primary and secondary sources to build an argument about specific relationships between the music and art worlds in Toronto. Occasionally, relevant cultural artifacts from other mediums are discussed to support this argument; including musical recordings, independent films, art zines, and performance pieces. Recordings that are referenced directly include The Diodes self-titled album *The Diodes* and *Action/Reaction*, which were purchased on vinyl from Ottawa record stores. The zines that are most relevant to my case study are *FILE Magazine* from General Idea, and *Art Communication Edition/STRIKE* from CEAC. These publications were consulted directly via copies stored in the Toronto Reference Library Archives. Other resources I accessed through the reference library included the film *The Last Pogo Jumps Again* (Brunton 2013), The Diodes first album on CBS records *Released*, and the P. Suddon Collection of telephone pole posters from the period in Toronto. This portion of my research was conducted entirely over the summer of 2018 when I lived and worked in the city for four months. Much of the trajectory for this project was solidified over this period, and I feel indebted to the experiences I had, including many concerts (I even caught a Teenage Head show at Horseshoe Tavern), and the people that I met¹ in that time in shaping my current direction.

In chapter four I undertake a longer musical analysis of the *Raw/War* recording, the 7" record released by the CEAC group with musical support from The Diodes and Mickey Skin of the Curse, and possibly the rarest piece of punk ephemera in Toronto's history.² An online

¹ I must have met about half a dozen separate individuals over the age of 50 who were interested and knowledgeable in my topic. These included a couple who were family friends, several librarians at the Toronto Reference Library, and a group of punk dads outside of a friend's gig at the Gladstone Hotel in Parkdale. I found it interesting how well-known this otherwise obscure chapter in Canadian music history was in Toronto, as well as how much nostalgia and pride these folks have attached to the old scene.

² As of January 23, 2019, a copy of the *Raw/War* record was being sold on discogs.com – a popular online vinyl marketplace – for £399.99 pounds, equivalent of approximately \$690.89 in Canadian dollars. See: <https://www.discogs.com/sell/release/3682420?ev=rb>

archive of this recording was linked to me by Philip Monk,³ whose book *Is Toronto Burning?* forms a prominent backbone to my argument in chapters three and four. I met with Philip Monk in Toronto as a part of another aspect of my research; a series of ethics approved informal interviews with members of the communities in question, and those with closely related affiliations. I also interviewed Ian Mackay, an artist and musician who performed with The Eels and The Diodes. These interviews have been helpful in understanding the insider's perspective on the events I am referencing, and to clarify conflicting accounts between sources. In places where I quote these individuals directly, I have attributed their words as appropriate, but much of the interview material served primarily as background and context for my broader arguments.

I am fortunate to be undertaking this study in a decade that has seen a renewed interest in the topic; two illuminating books on Toronto punk were released in 2011 and 2012 respectively. My main source of primary material for this thesis has been *Treat Me Like Dirt* by Liz Worth, an oral history that tells the story from the perspective of the participants themselves. The second source is *Perfect Youth* by Sam Sutherland, a journalistic account of Canadian punk which dedicates roughly one third of its chapters to covering Toronto groups.⁴ Both of these books have been useful in sketching out historical background details that would have been relatively obscure prior to their publications.

In the academic literature, it has been noted that certain limitations are inherent in the format of oral history (Turrini 2013), a genre of music biography that has been increasingly

³ *RAW/WAR* can be listened to on an archive of a Los Angeles radio show titled "Evidence of Movement". The recording is the introduction to program number 92, and can be accessed at the following link: http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/evidence_movement/close_radio.html

⁴ To be exact, there are five chapters that cover Toronto groups, seven if you include Hamiltonian bands – although often considered part of the Toronto scene, it has been argued that the cultural context of working-class Hamilton gave these groups a unique sound and perspective (Pevere 2014). In Sutherland, the eight chapters relevant to my case study are chapters one, five, seven, ten, thirteen, fifteen, and nineteen (Sutherland 2012, 20-42, 94-108, 126-142, 178-194, 232-248, 268-286, 328-348).

popular since the mid-1990s.⁵ Aging punk rockers see these texts as a continuation of the DIY ethos, which has always privileged direct production, dissemination, and consumption of cultural products without reliance on an intermediary. However, Joseph Turrini notes that punk oral histories "merge the (highly selective) autobiographical memories of a large group of people into a much more coherent and unified narrative that is shaping collective memory in a manner that other formats would not." (Turrini 2013, 59-77). With this disclaimer in place, I will continue to use *Treat Me Like Dirt* as my direct historical source throughout, although with awareness of the limitations of the format.

In investigating the relationship between the punk music and art communities in 1970s Toronto, I have focused on several intersecting research questions. My first concern is how the presence of a local art school, the Ontario College of Art (OCA – later OCAD), affected the development of the punk music scene in Toronto. It has been well documented that British art schools in and around London had an important influence on popular musical developments of the mid 20th century – from blues to punk and new wave (Frith and Horne 1987). In America and Canada, circumstances were slightly different due to differences in class structure, but the influence of the art school *mentality* – or subjectivity - was still very much felt. I am interested in the way that artist/musicians from Toronto like the members of The Diodes utilized knowledge from their artistic training to augment their musical practice, as well as how they saw music as fitting into their broader nexus of practices as artists. My second concern is more connected with aesthetics, and has to do with the deep relationship that existed between punk and performance

⁵ The first oral history in a similar format to *Treat Me Like Dirt* was *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (McNeil, 1996), followed by *Our Band Could Be Your Life* (Azerrad 2002) which follows bands from the 1980s indie underground. The most recent release in the genre has been *Meet Me in the Bathroom: Rebirth and Rock and Roll in New York City 2001-2011* (Goodman 2017), solidifying the privileging of this format for the next generation of music fans.

art. I claim that the history of performance art – from Dada to Futurism to Happenings – influenced the punk approach to performance for a select few (Henry 1984). Once the subcultural codes of punk were established, the punk look, attitude, and aesthetic then fed back into aspects of performance art practice (Goldberg 2011). The relationship here is only partial, and in no way causal on either side of the equation. However, I contend that punk exerted a definite ambient influence of performance art style in the 1970s,⁶ the effects of which are still being felt in the art world today.

A core problematic at the heart of this thesis is what Simon Frith and Howard Horne call the Art/Pop dialectic (Frith and Horne 1987, 1-26). This dialectic is implicated in several different permutations throughout their analysis of post-1950s popular music. On one level Art/Pop is simply a recasting of the age-old debate between high culture and low/pop culture; traditionally left-wing academics such as Adorno took the position that society's reification of the latter mass culture in the 20th century had a standardizing and cheapening effect on our collective and individual sense of self (Adorno 1991). However, by the mid 20th century this narrative became increasingly problematic, and the case of art students investing themselves in the mass cultural form that is pop music served to subvert, if not entirely transcend, this critique. Frith and Horne write, "art school graduates are petit-bourgeois professionals who, as pop musicians, apply 'high art' skills and identities to a mass cultural form" (Frith and Horne 1987, 2), which under the Adorno lens would appear to disqualify their resulting output from being considered oppositional, but in the new post-modern reality of the mid 20th century onwards, the result was in fact the complete opposite and the art/pop duality that these artists/musicians occupied allowed them to freshly engage with and "respond to the ideological problems of their

⁶ A descriptive term that was suggested to me in my conversation with Philip Monk.

place in a commercial process” (Frith and Horne 1987, 25). Frith and Horne catalogue numerous instances throughout (specifically British) history that art school graduates took up popular music forms in this way; from beat to mod, glam to punk/new wave. Their argument is to use this high art/low pop as a connecting thread between these movements, but in this thesis, I am focused on the particularities of specifically early punk rock in Toronto, and thus I will draw selectively from *Art Into Pop* only in places where their argument fits into the context of my case study.

Similarly to Andy Warhol’s experiments ten years earlier, punk musicians embraced both pop and art, using the critical faculty of art to create self-consciously, while using the populist anti-elitism of pop to critique the very notion of art itself. The art/pop relationship can thus appear quite convoluted, but this is largely by design. As Gendron writes, "Because of this dynamic interplay between complementarity and opposition, the art/pop tension proved to be, in its unresolved state, a boon to the development of the discourses of punk - to the generation of debates, nuances, distinctions, and theoretical inflections. That is, this tension was more productive in its unresolved state than it would have been once the oppositions were overcome" (Gendron 2002, 238).

The structure of this thesis will roughly flow from an overview of the topic, to an exploration of relevant theoretical models, to a more in-depth look at specific artist collectives and their relationship to the punk world. In chapter one, I will introduce my primary research questions in relation to specific examples drawn from the history of Toronto’s first wave punk scene. The importance of two sets of groups and locations to the music-art crossover will be emphasized; first it will be shown how The Dishes and the Beverley Tavern (an OCA haunt) created an audience of art students for these new up-and-coming bands, and secondly I claim that

The Diodes opening Crash 'n' Burn in May of 1977 was the moment that catalyzed a surge of creative energy that moved the Toronto scene from a small local phenomenon to an internationally recognized one, attracting the praise of well-established groups such as Thin Lizzy and the Ramones (Worth 2011). In chapter two, I will shift to a more theoretical discussion of punk's aesthetics and politics. Beginning with some brief notes on punk's initial genesis in New York and London, I will then move into a discussion of the academic response to it. Major texts from the Birmingham School including Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's *Resistance Through Rituals*, and Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* will be considered for their usefulness to the remainder of my case study. Other models explored will include situationism, pop art, and theories of the avant-garde. In chapter three, I will again discuss the particularities of Toronto, this time focusing on the art world side of the equation. This chapter will examine relevant work by the influential art collective General Idea, as well as their writings about punk in *FILE Magazine*. In chapter four, I will use the artist collective CEAC as a second case study that brings together all of the concerns of the previous three chapters. The CEAC collective's attitude to punk shifted significantly between their publication of *Art & Communication Edition* issue six and issue nine. This shift will be traced through both the contextual circumstances, and through the theoretical lens of leftist theory and praxis. The aim in this chapter will be to understand CEAC's argument for, and then against, punk in the terms of their own discursive models. Through the analysis of the particular social and historical circumstances of Toronto, my aim throughout the thesis is always to consider how this study connects to much larger issues. Is a radical art truly possible? Was a punk show an aesthetic experience on par with any other art form? Was there a window of time when punk rock had a real political potential to topple the old world and create a new one? If so, when did it close, and

why? These questions are all outside of the scope of a single master's thesis, but I hope that the reader takes them into consideration, as I have, as they read on.

Chapter One

The Ontario College of Art and the Origins of Punk in Toronto

"Every once in a while, maybe in every century, a city has its moment. And I think a lot of Toronto's moment was between 1976 and 1980. There was just an incredible amount of energy in Toronto. I think it was a pretty boring place before all of us. We kind of were the instigators in terms of changing an awful lot of the direction of the city, artistically and musically and stylistically. People wanted Toronto to be more New York than New York, but keep its own identity. They wanted it to be important; they wanted it to matter. A lot of what I see in Toronto now is the product of what we created in a five-year period of time." (Paul Robinson, Worth 2011)

The above quote is from the back cover of Liz Worth's oral history *Treat Me Like Dirt*.

As an academic, my first impulse is to question whether a quotation like this serves as a statement of fact, or as an essentializing and inflated claim to further the author's reputation.

Although it may be logically sound to pick the quotation apart in the latter fashion, I believe this would be missing the forest for the trees. The real question is, what does Robinson show us about the prevailing spirit of the times in Toronto? For Robinson, and likely other participants in the popular music community of the time, the sense was that the city was a clean slate, and in hindsight, Robinson projects a sense of accomplishment conveying his belief that the punk/art community was successful at creating something from nothing, setting the city on a new course. This sense of newness of the moment, the emerging uniqueness of Toronto made music and art, and the anxiety of influence from living under New York's cultural shadow are all themes I am concerned with in this chapter, and in this thesis. As Anna Bourque of The Curse puts it, the first stirrings of new-wave/punk (when the terms were more interlinked) in Toronto was "kind of when you started to see the world turn in a way" (Worth 2011, 36). In context, Bourque is referencing a concert at the Ontario College of Art, which was an incubating institution of the scene. To situate this development, I will begin with a discussion of issues unique to the Canadian cultural context, followed by another on art education in Toronto.

Canada occupies an interesting position in global cultural politics. Our legacy as a colonial British outpost is still very much entrenched in day to day life, yet the cultural and economic influence of the United States often dominates. This results in a relatively marginal position for Canadian content in the world marketplace, and a national culture that is widely regarded as colonized and weak (Straw 2002, 95-111). In terms of music, Canadian identity has sometimes been characterized in the 20th century as a tendency towards feelings of superiority over excesses elsewhere, coupled with an ongoing anxiety over having no important role to play in globally influential stylistic developments (Straw 2002, 101). In this narrative, Canada is constantly in the reactive mode, creating versions of musical forms that have already proven successful elsewhere. A particular sense of ennui and inertia lurks in the Canadian zeitgeist, often finding expression in songwriters' lyrics. The Demics 1979 song "New York City" contains the lyrics: "I'm getting pretty tired/Of going downtown/You know the same trip everyday/It's kind of bringing me down," followed by a chorus of "I wanna go to New York City/Cuz they tell me it's the place to be/Ah I wanna go to New York City/I just know it's the place for me." Tellingly, *Chart Attack* released a poll in 1996 that declared 'New York City' the number one Canadian song of all time. Other contenders for this spot included well-known names such as Joni Mitchell and Neil Young, either of which would be more obvious number one choices. I cannot presume to know the motivations behind the voters' choice of 'New York City' as number one, but it is evident that this particularly Canadian theme of superiority/inferiority towards our American cousins comes into play here, thereby expressing an integral part of the experience of a Canadian punk fan in this era.

The punk moment in Toronto followed some of these established cultural patterns, while breaking others entirely. The very first new wave group in Toronto were The Dishes, who took

up residency at The Beverley Tavern – an old haunt for OCA students – in early 1976 (Worth 2011, 35). This predated the first Ramones concert (September 24, 1976) in the city by several months, allowing The Dishes to build an appreciative audience early on that understood them as something hip and new, with a sound that fit into rumoured parallel developments in New York and London, but also expressed something uniquely Toronto. As was the case in many urban centres outside of New York and London, that first Ramones show inspired many of the audience members to begin their own punk bands, leading to the formation of Viletones, The Eels and The Diodes (Worth 2011, 38-45; Sutherland 2012, 128). The Ramones concert was presented by The Garys, a duo of promoters who owned and operated the New Yorker Theatre, a key institution for the scene that created a measurable impact on the inculcation of punk sensibility into the Toronto area (Pyle 2011, 20). Gary Topp was the first one to screen films such as Amos Poe's *Blank Generation*, a portrait of the CBGB's scene, and the first to bring proto-punk stars like Iggy Pop, Patti Smith, and David Bowie to the city. Despite the connecting thread between all of his activities, Gary Topp claims that he really wasn't thinking of what he was doing as punk rock at the time. When he booked the Ramones, he claims it wasn't because they were trendy, underground, or controversial, but because "they sounded interesting and my musical tastes are quite unusual" (Worth 2011, 41). Statements like this one illustrates another feature of the Canadian cultural landscape according to Will Straw, who writes that "most subcultural forms enter Canada through the gateway of connoisseurship" (Straw 2002, 100). Due to our geographic marginality, and in a world before computers, aspiring scenesters were forced to rely on individuals like Gary Topp for access to obscure cultural goods. According to Straw this resulted in subcultural taste in Canada tending to cluster within the middle class, due to the comparative inaccessibility of requisite cultural artifacts to the working class (Straw 2002, 100).

Social class was one major factor that differentiated the Canadian punk scene from its American and British counterparts, especially from those in the UK, who were experiencing widespread austerity measures and unemployment, leading to a rise in populist discontent. In Canada, “It was not easy to sing about ‘No Future’ with any credibility... in the mid 1970s. Unlike England, this country was enjoying a period of economic prosperity” (O’Connor 2002, 229). Toronto punks existed on the edge of a capitalist surplus, having grown up largely in the suburbs (Thornhill especially), and then moved downtown where they could live inexpensively (Monk 2016, 200). Additionally, the city of Toronto was experiencing an economic renaissance, having benefited from several corporate headquarters relocating from Montréal in the wake of the election of the separatist Parti Québécois. The resultant shift in demographics within Canadian society led to Toronto becoming the most populous Canadian city by the early 1980s, and re-made Bay Street into the heart of Canada's financial sector.⁷ This shift was good for the economic and cultural growth of the city, but perhaps not as good for the default street reputation of Canadian punk groups. O’Connor writes that “From the beginning, punk in Toronto was having an identity crisis” (O’Connor 2002, 229), which could have given the bands more of an incentive to prove themselves as equal to, or even greater than, their American counterparts.

Not far from the financial district lay Queen Street West, a formerly derelict stretch that was being transformed by an eclectic group of artists, musicians, and drifters. The Queen West of today is completely unrecognizable compared to that of the 1970s, but its current reputation as one of the ‘coolest neighbourhoods in the world’⁸ has roots in the accelerating influence of the

⁷ “Quebec offers model of how money moves on recession threat,” Quebec, Financial Times, last modified September 12, 2014, <https://www.ft.com/content/7ba064e4-3a61-11e4-bd08-00144feabdc0>.

⁸ “Global Street Style Report: Mapping Out the 15 Coolest Neighbourhoods in the World,” Vogue, accessed March 4, 2019, <https://www.vogue.com/slideshow/fifteen-coolest-street-style-neighborhoods#2>.

1970s punk scene.⁹ Musicians and artists connected to the punk and new wave scenes formed an essential part of this early gentrification of the area, opening restaurants, clubs, and record stores amid the used electronics stores and laundromats. The location for this development made sense considering Queen Street was just steps from the OCA campus, attracting bohemian art students seeking cheap rents and an urban lifestyle. This mixture of social classes in the budding Queen Street scene was conducive to the development of the emergent alternative culture, however it was not without its detractors. On the one hand, this revitalization of underutilized downtown space is a fairly typical pattern of urban geography, with artists and musicians (largely from the suburbs) “drawing legitimacy from the grit and poverty of the area” and making what some have called a disingenuous appeal to authenticity in the process (Deveau 2015, 326-344). On the other hand, in the case of Queen West, the art students, store owners, and locals, appeared to have been in a relatively harmonious and symbiotic relationship, with each class helping to grow the other.

According to Ian Mackay of The Diodes:

It was a very interesting point in history on the Queen Street scene because you had OCA feeding onto Queen Street, and you also had the emergence of all of these electronics and hobby computing stores popping up along Queen Street. So, the name the Diodes was loosely related to the fact that there was this microcomputer revolution happening at the same time the punk revolution was happening. (Worth 2011, 43)

The owners of these small businesses were often immigrants, bringing a cultural diversity to the stretch that added to its vibrancy.

The development of the Queen West scene was partly a response to the rapid gentrification of the formerly bohemian enclave of Yorkville, which had transformed from Canada’s answer to Greenwich village into one of Toronto’s most expensive neighbourhoods. In the 1960s, Yorkville hosted an influential folk scene that supported the early careers of such

⁹ “Accelerator” was a term suggested to me by Ian Mackay to describe the influence of punk on the burgeoning Queen Street West scene.

successful Canadian musicians as Neil Young and Joni Mitchell, and an art scene that birthed Michael Snow. Stuart Henderson utilizes the concept of “hip identity” to explain the particular network of forces that created Yorkville, as both a material place and as an imagined ideal that was further propagated by the Canadian media. He writes that "people, in the idiom of the 1960s hip culture, used to use the expression 'making the scene' to refer to being someplace, as though it were the people, not the structure, that constituted the scenery in any given location" (Henderson 2011, 7). In this way, the scene is made and re-made over and over depending on the density of individual actors who are, or are perceived to be, hip (often this distinction is illusory). Through the lens of hip identities, Henderson shows how the residents of 1960s Yorkville "recognized the power of *presence* in creating meaning in any particular locus" (Henderson 2011, 7. Emphasis in original). At a basic level, the mission of the counterculture was an attempt to live deliberately and with consciousness; which is both a positive vision for a different way of life and a negative critique of existing social conditions in the world at large. When punk rock hit in the 1970s, its critique thus appeared very similar to the hippies, notwithstanding punk rocker's frequent and performative disdain for them.

In relation to Henderson's study, I have found that the rhetoric of Toronto punks was often articulated within a similar nexus of hip identity. A sense of presence was imperative in the few locations the scene participants frequented: OCA, the Beverley Tavern, Peter Pan Restaurant, the clothing shop New Rose, the New Yorker Theatre, and later Crash 'n' Burn, and bars such as the Colonial Underground, the Horseshoe Tavern, and David's. Many of these locations will be revisited throughout this chapter, but for now I now turn my attention to the Ontario College of Art, considering its particular influence on Toronto punk and New Wave in their early days.

Art School

The original precursor to OCA, the Ontario School of Art, was founded in 1876 to provide a home for the practices and teaching activities of the Ontario Society of Artists. The curriculum in the school's 19th century incarnation "followed that of the Department of Science and Art, South Kensington, London, which was noted for its emphasis on 'practical art,' its systematic course of training, and its centralized examination scheme" (OCA 1976, 11). By the time of the school's reincarnation as the Ontario College of Art in 1912, its focus had shifted slightly away from the practical art of the British arts and crafts movement (see: Frith 1987, 33) and towards "the training of students in the fine art... and in all branches of the applied arts... and the training of teachers in the fine and applied arts" (OCA 1976, 14). Throughout the first half of the 20th century, the college remained relatively small and provincial. This changed in the 1960s, when Canadian art education saw a period of rapid expansion, bolstered by a new crop of professors coming from American graduate programs. These new hires brought with them an American approach to art education, which they implemented in their Canadian classrooms.¹⁰ One feature of American art education is that U.S. institutions "are far more closely related to industry and commerce than their British and French counterparts" (Frith and Horne 1987, footnote 7), as opposed to focusing on Romantic notions of individual creativity and expression. This shift in ideology had ramifications on the sort of education Canadian art school graduates were receiving in the 1970s.

The purpose of art education has been the subject of much debate over the years, and according to pedagogue Ronald MacGregor there are now seven possible dimensions to the

¹⁰ In a collection titled *Readings in Canadian Art Education*, Ronald MacGregor writes, "It was therefore not surprising to see the points of view expressed by prominent American art educators such as Vincent Lanier, Elliot Eisner, Kenneth Beittel, June McFee or Edmund Feldman being espoused and implemented in undergraduate programs" (MacGregor 1984).

rationale for its continuation: Creativity, Leisure Time, Personality Integration, Intuitive/Subjective, Visual/Environmental, Appreciation/Cultural Heritage, and Art as a Unique Form of Knowledge (MacGregor 1984, 37). Although there are compelling features to all of these factors, for the purpose of my study I have chosen to focus on numbers three, four and five. The intuitive/subjective dimension is interesting for its political implications, as intuition here is treated as a faculty to be developed in opposition to the mechanized formalism that dominates much of the contemporary world. On the visual/environmental dimension, MacGregor writes: “an art program should provide visual education with emphasis on the effects of mass media, urban sprawl, and advertising in our present and future environments” (MacGregor 1984, 38). These concerns resonate with many themes in punk and new wave music, and in certain strands of conceptual art such as the work of collective General Idea. Finally, we have the Personality Integration dimension, on which MacGregor writes: “art classes should have an integrating effect on the student's personality and should provide him [*sic*] with opportunities to release tensions and express inner feelings using art materials” (MacGregor 1984, 38). From my research, I believe that this last rationale had a likely impact on art student musicians in Toronto, and it enabled them to self-consciously cultivate personas and viewpoints on art and life that aided the creative process of their music.

Simon Frith and Howard Horne write that this deeply personal aspect of art school is part of what made it such a natural site for countercultures to take root. For him, the aim of art education is “the creation of awareness, to allow potentially creative people to develop their attitudes, to encourage questioning, to promote discovery, to develop creative *behaviour*” (Frith and Horne 1987, 49). The notion of creative behaviour was especially foregrounded by those who were interested in more experimental forms of performance-based art in the 1970s, such as

CEAC (see chapter four). At the Ontario College of Art, the experimental arts wing and brand-new photo/electric arts program were two overlapping locales for individuals to pursue these questions.

For most of the 1960s and 70s, the Ontario College of Art stuck to quite a traditional program, even while art colleges elsewhere were beginning to reconfigure their offerings in response to recent developments in contemporary and conceptual styles. Art critic Earl Miller claims that this lack of a progressive art college is part of what fueled the emergence of new wave in Toronto, as disaffected students turned to music as an alternative to the cultural conservatism of their institution. Miller writes: “the Ontario College of Art and Design – then the Ontario College of Art or OCA – at the time trained a glut of commercial artists and still-life painters but ghettoized the few ‘radicals’ in a diminutive Experimental Arts department” (Miller 2005, 30). The experimental arts department at the time had a significant overlap with the newly created Photo/Electric Arts programme, described in a retrospective as “a unique programme concerned with the photo/electric media and their effect on culture and perception” (OCA 1976, 19). This description immediately brings to mind the theories of Marshall McLuhan, who had an impact on the thinking of punk rockers such as Ian Mackay (The Diodes), Michael Jordana (The Poles) and Steve Leckie (Viletones) (Worth 2011, Pp. 91, 88, 118). Mackay, who did a split program between the experimental art and photo/electric departments (Nevarez 2017), corroborates that the McLuhan influence did indeed come from his coursework in the latter’s classes:

I was taking courses at the Ontario College of Art which were heavily influenced by Marshall McLuhan’s writings. I remember Dean Motter, who was teaching us; I was asking him if I should do this Diodes or not, and he said, “Think of it as a media probe. You can go and be a rock star, but think all the time that you’re probing into the whereabouts of the rock business.” (Worth 2011, 118)

McLuhan understood media and communication technologies as being an extension of our own human consciousness, creating a total environment that we unwittingly swim through every day, like fish through water. A full explication of McLuhan's ideas is far beyond the scope of this thesis, but his concept of a media probe, referenced here by Mackay, is a useful framework through which to conceptualize The Diodes' oeuvre. McLuhan was fond of writing pithy short statements that encapsulate a much broader concept, hence a media *probe* whose purpose is to be outrageous, and sometimes extreme (see: McLuhan 1989), in an effort to shock the reader into some sort of understanding. Examples of probes include slogans such as: "point of view is failure to achieve structural awareness", and "any highway eatery with its TV set, newspaper and magazine is as cosmopolitan as New York or Paris" (McLuhan 1989, 32, 33). These statements lead to reflection, often causing a re-orientation of perspective, not unlike the effect that arty punk and new wave music could have on the unfamiliar but intrigued listener.

Arguably, without the Experimental Arts department and Photo/Electric program at OCA, new wave in Toronto would not have had the same critical sensibility as it did. The group of students and associates that hung around the building eventually formed the nucleus that would both form bands and become the audience for them. Steven Davey of The Dishes recalls that at OCA "they had a building just south of the main campus which was the experimental arts wing and they had a recording studio and video equipment and they would have parties in there all the time and have really horrible blues bands play. Me and my friends would go, 'Wait a minute, we have our own band.' And so that was the nucleus" (Worth 2011, 36). The first informal musical project to come out of this nascent scene was Oh Those Pants!, a group of OCA staff who played joking cover renditions of pop songs. This group included Martha Johnson, who would later go on to be the lead vocalist of Martha & The Muffins. Oh Those Pants! left no

recordings or significant documentation behind, but their impact was nevertheless significant, simply because they were the first to try something new. Crucially, these OCA parties happened before The Ramones, Patti Smith, or the Talking Heads ever set foot in Toronto. The sound and sensibility that OCA students and staff were experimenting with behind closed doors was at the time something that had never been done before in Toronto, and was created independently (although perhaps not uninfluenced by) parallel developments in New York and London. The best known and most influential product of this early experimentation were The Dishes, whose 1976 residency at the Beverley Tavern became a pivotal moment in the history of the city's scene.

Art and the Toronto Punk Scene

The fact that it is possible to convey such a central part of the history of Toronto's first wave punk scene largely through its association with art and the art world is a testament to how entwined these worlds were at the time. As a short disclaimer, there were many groups and individuals in the punk scene who rejected associations with art school sensibility. This included two of the most prominent groups to come out of the scene: Teenage Head and The Viletones. The members of Teenage Head, who were based in Hamilton, gave no indication of interest in the conceptual art element of punk (see: Pevere 2014). The Viletones went further and were actively antagonistic to their peers on the artier side of the punk spectrum. Before the group had even played a single show, they would frequent scene bars with leather jackets emblazoned with stick-on letters spelling out VILETONES, and Steven Leckie would pontificate to his peers that "The Viletones is my band and it ain't no faggot art school band" (Worth 2011, 49). To a certain extent this antagonism was performative and manufactured, largely by Leckie himself, and The

Viletones weren't as anti-art as they postured. In an interview with Sam Sutherland, Leckie claims: "The words of Rimbaud not only told but warned over 100 years ago this spectacle would come, and I, far more than most first-generation punk artists, embraced and heeded that future vision. A vision that manifests in high art reality" (Sutherland 2012, 23).

Returning to the OCA crowd, by February of 1976 The Dishes had started playing several nights a week at The Beverley Tavern, a bar regularly frequented by art students due to its proximity to the college. Technically, it was John Hamilton (The Diodes) first band, Daily Planet, that was the first new wave oriented group to play the Beverley, but it was widely accepted by interviewees that The Dishes were the ones who really got things started in terms of building a durable scene (Sutherland 2012, 96). According to Johnny MacLeod (Johnny and the G-Rays):

The Dishes played the Beverley more than other people because they were getting the whole thing started. They were really the only band that could ever fill the Beverley at the early stages. They were the only band to play all original material all night and they were really a focal point. Anybody who started a band would show up at their gigs at the Beverley. (Worth 2011, 37)

The audience for The Dishes began with their friends from Thornhill, and OCA students, but grew steadily as word began to get out. It is important to remember that at the time there was not very much original music being performed in Toronto, at least in smaller venues such as nightclubs and bars. The reason for this, according to Steven Davey (The Dishes) is that, "to play in this city anyway you had to be in the Musicians' Union to play, or so they told you, and you had to be represented by an agent if you wanted to play one of the eight clubs in town that put bands on" (Worth 2011, 37). The union groups were mostly cover bands, pub oriented in style and content. This situation made it difficult for new original groups, especially those with more experimental sounds, to carve out an audience in the city. The arrival of punk/new wave then,

with its emphasis on a Do-It-Yourself mindset and culture, was a much-needed and necessary development in the creative direction of Toronto.

One important aspect of The Dishes was their creation of a defined image and aesthetic. The drummer Steven Davey was instrumental in the creation of a graphic language for the group; describing himself as the “manager and conceptualist” (Worth 2011, 35), he created posters for their Beverley shows and gave the group a stylish and ironic image in performance. The group claims to be the first to have taped posters to telephone polls in the city (Sutherland 2012, 98), which had an effect of creating a clearly visual change in the Queen West strip, signalling to any passersby the emergence of the alternative culture in the neighbourhood. Davey had the most connections and was key in aligning The Dishes with figures in the art world. Following the example of Toronto rock veterans Rough Trade, Davey says:

I always knew that all you had to do was appeal to people who worked in boutiques... They [Rough Trade] started out at Grossman’s and I saw how they attracted this trendy, elite core, and I realized if you could get those people to like your band it would snowball from there. And of course we did – the photographers, the fashion people, people who owned stores. Those are the people who are usually up on new things and hip things. (Worth 2011, 35)

These efforts eventually did pay off for The Dishes when they attracted the attention of one of the biggest names in contemporary art in Toronto, General Idea.

General Idea were a trio of conceptual artists who had been active in the city since 1969 (Smith 2016). Taking on the pseudonyms Felix Partz, Jorge Zontal and AA Bronson, GI were instrumental in the formation of the artist-run system of galleries in Canada – an alternative to the government run arts council monopoly.¹¹ In addition to creating an extensive body of work

¹¹ The artist-run system of galleries, or the ‘Eternal Network’ as it was sometimes referred to by artists, was an informal coalition of centres that shared artwork and techniques across the country, allowing artists a “generous latitude to shape the discourse of their work” (Bronson 1987). The first such centre was Intermedia in Vancouver; opened in the late 1960s. Intermedia set out the model for later institutions, especially by championing the then-new

that tackles sexuality, AIDS, media images and communications, the members of General Idea became nightlife fixtures in the city, championing all things glamorous and extravagant. Around them grew a diverse posse of socialites, including performance artist David Buchan, model Anya Varda and vintage clothing designer (later restaurateur) Sandy Stagg (Miller 2005, 32). Varda and Stagg in particular had one foot each in both the punk scene and the art world, two communities that began to intersect more and more as a familiarity developed between them. General Idea appeared to understand the value of this alliance, and by 1977 they were actively championing punk rock, releasing an issue of their *FILE Magazine* titled “Punk til’ you Puke”. The Dishes became General Idea’s house band for a period, playing art openings at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, and also playing at Fashion Burn, GI’s hybrid fashion show, performance piece, and house party, mounted at Crash 'n' Burn in June of 1977 (Monk 2016, 198). From this collaboration came the *Hot Property* project, a video art piece that used The Dishes album of the same name as a soundtrack (Smith 2016, 11). This association, and General Idea’s career, will be explored in further depth in chapter three.

In 1976, two key locations for the art and music scenes opened up on Queen Street; General Idea’s A Space gallery and exhibition space, and the Peter Pan Restaurant. According to Sandy Stagg, owner and founder of Peter Pan, her restaurant was an important factor in the development in the scene because she employed many members of local bands including The Dishes and Diodes (Worth 2011, 63). Additionally, Peter Pan was a place where members of the scene could meet and mingle. AA Bronson (General Idea) says, “it became this extremely lively spot where all the art slash music slash theatre etcetera scene could go out and hang out and eat[.] ... It’s hard to image now; the scene was so small then that there really wasn’t any place to

medium of video art. The gallery A Space followed soon after in 1970; a General Idea-run multimedia gallery space in downtown Toronto.

go. Now there's countless little artsy restaurant in Toronto, but then there was really only the one" (Worth, 63). With Peter Pan as a social hub, the Beverley as an informal concert venue, and A Space as an exhibition space for artists, the stage for the Queen Street scene was set. All other developments in the Toronto punk/art cross-fertilization of 1977 and onwards grew from this first year of cultural ferment.

Many of the groups that emerged from this early scene tread the line between art and music lightly, and one group in particular stands out for being more closely aligned with the former than the latter. The Poles were a new wave group consisting of the partner duo of visual artist Michael Jordana, and musician Doug Pringle (who previously played in electro-pop band Syrinx) (Worth 2011, 89). Jordana began her career creating photography and performance art pieces inspired by a summer living in the high arctic; the name The Poles was a nod to this history. During this period, Berman wrote a manifesto for performance art with a friend, and exhibited a series of pieces called *The Rites of Nulijuk* at A Space where she took on the persona of a whale in performance. For Berman, music began to grow organically out of these performances: "But eventually I started singing. It was at art galleries like A Space. It just grew and grew and grew. We got a cult following that followed us everywhere, so we started getting invited to play larger and larger venues" (Worth 2011, 89). The Poles are an interesting case as the music aspect grew from the performance art aspect, and throughout Jordana consistently maintained her identity as an artist first and as a musician second. This is very different than the approach of a group like The Dishes, who were aligned with the art world and shared many of their sensibilities but were still resolutely a pop band whose members identified primarily as musicians, not artists. In the case of the music and art symbiosis that was created in Toronto at

this particular moment, by comparing the cases of The Poles and The Dishes, we can see both a range of expressions and a range of depths existed within these interrelationships.

The last group I would like to discuss in this chapter had yet another perspective on the art/music relationship, stemming from their formal education in fine art. The Diodes were the most successful group to come out of the Toronto punk scene, securing a record deal with CBS in 1978 that gave them a brief moment of fame. The origins of this group were in the tight knit OCA scene; two art students, David Clarkson and Ian Mackay, originally formed a band called The Eels who opened for Oh Those Pants! at several Photo/Electric Arts department parties (Worth 2011, 42). Playing with The Eels was an important formative moment for Clarkson and Mackay, as it gave them their first platform to experiment with the use of music as a conceptual form. Inspired by their mentorship at the college, the idea behind The Eels, according to Mackay, was to create “a wall of sound as a sound sculpture and the idea would be we might submit that as an art project” (Worth 2011, 42). Mackay was in fact only the sound technician and occasional guitar player for the group, but his comments in *Treat Me Like Dirt* suggest he was in conversation with the other members as to their conceptual basis – a basis that appears to have been articulated in the language of fine art. When discussing the influences behind the group, Mackay cites Andy Warhol’s approach to art making, saying “he was a conceptual artist in many ways and yet he had this pop sensibility and spin to what he was doing” (Worth 2011, 42). Additionally, Mackay takes a postmodern position, advocating for art as a bricolage of styles:

If you look at the minimalists combined with the pop art, there was a convergence there in the late ‘60s and ‘70s where people were mixing and matching all these themes. So it was easier for us to take that on and say, “Yeah, we can do something that has intellectual rigour, a sound sculpture, but use the instruments of a rock band to manifest it.” (Worth 2011, 42)

Eventually, Ian Mackay eventually grew tired of simply being a conceptualist, and began desiring to start a rock group of his own. After The Eels broke up, Clarkson and Mackay recruited two new members: Paul Robinson, a graduate student in art history at York University, and John Catto, a fellow student at OCA. The resultant quartet was named The Diodes, a name inspired by the emerging technological interface between cybernetics, computing and electronic music (Worth 2011, 43).

The Diodes considered themselves definitively the “rock people” of the Toronto scene, inspired by proto-punk groups like The Stooges and the New York Dolls, as opposed to the glam oriented Roxy Music or David Bowie (Worth 2011, 44). Stylistically, The Diodes are closest to the American group Television, a rock group whose concept was avant-garde in scope but conventional in instrumentation. Where Television’s preoccupations were primarily literary, The Diodes wrote through the lens of a technological and media savviness that produced songs that were witty but perhaps not as overtly intellectual as their influences would suggest. As John Catto (The Diodes) says, “The main thing that we wanted was to *not* do something like The Dishes. We were rock people and that’s how it came out, really” (Worth 2011, 44). This positioning was not necessarily antagonistic, and in fact The Dishes and The Diodes formed a rather complementary pairing, similar in some ways to that of Talking Heads and The Ramones in New York. The Diodes were in fact big fans of Talking Heads, and in interview John Catto admits that “we booked the Talking Heads into OCA so we could open for them” (Sutherland 2012, 129). The Talking Heads were in town to play at the A Space gallery and were looking for a second gig. The Diodes jumped on the opportunity to bring them to the receptive audience that had developed at the art college, and also to score themselves their first gig opening from them, a plan that successfully came to fruition on January 28th 1977 (Worth 2011, 45).

By the summer of 1977, the punk scene in Toronto had fully solidified, but it was having trouble flourishing due to a lack of supportive venues. Even in venues that did allow independent punk bands to play, it was often grudgingly so, and in one case the tensions escalated into a brawl at The Colonial Tavern between bouncers armed with pool cues and The Diodes (plus fans). One result of the brawl was that most venues in Toronto made the decision to ban punk bands, worried about bad media coverage and the threat of violence, whether real or implied (Sutherland 2012, 130). Shortly before this event, The Diodes had opened an underground club called the Crash ‘n’ Burn in the basement of the Centre for Experimental Art and Communication (CEAC) on 15 Duncan Street. Finally having a place to call their own, and galvanized by the beatings at the Colonial, the punk scene for that summer created a united front, and all intra-scene divisions and rivalries were temporarily forgotten. According to Ian Mackay, the Crash ‘n’ Burn was “a golden moment where we needed solidarity to survive but there wasn’t any commercial value, so there wasn’t any opportunity for the scene to fragment” (Worth 2011, 79). The solidarity that was fostered there allowed the scene to thrive, and the club became the go-to nightlife spot in the city for visitors and touring groups – on one occasion the Ramones even stopped in to catch a double bill of The Diodes and Viletones (Sutherland 2012, 132). Harri Palm (Johnny & The G-Rays) says that “Crash ‘n’ Burn, that was the catalyst really. All of a sudden all these bands that had been playing basically private parties and funny little off-shoot gigs had a place to play, and that place rocked” (Worth 2011, 78). As the venue became more and more popular, increased media attention and visibility led to an increase in attendance far beyond the original scene, which resulted in challenges including occasional violence.

The impact that the Crash ‘n’ Burn summer had on the development of the punk scene (and perhaps on the city of Toronto) has been well acknowledged, however a piece that is often

missed, and that I would like to focus on in this thesis, is the relationship the venue had with the artists at the Centre for Experimental Art and Communication. The Diodes and CEAC found common ground in their shared art school background, DIY aesthetics, and a belief in the necessity for (respectively) a cultural and political revolution in the west. In chapter three, I will focus on CEAC's side of this story, but for the moment I would like to briefly consider this relationship from the point of view of members of The Diodes. David Clarkson says The Diodes gravitated more towards CEAC than they did towards General Idea (the two had a serious rivalry), because they perceived CEAC as being more political, and as trying something new in art, and the Diodes saw themselves as complementarily trying something new in music. According to Clarkson, "They [CEAC] were less interested in a cultural spectacle and more interested in spontaneous performances in using the actual context of where you actually were and incorporating that within the art performance rather than planning everything out" (Worth 2011, 63). For a time, CEAC saw the Crash 'n' Burn as an outgrowth of the spontaneous performances of behaviour they were conducting upstairs in the same building, and they saw the emergent punk subculture as a potential revolutionary tool to further their neo-Marxist worldview. As Paul Robinson puts it, "CEAC saw a window of opportunity with punk. They connected to the political lyrics of the UK scene, something that didn't exist in North America" (Worth 2011, 64). Already, we can see the problematic nature of this position; as has been stated, The Diodes were much more influenced by developments in the New York underground than by The Clash or Sex Pistols in the UK. There are however some real overlaps, such as a desire to shock the public out of a moribund sense of complacency in the face of serious social issues, and another to change a cultural landscape that, according to punks and radicals, was rapidly being bleached out.

After the Crash 'n' Burn closed, old divisions began to reappear in the punk scene, especially between the art crowd and those who were seen as more 'street' like the Viletones.

According to Steve Leckie (Viletones):

I don't think that division between the OCA bands and everyone else was there in the beginning but I know that me, I wanted to make a line between the two camps consciously. I recognized an opportunity to play off that Beatles/Stones – type thing. I think in the very beginning we co-existed just fine, like the Diodes and the Poles, but then I wanted a division because what was at stake was the audience. (Worth 2011, 113)

The division between art school groups and the others was partly one of class, although the lines between middle class on one side and working class on the other were certainly not as clear cut as Leckie made them out to be. Leckie was in fact born in the Annex, a relatively affluent area of Toronto, and it was not until later when he lived with his divorced father that they began to struggle financially. The real working-class groups in the scene were The Ugly and Teenage Head, who came up from Hamilton.

In summary, I argue that we can situate the first wave of punk in Toronto based on several key events. One interpretation would be to give it a start date of September 24th, 1976 (the first local Ramones show). However, I argue that if we are discussing the broader punk and new wave movement, which is a perspective more useful to the punk/art crossover, then the beginning is better placed sometime in February of 1976, concurrent with The Dishes first shows at The Beverley Tavern. Regardless of which origin point one picks, I would also argue that the punk moment in question lasted at most just short of two years. Before this period there was nothing of lasting impact in the way of punk or new wave music from Toronto, and afterwards the city saw a whole explosion of creativity across many variegated genres, going forward into the 1980s when various forms of second-wave punk, post-punk, and new wave became much more prominent on both the Canadian and international stage (see: Barclay 2011). But I argue

that this period, although short, had a critical importance in shaping the direction of the city. Through a combination of social, cultural and economic factors, a critical mass of artistic, intellectual and musical energy arrived in Toronto, creating a force that aided in the city's forward motion towards a vibrant new set of possibilities.

Chapter Two

Tracing a Genealogy of Punk: Subcultural and Aesthetic Theories

Any non-reductive definition of punk rock is necessarily fraught with complexities, tensions, and shades of nuance, and must reflect the heterogeneous sonics of the music itself. Many overlapping discourses contributed to the reception and dissemination of punk ideology in the 1970s, often claiming directly contradicting territory for this nascent musical movement. Depending on the author, punk was considered either a revivalist genre or a revolutionary break in the chain of popular music (Gendron 2002), as a street wise proletarian uprising or an ironic art school posture (Frith and Horne 1987), as a subversive insertion of the queered body into popular culture or as an extension of the macho rebel prototype of time immemorial. In all of these paired discourses lies an underlying dialectic tension that is difficult to resolve.

A large part of the definitional complexity had to do with the many refractions the punk label underwent before being codified (largely by the media) as any band that sonically and visually matched a fairly narrow paradigm centered around the Sex Pistols (see: Gendron 2002). In the early years of what became known as punk rock in New York and London, the music was largely an underground phenomenon with no name. As Richard Cabut surmises: “at the very beginning punk was constantly in the process of forming. If the pertinent sense of punk is to be found anywhere, it is in this formative gap, this disjuncture” (Gallix 2017, 26). This notion of constant formation reveals a deeply creative and grassroots level of involvement by musicians in the definition of their new sensibility, and this template was purposefully applied by the roster of bands who played CBGB-OMFUG (CBGBs) in New York City. The CBGBs crowd often referred to themselves as the Blank Generation, which Richard Hell of Television thought of as “a void to be filled with whatever might be conjured and created” (Gallix 2017, 7). This idea of

punk as a void, or a negation, that would wipe away all past forms of ‘dinosaur rock’ and replace it with something genuinely new, was an important part of the rhetoric of the first wave. While the idea of negation did come to bear on later definitions of the genre, it was largely transposed into a more generalized, and less overtly intellectual, encouragement of anarchic nihilism and hedonism, and punk itself was ironically recuperated by the capitalist market as yet another lifestyle option to be packaged and sold.

In this chapter, I will examine a small selection of literature dealing with meaning and subcultural agenda in the American and UK scenes, supplemented with examples from my Toronto case study, with an eye towards characterizing punk music and culture in a manner that sheds light on my broader project of examining the interplay between punk and art communities in mid-1970s Toronto. This will provide a more explicit theoretical framework for the general history discussed in Chapter One, and sets up the two focused case studies (General Idea and CEAC) which follow in later chapters. I will begin by teasing apart many of the aforementioned definitional complexities of the first wave of punk, with an eye to how the core dialectical tension of art/pop in its many permutations helped enrich both the music and its conditions for criticism by the nascent alternative rock press. In the next section, I will consider the political implications of punk and the class-based analysis of the UK scene offered by the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), whose approach to subcultural studies dominated early critical and sociological scholarship on punk and related musics. Hegemony, as a core theoretical concept in subcultural theory, will be emphasized, while other propositions will be reconsidered in light of the particularities of Toronto’s socioeconomic circumstances in the 1970s, and with respect to critiques by post-subcultural theorists. Next, I will examine difficulties in the move by much punk rhetoric to place itself both within and

without the pop process, and the resulting techniques adopted by groups to create a solution to this seeming paradox. Finally, I will turn my attention to the history of the artistic avant-garde and give a brief synopsis of traditions of performance art including Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, and Conceptualism. This latter discussion will set up arguments I will make in later chapters and will introduce the reader to artist collectives General Idea and CEAC as I lay the groundwork for a more detailed discussion of their specific uses of the Toronto punk scene in chapter three.

Punk Genesis

While 1960s countercultures were widely reviled by early participants in punk, there were many similarities in the oppositional attitude that both subcultures expressed (see for example McKay 1996). One reason for this was that the hippies and punk shared a common ancestor, the beat poets of the 1950s. The degree to which the beats were ground zero for a wide range of countercultures to come cannot be overstated. Several characters directly connected the beat generation with the hippies. Ken Kesey as a young graduate student at Stanford University first encountered the beats through one of their last bohemian enclaves on Perry Lane (Wolfe, 1968). Allen Ginsberg makes repeated appearances throughout the history of the 1960s counterculture; he was there at the 1967 Human Be-In at Golden Gate Park, and the 1968 Democratic National Convention where Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) members hijacked the proceedings. William Burroughs' writing style in *Naked Lunch*, which included cut-up techniques, deviance and junkie imagery, shows a startling prescience with respect to the punk sensibility that was to come. The connections from beat to hippie to punk (and to later subcultures such as rave) are thus multitudinous, and have been elaborated and commented on extensively elsewhere (McKay 1996, 2). For the purposes of this thesis, it is felicitous to

conclude that many of countercultural techniques of the hippies, such as independent publishing and instituting artist-run galleries, were copied directly or adapted by the alternative networks of the late 1970s that made up punk's critical discourse (Frith and Horne 1987, 60). The Toronto connections to the late 1960s period will be explored in further depth in chapter three.

As the optimism tinged psychedelic underground gained steam in California and London, an opposing and reactive aesthetic was being formed in New York City. In 1965, the Velvet Underground caught the attention of Andy Warhol, who enlisted them as the house band at his Factory studio. Warhol and the Velvet Underground's signature multimedia concert series, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, resembled the Acid Tests of the west coasts on a surface level, but the effect and theory behind it were quite different. In contrast to the free-flowing improvisatory gestures of the west coast psychedelic scene, the Velvet Underground "expressed uptightness and made the audience uptight" (Frith and Horne 1987, 112). The Velvet Underground's discursive positioning in relation to existing modes of the avant-garde was synergistic with Andy Warhol's pop art conception of the role of the artist within a society dominated by consumption (Bannister 2010). Later in this chapter I will examine the importance of pop art for critically situating art school (punk) rock music, with the former providing a set of tools or solutions to the bohemian predicaments of the latter. For the moment, however, it is important to note that in the case of the Velvet Underground "their importance turned out to be not quite what Warhol had intended: they became the model for an avant-garde *within* rock and roll" (Frith and Horne 1987, 112). In many ways the Velvet's legacy, shaped by rock critics and expanded upon by similarly positioned bands such as The Stooges and the MC5, as well as subsequent developments in the 1970s underground, laid the groundwork for the punk rock movement some 15 years later.

The Velvet Underground were largely unappreciated by critics in their day, and it was not until the early 1970s that a group of rock journalists rehabilitated their legacy. In addition to proselytizing on behalf of the Velvet Underground, this group of critics – which included Lester Bangs and Dave Marsh from *Creem* magazine, and Greg Shaw from *Bomp!* – were the first to categorize groups as *punk* rock (Gendron 2002, 230-32). For these writers, punk was a path to the restitution of a hidden history of rock music. They identified a unifying thread between 1960s garage groups, the abrasive avant-gardism of The Velvet Underground, and more contemporary groups like The New York Dolls. Lester Bangs hypothesized three components that shaped the punk sensibility of these groups; sheer aggressiveness, minimalism, and amateurism. These writers seem to have identified very early on a sea change on popular music aesthetics that would not hit full force for half a decade, and as Gendron puts it, "there is perhaps no comparable instance in the history of rock 'n' roll where a pre-existing discursive formation had such an impact on the formation and constitution of a musical genre" (Gendron 2002, 239). The Bangs, Marsh, and Shaw story reveals how the punk ethos had been building up for quite some time in the underground, and from these early stages maintained a certain hedonistically intellectual veneer that would become a part of the aesthetic and political profile of first-generation punk as such.

As has been shown, Punk drew on a wide variety of influences to achieve its own particular synthesis, a technique Dick Hebdige calls 'bricolage' (Hebdige 1979). Of these influences, there is a definite artistic side (glam, avant-garde, art pop), as well as a grittier street side (garage rock, 1950s rock n' roll). This created an art/pop dynamic that permeated the construction of punk identity, style, and aesthetics. These sort of confrontations over the meaning of early punk were common in many communities, and perhaps were even beneficial to its

glamorous image. Art/pop, then, is not a distinction that is easily resolved. And to define punk it is not necessary to emphasize one side over the other. Rather, we can acknowledge their equal weight as complementary opposites, which adds a richness to the theoretical discourse. I will now move on to very briefly give some history of the important New York and London punk scenes, emphasizing key aspects that are important in understanding the historical context within which the Toronto scene was enmeshed.

New York City was already a mecca for experiments on the fringes of art and popular music by the time that punk began to develop. The art/pop dialectic had been integral to Andy Warhol's pop art conception of *The Velvet Underground*, along with all other aspects of his work, and was present to a degree in a new scene forming around Greenwich Village's Mercer Arts Center in the early 1970s. At the Mercer, acclaimed performance artists such as Laurie Anderson would rub shoulders with edgy proto-punk acts New York Dolls and The Stooges (Frith and Horne 1987, 113). The effect of this artistic porousness was to naturalize a certain self-consciousness among groups from the New York underground, which encouraged the elevation of personality into art object, and musical style into a process of signifying (Frith and Horne 1987, 114), referencing older styles or building new ones through an ironic and knowing reflexivity. When the Mercer Arts Center burned down in 1973, much of this creative energy dispersed to other areas of the city, including the East Village/Bowery neighbourhood and the newly opened bar CBGB. Many of the groups in the scene followed in the art/pop signifying mode of their predecessors. Patti Smith brought the playful and collaborative aesthetic of the lower east side poetry scene to the bar, combining her Romantic and mystical poetry with a growling proto-punk backing (Kane 2012). Television brought to the table taut four-piece arrangements and a straight-ahead avant-rock style, with a literary aesthetic gleaned from 19th

century poets such as Rimbaud, and Verlaine (Reynolds 2009, 371). Blondie's tightly packaged personas and eventual commercial tendencies typified a pop art approach to commodification that presaged the MTV age zeitgeist of the 1980s (Frith and Horne 1987, 156). The Talking Heads balanced pop and art most finely, setting ironically preppy but intellectually sophisticated lyrics to a pulsing dance beat. Indeed, "even the Ramones were, in this setting, a wonderfully clever signification of stupidity" (Frith and Horne 1987, 114).

Punk in London shared some aspects with the New York scene, such as a post-modern conception of the breakdown of cultural time rendered colloquially effective – 'No Future!' – yet it differed in some key ways. In the late 1970s the UK was undergoing an existential crisis (which continues to this day) surrounding the fading imperial prowess of the nation (Street and Wilkinson 2018, 271), made dramatically clear by regularly televised images of poverty and decline. Punk rock enacted a dramatization of the country's economic and political crises, revelling in an image of degenerate youth that was subsequently reinforced by the news media (Street and Wilkinson 2018, 272), who christened the movement (before it had a name) as *dole queue rock* (Marsh 1977), a pejorative British expression for being forced to line up to collect unemployment benefits. The two biggest groups to come out of this scene were the Sex Pistols and The Clash, both of whom seized on this regional political imperative, albeit in two different directions.

The Sex Pistols were essentially a product of the tinkering of Malcolm McLaren, an art school graduate who combined a do-it-yourself business ethic with radical theories of the image drawn from situationism and pop art (Frith and Horne 1987, 130-31). Historians studying the effect of the Sex Pistols on culture tend to divide into two opposing camps; the first, taking a Birmingham School position, argue that they succeeded in challenging the established order and

subverting accepted norms, posing a genuine if temporary threat to the British status quo (Street and Wilkinson 2018, 271). The second believe that the Sex Pistols, and indeed punk in general, has been inappropriately inflated in its historical importance, compared to other movements which are often short changed such as disco (Street and Wilkinson 2018, 273). One author argues that it was the work of biased rock critics such as Greil Marcus and Jon Savage that resulted in this historical malfeasance, both of whom mythologized the Sex Pistols (Court 2015, 416-431). Regardless of where one may position themselves in this argument, it is important also to look at the effect the group exerted on actual material systems of power in their time. In his study, John Street and D. Wilkinson found that the moral panic that followed the group's "Anarchy in the UK" single was, remarkably, a powerful enough force that it created a limited but traceable impact upon systems of local governance, policing and higher education (Street and Wilkinson 2018, 287). Through the infamy that this moral panic engendered, the group became an international sensation, and rapidly the stereotypical punk image began to form around the persona of Sid Vicious. Marketed as something brand new, futuristic even, "this new nonretro notion of punk, uncoupled from references to 1960s bands, spread from England to North America, ultimately to dominate the discourses of punk there" (Gendron 2002, 265). By the summer of 1977, the Sex Pistols were the frame of reference for the media and the public's understanding of punk rock, a finding that has implications for how the Crash 'n' Burn and punk scene in Toronto was seen by Canadians at the time. The day after the Viletones played their first ever show, the *Globe and Mail's* entertainment section had, in bold font on its front page "Not Them! Not Here!" (Sutherland 2012, 23), as if punk were a zombifying virus that had somehow spread from the UK to Canada.

Hegemony and Aesthetic Revolt

In much of the literature on punk rock, the subculture's oppositional nature is frequently emphasized as an integral characteristic. A common notion among participants and commentators persists that to be punk is to be against the straight society of the mainstream, which is seen as a repressive force meant to keep citizens complacent, inert, and bored (see for ex: Kristiansen 2011). Beyond this, there is little agreement as to the exact specificities of punk's concrete political positions, if there are any at all. Some early groups such as The Clash recognized in this oppositional framework the seed of a direct-action radical politics, in line with the Marxist vision of revolutionary change (Faulk 2017). However, others such as the Viletones saw in this same component a lifestyle anarchism and casual deviance which was not nearly as rigorous in its political goals, focusing instead on the shock possibilities afforded by an oppositionally deviant cultural stance.¹² Keeping in mind the aforementioned historical context, I will now turn to a more theoretical examination of the structuring concept of hegemony, which will be useful in understanding these gradations of political allegiance in punk rock rhetoric.

Ground zero for subcultural theory is the celebrated, but much critiqued, Birmingham School of cultural studies. Active throughout the 1970s as the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), this group of authors were committed to a radically interdisciplinary lens through which to analyze cultural phenomena – the study of subculture was only one of many topics they were involved in. In 1975, the work of the CCCS' subcultures group was published in the collection *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (Hall and Jefferson 1975), which elaborated a theory of youth culture as a symptom of social and political

¹² The strategies of the Viletones are in fact in line with many of the artistic avant-garde's arguments for destabilizing social norms and society through subversive actions. I see this as parallel or overlapping to the Marxist approach of proletarian consciousness raising, both seek to provoke but merely for different ends.

change in the post-war period. In the first chapter of their book, building on the work of Stanley Cohen, Hall and Jefferson suggest a basic formula to understand subculture. In capitalist societies there is a dominant culture to which other cultural configurations are subordinate, which maintains its grip via an implied consensus – through cultural hegemony.¹³ Within both dominant and subordinate groups there are an increasing number of *subcultures*, generally youth cultures that, by exploring new patterns of life, attempt to symbolically solve the contradictions implicit in their parent cultures. So, for example, Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson see UK subcultures like the Teddy Boys, Mods, and Skinheads as a progression of youth cultures articulated against a working-class parent culture. In all three cases, unusual fashion choices, musical choices, etc., are a way of declaring independence from what was at the time a rigid class system in Britain. In the first two cases, this involved appropriating elements from the dominant culture, such as Edwardian suits, as a subversive attempt by subcultural participants to separate themselves from both their parent culture (working-class) and from the dominant culture (bourgeoisie and upper-class). This finding fed into Dick Hebdige's semiotic reading in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Hebdige, 1977) where he writes, "the tensions between dominant and subordinate groups can be found reflected in the surfaces of subculture - in the styles made up of mundane objects which have a double meaning" (Hebdige 1979, 2). Extending his analysis into punk, Hebdige claims the challenge these groups present to hegemony is

¹³ The concept of hegemony involves several interlocking definitions, and has significant overlap with related concepts such as 'Cultural Resistance'. What specific sense of 'cultural resistance' is meant here? In brief, cultural hegemony can be defined as "a historical process in which the dominant group exercises 'moral and intellectual leadership' throughout society by winning 'consent' of the people" (Kim 2001, 742-46). The power of the bourgeois class thus becomes naturalized and enshrined within the culture of the oppressed classes. Gramsci, a Marxist, takes this idea to its logical conclusion, and defines culture as the battleground upon which revolution is won and lost in the contemporary context. Put another way, "the dominant order can be challenged and contested through popular resistance directed in various cultural forms and practices" (Kim, 742). To add a modern-day example, U.S. congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is an excellent model of an individual who has so far been successful in challenging the cultural hegemony in that country.

expressed obliquely through their unique artifices, through which a subculture seeks to detach itself from the “taken-for-granted landscape of normalized forms” (Hebdige 1979, 19) and to create a more oppositional style in its place.

In subcultural analysis of this type, punk is seen as the next in a line of working-class subcultures; an assumption that was only partially correct in the UK context, and was largely inaccurate in the North American one. In a study by David Laing, it was found that 43% of British punk rockers were in fact from middle-class backgrounds (Laing 1985, 167). Of these actors, Laing found that many were students at art colleges in London and the surrounding area, a finding that supports Simon Frith and Howard Horne’s thesis in *Art Into Pop* (see page: 9-10). Other criticisms often levelled at the CCCS are its alleged essentialism (especially when it comes to class categories), and the seeming unawareness of women and their place within these spaces (McRobbie 1991, 16-34). In my view, the latter criticism is mostly correct; these writers failed to acknowledge both the real existence and importance of women in developing the punk scene, as well as the hegemonically masculinist tendencies of the subculture that may have kept women away in some instances. An example of erasure in the first instance is the failure of both biographical and academic accounts of early punk to mention the important figure of Judy Nylon. As someone who maintained close friendships with the likes of John Cale and Brian Eno, she bridged gaps between the North American and British underground, as well as the avant-garde and pop worlds of the 1970s (Gallix 2017, 1-7).

Despite these obvious limitations, some of which could partly be accounted for by their historical positionality, I do not agree with the tendency for much of the work critical of the CCCS to simply ‘throw out the baby with the bathwater’. Many of these studies do not go beyond critique to offer any alternative model to Hall and Jefferson, other than a vague appeal

for more empirically grounded research (Hall and Jefferson 2006, xiii). To return to the allegation of class essentialism, this particular point deserves particular scrutiny and contextualization, as it touches on much larger debates in academic circles between Marxist and non-Marxist writers. To understand why class remains a static dimension in the centre's work, it can help to consider Marx's theories and doctrines, to which the CCCS generally subscribed. In the orthodox Marxist worldview, the working class has an ontological centrality as the privileged agent of revolutionary change (Laclau 2011). Marx saw history as an unfolding dialectic process between an oppressed and an oppressor class, with capitalism being merely the next phase after feudalism in the chain of historical causality. Writing shortly after the apex of the industrial revolution, he hypothesized that a growing proletariat (working-class) would soon rise up against the bourgeois land owners and seize the means of production, ushering in a socialist utopia that would 'solve' the long dialectic process and usher in an age of prosperity. The failure of the left to bring about this future, along with the historical change from an industrial to a post-industrial society, precipitated a crisis in the Marxist tradition.

Ten years after *Resistance Through Rituals* was published, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe tried to pick up the thread and envision a post-Marxism with hegemony as its structuring principle. Laclau and Mouffe undertook a thorough deconstruction of the discourses of classical Marxism, thus acknowledging longstanding criticisms, especially those from feminist critics. Going further than a simple revision of Marx, they argue for a full reconstitution of the leftist political imaginary, right down to very basic principles. They write:

This is how the discourses that constituted the field of classical Marxism may help to form the thinking of a new left: by bequeathing some of their concepts, transforming or abandoning others, and diluting themselves in that infinite intertextuality of emancipatory discourses in which the plurality of the social takes shape. (Laclau 2011, 5)

Their treatment of Hegemony is a veritable transformation, although the basics are borrowed from Gramsci. Hegemony is shown to be the field on which both progressive and conservative impulses battle for control of the social space, aiming to either legitimize inequalities or to establish a vision of social division on a new and more equal basis. In other words, Hegemony is the "institution of the social, that is, of the definition and articulation of social relations in a field criss-crossed with antagonisms" (Laclau 2011, 153). Interestingly, Laclau and Mouffe chose to abandon the Base-Superstructure thesis from Marx, the very same concept that animates Gramsci. They refute the economic bias in Marx's work, which claims that a successful economic strategy will inevitably result in political and social effects (aka. the base shapes the superstructure). Laclau and Mouffe sought to untether Marx's superstructure from the base, and to free the process of hegemony from superstructure, and in doing so opened up new pathways for the radical political imagination that have since been taken up by Žižek, Badiou, and other theorists from the new generation (Johnston 2009).

By very briefly discussing Marx, Laclau and Mouffe, I am trying to show how the Birmingham School can be contextualized within a Marxist tradition that was facing tough questions that did not yet have answers. The CCCS wrote at a time, post-Frankfurt school, when revisionism rather than dogmatism was the favoured approach for theorists within the Marxist tradition, but were still too early to be influenced by the clean break from orthodoxy that came in the 1980s. To summarize my position in regards to Hall and Hebdige, I would like to suggest an approach not dissimilar to Laclau and Mouffe's treatment of texts by Marx. By adopting some concepts, like hegemony as a process underpinning subculture, while rejecting others, such as an overly-rigid class structure, we can undertake a reading that acknowledges punk's structural and oppositional characteristics, while allowing for what Laclau and Mouffe call "a flux of

intertextual emancipatory discourses” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 5) to leave their imprint on our understanding of it.

Pop Art Subversion

Another cultural movement frequently referenced as an intellectual basis for reading the revolutionary potential of punk is Situationism. The situationist international (or SI) were a group of European theorists and artistic practitioners who combined Marxism with the ideas of the 20th century Avant-Garde, generating a critique of contemporary consumer society that shows the sense of powerlessness that characterizes modern life to be a direct result of capitalist relations (Plant 2002). Active from the late 1950s through the late 1960s, the SI’s critical project was relatively short lived in its pure form, but the tendrils of its influence can be felt throughout postmodern theory (Plant 2002), and in the various offshoot pro-situ¹⁴ groups that take up the core cause while offering their own interpretations and perspectives. One such group was King Mob, an English radical group active in the late 1960s and early 1970s who advocated a particular strain of cultural anarchy that was unusually receptive to popular culture (most radicals at the time were still quite resistant). One infrequent member of this group was Malcolm McLaren, who would later utilize his familiarity with situationist sloganeering to develop his concept and marketing strategy for the Sex Pistols (Home 1988). In this case, often cited as definitive proof of a radical/intellectual basis to punk, the connection to situationism is already twice removed, thus making these associations tenuous at best. Additionally, the spread of the situationist reading of punk was contingent on McLaren’s own messianic self-mythologizing of the group, lending an aura of legitimacy and intellectual veneer to generalizing claims such as

¹⁴ Groups that were sympathetic to or adjacent to the politics of situationism without being specifically connected to the Situationist International.

the one that punk had permanently altered popular music and even the world, or was “the culmination of a ‘secret history’ of revolutionary avant-gardists” (Court 2015, 418).

Some of the debates about the connection of punk to situationism were directly addressed by members of King Mob, resulting in a text that is important to my study entitled *The End of Music* (1978). In this text, David Wise uses situationist theory to argue that punk, from its inception, was not a revolt against capitalism at all and in fact acted in complicity with the mores of the UK’s bourgeoisie. Wise’s argument is in two parts: first, that “the insipidness, (within of course its own terms) of early to mid 1970s rock, didn’t produce an active revolt against the musical spectacle but *merely* the urge to update it”, and second, that this update took the form of “a movement through trends in consumption for modernizing capitalism” (Wise 1978, 2. Emphasis in original). Punk is framed as an agent of bourgeois values in a campaign to update said values for the contemporary world, and thus becomes a vehicle for the final (and fatal) recuperation of the anarchist impulse into a capitalist framework.¹⁵ In other words, in this reading punk is said to have opened the floodgates for radical identity to be reformulated as yet another optional choice to be governed by consumption. By assuming the logic of capital, the very oppositional impulse of punk becomes the commodity to be sold, and thus the category is emptied of all prior political meaning. David Wise’s argument here resonates with another pro-situ writer, Sadie Plant, who argues: “indeed, punk was accommodated so swiftly that the possibility was raised that it was in some sense already recuperated before it had even begun” (Plant 1992, 144). If this was truly the case, and the oppositional character of punk was only ever

¹⁵ Situationist theory considered itself to be outside of the net of capitalist relations, and thus in positing its relationship to capitalist forms they theorized two related terms: detournement and recuperation. Detournement can be defined as “turning the establishment’s codes, forms and values (i.e. the hit parade) against itself” (Vermorels, 273-274; cited in Frith 1987, 131), whereas Recuperation represents the inverse process “whereby the establishment (i.e. record companies) absorbs criticism by patronising it, turning its negative (i.e. creative) value into positive (i.e. appreciative and celebratory values)” (Vermorels, 273-73).

a mirage hiding a much more simple transformation from one spectacle to another, then what are we to make of the accounts of Stuart Hall, and Dick Hebdige?¹⁶ And on a higher level, if even the most radical of gestures are immediately submitted to the logic of capital is any form of dissent now a futile pursuit? These questions formed the basis of an influential art movement to which I now turn.

Pop art as a movement upended the entire framework of high art/mass culture, institutional/avant-garde that had governed the discourses of the art world up to that point. One of the goals of the movement was to develop an aesthetic through which to appreciate mass production, and to create a technique through which artists could apply lessons learned from mass culture to their own work (Frith and Horne 1987, 104). In doing so, pop artists seemed to implicitly critique dominant notions of good taste, suggesting that what is good art is often determined by the taste of the ruling class of the period. In Andy Warhol's practice, he subverts this taste hierarchy by proclaiming that the best art must be that which is the most democratic (popular), and the only way to determine what is popular is by which art makes the most money. Thus, the truest indicator of artistic value is market success (Frith and Horne 1987, 109). Although to a staunch Marxist Warhol's position here may seem rather crass, there is a certain brilliance to his ironic logic that is hard to overlook. According to Frith, "for Warhol this move wasn't a moral or aesthetic decision but a necessary effect of the conditions of mass communication" (Frith and Horne 1987, 110). If, in our age of advertising and communication technologies the only honest thing left for an artist to do is to trivialize everything by refusing deeper questions of value, where does that leave possibilities for dissent?

¹⁶ This specific topic – whether the situationist critique disproves the thesis of the CCCS – is too broad and theoretical to be fully fleshed out here. As far as I am aware of no authors have attempted to answer this question as of yet, making it a potentially fruitful future avenue in which to continue my research.

Simon Frith argues that for pop artists, music offered a solution to the dilemma of how to be subversive in a culture of commodities. He suggests that "the best pop musicians respond to the ideological problems of their place in a commercial process" (Frith and Horne 1987, 25), and that groups are often forced to negotiate between what he calls artifice at one pole and authenticity at the other. He claims that a notion of authenticity borrowed from 19th-century Romanticism became the driving force behind many innovations in rock and other popular musics, beginning in the 1950s with jazz and culminating in the British scene of the 1960s, which spawned widely influential and commercially successful groups such as the Rolling Stones and The Beatles (Frith and Horne 1987, 71-123). Central to Frith's argument is the contention that the free-form nature of art college at the time enabled a certain attitude towards creativity that could not have been fostered in a more institutional or commercial setting, and that art colleges therefore served as one crucial site for the fostering of new experimental forms of popular music. In turn, more experimental and intellectually-engaged forms of popular music gave artists an opportunity to bring their newfound sensibilities to bear on everyday life. In Frith's words: "in the 1960s art school students became rock and roll musicians and in doing so inflected pop music with bohemian dreams and Romantic fancies and laid out the ideology of 'rock' - on the one hand a new art form, on the other a new community" (Frith and Horne 1987, 73).

David Bowie is an especially significant figure in this connection, since his unique sound and image masterfully treaded between rock concepts of authenticity and artifice, pop and art, and went on to influence typical punk approaches to these same categories. In his study of Bowie and Warhol, Cagle shows how both figures accomplished their visions by taking raw materials from popular sources and then transforming their contextual meanings (Cagle 1995). Through

this transformation, Cagle sees the possibility of "specific forms of dissent and "disruption" within normative structures of communication and mass mediation" (Cagle 1995, 2). In Bowie's case, the most disruptive effect was the redefining for his large audience of what sexuality is and could be, with his bisexual identity and androgynous alter-egos taking on a pivotal role in a queer interpretation of his work. In Warhol's case, his disruption seemed to "ironically expose the commodity nature of *all* art" (Cagle 1995, 10) by creating works of art that are explicitly meant to be a reproduction of a commodity (e.g., Campbell's soup cans and Brillo boxes). By cleverly using the codes of art against themselves in order to make a statement on the role of art in industrial society, Warhol actually follows quite closely the impetus behind the early 20th century avant-garde he seemed to have rejected.

Avant-Garde Performance

In the context of art, the term avant-garde is used to denote a wide variety of styles and sensibilities that share a common oppositional tendency in relation to the mainstream's artistic establishment. The first avant-gardes were mostly a geographically specific French phenomenon confined to the medium of painting (O'Pray 2003), but the term gained wider currency throughout the 20th century as a successive series of movements including Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, Expressionism and finally Conceptual Art, repeatedly challenged artistic mainstreams. That each of these movements were reactive in nature, and often incorporated elements critical of society at large, suggests a set of historical relations (O'Pray 2003, 4). The distinction between avant-garde and mainstream art is contingent on the particular configuration of social and cultural conditions at a particular time, and this dialectical relationship is ever shifting (Taylor 1995).

By the mid 1970s, one theme that emerged from avant-garde artistic circles was a renewed focus on the body as a site of resistance, a concern that resonated with the emergent women's liberation movement, queer politics, and the medium of performance art. In Toronto, a queer focused, postmodern artistic sensibility emerged led by the artist collective General Idea and present in magazines such as *The Body Politic*, a publication which covered art and queer themes reflecting the gay communities present in Toronto. Another camp, led by CEAC, attempted to continue a radical artistic trajectory that had begun in the 1960s, following the groundwork of conceptual art laid by groups such as Fluxus and in countercultural happenings, while emphasizing a philosophy of liberation that sometimes intersected with leftist politics. A primary influence of CEAC's approach to conceptualism was New York City's Art & Language group, who advanced a spectacularly radical vision of conceptual art in its journal *The Fox* that "promoted the rhetorical style of a self-doubting Conceptualism taken towards the limits of an increasingly frustrated Marxist analysis of art" (Taylor 1995, 32). The frustrated tone of the contemporary orthodox Marxist artist was present in the work of the Art & Language-influenced Centre for Experimental Art and Communication (CEAC) in Toronto, whose Behaviour School seminars and publication *Art Communication Edition* attempted to advance a position as the "antithesis of all ideology" (CEAC 1977) in order to carve a space for the artists outside of capitalist interests from which to critique capitalism's machinations. The work of General Idea and CEAC will be examined in further depth in chapters three and four respectively, as I draw on their aesthetic concepts to formulate an explanation for their alliances with Toronto's punk rock scene.

The realignment of the values of the art world in the 1970s thus coincided roughly with the emergence of punk, but curiously it was a much earlier avant-gardist formation that primarily

influenced the development of punk's unique aesthetic. Techniques from the early 20th century avant-garde, most prominently Dada and Russian Futurism, were explicitly adopted by British groups such as The Clash. From the former, punk inherited its anti-art, anti-society antagonisms (Goldberg 2011, 182), along with its advocacy for the blurring of boundaries between art and everyday life, performer and audience (Henry 1984, 30). And from the latter, most critically, came the impetus to take your art to the streets through a costume or character. According to Tricia Henry, "the punks used fashion as a revolutionary tool in much the same way the Russian futurists had" (Henry 1984, 30), that is to say, they aimed to provoke a much wider swath of the public by presenting themselves in character at all times and risking potential harassment and abuse as a result. Many of these tactics had been taken up by more recent avant-gardes like the Situationists (see previous section) in the 1960s, so the manner through which they entered the DNA of punk is muddled and unclear. As an important caveat, influence was always a manner of individual interpretation, and one intellectually inclined punk musician would have had a much different palate than another.

Supposing that these appropriations from the artistic avant-garde were being emulated directly from early 20th century movements, then why was it that punk's references were so dated? According to Stuart Home, the answer was that "the backwardness of British art schools, the environment from which much of the original punk milieu emerged, resulted in a familiarity with early manifestations of the utopian avant-garde combined with an ignorance of its post-war developments" (Home 1988, 81). To the degree that this may be true in the British case, it would likely apply in the Canadian context as well (Miller 2005). But there are also other factors at play in the relative conservatism of punk's borrowings from the avant-garde. The art world is bounded by a discourse of formalism that popular music in general lacks, and even in cases

where art tries to escape these constraints it is still constrained by its own institutionalization. One result of this was the consistently self-critical nature of much 20th-century art from Dada onwards, creating an expectation of constant change and flux. Popular music, on the other hand, has been relatively free to pick and choose materials from the entirety of its history without generally yielding to the same systematizing impulse. What this creates is a paradoxical dynamic where pop music tends to be both more conservative and less constrained than the art world, by virtue of not having to fit the implied seriousness of a cohesive movement or an official cultural institution, allowing of course for outliers at both ends.¹⁷ The resultant dynamic is that in cases where art influences music, the latter gains an extra measure of intellectual content and an enhanced respectability in some circles, and conversely, in cases where music influences art, art absorbs a new sense of novelty and currency, owing to musical culture's predilection towards recombining unique combinations of elements into new forms. Nowhere in the history of the art/pop relationship was this dynamic more potent than in the relationship between the punk aesthetic and the art world, where the former became a tool that the latter could use to augment their existing aesthetic concerns, and a vehicle through which some of the more petrified norms of an institutionalized art world could be overcome.

Focusing on the perspective of the art work, RosaLee Goldberg writes about specific overlaps between punk and the art world, such as the work of artists Cosey Fanni Tutti and Genesis P. Orridge, who merged performance art with industrial music at COUM transmission and later as Throbbing Gristle, as well as a more diffuse influence of the *punk aesthetic* on fashion, and attitude (Goldberg 2011). In the wake of punk, a new generation of performance artists emerged: "Their new style of performance, while reflecting the punk aesthetic, with its

¹⁷ Some examples on the music end would include post-punk and nowave groups like Pere Ubu and Gang of Four. On the art end, we have ludic focused artists such as General Idea.

anarchistic and overtly sadistic and erotic attitudes, was, at the same time, a sophisticated blend of recent performance precedents with their own life styles and sensibilities" (Goldberg 2011, 183). Although the avant-garde punk connection was undeniable, Goldberg emphasizes that it does have its limits, writing that "the transition from art to anti-art punk was, for many artists, not absolute, in that they still considered much of their work as artists' performance" (Goldberg 2011, 182). The distinction she makes here is certainly below the level of appearances, suggesting that what can be said to constitute music and what is art is in large part a matter of intention (and possibly of formal training). Resonances of this theme – the artist as punk band as performance art – could be found in the Toronto scene; for example, Michaele Jordana of The Poles had been active as a performance artist for years before joining the group, and would often perform in bondage, a common theme in 1970s performance art. There was thus a symbiotic relationship between punk and the art world, not always on the direct level of art-theoretical discourse, but rather, on the ambient level of aesthetical influence.

Some artists based in Toronto had a notable interest in the avant-garde punk connection. Particularly for General Idea, who got their start in the late 1960s, punk became a necessary ingredient in overcoming their hippie roots. In 1971, General Idea founded A Space, which became a leading site in the artist-run system of galleries in Canada, which in a very 1960s gesture was nicknamed the Eternal Network. This position in the art world, although it gave them prominence, was by the late 1970s a reason to call General Idea out of touch remnants of the hippie era (Monk 2016, 187-192). Regarding hippies as out of touch was an attitude many young punk fans shared, and thus they had something that General Idea, and the Canadian art scene by extension, needed; an opening to overcome the recent past and an invitation to create a new aesthetic ideology. In the next two chapters, I will build on Monk's brief description of an

art-theoretical basis to Toronto's particular art/pop overlap, expanding some elements and modifying others, while comparing this case study against the larger concerns outlined in this chapter, and keeping in mind insights gained from the 'street' level of the punk community as discussed in chapter one.

Chapter Three

The General Idea Crowd: Subculture, Queer Culture and Outsider Deviancy

Thus far, I have examined the art/music overlap in Toronto primarily through a discussion of the impact of art school education on the creative processes and social networks of early punk/new wave groups. In chapter two, I hinted at an additional layer of involvement in this relationship, wherein a symbiotic influence existed between avant-garde performance art and punk performance. The former's historical movements were shown to provide a precedent for the development of the latter's confrontational style, and subsequently the art world returned the favour by absorbing some of punk's motifs and aesthetic into their own work. In Toronto, this avant-garde tendency was present and was mixed together with many other threads of influence and collaboration to create an eclectic art/music mosaic. In this chapter I will focus on one group in particular, the artist collective General Idea, discussing their writings about punk in *FILE Magazine*, their Factory-esque enlisting of The Dishes as house band, and the subcultural scene of new wave aficionados that sprung up around their activities. This chapter moves towards a perspective on my case study that is framed more by the ideas and work of artists rather than by a musicological reading of punk, however, certain critical issues raised here will have broader applicability to Toronto's art/music scene as a totality.

General Idea were a collective active from 1969 to 1994, comprised of artists AA Bronson, Felix Partz, and Jorge Zontal. Throughout their career, they interrogated a range of controversial topics including the effects of new media, popular culture, queer identity, and (later) the politics of the AIDS crisis (Smith 2016, 3-18). In the mid 1970s, General Idea were engaged in a period of myth-making where they were concerned with carving out an image of themselves, as well as the Canadian art scene at large, that could easily be identified, processed

and consumed by an international audience. This image was performative in function; enabled by new advances in film and photographic art, General Idea sought to create in Toronto an art scene that was ‘looking at itself’, and through this introspective reflection its mirror (films, photographs) would become indistinguishable from reality, and thus manifest *as* its reality.

Philip Monk explains this strategy in detail: “This is a thing that makes Toronto distinctive, not just this co-operative production or staging, but also the *fictional* image artists sustained of an art scene before it was recognised as one – and that helped usher it in” (Monk 2016, 8). Toronto artists had a rare opportunity to create this conceptual art scene from scratch, due to a confluence of factors including the absence of a guiding local movement in contemporary art, and a derelict downtown core devoid of any cultural activities (Monk 2016, 8). For most of the 20th century, Canada had followed along with whatever artistic movement was current in New York at the time – from expressionism to pop art to minimalism. In the mid 1970s, though, a certain post-movement sensibility had crept into the art world, giving a colonial outpost like Canada an opportunity to define its own course. In Toronto, and for General Idea especially, this meant an opportunity to dramatically alter the very structure of what an art world could look like, and thus they repudiated the old guard of establishment artists (who at the time were largely based in commercial Yorkville galleries) and created an alternative to the alternative of existing institutions.

General Idea’s contributions to the building of a Canadian art world began in the late 1960s, when they came into contact with Intermedia in Vancouver, the first centre in what would become an official artist-run system of galleries, showcasing “experimental projects such as video works, performance art, and conceptual art” (Smith 2016. 55), as well as more traditional forms. As stewards of this network, General Idea helped guide many policy decisions, and

established their own organization in 1974 called Art Metropole, whose space in Toronto became a key distributor of artists' books, videos, posters, and more (Smith 2016, 55). Additionally, General Idea were heavily involved in the operations of A Space, another artist-run gallery that you may recall played host to the pivotal Talking Heads/Diodes concert, as well as Michael Jordana's punk/performance art project. A Space describe their past mandate on their website as an "innovative space dedicated to exploring current ideas in art, A Space was a place for alternative music, poetry, dance, video and performance throughout the 70s."¹⁸ Note how many different multimedia categories are mentioned here. For the purposes of my study, I will not have space to survey relevant work in poetry, dance, or video, but there were certainly overlaps (at least in audience) at the time between those mediums and the punk scene. Through General Idea's involvement with A Space, we can see their ideological commitment to artistic cross-relations, and to breaking down the boundaries between what used to be self-contained forms.

In 1972, General Idea began regularly publishing a magazine called *FILE Magazine*. The title is an anagram of LIFE magazine – whose font and format are purposely mimicked in the cover design (see fig. 1, p. 59), a gesture that drew from GI's interest in crafting a self-referential semiological universe and their conviction that "in order to be glamorous we had to become plagiarists, intellectual parasites" (General Idea 1975, 22). This mimicry is reminiscent of authors such as Roland Barthes and Marshall McLuhan, both of whom were interested in creating sophisticated techniques to deconstruct mass culture and in doing so to reveal what these forms may have to say about our culture's hidden ideologies. As Philip Monk puts it, "the function of structuralism is to render an 'object' intelligible; the function of semiology, or at least the mythology practiced by Barthes, is to render an image suspect. So constructed, object and

¹⁸ "History + Mandate," A Space Gallery, accessed March 4, 2019, <https://aspacegallery.org/?m=page&tag=about>.

image are seen to be artificial, which counters the usual case where an image authorises itself as something natural” (Monk 2016, 55). In General Idea’s work, the structuralist and the semiological, or the closely related constructive and the deconstructive impulses, are both equally present, often times simultaneously, creating a fluidity within their application of these theoretical texts. One strength of this method was to create a body of work that was critical yet managed to avoid some of the baggage that came with a traditionally Marxist critique of class-based society. At the time, this was a relatively new idea in contemporary art: “the novel idea was not necessarily to critique an image already there, but to perform another in its place” (Monk 2016, 29). Thus, General Idea would pick a form such as a tabloid magazine, or a beauty pageant, and occupy the form’s semiotic codes in order to parasitically deconstruct its associated mythologies and erect a glamorous art statement in their place – technique they called an ‘image virus’ (Smith 2016, 43). In chapter four, I will examine the counter argument to General Idea’s image virus, which was seen by some other punk-related Toronto artists as “avant-garde mystification” (Monk 2016, 118)¹⁹ that failed to adequately address the horrors and contradictions of modern capitalism.

In the fall of 1977, General Idea released an issue of *FILE* titled “Punk ‘til you Puke” (fig. 2, p. 59), which included essays on musical culture from AA Bronson, and spreads on international groups as well as Toronto locals like The Curse and Viletones (General Idea 1977). This wasn’t the first time *FILE* had included punk and new wave affiliated groups in its pages; as early as 1974 they promoted The Residents’ first LP, and “Cosey Fanni Tutti, later a member of

¹⁹ This phrase was first used by Amerigo Marras of CEAC to criticize artists like General Idea in a Joint Statement by the ‘Central Strike Committee’, who published the rebranded *STRIKE* during CEAC’s radical 1978 period. The title of the statement was “Dissidence in the 1978 Venice Biennale,” and the full context is: “Our general purpose is to communicate not posture; avant-garde mystification must be countered by de-mystification. Therefore we wish to be as clear as possible so that response is to our ideas and not to their appearance; not as recent modernists who now use politics as yet another gambit” (Marras 1978).

Throbbing Gristle, then a performance artist, appeared on the *recto* and *verso* covers of a ‘fake’ issue, also called *FILE*, included within an actual issue” (Miller 2005, 33). This shows that General Idea were from the beginning quite attuned to the percolating proto-punk sensibility, or at least towards the more explicitly avant-garde and art-oriented contingents therein.

The “Punk ‘til you Puke” issue of *FILE* was published right as the Crash ‘n’ Burn was winding down, and after punk had become a worldwide cultural phenomenon that was increasingly being divested of its underground origins. Thus, when AA Bronson writes, in his article “Pogo Dancing in the British Aisles,” about the “Punk Machine,” this is likely based on his own observations at the Crash ‘n’ Burn, which he chose to generalize in order to discuss the punk phenomena more broadly. He writes: “200 fans in a closed environment pump and strain in pogo rhythms, sex pistons, an essential component of the musician/audio equipment/audience desiring machine. Spitting provides the electrical connection that bypasses the contained sexuality of the family to power this group desire” (General Idea 1977, 17). In a fascinating confluence of two very different worlds, AA Bronson brings French Philosophy to bear on the punk phenomena – the “desiring machines” concept comes from Deleuze and Guattari’s now classic text *Anti-Oedipus*. The concept in short is that desire is not superfluous but in fact productive, a desiring machine is a node in the larger social fabric, and thus the creation of new desires can prove explosive: “there is no desiring-machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire social sectors” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 340). The Crash ‘n’ Burn was unequivocally a place where new desire was manufactured (as is often the case in subcultural spaces), and this appear to be corroborated by John Hamilton:

It was a physical experience being in there. It was boiling hot, people were wearing virtually no clothing and what they were wearing was usually soaked in beer. There was this light green, snotty-looking speed people were doing and it was really energetic and the music and all that complemented it. People would just go crazy; they really would go

crazy. It reminded me of Stonehenge or some kind of voodoo ceremony. (Worth 2011, 106)

The image Hamilton conjures of the CNB is one of quasi-religious sentiment crossed with an undercurrent of uninhibited sexuality. These qualities of physicality was part of what drew the members of General Idea to punk, giving them the inspiration to complete a transition within their own practice. Philip Monk devotes an entire chapter to the “House Punk” of Toronto’s art scene, drawing three primary conclusions regarding the importance of the music to General Idea. His first conclusion is that the subculture provided a model for securing a niche audience. Recalling the discussion of hegemony in chapter two, we can see how the model of cultural revolution that punks saw as an ideal required a strict separation between a dominant culture and an oppositional one. Notwithstanding the problematic elements of such a strict delineation between an “us” and a “them” (the situationist critique contends that any ‘opposition’ from the ‘outside’ is a delusion since all will inevitably be recuperated into the wide net of capitalist relations²⁰), the counter-hegemonic character of punk was very effective in creating a subculture whose coded style was initially inscrutable to the dominant culture. What General Idea wanted to emulate was not necessarily the content (of a Stuart Hall type politics) but the method (of a Hebdigean subcultural style): “The art scene needed just the right amount of visibility to make it a subset, a subculture, a unique art scene, but also the covert and subtle manipulation of styles and codes of belonging to make it obscure” (Monk 2016, 210).

²⁰ See Chapter two, especially (Wise 1978).

Fig. 1 Fig. 2

The second effect punk had on General Idea, according to Monk, was it allowed them to overcome the baggage of their history as a group; their involvement in correspondence art and the artist-run network in the 1960s and early 1970s had associated them with the hippie movement in the eyes of the art consuming public. In the editorial for the “Punk ‘til you Puke” issue, AA Bronson writes that “the sentimentalism of late 60s early 70s essentially surrealistic aesthetic has been replaced by a certain pragmatic anarchy which is now the theme of this issue” (General Idea 1977, 11). The shift towards pragmatic anarchy was not simply rhetoric coming from General Idea; they took the destructive impulse to heart when they (metaphorically) torched their long-standing conceptual set piece *Miss General Idea Pavilion*, creating a video work entitled *The Ruins of the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion*. Philip Monk implicates punk in this act of destruction: “Now having never existed, the Pavilion was never literally destroyed. But General Idea destroyed its underlying system to the degree they could never go back. Under what reckless impulse were they so destructive? Blame punk” (Monk 2016, 187). Punk supplied fuel to General Idea’s fire at a time when their status in the international art world was on the rise. The group had their first solo museum exhibition in Amsterdam in 1979 and continued to receive attention in Europe throughout the early 1980s until, in 1984, they were invited to put together a large-scale touring retrospective titled *The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion*, solidifying their status as a major name in contemporary art (Smith 2016, 12).

The third effect Philip Monk cites as impacting the output of General Idea was that punk encouraged an open confrontation with social norms, including those surrounding sexuality and sexual orientation. According to Monk:

General idea would re-tool and re-invest in a new language to discuss the body, sexuality, and homosexuality in ways that were more aggressive and open than the disguised and sentimentalist camp strategies of their earlier work. You could say that. Coincident with

General Idea's Anti-Oedipal conversion, punk brought queer to the fore in their world.
(Monk 2016, 187)

The cultural context of mid-1970s Toronto was exceptionally conservative by today's standards. Homosexuality, although it had been decriminalized in 1969, was still considered deviant behaviour by the courts and by the public at large. This was underscored on December 30th, 1977, when the office of Toronto's gay liberation magazine *The Body Politic* was raided by police for the "possession of obscene material for the purpose of distribution."²¹ Ostensibly, the raid was a part of the city's response to the sexual assault and murder of twelve year old Emanuel Jaques by three men on the Yonge Street strip, but it seems more likely that this tragedy was exploited in order to discipline any individual perceived as a degenerate or as an outsider. A positive effect of this uncomfortable new level of surveillance was that "the raid and subsequent court battle united Toronto's gay and artist communities in political solidarity for the first time" (Monk 2016, 209). Together, these marginalized communities understood the police raids as both discrimination and censorship, and in the case of General Idea this led to a lifetime of committed LGBTQ activism and an increasing depiction of homosexual themes in their work that culminated in 1987 with their *AIDS* series - an image virus play on the ubiquitous *LOVE* logo by artist Robert Indiana (Smith 2016, 59).

In Toronto, punk became deeply interconnected with these same gay and artist communities through its involvement with collectives like General Idea and CEAC (who also identified as queer), and through the influential sensibilities of two local groups; The Curse and The Dishes. The Curse were not explicitly queer-identifying as far as my research has shown, but the feminist attitudes they injected into Toronto's scene were undoubtedly influential in shifting

²¹ "TIMELINE | Same-sex Rights in Canada," CBC, accessed January 31, 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/timeline-same-sex-rights-in-canada-1.1147516>.

this subculture towards a more accepting stance regarding marginalized groups in general. After the Emanuel Jaques incident and the subsequent crack down on the gay community, The Curse released their single "Shoeshine Boy," a cutting critique of the manner in which the case was handled. In *Treat Me Like Dirt*, a fan lauds the group for their explicitly feminist stance: "it was very exciting to see women so sensual in music. In writing it, playing it, and telling men to go fuck themselves in a political and productive forum. That, to me, was the thing that drew me the most to them" (Worth 2011, 83). Comments like this one resonate with Judy Nylon's assessment of the actual environment for women in early (aka. pre-Sex Pistols) punk rock versus the later stereotypical view of the subculture as male-dominated or chauvinistic. Nylon writes: "Until the record companies stepped in, in London, where I was, at street level, punk was drenched in equality. Male punks might have been violent when pushed, but they were also engaged with feminism, vegetarianism and secularism in daily life. Nobody preached; they just walked it as a given" (Nylon 2017, 6). It must be nuanced here, that certainly not all male punks were committed to equality even at this early stage, and certainly this was the case in Toronto. The character of Steven Leckie, aka. Nazi Dog, would almost certainly be considered problematic by the standards of today's social justice infused independent music scenes; he would frequently hurl the expletive f*ggot as an insult of choice, and is pictured groping Lucasta Rochas of the B-Girls in a shoot for the opening of the Crash 'n' Burn. At a Viletones gig at the New Yorker Theatre in 1977, Anna Bourque of the Curse returned the favour, unzipping Leckie's pants and fondling his penis for a few seconds (see: Pyle 2011, 75). It's questionable whether this was a demonstration of equality or simple payback, but either way a statement was made, and the other members of Viletones laughed with Bourque for her audacity.

As has been shown previously, The Dishes were instrumental in planting the seeds in early 1976 that would blossom into Toronto's punk scene. It is not an inconsequential detail that frontman Steven Davey explicitly identified as queer; the upfront sexuality of the group was part of their subversive appeal and unique aesthetic. Partly because of the early influence of the Dishes' residency at The Beverley, the emerging alternative gay culture in Toronto cultivated deep ties with the new wave and punk scene (and art scene), arguably more so than in similar centres like New York and London (Sutherland 2012, 101). Furthermore, groups like the Dishes became a blueprint for the later emergence of queercore (or homocore) in the early 1980s, putting Toronto at the forefront of this emerging genre internationally (Sutherland 2012, 107). The alliance of these two fringe groups had less to do with Canada being perceived as a liberal or progressive country, and more to do with the scale involved. Canada was in fact a relatively conservative nation in the 1970s, and boasted a much smaller population than the United States or the UK. Within this context both the gay community and the punk community were seen as outsiders by the dominant culture, and thus part of their alliance became one of mere survival. As the art scene too began to be more frequently portrayed by authorities as deviant following the crack downs in late 1977 (a tension that had surely been building for some time before), they naturally formed a closer solidarity with these other marginal groups. This disparate and eclectic network of individuals lived outside of the norms of the dominant culture and created their own institutions and subcultural spaces within its interstices. In many ways, then, my case study would appear to fit within the purview of Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's definition of a subculture in its opposition to the dominant cultural hegemony. However, there are some key differences within its class composition and social dynamics that are worth investigating in detail.

As has been mentioned, many of the artists, musicians and fans who constituted the emerging Queen Street West scene in the mid 1970s came from the more affluent suburbs of Toronto, placing them in the middle class. At first, the core audience for The Dishes at the Beverley consisted of their friends from Thornhill, and the hip OCA students who had formed a nucleus for the new wave scene at parties in the photo/electric arts department. Steven Davey (The Dishes) understood his audience well, and sought to expand beyond this core by aligning himself with the stylish art crowd even before the group became an official appendage of General Idea. By aligning themselves with the “photographers, the fashion people, people who owned stores” (Worth 2011, 35), The Dishes were able to snowball their career and create themselves as a band that was seen as forward thinking and fashion conscious. In reference to 1960s Yorkville, Henderson argues that there existed a “mutable dialectic between supposedly authentic hipsters and their inauthentic pretenders [that] seemed part of the game” (Henderson 2011, 15). An individual such as Steven Davey was well aware of these dynamics as they continued to operate into the punk era, and based on the many validating comments from scene participants quoted in *Treat Me Like Dirt*, it would seem that for many The Dishes, as well as General Idea and the rest of their entourage, would be considered to be on the ‘authentic’ side of this dialectic. This act of labelling and authenticating certain groups and behaviours based on an inherently biased and subjective set of criteria can very quickly become a problematic one, but it must also be acknowledged that this in-group/out-group dynamic was an important part of how these musicians and artists saw themselves, and how they constructed their subjectivities and subcultural affiliations. In its original African-American argot meaning, hip means to “open one’s eyes”, whether to injustice, personal truth, or to style, it is an identity that is *politicized* but not necessarily political (Henderson 2011, 13). Thus, a hip identity becomes a tool for groups

like The Dishes or General Idea who faced stigma from society at large; their creation of exclusive subcultural spaces became an act of survival and resistance, allowing them to thrive individually and collectively amongst conditions that were not always favourable.

This was the political context within which General Idea and The Dishes were operating, the background to Mark Gane's proposition that "the 1970s culture, the mainstream culture, was just so incredibly bland. The '60s were a very revolutionary time, though it never fulfilled its promises. I don't think. Then in the '70s, it was like the '60s got blanded out" (Worth 2011, 34). Punk rock was a response to this perceived temporary lull in the cultural zeitgeist, and in their own way, the developments made by performance artists were too. By the mid 1970s, it was clear that the revolutionary promise of the 1960s had been broken, and that public enthusiasm had moved on to tamer pursuits. Any would-be radicals in the art world and the alternative music world were forced to contend with this loss, and to find new ways forward. For General Idea, one part of the way forward was an adoption of the punk rock philosophy of deviance, and an embrace of a queer sexuality that had only existed under the surface of their work beforehand. Philip Monk says that deviance was used by GI "strategically between 1977 and 1979 to cultivate a separation from both the dominant culture and the vague druggy diffusiveness of the counter culture" (Monk 2016, 210). By framing earlier countercultures in such negative terms, it is clear that Monk and General Idea were antagonistic to hippies as defined by a specific stereotype or what Hall and Jefferson would call a 'tendency' within the movement (Hall and Jefferson 2006).

In the end, the hippies were really composed of two sub-groups; the first were concerned mainly with what Hall calls a 'revolution in lifestyle mysticism'; a movement for free love, peace and tolerance. The second group sought to capitalize on the openness of the moment by

pushing for direct action activism, forming successful groups like Students for a Democratic Society, a group which inspired the later work of the women's liberation movement.²² Even if General Idea were aware of the more militant variety of 1960s countercultural politics (and they surely were, given their involvement with the radical Rochdale College²³) that would hardly have mattered as the cultural winds had changed. Punk, when it first crystallized, was something brand new, and it allowed General Idea to turn the corner and leave their hippie roots behind. Monk writes: "Punk turned the art scene from sentimentality to pragmatic anarchy, from hippie to new wave, and, yes, from counterculture to subculture" (Monk 2016, 209), and this claim is worth investigating given the theoretical implications it raises for the Birmingham School theory.

One common critique of the classic subcultural theory is that it is only applicable in its purest form to UK subcultures, due to the particular rigidity of the class structure in that state, along with other features of cultural specificity. In response to this difficulty, Van Cagle has attempted to transpose subcultural theory into the more fluid class dynamics that exist in the North American context, using Andy Warhol's Factory as one of his case studies. After a sprawling analysis, Cagle concludes that "the Factory qualifies as a subculture whose tactics are comparable to those of postwar British youth subcultures," however it is "dissimilar due to the manner in which it handled class relationships" (Cagle 1995, 208). The goal of the Factory subculture was less about providing an alternative to the restrictions of a single parent culture, and more about attempting to subvert the entire class structure and replace it with a bohemian ideal of a classless society. Cagle claims that in this case the attempt was successful, and that "an

²² The establishment's response to the hippies was to accept and incorporate aspects of the former group into the dominant culture, while fiercely limiting the platform of the latter. Marcuse called this process 'Repressive Desublimation', which entailed a move from traditional class ethics to a permissiveness of consumers' desires (Marcuse 1977).

²³ See: (Smith 2016, 4)

egalitarian social system replaced the class-based society that was all too familiar to those who had gained membership [in the Factory]" (Cagle, 2009). There was indeed a great amount of levelling the playing field occurring within the factory space, however, it seems to me suspect to conclude that this process was total. The work of some anarchist thinkers has shown how class dynamics can reappear amongst even the most seemingly liberated spaces; the logic of capitalism is insidious and touches every aspect of life, there is no outside to it (see for example: Montgomery and Bergman 2017).

My case study parallels Cagle's nicely, in that General Idea were inspired by and attempted to emulate Andy Warhol and the dynamics of his Factory. The entourage that GI fostered around themselves (including The Dishes) showed a commitment to the social system aspect of bohemianism, with its implicit desire to simulate a classless society. Rather than claim that class was eliminated in Toronto's music and arts scenes, I contend that classlessness was merely an ideal that may never have been reached, but was still present on the level of desire. AA Bronson makes this position clear in "Pogo Dancing in the British Aisles," when he writes: "Desire is anti-capitalist. Present economies of production and distribution do not allow for an economy of desire" (General Idea 1977, 17). So if present capitalist economics stifle desire, the very impulse we need to overcome it, how do we untangle ourselves in order to bring this about?²⁴ Bronson continues: "The strength of punk is dependent on its ability to generate new economies of production and distribution corresponding to the pattern of desire it has revealed.

²⁴ In a friendlier analysis of capitalism, production of new commodities is often equated with a production of desires, and this logic underpins the marketing aspect of the current economic system. In the tradition of Adorno, Baudrillard and others, this process can be described as the creation of a simulacra or a pseudo-object that stands in as a representation of true human desire. Whereas, the real goal behind the creation of commodities is the accumulation of capital, not the furthering of human potential, and thus the effectiveness of this mode of production will always be only partial. General Idea's approach, borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari's 'Desiring Machine' concept, sees human desire as a productive machinic force, with the capacity to demolish the partiality of commodity culture and replace it with something more meaningful.

Hence the self-produced record, the fan zine” (General Idea 1977, 17). In General Idea's praxis, their politics conflate a DIY aesthetic with a rearticulation and overcoming of existing class structures via an investment in subcultural spaces.

Chapter Four

A Revolutionary Window of Opportunity: CEAC, The Diodes, and Radical Behaviourism

Despite General Idea's affirmation that desire is anti-capitalist, and that punk may be the codable and decodable desiring machine through which a new politics will emerge, in practice GI remained relatively conservative in their dealings with both the art world and with capitalist society in general. Indeed, even the name General Idea itself evokes military and corporate connotations, which AA Bronson acknowledges was "radically politically incorrect at the time" (Smith 2016, 7). The Centre for Experimental Art and Communication, or CEAC, was another collective in the artist-run network who took issue with what they saw as the careerist posturing of General Idea. This antagonism was partly rooted in purely political and ideological differences between the two groups, but it also stemmed from the complex and contradictory conceptual art politics of the period. I will begin this chapter by briefly attempting to pick apart some of the conceptual issues with which CEAC were concerned during the punk period of their history, and following this I will explain how the Crash 'n' Burn fit into the group's unique revolutionary vision. Finally, I will undertake an analysis of the articulation of these political motives on a particular cultural artifact, the *Raw/War 7"* recording by Amerigo Marras, Reindeer Werk, The Diodes, and Mickey Skin (The Curse), synthesizing a musicological perspective with the cultural theory and art theory discussed thus far.

Before I proceed, I would like to borrow a clarifying note from Philip Monk about the nature of the relationship between politics and art. According to Monk, there were three intersecting dimensions in the art/politics relationship in Toronto: a *politics* of art based on "revolutionary affirmation and affiliation" (Monk 2016, 13); an *art* politics, expressed by 'palace

coups' at institutions such as A Space (where the old guard sentimentalists were ousted by a deviant younger generation); and *political art*, an art which is effective only within the art world's own discourses, and thus is "more rhetorical than reality driven" (Monk, 13). The question is then raised, was the radical work produced by CEAC expressing a *politics* of art, or was it a product of the detached posturing of a *political art*? Monk doesn't immediately answer this question, but his own biases seem to suggest that he would answer it was the latter. I do not feel qualified enough in this area to interject my own interpretation of CEAC's involvement, or lack thereof, with the politics and discourses of the art world at a larger scale, so I will leave the reader with these two competing interpretations of their output. Whether CEAC were effective in cutting through the theoretical haze of mid-1970s conceptual art to produce a truly revolutionary affect based on proletarian class consciousness, or if their work was simply another node in the unfurling chain of the self-referential rhetoric of the art world, this would not change my research focus for this chapter. CEAC were attracted to punk because they saw it as an example of "proletariat performance and a pop art infiltration" (Worth 2011, 67), and thus they connected to it as both an expression of their theoretical concerns and as a legitimization of their own self-perception. To understand this resonance, we must trace the development of CEAC's ideas back to their beginnings at the Kensington Art Association (KAA) in 1973.

The two primary figures in what would become CEAC were Amerigo Marras, an Italian immigrant with ties to the *autonomiste* movement, and Bruce Eves, a visual artist with a radical view of gay liberation. The KAA was a collective based out of 4 Kensington Avenue, dedicated to "a continuous collective experiment in living and in sociological infiltration with practical demonstrations" (Marras 1977, 30; quoted in Tuer 2005). From this vaguely communal arrangement sprung many of the radical ideas that would come to shape the Centre for

Experimental Art and Communication, which was an evolution of the KAA that changed its name after the ousting of some key original members due to interpersonal conflicts. An important exhibition in this history took place in the fall of 1975 and was titled *Language and Structure in North America*, described by Dot Tuer as “a sprawling exhibition of wall/book art, poetry, sound pieces, environmental investigations, film, video, and performance, the conjunction of theory and practice that would become CEAC’s trademark coalesced” (Tuer 2005, 63). The title of this exhibition was partly a nod to the well-known New York based group Art & Language, whose journal *The Fox* was highly influential in the development of conceptual practice in the 1970s. CEAC would eventually disavow this type of conceptual work as “avant-garde obscurantism” (CEAC August 1977), after discovering and adopting the perspective of the Polish contextualist (a self-coined term) Jan Swidzinski. Swidzinski saw the history of art as a progression through three differing models of visual semiotics: classical universalism, romantic relativism, and finally, logical conceptualism (Tuer 2005, 72). Swidzinski rejected all of these models as insufficient, and lambasted conceptual art for its inability to directly relate expression to reality. Contextualism, in short, attempted to situate “art as a dialectical praxis in which 'truth' was subject to the context of the ever-changing flux of reality” (Tuer 2005, 71), and thus advocated strongly for a social practice, as well as an artistic one, where the performer performs interventions into the social reality in dialogue with the audience in order to further specific ideological ends.

In September of 1976, CEAC bought a four-storey building at 15 Duncan Street, reserving the top floor and basement for performance programming and renting out the middle floors to tenants that included the Liberal Party headquarters. The basement was only accessible via a backdoor on Pearl Street, and thus when Marras and Eves decided to allow The Diodes to

open the Crash ‘n’ Burn on their property there was a sense of physical separation between the punks and their landlords upstairs. Soon after opening, the new Centre invited British performance art duo Reindeer Werk for a three-week residency in March of 1977. Reindeer Werk were interested in the “formal mechanics of socially unacceptable behaviour” (Tuer, 76), and linked the performance of deviance to a critique of Skinnerian models of behaviourism. This residency solidified another key component of CEAC’s ideas; behaviour and behaviour modification. Philip Monk writes, “If contextualism was the articulation of CEAC’s ideological program, behaviour was its realisation in performance situations” (Monk 2016, 101). Inspired by Reindeer Werk’s confrontational style, CEAC incorporated ‘behavioural action’ into their artistic and everyday lives (Tuer 2005, 77).

A third component, in addition to contextualism and behaviour, that Reindeer Werk partly inspired in CEAC was an active interest in pedagogy. This often went hand and hand with their interest in behaviour modification, and they established a series of weekly participatory lectures called a ‘Behaviour School’, who’s stated objective was “to raise questions that are found in the social context of the CEAC within the city of Toronto” (Tuer 2005, 77), and to experiment with an un-mediated conversational style that did not rely on “an exchange of value as a precondition to communicate”.²⁵ In reality, CEAC’s audience was largely limited to the specialized cadre of artists and radicals who were already familiar with many of the issues they raised, however, the sweeping scope of this political rhetoric suggests that in this period the group began to consider themselves engaged in a broader struggle far beyond the confines of the art world. This shift, from political art to political struggle tout court, would render itself complete when CEAC changed the name of their *Art Communication Edition* journal to *STRIKE*

²⁵ Lyrics from *Raw/War* (1977).

in 1978, adopting a more militant stance and advocating for the “knee capping demise of system”. This statement landed them in hot water with the state, and a combination of public outcry and pressure from the provincial government led to first the Canada Arts Council and then the Ontario Arts Council pulling funding for the institution. Despite alarm and outrage on the part of CEAC for what they considered to be political repression, these measures were devastatingly effective in limiting their platform, and within a couple months they were forced to shutter their operations at 15 Duncan Street. This high-profile event had a ripple effect on the Canadian art world as well, resulting in an increased awareness of the absolute dependency of artist-run institutions on government-controlled funding bodies. An unfortunate consequence of this was the assertion of a timidity fueled by an instinct towards self-preservation. Dot Tuer writes: "Oppositional energy, with all its contradictions and radical stances, would dissipate, and Philip Monk's lack of history would become the political analysis of the 1980s" (Tuer 2005, 88). Although this grim analysis is true on some level, as Mouffe and Laclau have shown when one door closes politically often another one opens, presenting new avenues for resistance and subversion within a different sociopolitical context (see chapter two).

From the biographical information presented thus far, I believe it is fair to conclude that punk entered the CEAC story at a transitional point for the group. When the Crash ‘n’ Burn opened, the collective had only been in their Duncan Street location for six months and were about a year away from their rebranding as knee capping revolutionaries with *STRIKE*. This was also quite a prolific period for the group; in an interview Bruce Eves says that “by the time of the Crash ‘n’ Burn there were events happening literally every day – it almost had the intensity of a latter-day Warhol’s Factory (but minus the drugs).”²⁶ Throughout the summer of 1977 events

²⁶ Bruce Eves, “Bruce Eves Interview (2013),” interview by Mike Hoolboom, 2013, <http://mikehoolboom.com/?p=16077>.

were happening very frequently upstairs, shows were held at the Crash ‘n’ Burn in the basement every weekend, CEAC released three editions of their periodical *Art Communication Edition* (four if you include AC8, aka. *Raw/War*), and Amerigo Marras took some of the show on an international European tour. The tour was a significant one in CEAC’s career, but its timing also meant that Marras did not witness first-hand the flowering and popularity of the Crash ‘n’ Burn over its four months of existence. When he returned, Marras had a change of heart about punk rock and about the club, and made an executive decision to pull the plug on the whole operation. Speculation about the cause of this decision runs rampant through many of the interview materials I consulted for this project, and many of the accounts are contradictory. What I will attempt here is to give as complete of a picture as possible of the motivations that may have underlaid Marras’ decision, beginning with articles he wrote on the punk subject in *Art Communication Edition* 6 through 9.

In *Art Communication Edition* 6, describing their adversarial relationship towards the art world and towards mainstream society, Marras writes: “Art communication edition proposes for itself the role of being the ‘antithesis to dominant ideologies’, rather than the role of being alternative to the hegemony of commercially motivated journals” (Marras 1977, 14).

Interestingly, this notion resonates with Bannister’s description of the Velvet Underground as attempting to extricate themselves from familiar discourses resulting from the dialectics of mainstream/underground, power/resistance (see Chapter Two of this thesis; Bannister 2010, 72). CEAC’s antithetical position is in part an application of Swidzinski’s notion of art as dialectical praxis, as well as possibly a nod to Adorno’s negative dialectics. Adorno writes of the negative dialectic:

[it] is a phrase that flouts tradition. As early as Plato, dialectics meant to achieve something positive by means of negation; the thought figure of the ‘negation of the

negation' later became the succinct term. This book seeks to free dialectics from such affirmative traits without reducing its determinacy. (Adorno 1990, xix)

Thus, it is the very negation of the negation, a privileged aspect of traditional Hegelian dialectics, that Adorno wants to reclaim as an object of inquiry in itself. In the case of CEAC, their declaration of always taking an antithetical position is a theoretical position as well as a political one. On one level I see this as a limiting position, since by abandoning any affirmative program for the building of a new and better society CEAC set themselves the task of existing solely to criticize the existing state of affairs, refusing to offer a competing vision of society in its place. The antithetical position often only serves to obscure a particular breed of defeatism and fatalism on the left, and can be unhelpful for activists engaged in more tangible community building projects. This form of critical negativity within radical politics, and especially radical art politics, was a common position in the 1970s. This was partly due to the political repression that took place in the late 1960s to early 1970s (see chapter three), as well as to a sense that Marxists had run out of ideas in a period where capitalism seemed infinitely adaptable and all-consuming.

In the same issue of *Art Communication*, Marras wrote an article titled “Spanking Punk,” where he gives his perspective on the new Crash ‘n’ Burn scene and offers it a tepid, yet critical, endorsement. Marras praises the myth-making potential of the venue, similar to that of CBGBs in New York, and states that “The Ramones and The Dead Boys have commented on the really alive spirit at crash ‘n’ burn, so different than the New York scene” (Marras 1977, 24). However, even here Marras seems hesitant to label punk a full-blown revolutionary movement (which for CEAC would be the prerequisite for a wholehearted endorsement), considering it rather a particular form of “withheld rebellion” and a “frustrated consumerism” that expresses itself “in broken beer glasses and makeup applied with razor blades” (Marras 1977, 24). This hesitancy is expressed more clearly in another article in the same issue, where Marras writes:

Dominant culture absorbs all the raw produces of the working mass and the undeveloped icons of sub-culture: hence the rush towards ‘povera’ and conceptual sensibility, the search for the worn and torn, the hot interest in the revolutionary declamation of ‘anarchy in the U.K.’. Rough edges, residues of original life-styles, the residues of the exploitation inflicted by the dominant culture itself is recovered as raw material for recycling. (Marras 1977, 3-4)

Marras seems to be conflating a group of artists like General Idea – via an oblique reference to conceptual sensibility – with the Sex Pistols, joined by their mutual tendency towards recuperation within the dominant framework. CEAC’s convictions show why they were so skeptical of avant-garde modes of opposition to cultural hegemony; in their view the opposition was futile if it is always recuperated. But what then is an antithetical standpoint if not counter-hegemonic? It seems disingenuous for CEAC to suggest that they alone are the true outsiders of the cultural order and exist one level removed from all other artists and radicals. Here is where their argument largely falls apart, a fact that is acknowledged by critics.²⁷ For example, Monk writes that although CEAC were intent on making the art world the enemy, “the glaring problem was that in supporting the revolutionary cause CEAC never could disengage itself from talking about art since this discussion, and the vehicle for it – *Strike* – was the site of its legitimacy” (Monk 2016, 113), and thus their stance vis-à-vis the art world establishment was rather hypocritical in the final assessment.

Art Communication Edition 7 was a special issue dedicated to an explication of CEAC’s ideas around behaviour. There are no polemics on punk/new wave in this issue, but there are a handful of photos and advertisements for events at the Crash ‘n’ Burn, including; a shot of a

²⁷ In a letter to *Open Paper Today* following the STRIKE incident in which CEAC lost their government funding, a collection of prominent artists wrote: “Make no mistake about the seriousness of *STRIKE*’s threat to humanist values. Art is only a minor battlefield.... Having established a façade of respectability, CEAC, through its affiliated publication, has now formed a political front to denigrate all art-making, to urge the overthrow of all existing structure and to declare its support for the terrorist strategy of the Red Brigade” (Letter to the Editor 1978). So, in the end, their reputation *was* in fact cemented as the outsiders of outsiders, but perhaps not for the reasons they desired. Public opinion turned swiftly following their ‘kneecapping’ comments, and they became seen as a danger to all of society. Perhaps an exaggeration if we believe Monk and they were simply engaging in art politics?

slobbering Stiv Bators of The Dead Boys gracing the cover; The Diodes wearing a screen-printed BEHAVIOUR shirt; and an ad for the soon to be release *Raw/Waw 7* record. The editorial for the issue mostly focuses on attacking the art world (by this point the group was fully disillusioned with it), but in an aside Marras opines that “The ‘careerism’ of punk was no different from that of artists” (Marras 1977, 3). This seems like an odd take from a group deeply invested in the punk moment, and is an omen of the clean break that would soon come. *Raw/War* was released as *Art Communication Edition 8*, signaling that CEAC intended the recording to function as part of the group’s canon they had been building in the publication up until that point, and that the record was a political statement, not just a cultural or a commercial one. I will return to this recording and the intentions associated with it, but first I will jump ahead to discuss CEAC’s disillusionment with punk as evident in *Art and Communication Edition 9*.

Art Communication Edition 9, the last issue before CEAC’s pivot towards the *STRIKE* rebrand, was released in November of 1977, three months after the closure of the Crash ‘n’ Burn. In the editorial for the issue, Marras venomously wrote:

In the western capitalist countries the Fall has cooled the steam produced by the 1977 summer of rock. Punks, mannerists, opportunists, nouveaux riche, promoters, fashion burnt, and all the other idiots fallen into the image of anarchy as dictated by the vogue punk, rush towards the cliché of fashion like flies to a mound of shit. (Marras 1977, 3)

Ignoring the bitter and inflammatory language for a moment, this quote seems to suggest a new interpretation of punk, and to signal CEAC's transition from a hesitant acknowledgment of punk's vibrancy to a denouncement of its spectacular appropriation.

One story of the closing of the Crash ‘n’ Burn was that it was a decision that was out of the hands of all parties involved; there was simply too much media attention and violence, and that a letter of complaint sent by the liberal party headquarters to CEAC forced them to shut down the venue. In an interview with Mike Hoolboom, Bruce Eves offers a different

interpretation of the demise of the CNB; that it had more to do with posturing political absolutism than anything else:

Now to the \$64,000 question: why was it closed down? I think there were two of three factors that led Amerigo to a stupid decision. All the nihilist posturing aside, the bands were in search of record deals, and for Amerigo this led to disillusionment. According to Diane Broadway, he thought the bands simply weren't radical enough. (It's beyond me how there is any difference between lusting after a record contract or a government grant). (Eves Interview 2013)²⁸

Considering the intensity of the rhetoric coming out of the CEAC camp at this moment, and the demonstrated willingness to put their principles into action soon after in the *STRIKE* period, my instinct is to support Eves' interpretation. Of course, there is no way to know for sure what was going through Marras' mind as he made the decision to withdraw support for Crash 'n' Burn, but it seems reasonable to surmise that the decision was in large part ideologically motivated.

When The Diodes and Mickey Skin agreed to record *Raw/War*, they were likely unaware of this complex and contradictory history in the detail I have laid out in this chapter thus far, but they also weren't ignorant people – they understood CEAC as something different and interesting (Worth 2011, 63-67), and were attracted to the group for this reason (in chapter one I traced the origins of this relationship). In hindsight, Paul Robinson (The Diodes) says that “they [CEAC] wanted the Diodes and the Curse to be political, and manipulated “Raw/War” to this end. It all seems a bit contrived now on hearing it again, but it was very interesting and very them” (Worth 2011, 67). So, it appears that even at this moment of seeming unity between the radical artists and the punks, fissures and a difference of expectations were present. In the summer of 1977, CEAC was hearing the political lyrics coming out of the UK by a band like The Clash and were interested in connecting to the revolutionary opportunity that they seemed to

²⁸ Bruce Eves, “Bruce Eves Interview (2013),” interview by Mike Hoolboom, 2013, <http://mikehoolboom.com/?p=16077>.

offer (Worth 2011, 43). For a brief moment, it appeared that a rupture in the cultural hegemony was taking place and that a political consciousness was emerging amongst the youth. CEAC then projected these expectations onto Toronto bands, and in so doing were ignoring the structural differences in economic conditions between Canada and the UK and were setting themselves up for disappointment when the underground energy of the music quickly became mainstream. The articulation of political values in *Raw/War*, considered as a cultural artifact, contains just as much internal contradiction as CEAC's history itself. In Dot Tuer's analysis, although the recording was meant to express Marras' enthusiastic perception of punk as a spontaneous behavioural reaction against mainstream media, the actual product left much to be desired. She writes: "*Raw/War* stands as an example of the incongruity of a highly sophisticated rhetoric pasted onto the extremely raw and naïve sound of hard-core punk" (Tuer 2005, 79). Although I do not disagree that the pairing of sophistication and musical rawness makes for a jarring and uneven recording here, I do believe that the value judgment she makes of the coupling as 'incongruous' deserves a critical unpacking. Despite all of its musical, theoretical and political flaws, I still find *Raw/War* to be a fascinating musicological case study in terms of the way that the twin discourses of 1970s cultural and political radicalism are articulated all at once, a product of misunderstanding but also of flagrant idealism, and of the yearning for a united front between all those of consciousness who sought to strongly resist the ruling class and the dominant cultural hegemony.

RAW/WAR

Drawing on the work of the previous three chapters, my analysis of the *Raw/War* recording will utilize Richard Middleton's theory of articulation in conjunction with Simon Frith

and Howard Horne's Art/Pop dialectic to note the appearance of cultural and class hierarchies, their contradictions, and their resolution (real or perceived) within the space of the recording. Middleton's main contention, drawing on Stuart Hall's model of subculture, can be summarized as follows:

The argument is that while elements of culture are not directly, eternally or exclusively tied to specific economically determined factors such as class position, they *are* determined in the final instance by such factors, through the operation of articulating principles which *are* tied to class position. (Middleton 1990, 8)

As a musicologist specializing in popular culture, Middleton is concerned with the way in which sometimes contradictory class articulations appear in music on a sonic level. He uses the example of Elvis Presley, demonstrating how one element of his sound comes from Tin Pan Alley technique (white, middle/upper class) and the other is what he calls 'boogification' (African-American, working class). This cross-articulation of race and class elements created nothing short of an entirely new genre of music, rock 'n roll (although Elvis was not the only progenitor of the style), which shows the powerful potential inherent in staking out new articulatory patterns.

The most common sociological analysis of punk rock was that it came out of a subculture that articulated elements of specifically the British working-class experience. On one level this is true, and like Elvis, punk was a novel style that established new articulatory patterns through a combination of older existing ones. Middleton subscribes to the belief that history does not move in a straight line, and that times like the mid 1970s "are moments involving elements of social crisis, or at least social unrest, when the strength of accepted articulated patterns declines" (Middleton 1990, 9), which leaves an opening for forms of creative expression that are radically different from all else that preceded them. If, as has been discussed, the early 1970s was a time culturally defined by a number of musical genres which could be interpreted as retreats from the

intensity and experimentation of the 1960s, then punk could be read as one solution that rushed in to fill this void and to create new patterns based off of a different set of experiences. I contend that, congruous with Middleton's model, punk articulated both a (white) working-class component and a (white) middle-class component, corresponding to the 'street' element and the art school element. As Simon Frith and Howard Horne describe it, "the punk-as-art movement was always intertwined with a punk-as-pub-rock movement" (Frith and Horne 1987, 124), sometimes at odds with each other, but always inseparable. The audiences for first wave punk rock came from both of these camps near equally (Laing 1985). Part of what allowed for this breakdown in class hierarchies within the punk subculture was the impact of art school on the mentalities of the middle-class contingent. Art school allowed these individuals to cross divisions of both class and ideology by applying "'high art' skill and identities to a mass cultural form" (Frith and Horne 1987, 2). And thus, when Simon Frith calls this dual articulation art/pop, there is a class-based subtext to his argument, with 'art' representing a middle-class articulation and pop a working-class one. These two patterns worked in a dialectic arrangement to give birth to punk rock, and although fraught with contradictions, both sides must be held at once in order to grasp the unique meaning of this subculture.

Musically, *Raw/War* is quite amorphous, and the contribution of The Diodes seems to be improvised or at least not very well rehearsed (see fig. 3, p. 85). As is sometimes the case with punk rock, the intent here seems to be to shock and to be as loud as possible, with considerations of musical form and structure occupying a secondary position. Throughout, The Diodes create what could be called a wall of sound through a constant drone of rhythm guitar, bass guitar reiterating the fundamental, and a driving drum beat that relies heavily on the snare. True to their influences, The Diodes appear to be channeling the raw energy of proto-punk groups like MC5

and The Stooges, combined with the arty rocker “wall of sound as sound sculpture” template that had been established by the precursor to the group, The Eels (Worth 2011, 42). One thing that differentiated The Diodes from some of their peers is that they had a reasonable degree of facility on their instruments. This is clear in their recorded albums, and can be glimpsed here through the skilled improvisations by lead guitarist John Catto that largely carries the vocal-less track.

However, other than Catto’s playing, the band seems much sloppier than usual in this recording, and there are several spots where vocalist Paul Robinson’s count ins (1-2-3-4-5) and count downs (5-4-3-2-1) are sometimes off-beat causing the band to not start and stop together.

Perhaps this is what led Dot Tuer to proclaim The Diodes contribution to *Raw/War* “raw and naïve”; a combination of stereotypes around punk and an unfamiliarity with the rest of the bands recorded output resulted in her simply lumping them in with groups occupying the more amateur end of the spectrum.

When you look at the rest of The Diodes’ recorded output, amateur is certainly not a word that would be fitting to describe them. *Raw/War* was the first single the group ever released, and the first punk record to come out of the Toronto scene. In August of 1977 the group signed to CBS records, shortly afterwards releasing their first full length self-titled LP. Don Pyle calls the early Diodes “a fantastic mix of klutz and chaos, hard rock and bubblegum” (Pyle 2011, 60), and this certainly translates onto *The Diodes*.²⁹ The 12 tracks on the record rarely let up on a mid-tempo chug of rhythm guitar and the accompanying straight-ahead in-quaver drums. Paul Robinson’s lead vocals sound strangely affected, perhaps unintendedly, by what I hear as a mix

²⁹ The Diodes released three albums after their self-titled debut, however, none of them were received particularly well. In 1978, the group was dropped by CBS records and were forced to release their second record, *Released*, independently (Sutherland 2012, 138). Without the reach of a label they had difficulty breaking out internationally other than one single from their first record, “Red Rubber Ball”, which received a fair amount of radio play in the United States. Their third album, *Action-Reaction* (1980), was followed by *Survivors* in 1982, and in 2010 they returned with a live album entitled *Time/Damage Live*.

of New Yorker cool and London UK accent. With this affectation, Robinson sings about mainly contemporary topics in lyrics that are often quite cleverly arranged. In "Plastic Girls," The Diodes tackle the much maligned 1960s counterculture: "they dare to be seen in health food stores/think they're it, but they're too late... but 1967 is long gone now/and I need a new breed of girl." At some points, the band's lyrics do get quite political, although in a much more oblique way than their CEAC collaborators. The track "Death in the Suburbs" begins: "paranoia...it's the kids/desolation...hit the skids/can't make time in this wasteland/can't even score a one-night stand." These four lyrics sum up what I see as the band's priorities more than anything else that I have uncovered in my research. The Diodes are fully on board with the dystopian imagery and nihilist aesthetics that set early punk apart from the rest of the music world at the time, but unlike groups like The Clash or (later) the Dead Kennedys, they do not explicitly advocate for a leftist political program to respond to it. This is not to say that they are intellectually inferior or insufficiently enlightened to make this connection between negation and politics, rather, they bring a different but complementary perspective to the table. On the second last track of the album "Shape of Things to Come" they offer a manifesto of sorts on their futuristic, post-modern perspective on life and art (remember John Catto's interest in electronics, Ian Mackay's McLuhan studies). The track ends: "when tomorrow is today/nothing can change the shape of things to come/nothing can change the shape of things to come" delivered in an emphatically confident tone by Robinson and repeated several times. Rather than raging at the "things to come" in the future like a political hardcore band would, The Diodes appear somewhat disturbingly resigned, yet not defeated. Their futuristic dystopia is less *1984* and more *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, that is to say, less authoritarian big brother, and more unstoppable entropic destruction and decline.

The Diodes was an intelligent, musically satisfying, and well-put together record, providing a night and day contrast to the *Raw/War* cut. The first side, *Raw*, is a high amplitude aural shock filled with punk's energy and minimalism, featuring a call and response structure between The Diodes and Amerigo Marras, and a chord structure rooted in a steadily rising phrygian mode scale beginning on an E power chord (see fig. 4, p. 85). The purpose of this recording appears to differ from the group's core recorded output. Here, The Diodes serve more as window dressing to the dialectic polemics of CEAC's rhetoric. After about 16 bars of music, The Diodes stop and Amerigo Marras intones aphoristic phrases such as "you people are the police, you people are your own point of view." Considering what we know about CEAC, and their approach to punk, it seems that they may have asked The Diodes to play in this unusually aggressive (for them) style, as a tool to shock the listener out of their complacency, and perhaps absorb more of the radical message in the process. CEAC had a tendency to take their ideological invectives literally, so perhaps when they praised the Crash 'n' Burn crowd as "proletariat performance and a pop art infiltration" (Worth 2011, 67), they consequently conflated working-class interests with displays of outright amateurism. Perhaps from CEAC's perspective, in the art/pop dialectic of this record, they were the art and the Diodes were the pop. This is one level to the articulatory structure of this piece. However, there is another level nested within this dialectic – The Diodes were regarded within the punk community at large as occupying the artier end of the spectrum, due to their education at OCA and their lack of street credentials. But of course, as Simon Frith has shown, one of the reasons art school students began to form rock bands was because this offered them a way out of the contradictions of the high art/mass culture dilemma, bringing their training from the former to bear on the latter. In a performative fashion, punk bands like The Diodes would often disavow their high art affiliation

Fig. 3 (Monk 2016, 182) **Fig. 4** My Analysis – Centre panel reproduced from (Monk, 2006) with permission

<u>Chord Changes</u>	<u>SIDE A</u>	<u>Notes</u>
E (power chords) – 16 Bars	1,2,3,4,5 (music) 5,4,3,2,1 - you people are the police, you people are your own point of view	-Strong opening, crash on every beat
F – 16 Bars	1,2,3,4,5 (Music) 5,4,3,2,1 - any refusal to co-operate is a transgression on the code of ethics	-Lead guitar in higher register
G – 12 Bars	1,2,3,4,5 (music) 5,4,3,2,1 - the contrary to not biting the hand that feeds is to shut up and hide our critical senses	
A – 12 Bars	1,2,3,4,5 (music) 5,4,3,2,1 - as a dialectical process, we see social struggle as cultural struggle	
B – 16 Bars	1,2,3,4,5 (music) 5,4,3,2,1 - behaviour is not concerned with interpersonal games as a means to communicate	-Heard as a dominant *or seventh -Heavy, crash cymbal
C- 14 Bars	1,2,3,4,5 (music) 5,4,3,2,1 - thus, whatever we do, even the annihilation of any system, becomes a further contribution to the establishments' history, or does it?	-Heard as a resolution? -Key centre off balance
D – 20 Bars	1,2,3,4,5 (music) 5,4,3,2,1	-Bass drops octave -Resolution, but tension remains

(Worth 2011, 44), which in a way amounts to a disavowal of their class position (Cagle 1995, 208-210). Thus, the articulation (abbreviated arc. in Figure 5, below) of values in *Raw/War* according to Middleton and Firth's theories would be as follows:

Fig. 5:

These categories could be broken down further, but this provides a good general template for the constitution of class-based articulations on this particular cultural artifact.

Finally, between the bursts of sonic energy from The Diodes, the record contains short aphorisms by CEAC that outline elements of their behavioural and political positions. These range from observations that are mundane and relatively obvious, such as “any refusal to cooperate is a transgression on the code of ethics,” to some which seem more insightful, for example, “behaviour is not concerned with interpersonal games as a means to communicate.” The latter statement sums up CEAC’s behaviour school program quite well, and when combined with the shattering volume of The Diodes bookending the aphorism has in my hearing a real punch; the first time I listened it triggered an illumination within me about the aspect of experience being referenced. It is my view that this line also stands out because of musical cues that surround it. Preceding the line there is a 16 bar riff that revolves around a B root, which would be the dominant if we consider the opening E riff to be the tonic. However, in the following line the band rises to a C natural chord, confusing the first key interpretation, perhaps

suggesting that the track actually began on the mediant chord in a C major scale. In the last analysis, *Raw/War* does not really establish a strong functional tonal center at all, but many listeners will still subconsciously pick up on these cues, being culturally conditioned to find tonal relationships even in ambiguous material. By emphasizing the ambiguous C chord at this point in the song, combined with a busier drum beat that moves over to the crash cymbal, The Diodes give the behaviour line a sense of tension that can aid in the impact that this political thought has on the listener.

If this is the most important line structurally, the most important line rhetorically precedes it: “as a dialectical process, we see social struggle as cultural struggle.” This is really the key to why CEAC wanted to make the record in the first place; their theoretical journeys had convinced them that the revolution would come from spontaneous behavioural changes within the working class, and their personal politics commanded them to attempt to advance this mission. Thus, no longer satisfied with exerting an influence only over the art world, they turned to punk rock as an agent of counter-hegemonic struggle, and in the process attempted to convert their social high art struggle into a proletarian (mass) cultural one, and to show how in fact these two struggles formed one continuum of the same. The political revolution could not exist without the cultural revolution; they needed each other in order to break free from a cultural hegemony that was intent on either excluding or recuperating all oppositional struggle.

Conclusion

As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, the points of overlap between the music and art worlds in 1970s Toronto were multitudinous and existed at several different levels of organization. My first research question when embarking upon this project was whether the presence of a local art college, the Ontario College of Art, impacted the development of the Queen Street West scene next door. Part of this question has to do with aesthetic ideology; how were art school musicians such as The Diodes influenced by their formal artistic training? In my later research I uncovered a second influence that OCA had on the scene as it created the space in which the seeds that would become punk in Toronto incubated; namely, by holding parties in the Experimental Arts Department with Oh Those Pants! in 1976, giving The Dishes inspiration to get started, and bringing in the Talking Heads on January 28, 1977. If my first research question covers the personal (creative) effects and social (community) effects of this particular overlap, my second question aims to fit my case study into a larger and prior historical/theoretical framework. In devoting two chapters to the usage of punk motifs and subculture in the work of General Idea and CEAC respectively, I have ventured to demonstrate the effects of what Philip Monk called the *ambient* influence of punk on traditions in performance and conceptual art. In the case of Toronto, punk arrived at a post-movement moment when the cultural influence of New York was receding, allowing for a proliferation of provincial artistic scenes (or subcultures). To General Idea, punk offered a model of securing a niche audience (Monk 2016, 210), and to CEAC, a model of deviant behaviour, both of which enacted a turning in their respective practices.

Although I have just ventured to draw quite a broad conclusion as to the importance of punk rock to culture, it is nevertheless quite important to nuance and reign in these sorts of

claims in the academic context, especially due to the propensity of non-academic accounts of the subculture towards myth making. In this thesis I have previously mentioned how oral history, as a genre, can be prone to exaggerating punk's influence on broader culture (Turrini 2013), and how pro-punk rock critics such as Greil Marcus and Jon Savage further twisted the plot by creating narratives in which especially the Sex Pistols are considered the "culmination of a secret history of avant-gardists" (Court 2015, 418). I have tried to filter my approach towards primary sources through this cautious lens throughout this project, but it is worth re-stating that some of the information about the scene I have used to build my argument may be tainted by bias, exclusions, or exaggeration. Since this project constitutes the first academic study I am aware of on first wave punk in Toronto,³⁰ I have been forced to rely on oral history and journalistic accounts, which may have impacted my conclusions.

One site that was particularly prone to these sorts of myth making was the Crash 'n' Burn in Toronto. When Amerigo Marras commented on the alive spirit that groups as prominent as the Ramones and Dead Boys had noticed at the venue, he fed into the growing local legends surrounding it. In this case, the myth making seems hardly exaggerated, as the venue was an emblematic monument to *punk rock* in all of the meanings that the phrase conjures. From the graffitied and dingy alley that provided the only access to the venue's basement entrance, to the DIY bar table fashioned out of a horizontal door, to the packed capacity room full of sweaty, fashion conscious young people, for one short summer the Crash 'n' Burn acquired a degree of subcultural capital that rivalled that of venues in New York and London. What the venue represented to its audience, the bands, and to curious artists was nothing less than a node of an

³⁰ There was one PhD thesis written on the subject of second wave hardcore punk in Toronto titled "Youth Expression in the Eighties: A Network Analysis of the Punks of Toronto." (Gaetz, 1985). This scene had almost no overlap, so I have not included this source in the thesis.

organic Cultural Revolution. General Idea looked on and saw the punks engaging in the circuit of a desiring machine possessing the capabilities of short-circuiting the routines of capital, which is anti-desire in its most basic orientation. This fit with General Idea's pre-existing maxim that "Desire is anticapitalist" (General Idea, fall 1977), a true but limited political mantra that CEAC would later criticize as part of a suspect agenda of "Avant-garde obscurantism" (CEAC, August 1977) that neglected the materialism of actual class struggle. When CEAC agreed to allow the Crash 'n' Burn to open in the basement of their building at 15 Duncan Street, they were taking a perspective that saw punk as fitting in neatly with their radical politics. To them, the Crash n' Burn represented proletarian performance and pop art infiltration (Worth 2011, 67), and they were attracted to the DIY aesthetic and lifestyle (Worth 2011, 64) for its ability to separate itself from the mainstream culture on an institutional level, something that CEAC had been trying to achieve vis a vis its relationship to the art world for years.

The critical mass of energies that allowed the Crash 'n' Burn to thrive in its moment would not have been possible were it not for the year and a half or so of development that Queen Street West had seen prior to its opening. I argue that the social scene of artists, musicians, drifters and hip fans that began to occupy the strip was more important to the development of the art/music scene than any individual performance venue was. The social aspect was facilitated by the opening of the Peter Pan Restaurant, which employed members of The Dishes and The Diodes (Worth 2011, 63), and the use of The Beverley Tavern as an after-class hangout and casual music venue for OCA students. Other important locations on the strip included New Rose clothing store, Horseshoe Tavern, A Space gallery, and David's. Except for A Space, all of these venues were not open to the punk community until at least 1977, and thus I claim that Peter Pan and The Beverley (both active in 1976) were more important in terms of shaping the early pre-

Crash ‘n’ Burn Toronto punk scene. Further, it is necessary to note that punk did not directly cause the flourishing of Queen West into first a hub of alternative culture in the 1980s (Deveau 2015) and second a gentrified, upscale shopping district in the current era. Rather, the influx of punks, artists and radicals into the area acted as an accelerator to pre-existing development that was emerging in the area. It has been noted that the repurposing of underutilized downtown spaces for art and culture purposes is a relatively typical pattern of urban development (Deveau 2015, 331), and it was a common attitude especially in 20th century scenes to draw “legitimacy from the grit and poverty of the area” (Deveau 2015, 331). The discourse surrounding Queen West was no different, and it was perhaps inevitable that Queen West would become the hip destination it became due to the above factors, and due to its proximity to the Ontario College of Art (as well as the Art Gallery of Ontario), a national institution that was seeing a period of rapid expansion under new leadership in the 1970s (100 Years 1976, 20).

Frith and Horne call art school a “natural setting for counterculture,” where social connections, fashion, and music become just as important to students’ individual artistic development as the techniques and theories they learn in their coursework. They write, “the art school experience is about commitment to a working practice, to a mode of learning which assumes the status of lifestyle” (Frith and Horne 1987, 28). In the British context, this lifestyle component had become a central feature of art education since at least 1968,³¹ but, as is typical, it was several years before it took hold in the pragmatic minded Canadian art schools. When researching the development of radical and avant-garde artistic education in Canada, one surprising finding I came across was that NSCAD in Halifax was an early champion of the

³¹ In the summer of 1968, students occupied the Hornsey College of Art to protest the integration of the college into a polytechnic. Ideologically attuned to the parallel occupations of French universities in May, the “occupation became the setting for a deeper questioning of the philosophies and purposes of [art] education” (Frith, 49).

international conceptual art movement in the Canadian context. From 1968 to 1973, the small institution acted as a vanguard in challenging the status quo of the art world, and maintained ties with American and European avant-gardists such as the Art & Language group and Joseph Beuys (Barber 2001). The Ontario College of Art was thus quite slow in developing programs addressing the new directions that art was taking in the 1960s and 1970s, even by Canadian standards, which led some critics to claim that this apparent lack of a progressive art college in Toronto was a factor that encouraged the development of outside alternatives such as CEAC and A Space (Miller 2005). I would argue that this situation was beginning to change in the mid 1970s, as the experimental arts department was joined by a new photo/electric arts program to create a small but active contingent of radically minded students and professors (100 Years, 19).

A strong influence on the photo/electric program, and on students such as Ian Mackay that were enrolled in it, was the communications scholar Marshall McLuhan, an alignment that makes sense considering his local roots and international superstardom. McLuhan exists within the constellation of critical theorists that encourage readers to undertake a critical and unorthodox reading of any of the vast array of non-human objects that make up the human world, not unlike Roland Barthes, who's text *Mythologies* became a key influence on General Idea's perspective (Monk 2016, 55). Students in this particular program at OCA would thus have been primed for engagement with the artist collectives I have discussed in a way that those registered in painting or industrial design would not have. In the photo/electric and experimental art departments, an intuitive or subjective rationale was implemented which gave students the tools to "see through" the mechanized world of industrial verging on post-industrial capitalism (MacGregor 1984), and a social environment through which their new worldview could be realized through lifestyle.

In this thesis I have been using the example of the band The Diodes as a stand-in for the process whereby these newly enlightened art students took up pop music, a crossing of worlds that contains a rich hidden dynamic. As I have demonstrated, art/pop is a dialectical process that describes both the inner workings of early punk aesthetics (and the source of much intra-scene tension) and the symbiotic collaboration between the established avant-garde art world and punk/new wave bands. Frith and Horne were the first ones to theorize this relationship in *Art Into Pop* as a crossing, breaking down and subverting of the pre-existing distinction between high and low culture, which “art school crosses... in terms of both class and ideology” (Frith and Horne 1987, 2). Art school was where the art/pop idea was worked out functionally, as art students were literally taking their high art perspective on individual creativity (which Frith calls the Romantic Ideology) and applying it to a different set of mass cultural meanings (to make money, to reproduce the social order, etc). Frith and Horne show how pivoting to pop music in fact solves a tension that existed in art education between creativity and commerce, answering the question of “how to be subversive in a culture of commodities” (Frith and Horne 1987, 133). Although this tension had been a key question behind the work of several successive generations of art school bands, it was in the punk moment that it truly came to the fore: “Punk rock was the ultimate art school music movement. It brought to a head fifteen years of questions about creativity in a mass medium” (Frith and Horne 1987, 124).

If Frith and Horne have been most useful for defining the first form of the art/pop definition I use, then it is Gendron who best describes the second. In *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*, he describes how the art/pop relationship shifted throughout the 20th century over several different permutations of collaboration between popular music and the avant-garde. In the early 20th century, in the Dadaist ballroom culture as typified by Montmartre in Paris, it

was the artists who were the primary instigators of the art/pop relationship, jazz musicians were hired to play as a part of an art exhibition that the other camp had complete control over. By the 1970s in New York, the avant-garde was in a much weaker cultural position, due to a variety of social and economic factors. Because of this, avant-gardists in the post-Warhol vein “turned to the new wave not only to accrue some of its hip cultural capital by association, but also to draw upon its energy, scavenge its formal devices, and assume its postures” (Gendron 2002, 319). This was certainly the case with General Idea, who drew on punk to enact a transformation in their own practice towards a more destructive and explicitly queer stance, and was somewhat the case for CEAC, who, soon after pulling the plug on the Crash ‘n’ Burn, began publishing *STRIKE* in such a confrontational style that they provoked the wrath of government censorship.

From this localized case study, I have attempted throughout to engage with two broader implications that arise when examining the particular intersection of punk with the art world; the united opposition to cultural hegemony, and the relationship between punk and avant-garde performance practice. Both of these areas are a slight aside to my original argument – that OCA contributed to punk/new wave’s development in Toronto, and then the scene subsequently influenced the artistic directions of General Idea and CEAC – but they are still highly relevant to my case study, and suggest some directions where further research on this topic would be salient. Additionally, these areas inform some of my own personal perspective, and thus they have influenced the direction I have chosen to go with this research. I will now briefly address some of the ways my case study has intersected with these broader questions, interspersing these observations with some concluding thoughts on General Idea and CEAC.

In chapter two of this thesis, I offered an expanded definition of cultural hegemony that supplements the original Gramscian conception with Laclau and Mouffe’s usage in their 1985

book, *Hegemony and Social Strategy*. The fluidity and nuance that this updated definition offers to our understanding of cultural hegemony is useful as a solution to the class essentialism critique that is often levelled at Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's *Resistance Through Rituals*. One further avenue for research I would suggest would be a more methodical comparison of Laclau's hegemony against the subculture concept, as I suspect one would find that many elements of Hall and Jefferson's theory could be salvaged. Perhaps class could still remain accounted for but take on more of a background role, allowing the more fundamentally important aspect of youthful deviance in the face of authority to take central stage as the primary site of opposition and liberation. This way, the politicized and radical nature of subcultural theory could be reconstructed without being watered down, while some of the more problematic aspects arising from a dogmatic version of Marxism could be removed or reworked, resulting in a contemporarily viable and rejuvenated theory.³² In Laclau and Mouffe's theory, class liberation sits among many types of liberation in an "infinite intertextuality of emancipatory discourses in which the plurality of the social takes shape" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 5). Thus, the connection I am making here is that, in a theory so general and encompassing, punk could be considered an emancipatory discourse that could offer its voice to the whole. Punk's outsider identity could sit alongside class struggle, as well as feminism, gay liberation and queer rights.³³ What joins these

³² I anticipate that this reworked theory would be especially useful in analyzing 21st century subculture, which would be a very important research pathway given that currently I do not see any recent theoretical developments linking the politicization of youth culture to radical politics and class analysis. The fluidity of Laclau's interpretation of the Hegemony concept would be a powerful framework to begin approaching the use of digital technologies by radicals, and how individuals are radicalized by these technologies. Take, for example, the recent development of hip-hop being used as a tool to confront authoritarian regimes in countries like Thailand and Spain. This was reported by Hasan Minhaj on his well-researched political comedy show *Patriot Act*, and he claims it was the presence of free streaming services like soundcloud and youtube in those countries that allowed anti-government hip-hop to thrive, and form a major presence in the local youth culture.

³³ Hopefully it is obvious that I do not mean to equate the experience of all punk rockers with the high levels of oppression that gay men and all women experience, especially in the 1970s. My purpose is more to point out that the punks have enemies in common with these oppressed groups, and that collaboration is possible and fruitful. An example of this occurring was at the event "Rock Against Racism" in the UK in 1976. I haven't had room to talk about R.A.R in this thesis, but it is certainly relevant to my research interests.

forces is a united opposition to the dominant cultural hegemony, in the varied but always oppressive expressions it can take.

In chapter three I linked the subculture concept to the queer culture and outsider deviance that General Idea were interested in representing in their work. I demonstrated how the gay community, the art community, and the punk/new-wave scene mixed and created a united front in the 1970s. Two queer-identified bands, Rough Trade and The Dishes, were invited to join the General Idea entourage, injecting an early gay sensibility into the punk scene in 1976, thus forming the bedrock for the scene's explosion the following year. Partly, the gay-punk alliance was a pragmatic arrangement as there was a lack of venues in Toronto who were welcoming to either group. This resulted in some direct collaborations, such as the punk scene's migration to the gay bar David's after Crash 'n' Burn closed, and the hosting of a General Idea party called Fashion Burn, featuring gay artist Dave Buchan, at the CNB. What the General Idea – Queer Community – Punk Scene triangulation lacked was a considered anti-capitalist politics beyond the level of desire. That desire is anti-capitalist is a truism and good praxis, however, it is not enough for a political revolution (but perhaps enough for a cultural revolution).

CEAC's methodical denouncement and refutation of the core practices of the art world was inspired partly by their aversion to the perceived obscurantism of General Idea (CEAC, August 1977). As Marxists, CEAC are of the view that to be simply 'against' capitalism is not enough; a full analysis and counter-program must be established. This viewpoint led to CEAC declaring themselves the "antithesis of all dominant ideologies", and by their *STRIKE* period, the goal of the group had become nothing less than to advance the complete dissolution of the capitalist system, and to create in the interim social and political alternatives that would sustain society post-revolution. CEAC relied on three interlinked theoretical imperatives in order to

advance this vision, and to create a context for their artwork that included both ideology and praxis; radical (anti-)behaviourism, Polish contextualism (as an alternative to conceptualism), and pedagogy. In his initial interest in punk, Amerigo Marras saw evidence of a real-life application of the sorts of systematization of deviant behaviour that he and Reindeer Werk had been working on in their weekly behaviour school at the CEAC building. When he later denounced punk for its careerist recuperation within the capitalist framework, Marras betrayed a fundamental hypocrisy in CEAC's project. Was CEAC's reliance on arts council funding really all that different from punk bands such as The Diodes relying on record industry money? Additionally, whether they liked it or not, it could be argued that CEAC's project only existed within the closed loop of the art world and for a few curious outsiders, and thus their populist stance was very limited in impact. CEAC's activism began and ended in the specialist discourse of the text-based art object, and their project had no actual material impact on the lives of the working class, or on the ideologies of the dominant social and cultural institutions.³⁴ This finding led Philip Monk to conclude that "in the end it seems that *STRIKE*'s rhetoric was the means by which CEAC lived its *imaginary* relationship to revolutionary politics" (Monk 2016, 124), a conclusion that I share, with a caveat.

CEAC did not have a relationship to this imaginary political revolution, and my intuition is that they were simply living out a fantasy of continuing the dream of the 1960s in a different form. In 1968, a true political revolution supported by a critical mass of the citizenry briefly appeared possible, but by the mid 1970s "the Radical social agenda of the later 1960s that

³⁴ Marras had it backwards; the punk wave of 1977 he was criticizing for not being radical enough made more of a difference than his radical project ever did. The infamy of the Sex Pistols and the hysteria the media created around them had a tangible impact on the wider world (Street and Wilkinson 2018), whereas the *Strike* scandal only served to make artists more aware of their reliance on council funding, making them more likely to stick within the status quo (Tuer 2005, 88).

provided a supportive context for earlier avant-garde art... was widely perceived to be past history" (Taylor 1995, 9). As the wave of the 1960s counterculture receded, a door was closed but a window opened. What punk rock enacted, especially in the UK, was a form of cultural revolution that responded to and deepened a crisis in the dominant cultural hegemony (Hebdige 1979). Artist collectives like General Idea and CEAC were intelligently attuned to this, and saw resonances of this revolution in their own outsider positioned work. So, despite all of the bitter factionalism with which the art world and punk scene alike were riven, these groups were connected tenuously to the same thing; a cultural counter-force to the counter-revolution of the early neoliberal years. This is not to discount some of the real disagreements that these groups often had with each other's positions; in terms of what Philip Monk calls the *politics* of art (Monk 2016), General Idea and CEAC could not be any further apart. However on a deeper level, the level of Laclau and Mouffe's flux of intertextual emancipatory discourses, their fight was in fact one and the same.

With my outsider status to these communities, and the hindsight of over 40 years since these events have passed, I have uncovered throughout this thesis a pattern that shows that these artists, musicians, and radicals, were connected on the deepest level by the same cultural wave. The energy of early punk was such because it had the force of the new behind it in an era where complacency appeared to rule. This cultural revolution was most concentrated in 1977, when punk had its moment in the spotlight but was then promptly either co-opted or dispersed by the 1980s (Plant 1992). My biggest take away from this research was that when a group of creative individuals from different practices but with a similar viewpoint come together to experiment with social and cultural norms, a grassroots power is created that with the right channeling can become a political force on its own terms. As with all left-leaning research, I hope that the

findings in this thesis can help to build a better world, as learning from our past is just as important as preparing for the frightening future.

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